

Yoga Center Trip April 2004

From Philly to Negril

It was cold for an April morning in Philadelphia as I walked the quarter mile from my house to Crestmont Station. Rushing to catch the 5:51AM train to the Airport I began to panic.

“If I miss this train, I’ll never get to the airport in time!!” My panicked brain cried out. Maybe it was the caffeine, maybe I really needed this vacation, but whatever it was right after crossing Old York Road I began to run. It’s not like I ran too far, maybe a hundred yards, but I felt better as soon as I was standing breathless at the deserted little depot.

I decided on this trip when a woman I had a crush on with since the 9th grade told me she had gotten married, again. Yeah again! She’d married two men that weren’t me! I think it’s time I drop the torch! I was invited to a reception thing in Houston on a Saturday in March, so I figured I’d take a week off, make an appearance, and then explore Southeast Texas.

Screw that! I’m sure Galveston is great but if I’m spending a week at the beach, I’m going to Negril! I flew to Houston for the day and then I booked a week at The Negril Yoga Centre.

“Nice Shirt!” The conductor shouted as I climbed up onto the train.

“I’m on vacation!” I said excitedly, as the conductor pantomimed climbing into my suitcase.

“Yeah, I’m on vacation,” I thought, and as I sat in the hard plastic seat, and already I could feel the stress begin to leave my body.

About a year before this trip, I’d finally quit the restaurant business. In the previous twenty years I’d taken only eight weeks vacation. In my new career, regular vacations were actually encouraged, so on my first day I promised myself no less than a week per year in Negril.

Soon I was at the airport, through security, and in the air.

The flight was uneventful, thank Jah, and by 10:30AM I was on the immigration line in the stale, humid air of Sangster International Airport. There’s a timeless quality to Sangster, from the ladies singing that same old song to the over eager Red Caps. Maybe it’s the government-issue paint job or the dated style of the employee uniforms. I can’t put my finger on it, it’s welcoming but at the same time you can’t wait to get out of there.

I dodged a few Red Caps, found a driver named Gordon, and negotiated a \$50 trip to Negril. Gordon was an older gent who didn’t say much as we drove through downtown Mobay. I asked him to please make a stop for Ting and Red Stripes. He just nodded, motioned forward and drove on. A few minutes later we stopped by a little bar where Gordon seemed to know everyone. I bought two Red Stripes, a Ting and a pack of Rizzlas.

Back in the van I cracked open my first Red Stripe. As I raised the beautiful sweaty brown bottle to my lips, Gordon hit the gas and my first swig went down my shirt instead of in my mouth.

“Woo Hoo!” I laughed. Even down my shirt this stuff was refreshing! I chugged half the bottle.

Gordon looked at me like I was crazy. Then he took the pack of Rizzlas out of my bag, looked me over and said, “I got a guy down near Lucea.”

“Cool, we’ll check it out,” I said, not wanting to seem over anxious. We drove in silence for the next thirty minutes.

The new road to Negril was finally done, and though it still wound through many small towns the clear parts between towns were able to be run at much higher speeds. I guess there was less romance to it, or maybe I’m just older and less romantic.

Just past Lucea, we met up with Gordon’s “guy”, and after a smooth transaction we were on our way. We ran the section of road between Lucea and Negril very fast, and in what seemed like minutes we were pulling up to the Negril Yoga Center.

The Negril Yoga Center Day One

I walked through the gate of the jungle like Yoga Center. I made my way along the path and came to a small cabin with open shutters and a small office sign.

Marcia stood in the window smiling. “You must be Mr. Vinny!” as she came out to greet me. “My name is Marcia.”

Marcia was tall and very pretty. Like many Jamaican women she held herself with a kind of dignity that both demands respect and is very alluring. We shook hands and walked into the small office. We did all the paperwork and went through the rules and quirks of the property. Then she then walked me to my room, Bamboo One, and showed me around.

Alone in my new space, I began to explore. My first impression was that the place was too rustic, but as I unpacked, changed clothes, showered and shaved, it was definitely growing on me. I got over the bright pink walls by referring to them in my journal as coral. The cabin was a classic Jamaican eight sided cottage with a bamboo and corrugated zinc roof. It had a nice queen sized bed, with a locally woven blue bedspread, plenty of shelf space, an armoire and a very cold refrigerator.

I opened the package I purchased from Gordon’s “guy”, took my pack of Rizzlas, and rolled a spliff. I sat on my bed, and enjoyed this Jamaican refreshment. Soon I was sitting in meditation feeling the energy of this place coursing through me. MMMM! This place is great.

One of my goals for 2004 was to get a handle on my spiritual self. I had been very influenced by Eastern Philosophies through the works of Alan Watts in recent years, and I knew a Negril trip would help me focus my quest. A little ganja and salty air can help disconnect one from the distractions of life.

Moving from my room, I began to explore the Center. What a cool place! There is a yoga pavilion with a highly polished wooden floor and mats stacked in the corner, very yoga-ish! In the back corner of the small property was the hammock hut, a thatched roof hut with no walls, several hammocks and a few benches. All over the property are sitting areas with beautiful mosaic tile tables. The energy of this place was inspiring. The mature plants and trees seemed each to have a story. The entire place was more a garden with a few cottages than the other way around. I felt as if it was their domain and I was their guest.

I walked into town to get some lunch and to stock up on provisions. This was my first visit here off-season and the vibe was more laid back than I remembered. The Burger King looked remodeled, almost new. I wondered who went there. Who would? I crossed West End Rd and walked into the Hi-Lo Market. I bought a liter of water, a six-pack of Red Strip and a few bananas. After paying in US dollars, I decided I wanted to use Jamaican dollars on this trip, so I hit the Cambio and cashed in \$200US for about 12,000J. The two bags of groceries were

heavier than they looked, but I refused the boy who offered to carry them back to my hotel. I tipped him 100J anyway, for effort.

The rest of the afternoon I stayed at the Yoga Center. Just before sunset I rolled over to Bar-B-Barn for dinner and I sat at the bar right on the beach. I had a great dinner and a few beers as I watched the sunset with a pretty Jamaican bartender. By beer four I found out she was not only a bartender but a part time working girl. I didn't take the bait. I'm not above giving this pretty girl the business in particular, but call me old fashioned, but I think it's disrespectful to Jamaicans in general, to use their women, however willing, as sex toys.

About 9PM I staggered back to the Yoga Center. It is so silent here. No, not silent really, but no man made sounds. I went to my room, put on some mosquito repellent and finished a spliff from earlier.

I sat for a while in a small courtyard and met a nice couple from New Zealand, who seemed freaked out meeting an American with a Phillies baseball cap and a loud Hawaiian shirt.

I also met Alan, the mosaic tile artist who had created the beautiful tables all around the property. He had been living on site in a tent for the last three months. He was a long time Negril traveler and a cool, interesting guy. He seemed to know everything about the Yoga Center, Negril and Jamaica. We talked for hours that seemed like minutes. By the time I looked at my watch it was 1AM, AKA bedtime.

My first full day in Negril

In some ways this was my favorite day. I did practically nothing, so this section will be short. I was up at dawn and walked across Norman Manley Boulevard also known as Beach Road through Shields Cottages and out to the beach.

Negril at sunrise is beautiful. From this end of the beach I can see a big freighter on the horizon and small fishing boats dotting the foreground. The air is cool and light, much less humid than in the later warmer hours. I walked up beach for what seemed like an hour, but when I crossed back out to the road I was just up past Selina's. I walked back in the early morning cool, feeling good and soaking in the positive vibes of post dawn Negril.

I spent the rest of the morning meditating, reading, and writing in my journal. It was decompression day. Only in retrospect did I realize how kinetic I'd been the day before, bouncing from place to place and making mental lists to fill my every waking hour. I guess that's how Jamaicans can tell you just got here. You've chilled out, but only in American terms, not by Jamaican standards. By the time you're here four or five days the new arrivals look stressed and harried to you too.

I napped through sunset, chipped in with the security guys for a delicious Brown Stew with rice and peas, and generally kept to myself that night. I read, wrote, drank a few Red Stripes and smoked. I knew I was headed for Selina's in the morning so I was asleep by 10.

The Negril.com Message Board Comes To Life.

Sunday Brunch at Selina's is like a Negrilaholics Anonymous meeting.

I'd found Negril.com quite sometime before this trip, but it was only when I began really planning did I discover the message board, and what a revelation it was.

I posted a note asking for information and suggestions regarding The Negril Yoga Center, and in minutes I had responses. Good responses. I expected a few, "Yeah Buddy, I got your Yoga

Center RIGHT HERE!!” type responses, but instead I received thoughtful emails from several people who had recently been to the Yoga Center who gave me honest, helpful opinions. I even got an email from Marcia from the Yoga Center management inviting me to check out the website.

I don’t know exactly when it happened but somehow I became a boardie! I changed my lurker moniker to Vinny_From_Philly and I was on my way.

One Sunday, still months before my trip, I was minding my own business when I came across post from “The Negril Crew” stating, “SELINA’S SUNDAY BRUNCH - JOIN US LIVE NOW!!!” Intrigued I clicked through to “The Real Negril” Webcast and before I knew it I was in Negril, chatting with people I’d seen on the board and listening to the Jamaican Cowboy. I was hooked! Over the next few weeks I became a Sunday morning regular at Selina’s, and I also stopped in at Three Dives a few times for a Negril sunset fix.

I woke up early Sunday morning. I was so excited to get to Selina’s but had to chill because it was still only 6AM. So, I took some time getting ready for my webcast premier, I shaved, poofed my hair, put on a good pair of shorts and a loud Hawaiian shirt. I topped it off with the Philadelphia Phillies baseball cap I’d bought especially for the trip. Not being a “Hat Guy,” I tried putting it on in different ways. Tilted, backwards, sideways, finally I looked in the mirror, “Face it, you’re 40, cool is escaping you.” I didn’t care, I was un-cool in Negril!

After some herbal mind enhancement I walked out to the breakfast table to find my friend Alan talking to a very pretty young woman from Paris. Now, being from the US, I’m supposed to dislike French people out of hand, but looking at this demure beauty, dislike was far from my mind. Her name was Yasmine and I was smitten.

I sat next to Yasmine and made small talk and Annette the chef brought some coffee. Time seemed to stand still as I listened to that sexy French accent telling the story of the trip to, and arrival in Jamaica via Amsterdam and Havana. I hung on her every word as if she was Buddha teaching the path to enlightenment. I clumsily told her of several plans I had for the week and opened several doors of invitation. She seemed kind of interested, or maybe she was just too nice to burst my caffeine and ganja induced bubble. Soon it was 9:30 and I had to get to Selina’s. I bade goodbye to my Yoga friends and headed to meet my boardie friends in person.

Armed with freshly stirred testosterone, I set out to walk the half mile to Selina’s. Of course, I only made it about a hundred yards when a rebel taxi driver made me an offer I couldn’t refuse and in seconds I was at Selina’s.

I walked from the road into the brightly colored and crowded brunch hot spot. The place had a well worn island quality, and the “No Ganja Smoking” sign didn’t seem out of place. I wondered if I’d recognize anyone, but no sooner was the thought completed that I spotted Rob (Mr. Real-Negril Webcast), Selina and the Jamaican Cowboy sitting together at the bar near a laptop computer. I walked over and made my introductions. I took a seat at the bar with a good view, ready for whatever was to happen.

I knew there were people here I have spoken to via the board, but I had no idea who was who. How was I going to figure this out? I began thinking nametags would have been a good idea, but a “Hello My Name Is” sticker didn’t seem like the island way.

The Jamaican Cowboy started his set as I ordered breakfast. I remembered The Jamaican Cowboy from the “Hedonism Island Picnic” almost ten years earlier though I couldn’t place him. Maybe he changed, maybe I changed? There couldn’t be two Jamaican Cowboy’s, could there? Anyway, this guy was kickin’ it old school to some sort of Jamaican rockabilly. Whatever

it was, he held the place spellbound. His gruff yet melodious voice, his piercing hazel blue eyes and his buddy on the rumba box keeping the bass line, had us all a-tapping and a-swaying.

This was my first trip to Selina's, the coffee was fantastic, and the Jamaican breakfast was spot on! Selina herself was everywhere. She knew almost everyone in the place, and the ones she didn't know she met! I don't know her story, but she's from Canada, she says "about" in that funny Canadian way, and she really seemed to find true happiness here in Negril. Big Roy her husband was in the kitchen and her beautiful children were scampering all about the place.

Suddenly, halfway through the attack on my plate, a smiling woman, who also seemed to know everyone, walked up to me and said, "You must be Vinny From Philly!!"

"That's me!" I said cheerfully, guessing the Phillies hat, now on the counter beside me acted as the afore mentioned nametag.

"I'm Meg....," she said and welcomed me to Negril as she introduced me to her group. Her husband Tom, Patty, Erin, Lisa, a guy named Frank, his wife and a few others.

They seemed like a lively bunch and I was invited to stop by Kuyaba later that afternoon. I joined in their conversation from my bar perch and I began looking forward to the impending party. Here I was thousands of miles from home and these folks made me feel as if I was back on South Street in Philly. Negril is a special place, and it attracts special people.

I listened to The Cowboy, met more boardies and waved to the several friends and family I'd told to look at the Webcast at exactly 11AM. The coffee, turned to Bloody Marys, and then to Red Stripes, while most of the brunching boardies headed back to their hotels. Too Soon the Webcast was over, and after a hug from Selina I was off to explore Sunday afternoon in Negril.

The Kuyaba Party Animals

The midday sun and the vodka from my Bloody Marys shortened my planned beach walk to town, so I cut through Travellers and hit the Yoga center for some bottled water and a nap in the hammock hut.

I woke several drooling hours later. Wow, I felt great! I ambled back to my cottage to find the maid had changed my dark blue bedspread to a loud bright pink tie-died one. Now pink isn't normally a favorite color, but this bedspread rocked! I took it as good omen for my night. Chicks dig pink!

About 6-ish, I walked over to Kuyaba and the crew was in full party mode. Frank was regaling the crowd with a story of island adventures from the previous days. I don't remember the story but he had all of us roaring. The next thing I knew it was dark, I was feeling no pain, and somehow I'd switched to a drink called a Dirty Banana.

I'm not a hundred percent sure what happened next, but Erin, Patty and I kind of paired off, trio'd off would be more accurate. We had a blast. The memories are blurry. Teary eyed blurry, we laughed for hours, and we didn't even visit Tedds! These two were awesome; we were three of a kind. On vacation, blowing off steam and not the least bit self conscious.

Sometime during the night I must have remembered I brought my camera because I took a series of drunken photos, mostly of Patty and Erin and several of nothing at all. I must have slipped into the obnoxious Philadelphia picture taking drunk, because many photos are of my new gal pals obviously saying, "STOP TAKING MY F#\$%&>? PICTURE!!!" The night somehow ended without the torrid threesome I was envisioning in my demented alcohol addled brain,

which was good because I don't think little vinny could have handled these two vixens in such a drunken state.

Slinking back to the Yoga Center, I felt like a teenager trying not to wake the family as I stumbled thru the property to my cottage. In the garden I noticed movement, Jamaican monsters, maybe? Night-time creepy crawlies, or just the owners cat checking out the new drunk guy? I slipped into the bare-bulbed light of my cottage, I opened a beer, and attempted to record the fun filled night in my journal, but to this day I have no idea what the scribbly gibberish means. Other than I must have had a good time.

The Day After

The next morning I had a legendary hangover, let's just say the free yoga class was scratched off my list. I dragged my massively enlarged head to the breakfast table. I had what would have been nice breakfast, but my mouth was numb. I then tried to converse with the couple from New Zealand but they just turned everything I said into rude, self important anti-American comments. What the hell did we ever do to the Kiwis? Anyway, with that I went back to sleep.

I re-woke about 10AM to find the yoga class in full swing. I watched as what seemed like every pretty woman in Negril stretched and contorted themselves in that yoga sort of way. Realizing I probably looked like Aqualung in a schoolyard, I retreated to my cottage for a cool shower, a few bananas and a three Extra Strength Excedrin's.

After the Yoga class was safely over, I wandered out to the breakfast table. The whole crew was there chit chatting with an unusually high level of animation. "Hmmm," I thought to myself, "I should try this Yoga thing."

Yasmine was talking to the yoga teacher who also hailed from France, or at least had a French accent. I'm not sure which is the chicken or the egg here, was it the cool summer breezes, French wines and cheeses, or the practice of Yoga, but Damn! The yoga instructor was probably fifty, but looked thirty. She had a girlish skip in her step, and deep romantic eyes. "Hmmm," I thought to myself, "I should try this Yoga thing."

Alan was there too, talking to a new arrival. She was introduced to me as Brenna from Saskatchewan. She was young, twenty one or so, her muscular build, and relatively short hair, combined with my Philadelphian male sensibility (or lack there of) made me immediately think lesbian. I find it easier to think of women I can never have as lesbians, it keeps the sting of impending middle-age at a safe distance.

Don't get me wrong, me thinking her a probable "girl only girl" didn't stop me from enjoying her youthful good looks. I don't know how a girl from Saskatchewan should look, but Brenna makes me want to go there to see! She was a tall brunette with green eyes and a great figure. In my mind's eye I picture her on an idyllic Canadian farm, hauling large bales of hay from a faded red 1953 Ford pick-up (all in slow motion of course). Ragged corduroy shorts, long muscular legs, well worn work boots, and rippling abs. A thin half shirt straining to cover her large, full breasts with a grey bandana keeping the hair off of her sweaty brow, but I digress.

She was a sweet bubbly girl here in the real world, right on the cuff of being referred to as a woman, as if the woman part was keeping the girlish part at bay. Traveling alone and in Jamaica for two weeks, she had already been out to Ocho Rios and Mobay. My own daughter was about eighteen at the time and I admired Brenna's ability, to strike out alone. Of course, Alan, Yasmine and I were all traveling alone, but even young Yasmine had ten years on her and was a world traveler in her own right. In the end Brenna and I had nothing in common, except

for my love of large firm breasts and her having them, but we did enjoy each other's company from time to time that week.

I was out of beer and money, so I took a walk into town. I was feeling very cosmopolitan walking through this familiar third world town. I hit the ATM at the Scotia Bank and grabbed 10,000J, which sounds like much more than it is. I walked all around downtown, meeting people and generally checking out the scene. I decided to walk up to the cliffs for lunch, but the hill rising out of town on West End Road got the best of me. So I turned around and went into the Jamaican version of a fast food chicken joint. Lunch gave me new energy, and I walked down by the craft market and onto the beach.

I took off my shirt and sandals. I walked along the water line. I'm not much of a beach person, which I'm sure seems weird for a guy who goes to Negril at least once a year, but I love walking in the surf, and sitting at a beach bar is one of life's great pleasures. I found one such place somewhere near Bamboo Beach. There was a picnic table with a big yellow umbrella and a bartender delivering 100J Red Stripes.

"Does it get any better than this?" I thought as I looked up to see Brenna walking towards me in a bikini, "Ok it did get better!"

I bought her a beer while we made chit chat, and I tried to keep from ogling her chest. We talked about Saskatchewan and sadly I found out she didn't work on a farm baling hay. What I did find intriguing is that she wouldn't say what she did, just that she worked. I didn't push it, women with secrets are all the more even sexy. She finished her beer waved to a few Italian guys she'd befriended and then she ran to catch-up with them.

By this time it was late afternoon and I needed some ganja and a nap. Back at my cottage I laughed at my lightweight self, seeing the spliff that had me pretty high the entire day was less than half smoked. I finished it and headed for the hammock hut.

I had a hard time negotiating the hammock. You can't really climb in from the side like a bed, but that's what I did and was glad no one was there to see me look so clumsy. After about ten minutes of jostling around I was finally comfortable, and began to read a book by Alan Watts, "The Wisdom of Insecurity." For some reason I like to think big thoughts while in Negril. The energy of the place seems to demand it and the tranquility definitely allows it. As I lay there thinking my big thoughts I noticed a ferret-like animal checking out the compost pile in the far back corner of the property, he was like a cross between a ferret and a groundhog. He scampered away as Alan came into the hut.

Alan stepped over the hammock, sat on the scrunched material, lifted his legs and slipped comfortably and easily into the hammock. I laughed at my lack of hammock savvy. I asked Alan about the large rodent and he said it was probably a mongoose. I thought he was kidding, but it kind of made sense since I'd noticed animal burrowed holes in all the garden beds and under some of the cabins and porches.

Again I'd slept through sunset. Alan was gone and I was alone in the hammock hut.

Tuesday 4/20/2004

It was becoming a routine for me, up before dawn, ganja with the sunrise. Since I missed two of the last four sunsets, I found myself falling in love with morning in Negril. Sitting quietly, eyes closed and senses tuned. I can hear distant waves gently washing the beach, a rooster is very serious about waking the entire neighborhood, another in the distance does the same. The sweetness of the garden calls to the Doctor Birds, like beautiful Jamaica herself called to sailors and pirates alike in centuries past.

The road gets busier as the sun rises. Cars race in and out of town, while voices sing their melodious patios. It's going to rain today. Big fluffy clouds float in on the breeze, and the garden seems to raise its collective countenance skyward in way of acceptance.

How cool is it to be in Negril on 4/20. I realized this early and planned to make it a true 420 kind of day.

I began breakfast alone about 8AM, but by the time I was finished the breakfast table was full. We were becoming quite the happy little group. I tried to explain the concept of 420 to a Canadian, a French-Moroccan, and an aging non-conformist, agrarian tile artist, but to no avail. We moved to a discussion of doing something together one night. Alfred's Beach Party Extravaganza looked like a lot of fun, so we decided to go there together Wednesday night. Teach everyone in Negril how the yoga-folk get down!

I had a brochure from some tour company promising fun and frivolity at Black River for about \$60US. Yasmine liked the idea of a Black River trip and agreed to come along. She read my brochure then showed me her "Lonely Planet Guide to Jamaica", which had a less organized way of visiting Black River, it sounded great! Take a route taxi from Negril to Savanna-La Mar, another to Black River, then find a guide to take us up river in a small fishing boat. Alan explained the way route taxis worked and about what it should cost us. I was way excited! The idea of traveling by route taxi fit with my idea for this trip, a more "authentic" Jamaican experience. Not to mention that I would be spending the day with the lovely Yasmine. I told her about Tedd's Shroom Boom, she was non-committal, but I was hopeful, I'm always hopeful.

With my social calendar quickly filling up I figured it was a good time to hit the beach to get some photos. An original trip parameter was to get pictures of as many hotels and landmarks as possible, and I was falling woefully behind. Walking up the beach I was surprised to see the T-Water Beach Resort closed and abandoned. I snapped away with my camera and my mind raced to think up scenarios of how I could put a group together to buy this place. I'd call it "Vinny's - One Particular Harbor," and then I'd have to hire a roomful of lawyers to fight Jimmy Buffet when he sues me for copyright infringement.

I got an hour's worth of good pictures and I landed a few doors down from Kuyaba. I'd told my friends there I'd stop by this morning to see what they had planned for the next few days. A feeling of trepidation came over me as I walked across the beach. I'd gotten pretty loose the other night, (ok, sloppy even) and I really hoped I didn't step on any toes or worse, grab any asses!

No sooner did I enter the Kuyaba grounds did I see Patty and Erin sitting on their porch. They were surprised to see me. They actually thought they'd scared me off! HA! Scare me off? My trepidation dissipated.

The plan for the day was a trip to Rick's about three-ish. Every trip to Negril seems to include a night at Rick's, I know its touristy joint with all them All-Inclusive busses lined up in the yard, but I still like it. I consider it a Negrilian guilty pleasure.

The thunderheads that had been building all morning finally they let go, and the torrential downpour that ensued washed clean the thin veil of dust that seemed to cover everything. It was so tropical-y like, and stuff. I sat in the safety of Kuyaba's cottage porch, as big fat raindrops pounded man and nature. About a Red Stripe later, the rain stopped and the ladies went off to do some shopping. I headed back to the Yoga Center.

After a nap in the after-rain cool I strolled into town to check my email. More to unplug my mailbox spam, than to communicate with the strange world to the north, but as I looked at

eight hundred plus messages, It felt like a giant hand from the “Real World” was reaching out from the monitor to snatch my soul and drag it back to the land of schedules, appointments and phone calls. I logged off and almost ran out of the place.

Promptly at 3 o’clock I arrived at Kuyaba, and in true Jamaican fashion the taxi was soon come. This was fine because the others hadn’t returned and it gave us time for a round of Red Stripes. I tried to recruit them in my 420 concept too, they understood the meaning, but didn’t indulge in the action. The diver showed about 3:20 and we waited for the rest of the crew. After about ten minutes, Erin decided just to leave a note, but couldn’t find pen or paper so we just left our three empty Red Stripe bottles in front of Meg’s door as a clue. All the way to Ricks we devised a plan to bar hop all around the West End leaving only three Red Stripe bottles as clues to our whereabouts. We dubbed ourselves “The Three Red Stripe Crew,” but by the time we finished our first round our friends arrived foiling our plans.

Ricks was fun, isn’t it always? As the sun sank deeper in the western sky the crowd thickened, and the nightly party began. By the time “The Wild Thing” entered Rick’s tiny cove the party was in full swing. We drank, and drank some more, danced and danced some more. I had a feeling I should try diving from the highest cliff, so I sat down, had another beer and waited for that feeling to go away. Again, as before with the Kuyaba Party Animals, the hours flew by and twenty blurry photos later, it was dark and we headed back to Kuyaba for dinner.

Kuyaba has a great bar, swinging hammock style bar stools that were only uncomfortable if you were sober, which if you sat very long, you wouldn’t be. Kuyaba also has a top-notch restaurant, a diverse menu with good prices. It’s situated right on the beach, open-aired, with an almost Polynesian flavor. About eight or ten of us sat at a large table and enjoyed each other’s company. We were being much more civilized than we had been a few days earlier, and a good time was had by all.

I returned to the Yoga Center around 11PM to find Alan and Yasmine still up and discussing some form of intellectual pursuit. I joined them and we began to talk about this morning’s rain storm. They told me how the holes throughout the garden filled with water and the giant crabs that lived in them came scampering out and were running all over the place.

“Sure, make fun of the drunken guy.” I laughed, not believing them. They laughed even more at my insistence they were putting me on. “They’re mongoose holes!” I declared, which made them laugh all the harder.

“The Yoga Center is like a sanctuary for giant crabs, no one hunts them here so they can grow very big.” Alan explained.

“Why would we lie to you?” Yasmine asked innocently.

“If I was sitting here minding my own business and giant crabs came running from everywhere? Oh my God! I’d climb up on the table and start screaming like a little girl!!” I must have said with a terrified look on my face because they both thought that was hilarious!

“I still refuse to believe you!” I pouted and retreated back to my cottage.

Wednesday in Negril

I woke Wednesday morning to realize I’d left my camera at Kuyaba so I got up and headed there to see if it was still around. To my pleasant surprise it was, I love Jamaica! Patty and her friend Lisa were already awake and eating breakfast, I visited for a while and off they were for a day of shopping or some such adventure. The rest of the crew was going on the “Wild Thing”

for a day of snorkeling somewhere up near Green Island. They invited me to join them, but I'm not the snorkeling type and I didn't want to completely barge in on their vacation.

Since I was so close, I decided to walk over to Selina's for breakfast. It was much quieter this today than it was on Sunday. I got a cup of coffee and turned to watch the morning street scene. I could have sat there all day. I'd already missed the free yoga class, and a low key day was on the menu.

Returning to the Yoga Center a jerk stand appeared right in front of the property. It hadn't been there all week so I went over to check it out. It looked kind of like one of those dirty water hot dog stands you see in any big American city, but with distinctly Jamaican touches. Kenny the Jerk Cart Guy was busy getting his product ready for the lunchtime rush and had little time for my questions. I'd spent twenty years in the restaurant business and I was impressed with his skills. Not a wasted movement, the utility of every piece of equipment was orchestrated by years of practice. This wasn't what Kenny did, this was who he was! I decided not to cause further distraction and I promised him I'd be out for lunch.

"Just follow your nose and your watering mouth!! My Jerk is the best in Negril!" he shouted as I entered the Yoga Center gates.

By now the yoga class was in full swing, again! So I went into my cottage to roll a spliff and do some cerebral yoga. I was about halfway through, and feeling pretty good, when I realized that copious amounts of sweet ganja smoke were wafting out my window and directly into the yoga class.

"Busted!" I giggled to myself as I skulked past the yoga pavilion. I guess ganja smoke isn't very shocking in Jamaica because no one gave me a cross look.

I cracked open a Ting, and sat sphincter eyed at the breakfast table while my friends joined me. We talked about our adventures here in Jamaica, who we were and about our lives in the real world, though Brenna was still being mysterious.

By noon the smoky aroma from Kenny's sizzling creations filled the air, and my stomach growled on cue. Kenny greeted me like an old friend as I walked the twenty yards from the gate to his roadside bistro. In the shade of the Yoga Center fence were two older women sitting on five gallon plastic buckets eating voraciously with their fingers moaning and groaning in a kind of culinary orgasm.

"I'll have what they're having!" I joked over Kenny's head as he sadly reported he was all out of Jerk Chicken but had a few nice pieces of his special, best in town, Jerk Pork with rice, peas, and coco bread. I took a second look at the two bone sucking sexagenarians and ordered two portions, one for now and one for later.

HOOOO WEEEEEE!!!, it was heaven on a plate! Well, actually it wasn't on a plate, it was ingeniously wrapped in tin foil in a way that kept everything separate and hot. I offered Yasmine my second platter but she was too concerned as to where Kenny washed his hands. Fearing nothing I dug in with both hands and was soon heading towards my own peak of jerky spicy wonderfulness.

It's hard to explain an authentic Jamaican Jerk meal. The spiciness of the meat builds as you eat it. It could surely overwhelm you, but then you take a mouthful of rice and peas, which is the opposite of spicy, but still flavorful. It straightens you right out. I have no idea what's in coco bread, but it's as addictive as cocaine. Add a frosty Red Stripe and you have the perfect meal.

Sated as ever, I took a post coital nap in the Hammock hut, I love Negril!

I missed another sunset, damn!

I rolled out to the breakfast table around eight o'clock to find Brenna and Alan all ready to go to Alfred's Beach Party Extravaganza, Yasmine wasn't feeling well so she stayed behind. The sign said the party started at eight-thirty so we hung out till about nine before taking the long walk up the beach.

I took the lead as we walked up the dark beach claiming to be the protector of our little crew which made Brenna laugh.

"I'll do just fine," Brenna said, "I'm trained to protect myself."

"Professional Wrestler!" I shouted, "That's what you do!! I knew it!!"

"If you must know, I'm a soldier in the Canadian Army." She stated plainly, "Sometimes it freaks people out when I tell them that."

"Hell! You protect us!" I said as I ran around behind her.

We all had a good laugh, and we talked the rest of the three quarter mile trip about all things military and Brenna's love for and commitment to her role and her profession. Sexy soldier, that's even more exciting than the whole lesbian thing!

Alfred's Beach Party Extravaganza was a blast! Alan wasn't much of a dancer, but he could sway with the best of them. Brenna danced with every guy in the place, it was a good time. There were local reggae bands playing with DJs playing in-between. Beers go down very easily when you're reggae dancing.

Speaking of going down easily when you're dancing, I was surprised to see the amount of Jamaican girls plying their trade in the bar. So much so that I figured I was probably just being a pervert, then while danced with this one curvy young lady she whispered into my ear, "So you wanna fuk mi?"

"Like you wouldn't believe!" I replied, not missing a beat, "But I can't."

She looked deeply into my eyes and said, "Am I too young? Are my boobies too small? Let me get my friend."

"No, no, you're perfect, beyond perfect even, but I just can't," I stammered.

Like a fisherman with a snapped line, she turned and disappeared into the crowd, only to repair and recast. I turned to see Brenna and Alan snickering at me. Brenna seemed glad that I declined. I went into the "I have a daughter her age," and the whole "respect for women" thing.

"Dost thou protest too much?" She said and kissed me on the forehead, in an "Awww, such a cute little old guy" way, and went to buy me a beer to cool the flames.

Soon the night was ending, Brenna headed off with some guy friends, and Alan and I walked back to the Yoga Center.

When we got back to the Yoga Center, Alan and I stalked through the garden seeking the elusive Negril Giant Crab. They were all over! They were huge, like really huge! I was simultaneously amazed and freaked out!

I projected back to Yasmine's story of them running all over and hastened back to the safety of my cottage. That night as I lay in bed I could hear them creeping and crawling outside! I'd thought it was the owner's cat but it was giant monster crabs. Someone needs to call National Geographic!

Black River Safari w/ Yasmine & Rasta George

This was my last full day in Jamaica. This week went by so fast! Next time I'm staying at least ten days.

I don't know why but I was so nervous sitting there eating my morning vegetarian yummy-ness, when Yasmine appeared all packed and ready for our day on the road. I found myself apologizing for not being ready to go, I hate when I do that. Hell, it was only 8:15 in the damn morning and I'm all, "um uh, well, I, ah." She sat with me as I finished my coffee and Alan continued to give us last minute travel tips.

I went back to my cabin to get ready and to tweak my buzz. I did a few breathing exercises to clear my head and chill my angst. Soon my mellow returned and I let the excitement of the impending day's adventure take over. I took the two perfectly rolled fatties from my secret place and put them in my pocket, did one last mental checklist and out the door I strode.

The sun and I were a bit higher in the sky now, and boy did Yasmine look great! Energy and excitement seemed to radiate from her. It mingled with mine and seemed to lessen the space between us.

We waved good-bye to our friends and headed to the Negril Bus Depot which is about a quarter mile past the roundabout on the road to Sav-La-Mar. Walking past the roundabout a gaggle of cabbies called to us in their special way, but as soon as Yasmine's French accent called back, "70J to Sav?" they stopped, just stopped, and pointed towards the bus depot.

In a few minutes we were walking through a sea of white Toyotas at the depot. Again a dozen drivers told us of the "deals" they had, but once again they heard that French accent they gave up and pointed to the next taxi headed to Sav-La-Mar. I guess the Jamaicans think Europeans are not as flahoolic with their money as we Americans. I didn't care, they thought we were French and it was saving me money!

Since Yasmine had that French thing going for her and seemed to enjoy haggling I let her do all the talking. When I'm in Negril I have that "Everyone's my friend" attitude. Yeah, maybe it attracts more sellers and scammers and maybe I don't always get the rock bottom price, but for me that's half of Negril's charm. You have some fun interacting and you pump a few bucks into the local economy.

We paid our 70J a piece for the ride to Sav, once there we'd get another taxi to Black River. The driver sat me up front with him, and Yasmine sat in the back of the Corolla with three Jamaicans, a mother, her daughter, and a young man with a broken hand who somehow shoe horned in.

The driver drove like a sixteen year old kid trying to impress his friends, but as we headed out of town I let myself relax. It's one of those "give in to the moment" situations. The loud thumping reggae negated any ideas of chatting with Yasmine, so I sank into the seat and into the music.

Soon the excitement I'd been feeling, the ganja I'd been smoking and the energy that was flowing came together! I felt as if I was standing at the precipice of time, fully aware, leaning into the oncoming rush of the present. At that moment I wished Sav was a thousand miles away, I didn't want it to end, but it was one of those rare mountaintop experiences that are so special because you only get a glimpse at any one time.

Sav was very different from Negril, it's less colorful, there are fewer smiles, and the streets were not very crowded. I guess it's where people lived and worked, not where they were trying to impress tourists. I hear it really bustles on market day, I'm sure I'll be back through.

We unloaded in a small lot near the center of town. There were taxis lined up and a few food vendors with dull makeshift carts who half-heartedly advertised their wares. Yasmine walked over and got a jelly coconut from one of them, while I found taxi number two. This time the taxi was a mini-van, we climbed into what we thought was the two-seater up front as we sipped the delightfully strange coconut water with two straws. When the bus filled up a third person squeeze in next to us, so much for the two-seater, Yasmine was a bit squished but at least she was squished against me! Thank Jah for Dentine!

The ride out of Savannah-La-Mar was fast and furious, there were fourteen people shoved in the van, and I felt like I was actually traveling in a foreign country. The people were warm and friendly, they seemed interested in us, where we were from and why we weren't on a tour bus. I answered one older woman, "how else was I gonna meet you!" And they say Jamaicans are smooth!

It seems the entire tourism industry did everything it could to keep separation between tourists and normal Jamaicans, the ones not trained by years of working the tourist trade. Part of me knows that's how they make their money, by packaging Jamaica in a polished shell, but another part knows, that sadly, this is too close for most American and European tourists. Maybe, I can help spread the word.

Yasmine and I made chit chat, discussing philosophy, politics, and Paris (the city, not the heiress), it was wonderful. She was a strong, confident woman and yet so feminine. I admit the idea that these qualities are mutually exclusive is a defective mental construct made up of my past bad relationships, yet I could feel a manly confidence build as we sat close, touched and talked.

The terrain really changes as you leave Sav, the lush tropical feel gives way to grassy, almost desert-like conditions, which I guess why the Spanish named it, the savannah by the sea. Leaving Westmoreland Township and entering St. Elizabeth, the road immediately gets better, and the already racing driver picks up speed.

The taxi had all but emptied itself along the route. Most of the group getting out at the town of Bluefields, the boyhood home of Peter Tosh, the second most famous Jamaican reggae star, several more at Whitehouse, where they are building a huge new Sandals resort, more like a small city, really, than a resort. It stands out like a sore thumb, literally, because it is being built on a small peninsula, and figuratively because it breaks up the natural country charm of the area. At every cross road you see small rum shacks and markets, with small country inns sparsely dotting the roadside between. I guess in twenty years the south shore will look like the strip in Negril, hopefully Negril won't become like the over commercialized "Hip Strip" in Mobay. Old-timers say it already has.

Pulling into Black River, it looked a lot like Sav-La-Mar, though there was a bit more color and much more commerce. We each paid our 150J to the driver, and it struck me what a great trip it was, just over two hours and only about \$3.50US.

In Jamaica, the bus depots are not in the tourist part of town, they are in the people part of town. We headed across a small bridge towards the docks along the river. To our right was the Black River Safari, it was the local tourist trap taking a bus load of people up river at a time in covered pontoon boats, complete with music, and sticky-sweet rum punch at the turn around point.

We turned left and headed to local docks along the river. There were a half dozen twelve foot multicolored fishing boats lined up complete with local guides looking for more adventurous travelers like us, just like Yasmine's guide book said there would be.

This is where we met Rasta George. Rasta George was the real deal, he told us of an exciting, fun, educational, and romantic trip into the Black River Morass, and all this for only \$2US more than the "Corporate Tour." He had me at hello, but we haggled a bit anyway. He wouldn't budge, which somehow was so strange in Jamaica that we said ok and forked over \$40US. He told us to wait in a little café right there near the docks where we sipped icy Tings and excitedly waited for our odyssey to begin.

About fifteen minutes later we were climbing into a small fishing boat and headed up the river. It was only then when I realized I'd given my camera to Yasmine to keep in her bag. As I began taking pictures I focused on an oncoming big tour boat, the people yelled and waved as they zoomed by, and I looked at Yasmine and we said in unison, "This is so much better!" Rasta George smiled and said that we've seen nothing yet, and for years we'd be telling people to come see Rasta George in Black River. He was right!

Rasta George is a tall thin Rastaman, his dreads were tucked into a tam bearing the Rasta colors of green, yellow and red, he wore wire rimmed sunglasses and he bubbled with personality. He was a great guide explaining all about the morass, what rivers fed it and how they come together to form Black River, he knew all about the flora and fauna, and explained how the swamp's eco-chain worked.

As if on cue the boat driver Brant, shouted something to Rasta George and pointed to another tour boat also headed up river and paused along the riverside with all its passengers pointing, ooh-ing and aah-ing. As we pulled close we could see that just beyond the river's edge was a small lagoon with a supposed crocodile swimming around. The tour boat was stopped about ten yards out in the river, but we didn't even slow down as we approached!

"Brace yourself!" Called Rasta George as we crashed through the mangrove and slid into the small lagoon, and yes there was a crocodile in there with us! At first I was freaked out, more so from the tour boat folks screaming than from the three foot crocodile hastily swimming away from us.

"Just a pickney," he whispered to Yasmine and me as we went back out to the river, but as we passed near the tour boat he shouted, "No Mon! Can't see dem giants from a da tour boat," his wink told us he was playing to the tour boat patrons. The tour boat guide gave us a dirty look and gunned the engines on the big boat, as we smugly waved goodbye, feeling pretty good about our decision to see the river with Rasta George.

"Tourists," I said in a jokingly snobbish way, which made Yasmine laugh. I looked back a few seconds later and she was still laughing. "What?" I queried.

"You look like more of a tourist than anyone else on the entire island!" she said laughing with Rasta George and Brant joining in.

"Looks can be and obviously ARE deceiving!!" I retorted, and we all laughed and Yasmine gave

me an apologetic hug. Yeah, OK, I was wearing blue shorts, sandals, a loud Hawaiian shirt, a bright red Phillies baseball cap and I was furiously taking pictures, BUT looks are deceiving for I am Vinny, man of the world!

Now with my balls thoroughly broken we continued our trek up river. Soon we came up on a little bar where the tour boat from earlier was docked, the tourists were drinking thier punch and dancing to reggae from a boom box. They were having a grand 'ol time. Just past the bar was low concrete bridge, far too low for the tour boats and that was obviously where we were headed.

“Them tour boats can’t come up here, this is why you come with us!” Rasta George boasted and into the upper river we went. I never felt so separated from the real world as I did then, pulling away from the tourists I had flashbacks to all those movies where the scary part starts just like this! Anytime you go to Negril you know you’re not in Philly anymore, or Kansas, or, you know what I mean, but here, fifty miles from Negril and then ten miles up a jungle river, the feeling is truly awesome.

Up here there are some serious crocodiles, five footers at least, which seem pretty damn big, when you’re close enough to reach out and touch them. I don’t know how many times that day I thought to myself, “Is this really happening?” “Am I really here?” Little did I know the coolness meter was about to ratchet itself up another notch.

Around a small bend in the narrowing river was a rickety wooden dock at a tiny little cove. We docked at this little oasis in the mangrove. Yasmine and I just looked at each other. I was thinking this must be the romantic part of the trip Rasta George told us about back in town. I don't know what she was thinking.

Climbing out of the boat we could see a small thatched hut in the clearing and we walked up to make our introductions. We all got Red Stripes and made small talk as we shared one of the spliffs I brought with me.

The bartender told us to take advantage of the afternoon sun and take a dip in the crocodile filled river. I thought he was crazy but when Yasmine started back to the water I followed, and when she stripped down to her very sexy bikini, I joined her in the water. Splashing around was fun until Yasmine asked if I thought splashing around attracts crocodiles like it does sharks.

Buzz Kill!

“They’re more afraid of you than you are of them!” Rasta George shouted from shore.

“Ya sure?” I asked not expecting a real answer, but I got one.

“If I let the crocs eat the people I go out of business quick, no?” He answered, which made perfect sense to me.

After a few pictures we got out of the water, had a second beer and sunned ourselves on the large rocks like our friends the crocodiles do. After about an hour at our little oasis, it was sadly time to go.

On the way back to town we drove a lot faster and Yasmine and I shared a bench on the boat this time and kind of snuggled as the spray from the water gently washed over our faces. Few words were spoken, we were now on the homebound part of our trip and I was leaving tomorrow early. I don’t know about her, but I saw a very romantic evening ahead of us.

Back in Black River we went into the same little café and got some bottled water and french

fries.

“You guys did a great Job with these,” I said, squirting that translucent Jamaican ketchup on a plate.

“Fries?” she smirked.

“French Fries!!” I said teasing her.

“We had nothing to do with them,” she said dryly in that sultry French accent.

“I love your accent,” I said, immediately wishing I didn’t use the word love.

“What accent? You’re the one with the accent,” she teased back. “Americans think everyone has an accent, but them.”

“Go ahead, bash the ugly American” I pouted.

“You’re a very cute American,” she purred as she leaned over and kissed me.

Tedds with Yasmine

We returned to the bus/taxi lot to find a ride back to Sav-La-Mar. Being mid-afternoon, there weren’t many people headed to Sav so we had to wait for the taxi to fill. At only 150J a head, the taxis don’t leave till then, preferably not till over-full.

It had gotten really warm and we were in need of some refreshment, so we walked over to a fruit cart and ordered a pineapple from the big scary looking vendor. If you never had a pineapple in Jamaica, you don’t know what you’re missing. The Pineapple Guy takes hold of said fruit by the leafy cactussy part, pulls out a gigantic machete and lops off the bottom half inch in one smooth motion. Expertly he carves off the rough skin, and with the speed of a Cuisinart he slices it into thin discs. The discs fall onto a shiny metal plate balanced precariously atop a rickety wooden fruit crate, and at about the time you’re getting over the shock of the menacing twenty four inch blade whipping about, he scoops the pieces into a clear plastic bag and hands it to you with a gold tooth accentuated smile. The entire process takes about forty seconds and only cost a dollar US. What a show!

Watching as he wiped the residual juice off the heavy knife, I nodded and thought to myself, “Theft must be rare from this cart!”

The Pineapple Guy nodded back as if to say “Your Damn Right!”

Back in the shade of the minivan I opened doors on both sides to make the best of the slight breeze blowing over from the town center. We sat quietly and enjoyed both the sweetness of our pineapple and the sweetness we seemed to be finding in each other.

By the time we were finished we were on Jamaica Route A2 headed back to Sav. There were only four other people in the minivan which the driver didn’t seem too happy about.

Yasmine put her feet up, leaned against my chest and closed her eyes for this leg of the trip. My arm was draped over her sleeping shoulder and my hand rested gently on her belly as it rose and fell with each breath. Not wanting to risk waking her, I looked out the opposing window and timed my breath with hers.

The entire time I fought with myself, trying to keep my demons at bay. The normal thing to do would be to fall asleep with her, but my brain would have none of that! “What if you wake her up with your snoring, or worse, with you drooling all over her head?!”

Luckily for my sanity, my innate negativity towards my romantic success was overshadowed by the intoxicating scent of her chocolate brown hair. I found a quiet place in my mind by thinking of a love song written by my daughter Kristine. Somehow her words turned my doubts into hope and gave me peace.

Yasmine woke just minutes before we reached the Sav-La-Mar Taxi Station. We arrived right in the middle of the Jamaican version of rush hour and in minutes we were in a Negril bound taxi. There would be no sleeping on this leg of the trip though, we were stuffed in the back of a small Japanese sub-compact, and the between the driver’s exuberance and the Westmoreland roads we were on a rollercoaster ride.

Approaching Negril I remembered we’d talked about visiting Tedds Shroom Boom, I broached the subject with Yasmine and she was all for it!

“Woo Hoo!!” I thought, “There’ll be lovin’ in the hammock hut tonight!!”

I told the driver we needed to get out before the end of the route. I did it just in time because in what seemed like a minute later we were de-taxiing in front of Tedds colorful little yard.

It looked much like it did on my last visit about two years earlier, except this time the sign was inside the fence and I was concerned he may no longer be in business, but, to my relief, Garland came to the door as we approached the porch.

“Hi!!” I said with a big wave. Garland pretended to remember me, but his acting wasn’t all too convincing. Now, since my last trip I’d spoken to fellow Negrilista who told me to make sure I asked for “Double Strength Tea,” something I would soon regret, well sort of, in retrospect I don’t, but that day I did, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

Anyone who’s tried mushroom tea knows it is about as tasty as bat shit. Bat shit, mixed with water and honey. Suffice to say it’s nasty. Yasmine had no idea what to expect, she thought we’d be sitting in a quaint little café sipping something more like a cross between Earl Grey and the broth they use in wonton soup. Boy was she surprised!

Garland brought us over our tea and I paid him the \$20US he asked for. Yasmine thought I should have haggled but I knew it was a good price.

I can’t describe the look of shock and horror on her face as she took the first sip, but it was a lot like that of Brad and Janet when they realized what really happened to Eddie.

I thought she’d fold like a cheap camera, but, to her credit, she choked down the slimy psilocybin and honey concoction with the demure class with which she did most things.

We were having a really nice time, but I knew from experience we needed to get back to the Yoga Centre before this stuff really kicked in. We said out good-byes to Garland and his son, just as a group of six Hedo People took our place.

We walked out front and hailed a taxi. I knew this was an “In-Town” taxi and would cost whatever the market would bear, but I also knew we needed to get back because the waves of trippy shroomage were beginning to lap ever so gently on the shores of my skull!

By the time we got back to the Yoga Centre were giggling like characters in a Dr. Seuss book. OK, for a minute I thought we WERE characters in a Dr. Seuss book, but the calm was shattered when the driver asked us for \$5US for the ride.

Yasmine's flabber was gashed, "We only paid 70J to Sav!!" She shrieked in her here-to-fore sexy French accent.

The driver looked at me with eyes that said, "I don't want to deal with this." I peeled off 200J (about \$3.25US) and he seemed happy to get out of there. Yasmine seemed mad at me for giving in and I just laughed, trying to diffuse the situation and herded her into the Yoga Center gates. We split up and headed for showers in our respective cabins and planned to meet at the breakfast table afterwards.

The "Double Strength" hit hard!! It relentlessly toyed with my sanity as I tried to shower, brush my teeth, and roll a fatty. I tried to take a moment and record this awesome day in my journal, but when I grabbed my pen I was overtaken with the banality of expressing life is such a small, bourgeois, and utterly meaningless form as words or language! Yeah, I was out there!

Walking from my cabin, I came across Alan and the Kiwi couple. I dove right into conversation with them when, unfortunately, I realized the power of speech was well beyond my current mental state. I didn't see Yasmine so I asked Alan to tell her where I was. At least that was my intent.

Some time later Alan joined me in the Hammock hut and the next thing I know I was knocking on Yasmine's door. Now, I knew at some level that I was in the full clutches of the "Double-Strength Tea," but I also knew I had a hundred pounds on poor Yasmine. Physically she seemed fine, but looking into her eyes told a different story. The lights were on and somebody was definitely still home, but they were about to go on holiday for the next eight to ten hours!

Realizing, fresh air, liquids and maybe some ganja would be the best thing to keep us afloat in the midst of these rising tides, she headed across the yard to the hammock hut, and I went to my cabin for supplies. I soon joined her and we shared a hammock. Being with Yasmine made me feel great, the testosterone bubbled up through the waters, but making any moves on a woman in this state would be quite sumbaggedly of me so we rock and rolled with the increasing waves, within the safety of our sturdy hammock.

I awoke some time later, Yasmine was gone, and Alan was there. I knew I had to move, Alan was talking but I was no longer of this planet. I rushed back to my cabin and guzzled several Red Stripes and somehow managed to roll two big sloppy slpiffs. After a cold shower I was stabilized enough to eat the sweet bun in my refrigerator and drink some water. I walked out side and sat at the breakfast table.

No sooner did I relax did it all come flooding back over me, it was still strong, maybe stronger than before, but I seemed able to control it. Maybe it becomes more cerebral and less physical as time wears on. As my vision seemed to melt anything I looked at for more than a few seconds, I felt like Neo in the Matrix. I began to realize this "reality" is nothing but subjective energy fields that on some level we "agree" to see in a certain way.

I began to fixate on a large flowery bush under the spotlight near the center of the yard. It was actually a close knit series of individual shoots all integrated under the surface. On some level we were aware of each other and I was acutely aware of all the energy ebbing and flowing all around me, it was cool. In that moment I gained and understanding of the essence of life, if not the meaning. I knew this was a fleeting moment, and in the morning, like a day in OZ, I would be back in Kansas, and everything would be in black and white.

Over the next hour or so, I was lost between these worlds, debating which was real, and if the “Double Strength Tea” was causing it, or was it opening my doors of perception and allowing me to see it. I guess that’s the big question.

After a night of fitful sleep, and really wild dreams, I was awoken by a knock on my door. It was Eddie my driver I’d hired to take me to the Airport. It was 7AM. I told him my flight wasn’t till 1PM and he said he’d be back at ten.

I was all kinds of confused. The tea had run its course, but there was a residual effect mixing with my hangover, I’d drunken eight beers from about six and midnight and I felt them. Stumbling into the shower, the cold water invigorated me. I must have drunk a gallon of water the standing there. I knew the entire place slept till eight so I packed, the whole time very worried how Yasmine made it through the night.

I had a dream where she thought I’d poisoned her, and Alan and I ended up chasing her all over Negril ending up in the swamps behind the strip. I laughed as I recalled my wacky dream but found myself checking my sandals for swamp mud before I put them in my duffel just to be on the safe side.

I dressed in my travel clothes and made for the breakfast table. One of the security guys was high up in the mango tree shaking some fresh mangoes loose, Alan and Marie were standing below to catch the fruit before it hit the ground.

A few minutes later I was having a coffee and fresh mango breakfast. I apologized to Alan for my lack of coherence the previous evening and told him about Tedds, he smiled and took it in stride. I asked if he’d seen or heard from Yasmine. He said he ran into her a few times last night and though she was smiling, she didn’t say anything to him.

She never made it to breakfast and only moaned when I knocked on her door to say good-bye.

“She’s Pissed,” was my first thought, but somehow I knew she wasn’t. I joked to myself, “If she IS pissed it’s because she was denied my lovin’!”

What woman wouldn’t be?

I hopped into my taxi and headed north to Sangster International Airport.

Epilogue

Before I left Alan and I traded emails and I gave him a note for Yasmine. I’d have to wait to contact her since she was headed to Treasure Beach for the next week.

So, as I got back to my life, and made plans for another trip in the fall, I filled my journal with thoughts and memories of my wild week. A few weeks later I received an email from Yasmine, she regaled our day together and how Rasta George helped her find her place in Treasure Beach, and how she met a couple who went on the “Tourist” boat up Black River, but didn’t get to go to “Our” little cove. The funniest thing was while she was under the effects of the tea she thought she had been poisoned and spent some time in her cold shower as well.

As for Patty, Erin and the Kuyaba folks, we’ve kept in email touch.

I’m still a faithful boardie and get to as many webcasts as I can!

Peace :)

Vinny