

Interview 5

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

Date: June 29, 1993

Place: Montreal

Demographic Information

Gender: female

Age: 50

Marital status: divorced

Country of birth: St. Vincent

Occupation: nurse

Year of arrival: 1960

Children: daughter, age 17

COMMENTS: We sat in the spotless front room. Originally she was apprehensive about the interview offering me only one hour of her time. As the interview progressed she agreed to finish it. There was somebody cleaning in the kitchen who I did not meet.

I. BACKGROUND AND IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

I: Who was the first of your family to come to Canada?

R: Me. I came up on the Domestic scheme. You know, working as a babysitter for one year. And then after that I went to work for Bell Canada for 9 nine years, then I left, went away, got married, came back and went into nursing.

[Interviewer's note: At that time landed immigrant status was granted to women in the Domestic scheme automatically after one year.]

I: What year did you get married?

R: 1970, I went to Tanzania.

[He lived in Montreal and then she went to Tanzania with him, got married, lived there for two years then came back and then went back for another year and a half. Presently she is divorced. "It didn't work out."]

I: What level of education did you have before you came?

R: I had my 'matriculation' plus I had my teacher training from teacher's college. A lot of people who came from St. Vincent with that same background were able to teach here in the system without having to go back to school. At that time I was told that I could go to College for a one year teacher's course which I would have had to do. But after that people came and were able to teach without going back to school because even when I went back to St. Vincent after about five years here I met the principal of the teachers college there and he was a Canadian and he wanted to know where I was working so I told him Bell and he said why aren't you teaching, you could be teaching there, and I said well I didn't know that and he said you like Bell because of the shares and I said yeah, and it's the first thing I wanted to get out of this job [referring to the domestic work] I was doing so quick because it was nothing that I could do. It wasn't degrading it's just that I wasn't accustomed to that sort of thing.

I: What did you do at Bell? And in the scheme?

R: Clerical work, with the yellow pages.

I: What was the family like that you were with?

R: The first ones were really good, little kids and they were happy because I was there to teach them and help them. The father was surprised that I knew so much world geography and I said yeah we did that, but it was just too much, I'd never done that before. I was fourth of my family but I never had to take care of so many little children at one time. There were four kids in this family, the cleaning! I almost died and they realized that and they said this is not for you. Even though they were happy that I did their homework with them. And then I went to another family that had two teen-aged boys, one was in primary school, I would help him with his work and his mother I think was jealous because she'd say "we don't only have to know how to teach." I said that's all I knew. This was just my chance to come to Canada and that's the way the immigration system worked, otherwise you couldn't come here unless you came to study. I stayed there until my year ended and I applied for my job at Bell and of course I passed the test and had the qualifications and got the job.

I: What was your main reason to come to Canada?

R: In St. Vincent it's small, everybody leaves, you either go to study or go some place to work. That's what it is all over the islands. Even the small islands your mother would be home and your father would be working in another island and this is the way it was so it's just a matter of expanding, getting out and doing something. This is what I did. I was the first one because I was really fed up with it, as a matter of fact there were two choices, to go to England to do nursing or come here. I was accepted in England at St. Mary's to do nursing. My other classmates had gone there. It just so happened that this came before and I knew other girls who were coming and I just came. England was the time when everyone was going, it was the Industrial revolution there and everyone was rushing there, working in factories having a hard time so I figured well maybe Canada won't be that bad. In a way I don't regret, in a way I regret the scheme because I don't think it was the right way to get West Indians here. They did that to Europeans as well but not as much as West Indians--they could only come on that scheme. To this point I think it's a racist thing.

I: What did you know about Canada before you came?

R: I knew all about Canada, CN, I did world history and geography so I knew where the Rocky mountains were, the railroads. What I didn't know was that Montreal was completely bilingual. It was a French province, but I just thought that everybody spoke some English. At that point people were allowed to speak English more than now and even at Bell you have to be able to speak some English to get in there. There were some French speaking girls but they spoke some English too.

I: Did you have any problems there?

R: No I didn't have any problems there, only with one English supervisor because I didn't understand the system and I wasn't aware that people could be so mean because I didn't have that kind of experience in St. Vincent. People

could be rich or poor but they didn't look at your colour. We were in the majority anyway. There was a subtle thing of trying to push you out [referring to Bell]. While I mixed with all the girls and worked okay because they were around my age, twenties or eighteen, nineteen, and I found that there was one especially, she said "Oh you're not doing your work well" and I found that that was a lie because I looked at all the others. And she gave me a bad evaluation and put me over to somebody else and I was surprised. Everyone said "Oh she's so good and so smart," and I knew I was because our standard of education was pretty good, it was based on the British standard,... I didn't find it very challenging there... I learnt a lot more about the country, the names of places, because it was working with the yellow pages.

I: Did you have any problems integrating into the greater Montreal community?

R: Yes because we stayed within our area and we needed that because there were so many of us around that had nothing to do and no place to go. We didn't know the ins and out and we were young, we needed to mix and go to clubs but they didn't allow you. You know, there's always this sort of thing. So we kept to our own and formed associations and clubs... So we were completely away from what was happening in society.

I: How many were you in your circle at the time?

R: There were a lot, about twenty girls a year came.

I: How did you meet?

R: We knew because when we came they met us. As a group comes, the other group will meet them and they'll tell you the ropes and bring you to apartments. Some of them by that time would have their own. And there were a few guys who were studying here at the University...

I: How did they hear?

R: The girls that came before knew that it was an ongoing thing so they would know, there was this council, the West Indian and Eastern Caribbean council [or consulate] and they were sort of responsible for us in a way. So we'd report to them when they got here and they knew exactly who was coming and so the other girls would know that we were coming. And we had their numbers, St. Vincent is a small place so we know that somebody's there. Their parents would give us their address.

I: How did you get your first apartment?

R: There were some friends of my family who lived here, they had come, one brother was a doctor, and he was working in Toronto, and one brother was an accountant and he married a Black Canadian who was born here. I lived with them for a while. I had their number when I came because they're from the same area that I'm from so I knew them. Then another bunch of girls came, classmates, they had finished their year and two of us got together and got an apartment. She was working at [large Canadian company]. We paid \$90.00/month for the apt. By that time there quite a few guys coming up to go to university, on student visa. We knew them because they were going to school around the same time as us, so we'd mix with them...

I: How many family members do you have now in Canada?

R: One brother who came on his own. He applied on his own, as a teacher, had his job right in Ottawa. He had gone to study in England, he had a scholarship from St. Vincent so, he had no problem [his job was arranged in St. Vincent]. He retired last year as a department head. So I have two brothers in Ottawa, one in Edmonton, one here plus two sisters. One in the West Indies and two in England.

I: Did you sponsor any of them?

R: I sponsored five and one was sponsored by two of the others.

I: Did they come straight to Montreal?

R: Yes, one brother finished high school here and graduated, the rest, my sister worked part time, went to school, spent 7 years in school, got her masters.

I: In what?

R: In library science. She's a teacher now in high school. My other brother worked in social work, worked with retarded children, went to school and is married now. The younger ones both finished high school here.

I: Who makes up your family today?

R: My brothers and sisters, me and my daughter! She's seventeen, just graduated.

I: She's from the marriage you had earlier?

R: Yes.

I: Who makes up your household?

R: It's a communal household, I have room for six residents here, old people. I started this place in 1988. So I take care of elderly people and give them medication, wash, feed, whatever, and this place is supervised by the government. It used to be [social services agency], but it's no more...so when these people can't function anymore they go into this home. Now I have four of them, ranging in the eighties and one in his fifties who had a stroke and can't speak. Only men. So I use my nursing skills to operate this home care. And my daughter lives here.

I: When did you get this house?

R: 1987, it was bought specially for this type of idea, I couldn't manage this house by myself, and it's too big.

I: Did you ever take advantage of a job-bank, housing service, or support group offered by the community?

R: No, the only thing we had was a Negro club for Canadian Blacks, a few ladies ran this and they had outings and we went there on our days off, it was the only thing available to any Black person coming to Montreal from the English West Indies and we met people from all different islands. [They would coordinate with the eastern Caribbean council in terms of getting the names of people coming and invite them to the community centre.] Finally we met people from all over the place. My roommate ended up being from Grenadines. Some

of my best friends are still from different islands. I didn't meet any of those people at Bell. They were not like friends. These other people I met, we stayed friends.

I: Did you ever have any experiences with the Quebec government Immigrant Integration Programs?

R: No. I tried to get the French program when I needed it but they said that you've been here so long and it was only for new immigrants so you're not eligible. So I had to pay my way, for my own courses.

I: How much contact do you have with other group members, outside of kin? R: A lot, through the association. At one point I was the president, I was one of the founding members and I just keep going. And I try to get my daughter involved.

I: Are you an active church member?

R: Yes, that's where we met a lot of other non-Vincentians...

I: Are you a member of any 'Canadian' associations, clubs, like Rotary, political parties?

R: I'm a member of the Liberal Party.

I: Do you have contact with other (non-Black) Canadians? How?

R: I've had very good friends, European. I just lost a good friend; I go and look after her husband. The family left me in charge with two others, I have my work, and now as a nurse I meet a lot of Canadians...

I: How did you meet those friends?

R: At work. It's the only place that I met that many friends. I didn't meet Canadians outside of my work. Outside it was basically West Indians.

I: How many times have you visited family in St. Vincent?

R: I went back after being here for 4 years...about 5 times, last back in 1990.

I: How much contact do you have with those relatives?

R: A lot, I knew that when I go back they're there and spend time. I write to them, call them.

I: How many times a year?

R: Depends, if there's something, a death, a birthday, somebody's coming...

I: So how many relatives do you have in St. Vincent?

R: [Her brother lives in Trinidad] Just cousins, godmother...

I: Would you ever consider moving back there?

R: Yes. I'd love to retire there. Even now I'd like to live there. St. Vincent's always home. Canada is home for my daughter and I won't force her to live in St. Vincent. She's been there a couple of times but this is her home. I try to integrate her into the West Indian culture, which she's beginning to adopt but as a matter of fact she wants to live in the United States. I guess she sees more of this Black culture, you could identify a lot more with what's happening with the Black

community in the U.S than here. I don't think she'd ever live in St. Vincent.

II. RELATIONSHIP WITH SPOUSE

I: How old were you when you got married?

R: Late twenties. He was a year younger. At the time he was studying in Montreal.

I: How are the marriages different today for your group, here in Montreal versus how it would be back home?

R: No difference, maybe you don't have your family deciding. In the West Indies the family would know each other. Here your families don't have to know each other. You just meet and get married...

I: Can you give examples of 'intermarriage' which is TRADITIONALLY looked down upon among your group and describe the reactions to it? How has this changed in Canada? (In terms of the taboo groups and reactions)

R: Before, people intermarried very easily. The very strict ones would be the Indians... Here in Canada you can marry anyone, Indians... Vincentians marry whites and they're comfortable and they don't have the problems I've heard Africans have. You have to have approval from your family when you go back with someone not an African. In St. Vincent people marry whoever they want to.

I: How is divorce looked upon in your community, is it different from the attitude in St. Vincent? What are the circumstances which prompt a divorce most commonly?

R: It's not good at all. I even had a hard time dealing with mine. Now in St. Vincent you do it [low?] One of my friends, she lived here, got married and divorced and it made her very sick because she was afraid of how her family would look at it. For most Vincentians that come here now, it's different, it's easier than if they had to divorce in St. Vincent. Now it's changing a lot... More people are getting divorces now. Before people would stay together for religious reasons, etc., but now it's not as strict. Before I felt guilty. It's not the fact that I have to bring up a child on my own, that's a normal thing. Nobody bothers about it. You have an extended kind of family but the way you're brought up--you have to deal with that kind of emotion. Maybe in St. Vincent you hold on because it's a small place and everybody sees you and talk about it, older people, but here it's the common thing, part of this system... It's the Canadian values, and more women are working...

I: What would have been a reason to divorce in St. Vincent?

R: Abuse.

I: What are the reasons here?

R: Well she just wants to be independent or something and with the slightest provocation,... If somebody's unfaithful... In St. Vincent if somebody's unfaithful then you won't be divorced for sure. Nobody wants [others] to know that that's the reason. You could be unfaithful and have a child show up at your door that's your husband's. You'll take the child and still stay.

I: What are your views on the roles of women and men?

R: I think it's changing a lot. I don't like all these stereotypes of women, although that's how I was brought up in the British system... You had to get married at a certain age, have children, men were the bosses. I'm glad it's changing so much and my daughter doesn't have to go through that.

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Would you have wanted to have more children, or how many?

R: I would have had more. I lost my first child. But now I think it's enough especially, with the kind of work. I have to work and take care because I couldn't see myself staying home at all and just bringing up children because I would want to work and have a life of my own, and it's easier.

I: What are the main things that you want for your daughter?

R: To be able to live comfortably with everybody, have no hang-ups, be proud of who she is, have a good education and do what she wants to do, and contribute to the human race. I think she knows this.

I: How much freedom should a child have? Give examples...

R: Much more than we had in St. Vincent. My daughter is very open to me. One sister who thinks she (my daughter) speaks to me as though we were sisters. And she's (sister is) a teacher and I guess from that background she still has that thing of 'ruling' and kids should be in their place. But I think kids should be able to speak for themselves, especially when they're teenagers, but with some guidance. At this point I even let my daughter make her own decisions. I respect her decision but if I think she needs help I come in, but I don't say "you can't do this"... In the West Indies you can do that and get away with it because you have no other choice but to stay in your parents' home until you get married or can go out on your own because...you can't pay for an apartment. Here you can do two jobs, whatever, have your friends help you. There they stick to the norm and they'll push you to stick to the norm whereas here--What's the norm?

I: What are some examples of disciplining practices that you have?

R: When my daughter was 3-5 she'd be grounded in her room or spanked and she even said once she didn't mind the spanking... And then getting into the teens we yakked, sometimes shout. Now there's nothing. I just say to her that it's her decision but I'd like to see this or that. Up until grade 9 I would cut her telephone calls but now there's none. She knows what I expect of her in terms of going out, staying out late and calling me, telling me where she is. Doing her work is her own responsibility.

I: Does she play the same games or sing the same songs that you did in St. Vincent as a kid?

R: Yes because strange enough she plays basketball and I used to play netball. I wanted her to play netball and she never liked it--we had that in our little community, all the things we did there we tried to bring here. We played and then we brought our kids in.

I: Where did you play?

R: We'd use schools, in the winter the gym. Now I don't know where. We, the Vincentians, started a netball team that had everybody and then it branched off and at one point we had some English people who lived in the West Island who had a team. They played against us. I didn't know if they still have it but there are mainly West Indian clubs around that play.

I: What about songs or games?

R: The ones that I knew I taught her. The others she picked up in her school among her friends.

I: Did your child receive any formal or informal cultural education? (ie. a specific school curriculum or Sunday school)

R: Yes, she's gone to the Garvey Institute summer school when she was thirteen and now she teaches there for her summer job. Also going to the Vincentian association, and Cari-Fete. I got her to play in the bands and so she played until the age of 12 she didn't want to dance in the streets anymore in a band but she'll join the parade.

I: What did she do?

R: She'd wear a costume but now she won't. She wants to hang out with her teen-age friends who are just dancing... And in the church...

I: How and where do you hope she meets a potential spouse?

R: Well right now she meets people here and strange enough it's completely West Indian. She goes out with a guy who's Haitian and I think one of the reasons is that he's into sports and my nephew is into sports so they met and were introduced and a lot of times they talk about the guys in the States who are so cute. And I say, "Is this one of the reasons you want to go to the States?" And she says, "Yeah it's easier, there are lots of them, cute guys, much more than around here."

I: At the time of marriage would you expect your daughter to be experienced or knowledgeable about sex?

R: Yes. Not experienced as such. As a matter of fact she doesn't want to be... I don't know what will happen but she thinks that she should wait until she finds a person she really likes and feels she's ready for it. So we talk about that... She understands she should know her body and not rush into that...

I: She knows about safe sex?

R: Yes, she knows about the consequences of pregnancy and social diseases and she knows the responsibilities of having an unwanted child as a teenager because she's seen a lot of that in the community, even some friends that she knows that have gotten pregnant and really don't need to be.

I: With whom does she talk about personal things?

R: She talks to me and her uncle who has a teen-age daughter just like her and she's pretty open with him.

I: Is she close with her cousin?

R: Yes, even last Sunday she had her prom Friday night and they were all over Saturday morning. My brother came to pick his daughter up. We were talking about that, boy/girl relationships and how girls felt on prom night and a lot of her friends figured this is going to be it...

I: What would a popular reaction be in your community if a child told their parents that they are homosexual?

R: I think [laugh] really bad because in St. Vincent I know two people who are said to be homosexual and these are big old men and everybody accepted that but would laugh. To me he's just part of the system. I don't think anyone wants to know that their child is homosexual. It would hurt them a lot. In Montreal, I'm not sure. It depends, if you're old, for me it doesn't matter because I had schoolmates I knew were homosexual...

I: Does your mother hope for the same things for your daughter that you do?
Generation gap?

R: There is a generation gap, she says, "you shouldn't let her do that"...although I find it strange because I was allowed to do those things.

I: Like what?

R: I went to parties, went out, we didn't stay out as late but we went with our friends and we walked the streets and played our games but at that point they had control, they knew what you were doing, schoolwork, whatever, even if I tell her she's an A student she'll say, "I don't like when she comes home late because so many people are getting killed"... That's her fear, the kind of violence. When I was growing up people looked out for each other. Here you don't. Kids don't respect older people, or their mother's friends or father's friends...

I: What aspects of your culture do you want to see instilled in your daughter and generally, the next generation?

R: People are open in life and have respect for everybody. That's one thing I say and I always say, I didn't learn too much when I came to Canada in terms of relating to people I didn't learn anything. In fact it really turned me off. I learnt all of that in the West Indies. I learnt that people should be respected as human beings. And once I took my daughter to St. Vincent and I showed her how my god-mother just took two people off the streets. They come there and they get their meals from her. She could afford it but she's eighty. I don't think she knew them. She has a lot of little houses, buildings in her yard, and she gave these guys one place they can sleep. And they'll come up in the morning and help her. She will give them breakfast and they'll go and wander and come back knowing they have some place to sleep. That's what I pointed out to my daughter, "You see, we don't have people begging on the street," and we don't have people sleeping on the sidewalks unless they're mentally ill. People take in other people. And this is one of the things, I would like her to respect people and share. I think this is one of the reasons I was able to run a home like this. A lot of the people who do it are West Indians, a few French Canadians or Moroccans. It's one of the reasons: they respect old people whether you're mentally ill or old and this is one of the reasons why the system can accommodate them in this kind of job...

This is one of the things I find West Indian kids are having a hard time dealing with. My daughter know because she was instilled to be proud. All of my brothers and sisters give her that, but a lot of her friends have a hard time talking to you about their Blackness or whatever.

IV. RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

I: How often do you visit your mother?

R: She visits everybody, to Edmonton to Ottawa... One of my nieces had her graduation, grade thirteen so she was there for the ceremony on Friday. I usually see her twice a week because I work down there at the General Hospital. Sometimes after work I go to see her. She doesn't come here very often. Christmas time we have gatherings or for a birthday so we all meet.

I: What if she could no longer live on her own?

R: She could live with me or anyone. As a matter of fact I want her to live here but she doesn't want.

I: When did your father die?

R: I was around fourteen.

I: It must have been hard on your mother.

R: My grandmother was there [she lived in the house].

I: What about your grandfather?

R: My grandfather lived in Cuba--I didn't even know him. He went away when my mother was 4 years old.

I: How often does your daughter see her grandmother?

R: As often as I do, she goes into the city a lot. She has friends there, her school is there, she passes her house and takes her for her appointments.

I: Did your mother ever help you out financially, or other?

R: She just gets a pension but, yes, there were times when I needed to borrow and she lent me but she doesn't have that much. She uses her money to go away.

V. RELATIONS WITH EXTENDED FAMILY

I: When was the last time you got together with your family?

R: When my mother was seventy-five, two years ago, they all came from all over... and we had a big birthday party for her.

I: What about Christmas and Easter?

R: My sister who lives in [Montreal suburb], everybody goes there. Either the ones from Ottawa come down or, if my mother's around we'll stay in Montreal but if she's not here...

I: Where does she go?

R: To St. Vincent or Florida. Her only brother is there. If not we choose whom to be with. I may go to Ottawa to spend time with my brother...When she's here we try to have it all together. When she's not we do our own thing.

I: Are there some members of your family who take responsibility for keeping everybody else together?

R: My younger brother in Ottawa. One of the reasons is I think his wife likes this sort of thing. She's not from St. Vincent but she usually pushes for these things. She reminds everyone of mother's birthday and says what are we doing? The husband will then start...

I: Do your relatives expect you to help them and in what way? Is this different for the male or female spouse's side of the family?

R: We do, we help each other financially. I have one brother who is trying to market a speaker set so were all trying to help him get it going. But the money fell in Trinidad so he lost about 17 million dollars. So we tried to help him... If my sister needs a baby-sitter, my daughter is there...

I: What events bring your extended family together? (death, wedding, birth...) When was the last one?

R: Birthdays, my niece had her 18th birthday. Christenings, stuff like that, holidays, maybe Thanksgiving. And now the carnival weekend [Cari-Fete is held on the weekend at the end of June]--my sister, people coming from out of town, friends from New York, cousins, they will plan a barbecue at my sister's house or relatives and whoever is in town will go.

I: How often do you speak to your brother and sisters' family?

R: Every day, my sister here in Montreal, almost every day except once a month if we're not on speaking terms. We wait to work it out. But my brother in Ottawa, almost every week, we're close and his children are close to my daughter.

I: What would you say are the main attitudes of your group toward the family?

R: They're very close, protective and supportive. They could be mad at each other, not talking but if a stranger comes in...You can even see that among Vincentians, that if somebody says that Vincentians are stupid then you'll pick them up on that, it's a clannishness.

VI. IDENTITY AND ATTITUDES ABOUT LIFE IN CANADA

I: How many people from St. Vincent are there living in Canada?

R: 5,000-8,000, including children born here?

I: Was the thinking before migration based on the understanding that you or your relatives would join the Canadian community or would you join a transplanted St. Vincent and the Grenadines community?

R: I think they felt they'd be a part of a community but then when you came here you had a culture shock so you had to run back to your little group. And there's all these things against your integrating so you felt comfortable in your group. I think you figured it was a place where you know your neighbour just as it was in

St. Vincent.

I: Would you say your ethnic group is doing well in Canada? In what way and what are some problems you perceive?

R: Yes, there are some achievers. I worry about the kids, not only Vincentians. We've talked about it a lot and we wonder if these kids would ever be achievers. I always tell my daughter I'm glad I was brought up in St. Vincent as a teenager because it's hard to 'fit in' here... Nobody encourages you. Your friends and family can tell you that you can get whatever you want, but when you go out there you find it's not so...and you feel a failure. The Vincentians that came here are achievers, but the children are not. Mine might be but not as the parents were. We were able to make but then you look back and you see that your background was much more solid, you didn't have to fight with all these different things in the system. You felt proud of who you are? Here, there's all this negative... Yesterday my daughter wanted to play basketball and she was asking me because there's no one around here she can ask to go to the park.

I: What do you think about other ethnic groups in Canada and Montreal? Do you have any problems with specific groups?

R: In St. Vincent there are certain people that, for instance, even though you lived with Indians... they were the only ones that you felt there was a problem there because it was a closed society so we didn't bother with them. When you came here and met another type of Indians, East Indians, it was completely different and you begin to want to be with the West Indian Indians because they have the same mentality and outlook on life. So you become more accepting of your own, as long as you're Vincentian, be it Indian, Chinese, Portuguese. Here, you accept everyone...

I: What would your life be like had you stayed in St. Vincent as compared to here? (in terms of economic and social status, satisfaction, security...)

R: Sometimes I wonder. I would have been teaching, married to the guy I wanted to marry, but he's here now and I talk to him. He's married. In a way I would have been a housewife and mother and it would have been frustrating for me.

I: How many kids do you think you would have had?

R: Five. About the same. I've seen my counterparts, they've reached high levels in the government, and you could see that the age you grew up with didn't stay stagnant. Here I'm satisfied with the role I'm playing. I spend a lot of time with my daughter instead of building my career and if I would have done that I would have reached much further because of the system we live in. In St. Vincent I would have continued my teaching career, I would have been comparatively higher.

I: Does it seem to you that Canada is changing over time?

R: Completely. The immigration policy has changed completely, taking so many, got rid of the scheme. If I had understood that that's what it was I would never have come like that. There were a lot of people who were running the government and stuff, they had jobs in banks, they came here and did that--they

thought that this was the shot that you will get accepted after, and it wasn't. You had to start all over again...

I: What are traditional cultural practices that you observe for yourself and your family? (in terms of religion, cultural foods...)

R: On Good Friday I can't eat meat at all. I may not go to church but... At Christmas we make sure we have the traditional food like in St. Vincent, ginger beer, sorrel [drink made from plant], fruit cake made with a lot of rum... Easter we go to church, carnival we celebrate, christenings, confirmation...

I: What kind of newspapers do you read?

R: We read everything, the Gazette, my daughter picks up the French paper, I read the West Island paper, all the free papers like the Monitor..., the African Canadian... My friends get papers from St. Vincent and they pass it along.

I: Who belongs to your ethnic community? Is there anyone not from St. Vincent and the Grenadines that is accepted among you, or anyone from St. Vincent & the Grenadines that is not accepted by the group, and why?

R: We've had at the Association a vice president from another island. We've got Vincentians who are not members but they would support... They won't go to the meetings but they'll rally together, for instance, and I was instrumental in doing this, bringing up a kid who needed surgery on her leg at the Shriners. We were raising funds, we put it out there and it helped.

I: There are people who say they don't want to mix with Vincentians, Who?

R: I don't know their reasons. There's some people who may marry another culture and then they stay within that and don't mix. We just leave it at that.

I: Who do you look toward for leadership of your community? Internationally, nationally, locally, (Name them). Who inspires you or is a role model?

R: My Hungarian friend who died, I met her when I started working at Bell. She was somebody I could speak to about anything, international or otherwise. And she was a human being. She had a lot of love for anybody. I left, I didn't keep in touch with her for maybe 5-6 years and she was still there and her husband. I got my daughter to meet her and we still, we kept up... I like this writer C.L.R. James. A good friend of mine who died, from Tanzania, Walter Rodney who knows what the West Indies wants and needs. My godmother, she's the kind of person who respects human beings.

I: International?

R: In Tanzania, the past leader [when she lived there]

I: Americans?

R: Not too many. Trudeau, I respect his opinions, I like Kim Campbell because of what she stands for but I don't know too much about her policies because I like the Liberals,...

I: Black leaders?

R: Locally, Leo Bertley, he has the right attitude toward dealing with Black kids, my daughter adores him. Malcolm X, I always followed his writings in the 60s when all of that was happening. It was shocking to me because I didn't understand what was going on in the U.S until I came here. Writers like Maya

Angelou, Martin Luther King. All the Black artists, Aretha Franklin.

I: How important is it to you that the community of St. Vincentians in Montreal stay associated? How would you feel if the Vincentian Association were to pool resources with other island associations?

R: I would like that. I don't know how workable, because we still have our petty things in the islands, differences like by influence of Catholic versus Protestant churches. Vincentians are very open, you can feel comfortable in any church, and the Catholic islands are into only one thing. Also we prepare foods differently. Some people think that the way they were colonized is so important. St. Vincent places emphasis on their Carib people... Barbados used to boast the highest literacy rate but now I hear the St. Vincent has the highest post-primary school rate among women. But St. Vincent doesn't boast it, they'd rather speak about the Indigenous people.

I: What do they do to preserve indigenous culture?

R: Last year they had a celebration, they preserve artifacts of the Carib and are reviving the language...

I: How do you feel about the identity that is known as "Black"?

R: I like it, I prefer that everyone knows that I'm Black. St. Vincent is not one of those places where people will try to tell you, "Oh my grandfather was Spanish..." It makes it different. Black is good because if you say coloured it would mean everyone else that's non-white and I don't think they want 'me' to be coloured with them.

I: What is your personal identity? How do you want to be perceived by others, among members of your own community and by the larger society? (in terms of the groups you belong to and your personal character).

R: I am a Black West Indian living in Canada, female, single or divorced,...