

Roots and Reef

15 October 2011

FREE

Sitting On The Beach - Watching The Waves

“The Secret to a Happy Life – A lesson from the Rosetans.”

By Charles Leslie Jr.

Placencia Village Council Chairman

Excerpted, in part, from *Outlier: The Story of Success*, by Malcolm Gladwell, New York: Little, Brown, and Co., November 18, 2008

The village of Roseto Valfortore lies one hundred miles southeast of Rome in the Apennine foothills of the Italian province of Foggia in the Apulia region of Italy.

For centuries, the *paesani* of Roseto worked in the marble quarries in the surrounding hills, or cultivated the fields in the adjoining valley below, walking four and five miles down the mountain in the morning and then making the long journey back up the hill at night. Life was hard. Most were barely literate and desperately poor and did not have much hope of economic betterment until word reached Roseto at end of the nineteenth century of the land of opportunity across the ocean.

In January of 1882 the first group of Rosetans set sail for New York. They spent their first night in America sleeping on the floor of a tavern in Manhattan's Little Italy. Then they ventured west, eventually finding jobs in a slate quarry ninety miles west of the city near the town of Bangor, Pennsylvania. The word got back to Roseto about the promise of the New World, until the initial stream of immigrants became a flood.

The Rosetans began buying land on a rocky hillside connected to Bangor by a steep, rutted wagon path. They built closely clustered two-story stone houses with slate roofs on narrow streets running up and down the hillside. They built a church and named it Our Lady of Mount Carmel which stood on Garibaldi Avenue, and is named after the great hero of Italian unification, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Initially they called their town New Italy, but soon changed it to Roseto, being that almost all of them had come from the same village in Italy.

In 1896, an energetic young priest named Father Pasquale de Nisco took over at Our Lady of Mount Carmel. He set up spiritual societies and organized festivals. He encouraged the townsfolk to clear the land and plant onions, potatoes, beans, fruit trees and melons in the long backyards behind their houses. He gave out seeds and bulbs. The town came to life.

The Rosetans began raising pigs in their backyards and growing grapes for homemade wine. They built schools, a park, a convent and a cemetery. Small shops, bakeries, restaurants and bars opened along Garibaldi Avenue. More than a dozen factories sprang up making blouses for the garment trade. Neighboring Bangor was largely Welsh and English, and the next town over was overwhelmingly German, which meant – given the fractious relationships between the English and Germans and Italians in those years – that Roseto stayed strictly for Rosetans. Roseto, Pennsylvania, was its own tiny, self-sufficient world – all but unknown by the society around it – and it might have remained so if it weren't for Stewart Wolf.

Wolf was a physician who studied digestion and the stomach and taught in the medical school at the University of Oklahoma. He used to spend his summers on a farm in Pennsylvania, not far from Roseto. However, this did

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The Value of Our Water: Part I Treaty to Drill for Oil in Independence



A number of issues surround the water supply for the Placencia Peninsula area, including oil drilling, how much water we have, and pollution. Following is the first of a 2-part series about possible threats to our water supply.

Oil may or may not be Belize's economic salvation. Most Belizeans seem to agree that off-shore oil drilling is too risky for Belize. But, some inland areas right here in our own backyard may also be too risky – and the Independence Village area may be one of them.

Treaty Belize, a subsidiary of Treaty Energy Corporation, a US oil prospecting company, plans to drill its first exploratory well in Independence in the next few months. As most people here know, the three wells that provide water to Placencia/Seine Bight, Independence and Big Creek were drilled in a search for oil in the 1990s. Ironically, we have very good, clean drinking water because of oil exploration. The question is, what effect might the continued treasure hunt for oil do to the precious water supply that oil exploration gave us?

The current Government of Belize amended Belize's Environmental Regulations after taking office so that an Environmental Impact Assessment is no longer required before exploratory drilling for oil. However, Treaty has done some research, and according to a report done for Treaty Oil (the "Treaty Report"):

In regard to contamination and waste issues, it is considered that the main risk associated with the proposed project will be in relation to groundwater, which in the project area is considered to be susceptible to pollution. Two potential risks to groundwater have been identified: direct groundwater contamination arising due to drilling mud and other fluids entering the aquifer during drilling; and indirect contamination due to contaminated soils. The karst aquifer below the site is considered to be particularly vulnerable to pollution . . . (www.treatyenergy.com/files/Belize_Environmental_Report2.pdf)

(Karst aquifers are underground layers of rock that can yield high amounts of water and are extremely vulnerable to pollution according to the United States Geology Service. (<http://water.usgs.gov/ogw/karst/pages/whatiskarst>))

The Treaty Report predicts that the oil present in our area is light sweet crude oil, just like the oil drilled by Belize Natural Energy (BNE) in the Spanish Lookout area. Light sweet crude spreads rapidly on solid or water surfaces and penetrates porous surfaces – such as the rock surrounding our water aquifer. As pointed out in the above quote from the Treaty Report, Treaty Oil admits that drilling fluids may penetrate our karst aquifer and pollute our only water source.

However, Treaty deems the risk of contamination of our water to be low, because it will use

. . . good housekeeping procedures such as appropriate storage for fuels, waste minimization and off-site disposal (landfill) of wastes generated and appropriate well construction to ensure that potable fresh water aquifers are sealed to prevent contaminant ingress.

Unfortunately, well construction to protect karst aquifers is very difficult and the United States Environmental Protection Agency strongly recommends mapping and dye tracing to determine the path of the fresh water flow before any drilling of any kind in karst settings. The Treaty Report does not indicate that Treaty did any mapping and dye tracing for the wells it currently intends to drill. (<http://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPURL.cgi?Dockey=9100J0GF.txt>)

So, what if, despite all of Treaty's "good housekeeping," our aquifer is contaminated? As acknowledged by Treaty, contamination of the water environment, particularly if groundwater is impacted, can be a significant matter and difficult to remediate [clean up].

Not only difficult, but expensive. And who will pay if a mistake *is* made?

Three private companies may be on the hook for damages – but can any of them pay? Princess Petroleum Limited actually received the on-shore and off-shore concessions from the Government of Belize (GOB) to look for oil in 2007. But, Princess didn't put any money into oil exploration until Princess and Treaty Energy set up a 50-50 partnership in 2010 to split oil profits and obligating Treaty Energy to do the actual exploration and drilling.

So Princess Petroleum may not have any money, and, unfortunately, it doesn't seem much money may be available for cleanups from

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New Law Will Require Licenses to Keep Wildlife, including Parrots

At the second national Belize Wildlife Conservation Network (BWCN) Conference in September 2011, wildlife experts from around the country met with officers from the Belize Forestry Department to discuss the details of the proposed Wildlife Order, designed to control the illegal trade and mistreatment of wildlife commonly held as pets, such as parrots, monkeys, coati, racoons and even dangerous animals such as crocodiles and snakes. (In addition to wildlife kept as pets, the legislation will also cover wildlife held by organizations in facilities already approved by the Forest Department.)

The Wildlife Order will require a permit to keep wildlife and will include standards for the conditions in which the wildlife must be kept.

Once the legislation is passed, each captive bird or animal will require a license issued by the Forest Department. The license gives the Forest Department the right to conduct inspections to make sure the conditions in which the animals are kept complies with the new law. Conference participants suggested an amnesty period for before fines are imposed against people without the proper permits to keep wildlife.

According to Rasheda Garcia, the Wildlife Education Officer for the Forest Department, the Wildlife Order must undergo a final review process including stakeholder review of the final draft. Individuals or entities interested or participating in the final review process of the Wildlife Order, or who wish to know more about the BWCN can contact the Network through their website www.wildlifebelize.com

The Forest Department and BWCN would like to thank the conference sponsors: San Ignacio Hotel, Darwin Initiative, Caves Branch and Daniel Velasquez (film crew).

Hurricane di Come! Special Considerations for Contractors and Developers

When Belize is threatened by a hurricane, everyone has to prepare for it.

But contractors need to make some special preparations by picking up around their work sites and securing items such as loose boards, plywood, insulation, construction paper, shingles, etc.

These materials can become lethal weapons during high winds, causing serious harm to people and other buildings.

(A 2x4 can pierce even a concrete building in winds of 100 miles per hour or more.)

For the same reason, contractors, please move all construction materials and tools inside the structure. (Also, remember that anything left unsecured may be stolen!)

Treaty Oil

(cont. from page 1)

Treaty Energy. As of the date of this article, Treaty Energy is trading on the US stock market at about 5 cents a share. Its highest share sale price in the last 52 weeks was 9 cents and its lowest was .074 cents. According to the 10-Q report Treaty Oil filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC):

... [W]e had negative cash flows from operations of \$330,851 in 2010 and \$212,511 in 2009, and a working capital deficit of \$1,485,551 at December 31, 2010. These conditions raise substantial doubt as to our ability to continue as a going concern. The financial statements do not include any adjustments that might be necessary if we are unable to continue as a going concern. Management intends to finance these deficits by making additional shareholder notes and seeking additional outside financing through either debt or sales of its common stock.

Belize - We intend to finance the drilling of one to three wells by selling additional interests in our Joint Venture with Princess Petroleum Limited and through the sale of debt. (For additional financial information, see www.faqs.org/sec-filings/110415/Treaty-Energy-Corp_10-K/#ixzz1W38fDZJk)

Since Treaty Energy doesn't seem to have any money, its subsidiary, Treaty Belize, just incorporated on 28 April 2011, is also unlikely to have the kind of money needed for a cleanup.

And, bottom line, Treaty wants oil because oil is valuable, and its first obligation is to its shareholders, not local communities – as is amply reinforced on the Treaty Energy Website, which tells us that its mission is:

To increase the value and liquidity of our common stock, build the wealth of our investors, and work toward energy independence for the United States of America. (www.treatyenergy.com/flashsite/index-1)

So, where does that leave us?

Belize oil production agreements do require oil companies to carry insurance to cover clean-up costs. But, the agreements do not require any minimum amount of insurance, nor will insurance likely be available to cover losses to businesses and individuals harmed by the loss of clean water for drinking, bathing, etc. For example, a hotel or tour operator is not likely to be able to recover from insurance the value of losses stemming from cancelled reservations, costs of having to truck in potable water, etc. Property owners also likely won't be able to make any claims when their property value is cut because clean drinking water is no longer available.

In addition, we don't know if Treaty has the required insurance, or in what amount because this information can't be obtained from the Geology and Petroleum Department.

Thus, we have a possible (and not improbable) situation in which our water is contaminated and not enough money is available to complete the cleanup or compensate business and property owners for losses. Can GOB afford to pay? Does it know how to clean up if it had the money? Does Treaty?

It doesn't seem so. For example, the Treaty Report states that it will rely on the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) if it can't control a blow-out, which seems to be misplaced reliance since NEMO doesn't have the money or the expertise to deal with a blow-out. In fact, Belize still does not have a final National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, and the draft form that does exist is sorely lacking in addressing basic contingency plans for clean up.

Is the possible contamination of our water worth this risk?

According to Andre Cho, Senior Geologist with Belize's Geology and Petroleum Department, any oil field found is likely to be small:

They came looking for large fields of oil and then as time went by other companies came in and realizing that there was no major oil field in Belize, they began to look for a medium to small fields but eventually they were not successful. So the independence [sic] came in afterwards and looking especially at the price of oil being very high, they realized that being a small field could be commercial. To put it in a simple manner it's like combing for louse from one's head. If you use a wide teeth comb you won't catch anything. You use a smaller one you might catch some but you use a very fine teeth comb you can remove all the louse and that is what I think the little companies are trying to do. . . .

In addition, it doesn't appear that many jobs will come with the risk of oil exploration. According to the Treaty Report:

The effects of the proposed exploratory drilling will have little impact on the socio-economic development of Independence Village, as they are localized and short term in nature. There is a demand for jobs in the village, but the amount and quality of jobs provided by the exploration activities will be minimal and of short duration. There may be some short term benefit in terms of purchase of goods and services needed by the works and personnel working there.

During construction and decommissioning, there may be a need for temporary labor for the upgrading of access roads and preparation / clearance of the sites, which may create some temporary employment.

In sum, little local employment versus the risk of the loss of our water supply. How will that loss affect our tourism and tourism jobs, not to mention our own health and well-being? Where will our drinking water come from if it is contaminated? Even if it can be cleaned up, what do we do in the meantime? This affects all of us in this area, not just Independence, contrary to the Treaty Report, which states that "the members of the public most directly affected by the proposed drilling activities are likely to be the community of Independence Village."

Treaty Belize has offices in Belize City and in Placencia across the Placencia Road from the Blue Lagoon Apartments. Brian Luczywo is the Vice President of Operations for Treaty Belize. Keon Garbutt, is the Project Manager of drilling operations. Andrew V. Reid is the Treaty Energy CEO and Chairman.

Treaty says that 8 well sites have been approved by the Belize government and that Treaty will fully exploit its 200,000 acre land based concession before it moves on to its 1,800,000 acre off-shore concession.

On 18 August 2011, Treaty Oil announced the establishment of the Belizean National Leadership Fund that Treaty says will be dedicated to "raising the level of visibility of Belize's economic, education, and environmental leadership in Latin America and around the world." Projects in which the Fund may invest include philanthrotourism, remedial and vocational training and "consulting with environmental protection agencies ensuring that recent economic growth occurs in a manner that protects Belize's natural resources."

Also, on 15 September 2011, Treaty Oil agreed to buy all issued and outstanding shares of Paradise Energy, Ltd. from Kimano N'laja Barrow and Alfredo Antonio Acosta, the shareholders of Paradise. (biz.yahoo.com/e/110923/teco.pk8-k.html) Kimano Barrow is the nephew of Prime Minister Dean Barrow and the son of Denys Barrow. The purchase price for the Paradise stock is 4,000,000 shares of Treaty common stock plus \$162,000 in cash, plus a royalty based on the number of barrels of oil produced. The cash portion of the purchase price will be paid over three years with monthly payments of \$4,500. According to Oceana, the oil concessions Treaty may exploit under this agreement include large portions of Stann Creek Valley, the Maya Mountains and the Chiquibul National Forest. Paradise received its oil concession from the Government of Belize on 21 June 2010. (edition.channel5belize.com/archives/49695)

A Day In The Life: Magda Morales



Magda Morales' mother worked 360 days a year growing and selling vegetables and fruits in a market in Siguatepeque, Honduras. Her mother took only five days off every year, and on those five days, as exhausted as she was, she cooked meals for her family. Magda recalls these infrequent preparations of food as acts of love. And, Magda now shares her own acts of love with her patrons at The Shak, a small eatery at Placencia Point where she dishes up breakfasts and lunches, including a variety of vegetarian meals and fresh fruit smoothies, against a Caribbean beach backdrop that looks like a scene straight out of the movies.

"My day begins at six thirty in the morning when I open the restaurant and ends at five thirty in the evening when I close. I do everything to ensure my customers get the freshest and best prepared foods. Being right next to the Coop and buying directly from produce trucks, you can't beat that freshness. I also buy seaweed for my seaweed shakes directly from a local fisherman. When I was a little girl in Honduras, I worked the earth, growing my own vegetables. When I was eight, I had my own vendor's stall in the market, so I know quality. When first I came to Placencia in 1986, it used to be so hard to find any vegetable more than a carrot, cabbage, or potato in Placencia. Now I can find so much more variety from the trucks that bring produce to Placencia, and my clients like that variety. I am a strong advocate of protecting our environment—a healthy environment creates healthy foods, and healthy foods create a healthy business environment for me and a strong economy for all of us.

"And I do everything around here—cook, wash dishes, wait tables, do all the paperwork small self employed businesses must do. When my children are on holiday, they work here, too. Everybody has to work. When I first saw this space, it was run down, rusty. My son thought I was crazy to want it for my business. But I explained to my son that sometimes you have to look at what you see in front of you in different ways. And I am so glad that I did."

Magda does not just express her creativity in her food preparation or the paintings on the walls of her restaurant, but in her poems. Whatever chores she is performing during the day at The Shak, Magda keeps a small notebook and pencil with her. "If this place is full, and the feeling is in me, I write poems. I am blessed that not only do I have a gift for cooking, but I also found a gift for writing poetry. Belize has been my home for twenty seven years. I am proud to carry a Belize passport. My four children were born right here in Belize, so I care deeply about this place I call home."

Her poems reflect that love for country, in words that address the very real and deep concerns that Magda believes face our community, its families, and its youth. Magda's poems reflect the struggles and darker undercurrents that sometimes exist beneath the calm and natural beauty that surrounds us.

Magda states with a strength and conviction that has earmarked her life: "If we do not fight for ourselves, we have no control over ourselves."

Thank you, Magda, for giving us the privilege to publish one of your poems.

Don't beat me, momma
For I'm not dumb or lazy
It's just the A,B,C's
Playing tricks on me
Words I can't comprehend
Even if I try my best
They just make no sense
But there are hidden talents
In me. Don't you see?
Maybe you are preoccupied
Because I can't read or write properly
Even if I try with all my might
The words just keep eluding me
And I pray every night
That come morning light
I'll be able to read and write
Then I wake up.

Momma be patient with me
Everybody doesn't learn at the same
Pace . Can't you see
That you don't help by screaming at
me
It just confuses me
Making me see the B's as D's
Momma I need your help
Just take a second look at me
And you will see
All the talents and potential
Hidden inside of me
And success will be in the future
For me.

By Magda Morales

Adrian Vernon Represents Belize at Merida Conference

Every year for the past few decades, the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) and its partners have hosted a world conference where members from all over the world gather to share their work in environmental restoration, both successes and failures. It is a conference where people come to learn and teach each other.

This year, the World Conference on Ecological Restoration, sponsored by SER, met in Merida, Mexico, and for the first time, Belize was proudly represented by Adrian Vernon, thanks to Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development (PCSD) — and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which contributed Adrian's tuition for a 3-day pre-conference session on worldwide mangrove restoration.

During the mangrove pre-conference, Adrian shared with participants the mangrove work being done on the Placencia Peninsula and learned more about mangrove restoration, while also gaining new insight into the importance of this vital ecological feature. Adrian highlighted the devastating ecological and social impacts associated with areas that have lost their mangrove forests.

The conference was eye opening and many of the results gave me new drive and vision for the future of our small country, for as much as we see ourselves going backwards, we are still ahead of much of the world when it comes to conservation. We do not need so much restoration, but protection and education. I definitely prefer this trend.

During the primary conference, Adrian also learned about restoration efforts in lakes, marsh lands, mangroves, wet lands, sea grass, pine savannah, grass lands, deserts, littoral forests (the vegetation found on higher land along the mainland coast and on forested cayes) and many more. The restoration efforts were not geared towards particular species but toward total environments with the hope that all parts of that environment will be restored.

Says Adrian:

The primary conference presentations will help me here on the Peninsula in reminding people that we can't just be concerned about one discrete part of our eco-systems – not just mangroves or sea grass or wetlands or the littoral forests. Each of them is an integral part of our environment and each must be there for the environment to work properly to provide us with protection from storms, fish to eat and beauty to be seen with our eyes and felt with our souls. I can't imagine a message more important for not only Placencia, but the entire world.

Belize Reef Remains World Heritage Site in Danger

In July (2011), UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) decided to keep Belize's Barrier Reef System on the World Heritage Site in Danger List until February 2012. Then UNESCO will again look at whether to keep our Barrier Reef on the Danger List, remove it from the Danger List or decertify it entirely as a World Heritage Site.

UNESCO put the Belize Barrier Reef on the Danger List in 2009 because Belize is allowing the destruction of mangrove and marine ecosystems on the Reef by selling and leasing public lands for development, granting oil concessions and allowing the introduction of plant and animal species not native to Belize.

The Belize Government promised to pass and enforce laws to stop these problems, including prohibiting cutting of mangroves and coral dredging and ensuring that development is strictly controlled with the Barrier Reef System.

However, UNESCO decided that while the Belize Government had made some effort to live up to its promises, it had fallen short in many ways, including:

- No evidence that Belize could or would enforce any laws related to the Barrier Reef;
- Failing to come up with a restoration plan for illegally degraded areas (areas where something such as dredging or removing mangroves without a permit has harmed parts of the Reef System);
- Failing to come up with a plan that gives conservation of the Reef a priority in government decision making;
- Failing to make land ownership records for all property within the Barrier Reef System publicly available, including ownership of mangrove islands, and
- Failing to make the Reef off-limits for oil exploration.

Belize now has until 1 February 2012 to report back to UNESCO on what it has done to fulfill its promises, at which time, UNESCO will again review the Belize Barrier Reef and decide whether it should remain a World Heritage Site.

The full UNESCO report is available at www.pcsdbelize.org/barrier_reef.pdf

UB Students Review Development Effects on Placencia Village



Tourism-related development is by far the primary cause of environmental and social impacts being forced on the ecology and communities of the Placencia Peninsula, largely by outside investors and customers.

On 28 April 2011, eleven University of Belize advanced level national resources management students and one of their professors, Dr. Ed Boles, arrived in Placencia to study what was happening on our Peninsula in terms of development and tourism.

The group looked at garbage, sewage, transportation, existing and new developments, residential housing, the Placencia Lagoon and our beaches. They talked to members of the Village Councils, tour guides, tour operators, hotel owners, developers, environmentalists, teachers, fishermen, students, tourists, ex-pats, retirees, born Placencians – anyone and everyone they could find who help them “better understand the complex and challenging issues confronting this small coastal Village striving to find its place in the growing tourist industry in Belize.”

Then they went home, discussed their findings, did research and produced the document, *A Rapid Assessment of Effects and Issues Related to Development in the Placencia Area Dry Season 2011*.

Following are some of the issues identified in the Report:

- Clear cutting of mangroves, along with dredging and wastewater discharge, appears to be the primary cause of increased coastline erosion, decreased fish stock and marine habitat destruction, including coral reefs and grass beds.
- Large-scale developments are significantly competing with and smothering local small-scale development, causing loss of jobs in some sectors, and an increase in jobs in others.
- Seine Bight and Placencia Villages are cooperating with each other more and more as both communities struggle to deal with changes brought by development.
- Increased crime is a major concern of most people on the Peninsula.
- Tourism development (both resort and residential tourism) are causing conflict among “born” Belizeans and “foreign” developers, ex-pats, retirees and business owners.
- Given the current rate of development and the lack of an overall development plan and regulations for the Peninsula, the estimated 2006 population of the Peninsula of 10,000 in the high season, including tourists, could double or triple before 2020
- Development and increased population will greatly increase current problems with garbage, sewage, water requirements, air and water pollution, vehicle traffic, boat traffic, over-fishing and noise.

continued in next column

PCSD Summer Intern and the Plants of Placencia



PCSD had the good fortune to be teamed with Maddy Chera as our summer intern in July 2011.

Maddy is from Pennsylvania and is a graduate student in the Anthropology Department of the University of Indiana with a concentration in food studies.

Maddy was in Belize with other University of Indiana food studies students looking at ways to connect Toledo and Stann Creek farmers with local consumers and chefs to reduce the Placencia area’s dependence on imported food and food from distant parts of Belize, such as San Ignacio and Orange Walk.

The first half of the group’s study was spent in Maya villages not far from the Placencia Peninsula, such as Red Bank, Maya Centre, San Roman and Santa Rosa. There, they researched issues such as the kinds of crops being grown and when, how crops are stored and marketed, how much money local farmers make from selling their produce and how crops are transported from local farmers to consumer markets.

For the second half of their summer’s work, the interns traveled to the Placencia Peninsula where they worked for local restaurants, resorts, tour operators and organizations such as PCSD to learn about how food and what kinds of food are purchased for different markets, use of imported and native foods and expectations of tourists and residents of the Peninsula.

While with PCSD, Maddie worked with Adrian Vernon to develop a funding proposal for a book on the plants of the Peninsula, to be researched and produced by local Standard 6 students. The book will include pictures of plants, their botanical and local names, medicinal, food and ornamental uses, and information about plants that are no longer present on the Peninsula (or are present in reduced quantities) due to climate change, development and other environmental changes. In addition to the useful information this book will provide, if PCSD can secure funding, students will also receive training in photography, research (including Internet research), plant classification systems, plus interviewing, writing and lay-out skills.

PCSD greatly benefited from Maddie’s internship, and we hope she feels the same about her time with us. And, many thanks for this opportunity to project leaders Dr. Richard Wilk, Director of the Food Studies Anthropology program at Indiana University, and Lyra Spang, a Ph.D candidate in the University’s Food Studies Anthropology program.

- No one knows how large the aquifer supplying water to the Peninsula is, or the recharge rate of the aquifer, both critical issues in an area undergoing rapid development. (In May 2010, 8,378,400 gallons were pumped from the well in Big Creek that supplies the Peninsula’s water.)
- A recent study found *Escherichia coli* (a bacteria present in animal feces) in the Placencia Lagoon extending from the Placencia Hotel and Residences to the southernmost tip of the Peninsula. The highest concentrations of fecal coliform were recorded within the limits of Placencia Village.
- Garbage is a continuing problem with many residents dumping garbage along roadsides, in mangroves and in the Placencia Lagoon, creating health hazards for other Peninsula residents.
- Completed paving of the Peninsula Road will further increase traffic congestion, and will create additional problems with conflicts over how the limited land on the Peninsula should best be used.

The entire report can be read at the PCSD office next to the Worship Center on the Peninsula Road, and can be downloaded from www.pcsdbelize.org/placencia-assessment.pdf

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not mean much, since Roseto was pretty much in its own world and it was possible to live in the next town and never know much about it. Wolf was visiting one time, in the late fifties, and was invited to give a talk at the local medical society. After the talk was over, one of the local doctors invited him to have a beer. While they were having a drink, Wolf's new doctor friend told him that he has been practicing for seventeen years, and had dealt with patients from all over and he had rarely found anyone from Roseto under the age of sixty-five with heart disease.

Wolf could not believe his ears. This was the 1960s, years before the advent of cholesterol-lowering drugs and aggressive measures to prevent heart disease. Heart attacks were an epidemic in the United States and were the leading cause of death in men under the age of sixty-five. It was impossible to be a doctor and not see heart disease.

Wolf set out to investigate this phenomenon. He enlisted the support of some of his students and colleagues from Oklahoma. They first checked all the death certificates they could find from Roseto residents. They analyzed physicians' records; took medical histories and constructed family genealogies. Wolf's team got very busy, and decided to do a preliminary study, starting in 1961. They took blood and did EKGs over a course of four weeks, and tested the entire population of Roseto.

The results were astonishing. Virtually no one under fifty-five had died of a heart attack or showed any signs of heart disease. For men over sixty-five, the death rate from heart disease in Roseto was roughly half that of the United States as a whole. The death rate from all causes in Roseto, in fact, was 30 to 35 percent lower than expected.

Still in disbelief, Wolf decided to bring into the research his friend John Bruhn, a sociologist from Oklahoma. Bruhn hired medical students and sociology grad students as interviewers, and in Roseto they went house to house and talked to every person aged twenty-one and over. What they found was amazing; there was no suicide, no alcoholism, no drug addiction and very little crime. They didn't have anyone on welfare. They looked for peptic ulcers and none was evident – THESE PEOPLE WERE DYING OF OLD AGE!

Wolf's first thought was that the Rosetans must have held on to some dietary practices from the Old World that left them healthier than other Americans. But he quickly realized that wasn't the case. The Rosetans were cooking with lard instead of with much healthier olive oil they had used back in Italy. Pizza in Italy was a thin crust with salt, oil, and perhaps some tomatoes, anchovies, or onions. Pizza in Pennsylvania was bread dough plus sausage, pepperoni, salami, ham, and sometimes eggs. Sweets such as biscotti and *taralli* used to be reserved for Christmas and Easter; in Roseto they were eaten year round. When Wolf had dieticians analyze the typical Rosetan's eating habits, they found that a whopping 41 percent of their calories came from fat. Nor was this a town where people got up at dawn to do yoga and run a brisk six miles. The Pennsylvanian Rosetans smoked heavily and many were struggling with obesity.

Wolf thought to himself, "If diet and exercise don't explain the findings, then what about genetics?" The Rosetans were a close-knit group from the same region of Italy, and Wolf's next thought was to wonder whether they were of a particularly hardy stock that protected them from disease. So he tracked down relatives of the Rosetans who were living in other parts of the United States to see if they shared the same remarkable good health as their cousins in Pennsylvania. They didn't. He then looked at the region where the Rosetans lived. Was it possible that there was something about living in the foothills of eastern Pennsylvania that was good for their health? The two closest towns to Roseto were Bangor, which was just down the

hill, and Nazareth, a few miles away. These were both about the same size as Roseto, and both were populated with the same kind of hard-working European immigrants. Wolf combed through both towns' medical records. For men over sixty-five, the death rates from heart disease in Nazareth and Bangor were three times that of Roseto. Another dead end.

The epiphany to true happiness and health

What Wolf began to realize was that the secret of Roseto wasn't diet or exercise or genes or location. *It had to be Roseto itself.* As Bruhn and Wolf walked around the town, they figured out why. They looked at how the Rosetans visited one another, stopping to chat on the street, cooking for one another in their backyards. They learned about the extended family clans that underlay the town's social structure. They saw how many homes had three generations living under one roof, and how much respect grandparents commanded. They went to mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and saw the unifying and calming effect of the church. They counted twenty-two separate civic organizations in a town of just fewer than two thousand people. They picked up on the particular equal spirit of the community, which discouraged the wealthy from flaunting their success and helped the unsuccessful obscure their failures.

In transplanting the *paesani* culture of Southern Italy to the hills of eastern Pennsylvania, the Rosetans had created a powerful, protective social structure capable of insulating them from the pressures of the modern world. The Rosetans were healthy because of where they were *from*, because of the world they had created for themselves in their tiny little town in the hills.

Community is Health

Mental, spiritual, physical, financial health need to be thought of in terms of *community*. We can't understand why someone is healthy if all we think about is an individual's personal choices or actions in isolation. We have to look beyond the individual. We have to understand the culture that we are part of, and who our friends and families are and where we came from. We have to appreciate the idea that values of the world we inhabit and the people we surround ourselves with have a profound effect on who we are.

This story almost parallel's what Placencia used to be. I remember, as a kid, we used to be a very close knit community. We used to have Village Life where everyone and their family came out and exchanged stories, laughed, talked and socialized, where the great cooks showcased their conch soups, BBQs, rice and beans etc., where the community's musicians entertained everyone and all the children played with each other. I miss those days, those days I felt great joy, I felt great freedom and felt like part of something very special. Back then I believed the rest of the world was as peaceful and blessed as we were in Belize – things didn't matter to us, only family and community.

Placencia still has that community ethos, but it has drastically deteriorated, we have become selfish people; we have become worshipers of materialism; we flaunt our success in the face of the not-so-fortunate; we are reluctant to help our fallen brothers and sisters; we have lost what role parents play in our children's lives; our children have lost their respect for their parents and elders as well as each other; our children don't play and interact enough, in a positive way, with each other and the list goes on.

However I have not lost an ounce of hope and pride in my community for this is merely an acknowledgement, for I believe acknowledgement is the catalyst to the tools of change - good or bad - Free Will, will let us chose whether we should continue down this current path or change our attitudes about WHERE we came from, WHO we are as a community, who WE ARE instead of who I AM; for our community does not exist in some parallel universe and we exist in our individual ones. Our community is made up of each one of us – I AM MY COMMUNITY.

Fair Comment

"Land of the Free by the Carib Sea"

21 September has just rolled around. Our national anthem has been sung, hummed, whistled, and danced to. Parades throughout the country celebrated what Belize's song shouts to us all:

Keep watch with the angels, the stars, the moon,
For freedom comes to tomorrow's noon.

Drive back the tyrants, let despots flee—
Land of the free by the Carib Sea!

"Freedom"—such a sweet word that Belize won in its peaceful struggle for independence. Turn on your TV and watch people fighting and dying throughout the world for "freedom," for their rights to express themselves and live without fear of punishment, revenge or reprisals.

And here we are-- Belize—land of the free by the Carib Sea!

Belize does not just sing pretty about freedom either. We have it in writing. We have a Constitution that guarantees the fundamental rights of all dwelling within our borders of "freedom of conscience, of expression, of assembly, and association." (Belize Constitution, Part II, section 12).

Yes, we can speak our minds, join with others, and express ourselves, individually or collectively—the Belize Constitution says so! Your personal voice, our newspaper's editorials, your pastor's teachings, website postings—they are protected by law.

And what if we want to know more from and about our Government, so our voices can take on deeper meaning and truth?

The Freedom of Information Act is a law passed in 1994 and revised in 2000 that gives any member of the public rights of access to official documents of the Government and public authorities. This law gives the public the right to examine records relating to Government's financial, contractual, or other transactions. (FOIA, Chapter 13, Laws of Belize).

"Transparency" was the political theme for the 2008 national elections. Even our political leaders claim that these freedoms are precious and deserving of every protection.

However, we live in an imperfect world where freedom of speech is sometimes challenged, sometimes even by the Government itself.

PCSD, numerous other NGO's, and individuals have been denied access to public documents. We are stonewalled by Department of the Environment when we request documents in the public domain. Yes, you have read this in a previous editorial, but the stonewalling continues. For example, DOE claims that it approved a golf course for the northern end of the Placencia Lagoon, but it won't release the Environmental Compliance Plan for the golf course – not even to the Placencia Village Council.

Unfortunately, it does not stop there. PCSD is currently being challenged by a private developer to "cease and desist", and to remove any reference to this development from PCSD's website. This development has not been singled out by PCSD. ALL new developments since 2006 are on the PCSD Website, along with documents and information about the developments – such as approvals granted, name of the developer, development requirements and restrictions, pictures of the development, etc.

Government itself should actually be providing this information, especially for critical documents such as Environmental Compliance Plans (ECPs) which allow residents in an area to know whether the developer is complying with DOE's requirements. DOE even has a section on its Website for publication of ECPs, but it has never published them – not a single one.

PCSD believes that it is important for the community to know what is going on in its backyard – the cayes and the Lagoon as well as on the Peninsula itself. No one else is providing the information – not the government, and not the national news media, which virtually ignore southern Belize in news coverage.

Publishing this kind of information for the public benefit is the essence of free speech. All of us have a right to public information and one of the reasons PCSD was formed was because Peninsula residents were not getting the information we needed to be responsible and educated citizens.

More importantly, we are fighting challenges by private developers and Government that erode our guaranteed freedoms of speech and expression.

So, check out our Website yourselves, particularly the section on developments in our area, and decide for yourselves whether developers should be threatening legal action against people and organizations that provide this essential community service – and exercising Belizeans' constitutionally protected right of free speech. (The development section of the PCSD Website starts at www.pcsdbelize.org/developments/developments.html)

Freedom is a gift. And with our words, our actions, our commitments, our dedication, we must keep it.

cont. in next column

Beach Monitoring



Developments such as marinas and piers, installation of groins, mining in rivers north of the Peninsula and removal of mangroves are some of the causes of beach erosion along the Peninsula, in some cases, severe beach erosion, particularly in Seine Bight and north of Seine Bight.

The beaches of the Peninsula are some of its primary assets – and the reason many tourists visit the area. Loss of beach also affects owners' property values. So, loss of beach is a very important concern for everyone on the Peninsula.

And, eventually controlling beach erosion means we have to understand it. Which beaches are eroding and then coming back in the normal cycle of beaches on the Peninsula, and which beaches are permanently eroding – and why?

To begin to answer these types of questions, PCSD is starting a beach monitoring program to measure beaches beginning just south of Riversdale all the way down to the southern end of Peninsula Village. The first year of measurement will establish a baseline of what is here now, followed by documenting changes to our beaches.

PCSD's beach monitoring program is being headed up by Adrian Vernon and John Van Deurzen, a retired engineer who now lives on the Peninsula. Property owners all along the Peninsula have already agreed to participate in the program, and we now need two volunteers who can devote two days a month to taking and recording beach measurements (as well as learning about the ecology of the Peninsula's beaches in the process).

If you would like to volunteer for the beach erosion program, please contact us at info@pcsdbelize.org or by calling 523-3587.

Belize to Grow Genetically Modified Corn?

The Belize Ministry of Agriculture recently permitted GMO seed corn to be imported into Belize for trial planting near Spanish Lookout. GMO stands for "Genetically Modified Organism." In the case of corn, genetic modification means corn with the genes of the bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, artificially introduced into the corn to give it greater resistance to insects.

The Ministry of Agriculture's permission for importation of GMO seed corn into Belize may be the first time GMO seed has been allowed into the country and contradicts Belize's National Biosafety Policy of 2009 (www.baha.bz/bio_safety/biosafety_policy.pdf) This policy was adopted after three years of consultations (2006-2009) with Belize's agricultural community, and requires a scientifically rigorous risk assessment to be carried out before allowing the importation of GMOs.

Agriculture's approval of importation of GMO seed corn is causing a great deal of concern throughout Belize. These concerns focus on:

- **Dependency and increased costs for farmers and consumers.** Companies such as Monsanto that sell GMO seeds prohibit farmers from saving seed from one year's crop to plant the next year. Instead, farmers are contractually obligated to buy new seed every year, AND pay a licensing fee to the company that produces the seeds. (Companies like Monsanto ensure that farmers don't save seed by the use of "seed cops" who actually visit farms and check on whether seed is being saved.) This causes farmers to become dependent on one company for all of their seeds. Also, if buying seed each year causes corn to be more expensive to grow, then the cost of corn products or corn fed meat, such as chicken and pork, will increase for consumers.
- **Labeling laws/health risks for humans, livestock and poultry.** Belize does not have any labeling laws that will protect consumers who do not want to eat GMO altered food. For example, recent scientific studies have found the *Bacillus thuringiensis* bacteria in GM corn stays in our bodies and can be passed on to babies in their mothers' breast milk. In Belize, mothers who do not want their babies to be exposed to this bacteria have no way of knowing whether they might be eating GMO corn. Also, research conducted by Prof. Don Huber of Purdue University found that deaths and abortions in cattle increased when GMO corn was used as feed because of a loss of nutrition in GMO corn.
- **Increasing toxic herbicide use.** Most GM crops are engineered to be "herbicide tolerant." Between 1996 and 2008 US farmers sprayed an extra 383 million pounds of herbicide on GM crops. Overuse results in "superweeds" causing farmers to use even more toxic herbicides every year.
- **Unsustainability.** GM crops reduce bio-diversity by limiting production of crops to one variety only, and can pollute streams and rivers through bacteria and insecticides runoff from GMO planted fields.

Placencia Village By-Laws

The Placencia Village Council was recently informed that Placencia's By-Laws have been sent to the legislature for enactment into law. However, unless Placencia Village residents take action, the By-Laws could remain in the same limbo they have been in since 2002.

Following is information on contacting the appropriate officials regarding passage of the Village Council By-Laws. Please email, mail and fax letters to as many of these individuals as you can, because local control is becoming more and more critical and having Village By-Laws in place is necessary to the continued health and welfare of Placencia Village.

You may want to mention in your letter that the Placencia Village Council By-Laws were initially passed and submitted to national government for approval in 2002, that they have been reviewed by the Office of the Solicitor General, and were passed again earlier this year by Placencia residents at a public Placencia Village Council meeting. You may also want to mention that the Village Council By-Laws are urgently necessary for the continuing health, welfare and safety of our rapidly growing Village, including control of building construction, regulation of public areas, animal control, pest control, abatement of nuisances, sound environmental practices and the efficient government of the Village.

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primeminister@belize.gov.bz
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Mr. Orlando Dawson, President
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Ms. Corona Villafranco, President
Stann Creek District Assoc. of Village Councils
Pomona Village, Belize

Hon. Bernard Q. A. Pitts
Attorney General
Ministry of the Attorney General
Belmopan, Belize
Fax: 822-3390

Honorable Melvin Hulse
Area Representative
Stann Creek District
Belmopan, Belize

Mr. Emil Arguelles, Speaker
House of Representatives
National Assembly
Belmopan, Belize

- **Production of profit for big business like Monsanto without alleviating hunger.** GM crops DO NOT increase yields and work against feeding a hungry world according to the Union of Concerned Scientists' 2009 report *Failure to Yield* - the definitive study to date on GM crops and whether GM crops can increase food production. In fact, the *Failure to Yield* report states that GMO seed increases production of corn by an average of 0.2% to 0.3% a year, while traditional agricultural methods increase corn production by 1% a year. In addition, the report concludes that organic and similar farming methods that minimize the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers can more than double crop yields at little cost to poor farmers in contrast to the high cost of GM seeds. (www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/food_and_agriculture/failure-to-yeild.pdf)
- **Destruction of non-GM export markets.** Non-GMO countries to which Belize now exports, like Japan, claim that truly independent research in GM technology is systematically blocked by the GMO corporations which own the GM seeds and reference materials.

Section 4.4.9 of the Belize Biosafety Policy requires that decisions on biosafety issues not favor commercial considerations over public health, environmental and safety interests. Therefore, based on the well-documented concerns voiced about GMO, we urge the Belize government to conduct the rigorous risk assessment needed to determine whether GMO seeds and plants will truly benefit the health and welfare of Belizeans and not just commercial interests of individual farmers or private companies.

Volunteer Opportunities With PCSD

PCSD needs volunteers for the following programs:

Beach Erosion Project: Two to three volunteers (ages 14 and up) are needed to assist two to three days a month with measurement and recording of beaches along the entire Placencia Peninsula from Riversdale to the southern point of Placencia Village. Transportation provided, if needed.

Plants of the Placencia Peninsula: Adult volunteers are needed to teach and assist Standard 6 students in learning and using skills in photography, Internet research, plant classifications, interviewing, writing and print layout for a book on the plants found on the Placencia Peninsula. Time requirement is approximately 30 hours per month for 3-4 months.

Office Management: Assist Adrian Vernon, PCSD Program Coordinator, with office management, including answering inquiries, office organization and keeping the office open 2 to 3 hours a day for 2 to 3 days per week. (Position can be shared.)

For more information on these volunteer positions, please contact Adrian Vernon at 523-3587, or email info@pcsdbelize.org

Coastal Water Quality Problems

Beginning around May, water quality in Belize's coastal waters and in the Placencia Lagoon started to deteriorate and cloudy water conditions persisted through August and into September.

What caused this problem and can we expect this to be a regular occurrence?

Unfortunately, no one still knows for sure.

Historical data shows that Placencia gets a small algae bloom every year in mid to late May, but it usually doesn't last long and it is never as bad as what we've experienced this year.

Algal blooms occur due to high levels of nutrients in the water. Typically these originate from the land (e.g. from fertilizers used in agriculture or from other land-based sources of pollution) and enter the water through river systems. Speculations as to the cause of this year's algal bloom include our unusual drought and fires followed by the rainy season which flushed nutrient-rich sediments offshore. Warm seawater temperatures and high levels of salinity due to the rains coming later this year appear to have enabled the algae to flourish in excessive amounts.

Run-off from shrimp farms and dredging at Big Creek have been cause for concern in the Placencia Lagoon. However, it appears that neither of these factors is causing the offshore water quality issues. Reports of bad water quality have come from as far north as Dangriga, and NASA satellite images show high levels of algae in coastal waters as far north as Belize City. The poor water quality experienced so far north rules out blaming local shrimp farm run-off or Big Creek dredging for poor coastal water quality.

Water sampling at 8 sites (including outside the reef at Gladden Spit, the Silk Cayes, Laughing Bird Caye, Monkey River, outside Big Creek and in the Placencia Lagoon) was conducted by PCSD, the Southern Environmental Association and the Belize Fisheries Department in July and August. Analysis indicates that the bloom is a green algae of the Genus *Chlorella*. *Chlorella* is not toxic or harmful, except in large quantities which could affect coral health by restricting the amount of light the corals receive. Alternatively, it could 'shade' the corals and protect them from high intensity solar radiation which contributes to 'coral bleaching.' However, due to the very low visibility in the water, the presence of this alga does have a very bad effect on local snorkeling and diving operations.

Fortunately, water quality was beginning to improve at the end of August and by the time this paper is published, we hope it is back to normal. But, until we know what caused this year's bloom (if we ever know), there will be no answer to the question of whether it will come back next year – or the next or the next.

Any additional information on the problem that becomes available will be published in Roots and Reef and on the PCSD Facebook page. (www.facebook.com/pcsdbelize)

Environmental Research Institute of Belize Research Goals for our Marine Environment

In January, 2010, the University of Belize opened its newest department, the Environmental Research Institute (ERI). This department aims to increase our country's ability to scientifically research and monitor our natural resources so that we can make sound and responsible decisions about managing our environment.

One of ERI's first major projects was to develop a list of priorities for research about our marine and land-based natural resources – information critical to the continuing health and long-term viability of our country's unique environmental assets.

ERI developed these priorities with both government agencies involved in environmental and natural resources management, such as the Departments of Environment, Forests and Geology and Petroleum, and organizations actively involved in environmental management, such as the Southern Environmental Association (SEA), the Toledo Institute for Industry and the Environment (TIDE), fishermen's cooperatives, the Sugar Cane Farmers Association, the Environmental Defense Fund, Friends of Swallow Caye and many, many more.

ERI's identified research priorities for our marine environment are:

- Whether our marine protected areas include and are adequately protecting our most critical marine habitats and marine species of commercial importance, such as lobster and conch, but particularly finfish;
- Where are our healthiest coral reefs and what must be done to maintain their health in the face of challenges such as climate change and pollution;
- Developing catch and size limits for finfish including snappers, groupers, hogfish, barracuda, sharks, queen triggerfish and mackerel;
- Determining the value of ecosystem services the coastal zone provides us such as protection from storms, clean water, food, erosion control and climate regulation so that we can rationally judge whether commercial activities such as drilling for oil, large tourism developments and industrial fishing, and decide whether these activities are worth the risk to our environment;
- Whether Belize's Marine Protected Areas are helping to increase stocks of commercial marine products and the ecosystems that support them;
- What marine species are being caught and how close some marine species are to extinction (including illegal, undersized and unreported catch);
- The size of finfish stocks, stock structure, and source of larval supply for fish stocks of the Belize Barrier Reef;
- Which coastal areas and cayes are at risk from erosion and why;
- Oceanographic and bathymetric patterns of Belize's coastal and marine environment. (Oceanographic and bathymetric studies show how the sea currents move around and also illustrate the Sea's depths at various points. This information is critical for natural resource managers to predict movement of coral and fish larvae and movement of contaminants and sediments from coastal development activities. This data can also be used in regulating dredging, responding to oil spills and restricting activities that can have far reaching impacts on the marine environment.), and
- Cumulative impacts of coastal and cayes development on the fishing industry and environmental health of marine ecosystems.

ERI and its partners such as SEA and TIDE are asking that all research organizations use these priorities as a guide when designing or doing any environmental or natural resource research in Belize so that all of this critically necessary information can be available to Belize as soon as possible.

The full National Environmental and Natural Resources Management (NRM) Agenda can be found at www.eriub.org/latest-news/the-national-environmental-and-nrm-research-agenda.html

Placencia Lagoon Mangrove Reserve

The Placencia Lagoon gives Peninsula communities so much and now it needs our protection!

We all know about the Lagoon as the nursery for juvenile marine life, the shelter its mangroves provide from storms, the food it provides for local families, its attractions for tourists, and the home it gives to dolphins, manatees, birds and other wildlife.

But, over the years the Lagoon's ability to give so much has been harmed—by dredging, cutting down of mangroves, residential and tourism coastal development, and pollution from sewage, garbage and run-off from agriculture and aquaculture.

Now a new threat has appeared—it seems that beachfront and Lagoon front properties are becoming so scarce that developers are now casting their eyes on the mangrove islands in the Lagoon. Just recently survey lines were found cut through old-growth mangrove on Drunken Man Caye.

So Peninsula community groups are now organizing to get protected status for the Placencia Lagoon, the mangrove islands within the Lagoon and publicly owned lands around the Lagoon.

As a first step in the protected status process, the Government of Belize will be asked to declare a moratorium immediately against the granting of any leases as well as the conversion of existing leases into title on any land or water in and around Placencia Lagoon. This moratorium is absolutely crucial because if all the lands and waters of the Lagoon are parceled out there will be no area to protect.

Once the moratorium has been put in place, the work of research, scientific study and political input to set up protected area status will begin.

Letters of support for the reserve and moratorium have already been received from the Placencia Village Council, the Placencia chapter of the Belize Tourism Industry Association, the Southern Environmental Association and Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development.

Any other organizations that would like to offer assistance/ support for the Placencia Lagoon Mangrove Reserve Protected Area project should contact Adrian Vernon at 523-3587, 620-2159 or Adri-

A Great Experience in Merida

By Adrian Vernon

I was privileged to attend the World Conference on Ecological Restoration in Merida, Mexico, from 17 - 28 August 2011. The conference drew people from around the world and we learned about other people's global experiences in environmental restoration and conservation. I was especially interested in the mangrove reserve there in Merida, as well as their restoration methods and the large areas of dead mangrove forest around the world.



Of course your mind can never be fully focused on restoration while you are in one of the most beautiful, cultural, historical and safe cities in the world.

The city was just fascinating, especially because I love art and history, as well as food, and these three things were everywhere. On several different occasions I found myself walking for hours just sightseeing.

Every night, Merida's Grand Central Park came alive with all sorts of local food, music, entertainment and art. I sat for hours enjoying everything with a back drop of one of the oldest cathedrals in the city.

Amidst this rich cultural back drop, the highlight of my

Miss Elsie Villanueva Leslie "Shaped by the Sea"

Not too many folks know what life was like eighty years ago in Placencia.

The voices and stories of that long ago time are slowly slipping away. But meet Miss Elsie Villanueva Leslie, who recalls clearly and with much fondness and a touch of nostalgia of a time gone by.

Miss Elsie takes us back in time: "I was born in a tiny wooden house where Rum Point is. No, there was no Rum Point then. We had no neighbors up that way. There was no sandy beach: it was bush, all bush. There was no road, no market, no electricity, no water, no motor boats, no tourists, not even radios.

"Families were the focus of our lives. When I was 18 years old, I caught the eye of Owen Leslie. He asked me to marry him. I told him to ask my mother. My mother said it was fine with her, so we got married, and Owen treated me good. When we were newly wedded, we actually lived downstairs from my mother.

"Placencia was a fishing village pure and simple. Every man was a fisherman with a wooden dory. We women raised the children and attended to home chores that kept us pretty much self-sufficient.

"We cooked over fire hearth, and made cashew seeds, guava jelly, stewed mangos, coco plum, papaya, coconut oil—whatever nature provided us, we cooked up. We bought plantains from Monkey River. We paid 5 cents a pound for flour, rice, and beans. Lobster and conch were plentiful.

"Our lives then were simple but very profitable. During Lent, all the men went fishing out at camps on the cayes and sold their fish to the Hondurans. They sold lobsters for 25 cents each. The men came in for Easter, and there was lots of money and good times.

"Owen and I purchased a big piece of land in Placencia from Sea to Lagoon for BZ \$300, and I birthed eleven children. Aunt Thelo Cabral and Nurse Helen Villanueva were my midwives. I scarcely went anywhere—Owen was gone fishing, and I was raising my children. I consider this the happiest time of my life, raising my family."

When Miss Elsie's children grew up, and she was in her fifties, she took up fishing. Her friend Miss Cherry Vernon and her sister, Miss Cunchee Godfrey, taught her to fish, and it became her passion. I remember passing her daily on the beach, Miss Elsie sitting on a piece of driftwood, her handline in the Sea.

"A year ago, I fell, and I stopped fishing. My people tell me I'm too old to fish, but I don't feel old. I take the bus to my doctor in Dangriga. I don't have sugar, or cholesterol, just a little high blood pressure. These days, my family brings me fish they have caught, so I continue to eat from the Sea."

We take for granted now the scientific ability to fore-

attendance at this conference was a presentation given by a native American from Arizona, USA, who shared with us her efforts and commitment to environmental conservation.

Her story was heartfelt and very personal. Her people depend on a bean grown wildly for nutritious food for their young. This bean grows underground.

A mouse gathers the beans from underground and does not harm the plant. The women of her tribe walk the desert with their daughters and granddaughters singing prayers to the Earth for providing the food. Upon finding the beans stored by the mice, the women take the beans and replace them with wheat or corn while singing a song thanking the mice for providing for the children of the tribe and promising the mice that the humans, in turn, would never let the offspring of the mice starve.

As this young woman sang her songs and greeted all the attendees at the conference as brothers and sisters of the Earth, the atmosphere somehow felt almost peaceful. Everyone became quiet. For at least that moment, our overall efforts seemed not so much challenges-- we were all working together, worldwide --but working as one family with one goal.

"It's not like a grocery store, the ocean; we can't keep taking things out and expect everything is okay."

Brian Skerry, National Geographic Photographer



Miss Elsie

cast hurricanes, but Miss Elsie remembers that before technology, that was not the case.

"Hurricane Hattie blew some big winds our way in 1961. We sought shelter in the Anglican Bishop's newly built house on the beach. As new and as strong as we thought that house was, it trembled!

"There was a lull in the storm, then come again the wind, lull again and come again the wind, lull again, come again the wind. I felt those winds were going to throw us down! I lost my house in 2001 to Hurricane Iris. The Anglican Church helped me build it back. To this day, I am so grateful to Miss Sonia Leslie and Father Flowers of St. John's Church."

In her 80 years in Placencia, Miss Elsie comments how no one fishes for profit anymore.

"Everyone is into guiding and the tourism business. Where once there was an abundance of fish, the supply has diminished. And lately, the Sea is dirty, dirty, dirty. It's yellow and looks like the Sea after flooding. (See related article, *Water Quality*, on page 7 of this edition.)

And, when it comes to cruise ships, Placencia has got no chance. Cruise ships will bring their own people in. We need to keep Placencia as it is, for we people."

Miss Elsie calls this chapter of her life a very happy one, much like when she was raising her family. Her family surrounds her on the Leslie property, and she lives with one of her daughters. Another one of her daughters returned from living in the States and built her own house here.

"I am surrounded by family and I am very, very happy."

Thank you, Miss Elsie, for sharing your life with us!