

Driver's Licenses (Advice and Adventure)

I still can't get over how much I love Belize, and do you know why? It's because it is just full of Belizeans.

A few weeks ago Herb and I decided that the time had come to get our Belize driver's licenses. As usual, he had done all the research, so we filled out and presented our paperwork with a stamped affidavit from a medical doctor (assuring the authorities that we were not deranged) to the government worker in the transportation office. He spent considerable time transferring our information into his computer and then transcribing it onto other forms before he sent us two buildings down, where we paid our BZD \$30.00 each and returned with receipts in hand. When we went back to the desk, I expected to take the driving test (for which I had studied) and to get our licenses. "Nooooooo," explained the gentleman with a lovely Caribbean lilt. "This is only for your driving permit. You must come back after a week or more to take the test, and if you pass your test," and at this he looked at me as if he was kind of doubtful, "then you will receive your license."

Herb gently guided me by the elbow to the door. When we were in the car I asked him if we needed to keep the permits with us in order to drive. "No," he said while firing up the car, "We can just continue to drive on our U.S. driver's licenses."

Well...there you have it.

So, last week we went back to get our **real** driver's licenses. When we arrived, there were smiles all around even though the small, tunnel-like offices were filled to overflowing with people. We presented our impressively clean (and hardly used) learner's permits to the man at the desk and were taken (almost immediately) around the corner to another crowded corridor that serves as an office for at least two transportation workers. The walls of this space were lined floor-to-ceiling with boxes and crates brimming with numbered file folders. Although they use computers to hold some information, much work is still recorded and stored on paper.

Both of them stood up from their desks as we entered and gave us their seats. They cheerfully settled us in **their** chairs with our written tests, and proceeded to do their own work standing up--using filing cabinets as desktops. As I scribbled my answers, I could hear one of the workers helping two other men with their car registrations. He spoke Spanish to one, English to the other, and asked questions and made comments to his colleague in Creole. "Wow!" I thought, "This guy can navigate in at least three languages and he probably can help Mayan people too."

Now I want to digress a little to the test I was taking because prepping for it was such fun. The rules were mostly straightforward, but some were peppered with good advice. For example, rule #30 states, "It is important to turn on parking lights whilst on the road when it is rainy, dusty or foggy so that you can be seen by oncoming traffic and from

vehicles appearing from the rear. At all times headlights should be turned on if the visibility is poor. *Doing this would mean "a safe driving for all."*

#40 tells us, "When approaching a curve a driver should dip the headlights at least three to four times, to alert oncoming traffic of his presence. *If all drivers practice such attitude, the accident rate would decrease.*"

#42 tells us, "It is an offence to drive a motor vehicle on a road at night with one headlight, *but apart from being an offence it is most dangerous because if it is the left front lamp which is blown out, oncoming traffic would take it for granted that such vehicle is a motorcycle. Lots of accidents are caused on the road because of such negligence.*"

And finally, although somewhat incomprehensible, #44 shows up on the test. I quote, "*It is dangerous to leave on headlights of a motor vehicle when about to mount the Belize Swing Bridge or when driving over its headlights or fog lights flash on drivers travelling from the opposite direction causing these drivers to immediately have a very poor visibility and would allow both drivers to involve themselves in an accident. Only park lights are to be used.*"

As I waited for the worker to pick up my test I looked around and saw a "bumper sticker" stuck to the side of a filing cabinet. I realized that the most important message of all was emblazoned on this single strip of paper. It read, "Jesus died on the cross for your sins."

How wonderful, in the busyness of this world to be reminded of this most important truth! May we all take comfort from its saving power.

Blessing to you all from Belize!
Markie