

## An Inside Look

First published, November 2012

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Self-published

ISBN: 978-90-484-2749-9

NUR: 402

Production: Free Musketeers, Zoetermeer

[www.freemusketeers.nl](http://www.freemusketeers.nl)



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# An Inside Look

*Raphael Sorton*



# Preface

This book is dedicated to my loving parents: Mr. Rupert A. Sorton† and Mrs. Elmira N. Sorton-Hodge. It is also a tribute to my brothers and sisters, who although not consciously, contributed to my being able to study abroad, for which sacrifices at home had to be made. My parents did their utmost to make sure that my siblings were not affected by the (financial) support I needed.

To all my tutors and teachers who always believed in me and supported me and those that opened their homes to take me in as a student, away from home at the tender age of 13, away from my close-knitted family of 5 brothers and 6 sisters, including myself. In the years to come, another brother and sister completed our family.

What begun as a little shy Island boy in 1959, leaving my Island after just completing Primary education, resulted in a lifelong career as Public official, of the Central Government of the Netherlands Antilles, highlighted by serving, first as Administrator and subsequently as Act. Lieutenant Governor of my native Island, the Island Territory of Saba. I was subsequently detached in The Netherlands as Commissioner for Industrial Promotion in Europe for the Netherlands Antilles and when this assignment ended, I was appointed as Head of the Industrial Acquisition unit at the Department for Trade, Industry and Employment on Curaçao. Two years later I was appointed as Head of Economic Affairs at the Cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Netherlands Antilles in The Hague, and based on the political agreement that the Windward Islands People Movement of Saba, (WIPM) under the leadership of Mr. W.S. Johnson, made during the formation of the new Government coalition, I was nominated for the post of 2nd Act. Deputy Minister Plenipotentiary and Act. Director of said Cabinet. I am very proud to say that I am one of the few government officials from the Netherlands Antilles that took the oath of

office in hands of Her Majesty, Queen Beatrix! The foundation of this all was laid by the acquired experience, working as a public official for the Netherlands Government from 1969 to 1980, but I was always conscious of the teachings of my parents that served as my guide throughout my life after leaving home! Thank you Mom & Dad!

I am forever indebted to my sister Ruth Levestone and her husband Mathias, who was employed by the ESSO oil refinery on Aruba for accepting and caring for me during my first year away from home at the tender age of 13 years! Sadly, both have passed on to a better life and have not witnessed this aspect of my ambition. During life, however, I have thanked them many times for the role they played in my life. Just one year later, I had to relocate to Sint Maarten because of the restructuring and reduction in employment that was taking place at the refinery. Thinking ahead, Mathias whose department was also nominated for restructuring, was considering moving back to Saba for the event his employment was to be terminated which meant I would also have to relocate. My parents decided it would be better to start the new school year at a new location which turned out to be on the Island of Sint Maarten. I lodged at the Capt. Hodge's Guesthouse, where there were three other young scholars from Saba staying, also in pursuit of a higher education. My aunt, Venetia Hodge, affectionately known as aunt Winnie, later married to Mr. Pretty, also took care of us as if we were her own children. I say "we", because my elder sister was under her care, when we sailed away from the SABA the year before to further our education. Later, many more brothers and sisters would follow. Finally, completing my secondary education on Curacao, where a longtime friend of my parents, Miss Olive Simmons, was willing to take me in during the next 4 years I spent there.

Teachers that inspired and believed in me were: Mr Frank Hassell, Miss Olga Hassell, Mrs. Elaine Hassell and the teacher responsible for pushing for the "off-island" continuation of our education, Mrs. O'Neal. A special acknowledgement of Mr. H.L. van Scheepen, a teacher from Holland who worked on Saba from 1956 to 1958, and

who inspired me to change my style of writing, which earned me an above average mark for that subject.

*This book is in no way intended to have a historical character. Facts as stated are simply based on my recollection and perception as I experienced them and know them to be true.*

### The author



*Ruth Levestone*





# Chapter 1

Born on Saba on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1946, in the Capitol, known as The Bottom, and predominantly inhabited by Negro families, I grew up learning at an early age what the social position of the Negroes was deemed to be, because of their mostly dependant status on the Caucasian families for work and other income. My grandmother was the one that told us fascinating stories and experiences of encounters with, as she called them “white folks”. Besides being a good story teller, she undoubtedly instilled in us a sense of pride and character for ourselves, but also of respect for others. What today in many West-European countries is seen as a problem, e.g. how to forge a good balance in the assimilation process between indigenous natives and the “new” immigrants, turned out to be a very natural process for us growing up in a, in those days, rather segregated society. Under the surface, there were racial issues, between the villages, two of which were predominantly “black” and two “white”. In his book: “History of Saba”, Dr. J. Hartog<sup>1</sup> describes this aspect adequately.

Children will be children, so of course issues would surface between schoolchildren as well. Referring to my grandmother, she was well known, because she didn’t accept being talked down too, or not being paid the correct amount for the baked products she sold to the “well-to-do” families. “I may be poor, but I’m not ignorant” she would say. Another one of her famous expressions was: “Don’t play smart if you ain’t clever”. It was also important to carry yourself with dignity and respect others, in order to be able to demand and earn respect in return.

She was a mother raising her children alone and she was a firm believer as an Anglican, which originally was the more dominant religion on the Island, but the Roman Catholic surge, was gaining ground fast.

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1 Dr. J. Hartog: History of Saba.

Education was one of the areas where the influence of the Roman Catholics, through the Nuns, could be spread. It was also common practice for the Priest to visit families where there was a newborn and try to convince the parents that this baby or even the next one should be baptized a Roman Catholic! I remember an incident between my father and a Priest who regularly walked around our little town in the afternoon and paid visits here and there. Shortly after there was a newborn in the home, he came by and as he entered the home, my father could see him from the shop window, where he kept a keen eye on everything that we as kids would be doing around the house, so he immediately came to see what message the Priest might have for the family. Besides, it was just politeness to be present if and when a Priest would visit your home. To my Parents' surprise, he began talking about the number of children in the home and that they were all baptized in the Anglican Church and he thought it was time for the newborn to be baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. My Father didn't wait to hear anymore. This also had to do with his experience with the Nuns as a schoolboy, which wasn't very positive. "Excuse me Reverend", he said, "We as Parents were baptized and christened Anglicans, and will surely die as Anglicans. We made this choice for our children and it is not prudent, nor your responsibility to tell us what denomination our children should have. Now if you will excuse us, there is the door". The Priest then uttered something like "you don't have to get angry, but *we* have to try to bring about a more balanced community". Out the door he went and never visited us again.

Parents would be encouraged to move their children from the Public School to the Roman Catholic school. Children that misbehaved or were disobedient beyond the wishes of the Nuns or "Sisters" as they were commonly called, were threatened to be put out of school and never be able to learn to read or write! In discussions like these was where my grandmother would be fearless. She had children at both schools and saw the benefits, but also the negative side of certain aspects. But she was fair. There, where her child was wrong, she would convince him or her to do better and not to give up, because of the way they were treated, because their future depended on a good edu-