

Where are you from?

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No, but really - where are you from?

Four little words - with one big question

A question I heard so many times growing up and my answer - Watford - rarely seemed to satisfy.

“No, but really - where are you from? I don’t mean to pry...”

So, to answer.

I’m from parents who crossed the seas from Trinidad

They were young and full of hope and pride

They had dreams, fierce ambition and
ancestral resilience on their side

I’m from mum working long night shifts in an overstretched NHS

Where despite her qualifications she was sometimes made to feel less

Caring for those who would sometimes scorn

And denigrate her for where she was born

But

I’m also from summer holidays watching my dad playing county cricket.

The sound of leather on willow and cheers for falling wickets

Dad was proud to fail Norman Tebbit’s infamous cricket test.

As a Trinidadian batsman when the Windies were the best.

I’m from Saturday schools where we were able to play, learn and chat

And eat our lunch in peace without someone asking, “ooh what’s that”?

I’m from Saturday night cornmeal dumplings in delicious fish stew

The amazing aroma filling the house all afternoon

I’m from Sunday morning breakfasts of salt fish and bakes

Afternoon treats of sweet coconut cakes

I’m from macaroni cheese, rice and peas

And delicious goat curry scooped up in a spicy roti.

I'm from Sunday evening's hair wash and the ritual of braids
While in the background the sound of gospel and calypso played
I remember hair grease and love were plaited into every strand
But you'd better sit still or you will feel the back of the brush on your hand!

I'm from the "good front room"
We children were seldom allowed into that sacred space
A room full of nic nacs and ornaments of questionable taste
I remember the worn armchairs covered with embroidery and lace
And a treasured map of Trinidad & Tobago was hung pride of place

I'm from West Indian folklore and Ananci tales
From old sayings and proverbs where good always prevails
From elders who told us we'd "have to work twice as hard to get half as far"
But to always remember "just who you are"

So, in truth I am from Watford - but that's only half the story
I'm from islands far away not just this land of hope and glory.

