

Interview 9

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

Date: July 20, 1993

Place: Montreal

Demographic Information

Gender: female

Age: 64

Marital status: widow

Place of birth: village in St. Vincent

Occupation: retired (previously clerical work)

Year of arrival: late 1950's (second batch in domestic scheme)

Children: none, seeking to adopt baby from St. Vincent, girl, age 16 months

COMMENTS:

I interviewed R. at her home in a predominantly Jewish suburb of Montreal at 10:00am. Her niece was visiting, reading a book in the kitchen while we were in the living room. R. gave me some juice and a piece of freshly made cake after the interview. Then she showed me her photos of the man she might marry in St. Vincent. She explained that he's an architect and she showed me the pictures of the home he's building on the coast. I also saw pictures of the baby she wants to adopt, who is now in the care of other family members in St. Vincent. Then she took me on a tour of the house pointing out photographs of family and friends. The basement was the main room she wanted to show me because it is there, she explained, that she holds parties for various causes. There was a drink price list above the bar and posters of St. Vincent. On the book shelves were knit dolls and shams ready for sale. We sat and talked in the living room for about an hour after that.

I. BACKGROUND AND IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

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

R: I was.

I: Did you ever sponsor anyone in your family?

R: Yes, my two brothers.

I: What was your motivation?

R: To make life better for myself, go back to school, study do something useful with my life, but I was very depressed that I didn't want to go back to school I just wanted to go back home but I couldn't walk or swim back!

I: What were you doing before you came?

R: I worked in an office as a typist.

I: So when you came here, what courses did you want to take?

R: Anything more or less like being a nurse or doctor's assistant.

I: Why did you choose to come here with the scheme rather than to England to study nursing?

R: I was either going to England or...and here came up first. Why Montreal? Because mostly all of my friends were here and we wanted to keep close.... Did you come over with those people or did you know them from before? Some were here before and we came in the second batch so we all stuck together.

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

R: Well just from school, the geographical feature of it, where it is what they grew, the weather conditions, but when it comes to winter we didn't know the winter was like winter it was so long...the first time we saw snow we were so enthralled about the whole thing that when you have to go outside and go to work it in it was a different ballgame.

I: Do you have relatives that left St. Vincent and the Grenadines but settled elsewhere?

R: Yes in the States.

I: What cities?

R: New York, and some went to England. Anyone else in Canada? No.

I: Tell me about your experiences when you first arrived. Did anything surprise you or pose an initial problem...?

R: Yes, the morning... we came in the night I can't remember what airport but it was cold and we stayed at something like a hostel, a crude looking thing, and the morning--as if the owners came to pick up the slaves, which I dislike up to this day. I have to say the way the government... I don't think it should be a trading fair like this. You should be freer or they should tell you more about what you'll encounter. My mistress came to pick me up the morning, early. I was the first one to dispatch. Like you're in a hall and when whoever 'buys you,' they call you and you go up and they say, "this is the person you're going to work with," and off you went with that person. It was alarming I have to say, my 'mistress'--if you have to put it so--was not too nice but the man was a doctor and I guess he was humane, so that makes life a little easier for me. He cared when he came home, he will ask if I heard from home, and how are you... She was something else, you know. It was through him... And when I heard about what others went through, and I think the contract was for two years...I took up this woman's house because she donned [?] her apron on me and white dress and everything--and you're accustomed to two three maids at home. I didn't despise that but the whole reaction... Then afterwards I took over this woman's house as if it were mine because she didn't know a damn thing about keeping house... On Thursdays we went off to the Negro community hall and with other friends. You'll go shopping and then get together and you're able to exchange ideas, and when I heard what some were going through I said, "Oh boy I'm not moving!" because at least I was kind of happy there.

I: What were some of the stories you heard?

R: Some of them didn't feed them well or they didn't have a good place for

them to stay, and I think this should have been arranged by the government, although the government knew some of the girls were not happy where they were living, they sent them to other places, some were worse, and they will send other people to that same person who you complained about, because I knew it wasn't one person who stayed with this couple and I knew this man will go after her and she will tell the mistress, tell your husband to stay in his room not to come to my room or when she's gone to work he comes back at her and she complained about it and the bad thing about it is to see they send her somewhere else but send somebody else back to them. I think it was money talk, you're a big-shot and you get whatever you want. I was peeved about these things that happened in this century. I likened it unto a slave trade, but maybe it's bad to say this.

I: What city did you work in?

R: In Hampstead.

I: Since you hung around with people you already knew from St. Vincent, how did you meet new people?

R: The old ones knew their way around by now so, like my girlfriend, she was living in Cote St Luc, so she would come and pick me up when it's time for me to go on Thursday evening, she'd pass pick me up and then we'd shop, go down to the Negro Community Center and then she'll bring me back home until I learned my way around. But we'd always say where we would meet and... you were happy to be together.

I: So at the N.C.C. you met people from different islands?

R: Yes. Sometimes they would have a speaker or someone to help you out like your way around and what you do...

I: So looking back on your circle of friends, were most of them from St. Vincent or did you end up meeting people from all over?

R: You meet people from all over the isles. You became friend--although some are married, dead and whatnot--you keep in touch when you meet... Sometimes here they will have a West Indian evening or in the park or a picnic and then you'll see people you haven't seen for years so you make acquaintance.

I: What was your first job after you stopped doing domestic work?
(after those two years)

R: It was hell to get a job outside that field because it is known that West Indians or negroes are always supposed to be maids or menial jobs, they say dummies, stupid or whatever you call it. I remember looking through the ads. You didn't know your way around as a matter of fact and you have to ask a lot of questions and I remember once I went to this man and I spoke to him on the phone and he said, "Yes." Maybe I sounded like an Englishwoman at the time, he said "Yes, can you type?" I said yes, but when the man saw me, like he's never seen a Black person before. He almost fainted. [laugh] I knew what was wrong, but the audacity... I think he was very stupid if he realizes it that..."Have you ever seen a typewriter?" things like that which make him look stupid if he isn't stupid. "Have you ever seen a stethoscope, a this, a

that..." I say, "Yes, I know typewriter that you type, or else I would not have applied." He went in the drawer and pulled out a letter. "Can you do something like this?" I looked through the letter, I said I could do a little better than this. I said where I worked, our head office--we sold electricity--our head office was in London England. When you do anything it has to be presentable. I say look at the salutation, look at the end, you signed it, some errors that were made. I said, "I couldn't give my boss a letter like this, I know, you can't see anything wrong with it." He gave somebody the job and he couldn't find anybody... I was so mad and peeved at the whole idea that if I knew my way around... And this is why I dislike anyone calling me to be a juror... I can see where people are motivated to do bad things, so it would be hell if I'm called as a juror to depict what is right from what is wrong from my point of view.

[Interviewer's summary: R. then goes on to explain more of her experiences and thoughts on the problems she had trying to find a job. The next place she went was to a big bank on Bleury Ave. They made her do a skill-testing questionnaire which she passed admirably according to the job interviewer at the bank, but then was told by the boss that the position was no longer available. The job interviewer protested knowing that it wasn't true. R. told the job interviewer not to bother because "If I'm given the job I don't think I'll be happy working here." Nowadays, she said, she would have demanded to be given the job. "You can control the whole system, but before you don't even know where you are and it's a drawback." She then went to Jewish Vocational Services. "They're the ones who help!" The worker sent her to one interview but she was not given the job so she said, "Look, when you call them up, tell them I'm Black. I'm not going to face this again." So the worker would then do that and would find out that the quota of one Black person was filled. One was a Jewish firm. They said, "Whether she Black, White, Pink or Blue if she can do the work..." She worked hard there for \$30.00/wk. Then she spotted an ad for a job paying \$65.00/wk and got that job. "You file applications with Eaton's, Drake's Personal, etc., but as soon as you leave..." R. spent about an hour filling the application, (what do they want about your dead father?)... "the looks she will give you..." She told of how she had to go back the following week to seek a new position and although they keep applications on file for three months, hers was in the garbage. She went back to Eaton's and was offered a position doing book-keeping at night. She said she had to discuss it with her husband first and they decided that "things were pretty bad" so she took the job hoping to get into the day shift. She worked in Accounts for 10-12 years. After that closed up because of new data processing she started taking up odd jobs and decided, "after I was approaching that age," to look after the elderly. She went to learn about the process of aging. She opened a nursing home. But it's difficult getting people. "Maybe some don't want to stay with Black families... The hospitals are filled with people, if I got sick I couldn't get a room there. They could let some of the people out. I don't know. When you call once a week they say they don't have anybody." She says she's spending her own money on it now because houses are not selling. She has a duplex near her home with three clients. But it can hold seven people. She puts ads in the paper... One potential client asked her if everyone there was Black and she said, "No, everyone is God's children" but she knew

that she wouldn't be happy there. "But things are changing, before on a bus, in a two seater, they would never sit down next to you but now it's different with the younger generation..."]

I: How did you find your first apartment?

[She moved in with a friend].

R: Well it was to get an apartment. At that time, a friend of mine was living there and he moved out.

I: How did you know him?

R: We knew him from back home. He had some brothers who studied here, doctors, they moved to Toronto. [He was an accountant and he moved to Toronto. His cousin was her room-mate and he sublet it to them and another girl.]

R: I had to import my husband which was very rough at Immigration. They didn't like the idea, although they said that after two years you can send for next of kin and boyfriends. One was out his place when he said why she had to import somebody when they have men here... I think they were very cruel, some of them, but anyhow he came and we got married. We wanted to move from that scene... because we wanted our own apartment. It was very difficult getting an apartment. When you see an ad you go or you call and when you go, she told us when she saw us, "I'm sorry." I say, "You just told us ten minutes ago that it was free..." So I took the ad (that was posted) and threw it in the gutter. She said she was going to call the police. I was really mad so I said "You better be careful I don't throw you in the gutter instead." My husband said he wasn't going back with me because I'm too hasty. He was a very quiet man. Eventually we bought our own property [in St. Leonard] because it was hard to get a decent apartment. They don't rent to Black people. I think I even reported it...

I: What year did you get married?

R: 1960.

I: How many years had you known him?

R: Five years...

I: So you were engaged when you left?

R: Yes. Either I would go back and meet him or he comes here.

I: What was his occupation before he left and then when he arrived?

R: He was in Aruba. He worked with Largo Oil Company. When he came here, they had the hardest time to find jobs, like my friend's husbands and so on. Poor him, he would work all day, during the night for \$135/wk. The whole thing was manipulated so that you couldn't see where you were going. It was a grievous period but now I see people coming up and it's easier for them. You had to be the ambassadors, setting the standard wherever you worked, do twice the amount, for less pay... I liked working. At work at Eaton's they would post two thousand, I would post nearly four thousand. My boss would say "I don't know how Mrs. _ can do it, I would have to show them..."

I: Were you a member of any 'Canadian' associations, clubs, like Rotary, political parties,...? Do you have contact with other (non-ethnic) Canadians? How?

R: No. I was a member of the Red Cross St. John's Ambulance Assoc. and the Vincentian Assoc.

I: Who makes up your family?

R: There were five of us. My sister, a nurse, stayed back to help look after my mother. I wanted to get her up here because she was working at the time. My brothers, two were sailing in the big boats, going to Arab oil companies. I sent for them because one of their boats got bombed so I sent for them. They're married with children and grandchildren. One of my brothers is still back home. My father passed away long before I left. My mother died recently at 97. So I keep travelling back and forth.

I: How many times have you been back to St. Vincent?

R: Mostly every two three years. I still go at Christmas time because losing my husband and everything. Usually I feel lonely and despondent so I call up the airlines and go home. Last year I arrived Christmas morning like Santa Claus... I find a little baby...my sister was having a Christmas party for the village children and I heard that a baby was on our land. I ran down along with the children and I found a little baby in the ravine so I took her up, I didn't know whether she was dead or alive, but in my heart I said she has to be alive so I took her up to the hospital, she didn't even have a pulse. Now she's a big girl, my sister is taking care of her. Her name is Andrea because she was found by Andrew who saw the basket. We couldn't call her Moses because she's a girl (laugh). She's living with my sister taking special care that I can take care of her but all the papers haven't gone through--it has to go through a federal court. But up here I applied for her but the criteria was age. But back home it's different because you have your family and friends who can take over. I assigned her to two people in case I get old and decrepit because it's hard at her age (one year four months)...

I: So you want to bring her here if you could?

R: I would like to. Even though I don't know when I might be going back home for good, this year, next year,...

I: Are you planning to retire there?

R: I retired about eight years ago but the hardest I ever worked, from doing this [managing the old age home]. It's a 24 hour job.

I: So you're planning to move back for good?

R: I found a guy down there, maybe I'll join him--I'm not sure yet...

I: Did you have any other children?

R: No. And I love children so much. I just end up having miscarriages at the end, at my futile age..., so I just forget about it after a while. Just miscarriages with my husband so the doctor said don't get in that trap again.

I: Would you have considered adopting?

R: Yes but it was very difficult. He has to be bringing in a lot of money, we have to have a house, and I have to stay home,... then when I got relaxed...menopause [hushed voice] three, four months and you end up in the hospital... It was a big thing that you had to be in a certain grade to adopt children, but afterwards they were begging you to adopt especially these multi-racial children because the only rich people, they were White,...so afterward they were begging Black families to adopt children. You could have gone down there and choose whichever one you wanted but my husband said that you might chose a very sick child. I say, perhaps, so we didn't bother anymore.

I: Who do you live with in your household today?

R: Just me.

I: So you just visit the duplex [the home]?

R: Yes and on weekends when the girl is off I take over. I'm not feeling too well because I fell down so this is why I'm up here most of the time. I go every day or every other day according to the shopping,... When I go on the weekend I seem to do a whole week's work.

I: Did you ever consider moving anywhere else besides Montreal?

R: No. After my husband died (1977) I wanted to go to England to study something. I'm very fascinated with the eye or the ear since I was young but as the years keep going on I said I'm too old to go back to school. The only time I went back to school I wanted to do more on the aging so I took a gerontology course.

II. RELATION WITH SPOUSE

I: Was your marriage like that of the previous generation back home or did Montreal change things?

R: No it didn't deter anything. He was quite an old fashioned guy because he was brought up with his grandmother. As a matter of fact I think I felt like a two year old child with him because he took care of you. You couldn't do what you want to do. This is the only thing I abhor... very strict.

I: What is a typical marriage in the island?

R: The husband is the supporter, he brings in the bread and the woman looks after the home. If they're pretty wealthy you might have a helper or two and she meets your every need. But now things have changed a lot like the European countries. Progress is being built up, you want a bigger house, you do a lot of travelling, so the trend is the same as other countries.

I: What would your life have been like if you still lived in the Isles? Would you have married the same person?

R: I don't know... I had a very good job at home. I just wanted to travel, the grass is greener on the other side. I might've been happier. I might have gotten two three cars already. My company begged me to stay. My home was very

pleasant because after work it was like going on a holiday. Your boyfriend would pick you up and you go on the beach with the other girls. So you don't feel like you need a holiday... Here, you're always tired because when you get home, especially the different seasons, you have to prepare something to eat and something for the following day that I often wonder how people with children cope. It's like a pressurized cooker you're into... At home you were more relaxed and being amongst your loved ones made it easier.

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: No (referring to Andrea), I have no objection whether she wants to marry Black, White,...

I: Religion?

R: I would kick against her marrying a non-religious person because our life is built on faith and without it I know what can happen. You have to have a background, like in a marriage there has to be something solid that you build on and if it isn't there it won't stand the test, that there is a creator that she can call on... It has happened to me and those that I know that there is a background, and she is not alone standing.

I: How is divorce looked upon in your community? Is it different from the attitude in St. Vincent?

R: To be open minded, although we answer the vow as long as life lasts, only death do us part, I can see where for two people things change maybe on a love basis...

I: What would be an understandable reason for a divorce?

R: The main reason--if the man is cruel and if he is not faithful, it's breaking one of the commandments. If he's abusing me whether orally or physically I don't think I'd withstand it... But if there's communication you will try everything until the last... You might be better off with somebody else because we're only halves...

I: Would your spouse be likely to discuss things like say, career changes or other major decisions before acting on it?

R: We'd both discuss it, weigh the pros and the cons. One time he wanted to join a lodge, his friend was behind him and I was afraid because it was the masons, then years later I said to him that I wouldn't mind if he joined but he said no.

[She goes on to say that she wanted to join a lodge herself but she didn't like the way people were carrying on, talking badly about each other,...she felt it didn't "upgrade" one's character which is the point of joining one, so she never found one to join.]

I: What church did you and your husband belong to?

R: Protestant, Wesley United. We took active parts in the church. He was an elder there, and we sung in the choir...

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

R: Both should be one... If I were to go home now and marry I wouldn't like my husband to keep me down from doing what I want to do. My group is the sunshine group, we will have to open a soup kitchen,...right now I have a group here that help with children with special needs back home, with the hospital, It's a poor place. I have a lot of big ideas since I was a kid back home. I did this type of work from 4H to Women's club... It's still in me to do work that needs to be done. One should not stay home and lay among ones wealth...

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

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

R: I would like to instill in her to be an optimist. She went through quite a lot as a child and maybe she lived because of some special... She came to be a special person. She was found and I want her to be a great person, one that will stand on the mountain-top and save her nation, something great. But my husband would say that I want too much out of a child and this is why I haven't got any... Because I used to say that at five years old they must be given their first piano recital or be a ballet dancer or something great to look forward to. But some children are the opposite. Whether she's a politician or not, but a good one that can save the nation whether spiritually... But I don't want her to be an ordinary, dumb, no-good person.

I: How much freedom should a child have? Are kids brought up here differently than in St. Vincent?

R: Because we're exposed to TV, everybody lives alike, children at home have guns, pills, dope. They all live alike now, there are no remote areas anymore. We used to be happy kids, you open your door and the kids fly out and play all day long. Now you have to restrict your child and the company it keeps... Money is flowing.

I: What are some ways to discipline your daughter if she is disobedient?

R: I won't say I'll spank her every time she does something wrong. I will talk to her as much as possible to differentiate good from bad. But still I think if you instill certain things in a child's mind no matter what may happen, certain things come back to them. But I don't think I'll treat her like my mother, you know, anything you do bad or say bad they spank you...

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

R: I won't say someone very poor but a man with a sense of humanity, a reason for living but not somebody that will pull her down or degrade her.

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

R: Yes, before she will be learning from a simple point of view, like back home she'll see the animals giving birth and you'll buy books then gradually you'll go up because of other children. You wouldn't believe what a 5-6 year old might know--maybe more than you do. So I have to prepare her so that when she hears she'll know what it's all about. People say oh you'll wait until she's sixteen but at that time they've already gone overboard so you have to

prepare them at an early age and we get further and further. I would like her to commune with me so that there isn't anything she's afraid to tell me. I'd like to leave an open thing so that she can run to me with anything, no matter what. I want good communication with her, my husband as well and those surrounding her so that she's not afraid. This is what I think is a friend, if you can communicate, no matter what, telling the truth.

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

R: To me as I view it, I haven't gone into it from a doctor's point of view but what I have known and seen, some are born, one of those "click, click" can go into the wrong area and that child can be either thing. From an early stage you can tell if that child loves to put on your high-heeled shoes or your lipstick,... We had a little boy that you couldn't leave your lipstick around, he was always in it or between the dresses. My sister tried to talk him out of it but I don't know his reaction now... Those who are born that way only, I do sympathize and I will bring them into my life... God I pray not...

I: Do you think that your parents would have hoped for the same things for Andrea that you hope for?

R: Oh, yes! Even my sister is hoping the same.

I: What aspects of your culture do you want to see instilled in children of the next generation?

R: That she have respect for everyone, love everyone, everyone's her brother and sister. Once you think all people are human beings, and I think this is what we do not love each other and why we have war. Somebody think we're not human but we all have feelings. I see people who don't even love themselves anymore...parents don't love their children,...

[She discusses how maybe it is the adults that are to be blamed because the kids don't have a good example to follow, no heroes or heroines, "I don't know."]

I: How is abortion looked upon in your community?

R: It's something hated, looked upon as degradation. A human life is being taken. It goes on anyhow, the Aborigines... we hear about them back home. In Africa there are many bushes around that can give you a child or take it away. So there are bush doctors who know what bushes they will take that would induce abortion. Mostly, 90% of the people their mothers might be mad but still you will find that they bring a child. I had that argument here, I said here it's different because we're open back home and here you can control having a baby or preventing it from the onset, so it's a vast difference... Your boyfriend here can go in the drugstore and buy something. We haven't got money for those things maybe. So you find the girl gets pregnant because she doesn't know what to use...

I: Has that changed for a lot of women in Montreal in your community?

R: Well back home now it's different. They're open, they're real well read, have lectures, are given free condoms, so the birth rate is being controlled by the young and the standard of living is different. Some girls won't be getting

into trouble.

IV. RELATION TO PARENTS

I: Were your husband's parents in Aruba?

R: No, St. Vincent. One of his sisters we brought up here and she in turn would send for family.

I: Did your mother ever come here?

R: No.

I: Did you want her to live here?

R: Only at holidays. At home it's free, you open your doors and see your neighbours... I knew the whole village, my club played netball so we'd meet different people. Everybody is your family. If I brought her here I would have to lock her up in the house and leave her here. She would die, like a prison. Even I feel that way, much less an old person.

I: What is one's responsibility to one's parents after marriage, and is this different for the male vs. female spouse? When Andrea gets married how often do you expect her to visit you?

R: Well as much as possible. It all depends on what she is doing and what we convey to each other because if you really truly love somebody as soon as you get a chance, you want to know what they're doing. If she's a caring child then we'll be calling and visiting each other.

I: Do one's parents help the couple financially?

R: Yes, everything I have belongs to her. Her college fee is already arranged. Whether I get her, yes or no [referring to the adoption]. I have another nephew who is a doctor, a brilliant student. I went down for his graduation in Cuba. He married a doctor and they live in Jamaica...

[She said she asked one of her nephews if he wanted to be a surgeon because they needed one on the isle. "And I would give him the money, but he said no and went into business administration." The point of her story being "anybody, they haven't got to be related to me, whilst they have good intentions and want to help other people, I will try my best to help them.... If you want to be a doctor, I will lend out my money, I don't know why, even you." (referring to interviewer)]

V. RELATION TO OTHER RELATIVES

I: Describe your relations with your relatives, where they live, how often you see them, and talk on the phone...

R: Christmas time. I like to go home because I'm sad up here. Sometimes one or two of my brothers will be home and we get together with friends and relatives. You're happy in that environment. Here it's too cold to go out. You have a party...

I: Who comes to the party?

R: A lot of people, some we don't know. We always had the New Years party at our house, we have a lot of music, etc. At the other house when I would have a party for the crippled children, we would have 100 people. Here I can cram in 60-70. I like that, helping out. I used to be the treasurer of the church, so the minister's cheque bounced, it's a poor old congregation, and we couldn't give out hampers. So with another girl, we invited people and raised enough money to get the hampers... If I'm here for the holidays we get together with family and friends. Thanksgiving and Easter we get together with friends and family.

I: When otherwise do you see your sister in St. Vincent?

R: Only Christmas, whenever I fell or when there's an emergency, death in the family or a wedding. I went home in September [mother's funeral] and then Christmas...

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

R: That's assigned to me. Even family I don't know in the States, because my other cousin, we just started a family tree so I'm trying to track down as much as possible. But everything is me, me, me. Even to send a telegram or whatever, they won't take responsibility. Something is wrong with my brother and his wife and my sister's giving me the time of my life [i.e. "I should see things straightened out and keep the family together].

I: When would your relatives in the States come down?

R: If there's a holiday, friends usually drop in. I call it an open house.

VI. IDENTITY AND ATTITUDES ABOUT LIFE IN CANADA

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

R: I have no knowledge. It's growing rapidly... I know some of my friends went back home, with a masters, Ph.D., and they taught school, built a house... Maybe I'll go back.

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 G. community?

R: I thought I would be integrated, live the life that Canadians do, but we found that they didn't want us! Excuse me for saying that maybe I'm wrong. It's hard to fit into the culture, but there's not a close relationship between the Black and White, even if you're married... I wonder if we know each other even among the Blacks because we're different culturally.

I: What differences? We don't communicate much or helping people out as before, even back home. It was a community. Everybody would chip in without being asked. Now it's a selfish way. Nothing's the same in all nations.

I: Would you say your ethnic group is doing well in Canada?

R: Not as I would like them to do. We could do better if we get closer together and people they [youth] can look up to. Even looking forward to being the next president or whatever, to that height, set a good standard. But they seem to think that the racial problems with the police... Young people give up.

I: Is there a problem then with the youth?

R: To me, yes. You always hear about the shooting out with the Blacks, you don't hear good things and it hurts me to know these things happen. I want them to be a part of wherever they're living, to build themselves... For them there's nothing to look forward to.

I: Does it seem to you that this changing over time in Canada or any other changes?

R: It's changing... Things were very rough when we came but it seems worse now too. I know we're going through a depression, but with all the advancements we have [in science] humans shouldn't go through this stuff. We're too wise. Instead of going forward, we're going back 150 years... Everybody has to pull themselves up, like if I'm working somewhere and it's going to close down, I prefer to give you a free day and I make the sacrifice so that we're able to go on... All I hear is that we need more money and people are being squeezed, and people stronger than I am are on welfare. I won't say communism, it isn't a bad word, it's how it's applied. Like if you're old, you can babysit so that I can go to work... Everybody should be paid according to their task.

I: What do you think about other ethnic groups in Canada and Montreal? Do you have any problems with specific groups? (such as French Quebecois, Black Caribbeans from other Islands, Blacks from other countries especially those from French colonies, white immigrant groups, refugee status groups ...)

R: There isn't much connection amongst all the groups, even the West Indians. We do get together but at a distance.

I: Why?

R: We're from different backgrounds, even among the Canadians with the French, we're caught in the friction.

I: What are traditional cultural practices that you observed with your husband? (in terms of religion, cultural foods...)

R: Christmas time and New Years, it's great festivities. We usually get together and cook the basic West Indian things, and funerals, we do attend, we're getting old, and know I come across death more often. We have a wake, pray and sing...

I: What kind of newspapers do you read? Any 'ethnic' ones? Where do you get your ideas from?

R: To tell you the truth I don't read or listen to the news because I like to knit and sell them for the crippled children (although they don't like to be called that). Things like toilet covers, etc. I go to Cote St Luc library and then I have to repeat them because I don't read them. I flip through magazines, like Better

Homes, anything that catches me, like entertainment books.

I: TV?

R: No.

I: Who do you look toward for leadership of your community?

Internationally, nationally, locally,... (name them).

R: If I tell you you'll be surprised. I don't look for leadership because we all have our own way of living, you might want to be a good leader but you get deterred by the roadside and you become corrupted, politicians, ministers... nobody's leading a life you can look up to now... My inspiration, I read my daily word and I get a lot of things from it. I believe in God. A lot of things happened in my life, even my cousin asks how I stay so jovial. I say I cast everything aside. Sometime you die before your time. I have something like a million dollars pending now on certain things. I say I'm not going to let that bother me. When the time comes I will have that strength to cope with it. I might not live to see the outcome of it so why should I be bothered. My philosophy in life is when I have a problem too big for me I put aside and say, God take care of it for me. My accountant says I want every money you take in and spend. I say the miracle might be broken if I do that. I've never gotten back a bounced cheque and I just want to keep it so... I know there is a provider who will take care of me, so why should I worry? [referring to god]

I: How important is it to you that the community of St. Vincentians in Montreal stay associated?

R: We do get together, having a West Indian affair where all the isles get together. Caribbana, etc.

I: But what if the association shut down and joined a larger group?

R: No, I think you have segments, you like to be part of the world but still part of yourself. It's like a tree you might throw out branches but still you want the main ingredient.

I: What is the main ingredient for you then?

R: Vincentian. You might branch off marrying one from Barbadoes or Jamaica but still you're trying to keep your own identity somehow along the line. Some of them call things differently. Even if you join the rest you have your little part.

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

R: It's just a description of colour. It doesn't bother me whether somebody says I'm Black or what. Everyone's human, whether pink or blue. It's a word to degrade somebody sometimes...

I: Who is your community then?

R: That's a hard question to answer. I would say that I belong to the West Indian community but at the same time I'm in a white area, maybe they're Jewish or what, it doesn't matter. People are people no matter where you're from. I can live anywhere and not feel inferior. Here, they're all very nice.

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?

R: I'm a human being made in the image the same way you were made, regardless of colour, creed or class. I just know myself as a human being not as West Indian, Black, or Arab, whatever. I'd just leave it.