

Under The Sea Grape Tree
by: Will Johnson

It seems like yesterday when I would be sitting under the sea grape tree reflecting on my future.

A young teenager just finished with high school on Curacao and holding down a job in the Postoffice.

It was not quiet meditation mind you. The future looked bleak and it required a lot of imagination to think positive.

How the world has changed since then. Just like Jean Rhys on her only return to her native Dominica in "I lived here once", I too have the same feeling when I try to retrieve that once secluded and quiet spot on the Great Bay.

The Daily Herald seems to think that I am back under the sea grape tree and that I now have enough time for a column.

When I sat under the sea grape tree I used to write a column "News & Views" for the Windwards Islands Opinion of my friend the late Joseph H.Lake Sr.

My calling card which proclaimed that I was a columnist was ridiculed by all as a misspelling. Of course being always dressed like Fidel one had to wonder indeed if I had misspelled the word. The wording of this card was used against me by the Democrat Party in the 1969 elections when I was opposing them for the Senators seat of the Windward Islands. Various speakers on the Democrat party podium got very emotional about the various services offered on my card. Among them "uprisings quelled, governments overthrown, governments run, revolutions organized and even orgies organized. And me! Well I did not even know what an orgy was. And still don't. Anyway the Democrat Party obviously felt that I was offering services which had led to the May 30th, 1969 uprising on Curacao which was cause for the election in the first place.

Some people still question whether or not I have strayed from my original beliefs and especially get upset when I give a list of my third world heroes. Ayatollah Khomeini and Fidel are not easy to digest for some folks.

Anyway The Herald has asked me (at least Wim Hart has done so) to contribute a column to people I have known in my long political career.

I have been considering it. I am sure there are people who would like to read about the time I crashed the Lt. Governor's car into a wall on St.John's while serving as a host for Jackie Kennedy Onassis and her two children, or how I introduced Forbes Burnham to Le Pirate, or when Benny Goodman gave Busby the wrong tip and so on.

Coming from a small island like Saba and growing up in a time which seems world's away, I have been privileged to meet many celebrities as well as many "small people" who also deserve to be highlighted.

I have always felt the need for a literary magazine for these islands. Not a BIM of course. There are only so many Frank Collymore's to go around. But I applaud the effort of the Daily Herald's Weekender to try and combine journalism with literature. Charles Borromeo Hodge told me once that he had a lively correspondence with Frank from New York. To his dismay he found out as he said to me "That Frank turned out to be a Caucasian". Anyway since he liked me too he must have had a soft spot for Caucasians.

The Nicaraguan writer Sergio Ramirez was Vice President under the Sandanistas. He claimed that a revolution had crossed his path and that politics had interrupted his career as a writer.

Ramirez had the following to say about literature and journalism. To the question by the OAS Magazine, AMERICAS, "You're a political scientist and analyst who writes for many publications. What do you think is the connection between journalism and literature?", he answers;

"The kind of journalism that I prefer and that I like to see practiced - the journalism that I teach my students in the journalism workshops at the Ibero American Foundation for new journalism in Cartagena - is what is called literary journalism. It's journalism with the gripping style of literary writing, the kind of writing where you reel in the reader little by little - where you set out the bait, create suspense, and keep the reader connected to the story. Literary journalism is storytelling, stories written with literary language. It's a big challenge, especially when the written newspapers no longer have the capacity to inform, to really give the news.

These days before you open the newspaper you already know everything that has occurred, so for newspapers to be able to compete, they are going to have to get into descriptive articles, a more in-depth recounting of the event. And they should go back to the kind of old journalism practiced in the early twentieth century, when LA NACION in Buenos Aires used to devote an entire article to Reuben Dario that started on the front page. That's the journalism I aspire to."

I will refrain from my old style journalism though. A New York newspaper after reading the Saba Herald questioned the authorities as to how I could be walking around free. That sort of style is reserved for other papers, not for literary journalism which I now advocate and aspire to. That style of journalism will be dealt with in Saba News Agency TWO.

People I would like to inform readers about vary from Stella Sloterdijk-Richardson, who wrote the most wonderful poem ever written about Saba, to the famous and infamous people I have met. From Fidel Castro to David Frederick, and from the fisherman on his lonely craft to the preacher on his high pulpit.

I will try from time to time to educate our people to look out so they can move up. I want to share the joys of reading and pass on information to our young people and hope that something I write can serve to educate them to look at life from a different perspective. To be realistic and as Sergio Ramirez says: "Societies don't change because of a single administration during a period of five or six years. They change little by little in a process of accumulation. Change happens when society decides to take ownership of a single project and move it forward with various nuances until it's consolidated."

The single most important project of our times is that the youth, the custodians of our future, need real life examples of local pioneers who did what seemed the impossible. I want to highlight some of those native peoples so that our young people can look to their lives for guidance.

Life has changed. I am no longer under the sea grape tree looking out to the future. High on the hill looking back on the past is where I am at now. Pablo Neruda, (whose former home, now a museum, I have visited in Valparaiso, Chile) in "A Dream of

Trains", best describes where I am at now, in my final stage of reflection and contemplation:

"I was alone in the solitary train,
but not only was I alone -
a host of solitudes were gathered
around the hope of the journey,
like peasants on the platforms.
And I, in the train, like stale smoke,
with so many shiftless souls,
burdened by so many deaths,
felt myself on a journey
in which nothing was moving
but my exhausted heart."

Will Johnson