After waiting in the airport bathroom for 15 minutes, he finally hears the plane touch down. With nothing but a brief case and a paper bag, he exits – waving briefly at nearby airport personnel. He breezes through security, and boards a 40-seat LIAT airplane to Barbados. It is the afternoon of Dec. 6 1982, and his connecting flight to the United States leaves in a few hours. As the aircraft takes off, he looks one last time at his beautiful island, and says goodbye as it fades beneath him through the clouds.

My father, Vincent Alexander, was a teacher in his home country of Grenada, West Indies in the 1970s when he became involved in the Youth For Reconstruction (YFR) movement. This was a response to what became known as “squander-mania.” Government officials squandering government funds for their personal affairs stirred the large youth population to fight for change. “It was similar to the Obama election [in that] young people were coming together feverishly,” says Alexander. The YFR soon devised a plan to take the then Prime Minister Eric Matthew Gairy out of office.

The YFR formed an alliance with three opposition parties – the Grenada National Party, the United People’s Party and the New Jewel Movement – in time for the 1976 general election. “We legitimately fought at the ballots,” he says. In the end, seven of 15 seats in government were held by YFR movement leaders.

Despite the success of the 1976 election, the New Jewel Movement chose to form a more radical revolution in the years following. They began conducting secret meetings and changed the name of the newly formed regime to the People’s Revolutionary Government, with Maurice Bishop as their leader. My father explained that although the second revolution was not violent at first, as an educator and a person who understood government, he saw the possibility of things taking a turn for the worst.

The new government was leaning very heavily towards Communism. He recalls being asked to attend meetings where people were being indoctrinated in communist beliefs, as well as conferences with the leaders of Cuba and Libya.
At this time my mother, Marlene Alexander, worked as a government clerk and she traveled in her job. During these trips she began hearing rumors of what members of the new administration intended to do to my father who, at this point, openly opposed the People’s Revolutionary Government.

After being made the project officer in the Ministry of Education and Cooperatives – responsible for government grant writing and fund acquisition – in 1980, my father began writing a book. It was a compilation of journal entries, in which he named everyone involved in the new revolution and detailed meetings he had been attending. He describes it as “ideas you jot down that you can never get back.”

Months after the start of his book, a looming fear of being killed began to set in. One day a bomb went off close to where he was sitting at a large rally. A second, more overt, attempt on his life was made at a local bar.

Secret police were aware of my father’s vocal opposition of their regime, and had gathered at the bar waiting for his arrival. Quickly becoming aware of the situation, he managed to get out of the bar – his hide-out ironically being an adjacent cemetery. “I sat on a grave for about 20 minutes listening to them quarrel about letting me get away,” he says.

Early one morning, they finally came for my father. A 150-man search party ransacked my parents’ property, trampling his expansive garden then breaking into the house where they found my father in bed. The extracted him in nothing but his underpants, all the while saying “You made it now you want to break it.”

They took him from the house, leaving my mother – who hastily burned the book.

“I would have loved to read it,” my father says with a slight smile. “But they wouldn’t have let me leave Grenada alive if they read it.”

My father was taken to Carifta Cottages. The complex, built in 1969 by Gairy for an international conference (Expo 69), was converted into a jail as “secure as a paper bag,” according to my father. He recalls knowing that he wouldn’t be killed, seeing as some of the others prisoners being held at Carifta
were not involved in the revolution. After three days of interrogation, officials had nothing to hold him on, and he was released. However, his government positions were revoked and he was thrown out of the party. Having nearly been killed twice and forcibly apprehended, Alexander says it was around this time he realized he had to get out of Grenada.

Though he was no longer a government official, my father retained many of his government connections. He began working on an agricultural project pitch for a Canadian company that eventually landed him a $5,000 grant; all the money he needed to get off the island. He left the bulk of the money in an account under the care of my uncle, and began trying to obtain a visa to travel to the U.S. When asked about his upcoming trip to the states, he brandished a list of necessities that the head of the Ministry of Agriculture – his oldest sister – had provided him with. With this convincing alibi and his well worn passport, he was granted a three-month visa to the United States.

Only four immediate family members and his pregnant wife knew of his planned escape. He arranged to get on a plane leaving from the airport adjacent to his home in the countryside. My parents along with my uncle, arrived at the airport at around noon, he recalls. He waited in a bathroom stall to avoid being seen by anyone before his departure.

That December my father left his Grenada and in 29 years since has not returned.

My mother left Grenada in May of 1983 and traveled to Canada to her brother’s. She lived ther for six months, and had my older sister that August. She then returned to Grenada for a few months, came back to Toronto and finally to New York. After two years of separation, she, my father and their daughter were reunited.

My father has told me that he does not regret migrating to the United States. “Everything corrected itself. I wouldn’t have had my two lovely daughters, I probably would have had about 10 kids in Grenada to be honest,” he says jokingly.
--Alyssa Alexander