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# She The Story of Eva B. Dykes Fulfilled the Impossible Dream



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DeWitt S. Williams

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REVIEW AND HERALD PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

Washington, DC 20039-0555

Hagerstown, MD 21740

BX 6193  
.D94  
W54

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Review and Herald Publishing Association

This book was  
Edited by Gerald Wheeler  
Cover art and design by Richard Steadham  
Type set: 11/12 Bookman

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Williams, DeWitt S., 1939-  
She fulfilled the impossible dream.

1. Dykes, Eva Beatrice, 1893- . 2. Seventh-day  
Adventists—United States—Biography. 3. College  
teachers—United States—Biography. I. Title.  
BX6193.D94W54 1985 286.7'32'0924 [B] 84-17726  
ISBN 0-8280-0274-6

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# Dedication

I dedicate this book to my wife, who, as an outstanding teacher, follows in the tradition of Eva B. Dykes. I would like to thank the many people who gave of their time and comments to make this book possible: Esther Osborne Ward; Agnes Barksdale, Dr. Dykes' cousin; contemporary friends Helen Sugland, Joe and Willie Dodson, Myrtle G. Murphy, Alan and Lucille Anderson, and Lillian Burges Ashby; Mary Rose Allen, former teacher with Eva B. Dykes at Howard University; and Janice Lewis, who made available resource materials from the Eva B. Dykes Library at Oakwood College.

I would also like to thank the authors of previously written articles about Eva Dykes. I do not include footnotes in the story, but admit that I had to depend heavily on their information and research to make my story complete. Most helpful were "The Achievements of Eva Beatrice Dykes," by Lela M. Gooding; *Climbing High Mountains*, by F. L. Peterson; "She Fulfilled the Impossible Dream," by Louis B. Reynolds; Jannith Lewis' 1973 unpublished interview with Dr. Dykes on civil rights; Clara Rock's March, 1975, interview with Dr. Dykes, also unpublished; "A Glimpse at Dr. Eva B. Dykes," by Gwen Ward; and the article "Dr. Eva Beatrice Dykes," prepared for *Spectrum* by Irene

Wakeham but unpublished.

Most sincere appreciation goes to all of the cooperative people at Howard University for opening up their rich resources: Jane S. Knowles, Radcliffe College archivist; Lona Nell Lea and C. D. Brooks, for helpful suggestions; Debra M. Carroll, for typing, editing, and retyping the manuscript; and my family, for patiently enduring the odd and unusually long hours that I spent at my desk and away from them while writing this book. Last, but not least, to Dr. Eva B. Dykes herself, who patiently answered my myriad questions.

## The Challenge

**E**va Beatrice Dykes!"

Hearing her name, she lifted her head and walked briskly to the center of the stage. Polite applause could not hide the spontaneous murmur that spread throughout the all-white audience.

"Isn't that a colored girl?" Those in the back rows stretched their necks to see, while those in the front stared in unbelief. But all whispered the same question. "Isn't that a colored girl?"

Undaunted, she took the diploma and pumped the outstretched hand. "Thank you. Thank you very much," she managed to say.

Flicking her tassel to the other side of her mortarboard, she continued to the spot where the seven female doctoral candidates were to stand. Commencement day, June 22, 1921, was different from any that had gone before. Since it opened its doors in 1879, Radcliffe, an exclusive, Ivy-League college for women, had not conferred this highest honor on a black person.

She stood with humble dignity, representing not one but two minority groups. Black women in America have always faced the double obstacles of gender and race to achieve their dreams and aspirations. That so many have succeeded in so many varied



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Undaunted, she took the diploma and pumped the outstretched hand. She was the first black American to have completed the requirements for the Ph.D. degree. Soon she would begin a career of service to the black community, first at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, then Howard University in Washington, D.C., and finally the black senior college of her adopted faith, Oakwood College, near Huntsville, Alabama.

One of the most beloved black Seventh-day Adventist teachers, she contributed an inspiring life of selfless devotion and service and triumph over prejudice. She played a significant part in advancing the role of blacks in the SDA Church.

DeWitt S. Williams is associate director of the Health and Temperance Department of the General Conference. A former student under Dr. Dykes, Williams wrote this book out of admiration for her Christian character and service.



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