

# Notes from a very small island

Of Boats, Cars and Thursdays..

I write this on a Thursday which is the main shopping day. Every week on a Thursday the town fills up early as goodies not normally for sale are put on display. This is the one day you can usually get some fresh vegetables, salad and sometimes fruit. Because distribution is not the best and, so gossip goes, the shop workers put by what they want before the general public get anywhere near it, you need to get there early. For an island surrounded by the sea it is bizarre that when fresh fish is for sale it is broadcast on the radio at 7.30am and by 8 am it has all gone. With other food it is not that bad so long as it is in stock.

We get a boat every month and today is a perfect storm because it is not only a Thursday but they have just started to unload the boat which takes about 5 days. In a quirk that is unsurprising to those living here the newly built port at Ruperts Bay cannot unload the containers. This means they are taken off the ship while it bobs about in the harbour, put on a World War II landing craft left by the Americans and chugged over to the wharf in James Bay. Here they sit around a bit being looked at by Customs before the contents are distributed on the back of flat bed trucks to the various shops. The fresh food comes off first and excited rumours abound as to what we are getting this time. We had peaches this month which, despite being over £1 each, were sold out within a couple of hours.

After the fresh food comes the rest and we discover what they have not put on the boat, again we have no flour. Christmas is coming and the Saints love to bake. This means that whenever there is flour it is bought up in bulk as if you never know when it may be available again, which of course you don't. Add into that the inability to buy bread most of the time you can see this is a precious commodity the absence of which is easily remedied, but where would be the fun in that?

Back to today. The combination of the boat and bountiful Thursday has led to a kind of communal lunacy. Bewildered looking husbands are pressed into service and have that air of a man in a clothes shop while his wife tries on dress after dress. A glazed faraway look comes into their eyes as they carry endless shopping bags while following determined looking women busily sharpening their elbows. The air is heavy with diesel fumes as cars clog up the one street, their drivers chatting to one another while blocking the road. This is a particularly Saint practice which you learn to adopt. If you pass a car coming the other way you automatically acknowledge the driver by holding your hand up, but if you know them you wave frantically out of the window and stop your respective vehicles and pass the time of day. You get used to waiting for two friends to have a natter before the car in front pulls off and you can follow on.

Meanwhile the shops are unloading their supplies causing more mayhem and the police busy themselves with issuing what they call 'parking tickets.' These are just sheets of paper telling you that you are parked illegally and threatening unspecified dire consequences if they catch you at it again. As there is no power to issue a fixed penalty you simply end up with something to write a shopping list on. There is now a competition to see how many of these notices you can get, my friend Ivy is incapable of parking within a parking space even if one is available so she heads the leader board at the moment. She has the advantage of having a small car and is particularly ingenious in finding places to park no-one would think were possible, maybe we should introduce a handicap system to level the playing field.

- Duncan Cooke



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