

AltspaceVR

by Jason Lee Norman

Belize

In Belize there is muddy water. Rivers turned brown from the silt and clay of the soil. Water that looks like chocolate milk but the kind of chocolate milk that came in a box like a juice box and not a carton. That type of chocolate milk.

Belize comes from an old Mestizo word that means: *leave your raft here* or *a place for your raft*. Everyone in Belize travels by raft. They move up and down the rivers like cars on a highway. In the towns and cities of Belize anyone can just leave their raft on the shore and won't have to worry about it. Nobody in Belize would ever steal someone else's raft.

In Belize they make rafts out of the bones of their ancestors. The cemeteries are all full and there isn't as much wood as there used to be, so they let the bones dry and bleach in the sun and then lash them together for their rafts.

Most of the trees in Belize that are still standing are mahogany trees. The people in Belize believe that all life came from the seeds falling from the mahogany. Everything in Belize is shaded by the huge canopy of the mahogany tree. The seeds fall and land in the shaded areas and is born. That is why the motto of Belize is, "under the shade of the mahogany, I flourish."

El Salvador

In El Salvador, it snowed once at the top of the highest point in El Salvador, on the coldest day in its history. At first they thought the snow was volcanic ash but when it hit their skin and it was cold, they knew it was something else. This just happened a few years ago so the people in the area knew what snow was and what it was made from. They knew what they could do with it and what they couldn't

do. If this had happened fifty or so years ago the people may not have known exactly what was happening. They may have thought the sky was falling or that the clouds were coming apart.

When snow falls anywhere in the world it makes the same sound. It sounds like rain whispering. If it falls in a place that is usually very warm then you'll hear a sound like grasshoppers or butterflies landing on the roof of your tent and then you'll hear, all at once, the sound of millions of flakes evaporating like tiny applause. If it's cool enough outside for the snow to accumulate, you'll hear the same sounds but then eventually the ground and the roofs and the tops of the trees will all be so soft from all the snow that you won't hear any noise at all.

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In El Salvador, it snowed only once in the history of El Salvador and it was on the coldest day in history in El Salvador and at the top of the tallest mountain in El Salvador. They gave all the children in El Salvador the day off school anyway because of the historical significance of the event. In some cities there was free ice cream.

At the top of the tallest mountain in El Salvador, some hikers who were camped out nearby stayed up all night helping to keep the mangos warm.

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In El Salvador, it snowed once at the very top of the tallest mountains in El Salvador. Only one person witnessed it and he wrote it down in his journal.

Honduras

In Honduras they say a prayer that sounds like screaming at the top of your lungs. On the second Wednesday in September the citizens lie on the asphalt and shout at the sun in unison. Their skin sizzles like bacon in a pan as they scream their prayer in the afternoon heat. The prayer that sounds like screaming at the top of your lungs is a prayer of thanksgiving. The people of Honduras are

thankful for the trees and the thousands of birds that share the island with them but they are most thankful for having been discovered. They had been waiting around for as long as anyone can remember, just waiting for someone to come and say hello and get some word of mouth going. Honduras is alive with prayer. Honduras is alive with people screaming at the top of their lungs.

In Costa Rica they do not pray. Instead they eat scallops rolled in lemon pepper and skewered on the barbeque. Sometimes while eating they hear the sounds of screaming brought in from the ocean breeze. In November they have a festival but it usually rains so it is poorly attended. Later in the month many inhabitants leave to follow the trade winds.

In Newfoundland the arctic terns rest in the snow banks on the last leg of their journey back to the North Pole from Antarctica. They are the most tired creatures in the entire world. They huddle together to shelter themselves from the wind. When it blows it sounds like people screaming at the top of their lungs. Terns hate being alone. They hate it as much as wind, and sea lions, and albatross. Newfoundland is an angry place and will devour the terns if they stay even another hour. They fly blindly into the blowing snow.

Back in Honduras they drink tea over ice to soothe their throats. In the evening some of them will go out to dance, others will have sex. The night air smells like grilling scallops.

Nicaragua

In Nicaragua there is a lake with sweet water. The water evaporates in the sun and then falls as rain in the fields surrounding the lake. This causes the grass to also taste sweet. The cows eat the grass and their milk tastes sweet too. The people of Nicaragua drink the milk and it makes their tears taste sweet. Some people say that it is the other way around and that the people of Nicaragua always had sweet tears and that, over time, their tears filled the lake.

People in Nicaragua cry more than any other people in any other country in the Americas. Nicaragua isn't a sad place to live, they just cry more than most people. For example, in Uruguay they cry once a month. In Nicaragua they cry about once a day.

Once, an artist came to Nicaragua and he wanted to collect tears from the people and keep them in tiny vials, like they used to do in ancient Rome. The artist traveled around Nicaragua for a year and collected the tears and then wrote down the name of the person who the tears came from and what they were thinking about when they cried or what made them cry:

Xiomar Blandino- Bee sting

Cristiana Frixione- Broken Ankle

Thelma Rodriguez- Onions

Mari Ramos- the birth of Violeta Ramos

Violeta Ramos- the birth of Violeta Ramos

Maximo Jerez- listening to the music of Erwin Kruger

Aminta Granera- Gunshot wound to the chest

Eden Granera- the death of Aminta Granera

The artist kept each sample in an identical vial with a plain white card to sit underneath, demarcating each vial from the next and the name of each donor and the purpose for their tears. The vials were to be put on display at the Museum of Antiquities. The artist equipped the vials with special stoppers that would allow the tears inside to evaporate. Once the tears were all gone then the installation would be over. Nobody in Nicaragua knew how long it would take for tears in a vial to evaporate. Researchers from the University of Nicaragua kept a close eye on the vials and each day would record something in their notebooks to the tune of, "Day 5: no tears have evaporated". One young researcher was curious to find out if different tears that were caused by different events evaporated quicker than others. Did tears caused by physical pain evaporate quicker than tears of sorrow? The researcher soon found out that in Nicaragua all the tears evaporate in the same amount of time. Just like dropping a hammer and a feather on the Moon and they land at the exact same moment.

Costa Rica

In Costa Rica the natives have over one hundred words for sand. Beach sand that gets caught between your toes has a different name than sand from the beach that gets stuck in your ears. Hourglass sand is different from the sand inside a sand bag for example. They have a word for the sound that sand makes when you rub it between your fingers and a word for the sound that sand makes when it blows against a window during a tropical storm. In Costa Rica there is sand everywhere. It rests on the small hairs of the arms and legs of the people of Costa Rica and clings to the bottoms of their feet like a second sole. In Costa Rica the people know that after you die you go back to the sand. That's why it's everywhere and that's why it has so many names.



In Costa Rica they don't have an army anymore. One day the president just decided that they didn't need one and he abolished the army. That was so long ago that the people of Costa Rica have no recollection of war or of soldiers leaving on a boat to fight in Mozambique or Suriname. There are no more retired soldiers left in Costa Rica and the old war memorials in the country are all covered up with sand.

Panama

In Panama there are many trees, many fish, and many butterflies. It is very far away. There used to be more butterflies in Panama than there are today. Butterfly wings used to be the currency in Panama. Two butterfly wings would get you an *empanada* or a glass of *chicha* in most towns. Some people say that Panama comes from a native word that means 'the land of many butterflies'.

One hundred years ago they cut Panama in half by digging a trench one hundred miles across. Twenty thousand people died of homesickness while building the Panama Canal. They called it homesickness at the time because they didn't know that mosquitos carried disease. Some people say that the word Panama means 'the land of many mosquitoes'.

People in Panama feel very disconnected. The canal brings in ships from all over the world but the canal also cuts their country in half. They feel like they themselves have a hole cut through them. Imagine if someone built a highway that went right through your front room. The national motto of Panama is, "the shortest distance between two points is to dig a hole through the middle".

Most people agree that the word Panama comes from an old native word that means 'far away'. Nobody knows what they are far away from or perhaps they just feel that whoever comes to Panama would have to come from very far away but that's always been the meaning for as long as anyone can remember. The only way to get to Panama is by boat so it would probably take a long time to get there. It is very far away.

Colombia

In Colombia, two boys are arguing over a chocolate bar in an alleyway between two houses. The roofs of the houses are made of clay. Everything is made of clay. There are cats everywhere.

They are arguing about what chocolate tastes like.

Chocolate tastes like wood that has recently been on fire, said one.

Chocolate tastes the way that coffee smells, said the other.

Chocolate tastes like a kitten's hair.

Chocolate tastes like leather.

In Colombia, a group of boys are playing with sticks and pretending they are swords. They are pretending they are famous warriors. One boy hits another in the ear and he starts bleeding.

"You're dead!" the boy shouts. The boy whose ear is bleeding cries and runs toward home.

"What do you think dying is like?"

"When you die you get to become a cloud." says one boy.

"Dying is like being inside a whale or a tiger." says another.

In Colombia, a bullfighter is removing his bull fighting clothing. He licks the tip of his sword. It tastes like warm chocolate.

