

Kevin Ryan

The First Jamaican Church Experience

It's one of those nights, where this mind is racing & feels of fire, trying to fall back asleep is a futile effort. So here I am. I felt it necessary to write this to you, tonight, & hopefully helping me write it out a bit, will calm the seas inside. This is the story I wanted to share with you & is a good example with how I develop the stories I live. Dianne & Peter are 82 & 84 respectively, together they developed the creative arts program at USC Santa Cruz in the 1960s. I'm humbled & honored to be within their lives, but even better, our friendships all grow further because of each others shared input regarding all our lives. Drew & Tia are friends from Negril & you'll see them in the video, I'll attach a link to, before the story. Coincidentally, Drew lives in Santa Cruz. Coincidences are sometimes commonplace in the life I live, as I once heard, "a coincidence is God winking at you" from a woman in Alabama.

First, a quick section about Tia & her family. They play music & have for 40 years now, well her parents have, she's 25. The "Ode to Mama Ruth" poem, <http://www.blazevox.org/BX%20Covers/BXFall2017/Kevin%20Ryan%20-%20Fall17.pdf> Mama Ruth is Tia's Mom & she's a beautiful soul, they both are. The story that is Tia & I is still being lived & it is deep. Even as I write this to you, tears well in my eyes. I Love her in absolute, our friendship is incredibly difficult to explain, it's obviously noticeable when we are together in the same room. There's a lot to it, and that story, those stories will be written when I feel the time is right. March 27th, 2015 was one of the most impactful & profound days I have ever lived. I'm still gathering & cultivating life from that day, from 3pm it involves Tia, her family, Drew & an adventure deep into the hills outside of Lucea, Jamaica, before involves me, a cave

carved in the coral cliffs, the sea & an other worldly mushroom experience with a 16th century soundtrack.

Tia was married last November, on Election Day, to a Trump supporter. Also more layers to this story, but for now, keeping things focused on this story & introducing you to a lot of me & family in Jamaica. I have spoke with Mama Ruth a lot this year & she often lets me know how she wishes I was her son. I assure her that my Love is True, for her, for Tia & the family; there is hopefully an abundance of life for us to live & share. It's not as painful anymore with the path Tia decided to take, I Love her & I support her in ways that I know she feels & appreciates. When I was in Negril this past March, it was awkward for only a few moments, but as cliché as it may sound, I firmly believe there's a greater force, greater than this self & greater than Tia, that defines our friendship & chemistry. One dream Tia & I have is building schools in Jamaica, early elementary kindergartens, her idea, I'm learning ways with how. Her daughter, Taydrea, as Tia puts it, "fell in Love with me first" when I first laid eyes on Tia & it's true. Tia was singing & Tay was already wanting to be in my arms at the age of two, she's five now. As I said, deep roots have been planted & have been growing.

Tia, Taydrea & Tia's adopted daughter Akalia from last March at the Castle.

<https://youtu.be/pOfdypvRQn4>

Princess Tia & The Overtakers

<https://youtu.be/644-fyrCH84>

A great introduction to their music & way

Good Afternoon Peter & Dianne,

Yesterday morning when I woke at 4:30, the energy & the direction the day was already leading me towards was this story, the story in which I first entered a church in Negril. I have yet to truly write anything about it, but I have spoken about the experience to friends face to face. It's incredibly powerful & due to the climate of the current times, keeping in mind the amount of change (sometimes difficult) a lot of folks are experiencing, I feel it necessary to invest the time to pass it along.



Included in this message, carbon copied, are two dear friends I have grown to admire & Love, Drew & Tia. I have only seen their smiling faces thus far on that Island of Hope & Love. There's another person as well "carbon copied blindly", who I feel should have the opportunity to read this, if they so choose to do so.

An incredibly quick aspect to point out, the year prior in Jamaica, at a "King's party", (a story for another day!)

Tia & I discussed Gospel music & our Love for it. I asked her if she would take me to her church the next year visiting, as so I could experience & hear her sing the Gospel. Still one of my favorite Gospel songs is "Peace in the Valley", I've always resonated well with the valley motif in those spiritual songs of psalms & grace.

<https://youtu.be/OZVFoUh7i4I>

The night of March 19th, 2016, Princess Tia (her stage name & also creates great mystique to the stories soon to be shared) & a friend of hers came to the Castle where I reside in Negril. We all conversed in the deep, dark night the west end can provide & were soon joined by another guest taking quarters above the tower room I was staying.

Jim, the Parrot, as someone coined him perfectly due to his chatterbox & volume, joined in on our conversation. It was crystal clear that Jim had too much alcohol to drink & began living up to his pet-name. Often the case with those who drink heavily, he began to dominate the conversation & his motives became obvious, being in the presence of two beautiful young women.

Once the conversation became deeper & personal in nature, I put my guard up, along with a heightened sense of awareness. Tread lightly, or try to. Once he told me my input wasn't necessary involving children because I didn't have any, my blood began to boil. How dare anyone say these words to me without even knowing my name, let alone personal history. Divide & conquer was his strategy seemingly & I would not continue without speaking my mind before exiting the conversation. To tell me that I do not know anything about children & how hard separation can be when a father leaves a family could not be left unaddressed <https://www.dropbox.com/s/u3iyhvbh624q9cr/..... The First Departure 1995.pdf?dl=0> considering the essay from 1995 I shared with you all. I was immediately upset & turned that burned, bright red I saw so many years ago. I was angry in paradise due to a past that found its way here. **As Tia put it, "you got real with him" & I had to.**

After saying what I needed to in that emotion, I retreated to my room, & began listening to the Stars, because

they soothe this soul. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et_IDyRymrw Once that occurred, Tia saw her friend to her exit & Jim went off to his room, the other tower room above mine. When Tia returned, she saw & could feel what deep pain I was in. I was angry that I was angry & immediately felt horrible for lashing out on someone as I just did. I prefer to be calm & tranquil, a sea of glass. Tia kept reassuring me that I did what was necessary & what was just. I am an emotional being & that was an emotional response, from a past that is deeply rooted & the fabric of my very being as a person. Once she knew that I was calming, listening to the deep sea sounds, the vastness of the Stars & space, she left; asking before leaving, “Will I see you at church tomorrow morning?”, “Of Course” was my reply & I could taste the sea from the teardrops cascading from my face. I slept like a baby to the sound of the Stars & old spiritual gospels recorded from the 1920s & 30s in North Carolina.

<https://youtu.be/kjeW8vEfrLQ>

Waking up the next morning at 4:30, I sat and continued reading Don Quixote until the skies began to hint of day break, still listening to the Stars. For whatever reason, the parallels of the first few hundred pages of Cervantes's Opus were impossible to ignore & it was an enthralling distraction from the sudden reality I was facing. I was nervous, having strange, sour energy about going into the public area to see the sea whilst sipping coffee, but then I thought of the experience waiting only a few hours away. Church. I did not want to see Jim, but I did need to see Jim. The morning swim would surely help calm my nerves & as is customary with being submerged in the depths of the Caribbean, a thought, a way, would come to mind as I focused on breathing & gazing at the ocean's floor.

Once out of the water & a second cup of coffee in hand, Jim joined me. He apologized for his drunken behavior, as did I for expressing such anger, but informing him that he hit a nerve. The thought the seas provided was offering him an invitation to church that morning. I asked & he accepted, a peace offering. I informed him when we would be leaving & I already acquired transportation through an acquaintance; Lloyd would be ready in an hour.

Once in Lloyd's car, Jim confirmed to me that this would be his first church experience in Jamaica as well.

We both had no idea what to expect, but I went in with joy & relief. I learned how to forgive & forget in the span of a couple hours, which was & can be difficult for me, the feeling of paradise returned.

When arriving to the church & entering, the Bible study was concluding, a study on forgiveness & the importance of it. I remember uttering to myself, "you can't make this stuff up." I did not know anyone there, besides Jim & Tia who was yet to arrive. As the congregation kept arriving, I smiled to some & we sat towards the back of the small church. It was warm, but not hot yet, as it was still morning, but soon the sun would peek & the sound of fans humming became just a bit louder, as water was distributed to all.

Tia messaged & was running late, island time, as they say. I informed her that I brought a guest, Jim. She was stunned, but she also knows how I am & was concerned if he was still drinking or drunk. I assured her, he wasn't & it was a gesture of keeping good faith. When she arrived, her smile was bright and beaming, but also shaking her head as I was sitting next to Jim once again. The lingering odor of alcohol couldn't be hidden.

The Sunday service already began at this point & I was at peace with the moment, there was no other place I would rather be. Now a Caribbean church service can be long, up to three hours, but I already informed Jim I would stay for the whole service, when he felt he had enough & wanted to move on, I would call Lloyd and he could roam where he wished.

The first sounds of music were beautiful, booming & true, a beat accompanied the hearts that were open and ready to let the Light in. The voices were loud & Tia, oh that voice! I was in Heaven hearing this gospel. Even Jim was moved, it was hard not to be with the sounds and energy radiating inside, what looked from the outside, a simple stone & wood church. This was a church service I truly have never experienced in my life, growing up a seldom practicing Roman Catholic, this was truly the polar opposite & thought if Jesus, the man, were here today, this must be the place where he would dance with delight.

After about an hour & a half, Jim was ready to leave. He was hungry & hung over. I understood & messaged

Lloyd. As Jim left, I noticed he wandered down the road a bit, but felt all would be fine. Now I sat alone in a church with such power & performance. The energies I felt were positive & the message was that of Love & forgiveness. Wonderful, this is exactly what I needed at that moment. Seeing Tia perform in her element truly made her presence appear as the soulful Princess she certainly is. She was standing & sitting with her family in Christ behind the pulpit. The drums, the piano & the singing seldom stopped. The messages were being delivered, one by one to the parishioners & one by one, each person on the pulpit platform spoke their passion. A Bible was handed to me, allowing me to follow along with the Word(s) sometimes said & oftentimes sung.

Someone approached to inform me that the driver, Lloyd, was outside the church parked. I thanked her, reassuring her I was going to witness the service all the way through to its conclusion. More singing, hands in the air, the highest of praise continued. The fans throughout were all on high, the buzzing couldn't be heard, not through this glory, their glory, our glories; even with the temperature climbing, inside & out.

I sensed the conclusion & could see that my attention was being sought. The Good Sister ministering this special Sunday was waving at me & called for presence at the underside of the pulpit. Without hesitation I stood up & walked in her direction. Once beneath where she stood with a microphone in hand, she whispered into my ear to stand still & let the moment manifest into what it needs to. I nodded in support. She then called for all the men of the church to stand & form a circle around me at the front of the pulpit. One by one, they approached & stood side by side, I was in the center of their circle, as the men joined hands.

The music was deafening; drums beating, keys sounding true & the choir singing. The Good Sister started ministering to the circle of men to pray for me, yelling & shouting, her words would echo for eternity in any valley. One by one, the voices of the men spun in a circle, with such speed in which they were speaking, spinning around me. I closed my eyes & focused on only those circular sounds speaking & swirling around my being. The Good Sister still booming, & my arms now in the air, my pale blue eyes began to open, the rivers of Babylon streamed down my face. This was an experience I never have felt. The Good Sister



instructed a strong, stern man to join me in the circle to embrace my being. His arms opened & invited me into them, his grasp wrapping around my body with such strength. Holding me as tight as possible, this hug, this prayer circle, felt of hours, yet lasting only minutes. Still hearing the swirling statements surrounding me, the Good Sister assured all to let loose of the moment, my eyes still spilling the waters of the sea.

The man embracing me let go & shook my hand, slowly, one by one, the circle of men surrounding me, unclasped their hands, approached to shake mine & introduced themselves. I felt so accepted. I felt so many things & was struggling for words, so I said only hallelujah & my name shaking each man's hand. As the last man shook, I was standing still before the pulpit, eyes red, heart full & spirit free, the service was concluded by the Good Sister.

As I stood before the stage, nearly everyone in the church approached me to introduce themselves to offer a hello, a hug & a smile. A fellowship found me & I found a fellowship. Still speechless, the word that was in mind was powerful. The only other white skinned attendee at the church approached, shook my hand & asked, "Rejuvenated?" I smiled & said, "yes, powerful!"

Stepping away from the pulpit is when the Princess approached, Tia was apologetic, stating she had nothing to do with what unfolded, fearful that I would disapprove. I reassured her that this is a powerful blessing of rejuvenation & smiled. I could sense that even she was having difficulties understanding what unfolded to conclude this Sunday's worship.

Once outside the church, entering the bright, hot heat, I saw Lloyd leaning on the hood of his car. "How was it? he asked, & I smiled saying, "powerful & rejuvenating." He explained that he came to pick up Jim, but couldn't find him & decided to sit in his car, listening to the service, instead of retreating back home, in case Jim returned. We filled his car with folks from the fellowship needing a ride down the western mountain road to the main one near the sea. Once we reached the main road, Tia saw Jim, beer in hand, walking in the direction towards the Castle.

We pulled over & offered a ride, he climbed in & asked, "how was the rest?" "Powerful & Rejuvenating." He complimented the Princess on her pipes, "you can truly sing, I wish I could have stayed for the rest, but I got hungry & needed a drink and a cigarette." We reassured him all was fine & that peace prevailed that day for every one present.

I will conclude this message in stating that the following weekend was the Easter celebrations, which I also was within. From Good Friday to Easter Monday, each day its own story. Incredibly profound to have lived & experienced. Dianne, you mentioned you thought, even believed that I would be returning to Jamaica soon. In a way you are correct, by the way of the word. To write this & what soon shall follow, is returning, albeit in a mental way, as opposed to the physical, but even that perhaps shall soon come. Day by day, one by one...

Peace & Love,
Power & Rejuvenation,
Kevin

