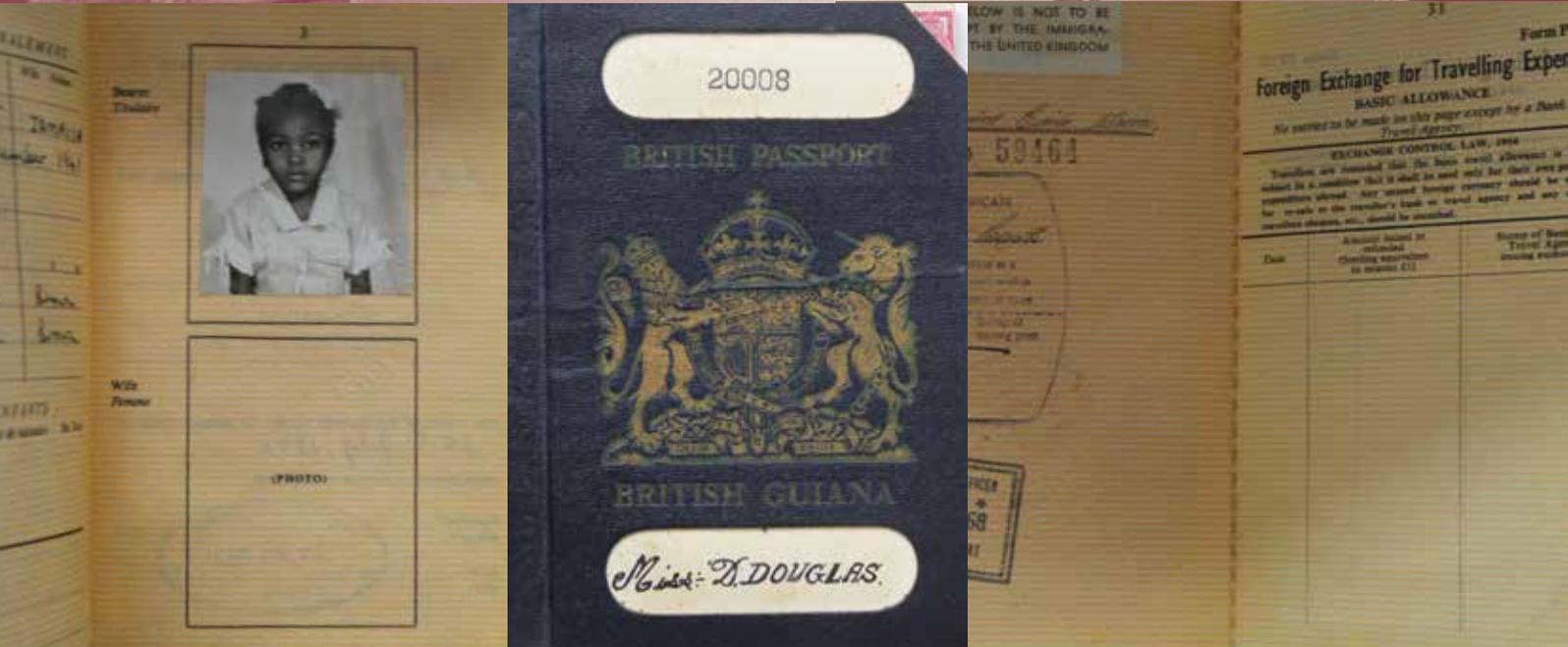


Windrush

Stories of a Hackney Generation





“*These stories are so important for us to hear and to hear them from the people who have the lived experience, that is part of this country’s history. This booklet and accompanying podcasts will be available at Hackney Council’s archives and it’s great that generations for years to come, will be able to learn from and celebrate Hackney’s Windrush residents.*”



Introduction

I am very proud to be introducing this booklet and the stories from Hackney’s Windrush generation, which have been developed as a project within Connect Hackney, Ageing Better. Connect Hackney is a six year, Big Lottery funded programme that aims to support older people to be actively involved in the community and to highlight the valuable contribution that they make.

It has been a pleasure to watch this project develop and to read about the different experiences of moving to the UK, as part of the Windrush era. We are incredibly appreciative of the stories that have been shared with us and we would like to thank everyone who generously contributed to this booklet.

These stories are so important for us to hear and to hear them from the people who have the lived experience, that is part of this country’s history. This booklet and accompanying podcasts will be available at Hackney Council’s archives and it’s great that generations for years to come, will be able to learn from and celebrate Hackney’s Windrush residents.

Lola Akindoyin

Programme Director – Connect Hackney

Hackney CVS

Messages on the Windrush Generation



Over a thousand people docked at Tilbury in June 1948 from the Empire Windrush. They were dressed in their Sunday best, laden with a strong sense of Britishness, enthusiasm and a hope of wanting to build a better future for themselves. Hackney was a popular destination for those that came. Responding to a Commonwealth recruitment call from the ‘mother country’, the Windrush generation came here to help rebuild the country after the Second World War. They came with an array of skills and filled staff shortages in many areas including schools and transport. It is no coincidence that one of this country’s proudest achievements, the National Health Service, celebrates its

anniversary at the same time as Windrush does. My own mother came here as a nurse, and alongside many other women, played their role in building the NHS to make life better for all of us. Like many other people in this country, I am incredibly thankful to both institutions.

Moving to a new country was never going to be easy and racism played a part in their lack of inclusion; but what the Windrush generation continues to do through their children and grandchildren is prove that tolerance and resilience are important attributes. Economically, socially and culturally the Windrush generation have made their contributions, for which they will be cherished.

Shadow Home Secretary **Diane Abbott**
MP for Hackney North and Stoke
Newington



It’s really important that as a borough with a large Caribbean community, we celebrate the 70th anniversary of Windrush arriving in the UK. The ship was the first to bring Commonwealth citizens from the Caribbean to Britain, part of a request from the government to help rebuild the country after World War II. Windrush at 70 not only commemorates the 500 people on board, but recognises and honours the enormous contribution migrants and their descendants have made to British life and identity.

Alongside our celebrations it’s also important for us to honour and respect people affected by this history in the present, and realise the hardships

that communities like the Windrush generation still face today, and how as a society we can reflect on history to overcome this. It’s important for us to celebrate these communities through events like Windrush Day and Hackney’s Big Caribbean Tea Party.

Hackney has a long cherished history of migration which has made it the special place it is today. Though the Council does not have precise figures, it’s believed the borough is home to hundreds, if not thousands, of the Windrush generation, and many more come from Commonwealth countries across the globe. They and their children have contributed and continue to contribute a huge amount to Hackney, and are at the heart of the borough’s rich diversity and vibrant culture.

Anntoinette Bramble
Deputy Mayor, Hackney Council

“When I first see London I say ‘Oh, this is London, the Queen’s country?’ I find it very dirty. But I didn’t find it hard to adjust, because when I come, I come with the sunshine in my bones still, so I wasn’t feeling cold you know!”



Janet Nickie – *Cold London but “sunshine in my bones”*

*Arriving in London in the 70s from St Vincent, Janet recalls the vital community support of the “pardner” scheme. Interviewed by **Elizabeth Abimado***

I come to London to study nursing, because I always wanted to be a nurse when I was growing up. Nursing was regarded as a high profession. They always recruited nurses to come to England.

I grew up with my grandmother from the age of two. We weren’t rich, but we would never go hungry – she was a fish seller, so we always had food on the table. Before I left Saint Vincent, my grandmother passed and then I decided it was time to come to London. I like adventure!

I came to my aunt who was living in Essex Road, Islington – she’d been here since the 60s. When I first see London I say, “Oh, this is London, the Queen’s country?” I find it very dirty. But I didn’t find it hard to adjust, because when I come, I come with the sunshine in my bones still, so I wasn’t feeling cold you know! I came September but I didn’t start wearing a coat until way down after Christmas – I wasn’t feeling cold!

I met my husband when I started to train as a nurse at Bart’s Hospital, he worked

there as a porter. I got married when I was 19 and I had my first child when I was 21. So I didn’t stand a chance!

The salary you used to get was so little – it was nothing really. Pardner start back home, because I remember my grandmother used to do pardners and when the people come here they start their pardners with their friends.

People are still doing it today

It works like, if you have ten people in the pardner – it’s £10 a hand, so you put that £10 in. At the end of the day when everybody pays, one person would receive that hand and then it would start the round again and so it goes on. People are still doing it today.

The pardner helped them – and the blues party. You charge people to come in and you charge them for food and you charge them for drink. They used to go on a lot so people could get money together and it’s how the West Indians get their houses.

“So you left the place where you were familiar with the people, with the fruits, with the land, with everything – you came to a place that was freezing cold and you weren’t familiar with anybody.”



Ngoma Bishop – *Standing up for change*

Ngoma Bishop remembers the political activism and personal struggles he faced growing up in North East London.

I was born in Barbados, which at the time had the highest literacy rate on the planet. I started school early, because at four I was able to read. And then at eight, that’s when my parents sent for me here and that’s when the problems started.

I remember the day I started secondary school. They had streaming 1A to 1D and the top stream was 1A. I got to the school. In the first year they separated us out – they sit you there and ask you a few questions, and if you spoke with a Jamaican accent you went right into 1D, except if you were exceptionally intelligent and then you might be put a class up.

A lot of people have positive things to say about the schooling system in England. I have nothing positive to say about it at all. Everything I learned, I either learned by the time I was eight in Barbados or I learned it on my own. I learned very little as a result of the British school system – I went through it, it was done to me. I survived it and I came out the other side, I give no credit to their system.

I’m an African born on the island of Barbados and living in the UK, London specifically, for most of my life since then.

I was eight years of age when I came here. I came in 1963 in the coldest winter

on record – I came straight from the hottest island in the Caribbean to the coldest place on the face of the planet. I came in November, so it wasn’t that great when I landed at Heathrow airport. I never really recovered from the snow, to tell you the truth.

Adjusting to an estranged family

My father realised he was going to be here longer than he thought, and he sent for my mother and left me with a friend of the family. By the time I came, I had three young siblings I knew nothing about and who all spoke differently than I did and culturally were millions of miles apart. Plus the fact that they had grown up with our parents – everything was different.

Discovering my parents

I knew they were my parents because they’d sent letters and I’d sent letters but I couldn’t tell you what they looked like. When I landed at the airport, the only way we recognised each other was they had a placard with my name and I had a piece of paper with what to look out for. I saw a couple of people with a sign with my name on and I figured they must be my parents.

It took several years to kind of come to terms with that. There’s a lot of people in a similar situation who never actually

recovered. So you left the place where you were familiar with the people, with the fruits, with the land, with everything – you came to a place that was freezing cold and you weren't familiar with anybody. And you didn't talk like anybody, you didn't look like... well you looked like some of them!

I grew up in Kilburn – there were a few people who looked like me, although they weren't the majority demographic.

Campaigning for justice

There was a theatre company, Black Theatre Corps as I recall, off the Caledonian Road, Islington. A lot of those who became established actors went through that. I'm perhaps better known for my creative writing, but I have involvement in most areas of the arts. For a lot of us it was a way to express ourselves culturally and also to comment on the political dynamics of the time.

Colin Roach was a young person who died from gunshot wounds in the old Stoke Newington police station, Hackney. I was part of the campaign formed to support the Roach family who were looking for answers as regards the death of their son. They never said the police killed him or whatever, they did not know how he died and they were campaigning for answers.

It was about organising and creating a situation where the truth would emerge. Subsequently it didn't. We petitioned successive Home Secretaries, Willie Whitelaw and Leon Brittan, and we put the case for an independent inquiry and it was rejected by both. We established a strategy to progress the campaign. Part of that strategy included the idea that since we, the people, were indirectly paying the wages of the police, we weren't paying the police to kill us, so we felt it appropriate to withdraw our money.

Myself and three others – at that time I was a member of the Labour Party – were charged with the task of persuading the borough that until there was a public inquiry to the satisfaction of the residents, there should be no links with the police. Local authorities should withhold the money they were charged for maintenance of the police. Hackney supported it right the way along the line.

By the time it came to my generation – Colin Roach was about ten years younger than me – a lot of people from the Caribbean had taken the view that we're not having this crap any more. Some of us undervalued the contribution of our parents or the fight they went through, and said, well you've worked all your life and you have nothing, so sod it if we're going down that road too. So that was the innately political thinking of our generation.

With the support of people from all communities we commissioned and successfully wrote our own analysis [of the Colin Roach case]. And all these things were meant to engender a positive thing. There was a Hackney Black People's Association, that was Lester Lewis and co. We brought over the great Kwame Ture, previously known as Stokely Carmichael, to Hackney. We brought Sam Greenlee, who wrote *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* – a seminal book, almost a toolkit on how to resist oppression.

This is one of the reasons that led to the library in Dalston being called the CLR James Library – and CLR James was over for the library launch. There were also people from the New Jewel Movement, the Grenadian resistance, so there were a lot of people with experience of positive things.

“When we came back to Burma Road in Hackney near Clissold Park – what I noticed as a child and it stuck with me – in Guyana everybody had a house and it was separated, but when we came to Britain all the houses were joined to each other and we didn’t have a house.”



Dahlia Douglas – *Ridley Road and Clissold Park back in the day*

Leaving Guyana aged 10, Dahlia looks back on her early days living in Hackney.

I must have been about 10. I remember growing up in Guyana. I recall it because it’s still fresh – I lived in Georgetown, Charlotte Street and we had a house and underneath the house my mum kept chickens and within this house we had a sitting room, bedroom and a kitchen and you had your shower to bathe.

It was good in Guyana – very good, very happy, lots of family. My dad is always adventurous. He had a job as a welder and he was also a ladies’ hairdresser which was unique at that time for a man to be a ladies’ hairdresser. In those days you had the hot comb so I always remember the house being full with people doing their hair and that was dad’s hobby, but out of it dad won a lot of competitions because he was male and he was good, he’s very artistic and very adventurous.

Dad, I think, wanted a change, so dad came to Britain and then within two years dad sent for mum and myself and we came to England.

We came to England – the trip was a bit rough. Dad met us at the boat and we got on a train and I remember dad saying, “Oh it’s a bit different here, it’s going to be a bit colder.” When we came back to Burma Road in Hackney near Clissold

Park – what I noticed as a child and it stuck with me – in Guyana everybody had a house and it was separated, but when we came to Britain all the houses were joined to each other and we didn’t have a house. Mum, dad and me had one room and within that one room we had to sleep, we cooked and everything.

And it was wonderful because a black man owned that house and he was a wonderful landlord and because a black man owned that house, we had a bath in that house. Because when we moved from there to get a bigger house, there were no baths in the house, so for us to bathe you had to go to a public bath where there were lines of black people waiting to have a bath. And you used to have horse troughs where the horses would drink.

Back home mum looked after me, but when she came here she couldn’t get a job teaching although it was the same type of certificate back home because it was a British colony, so mum worked in a factory and I had a childminder. She was a wonderful white woman and her name was Gertrude and she showered me with love and she took me to St Matthias primary school. Wonderful, and that was by Newington Green.



When we moved to Milton Grove there were half buildings and they said that was the result of bombing because the places couldn't be rebuilt unless you had people to build a country. And because you have people come into a country then those half buildings – people work to rebuild a country so I have seen a country rebuilt.

In those days they used to call us coloured and coloured people couldn't get council

houses so that is how Jewish people are the only ones that rented to us. And I remember in Ridely Road, certain people wouldn't sell to us. You would stand at a bus stop and people would come and spit at people – “Go back to your country. What are you doing here?” Lots of things like that. But my parents always instilled in me that I am worthy and my education mattered.

“My grandmother always said to me when one star refuses to shine there are myriads of others to take its place.”



Augustina Belnavis – *A passion for teaching*

Kindergarten teacher Augustina Belnavis came to England from Jamaica with the ambition and determination to further her teaching career.

I was teaching in a kindergarten in Kingston for a few years and then I came to England. I've always wanted to be a teacher – that was my childhood ambition.

When I came to England I was told I couldn't do teaching because I didn't have the qualification – which in a sense I didn't, because I hadn't gone to college here. While I was doing the teaching, I also did shorthand and typing evening classes so I had the option of going into an office.

But when I tried to get jobs, one person actually told me that they didn't have any black people in their office and so he couldn't offer me a job. That was the first time I thought to myself that this was ridiculous. I said to him, “Do you have black people working in your factory floor?” And he said, “Yes.” So I said, “Why can't you have a black person working in your office?” Anyway, I always take things in my stride.

Back in employment aged 40

My grandmother always said to me that when one star refuses to shine there are myriads of others to take its place. I didn't even know what myriads were at the time – I was quite small. I don't

think I can ever forget that statement from my grandmother. I met my husband in Jamaica. He sent for me actually, so that was it. I took some time out – about 10 years – and I had five children.

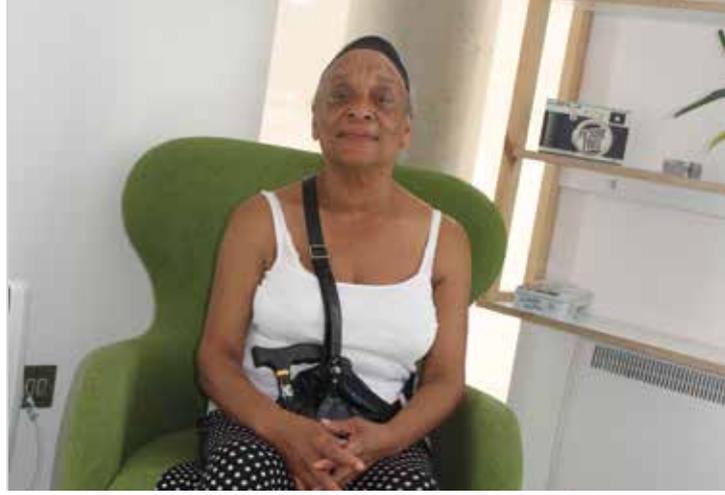
I decided to do teacher training and I went back into employment at the age of 40. I always planned my life and I was quite determined – my mum always said you are too hell bent! That's how she used to describe me.

Settling in and making good

England, it was disappointing actually. For one thing, I came in October when the weather had changed, dull and snowy and cold, and I thought I would like to go back. But then I had commitments, so I got married and I settled in. You make good for yourselves of whatever you've got. We were resourceful.

The community where I lived was a bit cold. I thought, probably the weather... then I realised this was because I was black actually. Some of the people, the neighbours, weren't very welcoming. Getting a place to live was difficult. The only people we could get places to rent from were the Jewish people. I think they were the saviours of the black community because they would let to us.

“I met up with Saint Lucian friends every single weekend and we went to dances. There were dances being kept at Commercial Street and Hackney Town Hall, then we went to loads of parties in homes, and we went to Roaring Twenties in the West End. We listened to everything – jive, reggae, soul – and we danced merengue!”



Ann Canaii – *Romantic highs and homesick lows*

Interviewed by **Janet Nickie**

When did you come to this country?

AC: I came on the 8th of April, 1960.

So how old were you when you came here?

AC: I was 14 and a half. I came to live with my aunt. Because of a certain young man, my parents decided to get rid of me and send me to England. In Saint Lucia life was very good for me. My father had estates, my mother had a shop – so I was one of the privileged few.

How did you get here?

AC: We came by boat. It was quite a nice journey until we got to Gibraltar. I went on deck and I passed out and then I caught pneumonia. I had to be ferried backwards and forwards to the medical centre and I lost so much weight that by the time I came I couldn't fit in my clothes.

What was your first impression of England?

AC: Terrible! I cried for 13 years! It was so dismal, it was damp, it was dirty, it was ugly – it was everything I hadn't expected. It was so cold, so cold. I just couldn't get used to it. I got chilblains on my toes and my fingers – until this day my fingers never went back to normal. I really, really hated it. I cried for 13 years until I returned to Saint Lucia.

So, you were involved in a beauty contest?

AC: Yes, in 1963 I was invited to a beauty pageant in Seven Sisters Road, Hornsey, at the Cooperative Hall. I attended and after the beauty contest there was a dance and I saw this very handsome young man standing there, so I went up to him and asked him if he would like to dance. I don't think I came anywhere in the competition, because once I saw him I forgot about the pageant!

Apparently, he was shy, he wanted to ask me. So I asked him because he had a semblance of the boyfriend that I had left in Saint Lucia. We danced and, after everything was over, we exchanged addresses. He came around and met my aunt and we took it from there. Eventually we got married and had three kids. He was my first husband.

Did you get to meet other friends from Saint Lucia?

AC: I met up with Saint Lucian friends every single weekend and we went to dances. There were dances being kept at Commercial Street and Hackney Town Hall, then we went to loads of parties in homes, and we went to Roaring Twenties in the West End. We listened to everything – jive, reggae, soul – and we danced merengue!

“We spent eight days travelling across the Atlantic Ocean. All we could see was the sky and the water. We were right in the bottom cabin, six of us shared bunk beds... we were all Grenadians. We looked forward to coming to England.”

Bishop Elon Charles – “I wanted a change”

As a young man Elon left behind a harsh life in Grenada and pursued a new beginning in London.

My name is Bishop Elon Joshua Charles. I'm from Grenada, the Land of Spice. I arrived in London 1961, a Sunday, 17th of November on the *TV Montserrat*. We arrived at Southampton, then we boarded the train that took us to Waterloo station. I went to meet my brother who was living in Upper Clapton at the time. It was very cold, of course, coming from a hot climate. It was a new challenge for me.

I left when I was 20 years old, very young. It was very hard and difficult. I come from a family of nine – five boys and four girls. My mum died when I was nine years old and my two elder sisters took the leading role of the house, cooking, washing, seeing that the younger siblings get up in the morning in time for school.

Things were very difficult for me then after the death of my mother.

I left school at age 16, and at that point it was a real uphill struggle. I came up the rough side of the mountain. I did all sorts of manual work – basically going on the plantations, the sugar, bananas, tobacco, etc.

I usually took two days off school to work on the banana truck. We used to take the bananas from my home town, Victoria, we take them 16 miles down in the capital where we unload the bananas from the

truck onto the boat – and for two days' work I got payment of just \$5, which was equal to £1.

So you see it was very hard and difficult, very hard indeed. We had very little in terms of money, but what we did have was the food – we planted enough vegetables and fruits.

Joy and high expectations

My dad was a very hard labourer working on the estates. They work from 6am to 5.30pm then they go home.

They would work for six days a week and earn just \$24. It was hard sheer slavery in those days. The estate owners make sure the ordinary people, especially the men, would have to work hard. The women would have to work also to pick the cocoa, to cut the banana and prepare the banana for shipment every two weeks.

So from 16, I did all kinds of work: in the carpentry trade, in the joinery shop, agricultural work and so on. It came to a time that I was very angry with myself and I wanted a change.

The date given me to travel to England in 1961, that day was a day when I looked forward, coming to London. You could imagine me with the joy, you can imagine my glee, my expectation coming to see



Buckingham Palace, the River Thames, London Bridge.

We spent eight days travelling across the Atlantic Ocean. All we could see was the sky and the water. We were right in the bottom cabin, six of us shared bunk beds, and it was a real case of experience because we were all Grenadians in that cabin. We made lots of jokes and kept up high spirits. We looked forward to coming to England.

Education was a priority

We learned more about England than Grenada at school in Grenada because of “Land of Hope and Glory”, “Rule Britannia – Britannia rules the waves”.

I did six months of vocational training in shoe repairs in the Walden Technical College in 1962. After training for six months, I did an extra three, four months in a very small shoeshop in Hainault, Essex.

I met some very nice gentlemen in shoe training. One of them was Scottish, he took me under his wing, invited me down to his home and it was like I was one of the family. However, from there I did the IT and computer assembly while I was working for Royal Mail for 37 and a half years. I also did a City and Guilds

in Sound Engineering at the UXL studio in Hackney.

I never wanted to rest on my laurels. For me, I think Longfellow tells me, “*The heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.*” So for me education was my priority, it was my first achievement in life because I never wanted to be like most of the Caribbean men that usually would go out and drink in bars.

From the first arrival here in England I set myself targets of education. And even at my current stage of coming up 78, I am still pursuing, teaching people. I worked for the Bags of Taste, which is a new institute of teaching cooking. I got on board and I am now one that supervises the young students who come in to learn to cook the different cooking styles.

London is a city of culture. It’s a diverse city and it made me what I am. I got married in London. Of course my children were born in London. I went to the academic schools in London, I work in London, so London for me is the number one of my roots, since coming to England. I am what I am now because of living in London.

Jean John – *Supporting the heart of the community*

Hackney resident Jean came from St Vincent in December 1964, aged 19, and went on to set up the Wayside Community Centre in 1989.

We used to be in my house and then we went to the church hall and asked them if we could have a lunch club. So, 50 people one day a week were coming to have lunch, and then we hired a house in Douglas Road where mentally ill people could come and chat.

We had a lot of young people, from the Gambia and so on, and we begin to work with Social Services and we begin to bring the young people there. We did a lot of social activities, taking them to the park, sharing laughter with them, encouraging them to talk, dancing. This is how I believe the Lord showed me how to deal with them, and before you know it they were getting back into society because they were there with the community.

We started with no feasibility study, nothing like that, just me telling people about my brokenness and other people coming in and sharing theirs. By me opening myself, people began to knock

and they brought others, and before you know it we became a big family and everybody believed we can support one another. At times I still get depressed, at times you feel low. What I do, I just go to bed. I deal with a lot of young people in my work, and I understand them and they say, “How you understand us like that? A lot of people don’t seem to understand us!” And I say, “I can empathise, I know what it’s like, I know what it’s like crying and the chair is falling back inside as if it’s going to drown your heart, because you can’t let nobody see.” So I can talk to them because I have been in that place.

On the recent Windrush scandal

I can’t understand that. They’ve been here for all these years when Hackney was all a broken-down place. When we came here, Hackney was a terrible place – and after they’re here all these years, I really believe that they worked hard and they should never be deported.

Monica Mattocks – *came from Jamaica to London, aged 16, in 1965*

I acquired the name Mattocks through marriage, but my birth name is Levy so I understand I’m from a Jewish background which I wasn’t aware of until I came to this country in 1965. There was a lot to miss really, the natural thing of going down to the back, picking your mangoes, your plums, your oranges, everything fresh – vegetables. Coming here was scary, it did affect me socially, mentally.

I didn’t suffer racism but I know it was there. They used to call mixed race children half-castes and I used to say,

“What’s that?” And all of a sudden they say ‘mixed race’ and to me that’s more appropriate because you can be three, four different races.

I married in Haringey. I met him accidentally – he was Jamaican. When we moved to Perth Road in Finsbury Park, we were living at 4, he was at 62 and there was a letter box outside and I went to post a letter and he was standing at his gate. And he talked to me and wanted to meet my mum and the rest is just history!

Patricia Joseph – *Queues, coal and the buses*

Patricia left Guyana in 1959 and came to England where she worked for London Transport.

I came to an address that I did not know the people, relations of mine that I had to stay at. When I got off the bus at St Stephen's Avenue, Shepherd's Bush, I saw the trees and they were all just brown stumps, brown limbs, and I say, "Why do they have all these dried-up trees, why don't they cut them down?" – not knowing that it's because it's winter, all the leaves drop!

I worked at London Transport, then nursing, and then back to London Transport. In those days London Transport was one big family and I worked in the canteen. Money was little, but it used to go very far.

I found we all fitted in quite well, we didn't have to adjust ourselves or change. The only thing we had to change is that they had just come out of the war over here so people had that way of queuing

up for things, queue up for bread and queue up all the time. And the long queue for these buses and we had to get to work on time and if you don't you used to lose your money – because you slot in on a machine in those days and so money would be docked if you're late.

Lots of our men got taken over, because most of the men were killed in the war, so these women were glad to accept a companion. In those days we were always hearing the remarks like, "Why don't you go back where you came from?" I remember once on the bus a Caucasian conductor says to me about going back and I said, "Where I come from the place is pack up with people like you so we have to come!" She says, "That's why you all have to come out?" I said, "Yes, that's the reason why we come out. Besides that, you all take over our men so there it is, we are over here as well!"

Joyce Edwards – *"Faith has played a great part in my success"*

Leaving the Spice Isle, Grenada in 1965, Joyce came to England and began a nursing career.

In Grenada life was very tough because we were under colonialism and everything was British and we lived under a lot of suppression, oppression. I came to join my sister. I worked in a factory. It was really tough as a machinist in a rag trade factory in East London for £5 a week. I only made one week – I said, "No this is not for me!" and my back was aching. So I got a job in a hospital – in the nurses' dining room and had to wash dishes, so that was a little more, I think £13 a week.

I went on to train as a nurse in Maidenhead. There were quite a lot of nurses there from the Caribbean and we had a good time. After I was qualified I came back to London and my first job was at St Giles Hospital in Camberwell and later I worked at Guy's.

So here I am and I haven't regretted it, I came here with little education and the Lord helped me that I went to university. I have to say my faith has played a great part in my success in this country.

“I got the life I wanted in London, very much so. London is just London. And Hackney, more than all, is lovely. I love Hackney so much – it’s the people.”



Olive Johnson – *From St Ann’s to Evering Road*

Olive left St Ann’s, Jamaica in the 1960s and found a ‘home from home’ in Hackney.

I’m from St Ann in Jamaica and I came to England in the 1960s. I don’t know why I left Jamaica – but I’ve got an idea. I was the last of nine children and I suppose mummy thought because my sister was here she wanted to keep me under control.

I came by air. My sister was here, married with two children. I came to Tresham Avenue in Hackney – I’ve always been in Hackney. Tresham Avenue was from home to home.

My mother was very well up to date and used to get to know everybody. She did the register of births and deaths and people were always coming to the house and she used to make dresses as well. The house was always occupied with people – it was a lovely family.

Nursing is my life

When I was 18 I applied to do nursing. Nursing is my life and I enjoy every minute of it. I was in Whipps Cross, a little side hospital called Connaught in Walthamstow, and then they closed Connaught and we went to Whipps Cross Hospital full time. You see, the British people, their children didn’t like nursing and most of the men said their wives shouldn’t be nurses. They wanted them to be at home to give them their slippers

and their dinners when they come home at night. A woman’s place is in the home – that was the British men. And of course the money wasn’t that good.

But nursing is nice. It was all I wanted. I got on very well with people, especially the men! When I came on nights they would say, who is on duty now? The tall nurse – and they would all look through the door to see who was coming in. It was lovely, lovely, lovely. I enjoyed every minute.

I got the life I wanted in London, very much so. London is just London. And Hackney, more than all, is lovely. I love Hackney so much – it’s the people. I lived on Evering Road when my sister went back. They were all West Indians there and other nations.

Chatting in the front yard

A few weeks ago, a Pakistani man said to me, “What was Evering Road like?” I said, “Evering Road was like from home to home.” In the mornings you’d see all the people sweeping out their front yard and chatting. You could just leave your house open and the people were lovely. Even now the people leave and they want to come back to Hackney. But now they can’t afford to come back – the houses are too expensive.





Clockwise from left:
Ann Canaii, Dahlia Douglas'
father, Olive Johnson x 2,
Ann Canaii, Dahlia Douglas
Centre: with schoolfriends

Overleaf: Olive Johnson x 2,
Veronica Husbands, Olive
Johnson and daughter, a
Dr Scholl's event.





“And then I went to Great Ormond Street ... and that was beautiful because there were babies born with so many different health issues and they can't tell you that they're feeling pain so you have to decipher what's going on there.”



Beulah Watts – *A life dedicated to the young and the old*

Responding to a call from the UK for nurses, Beulah Watts came to England from Tobago to care for the most vulnerable.

I'm from the island of Tobago in the West Indies. I always was interested in training to be a nurse, and then at one point there was an agreement between the government of this country and my home country Trinidad and Tobago for nurses. Because I had the desire to become a nurse, I didn't allow this opportunity to pass me by.

I got all the necessary qualifications that they asked for. I filled in all the necessary forms, sent them in, and I was accepted. I eventually ended up in England on the 24th of December, 1969.

I worked in Watford General Hospital. We used to be in our hospital and we could see over in the Watford football ground and we'd enjoy the match without having to pay for a ticket.

Caring for the elderly

We had a good time there. I went home and then I came back and went to Oxford because I wanted to do a course about caring for the elderly.

I did children and I did old people – those in between could look after themselves.

I did a course in psychogeriatrics and I came to realise that although people grow older, sometimes the health issues they had could make them very violent. No

nurse worked on her own: you worked in pairs, your neighbour looked out for you, watched your back because an older psychogeriatric patient will lock your neck and break it if you didn't have somebody working alongside with you.

Staying in Hackney

And then I went to Great Ormond Street where I did cardiothoracic nursing. That was beautiful because there were babies born with so many different health issues and they can't tell you that they're feeling pain, so you have to decipher what's going on there.

Now I'm retired I don't like to tell people I was a nurse... If you tell them you're a nurse sometimes a barrier goes up and I don't want any barriers up. The fact I'm a nurse doesn't mean to say that I can't be a patient. I'm the patient now and I respect you, whatever you tell me goes.

When I did that cardiothoracic course in Great Ormond Street Hospital, I lived in Hackney. I took up a permanent job there in the North Middlesex Hospital that had a branch specialising in care for the elderly – which I did like then – called Greentrees. I retired working in Greentrees and I liked Hackney, so I stayed in Hackney.

“My dad always stressed the importance of education, putting both me and my brother through university and we had a very happy family life.”

My Lovely Parents by Margaret Smith



My name is Margaret Smith and I would like to tell you about my parents. My mum is Singaporean Chinese and my dad was from Jamaica.

Theirs is an interesting love story. My dad first came to the UK when he joined the Royal Air Force in the early 1940s to help fight in the Second World War. After the war was over, he continued in the RAF, staying in the UK.

After many years he was posted out to Singapore where he met my mum. They fell in love and he invited her back to the UK. My mum came over on a ship arriving in Tilbury Docks in 1962. My parents were married in 1964 in London.

Although we have lived in several towns over the years, our main family home was in Edmonton, North London. I am one of two children.

My dad always stressed the importance of education, putting both me and my brother through university and we had a very happy family life.

My dad left the RAF in 1973. He had an economics degree which he studied for in

his spare time when he was younger and when he was in the Air Force.

Later on in his life he studied law which he really enjoyed. There were so many law books in our house. He trained to be a barrister but never practised in the end.

My mum has always worked as a garment factory supervisor until she retired. She enjoyed her work immensely.

My mum went back to Singapore on holiday recently after about 50 years in this country. She noticed many changes in Singapore, like many modern high-rise flats and new shopping arcades had been built there.

My dad, though, never went back to Jamaica for a holiday. I think that that was because he was so happy with life over here.

Gardening was one of his hobbies. He also enjoyed cooking – stew with dumplings was one of the dishes that he enjoyed cooking. Sadly he died of prostate cancer in 2003 aged 78. He was a very kind and principled man and our family has very fond memories of him.

“The street where we lived, the other side was a bomb site, most of the way from Kingshold Road to Victoria Park – so we spent most of our time playing on the bomb site with the other local kids.”

Lloyd French – *Vivid memories of a boyhood in Hackney*

As a young boy from Montserrat, Lloyd found a different kind of freedom in his new life in East London.

I'm 63. I was born in Montserrat. I'm one of three boys amazingly enough, and we had great fun growing up in the Caribbean, so it was a bit of a wrench leaving the island for this 'land of milk and honey' as they called it.

My younger brother was 6, I was 7, my older brother was 10. Everybody says Windrush generation but people came from the Caribbean in lots of different transport modes. Some came by plane. We came on a cruise ship – they weren't banana boats, they were proper cruise ships.

Living our lives in the Caribbean, we went to a Catholic school. They were run by nuns, who were more like spartan sergeant majors who were training children for war rather than life. If you turned up in school and your uniform wasn't right, your shoes were scuffed, your hair wasn't combed or your fingernails were dirty, you were subject to corporal punishment.

So there was good and bad in the old Caribbean, but I loved it there and leaving was a wrench for me.

We left because our dad went to live in America and tried to make a life there. My mother came to England with her brothers and sisters.

I didn't want my mother to leave so I thought if I did something, like if I was sick or injured maybe, she would stay. So I went and stepped on a piece of glass and cut my foot deliberately in the hope

that she wouldn't leave. She came, gave me a cuddle, put a plaster on my foot and handed me back to my grandmother – and off she went. I've still got the scar in the bottom of my foot.

She eventually sent for us, and we came over on the cruise ship *Ascania*. We came to Portsmouth. We took a train up to London. We were looking out the window as the train came into the station, and although I didn't have a memory of my mother in the Caribbean other than cutting my foot to make her stay, I was able to recognise her on the platform, and I said, "There's mum!"

I think it was after she remarried that they got her rehoused from the shared home to a council house in Kingshold Road off Well Street and she sent for us, so we came – in 1964.

Primary school in Well Street

It was strange on the train seeing the countryside, not the Caribbean countryside. The journey in the car seeing the tall buildings, coming into a street where there were loads of cars parked... going up into our council flat, unpacking and setting up our bedroom, and the next morning getting ready to have a wash and mum coming in and trying to wash us. We had to tell her, "Mum we can do it ourselves now, we don't wear nappies." So there was that kind of relationship in terms of re-bonding – our mother having in



her head that we were still babies that needed feeding and washing.

We got into school, Orchard Primary School, Well Street. Mum had prepared everything, sharp pencils, rulers, school uniforms and those godawful short trousers.

In England you were given toys that were ready-made: cowboy and Indian, guns, bow and arrow, Ludo and all kind of board games. But in the Caribbean you had to make everything. I was amazed how backward the English children were in terms of, if they didn't have a toy they were lost. Us in the Caribbean, if we didn't have a toy we'd go out and make something. We made go-carts, scooters and made toys out of wheel rims.

I don't think we had less freedom here, because when we came over, the street where we lived, the other side was a bomb site, most of the way from Kingshold Road to Victoria Park – so we spent most of our time playing on the bomb site with the other local kids. It was a different type of freedom, but we felt just as free as any child.

Playground games

I don't remember anything negative about the school at all. My one abiding memory is playing games in the playground.

I remember that the film *Zulu* had come out with Michael Caine. So some smart Alec had decided we would play *Zulu*... It would involve the whole playground, spilt off into two armies. One army had to defend the bike shed and the other army had to defend the bin chamber at the other end. We'd all start off in our respective camps and we'd all start screaming – the Zulus would start screaming “Ooh, ooh ooh...” and the British would start chanting their chant and when it got to a pitch everyone would just run at each other. And all hell would break loose. That was so much fun – that still stays in my memory. Everyone in the playground was involved in that, no one was left out.

Apart from a close friend of mine in the same class saying my uncle was “a friend of Oswald Mosley”, no racism was directed at me in the school or even in the street where we lived. Although if we were out playing with the kids and somebody upset somebody from another school or group and they blurted out something racist, they'd always say, “Oh not you, Lloyd, you're one of us.” Well, I'm not but still... there was no direct racism throughout my school life.

“I thought they would treat us a bit more kindly. We spent all of our days here, we have no other home but Britain, this is the only home that we know now because if I go back to Jamaica I would be like a stranger there because all my young days and my life have been spent here.”



Novlett Waugh

Novlett came from Saint Catherine, Jamaica in 1960, to make a better life and help rebuild Britain.

The reason I left Jamaica – my husband came here before and he sent for me, and I followed him to make a better life. When I left Jamaica, it was after the Second World War and this country was not very good – they needed a lot of people to build the country, so they started to recruit from the West Indies.

Invitation from Enoch Powell

We came here and we worked very hard to build the country and do everything that they asked of us. At that time Enoch Powell was one of the ministers in the Conservative Party and he was the one that asked us to come.

When we came here it was very hard, the weather was very cold and dark and I was wondering to myself why this country is so dark and we have no daylight – the day looks like the night and the night look like the day! But we stuck in out because it was our mother country.

We didn't have to have any other passport – our passport was British passport, so we thought we were leaving one home and come to another home. And when we come it was not so. A lot of people was very hostile. In those days they say they don't want no blacks, no Irish and no dogs.

It was very hard to get a place to live, but nevertheless we worked hard to build this country and we do the best we can.

And when this time later down in different century, when we heard that we weren't wanted any more, it was very grieving to us because we know that all our young days and our lives were spent in this country.

Having our children, we thought everything was secure. But nevertheless, hearing that the Windrush people didn't have anywhere to go, their houses were taken away because they didn't have papers to show that they were belonging to this country.

Windrush – do more, get less

I thought they would treat us a bit more kindly. We spent all of our days here, we have no other home but Britain, this is the only home that we know now because if I go back to Jamaica I would be like a stranger there because all my young days and my life have been spent here.

And I'm saying the government is a bit disingenuous to do this to the Windrush people and it makes me feel sad that the more you do, is the less you get.

Catherine Browne – *Journey to the ‘Mother Country’*

Interview by *Hyacinth Wellington*, Connect Hackney Senior Media Group

Hyacinth Wellington: When did you come to England?

Catherine Browne (CB): I came here in 1955 from Barbados – I arrived here 13th of May. I came in at Plymouth and took the train to Paddington and then my husband picked me up from there.

How did you travel?

CB: I travelled by boat, the *SS Columbia* to Plymouth. We stopped at three places, but I didn't get out at Haiti because every person I saw in Haiti either they had one big foot or two big foot [from the disease elephantiasis], so I didn't go walking about. I don't know what Haiti was like because I never went. I came back to the boat.

What were your first impressions of Hackney in the 50s?

CB: Oh... Hackney was like a dump. It was terrible. My country was better than Hackney. You see all these derelict places and things, you couldn't believe that this is England, that they call the Mother Country. And my little place was better than Hackney. Yet I lived here all my life in Hackney.

How did your husband find work?

CB: They recruit them from home, from Barbados to come here and brought them here to various kind of jobs. So he was a guard on the Tube. And then he was promoted to driving.

What was your housing like in Hackney?

CB: Oh it was terrible, it was about 10 people living in one room. When one lot going out on mornings, the next lot coming in, on afternoons. And we had to share the cooker and everybody come with their pot to put on the stove and it only had three holes. You had to wait till

I take off my pot to put on yours. We had to punch money [into the gas/electricity meter]. That time it was a shilling, and a shilling would last you a long time. But some of us come from work and it had no money in it and they wouldn't put no money in it. But as soon as they hear you drop the money in they run out with their pot to put on the stove. It used to cause a lot of worries, especially with my husband – he never put up with it.

What kind of jobs were available?

CB: There were so many different kinds. When I came here they sent me from the Labour Exchange to the laundry in Richmond Road, and I was there to fold clothes when they come out of the colander. And after they see I could work fast they put me on the colander with the dirty clothes – oh, it was terrible.

So when I go home I used to tell him about how women went to take off their [dirty clothes] and put it in the colander. He said to me, "If you don't like it, you're going to have to go back [to Barbados]." And when I go home at night I had to wash my hands before I could do anything.

Would you return to the Caribbean, to the island of Barbados to live?

CB: No, I wouldn't. I would go and visit. If my mum was alive, yes. But she's not there and it's not the same.

My family always make noise at me, "When you coming home? When you coming home?" I say, "When I'm dead." Not even then. I have a little, I call it a hut down there and I told my niece she can do whatever she likes with it 'cause we are not coming back to live there. Even if I die, I say don't take me back there – throw me in the river or somewhere.

“The thing is though, with coming to Britain, I didn’t really know my parents because I was left there from a young age. So, when I came, I don’t think we actually formed a bond, there was no bond there – they were just two people really.”



Veronica White – *Forming new family bonds*

Veronica left Jamaica aged seven to begin a new life in Hackney. Interviewed by **Dahlia Douglas**

Dahlia Douglas: When did you come here?

Veronica White (VW): I came in 1967 (from Jamaica). I was seven years old. My mum and dad came to Britain when I was young.

They left me when I was six months with my grandparents and elder siblings and I really can’t tell you anything else about what took place in Jamaica apart from the fact that I came here when I was seven – that’s where I believe my life started to be honest.

We lived in Amhurst Road in Stoke Newington. We lived in the basement part of the house – luckily we had a bathroom, two bedrooms and a kitchen and we had a lovely big garden.

I went to primary school in Shacklewell Lane – people were accepting, I didn’t have any problems. I went to Clissold Park secondary school, school was my happiest time.

Later my dad got a house in Clacton – I think they did the partner’s scheme to put money together. That’s where we are still.

Can you remember your journey from Jamaica to Britain?

VW: I was so young, but I think I got on a plane – me and my brothers, with my uncle. I can’t remember leaving Jamaica, but I remember entering Britain on the plane. I was sitting by the window, we came at night and all I saw was the lights – they were like stars.

The thing is though, with coming to Britain, I didn’t really know my parents because I left there from a young age. So, when I came, I don’t think we actually formed a bond, there was no bond there – they were just two people really. So, the bond was with my elder sister really because she grew me with my granny.

The bond still, up till this day, I’ve not actually bonded with my mum – she never really took to me. My dad’s passed.

Thank you Veronica for sharing that. That is something I have heard from several people, where parents came ahead. People came for a better life, but they lost something with their children.

“*Things have improved tremendously now. I don't know who made the changes or how the changes came about, but I think why we are being treated differently now is simply because black people have opened their eyes to reality and don't just sit and take what is piled in our face.*”



Veronica Husbunds (Zando) – “*You had to have good nerves*”

Over the years Veronica and her family have faced challenges but they have also seen welcome change.

To be quite honest with you, I did not want to come to England – I was forced to come. When I understood that my mum was sending for me, I cried for a complete day because I never wanted to come.

Life in Portsmouth, Dominica, was very sweet, I had no problem at home. I was more or less self-employed, making dresses. Like it was a Windrush here, it was a Windrush for me over there making wedding dresses, making baby clothes, first communion dresses, bridesmaid dresses.

One of the most horrible experiences I had – I went to a shop to buy a suit and I said to the lady, “I would like to have this suit hanging there,” and she said, “Oh that’s too expensive for you.” So I said to her, “If you don’t know how much money I have, how can you tell me it is too expensive for me?” And then she just flung it on the counter, and then the manager came out and she said, “You don’t do that. If she says she wants that, you give that to her. If she couldn’t afford it, she would not ask for it.”

That’s the way we were treated when we came to this country. Walking the street, close to the houses, and you say, “Oh it’s drizzling” – and when you look up people are spitting on you. I’ve been hit with

coal. One day my Mum came home with her hand bleeding – boys were flinging eggs at her and cut her. It was tough going, you had to have good nerves to deal with the public in those days.

Things have improved tremendously now. I don’t know who made the changes or how the changes came about, but I think why we are being treated differently now is simply because black people have opened their eyes to reality and don’t just sit and take what is piled in our face.

About 12 years ago my mum, my two daughters and my grandchildren went to Jamaica on holiday. I did not go. And when they were coming back, the immigration officer said to my mum, “I’m sorry but we can’t allow you to come through because you don’t have a British passport, you have a stupid [Dominican] passport and that would not enable you entry to this country.” My daughter said, “Well, if you’re going to do that to her, you’ll have to do that to me and all my children.” So he said, “Okay, I’m going to let her through, but make sure you take her to get a better passport, because if she come through with this passport again, she won’t be coming back to this country.”

“But there was no bath. You had to go to the Hackney Baths. You’d go, queue up and then you go in and they let the water in for you. If it’s too hot you call out, ‘Cold water in number so and so.’ Or if it’s too cold you say, ‘Hot water in number so and so.’



Eugenia Fredrick – *Making a home in Hackney*

Interviewed by **Elizabeth McGovern** – Connect Hackney Senior Media Group

Elizabeth McGovern: Let’s start with you arriving in England...

Eugenia Fredrick (EF): I came on the boat. Took us quite a long time to get here. My dad came to meet us at the train station – after we came out of the boat, we went on the train and my dad met us at Waterloo and brought us to a house in Hackney where he was living with my mother and my aunt.

How did you feel?

EF: It was very, very cold and not enough garments. Nothing made us warm again. We went to work, we came home in the evening after work – cold, cold, cold. One year there was a bad fog as well. And of course there was black ice on the ground that refused to go away. And the buses, the conductor had to walk in front with a light so the bus will see where the road was. But now it’s all gone because there’s central heating now so there’s no smoke, and no coal to make the smoke. They were still building after the war – there was quite a lot of houses they were rebuilding. I watched some go up, and others come down, then they go up – different buildings, different things, different shops, different roads. I’ve seen a lot of change.

How did that compare with what you expected in London?

EF: Well I didn’t know what to expect because I was coming over to meet up with my parents. So whatever is going on, I’ll just join in, you know.

When I came, you would get a room in a house. If you were lucky you would get maybe two rooms. Well with me, we had two rooms with a bathroom sink on the landing, with a cooker that was on the landing, and a meter to drop your money in for the gas and the electricity and that was it. There was no [council] place for us. You had to find your own place. A lot of people didn’t want to rent a place to the black people that was coming over to England. The people that used to rent houses to the West Indian people was always the Jewish people because, remember, they came over to the same thing [when they arrived in Britain].

I have cousins in London, because my mother, she came from Ireland...

EF: She probably went through the same thing because you used to have the newspapers in the library, lots of houses to let. You used to go looking for rooms for rent and they would say, “No Irish, no children, no dogs, no blacks.”

How did you feel about that?

EF: Well it never happened to me personally. It’s what you read and what

other people say. It never happened to me so it didn't bother me that much.

What did you think about people who tried to protest about that?

EF: Well I never used to protest, I would stay behind my closed door. But whoever wants to protest they can go and protest, but I wouldn't get involved, I would stay out of it. It's wrong, but you [don't have to] protest now because there is the law [against race discrimination].

Old Hackney Baths

It was all one family in the house – my dad and his sisters and their husbands, we all lived in one house. So we were on the top floor, and his sister was on the other floor. And all the boys used to be in the basement in that house. And there was a toilet – it was outside, but you could open the door inside to go.

But there was no bath. You had to go to the Hackney Baths. You'd go and queue up and then you go in and they let the water in for you. If it's too hot you call out, "Cold water in number so and so." Or if it's too cold you say, "Hot water in number so and so." And then you have your bath. When you've finished, you've had your half hour bath, you come out and they come and wash the bath and someone else comes and uses the bath.

Heating was a paraffin heater, you'd go and buy paraffin to put in the heater to warm up, to dry the clothes in the room. And sometimes you would do your toast on top of the heater – it had the lines on top – and you could do your toast, and that was it! That was how we used to have toast.

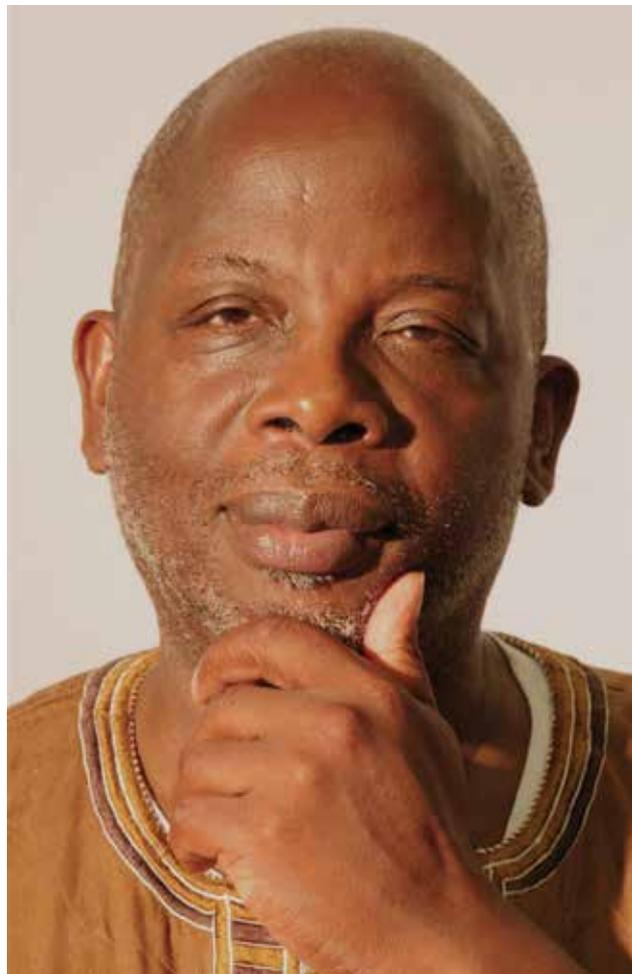
Did you like toast?

EF: Well... stale bread is better toasted! But then again, you probably couldn't afford to buy a toaster anyway.





Photos: Marlyna Gilbracka



“Eventually a gang came into existence that were prejudiced against the Indians, for whatever reason. It used to be they want to fight with the blacks, but then they turned their attention to the Indians – they were the National Front.”



Priscilla Murphy – *Culture clashes and racial harmony*

During the 60s and 70s a new kind of racism emerged in multicultural Britain.

I say Barbuda because my mother, grandmother and all the generations before them come from Barbuda. The women are usually short and sturdy and the men are tall like warriors.

When we came over we first lived in Dalston in London and spent a year here, it was just after the war. Afterwards we went to Leicester and that's where we stayed – I enjoyed Leicester tremendously.

I remember going in a shop across from my street and I wanted to buy a Kit Kat and I said, “Hello, can I buy a kitty cat please?” and all the people in the grocers' looked at me and the lady said, “Do you want some cat food?”, and I'm getting impatient now, and the lady looked and said, “Or is it a chocolate you want?” and I said, “Yes, a kitty cat” and everybody burst out laughing! I really enjoyed being in Leicester because it was like home from home, the English people were trying to get on with us.

In 1960s and 70s the atmosphere started changing. Then the Asians weren't all that friendly. You tried to speak to them, they said, “No speak English” and they kept away from you. if you're walking on the street they draw away from you, but if there's a white person on the street they don't draw away.

Eventually a gang came into existence that were prejudiced against the Indians, for whatever reason. It used to be they want to fight with the blacks, but then they turned their attention to the Indians – they were the National Front. They started on them and the same ones that weren't talking to us or walking anywhere close then decided they want to be our brothers and our sisters because they realise they were vulnerable to these people and the Caribbean people were more aggressive and these people were more scared of the Caribbeans. And because the Asians knew that, they thought, join hands with them – to protect themselves.

So then you start seeing in the 70s, “Oh hello brother,” and they opening up their house to you and being nice to you because the NF started doing all kinds of things to them that they weren't expecting all that to happen to them. So they realised their strength was with us.

The National Front were dreadful, smashing up windows, beating up people, they'd kill people, rape women, it was dreadful. When they realised the Indians were joining with us it cooled down – because they weren't at liberty any more to do what they liked.

“My mum made us pink sailor dresses for us to set sail for England – our journey took three weeks. I was only five, I remember my sister telling me she had heard the horn blowing and it had frightened her.”



Patricia Rodgers – *Being part of the Windrush Generation*

By Patricia Rodgers

My name is Patricia. I was born in the Caribbean on the island of Saint Vincent where I grew up with my four sisters, mum and dad. My dad went to Aruba, then went to England and my mum followed later.

My four sisters and myself lived with our gran for a short while. My mum then came back from Saint Vincent to take us to England. My mum made us pink sailor dresses for us to set sail for England – our journey took three weeks. I was only five, I remember my sister telling me she had heard the horn blowing and it had frightened her.

On our journey in the morning my sister would have boiled egg, so every morning she would eat about four eggs. One of my sisters and I loved our vanilla flavour ice-cream.

When we arrived in England we moved to High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. The first thing we had to eat was a packet of ready salted crisps. I don't think you can go wrong with plain crisps costing two and half pence but these days, 70 to 90 pence depends on the crisps!

Biking and athletics

We lived in a big house which we shared with a few other families. We lived there for a few years. Eventually we moved to a

three-bedroom house. I believe the reason the town is called High Wycombe because it has a lot of hills.

While living in Buckinghamshire, my mum bought us a purple chopper bike and, yes, for the five of us to share again! But my sisters did not like riding nor did they want to learn, so the bike became mine.

I had fun, but as I mentioned earlier, it is very hilly so I would take the bike from the shed and go riding. Going down the hill was fun, the downside was having to push it back up again – in those days they did not have much gears.

Winning medals

While living in High Wycombe, I was a member of an athletics club, Wycombe Phoenix Harriers. I got my athletic ability from my dad who was a professional bicycle rider in Aruba. There were many events in the summertime. I ran the 100 and 200 metres and relay, and in the winter we only ran one race which was the cross country. The time I spent at the club, I received four medals.

I love my time in High Wycombe. When eventually we moved to London, I lived in North London for many years and now reside in East London.

With thanks to everyone who contributed to Windrush, Stories of a Hackney Generation

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Eugenia Fredrick – bridesmaid in Hackney, 1960s

Ngoma Bishop presents one of his first poems...

Hotter fire

Well I came here cos I was told
I mean as a child of eight years old
I never knew about no streets of gold
But I was unprepared for the freezing cold
Yet colder still the people here
who'd made us come
even subsidised our fare
But made sure we worked hard for our share
of the freezing cold and the icy air
But then a new generation came along
This one stood firm and this one stood strong
And overstanding what was going down
This one stood up and held its ground
Cried Powell, who first made us come
“Go back, go back or blood will run”
but youth who'd never seen the sun said, “Huh, let it run,
make fire burn and more besides where shall we go?
For here we born and here we grow
and we're accustomed to the snow
for hotter fire is what we know
Well what shall be must come to pass
The snow and ice won't always last
We – and they – know that it must pass
So get ready for the furnace blast
Hotter fire