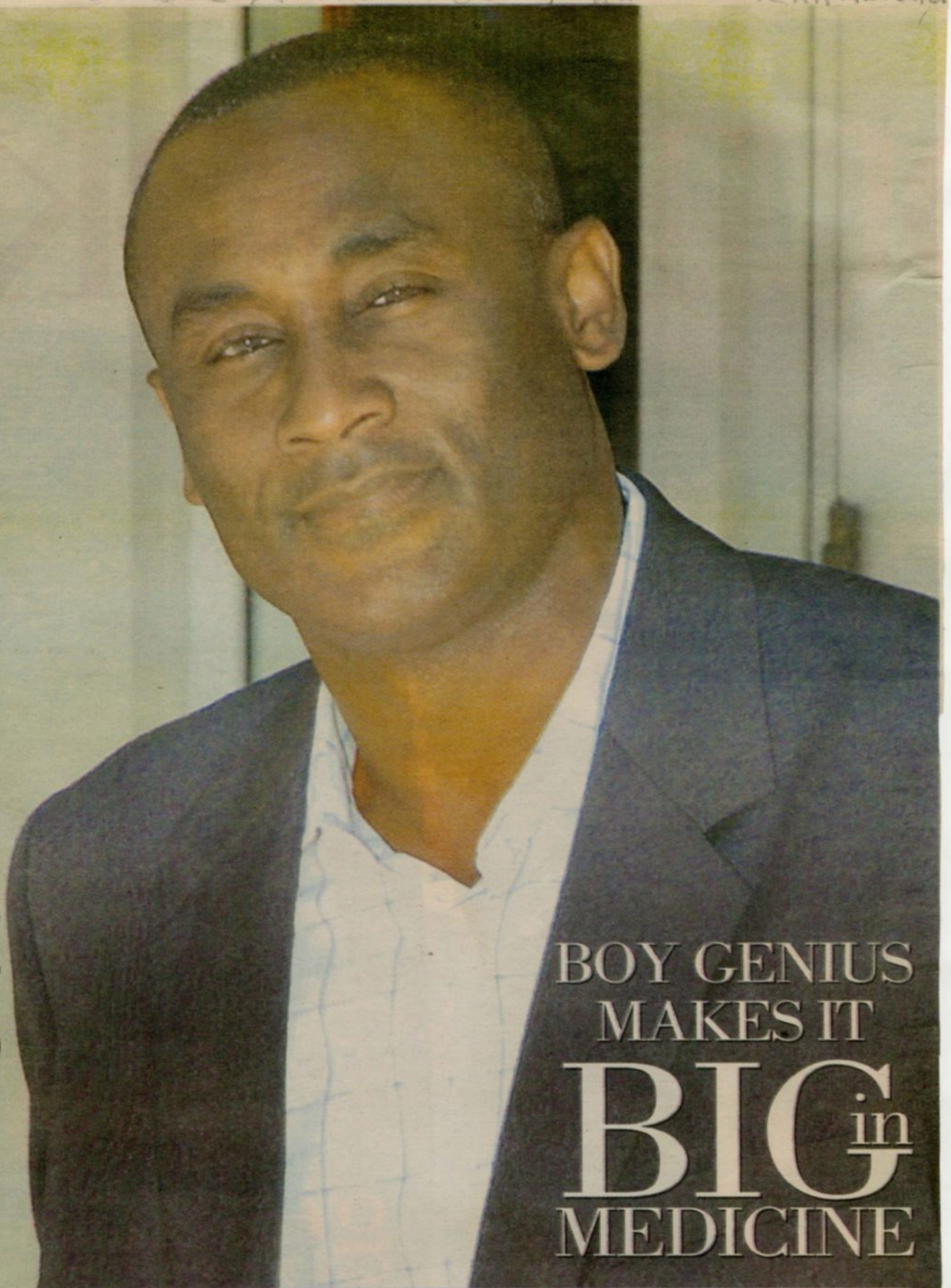


Dr Answorth Allen



BOY GENIUS
MAKES IT
BIG in
MEDICINE

Janet Silvera
Outlook Writer

WESTERN BUREAU:

HIS APTITUDE surpassed every other child in the New York City high school he enrolled in. As a consequence, school administrators asked him to leave two and a half months into his first semester.

Dr. Answorth Allen's phenomenal teachers at Titchfield High School in Portland had unleashed a 15-year-old genius

into the American school system and the only other institution equipped to handle the youngster was a foundation of higher learning.

NEW YORK'S QUEENS COLLEGE

A high achiever whose high school crescendo was 10 O'Levels, his next step was to register in a university and New York's Queens College was the choice.

At Queens College, while other children spent their summer holidays having fun,

Answorth Allen opted for summer programmes at Harvard University. Four years later at age 19, he graduated with a B.Sc., in Chemistry.

Born in Port Antonio, Portland, Answorth Allen could almost be termed a 'barrel pickney' who was nurtured by his grandmother Lena Irving, before he moved to the Big Apple to live with his mother Millicent James.

The most important life lessons of humility, discipline and hard work he said he learnt from

A huge basketball fan, in 2004, the New York Knicks knocked on his door offering him his dream job, as head orthopaedic consultant. For years he had watched Jamaican Patrick Ewing suffer the criticisms and jeers and that had a major impact on him. He wanted so badly to care for Ewing.

his grandmother. And the mind set that has carried him through his illustrious career as one of the United States' leading orthopaedic surgeons came about as a result of her teachings.

"She always said, I could do anything, there was no barrier as to what I could do or accomplish," he spoke humbly of the woman who was a seamstress with probably 10 other jobs, including chief operations officer (CEO) for the family.

Those words coupled with the attitude of his teachers at Titchfield, especially, a former principal Mr. Chin, moulded him into the man he is today. "The school and the teachers had a vision and the same attitude of my household, there was no limit as to what you could do."

LOOKING BACK

Today, when he looks back at the sacrifices made by his mother, a nurse residing in New York, he still says to himself, "She is so smart, I kind of feel that she should have been the doctor, but she lived in a different time and a different place."

An associate attending surgeon at the Hospital for Special Surgery, specialising in shoulder and knee surgery, he is also an Associate Professor of Clinical Orthopedic Surgery at Weill Medical College of Cornell University in New York City, his alma-mater. At 41 years old, he has achieved much more than can be written, and outside of the general cultural differences and environmental changes faced by immigrants on arrival in another country, Answorth Allen says he encountered very few challenges throughout life.

He was focused from day one and it was a foregone conclusion that he would become a doctor

Dr. Answorth Allen

long before he turned 13. He was influenced by a physician by the name of Dr. Martin who had a clinic across the road from his home in Port Antonio. "I was fascinated by Dr. Martin," he reminisced. "On Saturdays it was incredible to see the number of people he attended to, and those who couldn't pay with cash, paid with chicken, eggs and ground provision."

He said Dr. Martin made an impact on his life, not only because he was a great asset to the people in the community, but because he cared. "He was a role model for me."

After graduating from Queens College in 1982, Dr. Allen was

accepted by a number of Ivy League universities, but he chose Cornell University where he received a full scholarship and admission into their medical school.

Asked how his mother felt about his achievements, he shrugged, "It was the expectation of the family." And he wasn't boasting. In his family, it was the accepted fact that he would achieve anything he had set his mind to.

This same mind became bored very easily and seven months into Cornell, he tried to find an outlet and accidentally ended up

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GENIUS

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working with one of the world's renowned researchers, Dr. Steven Arnoczky. At the time young Allen didn't know he had struck gold.

He now had a chance to operate, as Dr. Arnoczky was doing a lot of research in sports medicine, ligament and cartilage healing. "I got exposed to the clinical aspects of the job," he says.

ONLY SETBACK

The only setback was, as a first year student he wasn't allowed in the laboratory or the operating theatre. However, not even slightly deterred, the young Jamaican's determination made history and changed the culture, rules and regulations of the institution in seven months.

"I was a pain in the ass; I kept bugging him (Dr. Arnoczky) until he agreed."

Reminiscing, Dr. Allen said that was the most singular event in medicine for him. He was exposed to a field that he knew nothing about.

So was he lucky or what? "Luck is preparation meeting opportunity," he explains. "I was in the right place, at the right time." Sports medicine was in a somewhat embryonic stage and he had the chance to meet many leaders in the field.

LIFE CHANGED

His life changed completely and after graduating from Cornell in 1988, he went on to do his internship at St. Luke's and Roosevelt Hospital for a year. He then did his residency in Orthopaedics at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Centre, one of the better centres in the United States and finished his fellowship in sports medicine and shoulder surgery at the University of Pittsburg.

His next feat took 130 years to become a reality in the United States. Dr. Allen went back to New York and joined the staff at the Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS), as one of the first black surgeons to work in this fine institution.

"I happened to be there when the time was right for that change, I don't feel extremely

special," he added without an inkling of rudeness. Obviously, he has grown to expect nothing less from life.

His first big break in professional sport came about when he became an associate team physician for the New York Mets. He was now in the big league and held this position for five years, from 1995 to 2000.

DREAM JOB

A huge basketball fan, in 2004, the New York Knicks knocked on his door offering him his dream job, as head orthopaedic consultant. For years he had watched Jamaican Patrick Ewing suffer the criticisms and jeers and that had a major impact on him. He wanted so badly to care for Ewing. "I empathised with him, because he went through a lot."

Although he started working with the Knicks after Ewing left, just the thought that another great Jamaican played on the

team adds that extra closeness that he feels to that team.

Careful not to allow the celebrity status to get to his head, he says as a doctor his number one priority is the patient. "At the end of the day, we all drink, eat the same thing," he says.

LARGE PRACTICE

Dr. Answorth Allen currently runs a large practice in New York, is the Orthopaedic Consultant at the prestigious St. John's University, continues to consult with the West Indies Cricket team, yet he finds time to assist and give lectures to the Jamaica Orthopaedic Association and source equipment that can be used in Jamaican hospitals.

Ultimately his aim is to get fellowships so that Jamaican doctors can get first hand experience in areas such as micro surgery, which is less invasive than open surgery.

Back off ladies! He is already married - to a gynaecologist. They have two children too.

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