

Sharon Shane's Travel Journal

> 1996 to 1998

The Bahamas and St. Maarten

After Adam and I relocated from living in Los Angeles to New Jersey, we took a trip to The Bahamas with Mom. I can't remember if it was during a school break when Adam was in high school or if I just wrote him a note of excused absence to go on this trip. No month or year was even written on the photos, so I had to try to guess from memory that it was probably winter of 1996 or early 1997. As soon as we landed, I loved the whole vibe of The Bahamas. The people were so friendly and accommodating. I took this photo from our hotel balcony the first day on arrival, which was a bit overcast. At first a bit disappointing with no sun to greet us, but all the following days were beautifully sunny. We did take scuba diving lessons in a pool, as Adam begged me to go on a dive. Since we had too much sun we were shivering in the pool during the lesson. He did OK but I was not able to breathe underwater due to the many years since early childhood of training myself to hold my breath underwater. It felt so scary to try to breathe underwater and not easy while shivering from too much sun in the cold pool water. Adam was disappointed but I opted out of us going on the scuba dive the next day down 29 feet of water with me not being able to handle praticing in the shallow end of the pool. I didn't feel comfortable letting him go on his own.



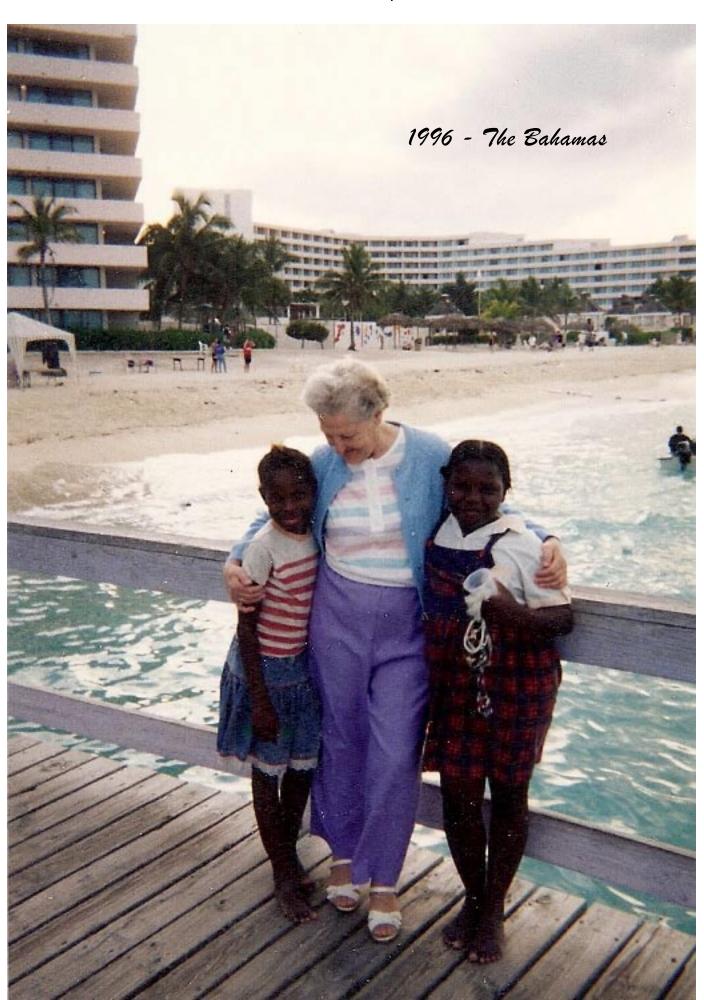




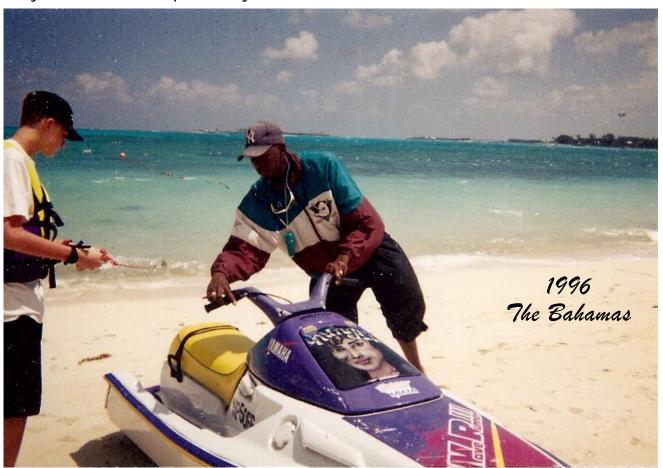


While taking a picture on the pier, these beautiful curious children were giggling and smiling, so I invited them to take a photo with me.

And then it was Mom's turn to pose with them.



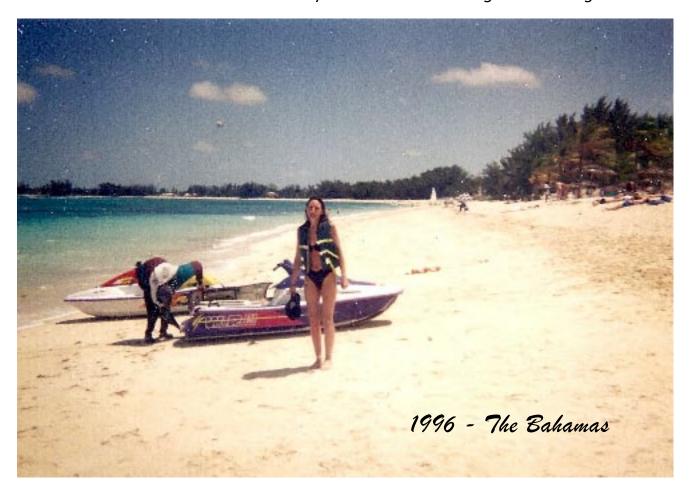
I wanted to have Adam take his first jet ski ride. Most of the places wouldn't rent to him becuase he was underage. But we found "that one guy" who was always willing to bend the rules to make some cash. I shot the bottom photo of Adam on the jet ski from on my rented jet ski.





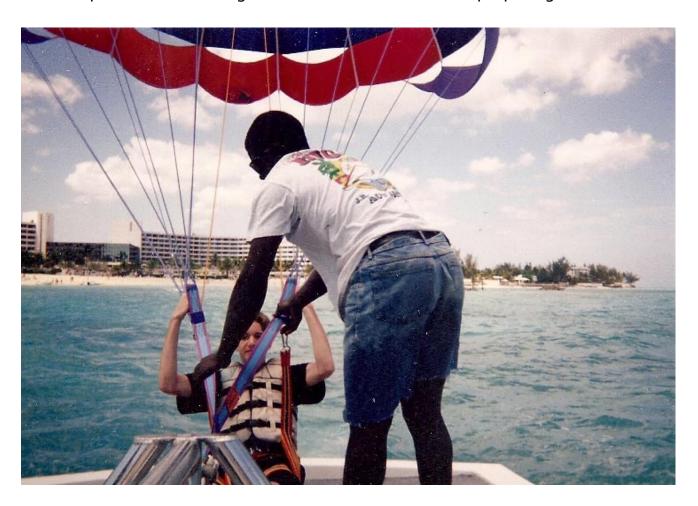


I took the photo above of a view from my jet ski after riding way out from the beach we left. Below that's me in my life vest after having been on a great ride.





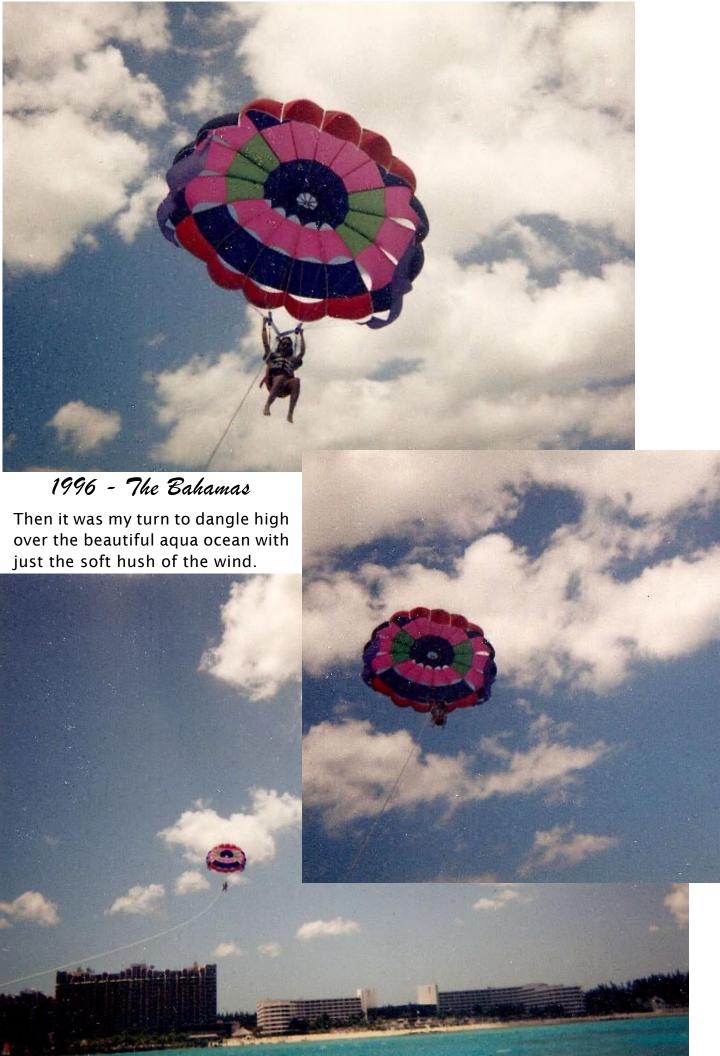
Then another day it was off to do our first try at parasailing. Above Adam smiling in anticipation of becoming a human kite. Below Adam preparing for take-off.





Up, up and away up high.

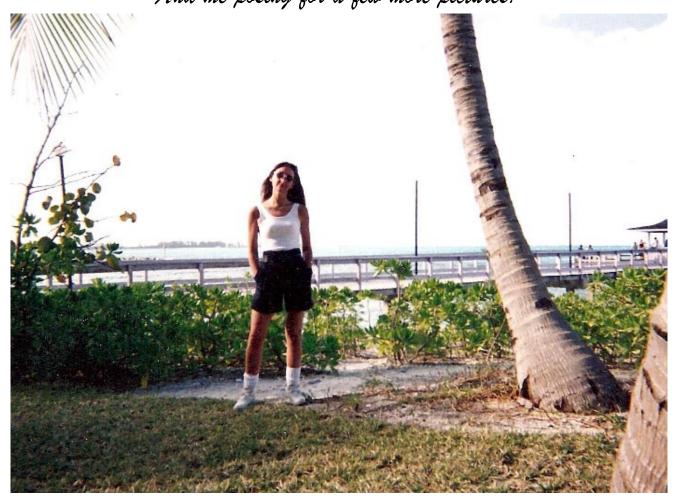


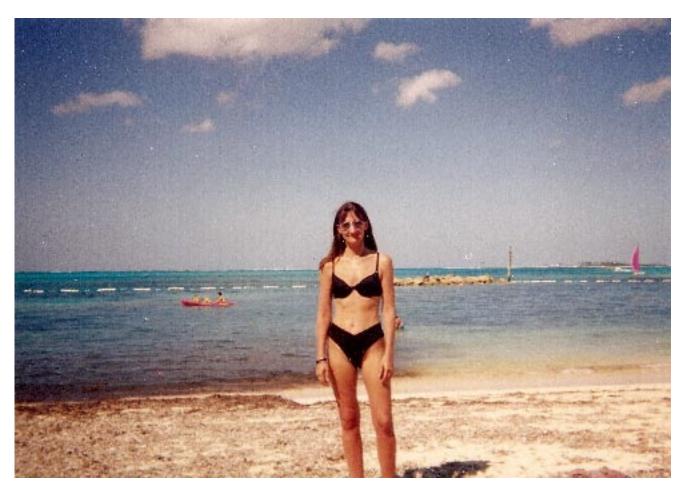


1996 - The Bahamas Me sportina a little outlit I desianed and sewed just lor this trip.



1996 - The Bahamas And me posing for a few more pictures.





1996 - The Bahamas



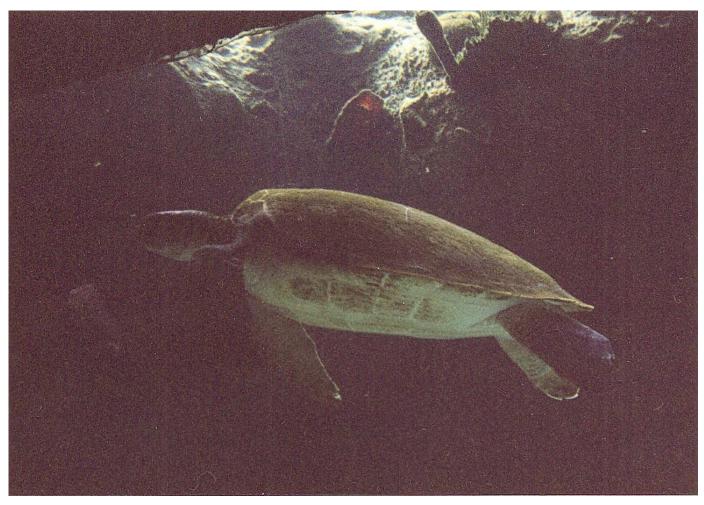
Adam perusing the menu at one of the restaurants we dined at. We went to the Hard Rock and the best place was Cafe Johnny Canoe, which we ate at a few times. Below that's me in silhouette with Mom looking from above at the Atlantis Hotel. Adam and I went to see Carrot Top there one night, while Mom was off winning a lot of money on the slot machines.





1996 - The Bahamas

The Atlantis has a great aquarium that's in the shape of a tunnel that you walk through with sharks swimming overhead and all around you and the large turtle below.





Another snorkel trip with Adam on the snorkel boat above. The current was so strong, the boat captain urged us to wear life vests even if we were good swimmers. At first I tried without the vest, and realized I was being swept away with the strong tide, so I swam back to the boat to get the life vest.





Me urging Adam to get back on the boat and put the vest on with strong argument from him until he acquiesced when the captain finally was able to convince him he should wear one.





1996 - The Bahamas Adam, the frogman, and underwater photo.





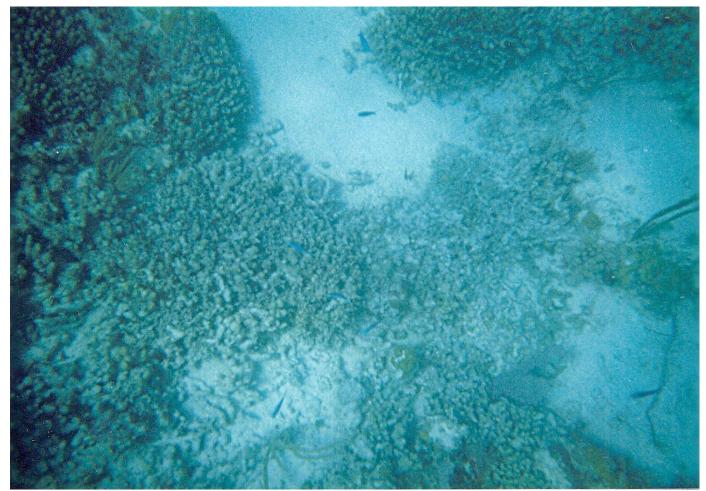
1996 - The Bahamas More underwater photos.



1996 - The Bahamas And still more underwater photos.

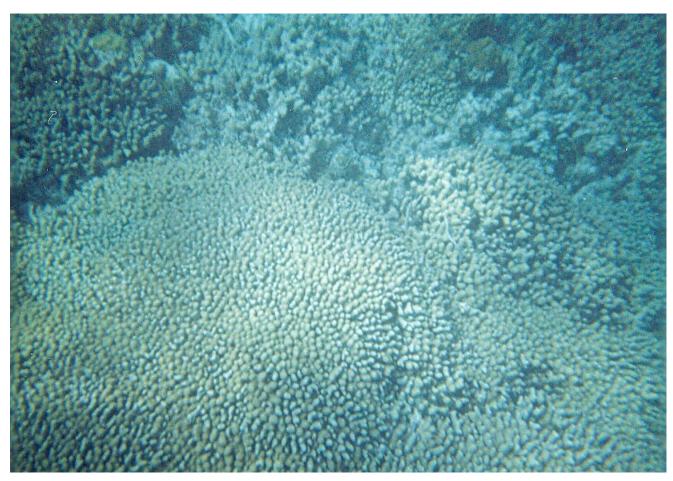






1996 - The Bahamas And still even more underwater photos.





1996 - The Bahamas And finally the last of the underwater photos.



May 1998

St. Maarten

May 1998 - St. Maarten

One of my aunt's had a time share she wasn't going to use and offered it to us. Mom left it to me to choose which place to go, so I ended up choosing St. Maarten due to the fact that other choices on my aunt's list of time shares in other locations were not available at the time. On this trip I kept a written journal, which I included here along with the photos.

5/2/98 - Saturday

12:30 PM - Arrived to partly cloudy skies and light rain. Got lost as the roads are not clearly marked and the road signs are foreign. Finally found the condo and settled in. The condo is on the Dutch side. Ate Chinese food in the downstairs restaurant overlooking the ocean. Saw a rainbow emerge from the sea and arch over the town.

7:00 PM - Walked through the town of Phillipsburg splashing in the puddles of the cobblestone street, as my inner child came out to play. Rain continued through the night.

5/3/98 - Sunday

6:00 AM - Awoke to see the Caribbean sunrise. Colors splashed across the sky bouncing off of the remains of the clouds from the previous night's storm. Everything is aqua colored. I sit on the sundeck of the condo with earphones and discman. My soul sings to "Deep Forest" in celebration of such beauty.

A pelican swoops over the sea right past the balcony. I observe its search for breakfast. The mysterious island of Saba looms in the distance on the horizon shrouded in a mist of clouds...like a dream not yet made manifest.

I will visit Saba and hike through the tropical rainforest there. What treasures lie in wait for me to discover? There are only 1200 inhabitants on that island.

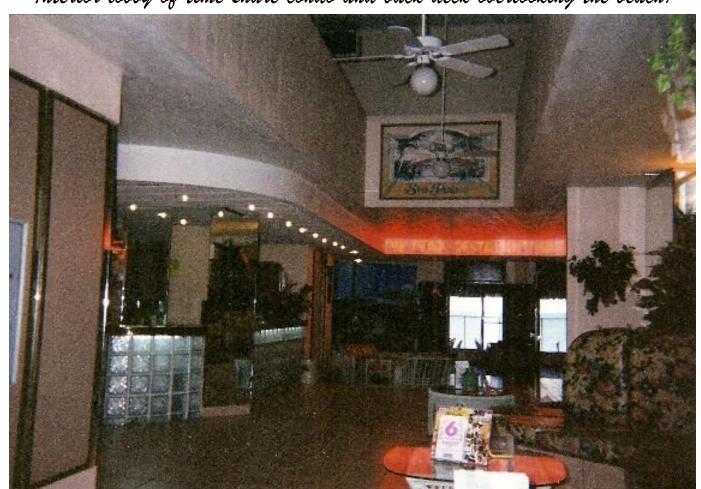
I am free and joyful. My happiness depends on no other than my very own soul. Its beauty and splendor is reflected to me in these tranquil turquoise surroundings. I realized last night that the world was too big for me to ever be able to experience it all. Today I realize I must "become the world" and experience it and myself in totality...wholeness.

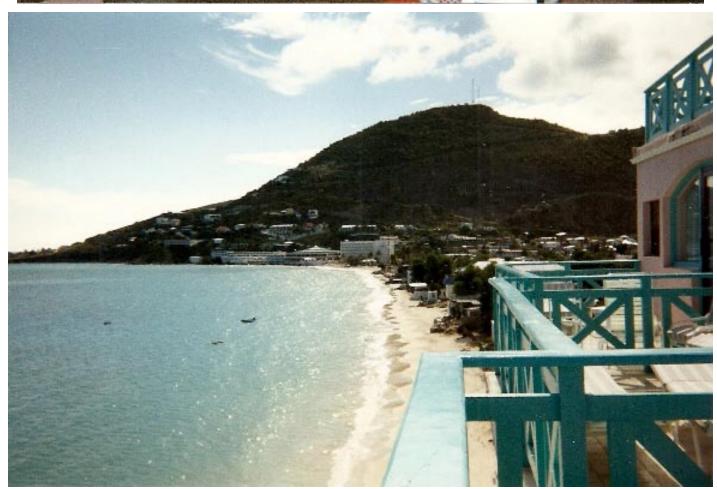
The pelican returned. The first crash dive for food was unsuccessful but the second try brought breakfast.

May 1998 - St. Maarten Exterior of time share condo.

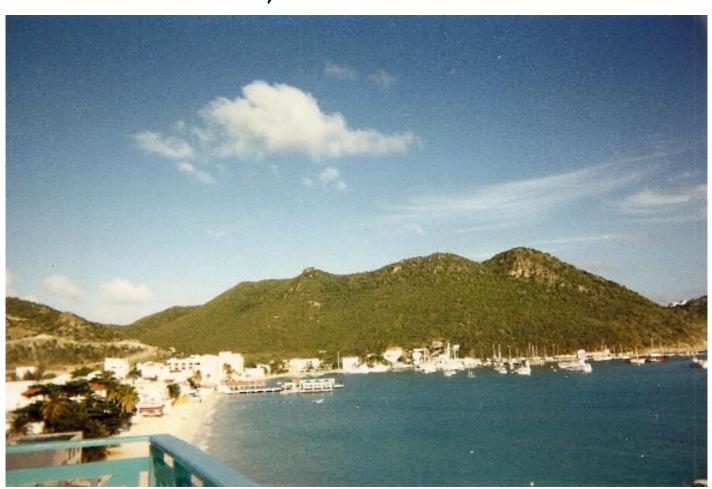


May 1998 - St. Maarten Interior lobby of time share condo and back deck overlooking the beach.





May 1998 - St. Maarten

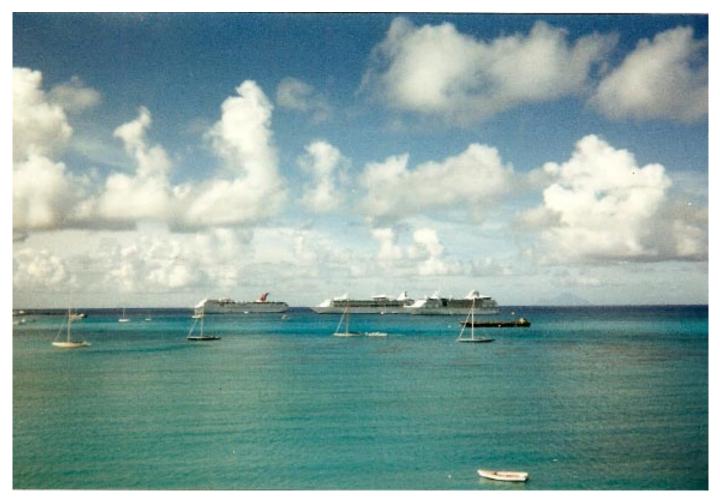


View from back deck of the condo and me posing on the deck.



May 1998 - St. Maarten Me sunbathing on the deck and view from the beach.







May 1998 - St. Maarten View from the beach.

5/3/98 - Sunday (continued)

10:00 AM - I descend from the 5th floor observation deck to the beach. My feet touch the sand. I merge with the aqua water and swim and float freely gazing at the sky. My olive skin absorbs the radiance of the sun, as if it has been starved for its warmth and light. The solar heat burns within and without. I was made for warm climates--the warmth of the womb. Nurtured by the elements I attain a balance of heart, soul, body and mind.

3:00 PM - Drove to the French side of the island. Stopped in Marigot for a quick, cool thirst quencher. Circled the island back to Phillipsburg. Goats and dogs run free and are numerous.

6:00 PM - From the sun deck watched as all the colors receded back into the void, as night crept in. A half-moon over the Caribbean sea, three lit candles on the outdoor table and the harbor lights were all that remained. Saba's shadowy silhouette still beckons.

May 1998 - St. Maarten Stopped at the Havana restaurant in Marigot for a cold drink.



May 1998 - St. Maarten

5/4/98 - Monday

7:00 AM - Awoke to heavy rains beating on the window. Gusts of wind blew the storm away making way for a beautiful sunny day. Saw another rainbow arc from sea to shore. Mom mentioned she didn't bring a tote bag to use for the catamaran sail trip planned for Thursday.

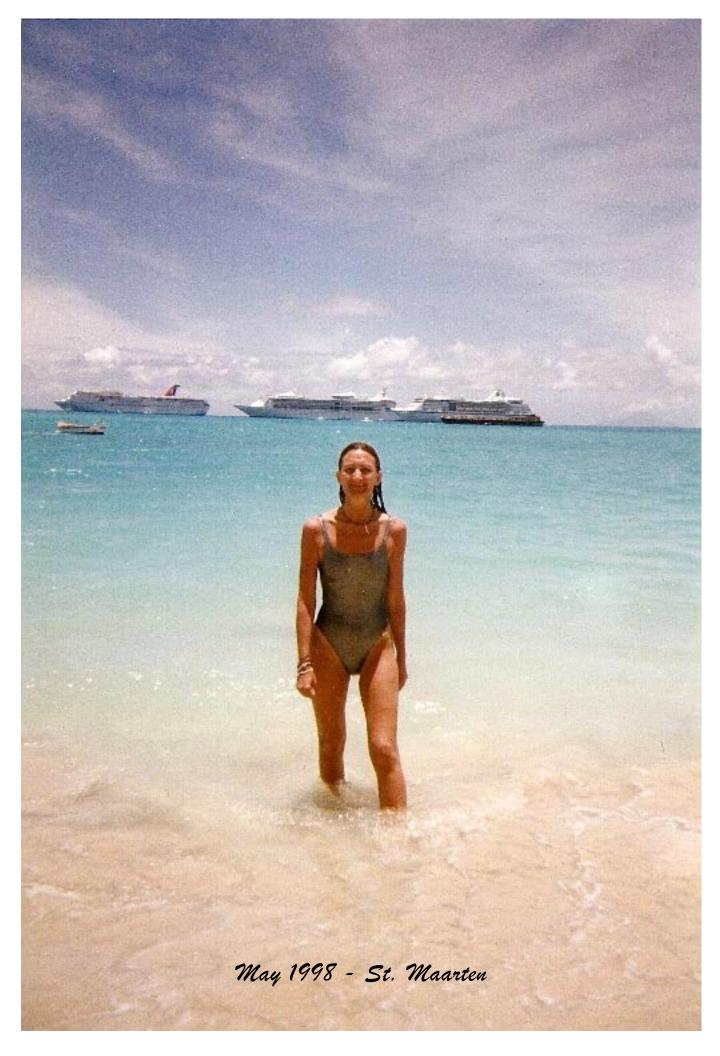
12:30 PM - I went swimming in the sea. As I emerged from the water like a dripping sea nymph, a beach vendor, named Alan, handed me two free tote bags. Must have been a "Goddess enchantment" manifestation of tote bags mentioned earlier. I entered the condo and handed the freebie bag to Mom. She was amazed. I inwardly smiled my shamaness "knowing" smile.

2:00 PM - Back to the beach to jet ski. Speeding over the sea my laughter resounded. Swimming and water sports in waves of joy brought exhaustion.

Rested on the sun deck. Time moves very slowly here, while somewhere the rest of the world speeds by. The rhythm of the crashing waves lulls me into a meditative trance. The colors of the sunset glimmer on the surface of the sea.

Dusk is the magical time where the crack between the worlds avails itself to those who hold the key to its portal. The daytime dreaming withdraws and night cloaks me in the deepest black.

Visitors in the condo next door are from Holland, a lovely family with three sons. We chatted into the evening about our homelands and other travel stories. Delightful people. We laughed over the sundeck fence like backyard neighbors. The world isn't so large and isolated as it sometimes appears.

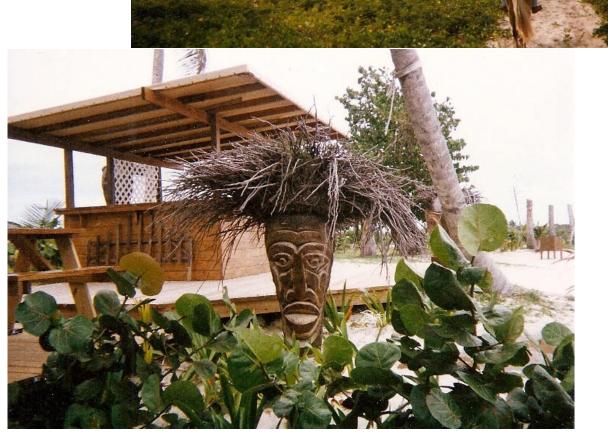


7:30 AM - Woke early to drive to the French side of the island for horseback riding along the beach. Arrived early, so I stopped in a small grocery store to buy bottled water and the best home made French croissant.

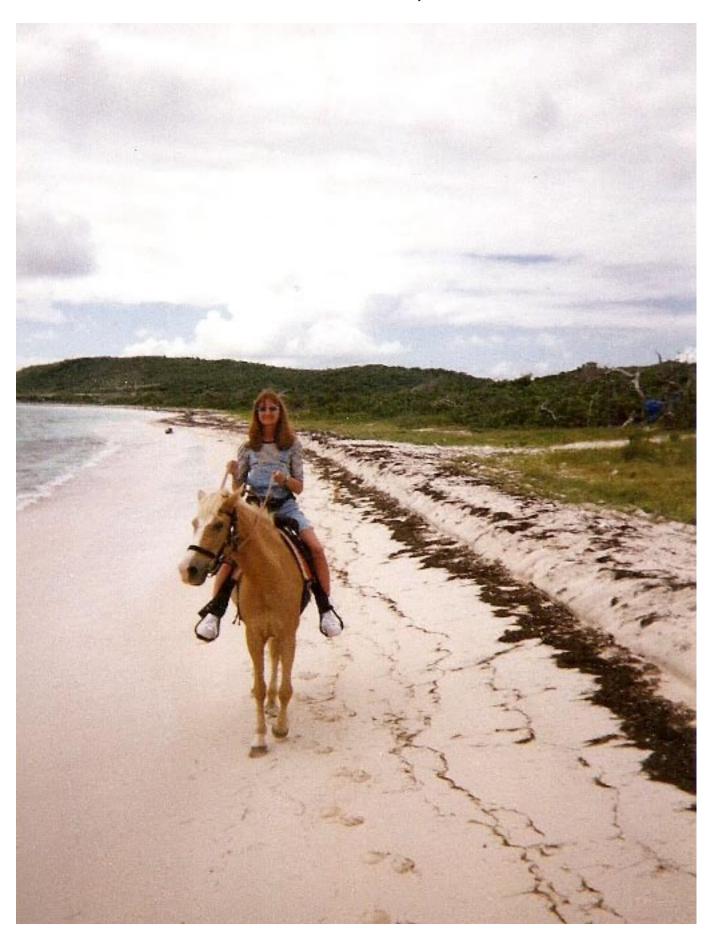
Met Phillipe, my horsetrail guide. I was the lone rider today. We headed towards the beach. I straddled a horse named "Bonita" who lagged and barely made a trot, lazy girl. We stopped at a beachfront tiki hut bar. Phillipe drank cappuccino and I downed a diet Coke. We talked about our lives. Phillipe moved to St. Maarten from France 7 years prior. He told me how his 12-year old daughter and his girlfriend sometimes fight. I mentioned I left my son

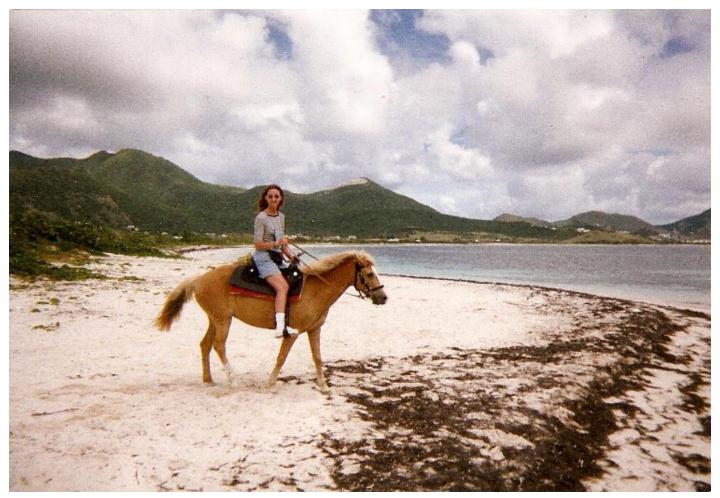
home to get away. We laughed on the common ground we shared as parents. I asked him if he enjoyed living in paradise. Phillipe spoke about the limitations, about how one loses objectivity of the larger world and what it has to offer. He explained how it can stunt one's growth to come to a standstill without the interaction and culture of a big city like Paris.



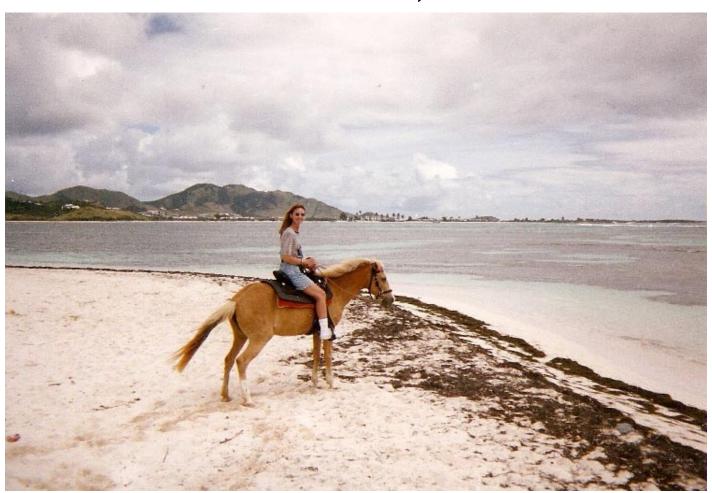


May 1998 - St. Maarten Horseback riding.





May 1998 - St. Maarten Horseback riding.



May 1998 - St. Maarten Horseback riding.

5/5/98 - Tuesday (continued)

I've heard some people say the French are very snobby. My mother-in-law is from Paris. She is delightful and we remained friends even after I divorced her son. Phillipe was as sweet as a French pastry and so warm, open, charming and a gentleman.

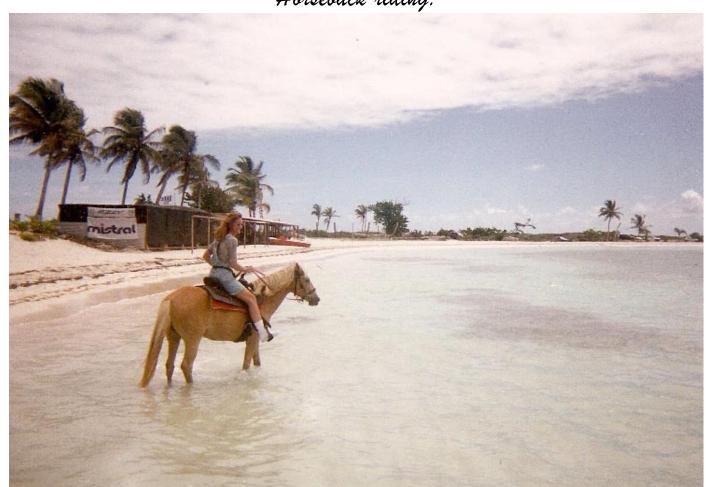
I've only been to the coast of France back in the very early 70's, a small village across the English Channel from Dover. I remember some French folks in a local bank making fun of my friend's feeble attempt to speak a little French. Some people are snobby, some are friendly--wherever you go. Generalizations create barriers and limitations. The human mind wants to put everything in small shoebox containers. All the subtle nuances are then overlooked in such cases. The small details hold the magic and can reveal pieces of the map of oneness.

When it came time for the horses to swim in the sea, Bonita didn't want to get her "mane" wet. Such a girl! (But as you can see from the photo I didn't want to get my shoes wet, as I pulled my feet out of the stirrups and held them higher above the water!)





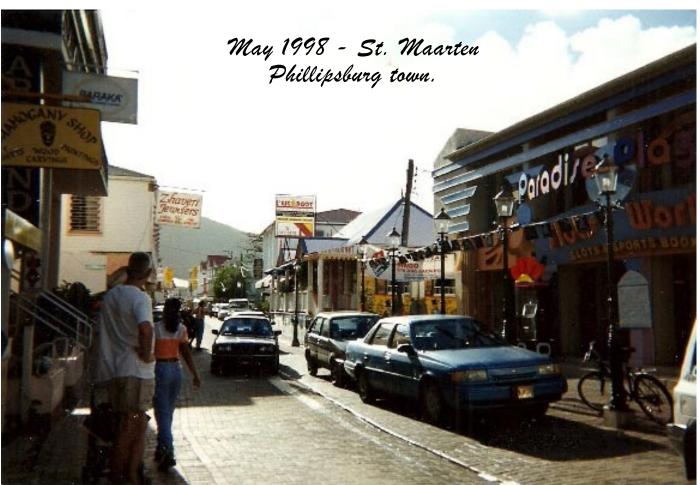
May 1998 - St. Maarten Horseback riding.



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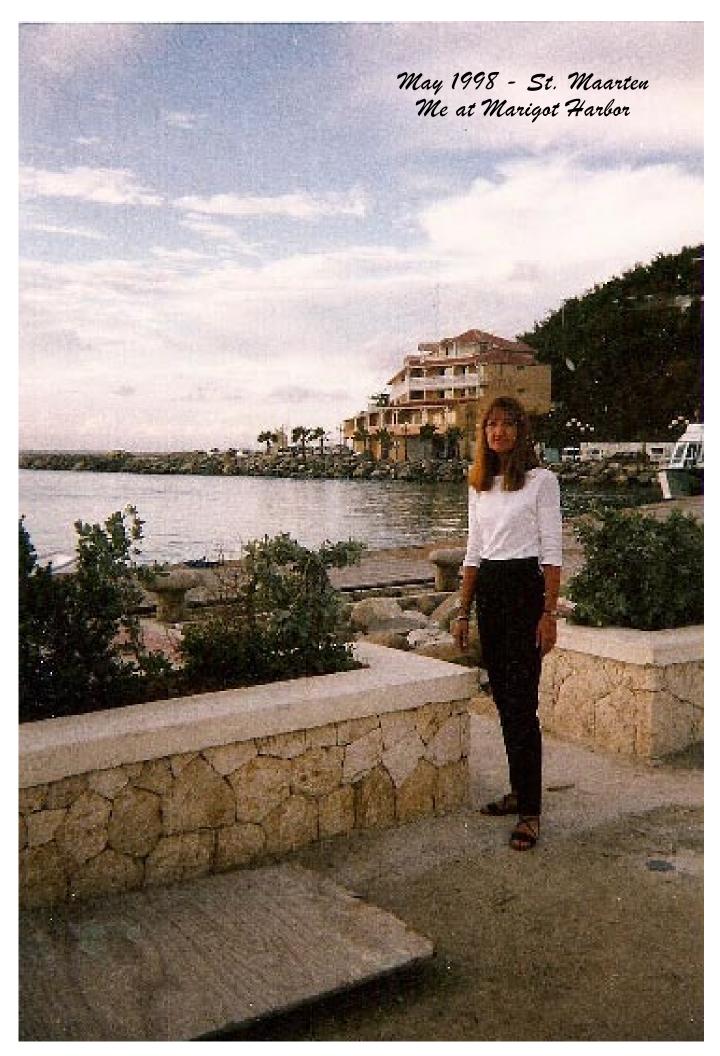
12:30 PM - Ate at a small waterfront cafe in Phillipsburg and went shopping. Saw Alan, the street/beach hustler vendor again. He keeps hitting on me, when he's not trying to "strike a deal." This Goddess enchantment is potent. He told me he could score me some "weed." I laughed heartily out loud and said, "I don't smoke." But I went off to shop and bought a very uniquely hand carved clay "hash" pipe to place on my altar of sacred shaman artifacts and the tiniest miniature marracas to take to drum circles.



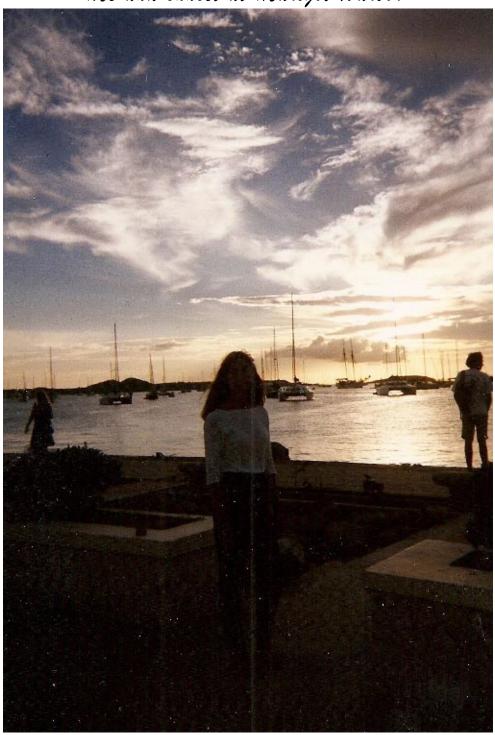
5/5/98 - Tuesday (continued)

4:30 PM - Drove over to Marigot. Was followed down the street by a slightly crazed French man mumbling lewd remarks under his breath. Although he spoke in French, my intuition read his thoughts. We stopped in front of a store window next to the Gendarmaine until he walked on.

Ate bad pizza at an outdoor cafe and watched the sunset. Strains of Chrissie Hynde singing *State of Independence* came from the bar of the cafe. Such marvels, as I just last week asked Adam's friend, Mark, to get me the CD of this song from the CD store he works in. One of those perfect synchronistic moments. Watched a newt or salamander on the rocks by the water exercising his throat muscle, a balloon-like sac which expanded and contracted.



May 1998 - St. Maarten Me and sunset at Marigot Harbor



5/5/98 - Tuesday (continued)

7:30 PM - Back at the condo, sipped herbal tea under a moon growing full. For the first time since I arrived, I can see the lights glimmering dimly from the far off island of Saba. Soon you and I will touch, and I will understand your light, as I become one with you...mysterious Saba.

10:00 PM - Called home. Adam was working but Mark was there. All is well on the home front. The rhythm of the waves lures me to sleep.

May 1998 - St. Maarten

5/6/98 - Wednesday

Spent the day swimming and lazing in the sun, a day of rest. A young bronzed man on a jet ski offered me a ride on the "scooter." I declined. Read the following in Entering the Circle by Olga Kharitidi: "...every choice you make in your life, from the most important ones to the smallest everyday decisions, must be tested by conscious questioning. For each decision you face, you must ask yourself if the choice you make will satisfy five necessary attributes. If even one of them is absent, you must look for another direction. In this way, you will always find the right path. These five attributes are truth, beauty, health, happiness and light. When you make a decision in this manner, you can always be certain it is the right one. You will be in touch with your genuine self, your heart self, and you will create for yourself an invincible power of will."

As I sat on the sundeck witnessing "beauty," feeling "healthy" from the sun and exercise, radiating "happiness," I saw the "light" of the "truth" in my choice to vacation here. I called on my invincible will and made a very strong decision/choice. This choice will manifest for all of my choices do, unless I consciously choose to change them. I choose to find my paradise and live there, wtihin and without.

5/7/98 - Thursday

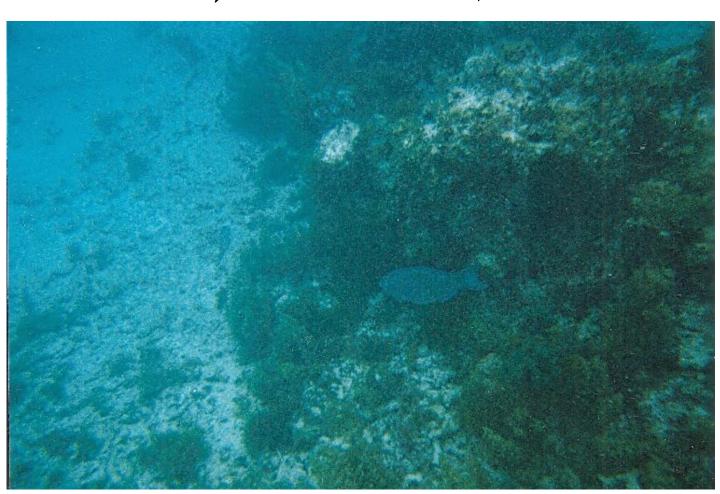
Awoke early to catch a ride on the catamaran named "Bluebeard" to the British isle of Anquilla, a neighboring island of St. Maarten. Boarded and met the young international crew from England, Austrailia and Ireland, three cute young men, blasting 70's Creedence Clearwater. Departed Simpson Bay under cloudy skies. Arrived on the shore of Anguilla where taxi vans awaited to take us to the other side of the island. We boarded Gus' bus and got a tour of Anguilla. Goats, cows and bulls graced the roadsides.

After a bumpy ride over roads less than smoothly paved, we pulled into a dirt road, which led to Shoal Bay. Entered the water in snorkel gear looking like frog woman from the deep (again!). Some pretty fish--blues and yellows but the clouds and rain put a damper on the visual.

Ate lunch served to us by our faithful crew of the Bluebeard at an outdoor restaurant on the beach called "Hard Broke Restaurant." Walked along the most pristine white sand beach wading through crystal clear water. A few cottage type hotels lined the beach, but all was quiet and almost deserted. There is nothing to do on Anguilla but enjoy the quiet beaches.



May 1998 - St. Maarten Anguilla - Underwater snorkel photos

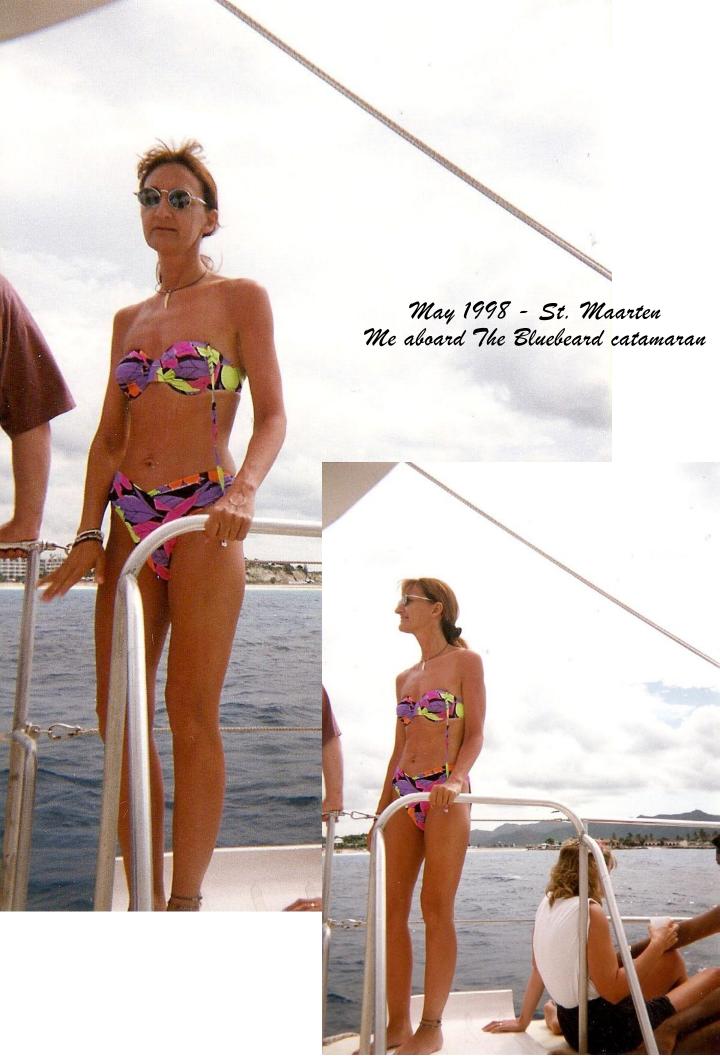






May 1998 - St. Maarten Anguilla - Underwater snorkel photos





5/7/98 - Thursday (continued)

Back on board Gus' bus for another 30-minute bumpy ride. Gus was a sweet older man born on Aguilla. Sailed back to the sounds of The Rolling Stones and Santana on the "party boat," as everyone (except me and Mom) were now getting blasted at the open bar. Our crew served us French bread and cheese.

I stood at the side rail with the wind in my hair and the rain splashing my face filling my lungs deeply with the fresh salt air, dancing and swaying with the boat and music. Pulled into Simpson Bay at St. Maarten to end a lovely sail trip in spite of the weather.

All the "party animals" on board started calling our young skipper from England "Kato", as he resembled Kato Kaitlin. This young lad has been out to sea so much he didn't know who Kato was. "Kato" docked the boat at "Simpson Bay"!!! Disembarked to eat pizza and sip tea on the sundeck balcony. The moon and Saba were obscured by heavy clouds, but the sound of the surf sang its sweet rhythmic lullabye. Good night sweet Caribbean sea.

May 1998 - St. Maarten The crew of The Bluebeard catamaran and the blonde one looking like Kato Kaitlin



May 1998 - St. Maarten

View of Saba from the "The Edge" ferry.



5/8/98 - Friday

Arose early to catch "The Edge," a speed ferry, to Saba. Departed under cloudy skies. Saba is called "the unspoiled queen" probably because there are no beaches. The cliffs come right down to the water's edge all around this island. Major attraction is diving.

Local taxis awaited our arrival. I rode in a taxi driven by a local woman named Peggy Barns. She gave me a short tour up the mountainous roads to the capital called "The Bottom."

Further up the cliffs she dropped me at the tiny hamlet of St. John's, where I had lunch in "The Swinging Doors" restaurant named because the doors looked like old western saloon doors.

11:30 AM - I stoked up on food in preparation for the hike up to the apex through the tropical rainforest. To make it to the very top of Mt. Scenery, I must climb 1,064 steps of rock, over 2,000 feet high.

May 1998 - St. Maarten

Saba - Sign of the climb to the top



5/8/98 - Friday (continued)

12:00 PM - I began my ascent thinking I won't even make it half-way. The climb was already a challenge. I shifted into shamaness mode and became like a mountain goat. My stride became sure-footed, as I made my way up this steep incline. The foliage was lush. The air was heavy and humid. Met two other hikers and we took snapshots for each other about one-third of the way up. My hair frizzed into a "fro"--tied it back. Up and up I climbed and a light tropical rain fell on my sweaty skin mixing the moisture of body and earth cooling me slightly. The more I climbed using the shapeshifting techniqure of mountain goat, the more my stamina surprised me for I did not think I was in shape enough to make it. They say it takes about 90 minutes one way, and I made it in 75 minutes.

1:15 PM - Once at the top the cloud cover was too thick to be able to see the view, but the climb through this jungle paradise was well worth it. It is called "The Elfin Forest." A heavy rain started, as I began my descent. The moss covered rocks became very slippery. Twice I lost my footing and slid. The second slip I thought I would fall about 10 steps had I not grabbed hold of a large elephant leafed plant. Its firm roots brought me the support I needed. Gratitude was given. I decided to take my shoes and socks off and go barefoot. This worked better and brought out the wild woman native in me. I was slightly muddy from the slip, and my heart sang at such frolic with earth and water. The Goddess is alive and well in this Elfin Forest. Part way from the top there was a covered bench for resting where I sat out a bit of the rain and exchanged whistles with one of the many "scaly breasted" or "pearly eyed" thrasher birds. Bliss. Some other hikers arrived and disrupted our conversation, so I put my shoes and socks back on and proceeded down. By now my leg muscles were trembling making it difficult to descent, but I made it to the bottom without slipping again.

Walked around the town and was amazed at how friendly everyone is. Every driver waves to other drivers and pedestrians. The island is literally "crime free" with just 1200 inhabitants. The cottages and small churches looked to be out of a fairytale storybook.

2:50 PM - Peggy arrived at our meeting place to drive me back to the boat. I whispered my farewell to this beautiful island of Saba, as we headed back to St. Maarten.

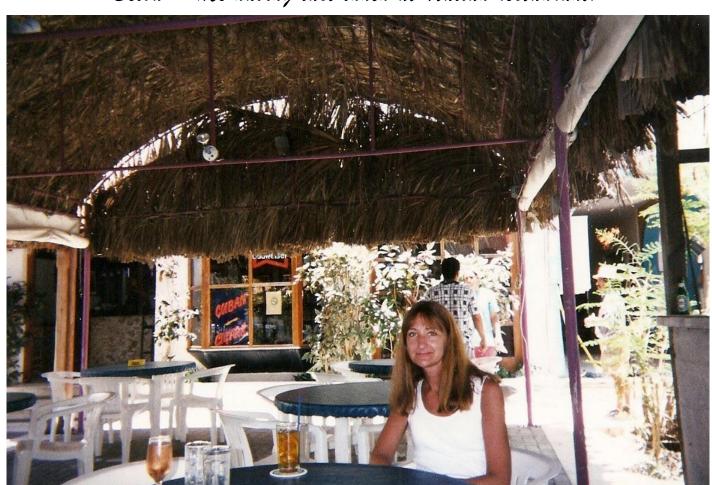
I sat in the back of the ferry where it is open to avoid sea sickness. Rain poured down, and a few of us just sat out there soaking ourselves. Another woman and I marveled at how the rain made the ocean smooth into desert sand-like waves like miles of "blue dunes."

May 1998 - St. Maarten - Saba The rock steps of the tropical rainforest.





May 1998 - St. Maarten Above - Me on the climb to the top of The Elfin Forest. Below - Me having last lunch at Italian restaurant.



5/8/98 - Friday (continued)

Back to the condo to rest and begin packing, for tomorrow I depart for home. I closed my eyes to see images of sweet Saba, unspoiled queen, and her tropical lush forest.

5/9/98 - Saturday

8:30 AM - Caught some last minute sun and packed.

Ate lunch at a great outdoor Italian cafe and watched the lizards scurrying under the tables.

The airport was hot and crowded. The weather was sunny and clear and we departed on time.

Our landing in Philadelphia was delayed by heavy winds and rain, so we circled once before setting down.

A chill was in the air. Back safely.

