

B/N Golding, Bruce

Bruce Golding's trek from Ginger Ridge to Jamaica House



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The following article was published in the Wednesday, September 12, 2007 edition of the Daily Observer, nine days after the general elections in which Bruce Golding led the Jamaica Labour Party to victory after just over 18 years in Opposition.

HIGH in the St Catherine hills is Ginger Ridge, a verdant rural village that is like any other in Jamaica's mountainous interior. Except, as of yesterday, this district will be known as the birthplace of the country's eighth prime minister, Bruce Golding.

Interestingly, not too far away is Woodhall district — the birthplace of former prime minister Portia Simpson Miller, whom Golding succeeds.

The **Observer**, through intermittent, but heavy downpours on Monday, trekked the hilly communities from St Faith's in the valley to Ginger Ridge at the peak to unearth Golding's childhood roots.

But most of the new prime minister's contemporaries from Ginger Ridge and adjoining districts have moved elsewhere, and first-hand information on Golding's formative rural years was almost impossible to find.

In fact, there is little recollection of Bruce Golding at Ginger Ridge as he left there as a young child at the tender age of about two years.

Nevertheless, a few elder residents gave interesting recollections about the Golding family and its most prominent son who went on in 1972 to become the youngest member of parliament at the

age of 24.

What is certain is that Golding grew up in a strong political environment and was exposed from very young.

For he was just about two years old when his father, Tacius Golding, was first elected as a member of the House of Representatives for West St Catherine — a seat that he retained for 22 years until his retirement in 1972. Bruce Golding, in 1969, was elected to the Central Executive of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) at the age of 21 and subsequently elected to Parliament in 1972.

Eunice Baxter, 72-year-old retired headmistress of the Ginger Ridge Primary school, recalls a young Golding at about two years old "running around and giving everybody trouble".

She was a student at school at the time.

Bruce's father, Tacius, was then head teacher and lived with his wife Enid at the Ginger Ridge School, says Baxter who resigned as principal of the school in 1991.

Bruce Golding was the third of four children, Trevor being the first, the second, a girl who died shortly after birth, and Anthony — all born in Ginger Ridge.

But according to a published Bruce Golding biography, he was actually born in Clarendon at the home of his godmother, Winnifred Stewart, mother of Mrs Percival Broderick. However, a few days after his birth on December 5, 1947, he was taken to the family home at Ginger Ridge where he was officially registered.

Passing years have blurred the memory, but Baxter vividly recounts circumstances which she said led to the Goldings having to live at the Ginger Ridge schoolhouse.

"Teacher Golding was a very good



Bruce Golding being sworn in as prime minister at King's House in September 2007. (Observer file photo)

man, but he had detractors," says Baxter.

She recalls that a resident of the community, Edward Thompson, who was financially well off, influenced other members of the district not to rent premises to the young teacher.

As a result, she says, teacher Golding actually lived in a section of the schoolhouse.

"I don't know why, but he did not like Tacius," her voice trails off.

"He owned an upstairs house, had

money and much talk in the community and influenced people not to rent Tacius Golding anywhere."

Eventually a man named Berry rented him a house close to the school, Baxter says.

Today, all that remains of the original Ginger Ridge School are the semi-circular steps, the old wooden building having been torn down and replaced by concrete classrooms.

After leaving Ginger Ridge, the Golding family moved to St Faith's

“I had him as a leader of the country from then,” says Pastor Peterson.

“That was the late 1960s.”

District a few miles away from Ginger Ridge, closer to Brown's Hall in the parish.

There, Baxter says, the family rented a house. By then Bruce Golding was about three years old.

Baxter is not sure what happened next, but she emphatically reminds that Tacius Golding eventually gave government the land on which the Tacius Golding High School is now built.

While living at St Faith's, Bruce Golding attended Watermount Elementary School and later Macca Tree Elementary School, leaving the parish for Kingston at about six years old.

“Their old house is lying on its side right now at St Faith's near to the high school. It was deteriorating but was finally destroyed during Hurricane Ivan,” Baxter says, while giving directions to the house's exact location.

“They lived at that house until Tacius bought a house in Spanish Town and moved out,” she shares.

A resident of the district shares that the old Golding house at St Faith's was actually owned by the Gregorys, relatives to the late journalist Dwight Whyllie and prominent musician Marjorie Whyllie.

Seventy-odd-year-old Enid Peterson has spent all her life in the Ginger Ridge community. She attended the primary school, returned there as teacher and is now married and living at Connors, a district about three miles from Ginger Ridge.

Her husband Adonijah, a minister of religion at Connors, says that he met Bruce Golding when he returned to the district as a youngster and budding politician.

“I had him as a leader of the country from then,” says Pastor Peterson. “That was the late 1960s.”

He adds that Golding has returned to the community on various occasions since then.

“He was even here with us about two months ago with Ken Baugh. It is Ken Baugh's constituency.”

Another Golding visit to the Ginger Ridge community that Baxter remembers is one in search of his sister's grave. She was buried on the Ginger Ridge school grounds but it was not a marked grave, Baxter shares.

“I heard he came back last year to look for his sister's grave but he couldn't find it. If he had asked me I could tell him because I know where it is,” she says.