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BIOGRAPHY OF A CENTENARIAN: MAJORIE ROACH OF BARBADOS AND TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
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Abstract

This research aims to add to the historical records of the Caribbean region by chronicling the life of Marjorie Roach, a 102 year old centenarian of both Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. Important events such as World War II and the Barbados Labour Riots of 1937, in which Marjorie lived through, are documented in this research paper together with the testimonies of those who have been cared for by her and those who presently are her caregivers. This document aims to show, through the life experiences of Marjorie, that the elderly despite their age possess information that is important to the historiography of our country and region.
Introduction

Title of Thesis
Biography of a Centenarian: Marjorie Roach of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

Objective of Thesis

It has been my experience prior to my interviews with Mrs. Roach that the elderly among us have had experiences that are worth documenting and adding to the historical records. I wish to add to the historical records of the Caribbean by documenting the life of one of our own centenarians against the background of regional and international events which unfolded around her.

Literature Review

The book “Ageing in the Caribbean”, edited by Dr. Joan Rawlins and Dr. Nicole Alea, contains research from 12 scholars from the Caribbean region that addresses the well-being of senior citizens in the Caribbean. It also highlights some of the issues that senior citizens of the region, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados, encounter. These issues range from the perception of the elderly in society, their mental and physical health, the availability of social services to assist them, the willingness of seniors to learn new things, the elderly as breadwinners with dependent adults in the household and difficulties in accessing social services for the ageing. Although this book gives its readers an insight into a very wide range of issues that senior citizens of these different Caribbean countries experience, as it pertains to social welfare for the elderly, it does not pay particular attention to the personal stories that are stored up in the elderly:
the invaluable knowledge that the aged among us possess as it relates to the history of our region, countries and communities. There is solidarity with the data enclosed and shared by the writers of this book. However, understanding that there exists among us men and women who have lived through historical events globally, regionally and domestically should also be included in a discourse such as this.

Another publication that addresses some concerns of the ageing population in Caribbean countries is a 2012, document by the Pan American Health Organization called, “Guidelines for Mainstreaming the Needs of Older Persons in Disaster Situations.” This document delineates some difficulties older persons of Caribbean countries such as the British Virgin Islands, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Grenada and Suriname are faced with during disasters and presents solutions that “should be considered and implemented at different operational levels, from the national policy level through sub-national, facility and individual levels.” Some recommended areas of action the PAHO believes should be implemented are care facilities, and shelters, in the wake of hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes. Additionally, provisions for the food and nutrition, and the mental health and psychosocial support of the elderly in disaster situations are also included in this report. Despite these well founded concerns and provisions for the elderly the publication, to a large extent, focuses on meeting the physical needs of the aged, but does not give its readers reasons, beyond their safety, why it is important to ensure that the elderly are supported. A failure to recognize that senior citizens are more than just people we should take care of, but are in addition people from whom we can learn is a drawback in this publication.
Another text that is relevant to this topic is “World War II And The Caribbean”, edited by Karen E. Eccles and Debbie McCollin. This book contains the contributions of several writers who examine impacts of World War II on the Caribbean region. Issues of trade and food production and shortages, civil unrest in some islands concerning American and European imperialism as well as immigration concerns, and the experiences of women in the area of volunteerism and prostitution are some topics addressed in this book. Although this work provides significant data about the economic and social challenges and victories experienced by some Caribbean nations during World War II, it does not provide personal testimonies of Caribbean people who would have lived during this time and witnessed or were directly involved in the developments highlighted in this book.

Another major sub theme of this research is the Barbados labour riots of the 1930s. One publication which has specialized in this subject is Richard Hart’s “Labour rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean region colonies.” The study provides sufficient details about the circumstances surrounding labour rebellions in the Caribbean. One specific section within the article titled “The Labour Rebellion in Barbados”, focuses on a very influential leader of the labour movement in Barbados in 1937, Clement Payne and explains his influence over the black working class concerning labour rights and his attempt to form a trade union. Hart also gives insight into the colonial authorities’ disdain for Payne and the methods they employed in deporting him from Barbados to Trinidad. This expulsion led to days of riots that damaged the properties and injured and killed many in both urban and rural areas of Barbados. The article supports Marjorie’s
testimonial about what she witnessed during the riots, but her testimony personalized the experiences of this volatile period in the history of Barbados.

Arthur Lewis, a contributor in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd’s edited book titled *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present*, also gives some insight into the Barbados Labour Riots of 1937, in his chapter, “The 1930s Social Revolution.” In this chapter Lewis, like Hart delves into the causes of the labour riots in Barbados in 1937. Lewis identifies its participants, chronicles the responses of members of the public who engaged in rioting and analyses the reactions of the national defence and some members of the political faction who ruled during this period. However, Lewis puts forward more information by way of official reports to support his research. This evidence also aids in supporting Marjorie’s personal accounts of the event.

My interviews with Mrs. Marjorie Roach have caused me to become purposely aware of the elderly among us. I am fortunate to interact regularly some of these aged folks such as my neighbours and grandmothers. Deep within these individuals are oral histories that have not yet been documented and that are integral to the history of our communities, the Caribbean region and the wider world by extension. My aim is to add to the historical records of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago by documenting the experiences of one of our region’s centenarians. In addition to adding to the historical discourse of our region, I also would like the readers of my research to understand that the elderly among us should always be cherished for they possess potent and relevant knowledge for which we need not look far to uncover.
Parameters of the Study

Specific moments of Marjorie Roach’s life in both Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago from the year 1915 to 2018 are documented and particular members of her family and community such as her parents, siblings, teachers and friends are highlighted in this thesis. Her experiences during World War II and the Barbados Labour Riots of 1936, while a citizen of Barbados as well her marriage, emigration to Trinidad in 1945 and family dynamics are also documented. Some themes explored in this thesis are relationships, experiences and reflection.

Methodology

Primary and secondary sources were used to collect data for this research. A total of five face to face interviews were conducted with Marjorie Roach, her daughters Shirley Adams and Patricia Roach as well as her great niece Doreen Devonish- Hinds. Additionally, multiple scholarly books and articles written on World War II and the Caribbean’s involvement and the 1937 Barbados Labour Riots were utilized to give an overview of and support the information taken from the interviews.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this research paper summarizes the life of Marjorie Roach. It looks at her experiences and interactions with her family and friends in Barbados and Trinidad.

Chapter two examines two notable historical events through which Marjorie lived through. These events were World War II and the Barbados Labour Riots of 1937.
Scholarly overviews are provided for each topic, followed by Marjorie’s accounts of her experiences during these events.

Finally, in the third chapter Marjorie’s personal feelings regarding her age as well as her family’s are documented. The celebration of her 100th birthday and four of the most important events of her life are also discussed.
Chapter 1 – The Life of Marjorie Roach in Barbados and Trinidad

Marjorie Primrose Roach was born on October 10, 1915, in Carrington Village, St. Michael, Barbados. Her family later relocated to Bank Hall and finally, Bush Hall, St. Michael, where they lived on two plots of land. Her parents; Charles Devonish and Gertrude Devonish, were both Barbadian. Her siblings consisted of Shirley her oldest brother, Violet her oldest sister and her other siblings were John, Barbsy, Frank and Pitman. They were all born in Barbados. Marjorie, is the sixth of the seven children and the self-described baby girl of the family.

Marjorie Roach describes her mother as a sweet lady, with a clear complexion and thin straight hair that would not stay in plaits. Her mother was the breadwinner of the family and worked at Bishops Court, Barbados where she served as head cook and pastry chef to Bishop David Bentley and his family who were Irish. Marjorie remembers helping her mother, along with her siblings, to wash the kitchen wares at nights and having to hide behind the door in the pantry so as not to be seen by the Bentley’s when they came down to instruct their mother and the kitchen staff, who were under their mother, about what to prepare for meals.

Marjorie Roach’s father, however was not as influential in her life as he left the family when she was eight years old. Charles Devonish was a carpenter and joiner by trade and a teacher at a Boys High School in Bridgetown, Barbados. Marjorie describes him as a tall, good looking and dark skinned man who as she bluntly puts it, “liked the skirts.” She confesses that she did not have a close relationship with her father but is proud that she bears some resemblance to him.

Marjorie Roach attended Hindsbury Primary (Girls) School, St. Michael, Barbados and admits that she was not a scholar. She had a difficult time grasping what was taught in classes, especially Math, but found dictation enjoyable. She remembers the school being mostly attended
by children of African descent, with white children being in the minority. Marjorie recalls the names of her School Mistress, Ms. Light and her teacher, Ms. Hunt who were both strict. At age fifteen, as she and other girls her age were preparing to enter into High School, Marjorie decided not to. Her oldest brother Shirley was prepared to pay for her to attend High School, but she declined because she found the subjects difficult to understand and so reasoned with him not to send her as she believed it would be a waste of his money. She, however was not idle and immediately took up sewing with her neighbour, Mrs. Armstrong, whom she praises for having taught her how to sew.

Mrs. Rita Armstrong was the wife of a police officer, Mr. Armstrong, who Mrs. Roach adored and describes as a nice man, who was never troubled and always sat on a bench outside his home. He would be the one she ran to break up fights between her older brothers Shirley and John, a memory she found quite amusing. Mrs. Armstrong, she proudly recounts, “learn me how to cut pants. To make man pants and jacket.” Mrs. Armstrong, she recalls was a mulatto woman or in her words, “half white and half black.” Mrs. Roach continued to be a seamstress throughout her life in Barbados and continued working with Mrs. Armstrong. Her other colleague was a woman by the name of Cariss Pilgrim, who through relaying family stories found out that they were related on her father’s side. When asked if they had a business name she answered no, but they were known in their community for sewing. Most of her clients she fondly remembers were brides, brides’ maids and police officers.

Marjorie sewed police shirts in a shop over the Swing Bridge in Bridgetown, with three other women, one of whom was her sister-in-law. She was quite descriptive in the process and discipline it took to sew police shirts and bridal dresses. “When we had bride work, Cariss would put us inside the bedroom to sew because bride work is a thing you can not touch plenty. Right?
It does get dirty quick, so you cannot sew bride clothes with sweaty hand.” In speaking and listing to Mrs. Roach her passion for sewing was quiet evident.

At the age of twenty-eight she met her husband Dudley Theophilus Roach, who she describes as an “alright man”, and an inch taller than her. Her mind is quite sharp and remembers vividly how they met, their courtship and their wedding day. Dudley and Marjorie met, as she was on her way to purchase salt fish one evening. As she walked along Savannah road near her home, she observed in her own words, “this mister with a box, a box of tools and the saw pointing through it. And in my going he coming with this box and I go and I maliciously take up the box and walk a lil ways with it and say lemme see how heavy the tool box is.” After taking a couple steps forward she could no longer bare the strain and returned the tool box to him. After this act, Marjorie recalls being concerned because soon after he found out where she lived. As a result, she says she sternly warned him not to visit her home, for fear of the reprimand she would receive from her mother should he. Dudley lived nine miles from her home in St. Joseph and worked as a carpenter. He would sometimes sleep at the home of his co-worker, Mr. King when he was too tired to commute home on his bicycle. He was always welcomed by the Kings, Marjorie explains, and was sometimes called “boyfriend” playfully by Mrs’ King. The King’s, she says, thought of Dudley as their son because they had no children of their own.

After their first meeting Dudley ignored her warning and visited her home regularly, specifically to talk with her mother, who always welcomed his visits. Marjorie did not like this and ignored him whenever he visited. She says, “I would say goodnight, go to church, come back he say goodnight and that was it. When he ready, he get up and went home. Me didn’t like he at all. I did not like him at all.” When asked why she did not like him at that time, her response was that she liked someone else in her district. A young man by the name of Frank Taylor, who was
tall. She confessed jokingly that she was attracted to taller men. However, her feelings for the tall Frank Taylor would remain at that because her mother disapproved of Frank citing that he had nothing to offer her. Marjorie memorized her mother’s exact words to her about Frank Taylor, “I see she there with Frank. Frank eh have nothing to offer she and when anything, Frank eh working. He eh have no trade. He eh have nothin and she deh behind Frank”. Marjorie Roach finds this memory quite amusing. Needless to say she did not choose Frank Taylor and one particular incident which tipped the scales in favour of Dudley was her witnessing his interaction with another young lady.

One day, on one of his regular visits to her home, Frank Taylor stopped to chat with a young woman who apparently was visiting Marjorie’s next door neighbour. She remembers getting upset at the sight of the two in conversation and saying to herself, “Yuh see that. I so stupid. I don’t want to talk to the boy, but she could come from where ever she come from and go and find talk for him.” It was at this point she decided to engage Dudley in conversation. The two eventually began courting which made her mother very happy.

Dudley and Marjorie married on June 28, 1945, both at the age of twenty-eight, but prior to their union, Dudley left Barbados for Trinidad on a government contract. They were separated for approximately five months before he sent a letter asking her to join him in Trinidad, to which she responded by telling him that her mother would never approve of her coming since they were not married. It was then he returned to Barbados on vacation leave and married Marjorie. Their wedding she says, “Well, my wedding was short because he did just come back on holiday. That was his holiday from the government, so we had to marry quick because the days was short. So didn’t have no big wedding.” At her wedding her father did not give her away but instead, Mr. Armstrong. She says that she had decided from early on that if she were ever to marry that Mr.
Armstrong would be the man who would give her away. Marjorie credits her father’s leaving the family and her lack of fatherly love towards him for making this decision.

After marring, Marjorie Devonish became Mrs. Marjorie Primrose Devonish Roach and accompanied her husband to Trinidad in 1945. She first settled in San Fernando at the residence of her older brother John for five months and then relocated to Cunupia with her husband. Later, they moved to Pasea, Tunapuna and finally, Jubilee Street, Tunapuna, where she lives presently. Marjorie continued working as a seamstress in Trinidad and Dudley worked for Town and Country on the railways as a carpenter foreman. When asked if she found adjusting to Trinidad difficult she said it was not because she had her husband and her brother John as well.

Marjorie sewed only from home and when asked why she didn’t work outside her home she said her husband did not want her to. She remembers one time a female acquaintance came to her telling her about a job vacancy, and upon hearing their conversation her husband swiftly declined on her behalf. She remembers exactly what he said to her afterwards, “You does do yuh work home. You does take in yuh lil sewing home. Wahyuhgoin to run yuhs elf out now when de morning come? I working for as much will keep you. You not going and work nowhere.” His explanation she recalls was done in a gentle manner and she respected his stance because he was true to his promise and provided well for her and their children.

Dudley and Marjorie Roach are parents to three children. Shirley is the first born and oldest girl. Patricia is the second and only of the three to be born in Barbados and Randolph Theophilus Roach is the last child and only son. Marjorie is the mother in-law of Dave Adams, her oldest daughter Shirley’s husband and is the grandmother of three, Kerry Adams, Kyle Winn-Roach and Keion Winn-Roach.
Chapter 2 – Historical Events in the life of Marjorie Roach

- World War II

Men of the British West Indian Regiment (BWIR) cleaning their rifles, Albert- Amiens Road, September 1916. Image courtesy Turks and Caicos Preservation Foundation

The life of Marjorie Roach unfolded during the great conflict known as World War II. World War II was a military conflict fought largely in Europe, which lasted from 1939 to 1945 and involved two groups of countries- the “Allies”, made up of Britain, France, Russia and the United States and the “Axes”, which comprised of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan. Different factors caused World War II, but the 1919, Treaty of Versailles, Germany’s breach of the Treaty’s agreement and the failure of the British and French governments to check Germany, are three of the major causes.
The Treaty of Versailles, known also as “The Unhappy Compromise”, was signed on June 28, 1919. It was a peace agreement that brought to an end World War I between Germany and the Allied powers. Writer Robert Wilde, in *Treaty of Versailles- An Overview*, states that its intent was to “ensure a lasting peace by punishing Germany and to set up a League of Nations to solve diplomatic problems.” Even though World War I was a direct result of Austria- Hungary’s declaration of war on Serbia, and Germany being pulled into battle because of their alliance with Austria- Hungary, many saw Germany as the aggressor and ultimately the author of the First World War. This was reflected in the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Germany, through the treaty, was made to accept full responsibility for the war and was forced to pay 6,600 million pounds for the damages caused by the war. The agreement also took land away from Germany and gave it to countries such as, Poland and Denmark, and stipulated that the Rhineland was to be a demilitarized zone. Furthermore, military restrictions were imposed on Germany. The army was “limited to 100,000 men, with no tanks or heavy artillery: the navy was to have no warships of over 10,000 tonnes, and no submarines; there was to be no military or naval aviation. Not least, the German General Staff…was to be dissolved.” (P.M.H. Bell 2007: 19) As one could imagine, the Germans were unhappy with these harsh terms which they claimed demanded much more of them than they could pay. As a result, Germany complained of economic suffering and harboured resentment towards the Allied powers, which manifested itself in the views of a rising politician named Adolf Hitler and his nationalist party and their breaking of the terms of the treaty. In the end, the Treaty of Versailles helped provoke exactly what it aimed to prevent, the start of another World War.

On September 1st, 1939, Germany invaded Poland in direct breach of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However, this was only one manifestation of Germany’s utter disregard for the
agreement. Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler and his political party called the National Socialists or Nazi, Hitler promised to make Germany great again and began to arm Germany again and to seize land from neighbouring countries. At the beginning of 1935, “Germany was building up a sizeable air force” (Ruth Henig 1985: 19). A year later Germany invaded the Rhineland without any opposition from the Allied powers of Britain and France.

Later in 1938, Hitler, marched into Austria. Again, the Allied powers failed to enforce the terms of the treaty and to reprimand Germany for their deliberate breeches of the signed agreement. As a result, Czechoslovakia was invaded on March 1939, followed finally by the invasion of Poland in September that same year, which marked the beginning of the six yearlong military conflict of World War II. The Second World War saw the deaths of an estimated 70 million people worldwide. It was a war fought not only by ‘Allied’ and ‘Axis’ countries, but by colonies and territories, such as those found in the British West Indies.

An estimated 10,000 West Indians from the British Commonwealth, volunteered for service alongside the British during the Second World War. Claire Brennan, in *Soldiers of the Caribbean: Britain's forgotten war heroes*, says, “Some 10,000 left their families and homes to join the British armed forces, working behind the scenes and on the frontline to defeat the Nazis.” These men and women served in different positions, such as members of the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) in British Military Hospitals, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Canadian Air Force as fighter pilots and air gunners. One of the most dangerous services that Caribbean Sea men in particular served in was the Merchant Navy. German U-Boats bombed and sunk a large number of merchant ships which primarily supplied food such as sugar, food, as well as oil to ‘Allied’ military bases and subsequently naval ships in America and Canada.
One documented attack on merchant vessels in the Caribbean was the torpedoing of the Cornwallis in Carlisle Bay, Barbados on the September 11th 1942, by German U-Boat 514. The Cornwallis suffered a series of two attacks by the Germans, according to Burt’s Jnr., in *Torpedoing of the Cornwallis in Carlisle Bay, Barbados, 11th September 1942: 75th Anniversary*. The writer states that the first attack left the ship with a, “44-foot-long and 14 foot deep hole in its side.” The vessel was then towed to Trinidad for repairs and on December 3rd, 1944, sixteen months later, the Cornwallis was again torpedoed and sunk by another German U-Boat, the U-1230. The Cornwallis’ destination was St. John, New Brunswick in Canada from Barbados. Burt’s Jnr., again in, *Torpedoing of the Cornwallis in Carlisle Bay, Barbados, 11th September 1942: 75th Anniversary*, writes that the ship was, “carrying a cargo of sugar in bags and molasses in barrels”, a testament to the operations and important duties of sea men of the Caribbean. In the attack only five survived, but the Master, 35 crew members and seven gunners, were killed.

This account is but one example of the impacts of the Second World War in British territories, as it relates to combat. In British territories such as Trinidad and Barbados, the daily lives of civilians, as well as food supplies to these countries, were disrupted. In Trinidad there was a “scarcity of imported food and other supply items for the civilian sector of the population.” (Pemberton 94). Staples, such as flour and rice, had to be imported from Britain, America and Canada “to supply the region with imported items.” (Pemberton 94). Barbados in particular implemented a food rationing system within the island, as told by Marjorie Roach, who lived in Barbados during the Second World War. She recalls each household in her community of St. Michael, Barbados being allowed only one pound of rice on days of distribution.
Marjorie Roach remembers World War II

Marjorie Roach was 24 years old and lived in Barbados when World War II began. Barbados did not play a major role in the Second World War, but being a British colony at the time of the war, Barbados like the rest of the Caribbean region was affected by the Great War. Marjorie says during this period Barbados experienced curfews, food rationing and cuts in various supplies to the island.

She describes the atmosphere in her community as “dark” during World War II. She recalls having a curfew and the street lights, as well as lights in houses and other buildings having to be turned off and blown out at a certain time. Lamp light was the main source of lighting for Marjorie’s home and other households in St. Michael, Barbados during this period. She says, “Dark. Like yuhcyah light no lamp in the house. And we used to have to sit down at the door to get light. Sit down at the house door nah to get street light from the street. And we had a post by us nah so it used to give us some light. But otherwise you couldn’t light a lamp inside the house. Ah certain time eh.”

Food rationing was another disruption in the lives of Barbadians that Marjorie remembers quite well. She says each family member, per household was given one pound of rice because the supply of this staple food in the island was limited. She recounts, “Them used to ration rice, one pound per family. One pound of rice for each person in the house. Right!? But there were seven of us.” Her family’s tactic for getting more rice was to spread out each family member in the collection lines and rotate them, so as not to be caught. She states, “we had to do something to get more food. So we used to put one in the front, one the third one, the next one is about the fifth. Right!?” She says this was necessary as her family had eight members at that time and
three pounds of rice was normally cooked each day to feed the household, and so what was given out was insufficient. Marjorie says that rice along with certain food items were free, but if one wanted other items, you would have to purchase it. She says her family kept a kitchen garden where they grew ground provisions such as potatoes, yams and eddoes. This helped feed them during the food rationing.

As mentioned earlier, Marjorie became a seamstress after leaving school. During World War II, she says, that although there was work for her and her co-workers, there was little cloth being imported into the country at that time. To have shirts made, her clients would use flour bags, which they called Jitterbug. She states, “Deh had a time no material was coming in the country. Right!? So the people had to go and buy flour bag in de shop. I used to make jitterbug shirts out of de flour bag for dem young boys.” Jitterbug was a thick flour bag of cotton material. Marjorie says that it was very strong and that people would wash these jitterbug bags lily white and bring it for her to be sewn into long sleeved and short sleeved shirts.

Marjorie also talks about the interaction between locals and the foreign naval sailors who were stationed in Barbados during the war. When asked if she mingled with or interacted with them her response was a firm “NO”. In fact, she and her siblings would run into their house and hide under their bed when they saw them walking up their street. She says, however that there were girls in her community, who she refers to as “wild girls” who did mingle with these sailors, even bringing them to their homes. She says, “Dem wild girls dem.Dey would bring dem home widdem. Not by we. They would carry the sailors by dem.”

In listening to Marjorie’s experiences during World War II, it is clear that Barbados’ trade supply was affected during the war, but despite these disruptions the population found creative
ways of providing for themselves. Whether it was by strategizing among one another to gather more food or utilizing materials found in unexpected ways to clothe themselves, the Barbadian population and indeed Marjorie, her family and her community were resourceful and resilient during difficult and uncertain times.
Another significant historical episode through which the life of Marjorie Roach was filtered was the labour riots which swept through the Caribbean region in the 1930s. She was a living witness of the riots which broke out in Barbados in 1937. Clement Osbourne Payne, was born in Trinidad in 1904, to Barbadian parents. He was a Pan Africanist and trade union organizer and as an adult he was influenced by the, “nascent Black Power ideology of Marcus Garvey and the growing radicalism of Trinidad,” according to James Ferguson in, Missing in action: Clement Payne. Payne spent his early childhood in Barbados and in his early twenties in Trinidad. It was not until 1937 that he would return to Barbados. While there, Payne encouraged the island’s poor blacks to organize themselves into a union and confront the plantocracy and those who partnered with them. Such encouragement was seen as a threat by the governing powers who kept a close watch over Payne’s movements. He was followed by the police and subsequently arrested and
accused of, “falsifying a statement to the Barbados Harbour Authorities when he entered Barbados in 1937, stating that his place of birth was Barbados, and not Trinidad”, according to Brett Callaghan in, *Clement Osbourne Payne - National Hero of Barbados*. Payne was found guilty, but appealed the ruling and later that evening marched on Governor Mark Young’s residence, demanding to speak with him. Payne was arrested for this act and ultimately expelled from Barbados to his place of birth, Trinidad.

Following his deportation on July 26, 1937, Barbados erupted into four days of rioting throughout the country. Payne’s expulsion was, “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” The black and poor protested the lack of opportunity, unemployment and the labour conditions that limited them to the agrarian sector of the country, while white elites held the economic and political power of the country. Brett Callaghan, in *Clement Osbourne Payne - National Hero of Barbados*” states, “Rioting continued for four days island-wide which saw the commercial district severely damaged – cars were pushed into the sea or smashed, shop windows were broken …” The riots left 14 dead, 47 wounded, 500 arrested and millions of dollars in property damage.

**Marjorie Roach remembers the Barbados Labour Riots of 1937**

The effects of the Barbados Labour Riots of 1937, were not only felt by those who participated, but by citizens who deliberately stayed away from such practices. Marjorie Roach is one such individual, who at the time of the Riots was a young woman. She describes the atmosphere of her homeland during this period as frightening. She recounts, “Something wasn’t pleasing to the outside people. And they had a kind of riot in town. Everybody in town hitting up
one another and beating up the stores. So, they breaking all the big glass stores and windows.” Marjorie also remembers quite clearly two instances where the effects of the riots reached her doorsteps.

The first involved her older brother Franky, who was the chauffeur of a then prominent white businessman called Mr. Pile in Barbados. She says that one evening while transporting his employer, Franky was stopped by a mob of men who were overturning cars in the capital. When they surveyed the occupants of the car and saw who was seated at the back, the rioters allowed them to pass safely. Marjorie explains what transpired, “Franky was driving Pile, that he was working at. Pile is one of the big man of the country. But they did not care. So when they told them they driving for him and Pile was in the car they did not go to turn the car over. Cuz they was going to turn over the car. And as Franky was driving the car they did not turn it over again.”

The second incident involved one of her neighbours. Marjorie describes the neighbour in question as male, a known gang member and trouble maker. She says on the evening of the riots she was home and suddenly a van filled with police officers arrived at her neighbour’s home. The police officers, she says, exited the vehicle and barged into the home of the man and forcefully apprehended him and took him into police custody. Marjorie says, “It had a gang and one of them did live by we. The head one name Rat who live side ah we. The police did come for him. They beat him up and push he head down in a barrel of water. He did done break up the glass windows in town already. And then he did run home. Right!? He did live side of us. And when he did think he was alright the gang of police… Ah whole cart of police come for him and bring him out. But he run when he makehe mischief. He run home. They carry him down. He went to jail.”
Marjorie Roach lived through a period of global, regional and domestic uncertainty and changes. Although she was not a direct participant, she witnessed and felt the effects of these events and, remarkably can recall clearly, as well as verbalize in great detail these life changing events. Such recounts are of value as they give us in the Twenty-first century an insight into what life was like for people who lived through Caribbean history in the twentieth century.
Chapter 3 – Celebrating 100 Years, Plus

Testimonials of Family

At the age of 102, Marjorie Roach certainly has witnessed many changes in her life. She has spoken about her interactions with her family, friends, community and country during these changes and has pondered on their effects on her as well. We have yet to hear the testimonials of those impacted by the life of Marjorie. Three persons who will provide some insight into Marjorie’s life are her two daughters; Shirley Adams and Patricia Roach, and her great niece Doreen Elaine Devonish Hinds; daughter of her older sister Violet.

When asked about what their fondest memories of Marjorie were, Patricia’s response was the memory of their primary school dance. She says that their father was a strict man and he did not want both she and Shirley to attend their schools’ dance, but her mother, unbeknownst to her father, sewed their costumes and allowed them to participate. Patricia can recall the costumes their mother made. She says, “Shirley dress up in black and white. A white shirt with a white pants and black bow tie. And I had on African clothes. African wear”. She also remembers dancing to a Miriam Makeba song. Patricia states that her father never knew that her mother allowed them to go, and that what her mother did for them will forever be in her memory, Shirley shares similar sentiments about this experience in their young lives.

Patricia continues and shares that as a child growing up, she remembers her mother singing all the time. She says she sang so much that if she did not, their neighbours would call to check on her. She says, “Every morning, noon and night. Loud. Everybody could hear her singing. Until we used to say, “Oh gosh. Stop now nah!” When the neighbours ain’t hear she singing they would call to see if she alright”. Patricia states firmly, that the songs sung by her mother were not
calypso’s, but hymns and that Marjorie sang quite well. When asked by her daughter why she sang so much, Marjorie’s answer was that it was because she grew up in the church singing in the choir. She says, “I always in the church. I grow up singing, reciting. I grow up singing. They giving me the solo’s. They used to over do it. Everything they putting me in the front to sing”.

One of her fondest memories of her mother was answered next by Marjorie’s oldest daughter Shirley. She says her mother always allowed them to play with other children. Shirley recalls, “We grew up in Pasea, so we used to play in the yard with all the neighbours. Playing pitch and marbles. Hop scotch and catching butterflies. She never really stopped us from playing.” Marjorie’s great niece Doreen Hinds, who grew up in the care of her great aunt, remembers an incident involving a pair of stretched stockings. Doreen explains that the incident occurred during the period where ‘stay-up stockings” were in fashion. Marjorie had a pair of these stockings and while she was away, Doreen decided to try them on. She says, “So one time I went and try on her stockings and my calves bigger than hers and when she got dressed the Sunday to go to church and she put on the stockings, the stockings stretch.”

The incident stirred up such emotion that during Doreen’s testimony Marjorie interrupt’s and retells the story with so much displeasure one would think the incident just occurred. Needless to say Marjorie was not happy with her niece at that time and even shared tears over her stockings. Doreen further explains her close relationship with her aunt and says, “My Aunt was a young woman and I was a young girl so she used to watch me when my Mum go to work. That’s why I say she raised me. So those were memories I never forgot. She was angry with me but we got along well all the time. She was a young woman and ting and I look up to her.” The latter is especially true as Doreen makes regular trips from Barbados to visit with her aunt.
Another question posed to these three women was; what quality did they admire in Marjorie. All three women unanimously agreed that her prayer life, friendliness and fashion sense were qualities they admired in her. Patricia says that her mother would pray for various things regularly and jokes by saying, “She is ah prayer warrior. Ask her to pray anytime. She praying for the mosquito. Everybody. Pray, pray, pray”. Shirley talks about her friendliness and popularity and says that it was a practice of Marjorie, when she sewed, to visit fabric stores and interact with the employees there. Marjorie, she says, is a very friendly person, “she is a very friendly person. Up to this age mummy is popular. Even up to now we would go to the stores. She was a seamstress and she would shop at the stores. People ask for her, up to this Christmas. Popular and loving.”

Doreen gives a particular example of Marjorie’s fashion sense and her popularity in Barbados, many years ago. She recalls her aunt being invited to a social gathering at the Government’s House and the response of those gathered about the dress Marjorie wore. Doreen says, “The most expensive material Aunt Marjorie used to buy. I had an Uncle that was very proud. My Uncle John. Tall and stately. And when there are invitations to go out, yours truly would go. The Government House… “The Queen” (Marjorie) would go out. She was beautifully attired and she, everybody used to fuss about how she would dress. Fit up and ting. Dressing is nothing new for Aunt Marj.”

The testimonials of Marjorie Roach’s daughters and niece allows us to understand her impact in the lives of those she cared for and came into contact with. It is clear her faith and skill as a seamstress have guided her throughout her life and has played major roles in winning the admiration and respect of family, friends and acquaintances these 102 years. Marjorie’s daughter’s says they feel quite happy and proud having a mother who is 102. Doreen shares their
point of view and says she boasts, when she is in Barbados, that she has an aunt who is 102. She admits that she sometimes has mixed feelings and describes them as, “Tingly at times, sad at times, but happy”.

**Most Important Events in the Life of Marjorie Roach**

Four significant events in the life of Marjorie Roach as she describes are her wedding day, meeting her husband, giving birth to her children and turning 100 years old. Marjorie says her wedding day was the first because of the excitement of getting ready and also making sure that Mr. Roach was present in the church to marry her. She explains that there was a time when young men did not show up to marry their brides in Barbados. She says she did not want that to be her experience and made sure that Mr. Roach was present before she came to the church. Marjorie says that she sent Mr. Roach’s close friend, Mr. King, to make sure he was at the church. She states, “Here all I was concern was that at that time it had the young people marrying. The bride go to the church and de bridegroom didn’t come. I make sure that it eh happen to me. I tell my partner… ah man. Mr. King…that was he good friend. I tell Mr. King make sure and go down in James Street Church and see that Mr. Roach was there. I am not coming in the church unless he is there. So Mr. King was my buddy.” Fortunately, Mr. Roach was present and he and Marjorie married. Their union explains why Mr. Roach was her second choice.

Marjorie explains that her husband was a selfless man. She professes that he treated her well and he, in her own words, “loveyuh girl too bad.” She continues by giving an example of Mr. Roaches character and says, “He eh have a spoon full of rice he go to cut it in half. If he eh find my share eh enough he’ll cut it in half and giving it to me. He like to know that I am satisfied
and I am well fed”; an example her daughters bore witness to throughout their childhood and adult years.

Her third choice was the birth of her children, an event she says made Mr. Roach a happy man three times over. She explains, “Yes when I make the children. And I was excited with them and Mr. Roach did love dem and he used to carry us all about when the Sunday evening did come. Carry we down the road for a walk and come back.”

Marjorie’s final selection was turning 100 years old. She says having her family, who lived abroad, make the trip to celebrate with her was exciting. In fact, her three children along with friends and family members, planned a surprise celebration which took place on Saturday, October 10th, 2015 and was held in the Tunapuna Methodist Church. So festive was the event surrounding Marjorie’s 100th birthday that she arrived at the church in a stretched limousine, and was escorted by her son Randolf and her grandson Kyle into the church which was filled with well-wishers, relatives and friends. Her daughter Patricia says as Marjorie entered she shouted, “Happy Birthday to me” and her favourite song ‘Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah’ was sung. Patricia says one of the memorable portions of that day was a tribute given by one of the Deacons present, Deacon Randolf Gordon, who likened Marjorie’s hundredth birthday to that of a cricketer who had made a century in a cricket match. The celebrations did not end at the church but continued at Marjorie’s residence for those who could not make it to the church. Coverage of the day’s celebrations as well as an interview with her was done by journalist Janelle De Souza of the Trinidad and Tobago Newsday and was published under the title, “Live, love and serve your fellow creatures.” the following day by the journalist. To also commemorate her turning 100, Marjorie was presented with a congratulatory letter from the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona and was presented
with an Award of Honour from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Division of Aging.

Furthermore, Marjorie credits her long life to her relationship with God. She says that at the age of fifteen she accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour and it has been a decision that she has never regretted till this day. She says, “I never, never regret it. I live up to it. Come what may in my life. And I can tell anybody that I never had a miserable life.” Marjorie also shares a scripture taken from Romans 12:1-2 and recites, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Amen.” When asked if she had any feelings about turning 102, Marjorie replies with a song entitled ‘Morning Star’ and says that she does not feel any different. Although Marjorie suffers from glaucoma in both her eyes and needs assistance with walking and taking care of herself she is thankful nevertheless and reiterates in song and laughter that she feels like a morning star.
Conclusion

Marjorie’s ability to remember, in great detail, events and people in her early life was particularly interesting for me during my research. Prior to my findings, I was doubtful of how much she would be able to recall and share because of her age. However, I was amazed to discover that her memories are quite intact and she is able to also clearly express her those experiences.

My meetings with Marjorie also helped me to think differently about the elderly whom I regularly interact with. It caused me to understand that senior citizens are not persons without experiences nor should they be people who we only engage with to ensure that their physical and mental needs are being met. They are instead individuals who we should remember were once our age and who have had life experiences that can be and in some cases must be added to the historical records of our communities and countries.
Bibliography


