

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Happy 90th Birthday, Ms. Vida Chinnery!

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She's lived through the Second World War, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, and the first walk on the moon. Not to mention, she was born only eight years after the Virgin Islands were transferred from under Danish rule to that of the United States. But, perhaps most impressive is the fact that Ms. Vida Chinnery still remembers the exact house number where she was born some 90 years ago on February 5, 1925 on St. Croix.

To commemorate Ms. Chinnery's milestone birthday, which she celebrated last Thursday, members of the Christiansted Seventh-Day Adventist Temple, where Ms. Chinnery is a member, surprised her with an intimate gathering at the church fellowship hall following Sabbath services yesterday.

And to say that Ms. Chinnery was surprised is an understatement.

During brief opening remarks, church elder Horace Graham, Jr., spoke of how thankful the congregation is to have Ms. Chinnery be a part of it.

"When God has taken someone and given them a long life, we really have to say thank you to God for that," Graham said, adding, "We hope we are not overwhelming you, but we are overwhelmed by how much you mean to us."

Ms. Chinnery, sitting nearby at the head table, could hardly contain her joy.

"Overwhelmed? I'm more than overwhelmed. You're lucky you don't have to call the but, which was received with



Vida Chinnery (center with

corsage) surrounded by friends at 90th birthday celebration at C'sted Seventh-Day Adventist Temple

The feisty and fashionable nonagenarian donned a rose-pink skirt suit, accentuated by an eggplant-colored blouse beneath the scallop-sleeved jacket. A lovely red-rose corsage adorned the jacket's left front panel. Oh, and her silver hair was stylishly arranged into a French roll.

She again expressed surprise when she was presented with a bouquet of red roses.

"I've never gotten a bouquet of red roses ever in my entire life before," she exclaimed.

And speaking of Ms. Chinnery's life, she shared some of its many highlights with the *VI Consortium*.

Her first job was babysitting the infant daughter of a young couple that lived at the Grande Hotel in St. Thomas. But, she would have to relinquish that job when love came

knocking and she married a Mr. Trotman in 1943. She next worked as a waitress at St. Thomas' Caribbean Hotel, and then moved to New York City where she worked in the garment factories.

Ms. Chinnery then embarked on a career in the healthcare field. She first worked as a nurse at a Catholic hospital in the Bronx, then the state called and offered her a position at the Creedmoor Psychiatric Hospital in Queens Village, NY. That was on Oct. 5, 1955. She remained there for 17 years before relocating back to St. Croix in 1972. That same year, she married Mr. Chinnery, after having been divorced since 1953. Mr. Chinnery passed away in 1993.

Ms. Chinnery spoke fondly of the day she turned 90 and received a telephone call from her grandson, Edwin Trotman, in Staten Island. He connected her other family members, including her daughter Rosalita and family, in the Bronx and her grand daughter, Antoinette Moses, in Staten Island. Ms. Chinnery also has a son in Colorado and another daughter Florine, also in the Bronx.

Ms. Chinnery, the oldest of six girls, is the aunt of Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett. Plaskett is the daughter of Ms. Chinnery's younger sister, Magdalene.

"I am very proud of her," she said. "Stacey has a big job to do. Her parents struggled to keep her in the best of schools."



When asked what is her formula for longevity, Ms. Chinnery's advice was clear.

"Not drinking, not smoking, not carousing," she said.

Of the new Seventh-Day Adventist family she joined in 2004, after 80 years of being a devout Lutheran, Ms. Chinnery said the experience has changed her life.

"I used to worry a lot, but now I just take things to the Lord in prayer," she said.

And she had occasion to put her faith to work last year when she battled a serious bout of pneumonia.

"April, May and June, I was sick with pneumonia and I thought I would be a goner," she reflected. "But, I am blessed and highly favored by the grace of God."

She praised the efforts of her friends and neighbors, Joaquine Delon and Thelma Long, who helped nurse her back to life and who were also on hand to see her celebrate the big 9-0.

Ms. Chinnery is the mother of six; three of her children are deceased. While she could not give the exact count of her grandchildren, she proudly told *VI Consortium* that she is "the grandmother of four generations," while holding up four fingers.

She is sister to Emily Westby, Adella Jacobs, Magdalene Hendricks, Evangeline Hendricks, and Eleanor Nicco.

The way she effortlessly rattles off dates and details, like they happened just yesterday and not over the course of nine decades, is, well, quite remarkable. Nothing seems able to escape the memory of this charming lady that is so full of life.

As for that house number, Ms. Chinnery declared with all certainty, "Number 23 Prince Street in Christiansted town is where I was born."

Of her 90th birthday celebration with her friends at Christiansted SDA, Ms. Chinnery said, "I feel honored, wonderful, blessed and highly favored. Never would I have thought God would do something like this for me."

Well, we see no reason why He wouldn't.

Happy 90th, Ms. Chinnery!

Feature Image: Vida Chinnery taken by Bruce Graham