



THE HAMMOCK POETRY COLLECTION & LOVE LETTERS TO MY PEOPLE

Submission To the Roy Bodden Symposium

ABSTRACT

Reflections on the Caymanian Identity through poetry
and prose

Annikki Hill

2021

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INTRODUCTION

These two collections of works were not created for the reading of others. They were born on the steam rising off my morning coffee on the wake of my nighttime dreams – written for me by me, perhaps the truest form of self-expression. You will notice the language of my writing is not devoid of expletives and colourful thoughts. I do not lie to myself, not even in writing, and I will not edit my sacred private thoughts for you. I am known to myself and to my community as an accomplished professional, a chaotic artist, a hellcat after sunset, and an incorrigible nerd. If I have represented all of these things in my writing I will have done myself proud.

I am, like all things Caymanian, a complex mix of chaos and order, sinner and saint, light and darkness, salt and sweet. We cannot truly understand the Caymanian identity without owning all of its parts. There are the bright sunlit parts of us that make it to the tourism posters, and there are the parts of us that are cast in shadow. To not own it all is to be a brittle shell painted in pretty dissonance that cannot stand the test of a good hurricane. We cannot own our Christian roots without facing the subjugation that came with it. We cannot ignore our history of piracy while embracing our seafaring heritage. We cannot honour our colonial forebears without acknowledging the deserters and slaves who married or mixed, willing or unwilling, into their bloodlines. We cannot fully appreciate the genius of our small-island genetics without facing the disabilities. And I cannot write honest love songs about my people if I don't cuss a little.

Throughout his works, Mr. Roy Bodden has told his story and the story of our people with his strong voice. He has been the soloist that has begun the conversation, the record keeping, the music of presenting our identity. But anyone who knows music knows that the fullness of sound comes better from a choir than from a soloist, no matter how good. The beauty of the solo is not lost, but made more powerful by the harmony formed and broken and formed again around it. In talk of voices, I should speak, not only of beauty, but of danger. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has taught us well the "danger of a single story" and how much we lose by leaving the soloist on his own. A single warrior is not as effective as an army, a single negotiator not as effective as a delegation, and a single voice is woefully ill equipped to fully convey the complexity of a nation's identity. Identity may well be impossible to fully capture with any number of people! But we have learned that voices raised together stand a much better chance of being heard, and being right.

May the words I share raise another voice, add another colour to paint the picture of who we are. May we learn from the harmony of all things presented to love every part of what makes us Caymanian.

THE HAMMOCK POETRY COLLECTION

Chat Bout

2007

CHAT BOUT!

Ladies and gentlemen please be warned
That I will use my own Caymanian language.

See when my passion grips me
Only my local tongue
Can quite convey my message
And where I'm coming from.
Now if you fail to understand
My good good local words
Don't expect my sympathy
Chile... iz bout time you larn!

My tale begins in Cayman
In a lil pryvit school
Where they took my dialect
Tryn mek me look fool fool
One lil blon gyull turn to me
In the classroom that day
Flick her ponytail cross my desk
Blink blink at me an say:
"Why is your accent so strong?
In't this Cayman?
Y'all should speak good english
So wese kin understan." I light into huh like fyah
My eyes blaze open SO
"Tee dee don't mek me have to tell you
How dis talk ting go!
You fine me talkin like dis
When you come from USA
An when you pack your tings to roll
I'll be talkin ya same way!
My people is a peaceful bunch
We share our home with grace

But while you in dis classroom
Don't you figet yo place!
Cuz in dis sewenty six square miles
Where my ole people blood an sweat
Pour the foundation of dis here islan
Iz YOU wid di accent."

One maddy maddy Cayman boy
So confuse he head spin roun
Fine he seff in di story
Tryin to talk me down
Bout "I'm a born Caymanian
But I don't talk like YOU
Cuz I don't want to soun igranant
So dis is what I do..." CHU!
When I tun into he backside
Come in like white on rice!
I shame him bad bout "igranant"
And he never cross me twice.
"Hm! Conveniently Caymanian
But you come in like you shame.
Only when you wan someting
You use Cayman name in vain!
Memba I tel you Bobo
Call me "igranant" if you please
But "A" is on MY report card
And all you gets is "D"s
My people are full of colour
And if I goin succeed
I don't need to bleach myself
To please some other breed.
An when time comes for English
I use it like a pro
But I know where I was born an raise
And I ain't lettin go.

Now when time come to graduate
My name was called up first
I used the english in my speech
And leff dem in my dust.

To all who follow backa me
Rememba what I say!
Beat dem at dey english
Den go home and talk SAME WAY.

Poet's Note: I debated whether to include this earlier work within the Hammock Poetry Collection. It is a poem that was born out of a schoolgirl experience of injustice, frustration, and overall triumph. It has served me well in the Cayman of today to commit to being "bilingual", but this is not a privilege afforded to all of Cayman's youth today. That, to me, is a tragedy. In the end I chose to include it, as the frustration of my own girlhood has only been compounded in the experiences of today. It is still someone's story even if I have outgrown it.

The Buckra's Grave

10 February 2017

Heavy, hot and lead
is the heat within my heart
seeing my beloved girl
paraded naked, bought
sorely bled by sons of
split-heeled buckras and their
thrice-raped slaves
choosing shallow gold-lined
graves for us all -
but mostly them.

Their pockets first with zero thought
for the future they've been bought
so cheaply to destroy.
Filthy bastard-bearing men
come to rape the town again
claiming Christ and his salvation
several generations after
first their ooze did pour out
scurvy-ridden on this shore
bearded lice, poor as dirt
with that name cursed in sacrilege
different letters, names, same privilege
- I hope to Christ He hears you.

When He does I hope you cry
begging him to help you die
and the Earth you claim to own proves
herself true to Him alone.
May He remind you that dominion
is just a small, humble opinion
and does not mean that she is yours
one of your thieving dirty whores who
take this stewardship ting fa joke.
May the Earth from whence you whelped

reject your bones beyond all help
as you refused to see her hurt
and lift a puny human finger
may the trees themselves remind you
what it is to really work
as you beg for them to carry you
to rest deep in a beach
your life's work was to destroy.

How High?

15 February 2017

Small town muzzles keep
good citizens in check while
big cashy sticks and
small pricks make
wrecks of roads, codes
hymns to Jesus
and Our Father.

How would the music change if
we could hear
our own voices?

How high
must flames rise
before we open
our eyes and throats
raise belly cries
to the Universe
lay ourselves bare
honest, tainted bruised
naked before the God of all
(that means us, fam).
In him and ourselves alone
can we trust...

Divine Dust

22 February 2017

Do not seek to separate your most gifted self from others
That is not the endgame of the mountains we must climb
Choose to be instead a beacon, light and guide the way
To be closer, nearer, dearer still to all that is divine.
Cast not down shade on others a couple steps below
Remember your own journey on that changing crooked path
Cast instead a rope here and there where it is hardest
For who arrives first and alone most often shall finish last.
There's treasure laid in pockets, secret places in our souls
Gifts are made for purposes that we must search to fill
Undiscovered, unused they linger heavy and disturbing
Some of the most mystical unfound can even kill.
But he who searches for his purpose, applies his merits to the climb
Who each morning takes his shovel and clears a path out of his fears
Not only climbs the highest and the fastest of us all
But builds the path before his feet, creating new frontiers.
Yes, dear one, that's how it works, how it has for all of time
We're the most magical ghosts, riding steeds of flesh and bone
Creating as we go along the mountains that we climb
With the divine dust we're made of sprinkled in by God alone.

Privilege

8 March 2017

Uncle Tom sits by his window
drinking coffee from a fine cup
as his children and their children laugh
each age lighter, softer than the last
frolic scar-free in the gifted garden
tamed under the whipped hands
of his brothers' children
long driven to their graves
where they call to him each night
keeping him at odds with sleep
tomorrow he will need more
black milk to live
his Privilege
(his shame)
again.

Crochet Bedspread

9 March 2017

On days when I cannot bear to hear
another arrogant word blown
with hot air on an ill wind
out of the foul mouth of man
I choose to sit smiling and surrounded
by colour, fluffy beauty made by gentle
sisterly hands, tributes to Goddesses
long made wrong by a mans
best laid plans and septic world.

For this we were made.
For this we make.
For the world that could be.
For all our sakes.

Poet's Note: There is a secret life women live in most societies, passing down traditions to their little girls as they teach them to be women. In this, Cayman is no different. Our mothers taught us how to care for our woman bodies, how to clean fish and meat and season a pot, how to use needles and thread to create knotted patterns of elaborate beauty. Crochet has been a tradition in most Cayman families and is a dying art – but not in my family. It remains a Bush woman's solace when the world gets too loud.

Swamp Censor

22 March 2017

I will not be gagged! Not here
with contracts, waivers,
Johnny-come-latelies
assessed, measured or scrubbed down
by white washers with black jackets
who guard "the master's" racket
-the purchased, drained and pillaged
finest piss-pot in the village
Utopia built for someone else
on my Grandfather's favorite swamp
to hunt rain-driven crabs.

Painting Zion

24 March 2017

Babylon, tek yu dutty hand offa I man art
You don't get to say when I muss stop or I muss start
Being the creator Jah created I to be
Dutty system haffi memba seh
None is higher here than He.

Good Mornin' Sunshine

3 April 2017

Through coffee steam
And torn porch screen
I see you walk your
Light-touched fingertips
Down the Fig tree's legs
Sashay West across the lawn
To kiss the Neem
Good morning

Hammock Lullaby

6 April 2017

Crick crack
Swing me back
Black flag coil
Coconut oil
Powered sweet
For island heat
And Nanee's lullabies

Crick crack
I swing right back
On my back porch
I take the torch
Sing the songs of
Times long gone
Till you close your little eyes

Dear Pa

8 April 2017

Dear Pa,

You are missed every day by those you left behind.
Your girls long for your comfort when the world gets so unkind.
But Pa, as I look today at what home has become
I am kinda glad you left before the damage here was done.

You see, Pa, if you came back today and we were still so poor
there is no way that you could feed your family anymore -
the rabbits you would hunt with the BB gun and the sling shot
if the neighbors was to see you now they'd run and call the cops.

Oh and those neighbors are no longer people with our last name
but folks who have just come ya on some fancy aero plane.
The old people live with their children under one roof and one rent
cuz with one months work for one months bills the money is all done spent.

I know what you thinkin Pa, don't fret - you know we was raised right
We are nice to the new people - even the crooks we do not fight.
But now we need a license to sell breadfruit from the yard
and if you see how much that license cost you know times is really hard.

Spear gun and hook stick worse Pa, though you raised us on the sea
we would lose our freedom if we were how you raised us to be.
Remember the old coral head where you tied your old fish pot?
Boo went fishin' there last week and is in jail cuz he got caught.

Oh Pa, times is hard and we miss you we really do
but if you came back home today it would be illegal to be you.

Prophecy

2 May 2017

I have seen the rootless swing weighty from their money trees
In lost gardens of crumbling castles flung beyond their grasping means
Their children only glance up from privilege-enchanted screens
For a breath, not alive enough to form a human scream.

Election Prayer

23 May 2017

Oh my darling islands,
I send you all my love.
May the hustlers and the shut ins
feel the grace of God above.
May the school girls and school boys
who rise now from out of bed
wash their faces, enter kitchens
where they are loved and they are fed.
Keep the mosquitos in the swamp
and the dolphins running strong
woodpeckers far from flashing
hush the parrot's mango song.
May the struggling baby mama
get all the help she needs.
May the inmate and the officer
see God's sky above the weeds.
May the doctors do the right thing
keep the lawyers far from lies
help the cashiers all to balance
and the cooks win over flies.
Keep the low lands safe from flooding
keep the sand up on the beach
and keep evil from our hearts
our treasures out of Satan's reach.
Bless the grannies' lullabies
and the daddies who provide
bless the adults at Sunrise
the fisherman out off North Side.
Keep us all in safety
Keep our sailors' wits afloat
May the Good Lord's will be done
when we all go out to vote.

Still I See

9 August 2017

People come from far and wide
to rest upon this island's pride
They will never see the things that our eyes see.
The tree that was before the wall
Titans we've seen rise and fall
Layer upon layer of timeless memory.
Our people fall between the cracks
Concrete piled up on their backs
As the ever-present Greedy take their rise
But all the buildings on the Earth
Will never change what we are worth
Cannot steal the treasure that we see with our own eyes.

Still I see...

You on the road laywaitin' Johns
Clothed mostly in the shames you've done
You're the girl who shared your patty when I forgot my money home
And you in the dock telling your lie
To wigs who don't care if you die
To me you are the boy who never let me walk home alone.

Still I see...

You on social services with three kids
I see all the good you did
To keep your brothers' school work up to pace
And you with your stiff corporate job
I can still see you sit and sob
The day your dad broke up your mamas face.

I still see...

What will we or can we be?
Seeing things no one can see?
Why do we let the blind run our homeland?
By faith and by this sight I wait

My people's eyes will guide our fate
Wisdom stalks, vision will tell us when to stand.

Grass

8 September 2017

I would be Joseph to your Pharaoh
Read your dreams of things to come
But you are the invader here
And I the native son
The limestone that assaults you so
Was used to build my bones
The blood that quickens in my flesh
Floods shores you think you own.
You need not tell me of your dreams
That wake you chill with sweat
Cuz I know this land that calls me hers
Ain't finished with you yet.

Middle Passage

28 September 2017

We know to be less afraid
of homegrown hurricanes
than those who ride the blackened bones
picked clean through centuries of misuse
(an ongoing abuse)
harsh salt and whitened caps.

Discarded cargoes of
wasted lives find
hot new purposes
in death delivered to
the conquerors of lands
"discovered".

Darlings turned demons
sucked to their death in the depths
rise up to wreak havoc
on plunder-fattened
heirs to the cane fields.

Hammock Lullaby (2)

6 January 2018

Born to the land of lullabies
Song-kissed lids close tired eyes
Hammocks groan against the breeze
Sweeping slow dance with the trees

Note: I woke up this morning with the memory of my grandmother rocking me gently to sleep in a hammock out under the trees. There are some days that just feel like others, and as I sit on the patio next to my own hammock watching the rain fall as the sun rises I remember her singing as the sun set in that long ago memory.

This is what memories are for - to keep us grounded in our current choppy waters with the hope that this storm will also pass. They are a reminder that the peace and beauty of that moment will always return.

No apologies for you...

13 March 2018

My words
they may not
be for you.
You who choose
their meaning
you demeaning
before they
leave my
loving lips.
Nah. Not you.
But you serve
Them
well.
Eating them,
shitting them,
spitting out the
seeds of them
into a world
you are in and not of
the land of children fair
people who care
who haven't sold
their hearts for
the decoration
false saving
of badly painted
skin stretched thin
over goals
with no souls.

“Emotional” Caymanian

21 November 2018

They call us emotional
as if emotions
were not a critical part
of a healthy whole
as if to ignore them
would ennoble us
not just enable them to
leave a bleeding hole.
I’m done being gaslit
by the unlit
told to make an X
for who screws us next.
So yes,
I am emotional
complete and
consequential
for I FEEL
to truly KNOW
only the grounded
really grow.

Identity does not exist to be sold.
It is FELT, and it is GOLD.

Solomon's Baby

12 December 2018

Colour-who?

I see no preference here.

Hair pulled on the playground

too white to be liked

too black to take home

a Viking's eyes

a lion's soul

fighting alone...

(Thank god I speak Spanish!)

The tongue of the

bankrupt owner and

beaten turned brutal

would break or brook

me no voice of my own.

But permission be fucked

relics of apartheid

sit you divided ducks

-I said S.I.T. your asses down-

and hear this diction.

My voice is mine

meant to bring friction

to a world that needs more fire

than historical division.

Go shove your box

up someone else

cuz this brown bitch

will not be hitched

to your bigot wagon,

perpetuate Babylons system,

nor will I whip you the way

you're taught to want me to

so you can call me yellow.

Save your cowardice

for the old world

The new one will be
stirred with love and
smell like the rainbow
after the storm.

SALT

26 January 2019

The secret swims
in our blood
no one knows
but us.
From it water flows
Tides rise and fall
Our senses
of self
of us
of it all
shift with
the water table

I feel it breathe only
when the water breaks
it's silver back on
the hunted reefs
of home
and when my eyes
lock with those of
an island man
alone
I am trapped by it
comforted in it
overwhelmed with it
hungry
for
It

Who I am and
who I long
to be
all my hurt
all my feels
all my comfort
The colour of my blood
The smell of my breath

There is no life without

Salt.

Duppy Water

26 January 2019

You will never understand
a childhood lived waiting
for fish to jump, watching
every crest for grey
every swell for sharp angles
eyes slicing water over
sea grape shaded dinner
eyes slowly shut
in the swing of a hammock
skin cooled from morning
winning kingship of the rock.
Brought here by pain
not by airplane
we see different things
in the mirror of deep water
God sends messages
Just for us.

Duppy water is the term Caymanians gave to places in deep water where the rays of the sun refract and make the water look bottomless and shallow all at once.

Smoothe seas are for tourists

28 January 2019

The island soul glories
in white cap reclamation.
Water-ground ancestral bones
now white powdered sand
living spiritual boundaries
of our grandfathers' land.

LOVE LETTERS TO MY PEOPLE

A Dream Made Pedestrian

24 February 2021 #LoveLettersToMyPeople

A few years ago a beloved neighbor, friend and Cayman Legend, David Jonathan Ebanks Jr. of blessed memory, took to Facebook and wrote his morning post of the day. It was simple and likely landed on many a deaf mind, but my mother picked it up, thought it over, and called me. He posted how proud he was of his children heading off to work in the morning as he sat in his favorite chair on his front porch. My mother called me to tell me how proud she was of me, because she recognized in Jonathan's post the realization of the Caymanian Dream. The Caymanian Dream.

I reflected on this Caymanian Dream as I drove through the old neighborhood of Tropical Gardens yesterday to visit a dear friend's new condo on the water. In my childhood, Tropical Gardens was the Caymanian dream. It was an up and coming neighborhood, home to my piano teacher and other hard working upper middle class people like her. It was where I met some of my lifelong friends. My piano lesson evenings were populated by Danielle in her brown St. Ignatius uniform, Stephen in his George Hicks blue and white, and me proudly wearing my Savannah blue gingham dress. We would roam the land behind Mrs. McHayle's house, pouring out into the sunshine as soon as we were released from the keys in search of treasure only nature can provide. The neighborhood was known for proud front gardens, over-laden cherry trees and playing children. The breeze off the North Sound would catch Stephen up in the mango tree right as he reached for the ripest julie near the top. This hands-in-the-soil, natural, salt-of-the-Earth life was the Caymanian dream.

The front yards of Tropical Gardens are still proud. The fruit trees are still bearing. The homes still boast the pride of self-making. But the breeze is blocked by something new. Three-story box condos now line the old North Sound access points where you used to be able to drive to the sea, towering over the quiet old neighborhood. These new buildings, very like several modern luxury developments up and down the West Bay Road corridor spreading East throughout Red Bay, are home to a new type of dream. It's a beautiful dream of infinity edge swimming pools, dock space for the boat, glass walls overlooking the ocean and 14 foot ceilings. These are dreams that come at the price of \$700,000 and more, where a half million is never enough for that view, and where trees are valued for their decorative as opposed to fruit-bearing potential.

The friend I came to visit is a hardworking and caring person, someone I care about and would go to bat for in any argument. She is an amazing human being who deserves more than most the fruits of her well intentioned and executed labour. Her home is beautiful

and she will build a good life here. I pray for her success and I'm proud of what she has created for herself together with her husband. Her vision and creation is that of the New Caymanian Dream.

At the same time, I couldn't help but feel sad as I drove out of the neighborhood. She and I talk about this all the time - this weird tension of the Cayman reality. She asked questions on the drive out about the fruit trees and we talked about what the neighborhood was like before. I shared with her my own history with the place. I then sat back in my own confusion. But as I sit to write and untangle, I realize the source of the confusion. It's grief.

It is a grief for a dream that has now been made pedestrian. I am saddened at the conflict within me for myself and for my homeland. For my homeland I am saddened at what the pinnacle of a past time has inevitably fallen to become. For myself, it made me realize that I hold on to very old values and, despite the peer pressure of the beauty of the new dream, I still want my mango trees and sea breeze. There is an image, a lifestyle that is expected of someone of my level of professional attainment that I don't want to pursue. I still want to see wild bush and hear the sound of big doves in the morning. I still hold to the old dream. I am blessed to have all that I need, and the ability to reach for more. But then I ask myself, should I really WANT more? I don't know, should I? Isn't this enough? Is it? If I'm truest to my values, it is. Or at least it SHOULD be. But what is expected of me? What is expected of us? Am I resisting change? Should I be embracing something different? Aren't even these questions a testament of my privilege? It is so confusing!

But grief often is. Confusing and painful. I judge myself as disloyal, because though I am truly happy for my friend I am also grieving, and I have been grieving for years. This grief began with the building of the Westin Hotel on my childhood favorite beach. It's strange to hold these feelings all at once.

It also struck me that this confusion is something I am probably better placed to articulate than many of my contemporaries. Not all Caymanians have had the privileges I have had or have the practice in their voice that I have. I have been educated abroad, lived in other countries, and have dipped my toe into other ways of life. I have had deep and enlightening conversations in speakeasies and riverside cafes about the gentrification of Harlem and the impact of oil money on the London housing market. I have had a respectable amount of success in my chosen industry. My voice has been heard nationally on many issues related to my field. And on a personal level, I have plans for my retirement, plans for my parents' retirement, and plans for any children I might have that I have confidence in achieving. I am privileged to be feeling grief and not outright terror. My

Caymanian dream is being impacted only in my mind, many years after so many of my childhood peers have been struck by the realities of impossibility.

So many Caymanians have been feeling grief for much longer and are facing a terror-filled reality. So many have been unable to get to where they were groomed to reach because the goal post kept moving, land prices shooting up while jobs paid less and less in comparison. So many have moved from grief to the realization of their fears of actual poverty and abject need. Many who are working hard have no hope of achieving any sort of dream beyond making it to payday. The old dream is just as far away as it was and keeps moving further and further away as prices continue to rise and paychecks either stay the same or fall shorter and shorter. Grief is the least. I am LUCKY to be experiencing grief. But grief is spreading. And on its heels, fear is spreading thick as paychecks spread thin, grocery bills triple, and jobs require more qualifications for less money.

In this confusion about who we are, what we are to become, and what the Caymanian dream is today, I hesitate to have children. How do I deal with these tensions in a four year old? How do I translate the world I don't understand to a child I am charged with guiding and protecting? Once again I am fortunate. Many of my peers do not have a choice.

I write this from my heart with no clear direction. I am here to be the translator, the expresser of a sentiment, not the fixer. I am sitting here forming questions, not answers. There are people who are putting themselves up for election to do that. So many people who live here don't understand the feelings behind the tensions in our society. This applies to both newcomers to our islands and people whose families have been here for generations. To be fair to us all, neither do I. We are living in a time of rapid change that is labeled as growth, but what is it really? What of the impacts of these changes do we really understand? What happens next? How do we prepare for it? We see so many harbingers blow by on this road that we are traveling at breakneck speed, but we can't read the signs because they pass so quickly.

To my islands, I love you and hope you find out who you are soon. And I hope you find a way for us all to honor and achieve our chosen dreams.

My One Consistent Vice

10 March 2021 #LoveLettersToMyPeople

Should anyone in a distant future read the silly account I have taken of my life after I am gone, I would have them know that I have had one consistent vice. This vice was poured down to me through generations of people, of giants, of great women, who grew their own food and woke at this time of morning long before dawn to begin their day's work by lamplight. They would boil the water in the dark, usually in a building separate from the one their children slept in, leaning over smoke and flame in the few minutes they would have had to themselves. Four women in three different islands would have begun their day with hot water poured over ground coffee beans. One would have grown hers herself, all would have ground the beans in the days before. At least one would add a pinch of salt, three would add milk, and all would heap in sugar the way everyone in these sugar islands would have done back then. (I choose this morning and most mornings a spoon of the grainy part of the honey that collects at the bottom of the jar in honor of their love for sweetness.)

At some point, all four of these women would have been alive at the same time, lived parallel lives through at least one world war, listened to the same radio broadcasts, and woken up at the same pre-dawn moment to bring the water to a boil. I imagine them raising that first cup at the same time, mindless of the waters flowing between them coming every day closer together. They would never meet, these four women, in spite of their extensive travels uncharacteristic of women of their time. But they would come to meet in me, in my body, in my remembering. Julia the Maroon Mother, Birdie the St. Bess Beauty, Hazel the Utilian Queen, and Chrissy the Caymanian Cornerstone would come alive in me, Annikki, here in 2021.

Sometimes I think of my Great-Grandmothers and what they, now free from the social traps set for women in their own times, must think of me. Are they proud of what they have become?

I knew only two of them in body and only briefly, but I know deeply that they were great. Four women saw their way through childbirth and loss, austerity and war, the adulthood of their own children and a ripe old age. They died fit rather than fat, tired rather than bored, and proud rather than regretful.

And so, I boil my water at 4:30 this morning, pick up a pen and think of them. I hope you think of your own great mothers as we sip together from the Cup of Queens. May our choices honor their greatness as we go about our day and live through these, our very own interesting times.

The Camp Must Go On

3 April 2021 #LoveLettersToMyPeople

It occurred to me again this year that Easter is the time that we get to be Caymanian. Our island is completely unrecognizable from the days of my childhood, and even my young adulthood... except at Easter.

I have travelled a decent amount and distance in my young life, and I have seen Easter in different places, but the Easter I know and love only exists where Caymanians are. Our Easter can be experienced on Cayman beaches and, funny enough, also on the beaches of the Bay Islands where the co-decedents of our forebears made themselves a home. Right now, Pumpkin Hill Beach probably looks just like the beaches between Bodden Town Proper and Breakers. The casuarina pines and grape trees are alive with grape wood cook fires, tents and hammocks fighting the breeze.

What is it that makes a Caymanian Easter special? I have camped in other countries with other people and it isn't the camping that makes it special. I have gone to churches and celebrated Easter in three different languages and it isn't church. I have played ludi and drunk fish tea and lit fires at other times and it isn't these things. I have bathed in the sea a million times, had a thousand sunburns, and slept in a hundred hammocks, but these things, though rites of Easter passage, are not what makes a Cayman Easter special.

The Easter of my childhood began with care and reverence, packing and prayer. Good Friday was brought in with quiet solemnity under a moon near full, peaking beams of light through the spaces between sea grape leaves. The smell of the dying fire would complement the crick-crack of the hammock ropes. Us children, our tight-toasted skin rinsed clean of salt water and our hair dried crispy around the edges, would drift to sleep to the sound of my Nanees lullabies. She would sing, then Aunt Holly would take over, and Mummy would join in. "Bright stars watch over the world as it sleeps..." And what they sang was true. We could see them, watching over our Easter Camp.

The Friday was always the end of a week so solemn it verged on the superstitious. We were always told this was the most dangerous week of the year. More car accidents and freak deaths happened this time of year than any other time of year in my childhood and nobody could tell me different. I still don't go fishing, don't party on Good Friday, the day that every year the world goes dark.

On the Good Friday mornings of our childhood, some of us would be taken home, dressed for church, squirming through service itching to get back to camp. But for those of us who stayed at camp there was an egg and fritters breakfast cooked in coconut oil in a

dutchy on an open fire. We would spend the day playing in the surf, not allowed to go too far at all, because it was Good Friday. The next days would be more relaxed. The Adventists among us would serve our time in church confines and then spill back out into the Saturday sunshine in time for a lunch of fried fish freshly caught.

Camp always brings a little discomfort. I remember the red ants one year taking over the old camp ground that we can no longer use, consumed as it is by modern road on one side and hurricane erosion on the other. Other years it has been driving rain, and this year a determined wind. But camp goes on, as we well know. Every year without fail and pandemic.

In 2020 there was an outcry of grief at the government mandate against camping and that we stay at home. It was the first time I realized how sacred this is, not just to me, but to my people. This is our story. We hold this sacred. As I soaked in my sadness sitting on the screened porch on Good Friday 2020, there was a sweet comfort that cushioned the sharp edges of my grief. I AM NOT ALONE. MY PEOPLE ARE STILL HERE. WE ARE STILL WHO WE ARE. The Camp must go on.

This is what Easter has come to mean for us. It isn't a Christian celebration to Caymanians, even though many of us celebrate the Christian Easter. This is our annual celebration of who we are and what still remains of us. Easter is our time to be Caymanian, eat Caymanian food for our Caymanian sakes, play Caymanian games, teach our Caymanian children how to fish, swim, and survive like a Caymanian. Easter Camp is our monument to the joys and hardships of our humble past, our homesickness for the innocent days blessed in our memories, a reminder of our nations most sacred and unifying value - RESILIENCE.

Our grandfathers roamed the seas, survived multiple shipwrecks, walked barefoot on foreign pan shoals to feed our futures. Our grandmothers planted the very same ground provisions we still put in our Easter rundown with coconut oil they burned the hair off their arms and legs to make themselves over hot fires. Every Easter, camp is stocked with lessons they passed on and lessons we have ourselves learned from our own hardships. I never see a lantern without remembering my beautiful Aunt breastfeeding her newborn son, mother and child bathed in flickering oil lamp light during Hurricane Gilbert like a Caymanian Madonna, as the winds howled outside. I never put a cornbeef sandwich to my lips without remembering the hard days without water and electricity after Hurricane Ivan. I never see a small boat pull up to the Easter Camp beach without remembering my grandfather's boat, *the Será*.

On every beach where we are still allowed to be, my people are living this weekend steeped in their own version of my memories, their part of our collective story. Easter is

when we, a resilient people of a dying culture, get to remember who we are and who we can be. May your rundown be full of good dumplings and breadkine, may your fritters be fluffy, and may there be enough beach next year for us to do this again.
The Camp must go on.