

My brother Freddie.

Freddie was born in the year 1932 in a small village called Behind-the Ridge on Saba above the old sulphur mine. My mother hated the place and suggested that it should be called Behind the Face of God instead. In those days Saba had no roads, no electricity, no airport, no harbor, no motor cars and only very occasionally a small plane would fly over the island.

Into that environment one day when Freddie was about eight years old, the villagers and fellow islanders were startled when they saw a large object in the air passing close over the island. Everyone was in panic. People were saying it was the end of the world. My brother Eric tells me that Freddie was the only one who remained calm. He observed the great flying monster closely with the large NAZI sign on its side and declared to all present that there was nothing to be scared about. Freddie declared that it was a Zeppelin (or blimp) from Germany. Mind you there were no books, or magazines or radios and certainly no television Behind the Ridge. So everyone wondered where Freddie had gotten all that knowledge from.

So you can see that at an early age already Freddie was interested in what to the rest of Saba were Unidentifiable Flying Objects.

Most people remember Freddie for his many years at the airport. In doing so people forget or do not even know that Freddie was proud to be a primary school teacher in front of the class for no less than thirty five years. He had a problem with teachers who at the first opportunity left the class and went to work in air-conditioned offices in the Department of Education. He felt that a teachers place should be in front the class.

In order to reach his school in The Bottom, Freddie would have to start out with my father from Behind the Ridge over a series of goat paths up and down the mountain. He would have to pass through Hell's Gate, English Quarter, Windwardside, and St.John's until they finally reached The Bottom. They would have to leave home at five o'clock with an old kerosene lamp in order that my father could reach his work as a foreman on the road for seven o'clock and Freddie could make it to school. Finally my mother had enough of that and did the unheard of on Saba by leaving her home behind and moving to her sister's house in Windwardside which she rented for twelve guilders a month. In those days no one paid house rent on Saba unless it was an off island teacher or a doctor. My father by the way was making thirty guilders a month when the government had work for him.

My mother was a Simmons and she inherited the Simmons' ambition and wanted something more for her children than just farming and fishing which Saba had to offer at the time. She firmly believed that if her children had remained Behind the Ridge that they would have been trapped there. In 1947 Freddie came to St.Maarten to finish his schooling and to follow a teachers training course. St.Maarten at the time had little more to offer than Saba. However Freddie loved the place and used to tell many stories of his stay with Mrs. Gathay Wathey next to the Methodist church and later with Miss Browlia Maillard on the backstreet. In 1950 he nearly lost his life on a small sloop which caught up in a hurricane on his way back to school.

In 1951 he graduated and was intending to go to Aruba. The day before he left home the entire family went to church. My father had not been to church in some 28 years. While the family was in church a terrible lightning storm broke out. It was so bad that the priest had to cancel the Mass. Then the police came and informed my father that the house we lived in had been badly damaged by a lightning strike.

When my mother was six weeks old a bolt of lightning had destroyed her house, killed her sister and badly wounded her grandmother and a cousin. So you can imagine my mother's crisis with having had two houses destroyed by lightning in her lifetime. Anyway we bundled Freddie off to St. Maarten the next day and he went on to Aruba where he taught at the Prince Bernhard School in San Nicolas until 1956. He paid my passage to go over from Curacao for the Christmas of 1955. I was recently in Aruba and I am always amazed how much all the islands have changed in recent years.

In 1956 Freddie returned to teach at the elementary school on Saba. He was active as Leader of the Boy Scouts for years, also a Member in good standing of the Lions Club and active in the Catholic Church as well. In 1959 he married Patsy and together they had three children. In 1962 when Claude Wathey was running for the only parliamentary seat of the Windward Islands he sent me from St. Maarten where I lived, to Saba to campaign for him there. After the elections I was told by someone to try and get the agency of Windward Islands Airways. I remember writing a letter to Mr. Chester Wathey and a reply came back the following week appointing my father as agent. My father was then in very bad health and could hardly read and write, so it was Freddie who with his love of planes was the de facto agent of Windward Islands Airways. He was assisted in the day to day work by the only two people who worked at the airport at the time namely Leo Hassell who ran everything that could be run at the airport, even the goats would have to be run off the runway by Leo so that the plane could land. Also Thomas Johnson helped out Freddie. In 1986 or so Freddie decided to take his pension as a teacher and dedicate himself full time to running the agency on Saba for Winair. During his years as agent Freddie gave many young people a break. They worked for him during their school vacations and then moved on to higher things. My son Chris Johnson, Commissioner and Leader of Government was one of those who worked for the agency for awhile.

Our family has taken Winair seriously as if the airline belonged to us. My brother Eric for many years was on the board of Winair. I then followed him, and then my son Teddy was on the board until recently. I would like to recognize Erla Granger the latest family member to be on the Board of Winair. Erla is the daughter of Carlyle Granger and he and Freddie lived like real brothers from the time they were little boys. I am sure that the two of them are somewhere in Heaven under a sea grape tree pounding melee as they used to do here on earth.

Freddie and his family have been one of the most reliable agents for Winair since 1962. For years Freddie did not charge the company ground handling fees as he said Winair could not afford it. Only when Hortence Smith became Winair Manager he insisted that Freddie like all the other agents should get ground handling fees. I want to recognize the presence here today of his widow Patsy and his children and congratulate them on this honour being bestowed on Freddie today. They would like to thank the committee who suggested this tribute to Freddie, as well as to the Post office for following the recommendation. By the way Freddie's son in law Aron Soares is the great great grandson of Verne C.

Gorst the grandfather of United Airlines. Since the Postal Authorities are present here today, I want to sidetrack for a moment and remind them of the following; when the Post office belonged to government, I represented the Windward Islands on the committee to honour persons of merit in the community. While serving on that committee we were able to get at least six Windward Islanders honoured with a stamp. Mr. Cyrus Wathey, Mr. Joseph H. Lake and Mr. Steve Kruythoff on St. Maarten. For St. Eustatius it was Miss Paula Dorner and Mrs. Christine Flanders and for Saba Mrs. Gertrude Johnson born Hassell, and Mrs. Maude Edwards-Jackson.) People have been urging the Postal Service to bring back that tradition. It is a nice way to honour meritorious persons and the families and the community appreciate this. I am happy today to see that they have started once again to honour our people who have dedicated themselves to their communities.

On behalf of the Johnson family and the people of Saba I would like to thank the Aviation Pioneers of the Caribbean Foundation who took the initiative to honour these three individuals here today. Of course all could not be honoured today. However we cannot forget people like Mr. George Greaux, Mr. Faustin Ledee, and Mr. Louis Richardson and so on. In the past thirty years many young St. Martiners like my friends Edwin Hodge and Rodger Hodge, and also Sabans have been inspired to learn to be pilots. We have Gavin Peterson from Saba flying out of Singapore. And not to forget my friend Henkie Rivers of St. Eustatius, with whom I had many interesting experiences when he flew for Winair. I have landed over 800 times on Saba's airport and believe me I still have not gotten accustomed to it. Many of the former St. Barths pilots went on to become captains of large airlines. I remember one night flying from Aruba to Lima Peru on a KLM 747 plane, when the pilot came on with an announcement while we were flying over the Andes. When he identified himself I asked the stewardess to tell him that I was on board. Shortly after that he came from the cockpit looking for me quarreling with me as to why I had not let him know earlier that I was on board. He was one of the Blanchard brothers who used to land on Saba with the Winair planes. Jerry Cassius the former chief engineer for Winair was a personal friend of mine and I and others have been assisting him with some research his planned book on Aviation History of the Windward Islands.

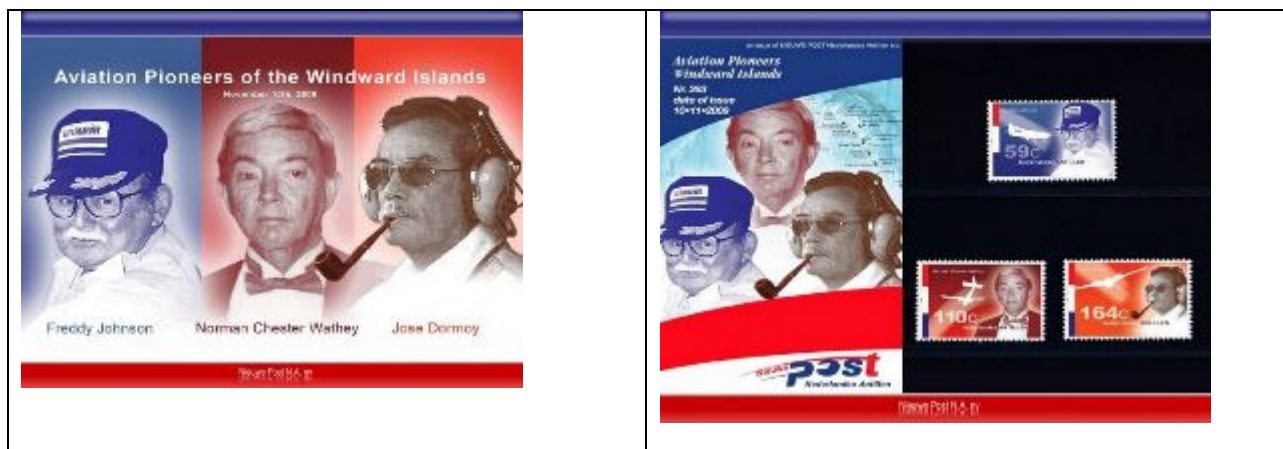
Although our father was a quiet man, three of his sons Eric, Freddie and myself always have been opinionated and have always expressed our views on issues in the papers. Freddie wrote often on topics pertaining to the neglect of the Saba airport and aviation services to Saba over the years. For months on end Saba in the nineteen sixties did not get air service, prompting the people of the island at the time to hoist a French flag over the police station in the Windward side. Why the French flag one may ask? My answer to that is that there was no Cuban or Russian flag available at the time. I carry a whole closet of flags from all the rebel countries just in case if a statement has to be made. On a recent trip to the Alhambra, I bought a Spanish flag there. My wife Lynne asked me: "Why would you buy a large Spanish flag?" I told her, "You can never tell. Saba was owned by Spain from 1493 until 1640. A Spanish flag never flew over the island. And you can never tell when I will need it to pester the Dutch with." The raising of the French flag on Saba in 1964 was a desperate call for attention to the islands plight by its people. Hopefully soon when Saba attains its new political status Freddie's dream of a cross-strip for Saba's runway can be realized.

I remember once that some high officials were standing close to where Freddie was doing his paperwork in preparation for the flight. Freddie made some remark which I felt had been overheard by the officials. I whispered to him: "Freddie man you can't say that." He replied: "And who said that? At my age if I cannot say what I think and feel when will I ever get the chance to speak out?" Within a few months he was no longer in the land of the living. And so we Johnson's continue to speak out and the next generation are already making a name for themselves for their ability to carry on the tradition of boldly speaking out on issues concerning our island and the world.

If I started to talk about Chester Wathey and Jose Dormoi, believe me you would chase me off the podium as I could go on for hours about my personal relationship with these two gentlemen. "Pipe" was such an institution on Saba that he even became the subject of sermons. I remember one morning in the Anglican Church in Windwardside when Father Jacobs was explaining the difference to his parishioners between hope and certainty. He likened it to when you got in the plane and you saw Pipe in the cockpit you were certain you would reach your destination while with other pilots you could only hope and pray that you would get there. Father Aldric Hassell would hang around the airport to find out if "Pipe" was flying. If not he would pretend that he was just visiting the airport and head back up to Mountain to await a better day when Pipe would be flying. Suffice me then to congratulate the friends and families of these two gentlemen as well.

Many of those who worked at the airport on Saba with Freddie frequently recall words of wisdom that "Meneer Freddie" used to suit certain occasions. Someone, a former student of his, recently said to me: 'don't think that Meneer wasn't smart,' and he then went on to describe a situation and the philosophical way "Meneer Freddie" had put a label to it. The people of Behind-the-Ridge already knew that, when Freddie was eight or nine years old. When they thought the world was coming to an end Freddie with a keen sense of observation calmly assessed the situation and informed the anxious crowd that what they were seeing was a German Zeppelin.

Thank you.



Technical Data

Date of issue	• November 10th, 2009	Printing technique	• offset
Stamp size	• 36 mm x 25 mm	Colors	• cyan, yellow, magenta & black
Image size	• 33 mm x 22 mm	Designer	• Richmond Gijsbertha
Perforation stamps	• 13 ^{1/4} x 12 ^{3/4}	Printer	• Johan Enschedé Stamps Security Printing Haarlem, The Netherlands
Paper	• stamp paper no watermark		
Gumming	• synthetic		

59c stamp: Walter Frederick Martinus Johnson (May 24th, 1932 - January 2nd, 2001†)

Known to all as "Freddy," he was part of the very start of aviation on Saba as his father Daniel was appointed agent for Winair in 1963 when Saba's airport was opened and Winair started flying to the shortest commercial runway in the world (which it still is). A teacher by trade, he initially only helped his father part time. It became a full-time commitment after his father's passing. He became a living symbol of Saba's warm and genuine hospitality, contributing to the growth of air travel to the formerly isolated island. He was decorated by the Queen of Holland for his services to the island of Saba. After he passed away, Winair named a Twin Otter after him.

110 cents stamp: Norman Chester Wathey (March 1st, 1925 - January 4th, 2001†)

Norman Chester Wathey was one of the pioneers on St. Maarten as it pertains to its aviation history. Being a founding member of Winair (Windward Islands Airways), he contributed positively to the growth and economic development of several surrounding islands. An endeavour which became reality on August 21st, 1963 along with longtime buddies, Faustin Ledee and Georges Greaux Senior, Chester sat as the Chairman of the board of directors of Winair, as well as a member of the board of ALM.

164 cents stamp: José "Pipe" Dormoy (September 18th, 1925 - September 10th, 2007†)

Born in Guadeloupe, José Dormoy belongs to the earliest pioneers of aviation in the northeastern Caribbean. He was one of the three original pilots of the Compagnie Aérienne Antillaise (C.A.A.) that was instrumental in opening up St. Eustatius and Saba to the outside world from 1946. Fearless and capable, he was Winair's first official and fully employed pilot and a legendary figure on the islands. He received his nickname "Pipe" from the pipe that he would not stop smoking – not even while flying. He served Winair for 26 years and retired in St. Eustatius in 1989 with a record of 18,000 hours flying Twin Otters, and 37,000 hours total flying time, with 20,000 landings in Saba alone. One could always count on him to fly a patient out in cases of medical emergencies. He never cancelled on a flight to Saba – even when the wind came from the South and you risked arriving below the level of the runway. He had his own special technique to overcome that problem.

© 2009 Nieuwe Post Nederlandse Antillen n.v.