

## **Interview with Rudy Gurley** **Author of *A Caribbean Tale***

Reader Views welcomes Rudy Gurley, author of the memoir “A Caribbean Tale.” Rudy is being interviewed by Juanita Watson, Assistant Editor of Reader Views.

**Juanita:** Thanks for talking with us today Rudy. Would you please tell us where you are living today and a little of your personal and professional background?

**Rudy:** Good day Juanita.

I was born and bred in St.Lucia, a tiny Caribbean island, which, miraculously, has produced two Nobel Prize Winners, one in economics, the other in literature.

But my roots also extend to other Caribbean islands: Barbados, the land of my father’s birth; Grenada, the birthplace of my maternal grandmother, and to St.Vincent and the Grenadines, where my maternal grandfather’s navel string is buried.

I spent the mid-eighties in the UK where I became a Chartered Management Accountant. Later, I picked up an MBA from Henley Management College. I’m also a member of the Institute of Management, and the Institute of Directors ... both British institutions.

Last year I retired early from corporate life after fifteen years with British Telecommunications giant, Cable & Wireless (C&W), a company set up by the British Government over a century ago, to provide telecoms services to former colonies of the British Empire.

I’ve held a number of positions at C&W, including Chief Executive of their St.Lucia, and Grenada operations. I’ve also been the Chief Financial Officer of the former. In addition, I’ve sat on a number of boards, in different capacities, including: Chairman of the St.Lucia Development Bank, Chairman of Cable & Wireless Grenada, Director of the Bank of St.Lucia, Director of the National Commercial Bank of St.Lucia, and Director of C&W Dominica.

I live in St.Lucia with my wife, Susanna, the girl of my dreams whom I met at school.

**Juanita:** You have just released your autobiography entitled “A Caribbean Tale.” Would you tell us about the deeply-moving journey you recall in your new book?

**Rudy:** The book tells the story of a boy who was abandoned by his teenage parents when they left the Caribbean and migrated to England in the mid-sixties. I was that little boy.

My sister and I were left in the care of our aunt ... neither of my parents turned back. As a youngster, it seemed to the outside world that I was destined for the scrap heap, for I kept failing the exams that would give me entry to one of the three secondary schools on the tiny island. It appeared that I would have been booted out of school at fifteen, facing unemployment, and at best a low paid menial job.

But what the outside world didn't know was that at age eleven I had stumbled upon the best-selling inspirational book of all time: 'The Power of Positive Thinking' by Norman Vincent Peale. This book would become my lifelong companion, guiding me through the long and arduous road called life. It taught me all I needed to learn about success and failure, about believing in oneself, about sticking to the fight when you're hardest hit, and about getting off the canvass when knocked down.

So, despite devastating early failures, and against formidable odds, I charted my course and set out from the Caribbean on a treacherous quest that takes me on a journey of self discovery to the UK. Years later, I return to my island home where I come face to face with my past and my future.

I vicariously take my readers with me along the journey.

The book is lush, evocative and deeply humane. It is a tale of hope and dreams, triumph and disaster, and the lessons of life and of living.

**Juanita:** What inspired you to sit down and write your personal experience?

**Rudy:** I believe human development is a continuous process of learning from each other – whether as nations, races, communities, or individuals. During my latter days at C&W I felt increasingly convinced that my story could be of value to others. And, of course, I was taken in by what Dan Brown and JK Rowling had accomplished. Writing, for me, therefore, satisfied both a humanitarian and commercial need.

**Juanita:** Take us back to the beginning. Why were you estranged from your parents, and what was childhood like for you growing up with your aunt Sheila?

**Rudy:** My mother and father were teenage neighbors. They fell in love. My mother had my sister at sixteen ... my father was eighteen. I came on the scene a year later. Of course, our parents were unmarried. My father left for England months before I was born, and my mother left to join him several months after my birth. My sister and I were left in the care of our grandmother and aunt.

The only evidence I had of our parent's existence was a photo of my mother adorning the living room wall, and a little picture of my father. My sister and I were told our parents were in England and that we would soon be joining them. So we lived in hope of one day going to England to be with our parents.

One day (I was five at the time) a parcel arrived from England. It contained clothes for my sister and me, and a photo album. The album contained wedding pictures, but we didn't recognize the man always standing next to our mother in the pictures ... he looked nothing like the picture of our father. It turned out our mother had married another man. Our father had disappeared. He was nowhere to be found when my mother arrived in London. He had abandoned his family.

I would speak to my mother for the first time at age 21. I was well into my late thirties when I met my father for the first time.

My aunt tried her best bringing us up, but she was the only bread winner in the household comprising a multitude of relatives. Her \$125 monthly salary could only stretch so far. And she couldn't dedicate all her time to looking after us. So, life for me as a kid wasn't a bed of roses. It didn't help that I was fairly light-skinned (almost white) in a household of mainly dark-skinned people. Oftentimes I would find myself sitting alone in the woods behind our home humming my favorite song – 'I'm no body's child'.

**Juanita:** How did you eventually meet your parents? What was the experience like for you after so many years – was there bitterness?

**Rudy:** After I'd left school and found a job at a firm of chartered accountants, one day, out of the blue, I received a call from this person with a strange accent, who said she was my mother. The experience was mind-boggling, delightful. Interestingly enough, the call came around the time I was considering going away to London to pursue my accountancy qualification. My mother agreed to accommodate me at her home. I resigned my job, got a small student's loan, and bought my ticket to the UK.

The week before I was due to leave she wrote, telling me to remain in the Caribbean ... she was no longer able to accommodate me. This felt as if the rug had been yanked out from under me. But there was no turning back. I was defiant. I wrote back saying I would come to the UK nonetheless, and would need only a month's accommodation. Of course, I hadn't a clue how I would survive.

Meeting my mother, half brother and three half sisters was a strange experience as those who read the 'A Caribbean Tale' will see for themselves. Somehow, I found it difficult to develop a sense of kinship towards my mother and siblings. The internal family politics, and a totally alien black British culture didn't help at all.

But I felt no bitterness. When during week two of my stay with my mother, she asked me to start paying rent, my indifference mushroomed, and I soon moved out on my own.

Completely broke, I spent hours in freezing phone booths trying to track down my father. I wrote letters, studied the faces of men I passed on the streets of London... all to no avail.

I had made CEO and was 37 when I tracked him down using a private investigator I'd found on the net. My father was on his second wife ... second family. His family hadn't a clue of my and my

sister's existence, or of his former life. The series of events that unfolded was the stuff of soap operas.

It turned out that my father had had quite a successful career as a senior British civil servant, advising Members of Parliament on tax matters. Meeting him, his wife, daughter and two sons, was a surreal experience. No bitterness whatsoever on my part. And when I learned that my grandmother was alive and well ... going on 84 .... in neighboring Barbados where she had lived all her life, I was absolutely intrigued. No bitterness, no guilt trips. I simply focused on the positives of that experience.

**Juanita:** What were some of the other hardships you encountered throughout your life that your detail in "A Caribbean Tale"?

**Rudy:** I grew up in a household filled with relatives ... a compound family. My blind grandfather had over thirty children outside his marriage. He brought several of his illegitimate offspring home to the care of his wife. Possibly because of my fairly light complexion, somewhat oriental and girlish looks, I always seemed the butt of family ridicule in an environment of mainly dark-skinned people. Of course, it didn't help that I was somewhat of a sensitive little boy. I particularly hated being called a 'poor white man (Betche Pouvre – in the local French-based dialect) – a derogatory term. It was worse being ridiculed as the boy without a father and mother.

But it wasn't all bad.

One of my distant relatives was my hero. I worshipped him. I wasn't sure how we were related, but we always lived in the same house, and what really mattered was that he called me his little brother. My sister and I turned ourselves inside out trying to find favor with him. And he always treated us well ... until one day ... when he turned on me. I was six years old. I couldn't pronounce his name properly ... somehow Matthew, always came out as Mafoo. 'A Caribbean Tale' describes in graphic detail, the battering I received at his hands, for the crime of mispronouncing his name one fateful day. I almost died. I spent all of three months in hospital. And all the while I kept thinking how much I'd let down my hero. No one knew what had happened to me ... I refused to 'squeal' on my hero. Many of my relatives, including my aunt who brought me up, would have found out about the battering for the first time, when they read about it in the book.

I encounter several near disasters along the way: a ferocious hurricane; finding myself destitute in London; a bout of temporary blindness in the midst of my first English winter; miserably failing my first accountancy job in London; a real fiasco when I write my finals ....

**Juanita:** Rudy, you went on to become a very successful professional? Would you comment on your ambitious career, and how you managed to align yourself with so many successes, against what many would consider such overpowering personal odds?

**Rudy:** Whenever the subject of success comes up in conversations with friends I tend to remind them of Christopher Marley's maxim that 'There is only one success ... to be able to spend your life in your own way'.

Sometimes I go a bit further and remind my friends of what Booker T. Washington – an ex-slave in plantation America – had said:

*Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.*

Success is also transient, I tell my friends: it could be here today, but gone tomorrow.

So ... I've achieved some degree of success ... but the journey continues.

When, at age eleven, I read 'The Power of Positive Thinking' I became convinced that we ... all of us ... have been endowed with an inexhaustible source of power to make our dreams come true. But first you must dream ... you must set goals. And you must believe in those dreams and those goals ... and in your self. And whilst dreaming, and believing in yourself, you must work relentlessly towards your goal, for, as the bible says: 'Faith without works is dead'.

This is how I was able to achieve the things that I did. And this is how I will continue to pursue the blissful dreams that I now dream.

**Juanita:** Rudy, I understand that you offer many insights into racial prejudice in and out of the U.S., as well as thoughts on those of African descent. Would you elaborate on the cultural themes you present in "A Caribbean Tale"?

**Rudy:** Many people are uncomfortable talking about race. I'm not one of them.

I believe we were all meant to be equal, but we're not ... some are more equal than others. Perhaps the relative dominance and power of individual races, over time, is a cyclical thing? I once read somewhere that when the history of the world is told, it will be said that the Chinese dominated the world except for a fleeting period of a few hundred years, when those in the west ruled.

What I believe is that the world would be a far better place if we all appreciated and respected each others uniqueness. For my part, I see white, black, yellow, etc. only in group terms ... for I believe in the individual. I do become color blind when I get to know someone.

'A Caribbean Tale' has no specific agenda on race. It simply presents the naked realities of what's happening out there ... on both sides of the fence ... black and white. The book dramatizes a scene involving a seemingly quintessential American gentleman standing before an audience at Hyde Park Corner (Speaker's Corner) in London, preaching the most venomous racial filth I'd ever heard. It was the first I'd heard of the 'White Man's Bible' – a very well written document that seeks to justify hatred against the so called 'mud races' – Blacks, Jews, etc.

One of the ironies of that experience was that the interaction between the speaker and his audience provided me (and now my readers) with a history lesson on elements of slavery in the US. Readers are given an insight into the minds of the Founding Fathers and their declaration that 'all men are created equal'. The founding fathers of America had themselves been owners of slaves. Indeed, it

was widely alleged that Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States and one of the authors of the Declaration of Independence, had fathered several children with a slave named Sally Hemmings.

But the reaction of the mainly white London crowd gave me (and hopefully my readers) the confidence, that, for the most part, the world wouldn't tolerate the racist dissertation the speaker at Hyde Park had presented.

But this isn't the most profound racial experience dramatized in 'A Caribbean Tale'. My encounter with two Zimbabweans, wins hands down. There I was, at the London City YMCA dining with these two young men whom I'd just met ... delighted that mine wasn't the only black face at the hostel. I'd always been somewhat alarmed that, during my student days, whenever I passed in front of the South African Embassy in London (on my way to and from work on the graveyard shift at McDonalds) there were always protestors demanding Nelson Mandela's release from prison, but that not once had I seen a black or brown face amid the protestors.

I got the shock of my life when I chose to lament that fact to my two African friends. The racial venom that spewed from their mouths reconfigured my image of the American Gentleman (at Hyde Park) as mild and subtle. These guys, the Africans, were racists. The worse kind. They were not black ... they were coloured ... mixed ... one or more percent of superior white genes, they claimed. Mandela and his black ANC bastards will rot in jail.

And I got a graphic demonstration of their hatred of 'blacks' when I witnessed their reaction to a native African who dared to show up in the same canteen as the Colourds. Total madness. The world is messed up. These guys were both darker than Mandela!

As I said before 'A Caribbean Tale' has no agenda on race. Despite the known brutality of slavery, the reader sees for himself that it was a British gentleman – William Wilberforce, who, at great personal risk and sacrifice, championed the emancipation of the slaves. The reader discovers, vicariously with me, that the average British citizen had little tolerance of slavery in the colonies, and that when they threw their weight behind the abolitionists, slavery was in fact, done away with.

I hope my readers are left with a sense that what really matters are individuals, not racial groupings. If we, as individuals, take it upon ourselves to use the power we've all been endowed with to pursue our goals, we would all progress. Race then becomes a non-issue.

**Juanita:** How did your personal hardships and struggles influence who you are today?

**Rudy:** It was Charles Spurgeon who said that 'Many men owed the grandeur of their lives to their tremendous difficulties'.

And it was the legendary Chinese philosopher, Confucius, who said: "The gem cannot be polished with friction, nor can man be perfected without trials.

I couldn't have been the man that I am today had I not been shaped and reshaped by those learning experiences sometimes called 'trials and tribulations'.

**Juanita:** Your humorous nature certainly comes through in your narrative. Would you comment on this aspect of your personality?

**Rudy:** Most times I don't think I'm funny at all. In fact, I'm never one to volunteer a joke during normal conversation ... this just isn't me. It simply comes out naturally at times ... and most times when it does, I keep a straight face. So, I suppose, any traces of humor inherent in my personality, is humor of the most subtle kind ... the kind that could easily fly over many heads ... the subtle type of humor I may have picked up from the British.

**Juanita:** In your book, what statements are you making towards achieving success and reaching goals? Is it really a personal choice whether we prosper or fail in life?

**Rudy:** Success is an individual thing ... it is, indeed, a matter of choice ... it is a function of the decisions that you take. It is as deliberate as saying 'I will get out of bed today and go find a job'.

Where you are today reflects the decisions you've made in days gone by. Where you end up tomorrow will be determined by the decisions you make today. Decisions steer the course towards success.

The goals that you set yourself are the destinations you're trying to reach. Along the way you will face obstacles ... a punctured tire, a collision, here and there a bump in the road. You ought not to give up on reaching your destination because of those mishaps ... in fact those are learning experiences, making you a better driver ... a better navigator, preparing you for more trouble up ahead, for that's the nature of life ... a long, winding road laden with obstacles. All along the way you're making decisions to keep you on course ... turning left, or right, or going straight on ... navigating the course toward success.

**Juanita:** Who have been your strongest influences? Why?

**Rudy:** I've been strongly influenced by Norman Vincent Peale in his bestseller, 'The Power of Positive Thinking', and his subsequent writings.

Years later, Anthony Robbins took 'positive thinking' to a whole new level when he released 'Awaken the Giant Within'. This book is, to me, the bible of self mastery. So I'd say that Anthony Robbins also strongly influenced my life.

**Juanita:** Rudy, what is the underlying message of your book?

**Rudy:** The underlying message is that your success, or failure, in life, is not determined by your personal circumstances, or conditions. Whether you've been born into poverty, abandoned like me, or whether you were born with a silver spoon ... is irrelevant to where you end up in life.

We all have the power within us to make our dreams come true. And most importantly, by believing in ourselves, by practicing positive thinking, by learning the importance of adversity and how it helps shape us ... we could effectively program ourselves for success ... develop a blueprint for success ... whatever we deem success to be.

**Juanita:** I understand that you are writing a sequel to “A Caribbean Tale.” Would you tell us more about it?

**Rudy:** Here is the tag line to the sequel, which is entitled ‘Sent From Overseas’:

‘Two powerful men, one a self-made Caribbean man, the other a smooth British expatriate – divided by culture, values, ethics; linked by a common employer – locked in a subtle battle ... a battle of attrition ..... a battle that, in the end, would leave just one man standing.

A compelling tale, possibly of historic proportions ... a dramatic clash between two men ... whose bitter feud ... may well define a generation.’

I am that self-made Caribbean man.

The British expatriate - a smooth Englishman adept at illusion and deceit ... a serial corporate bully with a Jekyll and Hyde nature, a man driven solely by his personal agenda - is my boss ... sent from overseas ... from London.

‘Sent From Overseas’ and ‘A Caribbean Tale’ were written together. The sequel will hit the market in early 2007.

**Juanita:** Sounds like a fascinating sequel Rudy. How can readers find out more about you and your endeavors?

**Rudy:** I invite readers to check out my website at [www.rudygurley.com](http://www.rudygurley.com)

**Juanita:** Rudy, “A Caribbean Tale” will certainly serve as great inspiration to readers. We would like to thank you for taking the time to talk with us today, and we hope for many successes with your writing career. Do you have any final thoughts for your readers?

**Rudy:** Thank you Juanita, for your time and attention; it’s been a real pleasure talking to you. I would like to leave my readers with this short poem by Calvin Coolidge, the 30<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. It is entitled ‘Persistence’.

*Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence  
Talent will not;  
nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.  
Genius will not;  
unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.  
Education will not;*

*the world is full of educated derelicts.  
Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.  
The slogan 'Press On' has solved  
and always will solve  
the problems of the human race.*