

Jamaica 2003 – 2004

December 26, 2003 – Having made a last minute hotel reservation in Miami at a grand hotel, we had a pedicure, picked up some last minute things and drove down to the big city. The hotel was splendid and I lament that I was so clean that I didn't even need a shower there. We were driven in luxury to the airport and left our car in the hotel parking lot.

December 27, 2003 – Our flight to Jamaica went smoothly. It's an hour and 10 minutes from Miami, only enough time for the Champaign Breakfast, but not enough time for coffee or tea. After a long wait in immigration, we passed through customs and picked up our car. First surprise! The \$300 per week turned into \$457 with the mandatory insurance and taxes. I stayed in the car while Judy met Rob and Michele. We discussed the problem of luggage. It did not seem like there would be enough room for all of our bags and four adults. We considered that one of us might take the bus to Negril, a 40-mile drive to the west of Montero Bay. As it turned out, Rob and Michele's suitcases were soft side and fit into the trunk with my case between the two back seat passengers.

On our way we got lost once or twice, they do not have many road directional signs here. I guess most people know where they are going. We arrived at our resort early in the afternoon and were surprised that our room was not yet available. First they told us we would have a studio apartment until Tuesday and then move into a two bedroom. Judy popped up to say that was not what we had reserved seven months ago and it would not be satisfactory. After being told, "one moment, please" a few times we decided to go get some lunch and let them figure it out. No problem, we will stop at the Burger King for some food and return. Well upon our return, there was still a delay but eventually we were ushered to our suite, a beautiful, two bedroom, 2 ½ bath, garden view suite with a large living room, lanai, kitchen and dining room.



We donned our swimsuits and went to the beach, 150 yards away to stroll and watch the sunset. We had dinner at the onsite restaurant, a buffet. The bill was rather high, \$25 per person for food that was good, but not special. We sat in our living room and talked until we turned in for the night, Rob and Michele to their king-size canopy bed and us to our two twin beds, put together.

December 28, 2003 – Today our mission was to go to Dunn's River Falls, the fun place that I remember when I was here 30 years ago. We started out on the south route, the road to Kingston. After an hour and a half we were hungry and being it was Sunday, the pickings were slim. We stopped in a bar that had plenty of cars and tank trucks, generally a sign of good food but alas, they only served liquor and beer on Sundays. Those who were eating brought their own food. They suggested that we go to the café down the road, Café



Mariner. We continued on to the place on our right and drove in the gate. There was a man working on his car and I asked him if they were serving food. He said that the food was prepared to order and we needed to allow 15 minutes. No problem man, our retort. An hour and a half later, we had finished our genuine Jamaican steamed fish, chicken and pork. The food was good (other than the soggy French fries) and we were the only ones in the restaurant. Undaunted we continued on our journey. As we approached Mandeville, we knew we were on the right course however we took a wrong turn and realized an hour later that we were headed back to our start and that it would be impossible to complete the journey to our original destination. We headed home and hit a big hole in the road. Now there are plenty of holes to avoid, this one got me because it was at a bend and I was watching for traffic. It was getting to be time to stop for fuel and as we filled the tank, we saw the tire was flat. Furthermore, there was no air at the station. Rob and I quickly changed to the spare and continued on.

Dinner that night was at Margaritaville, Jimmy Buffet's home, the restaurant and bar next door to ours. I had jerk chicken, my first; Judy just wanted something to sooth her throat as she had been coughing all day. An ice cream sundae hit the spot. All the food was good and Rob enjoyed his margaritas while I had a Red Stripe beer, the local brew.

Monday, December 29, 2003 – Having spent all day yesterday in the car, today we vowed to do the beach. But first Judy and Michele went to the grocery store for breakfast and lunch food while Rob and I had the tire fixed. The man was reluctant to fix it, claiming it would be unsafe but we assured him it would only be used for a spare. For \$20 he would patch it in, what turned out to be, four places. Meanwhile the ladies finished their shopping only to report that the bread and milk had not yet arrived, we should return in the afternoon for those commodities. Michele said that this reminded her of the Bahamas where the savvy shopper knows which days to go to the store for the various staples.

We had a wonderful peanut butter lunch in our own dining room.



Donning our swim attire we made our way to the beach, picked up beach towels and lounge chairs and enjoyed watching the children play in the sand, people jump on the water trampoline and parasailers float by. Rob and I said that this was something we always wanted to try. At about 2 p.m., a man asked if we'd like to sail. I asked Rob if he was ready yet. We asked the price and said we'd need to get money. No problem man, I'll get it from you later, was his reply. We were quickly



transferred from the shore to the parasail boat with a brief stop over to sign the release. The woman in charge asked Rob how she was going to be paid. Rob didn't know the name of the man who solicited us but it was worked out anyway. Off to the parasail powerboat we went. We put on the ski vests and a harness that was mostly a belt that went around our chests. There were straps to put our legs through but they were never in use. We sat on the platform at the rear of the boat as our sail was launched and we rose upward, 50 yards above the water's surface. We saw burning on the land, all of the resorts along the coast and the land where the coastline changed to cliffs. It was a wonderful experience, like none I'd ever had. We were suspended in space as if attached to a kite. We were up for about 15 minutes (all that you need) before the boat winched our line in. As we arrived at the boat, we just sat down on the platform and released the tether before clamoring into the bow of the boat again. When we returned to shore, Judy and Michele had seen us, but just as specks in the sky. \$70 for the two of us was money well spent.

After returning to our rooms and cleaning up, Judy and I returned to the store to pick up the balance of our groceries. Then we had some wine and cheese while Rob prepared for dinner.

While we were on the beach, a man gave us a coupon for a free drink or 10% off at a local restaurant. Their come on was 2 for 1 lobster, shrimp, drinks, etc. We went there tonight and fully enjoyed our 2 for 1 grilled lobster with a fried conch bites appetizer. The daiquiris were also very good. We all agreed that this was the best dinner we had and that we could go back again.

On our way home, we saw the brightest shooting star (meteorite) that any of us had ever seen. It appeared near the moon and continued down to a few feet over the ocean.



Tuesday, December 30, 2003 – Shopping day began after lunch. We went to the Times Square Mall, a group of jewelry and specialty stores mostly run by Indians in search of a characteristic charm. Instead, Rob bought some typical rum and Judy bought a swim wrap. Afterward, we went to a pharmacy for some cough syrup, as Judy had still not conquered her cold.

Tonight's dinner was at the Italian restaurant up the beach. The food was comparable to last night and we brought home leftovers for tomorrow's lunch.

Wednesday, December 31, 2003 – We discussed how we might visit the Mayfield Falls today, even going to the front desk for their advice, brochures and to call a resort in the vicinity. No plan seemed workable so we decided on the nearby Negril lighthouse, instead. We drove carefully

down the west end road and as we approached the lighthouse we were unsure of where to park. A young man on a motorcycle suggested that we turn in right there to park and he; Kevin became our guardian angel for the day.

The cove area is known for its beautiful, clear water, coral formations and an arch where you can jump in from 30 feet. We did not bother with the arch, as we did not intend to jump to our demise.





Kevin took our pictures and showed us the various floras. The cottonwood tree pictured at the upper left is very old. This is the type of tree used for boats.

Kevin told us that he would take us to a waterfall and river, if we liked. "It was just down the road and a turn to the left." He would show us where.

An hour and a half later we arrived at "Roaring River" having easily followed our orange shirted guide on his motorcycle. The motorcycle easily navigated the pot-holed roads over which we drove very carefully. Having patched the spare, we did not want another incident.



Kevin passed us off to Richard, pictured to the left, who was our guide for this natural wonderland. He showed us every edible plant and tree and the spring of water that he promised would restore our youth, cure our ills, sooth our joints and give us lives of up to 120 years. Such an advertisement we could not resist so you see us in the spring of cool water.

The spring below is reported to be more than 500 feet deep. It never goes dry and supplies most of the

The spring below is reported to be more than 500 feet deep. It never goes dry and supplies most of the drinking water for Jamaicans today.



Regardless of what Richard said about crops and fruits of Jamaican trees, we know that the above represents the principal crop of Jamaica. (Marijuana) We received a lesson in crop management from our guide's friend. One must carefully remove

the male plants, identified by the yellow genitalia, from the garden. As the plants mature to eight inches, the leaves are removed and allowed to dry for six days. They are then crumbled and are ready for use. We saw cigarette papers sold at the local pharmacy. They are rarely used for tobacco. Our field rep received a small tip and our guide acquired some of the national crop, which, after seeking permission, he consumed through the balance of the tour. He was quite content.

As we reached the end of our tour, Richard pointed out the birthplace and home (house on the left) of Bob Marley, the reggae king. Not born in a palace, Marley developed his skill in this humble estate. Bob Marley is to Jamaica what Elvis Presley is to the US.



Judy thought this little purple house was cute with the icicles hanging for Christmas. This goat is one of many that we saw on our trip. Many times we would have to wait for them to cross the road or move out of the way. The same thing went for cows. It was not at all unusual to see cows along the road or in the

road. The animals have the right of way.

Finally, we returned to the beginning to take a quick jump off the bridge into the “Roaring River” where the current would take us under the bridge to an easy exit point. Michele did not jump off the bridge although she did dive into the water so as not to hit rocks. None of us knew about this until after she had done it.



Upon our return home, we stopped at the bank to tip our guide. Of course, we had not expected to spend the day away, only to visit the lighthouse. The standard guide reply is “can’t your friend put a bit with it.” We are now wise to this ploy. It appears that in “tour guide training academy,” they are taught to always ask for more. As they will never see you again, this scheme generally works, and if it doesn’t, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Burger King beckoned to us as we passed by for a late lunch at 4:30, a shower and a nap to prepare for the New Year’s Eve festivities.

We promised ourselves more 2 for 1 lobster and we also liked the conch we had at the previous restaurant so we returned, walking along the beach, in the quiet of the evening, hand in hand, as lovers. Our coupon

promised free drinks so everyone had one and we enjoyed the music from the bar. We passed numerous piles of wood prepared for bonfires to be lit as the New Year approached. As we approached our home we passed dance bands and native craft sellers who were powered by the energy from generators. The bonfires had been lit and the mood was wonderfully festive. We sat and stood at our place awaiting the fireworks that would begin at midnight over the sea. The display was very nice. I should have taken some pictures with my digital camera that has a setting for fireworks that I haven't yet used. I should have tried it out last night.

Thursday, January 01, 2004 – Happy New Year! Having partied late last night, we all slept in and lounged around the house. As some of our supplies had dwindled, we went on the look out for an open grocery store. The one we regularly visit was closed, but from our lighthouse venture the other day, we remembered one in the west end. It was open so we picked up some more water. We had decided on pizza for supper so we will go to the resort next door and try theirs.

Well that's not quite all, "Hello everyone," Rob here, Jim's son. Jim has quietly skipped over what really happened in the early morning hours just after New Year's fell. Jim has graciously done so to save any embarrassment to my wife, Michele. But after further consideration, I thought it necessary to add to his journal, for it is the one moment in our trip that really defined what family is all about and how, in moment of crises, family members somehow always unite by pulling from the greatest strengths of each individual for the one in need.

To give you a little background, Michele, my wife, is nearly seven months pregnant. She wasn't pregnant when we booked the trip but with the proper clearances and assurances for our local doctors, we wanted to see Jamaica, even if it only meant setting on the beach watching everyone else. With the doctors being game, we were game, and so off to the Jamaican sunshine we went. The one concern that we could not remove from the back of our minds was, "What if?" What if something were to go wrong, would the Jamaican witch doctor or voodoo doctor we imagined, be able to treat her and do so with all the technological advances that we rely so heavily upon in The States? Of course the answer is no, but we were still willing to take the risk.

At dinner on New Years Eve we noticed Michele was not quite up to herself but being the trooper she had been all week, she was not willing to sacrifice the enjoyment of others, to attend to her needs. However, we did not know she needed attention and thought it was typical pregnancy pains caused by the little one to be, Zach. When in fact, Michele was experiencing severe abdominal cramping, stemming from her being unable to have a bowel movement since the night before leaving for Jamaica, more than five days prior (I would have died long before).

After the fireworks had ended and as we were retreating to the room for the evening, she began to express some of her concerns with me. She mentioned that it was quite normal for women in their third trimester to experience similar difficulties. She was hoping the pains were an indication that the time had come. She gave me a kiss and said she might be a while, little did she know. A half hour later I began to hear some noises from the bathroom that didn't sound right, I gently opened the door to ask if all was okay, only to find my wife, on her knees, regurgitating uncontrollably into the toilet. To refrain from any other embarrassment to my wife, I spent the next hour assisting my beautiful wife in ways she had hoped I would never see her. As time continued, the abdominal pains increased with more intensity. Seeing no end in sight, I moved Michele to our bed and went to get mom for help about 2:15 a.m. Mom quickly saw that the job called for an expert and called the front desk for a doctor.

A doctor quickly responded by phone, saying that he was stuck in traffic (fireworks traffic disbursement) relatively close by and would be there shortly. I was scared to death that the voodoo witch doctor I had previously imagined was shortly going to appear before us to perform some ancient tribal ritualistic ceremony

but at this point, had I thought it would have helped, I would have done my own little dance on top of the bed. Jim met the doctor in the parking lot and ushered him in. To my relief, and the rest of the family, in walked the local doctor that looks typical to any doctor seen in The States and carrying a little black instrument bag similar to the one I used to play with as a child. His first concern was getting Michele's breathing under control, as she was hyperventilating, not only from the pain but also from the sheer terror of being ill in a foreign land. The doctor gave Michele two shots primarily to get her to relax, but was unable to provide anything to correct the problem or its pain. He also let us know that all stores would be closed because of the holiday and that getting the proper supplies might be delayed another day. With that said, the good doctor was off into the dark of night and asked that I called him in the morning. With little left to do, Mom and Jim retired to bed around 3:30 a.m. I spent the rest of the night by my wife's side primarily calming her, but assisting with any of her needs, while both of us managed five and ten minute catnaps here and there totaling maybe an hour between us. About 10:00 a.m. the doctor returned with medical relief that took effect shortly after being administered.

So you see the day was not one that was lost, but one used primarily to recover from the night before. I, myself, can function on little or no sleep and often find myself on my days off leaving the house between 2:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. (insane hours as Michele puts it) for a day hunting with the boys. Though I am accustomed to little or no sleep, the others aren't. Mom and Jim slept in, Michele spent the rest of the day in bed resting and recovering, and I eventually took an afternoon nap. Later in the afternoon, the diminished supplies Jim mentioned replacing, were actually foods that he and I shopped for that we thought Michele could eat. I'm pleased to write, that the doctor returned for his third house call and later called to see if we could stop by his office for him to listen to the baby's heart beat. His bill was quit reasonable considering three house calls.

As I mentioned before, Jim was going to graciously leave this episode out of his journal to save Michele any embarrassment, however I'm sure many years from now, this will be my most memorable (not enjoyable) day from our trip to Jamaica. A day when I saw sides of my parents I knew existed but so rarely get to see. A day that I saw my wife on one of her worst days and still thought she was as beautiful and loving as she was the day I married her. And I'm happy to report that Michele is recovering quit nicely and little Zach seems unaffected by Michele's all-nighter.

Judy was pleasantly touched when Michele said, "You're a good mother-in-law."

Friday, January 02, 2004 – Our last full day we slept in and then went shopping to pick up the charm that Judy selected the day before. Meanwhile, I bought some gasoline, to bring up the tank for our drive back to Montego Bay, tomorrow. After lunch we went to the beach, got some sun on our backs and bought a fresh pineapple. A lady was selling the pineapples next to our resort and cut them up for you. The pineapple was very sweet and good. That evening we returned to our favorite restaurant for our last installment of lobster. This time we took it to go. The restaurant would have put our drinks in plastic cups but they had no lids so I went back to the room and brought a pitcher back. The bartender was very pleased when he almost filled the pitcher with the two drinks we bought. As Rob and I ate our lobster, Michele ate her macaroni and cheese. She was not the slightest bit jealous.

Following dinner, we played an aggressive game of hearts. The winner treated everyone to a brownie sundae at next-door Margaritaville, Jimmy Buffet's restaurant and bar located here, Montego Bay and Ocho Rios. Everyone who visits Jamaica has the opportunity to enjoy the music and festivities at this bar patronized mostly by young adults. Tonight was karaoke night and a few fairly drunk youths were entertaining us with their songs. It was fun.

Saturday, January 03, 2004 – As we pack our suitcases, we bid a fond farewell Negril but first a stop to the store to pick up some souvenir coffee. In Montego Bay we visited a very old church, saw the downtown shopping area, including a craft center where we ate lunch. We were looking for a bracelet. Judy believes that the cost of gold is less here than at home and of course, one need not pay sales tax. We ultimately found the perfect bracelet for the grandchildren charms and negotiated a good price. While we were at it, we also bought another charm bracelet for travel charms. Judy had just about filled her existing bracelet and rather than stop traveling, getting another bracelet was a good alternative. She really enjoys searching for the charm that will be characteristic of the country we are visiting. For Jamaica we have a barefoot to remind us of all the unworn socks that we brought back home.