George Price
Journey of a Belizean Hero

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Cover design: Image Factory
Illustration: Emil Alvarez

This page: George Price as a teenager
Opposite page: George Price greeting lady in rural Belize
To think of George Price is to think of Belize. His life, beliefs and values have been the guiding light in the destiny of Belize, taking it from a once backward colony of Britain to a young, dynamic, sovereign, democratic Central American State in the Caribbean region.

His lifestyle, simple and unpretentious, has been unchanged over the past fifty years, where he has been for the most part, the central figure in the political drama of this emerging nation.

Said Musa, Prime Minister of Belize
from the foreword George Price: Father of the Nation Belize
ION Media, 2000
Acknowledgements


This publication is designed for students, teachers and general readers. It deals with the life and work of the most important political figure in modern Belize. It includes rare photographs and illustrations that portray the vibrant and active character of a great Belizean man.

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George Price in Chan Pine Ridge, Orange Walk, 1983
Have you wondered what makes a leader? Is he or she born into a special family or a genius, a product of chance meetings of events or part of God’s providence? The life of George Price may help to give an answer.

He was born on January 15, 1919, at 3 Pickstock Street, Belize City. His mother was Irene Cecilia Escalante of Orange Walk Town who married William Cadle Price of Belize City on July 26, 1913.
His father was a self-educated man and left a high record of public service. The marriage produced 8 girls and 3 boys. George was the third child and oldest boy.

(L-R) George Price (1919), Josephine (1925), Irene Cecilia (mother), Elizabeth (1927), Alice Margaret “Meg” (1920), Lydia (1914), Sam (1926), Jane (1917), Ann (1922), not yet born Catherine, Judith and John.

Holy Redeemer Cathedral on North Front Street, how it looked when George Price was a boy. pre-1931

George was christened at the Holy Redeemer Cathedral in Belize City by Bishop Frederick Hopkins, S.J. Seven years later he was confirmed by Bishop Joseph Murphy, S.J. Today, he still worships at this cathedral and shares in the Eucharist.
His childhood was happy, playful and free of cares. It was the little world of 3 Pickstock Street: a big house and a big yard with crotons, flowers, sugarcane, pear, plum, lime, mango trees and geese and two old horse stables.

His early education was in the hands of the Sisters of Mercy at Saint Catherine’s Academy and the Holy Redeemer School in the years 1924 to 1930. He learnt the basic lessons and he also learnt about God and the Ten Commandments.

He played the piano by ear and later became familiar with written music. There was love and friendship for his brothers and sisters and schoolmates.
He liked the sea and became a good swimmer. The family had a home at St. George’s Caye where they spent the school holidays. George delighted in paddling a small dorey not far from the shore of the caye.
After primary school there was St. John's College a school run by the Society of Jesus. He enrolled as a boarder and was there for three months when the college was totally destroyed by the hurricane of 1931.

The college was on the sea coast on reclaimed swamp land on the south side of Belize City. The hurricane struck on the afternoon of September 10. It blew from the northwest. The large wooden building of three stories rested on concrete posts that were not reinforced with steel rods. It leaned and collapsed with the terrifying noise of thunder.

Along with some boarders and their teachers George ran out before the building crumbled. They took shelter behind the sea wall until the eye of the hurricane brought calm and sunlight for some minutes.
During the lull Karl Kittiel came from town on his bicycle. He took George on the bicycle and rode to the Kittiel home on Albert Street. On the way the second half of the hurricane struck blowing from the southeast and brought back the sea in a huge tidal wave 13 feet high.

The house began to shake. The people got out and took refuge in a bakery that was next to the Wesley Church. The upper part of the church fell on the bakery. George heard the sound of thunder and got out in time.

After two narrow escapes from falling buildings, his 12 year old mind thought of home on Pickstock Street as a safe place and there he would go. Albert Street was flooded high by the tidal wave. He swam toward the swing bridge and took shelter in the lobby of the Palace Theatre.

People lining up for food at the Battlefield Park, Belize City after the 1931 hurricane.
Towards nightfall the hurricane passed. With the help of Mr. Ronald Young he reached his home to see the house on the ground blown down off its brick posts.

After the college at Loyola Park was destroyed, classes continued in the compound of the Holy Redeemer School, 144 North Front Street. The time of 1931 to 1935 at St. John’s College were formative years. It was a preparation for the future yet unknown.

There was training in public speaking. Elocution contests were held yearly and the winners got gold medals. George won one of these contests.
During the years Italy invaded Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) student general, Jaime Noguera, supported by other students, held meetings on the school yard and defended Haile Selassie and his people. Sometimes these meetings got rough and led to disciplinary measures.

A friend and adviser was Father Hugh Harkins, S.J. He helped George to improve playing the piano and the pipe organ. He also introduced George to the world of suffering and poverty by taking him on visits to the Poor House and Tuberculosis Huts.
George was a member of the first team in the basketball competition. He was also a scout and leader of the Black Panther Patrol.

At the age of 16 years George felt a call to the priesthood. He went to the Minor Seminary of Saint Augustine staffed by the Society of the Divine Word.

The seminary was in Bay St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. At that time St. Augustine's was for black students. It was also the time of racial segregation. There was need for discipline, discretion and sympathy for the disadvantaged.

There followed a year at the Major Seminary in Guatemala and an introduction to philosophy taught by university Jesuit teachers from Spain.

The experience gave a vision of a greater Central America with Belize as a sovereign nation.

World War II was raging and it was impossible to go to Rome for continuing studies. In those circumstances George decided to stay in Belize and help his family.

He went to work with Mr. Robert Sydney Turton, a rich merchant and exporter of mahogany and chicle to the U.S.A.

Mr. Turton was also a member of the Legislative Council. Working with him was like going to a university. Price learnt about the world of commerce. He was a traveling secretary on visits abroad.

He was introduced to Belizean politics helping to draft speeches and other interventions in the Legislative Council at a time when the Hon. R.S. Turton stood up to some of the policies of the colonial system.
In 1944 George Price entered municipal politics, almost as if by accident. He was told by Mr. Turton to be a candidate. This was three days before the election. Price lost. The lesson learnt was that it is essential to spend more time and preparation in an election campaign.

In 1947 he won, and was elected to the Council for six terms ending 1965. He was Mayor of Belize City from 1958 to 1962.

The Council of 1950-53 was dissolved by the colonial Governor because the People’s United Party was against hanging the King’s picture in City Hall as a protest to colonialism.

Belize City had a population of about 17,000 people and the area was about one fourth the size in 2003.

The budget was less than half a million British Honduras dollars. The revenue and other resources were not enough to maintain its assets and to increase its work. The Council was responsible for streets, drains, markets, bridges, parks and playgrounds.

The experience was that for more development, there was need for more revenue.

To be a voter in those years a person had to be 21 years of age and over, with an income of $300 yearly or property of a value of $500 yearly.

Adult suffrage came in 1954. It guarantees every person 18 years and over the right to vote.
On the night of December 31, 1949, the day when the British Honduran dollar was devalued by the colonial Governor against the will of a majority of the Council, there was a meeting of about ten citizens in the home of George Price, 3 Pickstock Street, Belize City.

That meeting was the start of the Peaceful, Constructive, Belizean Revolution. The People’s Committee was formed to organize demonstrations of protest against devaluation.

Nine months later on September 29, 1950, the People’s Committee became the People’s United Party. It was the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel.
During these years (1964-1981), Price and the People's United Party prepared the people for independence. They created the symbols of an independent and sovereign nation.

Belize got its flag of the revolution: the blue and white flag with the coat-of-arms in the centre. This flag became the national flag when red borders were added.

The country got back its historic name: the settlement of BELIZE in the Bay of Honduras. It also got its national anthem: LAND OF THE FREE, and its independence constitution. All these symbols were created by long struggle and hard work of Price and the P.U.P. Working the revolution, Price visited the rural areas. He would visit homes and go in kitchens to see what food was on the fire-hearth or stove. Some times he would lift the lid of pots on the fire. It was a social study to learn what food was there for survival.

He visited schools and led the children in cleaning the school yard litter and rubbish. It was an exercise to make the children conscious of need for a healthy environment.

Once Price addressed a night time meeting in Barranco, the southern most coastal village. He was returning that night to Punta Gorda in the "Stella Maris", a small sailing boat. The sea was rough. A strong head wind tore down the sail and the small boat was in danger of drifting out to sea. All night John Ramirez, better known as George Price, poled the crippled boat towards land. Next day they reached the mangrove coast on the south side of Punta Gorda.
From 1954 to 1984, the P.U.P. won all seven elections to the House of Representative of the National Assembly.


In 1956 Leigh Richardson, Philip Goldson and Herman Jex were expelled from the party on the charge that they, against the will of the people, were working to take Belize into the West Indian Federation. The Federation some years later ceased to exist.

Price was elected Party Leader in that same year.

In 1957 Price was expelled by the colonial Governor from the executive Council on the charge that, without informing the Governor and the British Government and getting their consent, he met with the Guatemalan Ambassador in London.

At this meeting in London the Guatemalan Ambassador informed Price that the Guatemalans would be meeting with the British Government to try and find a solution to his country’s claim to Belize.

The counter-charge could well have been that the British Government did not inform Price and the P.U.P. government about their meeting with the Guatemalans.

During the 17 years between self-government (1964) and independence (1981) much work was done to improve and expand the infrastructure of transportation and communication. Stann Creek and the Toledo districts were connected with the national road system.

Price visited many villages in Belize walking on “picadoss” (bush trails) and wading through creeks and rivers. Afterwards the roads were built.

Health and educational services were expanded and houses and jobs made available.

Belmopan was built and the government moved there and began to function on August 1, 1970.

In 1958 Price was tried in the Supreme Court on the charge of sedition. At a Public Meeting in Belize he described the Queen’s visit to New York City in 1957 in an allegedly “insulting” way.

The jurors found him not guilty and he was acquitted.
But an obstacle blocked the road to Belize’s independence. The British government said it would withdraw its garrison when Belize became independent.

The struggle then turned to secure international support to prevail on the British Government to give a defence guarantee.

The case of Belize was taken to the United Nations by the combined endeavours of the Caribbean Community, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Another problem arose when the Latin American countries gave their support to Guatemala. With the help of the late General Omar Torrillos of Panama and others Belize got the support of all Latin American countries except Guatemala.

Three resolutions were passed at different times calling on the British Government to give Belize the necessary military guarantee. The last one got overwhelming support. Practically all member states voted in favour except Guatemala.

On September 21, 1981, Belize became an independent nation with a guarantee of nine months duration. A longer guarantee was necessary.

A few days after independence Price attended a meeting of the Heads of Commonwealth governments in Melbourne, Australia. There he met the Queen and informed her about the need for a longer period of a defence guarantee.

The then British Prime Minister, Lady Margaret Thatcher, and her government extended the time of nine months. It was extended for thirteen years until 1994 when the British guarantee was reduced to a jungle training force. At this time the P.U.P. had lost the 1993 elections and the United Democratic Party was the government.

The struggle and the international work that achieved the United Nations resolutions show the importance and value of international cooperation.

During the struggle to obtain self-government and independence Price and the P.U.P. won all the national elections.

The P.U.P. lost the elections of 1984 and 1993; but continued the struggle and won the elections of 1998 and 2003.

These two elections were won under the leadership of Prime Minister Said Musa and a new generation of workers in politics.

During the time of active political work, George Price contested eleven national elections and he won ten of them.
For forty years (1956 to 1996) he was the Party Leader. On October 20, 1996, he stepped aside from the leadership of the P.U.P. and left future campaigns and elections to a younger generation of the P.U.P.

Since 1996 Price contested and won the Pickstock Electoral Division. The Prime Minister appointed him to his cabinet as Senior Minister.

In 2003 Price retired from active politics after fifty years of political work. At present he is a member of NEMO (the National Emergency Management Organization) and a member of the National Security Council.

Price was the Vice Chairman of the Council of Democratic Leaders of the Americas with headquarters at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.

With President Jimmy Carter he has observed elections in Haiti (3 times), Panama (2 times), Nicaragua (2 times), the Dominican Republic, Guyana and Jamaica.
He has been awarded the national honours of Belize, Mexico, Venezuela, Honduras and the international honour of the Caribbean Community.

Price has made state visits to Mexico, Venezuela and Honduras. He also made an official visit to the United States of America and was received at the White House by President Ronald Reagan.

On January 15, Price will be 85 years of age and will begin his 86th year of life. He is in fairly good health recovering from a stroke in the left leg.

He has lived the life of a bachelor. He has no offspring. When asked about his person he describes himself as a Caribbean man with the bloodlines of Africa, Asia, Europe and Maya America.

George Price gives his full support to Prime Minister Said Musa and the government of the People’s United Party. He remains on call to duty.
He prays and trusts that they will advance the good work of the Peaceful, Constructive, Belizean Revolution with the help of God and the support of the people.

Some people have said that Price must have studied political science which helped him to make right judgments in times of crisis.

His comment was that he made no such studies but prayed to the Holy Spirit for grace to know the truth and strength to do the right thing.

His was the experience of words in Belize’s National Anthem: “by the might of truth and the grace of God”.

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George Price credits much of his knowledge to reading. He is an avid reader of all kinds of books including philosophy, literature, poetry, and religion.
We must not forget, in our up-hill work, that the rich industrial countries built their vast economies on agriculture. Our ancestors knew about this. Their view is recorded in our history.

George Price
Address to graduates of The Belize School of Agriculture, San Ignacio, July 22, 1984
Belize, with the help of God and the support of its people, will stand upright and will do its duty to help bring peace, stability and prosperity to our region and to wider circles of our planet earth.

This is our wish and our prayer as we bid all at home and abroad a very happy Independence Day.

Belmopan, BELIZE, September 21, 1981
Premier George Price
Prime Minister Said Musa presenting George Price with Order of Belize Award 2000
The message that once flowed and spread through cable and by wireless now rides post-haste airwaves of the sky and tells the universe:
Here live a good and gentle people destined and deserving to be free, owners of their land, masters of their destiny, secure in every glen or avenue be it Amara, Sawai or Trinity. Then let the message flash forth full force, tropical and clear, by cable, by wireless, by satellite that this American land must be free from threat or peril, and to nationhood must full grow.⁹

"Earth Based Satellite of Belmopan"
by George Price, 1978
Timeline

1919  Born January 15
1924-1930  Holy Redeemer School
1931  Almost lost his life in Hurricane
1931-1935  St. John's College
1944  Entered politics, lost 1st election
1947  Won 1st election on Town Council elected for 6 terms
1950  Along with others George Price forms People's United Party. He is Secretary General until 1956.
1954  Universal Adult Suffrage
1954  Member of the Legislative Council until 1956
1956  Becomes leader of Peoples United Party until 1996
1964  Self-Government (Governor’s powers reduced to ‘defense’, Executive Council replaced by Cabinet headed by Premier). George Price becomes Premier.
1970  Government moves to new capital, Belmopan
1973  June 1 – Name British Honduras changed to Belize
1984  People's United Party loses 1st General Election
2000  George Price awarded Order of Belize
...knowledge alone does not move you to action. It is the desire, the will to serve. The new Belizean man and woman is known by his or her lively interest and energetic and optimistic approach to the many problems that come from progress and from growth.

George Price, 1965
George Price is known as a politician, poet and philosopher. He describes himself simply as "a worker." To the Belizean people he is the father of the nation. Designed for students, teachers and general readers this book is a simple and clear outline of the life and work of George Price.