

"A SERIES THAT WILL APPEAL TO
FANS OF JACQUELINE WILSON."
THE TIMES



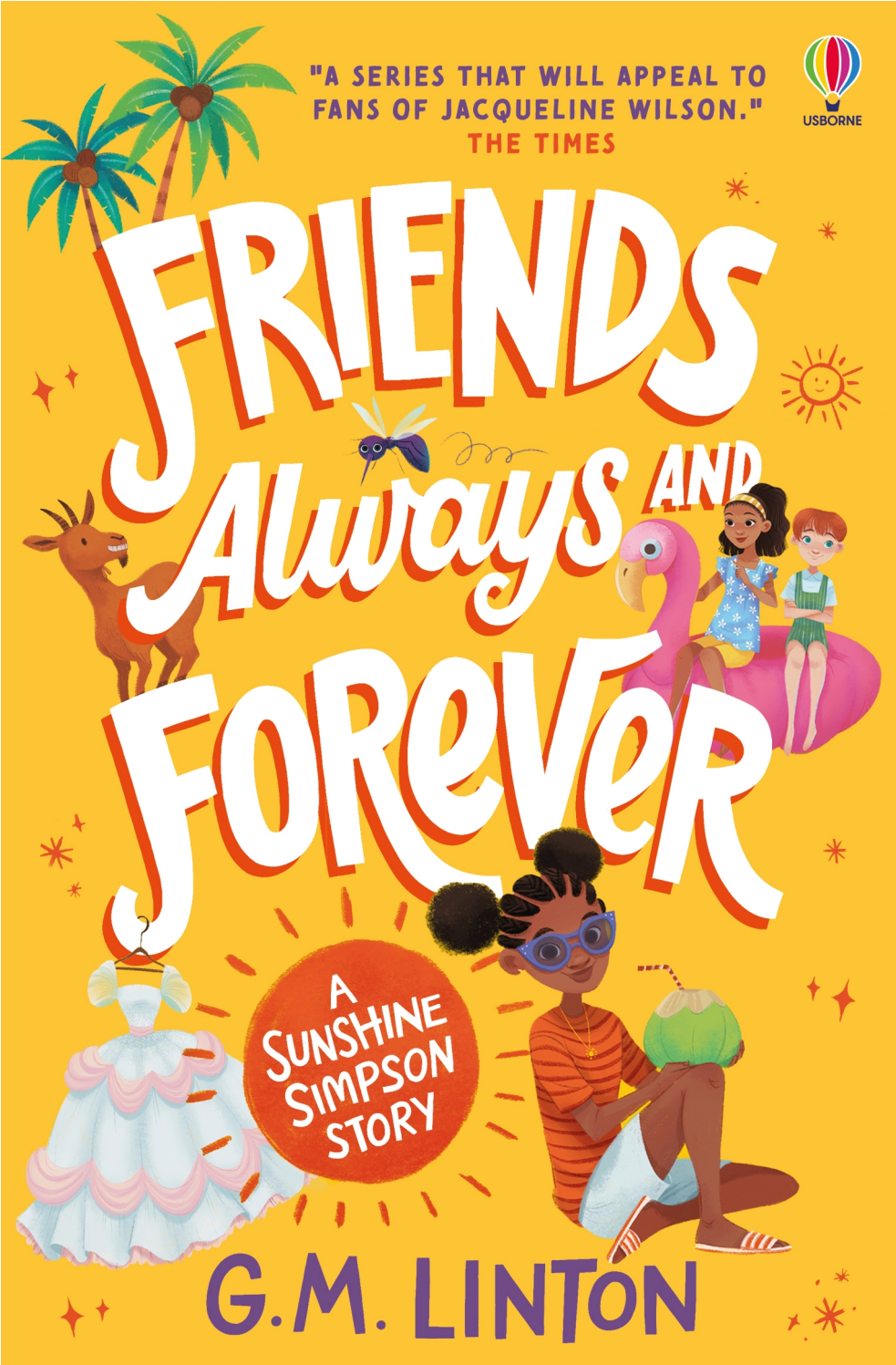
FRIENDS

Always AND

FOREVER

A
SUNSHINE
SIMPSON
STORY

G.M. LINTON





Readers love Sunshine!



“A book as warm and radiant as sunshine itself!”

Lisa Thompson, author of *The Goldfish Boy*

“An utterly brilliant book that had me laughing and crying in equal measure.”

Tolá Okogwu, author of *Onyeka and the Academy of the Sun*

“A beautiful, heartwarming hug of a book about the power of self-acceptance. I defy anyone not to fall in love with Sunshine!”

Hannah Gold, author of *The Last Bear*



“A delightful story that manages to be both sincerely heartfelt and sparkingly funny in equal measure.”

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“Powerful and poignant, hilarious and heartwarming. I’m just so in love with this book.”

Rashmi Sirdeshpande, author of *How To Be Extraordinary*





*For my Aunt Grace, the Peart family, and all of my
Jamaican relatives*



First published in the UK in 2024 by Usborne Publishing Limited, Usborne House,
83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England, usborne.com

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Limited, Prüfeninger Str. 20,
93049 Regensburg, Deutschland VK Nr. 17560

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 9781801313360 7605/1 JFMAM JASOND/24

Printed and bound using 100% renewable energy at CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY.



SUNSHINE SIMPSON

Friends Always & Forever



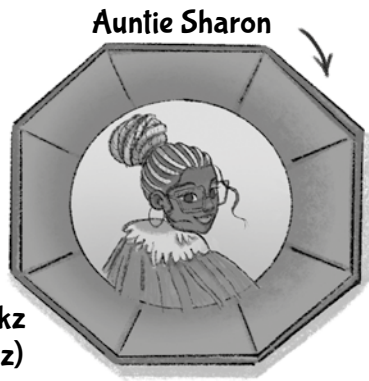
G.M. LINTON

Illustrated by Fuuji Takashi and Asma Enayeh





Dariuszkz
(aka Daz)



Auntie Sharon



Great-Aunt Vi



Ziggy



Granny
Cynthie &
Grampie
Clive



Mum & Dad



Great-Aunt Joy



Me



Grandad Bobby



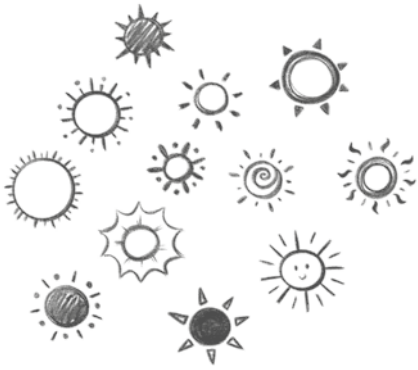
Grandma Pepper



The Twinzies (Lena & Peter)

Meet my family –
and welcome to my
rollercoaster life!

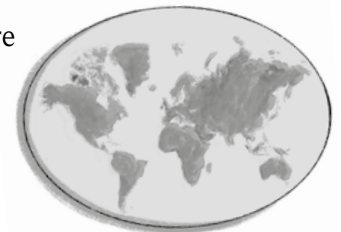




I have a large map of the world on my bedroom wall.

When I meet someone new, from a country other than the UK, I put a yellow dot on my map to mark the place they're from. It could be a big country like India or a smaller country, maybe somewhere like Barbados, where the singer Rihanna is from. (I like little bonus extra facts like that.)

Today was going to be different. This time, I'd be putting an extra special red dot on my map, because I was getting ready for an adventure of my very own.



I took my red dot and fixed my eyes on the Caribbean Sea, finding the island I was looking for. I carefully placed the red dot on the map, which swallowed the island whole.



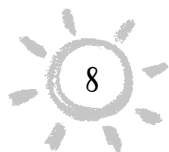
The island may have looked small on the map, but from all I knew and had heard about it, it was far larger and brighter than any map could ever show.

My body tingled inside and out, through a mixture of nerves and excitement.

I chewed on my bottom lip, thinking about what my Grandad Bobby would tell me if he was here with me now. “Go and have your own adventures.” That’s exactly what he would have told me.

It was time...

Time for this girl to go **INTERNATIONAL**.



LUCKY NUMBER SEVEN (AND ELEVEN)

7, 14, 21, 28, 35 – 11.

These are the numbers that changed my family’s life.

Last Christmas, in memory of her dad (my Grandad Bobby) my Auntie Sharon had played the Christmas lottery with the numbers that Grandad had always played with – and she won, **BIG TIME**.

Auntie Sharon had won **FOUR AND A HALF MILLION POUNDS**.

I’d always thought that when choosing lottery numbers, people picked special occasions like anniversaries and birthdays. But not my grandad. He believed that seven and combinations



of seven were his lucky numbers. Though I wasn't sure where the number eleven had come from.

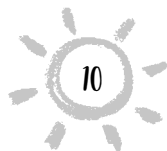
It turns out that Grandad was right about lucky number seven. And even though he was, sadly, no longer here to share the win, Auntie Sharon wanted to make sure that the rest of the family didn't miss out on enjoying her lottery-winning good fortune.

Once my family had finished an evening of non-stop screaming after we'd found out about the win, Auntie Sharon went on a "bit" of a spending spree.

She bought a MASSIVE four-bedroom house in a posh area of town called Poseley. Almost every room, including the four bathrooms, are decorated with animal-print velvet wallpaper and animal-print furniture to match. If you close your eyes and touch the wallpaper in Auntie Sharon's new house it feels like you're on safari. And when she wears animal print clothes to match her rooms, it's as if she's hiding in camouflage.

She also bought:

- * A "racing red" sports car.
- * A HUMUNGOUS diamond ring, which she'd flash



around while singing and doing the dance moves to Beyoncé's song "Single Ladies! (Put A Ring On It)" (even though she now has a nice boyfriend, called Dennis).

- * Luxury food hampers from a famous, expensive shop in London called Harrods, which she had delivered to all her old neighbours and friends as if she was Mother Christmas.

- * A speedboat.

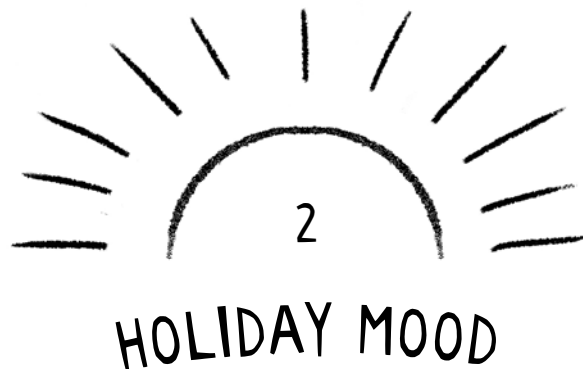
"A SPEEDBOAT?" cried Mum when Auntie Sharon had shown us a picture of it in the brochure. "We live in the West Midlands. It's LANDLOCKED."

"What can I say? I feel the need for speed – and the boat is just so SHINY." Auntie Sharon's eyes shone brighter than her boat. "And PAH! LandlockedSCHMANDLOCKED! We have more miles of canals than Venice. There's plenty of room for me and my little speedboat."

Mum opened and closed her mouth like a goldfish but said nothing else.

That's the thing about my Auntie Sharon, she often leaves people speechless.





And another thing about my auntie is she's a very generous person. As well as also sharing her good fortune with local charities, and buying lots of other gifts for her family and friends, the **BEST** thing of all was her treating us – her son, Daz; my parents; my seven-year-old siblings, Peter and Lena (or The Twinzies as I like to call them because they are twins); Dad's parents, my Granny Cynthia and Grampie Clive; her boyfriend Dennis; and me – to a **HOLIDAY OF A LIFETIME.**

We'd be going to Jamaica for **THREE WHOLE WEEKS** during the summer holidays and staying in an all-inclusive five-star resort as part of the trip.

This was brilliant news, because not only would it distract me from thinking too much about high school, which I'd be starting in September and was beginning to get nervous about for reasons I'll get to, but visiting Jamaica was also the holiday of my dreams. We'd only ever been on holidays in Britain before – and never as a whole family.

These were epic times. Sun, sea – and **NO SCHOOL!** I was so excited I thought my head might explode.



So now here we were, already two-and-a-bit weeks into the summer holiday and just a few days before we'd be jetting off to Jamaica. It was Friday evening, and we were leaving on the Monday morning.

As well as staring dreamily at Jamaica on my wall map of the world, I'd also been spinning my desk globe around so much, in giddy delight, that it had almost flown off its podium.

Mum kept popping her head into my bedroom, making tutting sounds and telling me I needed to finish packing my suitcase by the next day for checking, but I was just so busy with other **VERY IMPORTANT** stuff...



“Are you sure you don’t want me to help you?” asked Mum, after her twentieth head-pop into my room. “I’ve added your toiletry bag, underwear and sandals into your case, but as you’ve INSISTED on packing the rest of your clothes yourself, I DON’T want us to enter into a last-minute scramble situation. AM I MAKING MYSELF CLEAR?”

Mum was both LOUD and clear.

I battled an outward sigh. “Mum, you worry too much. I’ll be starting high school after the summer holidays. I’m practically a teenager, so I think I can manage to add my own clothes to a little old suitcase.”

Mum’s eyebrows sailed up towards the ceiling. “Hmm... We’ll see,” she said, in that doubting-Mum way of hers and walked off.

Oof, sometimes grown-ups have no faith.

I went back to not doing my packing. Instead, I decided to write some of the things that I’d researched – and that my grandparents had told me – about Jamaica into my Things and Places of Interest notebook, where I write about all the new people I meet from different parts of the



world and exciting facts about new places I’ve never been to before. I just couldn’t stop thinking about it, so writing things down helped me to feel like I was already there.

MY LIST OF EXCITING THINGS ABOUT JAMAICA:

* Jamaica is known as “the land of wood and water”. It has gorgeous sunny weather, lush, green mountains and clear seas, and is known for some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Sun, sea and sand (and green). Woo-hoo!

* Usain Bolt, who is a super-fast world record holder, is from Jamaica and Elaine Thompson-Herah and Shelley-Ann Fraser-Pryce are two of the fastest women sprinters ever. It’s a speedy island!

* Jamaica is famous for reggae music and one of its most famous musicians is Bob Marley. Other famous musicians that my grandparents love are Jimmy Cliff, John Holt, Desmond Dekker, and Dennis Brown. Music is in Jamaica’s heart and soul.



* Jamaican food is very tasty. Its national dish is ackee and saltfish, and then there's my favourite dish, brown stew chicken and fried dumplings. There's other great food too like jerk chicken, rice and peas, and curry patties as well as so much more.

YUM!

* James Bond, 007, is Jamaican. Kind of. The writer of the James Bond books, Ian Fleming, wrote them in Jamaica, from his home called Goldeneye. (I'd be Sunshine Simpson 011 – because that's my age.)

* Even though it's a really hot country where it doesn't snow, Jamaica had a bobsled team go to the Winter Olympic Games in 1988. A film called *Cool Runnings* is inspired by the team's story. (Note to self: no need to bring ski boots on holiday to Jamaica.)

* Jamaica is around 22 times smaller than the United Kingdom. There are almost 68 million people living in the UK compared with nearly three million people who live in Jamaica. Jamaica is "likkle but tallawah", small but **STRONG**.



Just when I was getting into my flow, Mum called me downstairs.

I was expecting another nagathon about packing. If only I had a magic finger where I could just whisk things out of my drawers and into my suitcase. That would be much more fun – and so much quicker.

When I came down to the living room, Dad and Mum – who was finally taking a break from over-organizing our lives – were sitting next to each other on the sofa looking at photo albums.

“Hey, Sunny, we’re just getting into the holiday mood by looking at these old pictures of family in Jamaica,” said Dad.

“Yes, we thought you’d like to see them as you’re taking your holiday research very seriously.” Mum smiled. I grinned back at her. How did she know what we were up to almost all the time?

Flicking through one of the albums was like watching a film of Mum’s and Auntie Sharon’s lives when they were kids.

There were loads of pictures of them when they had



been a little younger than me, on holiday in Jamaica, smiling and wearing T-shirts and shorts while stuffing their faces at a beach barbecue, with corn on the cob as yellow as the sandy beach they were standing on. Then there were the photos, a few years on, where Mum looked like a sulky teenager, standing, with slumping shoulders, in between Grandad Bobby and my very glamorous grandmother, Glammy Pepper, as we call her.

Mum and Auntie Sharon went to live in Jamaica with my grandparents when they were teenagers, but they couldn't fully settle into life there, so Glammy and Grandad Bobby brought them home again. Mum doesn't really like to talk about that time, and she hasn't been back to Jamaica since.

“This is a picture of your Great-Aunt Joy, your grandmother's sister, on the veranda of her house. We'll be travelling to visit her and the rest of the family in Clarendon,” said Mum.

I nodded. I knew all about the plan. Mum is very much one for planning things out to the smallest detail. I mean, what's wrong with freestyling sometimes? Mum needed to chill a bit more.



In the first week of the holiday, we'd be at the hotel. For the second week, we'd be visiting Glammy Pepper, Great-Aunt Joy and some of the rest of my Jamaican family on Mum's side for five days. Then for the third and final week of our holiday we'd be returning to the hotel, where Dad's side of the family in Jamaica would be joining us.

I was looking forward to staying at the hotel, but I was even more eager to get a slice of Jamaican life at my Great-Aunt Joy's place in Clarendon. Two of my Grandad Bobby's favourite singers, Freddie McGregor, who sings reggae songs, and Liz Mitchell, from a band called Boney M, who sang the famous Christmas song “Mary's Boy Child”, were from Clarendon. And a man called Levi Roots, who's famous for being on Dragons' Den and making reggae sauces that you can buy in supermarkets is from there too. All part of my research! Would I see anyone famous on this holiday, like when my friend Evie saw the famous film star George Dooley when she went on holiday to Italy a few years ago? I giggled at the prospect of what lay ahead, even though I doubted I'd meet any superstars. I couldn't wait to meet some of my Jamaican relatives for the first time.



Mum then showed me photos of our cousin Lorna, Great-Aunt Joy's daughter, who Mum used to hang out with when she was in Jamaica. One photo showed Lorna when she was older, with a toddler balancing on her knee. The little boy was dressed in shorts, a smart shirt and a cap, which sat lopsided on his head, as if he'd tried to yank it off but failed. He was smiling broadly, through a glistening, dribbling mouth, and looked like he was mischievously trying to wriggle out of Lorna's firm grip.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"It's your cousin, Ziggy, of course. Lorna's son." Dad smiled. "Ziggy's thirteen now, so two years older than you. Hopefully you'll get to hang out with him. It'll be good for you to have company close to your own age."

The thought of meeting my older cousin for real, and not just saying a quick awkward hello on a phone call, which is what I had been used to doing at Christmas and Easter for as long as I could remember, was exciting but also a little nerve-racking too. Would we get on?

"And here's a photo up at Old Farm, your grandad's childhood home," said Mum, as she ran her finger gently

across the photograph.

It was a colourful photo – dimmed slightly by age, but bright colours of orange, green and more still did their best to burst through. Mum, Auntie Sharon, Glammy Pepper and Grandad Bobby stood next to a tall mango tree. Its branches were bursting with the tender fruit. There was a small woman, wearing a cap and a T-shirt that had the words "Jamaica – No Problem" written on it, standing next to them.

"Is that Grandad's sister?" I asked.

"Yes, that is your Great-Aunt Vi." Mum smiled. "She still lives up at Old Farm with her family. We'll go and visit them too, while we're in Clarendon... So much to do and still so much to organize." Mum sighed, her mind wandering back to suitcase packing, no doubt.

I'd never met any of my Jamaican family in person. But my mind was opening to seeing these distant people for real. Would Ziggy have the same big smile he did as a baby – but hopefully not the dribbly mouth? It was like having a whole different part of yourself – your history – somewhere else in the world and I was here for it.



“Have Lorna or Great-Aunt Joy ever visited England?” I asked.

“Lorna came over for our wedding,” said Mum with a smile. “She saved really hard and other family members, including Aunt Joy, and my mum and dad, helped out with her plane fare. I was so grateful that she could make it.”

“Didn’t you want to go back to Jamaica for your honeymoon?” I was peppering Mum and Dad with questions. I must have asked that one a bit abruptly because Mum seemed startled by it.

“Well,” said Dad, taking over the conversation. “As Lorna had come all the way to England for the wedding, we spent some time showing her around. And then, after Lorna returned to Jamaica, we had a long weekend in sunny Spain. It was lovely.”

“Even though it rained every day – so it ended up more like soggy Spain,” said Mum, with a rueful smile.

“But we still had each other, so that was all right,” said Dad, a bit too soporily for my liking. “We just never got round to going back over to the land of wood and water.



What with life, work...just big people boring stuff. Until now, that is. But, no regrets.” Dad reached over and gently squeezed one of Mum’s hands.

“No regrets,” said Mum in a small voice. She returned Dad’s hand squeeze. But the faraway look in Mum’s eyes made me wonder if there was something more. Maybe it would be hard for her to go back after being away for so long. I know she’d found it hard to settle there as a teenager, and I sometimes got the sense that she felt guilty for wanting to move back to England, and that it was painful that my grandma had then left them to go back to live in Jamaica. Maybe there was a whisper of regret lingering somewhere inside of her at not going back sooner, or maybe she was hesitant to go back at all. I hadn’t thought about it like that before. I’d been too busy bouncing off the walls with my own excitement. I hoped she’d have fun on this holiday – that’s if she could free herself from Mum mode and start enjoying herself.

“But that was then, and this is now,” said Dad with a broad beam. “We’ve got a lot of time to make up for!”

“Yes, and it’s almost fifteen years ago since our very



special day,” said Mum smiling sweetly and batting her eyelashes at Dad.

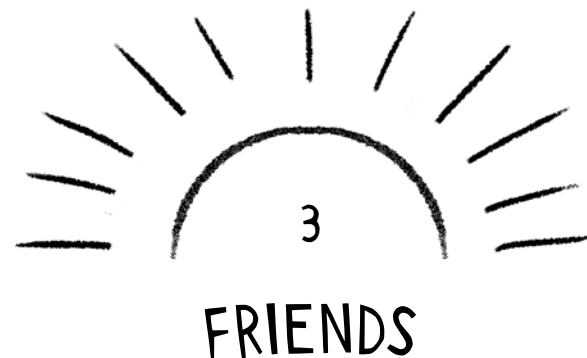
Dad’s face suddenly dropped. His mouth contorted and his eyes twitched as if he’d been struck by a lightning bolt. He moved to say something, but then the Twinzies boinged into the room, legs made from springs, distracting everyone.

“Is dinner ready?” they asked in unison.

Dad exhaled with relief. He got to his feet hurriedly as if the Twinzies had rescued him from “a situation”.

“Ooh, there’s us getting distracted. Let’s have no more of that. At your service. Dinner coming right up!” Dad almost fell over the coffee table in his hurry to leave the room.

But I hadn’t forgotten that “I’m in big trouble” mashed-up contorted look on his face. What was up with Dad?



Maybe it was all the talk of having no regrets, because the next day, Mum took a break from nagging me about organizing myself for our trip and let me spend Saturday afternoon over at Evie’s house along with my best friends Charley and Arun.

I’m glad Mum let me go; I wanted to say a proper goodbye. By the time I’d be back from Jamaica, I’d barely have a chance to spend any more time with my friends before we all headed off to secondary school to be proper grown-up kids, wearing blazers and ties, carrying calculators, and doing other high-schooly stuff.

This felt like the last proper “before high school”

