



News Release

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Eight decades on, poignant award marks life of dedicated student

A family from Jamaica has made an emotional journey to celebrate the achievements of a promising medical student whose life was cut tragically short.

Relatives of Stephanie McGregor have travelled to Scotland to receive her posthumous degree from the University of Edinburgh, almost 80 years after Stephanie's death.

Stephanie's great niece Lauren McGregor will accept the degree at the University's medical graduation ceremony at the Usher Hall in Edinburgh tomorrow (Saturday, 4 July). A further 15 member of Stephanie's family will attend the ceremony.

While in Edinburgh, the family will visit Stephanie's grave at Piershill Cemetery. They will also visit the Centre for Research Collections in the University's Main Library. There they will be shown Stephanie's student record, a photograph from her time at university and some related items.

Stephanie was born in Gayle St. Mary, Jamaica, in 1911 – the daughter of plantation owner Peter James McGregor and his wife Julianna Marsh. She began her studies at the University of Edinburgh in 1931.

Despite struggling with finances – her allowance was partly tied to banana harvests back home – Stephanie excelled, earning merit certificates and awards. She was, the Advisor of Women Students wrote, 'one of the best in her class'.

But Stephanie continued to face challenges – first her father's death in 1934, more financial worries, and a bout of illness which hospitalized her in January 1936.

Released from the Royal Infirmary after 15 days, she travelled north to Argyll to convalesce, but this left her weakened and bedridden for a week. She wrote to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine to say she was worried about her studies, forced for the first time to miss classes and fall behind in her work.

The promising student never graduated. She died on 4 July, 1936 – at the age of 25 – of rheumatic fever following a bout of tonsillitis that affected her heart.

The University first allowed women to matriculate in the 1890s and only in 1916 did women gain equal status in the Faculty of Medicine. An industrious worker, Stephanie could be considered a pioneer for women at the University. She seemed destined to follow a distinguished career in medicine.

At tomorrow's graduation ceremony – 79 years to the day since Stephanie's death – the University will honour her, and her family, with a posthumous degree as a timely celebration of a remarkable and courageous life.

For Lauren McGregor, the trip to Scotland has been a moving experience: "I am so overjoyed. I just want to thank everyone who has helped to bring Stephanie's story to light, and to life."

Grant Buttars, the University's Deputy University Archivist, said: "Stephanie showed all the signs of a highly motivated and conscientious student. At the time Stephanie was studying, numbers of female students were very small compared with men.

"Although she probably never saw herself as such, Stephanie can be seen as a contributor towards a major change within medical education, paving the way for those who followed."

To find out more about Stephanie's story, please go to

<http://libraryblogs.is.ed.ac.uk/edinburghuniversityarchives/2015/06/30/a-life-cut-short-stephanies-story/>

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