



## Denver woman stands ground against Antigua

### Grandmother fights decade-long effort to seize family's resort

ST. JOHN'S, Antigua — A petite 5-foot-2 Denver grandmother has for 10 years been fending off Antiguan government attempts to expropriate Half Moon Bay, a prized resort owned by her family and other U.S. investors.

Natalia Querard has done so without any visible support from the U.S. State Department, which says a long-standing treaty — ratified by Antigua when it became independent in 1981 — does not apply in this case.

Querard has written to U.S. Ambassador



Joe McGowan Jr.

Mary Kramer in Barbados, saying opposition to her and the resort now threatens to escalate into physical confrontation and possible damage to property and, more importantly, individuals.

Threats are nothing new to this determined woman. She said her car has been run off the road twice in recent years.

Though the 100-room resort has been empty and idle since being severely damaged by Hurricane Luis in 1995, Querard pays for round-the-clock security.

Insurance disputes kept the owners from restoring the Caribbean getaway. And government attempts to take over the property have discouraged otherwise willing foreign investors.

After the hurricane, Querard placed everything salvageable — including appliances, bathroom equipment, doors and furniture — in rented storage.

All was lost when an arsonist destroyed the storage unit. No one has been arrested.

To keep the government from declaring the property abandoned, Querard has stayed on the island almost constantly ever since, while her husband, John, continues his work in Denver as an independent economic analyst.

The resort is located on the southeast corner of the roughly 10-mile-by-10-mile island nation of 70,000 citizens. It has a nine-hole golf course, five tennis courts and a freshwater swimming pool.

Querard has drawings for a complete rebuilding of the resort and an expansion to 125 rooms, plus some luxury suites and later, development of villas along the golf fairways.

During my visit to the island last month, Querard said she occupies herself by keeping a massive set of files on activities involving the resort.

Newspaper articles, statements by government officials and a large set of legal files all attest to her lengthy and expensive fight to keep the property in family hands.

"There is never a dull moment," she said. "Most of Antigua listens to talk radio. Half Moon Bay is a hot issue. I need to listen and then respond with balancing comments."

"It is tough being separated from my family. But I am watching out for my parents' interests and the interests of my children."

### A familiar face in St. John's

Her father, Michael Kluge, and other U.S. investors acquired Half Moon Bay resort in 1971. Kluge, who lived in New York City until his death in 2000, was a pioneer in the containerized freight industry and the first to establish a one-way worldwide system of container rentals.

Her husband visits the island periodically, as does her son, Constantine, a Phoenix businessman.

"I have become adept at legal speak because of the constant dealings with my attorney and the documents we have had to file and court proceedings that have followed," she said.

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"Also, I try to stay healthy so I can keep up the fight," Querard said. "I dine out with Antiguan friends and with expatriates living here. They sympathize with my situation and are supportive as much as they can be."

As we dined at an Italian restaurant in downtown St. John's, the waitress asked, "The usual, Mrs. Querard?"

People on sidewalks smile and greet her and shake her hand. Many encouraged her to keep up the fight.

In 2003, then-Prime Minister Lester Bird instigated parliamentary action to take over the resort. Antiguan newspapers said he intended to turn the resort over to R. Allen Stanford, a Houston-based developer and international banker.

Bird told parliament that seizure and resale of the resort could solve Antigua's budget deficit.

Dogged by 10 years of scandals, Bird was voted out of office in March 2004. He was succeeded by Baldwin Spencer, whose United Progressive Party took a majority in parliament over Bird's Antigua Labor Party.

On the day Bird proposed expropriation of Half Moon Bay resort, Spencer and his UPP minority members walked out in protest.

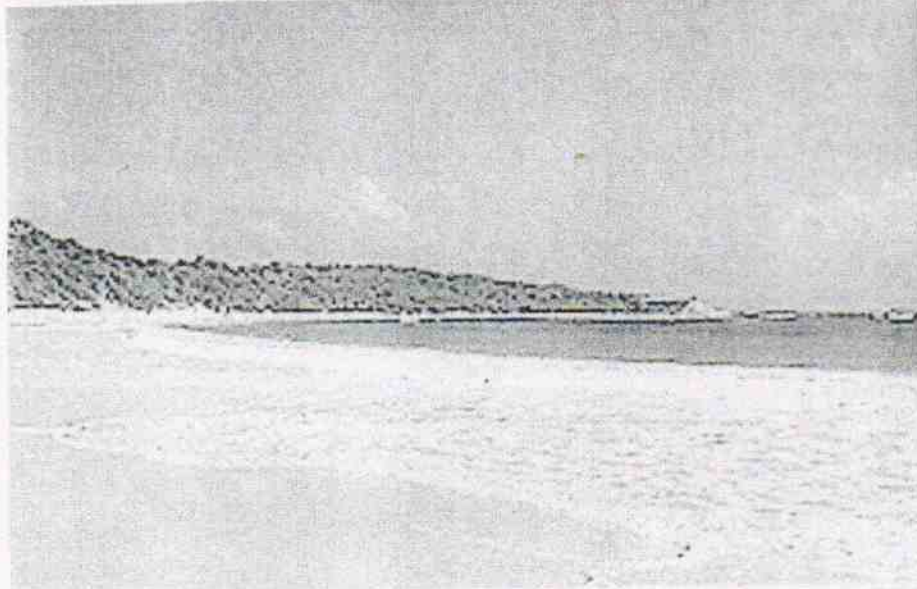
Later, in support of Querard's plea to the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court to intervene, Spencer filed an affidavit, saying his party opposed "the government's unlawful move to acquire the applicant's property."

Yet, in the ensuing months, nothing has been done to reverse the former parliament's expropriation attempt or to formally abandon the process of forced acquisition.

Tourism Minister Harold Lovell said in March that he and the prime minister agree the matter must be addressed by parliament. But he said Attorney General Justin Simon suggested "a particular way" the expropriation could be reversed without going to parliament.

"We expect to have it done very shortly," Lovell said, "within seven days."

Two months later, nothing has been done.



## Officials eye would-be buyers

In the meantime, contrary to a court order still in force, Cabinet members show and discuss the Half Moon Bay property with potential buyers and developers.

On April 1, Agriculture Minister Charlesworth Samuel took a golf course developer from Monterrey, Mexico, on a tour of the resort. He was accompanied by a developer from Clearwater, Fla. Both men told me they were unaware of the legal fight over the property.

Wilmoth Daniel, deputy prime minister and minister of public works, along with Senate President Dr. Edward Monsoor, have been reported discussing a Half Moon Bay development with Dr. Juan Vega, whose company VegaProyectos is based in Medellin, Colombia.

Meanwhile, Stanford, the Houston-based businessman who acquired Antiguan citizenship in 1999, has become the largest foreign investor in Antigua. He also is a banker for the Antigua government.

His Stanford Group of Companies is best-known in the United States for the Stanford Financial Group, which claims investors in more than 80 countries. Stanford has an office in downtown Denver.

Most of Stanford's activity appears to be centered in the Caribbean and South America. He owns Caribbean Star regional airline, newspapers in Antigua and St. Kitts, and local and offshore banks in Antigua and Panama.

Stanford receives payments from airport landing fees, property taxes and a passenger exit tax. He built a luxury restaurant called Sticky Wicket on airport grounds. And he built a four-story wooden observation tower on a hill at one edge of the airport. Local residents say it is so Stanford can climb to the top and survey "his kingdom."

Stanford has loaned in excess of \$100 million to various projects initiated by the Bird regime, including \$30 million toward a new hospital, which sits unfinished and idle.

A Royal Commission of Inquiry report on the hospital and its loan arrangements recommended appointment of a special prosecutor. The report noted several people had left the country or otherwise failed to re-

spond to summonses. It said Stanford "failed to appear, reportedly cause of heavy business commitments."

In addition to management of airport, Stanford has received ownership of various land parcels and a number of smaller islands off the island coast.

*The Wall Street Journal* report in 2002 that Stanford called the tempted expropriation of Half Moon Bay "simply a matter of eminent domain." *The Journal* said Stanford's offshore banking activities have come under scrutiny from the U.S. Treasury and State departments.

The government said it had right to seize the property because the owners had not repaired the hurricane damage and reopened the hotel. But investors were scared off the government's repeated threats and Bird's announcement that would go to Stanford.

## No water, power, phones

As managing director for the owners, Querard has lived in a cotta at Half Moon Bay since 1995, overseeing maintenance and security the property.

Three years ago, the governme-

utility company (APUA) cut water, power and phone service to the resort. A court order two months ago ordered services be reconnected. But no service has been restored, and the government has been in contempt of court since April 8.

In addition to full-time security guards, Querard pays for maintenance staff and groundskeepers. And although the resort buildings are damaged, maintenance of the beach and grounds has been such that the Travel Channel in 1999 named Half Moon Bay the "best beach in the world."

Querard became a heroine among Bird's opponents when ALP Senator Asot Michael verbally attacked her in parliament.

"You are an enemy of the state — no white woman can be allowed to own such property," he shouted as his words were recorded and rebroadcast by Antiguan radio stations.

Periodically, son Constantine takes over the "watchman's duties" so his mother can leave the island for business or family matters.

Querard says if the government does not soon abandon its attempt at expropriation and reverse the parliamentary declaration, she is "prepared to exercise our option of appealing to the Privy Council in London," the highest court of appeal for several independent Commonwealth countries, including Antigua.

On April 19, the State Department through its embassy in Barbados gave the following statement.

"The U.S. Embassy in Bridgetown continues to work toward a resolution of this ongoing dispute and remains engaged with the owners of Half Moon Bay and the government of Antigua and Barbuda to achieve such resolution."

Meanwhile, the tourism minister admits the government is in a bind to resolve the Half Moon Bay dispute.

Lovell said Antigua will be a host for the World Cricket Cup in 2007 and needs every possible hotel bed for the thousands of visitors expected.

He admitted that even now, it would be a tight schedule to get Half Moon Bay restored in time.

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**Bird, Antigua's ex-premier, instigated effort to expropriate Half Moon Bay.**