"We Want To Speak Of Old Times"

Scenario - Script draft September 8th 1998

At home in Caribbean

Market scene and song with market place song: one verse and two chorusses with mime of selling at a market, standing at seated sellers.

Desmond:
The community spirit which was there in the Caribbean in my time was very strong. In the past people used to walk more, which means they came into contact with people more and there was more scope for saying hello and having a chat.

(Improvisation here with Catherine, Dolly and Hortense greeting each other and arranging to buy things for each other)

Desmond:
I remember the love, the care and concern of people towards people from when I was young. Jamaica in my time was one great big family and that family wasn’t just to the people in Jamaica. Our biggest greatest boast was that people from anywhere in the world could walk into Jamaica and feel at home, safe, made to feel welcome, happy.

Catherine:
You get a lot of freedom in the Caribbean. Everything’s fresh. Sunshine, I like the sunshine, the sea. When you feel warm, you feel all right. You have to get up early, as soon as the sun rises. When it gets hot, everyone goes to sleep.

Dolly: You could just pick the fruit off the trees. When I was a child you could just make a breakfast of fresh fruits. There was cane all around, sugar cane. You break one, you could beat it, squeeze it. You have mango trees, coconut trees, you pick anything you like.

Pam: You’d sit out on your veranda in the evening and you’d hear the frogs singing, the crickets chirping and all fireflies like little sparks flying. And in the morning you’d hear the birds singing in the trees around the house.

chi-chi-birdo song
Desmond:
Speaks about country cooking, calabash,
“Dip and fall’ back” song and mime

The Mother Country

Pam: Mother Country! We were taught in school that England was the Mother Country. The names of the towns and villages are all English, so we felt related. In school we were taught everything about English history and geography.
Catherine: I come from Trafalgar Village, Guyana, South America. As a child I was taught that England is our Mother Country. I learned everything about England but nothing about Guyana. We sang the national anthem and celebrated the English kings and queens birthdays and celebrated everything British.

Everyone sings Rule Britannia!! and salutes.

Deciding to leave

Rose and Betty set up for the scene.

Beth is busy in the kitchen. Enter her daughter Queenie.

Queenie: Mam, I have something to tell you.

Beth: I’m listening.

Queenie: It’s very serious, mam.

The bowl slips from Beth’s grasp and lands heavily on the floor.

Beth: What, you don’t mean you are...?

Queenie: Nothing of the sort, mam.

Beth: Lord, m’heart nearly jumped through my head.

Queenie: Mam, I said serious, not dangerous.

Beth: Well, say whatever you have to say child.

Queenie: It’s about my future, mam.

Beth: Yes?

Queenie: Well, our future really. You remember how you are constantly telling me. “Queenie, keep your head up. Get a good occupation. Be of value to your nation”.

Beth: You head me alright.

Queenie: Yes, I heard, and it is time for action.

She embraces Beth

Well, I have been thinking. I mean, how would you feel if I should go abroad to improve myself.
Beth: Abroad? Lord, take the case and leave me the pillow. What broad are you thinking of, child?

Queenie: England, mam.

Beth: England? So far?

Queenie: I’ll keep in touch mam, as if I’ve never left.

Beth: You don’t even know the place. What kind of people you will be dealing with. Who will receive you there? Answer me child.

Queenie: Aunt Frida is there. I can get her to receive me. The people there are Christians like us. I’m sure I will be accepted.

Beth: So, what brought this about?

Queenie: Well, as you know, nursing is what I really wants to do. Some government official from England came here, and invite us to help the mother country, and improve our education in the process.

Beth: So you think you can.

Queenie: Yes, mam, I can. But most importantly, I want to study nursing, and I want to make you a very proud mother.

Beth: Thank you my child. I am proud of you.

Queenie: Thank you mam, I knew you would understand. I really love you. It’s not that I want to run off and leave you. Don’t worry, mam. I will be back in five years.

Beth: Five years?

Queenie: Yes mam, five years.

_They embrace._

Beth: Now I don’t want you going off in poor health, so go and get some dandelion, ciroce, chicken-weed, bridal-wist, and the usual. I am going to get the yabba ready.

**Departure**

Desmond:

A lot of people who left Jamaica from the country parts of the island had a whole truck load of people accompanying them to the airport. One person would be leaving, and they’d be accompanied by 30 or 40 people. They’d hire a vehicle and drive the 30 miles and have day out, make it an outing. The airport was full of people. My mother and friends came to the airport with me, just two carloads for me.
Ena gives seracee, Dolly gives a bible, Pam gives money and Rose gives coffee. Include little songs about seracee and coffee.

Betty:
I remember very well the morning I left and the sadness of it. We were a small family and very close knit. I have one sister and one brother, just three of us. My father was in bed with a dislocated shoulder and he could hardly lift his head up to say goodbye. He just stretched his hands out and wished me well and I didn’t ever see him alive again. He died about eight years later and I had not managed to go back before then. I said goodbye to my mother and said I would write and we had a little hug. I wouldn’t say it was very sad; it was rather abrupt, which was the way we could deal with it. She said to me: “Goodbye, avoid bad company. Just make the most of it. I’ll write.” And a little hug.

Hortense
I came in 1957. The night before we came, me and the girls went out for a drink. We girls were joking and talking about the good times we’d had. We were all reminiscing on how we used to do everything together, how one had already gone out of our batch of five friends, then I was going, so the group was drifting apart. We cried, we hugged each other because we were good friends. I wasn’t really a drinker, but we were drinking red stripe beer and they spiked mine with white rum, which they call steel bottom, so I got drunk. They had to carry me to somebody’s house to sober me up before I came home to me grandma. When I came back, my grandma had planned a prayer meeting for me. When I came home, all the people were there waiting for the prayer meeting and they were all praying and I was wanting to be sick.

Improvisation with Hortense and Ena (her grandmother) ending with
Ena: Oh Lord, just look at you. Fancy you coming home drunk. You should be ashamed. Child, what you need is prayer.

Cue for song:
May the good Lord bless and keep you, whether near or far away
May you find that long-awaited golden day today
May your troubles all be small ones and your fortunes ten times ten
May the good Lord bless and keep you till we meet again.

Rose: God go with you

Pam: Remember to write

Ena: Go safe, land safe, stay safe

Dolly: Avoid bad company
Travelling outfits
3 ladies and Desmond describe travelling outfits using own memories similar to those used by girls.

Pam: I thought I looked very smart. I had gloves and a blue-ish grey suit and stockings. I had a little half moon hat and I had red court shoes and a new leather suitcase.

Ena: I made the dress I came over in. It was a pink taffeta dress. It was really beautiful, not too short, not too long. And a hat to match, and a bag and shoes. Long gloves up to here. We wore stockings. The seam had to be straight. You should’ve seen me then. I was beautiful, very smart.

Dolly: I had a little hat with a veil on the front and an orange dress out of embroidered linen. The skirt, had a slit up to there. It was really really nice. And I had a black bag and black shoes with a little bow. I looked very smart. And it was very expensive.

Desmond: All the men were wearing suits, I couldn’t get a hat to fit my head, it was too big. I had a pin stripe suit, and what do you call those ties again? Slim Jim, it was a tie, a very slim one. Like the “spivs” wore.

The Journey Over

Betty: I came to England on an Italian boat called the Castel Verdi. We did have evenings when we had little concerts and the ship’s crew put on music for dancing or you could sit and listen and drink Italian beer. It took us three weeks getting there.

Pam: It was rough coming here on the boat. Fourteen days and I was sick for all the fourteen days. I couldn’t eat. They served us turkey and it still had black feathers on it and I cried. I just ate cream crackers me mum had given me a lot of cream crackers and cheese from Jamaica.

Dolly: I felt very apprehensive about what I was going to find and I was sad because I’d left my family behind. I was just longing for it to be over.

First Impressions

Betty: I didn’t have a picture of England really. I expected to see a lovely bright place, not exactly streets paved with gold, but near enough! And I saw the direct opposite. It was dismal and cold and I couldn’t believe it. It was quite a shock, especially seeing the houses so close together. Also seeing so many white people as opposed to being together with black people all the time. And I remember people staring at me.
Dolly: I came into Liverpool and to me it felt very very cold. It was raining and I remember having one of those big umbrellas and walking down the ship’s deck with my coat on, opening it up, shading myself from the rain. Everything was quite grey looking. The trees seemed to be a sort of rust brown. In fact I was very disappointed to start with. But as I was already here I had to make the most of it. It was warm in the hospital and the nursing home. It helped quite a bit talking with the other nurses I’d come with. If we weren’t in a group, if I’d come by myself, I’m sure I would have gone back.

Living Conditions:

Desmond: Finding a place to live when we first came over was very difficult. Most places we tried, we would be faced with a sign that read, “No Irish, no dogs, no blacks.” So we pooled our resources. Some bought houses and housed others until they were able to buy their own. We were packed in like sardines and we shared the limited facilities including the bathroom.

Bathroom scene Desmond discovers washing in the bath and removes it. Sings “At the end of the river” and everyone starts queuing outside the door and shouting. Ends with Grace saying, “I’ve got to go. I’ll just do the houses of parliament” (washing herself) and get to work.

Working Lives (ideally with music behind)

Desmond: We were invite over to fill the many job vacancies that sprung up after the war. However, finding a job was not always easy. Some vacant positions that we went for would be filled minutes before we got there, only to be made vacant again minutes after we’d left. But we persevered. We found reasonable employment and some of us even advanced up the career ladder.

Everyone moves into mimed jobs...Grace in hospital, Betty caring for mum and new baby, Ena in factory, Dolly on phone, Rose hairdressing, Pam nursing, Catherine sewing, Desmond with battery.

One-liners about work
Desmond: The driver complained that the battery is flat, but here it is, a perfect rectangular cube, just the way the manufacturers made it.
Betty visiting a new mother: So why isn’t baby sleeping? Let’s weigh him and see how he’s doing.
Dolly on phone as social worker: I’ll see to the cat and dog...you just get in the ambulance. I’ll make sure everything is all right at the house.
Rose as hairdresser: ..Your hair’s very shiny today. How would you like it done?
Pam: Have you finished with that bowl yet.
Ena in shirt factory: What a nice shirt with all the stripes. All these ends to cut off. I must hurry cos it’s piece work...
Catherine at sewing machine: I’ll get it finished by Saturday......

Desmond: And after a hard day’s work, it is back to a lonely room.
Everyone in rooms: Ena and her tea on the paraffin heater listens to Mona Lisa
Ena decides to go and cook

Kitchen scene
Ena comes in and prepares food. Other come in quickly...
Grace comes in and asks which ring she’s using and puts her little rice pan for her mum on another ring
Rose comes in and chooses another ring
Pam has been fetching things from the cupboard and now brings pan to 4th ring
Gas goes off. General consternation. Pam asks Rose what she cooked last night.
In the end she confesses to dried gungho peas and that takes ages to cook.
She finally agrees to put more money in the meter.

Social Life

Desmond: This place needs livening up. I think it’s time we had a little do.
Desmond phone box
Word goes quickly round about the party
People arrive quickly one after another, including Rose who has come over recently and Pam who knows her.
Pam: So where the decent music Desmond?
Desmond: Waith a minute. I’m going to hit you with the latest. Hot off the press from Jamaica
The group sing “This carry go bring come”..... everyone dances and then party ends on song with everyone waving and saying thankyou and goodnight Desmond.

Desmond: We came over, we worked hard and we played hard. And after 25 years, the strain is beginning to show. But we still have some years to go......so let’s get on with our work.

Everyone is exhausted. Doing jobs slowly with music (? Ole man river) behind...

More one-liners:
Dolly: this job is so stressful. The phone’s started ringing before I can even hang my coat up. ....
Rose: If only I could do this in my own time ...... I can’t keep up the pace any more.
Pam: It’s time for you to have some exercise Mrs Smith. We’ll go in the garden. You know you can walk and it’s good for you.
Ena: I can’t keep up any more. It’s too fast for me....
Desmond: If I didn’t have to write reports all the time, I’d have something to report.
Betty: Oh dear baby keeping you awake. Let’s see what’s going on. (to audience)
Can’t wait to get out of here. I’ve had enough.
Catherine: I’ve had enough. I’m old now. I’m going to stop working and retire.
Signal to stop work..... Retiring from work

Desmond: We brought with us strehnath, skills and commitment. We applied these to the best of our abilities. Now age has crept up, strength begun to fail and retirement bids us welcome.

Pam: I can lie in bed in the mornings as long as I like
Grace: At last I can relax ....
Rose: I can tea in bed in the mornings ....
Ena: I can have as many cups of coffee as I like ....
Dolly: I can take my holidays whenever I like without asking permission....
Betty: At last I’m free to enjoy myself. I can switch off that alarm clock.

Desmond: Now that our lives are no longer governed by the clock, we can enjoy the rich culture of this community. At the same time add to its richness by the constant practice of our own culture.

Brown girl in the ring dance
People leave their work positions and start the dance:

Betty:....content with my life and proud of my nursing career....

Show me your motion...

Rose: about bringing up children and now taking the floor for herself...

Skip across the ocean

Pam: I can read all those books I’ve wanted to read and never had time for...

Stand and face your partner

Dolly: about England as University and now keen to travel and learn ....

Wheel and turn your partner

Ena about always being keen to participate and perform and have fun, and here I am performing again. My teacher said one day you’re going to be a star and here I am, a star!!

Brown girl in the ring

Finish with final chorus of brown girl
Bow and then “Down on the way.....Kingston Town”

13/10/98