

Forty-five years ago, I came to The Bahamas as an expatriate wife; married at the time to Patrick Rahming, among the first five Bahamian architects to have earned internationally recognized professional qualifications. Bahamian engineers were equally rare; I remember George Cox; there may have been others, but not many.

Two months later, I was hired as a grade four teacher at Queen's College. Well over 90% of the teachers were expatriate as was the entire leadership team. Teacher celebration events were often held at the Montague Beach Hotel, a favourite of expatriate bankers and accountants.

The Bahamas was a British colony and although institutionalized racial discrimination had mostly ended, the legacy of colonialism and racism was embedded in the economic and social structures of the time.

Majority rule was history; independence was yet to come.

I was asked to take on a remedial reading class, and, shortly thereafter, I was invited to teach reading methods at The Bahamas Teachers' College. The vast majority of lecturers were expatriate. There were outstanding Bahamian education leaders, people like Corinne Thompson, Sheila Seymour, Patrick Bethel and others, but they were a minority. In addition to training pre-service primary and junior secondary teachers, offering not degrees but certificates, we also offered training to in-service teachers, many of whom had begun to teach right after completing high school, most often in the Family Islands.

Independence came and with it came The College of The Bahamas in 1974. We who had been teaching at The Bahamas Teachers' College, San Salvador Teachers' College, C. R. Walker Technical College and in the sixth form of The Government High School, joined together with the mission to create a unified post-secondary institution. Few of us had graduate degrees.

The colonial past was reflected in the lack of teaching materials and the profound irrelevance of the few we had. Dick and Jane taking their dog Spot for a walk in a London park did not make for exciting reading for a Bahamian six-year-old.

We created our own materials and competed to get our share of the meagre mimeograph and Gestetner budget - and to maintain the goodwill of Ms. Horton who ran the print centre, always grumbling that our deadlines were impossible, and yet, always delivering the needed materials on time. Air conditioning was non-existent – a problem, I understand, that still plagues some classrooms today.

Still, our students were great and we shared with them, and with the exceptional Bahamians who became our leaders - Keva Bethel, Eleanor Thompson, Ruby Major, Roger Brown, Mavis Pratt and others - the knowledge that we were engaged in building a nation. Though we complained about budgets, working conditions, bureaucratic hurdles and endless meetings, our work had meaning.

The College began to grow, sending more and more of its faculty to earn advanced degrees, so that we could offer degrees as well as certificates.

I left for graduate school on unpaid leave from The College. After graduate school, life took me elsewhere. I came back at times, and my three children came back every year, and then, ten years ago, I came back for a longer time.

When you come back after having lived away for more than twenty years, you are struck by changes that others who have lived through these in a gradual way may not see as momentous.

What did I see? Teachers: Bahamian. Architects and engineers: Bahamians. Accountants and bankers: Bahamian. Nurses: Bahamian. Chefs: Bahamian. And I could go on and on.

There now was a strong Bahamian middle class, a black Bahamian middle class.

And at the centre of these changes: The College. The College, with its modest resources and very large heart had proven the transformative power of higher education.

Bahamian faculty had earned advanced degrees. Indeed, many colleagues were less focused on Bahamianization than on achieving healthy diversity in the right mix of Bahamian and non-Bahamian professors.

New academic programmes were rigorously developed under the leadership of Rhonda Chipman-Johnson with the support of the Deans and the Academic Board. There were new foreign language programmes, a new Small Island Sustainability programme led by Brendamae Cleare, a new MBA led by Remelda Moxey and more. Academic support services were also being strengthened: a new Library was being designed under the oversight of Willamae Johnson, while Danny Davis and Vernice Williams took on the challenge of online registration. In Grand Bahama, Coralee Kelly had overseen growth on a campus that now required larger and better facilities.

Outside the classroom, equally important initiatives flourished; The Colour of Harmony, an innovation brought to life by Pauline Glasby, supported by Stan Burnside and by their colleagues in the Music and Art Departments; the Anatol Rodgers Lecture Series created by Marjorie Brooks-Jones – whose passion also convinced the Rodgers family to fund the series; new sports and athletic initiatives,

driven by the work of Cynthia Pratt and, later, Bradley Cooper; the Job Fair, championed by the College counsellors under the leadership of Colyn Major; and so much more - events and activities that were led by faculty and staff to enrich the student experience and engage the broader public.

There can be no doubt about the quality of the education offered at The College. Under Linda Davis' leadership, students left on semester abroad programmes to some of the best universities in North America and did extremely well. Alumni who had left to pursue their studies abroad told us how well prepared they were. Employers in the financial services sector told us our graduates performed extremely well. Our nurses were prize recruits.

This success is attributable to the quality of the work of faculty, staff and students, and to the sacrifices students and their families made in order to attend. It is also a consequence of the wise choices educational leaders at The College and political leaders, from both parties, made over the course of post-independence history.

The College was also built on the gifts of donors who understood the national purpose being served; donors like The Freedom Foundation, the Lyford Cay Foundation and the Canadian Lyford Cay Foundation, RBC, Sir Franklyn and Lady Sharon Wilson, Scotia Bank and The Commonwealth Bank, to name a few among many.

Forty-two years later, we are here to celebrate The Charter Week of The University of The Bahamas. I would like to honour the leadership of Prime Minister Perry Christie and Minister Jerome Fitzgerald and their teams, and that of Council Chairman Earl Cash and President Rodney Smith and their teams; their leadership has brought us to this new milestone.

As this chapter ends, it's time to take pride in the Bahamian talent, creativity, determination and resilience that turned a national dream into a national success.

Time also to thank all who contributed. There are too many College Builders to list them all today, but if you are one of them, take pride. You may be also be thinking, as I am, how proud people who are no longer here, people like Keva Bethel, would be today.

Still, stories of countries and universities are told in centuries, not in decades. So first, we rejoice; and now, we turn our thoughts to the future.

How can The University of The Bahamas expand the role it plays in national development – and in the search for health, peace and prosperity for all Bahamians?

The University of The Bahamas belongs to the people of this nation, and to flourish, it needs to be cherished by them. From this flows UB's obligation to meet the needs of the people of this country.

We know The College served its students well and we know the University will continue to do so. Serving well means providing students with workplace skills while nurturing critical thinking and the capacity for teamwork and civil discourse that undergird a healthy democratic society. It also means providing a broad enough education so that graduates have an appreciation of culture and the arts, privileged modes of expression that capture the soul of a nation.

A university must also focus directly on bringing forward innovations to address national issues. The following five immediately come to mind:

- **Health and environmental sustainability.** How can the University work with partners to improve the health of Bahamians and the extent to which communities are healthy places - physically, emotionally, socially and environmentally?
- **Climate change.** In the country of shallow seas, what should be done to protect the archipelago and mitigate the effects of climate change and sea level rise - an issue that takes on particularly poignancy in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew.
- **Poverty and crime.** In a country plagued by crime and fear of crime, what can be done to alleviate the prime drivers of crime: poverty, child abuse and neglect?
- **Illegal immigration.** What policies and practices can ensure the protection of a porous national border in a country that cannot absorb the number of desperate people who make their way here - and carry out this protection without failing in the obligation to treat all human beings with dignity and respect?
- **Economic development and diversification.** Deep changes are underway in the two largest sectors of the Bahamian economy: tourism and financial services. What strategies can be deployed to support these industries as they manage these changes; and what other areas of economic activity could serve to expand and diversify the economy?

All of these issues are complex. None can be resolved by government acting alone. By providing the ideas, the data, and the analysis that fuel the search for solutions, the University can make a significant contribution to a productive national conversation. It is by engaging, through teaching, innovation and research, in issues that affect the lives of Bahamians that The University will deliver on its expanded mission. This is hard work but it is also deeply meaningful work - the very best kind.

A country that wins Olympic Gold so much more frequently than population size would predict, can put the same faith that drives its athletes and trainers, the same discipline, the same determination and resilience, into building a national university that will stand proudly alongside its international peers.

Bahamian millennials do not need to be reminded of this - neither they, nor Generation X Bahamians, like my son, M'wale Rahming, who returned home to build a market research company that now employs over a dozen people. They know that their skills meet international standards and they will be looking at The University with such standards as their benchmark. The good news is that The University of The Bahamas can meet them.

Forty years from now, someone will stand here to tell the story of how UB built on COB to become a university powerhouse that nurtures skill development, talent, innovation and research in service to the country.

Meanwhile, as the journey continues, we remember that the goal of a good education is not simply knowledge. It is also wisdom. Wisdom requires us to use knowledge to find what is true and right and good in what we say and in what we do. Forty-two years ago, this idea was expressed in The College's motto: "knowledge, truth and integrity".

May The University of The Bahamas continue to be guided by this motto and by the good will of all who love it and love this country - as I do.

Thank you.