

Connie Bennett Cameron's Mini-Novel Series

Hard Work And Tremendous Drive K

By CONNIE BENNETT CAMERON

Chris Bennett has been tabbed the Father of the Black Press in the Pacific Northwest, and his colleagues call him a publisher's publisher.

He's ambitious, strong and many refer to him as the Frederick Douglass of the 80's. He has the courage and brains that perhaps none can surpass.

Chris Bennett has dynamic leadership ability and when appropriate, he's a follower. He's a dedicated man who continues to grapple with the thorniest issues of our time.

No mountain is too high for this man who has had big dreams from the very start. From the time he was a boy on the rural farms in Georgia, Bennett had dreams of becoming a doctor. And though he never knew it, his mother shared those same dreams.

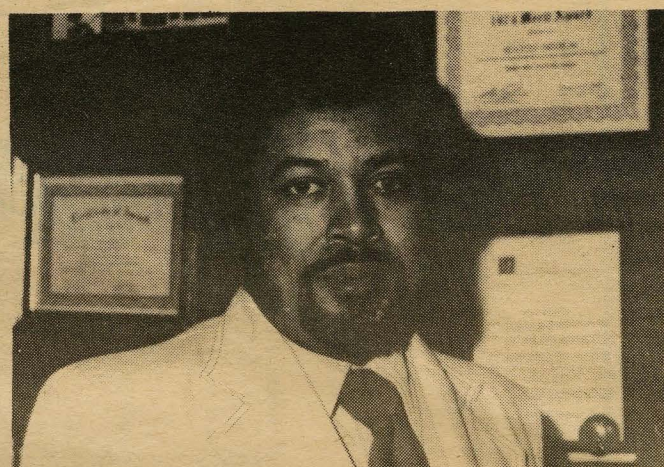
When he was born, his grandfather, whose wise

intuition was cherished by the family, said Bennett was destined to be a president, though he never mentioned what kind.

And 40 years later, Bennett is president of Tiloben Publishing Company, one of the most successful Black businesses in the country.

But getting there hasn't always been easy, Bennett admits. And it still isn't. "There's always a struggle. You can't give up. A lot of people think it's easy putting out a newspaper, but it isn't. It's really hard and mind-boggling.

"The everyday occurrence of racism," he continued, "that threatens to dismantle a strong community base is a constant struggle of major significance that must be guarded against by all concerned. And it's our duty as communicators to see that the people are properly informed of these activities."



Publisher Chris Bennett

In the early stages of his life, Bennett's greatest obstacle, he thought, was leaving the tiny rural Georgia town, and preparing himself for the big dreams he had. He recalled having to get up at 4:30 in the morning to do the chores around his mother's farm, who incidentally was a single parent at the time, until he reached 11.

"We had to walk 5 miles to school in the bitter cold one way every morning and 5 miles back." The school was a one-room church with about 100 students, two teachers, and went from first to seventh grades. "When we got there, the building was real cold, sometimes the water would be frozen. We used wood heat so we had to gather wood for the stove. We had outdoor toilets."

Bennett remembers walking alongside the road to school, and buses carrying White children to nice warm schools would pass them by. Sometimes they would poke fun at them.

"Christopher was always a good student," said one of his former teachers. "He was outstanding, determined to learn and a very hard worker. We used to call him our little genius."

Bennett cites his mother for preparing him for the bitter cold winters that would later prepare him for the bitter cold world. "It was her love, prayers and a commitment to education and the basics in life that I credit my success. She was and still is always there when I need her."

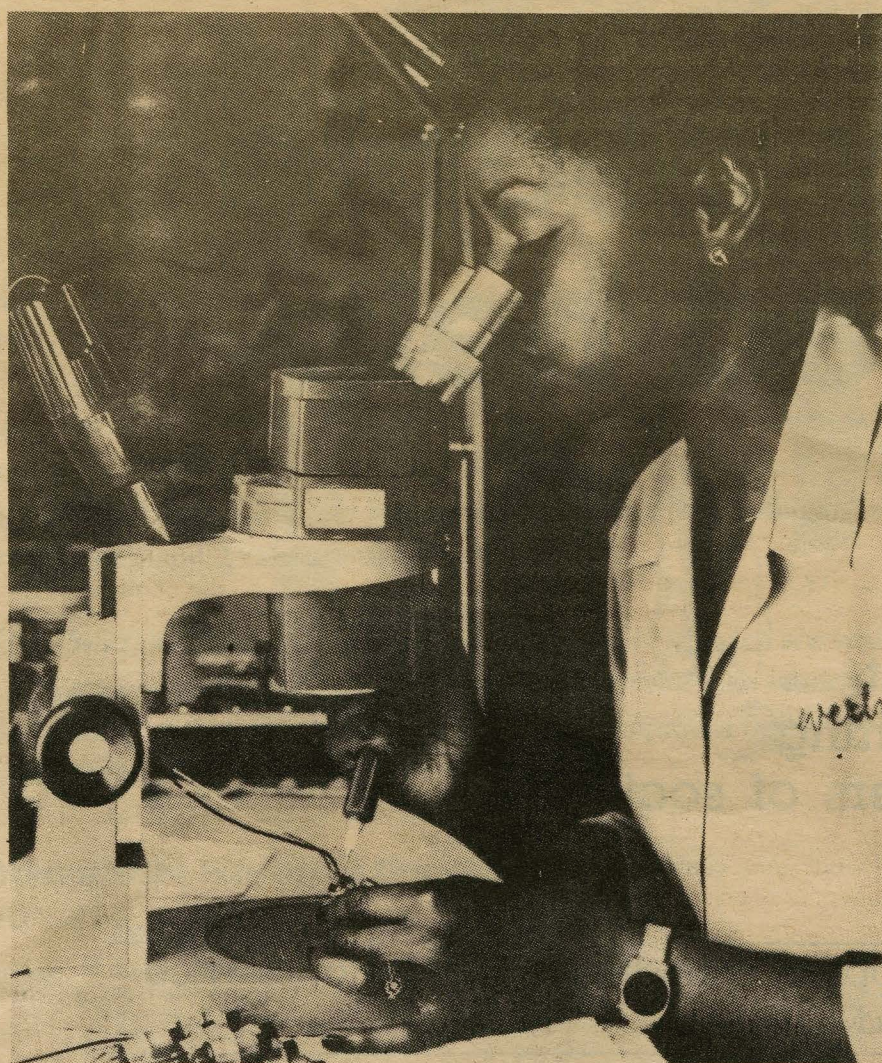
Bennett's mother manages one of his newspapers, The True Citizen, in Tacoma.

Bennett's first break away from the one-room school came after the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision when some of Georgia's lawmakers interpreted the law to mean separate but equal school facilities. "At that time we were bused to brand new buildings in brand new buses, but with the same old books. We had indoor bathrooms and hot lunches everyday."

At an early age, Bennett was able to transfer from junior high to high school because of his high academic standing. He was an honor student and was very active in extracurricular activities. He became active in sports in his later high school years because he was younger and therefore smaller than the others.

Bennett dropped out of high school in the 11th grade because he thought he could finish school at night while he worked during the day — a popular thing to do back then. This venture would later take him to the resort areas of Florida, where he would discover that working 10 hours a day and trying to complete school at night was very difficult. He briefly withdrew from school, but returned to complete his education.

Farming in Georgia became very political while Bennett was in Florida. Those who owned farms were paid not to plant their crops. Many plantation politicians who owned farms that Blacks rented or sharecropped, found it economically feasible to kick the Black folks off the farms and get paid for not farming. Consequently, the Bennett family gave up farming and moved to the city.



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