

## **MY ACCOUNT OF HOW THE LAWRENCE SCHACHT CLINIC SIGN WAS ACQUIRED**

My name is Derek Anthony Braithwaite formerly of Guyana. I currently reside in Queens, New York and I am employed as an Environmental Engineer at the New York City Transit. While I was a civil engineering student of the University of Guyana I visited Jonestown once in August/September of 1980 and multiple times in 1982 beginning on November 18, the fourth anniversary of the mass suicide/murder.

At that period in Guyana, university students were required to perform one (1) year of national service, which included three months of basic military training. One of the many training centers was located in a place called Papaya, which is about 6 – 10 miles northwest of Matthews Ridge, which in turn was approximately 35 miles from Port Kaituma. Jonestown was about 6 miles from Port Kaituma. In the 1960s manganese ore was mined around Matthews Ridge and was transported by rail to Port Kaituma from whence it was shipped to the US and other destinations. In effect Port Kaituma was the gateway to that part of the country and most people traveled through Port Kaituma to get to the capital of Georgetown by boat. Flying from Matthews Ridge and Port Kaituma was a choice but it was expensive for ordinary people.

In 1980, on my way back to the capital after basic training at Papaya, a group of students including myself hiked into Jonestown to sightsee. When we got there, it was still intact but was being reclaimed gradually by the jungle. The entire settlement was ransacked by fortune seekers, which included soldiers responding to the mass suicide/murder and the residents of Port Kaituma after it was abandoned by the army. Because it was known that Jim Jones imported cyanide, there were rumors that he was mining gold and thus the reason for the ransacking. The local people removed all of the useful household items.

After I returned to Georgetown in Aug/Sept of 1980, I learned that the remainder of my national service was postponed to allow for a full 3<sup>rd</sup> year civil engineering class. The remaining nine months had to be served upon the completion of the 4<sup>th</sup> year in 1982. So in 1982, rather than allowing me to continue the ‘softer part’ of my national service, I was forced to repeat my basic training with the incoming batch of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students. By this time, the organization called the Guyana National Service had opened a satellite training center at Port Kaituma and another at Arakaka, a settlement between Port Kaituma and Matthews Ridge. I was stationed at Port Kaituma. During this ‘tour of duty’ I visited Jonestown several times (beginning November 18) to scavenge building materials to use in projects for the local community. On November 18, 1982 other students and I used the opportunity to scavenge for mementos. I found the cards/labels and while going through the clinic I found Dr. Schacht’s nameplate on the floor amongst the remains strewn by the ‘ransackers’.

I was unable to retrieve the Jim Jones light blue wooden chair and the sign “THOSE WHO DO NOT REMEMBER THE PAST ARE CONDEMNED TO REPEAT IT” because I had no place to store it in the barracks. Had I taken it there, it would have faced



certain confiscation by the training staff. So I left it at Jonestown in their original positions with the hope of returning later to recover them, but that never happened.

Some of my colleagues recovered letters, books and most importantly a set of class notes taken during a lecture by Jim Jones. In that lecture he told the students that the Guyana Government allowed him to settle at that location, not because it loved them, but because they were US citizens and thus were invaluable insurance against any future Venezuelan incursion. Venezuela has an historical claim to two-thirds of Guyana including the region where Jonestown was located. The Venezuelan border and military units were about 60 miles away. Jim Jones was correct in his observation but to date none of the investigators have been able to uncover that purpose of Jonestown. It was for this reason that the Government of Guyana did not enforce its jurisdiction over the settlement and thus no one knew the real conditions at Jonestown. To avoid scrutiny by the Guyanese public, the Peoples Temple treated the locals in Georgetown to concerts by their string band 'Jonestown Express'. They also arranged well-choreographed tours of Jonestown by prominent citizens all of whom were interviewed after and asked to tell of their 'wonderful' experiences. This was aired every Saturday at 2:00 pm. It was such an impressive public relations campaign I was completely won over. I even tried to visit Jonestown in August of 1978 but was unsuccessful. I was impressed that these people were willing to give up all the trappings of the US to fashion a settlement out of nothing in the jungle. How blinded and fooled we all were in Guyana.

For the superstitious, the November 18 trip was a challenge. The agricultural tractor and trailer we used got stuck in a soft spot on the access road about 200 feet short of the entrance. We postponed the effort to extricate the vehicle so that that we can complete the personal scavenging mission. Soon after leaving the vehicle we were confronted by a green snake which raised about half of its body off the ground and refused to budge for several minutes. At this point some of the student were unnerved and wanted to go back but the rest us including the driver prevailed and finished our mission. The remaining visits I made were to select and remove building materials such as the corrugated roofing, wall boards/cladding, framing, etc. This was the beginning of the end of the physical remains of Jonestown. Based on what I saw in the recent CNN documentary nothing is left of the settlement.

Since that time I have been carrying around and protecting the cards and the name plate to the extent that I misplaced them often. In recent times I became obsessed in getting rid of them and considered selling them to a collector. However, my conscience kept preventing me from doing so. Finally, I found an honorable way of parting with these artifacts: while visiting the CNN website I observed that CHS provided the audiotape of the final moments and immediately I contacted CHS with the offer to donate the items.

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