



TALES OF AN INTREPID TRAVELLER

Sampson Duker has lived on the Suburb for over 20 years. He was born in a village called Enyan Abasa, in the central region of Ghana, and in accordance with local custom he was given the name Kobena (as a male child born on a Tuesday) After attending the local primary school he continued his education at Cape Coast, near the capital Accra, then came to the UK in 1959.

While working during the day doing a variety of jobs, he attended North London Polytechnic in the evenings, studying successfully for his 'A' levels. He then joined the Inland Revenue and subsequently went on to gain a degree in Government and further qualifications in accountancy.

Sampson has always had an insatiable desire to travel to the more exotic places in the world and to South America in particular. After spending holidays in Argentina, Peru and Brazil he decided to purchase a flat in Recife on the East coast of Brazil, some 1000 miles north of Rio de Janeiro where he spends the winter months now that he has retired.

As Sampson says, with the daily temperatures between 22 and 35 degrees centigrade throughout the year the weather, unlike in the UK, is not a topic for conversation – except when it becomes humid. After flights from London of nine and a half hours via Lisbon, his first tasks were to register his presence with the British Consulate, and to find both a doctor and lawyer who spoke or at least understood English.

Brazilian Portuguese is the main language spoken by 95% of the population, so enrolling for language lessons was also a top priority. Coming to grips with the translation of a foreign language and a lack of vocabulary can sometimes have amusing implications. For instance, when he telephoned an acquaintance and asked about his health he was told that at that moment the friend was at the hospital with his wife who was 'suffering from her stomach'. In a later conversation it turned out that the lady was in fact pregnant!

Another thing that Sampson soon learned was that, in Brazil, you do not take an initial 'no' to a request as a final answer. Persistence usually pays off, particularly if you are sure of your facts. He finds that the Brazilians are very proud of their nationality and independence. It is a close knit society, very protective of family and friends and definitely male oriented. While football is the national sport, indeed passion, volleyball (particularly on the beach played by shapely young women) is also very popular.

Unemployment is undoubtedly a problem, so it was not perhaps too surprising for him to mention his experience when three men arrived to install a television aerial – although only one did the actual job! The cost of living in Recife is comparatively low, and considerably lower than in Rio. For example, one can enjoy a very reasonable lunch for only R\$16 (exchange rate: £1 = R\$4.5). Public transport is generally good and taxi fares are incredibly cheap as are the excellent fruit and vegetables.

As Sampson says, "What if the pace of life is somewhat slower than in the UK, the climate and lifestyle take a lot of beating. Then as a bonus, one has the religious festivals at Christmas and Easter and the Recife carnival in February (quite separate from the world famous carnival in Rio). Christmas Day is one for the family to get together at home so the roads, beaches and even restaurants in Recife are deserted. The New Year's celebration, however, is altogether unique and out of this world. Tables are arranged on the beach with vast quantities of alcoholic drinks and it is a huge occasion enjoyed by everyone. Some people who did not seem to know where they were, soon found themselves in the sea or asleep on the beach".

The Carnival (which this year was held between Sunday 5 and Wednesday 9 February) and which Sampson, describes as 'organised chaos', is for everyone to forget their problems, lose their inhibitions and let their hair down, so to speak. It seems that for a month or so before this celebration almost every appointment is postponed until after the event. Then, during the Carnival almost all the shops, restaurants and offices are firmly shut and bolted, and roads diverted. It appears that most people take the whole week off. So, if you were going to fall ill, then one has to be sure that is not during the week of the Carnival!

SUBURB

Experiences

featuring Ellen Gilbert

TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH

Suburb artist Ellen Gilbert's description, soon after the event, of her tragic encounter with an SUV on a Suburb roundabout.

THE TRAGEDY

About the accident which occurred on the morning of 30 July around 8am, I don't remember. I was at the roundabout at Wildwood Road and Kingsley Way heading north. Coming towards the turn into Wildwood Road, and heading north out of the roundabout at the intersection with Kingsley Way, I was struck by a black Mercedes 4 x 4 vehicle with bull bars, two men aboard. They left no room for me to pass them. They were over the centre line, over the entrance to the roundabout and on my side of the road. The impact knocked me out, and I suffered extensive bruising and concussion. Fortunately I was wearing a bike helmet. I have a helmet shaped bruise around my head, bruising on my face from my glasses (shatter proof), bruising and cuts to my left arm and left leg, and to a lesser extent my right leg. In suffering concussion I have suffered memory loss, left brain function is negligible. In other words, I don't remember how to add, speak Hebrew, French or cook. The first week I realised I couldn't see as all was blurry. The ignoramuses pulled me to my feet, and the pain brought me around. St John's Ambulance training years ago taught me that you never touch a concussed victim. I probably shrieked at them to leave me alone. They tried to bundle my old Claud Butler racing bike into the back of their vehicle, which wouldn't fit of course unless you quick-release the wheels. The right handlebar brake is severely twisted and crushed which leads me to believe that somewhere in Hampstead Garden Suburb is a Mercedes with scratches on it's right side front or recently repainted. I don't remember how I got home. My bike was downstairs, and is still there. The bike pannier, helmet and I were upstairs and I have no idea how I got there. The two men, if they had brought me home, did not give any identifying information, phone number, etc. and they left. They did not call an ambulance or inform the police. I live alone with a Polish lodger, who says that I came in wet with rain, and kept repeating I can't find my keys and said that I looked very strange. I went to lie down, awoke at 12.15 and phoned my GP. Temple Fortune Health Centre is closed at the weekend but provides a sort of mechanical locum service which urged me to go the Accident & Emergency at the Royal Free. A wonderful neighbour drove me there and waited until I was seen. I was kept there until 8 or 9pm being observed. Then I was sent home because it would be impossible for me to rest quietly during a Saturday night in the hospital. I don't remember Sunday. I was able to see my GP on Monday, and she told me to go home and do absolutely nothing, which I find very difficult. I spent the subsequent week more or less doing that.

...AND THE TRIUMPH

Ellen's first real outing was not until a month later and it was to see one of her pictures that had been selected, from an entry of more than a thousand, for the Garrick/Milne prize. The subject of the competition was Artists in Rehearsal because, as was explained, the Garrick had realised that while it had plenty of portraits of actors of the past there were no contemporary ones hanging on their walls. Ellen had entered a sketch of the Endellion String Quartet rehearsing at the Proms at St Jude's but the winner was an almost life size oil of Sir Michael Gambon. The show, plus reception and prizegiving was at Sotheby's and was a glittering occasion with famous actors outnumbering us ordinary mortals. "I can't believe I'm here with all these famous people," said Ellen.



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