

IF, for Rosemary Brown

By Linda Rogers

The blind singer said he could see with his ears, and his pitch was perfect. We sang his song while we stuffed envelopes. We sang while we knocked on doors. We danced on the edge of the flat world. We were not afraid of falling into better times, where everyone would be colour blind.

Rosemary is for remembrance, and it means "dew of the sea." "Lonely rivers flow to the sea, to the sea," we sang, "to the open arms of the sea." And then she laughed, making the sound of waves slapping the beach like the slipper dances of our African foremothers, who hummed and hollered, drowning out the terrible rhythm of oars crossing the Atlantic from the Dark Continent to a Brave New World still to be born.

How could a woman born on an island not struggle to swim through the songs of protest and longing toward a great confluence as silent as melting snow?

"Brown is beautiful," we liked to say, Because that was the colour of silt from mighty rivers, the blend our children made when they mixed everything on their palettes, earth, air, fire and water, together.

In those days, when two women riding in an old Volkswagen with the top down dared to dream, we headed for Spanish Banks, the beach where our children and grandchildren, born and unborn, waited for the tide to change, believing, if we sang loud enough, everyone would hear, and everyone, pitch perfect as the blind man who sang in his chains like the sea, would be free.

For **Black History Month** and her commemorative stamp, 2009