

Tout Moun

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*Beyond the Crisis-Generation and the Dread
Instilled: Special Issue in Honour of
Professor Paula Eleanor Morgan*

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PROFESSOR PAULA ELEANOR MORGAN: A TRIBUTE



Geraldine Skeete

In this *Tout Moun* special issue, I share what Paula Morgan—retired professor of West Indian Literature and Culture—means to me, both professionally and personally. What I say here is very brief, but it signifies the saying that ‘less is more’ since my words encapsulate much more meaning than they may seem to indicate. Professor Morgan, more than any other lecturer, has been a part of multiple watershed periods in my years as student and staff in the Faculty of Humanities and Education (FHE) at The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine.

I first encountered her—then Dr Morgan—in 1994 when I began my BA - Literatures in English programme. She was my very first lecturer at The UWI. That is her first importance to me. At 28 years old I was a mature, working student; it was my first attempt at having to manage a work-life-study balance, and therefore she is a key figure associated with that experience. Just one among a few indelible memories of Morgan during those early undergraduate years is of her beautifully singing one of the ballads she taught us for the introductory poetry course—the first course she ever taught me. I recall sitting in awe at my lecturer singing in the university classroom, demonstrating in her teaching that ballads were written to be sung.

As a graduate student I interacted more closely with her; for instance, teaching the pre-university ‘Reading for Meaning’ course she designed for potential UWI Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC) students when she was the FHE’s Deputy Dean for Distance and Outreach. In addition, she was an assessor of my MPhil to PhD upgrade seminar, and subsequently an examiner of my PhD thesis and viva. During one of her stints as Head of Department and mine as an adjunct staff, she generously offered me

the use of her vacated lecturer's office as my own. From observation, direct involvement and collaboration—starting from 1999 as I transitioned from graduate student to colleague—I learnt much from Professor Morgan about how to organize departmental activities, international conferences, etcetera; how to mediate conflict in the workplace; how to treat with forgiveness or kindness those colleagues who dislike and wrong us and/or with whom we are at odds; and how to practice the collegiality, camaraderie, and professional ethos of being an academic and staff member specifically in the Literatures in English section and, generally, at The UWI. She remains someone to whom I can turn for wise advice on matters of career and life. Her love of God, family, nature (particularly her plants), literature, teaching—and she is an excellent teacher; her hospitality as a hostess; her displays of leadership, hard work, scholarship, and productivity (before and after retirement); as well as her loyalty and devotion towards her students are all qualities I have noted, admired, and respected.

Professor Morgan has therefore been a teacher, mentor, and role model with whom I have had a 29-year relationship and who has strongly and positively impacted my professional and personal development. I end with these words from poet and philosopher Ibn Gabirol since they embody, in part but significantly, what Morgan has taught me by the kind of person that she is: “In seeking wisdom, the first step is silence, the second listening, the third remembering, the fourth practicing, the fifth – teaching others.”