



The University of the West Indies

Dr. Ruby Beryl Viola Lake-Richards

Degree of Doctor of Science (DSc)

*“Since the beginning of time, we standing in line,
Taking we grind, following behind,
Now we woman have changed the course,
Without remorse, woman is boss.
When it comes to caring, sharing and achieving, woman is boss.”*

Chancellor, these lyrics from the 1988 song ‘Woman is Boss’ by Denyse Plummer, resonate with me as I present to you **Dr. Ruby Beryl Viola Lake-Richards**, a quiet, humble force of nature, and a boss of a woman! She introduces herself without title, but today Chancellor, I wish to acknowledge the achievements of this quietly extraordinary person, who, in an era when women were expected to *follow behind*, pushed the boundaries into a career that spanned decades and regions. Today, Chancellor, I beg you to recognize the achievements of this precious daughter of the soil whose life and work are a superlative example of the strength of a woman. A precious gem by name! A precious gem by nature!

Ruby Beryl Viola Lake was born at the Delap’s Sugar Estate in St. Paul, Antigua in 1922, the second of six children. Chancellor, I feel compelled to pause here to recognize that if she had achieved nothing else in life, just being here at **ninety-nine years old and in her hundredth year of life** would have been sufficient for celebration! Her illustrious lifetime spans regional and

international historical events about which most of us can only read! Imagine! plantocracy; colonialism and World War II; the Federation of the West Indies; statehood and independence of Antigua and Barbuda; and in Montreal, Canada, the October Crisis (the uprising of the *Front de libération du Québec*-FLQ) of 1970. Pressed to share the secret of her long life, this admirable gem of a woman simply reminds us that “*we are what we eat*”, and credits the fresh, unprocessed fruits, vegetables and seafood in her early years, describing them as “*like no other*”.

Dr. Lake-Richards has had a distinguished career as a medical doctor which started with the education foundation she received at the Thomas Oliver Robinson ‘TOR’ Memorial School in Antigua (for those of you who go that far back [pause] it was simply called ‘Ms. Robinson’s’). After that, in 1948, at about 26 years old, she went off to study medicine at the University College of the West Indies (now The UWI Mona Campus) in Jamaica, part of the first cohort of 33 students registered in the medical programme, **one of ten women** and **one of two** Antiguan. She received her medical degree in 1954.

In 1958, now wedded to Novelle Hamilton Richards, then a newly elected member of the West Indies Federal Parliament, Dr. Lake-Richards travelled to Trinidad and Tobago, where for one year, she continued to practice her craft as a medical doctor, before returning home to a post of Parish Doctor in Glanville, while operating a private clinic from her home. Shortly after, she migrated to Canada with her husband as he took up a diplomatic post there. It is while in Canada that her attention turned to the issue of mental illness, especially in children and this prompted her to specialize in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at McGill University. In 1977, she received her Fellowship in the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and worked at the Reddy Memorial Hospital and the Montreal Children’s Hospital. She lectured in the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University and served as a Psychiatrist at the Douglas Mental Health University up until the age of **93 years!**

Chancellor, I am sure that you will agree with me for a woman to support her husband on his career paths, as was expected of women in that era, while at the same time pursuing her personal career interests and ambitions, is indeed **phenomenal!** This woman surely “*changed the course*”, epitomizing the claim that “*Woman is Boss*”.

A proud Antiguan, Dr. Lake-Richards recalls the “goosebumps” she felt on hearing the Antiguan national anthem sung for the first time, a pride that was no doubt doubled by the fact that the lyrics

were penned by her husband! She transferred this pride to her son, Barry, who though living in Canada, had to visit his homeland regularly to remain anchored to his culture and his family. But she also taught him to respect and value other peoples and cultures. She exposed him to different situations and peoples, and taught him that there is value and beauty in everyone. He speaks of her as someone who always gives of herself effortlessly, and recalls the time when she volunteered to return a patient safely to Nigeria and used the opportunity to teach him about other environments and lifestyles while touring Africa and later Europe.

Chancellor, a good measure of the strength of a person, or dare I say in this case, of a woman, is her coping and resilience under stress and pressure. Dr. Lake-Richards met the mark and exceeded it! As a medical doctor in Antigua in the late fifties/early sixties, she went out on house calls and sometimes had to visit horrific scenes of sickness and death. She recalls one morning, while serving her family breakfast, being called to a mass casualty bus accident where persons were killed and dismembered. Her resilience was also evident while she was practicing her craft in Canada, where she sometimes encountered serious, life-threatening conflicts. Nevertheless, this gem of a woman gave selflessly, always placing the well-being of her patients before her own. The singer Shaggy could have had her in mind when in his song “Strength of a woman”, he sang,

“With a smile and a style, She’ll protect you like a child”

This indeed she did, as she protected her patients, many of whom were children.

Chancellor, surely you will agree with me that it takes a special woman to be able to not only meet her family responsibilities, but also give of herself to her community, both in and out of the region.

Dr. Ruby Beryl Viola Lake-Richards: Humble! Quiet! Calm! A resilient woman with abounding love for humankind. **“Caring, sharing and achieving!”** Combining roles of **wife, mother, teacher and doctor**! Chancellor I am sure that you will agree with me today, that this **“woman is boss”**.

Chancellor, it is my pleasure to invite you, by the authority vested in you by the Senate and Council of The University of the West Indies, to confer on **Dr. Ruby Beryl Viola Lake-Richards**, the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.