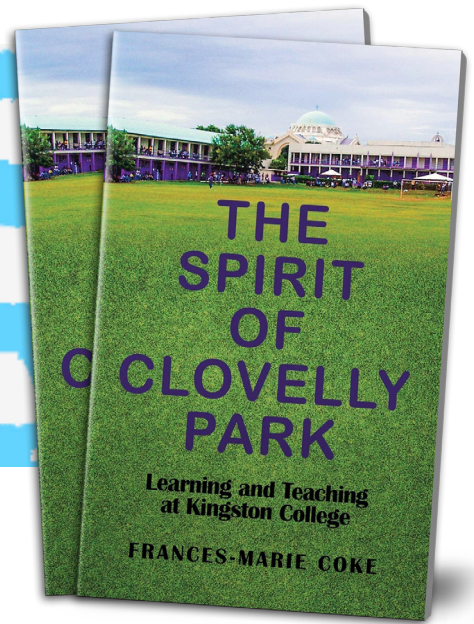


THE US Review of Books



The Spirit of Clovelly Park: Learning and Teaching at Kingston College

by Frances-Marie Coke

iUniverse book review by Mari Carlson

“And whenever the time came for me to escape from my own challenges, the room and the boys became my refuge, too.”

Coincidental events in 2014, such as a bird knocking into her window while emails from “KC boys” flood her inbox, inspire the author to recall Kingston College’s significance in her life in this engaging memoir. She works at the school in the early 1970s, first with her bachelor’s degree in English but with no formal teacher’s training, and then as a fully qualified teacher after completing the university’s postgraduate diploma in education. She later serves as a guidance counselor.

The narrative excels at delving into curious juxtapositions, such as with Coke becoming a teacher after hating school herself. Recalling her own stressful school days at the neighboring Alpha girls’ school, Coke puts herself in her students’ shoes, consequently teaching more compassionately and effectively. The author also draws parallels between personal experience and Jamaica’s chaotic political and cultural landscape. She works through her internal turmoil while living alone in a “blue room” in Reading, England, where she trains as a guidance counselor and returns, renewed, to Kingston, where she helps boys navigate education during social unrest.

Coke’s candid and poetic language about her feelings and circumstances captures Jamaica’s beauty and tragedy. Foremost among the book’s many insightful associations are Kingston’s “Fortis” spirit and academic achievement. Vignettes featuring the Schools’ Challenge Quiz team that she coaches, as well as challenges with specific students and colleagues, lead step by step to a rousing conclusion: academics and passion can go hand in hand. Seeing something behind the boys’ eyes is a recurring image. In a similar way, this memoir is a glimpse behind the eyes of its author, a lifelong teacher and writer. The book’s immediacy of emotion and depth of inquiry get to the heart of Coke’s recollections as well as contribute to a collective effort to make the most of our experiences.

RECOMMENDED by the US Review