



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Diana Mahabir-Wyatt

Chancellor, the pelican epitomizes profound self sacrifice in the interest of others. Today we stand in that symbolic shadow of the pelican atop the crest of a light shining from the West. And today OUR pelican recognizes and celebrates another- Ms Diana Mahabir-Wyatt. This pelican flew her cozy and feathered nest in Canada more than 50 years ago, followed her heart to Trinidad and has been caring for her adopted brood ever since. Her brood does not only include 4 children, 3 foster children, 3 stepchildren and 14 grandchildren but indeed- all of the voiceless everywhere.

It is an oft -repeated cliché- that a society should be judged by the extent to which it shows care to its most disadvantaged citizens. If this is the yardstick, then Diana Mahabir-Wyatt has done more than anyone in identifying those who are the most vulnerable. All of her life's work has been dedicated to shedding light on the darker corners of our existence from places of work to places of neglect and abuse.

Diana Mahabir-Wyatt has led a complete professional life. In 1966, she joined the Employer's Consultative Association and 3 years later was appointed Director. She was a founding member of the National Training Board. She has served on a number of other national committees including the Workman's Compensation/ Employment Injury Committee, Severance Pay Legislation Committee, Freedom of Association Committee and National Flexi-Time Committee. She was a founding member of the National Productivity Council, The National Training Board and the National Self Help Commission.

In the International arena, she has represented us at the International Labour Organization and The Organization of American States.

Though her professional life may be impressive to an onlooker, to her, it was simply doing her job. She, however, considered it her duty to expand her sphere and to serve far more widely. For 15 years she was a weekly columnist on social, economic and political matters for a leading national newspaper. In the field of culture, she has contributed to the Tent Theatre, The National Carnival Commission and the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. Notably, she was also one of the contributors to an anthology of poems by women of Trinidad and Tobago in a publication called "The Washerwoman".

Chancellor, it is said that poetry liberates. Here is a woman whose moral convictions elevate her from being simply a poet to that of becoming a poetess of social justice. For most of all she has had the courage to act; to act in defense of all of the voiceless in our society. It is here where she like a

true washerwoman has worked her knuckles to the bone to lift some dirty stains from the fabric of our society. She is a tireless advocate for the affairs of women and children. She is the founder and patron of The Shelter, a home for battered women and children. She is a founding member and Chair of the Coalition Against Domestic Violence and its evolutionary spin offs including "Peace, Love and Understanding in Schools", "Childline", and "Stop Elderly Abuse Now". In local lingo, she has put her money where her mouth is! And what about her mouth? In the highest court of this land she has raised her voice for 12 years as an Independent Senator using her influence to legislate on industrial relations, equal opportunity, domestic violence, sexual offences and legislation related to children and cohabitation.

Shakespeare promises: The peace of heaven is theirs that lift their swords in such a just and charitable war. This veritable one woman army has lifted her sword in a charitable war. Yet for all her achievements she is quoted in the Sunday Express interview of March 8th, 2009 of feeling herself a failure.

.Therefore Chancellor, I invite you to receive a poet of stanzas, a poetess of social justice and a washerwoman extraordinaire and to confer upon her the degree of Doctors of Laws, Honoris Causa.

St. Augustine Campus

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