

Mr. Cricket's memorabilia finds a home

By STAN WALKER



An earnest desire by Mrs. Ena Gabriel to find a home for her late husband James "Mr. Cricket" Gabriel's memorabilia was realized on Tuesday, August 4, when a team from the Cricket Hall of Fame headed by director Michael Chambers turned up at her home in Manhattan to collect the items.

Ena, who will turn 102 in November (2009), was concerned that the items which she collected and secured over the years could end up in the garbage. "I was worried that they would be destroyed after my passing," she said. The collection included newspaper and magazine clippings with articles on her husband, photographs, trophies and a signed bat.

Born in St. Lucia in May, 1895, Jimmy as her husband was affectionately called, arrived in the United States in 1921, and passed away in 1997 at the age of 102. He dedicated almost his entire life to the game that he so dearly loved. Jimmy, one of the first inductees into the Cricket Hall of Fame, served the New York Cricket League for 66 years in various positions, 45 as a player for the St. Lucia Athletic Club. He played his last match at the age of 70.

During the visit, which lasted for approximately four hours, Ena, who belies her age, with all her faculties very much intact, engaged in a lively conversation in which she reminisced on the memorable times that she had with her beloved husband and some of his cricket colleagues.

Speaking glowingly of Jimmy, whom she described as a gentleman outside and inside the house, she quipped, that "Cricket was Jimmy's first love, I came second. Each year at the start of the season I generally divorce him but at the end of the season we got married again. Jimmy lived for cricket. Everything has a price! Otherwise we got along well. I enjoyed all the moments that I spent with him." The couple met at a cricket game

The centenarian, whom one could easily see was very attractive in her youth, said that she loved to be admired by men. "When I visited the games with Jimmy, I knew that the men were looking at me, but that didn't matter because I had eyes only for Jimmy. I was lucky to have a man like him. When you have a nice man like him in your life, it is good to be alive. I was fortunate to have a good companion in my life."

A former dressmaker, Ena said that sewing was her greatest passion. She deplored the manner in which youngsters of today approach life. "In many cases they are living above their means. They are spoiled rotten."

During the lively and spirited conversation, Ena who was obviously happy that the memorabilia would be going to a good place, got very excited when she found out that one of the members of the Hall of Fame team, Ovid John, was from the county (Demerara) in Guyana, where she was born. She quickly got up walked over and embraced him briefly, checking to find out if they were related.

Living a long time is good as long as you are not crippled up in bed, she reiterated, attributing her longevity to having a good companion, and the way that you eat, which she says is what keeps you healthy.

Ena said that she stopped eating canned food since she was very young and except for a bit of chicken and fish, she does not eat any other meat. She was critical of beef saying that today they feed the cows with too much chemicals. "I do not keep anything sweet in my house and the only juice she drinks or freshly squeezed orange juice. Occasionally she uses honey as a sweetener for tea.

According to her social worker Esther Henderson, who is from Antigua and who comes from a family with a cricket background, it has been Ena's long desire to donate her beloved memorabilia to some place where it can be preserved. In fact, the Hall of Fame was contacted more than two years ago to collect the items. "This means a lot to her. She is totally relieved that it is done. If she never gets to do anything else in this life, I know that she will die in peace," Henderson said as she thanked the Hall of Fame for making the visit to Ena's home.

Before the Hall of Fame team left her apartment, Ena had one request: a visit to Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, New York, where she spent many memorable days with her husband and his cricket fraternity, to compare it to what it looked like back in the days.

Still looking very sprightly, Ena says that her days are numbered. However, because of her witty and jovial attitude one should not be surprised if she outlives her husband stay with us for many more years.