

I didn't find Tyron, Tyron found me. Tyron runs a bomb-ass podcast called Tea and Converse, and over some Instagram chatter, he told me he had dug my recent musical endeavor "songs for charles", and wanted to sit down and rap a taste about my work and my art. I was all like "Bet. Count me in." I don't really mess with tea like that, being a black coffee kinda' guy (shouts to Heavy D), but the idea sounded fresh enough. Now, at this point, I haven't seen Ty's face. I didn't really stalk his social media like I normally would when interviews and such come up. Because, that's what nerds do, stalk, but on the low-low.

I head to a somewhat seedy apartment building that still feels newly gentrified, and ring the buzzer. The White guy I meet is NOT Ty. Cool. I walk into a comfy enough studio space. No tea. But, I do meet Ty. I'm still worried about fucking his name up cause, shit is just spelled wild funny. We dap up and begin the interview. Before we start, he introduces me to his daughter. She asks him what he did with her fish eye lense. He chuckles, and admits he may have lost it. She kindly chastises him for his lack of remembrance. And in this exchange, I get a glimpse of what true fatherhood sounds and tastes like; in her I see the joy of being loved by a father, a Black father. So, I trust that he must be a good man. We talk for over an hour about music, life, the hood, acting, the works. We leave and dap up, and I decide then and there that I am going to make Tyron my friend, my new Black friend.

I had friends growing up. But always felt like a loner. Lots of imaginary friends, imaginary boy bands, imaginary movies and music tours, lots of G.I. Joe's and comic books and video games. I always had a circle, but also, always felt outside of the circle, like there were parts of me that would forever be unshared with the rest of the world for fear of ridicule, or whatever. That carried over to high school, where identification issues grew tenfold; I was used to being called a "White boy" in elementary school because I always raised my hand in class and did all my homework and liked reading the dictionary and used "big words" and "talked properly" or "White" (sidebar: let's please stop using Whiteness in POC communities as the bar for what is good, appropriate, or credible. Moving on...). Shit got really real as a teenager when I actually had to sit and work alongside actual White boys. I could feel the heat from the cats from around the way who would ask me to write their essays, or do their homework for them, because shit, they were Black, and I was Black, and I should help them because that's what you do as Black man/woman; you sacrifice and deal to appease others, regardless of whether or not the appeasement is justified, or could be viewed from your own lens as a sacrifice of your own well-being (I wrote a dude's WHOLE essay. We were in the same class. He got a B+. I got a C. Go figure). And I didn't ask for any money, ever. Because I thought the respect I would get in return from brothers who shared my struggles and melanin would balance the lack of bread out, right? Nah, shun. I was still the cat who wore button

downs under sweater vests, who wanted to sneak out of Mr. Walsh's English class (which I loved) to play ball with the art and instrumental majors at La Guardia, and still felt guilty about it, because I wanted to fit in.

College was the first time I felt like an actual Black man, whatever the fuck that means. I was still trying too hard; laughing too hard, clowning too hard, partying and dancing and rapping too hard. All for the need of acceptance. I had some great friends, but pretending to be someone else in a group of folks who love you means they don't really love you, because you won't let them; all they really love is the mask, the image of who you are making yourself out to be for the mirrors and cameras. Even amongst my older brother's friends, a litany of grown, dope Black men, almost all from the same hood, I was never really "in". They were never really mine. I was a homie by "default". There was a false sense of belonging that I would never shake.

Fast forward to today and I now have a rainbow coalition of friends that feels like home to me. However, there was something missing: commonality. Because for all the beautiful people around me, there is nothing like the kinship felt from a Black man; I can't explain it to you if you're not in the know. Like, why Usher and not Mario? Why did B.I.G. blow up and not Craig Mack? What made you go left, instead of right? Many variables, all unexplainable...it just is what it is. So, meeting Tyron felt like closure. I was starting to feel like Paul Rudd in "I Love You, Man" (yes. That shit really happens to men. You will deal). I was looking for a homie in my age bracket who I could shoot the shit with. I wasn't blessed with the "we still friends after kindergarten and have a drink at our favorite bar every Sunday" Rat Pack contingent of fellas. No fraternity that gets drunk and pees in the grass together, either. Nope. No footballbaseballbasketballlacrossehockeysquash team to self-identify with. Granted, the wholeness I feel is wholeness of self; the feeling of knowing I complete me, right? My Ram Dass shit. But thank you, Tyron, and all the other Tyron's in the world, for being a friend when I ain't even know I needed one. Word life.