

One-on-one with the Governor-General

# Just how well do you know Sir Howard?

Laura Tanna

CONTRIBUTOR

AS A 17-YEAR-OLD STUDENT, Howard Cooke was refused admittance to King's House. Today it is his home. Sixty-nine years after that incident, the Most Honourable Sir Howard Cooke, Governor General of Jamaica, will be host to Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in King's House from February 18th to the 20th.

She has chosen Jamaica as one of only four countries to which she will travel in 2002, during her Golden Jubilee celebration of fifty years as Monarch.

Sir Howard will be even more in the limelight than usual during the Royal visit and since he was born in 1915, more than a lifetime ago for many of us, we might want to learn a little more about Jamaica's Head of State. On November 13, 2001 he kindly agreed to share some of his experiences and ideas with us.

Sir Howard began: "I was born in what is known as a 'free village'. Goodwill is on the border between Trelawny and St. James, a very unique village, because we were what I would regard as a composite people, from all over the world. The



■ Cooke

Portuguese Jews lived there. You had Scottish people, English people; you had of course the black people and Indians. So we had a great community and because of that we are so mixed up we can't truly say we are Africans. My father's father was a carpenter who lived some distance away in the

mountains, near Somerton. My father was quite a learned person, by occupation a builder. He made buggies and wagons and built churches, so he was quite prominent in the community. The community could be dry at times. When it was, we had to go long distances to get

water and we carried the water on animals, in drums, and sometimes on our heads. So we are really sturdy people. We worked hard.

"The community was an unusual one, built by the Presbyterians. They bought so many acres of land and cut it up into a village. Nearly all the houses were the same, because there was co-operative building. They usually had two stories. The foundation was solid and then the upper part of the building was what we call 'Spanish walling,' of wood and mortar, a special hard wood frame, and then they used white lime, sometimes red earth, sometimes marl and when you got this together, it

was very solid. The house in which I was born is still there.

"Now in the Jamaican context, half-brothers and sisters are not regarded as anything but full brothers and sisters so

Continues on 21

P.T.O

B/N - Cooke, Howard (Sir)

# Just how well do you know Sir Howard?

**Continued from 21**

country. At the time, it provided all the tertiary education. If you wanted to see anything in science, you had to go there. And the history! I haven't been there recently, but they were able to show you the various stages of our historical development."

He was considered a bright boy, so when he was ten plus, his father drove him in the family's Ford car to board with his Godfather, a teacher at Grange Hill, where Sir Howard studied until, at the age of seventeen, he left for Mico College to become a teacher.

The Governor General says of his Mico training: "When you went to Mico, you were trained to be a headmaster. Yes. Only men. It was serious. You were trained to do everything. You were trained to write the will. You were trained to bury the dead. You were trained in community development. The teacher was everything in the community. So I spent three years there. I was no outstanding student. But an interesting thing happened my first year. Apparently when I went to do the exam, I must have scored very high. So they selected me as the first person to teach. It was a poor class, very poor,

and everybody criticised me SEVERELY. I felt that teaching was not my career so I should pack up and go."

Fortunately, the master, an Englishman named Arnold Moore, encouraged Sir Howard to stay, showing him that every good lesson should have an aim and loaning him books until eventually, though the youngest, Sir Howard became the senior student. He remembers: "You had to return to College by SIX o'clock in the evening, except on Saturdays or when you went to church on Sunday. You were not allowed to have girlfriends and there was no

sort of bawdiness about your life. They were setting out, without saying so, to train Christian gentlemen. All of us, when we went out, became leaders in the community and you were usually employed by the Church. You had church schools and you were expected to be exemplary in behaviour. There was such a respect. When I became Senior Student of the College, I was literally in control. And no one, although most were older, ever looked back and said: "No, I won't do it."

When asked what had contributed to the breakdown of this kind of discipline and

respect, the Governor General replied: "Many things. I think at a certain stage of development, we were trying to find an identity and in the political milieu some people didn't understand the purpose of living. They thought that you

could be rebellious and do as you like without counting the cost. And that for me was a serious thing."

**☐ TOMORROW: HIS ROLE IN FOUNDING THE PNP AND HIS RISE TO BECOME GG.**