

MARCH 26, 1987

Please withhold judgment of this trip until all the installments have been reported. When I told my lawyer son in Austin that I was going to help count the monkeys on St. Kitts in the West Indies, he burst into such paroxysms of laughter that he dropped his telephone.

After his reaction, I quietly applied to be on Team Five of an outfit called Earth watch that sponsors archeological and natural studies over the world. Out of 50 expeditions, I chose the one to study monkeys on St. Kitts. In my youth I'd done all the excavating on fence lines that I cared to contribute to archeology, so I signed on as monkey census taker without knowing any more about the job than that it took some hiking and camping out on a tropical island.

Our base headquarters overlooks the deep harbor of Basseterre, the capital city of St. Kitts. Three volunteers, two team leaders, and myself are living in a five-bedroom private residence that is outfitted about like college landlords used to furnish their rent houses during the critical housing shortages after World War Two.

I haven't had time to meet the neighbors yet. The family that lives directly across the street from my front bedroom window gives an accordion concert every evening. The ones who live next door have a new baby that is evidently frightened by accordion music; she starts crying so hard at dusk that she keeps the dogs howling until daylight, when the roosters begin to crow.

The bad thing isn't the din of the crying and howling and crowing. The really bad thing is that an that noise makes the mosquitoes so mad they'll attack whether they are thirsty or not. These St. Kitts models prefer the tender flank area between the hip bone and the lower rib. I haven't found a one I couldn't take, once I got a good hold underneath his chin, a grip on his forelock, and made a fast, hard twist.

St. Kitts has a population of 34,000 of which one percent are white. I rarely see anyone my color. The British colonial government left in 1983, and unless you meet a tourist on the day his plane lands, the next time you see him, he'll be so sunburned that he's more of a "red" than a "white."

Once I do start meeting the neighbors, I am going to tell them my nationality stems from the peace committee of the United Nations. St. Kitteans have the reputation of being friendly and tolerant people; however, as bleached out as I am from spending the winter bundled up in heavy clothes, I don't think the best makeup man that ever put the black face on a minstrel show could make me match up with the natives.

During the day while we've been out surveying the island, the infants and the musicians and the pets and the chickens have been shading up. Social requirements for the neighborhood seem to include owning about seven cur dogs and that many red and yellow roosters. Tonight I'm going to run a test to see how it works to be a citizen of the U.N.