

SO IT GOES

BY JASON LOVE



My life is a holiday. I wake up at whenever o'clock, write all day, and watch sports for dessert. How, then, did my wife Yahaira induce me to take a holiday? There is only one logical answer, and that is voodoo.

She wanted to show me her homeland, the Dominican Republic (hereinafter referred to as 'the DR'). That is where 62,000 members of her family reside. I met them all in 10 days.

The island seemed harmless enough from the plane: jungles and beaches and jungles. I couldn't make out the swarming brown clouds. Turned out to be mosquitoes; they heard I was coming.

Yahaira and I stepped off the plane and into the arms of her aunt, her godmother, two uncles, five cousins, sixteen in-laws, and most of the nation's children. They gang-tackled Yahaira and held her down so long that I thought she could use a snorkel. After they got to their feet, *they did the same to me!* Tons of people whose names I couldn't pronounce, all hugging me.

I ventured to speak: "My flight is great," I said (I only speak present tense).

The DR comes in two parts. There is Santo Domingo, which rivals the finest capitals in the world in terms of soaring hotels, mega corporations, and streets so clean you could eat off them. Then there is the other 99% of the country, which is kind of like that minus the hotels, the corporations, and the streets.

I had little time to sightsee, however, as I was gripped by a series of near-death experiences called *Driving in the DR*. Back home I'm

considered a bad driver. My wife demands the keys from me even when I'm sober.

You'll consider mine a qualified opinion, then, when I say that Dominicans are the worst drivers in the universe. In their defence, the country could benefit greatly from painting lines on the road. People just don't fare well when these things are left to the imagination. No matter how narrow the path, there was some nut—usually the one driving me around—who felt that he could fit.

Fortunately, only half the people owned cars. You can take a taxi, but if you can't find one, you are forced to—enter *Psycho* music—take the bus.

In the DR, bussing is big business. The drivers, because they own the buses, don't see space the same as we do—one bum per seat. They see it in terms of possibility per cubic centimetre. Children are placed on laps, family's and otherwise, and when they run out of seats, folding chairs go up in the aisle.

Drivers don't stop at junctions but do extend the courtesy of honking to let others know they are coming. There are stop signs at selected locations, but they are intended strictly for tourists. On corners I clawed the stuffing right out of my seat, trying to prevent the bus from overturning.

Just as I was calling for my last rites, a miracle appeared on the horizon: speed bumps. Not government-issue speed bumps but little ramparts erected by the locals to protect their children and other livestock. They consisted of cement and glass and leftover rice, and rose two feet high in places. We sssscrapped over the bumps, listening for the engine to drop.

This, of course, presented an opening for the locals to sell produce. They ran at the bus armed with all kinds of vegetables you wouldn't recognise. They were excited to see me at the window, because Caucasians are known throughout the Spanish-speaking world for their unique blend of wealth and stupidity. Even as our bus pulled away, a boy was trying sell me a cockerel. I held up my hands and made the sorry face. The cockerel seemed hurt.

Finally we arrived at Tia's house, where we were tackled by 100 new relatives. They were cooking and dancing and praising the Lord, all on a Monday morning.

A cousin hugged me and said, "Yayson, how did you like the ride?" I plopped down my luggage and said, "I don't."