

AFRO SOLO UK

**39 Life Stories of African life in Greater
Manchester 1920 - 1960**



Researched and Authored by SuAndi OBE



Afro Solo UK (ASUK)

ASUK Researcher and Author SuAndi

Published by artBlacklive
September 2014

This book has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund

ISBN: 978-0-9542766-1-4

www.afrosolouk.com.

Cover picture donated by
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Inspirational: National, Local, International.

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Project Partners: Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Centre,
Manchester Cathedral, Imperial War Museum North,
Manchester Metropolitan University and NBAA.
Funded by Heritage Lottery Fund.

Acknowledgements:

SPECIAL THANKS

Sadie Lund - Interview transcription

Kate Swainson – Proofing

Dominique Tessier founder + coordinator of Manchester's first Cafe
Historique for introducing Eunice Nwagbara to ASUK

Anthony Oniomu Atta

Stan Finni

Steve Bryan – Memorial Technician

Back2Roots

Michael Todd Director <http://riverhorse.tv/>

Warrant officer Lutha Magloire

Specialist advisor for the British Army Steve Cottier

VOLUNTEERS

Sally Medlyn – Advising

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Karis Tottoth, Hamza Abbas, Simon Ali Jordan, Bedos Mavanubu, Marcus

'WE ARE BECAUSE THEY WERE – STRONG' – Digital Exhibition

Clive Hunte. Bushra Productions. <http://people.bayt.com/clive-hunte/>

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We Are Because They Were – Strong' Director

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INTRODUCTION TO AFRO SOLO UK

by Hakim Adi

What passes for 'Black British History' often bears little resemblance to the long history of Africans and those of African heritage in Britain, which dates back to the Roman era. Unfortunately, for many, this history still begins with the arrival of the *S.S Windrush* in 1948 and revolves around the experiences of those who migrated from the Caribbean and their descendants. Everything else is ignored, or remains hidden, apparently still waiting to be discovered and restored to its rightful place. It is as if there should not be a history of Britain in its all its diversity and complexity but only a 'Black British History,' which purports to present a single story from which many are completely excluded. As the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie tells us there is 'danger in a single story,' since the reality is always more complex.¹

What is presented here is something entirely different to the single story, instead we are presented with the multiple histories that have been collected as part of the Afro Solo UK (ASUK) research project. ASUK is so named because the vast majority of Africans, who are the focus of this project, came to Britain alone, in the period before the 1960s, during the colonial period before wide-scale migration from Africa or the Caribbean. ASUK has undertaken the collection of oral histories and photographs of African communities around Greater Manchester. Many, although not all, were based in and around the Moss Side area in Manchester, which even before 1945 was already an area in which Africans were a significant presence. It was with good reason that it was Manchester that was chosen as the location of the most important of all the Pan-African congresses, held in Chorlton Town Hall in 1945. It was a city that could provide delegates and supporters, accommodation, food and hospitality at a time when racist discrimination (often referred to as the colour bar) was widespread and racism still legal throughout Britain.

1 http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

The histories that appear in the following pages recount the lives and times of Africans in Manchester from the 1920s onwards. It is, however, much more than simply a historical record of Africans who ventured to Britain in that era, although that would be important enough. It is, perhaps it's better to say, that these are the histories of African-headed families. These mostly comprised of men, but also a few women, mainly from Britain's four West African colonies - Nigeria, the Gold Coast (as Ghana was known pre political independence in 1957), Sierra Leone and the Gambia, in addition to some other African colonies such as Togoland and Somaliland, and their white British and Irish wives. Many of the men found their way to Britain as seafarers, often firemen/stokers - a job considered fit only for Africans in those days, although they worked in a variety of occupations after their arrival. Some had managed to secure a good education or a profession before they embarked, even during the colonial period, but most remained members of the Mancunian working class throughout their lives in Britain.

These are histories of Britain and of the Manchester area but they are all also histories of Africa and its diaspora. Some of the families, or family members, even lived in Africa for a time, but even if they didn't all have this experience, family ties remain and are strong, or not so strong, depending on individual circumstances.

A few of the personal histories are told by the men themselves, some by their wives but most from the perspectives of their children. What we are given here is something very special, unique even, since although such families have been an integral part of Britain's history for many centuries in London, Liverpool, Cardiff and other towns and cities, never have so many told their own histories in such a compelling way as can be found in the following pages.

These are personal histories that are funny and sad, heart-warming and at times shocking, full of love, emotion and above all honesty. They tell of immaculately dressed hard-working African fathers, but sometimes of fathers who were too often absent, who sometimes failed to provide their children with sufficient information about their African homeland, apart from Jollof rice, Eba and Egusi, an Africa with numerous unknown and unseen family members that might only be fully discovered upon the death of the parent, or for some not at all. As one of the narrators presents it: 'If my Dad was

here now I would reprimand him about almost everything really. Not teaching me his language, not being there more and not taking me to Africa'. These histories also tell of families divided by racism, of children who were denied grandparents, aunts and uncles but above all they speak of a sense of community of common experiences, discipline, attitudes, shift work, food, small rooms, big houses, landmarks, challenges – of life.

Having established that there is no single story, there are certain commonalities: immaculately-dressed African men who speak loudly to each other in their own languages to the embarrassment of their children seems to be one. The locked room that appears almost like Aladdin's cave another. There are stories of remarkable, strong men but perhaps even more remarkable and stronger women. Women who exemplify the very best British qualities, who refused to be dissuaded or cowered by racism and prejudice, who sometimes were forced to sever family ties and often devoted their lives to husbands and children even in very difficult circumstances. Included here are several love histories and evidence that there are many different forms of love.

Because these stories are often related by children it is perhaps not surprising that their histories often appear centre stage. Once again there is no single story but there are certain common experiences and significant attitudes. The histories of the 'Shine boys,' or half-castes', those of 'mixed race' and dual heritage have seldom been expressed so articulately and passionately, or so vividly.² As one narrator recalls, parents often had a key role to play in establishing a positive sense of identity. 'But we all knew we were black and African. We were brought up with African values, we were brought up to respect – I always remember that. But we also knew though that we did have our own identities...But I am African, I have been African from day one. I know that, from the way I eat to my mode of punishment. For me 'mixed-race' is a modern word.' In these histories therefore, there is a unanimous sense of being Black, of being African, and suffering all the disadvantages which racism bestowed.

² A notable exception is Mark Christian's *Multiracial Identity: An International Perspective* (London, 2000), which is based uses numerous interviews conducted with those in Liverpool.

It is to be hoped that these stories will not just enlighten and interest those fortunate enough to read them but that many will be inspired to collect similar stories in other towns and cities. Much more of such 'hidden history' needs to be uncovered and presented, as Afro Solo UK has done, if the true history of Britain, Africa and its Diaspora is to be more fully known and understood.

CREATIVE JOURNEY TO AFRO SOLO UK

SuAndi

When Lesley Johnson donated his parent's collection of photographs to the Archive,¹ neither he nor anyone imagined the tears that would result. Over the course of this project I and almost everyone I have interviewed have felt the flow of tears, the quiet weeping type that leaves you feeling exhausted but somehow surprised and cleansed.

I have always preferred men over women even though I am very lucky to have a strong group of supporting females in my life. I blame my cousin John Tottoh because it is a family fact that before I was born he would clasp my mother's protruding belly to embrace me and when I was a baby he would dribble in delight over me. Such was his strength that even though he was only a little boy he was not allowed to hold me for fear his love would crush my tiny body.

There were nine years between my brother Malcolm and I and I would go to bed and wish that in the morning we would become twins. I so much wanted to spend every moment with my brother who wasn't in the least bit interested in forming a friendship with his kid sister. That was not to happen for another 30 years and even then he called me his baby and bossed me at every opportunity. Little did he know that I in turn referred to him and my father as 'my boys' because I met their every need

Even though I was very much a girly-girl in pretty dresses with Shirley Temple² curls, I would swagger like a boy. I was loud and boisterous. Men definitely held secrets that I wanted to know so I constantly though not necessarily consciously sought out time with the men in my family.

My eldest cousin Jimmy (James Tottoh) was truly the story teller of the family and I pleaded with him all the time to record his life, particularly as he was the eldest and he was also the tallest with his red hair and pale freckled skin. I wanted him to share what it was like to be the white (Welsh) son of a Nigerian.

1 Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre and Education Trust
2 www.shirleytemple.com/

Where Jimmy was relaxed and easy going, the others always had an edge of anger. I didn't understand it then. I understand it much more now. In many ways they, like our fathers, were stranded in a land that rejected them. They lived in a war zone that often only their mothers were aware of.

While Afro Solo UK may be stories from the past of contemporary people it is also of the present – the issues remain live and sharp as the next paragraph illustrates.

I am disturbed from writing this chapter by a knock on the door; it is one of my neighbours. I haven't lived here long but we greet each other. I have never been sure of her racial identity; her husband is Black, possibly mixed race. I learn today that her mother is of dual heritage Gambian and Irish. She is seeking my advice following an accident her son had in the gym of his primary school. She learns that for at least six weeks he has received his education sat in a corner behind a barricade formed by a bookcase and a piece of cardboard sellotaped into place. She now understands why he has started to show small bruises, the result of the other kids knocking against the bookcase causing it or the cardboard to make contact with him. When he is permitted to sit with the other pupils he is given a stool to perch on, perch because it is smaller and lower than the other chairs. When the teacher addresses him, she calls him 'Rude Boy'. He is the only black child in the class. Her anger is justified. The teacher has been suspended but no one has given either an apology or explanation. I have already begun to call on friends and colleagues who might be able to assist her. (April 2014)

My journey towards this research has been not just personal as the daughter of a Nigerian but also professional as a poet and writer.

Working with and for National Black Arts Alliance, we formed a partnership with the Los Angeles based Hittite Empire,³ a company of 40 African-American men. When I saw their first production at the ICA⁴ London

3 <http://artists.refuseandresist.org/artists/keithantarmason.html>

4 <http://www.ica.org.uk/>

I was blown away. They were sharing secrets, not all but some. They were speaking their fears of the racists in a public arena so that we the audience might begin to understand what has forced too many Black men into incarceration, domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse. Let me repeat myself by saying not all Black men but far too many. But even though the African sold into slavery had been genetically raped, none of the Hittites could reflect the life experience of what I call the first generation Africans here in the UK. Nor did the company share their personal hopes and dreams particularly around their families.

In 2001 I produced and directed a production involving 147 Black men and youths. 'In My Father's House'⁵ it was a huge success and a credit to all the lead artists, but I wasn't totally satisfied with it because it never explored the emotional link between fathers and sons. Two years later I single handedly brought 'In My Father's House 2' to the stage with 64 performers aged from 60 -14 but this time I led the workshops and wrote the 'script' based on their own words. I felt this was far closer to my intentions.

The men around me were getting older. Friends of my brother and cousins no longer treated me as a younger nuisance and what's more, they weren't just fathers but grandfathers who were beginning to reflect not only on their own lives but those of their parents. The most common topic of memory was meal times. Whenever I rang my cousin Alan just before or after dinner he would say something on the lines that the meal he had made that night was almost as good but not as good as his father's cooking. All my meals are prepared by the same measure and even though my father feared I would never learn to cook anything more tasty than my mother's bacon butties and Sunday roast, I did work professionally as a chef and am a popular host but I still cannot hit the cooking skill of my dad.

This growth of the African family I explore via a 2005 NBAA commission of the photographer Antony Jones⁶ for the exhibition 'Once We Were Africans'⁷. Jones portraiture captured multi-generational African families as a means to ridicule the assumption that we are 'newly arrived people'.

5 <http://www.blackartists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/imfhevaldocument.pdf>

6 <http://www.ajphoto.info/>

7 http://www.bbc.co.uk/manchester/content/articles/2005/08/23/230805_once_we_were_africans_feature.shtml

Fou-Fou Youth

*My father would take fou-fou
Pound, knead it until it formed a cloud in the bowl
For we to roll, fingers eager
To dip into soup of soft meat overlaying fish
Smacking our lips on the tingle of hot pepper
His smile of pleasure eased out the memories
Of all the good 'whopping' that heated our backsides for failing,
Saying, doing, something
Unacceptable to the rules we never saw written down
Now our wives struggle
To make again that taste of home
And delight out tongues with images of yesterday
When our mother's lap seemed as high as Mandara⁸
And our father's voice boomed like the Niger
Today we tell our kids to remember
They are not just Mancunians⁹ they are also Nigerians
Descendants of Ras Finni
He who stood tall and determined for African Unity 1945
And now in 2005 we are still Africans*

8 The Mandara Mountains of what is today Cameroon
9 The associated adjective and demonym of Manchester

The Black History Trail¹⁰ was an important element of the annual Black History Month celebrations that NABA coordinated under the banner of Acts of Achievement. In the second year, Dominique Tessier persuaded me to host the tour. I wasn't prepared for the memories it would evoke not just of my city but of my family and the families I had grown up with. A seed of an idea was planted but it would never have taken root without the pictures of Jide and Renee Johnson and the encouragement of Jackie Ould-Okojie.

I did not foresee it as an arduous task, after all this was my birth community, but how to begin aside from employing all the usual marketing techniques. The objective was to record for history the stories of 12 Africans who had come to England between the time period of 1920-1960. Even with the HLF funding support secured, I talked through the project with my cousins and Stan Finni and Anthony Oniomu Atta and to be honest neither were confident that there would be any response. This publication contains 40 and then that of my own father.

The format written here seems fairly simple

1. The interview is recorded
2. Then transcribed
3. I then rework the interview into a chapter
4. The chapter is then returned to the interviewee for them to make any necessary amendments.

The reality was that

1. I never learnt how to control the length of each interview as I became as engrossed as the person speaking
2. The project would never have been completed without Sadie Lund's unbelievable patience in typing up hours of recordings
3. I often spent weeks trying to find the first line to open each life story with
4. Without exception everyone choose to remove something that they hadn't realised they had shared as they became absorbed in their memories.

10 <http://www.actsofachievement.org.uk/blackhistorytrail/> Developed from an idea formulated in 2000 by the AIEUT with Dominique Tessier, Maria Noble of Manchester Education, and NBAA

Anthony was the first interviewee. He had, he said, 90 or more minutes to spend with me. Many hours later having both shed a few tears, I was left facing the reality of the project.

When I interviewed Stan, he kept on saying 'only you Baby, only you'. This was Stan's way of expressing his trust in me to represent him honestly.

In February 2013 my precious cousin Alan Tottoh died. Together as a family we had nursed him over the last few days of his life. His younger brothers and sisters Melvin, Andrew, Mandy and Carmen and John the eldest formed a battalion of support for Alan's five daughters and we all remembered Christopher who died too young. Now together with the children and grandchildren and me their one cousin, we stepped out of the cars into what I can only describe as a village of largely mixed race men. What little more evidence did I need on the importance of this project?

Mike Mayisi regularly expressed that he believed that for many the research was something that his generation had been waiting for. The telling of their stories which could only begin to be told via the stories and memories of their fathers.

For the fathers I interviewed in person, it took some persuasion not because they were reluctant to speak but they didn't feel that their lives had any interest to anyone. How wrong could they be?

From the daughters I interviewed, I learnt so much about myself and could reflect on my own father and daughter relationship.

Everyone interviewed made sure that mothers were honoured for their strength, diligence and determination to bring their families up with the dignity that society in many cases denied them because they were with African men. Where fathers have never been forgotten, mothers have been honoured and I am grateful to Eunice and June for their contributions.

And at the end of it all we learn what in our hearts I believe each and everyone one of us have always known

*Some days we are like the lost
Spiralling between a land, a culture
A memory of a place unknown
Children born here
Still regarded as foreign
Taking trips to visit families
Arriving like strangers
Leaving full of sadness
To return to a life made secure by elders*

*Seeing our children hooking up with mates
As English as crumpets
Loyal friends they can depend on
If leaving here meant losing them
We can never go
And leave all of this so familiar
At times cruel
At times so wonderfully laughable*

*So we gather together in the rituals
Of carnival, birthdays, weddings
And to celebrate life at funerals
Clothe ourselves in our ancestral heritage
Resplendent in the knowledge
That once we were Africans
And in our hearts we still are
By the girth of our souls
The soar of our spirits
Africans abroad. ¹¹*

CHAPTER 1

JIDE JAMES OLAJIDE JOHNSON *by his son Leslie*



Jide holding Leslie



Leslie and wife Gillian



Renee Jide's Wedding

'I know in many ways I was lucky because my Dad told me he loved me... he might have skirted round it and said 'we have done this because we love you...'

Basically my Father just worked – he always had a job and was a steady worker. He worked odd hours and always travelled on a pedal bike.

My parents were childless living in Manchester when they were notified of an available baby boy in a sanatorium in Abergele¹ North Wales. The fact that I had TB never deterred them and they immediately started the adoption application with Manchester Council. I was in the hospital just short of three years, from six months to three years of age. Every week without fail on their own or together, mother and father would get on the *charabanc*² coach in Manchester, travel to Rhyl and then from Rhyl carry on up to the sanatorium. It was an absolutely full day's journey to get there. They had to stop and have lunch. They never missed a week – if the coach was going, one of my adoptive parents were on that coach regardless of anything – that was their priority. I was their priority.

When I came on the scene, when my family adopted me and I remember this vividly, all that ever happened was that my father worked to bring back money for the family home. That was it, and when he came home there was food on the table. God bless him, he worked that hard that he was always tired. My Mother did part-time work, cleaning jobs and working behind the bar at the Robin Hood pub in Moss Side, because at one time we lived next door to the Robin Hood.³

I can't say who cooked the best. Put it this way you can't beat bacon butties and you can't beat chips. Dad used to do this stew – a curry stew. Actually it was cayenne pepper, not curry and we'd get mackerel because it was cheap and that would go in, along with lamb and stuff and he taught me how to cook rice, good rice and the pot would be on for a couple of days. But Sunday morning was always bacon, egg and tomatoes.

1 <http://www.abergelepost.com/abergele-chest-hospital-sanitorium.html>

2 Pronounced sharabang. An old English word for a *Bus* or *Coach*.

3 <http://pubs-of-manchester.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/robin-hood-lloyd-street-north.html>

Dad would make his semolina⁴, Garri⁵, and fufu⁶ and we ate, we ate together.

It was a loving caring family. I was spoilt in one way because I was an only child. I was never hit, my mother only had to say something to me in a certain tone of voice and I backed off, that was enough. I was never hit, never abused and you know how girls tend to go to their fathers, well I always went to my Mother. Sadly in later life at the age of fourteen or fifteen, what with my Dad being Nigerian and his way being the only way he wanted me to live, I wouldn't say a wedge came between us, but as a teenager I started to resist his constraints and opinions. Not surprising really as I was working at fifteen, earning me own money.

My father Jide James Olajide Johnson was a Yoruba Nigerian. He first arrived in England docking in Liverpool around 1940/1945 – the 'War Years'. He was in his late 30s. He was a Merchant Seamen crew member working his passage as a fireman (Furner). He would only have been young and he would have lied about his age to get on the ship.

Apparently he used to manage a pool hall in Lagos and when he was in the Merchant Navy, he was a trusted person because he used to manage all the money off the gamblers - winners and the losers - and at the end of the trip he would pay them out. He was like a banker. He had a good head for figures, always a worker, an industrious guy.

I can't tell you anything else about when he was younger. He never really talked about it. That is a question to ask of all the people helping to make Afro Solo UK, to find out what was the big secret about Nigerians? Dad never talked about family back in Nigeria. The only time he did talk about it

4 A common food in [West Africa](#) especially among [Nigerians](#). It is eaten as either lunch or dinner with stew or soup. It is prepared just like [eba](#)(cassava flour) or [fufu](#) with water and boiled for 5 to 10 minutes.

5 Garri (also known as *gari*, *garry*, or *tapioca*) is a popular *West African* food made from cassava tubers. The spelling 'garri' is mainly used in Nigeria, Cameroon

6 An ancient african dish it is a thick paste usually made by boiling starchy root vegetables

was just before he died. I read a letter from Nigeria. Do you remember me showing you that? I remember him crying because it was so hard and cold like, 'Your Mother has died and can you send money over to us'. I think he was from farming land; he spoke Yoruba and had three tribal cheek scars. On their marriage certificate his father's work is written as farmer.

Through trawling the internet, I found the ship he came on was the SS⁷ Manchester Commerce⁸ Hull Blyth Shipping Co⁹ on 25th September 1943. I also know that he took 'shore leave' in the 'Suez. In February 1944 he sailed to New York. And on his 1944 ID card he has Jacole Lawson, 89 Demark Road, Moss Side, Manchester as 'Next of Kin'.

Because it was war time in many ways there was work aplenty so he, along with his friends, his ship mates, would travel to Liverpool to pick up a ship. It was pot luck which ship took you on and then they would all sail out in the same convey. He told me many years later while he was in the hospital dying, of one trip when some of his mates boarded a different ship to his and he witnessed it being torpedoed and his mates, they just never came out the water.

On the ships, he was stoker working on the furnace. When they were in port he would carry his suitcase on his head. Custom staff would start laughing at the sight of him and make him bend down so they could put the white cross that symbolised nothing to declare onto the case little knowing the contents. Understand Jide smoked but he never ever smoked Ganga. Then he got a job at Bradford Road Gas Works¹⁰.

7 Prefixes for civilian vessels may either identify the type of propulsion, such as "SS" for steamship

8 Manchester Commerce played her part in the North African invasion, making two trips under Capt. C.A.Walker. When commodore ship she was attacked by enemy aircraft off Gibraltar, three were brought down.

9 One of West Africa's longest established and best known ship agencies and have been operating continuously in the region for over 160 years

10 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=1866-nwmac&cid=2#2>

When he finished there, he went working for Dunlop Rubber Company¹¹, making rubber gloves and everything that they used to make, that was down on Cambridge Street just before you get to the Hotspur Publishing.¹²

At first in the late 1940s, he lived in lodgings in Moss Side and then almost on each decade our family moved. In the early 1950s to Hulme then to Wythenshawe and onto Miles Platting in the 1960s, Rusholme in the 1970s and back to Moss Side in 1981.

My Mum, Renne, was from Salford. She was born around 1923 so she was about ten years younger than Jide but there was no friction with her parents they were all, how can I put it, they were all very warm to him. They were all straight Catholics which meant in their religion everybody is equal and la di la di la. But they genuinely liked him, he was a likable guy.

It was a love story. Her friends said they would end up together after they met at a ballroom dance. He said it was his polished shoes and a bit of Juju¹³. He touched her as he passed and she pushed his hand away. Other friends said they would end up together. They were 100% together.

Racism wasn't top of our agenda when I was a child. For example as a young child, I'd be out with my Dad and all of a sudden I'd say 'I need to pee'. So there's this black guy going towards the bushes with what looks like a white child to have a pee and then returning to stand back at the bus stop. People being people would clock it. If you saw that today with anybody you would just observe it and make sure it was right.

I never had any trouble at school. Even though the only black kid in class at Benchill, my race identity never came up aside from when in the summer I got darker. I don't think either Mum or Dad came to parent's evening because I always used to come home with a good report.

11 <http://www.derelictplaces.co.uk/main/showthread.php?t=15468#UjeatcakqPw>

12 <http://hotspurpublishing.wordpress.com/>

13 Commonly used to describe mischievous magic

I went to Broad Street School off Great Western Street and finished my schooling in Victoria Park at Pope Pius. Because we had moved around a lot, academically I wasn't very good. I was always behind. Then when we moved in to Rusholme at the age of thirteen, fourteen, I had been at Pope Pius for two years – I came second in the class of school leavers. This gave me the option to then go in to a higher grade which meant taking Levels. In the first year I came ninth, so I was settling down. I was good at Maths and Geography and remembering stuff but because I had moved around so much my handwriting and spelling were absolute rubbish. To this day I print rather than handwrite because I am so embarrassed about it.

Mum and Dad were absolutely fabulous ballroom dancers. Dad stopped socialising when I came on the scene. He didn't go the pub, he didn't go to a social club. He didn't go out as such. When I met other Africans who knew him, they would say 'Renee and Jide, they were the cream of the crop, they were this that and the other, they wouldn't be off the dance floor all night, they could have been professionals' and I am thinking, I can't relate to this because all he ever did was work, come home, eat. I hadn't thought at that time how much they had given up giving their lives to raising me.

They would have travelled to see Big Band music in the early years. I would imagine possibly on the same circuit as their close friends. I don't know if the Ritz would have had wartime dances, they might have gone there. Dad would have known the owners of the Nile because I remember once we went in the Nile and a big fuss was made and it didn't relate to me why such a fuss was being made. It was like a scene from one of the Godfather films where all of a sudden they walked in and it was like 'Oh my God' and a table appeared from the front with service, right away, out from nowhere. So I can only assume that in the early years they would have gone there for nights out. I know he enjoyed a laugh. He wasn't a drinker. To him a drink was a glass of sherry at Christmas or whatever. He liked to gamble.

He did the Pools religiously, and the horses. I can't tell you if he ever won or if he ever lost. Even so I think he was a lucky man with the gambling.

They never lost their love of music, in terms of the big band music they used to dance to. As a very small child I remember being asked to change the needle on the radiogram to play all the 78s¹⁴. That was their pleasure because they couldn't go out but they still had a radiogram. Dad used to take me down to Denmark Road market¹⁵ to the record stall. They would buy records, once or twice a week. The Platters - the Platters on 78 and stuff like that. And to this day I thank them for introducing me to listening to all sorts of music because obviously in this day and age, with YouTube and downloading music, I have got literally thousands of old fifties, sixties, seventies – every genre of music going and I thoroughly enjoy it and that's how my musical seeds were sown because there was always music in the house.

When I was young I remember going to my Father's work's Christmas parties at the Gasworks and one year I remember vividly, because I cried. All the kids got presents at the end of the party. Kids were getting guns and footballs and I got a pair of braces and I just cried because it wasn't a toy. It was one of those things as presents didn't have your name on them. I threw them in the drawer. Years later along comes Northern Soul¹⁶ and Mods¹⁷ and all of a sudden braces were fashionable. So many, many years later I pulled those bloody braces out and wore them. So the moral of the story is never, never ever throw anything away.

Jide was a very meticulous and immaculate dresser. He could really dress it up and look smart, from his wedding photographs, right the way

14 Records were described by their diameter in inches (12", 10", 7"), the rotational speed in rpm at which they are played (33 $\frac{1}{3}$, 45, 78),

15 <http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk/found-this-picture-in-manchester-central-library-of-denmark-rd-market-and-notic/Memory/5c13fc99-87ae-45a3-b5c1-08c0a77d65f1>

16 <http://www.northernsoulthefilm.com/>

17 <http://www.modculture.co.uk/>

through. If we argued about any one thing through my teenage years – it could have been about clothes, because as a teenager fashions were constantly changing. If you went to the same club in the same shirt you wore two weeks ago it would be out of fashion. He would be saying to me ‘you are wasting money, go to my wardrobe – look at these suits they are all immaculate, look at these shoes - you just don’t have respect’. He viewed that I had no respect for clothes because I didn’t keep them pristine all the time, but in them days as a teenager you didn’t do that – you went with whatever trends were out and what you bought three weeks ago went in the bin!

Yeah, I was buying quality stuff like the kids do today. I had bought this suit and I was going out and this, that and the other and I was learning to drink. When you are learning to drink you are not very good at it, and what happened was that I was coming home drunk and I was tired and I had been dancing all night – and basically I put the key in the door and I started to strip off as I walked up the stairs. In the morning me Dad came down and saw my jacket in the hallway and the pants there and he went ballistic. But because I was working I said to him ‘My suit, my money – I work, I will do what I want with it’ and he couldn’t get that into his head. I suppose if I had kids now I would go ballistic if one of them said ‘I’m going to pay £100 for a pair of trainers’! Coz I haven’t got that sort of money. And that is when the friction started - he was trying in his way to advise me and help me. And it’s only since he has gone, and I got older, that I suddenly realise that the advice he was trying to give was the right advice.

It was always a deal with me Mother that your first weeks’ pay was all your own. After that she would take half of whatever I earned for housekeeping. Which I have always thought was a fabulous idea, and she said ‘if you do overtime we split that, so the more you earn the more I get as a payback thing’. So the first week was mine and then I tipped up half of what I was earning; £4 a week at a lightening company. I was down in

the clubs in Manchester even at the age of fifteen, sixteen, because I was just fifteen when I started work. So by the time I was sixteen I had got into things like Northern Soul and going to clubs - The Twisted Wheel¹⁸ and The Blue Note Club - and it was just when 100% mohair two tone suits¹⁹ were coming in to fashion. I remember I paid something like 100 guineas²⁰ from Singletons Men's Tailors down on Alexander Road. I was probably taking a leaf out of my Dad's book, that I wanted to look cool and chic going out but I was destroyed when the suit I had worked hard to pay for was within a few months in a shop on Market Street called 'Stolen from Ivor'²¹ and they were selling a similar style suit for about £45. But mine was hand stitched, tailor made, I am sure it was on Alexandra Road and yeah I used to dress well.

When you are young, you are a rebel and you don't want to be told what to do by your parents. Anybody does that – it's part of growing up, it's part of finding your own identity and finding out who you are – not to be told by your parents that you have got to live 'their way' and that is why we fell out so much. The irony is that I have turned into him. I now have suits that I have had for 20 years.

I think I was seventeen when I left home and got a flat in Salford. I didn't abandon them. I just couldn't hack the confrontation – being told what to do. I would go back once a week, twice a week. That would have been in the seventies and obviously they would have been fifty plus, and fifty plus in them days was old, very old. We continued to knock heads as I became the stubborn African. When you are young you haven't got time to go home every day. Once mum arrived to say dad wanted me to come home; she came to tell me, not him, her!

18 <http://www.twistedwheel.net/>

19 http://www.modclothin.co.uk/Ben-Sherman-Teal-Tonic-Suit-Package_A137AH.aspx

20 One guinea equalled twenty-one shillings

21 <https://www.facebook.com/pages/stolen-from-ivor/104599857719>

Mum would bring me stuff like pots and pans saying 'I brought them but don't let your father know. You know Leslie we both would die for you and are always here for you.' She wouldn't cross him but she bent the rules.

I remember at one time it became cool to be half-caste. I remember when it was the 'done thing' to be seen at Lewis'²² café on the top floor on a Saturday afternoon to chill out and discuss what was happening and where you were going that night.

I don't know with my light skin whether or not the other guys realised I too am half-caste. There may have been some who perceived me as white. I never went up to anybody and said 'Hey I am half black' in the same way I would never go up to say to anyone that 'I'm not white'. I always used to float in and out and do what I wanted to do. If I walked in and it wasn't what I wanted to do, I would walk out and go to another club or another pub or this, that and the other, so I was never in a gang as such. I have always been my own person and even when I was out clubbing where all the half caste used to go, I was never one who would say 'eight o'clock on a Friday I will meet you here and we will go to this club today'. I knew everyone obviously as you would see the same faces at different clubs and it was always on nodding terms. I had always been a loner from being a kid as neither my mum nor my dad had family. I find it difficult now because I moved away. I moved out of Moss Side so any connections I had with Moss Side I've lost because of where I live now. I just don't do Moss Side anymore and I don't do Manchester as much. I adore Manchester, it's like touching base, going home to me. But where I am living now, I go there less and less because I have less and less reason to go there.

I am really interested to know when it all comes to fruition, because I am truthfully hoping that there is a mirror image of me in all the other guys.

²² Opened in Manchester in 1877 the store included a full scale ballroom on the fifth floor, which was also used for exhibitions

Because at our time of life now – all turned fifty and turned sixty or whatever, I now realise that I am not the only one to have had these experiences.

I know in many ways I was lucky because my Dad told me he loved me. It wasn't an everyday thing, he might have skirted round it and said 'we have done this because we love you', maybe that is all the other guys got too. Maybe not a one to one 'I love you' but 'we will always love you' and 'we have done this because we love you'. I take it that he loved me. Yeah, oh yeah, no problem with that. He was my Dad.

He must have been part of the African Society because he knew everybody. He really did – like I say, I think he knew everybody pre '52 when they adopted me. I remember he took me to the Nigerian Independence Party in Cheetham Hill in the 60s.

Mr Finni as far as I can remember was always the most respected man that Jide would ever talk about, they were solid good mates. We would go round to Finni's every Christmas or Finni would come round to us. I think they were godparents to Rita Finni and I certainly have photographs of Rita in African dress when she went to be a – was she made a Tribal Queen? It is signed on the back 'To Renee and Jide, Mummy and Daddy' – it was that close the relationship with the Finnis. After my parents died I actually went back to have a drink with Mr Finni in his flat somewhere down Greenheys Lane, I think it was. I went because he would always have a Guinness with us. I knocked on the door and he was like 'who are you, oh Leslie, come in, come in, come in'. He must have been in his late seventies, late eighties – I am a bit vague on that now. It was probably fifteen, twenty years ago when I last saw him. He was always talked about and was always within the Johnson family. Jide did know a lot of people and the sad thing is that I have forgotten a lot of the names, but I only have to hear them and 'click' it all comes back to me.

Mum started to go in and out of hospital with various illnesses. During this time when she was ill, we would sit around talking, chatting about nothing in particular then we would start laughing into tears. There were years of understanding between them and me. It was 1981. Whilst she was in hospital all her organs collapsed and she just died without any warning really. We were devastated. They had been together for forty years and Dad couldn't cope. I used to go and look after him and clean his flat every Saturday or Sunday.

He was in a maisonette just off Raby Street. And I remember the guy below him, a white guy and the guy below says 'you are a good boy you, aren't you?' I am thinking 'what are you talking about' and he says 'you come every week and help him, so that is good' and I did. Now I think there was no way this guy would have realised I was Jide's son. I used to go round to Dad's and we would have a meal together and he would be fine then he would start crying into the food saying 'Renee has gone'.

I continued to do this for six months then one day I was at work and I thought 'oh god I didn't go round on Sunday and he has not phoned me and I haven't phoned him'. So I went straight there and put the key in the door and he was behind the door. He had been there three or four days having had a stroke. Dad's broken heart had caused him to waste away. He was barely five stone in weight when he died. They took him into hospital but it was his excuse to die because he had nothing to live for, because Mum had gone. He had a heart attack, his heart was broken. Mum died at Christmas and Dad died in Manchester Royal Infirmary six months later when the riots²³ were on. I remember I could see the Nile burning and the clothes shop in flames from my flat behind the Harp Lager building. I didn't want my dad to come back to this.

23 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981_Moss_Side_riot

People were burning down the heritage of Princess Road. I suffered for a long, long time afterwards because I was always saying 'why did I not go on the Saturday when I usually did'.

As a child, I remember as a young child being on his chest. He was lying on the floor and I was on his chest. Then as the fifteen year old man, there was no physical contact, but when he was ill in hospital because there was no conflict between him and me and also he didn't have the fight to reprimand me for the past. Anyway I was back respecting him again. I used to hold his hand because I was trying to get a response out of him. I enjoyed holding his hand because he was (erm....) that is all I can say really, it just felt right, I don't know.

It's quite sad really because my adopted Mother had two brothers and none of them have any children. So me Mum's side has all gone, and all I have got is one Auntie who is the wife of one of my Mum's brothers and that is just one out of all that side. I too have no children.

Some years after I lost my parents and maybe because I made contact with the sanatorium where I first lived as a baby, I started to look for my birth parents. My father was a GI based at Burtonwood near Warrington as part of the US Air force. I not only know his name but I have been to where he lived in America. I traced where he lived through the library in his home town in the Deep South. The librarian was really helpful but at first couldn't find him in the directory. I had to explain that my father was black, she hadn't thought to look in the "Black directory" as she had just looked at my light skin and assumed I was white and was looking through the "White Only" phone directory.

In 1996 I was reunited with my birth Mother who came from Ireland to England at a young age. She lived in Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester. I have talked with her in depth regarding life during the late forties into the fifties regarding prejudice and racism during those years. The

era of signs saying 'No Blacks No Irish No Dogs' displayed in the windows of accommodation to rent with my Mother trying to cope with three mixed race children. I will always love her for giving me the gift of life. We get on great, like a house on fire. I am also very close to my sister who has five kids so she has got my share. We also had another half-brother, who died unfortunately in 1986 leaving two children. We are all sort of half-brothers, half-sisters. My sister and I, we go together to visit our Mother, and she comes and visits us here at my home the way Renne and Jide never got the chance to.

We, the Johnsons, are from the old Moss Side, I won't call it 'slums'. I will call it Moss Side 'dwellings', where you turned the lights on in the morning and the room would move and the family cat did what cat's do best. It wasn't a dirty house but that is the way it was for everybody in all those big old houses with damp coal cellar's in our street.

I would have loved for them to sit here in my house with Gillian my wife and me on a hot sunny day, because when it's hot – it's hot, and I could give them anything that they would want to pay back their love, their time, everything they had given to me. I would dearly love to pay them back now and the saddest thing of all is they are not here for me to do that.

My biggest regret is that I never took him for a pint – we never had a pint in a pub together – I just can't believe that as I love a drink, so I often raise a glass or two and shout 'Cheers!' to them both.

CHAPTER 2

SOLOMON QUARCOOPOME *in his own words*



Solomons with daughters Sue and Samanta Caveney



Solomon 1956



Solomon and June

'My life is June, Samanda and Susie. And Susie's kid, Kwame and that is it really, at the moment...'

My father wanted me to be a tailor he sent me for training but you sit down in one place for hours and hours and hours, and in the long run I said 'This is not for me' so I move, I left home.

My brother became a tailor, he got a shop and had people working for him. That is why my father wanted the same for me. So he sent me to learn the trade. I didn't want to sit all the time beside a sewing machine and they used to be always sending me to get things. 'Go' they would say 'go get this' or 'get that'. But I just couldn't handle it. So I ran away.

I come from Osu, the 'West End' of Accra; they used to call it Accra before Ghana. Osu is the town centre with lots of shops and businesses. My father was well known and highly respected and he was a Freemason.

The day I said that's it, I moved from Accra to Takra Adiokro¹, that is where the airport is and from there I get on a ship. I was 19 or maybe 20 and I stowed away. The ship was *SS Llanwern*²; I can't spell it, its Welsh. It was registered in Wales. The others stowaways were Nigerian, about six of them, children from Nigeria. When the ship docked in Liverpool we all came out. We had managed to stay hidden throughout the voyage. Most of them are gone now, the Nigerians, most of them dead now.

We stayed in Liverpool for a couple of weeks or so then we moved to Sheffield, because they said in Sheffield you can get a job. So we went to Sheffield. In them days if you finished a job today, you got another one tomorrow.

In Sheffield I started working in the Steel Works with iron things. Steelworks, we call it steelworks. They heat the iron to make the coils by stretching and cutting it. It was a labouring job. You don't do any training really, it's all labouring.

1 In the Ivory Coast

2 Elder Dempster Lines. There was a Cardiff ship in 1949 called Llanwern (named after a village near Newport, Mon)

I joined the union, but I can't remember the name of it. Maybe it was the Trade Union, it was a Union but it is a long time since those days. In '58 I came to Manchester so I think I worked there from 1950 – 58.

I came to Manchester to be with June. I would see her on a scooter with her friend Molly – Molly used to pick her up when we live on Carnaby Street. It makes me laugh to remember. You wouldn't believe it. It was good though, the good old days.

Molly had a job cleaning so she would pick June up. A nice woman Molly was, she has been dead a long time now.

I knew June before I moved here to be with her. We were good friends then we decided to move in together. My life is June, Mandy and Susie. And Susie's kid, Kwame and that is it really, at the moment.

In Sheffield I have two more daughters from when I first came. But I don't agree with their Mother so that is why I left completely and came here. I used to go back and see them and when I was going June used to give me things for them.

I would say to their Mother, 'Phone up and say thank you to June' you know, but she would say 'We didn't ask for it, they didn't ask for it'. So I don't bother now and I never been since.

June used to tell me 'Go and see the kids, pack up these things.' Kid's things really, perfume mostly and when I said 'Come and say thank you' no one would pick up the phone to say thank you and with their mother saying 'They didn't ask for it, they didn't ask for it'. You know what women are like. So I stopped going, I don't know if they are alive or dead now. I mean they didn't pick up the phone and said 'thank-you' – nobody bothered.

When I say I am 84 years old, people keep telling me that I am telling fibs.

Manchester, it's been a good life, as I sit down here and I look at all my trimmings and my girls Mandy and Susie, I never had any problem with them really. I have only been to night school, which is what I used to tell my children. 'You though are going to get this', and 'you are going to do this, and know this' – even though I was never into school.

My father had about six wives, so all the brothers and sisters I am talking about are from different mothers. You can't do that here marry three or four, it's not Africa here. And him supposedly a Freemason³. I don't why the hell he was a Freemason.

I have many sisters though most of them are gone now and three brothers, one of them not long gone, at ninety years old. So now just two brothers, I was speaking to one yesterday. He phones me often. He is living in Ghana now.

When they ordained my Dad into the Freemasons, he wanted me to be one too but that wasn't for me. When I was growing, I didn't agree with my Dad, I was a pure rascal – I don't listen to him.

If it wasn't for Susie I wouldn't have bothered going back at all, but Susie kept saying 'Come on, come on let's go' and I would keep saying 'I am working I have got no time'. But when I retired Susie say 'Well you are not working now', so she booked everything, paid the passage and everything. So we went. When I got back home it had changed, the place has changed. There are so many people, now, it's unbelievable.

You know I came here and I wondered if people back home wondered where I was. Nobody knew I was here until I sent letter to say I was in England. They were surprised, you know. My children always say you were going shopping but by the time you get there you had moved to England.

3 A fraternal organisation that traces its origins to the local fraternities of stonemasons

I just sent the letters to my home town addresses to my father and with my father being a freemason and everyone knowing him, he got the letters and he sent me one back asking, 'What am I doing here?'

My dad died before I went home, but I went to see my Mother. I think she was nearly ninety or something and still she remembered stuff to argue about. I started arguing with her and she would argue back.

Susie was home when she died and phoned me and said 'Guess what?' But I knew already when I heard Susie on the phone. I knew what she was going to say, 'Your Mum has died'.

I came with a ship and went back on a plane. Ten times now because of Susie and with Susie and Mandy. June doesn't like to fly, and doesn't want to.

It's great, at the airport people turn up and take photographs of my return. But it is too hot for me when I go there; it's very, very hot.

Susie took me home even though I never taught my girls about Ghana. I didn't believe they would go to Africa, but Susie went there with a friend. She went to the house and went to see my Mother and she came with photographs of my mother and everything. I was surprised and I was so happy. Happy with Susie, – oh yeah. Especially with the photograph with my mother. I couldn't believe it. If it had been left to me I wouldn't have bothered going. But she came nagging saying 'Come on, you're not working now, go and see it again'.

I still wear my traditional clothes, tops and things like that. I have full robes and shirts. Neither of my girls speaks Ga, my language. Well they can't be African children really can they? They were born here. We always eat African food and English food. I used to make the African food but I can't cook now so June does all the cooking. I can't even turn the gas on now.

I don't think you can ever forget your own language, I don't know how people can forget. When you live in Africa all those years, you can't forget the language. Some people kid, they make me laugh, but you can't forget the language, you can't forget.

If I am talking to a Nigerian fellow, I can tell he was from Nigeria because of the way he talks even if I do not understand his language. My countrymen come round now and then but not many, but when they are here we talk our language.

When I was in Sheffield everyone wore a cap. Did they call it a felt cap? No a flat cap.

When I moved to Manchester a Jewish fellow who used to live on this road here, (Princess Road) made my suits. What was his name now? Green, Tailor Green. Most of our lads used to go there for suits and things. I wonder what happen to him, well he should be dead by now anyway – it was a long, long time ago.

In them days everyone went to Clubs and Pubs and this and that, you know. They are all pull down now. The Alex⁴, near here, but it's all gone now. I don't really go anywhere much now. There was the Denmark pub⁵. That was really popular before the Alex. I don't go much to the Big Western⁶. There were Nightclubs, yeah the Nile⁷ and the Reno⁸ in those days.

You see I worked for my family. I never had a business; I always mind my own (laughing).

My friends are African, English, Caribbean people who you meet in a pub in general, but what I call actual friends – one or two who comes round here and we sit down and have a laugh and have a drink and things

4 Alexandra, Moss Lane East

5 Denmark Hotel, Denmark Road..

6 Big Western, Great Western Street, Moss Side.

7 The Nile Tunde Moses was a co-owner of The Nile

8 Reno Club established in 1962

like that. Only two friends really, one is Nigerian, he lives in Salford. We have a chat on the phone now and again. Larty worked on the door of the Reno and used to live round here but he move to Sale, then his wife died so he lives there alone now.

We used to go to African Union meetings a long time ago at St Luke's, on Denmark Road but I don't know where they all are, everybody disappeared. Would I go if other Africans held meetings now? Well I don't know really. I don't think someplace would be like that again, really. They used to have something there; I think it was for Nigerians, Appleby House⁹ or something. When you buy a bottle of brandy they write it down, anything, I said 'What kind of place?' I only was there because of Larty because it was for Nigerians only. It is not there now. Like London Bridge – it's falling down

Am I getting paid for this? (Laughing).

9 Nigeria Centre Appleby House, Platt Lane, M14 5NE.

CHAPTER 3

OUSMAN FASSAH SAIDY *by his son Kevin*



Saidy Aunti Kumba & Husband



Saidy Mum in tartan coat, Paul F in hat and Francis P on right

'The Saidy family is like a tree there are many branches to it. Ousman Fassah was the root of the tree now there are lots of different branches sprouting out. All the time it is growing.'



Saidy family

I always remember being sat up in bed listening to my Dad and his friends downstairs talking in this strange language. It sounded to me like somebody underwater blowing bubbles almost. It also sounded a bit aggressive but it wasn't. It was people speaking and being sociable, having a laugh and a joke.

I remember once when we were watching a Hammer House of Horror film and the electric went. We dived on our Dad for protection and when the light came back on there were about eight of us on him. Brian, who's the eldest, had to go and put 10 bob¹ in the meter. Yeah, he was really nice my Dad, a really easy going bloke.

Doris Buller was Mum's maiden name. She lived on Upper Morris Street in Scholes Wigan. She was working in Liverpool at a munitions factory making bombs. She used to finish work covered head to foot in orange soot. Doris and Ousman Fassah Saidy married in the early 50's and I think they moved to Manchester because it was where there were lots of African people so a better chance of integration and finding accommodation.

My maternal grandmother died in 1918 when Mum was six months old; her father never remarried. She had three brothers who all joined the army and went to war. I went to one of her brother's funeral in the 80s and that is about the only time I have had contact with them. There was another time when I tried to reach out to them because they live close to me, but they were a bit stand offish and I didn't want to invade their lives, so I just let it go. So I don't know if she was disowned by them; I just know we never saw anything of them. Dad took on various jobs to get money and mum did just the same. It was hard with nine children to bring up; I am a twin and I have four brothers and four sisters. But without doubt it was a happy marriage.

He was head of the household because in those days it was very male orientated, but she definitely worked as hard as him. Yeah, behind every good man is a good woman! Every Sunday he would go to the Denmark Hotel to meet his friends and countrymen, coming back home around dinner time. Sometimes Mum and I used to go down there too to be with him and because she knew some of the other wives who were married to Africans would be there. She would walk in to the pub and clear her throat and Dad would know that she had arrived.

1 The *slang* term for a *shilling* in UK currency prior to 1984 decimalisation

Ousman was a very tall man – about 6 foot 3 inches or something like that. He dressed casual rather than in a suit. A casual jacket, trousers and very smart size 10s polished shoes. He always looked after his clothes.

They used to go dancing even though dad wasn't a dancer. I think the Reno in them days was a dancehall rather than how my generation knew it and upstairs in the Nile and places like that. She danced with a Gambian guy called Joofé, who is still alive. Dad was the one who used to stand at the back, he was very quiet my Dad. He was quite a generous man but strict. If he asked you to do something you would do it!

He never went back to Gambia. I don't think he ever found time after nine children and the cost those days was a bit like going to Mars. You would probably never come back and a lot of people never did. Let's not forget there is definitely a guarded sort of mentality among the people there when you return because they know that you have been abroad, lived in the UK or other countries. They try not to show it to you but there is definitely a mentality of 'them and us' because those who return home have an income and lots of the local people have nothing. He stayed connected to his country as a member of the Gambian Union.

Dad was in my life for nine and a half years. It was an industrial accident. He was badly burned and ill for probably about 18 months. I remember him being in bed for quite a long time and having to shout at us because we kids were running wild downstairs. All this was before the brain tumour. He went into the Manchester Royal Infirmary² for an operation on the back of the head where the tumour was. He survived the operation, but they told us that he had caught a chill and died. It was 1971.

Mum took it very badly. I do remember her being very upset. She didn't come to the Mosque with us but she joined us later on at the Cemetery. I don't think she would have wanted to be there for the whole service even if she could have been.

Brian Sarge's dad, Kebba Sarge, Abli Drammeh and Alison Sanneh looked after things. They took Dad's body to clean, wash him and get him ready. The service was at the Mosque on Wilbraham Road then he was buried at Southern Cemetery.

Mum never married again, she struggled on bringing us all up. I had a

2 Founded by Charles White in 1752 as a cottage hospital

younger sister who was 6 when our Dad died and Brian the eldest brother was about 20 – 21. We never really had any fears of being alone or stuff like that, because it was a full house - a five bedroomed house.

She probably held down about five jobs. We used to go with her to Manchester City Centre and sit in the Wimpy at night whilst she cleaned various offices and banks. She worked very hard for a very long time.

Mum did try to cook African food for us - the food that he cooked when he was alive and fed us because we tried to hang on to that. But eggs, chips and beans played a big role in our lives. We always had a Sunday dinner, a leg of lamb sort of thing and she would make pies and stuff like that so food gradually became very British.

She did find friendship with another man and went out socially with him a few times but it wasn't to our liking; when you are younger you are very selfish and only think about yourself. She had us and we took up all of her time. Mum was very protective and worked tremendously hard to keep us clean and smart, which was difficult, but she managed. I remember her going to our school after Colin and I had been chastised by a teacher and confronting the teacher. She would fight our corners, she was very proud of us.

In December³ she is 91 on the 2nd and doing well. A little old lady, who still lives independently – in the five bedroomed house in Ardwick Green that we moved in to when Colin my twin, and I were six months old.

I am the last boy born and the first one to return home; I really am the Historian in the family. 1990 was the first time I went to the Gambia to find all the people we had written to for years, to see them and find out who they are and how they are. There was definitely something missing in our lives yet a part of our lives was still going on. A part that we had never seen and I wanted to go and find and connect with that part.

When my Dad came here it took something like six weeks to get to Europe on a boat and when I first went back I got a flight from Gatwick Airport, with British Airways. It cost a lot of money and in comparison to my Dad's journey it only took something like six and a half hours. It shows what a new decade and railway redundancy can achieve.

3 2014

Had Dad lived we would have probably sent him home for a visit. As it was it was me who went to visit *Aunty Aji Kumba Saily*. Dad's brother sent Aunty a telegram when Dad died and she gave it to me. It is dated the 8th June and Dad died on the 16th March. It just shows you how long it took for the information to travel.

I found myself in what they term a "third world country" with cockroaches huge in comparison to the ones we had then in Moss Side. The house had a corrugated roof and a badly fitted front door so anything and everything came in during the night. Aunty Kumba couldn't read or write but made money by travelling to Senegal and trading in the buying and selling of cloth.

I had quite a lot of fights with the local Gambian people because they were calling me a 'Tubab' – a white man. You come from a country where people are calling you 'black bastards' and you go to a country where people call you 'white bastards'! I'd say to them 'if you knew anything about your history you would know who I am', but none of them really did and I remember looking at the Gambian people and the way they were and thinking to myself 'I have never before met anyone blacker than me here'. They accept me now though I still hear this word 'Tubab; which I don't like, it's offensive to me, to the kind of person I am now.

The African in us reveals itself in our habits, our gestures and our carriage in Gambia I have seen the similar mannerisms that the people have. This might seem a weird example to give but I instantly recognised the way people spit; as kids we used to spit all the time. In England it is considered offensive especially in the 50s and 60s when it was spreading diseases. In Gambia even women spit. Aunty Kumba would clear her throat and spit it out. It is an acceptable thing not seen as being dirty or potentially infectious.

And you see lots of people you know, you will say 'he looks like Albert and he looks like Barrie whoever' and you see lots of black people who look like white people you know, so it's strange seeing people that you don't know who look like people that I know.

I definitely believe that he would have gone back to see his family and everybody else that he grew up with. I feel that some of the things I have done I have done for him, in his spirit. That I managed to see his sister

before she passed away and met his other half brother and sister who I still see each time I go over. I am very proud of him and the people that I have met since I have returned to the Gambia.

I will always remember him never waking up from the operation. I always used to think 'when is he going to wake up from this?' or 'when am I, going to wake up from this?' I suppose I have been angry for a long time because of him dying; he has definitely been missed by everybody.

I would have to sit down and count but there are probably about fifty odd of us with great grandchildren making up the next generation. I have heard Dad's brother say 'Saidy is like a tree there are many branches to it. Ousman Fassah was the root of the tree now there are lots of different branches sprouting out. All the time it is growing'.

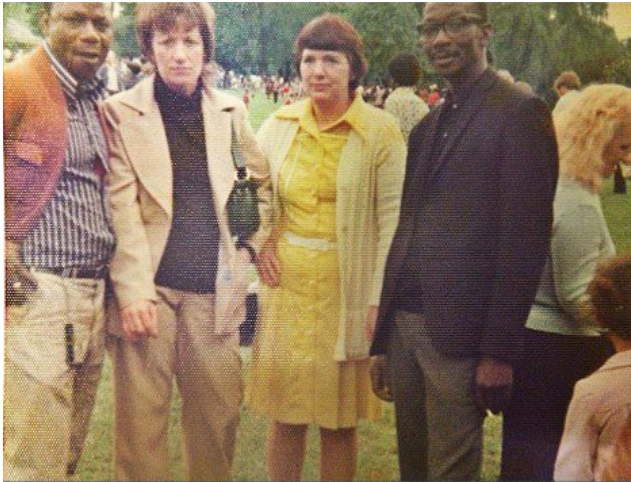
CHAPTER 4

JONATHAN KWAKU MAYISI *by his son Mike*

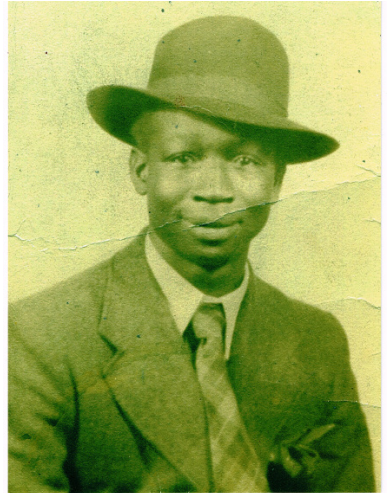
'I didn't have any family until my two sisters turned up. People that your dad would say 'these are your cousins' they weren't real cousins, they were from your Dad's tribe or from the same country. That is how they used to stick together.'



Mayisi Jnr



Mr and Mrs Mayisi



Mr Mayisi

Everybody says I am the spit of him. He was a bit taller than me and slim. Yep, he was a tall handsome good looking man, my dad; good cheekbones and a nice smile.

He wasn't just a very intelligent man he was university educated in accountancy but hadn't completed his finals. He spoke Latin, very, very well. Dad got one of the maids pregnant and was sent here with his cousin Ronnie because he had shamed the family... He was sent to complete his accountancy degree, but because of the conditions, because of racism basically, it was extremely difficult to find accommodation never mind get a place in university.

They didn't have any family here to support them. They lived in lodgings, anywhere where they could stay, because it was very difficult to find places who would take black people at the end of the 40s. But they got by and a lot of places where they did find employment also directed them to housing where other immigrants lived. They lived from hand to mouth basically amongst themselves, because there weren't many of them in England at that time...

The Africans back in the 40s, 50s and 60s didn't have that large a collective community, because they were from different countries, different tribes all thousands of miles apart. We were brought up in small groups; a few Ghanaians here, some Gambians there, the Nigerians who owned most of the clubs. We were just too far apart initially to form a real community. Unlike in Liverpool where they took one area like the Asians do today, they all lived in one area and they were all African. They formed a community, because it was a port and they had been Africans going there for hundreds of years. But Manchester – it was in the middle of nowhere really, for all these Africans from all over West Africa to end up in; struggling to find accommodation, struggling to find work and when you are at work you are dealing with racism and you are fighting to defend yourself to have the right to go in to work. It was a very, very hard life.

Marion my Mum was from Birkenhead. They met in a club in Blackpool. They got married when we kids were youngsters. Her brothers weren't impressed, yeah they weren't really impressed. They never kept in contact. I can't even remember Grandma's name and Granddad died during the war so I never got to meet him. There were other grandchildren and you could see the difference in the way they got treated to the way I got treated.

At four, before any of my sisters turned up, I didn't like going over there at all. On the odd occasion when Mum and Dad fell out we would get shipped off to Birkenhead but it was horrible over there, proper racist, didn't like it at all.

So basically I didn't have any family until my two sisters turned up. People that your dad would say 'these are your cousins' they weren't real cousins, they were from your Dad's tribe or from the same country. That is how they used to stick together 'this is your cousin, or this is your Uncle Bruce', so I have never really had a large family.

Family life always seemed to be a struggle, we never had an excess of anything, but we never went short. Mum and Dad both tried to be in work all the time. My Mum would have two or three jobs. She would be up and out of the house at five in the morning, going and doing cleaning jobs. My Dad was a driver, he drove buses, he drove trucks and then he went and did his electrical engineering training.

My Dad liked to cook and Mum was also a good cook. She couldn't cook African food. She would do all the English stuff, she would do soups and proper roasts and all that and Dad would cook African food because we always had Africans coming. We got well fed, it was good food, it wasn't takeaway and there were three of us now Brenda, she's the middle sister and Shirley the youngest.

I couldn't say it was a happy marriage and life for Mum was extremely hard. Getting spat on by strangers! It was a nasty place for our mothers, white mothers and they had to be extremely strong and a lot of them were very, very strong women. They really have to be because a lot of their families had thrown them out leaving them stuck in a situation where they don't really know anybody around them, just the new man or the new husband's friends and family and whether they liked them or not, that is all they had. Very, very hard. Some of the stories my Mum told me - you wouldn't know it to look at her but she was quite fiery. Dad liked riding bikes; she actually jumped off the back of one whilst the bike was moving because this woman was giving her that much aggravation. She just jumped off in rage and beat the woman up. Another time when I was only a little lad, round about six, she beat another woman up because she couldn't take any more of the insults.

My Mum wasn't really one for going out, in fact I can never remember her going out and she wasn't a drinker. My Dad did parties, you know Ghana parties, so at least once a month there would be a party at our house and Mum would be there. Dad, a bit of a sly one, would get out on occasion, but you never knew, because we were in bed when he went out and he was always in and off to work the next day. But Mum was a proper home body and never went anywhere.

Dad was the focal point for all the Ghanaians that came to Manchester. They all seemed to turn up at the house and he would write letters home for them. These Africans would turn up almost weekly and never be seen again. Dad was a very quiet man who never fulfilled his full potential.

We had regular Ghanaian parties, all through the sixties and then a Ghanaian Society was set up. They bought a house on Cheetham Hill Road, just round the corner from where Queen's Road is, before you get to Banjos, but it didn't progress or anything. I remember we would all be going there as kids decorating and stuff, but for some reason it never took off. Like I said, they would come to our house all the time and just sit there. You weren't allowed in because the living room was just for my Dad and his mates so most of the time you didn't know what they were talking about because you were kept out!

He had settled in Manchester in 1950 and if my recollections are right, he lived behind All Saints. Maskall Street, it is not there anymore. The family lived in Nelson Street, where Manchester Royal Infirmary is. We lived in Hulme in Bristol Street and behind St. Marys, there was a road going from St. Marys to where Asda, Hulme is now, we lived there. When you walked down the road there you were always going to see mixed race people, because back then it was generally all Africans and they all seemed to know one another. It was the same in Moss Side when we lived on Monton Street, next to Coco Clarke. Then we moved again back over by the hospital again, I can't remember the name of that street... Then we moved on to Rose Street, off Greenheys Lane, just behind Denmark Road and we were there until 1970.

The Africans started to buy houses. During the 50s and 60s most of the properties belonged to Jews and they ripped a lot of the Africans off. They were selling houses to the Africans in Hulme, knowing they were going

to be demolished. Compensation didn't come into it because they hadn't been in the houses long enough so they got nothing. I know for a fact that my Dad lost three houses and I don't think that he ever recovered from it. They called it slum clearance as they demolished them, they were big houses too.

He never kept in touch with his family because he was so ashamed. He came from a good family as did my Uncle Ronnie. My Dad never fulfilled his potential. It wasn't until the 80s that we actually met any of his family. We went to see one of his sisters in London. They were very church going people – one was running the Ghana embassy in London, his other cousin was the head of Ghana Airways in London. They had traced him through lost families but initially he ignored their attempts to contact him. So ok, he didn't become a millionaire, ok he didn't do this or that, Dad was very proud – but for me he was foolish too!

He wasn't a playful man, very serious. That is how I remember my Dad, serious and ...serious. I can't say I have a lot of fond memories of my Dad growing up and that is why I left and joined the army as I needed to get away from his control over me.

He was extremely strict with me. At six he took me to school at St. Mary's. I can remember him being stuck behind me telling the head teacher 'my son must do more school work'. He would stand over me and if I got something wrong, I would get a click with the knuckle, 'You are stupid'. I was six or seven years of age!!!! I used to tell myself I am not stupid. I can read and write and do mathematics, I could always do it but I got to the stage at fourteen or fifteen where I had just had enough and just didn't want to do it anymore.

I was terrified of my Dad.

Dad told me about the beatings that his dad gave him and they all thought it was ok – I know many of the lads, they had to go out and pick their own branches from the trees to get whipped with, you know the Laryeas. Too many of the lads I grew up with, their dads beat the shit out of them. I have been thrown out of the bed then the bed tipped on top of me and he has jumped all over the bed and beat me with a broom handle until there was less than six inches of it left. He would bust it up over me; I was only skinny - tiny, small and skinny. I would be going to school and trying to hide

as I got undressed for sports. I know for a fact that some of the teachers saw the bruises and said nothing! So nothing much has changed, teachers turning a blind eye – it was always brushed under the carpet.

Even when I was on home leave from the army he still tried to treat me like a boy. One time friends I hadn't seen for a while took me out and I stayed over at theirs. When I got back home he tried to front me, I said 'Dad I don't live here anymore now', – he attacked me!! But I didn't flinch this time. He was going to whack me with the weapon he was holding. If I had ducked he would have hit me, but I didn't flinch, it went whoosh as it hit the wall at the side of my head. Then I challenged him 'if you think you can get away with that now - Come on lets you and me go in to the garden and sort this out'.

I called him out and got a shovel or a spade and said 'Come on you bastard!' I am eighteen now. He had come at me with a ten pin bowling pin he always had in the house. He wouldn't have hit me in the head or anything, but he was violent, very violent. I remember him beating my Mum when I was small. I would hide under the kitchen table. A violent man, but to see him he was a gentleman. He was as smart as a pin, nothing ever out of order, shirt always pressed, always very, very smart in a suit and tie every day. Smart as anything.

I married Stella and moved into a flat was on Bennett Street, Heywood House Ardwick. My son was a couple of months old and because they had had a fight Mum had come to mine. She was sat cradling my son, their grandson, when Dad had come looking for her and went to slap her and I said 'You might get away with that in your house, but this is my house and you don't touch my Mother in here'. I had promised myself for years for all the beatings he had given me I was going to beat him one day. He took a swing at me for telling him off and I ducked and I begged him not to as now I knew a few unarmed combat moves. When it came to it, I couldn't hit him and I put him on the floor. When we got up, we went for a drink. The tension was then gone between us and I could sit down and have a laugh with him like with the Uncles I had known like Kojo and Dennis Benjamin's dad, who used to live next door to Coca back on Monton Street, Laria, Badu, George Sarge, the Pierreras, all of them.

Many of Dad's mates went back home, a lot of them went back whilst they were still able. My Dad wouldn't because he was so ashamed.

They had dealt with a lot of disappointment – like I said, that breed didn't know... beating their wives, all that violence.

Funny thing is they thought it was easier for us than them because we were half white. They seriously believed that we got treated differently. Bullshit, I had to say to my Dad 'Dad, when the National Front sees me and you walking down the road they don't say to you 'get home you black bastard' and 'you get home to your mother' they say 'you pair of black bastards, get back to where you came from''. My Dad was shocked.

When I little between 4 and 6 and taken to my Gran in Birkenhead, I heard women scream at me 'Hey you nigger, ugly bitch.'" When you are a kid and are told to go to the shop you can't say 'No'. I always knew when I went out I was going to be attacked. So rather than wait, I went and knocked on the door of the head of the little white gang and said 'I'm here, do you want a fight?' They left me alone after that and it was alright for a little while.

I am ten now and we have moved from Bristol Street to Rose Street. I have got Tony Phillips round the corner, Dave Phillips over there, Sandra Richoh and Jimmy Richoh – Sandra Ashcroft and in that house there you have got Renee and Lloyd – so these are all mixed race families. At the top of the road we have got Bis Bellow and his family and Ryan and Ganu – so at that time from being 10 now you start being aware 'well actually there are quite a few of us'. We would walk over to the other side of Denmark Road and you would have the Pierreras, Gilbert Expenyong, Billy Marbells, the Rowells, so you have got this camaraderie then because you are not on your own.

But of course there were times when I was alone like when I was about 13 now, with a bit more confidence. We went to football matches – Tranmere Rovers¹ was the first one, and then we went to Anfield². I am climbing from the kids' kop³ in to the main Kop – climbing the old steel beams. There are five of us and the others have done it before and they quickly drop in to the main Kop. But I am hanging there and all I can hear is 'Oooh, oooh, oooh'. I am the only black kid and they are all screaming, not one or two of them, but hundreds of them. It felt like everyone in the stadium was doing this monkey chant. When I drop they all cheered because

1 <http://www.tranmererovers.co.uk/>

2 <http://www.liverpoolfc.com/stadium/anfield>

3 A colloquial name or term for a number of terraces and stands at sports stadiums attended by hardcore fans.

I had the bottle to drop in to that cauldron there. Same when I went to Old Trafford. I walk in at the Stretford End and I am the only black kid, I can't see another black face – this is 1967 and nigger and monkey chants were the norm. I was really lucky because this big f-ing Salford lad went 'Shut it' to the crowd and said 'you stay with us'. He just liked the fact that I had the bottle to come there on me own. So I got taken on and after that I started going all over the country with the football and never had that problem with race again because I had this gang who never allowed anyone to call me Nigger. It was great.

I loved me Mum, she was always there, after he had been bad with me. She was the one who would clean me up, sometimes I would be bleeding. My mum was always there, always, without fail. Yeah, she was a good Mum. I can't say I loved him. I never even went for a drink with him until my own son was born.

Mum and Dad stayed together up to the mid-seventies – about 73 when my Mum had had enough of him and kicked him out. Dad and I were getting on alright by then. We had come to an understanding. He is living on his own now, on his own up Rochdale Road. Mum and him still had a relationship, he would come and stay, she would cook for him and he would then go home. She is an independent woman now and is quick to say, 'you are out the door, mister.'

They were only little puppies, little Yorkies⁴ they started to run round Mum's legs and she fell over and broke her hip. It was from then that things started getting worse and she developed *chronic obstructive pulmonary disease*. *It is not a nice illness, I should know, I am her son and I have it too*. I hate going out now because of the effort it takes. If someone is driving, it's ok. If I have got to walk from here to the corner, I'll just get a taxi. It is not nice. Shirley looked after Mum for a long time; she is alright and with a good man, Brian Sarge.

I was here – Brenda was at the hospital but I had come home for a sleep. Brenda has three kids and has been with the same boyfriend, now her husband since she was seven years old. So Brenda would come in to give me a break. It's just gone half six in the morning and I get a phone call and I said 'I'm coming now'. I was up, dressed and there in 20 minutes but she had gone. She is in Southern Cemetery now.

4 Yorkshire Terriers

I believe the hospital killed my dad because I watched a television programme on pseudomonas⁵. They treated him for the wrong illness and then stuck those tubes down that killed him but it is too late to sue now.

I was at the hospital; I spent most of my time there. It was the day of the carnival, he fell over and got taken to the hospital. Because he used to trade on the Ghana ships he caught an infection and got pneumonia, tropical pneumonia. It is a different treatment for English pneumonia and they sent in him into a coma. It was days before they realised they were at fault but he never regained consciousness after thirteen days.

In 65/66, when I was twelve, Dad's brother came and gave me an ivory bracelet. Brian Sarge was a big man to me in them times; I used to run around chasing after him. He saw it, liked it and took it. Then a couple of years ago he said 'it is about time you had the bracelet back'. Within two weeks, my niece as it turns out, the daughter of the man who gave me the bracelet, starting talking to my daughter Sorrell on Facebook. But the thing is that the bracelet was all that I had aside from my Dad to connect me to the family in Ghana.

All these Africans, who had come from Sweden, Switzerland and Amsterdam and I never realised there were so many people involved with my Dad. My Dad was so quiet. I had never expected so big a funeral with family who had come from all over Europe and Africa. The Volta on Great Western Street was my Uncle Ben's and where they had the wake, upstairs after the cremation. There were all these Ghanaians in their tribal clothes and they were doing this ceremony with milk and this and that and I have got no say in anything whatsoever. 'Hang on; this is my Dad's funeral'. 'No Michael, it's a State Funeral', so I can't make a scene or anything. I didn't have any say whatsoever – 'this is your Dad's family' and poof 'back to Ghana'. Dad's funeral was hijacked.

I miss the pair of them, but I will get to see the pair of them soon. Not that soon, but eventually. Meanwhile next summer the three of us Brenda, Shirley and me are organizing – we are going to go to Ghana and we will get some answers.

5 Pseudomosaicism the finding of chromosomal abnormalities in 2% or fewer of cells of an organism.

CHAPTER 5

SAMMY GEORGE *by his son Barrie Okachoowu*



Sammy



Sammy's eldest son Barrie and wife Pauline

I don't think he had any understanding of how hard it was for his kids because we wouldn't go home and say 'Dad we have been beaten up'



Sammy with Children

He was a small fellow but threw a long shadow, he really did.

He always used to shout at me for fighting 'Walk away, walk away' even though he was quite a fighter when he was young, so much so he got thrown out of his village. His Dad had died and he got sent back to his mother's village because they couldn't handle his fighting. He even lost his ear, bitten off by an opponent.

I remember when a neighbour on Lamb Street kicked at the front door while Mum and Dad were at work. He kicked until the door caved in because my sister Christine had an argument with his daughter. When Dad came home and heard about it he went round their house and literally picked him off the floor because he tried to harm his children. I remember Mum screaming at him 'Put him down George put him down' and he did, but he always said 'never trouble anyone unless they trouble you, and then trouble them twice as bad'.

He had this stubborn streak and wouldn't give in. Once he had an accident at work. He broke his foot and damaged his arm and two days later he went back to work. It was the way he was, short and stubborn which is funny when you consider that my Mum, his wife Pat was tall and blonde.

Lamb Street was a two up two down house just up the road from the rented rooms we moved from on Shakespeare Street, Ardwick. We still didn't have a bathroom, so it was the tin bath in front of the fire. It was still a move up from living in rooms. There was another family living in there, a white family, I don't know if they owned the house. He was a fireman, Tony his name was, I can't remember the surname. Uncle Ben and Nancy were the third family. He wasn't actually an Uncle, just a close friend but he was African so he was our uncle.

Across the road Larry Osona and his sister Oduka lived but their parents owned their house. Larry's mum would babysit us sometimes because Mum used to go out cleaning houses and Dad was working days and nights.

I think I was about four or five when it blew up with my Gran who lived on St Bees Street, leaving Mum to cope on her own. It was an argument that had gone on about my dad which was funny considering Gran's second marriage was to a Chinese man, Ann Ling's father. Ann was our Auntie and she would come over and babysit us sometimes. We never saw my Gran

again for about thirty years, they really fell out even though Mum's sister also married a Nigerian called Tinubu Rufia; there is a *square*¹ in Lagos named after his family.

Mum was the strong one and Dad tipped up all the money to her so she could sort out the bills. My Mum seemed to be working all the time and we were the ones going out getting the coal and the big batteries, the accumulator batteries for the radio. You had to go and get them charged and everything was on the tick. 'Can you go down to so and so's shop and ask her to put it on my tick'.

When Dad and all the men were at sea the women didn't get paid if the men hadn't signed the passbook. They had to go Manchester Docks to co-sign his passbook before they could take his wages. In 1950 after Christine was born, he decided to leave the Merchant Navy and got a job with the Gas Board. He joined the Merchant Navy when he was 14, God knows when that was as he never told us his real age!

He stayed at the Gas Board working first at Gaythorne, then Partington and finally at Bradford Road where we used to go to the Christmas parties. He was made redundant aged 60 from there and then went to work for a wire manufacturer carrying out labouring duties until he retired at 70. (He fibbed about his age when starting this job, he told them he was 50).

Mum cooked English food and my Dad the African. Food was very important to him, very important. If he offered you food and you said 'no' then he was insulted. If you dared to turn your nose up then you didn't eat. Dad would make a big pan of whatever it was, pigs feet and lamb that he would warm up every night for that week. Mam wouldn't have Fufu², so he'd do her a plate of rice with sauce over the top. Garri³ was on a Saturday night, because that was his first meal, the fresh meal, and we would get fufu for the rest of the week. He was famous for his breakfast, he called it his sunny breakfast and we still talk about it today. He skinned sausages putting the meat with bacon, tomatoes, and then scrambled in the eggs.

1 Tinubu Square a site of historical importance; it was here that the 1914 Amalgamation Ceremony that unified the North and South protectorate to form Nigeria took place.

2 *Fufu* is an ancient African dish it is a thick paste usually made by boiling starchy root vegetables

3 Garri (also known as *gari*, *garry*, or *tapioca*) is a popular West African food made from cassava tubers. The spelling 'garri' is mainly used in Nigeria, Cameroon

It was like a sloppy Spanish omelette - so tasty that it was untrue. Mum said he would invite tramps in to eat and give them drinks, give them money and he had no money. She used to say 'George stop doing that', she always called him George. Even after Mum had died all his cupboards were stocked, he had enough food in there to feed an army.

We were poor but we didn't feel poor at the time. It was hard from day one with me Mam and Dad I think. When they came over here and met the English girls they wanted to treat them like goddesses, they really did. The fact is my Dad's family weren't poor. There were three wives, people keep saying to me 'you've got land in this village, you've got land in your father's village and your father's mother's village. You've got land'. So I don't think they could have been poor. Dad's brother was a Policeman so even though he couldn't read and write not all the family were illiterate. He learned much later that all his family thought he had died in the war.

He was a strong willed man, but I suppose he had to be. Like when we asked him that question, you know the one 'What did you do in the war dad?' He told us his ship had been sunk twice. He told us about Dunkirk, evacuating people from Dunkirk. And that was it, no bragging just the minimal of what happened in answer to our questions. What we do know is that during the Second World War he was sunk twice. I used to ask me Dad all sorts of questions and I never got a straight answer off him – ever! I think partly because he didn't speak very good English even though he was over here for so long.

But you could never do him out of a penny!! In Ardwick, I used to go to the bookies for him. You know at the back door, down the entry. I used to go there with his bet. And when we moved up here it was the bookies at the Mountain Ash. Always a Yankee.⁴ Not the easiest bet to calculate your winnings on.

Dad was in Canada when I was born and he came home and took me round all of his friends every single one of them, 'There you are, there you are'. I am the spit of my Dad. Mam told me he did it because I was so light skinned everyone was saying 'you're not Sam's, you're not Sam's'. He did it because he was strong and he believed and never ever doubted my Mum.

⁴ A wager on four selections and consisting of 11 separate bets: 6 doubles, 4 trebles and a fourfold accumulator. A minimum two selections must win to gain a return

My Mum doubted it and told the nurses ‘He should be blacker’!! (Laughter). My dad always told me that he fed me Cayenne pepper off a spoon when I was a baby. All his friends said ‘he’s an African’ because I ate it and didn’t cry.

Going round the shops with him he would say to people ‘This is my boy, this is my baby boy’ and I would say ‘Wooah Dad I’m forty’ and he’d say ‘I don’t care, you are my boy’ and that is how he would introduce me to everyone. I hated it when he did that. Hated it so much I loved it.

He was strict, but he never hit us, that was Mam’s job. His punishment was standing on one finger and one leg. It seemed like an age to us but it was probably only two minutes standing there bent over trying to balance on a finger with the one leg in the air. They put us to bed with no food, that sort of thing, but it was Mum who gave the clouts. Dad would say, ‘You deserve it. You deserve that, you are the eldest, you look after the children’.

I never swore in front of him, ever, I would never dream of doing it and he never swore. The worst he ever said was ‘bloody’ and that’s when he got really angry with me. Mum would say, ‘You better go and get him because if your dad said ‘bloody’ he’s angry’.

Two times he hit me, just twice because I stood up to him. The first time I was about fourteen and came in at half past ten, thirty minutes late and he went mad. I said ‘Look I’m a big boy and I can look after myself’ and he said ‘Are you?’ And I stood up and he went ‘boomp’ and sat me down again! The second and last time, was after I went to the Twisted Wheel⁵ all-nighter I was about sixteen. Obviously he was worried. Verbally I was all geared up, ‘Look, right, there is no way I am...’ sort of thing and I stood up to him and raised my fist. At least I tried to before I got a brush handle in my eye – boomp. And I thought ‘this ain’t good’. Those were the only two times.

In 1962 we moved to Wythenshawe⁶ there wasn’t a lot of black families then. There was Dave Jawando’s family who lived up the Portway end, there was us, the Georgies who lived in Woodhouse Park and that was it as far as I can recall. The neighbours were fine but my first day in school

5 <http://www.twistedwheel.net/>

6 Referred to as one of the largest council housing estates in Europe, City of Manchester, began building a massive housing estate there in the 1920s to resolve the overpopulation and deprivation in its inner-city slums.

they tried to put my head down the toilet and I thought I am not having that, so it was a bit of fisticuffs. Truth is I found my feet and from there on in all fairness it wasn't so bad. If you get a name for yourself then people leave you alone!! And that's how it was.

I don't think he had any understanding of how hard it was for his kids because we wouldn't go home and say 'Dad we have been beaten up' because you just didn't because even though Dad never hit us in a sense you would just get beaten up again anyway.

Once I had left school and started to go to town it was just strange how it happened that all the half caste lads seemed to all meet up, from Ardwick, from Ancoats and Moss Side we all came together. I can't explain it, it was a phenomenon, it really was. Up until then when you walked down a road the white boys would expect you to walk around them. Then for some reason on this particular day it was like 'we are walking through you right!' And we did just that, we walked through them and got in a bit of a ruckus.

People used to say 'watch the half caste lads, they're trouble' because it seemed we were always fighting. I think that's something we decided to do for ourselves. I remember having a couple of fights on the bus and 'don't mess with the half caste' was my parting shot. Loads of people used to say 'don't mess with them, they are trouble'. We got stick off both sides, off the blacks, mainly the Jamaicans at that time and the whites so we became our own entity.

I used the word 'entity' and not gang, we were never a gang. We just became a race of people of our own, with our own identity. But we all knew we were black and African. We were brought up with African values, we were brought up to respect – I always remember that. But we also knew though that we did have our own identities. I have always said we paved the way for the others that were coming up behind us. They didn't get as much abuse as we got. I put that down to our being solid together. I put that down to our generation and to our parents.

Yeah I am African, through and through but I get slated for it, trust me. Even our Pauline says 'You're only saying that because you're African or think you are African!' But I am African, I have been African from day one, I know that, from the way I eat to my mode of punishment. For me 'mixed

race' is a modern word. We were half caste and we became that entity because we were half caste and it formulated our lives. The things we did and things we couldn't do. We never became professional footballers; we never became professional rugby players. I was good at rugby, but I had no role models because unlike today there were no black rugby players or footballers who you could follow so what could you do? You couldn't go in to the police because there were no black policemen, same with the fire service.

So you became this insular person trying to find your own way in life. You made your mistakes and you came back, we all made them. Possibly 70% of my generation have been in jail. I think that is because we didn't have much room for manoeuvre, I really believe that.

My father was a strong proud man, who brought his children up to respect their elders and have a strong sense of the African roots and traditions, such as the Kola nut ⁷ tradition. We were all given Igbo names, African middle names. All our family are fair skinned and I want them to know where their roots are and of the hard times our Mum and Dad endured in the 50/60s.

When the kids at school found out that my middle name is Okajubu I used to get the mickey taken all the time. Today I am proud of it, my kids are proud of it, my grandkids are proud of it. One night my son Nathan was watching football and I asked him who he supported. Nigeria, he said. He is our third generation. I called him Ohokwae, he knows what it means; he who says does' because I told him when he was only little and he never ever forgot, he knows his roots.

David took Dad home in 1992, he was about 60. His brother cried to see him and they treated him so well even making him an Honorary Chief.

I can remember the day Nigeria gained its Independence⁸; we had a massive party at Nigeria House⁹. We had green and silver ties. I had never seen so many African adults in one place, I thought it was great!!!

7 The kola nut tradition is used for a variety of events, but principally to welcome guests to a village or house.

8 1ST October 1960

9 Purchased 1982.

We went to what is called Ebo¹⁰ Day in Liverpool, meeting up with Dad's cousin. They gave us bitter Kola nut; Dad's cousin chopped it up and gave it to our Dave who in turn has to serve everybody. As the eldest Dad was served first then the others based on age with Dave last. That is the custom we were all brought up to respect. You were given these customs and even today you stick by them. You think you have got away from them but now and again you think 'I've just done what Dad used to do'.

Dad spoke Hausa¹¹ Yoruba and Ebo and other dialects. Often other African men would come around. I would sit on his knee as they talked but moving to Wythenshawe cut all those ties, those rituals with Mr Wilson Mr Finni¹², Mr Pereira¹³ all the others.

Boxing, he loved boxing my Dad. He loved Joe Louis and a lot of the old time boxers like Ben Turpin, he was always reminding us that he had been to see him and he loved it.

He actually believed that Coronation Street was real. Eddie Yates¹⁴, he used to say 'he's a bad boy' and I'd say 'why' and he'd say because he had done something when he was in Dustbin Men¹⁵ or something. I would say 'Dad it's a film' 'Uh uh he's a bad boy' and he really truly believed it was real.

When he watched a Western he would sit in his chair and gallop along saying 'come on'. I bet mum loved that child that he still had in him.

Sammy would go to different Blues¹⁶ in the early 50's and he loved Rock and Roll music, but he had quite an eclectic taste in music. I would come home and put my records on and he would like them. When we were kids Mum and Dad went out together. He loved to dance the jitterbug and jiving, even at 70 he was still dancing.

10 Ebo Landing (originally Igbo, also Ibo) is legend of auctioned slaves Ebo women and men began chanting together following the chief "The Sea brought me and the Sea will bring me home.". Chained one to the other they walked into the depths of Dunbar Creek, Savannah, Georgia

11 Mainly spoken in Niger and in the north of Nigeria, also spoken as a trade language across a much larger swathe of West Africa

12 See Finni Chapter

13 See Pereira Chapter

14 A fictional character from the Granada Television British soap opera Coronation Street,

15 A British television sitcom made by Granada Television for ITV,

16 Set up by the Black community many were unlicensed

In his wardrobe he had suits from the 40s on a Saturday night I used to borrow either his trousers or jacket of his zoot suit¹⁷.

Mum died at 50 of cancer. Dad never cleared anything out of hers. In fact our David only recently cleared the wardrobe. When she was ill, he was very strong for her. He did the shopping, go to work, come home and get the shopping. And he would never let us know how he felt. It had been a happy marriage with four children Christine, Michael, David and me, Barrie. My Dad absolutely adored her.

After Mum died, he would visit her ashes every week. Every Sunday without fail he would ask Christine ‘run me down’ ‘take me down’ and that was every Sunday and like I say he wouldn’t throw anything away and he stayed on his own, you know he died on his own. Well he died with his family around him, but he never met anyone else again.

It was so peaceful, his death. He just opened his eyes and looked at us and it was then he went to sleep. I washed my Dad, I didn’t want anyone else to do it, so I washed him.

We used to go to my Dads’ every weekend without fail. We might just stay an hour or two hours, but sometimes we’d stay all afternoon. All the grandkids knew him. Now they put on Facebook ‘our favourite granddad’ – he was great. I actually tried to do a eulogy, but I couldn’t because I broke down. He was great man really, he really was – a great ‘little man’.

17 A man’s suit with high-waisted, wide-legged, tight-cuffed, pegged trousers, and a long coat with wide lapels and wide

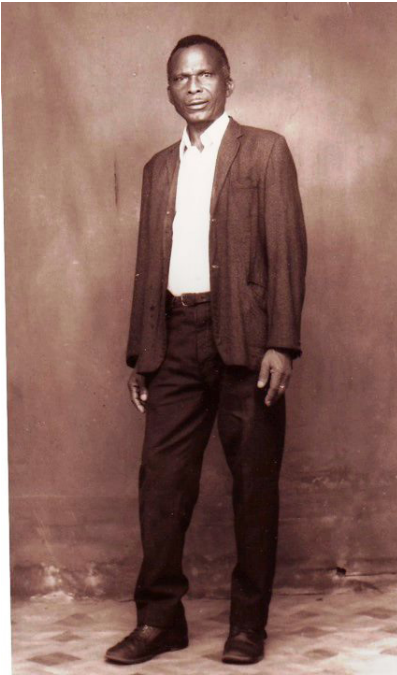
CHAPTER 6

DAZZY ATTA *by his son Oniomo*

*'He did the best he could.
I think African fathers took their
responsibilities very seriously;
it was rare to find men who
fathered children and then totally
disappeared'*



Anthony Oniomo Atta



Dazzy Atta



Atta and sisters

Daddy Atta my father died in 1987. He was only 67 and he knew his time was near. He knew he was dying because he had started to visit people, the last goodbye sort of thing. He's buried close to where he lived. Close to the ancestral home.

When I left Ajegunle¹, (a slum area of Lagos known as Jungle city) I was glad to get home. At Stansted when I landed I drank a pint of milk. For my dad's funeral I paid for a cow and Captain's Morgan's rum.

It was January 1972 when my dad told me he was leaving England. I found out that he had been planning it and saving his money for a year or so. I realised on his last morning in Manchester that I was never going to see him again.

I had a job and he was sailing from Southampton so I couldn't go to see him off. My sisters went and afterwards they told me, there were no speeches. I told him that I wanted to visit him in Nigeria and he said OK, but back then I had no idea how to make it happen.

When he was born Ozoro² was just a traditional African village in the Nigerian Interior without electricity or any mains water supply. Now it is a medium size town of the Delta State.

In his mid-twenties; looking for adventure he'd run away from his village to Ghana. There he met a girl and the people wanted them to get married but he decided instead to go to sea travelling the globe before arriving in England around 1947 or 1948.

He was a fireman stoker on an Elder Dempster³ ship docking first in Hull and during many voyages he disembarked at all the British ports before settling in Moss Side Manchester.

Everything was done for us by my dad and we were shaped by my dad. Even food was different. Omelettes not like your regular English simple egg omelettes.

1 A district of Lagos State, and is located in the heart of Lagos. In the past few years, it has produced notable footballers and musicians, It's uniqueness lies in the fact that it is a concentration of all the many ethnic groups in Nigeria.

2 The headquarters of the Isoko North Local Government Area, one of the two administrative units in the Isoko region of Delta State, southern Nigeria

3 One of the UK's largest shipping companies
<http://www.elderdempster.org/>

Dad's were different amazingly different. Pepper soup and garri.⁴ We always ate with our hands, it was normal but as I got older, I grew embarrassed I think I thought it was, well not primitive but not right. You know the way other people ate. It wasn't normal.

We had lots of Uncles; other men would come to play cards and eat 'Red's' pepper soup. That was his nickname 'Red'.

The only men that ever came to the house were Africans. When the house was full you could feel the atmosphere, feel the music. It was like the air itself was African. They would talk together in their first and natural language. My dad spoke Isoko⁵ and even though I never learnt it you could tell from the way the talk changed that whoever was visiting that day, they were talking across their different tribal languages. When they laughed it hurt because you knew they were sharing something you would never know or understand. Something special to themselves, something that came before me, my sisters, England and the cold.

He made friends with a few neighbours but he never really had English friends. He had workmates of course, but no friends. I remember my Uncle John taking me to New Brighton in his car for my passing the eleven plus, but that was later. Mum and Dad separated by the time I was three years old. I'm the oldest; two sisters, and Carol. One year between each of us. I used to love telling my sister Carol that everybody thought I was the youngest. She hated that!

We were living in rooms above a café on Denmark Road. There were 3 children and 2 adults and no matter how many times he applied he could not get council accommodation. In desperation he took us all to the Town Hall and left us, his three children, on the counter and said 'you look after them'. This is how we got a council house in Carrick Gardens, Benchill, on the Wythenshawe estate. The neighbours weren't a bit happy and all but 3 signed a petition to say '*we don't want niggers in the street*'.

My father never had a white friend. I can't remember any white man coming to the house. My Dad must have known what the neighbours had done. Well he must have known, because I know about the petition.

4 Garri (also known as *gari*, *garry*, or *tapioca*) is a popular West African food made from cassava tubers. The spelling 'garri' is mainly used in Nigeria, Cameroon

5 The Isoko Land is one of the most densely populated areas in Nigeria

One evening my mother said “I am going to get some crisps” and she never came back.

She’d met my Dad when she was about seventeen or so, relatively young and I found out much later that when she first met my Dad, she took him to meet her folks, her parents. They were I think, probably from Salford, I can’t really remember the name but it was on Pendlebury Road. When they both walked into the pub, her mother, my grandmother, point blank refused to even acknowledge him and that’s the way it remained. I never had a grandmother. She never acknowledged she even had grandchildren; she just refused to speak to her daughter because she was with a black man.

I’m surprised my old man actually knew a pub in Pendlebury because I wouldn’t even go there. Maybe I would have when I was a teenager but I wouldn’t go now.

Her husband, our ‘granddad’ and my grandmother were separated... We found out later who he was, but we never met him, so we didn’t have any grandparents really.

My Mum was christened Jean Bowman I have been told she was quite a ‘looker’ in her day. We don’t have any photographs.

After she left, we heard she was living in Birmingham. She didn’t come back to live in Manchester until we were all adults – into our twenties. She came back briefly a few days every few years. My sister Carole lived with her for around a year then came back home to Benchill. Then we did have some sort of contact. But for me it was a very strange relationship, I never really had a mother type relationship. Lots of women would have taken their kids. I understand it may have been a hard relationship for her. But lots of women would have taken their kids.

I know that he did the best he could.

I think African fathers took their responsibilities very seriously; it was rare to find African men who fathered children and then totally disappeared.

He wasn’t celibate or anything like that. He had loads of girlfriend which meant we had lots of aunties. Auntie Stella stayed for 3 weeks, even the white girlfriends were our aunties.

He just did the best he could really.

He left the ships around 1947-48 to work in what was really sweated labour type jobs; The Rubber Regeneration Co, at Dunlop's and Greengate & Irwell Rubber Company⁶. Shift work it was all shift work. Metro Vicks⁷ and at Almonds Bakery. I loved it when he worked nights because it left me in charge. I was responsible even though I was only a kid myself. There were no social workers snooping about in those days.

Dad was almost illiterate yet in spite of this he was the contact point for university students from his region of Africa who came over to study. His basic reading and writing was the result of the "bookies"⁸. He ran a card school⁹ in the basement of Denmark Road café. These were days when making a living was all that mattered and these men had few job opportunities.

He would stand me in front of the mirror and say 'If you and your friends cause any trouble you will be the one identified'. I remember the first time I heard the Michael Jackson record.... Jackson was singing my dad's refrain.

One of the things that I have always regretted and maybe it is selfish, still nevertheless; it was when we all started school. 1955 in Wythenshawe there were about four or five mixed race children in the whole area. I remember going into school with my father and the headmistress taking him to one side and saying *'they have a hard enough time as it is, you know with your colour and I suggest that you change your son's name from Oniomo to Tony, to Anthony because it will make it easier for him to fit in.'*

My old man, not knowing any different said kind of just 'Yeah OK yeah' and that's how and why I became Tony Atta instead of Oniomo Atta and it's like *****.

6 Formed by the 1919 amalgamation of two companies, with factories at Manchester, Radcliffe, London and Glasgow.. Greengate mainly produced rubber belting and tubing, V-ropes, hose, cables, proofed fabrics and clothing. Rubber footwear represented only a small proportion of its sales in the United Kingdom.

7 In 1935 Metrovick and B.T.H. became the first two firms in the world to construct jet engines (independently from each other).

8 A bookmaker, **bookie** or turf accountant is an organization or a person that takes bets on sporting and other events at agreed upon odds.

9 Slang for playing poker or other gambling card game

I've had plenty of time to think about it, plenty of time to stand in front of the mirror and though everyone calls me Tony, I made sure; I made sure I reclaimed Oniomo.

When I was a kid being called Tony did make it a lot easier. Still I wish he hadn't done it. But because my Dad called me Oni, the kids on the street called me Oni. Of course anyone that didn't know me asked, 'What kind of name is that'. Was it Shakespeare who said that? Somebody said 'What's in a name'.¹⁰ Trouble was there was a washing powder called Omo. So Oni-Omo got me in a few playground fights.

Dad knew the value of education but not the measure. When the letter came to say I had passed my 11+, he was asked to select Grammar schools in an order of preference. He didn't know the difference between secondary and grammar, he just went for the one closest to home proposing to place me in the local Secondary Modern school. I had to show him that I could go to Poundswick (the grammar school nearest to us).

This was the same man who was always telling me I could do better. In junior school I was usually top-second and got a beating. He always said, 'you can do better' and followed it with a slap. But I was always left to my own devices. He never checked my homework. He couldn't read and understand my homework. But it didn't stop him from saying; 'Do better'. Slap!

I did get a brand new satchel for school from Uncle John the day we went to Brighton in his car. Don't forget, this little ragamuffin me, had passed his 11+.

But before long I was doing minimal homework and as a result my academic potential drained away. As a youth I had quickly decided to bypass the shit and live a life. I forgot about that mirror.

From 16-20 they were my bad years, stealing cars robbing people. In 1970 I got a 3 year sentence. He must have felt helpless.

10 "What's in a name? that which we call a rose By any other name would smell as sweet;" Romeo and Juliet, (What we call ourselves is an important part of our identity. It is part of how we see ourselves and often we resent it when someone pronounces our name in an odd way or makes fun of it. The Africans who were sold into slavery were repeatedly humiliated by the naming practices of their owners.)

Letters he had dictated for someone else to write. He wrote that I would be welcomed to visit. I tried to send him money but back then there was no American Express or Money Transfers you were reliant on people travelling back and forth. Reliant on their honesty.

In 1978 I had just started at the Manchester Polytechnic in Applied Community Studies to become a Youth Worker. I'd bought a house and had a full length mirror. I told myself it was now or never. I wanted to know what it was like. I wanted to see Nigeria. I wanted to see my Dad in his home in Nigeria.

With the freedom of the long summer holidays and a full grant plus a job, I had the money. So just 6 weeks later I flew into Lagos. A relative met me, a cousin I think although the concept of cousins is not recognised in Africa. He took me to my dad's.

Amazingly when we got to the compound my dad wasn't there. About an hour later there was all this commotion and kids started to shout out that I was there, obviously not in English but they were shouting 'He is here, he is here.' Dad entered. It was a big reunion and when I asked where he had been he said he had gone out just in case I hadn't turned up. Because he had to get someone to read my letters he hadn't been able to keep my visit private and he didn't want to have the whole village see the shame of his disappointment had I not arrived. He was a security guard for an ex-pat, a Welshman, working for him part time so he could take me out and about.

In '78 I was skinny; I had an Afro and a beard. In Lagos there was a burgeoning awareness, an acceptance of me as a Black man. After a week we left Lagos and went to his village. In the village I was treated like a white man. Going into a dwelling the children would crowd around and stare at me and women would stop whatever they were doing to applaud when they saw me. Everyone we met there gave long speeches and we were given Kola nuts¹¹.

One morning Dad said that I was to make sure I had sandals on for the goat ritual. This entailed the slaughter of a goat and its blood being sprinkled over my bare feet. This was serious, it meant the village was

11 Öjì luo ünö okwuo ebe osi bia.' *'When the Kola nut reaches home, it will tell where it came from.'* This proverb says that the visitor needs to show the kola nut to his people at home as a proof of having visited this village.

officially recognising me as his son and welcoming me back home.

We went to the old quarter where his aunt lived. She was very old and blind. I had to squat down to get through the door space. She reached out with her hand, felt for my head and rested her forehead gently against mine.

It was such a profound experience. The best experience I had in all my time in Nigeria.

We then went back to the city. To Lagos, with its' hustle and bustle and constant noise. I loved Lagos but it was so full on 24 hours a day. But when I left, I was happy to be leaving and going home. Especially, leaving the noise, the noise of the village, the city, the people, everything.

I still don't know why but when I got back on UK ground I had this desperate thirst for milk. I drank a whole pint right off.

I visited him again a couple of years later. We made plans to build a house for him in his village so I went back out with the money for it. We started it off, buying building materials etc and I left him in charge of it so he was happy, but then I became ill with cancer and felt unable to make such an arduous trip again. I never went back until one day I got a phone call to say he had died after he had made his last visits to all his relatives. I am sure he knew that he was ill and dying. I travelled there again, even though I was sick in order to bury him. I felt it was my responsibility, not the village's.

And when he died I felt a responsibility to the village to not to leave them to bury him. For them it was a huge cost. And he was my dad - mine and my sisters.

So I paid for a cow to be slaughtered and cooked for the mourners and I took with me his favourite alcohol, Captain Morgan's Rum which I poured over his grave. (Much to the consternation of some of the mourners who felt that they should be drinking it), but I wasn't having any of that!!

CHAPTER 7

PRINCE ARDAYE ANKRAH *by his daughter Alexandra*



African Prince Weds Finnish Girl,
The News, Frederick, Maryland,
14 Jan 1954



Prince Ankrah 1950



Alexandra with Desmond Tutu

'Our family was definitely multi-cultural. It was a melting pot...'

My dad, Prince Ardaye Coffi Ankrah (Duke), as a youngster had a total lack of interest in school and education, which resulted in him being suspended from most of the top Gold Coast [later Ghana] public schools. As the son of a chief Nii Kpakpo Oti II, he saw no need to better himself and simply wanted to spend his days playing football and drumming. Already pampered by his mother, he enjoyed a life of privilege in a 36 room mansion house in what was called British Accra, near Jamestown. His mother Sara had helped build the house. Her resources were plentiful because part of the wealth of Chief Ankrah, her husband, came from the homage that city dwellers and villages surrounding Accra paid to him by way of cattle and other livestock. His mother was also a trader in her own right and the licensed bar she built and ran is still standing. In those days his mother traded in Schnapps, imported from Holland, and local palm wine.

By “acquiring” the right documents via his cousin Dixon Almeida, who was already in the Merchant Navy, he came to England in his early 20’s docking in Liverpool around 1941 and by 1946 moved to London and then to Manchester. I don’t know if he was in the Union of African Seaman as it wouldn’t have been under his own name.

He timed moving to London perfectly because Les Ballets Nègres¹ was launched in April 1946, Europe’s first professional African-Caribbean dance company. Duke was one of the two drummers in the premiere performance.

My Dad was a showman and you could see that he was in his element. And the man could dance. When I went to see Richard Riley (co-founder of Les Ballet Nègres) as he lay dying in hospital, he still managed to describe my Dad as the greatest drummer who ever lived. He said that he could make a drum go from the sound of raindrops to the roar of a Boeing 747 taking off – that his control of his instrument was total.

Duke was intensely proud of his cultural heritage and of ritual so he created a little Ghana wherever he was.

He was not ashamed to ‘wear his cloth’² or to speak his language and he surrounded himself with Ghanaians. He also had many great friends and

1 The English and world renowned, black ballet company first performed on BBC Television in June 1946, when they performed two ballets “They Came” and “Market Day”. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef6qqynukXY>

2 Slang for Africans who wear the traditional clothing of their country

loads who were English. This came probably from something his father cultivated in him. His godfather was a McKenzie; a colonial administrator who I understand did a bit of business with my grandfather. So my Dad was given the same middle name and his pride of it was illustrated by the McKenzie tartan in his costumes and I spent a lot of my childhood being dressed in McKenzie kilts. The Scots have a long historical association with Ghana.

However my Dad wasn't an assimilationist and that was always the contradiction. He was intensely proud of his culture and his class, because he came from a Royal family and you never forgot it. Even on my birth certificate it has got 'HRH'! It's got 58, Trafalgar Road, Salford and HRH!! So he never let you forget you're royalty, so you know - the Prince and my Mother, the Princess, and me the Princess, living in the middle of Salford!!

The Ankrahs of ancient history were slavers and had been for several hundred years and that is where their money came from. The Ankrahs didn't originate in Ghana, but have been there over 1,000 years as part of the distinct ethnic group – the Ga people. Many of the Ankrahs were thoroughly nasty people and even Bill Harpe³ sent me a Liverpool book of Liverpool History and it talks about Ankrah the Chief who used to go to war, on slaving expeditions, even as late as 300 years ago.

Dad would talk fondly of the Akwamu Wars⁴, as though they happened yesterday and kept up the practice of our major festival held around August/September called Homowo⁵, which translates as 'Tooting at hunger'. It is preceded by a complete ban on drumming, which is interesting considering his one love of the drums. Wherever we were we would celebrate Homowo. It is very much like the Jewish Passover because during the year the food we eat is kenke⁶, (fermented corn), but during Homowo it is prohibited. You have to eat it just boiled and not fermented. I used to make it for my Dad; you put in palm oil and minced onions and a bit of pulped Okra, and then you sprinkle it remembering the ancestors – it's the food of G-d basically. In the old days they would go to the outskirts of the City to meet visiting relatives and also get the red mud that Accra is built on to put on the door, so evil would pass over the household.

3 Co-Founder and Director of The Black-E <http://www.theblack-e.co.uk>

4 <http://www.akuapem.com/akwamu.html>

5 http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/tribes/homowo_festival.php

6 <http://footandpedaldisease.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/kenke.html>

There are seven clans amongst the Ga peoples, who in blessed memory come from, or at least passed through the Calabar, now in modern Nigeria, on their journey across continents and into what is now modern Ghana. So even my name isn't actually Alexandra, my name is Aduwah and my sister is Amanua because these two women are like Romulus and Remus – they are the historic founders of our clan. My name is not to be confused with Adjoa 'born on a Monday' because we don't name after days of the week, we name after our ancestral hierarchy if you like. Dad named us and some of his grandchildren in accordance with tradition and boys were circumcised on the eighth day – fulfilling our ancestral promise. In the past we had to call on a Mohe⁷ to circumcise our kids and some of us still have to, so we make links with the Jewish community in order to preserve their traditional practice. I am the mother of daughters and there has never been the cutting or mutilation of girl-children amongst my father's people.

I am sure I have a picture of him in a pub in Salford. There was very much the social scene with people coming and going between each other's houses and of course there was Church! He was a Catholic, but he was also a Catholic in order to progress the education of us his children.

Because the Ga language can be very loud and intense, as a kid I remember being absolutely embarrassed when he had a conversation with his chums. People thought they were arguing and I would stand on street corners looking around thinking 'Ohhh' because people didn't quite clock that their animation and loudness was in fact probably just a conversation about the price of eggs! It took me years to get over and not feel so embarrassed! Now I am just loud.

Our family was definitely multi-cultural. It was a melting pot because Mum comes from a strong European tradition so there were oil paintings and still are! My father was fixated with European art, so we had a big collection of European art portfolio that he probably brought piece by piece, you know one of those book sets that sort of had all of the great artists from Leonardo Da Vinci to Caravaggio. He insisted you read so to understand what real art is. Mother was an avid book purchaser, so the house was filled with books and though Dad had a loose relationship with the written word; he could read and was a newspaper reader. Music was a

7 "Circumciser"

mixture of 'High Life'⁸ , Operas like Carmen Jones⁹ . My Mother very much liked Mario Lanza¹⁰ and Harry Belafonte¹¹ and so did my Dad along with Frankie Lane¹² , so it was a fusion. They loved the cinema all the great movies of the day.

Mum, Sinikka Sirka Liisa nee Toivonen is from Nokia in Finland. Dad had made his money touring, buying his house in cash by 1952. Now with his own company "Prince Ankrah and Players" (African in content and structure), he wore leopard skin and did fire walking and fire-eating, touring Europe and performing at the Helsinki Olympics. Their marriage was reported in the front cover of the 'News of the World' England, Jet Magazine USA¹³ and Helsinki Sanomat¹⁴ , the Finnish equivalent of the Guardian newspaper: reported and misreported. There were all sorts of racist stories that appeared in the lesser press. In fact there was a debate in Finland in 2012 about racism and one of the images they brought up was of them, a cartoon with my Dad with a big bone through his nose and my Mum in a cooking pot. And the question was 'was this racist?!

My Dad was essentially a showman and my Mother looked a bit like Marilyn Munroe. She was an absolute beauty who had done the completely bonkers thing (or so outsiders thought) at seventeen going on eighteen of marrying a man whose only language of communication was in her second language German and he spoke that only a little. She comes from a very good family the Toivonens, a really good family; but Finland after the war was a shattered country. She didn't run off, she had the full permission of her family to marry this Prince from Africa and in effect go on the road, touring.

She became his administrator in Germany. She had a diploma from a business school and was fluent in the language.

Alongside his trading business he also contracted artists, including

8 A music genre that originated in Ghana at the turn of the 20th century

9 The first operatic film with an all-black cast

10 American tenor, actor, and Hollywood movie star of the late 1940s and the 1950s

11 African American singer, songwriter, actor and an advocate for civil rights and humanitarian causes

12 American singer, songwriter, and actor whose career spanned 75 years

13 No. 1 African-American newsweekly and has more than 7 million readers. <http://jetmag.com/>

14 The biggest daily subscription-based newspaper in Scandinavia. It is also Finland's leading national paper

the parents of many leading Black dancers in performance today. Omar Okine's father worked with my Dad, Marjorie his Mum had Manchester roots. Bruce Vanderpuye, his son is William Vanderpuye¹⁵, who has done a load of work from Desmond to Death in Paradise too – I remember seeing him in Reggae Britannia¹⁶. He does a lot of voice-over work and things like that.

Eventually the company returned to London and then Mum and Dad moved to Manchester to live. One of the most painful things for him was my parent's divorce after twenty five years of marriage. Morally he believed in the institution of marriage. He would say to me about their divorce, it was 'your Mother who had brought divorce in to his family, because there had been no other divorces'. This is one of the things I do chuckle about, this idea that there was no divorce - and it's like 'yeah there probably hadn't been, but my Dad's father, my grandfather, had eleven wives!!' Do you know what I mean and grandfather lived to 101.

In a sense my Dad was a very old father when I was born, probably fifty, and my mother had married him not realising – she thought he was in his twenties – but he was nearer to his forties; I didn't come along until the early 1960's.

It was a contemporary home, but the cooking pot was mainly Ghanaian. My mother was able to cook Ghanaian food, because in Finland they too mix meat and fish in the same pot, like herring and pork. You would come home and my Dad would have a sheep's head in the oven on a very low mark baking it to stick in the soup. Then you would open the fridge and there would be a pig's head, because my Mother would be about to stick it with half a pound of veal to make brawn. This food was fused together and it was always in great abundance partly because they really knew where and how to shop, both of them. I don't think there are such things anymore as cheap cuts because things like pig's cheeks are sold for loads of money in Waitrose. You go in to Morrison's and they are selling pig's trotters at alarming prices and lamb shank that I can't afford, whereas they were the cheap cuts then. So the pot was always brimming and people were always coming round to eat and there was always room for everybody. And there was the fact that some of my Mums' friends and relatives, married into Dad's family.

15 Award-winning British actor and voice-over artist

16 By Leigh Jackson July 1979.

Dixon Almeida, he married Mum's first cousin, Ritva Saloranta. She had come over from Finland to be our sort of au pair in Manchester and ended up marrying Dad's cousin. Dixon had a big win on the pools and they bought a house in Wembley, London. After he retired from the Merchant Navy, he worked for the Post Office and he died aged ninety, about eight years ago and he never returned to Ghana even though he was always going to.

As a father, my Dad placed great emphasis on the oral traditions, so I thought he had invented the Brer Rabbit¹⁷ stories. I was convinced that Spider Anansi¹⁸ stories were personally written by my Dad because they had been the stories he had told me when we snuggled up together in bed with my little brother. The whole family would pile in the double bed and he would tell these stories. I was convinced that he was the creator/author so it came as a bit of a shock by the seventies with the introduction of 'multicultural education', that other people knew about Brer Rabbit. Almost as big a shock as young people today not seeing the connection between Marvel comics¹⁹ Spider-man and Anansi.

My Dad was funny – absolutely funny, but he also wouldn't be taken for a ride. My Dad was a bit diverse, but there were many layers, a man of contradictions. He was on one level more of – 'I'm a pragmatist now and we are in England'. So he would say to me 'It would be really lovely if you married a Ghanaian, but English will do but don't bother with any of the West Indians'. He would say 'who is he? Is he the son of a West Indian?' That was an old fashioned construct and I think that more reflected the people who had come in the 1960's. Certainly in his view the ones who were hanging around Manchester were the educated Ghanaians. He was prejudiced in the sense he viewed the people who then came from the Caribbean, and who he met, as manual workers and trades people.

However the contradiction is that throughout his cultural practice he had worked with and created alongside women and men from the Caribbean – there was a mutual respect. Certainly by the time I had come along he had

17 Central figure as Uncle Remus tells stories of the Southern United States

18 The trickster is a West African god. He often takes the shape of a spider and is one of the most important characters of West African and Caribbean folklore.

19 <http://marvel.com/comics>

rediscovered this education thing. After I had got my degree I remember him saying to me ‘Oh you stupid girl, what good is a degree? A degree is useless, everybody has a degree.

What you now need is a Masters, better still, go to Law School’ and you didn’t argue with him and you didn’t say ‘Hold on a moment, you haven’t even got your secondary school leaving certificate’. That is how he was!!

Another layer was his political views; he was ultra conservative and right wing – like many Ghanaians. I mean there is no secret that the three black Conservative MPs, who are most visible, are Ghanaian. So my parents they were fully paid up members of the Conservative party and thought Margaret Thatcher had done so much for the Nation and the world and he continued to think that until his dying day. So he had no time for Labour or the Liberals. He shuttled back and forth to Ghana as the mood took him, but it was difficult for him because Ghana had changed dramatically. His cousin the late General Ankrah who would later overthrow Nkrumah²⁰ in a military coup stayed with Dad; but that is another chapter in Ghana’s history.

In theory he was in the Pan-African movement but as a cultural practitioner he was invited to form the Ghana Arts Council, and he duly went. Nkrumah was in power but there were already suspicions about General Ankrah and Ghana had become a place which politically, just wasn’t him.

His other cousin Roy Ankrah ‘Black Flash’²¹ was the Commonwealth Boxing Champion and Ghana’s boxing coach. I certainly know by 62/63 Roy Ankrah had invited Cassius Clay to Ghana and he duly came and met my Mum. I know my Mum met him a couple of times and that was a family joke. She met him at the Ambassador Hotel in 1963 in the company of my Uncle, Roy Ankrah and then I am born nine months later – but my Mother was very shy, so I can’t make any claims!!

Eventually we moved to London, but we would be scuttling up and down the M1/M6, because a lot of their good friends were back in Manchester.

I recall a gentleman called Ben Coker, he was my Godfather, and if my

20 Leader of Ghana and its predecessor state, the Gold Coast, from 1951 to 1966.

21 http://boxrec.com/media/index.php/Roy_Ankrah

memory serves me right, he was somehow involved in medical equipment, pharmaceutical work. By 1964 he already had a ten year old son who had been born in Manchester. Dad knew him from the forties and fifties. Ben went on to own a little corner shop which he had for many years, Salford way.

The Coker family of Manchester now has three Bens. The late Ben, the father born in the Gold Coast, lived and worked most of his life and died in Manchester. Ben the son is sixty now, he moved away from Manchester in the seventies to set up a successful building company in London. Ben (junior)²² is now a respected performance coach in rugby. He moved over from the Harlequins to one of the league teams in Bath. Three generations from the Manchester Ben Coker.

There were other families – the Laryea family I think, who suffered a house fire. Neighbours were trying to get the father to jump clear, but he wouldn't without finding his young son, who would have been five. When he did jump he died – the boy died in the fire – he had hidden under his bed. Bridget the Mum was the sole survivor and never recovered: she was re-housed. She was a friend of my mum's but they lost touch in the late 1980's. They were nearer Moss Side actually. The only reason that I knew of the story was because when I was about ten or eleven, about 1976, my Mum brought us up to Manchester to stay with Auntie Bridget. I didn't really know she had had a son, I overheard, because it's not the sort of thing you talk about.

Mother is still with us, she is in Torquay as we speak and is proud Gran aged 78. My Dad's mum was eighty nine when she died and my father made it to 3rd January, 2001. He would have been around eighty six. Even when he was dying, he still had his chamois leather cloth that he would use to apply his face powder and his mascara; his hair was dyed so people always thought he was forty years younger than he was. A favourite memory would be him getting up in cloth and dancing at weddings because if anyone had a wedding, they would always invite my Dad.

From Mum and Dad there came 4 children, 15 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.

22 <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/ben-coker/44/657/2b2>

I only found out that our Josephine existed on a scan dated 3rd January 2001, the day he died. Josephine is so like him in many ways; she takes pride in putting her outfits together and with looking good. Like my father, she enjoys dressing with her own sense of style. The one thing that irritated him was that I never did learn to dress properly! Remember this is a man who went to Church so he could show off his cloth. He would go off and buy the latest brocades – he could spend up to fifty quid a metre on brocades in John Lewis – he would buy woven upholstery cloth to wear and show and’ bluff’. Wearing it just like Kente²³, because he had his own style. So I think he would have been really amazed by Josephine and her artistic ability, her singing voice, her dance and saxophone playing. They would have probably spent time comparing notes on dress! But physically, actually they are very alike – but actually we call her the ‘Divine Miss Josephine Baker’.

Hannah is the clown, she has his joy and humour and I always think ‘look at what your legacy is and be assured that your path and the journey you took, you put your foot the right way every time’.

The old man would have taken joy in seeing all of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but that does not mean he would have not have had some advice on education and working hard. I know he would have been so incredibly proud of Rebecca, my eldest. I think he would have been proud of her voice, her artistic ability – she has sung at Bestival²⁴ and does a lot of charity concert work and she composes music. I know my Dad would have related to Rebecca’s original compositions as lyrically they echo a lost age of R&B. He would have loved Elizabeth my second daughter and her quiet ways and he would have seen in her his favourite sister Lucy, and he would have loved her for that. In fact he did meet her and he loved her and paid for her private education because he had a fascination for her. Elizabeth and Rebecca he knew and I am sure he knew they would amount to something and they would do great things. By God’s grace Rebecca has graduated and is working as a medical Doctor which is right up there in a Ghana family’s ideal career, along with Lawyer, Teacher, Engineer, Professor...

What aggravates me is that he is not here to see his grandchildren in their full bloom. He knew what I had done and he knew that I had loved him

23 Known as nwentoma in Akan, is a type of silk and cotton fabric made of interwoven cloth strips and is native to the Akan ethnic group of South Ghana

24 <http://www.bestival.net/>

and I felt privileged having Prince as a father. I was deeply grateful; deeply privileged and I think he knew.

Bizarrely he wanted to be cremated. We had a whole band of twelve drummers and other cultural practitioners and three hundred guests, including family and friends from Manchester, Stockport and Liverpool. We held his wake at the Yaa Asantewaa Arts Centre²⁵. Ironically that is just behind the house he brought in London, Goldney Road; you can see it from the kitchen window actually. His ashes were taken and laid at the original front door of his family mansion in Accra – the building was originally heavily decorated with his family symbol the Sankofa²⁶.

The most important thing I could have inherited is that Sankofa Bird – that reminder that some things should not be left in the past. *We must look forward, we must go forward, but we must take forward with us lessons from the past.* My father’s lesson to me is art and culture is key to our progress – as individuals, as a family and as a community.

25 <http://yaaasantewaa.com/>

26 Means either the word in the Akan language of Ghana that translates in English to “reach back and get it” or the Asante Adinkra symbols of a bird with its head turned backwards taking an egg off its back,

CHAPTER 8

SHECKU BROWN SEISAY *by his son Kevin*



Seisay Shecku



Seisay with children



Seisay family

'No matter which way you look at it. You walk past a shop window, look at yourself and think 'My god, that's my Dad' and that's it, there is no getting away from that. ...'

No matter which way you look at it, you walk past a shop window, look at yourself and think 'My god, that's my Dad' and that's it, there is no getting away from that. And in our family if we do something, we say 'that's African, an African would actually do that'. There are certain things that Africans do that are eccentric. The British are eccentric, but I think Africans are really eccentric.

When Dad was still single he lived in Moss Side in a room with Claude Thompson, Papa Bouse, and Tappa Dawson - all from Freetown. When he first came he would have times of feeling low and unhappy. So one day Claude suggested they go to the football and when the team came out in the same colours as his team 'back home' in Freetown, it was love at first sight.

When Manchester City played at Moss Side we used to go and visit Tappa Dawson quite a bit after the game. There was Claude Thompson who used to live near the Manchester Royal Infirmary and used to come up now and again and Pappa Post who was the first one to die out of the group. The whole family are Manchester City fans. It is a legacy that goes far deeper than just winning games, he started it off and it now runs like a gene in our veins!

Often we say things in the Freetown accent emulating dad and things in a Scouse¹ accent emulating our mother. Yeah, they both come up in conversation a lot. When we were kids we had a great time so when we are together most of the stuff we talk about is when we were kids because it was funny, it was hilarious. Yeah it was a good marriage; I was at the wedding ceremony of course!

I never saw any affection between Mum and Dad like holding hands or kissing - no I never really saw that. But obviously it must have happened at least six times. They had six of us altogether, two girls and four boys. Maxine came after me and died when she was two and a half. That was a nightmare that I can remember fairly well. When my mum got the diagnosis she said 'Oh great. Well when will she be better then..?' No one had really ever heard of leukaemia in those days.

Mum was from the Dingle, Liverpool. She used to have a café with my Auntie Doll in Middlesbrough way over in the North East of England.

1 Liverpool accent

My future Dad came in one evening wearing a light shirt and a light green suit and he sort of captured my mother's heart, and that was it! I am just trying to imagine what it was like in the Dingle when the war was on, when these couples were walking down the street together, what kind of reaction they must have got?

In 1952 Charlie my Dad, moved with his wife, my Mum to Upper Wilmot St into a rented house in Hulme². We didn't have any problems. We then moved to Blackley into a pre-fab³ off Charlestown Road actually in Boggart Hole Clough⁴. When we lived in Blackley it was a different story. Mum was only a 5ft 1 ½, to 5 ft. 2, Scouser, but dynamite. There was one particular woman who lived on the same estate. She was a bully, a big strapping woman. I don't know if you remember Bessie Braddock⁵, she was big like that and a bully. I don't think we were her favourite family on the estate, shall we say. One particular day she gave my brother a bit of verbal and he gave her some verbal back and the next thing this woman comes bouncing down to our house and everyone says, 'Oh no! Mrs Healey is going to see Madge what's going to happen?' Anyway we got advance warning and my mother was waiting at the gate. The altercation lasted about two and a half minutes and Mrs Healey was just flattened. That was it, the end. Everyone was aghast! She was going to try and foam my mother up, but it was no contest – not a pretty sight. The men go to sea; the women stay at home and have to fend....(that's how it was in Liverpool).

I saw my Dad get angry once when the window cleaner man came round or maybe it was the milk man and said 'Have you got the money for the week's milk' and Dad gave it to him. When Mum came back in she said 'Oh I paid the milkman before'. The milkman had been paid twice. Dad knew that this milkman would be in the bookies so he went there and there was a bit of argy-bargy⁶, but let's say he got his money back.

He wouldn't bear grudges or anything like that but he could get annoyed, very annoyed, but it dissipated quite quickly. Then the very thing he was telling you he couldn't do when you asked him to do it, he would say 'what are you telling me for' which meant 'what are you asking me for

2 Hulme (pronounced hyoom) is an ex-industrial suburb to the south of the city. <http://www.exhulme.co.uk/>

3 Prefabricated homes

4 a large urban park in Blackley

5 A British Labour politician nicknamed 'Battling Bessie'

6 An argument or disagreement.

– go and do it if you want’. I think my Dad would only intervene if it was going a bit ‘Pete Tong’. ⁷So when it was going wrong that is when my Dad intervened. I don’t think it was anything constructive it was just (*in African accent*) ‘You must do better’!!

In the 60s we moved into an overspill estate⁸ in Marple. My mother had heard of it and thought it was posh so we moved there. After leaving the Merchant Navy, Dad worked in a wood yard behind the Rose and Crown in Stalybridge. He then got a job at Manchester Victoria station as a shunter⁹. They hooked the trains together. He took the opportunity to get some training and became a railway guard until what was to be his last job, at Rose Hill station Marple where he was the manager. There was a pub on the approach so he would take the opportunity to have a swift half¹⁰ whilst waiting on the next train. He liked a drink. Everyone knew him he as he walked around with his umbrella. He was well liked and he always had his umbrella with him. I suppose he just didn’t trust the English weather.

He was happy in England because literally in the Merchant Navy he travelled all over the world. He went to China, Japan, South America and different places in Africa as well, but he decided to settle in England, and that was by choice. When he went to America they went to certain places where they had to drink out of paper cups and things like that. Well it was segregation in those days, but not so much in England, I don’t think.

Obviously back in those days there were certain areas in England which were notoriously hard for black people and one of those was Birmingham. Some areas of Liverpool they still had a colour bar and where the Unions, in cahoots with the employers, made a pact to only employ so many black people whether it be African or West Indians, or Asians I suppose.

He liked to laugh and he was a bit of a joker. Even now people speak about him especially those who knew him at Rose Hill. A lot of the lads that are my age have told me that on occasion when they didn’t have enough money to get a ticket, he would say ‘well I am just going in now to have a

7 Manchester rhyming slang for ‘wrong’

8 A housing estate planned and built for the rehousing of people from decaying inner city areas,

9 Moved trains or vehicles from one track to another.

10 Refers to the mythical quick half pint of beer or lager. Source Urban Dictionary

cup of tea - if you get on now and I don't see you, well...' – so he was fairly diplomatic.

Yes, he had a great mix of friends from the reprobates to the religious I would say and across the race line. A couple of Scottish people, a fellow from Nigeria and just a few close friends, real friends. African friends. There are not many people alive now to use as a reference point. Mr Jaffat who was a good friend of his and Albert Jacobs speaks about him fondly but that was when they were young in Sierra Leone. It is sad that the people you could actually use as a reference point today are few and far between.

I do know subsequently that Uncles, Aunties and my granddad Tommy Taylor from Mum's family; they too liked him. There was no animosity at all from what I know. I've got family from my mother's side. My mother's sister married another African, an Egyptian and they are scattered about all over the place. My uncle Eric, he lives in St. Helens and there are a couple of old aunties who live locally down Aigburth Road and that's about it.

As a family we had the best of both worlds because we would have roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and Jolof rice¹¹ and Garri and fried bananas and all that kind of stuff, so I think that was the best of both worlds. I just wonder how on earth they could afford it, because my mother wasn't working. How could they actually afford us kids and what must it have been like when the pressure of things like Christmas was on. Then there were old traditions like when you would get new clothes at Whitsun¹² and you would go to someone's house and stand there waiting for them to give money.

Because he worked on the railway he used to get cheap tickets, they were called PT tickets – I can remember them, little green tickets. They used to allow you so many free journeys a year. My mother had a lifetime one which could have taken her all over Europe but she didn't use it. We would go to places on the trains; I remember the old steam trains. I think this is where I get my caravanning from. We used to go to this place called Abbey Ford camp, near *Rhyl, Abergele*. Yeah, we went on holidays as a family,

11 Also called 'Benachin' meaning *one pot* in the Wolof language, popular in many parts of West Africa. Ingredients: rice, tomatoes and tomato paste, onion, salt, and red pepper any kind of meat, vegetable can be added.

12 In the North West church and chapel have Whit Walks including brass bands and choirs; girls attending are dressed in white and boys are suited

caravanning, that was the thing. Not surprising that I have got a van. I keep it parked outside the house. We take my little motorhome to the wilderness and just chill out - take the guitars and beer almost just like I did with Mum and Dad when I was a kid.

I remember one particular time when dad was on nights so he was in bed and the five of us were all downstairs. We couldn't unlock the living room door to get out, so we started to panic and started shouting 'Dad, Dad, Dad'. Naturally he thought something really bad was happening. We could hear his footsteps banging upstairs as he jumped out of bed. He didn't have any clothes on and he grabbed the first thing to hand to wrap around him. When he burst his way into the room, we looked down and he was wearing a curtain with all the curtain rings still round the bottom and we started laughing and he was just going crazy, chasing us round saying 'I thought you were all dying'!

My mother and my dad are never far from any of us really. They get brought up regularly in conversation. Sometimes, if something happens, like the curtain incident, I will phone my sister and say 'do you remember this?' Or there was a time, we used to have a coal fire in the winter and one Sunday evening we could see that Dad asleep had his feet near the fire and his feet were getting closer and closer to the fire. Then he lifted his feet and they were actually in the fire. We could have woken him up obviously but we didn't. He screamed and did a scissor kick and there were all these embers stuck to his socks. So again, if I think about that I will phone my sister up and say 'do you remember the time when my Dad burnt his feet'. It is just things like that that keep him especially close to us.

Let me describe him physically. He was about six foot tall; he had typical African very high cheek bones which I think I have inherited from him. Ever since I can remember he always had a moustache, a little moustache and absolutely perfect teeth, the shape of them was absolutely superb. He was fairly thin as well, but as he got older – through years of eating stuff like belly pork, he was still thin but he had this big belly, really big belly that he used to be proud of!! The weird thing was that he had a huge presence yet Dad could sit in a room of a hundred people and make himself almost invisible in the corner.

I wouldn't say that I really knew my Dad, but as I am getting older I find myself actually doing things that he would do and thinking in certain

ways and I can understand how he thought about things. These days I have a better insight in to what he was like himself and what he thought about things and what his emotions were like and how certain things affected him or, for example, how he could feel really angry - not an increasing growl but a shout but only for five seconds and then it was gone. He also had very long, as my mother used to say, piano player's hands which I think I have inherited as well.

I used to kiss him on the head a lot. He didn't really respond – he wasn't that touchy feely type of a person. He was kind of aloof. I wouldn't say affectionate, but he would do things in a different way – he wouldn't put his arms around you and give you a hug. For example, we were all sat in one Friday after Xmas, me, my brothers and sister all teenagers; no money just sat there. Dad just says 'just go upstairs under my bed and have a look'. So we went upstairs and there was beer and flagons of cider there. He had kept it for the time when we were broke. So to us that showed his affectionate side.

He was working right to the end. He was only 58 for goodness sake. He didn't really care about diet, exercise or anything like that. So being healthy was somewhere down the line of his priorities I think and even more so as he got older and older. He did walk places you know, he did walk. But he did have a problem with high blood pressure, like most Africans do. And I suppose that back in those days people weren't checked as much as they were now. So when the people talk about the good old days, I think the good old days really are now and not then. Everything is better now!

He's had some problems. I was there a couple of nights when he was gasping for breath and I had to phone the doctor to get him to hospital. That happened three or four times and he needed a heart valve – so there was a heart valve leaking. Apart from that to be honest I can't remember him being ill – as unhealthy as his lifestyle was.

I was in my twenties. I was doing a gig at some art centre in Mansfield when I got a phone call and that was it, a heart attack. There was nothing I could do but just do the gig. I couldn't have done anything anyway. I was miles away from home and I couldn't have got back. It wasn't until the next day that it suddenly dawned upon me. Not suddenly dawned on me, obviously it was shock as it was totally unexpected. My Dad died about 33 years ago, my Mum 25 years ago. They are together in Southern Cemetery

with my sister. I have not been down to the grave many times. My belief is when someone has gone, they have gone. Thankfully he got to know my oldest girl Chloe but not Luke, Charlie and Elspeth. But that is how it goes.

I'm glad he went back to Sierra Leone before he died. He spent six weeks there, that was a good thing. He said it was too hot! He brought back robes like shirts and longer knee length robes.

I was supposed to be going to a Sierra Leone arts festival years and years ago but then the troubles started and obviously it got bit nasty with the civil war, so we didn't go. Then time passes and you end up not going. The only member of the family who has been near Sierra Leone since my Dad died is my cousin James who went with the Royal Marines doing manoeuvres in the jungle – not exactly relaxing.

Now he has gone you can't help but think what you would like to share with him - obviously your own children which he hasn't seen for starters that is a big thing. One other thing, a really, really, big thing that has nothing to do with the family, is Manchester City winning the championship. I have already said that my Dad played in Sierra Leone and the first time he went to Maine Road and the City team came out in the same colours as his home team it was love at first sight. So with the Seisays it has been our tradition ever since. And let's not forget that when we were younger there were no black players, I think Albert Johannsen¹³ who used to play for Leeds United, maybe. There were not many decades ago, in fact the first black player I think played for Celtic¹⁴ but it never stopped our love for the game.

Me and my son Charlie were watching the last five minutes of Manchester City winning the championship, (the season before last they won the premiersip¹⁵). Then there was a silence followed by tears. We were crying. Everybody did, every fan and I knew my Dad would have been just the same – but he wouldn't have done that in front of us, he would have gone somewhere else to cry in private.

13 South African Albert Johannsen was one of the first high-profile black men, of any nationality, to play top-flight football in England

14 Gil Heron (9 April 1922 – 27 November 2008) was a Jamaican professional footballer. He was the first black player to play for Scottish club Celtic, and was the father of poet and musician Gil Scott-Heron.

15 In 2012, the club won the Premier League, their first league title for 44 years.

I think there is a lot of African inherited from my Dad to me and now to my kids. There is a type of behaviour and certain eccentricities. Is it stereotyping?

I don't know, maybe you fall into this trap of looking for things or when things happen, saying it's African when it just might be normal – it might not be African it might just be something specific to that person and we are attaching this label of African to it. I do think my kids display some traits that come straight from my dad, expressions, body posture as well and things that I can see.

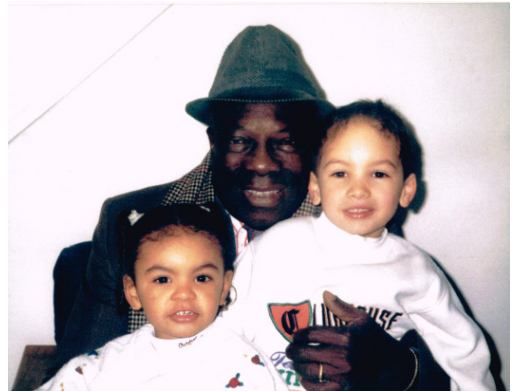
There are some things that are very distinctive between being African and Caribbean I can feel it more as I am getting older than when I was younger.

CHAPTER 9

EUISBIUS ABYOMI PEREIRA *by his son Francis*



Pereira family and friends



Euisbius Abyomi Pereira with children

'... this one man who packed his bag one day and came to England from the African continent, he has produced a tribe in England...'



Pereira family

Across the City of Manchester there cannot be many first generation Africans who do not know the name Pereira and most notably that of “Big Frank” as he is often called. Francis is big and tall which is in direct contrast to his father for as he tells, his mother at 5ft 11ins towered over her shorter 5ft 8in husband.

Euisbius Abyomi Pereira in many ways breaks the mould of perception of the unskilled African who came to England as Merchant seamen. Euisbius had an education, he was a school teacher, a Maths teacher and his father was a minister. Euisbius loved his mathematics, he called them ‘Sweet’. He joined the Merchant Ships to take food to the Russian Front, to the Commonwealth troops who were out there fighting. Sailing with the Elder Dempster line¹ he was torpedoed a couple of times and had to be fished out of the water once. Sadly he never talked much about the war and by the time his children were old enough to understand, Francis says that ‘nobody was really interested’.

Discovered warrant cards² make Euisbius a 1924 baby but, as Francis tells, he believes his father was at least ten years older than he pretended to be. It was 1978 before Francis got the opportunity to meet his grandmother who he reckons was near enough 90 years of age herself. The compound where they met was the same one that she had been in almost all of her life. He tells ‘when she had first moved from her village to Lagos there was only one car in the whole of the city and that belonged to the British High Commission. No other vehicle whatsoever, just the one vehicle that was driven about once a week.’

Euisbius Abyomi Pereira had two sisters and three brothers, sadly they are all deceased.

SuAndi: did he teach here?

No, he didn’t take a teaching job here though he used to get all of us in from the street and the other Africans would send their lads to him once a week for Maths lessons. Stan Finni and the likes, they would all come. I was quick because I lived there so I had to be – he would be at me every minute with mental arithmetic – he was a bugger.

1 One of the UK’s largest shipping companies its cargo ships operated three liners on a scheduled service to Ghana and Nigeria.
<http://www.elderdempster.org/>

2 Personal Identity cards

No he didn't teach here – he was a shop steward at the Gas Works at Bradford Road³. I don't think anyone would have given a black man a teaching job in the 1940s and 1950s it was as simple as that. So he worked at the Gas Works and became a shop steward and helped a lot of Caribbean people who arrived in the late 50s to get work on the railways and in all sorts of different jobs. Helped them find employment and get around – registering at the Doctors and things like that.

We had a three bedroom house at 63 Blackcarr Road, Newall Green, Wythenshawe. Dad used to have to ride his pushbike from there to work in Miles Platting which is a heck of a way⁴. He did shift work then. When he was on at 6 he would have to leave about 3.30 in the morning to get there for six o'clock.

My dad worked there. They used to do 6-2, 2-10 and 8 something.

Yes that is it, and night shifts so it was a hell of a way to go even for us kids because we went to Webster Street school from there and that was a farce to get to. In about 1954 we got an exchange⁵ and move to Fairlawn Street in Moss Side to the new houses, and it halved his travel distance.

He had met our mum Margaret Ann Lee just after the war around 1946. Mum was from Ashton under Lyne and was a widower raising her daughter Ann alone after her husband got killed in action. Her family wasn't happy that she had tied up with a black man so there was no contact and her mother took Ann in and brought her up. We did have contact with Ann for the first 3 or 4 years and then it stopped.

First of all they could only get rooms, so I was born in the attic of 247, Moss Lane East and from there we moved to Wythenshawe where the other children were born and then we moved back to Moss Side to Fairlawn Street. It was a big house - well it had to be with us lot. It had five or six bedrooms, there were about 7 of us then I think when I was about 8 or nine years of age and there ended up being 11 of us in the end.

Who ruled the roost?

Well my Mum, because Dad was at work all the time.

3 <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/alscot1/BradfordRD.htm>

4 95 Minutes 9.4 miles

5 Council tenants can apply to swap homes with other tenants.

When we were still kids we had a range fire⁶ and gas lights. Mum would cook all the English traditional dishes. On Friday we would have fish and chips or we would have scrapings and chips and the old man⁷ got the fish. That was a treat, even though in those days the chippy was cheap enough for a treat. Dad cooked African food now and again and Mum knew how to cook all the Nigerian dishes.

What would happen was his friends would come on the ships the Oriel⁸ and another ship I think it was called the Faraday⁹ that rotated every 10 days. One would be here in Liverpool and the other one in Lagos. Dad was always going down to the docks to meet his Sea Crew friends who would bring food for him – yams,¹⁰ egusi,¹¹ bitter leaf¹² and all sorts of food you couldn't get here.

The food was a mixture, it was African but it was also boosted by the people in our street. We had Jamaicans living three doors down, and across the road we had Sikhs. I had to go to Mrs Singh's on a Friday to get the chapattis she cooked in the back yard. So it was basically multi-cultured. Across the road we had the Flamingo café which was open 24 hours and owned by Odusanya.

You said that your Mum and Dad met at a club. Did they have a social life?

With 11 kids well 12 actually with her first daughter Ann? Yeah Mum liked to go out and have a drink so somehow she did. He used to take her out at weekends. In those days the Denmark pub¹³ on Sundays opened the main room with its piano. Everybody would have to dress up to go in there – tie, dickie bow and all that – you couldn't get in unless you were dressed properly. Every Sunday Dad used to take her out. And there were the clubs, the Lagos Lagoon, the Rainy City, the Palm Beach.

6 Victorian Cast Iron Kitchen Cooking Range Fireplace
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/3360334/Kitchen-ranges-All-fired-up-on-the-old-range.html>

7 Affectionate term for Father/Dad

8 <http://www.tynebuiltships.co.uk/O-Ships/oriel1897.html>

9 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CS_Faraday_\(1923\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CS_Faraday_(1923))

10 The tuber of a tropical vine (*Dioscorea batatas*)

11 Egusi seeds come from squash, melon, gourd plants.

12 A traditional ingredient in many African soups

13 <http://pubs-of-manchester.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/denmark-lloyd-street-north.html>

When I was growing up Moss Side was basically like (a) Harlem in Manchester.

Dad in the early days wore his cloth all the while. Especially on a Sunday he'd go out with his African robes on. They all did, all the men that came to visit him. I used to wear them too, I was the only mixed race lad who wore the robes. I still wear them now in the summer and I get right laughs from people. 'Look at that man, he has got his pyjamas on – look at the colour of them, orange with grapes all over them'.

And Dad was a suit man – from his shop steward days, always a smart dresser; from his trilby hat to his suit to his shoes to his top coat with a tie on. He would come home and bathe and change from his working clothes and put his suit and tie on – never jeans he was never a casual dresser.

Just for my curiosity did he wear a vest under his shirt?

Definitely, always wore a vest.

Why did you leave home at fifteen?

After being worked like a workhorse? Come on, you know why, freedom! I got a room and left home at 15. He was very strict as most fathers were then. I had to be in at a certain time if not he'd beat the living daylight out of me. Beat me in my bed once! I would have to be on me toes not to get a beating, making sure I had done everything correct, because if I didn't, I would get a beating. They didn't F-about and didn't hold back the punches.

When I interviewed you the first time you said sometimes you thought your Dad wasn't your Dad because he made you work so hard, tell me about that?

That's true. Because all the other kids are playing out and you have got loads of jobs to do. Grafting all the time and I mean all the time, 24/7.

When I was 9 and Tony Bello would confirm this, I would be in our back yard on a Friday or Saturday killing 300 – 400 chickens because the Caribbean people wouldn't buy dead meat from the butcher's shops because they had not experienced anything like that before. So Dad would go to the farms and buy these wooden cages and fill them with chickens, 20 or 30 or 50 in each one and bring them back to our back yard and I would

kill them and I was known as the 'Chicken Killer'.

When I was 10 or 11 if I wasn't killing the chickens or selling yams, I was driving a 7 tonne truck or a 3 tonne Bedford, I taught myself to drive. We had a bakery at the top of our street, the Pioneer. It was an English bakery before Mr Lawford, a very nice man, a Jamaican brought it in 1955. I used to go in the bread vans all over England instead of going to school. My attendance was probably only a third of what it should have been – so out of 60 days I would only go for about 20!

Did no one from school come looking for you?

No because when it came to the exams I was always in the top 3 of the 40 in the class – I was bright, very, very bright. On Fridays we had maths all afternoon. The teacher would write the sums on the blackboard for us to copy in our books to answer them. That should have taken all afternoon. He hated me because as he sat down and opened his novel to read, I would close my book. 'What are you doing Pereria?' I'd reply, 'I've finished' – 'how could you finish I have just sat down and I have not even opened my book yet, you couldn't have finished?' 'I have finished, I'd say 'I have answered them all and checked them all, give me something else to do' he would always say, 'I can't – you're too far ahead of the class already!'

Didn't anyone ask you how you knew your Maths?

No, nothing about your home life was ever asked in school.

What were your Dad's aspirations for you, for all 11 children?

Philip, Tony and John went to Merchant training before they left school. John went Gravesend¹⁴ sea training college in Kent in 1969 and Phillip trained on the Indefatigable¹⁵ sea training ship in Wales 1962/3 . There was only me and Robert who didn't go, the first and last born. I wanted to go but no chance. I was the workhorse and that's why I thought I was the slave of the family, because he never sent me.

The girls had to 'toe the line'¹⁶ and they all did. Africans are really funny when it comes to girls.

14 <http://www.nwkcollege.ac.uk/services-for-businesses/national-maritime-training-centre.aspx>

15 <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/trainingships/>

16 Conform to a rule or standard

They just want them to get married, not get in any trouble and not bring any shame on the family. Most of the girls did as was expected because basically they just wanted to get on with their lives.

We were a new race of people really, although we didn't realise it because we got conflict from both sides, from the blacks and the whites. We had to fight teddy boys running from gangs of them, running from the blacks as well and we would think 'what the F do they want to beat me up for, I am black too aren't I, what's going on?' So it was confusing sometimes.

There was one time when I offered to look after some kids. I was about 15, living in this room with a single mother living in the attic. She would secure the door with two padlocks and be gone from seven in the morning until seven at night and her two kids would be screaming and bawling all day – I would play my music to drown them out but I got sick of hearing them. So one weekend I said 'Excuse me, I know it is none of my business but you have to go to work and I don't do anything. I am here all day. I don't mind looking after your children for you if you like'. She said 'You! You two nation bitch, you are neither black nor white. You think you can watch my kids?' and this woman was the ugliest black woman that you have ever seen in your life.

But it was still a community and everyone helped one another and people left their doors open and no one robbed anything, not like now. People would leave a message on the mantelpiece 'gone to the shops' and leave the latch off the door¹⁷. The trust was there and people were far more sociable then. There wasn't much racism or hatred locally. There was more prejudice amongst the blacks from what I saw – Kittians¹⁸ hating Jamaicans and Barbadians hating Trinidadians.

In about 1956/7 maybe 58, around them times when I was still at Webster Street, I went every Saturday to the Denmark Road Post Office and 'translated' for the Post Master because he couldn't understand what they were saying. 'This is a postal order for 1 and 6 and it needs sending to Trinidad.' I'd explain to him I was a street boy. I'd picked up all the different dialects of patwa. Yeah it was really multi-cultural and people were much happier then and everybody had a little of money to get by on so there wasn't really much crime.

17 Closed but not locked

18 *People* from the island of *St. Kitts*

Barrie George uses the term 'half caste' with great pride and talks of a day when he is walking with mates and up ahead there is a group of white lads. Someone says 'don't move', whereas before they/you would have stepped aside and let them through. He said that was almost when he came into being as a half caste guy. My brother Malcolm (X. Assassin) used to use the term 'Shine boy', a Liverpool term I have since found out. So about this sense of identity, you didn't realise you were a new people, tell me more about it?

We found we had a lot of conflict everywhere we went. I used to go for jobs, have a beautiful conversation with the white people over the phone and they would say 'come down, you have got the job'. As soon as they saw the colour of my skin – I could see by the expression on their faces.... They are going to lie now because they have blushed.

I think we are almost like sparring boxers because we are always dodging the punches.

Well yeah, it is because everywhere we go we are always being looked at. I get an instant feeling. I will know right away whether it is hatred or just ignorance. I can shake someone's hand and if it's hatred, I can feel the hatred in the whole of his body and I will take my hand away. He doesn't know me but he hates me – why does he hate me when he doesn't know me?

Obviously we know racism still exists. Do you think there was a different level of bigotry towards mixed race?

Yes, I think they were frightened of us, because we were very intelligent and they didn't want to improve that intelligence, I think they wanted to push it back.

To the primitive Africa?

Yes, they were frightened because we were very fast, very quick – we were eager learners and they wanted to slow that learning process. I think that is why they created those schools to stop that.¹⁹ I wanted to go to college, to go to university but they didn't want me and I knew they didn't want me.

19 <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/schools-still-failing-black-children/> Bernard Coard

When I went to do my 11 plus and saw the questions, I thought this wasn't fair because they hadn't taught me any of it, so what chance had I got. I did what I could and what I didn't understand I put a line right through it and I wrote on it that it wasn't fair. I knew they didn't want me and I really wanted to go to those institutions. It was only when I went to jail that I found out how clever I was.

My first secondary school was Heald Place, and then I went to Old Moat. They both threw me out for bad attendance. It was religious education and the teacher said to me 'we are having a test today, you might as well stop and do it Pereria, you are never here, but since you are here today you may as well do the exam with the rest of them'. To keep an eye on my mischievousness she always made me sit in the front row but she sent me to the back of the class to do the test. I loved religious education. I used to go to about three churches so I knew a lot about it. I knew I had done well and about three weeks later I am back in class for the results. I will never forget a word she said for as long as I live. She said 'First in the class' - of course her star pupil, who I used to have to sit next to at the front. 'Second in the class and he couldn't have cheated because I sent him to the back of the class, Francis Pereria.' I got up and said 'I should have been first' – I couldn't help it. She had made a bad remark about me. By saying 'You couldn't have cheated' she was implying to all the class that normally I copied from her favourite student.

If kids didn't turn up do you think the teachers cared?

They didn't bother. There were very few of us in schools, particularly in my school Old Moat, there can't have been ten black kids in the whole school.

When I was 9 the doctor who brought me in to the world, Dr Vallance, a wonderful man, from Brunswick Health Centre, (now been named after him)²⁰. He said to me 'Francis, you need a break from this ghetto, out of this slum where you have been worked like a work horse. I am going to get you to get into this school, Moreton Hall. I am going to tell them you have got asthma'. 'You will have your own bed, your own room, everything, I might be able to get you in for a couple of terms but it won't be more than that. It will give you a break' and I said 'yeah, yeah, yeah' and he did too, he got me in for two terms.

The first day I went in the dining hall. The whole school was eating dinner and I swear that the whole f-ing dining room froze for a split second and why – BECAUSE I WAS BLACK. I couldn't believe it. It was like all the knives and forks stopped in a room of about 200 white kids.

Great Moreton Hall in Congleton – oh I loved it, I had my own bed, sheets and pillows. I had never seen anything like it before, it was like fairy dream land and in a castle as well!!!! I thought wow – is this real? I had to pretend and put on my asthma!!!. I was a street boy, I came from the ghetto to this posh school where they were doing italic handwriting, six in a class – in a castle. I was nine years old, and I felt like royalty.

You go to prison – how old are you?

Well the first time was 1966 – when the World Cup was on. I got three months detention at Buckley Hall²¹ in Rochdale from dealing with immoral earnings. I wasn't a pimp in the sense that I had women around the place. Because I could drive, the women used to come and ask me – this was before I went to Prison for it – to take them to Bradford. I would take about 4 or 5 of them and we would share the money. £50 then was like six months wages, it was a lot of money. As for pimping and having women, I was never a pimp I was more of a front man, a blagger²²– that was my job.

Stan Finni says, and he is of course talking about his own family not all families, when you see that is a way to live, it is an easy way of life to copy. Do you agree?

1957, I was ten, the Prostitution Law didn't come in until 1959 – I was driving and doing things that no 10 year old kid should be doing and all you see is women selling themselves.

I used to be frontman for the Maltese gaffes²³ where GIs would be lined up outside and I would be ticking them off in a book - how many were going in and if they had been in there too long, I'd go and bang on the door and say 'come on mate, you have been in there too long someone else is waiting'. It was a business, as far as I was concerned.

21 After WW2 the old mansion was demolished and Buckley Hall Young Offenders Institution was built in its place, The site acted as a prison for young males until 1989.

22 Someone who could sell ice to the Eskimos.

23 Urban slang for houses

I was looking after it for the Maltese. If you see these things when you are growing up what are you supposed to think!

In 1959 when they made it against the law for a woman to solicit or prostitute themselves on the street and around the same time 1960 they brought in the drug law. I used to buy the Philon (sic) for the girls. 10 In a tube for half a crown, which was 2 and six in old money and I would get a whole box of them. Then it wasn't illegal to buy 'speed' at the chemist because there was no drug law then. The girls would drink wine and take the vials to work all night. I used to work for all the girls, do the cleaning and lighting the fires, especially in winter.

You were only young then but now do you consider this was society's perception of white women – of all of our mothers as being prostitutes. Did you never make the connection between the two ?

Oh yes course, society would look upon it like that – any white woman who went with a black man would be seen as a prostitute – even when we grew and travelled the country you would get that from being with white girls. Mixed raced lads as we are, 'oh she is with a black man', because they looked upon us as black men, (the white people did), so she has to be a prostitute, it was automatic – she has got to be one.

Was there no point when you felt you were adding to that perception?

No not really. We were just basically living our lives I think – I don't think we looked upon it as adding to anything – they created a path for us and we just followed it – until we got fed up of it and turned to something else which is what I did. I thought that is just a waste of time, I can't just sit around waiting for others to bring in money.

Barrie George talks about a generation of boys who ended up with a criminal record.

They went out of their way to give you one. One of the greatest Judges who I went before and who used to argue with the police all the time was Bamber a magistrate and I went before him so many times I couldn't believe it. The clerks of the Court used to say 'You can't let Francis Pereria go again, you let him go last time'. I was a bugger, taking and driving away, lots of little things, not really criminal criminal, just mischievous things more or less and he knew it. He had looked at my school report and he had seen

that I had the potential to being something really good but I wasn't really given the opportunity. I was always on his books. If I was in Court he would want me, and if they tried to switch me and put me before another judge he would go mad 'I want Francis Pereira here'.

You said that there was a stage when you wanted to go to university, you wanted that kind of lifestyle?

Yes, I wanted to learn and I wanted to go to all these places and see what it was all about because I think I had the intelligence to further my education and become something, but the system didn't want me.

Is there anything in particular that you wanted to be?

Yes a philosopher!!

Well that is the African in you!!

To help guide people in the right direction to achieve their fulfilment. I have helped a lot of people who had been on another path and I have seen the results. I don't want any reward, it just pleases me to see that they did take the other choice and go the way that I said they should.

Let's bring you back to your young teens. I am like the kid of the family and I grew up with a myth of who were the leaders of Moss Side and Hulme of which you were one, can you name some of the others?

Well yeah, there was a firm of lads really. There was Jimmy Cole, Johnny Tottoh, Tommy and Alan Toby, Colin Williams, he was a friend of Alan's, I used to like him. The late Ray Coleman and a big white lad, Big Bernard from Cheetham Hill, also no longer with us.

My cousin John (Tottoh) said that he always imagined that our Jimmy (eldest cousin) who was white had such an easy life and so John (I use his own words) 'wanted to be white'. Mike Mayisi said he was shocked when he finally had a real conversation with his dad to learn he thought Mike had it easy because he was half white. We have already said none of us had it easy because on the street we weren't half anything but black. We also have fathers who came from lifestyles so far removed from 'here' that they imposed incredible violent control of their sons.

My father was very educated, but very ignorant at the same time. It was because he didn't know and I understand that he didn't know what I wanted. His concern was to teach me what he had to teach me and love didn't come in to it and it was probably the same way he was brought up. Love may as well be a 'white' word created for marriage.

The way they got beaten some fathers beat their sons in the same manner. Do you think that shaped how your generation turned out?

Yeah, it shaped us because we had no direction no real leaders and the ones who did become stand out like John Conteh²⁴. He was a great boxer until he messed up and shamed us.²⁵

And John Tottoh as a boxer who did he look up to?

Well naturally he would be looking to his own father who was a literary man my Dad told me because he used to go round and help. My Dad was good like that. They were never allowed to come out the house hardly when they were lads – Johnny and Alan, because I think their mother had left and left the kids with him. Dad told me about that.

Of course I understand why he was like that – I can't blame him for anything really and he did do good. On average I think we were one of the best families to come out of Moss Side from those times. I look at all the families and there are not many that I can say much for, to tell you the truth. Some of them have been right bastards, some of them have tried, half of the families have tried and half have been bad. There have been very few - the only one who has escaped and not had any problems I think was Francis Asuma – his son joined the metropolitan police force but then he resigned because of racism. His daughter Francesca became the first Black model for Marks & Spencer's store advertising.

My Dad never held my hand, never took me to the park, never told me that he loved me, he never did anything like that. We got all of that from Mum naturally, but never from our Father.

You are a Dad yourself are you different to your Dad?

Well I have never hit any of them, maybe I should have – it might

24 1974 WBC Light Heavyweight Champion

25 An excessive lifestyle of alcoholism and an assault led to a premature decline of his skill.

have done them some good! I tried to guide them in the right direction, but they wouldn't listen! I did wrongs myself to put them in the best schools. I didn't do anything here where I live, they were done in London, Birmingham, Bristol, all over, but not here. You don't shit on your own doorstep. You make your money out there and bring it home.

Do you tell your boy children that you love them?

Oh yeah, always. Even today, every time my son speaks to me, both of them, they finish up with they love me, because I always told them as they were growing up. I would take them to the park, take them on the bike, play football with them, everything a father should do and try and guide them in the right direction. But when they get to a certain age they want to go their own way and there is nothing you can do. You can't tie them down and force them to do it, but you try and guide them in the right way but they don't listen. Natalie, I put her in Howells school²⁶, one of the best schools in England, it cost me a fortune. She passed 11 passes in her 'O' levels²⁷ and if she had gone on she would have been brilliant, but she chose the Ghetto. Her choice, not mine. I give you life, I can't force you to do anything, I can only try and direct you.

My son is 22 now and was born in December 1988 and my mother died in February the following year. He was the last one Mum held in the family. She had a heart attack at home and by the time she got to the hospital she had died. She'd had several attacks. After so many kids it had weakened her heart. She had been advised not to have the last one but she had 11 already so she wasn't going to stop.

It was the first time I had ever seen Dad cry and I was quite shocked really because I had never ever seen him cry.

For about six years Dad had been travelling back to Africa on business. Mum knew he had two kids out there, she wasn't daft. But he hadn't married her yet. He couldn't because Mum was still alive. I knew because I had been out there and seen them and he would say 'this is your Mum' but I would say 'forget that extended family business, I am sorry I am not interested, I don't want anything from these out here'.

Did you all regard your Mum as the Queen of the family?

26 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howell's_School_\(Denbigh\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howell's_School_(Denbigh))
27 A UK academic qualification now defunct.

Yeah, without a doubt. She was the one who did everything, took care of everything, not him. She clothed us from catalogues²⁸, she did all sorts of things to keep us smart and looked after. She would set traps for him and rob him to get money out of him. Mum broke in to his back room and rigged his pools coupon once to make him spend money. He thought he had won and he splashed out and came out with some hidden money. We said ‘He is going to find out’ and of course he bleeding did!! He phoned Vernons!²⁹

There is something familiar about this locked room – they all had them. Do you think it is their little Africa?

Oh yeah. We had a locked back room, padlocked and we used to unscrew the hinges – we weren’t going to break the padlock. Inside was all his hidden stuff – he had loads of books and in his books he used to hide money. Shelves full of books and electrical parts, because he used to make radios. In his spare time he would go into the little box room next to the toilet upstairs. In those houses on Fairlawn Street - you couldn’t even get a single bed in there.

Yes all the Africans had them – it was their own private little domain I imagine especially when they had so many kids – some didn’t have that many but they still had the locked room where they could go into their own little world, their own time out as you might say, because I think they must have had their own place like that in Africa.

How they all gathered behind closed doors to talk their own language is almost sacred isn’t it?

It is and our Mothers shouldn’t really have stopped them teaching it to us – but a lot of them did because basically they didn’t want secrets to be had between the fathers and the children. That is the main reason why we didn’t learn it. Dad wanted to teach us from when we were babies, but Mum stopped him and she told me that was her reason. The Indians do it though don’t they – they manage two languages.

28 Buying clothing and paying for them weekly

29 Football pool, often collectively referred to as “the pools”, is a betting pool based on predicting the outcome of top-level association football matches taking place in the coming week. Littlewoods, Vernons and Zettors were the most famous companies.

I was the eldest, he wanted to teach me his language but it didn't happen so I can't pass it on, because it wasn't passed to me. As the eldest boy my job was to look after the rest of the family.

It was my responsibility, so he had to teach me everything that he knew regarding looking after a family – not education or future studies. My job was to take over the care of them should anything happen to him before we became adults.

Leslie Johnson questions specifically to Nigerians, what is this secret about their lives? Do you think we are secretive people?

Oh Yeah, I think we are – I think we are very good people deep down – the majority are, deep down. Never mind this 419³⁰ – it's one of those things, the British dominated them and ruled them like they did everywhere and they'd just sucked countries dry, inside and out. We know that from the history we were allowed to read. And they did their worse in Africa. They scream about the Holocaust but there were 6 hundred million of us that were slaughtered in the African Holocaust– who gives a damned about that?

What was your Dad's attitude to the English? My Dad kowtowed – you know he was called Thomas: gentleman Tom, doubting Thomas. My Dad made himself subservient to the English.

My old man was the same. They all had that sort of thing, I don't know why. Then on the opposite side there was this militancy especially for independence; he was part of the African Union. They all met at Dad's house in Fairlawn Street including a few top Africans like Kwame Nkrumah.

They faced a lot of barriers here with '*behind the door racism*', which was very, very strong and unbelievably powerful. It must have been very hurtful to them because they had fought in the war. They weren't stupid. They could feel they were not wanted. No wonder they wanted to go back home where you know you are wanted and accepted and can do a lot of help with what you have learnt from your travels.

30 'The black money scam'. 419 refers to the article of the Nigerian Criminal Code dealing with fraud

But Tunde Moses said, and, I think he speaks for many, he said he couldn't go home because his family didn't understand, he had to go home as a success.

Basically, they all felt like that and which 'third world country' doesn't expect their child to leave and come back a success; that is the norm. That is what prevented a lot of them from returning - the too high expectation of their success. For my Dad when the ships came in – it was pure shopping lists from his family. He had to send boxes and suitcases of things back via the seamen who delivered them to his Mum and brothers – clothes and everything, because they didn't have many things if any.

Many families paid to send one child, the brightest over to England so you had to be successful to help them. And this is how it is done in so many countries that endured colonisation.

I don't think he had any regrets about coming to England. He was strict but he was also a happy man and he must have loved children otherwise he wouldn't have had so bloomin many. Yeah, yeah, he was a happy man but who wouldn't be, surrounded by kids all the time, but that is what he liked. He always talked about going back home and he did eventually in the later years when we all got older - we sent him back. I went back before he did to meet his mother, then we went together and he got to spend time with her before she died.

He is buried with my Mum – he couldn't escape that!! I'd promised her, 'Don't worry Mum I will make sure he is with you when he goes, he is not going to Africa. You gave your life to him – he belongs to you, not to anyone anywhere else' – because you know, she knew about his other children. I suppose in some sense it was his way of leaving his roots in the land of his forefathers, and he had a right to leave his seed in his own land for his family. Let's face it, none of us would have been born if he never left there to come and fight in a war for a country that had already exploited him. So I do understand that aspect of it and I was never really nasty towards him about it even though I knew he had her there, out there, and me Mum over here.

Throat cancer took Dad. They cut it out, but it wouldn't heal. They say he was 76 but I think he was about 86. They all told lies about their ages you know and they got away with it. I think he was a lot older, at least 10

years older.

I was expecting it to happen really, because they were operating on him and he was saying that he could see Salawu and Babbington waiting for him. That they were waving to him and calling to him and I am saying 'well I can't see anybody Dad' and he said 'yes they are there waiting for me'. I said 'well what can I do?' At least there was communication between us, then he died the next day.

Yeah, he was calling all his dead friends who had gone already, they were waiting for him – so maybe that is what the spirit world is all about – maybe first you go to where your village and blood line came from - maybe my mother went to hers.

You do miss them. I miss me Mum as well. I have totally changed especially over the last 20 years. I went to Africa. I spent the 7 years out there and saw so many things. I learnt how my people suffer in this world. If they don't have anything – they just die right there.

I feel free when I am there – I was born here but I don't feel free here. When I am there I feel free even though there is a lot of crime it's irrelevant because my spirit feels free when I am in Africa. You can't explain it unless you too have been there. When I come to a European country this weight comes on me and problems come on me, but when I go to an African country, all that burden seems to go and I am able to use my mind and make things happen whereas I can't do that over here.

I think that is why they all had their little rooms, it must have been like a haven for them to go to.

CHAPTER 10

PAUL CHARTEY MARBELL *by his son Billy*

'My dad gave 67 years to this country building a life, working and raising a family. When he died he was 84 years old...'



Paul Chartey Marbell



Billy Marbell



Daisy Marbell (1994)

My dad gave 67 years to this country building a life, working and raising a family. When he died he was 84 years old. I have got friends whose fathers died at ninety seven! There are some fathers still living.

People say we have just come!! Uuumm I know for a fact there have been African people in London 200 years ago and there was a lot of mixed race too. Maybe not exactly 200 years, but there were – even in Queen Victoria’s times - there were a lot of black people here and mixed race children. And I think she even made a comment at one time saying that there were too many black people mixing with the locals. Obviously she didn’t like it.

I always knew I was different to my friends, my white friends that is, compared to them I always knew I was different. I don’t know about you, but I remember going to places as a child and they’d all say ‘oooh let me feel your hair’ you know and things like that. I always knew I was different.

I am British but some days I can walk down the street, probably the same as you, in an area where there are not many black people and they will just assume that you are from Jamaica or African or America even. They don’t or won’t let you be British –

Maybe that is why my dad’s moods would change. There were times when he was a happy man but there were times when he would be not so happy. It might have just been how hard it was at the time, you know, I think even white people during those days were unhappy at times.

I think though, if it wasn’t for the women, our Mothers, because they helped the Africans a lot, I think it would have been harder if it wasn’t for our Mothers. Most of the women who the Africans were with were white and there weren’t a lot of black women around.

Mum? She was OK but it must have been hard for her. But I know families who had it harder, but I don’t think I will mention their names, but it was hard for some of them.

Mum’s maiden name was Daisy Walsh, she came from Oldham. Her family stayed in touch but there was a distance, a coldness that even as kids Kathleen my sister, brothers David and Edward and I could sense. They married in 1949 and went to live in a house in St Bees Street owned by a Ghanaian, Mr Nelson, and he came to England in 1911! Later we moved

to Hulme to Cuba Street. We all lived together until, I think Kathleen was around eighteen and left home to get married.

The neighbourhood was brilliant. We lived in a small back to back and at the time I didn't really realise it was a ghetto until I saw a television documentary and they were saying how Hulme was a ghetto. To me, it wasn't a ghetto. I didn't see it that way. It was a community, in fact where I am living now is OK but you don't know as many people as you did in them days. I think that the community spirit has gone out of this nation.

Dad came to England as a merchant seamen working as a Stoker. He arrived in 1947, he was about 27 years old. He stayed in Liverpool for a while before moving to Manchester sharing lodgings with other Africans until he moved in with Mum.

When I was a kid growing up Dad worked on the railways greasing the parts then he moved up the work ladder to stand on the ticket barriers. I don't know if he was in the Worker's Union but he was definitely an active member of the Ghanaian Union attending meetings at St Gerard's. St Gerard's was on the corner of Denmark Road facing the police station. He didn't really mention the war very much. But I know at that time he was in the Merchant Navy.

I think when I was younger Dad found it hard to show affection. Mum was the face of the family. Like with school, it was always Mum who dealt with stuff like that. He used to tell us to study and do our work but that was about it.

My Dad loved cooking, he was brilliant. I asked him once 'How did you learn to cook like that Dad?' and he said 'I was the first born and I used to watch me Mother do it'. He was always with his Mum when he was little and that is where he learnt to cook, off his Mum. He used to cook and everything, I liked his food. I liked me Mother's food.

I cook myself and I try and get the same taste but I can't always get it like he got it. I will make something and think 'it's almost like my Dads that'. Isn't that funny?

Yeah, yeah. He used to be a brilliant cook my Dad. All his friends used to come and say what a fantastic cook he was. He was a brilliant cook he was. They would all eat and talk and it was OK. It was OK.

I learnt a little bit of his language but that was later. When his friends visited - well it was his private time, men's time.

I remember getting the belt now and then for making a noise in bed (laughing). He used to come up with the belt once or twice so I used to move to the wall and put me brother on the outside. He was younger my brother and I shouldn't have done it really!!

He was a good looking man and for special events he wore African clothes. I still have all his African clothes. He was smart my Dad. He used to wear a Trilby and dress up smart. Most of the Africans were smart in their appearance. He had lovely shoes; brogues, snakeskin ones and two toned shoes. I used to polish them, that was my job!

I came to know my Dad better after I sort of fell out with my Mum. Not really falling out with her but like most kids I used to argue with her. In time I stopped being a typical 'mummy's boy' and got closer to my Dad. This meant that questions I used to ask Mum I began to ask my Dad.

I became so close to him that he took me to Africa, sharing with me his African life. Two of his brothers had died in a car crash so we went to the funeral. I was closer to him yeah, he was more my Dad. Not that I saw him that often (laughter) because I was dumped at me Uncle's. It was a nice house and his wife looked after me. Every couple of days Dad would come round and take me out, you know. It was brilliant, I loved it.

About 1964 he went home to Ghana again for 6 months and when he came back it was almost like he had been away for too long and he and Mum separated. Since then I have been back three times and I have no doubt that I will be going again soon.

I was still living with him then but in the later years, he spent most of the time on his own. He lived in Tristram Walk Hulme and behind Alexandra Road close to Gooch Close. He lived down there near the Medical Centre. I used to go round and take him to the hospitals, do his shopping, almost everything he needed.

As an older man he was mellow, he didn't go out very much. He had a friend who he used to go and see all the time. But more and more he sort of got sad.

I don't think he ever regretted coming to England. He used to say

to me Ghana used to be nice in the Colonial times when the British were occupying it. Yes, I am sure he liked being here. I had a different opinion to Dad – I was a bit more radical about things.

When he became really ill he asked me if I could take him back. To sell up and take him back and go and live there, but I had my responsibilities here and my children here. Even if I had wanted to go, with his condition it would have been terrible, so I didn't take him back. The truth was I couldn't take him back so instead I moved him in with me and I looked after him.

Living with me allowed him to be more central to the family, especially my two children. I wish I had been closer to my children. I was close to them but I used to work away a lot in Germany and that, but I was still close to my children.

He was a different kind of man with the grandchildren. Yes he had mellowed, most people do. You get a second chance with grandchildren now your children have grown up. Father, he was brilliant. And not just with my kids. Our Kathleen had about ten children and she has got a lot of grandchildren, I don't even know all their names to be honest with you.

I can remember my great grandmother on mother's side, my grandmother, then there was mum who had us, my generation and I had children and they have children. So there are six generations that I can remember.

On father's side I knew my grandfather and grandmother then it's down to my father, me and then my children – that's another five generations. I have got pictures of them, pictures of me with them.

I have had conversations with my Father since he has been dead.

I've still got his ashes and I don't know what to do with them. ... My intention was to take them back but when I went and I spoke to some of the family and looked at the situation, I thought - when somebody dies over there they normally have a big celebration and most of the people of me Dad's age had gone, so it was like my generation – and I didn't want to bother them to have a service and all that really so I never took the ashes.

There are things that I wish I would have told him but it was kind of too late. Well it is too late now.

I would have liked to have told him that I loved him.

I didn't actually say the words. But I would give him a kiss on his head. (Look what you have done to me....)

I think I showed it looking after him you know – (I am getting all tearful)

I loved him, he knows I loved him.

I had quite a good childhood, but we had it tough didn't we.....?
Doesn't really help does it!

CHAPTER 11

RAZACH ISHOLA FINNI *by his son Stan*

'The fact is that their environment was wholly Africans. They went home to a white woman and they were the boss. So they didn't live in a mini England they lived in a mini Africa...'



Ras Finni with
Stan and Rita



May Finni



Finni men

I went to boarding school when I was seven because my Dad had the money and he wanted a better life for his children— all Nigerians like to educate their children, they don't see us as actors or performers, they see us as academics – as in Doctors, Solicitors, Barristers, Accountants or Dentists. People think it is only Asians parents that make these demands and it is not true Africans are just the same.

Our fathers came as a community of Africans, such as the Jaspers, the Pereiras, the Saidys, the Jawandos, and many more. They all came at the same time, they were all seaman – that was their way of getting out of the poverty, coming here, striving for a better life. Sadly they were too busy earning money by trading and working that they didn't speak to their children in their native tongue – they were too busy fighting off the prejudice and racism and they just didn't think how important it was. Even today, I see families with black mothers and black fathers, both Nigerian, both speak Yoruba¹, who don't speak to the kids in Yoruba and I ask the question, I ask 'why not?' But now younger generations they have started doing it. For example, nowadays the parents of a school kid in England, regardless if one or both of them are Nigerian, they will send their child back home to Nigeria for six weeks of the year, to become fluent in the language and study the culture to ensure that the heritage stays in place. My father Razach Ishaola Finni came to England during WW2 as an officer in the Merchant Navy. He had been to university to study agriculture. Raz was one of 6 brothers and sisters and all of them were well educated.

At one time we owned all the land around AFINNIH Lane in Lagos where the original family house was built. Great, great, granddad built the central mosque around 1870 and it is still standing there today, even though all the land has been redeveloped and now there are hundreds of traders in lace and material. Actually granddad was also a merchant travelling to Germany in the beginning of the 19th century.

My dad was a totally, absolutely immaculate man; I remember taking all his shirts to the Chinese laundry on Claremont Road, unfortunately it no longer exists. He never went out of the house without a tie, he was meticulously clean. Always wore a suit and shiny shoes, like they all did. He was a man of about 5 ft. 9, 5ft.10. He could be very arrogant at times, a disciplinarian; he could also be very violent.

1 A Niger–Congo *language spoken in West Africa.*

I remember him beating my Mum on several occasions. But he was a very, very clever business man with a passion for cooking. He was a wonderful man...He used to wear African dress, his Agbada² when he was going to important events like my wedding and when he went to the Pan African National Congress³, because my Dad was part of that. He was also a member of The African National Union and the Merchant Seaman's Union. I think there was ship that mutinied and I think my Dad had something to do with it but the details I no longer remember.

Sadly my Dad Like a lot of the men at that time profited from my Mum being a worker and she was a bit of a messer⁴ that is how Dad started his business. I don't mind you putting this in; it is why I want to write my own story. This chapter is just an outline of it; the foreword you might say to a complete publication that I am working on.

My Mum, May O'Neill, was of Irish descent - Romany Gypsy stock. It would have been a no go – a black being with a white woman... How her family reacted to the relationship is one question I can't answer, but I don't think they really cared. I reckon they probably met in one of two, three places: either the Big Alex,⁵ the Denmark⁶ or at the snooker hall on Moss Lane East, next to the Methodist Church.

I think my Mum was already working-when she met my Dad so there was money coming in and I suppose he thought 'why should I go back'. 'I do love her', but things just escalated because my Mum wreckless She had an affair with the Chief of Police at one time. She was a right rum'un.⁷

In the sixties my father was one of the first men, apart from Mr Odyusan, to own bookies even though they were illegal but that is part of another story. He liked to entertain and he used to entertain all the dignitaries and all the other illegal bookies - Arthur Roy, Arthur Bird, Gus

2 The Yoruba name for a type of flowing wide sleeved robe, usually decorated with embroidery, which is worn throughout much of Nigeria by important men, such as kings and chiefs, and on ceremonial occasions like weddings and funerals.

3 5th Pan African Congress 1945 at Chorlton on Medlock Town Hall

4 Local slang for someone who messes about, particularly immorally

5 Corner of Moss Lane and Princess Road Manchester. Demolished after the 1981 Moss Side Riots

6 Denmark Hotel, 349, Moss Lane East

7 A term you hear round Manchester for someone who likes misbehaving

Demmy father of sons Harvey⁸ and Selwyn⁹ Demmy. He couldn't run the bookmaking on his own, he had to have people on the race tracks be it Ascot or Chester, Wavertree all of them. An insider is how it worked. Dad's insiders were Jewish friends, from Bramhall.¹⁰ I remember them coming in their big posh cars!

He also had a shop on Denmark Road – Africans have always been traders and incidentally there were no Asian corner shops then – none! So Dad, Mr Finni had that shop plus his bookies¹¹, plus another shop on Moss Lane East and next door but one to it he had a café, The Monaco. He owned them, but he then lost them all.

May and Mr Finni started to live together at 4, Darcy Street then they bought 46 Fairlawn Street with the money she was earning. I suppose houses then were like £800. It's funny as a lot of boys lived on Fairlawn Street. There were very, very few West Indians, there were very, very few Pakistanis; there were Indians, West Africans, Polish and Irish – let's not forget 'No Niggers, No Irish, no dogs' – a true fact, I am witness to that.

Back in the day Tiger Freeman had about eleven houses. Like the Jews and Asians do now, we owned lots of properties. Mr Finni had 4, Darcy Street, 34 Greenheys Lane, 46 Fairlawn Street and 34 Lloyd Street where the 75 bus used to run down on a tram. Dad owned about five houses and he left them in the charge of a family member who happened to be a compulsive gambler and alcoholic.

Then the compulsory purchase order¹² came in and I think part of the Government's plan was to wipe out the communities, because we were very strong in the community and we owned properties. None of us were born in social housing – it wasn't council housing then, it was social housing. We weren't born in social houses, we owned our houses. The government pulled them down and robbed everyone of compensation.

8 Harvey Demmy *Promotions Limited*

9 Demmy The Bookmaker Limited

10 One of the most sought after residential postcodes in the UK

11 Slang for Bookmaker who takes bets (especially on horse races), calculate odds, and pay out winnings; the manager of a betting shop.

12 (CPO) is a legal function in the United Kingdom and Ireland that allows certain bodies which need to obtain land or property to do so without the consent of the owner. It may be enforced if a proposed development is considered one for public betterment

The Nigerian civil war¹³ had brought many changes including the currency which stopped being sterling and changed to the Naira¹⁴. They became equal tender so if you earned five pounds in Africa you earned five pounds here.

I think like a lot of the Africans my Dad stayed here because they had children, they had bought a house, they couldn't buy a house in Nigeria for the price you could here. Dad was happy in this country? Yes, he loved it. He loved England.

When Mr Finni came out of prison, he had lost everything and all he could rekindle was 34 Greenheys Lane. He got 18 months for doing something he didn't do. In fact he had taken the rap for someone else who attacked a man because he had been abusive to the woman serving him in the café. My father believed not only in justice but because he had what he thought was a good relationship with the police, he would be found not guilty. The course of history may have been different if he had stayed in England on his release but he didn't, his pride was dented. Dad was in Nigeria when they legalised bookmaking¹⁵ and he lost his patch¹⁶ to Arthur Roys.

Up until a certain age it was a happy household. I would say from about the age of seven it started to go wrong. There are five of us, David, me, Rita the third eldest, Richard and Rizi. When Mum had a drink she was a prolific liar! She always said that Rita was one of twins that she had tried to terminate but one, our Rita, lived.

Imagine the late fifties after the war when a pound was a pound and there were lots of jobs. You could go in to one job, leave it and walk into another job because the economy was booming in recovery from the war. The women that were with black men had to endure lots of abuse from white service men and from white English civilian men and women. May already had David. He may have been around ten years old when I was born. David took my Dad's name because Mr Finni loved David! It changed for David when Rita was born. Because she was a girl, Dad gave her all his

13 Also known as the Nigerian–Biafra War, 6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970

14 Nigeria issued the Nigerian Pound (NGP) at par with the British West African Pound after the Nigerian Central Bank was established on July 1, 1959. On January 1, 1973, Naira

15 1960 new Betting and Gaming Act

16 The locality (punters)of his bookmaking business

attention or so my Mum thought, but it wasn't.

I went to Private School, I think it was in Prestbury or Prestwich – I don't remember, I was seven going on eight. I can remember that Sylvia Bull used to take me to boarding school and Marcel William's¹⁷ mum. I used to speak awfully posh.

In the end the violence and beatings came to a head and they split up. I must have been about eight when my mum left and I went to live with my Nana Annie Lee. Richard went to Nigeria at the age of six or seven and became Rasheed. Rizi my youngest sister stayed with my Mum and was carted off to London and I was left to fend for myself at my Nana's. She was looking after me, but she was working, my Granddad was working and I was going to school on the bus and sometimes I didn't have the fare but I would still take the bus. If I went out, I would stay out, sleep at the Pereira's and then I would come home. The Pereiras were like a second family to me and in fact at one point Mrs Pereira nearly adopted me. There was more of a community spirit around then. We were just left to do what we wanted to do. We just roamed the streets. But we didn't roam the streets picking pockets and stealing handbags, we just roamed the streets.

Francis Pereira (his story has got to be number one in this book) and I used to make our money on Denmark Road market.¹⁸ It was a source for earning money. If I didn't work on the cake stall, I would work on the shirt stall and if I was lucky I made 2/6d, which was good wages. I think finding a source of income is instilled in us. I think it is just in our DNA because none of us really are lazy. We work, I mean all I have done in my life is buy and sell and that is what our fathers and ancestors did.

I need to tell you something. The people who inhabited Moss Side before we did as immigrants – were the Jews and as with everyone, people move on and generations move on, they moved up to Prestwich, and some moved to Hale and Whitefield etc. For me my community, Moss Side, gave me the happiest times of my life, even though I came from a broken marriage. It was happy, it was warm, you never went hungry, someone was always there to feed you and someone was always there to look after you.

17 Marcel King of Sad Sweet Dreamer <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8svzPLWwWkc>

18 <http://www.friendsreunited.co.uk/found-this-picture-in-manchester-central-library-of-denmark-rd-market-and-notic/Memory/5c13fc99-87ae-45a3-b5c1-08c0a77d65f1>

There was no paedophilia, there was no aggression and a pound was a pound. It didn't matter whether if I had money and you had no money because what is mine was yours. It didn't matter if you were black or white. In fact I have only been called a Nigger once and that was in the early seventies when I was selling encyclopaedias in Wales somewhere. I knocked on a door and a little girl answered and said 'Mummy there is a nigger at the door', but not in Manchester, it wasn't there – you couldn't even smell it!!!

I don't think that is the right analogy to give you by way of explanation but I will try. Today there are communities such as if you go to Prestwich or you go to Bury and you get a collection of streets that are mainly Asians. This might mean that there is a high representation of Muslim children in the local school. It was much the same in Manchester before the fifties to sixties. Because there were no West Indians, no Pakistanis. The immigrants were the Irish and the African, so that meant mixed raced children, back then it was half caste. So there were mixed race children, though it doesn't mean to say that there was total unity. There were many women who already had white children then married or moved in with black guys, so the colour never came in to it. It was a unity as one; it wasn't just that we might have outnumbered white people. When we went in to town we'd have white people with us, but they might be more mixed race. It is too simplistic to use the term unity, because we were all one.

I don't know how to describe it without being derogatory and it is too cliché to tell you even though it is true that my best mate was a white guy Alfie Carter. The Carters were a large family who used to live next door. Maybe Jide's son Leslie Johnson is a better example. Does he look white or not? But the question is, is he? How can you tell just by looking? There you go. Would you say 'we are getting the bus, but you are not coming with us because'.... It didn't happen like that. We were a community, it didn't matter if you were black, white, yellow, or pink – it didn't matter.

We are all born equal although I always knew there was something strange about me. Sadly many of us had no guidance. Black or white, it doesn't matter what colour you are - you need guidance and you need love. That love and that word, 'I love you' and the touch and feel of love. The only person Mr Finni loved and adored was Rita because she's a girl, his first daughter. She only needed to blink and smile at him and she would get what

she wanted, we lived in her shadows as far as he was concerned.

My Mum was a piss head basically. Oh my Mum, god bless her soul in heaven, she used to say 'I love you but I don't fucking like you'. She was a cracker, I loved her to death. May never went out without her make up on and always wore a wig of long black hair and had false eyelashes even when she was an old lady. She would leave the house in Moss Side, take her trolley and hobble, she had two false hips and was about 5ft 1. Off she would go hobbling to the 82 bus stop, to Chorlton, go to all the second hand shops, go to all the pubs and someone would phone me and say 'Stan you better come and pick your mum up' and I would say 'where is she?' 'In Weatherspoon's, on the floor'! The bugger!!¹⁹ Yes my Mother she was sound.

Our house was African. There was always an African pot. An African pot is either one meat or three meats. My Dad used to do two meats together, some people do three. Shin beef was one of his favourites and oxtail, with Garri which is like a corn meal, but it only becomes Eba²⁰ when you put hot water with it. It's like you doing mashed potatoes and eating it with your fingers. My Dad never ate English food, ever and he would never eat, (I shouldn't say this because it is racist), West Indian food because they used to fight with each other!

The fact is that their environment was wholly African. They went home to a white woman and they were the boss. So they didn't live in a mini England, they lived in a mini Africa. The question is why they didn't share their culture? Why did they leave us to find it out for ourselves? Many of us went to Africa and we couldn't speak the language. We should be fluent in Yoruba.

I stammered for a while and he made me stutter. You asked me if I loved him – no – I didn't love him because he was a bully. He used to beat me with lamp flex and a wooden spoon. If he came to look for me when I was playing out on the top of Fairlawn Street, he would snap privet twigs off and slap and beat me with them. I have always had spirit within me, a spirit that guided me through it.

19 Slang; 'a humorous or affectionate term : a silly old bugger; a friendly little bugger.

20 A stiff dough made by soaking gari in hot water and kneading it with a flat wooden baton

These inner voices were telling me to do things which I didn't understand then but I do now, so you ask me a question, did I love him? And I can categorically say, I did not love him.

I think he loved me a lot but I don't think he knew how to show his love to a boy. And I think he loved his mum, truly he idolized his mum. But you see there are reasons why emotions set in because in the beginning we are all born equal really.

I can remember Mr Jasper and my Dad, because they were like old Mothers together. They used to have a special whistle between each other. It was the way they communicated, as if they were talking together - like 'I'm here Raz'. And I remember my Mum hiding behind the headboard at 46, Fairlawn Street. The two of them were at the bottom of the bed and my Dad was going mad at my Mum while Mr Jasper was trying to calm him down. I have seen my mum with some bruises and bloody noses.

He always had good health but he got to a certain age when he gave up. My Dad mellowed and my Dad cried because he knew he had done wrong, and I knew he had done wrong. Even though I wasn't a spiritualist then, I could still read him. I think he was lonely and I think he regretted his life.

He was living in the shop on Bold Street, Moss Side. He couldn't understand why he had worked all his life and if he was late with one payment, they would send a court order or the bailiffs round. One time I bailed him out with £400 to prevent the bailiffs from coming - and a person shouldn't have to endure that. All his life he had paid his tax and into his pension, all his life. He went to prison because he had been framed because the police knew he hadn't done it and I think that is why he gave up. It's like someone getting a stroke and thinking 'fuck it, I don't care, I don't care, I am going to die anyway'. It's like when David told me he went into the Claremont pub one Saturday. He hadn't been there for over 25 years and the way he described it was, he walked in and couldn't believe what he saw. It was like everyone had given up – everyone had just given up in the pub, 'that's my tobacco, that's my pint' that's all they had.

I used to take Mr Finni to the pub every Sunday to the Pepperhill.²¹ It's a mosque now.

21 <http://sabotagetimes.com/travel/a-tribute-to-manchester-estate-pubs/>

I used to take my Dad there and he loved it because everyone knew him. People from when he had the shop and they used to go in to buy sweets after school and now they have kids and grandkids of their own like Les Johnson. (I like him.) He told me how it was good that he had managed to visit Mr Finni before he passed. I still loved my Dad (then), isn't love a funny word? I respected him because he was my Dad. He had been ill, caught a cold or something. It may have been his pancreas— I don't know but it doesn't matter now because what I do know is that spiritually he had given up. He just wanted to die. He died in hospital, he was 82.

In our culture the oldest child makes the funeral arrangements so even though I was in prison, I had to be consulted. I said to my sister Rita and my daughter Shola²² 'Do not bury him in this country because no one will go to the grave because it is not our custom'. Mind you I wasn't a spiritualist then. Now I know it doesn't matter, because when you go, you go.

There has to be irony in the fact that May died in Nigeria. What happened is she went on a visit and I picked her up from the airport, gave her a large brandy and took her home but she was very poorly and went into hospital and though the treatment was successful, it was the beginning of her demise and she lost loads of weight. After she was discharged I would go every day with food while she would be sneaking in a bottle of whisky and a bottle of Leibfraumilch²³ and drinking the lot. So I would arrive and many a time she would be off her head. My youngest sister Rizi owns a 12 bedroom guesthouse in Lagos and we both said 'she is not going to go into a nursing home'. So Rizi took her back and she had her last five years in Nigeria living like a Queen until she passed. I went over to bury her and I remember this as plain as day. We were in the morgue and even though I hate make up, I had to put her lipstick and rouge on and put her wig straight. I said 'Look at you, you're still there in your make-up, rings on and glasses on a chain'. I cut some of her hair to keep and I have her ashes. I am going to go to Chorlton and scatter them in the shops that she used to go in. She was as tight as a duck's arse²⁴ but it turned out she had a bank account, but I didn't get any of her money. Our kid got it, but she doesn't know that I know that.

I would ask Mr Finni why when my Mum was supporting him was he so bad to her. That is what I would ask him. I can't understand the beatings

22 Name after Stan the female of Ishola

23 A style of semi-sweet white German wine

24 Mean, excessively thrifty

he gave me because the discipline that was instilled upon him, he had no reason to impose on his own children. He should have come clean and apologise not only to my Mum but to me as well, to all his children. I never called him Mr Finni but the name is so synonymous with the personality he projected, it seems the right way to refer to him.

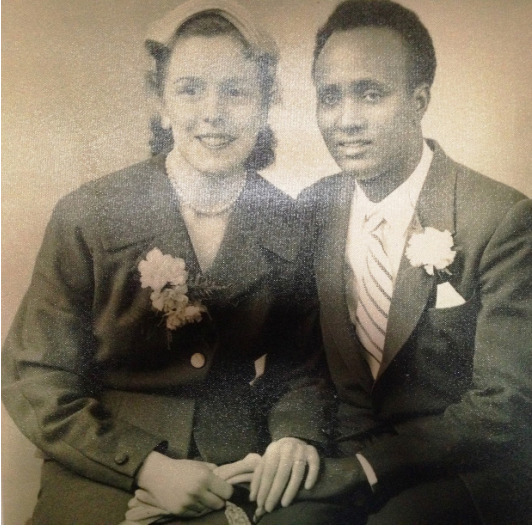
When it is my time to go over to the spirit world I will look for him to ask the same question. I too will be judged because we all have faults but I have always told and shared my love to all my children.

DISCLAIMER:

As with any family each child can hold a different aspect of memory of their parents. This is the case here. Stanley's brothers and sisters disagree with some of his memories and therefore do not support the overall detail of this chapter

CHAPTER 12

ADAM MOHAMMED ALI *by his daughters Farida & Yasma*



Mr & Mrs Ali

*'We never knew
Mum and Dad not be
together...'*



Awowo Adam relaxes on
ship



Awowo Adam

Don't know how he found time to sleep because Dad could fall asleep stood up. Truth is we hardly saw him. He was a teetotal work alcoholic. He didn't have a social life it was work, work, work and only then, possibly, sleep!

I think father was a poser. There is an old photograph where he was on this boat with a guitar. No shirt, on a boat and with a guitar. As far as we know he never played the guitar, so he might have just been posing. He was a good looking man. Black, tall, handsome, very well built, very strong, very proud and very loud!

We never knew Mum and Dad not be together. English born Marion Gent from Failsworth became Marion Adam Mohammed Ali. Note how she took father's full name - Mohammed Ali.

They met at a dance where they used to cover up the swimming pool, somewhere in Failsworth. That is all I know and remember. Dad did like his music because he used to have those twelve tracks with singers such as Marvin Gaye but Barry White was his favourite.

Their relationship wasn't accepted, but Dad was determined to constantly demonstrate to her family that he wasn't the perception they might have of a black man with a white woman; one who would mistreat and then leave them. Dad was driven to prove that he was a man of substance, which he was eventually. Initially it was a struggle, Mum stood by his side as his 50-50 partner so we had total contact with Mum's family and got invited to Christmas parties.

Mum had to become a Muslim before Dad could marry her. But not in a dictatorial sense like having to cover up but she did have to give up bacon beer and fags which must have been difficult for her.

If Mum could have got a bacon sandwich I am sure she would have loved one! But she respected Dad's wishes so we never ate one again. It was like an 'East is East' situation, like the film.¹ That is the closest to our family except no domestic violence and none of the extremities that you see there, but that clash of culture. Home was like that cartoon, all Mum used to have to say was 'wait until your father gets home' and that was it, everybody's behaviour used to change and whatever needed to be done, got done.

1 1999 British comedy-drama film written by Ayub Khan-Din set in Salford, Lancashire in 1971, a mixed-ethnicity family headed By Pakistani father George and an English mother

Dad taught her to cook, she got better but Mum could never really cook! Dad knew her cooking limitations were spuds and veg, that wouldn't have been enough for Dad. He had to teach her to cook rice and meat the way he liked to eat.

At that time Somalis were rare. There was a community connection because of the civil war so everyone was an uncle. He used to feed the Somali students making special food for them. They visited from all over the UK.

He was the main representative of his tribe, the Esa Musa, and the leader for refugees who came from his tribe and called on him. He would always be there. He used to drive to London and back to pick up families from the airport. Mum and dad's door was always open to any Somali that needed his support including Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud² and his children. Dad was the person that held all the families together, visiting them when they were sick or needed translation for doctors.

Any social life was an issue for him as he wouldn't go to places where there was alcohol, and anyway how would they find the time? They were always self-employed, always working. We did have holidays somewhere in Prestatyn, North Wales, called the Golden Sands where everybody used to go.

Mum was a strong character but she was quite willing to be amenable and that definitely suited Dad. God! our mothers must have been brave. You think racism exists now? Mum used to get on the bus with all five of us and people would spit at her. Can you imagine that happening in today's society?!! How difficult, how difficult, hard to imagine but they survived it didn't they?

Wearing his spectacles, he read the Telegraph and Guardian newspapers and when his eyesight went we, his children, would read the papers for him. He valued a good education even though he didn't have one and made sure all of us were educated. So we all went to private school. We came from an extraordinary level of affluence for a mixed race family fed on a diet of lamb chops and steaks which we complained about wanting sausages and chips like the other kids!!!

2 "Silanyo" was educated at the University of Manchester and began his presidential term in 2010

Dad would be shocked when we asked, Somalis do not eat sausages. We were brought up in Handforth then we moved to Sale.

He was a very, very proud man who liked nice things and knew good things. A meticulous dresser; Jaeger, Jacques Vertes, Windsmoor, the best of the best in those days. He didn't have the money to match his taste so he would take us all to the second hand shops in Alderley Edge³, so when we got clothes that were second hand, they were the very best of hand-me-downs⁴.

When our father became more successful in life he started taking us to Kendals and use to say to mum 'Right I am off Mariam to take the kids shopping' and we always came back with a short curly hair cut (Mum found it hard to brush our hair when we were young) and beautiful patent shoes and expensive fancy dresses and jackets for the boys.

Yasma - I used to love going shopping with dad.

He started driving the more expensive family cars - the more children - the later we use to come from home – the more we stopped by the Police! I remember many a night leaving the Plaza Cafe at 4 - 5 am in the morning. On this one occasion Dad was driving the latest model Renault and warned us, 'watch this we will be stopped !' And we were and he was addressed in the favourite words of the police 'Is this your car Sir – Licence etc and where have you come from?'

Dad realised he definitely needed a UK education if he was going to succeed as there were forms that needed filling in. He also quickly realised that doors opened easier to a white face over a black one. I think Dad would have said that these were still evident even later in his life experiences. Although Dad could do the physical side of everything, looking back Mum was also entrepreneurial because she became the 'face' of the business. Mum did the paperwork, dealt with the banks and raised five children, and she DID IT!!

Dad made sure that we knew that we are Somali first and everything else is after, even though in the main Somalis don't see mixed race children as Somali.

3 A village in Cheshire now often referred to as WAG (urban for footballer's Wives and Girlfriends)

4 A garment or other item that has been passed on from another person.

He sent us all to Somalia to live amongst the people, learn the language and live the culture. Our brothers never went into the kitchen, we did all the fetching and carrying, but from the African Culture - that was seen to be right as 'all these women in the house have to be responsible for the housework'. In a way I suppose it is correct as in the African culture and the World as a whole the man brings in the bread and butter and the women are the ones that butter it, so to speak!

We have never had any issue about identity, where you belong, where you are from, whereas a lot of people do have an ambiguity of not knowing their history or having any roots. We lived in Hargesia and were schooled there for over a year and half. We used to return regularly almost on an annual basis. Father also saw his family which meant gifts for everyone. No wonder he seemed to work like three men.

We knew Mum was going to die early. At 38 she had already been diagnosed with breast cancer. The mastectomy was successful but then the cancer came back with double vengeance. So mother's death wasn't sudden or a shock. Dad did what most men do when faced with the illness of someone they love; he threw himself further into work. He already operated the famous 24 hours Plaza Café on Upper Brook Street, he then bought a restaurant on Oxford Road next to the Johnny Roadhouse Music Shop.

Mum died young at 48 years of age. Our older brother was 28; Farida was 23 with six month's old twins. We had to fight my Dad for her headstone - an all singing, all dancing one.

Dad couldn't have coped on his own. He was a typical black man and a Muslim man too. It didn't take him long to remarry, not somebody younger but someone with whom he could have companionship. It was a bit strange really because his second wife had known our Mum. The marriage lasted. She is 70 something now, looking after her 97 year old mother, phenomenal. She's English but a very devout practicing Muslim woman, who wears the hijab,⁵ prays and knows the Koran - Mum didn't do any of that!

Being Muslim, as he got older he got more entrenched in his faith. He was very clear that you come in to this world with nothing and you leave with nothing.

5 Literally "covering up" in Arabic

Towards the end he was in a lot of pain and it was comforting that all the family stayed close by him.

His wife was physically able to look after him; she and we did what we could do even if it meant just being there for the two of them.

Dad had to be admitted into hospital as the pancreatic cancer worsened. When he died we respected his wishes to be buried the next day and we got on with living but to this day missing his words and support greatly. He never suggested that he wanted to be buried at home in Africa.

Mum is buried here and Dad too in the Manchester Muslim cemetery. In Islam when anybody is buried women are not allowed to attend the burial. It sounds quite callous really, but I suppose it is done so the women are not exposed to such areas of emotions and extreme sadness.

Yasma says 'you are born a Muslim and you die a Muslim. You are born in your faith, you die in your faith no matter happens in between.'

Farida is not necessarily a practicing Muslim but very clear that on official documents she is recorded as a Muslim.

Farida says 'I am a Muslim and my heritage is Somali. I have worked with people who are lost in their identities. I have none of that. The issue of racism, of where you belong whether it is within black families, or white communities, I have none of that confusion because my Dad sent us to Somalia where we were surrounded by black people.'

I am 52 now. I was 8 when we left England to live in Africa where everybody is black and we were the odd ones out. They called us Arrabadigas which meant that we were Arabs, because we were light skinned compared to them. Here we are just seen as black this and black that, but the Somalis didn't see us that way... Dad was very keen for us to see that there is a black power of different identities. I think that it was a brilliant thing that he left all of us. I have no doubt of whom I am and where I am from.'

For Farida even though her children were born outside of a Muslim marriage she is proud to say her father accepted her children totally, he didn't differentiate.

Yasma married a Somalian. Her father orchestrated the introduction

that led into a love match. Her six children have grown knowing the best of their three countries; the UK, Hargesia⁶ and the UAE they have taught them to let go the tainted and bad and take the best of the three wherever they go.

Muslims are very much of the belief that life is predestined. Everyone is born with a book with their name on it and although people think they can change what is written; destiny is destiny.

But one has to remember, it was what we do with our destiny like our father that matters 'From seaman to businessman - Rest In Peace Dad - may your time in the grave be peaceful, full of light and may you smell the sweetness of Heaven – Until we will meet again on the Day Of Judgement'.

6 A city in the north-western Woqooyi Galbeed province of Somalia. It is the second-largest city in the country after Mogadishu, the national capital.

CHAPTER 13

ALFRED LAWRENCE *by his daughter Coca*



Coca and Baby



The Lawrence Family



Lawrence Men

'I consider myself to be Black British but when I was young I identified more as African because Dad always taught us to, 'hold our heads up high'...'

Mr Alfred Lawrence was illiterate but he had entrepreneurial skills and used them to sell black-eyed peas and red beans as lucky charms. He could buy and sell anything, turning a shilling into a pound. He also took advance notes¹ from other seamen to tide them over until pay day.

He worked on the ships as a cabin boy on the Blue Liners² from about 14 years of age. He told us that his captain had false teeth and it was the first time he had seen any. They were soaking in cold water in the cabin and scared the life out of him he really believed they represented Juju.³

On one trip the ship docked in Cardiff and he just decided to stay. I think this was about 1920.

In 1927 he moved to Manchester and my sister (Kath Locke⁴) was born in 1928. At first the family lived in rooms rented from Jewish people in Greengate Salford.⁵

As an elder, the younger Africans would look to him for guidance and he had his favourites such as Mr Gasper who was a mechanic and that made him very proud and Tiger Freeman for his business skills.

In 1929 he met Jomo Kenyatta⁶ and father played a role in the

1 Documents promising the future payment of money on account of a seaman's wages conditionally on his going to sea and made before the wages have been earned—are void, and no money paid in respect of an advance note can be deducted from the wages earned, Merchant Seamen (Payment of Wages and Eating) Act, 1880

2 Hull Blyth & Co Ltd is the remnants of the "Blue Funnel Line".

3 Refers specifically to objects, such as amulets, and spells used superstitiously as part of witchcraft in West Africa.

4 <http://blackfeministsmanchester.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/reflection-kath-locke-a-historical-assessment/>

5 The first Africans known to have lived in Manchester were purchased domestic slaves in approximately 1757. Until 1894 aside from fugitive and freed slaves no 'black community' evolved. From the opening of the Manchester ship canal in 1894, black seamen began to arrive in Salford docks and from then until the First World War, a few took lodgings in the part of Ordsall closest to the canal, a district which became known to locals as 'Little Africa'. During WW1 conscription West Africans from Ethiopia and Sierra Leone arrived to work as seamen and dockers. This led to what the local police named 'Salford's black quarter': the Greengate district a close-knit black community (mostly West Africans, but a few West Indians and black Americans) until the eve of the Second World War. Source Professor Bill Williams [The Black Communities of Ordsall and Greengate, 1896-1930](#) (abridged)

6 1961 President of the Kenya African National Union

Pan African Meeting 1945 and was a member of the 'Buffs'⁷, a society very similar to the Masons⁸.

As with a lot of Africans he couldn't get any work but he was nothing if not inventive and in 1933 he moved his family to Blackpool⁹. An old Japanese man gave him a stall on the Promenade. In 1934 he hosted his first African show as The Chief.

To entertain the crowds he walked on glass, did illusions by changing women into snakes and kept a live crocodile. Leah Grant, a mixed race woman from Liverpool, was one of his dancers. We kids were forbidden to talk to him in English outside the home to keep the illusion of him alive and popular.

Although he wasn't a 'real' drinking man, he would go to the pubs in Blackpool but he liked to come back to Manchester at the weekend to spend time with his countrymen. He was a popular face on the Blackpool scene and formed a friendship with the Chief of Police which was to prove useful if not a life-saver for two African American servicemen who wandered into town one night breaching the segregation curfew¹⁰. When the Military Police tried to arrest them a Sandgrown'un¹¹ suggested they were visiting Mr Lawrence and they were quickly dispatched to meet Dad. Later they became regular visitors. The travelling bug in him also took him to Cardiff and Liverpool.

Blackpool wasn't all good though. For example, when we first moved the neighbours were so angry to have a family move in where the father was black and the mother white that our Mum came home one day to find the neighbours had changed the lock to the door so she couldn't get in.

He continued his performance until war was declared. When peace finally came he tried to return but the Japanese man had disappeared and he couldn't get a decent place on the prom.

7 http://www.raob.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=64

8 <http://lodgeofhappiness.org.uk/>

9 <http://www.localhistories.org/blackpool.html>

10 Jim Crow in Britain <http://www.bulldozia.com/projects/index.php?id=293>

11 People originating from Blackpool (people originating from Morecambe and Southport) are *Seasiders*

By 1946 he had started to get homesick so we moved back to Manchester in 48. He wanted to get something going collectively with other Africans but no one was interested.

He called England 'Motherland' and while that might make him appear a royalist, it most definitely was not the case. He was 100% African. He never referred to anybody by their nation states. He would refer to somebody as Igbo, Yoruba Amhara,¹² Mandé,¹³ Wolof,¹⁴ all by their African linguistic group. He never described anyone as Liberian, or Nigerian. It was always in their linguistic group!! He would refer to places by what they produced. For example Liberia, was literally always the Firestone Country.¹⁵

I think Mum and Dad were introduced by Uncle, Ernest Mark, who later became Kath's Godfather. They married in 1928 at the Holy Name Church Oxford Road. A little later that year my mother was born, christened and confirmed in the same church.

Our mother Ada was very petite, probably about four foot eight. She was a Primary School teacher when they met but after marrying our father, the school sacked her and she became a seamstress. She was strict and also very, very practical; she could cook anything, making meals out of very, very little.

A First World War widow she already had two children, Tommy and Madge. Then along came Kath, me Coca, Aida and Danny. They kept the family together by doing everything they could to make ends meet.

He was a strong believer in education and progressing yourself, going forward and learning so that the next generation did better than the last. When I went to school dyslexia wasn't even a known issue so I was constantly in trouble for failing to complete written work. Dad always said 'There is nothing wrong with Coca, she is slow but sure. Slow but sure.'

Mum was teetotal and Dad maybe had a couple of Guinness now and again but that would mainly be when people came round and that would be that; though he did keep a bottle of rum in the bedroom for medicinal

12 Ethiopian

13 West Africa

14 Senegal, the Gambia, and Mauritania.

15 The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company had a rubber plantation in Liberia that covered more than 4,000 square kilometers (1 million acres).

purposes. Parties would be more about food and children's parties were organised around cake.

Quite a lot of people would come around and talk to our family. We were always seen as good neighbours. Mr Marks our Jewish neighbour had the Chemist on Denmark Road and would come quite often to the house and ask Dad for things. Across the road was a haulage company owned by Sikhs and they also sought him out. He was always helping our neighbours whether they were Sikh or Gambian, whether they were Senegal, Jewish or white.

He also talked to me a lot because he was willing to talk about what he had been through in both the First and Second World Wars. What it was really like and how hard it was on the ships. Most of the Africans toiled in the engine rooms because they were big and strong. The engine rooms required a lot of physical strength whether they were coal fired or oil fired ships. Their job was a physically arduous task because without the engine, you have no hydraulics, you have no power and the ship can't sail.

He used to tell what happened when they went 'into action'¹⁶. They would batten down the hatches¹⁷ and an officer would stand over them with a pistol, keeping them at their post, even if the ship was hit. So if the ship was hit, they went down with the ship often as they were sailing in freezing cold weather.

His final trip happened because father left his papers on the train and had to go and retrieve them. His brother Danny went ahead and joined the crew of the first ship¹⁸ with Dad getting on the second. He saw his brother's ship torpedoed with all lives lost. Dad's ship suffered torpedo fire for 5 days.

During the years of peace, 1918-1939, there was no form of unemployment support. So when a man wasn't on a ship, he wasn't earning. He sold things, anything and everything he could sell from beads to Bric-à-brac¹⁹. One Pakistani friend he had even taught him how to make perfume. All us kids had to support him on his market stalls whether in Manchester, Bolton, and Wigan - even Wigan. He went everywhere to sell his stock and

16 Fighting hostile forces
17 Opening in the deck of a ship
18 Elder Dempster Line
19 Lesser objets d'art forming collections of curios,

earn money for the family.

With Uncle Ernest working as his 'Kai', this is like a gypsy term for the man who draws in the crowd to watch the 'spectacular', he would go to the fairgrounds' boxing rings to earn the money that the people threw into his hat. He was a big strong man.

The funny thing is that when we came back to Manchester the family were considered as 'Blackpool posh', particularly as Dad always went out wearing his watch on a long gold chain.

I missed him naturally because you know how Africans are, how strict they are, they don't mess about. They will tell you something in fifty million different ways! And they are not worried about how long it takes, they just wear you down. If we refused to eat anything that definitely meant a lecture, particularly on how hard life was for him back home in Africa and in the war. Whilst trying to survive under torpedo fire he and his fellow crew men were forced to eat the leather from their boots.

Frugal wasn't simply part of his nature. Dad was tight. We hated to have to go out with him to buy clothes for example because he would barter for everything to get the price reduced often getting a ten bob²⁰ reduction on our coats. He would even barter to get into the pictures so if they were charging one and six pence, Dad would want get them down to one and thruppence.²¹

It seems a contradiction to say he was a very quiet man but he was. The truth is that his lectures were worse. He never raised his hand to chastise us aside from the one time I got a slap for leaving the house after I had been asked to look after Mum one day when she was sick.

The other truth is that our mother brought us up. She died in my arms in 1963. I hung her picture on the wall in the hallway so that I can pass by her many times in a day and always say hello.

I consider myself to be Black British but when I was young I identified more as African because Dad always taught us to, 'hold our heads up high'. That we as 'coloured' people had to, because what we had in character was like petrol. If it was spilt it was impossible to mop up.

20 Slang for a *shilling*

21 The threepence or thruppenny bit prior to 1971 decimalisation

Realistically if I went to Africa today they would look at me as a foreigner.

In 1954 Dad went to Nigeria for a holiday and in seeing a money making potential, he bought three tipper wagons and had them shipped over from the UK. He returned again this time with my brother Danny. The war²² started and they got caught up in the fighting. The family contacted the British Red Cross who found Dad in Nigeria and learnt that he was partially blinded in the fighting and Danny had died from his wounds. After that we never heard from our father again, so in a way for us he never died, he just never came home.

22 Nigerian-Biafran War, 6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970

CHAPTER 14

SOLOMAN OLAYINKA LABINJOH *by his son Bolarji*



Labinjoh and Kath wife

'They were very conservative about how people should behave and how they should deal with things and they were horrified when people didn't behave in a certain and expected way...'



Labinjoh wife and son



Labinjoh christening his son

My Dad taught me how to polish shoes and clean the grate. Everybody in the family had a job, a chore and mine was the grate and shoe shining. ‘Those shoes have got to shine Bolaji’, he would say to me. He had a method like they have in the Army. Heat the polish and apply in a circular motion. Then build it up and let it dry. Build it up once and then build it up twice in neat military precision.

When we went to visit his African friends in London as well as Manchester, he would make sure that your shoes were shiny, your hair was done, your tie was straight and you were acceptable. If your teeth didn’t pass inspection, you would have to go back and brush them again..... When we arrived, let’s say at Uncle Finni’s or Uncle Ben Adu’s or Ben Odunsi’s (David) or somebody like that, you would be inspected from top to toe. If everything was right in place you were sent to sit in the living room with their kids and told not to say the wrong thing. You weren’t allowed to breath, even move whilst they would go somewhere and have their conversation in Yoruba.

Africa was in everything in our house.

I think my Dad was a middle child. I do know he had a couple of older brothers and younger brothers and quite a few sisters. So although he was very cerebral because he was a middle child he was much more at ease; more ‘joi de vie’¹ whereas my Mum was very serious. As the eldest child she was very practical with all those extra responsibilities that it brought. She wasn’t very jokey. Her attitude was ‘get on with it’.

Mr Finni introduced my Dad to my Mum in about 1947/48 when he was de-mobbed. My Mum would have been about nineteen or twenty. They met in London where she was a croupier working in the best casinos; she knew most of the nightclubs but wasn’t really interested in them as a social life.

We lived literally to the right of the Anglican Church on Monton Street, on the right side. At least every week there would be something at my Uncle Eddie’s (Eddie Zona) house or the Pereiras’ or Uncle Finni would have something. Dad always got invited to join with others to talk through things and figure problems out.

1 A French phrase often used in English to express a cheerful enjoyment of life

They were like councils called maybe because a son had stolen something or somebody was being disrespectful by having an affair with somebody else's wife. As a kid you would sit there hoping not to get noticed and when you were, they would send you out.

If you were lucky you might catch the end of the conversations. They were big people's conversations not meant to be listened into. They were conservative and very, very strict on how people should behave and how they should deal with things and they were just horrified when people didn't behave a certain way.

As children you were encouraged to do well and be a positive part of the community. You were never ever allowed to waste food. We were always being told that there were people starving in Africa and they would be glad of a meal.

Educationally you had to do well. You had to do well - there wasn't an option. If I came fifth or second in class they weren't impressed. There would be a conversation along the lines of 'ah how many schools are there and you came second – so all the boys in Britain and you came second in class and you think there is something to celebrate?'

They wanted things done in a certain way, they didn't mess about and they wouldn't put up with anything they thought was second rate. Many of this generation of Africans who came to England were quite well educated as most of them went to grammar school. Quite a few of them such as Mr Finni, Tiger Freeman and my father went to the same school the CMS – Catholic Missionary School in Lagos. They were educated enough to be engineers on the ship.

I met some of my cousins when I went to Lagos and they are all the same as the men here. All the men in my family are exactly the same; quite didactic, quite emphatic – quite bull-headed; they know what they want and they know how to get it. The men in my family are very easily identified; they are not exactly new age, not quite metropolitan nor are they primitive either. They know what they want, how to express themselves. They are clear and emphatic, there's no messing about. They believe what they believe!

My nephew is exactly like them, I am exactly like them and my brother is exactly like them and my Dad was exactly like them. My daughter

is the same - hard headed Nigerian, no messing about. Once the information is in they are very forensic, they act on it. We don't suffer fools lightly. No, my family don't tolerate that kind of nonsense – don't tolerate anything like that! Importantly we don't change our friends like we change our underwear, once we make a friend that is it; we stick to them like glue.

Gillian, Stephen and I weren't allowed to go to the Moss Side Youth Club very often. We were allowed to go if somebody else went. Gillian is adopted and with Stephen's birth our Mum had a lot of gynaecological problems. I think she had a full or partial hysterectomy.

The youth club was run by an elderly white guy called Mr Elliott; we would go to play football with Roger Sandeford, a West Indian guy from St. Bees Street because my Mum knew him. I could go with Melvin² because my Mum and my family knew his Dad, Uncle John³, (Big John). I couldn't go on my own, because my Mother was very, very strict about where we went and what time we came back.

I have never forgot the day when we were playing football or something on Darcy Street just in front of Moss Side Youth Club, literally right near where the Williams lived and just up from Uncle Francis Azumah's barbers. We heard that a child had been knocked over and all hell broke loose. I remember that event like it was yesterday because Melvin and I think Carmen and Mandy⁴ were there. It was probably about the time to go home when Alan Tottoh's⁵ son, Danny, was killed by a car. Moss Side Youth Club had lots of lights in front of it and the rest of the street was quite dark other than street lights, yet still I just couldn't understand how something like that could happen. Darcy Street was a side-street; it wasn't a main street like Princess Road or anything like that.

I knew Melvin, Carmen and Mandy because they were my age but wouldn't have spoken to or even said 'hello' to Alan or John⁶, or Stan or David⁷ unless they said 'hello' to us first.

2 Melvin Tottoh
3 John Endomini Tottoh
4 John Tottoh's younger children
5 <http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes/to/alan-tottoh-1.html>
6 John Thomas Tottoh
7 Stan and David Finni

I wouldn't even have known how to speak to Alan or John. I wouldn't even have looked their way. They just seemed – not as big as your Dad or Grandfather, but when I say they 'took us under their wing and showed us how to box' it still doesn't mean I would speak to them, they were big people still. I would speak to Melvin and Mandy and Carmel but not Alan or John – no, they were gods. We would have been as pleased as punch if he said 'hello' to us. Alan the world class boxer who was going to the 1968 Mexico Olympics - that is how we were. And let's not forget I am now without my father so I expect I was in awe of all the older men.

I was never allowed to go to the Reno, the Nile or the Sakimo club or any of the clubs 'of the day'. This was orchestrated by my Mother, my Aunt Ada and my Auntie Coco – the sisters were very different. My mom very political, Aunt Ada was religious and polite and my Auntie Coco was very street smart! This was supported by Sonny Nwagbara who owned the Nile, Uncle Ben Obafemi Odunsi⁸ and my Uncle Finni. It doesn't leave a great deal of time for mischief if you are reading Churchill's 'History of the World', going to Stretford Athletics Club or playing football and to be absolutely honest, I didn't have a great deal of spare time. If I wasn't doing my homework, I was working for my Uncle Finni – I worked in all of his shops - at Ripon Street, Denmark Road, Princess Road and Cheetham Hill. I think the only one I didn't work at was probably the last shop he owned which was on the estate. That was how it went for me, if I wasn't at football or athletics then I would be at basketball and if I wasn't there I would be at the Central Reference library.

After my Father died (1967), the finances of the household changed completely and doing the 11 plus and going to a Grammar School was completely out of the question so I went to Central.⁹ He died when I was really young, about eight, nine years of age. He had been trying to set up a business in Nigeria during the Civil War¹⁰. He was injured and got a leg infection. The war meant there was a shortage of medicine and he wouldn't let them cut his leg off so the infection killed him.

So things were very tough financially between '67 and '70. It was about the same time that my Grandfather had also gone to Nigeria.

8 Eighty six now and living in Canary Wharf London
9 Manchester Central High school for Boys
10 6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970

We had a problem with compensation with the house on Monton Street – Grandfather’s house and sorting out my Father’s estate. Because he died in the middle of a civil war, it was devilishly hard to get a death certificate which would have sorted out his pension and all the other finances. It was impossible to sort his estate out to allow our Mum to get any kind of benefit support. Mum was virtually housebound because she had just had Stephen, a difficult birth followed by a hysterectomy, and couldn’t work. By this time we were living in my Grandfather’s house which did make things a little bit easier.

Our reality was we didn’t know he had died until like a year and a half later.

We had always owned our own homes. Africans often had a good amount of money when they came back because a lot of the seamen didn’t get demobilised until 1948 and could benefit by the deflated price of the property market.

The areas where white people were in the majority got redevelopment schemes. Properties were repaired and updated without loss of ownership. But areas in Britain where there were black people they were demolished. Under Left Wing Labour and local authorities’ compulsory purchase orders, owners were paid a pittance of between five and fifty pounds. The result was we would never own property again within that generation.

If you look at areas nationally with property stock similar to Moss Side and Brixton in the 60s and 70s, they all experienced the same thing. Property in Moss Side and Hulme - it was no different to other areas in Manchester - so the question is ‘why was Moss Side demolished?’ Nobody ever said the houses were unfit for habitation, it was simply because they didn’t want black people living together and having a stake in their own community.

There were a lot of racist issues. Some were even quite funny. It was probably about the late sixties and the Skinheads¹¹ had just started up. A gang who weren’t local started to come through Moss Side. In Monton Street where we lived there was and still is I think, a Sikh temple. They were

11 <http://www.skinheads.net/>

looking to do some ‘paki bashing’¹² but Sikhs are not Pakistanis nor do they like the tag. Plus the Skinheads didn’t know that Sikhs are a martial race and carry swords as part of their religion. So one minute you have got these skinheads being all arrogant and aggressive and the next minute you have them flying back with the yellow turbaned Sikhs running after them.

The race card was also evident in nightclubs that had laughingly unsubtle, but which they thought were subtle, policies for exclusion such as a dress code which would only affect black people and mixed raced people such as ‘No Afros’.

I wasn’t much of a club goer. When I did go I knew it was best to go alone or maybe with one other friend as often groups of four or five or more people got turned away.

Unintentionally I went out mainly with white guys, not that it prevented the club bouncer taking one look at you and thinking ‘uh uh black or mixed race – trouble’ and I would be barred on some dress code excuse.

Just after my ‘A’ levels¹³ I went to the nightclubs on Oxford Street but only if the people I was going with were known to my family. Even into my teens, my Mum and the rest of my family kept me on a very, very short rein. I spent a short time in France and Italy working after I did my ‘A’ levels and then went to University.

I was definitely into soul – soul and funk music. I listened to some Reggae, Bob Marley mainly. I would go to concerts at the Free Trade Hall¹⁴, the Apollo¹⁵, where I saw many of the greats such as Ohio Players¹⁶, Chaka Khan¹⁷, The Commodores¹⁸, War¹⁹, Earth Wind and Fire²⁰, and George

12 Brit slang the activity of making vicious and unprovoked physical assaults upon Pakistani immigrants or people of Pakistani descent

13 The General Certificate of Education Advanced Level , is an academic qualification offered to students completing secondary or pre-university education.

14 *In Peter Street, Manchester, a public hall constructed in 1853–6*

15 Art-deco former cinema in Ardwick built in 1938 with a dancehall, and a cafe.

16 www.discogs.com/artist/Ohio+Players

17 www.chakakhan.com

18 www.discogs.com/artist/Commodores

19 www.war.com

20 www.earthwindandfire.com

Benson²¹ . Belle Vue²² was the other place because Nicky Ogunyemi – he worked there and used to get us in. I think the Jackson Five were there probably in about 74, or something like that.²³

The last conversation I had with my Dad was about some of the tests that they had in the 11 plus and how I had to try to aim for 100 percent, not just to pass! Granddad had gone home to Nigeria probably around 63 – 64. My Dad died in 67.

My Uncle Eddie Zona came to get me and took me to my Uncle Finni’s shop. I think I had just finished doing stuff, I don’t remember what exactly; I think I might have just been helping with the banking for the bookies or whatever. Uncle Finni just turned to me and told me my Father had died, blah, blah, blah and that was it.

So the last conversation I had with my Dad was about some of the tests that they had in the 11 plus.

21 www.georgebenson.com

22 Belle Vue Zoological Gardens also housed an amusement park, exhibition hall complex and speedway stadium. The Kings Hall, opened in 1910, enlarged in 1928 and reconstructed as a “saucer like arena” capable of seating 7,000 people

23 10/11/1972 - Manchester Bellevue <http://www.jackson5abc.com/dossiers/concerts/>

CHAPTER 15

JOHN ENDOMINI TOTTOH *in his own words*

*'I may go sometime, this Saturday I might
will the pools. If I win the pools tomorrow,
before I turn around and know where I am
I could be in Africa...'*



Uncle John Tottoh



Tottoh with his cousin Thomas
Andi



The older Tottoh children

SuAndi: this interview with my Uncle Tottoh took place in the late eighties – early nineties before the family said farewell to him in 1994. It was to form part of another project I was working on with Ngoma ‘Colin’ Johnson looking at the lives of African men living in Manchester. I later made copies for my cousins. The recording has only been slightly edited in order to retain his character, humour and strength

To tell you the truth, I know nothing about England. My name is John Tottoh. My age is 56.

How old?

I am 77; I will be 78 in November.

Why did you come to England?

To tell you the truth, I never think of coming to England. You see, I was working in a hospital in Accra, Ghana and each day a German Ship called at the port with a shipman, he was the cook. The cook went into hospital so there was no one to cook on the return to Germany.

I was working that day and my boss says ‘there is a boat in the dock and they want a cook to take the ship to Germany because their cook is sick he in hospital’.

I thought they were joking and I was laughing. Then he says ‘no I really mean it’. He wanted me to go and sign on the ship to Germany, a ship cannot live without a cook. So I joined the ship. I never think I would leave Africa on that day, because I never thought to leave the country for England or anywhere else. So I joined the ship and about an hour later the ship set sail for Germany. From Hamburg we sail to Hull and then to Liverpool.

At that time it gets near to the War. I had no reason to be involved in war, war, war. I was frightened, inside me I was frightened, because I am alone, this only one black man amongst the Germans – that is 1939 then, and I joined about 38.

When we get to Liverpool I was pleased as anything and I told the Captain, ‘I am not going back with the ship’.

The Captain doesn’t know what is inside me, he can’t understand

as they have treated me well but to tell you the truth, I was frightened. So anyway, he says 'No, if you don't want to stay with us, you stay with us until we take you back to Nigeria, where you come from'. I say 'No, I am going to stop here'. So he says 'You can't. I say 'Yes'.

We argue for two days, last minute he says to me 'Alright, I will take you to immigration office, if immigration office says you have right to stay here, you can stay.' So I said 'Alright'.

So one morning, after the whole ship has breakfast, the two of us went to the immigration office. The Captain tells the immigration officer 'Look this man is my cook, that I signed on my ship from Nigeria, but now he say he don't want to go, he want to stop here'. So we arguing this point 'I bring him, does he have a right to stay here?'

The immigration officer asked me 'do you hear what he says?' I say 'Yes'. 'Do you know anybody here?' Well I had a friend, you know friends that I used to write to, when I was back in Africa. Young men and I got their pieces of papers, their letters in my pocket, which the Captain didn't know about.

Do you remember their names were they Nigerians?

Yes, they were Nigerians that lived in Liverpool.

I said I know them; they are my brothers – in those days when I see you I call you brother, you call me brother.

He says 'You know them?' I say 'Yes, I got brothers. I know their addresses, the name of their street – Batley Street¹'. I show him I say 'Look in Batley Street my brother is there' and even though I don't know where it is you know, the address is there. So when this man seen that, he turn round and tell the Captain, he say 'Well, I can't stop him'.

In those days, we are that British, not like now. In those days when you are Nigerian man, you come here, you just walk in. You understand that, because British rule.

Immigration told the Captain 'I can't stop him if he has somebody to go to, got brothers, there is nothing I can do'. 'Tell him to go back with us until we get cook from Germany' the captain asked.

1 This is possibly Brierley street Liverpool 8

I say 'Yes I can, I can do that' and that settled the matter and I went with him. They sent a telegram from Liverpool to Hamburg that they need a cook who travelled from Hamburg with speed boat, you know those fast ones and when he got to Hull he caught a train to Liverpool.

I stayed with him for a day showing him this is this, that is yours, like that. When I finished I left to look where I will settle, for this address on Batley Street and when I get there the boys that I know have all gone away – they had signed ship and gone away.

So they were seamen also?

Yeah, yeah, all of them are seaman and they have all gone away, but the owner of the house is there. An old man called Walpele he is African too. So when I explain to him, he said 'Come in, come in' he received me and let me stay there. I stay for two weeks.

What did you think of England when you saw the surroundings, the houses, and the people?

I just think it was a new place even though it all look dark you know, some days three o'clock it is nearly dark and with fog, a different set up in those days to now. But really you don't think much, you don't think bad about it, you think you are in a good place, better than where you come from.

The people, some nice, some call you names. They call you names more than those that don't call you names mostly 'You're a nigger, blacks' you know, but at the same time in yourself you are alright, you don't feel much bad about it.

A man comes in one evening and he says 'where you come from and what are you doing?' I say 'I come from such and such in Africa, I came as a cook but I left'. He says 'don't worry, you won't get cook on another ship. He says 'So-n-so is a cook but because he is black they won't give him a job. So you better forget about cooking.'

Even before this fellow come others were telling me I had to go to cooking school because what I know is not enough to be a cook here. I say 'I took the whole ship from Nigeria to Germany.' 'That is not enough,' they tell me 'you must get a proper set up, a degree and all that'.

This same man who told me I can't be cook then offers me a job 'I'll give you a job, you meet me at such and such a place tomorrow morning' I said 'I don't know anywhere'.

So he calls the old man Alfred Walpele whose house it is and asks him to take me. This man is a foreman in a ship and it is in the Southern dock. He says 'Alfred, will you take this man, John Tottoh to so and so dock, *Tom Jack* want to give him a job' like that. The next morning I am a greaser². He took me right down to the bottom of the ship, I have never seen an engine room in my life.

He told me 'this is your job, you have to put oil here, you do that there, and you do that there'. He says 'Don't worry, in four hours you will know the job from the other boys'. I'm glad so I signed on the ship. It was £21 per month, the wages – it was big money then. We were in dock for about a week before we sailed back to Nigeria. I think I went up and down about three times, and then the war³ starts getting hot.

We are two days sailing to Hamburg when we saw a big, big destroyer, a hell of a destroyer; I think it is a metal forest. Dispatches say 'Go back, the Germans have over three hundred submarines all over the place so go back'. So the ship turned and we run to Dartmoor, a place where they train all these navy officers⁴. We stayed there in free time for about a week then on we went to Liverpool.

Now there is plenty of work, lots of work. Telegrams come to the house 'join ship in such and such a place – all come aside ship'. I officially become a seaman, when the war starts. There are no breaks, I go up and down. Go to America, different places, carrying tank, petrol. I can't remember a lot of places.

9th July, 1943, we left Manchester Dock. In those days ships come in and out here, you see. A number of ships set sail and when we hit the sea we divide with my ship going to Tunis. Tunis was captured by Germany then they lost it and America and England took over.

2 Responsible for lubricating the bearings and moving parts of engines and mechanical equipment aboard a ship

3 1939

4 Britannia Royal Naval School (BRNC) Dartmouth

We go there first, the second convoy with war supplies. Then we are hit⁵. It was 1.15 in the morning that happen, by the time they pick me up it is about half past four to five. When this happen, you don't know who live or who die, until they collect everybody. Someone asks 'where has John Tottoh gone, where has Toby gone?' At the time, whatever happened, happened! You don't know your Mother, you don't know your Father, and you are running for your life.

A lot of my friends are gone. A lad under my bunk, he never get up, he never wake up, I don't know what happen to him. But we are 15 coloured, 15 blacks in amongst the whites. We are fifteen blacks and we love ourselves, we are brothers.

So many kids died in action. Sixty of your people there and you have gone sick and not got on that boat and all that sixty perish. I don't think you will forget that day. Now that is what I try to say, my bunk, my bed about here, and my mate down there. What kill him, or what saved me? What saved me, why don't save him, or what kill him why not kill me?

But not only him, what about those there, what kill them why don't it kill me? So, when you bring 'Does God matter?' I says 'there is a god, I can't believe there isn't a God' but I don't know how to put it. All young lads and strong but they stay forever younger than me because they die and I still here growing old. But when it happens, you don't see anyone. So from there, they pick you up, about half past four to five, I don't know. Take us to a big, big hospital boat, all white. No clothes. You know those football shirts, because round there it is very, very hot, so when you are in the cabin you only wear things very, very light or you wear nothing. But whatever you wear when this tornado hit the ship, you just forget everything. You are drunk, more than drunk.

So we are all in the boat, men mainly – no women from my ship, but a few women from the other ship that sunk – two ships were hit at the same time, one here and one here.

5 1941 Manchester Citizen (Capt.T.Makin) took supplies for the Eighth Army and in 1942, under Capt. F. L. Osborne was one of the first ships to enter Bone on the North African Coast and was under fire almost continuously for 16 days and nights. After two further trips under Capt. Swales she proceeded to the West Coast of Africa and was sunk by U-508 Kapitanleutnant Staats on 9.7.43 with loss of 15 lives. The cargo ship was torpedoed and sunk in the Gulf of Benin with the loss of 28 of her 104 crew. Survivors were rescued by Commandant Detroyant

Submarine stop at the front of us and the two ships going like this. So when the submarine get in between – hit us at the same time and this one 300, 300 – it's a pleasure boat, the one they shot with us. A pleasure boat, women, men, kids and when they pick them up, the women are just naked – nothing.

Anyway, they put us in this boat; we don't know where they are going. Cruise round, cruise round and we end up in Nigeria, Lagos, yeah!! So I was there for three months and five days because when I left England I leave money for my wife, you see, a lot went to my family and I don't have much money to spend. Understand now? So when I get there they only give each of us, £2 a week. What is £2, you can't do much with it, but in those days that is what you got.

Did you still have people in Nigeria at that time?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You see, at the same time I was in direct spot where my people are.

I was there for three months and five days. One day they give us a hotel where the food is free, everything is free. Then they said ship is ready we need to go. So all of us pack our things, nothing to pack but we got our towel and toothbrush and we left. I get here 26th December 1943. I left England here, what happened, happened on 9th July 1943 and I get back 26th December, 1943.

Were you already married then?

Yeah to Josie and Kay was just born in Withington hospital. I went to see her then I join the ship. By the time I came back the baby is nearly a big girl.

After that I had an accident I banged by spine and they sent me to the Royal Infirmary and operated on me and from then I stopped going to sea.

Afterwards I wasn't working for some time. Then I pick myself up and start looking for labourer jobs. I go to Trafford Park and work here and work there and work here.

Where were you living then, was it in a room or a house?

I live on Fairlawn Street in my house. You see I leave Josie there in one place then I went and when I come back and I met her there. That is how I struggle with Josie my wife.

Then one day I went into the kitchen and someone called and said a man is selling his club, Len Johnson, the boxer. I went and see him and he said he would help me to get it. It belongs to a Communist, he wanted £300 for him to try and get me this club. So I sold the house I was in. I sold it and gave the money to pay for this club.

So I start earning with the club. I don't know much – I got no brains to run clubs, I never even thought about clubs, when this opportunity comes to me I took it.

So I took my wife – but I should have gone on my own, but what I was thinking if I go on my own and I get another woman, they will rob me and will do this and do that. So I took my wife with me, at first it was hard, and then suddenly business just pick up.

When I first get it, it's called The Cotton Club. I can't change the name because of the licence. After three months I call my club the Cosmopolitan⁶ it's for you, me, and everybody. It was opposite the Royal Infirmary, now it's in the middle of the University. If I went there now, I wouldn't know it, I wouldn't know the spot where my club was.

At that time there is no club, no blacks' club maybe two, one in All Saints, and one in Moss Side, but now you find about a dozen or more.

When I say club, on Friday, Saturday, Sunday nights I have a five piece band. It's not like gold looking, or diamond looking, but you see it's very popular. I have four waiters, it's nice and the blacks in those days, we love ourselves.

The music is not like now, it was old time rocking. It's nice, very very nice.

If you want to sing, you can stand and sing, it was nice. I had four or five men regular in my band. Friday comes, I know they will be there because I pay them. My club just near the students. They are dead now themselves.

6 June Prouse calls it The Cotton Club in her chapter

So were you rich then?

Well I should be rich, I should pick up from there, but I get no brains. As I told you earlier, business brains, I just don't have it. I rely on you, I rely on you, I rely on you, well that not good enough.

Everyone supposed to work with me but they pinching me, robbing me, I can't see it!

*But, didn't you used to spend your money on some strange things?
I remember you buying Alan a horse.*

Well, that doesn't mean you spend your money and that that is going to be your downfall. You buy things; you do whatever you like with your spare money.

How many children did you have then?

Erm, four? Jimmy, Kay, Alan and John. I want John to be a World Boxing Champion. Boxing. I put him into it, and he assures me that he was going to make it. He shouldn't stop where he did stop. He should go; he should go, far away from that just like Alan.

Alan better than John if I can put it like that. But you can't tell him what to do – even his trainer can't tell him. Get a phone call every bloody night 'Where is your boy? He is going to fight now'. And when I see Alan 'Ghhrr, I will knock his head off, I don't have to train'. You see, so when the fight come, he train only one week, when the fight come, Alan will knock the hell out of you for four rounds, but after that where you go!

It's is my belief, my son fighting must win. To me, must win and if he lose, well I must get a vision of him losing.

What did you want Kay to be when she grew up?

Kay, a ballerina. You see in those days, it's a bit different from now. If you get no brain or anything, you get nowhere, you understand? Today, it is far different. So I thought if she comes top of ballet she will be somebody. Boxing is not the best thing for any kids, but that is what I could think of in those days.

Why didn't you think of pushing him into academic work – educationally?

In those days, it didn't exist, like now. Now I get a daughter⁷ now, as old as I am, she is going to Manchester University. If I got kids now, I wouldn't ask them to do hard thing like that, because whatever they do now, I know they will accept you. You see.

Your children are almost across two generations is that right?

Yeah, if you are my son now, and you have got brains, then I will push you in because I know when you finish, nobody will look you down. But those days, the idea we got, whatever you may know, the public won't accept you. Look at football today, black boys are top now, but in those days doesn't matter how you speak to the boss, they won't think you can talk like that. They say 'no black man is good, black man no good, black man got no guts.' Now who get the guts today in the fucking field, (excuse me sorry) who gets the guts now? So if your boy good in football today, nothing will set you back, you will help him, because when you finish, the public will accept you, because it is who you know not what you know today. But those days, different.

What do you think about black youths today?

Black youths today are going wrong. Far, far, far wrong, because they should think of we, when I say 'we' they should look at me because I am your Dad, the way I am but they don't.

The black boys today, their downfall – wizz⁸ is the downfall of black men in this country today. White man get no power⁸ now, white man's back is broken. If you call a boy today want anything, white will help him more than blacks. The black young lads don't know it. They are spoiling it, they are *****

Are saying the help is there, but we don't use it.

Yeah, to help the Nation to help the what you call the blacks. Nice, nice, built, nice looking, but what they do?

When we come here we are like old people, old, old, old people. When we came here we don't act like this.

7 Mandy got a degree in Psychology
8 Drugs – chemical

If we act like this there will be no black man in England. As daft, as stupid as we are, we try to show them. They kick us about, they steal, and they pick on this one here, this one there, that one there. But we blacks, young ones like you⁹, all of us, it's a shame, it's a disgrace. Black boys could get a long way and they will get there, but they have got to fight.

How was it having half caste children, do you think it was difficult for the kids?

Nah, no, those days have gone. Look, look, look. When I first came here, you go out with him, make baby without married, it's a shame, and it's a sin. It's a big, big, big sin. Today, see all the top, top, top men in that house there, what are they doing now, they are making babies. Do they call their babies niggers, did they call their babies bastards? No, those days gone.

If somebody called John 'You are a nigger and this and that' then I will go out and fight. If you compare it to today, that is nothing now. It is nothing.

I can remember us playing, I remember this clearly, outside St. Bee's street, and somebody asking why Jimmy was white and John was black. And John said 'Because Jimmy takes after my Mum and I take after my Dad' and it was that simple. Did nobody ask you any questions about Jimmy?

No, no, they know I can't make Jimmy. He is my son, yeah. You understand. Except for very little, little kids, they will not understand and think, I don't know. But any big man with a brain will know why he is my son. I don't think that sort of question is very important. It is simple. So I don't know what more you want to know.

Can I ask you why you never went home?

That is another belief again of God; God says that I should never go back there. I don't know about tomorrow. I may go sometime, this Saturday I might win the pools¹⁰.

9 Here he is speaking directly to Ngoma

10 A football pool, often collectively referred to as "the pools", is a betting pool based on predicting the outcome of top-level association football matches taking place in the coming week. The pools are typically cheap to enter, with the potential to win a very large sum of money

If I win the pools tomorrow, before I turn around and know where I am I could be in Africa. I may not stay there, but I will go and see you, see you, see you, come back.

I would like to go back home and see them. But I can't afford it? I can't. Something, somehow happened, so that I can't make it. But if God says 'yes that will happen before I die' I will go. You understand. Not that I don't want to go to Africa, I kill nobody there. I just can't make it. I believe that it is the same for other Africans, thousands, millions.

A few that have gone home have died soon after haven't they?

Yeah, yeah. But you see those who go home, you are talking about those who force themselves to go home. Those who don't like it 'I don't want to stay here'. I had heard boys like me, men like me say 'I don't want to die in England I want to go and die in Africa'. What they fucking well get there? Die here; die over there, what is the difference? They want to go. When they are strong enough, get a bit of money in their pocket jump aboard, they never think to go there. But when they are down, and can't make their headway here, I don't know. They say 'I want to go and die in Africa' they did go and they did die there. What the difference? They suffer more before they die.

You see if I say 'I don't want to die here, I want to go home'. If I go I will be doubly punished. God will punish me double.

Tomorrow I am going to hospital about my leg. I fell down and broke my hip, within fifteen minute I am in theatre. Couple of weeks I am alright, then after pain again, they take me back. If I am there in Africa what will happen to me? They will say 'That Sissy¹¹, that one'. Here there are a lot who I can count, go home and they don't see daylight.

Do you feel that your parents accepted that you married a white woman?

They don't know no different. If I was in a position to take the white woman, as you call it, there they will worship her, not in that way but you know what I mean. They won't say 'why did you get married white woman, why you do this, why do you do that?' They won't do that. But, your question is right in some way.

11 A timid or cowardly person

The coloured men I know who took white woman from here to Africa, they stayed there, and they made a business. His parents and old women still want you to have a friendship with coloured girl apart from your wife. That happening here too. Look at all these white men here, some get two homes, some get three homes, white homes.

So what was the reason behind the parents doing that? Do they want you to have two black wives, to have more kids?

Well, I don't know, in some daft way they want you to produce more kids. That is my opinion. You see, they wouldn't go against me for marrying her. But they still want me to go out and marry your sister. Not married openly the way she can claimed to be my wife, I can get two, three, four girls. That is the system of the place.

There is no disgrace over there. 'Oh this man Tottoh he gets a wife and he still get two, three girl there'. No, no disgrace. So my Mother, an old woman, failed to understand that point. 'Go, get that one, get her, and get her'. And the reason why I think she is doing that is because she likes grandkids. So she wants me to produce more kids with her, and to produce more kids with her, apart from my wife. I don't know. That why I stick to this one woman alone.

(Laughing), not that my Uncle Tottoh ever had any girlfriends (turn the tape off!!!)

CHAPTER 16

HAWTON SAMUEL ERIZIA *by his son Tony Erizia*



Hawton Erizia circa 1959

'They used to say you don't want this racial mixing because you have got to think of the children – what did they think that we would have 'horns coming out of our heads!...'



Derek with ice cream in still from Sparrows Can't Sing (1963)



Baby Tony Tit Bits Mag circa Feb 53

SuAndi: Did you know your father?

No.

I don't like arguments but I had to put up with a load of abuse when I was a kid. My school was integrated – 799 white kids and me! It was a good school, a public school, anyone could go there and there were the standard jokes. I don't like getting into arguments because I end up getting quite unpleasant and I don't like doing that, I would rather walk away. As I got older and became more conscious, I realised that the really big thing that was missing in my life was my father; it was monumental. My foster father did a really good job of being a major part of my life – I think of him nearly every day. Even so, you look in the mirror and you can't understand certain things about yourself – lots of questions. Anyone who doesn't think that blood is not thicker than water should come and talk to me. The older I get, the more obvious the problem is and you realise the void. It's the identity the confidence, it's everything.

The family that raised you, were they white English?

Yes, working class English so they were limited in what they could do in terms of culture, knowledge and even education, but everything else they could do they did do. My foster parents' mantra was 'you are exactly the same' (out of the 799 kids and me). There was a choir at school and I remember we did 'Listen to the Lambs'.¹ It was an all-white choir with a white choir master and me aged about 13 and I knew I wasn't singing it right, I knew it then instinctively. It was a Christmas performance and in the winter my skin gets fairer and my foster Dad said, 'looking from all the way back there, you looked as white as all the others, which is good isn't it?' He didn't mean anything, he loved me. The same when he tried to get me a job; anywhere, any kind of job by going in first because he was anxious to say, 'he is coloured, but he is not very coloured'. This is not what you are going to have from your natural father, the dude isn't going to do it. It is not going to happen.

My foster parents were uneducated; both left school at about 12 years and had fought in the First World War. They both knew their place, they were deferential. Social services wouldn't let the Lawrences adopt me and so they lived with a terror they might lose me.

1 Written by Kadison Joshua B.

It was far easier for Church of England to give them a few pounds for looking after me over the cost of putting me in a home, but for me there was always this thing that you were going to go back to the (children's) home. When I grew up they used to say, 'your attitude, you can't do that, you can't take these people on'.

Finally, at 16, they decided to let the adoption go ahead and produced my birth mother's death certificate and I saw that my father was Hawton Erizia. I knew already my name was Anthony Catlin changed to Lawrence, and that my father was West African because I had been told. (Later my brother told me he had decided that he was an American and tried to join the US Marines.) I also discovered I was illegitimate and when I was growing up being a 'bastard' was a big deal, so that stunned me.

I left school at 15 and worked in a print factory for about five years, earning good money. I went to Africa, travelled down through Zimbabwe² – it was Rhodesia at the time.

Why did you go Africa?

I was engaged to a Zimbabwean girl and I wanted to go to Africa – I badly wanted to go to Africa.

So you knew you were African?

I believed I was African and I had been told I was African.

Even with an absent father – did you distinctively feel more African than Caribbean, were you aware of any differences?

Not when I grew up – my first black friends were Caribbean, but then as you get to know them you start to 'recognise' differences. For some reason when I was in University the Nigerians took to me – something I have never worked out why – they wanted me to go and live out there. I never really thought about it, I just thought the Nigerians were rather brash people. Then in one argument with my Zimbabwean girlfriend – in fact we were engaged, she turned round and said 'You are a Nigerian I can tell, I bet you anything.' I think of it now because we didn't know what my father's race was at that time.

² Officially the Republic of Rhodesia from 1970 to 1979, was an unrecognised state located in southern Africa during the Cold War. From 1965 to 1979, it comprised the region now known as Zimbabwe.

So at that stage you didn't know?

Oh no, I found that out later, but it was quite amusing that she said that and also that the Nigerian

Society seemed to take to me – I didn't realise why, I never told them anything like that, I just said my father was from West Africa.

I know when I went to Ghana people said 'SuAndi you are Nigerian' before that people have asked me if I am Somalian or Ethiopian.

They know (laughing). They know. It causes enormous problems.

My Mother had decided to have nothing to do with the Erizias and deliberately cut off all ties. If I could have had my Uncles in my life, a family link, it would have made all the difference.

When I came back to England I decided that I wasn't going to spend my life throwing around bundles of newspapers, (funny thing is I have never earned so much money as I did then because of the high power of the print unions). But I wasn't going to do that – there was no way in this world. So I did apparently what the Erizias have always done – I went and got an education and I got it myself. Apparently that is in my genes because as a cousin was to tell me years later, one Erizia philosophy is, 'it doesn't matter what you do – without an education you are shallow.'

At the college interview they produced a file though I wasn't allowed to read it. They said 'you have a half-brother.' I had a brother! I was 21!

My foster father died in 1976 and my siblings threw me out – straight after the funeral and that was the end of that!! There is a belief about how it has affected me long term.

Half way through university my old social worker turned up and said 'do you want to meet your brother?' So in 1977 I travelled up from Colchester, Essex, where I was studying and went to the offices of the Church of England Children's Society, where I received a full apology for any pain that previous social workers might have caused me and which I accepted. Then I met my brother. In my early years I had missed my brother. I was aware of him even though they had told me that I didn't have a brother and I was to find out that I had coped with it better than my brother. We were reunited 25 years later!!! Then we started comparing notes.

My older brother, Derek Paul, was born in November 1950. My parents had separated and then got back together again and I was born either on September 26th, according to my birth certificate or according to the Church of England Children Society - December 21st. That makes me a 10 month baby, so I am inclined to go with the later date which makes me 3 months younger!! This is precious at my time of life!

And do you look like each other?

Yeah we do, we do look alike and that was the first time I had seen anyone with any family resemblance.

Any resemblance to your Mum?

My brother has a picture of my Mother. I haven't got one and from that one picture it's difficult to know but I think there probably is a resemblance to my Mum. I remember my Mother – I used to get these really panicky dreams, one of them I still have. I am with all my friends and my family and all of a sudden everybody is gone and I am left alone and I have a pretty good idea where that goes back to. In one dream I had when I was very young, about 4 or 5 maybe, I am with my foster mother and then she is gone and there is a tall fair haired woman holding my hand. I remember it very, very graphically and when my brother showed me the picture he has got, that was my mother. I thought she was beautiful and the Erizia set a high store on looks – we are a vain group of people. So you have these fragments of memories and a powerful memory can be a blessing or a burden, even a curse – I will go with it as a blessing.

Let's go back to the death of your foster father.

I finished university as best I could and went to London. Then my foster Mother died, things weren't good especially with my (foster) siblings so I came to Manchester. I needed a profession. I wanted to do Law but I realised that (back) then there were limited opportunities for people of colour so I decided to do teaching. I thought I might be able to find trace of my father but I couldn't, as much as I looked around Moss Side and asked around.

My Father was only nineteen when he became a father himself. There is a tendency to think that he behaved very badly but I think people have to put themselves in London in 1951 and 1952 - I mean I was there in

the late sixties and even up the eighties it was bad enough. At 19 years of age, from a foreign country living in London with your partner's family hating you. Let's be honest - relationships have broken down over a lot less. He left London and came up to Manchester, settled down with a lady here and had another child. From what we understand he carried on intermittently with his studies and had a good time. He had a business but no idea what it was.

My sister went to Chorlton High, the school that I was later to teach in, without knowing who she was, because I didn't know she existed. She went to London while I was in Manchester then in 2008 I got a Facebook asking why I was using the name Tony Erizia, the name I used when I sang Jazz professionally. The message came from Christine Erizia saying 'Are you Hawton Erizia's son' and I said 'yes that is me' and that took me in to the Erizias! There was my first cousin 'Bisi' and her family and my second cousin Christine who lives in London. Every time an Erizia came to England they were told to find the children, the 'lost' children. But the children had different surnames, my brother was called Catlin and I was called Lawrence so what chance did we have?

I had returned to London to work and was living in Luton when I got a phone call from Ann Le French³ telling me that she had met someone claiming to be my cousin in Manchester.

Who did you meet?

David Kantabe a second or third cousin who was one of the leading lights in the Manchester Nigerian Community in the 80s. By this time my Uncle Godwin, was over here chasing the Erizia children and he found Rhona. My brother grabbed one of those tape machines that were popular then we drove up to Manchester and got on the trail. From the information we got, my brother heard about a sister and set about trying to track her down. It's 2008, maybe 2009, shortly after I met my cousins, my brother found our sister Rhona and she contacted me on Facebook.

Did Rhona know her father?

Yes she has fond memories of him – he used to push her around Moss Side in the pram. We met up and learnt that our father was buried in Southern Cemetery. He had become ill and died in 1957 he was only 28.

3 See Le French chapter

Though Rhona's mother lived quite a bit longer than young Hawton, she is dead now too so that seemed to be the end of the story in a way.

It's 2009 now. I have jumped ahead so now I am going back. We have met the cousins, I have met my sister and we are now asked to find our father's grave. I found it, unattended, in Southern Cemetery, 400 yards where I used to teach every day.

A local leader, Mr Silvanus, who owned the grave buried my father and after his service he had a young Ijo⁴ boy 'Goodluck Atoto' put in the grave as well so they are buried together. Just two years ago⁵ my sister put a head stone down and there are photographs of it on Facebook.

So that is where the story sort of ended. So it was left to me to find out as much as I could about him. I have the photograph that my sister gave me and I have some other family photographs.

Most of the data we got about him from London was from the book 'City of Spades'.⁶ The dedication is 'for Ricky'. MacInnes⁷ thought he was incredibly exciting and interesting.

Johnny Fortune⁸ is Hawton Samuel Erizia, my father. How caricatured he is I don't know. I imagine that is an element of conflation, an element of fact and an element of how MacInnes would have seen these people that he had never seen before, and, MacInnes is openly gay which comes through in the sensuality way he writes about my father. You know it is him. You get the description in the book of him leaving Lagos and then you get the description and the name of his older brother, his serious brother, the one I apparently take after and he calls him Christmas (his real name was Easter).

4 Ijaw (also known by the subgroups "Ijo" or "Izon") are a collection of peoples indigenous mostly to the forest regions of the Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States within the Niger Delta in Nigeria

5 2011

6 Adapted by Biyi Bandele as a radio play, directed by Toby Swift, broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 28 April 2001.

7 Colin MacInnes was openly bisexual and wrote on subjects such as urban squalor, racial issues, bisexuality, drugs, anarchy, and «decadence.» The author of a number of books depicting London youth and black immigrant culture during the 1950s, in particular *City of Spades* (1957), *Absolute Beginners* (1959) and *Mr Love & Justice* (1960), collectively known as the «London trilogy

8 *Nigerian immigrant Johnny finds himself caught up in the new ethnic subculture in 50s London.*

The whole thing just links up like the fictional sister who is based on my Aunt Rosa who is a very determined, powerful woman.

I have been told that my sister, Rhona, takes very much after our Aunt. My sister is a very determined and powerful woman.

We already knew he used to hang around the Jazz Clubs, which is where he met our mother Sylvia Catlin. She was a 16 -17 year old young woman from East London. Truth is Jazz, the love of music itself, runs in our family. When he lived in Moss Side aside from his studying he used to gamble on the streets.

And have you tried to trace your Mum's family?

I know where they are. *But you are not interested?* They didn't treat my brother very well in fact he grew up in tatters, holes, he was very badly treated and never got over it, so no, no.

Do you know what her parent's response was to this relationship with your Dad?

Hatred, hysteria – don't ever darken our doorstep again.

My Mother came from a Catholic family and had rebelled – not only in terms of the race of the man she went with. After my father left she was put on probation for being a vagrant and she was criminally charged for having nowhere to live. The probation officer was Catholic and pressured her, (persuaded her) to christen my brother as a Catholic. But then she christened me as a protestant, Church of England. Basically she couldn't cope, Derek was taken 'into care'⁹ by the Catholic Care Authorities. She abandons me and I go to the Church of England Children's Society. I suffered failure to thrive, I had malnutrition that is one of the reasons I have a funny shape - I have huge hands – I am six feet tall but I reckon I am an inch and a half too short.

At nineteen my Mother dies unpleasantly, gangrene of the intestines.

What do you classify as your identity? I always give this as an example – I am the Liverpool daughter of a Nigerian father – I am not a Nigerian Nigerian.

9 *When a child is removed from their natural parents into the care of the local authority.*

No I am not a Nigerian – I spend enough time with them – I am from my father of Nigerian extraction.

From a Nigerian father brought up in the South East of England – my brother is the same but he is a cockney. But there is a difference – you pick up the telephone, like I remember the first time I talked to you, the first thing I thought was ‘what a great voice that is as rich as honey’.

Nine times out of ten a white person speaking to me on the phone for the first time will say ‘yes sir’ and I say ‘I am not a man’.

Doesn’t sound like a white voice to me, it sounds like a really rich black woman’s voice and I could sit and listen to that voice for quite a long time.

What is your daughter’s identity?

My daughter sees herself as an English girl with a mixed heritage. She was most upset that she didn’t get an internship because they wanted ethnic minority and she said ‘I am from an ethnic minority and don’t you forget it!!’

Because she is an only child I have told her, ‘Look kiddo, I am not always going to be here and when I am not here you are going to need family, your friends will often fade away, but you keep in touch with your cousins. There has been a battle to keep this family going through a generation, we could have just subsided and disappeared but we haven’t, and, it’s important for you now and I don’t want you to be alone’. Because I have had that and it really isn’t nice.’ My brother has been a little bit more prolific in that department than me. If you had interviewed my brother, I would imagine that he would have broken down by now...

Looking back, I am pretty relaxed about it all because there is nothing I could have done about it and I think I did the best in the circumstances that I could. You have to do what you can to make things better for the next generation. In the end my father got nothing, some of my mother’s stories are dreadful and the rest of us – my brother is not happy but he is surviving. I have taken the ball as far as I can now ‘back to Africa’ – my side of the family anyway. Happily my daughter’s future is bright, she is at the University of Nottingham, she is a clever girl, and she is working hard.

I just have this notion that you get an education and they can’t take that

away from you. I have always believed that and it is very much the creed of the family and Bisi has said the Erizia can be as poor as a church mouse but as proud as a peacock – it's a family trait which some people take as arrogance.

My sister told me that on the day my father died when he was going to the ambulance, he was desperate for his best jacket – he had to have that jacket on and he did put that jacket on. That is one of the things that she really remembers about him. He was fastidious – my brother takes after him – I like to dress, I am vain but I am not fastidious – I dress for the occasion. If it's something important I will really make the effort. Rest of the time, I will slob around. My brother, you always know when he is well or when he is not well because he lets himself go. He is incredibly fastidious and my father was like that. Everything had to be right. When you read the physical description of what he is wearing in *City of Spades*, it's obvious MacInnes is blown away by his hair, clothes, everything about him. My daughter used to call me 'vain man, vain man' because I used to look at myself in car mirrors and then she met my brother and decided I wasn't that vain after all!! The truth is I am an Erizia!

When you look at the mixed relationships and look at the parents, there is an element, you could look at it this way really - this is just anecdotal for me - is that at least one of them is a lost soul, sometimes both. If you look at my father – he came from a very good family, they were not rich but they were eminent, they worked in government, radio and stuff like that. Hawton's father Samuel died of a broken heart. Whereas in my mother's family, she didn't get a lot of love there, she got very little, these were not nice people. The social worker described them to my foster parents as a 'right lot'. So I think there is an element of that, you go out of your comfort zone and because it is a new and unknown zone, you don't have any inhibitions of something which is 'forbidden' because what is allowed for you isn't really a lot. Of course the pressures are so different. The people today have no idea whatsoever. They used to say 'you don't want this racial mixing because you have got to think of the children' – what did they think that we would have horns coming out of our heads!

CHAPTER 17

EKOW FRANCIS QUAINOO *in his own words*



Francis Q



Francis Q

'We made the wrong move to come to this country but we had to come here and find that out...'



Francis Q and Stella

My mother had nine of us, five girls and four boys. I am the only one out of the family to come to England and I am as they say “the black sheep”. I was brought up by a loving family but with my friends I wanted to come to Britain, because every day and night we saw ships coming in and some of the sailors were black people. From the way they talk and the way they boast and how they dress, it made us want to see Britain. So we came here as stowaways¹. We were just school boys. I was only 16.

The ship’s crew found us quickly but they treated us ok and when we landed in Middlesbrough they handed us over to the authorities. At first they wanted to send me back but after contacting my parents they let me stay. I don’t know what my parents said, most likely that I could stay if I finished my education. They sent me to live at Colonial House² in Newcastle. One of my school friends went on to Liverpool. I can’t remember where the other two went but my friend Francis Ekwa and I, we stayed in Newcastle.

I was working in the ship yard training to be a welder, a welder apprentice, when I had got into some trouble with some Polish people. I was remanded in Durham prison for about 18 months. It was a very serious matter and I defended myself because I wasn’t guilty.

I was attacked by people coming out of a Polish club. I was attacked badly and I stabbed one of them. I was arrested on the charge of attempted murder. Eventually I was found not guilty and released because when the case comes to court, the Judge asked me if I had any witnesses. Imagine the crowd, the court was full of people; even kids, school kids, grandparents. The Judge asked me, if I had any witnesses and the whole court stands up and shouts ‘YES’.

I am telling you ‘God is alive’. The Judge couldn’t believe it, none of the Court workers or the Polish can believe their eyes and what they see. The judge asks a little girl, round about 10 and a boy about 8, to tell what they saw. He say ‘What did you see, were you in the street? They said ‘No they were in bed’, but they hear the confusion and they opened the back door latch³. The Judge didn’t finish asking any more questions. He knocked on the bench and says ‘Francis Quainoo, you’re free’

1 A crossing was approximately ten days from Africa to UK

2 There was a ‘coloured’ seamen’s hostel known as Colonial House at 3 Northumberland Place.

3 A type of door or window fastener

It is important for me to say that I lived with a Polish Jewish family who had been in that area for a long time. I was the only black person who lived in that house and they were very good to me. They were also opposed to my marriage but I still sought the advice and guidance of my family, my mother and father, sisters and brothers. My mother said if I had anything to do with the girl - then I should marry her. So I took my mother's advice and ignored what my landlord and landlady were telling me and went and got a special license from the registry office in Newcastle and married my wife in 1952. She was pregnant and told me the child was mine but in truth it wasn't.

One day I came from work and the baby was gone and I ask her, 'where is the baby?' and she says 'never mind' and I say 'what do you mean never mind?' She said, 'the baby is with my parents'. I got advised to see a solicitor and the matter went to Court. But even before it entered Court, her parents had adopted the baby.

It was like a secret society that is the only way I can describe it.

When I was released from prison, Mrs Atkins my landlady she says 'Francis this is what we tried to tell you, but you are so stubborn, you accused us of prejudice and all that'. In fact people in the street, even the white people in the street feel sorry for me. A white family on the street, this guy and his wife call me one day when I am coming home from work, they call me into the house, the wife told me as tears were running in her eyes 'I have got kids, I wouldn't like that to happen to anyone whether they are black or white'. She said 'That kid is not yours.'

I am an old man now, but the way I got married. In fact as I am talking to you now it still hurts me that I lost my virginity in that way. I don't like, up until now!

While I was in prison my wife left me. I think her parents heard the gossip and took her to Manchester. But she had written to me while I was in prison and when I was first released she came back just for a short time, maybe two months and then she left again. The next time she wrote it was tell she was pregnant so I decided to follow her to try to make the marriage work.

I came to Manchester in about 1954. I moved into lodgings in Raby Street sharing with one Ghanaian, Emmanuel and the others were Nigerian.

Our landlord who owned the house was a Yoruba called David; I don't remember the rest of his name.

I got a job in Denton doing bicycle handles and pedals when the baby was born. When she was about 3 months I decided to christen her but after the party on the Sunday morning, a knock came to my door. I opened the door and there were four policemen.

'Are you Francis Quainoo?' I say 'Yes.' They say 'we got information that you are selling dope!' 'I selling dope – I don't think so'. I say 'I might use it, but I don't sell it.' So there I go back to prison.

I was sent to Strangeways⁴ where finally my luck changed. I worked in the Prison office. This was a great opportunity for any black man because they took an interest in me. They asked why I didn't continue my apprenticeship and I explained my circumstances to them. After a few months they said 'we have got your record from Newcastle' and somebody will come and meet you at the prison gate. I say 'look I'm not going, I don't know what I have done but everywhere I go there is trouble.... I got married, trouble, I have baby..... trouble. What have I done?' They said 'calm down, you haven't done nothing'. 'Somebody who is interested in you is coming to meet you'.

When I was being released they took me to the prison gate office to meet Bramis (I don't know how to spell it) a businessman with a factory in Old Trafford.

'Are you Francis 'he said 'who trained at Redhead⁵ in Newcastle?' and I said 'yeah'. He says 'I won't go on about your troubles. Are you still interested in finishing your qualification?' I said 'Yes' he said 'OK, I've got a job for you'. 'Life is a bitch; you really have a job for me?'

He took me straight to his factory in his Rolls Royce and said 'when do you want to start?' I forgot the street, not far from the United Football ground. At that time the area was different to how it is now. Anyway he said 'next week, I see you Monday morning 7 o'clock.' I said 'Thank you'.

4 *HMP Manchester* – still known by its former name '*Strangeways*' –in 2003 became one of the country's largest high security, category A men's prisons

5 John Readhead and Sons shipbuilding name was first established in 1865.

Before even a fortnight had passed, he told me he was building a new shop, a bigger shop in Sheffield and asked me if I would like to go there. I hadn't moved back in with my wife and anyway while I was in prison she had sold everything, or whatever she did; I don't know. When I went to pick up my things I was left with one shoe and one suit and it's the same shoe, the same suit, the same shirt...I go to work in.

I asked her if she wanted to try again in Sheffield but she didn't so I told my boss that I am going, because it was the only trade that I knew. If I look back and follow her, hadn't I had enough problems already? If I continue to follow her I don't know what will happen to me.

For thirty five years I was a welder. In them days, the Polytechnics⁶ are today's Universities. Polytechnic were for workers, for trade, you know, people like electricians, burners, platers⁷ and welders – it's not a University, although it has got something to do with them. I got my City and Guilds, years ago. I was in the Worker's Union. I am a union man. I represent the Boiler Makers Union. I was doing all sorts, all those motorways railings you see now, and I am involved. My friends do most of it. The black guys who work for this company are all steel people. I think about seven of us, there were short brasses, painters, platers, welders, you know. There were about seven black in the factory.

When I was young I used to go to the clubs. Any place where we can and where we fancy. I wasn't mad for socialising so I never stayed long. When I went out, I might stay for an hour or two then I would leave. I didn't even dance, I would just decide to leave, get up and go home.

I used to meet with my own black people, Africans, but there were many of them and the life they live, I don't like it; especially in Manchester, from what I see going on in Moss Side these days. I don't say all of them, but too many don't want to work. I don't know where they get their money from. Many of them are in betting shop – in the old days betting shops were bookmakers and they call them 'bookies'; too many of them depend on the horses.

6 They were tertiary education teaching institution in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland offering higher diplomas, undergraduate degree and post graduate education that was governed and administered at the national level. After the passage of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 they became independent universities which meant they could award their own degrees.

7 Electroplaters, electroplating, metal finishers

Many of the men maybe are unhappy, maybe they want to go back home, to wherever home was?

The only person who I see still and speak with in my old language is Solomon Kokupon. He is from Accra. He lives just behind where the old garage used to be on Barn Hill Street, down the hill. I walk to his and we talk. Francis Ekwa went home, Denis died. I knew a woman called Nola, a white lady. She had bad legs, and she died too. I have been home - three times - but I am eighty-five. I am too old now to leave England and anyway all the money I saved was stolen from me!

The first time I spent any real time with my daughter Stella, she was seventeen years old. The last time I had seen her she was a five year old. All those years had passed since I moved to Sheffield and was taken falsely to court for maintenance. More years pass and now she has her own children so I promise her 'since you have kids I will try my best to help you' because as I have already told you I was brought up by a loving family.

At that time I had bought machine tools making ready to go home to Ghana. But when I saw her, I felt sorry for her and promised to help her. I should have minded my own business and gone home because it was from frying pan to fire. From frying pan to fire, but when I make a promise I stick by it and being my daughter I stood by it. So it was every weekend she would pack them up and she sends them to me in Sheffield. I looked after them - the two boys and a girl.

Sorrell is my favourite. She would come Friday to Sunday. I always made sure to get home before six o'clock when she would come in her school uniform, leaving again on Sunday night to go back to school. Sorrell doesn't live with her mum anymore but she is hardly a baby now, she is with a white guy which I don't mind.

Bramis died leaving his sons and his daughter running the business. They were young people. I don't know what they were doing with the business but we were all made redundant. Because I am very involved with my daughter's children, Bramis's son finds this flat for me and I came back to Manchester.

'Sometimes I cry, only you didn't see me crying, but I have been upset already as I talk with you.'

Now I just listen to the radio and watch the telly and DVDs. The black family that used to live here at number 1, Samantha the daughter still does my shopping. But the one person that I can and do rely on for over twenty years since I came here is Mrs Rosalind. She has been a very, very good friend to me.

She is very good to me. When my video broke, she brings her video to me. That video there, plenty video there, belong to her. She comes here every week to see me. If I miss something, Ros will get it for me. My best friend is Ros. All of my male friends, they're all gone now.

You ask me do I go to church? I like that question. In Newcastle I did go to Church. Then one day I went to church and this new priest, preached the gospel. I was the only black person there and he did his sermon on me. He was telling the people that God has brought a black man; I forgot what he said now. From that day I say 'No'. He shouldn't mention any colour. He shouldn't mention colour in God's house. He is bringing attention to me. The people didn't come to hear about me. Then from that day I said 'No'. I will stick to my Bible. I still got my school Bible – small little Bible, I still have that Bible here today. I take my Bible and read psalms and pray and pray and thank God who has rescued me twice in a different country. I pray and read my Bible every day, every night until I have this problem with my eyesight. You also ask if I am still feel Ghanaian. Well I still eat Ghanaian food! Oh yeah, yeah that is one thing that will never go. What I can say, I live here all these years I am a British. I grew up here, I lost my virginity here, I am British.

Sometimes I remember all this and I cry because those seamen, some of them who couldn't even sign their own names, let alone make money and live big. Everything they told us back home – the whole thing it was lies. Yes, they make themselves big when they come on shore and we youngsters, well I don't know about the others, but me, they certainly fooled me. The way they dressed – they come in suits – we don't wear suits in Africa. My father didn't have a suit, my elder brothers hasn't got suit, so when you see a black man with all this tie and suit and talking and spending money like nobody's business and you are a kid, a school boy, it make you think they are living good. We made the wrong move to come to this country but we had to come here and find that out.

CHAPTER 18

DONALD SECKA in his own words



Donald Momodou Secka



Secka Family

*'We made the wrong
move to come to this
country but we had
to come here and find
that out...'*

I was trained as a mechanic but I couldn't find work so I worked in a factory. I was married twice, once in Gambia and I have one boy there and then I married again here in England in 1955. Both my wives are Gambian.

Here I am known as Don. It is very different from where I was born. My people are Jola¹ and my language is the same. My Dad was a male nurse and mum a housewife. They had 5 boys and 5 girls, I am the 3rd boy. I was 24 years old when I came over to England to further my education. I was a passenger on the Leody, a French ship from Senegal. We docked in Marseille then Dover. For the first eleven years before I moved to Manchester I lived in London in lodgings with other Gambians. I got married and we lived just off Stockport Road, then there were domestic problems and I moved here and got a flat in Moss Side.

I worked in a factory with wood veneer for John Wright and then the Fords Motor company. I joined the Transport and General Union and was also a member of the Gambian Society.

My first impression of England was that it was hard and cold and the people were not very friendly. Aside from my boss who I don't really remember, I had not had any contact with English people in Gambia. I expected England to be very friendly and full of opportunities but it wasn't.

Finding work was easy but not as a mechanic. They needed men with more experience and we were behind in our training. I got a job at a small garage but it was very cold, they used to burn newspaper for heating. That is why I left to work in the factories. There were a few other black men there but not many, only me and another two Gambians, a couple of Caribbean but the rest were white, mostly they were white.

I did make a few English friends some of them were alright, but we stopped being in touch when I left work. I retired after being made redundant 15 years ago and not heard from them since.

I didn't personally suffer any racism but obviously I was and am aware of it. I thought more opportunities lay here. England was the mother country open to anybody that comes, friendly and like we are back home in Gambia. We make all strangers welcome.

1 Also known as the Jolla or Diola tribe they make up 10% of the Gambian population

I came to England after the war. England was looking to the future but I have never been an ambitious guy, you know what I mean. So part of it is my fault.

I had a school friend who came to England before me and got a job as an apprentice and he carried on being a mechanic. When he was qualified he went home and got a good job. I never went to school and I blame myself for that.

I have two clans of brothers because my mother remarried. They are well educated and there is nothing special about them, so it's my fault. I was loved as much as the other ones.

You know I grew up without a Dad. That might be something that may have affected me. I have always been a serious guy in life – no hanky panky² or trouble. It's just that I haven't been ambitious; maybe if I had had a Dad I would have been different.

I have plenty children you know! Six girls and two boys; four here in Manchester, three in London and one boy born and living in Gambia. One of the girls in London works in a bank, another one works at the Courts and two girls are at school. My son is looking for employment.

I was a good Dad. You know what I mean, very good. I was good even though I say it myself. I was quiet and hardworking and you know sometimes women take the piss.

In my marriage here in England I brought up two kids who were not mine and I brought them up as if they were my kids and I lose them all. When I say losing, I mean in time they finish with me, no more contact.

My children grew up in an African house, the food, everything. But they change after time, change their attitude. Some of them speak my language and of course they speak English and in a way they have English ways.

I don't do any wrong. I can't say I'm perfect but I don't do any wrong. I stay home and look after the kids. When I was young and used to go out, yeah I have good times.

2 Naughty behaviour

I enjoyed going for a drink in the Big Alex³ and the Reno.⁴ The only time I would dance was when I had a drink. I like music I like reggae, pop and soul music especially. But I didn't drink and get silly.

Now I have eight grandkids, two great grandkids. The two grandkids are mixed race, they are white, the grandkids. I do have contact not often, but I see them. Maybe I just bore them.

I do regret leaving home and coming to England even though there are better things here such as the National Health and Social Services. We have nothing like that at home.

But most of my friends have done better than me by staying there. When I went back home in 1996 I saw that they were alright, they owned a good house, they have their family around, they are happy, they have cars, some of them have new cars. They have done better than me, not all of them, but those who were very close to me.

I would love to go back for good, but you know the situation. I had no qualifications, I didn't have enough money and I have family here. If I had another chance to come here, I would study law. Being a lawyer is a good profession and they are respected and always make money. If you do wrong and get caught you go to court.

I never been stop and searched or arrested. So I think the law is good unless of course something went wrong for me.

3 <http://pubs-of-manchester.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/alexandra-hotel-moss-lane-east.html>

4 <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Reno-Club-Manchester/158372724181214>

CHAPTER 19

OLATUNDE JOSEPH MOSES *in his own words*



Tunde Moses

'They told us lies to come. Mr Churchill said you don't want to speak German do you? So we volunteered...'



Tunde with great grand and grand children

They told us lies to come. Mr Churchill said you don't want to speak German do you? So we volunteered.

I never went back to Nigeria, because my sister wrote me and told me not to come back. They didn't understand that life is a gamble. I come from a big family. My parents were traders. I was born in the city Ijeibu,¹ the eldest of three boys and have two sisters. I have lived in Accra, I was a traveller. In Accra there are two kinds of people, one call themselves Fante². In Ghana, there are three different languages. They are fisherman. This is their job. They go to sea, throw their net and catch fish. And they use the gourd³ for when they eat and when they drink water. I can still remember Ghana George, his son was called Abraham.

I left school in 1939 as war broke out. I was 18 years old. I came to England as a crew-member on the ship; I helped the stoker moving the coal to fire the engine. Many of the men who came over to England, I knew from school. There were a lot of characters but they are all gone now, but I remember Black Jack, Doughty was his surname he was what you call a right character. Where we land in Middlesbrough North Shields it was very cold. They gave us a cellar room in Colonial House⁴. There were lots of people living there. I also sailed sometimes out of Hull and Yorkshire.

Over in South Shields an African Mr Adam, he managed a house that was cold too but at least we got a room each. Fish and chips that was English food; there was no problem eating it because it was cheap. I worked as a painter at Swan Hunter⁵ at the Wallsend yard⁶ on big military ships - aircraft carriers.

1 Ijebu Ode is a Local Government Area and city located in south-western Nigeria

2 Are an Akan people. This ethnic group is mainly gathered in the south-western coastal region of Ghana,

3 Specifically referring to the plants of the two Cucurbitaceous to their hollow, dried-out shell. They have had a multitude of uses, including food, kitchen tools, toys, musical instruments and decoration

4 There was a 'coloured' seamen's hostel known as Colonial House at 3 Northumberland Place.

5 The Tyne shipyard internationally renowned as a world class shipbuilder. During a 130 year existence, the birth-place of many fine ships of almost every type and size.

6 Wallsend Slipway & Engineering Company Ltd was formerly an independent company, located around a mile downstream from the Swan Hunter shipyard, with which it later merged.

During the war I ended up in Casablanca in Morocco⁷ where the convoys sailed from before they went to war. As the ships slowed down you would see the mines in the water. It was the first time I saw camels and the first time I ate macaroni because my ship left me and the embassy put me with Italian prisoners but I didn't know it then.

When Germany surrendered we went to the consulate to get another ship. All you had to do was take a photo, send it to the Home Office and that way you got your identity card.

Back in England I moved to Manchester. Cold damp Manchester - you could catch pneumonia here. I had a single room first in Fairlawn Street. The house was owned by John Tottoh.

I was in Cardiff working on the ship when I met Doreen's mother Euphema McMillan Cannon who was Scottish. Doreen came along later and was born in Crumpsall Hospital in Manchester in 1948. I never stayed home until I got a place for the children. I never saw any problems that my wife had because I was looking for the money. I bought a house on Everton Road because I was lucky at gambling. My suits came from Reeds Brothers. I never got them off the shelf, I got them made. They measure you and then they made each piece for you alone. My shoes were always leather and I wore a small hat.

I remember that some of the English were alright and honest. Not all of them, some of them were not very nice. To tell the truth they were all English man to me.

Mr Bowman lived in Fallowfield, on a very nice old English farm. He gave us the place that became the club after he said 'Do what you like with it'. I forget the name of the other man, he was the mechanic at the back of the Denmark Hotel, anyway, this was where there used to be horses. We cleaned out the whole place and when we got the money together we opened a club. The Lagos Lagoon. We got the name from someone in London. It was 1961 when we opened for gambling and dancing. We didn't have cabaret or anything like that, just a big heater on the stage.

⁷ an important strategic port during World War II and hosted the Casablanca Conference in 1943

Even though gambling was illegal we had a lawyer and he said for gaming house it is not a criminal offence. They will fine you and if you don't pay the fine then you go to jail. So we always paid.

The only people who give me any trouble were the gypsies. They come over and put their caravan in front of the club. There were lots of caravans in Moss Side in them days. They are good spenders even though some of them couldn't read or write, but they are trouble. Most people got on well but some will always take liberty even the police. We had fighting amongst ourselves naturally. Even the Jamaican president came one time to settle a dispute between the West Indians.

I went one day to a club in Blackpool. I was the first African to go there. It was owned by a wrestler Jack Pye⁸. The building was the same as I had. They were open until 2 o'clock but we were only open until half past ten. So I ask this guy Jack, 'How did you manage that?' He told me that where people drink, you have to offer a sandwich or something and then get a lawyer to get a 2 o'clock license.

The lawyer Nigel Copeland was very good to me. He was a very nice person. He told me that I was a very good person and I laughed and asked 'why?' and he says 'Anyone could get to you – the way you express yourself and everything'. He specialised in license, a club license.

Babington did the cooking. He had come from Nigeria before me. It was only rice and chicken. Everybody eats rice and chicken and our customers were cosmopolitan. So we cooked our own food then they said it was not hygienic, so we have to get a certificate, but now anywhere you go in this country there is a club and yet before they said it wasn't hygienic.

The club was liked by everyone. The BBC even made a film in it. We were all there dancing. All people. Black men, white men and women together.

Their mum she cooked porridge, bacon and egg and I used to cook when the kids are young. There were no African women here then, none, only now. And if there were, I didn't know them. But now, there are, maybe they ship them here!!

8 Jack Pye, the Doncaster Panther Jack and his brother Harry managed the Horseshoe Club Blackpool

I hear they bring women in to work in the houses but they don't pay them for months and months and nobody does anything, and that is this government for you!

Chris: I would say his best dish was his soup. It's meat, tomato, onions and cayenne pepper and dried shrimp. Dad taught me how to cook that. The soup comes with fufu⁹ and garri¹⁰. My children are now 18, but every Sunday, every Sunday, they would come to my Dad's to eat food with their Granddad. Now I make the same food and my kids say 'Yeah it's nice Dad, but it's not as good as Granddad's'

I don't regret coming to England because it was hard to get a job in Nigeria and when you got it, you just kept yourself to yourself. So I think I have had a better life in England than I would have had in Africa.

Chris: At least the weather would have been better.

Rain is rain and sun is sun. Our rain season is June, July, August and occasionally snow from the North from Abidjan.¹¹

You don't pay insurance in my home; you pay it yourself so if something goes wrong you pay it yourself. Maybe they have that there now I don't know, but I hear tell from one man in Nigeria you might go in hospital and they don't have a bed and I say "how can they look after you?"

Life depends how you keep yourself. The Council demolished the Lagos and we moved to Ainsworth Lane in Bolton. At that time I finished with the night club business and got a job making car batteries at a company on Radcliffe road.

Mr Copeland who got the licence he wanted me to take a new place but I was living in Bolton so I opened a cafe and club on Radcliffe Road called the Number 1. I bought it from the Jamaican "Black Alex". He had the hotel on Hathersage Road. Donald Croft supplied the beer which we had to go to pick up and then go to the farm for chicken and eggs.

9 An ancient African dish it is a thick paste usually made by boiling starchy root vegetables

10 Garri (also known as *gari*, *garry*, or *tapioca*) is a popular West African food made from cassava tubers. The spelling 'garri' is mainly used in Nigeria, Cameroon

11 The economic centre and former official capital of Ivory Coast

At this time I was just living with Chris my son. Then one day the Social Services came and tried to take him from me so we skipped off and came back to Manchester to live with English people - Auntie Elsie and Uncle Nick a Caribbean. Elsie used to bring my son Chris to the club when she did the cleaning. You see how it is people together!

I have no regrets about England. I have enough children and grandchildren. I am very proud of all my children, the girls, Remi he became a footballer - yes all of them even though I don't name them here. Now I live with my son Chris, he is a good son.

Sadly Mr Moses passed 11/9/2014, days before this publication was completed.

CHAPTER 20
BURJOR AVARI *in his own words*



Burjor Avari MBE 1998

*Although Manchester is now
our home my wife and I feel
nostalgic about our life in
East Africa...'*

I had a wonderful time as a student at the Portsmouth College of Technology for two years, in the mid-50s when the weather was much kinder than now. I was only 16 and very innocent and carefree. After two years I went to Manchester for the next four years – studying for a History Honours degree. Normally that course takes three years, but I had to spend an extra year over Latin which was compulsory and which was very new to me.

After finishing my degree I spent a year at Oxford University Department of Education and gained a Diploma in Education. That made me a professional teacher, and I returned to Kenya in July 1962 to start my career.

I taught for four years in Kenya: at an Indian Boys' School in Nairobi for the first two years, and in an African Boys' Boarding School, outside Mombasa, for another two years. I was the Head of History in both schools.

I came back to England in 1966 to study for my MA. This time there was no scholarship, so I had to earn my way in Britain. With the influence of a kind-hearted councillor in Southend-on-Sea, where my brother had come to study, I was offered a job in a very rough secondary school. I spent a very difficult year in that school before getting a job in Manchester where I could do my MA. I finished my MA part time in 1970, while teaching. I taught in two Manchester schools, between 1967 and 1984, reaching the position of the Head of Faculty of Humanities.

Between 1984 and 1987 I was working as Multicultural Education Team Leader in the Tameside Education Department. My multicultural work in Manchester schools and in Tameside was recognised by the British government, and I was awarded an MBE in January 1988 honours list.

From January 1988 I also started a new job as the Coordinator for Multicultural Studies at the Manchester Polytechnic which later became the Manchester Metropolitan University. I retired at the age of 65 in December 2003. Between January 2004 and January 2011 I was employed by the University in a part time capacity. In January 2011 I ceased being a staff member and I was made an Honorary Research Fellow in the History Department, where I am now based.

I married my wife, Zarin, in August 1971, in London. She taught Domestic Science and ESL in schools in London and Manchester, and retired

in 2004. She originally comes from the island of Zanzibar, which is off the coast of Tanzania. We both belong to an ethnic group called the Parsees¹, the followers of an ancient Persian prophet called Zoroaster. We have two daughters. One is the Assistant Head Teacher in a Manchester primary school; the other one works with the Home Office.

Although Manchester is now our home my wife and I feel nostalgic about our life in East Africa. In 2007 we took our daughters to Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanzania: and we all enjoyed the experience very much.

1 A member of one of the two Zoroastrian communities found throughout South Asia. They are ethnically distinct from the Iranis even though both groups descend from Persian Zoroastrians.

CHAPTER 21

SUNDAY NWAGBARA *by his wife Margaret Eunice*

*'His family was everything
we were kept separated from
the business...'*



Sunny with Eric Deans Band



Sunny and Bobby And Joe
Behind the Nile Club Bar



Sunny Nwagbara
1959

Margaret prefers to be addressed as Eunice. She married her husband Sunday Nwagbara aged twenty-two, Sunny (as he was known by everyone) was thirty. Family life took place in Manchester and Nigeria.

When she reveals that she is looking towards her eighty-first birthday I say, 'you're a baby and you look good as well!!' 'I know' is her reply and though she is laughing I know from the start that I am meeting a confident, strong woman who faces life on the chin and she has needed such skills from the moment she met her future husband.

A 3rd year student nurse at Withington Hospital she is encouraged by two friends to go to a dance at the British Council¹ on Barlow Moor Road in Didsbury where she meets the man who was soon to become her husband even though it begins with a disagreement!

'I'll take you home' he said. 'I don't want you to take me home I only live round the corner from the hospital'. 'I've got a car, I'll take you home' – now to have a car in those days was really something!! He was also very, very, well dressed.

Eunice doesn't lay any merits on looks

Eunice: "I think good looking men are very vain and more into themselves."

I asked her, had she met any other black men.

Me, no, never. But there wasn't that many black people here. In fact they came here, the West Africans before the West Indians started flooding in.

She recognises something in Sunny, a determination and a refusal to be pushed along by others so she agrees to date him on her first night off; and even though she oversleeps, giving her half an hour, he waits until she is up and dressed and takes her off to her first club experience. The establishment is owned by his uncle Steve Hatton and his wife Madge. (Eunice doesn't remember the name of the club).

¹ Now a Mitchells & Butler (Metro Professionals) house, it was converted to the Woodstock Arms pub some years ago

He took me behind the bar and sat me on a stool, he was on the door and he said 'Don't let her out of here'. It was packed with American soldiers, the music was swinging and the whole place was heaving. I had never seen anything like it in my whole life, it was quite an experience.

After nearly four years of courting, Sunny didn't actually ask for her hand in marriage. Not surprisingly therefore she once told him :

'You know, people don't like you' he said 'No, but they respect me' and that was true because everybody respected him. Because he helped a lot of people, he was very good, but he didn't stand fools. He couldn't stand anyone trying to fool him. He was very arrogant, a very arrogant man.

He told me we were getting married on the Saturday. He said 'You have got to go down to where you go to get married'. 'What for?' – 'Well I have booked us in, we are getting married next Saturday and then you have to have got the wedding ready, the food and everything'.

So I went to the Registry Office² and they said 'We have called you in, because if you want to know if he is already married, before you get married to him.....' and I said 'Look, I'm not even interested, if he was married he would have told me' – I said 'I just want to get married and that's it'.

Let me just go back a bit. They wanted to do a check, as to whether he was already married in England or Africa?

Yes!

I had to find myself a dress and find this, that and the other. My Mother didn't want it because she was very prejudiced. She wouldn't come to the wedding. My father got on alright with him. But my Mother was an inverted snob.

Did she ever come round? Mellow when you had your own children?

No, not really but that was her problem, not mine.

Turns out even the date of their marriage was to become a bone of contention between Eunice and Sunny.

² Maintain the national archive of all births, marriages and deaths dating back to 1837

He always said it was the 21st December but it was on the marriage license as the 22nd! And you'd show it him and he'd say 'No - they've got it wrong!!'

A qualified (Engineering) designer Sunny came to England as a passenger in his early twenties under contract to a company in Birmingham. He disembarked in Liverpool in the rain.

It was pouring with rain, there were cobbles on the path and he said 'I'm going back on the ship, I'm going back, I'm not staying here,' but he didn't. He stayed in Birmingham a couple of years, working and then moved to Manchester to be employed by Metro Vicks³.

While Eunice and Sunny were courting he moved from renting a room to lodgings.

He got a place in Didsbury, with a mother and daughter who used to look after him as if he was a little baby. They'd come and say 'Your bath is ready'.

On marrying Eunice, Sunny bought one of the large houses on Palatine Road⁴ and with four children, the youngest just six weeks old he announced that he was taking the family back to Nigeria. Passed over for promotion at Metro Vicks, Sunny left their employ the next day, having decided that his future lay in the self-employment of owning his own club. He used to work on the door of his Uncle Steve's club on his days off. A "swinging club" on Grafton Street frequented by American servicemen.

He found one (a space) above the Reno⁵. It belonged to an old Jewish man who was a millionaire, he owned half of Southport. He wouldn't let him have it, but Sunny found out that he liked the women. So I had to get on the phone and had to sweet-talk him. He agreed to let him have the club because of me. I never saw the man in all the years of the business. I never ever saw him. Then it was all hands to the deck to get everything sorted and ready and that is how he started the Nile Club⁶.

3 Metropolitan-Vickers was a British heavy electrical engineering company of the early-to-mid 20th century

4 <http://www.palatineroad.co.uk/>

5 <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Reno-Club-Manchester/158372724181214>

6 http://www.manchesterbeat.com/venues/moss_side/nileclub/nileclub.php

You ask anybody about the Nile club and they will tell you.

How long did you live in Nigeria

The first time we went we lived there for six months. We brought all new furniture, all new. We took everything up to the washing line with us because didn't know what we were going to experience there finding such things. We even took a brand new car!

We also rented a house here in Manchester on Egerton Road for when we had to come back.

When we first arrived we were given a government flat because his cousin was the Home Secretary or something like that. They had these flats for out of town visitors and that is where we lived until we got settled. It was very posh. It was by the sea it was where the ex-pats lived and who thought they were Lord and Lady Muck!

Did they make you welcome?

No, I had nothing to do with them I wasn't interested in them, or their lives. This was my life.

When he said he wanted to go back to Africa, I didn't have a choice – 'You are my wife, these are my children, we go', but I wanted to go because I like adventure. We went by ship, came back by plane. I loved it there.

My youngest daughter was six weeks old and was bitten by mosquitoes, even inside her mouth, inside her nose and inside her ears, even though she was wrapped in the mosquito nets. To this day, as a grown woman with her own children she has never been ill. My sister in law used to bathe her in palm water, not the oil, and she has never been ill, never. I hadn't done any tropical nursing so I didn't know anything about it, but they had their own way of doing these things.

Two male cousins used to come and take me wherever I wanted to go with the children. We would go to where the sea was, because it was cool with the palm trees. I can't stand the heat over here, but the heat there didn't bother me, it is a different kind of heat.

It was purely business that brought us back, because certain people, who were meant to be running the business, weren't doing what

they should.

Was your home in England an African home or English home?

It was just an ordinary home. My life? I loved it, it was mad, totally mad and you never knew what was going to happen from one day to the next.

Because he worked in the club, he slept during the day and the kids had to be quiet when he was in bed. We lived in a big house with a big garden so they didn't really disturb him, but even if they did it didn't really bother him – it was my fault, it wasn't their fault – everything was my fault. It was how we had started together, arguing, we argued night and day.

One day he went out in the car with the two boys and they came back with a sheep in the back. Not a dead sheep, a live sheep. He was going to cook it - cut it up and kill it and everything. So it was kept in the garage for about a week until he was ready to do it. He had them hold its legs whilst he cut its throat.

We had a big freezer in the hall, a huge freezer. So the sheep was put in this freezer and we would say 'It's stinking, it's stinking' but he wouldn't have it 'I'm cooking me sheep today'. He was a devil for things like that! And he also brought chickens which the neighbours used to come and say 'Your chickens are out Eunice', (laughing) 'Come and get them'

The house was a total mad house.

You daren't say 'No' to him. The only one who said 'No' to him was our eldest daughter and he said to me 'Watch her'. She was about eleven then and he'd say 'Watch her, keep her down because she is going to be a villain'. She has never been bad, never done anything wrong but she has been a handful because she won't do anything. She is just like me, she does her own thing.

All four children have African names and they were all named by the family in Africa. They told him what he had to name his children. The teachers had problems with the kids' names – so they said 'We'll call them by.....' and I said 'You'll call them by their name because that is their name and you will have to learn it' and they did, all the teachers knew them. I don't stand any nonsense with teachers. In high school they used to say 'Here is the Mother coming up the path'. I would only go if they did something

wrong and I will fight like every other mother for my kids.

Did he become a member of a club or any unions? Was he in the African Union?

They all used to come to our house. They wanted him to stand for the Council, but he said 'No' he didn't want to do that as he didn't have time to do that. He was very well known and people wanted him to do this, that and the other, but he just didn't have time for all those things.

We came back from Africa just before the Biafra⁷ war started. He gave a lot of money to Biafra and he gave a lot of money to the Biafrans in my name.

When Nigeria got its independence, he was asked to carry the flag at Manchester Cathedral so he had to have an outfit made for him. Well he had never worn this before, it had always been a shirt and trousers, and I told you he was one of the smartest men you've ever met. He put the new outfit on to carry this flag and he nearly fell over until he got used to it. He had to get used to it. Afterwards there was a big do at the club.

Aside from the Club what did he do for a social life?

He had a family; his family was everything, we were kept separate from the business, totally separate. We didn't go to pubs. If we went out, which was about twice a year – every time the Doctor said I needed to go out, you know (laughing). We used to go to the big clubs in town, because he liked gambling, he was a big gambler. We are not talking a tuppence⁸ halfpenny gambler. We just went to the posh clubs.

Any regrets?

No regrets whatsoever. I am just sorry that he died when he did. 39 years this year.⁹ I used to curse and say 'Why did you leave me when they were teenagers, anything but teenagers!'

It was Whit Sunday.¹⁰ The Police phoned, asked who I was and said

7 The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafra War, 6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970

8 Two pence (or *pennies*) in pre-decimal British coinage

9 1975 (2014)

10 The Sunday of the feast of Whitsun or Pentecost in the Christian liturgical year, observed 7 weeks after Easter

'Would you mind if we came down there has been a bit of an accident'. I said 'Yeah alright'.

I was ironing. They said 'Would you mind getting dressed', because I wasn't dressed, I said 'Ok' and got dressed. 'Would you mind coming with us to the hospital as your husband is in the operating theatre'.

They took me to the hospital and I was there for ages and of course the people who knew us, started coming, saying 'Are you alright and what's happened and this, that and the other'.

I knew exactly the minute he died. As the Doctor walked in I said 'He is dead isn't he?' He said 'Yeah'. I knew the exact minute; we had that kind of rapport between us even though we were arguing all the time. People thought we were arguing even when we weren't. I knew the minute he had died.

He had been in the Nile Club and this man came in insisting that he wanted to play poker. He must have won some money somewhere earlier as he had £400. Sunny won the lot off him, so he started calling Sunny all sorts of names.

About five in the morning as they closed the club and were going home, they stood on the kerb waiting for his friend Bobby to come out and lock the front door. The man returned to steal Sunny's briefcase, thinking he had got all the money in it, but he hadn't.

Sunny was hit over the head with an iron bar, he was murdered.

My son had just turned 18 a month before his father died. To keep the club open, he said he would do it, giving up his college place on graphic design, which I was annoyed about. He didn't know what was what, but supposedly supported by my nephew and his sister's son, who is the biggest crook you have ever met; together they ran the club.

They nearly had me in the Bankruptcy Court between the lot of them. So I went to the lawyer and said 'I am going to sell' and he said 'I think you are doing the right thing Eunice – we'll sell it'. So I sold it. We didn't get much for it because the property wasn't ours. The property still belonged to the millionaire.

I had a lot of reporters at the door and they were getting on my

nerves. I told the Police ‘I don’t want these people harassing me, I have got enough without this’ and they said ‘We want one paper to have your story because it will help us find the killer.’ I chose the Evening News¹¹ but I did say if there are any lies in it or any wrongdoing or saying about anything, it’s got to be what I have said not what you are putting in my mouth. And the bloke who did it, he did it exactly the way I wanted.

I took Sunny’s body back to be buried in the interior, in Umahia¹².

He laid in state in the front room. People from Liverpool got in touch with the Nigerian Embassy which was in Liverpool at that time. They brought the Ambassador to meet me before they would do anything. After we met he said ‘They will take over now’ and they took over. They arranged for the burial, the undertakers - they came up from London, and then they drove back and got the plane to Africa for the funeral.

The day before we flew to London with the coffin, there must have been about 400 – 500 who came through my house.

I went with my eldest son and there were the people who we knew already in Nigeria. When we got there, they all came and I have never seen.... It was a wonderful thing to experience. You wouldn’t see it here.

His brother built a big house in Umahia – nothing in it, and Sunny is buried outside it.

The coffin was on a table as we went in. And all these women¹³ – ahhh – I’ve not got time for all that, but I just stood there and let them do it.

I think because his coffin was flown to Nigeria we were told that it had to be pneumatically sealed and must not be opened. The undertaker had said although they knew that Nigerians do like to see the body, because of the flight it wasn’t going to be possible. But they opened it; they opened it when they got it to his brother’s house.

After the funeral they don’t make a hole in the ground. It was like a mausoleum, all concrete inside. My son helped put the body down, he insisted he wanted to do that and I said ‘OK - do what you want’. Then they sealed it, but others can be buried in it.

11 Formerly the Guardian and Manchester Evening News Ltd until 2007
12 The capital of Abia State in South Eastern Nigeria
13 Professional waiters

Afterwards we went upstairs on the balcony of the house.

It was like being a teacher in a school. They said 'Bring Auntie food'. What did they bring? Sandwiches! I said 'Where is the chicken, where is the rice?' 'Oh Auntie wants to eat food!!!' So they brought us real food.

Then his brother, who even then was very old and if he is still alive he must be about 200 years old now; took us into his bedroom and brings this whisky from under the mattress so nobody else would see it.

He spoke Pidgin English so I had to have an interpreter so I knew what he was talking about. He said 'We are going to drink this now' and I said 'No, I don't drink whisky, but save it for the next time I come, and we will drink it, me and you'. Then his sister's son, my nephew who had been living with us in Manchester, went to grab the bottle saying, 'I'll have that'. Well, they nearly killed him; they nearly killed him because he had gone for this whisky. 'Nooooo' said the brother and he took the whisky and put it under the mattress saying 'When Auntie comes back'.

A lot of people will say 'I knew Sunny, I knew Sunny very well' but no one knew Sunny, only me. Even our children didn't know Sunny like I knew him, so there is only me, who can tell Sunny's story.

CHAPTER 22

ERIC SKILTON *by his wife Nadia*

SuAndi: Nada is a petite lady forced just two years ago to move to residential care and leave the home she and Eric shared together where every room is full of memories.

She was 21 years old when she arrived in England from Austria. She thinks it was around 1938.

Along with other Austrians and Germans including Jewish people, Nada was interned and spent eighteen months on the Isle of Man. Her release was determined by the courts she tells me :

They asked ‘What did your grandfather do?’ I didn’t do anything, I was Austrian and all the Germans and Austrians were interned. Even the Jews; what did the Jews do? They ran from the Germans. I didn’t, I didn’t do anything; there were a lot of people like me. Then they said ‘you can go home’, but there is no home. So when this person says ‘where do you want to go - Manchester or London?’ I thought and I have been in London and the South so I am going to Manchester.’

Unhappy with the first place she lives in, she moves to Heslington Street¹ in Moss Side and with a good job and money she settles into the routine of life, she thinks this was around 1942.

At first, I had some war work – shells!! It nearly drove me mad – hammering all day, and I really got ill with it.

Because I was used to walking, every day I walked from Moss Side to Didsbury. Then one day I went home on the bus. Anyhow, I went home when I saw a fellow, by god he looked terrible, very poorly dressed in hospital blues² and being so tall his trousers were here, how you say ‘half-mast’ and his sleeves were here. I just happened to look and I thought ‘by

1 <http://images.manchester.gov.uk/Display.php?irn=47508&QueryPage=%2Findex.php%3Fsession%3Dpass&session=pass&QueryName=BasicQuery&QueryPage=%2Findex.php%3Fsession%3Dpass&Anywhere=SummaryData&StartAt=13881>

2 Eric was most likely a patient of the 2nd Western General Hospital at Grangethrope

Jove³ he is handsome.' Why do the people surround him in such ill-fitting clothes? Then he looked across and I looked right back at him.

I went home and the other girls in the house asked me, 'where have you been today' and I said 'I saw the man I am going to marry'. That was only fun but I did think 'by Jove, he is beautiful'.

When you saw him had you seen or did you know any other black people?

Not really, to me this was just like a sea. I was used to all sorts, my landlady when she interviewed me she had warned me that there were some bad people locally. She also said no men at the house and don't talk to the coloured people, they're bad! Afterwards I thought 'how in god's earth can you say they are bad and you are so religious!' And I mean religious, before lunch you had to pray and afterwards.

I didn't go for a walk for a few days, then as I came over the river to go to the bank and there he is on the bridge and he said, 'Hello, where have you been?' I said, 'where have I been?' He said 'my name is Eric Skilton, and my number⁴ – I'm not just picking you up, I just want to talk to you'. Not another soul around. Not a soul, we just stood there and I can still see it now. He had his hands on the railings, big hands and we were chatting. Then he said 'I have to be back in hospital' and I said 'well I have to go to the bus.' 'Are you coming down here again?' he asked me. 'Can I meet you?' I thought he's very nice, so I say 'yeah, if the weather isn't bad,' and he said 'God give you a nice day'.

The next time we met in the little park there. You know the lovely park (Fletcher Moss⁵). We sat underneath the apple tree, they were in blossom. We sat there every time we met, he couldn't go anywhere; he had no money and he couldn't walk. When he finally left the convalescence home (*the old Didsbury College*) we started to walk out together.

One day I came home early from work. There was something very nice on at the theatre, very hard to get tickets but he managed it. He was very keen on theatre.

3 It was considered a great offense to say "By God". Instead people started to say "BY Jove"

4 Possibly she means his military number

5 The Botanical Gardens in Didsbury between the River Mersey and Stenner Woods

Because I thought my landlady wouldn't be home, I could snatch a bath to wash away the smell of the cooking. I had a new job now at 'Groxrux'⁶ near the Opera House and I looked after a hell of a lot of people and I was there for years and years. Anyhow she caught me and asked 'what are you doing?' and I said 'I'm having a bath as I am going out'. She said 'where are you going?' and I said 'To the Opera House'. She said 'Who are you going with' – 'my friend' – 'which friend?' 'Erica' I said, 'she is waiting in the park'. It was only like across the road, not further! And she said 'Well ask her to come in.'

I was so mad, so for months and months I had lied, and I am not a lying person and it was hard but 'she' is a 'he' and 'he' is 'coloured'!! I had told Eric 'You can't come to the house' and 'she mustn't see or I will lose the lodgings.' One of the manageresses used to see us in Wythenshawe Park on a Saturday. We'd sit underneath a tree. I'd be knitting and he would read to me improving my English.

So I told her, 'you said to me I mustn't bring any coloured people to the house, or talk to any because they are Satan. So now if you want me to leave OK, but let me have a bath first.' She denied it and went off across the road and said 'I'm Paula, Nada's landlady. You come in and have a cup of tea with me'. Well, I mean, he said it nearly knocked him out. From that day on he could come and fetch me. She would make him a meal if he came late, and he was her best man when she got married. It went to the other side. It just shows what people are and not thinking – I think they are absolutely heartless! Especially to the little children, I could never understand them.

We went out a long long time and they never ever bothered me. People are nasty, they ask, questions. I never told them at work, never. The boss knew that he was coloured. I said 'You might be against it, it's a good job, but you might throw me out.' I had heard things like that. He said 'I'm not like that' and he came sometimes to visit us.

But we didn't bother. My eyes were for him and he was for me. We were courting for five years. He went back to the army but still I saw him often. He was in Wiltshire and then abroad. When he came to Manchester he stayed in one of those homes, you know where soldiers stay. Everything was hunky dory. He wanted to marry me but I said 'No, you have no job, no home, I have no home and I am not going back to my home except for a visit.'

6 Not possible to trace as the correct name or spelling not known

He said 'I'm not going to ask you until I am out of the army,' and he told me the date.

'We can't live for ever like this, me in a home and you lodging at Paula's', so we got married and that was it.

He told me all sorts about his life, well he told me everything but it is now a long time ago and I forget this. You need to forgive me, remember he was 23 maybe 24 when we first met.

He had nothing, no brothers no sisters nothing. No parents, nothing. He was adopted, before, a coloured boy was something. When he was adopted - they made fun of him. He had everything going, it was a big house – I saw it. It was like an estate but I cannot think where the village was. It was where the big soldiers were near Aldershot. He wasn't allowed just to play he had to work and the bigger he got, the more he worked.

He had good college, he had everything. But when those people got married and had a child, then he was out. Whatever happened then, I never know. He left and started wandering around until he went in the army. He was fourteen, something like that when he left. He ran away.

Nada cannot remember much about Eric's time in the armed forces though she remembered that he used to go to reunions in Blackpool and that they were riding horses.

I didn't want to hear it. It was miserable 'let's forget it' but he was brooding. I said 'Look Eric, you had good schooling,' (*he was very well educated, upper class accent*) – you would never think anything else of him but that he was a gentleman. And he never, ever, touched me before we were married. You know from other people - coloured people have 'bad reputations' you know they rape and are violent whatever the idea was. He always said our love making 'it has to come from you.'

When we married we lived with Pammie.⁷ All the girls had left, the war was over so he had a room. Then we had an apartment in Moss Side before we moved again to Parrs Wood⁸ and then we got money problems. He was used to the best, though he was in the army, well you knew, big house, (*best shirts*) and all that went with that life, his old life. So was I, but we were not rich but we were working and well off.

7 Not sure if this is her pet name for Paula or Pammie is someone else

8 Not really a definite area it incorporates part of East Didsbury

At least I knew what money meant, he had no clue especially since when he was in the circus he had made such a good living and spent it all.

Pammie was very knowledgeable about life and she said ‘what you two want is money, but how do you get it?’ Then she said ‘buy a chip shop, sell the house, and buy a chip shop’ and I thought ‘bloody hell, a chip shop’. Anyhow, we got a good chip shop on Church Lane Northenden⁹ – it was very nice – to me it never was nice – but it was nice. It had no name – just Eric Skilton. It was a very good chip shop and I did like it. And he said ‘it’s only till we got on our feet’.

We opened and he would go to the Bowling Green for an hour or half an hour or an hour. There was nothing much to do so I used to open up on my own to make sure everything was right for when the help arrived.

This day I was alone when a big fellow came and I mean a big fellow about 6ft 6, an Irish man. He called me everything there was. A ‘whore’ was probably the nicest thing, words that were absolutely obscene, many I had never heard before; I had to ask Eric what some of them meant. At first I thought I had dealt with him but he came regularly, he would watch Eric going out to the pub and then he came to the shop.

This day Eric hid so the fellow couldn’t see him. So he came in again and gave me again all the bad words and shouting. Eric stepped in from the back, got him from the back. The shop street is like a hill and it was a bit damp as it had been raining. You have to know Eric was a big fellow, very athletic. The Irish fella at first couldn’t move, then he fell all over the place. After that we never saw the Irish man again.

Some other people called me names and I always said ‘My husband doesn’t hit me, that’s something we don’t have in common.’ I lived well for Eric I couldn’t do wrong. In fact, I wish at times I wasn’t such a bad little devil. I used to take advantage, you know like you do – milk the cow whilst it’s there.

We stayed ten years and we made the money needed. Mind you, having said that, we still had fantastic holidays, a month long, shopping – clothes. We got friendly with another shop in the village and said ‘if we have holidays a different time to you then we all make profit’. We were friendly, so we did that.

⁹ Northenden became an official district of Manchester in 1931 prior to this Church Road was the centre

Whatever we want, we saw it. It didn't matter if we went to London for the weekends, you know – he was very keen on London. Anyhow, this had to stop. I thought 'right we got the money we want, so who is meant to never really get her hands dirty and yet I have to work like a dog!'

I said 'no way Eric, enough I go back to my job and you find a job'. He said 'Well if you get this price for the chip shop you could sell it tomorrow' and I said 'Do you mean it?' and he said 'yes I mean it'.

Saturday, Eric meets his friends for football. A fellow comes in at 12 o'clock in the shop, just when I open and tells me I look a little miserable today' and I said 'I'm fed up with this shop, I wish I could get rid of it!'

When Eric comes home I have £100 in my hand and he says 'Hello Lover, you didn't make that in a day, never.....' When I told him he said he hadn't meant it. So I said 'you have never told me what you didn't mean, so now don't lie and mess about!' 'Alright' he said, he couldn't do otherwise and in the morning the fellow came and paid the rest of the cash.

And he said 'when do you want to finish' and I said 'tomorrow if you want'.

He always had a job and was never without a job. He was a painter and decorator. He was a gentleman really. He was, he was. At the building site they called him 'the man from the BBC.' He wanted to be a physiotherapist. But we didn't have the money that he needed. But he was good, because I suffered with a lot of rheumatism. He was very good.

He didn't drink, he didn't smoke. He had all the mannerisms of a gentleman, he was still very fastidious, very fastidious. Not overpowering, but if somebody 'scoffed'¹⁰ as he called it, I know it hurt him. It's funny I never had bad manners and I enjoy food but believe you me, it was too much for me. My mother visited and we were all invited to a party. It was big event, we were all sat down everything was very lush – to impress. Some people from the Town Hall, somebody who was somebody. Mother was staring at the lovely sandwiches, brown bread and sliced cucumber. They looked beautiful.

Mother looked, and her voice was rather loud 'What's this? Fancy giving you this, there should be meat on them!' Everyone looked!

10 Mocked him

Eric stood and said 'Mother, Mother you always have to have something different – you want to get up in society'. They all started laughing and it was such laughter, it was never forgotten. It was like he was on the stage, there he stood! Then he put his head down 'She comes from Austria' and I said 'It sounds Eric that you said that she came from a Cow shed.'

He loved children. There is only one thing, it's a pity we didn't have children. The kids around here liked him a lot. I cried at times, but no tears will help you. We even thought of adopting, but I said no, I had had enough by then. And they ask some questions and a coloured person and a white one will never get any. I really don't understand why two decent people can't have adopted children. I could not understand, you know what I mean. I had never done anything, been locked up or reprimanded or nothing. I don't know if it's different now.

Eric saw this house that he thought would suit us. We altered it quite a bit. The people wanted to go out and live 'posh' in another house. Then when we came here and we had it all altered, they wanted to come back. It was really funny. They sent me the furniture from Austria, it was so nice. The garden was lovely and I had a good job. It was all in the paper. They came round and Eric was interviewed as there wasn't a white woman marrying a coloured fellow. I could have screwed his neck after I read it because this was our business no one else's.

45 years we have been here in this house, there was never a dull moment, one day we had a dog, next day a cat, next day we went for a trip maybe down to London.

Do you mind telling me about when you lost Eric, when did he die?

No, I don't. He got Alzheimer's disease, I don't know when. I looked after him. He was good, but I still had to go out to do the shopping. I said, 'Eric, here is this and that and be good, don't bother anybody, I will come home as soon as I can'. He would walk outside and ask people 'Have you seen Nada, have you seen Nada, she has left me.' He was frightened that I had left him.

When I came back I would say to him 'Well you silly devil, what is all this about'. 'Well you weren't here' he said and I said 'I told you' – but he didn't know.

One of Nada's friends is with us during the interview and she says; 'When you went out and he stayed with us for the day and every ten

minutes he would say 'where is Nada.' He told me all the stories of when he was in the circus, of his Derby days, he knew all that – but he couldn't take in where Nada was.

Eric also wrote and published his autobiography which not only covered his experience as a parachutist but his time in the circus and his childhood. Sadly I have not been able to locate a copy. Nada did have a copy but as she tells me -

When he ran away to the circus; He wrote about this, Yah, Elephants and Tigers and governments, believe you me, it was fascinating.

I had a carer¹¹ coming in and she asked me about his book. I said, 'You can have the book to read it' and I gave it to her to send it back and she hasn't.

She was white, she was a nice woman. I got her address. She works in the Town Hall.

All the cuttings were all in, but really it was my fault!

He could not be without me.

That day, he was very bad and I sat with him until midnight and I said 'you have a shower now' (he had one every night before he went to bed) and I helped him and we went to bed and I said 'Was it a long day?' and he said 'yes'. He just lied down there and said 'sit with me' and I had to sit with him and we talked. Then I said 'Eric I am so tired' which I was as I was doing all the jobs, running around and he held my hand and said 'I always loved you even when I was nasty to you' and he wasn't really, just disagreeable. He said 'I always loved you' and kissed me. And that was it. He said 'Come back and let me have a look.' And in the morning, I came and he must have died 5 minutes after, I swear by it because he lay in bed just as I put him, the bed wasn't even crumpled. He was just there with his the feet out of bed.

He was washed, changed. They had nothing to do.

11 A Social Service Carer helps with shopping laundry and cleaning. They are not permitted to take money or gifts from the client.

CHAPTER 23

SIMON AKINTOLA FAGBORE *by his daughter Ann*



Fagbore renewing marriage vows

*‘They fought like cat and dog
my Mum and Dad as people do
but they never, never fell out.
They did everything together and
separately...’*



Fagbore family in West African Army



Fagbore with army & airforce colleagues

Nobody came to Mum and Dad's wedding except Uncle Ernie, Mum's brother.

Simon was a qualified mining engineer and came to England to expand his experience. He could not find employment in Manchester so he joined the Air Force becoming a Gunner with the Lancaster Bombers. This is how he met Elsie. She was a "Land Girl"¹ he was in the parachutes.

My Mum Elsie changed her name from Bagshaw when she was twenty four, Dad was ten years older. They lived first in Chorlton with friends. Then they bought a house in Byron Street Hulme, the whole street was mixed race, it was great, absolutely great.

Everything changed when we moved to Northenden in 1980. We had no contact with our neighbours, none! Jesus Christ, it was just 'Nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger.' Can you understand that? I didn't stay there long; I lived in at the MRI, got married and moved out. But my poor old Mum and Dad were stuck.

They did us five proud. Coleen is retired now, Jacqui she is a doctor in Radcliffe, Anna is a nursery nurse, John is a jeweller, James was a boxer and then a bouncer - believe it or not he still is and I became a nurse at Wythenshawe hospital. We take after Mum us girls. Mum was a machinist and school dinner lady then a teachers' assistant. Yes she was a great little lady.

Dad was strict. It was the way he had been brought up. When he went to school, he had to tie his shoes around his neck and walk there in bare feet. So, Oh my god, strict! He was really strict....

You know we used to do this. If us girls did anything wrong we would have to put our hands out and he would have a big stick and all of us girls would say this 'me next Daddy, me next'. We were all blinking afraid of him.

They fought like cat and dog my Mum and Dad as people do but they never, never fell out. They did everything together and separately. Like doing the shopping. My Dad went to Moss Side, my Mum went to you know, Stretford Road. He went to the market in Moss Side.

1 Women who worked for the Women's' Land Army were commonly known as *Land Girls*

It was great, honest to God, I wish now it was close to where I live.

He cooked meat you know, like tons of stew and big plates of carbs; you know what's it called that white sticky stuff? Yes that's it. Fufu.

I can even remember my first Yams. He bought them as soon as they started to come into the shops.

He did use to put loads of pepper on and I thought, 'Oh my God' and we'd sweat like bloody mental but he also used to sweat from the pepper.

But even though Mum and Dad argued my Dad would do anything for a quiet life and a dance. He loved dancing.

He was a very smart dresser and they loved going out, they loved parties. We went to all the parties from being young from about 3 or 4. We kids would fall asleep and our Dad would still be dancing.

We used to go out together - Mum, Dad and all us kids. We went to Moss Side and Whalley Range; I can't remember the names of the places now. But I do remember the time when we didn't get home until 4 o'clock the next day. Not in the morning, I mean the next day. Oh my God. The party was for Chubby Checker and we really did twist the night away.

My Dad died in 1988 so I came back to live with my Mum because the house had gone quiet. When my Dad was alive his friends used to come round. Friends and relatives came from Africa, Whalley Range and Moss Side.

They would come round the men and speak in their own languages. We kids loved that you could almost dance to the way they spoke.

Now the house was empty and Mum became empty too.

Did I tell you they retook their wedding vows for their Ruby wedding? That's 40 years. Forty years to make five children and 22 grandchildren.

That was a great party. After they took their wedding vows again, yeah and we all came back and went to the pub, the Heald Green. Lillian Stockton, Mum's sister ran the Heald Green. We went there and had a real party. We got smashed – all of us, I mean the kids they were all running around and being blinking mental. You know when my Mam was fifty – it was great, it was great.

We used to go to the Odeon. You know the Odeon? When it was the Odeon! We'd go with Aunty Eileen, she's dead. We'd all go to the pictures and watch, do you remember Helen Shapiro² and Bobby, Bobby something. We'd all get an ice cream. That was fun. We were kids then you know like, those were the days! Helen Shapiro and Bobby Darin³? *Ann Starts singing 'Coz the Night has a thousand eyes.....*

Dad had that coal miner's disease⁴ he was 72.

Mum died of a broken heart at 80. She died here. I don't want to be morbid, but she died in my bed. Oh my god, she died in my bed. Ben was about five and he said 'Mum, Nana's on the floor, and I said 'What do you mean Nana is on the floor?' I said 'Is she praying?' He said 'no she can't get up'. So we picked her up and put her on the bed and she looked at us like..... Well you know then don't you.

They are buried together in Southern Cemetery.

2 <http://www.electricearl.com/dawson/helenshapiro.html>

3 <http://www.bobbydarin.net/>

4 Pneumoconiosis (CWP), colloquially referred to as black lung *disease*, caused by long exposure to coal dust.

CHAPTER 24

LARTY JACOB LADIPO LAWSON *by his son Larty*



Lawson



Lawson with son Larty and
Grandson Larty Jnr and great
grand dad

*'I have got lots of his
photographs and all his
suits stored in an old
flight case that when you
open it there is a smell of
Papa...'*



Lawson with family in Africa

If my Dad was here now I would reprimand him about everything really. Not teaching me his language, not being there more and not taking me to Africa. Now I would demand to go with him. I would thank him for trying to make my life better than his by trying to enlist me into the Navy, although would I have turned out differently? Who knows? I am quite happy with who I am, how I am inside. I am not a bad person to anybody and I think that comes from the heart.

He had a number of houses which I think he bought with the help of my mum because I don't think he could write very well. So he did well considering how he started. Then the City Council brought in 'compulsory purchase orders'¹ and he got a miserable £1500 for one eight bed roomed house. I don't think they could get away with that today.

When he died he left one house to me and the other to my son, his grandson. He also left me some money, his hard earned money. I've not spent much of it. My wife Janine and son can have it to make their life better.

I have got lots of his photographs and all his suits stored in an old flight case that when you open it there is a smell of Papa. I close my eyes and breathe in and it is like he is still here.

I was born in Stepping Hill Hospital² in Stockport. Dad met my Mum after her marriage had broken down and my Dad took on her three children who were white and looked after them and brought them up. She had three girls and one boy.

I was the baby. They were older than me, the eldest sister moved on and then the other sister until there was Elaine, Malcolm and me. Our life was messing around on the back crofts³ and making bogies⁴.

1 (CPO) is a legal function in the United Kingdom and Ireland that allows certain bodies which need to obtain land or property to do so without the consent of the owner. It may be enforced if a proposed development is considered one for public betterment; for example, when building motorways where a land owner does not want to sell. Similarly, if town councils wish to develop a town centre, they may issue compulsory purchase orders.

2 Stockport NHS Foundation Trust's main hospital

3 An inner city term used for land without a building on it, most often a bomb site

4 Made out of old pram wheels and bits of wood, a bit dangerous as you steered them with bits of rope attached to front wheels' axle

Where we lived off Denmark Road, in our street all the kids were white! As I was growing up, I wanted my hair to be straight and I used to think ‘why can’t I have my hair gelled back?’ You know the quiff⁵ that the white lads had.

I have to describe Dad as a worker, with his overalls on because that is all I would ever see him in, his overalls, his long coat and his trilby, either riding his bike or pushing his bike when he came to visit us. He had a business, a scrap yard in Stockport with another African man. It was a Rag and Bone⁶ yard with horses and carts; I remember seeing the reins of the horses up in the loft in the house in Denmark Road.

Eventually the business folded and though I feel sure he would have done well by himself, I don’t think he had the confidence to go it alone. If he had, he would have become a millionaire because he was very good with money and what to do with it.

Dad thought ‘I have got to earn money, I have got to work’ and from that time, he just worked and worked and worked. The only place I can remember him working at was a German firm in Oldham making the long trailers for the articulated lorries. He was there for all the years that I can remember. It was a strange household really, me growing up as the only coloured person there. I used to argue with one sister and my brother and sometimes she would call me the ‘N’ word. It used to hurt but in the long run it made me stronger. My dad did tell me I was different. I remember looking up at him as black as coal and my Mam snowy white. I liked my colour.

There wasn’t a unity, to tell you the truth there has never been a unity in the family – from my perspective as the youngest. There has never been unity; there have always been problems along the way. Eventually my sisters came, I think, to love me, really love me for what I am. Not sure if my brother did.

I don’t really know much about Mum and Dad’s relationship. I never really saw them hugging as mothers and fathers do, I never saw that.

5 A hairstyle that combines the 1950s pompadour hairstyle, the 50s flattop, and sometimes a Mohawk

6 A *rag-and-bone* man collects unwanted household items and sells them to merchants

I think maybe my Dad was only there to supply what was needed to look after me, his offspring. He didn't live with us. He lived in his own house on Carlton Street. He had a few houses; he had Carter Street and Ripon Street. So they were together obviously, but separated because they didn't live together.

Really it was an English house so I was brought up more English than African. It was an English house with an African room and that was his room where all his things were kept under lock and key. We only went in there when he came round. In there were all his own bits of furniture, the glass round table, the glass standard lamps and the glass ashtray stands on either side. When I used to go in there, it was like going into a special room in the house because that was his room.

It was very rare that we would sit down at a table and eat together. I used to do that with Dad in his own house. He would go to one house, maybe do some work and then go onto his house, have some food and then he would take me back home. So I did spend some time with him but it was more or less going to houses. It was working time not playing time and definitely not teaching time; especially about his culture which I would have liked. If you ask most half caste or mixed race - I prefer half caste than mixed race - if you ask most of them I don't think many of them can speak African. They should have taught their children, at least I think so. He did start to teach me and I was beginning to understand, then for some reason he just stopped. I never got around to asking him why.

If I was naughty, Mum would always say 'Wait 'til your Dad comes home'. I would see my Dad cycling. I could tell him from miles away because of the way he used to pedal with his knees out and his feet out, a bit like Charlie Chaplin. He always cycled, never drove. When he came in I would start praying that my Mother wouldn't say anything. Sometimes she did and he would warn me and sometimes she didn't, she just did that to frighten me!! Dad's favourite thing was getting hold of my ear and then twisting it before the slap across the face... When he got annoyed his cheekbone would twitch. He was strict and I was scared of him but it did me no harm! He taught me about manners and that is one thing I know. If I went into the room and my mother said 'Larty would you pass me that' and I replied, 'What?' Dad would look at me until I said, 'Yes Mum, Yes Dad' 'Yes please, no thank you'. So I was brought up with manners as a lot of us have been.

When he came to the house and they were talking, she would say ‘Do you want a cup of coffee Papa?’ Mum would call him Papa when she was looking for something or some money. I think it was her ‘sweet-sweet ways’. He would spend time at the house, but only for about an hour, two hours, then he would go and I wouldn’t see him until the next day or for a couple of days.

He did try to do well by me, especially the time he tried to enlist me in the Royal Navy. Only problem was he filled all the forms out and paid for everything without me knowing. One morning he gets me up at 6am and I think ‘this is early, what’s happening here?’ He says ‘Right come on, up’ and he took me to Liverpool. At the station he said ‘a single and a return’ and I remember thinking ‘somebody’s not coming back’!

We got to Liverpool and went into a building and I asked another lad, ‘What is this place?’ and he replied ‘This is the Royal Navy and from here we are going to Bangor on the ship’.

This was the first I knew about it. I thought, ‘I have not even said ‘Ta-ra’⁷ to my friends’.

All the boys were getting on the coach to leave for Bangor when Dad said ‘Get on the coach.’ ‘I don’t want to go Dad.’ He said ‘Get on the coach’. I knew he was getting annoyed because his cheekbone started to twitch really quickly. I looked around put my head down and ran. When I eventually got back home at 9 o’clock at night I was told that he had said to my Mum, ‘I disown that lad, I disown him’. He took all my clothes, everything, leaving me in rags, old clothes for about 5 or 6 weeks. He took all my best things he had brought me, everything. It wasn’t until one of my sisters was getting married that mother asked him to let me have the clothes back so I had something to wear for the wedding. After that it was more or less back to normal.

I imagine he was disappointed in me. It wasn’t helped by my behaviour at the wedding reception. I must have been maybe 12 or 13 – I had lots of drink and I was drunk! Very drunk.

I came home crying ‘my sister is leaving, Patricia is leaving’ crying, crying. I got back to Denmark Road and went to the bedroom.

7 Chiefly a Northern English informal goodbye; farewell.

I opened the door, the coal fire was lit and there was a silhouette in the dark. It was my Dad in his long coat and trilby. I can imagine now years later, what he was thinking. Here was I drunk and he had wanted me in the Royal Navy to be a captain, an upstanding person and now he is thinking 'he is just going to be a drunkard'.

I started going out in my teens to little pop clubs for soda and then my first club at 18. Even though at 15 or so I was recognising music, I was just listening to the beat and not listening to the words. All those records were telling me a lot of stuff but it was just the beat I was interested in. From 18 I was going into town to places like Explosion⁸ and Pips⁹.

I think when I was younger, due to growing up in a white family, I was white, or rather I thought I was white, not in colour but in mind. I used to see black people going about locally but it was all white kids that I played with – until I started going to Clubs and then I wanted to listen to this superb music which was black music. I started playing with Afro Ville. The whole team was half caste and looked the same as me and it felt good, especially when we won. It felt good because we were united together.

I wasn't really a good teenager. I haven't been to Queens College¹⁰ but I have been in a detention centre¹¹. If a lad called me a 'black bastard' today I would walk away. I wouldn't want to talk to someone like him, but when I was 17, I went mad at him. Three months of my life wasted for that. I was in Stoke on Trent Detention Centre¹² so my Dad couldn't visit as he didn't have any transport. The only time he did visit he said to me 'Look Larty, it was only for a fight; you have not been burgling houses or robbing any people. You had a fight with another lad and you beat him up', so that made it that little bit easier for me.

Mum passed in 1980 and she never spoke about their relationship. Now I know it was not unusual for African men to be happy to take on and raise children who were not their own.

8 http://www.manchesterbeat.com/venues/manchester_cbd/explosion/explosion.php

9 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGjM26me_AA

10 Slang for Prison

11 A *juvenile detention centre* is a secured residential facility for young people awaiting court hearings or as a care facility program

12 HMYOI Werrington a young offender institution holding sentenced and remanded young men up to the age of 18, primarily serving a Detention and Training Order (DTO) of 4, 6, 8, 12, 18 or 24 months

That is probably from the heart. Black people have got a good heart and that is what I have learnt in this life, at my age, so it didn't surprise me. I don't know if I could do what he did, but that was his life. Because he had two different lives.

I rarely saw him dressed up to go to somewhere special. He had his own life and that life was in another house and I learnt much later, it was with another woman! This lady used to walk down the street with her dog and he used to say 'hello' and I would say 'hello', not knowing it was actually the lady he was living with.

He had me very late in life – he was born in 1902 and I was born in 1953 so he was 51. Mum died when she was 62. When my Mother was alive, I never said to her 'Mom I love you' so when Dad started to get poorly I made sure I let him know.

I looked after him and it felt good looking after Papa. I call him Papa now and I would have loved to have said it when he was alive, but then it was Dad, 'yes Dad, no Dad'. I took over doing his shopping, paying his bills, visiting him. If I could go back I would have been there more, but I was doing my own work. I would stay for an hour or an hour and a half and then I was off because he was still an independent man even when he went totally blind. I would say 'do you want me to that Dad?' and he would say 'No, I can do it, I can do it'.

The doctors had told him that eventually he would lose his eyesight. It took about 8–10 years. It was because of the conditions where he worked. They were issued with a shield for protection whilst welding. Sparks were breaching the sides deteriorating the eyes. Eventually he would struggle just doing bits and pieces around the house.

He went to Africa at least twice I think. The first time I was far too young to even think about going. The second time I was old enough and with his failing eyesight I should have taken him, looked after him and gone to see his homeland. To this day, I am sorry I didn't do that. I should have taken him to Africa and met the families and brought him back safe and well.

I loved being at my Dad's when friends visited. I used to love hearing them talk in their own language even though I didn't understand it. All I used to do really was make them coffee and listen to them having a good

natter¹³ and have a good laugh.

They used to regularly say to each other ‘I will see you on the other side.’ His best friend died first and I don’t even know how Dad felt about losing such a close friend. He was living just off Great Western Street with that lady. She also passed away and I didn’t really know much about her death either because of this separate life that we lived. I didn’t know how to read his emotions.

I only really got to know him in a father and son relationship in the last six weeks of his life. I felt that he really needed me when he was on morphine and his health seemed to get worse by the day. On his last day, I said to him in his ear ‘Dad I love you’ and I will always remember how his eyebrow went up, so I said ‘Dad if you heard that, do that again’, he did! So just as he started his journey of death he knew his son loved him and that was a big comfort to me.

I have missed him, I have missed his life and I would dearly have loved to have spent more time with him and to get to know more about him. He was a stranger really. He was a stranger because we lived in two different worlds. Like the song goes ‘if I could dance with my father again’¹⁴ that would be the best thing in my life.

13 Talk casually, especially on unimportant matters; chat. “they nattered away for hours”

14 *Dance with My Father* was the thirteenth and final studio album by American R&B-soul singer-songwriter Luther Vandross’

CHAPTER 25

ABDUL ALHIJI ABDUL WAHA OKELOLA TELLA

by his daughter Silafatu



Tella Family



Abdul A. A. W. Okelola Tella

‘... if you go to certain parts of our village and you see my Dad walking, they know him as Oba and they bow down to him but the young people, and these are students they call him ‘Baba London’ or ‘Baba England’, because he was the first one to travel the world from his small village. ...’



The Tella Children



Ann Tella and grandchildren

He loved England; when you go to Africa in certain parts of our village and you see my Dad walking, they know him as Oba¹ and they bow down to him. The young people call him ‘Baba London’ or ‘Baba England’, because he was the first one to travel the world from his small village. A lot of them don’t have what my father has because he comes from a good lineage so the people love him. He is slower now; he had a fall and broke his leg. But he hasn’t got Alzheimer’s or dementia or anything like that, I don’t have to worry about that old goat that way even though he is now 99.

SuAndi: Silafatu was one of the most challenging interviews not because she was reluctant to speak; far from it. Keeping her on track was the issue. Making tracks has been her professional life as she is known globally as the singer Sylvia Tella². Some might say from her time as a backing singer for Boney M³ but the truth is that her debut album, Spell⁴, became one of the best-selling Lovers Rock⁵ albums of all time.

Sylvia is strong beautiful and to my delight for Afro Solo UK she knows her African connection as strongly as her English heritage. Not only does she know it but she relishes it for feeding the dignity of her back bone. As she tells me :

My grandparents are from Royal House and they are Oba Kings from Ilaro⁶ village where there is a street named Okeela area after him in Egbado State⁷. If you put that in Google you see our land is very good, in the past it was a big state with four kingdoms.

1 Oba (king), a Yoruba title for certain royal rulers

2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Tella

3 The group of Jamaican-born singers was formed in 1975 in Germany and achieved popularity during the disco era of the late 1970

4 1981

5 A style of reggae music noted for its romantic sound and content

6 Western Ogun state,

7 The *Egbado*, now *Yewa*, are a clan of the Yoruba people, and inhabit the eastern area of Ogun West Senatorial District, Ogun State, in south-west Nigeria

Unfortunately on this occasion I need her to concentrate just on her father's life in the UK –

From what you have told me already your father is wealthy in Nigeria, but he is not educated and decides to come to England.

He came to England for a better life. His lack of an education was a disappointment to his father who was a professor – why he didn't learn how to read and write – I don't know!! But the truth is that although he didn't do well in school, he was an excellent tailor who helped to send his siblings to school. The reality was he was too busy working helping the rest of the family be educated to get an education for himself. His brother's son, Shereff is a good example. He invented all the mathematical programmes the Japanese use in computers. Shereff now works for a number of Nigerian universities.

My father was very adventurous so at 15 he decided that he needed to go to another world – he stowed away on a ship and on subsequent voyages over 14 or 15 years sailed to Portugal, Canada and Brazil before coming to England as a big man in the 40s. He was about 30 something because he met my mother when he was 42 and she was only 22 – so he was 20 odd years older than my Mum.

After the crew found him he wasn't treated as a stowaway because the captain got to like him and made him his cabin boy. From there he became the cook making the dinners and from there he made their clothes. So he did everything and he was the Captain's personal aide. He looked so handsome in his uniform. I have a picture of him, but that is in Nigeria.

Do you know where he landed?

Yeah, Liverpool; with his cousin who stayed there when my father came to Manchester. Then he just started working, he started by buying a building, doing it up to turn it into a sewing machine factory. My father

was⁸ a very smart man; he could make a man's suit in a day. He couldn't read or write, but he could do anything with his hands; build, everything.

He bought his own house in Robin Hood Street in the Temple area⁹ of Cheetham Hill, and then he bought three more. He also had a chip shop and the Lucky Bird cafe with a shabeen¹⁰ underneath. It was near Temple School. I was too young then to know the actual address but I remember I would sit at the top of the stairs listening to the blues and ska¹¹ music.

He built our house in Robin Hood Street, Cheetham Hill with his own hands. It had 4 bedrooms, a kitchen dinette, the living room that we were not allowed to use, in them days it was the grown ups' room, and the back yard where dad kept Chickens. We even had a cellar!

They don't make men like my Dad any more. My Dad built my first wardrobe. It matched the fancy fitted wardrobes with doors you see today. He even drew a plan and got someone to make one in my African home to his specification. It's lovely with carvings, whereas the one I had here was just plain. Still it was my Dad who built it and that was in the 60s. My father told me the reason why he set up business and built his own house was because when he came they wouldn't allow him to sleep in a house. Back in those days, I don't know how black people could buy houses because they couldn't even get an apartment.

But even though my father was an African man, he was loved. We lived in a street where we were the only black people, and I never saw racism as I see it now, even though in reality it was there.

I couldn't believe it when they (the council) tricked my Dad and said

8 Sylvia uses the past tense only because she is referring to his past life in England as opposed to his life now in Africa

9 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchesterarchiveplus/5256899603/>

10 An illicit bar or club where excisable alcoholic beverages were sold without a licence.

11 A music genre that originated in Jamaica in the late 1950s, and was the precursor to rocksteady and reggae

that they needed the house for redevelopment – the same frigging pub that was next to us – the Robin Hood pub, looking like a load of shit – they have done nothing to it. So why did they do that? *I think our strong hold was getting strong.* We were getting strong, because in my time as a child, every black person I came in to contact with whether they were West Indian or African owned their home.

Using the law¹² the council took away our financial heritage. At my school my mates started inheriting houses while ours is being robbed from us. I didn't question it, because I didn't understand.

I did, because my Dad told me the truth that the government bought back the houses from our parents because they were in prime locations and they wanted to build up the city at minimum cost. They couldn't do that with my Dad because my Dad was smart so they brought in lawyers to push their case. The café they got for little and nothing. The last house, our family home, I think he made £20,000. £20,000 for a house which was worth £200,000!

Part of this project is about the false projection of black people that we came over and just took from this country, all the jobs and all the benefits..

That is not true because all the people who came over here did all the jobs that the English didn't want to do – sanitation, cleaning up the rubbish. Even my father-in-law who is from the Caribbean told me that when he came over to this country, which was just after the war, it was in a mess because so many men weren't even here to do the jobs – it was only the foreigners who were here and they were willing and wanted to work

12 Compulsory purchase is the power to acquire rights or to buy a property outright “for the public benefit”, without the current owner’s consent in return for compensation

20 – 30 years ago, before advancement in technology, nobody in Africa really knew the reality of England, they still believed that the streets were paved with gold. They thought here you had everything. That view has changed now as more people have travel and have seen things on the internet, they see some people over here are living in boxes and they can't believe it.

In my father's time when he travelled it was because you heard about these foreign countries that you would love to explore. You are a young man of 15, you want to do more for your family, you want to do more for your life, but that means you need to travel, but as a young man how are you going to travel without money. How are you going to do it - you stowaway, then you are in the middle of nowhere, they can't throw you off so they use you. You become very useful, because not only can you cook but you can sew clothes.

Was he ever officially in the Merchant Navy?

Yes in the end. When I was in Africa he showed me all his mementos like his card¹³. I felt good, he had his uniform on and his hat. My brothers Ganiyu and Hakim went in to the forces, one in the Royal Air Force and one in the Army. My older brother Dean, the one after me became a boxer and followed my father's footsteps, became a business man in property and cars. He also is a good Tailor.

They all became valuable members of this society.

They had to. No they didn't have to because we know a lot of people fell aside, they chose to.

My father took my younger brothers back to Africa when they were around 7 and 9 years old and I brought them back when they were 21 and 23.

13 British Seamen's *identity card*.

They had qualifications that were not recognised here but there was no money to cover re-training so in order to get the jobs they wanted they had to join the forces to qualify again. I couldn't believe it and that is what really makes me angry because African education.....

.....is based on British.

Thank you! And is of the highest form, the highest! And they have also got Montessori¹⁴ schools, which is where I sent my kids. I sent them there before I sent them to ones in St. John's Wood, and these are all private schools. Schools like where Charles'¹⁵ children went to. They used to think I was the cleaner – seriously, or the au pair because I didn't go there with fur coats and lipstick on a hot summer's day; but I am the mum!

What was your Mum's maiden name?

Ann Woodward – she was one of those sheltered girls, she lived in Harpurhey¹⁶ and had never even been in to town until my Dad brought her. She was disowned and never saw her parents again until they died. Even when we were born and they didn't want to know. We got to know some of her siblings our Aunties and Uncles, even the ones who didn't like blacks, but we knew which ones we liked and which ones we didn't – we have a lot of cousins.

Ann was engaged to a white man who was in the army and she was up the tub¹⁷. Her father had disowned her and kicked her out so she had moved in to her friend's house – a woman who loved black men whereas my mother had never even seen a black man.

14 An educational approach developed by Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori and characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychological, physical, and social development

15 Here Sylvia is referring to Prince Charles

16 Three miles north east of the city centre.

17 Pregnant

My Dad kept asking 'Who is your friend?' every time he saw them in the street as my mother always walked on the other side because she was scared.

Dad invited her via her friend to his 40th birthday party, but the other woman fancied my Dad and didn't tell her. So when he saw her months later he said 'You never came to my birthday party' and she said 'I didn't know'. Dad knew the truth then so he asked her out saying 'I will cook you dinner'. And because he was so nice with my half-sister Christine – my mother thought 'look how Christine is laughing' and she said 'OK' and she went and after a time they got married in a mosque because Dad is a Muslim and the rest is now history. For a while, she wore the appropriate clothing but Dad became more westernised wearing suits, keeping his gowns for special occasions though more or less every day he would be in work trousers fixing his cars in the garage.

Everybody loved my Dad because he was a people's person. When I think about my childhood there were so many people who knew my dad and everybody called him 'Tella'; from the shop keepers to the neighbours to family members. Even I get called 'Tella' by my musicians. I admired my Dad because as a kid he seemed to be able to do everything and anything except read and write. Good he couldn't do that, I taught him how to read and write when I was a kid. But he was very strict with us when it came to learning. We couldn't play out, we had to be in front of the board – I was learning shorthand at the age of bloody 7, I didn't know anything about shorthand and typing but he was so insistent it didn't matter how we did it, we had to learn.

He has always been more religious than political. When I worked for the government in Africa he was scared because he is more 'I'll pray for change rather than I will go to parliament and debate'.

When I was a kid I used to think he was about 6ft tall, the most

handsomest man who could do everything. I love my Dad and admire him and I wanted a man like my dad and I think I did. My first husband, my children's father even looks like my dad when I think about it.

Dad has a presence because he has a smile that lights up the place and he is very handsome and very charismatic. When he wears his African cloth and walks about he looks regal and elegant.

Together mum and dad made a handsome couple who went to every African social event. My mother being disowned had to be part of the African community.

African independence was coming so everybody was always celebrating, there were celebrations at town halls everywhere – they were big events. My father would sew all our beautiful African clothes and we went as an African family to every event, whether it was Liverpool, Birmingham, and Manchester. African independence for Ghana, Nigeria – we went. It was very, very important but I didn't understand it then because I was a kid.

So in that village and I use this analogy, it didn't actually matter whether this man was from Ghana or Kenya – it was the African?

It was all African, remember all those countries one after the other – they rose and got their independence. I get excited over that because it was true and I was a part of it even though then as a child I didn't realise its importance. Going to all the African dances, the independence dances, Muslim dances like my own christening which lasted three days – the party was three days long!! Everyone from Cheetham Hill came, they came from everywhere!

Did he teach you his language?

Yeah, but when I was small, so now when I go to Africa and talk a little Yoruba people laugh at me, because the things I say you would never

say it that way to a grown up. My Dad always laughs.

So who was head of the family, your Mum or your Dad?

I would say my Dad as we ate African food, we were taught African ways and we have to abide by the African mentality. If I was on my periods 'you can't go in to the kitchen', if people come in the house, we have to greet them – really respectful. That is the way we were brought up.

How many children do they have together?

My brother Dean and me. But Dad was a womaniser, a good looking man, 'he loved women'. According to my Mum and my brothers and sisters and the stories my Dad used to tell me when I was young, when he lived in Africa and he had four wives and they all loved him. He was a very, very handsome man – even now even as an old 99 year old man the 'washerwomen love him off'.

Dad had an affair with a Scottish woman and had two sons, my brothers Ganiyu & Hakim with her. Then she left him and married a white man who was ill-treating them, putting things like 'niggers not allowed' on the toilet doors and things like that, and this was a very intelligent man of means carrying on like that. My father just took my brothers and my mother ended up raising them. Even now they don't go to their birth mother, they go to my mother.

So they split up and then got back together again?

Yeah, one Christmas I woke up thinking it's Father Xmas¹⁸ coming, and who do I see but my parents sneaking in with the presents and mum has dad's dressing gown on. I was shocked, I rubbed my eyes to check I wasn't sleeping. When they went out the room, I woke my brothers and told them our mum was back with us - her family.

18 Abbreviation of Father Christmas

There were lots of issues, there were so many things that I understand now which I didn't when I was little. They split up again and the judge gave custody to my father because my mother is on her own working in a brewery and as a cleaner in the evening. Even so without fail she came every week with clothes and all sort of things for us.

My brother Dean wanted to go and live with our Mother, and my father said 'OK, you can have the children'. I didn't want to go so I stayed with Dad, which is probably why she and I are a bit estranged even now.

I was 12 when my Father announces he is going back to Africa and wants us to all to go with him. Mum and him had divorced and he was going out with this woman called Jean who had a daughter Mary aged three year old. He marries her without telling any of us so I was angry with him and I said 'You didn't even invite me to the wedding and blah blah blah', so though I had planned to go home with him, I changed my mind at the last minute – all my clothes went and everything went, but I changed my mind.

By now I was 13 in a band, singing at the Russell Club,¹⁹ Falstaff pub²⁰ and other local pubs and clubs. I was trying to make my own life as you do as a young person and my dad said 'While you are in this country I will give you nothing'. As he went off to Africa he cursed me 'And you will end up pregnant and your brother will end up in prison'.

And so said and so done (laughing). But we were smart enough to change our lives – the first time I did anything in my life I got caught and my brother ended up in prison but luckily we changed our lives and we became better. Dean owns his own house and has worked all his life.

Did you witness any racism towards your Mum?

19 Also known as the PSV, The Factory or The Caribbean **Club** www.mancky.co.uk

20 <http://pubs-of-manchester.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/falstaff-inn-st-wilfrids-street.html>

Yeah, it was a horrible. I was about 6 and we were in town and I needed to go to the toilet. They were downstairs under the pavement. While my Mum was waiting for me she bumped in to an old school friend, remember she hadn't mixed in Harpurhey since she had been disowned. They got talking and I came back to overhear the woman ask 'Where are you living and did you get married and have kids because I heard you left'. Mum said 'this is one of mine' and the woman's face just changed when she saw me. I noticed the change but I didn't know why. Then she turned to my mother and said 'so you are a black man's whore' or something like that, I don't remember the exact words. I knew they were horrible words by my Mum's expression. The next thing my Mum takes hold of the woman by her head and put it down the toilet. I just stood there in shock because my Mum looked like a mad woman, as she shoved the woman's head down the toilet. I was just numb.

It is true, that in those days a white woman with a black man was considered a whore whether he was a decent man or not. The men didn't necessarily know what they did for us, their children. They would fight for us because they were our mothers.

And what about your father's reaction to racism did you witness anything?

I don't think I did because I don't remember my Dad ever saying anything bad about the white man in England. I used to think they, my dad and the other men, were like coconuts. I used to call and say, 'you can't be black you must be white inside, because how can you not see what is going on?' I will give you an example. School - my father came to the school because of an incident which I thought was black related but he believed the teachers. I couldn't understand it because my mum was always the one who would say 'If my daughter was white, she wouldn't have been there in the first place'.

Then the next time it happened it went too far when the teacher punched me in the face and I went mental. She got suspended but she wouldn't have got suspended if my father had not come. I had gone crazy and ran home and told my Dad and he came up to the school and he said 'Uh uh, you hit my daughter'.

To see my Dad get angry was wonderful for me because he was defending me and made such a fuss that the Headmaster suspended the teacher. That was my Dad in his greatest moment as far as I was concerned. Because not only did he make it known he was my Dad but also that no one could mess with his daughter.

So am I right in saying that like me you are growing up English?

No there is always going to be English in me because I was born and bred here but I, by the day I was growing more African. The reason why I can say that is because in school we never had any history about who we were, but I was very fortunate that my father made sure that his children knew who they were so our history and culture was in our home by the way we lived.

How did that affect your attitude to this very narrow view of Africa that you had been taught in school?

At school they only showed you the negative side of Africa. Consequently I hated being African when I was a kid, hated it, hated the fact that my dad would plait my hair, hated my clothes, hated my name. When people would say my name they would never say it properly, that is why I changed it to Sylvia. My birth name is Silafatu, at school they used to call me 'Silvat' even my mother's side of my family. I changed it when I became a singer. I wanted a name that is easy to remember, so I called myself 'Sylvia' – I kept Tella, because it my family name. I remember when I joined Boney M²¹

21 A vocal group created by German record producer Frank Farian. <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/boney-m-mn000081403>

and Frank Farian said to me ‘your name is a really good singing name’ and I believed him so I became Sylvia Tella! Whereas now you would go with your African name!

Dean, my brother, had issues. After our parents split up he would set fire to things. There is always someone who gets hurt when a relationship breaks down and it was my brother. He started spelling his name backwards, all kind of shit. Mum took him to a kiddie’s psychiatric unit to get some guidance - before they got all these friggig stupid names that they have got for things these days. It was really just for someone to talk to because he felt he didn’t want to be black. He used to say ‘I am not black am I Mum? I am like you’ and it was a horrible experience for him – I understand it now. But when I was a kid I was vexed coz I used to think ‘you want to be white like my Mum, you just want to be with my Mum’.

I have a white mother and I was born and bred in Manchester and I have an African father and I have lived in Africa, that makes me African, but it also makes me English. I am dual nationality and I think I have the best of both worlds.

When you start to learn there is a race of people that you didn’t know anything about or where they came from – it’s like 400,000 years of missing black history, then you want to go to your parents to find out more about who you are in this story.

I have to tell you all of it as it is not just one thing. I first started going to Nigeria in the 70s but the culture shock for me came aged age of 13- 14 when I started touring the world as an artist. I saw countries where black people were in the powerful positions of leaders and presidents and kings. In every walk of life where you have never seen black people, even the record company founders and owners. That was a culture shock.

My confusion became confirmation for me as I got older because

that is when you start seeking out knowledge. First of all spiritual knowledge and with that you start to recognize that you are not even in the equation. There is no black this and no black that, so where were we? Then you start questioning everything. I asked my father and he showed me history books, showed me that as Africans we are full of spirituality. People say 'they have powers or they have sights, they are seers' and they label things but it's not necessarily that, it is about your culture and your upbringing and the closeness that Africa has with the creator.

But getting back to me recognising the culture and history and what we Africans have achieved, I did have to travel to see countries with our people in power and ask the question 'how come in England I don't see any black people in big jobs, how come I don't see any black teachers?' Remember I was born and bred here, we didn't have all that. It wasn't until I was taking my own children to school, that I started to see black teachers.

I'm like you born here with a white mum. So there was all that desire, want, need to have that harmonious interracial lifestyle without understanding the power of the powers.

Yes.

And I think that the powers thought that we mixed raced children of African as a presence that they hadn't counted on. I mean there was no ethnic minority measurement of people here, but suddenly we were here, the dreaded, as someone said in their interview 'what did they expect to see - horns growing out of our heads' when they said 'think of the children'. This is before the so-called Windrush migration. "Suddenly" we are here, in the schools we are the black ("brown") kid in the picture.

Think about it in this way, go back to the first black peoples who

came over here, the Moors²², they were elite, not only mentally, but in finance and in wealth. They came to England when England was the pit of all pits and they developed the country. They made all of these royal houses, these big mansions, they taught physics. Those black teachers, as they called the Moors, they were getting paid £20,000 in the 15th Century and 16th Century, that was money.

Jump now to 20th century and the two world wars when they realised they had no men to keep their countries safe. So they turned to the colonies, gave them British passports, full citizenship, and they were fed a load of shit of how the streets were paved with gold, you will have a great life and they came to clean up the mess that the rest of the people wouldn't do or there weren't enough men for the work.

So on that promise, the mentality of black people came in with a different vision, they didn't come in as slaves. The very first lot, the Moors, came to pass on their knowledge, the second lot were slaves and the third lot were citizens with British passports, only to find 'blacks not allowed', ('no niggers, no Irish and no dogs') from the same people that 'invited' them as British citizens. The people they were coming to help and even when they were being abused from all the racism and all the things that were going on in those days, black people still maintained belief and dignity.

We, their children, were a new generation of British blacks and we were different. We had a sense of belonging, we didn't see ourselves as inferior citizens, we wanted to be considered as positive productive members of society who could and would be the doctors and the teachers.

Some of us even had white brothers and sisters so we demanded to live equal and we definitely understood that racism came from adults not children.

22 http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/early_times/moors.htm

That it is borne out of ignorance and a lack of education like the way people wanted to touch our hair or our skin.

How long has your Dad been back in Africa?

I took him back in 2009. I didn't leave him, I stayed with him. Eventually I came back to England because my Mum became sick.

So you weren't going to come back?

Was I hell.

When you did come back how did you feel emotionally leaving him?

I didn't want to leave him, I have got sisters out there so he is not alone, but he is very independent my Dad

I was gutted. For one I didn't want to leave Africa, I love Africa and two I didn't want to leave my dad because we had plans and we were doing things, but mum was sick and I had to be here because my brothers were panicking, thinking she has got cancer. She had some kind of virus and lost something like four stones in three weeks going from a fat lady to nothing, although she is looking a lot better now.

Every time I thought of going home something would happen. My mum lost her husband Jinx after he got pneumonia, so I was taking care of both of them. So I decided to move up here and stay with my mum but I couldn't handle old people on a full time basis so I moved in to an African woman friend's house for about five months until I got this place. Now my daughter has got cancer and is receiving treatment.

You use the expression 'every time I thought of going home' why?

Because home is Africa! Because like I said to you, as I toured I saw black people in power, but when you go home and you see that you are the Jasperer, the descendant of man born.

I became a citizen of Nigeria, they respect me. In fact they respect this colour more than they respect their own, which is a bit annoying for me, because I am not a racist person and I don't believe in this kind of shading, and I have seen it around the world especially in Jamaica.

For me home is Africa, it is where I really feel at home and where I have an identification of who I really am. I am an African descendent, the daughter of an African man who has history and heritage who when you go back to the history, is right there next to God. This is the God who I never had any association with when I was in the UK because being this colour does not directly link you with God and Christianity as it is known in this country. Whereas in Africa this colour is valued, not only because you are of African descent, but because you are English, they don't dis²³ you for being English but here in the UK they dis you for being foreign. And let's not forget what they did to our mothers. My dad was the head of the house but in those times society wouldn't embrace black so the women gave up everything. They were the brave ones who lost their families and were penalised by society so we her children became her culture.

23 To disrespect some one

CHAPTER 26

DR GODWIN AUNKO EDENMA IKOMI MBE

by his son Leslie



Leslie Braine Ikomi



Doctor Ikomi at Glasgow
University 1945 - 1950

*'...this is where you
are at and this is
what it is!'*



Leslie Braine Ikomi after Christening

The first time I met my father he was in a huge room and sat in an armchair at the far side with his wife. After I walked in and sat down he said, 'Why are you here?'

'I have come to see you,' I said. 'I have been to Glasgow University and the woman there gave me the information there was about you.'

He said 'What right has the woman in Glasgow got to give you my information?'

'When I told her the story she was very interested and tried to help me with my search.'

Then he got up walked over and looked at me and said in a low voice, "you have gone big now.' I was standing at the time.

Then he went back to his chair and asked 'How come you don't have a Scottish accent?'

Leslie Howard Porter Braine Ikomi¹ is a highly respected antique collector of images of the African Diaspora from the 1700s to the mid-20th century and African Art. Having sat on numerous occasions in the same seminars and conferences as him, it would not be unfair to say that his questioning of representatives of the art and history sector is not always welcomed. I was not therefore surprised to learn that not only is he a Nigerian son but our fathers both come from Warri².

SuAndi; your business is African artefact; you are very vocal about the representation and misrepresentation of our African culture and history. Do you think that is because you, the child, were falsely represented by another person's name?

Well, I have never thought of it that way. The business I started was furniture and general antiques. People used to come to the shop with African pieces for me to buy. I ended up buying them because I was black and thought I should, and they were cheap at the time!

1 <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/leslie-braine-ikomi/8a/1b2/4aa>

2 The Kingdom of Warri is a traditional state based on the town of Warri an inland port in Delta State.

Eventually, I started to understand about African Art and started to buy it and I kept it at the back of the shop. When the French and Germans came in they bought it first and then they bought the furniture. Then someone came in and said that all that African art was auctioned at Sotheby's and places like that in London. I rang them and started to get the catalogues.

Sotheby's, Christies, Bonham's and Philips at this time held 'Tribal Art Auctions' which included African art – I wanted to know its origin.

Eventually I went to the Gambia, but it wasn't the art that I wanted. I went to Ghana and that was more interesting, Togo and then the Ivory Coast.

I was in and out of Africa, not even realising my father also came from Africa.

I love anthropology, the study of people. When I meet people I am pleased to recognize them by their features – the regions of Africa they come from.

Maybe by doing antiques it was my road to find more about Black British history and myself.

Everywhere you look there's Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and The Windrush, but there is so much more to our history that is not discussed.

I remember as a child sitting on the step of number 38, next door to number 40 Rumford Street both owned by my mother. The two houses faced what we call the croft³ where Fallowfield Cycle Racing Club⁴ held their weekend rallies. I spent much of my time in Manchester Museum which was 3 minutes away, looking at the stuffed animals and reptiles.

When I was little, my mum was living with Vincent Braine, a West Indian who I thought was my father. In a sense he was as I was brought up with him.

Deep down I knew I didn't belong in the family. One day my sister turned and said 'I think you are African and not West Indian'. To be called African in those days was almost an insult.

3 Normally derelict land

4 The hosted a few stock car events in the pioneer days of 1954 and 1955.
<http://www.simonlewis.com/sc5.html>

I said 'so what, it doesn't mean anything.'

They felt West Indian, but I didn't feel either way.

When my sister Veronica was small, a lot younger than me, I was about 13, she said, 'do you really think you are part of the family?' I said 'Yes, why not?' and she said 'Well I don't think I am'.

I just pushed it away because she was only young, but I never really felt part of the Braine family. As a child you sense that things are not quite right, because you don't know the reason, anything bad that happens, when people get angry with you for example, you blame yourself.

The whole story came out after I took up hang gliding. I had already opened my antique shop and thought I had better take out some accident insurance otherwise I could lose everything if I got injured. But when I applied for my birth certificate it had my date of birth incorrectly recorded as 1962 instead of 1949.

Carolyn (my partner) and I went to the registrars in Edinburgh in Scotland. Their records showed my original birth certificate.

The name on my original birth certificate is Leslie Howard Porter – father unknown! My mother and step father had changed my name to Leslie Howard Braine in 1962 when my younger brother got baptized at St. Paul's Church, Withington⁵.

They didn't adopt me they just changed my name. The registrar said this was illegal but very common. I confronted Vincent Braine and said 'you're not my father, who is my father?' He said, 'you have to go and ask your mother.' By that time my mother was living with someone else.

At first she gave me false leads like saying my father was called King which sent me running around trying to find someone with that name. Other people said 'No you're not King's son, you're someone else's'.

When she was living in Whalley Range she said 'whatever happens you will always be my son.' But the truth is I never got on with my Mother at all. She used to say 'do you want to go and live with Vincent and Brenda?' (her friends).

5 <http://www.st-paulshigh.net/>

As a child you think why would somebody do that? When I was about 10, I went to Withington police station because I wanted to live in a (children's) home, I didn't want to live there anymore. When I left home in the 1960s, at about 16, I was glad to leave!

Eventually she said 'your dad was studying to be a Doctor in Glasgow and his sister's name is Flora'. I said 'Flora like Flora Margarine?' So slowly the story began to reveal itself.

My mother worked in a cotton mill, on my birth certificate she was a bobbin operator⁶; I don't know exactly what she did. Godwin my father came to the UK in 1945 to study to be a Doctor qualifying around 1951/52. He then went back to Nigeria but later returning to England a number of times in the 50s and 60s to get his diplomas to be a surgeon and lived in London.

I am not too sure how they met but I imagine in a pub, club or social event in Glasgow. She was working class and I suppose my dad was sort of upper middle class because when he came over he came with the Prince of Benin who wanted to be a Doctor but ended up being a Barrister.

I was born in 1949 at 68 Nicholson Street in the Gorbals⁷ Glasgow. They probably were together in the beginning then after he passed out of university he had to do his medical training in Leigh, just outside Manchester. I presume she followed him down to Manchester with me as a six, maybe eight month old baby.

Where we lived in Rumford Street in Chorlton on Medlock it went all the way up to Akker Street at the University. My mother rented rooms off to West Indians, Africans and Irish people. She owned the house, though I don't really know where the money came from.

We also had the corner grocery shop on Rumford Street. I remember people with their ration books. By this time my mother was in her 20's and she had been a factory girl but here was a woman of enterprise and determination.

Possibly some of the money came from Africa.

6 No direct reference this is the closest. Used for mill workers whose job it is to remove full bobbins or pins holding spun fibre and replace them with empty bobbins or pins. In modern mills, a machine called a doffer may do this task.

7 The Gorbals is an area on the south bank of the River Clyde

Once he has finished his studies he goes to London then returns to Nigeria to head up a hospital. When he does return to the UK over the years does he contact you?

Not that I know of. Maybe, because when I first met him he said 'oh you have gone big now.' I think I can remember as a child, somebody like him who came in to a room at my mother's.

I may have seen him but not recognized him as my father, I just saw Vincent Braine as my father.

How old were you Les when you truly met your father?

I was 48 or 49 when I went to Nigeria, before that I had written to him but the whole situation was quite strained.

I had already gone through loads of emotions over the years and then I thought, I want to know him, and I didn't care whether he did or not. I just wanted to see him, to see what he looked like, because living with the Braine family, none of them look like me.

It's too big a story to relate in detail but I got in touch with people in London who were called Ikomi.

Through trial and error I met my Uncle William who was the first person to call me Leslie Porter and ask about my mother.

He arranged for me to go to Nigeria. I was told by other Nigerians 'when you get to Nigeria, you need a name that no one else will know – like a password'. I thought Blue Moon – like once in a Blue Moon⁸ and 'tell them I will be wearing a white cap.'

Before I left England I had checked out the Hilton Hotel in Lagos, saying to myself 'well if this person doesn't turn up at the airport – I'll go to the Hilton and stay there for a week.'

A man approached me outside Lagos airport and said 'Blue Sky?' My password was 'Blue Moon'. But he actually looked like me, then he said 'I'm Edward and I am your father's brother and we have been looking at you from afar.' So they had recognised the resemblance in me also.

8 Metaphorically, a "blue moon" is a rare event

Edward then said ‘we will put you in your father’s hotel, it is the one he likes to stay in.’

They booked me into the Lagos Hotel, everything was paid for. ‘I will pick you up in the morning,’ he said ‘and then you can travel to your father in Warri. What you have to do is book the back seat of the taxi.’ So I thought ‘OK’ and I booked the back seat.

When I arrived in Warri, my Uncle Charles who is Chief Ikomi met me and said ‘I am glad that you look like your Father, it would have made everything more complicated otherwise, because your father has been in denial.

Remember it was Auntie Flora, my father’s sister, who had kept contact with my mother for a while. I wasn’t particularly too bothered, I mean I had seen him now. I knew I looked like his brother and I looked like him too, my dad and I had the same mannerisms. But my emotions were all over the place. I had waited for this moment for so long, since being a child with a sense of no belonging to now a man in my forties. It was not helped by him asking me, ‘when are you getting your plane back?’

Now I am thinking ‘what am I doing here in Warri’ because he wasn’t making me welcome, but then he said ‘well you can come to church on Sunday.’ At the Church the Ikomi family were on one side and I sat with them. After the ceremony the people all walked round and shook my father’s hand and he greeted all the family, so I shook his hand too and was blessed as part of the family.

I found all the African ladies absolutely fabulous. The older ones who were of my Auntie Flora’s age, in their 70s and 80s, they knew about me and they said ‘this is where you are at and this is what it is!’ I was given my family tree and blessed with the name Yemi.

When I said my ‘Goodbyes’ to everyone in the family, to Chief Ikomi and everyone; everybody was really happy, probably happy for him my father.

How old are you now Les and how many years has your father been in your life? I am trying to get you to define your relationship. Is it as father and son, has he ever told you what his life was like in England?

I am 65 now and have known my father for 15 years; my relationship with him is really through third parties.

I know it sounds bad, but I prefer my real father now to Vincent Braine my stepfather, even though I lived with him for a long time. It is probably because he was with my mother and anything she said would go; it was like being beaten. I realise now she was getting at me because my real father had left her.

Even though I don't really know my father the family say 'you behave like him, you look like him, and you have the same mannerisms.'

I wouldn't say I would blame him for anything. If you asked me would I forgive him for not being around, I would forgive him for that because my life was fairly unhappy so it was a release from that misery for me to find him. If I had never seen his face I would always know that something was missing from my life.

When did you last see your Mum?

When was the last time I saw her – I may have passed her in the street about 30 years ago.

How do you describe yourself?

I'm British, but I am an Ikomi.

Why are you an Ikomi?

Because of the Ikomi relatives I have met many times in London and Africa, I just know I am an Ikomi.

I was born here and brought up here – I am not a Nigerian. I say I am British, but really I am a man with no country. I am looking forward really to Scotland getting devolution so then I can go and get my passport and be a Scot!

So you are an Ikomi but still you say that you have never had a real conversation with your father.

No not really. He is 94 now and I haven't sat around with him for an hour on my own or anything like that – there are always lots of other people there.

But I have had many conversations with members of the Ikomi family of all ages over the years.

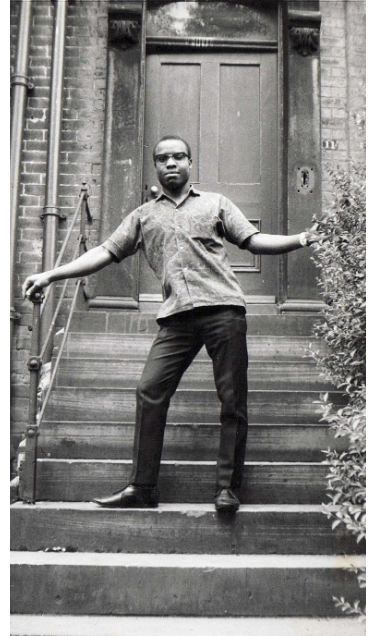
He came to go to University. He did what he had to do to be a Doctor then, he came back to be a surgeon. He got an MBE off the Queen⁹. He wrote some books – I think on bypass surgery. His life really was in Nigeria.

⁹ The Queen, awards the honour Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for a significant achievement or outstanding service to the community. It is also awarded for local 'hands-on' service which stands out as an example to other people.

CHAPTER 27
SAMUEL OLABODE OLORUNSHOLA
by his son Segun with his mother Ann



Segun



Sam Olorunshola 1967



Ann with Segun's extended family

*'My father said that
you shouldn't dwell
in the archives of
memory -'*

SuAndi: Samuel was 25 years of age when he came to England where he shortened his name to Sam and started his studies at Leeds Polytechnic to become an accountant.

He came from Isanlu-Mopo in Yagbaland¹ Nigeria. It is a small rural area of about 2000 people on the main road between Lokoja² and Ilorin³. Though his people were farmers they were also literate and wanted their son to achieve more in his life. He achieved matriculation via a correspondence course that his mother paid for from her earnings as a trader. So it may be surprising to learn that Sam didn't actually want to stay in England.

One other fact - Sam was a member of The Rosicrucian Order⁴ and though his son Segun never joined, there is evidence that he still managed to pass some of the philosophy on.

Anne describes her partner Sam

He was quite short for a man, about 5ft 7inches; his father was a lot taller. He had his mother's physique, quite a solid build, very nice eyes and nose. He was quite serious because he was really interested in improving his mind because he came from a literate family. Before he came to England he had got engaged. At first the Mother refused but he persevered and persevered and eventually the Mother gave her permission. But after he arrived here his fiancée stopped writing to him. (She told me later that she had met somebody else.) So when I met him he was free, then unfortunately she started writing again, just when I became pregnant. He went back to Nigeria and married her although they split up a few years later.

People were quite conventional in their dressing in those days. I can't remember exactly what he wore because it was unremarkable. He didn't wear a hat and if it was hot in the summer he would wear shirt sleeves and I could see a string vest underneath.

He was very, very keen to expand his education – I remember him going to Georgian plays and things like that and he took us off to a place near

1 A Local Government Area in Kogi State

2 The capital city of Kogi State, in central Nigeria

3 The capital of Kwara State

4 AMORC is a community of Seekers who study and practice the metaphysical laws governing the universe.

Leeds called Temple Newsam⁵ and he used to buy the Psychology magazine. We did go to dances with the Africans even if they weren't Yoruba⁶; they all mixed with each other at that particular point.

So he obviously saw England as opportunity and he had to make the best of that opportunity.

Yes that is right. He was extremely upset when one time he failed one of his exams, in fact he blamed me for it, because he used to come round to my place about three times a week to bathe because it was difficult to get a bath in the house he lived in. Anyway, he retook the exam and passed it.

He really put his mind to re-sitting this particular exam. It was one of the exams in the progression of accountancy, after that I only saw him about once a week. He told me about his fiancé when I had known him about three months. I had probably known him about six months when he told me she had stopped writing to him and about the same time I became pregnant.

Initially when the twins were born he would just come for a few hours and then go off. Then I went home after the Easter holidays he started coming regularly again before he went back to Nigeria. They were born in February and he went back in either July or August.

Anne calls her son by his birth name of Sam but for clarity between him and his father I am referring to him as Segun⁷ the name he is known by. His twin was christened Ekundayo (Eric Julian).

They were identical twins but Segun's brother's trachea⁸, or esophagus⁹ didn't develop properly. I don't think that he was properly looked after when he in hospital, because he caught an infection in the children's ward and he should have been in a separate ward.

By the time their big sister became a medical student she learnt that it could

5 A Tudor-Jacobean house with grounds landscaped by Capability Brown www.leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries/Pages/Temple-Newsam.aspx.

6 South Western Nigeria and southern Benin

7 <http://www.segunleefrench.com/>

8 It plays a significant role in the smooth functioning of the digestive system as it ensures that the food swallowed travels well down to the stomach.

9 A muscular tube through which food passes from the pharynx to the stomach

have easily been dealt with instead of it being fatal.

I could have become his second wife and lived in Nigeria. His first wife had agreed provided I didn't live in the same house. But I think by that time I must have cooled off the idea a bit. He had promised that he would send money to help support Segun because he didn't give me anything whilst he was here. But when I asked him, when he wrote that unless he could have custody of his son (when he was about three), he wasn't going to send me a penny. For me that was the end of the relationship!

I don't remember who started writing letters again but in 1974 we went to Nigeria. His wife was extremely hospitable, very kind and generous taking me around while he was out drinking with his friends. All that work ethic and study had been pushed to one side. I didn't really see much of Segun's father. He had actually split up with his wife before we arrived. The family had persuaded them to get back together which they did but it didn't last and he moved on to his second wife.

In 1974 aged seven Segun goes to Nigeria for the first time and in many ways it is his first meeting with his father. He remembers being there but not that many details of the time they shared together. He returns in 1999 this time the visit has a far greater impact mainly because he travels with a specific purpose and this time he is assisted by his younger Nigerian born sister Aduke and brother Dap.

1999 – Yeah it had a big impact on me! In 1997 I was doing a lot of singing and recording. To help me sing better I went to see a hypnotherapist who was experimenting with shamanism¹⁰ and without telling me she decided to use me as a test subject. Then she asked me if there was another voice that wanted to speak and my twin brother spoke through me and he said he wasn't happy where he was buried.

I then¹¹ decided to get involved with the people who practice the Yoruba religion led by Priestess Olayinka. Aduke, my younger sister, had written to me around 1990 and we exchanged some correspondence.

Then my brother Dap wrote and invited me over. I agreed mainly because I

10 A practice that involves a practitioner reaching altered states of consciousness in order to encounter and interact with the spirit world and channel these transcendental energies into this world

11 Formed of diverse traditions and has no single founder.

had a purpose - to hold some kind of a ceremony to acknowledge the death of Eric my twin brother.

When you went to Africa did you think 'I want a piece of that or I don't; I am going to be my own man?' I watched you go through a Nigerian stage without knowing any of this and for me you have always been Nigerian; I can smell it in you. Do you know what I mean, the charm, the slick – I don't mean that negatively, I recognize that in you.

Well it's funny that you say that because I do remember as a child I was obsessed with matching, everything matching. When we spent Christmas at Grandpa's I would take a long time in the morning making sure that all my clothes matched, such as if this was green, this had to be green and that has to be green too. Nobody else in the family would do it. Then when I went to Nigeria, I thought 'Oh right that is how a Nigerian would do it!'

Anne recalls that Sam was very interested in politics and that he always listened to the BBC World News. He became a chief and he was a member of the state legislature.

Obviously I remember him a lot better from that trip. He was a very charismatic person, quite tactful and very diplomatic. For me community is important, but for him community was central, the bedrock.

Initially I thought he was very impressive, in a quiet way, and I think I have inherited that sense of knowing that you don't have to shout a lot to get what you want to happen. That is how he behaved.

Anne do you see Sam in Segun?

When he was a child he had the same face as his father, perhaps less so now - he looks more English now especially with the shape of his head. But yeah, I can see things, definitely on the spiritual side. I forgot to say that Sam was pretty conventional in that the man was more important than the woman, which would be his upbringing.

Segun what do you think

Certainly I think the Yoruba spirit is within me and that might be from him or it might be from his father or it might be from his grand-father

like a line that is passed through. It's a tricky thing to pin down.

There are certain things very similar between us – like for example I didn't know he was a 'Rosicrucian' until I went to Nigeria and saw all these magazines - he had a pile about a foot deep from over the years. Before that I was interested in Rosicrucianism for a long time so I could see that there was a link there. The reason why I say it's difficult to pinpoint is because on my Mum's side there are a few esoteric freaks as well.

I don't see him in me anymore; I think I have got past that stage. Immediately afterwards I came back in 1999 I did have a kind of romantic notion but about 6 or 7 years ago I got over it. I much prefer to see how you reinvent yourself as a person – with bits of your parents.

I kind of think the part of the physical side which ties to the emotional side is what tends to keep the link like the way someone sits or walks or tone or voice. These can be inherited and those are the kinds of things that I might have inherited from him. In terms of like emotional attitudes and political attitudes I think that is different. It's a lot easier to see in my son Ayo the things that are from me, than to see what is in me from my father.

When I was growing up my Mum used to go to lots of conferences in Leeds and she did have a lot of African books and records. If you look around the room there are a lot of things from around the world.

I am not Nigerian – I don't see myself as a Nigerian. I think I am a Mancunian, I am an African and I am English and I am Yoruba, I am also of my father's clan and of my mother's, I am all the layers that make up where I have lived and who my family are – I wouldn't say I am one or the other.

I am pushing emotions here, if your father was here is there anything you would like to say to him?

Well we only really had conversations for two weeks and in those two weeks we probably only really had three conversations. Immediately after I came back and he died. He died less than two months after my trip to Nigeria. In some ways it's more of what he could have said to me rather than what I could have said to him. It's great to tell your father about what you are doing in your life but actually what is more important is what he could have told me about his life and what was important to him.

CHAPTER 28

SAMUEL OKANTE *by his daughter Samanda*



'When I came back from Africa, I was African. I was so African, it's not true.... I can't explain it finitely.'

Maurice Okante



Samanda with Mum June and Sister Susie



Samanda and Pete

I think when I was around three or four; I have memories of this big handsome black guy, a monster of a man who used to talk to me through the school gates. He'd call me over and pass me a little bag of sweets, ask me how I was and then he would disappear. I remember this happening three or four times, and then one day I mentioned it to my Mum and I think we swapped schools very soon after that.

SuAndi: Samanda, known as Mandy to her friends is June Prouse and Solomon Quarcoopome's eldest daughter. She has been married to Peter Caveney for 25 years and loves to DJ and believes her love of music comes from her father.

Tell me about your father.

Not a lot of kids know their dads, especially in a family of a black Dad and a white Mum, because they are her kids and any history is her history, because the men don't talk about home or anything related to where they came from, so it's your Mum's culture really.

So he never told you about Ghana or anything to do with his life there?

Sol has never shared anything! It has only started since he has been back home. At first he couldn't be persuaded to go back but then he did after he retired and has been back 4 or 5 times now and now I know Sol in way I never knew him before.

Do you think our fathers failed us by not sharing?

Yes they have. Most of us in grew up in Moss Side which is multi-racial and we know that our Chinese friends speak English and Chinese and all our Indian friends speak both mother tongues yet there wasn't one of us who could utter a word in African. They didn't talk about their past, their history, until they are senior citizens then all of a sudden little stories start to come out. Clearly they are looking back on their lives and suddenly willing to share. I didn't get to know my Dad until I went to Africa. Before then he was just Dad.

He was just Dad and everything that goes with a Dad. Sol didn't really have any family here, aside from his cousin Fred who used to come back and forth. He had this whole new life without any roots and although he made roots with mum and us, it's not the same is it? But when we went

to Africa, Sol wasn't the Sol that lives here. Sol was suddenly a boy again and everything about him was youthful. He had been there for four weeks before I arrived. My reaction was 'who is this?'

We had a ball, we really did and since Africa, I have a totally different relationship with my Dad. Mum is a bit jealous, which she is entitled to be, she would say 'no' but then she would say 'well yeah, I am'.

He knows I love him because I ring him at six o'clock in the morning, I do! Now I have a relationship with my Dad that I never had as a kid, not just because I am an adult but since Africa. I ring him anytime between 6 and 7.30 in the morning about 3 times a week because Mum doesn't come down until 8 o'clock. He says 'don't tell me Mum I told you'. And I say, 'I won't, I promise I won't'. Then I tell Mum, 'leave Dad alone today, give him a rest'. My Mum can be overpowering and she never lets him have anything to himself. She says 'F- off Mandy'. So though I don't use the words, 'I love you', I think he knows.

Tell me more about the trip to Africa.

I think it put me in a better place because it changed who I was, because I found a missing piece of me; something I didn't expect to find.

Sol thought we – Susie my sister and me - would never go, so we decided to surprise him and flew out for the last two of his six week's visit. I am so glad that I went. It definitely changed who I was. I immediately came back and Africanised my living space. That was 8 or 9 years ago and I have never changed it back. Yeah, it definitely changed me.

Did you feel that you had come home?

Oh definitely, there is no doubt about it.

You get off the plane and that heat hits you. There was the smell of Africa and there was the heat of Africa and you just knew you were in Africa, I can't explain it.

The airport was beautifully air conditioned so you do forget everything at that moment. Then the excitement comes back and then it's out of the airport to a mass of people, all smiling. Everyone wanted to help you, everybody, not like here when someone jumps in front of you at the train station and says 'I'll help you with your bag' and you don't let go of it.

Everyone just wanted to help you.

We had arrived late at night, and in Africa all the lights go out very early as you'll know. The next morning I can't wait to get up and dressed. I go outside and the heat hits me. I go on through the front gates and it's like F-ing wow...., I love gardens and flowers and everywhere there were flowers that I had never seen in my life. They didn't even look real. I was bending down, touching things, I couldn't believe it. Then Sol came out and asked, 'Do you like it?' I said 'Dad I fucking love it, I love it'.

We were there for only two weeks. We met family, some of Dad's friends, quite a few nights out, hit a few beaches, it was fabulous!

You have already told me that you see yourself as half caste. Did that change after the trip?

Although I am English born and bred. I believe some white people, not all, but some white people, no matter how long I have lived here, will never see me as English. I am always black to them, something different.

It has a lot to do with our (half caste) confidence but that others see as aggressive. I think we are seen as smart arses. Actually we are smart but our delivery isn't always acceptable to everybody, and yes I am going to say it, probably it is a stupid thing to say but I think we are a cut above the rest and I think that is the result of the two blendings because it allows us to see all of life rather than a part of life. I don't know if you can make some sense out of that?

Before I went to Africa, I was definitely English and also definitely half caste. We can swim between the two quite easily and I can settle between the both sides, quite easily. So yes, I thought I was English.

When I came back from Africa, I was African. I was so African, it's not true.... I can't explain it.

I am so glad that I went. I am so glad I saw the nothing that they have, yet they make the most of. Especially the children. The children next door to where we were staying were playing with bottle tops for hours. They had nothing, but they were so happy. There were about four of them, and obviously the crazy English showered them with gifts.

It changed a lot of my outlook going back home then coming back

here. I don't think anybody is the same once they go home and then they come back to what seems as their home, here.

So when and how did you know about your father?

I never thought or knew anything until about aged 10 or 12, I can't remember exactly. My brother Tommy was working with a mutual friend and they were having an argument one day and she was having a go at him by saying 'You and Mandy, you are headstrong, you are always doing things wrong and you don't want to listen. What is wrong with you, why can't you be more like Susie?' And he, not realising that Susie was there just came out with, 'maybe it is because Susie is the only one who has a father'. So at that, Susie has gone charging in with, 'What do you mean?' It's out now so he told her that Solomon is her father not mine. I mean we already know about Tommy because he isn't black like we are.

Susie promptly runs down the street to tell me and we had a cry and then we told Mum and she had a cry because she didn't want it coming out that way. Mum said 'Don't you remember a big man who used to come to the Princess Road school and pass you sweets through the gates?' – and then it was like a recording, 'of course I can remember him' – 'well that was your father'. 'But Solomon is your Dad because he is the one who brought you up' and that was fine by me and that was that.

It was a couple of days before my sixteenth birthday. I was at my Mum's and she said somebody wanted to meet me. She said 'Your father Maurice is in Manchester and wants to meet up with you.' So off I went to Tottohs.¹ He wasn't staying there but for some reason that is where the meeting took place.

I met this huge man, and he was all over me, he was so really pleased to see me he was crying. We made an emotional pair; him a Cancerian next to my Piscean, so there were lots of tears. He didn't give me any history about himself. He just wanted to give me money and take me out, the in-place then was the Reno club².

I think he was a boiler man; I have got a picture of him on board a ship with some of the crew, with a kerchief round his neck, a big daft smile, a big shiny face.

1 John Tottoh's House 54 St Bees Street.

2 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/renonightclub/>

He and Solomon came over together, but undoubtedly that relationship floundered within a year when Solomon set up home with June and she already had me by then.

I know that he loved music and dancing was a big part of his life as it is in mine. I know he danced professionally for a while and I think Sabina, Mum's sister-in-law knew him because she was a dancer as well but I don't know if they danced together in the same shows.

I do know he was in a few movies. I know he was in *Magambo*³ – it's a famous film, I think Clark Gable is in it. But I believe he was an extra in a lot of films. I think he was in *Zulu*⁴ as one of the Zulus.

Mum has been very tight lipped, like it's a case of it has not really happened, but she couldn't really get away from Maurice as she has only got to look at me and he is there.

One thing he did tell me was that he really loved my mother but she kept me away from him.

I made him cry one day and I can't even remember what we argued about, but I obviously turned into June because he said 'You are just like your mother because you know how to hurt with your words'. I hadn't said anything particularly bad, it was off the cuff and straightforward but it shocked him and he thought 'that's your Mother'.

June told SuAndi; "His name was Samuel Okante. He came from Christanberg in Accra. His mother and sisters had market stalls near the castle selling fish .That's the most I knew. I have no idea why he changed his name, maybe he thought it sounded French. Many of them took a new name when they landed. I never asked only surprised when I saw the spelling.

He was not a scholar. He was handsome, charming, and could jive. Other than that I have nothing to tell you."

When you met Maurice, your genetic father, did it make you feel different, seeing yourself in this man, did it bring everything into place?

3 1953 American film directed by John Ford and starring Clark Gable
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0046085/fullcredits/>

4 1964 historical war film depicting the Battle of Rorke's Drift between the British Army and the Zulus in January 1879,

Definitely, something slotted into place, because I was looking at me and then it was clear Susie has got without a doubt Sol's face and I have got Maurice's my father's face. Something clicked in to place because I saw me.

Are there any other children here or in Africa?

I wouldn't be surprised but I don't know. But I do know he had two girls here. I have met one. She is called Dawn – she actually searched me out. Apparently she came knocking at my Mum's door one day and when Mum opened the door she said 'Are you June?' She said 'yeah' and she said 'I'm Maurice's daughter' and mum said 'No you're not, I have got Maurice's daughter' and shut the door in her face. Then she knocked again and June got over herself and phoned me, 'you need to come here after work because your sister is here' and I said 'why? What is wrong with Susie?', 'No your other sister'.

She has got a look of me, but she is petite, bony, extremely skinny, but I think that is her nerves. She has definitely got what I call a 'head problem'. She sort of crashed in to my life on three separate occasions over about six years then disappeared and I have never seen her again. But there were connections especially with her daughter Poortaya who was about seven or eight. She played the cello, I like playing the cello. She was a singer, I used to love to sing. She is music mad and like Maurice, I love music.

Did meeting your father change anything in your family particularly between you and Sol?

No, definitely not. Nothing changed. Sol will always be my dad. How could that change? But things did change between Susie and me.

One thing about the African trip that was a bit upsetting was that everybody wants to meet Sol with his daughters. His late cousin Fred's wife Gill, a Jewish English girl who still lives out there took it upon herself to be very involved as we went about meeting the family. She would introduce Susie first 'Laminioko', the oldest, this is Solomon's daughter, blah blah, then this is Mandy. Eeerrrr! I wanted to knock her out but Susie 'looooved' it, but that is another story.

But there again, even with a house full of Africans when we were kids, you wouldn't know any stories anyway because we couldn't speak in African and we couldn't understand their tongue.

Don't you think that is why they used to fall out with their friends, their countrymen and sometimes those fallouts would last for years. Someone would come to the house and they would have an argument and they would never come again.

That is where Susie gets it from. Whereas I am very much an open book to my detriment, I have to say, but I can keep a secret if I have to.

It changed things with Susie because in her eyes, as we got older, Sol wasn't my Dad anymore. Sol was only her Dad and she has maintained that and it has got stronger and stronger.

You are sixteen, when you meet your father, headstrong in a way that he doesn't know because he doesn't have any experience of having a mixed raced child raised in this country.

That's right.

Were you on your best behaviour with him?

He was around for about three weeks and then he said he was going to Liverpool. I don't know what was happening in Liverpool, but he wanted me to visit him there. So I went for a week with Linda, a mate and we just partied. He sorted out where we stayed in a flat of one of his friends. They moved out so we could stay there. I saw him every night.

Then we came back to Manchester and I went back to work. I was working at Withington Baths and he just turned up and said 'Can I have a word? I am going home.' I said 'what do you mean you are going home?' He said 'I am going to Africa.' 'When are you going?' I asked him. He said 'tomorrow' and I hit him with something like 'So you waltz in to my life, make me aware of you and then you disappear?' It was only something like that, but it was enough to make him cry. And he was a big man, so it was hard to see. I never saw him again.

I think it was less than a year later that I received a letter from one of his friends to inform me that he had died and had left me some money that would be forwarded to me. Obviously the money never came and I never expected it to and that was it really.

Actually that is a bit of a fib because I have seen Maurice since he died. He came to me in a dream. We were in Roots pub in Moss Side, and we

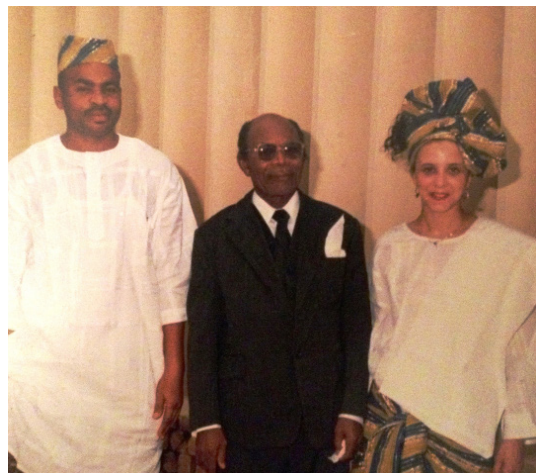
went and sat at the table. Susie was there and my friends Linda and Trudy and nobody batted an eyelash that my father was there.

I remember clearly saying to him 'What are you doing here because you are supposed to be dead?' and he said 'yes, I am dead, but I wanted to see you.' We were sat side by side and then he said 'I have got to go now.' I remember giving him a kiss, then I started crying and that's how I woke up.

I have just got two pictures of him. You will see his big daft face, the same as mine.

CHAPTER 29

SAMUEL DIDEN YALAJU-AMAYE *by his daughter Muli*



Muli with Brother and Father



Muli and Dad



Muli and Dad

*'I first met my father
in 1996 in Benin
City, Nigeria...
...ultimately I
would thank him for
acknowledging me
and allowing me to
be an equal part of
the African family.'*

I first met my father in 1996 in Benin City, Nigeria. We had been in contact via letter from 1987. I initiated contact. In 1978 I went to Manchester University offices on Oxford Road. All I knew about my father at that time was that his name was Diden Amaye and he had been a student. I told the administrator what I knew and asked if she could help. She took out a ledger from 1961 and looked under the A's. There was nothing. She told me that Nigerian names were often double-barrelled and that I should go for a walk and return in an hour. I was devastated. I'd waited 5 years to be able to find out information and it looked as though I never would.

When I returned she was smiling. She'd had to go almost through the whole ledger but she'd found him. She wrote down his full name and sent me to UMIST for his details because that's where he'd studied.

At UMIST the woman had been into the cellar and gone through the archives. She showed me his registration card, complete with photograph, his address in Manchester and his parents' address in Nigeria. She pulled the picture off and gave it to me along with his addresses.

I knew almost nothing about my father prior to meeting him. My mother said she didn't know anything. I knew she had met him in Victoria Park in the house where she was renting rooms from a Ghanaian landlord. I knew that he was a student.

My father on the other hand told me many stories about my mother and the things she said and did. This was interesting, because it was evidence of a stronger tie than my mother is willing to discuss. But I can allow her the privacy she needs in order to deal with her life choices. Dad said my mother often called the police out if he attempted to see me. He said he became quite friendly with them and they advised him to give up. However, in 1963 when he was leaving for Nigeria, he paid two Jamaicans (his words, not mine) to kidnap me and take me to the docks in Liverpool so he could take me 'home'. Needless to say they never turned up. Although until I was around the age of 9 we did move house frequently so I can only surmise it was something to do with this. Though I may be mistaken.

My father told me, in 2002, when he came to visit me in the UK that he had arrived in Cardiff in 1950 and studied for his undergraduate degree. He was a mathematician and had taught in Nigeria prior to coming to the UK. He said the communists sent him to Manchester to do his Masters. He talked about his old professors and the way they had been so helpful to

him. He was studying civil engineering. He went to 'school' all day then did a nightshift down the mines at Bradford Colliery, Manchester. He thought it was very funny that he had been the supervisor for the white miners. He often took his books with him and studied and slept on a bench. As the supervisor he was not required to work the mines. I'm sure his post was a placement connected to his MSc.

My father lived at 51 or 52 Manley Road, Whalley Range. Before that he had lived in Cardiff but I don't have an address.

He had quite a social life but did not tell me which clubs he went to. He ran around with his cousin, who ran clubs in Hull until about 15 years ago. He said they used to walk Denmark Road and call it cut throat lane because there were often fights. He remembered Caribbean men sitting at tables under trees playing dominoes. When I took him to Denmark Road he couldn't recognise anything. I know he moved between Sheffield, Hull and Manchester, but I have no specific details. He was having a good time though he assured me.

My father loved Manchester. When he came back in 2002 and 2004 he tried to go out on his own because he knew the city. He became upset when he got lost time and time again, because nothing was the same. He didn't understand why he couldn't find his way around. I don't think he had expected change to happen.

He didn't start a business as far as I know, though he may have done something with his cousin. Although they were like strangers when they met in 2002. It was like they had never run around together.

Dad was connected to the Communist party. He had a room full of Marxist books and received the Daily Worker newspaper. His landlady wasn't impressed and he said he had to hide it. He also said that when he left he didn't take any of his books with him. He didn't talk about it in depth, but from what I can piece together, he was recruited in Cardiff as a student and saw the opportunity to extend his studies so took it without any real affiliation.

I didn't meet dad's cousin until 2002. In fact dad didn't tell me that there were family members in the UK. I became quite close to one of his cousins from Newcastle.

Dad died on 10 October 2005. He had been treated for bladder

cancer in 2004 but family circumstances meant that he forfeited further treatment which could have removed it. He was in Nigeria when he passed.

I attended his funeral in my capacity as his eldest daughter. This took place at the end of November 2005. I aligned myself with one branch of the family during the funeral because I did not know the whole family and the dynamics. I have a half-brother who lives in UK and he looked out for me in Nigeria.

I was brought up in Manchester with no sense of any Africa-ness. The area I lived in was white, my family was white, the church was white and there were about 5 black kids at secondary school (none at primary school). From the age of 12 I craved some understanding of my heritage, but because my birth was my mother's story and not mine and she chose to erase her history from her memory, I knew nothing.

Visiting Nigeria in 1996 changed my life. I felt a sense of belonging even though I couldn't speak the language (Itsekiri) and didn't have a shared background. Just knowing I had a father and that there were siblings who looked like me was amazing. Also the fact that my dad and sisters and brothers had been to university had an impact on me. I had always wanted to study but didn't think it was for me. Two years after meeting dad and my sister coming to stay with me for 6 weeks, I enrolled at university.

I am African. Without the full cultural understanding of what that means I still claim the title. I never really fit into being white working class Manchester even though that was the only life I knew. Meeting my other family let me start to breathe because I began to know who I was.

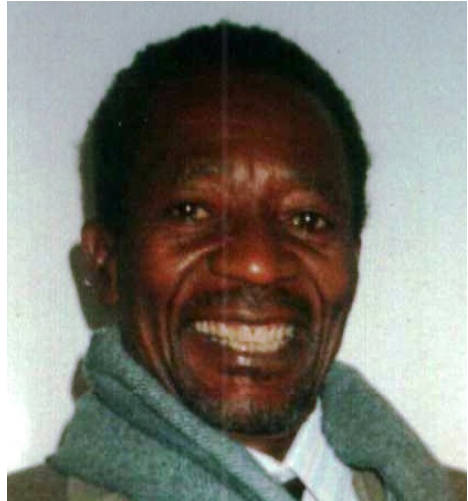
My daughter claims her African heritage as fiercely as she claims her Scottish roots. My son is slightly bemused with his African, Jamaican, British mixture and although I would define him as African he firmly roots himself in Britain. I see both of my children as African descendants.

There are so many things I would want to say to my dad if he was still here. There are so many things I want to know about his life here and in Nigeria. I think ultimately though I would thank him for acknowledging me and allowing me to be an equal part of the African family.

CHAPTER 30

ENGR. MBA KALU AGBAI *by his daughter Erinma*

'You know when you come from school; you see these gates..... Out there beyond these gates is Manchester - inside this house, this is Nigeria'..'



Mba Kalu Agbai Engineer



Agbai Family



Ugori and children

In the Nigerian community (back home¹), everybody knows who he is. He actually comes to England for a break. That's what he always says.... Not that he likes England very much. He always says 'You know I come here for a break to get away from the people'. But now with mobile phones they can and do ring him at all hours. He'll do anything for a quiet life. If he's got money and you start fussing, telling him what you need he'd give it all to you, he'd say 'here you are take it, take it' that is how he has always been. He has just turned 80 and he is still paying people's school fees, university fees, looking after certain families in the village and providing them with land. Repairing their housing, buying them vehicles – which he would travel to Amsterdam to purchase, he still does all that. We say to him, 'Dad you're a pensioner now'. 'But these people they need it, they don't have it', he says. 'You know I don't like any headaches, so I just give them.' That's how he is. As soon as people say, 'Papa I need this for this or this', he will say 'take, take'. To me, I think that's been his undoing, as people have learnt to rely on that over the years, so much so that they still continuously bother him. Dad is a large landowner in Ohafia² and uses most of his land to do arable farming.

He came to England on a ship as a passenger in early 1962. He came on a ship called Takwa. He chose to come by ship and not to fly so that he would be able to tell of the journey route he had taken.

He first landed in Liverpool, then sailed on to Southampton and then Tilbury. From there he was taken by the British Council, in London to a bed and breakfast and on several tours of London.

He asked the British Council to direct him how to get to Manchester, because he had a letter to deliver to a Nigerian in Stretford.

At first he lived in digs and linked up with two friends, whom he had written to from Nigeria. They both encouraged him to come to England and further his education like they were both doing. He first lived with Dr Awa and Mr Amougou Okwara who both had their own houses and Mr Agbai who wanted to own his own house too. Encouraged by the two elders, he bought our first home at 110 Heald Place, from a Polish man, and in 1963 brought mum over to the UK. Our mother's name is Ugorji she is from Asaga³.

1 Referring to village community
2 A local government Igbo speaking region in Abia State, Nigeria.
3 One of Ohafia villages founded by Ukpai Ezema Atita [Okwara]

They are proud people. Dad is from Amaekpu, Ohafia.

Our neighbours, at 110 Heald Place, were black people one side and the other side were Asian. Across the road, they were white people and because they were in the Council houses⁴ and we were in our own private houses, there was always conflict and arguments. I think simply because they thought we were richer which wasn't true. I remember my Mum telling us that they had to buy

their own houses; they had to save and use their money because the council wouldn't give them council houses. We were probably worse off having a mortgage to pay as well as looking after six children. Nobody helped to pay the mortgage. I remember asking my Mum 'why don't these people like us?' It wasn't racial because there were a couple of white families on our side, the private side whose kids went to my school. I was very friendly with one of them; I can never remember her name..... Tracy somebody. She was a really nice friend and her family were really nice. I think it was more economics and class.

Dad was a telecommunications engineer and when we were young he must have left for work at about 5 o'clock in the morning. My Mum left the house at seven. She worked in a café; she majored at university in catering. She worked at the café in the morning cooking breakfasts. Then from there she went to her job as a university lecturer and back to the café in the evening to do the teas; all this, before coming home. So it was like she had three jobs. She had a proper job but she still had to subsidise it.

Both my parents went to university. Dad first came to England to further his education. He had worked as a Head Postmaster in Nigeria and wrote to a representative of the GPO to ask whether he could come and work for them abroad (UK) and further his education as a telecommunications engineer. They said yes provided he would study to be an 'underground and overhead telecommunications officer'. Dad first studied at Openshaw Technical College⁵ whilst working, then went on to UMIST⁶ to study.

4 Built and operated by local councils to supply uncrowded, well-built homes on secure tenancies at reasonable rents to primarily working-class people.

5 <http://otcmancat.co.uk/>

6 University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology was a university based in the centre of the city of Manchester in England. It specialised in technical and scientific subjects and was a major centre for research.

Dad was introduced to the Nigerian Union as a way of keeping in touch with back home. This introduced him to politics, Nigerian politics.

So in time he dropped the successful self-made shipping business and went into politics back home and that finished his money, what wealth he had earned and saved. So he reverted back to the shipping. The shipping business he did alongside the GPO work. He would crate people's goods, strap them up and then deliver them to the wharf for shipping to Nigeria.

After Heald Place, Dad bought one of the big houses on Moss Lane East and rented out every room. There is nothing my Dad wouldn't do which is why it is difficult to pinpoint his skills. He did his own joinery, knocking out walls and putting up door frames and wall partitions – he did it all himself, making a room into two rooms.

I think back then he would only rent to Irish people. He used to say 'the only thing with the Irish is that they drink too much, drink too much'. I don't know about the drinking but I do know they set the house on fire... twice!!! In one of the fires somebody had to jump from the roof and they broke their legs. I remember that and another incident where I think two of them were fighting and someone got stabbed. A Jamaican I think stabbed an Irish guy and threw him out the front windows. (A couple of years later he was on 'Rough Justice'⁷.)

That's when he decided not to have any more tenants and the house stood empty for a long time.

People were always coming to the house to see my Dad. His friends who would come and sit, smoke and drink, talk and chat and laugh. There was always a lot of laughter and I used to think 'what are they doing wrong?' because Mum was always complaining. My Dad used to smoke too so the house was always very smoky especially when his friends were around and my Mum didn't like it so the men had their front room and we had ours. Till this day I still see some of them and when I see them I say, 'Yes I remember you, you used to come to our house'.

My Dad always used to get dressed up and have his hat on the side of the head. He has always been a very smart dresser, who loved going out, loved partying.

7 A BBC television series which investigated alleged miscarriages of justice. It was broadcast between 1982 and 2007

I know that because we all went to all the parties, we'd be there until we fell asleep on the chairs and he'd still be dancing, him and my Mum!! He went to the Nile and the Reno and I remember him talking about when the owner was murdered and it got closed down, I remember he went to the funeral. My Mum always used to complain that it was a gambling place, I never went in. When he used to go she would say 'he always goes there to gamble' and we'd say 'he's not gambling' they go there to chill and hang out.

For my Mum there are six of us. Dad has an elder daughter from a previous relationship, not a marriage, so she is the eldest. My two elder brothers were born in Nigeria and they came to England during the Biafra civil war⁸ which broke out just as my parents left for England. Mum and Dad were missing their sons who were left with my maternal grandmother. I am the eldest of the four born and raised here.

We were brought up in our home as Nigerians. I always remember my Mum saying to us and I repeat it now, she used to say 'You know when you come from school; you see these gates..... Out there beyond these gates is Manchester – inside this house, this is Nigeria'. And that's exactly how it was, inside the house it was Nigeria. You got treated like a Nigerian, you got spoken to like a Nigerian, we dressed it, and we ate it and talked it. It was Nigerian. Although at that time I think we learnt more to understand rather than to speak the language. That's why children like me were sent home.... to learn more of our culture and language, plus they said that I was getting a bit out of hand as I was a real tomboy. I was one of those who

said 'I'm never going to have children' – I can't believe I have five now. We were also sent to learn the language, because when you are around other Nigerians and other Igbos in particular, you would understand and automatically start speaking it.

I was a 'Daddy's girl'. I always knew how to get round Daddy. Mum never used to like me going out when I became a teenager so I'd get my Dad to take me. If I wanted he'd wait outside. He'd drop me at a party from 9 -10 o'clock at night and then wait outside until like 2 o'clock, and the poor man would be going to work the next day. Still he would sit there and wait because in them times you couldn't ring your Dad and say you're ready so he'd sit there and wait – no mobile phone or 10p for the phone box.

8 Also known as The Nigerian *Civil War*, 6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970,

He's a very loving man, very kind, very giving and very humble. Whatever he's got he will give it away. He also works very hard. Whilst he has just turned 80 years old, he still talks of travelling over to Amsterdam to buy a left hand drive vehicle which he will ship to Nigeria and sell. This he has normally done and still wishes to do it again.

His philosophy is, and he always says it to us, 'the more you've give, the more you get back'. You know, the more you give to mother earth or whatever you want to call it, the more you get back.

My dad has a few such phrases. "If you work with me, you will eat with me."

CHAPTER 31

FREDERICK CUMLAVA GASPER *by his son Leon*



Mrs Fitzpatrick Leon Mrs Pereira and Mrs Sadie

'England needed men to fight in the war he came as a merchant seamen he was a stoker. So at 15 or 16 he was fighting..'



Mr Gasper middle back row. Mrs Gasper front row left facing

I remember once some man was abusing my Mother - because she was going out with a black man. Dad picked the man up, tipped him upside down and dropped him down the drain on his head.

I was brought up in a home with an African father as were most of his friends or they were Jamaican. I always felt African, even before I went there, because people would say to me 'where are you from' and I would say 'Manchester'. 'No, No' they would say 'Where are you from?' 'Manchester' 'No, no where were you born' - 'Manchester' I would say. OK, I am not a typical European because my skin is dark and my hair is curly, but I am proud of myself and I would feel comfortable anywhere.

SuAndi: Do you think there is an almost like an invisible unity bond between you guys of mixed race of a certain age – inverted commas 'half caste lads'?

Yeah, yeah, only of a certain age - the younger generation haven't got the same thing.

Can you explain that?

I think it is because we grew up in a time when there weren't that many of us around. When we went to school out of about 500 children there were probably only about 5-6 mixed race and black children, so we did tend to stick together.

But there were white friends weren't there?

Yeah, oh yeah because the area we lived in, in Moss Side there were quite a lot of black people as opposed to some areas where there were virtually none. But nowadays it's different though because young people want to fight each other and I can't understand that.

I went to Nigeria in 2007. When you get off the plane, the heat is really oppressive, but you get used to it. I went to my father's village in Togo, my relatives were all happy to see me and treated me really well

- I have only got cousins now as my Aunties and Uncles have all passed away. The older people – they were quite shocked by how light we are; my daughter and I, they called us O-ebo ¹– well, some people did though not everyone. My daughter has been back twice, she liked it, they were very good to her and she liked it a lot.

It did make me think why my Dad never went back home even though compared to living in Manchester it is not as advanced. Though I suppose after he married our Mum going back would have been difficult for her because the health service is not so good and there is no electricity and some people do not have running water in their houses. Even in the capital Lagos – each area only has electricity for a couple of hours each day.

He didn't go home, but he sent money and gifts. He sent a gramophone once. He took it to Manchester Docks and one of his seaman friends took it back to Nigeria; my cousins remembered it turning up there.

I think why he never went back was because they must have thought he was rich and he wasn't and that would have been a source of embarrassment to him. He sent money, what he could afford, but I think the main reason was embarrassment because they thought living here that he was rich. Because people of my generation never used to ask their fathers questions - I don't know why, it was just different back then. If he was here now I would ask him about his childhood and his friends back in Africa and I would ask him the real reason why he didn't go back home.

My dad, Frederick Cumlava Gasper and Francis Kathleen my mum, met when he went with his mate to visit a friend at Manchester Royal Infirmary. At first her family weren't keen on the relationship, weren't keen on it at all, but Grandfather O'Connor came to like him and used to come round for him and used to take him out.

1 Kai, you're so fair! Afin (Yoruba for albino)

But before that they were against it and in fact they disowned her for a period of time. We never met our grandmother.

My parents went to Belle Vue to watch the wrestling². At weekends, they went to the Denmark Hotel and then they would go to the off license and get some beer, come back to the house and have parties in the house in the front room, where the kids weren't allowed to go in because it was the best room kept only for visitors. I remember going to Mr. Tottoh's³ house – he let us in the front room because I was with my father. They spoke, I didn't even move from my chair. I just sat there for I don't know how long in silence. Nowadays it's different, kids don't sit down, they run round the house and chit chat, but in those days –

We lived in Fernleaf Street, Moss Side where every black person was an uncle and every wife was an aunty and we were always in and out of each other's houses. It was good, it felt safe. St Bees Street was the street next to ours and the Williams and the Davidsons lived down there.

Our Mothers had a kind of unity between them. I think it was because they were going through the same experience. They clubbed together for security and strength.

We stayed in Moss Side until the seventies when they knocked the house down, which is a shame really because they didn't have the foresight to do any repairs⁴. Then we moved to Chorlton-on-Medlock⁵, near Ardwick Green. An area which a lot of people don't even know exists now. There were no friends from Moss Side there, just us as a family. We didn't know anybody there, we had to start again.

2 The first wrestling contest took place in 1930 at the Kings Hall and continued until 1981, watched by up to 5,000 spectators

3 See John Endomini Tottoh

4 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/manchesterarchiveplus/5334669121/>

5 The original township was known as Chorlton Row. <http://www.lan-opc.org.uk/Manchester/Chorlton-on-Medlock/>

We kids Yvonne, Daniel, Joseph, Kathleen and Maria and me off course, grew up in an African house, because it was always full of people. My father never ate English food, he had to cook his own food and if he didn't cook it, he used to give me a couple of pans to take to an African Café on Denmark Road to get his food. I had to go through the dining hall where all the old African men were sat eating and then on through to the kitchen with the two pans - I felt a right fool.

Dad came from Togo⁶. His birth language was Yoruba⁷. He also spoke English and French. He was born around 1915 and had one brother and a sister who died at 100. When he was around 5 years old the family moved to Nigeria, possibly for work.

Nigeria was a colony and when England needed men to fight the war, he came over in 1930 as a merchant seaman. He was a stoker. So at 15 or 16 he was fighting for England! He went on Artic Convoys⁸ to Russia and when the spray hit the ship the whole of the hull turned to ice that had to be chipped off or the boat would capsize. On docking, unbelievably the Russians wouldn't let them off the boat.

He also sailed to America and on one trip he was out with some crewmates when a group of white guys told them 'Niggers' move off the sidewalk and walk in the road. Dad and his mates replied 'we are not niggers we are Africans' and they beat up the white guys and then had to run back to the ship. The police came to arrest them but the captain wouldn't let the police board so they got away with it.

When he was first in England he lived in rooms in London. At one

6 Officially the Togolese Republic, bordered by Ghana to the west, Benin to the east and Burkina Faso to the north.

7 A Niger-Congo language spoken in West Africa

8 They were oceangoing convoys which sailed from the UK, Iceland, and North America to northern ports in the Soviet Union - About 1400 merchant ships delivered essential supplies to the Soviet Union under the Lend-Lease program,

time all he had to eat was sugar butties⁹.

By 1940 he had moved to Manchester.

My father was a very quiet man but physically very strong and he feared nobody – I think it was his upbringing – being from Africa and his experiences as a very young man during the war. He was jovial and confident in himself. He was tall, over 6ft, his nose was quite broad and he had full lips. He had a strong physique and he wasn't shy about his colour or anything; he was a proud and confident man.

I remember on one occasion when I was on fairground ride, I think it was New Brighton, you know near Liverpool? I was sick on the ride and two of the four men working on it verbally attacked me for being sick on the waltzers¹⁰. I went and told my Dad who in turn went and had a word even though there were four of them!! He told them not to abuse me and they backed down. So he was my hero!

After he left the Merchant Navy he got a job at Manchester Garages¹¹, but they wouldn't let him work in the garages, they made him work in the car park. Until one day they were short of mechanics and they let him help repair the cars. Then a man came to get his car fixed and said to the foreman 'who will fix my car?' The foreman said 'that man over there' meaning my father and the customer said 'I don't want that black man touching my car' and the foreman says 'OK then'. The customer came and took it away and about four days later he came back to the garage and he says 'I don't know what you did to my car but it is running better than ever, who fixed it?' and they said 'that black man over there' and the man was shocked. So from that day he worked at the Manchester Garages, over thirty odd years until he retired.

9 Local slang for sandwiches

10 A fairground ride that consists of a number of cars which are free to spin individually while rotating around a central point like a carousel.

11 On Oxford Road they were Ford main dealers,

On weekends his countrymen would come and he would fix their cars for next to nothing for them. This made him very popular.

He was popular at work too. When we had our new clothes for Whit Week¹² we used to go to his work and the men there would give us pennies. In fact one of his Managers used to have us all go to his house and he would make us food. He was valued, yeah, even by the bosses.

Because my Father was always at work it was my Mother who told us off. During the war she worked at Hyde's Brewery¹³ and then she worked as a cleaner at Ducie¹⁴ and then as a barmaid in the King Billy Pub¹⁵ in Chorlton in Medlock and her last job, before she retired, was working in McVities¹⁶ in Stockport.

Dad was a smart dresser he used to take all his shirts to the Chinese laundry on Claremont Road and his shirts had collars on them for studs and cufflinks on the sleeves. He was very smart when he was out, very smart. They used to go to McConnons (sic) which was on Lloyd Street (Kenyatta used to go there) and they used to go to Lagos Lagoon¹⁷ when Salawu owned it. There was a family called the Adams who had a big house and a club in Moss Side on the corner of Moss Lane and Lloyd Street, but I think my parents only ever went to the same two clubs.

I don't think Mum ever went out by herself, only with my father. I know she used to be very friendly with Mrs. Pereira and Mrs Asuma. Her husband was the barber.

12 Whitsun is the name used in the UK for the Christian festival of Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter,

13 A family-owned and managed *brewery* in Salford, England. The company has been *brewing* real ale since 1863

14 The *Ducie High School* was on *Lloyd Street* North

15 King William IV, public house in Justin Close was converted to residential property in 1996

16 A British snack food brand owned by United Biscuits

17 See Olatunde Joseph Moses chapter

When my father died, Mum was distraught but because she had children we helped her to get by. I was about 29 at the time. Mum was still working at McVities. She was very good and always used to buy clothes for her grandchildren and go to see them. She used to go out with my wife and sometimes I would go out with them. She was the life and soul of the party and people used to say 'is Kathleen coming out?' Everybody loved her, she didn't have a bad bone in her body, and she was so giving. She developed Alzheimer's towards the end of her life and needed looking after so she lived with my sister Yvonne. I lost her about six years ago, she was 91.

My father died in 1981. I put it down to hard work. He was only 77! His heart packed up causing heart failure, he was in hospital for about two weeks and then he died.

Mum and Dad are buried together at Southern cemetery, after all they were a married couple until he died. Before we buried Dad we cut his fingernails and shaved his hair and put them in a bag and gave them to my elder cousin who took it back and buried it in the family plot in Togo, so part of him is buried there with his family.

I have this one memory, I suppose it is kind of a special memory; my dad knew Chris Bonington and when he climbed the mountain¹⁸ he sent dad a postcard. That's Chris Bonington, the mountain climber.

We had a very happy childhood because we were safe. As I have said, if we went out everyone was your Uncle and Auntie, they would invite you into their house, welcome you and give you something to eat.

18 Bonington was part of the party that made the first British ascent of the South West Pillar (aka Bonatti Pillar) of the Aiguille du Dru in 1958,

CHAPTER 32
GODFREY TORO AKINGBAD AKINBODE
by his son Tayo



Tayo



Tayo

*'My father died when I was seven
from bowel cancer
Memories are a series of snap
shots...'*

The son Tayo wrote his first musical score in 1982 and since then has worked with numerous companies as Composer or Musical Director. Theatre credits include: Julius Caesar, Royal Shakespeare Company; The Glass Menagerie, Royal Exchange, Manchester; Our Day Out, The Sheffield Crucible; Totter down Tanzi, Bristol Old Vic; Mother Courage, Nottingham Playhouse.¹

I first spotted him as a set changer at the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester. I, and I suspect many black members of the audience, thought 'I wonder who the black guy with the earring is'.

Now Tayo spends more of his time either on the stage performing or writing the production's musical score. During the course of Afro Solo I have contacted him in Manchester, London and New York where he was playing with the Royal Shakespeare Company; a life so far removed from the sadness of his childhood.

My memories are like a series of snapshots, some of them are almost like short movies and some of them are just like images. To me my father was this tall, slim man that looked a bit like I do now physically, obviously without the earrings. My sister said 'no, no he was your height' so it is funny how we have different memories of our parents.

My father came to England in 1950, my mother followed in 1954 and my sister was born a year later. My father Tayo and my mother Omolara Rachel both came from Surulere² in Lagos Nigeria.

I am not sure whether my mum got her qualification as a nurse here in England but she worked in various hospitals. When I was around 5 or 6 she worked at the Royal Northern Hospital in London and towards the end she was a District Nurse. She worked hard and did long hours. One of my favourite things was that she used to do an evening surgery and every now and again I would have to go with her, and I would get stationery; pencils, books and things; that was like the best thing in the world really.

We lived in the ground floor flat of a house. It had two bedrooms with all us kids in one and my parents in the other, a living room and a little kitchen. So it wasn't a big flat but what was great was that we had a garden.

1 <http://www.20storieshigh.org.uk/>

2 A residential and commercial area, and a Local Government Area located on the Lagos mainland

The garden was fantastic so we were always out in the garden.

Dad was the centre of attention. People would come and ask for his advice; he was very well respected in the community. He was a deeply religious man. He wasn't a priest exactly but the people used to pray with him. The more I talk, the more things come back to me. That is an image that hadn't been there before in my bank of six or seven visual memories; the one of the room with all the people talking in Yoruba³. Unfortunately my parents didn't teach us their language because they thought we would be confused.

I am sure other people have said this to you when they were in a similar position hearing people speak and understanding bits of it but you not being able to speak it yourself. You know certain words – 'bẹ̀ẹ̀ni' which means yes, 'sun' sleep, 'joko' sit down. So there are all these bits of words that you know but you can't speak it because you have never spoken it. With the Yoruba language it's not like learning French or German where you just learn the words. It's more like Mandarin where you have to learn the sounds because it's a total language. So even though we didn't understand, I remember the prayers, the voices talking and then Dad speaking and people would say 'Ami' - 'Amen' and then more talking. There was always a lot of that stuff going on in the house. It seemed like there were always loads of people – family and friends. I didn't know the difference between them because everyone was Uncle and Auntie and I just thought I had the world's biggest family.

SuAndi: Give me some more of these images.

Nigerians and food; certainly in those days the traditional way was the adults ate first and the children ate what is left afterwards. We ate different food, Nigerian and English and I always loved Nigerian. There was one dish called Elubo⁴ that I have not eaten since a kid. I don't even know what was in it - it was dark but like fufu⁵.

Because I was the baby of the family my Dad would spoil me a little bit. He would eat and then he would let me have the food after him, his food, so that is one particular image.

3 A Niger–Congo language spoken in West Africa.

4 Amala is a West African dish that is prepared using yam flour or 'Elubo' in Yoruba

5 Made from, cassava, or semolina, or maize flour.

The last image of my father is visiting him in the Chapel of Rest. It was freaky for a kid. I have a photograph and his eyes aren't quite closed.

I lost my father when I was seven. He had bowel cancer. I remember seeing him in the front room and he was ill by this time and really, really frail. Then I have this image of seeing him in hospital with oxygen and him looking really, really ill. I knew he was sick but I didn't know he was going to die but still I must have sensed it was coming. I don't remember being completely floored by it I have to say. I did grieve but it wasn't a total out of the blue.

I remember one thought entering my head when I was told that Dad had died, it was - 'I am half way to being an orphan now'. I imagine it's not an uncommon thought when you lose any parent, because the whole concept of orphans is out there in every sense.

Now the family is just you the youngest at seven, your older sister Adenike and your brother Akindele Olujime, Was time with your Mum very limited now because of the single parent status and with her having to work long hours?

I don't remember it being particularly limited. Things were different then. Nowadays when you go to the school you see the parents taking their kids and picking them up later – that didn't happen when we were kids. I remember being about 4 or 5 and I lived on the same road as school and there was only one road to cross and I used to walk to school myself. It did seem like a long walk at that time, thinking about it now it was no further than where my kids went to school and I used to walk with them until they were in the last year of primary school, then I said 'you are going to big school soon, so it's time for you to start going by yourself'.

How was your Mum when your Dad died? Did it make her stricter or mellow?

I don't remember any change really. People always say to me I am always such a happy 'sun shining' kind of person and it comes from my Mum. When I think of her I always think of her smiling and as a beautiful woman. I remember saying to her once she should enter Miss World and 'you would win that easily, you could be Miss Nigeria'! I always thought of her as amazing. I don't remember a change. My mum loved the three of us, she was a really, really lovely woman.

In 1970 she takes you all to Nigeria her first trip home after 16 years.

I am pretty sure that it was 16, because it was in a local Lagos newspaper that we had returned home after 16 years. It was like a celebration - the killing of chickens and feasting!!! Because it was a big deal her going home because I think she was the first of her siblings to come over to the UK.

It was generally more serious and sombre when we saw various members of my Father's family because it was only two years since he died. For us kids there was a lot of time hanging out with older folk speaking Yoruba to us which was harder to understand in Nigeria than here because here people would throw in a lot of English words... like refrigerator or TV. That way you got the gist but not over there. So the people who could speak English would speak specifically to us. Later when we returned to England I said I wanted to learn Yoruba, so Mum started to teach me, with books!

It was great to see my Granddad even though we couldn't communicate properly. On my birth certificate it says 'Akintayo Olutosin Ayoola Akinbode' and we went to see my Grand-dad and he said to me 'you are now Samuel Theophilis' and those are his names and I have kept those names. So now when people ask me I say 'Akintayo Olutosin Ayoola Samuel Theophilus Akinbode. There was someone else, I don't know who he was gave me the names 'Ogunbi Ogunbayoji' a bit of a mouthful but I still used them for a little bit and told people my name was Akintayo Olutosin Ayoola Samuel Theophilus Ogunbi Ogunbayoji Akinbode.

Granddad gave my brother a name that was similarly constructed and he quite liked his! Then Granddad turned to my sister and said 'and you are now Florence Elizabeth Dorcas' and we said 'Dorcas!!' and we fell on the floor laughing as that was just the funniest name we had ever heard and we knew how to wind her up after that. And it wasn't even because there wasn't such a thing as a Dork⁶ then, but it was just so funny 'Dorcas'. So she never kept hers obviously, but me and my brother kept ours.

Not long after we came back from Nigeria, my Mum bought a house. It was reasonably sized, a couple of rooms downstairs, and a kitchen and a garden, smaller than we had before and a couple of rooms above that and an attic and I loved the attic.

6 A contemptible, socially inept person.

It had stairs up there and it had all the toys up there and that was our playroom really. It was a four bedroomed house in Holloway. She got a mortgage and got it for like about £4,000 which was a lot of money in those days, but she worked really hard. I was nine I had just one year to go.

I am ten now, my sister is 16 and my brother is 15. It was a Friday, we were watching telly. My brother went in to the kitchen and screamed. We went in and mother was collapsed on the floor slurring barely able to speak. It was terrifying and we were trying to pick her up and help her which wasn't easy as she was a big woman. Someone said call my Uncle Ade, my mother's cousin and we called the ambulance – I was at the top of the stairs and terrified. The ambulance came and my Mum was trying to speak and was saying 'I'll be OK, I'll be OK.'

We went to see her in hospital a number of times and the last time I think was a Saturday, and she was on really good form even though one side of her wasn't working from the stroke⁷. She was entertaining people being jolly then she died the Wednesday after. I remembered when I was seven and thinking I was half way to being an orphan but my Mum was such a presence that even though she was in hospital and I was being told she was alright and feeling better and making a recovery and then she didn't. I didn't see that one coming. I had a really dark 5 years from that day – there were two 5 year things, there were 5 years of death but in my mind the dark years started when my Mum died because when my Dad died I still had my Mum and she shone such a bright light and that went out when she died.

Then we were orphans! Apparently there was a will stating we were to go to Nigeria to my Dad's sister who terrified us; she didn't smile and wasn't loving and cuddling. Whereas my mother's younger brother Uncle Dipo lived about a mile away, married with two kids, living in a flat. Mum's insurance had paid off the house mortgage so we stayed. I liked my Uncle, he was nice, whereas Auntie, I don't think she was particularly keen on moving in to the house and looking after her husband's sisters' kids.

Auntie always used to say lovely things about my Dad. She used to say what a great man he was, what a bright man he was, how loved in the community he was, and all this stuff which I actually saw with my own eyes.

7 A *stroke* is a serious medical condition that occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off.

She didn't say such nice things about my Mum, so I don't think she was so keen on my Mum which is maybe why she wasn't so nice to us I guess, I don't know.

She liked my brother because he was jolly, a nice, cool, 16 years old. My sister was pretty, down serious kind of girl and Auntie didn't like her. And I was just grieving and a little boy completely lost.

At 17 my brother was full of life and energy. I didn't notice him being sick and getting sicker. He went into hospital and we all went to see him a lot and Auntie got him a wig when he lost his hair. The leukaemia went through him in about 3 or 4 months. The possibility that he might not recover was never put out there.

How do you come out of these two very precise five years of darkness and build your life and why as a musician?

People always ask me if I come from a musical family and I always say no and yes. We weren't that kind of family, but we played music all the time. There were always parties and dancing and singing along to stuff. Music was a big part of my life as a little kid. I used to play records, remember you used to stack them up and they used to fall down and you'd play them one at a time.

I went to a rough, tough all boys' school, academically it was rubbish. It was all about football and a load of footballers came out of it. Academically you could only take 6 subjects and it was mostly CSEs rather than O'Levels. They gave us a musical test and I scored more than 50% so I was put in the recorder group where I discovered 'playing' music. It was like a heavenly choir moment. I thought this is just amazing, you can make music as well as just listening to it.

I guess it was a release in contrast to tough stuff at home. My Auntie was horrible and used to say the worst things especially about my mother. My sister went to university the same summer that my brother died. I'd lost both of them in a way. It was just me and life at home was just hell, sometimes I just wanted to die. I guess that is what fuelled it and I just went from one instrument to another. Without that recorder I might not be where I am now as a musician.

My sister knew what an awful time her little brother was having.

She had escaped the hell hole and was making friends and having a great time, but all the time she knew that back at home her little brother was going through hell with this Auntie. So when she graduated⁸ after 3 years my sister came back and said to my Auntie ‘right it is time for you to leave my home now, it’s time to go. I am going to look after my brother now’. My Auntie wouldn’t go, so she took them to court, for cruelty and she became my legal guardian. She was 21.

I was like this caged animal that had been caged for 5 years and for whom someone just opened the door and I just ran and ran and I put my sister through absolute hell.

My Dad came to England to study to be a pharmacist but it’s my understanding that he failed his exams so he became a stockbroker trader. I remember my Mum saying if he had lived we would be living really comfortably. So that is another part of my Dad’s story. But he died.

I was good at sciences at school and I did toy with the idea of doing pharmacy especially as I heard ‘oh it’s what your father would have wanted’ and ‘he would have been really proud’, but I became a musician.

When I think about music I think about my Mum. She loved music. When I was about 3 or 4 my mum gave me 2 singles⁹, one was a Nigerian pop record and the other one was Doris Day ‘Move over Darling¹⁰’. ‘Rescue Me¹¹’, was one of my favourites when I was a kid, played it to death and I don’t know why, but it got put too close to the paraffin heater and then it wasn’t flat which became apparent when I tried to play it.

Frans was my English teacher he had just come out of University and wasn’t qualified in teaching or anything. He was only ten years older than we were. He used to take us, me and another friend Nick to the theatre sometimes and concerts and to his house and drink tea and chat to him and his wife – stuff teachers can’t do these days. There is no way! The three of us are still in touch. Frans said ‘go and discover youth theatre’ and that is when we went to Royal Court Theatre¹².

8 She became a teacher and she now lectures a teacher training course at University

9 A single is a song that is released separately from the album recording.

10 From the album ‘Doris Day Sings Her Great Movie Hits’

11 Released as a single by Fontella Bass in 1965

12 <http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/>

I was 18 now, I'd messed up my A 'levels. I was never in school. It was either the youth theatre or playing in bands. I loved doing the theatre thing, acting in plays, even though I realised in the end that I was rubbish at it. Janet Goddard from the theatre said 'go to Manchester and if you apply for the stage crew job at the Royal Exchange you will get it because they want someone to play bass for the Christmas show and you are a bass player'. I thought I could do it for 3 months; that was 1979 and I am still here in Manchester because I just fell in love with the place!!

I never thought I would live to be an old man especially because when I was 35 I had a brain tumour on the pituitary which is at the base of the brain. I was 33 when I went to the opticians and she said 'you are getting older your eyesight is starting to go!'

I was getting these headaches that you wouldn't believe. They were like someone sticking a dagger in my head. Deborah my partner at the time said 'go to the Doctor'. Eventually two years later I did! I was referred to the eye hospital where they said it must be something to do with the optical nerve so they gave me a scan and found the tumour. Because of where it was - on the pituitary which should have been the size of a pea but mine was the size of a big apricot, so it was way bigger than it should be - they had to operate. But because it was on the pituitary they told me it was not likely to be cancer, it would be benign, I wouldn't die but I could go blind! I would be useless as a blind musician, you are supposed to look at the music, but sod that; I have to look at my fingers - !!! So I had the surgery and I have lived to tell the tale and I will be eternally grateful to Deborah for making me seek a second opinion.

Maybe if I had lived 100 years ago I would have probably died an agonizing death eventually because that tumour would have just grown and grown and grown. My Dad's serious illness killed him, my Mum's serious illness killed her and my brother's serious illness killed him but because I live in the age that I do, I survived!

There have been a series of numbers in my life. One was hitting 40 because that was how old my Mum was when she died, then 45 my Dad's age when he died.

Then both my kids hitting 7 because that is how old I was when my Dad died, then both my kids hitting 10 because that is how old I was when my

Mum died. Then my son hitting 17 the age my brother was when he died. So I guess I had passed all my numbers, but there is one more number to go now and that is my daughter hitting 17 but it's different because they are different sexes.

We went for a family reunion and a funeral down in London. Uncle Dipo introduced us as Prince Akintayo and Prince Akinremi' . We said 'Prince?' and he said 'Of course you are Princes', I was like 'we are Princes' and he said 'Of course you are Princes' and I said 'I have made it to 39 and now you're telling me I am a Prince, I could have been using this with the girls!!

He explained that from my Mum's side of the family we come originally from a region called Owu¹³ which is why we are called Owolu and in this region there are 5 important families, and the Oba of the region (like the King) is chosen through an election. He goes round the five families, and if you are from one of those five families and you want to be the Oba you put yourselves forward. After voting the winner becomes the Oba for a period of time and if you come from one of those five families you are a Prince.

This was the first I had heard of this. Obviously there is a whole bunch of Princes out there because you only have to be connected to that family in some way to be a Prince.

Someone once said to me that the problem with Nigerians is that they all want to be Princes. But it is not used in the way it is used in England is it?

Yes, it is different, not like Prince Charles, with a palace and land!! Now they still have the Oba but it is more like the Mayor of the region, so we are Princes. I don't use the title, but some people do!!!!

My son was so proud that he was a Prince. In fact we were talking to my daughter Lara about it and she said 'I'm a Princess' and I said 'Yes darling, you are my Princess' because she would never get the chance to be a Princess because of how it works¹⁴.

13 The people of Owu (Owus) are part of the Yoruba tribe of West Africa. Ago-Owu in Abeokuta is where the Owus are mostly concentrated,

14 The Patriarchal social system means males are the primary authority figure in roles of political leadership, moral authority and control of property.

Ask me my name and I say Akintayo Olutosin Ayoola Samuel Theophilus Akinbode – I have got six names, and it's 'wow' that is my name. I got the name when I was 9 and I am now a 52 year old man so it obviously resounded very deeply in me.

When people ask 'where are you from?' I can't really give them a simple answer. Nigerians always use the word 'home' and it is an interesting concept. Definitely the family trip to Nigeria was quite profound even though I was only a child at the time.

What is really interesting is being in America because that question is different for African-Americans, because they don't have that same sense of us over here because it is like they are 'Americans'!

I have said 'Nigerian' to someone and they assumed I was born in Nigeria, but when I say 'No I was born in London', they say, 'so you are English'. 'No' I say. 'But you were born in London so how can you be Nigerian?'

'Home' and identify is complex. Where am I from? On one level I am from Nigeria because that is where my family is from, but I didn't grow up there, I don't speak the language, I have barely spent time there, but I feel a connection but it is not where I am going to retire, it's not 'home-home' but it is an important part of me. I am from Britain I guess, but it is not in the same way as my neighbours who are British and who have ancestors here, so I feel British but I don't feel that British. It's divided, so where am I from? Am I from Nigeria, Britain, London, Man my head starts to hurt.

People want a simple label and it isn't possible. There were 3 languages spoken in my home. My parents spoke Yoruba to each other, English to us and a kind of pidgin English, an English-Yoruba hybrid that much easier to understand than proper Yoruba, and we understood it, although I don't think English people would understand it and on the television the language was English. We ate English food, we ate Nigerian food. If that home was in Nigeria it would have looked felt and sounded different, so it is not that straightforward.

I am comfortable with who I am and where I am from, but it is not a simple answer. I am from many places

I don't know how much like my father I am, but I suspect there are things about me that are like him. There must be because genes are a powerful thing. Dad is a bit of a mystery to me, because I never really knew him. There are things I understand now that I am a parent. When you are the child you think parents just know stuff, they have all this knowledge; they are just so wise and have all the answers to everything. When you become the parent you think 'fuck', because you realise they were just making all that shit up as they went along!! They had an answer for everything by taking one step at a time and doing the best that they could with the tools that they had.

You can't deny nurture because we react to our surroundings, clearly we do. But also you can't deny nature – babies aren't a blank sheet of paper, they are born with stuff. They come into this world and there is a character already formed that reacts to the environment it is in. In some ways my daughter Lara is a bit more like her mum and my son more like me.

When my son went to university I wrote him a letter and I put all this stuff in about how proud I am of him and the man he has become. He challenges stuff and I always said to him to question everything, and he does. When people meet him they say 'he is a really nice man your son isn't he?' I am so proud that he has turned out into a good lad. I am proud of both of my children.

I am a product of the life I have led and how I worked it out - I could have gone a really different route, I could have been really angry.

You could have been a social worker's file case.

Yes absolutely, but I had my English teacher who helped me and I had music which was my salvation.

I know how short life is. I live in the moment quite a lot of the time even though I have got into all sorts of trouble financially. I think I would have been a very different person if I hadn't had the life I had as a child. Music has been like a release to me in a way. I don't write all just jolly, happy type of music because that is not really what it is about. I understand a lot about theory but the way I write music it is about feel and not theory.

I don't know what my parents would have made of me and the man I have become. If they had lived I would have probably been a very different

person. As the years have passed the effect of having survived my serious illness started to wear off and I started again to think that I'm not going to make it to a ripe old age. Then last year like in a blinding light came to me. My Dad, my Mum and my brother didn't make it, but I had two grand-dads in their 80s; one deep in to his 80s. Clearly men in my family can actually last a long time. If they can make it, maybe I can I guess and maybe I will. I am 52, certain things are starting to creak but I am OK.

CHAPTER 33

JOHN JOHNSON *by his son Johnny*



Johnny Johnson



John and friends

'There was always food on the table and clothes on our back – but people still insinuated their women our mothers were on the game....'

This interview was done by Oniomo Atta and donated to Afro Solo UK.

When I was a kid my Dad had two names, John Johnson and Peter Wilson. When I was about 8 or 9, I asked my Mum whether my name, was Johnson or Wilson. Mum said 'What is on your birth certificate'.

There were very, very few Africans who kept their own names for the simple reason that they were very hard to pronounce so they would just pick a name out.

He came from a place called Jawaza¹ which is the Cameroons, but it was only a small fishing village and from what I can understand he made his way from there down to Freetown². The majority of the old fellows were seaman as that was the only way of getting out of Africa at the time; they would go on board the ships and make their way to England as firemen or something like that. Some would go to Cardiff, Liverpool or Manchester. These were the only three ports where the African seaman would land. To tell you the truth, being a fireman on the ship was no life at all, the wages was nothing. Believe it or not they used to call it bed and breakfast!! They used to give them just a mattress cover so they had to go and buy straw to stuff the mattresses with. For the majority of them the foreman would get them a job on board and they had to pay him and the chief engineer a cut before they set sail. My Dad told me all this.

My Dad first came over in 1910 I think to Cardiff. The majority of them used to land in Cardiff, which is why there are more Africans of all different tribes in Cardiff than anywhere else. The majority of them lived down Bute Street³, the Old Tiger Bay⁴. I can I remember that when I was 3 until around 5, where I lived there were Kru⁵, Mende⁶ and Bassa⁷ men The majority of them lived the other side of Bellamy Road in the lodging houses there and there was a betting shop where they used to meet. Dad was on

1 From the recording we believe this to be correct we search reveals the closest sounding name to be Gawaza

2 The capital and largest city of Sierra Leone

3 <http://www.peterfinch.co.uk/bute.htm>

4 Tiger Bay had a reputation for being a tough and dangerous area.

Merchant seamen arrived in Cardiff from all over the world, only staying for as long as it took to discharge and reload their ships.

5 Ethnic group in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire

6 One of the two largest ethnic groups in Sierra Leone,

7 Also spelt Basa or Basaa and sometimes known as Bassa-Bakongo are a Bantu ethnic group in Cameroon.

the Manchester Liners⁸ so I'm not really sure if he travelled from Cardiff to Manchester or just left the ship there.

Some Africans saw two World Wars with the Manchester Liners, but when they changed them over to oil burners⁹ they tried to get rid of the Africans. Somebody had the sense to get in touch with a London MP and he came to the Manchester Docks. A fellow dock worker called Horsfield turned round and said 'Why are you getting rid of these men, some of who have served during two world wars, because of the changeover to oil burners?' They replied with the excuse 'well they don't know how to work them.' So he said send them to Liverpool and let them learn. The reality was that it was easy to learn within a couple of hours

So they started taking the Africans on again, but by this time some of them were getting old and didn't want to go to sea. My Dad was on a Manchester Ship when it got cut in two and was in Montreal for months to recover. Because he had lost all his property, clothes everything, he got a suit, overcoat, two sets of underwear, two shirts, shoes and when he got back home he had to pay for it!

My Mum's family originated in Bolton before they moved to Manchester and she got a job at Catenberrys in Southall Street in Cheetham Hill and Dad lived in Mary Street¹⁰ which was quite nearby. They started courting and got married on the sly. She was still going home to her family but eventually she had to tell her Mum and Dad. She really went through it and eventually was disowned by her parents but not her sister. I think they were married about 3 or 4 years before I was born in the 1930s. To my Auntie I was part of the family, there was no 'you're coloured or you're black' you know what I mean!

While Dad was at sea we moved to Henry Penwick¹¹ Street, I don't know how she got the house as there were no coloured people there whatsoever. On Bury New Road side there was, but on the Cheetham Hill side there wasn't. Dad came home from sea and together they built their home and family with Leslie, Billy and me the eldest.

8 A cargo and passenger shipping company, founded in 1898, based in Manchester, England. The line pioneered the regular passage of ocean-going vessels along the Manchester Ship Canal

9 As an example the S.S. Hartlepool was converted in Hong Kong in 1917
10 <http://www.salfordstar.com/article.asp?id=1042>

11 No reference

Later then, Billy and Annie Cole moved into the street probably about 4 or 5 years after. They paid their rent every week and didn't cause any trouble! Living around us at the time were Russian Jews, Catholics, Protestants and Poles and we all got on together.

At school there was a girl there called Eunice King and the teacher asked her to read that 'Ten little nigger boys'¹² poem. Eunice said 'no', and was sent out of school. Her Mum, who was a big woman, rushed in to school and grabbed the teacher by the throat and said 'you are asking my daughter to read this?' I am not sure if she gave the teacher a crack¹³!

They didn't want the black kids to be as smart. Billy Cole was one of the first men I knew who won a school scholarship. They said it's going to cost you this much for the uniform, so much for this and that, but they didn't say they would help him out with it or give him a grant. In other words the black are not going just the white kids

Oniomo - Can you remember what year you went to sea?

I was 15 so it would have been about 1942 or 1943 and it was just getting to the end of the war and I was at sea until I was nearly 23 years of age. I went as a galley boy and I learnt to be a chef. Out of the 7 years I think I spent about 6 to 9 months in England. The best place I have ever been to is Sweden – I have never seen a place so clean in my life. I also went to Dakar, Senegal French West Africa. Not being able to speak the language was a problem but even without that they didn't treat black people very well.

One time when we were in San Francisco, the chief cook was an African and he was talking to some of the dockers. They called me over and asked me what kind of school did I go to – I know what they were after – they wanted to know how coloured people coped in England. They wanted to know what you did if the other kids called us names. I said you would give them a slap and then you would get sent to the headmaster and tell him what happened and then the headmaster would tell me to go back to my class and the other kid would get a strapping – and they were amazed.

12 a mystery novel by Agatha Christie, first published in 1939 in the UK as *Ten Little Niggers*, after the British blackface song which serves as a major plot point. The title was changed to the last line of the rhyme – *And Then There Were None* – for the first American edition

13 Slang for a slap

They were similarly amazed at the fact that we could sit anywhere on the bus! This was before Martin Luther King.

You know these road side cafes? Well there was always one at the end of the docks. We were there one Christmas. They don't celebrate like we do, all theirs is done in the home, if you go in a pub there is only about 3-4 people in there. We were expecting it to be the same, everyone out enjoying themselves. A group of us went in to this one place for a drink. We walked in and there a big notice, white on one side, black on the other. I sat down on the white side – I'm English, you know what I mean. I am having a drink and a coloured yank is on the coloured side. He must have had a few drinks down his neck because he was arguing with the barman who got on the phone and said 'there is a nigger in here causing trouble.' Next thing there is a screeching of brakes – a man comes in and gives him a few whacks and slings him out. I think I am going to get some of this next. Then this big hand lands on my shoulder and says 'you are English aren't you' and buys us a drink and starts chatting and all the time all I want to do is get out. When we do get outside we pick up this poor yank and dust him off. He asks can we do him a favour and call the police and I say 'where is the telephone?' and he replies 'in the place you just came from!' So I say 'no chance.'

Back home all the girls wanted to marry a Yank. There was a pub on Cheetham Hill Road, pulled down now, where they would be sat there with coloured yanks. I said 'if you were back home and you were sat with white girls they would take you out and fucking hang you'. Don't come giving me 'the States this, the States that. Our houses are not marvellous but they are better than the slums you come from.' All the girls were taking it in. I don't like bullshit. When I was in the States I saw the conditions they were living in!

I was on the British tankers for four years - their base was Abadan¹⁴ in the Persian Gulf. We went all over – Karachi, Sydney, loads of places. As we were leaving Sydney, I was told I was needed on the bridge. I go up and the Captain says 'Alright Johnny' and then turns towards two immigration officers and they say 'he is Māori.¹⁵' I said 'hey I am no Māori, I am British and I was born in Manchester', so I get my passport out for them to inspect and they apologised.

14 A city in and the capital of Iran and 53 kilometres (33 mi) from the Persian Gulf

15 People native to New Zealand

When I tell people, they laugh – it was because I had long hair.

Oniomo - What do you reckon that life has taught you?

Life is hard. If anyone says it's easy they are wrong, if you work in an office life is hard, if you are a judge life is hard. No matter what you do it is hard.

What I can't understand is that our Dads weren't ambitious – they just wouldn't push themselves that little bit harder. And I will tell you another thing that I have noticed, out of all the coloured races, Pakistanis and all of them, is that the African man once he has a roof over his head, his kids have clothes and there is food on the table then that is all he is interested in.

I worked at Wallworks¹⁶ for 16 years until an accident that left me blinded in one eye and did my back in so they made me redundant. I worked with this African lad who was doing menial jobs. One day his father came from Africa, parked his big car outside and walked straight into the office asking, 'Where is my son working?' He was working on knock out¹⁷. The father said 'he has been to Oxford University, why is he doing a labouring job?' And the boss didn't know anything about it! Same thing again, the black man doing the hardest job.

Leslie Cole, he had his own business and he once asked me 'Hey Johnny have you never thought of going into business, why not?' 'Because I have a clock card, I put it in, I work, I clock it and I go home, no worries, I am satisfied.' The only thing is I wish I had a good education and gone to university but after I had been to university and done all that I would have still gone on the shop floor!

I have been retired for years now. When I see some of the lads I worked with and ask them what they think of retirement, they are enjoying every minute, but I am fed up! From 14 years of age to 65 I worked like a mule then when it was countdown to my finishing, you should have seen the scorch marks on the road where I ran out of the place.

They asked me what I was looking forward to and I say 'to rub the

16 *H. Wallwork and Co of Redbank, Manchester. 1888 Produced the Sturgeon gas engine*

17 *They knocked the hot iron out of the furnace*

ice off the windows so I can see the poor bastards going to work!’¹⁸

This is my outlook on life. I have been asked would I like to be rich. I wouldn't like to be rich, but just to have a bit of money – like my kids; if I ever come up on the lottery I would put the money in their names, but only so much so as not to spoil them.

When I was a small boy I asked my Dad what made him come to this country and he said 'John if it was any better there do you think I would be here?' Some of them were not as honest with their answers to their children – it was all milk and honey. They won't tell you that they were goat herders and such.

My Dad was a very strict man. He always used to say 'never fetch trouble to your door' otherwise you would be dead. I wouldn't say that he would disown you but you would have to do a lot to get back in his good books.

The funny thing is there must only be a few half caste lads whose Dads have talked to them about where they came from.

My sons have said many times that they would like to go and see where their Granddad lived. I know where he came from but I don't know what the village was called or his African name. My son Sammy said to me if you can find out his African name we can find out where he came from – from there. If I did get over, who am I going to say I am looking for? If I had the African name at least I would have something to go on and even with his English name – he had two!! John Johnson and Peter Wilson.

Oniomo - When I was a kid I thought all the Africans spoke the same language!!

Where my Dad came from there were only 6 people in Great Britain who could speak his language. The old fellow could speak 6 languages – first the Portuguese got into Cameroons then it was owned by the French, then the Germans so they had to speak all those languages as well as their own.

I remember him one time when he had some friends in the house speaking their language and my Mum came in and he said 'speak English now; when she is not here we can speak our language'. I remember that as if it is yesterday. That is what I liked about my Dad - he was a gentleman.

18 Before houses had central heating ice would build upon the inside of the windows

Oniomo - When did your Dad die?

Over 55 years ago. My Mum loved him and I saw her go through really hard times when my Dad died and yet when he was on the ships I remember my Dad would only be home for a week and then he would be gone.

Oniomo - My Dad had a thing about responsibility and used to say to me, people have kids here there and everywhere, but you must look after your kids and that is the African way, he brought us up single handedly.

I think this is where me and you have got it from. You see your own Dad and the way he does things and walks and talks. My Dad always said 'never fetch trouble to your door' and I said to myself 'John if you do a bit of fiddling make sure they never catch you' because he would have never have lifted a finger to help me! If you make trouble – you get yourself out of it.

Our Dads used to make sure we had clothes on our backs when lots of people were saying they wondered where we got our money from – is his wife on the game?' I said 'you know what, in all my life I have never sat on a pub step while my people are pulling it down their neck.' There was always food on the table and clothes on our back – but people still insinuated their women, our mothers, were on the game.

I met my wife on a double date. I was on leave and this bloke Billy asked me to go out with his girl's friend and it started off from there. I was on a ship called the Hartlepool¹⁹ that was sailing on a Saturday morning. She come to see me and I was walking her to the bus stop when we saw her father and her brother and they didn't look very pleased. Her father grips her by the hand and pulls her to one side. So I got hold of his hand and said 'I am going to sea, if anything happens to her while I am away you will have me to answer to'. Afterwards I found out that her mother had said, 'he is going to sea, you don't know how long he is going to be away, but if you have the same feelings for him when he comes home you can start courting'.

We were supposed to go away for three months but the generator of the ship broke down and we had to go into Dakar supposedly for 24 hours

19 British steam cargo ship built by William Gray & Co, of West Hartlepool in Sunderland.

but we were there for 24 days.

My Dad was ill at the time; he had dropsy and a bad heart so my girl had been going out with my Mother and my Auntie Janie every Saturday night.

Dad said to her 'do you still want to go out with my son?' and she says 'yeah', and he says 'if your Mum and Dad are still angry the best thing you can do is to go and get your gear and bring it here'. So we go there and she makes me go in the back way which I didn't understand – I had never been in through the back door in my life, but I did it for her. She knocks on the door and the mother and brother comes out, he is shouting his mouth off and I said 'look son do yourself a favour and shut up'. And the mother is going on and I said 'do you know what Mrs? You know what you are frightened of - you are worried about what the neighbours will say – I have sat down with better people than you will ever know in your life.' So she gets her stuff and comes back to our house and she is sleeping with my Mum and my Dad is downstairs and I have got my own room.

Days later there is a knock on the door – it's her mother and brother – so I says come in. And they said 'we want you to come to our house' – we had got engaged and I said 'no' because I didn't want to know but my Dad said 'John you have been invited you must go'. So I went and within a couple of minutes we were at ease and then things started going right.

When we got married all her family came and all my mates. My Uncle John came with her brother Billy and I looked at him and thought – that suit you have got on for a wedding, I'd wear to go to work in. I thought was it because she was marrying a black man and he was trying to put me down, but in the end he was putting himself down.

Oniomo - you had one son and one daughter?

After my daughter got married she came home one day crying because her husband's family were having a go at her (not because she was coloured). One of them worked in the post office. I popped by and said 'if any of your family lay a finger on my daughter I will show you what trouble really is'. Then I walked out. Sunday afternoon there was a knock at the door, and this man said 'have you said this to my cousin? I have come to sort it out.' I just put my hand out and lifted him up – 'see the gate – do yourself a favour and go away otherwise I will tear your head off' – and he went!! End of story.

Oniomo - What I have learnt is that most of the older generation I have spoken to can look after themselves with words or physically or both, but I wonder where are the people who can't do either?

I have said to my son 'at times I wish I could be more like you' – he is mellow, but I am a person who stops it before it starts. Whereas John, put him with any people and he is right into it talking and all that, but me I have to sit down and listen and then I can turn round and say 'oh he's a right dickhead' but the majority of times it just has to be one word and I have got them weighed up straight away.

John and I worked at Wallworks. He was there for 27 years and me for 25 years and I have always argued with gaffers and I have argued with them out the offices. John used to say to me 'Dad, Dad' and I would say 'No, John I am right' and I would always make sure I was right then I would have a go at them. I worked with an African guy – Solo, his missus was a teacher and his daughter was going to University. You would never think it the way he acted at work. I turned round and said 'if my Dad saw the way you carried on with these white people, my Dad would slap you.' It was pitiful, how can I explain it? There was this bloke and his name was John Trentbull, the other men would call him 'Nigerian black bastard' and Trentbull didn't hear but Solo was laughing his head off. I said to them 'hey who are you talking to, never let me hear you calling him that again.' And to Solo I said 'they have to show us respect and you are there laughing with them calling another black man'!!

When we were working on the disc pads, they decided to close that section down to send it to another factory. They said even though we were going to be a machine down we would still get the same wages. Solo gets his wages and is £15 down – even though we had it in writing about the wages. I told him he could be doing anything but he should still get the same wages. I told him to go and see the union man but he didn't he continued to be £15 short on his wages! But he knew what he was doing!!

When I was on the ships they were all diesel but one which was a coal burner. There was this man called Peter Frank he was a trimmer²⁰ on the ship – we dock at Los Angeles, San Francisco, Victoria, another port, then back to LA and then back home.

20 Coal trimmer, also known as a trimmer, distributes coal on a steam ship

You had to sign for your overtime; he goes to sign and then says 'no I am not signing'. Turns out the second engineer only wanted to give him £26. I said 'you are joking aren't you?' He said 'No', so we had to work out how many days he had been at sea or in port and worked out the hours he had done and what he was due. Then went to the shipping office and the union questioned us thoroughly, and do you know how much he had, £250 overtime!!! If he had accepted the £26 the second engineer would have probably pocketed the rest or shared it out amongst the other thieves!!

One thing that really got to me when we were working was when one of the old fellas said 'we made it good for you lads.' I said 'what do you mean by that, you didn't make it good – we made it good for you – you were at sea when we were being pulled to pieces – it was us who made these kids respect us and respect you'!

Oniomo - The generation now would say the same thing now about your generation – that you paved the way and had to struggle for acceptance and because you had to do that it made it easier for us and people younger than me say the same thing about us.

No, no if anyone said anything about us – it was that we reacted one on one. We went outside and gave him a slap – two minutes later we were friends. But how is it now they all congregate in one place – they haven't got the bottle to go for it on their own.

Oniomo – How long have you lived in North Manchester?

When I first came up here it took me five years to get used to it. When I went to a pub they'd be talking about roses and one thing and another, they weren't on my wavelength. So I would go and spend a few hours down the Berwick pub²¹ and gradually after five years I got used to it – I'd have a laugh. Can you just imagine it? An all-white pub and me the one black face in there!

In Cheetham Hill the area I grew up in, the lads who lived round our way worked in heavy industry, in foundries. There were Poles, Ukrainians, Jamaicans, Africans and us half caste boys.

21 Berwick Arms, Canarvon Street in the industrial estate off Cheetham Hill Road up the hill from Strangeways prisons

Over the last 12 months, 2 years – there have been more coloured people moving into the area. 40 years is a long time to be up here. And the funny thing is, I know Bill Crossley next door and I know George and there are about 5 or 6 more people who I know. The majority know me but I don't know them. They will say 'good morning' and 'good afternoon'. About 12 months ago John and me were in the pub and this lad said 'you know what – I wish I had a Dad like yours' and we said 'why?' – Because 'at least your Dad goes out with you for a drink!' You know young people they keep you young! I have got emphysema, asbestos on my lungs, can't walk very far – 25 yards and then I have to stop, but I won't let it get me down.

Oniomo- Are you happy with your lot then?

I look round and apart from the wife going. Until the day she left as far as I was concerned it was a good marriage and her mother said to me it was probably because I was doing 12 hour nights and I said to her 'do you think I liked working 12 hour nights?' I was working 12 hour nights not for myself but for the money for my family. If she had turned round to me and said 'get off nights' I would have been off nights so fast it would have been unbelievable.

She didn't speak to the kids and they never got a card from her for five solid years, but I say to them 'always remember this, she is your Mum go and see her.' The eldest one goes up to see her pretty regular and he says to me 'Dad she is half the size when she puts her arms around me, there is no meat on her'.

Oniomo - Do you ever sit down and think I can't believe I am this age, because inside I still feel 18.

Funny thing is age has never worried me. But I tell you what, I have seen some of my mates and I think 'bleeding hell he doesn't half look old,' some with a walking stick or wrinkles, shoulders hunched.

Oniomo - You do look so well for your age, I like the pony tail.

Oh yes, this pony tail I have had it for about 18 years. That is where John Sibthorpe got the idea from, although he has cut it off now. I know – he is growing it back now!! He is a laugh John and the nicest man. When we were kids he was always a ladies' man. He has got about 50 kids you know, all over the place!! He knows everyone and he says they all love him.

Oniomo - Did you know Tommy Toby?

They lived next door to us and then there was the Coles Leslie, Billy, Steven. The Tobys, Eva, Kathy, Tommy and Alan who got shot. Three doors down were the Jaspers. We lived in 26 and they lived in 24 – in fact there were only the three of them there. Then they went to Carter Street – do you remember the Salvation Army that used to be off Bury New Road, they used to live at the back of that.

If you come to think about it, the Tobys, the Codners, the Jacobs - we have always lived on this side of town. Nobody has uprooted and gone the other side of town. There were that many machine shops all the way round so there was always loads of work. It was only when the trade started going downhill that they started going in to factories for work.

Oniomo - Did you ever have much to do with Moss Side?

I remember going there as a kid. Funny thing is all them what lived down at Strangeways were like locusts when they found there were houses going at Moss Side. For the old African guys it was alright. I went down there to see one old African guy called John Mammo who went back home and took his daughter with him. She came back when she was about 18 or 19 and lived at our house for a while before she moved back to Moss Side.

Moss Side was nice at that time, then they started opening all the clubs there and it went the other way.

Believe it or not the first coloured club to open was the African Brotherhood Club, first on Mary Street then it went on to Cheetham Hill Road.

Banjo's in Cheetham Hill, that was owned by one of the old African boys. Before he got it, it used to be a hotel and that is where I had my wedding reception.

I think the first club to open in Moss Side was the Merchant Navy Club.²²

Oniomo - Did you ever go to these clubs?

22 co-founded by two Efik (Nigerian) seamen,

Yes, once or twice, when I had gone up with Bunny and them to see someone. I could turn round and say it wasn't really my scene. I loved the music, some of the people but some of them were too shifty. There have always been two distinct areas for Black people, Cheetham Hill and Moss Side

Oniomo - are you happy now?

Me and my Rita have been going out together over a lot of years. We have got our own places, but we go on holiday together and her kids think the world of me.

Sometimes now and again I feel a bit lonely, only for a couple of hours. I have things to do. I have to get my tea ready, do my washing or a bit of ironing – or got to go to the Doctors or to the hospital – there is always something.

When the good Lord says that is time for me to go and if I have a fiver in my pocket I will say 'hang on whilst I get shut of this fiver – I am leaving them nothing' and they know that! The kids today don't go through hard times.

CHAPTER 34

MUSSA MOHAMMED CONTEH *by his son Peter*



'He changed the village. He was a true African...'

Peter Conteh and Family



Mussa Conteh



Pete's sister, Mother and Auntie Hokie -
[Mussa's first (native) wife]

Peter Conteh is one of two interviewees whose stories breach the timeline of Afro Solo UK. I decided to accept his offer to capture his father's history because as the next generation the similarities are so numerous it is slightly unnerving. The real difference is that Peter has kept his vision for the future based on the consistent guidance he has received from both his parents. He describes his father as follows;

My Dad was an African man and I am proud to say that in the full sense of the word, he lived a full life and enjoyed his life. Basically he was a poor village boy and one thing I know he did was he left the village where he was born and where I grew up a better place.

He was born in Geritium, in a province called Golluma¹. When he was born the village didn't have a road, any wells or electricity. Because of the type of man he was and who he managed to become, now there is a road, houses with clean water in a thriving community.

My Dad was tall, like tall for his people: taller than average, stronger than average, more gregarious than average, loud and enthusiastic. . . If I think about the access to education and diet that he had, and the fact that he didn't have to carry buckets of water on his head every day because he went to school, he was taller and stronger and bigger than all of his family. His dress style was smart casual. I never saw him in African cloth.

Of course he was handsome, yeah (laughing) damned right! I remember him to be a happy man and strict, He was old school, he didn't ramp², he didn't play around, like he was real, but he was strict in a physical sense but lots of fun in other ways.

Many of the events I will talk about took place before I was born. I have never been told about them so I am going to have to piece them together from my childhood memories and pictures I have managed to get and stories I have been told from my African family.

He came to England in the late 70s landing in Heathrow to do a Master's degree in agriculture. He was the first from his village to come to England. He moved between Liverpool and Manchester.

1 Kailahun the capital of Kailahun District in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. The population is largely from the Mende

2 Get straight to da point 'don't ramp wid me boi'

After he qualified, my parents then went back to Sierra Leone and worked as VSO³s and then I was born. From my childhood point of view he got paid to go round and give talks to people. Basically he was working in Milton Keynes and London raising funds and awareness of the work that Christian Aid carried out.

One thing I respect about him was that he never rammed his views down my throat. He never took me to church in England. When we went in Sierra Leone, he enjoyed it. It's possible that he didn't really find a church community that he could be part of, or the flip side was that he worked for Christian Aid five days a week so the last thing he wanted to do was go to church on a weekend. It depends on what perspective you look at.

Don't get me wrong, my Dad was not the kind of man to go for a happy clappy African church. He came from a Muslim family and so I think religion for him was a very complex issue. – (I am on the verge of converting; I have been toying with it for a year or two)

Christmas was a cool African affair. It was quite odd too for me because I had to deal with the fact that I had a new Auntie or new Mother to live with and I had three brothers and a whole group of siblings that I had to live with or deal with. Dad would drink a fair bit, he enjoyed his drink and he would drive me round and introduce me to his friends. Because he worked for Christian Aid they were quite interesting people.

SuAndi: When you went home with your Dad, did you see him in a different light; was he a different man to what he was in England?

I am sorry if this sounds pedantic but when you say 'home' I need to know which home you mean because I never lived with my Dad here in England.

When he went back the first time after the Sierra Leone war⁴ he was really depressed, you could see it in his eyes. I remember standing in Freetown⁵ looking at the pock marked buildings.

3 The world's leading independent international development organisation that offers volunteers the chance to work abroad to fight poverty in developing countries

4 The Sierra Leone Civil War (1991–2002)

5 The capital and largest city

I was scared so I was using my street sense by standing in the shadows not wanting to draw attention to myself. Dad was striding up the street in shock. He asked a local guy for directions and the guy said ‘what are you doing in the street? why don’t you talk to him there,’ pointing to me. ‘He knows what he is doing’. That showed me that my Dad was shocked by the situation and had to make massive adjustments to his own outlook and the way he dealt with people in Sierra Leone at that time.

The African way is very expressive; it’s to talk using your body, your hands and using your soul essentially. However, through education, through learning and through the machinations of the English language, a different mode of communications is required, so he found himself – I think torn between issues back home in Sierra Leone and a life of – this is going to sound harsh –talking to people in charities.

After living in England for about 15 years because of his charity work with Christian Aid and his enthusiasm, my dad’s group was probably one of the first non UN and non-military and non-diamond dealing people who went back to Sierra Leone following the civil war.

There is a saying about the PhD⁶ in West Africa, it stands for pulling down, possibly because soon as someone gets educated internal family jealousies happen. People see the qualification as the beginning of (you) – sending something back (for them).

It’s not a black thing, I think if you leave a country where there is poverty you are expected to bring something back; in England they call it the Shirley Bassey⁷ syndrome.

I am glad you said ‘poverty’, because it is not about culture, it’s not about race, it is about economics essentially and that is what it is. If I can just say this now, the one thing about black communities in England, especially in Manchester, which is not the richest part of England, a lot of the research that I have seen and been part of is not clear cut and mixes up issues of ethnicity: local British assimilated cultures, native African cultures, Caribbean and African American cultures influences on black African culture here and finally economics, it is a very complicated matrix.

One thing my Dad taught me was always to say ‘hello’ to a black

6 Doctor of Philosophy
7 <http://shirleybassey.wordpress.com/>

person when you saw them in England and that is quite old school and I love him for that. And I love him for the fact that through my Dad, it doesn't matter what colour my children are, they will always have an affinity with Africa. He was I would call it nouveau⁸ African, he was definitely in contact with his roots, we always spoke Mende at home. When things were serious it was English because the words weren't there to express as you can do in English.

Do you connect as a family?

I have a complex life because my Mum is a white Geordie⁹ from Newcastle and Dad was a black man from Sierra Leone, a Mende.¹⁰ From my point of view I have been raised with the best of both.

The term family is nuance, we are not united, but if I can keep on this track, then we will be. I am Moinina, the eldest from my Dad, then comes Zuba, Doris, Fematia, Lamina, Manga, a baby we don't know and Tamba is my half-brother. All of Mussima Mohammed Conteh's children, who have come to England, live in England now. Doris and Mousa were born in Sierra Leone and have lived there all their lives.

It is interesting, because my step mum 'Auntie Margaret' decided she wanted us to be apart for some reason, my two younger brothers, Lamina and Manga were sent to be Jamaicans. It is not racism at all, but as a black African, schooled in the way that I was, I know that they wouldn't have dared pull that stunt with my Dad still alive. And it is not about saying that there is no hierarchy in blackness but as far as I am concerned, it is about truth and honesty and the fact that they are potentially culturally lost without a father figure and their attitudes towards Sierra Leone are not as grounded in reality as my own.

Margaret was from Tikonko¹¹ which was a small village or small town by English standards – it had a church there so you would call it a town. Dad was really good for her, he brought her over here, she took her nursing degree and passed and she is now a nurse living in Wolverton.¹²

8 Borrowed from the French for new or fashionable

9 A regional nickname for a person from the larger Tyneside^[1] region of North East England and the local dialect

10 One of the two largest ethnic groups

11 Magbema, Tikonko Chiefdom, Bo District.

12 A constituent town of Milton Keynes England

My parents divorced when I was 12 so I was given the choice to live with my Mum but because I was always quite an independent, forthright African child I chose to live with my Dad for a year or two but then I moved over to England with my Mum and sister for school reasons basically. My parents have two children. My Dad has lots more children, he is a genuine African man as I have already mentioned!!

My mum is Jean Conteh and I am really glad she kept my Dad's name, it really means a lot to me. She chooses whether or not to discuss her life with my Dad and of course there are some emotional kind of issues there which hopefully will get resolved so I don't go there because I respect the fact that she is my Mum.

Mum was always a teacher. When she left Sierra Leone and came back to England, she lived and taught in Newcastle. Then she moved to Bradford and became a professor; she will be retiring in two or three years' time from Leeds where she lectures on Pedagogy¹³ –helping teachers teach English. Her claim to fame is that she has written a book that is being used in several thousand African classrooms – it started its journey with Sarah Margeaux Kingston and the book, which is most interesting to me, is called 'Succeeding in Diversity'¹⁴ and deals with culture, language and learning in primary classrooms.

Can you describe your relationship with your Dad? Were you friends?

That is a really interesting question, fathers, sons and their relationships. It must be hard being a Dad because you get to see this thing that is yours, grow up and achieve independence. To my Dad, I was always 'Moi the boy'. My black family call me Moinina.

Because my parents divorced and he saw me at different stages of my life, he was quite shocked when he saw me after I graduated – I think he always felt a bit competitive with me and was quite surprised when I got my Masters. I knew, he never said it out loud, but he was always wary wondering if I gay or was I straight, was I strong enough, was I black enough!

13 The science and art of education; ranging from the full development of the human being to skills acquisition. <http://www.pedagogicalpatterns.org/>
14 Trentham Books Ltd (1 April 2003) ISBN-10: 1858562945

I don't want to brag but I have bedded a fair few women and he has seen me with women, so he knows I am not gay.

He has seen me in physical situations so he knows I am not strong enough. I really regret, I can remember driving my Dad to his village in a puddah puddah, which is like a bus full of people. We were in the front with the rest of the family in the back. The car was basically overloaded with supplies and while going over a bridge it tipped over onto its side. My Dad was a big man about 6ft 2 and I have an extra 2 inches on him. Stupidly I tried to lift him out with one hand and when I couldn't he gave me a dirty look and I ran around the back and helped everybody else. So much went unspoken; it was a communication via looks and signals that we understood each other by.

I think he accepted the fact that I would never be him – I tried my best, but I would never be him. I can speak the language and I can wear the clothes, I can talk the talk and walk the walk, but...

One thing that really interests me is that our phenotype¹⁵, the way that we look, is defined by less than 1% of our genes yet so much effort, so much pain, so many people died for that less than 1% of our genes.

I was living and working in England when I got a phone call to stay that he had passed so I went back to Sierra Leone to celebrate his life. He died of pancreatic cancer, he liked to drink and he liked to smoke. As a kid I used to tear up his cigarettes, which is quite ironic considering my addiction to smoking now.

The last time I spoke to my Dad I didn't get a chance to tell him that I loved him and that is what is tearing me up. He would always embarrass me to tears by saying to me 'I love you, I love you, I love you' on the phone and I would be like 'right, ok cool, next Dad, whatever, let's move on'.

I enjoyed him because he let me be free, let me do what I wanted to do, which allowed me to research and find out more about myself and as a result, more about him and as a result more about the place of the black man in the world, if you want to be that blunt. Or specifically, the case of immigrants coming to England

15 The composite of an organism's observable characteristics or traits

CHAPTER 35

JOHN THOMAS TOTTOH *in conversation*



February 1953

The Proctor Gymnasium and Hulme Lad's Club in Silver Street, played a great part in the life of Hulme boys, and has turned out many great men. Here Johnny Tottoh, of St. Bees Street, Moss Side, is in serious training.

*'My Dad was very hopeful
for his children and he
really tried to do the best
by his children and he lived
for his children...'*

When my Dad laughed, he laughed fully and just gave himself up to the laughter but it was very rare that he did.

SuAndi: Can you explain the relationship between our mothers and our fathers?

Our mothers were sisters and our fathers were cousins from the same village in Nigeria so we, you and I are closer than normal cousins.

I remember in my 20s my Uncle Andi told me that when he was a little boy in the village, my Dad was a big man with children. This made him a lot older than he said he was and I believe when my Dad died he was in his late 90s.

For many years when we were kids, when the 5th November came round, he would say that was his birthday. We would ask him how old he was and he would say 47. Then we were only kids but for many years he would say he was 47 and one day I said to him 'but you were 47 last year Dad', he said 'I am 47 this year', but funnily enough the next year he was still 47.

When I interviewed him he said he was 56, then he said 77 and then he said I am 78 next birthday and that was long before he died.

But the thing is, he was older than 78 – he was definitely in his late 90s, he claimed to have been born in 1910 and he died in 96 – which made him 86 when he died but in fact he was a lot older than that. He was 5ft 9 and slim, very muscular with high cheek bones which made him a handsome man who was smart, always suited, always had a three piece suit on.

Tell me about your Mum

My Mum Josie (Joanna Wilkey) was Liverpool Irish – Irish parents born in Liverpool; she was a good mother, hardworking – kept a clean house and when my Dad opened the Club she was a great help to him and she ran it really. She was a beautiful woman. My mum and Auntie Peggy¹ were brought up by nuns in an orphanage² from before they were the age of 10.

When my Mum first met my Dad she had a baby in arms called Jimmy.³

1 Margaret Andi (Wilkey).

2 Knolle Park

3 James Arthur Tottoh 1940-2006

Jimmy's father was Welsh, a white man who Jimmy never remembered. When my Dad came along Jimmy was 6 months old and then Mum got pregnant with me. So even though Jimmy was 15 months older than me, I was my Dad's first born. Kay came two years later then Alan⁴ a year after. When I was 13 my Mum left and my Dad took up life with another woman. Muriel had a son called Christopher and Dad took him as his son then together they had four children Melvyn, Mandy, Andrew and Carmen. That made a grand total of 9 and we always called Jimmy the eldest in the family.

Until you are 13 there are four of you, what was life like when you were a kid?

It was great, brilliant. We had everything that we needed, we were spoilt – my Dad was a hardworking man, he saved up and brought a house. I was born in 12 Fairlawn Street, I don't know if my Dad owned the house at that time but he did eventually own it. When I was five we moved to the street next to it - St. Bees Street and we had a happy time there.

I read in the Bible that you should never call any one man good, but my Dad was a good man, so I am not taking notice of the Bible; he was a very good man.

Muriel left and the children (where was Christopher) Melvyn, Mandy, Andrew and Carmen were placed in a home in Preston. Dad was having to go to work every day – he was running back and cooking the meals, but during the school holidays it was too difficult, it was very, very hard. When they first went into the Children's Home, my Dad was in agreement that it was for the best, there was no other solution at the time, or didn't seem to be – I didn't play any part in trying to look after the kids. Later Dad fought to get them out.

Personally, looking back, I say it was for the best. Melvyn⁵ ended up going to Fleetwood Naval training college and becoming an officer. Now he is a very successful man and we are all very proud of him, he has done very well for himself and is self-employed. Mandy after working as a nurse and a secretary, went to university and got a degree in Psychology. After playing professional football Andrew is now a drugs councillor and doing very well and has five grandchildren.

4 Alan Tottoh 1944-2013

5 Formerly a radio officer in the Merchant Navy and a former footballer who played in the Football League for Preston North End. Melvyn is now a director of his own company

Let's come back to your generation you are almost the first generation in numbers in the city, what was life like in school for you?

I don't remember any racial business, none whatsoever when I was a little boy in Moss Side, but when I went to Cavendish Street Secondary Modern it was difficult and I had to fight every now and again. It didn't harden me. It didn't change my opinion about anything, it's just every now and again I had to fight – it was simple.

I was the only black boy in my school when I went to Webster Street, they used to take you until the age of 15 but when I reached the age of 13 it changed into a primary school. So the second school I went to was Cavendish Street – I was the only black boy in the school and that was difficult and I was always fighting.

They were all local kids, I came from Moss Side which is not far, only 5 bus stops, but there were no blacks in the area and I was the only black boy from Moss Side to go to that school and it was difficult.

I always wanted Jimmy to write his life down and he struggled to write it and we lost him before he had chance to record it. I watched a program on twins, one was black, the other white. In this case they were boys and the white kid was really running away to join the circus and the black one had no regard for the struggles his brother had had. That is when it dawned on me that maybe that is why Jimmy went to sea. How do you think life was for Jimmy?

Funny you should ask that, because I found being black or mixed race in Manchester in them days very difficult and I often wished I was a white boy because of all the difficulties I found, invented and imagined.

I thought Jimmy couldn't have problems because he was white, but many years later – in fact it was in the last five years of his life that I put it to him 'you must have felt difficulties having a black father figure and black siblings' and he said 'yeah, it was difficult' but he overcame it, but he felt difficulties at times.

We women, Mum, Auntie Winnie and Pam and Christine often talked about how Josie left him behind as the only white child in the Tottohs but he told me after your dad died that she asked him to leave with her and to use his words he said, 'No, I want to stay with my dad.'

He loved us, Jimmy really loved his family.

Oh my god yes and it was useful having a black family, I remember us going to the pub once to show our presence.

Later in his 60s, Jimmy became a landlord of a pub with his wife, and he got some trouble off 3 or 4 scallywags who were ganging up on him. We went down there as a family, Andrew, you, me and Alan and showed our presence. When they came in they were amazed and it sort of put them on their back foot, but they never gave him any trouble after that ever again.

Do you agree that what our Fathers were doing was establishing a new tribe, a new kingdom in this country? At Alan's funeral I got out of the car and it was like entering a village of mainly mixed race men. There was a prominence of men there and interestingly many came without partners and if you had asked them why, they would struggle to answer.

I know what you are saying and by the way it's the biggest funeral I have ever been to, I expected it to be big, but not as big as it was. I love the way so many, many people were white, but also many, many mixed race people there and they were all friends, old time friends.

Barrie George said there was no one to aspire to be, be it in football; cricket, the fire brigade or police force, there was nobody black. Just behind us the Caribbean's are coming with a different mentality, the attitude of 'a right to be here'. We have a conflict going because we are straggling a dual culture but it wasn't about the Africans not wanting us because we are of mixed race because that is not true but we were labelled as 'confused' and I think that is a label that we are still trying to fight off.

Only our generation because the later generations are a lot more successful. It's funny that mixed raced people today don't like the term half caste but I don't find anything offensive in the term half caste and I have often described myself as half caste and though I now term myself as mixed race, looking back I didn't find any derogatory meaning to the word half caste.

I always say I am the Liverpool daughter of a Nigerian father.

You are a woman of mixed race and by saying you are 'only' black you are denying your mother, and I heard you say that on the radio and I

thought to myself 'that sounds like Su' - Radio 4, Woman's Hour.

I found it very difficult because everywhere I went I was the only black person there. I used to hear of mixed race guys from Liverpool, Jimmy Tagoe and his friends, they were all forward people, they were all cocks of the school, and they were all top footballers. I was without a doubt a talented boxer, we were all sort of talented as I remember it, but none of us every made anything of ourselves. We all went to approved schools⁶, Borstal, prison, until we learned sense and grew up, I wouldn't say we just got old.

Barrie George also says there was something almost – I am going to use an Africanism – an invisible drum that united half caste boys of your generation.

There were only a few of us and we all knew each other. Do you remember the Okeras (SIC)– I would like to mention them, they were of an older generation than us. I met Lily Okera's grandson recently, I knew his mother and father when they were courting. She was African mixed race and he was white and this man was the child of one of their children.

I remember Frankie Sampson he was a mixed race African he was older than me, a lot older than me by 15 years. One day he said that he expected great things of me. After I went to Approved School he wouldn't talk to me and it hurt that he didn't speak to me again.

Dad never went back home – he may have wanted to, but the fact is when he left the Merchant Navy he never went back to Africa, to Nigeria again. After he left the sea he was boiler scaling. The old mills had big steam boilers that ran the machinery and every now and again they would close the boilers down and then go inside empty the ashes out and de-scale them. They were as big as a small room and he would go inside them to chip all the scaling off.

At St Bees Street we had lodgers they were Polish, Sophie and Paul, I remember them very well. Now and again African seamen would come and stay overnight. When they docked in Liverpool they would come through to Manchester to see my Dad. From being a baby until in my 20s – sailors used to come and see my Dad.

⁶ A term formerly used for a residential institution to which young people could be sent by a court, usually for committing offences but sometimes because they were deemed to be beyond parental control.

Some of them were young, he didn't know them in Africa, but they brought messages and gifts from Africa to my father and in turn my father gave them gifts to take back to Africa.

At the weekends, on a Sunday especially, many Africans used to come to the house. If two Nigerians fell out with each other and there was dispute they would all come together in my Dad's front room and they would talk. They would have their say on who was to blame and it was sorted out and the guilty party, if there was one, would be told it was their fault. That was their way to make peace.

This might be my naivety but I always think about our family as being famous in Moss Side.

Well we were very well known, a very well-known family because we used to box – me and Alan. Jimmy at first, but Jimmy dropped away after two fights. Kay went to dancing at the Nina Hobson School of Dancing and Music. We all had piano lessons and we had a brand new piano. My Dad was very hopeful for his children and he really tried to do the best by his children and he lived for his children, really, and I feel I was a great disappointment to him

When Malcolm died, there was a piece in the newspaper about a boxer, tell me about that.

In the Manchester Evening News, there was a photograph of a boy from Oldham and I remember thinking he looks like a boxer, he had a towel round his neck and a vest on and the photo was from the waist up and in front of him on the table he had these three cups, identical trophies. When I read the accompanying words it did confirm he was a boxer and it said 'in winning his third school boy title he equalled John Tottoh's 38 year old record' I remember reading that. I was a talented fighter but mentally I didn't want to fight and I didn't want to box really.

Tell me about Uncle Tottoh's club and I should say during this research people have called it the Cotton Club.

It was called the Cosmopolitan Social Club, the Cosmo. He brought it off a mixed race man – an English Mother, African Father - Len Johnson the boxer. I think Johnson called it the Cotton Club⁷ but when my Dad

7 Len founded the New International Society, a club in Moss Side which combined social and political activities and ran for several years. <http://radicalmanchester.wordpress.com>

brought it he changed the name to the Cosmopolitan Social Club, known as the Cosmo.

It was a great place, full of American soldiers and airmen. The airmen got paid monthly they would come down to Manchester from Burtonwood⁸ and go to different clubs and the bars and there was trouble now and again at the clubs – the Americans were very successful with the women and that probably had a lot to do with it. They were blowing their money once a month then they would have to wait a month and when that month ended and they got paid they would overdo it. I remember that happening when my Dad had the club. To stop the trouble the American Services changed the payday to once a fortnight so they wouldn't have to wait so long in between.

I remember that the Alsatian dogs used to guard it overnight and normally that was Flash's job. One night Jet was left and in the morning the dog was on outside St Bees Street with the door around his head having bitten his way through to escape. I also remember the black and white floor and the bar at the end and the mirrors.

Do you remember the bandstand, the piano and drums and they had live music every night of the week! Mum and Dad had the club from me being 12 to 15 years and 4 months and when I came home two years later they didn't have the club. It wasn't open but they still owned it – my Dad had gone bankrupt. Part of why the club closed because my Mum left. She went when I was 13 and I am afraid to say that she left him with a lot of debt. He was generous. I don't know about recklessly generous though he did buy Alan a horse that lived in the back yard shelter, it wasn't a garden. Alan rode it before and after school. I was only at home for say three months when Alan had that horse, it was then that I got sent away.

Dad didn't write to me and never came to see me, I expected it – it didn't bother me at all. Looking back it may have been different when I came out if he had come to see me though maybe it wouldn't. But when I came out, I didn't stay at home a week and I was off running around and 4 months later I was in Borstal.

But you weren't on your own it was a generation thing.

8 Burtonwood airfield opened in 1940 and transferred to the United States Army Air Forces in 1942 as a servicing centre for the United States Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth and Fifteenth Air Forces aircraft until 1943.

Without a doubt it was a generational thing and we boys have spoken about it many times, we were all forward, we were all good at something, but...

I know that memory is selective and I choose to push away lots of memories and not simply because they are sad. But I want to direct yours if you don't mind. I remember the front room where the mantelpiece and all the furniture would dazzle the eyes with the trophies and medals that mainly you and Alan won for boxing and those of Kay for dancing. I also remember the exotic birds that someone, most likely Alan, used to set free when I was there because he knew I was scared of them. So may I ask you to tell me about Judy?

Judy was my Dad's parrot, though he is called Judy he is a boy. He is exactly 40 years old. He counts to ten just like my Dad and sounds just like me Dad especially when he calls the children. 'Carmen shut the door!!'

My Dad left him to Mandy's son Damien, but Damien wasn't well for a while so I had him and when I went to bed he said 'Good night John' and when I came down in the morning he would say 'Morning John'. When he called my name it would be in the same tone as my Dad and it sounded just like my Dad – in a stern voice. Dad went to hospital once and Judy was really depressed, you could see that, he missed my Dad. After a week or so of being in hospital Dad came home, and Judy saying 'boohoo, ooh', dropped his wings and started shivering as soon as he saw Dad. It was something he had never done before and something he never did since, but when Dad was in hospital for those 10 days or so, Judy missed him that much. We could see he missed my Dad, but we didn't realise how much, and when the bird did that it was unbelievable.

I think what is strange about our family, the whole aspect of the family, our mothers being sisters and our fathers' being cousins. On my side when I go, that is my side gone – the Andis' are finished, but on your side there is a whole bloody kingdom going on and on, of every shade. So in a sense I don't feel that my side is going to totally disappear because of that connection. Once when I was leaving from Stan Finni⁹ he said 'Go on, you look like Alan' - it wasn't anger, it was the way he said it - it wasn't fake either. Then Stan walked away from me because he didn't like it.

9 See chapter 11

And what I find amazing is when I look at all of you, all my cousins, is how resemblance has travelled differently through the family. When Lily Williams died I ended up writing a poem after her funeral because so many white ladies came up to me and I didn't remember them, but they said that I look just like my Mother – and no one had ever said that to me before because I am the spit of my dad. Every day you look more and more like your Mum.

Do you think so? They were brave women. My Mum died in 1972. I remember when I was in prison my Mum wrote to me and I had not spoken to her since I was 13 and I was now 30/31. She wrote to me and I had never seen her handwriting. When I opened the letter it said 'Dear Son' and I knew it was from my Mum and I knew immediately she was sick because the handwriting was so shivery. She lived six more months that is all. They were never reconciled and they never spoke again.

I know you have said you don't remember him saying it but the day before Alan died you were there, he hugged me and he held on to me. He said to me 'can you see that lady up there' and I said without thinking 'there were two' and he said 'of course there are two, Auntie Peggy loved me'.

When my Dad was dying, on his deathbed, I used to go and see him every day obviously and he used to say to me 'Josie, your Mum is there helping me, Josie is there helping me' and it's things like that which make me believe in God almighty. I don't believe in God, I know that God exists; it's a knowledge of God. I can't help it.

Dad once said to me 'John I am sorry' and I said 'What do you mean, you have nothing to be sorry for' but I sometimes think I won't see my family when I die.

Well you're wrong; you won't get rid of me.

I hope not Su, but you know I am full of the knowledge of god, but I don't believe in God, but I know he exists, because of my experiences I know he exists, but I don't pray.

On his death bed I told my father I loved him but not during his life, because we had a difficult relationship. Sometimes it was difficult. When I was a kid he spoke to me in parables and I found it very annoying. I just couldn't understand him but looking back, I think he was the wisest man I have met in my life!!

CHAPTER 36

ERNIMA BELL *in conversation*

'I will always be a Nigerian. If I was born in China I wouldn't be Chinese, I would still be a Nigerian born in China...'



Dr Erinma Bell MBE DL



Mr & Mrs Agbai



Erinma and husband Raymond

SuAndi: You sit in a unique position for Afro Solo UK in that you were born here and your mother was African. We know this is a generational thing. Tunde Moses and my own Uncle John both state that there were no African women when they first came. So I would like you to tell me about your mother please.

My Mum, she was very enterprising, I remember she used to leave the house around 7 o'clock in the morning, if not earlier. She used to leave the porridge on top of one of those paraffin heaters¹. Me and the two younger ones would then walk the five minutes to school and when we came back; we'd go to the other neighbour and sit in their house until Mum came back from work.

She worked very hard aside from her work as a University Lecturer, she had her own business selling African fabrics to UK based Nigerians. At first she travelled to Amsterdam to buy the fabric then she started buying in bulk from people like Taylor Barrett² that was in town in Manchester and there was another one but I forget the name. Every time I went with her I would think 'Oh God I have got to sit here while she picks all this material'. It was for my mum, a domestic enterprise.

She also sold our food stuffs Yam, Ogbonno, Egusi, Gari, Crayfish, Bitterleaf also known as Olugbu to name just a few. She'd go home to Nigeria, buy in bulk and bring it back, by this time she was flying to and from Nigeria regularly at least once or twice a year. We would weigh it out and transfer it to little bags and label them. It is important for some of our foods you really need to know the herb, or the bush or the seed. She used to bring sacks of Garri³ or bitter leaf⁴ which has no weight so she used to bring big sacks of it and consequently always got hassled at the airport.

She sold lots to the Asian man on Great Western Street behind our house. That's how come I know their family very well and the children went to our school.

1 Pod 8K Paraffin Heater no longer available. <http://www.base-camp.co.uk/wick%20stoves%20lanterns%20&%20heaters/Pod%20picture.htm>

2 Taylor Barrett African Fabrics Limited.

3 Garri (also known as Garri, garry, or tapioca)

4 (Vernonia amygdalina) is a vegetable used for preparing the popular Bitter leaf soup. Also known as *Onugbu*, *Shiwaka* & *Ewuro* by the *Igbos*, *Hausas* & *Yorubas* in Nigeria. Although this plant has been around for hundreds of years, only a few people know of its medicinal and healing properties.

When I went in to Tesco and first saw Polish food, I thought ‘wow’ you did that quick, didn’t you? Now there is a little Nigerian section in the Tesco in Wythenshawe at least. Yeah they sell fufu in a little section of African food but how many years has that taken?

I know exactly, probably about 50 years.

Mother always had problems at the airport but she didn’t mind. The one time she really kicked off was when they wanted to cut her yam⁵ and she said ‘No, you can’t cut the yam because you are going to spoil it! It will rot’. They insisted and she kicked up such a fuss that they arrested her. It was like one time when they asked, at Murtala Muhammad Airport⁶, ‘Have you got any money with you?’ She just openly said ‘Yeah I have got some naira⁷’, once again, they arrested her. You were not allowed to take naira into or out of Nigeria.

They had to call my Dad and I remember my Dad said ‘Your Mom has been arrested again’ and I’m like ‘What has she done now!!’ Dad said she got arrested at the airport, the Nigerian airport that is. Dad had to leave us all and fly to Nigeria. I remember missing my parents so much, as we (me and my sister) had to stay with a Nigerian friend of my Dad’s who was married to a white woman. They lived on Charles Barry Crescent in Hulme. I remember this vividly because I hated being there – their family setting was so different from our own.

I used to work in Nigeria. I was on a lot of money. I used to travel up and down, some of the stories I could tell, the hassle I got. I used to say ‘I’m not having children, I’m not interested in boys’ and everything was ‘I don’t care, I don’t care’. All I was interested in was fashion. I wanted to go to the School of Art and Design. My Mum said ‘No, you will be sitting in a factory with all those Asian women sewing cloth, you’re not going! You’ll be a doctor, a lawyer’ but I said ‘No I want to sew. I either want to sew or I want to do typing.’

Stan Finni said in his interview that the perception is that just Asian parents want their children to have an academic profession but that isn’t true especially for those of us who are first generation born

5 edible tubers of some plant species in the genus *Dioscorea* cultivated for the consumption of their starchy tubers

6 International airport in Ikeja

7 Nigerian currency

here Africans.

My Mum said ‘Typing no, send her to Nigeria. Let her go and see what her age group are doing’. I went with my Dad and for a while maybe a year or more, I travelled with him and helped in his business. It was car hire and I used to do the accounts and send the heavies round when people wouldn’t pay their money. I couldn’t drive so I’d get some of my cousins and say ‘Right, come on we are going to get the car’. Sometimes my cousins would say ‘Come on let’s give the guy a break’ and I’d say ‘No he hasn’t paid us’. So I learned how to drive, Dad taught me then I would go round and seize cars myself.

My uncles then said ‘this is no life for a girl’, I think I was seventeen nearly eighteen. So they had a family council meeting, my Mum’s side. Dad’s side of the family didn’t have a say, not even my Dad could comment because we are matriarchal. One Uncle asked me ‘Well what do you want to do?’ and I said ‘I want to type’. ‘YOU WANT TO TYPE? NOBODY IN OUR FAMILY IS GOING TO TYPE!!’ So I said ‘well I’ll be the first’. I will never forget it. They were all mortified and quickly found me a private secretarial college/finishing school because we used to have a lesson called ‘personality development’. You know, walk around with books on your head and teach you to sit straight and all that. It was run by nuns. On the first day I went in jeans and this one sister looked at me up and down and she said ‘Erinma, you will never come back through those gates in jeans – ladies do not wear trousers’.

What made you come back to England?

I first came for a two week holiday and mum said ‘*your rooms ready*’ and I said ‘*I’m only here on a holiday*’ and she said ‘*a holiday but we’ve got your room ready*’. ‘No no,’ I said, ‘*I am going back I have got a job now, I’ve got my own apartment.*’

I think I came home three more times and it was on the fourth trip when Barings Brothers⁸ started to hit the headlines and basically all expats⁹ had to leave. Even though I wasn’t an expat as such, I was treated as one because of my British passport. This was a bit weird for me.

8 The bank *collapsed* in 1995 after suffering losses of £827 million

9 An expatriate (sometimes shortened to *expat*) is a person temporarily or permanently residing in a country other than that of the person’s upbringing

When I first went back to Nigeria people said to me ‘get back to your country’. I used to think, ‘you know what’. I had just come from England where they were saying ‘get back to your country’ and you come to Nigeria and they are saying ‘get back!’ It felt like limbo.

In Nigeria I tried to further my education. It was a struggle, because just as they ask you about Henry VIII in the UK, in Nigeria they asked about past Presidents Ministers and Heads of States – historically none of them I knew. That’s when I realised I didn’t know the History of Nigeria as much as I would have done if I had been born there.

In Nigeria you have to sit exams to get into university and no matter how hard I swotted, I couldn’t get through and I tried twice. So I decided that I should come back to England, do some more ‘O’ Levels and ‘A’ Levels and go to University here and further my education.

Are you British or Nigerian?

Do you mean on my passport. I am British.

I went to see ‘Things that fall apart’.¹⁰ I went with Kirk, the African American I used to go out with. He went to see it three times after that first time and I had bruises down my arm from him going ‘you do that, that’s just like you, you do that, you know’. I had watched it thinking ‘Oh my god, I’m so Nigerian’. ‘Oh my god.’ My Dad had been dead such a long time, anytime is a long time, isn’t it? Because I hadn’t been in his company, I had forgotten. So my description for me I think fits. I am a Nigerian daughter and I am very much Black British. That’s why I asked you the question.

I always say I am a Nigerian born in Britain.

And your children are they British?

Sometimes they describe themselves as mixed race¹¹ which I think is politically challenging. But then I say well you are mixed race because we are two completely different races – we might look the same, but we have different languages, different foods. But for me they are Nigerians. They have Nigerian names I have given them Igbo¹² names; we got that from

10 Chinua Achebe

11 Raymond Bell is Caribbean

12 The Igbo people have a strong sense of ethnic identity

Mother's side so they have Igbo names, all of them!!!

Are you British or Nigerian?

I will always be a Nigerian. If I was born in China I wouldn't be Chinese, I would still be a Nigerian born in China. So I see myself as a Nigerian. I think it's also in your/my attitude that people recognise us for what we are.

CHAPTER 37

DOREEN AND PHILOMENA MOSES *in conversation*

Dedicated to Brother Raymond

'We rode with the hare and ran with the hounds, when we were younger we didn't see colour...'



The Moses children

Doreen and Philomena are Tunde Moses' eldest children. They both carry their father's features and slight but sharp build, but Doreen is really her father's twin right down to the twinkle in her eye when she is about to say something mischievous. The sisters often speak together over each other, interjecting into each other's conversation so for that reason their responses have been drawn together.

SuAndi: so tell me, about when he came to England on the Merchants ships.

He had a good home, he was just a devil, very adventurous and when he was about 14 he ran away and eventually joined the British Merchant Navy. During the war they brought rations over. He went all over the world and at the end of the war he was based in Wales.

He was still young and naïve as was our mum Euphemia Cannon. They met each other at a dance. She was a trained silver service waitress working in a hotel though during the war she worked on the munitions. Mum was Scottish.

When the African's first settled in England they weren't pinching anyone's job – so at first they were welcomed with open arms, they didn't face any racism as such. As soon as the war was over that is when the doors started to slam. But Africans, don't forget were governed by the English so they knew the English ways meaning their attitude was 'if you can't beat them, join them'. There were no African women here, it was all men and this is why the majority of African men married English women. Many of the English girls saw them as tall, dark and handsome and they hunted them down, they really did. Plus after that war – England was liberating to a certain extent, it was only ten or so years before the on-set of the sixties, lower classes women were grasping their new freedom.

Let's go back a bit to the women. I consider the women very brave in their isolation as a mother with black children meant that they had to be our warriors didn't they? Can I throw this in too; we do know of families where the mother wasn't the best mum, but if her character wasn't that strong, what she had to put up with on the streets could only bring negativity back in to the family – thinking 'if I didn't have you, I wouldn't have to put up with that crap outside'.

Definitely, that just shows you the guts they had to walk down the street arm in arm with a black man and to put up with what they had to. Mother absolutely adored dad and I don't even think she knew what racism was until she was left on her own with kids. She had to do a man's job, getting paid a women's wages bringing up four children. She was a decent woman who still went out to work. She wasn't a TaTat¹, she wasn't out all the time, she wasn't in the clubs.

You are growing up the children of a white Mum and an African Dad, how do you see your identity?

English African or we didn't think about it until we got older. We rode with the hare and ran with the hounds, when we were younger we didn't see colour. The only trouble we had was with one scumbag family – the Bloors, they were the only racists on the street with their 'you black this and you dirty that', but everybody soon put them in their place. There was the West Indian cricketer and his wife and I liked him. When the scumbags slagged him off he would say 'My face is black because that is the colour of my skin; you're black because you're a dirty bastard'.

Everyone on the street was in the same boat; they were all white so subconsciously we saw ourselves as white, because those people accepted us. Not as white, but not as different and I think that is the other side of the coin, that negative perception because we are mixed race we think of

1 Urban slang for a working girl/prostitute

ourselves as white, we didn't we just knew we were different.

Our brother Raymond, he would have faced racism but he never brought it home so we never knew about it. He was such a looker; the girls were always running after him, he was also a very well-liked and well thought of lad.

Are daughters stronger than sons, particularly in our generation?

Yeah, we have had to fight for them and get ahead and drag them up in a sense. Yeah, that is why women, especially black women are more get up and go than English women and I would never knock a black fellow for not having a job because their racism is entirely different from the racism we face.

We had it easier because the white man is more bleeding native than any black man could ever be. A black man could charm the birds off the trees that is the way they are – that is their whole personality. English men are jealous of that because they are so insecure in themselves.

Dad battered this fellow with a wrench when he was working at this garage. He said 'Hey Sambo pass me that'. Dad said 'What – you mean this?' and whacked him. But he didn't get the sack. His boss said 'come on Tunde I heard what he said' and Dad said 'No, I will never work for a white man again' because of that kind of abuse and that is when he started the club and the gambling house on Denmark Road. But as far as I am concerned that is being a soft git and giving in to those scumbags.

The work ethic came from Mum and Dad. We wouldn't go out and get money illegally, we learnt to work for what we wanted and our grand ideas were never shot down by Mum. When I (Doreen) bought my first house, it was the year that women got equal rights² and I jumped on that band wagon straight away.

2 1976 The Equal Opportunities Commission

Also we never lived on a council estate when we were kids. Dad bought us our own house. Mum said 'You are the first single woman I know that has brought a house'. I wanted my own house but the wages weren't enough that is why I always had two or three jobs. I think it was because I saw Dad working for himself and we'd always lived amongst people who always went to work. Watching Mum, I had seen how Dad had let her down and it must have hit me subconsciously – if you want anything, go and get it yourself, never rely on a man. The first thing I wanted wasn't a car, it was a house. The nearest I'd got to getting a house is when I moved into a flat and I was paying my rent and it pissed me off.

I went to Mr Copeland the Solicitor, even though he was a licensing Solicitor, he was very good at putting you in connection with things. He had wanted Dad to go back to Africa and run his factories. A lot of people don't know that Marks and Spencers have got other companies and one of the main ones is a big store in Africa. Copeland wanted Dad to go back and run them for him but Dad wouldn't go because he was scared. Even though Dad never said that, but you just knew why else give up an opportunity of a life time!

My Dad never went home and never seemed to want to go home.

Who have they got to connect with when they get back there, people wouldn't know where to start to look for their family, and Nigeria is not a bloody little village. It is a country! Not only that but they have got away with murder over here. They would have been hung, drawn and quartered in their own country for the tricks they got up to with the women and kids; so of course they are not going to go back.

Having said that, they were lovely our fathers, when you compare them with some of the Africans who come now; arrogant and up to every con that is going – they do come for the money. The Africans who came in Dad's time were totally different; they came over here to get a life. Even so,

here we are going on about it being hard, but a lot of them had the time of their bloody lives, a lot of them loved it, our father being one of them.

They built up their own communities in Moss Side, Leeds and other major cities; they worked for themselves – gambling houses, the bloody clubs, and cafes. Admittedly it was a minority, but when I think of Dad he had the life of Riley.³ The decent ones are the ones who really suffered – the ones who wanted to go out to work and bring a wage back to keep the wife and children.

They would always have a café that only the African men would go to, or a club. Yes, you might see white women in there but it wouldn't be their wives. I only know this because I was always going down to the clubs and I would see these white women but they were nothing to do with the Africans. The community, mixed as it was, was going on in the clubs. 9 times out of 10 the men congregated either at the bottom of the club gambling or all in the kitchen chatting. If you went down to the cellars you wouldn't see any women there, just the men gambling and Dad would come out straight away because he didn't want me there. He would give me what I wanted and off I would go.

Do you think you are in a form of limbo even today?

Sometimes, definitely, because you can't go to your father's country and you haven't really got your own country over here.

Mum's brother turned round to her and said 'oh you have got a performing monkey now have you' referring to me (Doreen), when I was two. Her brother-in-law, a red headed big bastard said 'your kids will never be as good as mine'. From that day to this she never spoke to any of her family.

3 Thought to have originated by Irish immigrants to America and refers to a carefree lifestyle.

We have got African blood in us but we have not been brought up the African way. Listen to what I am saying, you are running with the hare and hunting with the hounds because if and when racism knocks on your door you see it straight away. You see it quicker than an African or an Asian; you can see where it is coming from even though you are black because the women who raised us also taught us because of their own experience.

A lot of the Africans wanted to take the kids back to Africa, but a lot of the women wouldn't let them. They were scared that they might not come back. I have been to North Africa, I would love to go over. In fact at one time I was desperate to go and Jackson Okeowo used to say, 'come over with me (Philo)Mina, I will take you over' and I used to think no, if I am going I will go with family. Then Uncle David O'Duncie said 'Mina you should go over, they will treat you like a Queen'. But I am too anglicised now and I have lost that connection and I used to have a deep, deep connection that I don't have any more.

If they had taught us speak Yoruba we would without a doubt have got a winning link going and we would have felt more African than English because we would have understood what they were saying and that would have given us one-upmanship⁴. That is where our fathers let us down. What they are doing is slapping you in the face saying you're not worth teaching the language to. Mum used to tell him to teach us Yoruba, but he didn't want to. For the Africans, as far as they were concerned and as far as I was concerned, they might as well have been in the village bragging about how many kids they had. I'm sorry, but for me just because you are in a different country doesn't mean that you lose the traditions of your village.

I don't think they thought they would stay as long as they did – so maybe that was it, then they would have been no different from the Yanks who buggered off home.

4 Practice of successively outdoing a competitor

CHAPTER 38

JUNE THERESA PROUSE *in conversation*

'Dad was raised in a very multicultural area. He became a solicitor's clerk and never pointed a finger at anyone...'



June and Solomon



June in her teens



June's Children

June Theresa Prouse was born in London on February 8th 1935.

SuAndi: Tell me about your upbringing.

My grandfather came to England from Germany to escape the pogrom¹ and married an Irish girl, my grandmother. They were bakers and lived in the East End of London and life for them was hard. Dad was raised in a very multicultural area. He became a solicitor's clerk and never pointed a finger at anyone.

Dad was so proud of my family, of his grandchildren, my mixed raced children when they visited his office. My sister Jackie married a Greek, my other sister Susan became a single unmarried mother and none of this mattered to our Dad. They were his children and along with his grandchildren he loved every one of them.

Mum, was my step-mum who warmly took on me and my brother Bernard and never missed a birthday or Christmas. When I had my children she always sent a layette² through the post. She was a fantastic person.

In 1953 I was a window dresser at the Lyons' Corner House³ in Rupert Street and had wanted to go and do seasonal work⁴ but my father refused to give his permission but said I could go during my two weeks holiday. So in the April just before the Easter, I left for Blackpool unbeknown to my Dad with the intention of staying more than two weeks. And there I met my first boyfriend, Tommy who was stationed at Burtonwood⁵ and was involved in all kinds of things from the American PX⁶. Every time he had leave⁷ he would come through to Blackpool to ask me to go with him to Manchester for the weekend, and eventually I did.

1 An organized, often officially encouraged massacre or persecution of a minority group, especially one conducted against Jews.

2 A collection of clothing for a *new born* child

3 J. Lyons & Co. was a market-dominant British restaurant-chain, food-manufacturing, and hotel conglomerate founded in 1887.

4 Summer jobs, gap year jobs or short term employment,

5 Royal Air Force station 2 miles north-west of Warrington, Lancashire. During World War II and the Cold War it was used by the United States Air Force and was also known as USAAF station 590.

6 PX US Military

7 In the United States *Military*, *leave* is permission to be away from one's unit for a specific period of time

He had told me that we were going to this African's house that he had some dealings with and that he had a great family. I remember walking down Denmark Road to get there and everything was so different to anything I had ever seen. Tommy was a white guy but he was quite at home and everybody loved him. They all knew him because his other African friend, Joseph Tucker Senior⁸ who was to be the best man at our wedding, had put him in touch with everybody.

We went to John Tottoh's. He became the first African I ever met and no, there wasn't any reaction from me. Josie⁹, his wife made us very welcome and we had food. I met your dad Tom Andi¹⁰ there too. Oh it was my first African food and I loved it. It was exciting. Tommy must have been quite a few times prior to that because he told me all about Kay and Johnny¹¹.

By the September I am expecting and we are back in Blackpool when he said 'do you feel like going to live in Manchester?' I said 'Yes, why?' Obviously the military had got wise to his devilment and he went AWOL.

I remember the time Tommy said to me 'Meet me at the Cotton Club¹²' and I said 'Where is that?' He said 'it's John Tottoh's club, get the taxi to Cambridge Street and get out at the Ducie pub'. I said 'How will I find it then' and he said 'Well follow your nose and listen with your ear and you will find it'. And as I walked up Ducie Street I could hear it, and it was the band, all these white boys who played in it with a fantastic trumpet player. 'Cherry pink and apple blossom white' ohhhhhh!

Cherry pink and apple blossom white¹³ that was the name of the piece!!! Wow, I felt that music, I had a big belly and I couldn't wait to get downstairs. John owned the Cotton club with Vinnie Taylor Dad's (Sue Taylor's granddad) then they had a big falling out and Taylor opened the Palm Beach.

8 His son also called Joseph Tucker lived in Wythenshawe but now not in contact

9 Josie Tottoh was the sister of Margaret Andi

10 John Tottoh and Thomas Andi were cousins

11 John & Josie Tottoh's daughter and first son (elder son James)

12 Originally the New International Society founded by Len Johnson; Manchester boxer and Communist

13 "Cereza Rosa" or "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" or "Gummy Mambo" is the English version of "Cerisier rose et pommier blanc," a popular song with music by Louiguy written in 1950.

When we moved to Manchester we got rooms on Fairlawn Street at Betty Walker's with her daughter Mavis and her husband Colin from Freetown in Sierra Leone. So now we are round at John and Josie's regularly.

The African community accepted me because of Tommy. Why? I don't know because he never professed to be anything he wasn't. The young girls; Kay Tottoh, Linda Newman and Lily Williams used to always be hanging around the house, gazing at Tommy as if he was some kind of hero. Kay used to look after our son Michael for me when Tommy got picked up and I was living on my own. I still used to go round to the Tottoh's though at that time Josie was a bit unhappy. I know when she found out I was knocking around with some black guys she said to me 'don't get involved in this'. It was strange to me because her marriage looked dead good. Yeah fantastic in fact, at least I thought it was! Lovely house, lovely home, lovely front room with a big couch and big armchairs. Yeah, lovely house, lovely house – I remember it well. The point was I wasn't messing with other guys because I was waiting for Tommy to come back. But she was worried because I was going to the club on my own. Then Tommy got his military discharge and came back to marry me though not straight away what with his moving around and out and about with all the African boys like Ricky Erizia¹⁴ and Tucker.

Time passed and before we knew it Tommy had overstayed his visa, so he was on the run again. When they finally caught up with him he was deported. I had two kids by then Michael, the eldest and Tommy junior, conceived before his dad got sent back to America. Michael had a hole in the heart which got bigger as he got older. He was in and out of hospital and I was loathed to travel.

I showed my Dad one of the 'uncomfortable' letters I was getting from my mother-in-law and my Dad said 'that is not a woman who is going to make you welcome'. This time you are not going to Blackpool you are going to Delaware, it's a long way and I think you should think about it very carefully'.

But at that stage, I was still determined to go. In the end I spent my airfare three times. The last ticket I got was non-negotiable. End of story, Michael died, he was in and out of Booth Hall hospital and he died. 1957.

14 See Hatton Samuel Erizia chapter

And that was the end of that.¹⁵

The community was supportive of me after that. Yeah, very much so. Betty Walker was great with me and I never had to worry about babysitters or anything as Linda Newman and the other young girls used to come round. It was a bit of a blur during that time. I got a job for a short while in a Chemist's shop and also met Mandy's¹⁶ Dad, Samuel Okanty, a Ghanaian. Samuel was tall and handsome. He did a bit of acting and shows; dancing with Adama. It was a troupe of dancers. They used to perform at Belle Vue¹⁷ with the drums and go to Finland, Sweden and Germany and all over.

It came as a bit shock to me when I found out that he had a steady girlfriend who was a working girl. This was one of the things that Josie Tottoh had warned me about! I finished with him only to find out that I was pregnant and then I knew I had truly burnt my bridges with my husband Tommy. I could have got away with a lot of things but I knew this was the end of it.

I went to live in a little house in Daisy Street and it was then that Sabina came to live with me. She was sixteen, living rough after running away from home and I was glad of somebody looking after Tommy for me whilst I was pregnant and went to work at the Chemist.

I had my baby Samanda (Mandy) at home and somebody told Samuel¹⁸ who came round the next day whilst I was still in bed. But I told him 'it's not yours' and kept telling him that. In fact Mandy said even when she was at school, he used to come and stand at the school gates and tell her she is a Princess and he was her Daddy. I would said 'take no notice, he is a crazy man'.

I didn't want to know because of his lady friend. She used to provide him with her money, I shouldn't have bad mouthed her because her life could not have been easy.

15 I am still in touch with him and all his family. Three times he has been married now. Me first then Lois – who made young Tommy very welcomed when he used to go there for his holidays.

16 Samanda Caveney

17 Belle Vue Zoological Gardens, Gorton Manchester, 1836 – 1980 was a large zoo, amusement park, exhibition hall complex and speedway stadium. Initially intended to be an entertainment for the genteel middle classes, soon became one of the most popular attractions in Northern England.

18 See Samanda Caveney chapter

Solomon¹⁹ was living in Sheffield and used to come to Manchester for the weekend. I met him through Morris²⁰. I had a couple of dates with him and then I had had enough as I didn't want to know any more and he pursued me. He pursued me. I used to lay in bed and pretend that I couldn't hear him knocking at the door. The way you do!!

I have heard this said and looked around and thought uncomfortably it is fairly true, 'A black man will take on white children, but a white man will very rarely take on black children'. A case of 'you take the cow, you take the calf. Is that true?

Some black men took on whole families. I think that is true because in Africa they will take on a woman with kids and they expect their woman to be taken on by someone else with their kids. And I think – look at Solomon with Mandy. Mandy idolised him. She knew it wasn't her Dad but she idolised him. In fact it was Tottoh who told her 'he is not your Dad'!

So it wasn't uncommon was it? Because we have that picture of abandonment all the time, not how they were trying to mould a family from everything that was there. My Dad took on my brother Malcolm

It's now 1960 and I am living over the Italian shop on Moss Lane East going along the lines of what the Asians have these days with everything out at the front. There used to be a whole block of shops. Dot Collins who was also from London and me were there then and we had flats over the shop. Dot had Philip and Paul then and was expecting Mark. Solomon had left Sheffield to live in Manchester. He didn't like me living there because you had to go round the back entry and walk through the back to get to the flat door. I had Susie his daughter there before we moved out and to 120 Delvino Street, Hulme.

There was nothing posh on Delvino Street. They were terraced houses but I had a whole house to myself for the very first time. There was the off license on the corner where Anita King half-sister to Marcel King²¹ lived. Then there was nothing, just these three houses one was mine and opposite, the *Dalrymple* family lived.

19 Solomon Quarcoopome

20 Samuel Okante see *Samanda* chapter

21 Youngest member and lead vocalist of Sweet Sensation best known for their 1974 Number One UK hit, "Sad Sweet Dreamer".

Eighteen months we lived there renting it from a friend who had gone to Birmingham to be on the game. I was paying her every week via a postal order and she would return the rent book in the post. But it turned out she hadn't been paying the mortgage and the house was repossessed. So there I was in the shit and we had to move to Richmond Street, renting it off Bayo. Does that name mean anything to you? Brenda Bayo – she was a friend of your Auntie Josie.

I am going to guide you for a minute. So you are living in the middle of a black community, but it is not a black community it is a mixed community isn't it?

Very much so – a lot of Polish people as well.

Do you remember the Irish cobbler on Radnor Street – Tommy – he used to get drunk and he used to shout 'you need to all fucking go home' and neighbours would reply 'and you piss off back to Ireland'. Would you say it was a happy area?

Yes, and you were never nervous and you were never worried about walking home at night.

How was your family about you being with Solomon?

I was here alone, but I was never alone. I always knew if push came to shove I could have phoned and my Dad would have come up and taken me back to London. I have been so lucky, my Dad never pointed a finger, or my Mum.

Dad used to come to Manchester and when they offered him a smoke he took a smoke – I don't mean a cigarette, he was offered what was going. He would have a drink, come down to the clubs. Dad would pay Alan Dalrymple Senior to go off for a drink so that he could go out for a drink with Peggy his wife, because Dad fancied her! (Laughing) What can I say!!!

Sabina the girl who lived with me all those years back she was married to my brother, for a few years and had a couple of kids.

The concept or I should say the perception of our Mothers I think in the majority was negative. How was it with the children at school, how did the staff react to you?

Well Tommy was the first one, the white one and no problems at all when they were in junior school.

Then they went on to Birley²² – Tommy first then Mandy. I forget what happened, Mandy was always brilliant at art and Tommy was clever musically and everything else. One of the teachers said to Tommy ‘Prouse, there is another Prouse, Samanda Prouse’ and he said ‘Yeah that is my sister’ and then he looked at his teacher and said ‘Me Mum’s a sport!’

Solomon was very strict, you know what African’s are like. He didn’t like them playing with West Indian children, you know the way they are - ‘We are Africans’ and all of that. And it wasn’t easy because Tommy could be difficult with him and used to rob from him. You know what kids are like, stealing petty silly things. I would say ‘Are you unhappy Tommy?’ and he would say ‘No I can’t help it, these things happen’. At twelve maybe until thirteen he was doing things like breaking into Solomon’s wardrobe and to this day he says that he doesn’t know why. Solomon used to always lock our bedroom door. I never used to lock the fucking door and he would say ‘Why haven’t you locked the door’ and I would say ‘Why?’

I have never forgotten when I was in work at the chemist on Dickenson Road. On the same road the late Mike McGauran lived, a very handsome white guy who always knocked about with the black boys. His girlfriend came in, she said ‘I am sure I have just seen your girls being arrested’. I said ‘MY GIRLS!!!’ ‘Yes’ she said ‘they were in that supermarket on Wilmslow Road, I think they were shoplifting’. I said ‘No they are in school’, so she said ‘they had school uniform on, blue blazers’. I said ‘no!’

She hadn’t gone out the shop ten minutes when I said to Mr Wise ‘I’m worried now’ and he said ‘You need to be - Look,’ and there were two policemen walking up the path towards the shop. I said, ‘Oh my God’ and he said ‘Do what you have to do, go on, get off’.

They had been done for shoplifting. Mandy had lipstick testers; Susie had a salt and pepper thing. They had arrested them instead of taking them to the side and cautioning them!! Do you think I told Solomon - not on your life!! So it’s probation now – I didn’t let him know it – he was always at work anyway – he didn’t see it until the day the probation officer called when I was at work and Solomon was home.

22 www.birleyhighschool.com/

'She tells me nothing, she doesn't tell me anything – I am kept in the dark about everything'. Oh he went mad! 'You must tell me, you must tell me, I mustn't have strangers coming to the house!' To him it was shocking, you see.

My Mother would say 'You can go in and shoplift with your mates but when they ask the staff what did they look like, they will say – I don't know but one was definitely black and the black one was wearing... you know, and that is what they remember!'

Solomon has always been a wonderful father. Susie who was born in 1959 never had anything more than my other two kids had. If he was buying for one, he would buy for the three. He worked all over. He worked at English Abrasives which was making sandpaper and it was a horrible job. But in those days you took a job because it was a job and it was a wage. I did cleaning. I cleaned at night time so that one of us was always at home.

Any grandchildren?

Two; my grand-daughter Cassie is Tommy and Stella's girl. Stella was with Mike Mayisi, Tommy's mate and when they split up, Tommy moved in. Susie has one boy, Kwame. Both grand kids are thirty one

Any regrets?

Regrets? No. I would have liked to have gone with them when they went to Africa. But the thought of all those flies. I couldn't bear the thought of them.

Solomon and June have been together for 54 years they have two daughters Susie and Samantha. June keeps the memory of her son Michael close to her heart.

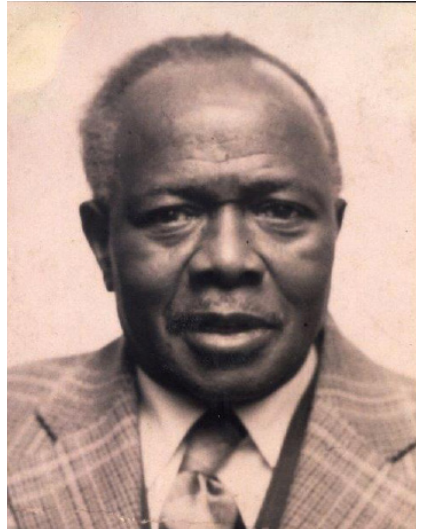
CHAPTER 39

THOMAS JABOUS ANDI *by his daughter SuAndi*

'I was never Daddy's little girl, I was my father's daughter. I was the core of his life...'



Thomas Andi



Thomas Andi aged 60



SuAndi(6 months) & Brother Malcolm (8 years)

*I shaved my father once
When he had no interest to do so
Held his head in my hand
And moved steel so sharp to murder
Closer than close to his skin
Wiped away the lather of white froth
To discover flesh so smooth
That age and he had no relationship
And kissed the handsome man
I found there smiling proudly at me¹*

Shaving my father that day was possibly the most intimate thing I ever did for him. It was towards the end of his life when he was living in a Care Home following a partial leg amputation. After the operation I would moisturise his legs which he also enjoyed, but the shave was special because it told me how much he trusted me.

My father wasn't a cold man and though he would laugh along with the radio and later the television, when I was a child I wanted to swap him for a Jamaican Dad. I thought Jamaicans seemed happier people who were less concerned with labour and education. My father was a worker, a manual worker. This was his profession and he applied himself as though he had been given the right to breathe only to go to work. Work was the nucleus of his life and when that ended and he proudly claimed his free bus pass he did mellow but he remained silent. By silent I mean he never spoke of his childhood, his war service, his hopes and dreams of when he first came to England. He had put the past behind him and sadly there is largely where it remained.

When I was still at primary school Dad received letters from Nigeria and I, like a secretary, wrote his dictated replies. The envelopes were stuffed with money, posted off and nothing more was heard from the writer.

1 The Shave © SuAndi

During the Biafran War² he sent money home via Merchant Seamen but he never knew whose pocket it was spent from. So little did I know about his childhood that I suffered his fury when I declared, so proud of myself that I had donated to the Biafra Red Cross fund, my father was Ijaw!³ It was not until his Wake that I learnt that he came from Warri⁴ an hour away from what was to become independent Biafra. He regarded the people as enemies in what is also known as The Nigerian Civil war

I always kissed my father hello and farewell but I don't recall him ever sitting me on his lap although I feel sure he did; or holding my hand when we walked together. I have never forgotten that he dragged me so frequently to the chest clinic out of fear I was infected that they finally conceded and attempted to give me daily injections. I bit the nurse so hard the first day that two attended on the next, but I was not to be defeated they never returned and I continued to sleep as though there was a large bear growling under the sheets.

My father supported my mother in buying what has remained my largest and most costly indulgence, my clothes, although he was most concerned with my coats, expensive leather school briefcases far too large for me to carry and shoes. Brogues were his favourite and like so many other Black parents his preference was to buy always from Clarkes because they had a fitting gauge and he was concerned about my walking gait, this was before my Cerebral Palsy was diagnosed.

It was he who polished my shoes as appearance was very important to him; his hats came from Dunhill⁵ and were returned regularly for cleaning. His dazzling shoes were worn with suits protected by top quality overcoats or rain macs.

At home he would forgo his tie to sit in his shirt sleeves with the vest he wore winter and summer almost as a modesty attire and aside from his slippers, that was as relaxed as his appearance got. I can still feel the small cuts that were caused by the almost wire unbreakable thread he would give me to sew back on his shirt buttons.

2 July 1967 – January 1970

3 Peoples indigenous mostly to the forest regions of the Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States within the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

4 A commercial city in Delta State

5 British-based company specialising in men's luxury leather goods, writing implements, lighters, timepieces, fragrances and clothing.

I visited my father at least once a week when my parent's marriage broke down. It was a relief when he left for the tension in the house went with him. His temper was not only loud it was often brutal and I never forgave him for the violence he made my mother endure; nor for his lack of tenderness to my older brother Malcolm (known locally as Assassin or X). I was in my teens before I knew that we were both my mother's children but only I was my father's. Father and son relationship hadn't always been fractured Dad had tried to bond with him taking him on one occasion to visit a submarine at Salford Docks and telling him a little about his time on the ships. The sad thing is that the only other things my father liked to polish were his medals. He was awarded the 1939-45 Star⁶, the Atlantic Star⁷ and the Second World War Medal⁸ 1939-45⁸. Medals, that later Malcolm would steal: pawn and never redeem.

I now know that he served as a merchant seaman between 1939-1955 on the Tanchee, Duquesa, SS Bairdevon, Kumasian, SS Huntress, and Manchester Progress, Harperley and HMS Empire Audacity.

Where my father was steadfast and stern, my uncle Tottoh was always happy or so I thought. It was many, many years later that I realised that these were men with secrets. Not just secrets they kept about their families (some had wives and children back home in Nigeria) but their innermost secrets of their hopes and dreams that they kept from us, their children.

My mother 'Peggy' Margaret Josephine Wilkey and her sister 'Josie' Joanna married cousins - Thomas Jabous Andi and John Endomini Tottoh. As did our other 'Auntie' Winifred Maud who married 'Sam' Ibikunle Beyioku Alase. The two sisters and their life long best friend Winnie had been raised in Knolle Park Orphanage⁹ Liverpool, I don't know if they married for love but I do know they all separated for happiness.

6 Awarded for operational service between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945.

7 The star was awarded for six months service afloat, in the Atlantic or in Home Waters, within the period 3 September 1939 to 8 May 1945.

8 Awarded to those who had served in the Armed Forces or Merchant Navy full-time for at least 28 days between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945.

9 (aka Saint Gabriel's). The 1968 street directory lists St Gabriel's Children's Home "Knolle Park" next door to St Gabriel's Convent at the Church Road end of Beaconsfield Road. The Convent was run by The Poor Servants of The Mother Of God nuns.

Mum told me how he would take her to what was in all essence a marriage counselling session where she would stand before a group of men as they decided who was right and wrong in a domestic dispute.

Every word was alien to her until they reached their verdict and always my mum was in the wrong and my father acknowledging his vindication by prolonged hand shaking.

While our parents were still together we, their children grew in a village under an English sky but with a Nigerian river running through it and while for me and possibly some of the other children it was out of sight, it was a main artery that kept us linked to Africa.

My cousins looked and sounded just like my brother and I. We ate, played and lived in each other's houses. With John and Alan - two boxing champions and a night club, the Tottohs were the Kingpins and I was so proud that they were part of my family. If there was any resentment between our fathers I was too young to see it. I was more concerned with keeping my misbehaviour out of sight because punishment would come from the nearest adult be they Mum, Dad, Uncle or Auntie.

Once when the television screened one of Alan's boxing matches, Dad told me he bought himself a bottle of whisky then the bout started before he had the chance to be seated and comfortable. He watched the whole match stood up and pouring. Cheering and pouring. Such was his excitement that he drank so much he passed out and missed the ending and was never sure if Alan won.

Because my father was a constant in my life I have always considered myself as African. In fact my mother had drilled it into me albeit not in a tone favourable to my father :

'You see your father, well, I can't stand the bastard.

But he's an African - that means you're an African never forget that'.¹⁰

So though I started my younger years as the 'coloured' girl who knew unquestionably without any stigma that she was half-caste, today when I am interviewed I respond to the question of my identity as the Nigerian daughter of a Liverpool mother because that is who I am.

10 'The Story of M' SuAndi © 2006. <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=the+story+of+M+>

However it was not until I undertook the authorship of Afro Solo UK did I realise how little my father had shared with me and how disinterested I had been to find out more for myself. And yet that artery had never failed and the realisation came to me in the theatre.

¹¹I sit in the audience of Chinua Achebe's¹² 'Things Fall Apart' at the Library Theatre, Manchester. My man (then) is African-American and he is slightly envious that, unlike himself, for whom the ravages of slavery have breached and broken the umbilical cord that would link his ancestral line to Africa, I know where my people come from. He has a few Nigerian friends, although they are mostly adopting smoother lifestyles in the Black neighbourhoods of Minneapolis. They also have a place called home and can point to it on the map.

I am startled by this production, this play. I am moved. I am comfortable. I see the turn of my head in the arrogance of the main character. I recognise hand movements, gestures, the rise and fall of the voice; I respond to the situations.

In front of me is a stage full of actors but my eyes see only my father, even though the actors are Ibos and my family Ijaw. We are the same people. My father's passing is a date only visible in my heart. I thought I had forgotten the rituals of being a Nigerian daughter. I had not. They were being played out in front of me in just the same way that I recreate them each day that I wake up and go out.

I went to this play once and have carried it with me ever since. Brosun goes two, three times. After the first night my arm reveals the bruising from his elbow nudging of 'You do that. That is just like you. Ouch, that look and your looks are just as disdainful'.

My mother died before my father and thankfully over the years they had built up a mutual respect for each other as parents. My father thought my mother had done well by me; he knew little of the troubles I brought home years after "acceptable" juvenile delinquency. He visited her in hospital telling her 'Peggy I pray for you in English and in my own language'. Peggy had been dropped as unfashionable so it was Margaret who turned her head to me and said, 'OK, get rid of him now.' He didn't weep at her funeral as he sat alongside Malcolm and me, not as her husband but as our father.

11 This is My Story, (of) How I Get Up in the Morning © SuAndi 2013

12 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe

‘It’s good to have the old man with us,’ Malcolm had said. As indeed it was. The years hadn’t wiped away the memories. The 10 shilling alimony that he raised to a £1 on the pretext of generosity when in fact he profited more by having me declared against his income tax. His irascible response to my accompanying him to the Nigerian Independence dance in European dress. My mother had it made for me, seventy percent of my clothing was tailor made. If my father wanted me to dress in Nigerian cloth he should have organised it. Instead he screamed obscenities at her when he dumped me back at the house. He had no interest in her exhaustion working night shifts trying to keep two wild children under control and the rivers of tears she wept when everything she did seemed to fail. He missed all of that. I turned up every week, ate one of his perfect dinners and left. My father never realised he knew as little about my life as I did his.

As the years passed my father’s world grew smaller. He no longer went to African meetings, he cancelled his subscription to African newspapers and magazines and he and my Uncle Tottoh fell out over something we children never understood and not only did they never ever speak again but they banned each other from attending their respective funerals. I understand now that we Nigerians stand by what we say, no matter if we are right or wrong. One by one his circle of friends grew smaller and we no longer visited men who lived in frugally furnished rooms and brewed hot sweeter-than-sweet tea. Or placed bowls of soup alongside plates of Garri for us to share. Many passed on, others went home and after the first one or two letters they became just memories. When William O’Dougha returned home without a word of warning, I think my father’s heart cracked. Now he had no one to talk to and English became his only language. As a child I, along with Mum, would dread to hear him refer to us in the midst of a secret chat with his friends. Now I wondered if he could put a full sentence together.

Now Africa was a place he caught sight of occasionally on the television often filmed to promote it as primitive and savage. Our local flea pit¹³ was the Wyclffe.¹⁴ One time he had petrified my dreams and those of Yvonne, Elaine and Angela Christian by taking us to see *The Hound of the Baskervilles*¹⁵.

13 Urban slang for cinema

14 <http://moss-side.webs.com/apps/photos/photo?photoid=54465633>

15 The third of the four crime novels written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle featuring the detective Sherlock Holmes

But when the credits for Zulu¹⁶ began to roll he turned to me and said, 'remember the English are liars'. I hadn't seen much of the film with my hands clasped over my eyes. I was keen on my father's choices whereas my mum I and I went to variety shows at Hulme Hippodrome¹⁷ far more little girl genteel.

In the eighties television brought Africa into his living room in a documentary format that had never been seen before; 'AFRICA: A Voyage of Discovery' produced and narrated by Basil Davidson¹⁸. My father watched almost every one stood in front of the TV. He would call out 'I don't know this place'. 'I know this place it is near mine'. 'I never saw that animal before' 'Are they sure this place is Africa'. During the programme dedicated to Nigeria he stood in silence with tears flowing down his face.

Few things made my father cry. Me, of course, my badness as much as my achievements, every Muhammad Ali fight, alongside my boxing cousins John and Alan, Michael Jackson dancing and his country being screened through the lens of a television camera. I had offered to take him home but he didn't want to go. His family had lied to him taking money years after his mother had died. England had smothered him in her damp dank weather. Walking through the greenhouses of Kew Gardens he had sweated like a tourist. His heart was never in England but England was his home.

I don't pretend to know what he did with his time. I never really knew anyway. But as age does to all of us he stopped socialising, no more nights at the Nile, Reno or drinks at the Denmark hotel. He continued to play the horses but thankfully not the football pools as every third working week I visited him on a Saturday morning due to his shift rota at Bradford Gas Works. That week I was required to post the coupon on the following Thursday. Inevitably at 8 or 9 years of age I used to forget and would spend the Saturday in contrition praying that his numbers would not come up.

I know he was proud of me. When I became a poet and the world of the arts took me to a Queen's Garden party, he made me remember the few medals he had left from Malcolm's stealth, so convinced was he that her royal highness would want to know what he been awarded.

16 Depicting the Battle of Rorke's Drift between the British Army and the Zulus in January 1879,

17 Originally known as the Grand Junction Theatre and Floral Hall,

18 Basil Risbridger Davidson MC was a British historian, writer and Africanist,

How he would have loved it when in 1999 I was awarded an OBE.¹⁹

Living in a nursing home turned out to be a revelation to my father. He had after all spent over 30 years living on his own. He discovered that not only was he a popular companion but that he liked people. Well some of them, he remained edgy if he was left alone with white women because he feared he would be accused of some physical-sexual misconduct.

Before he underwent the amputation he had a period of dementia caused by the infection. The medical team struggled to look after him because there was no language of communication; he forgot how to speak English. He forgot unless I was there. As soon as he saw me his English was as fluent as his kisses were plentiful. I would time my visits just before the evening meal and pretend that I had cooked a dish that he was no longer able to prepare. Food I was to realise was his gift of love to me.

He developed the knack of flirting with the nurses but was annoyingly acquiescent to the doctors and we had a loud argument when I discovered he had been fitted with a white artificial leg and I loudly demanded and succeeded in getting him refitted with a deep rich brown one. I remember how he told me that when he was a prisoner-of-war²⁰ the officers were billeted separately and in slightly better accommodation to the regular men. He felt that was proper. I had bitten my tongue. What was the point in arguing? My father was a child of colonialism and had swallowed servitude with all its trimmings.

Losing half a leg never fazed him. He told me that whilst in the prisoner of war camps they had been made to stand at attention for days as the enemy fired randomly amongst the ranks until those not injured were drenched in the bloodied inners of comrades. Everyone had their time he said his was not yet. He was a small man, stubby but strong. His fingers were bent from the Nazi's stomping on them as they shouted the abuse 'niggers fighting for the English'.²¹

19 Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) is awarded for having a major local role in any activity, including people whose work has made them known nationally in their chosen area.

20 Milag Nord a complex for men of the British Merchant Navy and Royal Navy.

21 According to the 1907 Hague Conventions, merchant seamen "...are not made prisoners of war, on condition that they make a formal promise in writing, not to undertake, while hostilities last, any service connected with the operations of the war." The Germans, however, always treated Merchant Navy seamen as POWs

He would sit and crack²² them, a Frankenstein noise for my young ears.

Removing his shirt and vest! he would lie on the floor and demand that I 'mash his back'. I was required to walk bare footed across his back muscles, even the soles of his feet. It was something I hated doing as he groaned in relief and possibly pain beneath my feet.

A week or so after his operation I was met in the ward by nurses. My father had an accident. Such was their concerned I tried to appear relaxed before them. I found my father laughing hysterically. He had wheeled himself into the toilet, raised himself up to pee forgetting he had only one and a half legs and had promptly fallen over.

In 1993 I received an invitation to attend the revival of Pan African Historical Theatre Festival in Ghana. Dad was ecstatic. This was a man who had done everything to prevent me travelling anywhere. Mention a holiday destination, dad would tell me why the country was not safe for me to go to. When I lived in St Moritz for four years he often faked illness to force me back home to which my mother would always tell me, 'Bugger him, and stay where you are.' On my visits home he would prepare me a returning meal of pork chops, chicken and lamb; all my favourites on the one plate as a persuasion to stay in England. Ironically it was my mother who was diagnosed with cancer whilst I was in Switzerland.

Ghana was almost home. Dad wanted me to go. Then the doctors announced that his other leg was infected and they wanted to remove that one too. Dad wasn't having it. He'd manage he said. Go; go to Africa he felt sure he would still be around when I got back. I told the doctors of his decision but on arrival in Accra the British Council had a fax requesting that I sign the release form for the operation to go ahead. I was at a loss what to do and eventually wrote a reply giving my permission. Four days later now at Cape Coast I got a message that the doctors had not been able to act on the fax because I had failed to sign it. Was fate playing a part in all of this? I remember standing on the parapet of Elima Castle with Michael McMillan talking about my father and weeping in Michael's arms dreading going home to a dying man. My father died as my return flight reached the skies. I was neither in Ghana or England.

22 Cracking or popping of joints is the action of joint manipulation to produce a sharp cracking or popping sound. This commonly occurs during deliberate knuckle-cracking.

Like my mother, he had died without me and distance between us meant that I had failed to keep a promise he had made me repeat over the years to sit with his body holding his hand on the first night of his death so that his soul could leave in love. A few years later my brother would also die on his own. I had nursed all three of them yet....

I was never Daddy's little girl, I was my father's daughter. I was the core of his life even though I knew I had a half-sister. Sadly for Bernadette, he had been incapable of dividing his love between the two of us and had rejected her. She came back into his life shortly before he died but we remain estranged.

Both my parents loved me unconditionally but my father idolised me and never ever wanted to let me go. When I had my first stroke by way of Bell's Palsy,²³ my father's terror was visible on his face. When my house in Rusholme²⁴ was burgled seven times, my dad would let himself in during the night as I slept to guard me and what possessions I had left.

Yet when he died I kept his ashes in the black box he was delivered in from the funeral directors under the bed in the spare bedroom for months. I didn't know what to do with him. I just knew England was not where his soul should rest so when I returned to Ghana, again for Panafest my dad went with me. One of the leisure days was spent on a deserted beach of miles of white sand and clear blue water. I arranged with Catherine Ugwu²⁵ that I would discreetly walk away from the group and into the sea to scatter his ashes. The sea was calm as I opened the box and began to say my final farewell urging him to take the journey home to Nigeria. I looked up and saw an enormous wave heading towards me, shocking me into immobility. It washed over me and my father's ashes covered me in fine and brittle dust. My father was never ever leaving me.

*Old ladies tell me I look like my mother
And I can see her perfectly
For I paid the price of love to have her etched into my heart
When I think of who I resemble,
I see my father's hand
The fingers are bent*

23 A condition that causes temporary muscular weakness or paralysis to one side of the face. It is the most common cause of facial paralysis.

24 Rusholme is about two miles south of the city centre. It has a large student population with the Curry Mile running through the centre.

25 <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm5312979/>

*Permanently
The cruelty of a concentration camp
The skin is shiny, taunt, like deep brown leather
It is moving towards me
To trace the line of my eye
Then a gentle descent down my cheek
He is looking for any sign that my stroke,
Bell's Palsy, is still obvious
At my mouth, he pulls tenderly so my lips begin to open
My father leans forward and kisses me
When he finds nothing he smiles
I smile back
And see my face reflected in perfect symmetry
Funny that
Because old ladies tell me, I look like my mother.²⁶*

Over the years since his death, my dad has not received a percentage of memory attention as my mother who has lived on in my production *The Story of M*²⁷. Then in a bout of spring cleaning I decided to donate his few remaining war memorabilia to the Imperial War Museum North. Single and childless, I didn't want his medals to end up in a skip once I was gone.

It was a timely decision as in 2010 the IWMN decided to honour men who had fought on the waves in the exhibition 'All Aboard: Stories of War at Sea' and there on display was a picture of my father and a summary of his life as a merchant seaman. This was my opportunity to learn one of his secrets. Pamela Alase (Auntie Winnie's eldest daughter) recalls remembering him talking and laughing over a film about the sinking of the *Graf Spee*²⁸ on TV and he complained that they were always showing it even though it was the ship that sank his. He said they were picked up out of the water and kept for ages, she thinks he said months, on the deck of the ship often without water before being taken to a POW camp.

Now my father is part of the IWMN education pack for students looking at the lives, valour and endurance of merchant seamen²⁹. He would definitely like that.

26 Resemblance © SuAndi

27 Ugwu/Keiden ICA Commission. *The Routledge Drama Anthology and Sourcebook: From Modernism to Contemporary*

28 In the weeks before the outbreak of World War II *Admiral Graf Spee* was deployed to be positioned in merchant sea lanes once war was declared. Between September and December 1939, the ship sank nine ships

29 290-292/2012 Catalogue Number OMD 8183-8185

FROM 'SLAVEPOOL'

by Eugene Lange Aka Muhammad Khalil

'Four hundred years of shackles and chains, four hundred years of racist names and institutionalised racist games, Slavepool's history has got to change' *From 'Slavepool' by Eugene Lange AKA Muhammad Khalil*

My mate, the late and inspirational, John Hill once described Liverpool-born Black people as Puzzle People. He had touched on the puzzling question of identity in the City of Liverpool. Negro in the 1940s, Second Generation Immigrants in the 1950s, Mixed-Race in the 1960s, Coloured/Half-caste in the 1970s, Afro Caribbean in the 1980s, Ethnic Minority in the 1990s and to be found somewhere on an Ethnic Monitoring Form in the Millennium. You can be, politely, described as any of the above at any given time or era in Liverpool. Confused? This article endeavours to explore the so-called Identity Crisis in Liverpool from a Liverpool-born Black perspective.

When I considered which direction this article should take I found that it was so emotional that I had to express some feelings and experiences, rather than provide an academic overview of identity in Liverpool. The latter is more than adequately addressed by Dr. Ray Costello in his excellent overview of this subject on page.

I was born and raised in the Granby area of Liverpool 8 with an African father and a White mother. We were born in the slums of Liverpool 8. As a teenager in the early 1960s I considered myself as one of the 'Shines' - obviously intended as a derogatory remark. It was one term used to describe Liverpool Blacks and was fitting with the racist Scouse humour of the time. Here's an example: Question - 'Where is the cleanest street in Liverpool?' - Answer: 'Upper Parliament Street where there is a Shine on every corner!'

Let's be honest.... Black people rarely get to hear the 'jokes' made against us by White people. This so-called 'joke' despite its racist connotations, made a young Toxteth kid feel a little pinch of pride. 'Yeah, don't mess with the Shine boys'. All I could see and hear around me was

courageous stories of older Black guys fighting with the Bullring, Earle Road, Scotland Road, Park Road, and most roads outside of the Granby Street area of Liverpool. These were my role models. Let us not forget that this was a time when '10 Little Niggers' by Agatha Christie and Uncle Tom's Cabin could be found in most Junior schools. Basically if you were in the wrong place at any time you had to be a good fighter or a fast runner.

In 2005 the horrific racist murder of Anthony Walker could have been any of our Black teenagers in the wrong place, in this case a Huyton bus stop.

FROM SHINES TO HALF CASTE

Little had changed by the time I became one of the older boys. Maybe I'm being a bit harsh. It was now almost 1970 and we were now being called 'half-caste' and we continued in the tradition of fighting racism head on. The term 'half-caste' in many ways distinguished us from our fathers only in the sense that we spoke the Scouse 'language', we were here to stay and mostly stood up for ourselves. It also isolated us from Black people outside of Liverpool. Terms like 'Yellow Man', 'half breed', and 'red' were familiar terms within a growing Black population. As a 12 year old I recall being told about the 'mad African' who strutted around Upper Stanhope Street waving a paper and shouting extremities about 'half-caste' people. We used to consider him as an object of fun. One day I actually listened to what he was saying and it summed up the dilemmas faced by Black kids of our generation; 'You half-caste. You are from nowhere. You were born in the middle of the Ocean'. Our fathers took a different view. They considered us as English, ignoring the skin pigmentation. Why did they not teach us African? We deployed 'black slang' instead. The African community was more elderly and holding on to the last strand of the institutions they had created. The Ibo, The Federation, The Crew Club, The Sierra Leone, The Nigerian and The Yoruba. They saw themselves as returning to Africa one day, not with us, and saw no reason why their sons and daughters could not assimilate into the indigenous population since we were born in Liverpool, England.

AFRO VILLE *in conversation with Steve Cottier*

Jason¹: Prior to the 1970's, amateur football teams in Manchester were largely mono-racial. Young black aspiring footballers became increasingly frustrated with the lack of opportunities to "play the game". This was to change when in 1973 the Afro South American youth worker called Ricky Williams, formed "The Brown Bombers". A name most likely inspired by Heavy Weight World Boxing Champion Joe Lewis.² The name was later changed to Afro Ville playing under the management and training of Williams.

The team players were exclusively mixed race of parentage that predated the Windrush 1948 timeline. They were the first generation born of African fathers and white³ or mixed race mothers. Steve Cottier played on the founding team and recalls memories from its emergence on to the City of Manchester Sunday football League⁴, to its end in 1983. As Steve revisits those Sunday afternoons most likely of sun, rain, snow, sleet and lots of mud his speech is punctuated by his distinctively infectious laugh and warm smile.

Amongst some of the historical photographs displayed in Steve's living room, hangs one of the earliest pictures of Afro Ville, a picture that wouldn't have looked amiss in any household or habitat in South America, Central America or North Africa.

Steve Cottier: ... The team was called the Brown Bombers at first, which would have been 1973 early 74.

1 Jason Culpeper BA (Hons) Voluntary researcher for ASUK

2 Joe Louis, American professional boxer and the World Heavyweight Champion 1937 -1949.

3 English and Irish

4 <http://www.masfl.co.uk/>

Ricky Williams a youth worker, formed the team, he was from South America somewhere, I'm sure it was Brazil, or Venezuela, he was our manager.

Our first training ground was at Cavendish Park Didsbury⁵ and then the field at the back of Cavendish School across the road from the park. At this stage we were still called the Brown Bombers, my position was mainly striker.

We started in the Sunday league in 74/75 and got to a cup final and also won the league in our first season. In 75/76 we changed our training ground to Moss Side youth club⁶. I was in Borstal⁷ during some of that period, when I got out the name had been changed to Afro Ville, (Steve laughs infectiously).

Our captain was Tony Atta. Tony was someone I looked up to and I still do, he always seems to know what to say to you if you need advice.

One of my favourite players was Brian Savage. Brian was a good midfielder, me and him worked well together, we read each other good. But Tony Cole was a genuine prospect who scouts⁸ had their eye on. And Ozzy Saidu was a genuine prospect too.

We didn't have sponsorship; Ricky tapped into some community funds, which got us our kit⁹ and that. The first kit was a green shirt, yellow shorts, and green socks. Then yellow shirt green shorts and yellow socks, the kit colours was influenced by the Brazil football team and from the looks of us any of the team could have been taken as a Brazilian.

5 <https://foursquare.com/v/cavendish-road-park/4e833c50722ed9df34b1b01b>

6 The Powerhouse is the forerunner of the old Moss Side Youth Club <http://mbla.net/projects/powerhouse-2/>

7 A borstal was a type of youth detention centre abolished in 1982 by The Criminal Justice Act

8 A Player Scout attends football matches on the behalf of professional clubs to collect intelligence.

9 Team shirts and boots

We did have daft little arguments sometimes about the kit and what kit we should have but we used to laugh it off.

Hough End fields was where most matches were held so where we played the most.

We won the cup and league in 77 & 78 after which Ricky left and Tony Atta and Dave Jawando became joint managers.

Sunday matches were 2pm kick off and more often than not, some of us hadn't left the Reno¹⁰ before 5am then sleeping until one in the afternoon. Then getting up to play the match and still winning most of them. Imagine what we would have been like if we got an early night!

Tony's frustration with the team's lack of discipline as players was heightened when we played a match in Failsworth on some rubbish field and got beat 4-2. Tony had had enough and that was the last time we played together as Afro Ville...

...We didn't sense any race issues on the pitch, or we didn't sense that we were representing our race as a team of colour, or black men, it was all about the game we were in, it was about football. Don't get me wrong the larger world of football was openly racist in them days but I never experienced it in our games and I don't think anyone else did.

There was 'camaraderie' on and off the pitch, there was a sense of brotherhood. We played on the pitch together and some of us off the pitch, going clubbing together and that type of thing,

When we first split up there was a void or hollowness for the first year or so but some of us went and played for other teams, but it wasn't the same as what we had with Afro Ville, that was special, some of us felt down about it.

10 <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Reno-Club-Manchester/158372724181214>

The reunion we had in 2013, 40years later at the Red Lion Pub in Withington¹¹ came together through some of the lads from Afro Ville attending a Motown night they host there every couple of weeks. I was stood there on one of these nights and it felt like it was a reunion in a small way and it felt nice, so I said to Brian Savage who was there, what do you think about me promoting an Afro Ville reunion and putting it on here? He agreed it was a good idea. It was a nostalgic evening anyway with the Motown tunes etc and everything felt right, I always felt happy when I thought of the Afro Ville days and felt passionate that the promotion would be a success. I put it into action after getting the ok off the landlady she was really good about it. It wasn't difficult to do, networking and a few phone calls, Facebook and flyers. A lot of people turned up, people I hadn't seen for years, it was great, everybody enjoyed themselves old and young, relatives and friends...and most of the original boys. There have been many calls to do it again, something I intend to put into action.

11 <http://www.redlionpubmanchester.co.uk/>

AHMED IQBAL ULLAH RACE RELATIONS RESOURCE CENTRE AND EDUCATION TRUST

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre is a unique library on race, ethnicity and migration, including life stories, resources for schools and rare archival sources. Ahmed Iqbal Ullah was a thirteen year old Bangladeshi boy, murdered in a racist incident at a local school in 1986. The Centre was named in his memory and is housed in the beautifully refurbished Manchester Central Library.

As one of the cultural assets of the University of Manchester, the library contains thousands of books and journals that document the contributions of Black people to British, European and American history as well as much ephemeral material – pamphlets, posters and interview transcripts - recording the struggles of Black communities against racism. We hold the most important collection of material on Black history in the NorthWest.

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust leads the community outreach work of the AIURRC, contributing to the development of our local history materials and archive. Our oral history projects: Exploring Our Roots, The Distance We Have Travelled and Yemeni Roots, Salford Lives have generated nearly two hundred oral history interviews. Many have been transcribed and can be accessed in the centre. The Centre also holds the interviews created by the Roots Family History Project (African and Caribbean elders). These interview collections are complemented by donated photographs.

Because of the continued lack of books about Black British heroes, the Trust runs school-based projects to create Black heroes biographies for children. The lives of Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Noor Inayat Khan and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor have all been described in books created by children in Manchester schools. The role of Black people in Britain's Olympic record is celebrated in our book Britain's Black Olympian, wonderfully illustrated by pupils in local schools.

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre is housed in Manchester Central Library and is available to members of the public and researchers alike.

Contact: 0161 275 2910

rrarchive@manchester.ac.uk

www.racearchive.org.uk

www.racearchive.manchester.ac.uk

www.facebook.com/AIUCentre

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS

Founded in 1917, IWM (Imperial War Museums) is the world's leading authority on conflict and its impact. We are dedicated to recording and telling the stories of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.

IWM's collections

Our collections are made up of the everyday and exceptional, and are drawn from people of all walks of life. They reflect the total nature of war and reveal stories of people, places, idea and events.

Our collections are vast and rich, from film and photography to oral history, works of art, posters and proclamations, objects, and personal letters and diaries. They include much that will help and inform people interested in African history.

For example, a visitor to IWM's website can find images or descriptions of material used by those who fought in the armed forces of the British Empire, including:

- Uniforms
- Insignia
- Weapons
- Equipment



Right: formation badge of 81st (West African) Division. [© IWM, INS 4165]

There are also reproductions of the posters that encouraged or celebrated the support of the African colonies for the British war effort and of paintings commissioned – sometimes from African artists – to record those contributions.

Right: the painting 'Recruiting' by S Okello, acquired by the War Artists Advisory Committee under a scheme to encourage the painting of local war activities by 'Native-born Colonial artists'. Work was acquired from artists in Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Jamaica. [© IWM, ART LD 2742]



Researchers can find film and photographs of African participation in the two World Wars, for example in the First World War as soldiers or carriers involved in the East African campaign or as members of the South African Native Labour Corps on the Western Front, or in the Second World War as soldiers fighting the Japanese in the Burma campaign.



Left: King George V inspecting NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers) of the South African Native Labour Corps at Abbeville, France, 10 July 1917. [© IWM, Q 5623]

Photographs and film also record Africans serving as merchant seamen or as industrial workers on the (British) Home Front, and life in countries in the years before independence. It is also possible to listen to interviews in which such events are recalled in later years by people who were involved – for example, a British NCO recalling his experiences with the Gambia Regiment.

Right: Alihu Turay, from Free Town, Sierra Leone, described in the original caption as 'a greaser in the Merchant Navy [who] has sailed on ships taking supplies to Russia.' [© IWM, D 16069]



Left: Second World War photograph captioned as 'Girls receiving instruction from a government schoolmistress at a school in the Gold Coast.' [© IWM, TR 2764]

An additional source for exploring film archives is the [Colonial Film](#) database, the result of a three-year research project (completed in 2010) in which IWM played a leading role. The database enables users to read descriptions of more than 6,000 films from the colonies of the British Empire now held in three UK collections, and to view some 150 titles online.

Left: Main title of a 1945 film about West African troops' participation in the campaign against the Japanese in Burma. [© IWM, COI 644]



Although copyright restrictions mean that fewer of the collections of private papers and printed materials can be digitised, the online database describes such materials which can still be explored in person via the Research Room. They include, for example, both the typescript and the published versions of the memoir of Isaac Fadoyebo recording his service with the Royal West African Frontier Force, January 1940 - June 1945.

Resources like these are undoubtedly valuable, but IWM recognises that there are significant gaps and inadequacies in its collections that reflect the historical circumstances in which the collections were built. In particular, the collections commonly reflect the position of IWM as a UK-based institution, and the perspective of Britain as an imperial power, rather than the priorities of those who were colonised.

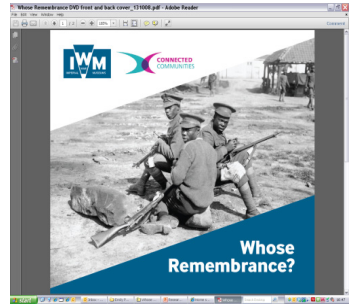
This means, for example, that the voices of European officers, administrators or settlers are heard far more often than those of the Africans over whom they exercised authority, and that African conflicts are reflected only in so far as British troops were involved in counter-insurgency or peace-keeping roles.

Above: Operational Service Medal given to troops deployed to Sierra Leone on 7 May 2000 on Operation PALLISER. [© IWM, OMD 5907]

Recent IWM Projects – *Whose Remembrance?*

IWM's first AHRC-funded research project marked a major step to redress the historical imbalance of IWM's collections.

Whose Remembrance? sought to investigate the state of research into the experiences of the peoples of Britain's former empire in the two World Wars, and the understanding and availability of this research to audiences and communities today.



The project was carried out by IWM's Research department in consultation with an advisory group of community historians, academics and other specialists. Outputs included the production of three databases of relevant material and two workshops held at IWM London, the first with historians and the second with museum professionals and community workers and representatives.

The team also included three specialist researchers from communities relevant to the project who assessed the accessibility and usefulness of IWM collections for understanding and interpreting historical topics which they chose. A specially commissioned film summarises the study's findings which has since been screened at special events across the UK.

Help us enhance our collections

Whose Remembrance? gave IWM a starting point on which it is keen to build, with the help of members of African and diaspora communities.

To offer items to enhance the collections, please see the Offer Material to the Collections section of the IWM website.

Details of individual participants can be uploaded to Lives of the First World War, IWM's new online project to record the stories of the more

than 8 million men and women who made a contribution during the First World War.

Meanwhile, new learning resources are being developed – see for example ‘The Empire Called to Arms’ and other material available from the IWM website.

News of IWM’s and other organisations’ plans to mark the centenary of the First World War can be found on the First World War Centenary website. Not-for-profit cultural and educational organisations can sign up as a Centenary partner in order to access a variety of free resources and participate in The British Empire at War discussion forum.

Using Collections Search

The items reproduced on the previous pages are a tiny proportion of the total amount of material available from IWM: the simplest way to find out more is to go to the Collections Search pages of the IWM website and start exploring.

The Collections Search pages of the IWM website provide remote access to a database covering hundreds of thousands of items held by IWM. As a growing number of digitisation programmes bear fruit, the website also offers the opportunity to view tens of thousands of archive photographs and reproductions of works of art, posters and exhibits, to listen to oral history interviews and watch films.

It is also possible to see original items from the collections that are not on display and have not yet been digitised but this will normally require a visit to IWM London (find out more about accessing the collections on the Research Facilities page of the IWM website).

Basic instructions for using Collections Search are given in the ‘How to Search’ paragraphs, but users looking for subjects relating to African history should be aware of some additional issues, as described below.

IWM is nearly 100 years old, and the items in its collections – and the way they have been catalogued – reflect the length of this history. This means that it is necessary to remember that names have changed over the years – for example, reference will be made to ‘Gold Coast’ as well

as to 'Ghana', to 'Salisbury, Rhodesia' as well as to 'Harare, Zimbabwe'.

It is also unfortunately the case that language is often used that will sound insensitive to modern ears: often patronising or even racist, as in these words from a Second World War photo caption: 'The picturesque disorderliness of a native village is replaced by properly laid out housing estates of sound and hygienic structure.'

Users of Collections Search may not only have to tolerate this language but even sometimes adopt it in their searches – to find African rather than European people in photographs, it can be helpful to use the word 'native' as a search term.

IWM sincerely regrets any offence or discomfort this may cause: although such language is not used in current cataloguing, it is characteristic of the period from which many catalogued items date and is thus an inevitable (and instructive) part of their history.

MIX-D MUSEUM

In 1925, a Liberian seaman and his white Welsh wife had a baby called Nora, who they raised in the Butetown port area of Cardiff, then known as ‘Tiger Bay’. Reminiscing on her childhood, Nora says:

‘I come from a very Welsh, very African family. My father was very African and my mother was very Welsh so hence the combination. It was a nice family, hardworking father, went to sea. He was in the Royal Navy in the 1914 war, in the Merchant Navy in the second war, worked very hard, was never home very much. My mother was an average mother with one child, me. She worked, some of the little jobs they had around here for mothers in those days, cleaning somebody else’s house or doing something menial. And I grew up as the average child in the Bay of a mixed family, played in the canal for a playground [...]. We ate Welsh and African food, fou fou and gari and jollof rice and then we ate potatoes and peas like the English or the Welsh. And I lived in Loudon Square [...]. All types of Africa, of types of everywhere lived in Loudon Square.’¹

Twenty-first century media headlines heralding the growing number of mixed race people in Britain (*‘Revealed: the rise of mixed-race Britain’*²) would have us believe that racial mixing is a modern phenomenon. Yet memories such as Nora’s – and of course the wonderful recollections gathered under the Afro Solo UK project – remind us that in reality, people from mixed racial backgrounds have a longstanding history in Britain, one that goes back way before Leona Lewis, before the introduction of the ‘Mixed’ category on the 2001 Census and even before Windrush. As Afro

1 Nora Glasgow, archived interview. Butetown Community History Project. www.bhac.org

2 *The Guardian*, 17 January 2009.

Solo highlights beautifully, within this rich and varied history, African people have a central role to play.

While there is evidence of an African presence in the country as early as Roman Britain, it is really from the sixteenth century onwards that Africans became notably visible in the public eye, in part due to their growing numbers. Indeed, in 1596, Elizabeth I issued her first edict decreeing that ‘blackamoors’ should be expelled from the realm, stating that of these ‘kind of people there are already too many here.’ Yet the Queen ‘waited in vain’ for by then the black population were already firmly ensconced in Britain’s communities.³ By the time of the 18th century, there was a distinct Black African presence in Britain. Some were slaves and servants in households but as Green has importantly highlighted, this was by no means the sum total of their experiences – Africans in Britain were also sailors, soldiers, students, merchants, musicians, entertainers and royalty.⁴ Mostly male, it is hardly surprising that many of this population sought companionship with local white women, much to the horror of the majority of the British establishment who frequently railed against interracial mixing, particularly that between Black Africans and white women. For example, in 1772, Edward Long, the British colonial administrator and historian complained about the ‘venomous and dangerous ulcer’ England was facing due to fondness of ‘lower class’ women for having relationships and children with black men,⁵ while a few years later, Captain Philip Thicknesse commented that, ‘London abounds with an incredible number of these black men...and [in] every country town, nay, in almost every village are to be seen a little race of mulattoes, mischievous as monkeys, and infinitely more dangerous.’⁶

3 Gerzina, Gretchen (1995) *Black England: Life before Emancipation*. London: John Murray, pp3-4.

4 Green, J. (2000) Before The Windrush in *History Today*, pp29-35.

5 Fryer, P. (1984) *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London: Pluto Press, pp157-8.

6 *Ibid.*, p162.

Though vicious, such hostile attitudes towards interracial mixing in Britain were, however, not universal amongst the British public – as demonstrated not least by the frequency with which many white British women in particular were willing to enter into such relationships during the eighteenth century and beyond. Indeed, white visitors to Britain were often shocked by the prevalence of interracial couples and families. Gerzina notes that the American academic Benjamin Silliman visiting London in the early nineteenth century was ‘appalled to see on Oxford Street ‘a well-dressed white girl, who was of ruddy complexion, and even handsome, walking arm in arm, and conversing very sociably, with a [black] man, who was as well dressed as she, and so black that his skin had a kind of ebony lustre’.⁷

While the minority ethnic population in Britain had declined throughout the 19th century, the labour needs of World War I in the early 20th century saw once again their presence become visible throughout the country. Though as with previous centuries this presence was similarly diverse in terms of occupation and settlement, much attention was paid to those seamen and other workers - many of whom fought for Britain – who settled in port towns such as London, Cardiff and Liverpool. Along with other many other minority ethnic groups, those of black African heritage found themselves, once again, in the public eye. The 1919 ‘race riots’ – in which a series of violent disturbances targeting black, Arab and other minorities occurred in nine of Britain’s main ports after the demobilisation of First World War service personnel – were viewed by many as the result of anger and resentment at ‘coloured’ men not only ‘taking’ white men’s jobs but also ‘their’ women – the former British colonial administrator, Sir Ralph Williams, blamed these interracial relationships for causing the violence; writing to *The Times* in 1919 he railed that “sexual relations between white women and coloured men revolt our very nature...What blame...to those white men who, seeing the conditions and loathing them, resort to violence?”

7 Gerzina, op. cit. p21-22.

Such tensions persisted throughout the 1920s, with authorities in cities across Britain becoming greatly concerned and increasingly condemnatory about the resulting children from mixed relationships. Officials in Cardiff, for example, cautioned that racial mixing had seen ‘the consequent growth of a half-caste population, alien in sentiment and habits to the native white inhabitants’.⁸ Similar concerns and warnings were touted vociferously in the media. In 1929 the *Daily Herald* declared that ‘hundreds of half-caste children with vicious tendencies’ were ‘growing up in Cardiff as the result of black men mating with white women’ while the *Daily Express* reported in 1930 that the hundreds of ‘poor little half-castes’ of East London’s Canning Town were ‘looked down and jeered at from the childhood upwards [...] launched while still in their teens upon a life barren of almost everything but dirt, disease and despair, without race, with no country that they can call their own’.

Such condemnatory attitudes were given credence by the work of social scientists, with mixed race children finding themselves the subject of academic enquiry. Turning their attention from the colonies, anthropometrists now measured the physical features of these British children to try and ascertain what having Black African (and Black Caribbean and Chinese) fathers and white British mothers meant for their physical and psychological development. Most notorious now of all the studies focusing on race crossing is Muriel Fletcher’s damning 1930 study into the welfare of ‘half castes’ – a *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and other Ports*. Sensational and disapproving in her commentary on the relationships in the port side communities between the black men and white women in particular, Fletcher concluded that the children of these relationships were social outcasts who also suffered from inherent physical, mental and moral defects. Fletcher’s report itself caused incredible damage

8 In Banton, M. (1953) ‘The Changing Position of the Negro in Britain’ in *Phylon*, 14(1): 74-83, p80.

to race relations within Liverpool⁹ and the themes of racial mixing and mixedness invoked in the report would be repeatedly noticeable in public thought in the decades to follow: hypersexual 'coloured' men, feckless white women and marginalised and confused children of the underclass. For those mixing and of mixed race throughout the majority of twentieth century Britain, it is clear that they did so against a social discourse and set of attitudes which, particularly at an official, institutional level, positioned them as unnatural, unsettling and unwanted. For many, this social condemnation had painful or brutal consequences: interracial couples being attacked or torn apart, those from mixed racial backgrounds being refused work and opportunities, mixed race children shipped off to orphanages to avoid social disgrace - and all the while seeing themselves and their families being constantly labelled as immoral, feckless, degenerative and dangerous.

Yet, amongst all the moral condemnation, there is nevertheless a sense of ordinariness. The concept of 'ordinary' may thus seem unusual when applied to racial mixing and its familiar setting of ostracism, marginalisation, 'tragic mulattoes' and 'marginal men'. Nevertheless, it is there. For when we look past the 'prurient gaze of middle-class observers peering through lens clouded by class, racial, gender, sexual and political anxieties'¹⁰ to the first-hand accounts and photos of those mixing or of mixed race themselves, we begin to glimpse a different story. We begin to see everyday lives and the negotiation of those social and practical issues, big and small, which people face on an everyday level, regardless of their race or colour: friendship, love, marriage, children, money, work, death, cleaning, cooking, decorating, shopping, socialising, parenting.¹¹

9 Christian, M. (2008) 'The Fletcher Report 1930: A Historical Case Study of Contested Black Mixed Heritage Britishness' in *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21(2-3), pp213-241.

10 Balachandran, G. (2011) 'Subaltern Cosmopolitanism in the Imperial Metropole: Notes towards a Prehistory of Racism and Multiculturalism' in *Working Papers in International History*, No. 8., pp27-28.

11 Caballero, C. and Aspinall, P. (forthcoming 2014) *Racial Mixing and Mixedness in Britain: Social Constructions and Lived Experience in the 20th and 21st Centuries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

The ‘ordinary’ stories of ‘everyday’ people of mixed race – both now and then – are seldom told, but they are critical in presenting a more balanced picture of the experiences of ‘mixedness’ – one that is not all about cultural harmony and acceptance but equally one that is not all about tragedy, prejudice and difficulty. Projects such as Afro Solo UK – and our work at the Mix-d Museum¹² – thus provide an important platform for different interpretations to be included in the important reclaiming of minority ethnic history in Britain. For when we slowly begin to uncover such accounts, which include the good, the bad and the quite simply mundane, we can start to see this generally hidden history of racial mixing in Britain as simply another part of the longstanding diversity and difference that is – and always has been – an ordinary feature of British life.

Dr Chamion Caballero

Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research, London South Bank University
For more on the Mix-d Museum, see www.mix-d.org.uk

12 www.mix-d.museum.org.uk

REMEMBERING AFRICANS OF MANCHESTER

Daddy – what did you do in the Great War ... against Apartheid? Remembering Africans of Greater Manchester helps us recall that from 1920 to 1960's, Manchester was to play a historic role in the struggle of African peoples, on many fronts. For Tutu UK – we look to the birth of the Pan African Federation, in Manchester 1944 and the first boycott of South African goods in 1960.

People of Africa have not just helped build a thriving community in Manchester; the cause of truth, justice and liberty for all, including a Free South Africa - also found support.

It is because of this that at the Tutu Foundation UK, today we echo our

Patron, Archbishop Desmond Tutu's message:

“thank-you, thank-you – to those who joined boycotts, campaigned and played their part in many ways, in the Anti-Apartheid Movement”

The Tutu Foundation UK was launched as a charity in 2007, to promote the legacy of Desmond & Leah Tutu, across communities here in the U.K. The values and vision of the Tutu Foundation owe a great deal to those who campaigned for both independence for Africa's nations – as well as an end to apartheid & injustice in South Africa.

The Fifth Pan-African Congress, Chorlton Town Hall, Manchester, England, 1945. The Congress marked the historic moment when Pan-Africanism became an idea whose time had come.

South Africa was represented at this historic event by: Peter Henry Abrahams Deras (Peter Abrahams) was born in Vrededorp and Mr. Marko Hlubi, who had been mandated by the ANC to give testimony to the world of the true plight of African peoples and the extent of

racial discrimination.

We are proud of their legacy - Speaking Truth to Power – the Tutu Foundation UK, is working to continue in this tradition.

Manchester Trade Hall:

The mid 1950's – would also see the then Father Trevor Huddleston, speak to a capacity audience at Manchester's Trade Hall – speaking first-hand on the evils of Apartheid. His work Nought for Your Comfort; his call to the people of Manchester, would sow the seeds for the rise of the Anti-Apartheid movement here in the UK and the national boycott of South African goods.

In the Spring of 1960 - 19 Co-op societies, among them Manchester and Salford, rejected the Co-Op's failure to take decisive action in solidarity against apartheid. The Manchester and Salford Co-op bravely went it alone in deciding to take South African products off their shelves. This would be the first ever organised boycott of South African goods as part of a campaign month. This action in Manchester & Salford helped lead to the creation the national Boycott Movement committee. The Boycott, would later become the Anti-Apartheid Co-ordinating Committee, established to co-ordinate activities of all organisations opposing apartheid and in particular those of the committees formed throughout the country during the Boycott Month. Manchester through its historic role in the Boycott Movement played a proud part in the fight against apartheid. As Desmond Tutu has acknowledged:

“What would have happened had Mandela died in prison as was the intended hope of the upholders of apartheid? I suppose most would have regarded him as no better than a terrorist.

Persons in high positions in Britain and the US did dismiss him as such. Mercifully for us and Gods' world, Mandela did not die in prison and this is thanks very largely to the amazing Anti-Apartheid movement led by that remarkable Englishman Archbishop Trevor Huddleston.”

See us at www.tutufoundationuk.org

MEMORIAL SERVICE

JOHNSON • QUARCOOPOME • SAIDY • MAYISI • GEORGE • ATTA • ANKRAH • SEISAY • MARBELL • SONNE • LAWRENCE • LABINJOH
SEENA • GASPER • QUAINOD • FABBRE • PEREIRA • LAWSON • TELLA • IKONI
AFRO SOLO UK
cordially invites families and friends to
**REMEMBERING AFRICANS
of GREATER MANCHESTER 1920 - 1960**
"I AM BECAUSE I AM"
Led by the Dean of Manchester in the presence of the Lord Mayor
Saturday April 5th 2014
6.30pm prompt
Manchester Cathedral
Celebrating the African fathers of forty local
families with music, poetry and drama
RSVP for seat allocation contact@afrosolouk.com
text name and number of tickets to 07757 278 188
supported by HLF
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FINNI • JASPER • ALI • MOSES • OKEWO • TOTTON • GASPER • OLORUNSHOLA
CAVENEY • AGBAI • AVARI • AMAYE • MAVINGA • SKILTON • BELL • MWAGARA • ERIZIA • ANDI • CONTEH • AKINBODE

"I'm so pleased to have been reconnected with my memories and that of others from the past in Manchester. From the Past, we have the now; let's hope that from now, in the future, others will also have our past, to remember. Enjoy the Day. May everybody's God, bless everybody."

-Leslie Johnson son of Jide and Renee

"For Contemplation"

KoraAfrican Memory Music

Jali Kuyadeh

Welcome

The Very Reverend Rogers Govender. Dean of Manchester

Afro Solo UK

Dinesh Allirajah MA. BA. Chair of Trustees National Black Arts Alliance

'The SS Mendi'
Kevin Seisay

'The Heart Is a Boomerang' and 'Young Radicals'
Peter Kalu honours fathers and children

The Blues
Franny Ubank

'You told us' and " Did You Fight'
Abi Idowu recalls memories.

'Peace for All' and 'Freedom'
Tyndale and Kadria Thomas with the Joy Music Collective

'We Are Because They Were – Strong'
Cast: Caleb and Marcia. Chloe Rebecca Bodkin. Samuel Awolesi Kevin Kipoyi,
Vanessa Mankoto. Esther Adebisi .

Prayers followed by 'The Lord's Prayer'
The Very Reverend Rogers Govender. Dean of Manchester

'Redemption Song'
Empress Asher

'We Will Miss You'.
The Company Honouring Our Fathers

Closing Music
All artists can be contacted for bookings via National Black Arts Alliance.

RESEARCH APPENDIX

Dr Chamion Caballero. Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research,
London South Bank University. Mix-d Museum, www.mix-d.org.uk

Dr David Jenkins Principal Curator, National Waterfront Museum.
<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/>

Professor Alan Rice Institute For Black Atlantic Research (IBAR)
University of Central Lancashire.

Professor Carol Baxter CBE. Head of Equality, Diversity and Human
Rights at NHS Employers. [http://www.nhsemployers.org/about-us/
whos-who](http://www.nhsemployers.org/about-us/whos-who)

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php 1987 by Phil Magbotiwan

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The Phrase Finder
Urban Dictionary
Wikipedia

For Kevin Seisay performance at the April 5th 2014 Memorial Service. 'The SS Mendi' In 1917 as the SS Mendi set sail towards the Western front when she was struck and cut almost in half by the SS Darro. The Mendi sank 25 minutes later and though it was an accident Captain Henry Stump of the Darro did nothing to assist the ailing ship. Today the wreck is the watery grave of the 617 South African Native Labour Corps who drowned off the coast of the Isle of Wight

OUR PARTNERS



The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre houses a collection of books, posters, videos and ephemeral resources on the history of racism and anti-racist struggle in Britain.



Manchester Cathedral is Mother Church within the Diocese of Manchester as is a centre for prayer, worship, music, arts and education in the City of Manchester.



Visit the award-winning IWM North, part of Imperial War Museums, to discover powerful personal stories that reveal how war shapes lives.



MMU Cheshire Department of Contemporary Arts offers two single-honours programmes, Drama and Contemporary Theatre and Performance, and the possibility of studying Drama in combination with one of several subject areas.



nbaa works across art forms to create productions that challenge perceptions of Black culture and that celebrate the many dimensions of Black heritages.



LOTTERY FUNDED

This Project was funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund.

**AfroSolo UK is a collection of 39 Life Stories of African life in
Greater Manchester 1920 - 1960**

'Afro Solo UK should be essential reading for anyone interested in the African Diaspora or post-war migration to the UK. Many stories narrate the frustration of fractured family histories, but there is also huge pride, nostalgia, curiosity and wonderment. Despite uneasy memories of prejudice and suspicion, there is a prevailing sense of gratitude to those early pioneers; a realisation that what connects us is love, the tenderness and solidarity of human concern.'

**Professor Graham Mort,
Centre for Transcultural Writing and Research,
Lancaster University, UK**

