

# The Life and Legacy of Gertrude Paul

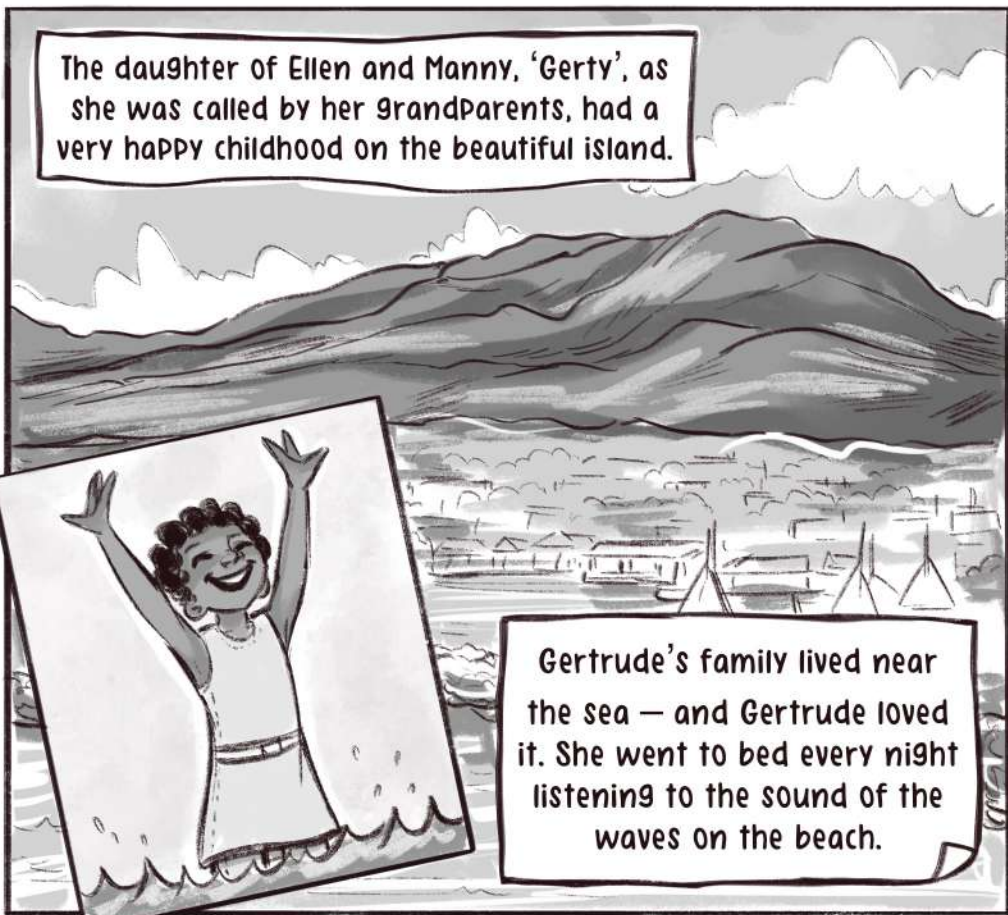


ILLUSTRATED BY SALOMEY DOKU

Project commissioned by Leeds School Library Service  
with thanks to Heather Paul for supporting this project  
and giving access to her research into Gertrude Paul



# The Early Life of Gertrude Paul



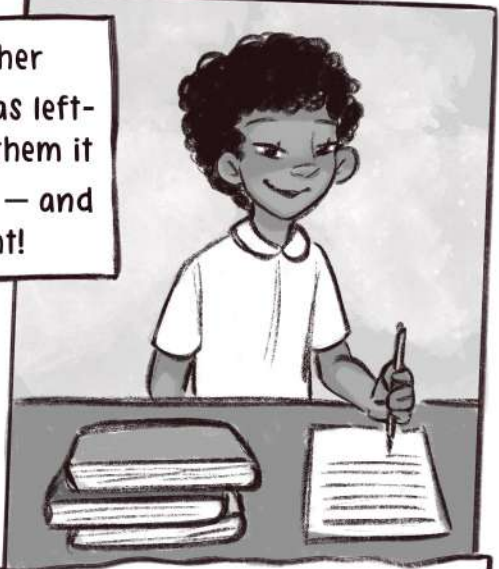
Gertrude was the eldest of 13 children, although sadly, only 11 survived to adulthood.



Gertrude, her 2 brothers and 2 sisters, were raised by their grandparents when their parents went to nearby Aruba to work!

She went to school from the age of four, then attended the island's Girls Convent Grammar School. She faced a few challenges from the start, but with support from her family and her determination, she overcame them.

Gertrude loved to learn, but her teachers did not like that she was left-handed. Her grandparents told them it didn't affect her ability to learn — and guess what? They were right!



Gertrude was also hearing impaired in her left ear, but she never let this stop her.



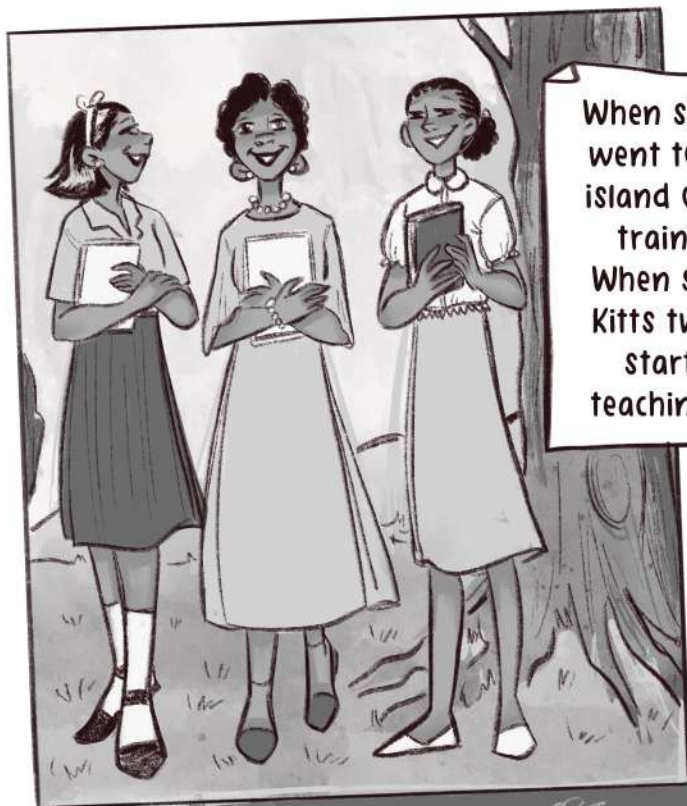
Gertrude was a friendly, outgoing child with a vibrant personality. She came from a musical family, and loved singing, dancing, performing, and music, especially playing the piano!



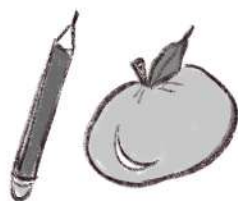
Her grandma and great-aunt were always buying her sheets of music, and putting on concerts which she loved to be a part of.



Gertrude was very good at teaching groups of singers how to harmonise. She also loved going on picnics!



When she was only 15, she went to the neighbouring island of Antigua to begin training as a teacher. When she returned to St. Kitts two years later, she started her first job teaching at Bethel School.

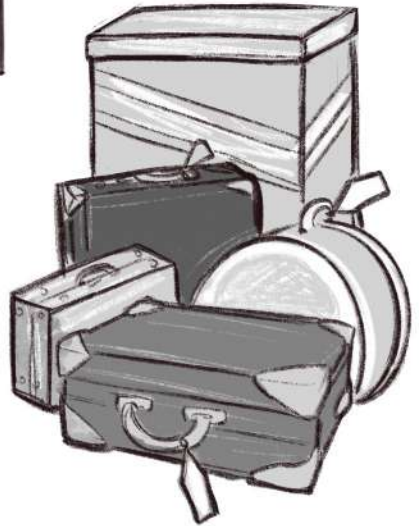


Her pupils loved her, and took her on a picnic when she left the school as a way to say thank you!



In 1955, when she was 20 years old, Gertrude married Keithley Paul. He was a super smart mathematician and mechanical engineer who loved debates, and could fix and make anything.

Gertrude loved maths too, and would tutor people who needed help in trigonometry outside of teaching.



In the autumn of 1955, Keithley left St. Kitts to go ahead of Gertrude to England, where they were recruiting people with skills from the islands. In 1956, aged 21, Gertrude Paul packed her life into boxes to make the journey to England too. She was very excited. It was time for a new chapter to begin.

# The Teaching Life of Gertrude Paul



The journey to England took 6 weeks by sea!



Gertrude made lots of friends on the voyage, many of which became her friends for life.



They stopped at lots of places on the way, and Gertrude spent many happy evenings hosting glamorous dinner parties. Gertrude was full of confidence, and people naturally gravitated towards her. She encouraged those who were scared, as she was naturally a very caring person.

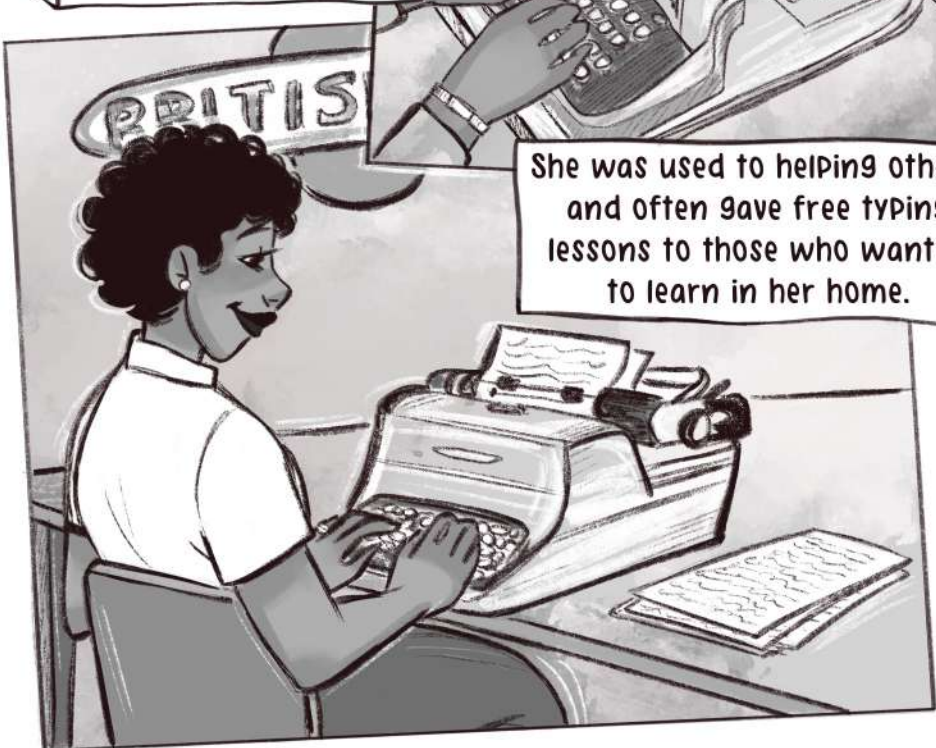


After the ship docked at Southampton, Gertrude went straight to Leeds in the 'Industrial North' to start her new life with her husband Keithley. They settled in Chapeltown. Leeds had a big population of people from St. Kitts and Nevis at that time.

Gertrude had packed her typewriter in one of her many boxes, and her first job in England was as a typist for British Rail!



She was used to helping others, and often gave free typing lessons to those who wanted to learn in her home.



Gertrude's dream was to teach in England the way she had taught in St. Kitts. Teaching was where she felt happiest and so she looked for a way to return to doing what she loved best.



Different communities across the country would often protest against racial discrimination



However, life was hard for people of colour in England at this time. Gertrude had to push through discrimination and racism, but she was very determined, and refused to let it stop her, as she believed in herself and her abilities.

In 1959, three years after she had first arrived in England, Gertrude started lobbying to teach. Despite already being qualified, she had to complete another teacher training course to be allowed to teach.

From 1960-1962 she studied at James Graham Teacher Training College for Education (now known as Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University), while still working very hard as a typist, and when she graduated in 1962, she became one of a handful of Black teachers in Leeds!

Gertrude started teaching at Primary schools in South and North East Leeds to gain experience. Her first teaching post was at Clapgate School in Belle Isle.



Mrs Paul, as she became known, had an excellent reputation for teaching Maths, English, Art, Drama and Music. She taught young people how to read music, how to play a musical instrument, and got them to participate in orchestras, which was the first time for many.

She also taught as Senior Mistress at Cowper Street School.



During this time, Gertrude and Keithley had two children — Heather and Michael Paul. Gertrude's family, her Parents and 10 siblings, also came to join her in England in 1960.



In 1976, at the age of 42, Gertrude became the very first Black headteacher in Leeds and Yorkshire, at Elmhurst Middle School (now known as Bracken Edge Primary)!



One of her goals was to prevent Black children being discriminated against and put unfairly into ESN ('educationally subnormal') school programmes that would limit their ability to achieve their real potential.

She loved to instil young people with a sense of identity, and taught them how to rise above all forms of negativity and prejudice, and aim to succeed in life.

# The Legacy of Gertrude Paul in Educational, Community and Cultural Activism

Friends, young people, and community were always at the heart of what Gertrude did.



She was a natural leader and could connect people of all different ages. Throughout the early 1960s, even while she was studying, she helped to set up and run several community groups, such as Leeds International Women's Group, The Afro-Asian Society, and the United Caribbean Association.



She would organise trips and activities for her community, including visiting Europe. Gertrude was also one of the founding members of Leeds West Indian Carnival – which is now one of the most important and fun events shared by many families in England!



Volunteering was a huge part of Gertrude's life, and outside of school hours, she hosted youth clubs and summer play schemes.

Gertrude loved to help people, and so she set up one of England's very first Saturday Schools within the African Caribbean Community, a first for Leeds.



It focused on teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, but it also taught good behaviour, discipline, creativity, and Black history, so that pupils could better understand their cultural heritage and feel proud of where they came from and who they were.

In 1976, Gertrude was a key part of the Defence Committee for a group of youth from Chapeltown who were wrongly charged by police after gathering to celebrate the evening of Bonfire Night Peacefully.



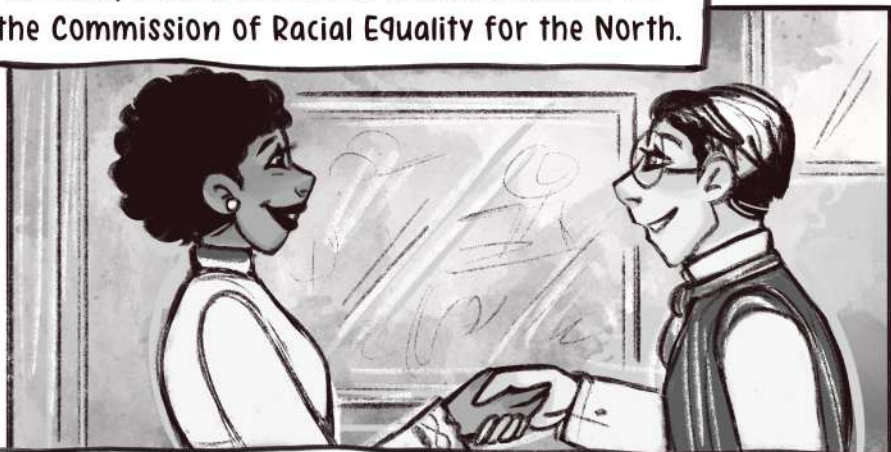
People protested by picketing

Gertrude with 2 of the acquitted

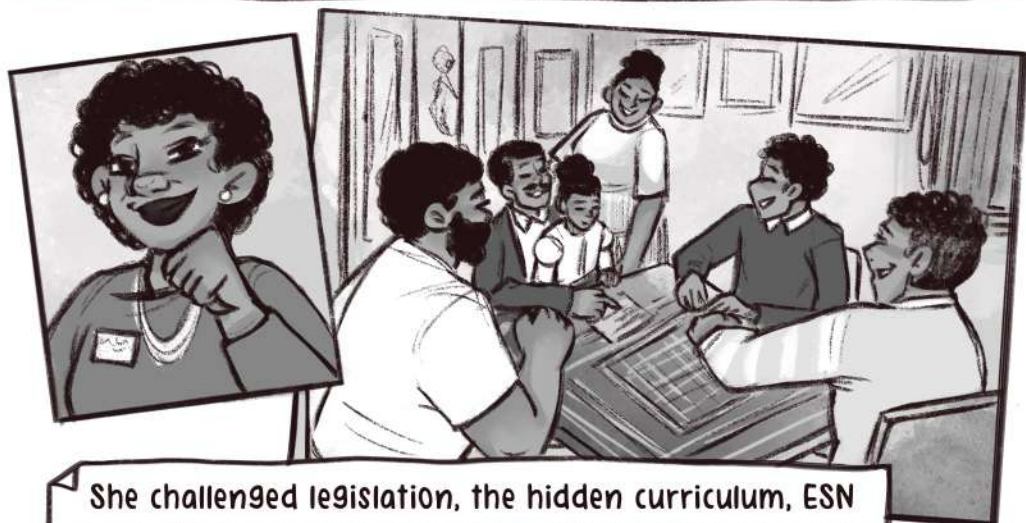
At the end of the Bonfire Night Trial, the Jury acquitted 21 of the 25 charges against the Youths finding most of them Not Guilty.

The result was a significant victory for Black young people, and a turning point in the struggle for racial justice and unity in Yorkshire, and in England.

In 1980, Gertrude became a Commissioner for the Commission of Racial Equality for the North.



Throughout her lifelong career, she worked tirelessly to encourage, lead, guide, and inspire. She encouraged parents from all backgrounds and ethnicities to speak up on their children's behalf in schools and in the communities across Yorkshire, and England.



She challenged legislation, the hidden curriculum, ESN campaigns, and championed the rights of young people for the next two decades. She also worked with community groups, parents, and the police to improve community relations. Gertrude always had an open door for anyone who needed her help and support.

On Friday 23rd February 1990, HRH Queen Elizabeth II and HRH Prince Philip came to Leeds in response to a letter from Mrs Paul, who was then the President of the United Caribbean Association, to open UCA House - a house converted by the UCA into a residential home for older people. This visit was a very special day for Gertrude.



In the summer of 1991, Gertrude retired from teaching formally due to ill health. In 1992, a year later, she passed away peacefully in her native St. Kitts after going to see her grandmother for the last time during a battle with cancer.

Her funeral in Leeds was attended by over 1500 people from all over Leeds, England, and abroad, all of whom were touched by her life.

## Conclusion

Mrs Gertrude Maretta Paul was one of the most important visionary female Black activists, role models, and community leaders to have ever called Leeds home.



She overcame adversity with a smile and a hug, remained positive in the face of hardship, worked hard to establish lasting change, and loved much. She brought values and ambition with her from St. Kitts that have left a lasting, inspiring impact on Leeds.

She believed that education was a golden thread that could break down barriers, form strong relationships, and help children build a brighter future for themselves and later give back to their community. Her legacy and influence continue to be felt today all over Yorkshire and the country.



