

This is the blog for Thursday. It may also appear above under the headline, Tony Cozier: The Voice of WI Cricket. They are the same, apart from these first three sentences, which I had to write because I don't know which, if any, of my attempted postings will take.

You may know already that, on Thursdays, I do a feature for the Nation of Barbados called, 'As Bajan as Flying Fish'. It's the other person's side of a chat we have and it really does cover Bajans from all walks of life. The very first one, e.g., was with a newspaper vendor, a lovely woman called Jackie - I'll put hers up on Saturday, with her pic, perhaps.

Here, though, is today's, a much longer version of the very funny and often touching conversation I had with the man who is arguably the most famous Bajan with only Sir Garry himeslf and Rihanna in his category. Coming into the commentary box, as it were, is Sir Tony Cozier. (The Queen is yet to planasse him with a sword, though.)

## AS BAJAN AS FLYING FISH as told to BC Pires

For 1 October 2009

Tony Cozier, cricket writer.

Journalism in the Blood

**My name is Tony Cozier** and I'm a cricket writer.

**I was born in one the three bungalows where the Island Inn hotel is now.** And I'm most disappointed they haven't put a plaque on it saying I was born there. As yet.

**When I was nine, and he having been there, my father sent me to Lodge School as a termly boarder.** My father worked in St Kitts, St Lucia, Trinidad and Barbados and was editor of the Guardian in Trinidad then. So I lived all over the Caribbean. I did have a term or two at Fatima College in Trinidad. From nine to 18 I was at Lodge. But I would go to St Lucia or Trinidad on holiday.

**I wrote my first cricket report when I was about 15.** Australia were here in Barbados in 1955. I asked my father, who was editor of the Voice in St Lucia, if I could do Test match reports. He got the permission of the headmaster, ARV "Pappy" Newsam. My father had been the only West Indian reporter covering the historic West Indies tour to England in 1950 on behalf of the West Indian press. So when Young Cozier came into the press box, he was well looked after. I filed my story by cable. I guess I've never left the press box since.

**I studied journalism at Carleton University in Ottawa.** It was the

first time I ever left the Caribbean. Winter was a terrible experience. The Barbados Daily News my father started here coincided with what should have been my final year for the degree. And I said, no, I'm not going back. They couldn't teach me anything. It was a BA degree and I knew the guts of journalism how to lay out pages, crop pictures and all that from the time I was "that high".

**My son Craig also followed into the cricket writing/journalism.** So we have three generations of it, started by my old man, who's got an autobiography,  
*Caribbean Newspaperman*

**Partly because of travelling around with my father and family, I consider myself more of a Caribbean person than simply a Barbadian.** That was helped in the Lodge School. All over the Caribbean, you'll find Lodge boys who went on to very high positions. Lifelong friendships were made there.

**When the sugar cane crop was ready, we Lodge boys reaped a lot of it.** Society Plantation cultivated a special area of cane which they thought was hidden from the boys to enter in the annual exhibition. A ball was hit into the middle of the cane piece and a few of the boys went looking for it and found these magnificent canes.

**Lodge, the boarding establishment was basically all-white, , but it had boys from all over the Caribbean and Venezuela.** Many have

gone on to be captains of industry but with the changing times, it had to change, I suppose. The government completely closed the boarding establishment down, converting the school to a co-ed day institution. Its reputation fell after that. But I'm happy to see it bounce back.

**I'm married to Jillian, a Barbadian.** We're coming up to our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year – which will coincide exactly with my 70<sup>th</sup>

birthday. I got married on my birthday so I would never forget my anniversary. She's done well to put up with me so long.

**We have two children, Craig and Natalie.** Natalie has given us Jodi, just turned six, Kailee, just one. And Craig's Laila is two-and-a-half.

**My tour in '68/69 was five Test matches in Australia and three in New Zealand.** When I came back, the first time I ever saw Craig, he was two-and-a-half months old.

**Craig is married to Samantha, the granddaughter of a national hero.** Sir Hugh Springer, the former

Governor-General. It is a happy coincidence that the foreword in my father's autobiography was by Hugh Springer. Natalie, a teacher, is also married to a Barbadian, Ryan Linton, but not with such elevated status.

**Organizing the Barbados Hockey Festival gave me as much satisfaction as anything else I've done in my life.** I played for Barbados; badly. Jillian played a little bit better. Craig was by far the best than of us. He really deserved to play. I think I got my pick because I was president.

**I don't read many books.** I read a lot of magazines and I read newspaper columns. Not necessarily BC Pires but, since I consider myself Caribbean rather than Bajan I don't get that annoyed. Jeremy Clarkson in the Sunday Times gives me a laugh. A lot of people take themselves too seriously in newspaper columns. I get a lot of cricket books but I just surf them.

**You don't want to read Peter Roebuck or Mike Atherton.** Because you feel very inadequate. In Australia I heard Peter Roebuck dictating his copy off the top of his head. I was slaving away and couldn't even get my first paragraph started and there he was, on the phone.

**I was lucky because newspapers in the West Indies either couldn't or didn't send representatives to report overseas for them.** Tony Becca of Jamaica and myself were often the only West Indian press representatives. Reds Perreira often did radio. Luckily, because of my connection to Peter Pitts who managed 610 Radio in Trinidad, I did my first commentary on radio. Doing two things, radio and press, helped to pay your way.

**My first overseas tour was '63, to England.** I convinced my father I should report for the Barbados Daily News. I stayed at YMCAs until I found West Indians – a lot of Lodge boys – and I bunked on the floor to cover that tour. Friends of my father's on the BBC, mainly Alva Clarke, allowed me to do some reports on the West Indies matches against the counties.

**If people say, “But you’re the voice of West Indies cricket”, I say, “By chance, really.”** It could have been anybody else. Roy Lawrence was that for some time. He was brilliant, that lovely Jamaican accent. I was the first to do cricket alone.

**My first tour of Australia was ‘68/69, covering the tour for the Advocate, the Guardian and the Graphic. Roy Lawrence couldn’t go and I got his spot to do radio commentary in that series.** That kicked my radio [career] off.

**I started television commentary much later, and it was luck again.** Always by chance. I hadn’t done any television at all [when Kerry] Packer’s World Series Cricket came up. Rudi Webster, team manager, said to TV producer, David Hill, “You don’t have a West Indian commentator and you’ve got a mostly West Indies team.” We were that strong in those days that Packer wanted 22 West Indians. Rudi said, “This fella will be coming for the West Indian papers on his own. Will you use him on TV?” So they did me on spec. I said I had to get back for

Christmas because my wife expects me David Hill said, “We’ll fly her out.” I rang and asked her if she wanted to come. She didn’t answer, just put the phone down on me. Next thing I knew, she was standing next to me in Perth.

**I did Channel Nine in Australia for 14 years.** And I did matches not involving West Indies. England v Australia e.g. Someone told me I’m on YouTube as the commentator when Shane Warne got his first Test wicket against India.

**I love dogs and did name them facetiously.** “Imran”, “Curtly”. We had “Lara”. We have “Fidel” now.

**Sarwan has it in him to be another Rowe but there’s a lack of discipline in West Indies cricket. It may be that it reflects society in general.** I look at the Trinidad steelband movement and say, “Look at that discipline, at the excellence they produce.” They come from rougher places than the rest of the Caribbean and look at what they’ve done.

**Michael Holding took over from me on TV.** They're looking for ex-Test players now. So I can see myself drifting out of it eventually. That was obviously going to come and I consider myself very fortunate to have remained on it for this long. There's only one other fella now doing it regularly who's not a Test or first-class player and that's Harsha Bhogle from India. Radio is different. They use a lot of genuine broadcasters like Henry Bolfield amongst the Test players.

**The best thing about the job is travelling and observing different people in different lands.** When you're in Calcutta, e.g., you know you're not in Auckland. Peshawar, the heart of Al-Quaeda in Pakistan, crowds in fezes, are as intense in watching, following and knowing cricket as the civil servant in Canberra, a completely different race, religion, nationality, outlook on life – all these places are so different, but cricket brings them all together

**I can't think of any bad thing about the job. Others complain about the living in hotel rooms but I have**

**more problems when I get back home.** I hear my wife muttering about dishes in the sink and I think, “Why is she fretting herself? Let Room Service get it”.

**West Indies cricket is an immense disappointment.** When Barbados became independent, there was a great deal of trepidation as to whether we could make it on our own – mainly from the upper and white classes. And we’ve done better in Independence than before! Yet, with our cricket, which was the pinnacle of world cricket, it’s taken only 20, 25 years for it to disintegrate. I just can’t understand how that could have happened. Other Caribbean countries have had their problems in other areas as well, to be realistic. But in Barbados, where everything else seems to have gone really well, cricket has just collapsed. We have a national hero in the greatest cricketer on Earth and, yet, for the last 20 years we’ve not produced anyone of any calibre; and I can’t see it happening in the future.

**I don’t think it’s too far fetched to say West Indies cricket as we’ve known it is in its death throes.** I would not be surprised – of course I would be absolutely devastated – if it actually breaks up and is no longer part of the global cricket fraternity, which envied it for ages.

The same Peter Roebuck is writing, “Look, we don’t need West Indies any more, they’ve given us so much trouble, let’s get rid of them”. Scyld Berry, the editor of Wisden, says it’s probably better for us to fragment, go our different ways and play as associates.

**We are definitely irrelevant to international cricket now and we don’t seem to recognize it.** The players’ association and the board, who you would think are there to protect the wellbeing of West Indies cricket, are at odds and creating so much damage that I don’t think our cricket will ever come back. I hope I’m wrong but they don’t seem to recognise it.

**I go by cricketers to say what a Bajan is.** I’m pleasantly astonished by what our cricketers from humble beginnings have made of their lives. Take, e.g., Sir Everton Weekes born virtually in poverty in the Orleans in inner-city Bridgetown. Sir Garry Sobers, same thing. Charlie Griffith, Wes Hall, you name ‘em all. They’ve all become successful after cricket, gone on to even greater things.

**Barbados is my home.** Every time I come back – and I come back quite a lot, because I go away quite a lot – I always try to get a seat on the left hand side. Because that's where you look down and see that land and it tugs at the heart strings.