

BACK TO SURINAME

ESSAYS AND CHRONICLES



BY TRADITIONALBODYWORK.COM

Table of Contents

Preface	3
Essays and Chronicles	6
IN SURINAME LIKE A BUTTERFLY	6
PARAMARIBO – CAPITAL OF SURINAME	8
AFTER THE CIVIL WAR THE NEW ORDER	10
SURINAME KON LIBI A NO KON TAN	13
BURYING MY GRANDMOTHER IN PARAMARIBO.....	15
A DIASPORIC STRANGER IN SURINAME	19
FROM MACOURIA TO PARAMARIBO – THE ROAD TRIP	22
GETTING RID OF MY INHERITANCE	26
WHERE DID THE SURINAMESE POETS GO TO?	29
LOOKING FOR WORK IN PARAMARIBO	37
HOLLAND OR SURINAME? HARD TO KNOW WHEN YOU'RE IN PARAMARIBO	39
AM I STILL SURINAMESE?	43
DECEMBER MURDERS THE EMOTIONAL AFTERMATH.....	55
CULMINATION NEITHER SURINAME, NOR HOLLAND	57
Epilogue	59
Appendix.....	60

Preface



Image from Depositphotos

With Christmas 1982, my father and I hastily fled Suriname shortly after the infamous *December Murders*. In the decades afterwards, I revisited the country several times: in 1996, 1997, 2011, and in 2012.

The essays and chronicles in this book were written between 2011 and 2015, and reflect my thoughts, emotions, and impressions with regard to those revisits of Suriname, the country in which I grew up from 1972 to 1982, from four to fourteen years old.

Mind that *Suriname* was previously known as *Dutch Guiana*, one of the three Guianas located in South America. The other two Guianas are *British Guiana* (today called *Guyana*) and *French Guiana* (in French called *La Guyane*).

Today, Suriname and Guyana are sovereign countries. La Guyane (French Guiana) is still an overseas department of France, and a de facto colony.

Copyrights

All rights reserved. This eBook or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of Marce Ferreira except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Title: Back to Suriname | Essays and Chronicles

First published: October, 2022

Latest revision: December, 2025 | Edition 2

Written by: Marce Ferreira

Produced by: TraditionalBodywork.com

Book cover image: Marce Ferreira

Images in the book: Marce Ferreira and Depositphotos

Our website address: <https://www.traditionalbodywork.com>

Questions and remarks about this book can be sent to Marce Ferreira at talk2us@traditionalbodywork.com

About the Author

I initially studied Information Technology in the Netherlands and worked seventeen years in software and database development for a variety of international companies and organizations.

After having lived twenty-six years in the Netherlands, I left the country in 2009 and discovered the beauty and healing power of Thai Massage and Reusi Dat Ton (Thai Yoga) in Thailand. It changed my life's direction and inspired me to become a massage and yoga practitioner and teacher.

After my return to Europe, I started offering treatments and training, and — for about a decade — regularly returned to Thailand to further my training in the Thai healing arts.

In 2018, I co-founded the TraditionalBodywork.com website as a platform to publish articles, eBooks, and Video Workshops about Thai Massage and Reusi Dat Ton.

Today, I also publish works about other types of massage and bodywork, somatic practices, alternative and complementary therapies, nature, spirituality, and unconventional lifestyles.

In addition, I share essays, poems, and reflections about my personal life and experiences.

You can learn more about my background and about the website through

<https://www.traditionalbodywork.com/website/>

Essays and Chronicles

In Suriname | Like a Butterfly



When you're small, everything seems so big. But once big yourself, and then being back here, everything seems so little.

The streets, the house I grew up in, the primary school I attended. It's all a bit scary, tight, and oppressive. Even my big family is suddenly not that big anymore.

It's a small world after all, especially in Paramaribo.

When you "grow with things," it's of course often quite different. The changes then are almost imperceptible. But now, if you go and come back much, much later, you cannot help but notice that you've "grown out of it," as it were.

Above it, or down under it, or through it. Anyway, just — out of it. Coming back and experiencing all this is far from easy. It's sad, a kind of gloomy, a feeling of utter melancholy.

It's like a caterpillar that transforms into a butterfly. How then to return to its cocoon? How to crawl again, along branches, on fresh leaves in a vast, boundless tree? This big tree called "home!"

How then, if you're now a butterfly and the only thing you can do is fly?

Paramaribo – Capital of Suriname



I don't know if Paramaribo is really an interesting city. It's hard to be sure. I grew up there, but I left when I was fourteen, and I suppose — after four decades — you see things differently; not through the eyes of a local, but neither through the eyes of a tourist or businessperson.

Nevertheless, over time, I think I have come to a more distant, more objective outlook. For instance, when I was still living in French Guiana (Suriname's neighboring country), I met quite some French people who had visited Suriname, some of them going on a regular basis.

Talking to them, you hear quite another story about Suriname — nothing about corruption, incompetence, the former military coup, the Civil War, the infamous December Murders, or dictatorship, but all about a Caribbean country that's cheap, a good business opportunity, fun, dynamic, multicultural, multicolored, and blessed with beautiful, pristine Amazonian nature.

The French generally describe Suriname as a nice, short-holiday destination and “fresh air” as a change from French Guiana’s everyday life. Of course, compared to Cayenne (French Guiana’s capital city has 60,000 inhabitants), Paramaribo with its 220,000 souls is almost “cosmopolitan,” and one can enjoy much more cultural, culinary, architectural, and tourist amenities.

Nevertheless, most of the French to whom I explained the sad and dreadful contemporary history of Suriname were simply amazed. To be honest, they usually found it all interesting to know about, but they didn’t actually care.

And in a way I understand their viewpoint — tourists who visit Cambodia to see the *Angkor Wat* temple complex usually don’t really care either that not so long ago more than a million people got brutally killed, murdered. Sure, it’s interesting, it helps to understand both historical and contemporary aspects of the country, but one is all too happy that one can visit and enjoy what is offered *now*.

Anyway, because of the French I got a better understanding of Suriname’s contemporary make-up, of its “objective” attractions. It made me feel calmer, I became more realistic and pragmatic — I could easier see “the other side.”

It didn’t change my mind about Suriname’s deeper foundation, its wounds, and struggles, but it gave me some peace of mind. I realized that Suriname is like many other “developing” countries — *wannabe* and *window-dressing* on the outside, and picking up the pieces on the inside.

And Paramaribo? Well, because of our shared history the city will always be a cherished, yet utterly subjective part of *my* make-up, but I don’t give a single damn about the place “objectively.” When it comes to that I prefer Bangkok, Mumbai, or Paris, or the jungle of French Guiana.

After the Civil War | The New Order



In February 1996, it was the first time I went back to Suriname after the December Murders of 1982. I went for a three weeks' holiday after having been away for about thirteen years.

Of course, there was "the shock," although that in itself was nothing exceptional. I mean, in the sense that many Surinamese people must have seen and felt the same when they returned. First of all, everything was actually much smaller than I remembered: the streets shorter and narrower, the houses packed together (in Paramaribo anyway), the rooms in the houses small.

Certainly, as a child — I was fourteen when I left the country — you perceive things as being much bigger, larger than when you see them as an adult, if only from a physical point of view, but in this instance I think it was indeed the case. Anyway, it all seemed so much smaller to me compared to other places in the world I had seen in the meantime.

Then, speaking of the sights in Paramaribo: done quickly. Family: seen everyone. Acquaintances: also. Paramaribo is really a small place after all, and every fart is heard everywhere by everyone, and so was the news that I was back in town.

It was also much warmer than I could remember; hot, clammy, humid. And, also the coloring, the light in the city, was of a strange dark and light at the same time. Dark, I think, because of the ubiquitous, dark green and lush vegetation, the jungle, and because of the brown, muddy, sometimes almost black river water. And yet, things also worked much lighter, because of the bright sun and the dazzling white, reflecting clouds.

Suriname. The country with its scorching, mighty, all-determining tropical climate, a trial and blessing at the same time. The Civil War (*Binnenlandse Oorlog* 1986-1992) was now over, peace had been signed, the Surinamese currency was again relatively stable, the economy growing, and democracy had somewhat returned. Suriname could breathe again.

The fear, the tension, and the uncertainty were of course still eerily tangible, but no one felt the need to look back, but rather forward by welcoming the new "blessings." The mood: the horrors finally seemed to be a thing of the past.

In the meanwhile, the coup plotters, rebels, military, fortune hunters, and collaborators had financially secured themselves well enough to be able to "allow" democracy to have a go; democracy that so flawlessly launders blood money into legal assets. The new Surinamese democracy that obtained approval from the International Community, which happily turned a blind eye to injustice done.

Suriname had changed: the middle class was noticeably absent, virtually wiped out, leaving the country with a screaming gap between rich and poor. Some of my family

and former acquaintances had shamelessly enriched themselves; others had great difficulty making ends meet and lived on the verge of real poverty.

School children who were starving, a broken infrastructure, houses in shambles, social facilities absent, NGOs operating as half-hearted rescue angels, and the interior of the country destitute and paralyzed — yet the new elite was laughing, cruising around in big four-wheel drive cars and enjoying themselves on the terraces of the *Waterkant* of Paramaribo (the *Waterkant* is a famous boulevard and street located in Paramaribo's historic center on the *Suriname River*).

Houses were now — from top to bottom — protected by iron bars (in Suriname called “thieves iron”), and some premises were even equipped with armed guards, but above all — a Paramaribo with new, shockingly brutal crime.

Suriname had finally become a “real” South American country. A banana republic with a sham democracy, fueled by white-washed drug money and silent extortion, a country where ruthless private armies ruled. Where the power and terror of money and guns were henceforth master.

Where murderers now roamed freely around, happy and wealthy, cheered and revered by those who received the crumbs of plenty, which were pressed down their throats while they were seemingly enjoying it.

A society where the old norms and values had been razed to the ground, brutally replaced by the law of the strongest, and where it was openly shown that torture, intimidation, crime, vulgar barbarity, and genocide simply pay off.

A country where all means are lawful if one wants to “get ahead,” that is, to enrich oneself at the expense of anyone who “stands in the way.” That's the Suriname I saw again. In 1996. The new Suriname. The new order.