

Miss Browlia Maillard

By; Will Johnson

The first time I stayed at “Miss Browlia’s” was around September 15th, 1955. I spent a couple of weeks there waiting for the next plane to Curacao. Having arrived late on St. Maarten with the sloop I could not get the next week’s flight. Besides that my father was in the hospital and it was convenient to visit with him. I associate my earliest memories of St. Maarten with Miss Browlia. She has been highlighted in the past by the Today Newspaper, and she was on Oral Gibbs Live and I am sure there were other stories written about her. For me however there was a personal relationship in that the times I stayed at her home going to and coming from school in Curacao made an indelible impression on me of the old St. Maarten which has stayed with me until now.

Browlia Florencia Maillard was born on St. Maarten on January 21st 1902 and she died at the age of 93 on November 25th, 1995. Her parents were Mrs. Ezulma Aponine Maillard born Larmonie and George Frederick Maillard a tenant farmer. The home she lived in was her parent’s home and must have been built in the early nineteen hundreds. In the living room of the big house she had two large framed photographs of her parents.

The Maillard family was descended from Dr. Philogene Philippe Maillard born on St. Croix (then Danish) on June 4th, 1806. He established himself on the Dutch side of St. Martin on September 1st, 1830 coming from the French side. He was a physician and was charged with providing medical services. He was married four times to; 1. Susanna Elizabeth Illidge van Romondt, daughter of Lt. Governor Diederik Johannes van Romondt (widow of Mr. W.H. Rink). 2. Ellen Rowland. 3. Ann Mary Francies Percival. 4. Augusta Vincenta Coakley. The story goes that when Dr. Maillard took on his fourth wife that he had engraved in the ring: “If you I survive, I’ll marry number five.” That was on March 9th, 1880 when he was 73 years old and his bride Augusta was 26. You cannot accuse Dr. Maillard of not being brave. He did not survive her however. He died on August 31st, 1886. His parents were Thomas William Maillard and Charlotte Ann Desmount Heyliger. Some of the Heyligers had moved from St. Eustatius to St. Croix during the Dutch period. Dr. Maillard had no children by any of his four wives. However Miss Browlia’s father was born George Halaman (mother Margarita Halaman) and by Government decree of March 14th 1885 was granted permission to use the surname Maillard as well as a brother Hubert who was granted the same right on June 1st, 1875. They were the children of Dr. Maillard. Before he died he must have decided to grant them his name. Remarkable is the fact that in the Old Dutch cemetery in Little Bay there is a grave of John Maillard who died in 1780 at the age of 56 in whose grave according to the inscription also lays buried “Ann, his fifth wife”, deceased 1763, “interred with several of her children and grandchildren.” The relationship between the two Maillard’s is not known. John could have been the grandfather or great grandfather of Dr. Maillard, but it is interesting to note that John had five wives and Dr. Maillard was denied that ambition but through his outside “interests” common at the time he more than achieved his goal. Dr. Maillard was also Act. Lt. Governor, from 1865 to 1866. Also intermarrying with the Maillards were the Voges, Carty’s, Halleys and Petersons. Miss Browlia’s grandmother on her mothers side was Nancy Ann Wilson (an aunt of Mr. Emilio Wilson).

There was the big house and then there was a small house both fronting the street. The big house had a verandah. I remember also in the yard she had about five of those large clay jars in which she caught water, even though there was a sizeable cistern in the yard. I was fascinated with those large jars as we never had such jars on Saba. They were associated with the sugar cane industry and there were many around St. Maarten and also St. Eustatius. However, Saba was not associated with sugar plantations and so even if there may have been one or two on Saba they would have been brought in by the Captains from Barbados or Guyana.

I stayed in the “Big House” with Miss Browlia. She took in short term boarders from Saba and St. Eustatius mainly. The short term boarders stayed in the big house whereas teachers like Mr. Frank Hassell, of Saba, Mr. Dennis Sprott of Statia and my brother Freddie stayed in the “small house”.



The lights would go off at 11 o'clock and there was always an oil lamp on. Having grown up with oil lamps, I can still smell them on my brain, and in times of hurricane when there is no electricity I am flooded with memories of my youth. One of my favourite authors William Henry Hudson in his book "Idle Days in Patagonia" describes the effect a flower had on him in an English garden many years after he had left his native Argentina:" All this about the plant, and much more, with many scenes and events of the past, are suggested to my mind by the flower in my hand; but while these scenes and events are recalled with pleasure, it is a kind of mental pleasure that we frequently experience, and very slight in degree. But when I approach the flower to my face and inhale its perfume, then a shock of keen pleasure is experienced, and a mental change so great that it is like a miracle. For a space of time so short that if it could be measured it would probably be found to occupy no more than a fraction of a second, I am no longer in an English garden recalling and consciously thinking about that vanished past, but during that brief moment time and space seem annihilated and the past is now. I am again on the grassy pampas, where I have been sleeping very soundly under the stars, - would that I could now sleep as soundly under a roof!" Hudson further on in the book goes on to say:" I have no doubt that my experience is similar to that of others, especially of those who have lived a rural life, and whose senses have been trained by an early-acquired habit of attention. When we read of Cuvier (and the same thing has been recorded of others), that the scent of some humble flower or weed, familiar to him in boyhood, would always affect him to tears, I presume that the poignant feeling of grief-grief, that is, for the loss of a vanished happiness - which ended in tears, succeeded to some vivid representation of the past as I have described, and to the purely delightful recovery of a vanished sensation. Not only flowery and aromatic odors can produce this powerful effect; it is caused by any smell, not positively disagreeable, which may be in any way associated with a happy period in early or past life. In recalling the past, emotion plays the part of a wet sponge, and it is excited most powerfully in us when we encounter, after a long interval, some once familiar odor associated in some way with the picture recalled. "

Some weeks ago I was at evening Mass in the Roman Catholic Church in Philipsburg. I used to go to church there back in the fifties and sixties. More, to see the pretty girls, than for religious reasons of course ,yet I can claim going to church every Sunday. The smell of the church brought back pungent and sweet memories of a carefree youth spent in that lovely town wedged in between the Great Salt Pond and the Great Bay. I was reminded of what W.H. Hudson wrote. Besides the oil lamp, among the smells I associate with Miss Browlia's place was the bakery of Miss Weez, across the street. I judge a country by its bread. Some places they make bread according to an imported formula and you might as well eat cardboard. Not Miss Weez' bread. Ah to be able to eat one of those butter bread once again. I can still get them on Statia though in the bakery across the street from my friends the Van Putter's (Louise and Kenneth). Miss Browlia would walk across the street in the early morning and get the bread fresh out of the oven to serve to her guests. The flower which the writer Hudson smelled could never brings back more memories to him than a slice of Miss Weez's hot bread would bring back to me if passed by my nose more than fifty years later.

Across the street from Miss Browlia besides the bakery and home of Mrs. Louisa Hazel born York, there was the St. Rose Hospital up until 1934. There was also the "Sweet Repose" where my friend of later

years “Mother-in-Trouble” lived. I still like the name “Sweet Repose”. Next door there was Mr. George from the Philipsburg Electric Company of which the Electricity plant was located just down the street from Miss Browlia’s place and which provided electricity from 6pm till 11pm. The Joe family recently returned from the Dominican Republic also lived close by. Further up the street was the large mansion of Richard Robinson Richardson (later owned by Diederick Johannes van Romondt). The building was known as “Dickey Dick’s Place”. Miss Zilah Richardson who had worked for the heirs of Johannes in New York had bought the place. Miss Zilah also took in students from Saba (Leo Chance, Max Nicholson, and so on). She also took in boarders from Saba and St. Eustatius. Everything was new to me and I soaked it up with relish and in my mind’s eye I still see it all, and can play it back for the readers of today to know what the fifties were like in sweet St. Martin’s land.

Also across the street and down the road a bit next to Miss Mato Beauperthuy and her children there lived an old man with a million cats. That was Mr. Lou Nisbeth son of the well known Walter Nisbeth. Remi Beauperthuy would remember him and his many cats. Up the road a bit there was an old lady “Miss Jeanne”. She gave her property to Nurse Angele Cagan who built a house there later on. Across the street from Miss Browlia there was a Mr. Arrindell who religiously on Sundays played his harp. The old age home “Sweet Repose” was where the Cultural building is now. In one of the buildings of the former St. Rose Hospital lived Jack Tool. It is claimed that he had been a priest but had left the church and the nuns and priest took pity on him. He used to ring the bell in the church and do odds and ends around the convent. Later on he rented an old building opposite the Little Bay cemetery in Cul-de-Sac and started a grocery store which later ended up being the Food Center. In the nineteen sixties he sold out and went to Holland where he died. Also across the street in the old hospital Mrs. A.Theopilus Illidge had a class for home economics which was attended by a large group of girls who learned to cook and so on.

Mr. Frank Hassell tells me that he and my brother Freddie went there to live in 1948 and they stayed until 1952. They went to Aruba to teach and in 1955 Frank returned and stayed at Miss Browlia’s until 1958. Also Carl Hassell from St. John’s stayed there as well as Howard Leverock. Freddie and Howard later moved with Floyd and Henry Every to Miss Gathie Wathey’s place next to the Methodist Church.

Senator Kenneth van Putten said that he never lived at Miss Browlia’s. He lived by Miss Zilah’s. However since two Statia girls Carmen Suarez-Mars and Angelica Brown-de Weer stayed at Miss Browlia’s that he would be visiting with them all the time. Nurse Olive Patrick of St. Eustatius was a good friend of Miss Browlia’s and they would visit back and forth. Miss Browlia visited Saba twice. Once on her way back to St.Maarten she spent the day and Mr. Frank took her around. Later when her niece Browlia Maillard as well, was teaching here on Saba, Miss Browlia came and stayed for a few days at Scout’s Place Guesthouse. I remember visiting with her and reminiscing about when I stayed with her. Frank told me that once when the Temmer family of St.Eustatius was staying at Miss Browlia’s there was a rumor of a tidal wave coming. They all decided to go to French Quarter to stay by friends there. However the tidal wave never came.

What was interesting in those days as well were the many vendors, all women, who would pass around in the morning selling their wares. These included all sorts of vegetables grown in Colombier but also in

Middle Region and elsewhere. Also, fresh meat, poultry, fish, sugar cakes, and fresh milk were available from these vendors. You name it and it was delivered to your door.

Miss Browlia started out as a Kindergarten teacher in 1920. She taught for 26 years. The school which she started later became known as the Princess Beatrix Kindergarten located in the old brick building on the grounds of the Methodist Church. Today it is known as the Methodist Agogic center. Miss Browlia used to use her own money to send to relatives in the United States to buy books and materials for her school. She received a Royal Distinction from Her Majesty Queen Juliana for her work as a school teacher. She also played an important role in the Methodist Church. She filled just about every post in the church at one time or another. Besides being a Sunday school teacher, Superintendent of Sunday School, a class leader, the President of the Women's League, a preacher, she also held the highest office in the church, which is that of Circuit Steward.

She had two adopted children, Ms. Irma Abdul-Hamid and Mr. Louis Eights. He said that Miss Browlia would rather "talk than use the rod; but according to Louis she would "talk your head off."

A number of the people whom I write about merit a book of their own about their life and work. These articles are mostly in appreciation of my association with them but also written in the hope that they will tease someone into writing a book about each and every one of them. It was nice to have visited with you once again in this fashion, Miss Browlia. And like the poet Longfellow said we are now like "Ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing,

Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;

Only a look and a voice;

Then darkness again and a silence.