

Couple's remarkable lives benefit Guyana

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A 23-year-old nursing student named Janet Rosenberg fell in love with a dental student named Cheddi Jagan at Northwestern University in 1942.

Rosenberg and Jagan married a year later over the objections of her Jewish and his Hindu parents. They announced plans to go to Jagan's home in British Guyana on the northern coast of South America to help win the country's independence. Guyana gained its independence in 1966.

Despite long odds including imprisonment and interference from the British and American governments, the Jagans not only came to head the government of Guyana, as it was known after it won independence, but the American Janet Jagan was elected president in 1997 after her husband's death.

"Thunder in Guyana," a documentary by Suzanne Wasserman, Janet Jagan's cousin, tells the story with the warmth of a family album and the distance you'd expect from a professional filmmaker.

Arawak, Carib and Warrau Indians were living in what came to be Guyana when Europeans arrived in the late 1500s. Guyana was ruled by the Dutch, French and British who formed the colony of British Guiana in 1831.

Forty percent of Guyana's population are the descendants of slaves brought from Africa to work on sugar plantations and rice farms.

When slavery was outlawed in 1838, planters brought in laborers from India to work the plantations. Europeans, Indians and Chinese round out the population.

In 1953, the Jagans led the multiracial People's Progressive Party to victory in the first election under universal suffrage. Jagan was elected chief minister; Janet Jagan was elected the country's first female minister and deputy speaker of Parliament.

Fearing Jagan's government would lead to a Communist toe-hold, the British removed the Jagans from office. The couple was jailed and held under house arrest.

By 1961, Jagan had been elected prime minister. Three years later, the United States and Britain again ousted Jagan. Forbes Burnham, a former Jagan ally, held dictatorial power for the next 28 years.

The Jagans maintained a political presence, traveling the country and the world trying to retake the government.

In 1992, Cheddi Jagan was elected president. He died five years later, and Janet Jagan was elected president at the age of 77. She resigned the office in 1999 because of poor health.

"Thunder in Guyana" is a love story and the story of two people who grew old while maintaining youthful ideals.

Made for Independent Lens and public television, WLPB will broadcast "Thunder in Guyana" at 3 a.m. Feb. 27 and at 10 p.m. It's worth taping for viewing at more wakeful hours. An independent movie is one that derives more than 50 percent of its funding from sources other than the major U.S. studios.

"Company of Soldiers"

What strikes you about the soldiers of Dog Company in this "Frontline" documentary, "A Company of Soldiers," is how young the soldiers are when we meet them and how old they seem by film's end.

An October Films production for WGBH, "Frontline" and the BBC, the documentary follows the soldiers into action in Iraq as they try to protect a market, find and kill insurgents and make the daily runs by armored truck that have gotten so many soldiers killed or wounded.

When a truck in front of the one carrying a cameraman is hit by explosives, you feel as though you're driving the second vehicle.

When the soldiers draw sniper fire and their machine gun mounted on the top of the speeding truck slams into an overhead obstruction, you flinch.

When the soldiers hold a memorial service for one of their comrades killed in action, you cry with the soldiers of Dog Company.

Because of the language and shots showing wounded and dead people, some PBS stations may opt not to air the film for fear of FCC sanctions. According to a statement from "Frontline," PBS stations airing the film will be asked to sign a form indemnifying PBS and WGBH from FCC damages.

Some soldiers curse, especially when they are frightened or angry. People - soldiers and civilians - get wounded and killed in war. A film that didn't show war as it is would be worthless.