



LIFETIMES ACTIVITY PACK



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Notes for Teachers

The interviews in this pack were prepared as part of an inter-generational project by the European Reminiscence Network. Elders from two local groups, Ajoda (African Elders) and COFA (Caribbean elders) worked with children in two Greenwich schools (Foxfield and Nightingale Primary Schools). They developed plays with the children during October 2007, which were performed in the Tramshed Theatre. They then went on to develop their own plays based on their life stories, which were performed at the "LIFETIMES FESTIVAL" in Black History Month 2008.

The interviews were conducted by Joanne Rosenthal, a volunteer on the European Reminiscence Network project. They are now offered in edited form, together with some suggested classroom activities.

The elders' stories as revealed in their interviews can be expanded and explored through curriculum work in geography and history, including information searches through libraries and on the Internet. The older people's comments on today's world, and the place of young people in it, can form a useful jumping off point for classroom writing and discussion. It is hoped that this pack might lead to visits by some local elders, perhaps grandparents, to the classroom to work directly with the young people.

Elders in the Classroom

Young people's understanding of life in the past, and the changes that have occurred, can be deepened by reading or listening to the first hand experience of older people.

When ethnic minority elders tell their stories in a classroom with children from different cultures and racial backgrounds they often help to create inter-cultural and inter-generational understanding. It is very important in such meetings that the older person is well prepared and supported, and that the teacher has done some background work with the children and created a respectful atmosphere.

For children and grandchildren of immigrants, a sense of personal and community history is especially important in building self-esteem. Older people have a very positive role to play here, re-enforcing a cultural legacy, passing on personal stories and customs, and stimulating children in their communities to be interested in their own families' histories.

Multicultural Britain

It is important that all our children have some understanding of why Britain is a multicultural society today. When older people from the Caribbean, for example, explain to children how they came in the post-war years to work in nursing or public transport or heavy industry when the 'mother country' was crying out for help, it assists children to understand the bigger changes in society and how they are affected by them. They can see history as something that happens to 'ordinary' people as well as great leaders, and indeed that it is 'ordinary' people who can make history.

There can be further educational, social and cultural benefits when the stories of these "time witnesses" are explored in the classroom through drama, art and creative writing. These creative approaches help the children to relate what they have heard to their own experience of life, and make greater sense of it.

“Lifetimes: memories of elders from Africa and the Caribbean”

Activities for young people

Maps and journeys

The interviewees come from faraway parts of the world. Use maps from the Internet or a school atlas to see where their birthplaces are.

Global families

Have some of you got connections with these places? Can you draw a map to show how many parts of the world have family connections for you and show where members of your families have travelled to and from in the past?

Discipline and punishments

Find out from your grandparents or an older neighbour how teachers punished children in the past. Compile a list of all the 'crimes and punishments' you have heard about and then compare what happens today in your classroom.

Helping at home

Many of the people interviewed had to work in the fields or in the home to help their parents, often after a day's schooling. What are you expected to help with and how do you feel about it? Are girls and boys expected to help out equally? Draw up lists of tasks undertaken by class members and compare.

Do we have to go?

Imagine that your parents decided to uproot the whole family and travel to a distant part of the world in the hope of making a better life? How would you feel about that? Would you try to persuade them to stay? Act out a scene in a group including some children who do not want to leave their friends behind and go off to an unknown country and others who are eager to explore a new place.

Why are you leaving us?

Now imagine you are 19 or 20 years old, and you have decided to try life in another country far from where you grew up. How do you think the rest of your family would react? What reasons might they produce to try to prevent you from leaving? Play out a scene between a mother and son or daughter in which the parent tries to persuade the young person to stay at home. Use Ade's or Anthony's story to help you.

Journey into the unknown

Imagine packing for a minimum 5-year stay in an unknown country. What would you definitely take with you to remind you of home? What would you have to leave behind?

Who would you need to say a special goodbye to?

Big decisions

Imagine you are considering leaving home to try life in a distant country. Divide a page down the middle and write out the pros and cons of leaving or staying. Go through them with someone else and try to decide what to do.

Window on the world

What ways do we now have of finding out about the places we are travelling to in advance? How many of these methods would have been available to the older people telling their stories in these interviews?

Mapping the journey

Choose one of the interviews and make a map to show the journey of the story-teller. Some people flew, but their journeys were often long and indirect. Many people sailed and stopped off on the way. Compare the journey you have marked out with others in the group. If there are older people willing to come to the classroom and share their journey story with the class, this marking out of the journey might be a good activity for young and old to do together.

Paved with gold?

One noticeable thread is people's surprise and often disappointment when they arrived in Britain. Taught in school about English history, culture and literature, many immigrants had expected to find "streets paved with gold." They were shocked to find dirt and poverty in Britain and they often had to rent rooms in the poorest parts of town.

"Freezing in the sun"

Imagine if you can, what it must have been like to come from a warm fertile place where you and your family were known and respected, to a cold unknown land where you could not find your bearings. Write a 3-day diary entry as though you were a new arrival to Britain from Africa or the Caribbean, with notes about what you might have seen or felt.

A letter home

Write a letter home, which you know you will not post, because you would not wish to worry your parents. Put in it all the things you would like to say. Then write a very different, much shorter letter containing what you would be willing to post home.

There'll always be a welcome?

When you hear the older people's stories about their early years here, do you feel that Britain has improved its response to new immigrants? Can you find any newspaper reports of the arrival of Caribbean immigrants in the early 1950s through your local library or on the Internet and compare them with what the tabloid newspapers are printing today about incomers.

Sorry, the room has gone

Many immigrants report on discrimination in housing. They were told rooms were available but, when they arrived, the accommodation was suddenly mysteriously full. Act out a scene in which this occurs. You could try to play it again with two people representing each character: one person saying what was actually said and the other saying what he or she felt but could not say.

Nurses needed

Many of the immigrants who came here in the 1950s and 60s went into public services as nurses or bus or train drivers. They had to wear the same uniforms as everyone else. Perhaps this helped others to see them as contributors in areas where they were needed. What skills are we short of in Britain today? How can we help new immigrants to integrate?

Come and join us

Design a poster campaign to attract workers to Britain to help in particular trades where there is a shortage of skilled workers, including plumbing and electrical work, teaching and medicine

What I miss most

What do you think it would be like to grow old far from where you grew up? If you were to spend all your later years in a far-away country, what do think would be your strongest memories of Britain and what would you miss the most? How might you hold on to some of your own childhood culture, even if you knew you could never come back to Britain?

The story of my life

The story-tellers in the book have talked about different stages of their lives in chronological sequence. School students have not lived through so much but there is still plenty to remember. Write down some of your earliest memories, people you have been close to, special events and exciting journeys. This could be in the form of a life-line with dates along it. Or you could choose to try writing a poem telling in short phrases about the moments you wish to recall and remember.

You may discover that it is quite painful to think about some of the sad things that have happened in your life so far, and you may want to pass over them quickly. Talk to another person about how that feels, and then consider together some of the sad stories told by the elders in these interviews. They will have had to revisit some painful memories too during their interviews, but they still wished to participate because they wanted a record of their lives to survive.

A life story interviews and books

If a grandparent or another older person is willing to talk to you about his or her life, you could conduct a life story interview, following the interview questions. You may like to divide into groups and let each group member take responsibility for asking about one section of the older person's life.

Write down what you remember from the interview. Then you could illustrate it with your idea of what the people and places in the interviewee's story looked like. Then invite the older person to enjoy the end result.

Mr Ade Aderogba MBE

Date of Birth: 1942
Place of Birth: Oshogbo, Nigeria



CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

I grew up in Oshogbo in the South West of Nigeria. I lived with my family in a traditional African family house compound. There were many rooms. The father's room was known, in colonial Africa, as the 'master bedroom' and the wives and the children had their own bedrooms. It was a very happy and typically African Yoruba environment.

Who was in your family?

My mother had 6 children and all six are alive and well today, which was very unusual given the mortality rate. Mine was a happy family. My father had two wives. It was the norm.

Were your parents strict?

My Mum wore the trousers in my family. She was a very powerful woman. She sorted out our education and each of my siblings got a good one. She was very keen on education.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

I went to a local primary school in Oshogbo. I really enjoyed school and I was always a keen student. In Nigeria, the British had set up boarding schools. These special public schools produced the crème de la crème of people who took over after independence. Four thousand candidates applied for the sixty places at Yaba Tech Institute in Nigeria. I was one of those sixty. Whilst at Yaba Tech, I was never taught by a single black person.

What did you used to do with your friends?

When I was at boarding school we woke up at 6am, had a cold shower and went out and played cricket or hockey.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

In May 1965.

What made you decide to move to England?

I was already a chartered secretary before I left Nigeria. I remember my boss called me in when I resigned and said "You've got A levels, you are an ACIS, you could just wait for a promotion; just carry on here." And I said, "No, all my friends are going. If only for adventure, I will go." I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do when I got to England, but I knew I wanted to gain more work experience.

How did you feel when you left?

Leaving home was an emotional thing. My mum echoed the same words as my boss. "What do you want to go to England for? I was trying to save the money to buy you a car." But I said, "Mum, I've got to travel", she replied "All right then!"

How did you get to England?

I bought a ticket from Lagos to Liverpool for £82. The company was called Elder Dempster Lines, one of the main shipping lines between Liverpool and West Africa. I did not travel alone. My cousin, Olaweirai Babalola, also worked for the University of Ibadan and we resigned at the same time. Our brothers came to see us off and stood on the harbour wall waving while we boarded this cargo boat. The ship took two weeks to cross from Lagos to Liverpool. As it was a cargo boat it stopped in Ghana to pick up cocoa, and then in Sierra Leone. It also stopped off at Las Palmas in the Canaries; they were beautiful islands. It felt like a free holiday.

Was England very different from Africa? How?

I was quite impressed with how built up it was, with all the houses. The sizes of the houses shocked me – I thought the rooms were small. But then after one winter, I understood, that's why the rooms have to be small, to keep the heat in! The countryside was beautiful. Every plot of land looked like a postcard, compared with the tropical situation in Africa, with the trees and the jungle.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

I stayed with a friend in Camberwell for about three or four months and then I rented my own room nearby. It belonged to an Ananuga Nigerian man and I said "That is my tribe, Ananuga, Yoruba". He gave me the keys and showed me the gas meter. He said "If you don't want to be cold you have to put some coins in the meter."

Were people nice to you when you got here?

My friend in Camberwell was working for Haywards pickle factory in Rotherhithe and he was able to get me a job there for a few weeks when I first arrived because I wanted to earn a bit of money to send to my family and I wasn't going to start my studying until September.

Was it easy to make friends?

At the factory I was the only black man. They found me to be a bit of an oddity. I wasn't very popular with the workers. They were sweet but their language was terrible. One of them said "Ade, come here! Give me three swear words or I will kill you!" But I couldn't swear. They said "What are you going to say when you get really angry?" and the best I could come up with was "Damn!". They said "Come on, find something bigger!"

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

I saw an advert in The Guardian for an Assistant Accountant with Camden Council and I went for the job and I got it. I met my wife while I was working at Camden. We got married in 1967 in Hampstead Town Hall. Then I took a one-year post-graduate course at Exeter University.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

I went back to Nigeria in 1968 and I worked for the World Bank Group for sixteen years in Africa. I returned to England with my wife in 1989 and worked in London until my retirement.

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

My friend in Camberwell.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

I have two sons and a daughter Lola. All three are doctors. They come home at weekends.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you think you'll ever go back to live there?

I'm going to go back to my real home in a few years time, and that's Nigeria. For someone like me, it is just unthinkable that I will spend my last few years in this country.

Mrs Cynthia Davis



Year of Birth: 1938
Place of Birth: Jamaica

CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

I grew up in Buff Bay, in Portland, and it was very good. As children we were free to go places but of course we had to be at home a certain time. In my district it was like a town and they used to call it Buff City, it was so big, everything was there. We had a big hospital, my mum used to work there. She was a ward maid.

Who was in your family?

My brother and me

Were your parents strict?

My mum was very strict, my father he was ok, not as strict as my mum. He died in his 40s. He was a cultivator, he had land, and he used to go and work on his land in the morning. Sometimes as children we used to go to the sea-shore with him and the men who worked with him. And they used to be cooking in these big pots, and we used to love it as children, sitting there with them.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

I went to a Church of England school. They were very strict. The teachers used to cane us, sometimes for no reason at all – they just enjoyed doing it. But they shouldn't have been doing it so when we had school inspectors coming around, they'd hide the cane! Sometimes we girls didn't look right, if our uniform was all messy, we'd get the cane! And if he was caning us, we'd have to stand there. And they'd sometimes do it for no reason at all.

What did you used to do with your friends?

We'd go to the seaside and play, there was no fear of allowing your children to go out. We'd play in the sea, we lived on the bay, so we were always in the sea.

Do you remember the war? What was it like growing up during the war?

It didn't affect us at all, we as children just run about. We were very young so it meant nothing to us.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

1962

What made you decide to move to England?

My husband came out and I was married in Jamaica, and you have to do as your husband wishes.

How did you feel when you left?

I was a married woman, so there were no tears – because I was going to see my husband. He came over in 1960 so I was excited to see him.

Most of us planned to go back home after 5 or 6 years but it never happened because you started working, having children. Eventually my husband left to go back to Jamaica when he was 50, but I didn't follow him.

How did you get to England?

I came by plane. It was ok, it was a long flight, still is!

Was England very different from the Caribbean? How?

It was completely different. In the district where I was brought up, everybody knew everybody, you'd speak to people in the street. When you came here nobody spoke to you, nobody looked at you or they looked at you for the wrong reasons. So you were like a prisoner in your own home.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

When I first came I was living in Battersea, and then I moved to Clapham Common, then to Claham North, then to Greenwich, then to Plumstead, and now I'm in Northfleet.

Were people nice to you when you got here?

Not really, nobody was friendly, apart from the people you knew from back home.

Was it easy to make friends?

Depending on where you worked, yes.

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

My first job was in Lyons Corner House Café. I worked there for some time, clearing tables. After that I worked in Westminster Hospital as a nursing orderly. When we moved to Greenwich I applied at the Miller Hospital for a nursing auxiliary's post which I got. I remember the assistant matron there, Miss Harvey. She came to me one day and said, "Nurse Davis, have you ever thought of doing your training?" – she said, "I've been watching you, if you think of doing your nursing, come back to me." So I did my training. I didn't come to England to do nursing but I did it later. I enjoyed nursing. Then later I decided to go to social work, and I did that for 18 years. When I applied I was Grade One and then you actually work yourself up to Grade Four. In fact, was the first black deputy manager in Greenwich Social Sevices at the time and everyone wanted to come and see who is this black manager.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

I miss working. I loved nursing, I loved looking after people, I love people full stop. But with nursing, every day you go in and more or less do the same thing. You have to go by the routine. But with social work you met so many different people and so many of their problems. I've been called so many different things because I worked with teenage girls and they're the worst! But I enjoyed it because each family has a different problem and you have to deal with that problem.

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

I had my husband and some friends and family.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

I've got four boys and three granddaughters. They all live in Catford. I see them often, we talk on the telephone. My eldest is 13 going on 31, and it will be her birthday on Saturday so I'm going there on Friday.

What is life like for you now you're retired? What do you like to do now?

I'm enjoying every minute of it. I'm never indoors. My son says he has to make an appointment to see me or speak to me.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you miss the Caribbean?

I don't think I'd like to go back to Jamaica to live because of the high crime rate there but I would like to go somewhere like Spain, Florida, somewhere sunny.

What was the happiest period of your life?

I think it's when I was confirmed, when I was about 10. I remember I was all dressed in white, white veil, white shoes. I remember the boys were in white suits and the girls in white dresses, white shoes, white socks. And we went up to kneel in front of the bishop and he put his hand on you. And we had a great party afterwards.

How has the world changed since when you were young?

It's changed for the worst. In Jamaica before I came here, everybody lived in unity and your doors weren't locked and things like that. When I came to England in the 1960s it was the same – you could leave your door open and there was no vandalism or anything like that, no murders. But now it's just out of control.

We were brought up very strict - to respect other people, respect our elders, respect other people's property. But these parents, they haven't got a clue. They want to be re-educated, most of these parents. And now, you can't scold children, you can't smack children, so this is why they're running wild. There's no discipline.

Mrs Irma Reid

Year of Birth: 1944
Place of Birth: Trinidad



CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

I grew up in San Fernando which is the second city in Trinidad and its in the South of Trinidad. It was near the sea, so we used to go to the Savannah to play.

Who was in your family?

I have 2 brothers and 3 sisters, so there were 6 of us, and my dad had 3 other children – 2 girls and a boy. We didn't live in the same house as them, but we knew them and we grew up close to them.

Were your parents strict?

My dad was very strict. My mum was a pussy cat! We could get away with murder with my mum, and she always would say 'wait till your father comes home!' But she never gave us away, she always made sure we were asleep before he came home anyway. My dad, he was very, very strict. The last time I got a licking I must have been in my early 30s or late 20s. I came home later than I was supposed to come home. As long as you lived in their house, you were the child and they were the parent. What they say goes. If your dad says, come home by 7 o'clock, then you did. You couldn't go anywhere unless you asked permission. If they said no, it's no. We did get to go out, to parties...and as we got older, we had more freedom, but he was very strict.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

St Ava Girls Roman Catholic School. That was my primary school. When I was 12 I went to a convent school. I enjoyed school. It was an all-girls school, but we did get to mix with boys, at the cubs and the scouts.

What did you used to do with your friends?

Because there were 6 of us, we played among ourselves. We played dolls houses, cricket. My mum used to make toys for us – cloth dolls with twine for the hair. We used to play tennis and netball at school, against other schools. We all used to meet up with our friends at church.

Do you remember the war? What was it like growing up during the war?

I don't remember the war. I was too young. But we did hear about it when older people talked about it. And we learned about it in history and geography lessons.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

1970

What made you decide to move to England?

I wanted to become a nurse and to train in England. Since I was a young girl, I have always wanted to be a nurse and to train in England. I used to read children's story books and nursing stories, and 'Heidi.'

How did you feel when you left?

I was happy I was leaving because I was going on an adventure but I was sad to leave the family. I wished that when I was coming they could all come with me. So I was very sad to leave, but I was also happy and looking forward to coming to England, and to see the world.

How did you get to England?

I came by boat. I came on the Oriana, a P&O cruise ship. Because it was a cruise ship, we stopped at lots of the islands on the way, and we stopped at Portugal, and finally arrived at Southampton.

Was England very different from the Caribbean? How?

At first it didn't feel too different, because it was a bright sunny day. But it was freezing cold! I was sitting on the train and we passed all these houses and they looked like dolly houses! All the houses were joined up and everything looked so pretty because it was spring time, the end of March. Everything looked like a picture postcard.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

When I first came, I stayed with a friend in Ipswich for 2 weeks. It was very cold there, it was snowing there. Then I went to stay in Grove Park Hospital, where I was doing my training.

Were people nice to you when you got here?

In Ipswich people were very friendly and very nice. In London people were different. When I got to London from Ipswich, I got to Liverpool St and had to get the bus to London Bridge station, and the driver told me to get off at the wrong stop. There was an elderly white couple at the bus stop and I asked them if this was London Bridge station and they told me I had got off 2 or 3 stops after the station. So they told me that the driver was very naughty, and told me which bus to get to go back there. When I got on the bus I explained what happened to me to the conductor and he let me get the bus for free.

Was it easy to make friends?

I've never had any problem making friends - I talk too much!

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

I did my training at Grove Park, and from there I went to the Royal Ears Nose and Throat Hospital in Grays Inn Road and then to Greenwich and then to the Brooke Hospital. I worked there from 1977 to 1994. Then I went to St Thomas Hospital. I retired in 1999.

I loved nursing. I wouldn't do anything else.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

I don't miss it. By the time I left I was glad to go, there were so many changes at the hospital.

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

I had the friend in Ipswich that I stayed with. And I had friends in Reading and Chalk Farm. And I had a cousin here too.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

I have one daughter who is 20 – Victoria. She lives with me.

What is life like for you now you're retired? What do you like to do now?

I had planned to go back home when I retire but it's not so easy now because of my sister's health problems. But I'd like to go home for the winter. We probably will go home eventually but for the time being we're better off here.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you miss the Caribbean?

I do miss the Caribbean, but just as much as I miss here when I'm there!

Do you ever go back? When was the first time you went back?

Since I've returned, I go every year for 3-4 months. In the future, I'll probably go for 6 months.

Do you think you'll ever go back to live there?

I would love to say I'd go and live there permanently but I don't think it would happen. Maybe when I get really old, I might go back there. I wouldn't like to get old and disabled and be in England. Not because I don't like it here, but because the climate is so difficult.

What was the happiest period of your life?

My school days were the happiest days.

How has the world changed since when you were young?

For the worse. Nowadays the parents don't discipline their children. You need to correct children when they do wrong. The children are misbehaving but you have to blame the parents because they let them get away with murder.

And also the people in authority who are supposed to know better, make all these rules – you can't discipline your child, you can't do this... And you can't even look at someone these days without them swearing at you, or wanting to stab you. I blame the parents. Doesn't matter what religion you are, as long as you have someone to guide you – some values to live by. You notice the ones who don't have them.

Mrs Shirley Clark



Year of Birth: 1947
Place of Birth: Trinidad

CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

I was born in Trinidad in Hurbertstown, Guapo. It was a new village, all the houses were new. It was nice growing up there. My street had just four houses so we all knew each other. We were allowed to play, in the yard we played cricket and hopscotch.

Who was in your family?

There were 6 of us, and I was the eldest. We had 4 girls and 2 boys.

Were your parents strict?

Yes! My mum was the strict one, my dad was alright, but my mum was the strict one. My dad let us get away with things so we used to play tricks on my mother behind her back.

Did you like school?

I enjoyed school to an extent but couldn't wait to get home after school. I never liked playing on the roads, before you knew it, I was at home.

What did you used to do with your friends?

We used to play hopscotch. In the church we had a youth club, so we joined the youth club and we used to have functions there once a week. We used to find things to do to entertain ourselves, and there were 6 of us in the family so most of the time it was the 6 of us. We had friends, but there were enough of us at home to have fun with.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

I came to England in March 1970.

What made you decide to move to England?

When I was at home I always wanted to do either nursing, and theatre nursing in particular, or typing and shorthand. After school I did a typing and shorthand class. I was either going to go to the United States to do typing and shorthand, or come to England to do nursing, whichever came first. I started applying to hospitals in England, and one of the hospitals I applied to answered - Grove Park, so my parents said I should go and I went to England to do nursing.

How did you feel when you left?

Well to tell you the truth, at that time, I wanted to leave. Because I was 21 and being with strict parents, I thought at 21 I should have been able to go out and come in at certain times, but they would say, 'go out and come in by 7 or 8', so at 21, I was ready to leave home.

The vicar came to my home and blessed me. He offered a travelling prayer and wished me success, a safe journey and Godspeed. Then my mum offered a formal prayer.

How did you get to England?

My father was about to retire and he decided that he'd put aside a thousand pounds and that was a lot of money in Trinidad money, and he said that that was my fare. So I came by plane. But I had some good friends whose family had just moved to the United States, so I went to visit them for 2 weeks. I left home on the 22 March, spent 2 weeks in the States, and arrived here on the 4th April.

Was England very different from the Caribbean? How?

Having nobody in England that I knew, when I arrived it was grey and wet. I couldn't find the coach, so I decided to take a black cab. So I went and asked him to take me to the hospital, and as parents do, they always give you money, so I had money. I know now that the amount I paid that driver was a whole month's salary in Trinidad. When you come to a country, you don't know anyone, and no way was I going to stay in the airport, so I didn't mind paying whatever, just so I could get to where I was staying.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

In the nurses accommodation in Grove Park Hospital

Was it easy to make friends?

When I just arrived, a cousin at home had a good friend who had been in the class before me there. So when I arrived, she knew I was coming, so I met her group, and went to parties and made a group of friends through that. And you meet friends through your nursing class group. But Christmas used to be horrible. Friends who had family would go to stay with them, but I'd be stuck on my own in my room, so I didn't like Christmas in my first years here.

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

I did my training at Grove Park, and after that I did theatre nursing at Chelmsford, and ophthalmic nursing in Moorfield Hospital, and back to Wanstead, and then went to work in Kent.

I enjoyed nursing even though it had its ups and downs. I treated my patients as if they were my mum or dad, regardless of who they are, because they were the ill ones and I was there to help them get better.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

I don't miss it at all! I enjoy being retired because I'm able to do all the things I like doing, like travelling and going to the theatre, and walking. So I'm glad I'm at this age.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

I have one child, she's 20, and have no grandchildren with her. But my husband has 3 others, who I have grandchildren with, and great grand children! They live in London, and we see them often.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you miss the Caribbean?

I've been living in this country longer than I lived in the Caribbean. I had my whole working life here so I consider England my home and I wouldn't go back to the Caribbean to live. For me, going back would be to have to make a whole new start. Here I've made friends all the time so it's a lot harder to go back but I visit as often as possible. I go back every 2 or 3 years.

What was the happiest period of your life?

One would be leaving home!! Getting to be my own woman! While I was under the roof of my parents, even though you think you're a woman, you're not. So my happiest time was becoming an independent person, and I still am, even though I have my husband!

How has the world changed since when you were young?

I think it has changed for the worst really. When I was at school, you were able to go out, and leave the house, and come back at 5 in the evening, and your parents didn't worry about you. But now, everybody has to be so careful.

Mrs Carmen Ward



Date of Birth: 1935
Place of Birth: Canouan

CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

I was born in Canouan, a very small island with a population of 700 and everyone knew everyone else or was even related to others. Lots of sun and warm sea. I left there at the age of 6 and moved to St Vincent where I grew up. It was quite different there because where we lived was very far away from the sea, whereas Canouan was such a small island that you were surrounded by water all the time. The food and everything was completely different. I really enjoyed growing up there.

Who was in your family?

I have two sisters. I had a very forceful grandmother who often cooked for us, and an auntie who lived up the hill from our house. My father was a carpenter.

Were your parents strict?

I was partly brought up by my aunt. My mum was very strict! She had a whip made of tamarind tree. She often told me to do chores for her, but I used to daydream in the sun and forget. Then she would chase me with her whip and I'd run to my aunt's house and she would hide me and protect me.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

At 11 I left and went to school in Kingston, the capital of St Vincent. I enjoyed school.

What did you used to do with your friends?

Actually, I was a rather dreamy girl. I spent a lot of time with my grandfather. Our house was bang on the sea and he had a boat. He had been a boat-builder and seaman. He told me long stories about men and the sea and I used to dream about travelling. He had binoculars and let me look through them.

Do you remember the war? What was it like growing up during the war?

The only thing I remember is the shortage of food and clothes that you couldn't get because they came from England. Flour was sparse and people had to improvise with whatever you had. People used to dry and pound breadfruit to grind it with whatever bit of flour there was and make fritters.

Oh yes, I remember one day seeing a German Zeppelin plane crash into coconut trees on our island. I think the surviving soldiers were taken to hospital.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

September 1958

What made you decide to move to England?

I came to England to do nursing.

How did you feel when you left?

It was fine. I wanted to leave when I was 18 but my auntie said I was too young and inexperienced so I went into teaching till I was 22. When I was 22 I was old enough to leave and my friend had already come ahead of me so I had someone in the same hospital I was going to. It was exciting to come. I had no idea what would happen till I came!

How did you get to England?

I got a plane from St Vincent to Barbados and then we waited there for 9 days until our papers came through. And then we got a boat from there to Genoa, a train from there to Calais, and then a ferry to Dover.

Was England very different from the Caribbean? How?

It was very different to the Caribbean. I remember the crowds of so many people meeting relatives. But I first lived in Colchester which was a small town. It was similar to St Vincent – just one main street, very small.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

I first lived in Colchester, for 4 years while I was working at the hospital there.

Were people nice to you when you got here?

Yes, they were very nice. English people are very polite!

Was it easy to make friends?

Yes, because there were lots of West Indian girls at the hospital so I made friends with them.

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

I qualified as a nurse in Colchester. I also worked in a hospital in Plaistow, East London. Later on I trained as a midwife. And in the 70s I became a community midwife. I did that for 30 years. I enjoyed my work very much. Being a midwife, helping people have babies, it's a happy event.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

After 30 years of being retired I don't miss it now!

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

I had just one friend – she was at the same hospital as me.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

No, I have no children.

What is life like for you now you're retired? What do you like to do now?

I enjoy being retired. I get up to all sorts now!

LOOKING BACK:

Do you miss the Caribbean?

Not really. I've been here 50 years now, so my parents have died, most of my friends have died or moved away. So there are very few people who know me there now, so its not really the same.

Do you ever go back? When was the first time you went back?

I first went back 7 years after I got here. I go back when I can.

Do you think you'll ever go back to live there?

No.

What was the happiest period of your life?

I think it would be my school days. They were the happiest days. I was with my friends and I was carefree. And it was in the Caribbean, so it was nice and hot!

How has the world changed since when you were young?

I think people were more caring when I was young. Nowadays, young people have no respect for the older people. They don't behave well, shouting and screaming. There was more decorum in those days. You felt safer. If you lost your way, you'd go to the policeman and he'd direct you to where you were going. You had no fear.

Mrs Gwen Sewell

Date of Birth: 1939
Place of Birth: Jamaica



CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

In Jamaica. I enjoyed growing up there, it was lovely. It was a small place and everyone knew everyone. When I looked out from the verandah of our house, I saw all the comings and goings, men with donkeys, people going to work in the fields and coming home again and people going to the shops.

Who was in your family?

Two brothers and two sisters.

Were your parents strict?

Very strict! My mother was very strict, My father was very quiet, he didn't interfere.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

I went to a church school. I liked going to school. I didn't learn much though!

What did you used to do with your friends?

We would sit and talk, and sew dolls clothes. But usually outdoors. You didn't live inside, you lived outside, because it's so warm and sunny.

Do you remember the war? What was it like growing up during the war?

I was just born at the end of the war so I don't remember it.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

22 August 1958

What made you decide to move to England?

My cousin was here and she said to come, so I came. I don't really know why I came.... I just came! I thought it was just for a few years. I didn't think I'd stay.

How did you feel when you left?

I wasn't sad because I knew I would be able to go back if it didn't work out. My dad had said he would send me the fare to go back home if I wanted to.

How did you get to England?

I got here by airplane. We stopped in America on the way. My cousin came to meet me.

Was England very different from the Caribbean? How?

I was living in the country where there were no rows of houses, but lots of space and everyone knew each other. So it felt very clustered. And very fast moving, people always rushing about. It felt totally different.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

I came to stay with my aunt and she got me a job once I was here.

Were people nice to you when you got here?

I had no problem with people.

Was it easy to make friends?

I had no problem making friends.

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

I worked in a laundry and then in a tin factory, making bottle tops. I enjoyed the work, I had nothing else to do! After that, I had my children. Then when I was 30 I decided I wanted to work in hospitals. You could walk in and ask for a job in those days. I put in an application to do auxiliary nursing at Lewisham Hospital. I enjoyed very very much being a nurse in Lewisham Hospital.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

For 14 years. Yes, I miss it. I love nursing, I love looking after people, especially old people. I miss caring for sick people and watching them get well again.

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

I had an aunt, a cousin, family who had already come over.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

3 children, 6 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild. They all live near and I see a lot of them

What is life like for you now you're retired? What do you like to do now?

I enjoy retirement very much! I love crafts –sewing, making cushion covers, hat making, dress making.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you miss the Caribbean?

No, I don't miss it, because I go back whenever I want.

Do you ever go back? When was the first time you went back?

My mum is still there, so I go back regularly.

Do you think you'll ever go back to live there?

My children want me to go home so they can come and stay! But England, is where I have made my life. My intention is to spend six months in Jamaica and six months in England. I have my children here, but when I get fed up I can go back home for a while.

What was the happiest period of your life?

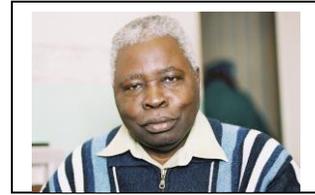
My youth, in the Caribbean. When I had my mother to care for me. I could go out and come back and there'd be food for me.

How has the world changed since when you were young?

It has changed a lot. Now you have children stabbing each other. We never knew of these things. Knives were used in the kitchen to chop fruit. Now they're used as weapons and people are killing each other. It's crazy!

Mr James Adebayo Adesina

Date of Birth: 1934
Place of Birth: Ibadan



CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

I was born in Ibadan, Nigeria. Ibadan is in a savannah area, between grassland and forest. My childhood home was made out of mud and the roofing was made out of iron sheeting. We didn't have any electricity but during that time it was considered a middle class African home.

Who was in your family?

I have two brothers and two sisters. I am the youngest. However there were more than just us in our family, we were a large family which included my grandmother and my dad's brothers and cousins.

Were your parents strict?

My sister was so much older than me that I used to think that she was my mother. When I went to school and saw her there and also my older brother, it took me by surprise.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

I went to a local village school which was built by my grandparents with the help of other parents. The teachers at my school were missionaries. I began school at the age of seven. It is quite interesting how they determine when you are ready to go to school. The missionaries would ask each child to go in front of the teacher and stretch his hand over his head. If the tip of his finger did not touch the ear on the other side then they were not old enough to start school.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

In 1960, when I was about twenty-six.

What made you decide to move to England?

I decided to come to Great Britain to study.

How did you get to England?

I eventually paid for my flight, which at the time was a lot of money. I didn't fly on my own. I was with all my friends. We all decided to come about the same time, and luckily, I think about forty or fifty of us travelled on the same day. I prayed that plane should not crash! It was the first time I'd been on a plane. It took two days to make the flight as we stopped in Libya.

Was England very different from Africa? How?

When I flew into Heathrow airport on the second day of my journey, and I saw the country it seemed grey and grim and not as prosperous as the one I had left behind. Back home, we like to play a lot of outdoor activities, and shout and make a lot of noise. This whole country looked cold like a graveyard. At first I said "Are there any living people in this country, or only dead people living here?"

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

I had arranged to live with a friend in Tufnell Park, so I had somewhere to go when I arrived. It was a damp basement, not a healthy environment but I survived. There were three of us living there and we were all students. It was good living in London because I could be together with people of my own kith and kin. Some Nigerians tried living outside London but eventually they returned because people seemed unfriendly outside London.

Were people nice to you when you got here?

There was prejudice, especially when you were looking for a room; you came up against a blank wall. "Sorry, no coloureds", "No niggers" and we had never been confronted with that type of discrimination.

Was it easy to make friends?

There was not much spare time because you had to study for the course. Physics, chemistry, mechanics and maths were subjects we learned thoroughly so there wasn't much time to socialise; only during the holidays, when we went to parties and saw friends that were getting married. We had had the opportunity of meeting people from Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania especially at college, but most important, people from your own background.

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

My first job was with the contractors, Waites Builders in Norbury. They posted me to Richmond in Surrey, to one of their giant estate developments. I worked there for about six months. I then decided to resign and went to do a course at Bournemouth College of Technology for three years. After my course had finished, I decided to move back to London and I worked for Lambeth Council.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

I decided to go back to Nigeria in July 1971. I didn't want to stay in this country. I had done the training and I thought I would be much more useful to my own native country. All my family over there were so delighted when I returned after eleven years of staying in foreign lands. I was welcomed then I looked for a job and I started working. I started my own business, but unfortunately, due to the unstable military government, my business in engineering work was affected. So I decided to return to Britain.

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

My friend in Tufnell Park.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

I don't have to worry about my children because they are settled down. One of my sons is married to an Italian, another son is married to a Ghanaian. My first son married a girl from the Eastern part of Nigeria.

What is life like for you now you're retired? What do you like to do now?

I do voluntary jobs for the council. I'm on some panels like Greenwich Borough Council. I think it is important to give something back to society as society has given us something.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you miss Africa?

There are some very good things that one needs to learn from this country but the future is what I am a little worried about. Back home it is like a compound, all the elderly stick together. We all take care of each other. I am lucky because I have the option of going back to Nigeria.

Do you ever go back? When was the first time you went back?

I go home for three or four months every year.

Do you think you'll ever go back to live there?

I don't want to end up in a residential home here, so I think I will go home when I am very old.

If you could change anything in your life what would it be?

All the people living in this country must all work together to make it a better place. There must be tolerance for the multicultural groups in order that everyone can enjoy living in harmony.

Mrs Veronica Shirfield

Date of Birth: 1932
Place of Birth: Grenada



CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

Sauteres, Grenada, in the parish of St Patrick's. Everybody would play outside in the yard, and the Savannah, flying kites.

Who was in your family?

I had a sister and a brother. I was the oldest, the big sister to them, kind of looking after them and teaching them things.

Were your parents strict?

Not more than anybody else. They were very strict about education because there's nothing much for you if you weren't educated. We had to read every day, the prayer book, a bit of the Bible.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

I went to a Church of England school. I liked school a lot, except Fridays – that was Maths day! I never liked maths, I still don't! I had a good education. Coming from the Caribbean, we had the same education as you had in England. It was a British colonial country so everything came from here.

What did you used to do with your friends?

You'd play with your friends in the street, ring-a-ring-a-roses kind of games, and flying your kites. There wasn't much time to play, you'd have to do your homework, small as you were, and you'd have to help with the housework, and sweep the garden, and you'd have to do your washing with a bowl of soap and water because there was no washing machine.

Do you remember the war? What was it like growing up during the war?

Of course I remember the war –we had serious food shortages, because nothing could reach us by ship. They used to sink the ships bringing food. We had to rely on the food that was grown in our own country – like bananas, and breadfruits

and corn. Things like flour, sugar, cheese, butter, toilet paper – they didn't reach us. At night, once it got dark, we weren't allowed to put our lamps on because they didn't want the German planes to see where we were, and come and bomb us. We weren't hit at all in St Patrick's but I think St George's did get hit.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

June 1958

What made you decide to move to England?

I always wanted to be a nurse, since I was going to school, and I used to go to the dentists, and I could smell all the spirits and hear the instruments boiling up to be sterilised, and the nurses all dressed in their nice starched uniforms. It was exciting. I liked to look after people, and put plasters on people, and play nurse. Most girls wanted to be nurses.

How did you feel when you left?

It was hard. Because I had to leave my mum and dad, and sister and brother. I was the first one to leave.

How did you get to England?

I travelled by boat. I was very ill, so I didn't enjoy the journey at all. I was so ill with a bad chest and a cold. Probably because I didn't have a warm coat. When you cross the Mediterranean, it was very cold. We went to Genoa, and from there we transferred to train, and then went to Dover or Southampton. From there we went to Victoria station. My friend and her husband were there to meet me.

Was England very different from the Caribbean? How?

Very different. My first impression was, "why was everybody running?!" It was June but it seemed very dark to me.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

For the first 2 weeks before I started nursing, I stayed with my friend and her husband. Then I went to live in at the hospital where I was training.

Were people nice to you when you got here?

Oh yes, I can't complain. Everybody was very nice. I had my friends, and my first encounter with people was with the doctor when I arrived and was very ill. He was very nice. When I offered him some money, he said "Don't worry, you don't have to pay me for it at all."

Was it easy to make friends?

Yes, because I'm a very happy-go-lucky person anyway. There were a lot of coloured girls in the hospital, and Chinese, Jamaican, Trinidadian, so it was very friendly.

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

My first job was in Langthorne Hospital. I loved my work. It was in the East End, and people were very friendly and nice. I didn't encounter any problems. Only the odd sick person would ask you if you climbed trees or something. On the whole it was alright.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

I was there for 2 years, and I did another 2.5 years in Ashford, Middlesex. Then I worked in a Geriatric hospital. I did all sorts of courses at different hospitals. Mainly I worked as a midwife.

I don't miss working! I don't miss getting up in the morning. But I really loved the babies, and even though now I have my own grandchildren, when I see babies and children in the street I always have to go and say hello and chat to them. I have to stop myself picking them up out of their prams because they look so nice. I miss the social life with the girls as well.

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

It was so easy to make friends when you were training as a nurse. I made friends with some of the English girls I trained with and I am still in touch with some of them.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

I have 3 children – 2 daughters and 1 son - and 6 grandchildren.

What is life like for you now you're retired? What do you like to do now?

I do the cleaning! I look after the children and grandchildren.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you miss the Caribbean?

Oh yes, I do miss the Caribbean. But I have been here for 40 years so you get used to it. I never get used to the winter though.

Do you ever go back? When was the first time you went back?

I first went back in 1972. I try and go back when I can.

Do you think you'll ever go back to live there?

No, I have no plans to go and live there. Just to visit.

What was the happiest period of your life?

I think it was when I got my nursing certificates. I was happy because I achieved what I came here for. That was very important to me.

When I got married, and had the babies too; I was very happy then. When I saw they were real, a boy and a girl in my arms, that was my proudest moment. I was pregnant again soon after, and I used to put all three of them in the pram together, one of those tall "royal" prams. People used to stop me and say, "Oh madam, aren't you lucky! You've got triplets!" And I'd say "Oh yes."

How has the world changed since when you were young?

Children may be children, but I find children now have no respect. Not like when I was growing up. They don't have any respect for the police, the priests, the doctors, the teachers. When I was growing up, these people were all pillars of the community. You weren't afraid of them but you respected them. I don't think you see that any more.

Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of good changes. The technology is beautiful, it's amazing what it can do. My daughter brought the computer here and with the webcam, we were connected to New Zealand! We could see the new baby, his eyes shining. We were talking and laughing. And you can just get photos through the computer. The fog has gone. The government did something about that. The trains are all smoke-less now. And most of all, the smoking ban is marvellous. Everywhere you used to go people were smoking, choking you when you don't smoke. And you have the new channel tunnel train. All this is new since I've been here. So, there's a lot of good things, but the worst thing is this respect thing.

Mr Tony Ray Maduagwu

Date of Birth: 1936
Place of Birth: Enyiogugu



CHILDHOOD:

Where did you grow up? What was it like growing up there?

I was born in a village called Enyiogugo, where we lived in mud houses, but from the age of five I was brought up in Yaba, a crowded area of Lagos, which was then the capital of Nigeria. As a child I remember living in a brick-built house with a corrugated iron roof. The climate in Nigeria is generally hot almost all of the year round. It only changes towards Christmas when it is usually a bit cold and windy.

Who was in your family?

My family consisted mainly of three children and my mother as my father passed away when I was young.

Were your parents strict?

We had a typical happy family life. I have to admit I was spoilt! As I was the first born, I didn't have to do anything. My sister did everything with my mother and my younger brother. In Nigeria the women do everything! Before I came here, I'd never stepped in a kitchen before, to the extent that when I was coming to Britain my mum wasn't happy because she thought I would die of starvation.

What school did you go to? Did you like school?

I went to school in Lagos. If you did well you went up to the next class but if you failed you stayed behind. I remember we had to run to catch the bus. If you were late for school, or if you failed to do your homework, you were punished. We respected the teachers. When I finished elementary

school I went to Yaba Tech engineering school and did engineering for four years.

What did you used to do with your friends?

I participated in lots of sports such as football and boxing. I even played for the national side. We were called the baby team because we were still young. I remember playing for the Challenge Cup, the Nigerian Cup and the School Cup.

MOVING TO ENGLAND:

When did you move to England?

I left home in 1964, and came over here to London and I am still here.

What made you decide to move to England?

My colleagues at work introduced me to the idea. We had two white people from England, who were working with us, and one of them said to me, "Why not go to England to further your education?"

How did you feel when you left?

My Mum wasn't happy at all, especially me being the first-born son. She reckoned I was going to die, because I might not be able to feed myself as I never did any cooking at home.

How did you get to England?

When I was coming, I just had a small suitcase of clothes and an address to come to. I paid the fare and sent some money to England through the bank so that when I arrived here I'd just have to collect it and there would be no big fuss about it. I came by aeroplane.

Was England very different from Africa? How?

Yes it was, different people and different food.

LIFE IN ENGLAND:

Where did you live?

I lived at No 110 Turnpike Lane. London N8

Were people nice to you when you got here?

Very few people were nice to us. Some people looked at us as though we were from another world.

Was it easy to make friends?

Not really

What job did you do? Did you like your work?

Although I was a skilled worker before arriving in England, it was not easy for me to find work. Once I had found work, some of the other workers went on strike as they did not want a black man working next to them. The company said "he is qualified, he is a member of your union. He must be allowed to work." In the long run, I was allowed to work there.

How long did you work for? Do you miss working?

I have worked and studied most of my stay in England although now I am a pensioner.

Did you have any friends or family here when you came to England?

Yes I did.

Do you have children/grandchildren? Do you see them often?

Yes I do and I have a good relationship with them.

What is life like for you now you're retired? What do you like to do now?

It is a little bit lonely but I do mix with other people.

LOOKING BACK:

Do you ever go back to Africa? When was the first time you went back?

Yes I visit home. Some times once or twice a year.

Do you think you'll ever go back to live there?

I am a pensioner over here having worked for 43 years in England. I don't think I could get a pension in Africa.

What was the happiest period of your life?

When I graduated from University

If you could change anything in your life what would it be?

To go back and use the knowledge that I have acquired.

How has the world changed since when you were young?

From good to better.