

Professor the Honorable Errol York St Aubyn Morrison
D.O.B.: September 21, 1945

6 months before his birth, Adolph Hitler had been defeated in World War 2.

1 month before his birth, the Americans had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in Japan.

7 days before his birth, a hurricane had destroyed 366 planes in southern Florida.
Was this a herald of things to come?

*Did Mrs. Morrison look at her newborn son with sorrow for the sorry state of the world she had bought him in or with anticipation and joy that this was a new beginning and that there was hope for her baby boy. I rather think the latter, as in that year **The United Nations Charter** had ratified by the **United States**, and that nation had become the third nation to join this new international organization.*

Lucille Maud Morrison was an ebullient, self-assured woman, a daredevil, a go-getter. As a teacher and honorary secretary to the Union of Teachers a precursor to the now Jamaica Teachers Association, she eschewed tradition, riding a bicycle to school and then “moving on up” to riding a motorcycle. We can just imagine how scandalized her more conservative colleagues were. Even in those times, there were concerns about remuneration for teachers. Mrs. Morrison was no shrinking violet. She supplemented her income by building and renovating houses. And there, ladies and gentlemen explains the entrepreneurial spirit of Errol because as Errol said “Chip can’t fly far from block”

Errol was a middle child. But Errol didn’t suffer from the middle child syndrome. No feelings of insecurity for him, no feelings of not belonging, no lack of a drive or a lack of sense of direction. In fact, much was expected of him because as his grandmother used to say “You head no big fe nutten” because ladies and gentlemen, Errol’s nickname when he was a little boy was “World Head” Let me translate for you : His head was as big as the world!

His school career was a distinguished one.

He went to Excelsior High School which at that time was headed by that intrepid and innovative educator, Mr. Wesley Powell.

Errol recalls the day when in giving the welcome at an event at the school, in true Jamaican fashion, he used all the big words he could think of. He sounded good! Professor Errol Miller who was then a teacher at XCLR congratulated him, and the students backslapped him.

Errol was glowing. Mr. Powell came to his classroom and in front of the students berated Errol and told him that a good communicator uses simple language that is understood by all. And to this day, Errol has embraced this advice. He now uses simple but elegant English in his lectures and in his radio programmes. In 1989, received the Archie Lindo Award for Educational Radio Programmes from the Press Association of Jamaica.

It is clear that Mr. Powell did not hold this episode Against Errol because in 1963, Errol was made head boy of the school.

At Excelsior, he embraced the meaning of his school's name Excelsior – Latin for “ever higher” and did them proud by winning the Jamaica Independence Open scholarship. He proceeded to the then University College of the West Indies where his interest in Biochemistry was fostered by being awarded the Medal for Biochemistry MBBS. This was to be the first of many awards.

He won a commonwealth scholarship to the University of Malta Errol proceeded to Malta and brought back both an MD degree and a new bride. He then obtained his MSc and PhD from the University of the West Indies, Mona.

Professor Morrison has had a distinguished university career at the University of the West Indies, rising through the ranks as lecturer, then as Head, Department of Biochemistry, Vice Dean (Pre-Clinical, Basic Medical Sciences) then as Pro Vice Chancellor & Dean, School for Graduate Studies & Research, UWI, 1999-2007. To date, he is the only professor of that institution to hold 2 chairs having been made professor of biochemistry in 1992 and professor of endocrinology in 1994.

Prof left the University of the West Indies for a much lower salary as President of the University of Technology. I asked him why and his simple response was “He saw the need, saw the challenge, and felt he had to do it”.

Since 1980, he has worked assiduously in the fields of natural products and diabetology. He supervised more than 25 postgraduate students, many of whom now take their rightful place as leaders in research and academia. I speak of none other than Professor Ragoobirsingh,

Professor of Biochemistry and Diabetes Education at the UWI, Mona, Prof E Albert Reece, Vice President of Medical Affairs, University of Maryland, Baltimore and Professor and Dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine amongst others.

I stand here today as a testimony of his mentorship. In those dark days of residency when after DM part 1 exam one had to scramble to find a research project, I was gently directed by the then Head, Professor Owen Morgan, to Professor Morrison who was known at that time to be a research powerhouse. Professor Morrison lit the spark of my interest in this field, fanned the flames by arranging further training and kept the fire going by encouraging my involvement in diabetes education of the public and members of the health team.

*Today, as we speak, Professor Morrison has a cadre of men and women who he has inspired and mentored, men and women who are his fans, who are loyal to him, who he can count on to support him as he goes about his work for this country. And as he moves from organization, to organization, the group gets bigger and bigger because that is the nature of the man. He remembers the advice he was given, that in climbing higher, **to always take others with you.***

Errol Morrison has changed the face of diabetes in Jamaica, the Caribbean and the world. This statement is not an exaggeration.

- 1. In 1976 he cofounded, along with members of the Lions Club of Kingston & St. Andrew, the Diabetes Association of Jamaica (DAJ), a private, voluntary, non-profit, non-governmental organization which has as its mandate the responsibility of developing and implementing a nationwide plan for the treatment and education of people with diabetes and for providing education on diabetes prevention and care to the public. Today, that organization has 50,000 members, seven branches and two chapters.*

It conducts outreach activities, and diabetes educational workshops. It offers secondary and primary diabetes care.

It is the only organization of its kind in the Caribbean which offers one-stop care for people with diabetes with laser therapy, kidney dialysis, foot care and pharmaceutical services, all under one roof.

- 2. As the Honorary (Life) President of this association, Errol had spearheaded the purchase of property and the development of the new headquarters for that association.*

He oversees an annual symposium on Diabetes for over 1000 lay persons.

He has conducted an educational radio programme "On the Alert".

The DAJ operates Camp Yellowbird, an annual camp for children with Diabetes.

The DAJ was instrumental in training foot care assistants a new category of health care worker which it has exported to other Caribbean countries such as Belize.

3. The Diabetes Association of the Caribbean

In 1982, he spearheaded the formation of the Diabetes Association of the Caribbean, which now has 26 member countries from the Spanish, Dutch, and French-speaking territories. He was been its President for the period 1985-87 and Vice President for the period 1989-91.

3. In 1991, the University Diabetes Outreach Project (UDOP) was launched by Professor Morrison, with the aid of a grant of £50,000 UK from the Wolfson Foundation. This was the University of the West Indies' contribution to the scourge of diabetes which was and is still sweeping the Caribbean nations carrying with it the amputated limbs, eyesight, renal function and lives of our people. Its mission was to translate all information about diabetes for communication far and wide to the nation. Its annual international UDOP meeting is now the premier medical meeting on diabetes mellitus in the Caribbean, enjoying an attendance of some 500 participants, from North America and Europe, China and the Far East with faculty drawn from Europe, USA, Canada and the Caribbean. It is now in its 17th year.

4. In 1993, Errol Morrison directed an all-island survey which revealed that the prevalence of diabetes in those over the age of 15 year was 17.9%. This was the first such survey of diabetes in Jamaica since the 1970's.

International Diabetes Federation (IDF)

Errol has been a Vice Chairman, Chairman and country representative of the North American Region (NAR) of the International Diabetes Federation (IDF). The IDF is a worldwide alliance of over 200 diabetes associations in more than 160 countries. It represents more than estimated 170 million persons worldwide. (1994-97, Chairman for 1997-2000, and Country representative of the NAR from 2000-2003).

Research

Errol has over 200 publications in peer reviewed journals, 7 books, 2 textbooks and numerous monograms.

Professor Morrison described a type of diabetes in Jamaica called Phasic Insulin Dependence, an update on Hugh James "J" type diabetes which was first described in the Lancet in 1961 and that of the WHO's Malnutrition-related Diabetes.

He is famous in the world of diabetology. When I go to far away and exotic places and the people there find out that I am Jamaican, they smile and nod and they say "Bob Marley". When I go to conferences on diabetology and the people there find out that I am Jamaican, my colleagues smile and nod and say "Errol Morrison!"

I say it once and I say it again, Errol has been the recipient

of many awards and honors

University Award

University of the West Indies Vice Chancellor's Award for all-round excellence in Research and Service to the University and Community.

National awards

Gold Musgrave Award for outstanding services in the medical sciences.

And the Order of Jamaica, OJ, for outstanding and distinguished services in Biochemistry, Medicine and the Voluntary Social Services'

International Awards

1. 1998 - *Harold Rifkin Medal of the American Diabetes Association for distinguished International Service in the cause of Diabetes.*

2. 2006 - *Queen Elizabeth II Gold Medal, Royal Society for the Promotion of Health, United Kingdom.*

He is honoured, he tells me to receive this award from his internal medicine colleagues.

For years, Errol toiled in clinical medicine in endocrinology and diabetes mellitus. In his Buff Bay practice he was called "the 4 yei doctor". Dr Ralston that is "the 4 eye doctor".

At the Diabetes Clinic at the UHWI he would swing into that overcrowded, hot and miserable clinic with a smile on his face and with that inimitable laugh that he is known for. One blind patient of his, blinded by diabetes asked after his health. Prof. Morrison answered "Just looking" The blind patient replied "Yes, but are you seeing". Out of the mouth of babes...

He has seen the wonders of the human spirit.

He has seen the importance of our people's beliefs and how their beliefs have impacted on the practice of medicine.

Ladies and gentlemen I present to you, Errol York St. Aubyn Morrison OJ, MD, PhD, FRCP, FACP, FRSM (UK), FRSHFJLM, leader extraordinaire, a distinguished son of Jamaica, the Caribbean and the world, renowned researcher, illustrious teacher and mentor, prominent endocrinologist, father of 8 and husband to Fay Whitbourne Morrison.

And I quote his favorite quotation from Aristotle:

"We are, what we repeatedly do..."

Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit"