

WHY ANTIGUA?

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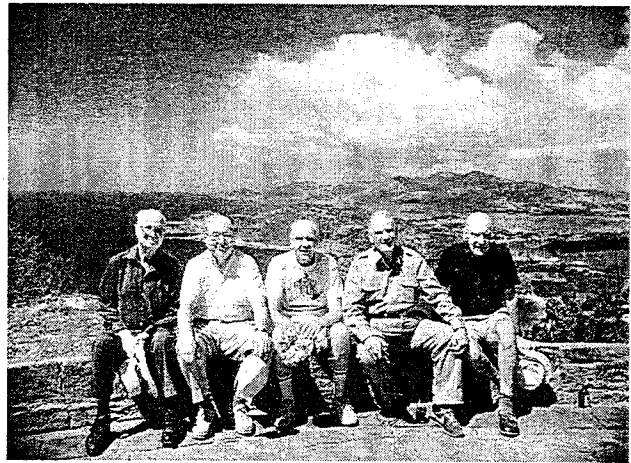
Editors: Classmate Ernie Chamberlin spent most of his working life supplying General Motors' cars to the residents of Long Island. Long before most of us were even thinking of retiring, i.e. in 1966, Ernie and Mary were attending a convention in Miami when close friends hi-jacked them to Antigua. They have been going there ever since. Ernie and Mary arranged our recent mini reunion in Antigua - "mini" in numbers but "maxi" in quality. Those present in addition to the Chamberlins included Gifford Agnew, Bob Clifford, Frank Dean and Justine and Bob Keidel. We stayed at the Long Bay Hotel, a charming inn on a beautiful beach facing the Atlantic Ocean and in the shadow of "Ernie's castle", a lovely house situated on a high bluff with a 360 degree view of the whole island and the ocean. The Chamberlins spend seven months of the year in Antigua. We were so intrigued with their more than a quarter of a century love affair with the island that we asked Ernie to tell us about it.

I have been repeatedly asked over the past 28 years: "Why Antigua?" Well, it all started one evening in Miami in January 1966 while Mary and I were attending a National Automobile Dealers Association convention. Close friends were going to Antigua after the meeting and wanted us to join them. As the evening wore on it became a better and better idea even though we had no passports or reservations. So armed with a driver's license and a P.T.A. membership card, we got on the plane and talked our way through immigration and customs and arrived about midnight at the Antigua Horizons Hotel on Long Bay (now the Pineapple Beach Club), after a harrowing ride across the island through the sugar cane fields. A Welcome Rum Punch helped and breakfast on the balcony, looking out over the white sand beach, the palm trees, the light green to dark blue water, the azure sky and white waves breaking on the reef offshore, and we were "hooked". We haven't missed a year at Long Bay Beach since. This is our 28th year.

Second most frequently asked question: "What do you find to do with yourselves for seven months?"

The first thing you learn when you become a resident is to quit being a tourist. No more lolling on the beach in a planter's chair with a rum punch in your hand all day. A fast prescription for becoming an alcoholic with skin cancer! One soon begins to perform the normal chores of housekeeping, gardening, marketing and socializing with friends and neighbors. By mid- or late afternoon when the tropic sun is lower in the sky we enjoy our "sun-bathe".

The next thing we learned after my retirement January 1st, 1970 was that staying three or more months in a hotel and eating the same 21 meals every week was not acceptable. So we moved to the other end of Long Bay Beach to a small



Dean, Agnew, Chamberlin, Clifford, Keidel on a gorgeous day in Antigua - March 1994, with Nelson's Harbor and Dockyard in the background

apartment at the Long Bay Hotel where Mary had her own small kitchen, a place to do her personal laundry and generally "keep house". Five years later we built our own cottage on the hotel property and enjoyed ten years in it.

Meantime I had been keeping my eye on the promontory at the east end of Long Bay. The owner finally decided to sell and I suddenly became a developer. This was not my decision alone but with the urging of the government. The previous owner had not set foot on the property for 15 years. Therefore no taxes paid to the government, no work for masons, carpenters, gardeners, maids, etc. When I submitted my plan for the development of the property they liked what they saw and granted me a landowner's license. With the help of a fine architect (a Scot) and an honest builder (Antiguan), I've enjoyed every minute of my retirement since.

How does one go about laying out a development plan for a piece of impenetrable jungle so thick with trees and vines that the sun is barely visible? Well, first you hire a local "bushman" with a sharp cutlass. (Machetes are used on Spanish and French isles). You then tell him you want to find out what you have just purchased. Can he cut a diagonal path right through the center of the property from corner to corner? "No problem, mon". "But how do you know where you are heading?" I ask.

I digress at the point to tell you that the adjoining Long Bay Hotel enjoys an 80% repeat business so the beach is always populated with old friends anxious for a "bit of action". Suffice it to say that the wily Chamberlin soon had a pool organized as to how close the "bushman" would come to the opposite corner of the property with no compass to guide him. Knowing he worked only from daybreak 'til noon and would follow the rising sun, I managed to win the pool and the bushman's wages for the week. I also found I had bought a beautiful level plateau which fell away to the sea on all sides and lent itself naturally to half a dozen pie-shaped homesites.

As clearing the site progressed my 200' steel tape became more and more useful. On one occasion my gardener and I had measured off a "point to point" distance. I told him to drop the free end and proceeded to reel in the tape through the bush. Suddenly I saw a mongoose fighting the receding tape. Now, over 200 years ago the mongoose was imported into Antigua to save the lives of the slaves who were being slaughtered by the "fer de lance" poisonous snakes in the sugar cane fields. Although snakes have been gone for almost 200 years and this "descendant" had never seen one, his genes were telling him to kill anything that looked like a snake!

And I've learned a lot of things on the way. On arrival one learns to say An-tee-ga. Not An-tig-wa, which is a city in Spain. When the English routed the Spanish from most of the Caribbean they bastardized the Spanish names. An-tig-wa became An-tee-ga, Granada (Gra-nah-da) became Granay-da and so forth.

Choosing a name - When one buys property and starts developing it a name must be chosen for the project. Those of you who have visited us know that we have a marvelous view of the off-shore reef. So the name "REEF VUE" came immediately to mind. That is, until we tried to say it to people. They wanted to know why we would choose "REVIEW"

or "REFUSE" and other sound-alikes! A quick family conference was called, since the brochure was in the hands of the printer. "PELICAN POINT" lost out to "LIME TREE HILL" Since there was not a lime tree on the property we had to find and plant them in a hurry since they take seven years to bear. Beaucoup limes now.

Labor relations - One of the first things we did after buying Lime Tree Hill was to encircle it with a native stone wall (plantation style). The stones were pickaxed out of the rocky soil while the masons with their mortar already mixed waited for them to be hand carried to the work site. One day when we were short of bearers a particularly strong young Antiguan lady came to me on the site with a tear-jerking tale of needing money and a job. Having carried bushel baskets of heavy vegetables on her head for years, toting stones presented no problem. So I put her to work. The next morning at 6 AM my entire work crew arrived at the cottage where we were living at the Long Bay Hotel demanding a "meetin'" When I finally interpreted the local patois it turned out I had hired a woman to do a man's work and that's a no-no. Had to fire the poor lady to get the men back on the job! Happily I was able to get her a job with the crew that cleans out the gutters in all the villages - strictly women's work.

Language, i.e. patois - Antigua was a former British colony so English is the native tongue. However, don't try to tell that to the tourists when the local people are giving them travel directions. It is still English but with a twist. First of all the nominative and the accusative cases are reversed. So when I go into a shop where I have promised to meet Mary and inquire for her, the answer may well be "Me no see she". Spoken rapidly it may be incomprehensible to a stranger. I got a kick out of one of the political tee-shirts the parties give out at election time. AMBROSE IS THE MAN FOR WE. They usually end their adverbs with a "y" rather than "ful" resulting in a thank you message "wasn't that thoughty of she". Now try putting the accent on a different syllable of every word of more than two syllables and speed up the tempo and you end up getting just about what they want you to understand.

Transportation - You definitely need a car to get around. I once bought one from a nice old lady at the hotel who had only used it to go church and market. Then I asked my manager, Kenneth Charles, how to get it licensed. He said, "Go to Fort James and get an appointment to have it inspected, find an insurance agent willing to write you a policy, go to

St. Johns police station for a title and a plate number, and then go to the place that makes license plates.” At that point I told him that he had just inherited a new car:- provided he would meet me at the airport whenever I came to Antigua, have the car at Lime Tree Hill for our use while we were there, and take me back to the airport whenever we left. Haven’t owned a car since!

Lest you all decide to recommend to your offsprings that they follow our footsteps in some third world or underdeveloped country, do heed my word of caution that all is not “peaches and cream”. You become aliens in a foreign country. You learn quickly what it is like to be a member of the minority. Thank goodness the Antiguan are delightful, God-fearing, placid souls who make you feel at home quickly. Many are well educated and widely travelled. It keeps one on his toes to hold his own in mixed company. We find Antigua the most integrated society racially we have ever encountered. Here one soon ceases to even think of the color of skin. We have entertained the Antiguan in our home and been entertained in theirs. On three occasions I have had a flat tire late at night in the pitch dark, not a happy event for an octogenarian like me. In each case the next car stopped and put on my spare over my protests (which I must admit were not too strong).

Riding through our nearest village of Willikies one day it was my misfortune to get too near the shoulder-less left edge of the road. My left wheels dropped into the ditch and there I sat on my axles wondering what to do. Within minutes about a half a dozen Antiguan housewives came out of their houses to survey the scene. It struck them funny to see this antique white man sitting there at a loss for words. After about five minutes of uproarious laughter (in which I did not join) they circled the car, leaned down, each grabbed a wheel or a bumper, and set me back on the concrete! Proof that the Antiguan women as well as their men are strong and friendly.

The most popular native game, along with dominoes, is WARRI. It is an old African game carried by the slaves to all parts of the world and known by many different names. Our son, David, Princeton 1962, an English professor at Millersville University in Lancaster, PA, got his Masters at Yale on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, and has spent many months of vacation time in Antigua. He became addicted to WARRI, but found no book of rules or instruction for it. So he wrote one. HOW TO PLAY WARRI. Now in its seventh printing at the local Antiguan printery, it is still the only text book we know of on the subject. To retain his skill he plays

for a couple of hours a day while he is here against the best players on the island. Loses a lot, he says.

We also have a daughter Judy, who, with her husband, David Neave, founded and operate Chelsea Farms, a dried flower business. They grow organically, dry, package and ship all over the country the fruits of their labors. Judy has written DRIED FLOWER CRAFTING, a national prize-winning craft book, DRIED FLOWER DESIGNS, and a hardback PRESSED AND DRIED FLOWERS, just coming out. Judy graduated from Wellesley in ’65 and got her PhD at the University of Toronto in French Literature. Perfect background for the dried flower business.

Politically, we became “permanent residents” of Antigua in 1986. Dual citizenship was not then allowed by the U. S. Now one may retain his U. S. citizenship and also be naturalized by Antigua. As yet we have not opted to take this step, seeing no reason to do so. At the same time being residents here, we are not residents of any state or municipality in the U.S. so we can only vote for our President and Vice-President, and not for any Congressmen, Governors, Mayors or other local officials.

Taxwise, we pay federal income taxes the same as all U. S. residents. Antigua has no income tax, no inheritance tax, no sales tax, and very reasonable real estate taxes. How do they finance the government? Almost entirely by import duties. This tends to make things here a bit expensive. The local currency is known as the ECC dollar (Eastern Caribbean Currency), 2.67 ECC dollars to one U. S. dollar. It was more fun years ago when the ECC dollar floated with the British pound. Gave us a chance to become international financiers gambling on the currency exchange!

Antigua is in the tropics at 17 degrees north latitude. The sun is directly overhead in May and again in July, giving us two “longest days of the year”. Also the sun sets more quickly in the tropics, going from a blazing fireball to darkness in just a fraction of an hour. Antigua is far enough east to be in the Atlantic time zone, one hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time. But when Eastern Daylight Time cuts in the two zones agree. Antigua is almost equidistant from Halifax, New York and Miami. From a health standpoint it is great. We are spared the northern winters. It never goes below 70 or above 90, winter or summer, night or day. The ocean temperature hangs right around 80 all year. Our Antiguan doctor is a fine diagnostician and makes house calls! He either cures our ailments or tells us where we should go for help.



Mary and Ernie in their new surroundings at Meadowood, Lansdale, PA.

Speaking of health, Mary and I have recently taken the plunge into the world of "life time care". We realize that the day will come when we won't be able to cope with the Antiguan commute and the limited facilities here. So after June 1, 1994 our new summer address will be 4 Dogwood Knoll, Meadowood, Lansdale, PA 19446, telephone 610-584-3860. We have made what we hope is our last move while we have each other to lean on, and while we both enjoy good health, are ambulatory and are sought after. When you find you really need "life time care", it is probably too late. At Meadowood we will be close to Princeton and to many friends in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. We hope to continue some of the kind of community activities we have engaged in wherever we have lived, though on a much reduced scale, and hope that classmates nearby will call us and stop by when they can.

We are not sure of our future winter plans at this point. Our villa and guest house have been advertised for sale. If and when they sell we have several options. We may build a small cottage on one of the remaining LIME TREE HILL lots for us and our children. Or, we may do a "deja-vu" and lease the Long Bay Hotel cottage we built years ago. When the commute to Antigua becomes too much we may choose something "stateside" like the Keidel's beautiful Ocean Reef Club on the Florida Keys; or even the Southwest, except there is no ocean there! One thing is sure - we are not yet ready to cope with northern winters, especially like the one just past. We'll continue to be "HAPPY SNOWBIRDS".

Views of 61st Class Dinner



Maddy Haythe, Curly Marsh and Kate Roebing



Frank Townend and Lenchen with Bill Hewson