

Coming to England in 1966

By Rosalind John-Alao

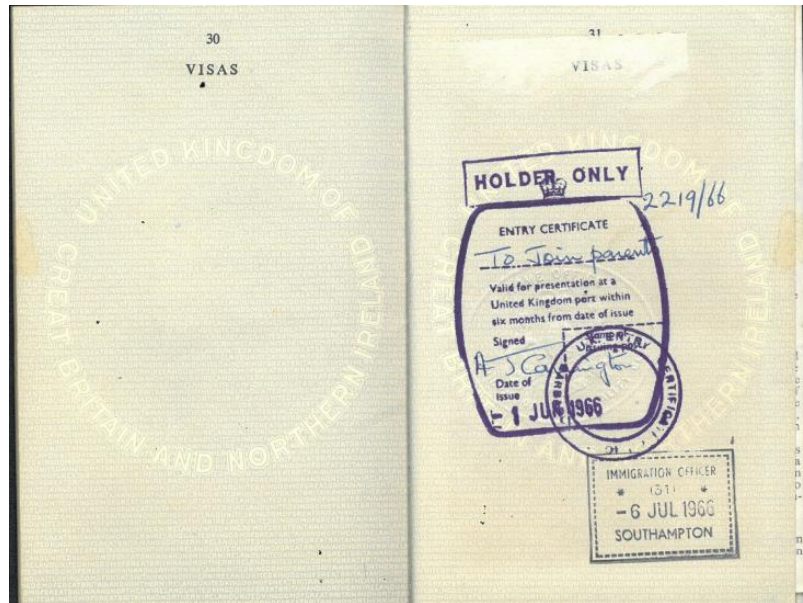
I was born in Dominica in the West Indies in 1958. I was 8 years old when I came to England. My father came to England in the very early 1960s after his brother saved money for my dad's ticket. His brother had come to England a few years before him. My dad's older brother settled in Leeds, West Yorkshire and very quickly got a job as a bus driver. When my father joined him, they shared a room for a few years. My father worked in a factory making dog food. Soon he had made enough money to send for his wife (my mother) and my two brothers and sister. It was my choice to stay behind in the West Indies as I was very close to my Grandad and did not want to leave him.



My family sent for me in 1966. I remember waking up very early to make my way to the harbour with my mother's friend. I was dressed in my best clothes, and I remember wearing gold dangling earrings which were too heavy for my ears and very painful. It was very early in the morning, I remember getting on a cruise liner, the biggest boat I had ever seen in my life. Lots of people were dressed in their finest clothes, me in suits and women wearing hats, handbags, pretty dresses and high heels.

The cruiser was so big it was like an island. I stood on the deck and saw hundreds of tiny people, it looked like they were walking on water. At the time, I thought they were. We docked somewhere in America, I'm guessing it was New York, where we stayed for the day and did some shopping, then returned to the boat.

The next time we stopped we had arrived I think in Southampton, at the time I thought it was London. From there we caught a train and me and my mum's friend carried onto London. My first feelings and thoughts of being in Britain was the cold. It must have been winter as it was very cold and I was not dressed for the weather. My mother's friend lived in London and a taxi came to collect us from the station. Travelling in the back of the taxi, I remember being very frightened, almost all the faces we passed were white, and that was strange to me.



My mother came to London the following day to collect me and take me to Doncaster, to reunite with my family. It felt at the time like I was being introduced to strangers. I hated Doncaster as it was so cold, wet and miserable and the only black faces I saw were my mother's friends.

It took me many years to get used to the weather. I lived in Doncaster for 13 years and left when I was 21 years old and moved to London in 1979.