

Belize

Sent: January 9, 2006

Subject: "Is It Rolling Bob?"



Is it rolling Bob? It is? Great. Hello. Hello. Who's there? Hello. Who am I speaking to?

What's that Bob" Yer sayin' what?

You mean I can't just talk directly to all these people? Its what?

It's a vocal transcriber? I thought it was a computer.

Okay, okay, so it's a computer with a vocal transcriber. Great, so what's that? The screen?
What about the screen? Okay, so I'll look at the ... holy shit. You're right Bob, its writing down all of this. Hey, this is great.

Bob do you mean I can just talk into this mike and do an email?

What do you mean dinosaur? Is that a button I should push?

Oh, ya, okay Bob so now you're some sort of expert just because you have an internet cafe?
You are an expert? Alright, well then, why is it that my long forgotten email site is so dusty? Its not? Sure it is--I can see dust all over the place. The screen? What about the screen" The dust?

You mean the dust isn't on my long forgotten email site? Okay, I'll wipe the... you're right, the dust is on the screen. So you're telling me Bob that its all clear for me to send an email to my friends? Alrighty, then--here we go....

I'm talking to you, yes talking to you my long lost email folks by way of a technology that's so new and sophisticated that its only been released here in Chilliwack as some sort of test experiment to... what?

Hey Bob, I was talking to my friends here. You say what? Its not an experiment? Everybody knows about this transcriber?

So why wasn't I...okay, I get it. Obviously I should have kept my subscription to Computer Monthly.

Sorry folks, I had no idea I could just talk to you on a computer. So now that technology has caught up to me and you, I'll say howdy. And by the way, I may have a story to tell.

Stories usually start at the beginning, then they proceed to the middle, then there's the ending. Other stories start at the end, progress to the middle, then end with the beginning. (I have never liked those stories too much: the ending was always too predictable) And then there's this story: it has a possible beginning this Thursday, a potential middle, and a probable ending. Before the story starts, I should explain the boundaries. In a few days I'll be travelling to a place with fantastic names. Yes, names. Names of the places, the towns, the reefs, the non-reefs, the non-places. Some destinations have names for everything. And that's where I'm going.

So what I'm saying is that I have a new theory of travel. Yes folks, you've heard it here first. A new theory of travel. The theory is this: the importance of any place is reflected in its name. But there are many layers to a name. Constantinople is now Istanbul, but I'm not going there, so it's a bogus example. More on the name theory later.

Having said all that, I now begin my pre-emptive analysis of the places I may go next week when I go to ... what's that Bob? Okay, okay, I'll speak a little louder. It's just that when I start thinking about going somewhere strange my thoughts get quiet.

So what I'm going to do here is predict the spirit of the places I'm headed to based upon their names.

I thought I already told you what country I'm going to, but in case I didn't, I should say I'm going to...

Jesus, Bob, you keep jumping in on my conversation with my friends here. Okay, okay, here's another five bucks to cover the end of my story. So where was I? Oh ya, the fantastic names of the towns, the non-towns, the reefs, the half-reefs, the sea ports...

Places such as SHARK RAY ALLEY. Now that's a great name. We already know by the name that there's gotta be all kinds of cool people hanging out there. Already I'm nervous about what I should wear.

YO CREEK must be a place where mafia types hang out. You know "Yo, how ya doin'" and all that kinda talk. I'll practice up on my mafioso jargon before I arrive there.

Now ORANGE WALK is a bit of a puzzler. But the fact that NEW RIVER flows through it helps in the analysis. The people there must be stoned. I mean, one day someone in ORANGE WALK must have said something like this: "Hey Ernie, you ever notice that river before?" And Ernie would have said "No I ain't. So now we gotta build a bridge over that there NEW RIVER."

Fortunately BLUE RIVER is nowhere near ORANGE WALK. The color contrast would have

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been extreme.

I don't have any theory yet about GALLON JUG, but it must be a wild place. And I'm expecting SITTEE RIVER to be a rather laid-back spot.



On the other hand, there is probably an educated and probably pretentious yuppie population in BERMUDIAN LANDING. I say that because they got the grammar right. Most people would have called it BERMUDA LANDING. But that's two nouns and thus incorrect. However, I'm not sure I want to meet the BERMUDIAN LANDINIANS.

SHIPYARD is just unusual since it's located inland. While GALLOWS POINT is just to be avoided. I do look forward to visiting the fun-sounding MONKEY RIVER and MANGO CREEK. But am rather tentative about going through COCKSCOMB BASIN and BURRELL BOOM.

There's gotta be some fun shopping to be done in HATTIEVILLE. I once bought a hat in Panama, thus became Panama hatted. But I'm not sure what the proper name would be for a hat purchased in HATTIEVILLE. Perhaps a homburg. And I'll have to visit LAUGHING BIRD PARK, if only to hear some laughter after my jokes.

The place that may be most intriguing is DANGRIGA. It is one of those unique, special names that only is used once on the entire planet. Like Cairo, Shanghai, and everybody's favourite, Timbuktu.

The theory about place names is like T.S. Eliot's theory about cat names. He said every cat has three names. The first is its everyday name, such as Ginger or Muffin. Then its second name is a unique name, special to that cat, such as Bustefulorem or Capricat. Third of all is the name which the cat calls itself when in those deep moments of cat contemplation. A name only the cat itself knows, its "effable, ineffable, effineffable, deep and inscrutable singular name."

Places such as ORANGE WALK or maybe even GALLON JUG are like the common everyday names. But DANGRIGA and SHARK RAY ALLEY are special, unique names for only one place on the planet. But then beyond those unique names is the inscrutable name which the place calls itself: its inner spirit and soul that only can be felt by being there and only then if you're

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lucky and patient. I'm not saying I'm either, but my quest is to get a feeling for the ineffable names for places such as DANGRIGA and SHARK RAY ALLEY. And to go there I'll be taking the HUMMINGBIRD HIGHWAY.

That's it for now. Thanks for listening in. And don't forget, "everybody loves somebody sometime."

PLACENCIA



aerial view of the Placencia Pennisula

Sent: January 16, 2006

Subject: Inside the inside of this place



As always, the only good thing about making plans is watching them change. Then there's the even better process of feeling your attitude change. That's what's happening here. But first a commercial break:

Comm ona down to de best and smookest place on de whole damn Caribbean. Dats right. De place is Belize an its da most laid back and Rasta man place to go to. Dats right. We got raggae tunes all day long and we got da rasta attitude too man. respect. An dats da way we lives our

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days. Just chillin' and feelin' tha happiness of being with our people, the Garifuna people. Cause we got our own culture an history. An we speak english the way its supposed to be spoken... with respect. So come on down to Belize.



VIEW OF PLACENCIA VILLAGE WATERFRONT

That was one of the local rasta men making a guest appearance on this network. And he spoke to you from the oddly named village of Placentia. That, of course, is its given name. But my goal here is to find, or perhaps feel, that secret name that this seaside village calls itself. Of course, I have no plan of action to actually get to that secret inner name. Along with the folks of Placentia I'll just sit and look around as one day just blends into the next. After a couple of days of that I expect that I'll simply forget that I have a goal in mind. It is then, perhaps, that the inner secret of this place might be revealed. Perhaps not. Even so, my dreadlocks will be a couple of days longer and more natty. Apparently that helps in the quest to find the inner name of these places. Nobody said science was easy.

My first lesson in the casual style these Garifuna folks have was right at the airport in Belize City. As I went through the omniscient customs check I started to brace up for the inevitable onslaught of tourist harassment that would be waiting for me as soon as I exited the airport. Its always there: the taxi hustlers, the money changers, the hotel grabbers the So I stepped out of the airport taking a moderately aggressive demeanour and placed myself in front of the first group of dudes waiting outside. I stood in front of them waiting for the onslaught. They just looked back at me but said nothing. I took a step closer in an attempt to get the whole harassment thing going (and hopefully over). Still nothing. Finally one of the guys said "welcome to Belize." That was it. They wanted nothing and I was once again the misplaced idiot. Lesson one in Belize: there's no tourist harassment. At best the tourist harass themselves with the locals just looking on. There's definitely two different wavelengths happening here. Respect.

On a different note. Have you noticed that superheroes rarely if ever hang out together? There's usually one superhero acting solo or else a superhero with a sidekick. My pal Chris and I are on the traveling road together for the first time since we struck out for Europe in the late 70's. It was a ill-informed and badly dressed trip that changed my demeanour forever. But perhaps more of that expedition another time.

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What's at issue here is that we're in disagreement as to who's the sidekick. I mean does anybody really want to be a sidekick. Do you think Tonto was happy calling the Lone Ranger "kimosabe"? And what did that mean?

For the answers to these and other questions tune in next week to same Bat channel. Until then, don't forget that everybody loves somebody sometime...

TROPICAL PARADISE HOTEL

Caye Caulker, Belize



Sent: January 23, 2006

Subject: "Hey look twice ... its another day for yo you and me in Paradise..."

As one local Caye Caulker said to me today, "this place is paradise, but its not heaven." Point is that paradise always has a edge to it. This little island of sand is no exception. While at the police station today I read a sign on the wall: "A wise man knows much, but says less than he knows. A fool says more than he knows." I kept that in mind as I spoke to Corporal Rodriguez. But I get ahead of myself

Travel, if left to its own decision-making process, determines its own course for you. You just have to let it do the tour planning. That's how I ended up staying at the scene of the crime--the Paradise Resort (or whatever the name of that cabana complex is). For two days my trusted sidekick Chris and I continued our debate over who was the superhero and who was the sidekick. While resolving this rather unimportant issue, the cabana we were in had the most gruesome water. How bad was it? Even the cockroaches went down the road when they needed a drink. Showering was a dangerous process of splatting "sewer water" around and mixing it with soap. (a disappointing activity). It turns out that one of the "edges" in this paradise is a water problem. Never before have I actually taken a handful of water and smelled it. But that was part of the selection process that got us to the scene of the crime (fresh-smelling water).

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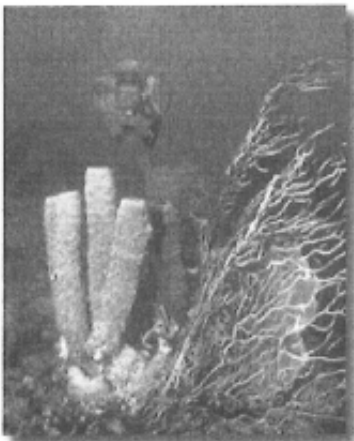
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Things were going fine until last night at 2:45. At that point I heard shouts and banging, then looked out a window to see a guy fleeing around one of the cabanas. Things were quiet for awhile, then a guy started shouting for help. I went over to his cabana to find out he had awoken to see a guy crawling along his floor. A wrestling match started up and the tourist was able to launch the thief from the second floor balcony. My crime scene analysis concluded that the two footprints in the sand showed the thief had made a lucky landing and then his escape around the corner where I caught a glimpse of him. As I explained this to Corporal Rodriguez I didn't ask why the Caye Caulker police commenced their "pursuit" of the thief a half-day later. (I still had in mind the helpful advice on the police station wall). However, while at the police station I found out there had also been a nasty assault in another room at the perhaps inappropriately named Paradise Resort. That one involved blood all over the walls along with a broken toilet, air conditioner and shower. I didn't ask how one breaks a shower. And in one of their two gritty jail cells, police had in custody a guy who had kabonged another guy on the head with a two by four. I began thinking I was just engaging in another day at work rather than actually being on a vacation. It was about then that Corporal Rodriguez finished writing out my statement. When reading it over I realized that the good Corporal is Spanish speaking first with English coming in as a distant second language. When signing the statement I thought that if I ever have to give evidence in court I'll have to do so with a Spanish accent. At this point in the investigation police have only concluded that it was not Coronal Mustard in the cabana with a candlestick.

So far, however, Belize has not been all crime and punishment. There was the white-knuckled boat ride out to Tobacco Caye--a speck of sand an hour off the coast. The driver bobbed and weaved through the huge ocean swells and only looked panicked when he lost the use of one of the (fortuitously) two outboard motors.



Then there was the unique and surprising shades of green I saw when making the first scuba

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trip off this rough coast. The green was not the ocean colour--its a wonderful light blue. The unique green shades were seen on my friend Chris' face as we plunged through the reef channel on our way to the dive site. It turns out all the dives this time of year require a hell-bent for oblivion trip to the rough side of the reef. Then there was the insight I got into hurricanes from one of the ubiquitous weathermen on this island. It turns out that everyone who lives here has an opinion about the weather, since each considers him or herself an expert. But this makes sense in a place where a hurricane cut the island in two some time ago. People here are close to nature and what I saw was a skill set and awareness that we miss in our urban "environment" where we rely on others to figure out everything for us, including the weather.

One further point learned last night (the thief had apparently grabbed a couple thousand in cash before being launched over the balcony) is that you shouldn't keep all your cookies in one cabana. Well, that just about wraps it up for Belize (at least for now). Until the next, don't forget that everybody loves somebody sometime.



South end of Caye Caulker

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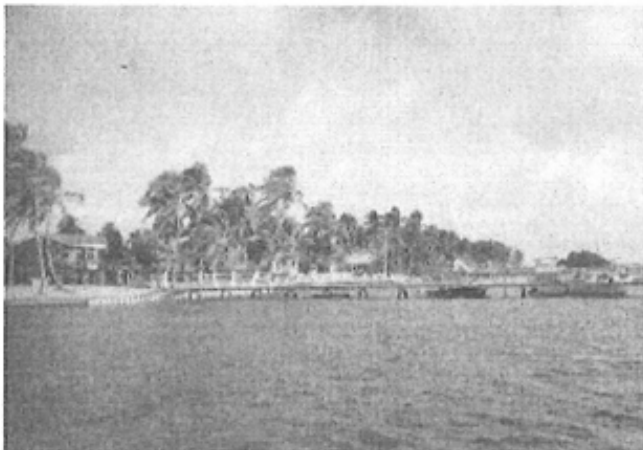
A typical white sand Caye Caulker beach.



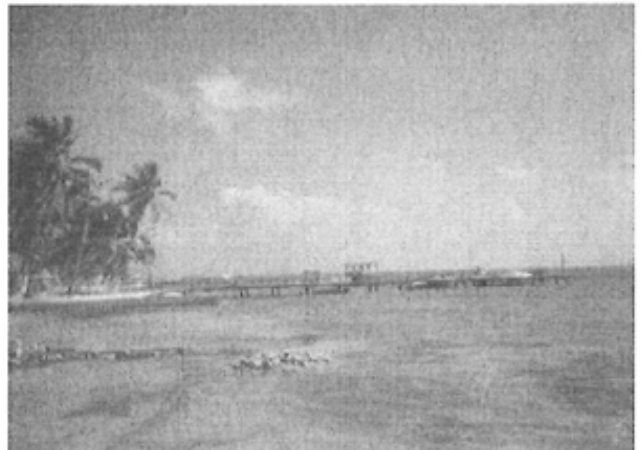
Caye Caulker - Main Street looking south from the Sandbox



Main street north of the Sandbox



Looking north from Tom's Hotel



Looking North from Tom's Dock

Sent: Tuesday, February 28, 2006 1:17 PM
Subject: SEXY CHICKEN

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You see, that got your attention. Nothing like a good headline to get a story going. The world of crime has taken over my life for the last few weeks, so haven't made time to put down a few last thoughts about Belize. Now I have. My travel notes are starting to fade, as are the memories, so here goes...

Why sexy chicken? You see I actually saw the Sexy Chicken in Shark Ray Alley. Well, not so much "in" as "on". You're probably still not clear about what this is about. The Sexy Chicken is the name of a boat I saw cruising over Shark Ray Alley. In fact, its not so much an "alley" as it is a zone of ocean where sharks (mostly friendly) and rays congregate to ... well, now that I mention it I'm not sure why they congregate, but the point is that they do. And then the tourists arrive to pat their cute little heads. One such group of tourists arrived in none other than the Sexy Chicken. On a personal note I should say that I've never found chickens to be sexy, but as a friend of mine says "each to his, her or its own." I just made sure I didn't get too close to that particular group of tourists.

Why is it that boat owners and hair shop owners always have to come up with poor attempts at puns or witticisms when naming their boats or hair shops: Hairistocracy, Clipperdom, A Cut Above, The Flying Penguin, Tony's Titanic. My all-time favourite, though, goes to a Chinese funeral home called the Wing On Funeral Chapel. I guess it beats paying for a plot.

Next Headline: Crime is Afoot

By way of denouement, I should tell you what happened to my crime investigation in Caye Caulker. Police arrested a guy by the name of Clifford William. Before asking me to ID the fellow I saw running from the burglary scene, Corporal Rodriguez told me what a bad character Mr. William was and how he had been caught once before breaking into the very same cabana. The police wanted me to say he was the guy, so they could put him away for five years or so. Thus, they had me sit across the street as they hauled Mr. William from the gritty jail cell and hold him out for viewing. That was the guy. No question. But I am aware of the "frailty" of eyewitness ID, so I just told the police I thought it might be him but couldn't be sure. I didn't explain to the police the elaborate way we in Canada get witnesses to ID a possible criminal: a photo pack of ten different photos of similar looking guys which are shown one by one to the witness. Put it this way: I suspect the Belize method results in a much higher conviction rate.

On the boat leaving Caye Caulker there were two guys handcuffed and obviously being hauled off to prison. So the police were keeping busy with other crimes and other criminals. Did you know that the words for "handcuffs" and "wife" are the same in Spanish? ("Espousa") No real point here, except perhaps that it raises the question as to whether the Spanish are being cynical or realistic.

Travel Tips

One travel tip I did pick up from that whole burglary episode is to lean a chair against your door when in hostile territory. It probably won't help much, but you do sleep a bit better. And besides, you won't be sitting on it anyways.

Then there's the whole lesson about walking lightly. You see, cheap hotels mean thin walls and thin, usually squeaky floors. Thus, its readily apparent who walks smoothly and who doesn't. What's more, I take it as a challenge to walk quietly in such places just for the fun in it. But then

again, I suppose people watching might be thinking "I could hardly hear that guy, but he sure walks strangely." For example, when walking up or down a staircase, go right along the wall where there's less flex in the wood. Or to be real quiet use the native hunting walk, whereby you lift your foot up slowly and place it down heel first and then slowly put weight on it along the outside edge. Of course, if you walk like that all the time your sex life will be wanting.

Other Theories: Corruption a la Centro

The big difference between Belize and the rest of Central America is that Belize has been subject to a British form of corruption, whereas the rest of Central America has been covertly (and sometimes not so covertly) controlled and corrupted by the U.S.

Of course, this is just a theory, but its source is this: the Spanish left the scene after warring with the U.S. in about 1898, leaving all Spanish zones in Central and South America; since then the CIA has been busy; but British Honduras was exactly that, British; so I imagine the Brits said to the yanks "stay away from our fiefdom"; notably, the British army still engages in jungle "training" in Belize; and that means they still have military bases there. I'm not sure how much of a catch Belize was for the Brits, since its largely jungle or mangrove swamps (with the usual abundance of crocodiles). However, recent discoveries of oil reserves may make the U.S. more interested in pushing out their British "neighbours." Stay tuned.

I'm not exactly sure how British style corruption differs from Yankee style corruption. One example, though, is the bumpy road to Placencia. How bumpy is it? It's so bumpy that there's potholes in the potholes and detours around the detours. Apparently the Taiwan government gave \$27 million to fix the road. Not one pothole was filled, but several Belize politicians bought up some hotels in Mexico and Cuba. I guess its their version of off-shore investment.

More Unique Corruption

Bumped into a guy whose job it is to sail crashed up sailboats from Belize to get fixed up in the shipyards in Honduras. Why is this? Turns out there's a company called Moorings which on its face looks pretty slick. At their port in Placencia there's a fleet of 10 to 15 large catamarans waiting to be rented by tourists (plus an uncounted number bouncing off the reefs of Belize or in the shipyards of Honduras). Each of the boats is an "investment" of \$5 million or so. That's the catch. Apparently Moorings is a front to a kind of investment scam. People have been convinced to invest in one of these boats, then after 5 years the boat is heir's. Problem is that Moorings doesn't care who rents the boats. Thus, they spend a lot of time plucking the expensive catamarans off the numerous and tricky reefs of Belize. Not sure how many holes a boat can have and still float. Don't know about you, but I prefer to get my money for nothing and my chicks for free.

Olympic Thoughts

While watching the Winter Olympics I wondered why there's only the summer and winter Olympics. Why isn't there the autumn and spring Olympics? It seems to me that a lot of athletes are getting ripped off. And in places like Belize there's three seasons: hot, wet, and hurricane. So why not have a Hurricane Olympics? I think it would be real exciting to watch the 100 meter hurdles in 150 kilometre winds. Is that downwind or upwind? Maybe we could have two events: one each way. My point is that there's all kinds of skill sets that aren't recognized by the Olympic Committee. We give great credit to the whitewater kayakers, but no recognition to the guys who

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motor the boats off the coast of Belize during hurricane season. The Olympics is an event about the human spirit as much as it is about particular skill sets. And those guys off the shores of Belize have a whole lot of human spirit.

Alex the Gardener

Was fortunate enough to go scuba diving with a guy who grew up on the reefs of Caye Caulker. His ability at scuba was matched by his adeptness at taking the boat and "parking" it in huge ocean waves. As we cruised the reef I noticed Alex picking up various bits of coral and sponges. At one point his arms were full with various bits of marine life. I thought he was picking up souvenirs. But that was just the tourist in me. As we continued the dive, Alex began finding spots along the reef to replant the wayward items he collected, thus replenishing his garden.

"Life is For Living"

Not much to say about that, other than that's what I heard a woman singing one day as she walked down one of the many sandy streets of Caye Caulker. Seems like a good message to me. Well, that just about wraps things up for now. Just remember that if you travel the road less travelled you will find few line-ups. By the way, I think I invented a new word yesterday. We know the show Seinfeld has generated several new phrases: "yadda yadda" and "Dufus" for example. The word that popped to mind yesterday is "Newfus". For example, you might want to say "I've never seen that Dufus before, he must be a Newfus."

So long for now. Have a trip planned for Japan in April, so perhaps I'll have something to say then. If not, not. And don't forget, everybody loves somebody sometime.