

Flavie Jackson

Dialogue With the Director of Cultural Affairs of the Seychelles



Mrs. Flavie Jackson carries with her an aura of gracious self-assurance and dynamic conviction. Speaking in fluent English, with a slight French accent, she talks rapidly and with enthusiasm about her homeland, her husband and children, and the various occupations in which she has engaged. Teacher, literature evangelist, executive secretary, hairdresser, archivist, librarian, director of cultural affairs. . . Here is a successful Christian woman who has raised a family, traveled extensively, and has served her homeland with distinction. She tells us that throughout her life she has felt God's guiding hand and, in turn, has sought to serve Him with integrity. Our dialogue took place in the city of Bangalore, India, while Mrs. Jackson was attending the Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the lay representative from the Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

■ *What can you tell us about the Seychelles?*

They are an archipelago of 92 small tropical islands located in the Indian Ocean, approximately 1,000 miles (1,600 km) east of the African mainland. The population stands at 70,000, with most of the Seychellois living on Mahé, the largest island.

The Seychelles were discovered in the early 1500s by the Portuguese and claimed by France in 1756. The British ruled the islands between 1814 until 1976, when our country became a republic. Our economy is based on tourism, fishing, and agriculture. I'm proud to be Seychellois and to live in one of the loveliest spots on earth!

■ *What is special about your homeland?*

First, the harmonious mixture of races and nationalities—from Africa, Europe, China, and India—all united by our Creole language and culture. In addition, most Seychellois also speak French and English. Second, the beauty

of the environment: the white sands, the blue-green sea, and the life-giving tropical sun. Third, some of our unique products—such as the *coco de mer*, a double coconut that can weigh as much as 50 pounds (24 kgs), giant tortoises, and unusual species of plants and birds.

■ *How did you come in contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church?*

Like most of the people in the Seychelles, my grandparents were Catholic. However, just after I was born my mother became a Seventh-day Adventist. I attended the only Adventist school in the Seychelles and was baptized when I was 13 years old in the sea, off the island of Cerf.

■ *Where did you spend your youth and early adulthood?*

After my parents migrated to Kenya, I joined them and continued my studies in Nairobi. When I completed my schooling, I was invited to teach in an elementary school for Moslem girls there. At that time I met Wilfred Jackson, a former British Army officer and who later became my husband. Bill had been raised in the Anglican faith and I began to pray that God will lead him to

become a Seventh-day Adventist. Slowly he started to change his life-style, to study the Bible, and to enjoy attending church meetings. By then we had moved to Tanganyika (now Tanzania), where he worked for the prison system. What a joy it was to see him join our church by baptism!

■ *Where did you go next?*

We moved to Kampala, Uganda, where my husband served for five years as the director of an agricultural school for the blind. In the meantime I began to work as a literature evangelist, distributing Adventist publications. We were both very involved in church activities. It was a very rewarding experience! By then our children started going to school. I decided to develop my skills and became executive secretary of the Uganda Council on Women. Later, thanks to my ability to communicate both in English and French, I joined Air Congo. I had been away from my islands for more than 20 years and I was beginning to feel homesick. So I convinced Bill to move back to the Seychelles.

■ *What did you do when you went back to your homeland?*

In 1971 Bill began working as an accountant in Victoria, the capital. I was

invited to serve as chief clerk in the national archives and eventually became the director under the last British governor. In 1976, as our country became an independent republic, I began working at the Carnegie Public Library. Two years later I went to England to study the operation of several major libraries. Upon my return, we reorganized our national library and started a mobile library to make our collections accessible to more people. Between 1979 and 1987 I was the chief librarian.

■ *Tell us about your children.*

We value Adventist education and for their secondary studies both attended our Stanborough School, located in the outskirts of London. Our daughter Georgette is now married to a civil engineer, and they have two children. They live in England, where she works as a secretary with Air Seychelles. Our son Francois is a pilot for Air Seychelles. He and his wife have a baby daughter.

■ *What are your current responsibilities?*

Since 1987 I have been serving as director of the Department of Cultural Affairs. This involves supervising and coordinating, for the national government, the library, archives and museums, the national heritage, the office of copyrights, the art associations, and the Conservatory for Music and Dance.

■ *Do you find rewarding your government work?*

I consider it an honor to serve my homeland. In addition, it has allowed me to expand my knowledge and skills. I have represented my country in various ways in many parts of the world: in Canada, China, Kenya, Russia, and the United States.

■ *What can you tell us about the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Seychelles?*

Adventist work in the Seychelles began just a few years before I was born. The first pastor came from the island of Mauritius. As a result of his faithful work, an Adventist congregation was established. Soon afterwards the first little church in the city of Victoria was built. Our first believers had to endure ridicule and harassment—stones thrown on the church's roof during the meetings and loud noises to drown the members' singing during the Sabbath services. In spite of the opposition, our church has grown, and we now have three congrega-

tions on the islands, with a total of 200-250 baptized members. Several hold positions of responsibility in government and business. At present there is one Seventh-day Adventist for approximately every 300 Seychellois.

■ *Describe a typical day in your life.*

I get up very early in the morning, usually at 4:30 AM, and my first activity is to spend some devotional time. I always ask the Lord to guide and inspire me during the day. Then I work on reports or write letters. At around 6:30 my husband and I have breakfast. By 7:30 both of us are at work in our respective offices. I spend almost the whole morning in meetings or discussions regarding the coordination of the various divisions in our ministry. At noon we might have a business lunch or meet with one of the cultural groups that visit our country. In the early afternoon there may be more meetings or planning sessions. By 4:00 I take care of the office paperwork and by 4:30 I'm on my way home. There I may work in the garden or attend to other tasks. After supper I devote time to my church responsibilities: preparing the Sabbath school program, as superintendent, or writing a sketch for the youth meeting.

■ *Do you have any hobbies?*

I used to do needlework and to embroider very well. In fact, when I was a school girl in Nairobi I was selected to embroider a table-runner for Princess Elizabeth—now Queen Elizabeth—when she came to Kenya. But now I concentrate on the garden, in which I have many flower plants that my mother left me when she died.

■ *What gives you the most satisfaction in your professional work?*

To have a project well-planned and successfully carried out.

■ *Can you share your faith as you fulfill your current responsibilities?*

There isn't a day in which I don't have the opportunity of witnessing for my faith. All those who know me are acquainted with my Adventist convictions and respect them. Through my work I meet government officials, ambassadors, and ministers. Frequently I

can share my beliefs with them. Those who plan the meetings or receptions know that they can't count with me on Friday nights or on Saturdays until sunset. They also respect my principles regarding food and drink.

■ *What does it mean to you to be a Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist?*

To think and feel that I am child of God and that the Lord has always something for me to do. To know by experience that God listens to my prayers. I was barely four years old when I fell into a pan of boiling water and was very badly burned. At the hospital I was for an entire month on my back, naked, unable to move. When the nurse tried to make me walk, I would scream in pain. One day my mother spent the entire night with me and we both prayed that God would allow me to walk again. The next morning the nurse took me across the ward to be with another lady who was very fond of talking with me. As the nurse went away, the lady asked me to walk back to my room by myself. I slowly got down and walked across the ward! Since that day I have marveled at God's answers to my prayers.

■ *How would you summarize your philosophy of life?*

I owe much to my parents, teachers, and ministers. The values I received from them I have sought to pass on to my own children and to the youth of my church. Two Bible passages have inspired me through the years: "Don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time" (Matthew 6:34, LB). "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today" (Exodus 14:13, NIV). □

Interview by Humberto M. Rasi