What's the meaning of Independence to Barbados? What have we achieved? What should we aim for?

Grandma always told me of how one day, over three hundred years ago, a man by the name Captain John Powell happened upon our island and claimed it in the name of his king. It was a bearded uncultured island paradise sitting peacefully just outside the edge of the Caribbean Sea, where brown pelicans nested nearby and flying fish swam the surrounding waters. She had said that the man's proprietor had ordered a settlement of the island and so they had returned some years later, landing in Jamestown (an old name for Holetown she explained), bringing with them the first of our ancestors. Later, most of our ancestors came from Africa as slaves to work the plantations of the settlers, toiling in their tobacco, cotton and fields of sweet cane that stretched as far as the eye could see. Until that fateful last day of November around fifty years ago, that is, Grandma said she remembered it like it had only just passed. She said not even the roar of the falling rain could drown the sounds of excitement and freedom as the Barbadian flag rose for the first time and the sound of the national anthem played as sweet as sugar cane juice to the soul. On November 30, 1966, Barbados became the third West Indian nation to become independent from British rule.

Independence is more than just a series of spirited events put on every year during the month of November and capped off with an elaborate parade. The state of being independent refers to the freedom of control by another country or outside entity Grandma had told me. She said this meant that the Barbadian people no longer had to rely upon the help of the "motherland" to survive; we could now make our own rules, set our own laws and govern the country the best way we saw fit. Despite maintaining ties to the British Monarchy through representation by the Governor General (although, grandma explained, history too was made in this department during 1967, when Sir Arleigh Winston Scott (1900 – 1976) became the first Barbadian Governor General of the island), it meant that we had finally become our own people after years of injustice. Independence gave us a free voice in the matters of our country's affairs and what the government does through parliamentary democracy, first under the leadership of the Right Honorable Errol Walton Barrow (1920 – 1987).

The Right Honorable Errol Walton Barrow, or the "Father of Independence" as Grandma affectionately called him, gave Barbados its greatest achievement yet: freedom. He had formed his own party, the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), in 1955, due to his discontentment with the leadership of the Barbados Labour Party (BLP), and won the 1961 elections to become a

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Premier of Barbados before leading the country to Independence in 1966. His achievements, and by association the Barbadian people's achievements did not stop there however, Grandma noted, as during his 15 year run as Prime Minister, the Father of Independence, revamped the image of what Barbados was, as he significantly improved the provision of services to all Barbadian people, as well as implemented a system looking after the unemployed and granted democratized free education to all students of the island, which in turn now ranks Barbadian people as some of the most literate people in the world. Barbados's economy also saw substantial economic growth after independence, Grandma went on, as a healthy interest in tourism evolved (to the point that it is now the foundation of the Barbadian economy) and the manufacturing sector developed (sugar and rum being the highest foreign exchange earners), which reflected in the Central Bank of Barbados being formed in 1972, allowing Barbados to break away from the East Caribbean Currency Authority, and develop a Barbados dollar in 1973 that adjusted to a consistent exchange rate with the United States dollar. As a very cultural people as well, Grandma added, Barbadians have also gone on to showcase their talents on a global stage, with people like Obadele Thompson and Sir Garfield Sobers establishing a name for us in sport and George Lamming and Rihanna achieving great things for us in the arts.

Despite our substantial strides in worldwide recognition, however, Barbados is still a small developing Caribbean island (166 square miles with a population just under 300,000). Grandma suggested that the country needs to make a push towards becoming a fully self-sustaining developed nation, but to do so the first step is to stabilise the government, and make sure that it is committed to the development of the country and the welfare of the people. The economy at the moment is so far from where it was at its highest point in history that something urgently must be done to help the country once again function to the absolute best of its ability, and strive for even more success. As read on our national coat of arms, the Barbados motto: "Pride and Industry", should resonate with our people as a whole, as Barbadian people are already a proud people no matter what we do, but we should aim for a higher development in industry. Grandma wished for betterment for our people, and an improvement of our economy; she wished for something to drastically be done about the growing unemployment in the nation, hoped for the government to find ways to help these people be placed in even the lowest ranking of employment areas to keep them and their families afloat. She believed that our citizens should always come first, and that home grown businesses should gain more support rather than selling away our lands and businesses to foreign corporations. She also mentioned something about tertiary education; she suggested that it should be a more affordable choice for at least one person in every household to gain degrees suitable for entrance into the highly

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competitive work force. These "fields and hills" deserve to run aquamarine, gold, and black with Barbadian spirit as our future Barbadians deserve better, to grow up and find a stronger, more stable Barbados.

Conclusively, Grandma made it clear that it is an absolutely astounding privilege for Barbados to celebrate a massive milestone such as these fifty years of Independence this year, and I'm sure she would have enjoyed all the celebrations happening around the country throughout the year. She always loved watching how Barbadian people all came together as more than a people, but as a really big family when it came to independence celebrations. She loved everything about it, from going down to watch the Lighting Ceremony in Bridgetown, to travelling to watch the grand parade pass by no matter where it took place. Barbados was, and always will be her home; it will always be our home; and it will be the home of all those who come after us. We are Barbados, and Barbados will always be home.