

## Dear Fred: Alfred Ramcharan and the External Aid Office<sup>1</sup>

I suppose I should begin saying how I know anything at all about Mr. Alfred Joseph Ramcharan.

I am neither a beneficiary of Mr. Ramcharan's Montreal teaching career nor am I connected to the North American branch of the Trinidadian Ramcharans, a branch founded when Alfred's famous sister, Pearl, married American anthropologist D.J. Crowley and moved to the United States.

My acquaintanceship with Alfred Ramcharan began when I learned that, on Saturday, 25 August 1962, the seven-member Gillespie family neglected to hand back their Macdonald College Brittain Hall room keys to Mr. Ramcharan.

On 30 August 1962, Mr. Ramcharan noted the Gillespie omission in a clear hand, putting fountain pen to paper at 2049 McGill College Avenue in Montreal. His note, received in the mails at the External Aid Office (EAO) in Ottawa, was read, and duly filed; spiked, top-left corner, into a buff-coloured card-stock government folder: File No. 36-8-3; Subject: Briefing Conferences For Teachers.

There, Alfred Ramcharan's note rested undisturbed until, on 28 November 2014, at a reading room table in Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, I photographed most of the contents of file 36-8-3.

Skimming the pages as I photographed them, Mr. Ramcharan's mention of "The Gillespie Room Key Incident" made me laugh. How typical of the Gillespies! It was my in-law Gillespies I was researching, not Alfred Ramcharan. The Gillespie family, Mr. Jim, Mrs. June, daughters Anne (Mrs. Wife!), Brenda, Clare (A-B-C) and sons Jamie and Ron went on assignment to Kenya for two years, from August 1962 to August 1964. The posting of an Ottawa teacher and his family to Kenya wasn't a one-off occurrence; their African adventure was a small piece of a bigger puzzle.

To concoct the *bigger puzzle*, take one part Cold War Geo-politics; stir in crumbling British Empire; fold in Canadian foreign-aid policy; add Baby Boom to taste. In response to a bilateral request from Kenya – on the threshold of independence from Britain in 1962 – the EAO sent Jim Gillespie to train Kenyan teachers. But before the Gillespies, together with another eighty-odd teacher-families comprising the EAO "class of '62", departed for assignments in the developing world, the EAO needed to brief them in person.

This was the Briefing Conference For Teachers, held each August at Macdonald College near Montreal just days before the teacher-families flew from Montreal to their assignments.

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<sup>1</sup> It is SO tempting to include many, many footnotes, densely packed with detailed information on the various points encapsulated herein. I am resisting this temptation.

## Briefing Conference For Teachers

The External Aid Office was established in November 1960 to administer Canada's foreign aid. The EAO mandate included assuming responsibility for Canadian "Experts" assisting developing countries. Pre-EAO, the Economic and Technical Assistance Branch of the Department of Trade and Commerce ran the "Experts" programme. In August, 1960, under Trade and Commerce, a briefing conference for 14 teachers was held in Ottawa. In 1961, the EAO moved the expanded August briefing conference (for 35 teacher-families) to Macdonald College. In 1962, as noted above, and in 1963, the conference welcomed about eighty-five teacher-families. By 1964, the number had grown to one-hundred-sixty-two.

Encouragement and help from Macdonald College's education Director, Professor David Munroe, and Professor Wayne Hall, made the College – its tranquil, isolated campus located not too far from Montreal's Dorval international airport – a natural conference venue choice.

Alfred Ramcharan happened to be a student at the Macdonald College School for Teachers, a 1961 graduate of the two-year degree programme.

And so begins our story...



### SECOND YEAR DEGREE

*Front Row, Left to Right: Lois Riker, Mara Rudzitis, Joan Evans, Anne Yeoman, Francis Hulme, Helen Lekas, Sharon Mitchell, Peter Findlay (Pres.), Erman Montgomery, Renate Bidner, Marina Moshonas, Wendy Board, Elizabeth MacAllister, Lynn Aitken, Gail Jessop, Maureen Spencer. Second Row: Caryl-Anne Erickson, Barbara Birtles, Susan Travers, Martha Eardley, Marion Edmonds, Suzanne Drolet, Katherine Boyne, Heather Kilpatrick, Lois Silversen, Claire Purdy, Mary Wighton, Stacia Parsons, Carol LaBlanc, Irene Dunfield, Joan Portfors, Joan Gregory, Beryl Amy, Esther Husk, Susan LeDain, Pat Gordon. Third Row: Sharon Schofield, Ann Smith, Bev Steer, Jean Stuart, Carolyn Carlisle, Alfred Ramcharan, Philip Bagniet, Bruce Middleton, Peter Kreuser, Andy Talmanis, Glee Willows, Leola Caya, Beverly Thorp, Eileen Bryson, Jean Brooks. Absent: Karen Caplan, Susan Craig, Anneleen de Brentani, Marion Forman, Jane Larson, Sandra-May Munro, Ann Stewart, Howard Thomas, Reg. Watts.*

*Clan Macdonald '61; page 49 (of the unnumbered yearbook)*

## Alfred Joseph (Kalkapersad) Ramcharan

Birth: 07 September 1923;  
Circular Rd., Princes Town, Victoria,  
Trinidad and Tobago

Death: 10 March 1988;  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada



Source: Crowley family website.

On 01 September 1960, Alfred J. Ramcharan was admitted to New York City by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, with permission to stay until 08 September 1960. He had come by BOAC from Piarco Airport in Trinidad.

Nationality: British; birthplace: Trinidad.

Alfred gave his permanent address as Brittain Hall, Macdonald College, Quebec, Canada.

Trinidad gained independence from Britain in 1962. If he foresaw independence, perhaps Alfred thought it would be easier to emigrate from Trinidad to Canada as a British citizen than as a citizen of the Commonwealth of Trinidad and Tobago (1962-1976). His older sister, Pearl, was educated in Canada (Toronto) and the US in the 1940s before returning to Trinidad. She returned to the US when she married American, D.J. Crowley, in 1958. She may have influenced his decision to come to Canada.

In Trinidad, though Alfred himself had received no formal secondary school education, he taught for several years in local elementary and high schools. Because Alfred graduated from the Macdonald College two-year teaching programme in one academic year (1960-61), it's reasonable to assume the school gave him credit for his years of teaching experience in Trinidad.

| Surname   | Given Name    | Initial     | Passport Number |
|---|---------------|-------------|-----------------|
| RAMCHARAN   | ALFRED        | J           | 104954 R        |
| Nationality (Citizenship)   | Birthplace    | Birthdate   |                 |
| BRITISH   | TRINIDAD, TWI | 7 SEPT 1923 |                 |
| United States Address<br>10 MRS ST BROWN, 1069 MATHIAS COURT, UNION<br>LORE ISLAND, A Y               |               |             |                 |
| Permanent Address<br>BRITAIN HALL, MACDONALD COLLEGE<br>QUEBEC, CANADA                                |               |             |                 |
| Visa Issued At<br>PORT OF SPAIN TRINIDAD  |               |             |                 |
| Date Visa Issued<br>5 AUGUST 1960   |               |             |                 |
| Vessel Name or Airline and Flight No. of Arrival<br>BOAC/BOAC 495                                     |               |             |                 |
| Passenger Boarded At<br>PIARCO AIRPORT  |               |             |                 |
| Form I-94 B (Rev. 7-1-57)<br>ARRIVAL - DEPARTURE RECORD   |               |             |                 |
| IM. & NATZ. SERVICE<br>NEW YORK, N. Y. 221<br>ADMITTED<br>SEP - 1 1960<br>CLASS B-2<br>TO SEP 8, 1960 |               |             |                 |

ANY HANDWRITTEN ENTRIES MUST BE IN BLOCK CAPITAL LETTERS

Source: Ancestry.ca

## The 1961 Briefing Conference for Teachers

During discussions between the EAO and Prof. Munroe about Macdonald College hosting the briefing conference, Prof. Munroe suggested Alfred Ramcharan as someone who could help with the administration side. Alfred would have been one of the most mature education students Macdonald College had in 1961 since he was thirty-seven years old that summer. The job offered to Alfred, described in an EAO letter to him at Macdonald College, dated 15 August 1961, was this:

“We need someone who can act as a receptionist from 2 p.m. on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August at Stewart Hall. This person would be responsible for meeting the teachers as they come in and assigning their rooms to them. During the conference itself, he would help with the small administrative tasks, and on Friday afternoon and on Saturday morning he would prepare bills for the teachers and help collect the money.”

The EAO offered Alfred \$25 for the 2.5 days work.

He quickly accepted the offer, in a letter dated 17 August 1961.

*Dear Sir:*

*Thank you for your letter 36-8-3 of August 15,  
re - Help required for the Conference of Teachers at  
Macdonald College from August 24 to 26.*

*It was very kind of Prof. Munroe to mention  
my name to you. I would be most willing to  
assist in whatever there is to be done.*

*yours truly  
Alfred J Ramcharan*

*Alfred Ramcharan to D.A.W. Judd, Thursday 17 August 1961.*

Alfred's accounts for the conference list receipts of \$1,380.50 and expenditures (including \$30 paid to himself – \$5 extra!) of \$1,377.95, a profit of \$2.55.



In that first 1961 autumn term at McGill, Alfred put himself forward as a candidate for the Students' Executive Council. I have been unable to find any documentation giving the election results. Fred's interest in stamps is advertised in his electoral "Pen Sketch."



*the McGill Daily*; 20 November 1961; page 6.

## The 1962 Briefing Conference for Teachers

Dear Fred:

Mr. Alfred Ramcharan,  
2049 McGill College Avenue,  
Montreal, Quebec.

During talks with Professor Wayne Hall at Macdonald College in preparation for its August 1962 briefing conference, the EAO expressed how excellent a job Fred Ramcharan had done in 1961 and how much

they hoped Fred would be available for the larger, day longer 1962 edition. The EAO job offer was mailed (with his surname spelled "Ramcharam" – not for the last time!) to Fred's McGill College Avenue rooms near McGill University in Montreal on 22 June, 1962.

On 27 June, Fred accepted the EOA offer with pleasure.

*It was very good of you to remember me again, and  
I shall be looking forward to that week of August 21-25.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Fred.*

*Alfred Ramcharan to D.A.W. Judd, Wednesday, 27 June 1962*

In early July, Mr. Noble Power of the EAO wrote Fred asking for his phone number. Mr. Power was going to be in Montreal in early August, making conference arrangements, and wanted to meet with Fred to discuss some of the details.

*Again may I say how glad I was to hear that you would be free  
to work with us during the Conference.*

*Yours sincerely*

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY

N. E. POWER

*Noble Power to Fred Ramcharan, Thursday, 05 July 1962*

Embarking on what was to become a very friendly acquaintanceship, Fred replied, 14 July, that he had no phone at his McGill College Avenue rooms but could be reached where he worked, at Victor 2-3241 [842-3241] Local 565. 842-3241 was the phone number of the Simpsons department store at 977 ouest Ste-Catherine; the store was very close to Fred's rooms on McGill College Avenue. Considering his philatelic interest, perhaps he worked in the Darnell Stamp Shop in Simpsons?



LA PRESSE, 31 May 1980, Page 19.

I have no telephone where I live, but you can reach me during the day at the office where I work — VI 2-3241, Local 565.

Thanks again for writing, and I shall be looking forward to meeting you sometime next month.

Yours sincerely

Fred Ramcharan

Fred Ramcharan to Noble Power, Saturday, 14 July 1962



Fred's duties at the 1962 conference were these:

1. Man the registration desk in Laird Hall.  
21 August: 77 teacher-families, an expected 250 children, women, and men start arriving about 11am. Fred assigns each family a room in Laird or Brittain Hall.
2. 21-25 August: Allocation of lecture halls for the various conference sessions; the showing of films; financial aspects of the conference (expenditures & receipts); general administration.
3. 25 August: Before the teacher-families board their flights that evening at Dorval Airport, Fred must settle their room & board bills (\$8.50 per person per day), and collect back all the room keys.
4. After the conference, Fred was to furnish a financial statement.

From a (slightly inaccurate) typed EAO name-list, there were about 84 teachers, 52 spouses, and 96 children at the conference. A separate team was employed for the challenging task of entertaining the 96 children of various ages (toddlers to teenagers) for 5 days, letting Fred concentrate on helping make the conference run smoothly!

The Conference will provide an opportunity for teachers to see films on the less developed countries and participate in seminars to discuss the problems of particular areas. They will also be attending lectures given by various experts in the field of education who will discuss such topics as "The Challenge of Teaching in Developing Countries".

1962 briefing conference press release excerpt

*Dear Noble,*

On 30 August, Fred submitted a detailed summary of his conference experience, including a one-page financial statement. The 5-day conference cost Canadian tax-payers five-thousand dollars.

It was in this note that the "Gillespie Room Keys Incident" was mentioned.

*Do you know that it is only one family in Brittain Hall who did not turn in the room keys? (Gillespies).*

Alfred Ramcharan to Noble Power, 30 August 1962



This Briefing Conference has been quite a unique occasion for me. To summarise some of the outstanding things:

I became acquainted with about seventy teachers and their families from various parts of Canada, and have made many friends among them.

I worked with, and got to know, some of the staff of the External Aid Office — you, Fred Smith, Harry Hodder, Mrs. Bateman, Dr. Flemington. It was a real pleasure to know these persons.

I met the Minister of External Affairs, Hon. H. Green, and was amazed at his superb memory for people, names and things about them.

The many and varied experiences that I had every day of the conference made this week one of the memorable ones in my two years stay in Canada.

This week has been a complete vacation for me — it was the first week since I have been in this country that I did not read a book or a newspaper, nor write a letter. I had been with books and studies for two years without a break, and for this vacation I worked during the day and attended summer school at nights — this week at Macdonald College has been a restful one (from studies and books) for me. I feel so much better now and so much more prepared for the reopening of Mc Gill in another two weeks.

In addition to all these, I gained financially as I had room and board for the week, and a sum of \$75 at the end.

I have been indeed, lucky, and fortunate, to be connected with this Briefing Conference, for I have gained immensely, all round.

Fred Ramcharan to Noble Power, 30 August 1962

3.

Another thing that I have just remembered. I gained some knowledge and experience in how to ~~run~~ operate a movie projector.

I hope that you are pleased with the conference and that everything turned out as you expected or even better. I know how much work and responsibility you have had, and I guess that you must have done months of planning and preparation for this important and intricate session.

It was a real pleasure to work with you, and I hope that I may again have the good fortune to be connected with any of such conferences in the future.

Please give my kind regards to Fred Smith, Harry Hodder, Mrs. Bateman, and Dr. Flemington.

Cheerio!

Sincerely  
Fred

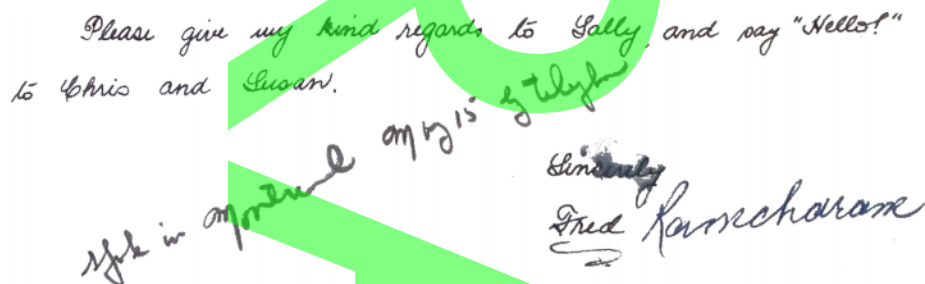
Fred Ramcharan to Noble Power, 30 August 1962

In a letter, 05 September 1962, Noble Power writes Fred to express the EAO's official and his personal appreciation for "helping to ensure that the conference ran smoothly and according to plan." Power repeats an invitation he made to Fred at the conference to visit the Power family on Aylmer Road, Aylmer East (in Quebec, across the Ottawa River from Ottawa); Power suggests a weekend in October. Despite being Ramcharan's junior by eight years (Power was born in 1931; Ramcharan in 1923) the two of them must have it off over the five-day conference. Power mentions that Fred should see Canada's capital before returning to Trinidad; in conversation at the conference perhaps Fred expressed an intention to return to Trinidad after graduating from McGill, and had not yet decided to stay in Canada permanently.

## The 1963 Briefing Conference for Teachers

Did Fred Ramcharan take up Noble Power's offer to visit him and his family near Ottawa? According to their correspondence related to the 1963 briefing conference, the answer is in the affirmative.

On May 10, 1963, Power wrote to Fred at his McGill College Avenue address, asking if he'd be willing to do his usual highly satisfactory job. In particular, Power asked that Fred phone him at Professor Munroe's Macdonald College Office at 11:30 A.M. on 14 May (where Power would be in discussions with Prof. Munroe about the briefing conference). However, Fred was in midst of practice teaching at Montreal high schools (Fred graduated with his B.Ed. in the spring of '63), and Power's letter only reached him at the end of the day on 14 May. Fred wrote back the same day that he was happy to assist again. Marginalia on Fred's letter indicate that Power managed to speak on the telephone to Fred in Montreal on 15 May. (Other marginalia continued to misspell Fred's surname as "Ramcharam".) The answer to the "Ottawa visit" question is given in Fred's last paragraph.



*Please give my kind regards to Sally and say "Hello!"  
to Chris and Susan.*

*Spk in Montreal on 15 by telephone*

*Sincerely  
Fred Ramcharan*

Noble Power of Montreal and Long Island socialite, Sarah "Sally" Kellogg Goetchius became engaged in January 1956 while both were doing graduate work at the Sorbonne, Paris. ("Both were graduated from the School of International Affairs of Columbia University" - New York Times; 23 January 1956.) Possibly they had bilaterally negotiated to adopt an alternate meaning for "International Affairs!" Christopher "Chris" Noble and his younger sister, Susannah "Susan" Morgan (born Ottawa, 30 November 1961) were the couple's young children.

That spring, at the mature age of thirty-nine, Fred was graduated (to use New York Times phraseology) from the Institute of Education of McGill University with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Education.

It appears that Noble Power delegated some additional responsibility to Fred for the 1963 conference. In a 10 July letter to Noble Power, Ted Wall, the young student who had directed the recreational activities (childcare!) at previous briefing conferences, wrote that Fred had come to Macdonald College to recruit him for the current conference.