

Christmas Day on the Beach

Before moving up here in the North (Yellowknife ,N.W.T) I lived and worked for two years on an Island in the Eastern Caribbean, called St. Maarten. This small island is half Dutch and half French. I lived and worked on the Dutch side. A typical weekday morning would begin with Eddy the local radio announcer commenting on how much he was enjoying his morning 'bush tea' and telling all his listeners to not forget to take their medications. Open sewers that overflowed onto the roads after a rain fall could be slightly annoying. On the way to church one day, Raymond (my husband) was wearing a crisp white shirt. As luck would have it, he got splashed by the water that over flowed from the sewers. Needless to say, we had to return home so Raymond could change. One of the other interesting things about this island was you could drive through the Dutch side and French side in less than twenty minutes without going through any border patrols. Also a typical weekly Saturday shopping trip meant traveling through both sides.

The teaching staff during my first year at the Montessori School was composed of Teachers from Holland, Canada, United States, Italy and the United Kingdom. I think a certain bond developed among us, mainly as a result of our various misadventures of adapting to this small Island that could be Paradise on some days and Hell on Earth on others. So, three years after having left St. Maarten, I still occasionally hear from the teacher from Italy. Also, Raymond and I are still very close to the teacher from the United Kingdom.

The teacher from the U.K, Raymond and I would head out on our Saturday expeditions nearly every week. We got to know each other very well by the time the holiday season arrived. The cost

of living was very, very high. So, for the first time in my life I had no T.V. However the local bus trips were very lively and made up for no T.V. I also discovered that to have Kraft Dinner for dinner sometimes three nights in a row would be considered very fortunate by many people on the Island. This was also to be my first year without a Christmas tree. On this Island by the way, Santa Claus arrives in a huge white Hummer.

On Christmas day, the three of us decided to pack up a picnic and spend the day on one of St. Maarten's popular beach, Orient Beach. On that day just sun bathing and frolicking in the sea, I reflected on how my perspective on life had changed over that year. My Mom had died two months after I arrived on St. Maarten and then two weeks after that I picked up a virus that was life threatening. I was amazed what these experiences have taught me: Strangers could be kind and determination can overcome many obstacles. Most importantly, I learned that you can always find joy in your love ones, friends, the children you teach, the sand, the sun, the sunset and the ocean. These are all simple things that do not cost anything but are priceless.