

AN

ODYSSEY

IN

REGGAE

AND

JOURNALISM

HOWARD MCGOWAN

## PRAISE FOR “AN ODYSSEY IN REGGAE AND JOURNALISM”

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*If you are someone who values your career and strives to find lasting happiness through work, then Howard McGowan’s book is a must-read for you. The book provides a no-nonsense approach to empowerment and truth-telling, which will help you advance in your career... the book is highly relevant and provides a much-needed boost for those looking to take their career to the next level.*

**Michael Whyte**

Sales Manager SportsMax Limited

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*I remember well the days when Howard would often quip, “the pen is mightier than the sword” and he did use his pen in a mighty way! No friend, no fear, no favour, Howard’s loyal followers could count on him to carry the latest in entertainment news garnered from highly placed and impeccable sources in his popular Saturday Gleaner Merry go Round column. I congratulate Howard on using that “mighty pen” to compile a legacy of his personal encounters, frank thoughts and his life’s journey of what I hope will be a best seller. Reggae enthusiasts and young aspiring journalists will find “An Odyssey in Reggae and Journalism” entertaining and inspirational. I encourage you to get your copy.*

**Pat Reid**

Former Co-ordinator, Miss Jamaica Independence  
Beauty Contest

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**HOWARD MCGOWAN**

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ISBN: 978-976-8332-30-1

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First printed: December 2023

Published by:

BambuSparks Publishing

4 Rochester Avenue,

Kingston 8, Jamaica W.I.

[www.bambusparks.com](http://www.bambusparks.com)

Cover Design: Rebeca Designs

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## DEDICATION



*This book is dedicated to my late mother,  
Beatrice (Pinky), my biological children:*

*Howard Jr. (King), Tyra (Princess),  
and*

*Christina*

...

*and those whose lives my presence impacted:*

*Claudine (BQ), Fontella  
and Richard (Richie).*



## CHAPTER 9

### ADVANTAGES OF GOING INCOGNITO



I had never bought into the idea of walking around with a pen, notebook, and in some instances, a tape recorder, as to my mind, this served only to draw unnecessary attention. So, while he was surprised by my “no pen” approach to our first Reggae Sunsplash assignment, my good friend Michael “Mikey” Whyte from the then Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC) came to appreciate the method to my madness.

It was during this time that I earned the moniker “journalist without a pen.” At the end of each night’s performance, we would head back to our hotel in the early morning; without sleep or notes, I’d call in my report to the typing pool and dictate my story which would make that afternoon’s *Star*.

Back to being incognito. The fact that people felt comfortable in my presence made for a more natural environment, and in some cases, the “big reveal” flowed from their mouths without a second thought. A case which comes

readily to mind was backstage Sting, inside the National Stadium in the late 80s. As was my style, I pulled no punches in my reporting and several artistes felt the wrath of my pen as the culture of “no shows” evolved. This came about when acts, duly booked for a show, took the advance (usually 50%) and failed to turn up for the event or refund the promoter’s money.

One such case involved DJ Papa San in his pre-gospel era. I received a call from a promoter in Curacao, who, in tears, told me that San, whom he had booked, failed to show. The result was patrons rioting, and in the aftermath, it caused thousands of dollars’ worth of damage to his club and even worse, his reputation as a promoter was severely tarnished. Naturally, this formed the lead on the entertainment page with Sasafra, San’s manager, calling with the feeble excuse that, due to the time difference, San, who was working in Japan, had mixed up his flight time.

Sometime later at Sting, I was in the company of fellow journalist and friend G. Fitz Bartley, when up walked Papa San. After exchanging pleasantries with Fitz, whom he knew well, San launched into an attack against me.

“The bwoy McGowan down a *Gleaner* a try wreck mi career, him want a shot.”

Sensing he was about to commit career suicide, G. Fitz interrupted him, pointed at me and said, “you know who this man is?”

To which San responded, “No.”

G. Fitz replied, “this is Mr. McGowan.”



San looked as if he had seen Casper the Friendly Ghost, fumbled to shake my hand and suddenly I had become “Boss.”

My next encounter with Papa San came at the staging of one of the top calendar stage shows during the late 80s to late 90s, “Fresh.” Staged by B&C (Bonnie and Country) Promotions, it was held the first Sunday in the New Year at Forth Clarence Beach, St. Catherine. It was January 1992. By this time, the “relationship” between Pap San and I had really deteriorated beyond repair, even with G. Fitz Bartley trying his best. It seems San had a knack for either being a no show or arriving late for his place on the running order of shows. For this, he, like others, received no “kid glove” treatment from me.

To further compound matters, a writer who masqueraded as a journalist at a rival paper, *The Record*, for reason best known to him, jumped to San’s defence, labelling me “Poison Pen.” So, there I was, backstage at the usual jam packed Fresh, chilling and observing, always alert. The late Louise Frazer Bennett and a few others and I were in conversation when Papa San and his crew strolled by hurling insults in my direction. Naturally, my cousin Courtney “Eva” Barrett and a “right-hand” friend of mine took offense. Words flew back and forth. But all this time, my eyes were fixed on San while making sure no one got behind me.

When my “right-hand” friend eased off someone who had gotten too close, San reached out, “chucked” me in the face and all hell broke loose. Punches rained every which way until the security on duty intervened.

Back in office the Monday, no worse for the wear, I reported my ordeal to Dr. Stokes. I declined to make a police report, but Dr. Stokes issued a decree that Papa San's name was not to appear, in either *The Gleaner* or *Star* for at least six months.

Papa San was not the only DJ to feel the power of my pen.

I had forged a powerful working relationship with cartoonist Clovis and following the blitz of shows during the year end silly season I would review these shows as well as major shows such as Reggae Sunsplash which would be accompanied by one of his cartoons. So, following Dancehall night at Reggae Sunsplash one year I got the brilliant idea of getting Clovis to do a particular cartoon to go along with my review.

Let's just say DJ Spragga Benz was less than impressive on the night, so I not only referred to him as Spragga Lada (a cheap car mostly used as taxis) so Clovis had a Benz hooked up on a wrecker being towed. A couple weeks later, Spragga performed at the then popular Mirage Night Club in Sovereign Centre. For some reason, I was not in attendance and according to reports, Spragga went on the attack. I was labelled a homosexual and was only targeting him because he refused my advances and informed me what I should do with my mother—considered the mother (pun intended) of all insults.

## Equal Opportunity Basher

In 1987, *The Gleaner* sent J.C. Proute and I to a series of seminars and workshops in Trinidad. One of the workshops had as its theme "No Free Lunch." In life and journalism, it

is said that once you have benefited from someone in whatever way, then certainly if you are not beholden, you are at least expected to return a favour in some way. *Quid pro quo*. I clearly remember the look on J.C.'s face when I rose in rebuttal to the theme.

I made the point that given my training and fearless no holds barred style, yes, I may well eat your lunch but will not hesitate to point out your shortcomings. I would like to refer to two situations which I believe aptly underscore this. Michael "Mikey" Whyte and I had been friends since 1983. In the latter part of that decade, he launched a promotion company after leaving the then Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (JBC).

When Yellow Man, for whom he did tour management duties, had a hit with the cover of Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill," an idea was fomented to bring Fats Domino to Jamaica and have both on the same show. Mikey became involved as a producer and sought my advice, and I told him it sounded like a winner but urged him to stay away from the National Arena, as I felt the crowd they were targeting would not support that venue. Well, they chose not to heed the advice, and the result was a disaster crowd wise—an almost empty Arena. So, my review stated that the show was a massive flop.

Then in my Disco Pop column in the Friday Star, I dissected the night's event. By the time the Star hit the streets, I got a call from Mikey saying, "enough already." I pointed out to him that's the price he had to pay for being my friend. It must not be perceived that I am going easy on him because of our friendship.

The second such situation came after I had left *The Gleaner* and started doing a weekly movie review show on CVM Television. Not only was Palace Amusement the sole distributor of movies on the island in 1997, but it was the main sponsor of my show. Well, on one of my shows, I pointed out that a particular movie was so bad I wouldn't cross the street to watch it. It was hardly a surprise when I was summoned to the station manager's office, who sternly reminded me who the show's sponsor was and how dare I say something like that about one of his movies.

I told him that if I was doing the show, my reputation was priceless.

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