

# New Directions

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Genevieve Ekaete

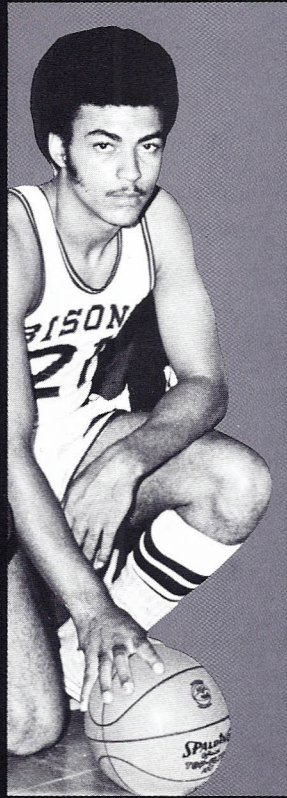
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# A Miracle Died

By Genevieve Ekaete

A miracle died on Wednesday, August 7, 1974. He was a 25-year-old athlete, six feet three inches tall, and weighed 200 pounds. He was Larry Eato.

"Larry was a mystery child. That's why he wasn't with us long," says his grieving mother, Mrs. Helen Eato. "His accidents, oh, they were so many."

According to her, they started from the very beginning, when he was born breach on January 25, 1949. "He came into the world walking and didn't stop." But he did stop for a while—12 years ago when doctors doubted that he would ever walk again. Larry Eato was 13-years-old then when he fell from a bench and broke a hip—his first major accident. The cause of the problem: His bones were too soft and he was growing too fast for his hip bones to support his weight.

It was his right hip that gave way first, and out slipped his right thigh bone. Doctors ran to the rescue, putting in four pins to hold the hip together. Two years later, the left hip broke but the doctors caught it in time. Meanwhile, the first set of pins, which had since been removed, had to be reinserted when the right hip started to disassemble again.

At Howard University where Larry Eato played forward on the Varsity Basketball Team from 1968 to 1972, few knew of his past physical ordeal. Part of the reason being that he looked the very picture of the well developed and generously endowed athlete. Few also noticed that his right leg was shorter than his left—a result of his broken and manually assembled hips.

In 1970, a *Washington Post* reporter, in a humorous article about Larry Eato, said: "Eato has so much metal in him that he would be easy prey for a prankster with an overgrown magnet. While everyone else on the basketball team is busy warming up, Eato could use an oil job."

A year later, as captain of the basketball team, he led the University through what his coach calls "one of the best years since I have been here." The seasonal score was: 18 victories and 9 defeats. The coach, Marshall Emery, remembers Larry Eato as "a fierce competitor who did not like to lose. He didn't like to be around losers." And he worked hard for victory. He had worked hard even for acceptance on the University team. Again Coach Emery recalls that Eato, unlike most of his teammates, was not a recruited player. "He did not come on scholarship. He earned his place on the team and the scholarship. He did this by practicing hard and dedicating himself." He had a lot of odds to overcome in order to prove himself because, miraculous as it might sound, Eato had had no previous experience in high school basketball. Coach Emery attests to that and so does Eato's senior year yearbook at Malverne High School in New York which says one of Eato's twin regrets was that "he was unable to participate in any sports due to a leg injury."

His mother—living alone in West Hempstead, Long Island, having long been separated from Eato's father—comforts

herself with the thought that her son had lived a happy life. "What God did not grant Larry in quantity, He made up in quality." Here, she is thinking of the depth of seeming hopelessness from which her son had risen to achieve his ambition of playing outstanding basketball. She reminds the writer that we are talking about someone whom doctors had pronounced 12 years ago would never walk again. Someone, who throughout his basketball days and till his death, had lost 45 percent use of his right leg. Someone who for four months after the first major operation in 1962 was in an orthopedic cast from neck to ankle, and who lay flat on his back for two more years, 1962-63, and participated in high school lectures through a complicated intercom system between the school and his home. The list of misfortunes did not stop there. The *Washington Post* reporter had listed them thus: "(Larry) had been stabbed in his hand, broken his left arm twice, fractured his skull, slammed his left thumb in a door, had six stitches in his head; and . . . had a girl crush the fingers on his shooting hand in her car door."

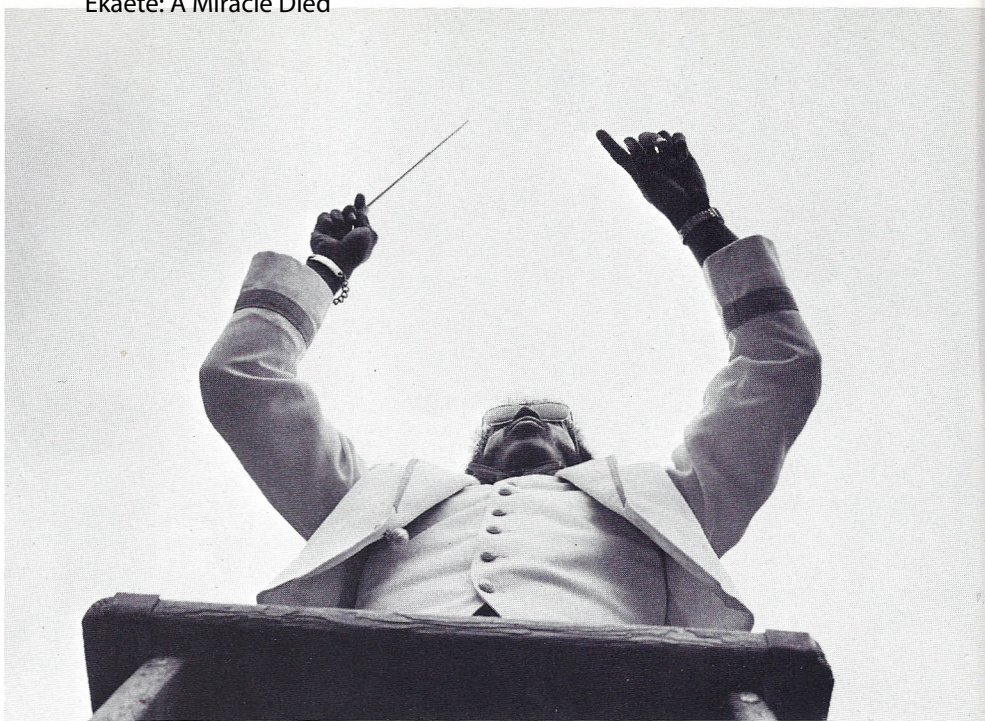
Not surprisingly, his mother doted ceaselessly about her son "as mother-hen watches over her chick." She often had visions of him falling on the basketball field—with one or two dismantled hips—being dragged to the hospital, perhaps to his death. But he was not to die that way.

The cause of his death, ironically, was once-too-often adherence to the very element which had made it possible for him to survive his accident-prone life: Stoicism. Given to much of that in the past, he never did know where to bring a halt. His mother recalls sadly that he would never admit to being sick or weak.

That old habit—which was to prove fatal—reasserted itself on the busy weekend of July 26 when Larry Eato went to New York to see his mother and to attend a friend's bachelor party and wedding. He felt tired but, as usual, kept on going, recalls his mother and a girlfriend who had seen him that weekend.

Mrs. Eato says her son left New York for Washington, D. C. on Sunday, July 28. Friends in Washington noticed that Eato had some dizzy spells on Monday but dismissed them as "nothing serious." On Tuesday, an inquiry from a concerned friend took the resident manager of Eato's apartment to an unconscious Larry Eato. An ambulance arrived to take Eato to George Washington University Hospital where he was admitted around 7:30 p.m. and remained in coma until his death on Wednesday, August 7, 1974. His mother says he was found to have hepatitis of the liver. An accompanying heart failure, along with pneumonia, took Larry Eato from the realm of the living to the dead.

Mrs. Eato finds some comfort in her three remaining older children—two sons and one daughter—and her job as a cashier at a department store near her home. She likes to remember her son Larry the way he looked at his funeral: "He was laying there just asleep as if you said 'Larry' he would get up and come. That's how natural he looked." □



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# Groovin' With Soul Steppers

By Peola Spurlock

There was a new dimension to Howard University's football games this fall. It dressed like the palace guard; grooved to the Top Forty hits of Stevie Wonder, Rufus and Barry White and bumped and double-bumped with the joyous intensity and grace of sweating finalists in a high school dance contest. This was the season for the unveiling of the University's new 124-member marching band, the Soul Steppers, who made half-time as much fun as game-time.

Weaving with a spidery deftness, their rhythmic and precise patterns, the Soul Steppers proved they are potential show-stoppers in the tradition of the great bands from Florida and Grambling. In their first year, the Soul Steppers had cavorted several light years beyond the staid marching tunes that have seemed to shackle so many college bands of the past.

Adding to the sparkle of the new band was a spiffy new uniform of blue, white and gold [designed by band Director Richard Myrick] which did everything but spell out SOUL. It is topped off by a hat symbolizing the horns of the Bison, the Howard mascot.

"This is the finest band in the history of the University," says Mr. Myrick, who credits Dr. Carl Anderson, vice president for student affairs and Dr. Vada Butcher, dean of the College of Fine Arts with giving the band financial and spiritual assistance.

The fall season augured well for the Soul Steppers. On Oct. 6, they achieved a kind of breakthrough by performing before 71,000 people at half-time at the Yale Bowl in New Haven for the Atlanta Falcons-New York Giants game. Spurring on the strutting Soul Steppers was the knowledge that the game was being beamed by the CBS network to television audiences in Atlanta and New York. Next spring, the Soul Steppers will serve as the host band of Washington, D. C.'s Cherry Blossom Festival. And in the fall, the Soul Steppers will step off at a Baltimore Colts football game.

Mr. Myrick came to Howard last year after serving as captain of the percussion section of the Florida A&M University band. Immediately, he began to recruit for the band with his assistant William J. Brawner, a former member of Howard's Nifty Fifty (which usually turned out to be Forty). Already the fruits of their national recruitment efforts have paid off. But both men estimate that it will be about five years before the Soul Steppers will reach the level of the Florida A&M or the Grambling band. This is no reflection on the band members, they note; it just takes that long to build quality showmanship.

The Soul Steppers have no illusions about the rigorous demands of their program. Football practice appears to be a breeze by comparison, some outside observers contend. They practice three hours and fifteen minutes each night, five days a week. At one pressure-filled rehearsal, three band members fainted. They were quickly revived and kept on playing.

Next year the objective is to increase the band membership to 180. This would give the Soul Steppers an opportunity to develop more formations.

But whatever the number, the Soul Steppers appear to be winning over fans already.



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More Photos on Pages 38 and 39







