

Moria Valentine Cann
S.R.N., S.C.M., H.V. Certificate

Moira Cann was one of my oldest and dearest friends. She was a humble woman whose career as a pioneer in Bermuda's nursing history could easily go unnoticed. She was reluctant to discuss her accomplishments, however, over the years I encouraged her to share some of her career and experiences with me.

Born on Valentine's Day 1930, she had always dreamed of becoming a nurse. She attended the West End School and the Berkeley Institute before being accepted for training at the Cottage Hospital in Happy Valley, Pembroke. Her father felt that she should be sent abroad for training and contacted the well respected Bermudian nurse Lorraine Dyer-Bizek, who was living in Bristol, England. With her assistance training was arranged for his daughter. While awaiting her acceptance abroad, Moira left the Cottage Hospital and accepted a temporary position as a nanny for the children of a British Naval Officer who lived near her home in Somerset. The officer's wife was very involved with the Girl Guiding and arranged for Moira to stay at the Girl Guide hostel in London.

At 19, Moira left Bermuda for New York. It was the first time she had left the island and the first time she had seen a television. She then travelled unaccompanied, by boat to Southampton, England. From there she boarded a train to London. She had never seen women bus and train conductors as well as cleaning the streets.

Her general training began at Walsall Manor Hospital located in Staffordshire, near Birmingham, England. It was often described as 'the Black Country,' due to the use of black, coal stoves. During her time there a Clean Air Act was passed leading to the use of electric and gas stoves. She remembered eating bread, buttered with pork drippings and sprinkled with salt. As a junior student she seldom had access to butter and sugar as they were rationed. Streets were lit by gas lights and there were people called 'Knockers' who went around waking people up every morning. Many people could not afford alarm clocks.

On the 31st March, 1950, two weeks after her arrival, she was selected to lay a wreath in memory of Nurses at the Walsall Monument.

She studied Midwifery Part 1 at Mortimer House in Bristol and Part 2 at South Meade Hospital where quadruplets were born. She described on one occasion leaving a home delivery only to emerge into heavy fog. Bewildered, she waited until she heard voices. She followed them and fortunately ended up in a police station where she waited until the fog lifted.

She later studied Health Visiting at a College of Advanced Technology and did not return to Bermuda until she had completed all of her training.

Moirra was unable to finding employment upon her return as K.E.M.H. did not employ black nurses. When Dr. E.F.Gordon was hospitalized he refused to have white nurses care for him. A special request was made for Moirra Tucker (her maiden name) to nurse him in hospital. She did so until his death in 1955. Dr. Gordon, during his lifetime, was a fighter and advocate for the rights of black nurses. He was always worried about how she was being treated and so she did not tell him that she was barred from the dinning room. She had to take her meals in the changing room. One day, to her surprise, a senior nurse came and escorted her into the dining room. Years later, a waitress told her she was so shocked that day, she nearly dropped her tray.

Following the death of Dr. Gordon she was once again, unemployed. Through a stroke of luck, a taxi driver, who was giving tourists a tour, was asked if he knew any Bermudian nurses who would be willing to work at Montefiore, a Jewish Hospital in New York. He suggested Moirra, who quickly took up the offer and moved to New York where she boarded with a Bermudian family and took the subway to work. She was assigned a position in the operating room where she assisted in all types of surgeries. She was described as the 'Bella Donna' of the operating room. At that time, they were performing experimental surgeries which involved replacing heart valves with those of cows. They also performed heart catheterizations. She loved the work but returned to Bermuda following her marriage to Durwood Cann in the 1959.

She quickly found work within the Ministry of Health as a Health Visitor with special responsibility for the western parishes. Her work included well baby clinics, the welfare of new born babies which she visited within ten days of birth, seniors and school children. She ran a special 'crying baby service,' where new mothers could call her at any hour of the night with their fears and concerns.

She was involved with Girl Guiding, the Bermuda Garden Club, the Friends of the Bermuda Library and the Continental Society. Following her retirement she enjoyed holding elaborate tea parties and travelled extensively with her husband. She also became a very active volunteer at the Packwood Home.

When her husband died, Moirra discussed with me her future health care plan. Her daughter lived abroad and her son was in ill health. She decided that when she could no longer care for herself adequately, she wanted to live at The Lefroy House Care Facility. She knew the staff was well trained and many had originally

worked at the Packwood Home. She also knew many of the staff from birth and through their days as school children and into adulthood.

Prior to the pandemic, I visited her at Lefroy House for the last time. She looked well and assured me that she was happy and pleased with her decision. She was enjoying her meals, the activities, the cheerful surroundings and the loving caring attitude of all the staff.

Moira Tucker-Cann died peacefully on January 3rd, 2021.

Cecille Snaith- Simmons
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