

Dr. Cicely Williams and her valiant struggle against Kwashiorkor

KEW PARK, Jamaica was a long way from Oxford, England and Cicely Delphine Williams was years away from the land of her birth but there was no mistaking that West Indian warmth with which she welcomed me to her home.

The years had not changed her. The eyes were steady, the hand shake firm and the footsteps sure. "Do you know that I was 91 of December 2?" was the first thing she said. I knew, but was somewhat amazed at the clarity of the faculties of this remarkable woman. There was no sign of the "second childhood" that was a part of the geriatric's world. Instead, she spoke easily of coffee-growing in Jamaica, the fall in our bauxite revenue, tourism and Negril. Of her many great-grandnieces and nephews all over the world. As we talked her many paintings looked down from the walls pregnant with stories of her indefatigable services in Accra, Nepal, Beirut and Uganda; but as Cicely insisted it all began in Kew Park, Jamaica. And indeed it did.

It was during the 17th Century that the first generation of the Williams family arrived in Jamaica. Like most immigrants in a new land, they must have had dreams of a better way of life but it was unlikely that such dreams, such expectations included the fostering of one of the most illustrious and distinctive women of the Twentieth Century. A woman whose services in the field of nutrition, hygiene, health-education and paediatrics and whose convictions would change and improve the lives of millions of children and mothers all over the world.

Cicely Delphine Williams was born at Kew Park, Westmoreland on 2nd December 1893 to James Rowland Williams and Margaret his wife. She was the fourth of six children. She was often referred to by the household help as the "sickly pickney", a shy child with an independent spirit. She was blessed with a strong will which was to serve her well in the years ahead.

Dad a scholar

As part of the privileged plantocracy of the day, Cicely could have opted for a life of comfortable ease and idle arrogance except that James was not just a gentleman but a gentleman and a scholar. He was a graduate of Trinity College, Oxford who had given up a fellowship to Brasenose College to return to Jamaica to manage the family properties. He became a tireless worker in the community; he was a magistrate, acting Colonial Secretary, Chairman of the Agricultural Society, Government Censor and Director of Education. In the latter capacity he appointed the first coloured schools Inspector and established the first scholarship system for girls, for higher education overseas.

Her inspiration

In an age when women were expected only to be decorative, this was not a popular view but it undoubtedly had a strong influence on his daughters. He never doubted that they too would go to Oxford. His frequently expressed wish to have a lady doctor in the family was Cicely's constant inspiration.



THE ORDER OF MERIT being presented to the Rt. Hon. Dr. Cicely Williams by His Excellency the Governor General, the Most Hon. Florizel Glasspole at King's House in 1976. Witnessing the presentation are from left Senator, the Hon Carl Rattray, then Minister of Justice; Professor the

Rt. Hon. Rex Nettleford, O.M; Dr. Joyce Isaacs-Saward, Miss Beryl Fletcher, Prof. Kenneth Standard, of the U.W.I. Department of Social and Preventive Medicine and Miss Olive Ennevor of that department.

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