

# Strangers in Paradise...New Old Friends in Nevis

by Marcie Connelly-Lynn

Mom always told us “Don’t ever go home with strangers!” Did we listen? Not this time! And we’re all the better for it. We were anchored in Basseterre Bay, St. Kitts and had gone ashore for a previously arranged island tour. Meandering our way around the island, we finally arrived at the highlight of the tour: the top of Brimstone Hill and massive Fort George.



*Gaby & Emil, our gracious Swiss hosts in Nevis.*

We delighted in the views and after wandering around the fort and the small museum, our guide pointed us in the direction of the snack bar for lunch. While sipping beers and eating burgers, we chatted with a Swiss couple, who lived on nearby Nevis and had taken the ferry to St. Kitts for the day. After nearly an hour of enjoyable conversation, our guide nodded that it was time to go, but not before our new Swiss acquaintances extended us an invitation to join them for a couple of days at their plantation home in Nevis. An unexpected invitation and one we thought better to decline until they added the magic words: “You’ll have your own guest quarters with hot showers and you can even bring your dirty laundry and use our washer.” How could we say no? We planned to meet them in two days on Nevis and would call to confirm our arrival.

We checked into Customs at Charlestown and wandered around a bit before making a phone call to our perspective hosts. Unsure of what to expect, David and I had agreed we would call, casually

tell them we had arrived and invite them to meet us for a drink. We were hoping to avoid putting them on the spot in case they were regretting their 2-day old invitation. Emil answered the phone on the first ring and with noticeable excitement in his voice, explained they had seen us coming into the anchorage and raced home to make sure they didn’t miss our call. They had even scoped out the best and closest anchorage for us, as well as safe dockage for our dinghy. We moved the boat a few miles north to Oualie Beach and caught sight of Emil and his Suzuki *Sidekick* waiting for us at the dink dock.

It seems impossible to have spent barely an hour with total strangers, and then feel totally relaxed with them at their home two days later, but our hosts managed it without a hitch. There were none of the usual awkward “new acquaintance” lapses in conversation, but rather a steady, pleasant flow of “old friend” chatter as we learned about each other’s lives. Emil had worked with UNICEF and Gaby was a nurse, both retired now and living several months of the year in Nevis. They had done extensive worldwide travel and shared their experiences while alternately soliciting cruising tales from us. No glazed-eye looks or yawns of boredom as we each related our adventures, but rather mutual rapt attention.



*Ruins of sugar plantations along the Atlantic coast.*

Not only did we have our own guest quarters as promised, we had our own little bungalow apart from the main house. This tidy, charming cottage

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with two beds, a sitting area and a large bathroom suited us perfectly. A large overhead fan spun lazily and the light breeze through the open shutters kept the room cool and fresh. We slept like logs and awakened to the sounds of tropical birds, goats and howling monkeys.

We found to our delight that Gaby was a gourmet cook and the meals she seemingly prepared with ease were outstanding. Steak au poivre and fresh salad, tropical fruits and interesting local vegetables were all served unceremoniously, but with a fine Swiss flair. I sat at the worktable in her homey kitchen, sipped wine and traded stories as we prepared meals. The air was peaceful and relaxed. When asked if we'd spend another night with them, we answered yes without hesitation.

Their single level main house was not particularly large, but it was open and spacious, styled after the sugar cane plantation houses of the past. White, with dark green shutters, the house sat majestically on a hill in the middle of a huge yard, which was lush with blossoming flowers and trees. A thick hedge lined the entire perimeter and a graceful stone staircase led up to a wraparound open-air verandah. While the hedge provided seclusion from the road, the verandah afforded us an unobstructed view of the bay, the Narrows and St. Kitts in the distance.



*Plantation house in Nevis.*

Emil offered us an island tour. We visited the ruins of various sugar cane plantations along the desert-like Atlantic coast. Several other plantations have been restored and we stopped at one high on a hill that had been converted into an inn and restaurant. Many of the old buildings were refurbished and melded well with the new additions. We had a beer and strolled through its exquisitely landscaped gardens. As we wandered, we could hear the chatter of shy green vervet monkeys and we saw them swinging through the trees.

We also visited the Nevis racetrack built parallel to the sea. Though the track happened to have donkeys and goats grazing on it when we saw it, about ten Sundays a year, there is thoroughbred horse racing here. It's a small track and sometimes there are only two horses competing in a race. Nevertheless, it is considered a major social outing on Nevis, and everyone, but everyone attends.



*This time of year only the goats and donkeys graze, but ten Sundays a year, this is the place to be in Nevis.*

After two days and nights, not wanting to overstay our welcome, we said our farewells midst hugs and promises to stay in touch. Emil drove us back to the dock and helped us launch the dink. As we sailed past their house, we could see them holding a large white sheet and waving it from the verandah...bidding friends, not strangers, a fond farewell.