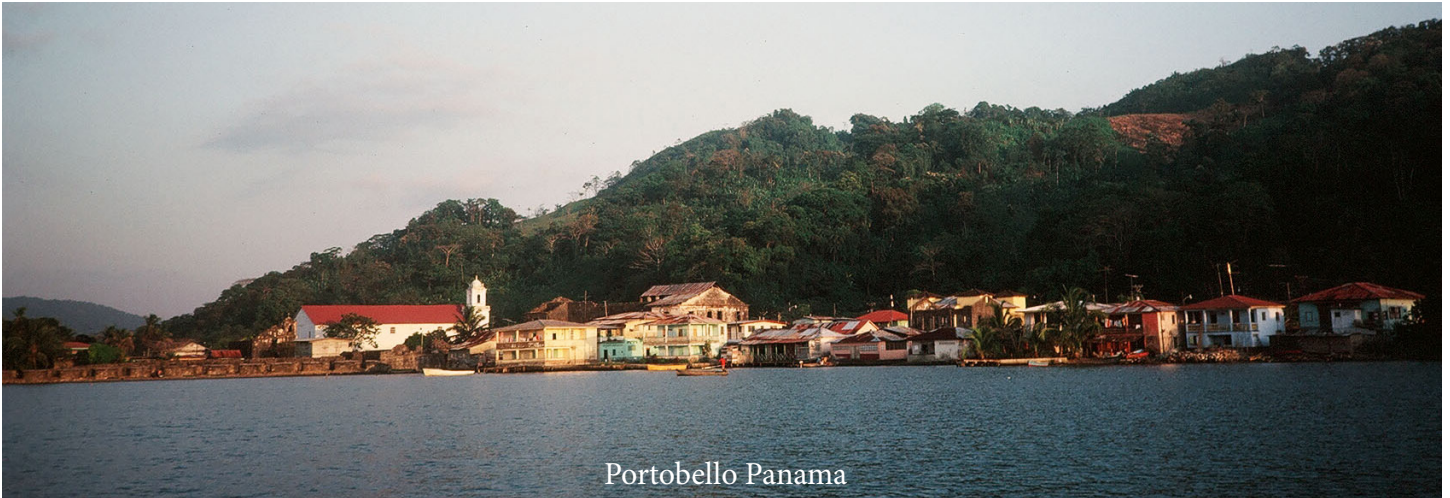


PRINCIPITO

PART-7a Panama Canal to San Blas Islands



Portobello Panama

Excerpt from Letter to Kathy N. fr. Portobello

Colon is not a very kind place to hang out. The hostility is palpable.. I wonder how much has to do with the American domination of the Canal for so many years. We didn't get to know much if anything of the regular Panamanians who were living their day to day lives. Being on a boat in this environment gives you a distorted view at best of the goings on of a country like Panama. The Canal must employ over 5000 people and benefits ancillary businesses including tourism.

The permission to build the Canal was given to the French then later to the U.S. and it's completion saved close to 8000 miles of travel rather than going around Cape Horn at the Southern tip of South America. There has been a lot of animosity by native Panamanians about the Canal and the share of benefits from the use of the Canal.

Before we arrived in the Canal zone we were warned by several sailors that we should avoid traveling alone around the cities especially Colon on the Caribbean side. One such person described his own experience with being held up in Colon walking down a side street in broad daylight with one assailant in front of him with a knife and two co-conspirators behind him. They wanted his money which he gave them and was left alone.

I was recounting this story to a fellow sailor coming from the Antilles and he claimed I was paranoid. I told him to be careful. A couple of days later he told the story of being robbed in a paint store while he was standing at the counter. Two men one on each side pushed him up against the counter and took his wallet. Funny but he didn't acknowledge that I had told him to be careful. I guess it's like when you inadvertently cut someone off in a car and you avoid the other person's gaze/judgment. Embarrassment is a tricky devil and I think a form of suppressed anger.

We were so paranoid, like the man said, after hearing story upon story of recriminations against travelers and after being in Colon for two and a half weeks looking over our shoulder that upon arriving in Portobello and being ig-

nored completely. It felt strange and mildly reassuring that not all of Panama is like Colon.

Since I cannot send this letter from Portobello. I will not end it here but rather will continue it as we go along through the islands until we meet someone going to the Canal who can mail it there.

Portobello is an interesting place, historically in the larger scheme of things. The Spanish came here to trade their goods for Peruvian silver and many battles were fought here. There are several ruins all over the bay. The British blew them up in the 18th Century.

Sir Francis Drake was buried here in 1596. It was said he was buried in a lead casket after dying of dysentery at sea. Between the 16-18 th centuries Portobello was a significant exporting port for Peruvian Silver. Columbus named the port "Puerto Bello" in 1502. Other famous characters from history fought and captured the port: Captain Henry Morgan being the most notorious. His men raped, tortured and murdered the inhabitants.

Even the British had a go at it in the mid 18th century and it was a very popular result for the people of Britain who celebrated it, in part by naming places in London, in honor of the campaign, like Portobello road. The British did not continue to have success in their campaign to displace the Spanish who soon recovered the port.

The harbor is very comfortable and cuts deep into the land making it possible for the large ships that used to come in here to maneuver because of course they had no motor. They must of had to get the lifeboat in the water and 10 men on oars to pull the heavy ship out far enough from the land to raise sail and sail away.

Today we walked past the church and noticed that only a few people were attending mass but the whole town had the mass broadcast over public address speakers even on the baseball field which today was featuring ladies softball.