

**Tribute to
Dr. Mavis Burke
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By
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Dr. Mavis Elaine Burke was born in Caimanera, Cuba to Jamaican parents, Ama Gladys Burke (nee Simpson) and Charles Norman Burke. She was part of a loving progressive family with her siblings: Enyd, Norma, Charles Norman (Junior), and Sydney. The family returned to Jamaica to live. Mavis was educated and taught in Jamaica for many years, before migrating to Canada to work with an educational consulting firm and to complete her doctoral studies.

Educational Background

In 1958, Mavis Burke graduated with a BA Honours degree in History from the University College of the West Indies (at that time, a College of the University of London, England. It later became the University of the West Indies, UWI). Mavis Elaine went on to complete, very successfully, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education, at the UWI; an MA in Education from the University of London; and, a PhD in Education from the University of Ottawa in 1975. Much later, Dr. Burke became a Fellow of the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education (OISE).

Work Experiences in Jamaica and Canada

Prior to migrating, Mavis Burke taught at several Jamaican high schools, as well as in the Department of Education at the UWI where she was well-known as an excellent academic.

In Ontario, Dr. Burke established a highly respected career in Education with a very strong focus on community development. She worked tirelessly to enhance the integration and well-being of immigrants and their families. For example, in Toronto, she was a Special Immigration Consultant with the Toronto School Board. In this capacity, she initiated processes to improve the relationships between the teachers, administrators, and the immigrant students, their parents and community members.

In the Ontario Ministry of Education, as of 1977, she once again led important educational initiatives to improve relations between teachers, students and community leaders. Under her leadership, as Chair and then President of the Ontario Advisory Council on Multiculturalism and Citizenship, she concentrated on introducing advisory policies that would promote and encourage the meaningful participation of ethnic and racial minorities in Canada's mainstream institutions.

Educational Consultant Enid Lee, who once worked with Dr. Mavis Burke, remembers her fondly, as follows:

*“When I heard of Dr. Burke’s passing, a feeling of gratitude flooded my spirit. Grateful for the opportunity I had to learn from her when I served as the Researcher/Consulting Editor in the development of **Black Studies: A Resource Guide for Teachers** in the Intermediate Division published by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1983. Mavis Burke was the Ministry’s Coordinator for that project. As a young woman, I learned a lot from her about how to work with very large bureaucracies. I learned from her because she was a generous, joyful teacher and further, because justice was the purpose of her work. Through my connection with her, I caught a glimpse of a public servant in a huge bureaucracy who knew how to keep marginalized communities in her gaze as policies were made and publications were produced, all of which were designed to foster the effective inclusion of marginalized students, parents and communities. The lessons live on even as Dr. Burke has passed on.”*

In Jamaica and Canada, Dr. Mavis Burke is well-known for founding Women of PACE, later **PACE Canada** (Project for Advancement of Childhood Education) or Early Childhood Education. Since its early beginnings in 1987, PACE has grown to its present status in which it has adopted over 300 Basic Schools, usually in rural Jamaica, and Early Childhood Schools in Canada. PACE is a unique, independent NGO that does not accept any government funding. It relies entirely on voluntary financial donations and on voluntary labour. PACE’s activities range widely from providing computers to playground equipment in the adopted schools.

Recognition Received

In recognition for her exemplary work, Dr. Burke has received many awards including: Order of Ontario, and a Queen’s Jubilee Medal. In Jamaica, Mavis Burke has received the Office of the Order of Distinction (OD), and the Prime Minister’s Medal for services in Education. Dr. Mavis Burke has been described as a visionary who influenced the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of children and adults in Jamaica and Canada. As Enid Lee states, her lessons and work will live on. She will be remembered and missed for a very long time.

Sources include:

- (i) Mavis Burke Obituary, 2022, Markham, Ontario (*Toronto Star*, July 16, 2022).
- (ii) Neil Armstrong’s article: Dr. Mavis Burke, Esteemed Educator and Champion of Early Childhood Education in Jamaica Has Died (*Pride News*, July 19, 2022).
- (iii) Enid Lee’s Reflections (August 8, 2022).