



bespoke homes jamaica

RECONNECTING YOU WITH YOUR ISLAND

Letter from Jamaica #6, 15 June 2012:

“To do a ting – or not to do a ting?”

Like many persons, I have often “belly-laughed” at the stories – and real experiences – of “doing a ting” in Jamaica. There’s the perhaps apochryphal ex-London bus driver. After thirty years of driving the streets of London, he returns to Jamaica. He has a few car driving lessons and studies the highway code from cover to cover. Test one – fail! Test two – fail!. Test three – fail! How can this be? Everything is correct. But his friend explains, “yu mus do a ting”. Once his paperwork for the examiner is accompanied by a dozen Manley bills, he passes – no problem!



Then there is the policeman who was so helpful by accepting the fine for a minor traffic infringement to save the driver from having to spend all the next day in court. Yet he asks the motorist to pull in to the next side street as there’ll be fewer persons with cell phone cameras to record this fine transaction!

Okay, we could all go on and on with examples. “Doing a ting” happens in many countries in one way or another. The GP in Romania’s health system will often anticipate a tip in addition to the standard payment – and that’s in a part of the EU!

And yet we can easily be blinded by all the talk of “doing a ting”. Only a few weeks ago a teacher at a primary school in Trelawny told me about the early start breakfast club that is helping children that face particular difficulties to get up to scratch. Teachers are starting work earlier, for no extra pay. Parents are helping with breakfast preparation. Others are helping to pay for the food. Pupils are keen – some even arriving before the teacher.



The more I think, the more I see examples of “not doing a ting”. A few weeks ago, we went to view a house in Runaway Bay. Afterwards, the man showing us round walked to our car and spotted wires hanging below the front bumper. Within a second, the bonnet was up and the problem sorted. Seconds later, his knife had unscrewed the defective auto-lock device on the key ring that had prevented us locking the car the night before.

Then there are the friends or neighbours – tax or legal experts – who will sort your technical difficulty with no expectation of financial gain to themselves. Just like the stranger standing in the road who gave us a bag of mango one day – and was followed by another stranger who thrust a sack of yam at us. Again, with no desire for money!

“What planet is he on?”, I hear you shout! Surely not the island of Jamaica? Is he in Cuba by mistake? Surely we are always reading about the latest night-time round of praedial larceny? And now the government is letting the scrap metal trade re-start, surely there’ll be more headlines about railway lines and power cables gone missing – and even the exhumation of metal-clad coffins.

Well, a labourer on one of our recent housing projects offers a salutary lesson. For weeks he impressed us as a hard-working 23-year-old. Give him a trench to dig and it will be done quickly and effectively. Well, much of the time it will be. On finding a rat’s nest one Friday morning, he had to dash off to town to buy the lottery. Each morning and afternoon, he was

absent while moving his eight cows between grazing land and a spot less prone to praedial larceny. We were content to work around his disappearances, as his work was so good. And we were impressed by his wider business efforts, which commenced at 4am each day.



The Friday after the unproductive rat's nest episode, I was anxiously re-tracing my steps, searching, searching, searching. A few site workers had encouraged "Cowman" to keep the lost scandal bag of US dollars. But as I reached the end of my first circuit, Cowman asked whether I had lost the little black bag. Not only was he fair and honest with me, he also wanted to be fair to his co-workers – whom he believed stood to lose two weeks' wages.

In a similar vein, we visited a potential project in Kensington a few weeks earlier. A colleague dropped her cell phone in long grass, as we struggled across rough terrain. Thinking the phone had been mislaid at an hotel, she rang the missing phone's number a few times. On the third call, a young lady answered and explained the phone's location and how she could be found. She happily returned a decent UK phone that carried plenty of international credit.

Such real-life stories of individuals "not doing a ting" should be flashed around Jamaica - and around the world. Jamaica really is made up of lots of honest persons – whatever some of the media may choose to magnify.

And we must not forget the Diaspora workers "in foreign" who send large amounts of hard-earned pay back to family and friends in Jamaica. A recent report calculated that almost a tenth of Jamaica's annual income (GDP) comes from individuals living in the USA and sending remittances to the island. Hard to believe it's so large, but it is! Adding in remittances from Canada and Britain means that perhaps a sixth or a seventh of Jamaica's economy stems from the "gifting" of Jamaicans living in foreign.



In addition, there are the many persons who contribute each year to Labour Day activities – or through more frequent assistance to individuals and their community. And there remain a good few examples of credit unions and “partners” pooling financial resources to help individuals at certain times. The recent anniversary of the St Catherine Co-Operative Credit Union recently attracted lengthy tributes from Portia Simpson Miller, Andrew Holness and the Governor General among others. As the Jamaica Co-Operative Credit Union League says, the Credit Union Movement “continues to have a significant impact on the Jamaican society promoting the ideas of self-help and community co-operation”.

In our island’s 50th anniversary year, we see many, many examples of honesty, endeavour and good spirit in Jamaica – from individuals to millions at home and in foreign. Whatever the cynics may say, we repeatedly see persons, day-in, day-out, year-in, year-out living by the spirit of our wonderful National Pledge:

“Before God and all mankind, I pledge the love and loyalty of my heart, the wisdom and courage of my mind, the strength and vigour of my body in the service of my fellow citizens; I promise to stand up for Justice, Brotherhood and Peace, to work diligently and creatively, to think generously and honestly, so that Jamaica may, under God, increase in beauty, fellowship and prosperity, and play her part in advancing the welfare of the whole human race.”

Few countries across the world can rival such a splendid pledge. Perhaps Singapore is one of the few that gets anywhere near.

So, let’s celebrate Cowman and our many sisters and brothers who strive to build the better Jamaica that we all long to see – whatever dem may sey ‘bout doing a ting.

Stuart Taylor
Mandeville, 15 June 2012
Bespoke Homes Jamaica

stuart@bespokehomesjamaica.com