



Mary Seacole

The land of Jamaica is wet, warm, and teeming with beautiful tropical plants. Each plant is special, just like you. They have unique properties to help people heal. If you look closely and experiment, you can figure out the special properties of each plant.

Mary Seacole was born in Kingston, Jamaica. She used to help her mother heal people using traditional Caribbean and African medicine. Together, they would grind up the pulp of leaves to make soothing salves, extract juices to make pungent ointments, and use the bounty of the Earth to treat their people. The land was their little pharmacy.

Mary's mother ran a boarding house, where she treated many injured soldiers. Since Mary was only 12, she didn't treat the soldiers herself, but she tested out her medicine on toys and pets. She would lovingly put soft bandages on her pets' legs. They thought they looked like knee socks!

More important than the medicines, however, were the principles her mother taught her. These were rules that Mary's mother knew as part of her Jamaican healing wisdom. Nearly a century before anyone else wrote about these principles, Mary's mother was doing things like taking care of hygiene to kill germs, keeping patients hydrated by giving them lots of water, ventilating rooms with fresh air, and recommending lots and lots of rest.

Mary traveled to London when she was only 12. There weren't many people from Jamaica there, and some children pointed at and made fun of her. This hurt Mary deeply, and later, she wrote about it.

She returned to Jamaica and made jams and pickles, all the while saving up money to go to faraway islands and exotic places. In each place she visited, she learned about the specific plants that healers used.

Soon, she was a doctress herself! Where others saw fleshy plants and delicious pomegranates, she saw healing and recovery. Mary went to Panama when she was 45, and when the Crimean War broke out, she went to London again, hoping to be sent to Crimea to work as a nurse. Mary hoped to use her wisdom to heal soldiers. Sadly, she was told she couldn't go, but she didn't give up! She set off using her own money and made a perilous, months-long journey to Crimea.

She used her traditional healing wisdom to treat diseases that others found unusual and confusing, like tropical yellow fever. When she suspected a soldier had food poisoning, she knew to use acrid ground mustard to help them vomit it out. When a soldier showed up dehydrated and weak due to diarrhea, Mary gave them rich, flavorful pomegranate juice to help them recover their energy.

She set up a place to help heal others, just like her mother had. And Mary would ride out on horseback to the battlefields. She helped so many soldiers along with Florence Nightingale that she was called 'The Other Lady with the Lamp', as they both carried lamps to help them work through the night.

She called the soldiers her sons, and they called her 'Mother Seacole'. Mary will always be remembered for her work in healing even unexpected diseases using tropical plants and flowers. All because she saw the healing properties of plants and experimented with different combinations of plants.

