

Interview 3

Ethnic Group: Caribbean (St. Vincent & the Grenadines)

Date: 1993

Place: Montreal

Demographic Information

Gender: male

Age: late 50s

Country of birth: St. Vincent

Occupation:

Year of arrival: 1965

Children: son, age 35; daughter, age 32; daughter, age 29

I. IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

I: Why did you come to Canada? What was your motivation? And what year was that?

R: 1965. I was looking for better conditions for my family.

I: Your family? So you had a family before you came?

R: Yes. I had a family, living in England. I went to England as a single young man.

I: And you met somebody there? Where was she from?

R: She is from St. Vincent, and we got married and had three kids.

I: Do you have any more kids now?

R: No, they were all born in England.

I: What was your occupation in St. Vincent before you left for England?

R: Well, I was only 19, I was mostly finishing school, I didn't do much there.

I: What did you know about Canada before you came? Montreal? Was this the first city you came to in Canada?

R: Yes. Well, my wife had a friend here, but I knew about Canada before that. I knew about wheat, member of the Commonwealth, the prime minister, etc. The history. It's no different from England, apart from the coal. Canada was a country, which offered better economic conditions; it was best to immigrate here. We were young, and the country was young, a developing nation.

I: Do you have relatives who came elsewhere, other than Canada?

R: Yes, I have a brother in England. My parents are dead now, most of my other family is in St. Vincent. Like cousins, some of them may be working somewhere in the U.S.A.

I: Did you go to school in England?

R: Yes, I studied designing and an English language programme. Designing of clothing.

I: Tell me about your experiences when you first came to Montreal.

R: First, language. It was something different, but my biggest shock was the use of the French political group. Separation. That was a shock. In the 1970s there were some political problems, and in England no one spoke of such things. So that was my shock.

I: The main contact person here was your wife's friend, then?

R: Yes, she was the main one. So I was staying with that friend and gradually I set myself up, got a job with the help of immigration. And eventually my family, the wife and three kids came along. I was alone for a month or two.

I: What immigration clause did you come in under?

R: I was under the Commonwealth clause; no one needed to sponsor me. The family only came later because I was finding a job and a place to live.

I: How long were you in England?

R: I was in England for about eight years.

I: Did you hook up with people from St. Vincent and the Grenadines here right away?

R: Yes, one of my brothers, he was a student here, and he knew lots of people. And they all welcomed me.

I: What was the community like at that time?

R: The association was already formed and these people, well known in the community, had started the association to resolve social problems. Like taxes, and education, and other problems of people.

I: You all sort of stuck together, then?

R: Yes, we were close and there were other associations, the Jamaican, Barbados, and other Caribbean associations. There were many students here at that time, the university of Sir George and Loyola were main places for education, and many people came back and forth from the U.S., Washington, New York, Boston, and quite a few people.

I: First residence?

R: It was in Cote de Neige. We moved away for a while and my children finished high school in another neighbourhood, but we live back in Cote de Neige again now. We see other St. Vincentians at social events, shopping, and other parts of the city.

I: Church?

R: No, I'm not a religious person.

I: Are you in any "Canadian" associations?

R: No, not at all.

I: So how would you meet any non-Caribbeans?

R: From work, I see Italians, Greeks, Jewish, Portuguese, Haitians.

I: Do you ever go out with them?

R: No.

I: Do you ever visit your family in St. Vincent?

R: Yes, I was there last time four years ago.

I: Have you sponsored any of your relatives to come to Canada?

R: No I haven't.

I: Have you considered living anywhere else in Canada?

R: Yes, I did, thinking about jobs that were available, for economic reasons. My kids might do well elsewhere, although they are at least bilingual. There are so many economic problems not only here but everywhere in Canada that I don't know if it would be possible to improve things by moving.

I: Did you ever consider moving back to St. Vincent?

R: No, most of my life was spent outside of St. Vincent, and I know that there are serious problems of economic life there. Since I have a health program here, and a pension, I need to stay here. And even though I would like to go for a holiday, there is nobody I know there anymore.

I: Who makes up your family?

R: My family is my three children and my wife. We all live together, no body else. [Children: One is 35 male, working in Ottawa, 32 - female, works in U.S., a lawyer, 29 - female, studied criminology in Ottawa, now is a lawyer. None married, no grand children.]

II. RELATION WITH SPOUSE

I: Ages at marriage

[He was in his early 20s; wife the same]

R: We knew each other only a short time.

[She was a school teacher, he was a student. She did a sociology course, and has a master's degree. His education was a certificate.]

I: Is your marriage like that of your parents?

R: Rather the same.

[He was accustomed to a lot of structure. Mother died when he was 9 months old, and his father remarried when he was 12.]

I: How would your marriage have been different if you had met your wife in St. Vincent?

R: Maybe it would have been better, cause St. Vincent is quite religious. I used to be quite religious, Anglican; she was a small Pentecostal religion. There is more structure, more prayer in Christian or religious marriage. The values might be more supportive to marriage. Here there isn't much religion. Jobs are so important here, but in St. Vincent that is not so important. Here you must have money to survive, but there they have religion and a different system. This is a more on the move society. But I've been gone for 35, 36 years, I don't know what it's like. I think it is slower there; there is more guidance from other people. Marriage works out the same in every community.

I: Are there more divorces here?

R: Yes, there are lots more divorce. There, only adultery would lead to divorce, but here it could be anything. There people look down on divorce, and problems with a marriage are hidden in St. Vincent. Here nobody cares, and they don't hide their problems so much. It's rare, in St. Vincent, its very rare. You never heard of it.

I: What about intermarriage in your community? Are there any kinds of people you wouldn't want your children to marry?

R: I don't know. In St. Vincent, you might just want your child to marry someone from a good

family, a good person. But here there are so many kinds of people, so many languages. Each community is private; you don't know things are in the next one. We are divided by language. Each group has different values, speaks different. In St. Vincent if a boy insists that he loves the girl, they get married. Here it would be the same within the St. Vincent community, but if the girl is from another community, they might not let her marry him, no matter what they want.

I: What if it is a daughter? what if a girl wants to marry someone from another religious group or another culture?

R: We don't bother them, if they want to do, unless there is something really wrong with the other side. People don't make much fuss about it, but if they did, others might have different views. The others might feel strongly about it, we don't.

I: How do spouses interact in the community? Is there a lot of communication, within the family? Are marriages really close?

R: If there is a strong relationship, that's normal. If there is a real relationship, they may have conflict. I don't have any knowledge of that.

I: What kind of relationship do you and your wife have?

R: Like anyone else. We are happy now.

I: What is your view on the roles of women and men.

R: I don't think I have any, but women are able to do any work. My daughters have excellent jobs, so does my wife. In some homes today, women have taken over as the man, earning more than their husband, and this is not only in this country, but also even in the Caribbean. Women are doctors and lawyers.

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Well, your kids are already grown up, but when they were growing up, what were the main things you wanted for your children?

R: My main aspiration was to have an education. This is all-important. They have good educations, but they aren't in families, they aren't getting married. I think it is because of economics, and the kinds of conflicts between people.

I: How much freedom do you think a child could have?

R: My children had quite a lot of freedom, I should say, when they were at home. There were certain rules we had, we gave the orders and they had to obey. That was like my upbringing. My children were brought up in the same way. As long as they did right, they had lots of freedom, if they wanted to go out, we took them out. They didn't have a lot of friends, we were a close family. They had a cousin here and they visited there, and they had some friends at school but not so much.

I: Did your wife have different aspirations for your kids?

R: No, we have the same values.

I: What about disciplining practices. Did your wife and you have different ideas about disciplining a child?

R: If a child has been brought up the right way, I think there is little that you have to do to

discipline them. They exactly know what to do, and you don't have the problem.

I: How did you teach them right from wrong when they were little?

R: Well, by example, by talking, we had books to teach them right from wrong. They liked sports and I did that with my son. And my girls played netball, and different things.

I: What if they were disobedient?

R: They weren't disobedient. If you give them good training, they know what to do. You manage, in some homes you may need to do that, but not in ours.

I: Did your kids play the same games and sing the same songs as you did when you grew up in St. Vincent?

R: No, it's hard to say I wasn't always there, but my son played hockey. My daughter wanted to play baseball and so we go along and I went with her to games.

I: Did your children receive any formal or informal education in the culture of St. Vincent?

R: No, the culture isn't any different from British values. Now perhaps they could learn about African countries, since independence. They are all alike really, and there was not much to teach them, you hear about slavery but not much. Now people say they want the Afro-history but my children were aware of that even if it wasn't taught.

I: What about foods? Do you make sure you gave your kids Afro-Caribbean foods?

R: Well, we like our food but the kids they also like to go to the Chinese restaurant, to have a hamburger, a hot dog, etc.

I: They had West Indian food and cooking too?

R: Yes, but mostly in England. Its mostly chicken and fish and the same foods other people eat.

I: How did you hope your child would meet their potential spouse?

R: They are grown up, they can choose their own.

I: Did you expect your children to be experienced and knowledgeable about sex before marriage?

R: Yes, I suppose so; generally kids pick this up during their school years. I never talked to them about it, I don't know if their mother did or not. They are grown up now I suppose they know (laughs). I think in most homes, children are generally closer to their mother than to their father, and if they wanted to talk with someone about a private matter they would talk to their mother.

I: What would the popular reaction be if a child told their parents that he was homosexual?

R: Oh, in my community I think they would take it hard. In St. Vincent I think up to now we really don't like that. Still, we resent homosexuals; I was just reading something in a newspaper. Here in Montreal I was hearing a radio talk-in show and a South African man said this is something we don't talk about in my country. We feel like that, we don't talk about it.

I: Do you think that your parents would have hoped for the same things for your children that you and your wife wanted?

R: Yes, I suppose so. Education is very high in the list.

I: What aspects of your culture do you want to see instilled in your children, your grandchildren

and future generations?

R: They shouldn't hurry; they just can't get swept up in other ways of life.

IV. RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

I: What about ties to the older generation, how often do people in your community visit their parents or their in-laws?

R: Well, my parents are gone, and my in-laws aren't here, they are in St. Vincent. They are close; they call each other every week.

I: Would you ever consider living with them if you had to?

R: Sure, I wouldn't mind.

I: What is one's responsibility to parents after marriage?

R: My wife is closely connected to them, she gets involved in making decisions, she asks their advice, etc.

I: How many brothers and sisters does your wife have?

R: Three brothers, they are here. And five sisters, they are all here. She might have sponsored one or two.

I: Does your wife try to get your mother-in-law to move here?

R: Yes, but living in St. Vincent is nice for an old person, the climate is good.

I: How often did your children see their grandparents when they were young.

R: They came here once, and once the kids went to St. Vincent. My own father never traveled and never came to Canada.

I: Would you and your wife help your children after their marriages?

R: Yes, we would help them if we were in a position to do that.

I: Did your parents take care of their parents?

[No, because the grandmother died early but the grandfather was independent and healthy and he took care of himself.]

V. RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELATIVES

I: How often do you get together with your in-laws?

R: Well, we see them often, at holidays, Christmas, Easter, etc. and just weekends. We see them often, they come to our house or we go to theirs. We will see them this long weekend, I talked to her sister last night and we are making plans to see them.

I: If someone in the family needed help, like financially, would you give it?

R: I suppose so, but it never happened.

I: What would bring the whole family together?

R: They have a party, they have a christening, they have a wedding. We all get together.

I: And when your father died, did you go? Did your brother go?

R: Yes, we both went, but my wife didn't go.

VI. IDENTITY AND ATTITUDES ABOUT LIFE IN CANADA

I: How many people do you think there are from St. Vincent in Montreal?

R: I don't know, I couldn't guess.

I: Before you came, did you think you would become a Canadian or do you think you would live with St. Vincentians?

R: Well, some of both, we have all gained some social contact especially with other African groups, but we don't see the others much.

I: Is your community doing well in Canada?

R: Yes, I would say so, some are doing well in becoming teachers, doctors, lawyers, and getting education.

I: Do you ever have trouble with other ethnic groups in Montreal?

R: No, I am not in contact with those people, even the Haitian group we just don't see them because of the language difficulties.

I: What would your life have been like if you had stayed in St. Vincent?

R: I don't think it would have been different. Maybe somewhat, I might have been in business, I would have fit into society better there. Here I don't fit in. It's a society with closed doors to people like me. You are allowed to meet people and do things, but how far do you get?

I: Does it seem to you that Canada and Montreal are changing over time, since you have been here?

R: Yes, there are changes. The French and English are in confusion, it is a confusing society.

I: Has it affected your life?

R: Yes, it affects all the groups, Greek and Italian and everyone. We don't know what will happen with Quebec, and we don't know what the future holds. Even in Ontario we don't know whether there is a nation, its pretty scary to people, for building themselves into something for the future.

I: Do you read newspapers?

R: Canadian, American newspapers. Just like any English-speaking person in an English country. I want to know what is going on in the world.

I: Do you read a paper from St. Vincent?

R: Yes, every month or so. I like to know what is happening. And you hear the same thing as here, someone got arrested for drugs, someone got killed, someone got married, the opposition is disgusted with the government. Just like everywhere else. There is a problem of blacks and whites in Canada, people who don't get along, the certain groups, like Skinheads, the Nazi groups and all.

I: Who belongs to your ethnic community, only St. Vincent, or more?

R: All the islands of the Caribbean. We all get along, each group will join in with the other groups to work together.

I: Whom do you look to for leadership for our community? Anyone?

R: Some people might be active leaders for our community, but I haven't seen anyone. I accept whomever the majority of the people elects.

[Mentions Jesse Jackson, Martin Luther King]

I: How important is it to you that people from St. Vincent stay associated?

R: Its important to me that we stick together, and respond to problems like illness, some youths getting into trouble, getting drunk or whatever. We need people to get together and protect our members. We all feel the same.

I: Do you anticipate a time when the St. Vincentians will be assimilated into the larger group?

R: Well, yes I think we should join in with all the other Caribbeans or Afro-Canadians together, for the younger generation. St. Vincent is a small place and shouldn't try to stand apart.

I: How do you feel about the black identity? What does it mean to you?

R: The black race. That's what we have been given.

I: What is your personal identity. Who are you?

R: I would say that I am an Afro-Canadian citizen, from St. Vincent but with an African background. I used to think that I was mostly just English but now I would say that I am Afro-Canadian. If I were in Europe I would say that I am a Canadian citizen.