

Woman for All Seasons

Just talking to Jo-Anne Nina Sewlal and finding out about all her accomplishments and achievements could leave you speechless and spellbound.

Still 28, she is already pursuing her PhD degree. But she is certainly no bookworm.

Her young life simply overflows with a myriad of activities in the academic, cultural and social spheres. She is research scientist, editor, essayist, writer, dancer, musician, artist, poet, photographer and dressmaker, among other accomplishments.

Born in San Fernando, Jo-Anne Nina Sewlal has spent her entire life in Point Fortin.

At first glance, you wouldn't believe that the petite Jo-Anne is an achiever

three orb-weaving spider families.

But why arachnology as a field of study? Joanne explains: "At secondary school I decided to pursue a career in zoology. But I was really bitten by the bug during my first year at UWI, when the American Arachnological Society held its AGM in Trinidad. I didn't want to do insects; I wanted to be different. I wanted to do spiders."

She has researched spiders in various islands in the Eastern Caribbean including St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Anguilla, Grenada and St. Vincent. On all of these islands her work has been featured in the local media, such as radio, television and newspapers. During her

petite Jo-Anne is an achiever par excellence. She is studying for her PhD degree; is doing research on local spiders; compiling data for a book; edits a news magazine; and still finds time to play the guitar and the steelpan, among a host of other activities.

Jo-Anne is currently a 2nd year PhD student at the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies, where she completed her Mphil degree as well. Her area of research for her Mphil and PhD is arachnology - the study of spiders, to put it simply - and her dissertation focuses on the biodiversity of

newspapers. During her travels she has formed affiliations with a variety of NGOs in the Eastern Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago.

She has also received recognition in our local media as well with articles on her research being featured in the local newspapers and twice on the Morning Edition television programme.

With respect to publications, Joanne has 108 general publications on various aspects of the environment, conservation and biology, and writes on a weekly basis for Environment TOBAGO column in the



A woman of many talents, Jo-Anne Sewlal shows off her painting of a hummingbird



Jo-Anne Sewlal points out a specimen of one of the many spiders she has focused her research on

Tobago News newspaper. She has also written 15 scientific publications, one of which resulted from data gathered during a research project which she completed as an undergraduate. It looked at the Amazon River as a barrier to passerine or song birds, and was published in the Journal of Biogeography

which is a well recognised international peer-reviewed journal.

In addition to being an author, Jo-Anne also acted as a reviewer for the Caribbean Journal of Science which is another international journal.

Not surprisingly, she has won several national and international awards for her

outstanding work. Just recently, she was awarded the prestigious Vincent Roth Award from the American Arachnology Society for a record third time. This award is open to young arachnologists all over the world and supports her research on spiders in the Eastern Caribbean.

Versatile entertainer as well

Although she is heavily involved in research, doing surveys, and studying for her PhD, the talented Joanne Sewlal is also a consummate entertainer, mastering several genres.

She started dancing at the age of four, taking up the art form seriously at eight with classical ballet. She followed with Modern, Jazz, Tap and Classical Indian Dance during her early teens, where she pursued all dance styles to professional exam level.

Her virtuosity allowed her to perform at many venues, such as Naparima Bowl, Queen's Hall, Little Carib Theatre and at Point Fortin Secondary School where she got her first standing ovation.

Joanne started composing poetry at the tender age of four with her mom writing it down for her. At eight, she published her first poem in the "Tinymites" section of the Sunday Guardian newspaper. Out of the seven that were published, three received the Editor's Choice Awards from the National Library of Poetry in USA and four were



Jo-Anne Sewlal shows off her musical abilities with a little number on her guitar

published in four anthologies, one of which was from Noble House Publishers in the UK.

As if that wasn't enough, the versatile Jo-Anne still found time to pursue music, playing the piano, melodica, recorder, steelpan, guitar and cuatro. She even appeared on the local TV show Rikki Tikki where she performed on the melodica and piano.

She is also an artist with a portfolio of pencil, pastel and ink drawings, as well as paintings and calligraphy.

She has also pursued a variety of courses including

some in the medical sciences such as, veterinary and medical assistant as well as pharmacy technician courses. She also holds diplomas in police science, legal assistant, photography, and dressmaking and design.

When asked what her hobbies are, she noted that she likes construction and has taken courses in tile laying, small furniture construction and upholstery as well as advanced plumbing.

There you have it! Jo-Anne Nina Sewlal... definitely a Woman for All Seasons.