



Dear Friends on the Journey,

When I was growing up in the 70s and 80s, my mother was a close friend of Barbadian author George Lamming. My mother was a tertiary level English literature teacher who taught African Diaspora and Caribbean Literature, as well as Chaucer and could speak Middle English - so she had a vested interest in knowing authors. We often visited George at the Atlantis Hotel where the stark simplicity of his room left an indelible impression on me. Even now I can still recall; a small typewriter - the essential tool of literary mastery of an era - sitting prominently on an otherwise stark single bed, covered in pristine white sheets in a room that overlooked the Atlantic Ocean and its foaming tides rushing ashore. “*Ah...*” I often thought to myself, “*...this is what an author is...an introverted creature on a unique but **often solitary** journey...*”


George Lamming’s writings and philosophical approach to his subject matter quietly influenced my thought processes, creeping into my psyche and taking up space. Echoes of his novel **In the Castle of my Skin**, especially the phrase “*my mother who fathered me*” - a phrase much loved and so often repeated by my mother - ignited a spark of socio-anthropological curiosity in me. My personal favourite was the question of “what was the time of slavery”, as asked by the school boys whose familiars would give them no answer, so as to permanently shroud painful memories in forgetfulness and mystery. Through George Lamming, I would meet African liberationist and Kenyan author Ngũgĩ, who during his political imprisonment, wrote an entire book on fragile sheets of toilet paper and successfully smuggled it out of jail.

By age eleven, in first form at the Combermere Secondary School, I attempted my first novel. My daily companions of the time were books by Ursula K. Le Guin, Anne McCaffery and Susan Cooper (**The Dark is Rising**), so it was already clear that the genre of fantasy would influence my style of writing. In that first attempt, I got no further than chapter 7. I shared my work with my best friend Michelle, and her feedback was that though she liked it, I also needed to develop my characters more deeply. Without quite realising it, that early pinpointing of a need for improvement in my writing via the constructive criticism of another, ultimately turned character development into one of my greatest strengths.

It seems, I was always orbiting the lives of authors, while slowly being pulled into the surrounding fractals of their lives. I was witnessing their literary greatness, and human ordinariness, from a close periphery, but never at the centre. In my late teens, while living in Puerto Rico with my father, I would read the book **La Tregua** by Uruguayan author Mario Benedetti for Spanish Literature class - *in Spanish!* There, I would first learn that the intensity of first intimacy could be conveyed by the simple gesture of hand-holding; the only option for shy lovers born in an era, where a kiss before marriage was unthinkable and even scandalous. I knew that in the apartment building next door, there lived a well-known Puerto Rican author whose book was also on my school syllabus. I inhabited a world filled with authors.

My ears and eyes became tuned to happenings and occurrences of storytellers everywhere!





In Barbados, whenever we drove on Maxwell Main Road, my mother would point to a house on the left and say in hushed tones, that the extremely talented Timothy Callender had lived there. Observing up close the humanity of literary greats such as Nobel Laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez in my mid-twenties, added to my understanding of the “authorly nature”. The seriousness of one’s gait; the single-minded purposefulness of one’s interactions; the almost desperate need for silence; and that odd semi-detachment from the very societies of which they wrote. I recognise those characteristics in myself today, and know exactly the impact it makes! I *might* be forever upset about missing a long-awaited phone call from my mother who was on a professorship in the distant USA while I was studying at film school in Communist Cuba.

I missed a call from my mother because Mr. Marquez did not allow for the “telecoreo” (phone exchange) to announce international calls on the “altoparlante” (loudspeaker) when his lectures were in session!

Can I tell you I was angry for days? However, none of that changes the fact that I daily walked the same shared halls as the celebrated Columbian author. To him (with the support of Revolutionary Leader; Fidel Castro, and many more action-based and highly philosophical revolutionary souls), I owed my very opportunity to become a creative, historically aware, culturally literate, contributing member of the Latin American and Caribbean society. Marquez’s *Love in the time of Cholera* remains one of my all-time favourite books. I have without a doubt emulated the art of infusing my work with some degree of the technique of **magic realism** as a result of the direct influence of his literary work. Similarly so, I am inspired by the works of Chilean American author Isabel Allende. The American Toni Morrison, and the Antiguan Jamaican Kinkaid would influence me likewise, from the black female perspective. I’d learn that rather than a weapon, the pen could be used as a tool for exorcism or rehabilitation.

I am thankful to the Jamaican author Anthony Winkler, whose books have taught me the value of humour in addressing serious subjects. Endless gratitude to the Barbados based Bim Literary Festival (Bim Lit Fest) for allowing me access to such inspiring authors as Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, through whom I saw **Omeros** up close, and from whom I learned the virtues of the **half rhyme**; and to social activist Erna Brodber whose genuine care for my personal development, echoed that of her spiritually gifted character in the book *Louisiana* and who, together with all the aforementioned, left an indelible impression on my black, female, somewhat Pan African, African Diasporic, Caribbean, Barbadian, born in Antigua, lived in Latin America, emancipated but still, ready to be free of post-colonial oppressions and shift the paradigm to Universal peace - **Creative Self**.

If you thought that last paragraph was a mouthful, then you might also be aware that one of the rules of writing is to not write a sentence that is longer than 20 words. There are also language rules that warn against beginning a sentence with and or but. **But**, know that these are literary guides - used to help make your message more easily accessible to the reader. They do not however preclude your use of creative license, when a change to the manner in which the message is to be received can be justified. Above all, I’ve learnt that creative writing requires a flexible mind. It requires a willingness to listen - as much – if not more than you speak. It benefits the writer to be open to adventure, open to opportunity and to other peoples’ cultures and expressions of being.

Without a doubt, these moments and influences have profoundly shaped my understanding of authorship and the art of storytelling. Each encounter, each lesson, whether direct or observed from the periphery - has contributed to my life and writer’s journey; affirming the beautiful relationship between lived experience and creative expression.

I wish you joy and success along the journey.

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