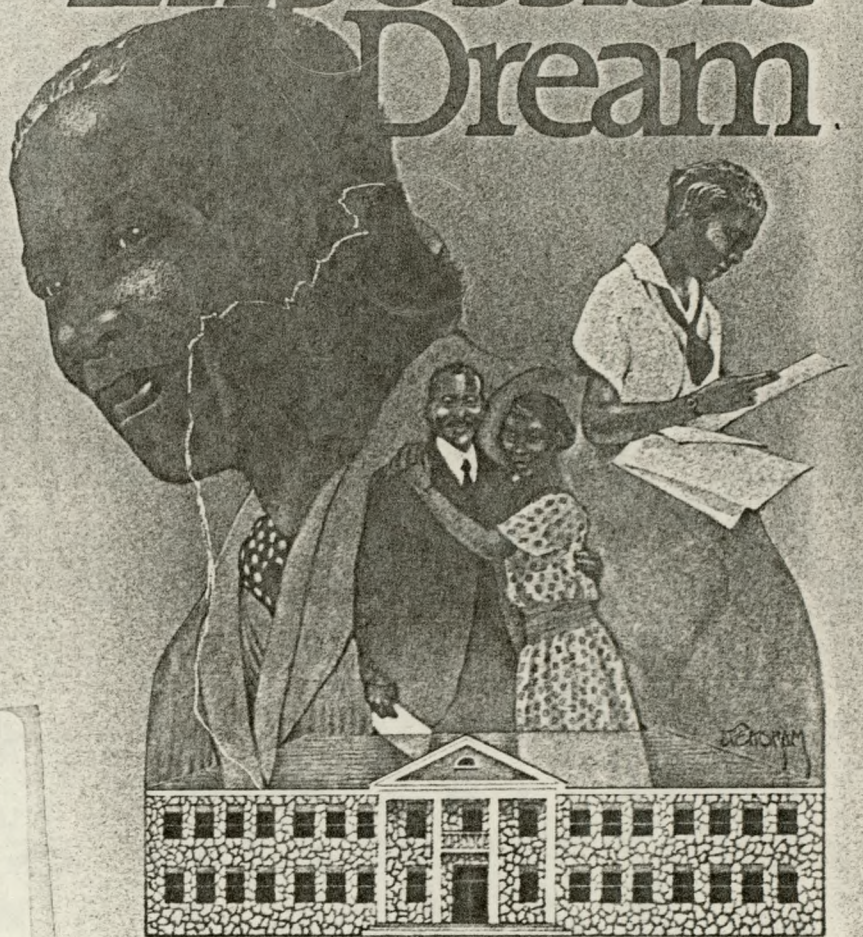


BANNER
BOOKS

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



DeWitt S. Williams

Teacher of Teachers

The postman deposited several letters in the rural box. The one that caught her attention had come from Alabama. "Office of the President, Oakwood College," she read in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope. Good to hear from Dr. Hale, and find out how Oakwood is doing, she thought.

Eva ripped open the letter and scanned the page. "I, along with the leaders of Oakwood College, have voted to invite you to rejoin our staff. We know that you are enjoying your retirement, but we need you here at Oakwood to chair the English department."

Though she was enjoying the comfort of the country and the freedom of retirement, her college had sounded a new challenge for her. Eva was never one to turn down a call that meant service to her church and the cause of education. In September of 1970 she stood once more in the classroom, this time for three more years of full-time service. In 1973 she asked the administration to reduce her load, and she continued from 1973 to 1975 on a part-time basis.

It was during her second term at Oakwood that the new Eva B. Dykes Library was dedicated. She edited and published the *Pierian*, a paper that brought together a collection of original poems by students

and fellow teachers like Florence Winslow and Irene Wakeham of the Oakwood English department.

She still had time to participate in musical activities, having once said, "Music has always given me more pleasure than anything else. If I have any gifts, I am more grateful for the gift of music than for any other."

In 1975 a letter from Washington, D.C., informed her that the General Conference would fly her to Vienna, Austria, where it would honor her along with several other outstanding women of the denomination. Dean Cooper wrote, when the denomination nominated Eva for its Outstanding Educators Award in Vienna, "The record of Dr. Dykes's contribution to Oakwood College is an illustrious and enviable one. She has served Oakwood with conspicuous excellence, with unflagging dedication, with extreme devotion, and with profound qualities of gentle greatness. . . . Dr. Dykes brought a spirit of true greatness to Oakwood College."

During 1976 the postman brought still another important letter. "From Wisconsin," she said to herself, puzzled. "Who in Wisconsin would be writing to me?" The return address indicated that it was from Dr. Geraldine Rickman, President, National Association of Black Professional Women in Higher Education. The letter invited Dr. Dykes to attend the charter meeting of the association at Wingspread, Johnson Foundation Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, on April 5. Accompanied by Mrs. Ruby Troy, an educator and wife of Dr. Owen Troy, the first Seventh-day Adventist black man to earn a Doctor of Theology, they attended this historic occasion.

The chairman introduced the honored guest to the hundreds of black women holding doctoral

degrees that had assembled to discuss education and the woman's role in it. Some had their doctorates in education, some in science, others in English and the arts. They listened and admired the little lady as the chairman continued.

"We have in our midst a pioneer. Pioneers are special people. 'Firsts' are always difficult. We don't know that things can be done, that dreams can be fulfilled, that great accomplishments can be realized until somebody takes that first step and shows the way. Black women had never realized their full intellectual development and potential until this pioneer, Dr. Eva B. Dykes, fifty-five years ago dared to take the first step and show the way. We honor here the spirit of her dreams. We are proud that she can be our guest of honor at this charter meeting, and we grant her charter membership in this association as the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. in the United States."

The spontaneous and thunderous applause before and after her speech made her feel uncomfortable. But it was the fitting climax to a career of more than fifty years of distinguished teaching.

Now as professor emeritus, residing at Oakwood, she is a living monument of excellence, a legend in her own time.

H. D. Saulters wrote this about her, "I enjoy building things with wood. There have been a few items that I have constructed from wood and, when completed, I enjoyed seeing them placed where they served in some useful function. You are a builder also. You have been building minds. Unlike objects of wood, minds are not completely finished and then put to some useful task. The training that you have given to the minds of hundreds of young men and women

has set in motion thinking powers that are ever growing broader and deeper.

"What joy can be yours as you lay aside your regular teaching duties and see many of your former students pushing forward and making strides in their journey throughout this life."

Lela M. Gooding ends her fifty-one-page research project by eulogizing her subject, "In a century that will survive in history through people like Mary McLeod Bethune and Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Jessie Jackson, hers has been a quiet, almost uneventful life, but she deserves her place in the pantheon.

"Committed to a policy of refusal to retaliate, she nevertheless managed to play an aggressive role in the improvement of several thousand black people. As a black person, as a woman, as an academician, she has been a trailblazer. She will be remembered."

President Millet said of her, with tongue in cheek, "Dr. Dykes is a lamplighter. Those who know her want to emulate her, except in sleeping in the open air summer and winter."

Elder Louis B. Reynolds closed his article on her by observing, "When God has put an impossible dream in our hearts . . . He means to help us fulfill it. Eva Dykes believed this to be true, when as a young woman, she heeded the call to prepare herself to help others and to attain the highest competence in order to do it. Through the years God has given her many other dreams of specific tasks He wanted her to do.

"'It is when we resist God,' she says, 'that we remain nothing. When we submit to Him, whatever the sacrifice or hardship, we can become with His help far more than we dare dream.'"