



Otázka: Mary Seacole

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Mary Seacole was born in Jamaica in 1805 and died in London in 1881. She cared for British soldiers during the Crimean War and it was not easy. Every nurse knows Florence Nightingale, lady with a lamp, and her care for soldiers. Now is a good time for Mary Seacole life story.

Mary Seacole was born in Jamaica, a British colony. Mary's mother was a free, black Jamaican Creole, and she learned her daughter some of her nursing skills and local herbal remedies. Mary's father was a Scottish soldier. Mary had a sister, Luisa, and brother, Eduard. (In 1820 was born Florence Nightingale in Florence, Italy, on 12th of May.)

Around 1823 Mary travelled to London again and returned to Jamaica in 1826. Over the next ten years, she cared about the final illness and then helped her mother care for soldiers recovering from yellow fever.

Mary married Englishman Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole on the 10th of November 1836. They lived in Jamaica in New Blundell Hall until 1844, when her husband died and her mother too soon after him. Mary nursed victims of the Kingston cholera epidemic.

It was probably at 1851 when she went to visit her brother, Edward, in Panama (then called New Granada). Two years later she cared for victims of a yellow fever epidemic in Jamaica. She changed New Blundell Hall into hospital to care for her patients. Next year, 1854, she travelled to England and there she read about Crimea war in The Times newspapers by war commentator Sir William Howard Russell. She decided to help soldiers at Crimea war. Mary offered own person in the War Office, the Quartermaster-General's Department, the Medical Department and Mrs Elizabeth Herbert, wife of Sidney Herbert (secretary at War), said no. She still thought that she can help at Crimea war and Mary arrived in Turkey in 1855 with introduction letter to Florence Nightingale at the Barrack Hospital in Scutari, now in Uskudar.

One Jamaica's segregant recognize Mary and escorted her on a tour of the wards, which „rended it unnecessary for me to trouble the busy nurses“. She waited to talk with Florence, but they didn't have any vacancy.

Mary and Mr Thomas Day organised the building British Hotel near the Balaclava on the Crimean Peninsula. The hotel was located on Spring Hill and provided soldiers with accomodation, food and nursing care. The war ended in March in 1856 and Mary had some financial difficulties. In July The Illustrated London News noted her presence at a ceremony to mark the official departure of troops from The Crimea: „Conspicuous in the foreground, Mrs Seacole, dresses in a plaid riding-habit, and the smarlest of hats, calling everybody her son. She was very much liked“.

Mary came back to London on the 26 of August 1856. She and Mr Day bankrupted. On the begining of 1857 she published her autobiography, „Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands“. Next year she visited Jamaica and her sister, Luisa, said her about a war in India, but Queen Victoria would not her, because her life was „too precious“. Next years were divided between Jamaica and England. She died in London on the 14 of May and she was burried at St. Mary's Catholic Cementary in Harrow Road in London.

Jamaica remembered Mary Seacole in sixties in various ways.

Seacole and Nightingale

They both cared for soldiers in crimea war, but each chose a different way. Florence hospital was several hundered miles from the Criemean peninsula. Marywas in the very front line and her British hotel in Balaclava was an important refuge.

Mary, like Florence, was a complex human being and both had their own frailties. mary should not be viewed as a saintly figure.

Nurses are the backbone of the health care workforce and we can find inspiration in both, Mary and Florence, work.

Book: A short history of Mary Seacole a resource for nurces and students, Professor Elizabeth N Anionwu RN HV Tutor PhD CBE GRCN, published by the Royal College of Nursing, London, July 2005.