

Young Heroes



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**Fictional accounts of the National Heroes of
Jamaica as children and young people written by
Gwyneth Harold.**

Illustrations by Taj Francis

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Paul Bogle

Be our Light Through Countless Hours



Seven-year-old Paul huddled under the house; alone, nervous, but not afraid. He had been there for some some hours and now it was pitch, black night. Normally at this time

on a Sunday he would have returned from evening service, and his mother would be urging him and his siblings and cousins to go to bed.

But there had been no Church service in Stony Gut that day. In the morning when the families were preparing the after church supper, the militia rode into the village, turned over cooking pots and demanded to know where recent runaways, Osonoko the Coromante; and Briton, who was born on the plantation had gone. No one knew - they said.

They were especially harsh on Quamina, because she had a history of being defiant. They put her to stand in the sun while they rode a horse through her house.

"Dem not here me seh!" she insisted, and the tone of her voice gave courage to the other villagers who refused to run into the bush and instead sat and kept their eyes trained on the militia men as they rampaged through huts and kitchens and vegetable plots and hen houses. Then they put Quamina into the cart first and ordered all of the young people, the adults and the elders into to join her. They drove away - no doubt to the workhouse for punishment - leaving the children alone in the village.

Paul ran under his parents' hut as soon as the commotion started and stayed there. He was hungry, but felt he could ignore the pangs and stay safe until his parents returned; but he could not ignore the scared crying of the other children, especially when evening and its darkness came.

He crept out and found eight-year-old Phibba in her mother's kitchen shivering and frightened. The faint embers from the cooking fire, where a breadfruit roasted until it burned, were barely there. Paul went behind the house for some dry banana leaves, tore them up, blew on the embers and used them to feed a small flame. Phibba placed a few pieces of wood on the flame and soon there was a small but steady fire, giving them courage in the dark.

In the night, Paul went from hut to hut, calling out and encouraging the children to come with him. He led them, many crying, to the flame in Phibba's kitchen. When he had done that, Paul went out again into the nearby bushes, calling out the names of the children he knew. In all more than 20 children eventually huddled together in the kitchen where they roasted fingers of plantain and ate them.

The night was long, but they held each other and Paul led them in the singing of songs from Church, "In this world of darkness, so we must shine. You in your small corner, and I in mine." They knew it well and it gave them courage.

Comforted, the smaller children drifted off to sleep and the older ones told Ananse stories. They heard how the spider man used his wits to stay alive and to look after his own family. Finally, after all the stories were told and the firewood was finished and the fire was once again red embers, only Paul was awake. He listened to the breathing of the children and their somnolent shuffling until daybreak, which was when the cart

returned with the weary adults. Despite being away all of Sunday, they would have to work again that morning in the fields.

The parents were relieved to find that all of the children were safe together and praised them all for their bravery.

When Phibba's mother asked them if they were afraid, she said, "No Mama, our Paul was our light through countless hours."