

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Georgetown /Guyana/ University of Guyana/ March 8, 2024

UG's First Female Graduate, Mrs. Bebe Isha Beekie, Remembered as Trailblazer, Beacon of Resilience, Advocate for Equality

"We were all inspired by Mum. She was a trailblazer in many regards, advocating for equality and respect for all, especially women, leaving an indelible mark on those who knew her." These were the words of Dr. Raj Beekie, a proud son of Mrs. Bebe Isha Beekie, who was among the first four women to graduate from the University of Guyana in 1967.

Mrs. Beekie pursued her university studies in an era when traditional gender roles were deeply ingrained in Guyanese society, and women were often expected to fulfil domestic roles rather than pursue higher education or professional careers. However, changing attitudes, influenced by global shifts in gender norms, began challenging these expectations.

Dr. Beekie, an Associate Professor who currently lectures at the Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, in an interview with the Department of Events, Conferences, and Communication (DECC), shared that his mother was the first person to stride across the stage to receive her diploma. He also spoke about her decision to pursue higher education and her academic journey at the University of Guyana.



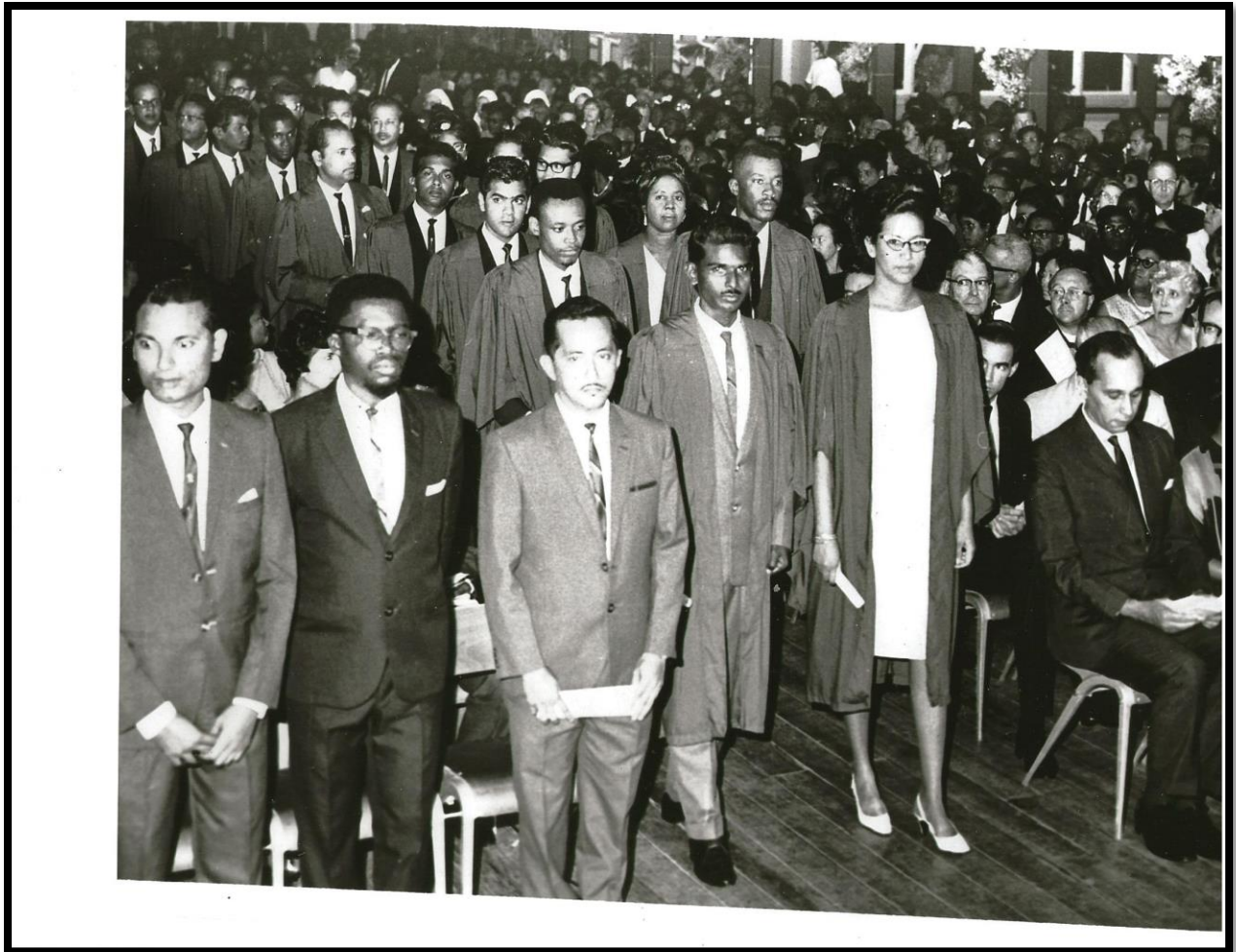
Mrs. Bebe Isha Beekie at the University of Guyana's First Convocation Ceremony in 1967

According to Dr. Beekie, his mother, who passed away at the age of 87 in December 2022, was always passionate about education and the development of young women. He explained that Mrs. Beekie's own decision to further her studies at UG stemmed from the fact that their family was expanding "faster than my father's paycheck." This meant his parents had to find additional ways to maintain their family. In addition to her six biological children, Mrs. Beekie cared for four of her nieces.

Dr. Beekie said his mother knew a university education would boost her chances of securing a better-paying job so that, along with her husband, she could better care for their family. "She approached the Head Mistress of Bishop's High School, who offered her a teaching assistant position and encouraged her to enrol at UG to become a certified teacher," he recounted.

Mrs. Beekie made a bold decision and enrolled at the University of Guyana in 1963, the same year UG was founded at Queen's College in Georgetown. Dr. Beekie recalled that it was not a smooth journey for his mother as she faced many challenges, but she was determined to overcome them in her quest to obtain her degree. He recounted instances when his mother's pregnancies briefly interrupted her studies. "Her lecturers not only encouraged her to resume her studies but also supported her while she was on breaks. They admired her determination and resilience and acted as mentors in ensuring she received the necessary information to cover her brief absences," he recalled.

Hailed as a trailblazer for women in higher education in Guyana, Mrs. Beekie chose as her thesis topic: "Historical Influences on Guyanese Creolese." This research involved extensive travels across different regions of Guyana, recording and later analysing the structure of the Creolese language. "She took immense pride in doing this body of work," the proud son said. After completing her studies at the University of Guyana in 1967, Mrs. Beekie served as a full-time teacher at Saint Joseph's High School for two decades. According to Dr. Beekie, the foundation his mother received at UG allowed her to be on top of her game. "Her achievements as a teacher brought her immense pride. She was respected not only as an educator but also as a relative, friend, and neighbour," he reflected.



The first group of students to graduate from the University of Guyana in 1967 at the Institution's Convocation Ceremony held at Queen's College.

In her reflective poem, where she wrote about a proud moment during her graduation, Mrs. Beekie captured the mood by saying: *“Vivid memories of the pomp and ceremony, the visiting dignitaries gowned in their impressive colours, the newly enrolled students overwhelmed by their commitment, and Dr. Lancelot Hogben, Vice Chancellor, delivering his inaugural Dissertation to the attentive ears of that august audience still surface to the mind...”*

She also wrote about her University of Guyana experience: *“It's a question of inspiration and sacrifice, excitement and goals, hard work and success,”* she wrote. *“They followed four years of challenges, dedication, and creativity from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., and William [her husband] arriving promptly to take me home to my six children all in bed fast asleep and to the burning of the midnight oil,”* Mrs. Beekie reminisced.



Dr. Raj Beekie, Associate Professor in the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) at Saint Mary's University in Minnesota.

Dr. Beekie highlighted that his mother always encouraged other women to pursue their academic dreams and become mentors to fellow women and girls within their communities. He added that his mother was surrounded by inspirational and influential women who recognised her passion and dedication. He explained that his mother's success would not have been possible without the support of her husband. He said throughout her life, she continued to provide encouragement and mentorship to many young persons up until the time of her passing.

The University of Guyana acknowledges the achievements and contributions of all women serving in various fields, especially those serving at UG and in the education sector in general.

(Feature by the Department of Events, Conferences and Communication (DECC), Office of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Guyana.)

The University of Guyana in Brief

The University of Guyana, the national University of Guyana, now in its 60th year, was founded in October 1963, three years before Guyana became independent. "UG" as it is fondly referred to offers over 160 distinct programmes in over 60 disciplines from certificates, Bachelor's degrees, Master's Degrees to Ph.D.'s. These programmes are offered online, face-to-face or in blended formats. UG delivers through a Guyana-based system across eight campuses. This includes its 35-year-old community-based institute for Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE) and the second major campus at Tain in Berbice celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2025. The University of Guyana's student population is over 11,000.

Through its 8 Faculties, including an accredited College of Medical Sciences, School for Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation and the School for Earth and Environmental Sciences which is ranked # 5 globally, “UG” has provided education, training and research for over 60,000 alumni over its 60-year history with significant national and global impact. Other faculties include the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, The Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, The Faculty of Natural Sciences, The College of Behavioural Sciences and Research, The Faculty of Education and Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The University is also home to 10 Research Institutes including the internationally important Centre for Biodiversity, The Institute for Food and Nutrition Security, The Institute for Innovation, Research and Entrepreneurship, The Institute for Energy Diplomacy, The Green Institute, The Institute for Human Resiliency, Strategic Security and the Future, and the International Centre for Excellence in Early Childhood Education. The mission of the University of Guyana is to discover, generate, disseminate and apply knowledge of the highest standard for advancement of communities, the nation, and mankind within an atmosphere of academic freedom, transparent accountability, pragmatic innovation and universal respect.

UG’s forward-thinking Blueprint 2040 is currently setting the course for the University’s future design and institutional response to the changing needs of Guyana, the region and the world. UG is currently celebrating its 60th anniversary with renewed focus on becoming the leading teaching and research University in Guyana. Visit UG at www.uog.edu.gy.

-end-