



STORIES from the HEART



Stories from the Heart

Lena Arrindell, Marie Elise Bryan, Maria Chemont,
Nora Fleming, Joycelyn Froston, Leona Gibbs-Arnell,
Prudence Hodge, Cedric James, Linda Lake,
Wilfred Manning, George Pantophlet, Louise Questel,
Amelie Lucia Reed, Clemence Romney, Rudolpho Richardson,
Wycliffe Smith, Carmen de Weever & Orlando Wilson

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Introduction

Elders hold the memory of a community. On the island of St. Martin, this role is especially important. During the lifetime of St. Martin's elders, the island has changed tremendously.

This book is a collection of oral histories recounted by elders on St. Martin. It is made of their stories, told in their own words. They are stories of personal experiences, and they also tell us about St. Martin, its culture and its history.

In these stories, daily life on St. Martin was very different. It was an island where water came from wells and cisterns. Light came from kerosene lamps. People walked across the island every day to go to school or to sell vegetables. People sold fish on the beach and cooked in stone ovens. Families grew crops in their provision grounds and cared for livestock.

St. Martin and its people went through many changes over time. Some went to work in Aruba or Curaçao. This often separated couples from each other and parents from children for years. Many came back to the island as it became a popular tourism destination with a growing economy. Now it had electricity, hotels, casinos, traffic and jet airplanes. People immigrated here from all over the world. The island was ravaged by major hurricanes.

Despite all these changes, St. Martin remains St. Martin. It keeps its unique culture. We experience some aspects every day. We hear St. Martiners speak in their mother tongue. Traditional foods are still cooked and eaten. Some traditions live on seasonally: tarts and guavaberry for Christmas, picnics for Easter, and dancing the Ponum for Emancipation Day.

Some traditions are practiced rarely today, if at all. Holding a jollification to build a home, sowing and reaping provision grounds, and watering livestock at the well are mostly activities of the past. But as long as we have the stories from our elders, these traditions will live on.

Perhaps most importantly, the stories told by elders tell us about the values of St. Martin people. They tell us of sharing and working together. They tell us of the closeness of family and community. They tell us of enjoying the simple pleasures of life, and the fun of celebrating with each other. As much as the island changes, these things can live on, as long as the stories do.

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She Would Boil Them in the Milk

What I love, there was a way that we used to get milk from the Bells. Two liters of milk per day, every morning. And there were times, let's say for instance, when my grandmother used to crush rocks with her hand, with a hammer. So we would bring the bigger size and she would crush them with a hammer to make the load of rocks. And sometimes she crushing so many rocks that she didn't have the time to cook like meat or so.

So, at night she would boil this milk with butter. There was a yellow golden butter and she would make, from the flour, little droppers. And those droppers, she would boil them in the milk. And that had such a nice flavor that we would eat those droppers, those little dumplings boiled in the milk and drink the milk. And it was a belly full. Very fulfilling. Until the next day when she had a time to cook meat or fish or whatever it is.

Our local dishes were peas and rice, callaloo and rice. And also she used to make cornmeal, mix the peas, pigeon peas in the cornmeal. Also that's a dish. Or callaloo, stir into the cornmeal like how they would stir spinach. But we didn't have spinach, what we had was callaloo. And we used to grow callaloo, my grandmother used to grow callaloo. We had a field of callaloo and those kind of things. And boiled fish. Boiled fish or stew fish. Whole fish with a head.

In those days a strap of fish was like for a guilder. And when I say a strap of fish, it was a long strap with lots of fishes. And that was a guilder. And you buy that at Simpson Bay, you go to Simpson Bay Fish Market, under the pomme surette. When the boats pull up, we will be there.

I can remember there were times when the fish was a little small and they didn't want to string them on the strap. They would even throw them back in the water. We had a particular gentleman that was raising a lot of children in Cole Bay. And he would collect all of those fishes, all of those small fish. And he would take them home and they would have them for supper. Nothing went to waste. What we would throw back also were conchs and crayfish that cost so much money now. But those were things that we really never used to eat them. They threw them back in the sea or make fish bait with them. You know, so St. Martin was just awesome.

~ *Maria Chemont*



▲ *Maria Chemont (Video still: Jarekay Studios)*



◀ *Fishermen come to shore with their catch while customers wait on the beach. (Photo: Willem van der Poll)*

Roast Your Cherry Nuts

Growing up on this island, we knew nothing different. So it was go to school, you come home, you do your chores. And then I being the last girl, and another boy after me, we were close. We were the closest in the family, three years apart. The others were big already.

And wherever he go in the afternoon, I was foot and foot behind him. He go to play marbles, I play marbles. He go to chuck cherry nuts, I chuck cherry nuts. He go rolling the tanks down the hill, I was right there, right behind him. Go set the traps, I was there as well, no matter what. I was the onliest girl used to play in his baseball team. That was, we were close, very, very close.

After you chuck cherry nuts and you won a whole pan of cherry nuts, gotta roast them and then pong them out. And we would go up in the corner of the yard because you're not allowed to go and roast cherry nuts where you had the regular wood fire. Because the chickens would get yaws if you roast cherry nuts in their area.

So you had to go all the way to the back of the yard. Make your little fire, your little pit, and you roast your cherry nuts. When those were roasted, you let them cool and you sit down and you pong them out. And my mother did a lot of things with the cherry nuts. She ground them, you use them in different recipes, had them to eat like normal. Now you go to the store and you buy cashews. You call them cashews now. You don't call them cherry nuts anymore.

When you pick your cherry, my mother used to sit down with a big kerosene pan of cherries and she would prick them with a fork and then stew them. After she washed them and cleaned them, she stewed them and we had it with bread, she put it in pies, different things. And when she make ice cream, she would dollop just a cherry on top, stewed cherry on the top of your ice cream.

~ Leona Gibbs-Arnell



▲ *Leona Gibbs-Arnell (Video still: Jarekay Studios)*

◀ *Cherry and cherry nut, also known as cashew.
(Photo: Mark Yokoyama)*



Two Pants and Three Shirts

In 1960, Donna, I could recall because my father was still sailing. And every day for the week leading up to Hurricane Donna, whenever the weather forecast would come on on the radio, he would track it. Get out his maps from the boat and his pencil and his rule, and he would track it.

Donna struck the Sunday night. And by Friday afternoon, he said, if it doesn't change its track, we are going to get hit. And Saturday morning, he decided that's it. He was going to take the boat into Oyster Pond because that was the only place to be able to store your boat. The Simpson Bay Lagoon was there, but there was no entrance to get to it.

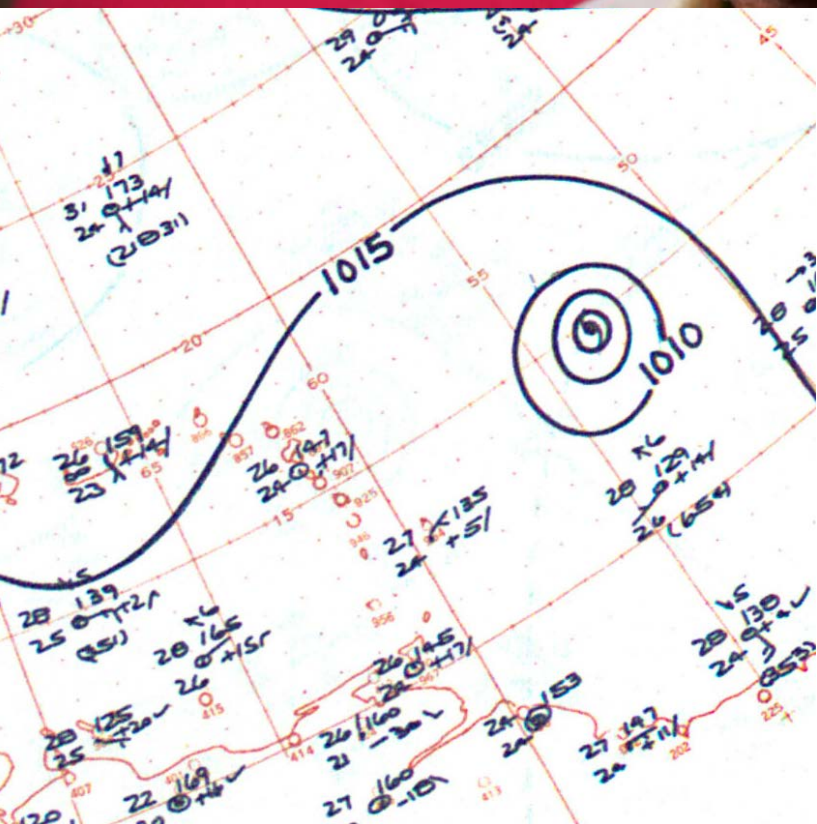
And so he left. And by the time he got down there, the seas was already raging. He went and he took the boat to Oyster Pond. And years later, he told us how difficult it was at the time because the boat didn't have an engine, then it was only sails. And he had to count the waves going into Oyster Pond in order to make the move to get into the channel.

Hurricane Donna hit us about nine o'clock Sunday night. And it was bad. I mean, I wasn't able to go around all over the island to see the damages. But some years after, I could recall even seeing a house roof that was completely taken off of a house in Pou Mou, going into French Quarter. The whole house roof was taken off and rest down next to the house. And for years, that house roof stayed there before they eventually replaced it.

Our house got damaged as well because there was a big L porch and that was blown away, which caused a room where we had the drinks stored to collapse.

Water actually dropped in my hair. That woke me up. And when I hit the door panicking, my father just said, "Boy, put on clothes." I rushed back inside to pull on the pants and a shirt, then I hit the door again. He said, "Put on clothes." And I already had on clothes. I put on another pants and a shirt. At the end of the day, I had on two pants and two shirts and he himself panicking. He had on two pants and three shirts.

~ Cedric James



◀ Weather map of Hurricane Donna approaching the Lesser Antilles on September 3, 1960 (NOAA)

Jimmy-john of Kerosene on My Head

Way back in those days, we didn't have any current. We used to use lantern and lamp. We didn't have any gas stove. We used to use kerosene stove, kerosene fridge, coal pot for your hut. I personally had to go and buy kerosene, jimmy-john of kerosene on my head for the stove and for the fridge.

And in those days, we had cistern. And when it was dry weather, we had to leave water in the cistern to keep the bottom cool. So every foreday morning, I had to get up and go to the well to full up tanks of water.

That water was to wash up dishes, bathe your skin, but it was well water. So, when you bathe your skin with the soap, your skin white, white, white. We didn't had any washing machine. So we had to scrub on scrubbing board, which was board, glass board and zinc board. You had to have your washing water, your rinsing water, your blue water and your Clorox water.

Then you had to starch your clothes, cook the starch, starch your clothes. And we didn't had any electric heater. So we had a goose and gas heater. So the goose, you had to full the coal pot of coal, put it in the goose and iron your clothes. And the gas heater, you had to put gas and pump it, pump it to iron.

~ Lena Arrindell



▲ *Lena Arrindell (Video still: Jarekay Studios)*



◀ *A woman carries a kerosene pan of water on her head. (Photo: unknown photographer)*

The Barrels Distract Them

My grandfather told us about the sea. He was a fisherman. He fish from Monday to Saturday. So, we eat fish. Maybe that's why I'm here so long, by the grace of God. We eat fish every day, you know, except Sunday. We eat fish maybe with fungi, eat a dumpling and fish, banana, then fish, fish, fish, but something with fish, potato and fish.

And he would tell us about the sea. He used to see a lot. He say when you sail in these vessels, and you see a lot of whales. You could see a whale ahead because when you see a whale ahead, you see the water going in the air, then you know whales ahead.

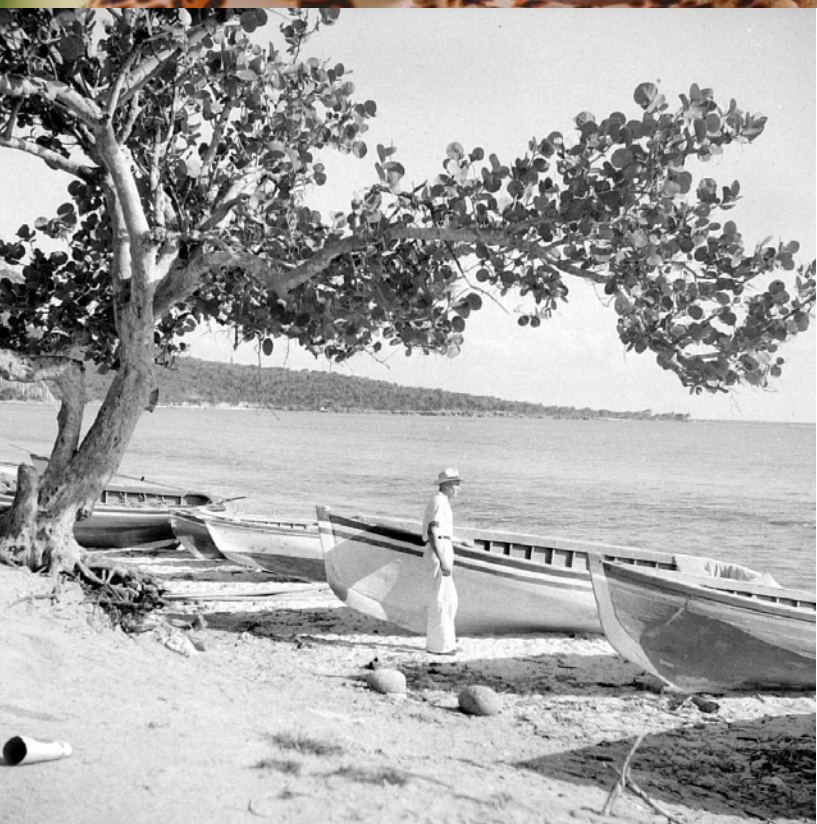
So then every ship has to have empty barrels, five, six or whatever. And when you see them, you have to throw the barrels out, so the barrels distract them, and then you get a chance to go the other way. I used to like to hear about that.

You see, a whale is dangerous because they does play. Like they have the vessels, they will play with them until they turn them over, because it's a big, big thing, you know. So you see, according to how close you see the water up in the air spewing, you know, you're close to them, you throw these barrels out. So the barrels distract them, and then you're gone. Then the whale will come, the whale will come your way again. But you got to have those empty barrels on your vessel.

~ *Marie Elise Bryan*



▲ Marie Elise Bryan (Video still: Jarekay Studios)



◀ Fishing boats on the beach under a sea grape tree. (Photo: unknown photographer)

Most of the Culture Was Cultivated Here

During my stay here on St. Martin, I'll have to go way back in history to remember things that might have left an indelible mark on me as far as culture is concerned. If I venture to say, there was very little culture that was from outside of St. Martin. Most of the culture was cultivated here on St. Martin itself.

People had their groups of serenading. That's one of the things that I remember very well. On occasions people would serenade. The culture of these people were more being together and jollification and have their pretty good dances and their entertainment that way.

I like a little bit of music because I like singing, but the music here was quite intriguing. I knew at that time there was a band, used to know as the Culebra Band, a string band consisting of a couple of local boys. Some of them have transitioned in the meantime, but that type of music was typical of St. Martin.

You had the congo, you had the strings and you had the singing accompanied. The narrative was very interesting. I like the music, especially the bongo, and St. Martin has a variety of all types of music. Latin music is predominant here, but American music is also very much liked here on St. Martin. So for me, music is music.

One of the striking ways and one of the striking things that I remember from the culture is that people are slowly moving away from the old culture that we knew many, many years ago. Sixty years ago, or even more than that. The younger generation don't seem to want to grasp or haven't got the opportunity to grasp and continue the culture. Which is a pity, because I would like St. Martin to continue with its culture.

~ *Wilfred Manning*



▲ Wilfred Manning (Video still: Jarekay Studios)

◀ St. Martin string band Tanny and the Boys.
(Video still from Back in the Day by Laura
Bijnsdorp)



We Run All Over the Boat

At the age of five, my father died and after my father died, my mother came back with us to St. Martin because they was the breadwinner back in those days. There was nothing much in St. Martin and she left us with our grandmother, seven of us. She left us with our grandparents and she went back to Aruba in order to continue to maintain us.

Back and forth she used to have us when there was no school. She used to take, especially the girls, which was three of us, back and forth when there was no school. It used to be fun going back to Aruba then because it wasn't KLM, it was the boat. That was the Antilia, the Antilia boat.

What I didn't like on the sea was the seasick part. It used to be fun because the little girls, we run all over the boat. It took us eight days from Aruba to St. Martin. Traveling on the sea to get back here. Whatever had to be shipped from Aruba to Saint Martin, it's the boat that used to bring it back in those days. If we had to go to Aruba, Curaçao or Bonaire, it was the boat.

My mother used to walk with stuff for us but they had things on the boat that you could have purchased. Mostly dry goods, biscuits or little things that are unperishable, stuff that would last, and water. But we could have got things on the boat that used to supply us. And for us as being small children, it was fun. It used to be fun. If it's our turn to take us to Aruba, then it used to be fun. Because if it wasn't the girls, it was the boys back and forth.

~ Louise Questel



▲ Louise Questel (Video still: Jarekay Studios)



◀ The Antilia at port in Great Bay. (Photo: unknown photographer)

Everybody Put Their Hands Together

Let me give you all a history of St. Martin. I came St. Martin in the year of '72. And I see St. Martin grow. I came St. Martin when they had well. They had no light. They had no water. Everything was well. They hardly had houses on St. Martin. If you live in the Middle Region, you had to walk from the Middle Region straight to town.

I get a job at Mullet Bay in 1978. And we had to walk from Suckergarden straight to town. And then they had very few buses running. So you had to stand up and wait until you catch a bus to go to your destination, to Mullet Bay. And when the bus dropped you home, you had to park up there by the head of the town where it was 4S Supermarket. And you had to walk back in Suckergarden. It was a long walk. You want to come to church, same thing.

I see St. Martin grow. St. Martin was the best place when I came here because we still had the salt. We used to run up the bank of the salt and come back down. The pond was very beautiful. Pink and white. But not today.

In the 70s, 80s, 90s up until maybe '95, tourism was still good. Up until we get Hurricane Luis. Then everything started to change. In those days tourists used to spend. Even working at casinos tourists used to spend. We who used to work, we used to get good money that you could build a house. Today you can't do it.

I used to get tips. That's how I built my house. At the casino you get your tips. It used to be over \$2,000. Sometimes three. It depends on how the tourist market be. You get more money. But the salary, your salary per week was small. \$28 for the week. You used to go home with it.

When I saw my uncle build his house, he used to have his friends come around on a Saturday. And everybody put their hands together and they make cement and they break blocks. They never charge each other. But you have to have a case of beer and a bottle of JB. That was their companion until they finished.

~ *Carmen de Weever*



▲ *Carmen de Weever (Video still: Jarekay Studios)*



◀ *Mullet Bay Beach before Hurricane Luis. (Photo: unknown photographer)*

They Were Welcomed Back

My first job was, of course, a teacher. I studied teaching. My family was rather poor. Nowadays students are very privileged. They can go to Holland. They get financing to come back on vacation and so on.

I went to Holland with the idea to spend five years there and then come back. But the Roman Catholic school board was very gracious and I had a mentor in Holland who wrote to the school board and said, “You know this young man, he will be coming back to the islands. Could you permit him or finance a trip back to the islands?” So the school board financed my trip back to St. Martin and to Saba with the agreement that I would work for them and pay them back after I started working. So that’s what I did.

After I was finished studying, I came back and it was very interesting compared to now. The school board looked for accommodations for you. So when I came back as a student, I was placed at Seaview Hotel for three months while they looked for accommodations. And the school board did find accommodations for me there in Saunders where I lived for quite a while.

But students, they were welcomed back. You felt as if you were wanted. Also, nowadays students have to pay back the scholarship part. In those days, if you worked for at least five years for the government, your scholarship debt would be, let’s say, erased. You didn’t have to pay back.

When I went to the Netherlands, even there, you were well taken care of. I was met at the airport in Schiphol. And in those days, you lived with a family. So before I left, I knew that there was a family I was going to live with. And that family took me in and treated me as their son. I lived with them for five years.

Going to Holland was made easier because there were people, there was an organization there that looked after your housing, that ensured your schooling, that also came and checked on you as a student to see how you were doing.

And coming back also, it was easy. The school board made arrangements for you to come back to work. This is in education. And in government, it was similar. Students who left to go to the Netherlands and came back to work for government, or even in the private sector, it was so much easier. And the private sector and the government made arrangements to have them, to accommodate them.

~ Wycliffe Smith



▲ Wycliffe Smith (Video still: Jarekay Studios)



◀ Pondsides Elementary School on the pondfill in Philipsburg. (Photo: unknown photographer)

He's Empty Handed

One thing that I remember well that I would never forget about it is, we went to church. A missionary from the States came and they started church, and we were glad to have somewhere to go. So when I went to Bible church is where we started. My boyfriend at that time, he came from Grand Case, La Savane, to church there, and there is where I met him, in church.

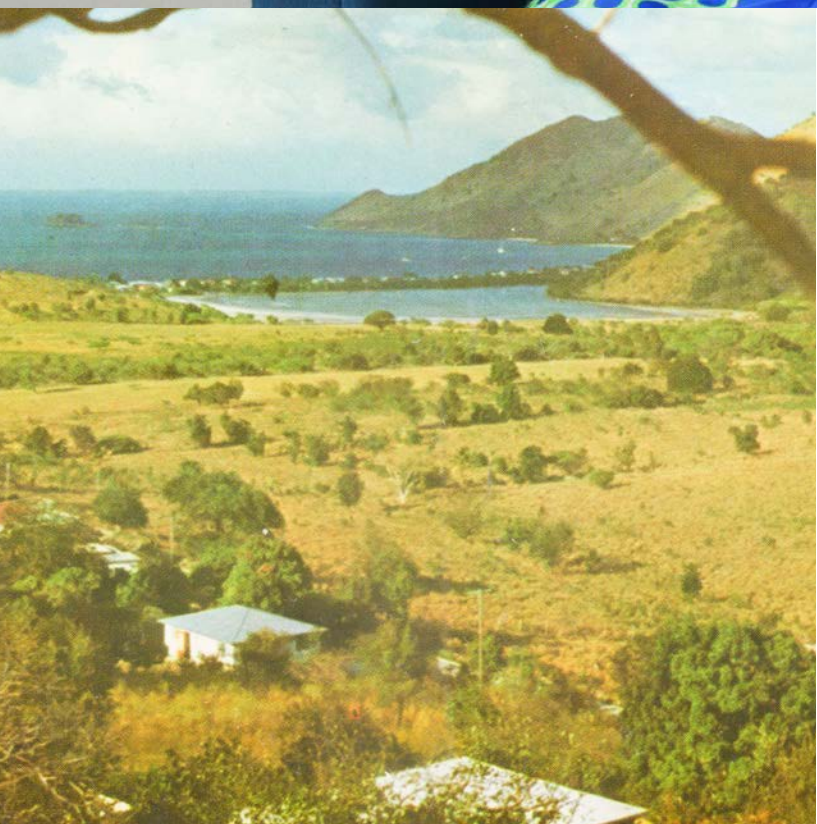
So we started to talk, you know, as young people. Then after, my boyfriend at that time, he had to leave to go Guadeloupe to finish his studies. So we used to communicate with letters, writing letters, putting them in the post, send it to him, he sent me back another letter.

And my mother got one of those letters one day, and she read it. And then she say, "This man don't have nothing, he don't have a house to put you in. What you find inside of that, he's empty handed, and you know, the other words behind that." So, she said, "I don't want you to write him no more." But I still continue writing.

And then she find his letter one day, and I remember one day she put me in a corner and she started to give me some blues. "I tell you not to write to him when you're still writing to him." And she began to beat me. So I told her, "I don't care what you do with me, he is the man that I'm going to marry to."

And from that day she said, "Okay, you're going to marry to him, you don't care what I do. So from this day, my hand is off." So I had all the liberty and the freedom to write and to talk to him at that day. And I did get married to him. And this year, it will be 58 years.

~ Clemence Romney



▲ Clemence Romney (Video still: Jarekay Studios)

◀ A view of La Savane and Grand Case.
(Postcard courtesy of Barbara Cannegieter)

Everybody Had Opportunity

I was born in Aruba. But my dad, interestingly, even though he was born on St. Martin, he loved Aruba more than St. Martin. And I'm born on Aruba, but I love St. Martin more than Aruba, so we kind of switch places.

But definitely indeed, my dad, he was a boxer, he was a fisherman, he worked as a security guard at Lago refinery at the time. He also sold numbers, he raised chickens and so on, because one of the things that I learned from him is you are responsible for your children. He fathered 11 children and he said plain, and I can never forget because I was not even mindful of politics, but he said, "Let me tell you this son," he said, "The government did not make you." He said, "I made you. So therefore, I am the one who has to provide for you and not the government."

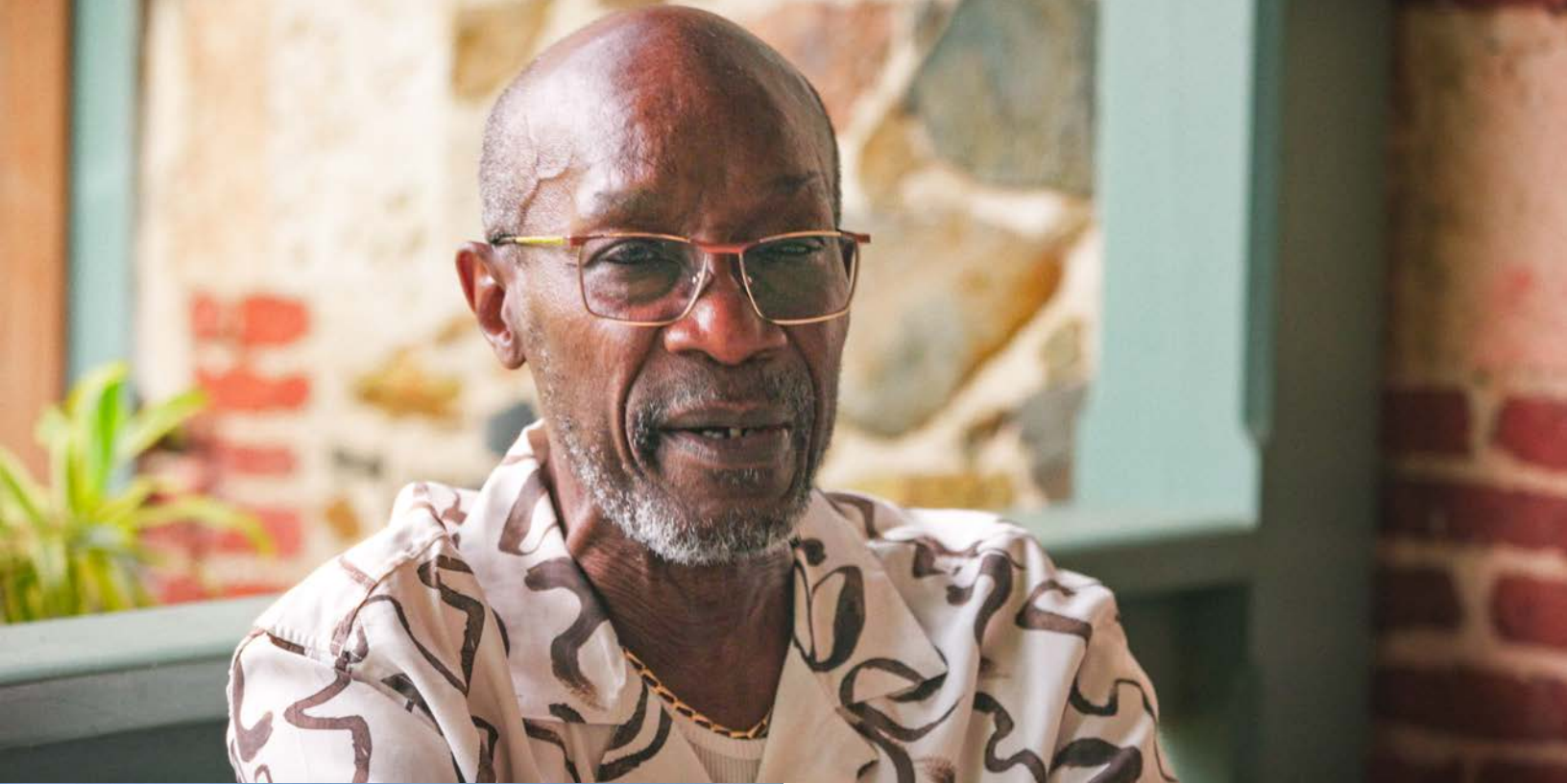
And that stuck with me all my life. Even up to today that I tell myself, and that's why I married a wife and had three children, and we have nine grandchildren. But I always told myself one of the things I learned from him was commitment to your family, especially your children, where that concerns.

I came in '72. When I came to St. Martin, as it came to the matter of employment, back in those days, you could have walked out of one job and walked into another job. Some persons had two or three jobs at the same time, and nobody complained, because why? Everybody had opportunity to be employed and to work.

One thing I remember very clearly that definitely had an effect on St. Martin was the passing of Hurricane Luis back in 1995. If you look at today, and we look at Irma, and Irma was devastating, had Hurricane Luis not given us the experience that it did back in 1995, I think in 2017, we would have suffered more.

I believe that Hurricane Luis is one of those major, major things that really changed St. Martin. It made us as a people more resilient. But again, at the same time, it appears though that even though we had those different mindsets back then, where you saw, you would see that you are your brother's keeper. People work more together as a team, as a unit, but unfortunately now as the years have transpired, we have gone back into the same old behavior pattern again, which I think is unfortunate.

~ George Pantophlet



▲ George Pantophlet (Video still: Jarekay Studios)

◀ The Lago oil refinery in Aruba. (Photo: Boy Lawson)

Born at the St. Rose Hospital

My name is Joycelyn Mae West Froston, born the 5th of June 1948, and born at the St. Rose Hospital. Right on Front Street.

I never moved from St. Martin. Never left St. Martin. I went to school next door to Oranje School. Had my education there. And I never went abroad because I didn't want to go, and my parents, you know, I didn't want to leave them to hear anything happen. So I stayed right here and I take care of them and then I started working.

My mother was from Anguilla. Ruth Augusta Hodge-Froston. And she lived here for years. My father was Frederick Froston Sr., taxi driver. Used to work at St. Rose Hospital. Take care of the nurses, everything. He worked there for many, many, many years until his passing in 1987. That's a very long time. He passed in 1987 and my mother passed in 1995 with Luis.

I got married in 1970. My mom worked so hard. She used to sell patties. And I used to be going and selling them in the evening. And then sometimes, you know, he pass up and saw me selling the patties. And then, as usual, wanted to speak to me. So I stand on the road and while I'm selling my pastechis, he spoke to me and we got in. We was together about six years before I got married.

So when I got married, it was the French side I was living. I lived on the French side a long time. I got married on July 25, 1970. I preferred to live on the French side at that time than the Dutch side. But every day I had to be in here to visit my parents.

We had two boys. After the children finished school, they finished school on the French side. They went to New York to further their education and they graduated there. I was in Philipsburg with my parents from then.

~ Joycelyn Froston



▲ Joycelyn Frost (Video still: Jarekay Studios)



◀ The St. Rose Hospital on Front Street in Philipsburg. (Photo: unknown photographer)

I Was Her Princess

As growing up with my other two siblings, my mother was a very strict person, so she never really allowed us to mingle with other children. So it was always just the three of us in the house. We'd go to school, we'd go to Sunday school, if there was a party, she wouldn't let us go to a party.

But for us, for me then, life was good. I don't know really, I can't say that I had hard life. Everything was just normal. My mother was a professional seamstress, so she'd sew for people, and as I was her princess, I used to model for the people. So every new style come out, I would have it. My mom would take off every weekend to make sure that she had three dresses for me. One for church, one for Sunday school, and one for school.

And life in St. Martin was very quiet. Everyone knew each other, the neighbors. We didn't have anything fantastic, but we had love. And as I say, if you need and I have, you would share it with each other.

~ *Prudence Hodge*



▲ Prudence Hodge (Video still: Jarekay Studios)



◀ Children play in a fishing boat on the beach in Great Bay. (Photo: unknown photographer)

I'm on the Wall of Fame

Way back, I can remember when I liked a lot of events, so I decided to get involved in sports and then culture. I began in sports on the pondfill where the park is right now with two little bench, a little table under a tree. I said, "Our village don't have anything, so I have to create something in the village." We start there and develop volleyball until many years, until I couldn't go anymore. I was a co-founder of volleyball in St. Martin. I'm on the wall of fame in Marigot today.

After volleyball, I grow in age. I said, "I have to do something else." I gather all the mothers from the Grand Case from up on Reilly Hill, up to the Methodist church by the airport, and I honor 65 mothers. I said, "These are mothers. Be good mothers, bad mothers, bad children or what? They are mothers. I know many that had it very hard, and they should be recognized in the community."

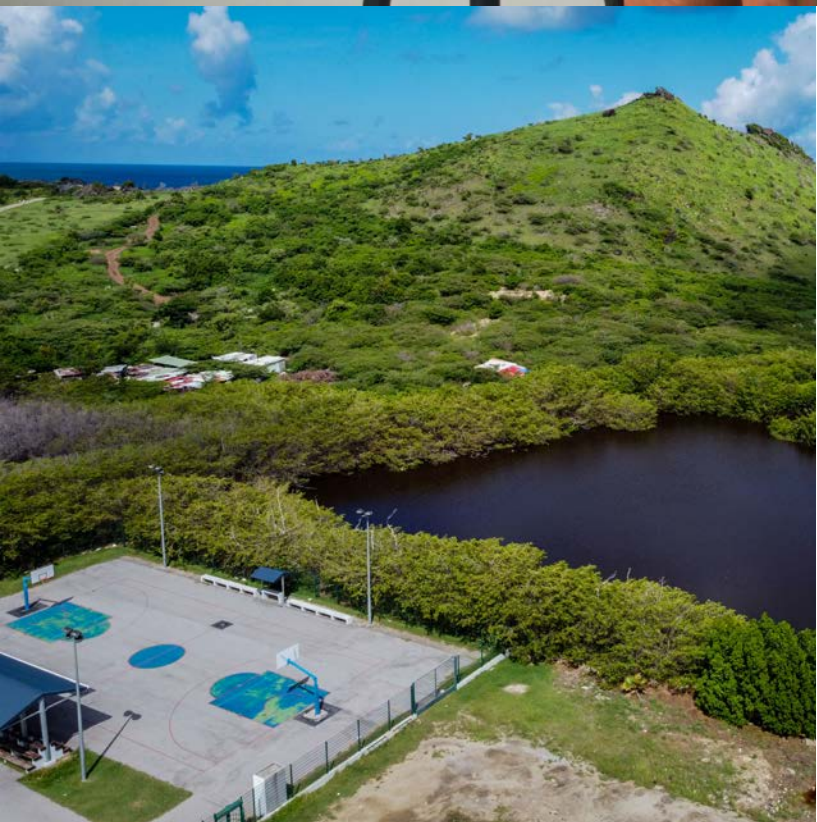
Then I decided, "That's not enough. I will take up the elderly." Then I started to gather all the elderly. We had different functions, we had Christmas parties. You name it, and we did it.

~ *Amelie Lucia Reed*



▲ *Amelie Lucia Reed (Video still: Jarekay Studios)*

◀ *The sports court by the pond in La Savane in 2022. (Photo: Mark Yokoyama)*



Everyone Was Fed

My grandfather was called Rueben Pantophlet. He died. And he had a shop not too far from here. And what I witnessed is to see that in those days, that money was not actually a fuss. Why? Because he would have fish and other folks would have meat and other folks would have vegetables. And there would be a constant barter situation, right? But everyone was fed. Everyone was fed.

And the island was more, you know, maybe that the money flowing through was not as how it is now. But folks were more contented. Folks were more contented. We were there and sleep in the same room, zinc house. But it was comfortable then. And the children were more respectful at that point in time. I can go on and on.

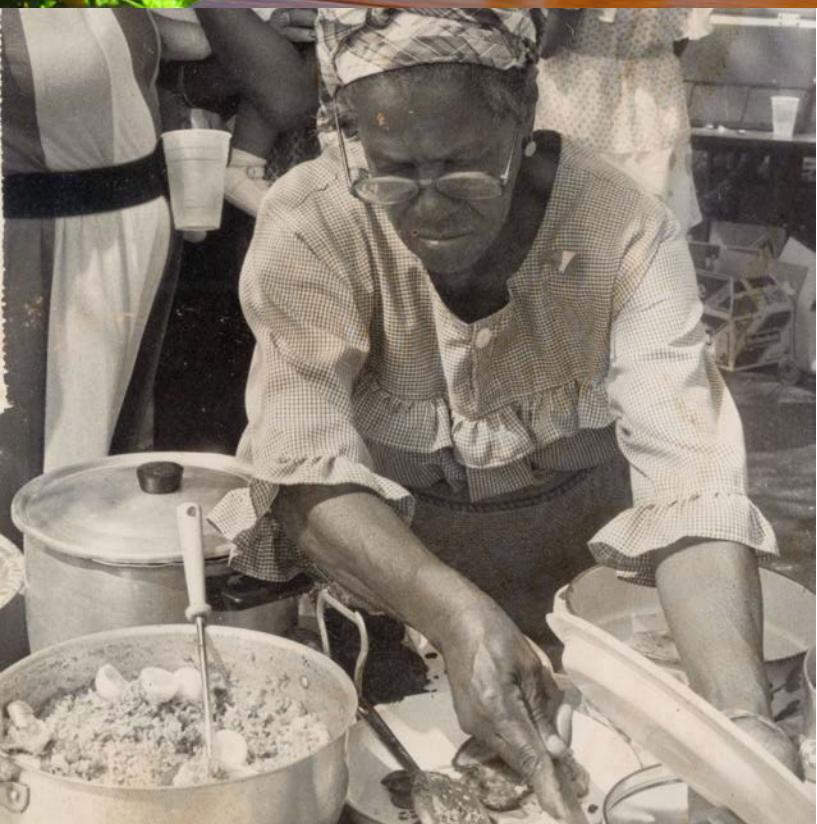
You know, development in a country. With development, if you do not keep a check on the culture, on the character, you would lose certain values of life. Because then you have folks that are just focusing on getting the money.

Then also we had an integrating of other countries and they would bring their values in. Now, St. Martin is so friendly that they are quick to adopt other values of countries than to be able to stand up. As in, this is our culture. This is our values. We welcome you. But still, this is our values.

~ Orlando Wilson



▲ Orlando Wilson (Video still: Jarekay Studios)



◀ A woman serves food at a gathering. (Photo: Pierre Beauperthuy collection)

I From the Old School

For Christmas we cook. A lot of people used to do pork because we never had ham those days. Remember, I from the old school. We cook. Pudding, tart. And yeah, you have a feast. Everybody come by, they could get something. Peas and rice. Guavaberry, sorrel, ginger.

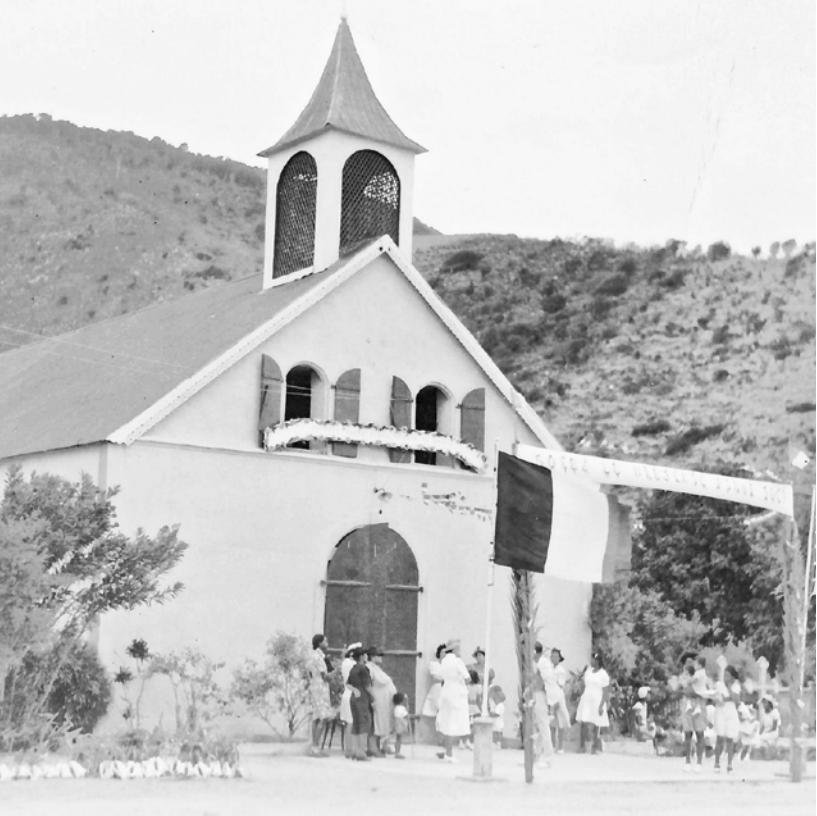
Being that I was a Catholic, we used to go midnight Mass on Christmas Eve night. You come back home. After you become at age, you going party after church. And in those days after the party, like for instance, New Year's, the Creole Stars then used to have a parade. From Old Year's Night to New Year's Day. A jam.

We used to be at Peace and Love. That's on the French side in La Savane. We go, it's like a little Carnival. Then we reach home at about 10 o'clock. We go to sleep because we tired. Boxing Day too, people used to go to the beach.

~ *Linda Lake*



▲ *Linda Lake (Video still: Jarekay Studios)*



◀ *Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Grand Case. (Photo: unknown photographer)*

They Used to Corn the Fish

I love my local food. My ground food. As our local dish, peas and rice. Corn dumpling. Corn dumpling and fish, and soup, pigeon soup. Salt fish, they used to corn the fish and string it up. Hang it up and when you need it, you just take it out. Salt fish and boiled potato and dumpling and fungi, you know, nice cook up and thing.

In those days, we had callaloo. We had kale, you know. We had papaya, you make your stew. You cook your meat and the papaya, it would soften the meat. You know, you don't have to go through no pressure. So it was good in those days.

~ Nora Fleming

They're Eating the Profits

I was a food and beverage manager. Someone came from the Oyster Pond, and said, "We heard about you, why don't you come to the Oyster Pond?" I went to the Oyster Pond. When I walk in the Oyster Pond hotel, I see the people, the quality food that the staff was eating. I said, "This place is not working right because they're eating the profits."

So I went and I make a menu for a week. Everybody wants to kill me when I did that. And then they see the end of the month, what different the salary was, they start to call me Goody, because they get a bigger salary because you stopped eating the profits. I made a menu out every day of the week. The normal food that was in the home, pork chops, salt fish, spare ribs. And not the the steaks and the big time things that cost so much. It cannot work like that. You're eating your profits.

~ Rudolpho Richardson



▲ Nora Fleming (Video still: Jarekay Studios)



◀ Rudolpho Richardson (Video still: Jarekay Studios)

I Still Love Christmas

My mother loved parties. So you know, Christmas was a party. And we would start from June, mango time, cherry time, coco plum time, whatever. She would stew down everything, and she had big bottles, those big bottles like a barrel, shape of a barrel. And she would stew and fill those up.

And then she would start baking maybe two days before Christmas, baking tarts, baking pudding, grating potato. We had potato pudding, bread pudding, anything, everything that you can think of for Christmas, 'cause she loved to cook.

She loved to cook, so we did that. And we had to learn how to do it. We had to participate. There was nothing that's you gone and I gone, and she doing everything. That's nowadays. Not then. Back then, everybody had to grate the coconut, for the coconut tart, grate the pumpkin, grate the sweet potatoes to make the sweet potato pudding.

And my father took care of butchering, whether it was a pig, a goat, a sheep, whatever. He took care of that. Early in the morning with two other men from across the street. They would hang the animal up in the tree, and then they had a big container. When they cut the neck, they would catch the blood, because the blood, you could stew up the blood and make boudin from that. You cook the blood with a lot of thyme and onion and rosemary and all the herbs, and you would stuff the intestine. And you make boudin from that, like a sausage.

Then we had the Christmas tree. No import, so we would be watching up in the hill. We would go up in the hill to get the cattle in the afternoon, because my father would take them up in the morning, but in the afternoon, we had to go up 4 o'clock and bring down the cattle. So you would make sure you have a tree. They had a special tree that they used for the Christmas tree. It had little spikes on it. And you would mark your tree to make sure that nobody don't trouble your tree, that it growing nice, so that Christmas Eve, you can go and cut your tree.

Christmas Eve, we had an outside oven, big oven. And my brother Norman, when he was the oven man, he would stack the oven with wood that he brought down out of the hill, dry wood, and light that oven maybe two hours in advance.

And then he had to keep checking by sprinkling flour to make sure that it's the right temperature. If the flour burned right away, you know it's too hot, you had to cool it down. You cool it down, you make a broom from moran bush. And you soak that in a bucket of water, and you clean the oven with that, wet it down. And then you would sprinkle some flour again. And the minute you see it start to golden brown, you know the bread can go in, the turkey, the pork leg.

And then Christmas night — but before Christmas night, you had the serenaders. They come serenading, and you had your guavaberry. Guavaberry was June time, so you had your guavaberries already set up. So they come for their drinks, and they serenade. Up to now, I still love Christmas. I just love Christmas.

~ Leona Gibs-Arnell



◀ Cattle are led to the well to get water. (Photo: Boy Lawson)

We Give Each Other Food

The Dutch side and the French side, we live as one. My father was born in Guadeloupe. My mother was born in French Quarter. I was born on the Dutch side. So we have family on both sides: Dutch side, French side. And we live as one in unity with each other.

The tradition food is still there, I must say. Locri, that is St. Martin food, conchs and dumpling, fish and corn meal, pigtail soup, salt fish. And fish in corn meal also. Peas in rice, red bean peas in rice, potato salad, crab in rice. Those was our tradition food. And corn pork.

In those days we didn't have any fridge. So when you kill the pig, you had to corn the pork and corn the fish on the house to dry. And that was one of the tradition. That one has disappeared, the corn fish and the corn pork.

Back in the days, the old people used to pick salt. We had sugar. We had cotton. The Salt Pond was there, and the government do away with all of that for tourism. So tourism is good, but we could have still had our salt, our cotton and our sugar, which we could have factories. We don't have any factory. If tourism disappear, that's it for the island. We don't have anything else.

Back then, every neighbor used to look out for each other. They used to reap ground. So if you reap potato, I give you, you reap pumpkin, you give me, you kill a goat. Because every Saturday you used to kill a goat, kill a pig, and we give each other food. You bake big bread. You give each other. The elders used to share with each other back then and look out for each other back then.

~ Lena Arrindell



▲ *Lena Arrindell (Video still: Jarekay Studios)*



◀ *A woman cooks on two coal pots. (Photo: unknown photographer)*

It Can Shock You

I can remember we got electricity in St. Martin in 1964. I can remember Princess Beatrix at that time coming to St. Martin and cutting the ribbon for the groundbreaking of the water plant to be in Cay Bay. And my sister after me, she was the one that did the ribbon cutting. And we were all small kids of course. So for me, that was part of history. And the next part of history was witnessing as a child the very first GEBE engine that was transported on a flatbed truck to St. Martin. And that was in the ending of 1963.

It was historical for St. Martin and for us as children it was scary. Because I can remember when they turned on the electricity, we were told, "Be careful, don't touch this and don't touch that because it can shock you, it will kill you." And I mean, it was really scary.

So the very first light switch that went on on St. Martin was GEBE in Cay Bay. One engine. And to look and see how GEBE has grown over the years. It was engine after engine after engine. And it was always excitement because you had overhead cables and you would see these men on the truck.

And these men were electricians that worked for OGEM in Curacao back in the day. And when GEBE came to St. Martin, these men, which were St. Martin men, were transferred then to St. Martin to work in the power plant in Cay Bay.

So I grew up in Cay Bay amongst all of these gentlemen and we looked to them as they were our parents. The wives were like our mothers. You know, so we were like a family. They came back but they never forgot their St. Martin culture, which was sharing. So we had this particular gentleman, Mr. Thomas, and his wife was from Statia and she used to bake bread every day. And this loaf of bread, one loaf of bread, was for my grandmother, free of charge. This is how we used to live back then.

~ Maria Chemont



▲ Maria Chemont (Video still: Jarekay Studios)

◀ Cay Bay and the GEBE power plant in 1964.
(Photo: Boy Lawson)



The Spring Always Running

In those days, they didn't have much luxurious home like now. You could have five, six people in a house. Two rooms. And everybody, well, some got on beds and some on the kind of mattress they make on the floor for the smaller ones. Everybody had to fit in there.

But then our family was lucky. My grandfather went to Santo Domingo to work and then he won a sweepstake. They don't pay much money, but in those days it was plenty money. So he came home and they built a house. But I born in a four-room house. That house went through Hurricane Luis, but Irma knock it down.

And they have like lanterns because they don't have no light. So everybody have lanterns for outside. And you have these big lamps for inside the house with beautiful shades. That was my job every Saturday, I had to wash them. Clean them up and they looked pretty. Because they get soot. So you have to wash them every Saturday.

And then sometimes you have to change the oil from the lamp too. They don't do that as often as you wash the shades. They wash the shades every Saturday. But the lamp can go for a long time. But when it gets a certain dirty light, you have to clean it. All that work I used to have to do.

Nearly every house had a garden. They have a garden for flowers and garden to eat. Above a house everybody had a ground. In the hills, everybody had a ground. The hills is to go to town to sell, to make a cent. And by the house is to eat every day.

We have a plenty of oleander, that can stand a lot of weather. And then we have buttercups, a yellow flower. Rose flowers too. Red rose, white rose and those type of things.

For eating we have bananas, potatoes, pumpkins. You could name it. We had ochros, tomatoes, even the thyme we put in the pot to season it up. That was the kind of thing we had above the house. Up in the ground we had about the same thing, but they used to grow more bigger. Because every time the rain passed over the hills first.

And really I tell you, those bananas that grow over the hill, much, much longer than my arm almost. But those below the house don't go that big because sometime before the rain was done, they finish. But you

know, if you notice, always see the rain falls more over the hills. So everybody would put their ground in the hills. And that's the one where you grow to sell.

We had goats, sheep, cattle. Everybody had their cattle, because they had to get their milk, the fresh milk in the morning time. And we used to churn the milk to make butter.

You set up the milk in a, you call this thing calabash, and then you cream it off every morning. And you put it apart a certain amount of time and then you start to churn it in a bottle. Then you get the butter. We had no butter to buy in shops, and all those things to buy butter, like now. We just churned the cream. Just the cream and churn. Then come the butter. It's like a "tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick."

Everybody, almost, have a cistern. But when it dry weather, you have to go all the way to the Moho well. You have to go for all the Belleplaine. But then you have donkey, with the kerosene pan on both sides, the crooks. And you, on your head, and you have everybody bringing water to fill up the tanks. So, hard work, you know.

My parents didn't have no cistern. When the daughter had a cistern, and they built a house, and the cistern was on the porch. You have to draw. So when it's full, 'cause you have to take care of the house, and you could take the water out. So we used to have the water from there.

When it's dry weather then you have to go to the Moho. And we had to carry our clothes by the Moho and wash them also. When the dry weather on. By the Moho, had a spring. The spring always running water. Everybody go there and get water, everybody. You wash your clothes there, and everything there. Because you can't afford to bring water, to drink and to wash clothes when you're dry, so you have to carry them up. To make it easier.

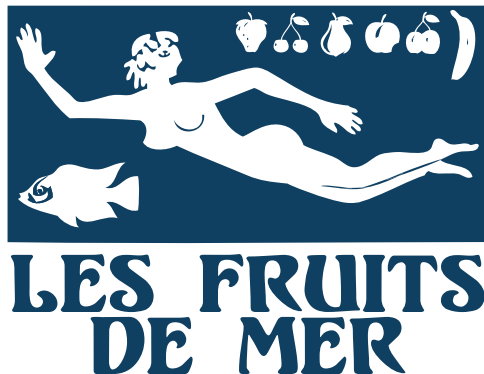
~ Marie Elise Bryan

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STORIES from the HEART

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Prudence Hodge, Cedric James, Linda Lake,
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This book collects twenty-two oral histories from eighteen elders about life on the island of St. Martin. In their own words, they describe St. Martin culture and traditions, historic events and meaningful moments in their lives. Through their stories, we are given a unique window into nine decades of life on St. Martin. During this time, there have been profound changes to the island and how people live. Their memories reveal St. Martin as it was, and why St. Martin's culture is what it is today.

