

Memoir

The Woman Who Loved Me

By Samuel Collins

I grew up in West African, in a small Liberian village, owned by my grandmother during the early 70s, - (that's before I was born) the 80s, and up to the 90s. Interestingly, this little village was only four miles from the city. Buchanan, as it was called, has become an industrial giant, rapidly growing in every area. There were lots of businesses, and investors, and countless supermarkets and stores, and paved roads, and beautiful beaches, including electricity, running water and telephone lines for easy access. During the early 80s, the city saw huge increase in immigration, majority of them were Lebanese merchants, and American investors, and Indian physicians. People came from the neighboring countries too to enjoy our wealth and the U.S dollars which was then the legal currency. The Ivoirians to the east would call us "Petit Americans." While our friends, the Sierra Leoneans to the west, and Nigerians called us "small America." By then the country had become one of the largest exporters in Africa. The economy flourished, parents could afford a lot more, teachers were paid on time. The Liberian people were happy.

The four miles' distance from the city to our village was enough to provide the shield we needed to muffle up industrial noise from a nearby power plant. More noise came from passenger and freight trains that belonged to the nearby American company.

Among the first things that visitors notice when they came into the village, was the lush, magnificent collections of flora, and the ever-evolving varieties of fauna population. We had lots of animals; pigs, chickens, pets and beautiful birds. I remember seeing so many animals from the wild, that came into the farm, eating our plants, and this made granny very unhappy that she and grandpa decided to fence the entire farm to keep those animals out.

I used to love looking at the aloe vera leaves along our village road, because they looked amazing. The fruit trees were altogether another world. We had from tropical bananas to plantains and avocados, and grape fruits, and oranges including ripe palm-nuts—countless other herbal trees which granny passionately called the "drugstore". And she knew what each tree was called. There

were a number of wild fruits and plums. Granny showed us three German plum trees that stood tall next to each other, which you saw on your way to the village, and these were my favorite. Then it was summer, and the village would begin to whiff with an enchanting fragrance that blankets the whole village, and this smelled more like a perfume—but only too sweet. The smell came from blossoming, wild flowers and ripe fruits mixed.



Common Snapping Turtle

Grandmother was my real heroine during those days. Being a staunch hunter herself, I would watch her disappear swiftly along the back road that connects our village to the thick, treacherous rain forest, there she would stay for hours, all by herself, fishing from the nearby river with baskets she had made herself. I was so connected to the “village life” and to granny, that it was often very difficult for me to return to the city at the beginning of the school year. I found the village peaceful and naturally serene, and I was more alive whenever I was there. Granny was my everything, food, shower, toys, clothes, and I adored her. This makes a lot of sense to me now, because granny always had that endless tolerance for my stubbornness. Unlike my mother, granny was extremely kind and patient with me. Back then we were so happy that we didn’t know if we were poor.

In many ways, I still feel connected to my village, and the memories from there still make me chuckle or moan, depending on what it’s I had brought back. When I look back on that life, I can still see again that graceful face of the woman who loved me, and the images of waving trees and the smell of beautiful flowers. Today, the village continued to give me a great sense of place, and the experience I had while there remains an integral part of my life. Together, they have immortalized themselves somewhere deep inside my soul. It’s where I go to find comfort when things get gloomy.

It's there alone, through the canopy of my mind, I feel a sense of serenity, and know again the power of love.