

# ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE EXPERIENCE—1949 to 1953

*By: Clifford J. Palacio*



*SJC Football Team 1949*

*Edited by: I. Myrtle Palacio*

## Preface

This booklet was shared with me by Mr. Clifford Palacio in July 2010 as a part of my continuing endeavours in data collection on the life experiences of the Garifuna people. He sent it to me in power point format which I converted into word format. I have conducted minor editing on this booklet primarily due in part to the conversion from power point format to the word format. Everything else, namely, the information including the pictures and writing style was all contributed by Mr. Clifford Palacio and his wife Rita presently resides in Los Angeles, California. Our means of communication is primarily via the e-mail.

The story is first-hand information or lived experiences of students under the guidance of the Jesuits at the St. John's College in Belize City and through the eyes of Mr. Palacio. Particularly, it is the experience of rural to urban movement of potential Garifuna leaders. It is an important era in the history of the Garifuna people for socio/economic reasons, but also to their continued contribution in nation building in the area of teaching in rural areas of Belize. Not only were they required to repay their education, but were assigned to teach and spread Catholicism particularly in the Maya and Kekchi communities of Belize. This is folk history at its best!!

Needless to say, the Jesuits were very visionary in their strategic outlook and business acumen. They invested in people though not financially, but by giving them an opportunity to uplift themselves. My understanding is that the cost of tuition etc. was repaid through salary deductions when they started to earn as teachers. Also the Hostel they lived in on New Road was owned and managed by the Jesuits.

The education of these ten young men made a major impact on the Garifuna communities and should form a part of an updated history that I have embarked upon. Two of the graduates in 1953 were hired as principals of the first out-district high schools in the country, namely, Lynam and Muffles in the Stann Creed and Orange Walk districts respectively. This was the beginning of the major contribution of the Garifuna people to nation building in the area of education in Belize.

I want to thank Mr. Cliff for sharing this part of his life experience and for agreeing to share with the wider Belizean and Garifuna communities where ever they may be. It will be shared on the superhighway so it can be accessible to all. Later on it will form part of an updated history of the Garifuna people.

*Seremei Mr. Cliff*  
*Happy Reading All!*  
*I. Myrtle Palacio*

## Cherished Memories—the Letter

After 50 years Mrs. Marian Oleson nee Norris mailed this letter to Dangriga to Clifford Palacio's address one of the only two addresses she had. His brother, Luke, in turn mailed the letter and photo, on the second page, to Clifford's Los Angeles address. This is Clifford's story of a life changing experience to a group of young men of Garifuna origin and potential leaders of their communities. They embarked upon a high school and teacher training education in Belize City, far removed from their communities.

830 Prairie St  
Aurora IL 60506  
Feb 1, 1994

Dear Clifford,

It was some time during the latter part of the 1940s that I was in Belize and this picture was taken. Father Ganey mailed this copy to me. He was so very proud of all his boys.

God Bless his soul. I know he missed all his friends when he had to leave on his new mission.

My brother was Frank Y Norris who lived for many years on his farm about 60 miles from Belize. I'm his sister Marian who visited down there a few times.

There is very likely no possibility this letter or photo will ever get to anyone who will remember those years. I could not just dispose of this picture without first making an effort to return it to Belize.

Fifty years is a long time to hold on to memories. I do remember talking to some of these boys.

I pray that your life has been rich and fulfilling. I'm 83 now and packing up some memories.

May God Bless you and yours

Marian Norris

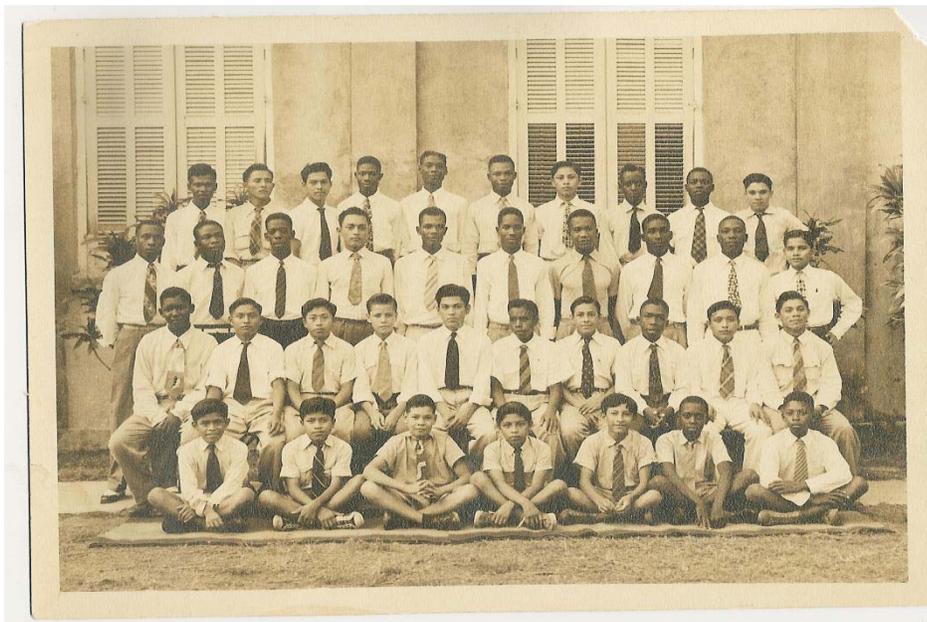
(now)

Marian Oleson

Under Fr. Ganey the SJC Hostel boys made a field trip to Norland, Cayo District for the inauguration of a Catholic School/Church building, erected there courtesy of an American businessman Mr. Frank Norris a sawmill owner. The Bullet Tree Falls school children sang the Mass in Latin under the direction of Mr. Peter A. A. Avila.

## The Selection

July, 1949 marked the beginning of the compelling story of our educational journey in Belize. Four-year high school education for potential teachers was established in 1949. Several young men were selected from five districts of Belize by Superior Fr. John M. Knopp, S.J., Superior, Jesuit Mission of British Honduras, and now Belize. Ten promising Garifuna young men from Stann Creek Town, Punta Gorda and Seine Bight were selected. These boys were to become Catholic school teachers. They among other students lived at a Boarding House on New Road in Belize City (Holy Redeemer yard), called the SJC Hostel. Most of the students at the boarding school were over the age of eighteen years.



**Fourth Row:** *Isabel Lopez, Juan Blanco, Ignatio Tun, Govel Morgan, Leith Paulino, Julian Arzu, Maure Pech, Constantine Enriquez, Eugene Hernandez, Gabriel Zetina, Guadalupe Pech*

**Third Row:** *Max Arzu, Austin Flores, Theodore Palacio, Carlos Morrison, Oswald Reyes, Andrew Valentine, Lionel Perez, Clifford Palacio, Paul Lewis*

**Second Row:** *Peter Avila, Inez Sanchez, Bedalfo Tzib, Vilio Marin, Antonio Tun, Herman Zuniga, Fortunato Cervantes, Fidel Flores, Basilio Novelo, Santiago Garcia*

**First Row:** *Florentino Chun, Juan Chun, Liborio Gonzalez, Erasmo Castellano, Rafael Coc, Edmund Augustine, Arthur Fernandez*

Most were given scholarships which were predicated on a commitment to teach after graduation in the rural, Maya Indian villages of Belize. It was also agreed upon that the cost of the scholarship would be repaid by monthly pay-sheet deductions after the

candidates began to work under the dual system of education (Church-state) in Belize. Fr. Marvin M. O'Connor, S.J., General Manager of Catholic Schools was in charge of the teacher preparation program, taking care of contracts and all financial arrangements.

The ten Garifuna young men selected were as follows (see Photographs below):

- **Dangriga**--Eugene Hernandez, Augustine Flores, George Guerrero and Clifford Palacio
- **Punta Gorda**--Govel Morgan, Leith Paulino, Lionel Perez and Julian Arzu
- **Seine Bight**--Isabel Jimmy Lopez and Hubert Cacho

Attending SJC at that time was of enormous importance and significance in the history of the Garifuna people in Belize.

FIRST ROW	SECOND ROW	THIRD ROW	FOURTH ROW
Florentino Chun	Peter Avila Inez Sanchez	Max Arzu Austin Flores	Isabel Lopez
Juan Chun	Bedalfo Tzib	Theodore Palacio	Juan Bianco
Liborio Gonzalez	Vilio Marin	Carlos Harrison	Ignatio Tun
Erasmus Castellano	Antonio Tun	Oswald Reyes	Govel Morgan
Rafael Coc	Herman Zuniga	Andrew Valentine	Leith Paulino
Edmund Augustine	Fortunato Cervantes	Lionel Perez	Julian Arzu
Arturo Fernandez	Fidel Flores	Clifford Palacio	Mauro Pech
	Basilio Novelo	Paul Lewis	Constantine Enriquez
	Santiago Garcia	Guadalupe Pech	Eugene Hernandez
			Gabriel Zelina

The list of students in original hand writing

Apart from the required regular high school subjects, such as, English, Latin, Spanish, History, Algebra, Arithmetic, Geometry, Literature, Public Speaking and Chemistry; our group was obliged to include Teacher Training classes--School Management and Practice Teaching, under Miss Signa Yorke.

We had a rigorous schedule as we were also involved in extra curricula activities like scouting, soccer, sodality and the teaching Sunday School classes. We assisted Fr. John Paul Cull, S.J. as he founded the new St. Joseph's Parish in Cinderella Town.

## SJC Soccer Team 1950

There were seven Garifuna on the SJC Soccer Team of 1950. Only the outstanding soccer players were selected to be on the team. Other eligibility was also based on academics.

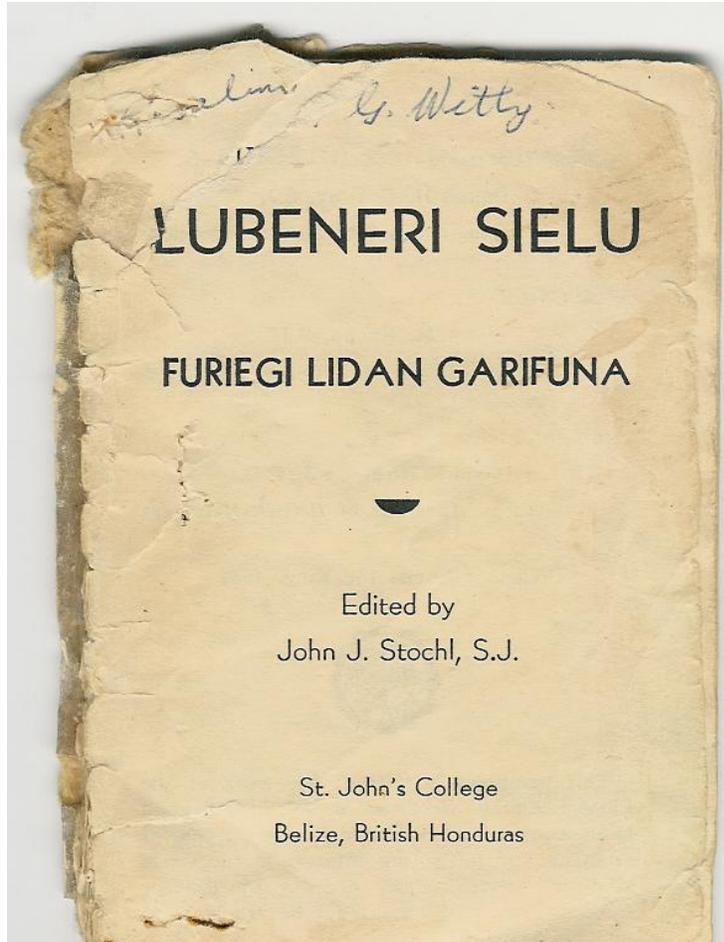


**Back Row (L to R):** *John Stochl, S.J., Frank Martin (Bishop Martin), Augustine Flores, Carlos Harrison, Andrew Valentine, George Usher, Clifford Palacio, Leith Paulino and Orin Orio*

**Front Row (L to R):** *Halil Bedran, Patrick Haylock, Alberto Garcia (from Honduras), Eugene Hernandez and Charles Arzu.*

## The Garifuna Prayer Book

A Garifuna Prayer Book entitled “Lubeneri Sielu” was written and published in 1951 under the supervision of Mr. John Stochl, S.J. It was the first of its kind.



Several of the SJC Garifuna student group wrote the book under the guidance of Mr. John Stochl, S.J., and Seminarian. They were: Theodore Palacio, Augustine Flores, Govel Morgan, Eugene Hernandez and Clifford Palacio. Fr. Martin Avila and Bishop Osmond Peter Martin who were Garifuna Seminarists at the time, contributed by translating some of the prayers and pamphlets into Garifuna. Govel Morgan and Clifford Palacio translated the English hymn “*Mother at Your Feet is Kneeling*” into Garifuna. Teacher Candido Arzu of Barranco was helpful in providing translations of some of the prayers. The hymns composed and written by Marcelina “Beata” Lambey and Teacher Sam Daniels were included.

In the summer of 1951 Mr. Stochl, S.J. and Clifford Palacio visited Seine Bight, after returning from Punta Gorda, to introduce the prayer book “LUBENERI SIELU” to the community. For a few days classes were held in the village church to teach the villagers how to read the new Garifuna prayer book, after which copies were

disseminated to the participants as gifts. The famous Garifuna composer Beata Lambey was one of the faithful participants of the Garifuna reading classes.

### **Recreation Time**

St. John's College boarding school was the crucible in which our characters were molded. During recreation some of the students were in the recreation room playing games and music on the piano. All the Garifuna boys from Peini (Punta Gorda) knew how to play the piano. Others resorted to trimming each other's hair.

In the photograph below Clifford Palacio is cutting Fr. Stochl's hair while Jimmy Lopez, Hubert Cacho and Augustine Flores are looking on. Jimmy Lopez was also a barber.



They also traveled to other parts of the country to play soccer with other teams, as when they traveled to Dangriga. At that time transportation to Dangriga was by boat only. This picture below was taken on board of the OCL motor vessel which was under Captain Justo Martin, Bishop Martin's father.



*On board the OCL*

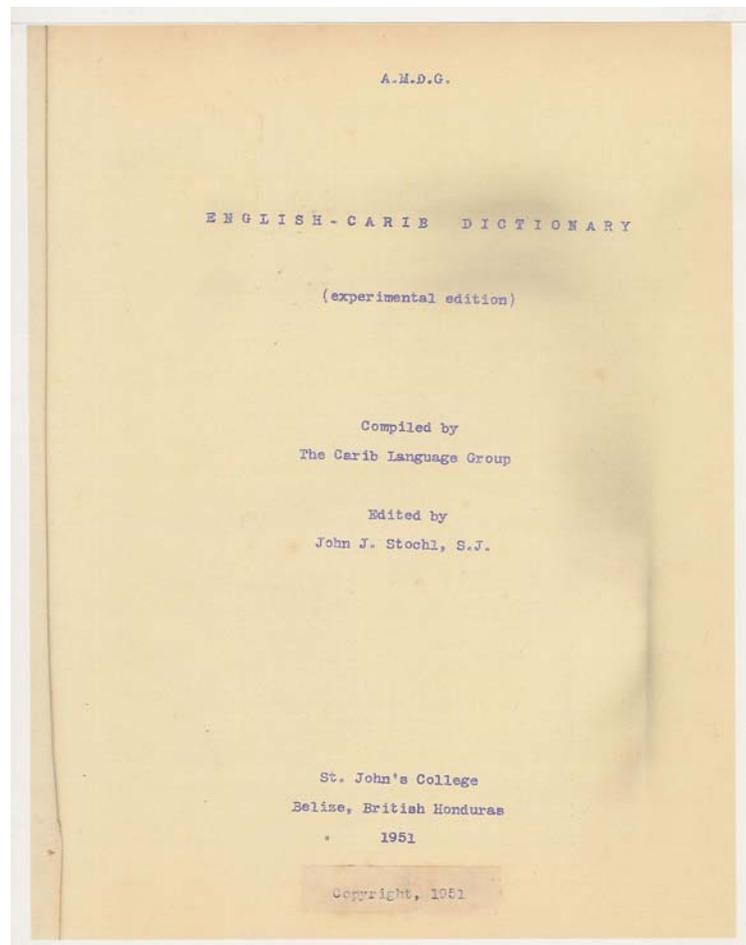
The Hummingbird Road was constructed in 1952. The Northern Highway and the Western Highway were already in use.

Annually, the team also traveled by road to Corozal, Orange Walk, San Ignacio and Benque Viejo Del Carmen for soccer matches. In the 40s it took teachers traveling on the Belize or Old River six days and six nights to reach El Cayo by flat river motor boats.

The team also participated in a competition against the best teams of Belize City – Crimson, MYA, Unknown, Police Team and the British Army. Among the best were the following famous players: The Tench brothers, Roy Canton, Kuylen, P.C. Chuku Young, P.C. Horace Holder, PC Sgt. Daley, Friskilo, P.C. Crecencio Sonny Flores, etc.

## English-Carib Dictionary

The Carib Language Group was composed of Garifuna students of St. John's College under the direction of John Stochl, S.J. and working in close cooperation with Garifuna teachers. The Group was formed at the beginning of year 1951 with the purpose of studying the history and language of the Black Caribs of Central America and of establishing a system of writing Garifuna that will be acceptable to those speaking the language. That group of Garifuna students was embarking on a historic venture – compiling and writing of the first known English-Carib Dictionary ever written in British Honduras, now Belize. Fr. John Stochl initiated the venture and with the help of Theodore Palacio, Eugene Hernandez, Augustine Flores, Govel Morgan and Clifford Palacio a dictionary was compiled and published. Mr. Candido Arzu was very helpful as a consultant who assisted in some translations.



*The English-Garifuna Dictionary, 1951*

The task of establishing a writing and spelling system for the language was not an easy one, especially as no previous works of the kind were available. Several months were spent in working out a standard that would be simple enough to be understood

by the ordinary person and at the same time authoritative enough to be accepted by all. The alphabet used is practically the same as the English alphabet with the addition of the Spanish “ñ”. The hope is that Garifuna people will begin to learn to read and write their own language as well as speak it.

Today, we know a lot more about the Garifuna language. We know that the language is largely Arawakan. It is composed of the following languages: Arawak (45%), Carib (25%), French (15%), English (10%) and Spanish (5%). Verbs in Garifuna can be conjugated and nouns may be declined according to certain rules and a set pattern. Gender, number and person are easily identified. Pronouns, Prepositions, Conjunctions and Interjections, like in English, play important roles.

A list of Garifuna words compiled in Yurumein (St. Vincent) in 1666 reveals that words in the language have undergone a tremendous change and modification over the past 300 years as the Garifuna faced different challenges in their newly adapted homes after the infamous banishment by the British from their homeland, Yurumein.

When near completion, the Group together with Mr. Stochl, the group spent two weeks during the Summer of 1951 in Punta Gorda Town editing the entire book and finalizing the work.

## **Afterword**

At the end of the four-year course in 1953, two Garifuna young teachers were selected from the class of 1949 to take [high school education](#) from [Belize City](#) to the District towns of [Dangriga](#) and [Orange Walk](#). Paul Lewis became the first principal of [Lynam High School](#) in Dangriga Town, and Eugene Hernandez became the first principal of [Muffles College](#) in [Orange Walk Town](#). Until Lynam and Muffles high school education was only available in Belize City. These two institutions were not only the first high schools in the respective communities, but began the expansion of secondary education to all districts in Belize.

In 1953 this group of SJC students became the first graduating class from Landivar the new campus. The impact of the high school education given to the Garifuna students had a telling effect on the Belizean community. In a conversation with a Garifuna ex-policeman recently, Mr. Clifford was amazed when he said, “After 1957 the Garifuna policemen encountered very little problem in getting promotions as compared to the period before that time.” The subject of the conversation was not education. The young man was recalling and talking in general about his experiences in the police force and his observation. Rapid promotions were given to young Garifuna policemen from that time onward, thanks to Fr. Knopp, S. J. for having transformed forever the high school education of [Belize](#).

In discussing with his wife Rita, Mr. Clifford recounted that Garifuna teachers not only worked in rural Maya and Kekchi Villages in southern Belize; but also in the Cayes such as, [San Pedro Ambergris Caye](#) and communities such as Bullet Tree Falls and Santa Familia in the Cayo District. Lastly, Garifuna teachers also laboured in the Creole villages such as [Mullins River](#), [Roaring Creek](#), Teakettle, Blackman Eddie, [Banana Bank](#), Bermudian Landing, St. Paul's Bank, Maskal, etc. In those days the Principal was not only responsible for the management of the school, but also had other responsibilities in the community. The [principal teacher](#) also perform tasks such as, minister of religion [on Sunday](#), Registrar of Deaths and Births, Telephone Operator, Counselor, Postmaster, Alcade, Health Inspector, to name a few.