

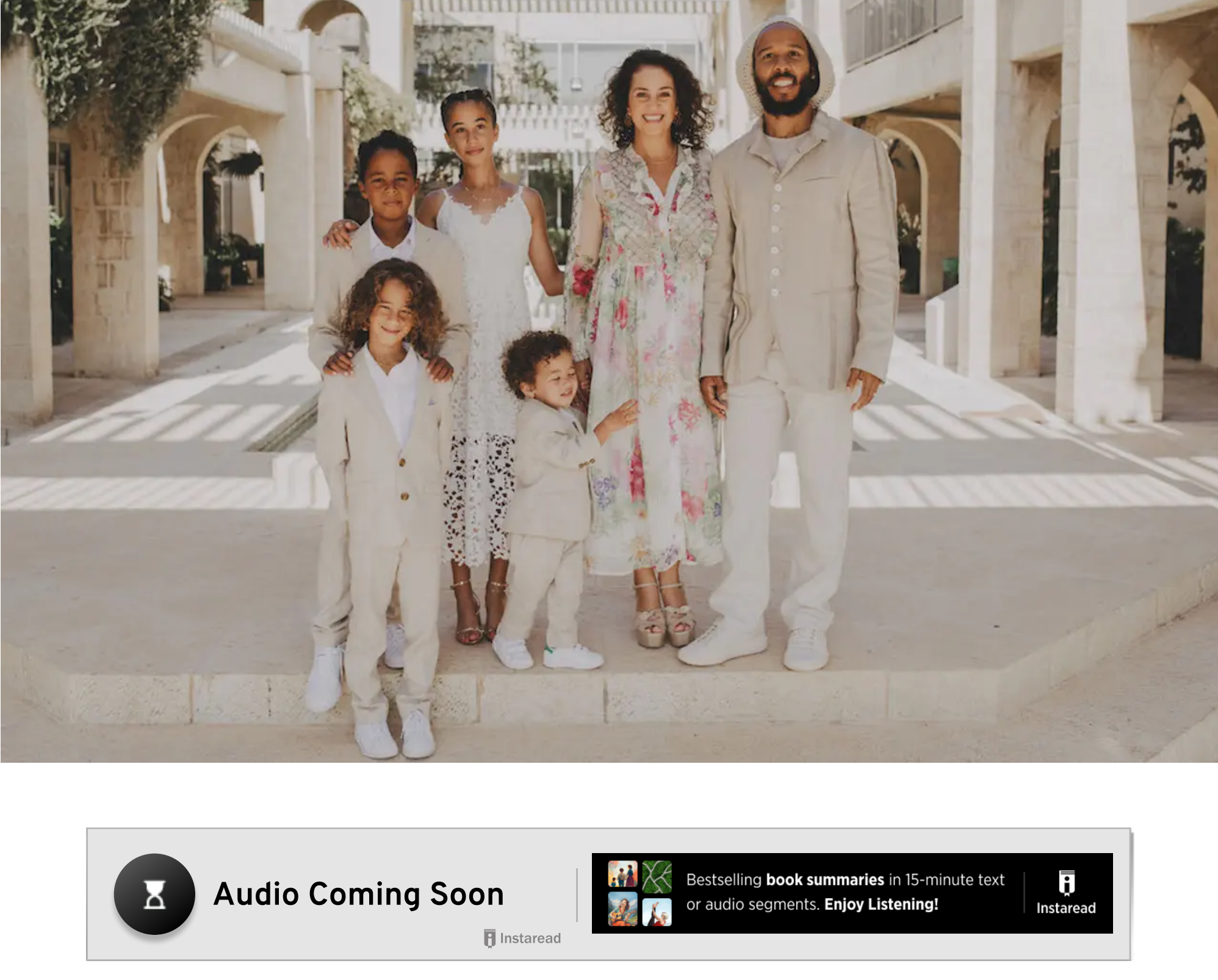
Ziggy Marley "I remember"

BY READERS DIGEST

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Jamaican musician Ziggy Marley, 50, is a seven-time Grammy winner, humanitarian and the son of reggae icon, Bob Marley. He looks back on his turbulent childhood in Jamaica, growing up in Rastafari culture and parenthood

...Growing up in 'Trench Town', Jamaica, which was then called "The Ghetto" because it was a very poor area. Some of my earliest memories are playing football with the neighbourhood kids. In those days, we didn't have internet or video games, so we'd just go outside, play games and pick mangoes and bananas. When my parents started earning more money from music, we moved to a slightly better community.

...My mother has always been the glue that held everything together.

Without her, things would fall apart. She's a very strong woman and the things I saw her do as a child impressed me and set an example for me. Jamaica was going through a rough time in the 1970s; there were riots in the streets, people blocking the roads, burning tyres and cars—there was political tension and it was a very volatile situation. Once, mum picked us up from school but we couldn't get home because these guys were blocking the road with old cars. She stopped in front of them, got out of the car and started arguing with them. I was watching them from the car, frightened, as I could see there was a lot of tension. But, somehow, she talked them down, they broke up the barrier, let us through and we got home safely. She's a brave woman and that moment inspired me to be as strong as she is.

...Spending time with my father.

He'd do fun activities with us like racing, and he'd always get to the finish line first, he'd never let us win! He was so competitive. He also used to take us to Saint Ann, which is the countryside of Jamaica, where he was born. He'd wake us up in the middle of the night and drive us there—I really enjoyed those rides.

...Music was always around.

When I was a child, I'd just hang around and listen to my parents write and rehearse new songs. They also exposed me to stuff like The Jackson 5 and Diana Ross. My parents travelled frequently so my great aunt would take care of us a lot of the time and she would play gospel music, Nat King Cole and Glen Campbell so we had a lot of American music in the house. "Rockin' Robin" was a song that we sang a lot when we were kids and I'll never forget Glen Campbell's "Rhinestone Cowboy".

...Sunday dinner was a big deal.

The rest of the week was alright but on Sunday, we ate fancy. We'd have chicken, rice, beans and many different side dishes. We looked forward to it all week. The whole family would cook everything together and there was always a lot of commotion; we would lick the pans, there'd be guys killing goats outside the house, there was a fire with a big pot on it—there was always a lot of activity going on.

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...Experiencing Christmas for the first time in Wilmington, Delaware. My parents moved there to try and find a better life when I was very young. There was no Christmas back in our community in Jamaica so it was the first time I saw all the Christmas trees, lights and snow. I got a Mickey Mouse drum set as a gift from my grandmother's husband at the time.

...Smoking marijuana wasn't considered a bad thing in Rastafarian culture.

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It wasn't something to hide from the kids. I can't even remember when I had my first "spliff", I was around nine. I was very young, too young. I wouldn't have let myself do it in my father's place. But it was a part of our religion—we're one of those ancient cultures with traditions that modern society wouldn't accept.

When I first consciously decided to smoke weed as a teenager, I approached it from a spiritual point of view. It's given me more insight into myself and into my spirituality, and I use it as a form of influence when I'm reading scriptures and books about spirituality. I use it to give me a different perspective so that my mind isn't in the same place that it normally is. I turn into a shaman. It was never just about getting high—I educated myself about it in terms of how Yogi in India use it and I went down that route with it, I didn't go down the "fun" route.

...The beginnings of our family group, The Melody Makers.

As kids, we'd always perform for our great aunt. We made up shows and she would oblige us by coming and watching us perform. Music was something my siblings and I just did without thinking about it and eventually it turned into The Melody Makers. In 1979, my father wrote a song for us called "Children Playing in the Streets" which is basically about how we grew up. "Children playing in the streets in broken bottles and rubbish heaps"—that's just how we were brought up. So we went into the studio and did that song and continued on. The first song I ever wrote as a child was about a girl I was seeing. I was about nine or ten. It went, "I love you to my heart and we're never gonna part."

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...When Dad took me and my brother Stephen to Zimbabwe.

He was going to do a concert for the independence of Zimbabwe, and that had a really big impact on me—to understand the ideas of colonialism, the ideas of freedom, revolution, change and the struggle that Africa was going through.

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It was a big topic in his life and it became a big topic in my life because of that trip. It opened up my eyes to a lot of things about Africa and the struggle that was going on there which shaped a militant ideology in my head. It formed my concepts of revolution and what music can do to help to free people.

...My Dad getting cancer.

As kids, we didn't know what the specifics of his illness were but we knew that something was wrong. It gave me great anxiety and I would frequently hyperventilate. But my dad would comfort me by making me laugh. He'd put on a mask and make fun of the situation, trying not to take it seriously. Even though he was really sick, he was trying to calm us down.

...Becoming a father was always a big dream for me.

It's a big thing for us in Jamaica. I was really young when I had my first child, 18 or 19. I didn't know or understand enough what being a "father" meant. So for me it was more like, "Woohoo, I did a 'man' thing, I became a man."

I grew up in a polygamous community. Our family structure wasn't anything like the Western concept of family. My father was married but he had other children outside of wedlock and this was the example I saw growing up.

So when I had my first child, I didn't see it as that big of a responsibility. I thought it was the woman's responsibility and I could just go hang out and play ball. I expected that the girl would make sure everything was in place. It wasn't until later in life that I understood what a big responsibility it is and got really involved as a father in the child's life.

...Collaborating with Woody Harrelson.

He came up to my house one day to hang out. I was in my home studio, working on a song about marijuana called "Wild and Free". I was like, "Yo, Woody, can you sing?" And he was like, "Yeah, I'll try". So we did it and I liked it and it came out on the record. It was one of the funniest, most spontaneous collaborations I've ever done.

...Meeting my wife, Orly.

I was doing a show in LA and she was my agent's assistant at the time. We had an instant connection. I was searching for something then. I'd gone down the road of having different women, but I never really liked it, it never really uplifted me. So it was a time of transition; I was exploring music in a different way, exploring myself, exploring my creativity, so when I met her, I was in a space of searching for something else, both personally and creatively. And she fell into that space. When we shook hands, we didn't let go, it was so comfortable. I was holding a stranger's hand but all I could think was, Why does this hand feel so comfortable in mine? It was just so normal and right.

Ziggy Marley only

...Understanding the person I have become and am becoming.

From where I started as a human being to where I am now, I'm very proud of my growth as a person. I'm proud of my inner voice, my consciousness that I allow to speak to me truthfully and to correct me when I'm wrong—that helps me squash my ego. I'm proud of being my own psychologist. I'm still a work in progress but generally speaking I feel like I'm a good person and I can look at myself objectively and say, "Yeah, you're a good person."

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