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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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# Contents

The Challenge	9
Heredity and Heroes	17
Summa Cum Laude	26
A High-class High School	33
School in Washington	40
A Daughter of Howard	50
Lay Leaders	60
Onward to Oakwood	68
Audibility and Academics	80
Where Loveliness Keeps House	89
Accreditation and Europe	95
On Controversial Issues	101
The Setting Sun	114
A Life Beautiful	118
Teacher of Teachers	122

# 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High Mountains*, by F. L. Peterson; "She Fulfilled the Impossible Dream," by Louis B. Reynolds; Jannith Lewis' 1973 unpublished interview with Dr.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 Dykes, also unpublished; "A Glimpse at Dr.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

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## 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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