

(gave this to the US Ambassador to Guyana - McCoy will send it to him in Wash. took most of the negative references to US so hope it's now acceptable for him) ALSO sent recipes and Fleming articles and cover letter

NOTES FROM THE LAST FRONTIER

BY DICK TROPP

*P. I. C. Pa*

The best location of Guyana has a tropical climate, but it's certainly pleasant, tempered by trade winds. Even in the rainy season there is more than two hours of rain a day. Though not a desert by any means, at sundown, thanks to the trades and the 40-50% cloud cover, the heat is not oppressive. Nights are in the upper 60's, cool enough for a light blanket. I couldn't begin to describe the natural beauty of the wilderness, the stillness that you can almost hear. The people in the capital (Georgetown, about 200 miles away), actually call this part of the world "paradise."

The community I live in is located on one of the world's last frontiers: a few acres of virgin forest near the Venezuela-Guyana border. Here, on several thousand acres of virgin jungle allotted by the Guyana Government in 1973, a group of Americans has been building an agricultural project. Already over a thousand acres have been converted into cropland and pasture. Bananas, cassava, pumpkins, vegetables, and beans of many varieties are being cultivated. Pigs, chickens, pigs, cattle, goats, ducks and rabbits. The community is the site of extensive experimentation with the aim of developing a continuously-cropped, diversified array of foodstuffs that will not only feed its nearly 1,000 residents, but will help boost the productivity of the surrounding region.

Perhaps more remarkable than the hundreds and hundreds of acres of tropical forest that are now producing food; more remarkable than the development of this lovely community out of virgin jungle, the housing construction, streets, electric lighting, sanitary facilities, fruit trees planted everywhere, is the population of Jonestown. Almost one thousand people are here in Jonestown and more come in every week. There are people here from every race, every background. Our farm supervisory staff, for example, includes a Pomo Indian woman, a young man from Northumberland who grew up on a farm in the shadow of Roman ruins, a former county attorney from Northern California, a young man from the Philadelphia ghetto who, through the inspiration and help of Jim Jones, studied agronomy at Cal State, a young woman from rural Mississippi, a 55-year-old farmer chemical engineer from a prominent family in Delaware, and an ex-Mormon dairy farmer from Shasta County.

250 senior citizens, mostly black, mostly ghetto-dwellers who suffered from hypertension, are here finding a place of peace and beauty, a new lease on life. The same goes for the over 200 teenagers and young adults who were unable to find the handle for their lives in the big cities. Here they have found something to put themselves into, a community to build, a challenging environment in a black nation.

The children have a future here. They are not, to use Paul Goodman's phrase, "growing up absurd." The world here makes sense. People are now part of a community, on land that is theirs, part of a purpose that is not confined to this community, but which is the pulse of the "third world." Here we have joined hearts, hands and minds with the Guyanese people in a massive effort to build a new society, based on the foundations of love and work, co-operation and equality.

P.I.C.P.G.

The Peoples Temple Agricultural Project has become a model operation. Guyana has been trying to get her people to settle the rich interior here, to develop local resources, to move towards self-sufficiency and economic independence. We are doing just that out here, and in the process, as Americans, are building a kind of good will between the Caribbean peoples and our native United States. Government officials have praised our work highly. American officials have come and have been impressed. One of Guyana's highest ranking ministers, a man who has traveled the world as a spokesman for a non-aligned nations, and who has addressed the U.N. General Assembly on several occasions, was moved to tears by what has been accomplished here, by the total absence of racism, sexism, and 'ageism,' and the place of honor given to senior citizens and children, the meticulous care of our medical staff, the happy faces, friendly and open people who have taken Guyana, and her people and her goals to heart. Visitors are chartering planes to come here, to see this group of Americans who defy the stereotypes.

My main task in coming here was to organize a high school program for about 90 youngsters. Besides several levels of instruction in language skills, math, and social studies, we have put together a "community development institute" that embodies practical study and training in all areas of building this entirely "home-made" community. The students are involved directly in learning about every aspect of agriculture, sanitation, mechanics, construction, food processing, composting, power plant technology, even some civil engineering and surveying, and more. The development of the community is the "open air" school that brings study and practical application together. Since the school program merges with the life-style here, there is no such thing as "irrelevance."

It has been the most exciting, challenging, and rewarding educational experience of my life.

The students include local (Amerindian) teenagers along with the American settlers. We have dramatic proof out here in the jungles that social and environmental conditions determine what children will be like, and can bring about profound characterological changes that are almost unbelievable.

I have seen "street" kids who craved only junk food, television and cars transformed, into gardeners, builders, scientists, leaders ... involved in constructive activity, regaining their health, eating and liking the natural foods here, developing confidence, responsibility, maturity. It is awe-inspiring to see them responding to the challenges of work and study in a culture, an environment that they can relate to. Some of the young people here were literally given up on by everyone -- even the juvenile authorities didn't want to deal with them.

I'd note that quite a few of them -- had they remained on the streets of San Francisco -- would have added hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of dollars to what is being spent on programs for rehabilitation, and for the repair of vandalized property. Some of them were hell raisers and they would have no doubt helped to heat up the inner city.

I have also been working on a program for the senior citizens who have come here to retire. The oldest, a woman whose parents were slaves in Virginia, came here in January. She took the up-river trip in our fishing boat, and she loves this beautiful, enchanting place. She will be 108 years old in October. Another fellow here, who came three years ago when the original

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jungle acreage was being cleared, is 102. He remains active, by his own choice, making furniture in his own shop.

We just cannot get the old folks here to "retire". The place turns them out, makes them forget they're old. Their wealth of experience has helped in numerous ways to find some tried-and-true, home-made solutions to problems that the younger folks never knew about. We have now set up a kind of high school program for those adults and seniors who didn't receive the advantages of an education (many grew up as children of tenant farmers and migrants, and had practically no schooling). It is moving to see people in their 70's and 80's diligently studying. They have also organized their own handicrafts and art classes. Their work has been displayed for the many visitors who come to the community, already famous and highly-regarded throughout the country.

Visitors stream in here. Guyana officials, as well as Americans, such as California's Lt. Governor Merv Dymally, anxious to see what has been termed by the Guyanese as a "model of co-operation."

The amazing thing to practically all who come is not only the co-operative spirit, the comprehensive planning and management that has gone into the project (with no outside funding), but the total lack of racism here: blacks, whites, Amerindians, latinos, Orientals, everyone working together like a big family. We know it has been precisely this level of human co-operation that has made the project such a success.

I wanted to also remark on the extensive medical services we have been able to bring to the region. Our clinic has saved lives, and is doing wonders in preventing and controlling parasite-caused illnesses common to the tropics, such as gastroenteritis.

The level of health care among residents here is very high -- higher than it was previously. The climate, diet, and peaceful, pressure-free surroundings have practically eliminated hypertension problems, kidney ailments, even heart problems among the elderly. A group of specialists and naturalists in the community have been working on herbal medicines, and we've had many successes -- for example, with papaya, in healing sores.

I took a leave from the college for one year. I didn't know what I was going to do when the year was up. I cannot see anything in front of me now but to continue with the work that is going on here. I will doubtless return to the States at some time in the future, but now, that is far from my mind.

The beauty here; the sense of the unexplored; the challenges of building a new community; the children who today have a new lease on life; the older people who can finally live in peace, in a place that is in real sense theirs, where they can have a voice, a dignity; these are all compelling reasons for me to remain.

While it may seem that this jungle is a place of escape, a retreat from the modern world, it is quite the opposite: here all is growth, all is rebirth, new horizons, becoming, development, a future.

But? Here in the South American jungle, we are stepping forward into the challenge of finding a future for mankind.