

## Thank you Aunt Bernice

*The past helps us in the present to create a better future*

### FOREWORD:

If you have entered this portal, you are going to get more than you bargained for. I selected several pathways from various sources to share my aunt's story. I have many pieces of history about her, and thought I knew all there was to know, until I was fascinated by what I recently heard when I listened to a 1984 interview conducted by the Ontario Black History Society.

Of course, I have always had a strong connection to my aunt because my father named me after her. However, as I advance into my senior years, I have taken on new feelings about what she and her legacy meant and now means to me.

So, if you choose to read on, you will discover that I reveal her story with tales that have been spoken about in our family since I can remember; you will gain insight into her reality from the writings that she left behind; you may experience an emotional surge from her remarks captured from the interview tape; and/or you may be curious about my thoughts about her life since I was given the responsibility to carry her name forward.

Let me warn you in advance that this story will unfold gradually because I am going to post what I write as I go – pausing from time to time as I revisit the treasure trove of information that has been left for me. On the surface my aunt's career choice seemed simple to accomplish. She was motivated and had the intelligence and the grades to make it happen. I respect her commitment and moxie for overcoming the obstacles that could have prevented her from fulfilling her childhood dream.

Let me start with my own feelings about why her story is so important to me. I take you to one of the excerpts in our family autobiography "A Fly in a Pail of Milk." to share my first thoughts about Bernice Isobel Carnegie.

### A Fly in a Pail of Milk – Page 210

*My name is part of my family's legacy*

I love that I inherited by birth the prestigious family name Carnegie. I am eternally grateful to my father for naming me Bernice. I've come to realize that through a lifetime, if we allow for personal growth, we will wear many hats and take on many names — though we will appreciate some more than others. Why is my name so important to me now? I have the privilege of carrying on the name of Bernice Isobel Carnegie who, like my father, has a special place in Canadian history. I now tell her story widely, whenever and wherever I can. She was the first Canadian-born Black registered nurse to practice in Canada.

# Bernice Isobel Carnegie Redmon RN

October 28, 1917 – October 23, 1993

## IN THE BEGINNING

**Bernice Isobel Carnegie** was born in Toronto on October 28, 1917. She was the fourth of seven children of George and Adina Carnegie who emigrated from Jamaica and settled in Toronto in 1912 when there was a very small Black population scattered throughout the city.

Daddy Carnegie moved his family out of the downtown area when Bernice was two years old and bought a very small house on Parkview Avenue (looked more like a shack) in what would have been considered a rural area. The nearest neighbour might have been a block or two away.

When she was about six years old, Daddy Carnegie had a large redbrick home built a few streets south of this meager dwelling. The new house had the look of an upgraded farmhouse with a large front porch that stretched across the full front of the house. Behind the dormers protruding from the front and back of the roof held the bedrooms where eventually seven children would share sleeping quarters. Although it had an indoor bathroom, at first Daddy Carnegie made the kids use the outhouse because there was no sewage service. He was mindful of every penny and knew how to conserve money as he fully understood the cost of removing waste. I am not sure my aunt, my father and their siblings understood the wisdom of his thinking as the summer faded and the prospect of using an outhouse as the fall and winter approached had no appeal at all.

Bernice Isobel reflects about

### HER CHILDHOOD

"I had a very interesting childhood and one that I remember with fondness, because in the area that we lived it was not very populated and I remember going out into the fields and picking strawberries and really enjoying the outdoor life. Summertime playing with the boys and winter skating, playing hockey and sleigh riding, and just having an enjoyable childhood."

Initially the houses in the area did not have numbers on them and were few and far between. They were identified by the name of the owner and so what was the *Carnegie Homestead* standing alone like a scarecrow amidst acres of fields became 215 Empress Avenue. As the area grew the block filled in with houses transforming it from a rural to a residential community like the photo below.

