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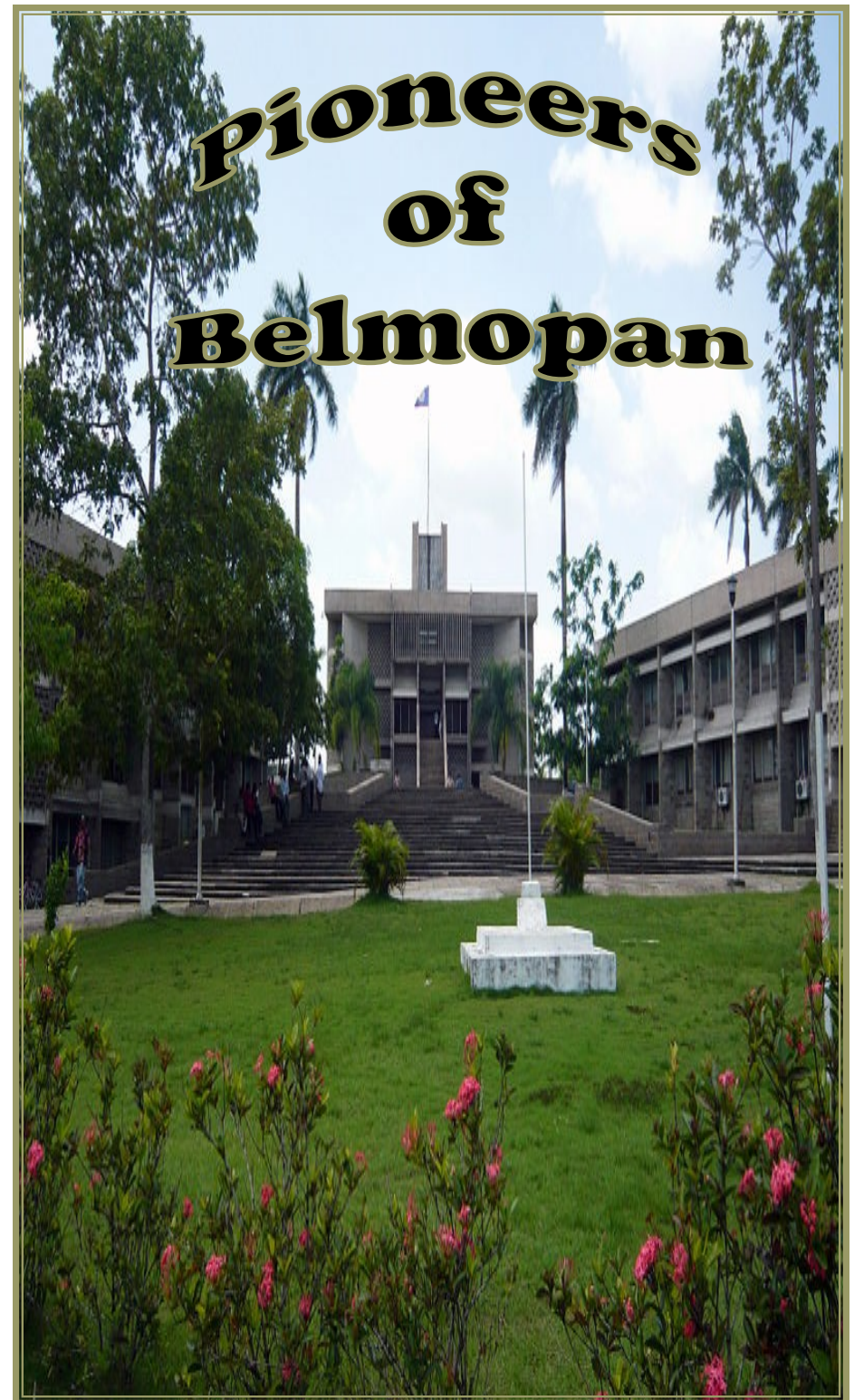
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## *Acknowledgement*

The National Council on Ageing continually seeks to raise awareness of the important role of older people in Belizean society.

Through the collaboration with Ms. Tiffany Taylor, University of Belize, Associates Degree, Social Work student, the NCA was able to highlight the contribution of just some of the older people who played a part in laying the foundations of Belmopan.

The people in this booklet, along with so many others too numerous to mention, are truly all 'Pioneers of Belmopan'.

The National Council on Ageing congratulates Tiffany for the production of this booklet and for successfully completing her Social Work Degree.



Special thanks to all the people who agreed to be interviewed and share their memories with me, without them this booklet wouldn't have been possible.

Thanks to the Belize Archives Department for providing me with valuable information about Belmopan

Thanks to all my friends. Roxanne, Michelle, Cynthia, Shari and Janine who supported me throughout this project and to all my family members. Thanks for all the support and for being patient with me.

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## FORWARD

The foundation of our country was built on the production and ambitions of our ancestors and present generation should preserve and admire the fruits of their labors, and therefore keep their stories alive and fresh in the minds of our youths.

As tomorrow comes and our loved ones move on to a better place, their memories, stories and history will disappear with them. If this memorable information is not documented it will remain just memories of the people, therefore it is best for us to keep our loved ones' memories alive.

This booklet aims to highlight the lives of some pioneers who have been witness to the growth and development of Belmopan City from its conception to the present day.

These Pioneers were the early settlers who migrated to Belmopan mainly because many Government offices were being relocated with the establishment of the new capital. These residents made some huge sacrifices to leave their homes but today they are all grateful and happy that they made the decision to move to Belmopan.

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## HISTORY OF BELMOPAN

In 1961, after hurricane Hattie destroyed approximately 75% of the houses and business in Belize City, the government at the time promoted the idea of building a new capital. This new capital should be located in a better terrain, would entail no costly reclaim of land and would provide for an industrial area.

In 1962 a committee chose a site located 51 miles west of Belize City and 50 miles inland from the Caribbean Sea, with an impressive 250 ft elevation above sea level, a place we now call Belmopan.

The land was purchased from Henry Melhado, with a grant from the Baron Bliss Trust. A ground breaking ceremony was held on 9th October, 1965 by, the then Secretary of State in the British Government, the Right Honorable Anthony Greenwood.

The name itself was a combination of the names of our country 'Belize' and 'Mopan', one of the rivers running in the area which empties out to the Belize River. The name Belmopan was chosen by the Cabinet from a list of names submitted in an open competition. The suggestion came from Police Inspector, Hubert Johnson and Registrar of Cooperatives, Mr. Charles Woods.

Work commenced in 1967 and three year later in 1970 the first phase of the new capital was completed.

Mr. Dakers went on to say that there was not much entertainment in the earlier years of Belmopan, but recalls party night in Belmopan was on Thursday nights whereby all the men would hang out at Charlie's Bar or Hilltop Club.

Mr. and Mrs. Dakers have both been active members of the Belmopan community. Mr. Dakers is a member of the Lions Club, having held the position of 1st Vice President in previous years. He is also a supportive member of Audubon Society, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Cancer Society, Scouts and his church. Mrs. Dakers is also a member of the Lion's Club, as well as HelpAge Belmopan, Rotary Club and her church.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Dakers are happy that they made the move to Belmopan. Although it was difficult in the beginning because there was such a lack of resources and everything needed to be brought from Belize City, including food supplies, they realize that they made the right decision. Mr. and Mrs. Dakers have always enjoyed dancing, socializing with friends and travelling, although they feel their dancing and travelling days are now over.

Mr. Dakers still enjoys reading novels such as mysteries and watching television. Mrs. Dakers enjoyed knitting but finds less time for this activity now

Mr. and Mrs. Dakers advice for the youths is for them to live by the words of God and do what is right. They both believe that the problems that young people are facing now have to do with drugs and that parents need to take proper responsibility for their children.



Mr. Edred and Mrs. Alma Dakers have been married for forty eight years and are the proud parents of two children. They are the original residents of Belmopan, having migrated from Belize City in 1970.

Mrs. Dakers worked as the private secretary to the Governor General at Government House both in Belize City and then in Belmopan, when the post was relocated. Mrs. Dakers retired from the Government Service in 1984.



Mr. Dakers worked in different Government Ministries such as Ministry of Works, as the Chief Finance Officer, and the Ministry of Energy. He retired from the Government Service in 1981 and then opened the first stationary store in Belmopan. Mr. Dakers said he was inspired to open the stationary store because the government departments were new in town and there was no other stationary store in Belmopan and the departments had to purchase supplies from Belize City. Daker's Stationary and Book Store was open on the 9th day of March, 1981. Mr. and Mrs. Dakers worked together in the store up until recently when they passed it on to their daughter who is now managing the store.

Mr. and Mrs. Dakers recall Belmopan in the earlier days as being very rainy and muddy. The surroundings were very bushy and at night it was very quiet. However, they have no regrets about moving to Belmopan, despite certain hardships in the early days of development.

From its inception Belmopan was governed by a corporation answering to the government called RECONDEV (Reconstruction and Development Corporation). In 1999 the residents of Belmopan voted in a referendum to switch to direct election of a city council. In 2000, Belmopan was incorporated as a city and held its first City Council election. Anthony Chanona of the People's United Party was elected the first Mayor of Belmopan.

Today what was once Belmopan is now Belmopan City boasting a population of 18,100.

## Mr. Justo Castillo

Mr. Justo Castillo was born on the 11 day of April, 1920, in Belize City. He attended and later graduated from Holy Redeemer Primary School and St. John's College in Belize City. He migrated to Belmopan in 1970 when the government offices were relocated. His work with the government began at the age of 18, during the course of his engagement he work across the Public Service and later served as Permanent Secretary in various Ministries.

Mr. Castillo later worked at the Development Finance Corporation as a **financial adviser** for ten years before his retirement at the age of 68.

Mr. Castillo is an active member of the Belmopan Community. He serves as a Lay Minister of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, is one of the founding members of the Belmopan Lions Club and is still active in the fundraising events. He is a member of HelpAge Belmopan, where he holds the position of treasure. Mr. Justo is also a member of the Executive Board of the National Council on Ageing and is a member of the VOICE organization.

Mr. Castillo is the proud father of seven children who, because of proper family values, are all successful people. They hold positions ranging from bankers, accountant, businesswoman, teacher to manager. Mr. Castillo, in his spare time, enjoys reading and watching old movies. He believe reading keeps his brain functioning.



## Mrs. Myrtle Gill

Mrs. Myrtle Gill was born on the 4th day of December 1934. Mrs. Gill was originally from Toledo district but migrated to Belmopan in June of 1969 with her husband.

Mr. and Mrs. Gill both moved to Belmopan due to their jobs. Mr. Gill worked with Social Investment and Mrs. Gill worked as a secretary with the consultant company Norman and Dawbarn (Architects and Town Planners), who constructed the first buildings in Belmopan. She worked for them for four years before moving to work at the Development Finance Cooperation. She retired from there in 1984.

Mrs. Gill was one of the first residents to live on Cardinal Street where she still resides. She recalls Belmopan in the earlier days as being a very rainy and muddy place and surrounded by bushes. Today she is pleased to see the development of Belmopan as a City with a growing population and many businesses.

Mrs. Gill is the mother of four children and in her spare time she enjoy playing board games with her family and taking care of her grandchildren. In her earlier years she enjoyed sewing and knitting.

Mrs. Gill is a member of HelpAge Belmopan, the Lions Club and Belmopan Cancer Society.

Her advice to the youths is for them to stay in school and study hard, to obey their parents and most of all to respect themselves.



Mrs. Justa Adela Arzu was born on the 28th Day of May, 1927. She was originally from Punta Gorda Town but migrated to Belmopan along with her husband, who worked with Mr. Mena, in 1970. Mrs. Arzu and her husband were among the first few people living in Belmopan.

She recalls Belmopan as being a place that rained a whole lot and due to lack of infrastructure, it caused the surrounding area to be muddy at times. Mrs. Arzu went on to say that Belmopan was a very quiet place and was surrounded by bushes.

Mrs. Arzu explained that she has seen Belmopan grow in many ways, in term of the vast increase of buildings, businesses and the growth of the Belmopan population.

Mrs. Arzu have been a widow since 1985 and is the mother of one son. She has been cooking for the Police Department since 1994, and is well known in her community for the pastries which she sells. In earlier years Mrs. Arzu was a member of Belmopan Women's group whereby they gave support to other women in the community. Presently she is a Lay Minister in her church and a member of HelpAge Belmopan.

Mrs. Arzu advises the youths of today, especially the females, to be independent. She encourage young people to go to church, obey their parents, respect themselves and older persons.

In her spare time she enjoys dancing, attending to her flowers and visiting friends in her neighborhood.



Mr. Castillo's advice to the youth is for them to live trying to please God and obey the Ten Commandments. He implores the young people to live morally healthy lives and to abstain from sex until marriage. Mr. Castillo also advises the young people to live within their means, save as much as they can financially, stay away from drugs and always believe in God.

Mr. Justo Castillo is an honest, humble and God fearing man who will continue to be active and serve the community of Belmopan.

## *Mrs. Gwendoline Zetina*

Mrs. Gwendoline Zetina was born on the 10th day of October, 1935, in Banana Bank, Cayo District, but grew up in Belize City. Mrs. Zetina moved all over the country with her husband who worked in the agriculture sector. She migrated with her family to Belmopan in 1981 and has been living there ever since.



Mrs. Zetina is very active in her community and her church. She has been a lay minister at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church for over 15 years and continues to sing in the choir. Ms. Gwen, as she is affectionately known, is also a member of many service organizations in Belmopan. She is an auxiliary member of the Lions Club, a member of HelpAge Belmopan and Belmopan Cancer Society. Her contribution to these organizations is generally through the various fundraising committees, where she volunteers to cook, serve and decorate for functions that seek to raise funds to provide service to others in the community.

In her early years, Ms. Gwen enjoyed sewing, which she did for fifty years for her family and others. She would also prepare wreaths for funerals but now she feels her eyes would not permit her to do such intricate activities.

As a member of the Belmopan beautification project, Ms. Gwen was among the many who helped beautify Belmopan by planting flowers around the city. Now in her spare time she still enjoys gardening and preparing flower arrangements

## *Mr. Orlando O. Orio*

Mr. Orlando Omar Orio was born on the 5th Day of October, 1930, in Corozal Town. Mr. Orio attended La Emaculada Primary School in Orange Walk and later went on to St. Johns College in Belize City.



After high school Mr. Orio went into the classroom to teach for one year and later went on to work with the Humane Society for two years. Mr. Orio then went on to work in the Agriculture sector where he moved around and worked in all the different districts of Belize.

Mr. Orio retired from the Government service in 1976, but continued to work in the agriculture private sector, including the Livestock Control Board.

Although Mr. Orio is officially retired from working in the agriculture field, he still works with farmers giving them advice and tips about farming and rearing animals. In his spare time, Mr. Orio still does volunteer work with farmers, as he loves agriculture work so much that it is difficult for him not to help the farmers.

In 1991 Mr. Orio and his wife decided to call Belmopan their home. He is the father of three children.

Mr. Orio's advice to the youths is for them to help build Belize by going into the agriculture sector. He encourages them to farm the land and provide for themselves. Mr. Orio also advises the youths to respect themselves as well as older persons.



**M**s. Juanita Ireland was born in Corozal on the 27 Day of December 1926, She attended the Methodist Primary School and from there she took her teacher's exam and went into the classroom for two years, but found that profession was not for her.



Ms. Ireland migrated to Belmopan in 1974 working in the health sector as a Rural Health Nurse and Midwife, where she served the community until 1990.

Ms. Ireland is the mother of four children, two boys and two girls.

Ms. Juanita is an active member in her church, where she enjoys assisting in her church fundraisers. She is also a member of HelpAge Belmopan, Red Cross and VOICE.

Ms. Ireland's advise to the youths is to respect older persons and themselves, and to stay away from drugs. She also would like for them to follow the ten commandment and to read the bible but most of all she advises them to stay in school.

Ms. Ireland enjoys sewing, singing, attending to her garden and animals.

It was natural that from her enjoyment of flowers, both growing and arranging, she has served on the committee responsible for organizing the flower shows and flower arrangements for the National Agricultural and Trade Show

Ms Gwen is a caregiver and has taken care of sixteen children, eight of her own and eight of family members and neighbours.

Ms. Gwen's advice to the youths of today is for them to live an honest life, respect themselves and others and most of all believe in God.

## *Mrs. Patricia B. Robinson*

Mrs. Patricia Beth Robinson was born on the 1st Day of October 1929 in the United Kingdom, she migrated to Belize, along with her husband when he returned to Belize City in 1956. Mrs. Robinson and her family migrated to Belmopan in 1978 and have been living here ever since.



Mrs. Robinson has been an active member in numerous organizations. She served as the Commissioner of the Belize Girl Guide Association from 1977 to 1981. She also served as an executive member of the Belize Red Cross both in Belize City and Belmopan.

Mrs. Robinson served as a member of the hospital auxiliary and also volunteered as a Librarian at St. Catharine Academy for four years. At present Mrs. Robinson is a member of Belmopan VOICE, member of a bible study group, and a committee member for the National Council on Ageing.

Mrs. Robinson's advice to the youths is for them to put God first and to live the way God wanted us to live.

In addition to all her activeness in the community, Mrs. Patricia Beth Robinson attends to her beautiful flower garden and her dogs.

## *Lady Leonie E. Cain*

Lady Leonie Elfreda Cain was born in Belize City on the 28th Day of July 1931. She attended Wesley Methodist Primary School and then went on to St. Hilda's College. She met and married the love of her life, Sir. Edney Cain and had fifty-six wonderful years of marriage up to the time of his death.



Lady Cain and her husband migrated to Belmopan permanently in 1991 after serving the Government of Belize as Ambassadors in Washington and London

As one of the original members of the YWCA, Lady Cain was one of the many people who helped built the YWCA building. When living in Belize City Lady Cain was very active in her church, where she worked with the women and youths. She continues to be active in the Methodist Church here in Belmopan. Lady Cain was also a member of the Belize Red Cross and is presently a member of VOICE, Belmopan.

Lady Cain enjoys cooking and taught cooking part time at the Belize Technical College. Lady Cain enjoys craft, travelling and working in her flowers garden and says she feels at peace whenever she is caring for her flowers.

Lady Cain's advice for the youths is for them to get involve in some form of skill, especially the girls, so they can work to have a better life.