

The Best Dressed Man in Tunapuna

This photograph was taken in the 1950s at a family party, shows from right to left: my mum's mother, (my grandmother) Elma (in the dark dress) her cousin Beula, her Uncle Bertie, her cousin Janet (who is my book!), Aunty Esme (married to Bertie) and her little cousin Roland (who obviously wasn't supposed to be in the picture- something that my mum still remembers to this day!)

My mother's uncle Bertie was a force of nature and well known in the region. He was variously known as Mr Sharpsuit, the Best Dressed Man in Tunapuna, or mostly that 'blasted' man, by his long-suffering wife. He was somewhat of a "ladies' man" a singer, trumpet player but also a gambler, who spent more time in on the road and in clubs than at home. He ran with his own version of the rat pack. But when home he spoiled his family and for all his swagger, he was a good man who had words of wisdom for the younger men who looked up to him, a ready smile for the ladies and a dollar in his pocket for not only his children, but nieces and nephews too. although my grandmother would disapprove of his generosity – always wondering where the money had come from.

My mother's auntie Esme (Janet's mother – who is in my story) was a talented dressmaker and cake maker and my mum would sometimes help her when she was busy. Her and Uncle Bertie recognised that my mum felt restricted in the small town and it was they who urged my grandma to send my mum to England and helped her with the fare. They had sent Janet a few years earlier and my mum would look forward to receiving letters from her cousin and was overjoyed when the opportunity came for her to go.

My mum has only returned to Trinidad once, when my grandma died – she was only in her fifties. By this time Uncle Bertie was frail and unable to attend her funeral so my mum visited him in his care home. She recalls his eyes lit up on seeing his favourite niece now a qualified nurse in England. He still tried to give her some Trinidadian dollars to take for her "*chillun*" and confided that he had managed to get himself one of the prized rooms in the home.

He was- of course - very popular with the staff and other residents and their families. she remembers that he was as sharp suited as ever surrounded by elderly ladies, still the best dressed man in Tunapuna.