



Cynthia Valmai Wilson

Chancellor, some people are born leaders, some develop leadership skills and some have leadership thrust upon them. Cynthia Valmai Wilson has been organising people since she was in diapers. Indeed a possibly apocryphal story suggests that when she was born she cut her own umbilical cord.

As a very little child she organised family concerts at home, singing lustily herself, and as the second of seven children she had a large cast at her disposal. Another well authenticated story relates that when she was seven her beloved grandmother died, and she played the role of junior undertaker, lining up her friends to view "the dead" in the parlour.

Cynthia's father was a distinguished primary school teacher, and headmaster in succession of Holy Trinity, St. Margaret's and St. Martin's Boys Schools. Like her oldest brother, Sir George Alleyne, our new Chancellor, she had the greatest childhood gifts that money cannot buy - a secure, educated family unit, in which she learnt the best of our disappearing human values, of discipline, service and integrity, from the finest role models, not to mention all those younger siblings who simply adored her.

At Queen's College she continued to organise the world around her, while being a scholar and athlete, and was hugely popular for her personality and her storytelling skills. She proceeded on a scholarship to Mona, and after completing a BA in history, Latin and English and a Diploma in Education she married her schooldays love of her life - Dr. Ronald Wilson - and lived happily ever after, as the saying goes, in Paris, Morocco and finally back home on the rock. And so to the second half of her life, organising the people and the creative culture of Barbados.

She has played a lead role in NIFCA, the National Independence Festival of Creative

Arts, from its earliest days, as well as in the Barbados Dance Theatre, but her passion has been in the theatre, and in Stage One Theatre Productions and WWB Theatre Productions. She has served as Member, as Actress, as Chairman, as Producer and as Director - all different ways of saying organiser - of countless cultural groups, companies, committees and productions. And as Director of the CARICOM Foundation for Arts and Culture her contribution has gone beyond our shores. Her published poems and short story collection "Same sea...another wave" have also received critical acclaim.

She helped to guide the development of the National Cultural Foundation as Deputy Chair from 1986 to 1994, and as a member of that Board, I had the pleasure of being one of those many people Cynthia organised. She has organised, produced or managed many plays, productions and workshops geared to train actors and develop professional theatre in Barbados and the Caribbean, and her work has been recognised with numerous awards including the Jackie Opel Award for Arts and Culture, and the Distinguished Graduate Award of UWI.

Chancellor, as mother of three and grandmother of five, Cynthia Wilson has extended her creative role to leave a legacy at every level of achievement. But she will not organise them, for with the wisdom of the ancestors, she knows they are seed which fell on fertile soil, and they will create their own game plan; that she has helped to pave the road, and they will extend it.

Chancellor, for this most exemplary life of creating and organising, and of enriching most meaningfully the cultural life of Barbados and the region, I invite you, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of the University, to confer on Cynthia Valmai Wilson the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.