

From The Publisher

One of my friends, a lady professional, called me on Monday to say how much she enjoyed Sunday night's play at the Bliss.

"You have earned the right to be as weird as you want to be," she said.

"Weird?" I responded. "Am I really weird?"

So, she changed "weird" to "idiosyncratic", and again I remonstrated, but not excessively, and so our conversation went on.

I suppose I must seem that way. I almost never socialize, and very few people outside of Partridge ever have any opportunity to converse with me.

Well, to begin with, I was raised, to a certain extent, on the sea, in the days when sailboats were much more common than motorboats, and even the motorboats those days were slow. The ability to remain quiet unless one had something relevant or important to say, was considered a sign of strength on the sea during long voyages. Chatter was not encouraged, especially, repeat especially, from children. Point one.

Anyway, shortly after returning home from college in 1968, I became mixed up with people who were considered revolutionary, and, in fact, my Black Muslim friends, including Ismail Shabazz and the late Charles X "Justice" Eagan, were considered dangerous. Their religion's headquarters in Chicago was reported to have contact with places like Libya and Egypt, which were then considered hostile to the United States of America.

After UBAD was formed and I was thrust into Belizean public life, I became conscious of the intelligence agents who were around and about working to gather information on people who were considered volatile. The feature boys amongst these were Belize's Special Branch, but, of course, one always assumed the British and the Americans, and later the Guatemalans, the Mexicans and the Cubans, were keeping tabs on the UBAD leaders. Just a routine. After UBAD, my friends were Said Musa and Assad Shoman, and some people considered them communists, so again I had reason to believe I was a target for people who wanted to know my business, who were my local and foreign friends, and so on and so forth.

Okay, so I've lived for the last 35 years on the assumption that my mail is opened, that my phones are tapped, and that strangers who appeared out of nowhere and were too quickly friendly, were not necessarily sincere. You develop survival mechanisms when you know that your enemies are powerful, that your enemies include agents of international superpowers, that your enemies number people amongst them who claim to have direct contact with Almighty God. You develop survival mechanisms. Normal people look at these survival mechanisms and they say that you are paranoid. All I can say is, better to be paranoid and alive, than otherwise. Straight.

With that said, let me take care of some business by way of the column, because I don't like to write letters or hold telephone conversations, besides which I don't know how to send e-mails. I need to tell some special people that I've received their messages, welcome them with love, but I'm weird or idiosyncratic or whatever.

First, Sherlene Neal Tablada, studying in Jamaica. Girl, I've received your e-mail, and it was bubbling with so much energy and love it really gave me a boost. Thanks, and keep on.

Evondale Coburn, between Georgia and Florida, brother, I really love your vibes. You have a spiritual tranquility and strength which give me courage.

Dr. Dennis Young (Harvard, class of 1967), now living in Detroit, Michigan, over all the years you be sending me articles and books and other things, you finally hit the nail directly on the damned head. The Nina Simone cd anthology I received and have placed in a spot for special treasures. Thank you, my brother, and how is the great Alden?

Dr. Neil Garbutt, U.S. Virgin Islands. You and I never agreed on much, but we sat in class so many years we have a groove. Respect.

Marion Paulino, Belmopan. What's up with you? You don't remember Hideo?

So back to my dear readers. If you feel that you're not interested in my messages to my friends, all I can do is beg your indulgence. Come to think of it, Anne K.Lowe, I almost never respond to your wonderful letters. I receive them and recognize them with great appreciation. Lady, you are truly special.

Cousin Guelda from Brooklyn and former secretary Cecilia in Manhattan, thanks for the encouragement vibes.

You all out there whose support for my writings have enabled me to support myself and my children, there is no greater happiness in life than in doing a job that you love. When you love it, it's no longer a job, Jack. It's just wonderful.

On the matter of the play, which was my opening topic this week. If you think about it, Belize does not have a playwright. In my heart and mind, I know that I was supposed to be the one, but there were forces which conspired to kill that dream. The way I've escaped bitterness is by checking on all my younger brethren and sistren in the community where I work, and I know nothing I experienced was as bad as the pressure (for real, Grandmaster) these kids have to deal with every day. I think the worst part of it is the discouragement every time one of them dares to dream.

The black American poet, Langston Hughes (1902-1967), said it best in his quiet classic – "A dream deferred."

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore –

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over –

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?