



# RED, GOLD & GREEN MEMORIES

## collected by Wendy Russell

Here I was, with reggae stars packed in all around me. It was real hot in the elevator. Outdoors was typical warm and sultry Florida weather, but in the elevator's tight confines, stuck between floors and not moving an inch for eight minutes now, we were really sweating it. We were all going up to a radio station on the top floor with MIKEY DREAD, LEROY SIBBLES, CORNELL CAMPBELL AND RANKING JOE, and had been laughing and really having fun as we tooted around the area's many radio stations that played reggae, all to talk up Reggae on the Beach 2004, happening that weekend on Key Biscayne – really having fun, that is – until this elevator jammed! Now we are all nervous while trying to be cool about the fact that we're stuck in an elevator late at night with no one to hear the alarm buttons we kept pushing, in a big empty building with only the DJs inside, but they were on the top floor with headphones covering their ears, doing their show. Weak laughs all around when someone asked, "We got rizlas?"

Oh my! There are so many experiences and memories out there in the big wide world of reggae's runnins, that we better hear from another, while I reason 'pon my own most favorite memory! Some great memories are here from our reggae family the whole world over – reggae-related experiences given me by people who want to share with you how reggae music has touched them in some way.

## From Colorado, DJ, promoter and festival MC Rasta Stevie had one memory shine bright:

On a cold Friday night in April following my Rasta dancehall and dub radio show, I needed to get online to do more works. I walked into Durango Joe's, a small but jumping new coffee shop in a refurbished old convenience store near Fort Lewis College in Durango, CO. A somewhat conservative-looking, red-haired woman in her early 20s approached me. I would have never guessed she wanted to share her life changing experience at the healing hands of reggae and BOB MARLEY. She said "Hey, don't I know you from the YELLOW WALL DUB SQUAD's Bob Marley Birthday Party?"



She was referring to the packed house at the Dolores River Brewery's 2005 Bob Marley Birthday Celebration in the rural town of Dolores, CO, population 800. When I answered "Yes," I had no idea I was opening the opportunity for an hour-and-a-half reasoning on the gift of reggae, the message of the true Christ in Haile Selassie I, of manifesting our reality through our thoughts and words – that word, sound have power. The unlikely reggae lover unabashedly shared, "I have been in bed from surgeries for weeks and reggae has lifted me through these times, you know," she continued, "Isn't Bob Marley's music awesome! When I listen to Bob's music I feel it in my heart like there is a hook sinking into it and then drawing me forward deeper into life." The conversation that night at Durango Joe's lifted us both.

## Next let's step up to Portland, Oregon, where "Higher Reasoning Reggae Time" DJ and promoter Ras Danny Fallon, tells us how he went from locked up to dreadlocked:

On a spring day in Hawaii, I was surprised by a group of Narcotics Squad officers, then handcuffed and arrested for possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell. The controlled substance – 3,000 doses of acid. The legal consequence – 12 years in federal prison with a six-year "supervised release" after that. I ended up serving nine years. In there was where I got a lot of my reggae/rasta education, or "edutainment" as I like to say. I remember after being moved from Hawaii to Sheridan Prison near Portland, OR, that I could pull in Portland's lefty-community radio institution, KBOO, by hook or crook, eagerly absorbing all the soul-saving reggae I could. It was really my only source for up-to-date reggae. At first, before the station improved its signal, I had to stand out in the middle of the prison yard holding my radio up at arm's length and move it around just to keep the signal in tight. Inside, I could hardly get KBOO at all unless I stuck my radio out a window or put



Ras Danny (on left) with his Kitchen Kaos Krew

Unknown Inmate Photographer

it up against a piece of steel. Sometimes I'd have to use my whole bed, which was made out of steel, as an antenna. But I managed.

When I got shipped from the jail in Hawaii to the mainland – though I had been into reggae for a long time and heard of Jah through the music – I didn't really know much about Rastafari. So I decided it was time to start learning. I started with books about Marcus Garvey, Haile Selassie and other great black people. I reasoned with some of the few Rasta bredren inside with me, and I also got involved in the African-American culture group. Through this learning process I found my real freedom. Ironic, eh? That I should find it in such an environment? Now free, and with my "supervised release" winding down, my mission is to forward Jah to the masses. After my release, I went right to KBOO where I now host my own weekly reggae program, the title of which is a reflection of the influence that Jah and reggae music have had in my life. I am also starting to promote live reggae events and am a big supporter of Portland's evolving reggae scene. All of my shows – even if I don't announce it – are livicated to my bredren and sistren who are doing time behind Babylon walls, in what I refer to as "Da Belly a Babylon Beast!"

#### **Next from a California reggae fan, Darlene Innes unexpectedly becomes a Jamaican movie actress:**

I am in a Jamaican comedy called *Twang* ('twang' is a term used for when one wants to fit in with the gang). I was cast while on vacation in Jamaica. I had been there roughly a week and my final chance to make the jump off a 25-foot cliff at the Sands was in front of me. One of the divers, "Drawers," (so named as a child due to his pants always falling off after diving), well, he called me a chicken – so off came the clothes down to my bathing suit and off the cliff I went – wow! What a thrill! Afterwards, on my way to the ladies' room, a very nice looking and sharply dressed, Jamaican gentleman approached me, asking where I was from. During our conversation he introduced himself as Paul, a producer, and invited me to be in a Jamaican movie, *Twang!* He told me to be there in the morning. Of course I accepted and with script in hand I was off to go study. That next morning Paul said, "After talking with you we decided that because you can carry on a conversation, we are going to give you a bigger part." Yep – it was too! The only acting I had ever done was singing "...just a spoonful of sugar..." as



Darlene Innes

**Making the leap!**

a child! So the last four days of my vacation were spent filming all over Negril, riding jet skis with my co-actors Greg, English and the rest of the Kingston crew! We filmed in the Deep West and on Seven Mile Beach, way out on a private boat with the sea turtles! I was also a guest at the Rootz Underground show at the Sands and what a beautiful group of people. When we were finished filming, the Kingstons showed me how they do things in the Kingston stylee and the singing and street dancing was SO much fun! The opening is August 5, 2005 at the Negril Film Festival in Jamaica. Oh by the way, Storm is the director of *Twang*. I met his mother and father, who is Chris Blackwell! The crew thanked me, told me I did a great job and told me that now I "had friends in the bad part of Jamaica." I replied, "Yes, but I have good friends in the bad part of Jamaica!" The crew was such a talented and special group! When I extended my stay that extra four days and took that leap I had no idea that it was about to change my fate forever! I'm moving to Jamaica! It was one of my greatest memories – and for my 49th birthday to boot! I'm going for it! I'm taking the leap!

#### **A life changing memory from Kush, lead vocalist and songwriter of Kush and Bloodfiah Angel:**

It was spring of 1986, I was in Ivory Coast (West Africa) where I grew up. I was 16, my mother was a single mom and very strict. I was in high school which was quite far from home, so my mother and I stayed at my sister's apartment for lunch that day. I had brought with me a tape of the BURNING SPEAR's *Live* album from 1977. We were listening to "Old Marcus Garvey" when my mother looked out of the window and told me with excitement: "Kush, I think Burning Spear is downstairs on the field playing football!" "This is the hardest joke possible to believe!" I replied to her. She insisted she was serious, so I finally jumped off my seat to rush to the window and there he was, Winston Rodney himself! My sister then said she thought she knew who had brought him to the neighborhood since her neighbor was a concert promoter, and arranged that I would meet with Burning Spear and the group after they were done playing football. I shook his hand and he invited me to sit next to him on a bench. My mother took a picture of the two of us. I told him as a teenage fan what it meant for me to talk with him like this. "For me it was to see Burning Spear and die." To this he replied something I have never forgotten, "No, man, see Burning Spear and LIVE!" He asked me if I could come to the show but I knew I wouldn't be allowed to go because it was at a huge stadium and I didn't have anyone to go with me. I was too young to go alone, my mother said. But instead I had the photo, a lifelong memory and what was for me the very best seat!

#### **Forward to reggae star and producer Junior Reid, on a cell phone, touring a few months ago:**

This is when I knew I wanted to be on stage – I was about 12 years old, walking from school in Kingston, Jamaica. As I passed the Downtown Parade, a band was playing there in the

## Red, Gold & Green Memories



**Junior Reid forwards the reggae vibe**

park. Anyone could jump up and free style with the band, so I got up. I wasn't afraid. What I remember the most is my foot bottoms got hot! It was slammin'! I sang that love song, "...never forget I love you more... someday I hope you'll be my bride..." and the whole park was kickin'! In yawd that day I realized I wanted to take it to a higher grade. That singing was a talent, not just a trade. I released my first single for producer Hugh Mundell the next year.

### **Australian born promoter Chris Deckker tells of breaking the Guinness Book of World Records:**

The moment I had been waiting for arrived – MICKEY HART took the stage and waved his drum baton high, surrounded by a battery of percussion instruments and over 5,500 dedicated drummers. There were drums of all shapes and sizes – samba drums, conga drums, log drums, homemade drums, middle eastern drums and me, with my trusty old African Djembe. The energy was electric! The crowd broke

out into a thunderous rumble which raised the hairs on my neck. The world's largest drum circle – dedicated to peace – had begun! For two hours maestro Mickey conducted the participants with timed precision, joined on stage by some of the world's most renowned percussionists including ZAKIR HUSSAIN and AIRTO MORIERA. I was awestruck by the sheer power that so many drummers could create! We drummed, our faces bursting with ecstatic grins and I was amazed that we were all actually playing in time! This was more than a drum circle, this was an ancient ritual reborn. I was immersed within the powerful rhythm of thousands of drummers beating as one heart. It was truly a healing experience for me. After the drum circle ended, I spoke to the pilot who was filming the event from the air (for further verification of crowd size for *Guinness Book of World Records*). He said that the sound was so powerful that wings of his plane were shaking. On further research I discovered that the only other known reports from pilots of their wings shaking was when they dropped bombs! Amazing! I will never forget the Drums of Peace.

### **Around the world to Puerto Rico:**

My name is Isabelle Cleveland. Here in Puerto Rico we have about one big event with an international artist monthly. About a year ago we had ALPHA BLONDY here on the island for a concert at the Tito Puente Amphitheater. At first it was

Wendy Russell



**Alpha Blondy has created more than one memory for reggae fans worldwide.**

amazing with his trancelike sound effects and beautiful raspy voice singing in French, mesmerizing everyone – even though most of us had no clue what he was saying. At the end of the show it started raining hard and so many of the people left but when Alpha Blondy said goodbye a few of us just couldn't let him go, we wanted more! So up to the front of the stage we went, chanting his name until he came back out and enticed us with another five songs in the pouring rain. I know for a fact many artists would not put up with this, because it has happened many times before. Usually the show will end right there – and it's understandable with all the music equipment and the singer's health at risk. But he was not ready to leave us even though we were all getting soaked! No one on or off

a beautiful night but as the songs went on it got a little cloudy. It didn't matter though, because here the reggae fans are used to dealing with rain as it's the only place reggae concerts are held and it will rain every other show. The place was packed, Alpha Blondy was

the stage could stop dancing and singing! It was by far the best reggae concert here in Puerto Rico and even though there was only about forty of us at the end, you could tell there was some sort of connection under the stars and the rain that night.

### **Jim Marshall, California reggae photographer and archivist has dozens of such stories:**

One stands out that we can call "The Most Generous Rasta." I had visited JUSTIN HINDS at his three-story home on a hillside in Steertown, Jamaica, several times and when he finally visited my Reggae and Ethiopian Archives in the late 1990s and saw all that I had there, he said "Jim, you must come forward to Jamaica with your archives and take over my house!" I mentally counted up and replied "But Justin, don't you have twelve or so family members living there with you?" He slowly counted up and enthusiastically replied "Fourteen, but it doesn't matter. They can all find some place else to stay. If you want, I'll stay. If you want, I'll leave too!" That's the kind of appreciative and giving person Justin Hinds was."

Ahhh, yes, a most generous Rasta indeed, who has given so much to our sweet reggae music! And after his long and illustrious singing career Justin Hinds has gone onwards ahead of us to Zion, March 17, 2005, for his just rewards.

## Red, Gold & Green Memories

### Producer and music distributor Jah Life worked with Junior Delgado in his last days:

We had spoken just the day before his passing, when Jah Life had caught him in his studio in England voicing a new song. Junior sounded healthy and strong. He wanted me to listen to the song. It was maybe the last one he ever recorded. It was hard to hear over the bad connections, but the riddim sounded wicked! I had known Junior since our days at Skateland in Kingston, but we got really close the last few months, talking almost every day on business and tings. Junior had a truck and they delivered music all over Europe. What's going to happen now?



Wendy Russell

Sister Carol reminisces

### On April 11, 2005, we lost Junior Delgado. Sister Carol remembers listening to him in the early days:

We would listen to Junior, also known as "Juks," on the radio and in our musical selection at home. I gained inspiration from his songs such as "Warrior," "Blackman's Heart Cries Out," "Tition" (politician) in my struggles as an up-and-coming artist. Another song of Junior's that was very dear to me was his version of "If This World Was Mine."

### Foundational bass player Fully Fullwood, also remembers Junior Delgado:

Niney the Observer was the producer and I backed up two or three tracks with Junior from back in those early days, when recording at Randy's Recording Studio in Jamaica: He and Dennis Brown were friends and so he would be around too. It's been so long now, I don't know which songs anymore, but I remember Junior was a very nice person and always respectful to us.

### DJ/producer Lance-O was certainly raised up right:

One of my fondest memories about reggae is also one of my earliest. I was heavily exposed to reggae in 1974 and it forever changed my life. At the time I was living with my Uncle Robbie, who was working with PETER TOSH on his first solo album, *Legalize It*, for Columbia Records. "Yuck" – as my uncle Robbie was nicknamed – played harps as the Jamaicans call it, but we know it as harmonica. Uncle Robbie was there – Jamaica, NY, Miami – wherever it was needed to help get this album done. In fact, so much so that he was being considered to be Peter's manager. So Peter was around the house on occasion. At the time, I didn't realize the stature of this man and the people like SLY and ROBBIE who were always

around when he was doing one of the several concerts that I also attended. What stand out for me is the memory of Peter's presence, Peter's music. I had heard reggae a little bit prior to this but it never had the impact that it had on me this time. From that time forward it was my favorite music. I always had it around. Don't get me wrong, I liked and listened to BOB MARLEY and JIMMY CLIFF. In fact, I went to see the movie starring Jimmy Cliff, *The Harder They Come* like ten times at a small, local, private theater but Peter still stood out. I would sit there with the *Legalize It* album cover and inside sleeve that had the lyrics and I would play the album over and over... all the while singing along. I sang along so much I knew the songs word for word. I didn't always know what I was singing but I knew the words. The one song that stands out the most was "Igziabeher" (Let Jah Be Praised). In this particular case, it was that of knowing the words but not truly knowing what was meant. At the time, I thought Jah was like a slang word for 'you.' Like let ya be praised, let you be praised. Then I came to find out what Jah meant and said to myself that I had been wrong. But now that the truth has been revealed, Jah really is 'you' for the most part. So essentially I was right all along. So let Jah be Praised and you will be praised.

### Next we hear about the dancehall as the spot of resistance in South Africa, from Leoxasib Galant:

I remember that it was a cold night during the State of Emergency (1985) in South Africa when we trodded to the dancehall as a posse. RAS JEFF, who was known as a Freedom Fighter, would be playing his regular Saturday night session in Gugulethu. Many comrades and Rastafarians would defy the apartheid emergency laws and skank the Saturday night away. The youth wanted a clean break from disco music and started to attend reggae dancehalls in the ghettos of Cape Town. Peter Tosh's *Equal Rights* album was the message a youth already pregnant with unrest wanted to hear. It was banned from South African airplay but we all knew Ras Jeff controlled the uncut version. As we entered the dancehall all sistren must cover their dread with a scarf or cap and all kings have to remove their tams and headdresses. We would start on the left-hand side and greet everybody already present in the dancehall. So the greeting of Oneness would continue through the night. The smell of umpepu (sage) mixed with ganja would bless you up on entering the dancehall. Strictly no alcohol or cigarette smoking on the premises. The queens were treated with respect and allowed to experience the meditative nature of the dancehall, rather than being on her guard fending off lustful idren. The brethren would normally dance in circles, showing off different dance moves that needed endurance and energy. The dancehall was a pitched canvas in somebody's backyard. At about two that night, a bredren made an announcement that the Babylon is outside and has declared the dancehall an illegal gathering. The elders went into talks with them while the music session continued. The Babylon called in more backup until they outnumbered us

## Red, Gold & Green Memories

almost three to one. Then they stormed the dancehall and tear gassed the dancehall steppers. They came in with their whips and batons and just continued to strike at anybody. They kicked in the speakers and did some damage to the house in their attempts to get into where the music continued to play. Some of the bredren started to fight them back – the light in the backyard went out and everybody was hitting and kicking. We succeeded to drive them to the street, back to their Caspers, Hippos and Gazelles (names for their specially-equipped unrest vehicles). Many people, including cops, were injured during this forceful attack. Public transport to the township stops just after sunset and would start again at sunrise, so we all had to stay at the dancehall for the whole night. The officer in charge kept a circle around the yard. They stood on top of their vehicles to experience how the dancehall thing a run. The broken pieces of equipment screamed thru the night, “Get Up, Stand Up...”, while clouds of ganja smoke became the only separation between cop and Rastaman. That single event stood out as the birth of dancehall freedom in Cape Town, South Africa.

### **Performer/songwriter Rocky Dawuni rocks out:**



Cary Sullivan

***Rocky Dawuni and Stevie Wonder create blessed memories together.***

My greatest reggae memory was during my concert at Zanzibar Club in Los Angeles, California last November. While I was preparing to go onstage I heard a loud noise in the packed house and then none other than STEVIE WONDER and his entourage walked through the crowd to my dressing room! I had played a benefit concert with Stevie a few months earlier in Accra, the capital city of my country, Ghana, so it was a great honor for me to see him again at my concert here in North America. We exchanged a few pleasantries about how great it was to see each other again, and how he was there to experience and support my music, just before my REVELATION PROJECT BAND got on stage. Halfway through our set, Stevie sent a message to me that he would love to join us on stage. The whole house erupted when he walked up on stage with his harmonica and joined us on my song “Wake the Town.” He played an incredible solo and then led the crowd in the most beautiful call and response of the “Shake it! Shake It!” refrain. He then delved into a soulful wail with the excited crowd screaming in disbelief. It was a great night for all who were blessed to be present.

### **Here’s my favorite to add to this wonderful collection:**

Last August I was backstage at Reggae on the River in

---

Wendy Russell



**Vaughn Benjamin and his brother Gainde Ron Benjamin forward that awesome St. Croix band, Midnite.**

MIDNITE's tented hospitality room. We were all absorbed in involved reasoning as manager Kufunya ran in and out organizing last minute business, the full room abuzz and active, when I saw the sweet side of VAUGHN BENJAMIN, the lead singer of Midnite. A young man had talked his way backstage and into the dressing room holding a large intricate, unfinished red, gold and green oil painting bearing the Rasta lion, asking anyone who would listen if he could

paint during Midnite's set with himself being on the huge RotR stage... but he was being brushed off. Quietly I said to Vaughn, "It's a big thing to be on the stage, that's why he wants to paint that painting on stage, people would see him and..." "It would help him?" Vaughn asked, interrupting me. "Yes, it would," I replied. "He probably hopes to sell that painting afterwards." When Midnite took to the stage, there was the young painter working on his canvas on stage. Midnite then graced us with mighty Jah's music as only Midnite can – exploding forward with righteousness, awesome riddims and lyrical Rasta reasonings. As we all danced in the crowd – all tight together in a spiritual high – a tear came to my eye in spite of my joy. This is how it could be. We are all one here. ♡

*Wendy Russell, a vibrant part of the reggae industry and community for many years, is a radio DJ on Satélite Radio Bilingue, with its many stations nationwide. She also is a promoter in Fresno, CA and helps produce other festivals. Along with being Editor and a writer for Reggae Festival Guide, she writes for [www.ReggaeReview.com](http://www.ReggaeReview.com) plus Wendy's Perspective for [www.JahWorks.org](http://www.JahWorks.org), and has Top 10s, CD reviews and photographs in various publications whenever requested. For relaxation she enjoys her gardens and her 60 turtles and tortoises from around the world. [reggaeW@aol.com](mailto:reggaeW@aol.com) 559/226-9280*