

Caribbean Journeys

Travel Writing by Nottingham Caribbean Elders



Edited by

Sofia Aatkar and Kelsi Delaney

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FOREWORD

Nick Everett

What was it like for young Caribbean men and women to come to Britain for the first time in the 1950s and 1960s? And what has it been like for them to return to their Caribbean homes in the decades since settling here in the East Midlands?

The accounts in this volume by Nottingham Caribbean Elders provide a remarkably full and varied range of answers to these questions. The book is endlessly diverting as well as informative. The many forms of strangeness encountered both in Britain on first arrival and back (after more or less prolonged absence) in the Caribbean contribute strongly to this, of course, but so do the wit and humour that accompany, and enhance, the serious and poignant in so many of the contributions. As the book progresses, the Caribbean views of Britain and British views of the Caribbean start merging and making way for a more complex cultural collaboration between the two, giving eloquent expression to how both have informed the lives of its contributors.

One of our primary aims at the University of Leicester's Centre for New Writing is to help local East Midlands communities establish a literary record of their distinctive experiences and perspectives. We are delighted, therefore, to support this collection of accounts which will continue to educate readers for many years to come about these extraordinary journeys in their cultural past.

Centre for New Writing
University of Leicester

PREFACE

Sofia Aatkar and Kelsi Delaney

The charity Journey to Justice ‘empowers people to take action for social justice through learning about human rights movements and the arts’.¹ Inspired by this mission statement, we developed a series of workshops for Nottingham-based people of Caribbean descent with the purpose of encouraging them to write about their personal experiences of travel. The Caribbean, as a geographical locale, has been shaped by the movement of people in and out of the region. Travel as a result of slavery, colonisation, indentured labour, migration, and more recently, tourism, has affected the Caribbean demographically, economically and culturally. As such, our aim has been to promote the authentic voices of Caribbean people as they reflect on their travels in order to create a lasting record of their experiences.

Implicit in the notion of travel is the idea of home. This is reflected in the narratives in this anthology as most of the participants describe a journey back home or their attempt to create a new home after migrating away from the Caribbean. Consequently, many of the travel accounts in this book depict either the passage of travel from the Caribbean to Britain or from Britain to the Caribbean, with a few participants also describing their journey to Nottingham. The book contains a diverse range of expressions, because, as editors, we thought it was important that the participants’ experiences are expressed in their own words. Some participants chose to vocalise their stories and have them transcribed, whereas others chose to write them. The narratives offer a unique insight into the complexities of belonging and the personal and familial politics of a return journey.

There is a widespread misconception that the black, specifically Caribbean, presence in Britain commenced with the docking of the S. S. Empire Windrush on 22nd June 1948. However, as texts such as Peter Fryer’s *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984) and David Olusoga’s *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016) have verified, black presence in Britain dates back as early as the Roman era.² By publishing this book of post-1948 narratives it is not our intention to reinforce the Windrush myth, but only to document the voices of the participants and to give them a platform through which to share their voyages.

Travel writing, as a genre, is often associated with European imperialism and accused of perpetuating colonial sentiment. At the 70th anniversary of the docking of the S. S. Empire Windrush, our anthology offers a timely intervention. By writing about their travel experiences, the participants of our project present alternative perspectives to those found within imperial travel narratives about the Caribbean by European authors, and thus, actively counter the Eurocentrism linked with the genre.

PREFACE

Other than the present publication, other outcomes from this project include two poems written collectively by the participants of the workshops. One of these centres on the theme of 'journeys' and the other on 'home'. Any participant who wanted to be involved wrote a line expressing what the concepts of journey and home meant to them. We then recorded the participants performing their lines of the poem and collated these into two videos. The collective poems can be found on the Caribbean Journeys Nottingham YouTube channel.³

¹ Journey to Justice, 'About', <<http://journeytojustice.org.uk>> [accessed 11th September 2017] (para. 1 of 3).

² Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2016).

³ Sofia Aatkar and Kelsi Delaney, *Caribbean Journeys* [YouTube channel], <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuVimtbVMTir_UYa7gR2_qg> [accessed 19th January 2018].

DESCRIPTION OF PARTNERS

Sofia Aatkar

Sofia is a Midlands3Cities and AHRC-funded PhD researcher at Nottingham Trent University. Her thesis focuses on anglophone Caribbean-British travel narratives and she examines the extent to which Caribbean-born travel writers work within or against the genre's imperial inheritance. Sofia is a postgraduate associate of the Centre for Travel Writing Studies and the Postcolonial Studies Centre at Nottingham Trent, and she managed the Journey to Justice: Nottingham twitter account from January 2017–June 2017.



Sofia Aatkar.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTNERS

Kelsi Delaney

Kelsi is a doctoral researcher and poet at the University of Leicester funded by Midlands3Cities and the AHRC. Her cross-disciplinary research in Caribbean Studies and Poetry Studies focusses on the cultural politics of poetic form in contemporary Caribbean poetry. Her thesis aims to explore the impact that the diverse cultural heritages of the Caribbean region have had on the works of contemporary Caribbean poets. Kelsi is also the Research Network Administrator for BA and AHRC funded projects on Representations of Crime in the Caribbean.



Kelsi Delaney.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTNERS

Museumand, The National Caribbean Heritage Museum

Located in Nottingham, United Kingdom, Museumand are a unique, vibrant, creative organisation working to commemorate and celebrate Caribbean heritage. Catherine Ross, Museumand's founder, encourages people to get in touch with the museum to share their stories. You can contact them on twitter (@Museumand_) or via Facebook.



Lynda-Louise Burrell and Catherine Ross , photo courtesy of the Nottingham Post.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTNERS

The Centre For New Writing

The Centre for New Writing was established to diversify literary voices beyond the metropolitan mainstream. From their Midlands base they specialise in devolved literary culture. The Centre fosters an understanding of Britain's literary landscape which sees beyond established hierarchies and actively seeks to reshape this landscape.

Journey to Justice

Inspired by Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s call for solidarity during the Civil Rights movement in the United States of America, Journey to Justice promotes acts of social justice led by 'people like us'. Their mission statement is 'to inspire and empower people to take action for social justice through learning from human rights movements and the arts.'

Midlands3Cities

Midlands3Cities is an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded doctoral training partnership. It brings together doctoral researchers from across six institutions, namely Nottingham Trent University, the University of Nottingham, the University of Leicester, De Montfort University, Birmingham City University and the University of Birmingham. Midlands3Cities provides combined research expertise for the professional and personal development of the next generation of arts and humanities doctoral researchers.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Members of the Gedling Elders

Tryphena Anderson
May Barrett
Carmeleta Burke
Louise Garvey
Hartsel Garvey
Enid McLawrence
Evadne Samuels

Friends of Museumand: The National Caribbean Heritage Museum

Lenny Bedward
Elzida Bejamin
Jasmin Laing
Margaret Hazel
O'Neill Simms
Madge Spencer
Oliver Spencer
Imogen Wallace
Chelsie Wint

Museumand: The National Caribbean Heritage Museum

Lynda-Louise Burrell
Catherine Ross

COLLECTIVE POEMS

Written by Caribbean Journeys Workshop Participants

The following poems were created during the Caribbean Journeys workshops. The poems were written collectively; any participant who wished to be involved contributed a line to each poem. Video recordings of the poems can be found on YouTube on our channel, 'Caribbean Journeys':

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuVimtbVMTir_UYa7gR2_qg.



Caribbean Journeys Workshop Participants, 2017. Photo by Museumand.

Journeys

Journeys are a great experience: seeing the sky above, the sea below,
and the plane in the middle, shows how great God is,
Journeys are going to places, meeting new people, finding out new things,
and eating new food,
Journeys are visits to family and friends,
Journeys are very good for experience,
Journeys to home are very exciting,
Journeys are meeting new people,
Journeys are going to a place I've never been before, it means great expectation,
Journeys are a good thing and a bad thing,
Journeys can be fun but also painful,
Journeys are where you go, where you live your life and how you live your life.

Home

Home is where I lay my head,
Home is the heart of my life,
Home is getting away from it all, going home, shut the door, and leave the world
behind,
Home is where the heart is,
Home is where I feel safe, with my family around me,
Home is where my inner soul lives,
Home is a safe place for shelter,
Home is a beautiful place to be,
Home is everything,
Home is where the heart is,
Home is where I take my shoes off and put my slippers on,
Home is a great place to be,
Home is where my mother is with open arms,
Home: sometimes I feel like I don't want to leave it,
Home is where I belong,
Home sweet home.

JOURNEYS TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

TRAVELLING TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

Carmeleta Burke

Preparing to travel to the UK was exciting. I packed all my clothes in my suitcase given to me by my grandmother. I remember the elegant matching skirt and top: sky blue with a stripe and the blue and white stripe camisole. With my gloves and pearl earrings and high heel shoes I looked really nice. We landed at Shannon airport.

Because I was under age, an escort was provided for me by the travel service. I arrived on 22nd October 1960 which was exciting but a little disappointing. It was cold, damp and grey. As the train travelled through the countryside, all I could see were trees and houses that looked like factories with smoke coming from the chimneys. I did not know what to expect. There was no gold lining the street as I was led to believe.

I arrived at Midlands Station and took a taxi to my mother's address. When I arrived she was surprised as she didn't get my letter or telegram. I was quite happy to meet my new step-dad and my two new sisters, aged two and four. The house was big and full of other tenants—that is how it was in the 1960s. This was all new to me, but my mum and my step-dad made me comfortable. We were all happy together, the house belonged to my mother and new step-dad, but there were about three other faces in the house. They took it in turns to use the two stoves.

Sundays were not the same as in Jamaica: going to church was different in England so I was not too happy. Anyway, I was taken to the Youth Employability Job Centre in town, they sent me to many jobs, but I was accepted by Boots Pure Drug Company packing and bottling tablets in Beeston, while attending college one day a week as I was under eighteen years old. I later left and worked on Faraday Road as a machinist, doing smocking, baby wear and buttoning. When I was eighteen I studied for qualifications in registered nursing and midwifery to be a nursing sister at Nottingham City Hospital and Firs Maternity Hospital. I later completed a course of one year at the polytechnic to become a health visitor, working with many General Practitioners at various health centres. My specialities were pregnant women, children from birth to five years and their mothers. As well as being a nurse, I returned to college to study English and Sociology which gave me more qualifications. I retired at the age of fifty-six years.

I got married when I was twenty-two and had two children, a boy and a girl. Since I retired, as well as being a proud grandmother to my four grandchildren, I keep active and busy with my church duties, gardens, visiting the elderly, cooking for my grandchildren, walking, exercising and attending my senior group. I have been a widow for over sixteen years and am fully immersed in my Lord.

I returned to Jamaica on many occasions over the years with my husband before he died. It was his wish to stay in Jamaica for good, but his health faded. I have assumed a home in Jamaica since 2007. I happily return twice a year with my children, grandchildren, family and friends. I spend two or three months at a time. I have many returning residents who were from Nottingham as my friends and neighbours. I have a lovely time with my returnees and some friends from the church.

There are ongoing problems in Jamaica and unfortunately some people are targeted, including business people and returning residents. Anyone can be targeted, just never be too trusting and always keep your eyes open and look over your shoulders. It is always wise to have your house alarmed and registered with the security service there. The camera is useful.

I had a successful life. Obstacles on the way were challenging, but I was able to rise above it. I did this through education and trying to rise to the top of my profession. These values I try to instil into my children and grandchildren.



Shannon Airport 1961. Photo by James O'Dea.

1964

Evadne Samuels

I was at school one day, and when I came home, my mum told me we were going to England. I was over the moon, as were my four brothers and sisters. I told all my friends I was going to England. From then on that was all I could think about. We had our photos taken for our passports and then our mum took us to the shop to get our shoes and clothes. Our mum gave us the privilege of wearing high-heeled shoes and tight dresses. After that, we gripped our cases and packed. On the day we came to travel all our friends came to meet us at our transport to say goodbye. I said, 'I'll write to you.' When I reached Kingston airport, the plane was not ready, so we were transferred to a hotel. We were disappointed because we wanted to get on the plane. While we were in the hotel we jumped on the bed and flushed the toilet. As a consequence, we missed our evening meals because we were having too much fun. We went out to the veranda to watch television. I hadn't seen a television before. I thought the people on the television could see me! When we went back to the airport and got on the plane we were excited. When we arrived in England, people came to meet us. They bought Babycham. Shortly after that I went to work. I earned £3 per week. I bought my wages home to my mum and she would give me £1 for pocket money. I saved and bought myself a cabinet and a bicycle. We had to do everything in the same room: wash, cook, and look after a baby. When it turned to winter, I did not like the country anymore because it was very cold. My hands and feet were numb. I would stand in front of the fire and the front of my clothes and my feet would get burnt. My fingers were so numb I couldn't clock in at work. I kept falling in the snow. I never liked to wear a coat because I wanted to show my clothes. When I grew up I started to understand things. My awareness of the country expanded and now I've been here for fifty-three years. I am quite happy living here now, but I have been back to Jamaica many times. I don't have any intention of changing country again.

THE JOURNEY

Oliver Spencer

There is an old saying, the source of which I am unable to recall, to preface what I have been asked to write: 'England is pleasant for those who are rich but England is a cruel place for such poor folks as !'

The early and the mid-Fifties marked the beginning of the mass movement of immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean Islands to Great Britain, stretching from Jamaica in the North to Trinidad in the South. Some travelled by air while others used the cheaper transport by sea, passenger liners from Spain and ships from Italy. The then-colony of St Kitts Nevis, two of the islands that make up the Leeward Islands, followed in the footsteps of the much larger islands such as Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, British Honduras and British Guyana of Central America. People from these British Colonies journeyed to the UK with one aim in mind, and that was to find employment. Fathers, husbands, daughters, sons and mothers set out from their homelands, very often to prepare for other siblings and other members of their family that would subsequently join them in cities all over the British Isles.

The year 1960 saw me and other members of my family that included my mother, Alice Maude, journeying to Basseterre to wave goodbye to my elder brother, John McClaude, who was about to sail away to England with hundreds of Kittitians and Nevisians on the ship that entered the Basseterre Roadstead that day. Tears were shed when it was time for the boarding of the ship. Indeed, it was a great joy to see that great big ship coming into the Basseterre Roadstead, to watch the passengers being taken out to the ship for boarding, and to see the ship depart from our shores. Some with the hopes of returning while others knew not what awaited them but with the hope that springs eternal for a better future.

My brother John promised me that when he settled in the United Kingdom he would help me to join him there, a promise he soon fulfilled. The September of that year, I too followed with a similar farewell by family and friends. The boat that took me from my homeland was not an ocean-going liner but a coastal trap that plied the waters of the Caribbean, picking up passengers like cattle from the smaller islands. The food for the period on the boat was simply corned beef and white rice—filling, but not appetising. We were taken to Barbados to await the Italian liner SS Sorrento. The first leg of my outward journey took us through our sister islands of Montserrat, Antigua and Dominica and then on through the Windward Islands of St Lucia, St Vincent, Grenada and then across to Barbados. The journey to Barbados gave me the opportunity to see the islands that I read and heard about during my school days and when international sport was being played. Although it was brief, I was glad I had the opportunity to step ashore these islands and to have this placed on record.

On arriving at Barbados, I, along with other passengers bound for the UK, were eventually housed in a building operated by the YMCA. It was quite comfortable and it also boasted a well-groomed cricket field and afforded us an opportunity to watch a first-class cricket match. After the third day of waiting for the ocean-going liner we joined the SS Sorrento for the trip across the infamous Atlantic with its huge waves. We could hear the bellowing horns of two sister ships as they passed each other in the mid-Atlantic Ocean. We were bound for the United Kingdom, calling at Tenerife in the Canary Islands and Barcelona in Spain. That night when our ship docked in Italy, we travelled to France and arrived at midnight to a ferry to travel to the Port of New Haven on the east of England. Then on to Victoria Station in London, then to Kings Cross Station, then to my final destination, the city of Leeds in the county of Yorkshire.

Having lived in the United Kingdom for almost seven wonderful years, my wife and I took the decision to go to the land of my birth, St Kitts in 1967 to start a new life there. It was still possible to travel to the Caribbean by ship. We sailed from the port of Southampton on the southern coast of England, then on to the Canary Islands, Barbados, Trinidad, Venezuela, Curacao, Jamaica, the French Islands, Martinique and Guadeloupe, and then to the island of Antigua and flew from Antigua to my homeland of St Kitts. I consider the experience of travelling between the United Kingdom and my homeland to be invaluable for the lessons learned and the long-lasting friendships made. The islands and the countries I visited have made a lasting impression upon my life, and that of my inward eye.



Oliver Spencer, 2009. Photo provided by Oliver Spencer.

‘BY GOD’S GOOD GRACE’

Chelsie Wint

I have always been ambitious. Our mother taught us that we should always work hard for good things in life, mainly in helping people. I have lived my life and travelled on life’s journeys with this in mind.

I was sixteen years old when my mother died. I always wanted to be a missionary and I planned to go to a Bible school in Mandeville. My father, though, was not so keen. He felt that missionaries always got killed and he didn’t want to lose another member of his family.

Undaunted and ambitious, I turned to a second career dream, that of being a nurse. I had two brothers and an older sister who was not in the best of health, two young nephews and a niece at home, and on my mum’s passing it was left to me to do the caring for the family. It was not easy at the age of sixteen to have such responsibility, but by God’s good grace I did this until I married, keeping my dream of being a nurse alive and staying hopeful that it would happen one day!

I got married at twenty-one and within a short space of time we had four children. The youngest was only three weeks old when we decided to take up the same opportunity as many other people, to go to work and perhaps live in the UK.

The plan was that my husband would go to England first and then, when he had sorted work and accommodation for us, we would follow. I did this in 1964 and our family grew by another two children from 1966–1970.

Finding work for myself was not particularly difficult and I enjoyed working at many places, doing diverse work in factories and at the universities doing catering. My husband, too, worked at many different places. His first job was mining, but that was before we came to join him. Back in sunny Jamaica he had been a carpenter, building houses and furniture, he was a very creative artisan. In England he worked in engineering and then at Chillwell Ordinance Factory until his retirement. Well, I say he retired formally from work, but for a while he tried his hand at driving in a taxi service company.

I worked in lace-making factories, until one day I got a job at Sherwood Hospital as an Auxiliary Nurse from 1971–1974. I began my training as a state-enrolled Nurse in 1974 and later, on the advice of the General Hospital I was working at, got a Diploma in Ear, Nose and Throat care. I worked in the department for sixteen years, but it was the hardest and most difficult job I had to do in the nursing service, as sometimes patients deliberately took to spewing and throwing up on me, perhaps it was because I was black!

I retired from nursing in 1996. I had fulfilled a life’s dream! I trained in Derby and worked in geriatric care as well as general hospitals. I enjoyed all of them.

Deciding what to do in retirement was easy. I have always been a Christian, and a faithful and regular church-goer. I served the Lord and the church as a secretary for overseas missions in the choir, and now as a member of the Voice of Vision Community Choir. I am a regular at prayer meetings and Monday Meetings for Women, and went as part of a visitors’ group giving ministry to older people in care homes and nursing homes.

It is a great privilege to be a Trustee and Elder at my church. In 2002 I went to university to take a certificate in Intercultural Theology. In the two years, I learned to use a computer and really took to writing about life. I now share my insights and learning about life in my Christian ministry, speaking at conventions, or preaching in areas throughout Nottingham, but also as far afield as Birmingham.

Life’s journey in my eighty-one years has not been easy, but I have always been in God’s hands, so never worried unduly. I did many things I have dreamed of, and embraced the things he has sent my way. Journeys from one country to another, from one city to another, from one career to another, and the emotional journeys, too, have given me a zest for even more life. God’s word has kept me strong and hopeful, especially Psalm 139; perhaps it will help you on your travels also.



Caribbean Journeys workshop in progress, 2017. Photo by Museumand.

‘MY DREAMS WERE HERE...’

O’Neill Simms

My dreams were here. It was not exactly what I dreamed, but it was close to what I saw in my dreams. Everything was built the same but the people were different; the way people talked, some were nice but some were not. I could not understand the English accent at first, people talked too quickly. The process you go through to get a job was not like back home. In England, you have to have a CV, a national insurance number and identification. In Jamaica I never had to do that, it was all by recommendations instead. It was easy for me to get a job in Jamaica.

When we went back to Jamaica it looked so different. To me it looked smaller. I remember going in my back garden. Before it looked massive, but it looked so small and strange this time. The people looked different and sounded different to how I remembered, I never knew that this was what my own accent sounded like. It shakes me up. It surprises me.

When I was about eight I lived with my dad. It was me, my brother and my sister. I first met my mum when I was nine or ten. My father was a juror and used to go to court early in the morning and used to leave us money to get food and cook. We each cooked our own food. Our neighbours used to try to nick things from my dad’s shop. One day this lady came in and tried to steal some stuff. My sister asked for it back but the lady said ‘I’m taking it’, so we tried to take it back from her. We started to fight. My sister started to beat the lady with a piece of stick and we tried to wrestle the stuff away from her. It was breadfruit. We were like a little team.

My dad leased land to people, he had a lot of property and used to take me around to see the elders. In Jamaica, you leased land from individuals, not companies, so my dad would go around and collect the money so he knew everybody. I learned to respect my elders. I grew up with discipline and respect for people. But my life changed when I turned thirteen and started working for myself. I got a driver’s license when I was sixteen and did farm work on a cane farm for five years. I drove a tractor and bought cane to the factory. I drove a truck, tractor and a grabber. When the sun is hot and you cut cane you have to sing. That was a part of my life challenge. I think doing those things made me the man I am now: motivated, willing and happy to do things for people.

I first went to Saint Martin when I was twenty-one. It was an experience. During my first month in Saint Martin everything was ok, but by the second month I was on the street. Something went wrong and I could not get residency. My sister kicked me out. I had nowhere to go and I knew nobody. On my way out of my sister’s, I saw this house with burglar bars. I slept on the porch for three weeks. I worked with the third biggest company in Saint Martin but I had no home. I was tired from sleeping rough.

‘MY DREAMS WERE HERE...’

After that, I slept on a friend’s chair for three weeks. I know God is alive because when my first payslip came they had over payed me and I got 1400 USD, not 650 USD. I think that was God. I know because that never happens. That changed my life because then I could rent my first place.

I met so many people through my job. I become one of the best salesmen for a Canadian charcoal company. In 2001, they filed for bankruptcy and had a massive sale. I had no job for four months. The manager recommended me to a new company. Then I worked for a restaurant. My wife and children were already in Britain, and after eighteen months I decided to join them. I thought I was visiting for six months, but after all these years I am still here.



A traditional 1920s Caribbean house. Photo by Oliver Spencer.

'I MISS THE SUNSHINE'

Imogen Wallace

I am from Jamaica. I arrived here in the 1960s. It was not cold, as it was in the month of May. We were coming to stay with our cousin in London, but a family friend in Nottingham said we could stay with them. So, my sister and I came to Nottingham, for we say London is like Kingston.

Our first week in Nottingham we went to look for a job. We was given a job, we just ask if there is any job, and they say, 'Yes, come in'.

We were the first black people to work at that place. We came here with £40 each, we paid for a room to live in, we had the job both myself and my sister. The first week wages we got our coat and boots and gloves. We were welcome at the workplace, they like us. My sister say she did not want to stay in Nottingham, so she went to London. I stay in Nottingham. I got married, work very hard for what I had, many different jobs some going to work in snow and frost. I fell down and had to get up and go on.

The winter was very bad sometimes, when you try to open the door your fingers was so frozen you can hardly put the key to open the door, times has change, the weather is like summer now.

I miss the sunshine but I still enjoy my life in England. When I was in Jamaica life was not too hard, for when you have your parents to look after you they try to give you the best. That is why when the Queen came to Jamaica and say they are short of nurses and people to help for plenty of job, that is why we did want to come. I been home to Jamaica about five times, it is a lovely island but everything has change. I have four sisters and two brothers, all my sisters live in England, one brother came, the other one did not want to come. When my parents passed away we went to bury them, we all had a nice memorial funeral. Time has change, no more coal fire, paraffin lamp or living and cooking in the one bedroom, going to the wash house in Willobough Street to wash your blankets and dry your jumpers. I love to plant flowers and visit the sick in nursing home. I work in one for seventeen years.

MI BLACK AND MI PROUD

Jasmin Laing

Mi black and mi proud,
Mi stand out ina any crowd,
If yu no like me, mi no care,
Cause mi a go marry, a millionaire.
Fi mi mada always tell mi;
Pickney, holy u head up high,
Grab every appatrunity,
No mek life pass yu by.
She sey; when yu a woman it hard,
When yu a black woman; it harda.
She sey; choose carefully
De man who a go be yu baby fada.
She sey: when tings hard and dutty tuff
Love nah lass if de money no nuff.
So mi no care wey yu all waan tink,
Even if mi hafi spike him drink.
Cause mi black and mi proud,
Mi hafi stand out ina every crowd,
If you don't like it, mi no care,
Cause mi done have mi a millionaire.

‘WE ALL SEE THE WORLD THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES’

Elzida Benjamin

I first came to England in April 1961. It was cold and damp and I did not enjoy being here at first. However, as time went by I became more settled, and was able to like Nottingham.

In those days, it was easy to get jobs, and I worked as a machinist at three different factories. First at a knitwear factory on Arkwright Street, the other two made what was called ‘city uniform’. Now I must say that as a youngster I always wanted to be a nurse, and in 1969 I applied and was accepted to my first nursing post. I later retired in the year 2000. I thank God for making this possible.

I am sure we will all agree that the face of England has changed over the past sixty or seventy years. Our streets have become more dangerous, our homes less secure and families are more distant. Despite these unpleasant changes and more, England in my opinion still has much more to offer than many countries around the world, for example our health service, our benefits, and education.

In my island, St. Kitts, I can see many changes for good, and visitors are usually impressed with what they see in this beautiful island. Of course we all see the world through different eyes, and in my view there are many unique blessings that England has to offer. So, my plan at the moment is to stay where I am today and tomorrow according to the will of God.

‘SWEET SIXTEEN AND READY FOR ADVENTURE’

Margaret Hazel

I pestered my mother to let me go to England. It took three months of pester power, as well as good and helpful behaviour around the house to show I was mature enough and responsible enough to take the life-changing step of moving to live in a new country. I was ready to make my mark on the world and certainly ready to have fun before settling down to create a family and do all the other things expected of a young woman. If I was going to do something momentous and fun, the time was right. It had to be now, 1956. I was sixteen and felt the world was opening its arms to me to try new things, and England was a good place to start! Lots of my friends were talking about the possibilities England was offering, but I knew for many of them that's what it would remain, just talk. Money and jobs were scarce on the island and the fare was more than many could afford.

My mother finally gave in to my pleas and my step-father agreed, provided I was chaperoned. While they asked around their friends to see who could accompany me, I set about saving to buy the things I wanted to take. A girl has to travel in style and I wanted to show England we know how to dress! I tried anything and everything to save money. I wanted to have enough money so that if I didn't find a job in England I could still survive. I used my two main skills, I made clothes for people, and I baked and sold sugar cake around the villages. I invited my extended family to donate to my big adventure and when local people wanted an extra pair of hands to do things around the home, shopping, or in the garden, I was first in line to offer my help.

Eventually, clothes were bought, money was collected and the fare paid. For the first time, nerves kicked in and I asked myself a hundred times, 'What if I made the wrong decision to leave my island home and family all in the name of adventure?' Perhaps I wasn't old enough to take such a step? Perhaps I wasn't sufficiently worldly-wise? Perhaps it's a case of the better the devil you know! However, by the time I started to have these doubts everyone else was more excited than me! I was hearing stories about England; how people had made a lot of money in record time, how jobs were two a penny so people could do the job they wanted not the job they had to do, how people were going to the theatre and cinema every weekend and living it up generally. My girlfriends were teasing me about the possibility of marrying a white man, and that with my skill and approach I could end up becoming a real rich woman. All of this was well and good, but inside I was terrified. What I wanted most at that time was my family to come with me, we had always done things together! Instead, my companion on my big adventure was going to be my mother's friend, who lived on our estate and whose son had been a soldier during the war. Her son had decided to make his home in England and now wanted his mother to join him.

The day of my departure from the sunny isle of St Kitts finally arrived. I stepped on the ship's gangway and looked back to see my parents. I gave the most confident look and smile I could muster to reassure them, then continued gingerly. The ship was rocking gently from side to side, so progress was slow. I got to the top eventually and tried to look as if I was a seasoned world traveller.

My first impressions on seeing my cabin was that the bunk bed would never win any prizes for comfort, for there was hardly any filling in the mattress. The cabin was the smallest room I had ever been in. I felt convinced that living in such close proximity to four people I didn't know for the next three weeks would be disastrous.

There were more men than women as passengers, and there weren't many from St Kitts. I was going to have to make friends with people from other Caribbean islands, islands I had only heard others speak about. This was my first journey off island! I am a naturally shy person and I wasn't looking forward to talking with so many strangers but needs must. One of the first lessons I learned was that people enjoy talking about food. In the many conversations I struck up—in the cabin, the dining room and on the decks—we spoke of how Caribbeans cook dishes that carry the same name differently. We Kittitians cooked with brown rice, and Jamaicans seemed to prefer white. I learned that Bajans called turned cornmeal cou-cou, but that whatever island they are from Caribbeans love cornmeal porridge!

Many women travellers were also seamstresses, all having served different kinds and different lengths of apprenticeship. They were all confident that making clothes was going to help them make big money. Many had made clothes for white people and thought that doing this in England would help them make friends and settle in quicker. Every day, women showed off their skill in what they wore. Flared skirts were the big thing and the yards of fabric were made into pleats, into frills and sported other decoration including patch pockets. We were going to take England by storm!

A few travellers wanted to be teachers, but the most popular job women were hoping for was to be a nurse. That was my dream and hope too, and I listened avidly as travellers shared their experiences of nursing in the Caribbean. I was going to make a real success in this field and I am sure that every night I dreamt about it.

Many people spent a lot of money on drink and gambling, or buying things from others that they forgot to buy, or didn't think was important until they heard scare stories on the trip, but I clung tightly onto my savings. England was going to be the first place I broke into my funds, and who knows what goodies I would find!

Eventually we landed and I, like many other Caribbeans, was surprised at the greyness we met, the cold we experienced, and the sideways look we had to endure from white people. Having left a large four-bedroomed house with acres of land attached, I was horrified that my first home in England was a shared room with my travelling companion. It had furniture that had seen better days and no garden to retreat too. Seeing lots of shops dotted around the area where we lived was a delight, you never had to travel far to buy groceries and household items. The department stores were mesmerising with the great choice of things they offered, all new and unfamiliar to me. Tempted to buy so much, I had to exercise self-control, but I really felt that the drab room needed cheering up and colour had to be introduced to stop depression.

This, I found out, was England. An England that I would have to live in for three years before I became accustomed to the landscape, and an economy that offered modern furniture and fabrics in colours other than greys and blues, black and white and dark reds, browns and green. People walked around in clothes made of heavy and serviceable fabrics rather than pretty, stylish ones with accessories to die for. Caribbeans seemed to draw attention to themselves for this reason, and with it a degree of envy which didn't make life easy with neighbours or those in the workplace during those early years of emigration. We were taunted more often than not, called names more often than not, or just ignored or bypassed. I didn't share all this with my parents as I didn't want them to worry. Their little girl was fast becoming a strong and resourceful young woman. The opportunities in this barely welcoming country were well worth the nonsense meted out to us, and so I had no hesitation writing to my parents saying, 'the stories are true, England is a great place to live, come and join me.' If I could survive, they would. If I could find joy in the cultural institutions, despite the inconsistency with which the service staff treated us, then my parents and siblings would too. We, as a family, are made of sterner stuff, and we have always lived by the code, 'united, we stand!'

As I posted the details to my dad about where and when I would meet him on his arrival in the UK, I felt more than excited. I knew that as he was a driver by career, our family would have a great time doing what we enjoy: travelling. Lands End to John O'Groats was going to be as familiar to us as Dieppe Bay to Conaree. England was going to be our new home, our adopted island. We would make our mark and show the English we earned the right to be here. We would bring our talents and triumphs that would help England regain its greatness now that the war was over.



St Kitts and Nevis , 2017. Photo by Timothy Hills.



Lands End, 1960. Photo by Ben Brooks.

JOURNEYS TO THE CARIBBEAN

AN UNEXPECTED TELEGRAM

Louise Garvey

Happy days, I am going home to my beautiful island Jamaica. The island of my birth, the island of my soul. The place I grew up in until the age of sixteen years. A place of blue sky, twinkling stars at nights, of undulating mountains, thick forest in various shades of green, rugged undergrowth and twisted vines which climb and attach themselves to anything while fighting to reach the sunlight. Nestled between the mountain ranges are areas of fertile flat land, cultivated with banana trees, coconut trees and fields of sugar cane with their white cane flags waving in the cool, cool summer breeze.

I am going home to see my loving grandmother after fifteen long years. Having a large extended family in Jamaica, I spent weeks shopping for a variety of presents for children and adults, male and female of varying ages and sizes. I knew I had to pack a separate case with these presents, which had to be paid for as excess baggage. I packed a second case with my summer clothes, shoes, toiletries and perfume of course, all I needed for my four-week holiday.

My flight day arrived, and I left my house in England at 3:00am in the morning, I headed for the airport in a car driven by my brother and arrived at the airport for 6:00am. My flight was due to leave for Jamaica at 9:00am. The journey to the airport was uneventful, as I slept most of the way. I climbed out of the car, my back aching from running about the previous two weeks in preparation for this trip home.

At the airport, I was in a queue for a very long time clearing customs but finally boarded the plane.

I got comfortable in my seat, listened to the flight attendants' safety instructions, then got a book out to read. I did not get very far in the story as I fell asleep, only to be awakened by a steward who was serving meals. I spent most of the journey re-living my childhood days, of friends I grew up with, time spent by the clean, clear bubbling river, washing clothes and listening to the sound of the flowing water.

I was also taken back to happy school holidays on my grandfather's small property during the reaping of pimento. He had two acres of pimento trees. The men break branches from the pimento trees laden with berries and the women pick the berries from their branches. Large quantities of these green berries are then spread out on cement barbecues to dry in the sun. Pimento reaping season was a time of great joy, watching women making open fires with logs collected by my cousins and brothers to cook lunch for everyone. As the women and men worked they sang songs handed down by their African ancestors.

As I neared landing, the humming of the aircraft seemed to be saying 'Jamaica-Jamaica Mammie-Mammie'. My loving grandmother, here I come at last.

The aircraft landed with a thud and then finally came to a standstill. Passengers were chatting and laughing with excitement, starting to collect their belongings, hustling and bustling, all anxious to disembark.

I alighted from the aircraft to an all-engulfing Caribbean summer's day heat which felt like a hug. Clearing customs was quite easy, and I left relaxed knowing that my cousins with transport would be waiting for me. After the excitement of greeting and hugging each other we set off for my rural village district called Scotts Runn.

I had been away from the island for so long. As we drove along, the buildings and streets seemed very small and remained that way for the following two weeks before my orientation normalised.

I had booked a four-week stay in Jamaica. The first three days I spent at home with my grandmother just talking and catching up with all the happenings in and around the three neighbouring villages, called Scotts Runn, Belle Castle and Belle Mount.

During that time, long time school friends who did not travel abroad visited. It was a time of laughter and reminiscing and of course there was a lot of cooking, eating and merrymaking. The following three days were spent visiting my grand aunts, who lived in an adjoining parish. Old customs dictated that family members returning from abroad pay respects to their elders. I had a very tiring first week visiting all over the place.

My second week was spent with friends and younger family members re-visiting many of my childhood special places. One of these places was where my friend Delma and I used to play 'post office' when we were about eight to ten years old. Our post office was a large old cedar tree trunk with an enclosed area at the base of the tree root. This was where we would place nicely wrapped up presents to each other.

I always felt special knowing we had this relationship, and that we had something to talk about when we met at school. I left the island for England and two years later Delma migrated to America. We have remained friends to this day.

The first two weeks of my holiday seemed to fly past quickly, and things I wanted to do specially for myself were yet to be done. So, my third week on the island was fun-packed, going to Kingston to see a cultural play, spending two nights at an all-inclusive holiday resort and climbing waterfalls. Leaving Jamaica age sixteen years old, I did not know many of the fourteen parishes in the island, in fact I only knew four.

On Sunday, the beginning of my fourth week of holiday, my grandmother, family members and I went to church, a Baptist Church, which was also the area's school

many years ago. I attended that church school. A beautiful building situated on a hill overlooking the blue Caribbean Sea.

The church school was built by British missionaries. A sturdy building with stained glass windows, which fascinated me as a school girl.

The Sunday service, with the choice of hymns and sermon, was very uplifting and joyful. After the service I was greeted, hugged and welcomed. Little did I know that the following day, a Monday, was to be a horrendous day, the effects of which would ripple throughout my life.

My mother volunteered to take care of my four children while I was away because she knew I longed to see my grandmother and she was planning to return to live permanently in Jamaica the following year. My husband did not want me to have time with my grandmother. The children went to stay at my mother's house, which was within walking distance from my house.

I can still vividly remember that Monday afternoon when I received a telegram from England. I had just got ready to go to the beach with my cousins, which was a pleasant walk through adjoining villages all downhill. I can even remember the clothes I was wearing: blue pedal pusher pants and a cream blouse. Speaking of a telegram, young people in their thirties would not be familiar with the communication system of contacting people in other communities by telegram.

Sitting on the veranda waiting for my cousins so we could leave for the beach, I noticed a young man walking up the path leading to the house. He stopped at the bottom of the veranda step and greeted me with a 'Good afternoon miss'.

The young man then asked, 'Is there a Mrs Taylor living here?'

I replied saying, 'Yes, I am Mrs Taylor'.

He then handed me a telegram and asked me to sign for it, which I did.

Curiosity and fear overcame me, as in those days a telegram only brought bad news.

Hands shaking and my heart beating fast, I quickly opened the telegram and read it. Time seemed to stop, I could feel ringing in my ears and my surroundings seemed to go dark. I was thinking 'I am going to faint', but I did not, all I remember was I let out an almighty scream, I was bawling and bawling, suddenly there were people all around me with worried faces repeating over and over 'What's the matter Louise?'

All I was able to do was point to the telegram on the floor. The telegram that read, 'Husband dead return at once.'

From then on I felt as if I was moving in a trance.

The family ushered me into the room they called 'Leta's room', which was my pet name and the room I slept in when I was a teenager in Jamaica. I could hear noises and voices outside in the yard and knew instantly that people from adjoining villages had come to find out what was happening. I was disabled with grief and felt so very sorry and sad for my elderly grandmother. I felt I had inflicted this sorrow and grief on her. From the moment the telegram was read and the family grasped the implication of what had happened, a plan of action was put in place.

A new single return ticket had to be purchased for my flight back to England. Someone had to go to the bank which was five hours there and back, as I was staying in a rural village where there was no bank.

Another person had to travel to the capital town, Kingston, to purchase the ticket and book a flight on the earliest aircraft that was leaving Jamaica for England. All this was done in forty-eight hours. I was driven to the airport in sorrow, feeling lost, but knew I had to return to face what the telegram conveyed and wondered how my mother and children were coping.

I cannot remember anything of the flight back to England, all I know was I landed at Heathrow airport, cleared custom and took a taxi cab from the airport to Lancashire. On arriving at my mother's house I paid the taxi driver and slowly got out of the taxi cab.

I lingered in fear outside for a while not wanting to face what was to come. I walked up the steps of the large Victorian house to my mother's door. I opened the door and walked into the passage leading into a large room.

My mother was ironing, she looked up and said to me, 'What are you doing here?'

All I could say was, 'Where are the children?'

To which she responded and said, 'They are at school.'

I then said to her, 'What happened, where is Tom?'

She replied, 'I don't know.' Then she anxiously repeated, 'I was not expecting you back for another week.'

By this time, I was confused and wondering what on earth was happening, all I heard myself saying was, 'I received a telegram from you saying my husband was dead and should return at once.'

My mother dropped the iron on the ironing board and said, 'What? I did not send you any telegram, and there is nothing wrong with Tom.'

I just sat down in shock and disbelief, crying all over again knowing it was my

AN UNEXPECTED TELEGRAM

husband that sent that telegram, and there was nothing I could do about it, as I knew my husband and was frightened of him.

Later that evening my husband called at my mother's house. He had no remorse about the cruelty he inflicted on the family. All he said was he wanted me back in England and he could have sent a telegram saying it was one of the children that was dead, but he thought it was better if he said it was him.

Little did I know that years later I would suffer worse by the man I married and called husband.



Rainforest. Photo by Oliver Spencer.

‘DANCING IN THE STREET’

Lenny Bedward

First time I went was in the 80s to help my mum with some property that her mother left to her. When we got out there, there were some squatters in the house, so we had to go to a solicitor to see how she was going to remove them. It was a lot of money to hire solicitors out there. It took about a year to get the squatters out. They didn't think anyone was coming back to the house and just took over, but my mum was paying the taxes, which helped.

I used to go to dances out there. They were different and livelier in Jamaica. There would be dancing in the street before going into the venue. I wanted to buy records and see how the DJs performed.

We went around visiting different parishes, seeing family and hearing different music. Kingston would have all the new stuff, but in the country it was mainly instrumental music.

In the Caribbean, you have to go to church on Sunday, and you save your best clothes. It is more lively, they are more into singing and clapping. The Jamaican life has two sides. Some people would think you are rich and want you to leave clothes and your shoes when you go, like you are made of gold.

I felt good the first time I went because I was going to my mum's birthplace to see where I come from, to see where my father was from, and where we went to school. I was fortunate to go because a lot of people only get to hear about it.

It gave me a good feeling to see Jamaica. The food is fresher. The lifestyle is very different—you've either got it, or you don't.

On the plane on the way back there was a young boy with a hoodie, with a baseball bat and a rucksack. He was walking up and down. They arrested him in the UK and held him at the airport. I couldn't sleep because I was uneasy.

I DJ for a sound called Quantro with my brother Kenneth, and friends Robert, Keith, Johnny, Leslie, Colin and Redman. We were the first sound to play in Nottingham's Market Square and at the Carnival. We've played with all the big sounds in the UK like Quaker City and Cosan Shocker. That took me on a lot of journeys, I got to meet a lot of people.

My father used to bring records home and he used to lock them in the front room. The front room was the best room, for guests only. The records were locked in what looked like a drinks cabinet but sometimes I used to steal the key and sneak in and listen. And that is what got me into music and sound system.

‘WHO ARE YOU CALLING A FOREIGNER?’

Madge Spencer

When I went to Jamaica for a holiday I took my youngest son, Hayden. Of course the sun was hot, hot, hot. He was very uncomfortable, for the earth was scorching to the touch of his feet. I took him around the area and showed him the different trees, fruits, and their names. I was enjoying showing my son all these things, when a man who was watching us called out and told me that I was a foreigner.

‘Who are you calling a foreigner?’ I said.

‘A you’, he said.

‘Why?’ I said.

‘Because you a thaw out’, he said. ‘Look bou me, me jus cool, cool, look bou you, you a taw out an wet up, wet up. Who man you jus com haff the plane.’

He was not going to call me anything else so I had to move on and leave him there sitting on the wall enjoying himself.

I was in town, downtown Kingston, shopping and enjoying the scenery, the smells, the colours and the noises, the well dress people. Some in designer clothes, some in summer dresses, others in Rasta type clothes, walking the cute type of Rasta walk with the hip-hop step and a red hanky in the pocket. Sometimes there would be someone with a ghetto blaster, blasting out loud music. Sometimes there would be impromptu dancing, with people swinging their hips, stomping their feet and gyrating like Carnival celebration.

'I AM A TRAVELLER...'

May Barrett

Coming to England from Jamaica I wrote to my sister and brother-in-law to say I wanted to come.

When I came, there was lots of snow on the ground and I asked my sister what it was because I had never seen snow before. She said, 'It's snow!'

I came on a Sunday and I got a job on Monday. I worked at a pram factory but I never liked it and I walked out. I took my passport to exchange to show that I was in the country. I worked at the university for two years. Then I worked as a nurse for twenty-eight years at City Hospital, looking after patients. I worked at Theatre Royal for five years before I retired.

I have two children, one is Yvette and one is Dale. My mother and father both passed away when I was in England. I went home for six weeks to bury them. When I went home it was not bad, some of the people were rough, but Jamaica is a lovely place. Lovely sunshine, lovely food, but some people beg, some of them want to take everything off you.

My family were very happy to see me. I stayed with my family. One of the family members was waiting for me to give them money for food. I asked her why she cannot buy food, and she told me that she does not have any money. She thought that we were millionaires. I gave her the money to buy what she wanted.

I visited Jamaica about four years ago. Things were strange. I did not know half the people and they did not know me, they had only heard of me. They greeted me well and I was glad to see my family and friends. I have one sister back home, she is ninety-three. Everything seemed like it had changed because we are in a different generation. It was so hot out there. I went to see my family in Victoria and they treated me well. Two brothers passed away. I also have a sister, Lena McKenzie, who lives in England, and another brother in London. We used to write letters, but now we phone, or use the internet. I also have one brother in America.

The countryside is good because we cultivate the land and grow lots of produce. Bananas, coconuts and all different things. Food tastes better in Jamaica, you do not need fertiliser for the plants, everything grows quicker.

I am a traveller, I have been to America, Israel and Spain. I travel by boat and I have been on cruises. I like Israel. I wanted to go to Africa to see my son-in-law's property, but a man, David, took our money, £800. When we went to the airport we couldn't get our tickets because there had never been any tickets and he had scammed us, so we had to go home. We had to get the police involved, but by this point the scammer was gone.

‘DO YOU WANT IT REAL CARIBBEAN STYLE?’

Lynda-Louise Burrell

When my mother announced with more enthusiasm than usual that we were going on holiday and it was to St Kitts I became fired up with excitement too. As a family, we'd had many holidays in farm cottages, caravans, coach houses, and occasionally in hotels in the UK. We even had a holiday in the south of France and that had been a whole lot of fun. Driving on the other side of the road to Britain and speaking in another language were things that really made the holiday for me. Well, the language experience was more me trying to put schoolgirl French into practise and trying to appear worldly-wise and cultured. My parents were impressed but I'm not sure the French were.

Going to the Caribbean however was a very different ball game, it promised to be a unique holiday experience because I was going to see the island of my ancestors from my mother's side at last.

Over the years, I had heard from my mum's family about the island they fondly called 'back home'. Mum had to endure my dad's teasing about her coming from a 'small island', and the way Kittitians cooked rice. You see my dad's a Jamaican and as far as Jamaicans are concerned, as most Caribbean islands are smaller than theirs, they refer to people from the other islands as 'small islanders'. This phrase, said in mockery, almost always raises the hackles and angers non-Jamaicans. One of the earliest conversations I overheard on this theme, of Jamaica being a large island and the inhabitants being better at most things, concerned the way rice is cooked. Jamaican rice is known for being on the firm side, while Kittitian rice is cooked much softer and the grains cling together more. Although I can confirm that with Jamaican rice you can count the grains, and that with rice cooked by a Kittitian on the whole that is not possible, both I have to say are equally enjoyable. However, as a British born black person and offspring of a Jamaican and a Kittitian I always say much to their chagrin I prefer mashed potato.

So, guess what I was looking forward to most from this once in a lifetime trip? It was not the sunshine—I have experienced some near-tropical days in the British Isles—I was looking forward to real Caribbean food, cooked in the traditional way out in the open air, vegetables freshly picked from home gardens and of course their home-brewed drinks. On the spot, bang slap on the island, take the food challenge and decide once and for all whether Kittitian food had the edge over that of Jamaica. I was ready for the challenge as I am a great foodie.

As soon as I landed at the Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport, while waiting for the car to take us to the hotel, I had my first drink on the island. It was a soft drink of course, a Peardrella, a product of the Carib Brewery on St Kitts, poured into a large glass filled with crushed ice. Cold, delicious, moreish and most welcome. I

knew from that instant I would be drinking it all the time during the holiday! Sweet sparkling pear juice. A first!

Really refreshed now and ready for something more substantial to eat than the in-flight meal I had, I was impressed as the car sped across the island through areas with their small village shops displaying local produce, vegetables and fruits stacked on either side of the shop front. The car was going too quickly however for me to identify what each stack was of, but there was no mistaking the shape of the mangoes, or the colours of the fresh and dried coconuts. These things in situ, not on supermarket shelves, looked even more appealing. Lush green bushes that clung to the rocky hills gave me occasional glimpses of the spectacular scenery and the turquoise sea below. The sight was so wonderful, so perfect that I had a spiritual moment. God is so good to provide all this for us. I felt unworthy to be having this privileged experience.

Finally seated at a dining table with a gleaming white table cloth and glasses of many shapes and sizes, I had no intention of getting up from it for at least two hours. How could I, when the menu choice was so extensive and had me clapping with delight as the things offered were all my favourites, each with a beautiful memory of the first or last time I had them? I tried to eat for two hours but my grandmother's saying—"Your eyes are bigger than your belly!"—came into my mind and I had to admit defeat on the fourth course and call it a night for my first dining experience. I blamed the old plantation house that was our hotel, it made me feel like gentry in its beautiful surroundings painted in sunshine yellow and white, and manicured lawns with its exotic shrubbery and trees. I experienced superb service where nothing was too much trouble, each course was explained to me and I was asked repeatedly, 'Do you want it real Caribbean style?' It made me wish I could dine like this forever. I am sure they asked me this because, although they knew I was of Caribbean origin, being British born and bred, they feared I was less strong than an islander should be! I think I did us Britishers proud!

Next morning, undaunted, I had a body-building breakfast of steamy cornmeal porridge complete with a nice thick skin, and saltfish fritters. I was going to have a modest amount but they were so tasty and colourful with unfamiliar seasoning I had to keep having yet another one so I could remember the taste when I next tried to make these myself. After breakfast, I planned to shop till I dropped in the market and the fortification the saltfish fritters gave me meant I would be able to endure the heat and the amount of walking I would have to do. I was going to learn to be a Caribbean housewife, to choose and cook some great Caribbean food and surprise my second cousins, whose home I was going to spend the rest of the day in, showing what a British-Caribbean could do in the kitchen.

The hotel car took me to the market past the famous Black Rocks where the tragedy of lost ships had taken place and island raiders came to pillage and plunder. I made a note to have a moment of reflection and remembrance here before I left the island. Today, though, I was going to have a very different experience! My gift of the gab was going to have to be even more perfect than usual, my ability to look lost and in need of a friend was going to have to be employed. I would do all in my power to get the best produce for the cheapest price, but not show myself up as being a novice at shopping Caribbean-style by not knowing one root vegetable from another, or asking the names of the produce. I arrived rather nervously and took in the sights and sounds of some stalls, but mostly of women seated on the ground, their produce spread out on colourful pieces of cloth, stacked enticingly. I couldn't resist, I had to touch and smell. Selecting the produce was even more important than the cooking because the best choice ensured a tasty meal. Caribbeans don't do bland, they don't overdo the spicy hot, they like lip-smacking, mouth-watering and belly-busting amounts. I was going to have a job cooking up such a treat. I smelled the fruit, I tried to touch and squeeze them like a real Caribbean housewife, I held them up to the light as I admired the colour and shape. I was really enjoying myself, and thought I looked like I knew what I was about, but when the sellers asked if I knew how to prepare them, I groaned inside but said rather quickly if not convincingly, 'yes I do, my mother taught me!' The proof was going to be in the eating—even I knew that.

The vegetables, too, I chose with care and mostly because of the shape: large and round specimens of root vegetables not the scrawny looking ones. The quantity was a mystery, it wasn't a case of just a cup of rice per person or three new potatoes per person, as was my usual measurement guide. I knew I had over purchased when I could hardly carry the bag which seemed to weigh more than me! Slave in the kitchen was my thought, as I inched my way through the market's throng to get to the taxi ramp. Dinner was eventually served with enough food left over, not just to keep some on the stove in case a visitor stopped by, a Caribbean practice, but enough to feed two more households. I got the seal of approval from such utterances as: 'This food good man!', and 'Miss England can cook!'

Basking in the sun for a whole day was my treat after this culinary feat. I dressed in beachwear that enabled me to soak up the rays that would activate my melanin and keep me the rich shade of brown that is my badge as a Caribbean, but which my sister refers to as keeping her natural tan real. I didn't quite rush for the best part of the beach and claim it as mine, or grab the best beach chair and drape myself on it but I lay there letting the sun's rays do their job and me mine: indulging in drinking ice-cold soft drinks, or spicing things up from time to time with the addition of

dark and white rum, and/or vodka. Coconut base, mango base, passion fruit base, drinking confirmed I was home, among my island family.

I lay there dreaming of trips to the mountains in vehicles that I feared wouldn't quite make the incline, or speeding up dirt tracks with popular Caribbean tunes blaring out with rhythms that I hear only at UK Carnivals, and a local dialect so broad and sweet that I was glad to be alive, even if I had to seek clarification at times that my understanding and interpretation of what was being said was correct. Up in the bush, wandering around the old ruins of sugar production and slavery, I was reminded of aspects of the island's past, but I couldn't really comprehend man's inhumanity to man, or how resilient the human body and mind could be. That awful history has given me my present and was going to guide my future. In that moment, I knew that this heritage re-acquaintance would boost my life experiences and enhance my enjoyment of life in the UK, but for today just an internal silence and recognition of how lucky I am was all that was needed, for as a people, as an island, 'we may be little but we tallawah (strong)' .



Rainforest in St Kitts. Photo by Oliver Spencer.

'IS IT LAST TIME?'

Enid McLawrence

While I was in England my father was in Jamaica. He was ninety-nine years and seven month an I general talk to him on the phone. The last time I talk to him an the tone of voice he talk to me, I know that he was ready to go over to the next side. What he says to me is 'God be with you'. And night an day I reason with myself, is it last time? And it was. What he was saying was goodbye.

Two weeks after that, he passed away. I have children in Jamaica they all get together an make the preparation until I arrive. For I have to book my flight an it take two weeks. To make preparations such as build the vault they have to get cement still an such, and prepare for the grave head, an drink rum.

Some time ago I was going to Jamaica an have a bad experience. I was flying from Gatwick airport. When we board the plane I notice that the plane not moving for hours, I was alone not talk to anyone. Wondering what happened. Afterwards it was announced that we not going until the next day, an they put us in a hotel. We never get something to eat until 8 o'clock at night. I general take biscuit with me, I was able to give a few people biscuit. The next day they have to check our luggage again before we board the next plane.

GOING BACK TO MY ROOTS: A VERY SPECIAL HOLIDAY

Catherine Ross

Going back to my roots was a liberating experience, it gave me a feeling of completeness, of being in a place where I rightly belonged. I was home. I emerged from the cool air of the aeroplane to the scorching heat of my sun-kissed isle. The emotion on touching my native soil and seeing so many of my people was so strong that it welled up inside me and came out as a surge, causing a confusion of feelings, of wanting to laugh and cry all at the same time. It was no ordinary cry that came from me but a deep, overwhelming, long-overdue expression of a realisation that I had missed this place, this land of my birth. The sharp and painful realisation that no-one should ever leave their homeland for more than a few years, no matter what, burned deep within me! Having committed the crime of staying away too long and acknowledging it, my emotion changed to one of delight and a long belly-bursting laugh that could not be stopped. Every part of my face registered the pleasure I was feeling. I was home and boy was I going to make the most of every moment. This place was mine. I was going to traverse it, every one of its sixty-eight square miles. I was going to get to know its secrets and delights, its people and its places, and reclaim it. This was going to be no ordinary holiday!

My eyes became wide from drinking in the sights before me, and my smile wider than the Caribbean Sea which I was going to get to know. My face burned from the sun's rays as they penetrated a skin more accustomed to the UK's blustery and cold weather. The rays reached down to my core, awakened my senses so fully that I knew my life had only been partly lived up to this moment, that I had only been part of what I was meant to be, and now thirty-five years later, somewhat late, I was going to come into full flower, and be the Caribbean rose I was meant to be. The burning sensation of real sunshine seemed to say with its force, I am imprinting you, leaving a tattoo of dark colouring, a reminder of where you belong and who you belong to. I wanted to shout to everyone, anyone, 'another island-daughter has returned and she needs your warm embrace and welcome'.

I had never seen so many black people before except at a UK Carnival, or on a more regular basis at a Caribbean church event. Here then was a new experience—spot the white person, and do you know I didn't want to, but there they were and they stood out like sore thumbs. It was more a case of marvelling when every shade of dark skin was sharing the same space as me, doing a myriad of things I had never seen such people do—policemen directing the traffic, air traffic control staff, hotel managers, bank managers and tellers. I saw them represented in areas of commerce from professionals in chemists to market stall vendors and I felt good. I felt a chest-expanding pride.

What I saw during my six-week holiday was a sight for sore eyes, but my ears were having their moment too, their own form of enjoyment, an epiphany. The most exciting being the lilt of a Caribbean voice, the real McCoy, not the Europeanised version! It was music to hear their laughter, hearty, unrestrained, infectious and melodic. Even their greetings shouted to each other across the street, despite the sounds of traffic and life, were audible in the extreme, causing others to turn their head to witness the display of affection being offered. What was also attention-grabbing was the cacophony engendered by the altercations, though few and far between, considering how many people were sharing the space on the busy streets. The sounds of the differences being aired were loud and ear-blasting, accompanied with a lot of kissing of teeth, and phraseology so blue the air rivalled the sky for its colour. All this was accompanied by a lot of hand gestures that gave warnings to the other person of potential aggression that could be meted out in their direction. Never once though did I see this follow through into action. I was surprised that passers-by didn't stop to watch the scenes play out. Perhaps they knew and I had yet to learn that this was all a case of letting off steam, a cultural expression of frustration, but one which I knew if it had occurred in the UK would have caused a white person to call for the police. I always watched and listened, bemused, always expecting an incident to become a drama, for excitement to unfold, but it never did. I was a novice and a newbie to this type of island life but it helped me realise why the English called us 'loud'!

The backdrop to my holiday experience of Caribbean society was a mishmash, a strange juxtaposition of buildings, which from their age and condition had seen all the sights and much, much more than I was witnessing in awe and amazement as an occasional tourist. Island history had not always been kind and I am sure the buildings could well testify to great injustices and outrages of men. Old colonial government buildings, magnificent in their European design but seeming out of place on such a small tropical island, stood cheek by jowl with buildings made from breeze blocks and those of native wood that islanders called home. Most of the homes were painted in colours that made them a cheery sight, a reflection of the cheery spirit of their inhabitants. Shades of blue, tints of green, and tones of yellow made my island tour, whatever village I visited, a visual delight.

History, my history, had been played out in these dwellings and seats of power, despite their now peeling paint, decaying facades and defunct features. Those who had occupied these spaces had won me the right to travel and be independent, to learn things on foreign soil that would prepare me to take my people to the next height of collective achievement. I felt the weight of my ancestors' expectation standing on the sites where they once stood. They were reaching out to me and giving me the embrace of welcome I had hoped for on my return home. I could do

nothing less than soak up their spirit and apply myself to dispelling myths about us not being ambitious, sophisticated, or achievers in all forms of sciences. My resolve sharpened to never again, not for a single moment, allow others to assert that black people can't do, or can't be anything they choose. Here was the evidence stretched out in front of me at the harbour, in the market place, in government institutions and the places where we were entertaining tourists and travellers. The media, the modern-day Town Crier, let us know we were conversing with kings and princes, world-leaders and gurus of all kinds. They announced we were providing a safe haven for those who were where we once were. My chest swelled with pride, pride in the legacy of my ancestors, in the genes that make us a people, and I felt ten feet tall.

In my tours round the island I saw no-one living in a cardboard box, no-one begging for food or sleeping in a doorway. Instead I saw a people busy, engaged in life in all its forms, even if it was playing dominoes at makeshift tables at the roadside, or standing at street corners sharing community gossip. I knew the purpose of my presence in that island in the sun was to keep it so, a place where the people are friendly and ready to welcome a stranger, a place where the warmth penetrated one's innermost and then was reflected back in the music played, the infectious laughter which echoed, the food that was as colourful and as nurturing as we are. My chest swelled with pride. This was not just a holiday this was a life-changing visit, a moment which was the making of me. I welcomed it.

Enterprise was evident in the smallest villages as it was in the town I visited. Village people selling produce grown in their yards to others who didn't have green fingers, sold to travellers in need of succour, and to those that didn't have the inclination to work that hard, or whose pressing life demands made them time-poor. Village entrepreneurs skilled in craft turned things into masterpieces, must-haves, and objects of desire for those who loved beauty and style and wanted a product that was unique and would be the envy of friends, family and total strangers. Local whittling created works of art, seamstresses dressed a nation and provided treasures for tourists to take home. These enterprising people, my people, whose skills on land and in the sea kept a nation going, and ensured its survival for centuries to come.

I was a visiting national-cum-tourist traversing the island's streets, which still held evidence of the island's past in such places as decaying gullies, once carrying blood as well as rainwater, and its monuments raised by the oppressors, and mountain pathways well-trod marked out by the feet of generations in search of food, work and escape. Village residents sitting on doorsteps of their homes, and bar staff pouring colourful cocktails told stories of times past of rendezvous and rallies that have taken place in the mountain bush, the deep countryside where plots were hatched and romantic promises made. I had to see these spots for myself where

sacrifices were made by my brave ancestors, visit the scenes where the tales of triumphs and adversities I had heard in my childhood had taken place. Behind the smiles of my people there has been a lot of pain, but we have emerged a people unbowed. Now I know why phrases you hear regularly around the island, though popular and sometimes said glibly, had a deeper meaning. So to be reassured with my favourite phrase, 'no problem', whenever I asked for assistance seemed a right and apt phrase, nothing is a problem to a Caribbean, we always find a way around or through adversity.

I was visiting to find personal peace, reconnect with my roots, and say thank you to those who had kept my island home going so I could return from time to time to my piece of paradise. In the town I saw women chattering, gossiping, ever ready to offer counsel to each other and keeping the community informed of goings on. I saw in the villages scattered across the land, people in huddles playing dominoes, sharing leisure moments, enjoying friendships. Children were engrossed in playing age-old games and strengthening limbs and imagination in the natural landscape that was their playground. Young men and women on the other hand, seduced by 21st century advances in technology, use it to become inventors and creators, using these new toys to create a uniquely Caribbean product they then offer to the world of tourism, their survival tool in an uncertain world. Necessity was still the mother of invention in this blessed isle.

Talking to these keepers of our stories, whether in the humble homes or the grandeur of Government house, many who were witnesses to island-changing events, I am amazed at the memories that come tumbling out. They make history books come alive and the names recorded in the pages speak again eloquently.

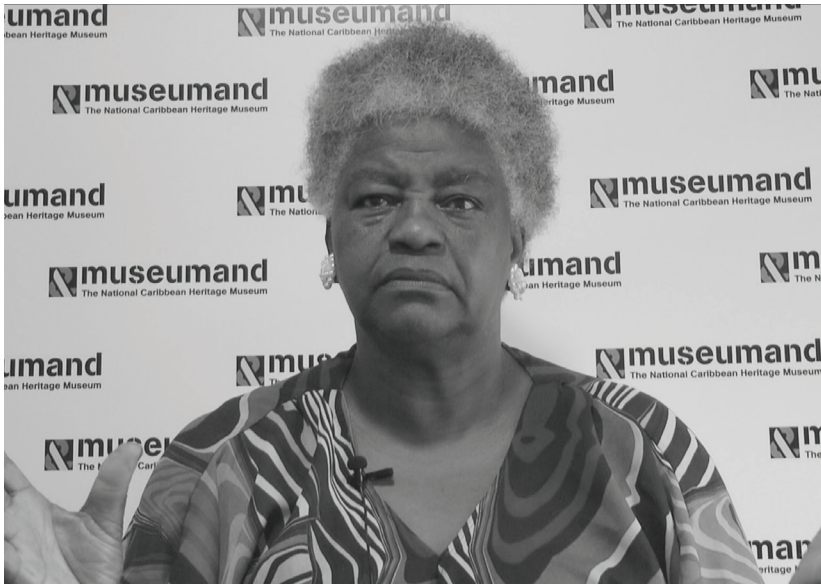
Holidays are a time for exploring and discovering yourself, people, places, and the past. Holidays are meant to be a time for rest and recreation, but I really did have to make every minute spent there count because of the variety of things to see. I've clambered up the mountainsides, taken perilous rides in vehicles I wouldn't ride in England, eaten ravenously of the nectar of fruits you still can't get in the UK, like jackfruit, and been fortified by foods that have sustained my people over generations, like the christophene. I've seen the vibrant colours that characterise the Caribbean like turquoise, and sunshine yellows; a real contrast to the sober and sombre shades of England.

Holidays are also about meeting new people and for me the interactions make me grateful for what I do have and I have to admit rather shamefacedly, hanker for the things I don't. Holidays in my country of origin are the best, the most inspiring, they give me an injection of me—rejuvenating and re-creating me. Fortified by my holiday experiences and a whole new clutch of memories and friends, I stepped on the plane, I was going from one island home to another.

CATCHING THE BUS

Madge Spencer

There was a time when what I saw was not for laughing or crying. I was standing in a queue at the bus stop. The bus came and people started to board the bus as they were standing one by one. However, as soon as one lady steps up to the second step of the bus her knickers fell to her feet. Embarrassment prevented her from doing anything, so she just stepped out of her knickers and left them on the step. People not realising what had happened continued to board the bus, stepping on the offending clothing, until soon it was just a piece of muddy rag.



Madge Spencer performing a collective poem, 2017. Photo by Museumand.

MY HOLIDAY IN JAMAICA

Hartsel Garvey

I was in England for eight years before I went back to Jamaica on holiday. I am the first child of my mother and we had a loving, close, relationship although she was very strict. She always depended on me to do things around the house.

I was missing my mother very much, and decided to go and spend four weeks with her in December at Christmas time.

Weeks before my flight I bought presents for my three brothers and four sisters. Of course, the presents for my mother were special. My then wife helped me to choose the clothing I needed for Jamaica, items to suit the hot weather.

I was taken to Gatwick Airport from Preston, Lancashire by two friends. I cleared customs and boarded the aircraft for Jamaica. The flight was steady and a good one. I had a window seat, sitting with another gentleman. The air hosts did the safety instructions, after which I introduced myself to the gentleman sitting next to me.

The plane arrived in Jamaica at dusk, just as it was becoming dark. I cleared customs after a long wait for my baggage. By now I was getting worried because I knew my mother and brothers were waiting outside for me and would be worrying that something might be wrong.

I was very happy to see my mother and brothers, I just ran up to my mother and gave her a big, long hug. I lived in a very rural area in a district called Cherry. I had forgotten how dark driving at night could be in the country. I was very happy to reach home. Because it was night we did not talk for very long, I was also very tired so we all went to bed.

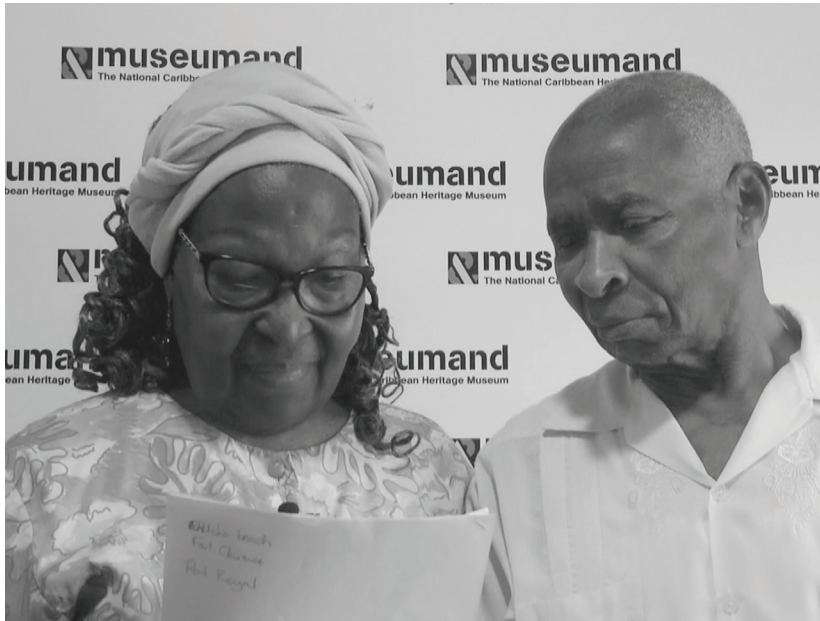
I was woken up early in the morning by the crowing of cockerels in the village. My mother always kept a yard full of cockerels, hens and chickens. First thing, my mother took me shopping in Spanish Town. My mother seemed to be proud of me. She took pleasure in introducing me to all her friends.

Lots of family members came to visit me. I also went to see some of my elderly aunts that were not very well. My great aunts were very involved with my life as a boy and helped steer me in a positive way, so I was truly pleased to see them and I felt blessed because I could go back to be with them.

My four-week holiday in Jamaica was a pleasure. We went to the beach several times and cooked and ate there.

Some evenings, groups of us would go to Old Harbour Bay to eat fish. This was a popular thing most people coming on holiday would do. It was nice to spend some time with my father as an adult, I could talk man to man with him and we had a few beers together.

My brothers love driving around the island and they took delight in showing me around places I did not know while I was young in Jamaica. I had a joyous time on my four-week holiday and was only sad when I had to leave the family, especially my mother.



Louise and Hartsel Garvey reading a collective poem, 2017. Photo by Museumand.

GROWING UP IN THE WEST INDIES

Carmeleta Burke

I was born in the parish of St Catherine in Jamaica, the district of Hampshire. I thought the name of my district was Water Course, but years later I discovered on my birth certificate that my birth was registered as Hampshire, Mount Hermon. My parents were Daphne and Jeremiah Campbell. I am the first of nine children: three of us born in Jamaica, the other six born in Nottingham, United Kingdom. I lived with my younger sister who was born four years after me and later a brother came along. My district was a lovely, small community with a good school and church (Mount Herman School and Mount Herman Baptist church). There were many other churches in the district, such as Seventh Day Adventists, Gospel Hall Church and a few others which were also well supported by people in the community.

Many influential people have come out of the district. Teachers, school inspectors, nurses, lecturers and so on. As I was growing up I was aware that I wanted to be someone or something good from Hampshire.

My maternal grandmother was an inspirational person to my siblings and I. My mother worked away from home so as to finance our care and education. We called grandmother 'mother', as did most of the children in the district. She had a heart of gold. Mother had a grocery shop, and always implied that the shop was not there to make money but to feed the people in the district as well as her children and grandchildren. We were later allowed to sell in the shop, we also ate a lot of the produce and gave away a lot of the food. Mother never got cross about that, her pot was always overfull with food for passers-by.

As I left school at fifteen years old, my parents decided to send me to Xavier High School in Kingston where I commenced a course in shorthand, typing and bookkeeping with the ambition of becoming a stenographer. Living with a family friend, I didn't settle in Kingston and after a period of some months I returned home to Water Course, and attended school by taxi every morning to finish my studies. My mother, being a single parent, now left for the United Kingdom to join a cousin. She had the ambition of becoming a nurse, unfortunately she did not undertake higher education in nursing but worked as a nursing auxiliary for many, many years. She was a good assistant nurse and loved every minute of it. Mother had a very caring heart. She worked as a nurse until she retired.

WHEN DEATH COMES KNOCKING

Madge Spencer

I was about five years old when my mom sent me to the shop. I heard a lady singing. When I went home I told my mom. She recited the story of the lady who would pray every night that if death should come for her she would be ready to go with him. Someone heard her praying one night and knock on her door and said, 'This is death and I have come for you'. When she heard that she screamed and shouted that the lady lived next door.



Sunset in St Kitts. Photo by Oliver Spencer.

BACK TO JAMAICA

Tryphena Anderson

Bless mi eye sight,
Mi live to see Kingston again!
Me mean Kingston, Jamaica.
It is good, the sun is shining.
Hot like fire,
Pinch me.
Twelve years now,
Since last I saw you.

There on the wharf stands my mother and mother-in-law.
I'm crying—at last!
I hugged one, then the other;
They hugged their granddaughters.
A big welcome awaits me at my
mother-in-law's house;
Nieces and neighbours to meet,
In those days, not many people returned—
Everyone want to see the people from foreign.
Refreshed, we make our way home to
the country,
The children are tired,
Peacefully they sleep.
I ask the driver of the car to go slowly.

There is Coronation market—
Noisy, bustly—
Everyone calling their wares
The smell of stew peas
Rice and peas,
Curry goat,
The hand carts
Pushing and shoving along.
And then the Tivoli theatre
(Really it's a cinema),
Pass number five graveyard—
The dead, well fenced in.
Few people selling grater cake, candy,
Then three miles and onto Ferry.

Ferry, where the water is green and dark
And flows freely in the canal—
The police station is still there,
And the big gangu tree stands tall.

Alongside the road—the cane fields
And the faint smell of food being cooked in the hot air.
Along comes Twickenham Park,
Jamaican school of Agriculture
Where my brother proudly graduated all those years ago
He took me to see the work he supervised
For the sugar cane owners—
How proud I am of my brother
(Knowing I contributed to his education).

Then onto Spanish Town,
Market Street, Cumberland Road
Hear again the noise!
People dodging the trucks, the cars, hooting, pap pap
The buses lining up to go to all over the country,
Hand carts, calling,
People selling by the *piazza*;

Grate cake, bread, bun—
And of course, Miss Mae's patties
And at the same time, the street
Vendors calling,
'Hot pattie and crust! Snowball, snowball!'
And just to smell the pastry baked with meat,
It makes your mouth water.

My grandmother;
My brothers and sisters;
My old friends;
What a crowd,
The big pot boiling;
What an adventure
For a ten and a nine year old—
Everyone wants to meet and hug me again.

I watch my children run free,
I see tears in my grandmother's eyes
Soon I'll leave
'To the day', my mother said,
'Nineteenth of December 1952'
Twelve long years,
So she did miss me.

What a happy heart
I leave to explore Jamaica.
Montego Bay, no words can explain;
We pass Tower Isle,
That place where black people
Could not go—
Only as servants.
Dunns River Falls,
Where the water tumbles over rocks,
The beauty of it
Hot it is in the town of Ocho Rios.

Turn right and we are at Fern Gully.
Cool as a cucumber,
The breeze blows easy.
Ferns line the banks of the ravine—
Higglers sell refreshments and
Local craft markets flourish
Huge trees,
Their branches overlapping,
Make you think of Bamboo Alley in St Elizabeth.
Everything is calm,
The road is good,
Because tourist travel on it.
Don't be deceived
It's a trap
Where you stand is a river bed.
My children want to run
'No', I said
It is only when it rains very hard.

Behold a rainbow
Through the trees
It spreads its colours
'Where is the pot of gold?'
Ask my children
We are not at the rainbow's end
Sleepily I took them home.

Don't forget the harvest festival.
The church dressed with flowers,
Oranges, tangerines,
Before the alter,
Yam, coconut,
Bananas, breadfruit—
Everyone dress to kill,
Mainly to see the people from foreign.

Don't forget the rally.
Rally the same, it never changes.

The members of the church collect donations all through the year—
And then on a designated Sunday in December
The money is paid—to the pastor for the church
Everyone tries to outdo the other
And take first prize.
My mother mostly wins, at times
She over-contributes.

Old friends leave messages
They want to take you to Milk River
'Milk River?' Asked my two
My two innocents
'Milk in the river?'

No, and I thought
'Pickni yu ha grow
Yu wi si.'
And so they did.

The sand is so dark where the river runs into the sea.
The finest I ever saw
Black sand, rich in radioactivity—
Here hundreds visit for its healing properties
You wash it off,
Then you wash your feet at the stand pipe.
You go under the shower,
You go home,
And yet everywhere there is sand;
Places where you would not expect sand to be!
They say it is a good medicine,
Good for arthritis and other ailments.

And now to town,
People ask to hear the children speak.
As they spoke
They say,
'Whe dim sey?'
All at once the drums
Bum-baca-bum-baca-bum
The children looked at me.
They so wanted to see John
Cunno—
An old African festival, the forerunner
to Carnival—
'Please may we see the dance?'
'Laud they have mannas eh?'
Trust the John Cunno to come now,
Off we went,
Bum-baca-bum-baca-bum.

Down they came,
The Devil leading, dressed in red,
Yellow and green flashing in his fiery costume;
Long, flowy headdress—big eyes popping
And with a wooden staff, he pretends to beat the people.
To hear the drums again brought back memories of childhood,
When I ran from the Devil and did not stop,
Not until I reached Admiral Rodney's statue.

Behind the Devil, all sorts of followers,
Male and female, dressed to cause terror,
Even in the boldest people.
The children cling to me
When we thought they had gone far enough,
They did not have enough.
Terrified and petrified,
Yet they wanted more.
One more trip Port Royal
Yes we pass the turn to where
Part of Dr No movie was filmed
Yes we turn before we reach
Where Three-finger-Jack roamed;
The Old Buccaneer.
The entry to Palisadoes Airport
To the left
A sailing ship,
Stuck in the sand.

In front is the sea at Port Royal
The streets paved with bricks
Tread on by buccaneers of old.
The children eyes open,
They say on a calm day
You can see the sails of ships
Under the sea
That's where they were sunk
During the earthquake of 1692.

On the way back
It was convenient to call my old teacher.
Victorian Avenue—Kingston.
Is he alive?
Is he dead?
To enter those gates again—oh the memories
I hear our laughter of years ago.
And feel the stillness as class is in progress
The tamarind tree under which some of us sat is still there,
String and sturdy in the right hand corner of the yard.

The gate creaks up the steps to the veranda,
I rang the bell,
Out tots Old Tom,
His teeth slightly protrudes.
He tilts his head,
'Is this Woodhouse?'
'Yes Mr Thompson, it is Woodhouse.'
Long and sweet, first time such intimacy,
As he tells me of his family.
One of his daughters is actually in Nottingham.

I fill him in about the people of 1950 to
1952 I know of,
But I had to ask about Gladstone Fairweather.
I didn't tell him that we used to call him Miss Fairweather
Because of his neatness in dress.
'He is a pastor' says he,
I smiled and thought,
Never would I believe that he would
become a pastor.

Another last hurrah
That made me more homesick.
I arranged for about ten people
To go and see 'Queenie's Daughter'
At Ward Theatre
Miss Lou, shone
The cast shone, I laugh till me side buss
I wish they could appear in Nottingham
One of the cast
Mistake me for someone else
We all laughed, time is getting on.
I must see dear Lovie
Before I leave
'Daughter,' says she,
'Won't you spend a night with me?'
Honoured I am—
It was just like old times,
When I used to spend Christmas
With Lovie.

We talked into the night with
Her adopted daughter Tavia.

There's another visit
To see my beloved friend's daughter;
They live in Blue Hole
She would never forgive me
If I did not go.
Over rock, over stone I go,
Grateful am I to a school
Friend who took me there
In his car.

Oh little Anthea
So pretty—eyes so bright
So dainty
I wish her mother was beside me
My friend's parents and her sister Icy
Such rapport
We adopted each other
And have become lifelong family.

Time is drawing near.
I now spend these days in Kingston
With my beloved mother-in-law
And her grandchildren.
Their welcome was warming,
We have remained friends
I am still their aunt.

To sail the 2nd of January,
Telegram arrives
*'Change arrangements
Ship Cap Valente
Sail on the 6th of January.'*
Four more days of sunshine.
But tight schedule for my training in England
Again they gather gifts I can't refuse
How do they think I can carry these things?
Instead of going from Kingston,

We sailed from Port Antonio.
Another adventure—
The children are jumping for joy.
The children in the district run to hug them,
Off they go.
People I forgot to tell you about
The song and the dance craze—ska.
Poor me can't dance!
Another story,
But how I loved to see the children;
They didn't dance ballerina dance,
They ska to the tune of
From the 'Ponderosa came Bonanza',
Then the song by the Mighty Sparrow
'Go Man Go.'

I just imagine my Nottingham
When they hear these records
Because those days
Song didn't reach us
As soon as they were cut.

Again I had to say goodbye
To my beloved grandmother.
On my way down,
Pass the cane fields,
Pass the two big turpentine mango trees,
Pass the sweet tangerine trees,
I was away in my thoughts.
My youngest daughter was skipping ahead,
Ran back and held me,
'Mummy, mummy run quick!'
I snapped out of my reverie.
'Come quick, when the drum stops
They will attack!'
'Who will attack?'
'*The Indians!*'
They are beating their drums,
The penny dropped.
'No my love,' I said

'It is twelve o'clock',
'These people are preparing for a
religious meeting.'

At last again the hugging
The tears, I am irritable,
I want to stay,
I can't.
My mother says
One more time
'Leave the children with me.'

No, my heart would break.
And so again, one more time,
I rest my eyes on the verdant scenery.
Tears, friends with card follow us to Port Antonio.
Of course they run into friends who
Supervise the loading of bananas
And they say,
'Give her a bunch of bananas!'
And sure enough when I reach Tilbury
I had the bananas.

The accommodation was first-class;
Our own bedroom, own living room,
Dined every day at the captain's table.
Caviar! Eggs like grapes,
And for ten to eleven days the brilliant
Caribbean sun shone.
All good things come to an end;
A dark, damp cold and foggy day awaits me in London.
Slowly we cleared customs
And made our weary way to dear
Nottingham.
Cold and damp,
But we knew it,
Soon we will adjust.
It would be another seven years before
I see Jamaica again.

What an adventure,
Especially for the children;
They still talk of Vigo, LaCarrona,
Las Palmas, and Tenerife
Where I first told them about Jamaica
As we sailed past the houses with the
White and red paint,
And the purple Bougainvillea that crept
That's what Jamaica looks like from afar.
Laguardia, Caracas, Columbia and
The photographs we took El Suicide
Corner on the Andes Mountain
Old road from LaGauria to Caracas.
Back to work!
Back to reality.



Caribbean Journeys Workshop in progress, 2017. Photo by Museumand.

Caribbean Journeys is a Nottingham-based community project, delivered by AHRC-funded doctoral researchers Sofia Aatkar and Kelsi Delaney in collaboration with the National Caribbean Heritage Museum. Caribbean Journeys is funded by Midlands3Cities, a partner of Journey to Justice.

The project presents travel writing by members of the Gedling Elders group and friends of the Museum, recording their journeys between the Caribbean and the United Kingdom. Caribbean Journeys provides a platform for their voices to be heard and creates a legacy for future generations.



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