

Paul's Adventure – The Beginning

Becoming a bus driver for GRT back in April of 2001 really wasn't my first choice of careers. But, I have to admit, that since the number one seat for Ferrari in Formula 1 racing was already taken at the time, I was forced to opt for a 40 foot bus on Route 8 to apply my aggressive driving skills. And coming to Tonga wasn't something that I had always dreamed of doing either. In fact, until about April of 2008, I had never even heard of the place, and I would learn later, that it is the only remaining Kingdom in the south pacific, and one of only a few remaining Kingdoms in the world.

The decision to come here had never started out as an adventure. It really began more as an act of desperation. As most of you know by now, on November 22, 2007, my GRT driving career came to an abrupt end. I had been busted at an OPP Ride Check many months earlier. I fought the charge in court and I lost. What was I going to do now? I didn't have a lot of options open. My first thought was that I would find a job locally, ride out the two year suspension, and try to resume my GRT career. But there aren't a lot of jobs anywhere that don't require the ability to drive a vehicle... after all; I would still have to get to and from work no matter what I was to do. Things looked pretty bleak.

About the same time that I had lost my ride with GRT, I had also met Brenda, the girl that was to become my wife. So, on December 11, 2008, we flew to Las Vegas and did the matrimonial thing. But upon returning, WE were now faced with the same dilemma... what to do now. After tossing around several ideas, I looked at Brenda one day and asked if she would be willing to sell the house, pack up our worldly goods, and venture off, to an as yet, undetermined location somewhere else on the planet. She said ok. We were now going to run away... but to where? At first, it was going to be some place in Central America, but as it turned out, and after lots of Googling and research, we fell upon The Kingdom of Tonga. In May of 2008, we made a two week fact finding, vacation trip to Tonga, and upon returning to Canada, decided that this was the place we were going to run away to. We sold the house, and began to pack a 20 foot container full of our worldly possessions. We also purchased an array of things we thought we might need for a new life of sunsets, coconuts, and fish... like tools, solar equipment, hardware etc., etc. On Dec 23rd, 2008, our packed container was picked up by truck in Guelph, and that was the last we saw of it until its arrival on the Southern Lily container ship out of Auckland New Zealand... 4 months later. Getting the thing here was a story in itself, but after haggling with Tongan Customs and Maersk Shipping, whom we had to eventually buy the container from, it now sits aside our little abode here on the Island of Vava'u... at the northern end of the Tongan Archipelago of volcanic and coral islands, still full of much of our belongings. As it turns out, buying the container was a blessing, as we would have had no place to store everything we had brought for our new adventure.

So, our original act of desperation, which eventually became an adventure, has now settled down and become a new life, and lifestyle. It seems that whenever one door closes, another one opens in life. Had it not been for the OPP Ride Check that one night of foolishness in Listowel ON, I would most likely still be doing laps on Route 8.

Now here we are, in the South Pacific some 500 kms east of Fiji, and about 1200 kms north east of New Zealand. We operate a small two apartment accommodations house for the

tourists, and are now about to build a small restaurant bar in the main town of Neiafu, on the Island of Vava'u. Who'd-a-thunk-it? We are about as removed from civilization as you can get. We don't have TV, but satellite is available if you want it, but frankly we don't miss any of it, but thank goodness we at least have Internet... our only portal to the rest of the world. My old Ontario driver's license, which I always kept for some unknown reason, was enough to secure a Tongan license, even if my old Ontario license was expired... they just don't care about that kind of stuff down here. So now, if I do drive anywhere, it's on the left hand side of the road in some old rusted out rattle trap of a vehicle... no safety inspections required here.

It is Saturday June 20th as I write this, and yesterday we had a whale frolicking about in the deep waters of the lagoon just in front of our place. The humpbacks from Antarctica come here to calf every year and now is the time they begin to arrive.... along with the many sailboats from around the world. Both will be here until November when the whale migration takes them back to the cold waters and many of the tourists leave. Tonga is the whale watch capital of the world, and this will be our first season to experience this phenomenon.

It is soon the start of winter here and the weather is now perfect... about what it's like back home in June. Summers here are brutishly hot and humid and tourism drops right off from November to May. Except for the expatriates and the locals, business is a little tough during those months. We do miss our friends back home, and I especially miss the people and friends that I made while working at GRT. There were a lot of good times and good memories. There are no more accident reports and customer complaints to deal with in my life now, but life is life and we have a whole new set of challenges ahead. There will never be another traffic jam to deal with. There isn't even a traffic light on the island. With a population of about 14,000 who needs them.

I have to go now and get to work building the restaurant/bar. We also have new guests arriving in our apartment downstairs today. We have our work cut out for us. Gotta run. Later.

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