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legendizeU- storytelling in a global world

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# MEN & their STORIES

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# Introduction

MEN & THEIR STORIES is a collaborative effort - men share their stories and I find the Middle Pages that foster connection. Our real human stories are vitally upheld by those Middle Pages where the plot develops and the characters are re-defined and refined.

Alongside our personal stories, beyond the titles and covers that identify us and the dramas of beginnings and endings, are those Middle Pages that allow us to connect through each others' journeys.

The recent election campaign in America got me thinking: are the main characters in our men's stories merely hero, villain or phoenix? And does our proclamation, when we get those hero and phoenix stories, 'now that's a MAN!' mean all others are not?

I think we are so busy looking for role models, successes or failures, fathers of the year and out-of-the-ashes stories that we often overlook the everyday stories of our men, those Middle Pages that keep men going...the man toiling in his back yard garden so he can manage the mental chatter, the taxi driver who tells his passengers stories so he can combat the traffic and road rage, the partner who forces his friend to the gym to workout that belly he's growing, the artist who only has that one memory to inspire him in a forgetful world...

In a world advocating for woman power I wonder, what good is empowerment if don't see our men here in an everyday existence, facing the same challenges we do, wanting the same things we do - a space to just be, without judgement, expectation, applause or disdain?

We're sharing stories to connect you with men you don't know, stories you don't know about artists you know, and we might even have the privilege of sharing their works in the making with you!

I'm humbled that so many of these men told me: I've never shared that story before.

Thank you for trusting me with your stories.

I hope you join us as we legendizeU and please feel free to share these stories.

If you would like to chat, please e-mail me via my contact page.

Join us on FB and follow us on IG to share MEN & their STORIES.

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# Chapter 1

**Wendell:** *Every one is a power. Every one is a movement. Every one is a change.*



Image: Wendell Manwarren

Photo Credit: Maria Nunes

My understanding of success is the daring to use your voice, the recognition that you - with or without a group - are a power, a force, a movement, a change...you, as one, impact the environment.

Part of the Wendell Manwarren story is the story of a boy who grew up in a fascinating Trinidad, a man flourishing in that environment and who stands, along with others, for re-creating that Trinidad in the now times.

When I was nine, my cousins and I were designated as Jacka's chariot pullers. We didn't know much about what was going on, just that Jacka was playing Caesar for J'Ouvert and his chariot needed some pullers and they pull us in and say 'Here, alyuh will be chariot pullers'. We didn't think anything of it - we took the Carnival, the culture for granted, it was just always there - it was a mas camp next to my house, it was Wiley the old Bat man who was my grandfather's friend always liming by us, it was everywhere and everybody - everybody involved in a mas making, mas playing, pan beating, wire-bending, costume sewing something.

So us nine year old boys getting pull in to pull Jacka's chariot was just another part of this something. They put us in some crocus bag costumes and slap some mud on us and all I thought then was how cold and horrible the mud felt - and then we were out and up the road J'Ouvert morning, pulling Jacka's chariot. Somewhere, sometime, some scramble take place, next thing we see is Jacka head get buss, blood spilling and some uncle whisk us away and then we were back home.

The whole thing was a surreal experience that had no starting and no ending, it was just a fluid movement of a multitude of people and a series of events that left me with a 'what just happen?' feeling.

I wasn't allowed back into J'Ouvert after that but when I was old enough to go on my own I went right back into the thing. That was a time in Trinidad when my generation was influenced by the idea of independence and looking to a new future, we were fuelled by the Masters all around us, the Helen Camps who showed us that what we had to say in Trinidad Tent Theatre was relevant, the Peter Minshall who showed us that mas was about intensity and a manifestation of a collective vision - however long and hard the days were, however creative we had to be, it wasn't about a cut and paste, finish it fast, import something, it was about an important something. We fed from the tables of Trinidad and Tobago Television and Dave Elcock on the radio who showed us how to feast on our own food. And when I went

on tour to London with Helen Camps and realised how interested these English people were in who we are, what we were doing, what we had to say, I came back with an even greater appreciation for what I was experiencing here.

It wasn't like we planned to make some statement with J'Ouvert or had some profound vision of J'Ouvert and Carnival, it was an organic thing, a product of the environment we were in, so me and Roger Roberts and Steve Ouditt just fell into that energy and formed the band as another part of that us.

When we came with the song Blue - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuojwYzouEY> - me, Roger Roberts, John Isaacs and Stanton Kewley - that was another organic thing - the first draft was a social commentary and it was Jean -Michele Gilbert who brought his posse from France and played with us every year who said: But alyuh should make a J'Ouvert song...yeah...duhhh ent? That line 'Three canal making a statement' was our expression of what we knew Carnival to be, that all encompassing, all inclusive thing around us that we grew up on, we were just saying: everybody come in, this is we!

People know the success of Blue, but they don't know the life-lesson of having overnight success you not ready for. The J'Ouvert band grew from 500 to 10,000 that year and J'Ouvert morning ended with drunken scragglers making their own statement that sent Roger to hospital with a buss head and left me with no voice from a big stone thrown at my throat. But everybody know you can't play mas and fraid powder, so Roger break out from hospital and the next day we were back on the road playing mas with Minshall.

So we making the statement: What time it is, what going on? Because that environment that fed us is gone...the Woodbrook we knew was cottage industries facilitated by mas', the mas camps we grew up in were huge teaching arenas that understood Minshall's statement that 'the mas happened only by the permission of the people', the music was about being accessible to the people, it was about engaging not pandering...the original Carnival was all-inclusive.

We can't necessarily bring back the Ole Time Days like Nappy sang - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JI49-i-QFl4> - but we can find ways of reminding the people, showing the people, engaging the people in the power of the Carnival imagination in this

time - this is a time to Talk Yuh Talk - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KVJEhj\\_HZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KVJEhj_HZE) - play a mas, say what you have to say Without our real understanding of this thing - this festival of liberation, renewal, affirmation of self, participation by all - without that knowing, we are abdicating our power.

Frustration is a real and inevitable part of this journey, whether you're an artist or not. Behind the frustration is the recognition that you care deeply about what you're doing, recognize the balance - you can't be naive and think everything must work your way, you can't take it personally when things don't work with your plan. Frustration is part of the movement, movement is constant work, it's not superficial. Keep faith in the unfolding: "Lord, we know what we are, but not what we may be." Shakespeare.

This is what the collaborating and mentoring and Boom Up History and the Big Black Box is about for us...finding ways of keeping that Carnival imagination alive, creating spaces for everybody to come in, to say 'this is we' and to learn together through practise, working through the frustration, using it to fuel new ideas..

We not interested in legacy; what time it is, is NOW. What going on is the re-evolution of the Carnival imagination.

# Chapter 2

**Mustapha:** *Keep on loving, no matter what.*



Image: Mustapha & mom, Pamela Sanowar

Photo Courtesy: Mustapha Sanowar

My understanding of success is choosing to smile - smiling is a choice- I'm not saying to hide behind our smiles, I'm saying when we smile we tell life that no matter what it brings, we will strive to believe in joy and love and happiness.

Part of the Mustapha Sanowar story is not only fitness and football, it's also about an adolescent's journey through his mother's bi-polar disorder and how the man today uses that to inform his life.

Joanne (Haynes) reminded me of a house party we had many years ago when my mom walked in in her nightgown and everybody made way for her as she walked up to me and said: 'Musty, dance with your mother'. She (Joanne) said I didn't hesitate to take my mother in my arms and dance with her even though it was awkward, especially for a teenager with the girls around looking on. Being reminded of that made me think about how big small acts of love are.

I was about 12 or 13 when I realized my mom wasn't well. The actual term is bi-polar disorder.

In those days, people really didn't acknowledge these kind of hidden illnesses, if you weren't physically unable to function, you weren't sick; if you were good one day and uncontrollably sad or angry the next, nobody really acknowledged that there might be some chemical and emotional problems.

But the Sanowars are a liberal family and we recognized that these illnesses were real. Dad is a druggist - you know the famous Sanowar Drugs on Mucurapo Street in San Fernando - my siblings and I would sometimes spend days hanging around the drug store, we saw people falling down emotionally, we saw people coming in looking 'normal' asking for help. There was a bar right next door to the drug store too, and we'd see 'normal' people going in and coming out hours later, anything but 'normal'. So this coming so close to home was not so much a surprise but it was hard.

My siblings and I would talk about it among ourselves, our grandmother and aunts rallied around us, when the days got too hard these aunts would take us for as long as we needed to be there, so we had many homes.



It affected my schoolwork terribly - or maybe I'm using that as an excuse - but I just wasn't motivated by school. But I had found sports, I had found football - in the Primary school I used to go to - Beacon Preparatory Academy, Auntie Anne, the Principal (Shirley Anne Davies Haynes) didn't dismiss anything outside the book, outside the classroom as unimportant and her son Louis (Haynes) started a football academy with us - girls and boys - that's a big part of my story, to this day I meet fellas who went to that school and we talk about how the approach to education was so different and about Louis' influence on us as the first to promote football in a way that made us take it seriously.

So in my 12- 13 year period when my mother's bi-polar disorder became a truth we had to acknowledge, football saved me. It would have been easy to fall in with the wrong crowd, at that age you are so vulnerable and on top of that you are dealing with a home situation that cannot put your needs first, but I had another influence and I went the football route. People like Jan Steadman and Steve Khan helped me hone what Louis had begun and through this outlet I dealt with my problems. Because my family was so open and supportive too, I confided in friends and I have to say that a big part of coping was not carrying any shame about mom's illness.

I'm happy to see so many people and organizations talking bravely about these illnesses now. That is world progress.

When I was 15 or 16 my mom wrote and published a book of poems called Whisperings and dedicated poems to each one of us in it. My dad used to say that mom's illness maybe was just a part of being an artist, I've done my own reading and seen so many artist who suffered with emotional issues, maybe its part of their journey, who knows? Whatever the answer, I don't see it as a weakness, I will never look down on anyone with this or any other emotional condition, I think we all here, just trying to do our best with our different challenges.

What I got at home was a life-lesson, I have more experience than a student of psychology. Bi-polar or not, my mom is the funniest person I know, when I was younger she'd say or do something that made me laugh and I would be so happy yet so sad at the same time. My best asset today is my smile, not that I hide behind it, but that I choose to smile because whatever happens in life, it's all about the choices you make. There were times I felt like I didn't love my mom so much, but when she made me laugh or we chatted about stuff and I got the mom I yearned for all the time, I realized that hurt and pain were clouding my love those times.

There's an intensity the person with bi-polar disorder has, when you're around them they can pick you up in a whirlwind of happiness or crash you into an ocean of sadness...now when my mom calls I take her calls so I can hear her voice and she can hear mine, but more often than not I know how to extract if it gets too heavy.

I'm more mindful of things that cause stress on children - if my wife and I have a disagreement I always say: let's not argue in front the baby - I think family life should be good stress, sure you will have things to sort out, but I think the world itself is so stressful, when you come home you should have a place to unwind. I'm veering away from training adults too and focusing on my Brazilian Touch Futebol Program for children -<https://www.facebook.com/sanowarfitness/?pnref=lhc>

My goal is to use the field for others to shine, because we never know what children are facing and how those few hours of training might be the one thing that helps them cope.

The biggest lesson my traumatic young life taught me was that you have nothing if you don't have love - give it, take it and share it...keep on loving, no matter what.

# Chapter 3

**Chryston:** *Learning how to compromise is part of growing up.*



Image: Chryston Floyd

Photo Courtesy: Chryston Floyd

My understanding of success is figuring out how to make sense of your reality and recognizing that this figuring out is not a one-stop thing.

They say parenting is the hardest job - I guess I will know one day - as a young man with traditional parents, I wish for more understanding from them about my desire to be a musician. I've heard some peers say - if only my parents had been more forceful, I might have made better choices - so who's to say which way is right...all I know is that you can get really depressed wishing for something in your life to be different, so you might as well figure out how to make the life you have work.

I didn't want to go into Form 6 after writing CXC, I wanted to do music. While everyone around me was choosing subjects, sure of what they wanted to do, the only thing I felt was disinterest. There was a period in school when I was seeming depressed to others, people kept asking if I was okay and I said yes, the school called in my parents and asked if everything was alright. I didn't know about this until after. I realized then that the internal battle I was having was manifesting externally and I told my parents I didn't want to go into Form 6 but they insisted.

I told myself I'd do Sixth Form and then do my own music thing after; that didn't happen and now I'm in UWI. I started UWI okay, but seeing everyone so sure about what they were doing reminded me of Sixth Form and I started to feel depressed and lost. After weeks of self-destructive behaviour - ignoring schoolwork, isolating myself, wanting nothing more than to stay in bed - I went and spoke with the Counsellor who urged me to talk with my parents but I remembered how that hadn't worked the first time, so I continued with least effort thinking that if I flunked out of UWI they'd have to take me out. My frustration and anger grew.

I didn't do too well in my first year at UWI but my parents didn't take me out so I decided I'd stay at home and commute and maybe less distractions would help me focus on school more.

It's hard to balance, some days I wake up and tell myself I'm not going to touch my computer or guitar and I'm going to study but in half an hour my fingers show me otherwise. I can play music, write songs and produce music all day and there's never enough time; when I have schoolwork to do, I can't wait to finish.

At first, I was like okay, I will get my engineering degree and please my parents, maybe start off as a part-time engineer and full-time musician, I know my goal is to support myself through music.

This grudging acceptance started giving way sometime ago to some kind of recognition of what my parents were doing for me - I saw that if I wanted a new guitar, I got it; if I decide to take part in a musical, play, film - <https://vimeo.com/175647251> - there's no pressure from my parents other than the reminder: Don't let the schoolwork suffer. Recently, I've started producing and have a small studio at home - since I have no income, you know how I got it.

So it occurs to me now that my parents are compromising too, giving me the space and support to express this talent and love and this makes me recognise that compromise is also required from me. Whether it's discipline or acceptance or maturity, I've decided to deal with my reality - balance schoolwork and feed my true love, so I give guitar lessons and grab performing opportunities and produce - <https://soundcloud.com/chryston-floyd> - because what I know for sure is that I'm not giving up; there's not a day I wake up and not think about my future of doing music alone - there's no other way I can see my future.

# Chapter 4

**IBO:** *You have to know what you want and have the will to make it happen.*



Image: Junior Ibo Joseph receiving TUCO Award for Best Calypso Producer, 2016.

Image Courtesy: Junior Ibo Joseph

Success for me is about leaving something behind...is what you do when you here that continues when you gone is what important.

I grow up as a ghetto youth. My mother died when I was 6; I am the youngest of 7 children, I never knew who my father was. You know sometimes you might be liming on the block and a fella will pass and somebody will say: 'Aye boy, look yuh father'- that never happen with me.

My grandmother took care of us until I was 12 and then she died and my older sister took over. When you grow up in the ghetto you see everything, life hard, in between I get carry away sometimes, but never with anything big enough to put me in trouble with the law. Somehow I always had it in the back of my head to try to do the right thing, I say God was with me because it would have been easy to fall on the wrong side.

When I was older I learn to sew and I used to make hats in a big way - my hats sold wholesale all up the Caribbean and in New York. I used to have a little shop on Library Corner in San Fernando. Then I picked up with music and started playing guitar, I used to play keyboard for studio recordings and I see that recording music could be a good living, I liked it too - the studio - the sound coming out from the final product, but because of my past, my poverty, I never really thought I could get to that point. I started playing keyboard with bands then too - Volt Express, Sound Revolution, Atlantic, so between that and the sewing I was getting by. Sometimes money from the music would carry the shop through the hard times, sometimes it was the other way around, it was always pull and tug with money.

The music thing never left me though- the producing - so bit by bit I started buying equipment and then I started a lil studio at the back of my house - no high tech thing, no full studio, I was just producing demos.

So it was the hats, the performances and now the demos. But in Carnival 1991 when I came off stage, is like I get a calling, something inside telling me that is only when I stop everything else and produce music full-time is when I will see progress. I not saying this for anybody to think they should do the same, because losing those other two incomes was really hard. I was lucky too because I started producing music at a time when plenty people were going outside (America) to record, so the need was there. Now is real studios in Trinidad, but it seems to me like everybody getting a piece of the pie, so if you thinking about this career, it is viable, just ensure like with anything else, you have the will to see it through because I

meet real youth men who think this is a cool scene and fast money, but this is hard work like any other job.

I in this thing about 26 years now; I struggle and work and work and struggle, my first big song was Preacher's 'Two Sapodilla and a Nine Inch Banana'. I've work with all kind of artists from the calypso, soca, gospel, poetry and storytelling, chutney...I did Prophet Benjamin first hit 'Pretty Boy' - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQeA\\_9PE5N8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQeA_9PE5N8), Fay-Ann Lyons first Road March 'Display' - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFAagxfGleo>.

From 2004-2007 I won the Soca Awards Organization Producer of the Year Award.

Sometimes I meet youth men who tell me this is what they want to do but their parents blocking and I always tell them you have to honor and submit to your parents while keeping your ambition and will alive. What you do for your parents is a phase at a certain point in your life, after that you can decide what you want to do, so if you really play it smart you will end up with the education your parents want you to get and the ambition and will to make your dream happen. To me that's like the best of both worlds.

Honor your background no matter where you come from, it have no shame in growing up in the ghetto, use where you come from to take you where you going.



# Chapter 5

**JOHAN:** *Love is a memory and a knowing more potent than death.*

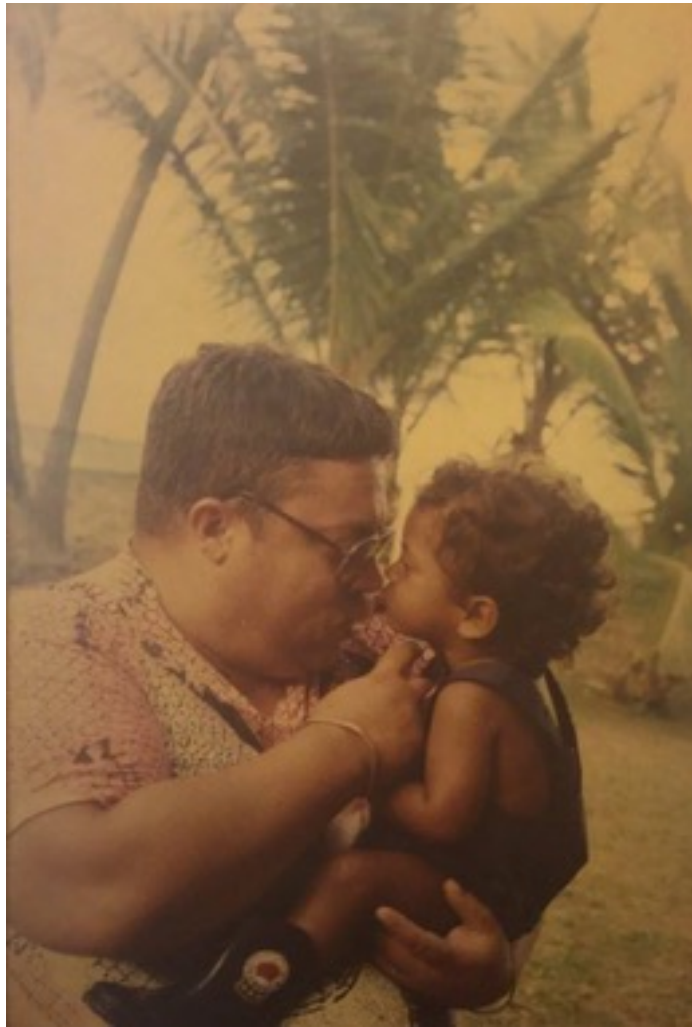


Image: Johan and dad, Scotty Haynes

Photo Courtesy: Johan Haynes

Success...hmmm...the word 'money' is always associated with men and success, my heart knows it's more than that. Photo: Johan and dad Scotty Haynes.

My dad died when I was two - so people obviously think I didn't know him...but read on, let me tell you an uncanny truth...

So dad died and life continued with mom, my sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, school... I guess this was normal for me, not having him around, I certainly didn't really feel something was different, there were moments growing up when I wished he was there but it was more like knowing you are missing something but not knowing what - but these were passing thoughts and feelings that came and went quickly.

When I was ten, my friend's dad was murdered. I remember how everybody at school went up to him and asked if he was okay, everybody except me. One of my other friends said: I can't believe you won't go ask X if he's okay. I said: Alyuh just making him feel worse.

It took me years to realise that the person who was really feeling worse then was me.

Behind my ignoring of my friend's loss was a bitter resentment: At least he has a memory of loss; he is lucky.

As I grew up a big thing was when Auntie (Sheryl Anne) would say: You remind me of your father. I didn't always know what I was doing that reminded her of dad and sometimes she said it in annoyance because as I understand, dad was quite the prankster, but it felt really nice to hear that...I took that into my scrawny chest and it muscled me in ways I couldn't explain.

The human ability to cope and reconfigure is tremendous. People always say: The worst thing that can happen is this or that - yet it's interesting to see how people are able to find good in even these so-called worst situations, how people can make the best out of the bad and keep a mentality that maintains sanity and growth...if we couldn't do this, we'd all be sad and disappointed. I think there's an ingenuity in going forward, even if what you do at one point to go forward needs to be re-examined and adjusted.

So what I did to go forward was develop an idea of happiness that didn't really look at the sad, heavy stuff. Seeing everyone around me happy was my goal; I'd make jokes, shurg things off with a smile, be the class clown, lighten the mood if debates or arguments arose... until the day I got a good buff from my older sister Shannon. Both of my sisters, Shannon and Kerensa, are very frank. So one day some argument was taking place while I smiled and tried to ease the tension when Shannon turned on me and said: You behaving like that makes it worse. I don't know if it's how she said it or if it reminded me of what I was thinking when my friend's dad died or if somewhere inside me I knew it too, but I heard her that day.

It started me thinking that what I was doing wasn't working - for me or for those around me - and as I opened up to learning from my sisters, I came to see value in speaking up as the way to solve a situation.

The thing that made me face the loss of my father head-on was the birth of my nephew Sebastian; before he came I never really spoke openly about dad. His birth gave me an understanding of what a parent must feel with the need to protect, educate, nurture and I finally recognized the want and emptiness inside me.

On one hand I felt a kind of freedom that I didn't have anything to reference fatherhood to - it was freeing, but it was sad too. Losing dad and now having a chance to be a kinda dad lit a fire inside me, I started to look at my life critically.

That's when I started to pay attention to those aspects of my personality and even my instinct that carry dad inside me - besides the farting games I play with Sebastian, I love a good prank whether it's by me or on me, there's a real deep love of family and community living which I'm told was dad's ideal of living, I love to cook and feed people - apparently one of dad's favourite outings was going to the market/grocery and buying enough food to feed an army which he'd then come home and divide and re-package for his sister and brothers - I'm always trying to fatten my girlfriend which doesn't amuse her but which gives me real kicks. A few years ago I found that reading philosophy and analysing theories was a favourite past-time of mine, dad was a liberal thinker, even radical, I can so see myself expounding with him.

Opening up is still a challenge. I see us men avoid opening up. For me it feels like I'm literally opening up my chest and showing my heart, I have to keep reminding myself that I can't be afraid of getting hurt. The irony is my girlfriend won't let me get away with not opening up and I love that about her. I really appreciate this opportunity to speak honestly, maybe my story will touch a nerve with someone and remind them that love is a memory and a knowing more potent than death.

# Chapter 6

## **ZENO:** *The Most Important Thing is to Take Part.*



Image: Zeno Constance (in all b;ack) with drama students, off to Surinam for Carifesta

Photo Courtesy: Zeno Constance

Success is bout finding meaningful ways to fight and knowing what you fighting for.

I have a motto: MYOB - Mind Yuh Own Business - the first difficulty we have is that our culture trapped in a season, whether is Ramlleela or Calypso, so it's not that we don't love the thing, it's that we don't know the thing. I remember I was on a bus in Jamaica in 2000 and the whole bus was singing Bob Marley songs and I say: So why we can't be like that here (Trinidad & Tobago?) I does call those DJs on the radio and quarrel: How come you could play Reggae Gold but you cah play Soca Gold? Ask anybody under 20 to sing Mih Lover, I bet they eh know it. But yuh see, we have to create the need for us to want to know, if there's no need, why we will want? This is a different time, when we were growing up there was one radio station, we had no choice and out of that we learn music, all kinda of music, we listen and learn and appreciate. Now if you lock your dial on station X, you won't know bout other types of music, you can't appreciate diversity and if you can't hear your self on the radio anytime of the year, how you will know yourself?

So for the young people reading this, lemme give a lil calypso history - calypso was big in the 1950's, so big it threatened rock and roll; one in every five records sold then in the US was calypso and nightclub owners were rearranging their places to accommodate calypso bands. Arrow's Hot, Hot, Hot sold 5,000,000 copies - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkGgdIBX1to> - and Harry Belafonte's album Calypso -<http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/music/harry-belafonte-calypso-set-gold-standard-music-article-1.2526023> - was the first gold album in record history and included a remake of our own Mighty Terror's Brown Skin Girl - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4No8NlbZfw> - listening to this calypso alone gives a whole understanding of our changing social landscape.

So you might ask: Well what happen? I think we have a country of pioneers, starters but little collective follow throughers because we don't MYOB. TUCO has this Calypso History month and Channel 4 does these lil snippets of calypso so hopefully we moving from competition to building appreciation. My friend Leonid (Francis - Point Fortin Secondary) and I, fighting for years to get the Ministry to put Calypso History on the syllabus, we still fighting, but for the last 6 years, I lecturing a course on Calypso History in UWI - when the students come in they only know bout Bunji and Machel, so you see how much work we have to do, but hopefully, we getting somewhere slowly.

The next thing is how we actually sharing this knowledge - on a programme on Gayelle, I made the point of finding the correct method to introduce young people to calypso. You know all calypso musicals does capture the student audience? When I do a calypso play I always put the calypso into context and students sing along with actions that encompass theatre and the story touches all the young people. When my students went to see Ten To One - <http://www.guardian.co.tt/entertainment/2015-01-11/sparrow-musical-ten-one-be-staged-carnival> - they come back singing all the songs - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKloUInMv5A> - so the thing (calypso) there and it good, it don't need remodelling, it's about exposing youths to it and the how we doing that, without MYOB calypso is like a bus running without people in it.

The big thing is that we confusing an education system with an exam pass system. 90% of teachers think they successful because of passes, but we not MYOB because passes don't mean good character, passes don't mean we facilitating young people into becoming adults - we don't shape the character but we want results, so there's this disconnect between education and person. How we could come through history and not know who we are? Is because History is taught in a disconnect - chapters rather than flow - I remember walking past a classroom and seeing that Emancipation came because of the fight against slavery from people like Wilberforce, I get vex too bad, I walk in the classroom and rub that off and write Emancipation came because we cut they ass.

I out here so long I see people fight and get beat up, fight and get through, fight and get bitter and not fight at all. I am one of the spillovers from Black Power - one in many who still never give up, one who out here doing what we have to do. I doh get bitter, I does get vex and fight because I eh dropping out. With all de drama awards and accomplishments, my greatest drama achievement is that we are the only school (Fyzabad Composite) that never miss a Drama Festival or a SanFest, the goal in life is to take part.

# Chapter 7

**COLIN:** *Cherish Your Life, Your Woman, Your Children...Cherish it all when you have it All.*



Image: The Syriac Family :Joy & Colin with daughter Chloe, middle son Jude and youngest Jerrell

Photo Courtesy: Colin Syriac

Success is about finding positive ways to see your way through life's challenges.



It was one of those ordinary married-man-father Fridays - Joy (my wife), was in POS for her usual checkup and I was on the way to pick up my boys from Cub Scouts and then my phone rang and life changed forever.

Joy said the doctor wanted to see me.

Picking up my boys faded into the background.

It took all my manness to call my older son to pick up his brothers and to somehow drive to meet Joy.

It was the longest, heaviest journey I've ever made.

When the doctor told me Joy had stage two breast cancer I cried.

I didn't recognize him at first, Joy's doctor, but he recognized me, we'd gone to school together over twenty years ago, somehow that helped...it was something familiar in this sea of questions, doubt, fear.

My first piece of advice for men/women going through this is to develop a relationship with the doctor, you want to be able to trust your doctor, so get to know him/her.

Trust is one of the biggest things in dealing with fear and doubt and worry - find where and what and who you trust so that then you can focus on the game plan and stick with it.

Generally, men do action best, the worst thing for most men is to feel helpless; I didn't stop crying, but I said: OK, let's get whatever done that needs to be done.

Surgery, as soon as the following week, was recommended. I went into action, making all the arrangements, being efficient, even though I had no clue how I would pay for this.

One of the biggest things that helped us deal with this situation is that Joy and I constantly communicate. Joy is very frank, I love that about her, some men feel dis-empowered by a strong, outspoken women, but I like knowing where I stand with my wife, even when I'm in the doghouse.

This is definitely another piece of advise I'd like to give - talk with your wife/partner - talk like you talked when you were trying to get some, talk all the time so that when a difficult conversation needs to be had, you don't have to jump the hurdle of opening up.

So now, this word 'cancer' came into our conversations like the worst intruder, yet because we always talked about everything, we found a way to allow it to come in without it breaking down our home.

We decided we'd have to include our children to gain full support, so they'd need an honest understanding about what was going to happen in the following weeks and recognize that all

the things they usually get and expect from Mummy now required that they step up and do for themselves and do for Mummy too.

Everything I do is about family; Joy and the children are my world.

Unlike Joy, I don't have a large extended family and a million friends, my only support is God. That's my next bit of advice - to be the man in the home you need support - whether your support is God, peers, family - you need inner strength. We men really need to understand the role and train for it, don't be complacent, don't wait for a situation to hit you, practise stepping up, being responsible, testing your character, use the time when you don't have to be any of those things to learn how to be those things so you don't get caught off-guard.

So Joy had a double mastectomy and then there was the chemo...some days were good, some days were not...all I knew was, as the man in the house, I couldn't let everything fall apart. I had to make sure that Jude could give S.E.A his best shot and figure out how to plait Chloe's hair in one - forget two like Mummy did it - convince Jerrell (Joy's spoil child) to sleep in his own bed, face my fears and help Joy hold hers at bay, and yes, keep focused on my job.

I remember telling a friend at work that I was going through a hard time and needed his support. He said: Sure. How's Joy?

And then I broke down.

Joy is cancer free now; she's been diagnosed as a triple A threat, which means there's a likelihood of the cancer coming back and if it does it will be far more aggressive, but once it doesn't come back in 5 years, it's gone.

I've put this in a compartment of my brain I don't open - until today - I'm actually lying on the couch talking with you, (Joanne), as if I'm by a shrink cause that's what it feels like.

So we're living with this ticking time-bomb, still, the philosophy is - don't put cancer at the center, continue on your journey, be practical and support each other.

On really hard days I focus on keeping my feet on the treadmill cause I know if I stand stationary I will find myself thinking...what if...sometimes I just go riding far and long until I pull my bike to the side of the road and talk with God or just simply cry.

The thing about cancer is that it's not only the person with cancer who's affected - it affects everyone - it calls children to grow up and men to man up. It's a whole lifestyle change - what you eat, where you go, how you think, what you say... how to keep going...

The only thing that gets you through it is love.

On the other side, cancer, as hard as it is, isn't only about bad stuff...I have an image in my head that I play over and over of my then 12 year old daughter changing her mother's bandages without squirming. Now this daughter has decided she wants a career in medicine. Saturday mornings I look out the window and see my 13 year old son mowing the lawn, most of the time without having to be reminded. Jerrell has learnt to sleep in his bed most nights. I know for sure that whatever happens, through this journey, our children have grown up and grown in love.

Joy has always epitomized this word, she's never been the victim through all of this.

As for me, I work my ass off with one mission in mind: money will never be the reason my wife can't have any treatment if she ever needs it. I treat my wife very special, I've always loved her, but now I see everyday as another opportunity to love her.

Cancer isn't just a word, it's one of life's biggest earthquakes.

The only thing that gets you through it, is love.

# Chapter 8

**ISAAC:** *You are a Diamond...  
Discovery & Evaluation don't  
determine Your Worth.*



Image: Isaac Blackman.

Photo Courtesy: Isaac Blackman

My understanding of success is the ability to be grounded in your faith so that neither fame nor misfortune change you.

Part of the Isaac Blackman story is the story of the sixteen year old who was thrown into a new world without his mentor, growing into the man who had to navigate how to walk in his own shoes while honouring the enormous ones left behind to become one of Trinidad and Tobago's top Gospel artists and music producers.

When my father, Ras Shorty I died, everything changed. We had to move out of Piparo and for the first time we were renting; none of us had formal education so we couldn't just go out and get jobs, there was Shorty I's massive medical bill to pay off and beyond all of those obvious challenges, there was a new world to grasp.

Piparo was not simply our physical home, it was our soul foundation - we learnt of a nurturing culture where selflessness was a lifestyle rather than an ideal or a thought. We'd grown up on a balanced diet where balance meant spiritual, physical, mental and emotional harmony, so we understood that the soul, heart, mind needed the same nourishment, the same goodness to consume. I felt shocked by this new world. I prayed everyday for God to send me a mentor.

At 16 all I knew how to do to make money was cut grass because I used to upkeep Piparo, so eventually I got a job helping a landscaper. I cut football fields and school yards and anything else I was sent to do. Opportunities for easy money came my way, but my upbringing prevailed.

A friend of ours gave me a computer crash course and at 17 I started building my own computer, buying some computer part every month when I got paid. Some of Sheldon's friends were building a studio, in exchange for my labour they taught me how to build beats on the computer. I remember Sheldon bought a family computer and I used to stay up late making noise in my poor mother's head as I practised what I'd been taught, until eventually I crashed the computer. I went back to building my own then, I got a program and stayed up four days and nights trying to learn it until I fainted on the fourth night.

So when those young bandits robbed me recently - telling me they liked my music, this wasn't personal they just have no other way - I laughed.

As an artist people think being Shorty I's son makes it easier but for me it was harder. People expected me to sound like him, yes, they were willing to record me, but they didn't want to record what I wanted to sing. I remember meeting two big names in the Soca industry in a studio and the first thing they said was: 'We know OC and Abby and Sheldon, but we don't know you.' When I played my music, the second thing they said was: 'It sounding nice but people doh want to hear that...Gospel music...you will starve, chook a lil bacchanal in it.' When I said 'No', the third thing they said was: 'He stubborn like his father.'

What people don't understand about Shorty I's issue with the trend that Soca took was that it was not a reflection of us, he would say: you don't do stupidness whole day, how come you don't sing (Soca) about the other parts of your life? The vision of Soca my father had was a music to reflect all of us, untie all of us, show us in all our doings, it was our story of love, social issues, spirituality, family told through the music that celebrated our creative essence - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThBmAKqONCg> - I want to bring that back, this beautiful music that didn't objectify anything or anyone, even if it was about a woman, the woman was depicted with grace and respect.

That studio experience reminded me of a dream I used to have while tending my goats in Piparo - I used to dream about having a recording studio and becoming a music producer. I was determined then to build a studio that would record other young people who didn't have the opportunity to record music outside of commercial Soca. It's important not to let the crowd dictate your pace, find your own path and walk brave.

When To The Ceiling - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxPn32KdOf8> - became a big hit, people thought I hit on something new but that is Jamoo, the music simply evolved to the people's ears. The biggest blessing to me is the fact that I stayed grounded, this is why I say I'm a diamond, the people's acknowledgement of my music does not define me, I am who I was and will be before, during and after.

My father instilled in us to present our facts based on undeniable truths. I've had 17 years to define his teaching to my own truth. My undeniable truth is my faith, when God answered my prayer for a mentor, He said: be what you want to see. So when these young people come to me with their big music dreams and their questions about if it can happen, I tell them: Do you - don't let the world dictate who you are.

My mission is to spread that love in my heart, to continue giving a fair chance to young people wanting to do something other than commercial soca. I think it's critical that we feed our young minds a balanced diet of music.

I believe those with influence have an accountability to the nation.

Whether you call my music jamoo or soca, it is, at heart, Gospel music, it is my meditation of life that our music is not only party music but music that tells our whole story and that I succeed through the grace and mercy of God.

# Chapter 9

## **MUNGAL:** *Music is breath.*



Image: Mungal Patasar

Photo Courtesy: Mungal Patasar

I believe success is about finding one's fulfillment; it's not about wealth or power.



People choose various pathways to find fulfillment in life; for me, fulfillment means becoming one with myself.

I believe every human has two personalities - the external personality that the world sees and the internal personality that is connected with the Divine. I don't look outside to connect with the Divine, I go inside.

Music is akin to a Divine art, it is one of the disciplines that provides a pathway to fulfillment. When I'm not performing or practising, I have a ten by ten room I sit in and play my sitar and during that time, the room and the space cease to exist - there's nothing but the Universe and I am just a part of It.

Music is one language, understood regardless of place and time. When I play music, I am dealing with a sound that is in empathy with the Universe; everything has a soul and we are connected with a Universal soul, music is soul connection - I see no physical when I play music, there is only the beautiful spark of Divinity.

I started off as a professional mandolin player with Dil-E-Nadan in the 1960's. I got my first sitar at 27 - people usually take 25 years to learn the sitar, yet within a year, I was able to play some songs on it.

I went abroad to study Classical Indian music and returned to Trinidad in 1983, excited to share my music at home. This is when I opened the Caribbean School of Indian Music (CSIM).

I returned to India in 1986 and came back home in 1990. One of the first performances upon my return was to play at Divali Nagar, I brought all I had learnt to my performance that day and quickly realised that the people did not connect with it.

Classical Indian music requires an involved audience who understands its language, it relies on the assumption that an audience will connect with it through knowing it. When I played at the Nagar, I could not feel the empathy of the music, I couldn't feel the soul connection.

I realised that if I was to be true to myself my music would have to connect here with my people. So I decided to take my classical learning and my Trinidadian heritage and merge the music. The traditional Indians who expected to hear me play classical Indian music were not happy, the non-Indians and non-traditional Indians were.

The artist must first be true to himself; I could not please everybody, so I remained true to myself, true to my belief that music is soul connection.

People ask me about the fusion in my music, they ask about using the sitar - a classical Indian instrument - in non-classical music. I always get asked how I came about naming a piece of music 'Dreadlocks' - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yoez7MqAKsw> - people wonder about the fusion of Rastafarianism with the classical Indian sitar.

The thing is, I don't hear fusion, I hear an Universal sound, a sound that resonates with all, a sound that knows no race or people but knows all internal personalities; it is the sound of the Divine. Dreadlocks and that whole album really gained success first in Europe before being acknowledged here, but it is Trinidad that helped me understand the importance of merging the music with the people.

Through this whole journey, family has been my everything, I can travel all over the world, but home is where my family is, I will never leave my family to follow music. My wife has been my inspiration and support, she is that brilliant mix of woman, wife, mother and every other. Every day starts with my wife and I sharing chai tea and chatting - she is the physical representation of all my dreams and fulfillment. Now my most important focus is teaching my grandchildren music. My wife, my children and grandchildren are the extra sparks of the Divine I am blessed to have connected with.

I am humbled by the goodness of life and the privileges with which I have been blessed.

