



PARDNER MONEY STORIES & POEMS



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

A.S.K.I
Advice Support Knowledge Information

FORWARD

by Michelle Inniss

In this booklet we have brought together a selection of Pardner money stories and poems, alongside a selection of recipe tales from the Caribbean.

Our stories are important and each one of us has a unique story to tell. Stories not only tell our individual experiences, but they also hold space for our experiences as a community, and in turn these experiences form the fabric of the society we live in, past, present, and future.

It is imperative that we create our own stories - our own narrative. Talking about our own lived experiences as Afro Caribbean people. Documenting the challenges, we have met, the struggles we have endured and the victories we have savoured. This is the reason we have been exploring the Pardner Savings System, through a year-long project focussing on the role it played in Caribbean communities in Croydon from the 1950's onwards.

Throughout the year we have learnt of the Pardner System's significance to the Caribbean/UK migrant story told through the lens of in-depth interviews, a documentary film, photographs, and the writing of short stories and poems made by the interviewees.

We have captured the experiences and memories of first-and second-generation Caribbean people from Croydon and Sutton. A snapshot of what the Pardner was, how it was used, and how it contributed to the financial development and prosperity of the Caribbean community during the 1950s and 1960s.

The Pardner System serves as part of the legacy of the Afro Caribbean migrant story. Through this project this heritage can now be shared and archived for posterity.

Before we dive into this creative milieu from the members of ASKI, let us look at what exactly a 'Pardner' is:

WHAT IS A PARDNER?

The Pardner System is a simple savings system whereby a group of individuals agree to save a set amount on a regular basis, usually once a week or month. Perhaps, the most important part of the Pardner System is that the Pardner is based on a verbal contract of trust. Therefore, the Pardner must be set up by a person, the Banker, who has the implicit trust of others.

In Jay Henderson's short story, we can see through the protagonist's predicament, the huge responsibility the Banker has in making sure that the Pardner money is kept safely.

"... (Marj) thought of the thousands and thousands and thousands of Padner money stuffed inside the old fashioned hoover bag. People's money."

Also, how important the Bankers reputation was...

"...Never. Never had she ever failed to pay up. Never. Never. Her reputation was excellent. People trusted her."

One of the important aspects of a Banker is that they needed to use discretion in who they chose to become a part of the Pardner System they were running. The Banker did not take just anybody. Always word of mouth. The reputation for being a trustworthy Banker was something built upon over several years. Did things ever go wrong? Well, humans being humans of course they did, but not as often as you might expect, anyhow, those old tales are not the feature of this booklet.

WHERE DID THE PARDNER COME FROM?

The pardner system was brought to Jamaica by enslaved Africans and was originally used as a device to purchase freedom. The pardner system also exists around the world and is known by different names, in South America it is known as *tanda*, in China *hui*, and it is still known as *susu* in West Africa. In the Caribbean people also refer to the savings system in different ways: pardner, partner, partnerhand, pardna, or su su.

As Elsie Henderson begins in her poem '*Pardner System*'

Pardner

Partner

Su Su

Whatever!

Mi like it, Mi like it!

HOW DOES THE PARDNER WORK?

Anyhow, let us explain a bit more about how the pardner works. The set amount that each person in the Pardner agrees to save is known as *a hand*. As said, the person who organises the pardner and collects the money is called *the banker*. The banker hands over all the contributions in a week or month, this is known as *the draw*, to the person whose turn it is to get paid.

In the early days the Banker did not take a cut of the money that was being saved, as the Banker also benefited from saving money herself. As the years stretched out into the future the Banker began to take a small percentage of a person's hand. It was a savings system that benefited many people who may not have the recourse to saving money through a high street bank and it also became a business for the Banker.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO USE THE PARDNER AND HOW IS IT USED?

The first Caribbean migrants answered the call to help rebuild post-war Britain. Having saved every last dollar to make the journey to the 'Mother Country', the hope of these hardworking people from the Caribbean shone so brightly that it could be said that it was used to navigate the way of the ships that travelled over four thousand miles across the Atlantic Ocean.

The *MV Empire Windrush* has become the emblem of a generation, but of course, there were other ships that came before and after the Windrush, for example, the *SS Ormond* and the *SS Almanzora* arrived in 1947 and the *SS Orbita*, *SS Reina Del Pacifico*, *SS Sorento* and the *SS Georgic* to name a few also played their part in history. These first Caribbean migrants held on to a dream for a better life and a promise that the streets were 'paved with gold'.

When they docked at various ports around Britain what they found was unemployment and inflation at a record high amid the hostility from one's new neighbours. With the odds stacked against them, these valiant people not only survived the daily onslaught of being made to feel like an outsider, but they prospered.

A huge part of their success story was owed to the Pardner System. It was used by first generation Caribbean migrants as a savings system to acquire resources to buy houses and set up businesses, as it was difficult at the time to get loans from banks. The pardner was also used to buy large items for the home, for example, a washing machine or a refrigerator, or for a longed-for trip back home to visit family. The Pardner System was a social, cultural, and entrepreneurial network.

IS THE PARDNER STILL NECESSARY TODAY?

Does the Pardner have a place in the Caribbean community today? With a continuing struggle to make ends meet for many Black people from the diaspora, the pardner system has not only survived the early days of the Caribbean migrants who settled in England's port cities but is still thriving throughout the UK.

The answer is quite simply, yes. The Pardner is very much alive and kicking. It may no longer be used to save for buying a house with the astronomical down payments that are now needed to secure a mortgage, but they are still being used to buy those modern necessities of life.

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHERE OUR RECIPE TALES CAME FROM

The recipe tales became an offshoot of the pardner stories as it seems that talking about money soon leads to talking about food!

We can conjure up memories from all kinds of different artefacts, which can lead to creating stories. The same can be said about food. Just the smell of a particular food can transport us back in time.

In recipe tales the writers delve into some of the earliest memories they have of their favourite dishes from 'back home'. They were asked to think about the following questions and then to weave them into their stories and recipes.

Who cooked them? Where did they cook them? When was the first time you ate this dish? How old were you? Who prepared it? Where were you? What ingredients are in it? Describe the way it is prepared. How it makes you feel when you see/smell/taste it?

We hope you enjoy the Caribbean recipe tales. Some will make your stomach rumble, others will make you laugh, the odd one may make you tear up and some will make you go, 'Oooooo!'

The stories and poems you are about to read are a mixture of first-hand experience, observation, and fiction.

Enjoy!

A Banker's Tale

by Jay Hendricks

Marj woke up, pleased with herself and with her world. She pattered down the stairs in ankle cotton socks, hair awry. Her silken nightdress made swishing sounds around her brown thighs. In the kitchen she listened for the kettle to whistle, she was old fashioned in that way. She'd had a hard time searching for that whistling kettle, finally she had success online. Her tiny flat gave access to street life.

'What a beautiful day,' she thought, idly running through her days activities as she sipped Earl Grey.

The short walk to Brixton afforded tree lined avenues. 'One day,' she thought. 'One good day I'll live in one of those.' Her church and Pastor had taught her to dream big, and Marj prided herself on always dreaming big. She was still waiting for that rich handsome husband. Pastor Collins had said age was no definer when it came to God's children. Marj agreed that 50 for her, is really the new 30. That's why she, Marj, always kept herself trim and sharp, buying sale clothing from top notch shops 'up town'. She so loved 'uptown'. Rubbing shoulders with those rich Arab women who looked like black penguins. One time she was sure she saw those two royal sisters. Oh, yes, no Primark or Lidl for her! She shivered at the thought of even darkening their doors, and mingling with those smelly unwashed people.

Her eyes fell on the bright red logo of her Bank and her steps quickened. Just then she clicked her fingers in annoyance. How could she forget to take the Padner money to the Bank? 'Oh, dear, dear!' she moaned quietly, and blew a raspberry. Should she retrace her steps home? No! Growing up in Jamaica she always heard it was 'bad luck to turn back'. Jamaica! She was there six months ago, and come next month she would be there again. Yep! She'd already placed her name against the holiday rota at the Nursery where she worked four days a week.

In Sainsbury's, she gathered the salmon, corn fed chicken and various vegetables and greens, not forgetting the dark chocolate, which was her passion. Just then her phone vibrated, and she placed her shopping against a trolley. With manicured nails she pressed it to her ear.

"Ma, am at your house, just picked up your Hoover, Carlene asked to borrow it. Hope it's ok."

She stood frozen to the spot. Her flawless make up seemed to drain from her face, and the pencil cracks became evident. Sainsbury's customers brushing against her, a few eyeballing her.

"You ok, dear? Is it a stroke? Shall I get an assistant?"

Marj began to sweat. Large globules of sweat streamed from the roots of her beautifully styled hair and rolled down her forehead mingling with her makeup. The sweat made its way between her eyes to rest just above her top lip. Her cheeks gleamed with perspiration, all shiny, giving the appearance of a brass door knob. People were beginning to stop and stare with worried expressions on their faces. A Sainsbury's assistant was determinedly making her way towards her. Marj suddenly jerked back to life and grabbed her shopping. Her feet hastening her escape. Marj walked, then ran. Running except in the gym was alien to her. She never ran outdoors. So common to see grown women running, running for busses, trains, trams. So utterly unladylike! She brushed past alarmed passers-by, a few swore. She didn't hear. Home! She had to get to her house.

It would be useless calling Jason, he never picked up, always going to voice mail. Oh, Jason! Oh, Jason! That child of hers. His name should have been, My Grief! Yes... My Grief! How could he? How dare he! When she took her front door keys off him, he must have made a copy. She could hear her fashionable footwear as it slapped and slapped against the grey pavement. Bits of crisps and sweet wrapper fluttered and flew around her.

Finally, her heart in her mouth, lips dry, and her eyes flooded with tears so she could barely see. No sign of the Hoover. No sign of Jason. No... Hoover.

"Mi lawd! Mi Gawd! Oh Fadder in heaven, lawd mi Gard!"

Marj never spoke any patois. She cringed, absolutely cringed when people around her descended into patois. She would turn and give them a withering look, oblivious of the ribald laughter or insults that singed her ears.

Carlene? She would call Carlene. Busy line... Dialling Carlene. Busy, busy, busy! Marj sat on the toilet groaning, hearing the lumps of excrement that exited her body. Dialling Carlene... busy, busy!

She thought of the thousands and thousands and thousands of Padner money stuffed inside the old fashioned Hoover bag. People's money. Never. Never had she ever failed to pay up. Never. Never. Her reputation was excellent. People trusted her. She didn't take just anybody. Always word of mouth. It was a business after all. She'd been doing it for over 20 years now. "Lawd Jesus! Mary, Mother of Jesus, have mercy pon me now." she cried. "Have mercy pon me now."

Pardner Story

By Marie

During my childhood days, I would sometimes hear the terms “Pardner Draw” or “Pardner Hand”, but it was not until I ear dropped on one of my older cousin’s conversation that I learnt the true meaning of these terms.

Pardner Draw and Pardner Hand are of the same and it simply means “money one received” from being a member of the scheme. A member can ask for their hand of money before it comes to an end or to wait until the end of the project to receive their draw of money. The scheme can run for any length of time, but it is more beneficial for it to run for a period of one year, any longer people might not be interested as it is aimed to be a quick and efficient turn around with people that are reliable and trustworthy. However, things don’t always run smooth...

I heard of some people who had lost their entire saving, because of the banker or one of the participants who disappeared with the money.

My understanding is that the main purpose of a pardner scheme is to emancipate oneself from the burden of debts, especially when there is added interest to be paid on a loan. Pardner has been around for a very long time; it first started during slavery times. The black community started this scheme among themselves because they were not allowed in a bank. Even to present time it is widely used in most areas of the black community.

I welcome Pardner, it has been extremely helpful in the black community and can be used for several different things. I know of families who use this scheme, for example, as a way of saving to obtain a house, to acquire furniture, to go on holiday, it has even been used for legal expenses for their children to join them in England.



CURRY LOVE

By Audrey Ingrid Fontenelle

I remember... Grandmother's cooking, and the smells that wafted around the small kitchen positioned just outside the house. The many delicious meals created on the coal fire, on which she cooked, were utterly amazing. We looked forward to mealtimes with great delight. The tempting odours meandered invisibly past our noses on its journey to further anticipation ahead. It is incredible how the techniques and versions of a dish can be adapted through generations. The same dish basically with a little more or less of a particular ingredient. Some odours carry lingering snatches of memories, flavours too can evoke joys of the past.

As a small child I could only watch. Waiting in anxious expectation for that plate of deliciousness. Observing the process was a subconscious introduction to the art of cooking. My sister and I would make pretend meals using scraps stuck to the butchers wrapping paper. Discarded onion trimmings and juicy grass, all combined in a tin pot and fed to each other's chins culminating our splendid cuisine.

When I came to England, aged 9, mum's meal preparation was much more sophisticated. We lived in a large house with a modern kitchen. No coal pot with fire logs. These memories create a combination of smiles and wonder at the resilience of those older people who brought up ambitious and successful children under conditions not so ideal.

I think Mum enjoyed cooking at some stage, as she often told stories of her training at Culinary School. Perhaps, it was the case of having to, because of increased family numbers. However, I did not know what grandmother's recipes incorporated. I only remember the delicious tender chicken nestling on the fluffy white rice with Roti on the side to soak up the spicy gravy.

As a teenager, I was taught to make curry chicken by my mother. She instructed me to clean the chicken thoroughly and to wash it in a vinegar, salt, and lemon solution. It would have a final dressing of lemon and salt before being covered in seasoned flour before frying. The fried pieces would be set aside whilst the curry base was prepared. This consisted of sliced onions and garlic fried until transparent. Curry powder was then added and fried after which dried or fresh thyme, chopped tomatoes, and spring onions are added. Chicken is then added to this paste with a cup of water and left to simmer for approximately 20 minutes. Diced potato is added, and the seasoning adjusted. The covered pot is left to continue its simmer until the chicken is thoroughly cooked and the potato is tender.

My version has some adaptations. I use skinless boned chicken thigh for its flavour. Onions and garlic are fried before adding Patak Mild Curry Paste. Chicken pieces are added to this base. When it is all coated and sealed for 10 minutes approximately ½ cup of chicken stock is added, and the covered pot is left to simmer for 30 minutes. Add diced potatoes and continue to cook for a further 15 minutes until soft. Serve with rice or roti and side salad.

My roti is quick and easy to make. For 4 rotis you will need 3 cups of plain flour, either Trex, Ghee or oil, ½ teaspoon baking powder, ½ teaspoon each of salt and sugar. Add sufficient water to flour and mix to create a soft dough. Leave to rest for 10-15 minutes. Cut dough into 4 pieces and roll into a circle. Brush with softened Trex, Ghee or oil. Make a cut from centre to edge, fold small sections around the circle resulting in a triangle. Fold the pointed end into the base and allow to rest for a further 15 minutes. Grease a frying pan or Tawa and set on medium heat. On a floured surface roll out the dough into a thin circle. Place in pan or Tawa. As the dough begins to cook, puffs will appear. Brush with oil before turning over. Once cooked place in a plastic bowl with a cover and shake vigorously to separate the layers. Fold and cover.



Although my mother's curry and my later version have always been enjoyable, my grandmothers' flavours have remained evasive. On reflection, was it the surroundings, sun and breeze, which eluded me, or the environment in which it was prepared and the mystery of its creation for a hungry child's tummy? Could it be the sound of the red-hot embers of wood, or the crackling combined with the smoky haze that made her curry dinners amongst others so exceptionally memorable? I guess it is the same for her steamed fish. Flavours of which are etched on my tongue but, that is another story!

Dahling... Dahl

By Jay Hendricks

When I was invited to Jamelia's wedding to Hussein, I quickly asked if I could bring my cousin who would be spending time with me during the holidays. I remember sitting cross legged, feeling the cool daub-scrubbed earth under my naked brown limbs. Brown to brown.

The air of expectancy mingled with the festive atmosphere permeated every inch of the huge tent that hid the hot sunshine outside. Slivers of sun, however, did peep in to see what was going on, framing the shadowy figures that moved around the tent. Bunting, balloons and fairy lights with bells winked at us constantly as if about to disclose some age-old secret.

Saried ladies tinkled and twinkled at every move from their bejewelled noses to their bangled wrists and ankles. Two ladies balancing a huge pot between them came towards us and doled out the seven curries, piling it onto our water lily leaf. Licking my lips and barely breathing, I watched their every movement.

'You know how to make dahl Claudette?' I asked. 'It's my favourite.'

'No,' she said, 'but my big sister can make it good. I like it bad.'

I ate in silence until my belly was full. I watched Claudette as she stuffed handful after handful in her mouth.

'I waiting for you to finish eating so we can dance,' I said. 'Hurry nah man!'

Claudette wiped her curry-stained hand on her dress, my dress that I was forced to lend her.

Under Nana's stern eyes, I reluctantly chose the first one I could find. It was yellow with a rose pattern, and there were frills of cream lace at the hem.

'Gal, you have too much clothes,' said Nana. 'Lend her the dress before I get angry with you.' I tried not to sulk as Nana's almond-coloured eyes were on me.

We stumbled and bumped along with the motley dressed guests who made soft cushions for our bony hips. How we laughed. She from the freedom of her 12 siblings, and me; overjoyed I had company for the long summer holidays. We copied their dance, twisting our skinny dark bodies round and round, hands on one hip, and the other high in the air fixing the light bulb. All the while singing and sometimes humming the Hindi tunes. As the music heightened, we twirled ourselves into a frenzy to finally tumble in a heap on the hard mud caked floor.

We ate Barfi, Gulab Jamun cheesecake and Jalebi.

'Which one you like best?' I asked looking at her. 'I like Jalebi.'

'I like all of them,' she said continuing to stuff her face. 'Yes, all of them!'

My cousin, who was visiting from Zeeberg, ate again as fresh curry was placed before her. She had never in her life seen so much food as she was one of 13 siblings and food was very scarce in their house.

That night I awoke to strange groans and a retching sound in my ears. Slowly, I sat in an upright position, just then Nana came in holding the lamp, its wick illuminating her paper brown face.

'What's all this noise? What's going on?' asked Nana. 'It's you Claudette, you ate too much food chile, too much food chile.'

Claudette sat on the pail and groaned and groaned straining to eject the contents of her stomach. The smell was of an open latrine on the hottest day, even pinching my nose it filled the room. Then Nana turned an accusing face towards me.

'Is why you let her eat so much? You were supposed to look after your cousin, nah true?'

'B.. b...ut, Nana, she 10 and me still 8.'

‘But she not used to all that food them people give out at weddings.’ said Nana. ‘This is her first time. Now you have me up till what a clock. Mi Lord have mercy on poor me, eh!’

I hung my face in shame. Nana never had to shout at me.

‘Tomorrow, tomorrow you watch,’ said Nana. ‘Castor Oil washout for you.’

Upon hearing this Claudette groaned all the more, throwing me an anguished tear-stained look.

My heart sunk. I wanted to add my cries to hers, because I knew I would be joining her in that cocktail of Castor Oil.

I watched the early morning sun peep in through the blinds, heard the birds greet the morning and the cock-cock-a-doodle-do of the hens in the coop. It was then I fell asleep. I slept beside Claudette uncomfortably as she sprawled with arms and legs thrown to the four corners.

‘Move up, you taking up all of the bed,’ I said. ‘There’s no place for me and its my own bed.’

Hours later, I lifted the pail and almost emptied its foul contents on the cool wooden floor. They were live snakes trying to wriggle their way out.

‘Nana!’ I screamed running without looking back. ‘Snakes! Snakes!’

I remember watching Nana boil yellow split peas, adding salt, pepper, hot pepper, turmeric, a bit of curry powder and jeera. And when it was all boiled and smelling lovely, she would begin to chunky the dahl. She would put finely chopped garlic in a hot pan with a little oil and fry. I would hear it sizzle and sing like two long lost lovers finding each other. It is then I would experience the orgasmic ecstasy of a foodie.

When I make it, it takes me right back to those days. I throw the blackened garlic to the pot, and hear the dahl sizzle happily. I imagine I hear Nana say,

‘Make sure you put the lid on quick.’

My 11-year-old granddaughter would throw me a shocked look as I proceed to use my fingers.

‘Granma!!’

‘This is the only way to eat dahl and rice,’ I said. ‘It Sweet bad.’

She would follow my hands as they mixed the bright yellow dahl with the rice forming a ball and carefully place into my mouth, and I would laugh as she copied, finally uttering,

‘What a mess! Think I’ll use the fork Granma.’



MY FAVOURITE BAJAN CUISINE BY ME MUDDA

By Elsie Henderson

I remember when I was young, about the age of 12, me mudda and I were sitting around two tall coconut trees on chairs. We were just chilling out enjoying the lovely breeze from above. There were other fruit trees like the mango tree, de mammy apple tree, de pear tree, de soursop tree, and a breadfruit tree full of breadfruit. I remember we were talking and laughing, and suddenly, mudda said,

“What am I going to cook today?”

I replied, “Look at de breadfruit tree and what can you see?”

“Oh, yeah,” she said.

We walked over to the tree, found an appropriate stick, and started hitting on it so the breadfruit will drop. As it happened only the ripe one drop. Mudda took de breadfruit to the kitchen and said,

“It’s breadfruit pickle me gon cook with left over seasoned flying fish from the day before. I have everything that I require.”

Mudda started to prepare it. She put de saucepan with water to boil on de stove. She then cut de breadfruit in half, sliced into several pieces so it was easy to peel. When she was peeling, she said,

“You have to cut de core out coz it is de tough part of de breadfruit.”

The breadfruit was washed and put in the pot to cook, and it should take about 20 minutes. Meanwhile, mudda started to prepare the pickle. She used two cucumber peeled and chopped into small pieces and put into a bowl, with one chopped onion, chopped parsley, two limes, red sweet peppers—so as to add a bit of colour, scotch bonnet pepper or pepper sauce. Every little ting now mixed evenly together. I could smell de aroma from the pickle coming through. What an amazing smell! The breadfruit was now cooked and cooled and cut up in any size or shape and added to de pickle, then Mudda said,

“Now, don’t fuh get to taste and allow to ‘rest’ as yuh ancestors always say.”

The last thing to cook was the steamed flying fish: all the ingredients such as onions, garlic, fresh thyme, marjoram, ginger, sweet peppers, curry power, and cook down with okras.

When dinner was finally served, the taste of breadfruit was tender with a good texture and complimented the juices of the pickle. On de other hand, the steamed fish was succulent and scrumptious.

I have learnt from this memory that coming from de country and living north of de island, which is very fruit and tlng, yuh can plant anything on yuh land and can’t starve!



MY FAVOURITE RECIPE

SALT FISH FRITTERS (SOMETIMES CALLED STAMP & GO)

By Jennifer Clarke

I remember eating salt fish fritters as a small child and how delicious they tasted. At the age of 10, my older sister taught me how to prepare and cook them. They are perfect finger food and can be served as a starter accompanying any meal or with a salad and/or dipping sauce.

Prep time 20 minutes

Cook time 20 minutes

Makes 24 small fritters

Ingredients:

200g salt cod, or other salt fish, boned

100g self-raising flour

1/4 red pepper diced

1/4 green pepper diced

1/4 onion or 2 scallion finely chopped

1/2 scotch bonnet pepper seeded & finely chopped (use 1/2 green chilli for milder taste)

1 tsp thyme leaves

1 large tomato chopped

Freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup cooking oil for shallow frying

1/2 cup water to mix ingredients

Lemon wedges



Method:

Drain the soaked salt fish and cook in boiling water for 20-25 minutes, or until the fish is tender. Drain and cool, remove any skin and pin bones, flake the fish.

Sift flour into a bowl and stir in cold water to make a thick paste. Stir in the salt fish, red and green peppers, onions, scotch bonnet pepper, tomato, and thyme. Season with freshly ground black pepper. Stir until all ingredients are blended.

With caution - heat cooking oil in a frying pan/skillet over a medium heat, when the oil is hot, carefully place a several spoonsful of the batter mix into the hot oil and fry in batches for 2-3 minutes on both sides until the fritters are crisp and golden brown. Remove from the pan and drain on kitchen paper to remove any excess oil. Add lemon wedges to serve.

Enjoy!!

My parents came to the 'Mother Country', as it was once known, from Trinidad and Tobago in the 50s and they settled in Liverpool.

It's a vague memory, as I was a child, perhaps 7 or 8 years old, however, I seem to remember my mother talking about going to pay into something called a Pardner. I also remember being with her on one occasion when she met Tantie Ven, every woman from the Caribbean was a Tantie back then, and them talking about when she was expected to 'draw' her Pardner and whose 'hand' was next. From the way they both spoke it seemed as though they knew all the members of the Pardner.

My mother's Pardner came a couple of months before Christmas and was used to travel to Trinidad and Tobago to spend Christmas with my grandparents and family. I doubt she would have been able to do this without having been a member of the Pardner scheme. This visit gave my brothers and I a direct connection with where we had come from, with our roots.

NOT A WHITE CHRISTMAS

By Michelle Inniss

The springtime had arrived at last, bringing with it soft petals of pink and white cherry blossom. It was the month of May and Grace and her two brothers followed in the shadows of their mother's footsteps as she marched solemnly behind the procession of Our Lady. The avenue was lined with cherry trees and a wisp of breeze gently carried its petals circling around the devout parishioners laying a fragile carpet in their wake.

Grace's mother had told her children that she had some exciting news to share with them, and Grace couldn't wait for the procession to be over. Her stomach grumbled which reminded her that they also had a special breakfast of roast bake fresh from the oven with scrambled egg and cheese to come. There were also hot dog sausages waiting for them, but she didn't like meat, which was always a problem. Grace shook her head - she didn't want to think about that now. When the procession was over, and her mother had said her goodbyes to Father O'Neil they trampled the cherry blossom underfoot as they walked along the avenue back home.

Grace couldn't hold it in any longer.

"What's the surprise, mum?"

"Patience is a virtue -"

Grace finished for her, "- and virtue is a grace, and my name is Grace."

Her mother smiled. "We' going to spend Christmas in Trinidad, man!"

Grace and her brothers could not believe their ears.

"Trinidad!' said Anthony jumping up to punch the air. "Yes!"

"Are we going to see granny and grandad?" asked Luke.

"Well, of course, man, that the reason we goin'!"

Grace was about to chime in with her excitement but then something suddenly occurred to her.

"Wha' happen to you?" her mother stopped momentarily to look at her, "Cat got yuh tongue?"

Grace stared shuffling from one foot to the next.

"Well, tell me nah man, what happen to you? Yuh not excited? We goin' to Trinidad!"

Grace latched onto her mother's open smile and dived in.

"Will Father Christmas still bring us presents if we're not at home?"

Her mother began to laugh, that laugh which caused sunflowers to turn away from the sun.

“So, that what got you all tied up?”

Nodding her head Grace felt silly but didn't really understand why.

“Yuh think St. Nicholas never visit de children in Trinidad? Like him an' he reindeer don't have a compass?”

“A compass, what's that?” asked Anthony.

“It's like a small watch but it hands don't tell de time; instead, they show you how to get to places.”

“So, Father Christmas will still come then?”

“What I just tell yuh?”

Grace threw herself at her mother and was gathered up in her arms. She closed her eyes and imagined the Christmas tree, lights sparkling, presents wrapped and granny and grandad happily smiling.

“Don't expect a white Christmas though.”

“What? No snow!” Shouted Luke and Anthony in unison.

“No,” said their mother laughing, “Only sun, sea and sand!”

Then the countdown began. Every day, Grace and her brothers took it in turns to mark off another day on the calendar which brought them closer to their first ever trip on an aeroplane. The cherry blossoms disappeared and were replaced by finger pricking roses, long hot walks to Oglet Shore and strawberry picking. Before they knew it the leaves on the cherry trees had fallen and turned the avenue different shades of yellow and brown. Autumn brought with it the need for warm Ready Break porridge on frosty mornings before walking to school and hot soups in the evenings. Grace's favourite was split pea soup with its yummy potato, sweet potato, yam and dumplings which she got to help her mother make. Grace entered the kitchen one morning and heard the crackling of the split peas soaking in the pressure cooker. She smiled at the thought of making baby dumplings with her mother. Later that day she rushed home from school and found her mother in the kitchen the pressure cooker spouting steam.

“Go an' wash yuh hands,” said her mother responding to the expectant look on Grace's face. She rushed off to the bathroom and returned to her special pink Tupperware bowl for dumpling making. She poured the flour into the bowl, added a dash of salt then poured warm water on top, soon her fingers were covered in the gooey mixture.

“Add more flour.”

Grace lifted the bag of flour with one gooey hand and let the fine white powder fall onto her other hand. She began to knead the gooey mess into a soft ball. Her mother's face beamed as she peeled the potatoes.

“I goin' to collect de Parnder hand tomorrow, an' then I goin' to buy de aeroplane tickets from Bee-wee.”

“What's a Pardner?” asked Grace.

“De Pardner?”

She nodded her head.

“Yuh no, girl, that a good question!”

Now it was Grace's turn to beam. Her mother stopped peeling the potatoes and stared off into the distance for a moment. She resumed the peeling and began,

“I never knew about de Pardner before coming to this country, yuh granny was always such a resourceful woman, you know she coulda make somethin' outta nothin' boy.”

Grace stared at her mother perplexed.

“That not really explaining it is it?”

She shook her head.

“Okay, so de Pardner not called Pardner in Trinidad, it called Su Su and it a way of saving but yuh don’t put yuh money in de bank you give it to a person.”

“A person?”

“That’s right, a person that you trust.”

She still looked perplexed.

“Okay, let me put it another way,” She said now peeling sweet potatoes. “So, let’s say Tantie Eunice is de bank, okay?”

Grace hesitated as she tried to get her head around Tantie Eunice being a bank. She nodded finally imagining Tantie Eunice wearing a big coat with lots of pockets to keep the money in.

“So, let’s say Tantie Vera, Tantie Beatrice, Tantie Mabelle, Tantie Wilma, Tantie Majorie, Tantie Odette and Tantie Loretta... How many we have now?”

Grace counted on her fingers whispering the names of the Tanties, as globules of flour fell into the bowl.

“Seven!”

“With me an’ Tantie Eunice that make nine, so, we go t’row in Danny for good luck. So, that make ten people. Now these ten people they gonna han’ over to Tantie Eunice £20 a week to hold on to.

“To all go on holiday?”

“Well, maybe a couple of them, let’s say Tantie Wilma need a washing machine, an’ Tantie Beatrice need a fridge, an’ Danny want to buy a car.”

“Okay,” said Grace separating the kneaded ball into smaller balls. She thought for a moment. “So, what does Tantie Eunice do with the money?”

“Good question,” said her mother. “Hopefully put it somewhere safe!” She started laughing. Grace smiled not really understanding the joke but wanting to feel some of the joy her mother was feeling.

“Okay, so, Tantie Eunice she’s de banker, she take de money an’ keep it somewhere safe an’ this happens every week for let’s say, a year. Yuh know how much Tantie Eunice gonna end up with?”

“A lot?” Her mother begins to laugh again.

“That’s right, a whole heap!” So, as de year goes by each person draw a hand.”

“A hand?”

“A hand just mean that it they turn to get de money that’s been saved by all de people in the Pardner or the partnership. This includes they own money too. So, then Tantie Wilma have all de money in one go to buy she washing machine, then on another month Tantie Beatrice get to buy she fridge an’ Danny he get to drive he new Ford Escort. Yuh understand?”

“I think so.”

“So, in my case I paid de money to Tantie Eunice.”

“The bank?”

“Yes, de Banker. Now it my turn to get de money from de pot.”

“To buy the tickets to go to Trinidad?”

“Precisely.”

“So, you all help each other to buy things?”

“Exactly! You one smart girl, boy.”

“So, the Pardner came from Trinidad?”

Her mother stopped chopping the onions.

“Well, not exactly.”

Grace looked at her mother as she stared off into the distance.

“There’s a bit of a story to it.” she said at last.

“I love stories!”

“So, a long time ago before you was born and before I was born even before granny was born.”

“That was a long time ago.”

“Yuh tellin’ me boy! Anyhow, in a place far, far away.”

“Further than where you’re from?”

“Yes, man even further than that.”

“What was it called?”

“Africa.”

“Africa,” she said. “I like the sound of that.”

“So, in Africa there lived a beautiful people, who we come from, our ancestors.”

“Ancestors, what’s that?”

“Our people, that mean the people that come before granny and grandad, they mudder and fadder, yuh great grandmudder an’ grandfadder.”

“Great grandmother and great grandfather.”

“That’s right but don’t worry yuh head too much about it. All yuh need to know is there was a whole heap of them and you a part of them and you carry them in you.”

“How? That’s a lot of people.”

“Well, that nose yuh have, it like mine not so?”

“A huh.”

“And granny have a similar nose and her mudder had a similar shape nose, so, basically that nose been passed down. Yuh understan’?”

“I think so.”

“Then there’s yuh sweet nature dat from yuh great Tantie Gloria, an’ de fire in your belly, well, dat from yuh great Tantie Euphemia on yuh fadder’s side.”

“So, it’s her fault when I get mad at Luke and Anthony?”

Her mother’s homemade apron shook with laughter.

“I tink that mostly you. Anyhow, our ancestors were stolen from Africa and taken across the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean.”

“Stolen!”

“That’s right, stolen.”

“But you can’t steal people, can you?”

“I ‘fraid yuh can, an’ some really bad people did exactly that.”

That sounds so scary.

“And it was for all those people.”

“Our ancestors.”

“That’s right.”

“Why didn’t they try to escape?”

“Some did try but then they were punished.”

“Like when I’m naughty and I don’t get to have a treat?”

“Far worse than that and they weren’t being naughty, they were trying to escape to get back to they families in the villages from where they were stolen.”

Grace became quiet. She pushed her finger into the small balls of dough.

“That sounds horrible.”

“It was.”

“Those people who stole them, they were evil people.”

“They were.”

“So, what happened to them?”

“Well, they were carried by ship to the different islands in the Caribbean, and then sold to the highest bidder.”

“Sold?”

“Yes, sold and then they were forced to work for no money.”

“And if they said no?”

“They were punished.”

“I feel sorry for our ancestors.”

“Me too, however, they were a resourceful people.”

“Resourceful?”

“They were strong willed, strong minded and clever. Some did try to escape mind, and others fought in big ways and small ways. Freedom and returning to Africa was always on their mind, but they had been stolen from their Motherland thousands of miles away, brought on ships to a land they didn’t know. Their main aim soon became being able to survive, because if they didn’t, well, you and I wouldn’t be here today.

Grace thought about what her mother had said.

“Our ancestors were strong people.”

“They were.”

“So, we were talking about how de Pardner came about. Remember how I said that our people were being sold?”

Grace nodded her head.

“Well, at some point a few of our people were able to buy their freedom and that how de Pardner began.”

“But how?”

“I didn’t tell you that they were a resourceful people. Those that could but de majority couldn’t well, they would sell their labour to other people on the other plantations after working up to fourteen hours or more 5a day unpaid.”

“Fourteen hours a day! They must have been very tired.”

“They were but they kept on going.”

“What’s a plantation?”

“That de name of the place where crops are grown, in de Caribbean durin those dark times of our enslaved ancestors sugar cane was de main crop which was grown.”

“So, that’s where sugar comes from?”

“Yes, that white powder sure did cause a lot of misery and suffering.”

“So, they helped each other too.”

“They did.”

“To buy their freedom.”

“To buy their freedom.”

Grace watched her mother as she stirred in the chopped-up potatoes, sweet potatoes, yam and green banana into the pot of yellow split peas. She watched her slender fingers add the seasoning, a pinch of this and a pinch of that knowing without measuring exactly the right amount to make the soup taste delicious. She thought about how her grandmother and her great grandmother, and her great, great grandmother had all made this soup and passed it down one to the other. She knew how the soup made her feel good inside so must it have been for them too. She decided that the split pea soup had been a part of her ancestors’ strength.

“Now let’s drop them dumplings in de soup before they dry up.”

Grace rolled the small balls between her hands stretching them out just a little, then she popped them one by one into the soup and watched as her mother stirred them in and they disappeared beneath the broth.

Grace thought about starting a Pardner of her own, saving up her weekly pocket money from her father, but when she asked Anthony and Luke to join her and she tried to explain it in the way her mother had explained it to her, her brothers just laughed hard and called her stupid. Why would they want to wait a whole year to buy their pick n mix sweets? When her mother found her in tears and she explained why her mother fetched her purse. She gave Grace fifty pence.

“So, you an’ me, we goin’ to have we own Pardner. So, what yuh saving up for?”

“A Tiny Tears. What will you save up for?”

“I not sure yet,” she thought for a moment. “I tink I got everyting I need.”

Grace looked surprised, “Really?”

“Yes,” she said hugging her.

“I got me a clever girl like you.”

The day finally came. Their suitcases were packed with more presents than clothes. They travelled in a mini cab to the airport. It really was a day of firsts, mini cab, aeroplane, and seeing granny and grandad without the confines of a photograph frame.

They waited for their flight in John Lennon Airport. Grace was transfixed by the size of some of the suitcases and startled by her mother's comment of, "Wid all them big, big, suitcase dem people carryin' let's see if we have anywhere to sit on de plane." The flight lasted for ten and half hours and when the aeroplane finally began its descent into Piarco Airport, Trinidad Luke and Anthony placed their hands over their ears and began to cry. Her mother explained that the pain was due to pressure inside their ear canal. Grace decided that it hadn't happened to her because of a trait she had inherited from her great Tantie Euphemia as she would have been too vexed to stand for any of that nonsense.

As the door to the aeroplane opened Grace followed in her mother's footsteps descending the stairs. She felt the hot air of Port-of-Spain wrap around her like a familiar blanket. With each step she thought of her ancestors and how their journey was nothing like her own and she suddenly felt a wave of sadness. Her mother turned to look at her and she laughed that laugh that made the sunflowers turn away from the sun.

"We're here! Thank you!"

As Grace's feet touched the ground a thousand whispers were caught on a light warm breeze, they tickled her neck and just behind her ears welcoming her. She could not help but smile.



Pardner System

Elsie Henderson

Pardner

Partner

Su Su

Whatever!

Mi like it, Mi like it!

'The Pardner' or 'Su Su' or 'Money Go Round' was brought to de Caribbean from West Africa by the slaves dem in the 17th century. It is an independent way of saving. The slaves used this way of saving to help ends meet and for a rainy day.

De system still exists up to this day, but different islands have different names for de same concept.

Now mi hear seh de Caribbean people dem a tek it stateside and beyond.

This Pardner ting consist of a Banker who collects de money from de members dem weekly or monthly, and it could last a few weeks, six month or even fuh up to a year depending on how many people a join up.

This Merry Go Round ting was brought to de Motherland in de 50s so de Caribbean people dem, club together as a community and carry on with the tradition.

Back then, dem, priority was to buy their own home as they struggle to find adequate accommodation due to the fact they were told every time, 'No dogs', 'No Blacks', 'No Irish' so dem throw dem little Pardner and save hard to get de deposit to buy their first home as traditional lending was not available. They continue to work hard doing many jobs to help throw de little Pardner and eventually bought de house outright.

Throwing de Pardner help emigrants in so many ways. It also helps dem buy furniture, send money and barrel back a yard, holidays, save up fuh wedding and a heap a tings dem.

Mi was first introduced to de system in the 70's but was a bit sceptical. People saving mi money and dem not even de real bank and mi won't even get interest pun it. Soh, mi give it some thought, and decided to join de Merry Go Round.

Around that time mi was learning to drive and mi had a date to take mi test and it also when I would get mi hand or draw. Timing was spot on, so started to look at cars and found a Fiat 127. Petite like me back then. Got mi Pardner and bought mi first car, cash wid that hand and other essentials. Passed mi test in de same car.

Continued to contribute over the years. It has help me to buy the things I needed to set up home and much more. Some Pardner last longer coz some members have more than one hand inna it. Like 6-10 hands and want all dey hands every week. That is frustrating and shouldn't be allowed to happen. I know of one that went on for 18 months!

Participating in a Pardner is about trust with all involved. Without trust it can cause breakdown in relationships. Mi never really had a problem. My request was always granted.

Mi nah know if it a true but mi hear seh if a member doesn't pay here and there, de Banker always tek de first hand, cos down de line she have that money to pay to cover de hand, but she usually have more than one hand.

Remember people if yuh go do a Pardner check out de pros and de cons coz it is not governed by de Financial Compensation Scheme.

Now a days de young people dem are inna it. They buy tings dem need and tings dem don't need. Dem a use it fuh go on holiday, pay off debts and a whole heap a ting dem. Now a kid's Pardner has been launched at £5 weekly.

Teaching young kids to save at an early age is also teaching them how to appreciate the value of money and that it doesn't grow on trees.

Mi nah bother wid it now. Mi prefer de Bank as mi nah want any headache. 'Never say never.' Once you are disciplined, you will be alright.

Another bit of gossip. De Bankers now a days give members a sheet of paper stating de guidelines of de terms and conditions which also include fuh every hand, she would tek de amount you pay weekly from yuh draw. Coz people dem inna de Pardner don't even gi she even a glass of water and she a tek on a big responsibility dat. But me say a glass of water is alright yuh know.

The system is helping de Brothers and Sisters dem to reach dem goals. It is a quick an easy way to save.

PEPPERPOT

By Esme Alexander

I remember going to the butchers with Mummy, and she asking the butcher for oxtail, cow-heel and brisket—a cut of beef; then the butcher with a chuckle remarking,

“Mother Forde, it's for the usual!”

I then asked, “Mummy, why so much meat, what are you going to do?”

She replied happily,

‘It's for Christmas, I'm going to make Pepperpot.’

She kindly asked the butcher to cut everything into sizeable pieces which he willingly did, all in the spirit of Christmas.

Mummy then collected other items needed and which she didn't have at home. Among these were, cinnamon, clove, thyme, hot pepper, oranges, and cassareep. Cassareep is the most important ingredient. It is produced chiefly by the Amerindian, the indigenous peoples. They used cassava, a root vegetable, in the production of cassareep, and this is what they used to cook their meat, making the dish we call, 'Pepperpot'.

I was about ten years old and beginning to like cooking. My friend Norma and I would do a 'baby cook' under the house, using bits we got from Mr Joe, the shopkeeper who gave us bits of salt fish, salt beef or ham scraps. We collected from the kitchen garden, ochro or whatever growing at the time and which we had permission to pick. Cooking and eating our own cooking was great fun.

You can imagine how I felt when my mother said I could help her in the kitchen. I was not always allowed there when she was cooking. So, there I was, helping my mother. I was given onions, garlic and thyme to chop into pieces. I had to peel an orange for a piece of the rind. Mother, meanwhile, was preparing the meat. I watched her. She washed and dried all the meat then put a very big pot on the stove to which she put the meat. She put a slow fire and allowed the meat to dry out some of its liquid before adding the spices that I had chopped and added some sugar, about two tablespoons, some sugar and half a cup of cassareep, and gave all a great stir. She then added hot water to cover the meat and that was left to cook slowly for about an hour when she remembered that she did not add that whole hot pepper.

She laughed, saying, “What will this be without pepper!”

As the meat cooked, it softened and absorbed the spices and cassareep and with the sauce it was a dark brown. The subtle aroma of the spices filled the room. The pot after another half an hour was removed from the fire and left for the next morning when it was reheated before serving.

It was Christmas morning, everyone was late in getting up, but all the family was at the table, well set with Pepperpot, cassava and freshly baked homemade bread. Another delightful smell.

I eagerly severed myself some Pepperpot and bread. That was so very delicious! I had seconds with boiled cassava. That too was a very enjoyable treat.

Every Christmas, thereafter, I prepare Pepperpot and everyone looks forward to this traditional Guyanese dish of my mother's Pepperpot!



RUNDOWN

By Merle Collins

I remember the first time I had this recipe I was living in the country, and I was about nine or ten years of age.

My mother would prepare this meal. She would break two dried coconuts, then extract the white flesh then grate them, then she would add small amount of water to extract the milk by squeezing the grated coconuts. This was done twice to make sure all the milk was completely extracted. Then she would strain the milk into an iron pot then put on the fire to reduce the content of the milk by about a third.

She would prepare either salted cod fish or salted mackerel by soaking them beforehand to get rid of most of the salt. This would be added to the coconut milk that's already on the fire and now looking like a thin gravy then she would add the following fresh ingredients: onions, thyme, pimento seeds, tomatoes, garlic and turmeric or small amount of curry (for colouring) scotch bonnet pepper (was added whole for flavour only).

When you smell this cooking, and the aroma was tempting you would want to taste it before it was finished cooking. This was served with one, two or three of the following: roasted or boiled breadfruit, yam, green banana, sweet potato, and dumplings (flour and cornmeal kneaded to a soft dough shaped in a round circle, flattened and boiled... this is called dumplings).

This recipe is called “Rundown”.

Don't ask me why it was given this name—but you could use your imagination!



SPLIT PEA SOUP

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

By Emerald Davis

One of my favourite memories takes me back to my grandmother's house. I must have been all of three years of age and it's Sunday. I can even smell the aroma now, split peas soup, it was our Sunday dish.

The night before, Mama got out the split peas, and together, we would sift through them for broken black seeds or unwanted grit or soil, then she would put it in a big pan of water to soak overnight. In another pan she would soak pigtaails and salt beef all chopped up in small pieces.

Sunday after we came back from church, she would start preparing the ingredients. I would take a keen interest in what she was doing on tip toes.

She'd put together plantains, sweet potatoes, cassava, eddoes and flour for making sugar dumplings. I particularly liked helping her with making the dumplings with a small amount of sugar, a pinch of salt, a splash of corn oil and a dollop of butter. This was mixed to a not too soft consistency ready for it to be spooned into the soup when it was nearly finished.

She'd start the soup off by putting the split peas, which were now swollen to about three or four times what they were before soaking, on to boil in a huge pan half filled with water.

She'd then put the onions, garlic and spring onions together with some parsley and thyme all finely chopped up in the frying pan and cook until soft and slightly brown being careful not to get them burnt, then she'd add the salt beef and pigtail pieces that were also soaking overnight and fry them all up before adding them to the boiling split peas and leave on a low fire.

Now we'd peel the provisions, I was not so keen on this part as I did not do too well manoeuvring the knife as I recall my hands were too small for the knife but I enjoyed pounding the plantain in the mortar with the pestle to make the *Fu Fu*. I would pound and Mama would periodically throw in drops of water and use a big spoon to stop it from sticking to the edges. We'd eventually shape it into round balls then just before the soup was ready, we would add them to the pot, just after adding the sugar dumplings.

Then we go into the pantry where the dining table was all set with special glasses and a fancy glass jug with lots of ice and ginger beer or pineapple drink or lemonade, all made by my grandmother. The soup bowls were also special resting on dainty special fancy plates. In the centre of the table would be a large loaf of home-made plait bread baked by mama.

After we'd eaten Papa would take me out to the backyard through the gated fence to the alligator pond and we would feed the alligators.

Oh, how I enjoyed the memories of those days! It's like a big warm hug.



My Partner Story

By Yvonne

In Guyana a Partner was called a Box Hand, it came about just after the Victorian era, according to my mother.

Women did not have bank accounts or work outside the home. Some housewives came together to start a Box, by using some of their housekeeping money; for example, each housewife would put, let's say, \$5.00 a week. One of the wives would be in charge of the money, and every week a different wife was given \$25.00 dollars and that would be hers to spend as she pleased.

Sometime after coming to London a colleague introduced me to a Partner. My colleague did not tell me I had to give the lady in charge of the Partner something like a commission, and as I was leaving, she turned to me and said "wait (in her lingo) yu na going give me my fee", or words to that effect. I felt so embarrassed, that after that session I did not go back.



Pardner Poem

Elsie Henderson

Pardner a start eee!

Pardner banker

Pardner members

Pardner a throw

Pardner hand.

Pardner fuh go six months eee!

Mi a get mi pardner money yuh see,

But when this a finish

Mi a finish too.

This ting is stressful yuh see,

me too old for dis ting ee!

Bank is de place for me yuh see,

Coz mi get interest eee!

But it was wort it.

Later!





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