

Preface

Dancing, always dancing.

It was always a special day when Mum brought home a new record. Music, especially reggae, was the soundtrack of my childhood. If the record player wasn't on, it was the pirate radio station. If it wasn't the pirate radio station, it was a cassette tape spooling round on a stereo or a ghetto blaster.

Mum was back from Brixton Market, the bulging plastic bags of food left forgotten by the front door. It was her new record that we all wanted to hear – me, my sisters Lisa, Sharon and Rose. Mum slipped the single out of its sleeve, gave it a twirl in the sunlight streaming through the front sash of the living room. As she put the record on the player and lowered the needle, I heard the tell-tale crackle that the record was about to begin.

A short opening roll of drums. Then clipped stabs of guitar against an endless bass that seemed to rise and fall with hypnotic, laid-back precision. Floating over the top, the featherlight female vocals began: 'I want to share your life ...'

I looked at my sisters and grinned. 'Someone Loves You Honey' by J.C. Lodge was one of the records of the summer of 1982. Number one back in Jamaica, every time you turned on a radio in Brixton it seemed as though the same sweet lyrics and pulsating

bass were there waiting for you. Transporting you for a few fleeting moments away from south London towards sunnier climes.

In front of the record player, Mum was starting to move. It was as though the richness of the reggae beat was rippling through her. Some people are born with a natural sense of rhythm. Mum was one of them. As she turned around, she gestured for the rest of us to join her. We didn't need a second invitation. Everyone was up on their feet, swaying and swinging in a circle around the coffee table.

As the song reached the chorus we all knew so well, everyone started to sing along. The louder I sang, the more Mum smiled.

After

One

It was a few days after my mum passed away in 2011 that my life was turned on its head for a second time. The first time had been in 1985, when I was eleven, and a dawn raid on our house in Brixton left her shot by the police and fighting for her life. That incident had triggered the second Brixton uprising. After the debris and destruction of that weekend had been cleared away, my family were left to pick up the pieces of our lives. For my mum, Cherry Groce, it was coming to terms with the fact that the shooting had left her paralysed, and facing the rest of her life in a wheelchair.

The second time began not with a bang, but with a whisper. I was back at King's College Hospital in south London, where Mum had passed away, to collect some paperwork. In a strange way, I was grateful for the bureaucracy that follows on from when somebody dies. It gave me something to do while I was still making sense of it all. I was thinking about the arrangements for the funeral and needed to get hold of the death certificate to set that up. There was a paper trail to follow – get something from the hospital, take that to someone else at the council, and then get the death certificate.

I was in the early days of grief, still coming to terms with the fact that Mum was no longer around. It was odd being in the

hospital without her there; it felt that little bit different, that little bit emptier. I'd been so many times to visit Mum I knew the way to the ward by muscle memory. But this time, I headed in the opposite direction, downstairs, in search of a small office in the basement. I explained to the woman behind the desk who I was and what I needed. She gave me a small smile of sympathy and disappeared to look through the files. I waited. The fluorescent strip light hummed.

OK, she said, returning. Here you go. But she didn't hand anything over. Instead, she continued to read. Then she whispered, more to herself than to me: Oh, hang on.

She looked up. She said: There's a comment here. The doctor has written something. I'm sorry, but I can't give you these at the moment. He thinks this might need to go to an inquest.

An inquest? I didn't know what that was.

It looks like the doctor is asking for a post-mortem to be done, the woman explained. And then this will need to be referred to the coroner's office to decide how to proceed. I'm sorry. These sorts of complications are probably the last thing you want.

She tilted her head to one side and gave me another sympathetic smile.

There was plenty I had wanted to happen in my life; this really wasn't up there with them.

It turned out that my mum's doctor wasn't certain about what the cause of death was. Or rather, he was clear on the medical reasons why Mum died, but wasn't completely certain about what had caused them. The post-mortem was done by a forensic pathologist called Dr Robert Chapman and took place a couple of weeks later. When I got sent the findings, I read it at my kitchen table in fits and starts; a paragraph or two, then flicking forward desperately, hoping that my brain would soak all the information up without

me having to properly digest it. Mums aren't bodies to be dissected. As part of the process, the pathologist removed a section of her spine to take away and analyse. As far as I know, that's still in a lab somewhere, gathering dust on a white shelf.

Reading the report was hard going. Chapman described how he found a succession of metallic fragments lodged in my mum's spine. These were fragments from the bullet fired by DS Lovelock back in 1985, which had become embedded. That wasn't a surprise: from the start, the medical advice when Mum had gone to hospital was that it was simply too dangerous to try and remove them all – any attempt to do so could cause further damage. The doctors took out what they could. The fragments that remained caused my mum pain throughout the rest of her life. A recurring, sharp, stabbing reminder of what had happened one September morning.

But what was a surprise was Chapman's conclusion. It was those fragments, he said, that killed her. It was those fragments that had caused her paralysis and paraplegia, and it was the paralysis and paraplegia that caused a urinary tract infection and bronchial pneumonia, and it had been the urinary tract infection and bronchial pneumonia that had caused more infection and acute renal failure that was the last straw. I had it in my hands: incontrovertible proof that, over two and a half decades after my mum had been shot by a policeman, his bullet had resulted in the end of her life. The pent-up need for action sat in my throat like a stone that was on fire.

He thinks it might have to go to an inquest, the woman in the hospital basement had said.

I didn't know how an inquest worked or what it could do, but I knew that I wanted it. The first Brixton uprising in 1981, the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 – they'd both resulted in public inquiries. After my mum had been shot, there had been an internal police investigation, which led to charges being brought against the officer who fired the gun. But he'd been found not guilty, and no public inquiry had followed. Public inquiries have

a habit of asking awkward questions that authority figures don't want to find themselves answering. As a family, we'd never had a chance to find out what really happened that morning all our lives were turned upside down. Would the inquest give us an opportunity to do so?

I had a friend called Anthony, who was a solicitor. Without him, I don't know how I'd have found out what I needed to do; how many other people have wasted chances because they didn't know the right person to explain that the chance exists? My solicitor friend put me in touch with a guy called Evans Amoah-Nyamekye, a lawyer who specialised in inquests. He told me that inquests are required by law if a death is unnatural or caused by violence. They are a fact-finding process to clarify four questions: who died, where, when and, most crucially, how. If the death is as the result of an action by a police officer, then a jury is required. It wouldn't be a court case – the jury wouldn't be able to find someone guilty; instead they'd have to answer the questions set out by the coroner. The role of the coroner, Evans explained, was crucial. As well as deciding on the questions the jury would need to find on, they decide the witnesses the inquest would call. Essentially, they were in charge of the whole thing.

I needed to find a way to convince the coroner to follow the agenda I thought the inquest should follow. As Evans described how that worked, I realised that this was not going to be simple or easy. But it was a chance to find out exactly what happened leading up to the moment that had changed all our lives. My chance to get Lovelock in the witness box. To get people to listen to what took place. To get Lovelock and the Metropolitan Police to finally face up to and accept responsibility for what they had done all those years ago.

I'd been waiting for over twenty-five years for that moment, without even realising it. The time was now.