

TRINIDAD RE-VISITED

Charli Holt

My son Randy and I drove to Portland on Sep. 24th and stayed at the Airport Howard Johnson for my early morning flight at 7 a.m. bound for Trinidad. I departed Trinidad at the end of May 2001, so you can imagine my state of excitement and anticipation. My first leg was from Portland to St. Louis and went well enough. Did you know American Airlines no longer feed their passengers? Boy! I wished I had eaten breckie!

In St. Louis, we apparently left for Miami without topping off the fuel tanks. About an hour out of Miami, the pilot announces, "We don't have enough fuel to make Miami with all the storms in the area; so we are going to Fort Myers to fuel up." In Ft. Myers we sat on the ground over two hours; which made us miss our connecting flights by minutes. Big announcement! We must stay in Miami until the following days' flights 'at our own expense.' It seemed that AA accepted no responsibility - they declared it "an act of God." Bull! I finally arrived at Piarco a day late (Friday the 26th) and was pleased to have Jesse James of Members Only Maxi busily pushing me through Immigration and Customs, collecting my luggage and walker and then my welcoming committee met me in the lobby. John from SY Parrothead had a cold Carib for me and Lesley had flowers. We arrived at Tammy's around 10 PM and John and I continued finishing the rest of the six-pack of Caribs while exchanging gossip. I was very happy to just crash and burn shortly after midnight.



My welcoming committee John and Lesley

Saturday. At 8:30 a.m. Jesse picked Lesley and me up for a trip to Maracas and I was pleased to see that the Calypsonian was alive and well and still singing clever Calypsos. The first stop at Maracas was, of course, Richards for a Shark 'N Bake. After washing that down with a cold Carib, we spent an hour on the beach and in the surf before the rains came and chased us off the beach.

Larry had quit at the beginning of the month and is presently installing carpet for Carpet World. He stopped by however to greet me. Also Dillon was pulling a shift at the bar. Jeremy had quit and now works at Tropical Marine. He's put on considerable weight but is the same happy-go-lucky kid. His little boy is absolutely adorable. His name is Jaden. Jeremy completed his Seaman 's course and has his Certification. He is waiting for an opening on a ship. Kevin still cleans boat bottoms and is presently working for Allen Dowden prepping and painting boats. He is much the same sweet, handsome young man; however, his dreds reach his waist now.

Oscar and Derrick are still working on ships. Both have moved to Chaguanas with their families. Recently, Oscar was kidnapped upon arriving home from sea and it cost his wife 25,000.00 to get him back. He suffered only minor cuts and bruises. No arrest has been made.

Harry, Jocelyn and Wade no longer work at TTSA. Graham from Dynamite is now operating the boatlift, as scheduled. Claudette has retired. The office staff is pretty minimal at present. They still need a person to handle the racing club. Rene is the manager and Phyllis has taken over Claudette's job. About 12 foreign boats are at anchor and three are on moorings. Many of the regulars have moved over to Tropical Marine.

Sunday. I went to Westside Community Church with Phyllis. They have moved to larger quarters in the gymnasium of the International School and the congregation has tripled in the past two years. Nathaniel, the song leader, has also organized a six-piece band to accompany the singing and they hold a half hour Praise Service before the regular church service begins. All the foreign church leaders have returned to the States and a local, Ronnie Heerah is now the minister. They still serve refreshments after the service. Due to Nathaniel's youth ministry, the number of youth has grown significantly.



Westside Community Church

That evening Lesley and I went to Central Bank Building and were thoroughly entertained by a play starring Richard Ragubersingh and Raymond Choo Kong. The ticket prices have doubled; but the theatre was sold out anyway.

Monday. Nicole had managed to get me an appointment with my Denturist, David Whiley (Whiley Dental Lab) and she picked me up at 9 a.m. She has recovered from her stroke she suffered on Mother's Day this year to the point that she walks with difficulty, has regained her speech, and her left arm is nearly recovered. When we arrived at his office, I felt like the blind leading the blind as she carefully held my arm and guided me along. David took impressions and told me to return on Wednesday. The total cost for a lower partial (all but four teeth) would be 700TT\$ which also included an extraction. Graham of Maja III arranged for a bridge game as practice for me in the afternoon at TTSA. Lesley and I attended Pot Luck in the evening, catching up on all the news. Mary Ann and Ron from Mighty Sparrow have taken on the responsibility for getting the charcoal and building the fire, setting up the tables, etc.

Tuesday. I went to the ANKH Internet Café at Tardieu Marine in the morning. This is a great Internet and very reasonable. It cost 5TT\$ to be a member which gives you 20 minutes free your first time and 15TT\$/hour. They have six machines, offer copying services, sell blank CD's, and offer free coffee. The Café was founded by Rodney of the SY Ankh shortly before his untimely death earlier this year. There is another Café located between IMS and the bay that is 12TT\$/hour; but the difference is in the cost of transportation. While I was waiting for my pickup, I visited with Kurt of Marine Warehouse that is right next door. He is living the love story of the century and I'll be writing about it soon; so, watch the Articles page on the website.

I met up with Mary and Kurt from Tenacity and rode back to TTSA in their dinghy. It was a comfortable ride most of the way and Kevin was on hand to help me out of the dinghy and up on to the dock when we arrived. My ride caught up to me there later in the afternoon. John and Betty from Parrothead were ashore and I got the skuttle-butt about my boat. It is still on the hard

in Carriacou, the new owner is in Florida and is advertising her for sale. If anyone is interested in a 32' Valiant, let me know and I'll put you in touch with the new owner. I am very unhappy with her plight, on the hard over two years, and would love to see someone take her who would put her to the use I built her for.

Wednesday. Nicole picked me up at 9 a.m. again and we went first to Dr. Bruno Mitchell, the ophthalmologist who operated on my eyes. It was a long wait as usual and Bruno was surprised to see me. He has moved his practice and has a nice building. His diagnosis was straight forward; there is some deterioration on the corneas and suggested I might need a new prescription for my glasses. From his office, we went back to the dentist and I had the extraction and received my plate. It's great to have a full set of choppers to chew with. I needed to return twice for minor adjustments and now I'm quite comfortable.

That evening Lesley and I went to TTSA for movie night. There were about twenty people in attendance. I bounced up more of my Trini friends: Phillippe Agostini, Mark and Graham of Dynamite Marine, and several members. Rupert Grimshaw and his cousin Trevor and Linda of Impulsive III were visiting.



Mark & Graham of Dynamite Marine



Left: Linda & Trevor & Rupert Right:

Thursday. The Bridge Club met at TTSA this week due to construction at Tropical. There were three tables. Three more Trinis have joined the group in addition to Ruth, who has been with us since the beginning. I hadn't played since leaving Trinidad but managed to hold my own. The game began at 1 pm and broke up around 4:30; I stayed and limed until about 6 pm.

Friday. Jack Dausend picked me up at 7:30 a.m. and I spent the morning at CrewsInn. I met Joyce (Mood Indigo) and she was showing Joyce (Wombat of Sydney) the ropes of going to town, shopping, emailing, etc. Wombat was at a dock without its mast. They had been on a

mooring buoy when lightning struck them and they lost all their electronics aboard.



CrewsInn

This photo is taken of Chaguaramus from the coffee shop and shows a pretty full harbor, despite the complaints of having less boats calling. I also visited with Dawn and Jeff of Nau-T-Kol. They are living in Woodbrook temporarily while their boat dries out on the hard. They were quite proud of being one of the finalists in the Business Of The Year Award. The award went to Echo Marine. Jack drove me home mid-afternoon and then picked me up on his way home in the evening and I spent a pleasant evening with he and Cathy, sharing dinner, ideas, and plans for a better world.



Jack and Charli dancing

Saturday. Race Day! Twenty-eight cruisers joined me for a day at Santa Rosa Park. It was a gorgeous day with no rain. Many of the horses running when I last attended were still running and doing very well. The 2-year olds were in good form. I met several of my track friends. I was saddened to hear of the death of Trinidad's Number One breeding stallion - Freshly Squeezed. He has left much progeny for future racing however.

Brian Harding was rated as #1 Jockey, #2 Ricky Jadoo.

Glen Mendez #1 Trainer, Grant Lorenzo #2. As it had been raining earlier in the week, the turf races were taken off due to soggy turf.

It was an exhilarating day for everyone and no one was a loser. KFC and the Tea Shop are still available and Caribs are still only \$5.00tt.

It had rained mercilessly in Port of Spain and Muskit described the streets so flooded that only the tops of the parked cars could be seen and the east end of the Savannah was a swimming pool. He drove us through the area and we could still see lots covered in water and the streets slimy with mud and silt. People were still sweeping water from their homes.

Sunday. The long-awaited Birthday Concert, honoring Lady Charli (74) Marjorie Boothman (7?) Karl Eric (83) Julia-Rose James (1) Alisha Moore(1).

Lesley and I were picked up at 4 pm and there was already a crowd at CrewsInn when we arrived. The concert would begin at 5 pm sharp. By physical count, there were over 350 people there, counting cruisers and Trinis. The Mood Indigo group had gown a little. On stage were Kurt, guitar; Russell, bass, Michael, guitar; Winston, drums; Dr. Dave Delandro, alto sax; Tony Woodruff, tenor sax; Tony Adams, flute; Alden, pan; David, trumpet; Rebekah, keyboard and Joyce, Vocalist. Guest artists included Nakisha, who first performed on stage at a Christmas concert when she was only five. She sang the theme song from Titanic without blemish and now at eight years of age, she gave another stellar performance. Sophia, the Australian wife aboard Egeria, sang Fly Me To The Moon and David the plumber's 14-year old daughter Resha performed a ballad, The Power of Love. The guest hit of the evening was Mungal Patissar with his sitar. He played musical tag with Russell on bass and Winston on drums to the crowds' delight. Richard from the vessel Eternity brought the house down with House of The Rising Sun and Pride and Joy. Joyce and Nakisha sang a duet rendition of Wind Beneath My Wings dedicated to Lady Charli and there were more than Charli's eyes wetted. Everyone remembers Kurt who operates Marine Warehouse and used to play in a jazz band in New Orleans. Kurt sang his latest song - "Central America" - but everyone called for "Trinidad Blues." Here are the words:

TRINIDAD BLUES, BY Kurt Kasson, written in 1998

I came down here to Trinidad
To get some boat work done
To hide away from hurricanes
And have some carnival fun
I came down here for three months,
But my plans have had to shift
And now the only way I'll be movin'
Will be by continental drift.

I hired an electrician now
I think his name was Vince
He tore out all my wiring
And I haven't seen him since
And my varnish needs attention
My man shows up and it starts to rain
And though it seems like yesterday
It's time to get my visa stamped again

The folks at Immigration
Wonder why it takes so long
To have a piece of teak cut
And then have that teak put on
And why I've joined a steel band
And why I've bought myself a car
They say, "You call yourself a cruiser;
We haven't seen much evidence so far."
I used to like my food cooked
By a chef from Cordon Bleu
Now I'm happy with a roti
And a bowl of callaloo
And I'd love to have some pelau
Crab back upon my plate
And the landfalls I've been planning
Well, they're just gonna have to wait.

Some circumnavigators have stopped
For a day to have a look
If you don't believe me
Their numbers are in the book
Their charts are caked in mildew
And their boats are on the hard
As they navigate lawn mowers
Round and round their yard. (repeat 1st verse)

Marjorie Boothman and I had a very special surprise when her grandson, Stephan made his stage debut playing the drums to Old Lady Walk.

During the last set, TV 6 was videotaping for promotion of the group in Guyana where they were to perform later in the month. I was fortunate enough to receive a copy of that tape and I have been able to share the joys of a Trinidad concert with my family. The tape includes all my favorites: Joyce and David's trumpet harmonizing on Jelly Bean Blues; Alden Moore playing Ave Maria on his pan; and, of course, the finale - When The Saints Go Marching In.

In 1996, Mood Indigo was performing every Wednesday night at the Pickle House downtown with only Joyce, David, Michael and Tony on stand-up bass. George (Vagrant) and I came up with an idea. When the band started to play The Saints, I rose, opened my black umbrella, and high-step marched through the club. George and others followed and thus began a regular routine. In my present condition of walking with the aid of a walker, I couldn't possibly march. But Jesse James was determined, pulled me up, supported me, and I did my best. For a few moments, the years rolled back and I felt pure joy. As Joyce launched into their final song, The Party's Over, I was both relieved and sad. Everyone swore that was Mood Indigo's BEST concert. I think the band felt the presence of the many cruiser's that had sailed in just for the concert and the resulting performance was phenomenal.

That pretty well established my daily routine for four more weeks. On Oct. 6th, I visited Del (Peace of Mind) who was staying in an apartment at Power Boats while recuperating from his recent fall. He was no longer drinking or even smoking. He was very alert and getting around without assistance. The following week he returned to his boat, which was on the hard and has continued to heal.

Oct. 7th I visited Maracas again in company with Mood Indigo, Joyce's sister Rachelle, Russell (bass player), his wife Corinne and their two teenaged kids. Jesse and I had the opportunity to discuss ways for him to work "smarter" instead of harder and he was busy copiously taking notes.

Oct. 8th while liming at the Spinnaker Bar Gerald, who is Denyse Plummer's sound engineer, sat with me and I told him to tell Denyse the cruisers would be at the Oval on Friday night in full force. Bettering me, he dialed her number and handed me the phone. She instantly recognized my voice and was thrilled with my news. She suggested we arrive one hour early to get good seats.



Denyse's "Yachtie Posse"

Oct. 10th: Denyse's advice proved to be correct and we were able to surround the stage with the presence of thirty cruisers. When Denyse came on, she beamed at the sight of all of us standing and clapping. She introduced us to the crowd as her "Yachtie Posse" and thanked us for coming, adding that she has missed us. Throughout her performance, she included the cruisers - finding the baldies and giving them a good rub. She dragged me out onto the dance floor and we wined a little. She sang a requested song for me for my birthday that brought me to tears. She promised to meet with us after the show and we enjoyed a stellar evening of greatness. Actually, this is the first time in eight years that I saw her with her own hair. Her birthday is Nov. 8th and she will be 50 but she still has a voice with enough energy to light up the City of New York. What a gal!



What a gal!

I did the net every Tuesday morning for Jesse and it was just like old times. Jesse would pick me up at 7:30 and take me to his office at Tropical Marine.

Saturday and another race day. It was a sad day at the races when one of my favorite grays, Digital Alarm, fell in the home stretch sustaining a broken leg and had to be destroyed. After the races, we went to the Anchorage where YSATT was hosting a Trade Show. Members Only had a booth and he and Sharon were manning the booth. Sharon needed to get home to the baby about 8 pm so she dropped me back at Tammy's and we had an opportunity to visit on the ride.

Oct. 13th: Snake came to visit me at TTSA and he was his usual self. Exuberant as ever. Snake is a local character who is a career Army man, leads Hike Seekers, a group of local hikers, and he invites the yachties to join in on the milder hikes. He is now stationed at the Heliport entrance and invited me to stop by anytime.

Oct. 14th My birthday: Jesse's gift to me was a trip to Ajoupa and the Temple In The Sea for me and 10 of my chosen friends. My guests were: Doris and Cam (Foxfire II), John and Betty (Parrothead), Denise and Graham (Maja III), Bill (Domoii), Joyce (Meander II), Cathy (ex Wind Psalm), and Lena (JackOBite).

Everyone was fascinated with the pottery factory and amazed by all the handwork performed on the various pieces. They were working on a ceramic mural probably 4 feet in diameter featuring a Trini forest in the background with a river in the forefront. This was a special order by a former Trini now living in Los Angeles, California. The word 'Ajoupa' means 'house' in AmerIndian and they make some lovely native houses, painted in bright colors. This one is unpainted but demonstrates the detail. After having a tour of the factory, we went up to the house where items can be purchased.

At the house as well in the factory there are many pet dogs. I fell in love with the little lady of the house and tried to kidnap her - until I remembered that I would never get her past my son Randy. Everyone made their purchases and we headed off for a lovely Roti lunch before visiting the Temple In The Sea.

THE TEMPLE IN THE SEA Waterloo, Couva

This has long been one of Trinidad's most favored places for me to visit. During my years here, I visited two to three times each year. I believe it is the spirit of the little man from India that draws me here. His spirit touches me as I set foot on the walkway over the water and quells my restless soul and gives me peace.

Siewdass Sadhu was a man of small stature - barely five feet tall. He enlisted to come to Trinidad as an indentured worker and departed for the new country with hope and his new wife. He worked seven days a week in the cane fields from sunup to sundown. He was physically a happy man but his religious beliefs were denied him and his heart was heavy. He built a small temple at the water's edge in Waterloo that housed Lord Shiba. Government officials soon appeared and told him that the land belonged to them and he could not do that. Siewdass was not daunted. He informed the official that the government did not own the sea; therefore, he would build a temple out in the sea.

Every day, he collected and carried home two bags of small stones he collected to fill in the sea and build a walkway out into the sea. Daily he remained devoted to his task - to build a place of light for everyone. It took him 25 years to complete while producing nine children; but, today, we are fortunate to have this lovely Temple in which to meditate.

Lord Shiba continues to guard the entryway but all are welcome. The practicing Hindus in the town of Couva maintain the gardens alongside the walkway and clean the Temple on a volunteer basis; but there are locked donation boxes for those who would care to help in this worthwhile work. Regular prayer services are held on Sundays. The ideal time for a visit is at sundown when the setting sun reflects its light through the stained glass windows and doors. To enter the Temple, you must remove your shoes and shelving is conveniently provided for your shoes. From a visit at this Temple, I would expect the individual to leave with a renewed sense of himself and a desire to let their own individual light make a difference in the world.

Jessie had a further surprise for me - a birthday cake, decorated with dolphins, and ice cream, which we all shared in the little park outside the Temple. A memorable day was spent by all of us. Following cake and ice cream, Jesse took us to see the newest (and biggest) temple in Carapichaima. The Ashram Center also boasts of a Yoga Center and was constructed solely by Hindus. Lord Hunaman stands eight-five feet in the air. He was constructed around a pole

erected atop the building by Hindu craftsmen. We were unable to go inside but I have seen pictures of the intricate ceilings.

Oct. 17th: Linda (Impulsive III) met with me at Tammy's for some computer programming tips. We then took Tammy to lunch at The Patio in West Mall. You wouldn't believe what they have done at West Mall! Where Hi-Lo used to be is now a big Court's Furniture Store and Hi-Lo has built a new larger store in what used to be their parking lot. Peppercorn is still in the same place but many other stores have changed. I checked at the Sports Center and was pleased to find a Windies Burgundy Cricket Hat, which I prize. I also had to buy another piece of luggage for my trip home due to all my buying and receiving of gifts. During my stay, Brian Lara's 9-1/2 year record of 376 runs was beaten by an Australian for 380.

Oct. 18th: Another race day at Santa Rosa and thirteen of us went directly to Michael Boothman's for Jazz in D' Yard. Altogether sixty cruisers attended. The price has doubled - beer is priced at CrewsInn prices - the food is still delicious and in generous portions - and the music outstanding! Michael had some wonderful guest vocalists from Barbados. Lisa absolutely stole the show singing Peggy Lee's "Fever." Her interpretation and style made the song sound like a brand new one. We demanded more and she favored us with "There's No Sunshine In My Life, Now You're Gone." Also David and Joyce performed a couple of songs and Stephan got to play on the drums again. Michael's younger brother, Roger, stopped by and gave me a CD of his and a print of one of David's (older brother) paintings of a Caribbean girl. He was otherwise engaged and was unable to favor us with one of his wonderful patois songs.

Sunday the 19th I spent all day with Rolf Bartolo from the racetrack. Four years ago I picked a yearling filly in the auction and recommended he buy her. She was a dynamic youngster - a real take charge kind of gal. She was bright, inquisitive, and well built. Rolf bought her and named her Angelica. I had the privilege a year later to help lead her into the winner 's circle and Rolf had that privilege many more times before breeding her. Rolf took me out to the farm to see her and her yearling colt and weanling filly. I was unable to see Angelica except through binoculars as she was way out in the pasture. I was disappointed not to be able to stroke and hug her but I blew her kisses



Angelica's Yearling Colt



Angelica's Weaning

Oct. 20th: I attended the Venezuelan Youth Symphony at Queen's Hall. They have just recently completed the Hall and what a nice job they did; however I missed the birds flying through. This Youth Orchestra was something to behold. 100 extremely accomplished players were not over 17 years of age. The conductor was only 22 himself. They played a variety of music and their finale was outstanding. They made it quite plain that they were certainly enjoying their performance. Concerts at the Hall are extremely expensive now (\$150tt) - but then I guess someone has to pay for the air-conditioning and plush seats.

Pan Royale started the 23rd with Andy Narrell featured on opening night. Andy, as you may recall, is a white boy from New York whose father brought the Pan home from Trinidad as a tool for rehabilitating the bad boys of the ghetto when Andy was about eight years old. Little did anyone know that he would master this instrument and become world-renowned. He doesn't visit Trinidad often so I wanted to take advantage of the timing. Wrong! Opening night would be held in Tobago. So I had to settle for Voices and Steel on Sunday.

Oct. 24th - Shubh Divali. The Festival Of Lights. This occasion can be likened to our New Year. The celebration is three-fold:

1. Wealth and prosperity;
2. The new year; and
3. The triumph of good over evil. Every home is alit with deyas , small earthen lamps, to welcome Mother Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Multi-colored designs, floral decorations and fireworks lend color and grandeur to this festival which heralds joy, mirth and happiness in the ensuing year. It is also a time for Hindus to reflect on the past year and dedicate the next year to making improvements in their behavior.

We had 150 cruisers being transported to the temple in St. James where the Pundit gave us a short talk on Hinduism and an explanation of Divali. Then we went in tandem to the village of Felicity to enjoy the lights and have a traditional meal, served on a banana leaf. As the taxis and taxis emptied, the drivers turned a hand and served the food and made drinks. It was amazing how smoothly 150 people were fed. While waiting for an empty seat, many went walking among the village and had a wonderful time interacting with the locals.

Saturday Oct. 25th and my last day at the races.

Sunday. Voices and Steel at the Queen's Royal College. We were 'royally' entertained by several steel pan bands, the best being the Nazarine Church group. The Lydians gave a stellar performance with Pat Bishop conducting. She has lost considerable weight and is looking very well. I especially enjoyed the performance by the Marionettes as Vanessa Bush (Harry from TTSA' s granddaughter) was there. She has graduated college in Canada and returned home to a great job in Trinidad.



Pan Royal

Monday Oct. 27th. Lots of last minute errands: email, shopping, etc. Then home to receive Claudette for lunch and a visit. She is just recovering from the flu and a case of wrong medication to complicate matters. She is very happy to be retired and is looking forward to working with Jack Dausend on the publication of The Boca. **(Nov. 23: I am shocked and saddened to have just received news of Claudette's death. The funeral is to be on Wed. Nov. 26. 2003)**

In Chaguaramus, some businesses have grown larger, some have moved, new ones (bike repair at Tardieu) have been built. YSATT has installed several more buoys in the harbor. For this time of year, there are less boats "with cruisers aboard" in any of the facilities.

The political and economical scenes in Trinidad are in dire need of help. Crime is rampant - Trini against Trini. Kidnappings for ransom are on the rise; however, many are hoaxes perpetrated by the kidnapped. The cruisers are in very little danger when they exercise good sense, remembering they are in a foreign country. Fuel prices went up while I was there; transport fares increased and so will many other things. In November, a new requirement was put in place by Immigration for all cruisers coming from Columbia or Venezuela: They must have current Yellow Fever Innoculations.

The Trini people, however, are still the warm, smiling, loving people they have always been.