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Awake & Aware

Hello guys and welcome to this 4th edition of Open Door, I'm Yann W. Tanoé founder of the platform, a platform created for 'today's conscious man', a multicultural platform where we bring together men of all ethnicities, colours, religions, sexualities and walks of life. I often get asked why I started this platform and my simple response is because I needed it. I needed for

many reasons but the main one was to heal my own relationship with masculinity and the men around me. As men we go through many situations where we hurt each other deeply, but never quite acknowledge this because of our conditioning and the fact that as men we are supposedly not created to acknowledge or stand too deep in the emotive realms.

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Yann W. Tanoé



“We can love each other, be aware of each other's emotions, help to normalise some of the ways that we feel, whether it be the doubts that we have, the weaknesses, insecurities...”

As men we hurt each other deeply and it goes unaddressed in the name of masculinity, in the name of bravado, 'that's what guys do', 'boys will be boys' and many other similar sayings that excuse this type of behaviour. Though these behaviours seem to be ingrained, I believe that they can be challenged and further still, broken down. The only way these behaviours can change is if there is a conscious awakening where men can call other men out and remind them of who they really are or should be.

As men regardless of background, race, religion and ethnicity, it is our duty to carry the torch of evolution and improvement, to be our brother's keeper, to be our brother's accountability partner, his hype man, his right hand man in order to help him self-actualise. We are what we are as humans, human nature will be human nature with its flaws and carnal instincts

but we can only but try as men to be decent humans and endeavour to rise above the ancestral conditioning we have received.

We can love each other, be aware of each other's emotions, help to normalise some of the ways that we feel, whether it be the doubts that we have, the weaknesses, insecurities. It is possible to be that type of man. And in my opinion every man deserves a man like that in their life, every man deserves a brother to help raise him to the level that he needs to be at. I pray that we all strive become. To become that man to each other and see how this influence can radiate and start improving our respectful communities, societies and our wider world. The work begins here. Right where you are standing. It can be done. ■ **Yann W. Tanoé**





meet the cover boy

Open Door a concept welcomes free spirited, conscious men! And no one embodies the two more than Mr Jonathan Curry. Let us get to know our new cover boy! He is pretty amazing!

YT: Hello Jon, tell us a little bit about yourself (where you are from, background, occupation, fun facts)

JC: Hello open door community. My name is Jonathan Robert Curry affectionately know as "The Jon Robert". I am proud native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, it has been my home for 27 years of my life. Pre Covid I had a 13 year career in hospitality working for major hotel brand such as: Hilton, Marriott, and IHG. I am now the cofounder of Yacht Club Company which is a black owned yacht company in Tulum, Mexico.

YT: What is your definition of masculinity and how has your upbringing helped shape that definition?

JC: Hmm interesting question. I think masculinity is the ability to stand tall in your truth, without fear of others or need of their approval.

YT: What nurtured your love for travelling and exploring?

JC: Travel has always been an important part of my life. Both of my parents were missionaries and so growing up with them they wanted me to have a global perspective and understanding of the world. So I have been traveling as long as I can remember.

YT: What was your favourite country to visit and why? What was your least favourite country and why?

JC: I don't have one favorite they are all special to me because they all provides a unique and interesting

perspective. I will say the country that I was pleasantly surprised by was Czech Republic. It was so whimsical with this enchanting lure to it. I don't have a least favorite.

YT: As a black man what were some of the more challenging experiences that you encountered traveling?

JC: Believe it or not I have yet to encounter in major challenges while traveling abroad as black man.

YT: How has your mind been opened by traveling?

JC: Travel is the greatest education one can give themselves, it's and interactive classroom. It's history, it's culture, it's math, it's economics, it breaks down your walls, and builds a better human being. From the people you meet, to the languages you try to speak. To understanding cultural norms, and currency.

YT: What are some pieces of advice you would give some people who have reservations about traveling?

JC: The world that you presently live in is not going anywhere. So If you end up not liking your experience you can always return to your present reality. However if you get out and explore what the world has to offer you mostly likely wont want to return to the life you left. ■

Jonathan Robert Curry

for more awesomeness,
read his article on page **22**



Becoming a Dad

BIG CHANGE SHOCK PRESSURE...

I became a father in 2018 to my precious daughter, Norah. She is, without a doubt, the best thing that has ever happened to me. The light of my life, and the most beautiful girl I have ever had the pleasure to have in my life. On face value, from Day 1, everything couldn't be better. A great wife, a good job, a lovely home, and a future ahead of us with our gorgeous new daughter. But behind the lovely social media and the in-hospital "shoots", day 1 – 100 (approximately) were not smooth in any way.

Now you'll be forgiven for immediately thinking "well it's not easy becoming a Dad, everyone knows this" but I don't think I'm alone in ignoring that advice, and being overwhelmed with positivity and excitement - therefore, for the right reasons, not preparing myself for it all. However, our birth wasn't as "normal" as you'd expect, and for numerous reasons, it has definitely been a traumatic experience for both mum and dad. And one we're not truly over, with no end date of knowing when

this trauma will pass – but for now, we bury it. We have to. Any parent knows, you don't have time to dwell. And that will be the premise of my story, for I'm not really ready to delve into my feelings about the birth yet...

So, being ready. What does that even mean? You get the nursery ready, you buy a load of nappies and baby wipes, you spend a fortune on baby proofing and toys, and you encourage (politely) for people to buy the *right* presents rather than going rogue! And then you sit and wait, and deal with the 3rd trimester issues of a heavily pregnant person. You feel ready. You feel excited for the future. You privately plan a name (or two, in case they don't "look" like the first one). You picture what they'll look like, how they'll sound, what they'll be like as a person. All the normal stuff. It's fair to say that whilst you worry a "normal" amount (what

John Stacey

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and founder of MENTalk Lincs,
Lincolnshire-based Mental
Health CIC for men. Marketer,
Dad of 1, and into year 5 (or so)
of identifying and working on his
own Mental Health struggles...



“...everything is scrutinised and second-guessed, by the most critical of all people – yourselves!”

“The overriding change of everything in your life, can be overwhelming. Some Dads have been a certain way, enjoying a certain type of life, for a long time.”

is a normal amount?), it's easily overtaken by the positivity that comes with becoming a parent. For the most part, generally, at least. It's exciting, right?!

Men are genetically, culturally, societally and historically, a part of the human race that are designed to be the protector, the calm, the collected, the strong. However, the modern man arguably has more pressures than ever to deal with; they're just more subtle. For me, I have an ongoing battle with my own mental health and working through historic emotional trauma from my childhood. Through this I hope to work on becoming a better version of myself, through defeating a distinct self-hatred, for the majority of my life. I also have a busy job, that demands a lot of me, as well as numerous other "irons in fires", just like most 30-somethings in modern society. So all in all, it's busy... and I knew this would come into play when I became a dad, but as with everything else the positivity was winning. The excitement of it all was beating any sensible choices I could make to try and make sure everything was more mentally manageable.

So, when you're given the task of leaving the hospital with this new-born tiny human, I don't know about any other Dads, but my first thought was "ah yes, thank you midwives and nurses. You've been amazing, but yeah I miss my own home... oh, no instruction manual to take home with us? No guidebook?... oh....". You're both (mum too) thrust into this parenting world to fend for yourselves. Now, in the old days, a man would take them home and then go back to work and leave the mother to magically work it all out for themselves. I can't quite get my head round that at the best of times, but it was slightly different for me to usual, in that I had 3 weeks off paternity (lucky, but I used some annual leave too) and my wife was still quite ill from the anaesthetic. Cue "DaddyMummy" hybrid for a week or so, bottle feeding and working out how to keep them both alive

and well! But as I said before, we crack on. We just do rather than dwell, or take stock, and think about it. We have to. And that's ok.

First of all, it's going to be obvious pointing this out, but the first few months are tiring. Sleepless nights, always rocking your baby to sleep, running backwards and forward for muslins or wipes or nappies; it's a good fitness regime because at the same time you're "fasting" by hardly having the time to eat properly! However, Google is your friend... not too much, as you can find many negative, scary holes to fall into, but if you need quick advice from statistical scientific guidance, and/or mums/dads already having gone through it, you can find the most random bits of info at the click of a button. And you have your health visitor appointments too, which are great... for mother and baby (I'll come back to this). Which is crucial.

But, what was interesting for me, as someone going through a bit of journey of self-discovery within my own mental health anyway, is that there isn't much guidance and support of how to deal with the numerous mental issues BOTH parents may go through. From the get-go we are in a constant state of anxiety concerned for the life of this small human. On top of that, everything is scrutinised and second-guessed, by the most critical of all people – yourselves! Guilt, doubt, pressure, worry, anger, are all examples of the obvious things you feel as a new parent – Mother OR Father. But from a male point of view, there's a couple I really want to highlight, that you may not realise are highly likely a major part of a father's mental issues.

Firstly, control. I don't mean the negative connotation of being "controlling" and everything is "my way or the highway". Men are conditioned to be quite risk averse when it comes to parenting or looking after a life/household/family/relationship, as traditionally they're seen as the main "bread-winner". And within that comes a sub-conscious desire to only want to do things knowing the outcome, or knowing it's correct and will work. Mainly because we're logic driven, and we want things correct and done, yesterday! We don't have time to figure things out... Well, if you have children you'll know that nothing about them is predictably scientific, and despite all efforts to mind-read (I ended up throwing away the Uri Gellar VHS), you'll never fully be able to know 100% what the heck is going on in their tiny minds! So, without intending any of this to be a help guide, what I HAD to do (as my control issues go a bit deeper than standard dad levels) was to find a way to deal with this – and that was, to ensure I could "control my controllables". What do I know I **can** do to help? What can I make an impact in? And within this,



what about taking an advice-led risk? Trial and error, within reason, can be its own science! This was a huge thing for me.

Secondly, it's that old adage – "Your life isn't going to be the same again!". Well it truly isn't! Do you like your time alone? A bit of independence, or time with your mates? Bit of FIFA or COD? Hobbies? Yeah, you can say goodbye to any of that! At least in the first few months. And whilst you might be reading this thinking "I could give up fun stuff, it's fine", I'd agree, it's luxuries you give up for the most important things, isn't it. Over time though, you realise that actually losing those material things, you lose a bit of yourself, and you begin to really value your time with yourself, and with your partner. Connections can feel lost, you do feel trapped, as harsh as it sounds, and you do feel like you are nothing but a Dad. This needs to be considered more important than a flippant thought, as it dramatically contributes to those feelings I've explained earlier. But as I've said numerous times, this trapped feeling, and being "nothing but a dad", is very normal...

The overriding change of everything in your life, can be overwhelming. Some Dads have been a certain way, enjoying a certain type of life, for a long time. Men, again, are quite simplistic in the way they live their life too – they have things they enjoy, they love, and they have some form of control of, and we often like to stay in that lane, stick with them, and only focus on them. However, a baby comes along, and you get this overwhelming forced feeling that your life isn't yours anymore. And that's true, but unfortunately you're mostly unprepared for that, and that's the issue. More needs to be done in pre-fatherhood to help Dads to know this will happen. There are huge studies out there showing that men can capitulate without preparation and foresight to know what to expect. They can feel helpless, and cast out, by pure proxy of the way they're dealing with so much themselves. This leads to higher suicide rates in new dads, and broken homes within a short timeframe after birth of a first-born.

“There's absolutely nothing wrong, weak, or weird about seeking help.”

“... it's a big pressure to be a parent. That pressure can be good – thrive in it, don't just survive.”

So my message really, in all of this, is 3-fold:

1. There's absolutely nothing wrong, weak, or weird about **seeking help**. Be that pre or post fatherhood! There ARE resources out there, but they won't be given to you (this is something that needs to change, but I can talk at length about this another time...) so do search for them. Search for likeminded peer advice – friends, family, and others like me who present their "findings" online! I wish I did at times, and I'll no doubt need to in the future.

2. **Breathe** – try and find some time, even if a few moments, for yourself. Reflect, and calm yourself because it's all go when you're a parent, and it can be really difficult to centre yourself and maintain that control of your controllables I mentioned earlier – one key controllable is your emotions, good and bad! My moment each day, is when I do the dishes!

3. **Pat yourself on your back** – find the positives in ANYTHING that you do. If something goes well, don't shrug it off as "ah it's just part of being a dad", take some time to think "you know what, I did do some good there" and let that feeling sink in. Allow yourself to smile knowing you can be good, and you do contribute. Without you, your baby and your partner would be lost, despite how we're conditioned to feel like babies only need their mother – that's categorically incorrect. Ultimately you will have times when you tell yourself this due to that conditioning I spoke about earlier. So if you're reading this, and you've had one of those moments, you were wrong! Try to retrain yourself to value your importance to your partner and your baby.

In conclusion, becoming a parent is a huge change. A big state of flux, probably forever. Being better prepped and open to all of this change is crucial. It's also a massive shock to the system, physically and mentally - That's ok, we're adaptable creatures, so let yourself adapt. And finally it's a big pressure to be a parent. That pressure can be good – thrive in it, don't just survive. Let yourself accept it and look positively on this as a great challenge, because ultimately being a parent is a future of **big hope** and **big enjoyment**. ■ **John Stacey**



'The Watcher'

In Norse mythology, the raven is known as the watcher – they keep their eye on all things and gather knowledge, reporting back to Oden, The All Father, what they have learned. Ravens are highly revered and respected through the Norse communities. I designed this piece as a tattoo design for my wife who recently had it tattooed onto her thigh.

Created with black ink on paper/edited digitally
Artist – Eddie Teale
Dead_ordinary_art@instagram

EDUCATION, — A SYSTEM — IN PROGRESS

Introduction -

"I don't see you doing very well, by the end of this Year, you just might be able to scrape a C". These were the words of one of my school teachers in one of my favourite subjects. As you can imagine as a young boy this was very demotivating and changed my pride and my passion for the subject into distaste and uninterested attitude.

The famous philosopher Rousseau once said; "It is the duty of the teacher to develop the passion of the student".

I'm sure many of us have felt discouraged or demotivated by at least one of our teachers at some point in our education. I meet so many young guys who leave school with little to no clear vision or passions. I meet



even more who have no idea of now to undertake practical aspects of life such as taxes, balance finances, buy a house or even fundamental things like being able to listen and lead.

My primary aim in writing this is to inspire you who are reading to seek out your own passion and genius which resides in every person; no matter who you are and to help those who lack this.

The innate genius -

Now these issues in our system of education (and even in our culture) issues which I intend to explore, have affected every one of us at some point or another in our academic lives, whether we know it or not. But, I believe that all people have in them an innate ability for intelligence. Every single man has a dormant genius waiting to be developed and unleashed. Every single person is unique, that is an undeniable truth. No two people share

the exact same experiences, upbringing and genetic makeup. And to each individual unique person lies a unique mind and way of thinking. The problem is, with our culture genius is only really recognised or given value when it's expressed through fields such as mathematics or the sciences. And despite this, every one of us in this country are taught using the same methods of sitting, listening, writing, memorising writing again, etc. Now this method of teaching works for a lot of people, hence why some students excel however others do not. Genius can take many forms sadly however, many young boys are made to feel mediocre and are convinced they're "not intelligent" because they have different interests or learn in different ways. I know this because I was one of them.

A young boy in school -

In school, I was as average as it gets. I was always okay at almost every subject but I never topped the class with grades. I was never the "naughty" kid or the one who just didn't get it, and so I noticed that unless you were one of



Rhys Brook - Holloway

'But, I believe that all people have in them an innate ability for intelligence. Every single man has a dormant genius waiting to be developed and unleashed.'

Artist, Public speaker
Theology and philosophy enthusiast
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Bio: I am a 20-year-old creative from Oxford, England. I create art in many formats, whether it's music, photography, writing, or a whole host of other creative things. My desire and passion is to use my gifts and skills, to encourage others to do the same.



“You see we can have remarkable teachers, but the system will always provide limitations on progress. True genius will only be revealed when such things are in place.”

these two types of students, you could just go under the radar as far as attention goes. I'd zone out in class and just find myself thinking of creative ideas and stories. My attention was often elsewhere at times. My area of deepest interest and my strongest passion I discovered was in the areas of philosophy, theology and expressing my thoughts on such things through written communication like stories or poems, even public speaking but there was no place for this in my school's curriculum, so I just had it pushed to the side. Now I actualised this passion and began developing my genius at the end of my educational life, and I discovered it out of my own accord and determination to better myself. I can't help but think what progress I could've made if someone had spotted this in me and helped me to develop it sooner.

Looking back, so many of my interests pointed towards this but I never put it all together. When I left school in 2018 I had only the faintest idea of what it was I actually wanted to do in life, and the inspiration that I had most certainly didn't come from my formal education.

It is so incredibly detrimental to both the individual and even society when one goes off out of school to either uni or find work not knowing or pursuing their own innate genius. Many people 'find' themselves in this after school phase, but many do not. What if at least the beginning of this journey could initiated when we are young.

Our system is flawed -

You see I'd be lying if I said I had all the answers, but with my limited experiences these are some of the things which I have noticed. The key issues we face can all be traced back to our system and style of education. You see we can have remarkable teachers, but the system will

always provide limitations on progress. True genius will only be revealed when such things are in place.

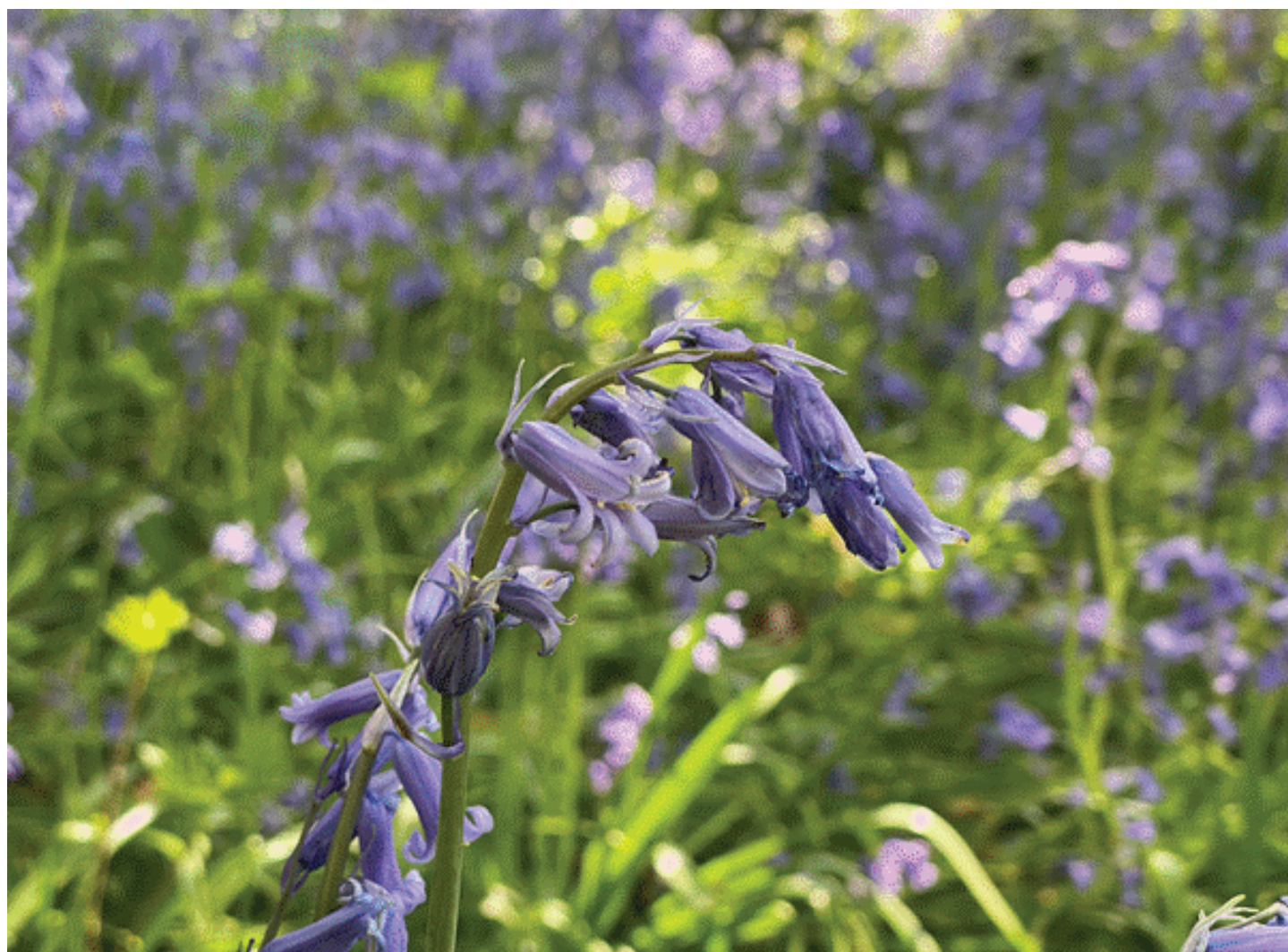
So, what do I think a good system is? That's a very good yet challenging question. A good Place to start would be to indicate what it is not, where it is lacking and go from there.

The British education system as mentioned earlier holds mathematics, the sciences and the students who excel in them in very high regard. Now I enjoyed maths and I see the need to have an understanding of it, but if I'm being honest, 90% of what was taught is completely useless to me now or least it serves me only as general knowledge. Several terms were spent on algebra, and yet I had only one lesson (Off curriculum) of how taxes work in my whole school life. I think that our priorities are off.

What would be ideal is extra classes for practical life skills on taxes, mortgages and budgeting, listening and conversations, all aspects of health and how to care

“No matter what we've faced, we have something to impart. I wouldn't be where I am if not for mentors who invested in me, helped me develop my genius in recent years and helped me to grow in innumerable ways.”

for yourself. Men would have far more to contribute to society and many issues with mental health and lack of self-worth would be remedied if this was taught early on. And yet students are already overwhelmed with content, teachers are overworked and under paid. The budget just isn't there. It's not just good enough to add content, the system needs a shakeup.



My ideal and what I believe would work best is a system in which students are examined and observed along their educational journey to see how it is their personal genius is expressed, where it is that they excel and how they best learn. Along with this there would be avenues which each student could go down depending on what it is they excel in, for example a curriculum which prioritises the arts or literature or humanities or whatever. And still prioritising teaching on the practical lessons as mentioned earlier. Each student learns differently, so classes that focus on different teaching styles like more tactile and hands on learning would be a great place to start.

A pessimistic hope -

To burst my own bubble, I am not optimistic for change. It would require a complete overhaul on how we as a culture for a couple hundred years have perceived and understood education. So that being the case, why am I even writing this? It's to inspire all of us to be the change for the young people around us. Children, siblings, whoever we have influence upon. The ball is in our court. No matter what we've faced, we have something to impart. I wouldn't be where I am if not for mentors who

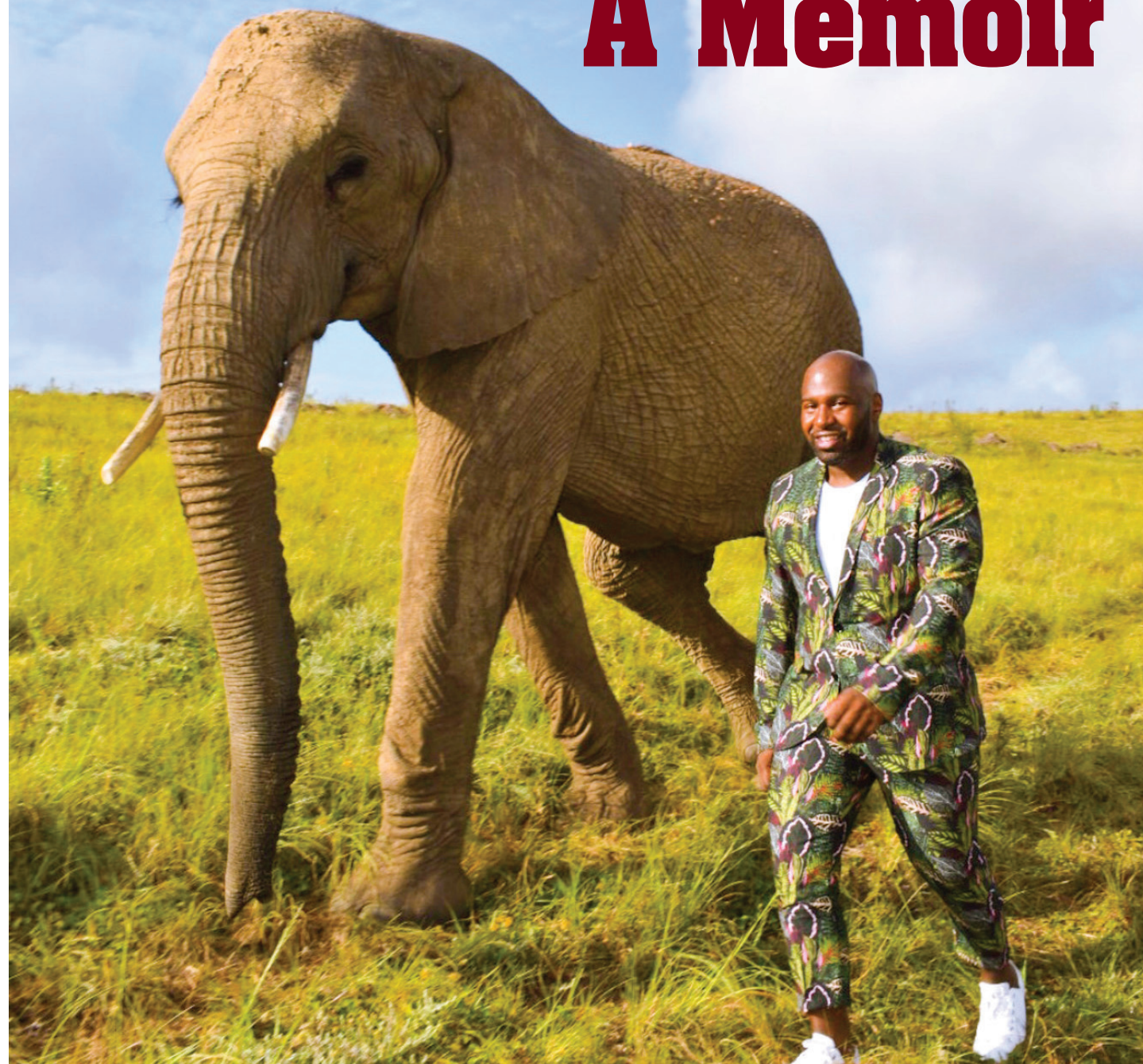
invested in me, helped me develop my genius in recent years and helped me to grow in innumerable ways. I wouldn't be the man I am now if it wasn't for other strong men in my life teaching me practical life lessons that my formal education never could.

Conclusion -

Now I don't want this to come across the wrong way. I am not anti-formal education, nor am I saying our system is all bad, but I can't help but feel it's unfinished. It needs supplementing, it is like a meal that lacks fruits and vegetables. I hope that change will come, but until it does, we must do what we can to first seek out our own genius and develop it no matter what we've been told. And second we must do our part to encourage and teach those around us how to navigate through life and succeed despite the odds. One day I hope to be able to teach, and help those who look up to me like my brothers and other young guys discover their genius and know how it is they are to journey effectively through this life. ■

Rhys Brook - Holloway @rhysthesage
photography page: @peaceof_rhys

The journey less travelled A Memoir



Jonathan Robert Curry

*'the most dangerous place for
an African American man is in
his own country'*

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As I travel the world, and experience it through the filter of my own lens. One question that is frequently asked of me is; "How does it feel to travel the world as a black man"? This question may seem odd to many of you, however the historical context of this question can't be ignored. The truth of the matter is black people in America often ask this question of each other, everytime we enter a new room ("room" is a metaphor for spaces black people don't regularly occupy). This question is rooted in 400 years of systematic oppression, distrust, racism, and slavery.

A clear example of the inequalities we often encounter as black people in America was on display at our Nation's Capital in January. There, at our Country's seat of power, thousands of (predominantly) white Trump supporters descended on the Capitol with one intent: to wreak havoc and damn the consequences. They beat and trampled police, looted and defiled those sacred

halls. Their actions were ignited and encouraged by the President, the very same President who, just last June, famously tweeted "when the looting starts, the shooting starts." But the shooting never came. Why is it that the full might of this great Republic was not put on display against these radical usurpers, while Black and Brown bodies were beaten, bloody, and brutalized across the country and indeed in that very city not six months prior.

Last summer, race relations in America returned to the forefront of our social and moral conscience. This was predicated by the numerous deaths of blacks when dealing with the police. George Floyd was violently murdered by four cops: one held his knee to his neck for nearly 10 minutes, while the other three held him down as his life slipped away. Then, Breonna Taylor, a black woman sleeping in her bed, was executed by police serving a no-knock warrant. The brutality of these events sent the nation into an uproar. It led to marches



and protests across the country and around the world, united under the banner "Black Lives Matter". It seemed that, to exist in America as a black person was to exist in fear of the militarization of the police

We are witnessing two Americas play out in real time; protestors who are actively being attacked by the police for proclaiming that their lives matter. Then another set of protestors that are freely welcomed by the police to destroy and defile property because who they voted for didn't win a fair election. To be clear, this is not a shock to Black American's; we've had evidence of this split from justice based on pigment for generations. Though I don't agree with the antics of the latter group, their actions were pivotal in magnifying to the world how broken our democracy is.

What all of this has shown to Black Americans is that we aren't even safe even in our homes in these United States. As an avid solo traveler I am often confronted with this question: Do you feel safe traveling through the world? I usually reply lamentingly "the most dangerous place for an African American man is in his own country." So the question becomes where can we find refuge? Does a place exist where Black people don't have to have a conversation with their sons about how to act if stopped by the police? Is there a place where we are welcomed as contributing members of society, in spite of the color of our skin?

Last year Ghana launched a campaign mostly geared towards Black Americans to come visit the motherland (The Year of the Return). The country made record breaking revenue in tourism--\$1.9 billion. For many African American millennials, this was the first time that an African country was actively marketing itself for them to visit.

This year, Ghana has launched a campaign called "Beyond the Return." The program is designed to promote tourism and home coming to Ghanaians and people of African descent. The program—which has 7 pillars—has one dedicated to making the visa and citizenship process for Black Americans much easier (Diaspora Pathway to Ghana). This isn't a new idea by any means; the Black - to-Africa movement of the 19th century proposed Americans of African heritage should return to the continent. This idea appeared again in the 20th century under the leadership of Afro Jamaican Marcus Garvey. Garvey believed that people of African descent should return to Africa, and envisioned a unified continental government system. Both of these attempts were largely considered to be failures.

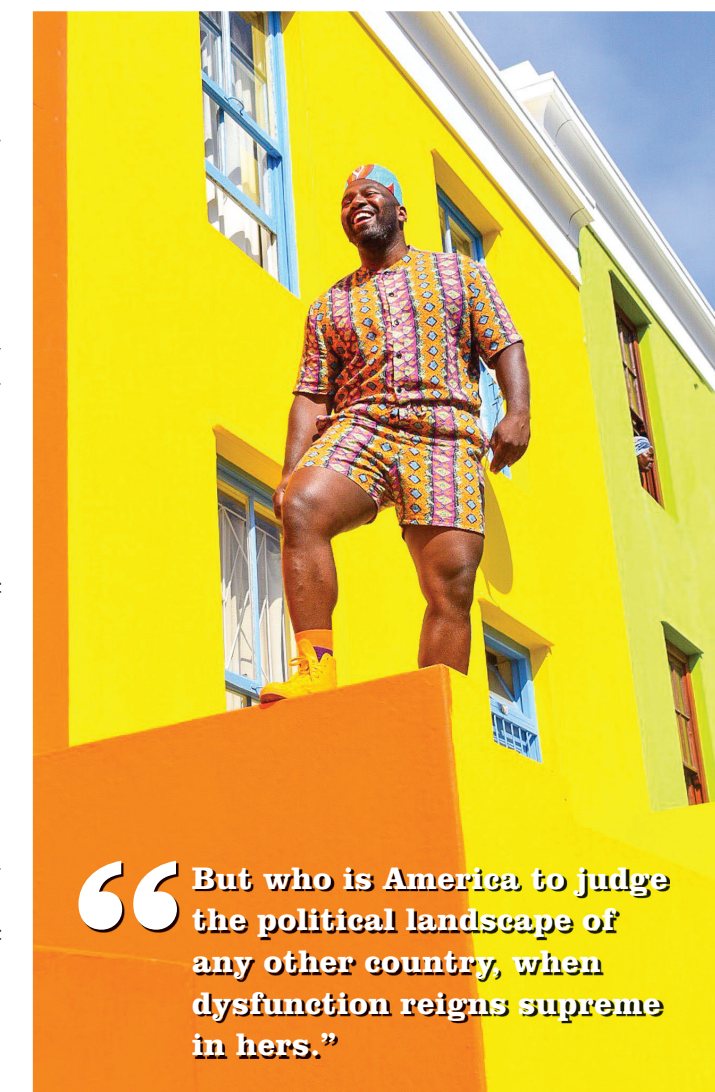
So what would be different now? For some African Americans just the idea of raising their children in an

environment that values them is enough. For others the pain of being black is sometimes soothed by the opportunities that are found in America.

Those who want to maintain their jobs but have the freedom to live anywhere, often consider the time difference. Will they have the ability to maintain business in the States? What will the quality of life be in comparison? Some just think Africa is too far from family and friends. So if not Africa, where?

The answer may be surprising: Mexico. Yes, the same country around which our President wanted to build a wall. How ironic is it that when every other country closed its doors to America, Mexico was one of the first countries to welcome American citizens? There is some historical significance in this answer, for this isn't the first time Black Americans have sought refuge in Mexico.

On February 14, 1829, under the leadership of Mexico's second President Vicente Guerrero, Mexico abolished slavery. What is also interesting to note is Guerrero is



“But who is America to judge the political landscape of any other country, when dysfunction reigns supreme in hers.”



“Don’t be alarmed by our inability to be excited, for we have tarried in these fields of great sorrow for far too long.”

now known as Mexico’s first and only Black President. Yes, 175 years before Barack Obama, Mexico had its first Afro-heritage President.

Word had spread to the South of the abolishment of slavery in Mexico, which at the time extended to what we now know as Texas. Black Americans began to flee to this new land for a chance at freedom. Recently, I uncovered that there was even an Underground Railroad to Mexico. This led me to the discovery of the Mascogos, which means “Birth of the Blacks.” The Mascogos were the original community of 60 or more Black families who fled America during slavery and created a community in Mexico. Now, 191 years after the first known group of Black Americans fled to Mexico, another exodus may be near.

With beautiful metropolitan cities like Mexico City and Monterrey, if you want a city feel either of these will do. With the streets bustling with people and activity, Mexico City—whose population is slightly larger than New York City and twice the size of Los Angeles—offers a lot. And Mexico City is only second to Paris with the most museums in the world. Of course Mexico City and Monterrey have a darkside, like any major metropolitan city crime can be high, the government has its share of woes as well. But who is America to judge the political landscape of any other country, when dysfunction reigns supreme in hers.

However for me an even more obscure option has gripped me to my core. An hour and a half ride from Cancun which is famous to beach lovers, partiers, and students on spring break. It is a beautiful, enchanting city in the Mayan Jungle in Mexican state of Quintana Roo called Tulum. With a population of less than 30,000 people, Tulum offers a refuge from the hustle and bustle of life. Nestled between the white sand outlining, the pristine beaches of the Caribbean Sea, and the beautiful lush tropical jungle, Tulum is a charming town in complete harmony with nature. Imagine an eco-friendly city, with bike lanes, tons of vegan options, that doesn’t allow boats on its waters to preserve the coral reef. A city with tons of fresh markets and fruit carts lining the streets. A city with Bohemian style textiles, wood detailing, beautiful raw concrete walls and floors. One avid traveler went as far to say “Tulum is the Bali of the Western Hemisphere.” He’s not wrong.

Tulum has been my secret place of peace and restoration from the woes of being Black in America. This isn’t lost on the citizens who live here. My taxi driver and now friend, Edwin, told me upon meeting me “Amigo you should move here; we aren’t racist.” What a puzzling way to be introduced to a new city, but unbeknownst to him a seed was planted.

With the American dollar exchanging at the rate of 1 to 21 it’s not hard to choose Tulum for financial freedom. With a modern condo market that offers fully furnished move-in-ready accommodations with all the luxuries we have become accustomed to in the States for as low as \$70,000. Tulum really offers value to people like me who want a simpler life, without having to sacrifice the conveniences they’re otherwise used to.

In the two and a half months I’ve been calling it home I can’t help but notice a spike in African American tourist. There are various facebook communities like the “Black Expats in Tulum”, and “The Black Freedom Colony Project” which have all helped over 100 Black Americans move to Tulum. There is even an Instagram page called “Melanin Tulum,” which is a photo clipboard of Black and Brown people in the charming city. There is a shift happening even amongst the backdrop of a global pandemic where Black Americans are finding solace in Tulum. Will Tulum become the next Mascogos? Only time will tell. ■

Jonathan Robert Curry





King Baldwin IV; Courage *and* Dignity

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/baldwin-iv>



In the early 2000s, legendary director Ridley Scott released two historical epics. The first was *Gladiator*, with Russell Crowe starring as the betrayed Maximus Decimus Meridius, commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Felix Legions, loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife (etc). For those who don't know the film, there is a spoiler coming. At the end of the film Maximus does get his revenge by defeating the villainous Emperor Commodus in mortal combat, before succumbing himself and reuniting with his murdered family in the afterlife. The film was massively successful, both at the box office and with critics, winning five Oscars including best actor and best film, yet Scott narrowly missed out in the best director category for which he was nominated.

Maybe partially motivated by missing out on a personal triumph, Scott rolled the dice again four years later on a similar formula; sword and sandals, epic runtime, visceral action scenes with 2005's *Kingdom of Heaven*. This second film tells the story of Christian Knights and their Muslim counterparts fighting over Jerusalem during crusader period. Sadly for poor Ridley, his second effort saw diminishing returns, garnering decidedly mixed reviews from critics, as well as yielding box office returns of less than half that of *Gladiator*, despite having a larger budget. Controversially, I personally prefer Scott's second attempt, with the story being deeper than *Gladiator*'s more cliched revenge narrative, as well as *Kingdom of Heaven* being more recognisably "historical" (despite a plethora of inaccuracies) rather than its predecessor which was more interested in portraying a time and

in the face of Difficulty

Jonathan Watts

'It seems as though Baldwin himself didn't see things this way however, and set about learning all he could about statecraft and diplomacy, while also training to become a great warrior and military leader'

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“It's striking that even as a very ill man, Baldwin continued to do his duty, and while it would surely have been very easy and understandable had he left military leadership in the hands of others, the king did all he could to never forego this element of his responsibility.”

feel of history, rather than any specific events. One area where I would agree with the critics, and potentially this explains some of the negative response to the film, is that Orlando Bloom's portrayal as the main protagonist Balian of Ibelin in *Kingdom of Heaven* is a less charismatic and magnetic presence than the burlier, powerful nobility of Russell Crowe.

Possibly the biggest box office star in *Kingdom of Heaven*, is one who's face isn't seen during the film. Edward Norton portrays King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem in a small but pivotal role, wearing a full face mask for the entirety of his on screen performance. As is the case in most Hollywood movies which set about to recreate a historical event, artistic licence and a create interpretation of the sources have been taken in this film, including with Scott's decision to have Baldwin always in a mask. What is an undisputed historical fact however, is the reason for him doing so, which is that King Baldwin IV was a leper.

Modern assumptions are that the young prince contracted leprosy from a wet nurse, yet the disease only came to light when as a boy of nine, a nobleman named William

of Tyre noticed that Baldwin didn't express any discomfort when his friends pinched him during play. An interesting foreshadowing to the stoicism and bravery with which Baldwin IV would live with this impairment, came from the fact that initially William wasn't surprised to hear that he endured his friends' pinches without complaint, in contrast to the other boy's cries and screams, because he was known to be possessed of a remarkably "patient disposition". After further investigation, the astute William perceived that the boy had no feeling at all in his right arm, which was a common symptom of the early stages of lepromatous leprosy, which is widely recognised as the worst and most debilitating strain of the disease.

At this point, and with his father, King Almaric only in his mid-thirties, the prospect of Baldwin ever fulfilling his birth right and taking the throne was a slim one, and even slimmer were the chances of him being anything more than a symbolic leader, with the likelihood being that a regent being appointed to carry out most of the duties which would normally fall on the monarch. Indeed, when in 1174 King Almaric died unexpectedly of a fever, Raymond III of Tripoli was appointed regent



<https://sites.google.com/site/reclaimingtheholylan/saladin>

as Baldwin was only thirteen and couldn't attain the throne for another two years. It was widely expected at this point that Raymond would stay on, as the prince's condition would surely make any notion of him taking the throne unlikely. It seems as though Baldwin himself didn't see things this way however, and set about learning all he could about statecraft and diplomacy, while also training to become a great warrior and military leader. William of Tyre noted that Baldwin had "become more skilled than men who were older than himself in controlling horses and riding them at gallop," painstakingly training himself in horse mastery by use of the knees only. This allowed him to become an expert in using his sword left handed, as his right was unable to grip anything from his early teens.

As an adolescent, he was also noted for his hope, courage and dignity, so in 1176, with Baldwin now 15, the Court at Jerusalem went ahead with the unlikely coronation of the leper king. It is possibly even more striking, and a great endorsement for the king's character and capabilities that this happened at a time when Jerusalem was threatened by the most unified Muslim army for generations, under

the leadership of the most capable and feared general that the Holy Land had ever known, Saladin.

Baldwin's short reign, (he would die before his 24th birthday), was dominated by his handling of the threat of the Muslim advance. Early on, the king was an active commander in a number of key military victories, the stakes of which were particularly high for him as even then he was incapable of retaking his saddle if he became unhorsed. Of course, war is a brutal and bloody theatre, and Baldwin would have been compelled to meet brutality with brutality and blood with blood, but the importance of demonstrating Jerusalem's military might and determination in the face of the invading forces cannot be overstated. It's striking that even as a very ill man, Baldwin continued to do his duty, and while it would surely have been very easy and understandable had he left military leadership in the hands of others, the king did all he could to never forego this element of his responsibility. I find this is kind of courage and tenacity inspirational, as is the determination not to look for excuses as to why he couldn't fulfil his duties and responsibilities.

It is clear that Baldwin knew there would be a time when he couldn't continue to lead his forces on the battlefield, as evidenced by the words he confided in correspondence to Louis XII of France;

"It is not fitting that a hand so weak as mine should hold power when fear of Arab aggression daily presses upon the Holy City"

Sadly for Baldwin, while he looked for somebody to whom he could pass on some of his responsibilities, there wasn't anybody who was both eligible and as capable as he himself. He had hoped that Guy de Lusignan would be the one who could take over his mantle, and as such arranged for his sister Sybilla to marry him, thus securing the throne. He gave Guy the regency, at a time when as William of Tyre wrote

"The leprosy became much worse than usual. He had lost his sight and the extremities of his body became completely diseased and damaged, so that he was unable to use his hands or feet."

But Guy lacked both the military capabilities and the diplomacy of Baldwin. After a number of uninspiring performances on the battlefield, Guy pushed Baldwin's

patience too far when he refused to leave a wedding feast at the fortress of Kerak to negotiate the end of a siege with Saladin. The true king realised that his brother-in-law wasn't suited to maintaining the peace and chivalry which he and Saladin had managed to establish thus far during his reign and with little thought for his own comfort or welfare, he travelled the 50 miles from Jerusalem to Kerak to depose Guy and arrange the safe relief of the fortress. This journey was taken at a time when he was too ill to ride, and had to be carried on a litter strung between two horses. William noted

"Although his body was weak and powerless, he was strong in spirit, and made superhuman effort to disguise his illness and shoulder the burdens of kingship."

Maybe predictably, Baldwin's death 2 years later left a vacuum of leadership and inspiration so that within a further 2 years Jerusalem had changed hands and the Muslims had taken over occupation of the most symbolic and holy city in the world.

When I look at Baldwin's life, I feel ashamed for the times when I leave my duty undone because I find a convenient excuse. It's not even as if I'm required to do anything



as challenging as leading an army in to battle; maybe I have to clean the car but I have a headache. Maybe I have to cut the grass but I don't have a decent strimmer. I suspect Baldwin wouldn't let these inconveniences stop him from doing what he knew to be his responsibility.

Beyond that, many of us can look at the circumstances of our lives, and question why we should sacrifice our time and energy to better the societies, communities or families that we're part of, when there are others who've had it much easier than us. Baldwin however accepted with courage and patience the hand he'd been dealt. While few of us will be afflicted with a disease such as leprosy, we will all experience multiple advantages and

disadvantages in life, and if we choose to we can spend our days pointing at all the reasons to justify our lack of action or success. Maybe our father was too tough on us, maybe we were the only ginger kid in our school, maybe we have legitimate grievances about discrimination or prejudice that we've faced. I'd suggest we can all learn from the inspirational way Baldwin played his hand, and focus on doing what we can do, rather than on why we can't.

■ **Jonathan Watts,**
Freelance writer and history enthusiast
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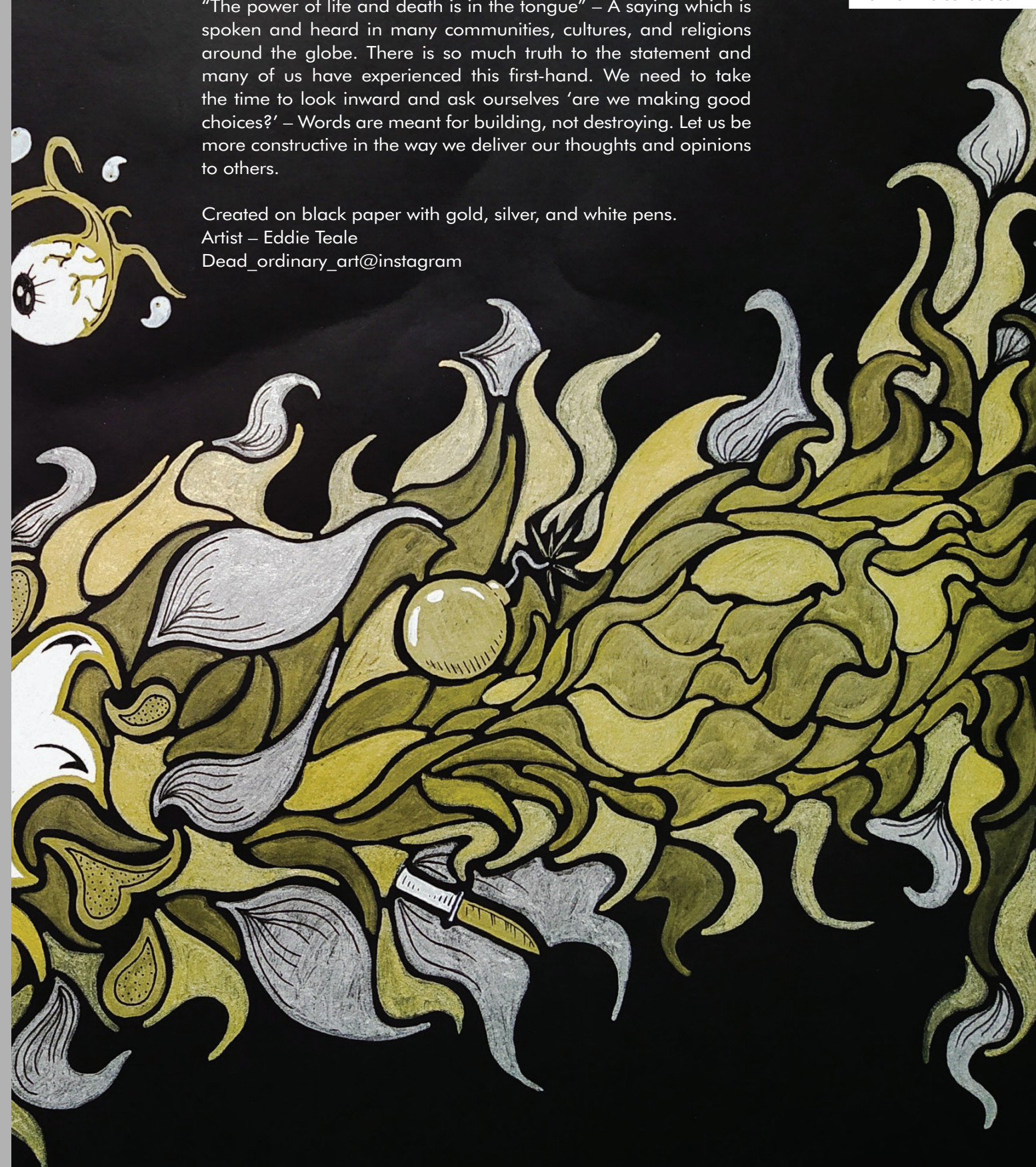
'Life and Death'

"The power of life and death is in the tongue" – A saying which is spoken and heard in many communities, cultures, and religions around the globe. There is so much truth to the statement and many of us have experienced this first-hand. We need to take the time to look inward and ask ourselves 'are we making good choices?' – Words are meant for building, not destroying. Let us be more constructive in the way we deliver our thoughts and opinions to others.

Created on black paper with gold, silver, and white pens.

Artist – Eddie Teale

Dead_ordinary_art@instagram



TALENT: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

"Hi, I'm Ben aka Bgbgb. I'm a singer/songwriter and aspiring actor." This is how I introduce myself. To an observer, I am someone of great talent and promise. The way I sing draws them in. My interpretive skills breathe new life to the song being performed. My songwriting gives them food for thought and as an actor, the role being embodied brings joy, laughter and empathy. The world sees a man who knows his power as a performer. If only they knew the journey of discovery it took to get here.

The humble beginnings of my talents are not worthy of a biopic! It is something that unbeknownst to me came in bits and bobs. It would take for key people to speak life into them for me to become aware. It

was those affirmations that would see me through developing them. But more on that later. I will begin this 'autobiography' of talent with childhood. My earliest memory of my talents would be in me making up songs to sing. I remember coming up with a ditty which was about two cousins of mine and whether one or the other would sleep on a mat or a bed. We were visiting my paternal grandmother in the village and these cousins were living with her. This song was clearly an indicator of my later songwriting and interpretive skills as an adult. Funny enough, I would carry on making up songs about friends and colleagues!

Also, within my childhood was a period where I was intent on learning song lyrics so that I would be able to sing along to my



"My mother had given the greatest gift in relieving me of the ignorance of what lay within. Knowledge is power and with that knowledge I would go on to develop my skills as a singer while heading into young adulthood."

Ben Gad-Briggs

Singer/Songwriter, Aspiring Actor
Instagram: @bgbgbinsta
Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/bgbgb>



Ben Gad-Briggs made his debut as a columnist on Issue 2 of Open Door Men's Magazine with the article, *Black Lives Matters and My Black British Experience*. He has worked within the media industry for 13 years mainly in television broadcasting. Outside of this, Ben is a singer/songwriter going by the name Bgbgb and an actor.

"The world sees a man who knows his power as a performer. If only they knew the journey of discovery it took to get here."

favourite songs. One clear memory was me trying to learn the lyrics to *You Are Not Alone* by Michael Jackson. The melody, the words and the music video captivated me. So much so that I had to learn the words even if it was the last thing I did. I don't think I was successful! I refer to this instance to highlight that I was still unaware of my abilities even though I was probably singing that song on key and at least giving the adlibs a passable go. Why did no one during that period see in me what I couldn't see in myself as a child or at least nurture it?

I was not alone in my household in dabbling with the performing arts. As my family moved to the UK from Nigeria and as me and my siblings grew into adolescence, we started displaying different talents. My eldest brother was rapping for a brief period. He quickly dropped it focusing on other endeavours. My second older brother got into producing music being heavily influenced by Dr Dre. He has since started producing again under the name #IAmPele. My sister became my duet partner, singing songs from my father's CD collection. She would go on to start taking piano lessons for our neighbour, join the school choir, take part in school plays and talent shows and get high marks in Drama. She knew her power and her capabilities. I was still yet to discover mine.

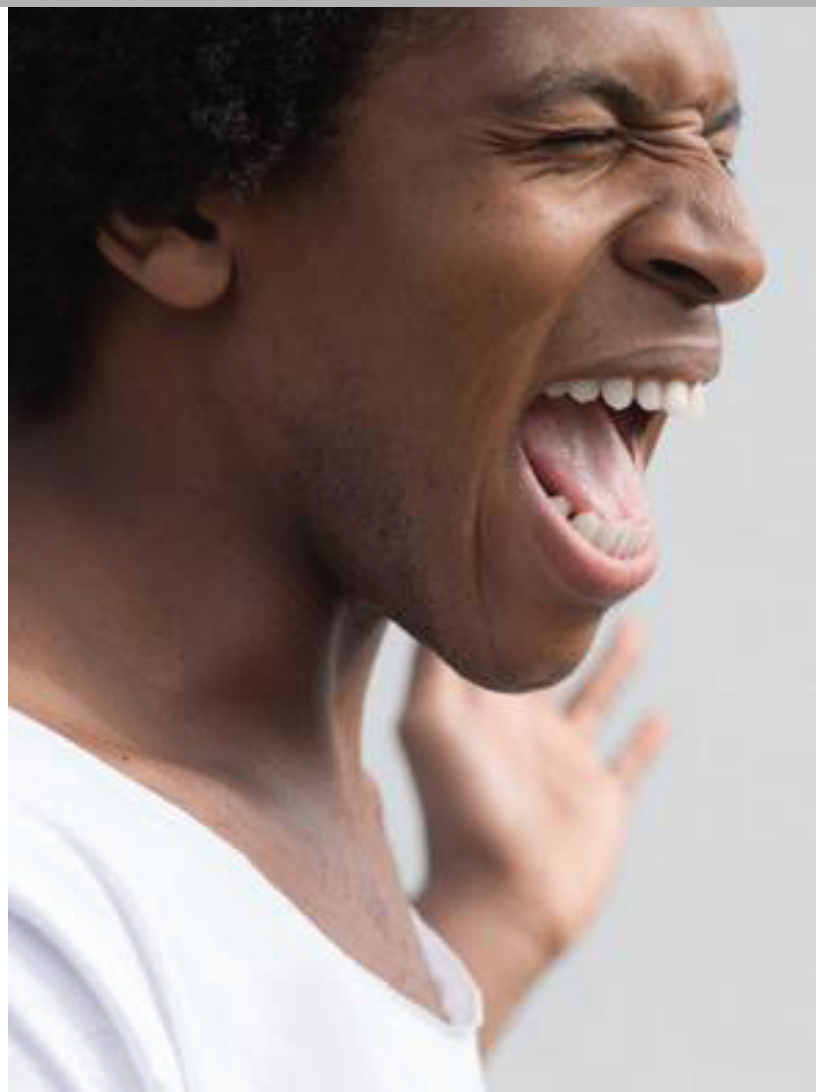
Moments of discovery started coming in those years too. I took to drama lessons at school very well often adding comedy to the roles I was given by the teacher. From that, I would also get great feedback on Parents' Evenings and go on to get a B in my GCSE performance. These were

clearly an indicator of my future acting endeavours. Another moment of discovery was in my ability to do a high falsetto note at the age of 12. The song *Hard Knock Life* by Jay Z, obviously a sample of the song from the musical *Annie* was where I learned this. The chorus of this song would be sung incessantly by myself in that register. That ability was used



as a party trick from then on and as my singing developed, I would begin to apply it within.

The biggest discovery came when I was 16. This was the moment that my mother finally validated my ability to sing. She had opened the gates for me to see (or hear) what others did. She had said this casually on a sunny summer's day and that was all I needed to move forward. Until that moment, no one had ever validated this. Not my father, my brothers, my classmates (I randomly sang a lot at school), not even my duet partner I call a sister! My mother had given the greatest gift in relieving me of the ignorance of what lay within. Knowledge is power and with that knowledge I would go on to develop my skills as a singer while heading into young adulthood. From the ages of 18-22 I would carry on singing as a hobby and I would have more people validate my abilities. It was also in those years where I started drawing from my musical influences to develop my style. I grew up listening to artists like Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey and Usher to name a few. There was a time during this period of development where I would study Whitney's live performances on YouTube. Her abilities to use melisma, riffs and runs astounded me and I would work to incorporate this into my own singing. Artists like DeBarge will come in later with their ability to apply



falsetto notes to their vocals which appealed to my own skills. The influences of such artists would give my vocals a light, sweet, boyish but sometimes nasal tone which in years to come, the musical director of my choir would encourage me to sing more in my natural tenor.

My songwriting really came to life at 22. I had tried writing during the ages of 19-20 but they always ended up sounding like things I listened to from my CD collection or the radio. Dissatisfied, I gave up. By the time I was ready to try again, I wanted to draw from a lifetime of being shy and sidelined. I wrote *Shell* as advocacy for myself and to others experiencing adversity. This song will later go on to be reworked and rewritten as *Empty Shell*, a track on my album, *A New Angle*. From *Shell*, I would spend 7 years before my first recorded song writing albums worth of songs. By the 7th year, I joined a meetup group called London Songwriters to go outside myself and collaborate with other songwriters. I was able to get other people's perspective on my songwriting and improved in areas that needed it. This group would also organise a retreat to the Peak District for a week of songwriting. In my article, *Great Xpectations* (Open Door Magazine Issue 3) I described this retreat as 'one of the catalysts in changing my life for

the better.' From that trip one of the decisions I made was delving fully into the performing arts rather than seeing it as a hobby.

Before that moment of truth, I still had times where people encouraged me to fully utilise my talents. Friends would ask me to sing at events they organised. My brother asked me to perform at his wedding in which I sang an original song. The one that sticks out was a conversation with a former housemate of mine. She worked a high powered 9-5 job but outside of that played keyboard and sang backing vocals in a band. She would have obviously heard me singing around the house during my time there and in this conversation, it seemed that she was scolding me for not making the most of what I had like she did. At the time, I never considered the performing arts as a career option and was content with my media career. Subconsciously, I feared failing and not being good enough but still her words planted a seed within me.

When I decided to focus on making something out of my talents, the first thing I did was join a talent website. From there, I found the London House Cats Choir which I auditioned for and gained membership to. I was also able to find a producer who was willing to record with a first timer like me. Together, we recorded 13 tracks within 3 years. 3 of those tracks currently feature on *A New Angle*. I knew I still had it in me to act so I looked for acting jobs too. I had booked roles



in an immersive theatre show, an audio play, music videos and theatre. One of the roles I booked was for a play called *Married to Christ: Her Story*. Although I was an extra, it was my first experience working in theatre and I enjoyed the rush of changing costumes between scenes and thinking on my feet as an actor. The director loved the way I worked within the cast and encouraged me to audition for a project she would be involved in. One that would solidify me as an actor.

I would describe my experience as a cast member on the play *Fatherless Son* as one of the greatest moments ever. From working with an amazing director to working with a unique cast on and off stage. One of the roles I auditioned for was Kyle, a teenager who wanted to get in with the local gang for protection and status. I was already in my thirties when I went for it but I looked young for my age. After a nervous audition, I successfully landed the role and went to work studying the script and character. Even during that experience, the director constantly encouraged me to believe in myself (a constant theme



in the journey of discovering my talents). I took her words to heart and applied it to my performance on the final night of the play's run. My character got positive reviews from the audience and made some friends and family see me in a different light. The role of Kyle in *Fatherless Son* gave me the confidence to enrol in drama school to expand my skills as an actor and helped me book my next theatre role.

"Hi, I'm Ben aka Bgbgb. I'm a singer/songwriter, actor...and columnist." I wear this as a badge of honour because it is the truth. I know my power and

it is using my talents to help others and reflect my experiences within this society. Everything happens for a reason and I believe there was a higher intention in me being oblivious to my talents. I needed to grow into them as they were part of my journey as a human being. If I had experienced them in my early years, I wouldn't be the person you see today. ■

Ben Gad-Briggs



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London House Cats Choir pic – From a summer gig at Alexandra Palace (August 2019)

Fatherless Son pic – Performed in October 2018

MG SKINCARE

PROFESSIONAL RESULTS-DRIVEN SKINCARE

FOR MEN



Anonymous Poesie



A New Angle (excerpt) by Bgbgb

*Written by B Gad-Briggs
Produced by KC Sounds
Engineered by RowBlack*

Verse 2

Straight ahead.
Don't look back.
The past is dead,
It don't mean jack...
Present day.
The time is now.
Let's go for gold.
Keep the bronze at bay.
Step it up some.
Blessings will come.
Keep believing,
And you will break through doors.

A New Angle (the single) available on YouTube and Sound-Cloud. Search 'Bgbgb' and 'A New Angle' on both platforms. Also available as part of the album of the same name on all digital platforms!!

In my head I'm a violinist that throws all caution into the wind and dances under the moonlit stars.

Where my words cannot reach, my notes will. I reach high in the firmament. I want to be here, yet I want to be there. Instead I am in the echo, the sound of the nothingness between worlds.

I don't know where I want to be, the world is not enough it would seem. But give me a piece of this half moon to take away. That should satisfy my confusion, it will suffice, it will simply have to do.

I defy the laws of reality. I push gravity off of her pedestal and gleefully watch her fall from grace.

Yet in between the echoes of the notes I play, dear ol' Melancholy unassumingly sits in her swing and sways in the emptiness of the no man's land between what I want and what I want to be.

Memories of such a world.

'Liberté, égalité, fraternité'
The French state once proclaimed, as a symbol of its blood earnt freedom. But today as I look around, I ask,
Where is the fraternity?
I see a lot of liberty to hurt and condemn
Indeed, where is the equality?

Who holds their brother's hand in equality,
In heartfelt fraternity?
Who looks at lifeless children, victims of this triviality and sees their own?
Who sees beyond the frontiers of their comfort zone, the frontiers of their seemingly innocent ignorance?

It's just another day for you and me in paradise
A treacherous paradise in which we can very easily rotate fortunes
Where a life of privileges is never guaranteed.
With karma forever omnipresent.



Yesterday me, today him, tomorrow it could be you.

Humans pain is felt by all,
When you step on my toes, I will react
When you cut me with a knife, I will bleed
When I catch a lost bullet, I will fall to the ground.
When a bomb explodes...I will surely disintegrate
Every dead has someone to mourn him.
No one fell from the sky.

We are 7 billion and still counting...
A new life blooming only 7 seconds away.
All statistics, numbers and digits.

You see, numbers are cold, senseless,
It is words that give us warmth, a life and identity.
Quantity over quality...
What is the real worth of your life?

We have no control over our destinies
Just the hope that a few prayers will sway good fortune in

our favour.
We humans are nothing.
Just like all nature, destined to return to dust 'Dust thou art and dust thou will remain'.
Take away the ego, the flash, the discourse, the stallions we ride...what is left?
Much ado about nothing.

Yet casting my memory back, I will always marvel at how we were, in this world I once knew.

What is the worth of life?
Is the unanswered rhetoric
Which I simply leave

While I gaze back over
The memories of this world I knew
Memories of such a world.



We all have an inner monologue, an inner piece of self titled poetry that we recite to ourselves. A monologue that represents our truth, the most inner, deep rooted impressions of how we view ourselves. What do you say to yourself when there is no one around? What inner conversations do you entertain? Do you doubt yourself? Worry to death? Beat yourself up? Indulge in your weaknesses? True healing from negative self perception can only come through changing that monologue, from a disabling one to an empowering one. 'I am strong, successful and resilient' is your true monologue.

I'm in quest of a new narrative.

Because the current one stopped responding to me. It doesn't talk back anymore. It lied to me and betrayed my hopes. It is cold, The flame has gone out. We have both grown frustrated. Yet I remember once upon a time being the master artist of this very narrative, crafting every sentence with such unprecedented passion. Adroitly Inserting every comma, colon, exclamation mark, semicolon where I decided it should be and with such immense enthusiasm -

I remember being oh so reluctant to use full stops. For, to me every sentence, every concept and idea that I had conceived in the womb of my mind would last forever and ever and ever. Yes, Nothing would ever put an end to my designs. Not even this principle piece of punctuation.

It was gratifying to create, and be the author of such an august achievement. To be the master of your plans and destiny, to write your own narrative and decide on the sequence of all your events...or so I led myself to believe...

It was gratifying to create and be the author of such an august achievement...until I realised that my self written narrative was nothing but fiction, for none of the grand designs had materialised.

For I had missed a fundamental step

A vital step...So today I am a man in searching, a wayfaring man, in quest of a new narrative.

This time I won't write it.

I'll put my pen down and let the greatest poet I know write my narrative. Yes, I'll humbly put my human pen down

and let the universe be the author of my narrative.

"We are longing spirits"

Longing
for more beauty

Longing
for more truth

Longing
simply for peace

Longing
for something

Beyond
Our knowing

Beyond
our living

Maybe a nirvana

Maybe a paradise

Maybe a turquoise
sky

Maybe
something out of this life

I
don't know

Maybe a nirvana

Maybe a paradise

Maybe a turquoise
sky

we are longing
spirits...

I
don't know

"Seek
and you'll find"

Taken from 'Caged Birds' Fiction

Thank you for reading this 4th Issue. We hope you enjoyed the experience. From all of us at Open Door, we hope that our experiences add value to the way in which you perceive yourself, your world and your experience of masculinity.

For more please follow us on our Instagram page: @opendoormensmag

And if interested, you can join our WhatsApp community where you can connect with the columnists and just socialise. DM us for more information! Alternatively email us! sunbirdjournalpublishing@gmail.com

See you for issue 4.

Additional contacts:

Submissions, partnerships and community contact Eddie: eddieopendoor@gmail.com

The Open Door Team and Columnists.



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