**Dedication**

To my mother, Mama (Marva), whose unwavering strength and selfless love have guided every chapter of my life—from the dusty lanes of Denham Town to classrooms across three continents. Your sacrifices, wisdom, and fierce determination laid the foundation upon which I have built my dreams.

To my children, Jilisha and Rhys, your love, laughter, and boundless curiosity have been my greatest joy and inspiration. You gave purpose to every cross-Atlantic journey and remind me of the legacy I want to leave behind.

To Sharon—thank you for your enduring presence, your patience, and for seeing me through seasons when I didn’t always make it easy. I know I was a challenge, but you stood firm.

To my brother Wayne (Roos), my first and best friend—your loyalty, humor, and quiet strength have been constants in a world of change.

To my Aunty Bar and Aunty Patsy, your love, guidance, and humor filled my childhood with warmth and belonging, and to my Uncle Basil, your calm wisdom and steady presence helped shape the man I have become.

To my sixth-grade teacher Mrs. Dunn, who saw in me a light I hadn’t yet recognized and opened the first academic door that led to St. George’s College. Your belief was a turning point.

To Ms. Dorrett Campbell, my brilliant college English lecturer at Mico, whose passion for literature and unwavering standards taught me that language is not only power—it is purpose. Your influence echoes in every classroom I’ve ever taught in.

This journey, in all its beauty and complexity, belongs to all of you. Your spirits walk with me on every page, every lesson, every triumph.

**About the Author**

Horatio Ward was born in Denham Town, one of the most impoverished yet culturally vibrant communities in Kingston, Jamaica. From an early age, he discovered the transformative power of words and education—an awakening that would shape his life’s purpose. The loss of his father at a young age and the unyielding strength of his mother, Marva, laid the foundation for his resilience and drive. A graduate of the prestigious Mico University College in Kingston and later Middlesex University in London, Horatio has dedicated more than twenty-five years to teaching English and Religious Education across three continents—Jamaica, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He is not only an educator, but also a storyteller, mentor, and cultural bridge for generations of students. His classrooms—whether in Kingston, North London, or Florida—have always been sanctuaries of affirmation, curiosity, and empowerment. Currently based in Lee County, Florida, Horatio teaches middle school English, where he continues to engage students through literature, identity, and global perspective. *A Journey in Three Acts* is his debut memoir—a powerful narrative of migration, memory, and the enduring spirit of a Jamaican boy who became a man of vision, voice, and vocation. His story is one of roots, reckoning, and remarkable resilience.

**Act I: Jamaica – The Roots**

The warm sun rose steadily over the rust-colored roofs of Tulip Lane, Denham Town, Kingston, Jamaica, bathing the sleepy city in a golden glow. It was a morning like many others, but for Lance, it was the kind of

morning that stirred reflection. A light breeze fluttered the edges of the curtains, carrying the scent of fried dumplings and ackee from a nearby yard. Roosters crowed in the distance, mingling with the tinny buzz of transistor radios playing gospel or old-school reggae. Tulip Lane was waking up, and so was memory.

Lance had always believed in beginnings—new chapters, new opportunities, and new lives. And Lance had lived many. This morning, as the sunlight touched the zinc rooftops and danced off puddles from the night’s brief rain, he allowed himself to drift backward—past the years, past the regrets, past the transformations—to the start.

Born in the foothills of Denham Town in 1969, Lance was the first of two boys. His father, a quiet, intelligent man with a passion for books and football, died tragically young—just nineteen—while still a student at Jamaica College. The loss reverberated through the generations. His mother, Marva—known to all as Mama—was just seventeen, yet even at that tender age, Mama was a whirlwind of strength and grace, balancing discipline with affection, and raising her sons with a fierce belief in the power of education.

Life was never easy, but it was never empty. Their home at 17 Tulip Lane was a modest tenement yard, a place that pulsed with activity from dawn till dusk. The air was always thick with voices, laughter, the clang of pots, the bark of distant dogs. It was a shared world—a close-knit, noisy village bound not by walls, but by love, respect, and obligation.

Aunt Amanda and Aunt B, two elderly pillars of the family, ruled the compound with quiet dignity. They kept order and held memory. Their presence was calming but never passive. Aunt Amanda, with her silver bun and wise eyes, was the resident historian, storyteller, and judge. Aunt Beatrice, thinner and more stern, had a way of folding her arms and pursing her lips that could silence even the most rebellious child.

The yard echoed daily with laughter and mischief. Mama had sisters—Aunty Bar and Aunty Patsy—and each added her own energy to the place. Their voices intertwined with the patter of feet and the shrieks of children: Nadia, Oneil, Manda, Hurry, Kaydene, Sandra, Beverly, Dennis,

and Juliet. Cousins in name but siblings in heart, they ran barefoot over sun-baked concrete, played dandy shandy and Chinese skip, splashed in puddles, and fought over mangoes and plastic toy soldiers.

Meals were often sparse but shared. Everyone got a piece of something—breadfruit, fried dumplings, callaloo. Salt mackerel and green bananas were stretchable commodities, and on Sundays, if the pot was big enough, even the neighbors could taste the stew.

Lance, a somewhat plump and bright-eyed boy with an insatiable curiosity, had a favorite hideout beneath Aunt Amanda’s towering double-decker bed. The cool, dusty space was his fortress of solitude. There, lying on a piece of cardboard or flattened flour sack, he’d stretch out with a stack of Spiderman comics, Hardy Boys adventures, and Nancy Drew mysteries. The scent of wood polish, old clothes, and mothballs surrounded him, but none of it mattered. The only world that existed was the one in his books.

Stories consumed him. He loved how words could build entire worlds, take him to foreign places, introduce him to brave heroes and cunning villains. That was where Lance learned English—not from a chalkboard, but from dialogue bubbles and plot twists. He read aloud in whispers, mimicking accents, practicing new vocabulary, imagining himself solving mysteries with Frank and Joe or swinging through skyscrapers like Peter Parker.

His passion didn't go unnoticed. By the age of ten, he was already beating Mama at crossword puzzles from the afternoon newspaper, *The Star*. He could fill in ten-letter words before Mama had read the clue properly. Neighbors would shake their heads and say, "Dat boy sharp like razor!" His mind was a sponge, absorbing not just words but meanings, rhythms, and nuance.

In the yard, he became known as the boy with the big words. He'd use phrases like "astonishing" and "melancholy" in conversations about marbles or mangoes, leaving the other children giggling or confused. But

even they admired him. Lance had a way of turning a simple story about a missing pencil into an epic tale of betrayal and redemption.

His sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Dunn, was the first formal educator to recognize his brilliance. A tall, dark-skinned woman with a penchant for floral blouses and exacting standards, she spotted something in Lance that felt urgent. She began feeding him extra books, longer writing assignments, and subtle nudges toward excellence. One day, after a particularly well-written composition on the topic of "My Greatest Hero," she pulled him aside and said, "Lance, yuh don’t just write stories. Yuh write truth. That’s a gift."

It was Mrs. Dunn who recommended Lance for the Common Entrance exam—the high school qualifying test that could open the gates to elite schools. Most boys in the tenement yard went to the local high school or dropped out entirely. But Lance had a chance.

He studied by kerosene lamp at night, propped up on old telephone directories, eyes burning but mind alive. Mama supported him every step of the way—ironing his uniform, packing his book bag, praying beside him every evening.

When the results came in, it was Lance's brother Wayne, and nine year old Wayne who galloped excitedly up Tulip lane, with his head cocked to his left, eyes brimming with tears, with The Star in hand shouting repeatedly, 'Mama, Lance pass, Mama, Lance pass.' 17 Tulip Lane erupted. Lance had passed the exam with flying colours and his name was listed in the newspaper. And not just that—he had earned a place at **St. George’s College**, one of the most prestigious Catholic boys’ schools in Kingston. Mama cried. Aunt Amanda clapped and muttered a prayer. Aunty Bar walked around the yard, arms raised, shouting, “Mi tell unu! Di bwoy a genius!”

For Lance, it was more than a pass. It was a passport. A doorway. A promise. That day, as the sun dipped behind the buildings and the hibiscus folded into sleep, Lance sat quietly beneath the guinep tree, The Star in hand. He looked up at the stars just beginning to twinkle above

the rust-colored roofs of Tulip Lane. Something had begun. Something big. Something beautiful. And he was ready.

At St George's College, Lance wasn’t just a student—he became part of a brotherhood. A brotherhood which rested on the foundations of trust and love. Brothers Lascelle Powell (Andypow), Ainsworth Beckford (Becky), Warren Grant (Bug), Clifton Brooks (Cheva), Caliph Delmohammed (Zellie), Clive Scarlett (Sam), Paul Tomlinson (Tommy), Delroy Smith (Smelly), Clayton Osbourne (CJ) and Alva Taylor, now men, have maintained that brotherly connection via our WhatsApp group 'StGC Class of 86.'

It wasn’t just academics that captured Lance’s heart. Every September to December, Kingston transformed into a cauldron of passion for *schoolboy football*. In those days, Manning Cup matches at Sabina Park were spiritual events. Lance lived and breathed the blue and white of St George’s College. From the echo of vuvuzelas and iron pipes, to the booming chants of “Georges Georges!,” schoolboy football was more than a game—it was identity, pride, and resistance. Lance, though never a star on the field, knew every player's name, position, and stat. He spent many afternoons watching Georges train at Winchester Park and weekends following them to matches. His heroes weren’t just Reggae Boyz—they were schoolboys, which included Richard Strachan, Christopher Zadie, Christopher Morgan, Nicholas Zadie, Andrew Price, Michael Forbes, Robert Hall right there in the city, making magic with a football and most significantly beating our rivals Kingston College (KC).

That love for football extended far beyond the island. From the first moment Lance saw Diego Maradona play on a grainy black and white television in the 1982 World Cup, Lance became a lifelong fan, and by extension, a fan of Argentina, until 2014. A similar love for Manchester United grew in Lance, and was further cemented on his first visit to England where he listened to football stories told by his grandfather, who lived within walking distance of Aston Villa's football stadium. For Man Utd, their grit, their glory, their drama—it all echoed the spirit of a young starry eyed boy from Kingston Jamaica. George Best, Bryan Robson, and

eventually Eric Cantona, Dwight Yorke, Cristiano Ronaldo and Paul Scholes all became icons in Lance’s imagination. To this day, Manchester United remains his religion of choice on Sunday mornings, although Man Utd seem to lose more than win these days.

In 1986, while attending St. George’s College, Lance met Annette Tracey. She was radiant, brilliant, and carried herself with a grace that left a mark on everyone she met. Lance, already known for his charm and wit, was smitten. They became the Prince and Princess of Cumberland, Portmore—a title jokingly bestowed by friends, but fitting nonetheless. It was his first taste of young love, sweet and electric, filled with long walks, whispered dreams, and cassette tapes shared in secret. Though life would eventually pull them in different directions, Annette would always occupy a quiet corner in Lance’s memory—his first great muse.

He joined a breakdancing group called The Outlaws. They practiced religiously in the yards and community centers, rehearsing moves like the windmill, backspin, and head glide. The group gained notoriety and was even featured in the Portmore News after a memorable performance at a neighborhood barbecue. That day, Lance danced like his life depended on it. Mama was in the audience, screaming proudly, “Go deh Rambo!”

Rambo. That was the nickname he earned one afternoon after a violent altercation in the community. A group of older boys had ganged up on his younger brother, Wayne, and without hesitation, Lance had stepped in—armed with nothing but a broken bottle and fierce determination. He didn’t see himself as brave; he saw himself as a big brother. But in the eyes of his friends and family, that act of courage branded him forever. He was Rambo—the defender, the protector, the warrior.

These years were foundational. They were filled with books and bruises, laughter and longing. Life in Denham Town wasn’t easy—it was raw and real—but it was also rich with meaning. And through it all, Lance carried one thing above all else: the unshakable belief that his life was a story worth telling. A story just beginning.

After graduating from St George’s College, Lance faced a question that haunts many bright Jamaican youth: what next? University was a dream, but not yet a reality. The cost was too steep, and time seemed too short. But teaching? That felt natural. That felt like purpose.

He enrolled at **The Mico Teachers’ College**, a historic institution nestled along Marescaux Road in Kingston. It was a place where boys and girls became educators—leaders in the making—and where traditions ran deep. Mico wasn’t easy. The work was rigorous, and the expectations high. But Lance thrived.

He found kinship among fellow students like Orson Nelson (Nello), Lennox Christie (DJ Lennox), Michelle Needham (Michieboo), Joel Findlay, Karen Miller, Aston Shaw (Stretch), Dennis Davis (PJ), and many others. It was a melting pot of ambition and camaraderie, with debates on politics over patties, group projects that turned into sleepovers, and evenings spent studying in the hush of the library.

Under the guidance of passionate lecturers—especially Ms. Dorrett Campbell—Lance emerged as one of the most promising English students in the entire Class of 1994. Ms. Campbell, sharp-eyed and no-nonsense, saw in Lance what few others did: not just a love for literature, but an instinct for shaping it into something useful, powerful, and healing. She challenged him with Chaucer, seduced him with Shakespeare, and grounded him in the rhythms of Caribbean literature—from Brathwaite to Lorna Goodison.

But more than texts and terms, Mico solidified Lance’s love for **teaching**. It was in those lecture halls that he realized storytelling wasn’t just art—it was survival. Literature and Religious Education had saved him in the quiet corners of Denham Town. Now, he wanted to offer that same lifeline to others.

In 1994, teaching diploma in hand, Lance returned to his alma mater, **St**

**George’s College**, this time not as a student, but as a teacher of **English and Religious Education**.

The classrooms were cramped, often packed with over 40 boys, some noisy, some disinterested, many full of potential. The blackboard was his battlefield, the chalk his weapon. But Lance had something even more potent: **passion**.

He read Shakespeare with a patois twist. He dramatized Chaucer, brought Psalms to life with reggae beats, and taught *To Kill a Mockingbird* through the lens of Jamaican justice. Students listened. Some for the first time.

In Religious Education, he went beyond scripture. He taught about world religions—Islam, Hinduism, Rastafari. He spoke about belief, community, and how spirituality shows up in dancehall just as much as it does in a pew. The boys connected with that. And they performed. In 1995, Lance's GCE Religious Education class achieved a **79% pass rate**—a school record that remains unmatched.

Among the young minds he helped mold were **Dr. Azizi Seixas** and **Dr. Parris Lyew Ayee**, who would go on to become shining lights in academia and innovation. Lance wasn’t just teaching curriculum. He was shaping futures.

It was during one of his evening adult education classes that Lance met **Sharon**. Sharp, ambitious, and fiercely independent, Sharon was different. She wasn’t there to play games or waste time—she was there to rise. Lance noticed her quiet focus, her measured questions, her strength. And slowly, that respect turned into affection.

Their relationship moved with both spontaneity and sincerity. Long walks. Shared jokes. Quiet conversations under Kingston’s night sky. By late 1995, they were a couple, along with their daughter, **Jilisha**—brilliant, sassy, and wide-eyed from the moment she arrived.

Lance loved being a father. He saw it as his greatest calling yet. But fatherhood didn’t erase the struggle. He was still a young man, still figuring things out. And his temper, his impulsive nature, often led to poor financial decisions and moments of friction. Kingston was beautiful, yes—but it was also harsh, and the cost of living scraped every dollar thin, which at times led Lance to often times committing egregious acts.

As the millennium approached, a whisper began echoing in his mind. A whisper that said, *“What if there’s more out there?”*

The island was his home, his heart—but not his limit.

The horizon called.

And in 2001, **England answered**.

**Act 11: England -The Bridge**

In July 2001, with a suitcase packed tight and hope wedged between every pair of folded jeans, Lance boarded an Air Jamaica flight bound for

**London**.

The skies above Norman Manley International Airport were tinged with grey, a mirror of the unknown he was about to face. Kingston faded into the clouds. Jamaica, with its warmth, its culture, its unfiltered honesty, disappeared beneath him.

London was waiting. But London did not smile. It was July, but to Lance, it felt like **November in Kingston**—chilly, grey, a little too polite. He landed with less than £200 in his pocket and a growing sense of urgency. The streets were unfamiliar. The accents clipped and fast. The Underground railway system was a maze. And the air—cold, thick, and damp—settled in his chest like a warning.

But Lance had not come to retreat. He quickly found a job teaching at **St. Thomas More RC School**, a diverse secondary school in North London. The corridors buzzed with students from every corner of the globe—Somalia, Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, Poland, the Caribbean. Many of them were first- or second-generation immigrants, like him, straddling cultures with unsure feet.

The system was different. The expectations unclear. But the classroom? That was still his kingdom. He taught **English with fire**. Shakespeare, Orwell, Zadie Smith. He drew lines between *Romeo and Juliet* and arranged marriages, between *Of Mice and Men* and racial injustice. He connected grime lyrics to poetic forms, turned essay-writing into spoken word, and made even the most reluctant student feel like a scholar.

His students called him **"Sir"**, but not just out of respect—out of love. He earned their trust, especially the Black boys who rarely saw themselves reflected in authority figures. He talked to them straight, respected their slang, challenged their excuses.

He was **a bridge**—between Brixton and Stratford-upon-Avon, between chicken shops and literary criticism.

After settling into the rhythm of life in London, Lance soon discovered

that survival in a new country required more than a steady teaching job. Though he remained committed to the classroom, he began using the skills he’d developed back in Jamaica and during his early years—specifically his knack for troubleshooting and problem-solving.

During evenings and on weekends, Lance took to fixing computers for friends, neighbors, and fellow teachers. What started as a casual favor soon grew into a side hustle. In communities like Tottenham, Enfield, and Edmonton, word spread quickly: “If your laptop blue-screens or your printer won’t talk to your computer, go see Lance.” He knew how to swap hard drives, upgrade RAM, clean out viruses, and recover precious files. Parents who couldn’t afford brand-new devices found new hope in his repairs, and students often showed up at school the next day with machines that ran like new, all thanks to “Sir.”

At the same time, Lance kept his heart tethered to community and culture. One of his favorite haunts in North London was Burger’s Barbershop—known affectionately to regulars as Simply U. More than just a place to get a shape-up or a fade, Simply U was a cultural institution, a modern-day village square. Jamaican and African men of all ages gathered there to debate football, politics, music, and women. It was where you learned the latest gossip, heard conspiracy theories about the Queen, and argued passionately about whether Pelé or Maradona was the true G.O.A.T.

Lance wasn’t just a customer—he was part of the furniture. Sometimes he’d stop by not for a cut, but just for the vibes, taking a seat under the hum of fluorescent lights, watching clippers dance over scalps as stories spilled like Red Stripe from a cold bottle. Some evenings, tutoring sessions would happen right there—young boys struggling with GCSE English sitting in the corner while Lance explained poetry or essay structure in between banter and laughter.

Tutoring, in fact, became another pillar of Lance’s British life. Whether it was a child of Jamaican immigrants trying to get through SATs or a South Asian girl grappling with George Orwell, Lance took pride in

helping students succeed outside the classroom. His teaching was holistic—it wasn’t just about passing exams, but about cultivating belief, especially in students whose accents, skin color, or postcode often meant they were underestimated. Parents would send him WhatsApp messages: “Mr. Ward, can you help my son with English? He doesn’t listen to anyone but you.” And Lance, always grounded in purpose, obliged.

Just three months into his new life, Lance welcomed **his daughter, Jilisha**, to England. She was six now—clever, inquisitive, Jamaican to the bone. She brought a kind of grounding that even poetry couldn't provide.

Nine months later, **Sharon** joined them, and the family settled in **Southgate**, on the northern fringes of North London.

It wasn’t glamorous. It was a one-bedroom flat with creaky floorboards and a leaky window. But it was home. It was warm with laughter, busy with school drop-offs, work commutes, Saturday cleaning rituals, and big pots of Sunday rice and peas. Lance and Sharon juggled life the way immigrant families do—stretching paychecks, dodging late fees, and navigating a system that wasn’t built with them in mind. Sharon worked tirelessly, eventually earning her **ACCA qualification**, along with both a **bachelor’s** and a **master’s degree** in accounting. They weren’t rich. But they were progressing.

Lance quickly rose in the ranks at school. He became **Head of House**, overseeing hundreds of students under the banner of *Drexel House*. He inspired them in morning assemblies, rallied them on sports day, and dealt firmly but fairly with discipline issues. Under his leadership, Drexel House achieved **back-to-back first place finishes** in the school’s annual house competitions—a feat not seen in years.

His classroom became a sanctuary for students dealing with everything from immigration trauma to gang pressure. And Lance didn’t just counsel—he listened. He *saw* them. He remembered what it was like to be misunderstood. To be underestimated. To be Black and bright and told to

tone it down.

In **February 2007**, Lance and Sharon welcomed their second child: a bouncing 7-pound baby boy named **Rhys**, born at North Middlesex Hospital in Edmonton.

Rhys was everything his father hoped for—strong, observant, with eyes that always seemed to be watching, absorbing. Jilisha doted on him from the moment he came home, thrilled to be a big sister.

The family moved again, this time to **Hornbeams Avenue in Enfield**, where they carved out a small but stable life in a three-bedroom house. It wasn’t perfect. But it was theirs. There were arguments, there were reconciliations. There were late-night fried dumpling cravings, and days when London felt like a cage instead of a city. But through it all, Lance stayed anchored in two things: **teaching** and **family**.

And football. Always football.

Whether it was cheering on Rhys at his first kickabout or screaming at the TV during a Manchester United match, Lance remained that same boy from Tulip Lane—heart beating to the rhythm of the ball.

The years passed with the quiet hum of routine. By 2010, Lance had become a fixture in North London education. He had taught thousands of students. Some moved on to university. Some disappeared into the system. But a few returned—to shake his hand, to say thank you. One even brought him a copy of his first published book, with a note inside: *“Sir, I’m a writer because you made me believe I had something to say.”*

That note lived on Lance’s wall for years.

At home, life was both steady and complicated. **Jilisha** was growing into a young woman—sharp-tongued, funny, and unbothered by nonsense. She had her mother’s ambition and her father’s love of stories. Lance and Sharon navigated parenting like seasoned sailors—sometimes smooth,

sometimes stormy.

**Rhys**, the baby who often fell asleep on Lance’s chest during *Match of the Day*, was now sprinting through the house, building Lego empires, and asking impossible questions about the stars. Lance loved being a father. Even on the hard days.

Sharon, meanwhile, was carving out her space in the corporate world. The same woman who once juggled diapers and night classes was now balancing budgets in an office full of men in suits. She never bragged. She just *did the work*. That was Sharon. They weren’t rich, but they were comfortable. They weren’t perfect, but they were together. Mostly.

But there were cracks in the façade.

Lance had started to feel the weight of the British classroom. The bureaucracies. The rigid Ofsted inspections. The subtle racism that lingered like smoke after a fire. He’d been mistaken for the janitor. He’d been told his accent was “too much” in meetings. He’d watched as white colleagues were promoted ahead of him—less qualified, less committed, less effective. But more acceptable.

It stung. Especially when he looked into the eyes of students who needed him. He tried to speak out. To push for more culturally responsive teaching. To challenge the narrow reading lists. To bring Caribbean voices into the curriculum. Sometimes he was heard. Most times, he was tolerated.

But **Lance was not made to be muted**.

He started speaking at small community events. On weekends, he led workshops at libraries. He mentored Black boys through youth programs and cricket clubs. He kept reminding them: *“Don’t let this system tell you what you’re worth.”*

By 2013, Lance found himself staring at the same horizon he had faced back in Kingston nearly fifteen years earlier.

The questions returned:

*“What else is out there?”*

*“Can I grow here anymore?”*

The UK was home—but it wasn’t **his**. Not fully. Not forever. He had family in **Florida**. The sun, the palm trees, the pace of life—it all reminded him of Jamaica. But more than that, the **promise** of America whispered to him again. He dreamed of teaching again—this time in a place where he could reinvent himself. Where the weight of Englishness wouldn’t pin him down. And so, in **2014**, Lance made the leap.

Another plane. Another goodbye.

This time, with more gray in his beard. With grown children behind him. And a new chapter ahead.

**Act III: USA – The Fruit**

In the fall of 2014, **Florida** welcomed Lance with a familiar warmth.

The sun wasn’t Kingston’s sun, but it was close. The breeze carried no patois, but the air was thick with promise. After years under grey British

skies, the brightness of Broward County made Lance feel like he could breathe again.

He landed in **Aunty Bar’s** house—a quiet neighborhood filled with hibiscus bushes and retirees watering lawns before sunrise. It wasn’t London, and it wasn’t Denham Town. It was something in-between. Something new.

America, though romanticized by many back home, was no paradise. And Lance, ever pragmatic, knew that from the start.

He didn't step immediately into a classroom. At first, Lance worked as a **life insurance agent**, selling policies door-to-door and over the phone. It was humbling. He missed the chalk, the conversations, the poetry of teaching. But he needed to work. The bills came monthly. Florida rent wasn’t forgiving. And his family—though still in London—depended on his stability. **Sharon** managed the household like a general. **Jilisha** was preparing for university. **Rhys** was thriving in school.

They visited during summers, and Lance sent money home, bought school supplies online, and helped with homework over WhatsApp video calls. Distance made the heart more inventive.

The plan was temporary. The **classroom was calling**, even if his path back to it took longer than he hoped.

Back in England, his children flourished.

**Jilisha**, always driven, graduated from **Hull University** with a degree in **Criminology and Psychology**, and later added a **Master’s** to her name. Her mind was sharp and her heart grounded—just like both her parents. Lance beamed with pride every time he introduced her as “my daughter, the scholar.”

**Rhys**, too, was excelling. In primary school, he collected awards like coins—reading, math, science, ICT. In 2018, he passed his high school entrance exam with a perfect score and enrolled at **Goffs Academy** in Broxbourne, a top-tier school in Hertfordshire.

Even from across the ocean, Lance was there—reviewing essays, sending encouragement, and bragging about them to his American coworkers who now knew the names “Rhys” and “Jilisha” like they were celebrities. But even with this joy, something gnawed at him.

He brought that same spirit of resourcefulness and community with him. In Florida, particularly in Lehigh Acres, the landscape shifted but the passion remained. Though no longer in London’s fast-paced swirl, he found peace in new traditions. One of his greatest joys was cooking jerk chicken on weekends. With a drum grill stationed outside his house and reggae beats thumping softly in the background, Lance became a neighborhood attraction. Smoke curled into the humid air as the seasoned chicken sizzled, coated in a homemade marinade passed down from his grandmother’s recipe. Neighbors would stop by just to ask, “Is that pimento I smell?” Some would walk away with a tin foil plate, others with an invitation to stay and chat. The act of grilling wasn’t just culinary—it was cultural, a thread of memory tying him back to Portmore and Denham Town, where outdoor cooking was ritual.

By early **2020**, just before the world changed, Lance felt the spark again.

He saw an opening for an English Language Arts position at a Charter **School in Cape Coral**, Florida. He applied, was interviewed, and accepted.

The classroom welcomed him like an old friend.

Gone were the blazers and ties of London. Here, kids wore hoodies and sneakers. They called him **Mr. Ward**, with that lazy Florida drawl. They weren’t familiar with Caribbean proverbs or Orwellian metaphors—but they were eager, curious, and open. Lance didn’t try to “Americanize” himself. He brought **himself** to the classroom: his accent, his swagger, his stories. He read *The Giver*, *Holes*, *Of Mice and Men*—and always connected them to real life. To identity. To resilience. To survival.

He brought in reggae music when discussing themes. He had kids write letters to their future selves. He started a **creative writing club**. He introduced them to **Jamaican patois**, conch shells, folk tales, and poems

that sang with rhythm and power.

One student asked, “Why your English sound different?”

Lance smiled and said, “Because I’ve lived in three places where people speak it three different ways. But I promise you—my stories sound like home.”

By the end of his first semester teaching in **Lee County**, Lance had found his rhythm—and so had his students. They loved his style. His metaphors. His no-nonsense tone balanced with laughter. They’d enter his classroom buzzing, eager for what he’d say next.

To them, he was more than a teacher—he was a **storyteller**.

He taught *The Giver* like a parable, *Of Mice and Men* like it was happening outside their schoolyard. When he taught poetry, he brought in Bob Marley lyrics, Maya Angelou, and Claude McKay. He’d stand at the front of the room and perform lines, voice rising and falling like waves. The students didn’t just analyze—they *felt* the words.

Some of them came from broken homes. Some had been told they wouldn’t graduate. Some hadn’t read a full book in years. But Lance treated each one like they were already **a future author**, a future speaker, a future leader.

Lance didn’t just teach standards—he taught **life**.

He started **journaling Fridays**, where students wrote about real experiences—grief, hope, embarrassment, dreams. These journals became sacred. No grades. No red ink. Just words. Pure, unfiltered, honest.

He read every single one.

One student wrote about losing her brother to gun violence. Another confessed his fear of never being “smart enough.” A quiet boy named Elijah shared his dream of being a rap artist, but how people laughed when he spoke.

Lance wrote back in the margins:

*“Elijah, your voice is your superpower. Keep writing. The world needs it.”*

Those words? Elijah printed them out and taped them inside his locker.

Lance wasn’t just transforming language scores. He was transforming **lives**.

He launched a **Black History Month project** where students could research their ancestry, create family trees, and present on their cultural heroes. Some discovered lost relatives. Some learned about Haiti, Nigeria, Jamaica, Cuba—for the first time.

He invited musicians, community leaders, even a local police officer of Caribbean descent to speak. They played steelpan. They shared proverbs. They broke stereotypes.

Lance didn’t care about state rankings or rigid tests. He cared about confidence. About curiosity. About courage.

The principal noticed. Parents began requesting him by name. Colleagues asked him to lead professional development on “student engagement.” But Lance stayed grounded.

He still woke up before dawn. Still called **Rhys** before school and sent WhatsApp messages to **Jilisha** after work. Still watched **Manchester United** every Sunday—even when they lost, which lately, felt too often.

Sometimes, in the silence after the last bell, Lance would sit alone in his classroom. The whiteboard would still bear the day's quote. His desk would hold a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, marked up and worn. He’d sip cold coffee and look at the photo pinned above his monitor—a young boy in khaki uniform, arms crossed, smiling outside a zinc-roof house in Kingston. That boy had dreamed big.

That boy had survived Tulip Lane, St George’s football fever, heartbreak, migration, racism, and financial struggles.

That boy had grown into **a man who planted stories like seeds**, across three continents.

Now in his fifties, Lance doesn’t think about retirement. Not seriously. There are still too many poems unwritten. Too many students who need to be told they *can*. He mentors young teachers online—especially those

from **Jamaica**, helping them prepare for exams, navigate visa processes, and survive their first classrooms abroad. He sends **books** back to schools in Kingston. He Zooms into literature classes at Mico and St George’s College when invited. His voice is steady. Humble. Certain.

Because now, he knows what he is.

A teacher.

A father.

A builder of bridges.

**The Guinep Tree**

Sometimes, on warm Florida evenings when the air sits heavy and the birds retire early, Lance dreams of **Denham Town**. He dreams of Tulip Lane, of his mother’s voice calling from the kitchen window, of Aunt

Amanda’s double-decker bed where he first fell in love with words. He dreams of guinep trees, of running barefoot on dusty roads, of the clamor of cousins and the rhythm of distant reggae on a neighbor’s radio.

One memory, in particular, returns often:

He is ten. Climbing the guinep tree in the yard. Reaching for the highest fruit. He slips. Falls hard. Skins his elbow. His mother rushes over—but doesn’t scold. She helps him up, dusts him off, and says simply:

*“You’ll climb again, Lance. You always do.”*

He never forgot that.

Over the decades, Lance has lived in three countries, taught in three education systems, and mentored thousands of young minds. From the bustling classrooms of Kingston to the multicultural corridors of North London, and finally, to the sunlit schools of Southwest Florida, his life has unfolded like a novel—rich in struggle, triumph, and meaning. He has taught in inner-city schools where textbooks were scarce and hope even scarcer. He has worked in British schools filled with immigrant children who, like him, were trying to find a voice in a system that barely saw them. And now, in the American South, he continues to do what he has always done—teach with purpose.

His children have grown. Jilisha, once a wide-eyed little girl who scribbled stories in lined notebooks, is now a confident, well-educated woman with a voice of her own. Rhys, the baby boy who used to fall asleep to bedtime tales and football commentary, has matured into a thoughtful young man, grounded in values his father and mother fought hard to instill. His family is his anchor, his mirror, and his legacy.

His students, too, have gone on to do great things. Some became teachers, some engineers, some artists, and some activists. Many are now parents themselves, passing down the same encouragement they once received from a Jamaican-born English teacher who taught them that literature is not just about reading—but about understanding the human experience.

For Lance, success isn’t defined by headlines or accolades. It’s found in

the emails from former students who say, “You believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself.” It’s in the nervous first-year teacher who seeks him out for mentorship, and in the eyes of a struggling eighth grader who finally “gets” metaphor because Lance made it feel like a song.

He has seen educational policies change. In Jamaica, he saw passionate teachers do more with less, creating miracles from chalk and devotion. In the UK, he watched standardized exams narrow creative potential, even as teachers resisted with ingenuity. In the U.S., he has learned to navigate data walls, lesson plan templates, and the relentless pressure of accountability metrics. But through it all, Lance’s approach has remained steady, b**ecause the essence of his work remains the same:**

📚 **Teach them stories.**

Lance has always known that stories are bridges—between people, between generations, between hearts. He teaches not only the great texts—Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Orwell—but also local voices, Caribbean poets, and contemporary writers who reflect the faces in his classroom. He believes that when students see themselves in literature, they understand that their experiences, their pain, their dreams, are worthy of record. Stories teach empathy. They challenge assumptions. They let a child in a Cape Coral classroom understand the struggles of a sharecropper in the Deep South, or the power of protest in a Bob Marley lyric. For Lance, storytelling is not entertainment—it is survival. His classroom is a library of lives. He lets students read fiction and memoir, yes, but he also lets them write their own truths. “Your life is a story,” he tells them. “Start writing it before someone else does.”

🎤 **Let them speak.**

In every country he has taught, Lance has encountered children who feel voiceless. Some were silenced by trauma. Others by a system that told them they didn’t belong. Some just didn’t know how to speak their truth—yet. Lance creates space for their voices. He uses journals, spoken word poetry, dramatic readings, and class debates. He invites guest speakers from the community—barbers, DJs, nurses, veterans—to show students that wisdom doesn’t only come in suits and titles. He encourages accents. He celebrates cultural slang. He lets them express themselves

in the language that raised them. Whether in patois, Spanglish, or Southern drawl, Lance teaches that communication isn’t about perfection—it’s about **connection**. Because when students are allowed to speak, they begin to believe they have something worth saying.

🌍 **Help them belong.**

Lance knows what it feels like to be the outsider. He has lived the awkward silence after pronouncing a word differently. He has been mistaken for the janitor. He has watched his culture be exoticized, ignored, or misrepresented. That’s why his classroom is built on the foundation of belonging. Flags hang from the ceiling. Music from around the world plays softly during writing time. Cultural celebrations are held with food, storytelling, and laughter. He makes every student feel seen. Whether they’re from Haiti, Honduras, Pakistan, or Palatka, Florida—they matter. He greets them at the door by name, asks about their families, remembers who has a soccer match that evening or whose grandmother just passed away. Belonging is built in the details, and Lance pays attention.

He introduces his students to each other’s histories—Black history, Indigenous history, immigrant history—not as “other,” but as central to the American story. He teaches them that diversity is not a checkbox. It’s the fuel that powers innovation, resilience, and progress.

Because Lance didn’t just want to teach English. He wanted to teach students how to navigate a world that may not always welcome them. He wanted to give them tools—not just to read or write, but to question, to feel, to lead. He teaches not from theory, but from lived experience. And that experience tells him that **belonging isn’t passive—it’s created**. Every day. One word at a time. Now in his fifties, with silver in his beard and stories carved into his voice, Lance continues to rise before dawn. He still tweaks lessons, searches for new poetry, checks in on former students. He still laughs loudly in the staffroom and cries quietly at home when a student shares something too heavy for words.

He teaches with urgency, with love, with the memory of a ten-year-old boy reading Spiderman comics beneath a bunk bed in Denham Town.

He teaches them stories.

He lets them speak.

He helps them belong.

And in doing so, he ensures that no matter where life takes them—whether to college or trade school, to Wall Street or the Navy, to the stage or the streets—they will carry within them the echo of his voice. A quiet, powerful reminder:

**“You belong.”**

**“Your words matter.”**

**“Write your story.”**

Because that’s what he has done. For decades. Across three continents.

And he’s still writing.

Books were always his **passport**. They carried him across oceans, through time, and into the minds of people he would never meet. From a dusty tenement yard in Denham Town to lecture halls in London and sunlit classrooms in Florida, books were the constant thread. Long before boarding a plane or submitting a visa application, Lance had already travelled the world through words. They weren’t just stories—they were lifelines. They taught him empathy, built his imagination, and gave him the courage to see beyond poverty, beyond pain, beyond borders.

Words, too, became his **shelter**. In a world that could be harsh, unfair, and unforgiving, language gave Lance power. It gave him a voice. When nothing else made sense—when life was chaotic, when finances were tight, when relationships cracked under pressure—he could always return to the page. To the metaphor. To the magic of expression. In his most uncertain moments—whether standing at the front of a rowdy Jamaican classroom, navigating microaggressions in an English staff room, or adjusting to the test-heavy, data-driven culture of American schools—it was language that steadied him. The act of storytelling wasn’t just performance; it was prayer, protest, and preservation. In every book he taught, in every journal entry he read, Lance found connection. And through connection, he found healing.

Teaching was, and still is, his **revolution**. It is how he pushes back against every statistic that underestimated him. It is how he lifts others

who feel unseen. His chalk and whiteboard markers are weapons of change; his classroom, a battlefield for minds yearning to believe in themselves. Lance never saw education as the simple transfer of knowledge—it was a sacred act, a way to plant seeds in broken soil. To tell a child who had never been told: “You matter.”

Now, in a Lee County middle school classroom filled with doodled desks and loud dreams, Lance continues to do what he was born to do. The setting has changed, but the mission hasn’t. The Florida sun may warm his skin now, but it’s the same fire that burned inside the boy from Tulip Lane who once read Hardy Boys mysteries under a giant bed. He walks then rows of his classroom with practiced grace, pausing to challenge a metaphor, correct a sentence, or offer encouragement with a half-smile and a quiet nod. His students—diverse, opinionated, wide-eyed—may not know where Kingston is or understand the full depth of his accent, but they understand him. They feel him. Because the truth of a good teacher doesn’t lie in their credentials—it lies in their presence.

He tells them, “Your life is a story. You get to write it. Make it bold. Make it messy. Make it yours.”

And when he looks around the room, he doesn’t just see teenagers. He sees potential. He sees brilliance yet to be polished. He sees a future filled with doctors, rappers, activists, poets, engineers, and peacemakers. He sees **Jamaica in their rhythm**, **England in their reasoning**, and **America in their ambition**. He sees echoes of himself—curious, rebellious, reaching. Always reaching.

For many of his students, Lance is the first teacher who ever truly listened. The first who said, “I believe in you” and meant it. Some of them walk into his class with emotional wounds too deep to name. Some have never heard their heritage spoken with pride. Some feel invisible. But when they enter The Room, they are seen. They are heard. They are reminded that their story—no matter how painful or incomplete—is worth telling.

The fruit of the guinep tree is small, sweet, and hard to reach. It doesn’t give itself easily. But it teaches **patience**. It teaches **hunger**. It teaches **resilience**. Lance has borne fruit—not just in his children, or his career, but in every student who walked out of his classroom believing they mattered. In every young mind that dared to dream, dared to question, dared to write.

And even now, as the years stretch forward, he keeps climbing—toward better lessons, deeper impact, and the infinite possibilities still waiting in every student’s blank page. When he sits quietly on his porch in Lehigh Acres with a book in one hand and a cup of tea in the other, he reflects not on test scores or titles, but on stories. On moments. On lives changed.

He has lived a journey in three acts. From Jamaica’s zinc-roof beginnings, to London’s busy corridors, to Florida’s hopeful classrooms, Lance has remained the same at his core—a storyteller. A believer in transformation. And the story is far from over.

**Lemuel Teal Middle School**

Having completed the BSI mission at Lemuel Teal Middle School, where he teamed with Onika Vassell, a stalwart of a teacher, Lance set himself to depart, with the satisfaction of a job well done. The corridors that once echoed with unfamiliar voices now carry memories of growth, laughter, and resilience. For nearly a year, he had stepped into a school in transition, uncertain of its direction, and helped plant seeds of renewal. From the first chaotic staff meeting to the final end-of-year assembly, Lance’s presence had become more than a contractual obligation—it had become part of the school’s heartbeat.

The Bureau of School Improvement program had been a tough assignment. Lemuel Teal was no ordinary school. It was a melting pot of broken stories: students displaced from other districts, children recovering from trauma, and families clinging to education as their last

hope. From day one, Lance approached the task not just with structure and discipline, but with empathy. He understood that beneath the angry outbursts and defiant silences were stories waiting to be heard. He became a listener first, then a guide. And slowly, students responded. Trust, once foreign in the hallways of Lemuel Teal, began to sprout.

He remembers his first interaction with Isaiah, a seventh grader known for being disruptive and disengaged. In the beginning, Isaiah barely made eye contact. But through consistent conversation, shared jokes, and moments of accountability wrapped in compassion, Isaiah started showing up—not just physically, but emotionally. By the end of the semester, he was reading Langston Hughes aloud in class and leading his peers in group projects. Lance saw in Isaiah what he’d seen in many students across the globe—a boy waiting for someone to believe in him.

There were many such stories.

Students like Jazmine, who once burst into tears over a group assignment, but who later stood on stage to deliver a speech about perseverance. Or Carlos, who used to skip class, and now asked for extra credit work. These were the quiet victories Lance carried with him, the intangible rewards of teaching that no test score could measure.

Administrators noticed. So did parents. The staff room, once cold with disconnection, began to buzz with collaboration. Lance had not only earned respect, he had helped redefine the culture.

**Return to Lehigh Acres Middle**

**As Lance prepares to return to Lehigh Acres Middle School in August**, he finds himself pausing more often—on the porch, in the quiet of early mornings, or while seasoning meat for one of his legendary Sunday jerk chicken sessions. The Florida sun, already bold and unforgiving in July, stretches itself across the yard like a seasoned storyteller, eager to remind him of the heat, the hustle, and the hope that fills every academic year.

He sips his Guiness, brewed strong with a hint of lime, and watches the

yard come alive. Birds flit between branches, a squirrel darts across the fence, and the neighbor's children laugh in the distance. It’s a moment of calm—rare, precious. These are the in-between spaces where Lance gathers himself. He is not just preparing lesson plans. He is preparing his mind, his heart, his entire spirit for the weight and wonder of another school year.

August is more than a date on a calendar. It’s a calling.

Back-to-school season carries an energy that only teachers truly understand. The anticipation of fresh faces. The weight of new responsibilities. The unspoken prayer that this year, maybe, just maybe, we’ll reach that one student no one else could. For Lance, this time of year brings both urgency and reverence. Urgency to innovate, to inspire, to ignite minds. Reverence for the sacredness of the classroom—the one place where transformation is not only possible but expected.

As he begins to organize his supplies—Expo markers, anchor charts, copies of *Of Mice and Men*, and the first week’s journal prompts—he reflects on how far he’s come. **Lehigh Acres is his third act**, but not his final one. Each chapter of his life—Jamaica, England, and now America—has carved something into his being. And now, in this sun-drenched suburb tucked between Cape Coral and Fort Myers, he brings the full force of that experience into a middle school classroom humming with adolescent energy.

His students at Lehigh Acres Middle come from every corner of the world. Some speak English as a second language. Others carry trauma heavier than their backpacks. A few are confident, most uncertain. All are searching—for voice, for place, for meaning. And Lance is determined to meet them where they are. Not with pity. But with possibility.

In his classroom, **learning begins with belonging**. The first week of school is never about syllabus coverage or seating charts. It’s about building a tribe. Posters with quotes from Toni Morrison and Kendrick Lamar line the walls. A world map displays pins from students’ countries of origin. Desks are arranged in collaborative pods—not rows. His rules

are simple: Listen deeply. Speak truth. Respect difference. Be brave with your words.

Each year, he begins with a writing exercise titled “The Story of Me.” No restrictions, no grades, just a blank page and a prompt: *“Tell me who you are.”* Some students scribble furiously. Others stare into space. A few fold their arms, skeptical. But Lance knows the power of the page. He waits. He nudges. He encourages.

And slowly, stories begin to bloom. A student from Haiti writes about escaping political unrest. A girl from rural Georgia describes her grandmother raising her after her mother was incarcerated. A Puerto Rican boy details the sounds of hurricanes and silence. Each story, raw and radiant, becomes a thread in the classroom’s collective tapestry. Lance reads every one. Writes comments. Highlights moments of courage. “You matter,” he scribbles in the margins. “Keep writing.”

He knows that when students write their truth, they reclaim power.

Teaching English is never just about grammar and themes. It’s about cultivating empathy. When Lance teaches *The Giver*, he draws parallels to cultural erasure and memory. *To Kill a Mockingbird* becomes an entry point to talk about modern-day injustice. Poetry is never just rhyme and meter—it is protest, prayer, and prophecy. Students dissect Tupac alongside Langston Hughes. They write haikus about heartbreak. They turn trauma into metaphor.

But teaching is not always beautiful. Some days, it’s hard. Some days, it’s heartbreaking. Students fight. Parents complain. Policies change overnight. And the pressure—standardized tests, administrative demands, underfunded programs—it mounts. There are days Lance goes home exhausted, questioning if it’s still worth it.

And yet, every August, he returns. Because every August brings another Elijah, another Brianna, another quiet genius who just needs someone to see them. He returns for the moments that don’t show up in data: the student who finally reads a book cover to cover, the shy girl who performs her first poem aloud, the boy who stops skipping class because, “Your class feel different, Mr. Ward.”

He returns for the laughter. For the impromptu dance-offs. For the shared playlists. For the debates that turn into revelations. He returns because teaching is the closest thing to time travel—watching children grow into the best versions of themselves before your very eyes.

This year, he wants to do more. He’s considering launching a podcast with his students, where they interview family members about their immigration journeys. He’s partnering with the social studies department to design a cross-curricular unit on protest movements. He’s ordering blank journals again—the good ones, with thick paper—because he wants his students to see their words as worthy of permanence.

And outside the classroom, life in Lehigh Acres continues to bloom. The home he now owns—a modest, two bedroom house with a screened patio—is a far cry from the rental in Cape Coral. Here, he grills jerk chicken on weekends, welcomes friends and sometimes, hosts neighbors who just want to talk. The neighborhood kids call him “Uncle Lance.” His driveway always smells like pimento and thyme. His kitchen radio always plays a mix of Beres Hammond, Luther Vandross, and NPR. In this space, he is both teacher and elder. Mentor and neighbor. Rooted and reaching.

As the school year approaches, he stocks up on his essentials—composition books, highlighters, granola bars for hungry kids, and teabags for his desk drawer. He updates his reading list, revisits old lessons with fresh eyes, and prints out the quote that hangs on his whiteboard every year:

**“A child who reads grows into an adult who thinks.”**

This, more than anything, is his mission. Not to churn out test scores or report cards, but to plant seeds. Seeds of self-awareness. Of curiosity. Of confidence. And as August approaches, Lance smiles—not because it will be easy, but because it will be meaningful. He knows his students will walk through his door carrying unseen burdens and unheard brilliance. He will greet them with open arms and an open heart.

Because he remembers what it felt like to be unseen.

And he has dedicated his life to making sure no child ever feels that again.

Not in his classroom.

Not on his watch.