

The Whi\$perer

That Time I Met Richard Branson



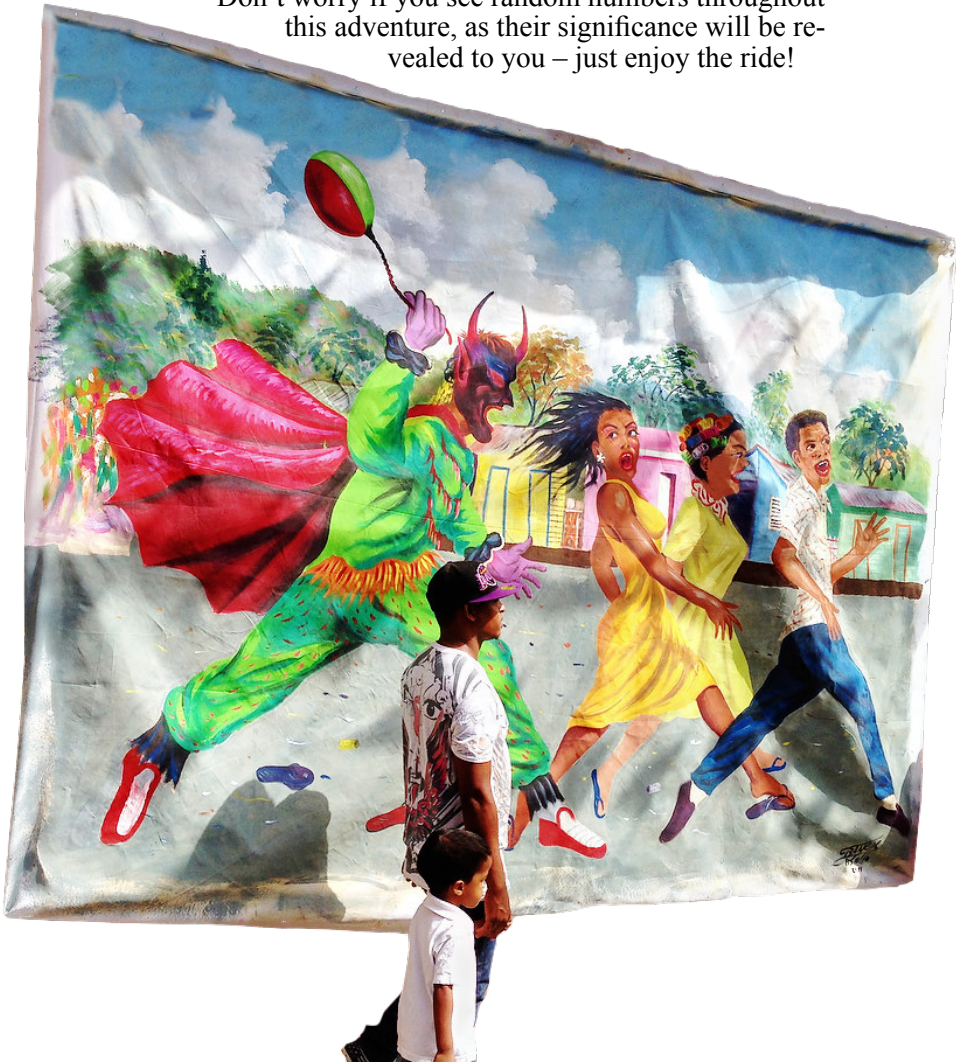
MARK GILCHRIST
January, 2019

INTRODUCTION

I'm pretty sure it was early 2018, and I was in Malaysia, staying at the Twin Pines Hotel in the Cameron Highlands, when I saw an old copy of Richard Branson's "*Like a Virgin*" book. As I read it, I found myself conjuring up a plot to meet the illustrious mogul, and then I wrote all this for my "*On This Planet Earth*" project before I even made it to the Thai border.

But, where should I meet Mr. Branson? Well, I had been in the Dominican Republic four years prior, and that seemed like the perfect locale seeing how he owns a home, (an island,) in the Caribbean, and the rest just kinda-sorta fell into place.

Don't worry if you see random numbers throughout this adventure, as their significance will be revealed to you – just enjoy the ride!



More great, (*quick!*) reads in the “[Time I Met](#)” series...

JERRY SEINFELD

IN NEW YORK CITY, U.S.A.

“Two Guys in a Car Getting Pizza”

I’m a guest on his show; “Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee,” but I’m not a comedian, I don’t drink coffee, and, as it ends up, I’m not on his show? (Nov. 2022)

ANGELINA JOLIE

IN CAMBODIA

“Untouchable”

Not only do I meet this miracle of the silver screen in her adopted homeland, but I break her heart – or I don’t, you be the judge. (Jan. 2019)

STEPHEN KING

in Maine, U.S.A.

“9-11; The Call”

We start the day with a dead man, and then we save thousands of lives. It’s September 11, 2001 as it always should have been. (March 2018)

RICHARD BRANSON

in the Dominican Republic

“The Whi\$perer”

I try to pry a few secrets from this wildly successful businessman, but he holds them so close in front of me, I can’t even see them. (March 2018)

TOM HANKS

in India

“Big Chance”

We meet on a Himalayan mountainside, and ride into Darjeeling, India, where Tom makes me a promise that he may not want to keep. (Jan. 2018)

“THE TIME I MET...”



** Every single word of this story is absolutely true, except for the part about meeting Richard Branson.*

One thing that Virgin Group founder, music executive, space pioneer and world-record holder Sir Richard Branson and I have in common is that we have both survived an armed bank robbery. I know this, because we were both in the same bank, and it was being robbed.

Richard and I are alive today due to the incompetence of the bank, and of the robbers, and also because Branson's ingenious



stunt work gave us a clean getaway. Yep, it all went like this, (all while guns were a blazin!)

“That your motorbike out back?” a guy behind me whispered as three men in front of me waved guns right at me and a dozen other people. The men were robbing the Dominican Republic Savings and Loan, or at least they were trying to.

They were failing, because it was Friday afternoon and the bank was pretty much out of cash. I know, because I had watched moments before, as the only teller in the bank emptied two drawers of U.S. bills – the kind that robbers love around here – into the hands of that guy right behind me, who then

stuffed the huge wads of cash into his cargo pants.

“Yeess...” I said, cleverly not moving my mouth, both hands raised way above my head because I’m scared of guns.

The robbers were getting agitated, and were now trying to rob the customers, who, to my surprise, actually resisted. One woman slid her money back into the teller window, saying that they could just steal the bank’s money, and





not her money. The teller pushed it back out, and the woman shoved it back in, until a robber grabbed the cash from both of them.

“When Benjamins fly, we fly,” my fellow hostage whispered as he pulled a pile of hundreds from his pocket. “You in?”

“Uh-huh,” I said. “I guess.” Not sure why I

agreed, but it was all pretty exciting. He threw the stack of bills in the air, shouting; “Money for everybody!” And we ran. We were outside in a flash, and the robbers didn’t chase us because they were picking up the cash and fighting with the customers



for it. Anyway, the Whisperer grabbed my helmet off the seat as I jumped on and started the bike. He took another helmet off the bike next to us and tucked a “Benjamin” under the seat strap.

He climbed on as I dropped it into first, and we roared out of there. He put our helmets on, which was kind of an awkward thing for me, but I let him do it because we had just been in a bank robbery and life was different now.



So, how do I know this was Richard Branson, one of the richest men in the world, owner of a zillion companies, a world rockin’ adventurer and class-A cool guy? He told me.

“Can you keep a secret, Chap?” He said over my shoulder.



“Uhh, yeah...?”

“Do you know who I am?”

“You’re a crazy guy who throws money at people.”

“Ha, there’s a bit of truth to that. Name’s Richard,” he said. “Richard Branson. And you are?”

“Umm, Mark...”

“Okay, Mark, I need to go to Sosua. Can you give me a lift up there?”

“Shouldn’t we just go find a cop?”

“Why would we want to do that?”

“Well, we witnessed a crime...”

“And made a fast getaway! Look, I’ll explain later, but I have millions of reasons why I just can’t be seen on this island.”

“Umm, millions? Can you explain just one?”

“Seriously?”

“Well, curious... ly.”

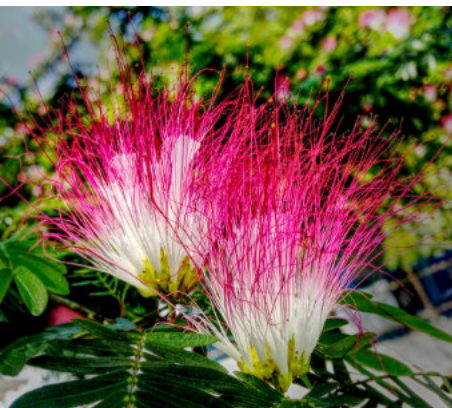
Okay Folks, stop there. I know you’re thinking; “How can they even talk on a motorcycle? Crazy!” But, really, with only 150 ccs in one cylinder, we couldn’t ride more than about 50mph, so it was an





easy ride through downtown Santo Domingo, and, yeah, I guess we were kinda yelling.

This is the capital of the Dominican Republic, and it is beautiful and reeks of history – it’s a UNESCO Heritage Site, and Ponce De Leon was a big deal here. An even bigger deal, (to some,) was when Francis Ford Coppola shot some of a “*The Godfather*” movie here, and ever since, filming locations are in all the scripts of all the tour guides downtown.



Okay, we’re back.

“I need to buy some property here,” Richard said, “and, funny thing is, as soon as people know who I am, the price goes through



the bloody roof.”

“Right...” I said. “You really think I believe that?”

“What?”

“C’mon, the real Richard Branson has people who do things like that for him.”

“Well, yes, but this is personal.”

“Isn’t everything?” Heck, I didn’t really care what excuse he gave; I was just thrilled to be with one of the most successful

businessmen in the world – and doing him a favor, no less!

“Yes, well, Chap, I was also hoping to get away for a few days,” he said. “Now it seems I’m in a bit of a pickle.”





“How’s that?”

“Well, the property is a birthday present for my daughter. She wants to build an equestrian center and baseball camp for handicapped children. If she finds out I’m here, it spoils the big surprise.”

“And you do love big surprises.”

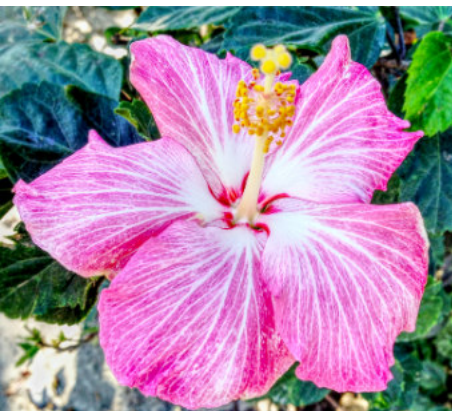
“Well, the nice ones; they make life beautiful!”

The real estate thing helped explain the Benjamins, at least. (With each one equal to 5,000 D.R. Pesos, that is the go-to bill around here for drug dealers and real estate investors.)

Besides, with 160 miles to Sosua, I hoped that maybe I could even maybe get a few business tips from him, just maybe?

“Say, do you think you could give me some tips on starting a business?” I said.

“Well, I don’t think you’d like my consulting fee – why



don't you just read my book?" he said, referring to his 2012 best-seller; *"Like a Virgin; Secrets They Won't Teach You at Business School."*

"Well, okay... So, we'll just head for the north coast?"

"My meeting's not until this evening, but let's get out of here. Everyone will be talking about that robbery, and I can't have people asking me questions that I can't answer honestly."

"Cool," I said. "Let's go." I steered the bike out of the city and onto the highway toward La Vega. Holding the throttle wide open, we scooted along at a steady 45 mph, and I was so ex-





cited, I completely forgot that I didn't even have a hotel room for tonight. I try to book early while cheap rooms are still available.

The island of Hispaniola is long and thin, much like the much larger Cuba to its west, and much like the much smaller Puerto Rico to the east.

The D.R. takes up the eastern two-thirds of the island, and its residents are much better off than are





Haitians, who live on the other third, and who have suffered under poor governorship for centuries. A beautiful mountain range rises up in the center of the country, above the beach-laden tourist areas of Puerto Plata, Sosua and Samana on the northern shore, and Santo Domingo on the southern shore.

6

After about an hour of riding, I stopped for gas. Stations here are full-service, with a man at each pump who will fill your tank and take your money as if that one pump was his own private



business.

We got off the bike and I said; “Fill it up,” and the guy did not understand even those three words of English. Incredible, I said it a few more times – “FILL... IT... UP” – only a bit louder each time, and with increasing frustration. This, of course, did not work, as people on motor-bikes here usually buy only a liter or two of gas at a time, and the guy just couldn’t figure me out.

“Full,” Richard said, smiling and with one thumb in the air. The man smiled back, put the nozzle in my tank and filled it up. Richard gave him cash before I could reach for my wallet.

“Thanks for the fill-up,” I said, getting on the bike.

“Thanks for the ride.”

“Boy, that is so annoying,” I said as we rolled out of there. “You’d think he could learn just a few words of English!”

“Mark?”

“Yeah?”





“Do you have any control over that?”

“What? Yeah, well, if enough people complain, maybe he’ll catch on, right?”

“Probably not, and if he ever does, you’ll be long gone.”

“You’re no fun.”

“It’s pretty simple,” he said. “Just don’t try to train people

you will never see again.”

“Yeah, I guess so. Say, I’m thinking of starting a business. Should I incorporate or use a simple partnership?”

“Well, that depends on the partner,” Richard said, and that was that.

“Umm... okay. Well then, just tell





me where to go.”

Richard lives in the British Virgin Islands, just on the other side of Puerto Rico, and I guess he’s been here before, right? So I let him guide the way.

#3, 7 & 5

We had to stop again, because Richard had to take a leak, and we had to stop at one of those modern, American chain restaurants, because Sir Richard just could not take a leak just anywhere. “I’ve peed in too many crappy places,” he said.

I got a few bottles of water, and after his royal flush, we found a corner table, and just sat quietly and people-watched. I took advantage of the moment to ask my supposed-business-tutor about business.

“So, how do you start an IPO?” I said. “I mean, how do you know when to take a business public...”



“Shhh... Do you see this?
“Just look at these employees.”

“Yeah, they look dead. I bet you would fire all of them.”

“Ha! No, I would fire the manager. This is a perfect example of poor leadership.” He was actually excited about this dysfunctional operation, not for what it was, I guessed, but for what it could be. “These folks all look like they’re here for the paycheck, and that is wrong! A good manager can help them do much better work, and with more

pride – do something they will look forward to every day.”

“But all they do is serve burgers... and fries.”

“No, they serve customers,” he said, “customers who are people. A good manager could turn this place around. Say, what do you think employees value the most?”

“Payday?”





“No, well, they need a paycheck, but people love to do quality work that they can be proud of, and they don’t like it when they cannot do quality work.

“I’m a pretty good manager – I mean, I can manage people when they behave. But the bad apples? Forget them.”

“Then you aren’t a good manager.”

“A what? What’d you call me?”





“Sorry, but I don’t hire managers to only lead people who do well on their own. I hire them to fix problems, fix systems, and when necessary, fix people.”

Whew! I asked a question about IPOs and got a psychology lecture – this just wasn’t working out. We got back on the bike and back on the road, cruising through La Vega where they were



recovering from the recent, massive Carnaval celebration, and I started to wonder about where I could sleep tonight.

1 & 2

Rolling through Santiago De Los Caballeros, we approached Cibao Stadium, and it was packed.

“You like baseball?” Richard said. “I always like to catch a game when I’m here. Truly boring sport, but there’s some great talent here.” He was referring to the fact that baseball has been a national sport in the D.R. for 130 years and that all of the Major League Baseball clubs in America have camps here. In fact, baseball is so popular in Cuba, the D.R. and Puerto Rico that I might refer to





them as the “Baseball Belt of the Caribbean,” but I won’t, because nobody else does, and no one listens to me anyway.

We parked, put our hats and sunglasses back on and walked in. Richard bought us tickets and we sat away from the crowd, far enough down the third



baseline that we could chat with the left fielder if we knew any Spanish.

We had arrived in the second inning, and maybe a half-hour later, a pack of drunken tourists showed up and sat a few rows behind us. They talked too loudly, laughed too hard and heckled everyone and everything. It was annoying.

“Let’s move,” Richard said.

“We were here first!”

“Well, that, chap, is the deal you wish you had...” He was right, and I knew it even before he said it, and he just had to say it in that stupid, phony, royal accent of his. So anyway, we got up, and as I was about to





glare right at the bozos behind us, I saw Richard smiling and waving to them. I asked him about that as we walked a few sections over to third base.

“What’s with the smile?” I said as we sat down.

“What?”

“You smiled at those guys, while I just wanted to punch ‘em.”

“Yes, I had that urge, too,” he said. “But Mark, never give your enemies a reason to hate you.”

“Whaa? But isn’t that what enemies are for?...”

“That’s an odd notion, chap. No, you need to



make your enemies respect and fear you, but hate will only make them do emotional things you can never predict, and over which you will have no control.”

We didn't stay much longer because, frankly, both teams were losing. We left the stadium and got back on the road – It was a

beautiful day for a ride through this beautiful country.

We arrived in Sosua with an hour to spare, so we took a walk up and down the famous beach south of town.

Nearly a half-mile of small restaurants, bars, souvenir shops and other stores line the beautifully shaded beach between Sosua





and Los Charamicos.

This town is noted for its immigrant wave of some 4,000 Jewish refugees from World War II and the subsequent Europeanization of the area. The men Richard was to meet were from Holland, and he would meet them at an outdoor restaurant with a Dutch-sounding name.

#4

Before we knew it, the big meeting was upon us. The restaurant was in town, and was a little more up-scale than those on the beach, but still outdoors. Not privy to details, I offered to sit this one out, which delighted Richard, so I sat a few tables away





and ordered the biggest steak on the menu because Richard was buying. He had given me a few hundred-dollar bills, (is that all he carries?) and asked me to covertly pay for everyone's meal. Not sure why, but I like this sort of high-rolling spy stuff, and I like his style.

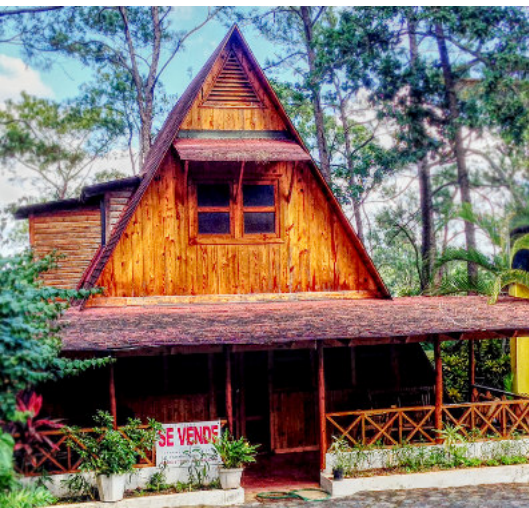
I was starting to get nervous about where I would crash tonight, as I usually had a hotel lined up by this hour, and this town was crawling with tourists, crushing any hopes of finding an available room that was decent and in my pitiful price range.

I couldn't hear the conversation, but watching expressions and





such, I could pretty much figure out which party was winning, and at the start at least, that party did not look like Richard. I saw a lot of furrowed brows and frowns, beard-stroking and forehead wiping. Then, about an hour in, there was tension, and it held for the longest time, ending with the Dutch men nodding their heads as if in submission, and Richard cracking that huge magazine-cover smile. A few minutes later, they all stood up and shook hands, and we left.



All in all, it was an ordinary meeting, except for the flies.

It was a very calm night, and gym-sock humid, and the bugs were out! The Dutch made no effort to conceal their wrath, flinging arms about and flapping napkins like surrender flags.

What struck me, though, was the incredible calm with which Richard

ignored the pests, and he just locked eyes with the men as they talked.

To think that one of the richest men in the world could be beaten by a simple fly, and he was powerless to swat it away. Wow!

I paid for the meal and gave the change back to Richard, having practiced how to react when he would say; “Aww, buddy, just keep it.” But he didn’t and I didn’t, and we moved on.

“So, how did it go?” I said. “Did you get what you wanted?”

“Oh, yes! And more – they were holding out on me for the land near a beach, but they came to their senses.”

“Great. Umm, so it’s getting dark. Should we try to find some hotel rooms or something?”

“Oh,” he said. And then he said the most normal thing; “My hotel is next door.” But coming out of the mouth of a billionaire, I kind of wondered what he meant by “my.”

We walked over to a fairly new, six-story building, and





walked in and past the front desk. The clerk looked up, smiled and said; “Good evening, Mr. Branson.”

Okay, still normal, right?

No, not normal, and the next hour got even more billionaire-not-normal.

On the way up to the room, I asked Richard about the flies.

“Oh, them,” he said. “A dreadful nuisance. Ah, did you see how those poor chaps tried so hard to fight them off, though?”

“Yes, I did. But you didn’t look bothered at all. Some kind of meditation-thing?”

“Not at all. Just focus. In negotiations, keep your eye on what’s important. I gave the deal in front of me 100 percent of my attention, while those men were working some kind of deals with the flies. That’s why I got what I wanted.”

Richard unlocked the door and handed me the key card.



“Use this for the elevator, and drinks at the pool,” he said.

Hmm, maybe I could sleep on a lounge by the pool – I had been hoping Richard would at least go halfies with me on a room, but now I was puzzled.

We walked into the nicest hotel room I have ever been in. It wasn't a suite, but just one, large two-story studio with floor-to-ceiling windows on three sides for an

incredible view of the ocean and coast, a bed, small kitchen and sitting area, and, yeah, a not-so-crappy bathroom.

“Okay, but, um... This is your room, right?” I said.

“Yes, one of my favorites.” He picked up two cell phones from the kitchen counter. “When will they make these bloody things so they won't let you leave the hotel without them?” He checked a few messages on one of the phones. “I tell you, chap, I was really in a fix this





morning, and you saved the day. For that, I am truly grateful.”

“Well, yeah, sure. I...”

“Say, could you give me one more lift?” He straightened some things in a closet, and closed a dresser drawer. “Just down the road...”

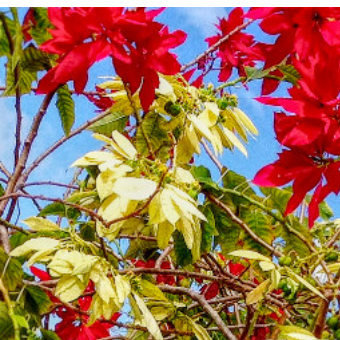
“Yeah, okay, but uhh...”

“Great!” he said as we walked out of the room to the elevator. “I hope you will stay for a while, will you? How about a few weeks? Room service is on me, okay?”

“Umm, sure... I’ll take the couch?”

“Ha! You’re funny. No, you can take the whole room.”

So, yeah, right there, I went from thoughts of sleeping on the beach tonight, to falling into crazy luxury. Wow! And things were about to get even “wow-er!”





We walked down the street to my motorcycle, got on and took off. A few miles down the main road, we took a right, into the Aeropuerto Internacional de Puerto Plata. Richard directed me past the main terminal and down a side street. He showed a guard something on his phone, and she waved us through. We rode past some hangers and were soon out on a tarmac where a huge private jet was glistening in the setting sun.

I parked the motorbike and we got off as the jet came to life. Lights glowed, engines hummed, the funny door-thing with steps emerged and a beautiful woman in a smart uniform stood in the doorway and smiled at us. I guessed this was time for



goodbye.

“Well, farewell, new friend!” Richard said, and then he gave me a quick man-hug. “I am so thankful for all of your help, and really, I am glad we met!”

“I, uh, well thank you! Are you going back to Necker?” That’s





his island, about 400 miles away.

“Yes, the family is expecting me. Wait 'til I tell them about my day – they just won't believe it!”

And then, right there, I just had to say the stupidest thing. I mean, really, I didn't have to say it, but then, I'm stupid.

“Say, so, I was hoping to, uh...”

“What, chap? What were you hoping?”

“Well, I wanted to learn a few things about running a business from the man who knows everything

about...”

“You did, did you?”

And for the first time today, I could see actual disappointment on Richard's face. “Well, I certainly tried,” he said. “Tell you what, I'll whip up a few things and email them to you, okay?”

“Okay... great!” I gave him my card, and, well frankly, I didn't expect anything. I mean, as soon as he gets on that plane, I thought, I am history with-



out a trace, save a few room-service bills that he will never see.

So, there he went. The man with whom I had actually escaped an armed robbery only 10 hours ago, and then we rode on a motorcycle clear across this incredible country, and he just vanished – he stepped up the funny door-thing into a Gulfstream 5, and then he was gone.

I waited and watched the plane roll down the runway and take off, because that is always such a cool thing to see, and it gives you a few more minutes to take the shards of a goodbye and fix them into memories.



ONE WEEK LATER

So, I checked my email this morning and I was shocked to see a message from “VIRGIN-ONE@virgin.not.”

Hello, Mark,

I do hope that I have thanked you sufficiently for your tremendous help last week! Holly had a beautiful birthday and she loves the present you helped get her. (We plan to open the equestrian facility first, in 2019 – will you join us?)

How is the hotel? I remember you didn't have much luggage, so if you borrowed my underwear, that's okay – just keep it though, all right?

Well, here is the business advice I promised you. I hope it serves you well in all your ventures and adventures!

Richard's 7 Rules For a Successful Business

1. Don't make your enemies hate you; make them respect and fear you.
2. Hate and frustration are emotions that serve no purpose and will only cloud your thinking.
3. Leadership is critical to effective employees, and employees are critical to a business.
4. Focus on the deal in front of you and ignore what is not important.
5. Anyone can manage good people, a good manager can repair broken ones.
6. Pick your battles; don't waste your energy trying to train strangers.
7. People value their ability to do quality work more than a paycheck.

Well, I'll be darned. Ol' Sir Richard could not have been more subtle, even if he had whispered everything to me.

MARK GILCHRIST, 2019

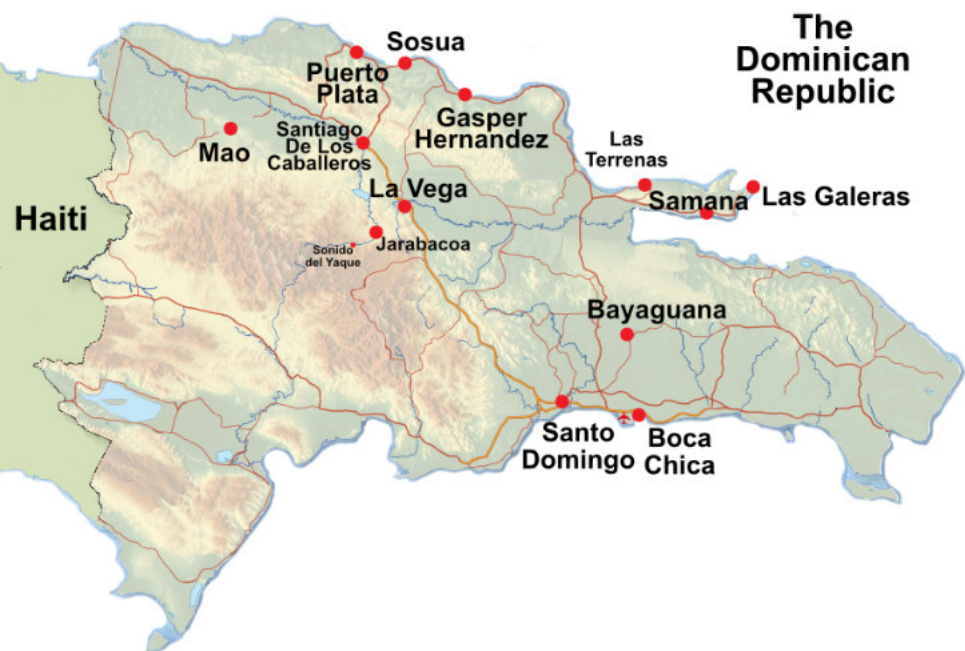


PHOTOGRAPHS

I took all photographs while in the Dominican Republic in early 2014. After landing in Santo Domingo, my first stop was Mao, where some friends from N.C. were building a church. Then, after a quick trip to Haiti, I rented a motorcycle, spent some time in the mountains, wandered along the north shore, and returned to the capital for the flight home.

All photos were taken with an iPhone 5 and a GoPro Hero 2, technology more than a decade old!

Here are the locations mentioned in the story:





- The Limping Devil, or “Diablos Cojuelos” with his whip, (“Vejigas,”) can also symbolize Spaniards who enslaved Dominicans. In

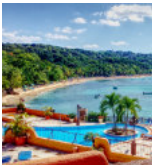
many variations, he is a main feature of the annual Carnaval celebration.



- Carnaval was held in the Dominican Republic before anywhere else in the Americas.



- Guarding a museum in the historic district of Santo Domingo, the capital of the D.R.



- Sosua Beach on the north shore is so popular with tourists, it has become tacky, or is so tacky, it has become popular with tourists...



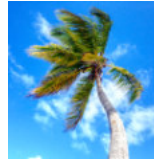
- The main courthouse in La Vega, where Christopher Columbus built a fort in 1492. The original city was one of the largest and most important in the hemisphere until destroyed by a 1562 earthquake.



- Just another beautiful street sign in the capital city Santo Domingo.



- Ready for tourists, in Santo Domingo. The D.R. has been popular with tourists since Columbus, (one of the first...)



- Looking up in Las Galaras, far away on the northeast shore, so I can be far away from most tourists.



- Jesus Christ greets visitors to El Portal Cultural in Santo Domingo.



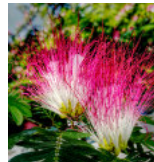
- Fresh fish sold on the streets of Boca Chica, a tourist town on the southern shore just east of the capital.



- Watching tourists walk past her home in La Vega.



- This home, a few blocks from the ocean in Santo Domingo, was used to film a scene in one of The Godfather films, or so my tour guide told me.



- I Googled this flower and saw dozens of names, but none used the obvious term; “paint brush,” so the heck with it.



- It was raining buckets along the north shore, so I stopped in Gasper Hernandez, bought a garbage bag from this guy, made a raincoat and rolled on.



- Bringing in the boats after a day's catch on a small beach near the airport in Santo Domingo.



- In the mountains in the north, I met this man selling fish from a cooler on his motorbike. Nice.



- Hibiscus, a flower we all know and love.



- One of my favorite places, I climbed down hundreds of steps to my room in this valley in Jarabacoa. This kid just rode his horse.



- You can ride a tram to the top of Pico Isabel de Torres to look over Puerto Plata, a beautiful city on the north shore, but since the ride up climbs an awesome, 2,000 feet in just a few miles, I rode my motorcycle.



- A bell tower of the Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación church in Santo Domingo.



- Fritters and minced pork, with toothpicks!



- In Santo Domingo, chess is a spectator sport.



- Stopping on my way down to Sonido Del Yaque in the central mountains.



- Drive-thru service in La Vega.



- I woke up to a nice sunrise and a bustling market outside my hotel in Bayaguana.



- Just one of the many surf shops that line the north shore, a region famous for surfing.



- Golden shrimp, vanilla flower or lollipop plant; take your pick to call this interesting bud I found in Cabarete on the north shore.



- Wandering over the mountains east of the capital, I saw just how diverse and beautiful this amazing country is.



- I had to store my motorcycle in this woman's living room while I stayed in an eco-lodge some 200 feet down a mountainside.



- A bridge across the Rio Yaque del Norte hardly gets used much anymore, I hope.



- Just another, (beautiful,) stop along the north shore.



- Some of the many Devil characters that parade and "terrorize" during Carnival in La Vega and throughout the country every February.



- One of maybe 100 shops, bars and restaurants that line Sosua Beach, a beautifully shaded tourist trap connecting two popular tourist areas.



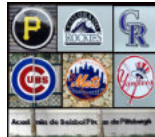
- Water-rescue training in Boca Chica.



- Walking to the airport, to avoid the \$50 cab ride, I wandered way too long on this beautiful beach and nearly missed my flight home.



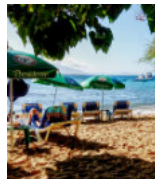
- Baseball is king in the D.R. with kids learning the game and developing a national passion for it at an early age.



- Most U.S. Major League Baseball teams have training camps of some kind in the D.R.



- A massive, Cristo Redentor, (Christ the Redeemer,) statue on Pico Isabel de Torres overlooking Puerto Plata.



- What I really liked about Sosua Beach is that maybe half of it is under shady trees, creating a comfortable atmosphere conducive to relaxing and entertaining in any weather.



- There was not much for me on the entire peninsula east of Santo Domingo, which is lined with luxury resorts, but I would have liked to see Elton John.



- This man in Jarabacoa would not only sell you an orange, but would peel it for you, in a remarkably entertaining way.



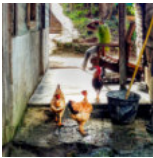
- The most popular name on Google for this flower is Clerodendrum, but I like "shooting star" or "starburst."



- Hand-rolling cigars for tourists in Las Terreras on the Samaná Peninsula.



- A common store display here, this in Jarabacoa, is impeccable, seriously OCD, or just beautiful.



- Down in the Sonido del Yaque valley, where fowl roam free.



- Two pairs of knees, one set of chairs, an old board and a box of dominos, for a beautiful afternoon in Samana.



- Strolling along the many businesses along Playa Sosua.



- Just some of the scenery along Calle Obdulio Jimenez in the central mountains.



- A little community west of La Vega was built in the spirit of the European Alps.



- A monument in Santo Domingo honors Fray Antonio de Montesinos, who fought against slavery on the island.



- Though very much run-down, this was one of my favorite treks, along bridges to islands on Brug Samana Van Leona Park in Samana.



- I stopped for the night in Bayaguana, a crossroads town northeast of the capital.



- The nice thing about just wandering, is you get to just stop anywhere for the night, and I got lucky here, at the Hotel Diana Victor, in the mountains above Jarabacoa. This charming, little place was filled with 20th-Century “antiques” with all things radio, music and telephony.



- Another stop along my trek down the valley to Sonido del Yaque.



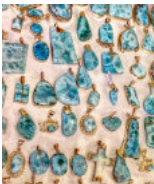
- Just another stop along Hwy 21 out of Santiago De Los Caballeros on my way to the north shore.



- I saw this gentleman in Mao, on the north-west plain, as I reported on a group of men from my hometown, who were building a church there.



- Walking up the streets of Jarabacoa, a beautiful city with enriching character.



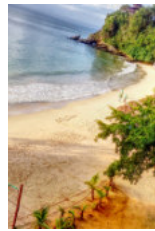
- Larimar stones are found only in the D.R. And, polished and mounted, they can be purchased in many stores on the island.



- Life in the Valley – These gentlemen watch a wandering tourist from inside a store on the Rio Yaque del Norte (river,) in the central mountains.



- Enjoying an ice cream, despite nosy tourists, on Playa Sosua on the north shore.



- Samana Bay, one of the best whale-watching sites in the world, is the “center of tourism” for the island in Jan., Feb. & March as the North Atlantic Humpbacks migrate here to give birth.



- Sometimes you're just lucky, and everything; the sky, trees, sand and an old boat, just fall into place for you, and you take the iconic shot of your entire trip, in 1/1,748th second.