



PanCanal Alumni Association, Inc.

"Where Panamanians Unite"

August 2008

www.pancanalalumni.com

Former Panama Canal Zone School Experience

By Mr. Victor L. Harewood

Alumni of La Boca High School Class of 1949

Prior to 1999, the Panama Canal Zone was probably the most unique territory of the Western Hemisphere. It was truly an enclave located almost in the center of the Isthmus of Panama covering approximately 550 square miles and governed exclusively by the United States government.

As a whole, the population of the Canal Zone was mixed yet definitely segregated. Within the Canal Zone, a number of communities were established. Some were for the so called "white" residents and others for non-whites, hence schools among other institutions were segregated.

My experience as a non-white student from Panama City attending the segregated school during the period of 1941 through 1949 was for me a blessing in disguise. It was a proven fact that separate but equal was by no means equal in its truest sense. Separate schools in the communities of Balboa and La Boca were not equal. Schools in Balboa provided the educational needs of the Caucasian residents. The schools in the community of La Boca provided the formal education for the non-white students.

The quality of education in the schools of La Boca and other non-white communities was substandard in a number of respects. However, the end results were amazingly positive due in great measure to the staff of teachers that were committed to develop students that were eager to learn and to become worthy individuals beyond the segregated enclosure of the Panama Canal Zone.

Today, fifty nine years after successfully completing elementary through high school training, I am forever grateful to the following teachers most of whom have passed on: Messers C. L. Barton, A.G. Blake, R. Beecher, A. G. Cockburn, G. L. Davis, E. Dixon, J. Keaney, H. Lavalas, D. Meyers, P.S. Martin, A. L. B. Morgan, J. Parchment, A. Parchment, R. T. Prescott, W. Steward, G. C. Wright, Miss A. Boulin, Mrs. V. Duncan, Mrs. S. Doig, Mrs. E. Pringle and Mrs. L. Perez. They all played a major role in my education. They prepared me excellently to function in a highly competitive society both in the Republic of Panama and in the United States.

Many of their students became teachers in the Canal Zone and the United States. They perpetuated the excellent caliber of training enjoyed by the native youngsters. Their legacy will be long remembered, all of which emerged from people who were dedicated and fully focused on developing students many of whom are outstanding Panamanian and American citizens today.

-end-