

the extended family, filled with photos of his grandparents, marking the legacy in a concrete way.

One photo featured in the book is of his grandparents at a party at Parliament's East Block, honouring their community achievements. In it, Pops Brown wears sunglasses; diabetes resulted in blindness later in life.

As well, Estelle had become ill in the late 1970s, and Brown left the business to care for her. Other family members took over Brown's Cleaners. Eventually the successful business was sold.

The nickname "Pops" came about for good reason. In the late 1950s, the Canadian government launched a domestic scheme to bring in Caribbean women for work as domestic helpers.

Brown served as a stand-in father at the weddings of at least seven of them — while Estelle Brown made their wedding dresses.

"For a while, their house was one of the only houses that the ladies of the islands would have as a place of sanctuary," says Nessa Bedward Sherwood, the daughter of Pops and Estelle Brown. She came to Ottawa from Jamaica at age 20.

It was difficult work for her parents, Sherwood recalls. But hard work runs in the family. Sherwood, now 81, became a nurse while raising four children, and has spent her life in Canada volunteering for organizations such as Planned Parenthood and the Elizabeth Fry Society.

Perseverance is also a family value: Sherwood recalls a time when she was only given night shifts at Ottawa's Civic Hospital in the 1950s, due to her race. "I just learned to turn my head; I had a mission to work. My father had that experience in the war also," she says.

Sherwood is a published author who also writes poetry, and notes that her father had a musical bent. During his life, Brown penned love songs to his wife and even a song about Ottawa. In retirement, he became an active choir member.

Ewart Walters, a prominent Ottawa journalist, author and former editor and publisher of Spectrum newspaper, recalls the impact Brown's Cleaners had in creating a sphere in Ottawa that welcomed new immigrants. He first met Pops Brown as a journalism student at Carleton in the mid-1960s, after coming from Jamaica on scholarship.

"You could say he helped to stabilize the social condition of Ottawa and of young black women in Ottawa who were getting married," says Walters.

"When you leave your community and travel to another country, the settling here can take a long time. So by helping them to feel comfortable, he was helping them settle into Ottawa," says Walters. "That is a success story if there ever was one."

*Carleton University journalism student Olivia Bowden is a Canada 150 apprentice for the Ottawa Citizen.*

**"He was a very gregarious individual.** My grandmother used to say if it wasn't for the fact that he was blind, he would be out dancing two to three times a week."

*Albert Bedward*

**"(Moving to Canada) was a hard decision.** But when you look out and see opportunity that you don't have where you are, you want more choices."

*Nessa Bedward Sherwood*

**"When we were here we were a novelty,** because there weren't very many of us. I always found, and I still find, that if they don't know you, they're reticent. But if they get to know you, it's different. It's how you break through to spend time with people so that they understand you're not necessarily just like them, but you're a person."

*Marvin Bedward on growing up as one of the few black students in his high school in Ottawa, and being a part of one of the few black families.*

## THE STORY OF BROWN'S CLEANERS

### 1937

Herbert "Pops" Brown comes to Canada from Jamaica, hoping to pursue a passion for singing. He works for the Canadian National Steamship line as a steward, going back and forth between Jamaica and Canada.

### 1939

The Second World War breaks out. Brown enlists in the army three days after Canada declared war. He becomes an instructor, then is promoted to sergeant.

### 1945

Brown returns to Ottawa and learns the dry cleaning trade.

### Late 1940s

Brown heads to Montreal to open his first dry cleaning business. The business doesn't find much success; eventually he moves back to Ottawa.

### 1952-53

Brown returns to Ottawa and sends for his family in Jamaica to join him.

### 1957

Brown and his wife, Estelle expand the business. They end up with several cleaner locations over the years that follow.

### 1971

Brown retires due to illness. Diabetes results in partial blindness and he sells the business to his son, Winston.

### 1977-78

The Brown family sells Brown's Cleaners.