

# BOOK REVIEW

Breaking the Glass Ceiling: the Stories of Three Caribbean Nurses by Jocelyn Hezekiah.

Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2000. 225 pp.

Trailblazers in Nursing Education: a Caribbean

Perspective by Hermi Hyacinth Hewitt. Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press, University of the West Indies, 2002. 268 pp. Indexed.

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The nursing profession in the Caribbean underwent a remarkable transformation between the 1950s and the 1990s. It was during this period that nursing education evolved from an apprenticeship system to a college or university educated profession based on recognized academic standards. Until the publication of these two books, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* and *Trailblazers in Nursing Education* however, no-one had written a history of Caribbean nursing for both the popular and academic audience. Although several doctoral theses have been written on various aspects of the Caribbean nursing history, none touched on the personalities involved in the development of nursing in the Caribbean, discussed their trials and tribulations, or described their struggles and achievements. The two books are similar in that each author has chosen three icons of the nursing profession in the Caribbean to tell their stories. Hezekiah has taken a pan-Caribbean approach choosing to profile Dame Nita Barrow, former Governor-General of Barbados, whose career in nursing administration took her from Barbados to Jamaica; Berenice Dolly, a leader in the establishment of a nurses' association in Trinidad and Tobago; and Mary Seivwright, the first doctoral-educated nurse from Jamaica. Hewitt's book focused on three nurses who ushered in significant change to nursing in Jamaica. Like Hezekiah, she chose Dame Nita Barrow; Gertrude Swaby, a nurse educator and editor of the journal *Jamaican Nurse*; and Julie Symes, an English nurse who moved to Jamaica after World War II and who was instrumental in establishing a nurse registration body in Jamaica.

The British colonial past of most nations in the English-speaking Caribbean links these geographically disparate countries – from the Bahamas in the north through Jamaica to Barbados and onward to Trinidad and Tobago and finally

Guyana in the south. These nations were transformed as a result of post-World War II independence movements, the granting of self government, trade unionism, and the improvement of educational opportunities for the black majority. As the political and economic situation in the Caribbean improved, so did health standards, resulting in the establishment of better health facilities and the need for indigenously trained medical professionals – especially nurses.

Changes in the administration and education of nurses in the Caribbean colonies were initiated in the late 1940s as a result of Lord Moyne's West India Commission report, which recommended that nursing education be better organized. Several women from each colony were chosen to go to England on scholarship for basic and advanced nurse training with the view that upon their return they would assume leadership roles in the organization and administration of nursing in their respective country. Up to this point in most Caribbean nations, the senior nurses (called Sisters or Matrons) were recruited from Britain and the locally-recruited staff nurses received in-hospital training, low pay and few opportunities for advancement. There was continued pressure through the 1950s and 1960s at both the local and regional levels to improve nursing in all respects: educational standards, the organization of nursing services, conditions of work, standards of practice, and for the establishment of an accreditation and registration body in each country.

Using a feminist approach, Hezekiah describes how the women's movement in the Caribbean developed and how nurses especially recognized the necessity for regional co-operation and net-working to improve their situation. Although none of the women profiled in Hezekiah's book would have considered themselves to be "feminist", they realized that the goals that they wished to attain were similar enough to warrant the establishment of the Caribbean Nurses Organization. Soon after the establishment of the CNO, and with the cooperation of the Pan American Health Organization, they embarked on a programme to survey all nursing schools in the Caribbean. Throughout the 1960s PAHO, CNO and ministries of health in many Caribbean nations undertook a series of studies on nursing . Thus, step by step, improvements were achieved in standards in nursing education, standards of care, application of the results of nursing research, among other achievements. The work of establishing and maintaining standards of nursing education and nursing care for the Caribbean was taken over by the Caribbean-based Regional Nursing Body following its establishment 1972.

Hewitt's focus is on the history of nurse education Jamaica between 1946 and 1986 when the profession of nursing and nurse education underwent great change. During this forty-year period Jamaica ceased to be a colony and became an independent nation. At the same time, nurse education was organized and a structured nurse training programme with a qualified nurse educator was implemented. Finally, with the establishment of a regulatory body for the registration of nurses, nursing became recognized as a profession. The three women profiled made their contribution to the development of nurse education in Jamaica, being pioneers not only in Jamaica but throughout the English-speaking Caribbean generally.

Students in institutions in the Caribbean are frequently asked to relate their learning to local and regional aspects of their course of study, thus they seek

information about the history, institutions, personalities, trends and issues relevant to the Caribbean as a whole or to their home country specifically. Locating written information is frequently difficult for a variety of reasons – the information may be published in non-mainstream journals that are not indexed, it may be included in reports from Caribbean institutions that are not published regularly and not available in the libraries in the region, it may be included in international documents and reports that are hard to locate, or the information may be located in newspaper articles. More often than not, students are obliged to interview the personalities. Hezekiah has done just that, and has produced a very personal, oral history, giving the reader deeper insight into the personalities of the three women profiled. Hewitt, however, has drawn extensively on primary sources, official documents, reports and archival materials as well as published secondary sources for her study. Her style is less intimate and there is less focus on the personalities of her subjects. She has placed more emphasis on the achievements of the women profiled and the historical context in which they lived and worked.

The two books together help explain the challenges faced by Caribbean nurse pioneers as they moved to reform the organization of nursing education, nurse-teaching education, nursing policy and nurse registration in the Caribbean. Their stories and experiences could equally be told in the history of Bahamian nursing or any other nation in the Caribbean.

*Breaking the Glass Ceiling* is volume 6 of the on-going UWI Press Biography Series, dedicated to “the solid contributions of the unsung”. The book is softcover, nicely bound and with a vibrant illustrative cover. *Trailblazers in Nursing Education* is an imprint of the Canoe Press of the University of the West Indies. It is also softcover, well bound and with an attractive colour cover. Both books include extensive bibliographies and are indexed. The only failings of both are the quality of the black and white photographs and the fact that not everyone is identified in every photograph.

In sum, both books are recommended as required reading for all Caribbean nursing schools and both would make excellent additions to all nursing school libraries with an interest in the history of nursing generally and in the Caribbean specifically.

## NOTES

- 1 Among the doctoral theses written are: Grayson, J.N.F. (1989). *The nurses' associations of Trinidad and Tobago*. E.D., Columbia University Teachers College. Gardner, P. (1993). *The development of nursing education in the English-speaking Caribbean islands*. Ph.D. Texas Tech University. Ward-Murray, E.M. (1990). *The development of nursing education in Barbados: with a recommendation for an inter-Caribbean curriculum*. Ph.D. Columbia University. Archer-Gift, C. (1995). *The baccalaureate degree program in Trinidad and Tobago*. Ph.D. Wayne State University. Hay Ho Sang, P. (1984). *The development of nursing education in Jamaica, West Indies, 1900-1975*. E.D. Columbia University Teacher's College, Columbia University. Hezekiah, J. (1987). *The development of nursing education in Trinidad and Tobago, 1956-1985*. Ph.D. University of Alberta. Hewitt, H.H. (2000). *Contributions of three nursing leaders to the development of regis-*

*tered nursing education in Jamaica, 1946-1986.* Ph.D. University of Iowa.

- 2 The series of reports on nursing sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization resulted from regional meetings held in various countries through the 1960s and the late 1980s. The following is not an exhaustive list: *Report of the survey of schools of nursing in the Caribbean Area, 1966. Report of the seminar on nursing education, 1966. Report on a seminar on the training of auxiliary nursing personnel, 1969. Report of seminar on nursing education, 1971. Re-survey of schools of nursing, 1971. Regional Nursing body, 1974. Nursing care standards in the hospital in the care of the Caribbean, 1974. Report of the workshop on nurse education, 1976. Standards for nurse education in the Commonwealth Caribbean, 1982. Caribbean standards of nursing care, 1984. Nursing policy for the Commonwealth Caribbean, 1985. Policies and procedures for evaluation and approval of schools of nursing, 1987.*

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