

BONDING

Wendy and Zoya are in Jamaica on a Government Sponsored Scholarship from Panama and Haiti. Wendy pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition and Zoya a Master of Arts in Education career at the University of Technology and the Northern Caribbean University respectively, while Peter and Magan are on a corporate-sponsored scholarship. Peter is pursuing his bachelor's degree in medicine and surgery. (MB, BS). Magan, a BA in Administrative Management and Banking at the University of the West Indies and the University of Technology in Kingston respectively. As first-year foreign Students and new to the island, Wendy and Zoya had to meet with their individual Embassy Personnel for consultation and then a visit to the bookstore before taking up residence on campus. As faith would have it, all but Peter's paths had crossed in a bookstore downtown Kingston while searching for books required for the semester. A text pals buddy system was established among the ladies, for two years kept in close contact. As third-year students, a year before graduation an agreement was reached among the three, along with Peter, to spend one week of their summer break at one of Montego Bay's best Resort Hotel at the invitation of Magan's Uncle. The meeting point for the beginning of the cross-country tour would be at Magan's off-campus apartment, which would eventually become a once in a lifetime experience touring Jamaica. At the end of their one week stay in Montego Bay, they would return to their respective Country to finish the remainder of their summer break.

It was 1:05 pm, in the afternoon. Wendy, checking her watch after finishing her final third-year examination, came rushing down

the corridor on the east wing side of the University calling for her friend.

“Magan! Magan! Have you seen her anywhere?”

“She was in room 201 the last time I saw her some ten minutes ago,” replied Michelle, a classmate.

“Thank you. Oh! There you are,” In a sigh of relief, “I begged for this moment all year to put away these books, let down my hair and just tour Jamaica, let us go, girl,” Magan a bit dazed from two hours of intense and grueling examination, looked at Wendy with a blank stare and said, “I really would like to know where are you getting all this energy from, I am not up to your speed so calm down please.” Magan managed to return a smile as she gathered her cell phone and other belongings from her locker before heading home. “I could drink a cool tall glass of some tropical fruit punch with crushed ice; the intense pressure from doing my final examination is taking its toll on me.” “Come with me, to the cafeteria let me treat you,” said Wendy.

Both ladies made their way past the library across the lawn under a humid 86 degrees Fahrenheit to the cafeteria.

“Why is the line so short, where is everybody?” asked Magan.

“I am not complaining,” said Wendy “They are still doing their examination, so let’s place our order. Cashire, can we order two vegetable patties and two large tropical fruit punches please.”

“Yes! Please pay here, and then pick up your order on the other side.”

Wendy, with her order on the tray, went for the corner table when Magan stopped her. “No! Wendy, we are going straight home, I need to take a shower and sleep this off before heading for the north coast tomorrow. I will eat while you drive, here is my key.”

Wendy went up to her dormitory to get her suitcase which was already packed for a week’s trek across Jamaica. Finally, they left the campus and then down Old Hope Road heading for the outer suburbs of Edgewater. Passing through Halfway Tree zone, driving towards Three miles roundabout, her cell phone rang.

“What was that? Is it your cell phone?”

“Yes, if I could just find it, I give up, let the person leave a message,” said Magan. By this time, they were crossing the causeway with Kingston Harbor behind, Port Royal to the left, Edgewater sits quietly in the background as the evening sun glistens over the Caribbean Sea. Wendy could not help but notice the fishermen mending their nets and scaling the fish.

“The smell of fish Magan makes me long for some fried breadfruit.”

“We will be stopping at the mall in a few minutes to get a couple of items for dinner. By the way, you will be cooking Wendy”.

“Are you talking to me?” She took a glance at Magan as the car drifted towards the curb and said, “I thought I was your guest.” Watch where you are going man, I do not want to end up with the fish.”

“Forget about being a guest; I want some good Panamanian cooking from you.” They continue driving up towards the shopping plaza.

“Ok, Magan where is the money?”

“I must give you money too, while you are driving my car?”

“Magan, please! I will get you one of these days when you least expected it.”

“Here is \$10,000.00 (Jamaican), you know the necessary items you will need to get, I will stay in the car and get me my beauty nap, I am so exhausted.”

After letting Wendy out, she moved the car and parked under an almond tree, where the cool tropical trade wind could blow in her face, putting her to sleep so quickly as if she were under anesthesia. It was short-lived when her cell phone message beeped. “Oh! I have a message, let us see who it is.”

“Hello Magan, this is your uncle, Oliver. Listen to me, who is this person in your phone saying to me, ‘Praise the Lord, are you born again, please leave a message at the beep.’”

“This is why I do not like cell phones you know! It will cause me to tell strangers all my private business. Magan, I called to find out from you if you and your friends are still coming over to the north

coast tomorrow; call me before 5:00 pm today.” Not long afterward Wendy came out with two bags of groceries to find Magan fast asleep.

“Let us go home and make us something to eat; meanwhile I need you to give me directions to your home.”

“At the roundabout, keep left and stay the course for a mile then turn left again,” replied Magan.

“Why there is so much traffic at this time of the day? It is taking too long to travel one mile.”

“There is the popular Naggo head beach up ahead and that’s what draws the crowd. Go slowly; my apartment is in the next block.” They finally pulled into the driveway after a long day. “Let me help you with the groceries, and remember the kitchen is yours, help yourself while I take my shower.”

“Will you please turn on the television so that I can watch the news and weather report while I am cooking dinner?”

As Magan took her shower and Wendy prepared dinner, the phone rang. “Wendy get that phone for me.”

“Hello, this is Wendy, who is calling?”

“This is Peter, is Magan at home?”

“Yes, but she is not available now, can I take a message?”

“Tell her that I did meet with Zoya, and we are leaving the campus of the University of the West Indies en route to her apartment.”

“I will convey the message to her as soon as possible. See you later.”

“Who was that, Wendy?”

“It’s Peter, and he is on his way with Zoya, by the way Magan, who is this Peter, tell me about him when you come out from the shower.”

Magan emerged head and body wrapped as if she was at some expensive health spa. “So, Peter and Zoya are finally on their way?”

“Yes!” said Wendy, “Where are you coming from looking like that girl, are we at the Club Med or what? Peter, who is he? You never talk about him.”

"He is a third-year student at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus; he is bi-racial, he is handsome, funny, quiet and a fine Christian Brother."

"When you say biracial what does that supposed to mean?"

"His mother is Chinese, and his father is Afro-Jamaican."

"You say also he is funny, quiet and handsome. I can dig that, but is a Christian?"

"Yes! Is there something wrong with that? Isn't Panama a Christian Country?"

"Sure! said Wendy.

"Then why are you so defensive."

"Probably because I was not raised in a Christian-practicing home. I went to Church on Christmas Day, Easter, Weddings, and Funerals and that's about it." Magan did not respond to the comment but sent up a silent prayer on Wendy's behalf, hoping that one day the timing would be right to discuss the matter at length. Wendy was preparing dinner and wanted to know if they should wait for Peter and Zoya to arrive before they start eating. "No!" said Magan. "We will begin, I am starving. Dinner smells good, what is this? Steamed vegetables, grilled chicken Caesar salad, roast fish with pasta, yellow yam, and dumplings. Girl, you can cook. You can stay here as long as you like."

With a slight grin across her face, Wendy pointed in Magan's direction. "You want a cook you will pay." They both burst out laughing,

"Wendy, you hang around too many Jamaicans, when I first met you, you were so timid." Wendy was about to start eating when Magan interjected, "Let me bless this food." After the blessing of the food, Wendy playfully said, "You took so long to bless the food it's cold already."

"Wendy don't start with me now. I am not in the mood. I can see what I am in for the next week." Then the phone rang to break up that conversation, what bad timing.

"Hello, who is this?"

"This is Zoya, Peter and I are half an hour away we are on the Causeway in rush hour traffic. Do you want us to pick up something to eat?"

"Don't worry, I have already cooked," said Magan. At that moment Wendy dropped her fork.

"What you meant by you cooked?" "Who is that?" asked Zoya.

"You know who it is, its Wendy of course, and who else it could be."

"I am hungry so save enough for us, see you later."

Peter, meeting Zoya for the first time, asked her if she had met Wendy before. "Yes! I have known her for the past three years".

"What is she like?"

"She's from Panama, very attractive, Afro-Panamanian and petite, she sports dreadlocks, and she is sharp and witty."

"Is she a student also?"

"Oh, yes, she is on a Government Scholarship studying to become a Nutritionist." Meanwhile, at Magan's apartment, Wendy looked satisfied that although she put together a simple menu, observed that Magan had eaten up all her Panamanian-style dinner.

"You were certainly hungry."

"Four hours of final examination took every substance out of me. Now that I have finished eating, I must pack and get some sleep." "Did you hear what I heard? A car horns at your gate," said Wendy. "It's Peter and Zoya. I am coming," said Magan.

Zoya was out of the car and smelling the flowers before Wendy could reach the front door. "I can see that you are attracted to plants like bees to honey."

"Hi there, Zoya and Peter are you guys ready for the All Island and North Coast Tour?"

"Hello, Magan and the beautiful young Lady."

"Peter this is Wendy, Wendy say hi! to Peter."

"Hi, Peter and Zoya."

"When do you have the time to keep up the flower garden and the lawn? It is beautiful; it's gorgeous here in Edgewater."

"The garden keeps me busy when I am not studying," said Magan.

“Come inside while I set the table for two.” Zoya is trying to give a helping hand. “I think its table for four, what about you guys.”

“We could not wait, we had a long and hectic day, all I had was a cup of hot chocolate, with a slice of buttered hard dough bread for breakfast before my final examinations.”

“I do understand, wow! these steamed vegetables and roast fish taste good Magan.”

“Do you think Magan cooked dinner?”

For a peaceful life, Magan stepped in and corrected the situation.

“This is Panamanian cooking my dear, our Maitre-d is Wendy, she came to our rescue. Did you try her Jamaican Great- nut Milk Shake?”

“Nope!”

At that point, the phone rang again.

“Will someone please get that phone for me?” Magan asked.
“Hi, who is this?”

“Who are you?”

“This is Wendy.”

“Ok, this is Magan’s Uncle.”

“Oh! Magan, your uncle, is on the line.”

“Uncle Oliver, I got your message from the answering machine.”
Bracing herself for some comic relief from her uncle.

“Let me tell you something my dear niece, I don’t like cell phones you know, they ask too many personal questions man, and give off funny little sounds and beeps.”

“I know that you are just kidding Uncle Oliver because you own a cell phone.”

“Yes, but it does not greet with sermons.”

“So, I guess you want to know if we are coming and the answer is yes, everyone is here at my apartment, ready to go.”

“I have arranged for you all to stay at the hotel instead of my home. This gives you better accommodation and relaxation, and I do not have to cook every day.” Pretending to not understand her uncle, she replied.

“Do you mean you don’t want us at your home?”

“No! No! You will be in Montego Bay for two weeks, you and your friends would be staying in one of Montego Bay’s best five-star Hotel for the first week, I will entertain you all at my home on the first weekend. As Manager of the Resort, I have little time allotted to me, so that’s the reason why I will treat the group to a first-class stay at the hotel, on the final week you will be staying at my home all by yourself.”

“Uncle Oliver, I love you for that.”

“You don’t just love me for that; you must love me because I am your uncle. When your mother died, I promised to make you happy, simply because you are a role model that many young girls from your High School would want to follow and this is for your hard work, all the way to college.”

As an only child, Magan is the petite split image of her mother, just by mentioning her, tears would form a mist in her eyes.

Magan said, “We cannot wait; we will be leaving around 8:00 am and will be in Montego Bay by 2:00 pm.”

“I will confirm the reservation for four and leave the information with Chloe at the front desk. See you tomorrow.”

“Bye Uncle Oliver.” Magan dropped the phone and began jumping up and down on the couch, screaming for joy. “Yes, Jesus!”

You see, all her life this young woman’s movements were from the dormitory at the Girls hostel, to school, church and the netball court. She had a strict upbringing, no brothers or sisters; never gone on any major vacation or a tour with friends of this sort.

“I have never seen you so happy, what is the good news?” Zoya curiously inquired.

Then Magan explained the new vacation offer her uncle had just relayed to her. Peter, Zoya, and Wendy all gasp in unison, “You are kidding.”

“You mean, hotel, swimming pool, private beach and buffet breakfast, lunch, and dinner?”

This will be my best time in Jamaica yet.” said Wendy. “So do I.” Responded Zoya.

“With that said, because tomorrow we have a long day ahead of us, lets hit the sack; I will volunteer to sleep on the couch and will be the first to admit that I am a couch potato until we reach Montego Bay tomorrow.”

As Peter looked between the curtains of the living room window to get a sense of the time, slowly he saw the sun was setting, the shadow of the evening casting a canopy across the sky as the crickets, the night Beatles, and the toads competed in their ways, welcoming the night. Hearing these sounds of the night reminded him to ask Magan to set the alarm on her cell phone for 5:00 am. While each said their bedtime prayer, Zoya was reviewing her Sabbath School Quarterly, before retiring for the night. Finally, the house lights were out then the moon acted as upon command shining its way through the windows, as it rose, the stars twinkled in the background giving the suburbs of Kingston and the surrounding area that silhouette look in typical Caribbean style. The fishermen out on the Bay mending and casting their nets for the next day's catch. All this was happening while the city was sleeping. Time certainly never remained still, it was not long before the cock crows three times as if boastfully announcing the dawning of a new day and did not matter whether if anyone did like his wake-up call. To those who ignore his crowing, he reminded them that the creator has embedded in His D.N.A. this timepiece, coco doodle doo! Peter responded, “Shut up Rooster, I have heard you, three times, now let me get my shower before the girls and then go for my morning run.” By the time he had his shower, the girls were already up.

“Ok, the bathroom is ready; I am off jogging will be back shortly.”

Out the front door through the gate, Peter went. In the splendor of the morning, the air was fresh and crispy, ideal for jogging. The sun gently rising from a distance, the towering mountain surrounded by magnificent architectural design homes perched like a bird; ready to take off over the ocean. The setting made it a pleasant one for Peter and others who were jogging. Peter could hear the gentle splashing of the wave while the seagulls flew over, looking for their first meal.

As he approached the ocean waterfront, he passed several bikers and runners, some with their dogs, as they greeted each other along the way. One runner came over as Peter did his exercise.

“Hello, my name is Ras Michael. I have never seen you here before, you are not from around this area or are you a new resident?”

“My name is Peter; just passing through. I am on a short layover here.” To keep the conversation flowing Peter spontaneously used the backdrop of the sun rising and said, “Who in his or her right mind after seeing this picturesque setting, would not come away with the conclusion that there has to be a Creator.”

“I suppose you are a Christian,” said Ras Michael. “Oh yes, said Peter, Jesus is my God and Savior.”

“I have searched the bible a lot, and I am coming to that conclusion too. I read in the Bible Psalms 53:1 that says, “It is a fool that says in his heart that there is no God, and I know that there is one God. Please pray for me, my brother”. Peter assured him, and both men shook hands and went their ways. Huffing and puffing Peter made it back home.

“Where were you? asked Magan, we are leaving soon?”

“I went for a morning run, and I ended up conversing with another runner who is a Rastafarian, you should see his locks grown to his waste, we exchanged thoughts and the goodness of the Lord.

“That is wonderful; In other words, you must have a song or a word of testimony on your heart at all times.”

“Ready for breakfast anyone?” asked Wendy. “What’s for breakfast?” Peter asked.

“Well, we have toast, jam, and orange marmalade; boiled eggs, whole wheat bread, cereal, and mint or chocolate tea.”

After breakfast, it was all green lights to start the journey across Jamaica. Peter, a strong person who he always was, took a leading role from the experience of his boyhood days as a Boys Brigade in challenging situations, little did he know that those experiences set him up for days like this.

“Ladies,” Peter said in a friendly commanding way, “We are embarking on a one-week vacation trip in which we do not control

the next moment to another, so this is where I think we should prayerfully call on a higher power, God for traveling mercies.”

Everyone held hands and closed their eyes except for curious Wendy as Peter prayed, with one eye closed she wanted to see everyone’s reaction, but to her surprise, this would become a routine procedure as they traveled and saw the need for such guidance and protection which they cannot guaranteed for themselves.

“Now that we have our suitcases packed, you can take them to my Sports Utility Vehicle so that we can go,” said Peter.

“That makes sense said Magan, your Land Cruiser has space, and air conditioning and is good on fuel consumption.”

“You will be our navigator, seeing that you are familiar with the surroundings Magan.”

“Zoya and I will keep you guys’ company.”

“No,” said Magan, “You will provide the food and drinks on the way. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

“Listen to me, I came here to study, see, and experience Jamaica, I will be writing my journal on the trip and recording with my camcorder when it’s possible, so my hands are already full,” replied Wendy.

“Now that we figured this out, can we go now? asked Zoya.

Between Peter and Magan, they got out the map and set their waypoints as Spanish Town, May pen, Williamsfield, Mandeville, Santa Cruz, Black River, Savanna-la-mar, Anchovy, Reading, and Montego Bay. They mapped out their touring route of approximately 115 miles due west to Savanna-la-mar and 32 miles due north into Montego Bay.

“Let the journey begin,” said Peter.

From now on the lives of these individuals however simple the expressions, accolades and the experience that they would have shared, will be etched permanently in their minds influencing their approach and attitude towards life no matter where they go as long as they live. The land cruiser picked up speed through the Edgewater suburb making its way to one of Jamaica’s Major Highways, The PJ

Patterson Highway. Wendy called for a final check of the weather report from the captain of a crew of four.

“Let me switch to one of the local radio stations for that information,” Peter is saying. “Oh! That’s my morning radio announcer, Alan, my man; we are just in time to hear the weather report”. “A cool 59°F going up to a high of 70°F, with a chance of an evening shower”.

“That’s perfect weather for traveling,” Responded Zoya.

Making their way on the local highway through sparsely scattered houses and shops. The change came gradually from the suburbs they had just left to the sugar cane plantation. As far as the eyes could see, covered by a low light frosty mist, the early morning commute was packed with speeding minivans and taxis traveling in the opposite direction heading to the city, coupled with almost zero visibility leaving no room to overtake. Beginning to enjoy the scenery, Wendy rolled down her window to allow the crisp air with the fresh smell of sugar cane into the SUV.

“I smell sugar cane juice; it seems that to get this aroma,” said Magan “We have to leave the city and come out to the suburbs to experience this, I must do this more often.”

Up ahead, Peter noticed that the traffic was backing up and made him concerned as he came to a complete stop, there could be a possibility that there is an accident. On closer examination, he saw that a Railroad crossing was the reason. Sure enough, the sound of the locomotive Engine and the huge puffs of smoke signaled that the train was crossing the Highway. Looking at his watch, it took five minutes before they began moving again. Picking up speed they finally caught up with the train, driving side by side for quite a while before going separate ways Wendy captured it all on videotape as it disappeared into the cane field. Traffic was starting to back up again, but the reason for this was obviously the toll booths were the cause. Upon entering PJ Patterson Highway, the scene changed drastically as the frost was burning off, with the Kingston skyline fading into the background reaching the point of no return for a week. Lies straight ahead is this magnificent tempting highway that

would match any international highway, with quality and design. Complementing this highway are these majestic hills and rolling meadows on one side while the ocean billows at a distance on the other side. Peter found it so tempting to let his Land Cruiser take over the road, but the Highway Police would have none of it. On this highway disguised in its camouflaged colors, the Police cars, equipped with radar guns attached to their sides like sidewinder missiles ready to be launched at a moment's notice at anyone who would be caught up with the beautiful scenery, and not paying attention to the speed limit. Zoya pretending to be getting restless, jokingly turns to Wendy and asks, "Are we there yet?"

Magan removed her sunglasses just like a mother would caution her child. "We have three hours to go, so go back to videotaping." "Oh! Please Magan", Wendy was saying.

Peter realized Wendy was videotaping so he tried to add a historical reference to the location that they were passing through.

"To your right, Wendy is Spanish Town, the first capital city from 1534 to 1872. The economic and political engine of the country was over there. It welcomed the Spaniards when they fled Sevilla La Nueva."

"Do they still speak Spanish in Spanish Town?" asked Wendy. "No," said Magan. "They kept the name and speak English."

After traveling in about twenty minutes on the plain in the parish of Clarendon the signpost states the next exit is Porus, which is the citrus town of Manchester.

"We should stop there Peter." Said Magan.

On exiting the highway and entering the district of Porus, there were fruit stalls all along the main road. These stalls were decorated with beautifully arranged fruits on bunches of different kinds such as tangerines, mangoes, apples, oranges, star apples, and pears. When they came to a stop, the van was rushed upon by young ladies and boys with fruits strung neatly in bunches like fruit baskets. Each is trying to convince potential customers that their product is the best.

All those who were asleep or recording, now came alive for the freshly picked fruit stalls.

"Lady, please buy my fruit; it is the sweetest," said one vendor. Each vendor jostled for a good position to market his or her product. A little boy caught Zoya's attention when he was pushed away from their presence, and she felt it was not fair to the little boy and that was his break to make one of his biggest sales.

"Come here little man, how much for those mangoes?" Zoya asked. Before he could answer, the other women who were much bigger than he was trying to make a sale, got in his way, and said,

"Buy mine Lady; I will give you a bargain."

"No thanks," said Zoya, "I am talking to the little boy." They were upset and walked away to another customer.

"What were you saying now, my Lady." Said the boy.

"I need \$4000.00 (Jamaican) worth of mixed fruits; can you give me a good bargain?"

"Yes, madam!"

"That reminds me that we should stock up on all the fruits we can get for the rest of the journey and our stay at the Hotel," said Magan.

So they pooled their money together and purchased the fruits from the little boy.

"Our next major stop is Mandeville," said Peter. This Area is Zoya's territory; her university is in the heart of this town. As they made their way back on the major highway leaving the plains of Manchester, the scenery changed again drastically as the highway made its winding way, a long gradual uphill climb along the highway towards Mandeville which sits on a plateau about 2,000 feet above sea level. In a matter of minutes, they were at an elevation of approximately 800 feet above sea level looking back on Porus and down on the plain of Manchester. The efficiency of the highway made it look very easy. The next small town they came upon was Williamsfield. Something interesting caught Wendy's curious eyes there.

"Why is the soil in this area so red compared to the sandy type we have become accustomed to see?"

"The soil is red; this area is rich in Bauxite which produces Aluminum. To our right is Alcan Kirkvine Bauxite Plant which sits on an area of Bauxite land which is thousands of acres."

“I can see large trucks look like Dinosaurs going back and forth and the trains like caterpillars.”

“It is a good thing you are taping the process.” Said Magan. “When you go back to Panama this will be your proof that you were at these places.” Still on the outskirts of Mandeville, suddenly the flow of traffic kept coming and going, climbing another 1000 feet above sea level placing them on the outskirts. The appearance of the Lexus, BMW, Toyotas, and Hummer SUV in driveways hinted that the Town of Mandeville was in range. Then came the Ninja Honda bikes, and the luxury tour buses added to the hype and further excitement to the hustle and bustle of the town.

“We will be stopping for a break to stretch our legs at the mall,” Magan reminded the group.

“This town seems to have a lot of millionaires; these houses gave them away.” Said Wendy.

“You have not seen it all, Zoya will tell you, she resides here,” Peter replied. “When we are on the other side of Mandeville I will tell you more about this magnificent Town.”

After that, they pulled into the Manchester shopping plaza for a half-hour break, where they did their window shopping, took photographs, and freshened up. After they finished their tour of the plaza, they finally moved out on their cross-country journey. Continuing the westward trek, it was interesting to Zoya that the more they moved towards the western end of Mandeville the more beautiful the development became. Her observation gave Magan a way to talk about the town of Mandeville.

“We are midway from my home to Montego Bay. Mandeville is the capital of Manchester, founded in 1814 and named after Lord Mandeville, the eldest son of the Duke of Manchester. Mandeville, in the nineteenth century, was developed as a place where English visitors came and were comfortable. One of the reasons was its climate which ranges from a cool 60°F to 70°F in the summer. When The Bauxite Industry employed the Americans and Canadians in the early 60’s late 70’s, Mandeville and Hopeful Village in Williams Field, were the areas that they had chosen to build their gated

village. To this day is the model that other communities took a page from. It's like carving out a section of Westbury Long Island New York and placing it down in Manchester. It's something to behold. Coming up next is the town of Hatfield famous for multimillion-dollar gated homes, with beautiful landscapes along with expensive flowering plants such as poinsettias, orchids, and anthuriums. Now we are about to enter the neighboring Parish of St. Elizabeth”.

“There is never a dull moment with the changing scenery,” said Wendy, with the video camera rolling.

At the very western end of Mandeville, there was a sudden drop of the land for some 2000 feet called Spur Tree Hill, which caused Wendy to make this observation.

“Are we looking at the ocean below us, Peter?”

“No! below us is the plain of St. Elisabeth called Gutters, the depth of this drop and the green vegetation along with the vast distance as far as your eyes can see, gives the perception of an ocean. As difficult as it might look, getting to the bottom is not as difficult as it might seem. There is a well-constructed highway with a winding bend in the form of several cock spurs to take us down to the bottom”.

“I could never explain this to my friends in Panama about this land shift, but my videotaping will convince them. This is what we call a breathtaking view.”

In ten minutes, they were at the bottom of the mountain in a little village of Santa Cruz. Peter had to refuel; this was the group's chance to get a good look at this mountain that they had just descended. Magan reminded Zoya and Wendy, that what they were about to see next was even more breathtaking so should brace themselves and have the camcorder ready for Holland Bamboo.

“What is that?”

“I am not letting the cat out of the bag yet.” Driving through Santa Cruz area was like driving in the Grand Prix. It was back on the plain again only that this section of Jamaica, the highway has a lot of curves and hairpin corners. “In Porus, we saw the fruit shops, but what are these little shops selling now?” asked Zoya.

“Well, we are in fish and bammy country now, so make way for some fried and roasted fish. There is a shop up ahead, let’s get some.” “I love this country; we should do this more often.” Said Zoya.

Before the engine could shut itself off, the land cruiser was surrounded by at least ten or more people.

“This is Porus all over again.” Wendy took a fish and got busy eating away. She began to have teary eyes.

“Why are you crying?” asked Magan, as if she did not know that the fish was spicy. Wendy used a couple of pages of the newspaper to fan some cool breeze over her mouth keeping it cool.

“This fish is hot but tastes good man.”

They bought four fish and left immediately because they were running behind time. Although it was 11:30 am, the thick shrubs and trees, some of which were logwood, mango, and blue mahoe along the highway were blocking out the sunlight making the time seem much earlier than it was.

“This town looks similar to a town in my district in Haiti.” Zoya’s face beamed as she reminisced, not realizing that the scenery was setting the stage for the next breathtaking scene as they traveled along.

“We are coming up to Holland Bamboo now.”

“Ok, my camera is rolling.” The scenery changed with the highway going through the large Appleton sugar cane estate plantation when suddenly came into view up ahead was this large green arch hanging over the highway forming a tunnel of bent Bamboo for three miles. As the vehicle came closer, Wendy could not believe what she was seeing.

“Did someone plant these trees like that? This scenery is fascinating,” commented as they passed several luxury buses parked along the highway as tourists photographed one of Jamaica’s most romantic spots.

“The next town is Black River the capital of St. Elizabeth, named after the famous river of a similar name which traveled some twenty- five miles going underground twice passing through the famous Cockpit Country; sparsely populated with crocodiles.”

Magan is continuing to give a brief history. "This Black River in the nineteenth century was a shipping port; at that time was Jamaica's most modern town. Here in Black River, the telephone, car, and electricity were first used. Like Spanish Town, the Spaniards came here also."

Then suddenly the ocean appeared for the first time since Edgewater. "Where are we now Magan?"

"This is Blue Fields, once a lookout point and unloading area for pirates. Ten miles up ahead we will be climbing the steep mountain range of Mocho and over to Montpelier, where we can look over on the 'Promised Land', Montego Bay. We will be leaving the highway now, climbing this mountain on this narrow and winding road with a series of sharp curves to Montego Bay; then we will be traveling through small villages such as Withorn, Mackfield, and Montpelier."

On reaching those villages, the residents were waving hello! sign, or trying to hitch a ride with them. Neatly built little homes and grocery shops along the way, some perched on the hilltops surrounded or shaded by large pear, breadfruit, or banana trees. Reaching the town of Anchovy, they stopped to look at the beautiful range of the Cockpit country, when Wendy asked this man in his tall water boots riding his donkey, carrying produce from the field.

"Which way is Montego Bay?" she asked.

He replied, 'Sometimes, the typical Jamaican countryman style'. "When you go up that hill and go around the corner, make a right and go down, you will see a shop; then you come where the road splits, you will see the sign say Montego Bay. Then you go so! ten more miles to your destination."

"Thank you, sir, you got that Peter?"

"I am trying to figure it out; I am processing it. I think we need our own GPS."

I am pointing in the direction of the Cockpit Country. Magan interrupted the conversation and continued to say, "There lies the Maroon Village, where the Maroons lived for over three hundred

years; free from the British who tried to enslave them, but they would not participate or have anything to do with slavery. They fought the British and won then signed a treaty in 1739 and to this day, they are still self-governed, and they pay no taxes.”

After that brief history, they got back in the vehicle heading downhill this time. The journey was not easy going down this breathtaking mountainous landscape. The loaded trucks with supplies and buses going up and down this steep hill for three miles at 5mph were challenging for Peter.

“This traffic is so slow, to get out and walk would be faster for me.”

In turn, Peter and the other drivers alternately overtook those slow vehicles with their lives hanging in the balance. Taking their chances overtaking on these winding two-lane roads was playing Russian roulette with their lives. Finally, out of nowhere after turning the hairpin bend corner on the mountain, approximately 1200 feet above sea level; there appeared this deep blue Ocean, Montego Bay was in view. The faces of Peter, Wendy Magan, and Zoya lit up, knowing well the trip that was planned in months is halfway completed. The feeling is like entering Canaan land filled with milk and honey. Peter of all persons, since the tour began, not once his emotions ever expressed, only now when he saw two 747 airplanes on approach at Montego Bay International Airport.

“Look girls, check this out! this is so cool, are you taping this?”

As the planes approached the Airport for a touchdown, the excitement heated up when tour buses, rental cars, and bikes came as if out of nowhere. The raw sea breeze began to sway the SUV side to side; Wendy was documenting every moment of this as they passed the towering hotels evenly spaced along the beach while the hustle and bustle of tourists, vendors, and citizens passed by. Restaurants filled with patrons upstairs and downstairs all along the major streets like New York restaurant row. Caught Magan’s eyes were the shopping malls, how strategically placed along the waterfront attracting the downtown crowd.

For the first time, you could sense the excitement in Zoya's voice asking, "How long before we get to our hotel?"

But in no time, the hotel could be seen on the outskirts of Montego Bay, away from the heavy traffic as downtown buzzes.

"You just asked me how long and there is the hotel, it's about two miles ahead," said Magan.

The hotel is on one side while the golf course is on the opposite side of the highway, with its tall, majestic palm trees, evenly spaced along its borders. The white sand beach is in the background with the hotel and shopping center further down on the highway.

"What more could we ask for," said Peter. Slowly they pulled in on the hotel ground parking lot. "Thank God, we made it here safely. Let's pause and give God some praise for His traveling mercies."

Zoya, who has a passion for plants, pointed out the formation of the almond trees and the Poinsettia mixed with hibiscus and chrysanthemum plants, neatly planted among the other trees

As they exited the land cruiser, Magan halted everyone, "Wait a minute, did we forget something?"

They held hands with bowed heads and Magan prayed a prayer of thanksgiving. There could be heard in the background, steel pan music playing softly with the melodious sounds of the Caribbean coming from the hotel lobby. Magan made her way past the Steel Pan band into the reception lounge.

"Good afternoon, welcome to The Sandhill Caribbean Resort. My name is Chloe. How can I help you?"

"I did not know it would be this easy to find you; my name is Magan."

"Say no more, so you are Mr. Oliver's Niece."

"Yes."

"Ok, I have your rooms ready for four, where are the rest of the party?"

"They are getting their luggage from the car, while I confirm their reservation."

"Here are the four electronic keycards for your suite, four poolside meal tickets, water skiing, and scuba diving passes, and

REMEMBER MAGAN

four open passes for regular meals good for the length of your stay. Please sign the keys and passes and finally here are four wristbands to be always worn on the hotel grounds for security purposes. The stairs are to your right, take them to your floor, Suite 301 through 304 are all yours. Have a pleasant stay, your luggage will be taken up by room service.”

OLIVER'S GUESTS

Peter, Zoya, and Wendy at that moment joined Magan in the lobby to take the stairs up to their respective rooms.

"Thank you, Chloe," she said, as they entered the elevator. "This is the third floor let's find our room" Peter advised the group.

Silently Zoya told herself that she was too tired to use a simple electronic key to open her room, and as she did, a sudden burst of cold air overwhelmed her as she entered her room, erasing the feeling of sleep from her mind. Slowly she stepped into the living room, and to her surprise, a thirty-two-inch plasma high-definition television was positioned by the lazy boy chair, and off to the side was the two-piece living room set; slowly she walked to the room in the back, and she opened the door. "I believe I have died, and I am in heaven, is that a Jacuzzi in the corner of the room, and is this a king-size bed and all mine for a week?"

By this time, Wendy had just surveyed her room, like Zoya's, while Peter, sitting on his section of the balcony observing the ocean waves before he had the chance to look over his room.

Wendy looked up to the ceiling and said, "God, wherever you are, thank you; what I have just done, talk to God? Well, that's an improvement."

"Is that the doorbell, who is it?" asked Magan. "Room service ma'am, I brought up all your luggage."

"Please leave them in my room, my friends, they will come and get them, here is your tip."

"Thank you, lady."

While Magan was unpacking, the room phone rang. "Good afternoon, who is this?" The mysterious voice on the phone said.

"I am sorry to tell you that the scheduled guests for the rooms that you and your other guests occupied are on their way up, so please vacate."

"What! Who is this? How could this be, we just got our keys. By the way," said Magan, "your voice sounds familiar, Uncle Oliver?"

"All right, why can't you allow me to celebrate this short stint? Do you like your suite?"

"Oh, yes, it's gorgeous, but for a while, you scared me."

"You and your friends meet me in the Lobby in twenty minutes so I can meet you all and then introduce you and your friends to me staff before they leave for the evening."

"Ok, let me round them up, and we will meet you in the lobby shortly." After checking out their rooms and the aerial view of the beach and surrounding areas, they all went down to the hotel lobby to meet this remarkable and generous man called Uncle Oliver. Oliver, a pleasant outgoing person, always inventing Ideas to start a conversation or make sure that whoever was in his company would always be in a pleasant mood. While Magan and her friends were making their way down to the lobby, he hid behind this large window drape. His staff assembled around the customer service counter awaiting his niece and company to come by, at the same time wondering what their boss's intention for going behind this curtain. Finally, the grand entrance of these three gorgeous ladies and this tall, handsome young man entered not knowing except for Magan, what to expect with their eyes searching the lobby to see who this person called Oliver. Then a voice sounded like an army instructor said, "Can I help you, are you looking for me?" Peter and Zoya searched the lobby meticulously with piercing eyes but came up empty.

But Magan would have none of it. "That voice sounded familiar, Uncle Oliver! will you please come from behind the curtain and meet my friends".

"Ok, I give up, sorry for this foiled up grand entrance, thanks to my niece. My name is Oliver, Magan's uncle, welcome to Sandhill Caribbean Resort".

Magan jumped right in, to introduce the group. "This is Peter, Wendy, and Zoya." They all returned their greetings in unison to Oliver. By this time all his staff gathered closer to see these fine young people.

"These are my staff who runs the Resort, anything you need they are here for you all."

"We have heard of you all especially Magan; it's nice to meet you."

"Dinner is served," said another member of the staff, "Come let me get you guys started. Its buffet style so get your trays, plates and utensils and join the line for some of the most delicious dinner you will ever have."

Oliver waited until they were seated before he sat with them. "Tell me Peter, Zoya, and Wendy where are you from?"

"Well, my name is Peter, and I am from Port Maria, St. Mary Jamaica of course". "I am Zoya; I am from Haiti."

"I am Wendy; I am from Panama."

"Zoya I cannot help but notice that your plate is filled with nothing but vegetables, what is the reason for that?"

"I am a vegetarian."

"By the way Uncle Oliver thanks for the accommodation, I have never had this red-carpet treatment before, whenever I return to Panama, I will reflect on these and other treasured moments in Jamaica."

"Let me correct you just call me Oliver, and thanks to Magan, academically she works hard in school, and she deserve to be with her friends in settings like this." They all exchanged pleasantries when Oliver stood up and said, "I must leave now, but Sunday is my day off, I will be inviting you all over to my home, for a barbecue cookout where the who is who of Montego Bay are invited, starting around noon. Enjoy your stay utilizing the pool, tennis court, the tours, and the beach."

With that said, they waved goodbye, and he left.

"I will be going to the pool after this, are you also coming Zoya and Wendy?" Peter was saying.

"No! we are, going to the beach, what about you Magan?"

“I will take a nap; I sensed that dizzy spell coming back.” “This is not the first time I noticed you complaining of this feeling. You should get a doctor’s advice when you return to Kingston.”

After strolling on the beach and spending some quality time in the pool, it seemed suddenly out of nowhere; there it was six o’clock. The magnificent sun in its yellowish-red glow was going down as if to say let’s call it a day, as the effortless wave of the sea rippled towards the white sandy shore while tourists watched in awe, at one of God’s creative signatures wishing goodnight to the curious onlookers. Zoya and Wendy quickly changed after a stroll on the beach; Peter went to the shower after swimming, while Magan stayed on the balcony outside of her room watching them from a distance reserving her energy for the next day. They all went for supper, and after observing nightfall, the glittering lights over downtown Montego Bay slowly came into view coupled with the cruise ships like little toys, glistening lights decorating its decks forming the backdrop of the night sky as it made their way across the horizon. Peter and the girls regrouped over supper and then, later went to Magan’s suite to discuss the daily schedule for the week-long vacation.

“Listen up, we have a tight ship to run during this week so pay keen attention and make notes of time and tour dates. Top of the list is the annual Jamaica Gospel Fest which we will get to later. Tomorrow, Thursday is a rest day; we can sleep late and hang out at the pool and the beach. There is an opportunity to go sailing, a coral reef tour, and snorkeling with the Montego Bay Undersea Tours. There is lawn tennis, volleyball sports, horseback riding, and golf. Thursday Night is Jamaica Culture Night. Friday, we will do a historical tour of Montego Bay, leaving right after breakfast; more information about the tour will be given to us at the front desk in the morning before the tour. Friday night is guest appreciation night.” As on cue, Magan was interrupted by Zoya.

“Here is where I would take my break. After dinner on Friday, I will not be able to enjoy your company until sunset Sabbath”.

“Why?” asked Wendy.

“Yes, explain yourself,” said Magan, “You do it best.”

“Well, I celebrate the Sabbath from sunset Friday evening to sunset Saturday evening, and during the day I will be attending church in Montego Bay.”

“I know that you are a Seventh Day Adventist and I am comfortable with that.”

“Wait a minute,” said Wendy, “I need to know some more, do you mean we will not see you until Saturday night?”

“We will get back to this after Magan is finished.”

“Can I take the floor now?”

“Yes, Magan go ahead.”

“On Saturday we have tickets to attend the Red Stripe Cup Cricket match at Jarrett Park starting at 11:00 am through 4:00 pm. Sunday morning we will go to church, and in the afternoon for an evening of relaxation, Uncle Oliver is inviting us to an outdoor barbecue party. Monday at the Aquaducts is the Jamaica Gospel Fest Talent Show starting at 5:00 pm. All the singers chosen from the best singers from across the Island will come together on one stage, imitating such singers as The Grace Thrillers, and Hopeton Lewis, also attending will be the best Pocomainia dance group displaying the art of the Jamaican culture, there will also be “Jonah the Prophets and the Last Day Saints”. Tuesday at 6:00 am we will be leaving for Port Antonio to do the bicycle ride tour down the famous Blue Mountain after which we will stop over by the Dunn’s River Falls, and then back to our hotel. Wednesday is another rest day before returning to Kingston on Thursday. Any questions? If not after a long day, it’s bedtime for me”.

Wendy was still wrestling with the idea that Zoya would be absent from the group all day on Saturday.

“Zoya, why can’t you go to church on Sunday with us instead of Saturday and watch the cricket match with us?”

“Let me ease your mind a little so that you know my position. Do you know where Christmas came from and how it crept into the church?”

“No,” said Wendy, “but what does Christmas has to do with my question?”

“So, what are you telling us, you do not celebrate Christmas?” asked Peter.

“Ok, if you will permit me to finish my line of questioning you will see where I am coming from.”

“I think we had this discussion before, so I know on what grounds you are forming your opinion but go ahead.” Said Magan.

“As I was saying, Christmas was started by pagan worshippers who had nothing to do with Christianity, gradually it crept into the church slowly over some time until it was accepted. The same way it is about Sunday, which was a day that the pagans used to worship their god, the sun god. This day of worship also crept into the church and Christians accepted it out of convenience. It is interesting to know that the World and its Civil Government operate under the Ten Commandments principle, thou shall not kill, thou shall not steal, and thou shall not commit adultery, etc., and still binding. The Sabbath was a command to remember. To celebrate Christmas, it's not commanding, so is Sunday. I would celebrate Christmas only to use the time wisely to tell the world that yes, Christ was born, certainly not on Christmas Day, I would also make use of the opportunity to use the season to spread the good news. There were two Institutions that God put into place from creation before there were any Jews; they are Marriage and the Sabbath. To this day they are still the pillar and cornerstone of a free society. Some Christians say because Christ rose on the first day of the week, this is why the day should change to Sunday. This also crept into the church as a tradition. But if you can show me where in the Bible the Fourth Commandment has changed to Sunday, Blessed and set apart, (Sanctified) as the Sabbath day, then I would go to the cricket match with you. Do not get me wrong, you can go to church on any day of the week, but to ignore or dismiss the Sabbath Day and say it does not matter anymore is not correct, because there is biblical proof.”

“I did not see it that way before,” said Wendy.

“So do many dedicated Christians who love the Lord with all their heart would come to your conclusion too, Wendy.”

“So let me ask you, Magan and Peter, “Why do you worship on Sunday?”

“I grew up in the church and saw my parents went to church on Sunday.”

“Me too,” said Magan, “I do not see anything wrong with it. Zoya has her belief, and I have mine.”

“This is my final question to you Zoya, so would you come to church with us on a Sunday?”

“Sure Peter, I would go to church with you guys on Sunday or any Sunday, the only thing is I might be too tired this Sunday; but you will not get me to go anywhere secular on the Sabbath (Saturday).

“Ok! I like that (Solomon’s) answer Zoya, that’s cool?”

“Anyway, ladies and gentlemen, we should not let this discussion get in the way, you did ask me the question. I am turning in now; it has been a long day.”

“This is a good time to break. I think everyone would agree?” Said Magan. See you in the morning.”

One of the beauties of the Caribbean Sea at night is to hear the rolling and rushing waves in the stillness of the night. Strolling by the sea or maybe just sitting on the balcony on a moonshine night or falling asleep listening to the therapeutic sound of the ebb and flow of the waves, is soothing to the vacationing mind. This was the experience of Peter and the rest of the group until the alarm went off.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND PLEASURE

P*eter* made his way down to the beach for his early morning run thinking that he was the only one at that time of the morning up and running, but to his surprise, there were other guests already on the beach running and doing their exercise. The atmosphere was quiet, the ocean was calm, and the air was salty and crisp with the scent of fresh fish as the fishermen emptied their nets from the night's catch, the scene of a typical Caribbean setting. Peter did his usual fifteen-minute run and went back to his room to break the news that morning had broken. He went room by room to wake Magan, Wendy, and Zoya. There was no need to wake up Zoya due to the fact she was reading her Morning devotion book.

Wendy who loves her sleep challenged Peter by making the point when she said, "Today is our rest day we got a pass to sleep late."

"If you want to miss breakfast then go back to bed, remember we are going to see the coral reefs and do some snorkeling, therefore having breakfast is important."

They finally managed to make it down to the dining hall after struggling desperately to get out of bed, only to find a long line waiting for them.

"What is this? It's only 6:30 am and look at this line, said Wendy, "We should have stayed in our rooms and requested room service."

“The best way is to join the line, its buffet style, and there you have a choice, but room service you would have to take what you get.” Were Peter’s comments.

This sobered up the group, to understand that it made sense to wait patiently until their turn came. Finally, the breakfast lines were moving because there were ten catering stands. In no time breakfast was served so that Magan and her friends could have enough time to change for a swim before it was time for the scheduled coral reef and snorkel tour. As Wendy, Zoya and Magan made their way to the beach, Peter went to the Jet Ski rental shop.

“What time is it Zoya?” asked Magan.

“According to my watch it’s 10:05 am, the beach is getting pretty crowded early, let’s go and get our beach towel and chair before they are all taken.”

There was not a cloud to be seen, nothing but blue skies and the brilliant sun reflecting its energy on hotel guests. Some were lying on lounge chairs or beach towels along the white sand beach as far as the eyes could see while others lined up to play lawn tennis and volleyball.

“Magan, I am so impressed with the setting, “By the way is that Peter on the Jet Ski over there, Wendy?

“Where? Look over by the yellow boat”. “Yes! He is certainly having fun. I am going for a swim, Magan, please watch my beach bag: it has my suntan lotion and towel.”

“Go ahead that gives me an excuse to borrow your sunglasses. I forget mine upstairs.”

“Hey! do not get too comfortable now,” said a smiling Wendy disappearing under the dashing wave.

“Hi there Zoya, are you not going for a swim?”

“No! No! Magan when you go into the water, then I will. This sun feels so good with the tropical breeze blowing; swimming will have to stay until another day.”

“May I have your attention please?” What is that, Magan?”

“Oh! That’s the public announcement system, let’s listen”.