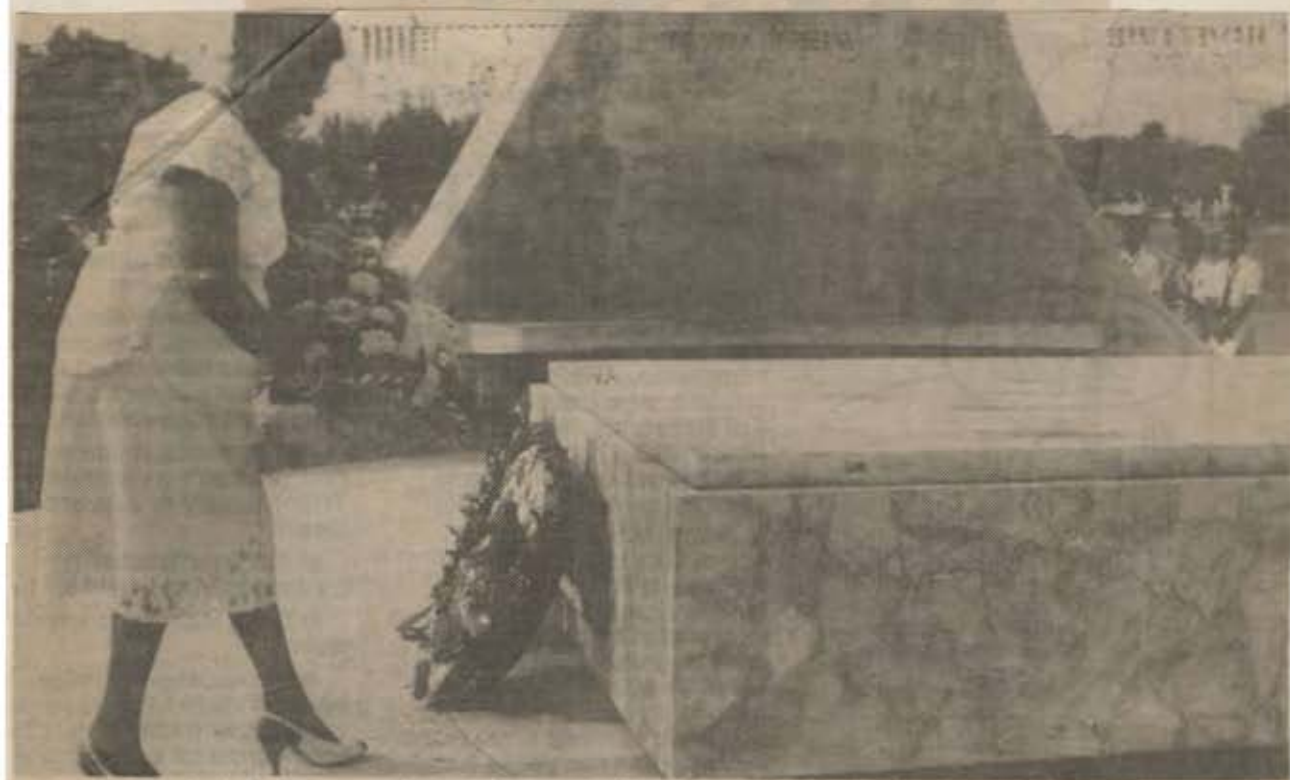


Lady Bustamante recalls...



Lady Bustamante about to lay a wreath at the shrine of her late husband.



Lady B Patron of the Bustamante Hospital for Children smiles as she presents this little boy with a toy.

By Crescencia Leon Medhurst

THE LOVE STORY between Gladys Maud Longbridge and Sir Alexander Bustamante may have been sparked the Sunday morning, Bustamante watched her walking with her cousins to The Church of the Redeemer church.

Of the incident, Lady B as she is affectionately called by the majority of Jamaicans recalls, "there was a tall distinguished looking man standing at the corner of North and Duke. He advised the three girls, 'to be careful when they crossed the road.'"

Whether or not it was a magically moment, the memory was still powerful enough to cause "Lady B" to blush when she related the incident.

Lady B who is a shy person was the first main speaker, in the new series "Downtown Forum", "Reflections on my life" by the Institute of Jamaica in collaboration with the Gleaner Co., and the Kingston Restoration Limited on January 15.

Sometime afterwards, Lady B said she got a temporary position working at Arlington House, a hotel where members of the Legislative met frequently.

After the job came to an end, she was encouraged by a friend to apply for the position of a secretary to Bustamante.

"I was not really interested in applying but a friend said, 'nothing tried nothing gained', so I did," she recalled.

At the interview, Bustamante said, "Oh, you are one of the girls I saw going to church," she remembered.

He then, offered her the position as his secretary, at one pound per week.

Miss Longbridge the early years

Gladys Longbridge was born in a small district of Ashton, Westmoreland. She was the daughter of James Longbridge, a farmer; and, Rebecca Blackwood-Longbridge. In her youth, she grew up with her grandparents. She attended school at the age of seven. Her childhood was not unlike other children of her time in the rural areas. However, music and



Lady B marries the Sir Alexander Bustamante on September 8 1962

church activities took up a major part in her life.

By the time, she was 11, she was able to assist in the church community at which she worshipped.

"I studied hard and passed all my exams, and became a pupil teacher," she said.

Two aunts went to the country and brought Miss Longbridge to Kingston. In those years, she lived in Jones Town and attended Tutorial College.

Her outstanding shorthand and typing skills at 150 w.p.m. was recognised by her tutor, Alvin Henry and he advised her to enter a combination examination for 120 w.p.m. Miss Longbridge emerged top of all the other students.

Of Miss Longbridge's employment with Bustamante, she recalled, "I wrote many letters as he answered everything in the press, on every subject on earth."

In the development of their working relationship, she remembered that Bustamante would often invite her to close the office early and take a walk with him to the wharf where the workers began work at six a.m. and continued throughout the day until the work was done.

Bustamante was concerned for people.

In the 30's, Bustamante and Miss Longbridge took to the road in a large black car. In rural areas, there were no restaurants for them to stop and many meals consisted of saltfish or what was available.

Many of the people who need to be unionised, resisted change vigourously.

Lady B remembered that Bustamante entered a bar to buy a drink for one of the women travelling with him that was not feeling well. He was approached by a man who asked "Are you Busta'?", When Bustamante identified himself, she was told that he was not welcomed in the bar because of his association with negroes.

On a trip to Port Antonio, the platform for the meeting was destroyed and dumped in the sea, while onlookers and the police encouraged it.

Lady B remembered many of Bustamante's words.

For example the day in Port Antonio, he told the group of drunken men in a bar that had destroyed the platform, "If your body was being sold for a penny, I would not pay a farthing."

Slowly, the attitudes of people began to change and the trips to the rural areas began to pay-off. Great numbers of Jamaicans began to grow in their support.

One of the memories which Lady B remembered occurred at George the VI Park (Race Course) during 1938.

... The police was poised to shoot the crowd. Bustamante understanding that the police was intent



Lady B giving a gentle hand to a plant.



Lady B escorted by the Deputy Prime Minister Hugh Shearer on an inspection of the troops. The occasion was a special civic function at Old From In Westmoreland.

on their purposes began to sing the British National Anthem forcing the police to lower their guns and to stand to attention...

During the 17 month period when Bustamante was in confinement in the 40's, "Lady B" noted that she visited him on a weekly basis. Upon his release, there was a great struggle between some of the Union Officers and Bustamante. He became angry, and at one point in the meeting took up the chairs and expelled them.

Miss Longbridge and Sir Alexander Bustamante married on September 8, 1962.

"The word retirement is not in my vocabulary, she told her listeners.

She is the Hon. Treasurer Bustamante Industrial Trade Union Trustee since 1938; Member, Executive Committee and Trustee Jamaica Labour Party, Old Age Pension Committee; and Patron of the Bustamante Hospital for Children.

She has received many awards including the Order of Jamaica. ✕

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