

Chapter 5: DOMINICA: March 1976 - October 1977

My first visit to Dominica was in the summer of 1969 when I had taken a teaching trip down the islands. I was very awed by the natural beauty of the island. It was relatively underdeveloped in comparison the other islands I had seen. It was so green and lush and quiet. By the end of the five days I stayed here it became my favorite island. But I try not to spread that opinion around to the other islands! Rúhíyyih Khánúm after one of her visits there said it was one of the most beautiful places she had ever been...wow!



Another reason it became my favorite were the people. While generally speaking, I find West Indians are kind, honest, and open to new ideas and will give you a chance to prove yourself. Dominicans go a little further than that. A good example of what I mean by that was shown by the ladies who sell things in the open market. Usually on other islands I had to pay more for my goods than local people simply because I was a stranger, a white American and everyone thinks they are all rich. But there, I was charged the same as anyone else. It made me feel good to be seen as "One of us".

My second visit was in the summer of 1975. A teaching team of eight was formed with members from Barbados, St. Vincent and Dominica. It was composed of Bahá'ís who were already friends so the trip was smooth and fun. One of the organized activities was a Bahá'í book display at the library. It drew a lot of attention with lots of material being given away and new friends of the Faith were made.



One of the people who enrolled during this project was a young man from a prominent Dominican family. It was really hoped that he would become deepened and serve the Faith and reach others at this level of society. Sadly this did not happen; he became interested in politics and chose that path instead.

The team made a visit trip to the Carib Indian Reservation. It was very interesting for me. We also were able to present a Bahá'í book to the reservation leader, Mas Clem Frederick.



Presentation of The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to Mas Clem (centre), Carib Indian Chief, Dominica, by a teaching team under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly of Barbados and the Windward Islands; August, 1975. Auxiliary Board member Shirley Yarbrough is seen on the extreme right.
 L to R: Yvette Clarke, Edith Elcock, Pat Paccassi, Don Providence, Mas Clem, Mrs Clem, Mona George, and Shirley Yarbrough

But the most memorable to me was the visit of Hand of the Cause of God

Enoch Olinga in March 1977 when he and his wife Elizabeth visited there. He gave his appearance as had been planned by the National Assembly. Afterwards I invited them to our home and they graciously accepted.



Visit of Hand of the Cause of God, Enoch Olinga (4th. from right) and Elizabeth Olinga, (1st. Right); to Dominica, 1977

Mr. Olinga and his wife Elizabeth's visit to our house in Dominica was charming. We lived in a small house on a big estate and it was all country. As we were all sitting in our screened porch, some chickens strolled by, and they both laughed, clapped their hands, saying, "It's just like home". Mr. Olinga made tea for us all, and as they were leaving, he turned to me and said "I'll see you in Haifa next year". This sorta surprised Frank and I, as we had been the National Assembly together for many years, but we said nothing. Next year at our National Convention, I was elected to serve, but Frank was not, and I did see Mr. Olinga in Haifa, as we stayed at the same hotel!

One of life's ironies hit me right after we had moved here. Up until this time I had been regularly serving as the recording secretary for our National Assembly. We moved here in March 1976. In April I was once again on the National Assembly, but now elected as the Corresponding Secretary. Wow. This meant a whole set of different duties requiring a lot of time spent in the National Office in Barbados taking care of the Assembly's business. I now had to travel from Dominica to Barbados and

stay there for two weeks every month. This was of course made so much more difficult as we lived on the opposite side of the island from the airport.

Another story that comes to mind even though it didn't happen during our stay there is an experience of one of the Dominican Bahá'ís. His name is Paul Von Elizee. He is a Carib Indian and one of the first who became Bahá'ís. His wife, Christaline, was the first Carib Indian to accept the Faith. They lived on the Reservation and had always attended the Catholic Church there.



One Sunday after he had enrolled, he was in Church and after the sermon, the Priest said to all, "I hear there is a Bahá'í with us today". GULP! This could not have been an easy moment for Paul. But God gives us strength and he stood up and said "I am the one". The Priest nodded and still in front of the whole congregation asked Paul to come to his office after service.

During this meeting, Paul said the Priest was very cordial and only asked about the Faith. Paul then proceeded to tell him as best he could. Paul and Christaline remained strong Bahá'ís. Paul served on the 1982-83 National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Windward Islands.

I have learned to love how Bahá'í quandaries are solved. They usually are, but not always how one expects. Our area was to receive a travel teacher of some renown, Meherangiz Munsiff. The National Assembly wanted to be able to prepare a proper agenda for her. No one knew what she looked like so how would we know to sight her when she arrived at the airport. I was set to travel to Barbados for my regular two weeks. I boarded the plane, saw an empty seat, sat down and there next to me was a lovely lady wearing a Sari. "Are you Mrs. Munsiff" I asked. Of course she was. I introduced myself and we started to chat becoming good friends from that moment.

I did get a bit of a shock in a moment. The stewardess announced that our flight to Antigua would take approximately 40 minutes. What? Antigua, I was supposed to be on a plane to

Barbados. The stewardess then spoke again explaining some plane had broken down or something and we were to pick up passengers in Antigua flying to Barbados. But it was fine with me; the dilemma on picking up Mrs. Munsiff was solved. You gotta love it!

There was a lovely young Bahá'í girl, Connie Didier, about Judy's age living close to us. The two of them became good friends and soon started to plan a teaching trip together to the island of Grenada. All went well and I proudly put the two of them on a plane to serve the Faith. This was her first teaching trip not with her Mother. I am sure one can imagine how very proud I was of my daughter!



In November of 1976 Al Segen and his sister, Edith Johnson, came to the island as pioneers. They moved to the capital, Roseau. This was good as we were on the other side of an island not easy to get around. They were wonderful people and experienced pioneers. Al was also a short-wave radio ham. This skill was a great help for this island as a category five Hurricane "David", hit there in fall of 1979. It was a devastating event; the island ran out of good water, food and was without electricity as well. Al, with his CB radio was able to communicate with the outside world. At a later date he was given a special award by Government for his dedicated services, as the island had been evacuated where Al stayed with other emergency personnel to give this service to the island.



In 1977 the teacher who had gone overseas for further training returned to Dominica. There were no other teaching jobs open for Frank. It was time to leave.

We again consulted with the National Assembly, asking them where they would like us to go. Its' first choice was St. Lucia. Except for Esther Evans, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, for the Windward Islands, who was 78, there were no other pioneers on the island. Once on my way back from the two weeks in Barbados I stopped in St. Lucia on an errand for the Assembly.

While there I picked up a *St. Lucia Gazette*, a government publication listing all the open teaching positions. I found that there were several openings for Science and Math teachers. Frank sent resumes to each school. As it turned out, all the resumes ended up in one place, the Teaching Service Commission.

A month after school had started the Commission called Frank and asked if he could teach Engineering Science. "Of course" he said. After the phone call he turned to me and said "I wonder what Engineering Science is?" They had offered him a teaching position and we were on our way.

Much to their surprise two weeks later we were in St. Lucia. They had not expected him until the start of the next term in January 1978 and this was only October 1977. Never mind, we were happy to be there. The Government put us in a guest house for several weeks where several people became Bahá'is.