



Interviewee: Urla Rollins

Interviewer: Liz Bloom

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012

My name is Mrs. Urla Rollins from the Parish of Christ Church, Barbados; as a teenager I emigrated to England in 1961.

#### My Life in Barbados

Barbados is actually a beautiful place and I had a beautiful, happy, disciplined and strict childhood; I was well brought up. I am the oldest of the children and we were brought up by our grandparents as our parents had their own businesses and they travelled a lot, so we had a lovely time with our grandparents.

#### My Schooling

I had a good education; I went to Infant, Primary, Secondary and Private school in Barbados where I sat some examinations. Our schooling was very strict and our teachers had a great influence in our lives. There was always an incentive and our teachers would make sure that we were encouraged and motivated and they would push us to achieve goals and objectives. *They thought that every child can be a Prime Minister.*

#### Travel to England

As I always love travelling, my Mom said, "Well, I will make sure that you will travel." So my mother placed my name on the Emigration Board in Barbados and they contacted me to study in England. Because I was allotted to the government in Barbados, everything was paid for me when I got here. There was a group of us teenagers together – eighteen and nineteen years old. We came by aeroplane – BOAC.

#### England

When I arrived in England, we were met at the airport by individuals who chaperoned us to our destination. As I travelled by train, my first impression of England was very disappointing because the train travelled at the back part of everybody's home where the buildings looked very dingy and I was shocked as our history of England was different compared to what I was seeing. My destination was Bishop Stortford General Hospital where I and the other comrades with me were greeted by the Matron and her staff. They were very welcoming and our rooms were centrally heated, very nice and warm. This was my first job, I had never worked before so it was all strange to me as I had to work and study, so I had to be very disciplined in everything as the senior staff would make sure that going to bed and waking up on time was significant.

Nevertheless, some of the indigenous students who studied with us were helpful and hospitable while working together but during an encounter on the streets, they were opposing. That was shocking! The other shocking thing was that many of us were ostracised from Church, we were not accepted, we were traumatised and some of us never went back to Church, whereas, in Barbados Church was for everyone, no one was excluded. Christmas time was always difficult for me as I missed my family and friends as there was always a community spirit among us, especially at Christmas. Notwithstanding, a Christmas dinner was always laid on for us at the hospital and we were expected to participate by attending this function in our evening wear.

However, I could not tolerate the food for some time as it was different but one of my friends from Barbados- she was here previously, she took me aside and said, "If you don't eat your food, you will die!" I became fearful and so I started to eat my food and now I love it! Our food in Barbados is fresh, fresh fish and vegetables; rice is a staple diet, served in various ways.

Hospital life was very good, despite the hard work as I was elected to work on the Private Ward where I met people from all walks of life and social life was exciting as we used to be invited by the Royal Air Force to these sophisticated dances where a coach was laid on for us. At the hospital, one of my Barbadian friends taught me to dance ( I was never allowed to dance at home in Barbados as we were strictly brought up) and I won first prize at one of these dances. *Remember we were teenagers!*

I stayed at Bishop Stortford for a length of time and completed my studies at the Hertford County Hospital where I obtained my State Registration in General Nursing (SRN).

During my studies at Bishop Stortford, I met a fellow student from Barbados and we became firm friends, her family lived in St. Albans and she introduced me to her family where I met, my husband, Wilkinson and we have lived in Fleetville, St. Albans, for many years.

Wilkinson Rollins

Interviewer: Liz Bloom

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012

My name is Wilkinson Rollins from the Parish of St. Andrews, Barbados. As a teenager of seventeen and a half years old, I came to England by aeroplane. It was an eight hours flight and because of the bad weather conditions in England (it was snowing heavily), the plane was diverted to Ireland and landed on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1961 and so my immigration to England was on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1962.

#### My life in Barbados

My life in Barbados was good; I had a delightful childhood as my parents had a big family. I had older sisters, with one brother older than me while the other brothers were younger. My sisters, brothers and I worked together in unity and as a team as my parents had a lot of land with many fruit trees and the scenery in that part of St. Andrews, Barbados is beautiful, with the river, hills and gullies, which was very exciting.

#### Travel to England

My older brother was here previously and he invited me to come to England and I took up the offer. Abandoning my apprenticeship as a mechanic, I travelled to England; from Ireland by train, I landed at Waterloo station but no one was there to escort me to my destination. However, I had an address and some money and a West Indian bloke (Jamaican), approached me and said, "Where are you going?" I showed him the address which I had written down on a piece of paper and he said, "I'll take you!" and he brought me straight to St. Albans at my sister's home where my brother was living. Many of us were stranded at Waterloo Station but this West Indian man took care of us all.

#### Work Life

As soon as I arrived, my brother took me for a job at the same factory where he was working, which was a rubber factory where I worked for four weeks. It was difficult as we had to travel through the snow to catch the bus but it was enjoyable in the factory as it was always hot. After changing my job, I went to a furniture factory - Porter's Wood in St. Albans - starting in upholstery, sanding, painting, steel work and woodwork and as a Charge Hand, I moved around doing different tasks over the years, training people and also working on machines, it was diversified and enjoyable. That's how I managed to last there for forty-two years. During work life in a factory, you learn to be sociable, that is, talking to everybody including different nationalities, such as Italians, Irish, and everybody working together as a team.

However, there was a difficulty and this problem was the streets in St. Albans. Teddy Boys were popular then, so you had to be careful but I stayed indoors most of the time anyway as I was a homely type of person. My experience here among the indigenous people was surprising as I thought coming to England was like coming to the "Mother Country". Barbados is called "Little England," so I expected open arms because when the white people come to us

from abroad, we have open arms but it didn't work that way. As I was about to bring my Bible from Barbados to England, my brother said to me, "Don't bring that in England because if you go to church, they won't accept you down here." So I didn't go to church until in the later years when he invited me to church which was when our church group started.

Through the introduction by my brother, I became acquainted with my wife, Urla, where we were married and lived in Fleetville, St. Albans, for many years.