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NEXT STEP

FROM PROFESSORSHIP TO POLITICS

Kathleen Gertrud Ferrier is a well-regarded former Dutch Member of Parliament of Surinamese decent. During her career spanning over three decades, she has worked mainly as a social aid worker all over the world and a teacher of languages. This of course might be considered an unlikely career path considering that Ms. Ferrier happens to be the daughter of the first Surinamese President, Johan Ferrier. Recently Ms. Ferrier joined Asian University for Women (AIW) as an honorary visiting professor and it was there that this writer sat down to talk to her about her experience in social work, politics, and teaching.

Why don't we start by talking a little bit about yourself and the work that you have done till now, because not many here in Bangladesh will know who you are and the work you have done.

Well I was born in Suriname, which is the former Dutch Guiana. One of the three Guiana's that are in the north coast of South America and I am from the part in the middle that used to be Dutch. Therefore, I have Dutch nationality. But in the school system I was in, I learnt Dutch, my mother tongue, English, French, and German, but not the languages of my continent, which of course were Spanish and Portuguese.

So when I got to university I decided to learn the languages of my continent by studying modern Spanish-American Literature. I did my Masters' thesis on a Cuban poet named Nicholas Guillen. And at the end of my study, I started to teach because when you learn a language you have to learn a profession, and after studying for six years, you can speak a language but then now you have to do something to earn a living. So some of us became interpreters, and some of us became teachers—I picked the latter.

So, I started to teach and that is how I met my husband. We married in Chile in 1984, and lived there for 7 years, during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. We had the privilege to see how the Chilean population went from this dictatorship to democracy and I am very honoured to have lived through that.

And then we moved to Brazil, where we lived for three years. In these 10 years in Latin America, I had been working with women and children in the poorest parts of the big cities. I worked at the grassroots level with women's and children's groups, where every week I would teach them alphabetisation and how to read and write, and talk about hygiene and health related issues that they were not aware about. And then we got back to the Netherlands with our two sons, our oldest who was born in Chile and our youngest



PHOTO: MARLIN BISWAS

who was born in Brazil.

How and why did you eventually decide on leaving politics?

In the Netherlands I was always an exception and people treated me like that. Even though I was not completely black, I was not treated as one of them. So, I consider myself a black woman and being a black woman in the Christian Democratic Party, I was not expected to make any difference. I was treated as if it was okay to be there, but they would not be bothered by me. But that was not why I was in politics and as a result, it was not a reason for me to leave. But I had been through some really trying times. Towards the end, my party decided to collab-

orate with an ultra-right wing party, which said that Islam is not a religion, but a political theory and ideology. This went against everything I believed in. While this collaboration did not hurt me personally, it did make it tough for me to work.

I could have stayed for four more years in the parliament, but I believe politicians should move and let new blood in. All over the world politicians think that they are irreplaceable but they are not. Politicians should always work knowing that they are replaceable while moving towards making the most constructive changes in their countries. It was with this thought that I eventually left my position.

During some of our private conversations, you have often talked about how your experiences here in South Asia are so vastly different from you time in Suriname. Could you please elaborate on that?

Well, I have to say that Suriname is a country which cannot really be compared to any other in the sense that it is such a rich mix of cultures—people from all over the world came here for so many reasons, but mainly due to colonialism and the colonisers' need for people to work on their land. My own ancestors are from places as varied as Kolkata and Africa. Suriname is probably one of the few places where you will find a mosque and a synagogue in the same place. One of the most important skills a future leader needs to have is being inter-cultural connectors, that they should be able to work with differences, and be able to think inclusively. Without this skill you cannot solve the problems of today and tomorrow. This is something which is very important in politics too. In Suriname, diversity in general is not seen a problem. It is seen as strength of force. And in Suriname, it was like that because we knew that we needed each other. *You often talk passionately about your time as a Member of Parliament in the Netherlands. It has been quite some time since you left, but have you ever wondered that "maybe I should go back" or "I want to go back"?*

One of the things I learnt as a politician is to say never say never. But when I left the parliament, and I have to tell you honestly, although I loved my work very much, it was not very easy. But since you yourself are not in politics, I will say that politics is not where your friends are. That is where you fight for your ideals to become true. So your friends are usually from somewhere else.

For the full interview, visit the Next Step website.

INTERVIEWED BY: RAISA ASHRAF

Raisa is a third-year Politics, Philosophy and Economics major at AIW.

THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY



ARE ALLERGIES KILLING YOUR PRODUCTIVITY?

Whether you are buried in a pile of tissues all year round, or are unexpectedly visited by the itchy-scratchies when you least expect it, leaving you doing the funny dance, allergies are the bane of the productive work life.

Fatigue, drowsiness, reduced focus and alertness—all side effects of allergies—contribute to a decline in learning and productivity, no matter how well you arm yourself with antihistamines and nasal spray. The nasal congestion from allergies also leads to poor sleep quality at night, resulting in cognitive impairment the next day.

And as if tiredness and difficult respiration were not hard enough to deal with, the very medications you take to relieve your symptoms can make things worse. One of the effects of oral histamines is increased drowsiness—a phenome-

non known as “decreased mentation”, a fancy term for reduced mental activity. In fact, one study found that the use of sedating antihistamines could result in a 25 percent reduction in productivity for two years a year.

But if medication is out of the question, what is a bogged-down, particularly sneezy individual to do? The first step is to figure out exactly what is triggering an allergic reaction in you. If you know you have a pollen allergy, i.e. the sneezes start coming around spring-time, or a dust allergy, it's fairly easy to handle. Doctors recommend

people with pollen allergy to change clothes and take a shower if they have been outdoors, and keep windows at home and in the car shut tight. If you have a dust allergy, get covers for your pillows and mattresses. If you're unsure, make an appointment with an allergist or immunologist to get down to the bottom of it. A number of food items can aggravate allergies and eliminating even one thing from your diet could do the trick. Doctors can also make recommendations for a more permanent fix, e.g. immunotherapy for long-term relief if your condition requires it.

ARCHROMA TEXTBIZ 2017: FIRST-EVER TEXTILES BUSINESS CASE COMPETITION

ArchromaTexBiz 2017, the first-ever business case competition based on the textile industry, was held between April 15-16. Organised by BUTEX Business Club, 26 teams from 13 universities around the country registered for the competition. Students hailing from business schools as well as engineering schools competed with each other



to display their creativity, teamwork, and spirit.

The chief guest of the grand finale was Dr. Shah Alimuzzaman Belal, Director of Student Welfare and Dean of the Faculty of Textile Engineering. Judges included: Abdus Sobhan, Managing Director, Auko-Tex Group; Mohammad Abdul Matin Emon, Founder and CEO,

Doctorola; Dr. Abbas Uddin Shiyak, Principal Engineering Consultant, REED Consulting Bangladesh LTD; and Nabi Khan, Chief Business Officer, Color City Ltd.

Team SWOT Cats from IUT came first, followed by Team Excalibur from IBA, University of Dhaka in second place, and Team 11th Hour from BUP in third.

Making a DIFFERENCE



TOP 3 TAKEAWAYS FROM MARK ZUCKERBERG'S COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

Our favourite Silicon Valley dropout has finally graduated. To be more precise, Mark Zuckerberg was invited to his alma mater last month to receive his degree and give the commencement speech for the class of 2017. We highlight the top three takeaways from his triumphant return to Harvard.

1. Take on big, meaningful projects together

The advent of automation spells frightening consequences: tens of millions of people will eventually get replaced by autonomous tech, so whatever your big, crazy idea is, make it a point to be inclusive. Zuckerberg advises, “How about stopping climate change before we destroy the planet and getting millions of people involved manufacturing and installing solar panels? How about curing all diseases and asking volunteers to track their health data and share their genomes?” Great things come when we work together, and not on the off-chance you are struck by genius.

2. Give everyone the freedom to pursue their purpose

We live in a world that measures progress by economic metrics like

GDP, but how many of us have a role we find meaningful? But having the freedom to pursue your purpose requires having the freedom to fail. Facebook wasn't the first thing Zuckerberg built. Games, chat systems, study tools, and music players all came before. And since not everyone has a cushion to fall back on if they fail, Zuckerberg believes people like him should pay for it. But it doesn't just have to be money. “If you take an hour or two a week, that's all it takes to give someone a hand, to help them reach their potential,” he said.

3. Build community across the world

Quoting a survey asking millennials around the world what defined their identity, the most popular answer was “citizen of the world,” said Zuckerberg. Now when there are so many

problems at home, it's hard to think about poverty, disease, or war anywhere else. But our generation has grown up connected, he argues. There's a Bangladeshi in Harvard with friends back home. That's why the communities we build can span countries, cross borders, and overcome differences.

Communities give us meaning and the sense that we're part of something bigger—that we are not alone and that we have the strength to expand our horizons. Change starts small and local, in your bedroom or a classroom at university, but whether we achieve our biggest opportunities comes down to making connections.

AMIYA HALDER

The writer is In-charge of the career publication of The Daily Star.