

Interview 12

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

Date: July 27, 1993

Place: Montreal

Demographic Information

Gender: female

Age:

Country of birth: St. Vincent & the Grenadines

Year of arrival: 1991

Education:

Occupation: Domestic worker. Care-giver for two kids for a family.

Marital status: married (husband in St. Vincent)

Children: daughter, age 15 in Canada; two in St. Vincent, ages 5 and 6

I. BACKGROUND AND IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

I: First of family to come to Canada?

R: My cousins, my uncle, my other uncle, my sisters. I was sponsored by my uncle.

[Interviewer's note: confusion--she isn't sponsored for immigration purposes].

I came here for a wedding two years ago, and I saw the opportunity to have a better life here, so I went to the immigration people, and they extended my stay, and I started from there.

I: Did you also have friends here?

R: Yes, lots.

I: Occupations:

R: My uncle is a builder, my brother is a male nurse.

I: How come you came here rather than Toronto?

R: Oh, I like it here. My impression was that Montreal is like heaven. Easy-way up there. Some people here take any advantage of you. You never have a real agreement, suddenly everything changes, especially when you are living in the house.

I: You had a job arranged here?

R: I worked in the West Island, living in the employer's home. The first two years I was here I had to live in, but after that I got an apartment.

[Apparently she was accepted into the Domestic Scheme within the country.]

I: Other family?

[England, Antigua, Barbados and Trinidad]

I meet my friends at church and at school, I am taking a course in nursing.

[Until she is landed she has to stay in domestic work. She went to school to do French, but "the work is so long and I'm so tired at the end of the day that I don't make any progress."]

(Her daughter came in at this stage and takes part in the interview. Interviewer

asked if this is her sister, but she says no, this is my daughter).

I: Current job?

R: I work for a family, with two babies and the parents. It's long hours. 8:30 in the morning until 9 at night.

I: Did you have any contact with government courses?
(Discussion of her rights as a non-landed immigrant.)

I: Any clubs?

R: No, I don't involved in clubs. I go to church, and work and that's it.

I: Friends?

R: I have Canadian friends, Vincentian friends, etc. I talk to them on the phone. Sometimes we get together, and sometimes you are at the bus stop.

[Two kids at home, ages 6 and 5. Her mother is taking care of them. And her father and her husband are in St. Vincent as well.]

R: I am not even landed here yet, I can't sponsor my husband and little kids.

I: How often do you talk to your family at home?

R: Once a month, because it is very expensive to talk on the phone.

I: Do you ever consider going back?

R: If it doesn't work for me here, I'll go back, what can I do?

I: Are you married to your husband?

R: Yes, about 10 years ago. We knew each other as friends before.

[The 15 years old daughter has another father.]

I: What did you do in St. Vincent before you came?

R: Domestic. (daughter disagrees, claims a store job) Domestic, only domestic.
[Interviewer's note: The discrepancy in their accounts may be because of a contradiction with what she told immigration.]

II. RELATIONSHIP WITH SPOUSE

I: How would your marriage be if your husband came here?

R: He works building houses. It was okay.

I: Can you give me any examples of intermarriage?

R: No, you just marry your choice. Indians are different. There are different cultures, but I don't get into people's affairs like that.

I: How is divorce looked upon in your community.

R: Some people get divorced. It depends on the family.

I: If your husband came here, how much communication would you have with your husband?

R: It depends. Life is funny, you never know, so prepare for the unexpected?

I: Any thoughts on the roles of men and women.

R: No, I can't talk on that. Women work harder than men, they have more responsibilities than men.

III. RELATIONS WITH CHILDREN

I: Would you like to have more children in the future.

R: No way. (laughs)

I: What do you want for your children?

R: Good education, and be independent. Not to have a rough life like I have. That's why we are fighting like that, to give our kids what we never have. This place has a lot of opportunity that we never had. (Daughter objects).

I: How would it be different back home?

[Daughter says it would be better.]

I: If you could imagine ideal jobs for your kids, what would it be?

R: They have to choose. I can't choose for them.

Daughter: I want to be an actress, but she doesn't want me to be an actress.

R: It's not suitable for her.

I: Do you think your husband has different aspiration for your kids?

R: About the same thing. He would say education and let the kids decide.

I: (asks daughter) How is it different to grow up in Montreal rather than in St. Vincent?

R (mother answers): She doesn't like it that when the parents discipline the kids here, they go get the police. The kids are brought up different here. The races don't mix together. They play separately. This is the first place I ever heard about racism. At home nothing is said and nobody talks about it. You think that it is the same because you can walk in the street and say good morning to everyone, but you find when you come here that your neighbours don't even know you exist. At home you have something you share with your neighbours and your neighbours share with you. Here there is nothing like that.

I: Did you expect to mix when you came here?

R: Sure, it was...

I: Do you want to make sure that your daughter knows about black history and Afro-Caribbean culture?

R: It doesn't matter who teach them, but they need to be taught what is right. Don't try to force one thing into a child. They come here from the West Indies and they try to force them into the French school and the child doesn't know anything about French. It's harder, and it's not fair to the kids. It's not an easy language, but we need to give and take.

I: How and where do you hope your daughter meets her potential spouse?

R: At 18 she can have a boyfriend, but now she can not. She is still young. I am not going to choose someone. I hope that she will get someone who can be like a father to her, someone who will care for her, and they will care for each other. She can have a happy life here, if she gets a good career, and a good education, and meets someone nice.

I: What would a reaction be if a child told their parents he is homosexual.

R: Oh, please. (Sounds shocked).

Daughter: They even get married, you can't always tell.

R: It's a disgrace to the family, and that sort of thing.

I: Do you think ideas are changing?

R: Maybe, not my ideas, but some people may be changing.

I: Do you think that your parents hope for the same things that you hope for your children?

R: Just the same.

Daughter: No, they are nicer.

R: I lay down my rules and she has to obey my rules. My parents they spoil her. So that's what she likes.

I: What is your culture to you?

R: Christmas is different, we all sing and go house to house, and take food to the old people who can't get out. Easter is different, the way we celebrate is different, and summer is different. In St. Vincent in the summer we go to the beach all the time, and you might go camping in the woods, and we have fun. It's lots of fun.

I: Let's say you were in Canada for many years, and went back to the Caribbean only once in a while. What would you want to make sure is their culture that they know?

R: Do you say that they are born here? They grow up here? Then I can't say nothing about what they must know, this is their culture. They just need to know that their grandparents are from there, their parents are from there, and they are from here. Many young people born here don't even like St. Vincent. Many are like that. They like to go there to have fun in the water, but they don't need to want to go settle there.

IV. RELATIONS WITH PARENTS

I: If your husband and children were here, would your parents like to come here?

R: No, they are old, they are done with traveling? The only way they would travel is if it needs an operation or if they needed to be taken care of. They have lots of sisters and others at home they don't need to come across the world to be taken care of. That's one thing, people in the West Indies take care of their parents. Taking care of children, and taking care of old people, that's done better in the West Indies than here. Some people here get abused, and you hear

terrible stories.

V. RELATIONS WITH EXTENDED FAMILY

I: How often do you see your relatives who are here?

R: Yes, once in a while.

I: Christmas?

R: No, I'm glad for the day to rest. I'm not going out in the snow to see the family.

(Daughters leaves)

I: Are there any events that would bring the whole family together now?

R: No, I can't go anywhere. It's rough. If my parents died right now, I couldn't go. I don't have any money. I have to take care of my kids. I have to pay my rent. I work all the time and I don't get ahead. I get off one day in a week, and it's so hard to make a life here. I don't have security of any sort. I try and try but they don't understand. It's just by the mercy of God that I'm getting by from one day to the next. I don't have anything to go back to, and it's tough, it's rough. I wish sometimes that they could understand. I want to get my landed, and get some education, and get a better job. Get out of this domestic work. I don't like to lean on family. My uncle is doing fine, and I have to do my best. As I don't have my landed I have to struggle on, and I'm hanging in there, with the help of God I will have faith and be strong. There is no way anyone could cope with this situation.

I: If you needed help could you turn to your relatives? Or if your cousins needed help would they turn to you?

R: No, we don't go to help for them for anything.

VI. IDENTITY AND ATTITUDES ABOUT LIFE IN CANADA

I: What is your ethnic community?

[Mentions lots of West Indian islands. Also Canadians who go to her church.]

R: We go on picnics, and like that. Different classes, different languages, different colours, we talk alike, you walk like me, you have eyes like me. God made everybody, and we should love everybody. That's what we grew up with. People travel now and it is going to make a difference in the whole world. The Jamaican or something might go out there and one does something bad, and then the whole community gets the blame. We can't blame everybody. It takes time to find the good people in any group.