

A black sand beach on the east coast of St Vincent.

wasn't. A melange of colour and shade, the walls of whitish rock were covered in lichen in bright red and fluorescent green, turning a horrific history toward art. Over time St Vincent's remedy had done its best, making new beauty with a little weathering. We should remember people's goodness and struggle, and not only their suffering: it's a reminder.

She drove on, north, to colonial looking Georgetown, which seemed to be trying to be more of a town than it really was. Beyond was the light forest of tall palms among the cane fields, the banana and guava orchards. It was an inching lane of warped bitumen that raised us to the shady turnaround at the start of the volcano trail.

Above the clouds, Soufrière's active bellybutton peak in the island's north is out of view; it's the skyward tip of the painted parasol of an island and it can erupt, and disrupt, again. Yet it's true, St Vincent would over time remodel any catastrophe, to make new beauty, with a little weathering.

Wherever there are humans there are struggles and Lucelle tells us of youth unemployment and the fear that her SVG could fall into the trap of drugs and crime that has already beset some of the neighbouring island nations. But she shows us the new schools the Vincentian government has built and the site of a proposed larger airport that could accommodate larger planes to help the tourism industry to bloom. She considers if her SVG couldn't become the IT hub of the Windies. She sees a bright future, there.

Meanwhile beyond the capital Kingstown on the west coast and another day the older model brown car drove to the little bay of the Hollywood treasure chest, where the movie Pirates of the Caribbean was filmed. Swashbuckling sets, warehouses and coffins are still, there. And in the small town of Barrouallie we stopped to meet her relatives; because although they'd never know it, you can't simply drive on. SVG is not that sort of a country.

Sometimes Lucelle would come to us and we'd sit in lazy chairs on the balcony overlooking Indian Bay's deep blue. She spoke of her life in easy, palm frond sentences, about her own troubles of the sort that can be found wherever there are humans.

She remembers the parties of Europe back in the diplomat days and smiles, and I won't tell the whole of it but I did want to mention about her husband, who suffers from dementia. She helps him to the beach and back twice a day, for a swim; and he needs a lot of care, not always knowing who she is. Sometimes in the not-knowing he can act with violence.

So when Lucelle worries about his safety, when she worries he might wander off and finds it hard to speak of these things; when she says 'He was very good to me,' it's really something to respect. That there's a kind of entwining in this world that can overcome any obstacle: it's a reminder. Sometimes we need reminders and Lucelle was an exceptional one: we saw so much goodness in her.

One day, she said, she walked into a bank in Kingstown and was shocked: there was no movement, as though time had stopped, customer and staff silent and frozen. It was the final stages of a cricket match, it turned out to be, and all those Vincentian eyes were glued to the TV set and Lucelle willingly did the same, more than willingly. For the several final minutes breaths were held, stomachs in throat until suddenly there were screams: in the bank the customers jumped about, she said, they woke up in spontaneous cheers and applause. Hurrah! The Windies had triumphed!

SVG is not the cure-all for the deficiencies of mankind but it does its best.

PHOTOS: ANDREW EAGLE