

## On Assignment

By: Dave Levenstone

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Another of Jimmy Zagers Antigua Black Pineapples

It is well known that on Saturdays and holidays Commissioner Will Johnson likes to spend time working in his vegetable garden. So last Saturday we decided to take a look and see if there was anything there to brag about.

Surprisingly he was gardening in one of his Che Guevarra shirts. When asked for an explanation he said. "It makes weeding easier. I imagine the weeds are CIA operatives and it gives me a certain amount of satisfaction to weed them out." He went on to say: "You know people think that I am bad, but if I was as bad as they think I am I would have asked the police to give that crazy woman from Santo Domingo a good planass for me and put her back on the plane. The one who came here to frighten people about the volcano.

When asked: "What exactly is a planass?" he answered. "When our people from the Eastern Caribbean islands used to go to Santo Domingo to work in the cane field they brought that word back with them. It means to lick someone with the flat side of a machete."

But let us go back to the garden. Will showed me a lovely bunch of plantains hanging over his wall. He said that earlier this year he had reaped a bunch with 61 plantains on it. He said that he enjoys the stories about pumpkin war but he wants to show now how much can grow on Saba. He has also reaped five bunches of bananas lately and has more to come.



Commissioner Will Johnson pointing at bunch of plantains

With that he proceeded to show me a pineapple fruit in his yard. He said he does not want to embarrass the lady from Simpson bay but rather to encourage her. He then showed us a 5 lb Antigua black, which he had bought from Jimmy Zagers on Zions Hill. Some years ago Jimmy started with one Antigua black and he now has many more. These are the best

pineapples in the world. According to Will you have to leave them sit for a few days after you reap them so that they can draw the sugar. He also makes a refreshing drink from the skins by putting them to foment in water with brown sugar.



**Commissioner Johnson in his Che Guevarra shirt holding Antigua black pineapple.**

He also showed us some cacao fruit, which Cisco Matthew had brought to him from the Banana Gut. There were people who used to dry the seed and make chocolate milk from them when I was a boy. The trees you have to plant under other trees for shade and I plan to plant a few slips.



**Commissioner Johnson showing off his cacaos.**

He has his own NONI tree and makes his own juice from the fruit. He informed us that Ronnie Simmons had called Clifton Berkel on St. Eustatius for advice and passed it on and now he can make his own juice. When asked if he thought there was anything to it he answered: 'Hey man. After you pass fifty whatever they tell you is good for your health do it. And you know we third world people believe in our bush medicine. It smells funny but after a while you acquire a taste for it.

He said, "Don't forget to mention about the plantains. You know I got a small slip from Joanna Hurtault, which she had gotten from Dominica. You know my friend Elmer Linzey and I used to think that plantains could not make it on Saba because once we had planted some slips and they died. Mine did bear some small plantains but nothing to go to the paper with. Now I have found out that they require a lot of water. Once you water them properly you not only get good plantains but they propagate suckers like crazy. Right now I have transplanted about fifteen slips from the first slip Joanna gave me and now I have some more to transplant. Just this morning Joe Hassell and Alfredo Hassell were here building a wall for me and I asked them to do me a favor and take out five suckers (slips) for me so that I can plant them.



**Commissioner Johnson holding up his 5lb Antigua black pineapple and on the table a sour sop and two cacaos.**

From the conversation you can see that the love for gardening begets friendships. "The small group of people who like to do gardening are constantly calling and exchanging ideas. One frequent caller is Franklin Every who has won the gardening contest for Saba Day on two occasions. Franklin is retired now and devotes most of his time to his garden and says he is as happy as a Lord with what he is doing."

In ending Will said "I don't do all that much but I hope that what I do will encourage others. "He said: "the other afternoon I was bursting up a rock with a sledgehammer. My neighbor Shawn Johnson has a large bull just below me and he was there feeding the bull. I called out to him and said. 'Shawn you think any of them Commissioners on St. Maarten or that big mouth Clyde van Putten can handle a sledgehammer like me? "He said: "I don't think so Mr. Will".

So there we have it, yet another contest coming up if anyone takes on the challenge. “A sledgehammer contest”.

Carry on Will.



**Commissioner Johnson looking at his pumpkin in his garden**