

Interview 6  
Ethnic Group: Caribbean (St. Vincent & the Grenadines)  
Date: 1993  
Place: Montreal

#### Demographic Information

Gender: Female  
Age: 24  
Country of birth: St. Vincent & the Grenadines  
Marital status: single or divorced  
Education: college  
Occupation: former primary teacher  
Children: son, age 6; daughter  
Year of arrival: 1989

### I. BACKGROUND AND IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

I: Were you the first of your family to come to Canada?

R: Yes, well, I had a nephew who came to Ontario but we weren't in any contact then, so that basically, yes, I was the first member of my family to come to Canada, at least this part of Canada.

I: What was your occupation back home, before you came?

R: I was a kindergarten school teacher there, when I came to Canada. I was 20 years old.

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

R: Well, I knew that it was bilingual, because I had studied Canada in school. I knew about the aboriginal peoples. I knew about the Great Lakes and a little about how they were formed, I knew about the prairies, about British Columbia, Vancouver. I knew that they were into fish, the salmon on the west coast, the cod off Newfoundland. In general I think I knew far more than many Canadian students, like high school students that I have spoken to, knew about Canada. At the time I knew who the Prime Minister was, Mr. Trudeau and the 8 provinces and the territories. I knew what Canada was about.

I: What was your main motivation in coming here?

R: I came here with the main intention to go back to school and major in history, because I was very much interested in European history and African history, but then when I arrived it was a friend of mine who invited me to come to Canada, and I came to be a student.

I: What was the policy then for students? You applied from there?

R: No, I was traveling and I had my passport and I came just as a visitor to check out the schools, but then the tuition fees at that time were too high for me because I didn't have that lump sum of money. So I ended up getting a job as a nanny, for a couple. They liked me very much because I was very attentive to their children, you know, having a teacher for a nanny. They realized that many of their friends who had nannies and housekeepers never showed that degree of

interest in and tolerance for the children. I explained to them my situation and my status, and they decided to sponsor me. That's how the whole thing came about. I went and worked for them for some time, and I went and did a course at [College] in gerontology.

I: How did you come across this family?

R: My girlfriend who invited me to come to Canada was working next door, and she met this couple and knew that they were looking for someone, and she told the couple about me, and that was it.

I: Did she come over on the Domestic Scheme?

R: My friend, yes, she came over on the domestic scheme. She had aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters here. I went first to Montreal and then I went to Ontario because I knew some people there. I am the curious type, and after reading about Canada I wanted to see some of it before I settled down. I've been to Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and others.

I: Do you have relatives there too?

R: Yes, I have a nephew in Alberta, and a niece in Ontario. I go to Ontario pretty regularly now, like once or twice every two months. I want to stay in Montreal because of the bilingual, even though I don't speak French. I love Montreal because it is a more cosmopolitan city. You have St. Catherine Street, and you see about five people from five countries wherever you go. It is densely packed, whereas Toronto is spread out, and it takes a while to travel around, but in Montreal the subway can take you anywhere you want to go.

I: When you first came to Montreal did you have any problems integrating into the Montreal community? Did anything surprise you or trouble you about living here?

R: The winter. There was a lot of snow, in December, and I found it extremely difficult at that time to move around in the snow. I wondered how do people get out to work when I saw these huge piles of snow. I wondered what I was prepared for. But people were very friendly, people were willing to help. You don't know where you are going and you ask someone for help and sure enough, they will direct you. Although from that time to now people have changed. I find more hostility now than when I came in 1989.

I: Why do you think that is?

R: Very much it's not only among Canadians but it also in people from the Caribbean and South America. When I came, in 1989, I don't think the population at that time was what it is today. Things were cheaper then, food, apartment rents. So it was easier sailing for people and people were able to relax. But as political changes begin to take effect, it's like revolution in Nicaragua, and Grenada, flee from the country and coming to Canada as a safe haven, and most of them, you know, it becomes populated and this individual wants a piece of the pie, and the others want to hold onto what they already have.

I: How strong are the community ties for you, do you know a lot of Vincentians?

R: I know a lot of Vincentians, but I'm not involved with the formal association of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I'm more involved with a group, it's more a humanitarian group, and, well, you spoke with [prominent leader in the community] and you know we help people who are refugees and if they arrive in Montreal and have nowhere to stay, well, [leader] is very well known in the community and so first they will get in touch with him, and he in turn will call me up and if I can make a contribution, I do. I don't remember any time I was asked to help and I couldn't do it. So I work with this group, it's a small group and we get together and discuss changes in the Caribbean, in Africa, and in Europe.

I: Who are most of your friends? Where did you meet them?

R: I'm a very easy person to get along with, and so it depends on how you define the word friend. I know so many people. The people I'm closest with, are people I speak to every day. They might be Vincentians, I have a few friends from Jamaica, and I've got no enemies. I'm known within the community, and in the Ontario community,

I: Do you have any white friends?

R: Yes, I do, in fact my closest friend, the one I name to help if my kids gets sick in school or something like that, is Caucasian, from Scotland. She is a neighbour.

I: So you work here, do you?

R: Yes, I work at home.

I: I was going to ask you if you meet people through the workplace, but you don't.

R: I meet people on the street, on the bus, at community gatherings, at the hospital, I meet people all over. My neighbourhood is made up of Italian, French Canadians, etc. My neighbour next door is from Bangladesh, and we keep checking all the time about his wife. Their cooking is different and you should smell the aroma from their cooking, the spices and that. Although some of their spices I use too in my kitchen. It's strange, differences in culture. He is thinking of going back home to Bangladesh because he dislikes the way the children are being brought up, and I said, "Why? Why aren't they the same here? They are your children. Why can't you lay down the rules of how you want them raised and just expect your children to follow along?" He said, "You know, when they go to school they are being influenced by the other children," but I said they have a mind of their own and if they are getting good teaching at home, what's being taught at home is what will come forward. That's my belief, I believe in that strongly.

I: How did you locate your first residence in Montreal?

R: You remember I told you about my friend in Canada. She had an apartment at Pointe St. Charles and I moved in with her. And she had this job as a housekeeper and when I arrived she picked me up at the airport and took me to her apartment, and told me about the situation with these people next door. And after I took that job, I would come home on weekends and we shared the apartment.

I: After you were no longer working for that family, how did you find your next residence?

R: I needed enough money to go out on my own and when I could I rented a basement apartment for only \$250 a month in a very nice quiet district.

I: That was when you were going to [college]?

R: Yes.

I: Did you have any contact with the Government programmes for immigrants?

R: No, no contact at all.

I: Didn't they offer you French courses or something like that?

R: They were offered in the Black community, but to tell the truth, as much as I like the idea of bilingualism, French doesn't interest me so much. If Spanish had been the second language in Montreal I would have been fully bilingual, but I never had much interest in French. I studied both French and Spanish in high school at home. Excuse me for saying this, I know it sounds ridiculous living in Quebec which is a French province, but French doesn't arouse me.

I: Are you an active church member?

R: In recent years, somewhat. I was brought up in a very active church way. My whole family were very active in the church and Sunday school, but I got my own opinion now, and I don't go to church as often as I used to.

I: Have you joined any white organisations like the Rotary club or political party or something?

R: The group I am associated with is more a political group and it's a non-profit organization. It's mixed, perhaps the majorities are from the Caribbean.

I: How many times have you been back to St. Vincents since you came here?

R: Once, and I'm planning to go back in September.

I: Have you sponsored any relatives to come here?

R: My father passed away, and my mother is in St. Vincent. I have family in England. My brother is in Florida. I'm from a very large family, there are fourteen of us in the family. Three of them are in Trinidad and Tobago, and one brother in St. Vincent and four sisters.

I: What do they do?

R: My brother is in politics. He is [a member of parliament]. I've got a sister who is a nurse and one sister runs a grocery store. And the other two sisters are retired.

I: Among your family in Canada, it is mostly nieces and nephews?

R: Yes, and cousins.

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

R: Right now I'm comfortable right where I am.

II. RELATION WITH SPOUSE

I: Are there any groups that if someone married into that group, other people would think it isn't right?

R: Not really, not where I come from. My husband, for instance, his mother is Scottish, he is a product of intermarriage. And my own family in England, many of them have married Caucasians, so the whole family is full of intermarriage. So no, I would have to say that we don't worry about intermarriage between groups.

I: Tell me about marriages in St. Vincent. How close are husbands and wives, for instance, do they talk about everything?

R: Marriage back home is pretty stable. If there is a breakdown of the marriage in the family, there is usually some effort, other people become involved. And usually the couple will listen to what their elders have to say. Talking about parents, and the couples tend to listen. Ninety percent of the time the marriage will survive. But here in Montreal, there is no respect for elders. From what I have seen, it's like you get married and there is misunderstanding between you. If the parents try to help, the couple won't listen and the in-laws may tell the mother and father to get lost. So that gap of communication is closed and the young couple is left to choose whatever route they think is best for them. And sometimes they decide to end the marriage when there really isn't any need to do that.

I: Do they communicate very well? Would a husband consult a wife about making a major decision, or just make up his mind and tell her the result?

R: From what I have seen, the society back home is male dominated. And I think this is because the husband is usually the breadwinner. And the women are stuck there, wondering if he pays the rent and buys the bread how will I survive without him? And as I see it women are changing now, and saying well I can protect myself from him, I can get along without him. This seems to be changing and the men aren't used to it yet, and they still think they can be high-handed to women. In the Caribbean we don't have the social backup for women. If she has no job or is not qualified to have a job, she is stuck because we don't have that back-up system, that social welfare program that will provide for her and her children. It's pretty much still a man's world. Women have come a long way to reach where they are today but we still have to continue the struggle, we still aren't getting equal pay for equal work and we are still being left with the majority of the bills and the responsibility for children. Our government in Ottawa is still dominated by men, and men make decisions really. Even by the year 2000 I doubt that women will be able to be equal.

### III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Let me ask you some questions about children now. Would you like to have some more children?

R: Yes and no. No because I'm alone right now and I've got a mortgage and they are going to private day care. But if I were thinking about remarrying I would think about having one or two more kids. I like kids, I'm from a large family, but because of the fact that I'm alone....

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

R: Well, I hope that they see things the way I do. They are attending a day care with children from five different backgrounds. There are children from Poland, from Saudi Arabia, French Canadian, English Caribbean, and English Canadian. Maybe you have heard of the Garvey Institute? My son is going to go to the Garvey Institute because he is going to a school where everybody seems to be white, and although he is only six he is asking me what colour am I, what group do I belong to? And so I want him to go to a school where most of the people are Black, so that he can have a clear idea of his role models.

I: So he is going to grade one.

R: And he is a very curious intelligent little boy. I really do hope that I am doing right, that the guidance I am giving him, what I should be doing. By sending him to the Garvey Institute he will be able to relate to people and know who he is. Like speaking with you, there is no hard feeling but I am a grown up and he is just a little boy. After Garvey, he will be ready for high school and so it balances off. If you understand what I am saying.

I: You want him to have a strong identity before he faces diversity?

R: Yes, that is right. He started out preschool at 18 months and now if he had gone to school with children of all white background by the time he was ready for school it would confuse him. He would say, "Who am I? Where are the Blacks? How come there are only two or three Blacks in the classroom?" By sending him to the Garvey Institute--which that age is the most crucial stage of life--he will, by age 10, 11, 12, he will be able to relate.

I: That's the main thing that you want for your children? For them to know who they are?

R: Yes, that's the main thing, to be able to relate to others and not lose their own identity.

I: If were to dream with rose-coloured glasses and you imaged an ideal job and an ideal life, what would your ideal be?

R: Basically, they are very young now to say that. But if I'm still around and they are at the age where they have to make decisions in life. Too often kids choose careers that they don't know what want. The CEGEP is good for that, if they are making and selecting careers, I'll strongly encourage them to find jobs like engineering. I've got a friend whose son has a job with a big oil company and he tells them where to drill for oil. These kinds of jobs and professions. Get away from the accounting. Technology is rapidly advancing, get into that. I'm strongly into bilingualism. I like science, medicine, aim at that level. The 9-to-5 you stagnate yourself. Move on kid-o.

I: How much freedom should a child have?

R: What's freedom? Define the word.

I: If you think about how you were brought up in St. Vincent, and now you are responsible for bringing up your children, how much space do you give them? And would it be different in St. Vincent?

R: They are still very young. I think they have the same amount of freedom that

I had when I was a child. Now it's different in some ways. My son gets up and he turns on the TV and watches Romper Room. Now when I was a child we got up in the morning and our first thing was to go to the fields, milk the cow, and walk back home and help with the chores before we took off for school. My children don't have things like that to do. They have more free space.

I: How about when they are teenagers?

R: I am trying to focus upon the present now. I am asking them to put their books and toys away and to hang up their coats. I'm trying to give them a sense of responsibility and show them that things have a place.

I: Do you think (the father of her children) has the same aspirations for your children as you have?

R: Yes, I think he wants the same for them.

I: Do you have the same discipline standards?

R: I am more lenient than he is. He is more formal. I might say [to my son], "No TV for the rest of the day," whereas his father, once he says no, that is it, no changing the mind.

I: Do your kids play the same games and sing the same songs that you had?

R: I am teaching them at their preschool, and so we sing them at home and I teach them to all the kids at school. We played a lot of games, hide and seek, hop scotch.

I: Do your kids have any cultural education?

R: Yes, they will go to the Garvey Institute.

I: Do they go to church?

R: When I go to church, they go with me. Not all the time.

I: What about any kind of cultural education in terms of Afro-Canadian traditions? What about foods?

R: I make them traditional foods. And we will be going to the Caribbean in December, and they will go to see their grandmother as they get older, go back and forth.

I: Where do you hope that your children will meet their future spouses?

R: In Montreal, in the community, maybe through baseball, maybe through the church, among friends, it could be at the swimming pool. It's very hard to see where one would meet a spouse. It could be on the Metro, it could be at funeral parlour. (laughs)

I: Would you expect your kids to be experienced and knowledgeable about sex when they get married? Before they get married?

R: Experienced, it is too soon to tell, they are just babies. But knowledgeable, I would hope so, and expect so. We have to teach them about venereal disease and unprotected sex, so they would have to know when they got old enough.

I: Who do you think that they would want to talk with about their personal

concerns?

R: We are very close, we talk about all sorts of things. Everyday I pick him up at his daycare center and I ask him what did you do at your school today, what did you learn today, what's on your mind? And he will say one boy brought a new toy to play with at school, or something about dinosaurs, or under the sea.

I: What would a popular reaction be if a child told his parents that he was homosexual? In St. Vincent's and in Montreal?

R: Times have changed. As Vincentians living in Montreal, people are more aware. People don't have illusions about people. It's like taking the bus. If a man chooses to be a homosexual or a woman chooses to be a lesbian, it's their choice.

I: Do you think your mother wishes for the same things for your children that you are hoping for? Or is there a generation gap?

R: I am what I am. There is some generation gap. I am me, and not just what my parents are. My early days in high school were when I started reading about Martin Luther, the Kennedys, Black power, Malcolm X. I understand more about Africa, the whole slave trade, when I was beginning to blossom, my parents knew nothing about that, their generation held back. I was always in debates and very curious, and I was out there with people in the street, in the ghettos. This is what brought about this individual who is speaking with you today. My mom is 80, and she never experienced racism, never traveled other than spending a few months here with me. She doesn't understand. She wants to see the best for my children but she really doesn't have the awareness of the world today.

I: What aspects of your culture do you want to see preserved for your children and for the next generation of Afro-Caribbeans in Montreal?

R: There is a lot of sharing, and respect. People look out for each other. I'm beginning to visit various countries in Africa. I want to see where slaves were captured, where they were handcuffed, where they went on the slave ship, and were brought on the triangular route to the Caribbean. I would like our people to be aware that Africa, our mother country, was raped and tortured and underdeveloped. I think the European could have done more to help Africa, to put more into that continent from what they have taken out of it. I've got books on Africa and I pass these books on to friends, and try to get people to be aware of where we come from and what our background was. So that they could understand. I do hope that they pass that on to their children.

#### IV. RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

I: Where are your in-laws?

R: In St. Vincent.

I: Do you go see them when you go to St. Vincent?

R: Yes, he (her son) has to go visit his grandparents in St. Vincent, and so I take him.



I: How often do your kids speak or write to their grandparents?

R: It is too expensive to phone, so we write. I send some pictures of the kids, and when someone goes to the Caribbean I send some photos and a note.

I: If times got tough, would you ever consider living with your mother or with your in-laws in the Caribbean?

R: If times get tough, I'll fight the toughness, and I'll survive. I hate the idea of living with my in-laws, it's like two rats living in a hole.

I: Would you feel the same way living with your mother?

R: I could live with my mother. But she is already too old to take care of herself, she wouldn't be taking care of me, but I of her. One of my sisters is looking after her. We don't let the elders live on their own like that. It's our responsibility. It's mainly the women who take care of elders.

I: If you needed help, would you go to your relatives? Or would they expect help from you?

R: My brothers and sisters we help each other out all the time.

I: Did your parents take care of their parents?

R: My mother didn't know her parents, but my father did take care of them. It hasn't changed, people still take care of their parents.

## V. RELATIONS WITH EXTENDED FAMILY

I: How often do you get together with your relatives?

R: My sister is going with me with December, so as often as possible we go together back to the Caribbean and we see each other when we can and have a reunion. I get together with my family on Thanksgiving. I go to Toronto often and see my family members. The Caribbana is coming up, there might be a wedding, a church communion, and the last time was in Easter. My brother in England, I correspond with him but I don't go. I haven't been to New York for a while, but we talk on the phone, maybe twice, or three times a month.

I: Does anyone keep touch with others?

R: Yes, I'm the one. Two years ago my sister came from England, and I brought one of my sisters from St. Vincent and another from Trinidad. It's not so much around a particular event but it's when we can find the time and the cost of traveling around.

I: Do people from St. Vincent have any special ideas about the family?

R: I think basically it is the same, the family looks out for one another. They share. We are all human, you feel what your sister, if she is in a hard place, and you help her.

I: What did you hope for when you got married?

R: Family was one, kids. My career was also important to me, taking care of the family, watching my kids grow up to be respectful constructive citizens. We were like all couples...

## VI. IDENTITY AND ATTITUDES ABOUT LIFE IN CANADA

I: How many people from St. Vincent live in Canada.

R: I don't know. Maybe roughly about 75,000.

I: Before you came to Montreal, did you expect to integrate into Montreal or did you expect to join a group of Vincentians?

R: I am already a Vincentians, and I didn't have any ideas about that before I came.

I: Would you say that Afro-Caribbeans in Canada are doing well? In jobs, happiness, socioeconomic status.

R: The people I know are doing well, those I communicate with, they have jobs, their homes, they are doing well.

I: What do you think about other ethnic groups in Canada, Any problems?

R: No.

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

R: It would have been the same because I shape my life, I make it.

I: What newspapers do you read?

I get the Gazette every morning. And the Vincentians, the suburbans, I get previous copies and give them away.

I: Who belongs to your ethnic community? Who are they?

R: I am part of the North American community. All religions, all ethnics, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, all religions. No ethnicity.

I: Who do you look toward for leadership? A political role model.

R: I like Winnie Mandela. She has guts, courage, and clout, extremely intelligent. She is tough. Audrey McLaughlin, she is my leader.

I: How important is it to you if the Vincentians stay united.

R: It would be the best thing that ever happened to Caribbeans if they would integrate. I am a Vincentian, but I would like to see the one Caribbean in a passport.

I: But what about island differences?

R: Personally I don't see much differences, that is, all people are different.

I: How do you feel about the identity of being Black.

R: I am Black. I identify as Black, I'm not coloured. I'm Black.

I: Is there a community of Black people? Is it just skin colour or do you see it as a political movement.

R: There are people who are Black but they are not part of the Black power movement.

I: Do you think that your son and daughter will grow up differently from you?

R: I see more of myself in my daughter. It just happened to be that way.