

Bank Street College of Education

Educate

2002

The Long Trip at Bank Street

2002

Long Trip 2002 Falmouth, Jamaica Reflections

Carol Hillman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/longtrip-2002>

"Soon Come"
by Carol B. Hillman

The fourth Long Trip set off for Jamaica, West Indies at the end of April, 2002. It was not the best beginning of a trip as we learned that our flight had been cancelled and the next available departure was twelve hours later. However, in true Bank Street style we made the best of it. With motel rooms and meals provided by Air Jamaica and lots of time to read, rest and get to know one another, we accepted the fact that our plane would "Soon Come."

Rose's By the Sea, our home away from home, had spacious and cheerful rooms overlooking an unspoiled inlet. In this small and peaceful place, complete with a swimming pool, we ate all of our meals outside. We were introduced to Jamaican food through a weekend breakfast which consisted of *achee*, a fruit whose yellow meat when cooked looks like scrambled eggs, fried plantain, yam and potato dumplings, *callalou*, a green spinach/chard-like vegetable, and aromatic coffee. Each day that followed, because of our enthusiasm and appreciation of these dishes, the hotel manager, Jean, would share a favorite recipe with us.

Our first exploration was to a coconut and allspice plantation which was high in the hills of Ocho Rios. There, a Jamaican family opened their home and their hearts to our group. We toured the plantation, mingled with local friends of the family, who included Jamaican dignitaries, and gazed at the beautiful waters of the James Bond Beach. We talked, laughed, sipped homemade ginger beer and felt at home in this open-air home, so well designed to take in the surrounding beauty.

Getting more of a feel of the land, we next toured, by a tractor drawn jitney, Prospect Plantation, one thousand acres of bananas, pineapples, mangoes, sugar cane and coconut trees. We tasted freshly opened coconut dipped into raw sugar – and relished it.

On to Harmony Hall, a restored mid-nineteenth century home which has been made into an art and craft center exhibiting the works of Jamaican artists. A wide selection of artwork was for sale and we did our share in helping to boost the economy. Then came an unexpected invitation from Annabella Proudlock, the visionary

founder and director of Harmony Hall, to visit her home and share her view and her private collection. Here was a gathering of the cream of Jamaican art, covering every inch of wall space, as well as collections of statuary, woodcarvings, ceramics and art books galore. This was an art lover's paradise, with everything bathed in extraordinary natural light.

Amid low-level mutterings and grumbling, our group attended an evening at the local Kiwanis Club, where Dean Fern Khan was asked to speak about our mission in coming to Jamaica. This turned out to be a remarkably rewarding time. As a direct result of that coming together, Bank Street has been asked to look into an ongoing relationship with Jamaican educators. One Kiwanis Club member, Jacqueline Green, joined our group for breakfast the morning prior to our departure from Jamaica. Jacky, who owns a bookstore in Falmouth, read Jamaican poems and stories while we relaxed on our patio.

During the trip we met with the Honorable Royland Barrett, Custos of Trelawny, (similar to an honorary major) an erudite but humble man involved in the restoration of the historic town of Falmouth where we stayed. He has taken upon himself the documentation of the religious history of the town, its prominent men and women collecting photographs that would bring together a pictorial representation of the past. We learned about the slave trade and the pivotal role Jamaican indentured people played in the casting off of bondage. How they start planting crops for their own consumption, but soon sold their excess produce at market. In this way they started to save those earnings, which became, for some, a means to buy their own freedom. Their lives were inextricably bound with the non-conformist churches, not only spiritually but also physically, building their own places of worship.

A boat ride at night in the lagoon was magical under a star-studded sky. Every movement that disturbed the water was rewarded with a luminous glow, a phosphorescence emanating from tiny organisms. Our skipper took us to the opposite shore where, by flashlight, we gazed at a colony of sleeping cattle egrets known locally as *cow birds* who come to roost each night at 5:30 in this particular group of red mangrove trees.

Our visit to a Great House, Rose Hall, was the former home of Annie Palmer, the legendary white witch of Rose Hall. She is said to have murdered three husbands there. On this magnificent looking estate we learned that there were two thousand slaves. The cruelty which they suffered was, in its brutality, sickening beyond description. It was difficult after learning about its history to remain in a place with such a deplorable past.

At Sam Sharpe Community College, we met a group of distinguished and dedicated educators involved in teacher training. We talked in small groups during lunch about their educational system, their classes of up to sixty students, their national curriculum and lack of disciplinary problems. In Jamaica the college teachers are guaranteed housing and have an active support system through their community.

Our visit to the sugar cane manufacturing plant, now owned by the government, was like witnessing a time gone by. Working conditions for the laborers were far beyond demanding. Each pair of men, with an average age of 55, used machetes to cut 2,000 pounds of sugar cane each day under the blazing sun. Inside the huge factory there were also horrendous working conditions. The vast rooms were poorly lit, jarringly noisy, extremely hot and filthy. One felt, walking along the narrow metal catwalks, unsafe, unclean and unhealthy. The employees have work from January through June and are then given a meager compensation for the rest of the year. We witnessed the entire process from stalks of sugar cane to raw brown sugar crystals and molasses – sweet tastes, but products made with small regard for the working conditions of the day laborers.

Simultaneously, this visit to the factory was a real Bank Street Social Studies experience. We met and talked with the workers, experienced first hand their working conditions and in the process, learned the history of the sugar estates dating back to the 17th century as well as the current economics of the sugar industry.

We attended a colorful flea market, went to the beach, heard local music, storytelling from a savvy social worker, and drank the juice from freshly picked coconuts, made friends with those we met within our group. We rode the bus, saw the sights, listened intently and learned a lot. We learned to have patience the Jamaican way ... that all things, including the jerk beef or chicken would "Soon Come."