

GILBERT

It is almost impossible to grasp the magnitude of a tragedy like the one being experienced by Jamaica without actually being there. The fact that communication links with that country (what with all the telephone lines down) only increases the sense of helplessness and uncertainty. It is indeed remarkable that the death toll is not as great as many anticipated it would be, and it is to the credit of the Disaster Preparedness Programme of the Jamaican Government that people were relatively well protected from the ravages of the storm. We are grateful, then, for those living. But it is becoming increasingly clear to many that the living will not have it easy for the next few months.

Imagine enjoying a balmy day in the Summer, life going on as usual, meals coming to you on time, public transportation chaotic but predictable, telephones working in their enigmatic way and electricity generated with adequate consistency. Then you are told to lock yourself indoors, bar up your windows, purchase storm lanterns, collect as much water as you can, store as much food as you can, muster up a first aid kit of sorts, remove all stray bits of shingle from around your house and ensure that there are no loose zinc sheets nearby. You are told to buy batteries for your radio to last at least a week, and warned over and over again to evacuate low-lying areas and find secure shelter. But it is still balmy and quite idyllic outside, and it is business as usual, just this foreboding, this awesome anticipation that is eating at your inners.

It is not hard to picture the anxiety of those locking themselves in for the night, listening to the radio and waiting for the lights to go. And then the storm comes. Gilbert frolics with the landscape whipping her into a frenzy, leaving her worn and drained in his wake as he dances off to other lands to cause the havoc of the century.

Nothing is the same. Jamaica has been very badly damaged by this hurricane, and the statistics do not begin to express the confusion, fear and ironic humor that must be passing from person to person in that country. I can hear people recalling the sordid details, talking about the buildings that went. I can see anxious and excited children keen on getting out and seeing how nasty a storm like that can be. I can imagine those who have lost relatives, stunned by the tragedy of helplessness. And I can hear the jokes, the laughter, the people who survived chatting with relief at the survival of it all. Yes, they will be drawn together, the DJs will chant about Gilbert for years to come and the writers will have substance for tales and more tales.

But the damage will also have that kind of lasting impact. The banana plantations have been totally destroyed, coconut trees have been uprooted, landslides have eroded much of the top soil; food will be hard to get because of the flooding and basic havoc caused on trees and the earth, the telephone system will not be together for months to come because all the wiring is on poles, most of which now form a bizarre version of some abstract artist's conception of the crucifixion, all over the island. It will be weeks and billions of dollars before electricity is restored and looters will loot and be shot in this curfew that has been called.

So when people say to me, "Thank God you are here and safe," I say that they don't know what they are talking about. Safety has a lot to do with one's state of mind, and these days I am walking through cool dry Fredericton as if I am picking my way through the flooded streets of Kingston looking for friends to help. I contemplate the damage done to homes of relatives and dear friends and all it will mean to make life normal again.

A new day will dawn, but the debris still lingers in the streets and the loss is profound.

Perhaps the lasting image of this grand moment remains for me the picture of a man standing outside of his home watching the river of flood waters churn down his avenue. His awe and total bewilderment were at once touching and amusing. No doubt he chuckled to himself at one point: "This is one hell of a t'ing, one hell of a somet'ing!"

P.S. As soon as I can find out more, I will try and see if there is anyway that interested people in Fredericton can help with the relief efforts in Jamaica. In the meantime, the Red Cross of Fredericton is accepting donations of money and clothing for Jamaica.

KWAME DAWES

EXPANDING THE

Kwame Dawes
Joanne DeJong

There are a few facts about university life that most people tend to take for granted. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that we have a chance to learn as much as we can in an environment that encourages study. The tyranny of "normal" life (working nine to five and that kind of thing) usually mitigates against any exploration of hidden talents, creativity or the improvement of certain job-related skills. The myth of freedom after college is exploded very quickly once we enter into the working world and the reality of regret for not having made the most of a good opportunity consumes us. It is a problem. It will be a problem. But there is good news. We can in fact prevent this tragedy of fate and take our fate into our own hands by taking advantage of the many vehicles for personal development being offered at this university.

Perhaps the strong success ethic that has permeated our societies has convinced today's students that the most crucial aspect of one's university education is the scoring of high grades in the essential courses. Anything that would seem to draw attention away from the regular academic plan dictated by the student handbook is an unnecessary diversion and a counter-productive enemy of the success ethic. Hence, few students have considered the possibility of taking courses like Basic Calligraphy, The Hand-on Film-making Workshop, Introductory Welsh, Yoga or Discussing Canadian Women Writers, which are all offered by the Continuing Education Programme at UNB.

The UNB Continuing Education Programme has become an essential feature of the campus both as a service to UNB students as well as a crucial service to the

Fredericton Community. In fact, the vast majority of persons who participate in the non-credit programmes offered by the programme are non-students and there is significant participation from senior citizens and children. Predictably, UNB students are particularly interested in the credit courses offered and those who enroll in non-credit courses are interested in courses that have direct bearing on the improvement of their academic performance. Courses like Effective Reading, and Preparation for the CET are heavily subscribed to by students.

This tyranny of academic pressure is also evidenced in the relatively poor student participation in extra-curricular activities at this university. It is one thing to lament the passing of the idle student who came to university to receive a rounded education and not a passport into the working world, but it is

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DANCERS GOING THROUGH THEIR EXERCISES IN ONE OF THE BALLET CLASSES