

We vacationed in Ireland and Wales May 22 to June 30. Surf to www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Travel/Ireland/Ireland.html and www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Travel/Wales_2010/Wales_2010.html for slide shows, etc.



You've seen plenty of poinsettias so instead of showing you the poinsettia trees in our yard, so to kick-off our **2010 Holiday Letter** here's our peach-colored hibiscus. It never grew more than a foot high in a pot in Massachusetts, but here it took off. It blooms year-round. This photo was taken December 22, 2009.

We ended our 2009 Holiday Letter with the December 19 wedding of our friends Chris & Luidmila. This one begins with **our 2010 Christmas celebrations.**

We had the Wilsons over on **Christmas Eve** for a gift exchange. Ruth and I gave each other one gift each; something the other was known to have wanted. That was a silver necklace charm in the shape of the island of Dominica for Ruth and an underwater case of our digital camera for Dan. We gave a number of gifts to others. To us, nothing says "Christmas present" quite like a fire engine for a little boy. Here's Tyreese with



his. It has voices, horns, sirens and other sounds and an extending ladder and it moves forward and back under its own power. He kept waking up all that night wanting to play with it. And here's a toy our dog wanted but didn't get.



Christmas Day, Ruth made a big turkey dinner for the Wilsons, Nathalie Ferrol, her son Mervin St. Luce & his wife Esther from the village of Paix Bouche. Hildreth Wilson, Esther, and Nathalie each brought a dish. The children present were Chelsi, Sheikana, &



Tyreese Wilson & 1-year-old Miguel St. Luce. We've known Nathalie and Mervin since 1987, and they visited us in MA when Mervin was 13. He & Esther married on our 35th anniversary, March 3, 2008. Miguel was born on December 9 that year. Not everything here is on "Caribbean time! Mervin shared good news. He'll be a doctoral candidate at McGill University in Montreal, with a job. (He got his master's degree in agriculture at the Univ. of the West Indies in Trinidad.) He left for Canada on January 12.

Ruth also made Tyreese a fireman quilt (above) and made Sheikana a bed quilt (below).



All of her quilts are in a slideshow at www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Needlework_Art/album/

Flora There's no end to the edible plants growing wild here in Dominica. A few years ago we made a list of the ones that we knew and could identify. There were some 85



plants on our list. We knew that we didn't know them all, and we still hear of some that grow in places we haven't been to. On December 26 Ruth noticed some men hitting the branches of a tree with long poles. I asked Herry what they were gathering and he went and got one of the fruit and gave it to me. They call it "pois douce" (French, Creole, or Patios for "sweet pea"). Steve Hill says it is *Inga laurina*. It's poisonous.

It's not a pea at all. Here it is (left); and on the right, a sweet pea, a pretty climbing pea with fragrant lavender flowers and toxic (unfortunately) peas. There are also edible pois sauvage (wild peas), "bougasou" in Patois, and a wild pea with a large flower but no useful peas. When you look at any pea flower closely it resembles a bird with fanned out tail, hence the name "peacock". Obscure facts.

The Sea There must have been a fierce storm far out at sea, because on December 28 - 30 our sea surface was calm, and the weather warm and bright, but the sea swells, and thus the waves breaking on the reef, were huge. When the swells hit the rocks in our view they send up huge spray plumes – sea fireworks – and we can hear the surf up on our hill.

Blue Moon on New Year's Eve There was a blue moon on Thursday as New Year's Eve, the first time since 1990 that a blue moon has coincided with New Year's Eve. A blue moon, popularly defined as the second full moon in a calendar month (the *Farmer's Almanac* defines a blue moon as the fourth full moon in a season), occurs only every 2½ years on average. In 2009 full moons occurred on December 2 and December 31. An astronomer, David Reneke, from *Australasian Science* magazine, said it was rare for the event to land on New Year's Eve, and it would not happen again until 2028. Other blue moons will occur August 2 and 31 2012 and July 2 & 31, 2015. Folk singer/songwriter Geoff Bartley (www.geoffbartley.com), a friend of ours, wrote and recorded "Blue Moon on New Year's Eve" several years ago and happened to put a new arrangement of it in on his new CD released in December 2009. I e-mailed him and told him about there being a blue moon this New Year's Eve. He'd had no idea! But he used the fact in his promotional mailings and kindly sent us a CD. Knowing obscure facts can pay off!

Codicil to "Auto Repair in Dominica" (See our 2009 Holiday Letter): It's a good thing that I went to use the car early in the day on **New Year's Eve**, December 31. When I

pressed the brake pedal down it went to the floor! It turns out that the guy who repaired our axle seals reassembled the left rear wheel's brakes wrong. Then he adjusted the brakes to their limit of travel. The result was that the wheel cylinder piston eventually passed its normal travel limit and its hydraulic seal popped out of the cylinder. I figured I'd need to get replacement parts (at the end I didn't) and I made a nail-biting drive (with down-hills, drop-offs, & hairpins) to Portsmouth for repairs.

New Year's Day, January 1 had a typical – for Dominica – event in the morning: The electric power went out. That happens a lot here, and the next most common utility outage is “pipe water”. It turned out that linemen had to repair a line to the house across the road and shut the power off. In the US they'd go house-to-house and tell people, but not here. People here are used to interrupted power and most don't own a computer, etc. The outage lasted about 3 hours. Fortunately, we weren't doing a load of wash (the machine has a memory, though), using the bread-maker (no memory), the computer (except to stream music; the silence alerted us to the outage), or even the TV. I've posted a log of utility and service outages for the year at the end of letter.

The day was cool and rainy – keeping us from doing our traditional New Year's Day version of a Bostonian L Street Brownie plunge into the Atlantic. We also had some good luck. We'd been searching for broken tile to “crazy tile” the north downstairs veranda. Our neighbor James Durban, a Dominican who'd been in Canada the last 32 years and is retiring back here is building his house off our northwest corner. He'd stored materials a year ago and there was a fire. He had tiles for us. They're whole and we didn't have to drive to Roseau (3 hour round-trip) to get them, and whole tiles take about one-third the time to set in as crazy-tiling with broken ones. His misfortune was our good luck.

Jan. Dinner out We planned to celebrate New Year's Eve with dinner at Le Flambeau restaurant in Picard, near Portsmouth. Unfortunately, Ruth had an upset stomach. So, we decided to have our 3rd of the month dinner there instead. (We were married on the 3rd of the month.) But we did it on the Saturday the 2nd, because Le Flambeau had arranged a party for over 100 new Ross University students on the 3rd. Good thing too, because the “pipe water” failed. I drove to Portsmouth twice on the 2nd because earlier I went and had the oil & filter, transmission fluid and engine coolant changed there that morning.

First Ocean Swim of 2010 On the 3rd of January we finally took our first dip in the ocean of the year. The sea looked very calm in Calibishie bay from our veranda, so that afternoon we went to Woodford Hill beach. There, the tide was high and the waves big; so big that they knocked Ruth down three times. The water was saltier than usual too, it seemed to us. But the water was warm. We could see new sand piled on the beach, and the normally sandy bottom had exposed rocks, so it was clear that the prior storm and big waves had deposited fresh bottom sand onto the beach. At least I got to try out the Christmas present Ruth gave me, the waterproof bag for our camera.



The 2nd holiday of 2010 New Year's Day, Friday January 1 was a holiday of course. But Dominica declares additional holidays at the drop of a hat. The Prime Minister designate

(the Prime Minister, effectively reelected) after his party's landslide victory in the December 18 2009 election declared that Monday January 4, 2010 would be Inauguration Day and a national holiday. It also pushed school re-start after the Christmas vacation back a day. But unlike a snow day in the US (which I explained to Chelsi), no day was added at the end of the school year.

Landscaping is progressing Herry and I got 18 fence posts footed into concrete and set on January 5. We need to put in three more and put up the fence and make two gates; one from our southeast corner to the road (the shortcut to Herry & Hildreth's house and to Simeon's shop) and another in the northwest corner to access our compost pit and upper vegetable garden and bean vines. This will be chain link, because it's generally hidden. We're waiting for an estimate on wrought iron fencing for our east (road facing) and north (driveway facing) sides. Then we can let our dogs run in the yard safely. And the only thing left to do will be to finish a sidewalk around the house.

The cashew trees started blooming on January 6. They fill the air with sweet perfume.

We **booked our vacation** (You may ask, "Living in Dominica, a vacation from what?") on January 9. We're planning to spend 34 days in Ireland and 5 days in Wales. Also on January 9, we saw "**Bling-Bling**". (Refer to our 2009 Holiday Letter at www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Tanner_Family/Documents/Holiday_Letter_2009.pdf) She escaped her cruel owners for a bit and she naturally ran right to our house for some love & kindness.

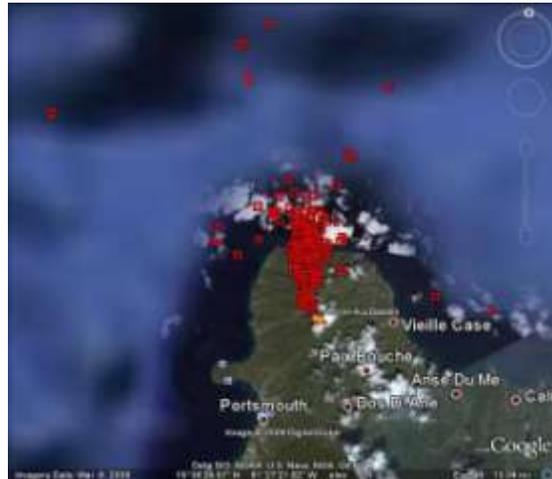
We love it when a fisherman comes up the road with **lobster** to sell. Ruth had planned a fish dinner on January 11, but that sure changed in a hurry. He had 6¼ pounds at EC\$10 (US\$3.72) per pound. But he had no other customer, it was getting dark, and he was a long way from home & he had no refrigeration. We got the lot for EC\$50. We cooked them all, had with our garden lima beans & French fries, and put aside the meat from the ones we didn't eat for a yummy lobster salad lunch later.

Eating well and healthily here costs so little! This past week I purchased four *bousse* (delicious white flesh fish, known as "old wife" on some islands) enough for three dinners, and had them cleaned for EC\$7 (US\$2.60). We were given as many pink grapefruit as I could carry in two shopping bags, and a "hand" each of plantain and bananas, and a chicken. We bought two large shopping bags of oranges for EC\$20 (US\$7.44).

Herry and I **fenced half the yard** on January 12. Those were the unseen south and west sides, using chain link to keep our dogs in and the neighborhood goats, dogs, and chickens out. Also, I got an estimate to have the scenic north (driveway) and east (road) side walls we made topped by wrought iron fencing within two weeks. The estimate came in at half what those gonifs at Dragon estimated for a PVC picket fence after tripling the salesperson's quote. (Gonif is a Hebrew/Yiddish word. A gonif operates on the shadowy borders of illegality and/or impropriety, and gets away with it.)

There was a horrible **earthquake in Haiti** on January 12 and we received numerous messages from people concerned about us. But we're not in the Dominican Republic, which shares the northwest Caribbean island of Hispaniola with Haiti. We're far to the south and east in the Eastern Caribbean, over 1200km (750 mi) away in Dominica. We didn't even feel that quake.

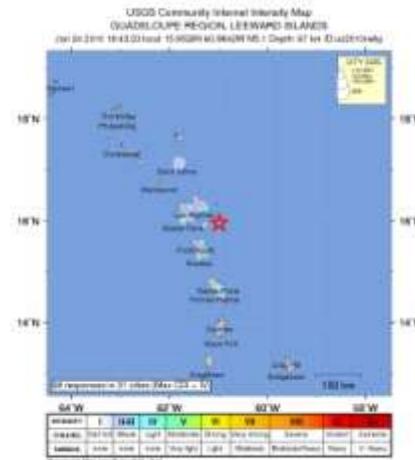
We felt an earthquake here last year. We started following the on-line public seismic network, which wrote *“December 2009 was an active month in the vicinity of Morne Aux Diabes. Our new network recorded more than 300 seismic events, 174 of which were locatable. Four were tectonic and 170 were volcano related.”* Calibishie, where we live is just above the word “Google” in the map’s lower right corner. Before we bought our land here, we were tempted by a plot with a spectacular view in Capuchin, which is obscured on the map by all that red!



We felt another on Sunday, January 24:

According to the Public Seismic Network:
Magnitude 5.1 EARTHQUAKE -

GUADELOUPE REGION, 2010 January 24 22:43:23 UTC Location 15.953°N, 60.984°W 80 km (50 miles) E of BASSE-TERRE, Guadeloupe 85 km (55 miles) NNE of ROSEAU, Dominica Depth 67.9 km (42.2 miles) Quake was felt in Portsmouth and Calibishie. Dominica is the island just below the star on the map. We’re on Dominica’s northeast coast in Calibishie.



A depressing afterthought about the Haiti quake: Most Dominicans believe that the quake is God’s wrath on Haitians for practicing Voodoo. (They didn’t get the idea from Pat Robertson.) No matter that the Catholic Archbishop of Haiti, aid workers, and innocent children were killed. No matter that there haven’t been quakes in countries where Christians are killed by another religious majority. No matter that Christianity was the religion forced on slaves brought to Haiti and Voodoo is a manifestation of African religion.

I took **two pretty pictures** moments apart on our veranda on January 21:



Also the same day we received more **free medical care**, this time for Ruth. She had some gastric distress, not unusual since her 2003 gall bladder removal. The hospital in Marigot was quickest and closest. She was seen by the nurse immediately, but had to wait a bit over 2 hours to see the doctor – only because there had been a school bus accident and he had to see six children and the driver (no serious injuries) first. Ruth received treatment and four prescriptions for free. We had to purchase a 5th Rx at a pharmacy, but only because the hospital’s pharmacy was out of it. It cost the equivalent of about US\$5. This happened one year to the day after Barak Obama’s first full day in office as President. The US doesn’t even have the crappy sausage factory health care bill that was pending, and (this could only happen in the USA!) Massachusetts elected a new senator whose campaign promise was to kill any health care bill.

Herry & I finished our chain link fence on January 26. On the 27th Walt James and his crew came to install the **decorative fence and gates** he’d made for us at less than half of



what a vinyl fence from Dragon would have cost. The fence keeps our dogs in and the local dogs & goats out. It was completed the 28th. That’s our good neighbor James Durban’s house behind them up our driveway. He’s from our village of Calibishie but lived in Canada the last 30 years and is now retiring “back home”. He’ll build apartments atop his house for his children & their families to visit. He’s a great neighbor.

We saw our friend Simon on February 2 and received **some great news**: No one in his immediate family was killed or hurt in the Haiti quake. Simon was a laborer on our house and also did some work for us afterwards. He has auto maintenance skills and I was able to refer him to a job here. He’s been working to bring his wife here.

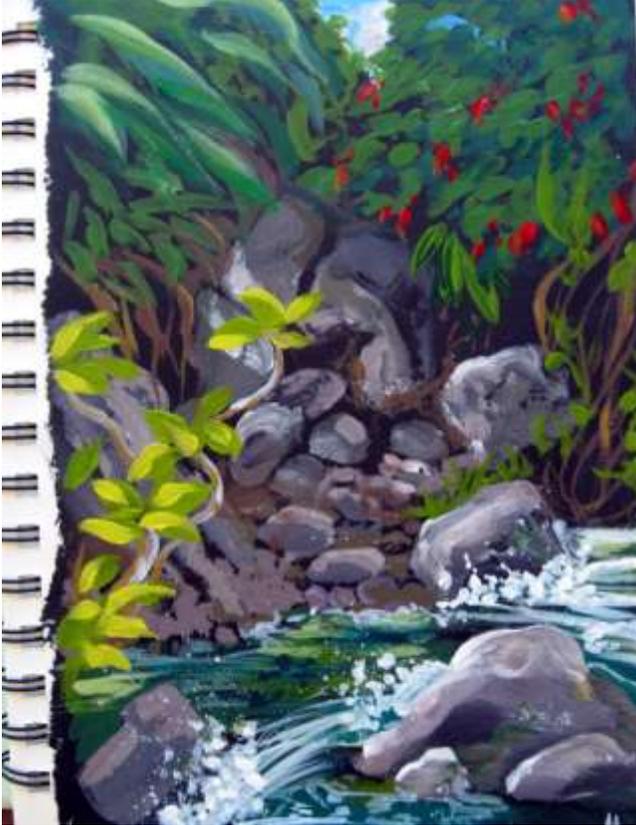
Mathilda arrived for her visit on February 4. On February 7 she and Ruth and I went out for brunch to River



Rush www.river-rush.com for my 69th birthday, which was on Monday, February 8. While we were there Mathilda made a nice “sketch” of some of its scenery.



Back at home we had some birthday cake for me and for Sheikana’s 9th birthday belatedly and that night the girls “let” me watch the Super Bowl. I’d thought the Colts would win, but I have to give the Saints credit for a great victory. My New Orleans relatives (numerous cousins) certainly were pleased. Mathilda’s sketch is below.



We also took Mathilda exploring during her visit. We went to see the garden at Silks and to tour the Carib Territory one day. I was fortunate to get this



shot of a hummingbird. Another day at Napier's Beach Mathilda got some macro close-ups of very tiny



hermit crabs. They sure are cute! Of course, they find every tiny auger shell, preventing Ruth from using them in the jewelry she likes to make. Slide shows: www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Silks for Silks and www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Carib_Territory

Mathilda also took my new favorite shot of Ruth. This is at Napier's White Sand Beach, with the Red Rocks behind her.

A little story about what I call the "**Dominican difference**": Here in the 3rd world the products that China (mostly) sells are inferior in grade – but affordable to most. Ruth noticed a small leak in our powder room coming from the angle valve that feeds the toilet tank. I tried to tighten it a bit, and the leak became a stream.



Now, there's no other shut-off other than the main. So I called a local plumber. [My favorite *New Yorker* cartoon shows a man in a 3-piece suit going up the walk to his house and seeing a plumber's panel truck in his driveway. The caption has him saying "Please God, let her be having an affair".] I wondered what the plumber would find and charge

us. He came, found the problem – the angle valve had a crack – and charged me EC\$40. That’s US\$14.92 and it included both his labor and the price of a new valve. The Dominican difference: Shoddy imported products and very cheap labor, even skilled.

“**Dominican Snow**” We awoke to what seemed a hazy sky on February 12, and then noticed that there was a heavy coating of white dust everywhere. We suspected it could be volcanic ash, so I checked the web.



Sure enough, the ash dome on the Montserrat volcano of 1995 has blown 9 miles into the air about 12 hours earlier and some 80 miles away. Here it is on a car in the next yard. Video (30 sec., by Mathilda): www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Videos/2010_02_12_volcanic_ash.AVI.

Also that day we went to Brenner’s Falls and to the Cold Soufriere. A video of the latter is at www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Videos/2010_02_12_Cold_Soufriere.AVI. (8 sec.) Here’s a still photo of the falls. For a slide show of Brenner’s Falls, surf to www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Brenner_Falls/.



For **Carnival** Ruth, Mathilda and I and Chelsi went to Roseau we took in Carnival activities for two days and a night, and also strolled to the Botanical gardens and drove up to **Trafalgar and Victoria Falls**. There’s a Carnival slide show at www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/2010_Carnival. Carnival was great! And there’s a slide show of Trafalgar & Victoria Falls at www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Trafalgar_and_Victoria_Falls/. And a slide show of the Botanical Gardens is at www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Botanical_Gardens/.

Saturday, February 20 was a special surprise day for Mathilda. Her best friend and former



college roommate Sarah arrived to stay until the day (March 4) that Mathilda will depart. Her arrival was a secret we & lots of our friends in the village kept carefully. Ruth



snapped this photo as Mathilda first glimpsed Sarah. The next day we went to Batibou Beach along with our friend and neighbor Seron.

On February 24, we drove them around as much of Dominica as we could cover in a day.



That included the Emerald Pool, where I got this shot of three monkeys.

March 1 was a red-letter day: They began to grade our 50-year old road in prep to a long-overdue, much needed re-paving.



Our 37th wedding anniversary was on Wednesday, March 3.



We celebrated by taking Mathilda and her friend Sarah out to dinner with us at Beau Rive. Another guest watched us dine, but he dined on insects who ventured to near to him. (Surf to www.beaurive.com.) We had tomato tart appetizers, coconut chicken with breadfruit garnish entrée (Mathilda, a vegetarian had a veggie plate) and fruit crumble with ice cream dessert and coffee



& tea. The ambience was wonderful, with soft jazz playing and jasmine scent occasionally wafting through. Mathilda & Sarah departed Dominica the next day.

Another great thing about our anniversary date: I used the “free” (Not really free, one must purchase an unneeded state module.) TurboTax on-line to file our US income taxes electronically using the info in mail forwarded to us by our best friends Roger & Rita. It took only a few minutes and we receive as a refund every cent that had been withheld from Ruth’s retirement pay (none had been withheld from my Social Security payments). That’s right: *For the first time in our lives we paid not one red cent to the US or any state in taxes!* And, there’s no property tax here, and no Dominica income tax for us. The only tax we paid is the value-added tax (VAT) that everyone here pays on their utility bills and store-purchased goods (which we minimize by buying produce in the village). We didn’t pay for heating oil or have to shovel snow either. Retired life in Dominica is great!

The same day I also learned how to **enable streaming videos** of rights-protected stuff to a non-US location. Go to www.anchorfree.com and download the free HotSpot program. It provides a virtual private network (VPN) connection making your PC appear to be US-based. Hello NBA, NFL, & MLB games, decent TV shows and Netflix!



Mathilda made a mural on a space we’d reserved on our veranda wall for her to do that. It is the Emerald Pool, with her own framing of chenille, anthurium, heliconia and hibiscus with a hummingbird. She’ll add lizards & frogs on another visit. We’ve seen hummingbirds fooled by it! She also made a mural of Bob Marley with the Dominican & Jamaican flags for our friend & neighbor Seron.



We celebrated **TS’s 7th birthday** a day early on Sunday, March 7. Ruth made a cake and



we gave him a “jungle dominos” set featuring animal and numerals instead of spots that Mathilda had gotten for him in New York City.

We’d been having a **drought**, 33 days without rain. It was great for Mathilda’s visit, not but for farmers



& people on rainwater. Dominica has more water than other islands and was sending water to St. Lucia. On March 8 the drought appeared to break, but it was only a tease.

As of March 14, we were back on drought. We went to Paix Bouche to celebrate our friend Nathalie's 50th birthday, actually on March 15. We've known Nathalie since 1987 and she and her oldest son Mervin, then 13, once visited our former home in Westboro MA. Mervin and Esther married on our 34th wedding anniversary and have a little boy, Miguel, 15 months old, now. Mervin is currently earning a doctorate in Montreal. Nathalie's 2nd and 3rd boys Greg and Javon live in NY City and are friends of our daughter Mathilda. On Monday, the 22nd and later we finally got significant rainfall.

We added **Sea Fans Apartment** to the Calibishie Coast web site on March 15. Surf to www.calibishiecoast.com/en/wheretostay.htm.

We saw **mother & calf humpback whales jumping** on March 18. We watched from our veranda. Cool! It looked like this. (I nearly wrote "We saw whales jumping from our veranda." Then you could ask how they got onto our veranda in the first place. The photo is stock, from the Web. I was not quick enough to grab our camera & anyhow its telephoto isn't that powerful. But it looked exactly like the photo because the ocean was just as calm and flat that day. Ruth spotted them as we lunched.



Simeon's 90th birthday was Saturday March 20. (Last year everyone, including Simeon, thought his birthday was March 21, but he took a look at his passport.) As usual, Ruth made a cake for him. Fifty or more relatives came by on Sunday, so we gave him his card and cake on Monday. His daughter and her progeny will come from Guadeloupe on Easter Monday to also celebrate his birthday, and those children will enjoy the cake. Simeon is amazing! He hurt his knee and put WD40 on it!

While the health care bill was in partisan debate in the USA, I again became the beneficiary of the **free health care system in Dominica**. An article on MSNBC.com told about potential side effects (muscle loss, liver &/or kidney problems) associated with the 80mg daily dose of Zocor that I take to maintain a healthy LDL cholesterol level. I contacted a doctor friend who advised me to cut my dosage to 40mg and get a fasting full lipid blood test. It turns out that I can get that test any Monday, in Marigot a half hour drive away, for free.

We saw **Fluffy** again after about 6 months when he came flying and joyously dancing into our house on March 22. He'd been held captive in an act of imagined spite by his owners (who wrongly believe we had anything to do with their arrests on drug charges) since the past September. He'd again been badly neglected and we again spent hours removing mats in his coat using scissors, and bathed him. His owner is mystified why Fluffy runs from him and why he comes to us and our house. We've tried to tell him about kindness, but he wishes not to hear.

From our veranda on March 28 I saw a **sperm whale** in the Atlantic. Ruth missed seeing it because her back was to the sea. They're easy to spot because of their distinctive 45° blow spout. It looked like this image from the Web. (Again, no time to grab the camera, and anyhow, our telephoto isn't that long.) It was swimming alone, heading west, towards Dominica's Caribbean coast, which is where the females and calves stay year-round. This is the time (March-June) that the bulls come through the area to mate. A few hours later Hildreth & I saw another, and again unfortunately Ruth had her back to the sea at the instant.



We've been healthy here, losing fat and gaining muscle, eating local foods. So much of the food in the US is fattening, heart-unhealthy crap loaded with sugar, saturated fats and trans-fats, and sodium. And the new scandal is that much of it is counterfeit; not really what it is claimed to be, from where it's said to be from, truly organic, etc. Here's a vision of what Michelangelo's "David" would look like on American fast food.

A **drought** that began in January **ended** with a vengeance on April 9. We'd never seen it so dry here, and some published accounts called this the driest spell since 1980. The farmers took it on the chin, many losing up to 60% of their income. There was always sufficient water for domestic consumption in the public "pipe water" supply due to at least mist and clouds trapped in Dominica's mountains, but the rivers were low and there was lots of cracked earth and blowing dust. Folks on rain-tank water had been trucking their supply in – at considerable cost – for about two months.

Prompted by 90-year-old Simeon's longing reminiscence of periwinkles (a/k/a *vieux*, **fresh-water snails**) I went to the Chaudiere River on April 16 to gather some. At one spot they were in a frenzy (as much of a frenzy as snails get into) and were clustered three or four deep – I raked them out of the water onto the flat top of the rock with both hands. On the way home I stopped at Gus's store and weighed them. I'd gathered 7 pounds! Simeon only took two ladles of them for broth. By the way, he says that local doctors used to prescribe that broth for nursing mothers. I gave the rest to Hildreth.



(Note: This is a story that I'm entering as it develops, so please excuse changes in tense.) On April 19 in the morning we heard noise from the bay. There were roadblocks and a **demonstration** going on. Five spots in main road (near the Black Pearl Snackette, by the post office, by the bus stop, by the bridge between the Calibishie Ridge and John the Baptist Ridge roads, and between the Savanne Paille and Windblow roads) and the end of the John the Baptist Ridge road had barricades, leaving no passage whatsoever through Calibishie to the airport or between Portsmouth & Marigot. For many that was serious, but there was a mob aspect too, and rum sales near the barricades made it worse. Police were on the scene and also a SAT Telecom cameraman, and it was on local news. Residents were concerned about a number of issues, among them roads, the condition of the government elementary school building and the health centre roof leaking. The road wasn't just a bumpy or tricky passage for vehicles. The footing was bad and older people and schoolchildren were falling. Three government ministers showed up that night and the roadblocks were mostly cleared

away, leaving two partial blockages where only one car at a time could pass. On Thursday, April 22 the Prime Minister came to Calibishie and promised the Village Council EC\$250,000 (US\$92,250) that it could allocate any way it saw fit. It seems that the money will be spent primarily on the road, as far as it goes. Work was projected to start on April 30 and could take 6 months or more to complete. On Friday April 23 I



heard word in the village that EC\$200K (US\$73,800), not EC\$250K was promised. And, that people were upset with the Village Council accepting that amount and deciding how it will be spent without holding a public meeting. **Road repair** began on Friday, April 30 “tarrish” for the road base was dumped along the roadside, and on Tuesday, May 4 (the 3rd was the first Monday in May, the May Day holiday) work began to clear the road’s gutters. On Friday, May 07 they began to pour concrete, just above our property’s southern border. One contractor, Raleigh Davis, will our concrete on the steep parts down to the village. Another contractor, Ashley (a/k/a “Ugly”) will pour concrete on the steep hills up above. The less steep parts will get macadam placed by the Dominica Public Works Department.

On Friday, April 23 Ruth and I were again treated to see **frolicking humpback whales** from our veranda. Quite a show! One of the pair stayed stationary and slapped the sea with its tail flukes fifteen times. It looked like this photo from the web.



We used **private medical care** here for the first time on April 27. We won’t go into details, but noted the following: In this country where medical care is free one can also go see a private physician. One phone call got us an immediate at-our-convenience walk-in appointment. The doctor treated us both for a charge of EC\$150 (US\$55.35) and our prescriptions cost EC\$33 (US\$12.18). Had we been in the USA we’d have had to wait to see the doctor and pay co-payments of US\$25 each and meet a prescriptions deductible. What’s more, our Blue Cross/Blue Shield coverage reimburses us for foreign medical visits and prescriptions. So, it’s cheaper and easier here to see a doctor and obtain medicine even without repayment.

Thursday, April 29 saw the **first paying guest at our Sea Fans Apartment**. Merritt & Elizabeth Wallick have purchased some land up Calibishie Ridge Road. In fact, had we been able to make the purchase we’d attempted to in 2003, they’d have become our neighbors. Merritt was here, alone, only four days, to plan their house placement. He had a GPS device and we learned our altitude. I’d been estimating we were 150 feet above the bay, but we’re at 202 feet.

Big news for the first week in May: **There’s now an ATM in Calibishie!** There are several here others in Dominica, but this one’s the first near us. Here’s store owner Alford Matthew next to it. Before, one had to go to either a half hour’s drive from Calibishie to Marigot or Portsmouth to find an ATM. And then it might not work. The one at the Marigot credit union was frequently off-line and would not dispense cash, and the fallback was to pay to get into the airport about 5 minute’s drive away and use the ATM there. But we wanted to be at the Marigot credit union in order to deposit to our



checking account there. And, for safety, to not carry much cash here or keep much at home. In and near Roseau there are also several ATMs but that's nearly an hour and a half's drive each way. One doesn't want to keep large amounts of funds in these uninsured accounts here. Many Americans write themselves checks on US banks and deposit them for budget money, but the checks take 4 weeks to clear through the commercial banks in Portsmouth or Roseau (and it is hard to qualify to have an account with them) and they take 6 weeks to clear through a credit union. And they charge you to handle the check and don't give the full 2.71 to 1 exchange rate. We found a great solution: Get a Schwab account. The required brokerage account does not have to be used or even hold any money. You get a linked on-line FDIC insured checking account that's completely free. You can withdraw local currency from any ATM displaying a VISA logo. You get the full exchange rate and interest and monthly reimbursement of any fees charged by the ATM. The only limit is on the withdrawal amount daily, but we got around that by having three such accounts, one for each of us and one joint. . The ATM at Portsmouth gave once me a receipt for an EC\$1000 withdrawal, but no cash. The bank said it would take a month to check for the error, but one phone call to Schwab got the funds replaced into my account immediately.

It took until late July before the Calibishie ATM was hooked and functioning, though.

On Friday, May 7, we had an **earth tremor** lasting about 10 seconds at 7:12PM. According to the Public Seismic Network, it was east of Guadeloupe, magnitude 5.1, 14 km (9.4 mi) deep, at 16°22'N, 60°59'W. (Dominica lies 15°25'N and 61°20'W.)

On Saturday, May 8, **Ruth left for the US to get a medical diagnosis.** On Monday the 10th we learned to our great relief that **it was nothing serious**, only IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) acting up, probably as a result of her gallbladder removal. So, she can have fun with friends Roger & Rita, driving around in the Miata, and shopping, etc until she meets me at JFK Airport on May 21 and we depart for our vacation in Ireland & Wales.

On May 13 I **cut the cord with Facebook.** One only needs real friends who send actual e-mail, write letters, or call. One doesn't need to waste time. One needs some privacy.

I left for the US on May 20, stayed overnight in NY City and met Ruth at JFK Airport on May 21 to leave for Ireland. We arrived in Ireland on May 22 and stayed until June 21, when we left for a week in Wales at *Drwys y Coed*, the B&B of our good friends Tom & Jane Bown. We



returned to Ireland on June 28 and flew back to JFK on June 30, arriving July 1. We stayed a night at my cousin Bruce's and his wife Linda's lovely restored farmhouse in Asbury NJ (not Asbury Park: for a slide show surf to www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Merrill_Creek/) and then visited

our friends Roger and Rita in Toms River NJ for 2 nights. We flew back to Dominica via San Juan PR with a necessary overnight stay there. We got home to Calibishie on July 4.

The badly-eroded lower part of our road had been repaired with new concrete. It's nice now. Another new thing is that we now have a FedEx sub-office in the village.

The "Thanks of a Grateful Nation": I visited the Brick NJ VA Clinic while in NJ in order to get a blood cholesterol test so that a physician friend who works part-time for the VA could access the results on-line and re-prescribe medication I've been using for years. At the VA Clinic in Worcester MA I used to be able to walk-in and get the test; but not in NJ. Despite my telling the doctor – who wore a head-scarf – why I could not be there

except for the one day, she insisted that I had to get an order for the test on another day, wait a week for, and then come back a week later to get the results. I kept my friend's identity from her inquisitions. My doctor friend was appalled. I'm a Navy veteran with a service-connected disability. The VA, in my opinion, sucks.

Excellent Veterinary Service: Inexpensive, too – costing only about US\$60. In mid-July we figured out why Ranger (10½ years old at the time) sometimes did not eat. His teeth and gums were hurting him. Despite Ruth's care for him, she brushes our dogs' teeth at least weekly, he had developed periodontal disease. He had to have 8 teeth removed; all 4 of his small front upper ones, 2 of his small lower ones, and one behind each of his lower canines. Dr. Reginald Thomas, who is also Dominica's Director of Veterinary Services for the Ministry of Agriculture and who graciously licensed Ranger and Lyla for import to Dominica gratis, did the work at his office in Roseau. Ranger is fine now and no longer suffering oral pain.

On July 29 **Mathilda began her new career.** She left Chilmark Pottery on Martha's Vineyard headed for Asheville NC where she'll establish an art business. Pete, her boyfriend, will join her when the pending sale of his Brooklyn NY property is complete.

On August 5 our friend Hildreth's & Herry's daughter Sherri in Antigua gave them their 1st grandchild an 8+ lb baby boy that she named Dante.

Warranty? What's that? On April 28 I bought a PUR faucet-mount water filter at James' Store opposite Ross University outside Portsmouth. At EC\$170 for it and an extra filter cartridge, I paid the equivalent of US\$63, about 2½ times what the price would be in the US. We used it for two weeks, and then Ruth left for the US. We returned on July 4 and one week later, on July 11, the plastic filter split open and began to spray water around the kitchen. PUR is a Proctor and Gamble company, and the box insert stated that the product had a 1-year warranty. I returned it to the store, which had no replacement and would not give me my money back. They told me that the proprietor had bought it at retail on St. Martin and the most he could do is return it to the retail store there when he next makes a trip there, and if the store gives him a replacement or his money back, he'd call me – fat chance. So I tried contacting P&G via its web site; not an easy thing to do. Incidentally, the PUR package insert also stated that one could register for the warranty via the web site, but that turns out to be impossible; P&G later told me so. (That begs the question why did they not post a notice rather than just letting those that tried receive 404 file not found.) P&G Company's response to my e-mail was a meaningless PR statement to the effect that they were sorry we had a bad experience and that other customers were satisfied. It took me sever e-mail exchanges with the same PR person before I could get her to understand that we don't live in the US and thus could not return it to the store. Then she sent an e-mail instructing me to contact the P&G office in my country, and that I could find it on the P&G web site. She should have checked first herself: Not only is there no P&G office in Dominica, there is none in any country with a name beginning with the letter D. I wrote back informing her that P&G had been to Dominica once, when it purchased the local Refresh Soap Company and promptly shut it down laying off all 100 employees; a major blow to this small, poor nation of 70,000. (I wrote to P&G about it at the time but never received a reply.) P&G currently makes Refresh elsewhere and markets it as a Palmolive sub-brand. I also scanned and sent her my James' Store receipt and an explanation of how to convert EC\$ to US\$. She responded by offering, as a one-time gesture, within two weeks, to send coupons for two replacements to a US address if

I could give her one. I had her send the coupons to Roger & Rita. They'll get and send us a metal replacement unit. We'll have to pay postage, wait, go to the customs office, and pay duty. Some warranty! In my opinion, P&G is a typical arrogant US corporation. The US Supreme Court has ruled that it has "free speech" can make unlimited political donations, the same as a person!

Critters: We live in the tropics and people often write asking about what critters we get in the house. Field mice may enter but can be trapped or poisoned. Locals leave out a dish of flour mixed with cement. When a mouse eats it and then drinks it forms concrete in its digestive tract and the mouse dies. The same would be true of a rat, if we had any. The main thing is to ensure never to leave edible trash around and to cover & protect all food or keep it in the refrigerator or freezer. We put all vegetable matter trash into a pit (it does not smell and eventually composts). We put glass & metal trash out for collection, after washing it. We burn all burnable trash. Animal matter trash gets fed to local dogs (not ours) or tossed into the sea (if it's fish). Cockroaches will become a problem unless you're scrupulously clean and take the aforementioned precautions regarding anything edible. In addition you can put roach poison in remote corners. But the best protection against all insects and spiders too is simply to buy a box of borax and sprinkle it around in the backs of cabinets, drawers and shelves. It destroys their exoskeletons. The borax is also useful as a household cleanser and laundry booster. The attic must be sealed or bats will roost in it. One even took to roosting behind one of our oil paintings. We released it several times and covered the back of the painting it had been cling to with plastic, but it liked the place and returned, clinging to the wall instead. I had to kill it – a shame because it would eat insects at night. We didn't need guano on our wall. Geckos come in and crawl on the walls or ceilings but they are cute, harmless, never come into contact, and eat bugs. Spiders eat bugs too, but aren't cute and I step on the few that enter. No, we don't have snakes indoors. Dominica has only non-poisonous species and they are rarely even seen, unless you raise chicks. Land crabs may enter the house and will take refuge in dark corners behind things. They can be swept out. One became stuck behind the propane tanks in our garage and expired. I smelled it and brushed it out. Flies can be kept away by wiping countertops down with bleach. Fans and/or the trade wind keep mosquitoes away. We have a mosquito net we don't bother to use and don't need or even have screens. We treat our dogs against fleas, ticks and internal parasites. The most important against the latter is to segregate our dogs from local ones, because they always have parasites. And, we inspect our dogs daily when we comb them. The only other living things that we battle against are mold & mildew. Things must be dusted, washed and/or kept perfectly dry. Any items containing flour must be kept in the refrigerator. We spray around our foundation against ants and never leave food, including sugar, out. Our house is concrete block, otherwise we'd have to guard against termites too – a near impossibility here. As to garden pests: we have to spray against caterpillars and put out slug traps. Now you know.

Home Improvements: The concrete walk around the house is finished. We replaced a rotting wooden "window" in our laundry room with glass blocks that admit light and keep the laundry room dry. All of the decorative/protective ironwork is done, and painted with proper priming so that the enamel won't flake off. We're blocking up the south-facing end of the kitchen veranda landing so that the floor won't get wet when it rains.

We've done touch-up on painting where projects had messed things up a bit. We've added sturdy shutters that swing up.

Fri 13Aug – which would have been my mother's 91st birthday – began a **bad string of days for infrastructure** here. We had a huge lightning strike (lightning rods would not have helped us because the strike was on the power lines, not our house). Of course, the power company accepts no responsibility, calling it an "act of God". But they have no lightning arrestors on the lines. "God helps those who help themselves," I'll tell them if they decline my damage claim.

Anyhow, on 13Aug we lost electrical power for about an hour. But more importantly, the surge blew out the USB header on my PC's motherboard, the ADSL Internet modem, and my wireless router. I took my modem to Portsmouth on Mon 16Aug to have it tested at the phone company office, but they told me no technician was there and that one would be at our house the next day. It took the damn serviceman from the phone company until Wed 18Aug to show up & replace our modem.

I also spent 6 hours at the PC repair shop on Sat 14Aug. Why 6 hours? Because the guy installed a new motherboard and Windows 7 (I never had any problems with Vista, or XP for that matter) and Office 2007. I'd told him that I had Office 2003. He should have done an upgrade, which would have preserved my e-mails, appointments, and most importantly, my contacts. But no. He did a "clean install" which wiped them all out! His reasoning was that most Dominicans don't bother to keep files and use web-based mail.

I know, I know. I used to be a storage & backup analyst. I had two backups but both failed. I tried to backup my contacts from my PDA only to learn that it only had names and phone numbers, no e-dresses on it. I next tried Mozy, which I'd signed up for in April 2008. I couldn't log in. I contacted Mozy and was told that my account had expired in April 2010 and had been deleted! Mozy never pointed that out at sign-up and sent no reminder or expiration warning. Mozy is an EMC company.

The work on the PC cost me EC\$750 (US\$278). Then it didn't turn on reliably and I also couldn't get sound out of it, and the HDMI interface connection to our TV shows my monitor background and nothing else (not even the icons on it). The modem cost EC\$170 (US\$63). A wireless router here costs about EC\$200 (US\$76). And what's the cost of losing all my contacts, etc? I took the PC back to the shop. More time, more gas... The boot-up problem was due to a motherboard that was too slow for my CPU. We changed it. The sound problem was connections. We fixed that too. Still no video feed or sound out of the TV/FM card. And, because we don't print often it took another 10 days before we realized that the lightning also fried our printer's USB interface. At the least, we'll spend US\$32 and wait 6 months until our friends can bring one with them on a visit.

I suppose we're fortunate. Most neighbors lost TVs (one lost 3 of them!) and appliances to the strike surge. It was worse the higher up the hill one goes, of course.

The huge amount of rainfall on the 13th at first made the pipe water muddy. Then the intake became clogged, cutting off the pipe water completely. It came on again on Sun 15Aug then went off again and came back on again for a short time Tue 17Aug. Then it went off again and returned on Wed 18Aug.

Then Thu 19 Aug the phone and Internet went down all the way from Calibishie to Wesley (the equivalent of NY – Wash DC).

Ruth's birthday was August 21. We had a great day. Our friends Dawn and Louise brought flowers. 90-year-old Simeon came over with a bottle of Ginger wine. I took Ruth, Dawn & Louise to the home of a lady who raises garden flowers so that Ruth could choose her own birthday presents. We had lobster salad for dinner. We spoke with Mathilda on the phone and learned she'd move into a nice rented house the very next day.

Ruth completed a **neat little wall-hanging quilt she calls**



"Through MY Window" in late August. Also the last weekend in August is always the Calibishie Village Festival. **Chelsi made a bunny cake** for the food fair exhibit. She won a prize for it. I was going to enter the knock-out domino tournament but it turned rainy and the tournament



was cancelled. We called **Mathilda and learned that she had entered the Miller Lite Rock Girls beauty pageant and won the round** she was in. She'll be a 2011 Miller Lite calendar girl. If she wins a round among the 12 calendar girls she'll also win \$1000.

Hurricane Igor slammed Bermuda Sunday, September 19. No closer than 500 miles from Dominica, it made **huge surf** on Wednesday and Thursday, September 15-16 making ocean bathing impossible and washing over our main village road along Calibishie Bay. It hit the Dominican Republic and received concerned e-mail messages from several friends who still confuse the island of Hispaniola that the Dominican Republic and Haiti share with Dominica where we live some 700 miles away to the southeast.

On Saturday, September 18 we got some wonderful news: Our best friends Roger and Rita are coming here for a 2-week visit. They'll arrive on January 11. We're delighted.

We got a kitten on September 29. She weighed 11 ounces. She disappeared while we ate dinner until Ruth found her curled up in the pantry in the vacuum cleaner box! Lyla is curious and jealous about "Coco" but Ranger is totally blasé. The next day we gave Coco a bath.



She had hundreds of fleas. Coco took her bath in stride, as if she knew we were helping her. The shampoo killed the fleas, but we spent a long time picking them out of her fur using tweezers and brushing her to get dead fleas from her dark fur to her white patches or tummy so that



we could pick them off her. The bath exhausted her and she curled up in a bowl for a nap. She bonded to us in about 4 days. By the end of a week she knew the house well, followed us around and gained 5 ounces to weigh in at exactly one pound. By the end of a second week, Coco had gained another 6 ounces;



doubling her weight! Here's a link to a 22-second video of her playing: http://www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/2010_10_02_Coco_playing.AVI.

We're invited to another wedding. Earlier in this letter we mentioned Chris & Luidmila's wedding on 19 Dec 2009. Well now our friend Verdan (she adopted a kitten we found; that's in last year's letter) is marrying Arvin also on 19 Dec, this year.

We saw Mel Brooks here! Or, his profile anyhow (right). October here is **Creole Month** and on Saturday the 23rd we participated in **Market Day with a Difference** at the Marigot Fishery Complex. We showed Ranger & Lyla's tricks, and also tricks by Chelsi's dog Lucky. And we showed quilts by Ruth and Chelsi. There was good food and music, and crafts on exhibit. On Thursday the 28th **Mathilda was on Asheville TV**, interviewed about her art, and giving a face-painting exhibition.



Friday the 29th was **Creole Night in Calibishie**. I did the flyer for it, but we had to skip the party because we had a prior dinner engagement. Here's Chelsi in Creole garb. On Creole Day all the schoolchildren and most of the island's ladies and many of the men dress for the occasion. The next day, the 30th, we felt the effect of **Hurricane Tomas** which passed about 100 miles south of Dominica after first hitting Barbados and then St. Vincent and St. Lucia, where,

sadly 14 people were killed and 7 more, including one American, are missing. And 1200 homes there were destroyed. We're just north of Martinique which is just north of St. Lucia. St. Vincent is immediately south of St. Lucia. We were lucky. Electric power went out – but returned within hours – three times. There was no lightning, fortunately, nor did the sea flood the village at the bay. And the “pipe water” system did not fail. We did have to take some hanging things down or move other things because of the wind, and there was a lot of rain. But inside our house stayed dry and our rain drainage system worked well. We lost a young paw-paw (papaya) tree and some tall flowers blew over. But the farmers here lost a lot of banana and plantain. They have shallow roots – a strong man can shake one down. That crop recovery will take about 5 months (instead of the worst-case 8 to 9 because we didn't receive the storm's full fury and only the larger fruit-laden trees came down).

We weigh Coco our kitten on Wednesdays, the day of the week we found her. On Nov 3, Dominica's 32nd Independence Day, she weighed 36oz (2lb, 4oz). When we got her 35 days earlier she weighed 11oz. We believe she'd not have survived had we not adopted her. A week later she was at 2lb, 11oz. That's quadruple her original weight plus 3oz in 6 weeks. On Nov 12, she caught **her 1st mouse**. She's been practicing on beetles, grasshoppers, lizards & frogs.



On what would be Thanksgiving week in the USA we did a lot of work here, replacing shutters on our house. The new ones swing up, providing some shelter from rain even while open and affording us a view of the ground below that we hadn't had before.

The same week Chelsi brought home her high school physics lab book with perfect grades! I'm so glad I was able to help her with the subject.

On November 30 Mathilda's boyfriend Pete finally sold his Brooklyn property. Now he can join Mathilda in Asheville NC. We expect certain follow-up developments.

Lots happened early in December. On December 1 we received exciting news. Our dear friends Tom & Jane from Anglesey Wales are on a cruise that will visit Dominica on January 11. We'll see them then. That's also the day that our closest & dearest friend Roger & Rita arrive here in the early evening for a 2-week visit. Also that day, Fluffy showed up at our house after about an 8-month absence. He'd been on a short leash and



neglected, as usual. We cleaned him up (in our own interest, because he comes into our house and plays with Ranger & Lyla and has befriended Coco. Here's before and after photos.



On December 3 we had a nice lobster dinner at the Veranda View. The next morning we **thought that tragedy had struck** that night. A bird had flown into our house the past night. Fluffy rushed up and bit it when it landed on the floor. Then Coco rushed at it. The next morning it appeared that the bird had pecked Coco's right eye out! Strangely, Coco seemed not to be bothered. We supposed she could in the future devote full attention to seafood stores. But the apparent injury was the membrane covering her eye. She's fine.

On the 4th we learned that Mathilda did not win the Miller Liter Rock Girl pageant the night before. A girl named Jennifer won. Later our friends Dawn & her grandmother Louise took us to **dinner at the Islet View.**

On December 5 we helped celebrate a **triple birthday.**



The party was nice, but Sheran could not come from Antigua because she was unable to obtain a passport for her infant son Dante.



Ruth made quilts as gifts for Hildreth & Chelsi. You can view all her quilts at www.dan-ruth-tanner.com/Needlework_Art/.



People often ask us about quality & reliability of utilities and services here. I maintained a log. From January 1 to December 21 we had:

- 22 power outages including one on New Year's Day, 3 failures on one day (counted as one), and a failure followed by a long brownout.
- 16 losses of "pipe water" pressure. And frequent dirty water due to work they're doing.
- 11 missed bi-weekly trash pick-ups. That's half of the scheduled annual pickups!
- 6 cable TV outages on SAT, which hasn't in two years delivered promised HDTV, Internet, or phone service. It has frequent outages of channels and in general poor picture &/or sound. There's no set-top box, no schedule, or even regular content provider to channel number assignment. We changing to MARPIN, the local (in receivership) cable company. It provides better TV picture & sound, but not yet any other promised service (Internet, phone). MARPIN promised installation within 3 business days, now says it'll come on the 5th business day (tomorrow, December 22).
- 11 Internet outages.
- One land-line phone outage. We don't want a land-line phone but LIME requires we have it to get their ADSL Internet service.
- One cell phone outage and frequent inability to call non-LIME (the new brand name of Cable & Wireless) phones. One can only get MARPIN's number from signs and the Internet. Because it offers phone service in competition with LIME, the latter won't list MARPIN in its directory.
- Four occasions when scheduled workers did not show up.
- Multiple (we lost track) failures to deliver goods on schedule or per appointment.
- A streetlight that went out and when "fixed" blinks on/off in high wind.

Overall, it was a good year here for utilities & services. And sometimes there's a pleasant surprise. I figured out that the National Bank of Dominica (NBD) ATMs were charging EC\$5 (about US\$1.90) per transaction but reporting the EC\$5 as part of the withdrawn amount. Thus, Schwab Bank wasn't re-paying our ATM fee. I talked with NBD and they got right on fixing the problem. That is, they deferred it to their provider. We're waiting.

In the pioneering spirit: On December 12 **we bought a live pig** from "Froggy" (pointing at in the photo). It weighed 116 pounds. Then Herry (holding the rope) and I butchered it. It yielded us 54 pounds of meat, pork chops, ribs, and trimmed boneless pork, and saved us a lot of money. Herry and his family took some parts, about 45 pounds. But I could never have butchered it myself, and we're also storing some of our meet in their chest freezer. I won't go into the gory details. I was a lot of work and I now understand why footballs are made of pigskin.



On December 19 we attended our friend Verdan's gala wedding to Arvin Paul:



Oh yeah: Remember that this wedding was exactly a year after the wedding of our friends Christophe Joseph (he publishes the blog www.dominica-weekly.com) and Luidmila?



Well, Chris & Luidmila's baby boy Ocean was born on December 6, 2010. What a handsome fellow!

Tonight (at about 4AM, Tuesday December 21, there's a total lunar eclipse visible here on midwinter's day. There won't be another winter solstice lunar eclipse until 2094.

We're preparing for Christmas 2010 now and will write about it in

our next annual letter.



And now it's time to bid you all Happy Holidays & say "bye" until next year.

PS: This doll lost in the Miller Lite Rock Girl contest. Good grief!

