

ASSET MAP WHO IS TERRY BROAD & BLACK THINKER'S GREENSPACE CULTURAL REVIVAL EXCEPTIONAL SELVES

ABOUT-INTRO

August 1, 2006

IMPRESSION OF WOMYN: A BROTHA'S TRIBUTE TO THREE GENERATIONS OF WOMEN IN HIS FAMILY

Tim'm West

I have seen my mother cry maybe twice. Once was just after she lost her mother, my grandmother Ellen. Grandma's death was the inevitable departure of a woman so kind, so patient, so generous in her capacity to love unconditionally that her dying signified something greater than our loss. It was our recognition of a symbolic passing.

For whatever examples of courage, forgiveness, or selflessness we would come to think of as impossible would be shadowed by grandma's legacy. Mother, wife, grandmother, God-fearing Baptist, and skeptic of church folk, grandma wore all these titles in the lines under her eyes. She packed her intention for sweetness into sweet potato pie, popcorn balls, and fried-pies.

My romance with my grandmother's "perfection" would not end with her death.

She was the first woman to recognize that I liked boys and to hint that there was some familial legacy of it: unmarried great-uncles who recited Hughes and who spoke passionately about colored folk and freedom. She spoke of strong women who had no use for triffin' men.



But grandma saw good in everybody. "Be careful" was among the last things my grandma said to me. She spoke it with her eyes, a smile, and her hand outstretched as I backed out of a room that had already begun to carry the scent of her absence.



She spoke of my greatness long before I had any sense that any was there-- buried underneath an insatiable curiosity, poetic scribbling, and the red-clay of dusty basketball courts. I denied liking boys, of course.

There was incredible anxiety about inhabiting a space that, in my eyes, would underscore my betrayal of the family-name. I did not, however, want to be a family secret -- the one whose branch did not bear fruit and who got spoken about with empty superlatives: talented, smart, handsome, unmarried.

But grandma saw good in everybody. "Be careful" was among the last things my grandma said to me. She spoke it with her eyes, a smile, and her hand outstretched as I backed out of a room that had already begun to carry the scent of her absence. The ambulance came hours later. My mother didn't cross the chicken yard and persimmon trees until the morning after to verify the loss I'd felt for the whole night. "No ambulance stays parked that long" I cautioned my sibs with ambivalent resolve. But my mother was tearing when she delivered the news of grandma's passing, so everyone cried. My mother never cried and had plenty reason to.



I could not cry.

I decided in that moment to be more like my mother — to save tears for big losses and not everyday pains. So I carry another family legacy almost as deadly as our silence.

The next time my mother cried was when her daughter, my lil' sister Charlette passed. Charlette said few words between the time of her birth and her transition at age thirteen. She was a victim of complications due to a severe case of Cerebral Palsy, and the breathing machine that we could not afford after her lungs had given up. Charlotte was the child of Negro parents who came together in crisis moments to hold hands over a hospital bed; as if it would resolve domestic feuding that a black child did not witness, but sensed in a mother's eyes. Like I did.

Like we all do.

I think that it was a single tear or two that fell from mama's eyes the day Charlette died. She was 13, I was 17. My lil' sis Charlette, who had been broken too many times to break, and who loved so effortlessly that it sometimes went unnoticed like oxygen for breathing or the water in Kool Aid - was not the crying type. Charlette, like her grandmother had been relieved from any further pain of being black and a womyn in the world. She, of all my siblings had eyes most like mine and smiled even bigger than me. She seemed to recognize my scent when we visited the care facility and would giggle when I tickled the hair on her bowed arms or legs. She, like my grandma was love unbounded, a smile without conditions, a little lady who came to recognize something familiar in my touch and took it with her to the heavens.

My mother now digests my movements in the world with little comment beyond her reminders that I'm loved or a biblical suggestion to "acknowledge God, and he will direct your path." I don't pout to her that I DO acknowledge God nor do I suggest that God must have been a womyn (or either a lot like me). I don't tell her that her boy is again falling in love with some other black mother's boy. She already knows this. She senses it in the silences. To say it would be the redundancy that her boy is committed to the truth he experiences. She knows I'm gay. I don't bother to complicate things with "same gender loving" or the more nuanced or context-driven "queer" identifications I sometimes claim. It took seventeen years to have the "gay" conversation, a lifetime to digest it and beyond that to overstand the insufficiency of any such term. We are both fine with this. Fine with it like we manage to draw upon the memories of strong womyn before us to grow and change.

It's cliché to say about one's mother that "she's my favorite girl" so I don't. I just note that something in her capacity to endure hardship, to smile through pain, her slips of volatility when tears snuck out, something in it all that I not only love, but aspire to be —beyond the ways or the shape of my eyes or my smile that mirror her more as the years pass. My arms, like hers have held men who can neither hold on nor let go. We both carry a legacy of nurturing dreams, children, and possibilities. Irma P. Stinson-West is the voice filling the space between where my courage ends and my determination begins. She is a next breath, a next Spring, a trait I hope will show up in the men or womyn I choose to try loving. She carries a softness that she selectively reveals. I too, am not a hardened human, just a mama's boy; trying, perhaps, too often not to show it.

Copyright © Tim'm West, 2006

Tim'm West, poet and spoken word artist, choreographer, vocalist and actor "firmly demonstrates a commitment to a holistic exploration of the arts." His comprehensive work is also worthy of exploring at his websites: www.reddirt.biz and at www.bravesoulcollective.org

Email Tim'm West at tim.m@reddirt.biz

Photo Credits:

HEADER

"Proud Woman," Courtesy of: African Millennium Foundation, www.african-millennium.com

"Agave2." Courtesy of: John Villinski, Abstract Southwest, www.abstractsouthwest.com

African "Egghead" and Black Man in White
Courtesy of: Gene Pearson, Gene Pearson Studio, www.genepearsonsculpture.com

BOTTOM PHOTO

Image of Tim'm West's eyes from his website, www.reddirt.biz

[COMMENT ON THIS WRITING](#)

[COMMENTS \(2\)](#)

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED SITES **STAGE PRESENCE** **REFLECTING POOL** **CONTACT** **PHOTO & MUSIC CREDITS**

Terryhowcott.com has made every effort to ascertain the origin of all photos, and is eager to cite all work. Please contact info@terryhowcott.com to discuss citing or to propose photos for exhibition by sending them with photographer/artist's name, image title, and/or web address.

© 2006 www.terryhowcott.com