

# Bingo

I came from Grenada in 1963. Grenada was British at that time. Growing up in Grenada was fun. Children in this country have no life, they can't go anywhere, they can't walk from their house to the beach like we used to.

I was taught at school by English people. My mother was a French speaker, because before Grenada was British, it was French. I remember whenever she was talking to her sisters, my aunts, she would tell me to leave the house. They were talking to each other in French. My mum didn't want me going to work. She was very strict, there was always church on Sundays.

My sister came to England and a few months after that, she sent for me and a man who eventually I got married to. It was a big cruise ship and we went through different countries, it took 22 days. We were going through countries and countries, stopping at Jamaica, then at Madeira, then in Italy somewhere. I wasn't sea sick, but the lady I was sharing a cabin with, she was sick from Trinidad to England. There was a hospital on the boat, shops, a cinema. It was fun, the cruise ship was fantastic.

When I landed in this country I started crying and saying that I wanted to go home. It was July 14<sup>th</sup>. How do I know? Because I still have my old passport with the stamp and the date on it when I came. My sister met me off the boat at Southampton. When I saw the train, I said "What's that big long thing?" I'd never seen a train before. I came to London with my sister and we went to Acton, Churchfield Road.

She had a place close to the park. We got off the bus, we went up there, and I stood at the window and looked over the park. What was funny was that I saw people in the park who were kissing. I said to my sister – what are they doing? Back in Grenada, if you kissed in the street, the police would come to arrest you.

At the start I wasn't happy at all in England, but afterwards I enjoyed it. In the 1960's it used to be fun. Weekends used to be fun. You could do what you wanted. People used to visit each other. There was no crime and no fear. I used to walk from Acton to Shepherd's Bush in the evening, I wouldn't dare to do that now.

My first job was in a laundry. The Whitehead Laundry in Avenue Road in Acton. The next job, I went to work for Lyons, they were making cakes. I didn't like that work, so I went into nursing. I started as an Auxiliary Nurse. Then one of the sisters said to me – "you're so good at this, why not train?" So I started to train as a nurse, but then I got pregnant and I dropped out and didn't finish because I wasn't legally married. If you were doing nursing and you weren't legally married then they won't keep you. On the 26<sup>th</sup> March 1966, my first child was born.

All my friends happened to be white people. I met some of them at work, especially Irish people. I didn't mix a lot with my own people. I used to mix with white people because I loved Bingo. I was the only black face in the Bingo hall. People accepted me, they used to say "she's one of us". I love the game. The largest amount I ever won was £1,500. I remember that night, I said to my friend 'if you win, you share it with me, if I win, I'll share it with you'. But she said 'No way!' And then I won £1,500. I still gave her £200. I still play Bingo, but I can't get to the Bingo hall anymore. I run a game here every Tuesday in the lounge.

Mary