

DAY 2

TRAVELS NEAR AND FAR- SENSE OF SMELL

I grew up on a farm in rural Jamaica, four miles from the town of Mandeville, the capital of the Parish of Manchester. The climate is tropical. yet Mandeville is cool, since it sits at an elevation of 2000 feet, or 609.6 meters above sea level. A tradition followed by many travellers into Mandeville, is to open the windows of their vehicle to inhale the pristine, fresh air. The town has attracted many international visitors and residents due to its salubrious climate and beautiful homes scattered across the landscape, most with elaborate gardens and vibrant splashes of colour.

Our house was situate at an ample corner of the property at the highest elevation. Some distance from the house was a winding trail through the shrubs and trees, leading downward to the farm. Our father had bought a large parcel of land and overtime had developed the land for two primary farming activities, orchards with all the varieties of citrus fruits and beef and dairy cattle rearing. Farming extended to other cash crops, but the scope was for domestic use, rather than in commercial quantities

I was the last of nine children and fell into the group known as “the three last ones”, an all-girl group. I think it was partly due to the risk posed by some of the cattle who were left to graze freely, and who could be quite aggressive particularly when they had calved, that we were never allowed to explore the farm on our own.

Every morning at six a.m my father would head off to the farm to participate in and supervise milking of the cows, and to assign duties to the labourers on the farm. I remember the excitement I felt the first time I was allowed to accompany my father on one of his early morning treks, when I was about eight years old. At that time of the morning, the dew was still on the shrubs and leaves, and formed the most intricate, beautiful patterns when the drops fell on spiders’ webs. That visit was my first up close introduction to some of the activities on the farm. The first activity was that of milking cows and this process was manual. I recall the milk being frothy and warm. That milk would later be strained and measured into large aluminum

double walled containers to be collected by the milk processing factory trucks. Our home was the hub to which other farmers in the surrounding areas would bring their milk to be strained and measured and recorded. Payment would be sent to my father at the end of each month, and as children. one of our duties was to manually calculate each farmer's contribution and earnings.

There is something about the various scents on a farm that has remained with me and afforded me deep gratification all my life. Most notable is the smell of cattle grazing on pasture land. It is a combination of the subtle, warm, earthy, slightly stale but not unpleasant smell of the cattle, mixed with the unmistakable scent of cropped grass. One could say the smell is akin to that of freshly mowed grass, but less sharp, and teeming with vitality, mixed with contentment, ably displayed by the ambling gait of cattle as they graze.

I developed a love of cattle and one sight that gives me great joy, is that of cattle grazing in open fields, and the vision brings the smell back to me, over and over again.

Adendum

As an anecdote, when I lived and worked in Canada, I arranged for the purchase and care of one head of cattle in rural Jamaica. It gave me such great pride, joy and excitement as my friend and I embarked on an adventure to see my one head of cattle. My brother became speechless when sometime after, I told him what I had done. The bull was a beautiful specimen.