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The Ken Gordon School of Communication, Creative and Digital Media

Celebrating 25 Years of COSTAATT



EDITORIAL

Our ‘Little Engine That Could’

Sophia Edwards Knox

In September 2001, when the rest of the world looked on in astonishment at the 9/11 attacks, a few thousand miles away, COSTAATT opened its doors to its first official intake of students. While our beginning might have been overshadowed by this gargantuan event, ask any COSTAATT staff member, and they just might tell you that this has been the hallmark of our journey in tertiary education. You see, our path has been far from smooth. We have at times been perceived as the underdog in tertiary education, and some have described us as the “best kept secret” in the industry.

I, however, disagree wholeheartedly! To me, we have always been “The Little Engine That Could”. In the face of adversity, we have always remained resilient, optimistic and hard working. You don’t get to 22,441 graduates without being a bit brazen in this town! The talent and voices of our students and graduates have propelled us to be one of the premier tertiary education institutions in the country, and, dare I say, the region. I’m sure our competitors don’t think we are a ‘secret’.

True story! I came to COSTAATT in 2002 to study journalism and public relations. I had never heard of the institution and no one else in the country was offering a programme in the discipline. To be honest, I didn’t plan to come to COSTAATT. My friend wanted company to study, so, like any good partner in crime, I decided to follow her into paths unknown.

When we went to the Admissions Department, she was excited and I was neither here nor there. However, when I started the degree, I grew more and more interested and curious about the discipline with every successive course. This was largely because of the lecturers I encountered. This has always been COSTAATT’s superpower, the amazing faculty! In two quick years, I completed my programme. And guess what, my dear friend who encouraged me to do the degree never actually started it, so, basically, I did it alone. I must remember to thank her.

To me, COSTAATT was lifechanging. The educational experience was refreshing and very different from other places I had gone to before. For the first time in my life, I enjoyed learning. From this experience, I knew I wanted to be a part of whatever this new thing was. In 2007 I joined the College’s faculty, and in 2009 I co-wrote what would be the department’s first bachelor’s degree. In 2011, I became the Academic Chair.

Today, I truly appreciate the experience I had as a student, as it has given me a perspective that is very unique. Because of this, the College’s milestones are more than just facts on a page to me. I have lived them!

So, from ACT 77 of 2000, which brought the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago to life on October 27, 2000, to today, we, the Lifers, always believed we could, and that is why we are still here 25 years later making dreams come true.



Christopher Kalloo

The Trinibats and POS-ARU teams prepare for field research shortly before sunset. Arena is a seasonal evergreen forest and one of the country’s 35 proclaimed forest reserves. Story on Page 6.



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The College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) has played a key role in widening access to tertiary education and supporting national development. Over the years, the College has achieved a number of important milestones:

25 Years of Transformation

2000

COSTAATT was established by an Act of Parliament as the national community college, mandated to expand opportunities for tertiary education across Trinidad and Tobago.

2005

Opening of the City Campus in Port of Spain, serving as the administrative and academic headquarters of the College.

2006

First bachelor's degrees: Environmental Management, Water Resource Management and Technology and Radiography

2009

Revision of academic affairs organisational structure into four schools and expansion of its academic portfolio with new Bachelor's programmes in all discipline areas.

2010

First tertiary level institution to achieve Institutional Accreditation from the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT), affirming the College's academic and governance standards.

2011

Establishment of the Ken Gordon School of Journalism and Communication Studies, now the Ken Gordon School of Communication, Creative and Digital Media

2017

Established and received accreditation for the Chaguanas Campus. Reaccreditation of COSTAATT.

2020

Seamlessly transitioned to more online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, with full adoption of Moodle eClassroom and digital support services for students. Training for this began in 2010.

2021

COSTAATT's 20000th graduate crossed the ceremony stage. That figure has since increased to 22441.

2023

As part of its restructuring exercise, COSTAATT introduced the School of Environment, Circular Economy and Sustainability, and renamed the existing five schools

2025

ClearCut, the first publication from the Ken Gordon School of Communication, Creative and Digital Media



Trinibats: Batting for Our Misunderstood Friends



Measuring the wingspan of a Greater Spear-nosed bat (*Phyllostomus hastatus*). Researchers use forearm length to help identify different species, and they check the shape of forearm joints to distinguish between adults and juveniles.

Photos and Story by Christopher Kalloo

If you happen to mention the phrase ‘batting’ to anyone on the street, you’re very likely to hear cricket fans bemoaning the current West Indies team’s struggles with poor shot selection and batting collapses. If you meet an ecologist though, you may get an entirely different answer.

For Trinibats, a conservation group in Trinidad and Tobago, batting simply means the non-destructive capture of bats for scientific study. Founded in 2011 by Trinidadian Geoffrey Gomes and British bat researcher Daniel Hargreaves, Trinibats has worked to raise awareness about the importance of local bat species and to educate the public.

Trinidad and Tobago has had a long history of bat research, with many prominent scientists having studied our bat population to advance our understanding of this often-feared group of animals. Today, Trinibats continues that legacy as one of the few dedicated groups in the country focused on bat research and conservation. Since the group’s incep-

tion, visitors from world renowned universities have come to these shores on bat survey expeditions, as our islands are home to at least 68 bat species. The group also does outreach work with universities and government agencies as part of its mission. One such collaboration took place on June 5th, 2025, at the Arena Forest Reserve in east Trinidad. The

Trinibats team conducted a field demonstration for the Anti-Rabies Unit (ARU) of the Port-of-Spain City Corporation. The emphasis was on building the capacity of the ARU’s staff on ethical and effective bat research techniques, which minimise harm to these small and fragile flying mammals. Darshan Narang, a COSTAATT graduate and ecologist with Trinibats,

explained that the demonstration focused on the use of mist netting, a key technique for capturing and observing the bats. The training’s purpose was to equip the staff of the ARU with the field skills needed to broaden their understanding of bat management that goes beyond just pest control.

Viewing bats as more than just pests is extremely vital since most people tend to have negative opinions of bats, as disease-ridden vermin, a widespread but often misleading misconception. Darshan acknowledged that while the cultural perception of bats as diseased and dangerous is not entirely unfounded, since

some species of local bats do carry the rabies virus, this limited understanding of bats can overshadow the ecological importance of the animals. He said that bats provide essential services such as pest-control, since many species prey on insects that are harmful to both humans and crops. Bats also contribute significantly to the pollination of many night-blooming plant species and help in seed dispersal throughout their various habitats during their feeding activities, which helps in forest regeneration.

Darshan said that Trinibats has a largely scientific focus, while the Anti-Rabies Units under the Ministry of Agriculture primarily focus on bats as disease vectors from a public health standpoint.

Trinibats continues to invite deeper engagement through its public education efforts and encourages anyone interested in learning more about our bat population to reach out to the organisation.



Trinibats member Shivam Mahadeo takes measurements as co-founder Geoffrey Gomes consults the field guide.



Signage at the entrance to the Arena Forest Reserve, 8km south of Arima in east Trinidad.



Tools laid out for a night of research, including *The Bats of Trinidad and Tobago*, co-authored by conservationist and Trinibats co-founder Geoffrey Gomes.



A Hairy-legged Myotis (*Myotis keaysi*) bat being released after being processed by the team. Researchers wear leather gloves to protect themselves from bites.



Trinibats co-founder Geoffrey Gomes (left) talks with members of the Port of Spain City Corporation Anti-Rabies unit: (L-R) Richard Peters, Latoya Mitchell, Sherry-Ann Monroe, and Lynette Lawrence-Mark.

Championing Inclusion Through Sign Language Education

By Faith Cheruiyot

“Language is for communication, not for theatre.”

For over five decades, Dr. Joan Bobb-Ward has dedicated her life to education, shaping inclusive learning environments across primary, special, and tertiary levels. Though retired, the former Dean of COSTAATT’s Tobago Campus sees courses like EDUC 124 Sign Language I as a continuation of that mission.

She believes the course is more than just an interesting elective. “It is a language,” she says. “Deaf people deserve to be able to communicate with us. Too often, we force our language on them, rather than including theirs.”

Dr. Bobb-Ward’s mission statement is simple: Education for all. That priority led her to focus on special education, and it carried her through the ranks from primary school teacher to Principal of the Tobago School for the Deaf, Speech and Language Impaired. There, she immersed herself in the world of deaf education and sign language, experiences that would deeply inform her later research and advocacy.

Today, her focus lies in teaching and expanding the scope of COSTAATT’s sign language offerings.

“The moment a person enters Sign Language I, they can begin to communicate with people who are deaf,” she says. From day one, students learn to fingerspell, greet, and converse at a basic level. Dr. Bobb-Ward designs her classes to be practical and interactive, encouraging group work, peer teaching, and research into new signs.

In her view, sign language should not be confined to a semester-long experience or a performance in church services. Instead, it should be recognized as a full linguistic and cultural system. She envisions COSTAATT eventually offering a certificate in sign language, delving into areas such as deaf culture, deaf history, and the socio-economic realities of the deaf community.

While sign language is a crucial step, Dr. Bobb-Ward believes it is only one of several important communication tools that students should acquire. Media students, for example, should be trained in accessibility practices like captioning, audio description, and sensitivity to

representation. Graduates from nursing and law stand to benefit as well. She has already customized training for Legal Aid officers, tailoring sign language exercises to real-life client interactions. Nurses trained at COSTAATT also leave with the ability to communicate directly with deaf patients. Accessibility training, she says, makes professionals more effective and society more inclusive.

Dr. Bobb-Ward commends COSTAATT’s success in rolling out sign language courses across disciplines and its willingness to customize programmes in special education. “The College has been extremely successful,” she says, noting that students leave with practical communication skills and a newfound confidence in inclusion. However, she further proposes extending sign language training

to faculty, staff, and even security officers. “If any person who is deaf walks into a COSTAATT campus, they should be able to use their language. We must dismantle barriers by learning theirs.”

“Our society comes from a history of exclusion,” Dr. Bobb-Ward says, referencing the legacy of slavery, status, and marginalisation. Overcoming that for persons with disabilities, she explains, requires conscious effort, changing mindsets, providing practical support like ramps and accessible bathrooms, and training leaders to manage change effectively.

Dr. Bobb-Ward believes that inclusion is not a matter of charity, but justice, and she encourages students to adopt an inclusive mindset. She challenges them to teach family and friends what they have learned, and to connect with people in their community who are deaf or living with disabilities. She says that all people have limitations, and that labelling others only perpetuates exclusion.

“We call people handicapped, forgetting that we are the ones who placed the barriers there.”

Dr. Bobb-Ward advocates for systemic change. She calls for public education campaigns to reshape attitudes and prepare the

society for genuine inclusivity. “How you treat a person with disabilities, how you treat a senior citizen, these are measures of a society’s advancement,” she reflects.

Sign language, Dr. Bobb-Ward notes, makes graduates bilingual, more employable, and, most importantly, more compassionate. “When a deaf person meets someone who can sign, they believe that the person cares about them.” Her advice to students considering Sign Language I is simple: take it. “You are entering an exciting new field. It is a beautiful language, and you are contributing to inclusion.” ■



Image: AI-generated

Tobago Love: A Trini Trades Islands

By Martina Renalis-Salazar

When I moved from Trinidad to the sister island of Tobago, I thought it would be a smooth transition: same country, same flag, same currency. I soon realised that this was a different state entirely. Here, time moves with the tide, speech has a different twang, and people take their time with everything - in a way living very much in the moment.

As a Trini, I’m used to fast talk, fast food, and an even faster pace. Here, I had to learn how to slow down or risk being the only one rushing on an island that doesn’t. From roast breadfruit to crab and dumpling, what do you do when your own country suddenly feels like foreign territory?

I got the opportunity to move to Tobago six years ago when my then-employer decided to expand the business to a whole other island. I was a perfect candidate for the new branch: I was 21, I lived on my own and had no responsibilities that anchored me to Trinidad.

“Why, there?” I wondered. “Why not open another branch uptown or in South? Tobago is so slow.”

At that point I had never been to the island.

Still, I grabbed the opportunity without hesitation. With nary a thought for my family, friends or even my boyfriend, I boxed up my life and moved away. Despite many warnings about expensive groceries, anti-Trini discrimination, and “obeah”, I wanted to take the challenge and

explore something new.

And I’m glad I did. From the very first time we opened our doors at the new branch, the island welcomed me like family and all the misconceptions slowly melted away. Tobagonians are friendly and willing to go above and beyond to show the authenticity of who they are and the kind of peace only the island gives. I fell in love with that compassion, the food, and the beauty of the island. From then I decided that I was committed to Tobago, no looking back!

Here are a few things I had to adjust to along the way:

A chill kind of groove

Living in Tobago is like putting your life in slow motion. Nothing is rushed. By 7:30AM in Trinidad, there’s a steady drone of vehicles and sharp bursts of horns everywhere. There’s a constant hustle and bustle, modern overstimulation, and don’t get me started with the bad driving and charged attitudes. Don’t get me wrong: driving in Tobago gives you a sixth sense for the road because sometimes you swear the highway turned into a main road without warning. If you do get a bad drive, it’s not like in Trinidad where people might curse you out. You will get a tight-lipped, apologetic smile: half-hopeful, half-ashamed. The roads here are either empty or traffic is moving at a steady pace. If you reach to work late it’s because you want



Image: AI-generated

to. At first, the quietness and slowness unnerved me. Where was the spontaneous roadside lime? The random soca blasting from a passing car at 10 a.m.? It wasn’t gone; it was just... softer. Tobagonians live with a kind of ease that’s both admirable and, to a Trini like me, slightly maddening sometimes.

One nation, two hearts

Tobago is so much more than its beautiful beaches. Living here, I’ve come to understand the pride Tobagonians feel in their culture. From their history to even their food, it’s all told with a kind of reverence you rarely hear back home. For instance, the Tuesday right after Easter Monday is considered a holiday. When everyone was back out to work in Trinidad, we were headed to Buccoo to see the goat and crab race.

I’ve experienced Tobago Harvest, which

blends community, religion, food, and festivity. Each household in the village cooks up a storm, from crab and dumpling to provision, all the meats you can think of, and the drinks are unlimited. Authentic Tobago food has the kind of taste that stays with you long after the plate is empty. Just imagine me as a Trini going to a complete stranger’s house for food and being ushered inside with a smile. Tobagonians welcome you to celebrate with them. That happens sometimes in Trinidad as well, but in Tobago, it’s a certainty.

What also took me time to get used to is Tobago creole. To this day I still don’t totally understand some of my co-workers. I’ve learned phrases like “Poke ahi poke, no beef”, “It nah yours. Leffum”, or my personal favourite “Come yuh ah come”. You guess what those mean, because I’m still trying to figure them out. It took time for the unfamiliar to

feel familiar, especially with customs I’d never experienced before. Also, let’s just say that in the time I’ve been here, my clothes got snug with love.

A gem tucked in plain sight

What surprised me most wasn’t the beaches or the peace of mind; it was how Tobago slowly became home. I thought this move would have just been temporary, a heartbeat’s worth of time. Now I know the names of my neighbours and their goats, and I’ve found new favourite eating spots. I find joy in traveling on the ferries, in waiting for rain to pass, in feeling life unfold.

Being a Trini in Tobago isn’t always easy, sometimes I do miss the hustle and bustle, the scenic drives and iconic spots. Even though my then-boyfriend is now my husband, that journey hasn’t been without its challenges, especially with him juggling work between both islands and trying to make time for us. My family and school life haven’t been easy either. I’ve had to miss a lot of activities, and even when I do get the chance to participate, I can’t stick around for long since work always calls me back. I truly believe God led me here for a reason. Each day, I continue to discover more about who I am and the light I’m meant to share with others.

It’s a beautiful contradiction - where familiarity meets discovery, and noise gives way to nuance. Every now and then, when the sea breeze catches a stray soca beat from someone’s porch radio, I smile, because I’m still a Trini. Despite its challenges, I’ve learned to live between the beats. When it comes to this little rock, it’s got my heart now too. ■

Life Lessons COSTAATT TAUGHT ME

By Zoë Laydoo

Six years. Two degrees. Two extraordinary internships. 14 semesters, 24 lecturers, 51 courses, and approximately 322 assignments. In December 2024, my journey with COSTAATT came to a bittersweet end at the Ken Gordon School. It has been perhaps my favourite chapter of my life thus far, chiefly because the plot centred around discovering who I am and more importantly: who I could be. During my time at COSTAATT, I gained gems of knowledge and wisdom that transcended academics. I'd like to share the lessons that have stayed with me long after compiling my last bibliography (that's one thing I don't miss!) and, in the process, pay tribute to some of my favourite characters in this story.

Lesson 1:
"Serve dessert first: lead with your best."
- Mr Roddy Batchasingh, March 3rd, 2023
(JOUR 123: Fundamentals of Reporting)

It's always about quality. It's about not just reaching the bar but raising it. I learned that quality often comes from the little details. I also learned to never settle for offering anything less than my best. That meant ensuring my work was of the best quality it could be, even if I had to spend five minutes buried in a thesaurus searching for the right word to convey the meaning and nuance I wanted to, or quadruple-checking assignments before submitting them. No assignment was ever submitted unless I was satisfied that I had led with my best. The result of learning to lead with my best for six years? I became the best version of myself that I've known so far. That's what COSTAATT did for me: it made me stronger. A stronger speaker; a stronger writer; a stronger thinker.

Lesson 2:
"You're a human being, so be before you do. We often put so much focus and effort on 'doing' that the 'being' part of life suffers."
- Ms Michelle Mitchell, March 23rd, 2021
(COMM 120: Critical Reading and Writing Skills for Journalism and Communication Majors)

Balance is key. What no one tells you about giving your best is that it often comes at a price. One of the areas I could have improved on during my degree was following Ms Mitchell's advice and establishing a better balance between "being" and "doing". School (the "doing") became my whole life for those six years while I sacrificed just "being" - so much so that I missed out on what ended up being my grandmother's last birthday because I stayed home to work on an assignment. I don't even remember what assignment or for what course. That was my fault because I prioritised school over family. If I had to do my degree all over again, that's the part I would do differently. But it taught me a valuable lesson, and I've since learned how to strike that balance

between doing my work while also making time to be with my family and friends.

Lesson 3:
"There is no separation or divide between the text and everyday life."
- Ms Sharleen Joefield-Lovell, November 2nd, 2021
(COMM 130: Communication III)

Nothing breathed life into the course material more than the two internships I did in corporate communications and journalism. I was no longer merely reading the text; I was living it. However, as a Mass Communication student, learning was never confined to a classroom. Life truly was (and still is) my classroom because communication is everywhere. Long before those internships, I began to see the theory come alive in my everyday reality. Ms Joefield-Lovell's words rang true: there was no divide. The earliest memory I have of this was learning about public speaking in class, then watching my pastor give a sermon in church and recognising everything my lecturer taught us embodied in his gestures, his speaking style, and his presentation. From then

on, I learned not to confine subject matter to the classroom, but to look for the parallelism in everyday life, which only enhanced my understanding and transformed my perspective as a student.

Lesson 4:
"To be a translator, you have to fall in love with the language."
- Mrs Abigail Guzman, January 23rd, 2019
(SPAN 150: Spanish Contrastive Grammar).

While writing has always been my first love, Spanish is a close second. I excelled at it in secondary school and fell in love with it long before coming to COSTAATT. So, you can imagine the trauma that ensued when, in the first Spanish course I did for my Associate degree, I got a D+ on the first coursework assignment. The second assignment was worse: a D. In my mind, D stood for death sentence. But, this was a language that had already captured my heart, and I wanted to continue excelling in it. So, I buckled down. Every Spanish word Mrs Guzman said in class that I didn't know, I scribbled it in my margin, looked it up in the dictionary afterwards, and memorised it. There was

no space left in those margins sometimes. My vocabulary skyrocketed within a month. On the third assignment, I scored an A, and by the time the course ended, I had a final grade of B+. Three years later, I graduated Valedictorian from that same degree. I never got another D again.

This experience taught me that to succeed at most things, you have to love it. You have to care. When things got tough during both my degrees, passion was what kept me going. My love for languages carried me through my associate degree in Spanish, and I leaned on my passion for writing and storytelling throughout my BA in Mass Communication. But - and this is key - I've also found that while passion will take you far, discipline will take you further.

Lesson 5:
"Remember that your light shines from within. It does not come from your superior academic gifts but from who you are inside."
- Mrs Kim De Silva, May 8th, 2021

Mrs De Silva was my first advisor and mentor, and the first character in my COSTAATT story. This quote from her came not from a class, but from a

video that she and my other lecturers sent on my graduation day for my Spanish degree. I chose it because her words encapsulated a key takeaway from my college experience:

Being a good student doesn't mean being academically gifted. It's not solely about achieving the perfect GPA. Rather, it's about the character and reputation you build along the way. Having a good attitude (even under stress), being open to learning, keeping a little curiosity burning, consistently nurturing a strong work ethic, using your gifts to help others—these are some of the hallmarks of a good student. People won't remember if you got a D in SPAN 140. They'll remember your attitude. They'll remember your reputation. That said, there's nothing wrong with pursuing a high GPA, but it's not the be-all and end-all. Through my journey at COSTAATT, I've learned that a good reputation can open doors that grades alone cannot. Ultimately, numbers and letters don't define us; character does.

Lesson 6:
"So what is social media? My feelings: social media was a mistake. Your goal this semester is to prove me wrong. Make me feel

something. Make me feel like it's worth it."
- Mr Kayode James, September 27th, 2022
(COMM 351: Social Media Communication)

I took this challenge from our fearless Editor-in-Chief here at ClearCut seriously. I made it my mission, not just for that course but for every course, to make him "feel like it's worth it" - except to me, the "it" was more than just social media. He taught me to think bigger. Reach further. Dig a level deeper. In my efforts to make him "feel like it's worth it", I had to unlock the shackles I had placed on my capabilities. To make him feel something, I had to first make myself feel something. It was through this process that I finally understood what the real goal was; what the point of every assignment was; what the point of the whole degree was. It wasn't writing essays or giving presentations. It wasn't even to get an A. The real goal was to craft meaning out of knowledge.

The lesson here, I found, is that the effort we put into leading with our best; the care we show in both our doing and our being; looking beyond

the text; the passion; the discipline; the reputation we build: it all matters. It creates meaning. When we reach the end of the chapter and look back at what we crafted with our minds, our will, and the people who believed in us, it is this meaning that makes our effort worth it.

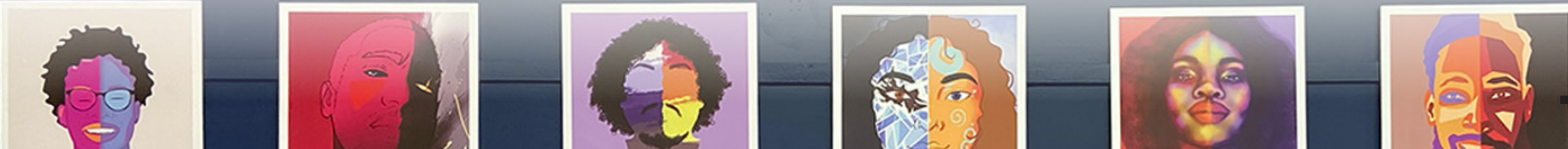
Lesson 7:
"Every story rests on the backdrop of those like it that came before."
- Ms Clarinda Jack, March 24th, 2021
(COMM 135: Voice and Presentation)

My story rests on the backdrops of the people who came before me and the community I found at COSTAATT. That's why I introduced each of these lessons with a quote from the lecturers and mentors who have taught me much more than could ever be found in a course outline. As happy as I was to complete my programme, submitting that last assignment felt like leaving home because over the past six years, that is what COSTAATT has become to me. Here, I found a home and gained a family. I met my best friends in Zoom class during my fully-online Bachelor's in the midst of the second lockdown.

They, along with my lecturers and all the other characters who have played a role in my COSTAATT story, have shown me the value of community and the importance of supporting each other.

All chapters must end, as we know. But that doesn't mean we can't reread them. My research for this article consisted of travelling back in time and scouring six years of notes from almost every course I've ever done to find these quotes from my lecturers. I quite literally reread the entire chapter. In doing so, I saw the metamorphosis from my AA Spanish to my BA Mass Communication; from my first year to my final year. The growth has been so exponential that the person I was when I first stepped foot in COSTAATT would not recognise the person I am now. In my case, COSTAATT's motto became a promise fulfilled. My life is irrevocably transformed for the better by the people who shaped me and the wisdom this experience imparted that I now carry with me beyond the degree.

Happy 25th Anniversary, COSTAATT! Here's to another 25 years of transforming lives, one student at a time.



Six Months of Growth as a Climate Journalist

By Suemita Teeluck

From November 2024 to April 2025, I had the honour of being one of 14 journalists selected from around the Caribbean to be a part of Climate Tracker's Cycle 4 Journalism Fellowship.

However, before getting accepted to this 4th cycle of Fellows, I was rejected...more than once. I first applied two years ago, was shortlisted, and did not make the final list. A year ago, I applied and got shortlisted; I interviewed and was once again turned down. Before applying again in 2024, Climate Tracker's Regional Director reached out to me and asked if I would like to be a part of their 4th cycle. This was the opportunity I had long been waiting for.

Being a part of this phenomenal group of fellow journalists was more than just valuable to my environmentalist pursuits. This Fellowship allowed me to use my voice as a journalist to share my passion for the environment and to focus on climate justice.

The climate crisis affects every corner of our planet and every one of us. Some parts of the world will feel the impact sooner, and more severely. The Caribbean region is especially vulnerable, with its sensitive ecosystems, small island states, and high dependence on natural resources. In this context, discussing and reporting climate justice becomes vital. By understanding and advocating, we can aim for a more equitable and sustainable future in the region.

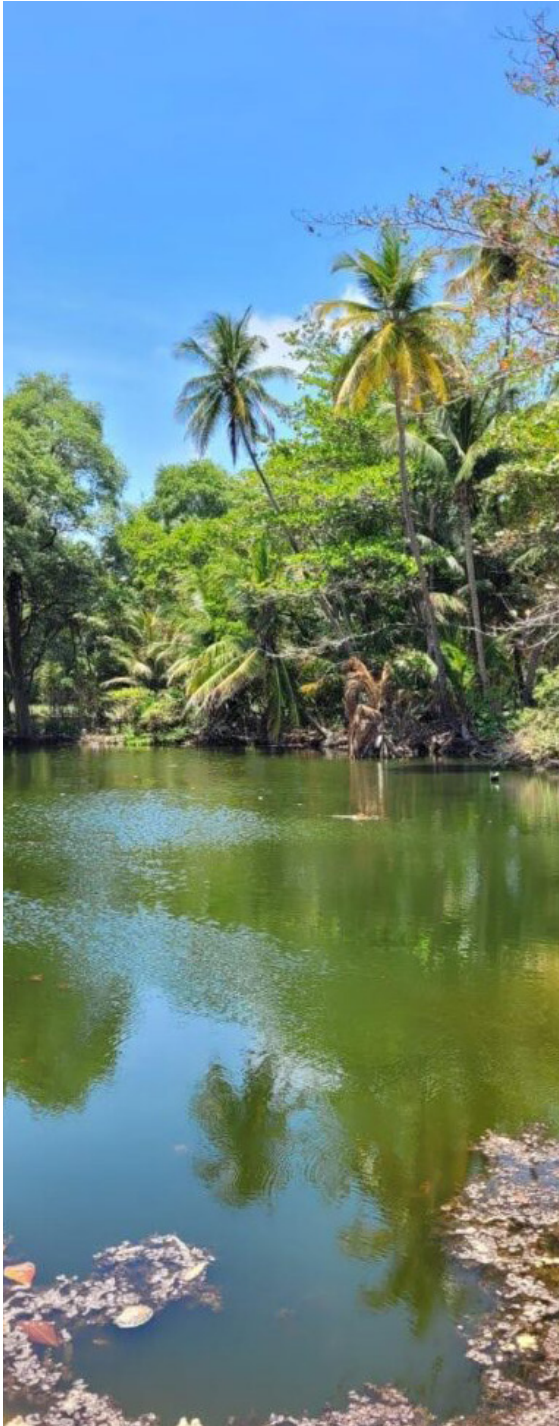


Photo: Suemita Teeluck

Those 6 months at Climate Tracker Caribbean were invaluable to my journey as a journalist. Here are my top 6 takeaways:

There's more to journalism than just covering the news

Sometimes when we're in the field, we can get caught up in being quick and timely. Covering the news involves reporting on events as they happen, but journalism goes deeper than that. Journalism involves investigating, analysing, and providing context, seeking to uncover deeper meaning and offer commentary, which can educate, inform, and empower the public. It's our job to dig deeper.

Journalists are charged with the responsibility of understanding

As a citizen, you're more likely to accept a change if you understand the reason for it. Interestingly, our acceptance seems to hinge less on how much we like the reason and more on how much sense the reason makes to us. As journalists, we seek to understand, and in turn, we help others do the same.

Don't be afraid of the digital age, but... be cautious

Digital technology offers significant benefits like instant news access and global connectivity, but also poses challenges

such as the spread of misinformation, privacy concerns, and information overload. When reporting the news, it allows for wide reach, speed, and cost-effectiveness. The drawback, however, is that it can empower destructive voices, perpetuate the unethical use of AI and promote the spread of misinformation. Despite these challenges, journalists should always use these platforms responsibly.

Knowledge is power

In journalism, the sharing of accurate information is essential. This helps citizens to make informed decisions, to think critically and give rise to a more democratic society. More than this, we have the responsibility to empower citizens, combat misinformation, promote critical thinking, foster media literacy, and, more importantly, hold those in power accountable.

Don't shy away

Even though something may be taboo, underreported, or more difficult to uncover than the obvious angle, you have a duty to push on and write about it, nonetheless. Before my fellowship - and even during - I was constantly told that no one cared to read about the environment, despite it being one of the most crucial topics to cover. I sometimes wonder if being in the field too long desensitises journalists. After those unforgettable six months with Climate Tracker, I am even more committed to being a voice for the voiceless.

Have Audacity

If you're sick of being told "no" and having countless doors slammed in your face, I'm with you.

It's exhausting constantly being told that you should wear rejection like a badge of honour. It gets annoying being told you must have thicker skin in this field. Unfortunately...it's true. For some time, I kept getting shot down. My stories weren't the right fit for a publication, my piercings and blue hair made me an 'unprofessional' journalist,

and my refusal to spend over half my salary on getting to and from work was just me being young and unappreciative. What I learnt, though, is that it gets easier. You will get good at losing. You will accept defeat with grace. More importantly, you will keep trying. And it will be worth it. If you're a journalist, you have to have

audacity. You have to keep going. Nothing bad will ever come from you trying again and again. So, try. Again, and again... and again.



Photo: Suemita Teeluck

Still Tuned In

By Virmala Balkaran

I regularly hear people questioning radio's place in today's media landscape.

With streaming platforms, digital playlists on demand, and endless podcasts, some are quick to believe that radio has already had

its time. But after more than eleven years on air, I cannot agree. Radio still breathes in ways that matter deeply, because what it

offers is not just sound, but companionship.

Since January 2014, I have lived behind the mic, learning every day that radio is more than songs and advertisements. For someone driving home after a hard shift, for the elderly woman who leaves the dial on in her kitchen, for the man who has gone the whole day without a single phone call, the voice on the radio becomes a friend. It carries comfort into empty spaces. It makes someone feel seen when no one else has noticed them. That is not a small thing. It can be the difference between silence that hurts and sound that heals.

Working afternoon drivetime for the past 8 years, I feel this weight and this privilege. The rush of traffic and the weight of people's worries meet in those hours, and my job is to ease that burden, even if only for a moment. Listeners often tell me they feel like they know me before we even meet. Some have turned into friends I cherish today. Others have shared that hearing me made them feel less alone at their lowest points. These are not just random encounters. They are reminders that what we do on radio connects deeply, even when we do not see the

faces on the other side. Yes, radio has changed to fit into an increasingly media-saturated world. It no longer dominates our soundscape as it once did, and many younger voices chase other platforms. But the heartbeat of radio has always been human. A playlist cannot laugh with you. An algorithm cannot speak to your community in real time or share in your celebrations and grief. Only radio can do that, because it is alive in the moment, carried by people who care enough to speak and to listen.

So, when people ask me if radio is dying, I think of the stranger in traffic who feels a little lighter hearing a familiar voice. I think of the person in a quiet house who feels less forgotten because the radio is on. I think of the friendships born from sound waves, the laughter shared with people I had not yet met, and the trust built across invisible lines.

Radio lives every time it keeps someone company, every time it turns loneliness into connection, every time a listener realizes they are not as alone as they feared. That is why I still believe in it, and why after all these years, I still feel honored every time I open the mic.



Image: AI-generated

They Deserve Better: An Outcry for our Animals



Photo: Virmala Balkaran

By Virmala Balkaran

In 2022, a stray cat from my community brought her kitten to my doorstep, as if she knew I was his only chance. He was so small, too fragile for this world, and I could see in her eyes that she could not protect him for long. She died soon after, and he was left in my care. I knew absolutely nothing about cats, but I knew enough to understand that he would not survive out there alone. I started to take care of him, trying everything to gain his trust, because I had promised him, silently, that he would live. I gave him a home and a name - Sweetpea.

What I did not realise at the time was how much

I needed him too. I was a year into my degree at COSTAATT, struggling with a salary cut, personal heartbreak, and the quiet weight of depression that crept in during those lonely days. Sweetpea became my companion. He was my reason to get up, my comfort when silence felt unbearable, my reminder that life still had moments worth holding on to. I thought I rescued him, but in truth, he rescued me during a time when my world felt dark.

Yet, while Sweetpea found a safe home, countless animals in our country are never given that chance. Every day, our social media feeds fill with heartbreaking images: tiny puppies abandoned in

boxes, kittens left to die in drains, and starving dogs wandering busy highways with no place to call home. Shelters are overwhelmed and cannot take in more animals, while countless good Samaritans plead for help on social media and spend their own time and money to keep abandoned animals alive. The problem continues to grow worse.

Places like Waterloo and Caroni have become well-known dumping grounds for unwanted dogs and cats, dropped off like garbage. Some are tied to posts and left to starve. Others roam until hunger, disease, or a speeding car claims them. Reports of cruelty persist each year, and it forces us to ask: Where is our sense of decency? Of compassion? These animals never asked to be born. They are voiceless, helpless, and dependent on our humanity, yet they pay the price for our neglect and cruelty.

The truth is we can stop this cycle. It begins with responsibility. Spaying and neutering pets is essential. Every unplanned litter becomes more mouths to feed, more animals abandoned, and more suffering on the streets. A simple surgery can prevent generations of pain. Along with this, we need to curb our obsession with buying pedigree animals while countless rescues wait for homes. For every exotic pet purchased, there are equally loving companions trembling behind overcrowded

shelter bars or starving by the roadside. Adoption should become the first choice. It saves lives and affirms that every creature matters.

Sweetpea's love lifted my heart when I needed hope, and I'm not unique in having experienced that kind of companionship. But personal stories are not enough. We must confront this as a society. The burden cannot remain on rescuers and shelters alone. Animal cruelty is not a fringe issue. It reflects who we are as people. What does our treatment of these loving creatures say about the kind of society we are becoming?

Trinidad and Tobago's animals deserve better. They deserve safety, dignity, and care.

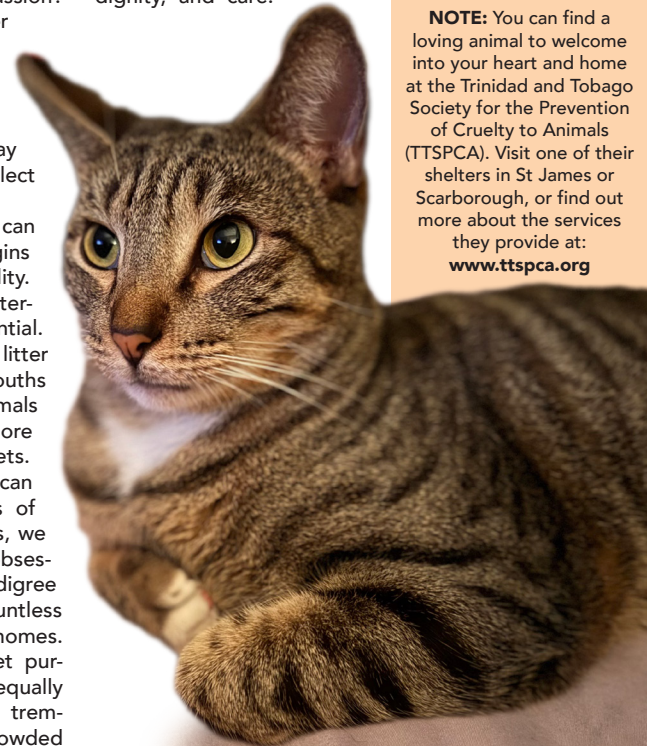


Photo: Virmala Balkaran

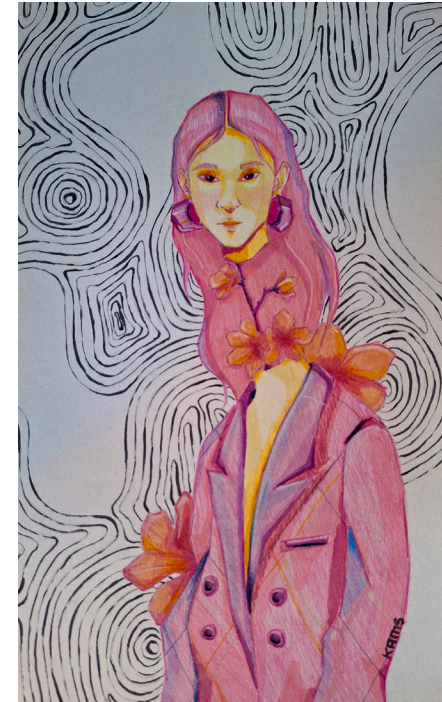
NOTE: You can find a loving animal to welcome into your heart and home at the Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (TTSPCA). Visit one of their shelters in St James or Scarborough, or find out more about the services they provide at: www.ttspca.org

ART & LITERATURE

Kamryn Campbell

Kamryn (BA Graphic Design student) is a multidisciplinary artist and graphic designer whose work bridges the gap between slightly normal and somewhat questionable. With a background in traditional art, her creative journey began at the age of five and evolved into a distinctive style blending expressive detail, bold colour, and thoughtful storytelling.

She loves exploring themes of complex human emotions and modern culture through her work. Her designs often reflect her love for the weirder things in life, and the beauty of the unknown. Whether designing digitally or crocheting with physical materials, she aims to inspire creativity and connection.



19 Feb 22



12 Dec 21



Burnout



Happy Born Day

Rotten Navel

By Kirk Bhajan

It was October. Grandpa had gotten senile. Ma got a call from one of the villagers in Flanagin Town saying that he went walking the road like a vagrant. Now Flanagin is a village right between the Central Range mountains and thick, thick bush. Ma told me to leave San Fernando and go check up on him, by the cocoa house, to see if I could find him. I sucked my teeth quietly and took the long drive from the city into the bush, just to look for the man.

Grandpa was one of the first mulattos in Trinidad. He never knew who his father was exactly, but it was rumoured he was the owner of the very plantation Grandpa grew up on. Grandpa grew up tough. So tough he eventually started looking like a bamboo rod, skinny and hard. As the years passed and everybody left or died, Grandpa remained by himself in that woodlouse-ridden cocoa house.

Anyway, by the time I arrived in Flanagin Town, it was already getting dusk dark. I asked one of the villagers, a man by the name of Cascadoo, who I knew since I was a child, to help me look for my grandfather. Cascadoo was a short, plucky man with thick calves and big round eyes.

When I asked for his assistance, Cascadoo opened his eyes even bigger and said, "Last place I see him was on the old plantation road. I go come help you look for him. Doh worry, he eh go be far. He go be somewhere. Close."

Taking my time, I drove slowly down the lonely stretch of road. I drove for a bit until the headlight of the car fell directly on a massive



Before Cascadoo could finish his sentence, the white stream of light from my flashlight fell directly on the silhouette of a man, sitting at the side of the road.

log that spread across the path ahead.

"We go hadda foot it from here," said Cascadoo.

The asphalt was still soft after soaking in the day's sun and the forest trees were croaking and moaning. We walked and walked and walked until the night began swallowing the forest. Now, you have to remember that in the country, when night time hits, the place gets pitch black.

As we continued walking, a sickly-sweet scent began filling the air.

"That is raw cocoa. When too much sun take it and the weather set up, it does smell. Bad," said Cascadoo.

I didn't say anything.

"The scent just settling. That is cause the air not breathing. You see how the air heavy and thick? That mean rain coming. It will buss down. Hard."

The air gradually began getting colder the further we walked.

"All here was cocoa land back in the day," said Cascadoo, as he started waving his hand wildly like a true storyteller.

"They say one of the owner of the plantation, a white man from Portugal, was real wicked. Evil. They say how all across this stretch it have one set of body bury here. They say how the owner did rape and kill a nine-year-old girl. They say how he kill the girl. He kill she. Dead."

Soon, we were in complete darkness. We walked onward still, until the night sounds of croaking crapauds and screeching cicadas filled the air. Suddenly, we heard something that made us both stop dead in our tracks. The noise sounded like the faint laughter of a child.

Illustration: Angeline Azeez

"This eh normal. Something eh right. No parent go allow their child to be out playing this late. Whatever we hearing not human. Whatever..."

Before Cascadoo could finish his sentence, the white stream of light from my flashlight fell directly on the silhouette of a man, sitting at the side of the road. It was my grandfather. His face was old and weathered and worn. His eyes were distant. His hands were clasped into each other, as if he was praying. He was in a short pants with thick, purple varicose veins running across his feeble thighs like the roadways on a map. He looked across at the forest that held the road together, and up higher at the rustling sky and into the black clouds that were shuffling across the full moon. I took him by the hand and said,

"Let's go home now Grandpa."

The rain was falling and I was inside making hot cocoa tea. Cascadoo was upstairs, closing the wooden louvers in the bedrooms. Grandpa sat outside on the porch. He wasn't saying anything. He was just sitting on an old, wooden bench, staring into the night. By the time I finished making the tea, the rain blazed down. Not just rain, mind you. Thunder and lightning too. It sounded as if God was dragging a coffin across the sky.

Cascadoo brought Grandpa inside and all of us huddled around the small kitchen table, sipping the hot, steamy cocoa. Cascadoo lit a flambeau. His big eyes started matching the flickering flame. He was in the mood to tell one of his stories, and given the circumstances, he decided to regale the tale of the time he encountered a spirit.

"Some years ago, I was doing security work in the Catholic primary school in Brasso Seco. It didn't

Cascadoo brought Grandpa inside and all of us huddled around the small kitchen table, sipping the hot, steamy cocoa.

have nobody living in the area. Just the building and bush. At night, the place was like a cemetery. Quiet. I reach to wuk six o'clock in the evening. The place was dark. Only light was a streetlamp in the distance. Far. Minutes to midnight I decide to eat something.

I had two cheese-paste sandwiches. So I eat one and drink some water. Then I feel like smoking a cigarette. I had a whole pack. Broadway..."

"Cascadoo, you think you will be able to finish the story tonight?" I interjected.

Unfazed, he continued, "As I was about to light the cigarette, I see through the window, a woman in white running towards the building. So I stand up. Like man. She come up to the gate and start to shake it, bawling SECURITY, SECURITY, help me! Well I get

very alert now as someone asking for help. I is a man serious 'bout my duty. Very serious. I walk outside and ask she what happen. She say, help, help, they want to hurt me! So I look at her. Then I look in the direction she come from. But it was clear. Nobody was around. No noise. Nothing. So I tell she, but ma'am, it have no one there. She still keep shaking up the gate saying help, help, they want to hurt me! So I start walking closer to the gate. All the while I looking at she and the direction she come from. I tell she again that it have no one there. But she keep doing an saying the same thing. As I get even closer to she I realise something was off. Real off. So I stop. When I look down at she foot, I see it. Cow hoof. As I see it, I scratch a match and she disappear. Well boy, whole night I smoke until morning come."

The rain continued falling with great intensity, fuelled by strong wind, rattling like bullets against the galvanized roof. A sudden peal of thunder ripped through the sky.

"I hope no spirit follow we back eh," Cascadoo said as his eyes darted about the place.

My grandfather suddenly began to chuckle. I went over to him and started rubbing his back. He was very brittle and felt like paper. I really felt sorry for him. I felt sad thinking that when Grandpa started losing his mind, all he could hold onto were fragments of his memories. He looked up at me and mumbled something in Patois. I couldn't understand and smiled a hollow smile. I continued passing my hand across his frail back.

About an hour passed. Cascadoo started talking about his plans to plant tomatoes on a larger scale.

"You know Cascadoo, I'm thinking of one day



Illustration: Angeline Azeez

Rotten Navel

Continued from Page 17

planting on this very land. Maybe try my hand at oranges," I said.

"I wouldn't do that if I was you."

"But why?"
"You from the city. You have your lil education. Take it and leave this place. Here is just a graveyard. It have no future here. None."

I took a final sip of my chocolate and then we all retired for the night. Cascadoo said he felt comfortable sleeping on the couch in the living room. I took my grandfather upstairs to bed. He smiled faintly at me once more. I wondered if he recognised me at all.

The rain had passed and the air was still and heavy. An overpowering, pungent smell woke me. It was fetid and foul, unlike anything I had ever smelled in my entire life. I raced downstairs. Cascadoo sat at the table, next to the light of the flambeaux. He looked at me with big, frightened eyes.

"What the hell smelling so?" I asked.

Before Cascadoo could respond, the faint sound of footsteps running across the floorboards above us echoed through the silent house. We both looked at each other, trying to make sense whether we were both in the same dream. My eyes shifted focus and settled on a large cockroach that slowly scuttled from under the table, toward the lamp.

From upstairs, the footsteps continued. This time they were heavier.

THUMP THUMP THUMP

"Oh God," Cascadoo said, "We in trouble. It have a jumbie in this house. Pray."



Illustration: Angeline Azeez

Without warning, my grandfather started screaming and bawling and cursing from upstairs. Nasty, foul curses that matched the pervading scent. A gust of wind threatened to snuff out the light of the flambeaux as the flame sputtered and danced in the darkness. Cascadoo grabbed the flambeaux and I turned on my flashlight.

We both made our way slowly up the stairs, to the sound of curses and howls. I could feel the suffocating heaviness of the air. A sharp smell, like rotted flesh, started coming down the old wooden staircase in the wind, until the smell was wrapped in the heavy still air around us. Cascadoo, who was ahead of me, slowly opened the door to

the bedroom. The cursing receded into what sounded like guttural growls and then to silence. For a split second, in the fleeting light of the flashlight, I saw my grandfather in the top corner of the room. He appeared to be floating weightlessly above the bed. Cascadoo and I were both rendered motionless, paralysed to the spot,

suffocated by the smell of dead flesh. In the corner of my eye, to the far left of the room, I saw a little girl approaching. Her skin was chocolate black, and her eyes were bright and round. The front of her simple church dress was torn. Her hands were positioned between her legs. Her fingers were drenched in thick blood. Around her neck was a scar that wrapped around like a scarf. She began laughing.

"Little girl!" Cascadoo shouted,

"Yuh navel rotten! Leave this house! You dead! Your navel rotten! Leave this place!"

The child looked up at us, her bright eyes shimmering in the dark room.

"Leave us now in peace. Yuh navel rotten. You dead. Go in peace!" he continued.

A powerful gust of wind blew, rocking the entire house. My grandfather fell onto the bed and both Cascadoo and I onto the ground. I looked up, the girl vanished and with her, the smell.

Cascadoo scrambled to the bed and let out a cry of anguish. I raced to check on my grandfather, flashing the light over his face. All the life was gone from his body. All that remained was his lifeless shell of flesh and bone, his expression contorted into a smile.

Each country has its own scent. The more you travel, the more you will realise this. And there is a smell that lingers in Flanagan Town. A scent that no amount of time and distance could remove. If you feel I just made this up, I dare you to take a trip there. Go look for Cascadoo. Ask him to tell you. If you don't want to believe him, then go walk the lonely plantation road at night. Maybe a spirit will follow you home. Maybe you will smell it too.

I saw my grandfather in the top corner of the room. He appeared to be floating weightlessly above the bed.

Sonielle Rahim

Sonielle is an acrylic painter, digital artist, graphic designer and illustrator who finds inspiration in the rhythms of everyday life, her emotions, and memories from childhood. Her art is a reflection of how she experiences the world, a blend of nostalgia, colour, and feeling. She loves working with acrylics on any surface and exploring digital illustration as another way to tell visual stories. She showcased her first collection in 2022 and is preparing for her next exhibition in 2026. Through her work, she aims to capture small, intimate moments and invite others to feel and connect with the world in their own way.

(BA Graphic Design alumna)



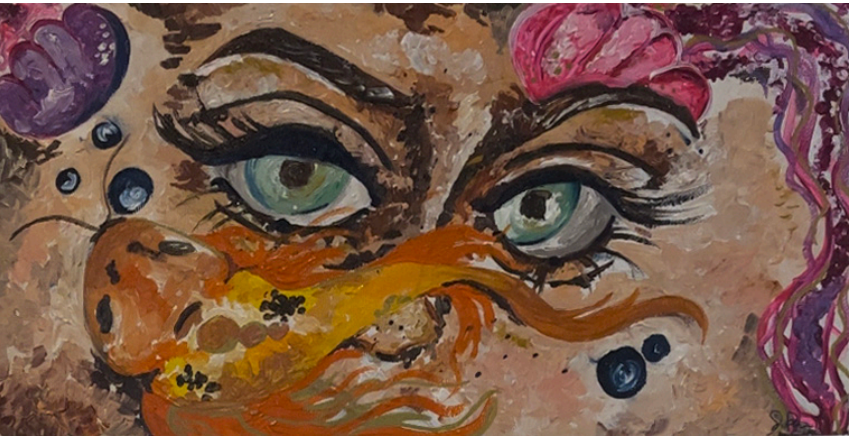
See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil



The Release



The Dreamer



Deep See



Crowned



Broken Beauty

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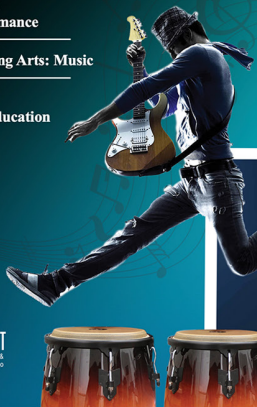
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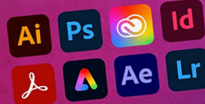


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