

A quick read for a laugh, a smile & a zany memory.

Coastwatcher

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1882.html?s=pdf>

Authors Note

The original 'Coastwatcher: Caribbean West' series appeared on the www.roatanet.com for a number of years. I always considered picking out my favorites and putting them into a book format, something that contained stories that could be read in minutes, at any time of the day or night. Like the times you just don't know what to do with your very scarce spare time. After looking at the contents of this book I think I have accomplished my goal. The stories, incidents, events, news items or whatever you chose to name them, are meant purely for entertainment. Good, bad indifferent or neutral, they are reflections of things that actually happened, most of which I witnessed myself. I chose from over 85 of the original weekly vignettes and events of the times, hoping that it is a balanced cross section of what everyday life is like in places that we consider paradise.

Draw your own conclusions about paradise. It is different things, to different people, but you can take these pages and apply them to almost any local in the Caribbean and Central America, if you are not yet decided on what paradise you will eventually be drawn to, if that is your dream. Most of us who have lived on beautiful tropical islands will tell you, it's all a state of mind.

One reader suggested I call this a sequel to 'Don't Stop the Carnival' a true life story of a couple from New York who tried to retire to a tropical island and run a resort thereon. It was Jamaica I think. The author was Herman Wouk. I enjoyed that book many years ago but I had no intentions of mimicking that most delightful recounting. I could probably think of several people on Roatan who experienced the same kind of crazy and zany mishaps and misunderstanding in places well removed from the locale of Mr. Wouk's story. That's the Caribbean. Coastwatcher is just like it happened, everyday, on Roatan, and if there are similarities between places like Jamaica or other Caribbean Resorts, and our little slice of paradise, it is because of the makeup of the populace. They almost all speak the same brand of reggae English, lots of Spanish, with some

Coastwatcher

French, Dutch and German. That's the cross section of colonists, in Caribbean history.

So read on my friends, and enjoy. Laugh with me in my recounting of some wonderful experiences, incredible people, and places of great beauty. I hope someday you find your paradise, and remember the characters in these pages, who came here to entertain you. I am one of them.

Introduction

Caribbean Islands are very glamorous places to visit. While we are vacationing on one, we lie on a beautiful white sand beach looking at the crystalline emerald sea and we dream. "Someday," you say to yourself. "Someday I'm going to come here to live. I will do this every day, just like I'm doing now. I will retire here and spend the rest of my days in this wonderful paradise."

If you are coming to Roatan or any other Caribbean paradise as a tourist, to soak up some sun, snorkel or dive, then read all the flowery brochures and come down for some fun. If you are coming here to live, then you need to take a longer look from a different slant. Living here and vacationing are not quite the same.

Retirement is a time to which most of us look forward. After toting the barge and lifting the bales for so long, you deserve a permanent vacation in a place of your choosing. It should be all fun, with every day a new adventure in your second life. We will stroll through all the ramifications of doing just that, going about it in the right way. It can be an exciting and pleasant journey.

Roatan is a very glamorous place, rich in folklore, with a fascinating history. We walk the beaches daily that were frequented by infamous pirates not too long ago. Many of the islanders here are descendants of those pirates who liked the place so much they finally settled here permanently. Of course they were persona non grata almost everywhere else. I have walked the very same beaches, in the footsteps of such notorious outlaws as Henry Morgan and Pierre La Feit.

Columbus was within sight of Roatan when he stopped at Guanaja, just fifteen miles to the northeast of us. On clear days, we can see the North Coast where he landed and walked on the ancient cobbled road built by indigenous Indians, centuries before his arrival.

Coastwatcher

The infamous William Walker (little Napoleon) sailed the waters of the Bay Islands. This genius, surgeon, lawyer, editor, turned privateer (filibuster) proclaimed himself Emperor of Nicaragua, after a dubious election in that war-torn region. Walker, was contacted by British dissidents on Roatan to help them take the Bay Islands away from Honduras. The British had recently agreed to give this island group off the North Coast of Honduras to an eager Central American recipient. These breakaway British residents wanted autonomy for the Bay Islands, and convinced Walker to invade Roatan and wrest control away from Hispanic dominion.

Walker, a renowned adventurer, marauder, condottiere, feared throughout Central America, set sail for the Bay Islands, only to make an inadvertent landing at Trujillo, a fortress outpost on the North Coast. He was captured there by British Marines in a presumed attempt to invade Nicaragua for the second time and was turned over to the Honduran Government.

At high noon on September 12, 1860, he was executed by a firing squad at the ripe old age of 36. Now, that is really something? How many American guys do you know, who made emperor by age 36? Not bad for a little kid from Tennessee.

Another interesting character who lived on Roatan for a short time was a writer known as O. Henry, whose real name was William Sydney Porter. He came to the island in 1896 to escape prosecution and a jail sentence for embezzlement at a former place of employment in Austin, Texas. Mr. Porter had been an accountant and journalist, and later returned to the U.S. to face the music; he served a three-year sentence for his crime. He then went on to become a writer of renown in his day, and won acclaim for his witty and humorous short stories, many about crime and con artists.

Two of my favorites were 'Shearing of the Lambs' and 'The Gentle Grafter', books of short stories written by Mr. O. Henry. There was even a radio series, back in the 30's and 40's, based on his writings titled, "The Arkansas Traveler." There are many modern day criminals wandering around in Honduras. In a country that has no extradition treaties, many known crooks are hiding out on the mainland and throughout the Bay

Tales of the Western Caribbean

Islands. We had an old cliché about watching “America’s Most Wanted”, on TV; to catch a glimpse of our neighbors.

Roatan is a melting pot. There are people of many races and origins living here. The earliest inhabitants were Indians about whom little is known. They were possibly Mayan or close relatives, followed centuries later by the coming of the Garafuna, the freed African slaves from the Caribbean islands. These people settled along the coastal areas of Honduras and the Bay Islands, bringing with them a fascinating culture.

There are many Garafuna villages in existence today. The Garafuna have no written language, but they speak an ancient tongue among themselves, brought from Africa, and handed down to each succeeding generation. There are colorful annual Garafuna celebrations that are a wonderful treat to behold.

The Bay Islands were a British possession until the year 1863. At that time, they were *formally* handed over to Honduras under great pressure from the American State Department, in its efforts to rid the Western Hemisphere of European presence (Monroe Doctrine). Until then, English was the official language of the islands, and many natives still speak English today. Spanish is now the official language. All legal transactions and documentation are written in Spanish.

The Spanish people came here from various parts of the mainland, to work in the building trades and at the resorts as the tourism industry of the island grew. They settled in several island communities, mainly French Harbour, Barrio los Fuertes (home of the strong) and Coxen Hole. The Central American Spanish are a mix of indigenous Indians and the descendants of the conquistadors, a very handsome dark skin race of people called Mestezo. Occasionally you will meet one with the green eyes of the Castilians.

Another prominent group in Honduras are the Palestinians. These Arabic people migrated here in the early thirties during the crisis in Palestine, when the British, Arabs and the Turks were going at it over the Holy Land. They are a very prosperous people and a major factor in commerce in

Coastwatcher

Honduras today. There is a TV channel that broadcasts directly to Honduras from Dubai, with all commentary in Arabic language.

The pace here is slow and I for one have learned to enjoy life this way. My hurry-scurry attitude, instilled in me as a native New Yorker was greatly tempered by spending thirty years in Florida. The Deep South has its pace too, which initially I found most annoying, even maddening at times. The people of the South had something good going for themselves and that became evident once I became 'settled in'. They managed to get things done in good time, but without all the commotion to which New Yorkers had become addicted. For us, everything had to be instantaneous. Quick was not fast enough.

The pace in the Bay islands is even slower than in the Deep South. I just want you to understand that nobody is in a hurry(except perhaps the taxi drivers) in this place. Life is leisurely, as it should be in a locale of tourism, relaxation and retirement. Begin to condition yourself friends, if you plan on living in paradise. Everything moves more deliberately slower here. What's the hurry?

There are some legitimate reasons for this lackadaisical gait. As an island dweller, you will soon realize that not everything to which we have become accustomed is readily available on our island. Waiting for the 'next boat' is a tradition we must endure as island dwellers, like it or not. Sometimes the 'next boat' is a ruse, a feeble excuse for some shortcoming or oversight. Nevertheless, frequently the excuse is legitimate.

Just yesterday, my painters came into the office in a state of upset because of an accident involving the truck that was bringing our paint order from San Pedro Sula, to the boat at Puerto Cortes.

The driver lost control somehow and the whole truckload of paint is now a colorful abstract on the highway, near Puerto Cortes. We are currently among the multitude awaiting the next, 'next boat'.

The tropics have always had the reputation for a place where things are done in slow motion. Sometimes, I think I have just imagined it when I

Tales of the Western Caribbean

pass a guy from Hondutel (our stone age national telephone company) setting up a ladder to climb up a pole, to fix somebody's telephone line, and when I pass by two hours later he is still standing in the same spot. Déjà vu. I remember seeing the same thing in Florida with the guys from Florida Power & Light standing around as if they were in a tabloid on stage.

I have always believed that change is good for the spirit. It is refreshment for the soul, a breath of new life; challenge; a major transformation of scene, things exciting, sometimes crazy, even infuriating. But, we all come here to attain those states of mind that are induced by change. Paradise itself is a state of mind. Your life here will be very different from what you have known. So much the better. It is good to get away from all that banter and bustle that has made living more hectic than you wished it to be.

Change is what living here is all about. If we wanted more of the same, we would just stay put. We yearn for something different. In time we realize that change is most often for the better, and if we look back at our own past, we can remember that our lives have been filled with change. The Polynesians have a proverb, which I have felt was a personal message, just meant for me, since I first read it in a book about the Hawaiian Islands. "Each life event is like a turning in the road. In order to find true happiness, one must learn to adjust to these changes."

Come to Roatan. Spend time here and on the Honduras mainland. Get to know the people, the language, the country and the cultures. Experience the lifestyle, the sometimes frustrating, often zany, downright crazy; the paradox, funny and sad at the same time.

Spend as long a time as possible in the place you intend to settle, before you take the leap into your third-world paradise, that secret place you have been dreaming about for so long. Be sure it is for you. A two-week vacation will give you a taste. However, two years would give you a much better idea as to how much you want to live there; you do not get the full flavor until you have lived in a place for a while.

Coastwatcher

Now we move onward, to our subject matter. The often hilarious, frequently sorrowful, and almost always zany everyday life events that make up life in paradise. It is my desire to give you a candid look at the great natural beauty of a magnificent tropical island, randomly covering true events, superstitions, island lore, recipes, skullduggery, fantasy, and dreams. They are not in any particular order, just as life here has never followed any patterns or rules to which we may have become accustomed in other parts of the civilized world.

Tale 1

Caribbean Myths Exploded!

A few years ago an agent for one of the magazines of that era, the genre of which was Caribbean Islands, asked me to fill out a questionnaire for that esteemed publication. It had to do with popular myths about the tropics, mostly fiction, that people believed to be true. It was really more wishful thinking than fact, and I found it to be quite humorous, so I complied with my friend's request and answered the questions put forth, but I did modify some of the questions into a more realistic context. Here is how it turned out.

The great blue sky opportunity is just out here waiting for you, and only you, not just anybody. So you want the inside scoop about the paradise where the living is easy, and cheap, and you can have things 'your way'? Let's take a look at the most common misconceptions and turn them inside-out, one at a time.

Myth: 1. My daily life will be slow, easy, warm, sunny and relaxing.

Truth: Your life will definitely be slow. There is no such thing as fast, or being in a hurry. *You* may be in a hurry, but nobody else is, unless it is a taxi trying to set a new reckless driver record from one end of the island to the other. Why is it they are only in a hurry when they are empty? They never go very fast when I am a passenger.

Easy: is a sometimes thing here, maddening at other times.

Warm: Warm is a for sure and probably pretty hot and humid at times as well. That part is almost always true, about the warm I mean.

Sunny: is right on target. You will get more than you need of sunny. And relaxing: purely a state of mind. If things have gone pretty smoothly all day and no bureaucrats have gotten in your face about senseless paper work and intricate obscure details therein, then maybe you have a shot at some relaxation. When it goes your way it can be very, very nice.

Myth: 2. When I apply my North Americano technology to their 'native culture' things will happen faster and better than they do now.

Truth: This one really breaks me up. But once in a while it works, if you are lucky enough to have the right people with you at the right time. Don't count on getting used to it happening. Just when you think it will work a second time, everything goes into reverse. But when you are lucky and it works, pat yourself on the back and go find yourself a place to celebrate and relax while you're 'hot' and feeling warm and sunny.

Myth: 3. I can expect my life down there to be just like my vacation experience just longer.

Truth: Well, now that's a good possibility! As soon as your friends and long lost relatives find out how nice it is where you are, they will not be able to live without you. Even though you lived just five miles from them up north, and you only saw them once every ten years, they will suddenly cherish your companionship. So let the good times roll. You will party 'til you drop, but they seem to acquire a great deal of stamina in this climate. Then you will find yourself praying for them to leave so you can go back to your hum-drum existence and do some relaxing.

Myth:4. I can live for next to nothing in the Caribbean.

Truth: I love this one because it has dimension, but there is ***one word too many*** in the conjecture. Let me re-phrase it so you get a more appropriate answer. "I can live (omit the word "for") next to nothing in the Caribbean." There are many places where there is nothing, so you can live next nothing if you wish. The north coast of Honduras, east of Trujillo is a vast emptiness of primeval rainforest, mountains and desolate beaches. As far as living cheap, these places may offer some real opportunity if you

like the ‘outpost’ lifestyle and have a great taste for adventure. I have never found things to be cheap in resort areas anyplace in the world. If you want to live in the Caribbean, remember, almost every island out here is a resort. And things are invariably more expensive on any resort island.

Myth: 5. I can bypass the local government, customs agents, real estate companies and lawyers, when doing business, buying property or importing things by just doing it “MYYYYYY WAAAY.”

Truth: Remember when old ‘Blue Eyes’ used to sing that song? He did it ‘his way’, but that is only lyrics, and not the real world of the Caribbean. There are some people who manage to do it their way, and they are sometimes very shady characters who think nothing of bending or completely ignoring the laws of the land where they are a *visitor*. You can try it your way, but just in case you wind up in the slammer make sure of two things. First; have a good lawyer who is very friendly with the local judge. Second; make sure you have somebody lined up to bring you food while you are enjoying your vacation in the poky, because they do not feed the prisoners in the jails here.

As far as buying real estate in a foreign country without the assistance of a reputable broker and/or an attorney familiar with local land titles, real estate laws and customs; PLEASE! PLEASE! PLEASE! come to me first. I have a deal that I have been holding, just for you. I have not told anybody else about it because I have been waiting for somebody with a nice face to come along and steal this ‘sleeper’ out from under everybody’s noses. It is the deal of the century! The sharks are just waiting for the smart guys who know how to make the deals on their own. So come to me instead and I’ll treat you right. I am a very good talker, I also have an honest face and you will like me. And besides, I need the money!

Whenever I import anything I use a customs broker. There are many good ones who operate with the customs agents on a daily basis, and even after paying their well earned and very modest fee, I come out ahead. You are a sitting duck if you walk in to see the Aduana (customs agent) by yourself. Unless he is a relative.

Myth: 6. The Caribbean is over priced, over crowded, and old news.

Truth: This statement would be very true of Florida, but there are still many good opportunities in the Bay Islands, especially Roatan. Not crowded is a very accurate statement, and undiscovered by the ‘tourista’ crowds. Most people have never heard of the Bay Islands*. One of the best SCUBA diving areas on earth exists here with our wonderful protected living reef system that rivals the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. Prices for land on Roatan are still relatively inexpensive compared to other Caribbean islands. We are growing at a nice easy pace, and many parts of the island are virtually uninhabited. So if you want to get away from it all, there are many distant places on Roatan. Remember some good common sense rules whenever contemplating property purchases anywhere, but especially in foreign countries.

BE SURE TO DEAL WITH REPUT REPUTABLE PEOPLE. CHECK THEM OUT! MAKE SURE THE PEOPLE YOU ARE PURCHASING FROM ARE THE *LEGAL* OWNERS AND HAVE A RIGHT TO SELL THE LAND. BE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN YOU WILL HAVE *LEGAL* ACCESS TO THE PROPERTY.

ARE WATER AND ELECTRICITY IN EXISTENCE THERE NOW? MAKE THEM PROVE IT! IF NOT YOU COULD BE IN FOR SOME IMMENSE EXPENDITURES LATER. THE CON ARTISTS ARE ALWAYS AT YOUR BECK AND CALL, WILLING TO RELIEVE YOU OF SOME GREENBACKS.

DO NOT TAKE ANYBODY’S WORD FOR IT JUST BECAUSE YOU LIKE THEM! “*IF IT AIN’T THERE . . . BEWARE!*”

DO NOT FALL ALL FOR THE SCAMS. “The owner will put in a driveway as soon as most of the lots are sold” “Water and electricity are nearby”. “This is my uncle’s land but he has allowed me to sign for him.” “All the owners will get together and have a well drilled.” Make them substantiate what they tell you. If you don’t, nobody else will.

Tales of the Western Caribbean

*Contrary to media reports, Roatan experienced very little damage from Hurricane Mitch. The people who reported our demise had never heard of this place before the storm, did not have **any** first hand information and shot from the hip with a blind-fold on. It was a blatant and irresponsible abuse of media reporting. **Totally untrue**. Things have never been better here. Come and enjoy!

Tale 2

A Return to Paradise

Sometimes life can become monotonous even in paradise. I know you will be thinking ‘How can this dummy be bored in paradise? Paradise monotonous? Come on get real! But anyway the shopping on the island can become down right tedious. Especially when everybody is out of everything you like and everything you need. Island living is different, and many of you say you want to know about my everyday life, because you think it will fit your lifestyle, once you manage to get here. Maybe so, but don’t count on it. We all have different tastes, so our goals and our daily objectives will probably be light years apart.

But after a few tourist seasons here you will find the shortages too irksome, especially after a massive influx of visitors, and short term residents who favor being here over various popular holidays. They unwittingly buy up everything you were planning on using for your holiday get together and now what are you going to do about the wonderful dinner party you have invited six couples over for?

None of the things you were going to use are left. You waited too long again, forgetting that there are limited suppliers in paradise. When those times of year disrupt your ‘routine life’ you will stick your head out of the window and scream, “I’m just not gonna take it anymore!” Especially when I went to the deli counter to find a very dear close friend had bought up everything I had been planning on using for my holiday entertaining. When she came and gave me a friendly kiss on the cheek, I felt like punching her out. Then I remembered that I was invited to her house, so I kissed her back. Nice lady.

There were no alternatives. I had to make an emergency trip to La Ceiba. So off to the airport. With all the traffic at this time of year I know the

Tales of the Western Caribbean

manager did me an extra special favor by confirming a flight for me next morning. I was committed to doing the thing I detest most, at any time of year. Fight the crowds. Give me strength!

The eight o'clock check-in requirement for the nine o'clock departure always makes me wonder if these people know anything about maintaining the slightest semblance of a schedule. Of course we didn't get off the ground till 9:45 which is about the usual time of departure for the 9 o'clock flight. I wonder why they just don't say it is a 9:45 departure and get it over with. We all know the truth!

La Ceiba was warm and muggy but I was not deterred. I walked right past the swarm of hucksters peddling "Taxi?" rides into town for 100 LPS but us old hands know that all we have to do is walk out to the main road and we can get a ride into town for 20 LPS. That extra eighty smackers buys me a very nice lunch. Besides, I'm at war with taxis, especially the taxis on Roatan. The shopping went very well except for one item my wife was craving so much it's all she talked about for the last two hours we spent together on the island. Tofu! I didn't know any one could get soooooo excited over tofu, that bland mush made from bean curd or some such.

I have never developed a taste for that stuff but evidently there is somebody in La Ceiba who is wild about it because after three big stores were sin tofu (it's defiantly not in the sinful food category, I'm just trying to sow off my wonderful mastery of Spanish, and 'sin' means 'without' in good old Espanole.) Not without sin, but without tofu.

Next morning I'm going to scurry back to Roatan early, so I have Israel, my favorite taxi driver getting his buggy warmed up for the airport run with a stop off at El Marrenito my meat fabricator but first I had to run over to the big supermercado for a few last minute perishable things I would hand carry home. In my haste I found myself facing the mad morning scramble right where the train tracks run down the middle of the street in La Ceiba.

Odds makers in New York would probably have given me about ten to one against, but I got lucky, when to my total amazement a taxi driver actually

Coastwatcher

stopped, displaying the first courtesy I have ever encountered or observed by a taxi. It must have been his first day or something, but I nodded my approval and as I stepped around his front bumper, an impatient bus driver, a few cars back came roaring at me with intent to kill.

With the deft and dexterity of a world class bull fighter, I did a pirouette that would be envied by a ballet dancer, leaping with the grace of a circus acrobat, I agilely moved out of the path of certain death. Several spectators on the bus screamed their approval of my fantastic dexterity. “Ole’!” they shouted out the windows. All I needed was the tight shiny pants and the funny hat, and I would have made my debut. Ha! Hey, Toro! Move over Manolete.

Getting my stuff out of Israel’s taxi is always a hassle. It is a hassle caused by ten guys waiting outside Goloson International Air Terminal to help people with their baggage. If you have three pieces of luggage then three different guys want to carry one piece each to the ticket counter, and each one then expects twenty Lempiras in exchange for the meager service. However I shout, “Una persona! Una persona, solo!” They are used to me now. No more of that turista fleecing with this Gringo.

The check-in agent tries to hassle me for excess baggage charges but I have a very effective argument that works every time. In five years I have only been charged once. I will not divulge this secret on these pages but if you really want to know about how I manage I will only tell you in person. So stop in and see me sometime.

My friendly check-in agent assured me I only had five minutes, so that I should hurry to the counter where I pay my 20 LPS security fee because we were pushing off at precisely 9:30, per schedule. We had wheels up at 10:15. I would have had time to go back into town for more shopping but instead I sat in the waiting room trying not to listen to all the strange announcements. It seems like ten flights left for Roatan before mine was finally called.

On the way back across the Bay of Honduras we were treated to some over-water turbulence, something rare at this time of year. A few very

Tales of the Western Caribbean

hefty bounces received my immediate attention. Looking out the window I noted the complete lack of sunshine, but a very dark gloom instead. Roatan was having some rain showers.

We broke out of the junk on final approach, just in time for me to notice that my house on the Ironshore was still intact. Nice touchdown, and a quick unloading and I was walking past ten hustlers trying to sell me a two dollar taxi ride for ten bucks. It makes my day when I can walk past and say, “No, gracious. Me caro es en parquero.” (My car is in the parking lot.)

There you have it. Just another humdrum grocery shopping day, and my return to the island. I told you life can be a little slow at times, even in paradise.

Tale 3

Caribbean Skies

I marvel every morning at the fantastic horizons out over the sea. Of course these vistas consist of the sea and the sky, often times the North Coast mountains, visions of which are modified greatly by the arrival of old Sol himself. The scene is changing every second so I usually go up to the solarium armed with a loaded 35mm camera, not wanting to miss that golden opportunity that will never be duplicated.

I gaze from my favorite perch, while sipping my first cup, awaiting the first pale glimmerings of daylight. Then the silhouette of the clouds become visible, the towering cumulus, like ships o' the line on the distant horizon. I was always terrified when at sea and sailing towards those fierce adversaries, knowing what mischief and ferocity they held in store for us.

The morning blossoms into a burst of colors, always a wonderful surprise; spectacular, breathtaking, as she only gives us one glimpse; I know I will never see it repeated; she is teasing, alluring, mystical, casting a spell. I think about how a warm friendly fire will hold my attention soon, trading the magnificent sky over my Caribbean for the cozy fireside chair that awaits me on my first visit to my homeland in five years.

The last time I ventured into the frozen north, is still a memory of chattering teeth and hugging those wonderful steam radiators that are conveniently located for people like me to embrace. I prefer my Caribbean skies and the warm tropical breezes to the tundra of Michigan and New York, but there comes a time when one must answer the call of the Wild North, "Come back to me my native son" she beckons. "Come home to my bosom, child."

Tales of the Western Caribbean

Yes! Once again, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping on all exposed parts of my unwilling body. But it will be a White Christmas, over the river and through the woods, a Thanksgiving feast with loved ones and friends.

The coastal mountains hold my gaze longest. They look so close, shrouded in the mist, specter-like. It always seems like an eternity getting to the mainland, especially when I'm in a hurry I will fly there soon.

I will miss this morning scene. It has become a ritual to which I look forward every day of my existence here. My island, my beautiful rugged and wild Ironshore Coast. I call it the Cascade Coast because of the cascading waters pouring back into the sea on those magnificent wild days. The natural order of things.

A creature of habit, I will awaken in a strange place and wonder for the first moment of consciousness, where I am. I once heard a comment by an adventurer who was asked why he took great risk, and what he felt was the reward for doing so. His reply was simple. "Which do you prefer, memories or dreams?" he asked his questioner. "When I dream of doing something and then actually accomplish it I have a memory of a real life event, not just a dream of it." Me too.

Tale 4

2001 and Counting

Do you remember all that hype and smoke blowing, when everybody was in a hubbub over the millennium 2000 ballyhoo? Lots of people made big bucks from writing books and magazine articles, TV specials and all kinds of scary nonsense. That was all you heard, what terrible shape the world would be in at the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999.

I wonder how much those books are worth in a bookstore today? The smoke-blowers made out like bandits, and I often wonder if any ‘believer’ who invested in one of those fairy tales ever wrote or called any of the author/experts, after January 1, 2000 to give them the word or maybe to utter a few choice phrases into their ears.

Maybe I shouldn’t talk too soon, the year isn’t over yet. Mr. Barnum should have been around for that one. His famous quote was most appropriate for the occasion. “There’s a sucker born every minute.”

For the last six months of 1999 the banks on Roatan had shut their computers down so they could be re-programmed to count from 1,999 to 2,000. That’s right. The bank computers were too dumb to count beyond 1999, so they had to have lessons. Every banking transaction in this country has to be done by hand, in triplicate, and lines were long and waiting tedious. People were really getting edgy, and right before Christmas it looked like there might be a run on the banks here. Like the time one of the big banks ran out of money because the manager forgot to call the armored car company to bring in enough cash for the holiday rush. The bank had to close at 10 A.M. and by 11 A.M. there were several hundred people lined up outside because they had heard the bank was failing.

Tales of the Western Caribbean

Then the manager came outside and told everybody what had happened and to please come back tomorrow when there would be plenty of cash. She wasn't even embarrassed. My computer knew it was 2000. I don't have any idea how it figured out that the first business day of the New Year was January 3, 2000. It was right here blinking the date at me. And I didn't have to shut it down to teach it either.

Some of the banks on Roatan are still having problems with their computers. There is a kind of glitch attributed to our beloved "telephone company". Hondutel told the banks to set up the new systems for one type of signal, and then used something else, creating some new problems.

We had a famous writer who lived on Roatan in the late 1800's, whose works were some of the funniest stories about con artists I have ever had the pleasure of reading. His name was William Sydney Porter, and he was a known embezzler. While serving his time for crimes against society, Mr. Porter, better known by his pen name, O. Henry, wrote about the scams of the times, and embellished those tales with great wit and humor. "The Gentle Grafters" and "Shearing the Lambs" were two of his well known collections of short stories.

There was even a radio series based on one of his characters called the 'Arkansas Traveler', that aired during the WW II years. We listened to radio back then since there wasn't any TV yet. So here we are, years have passed and still nothing of significance has happened except the silly presidential election in the U.S. Maybe that was what all the hype boiled down to. The American people may never have a President elected by a simple majority of the voters, the popular vote, as we had been promised after the Nixon fiasco.

How about a runoff election with no electoral votes? And the guy who gets the simple majority wins. They would only be allowed to use computers that knew how to count past 1,999 and there would be no recounts or any other politically motivated shenanigans, and no lawyers or politicians allowed to be involved. If the winner only had a one-vote margin, he would be in. One very smart computer would do all the counting, unassisted by man.

Coastwatcher

What if the date of the inauguration came and there was no decision?
Could Bill Clinton have declared himself 'President for Life'?

A quick read for a laugh, a smile & a zany memory.

Coastwatcher

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1882.html?s=pdf>