

# AN ORDINARY WOMAN, AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

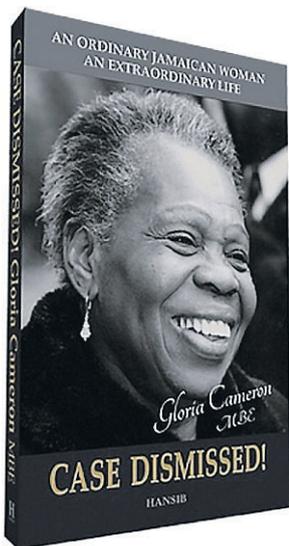
Celebrated community figure Gloria Cameron on how a false accusation threatened her reputation, and why the Windrush generation needs to share more of their stories

BY RYKESHA HUDSON

**I**T would be no exaggeration to say that Gloria Cameron's life so far has been an emotional, rewarding and challenging rollercoaster ride.

A celebrated community figure, who has been honoured by the Queen; had her business officially launched by Princess Diana; and who was awarded an appreciation medal from the Jamaican Prime Minister, Cameron believes she has quite the story to share, and has decided to do just that.

Her memoir, *Case Dismissed! An Ordinary Jamaican Woman; An Extraordinary Life* (below) closely observes her early childhood in Jamaica, as well as her journey of discovery in the UK and resilience to bounce back from a damaging false accusation which threatened to ruin her hard-earned reputation.



She also eloquently paints an historical picture of a unique Caribbean journey.

"I've worked on it for a very long time. I shelved it, then brought it back out," Cameron

says.

"There was lots to write about, which is why I settled down to do it. Not only because of the accolades, but of course for my new generation. I wanted to inform them. I wanted to inform them of what went on in my life."

The autobiography offers a fresh new chapter to the 83-year-old's life story, which saw her become a Justice of the Peace in the 1970s and achieve local and national recognition in the 1980s.

During that decade, she made numerous TV appearances, received an MBE from the Queen in 1980, met Princess Diana, who officially launched her Brixton-based nursery in 1983 and received a Medal of Appreciation for community development from then-Jamaican Prime Minister Edward Seaga in 1987.

And with all that, Cameron still found time for husband Herbert and to raise six children.

Cameron's life was underpinned by music. She helped establish the pioneering Caribbean Folk Culture company in the 1960s, performing alongside husband Herbert, as well as community stalwarts Courtney Laws and the late educationalist and historian Len Garrison, who was the architect of the Black Cultural Archives (BCA).

The family's love of music would impact on two of their six children, who went on to receive bursaries to attend the prestigious institutions of the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music. However, it was Herbert's accordion playing and ability to read music, which also helped nurture son Chris Cameron's impressive career.

The gifted teenager assisted in the music arrangement of his mother's *Mango Spice*, a collec-



ROYAL APPROVAL: Cameron received an MBE in 1980

tion of Caribbean songs. He has since carved out an enviable reputation as a keyboard player, writer, arranger and musical director, working with a number of international artists.

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Unfortunately, many years later the Cameron family was to face their biggest challenge – which is well-documented in the book. Throughout her career, Cameron was devoted to the local and wider community, contributing in a voluntary capacity to The Society of West End Theatres, the Laurence Olivier Awards Panel, HM Rochester Youth Borstal and The West Lambeth Area Health Authority.

She equally was passionate about supporting children, which led to her fostering and also establishing a nursery in

Lambeth.

Unfortunately, it was the latter which was to prove the most damaging, with accusations hanging over her for nearly two years. Although the case was without foundation and collapsed within two days, the nightmare took its toll on Cameron. She sees the book as an opportunity to set the record straight.

Cameron, who lived in Kingston, Jamaica until she arrived in the UK at 25 years old, said: "This was a book I had to write because I felt compelled to give people an insight into how false accusations not only challenge your very existence, but have an enormous impact on family and friends.

"I was also conscious that my life story can contribute to preserving our visual and oral history for the next generation. I really hope my story resonates with people everywhere and inspires them to pursue their passion and to become successful individuals."

Already doing her part to "preserve" history, the great grandmother believes that stories from past generations will be lost, if they're not shared.

"A lot of young people now have no idea what their parents and their grandparents encountered coming [to the UK]," she says.

But while she thinks it's "disappointing" that many young people do not know their own family history, she says they are not to blame.

"I don't think you can blame them, because I don't think enough books have been written. People of past generations have not written enough books to educate them. This is why I wanted to write this book."

Remembering her own experiences of arriving to the cold UK, Cameron admits she was not impressed.

"I wanted to turn back," she laughs. "If it was at all possible, I would have turned back."

Writing *Case Dismissed! An Ordinary Jamaican Woman; An*

*Extraordinary Life* would have also conjured up memories of another key biographical event: when she was presented with her own big red book by host Eamonn Andrews on the popular TV show *This Is Your Life* in 1983.

Cameron recalls: "They brought over my mother, who was still residing in Jamaica, as a guest. That was really exhilarating. When I saw her, I couldn't believe it."

And to show that her hard work had not gone amiss back home, the then-Jamaican High Commissioner also paid tribute to her on the programme.

"He came along bringing the blessings and love from the government and the people of Jamaica. That made me feel overly proud."

*Case Dismissed! An Ordinary Jamaican Woman; An Extraordinary Life* is out now.

For more information, visit [www.gloriacameron.co.uk](http://www.gloriacameron.co.uk)

## OTHER MEMOIRS BY AMAZING BLACK WOMEN

### The Face That Changed It All by Beverly Johnson

IN August 1974, Beverly Johnson became the first black woman to grace the cover of *American Vogue*. In her memoir, *In The Face That Changed It All*, Johnson delivers her own passionate and deeply honest voice to chronicle her childhood during the socially conscious, racially charged 60s.

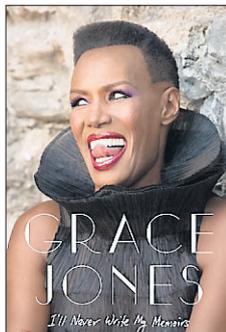
Initially drawn to a career in law due to the huge impact the Civil Rights movement had on her life, the 62-year-old eventually made her mark as the *Vogue's* first cover black cover star and a successful three-decade career in modelling followed.



### I'll Never Write My Memoirs by Grace Jones

LEGENDARY and influential performer Grace Jones offers a revealing account of her spectacular career and turbulent life, charting the development of a persona that has made her one of the world's most recognisable artists.

Celebrated for her audacious talent and trailblazing style, the Jamaican-born singer, dancer and model became one of the most unforgettable, free-spirited characters to emerge from the historic Studio 54, recording glittering disco classics including *I Need a Man* and *La Vie en Rose*.



### Year of Yes - How to Dance It Out, Stand In the Sun and Be Your Own Person by Shonda Rhimes

IN this poignant and deeply intimate call to arms, one of Hollywood's most powerful women, the mega-talented creator of *Scandal* and *Grey's Anatomy*, and executive producer of *How to Get Away with Murder* reveals how saying 'yes' changed her life – and how it can change yours too.

