

The background of the cover is a photograph of a rugged coastline. On the left, a dark, layered rock cliff descends towards the water. A series of small, cascading waterfalls flow down the cliff face into the sea. The ocean is a vibrant blue, with white foam from breaking waves visible. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The overall mood is one of natural beauty and discovery.

The Power of Disruption

A Memoir of Discovery

Susan
Cross

an excerpt from...

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A Memoir of Discovery

Susan Cross



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For Jon

the love of my life and my best friend

Author's Note

This book is a memoir, and it is drawn from my own experience. All the names of the people we met in Dominica have been changed or disguised to afford them their privacy. The exception is Hervé Nizard, our host at Citrus Creek Plantation, who kindly granted me permission to use his real name. The names of my family members are real and used with permission. Names of specific locations are real.

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Introduction

On January 30, 2017, my life changed forever. That was the day that I “died.” I don’t know for how long, and I can’t say that my heart stopped beating, I took a dramatic last breath, or any of the usual changes that can happen to a physical body when it ceases to be part of this earthly plain. But something happened that forced my life to come to a screeching halt in more ways than one. That was the day that I left this earth and transcended into another space and, quite literally, time stopped.

Obviously, I’m still here, so I didn’t die by the usual definition. Let’s call it a traumatic, dramatic pause that changed me forever immediately and in ways that I’m still discovering. It forced me to look closer at who I am, what I stand for, and what my purpose really is. It’s when life got both harder and simpler at the same time.

The timing of my death was unexpected, yet the fact that it happened really wasn’t. Looking back on it, I think it had been building for some time—maybe even my whole life. In that moment and all the moments since, it was as real to me as the words on this page. In fact, it’s hard to truly describe how real it was—and still is.

What happened? The medical answer is that my appendix ruptured while on vacation on the remote Caribbean island of Dominica and my body filled with infection. I almost died. The emotional answer is that I had to surrender fully to the

circumstances of my emergency surgery and recovery to restart my life. The spiritual answer is that in the midst of the poison of sickness and pain, I felt myself leave my earthly life to be bathed in light—a warm light so bright and full of hope, safety, comfort, promise, and joy that I wanted more and more of it. In short, I was reminded unequivocally that I matter, and my eyes opened to the mission all of us should be pursuing: living our best authentic life possible.

I have a gnawing need in my heart to share my story. Even when I was going through everything, I took notes on my phone because there was so much happening I knew I'd need to be able to process it all at a later time. I tried to fight writing the memoir and delayed starting anything in earnest until I hit the six-month anniversary of my surgery. That milestone, followed closely by an opportunity to hear firsthand the story of a survivor of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, made me change the way I think about the reactions of most who hear my story. I went through something scary, bold, amazing, and life changing. It meant something to me and maybe it can provide some inspiration for others, too.

Wishing you love and peace,

Susan

A Life Spinning Out of Control

The first time I remember being told I had to change the way I thought so I could fit in was in kindergarten. I could already read, and my teacher made us practice some phonics lessons and then color the worksheets. I was bored and colored each of the nine images on the page purple. My teacher sent a note to my parents and the next day, my dad went in for a conference because my mom was home with a toddler and my baby brother.

Since I wasn't a kid who usually got into trouble at school, I had no idea what was going on. When my dad got home, he and my mom weren't mad, but they told me very clearly that there would be times in life when I'd have to follow all the rules given to me by people in authority in order to get along. Coloring correctly on phonics papers fell into this category.

Despite this early lesson, my parents and others encouraged me to develop my whole self and gave me a lot of freedom to learn new things as I grew up. I grew confident in my own voice, and in my right to have one, but I also heard a consistent message of caution when it came to showing the world my true self.

Fast forward to adulthood. The messages of my youth convinced me I wasn't good enough as me. Me being me could be a disruption to those around me. I had to conform to the standards

others were able to tolerate in order to be recognized, appreciated, and valued, even if they were asking to know my true thoughts. So, I worked hard to adapt and thought I had to be an overachiever to find my space in the world.

My resumé as a public relations professional and marketing communications strategist has been hard-earned. I'm generally known as a high performer and team leader with a reputation for delivering results. Over time, my unique way of thinking earned praise and recognition because of what it could do for others. "At last," I told myself, "I have value!" Lucky me! Well, not really. I mistakenly believed that my self-worth was attached to what others told me I did well because it was important to them. I wasn't sure who I was if I wasn't fulfilling a specific role. I didn't know how to just be me.

While I had been living the American dream of success on paper, my world was rapidly becoming a series of compartmentalized experiences rather than one authentic life. On the outside I gave the appearance of focus and presence. On the inside, I was often miles away. Did I like what I was doing? You bet. It's amazing to stretch the brain, achieve professional success, and get paid for telling stories. Did I like myself while I was doing this? Not always. I just didn't realize it.

All I knew was that I was getting tired. My car knew its own way to the airport. I was fitting in time with my husband and kids. I was gaining weight and not making as much time as usual for exercise. I was receiving all the outward accolades of a life well lived, while on the inside I was slowly losing a connection to myself. Did I really know what was most important any longer? No. The truth is that I was living a life designed for future approvals without fully embracing the good of each moment *now*.

By the end of 2016, it had been nearly two years since I'd taken a real vacation, one that didn't require me to check in daily or set aside one to two hours per day to keep projects moving through

the boutique advertising agency where I worked. I'd been traveling a lot but was looking forward to visiting the remote Caribbean island of Dominica, known for its hiking and snorkeling, with my husband, Jon. Our late-January travel dates would be a nice respite from the hectic agency pace that had become normal. And they were just ahead of another busy, multiweek travel season for me.

This vacation was important, and I was ready to enjoy the sunshine, pristine waters, and slower pace that are uniquely Caribbean.

Choosing Dominica

My husband, Jon, and I are active vacationers. We hike, bike, kayak, and explore. Our main goal for every vacation is to just *be* and we usually don't overschedule. Our usual lives and jobs are highly structured, and we're generally surrounded by people. We've enjoyed the work and it's provided our family with a very nice life. When you're used to such a fast pace, vacation time is down time to shut off the brain and reconnect mind, body, and spirit.

This had long been the case, but once our kids left home for college and life pursuits of their own, we started treating ourselves to more frequent trips and getaways to remote locations. We like to rent a house or cabin and hit the grocery and farm stand to stock up on local food and drink. This allows us to set our own schedule and keeps our supplies fresh for day trips. We often visit local bars and restaurants, but after a long day's trek, we love coming back to our rented home base to relax.

During a hike on St. John in the US Virgin Islands one year, we met a retired couple who were talking about the wonders of Dominica, known as "the nature island" due to its spectacular flora and fauna, much of which is protected by an extensive national park system. Eco-tourism is popular on the island and it's also a popular honeymoon spot and cruise ship day trip. We were intrigued and told ourselves that we'd visit one day. That day finally came in January 2017.

The unique combination of rugged, natural beauty and all the comforts of home grabbed our attention. Jon was enjoying a work sabbatical and researched and booked everything for the trip. He found a wonderful cottage to rent on a working tropical fruits plantation located on the east coast of the island. This side of the island is known for being quieter and the landscape wilder than the west side, where all the cruise ships stop and where the main city of Roseau is located.

Citrus Creek Plantation is located on twenty acres along the banks of the Taberi River near the small town of La Plaine. There are twelve rental cottages and villas plus a restaurant. It's owned and operated by Hervé "RV" Nizard and that comforted us. While we are well traveled, we felt that it was important to stay somewhere that a local could help us if necessary. How fortunate that decision turned out to be.

All accommodations at the resort are open-air Caribbean style, combining the best of both outdoor living and the comforts of home. We chose the Banyan Stone Tree House, a seven-hundred-fifty-square-foot stone cottage built into the coconut ridge around a huge Banyan tree. It was very private and exclusive, which gave us the feeling of being alone in the jungle with earthy smells and the soothing natural music of bird, ocean, and insect sounds. The fully equipped kitchen was located outside on the lanai with a gorgeous view of the sea, mountains, and plantation. The bathroom was inside, but for extra fun, the shower was located outside in the roots of the Banyan tree! We were all set for another new experience, one we could never find back in the States.

An Island Paradise

Dominica is not easy to get to. It's about halfway between the French islands of Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. The island is small at only about 290 square miles but is still the fourth largest island in the eastern Caribbean. Many people have never heard of this island nation and frequently confuse it with the Dominican Republic. A mere 29.2 miles long and 18 miles wide, Dominica faces the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Caribbean Sea to the west. More than seventy thousand people live there, and most of the residents are of African or Carib descent. About fifteen thousand residents live in the capital of Roseau, which is on the southwest coast.

Dominica—called Waitikubuli, or “Tall is her Body,” by native Caribs—had been claimed by both the French and the British, but it has been independent since 1978. It is known for having one of the most rugged landscapes of the Caribbean and is covered by a largely unspoiled, multilayered rainforest. It is also among the earth's most rain-drenched lands, and the water runoff forms cascading rivers, waterfalls, and natural pools. Much of the island is protected as three national parks and multiple World UNESCO sites are found there. It's also known as a birder's paradise as it is home to some species that are considered endangered or extinct on other Caribbean islands. Its highest peak, Morne Diablotins, is nearly five thousand feet. The country's central spine is a

northwest-southeast axis of steep volcanic slopes and deep gorges. East-west mountain spurs extend to a narrow coastal plain, which is studded with sea cliffs. There are eight or nine active volcanoes on the island.

As we flew in, our view from the air was of this rugged landscape and no evidence of civilization. It was jungle—pure bush—completely covering jagged mountains. We could clearly see the sweeping landscape and the beautiful blues and greens of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. It was breathtaking. All of a sudden, an airstrip came into view. One minute we were flying and the next we were literally cutting through the jungle toward a narrow runway leading toward a very small airport. The remoteness was just what we wanted.



We were eager to get to our rental after nearly a full day of travel. It was getting dark and Citrus Creek had a driver waiting for us. We travel light—one suitcase and one backpack each—and squeezed into a small compact car with our driver and another man who appeared to be a driver-in-training. Our driver, a preacher by day, welcomed us warmly.

Thank goodness we had a driver! We're pretty easygoing when it comes to embracing local culture and practices, but from the very first ride, we knew that travel here would be anything but ordinary.

First, Dominicans drive on the left side of the road, a nod to the era in which they were under British rule. Second, to reach our final destination, we had to travel ten to twelve miles across the island, which takes about one hour over a winding, mountain road that is about one and half lanes wide. In most places, there were no guardrails, and in many places, the road was washed out, damaged, full of potholes, or being repaired. Third, there were no

lights on most of the road except for the car's headlights. And to add another degree of difficulty, the car was American-style with the steering wheel on the left side.

When we arrived, we were greeted by Citrus Creek's owner, Hervé, who invited us to dine at the restaurant. We eagerly accepted and enjoyed a delicious meal. Our first introduction to Citrus Creek and our vacation was just what we'd hoped for: good food, nice people, natural surroundings, and quiet. Hervé drove us in our rental car to the Banyan Stone Cottage, where we showered and slept soundly in our jungle paradise.

On our first full day, Tuesday, I got up, fixed myself some mint herbal tea, and sat on the lanai to email the kids that we'd arrived safely. The cottage had WiFi, which we used to keep in touch with the kids, but otherwise we enjoyed being cut off from our normal lives for the most part. Although I had promised myself (and Jon) I wasn't going to work, I had a lot going on that wasn't able to be completed before our trip and had agreed to check email once a day. Jon supported this and I limited my checking in to mornings for about an hour or so. After that, I'd read one of the many books on my iPad while I waited for Jon to wake up.

While I was sitting there, taking it all in, a little bananaquit bird landed on the table next to me, the first of a few such visits. I noticed that he had only one foot, but that didn't stop him from bopping around. I kept my movements to a minimum so I wouldn't scare him away, but he didn't show any fear. In fact, it felt like he was staring at me and sizing me up somehow. He didn't chirp or sing, but I swear that he looked me directly in the eyes and connected with me as if he were saying, "Good morning! Enjoy the day! You've come to the right place!" I remember thinking that it was a miracle that he'd survived with only one foot. That had to make landings and perching to eat pretty challenging. It didn't seem to slow him down, though. In fact, I told the kids he might have had only one foot, but he was a good flier. After about

five minutes or so, he flew off. I just sat there, read, and breathed. This was going to be an amazing vacation!

The best thing about vacation for me is the mind-set. It's the ultimate permission to simply stand down and live unscheduled. I'm a classic type-A personality—a real driver who is used to being on the go and multitasking. I go all in almost all the time, whether I'm at work or play. Most of my days are highly structured and deadline driven. I live by my calendar and usually recite it at least sixty days out.

On vacation, I'm the opposite. No makeup, hair under a hat, no clocks, minimal technology. My biggest decisions are what to eat and where to poke around to experience wherever I am. In fact, unless absolutely necessary, my husband and I don't even schedule anything except travel so we can absorb whatever we feel like being part of at any given moment.

When Jon finally got up, we discussed our plans for our first day. We agreed we wanted to get a better lay of the land near our cottage, and we started with a visit to the river and the nearby beach after having breakfast at the cottage. The river emptied into the ocean. We climbed around on the rocky beach beneath some cliffs. There's something so incredibly Zen-like for me when I'm around water. I can sit and stare out at the sea (or river or lake or pond) and just get lost in the beautiful rhythm of it. It's like my mind stops thinking through its usual checklist and becomes much more aware of the art of life and not the rigors of it. I can also tune out distracting sounds like cars, planes, and people and pay attention only to the sounds I want to hear, like birds and waves.

If you enjoy playing outside, then Dominica is the place to be. I've been lucky to travel all over the world and I've never seen a place with this kind of natural beauty. The jungle was lush and the water crystal clear. The mountains seemed to stand strong and proud as if they were watching over everything on the island. It's

both quiet and noisy with the sounds of birds, insects, and water ever-present. What's missing are the sounds of civilization like technology, motors, and airplanes.

It was so nice to be with Jon without phone service or television to distract us from our rest and relaxation. When we travel, we always make sure that the kids can reach us either at the place where we're staying or via text on a special app that works when we're out of the United States (one of the perks of being married to an IT guy is that he's always on top of the latest and greatest technology!). We tell the rest of the family that if they need us, they can contact the kids, who can track us down. In over thirty years of travel together, we can count on one hand the number of times anyone has had an emergency and reached out. On day one of our trip, we had no clue that this time it would be us doing the reaching out.

Hiking, Touring, and Getting to Know Dominica

On Wednesday, we drove for an hour to travel eighteen miles across the island along a winding, narrow, pothole-strewn road to Champagne Beach, near the capital of Roseau. The beach isn't sandy. It's all rock, but beautiful in its own right. We had our own snorkel gear and, after stowing our shoes, entered the water to see the wonders below the surface.

A quick word about snorkeling and swimming . . . I'm a strong swimmer, but I'm also a floater. No matter what I do, my body wants to float. This makes it kind of hard for me to wear fins to snorkel. My legs want to rise to the surface of the water, which means I must work extra hard to use my fins to get anywhere. After a few minutes in the water at Champagne Beach, I realized that I'd need to wear my Tevas and ditch my fins, which I did. I dove in and joined Jon.

We've snorkeled in some beautiful places and this ranks as one of the best. The sun's rays broke through the surface of the water, casting beams of bright light down toward the rocks. Schools of colorful fish swam everywhere and darted in and out of the sunlight. One fish, a parrot fish, kept swimming by as if he were checking me out. I smiled through my mask because it reminded me of one of my daughter's favorite childhood books, *The Rainbow Fish*.

To top that off, champagne-like bubbles floated up to the surface from fissures in the volcanic rock (hence the name “Champagne Beach”). The bubbles come from a volcanic vent under the rocks in the water. Picture a glass of champagne and the subtle effervescence that allows the bubbles to gently rise to the top of the glass. Now, imagine that you’re immersed in that glass and looking at the bubbles as they surround you. It’s surreal to be in the midst of that.

Jon was off exploring in the water diving here and there, while many cruise ship tourists were snorkeling in guided groups. I swam close to one guide to hear what he was saying about the natural phenomena. Then, I stopped swimming and just laid on top of the water and let myself float. To be weightless in the water was so relaxing. I felt myself drifting as if I were being gently cradled in a hammock and rocked. It was so comforting and peaceful. I lazily watched the bubbles and the fish and listened to the quiet. Something about that place seemed to speak to my soul and remind me to appreciate the simple pleasures of nature—and I listened for once. I’m not sure how long I remained suspended on the water, but my prunelike fingertips told me that it was quite a while.

“Wasn’t that amazing?” Jon said as we sat on the beach and removed our snorkeling gear. “I could hear the volcanic gases bubbling up through the fissures in the rock. Hey, are you okay?”

“I’m just tired,” I said. “I think I’m still transitioning from work to vacation. Now that I’m relaxing, it’s all catching up to me. I’ll be fine.”

“I’m hungry,” Jon said. “I wonder what we’ll find at the store.”

“It’s always an adventure to shop in the Caribbean,” I laughed. “Fresh food is local and organic, but the variety is a little different than back home. I don’t really have much of an appetite yet, but let’s go.”

We stowed our gear in our beach bags, dried off, and headed back to the car.

We stopped at a grocery store to stock up on the rest of our supplies and then made the long trek back to our cottage on the other side of the island.

The following day, Thursday, our third full day of the trip, we decided to find some hiking trails. Dominica is a hiker's paradise. There are hundreds of miles of trails that range from easy to treacherous. Its most famous trail, the renowned Waitikubuli National Trail, crosses the island. The first long-distance trail in the Caribbean, it's 115 miles long, has fourteen sections, and is rugged with no campsites. It's famous among hikers and people from all over the world come to hike this trail. We didn't hike the trail officially, but we did walk along a small part of it while visiting the Emerald Pool, a World Heritage Site located in Morne Trois Pitons National Park.

The Emerald Pool Trail was an easy manicured path to a waterfall falling into an emerald-colored pool of water. It was very pretty and is a popular stopping point for cruise ship travelers. Dominicans are very proud of this treasure and make sure it is well kept. Our leisurely walk was a lot of fun and a good start to the hiking part of our trip. I must admit that I was a little worried about seeing a snake on the trail. I'm afraid of snakes and know that while there aren't any poisonous snakes on Dominica, there are boa constrictors. Jon and I have a cardinal rule when we hike that he isn't allowed to point out any snakes he sees on the trail unless I'm in imminent danger of being bit. It's a rule that has stood us well on many a hike. We laugh about it, but in all these years, I can't think of one time he's broken it. I was praying that we didn't see any snakes. Luckily, we didn't.

When we got in the car to leave, a small tropical bird landed on the sideview mirror on my side of the car. It was the same kind of bird that had visited me at breakfast on our first morning on the island. It just sat there for a bit and looked at me as if it were checking me out. I mean, that bird really looked me in the eye.

It didn't flinch but studied me as if trying to connect with me in some way. I often have dogs, strangers, and children look at me as if they know me. They stare as if they're seeing right into my soul, as if they think I know something that they want to know or want to be part of me in some way. I had never paid much attention to it until Jon pointed it out. Anyway, this bird gave me that same look just as my breakfast companion did. It was weird, but not scary. After a short while it flew off. Both Jon and I smiled and commented that even the birds on Dominica were friendly!

From the Emerald Pool we went to go find a place called the Jacko Steps, which was billed as an easy hike by Dominican standards and had some history attached to it that intrigued us. This trail is named after a runaway slave named Jacko, who was the leader of a group of escaped slaves, known as Maroons, in the 1700s. The Maroons carved steps up the side of a mountain to the place where they lived for about one hundred years. The steep flight of 135 steps, each about two feet high, requires that you literally pull yourself up each one.

We arrived at where we thought the trail should be, then drove up and down the road a couple of times looking for the trailhead. Eventually we pulled over to look at the map some more. Not many places of interest are marked in Dominica. They're on maps but there are very few signs along the road to tell you where they are. We were still unsure even after checking the map, so we decided to get out of the car and ask for help. We approached an older local guy working on the road and he told us in the Caribbean English of Dominica that we just happened to be in the right place. He explained in detail how to get to the trail, but he was very hard to understand. I was at a loss. All Jon could understand was to walk down this gravel road and cross the river—the Layou River—which was in a beautiful gorge. According to Jon, "After that I was lost."

We headed back to the car to get our boots and other hiking gear. About that time a small dog ran under our car. He was an

adorable mutt and full of energy with a tail that wouldn't stop wagging. Once we had our hiking boots on, the dog, who had been patiently waiting, took off down the paved road ahead of us. Jon heard the old man yell, "Follow the dog!" and he thought, "Great, now we're at the mercy of a dog as a trail guide."

We headed down the road for maybe seven hundred feet. The path was lined with gorgeous, bright red and pink flowers. We could hear the river in the distance. When we got to the river, the dog was there waiting for us. He really was our trail guide! The dog bounced across the rocks in the river and scrambled up the other side of the bank and waited. Clearly, we were supposed to follow. We took off our boots, but the river bottom was too rocky to walk across barefoot. Jon went back to the car to get our sandals while I waited on the riverbank. With sandals on, we made it across the shallow river and the dog, who had disappeared for a bit, was waiting for us once again. He acted like we were supposed to go one direction, but we went the other way until we realized it wasn't right. We turned back, found the trail, paid the local nature organization a small fee to walk it, and climbed up the hill to the top of the Jacko Steps.

We arrived at the top of the steps and would descend toward the river. Jon, of course, was a champion. (I think he's part mountain goat the way he attacks climbing!) I did well on the climb down, especially since climbing isn't one of my big strengths. Those steps were steep! I must admit that some of the time I sat down and butt-slid from step to step. Hey, don't laugh (even though Jon did—although after more than thirty years, I don't think anything about me surprises him anymore)! And, don't ever underestimate the value of a good butt slide when it comes to a steep descent!

Once we reached the riverbank, we considered our options: walk back down the river to the car or climb the 135 steps we had just descended and return to our starting point. The river was high and fast with what appeared to be whitecaps swirling every once

in a while. The water was clean and clear, except where debris had been churned up from the fast flow. We'd passed a few hikers on the trail who had swum downriver and climbed up the steps. They were traversing the trail in the opposite direction than we were. They told us that their "float" was fun, but that it was also a little scary due to the strong current. We're good swimmers and usually up for a water adventure, but we weren't feeling it at that time. The current was pretty strong, and we didn't want to take any unnecessary risks. We decided to go back the same way we had come.

Jon, of course, skirted up the steps as if they were nothing. I was still gaining my balance and couldn't shake the mental exhaustion of being on such a fast work and life pace before vacation. To be honest, although I knew I had to climb my way out, I was dreading it. I wasn't just mentally tired, my body felt weighed down. When I reached the base of the steps, I looked up at the task before me, gave myself a good talking to, and started in. I was worried I might touch a snake or other critter as I clawed my way to the top by pretty much any means possible. All I kept thinking was that I was glad I was in good enough shape to make the hike and saying over and over, "One step at a time. One step at a time." It took me longer than Jon, but I did it! Once I got to the top, I was exhausted in every possible way, but also exhilarated.

On the drive back to our cottage, we stopped at another trail that was an easy walk back to a very nice waterfall. I was very tired, but Jon and I both figured it was due to the strenuous hike we just did. I wasn't especially sore or in pain, just zapped of energy. I was also starting to have some trouble concentrating, but I attributed that to the Jacko Steps hike. I was happy to let Jon be in charge and just be a follower for a bit. When we got back to our cottage, we enjoyed dinner on our lanai and just soaked in the sounds and smells of the jungle. It was a relaxing end to the day.



Jon told me later that when we got up Friday morning, I had a look on my face that he'd never seen in the thirty-plus years we've been together.

"Are you okay?" he asked. "You look like you're both mad and confused."

I could see a mix of genuine concern and compassion on his face, but I tried to make light of it.

"I'm fine," I replied. "I'm really tired. The hiking and snorkeling must have taken more out of me than I thought. Clearly, I didn't up my exercise game enough before we got here!"

I'd been pushing my body to help my mind relax and to restore my spirit, which all felt a little disconnected from each other. I didn't share this with Jon because I didn't think it was anything serious. Plus, I didn't want him to worry.

We stayed close to the cottage that day and walked along the beach across the road from our place. We then drove up the road to a trail that required climbing down a rope that hung over a tall cliff to the beach below. A waterfall in the cliff poured into the ocean. Jon did the climb down while I stayed at the trailhead. The trail looked amazing but hanging off a cliff on a rope isn't really my thing. Besides, I'd had a hard time with the small trail leading to the cliff and felt very tentative on it, and that was a well-manicured path. There were some steep spots, but it was really nothing that I couldn't have handled relatively well on a normal day.

My tentativeness was making me a little anxious, a feeling that I rarely have. It was as if my brain was starting to think at a faster pace than normal, kind of like when you speed up a video clip. Lacking another explanation, I attributed the feeling to coming down from an insane work schedule (average hours per week in the high fifties) and my body adjusting. There were no other incidents that day, but by the time I went to bed, I was bone tired.

On Saturday, we woke up refreshed, but I was still tired. We decided not to hike and went instead to a restored native village. It was located nearly all the way back to the airport—about an hour's drive across the island. It took some time to find the place, but once we did, the tour was wonderful and the enthusiasm and pride of the Dominicans working in the village made us feel like honored guests. We spent a couple of hours touring and learning the history of the native Caribs, then devoured a local dish with chicken, vegetables, and spices for lunch. It was delicious! Afterward, we drove the adventurous roads back to the cottage.

Our kids and their spouses had arranged for a private dinner to be prepared at our cottage that night. One of the chefs from the Citrus Creek restaurant and one of its general managers pulled out all the stops. Drinks, hors d'oeuvres, multiple courses—dinner was absolutely amazing! We were texting the kids photos and really enjoying ourselves. The seclusion of our cottage, the natural sounds, the great food—it was a fantastic cap to what had already been a great trip. There was just something about this place that seemed to be speaking to our souls.

Contact Susan

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