



Gloria Dolores Knight

Who would have thought the little lady had so much "gumption" in her? Mr. Chancellor, I present the Honourable Mrs. Gloria Knight, Officer of the Order of Jamaica and President of the Jamaica Mutual Life Assurance Society.

The "gumption" showed itself early. There is a story that, when, at the age of seventeen, she was interviewed for admission to the University College of the West Indies, after she left the room, a member of the interviewing panel, a certain Mr Robinson, said to his colleagues: "Watch that girl. She's going to run anything she goes into."

As Gloria Samms, she was in the Upper Sixth at St Andrew High School for Girls, and making plans to enter Columbia University, when she heard that an Arts faculty was being started at Mona. In October 1950 she became a member of the first class of Arts students at the UCWI. Her coming to Mona was the first in a series of pioneering moves in a career which may be described as a case of the right opportunity and the right moment repeatedly finding the right woman.

She had entered the UCWI to read English, Latin and Spanish, but in her first term she audited a lecture by Elsa Goveia on the causes of the abolition of slavery and was "converted." She had the nerve to go to the Professor of History and tell him that she had to do History, instead of Latin, even though she had not studied History beyond the fifth-form level. Of course, he deferred to her judgement, as many other men have subsequently been happy to do.

She had come to Mona knowing that she was going to be a teacher. After completing the BA degree, she moved into the Faculty of Education as one of its first students, reading for the Diploma in Education. But again history intervened. On the prompting of Philip Sherlock, then Warden of Irvine Hall where she resided, she became one of the first three persons, and the first UCWI graduate to be accepted into the newly instituted scheme of administrative cadetship in the Jamaican Civil Service. For the next fifteen years she served in various Ministries, attaining the rank of Principal Assistant Secretary.

During that time she broadened and deepened her academic qualifications. A one-year course in Public Administration at Oxford, on a CD & W scholarship, was followed by two years of postgraduate study in Sociology at McGill, on a Commonwealth scholarship. But she was also widening and deepening her qualifications in other respects. She married Marcel Knight in 1960, and during her two years at McGill, she contrived not only to pass all the examinations which she sat, but also to produce two children.

She was at the Ministry of Development and Social Welfare in 1966 when she was made Administrative Secretary to the Kingston Waterfront Re-development Company, which was then being started by the Minister. Her work was so impressive that when, two years later, the Urban Development Corporation came into being to replace the Kingston Waterfront Re-development Company, she was invited to be the first General Manager of the new organisation.

She remained at the UDC for the next twenty-one years. It has been her great work - so far. She began with a staff of three; today the number is some four hundred. The visible monuments of the Corporation, such as the Kingston and Ocho Rios waterfront developments and the Jamaica Conference Centre, speak for themselves and for her. That she is now able to leave the UDC without any fear about its being able to take care of itself is a measure of her achievement.

And in all of this she has always found time to give the University the benefit of her wise counsel, through service on the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Mona Campus Council. She says, "I have been to many universities, but UWI is *my* university."

And now history offers her a new challenge. Gloria Knight is the first woman to be chief executive of Jamaica Mutual, one of the largest insurance companies in the West Indies, and the first woman to have attained so important a position in the Jamaican private sector.

Persons who have worked under her leadership speak of her ability to articulate issues and to cut through to the heart of a problem. They speak warmly of her accessibility as a boss, of her open-door policy. She herself considers that she has been blessed with "the ability to work with people, the ability to *feel* what somebody else is thinking, the ability not only to hear but to *listen* ." The people who know her well also admire her for the way in which she has been able to keep her family-life inviolate against the intrusions of the workplace. *She* speaks gratefully of how supportive her husband and her children have been.

And behind them have been her parents, who understood the "gumption" and inculcated in her self-esteem and independence of spirit. She ran away from "prep" school because she objected to being beaten, especially for misdemeanours she had not committed. The word was out: "Watch that girl!" The world, since then, has not been able to take its eyes off her, and this evening we have her in full, deferential, laudatory and glorious view. Mr. Chancellor, I invite you, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of this University, to confer on Gloria Dolores Knight, BA (London - UCWI), MSc (Johns Hopkins), public servant, urban developer, manager extraordinary, the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*.