

Bluefields Blues

By : **Juggernaut**

Once upon a time mostly English or British descendents on the island settled in a town just over 2000 feet above the Caribbean Sea for the cool breeze and to get away from the tropical hot humid weather of the coastal areas. Thus the town acquired the name English town. The town is practically sitting on mineral rich bauxite hill. The bauxite soil is red in contrast to the thick, green tropical vegetation. The red dirt below and bright blue sky above; green vegetation year around with climate just right made this town a heaven for the residents that donâ€™t care for the beach, since a drive to the nearest beach is long and tiresome on winding mountain roads.



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Subba Rao

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The majority of the town people are employed in the aluminum smelters. The daily excavation into the mountain slopes to remove bauxite mineral for processing to extract aluminum exposed more bright red bauxite. On one side of the town is the 'Red Mud Lake' formed from the hazardous sludge, a waste by-product of the aluminum smelter; though looks magnificent from the hill side, its impact on the environment was unknown. But again, it is all about jobs that the aluminum smelters create that counts in the Bauxite town.

Since the town was located on a mountain, there is no ground or well water supply; the entire town population depends on stored rain water, which is plenty from abundant rains. The roof gutters allow rain water to flow into on-site water tanks for storage at each house providing free water supply.

The red bauxite soil is good for agriculture too; it supports anything that grows underground or aboveground from yellow and sweet yams to exotic fruits. The tall Pommerac trees with juicy fruits that resemble red apples are common along the roadside. Cho-Cho, a pear shaped squash like vegetable considered expensive in India with a name 'Bangalore Vankaaya' grows wild on wasteland here. The market at the town center is always bustling with vendors hawking fresh fruits; Avocados, guava, Guinep, naseberry, mangoes, oranges, tangerines, rose apple, star apple, sour and sweet sop, jack fruit and of course bananas. In any time of the day, one can shop for household goods, clothing, produce, fresh fruits and vegetables, flowers and meat from freshly killed animal carcasses hanging like bunch of bananas at the butcher shops.

The town center is also a bus stop for people travelling to the capital City and the surrounding areas. Hustlers run around to book passengers into their vans; in the process they snatch the bags from the passengers to place in vans to force them to accept the ride in their own vans. This experience was strange and freighting at first to Juggernaut when he just arrived in the town to accept employment with an agricultural research institute.

The English Town is full of expatriate technocrats or expats working with various agencies both private and government. The expats particularly liked the town for its excellent climate though far from the nearest beaches on southwest coast.

A drive to beautiful beaches on North coast from the town is long but less steep whereas the drive to southwest coastal beaches at the bottom of the hill is tedious through a winding road with sharp twists and hairpin turns.

Juggernaut was excited to drive for the very first time his brand new car, a sky blue Volkswagen Beetle to match with the color of the Caribbean sky. It was only one week ago, he received the driving license after a rigorous road test most people fail on the first instance. Shifting gears to maneuver the car through narrow winding roads on hillside was a challenge immediately after receiving the driver's license. One has to be careful in driving immediately after a rain shower since the fine bauxite dust on the road turns into thin film of mud turning the roads into slippery skid rows. The first scary driving experience for Juggernaut was to maneuver the skidding car to a safety during one such rain event.

Ganapathi was one of the longtime expats in town. Everybody called him GP for short. Born into a business family, his catch phrase was 'I am a business man you know.' With him every issue and event was either a loss or profit; his fingers were always tapping in the air as if he was calculating something. GP's expertise that brought him to the island were fuzzy, he was only known for buying and selling stuff on the side

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to make money. Dr. Mukherjee was an old time medical practitioner; he loved to show off his tolerance level for hot peppers by taking a big bite of raw Jamaican Scotch Bonnet hot pepper. A conversation with him always ended up with falling value of local dollar. Mr. Misra was an expert on bauxite processing; his favorite subject was Haitian zombies and voodoo medicine for mental illness. Mr. Pillai was only Indian expat that played golf and hang out with only British expats. Born in East Africa and migrated to England at an early age, Mr. Modi came to the island as crops irrigation expert. He was only Indian expat was dating a local woman working in a bank. She was very kind and gave preferential treatment to any Indian expat visiting her bank. Mrs. Singh, the wife of a Canadian expat loved the tropical warm climate so much she was always in shorts saying she couldn't dare wearing shorts back home in Canada yearround.

â Now you got a brand new car now, let's go to Bluefields beach this weekend,â said GP.

â I just got the driver's license few days ago and not sure whether I can handle the treacherous downhill drive to the beach,â Juggernaut was doubtful.

â Well, I will be your pilot, driving just ahead of your car, if I slow down, you put breaks, you just follow my car, is that simpleâ GP was assuring.

One sunny weekend, GP was ready with his family to drive to Bluefields Beach as a pilot and Juggernaut to follow him. The plan was GP will drive slowly to allow Juggernaut to follow closely; in case of an emergency or some unforeseen road conditions, GP will slow down his car and give a hand signal to Juggernaut to slow down in advance so that Juggernaut don't have to face a panic situation to make risky decisions as an inexperienced driver.

On the way, Juggernaut noticed that GP was applying breaks continuously to slow down his vehicle on a steep downhill road rather than driving in low gear. He wondered about GP's driving techniques. The dangerous winding downhill road with sharp hairpin turns reminded Juggernaut of such a bus route he took as a pilgrim to visit Lord Balaji temple in his old country. The route to the temple was so dangerous, the devotees in the bus chant â Govindaâ â Govindaâ loudly to boost the driver's morale and feel confident that God Govinda would make the trip safe. Juggernaut started chanting â Govindaâ â Lord Govindaâ loudly to drive his own spirits up while driving carefully behind GP's car through sharp twists and turns.

On reaching the bottom of the hill, a 2000 feet drop, Juggernaut felt safe and confident though still nervous. Now, the route was along the panoramic Southwest coastline of the island. The road was very narrow and winding with both sides covered with overgrown bushes over mounds of dirt. The telephone poles were encroaching on to the narrow street that allowed two-way traffic. While driving through a sea side town of Bluefields, a sleepy town right on the coast, all of a sudden, Juggernaut saw an unsteady man running to the center of the street from left to right as GP's car passed him and again he ran back towards Juggernaut's car as Juggernaut steered the car to his extreme left to avoid hitting the man only to crash into a telephone pole. The drunken man hit the front-end right bumper and fell on to the street. With his car crashed against the pole, a drunk lying on middle of street, Juggernaut saw GP stopped his car at some distance and came walking slowly.

â What happened man?â asked BP looking at the drunk laying on the street and juggernaut getting out from the crash.

â I thought you are supposed to be my pilot to warn against such an event like this?â asked Juggernaut. With no answer from GP, Juggernaut wondered why GP driving in front did not stop or at least slow down when he saw a drunk was crisscrossing the street in a disorderly fashion in front of his car. As per the plan, as a precaution, he should have slow down or stop to warn Juggernaut behind to stop to avoid the accident. The whole episode was bazaar. This accident could have been prevented altogether if not for GP's inaction. An ambulance took care of the injured drunk. It is a good thing that the engine of VW was located in the back in trunk area unlike in all other cars. The engine was in a good shape though the windshield and the front end was totally smashed. Throughout the incident, GP was walking around with a smirk on his face. Juggernaut blamed himself for his own poor choices leading up to this accident particularly believing in GP whom he hardly knew. â Wish I never met him,â thought the despondent Juggernaut.

Though well over three decades passed since the Bluefields accident, Juggernaut still feels the Bluefields blues particularly when he drives through winding narrow roads.

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