



Evan Holmes, St Pauls Bristol

My name is Evan Holmes, but I go by 'Tappis the Poet'. I study at University of Bristol and I'm an Ambassador for Bridging Histories. I'm a father of five and a Jamaica native. My love for the spoken word has helped empower and enrich me as an individual, and I enjoy learning very much.

You're a wonderful poet. These students will be writing poems to express who they are. What advice can you give them?

Just be true to yourself and have fun. It is good to have fun. And hopefully as you're having fun, then memories and experiences will present themselves and they'll inspire you to put pen to paper. But the first thing is to have fun.

That's great advice. The second activity is to share a recipe. Is there a recipe you'd like to share?

It would have to be ackee and saltfish and rice and peas. Rice and peas is our native Jamaican dish, and ackee is one of our national foods, so they merge them together to make ackee and saltfish and rice and peas. I'd see my mum or my grandmum getting

the peas. Sometimes my grandmum would soak the peas the night before so in the morning the peas are quite soft, normally red peas. Then she'd grate the coconut – they never used blenders at the time. So we used to use graters and sometimes our fingers actually getting grated too but I think that's part of the excitement! Then you strain the coconut and get the coconut juice. Boil it and while boiling add some seasons like scallions, garlic all-purpose, whatever seasons stimulate you, pimento. Depending on your level of spice you might add some pepper and then you add the rice. Depending on the moistness you want it is best to have the fire on a low frequency. There are times when you're rushing and the rice loses its moistness, so I've seen my grandmum put a clear plastic bag over the rice, that's one of the things I learned.

And then the saltfish comes next. Put it in some water, get the salt off in the water, and then boil it. There might be some bones. If you're not used to it you might take those out, but there's some nutrients in the bones. Get some seasons – scallion mostly, onions, garlic, tomato and get some oil, and make it not too hot. Season it well and put in coconut milk



in everything, put it in while its getting salted and squeeze in lemon as well. Then while that's cooking, five or ten minutes, add the salt, black pepper, all purpose. Then you get your ackee. Drain the water and put it in, stir it and add some more seasoning, cook five or ten minutes. Its probably not as easy as it sounds, actually!

What is your earliest memory of ackee and saltfish?

When I was younger in Jamaica I grew up in a single parent home, because my dad died when I was really young. So I remember going through a time when we were going through severe hardship, and in Jamaica they have loads of ackee trees, and I think the experience helped mould me into the individual I am in terms of being resilient. Because we were in extreme poverty, hungry, and my mom was pregnant with my younger brother. My mum had a strong feminine attitude and I see where she was coming from in terms of having pride and dignity. I was the eldest and I was thinking oh is there a way we can help ourselves. There was an ackee tree, so I remember I got myself a stick and made a hook to pick the ackees, and I got about a dozen. So I sold some to buy rice. And then I made it a routine every morning to go and pick ackees in the community. And it was so helpful that one school year I was able to go and buy my sister her uniform. So it became a way of survival, and this is why I'm so passionate about ackee, I remember what ackee did for me. That's one of my greatest memories of ackee. And at the time, having ackee was a privilege but having ackee and saltfish was a luxury. We could always have ackee with chicken, but ackee and saltfish was the crème de

la crème.

Is there a street that means something special to you?

I'd say Argyle Road. I used to live in Easton. And Argyle Road was so chaotic 10, 15, 20 year ago. There was so much happening, it was a street of excitement. You'd go out on the street riding your bikes, and people out on the corner doing stuff. Everything was complementing the community in some sense. That's where I also met my wife, so it is memorable for me. There were street parties, it is a road where it allows a lot of multicultural merging to take place. There would be street parties back then with roots rock reggae and just a multitude of people, the sound, the beat... Argyle Road was unique.

Do you have a family story you'd like the share?

My father's mum and my father's dad are from St Mary Jamaica. That's a rural area of Jamaica, so every holiday my mum would ship us off. Because we were from the town they called us townie. It was like being in a new experiment, a new world. The ocean, the rivers, the fruit trees. So in the morning we can't wait and we're up before the sun's down, and my nan would feed the chickens and go to the market on a Thursday to a Saturday and come back Saturday evening. Because that's what rural people usually do, they go and sell produce and take what they need. So while we're waiting on our nan to come back, we are going all over the place like carnival – every day was like a carnival. My granddad used to draw a sarsaparilla and dry it in the sun. They used to go have the sarsaparilla with creamed banana



and it was like medicinal, a native concoction and he'd say "Take it, it'll make you strong" And then when my grandma returns from the market she'd have pre-ripe bananas. We'd have to help in the morning, push the cart with the stuff, and the road is dark and stony. So we'd push the cart to the main road and wait for a truck to come. You could hear one 20 minutes away. Then we'd pack the stuff out and help her get on the truck. And there was also a shallow river. So when you see a bunch of dead leaves in the water you throw them up on the land and see if there are crayfish. So those are some of my rich experiences and my history.

Coming from town going into a rural community, they instil strict rules. It was a life lesson and I think that's what helped me become the individual I am. I adore respect and manners and principle, I think it is a big thing. My mum used to say "Manners take you through the world". I understand that as time goes by.

Our sixth activity is to be a changemaker, and I know you've been making big changes in your life, heading to University of Bristol. Tell us about that, and what advice would you give young people?

My journey to university came from my love of spoken word poetry. I was invited to do a workshop at the University with Fulbright students, with Bridging Histories. From there I moved on to doing the Foundation Year in Arts at University of Bristol. I just felt like I was supposed to be in the class, like I was supposed to be on that kind of journey as

well. So I embarked on it and I'm heading next to a 6-year degree in English Literature and Community Engagement. Bridging Histories has been instrumental in helping me manifest my changes.

You know, during that summer school course, the idea of changemaking came up. I decided I was going to implement real change, practical, real change, by focusing on my personal development. I'm a living example that change is possible and change is real. At the moment I'm going to enjoy learning, and developing my lifetime relationship with the whole idea of learning and knowledge.

What I'd say to kids wanting to make change, is first of all, listen to adults or individuals who come with positive, inspiring options and opportunities. I was young once too, and thought I knew everything, but I didn't. Take time to grow. In Jamaica they used to say it takes a community to raise a child, and I see the importance of that. I can't say don't indulge, but be practical, and listen. Enjoy growing up and try to always be independent. Try to not search for validation outside yourself but within yourself. Jump at opportunities to learn as much as possible, never stop learning. No one is perfect, and life is full of challenges, but always do the right thing. The right thing is always the best thing to do. Positive attitude goes a long way as well. Always take the opportunity to learn. And remember life is for living.

