

## Trevor Herbert Yee



*(December 29, 1944 – June 20, 2023)*

**Trevor Herbert Yee** completed his High School education at the top of his class in 1962 at **St George's College in Kingston, Jamaica**. He was blessed with an unrelenting curiosity, keen powers of observation, an analytical mind, a retentive memory and a love of the Jamaican landscape. He studied the sciences and, recognised as an outstanding student, he was immediately recruited by his headmaster to tutor the first class preparing to sit the Cambridge 'O-Level' examinations in Biology at the then fledgling companion school, **Campion College**. All the students were successful.

Trevor then proceeded to the UWI in 1964 on a **Jamaica Government Bursary**, and gained in 1967 a BSc degree in Chemistry & Botany with First Class Honours. On an **Alcan Independence Postgraduate Scholarship** he completed, in 1971, a PhD degree in Organic Chemistry under the guidance of the distinguished Professor Wilfred Chan, the "Father of Natural Products Chemistry" in the Caribbean, and the first Organising Secretary of the *Mona Symposium*. A **Canadian (CIDA) Postdoctoral Fellowship** (1971-73) took him to the University of British Columbia to study, with Professor James Kutney, the natural products associated with lower plants. He developed in the process a continuing interest in the botanical and culinary aspects of mushrooms. He has contributed a chapter on *The Fungi* in the Natural History Society of Jamaica's ***Guide to the Blue and John Crow Mountains* (2008)**.

While in Canada he pursued a **Certificate in Business Administration**, followed later (1988) by an **MBA**, with Honours, from Nova Southeastern in Florida, forging a route around Academia and into the family business between 1973 and 2001. In 1980 Trevor bought two of the companies involved, serving as Chairman and Managing Director for 20 years. This gave him an opportunity to travel extensively through the region, gaining a broad appreciation of the Caribbean, its business environment, natural environment, flora and its people. Concurrent with this period, Trevor served the **Jamaica Bureau of Standards** as Chair of the Cosmetics Committee, winning the accolade

of **Chairman of the Year** on several occasions. His interest in Academia continued during this “Commercial” phase and he generously supported the activities of the *Mona Symposium* – then named the *Natural Products Symposium*.

Trevor sold the businesses in 2000, and in 2001 returned to the Academic fold, joining the **Natural Products Institute** in the then Faculty of Pure & Applied Sciences at the UWI as Deputy Director, eventually becoming Director. He retired in 2015. During this spell, working with Professor Helen Jacobs, he gained the **first US Patent granted to the UWI**, for a new process to extract the bitter compound (quassin) from bitterwood – once an important export from Jamaica, and an essential ingredient in several internationally prominent beverages. He went on to gain patents in other areas – including processes for weaning butterflies and their destructive caterpillars off from their choice, citrus crop plants on to less valuable, related host plants; and for studies with Professors Paul Reese and Lisa Lindo, on the use of *Eucalyptus* extracts to control diabetes and hypertension, racking up, perhaps the largest number of patents for a local researcher. For the work on *Eucalyptus* extracts, the team involved was awarded by the **Scientific Research Council** in 2012 the **top prize for Innovation in Science & Technology**. He supervised three PhD and three MPhil students and wrote over 24 research papers and book chapters.

Trevor was an active member of the **Natural History Society of Jamaica** and served as its president for two 2-year stints. People who met him, particularly on Natural History Society field trips, as well as colleagues and students, were inevitably, thoroughly impressed by his encyclopaedic knowledge of the local flora. His enthusiastic observations led to intriguing research questions and ultimately to novel solutions, but also enticed the editor of the magazine *JamaicaEats* to invite Trevor to write a column in the Journal from a scientific perspective. Trevor enthusiastically did this for the past four years, combining his scientific and culinary interests in our local flora and fauna. The **Institute of Jamaica** recognised Trevor’s contributions to the Nation, with the award of a prestigious **Musgrave Medal** (bronze) for Science (Natural Products) in 2013.

Trevor was truly a National Treasure in his own right and his many contributions are sorely missed. May his soul rest in peace.