



Ismay

PATRICIA SINGH

Imagine life without the sun...

Our world plunged into darkness from the moment we lost our beloved mother, Ismay Patricia Singh, a few minutes before midnight on July 12th, 2022. She was love, she was light, she was laughter; a woman small in stature but big in heart and spirit. For the last four years, unified by the memory of a remarkable woman and a common cause, we have tried to honor her by fighting hard to protect her legacy. Her enduring influence, the values she taught us, the memories we treasure and the life she worked so tirelessly to build to make ours better.

Mummy was the anchor of our lives, the centre of our world, the glue that kept our family quite literally together. She was a woman defined by her quiet kindness which was never mistaken for weakness, her boundless generosity, and an unshakeable, hardworking spirit. She was always entrepreneurial at heart, which is why as a young stay-at-home mum of young children, she made and sold everything from sugar cakes to coconut bread through the front window or side door of our modest house in Bank Hall. Despite our humble beginnings, Mum made our tiny house into a home. Because of her, childhood Christmases were magical. She had the amazing ability to stretch what we had to make it work and gave when a neighbour or friend needed or had less.

In 1975, a year after the Crop Over Festival was revived, Mummy decided to venture into the food vending business. She worked at the festival at a time when Barbados still had donkeys for the decorated cart parade. She also worked at all the major festivals that followed; Holetown Festival, Oistins Fish Festival and of course, Congaline. As children she had us in tow with her, never leaving us home alone or with a babysitter. She continued at the Crop Over Festival for another 40 years, during which time she became very well known, and her stall sought after, for her delicious food by both locals and repeat visitors alike. The irony of losing her during the festival is not lost on us.

Mum was an amazing cook, and her coconut bread was legendary. Memories of cars lined up in the road waiting for her sweet bread straight from the oven, the mouthwateringly, delicious aroma lingering in the air outside.

In the early 80s, she started her own business, a rum shop which bore her name, Ismay's Bar & Restaurant in Suttle Street, Bridgetown. However, this was not her first attempt at such a venture. The earlier endeavour was in Baxter's Road but was destroyed by fire before it was ever opened. My sister Sherriann describes Mummy as determined, courageous, resilient and fierce, qualities that were evident especially after losing her first business to fire. She did not let that setback deter her from trying again, instead she rose from the ashes and with determination she found another site on which to start over in the face of adversity. Through the years we would see her strength and resilience on a recurring basis as she courageously battled the health challenges she would face for most of her adult life.

Michael, Mum's first born, describes her as devoted and sincere. As a young woman, when she had an opportunity to go to the UK to work, she chose to stay in Barbados with her baby boy. That move would have changed the entire trajectory of her life, but she stood firm in her decision not to leave her son. In that moment she defined the mother she would be, one who was always there for her children even when it was to her detriment. She lived her life entirely for her children, even when some showed they were less than deserving.

We were either too young to understand or too caught up in ourselves during our teenaged years to fully appreciate the sacrifices she made daily, the long hours spent away from home. Her greatest strength was not found in moments of ease, but in the countless days when she carried on despite being completely exhausted.

She was a mother who knew what it meant to be tired. She knew sleepless nights, endless responsibilities, and the weight of putting everyone else's needs before her own. There were days when she had very little left to give, yet somehow she always managed to find it. Her determination was quiet but unwavering.

Her sacrifices were seldom announced or recognized. They were found in early mornings, late nights, missed opportunities, and countless acts of kindness that became the foundation of our lives.

Her hands were rarely still. She worked hard and diligently every day until she was 78 years old, stopping only because of the covid shutdown, which forced her to close her bar and restaurant of over four decades. As we grew older and truly started to see her for the selfless person she was, we understood that her hard work was fueled by a fierce, protective love for her family. Her labour was her poetry and her love language, it was how she showed us every single day how much she cared because she would do anything for us. Her devotion was endless and sincere.

She wasn't perfect, and she never pretended to be. She worried, she struggled, and there were moments when the burdens of life seemed almost too much to bear. But she faced each new day with courage because the people she cared about mattered more to her than her own comfort. She taught us that strength is not about never feeling tired - it is about choosing to keep going because love gives us a reason. If we are resilient and determined today, it is because we learned those qualities by watching her. She showed us that perseverance isn't loud. Often, it looks like getting up one more time and trying one more time even when your heart and body are weary.

Mummy was that rare diamond in the rough. Coming from very humble beginnings, her mother - Ma - as we all called her, was a cleaner at the QEH. She didn't come from a background of privilege or opportunity, nor did she have the benefit of a good education. Nevertheless, that didn't stop her. She was sharp and quick, especially with numbers. Even in her senior years, she could accurately tally a customer's bill in her head regardless of the number of items on the table. She never made a mistake and never used a calculator which she considered laziness.

She possessed an extraordinary, quiet generosity, as described by Mark the baby and youngest in our family, that reached far beyond our front door, family and friends. She was the kind of person who would give or share her last meal, because as she said, "you should never begrudge a person a plate of food."

In the early 90s, she welcomed a young drug addict who had been living on the streets in Bridgetown, into our home. She said if one of her children was in a similar situation, she would want someone to do the same.

Because our friends were always welcomed regardless of where we lived, Mummy got to know them, and many continued to visit her at her shop long after school days were behind us. She would never accept their money treating them as if they were one of her own children. One such friend who eventually migrated to Canada always remembered her kindness and compassion for him. Until his recent passing, whenever he called, our conversations always started with, "Jo, how is Mum? Please tell her I said thanks." He once told me that he could never adequately put into words how much she had done for him at his lowest points.

Mark also remembers Mummy as not easily fooled; he knew this having tried many a time. To be fair, we all had at one point or another, but she was always one step ahead of us. We never cease to be amazed at how much she knew or how she found out given that thankfully, we didn't grow up in the social media era. Years later she would regale us with stories of incidents and events as if she had been present.

As for myself, I am blessed to be the first child born after she married my Trinidadian father, Tony Singh - the absolute love of her life and with whom she is now reunited. There is a sense of peace knowing that they are together again watching over us.

In the stillness of her absence, the world is noticeably emptier without her in it. Mummy was a huge part of my life on a daily basis starting with our hour-long morning phone calls which carried on throughout the day. She was and is love. It wasn't just a feeling; it was a sanctuary. It was unconditional, unwavering, and safe.

She was friend, confidante and advisor. Our supermarket marathon sessions every Sunday; the countless family functions at my house or hers where she insisted on doing most of the cooking so she could boast or complain about it later, and Christmas our favourite time of the year, are just a few of our happiest memories which are too many to mention but all of which are now cherished and treasured.

Sherriann also remembers her as hilarious with a contagious laugh. She hated pink but couldn't resist sparkly shoes and slippers. She loved music and convinced herself she could sing. Watching horror movies was one of her favourite pastimes. Growing up, she was an avid reader, especially of history books, her vivid imagination allowed her to lose herself in stories of kings and queens. She enjoyed family picnics and gatherings. Though not a regular church goer, she read the bible every morning, said her prayers and kept pictures of us between the pages. She asked for very little if ever at all. She was independent and no-nonsense.

Today, on the fourth anniversary of her passing, while our hearts continue to be heavy with grief, they are also filled with gratitude. We are grateful for every sacrifice she made, every dream she nurtured, and every act of love that often went unseen. We are who we are because she refused to give up.

The grief we feel is simply the price we pay for the immense privilege of being her children. The lessons she left behind cannot be measured in possessions or achievements, but in the character she helped build within each of us.

We can now imagine that the weariness she carried for so many years has finally been replaced with peace. The hands that worked so tirelessly are now at rest. The heart that loved so fiercely has completed its work, but its love remains with us.

We will miss her every day. We will hear her voice in our memories, see her kindness reflected in our own actions, and feel her love surrounding us.

Mum, you gave us everything you had. Your hardworking hands are finally at rest. Your kind soul is at peace. We hold you in our hearts Mummy, Granny, Ismay, Mrs. Singh, until we can hold you again in eternity. We love you so deeply. Rest now.

Written by Joann Singh Mirkarimi