

WINDRUSH

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN

INTRODUCTION

“I benefited coming to Britain. Where I am now, I cannot see myself here if I stayed in the Caribbean.”

Lena Douggan, a retired nurse, devoted great-grandmother, and active community member, resides in Balham, South London. She embarked on a courageous journey from her home in Trinidad to London, joining the ranks of many Caribbean travellers before her.

In sharing her story, Lena pays tribute to the untold narratives belonging to the remarkable individuals of the Windrush generation who ventured to Britain, each with their unique experiences and contributions.



NEXT: EARLY LIFE

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN



PREVIOUS:
INTRODUCTION



NEXT: THE JOURNEY
TO LONDON

EARLY LIFE

Lena was born in 1951 and grew up in Trinidad. The eldest of seven, from an early age she was fascinated by hospitals and always knew she wanted to be a nurse. When she finished school, her father gave her a choice: study nursing in England or America.

At the time, Britain needed more nurses from overseas and was actively recruiting

for women in the Caribbean. Lena also had a cousin living in London, so she decided that would be the best option.

So, in 1970, at just 18 years old, she moved to the UK to pursue her nursing career.

How would you feel leaving home at 18 to travel to a new country?

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN

THE JOURNEY TO LONDON

Lena travelled to London by plane. Travelling by herself for the first time, both she and her family were filled with a mix of nervousness and anticipation.

The turbulence during the flight added to her fears, and she couldn't help but worry when the announcement came that the plane would soon touch down in London, apprehensive about the possibility of her cousin not being present to receive her.

Fortunately, her cousin was there, accompanying her on the onward journey

from Heathrow to Colliers Wood, an area in southwest London, where she first stayed with a welcoming family, that eventually embraced her as if she were their own daughter.

As they made their way, Lena vividly recalls her astonishment at the grey, smoky sky, momentarily mistaking it for the darkness of night instead of the afternoon daylight.

What other impressions of the UK do you think the Windrush generation had when they first arrived?



PREVIOUS: EARLY LIFE



NEXT: FINDING HER CAREER

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN

FINDING HER CAREER

Throughout her career, Lena has contributed her skills and dedication to several renowned hospitals, including Guy's and St Thomas', as well as King's College Hospital. However, she began her career as a nursing assistant at St George's hospital in Tooting, before completing her nursing training.

Lena encountered challenges early on in her training, often finding herself the only black

woman on the ward and facing instances of racism from some of her fellow nurses who would assign her tasks they didn't wish to undertake.

Nevertheless, Lena's resilience prevailed, helped by the support of senior staff members who provided the foundation she needed to thrive.



PREVIOUS: THE JOURNEY TO LONDON



NEXT: STAYING IN TOUCH WITH HOME



READ MORE ABOUT THE ENTWINED HISTORY OF THE NHS AND THE WINDRUSH GENERATION.

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH HOME

Maintaining her connection to her home country and culture was challenging for Lena in the 1970s but she did find ways to bring the Caribbean into her new life in London.

One of her favourite activities was exploring Brixton, where she delighted in encountering familiar foods from her native country, such as plantains and mangoes.

To stay in touch with her family, she wrote many letters to her mother, which was her

only way of communication at the time. However, it was the vibrant, basement parties, organised by black communities across London, that offered Lena and other Caribbean migrants the space to forge new friendships and build a sense of community.

Many of the friends she holds dear today were met at those lively parties in the 1970s, including her husband, whom she married in 1971, and had three children with.



PREVIOUS: FINDING HER CAREER



NEXT: LIFE BEYOND NURSING



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE UK'S BIGGEST CARIBBEAN PARTY TODAY – THE NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN

LIFE BEYOND NURSING

After starting a family, she transitioned from hospital-based nursing to a community-based role, where she provided compassionate care to children and families in their own homes across London.

During this period, she also trained to become a counsellor, expanding her expertise in supporting others in need.

Although Lena retired from nursing at the age of 55 in 2006, she has continued to work in her local community. Currently, she remains actively engaged with Age UK Lambeth,

offering invaluable mentorship to those seeking their services. Additionally, she has volunteered as a counsellor for addiction charities.

Beyond her mentoring and counselling responsibilities, Lena also plays a significant role in organising religious trips for her local community, facilitating journeys from Norfolk to Lourdes in France.

In what ways do you think Lena has contributed to Britain?



PREVIOUS:
STAYING IN TOUCH
WITH HOME



NEXT: CONCLUSION

WINDRUSH VOICES: LENA DOUGGAN

CONCLUSION

Lena's story embodies resilience, determination, and a deep commitment to making a difference in the lives of others. Had she never made the journey to London, Britain would have missed out on a compassionate nurse, a mentor and a community advocate.

Her contributions have enriched her local community and positively impacted the lives of her patients, reminding us of the immense value that the Windrush generation has brought. Her story is an inspiration for anyone looking to pursue their dreams.

When asked about her advice for future generations contemplating a move to a new country, Lena advises, "Take a risk. If you

don't like it, you can always return home. However, coming to Britain has greatly benefited my life."



PREVIOUS: LIFE
BEYOND NURSING

WINDRUSH

