

"I believe in process. I believe in four seasons. I believe that winter's tough, but spring's coming. I believe that there's a growing season. And I think that you realize that in life, you grow. You get better." (Steve Southerland)

SPRING

Officially we met one morning at school. Upstairs, on the corridors of the Deighton Griffith Secondary. Lord only knows what the conversation was about. I was, as usual, on auto-pilot and lost in my thoughts. My thoughts were very clear today though... "damn this girl is beautiful". She's energetic and animated. She seems to like my sarcasm... we'll see how long that lasts. She's trying to be funny too though, she isn't very good at it but, she's trying to make me laugh though so you know "that's always good". Before I know it the conversation is ending and I now need only to ask for her number... yeah right. Ever heard of cardiac arrest? Even at that age, I knew it wasn't for me. So I turn to leave and she says "wait, you ain't gine ask for my number?". Of course, my expression said, "wait, you seriously just said that?"... inner thoughts however... "thank God she's bold too". This girl then proceeded to take one of my late slips, (I had a tendency to acquire them in bulk from the office), and fill it out then put it back into my pocket. I played it cool and turned to walk away... you know how it goes... a quick look back only to realise she was looking back too. I figured it wouldn't look cool to pump my fists so I just strolled off.

That was just the start. Next came many nights of long telephone conversations and the inevitable breakdown of relationships with siblings. In our house, Tiffany and Taamar became my mortal enemies at night. Lord knows they couldn't have had anything productive to talk about with anyone outside those walls. Then there was my mother who always wanted peace to reign and loved to pretend that she never had anyone to call for four and five hours per night. Once I got past them though there was her house... and Symeon. He became the proverbial thorn in my side. Didn't even get past him the first night but even he couldn't stop me. The bribery and begging aside I'm actually petty proud of how well I did.

Iesha and I talked about everything under the sun. Nobody knew her better than I and nobody knew me better than she. She really was my best friend and with every conversation, I became more and more certain I loved her more than I could ever say... and I mean ever because one faithful night, in her usual direct manner, she asked me how I felt about her and would you believe I told the girl I really liked her? Once the words left my mouth I had an out of body experience where I looked down at myself like "BRUH!!!". Once again thank God she was braver than I because she made it clear how she felt about me. Voice trembling and with no help whatsoever from me. Yeah, I really was a punk back then but, I think the first gift Iesha gave me was her example of being courageous. Took some time but I'm still getting it today.

She also taught me to laugh. I mean really laugh. I remember telling her during one of our "hours-long" phone conversations of my interest in computers. She told me she was into computers too to which I thought "Good Lord, you really know how to pick 'em." I then asked her which version of Windows she had... she said, and I kid you not... "Durette". I turned to the Lord again and said: "Lord, you sure you picked this one?". The rest of spring was spent with sore ears, heavy eyes and her trying to convince me that Durette thing was just a joke.

SUMMER

Fast forward not too far into the future and Creig and Ilesha was far more common on the lips of those who knew us than just Creig or just Ilesha ever were. We were at the Olympus theatres every weekend. We were taking younger siblings along to photoshoots. We were practically inseparable at school except for class times of course... though as a returning fifth with plenty of free "study time" I would have gotten her out of class once or twice just so I could spend more time with her. It was easy really... At DGS if your parent ever called for you at the office, Ms. Romany, the secretary, would write a simple note on a yellow post-it and have any random student deliver it to the teacher who would then allow you to leave the class to go to the office to call home. Ms. Romany was a calligrapher and her beautiful cursive handwriting was easily recognisable to the teaching staff. Of all the amazing skills I learned during "enrichment period" at DGS I value most my training in

calligraphy. Add to that the packs of post-its I usually had in my bag (I had a tendency to acquire them in bulk from my father's office), "lesha Perryman, call home" and I would wait outside until some youngster came along. "Ehy lil man... carry that to the teacher". Bingo. I remember when we heard about the hall passes being introduced at DGS years later. Oh my.

At this point, lesha was already a part of my family. My mother had finally stopped referring to her as "the young lady"... "Creig would the young lady like something to drink?", "Creig isn't the young lady hungry?". Now it was "lesha girl uh got something to tell ya but, not fa Creig to hear". Some she told me as soon as we were alone but some she never uttered again. She and Tiffany, Tessa and Shavon were going out without me. I won't even mention when Alana came into the picture.

Most would know lesha was a national level athlete but few would know she also was a dancer. I watched so many of her performances at church and every time I gave my feedback after she would still bother to ask how the other girls were and remind me that it wasn't a solo performance. It wasn't that I didn't know I really just didn't care. I knew who I was watching.

Church sports. We were Spartans... I know that to this day some of those women don't know who or what it was that flew past them on that track. Relays are always run last so imagine the last race of the day. First leg... good, Second leg... good, third leg... good, last leg, lesha Perryman... magic. Of course, she wasn't modest about it either. So Shane would come in with the drum and Sharon would

come in with the Spartan call "SPARTANS!!!!" and we all know how that went.

FALL

So it was finally time to "do the man thing" as uncle Algie would put it. Time to propose and make Iesha my wife. To the surprise of absolutely nobody as everyone who knew us just thought it was about time. Sunrise is followed by a sunset so naturally, Creig and Iesha would get married. It only made sense after all. Best decision I ever made and for the record "No, she didn't propose". By this time the new Creig was already born so take that. Of course, though I made it clear that when we have our kids I would be the one to tell our son the story of how I pursued her and wooed her and courageously won her heart. Iesha would just say "okay". Which basically meant she would wait until she was good and ready to sell me out, toss me under the bus, march me up to Golgotha and crucify me. I didn't mind because after all, there was still the matter of the Durette windows.

We were happy. I mean genuinely happy. I grew so much as a man having her in my life. And I loved every second of it. I was her pragmatism. But Iesha, she was my fun. She was my spontaneity. She was my courage. She was my sense of adventure. She was my hope.

A year after we were married I was working at Sandy Lane on the Green Monkey Golf course. I remember feeling nauseous to the point I thought I was gonna pass out. I remember thinking "I don't

get sick so surely this is it... I'm gonna die". Angela, an older lady, and dear friend came over with a quizzical look and said "huh... Creiggy boy, I hope you ain't gone cross". Older folk clearly didn't bother with science when they were at school. A day or two later Ilesha told me she was pregnant. As usual, I thought of everything wrong... "I'm not where I need to be professionally or financially. Zoé and Zachery were ok for practice but I didn't do the real heavy lifting", and as usual she seemed to be as happy and carefree as ever. Remember when I spoke of cardiac arrest earlier?

This girl had a model pregnancy. Active as ever and save the swollen feet and beautiful nose I happily bore all the sickness for her. Her delivery, however, was another story. I once prided myself in fearing pretty much nothing in life until I heard the words "emergency C-section". I feared because I knew I wasn't ready to lose her and even though I had not yet met my Caleb I knew I wasn't ready to lose him either. After it was finished I stayed with her in the recovery room though she asked me to go and look for Caleb but I couldn't because I was afraid of leaving her. When I finally did the nurse met me at the door and asked me how I could take so long to come to see my son but I was so weighted from thoughts of losing Ilesha that I couldn't imagine leaving her alone for that ordeal.

Every day with Caleb proved to me that I now had second place in her heart but, I didn't mind, in fact, I liked it that way. She wanted us to have a baby so badly as according to her "he/she would be a part of you I can have if you should die".

WINTER

We never saw it coming. To us, winter was a lifetime away. We would be old. I would be shriveled and bald and she would still be as beautiful as ever. We knew something was wrong because she was never quite herself after the delivery. The doctors had explanations like "the body is in distress" which isn't a real explanation. When they finally gave it a name we really had no idea what it was but the name was only the beginning, I was interested in the cure but they told us there is none. As a matter of fact, the condition is so rare there is not enough research into it so there really is no set course of treatment. I had to accept the diagnosis but the prognosis was simply unacceptable.

Those of us who knew Iesha... the runner, the dancer, the crazy girl... her energy and spirit, would understand why it hurt so much not just that she was ill but with a disease which would slowly rob her of her mobility, her youth. We know the kind of mother she longed to be to Caleb. Instead, we had to burden him with "understanding that mummy just can't". That didn't stop her from being there every step of the way but I saw her pain every time she had to remind him to be gentle when he hugged her. When she couldn't lift him out of the pool. When she had to stay in the car to watch his races from a distance instead of running and cheering next to him as he ran.

Scleroderma really took its toll. Not just on her but on us. As far as I was concerned the prognosis was an admission of the limitations

of modern medicine only. I was open to all forms of holistic care. Anything that could restore her. We disagreed on many things but nothing quite like this. We were both very different now. I really wish we could have fought harder together. It hurt me to watch as this condition ravished her. It was so aggressive, and honestly, it wasn't fair. I lost count of how many times I asked God for a miracle. I lost count of how many times I begged him to take it from her and give it to me. He never did.

I eventually had to accept that if restoration didn't come in this life then it would simply come in the next. So that is where I am now. I truly believe that Iesha is now free of the prison of this physical body. She can rest for now until the day that she can again run and dance to her heart's content. One day I will see her in all her beauty. Laughing and dancing and no doubt jumping on my back... but free.

So rather than mourn the very real pain in my heart I choose to say "I will see you again someday babes and thank you for the new spring you have left me in our son". Our intelligent, strong-willed, fearless son.

Who loves to run.

Who loves to dance.

Who loves trying to be funny... even if he isn't very good at it.

Written and delivered by Creigston Brathwaite in honour of my dear wife Iesha Brathwaite on the occasion of her burial on October 16th, 2019.