



DEBORAH GRANDISON INTERVIEW

Key:

EHdK: Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf (Interviewer)

DG: Deborah Grandison (Respondent)

Date/Location:

4th March 2023. St. Ann's Garrison, Barbados.

EHdK 00:02 I'm here today with Mrs Deborah Grandison who currently lives in Husbands, St James in Barbados. Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. We're going to talk through your story which, I think, is a very important one. And as I understand it, you were born in the UK in St George's Hospital in Tooting. Then at two-and-a-half years old, you came to live in Barbados. Initially in the UK, you were living with your grandparents and then you returned to Barbados and you were living with your uncle and his wife? Is that correct?

DG 00:57 Yes, that's correct.

EHdK 00:59 What do you remember about that time? I know you were very, very young. But when you were a very young child, what do you remember from that time?

DG 01:08 I remember it was fun at first. It was an experience for me coming up [to Barbados]. I would have gone to school. The composite school at five years old. It wasn't too far from where we were living. I remember going to church every Sunday. Three churches every Sunday. I remember being at the composite school, but I always felt I didn't make friends very easily back then. I also kept to myself a lot. I still do. And I would have gone to the Ellerslie Secondary School at 11.

EHdK 01:49 When you started attending school were you asked to show any paperwork or any documentation to be able to register at school?

DG 01:59 My stepmother, as I used to call her, or auntie, she would have been the person that would have been dealing with all of that. There was a lot of information that was kept from me over the years coming up.

EHdK 02:15 Were you aware when you were a young child that you had been born in the UK? Was that something that was commonly shared with you?

DG 02:21 My grandmother did, granny did tell me, but I didn't have a lot of contact with my mum. My mum was not allowed to return to Barbados for whatever reason. So, my grandmother used to come from England to visit me and return [to England] because she was working back then. But I didn't have a lot of contact with my mum.

EHdK 02:41 OK. I have here a copy of your birth certificate that you kindly shared with me that was issued when you were 13 years old. This was a certified copy of the birth certificate that would have been issued in the UK. Is that correct? Who would have applied for that birth certificate for you?

DG 03:06 I believe it would have been my grandmother. Granny.

EHdK 03:09 As we understand it, your grandma then applied for a certified copy of your birth certificate and then this was sent to Barbados. Why did you request this document?

DG 03:20 Why did granny request it?

EHdK 03:22 Yes. Why did your family request a copy of this document?

DG 03:23 I really don't know. Like I said, there's a lot of information that was kept from me coming up even in terms of trying to find relatives. I would have had a nanny for the two years that I would have been in England before I came here. I've been trying to find her too. Her, her husband, her mother. And to no avail.

EHdK 03:52 When did you start really exploring this issue about the fact that you were born in the UK, and you were brought up in Barbados? When did that start becoming a matter of concern to you?

DG 04:08 As I got older. And then I got married and I started having my own family and had my own kids. They would ask questions like, "Mummy, who's my granny? Who's my granddad?" and, "Mummy, were you born in Barbados?" Then I would have to explain to them what little information I did have. And I started asking questions. I would have gone to the British High Commission in Barbados.

EHdK 04:34 How many times did you visit the High Commission?

DG 04:37 I visited them like four times.

EHdK 04:39 And how old were you at that point?

DG 04:41 At that point in time, I would have had my first son. He's 29 now.

EHdK 04:47 And how many children do you have?

DG 04:49 At present, there are five. But they are adults now. I have two teenagers. Well, one is a teenager. He's 14 now.

EHdK 05:00 So your son was born and you decided to go to the British High Commission. With what aim? What did you want to find out?

DG 05:08 I wanted to get in contact with my mum Colleen. I was very interested in getting in contact with my mum back then. You know, he would have been my first child and I wanted her to be able to know where she was and send her pictures of her first grandson and things like that. But I never found her.

EHdK 05:27 What assistance, if any, did they offer you?

DG 05:32 They had promised to look into the information. I kept being told to come back. The person that would be dealing with it is not available. They gave me an appointment. I would have gone and then they would have said they had to reschedule it. I was turned around a lot basically.

EHdK 05:50 Can you remember what year that was more or less? Around the time your son was born, when would that have been?

DG 05:55 He would have been about seven when that happened. He's 29 now so 22 years ago. It would have been around 11 years ago as we're in 2023 now.

EHdK 06:08 Okay, so you started having questions for yourself.

DG 06:13 I did because my kids kept asking too and I wanted to know.

EHdK 06:17 Did you encounter any obstacles at all here in Barbados? Did you have any form of ID or any kind of official documentation here? Was there any time when you had any problems either in your employment or with an official because you were born in the UK?

DG 06:39 I did. At first, my first encounter probably would have been at the British High Commission. I was turned around a lot. A lot.

EHdK 06:47 Tell me about that.

DG 06:49 Like I was saying, I already went to them. I could not get an appointment to see the person. There was one lady. I don't remember her name. There was a lady who had tried her best to help. I also spoke with Mr Peter Simmons [Peter Patrick Kenneth Simmons] who would have been the High Commissioner at that point in time [Peter Patrick Kenneth Simmons was the Barbados High Commissioner to the UK, 1997-2000]. Now that gives you an idea as to the year because he would have been the British High Commissioner at the point [he was the Barbados High Commissioner to the UK]. He tried to help but that only

went so far. And then he had promised to put me onto somebody who could help me further, but nothing came of that.

EHdK 07:24 Okay, the help we were requesting from the High Commission was help to locate your mother at that point? It wasn't about your status?

DG 07:36 It was about everything. But I wasn't clear. I found out when I went to my relatives. I was turned around. There was a lot of information wasn't given. My grandmother subsequently she passed on so then there would have been information that she would have had that I was not privy to.

EHdK 07:56 How did that situation develop about your visits to the High Commission? You tried to find out information about your mother.

DG 08:06 I started asking questions that I didn't have answers to and there was nobody to help me. Since I was born there [Britain], I was told by a friend of mine to check with the British High Commission that they normally would assist people like me with that information. So, when I went to them, I was surprised by the way I was turned around and it didn't go anywhere.

EHdK 08:28 Because, essentially, you were going to them as a British citizen requesting help from overseas.

DG 08:39 Yes, I was. And it wasn't really treated like it was necessary or important. I was quite hurt, to be honest. Quite hurt and disappointed.

EHdK 08:54 You mentioned to me that you've been in contact with a number of people in the UK, as well, about your specific case. Can you tell me how that came to be?

DG 09:07 I was at the Oistins, Miami Beach and it's there I met Reverend Buddy Larrier. I would have known him from before with working with the Pan-African Affairs movement. I'm actually featured in one of his books as well. My story is in one of his books.

EHdK 09:35 What does he say about your story in his book?

DG 09:38 He finds it quite interesting. And he was the first person that put me onto the Windrush scheme and informed me of what was going on. He said he knew for a lot of years I was interested in locating my mum. A lot of our family is so widely separated because it's like 70-something cousins and my mum would have had seven other kids. I'm the oldest of eight and I know none of my sisters or my brothers.



EHdK 10:08 Are they in the UK?

DG 10:10 I am assuming they are because of the fact that we've never been in contact with one another since she would have had us. I did receive a call from Child Welfare Services in connection with a sister. Her name was Angela and she would have been suffering from sickle cell. They wanted me to take her and, at that point in time, I was not in a financial position to be able to do that. Unfortunately, I couldn't and that's the only little connection I would have had. I regret that to this day.

EHdK 10:45 What do you remember about your mother. Was she working at the time in London?

DG 10:50 I really don't know because of her mental state, I was not told anything about her.

EHdK 10:55 And you don't know how she came to live in the UK?

DG 11:00 From what I was told by my uncle, they were trying to separate my mother and my dad. I don't know why. And the problem is, she was taken back to England. From what my uncle told me, my father had relatives in Barbados and he would come here and as she's here, they would meet up.

EHdK 11:24 So you've been in contact with Reverend Buddy Larrier who was interested in your story. Who else then did he put you in contact with?

DG 11:39 Mr Rowland Houslin who would be following my story from the time he was told about it up until this point.

EHdK 11:46 And what interest has there been in your story? What specifically is it about your situation that has sparked the interest of people?

DG 11:58 The fact that I was in England. I would have been born up there and would not have been able to be allowed to return to the UK. The fact that there was no follow-up into my case.

EHdK 12:13 So you tried to travel to the UK? What year was that?

DG 12:21 That would have been...a long way back. My son would have been about seven years old. He's nine now.

EHdK 12:39 So in the 1990s more or less?

DG 12:40 Yes around that point. He's 29-years-old now.



EHdK 12:41 How did you try and travel to the UK? What process did you follow?

DG 12:49 I went to the British High Commission. I also spoke to Mr Keith Simmons who would have been the British High Commissioner [Peter Patrick Kenneth Simmons was the Barbados High Commissioner to the UK, 1997-2000]. I was also asked to speak to Mr Hamilton Lashley [Barbadian parliamentarian and former Minister of Social Transformation] who would have been the person in charge of family services and things like that. I went to his office. He had told me he would arrange a passage for me to go to England and all that. And that was it, it never came about.

EHdK 13:28 But what specifically were you looking for from the High Commission? What did you want? A British passport? Is that what you were trying to apply for?

DG 13:34 Yes, I was. And I basically wanted to know where my mum was and how she was doing. I wanted to get in contact with her. I thought that was necessary and important.

EHdK 13:43 But why were you unable to apply for a British passport given that you were born in the UK at a time when you would have had automatic right to UK citizenship? And you had a birth certificate? What was stopping you, were they saying, you from applying via the High Commission?

DG 14:00 They never gave me an explanation. They never gave me an explanation.

EHdK 14:05 What did they say?

DG 14:07 All they said to me is that the person that is specifically responsible for dealing with this situation is not available. Whenever we went to them, that's all they told me. They never said anything. Nobody called me. Nobody followed up. Nothing like that.

EHdK 14:20 Did you fill out any type of application form to apply for a British passport?

DG 14:26 No, I was never given anything like that. I just showed them the information I would have. Back then I would have had a Barbados passport. And that's it.

EHdK 14:35 How many times did you return to the High Commission?

DG 14:40 I went to them four times over a period of a couple of years I would have gone back to them.

EHdK 14:47 But you never submitted any formal application or anything?

DG 14:51 No.

EHdK 14:55 So what is it that you would like ideally in this situation? What would you like to be able to...?

DG 15:08 I would like all of my relatives to know one another. I would like us to be together at some point. I would like my sisters and all their nephews and their nieces. I would like to meet my sisters as I've never met them. I think it's crazy that you could pass your sister in Bridgetown and not know she's your sister. It's crazy.

EHdK 15:34 Have you applied for a Barbadian passport?

DG 15:38 I have. It needs to be renewed. It would have been misplaced as well. I need a new one.

EHdK 15:45 Are you able to travel to the UK on a Barbadian passport?

DG 15:50 I am not sure, I believe so [Barbadians currently can travel to the UK for tourism purposes without needing to apply for a visa]. But it would be a lot easier with a British passport. A new British passport.

EHdK 15:57 So how do you feel about your interactions with the British High Commission?

DG 16:02 I was very hurt and disappointed. What I would have had with them over the years. I felt as though my story and the mental aches and pains, the psychological effect that would have had on me. It's my mum. I really wanted to get to know her because the last time I would have seen her...she came back to Barbados when I was four as far as I remember. That's the last time I would have seen her. I don't have any recollection of her. I don't have a picture of her.

EHdK 16:35 When you said to the High Commission officials that you wanted a British passport, did they ask for any additional documentation or for you to bring any proof?

DG 16:47 No, I was just told that the person wasn't available and that I would need to come back. Or I would need to make an appointment and when I tried to make an appointment, they would say just come back. And I kept going back.

EHdK 16:59 When was the last time that you tried going back [to the British High Commission]?

DG 17:01 That would have been when I had my when my son. A lot of years ago.

EHdK 17:09 Have you heard then about issues over people in the Caribbean having problems in accessing their documents? Is this something that you were made aware of?

DG 17:24 It was by Reverend Larrier.

EHdK 17:30 What did Reverend Larrier say to you?

DG 17:33 He had mentioned that there is a scheme. That's when I first knew about the Windrush [compensation] Scheme because he spoke to me about it on the beach.

EHdK 17:39 The Windrush Compensation Scheme?

DG 17:42 Yes, he would have mentioned it to me. Kindly mentioned it to me. And that's when I was made aware. And I do know of other people who are in the same situation as myself. But some people do not like to be in the limelight and some people like to stay in the background. And I find that is a problem that we have in the Caribbean. A lot of people don't like to come forward and speak out.

EHdK 18:16 Have any of your peer or any colleagues or any friends of yours, have they got a similar story to you?

DG 18:23 Yes but they're not willing to come forward. That's the problem. I've been trying to speak to people and let them know about my story in Barbados. I've gotten responses that you know what, I just don't want to be involved in that. Let bygones be bygones and they're done.

EHdK 18:40 So are these people that would like to travel to the UK but feel that they've been prevented from doing so?

DG 18:47 A lot of people are frustrated. They're very frustrated. I've been told, people have told me...there's too much red tape to go through. It takes too long. They don't have that time and people are going along with their lives. They just can't be bothered. They've been turned around a lot and they just think that if they're going to get the same thing again. So, they don't want go back down the road.



EHdK 19:12 But also people from Barbados can travel to the UK without a visa. So, if you've got a Barbadian passport, you can now enter the UK for a limited period of time, but you don't need a visa. Which is a different situation to people I've been speaking to, for example, in Jamaica who have even more red tape in the sense that they have to apply for an entry visa as well. So, in that sense, in Barbados the situations are a little different because people can travel as Barbadians. But what you're telling me is that they're still finding problems over being able to access their UK documentation which they have a right to access because, as in your case, you are British. You were born a British citizen. In that sense, you should be able to acquire a UK passport from the British authorities here [nb passport applications are sent for processing overseas, not in Barbados]. I'm just interested about the other people you know that have encountered similar problems. What did you hear about the scandal itself? Did you see that in the news?

DG 20:40 I heard it through word of mouth.

EHdK 20:44 Would that be from your church or from your work colleagues?

DG 20:51 Mr Larrier had spoken to me at his book launch. And that's when it made me sad because when he had his book launch, I would have gone to his book launch. I don't have that date in my head. But I did attend the book launch. That was in an event at Bridgetown. I have copies of his books as well so I would have read, I would have made myself familiar. Even when I was at the book launch, I would have read the information on the flyers and stuff that were printed and the information that was on the wall and in the library upstairs. I then started looking into it more and on Zoom meetings as well twice a month.

EHdK 21:31 Tell me about the Zoom meetings. What do they consist in?

DG 21:35 They're interesting, very interesting. They let you know about a lot more about the scheme.

EHdK 21:40 What's the name of the meetings?

DG 21:44 The Windrush scheme.

EHdK 21:47 The one in the UK?

DG 21:48 That's it.



EHdK 21:55 So you've been participating in those zoom links. So that's been a way for you to then connect with people living in the UK about their issues as well. What have you learnt from those meetings?

DG 22:01 There are other people who are like me. It's amazing how I would have been, you know, made very comfortable by people who are dealing with this first-hand every day. They hear the stories and they see the people. We are over a system where we talk, and we can see people's faces and stuff like that. And I get more compassion or understanding from people who are thousands of miles away from me than I've gotten from the Barbadian persons here. That's sad. It's very, very sad.

EHdK 22:44 Also, what do you think about the situation for your children?

DG 22:50 It's hard for them as well. It is. Because they don't know their aunties. They don't know their granny. Their great-grandmother, she would have been passed on now. But they don't know their granny. They don't know their granddaddy. You know? My kids, they are not kids anymore. My oldest is 29. My daughter above him is 21. Then I have a 19-year-old daughter as well. Then I have a son was 14 and the smallest is 10. And they have no contact whatsoever with anybody in Jamaica where my father was originally from. Or my mother. Or my sisters or my brother. That's sad, that's very sad.

EHdK 23:34 So beyond going in person to the High Commission to request help and support in getting a passport and also speaking with Reverend Buddy Larrier and connecting with the Windrush zoom meetings. Have you gone anywhere else who spoken to anyone else about your issues?

DG 23:57 I have not apart from Mr Peter Simmons [Barbados High Commissioner to the UK] from years ago and Mr Hamilton Lashley.

EHdK 24:09 So Peter Simmons was the former High Commissioner. He was the British [Barbados] High Commissioner in the 1990s? I will have to check that. We will have to check that. So, you spoke with him personally. Why did he come and speak with you? Was it because you requested a meeting with him? Did you try and approach him at any public event as well?

DG 24:38 No, I spoke just with British High Commission.

EHdK 24:41 So what did High Commissioner Peter Simmons say to you? Can you remember? And how much time did he spend with you?

DG 24:49 Not much. I had one meeting with him [the former Barbados High Commissioner to the UK]. He had promised to follow it up. And he didn't. I assumed he didn't. I don't know if we got cut off or what.

EHdK 24:58 But what was your specific request?

DG 25:01 I went in with my story. I told him the whole thing...I came from when I was a baby. I wanted to get back in contact with my mum in England. I gave him all the information. My British passport, I sent in straight as well because I would have moved from one address to another.

EHdK 25:19 You've never held a British passport?

DG 25:20 I have.

EHdK 25:21 You have. Oh, ok. Tell me more about that please.

DG 25:22 I have but it's been misplaced.

EHdK 25:24 Sorry, so your British passport. You had that when you were a baby. And did you leave the UK on your British passport? Tell me about that as well.

DG 25:37 I would have come here with that as a baby. That is the one thing I had that I held on to, in a little case, but it's now gone.

EHdK 25:44 So we have evidence that you were clearly born in the UK, registered in the UK. Born to a Jamaican father and a Barbadian mother but at a time which was in 1973 when you would have acquired British nationality by birth. And you returned to Barbados on a UK passport, not a Barbadian passport. What happened to that passport?

DG 26:17 That disappeared. I've never put it in anybody's hand, it just disappeared. I did have one but that has my picture in it as a little girl when I came. You know, I still remember the picture.

EHdK 26:30 So, you lost that passport and then years later you attempted to get a new one and that process at the High Commission led nowhere?

DG 26:43 No, it did not because of financial constraints and difficulties with work and stuff like that here in Barbados. I would have been shuffling from one address to another with my kids. Because my first son, yeah. And then I had my daughter years after. There are documents that would have been misplaced because my Barbadian passport that was misplaced as well.

EHdK 27:07 What do you want now? What are you looking for now? Because I know that you've been finding out about the Compensation Scheme. What is it that you want?

DG 27:27 Because my financial situation is so rough, my kids are now grown. The last one is 10. I'm not able to afford [to send] my son to a club and he's very talented. Also, the 14-year-old is interested in science. He's on a scholarship. They're both very, very smart. One is into science, and one is into sports. I'm not able to afford certain things for my sons that I would love to be able to afford.

EHdK 28:09 Are you in a situation that you haven't applied for a British passport now because you can't afford the fees?

DG 28:15 At the moment, yes.

EHdK 28:16 Because you can't afford the fees. What support then are you seeking at the moment? Would you apply again?

DG 28:32 If it's possible, I would like to be compensated. That money could be taken then invested into getting a British passport and being able to afford a better way of life and stuff like that.

EHdK 28:46 Is there anything else you want to tell me about your story?

DG 28:55 I am really thankful that people like yourself and Reverend Larrier have taken the time to relate and recognise that this situation is a situation that is very important. Extremely important. There's nothing more important than family. And then you have a situation that we have people spread all over and they're not able to connect. And then when you try to connect the authorities or the people who are in charge who can actually do something about your situation, they are just sitting back, or they can't be bothered. Or something like that. And then the sad part about it is that by the time somebody does decide to do something about it, you have relatives who have died. In my case, because in my situation, my uncle that would have taken me here in Barbados and raised me, he's gone as well. My granny is gone. My granddaddy is gone. I don't know if my mum and my father are alive because I'm not in contact with them. I don't know them. So, I don't know if they're even alive. It's sad. It's very sad.

EHdK 30:02 Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today. Deborah, you told me that a few months ago, you tried once more to go to the British High Commission? Can you tell me about that experience please?

DG 30:18 Yes, my oldest son would have been with me, Shaquille. We were told when we got through the security that we couldn't enter the building back then. It was COVID times.

That would have been months ago. As far as I remember, back in September or earlier last year 2022. We were told that we couldn't come into the building. And if you were interested in applying for a passport, as we said, which would have been in my case, just go online and check or ask somebody. But the gentleman did not even stay five minutes with us to explain any information or anything like that. He was more interested in getting this from the security box.

EHdK 31:01 How did that make you feel?

DG 31:06 Disrespected, so to speak. And hurt. I was like, not this again. All over again. I mean, this is years gone on and you're basically getting the same response. It's not that easy to go online because sometimes you try to get online, and you're cut off. Sometimes you put in the information late. I did go online. I was trying to get on. And when I trying to get the photo, I sent the photo three different times, and I was told that it was not accepted.

EHdK 31:45 Because it has to fit certain criteria. Did you send a digital copy of your photograph? Did you go and get your photograph taken?

DG 31:53 No, I tried to take it on my phone from home. And I got three responses back saying that it's not accepted.

EHdK 32:01 Do you have a computer at home? Where did you use the computer?

DG 32:07 It was a desktop at home.

EHdK 32:11 Did somebody help you with that?

DG 32:12 My son.

EHdK 32:13 I think from what you've been telling me, the digital application. The fact that you're being asked to do things online and do things via a computer, you're finding that very difficult. In what way are you finding that very difficult?

DG 32:34 Because you're being asked to take these steps and you're doing it and then it's not being accepted. You're trying to find out why it's not being accepted. I never gotten back a response from that as well. I've never gotten back a response. So, I've never gotten anywhere apart from going to the British High Commission. They had asked to take the photo. I took the photo. I took three or four photos. That's as far as we got.

EHdK 33:01 As I understand it, in the past you were able to actually speak to High Commission staff, but what's the situation like now? Are you able to speak to a person?

DG 33:13 No, we didn't get past the security box. We were told that, "Is there anything else?" And we said that we were just here to find out about applying for a British passport. He said, "Well, I've already spoken to you, and I've already told you. You can ask someone else, or you can go online." And I explained to him that we tried and we're not getting on and the photo is not being accepted. He said, "Well, there is nothing else that I can tell you then."

EHdK 33:40 Okay, Deborah, thank you for your time.

[END OF AUDIOFILE].