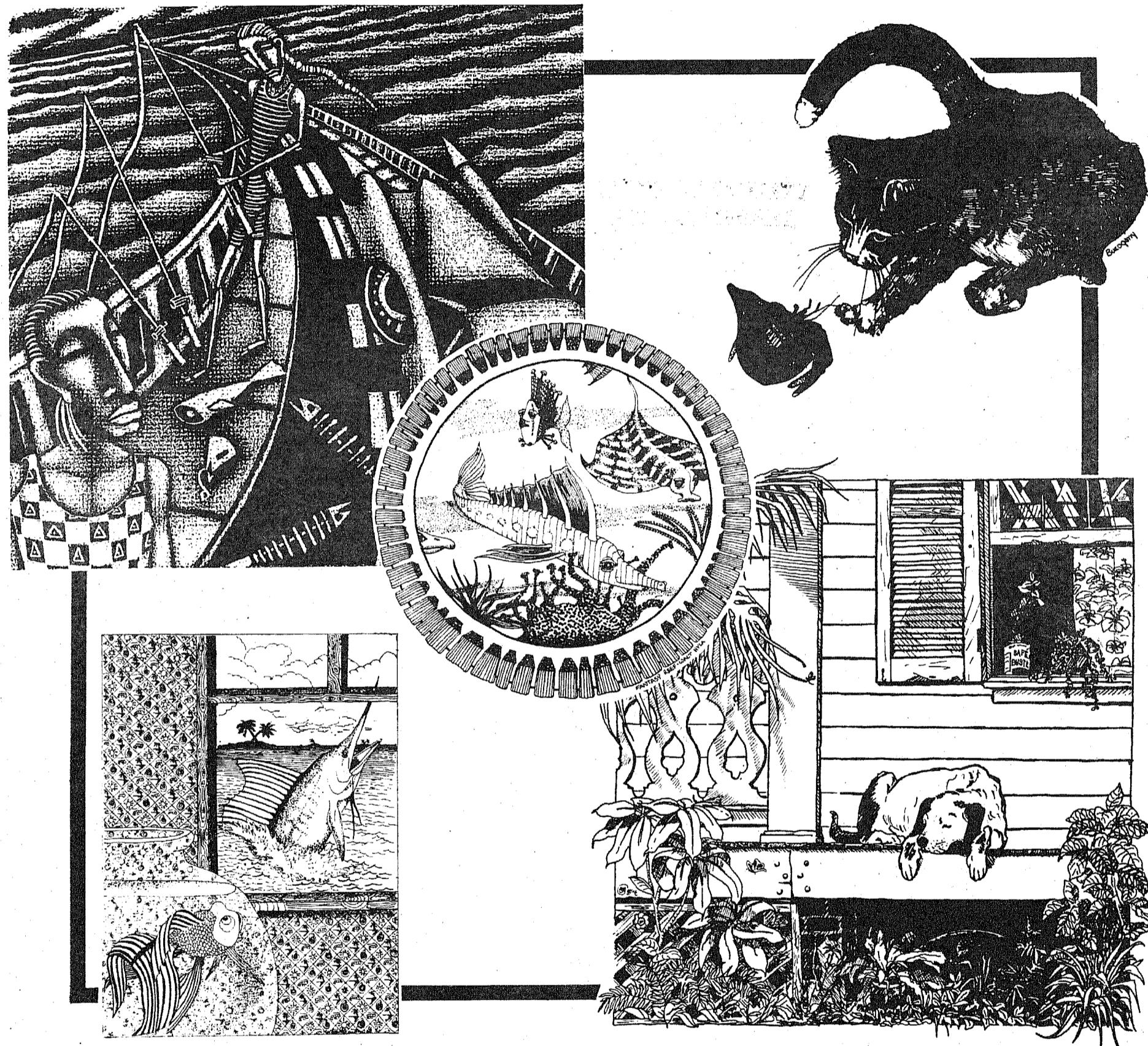


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VOL. 16, NO. 7 / KEY WEST, FLORIDA / JULY, 1988



SOME OF THE BEST OF SOLARES HILL
COLLECTOR'S EDITION

Page 4--July 1988--Solares Hill
Grover Cleveland was first serving as president of the United States?

Good question; he was getting born. Cleveland had won high office in 1884 by ignoring the bellicose bugging of the hitherto all-powerful Tammany Hall bosses, thus inspiring New York's Democrats to throw him the state's vital electoral vote ...

BURT GARNETT'S FIRST political awareness began after Cleveland won a second term in 1892. Much too young to understand the party system, Garnett nevertheless entered boyhood in philosophical kinship with Cleveland's brand of independent democracy, with free trade and a broadened civil service as cornerstones. Indeed an older Garnett might even have gone along with Cleveland's attempt to reverse the annexation of Hawaii on the ground that it involved the U.S. in world imperialism. But Burt is too pragmatic ever to have supported the president in his romantic desire to return to Hawaii's rickety throne the imperially proportioned ex-Queen Lilioukalani ...

UNFORTUNATELY OR NOT, Burt does not possess the cast of mind desirable in a politician. With his energy and his feeling for people, he might have gone far. But Garnett is straightforward and sometimes blunt; he has strong opinions, and he says what he thinks. Such an attitude can fatally damage an aspiring politico, who often has to tell gray lies so that the truth -- his truth -- can triumph.

Lies don't go down well with Burt. He has spent most of his life dispensing information in good faith. In a few of the positions he has held deviations from the straight and narrow have been implicit in the job description. Discoveries of such have always moved him on.

Here are some of the places and jobs that Burt has worked at:

Advertising agencies
Author
Columnist
Correspondent for newspaper and UP
Freelance writer
House mover
Lawyer's clerk
Managing editor
Painter (on canvas)
Publicity man
Reporter
Shoe business
Soldiers home employee
Trade paper editor
Typesetter
Weekly newspaper publisher

None of these, however, proved to be his real life work, of which more later.

Burt's first dip into printer's ink, in which his later life immersed itself, came in 1902, as a printer's helper. But a year later found him working in the packing room of a shoe wholesaler in St. Louis. There, as the youngest laborer, he was often sent out for beer. This taught him the virtues of the saloon free lunch, long sadly defunct ...

GARNETT SAVED ENOUGH money to enter the school of journalism at the

University of Missouri. Among several non-credit courses was a class in socialism, where, according to Burt, "nobody [else] lasted longer than three sessions." His net impression was that neither socialism nor communism would get far in this country unless courses in these subjects received credit. Garnett also studied economics, ethics, logic and Shakespeare. The last, he maintains, "enabled me to use antique words with only partial ignorance of their meaning."

In logic, the students were asked what would happen if an irresistible force met an immovable object. It was generally agreed that this question was of no consequence to anyone except football players ...

BURT'S FATHER HAD died and he had to drop out to support his mother. The year 1911 found him part owner of a weekly newspaper in Morgan County, Colorado, about 80 miles northeast of Denver. During this epoch he remembers arranging a dinner for the famous William Jennings Bryan, perennial presidential candidate but at the time a campaigner for Woodrow Wilson. Bryan touched none of the extra-special dishes that had been prepared for him, but put away two plates of radishes, all heavily buttered.

Garnett's next job was with the Cleveland *Leader*, as a result, he says, of having attended journalism school, a somewhat unusual credit in those days. At that time, "Cleveland was a three-cent town, including carfare, hot dogs, peanuts and schooners of beer."

The Cleveland newspaper business was uninhibited. The *Leader*, at a loss for something to editorialize about, started its own crime wave.

Burt had been raised to \$17 a week when he got fired and moved to Duluth, "where everything was so terrible that they had to pay a princely \$25."

BY 1915 GARNETT was writing a humorous column, "Duluth Guyed," which attracted the attention of the General Secretary of the National Rotary Club. This august personage alleged that he could get Burt a much better job if he would learn to imitate H.L. Mencken's acid pieces in *Smart Set* magazine.

The idea didn't appeal to Garnett, and he became editor of the Packard Motor Company's house organ in Detroit, awesome salary, \$50 a week.

Detroit was an exciting town. Henry Ford was turning the auto industry upside down, introducing such fantastically dangerous innovations as the \$5-a-day wage

and interchangeable parts. Packard was very scornful of Ford and predicted his speedy collapse or imprisonment.

War with Germany ended all passenger car production, even Ford's, and with it Burt's job. But his new leisure enabled him to attend a bring-your-own party where someone was stupid enough to bring Betty Harkness, whom he proceeded to woo and win ...

AFTER A STINT as managing editor at the Washington *Daily News*, Burt was working for the American Chemical Society, producing background news stories on rayon and plastics research, when he again began to ponder an idea which had first come to him as a corollary of his duties as a managing editor. Why shouldn't newspapers have similar background material on tap in all the fields they covered? On order, so to speak. No more waiting for the library to open while a noon deadline glares at you.

Thus was born Editorial Research

Solares Hill--July 1988--Page 5
Reports, of which Garnett was co-founder, partner and associate editor from 1923 to 1944. This was a daily/weekly newspaper service which kept on top of contemporary subjects, doing background reports on a topic before it became hot enough to warrant knowledgeable editorial comment. E.R.R. acted, in a sense, as a long and efficient arm of each of its clients' research departments.

The service filled an important gap in the operation of most newspapers. It was quick to succeed. As it grew in coverage and refinement, less supervision was needed at the top. By the late thirties Garnett was spending much of his time in Key West. But always he kept hammering on some project or other, for he has never really retired.

PERHAPS HIS MOST far-out endeavor, since becoming a permanent resident of The Rock, was his entry into the house-moving business. This provided many adventures, some of them financial and most of them unexpected.

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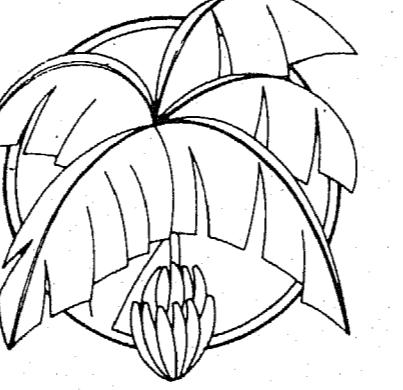
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In his Key West incarnation, Garnett has never been able to get far from the printer's ink into which he plunged almost 80 years ago. For a long time he wrote a column, "What Price Retirement?" which appeared in *The Miami Daily News*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, and *The Key West Citizen*. This explored the pros and cons of retirement theory and practice and offered cogent answers to readers' gut questions. When age finally permitted, Burt and his wife, Betty, checked out numerous retirement projects in person. "What Price Retirement?" reported the findings with both barrels, since Betty was a retired Washington woman's page editor.

In 1966, as a recognized authority on aging and regional vice president of the National Council of Senior Citizens, Garnett wrote the book *How to Retire in Florida*, covering the subject in exhaustive but always interesting detail.

Today, as one of the most senior and most respected citizens in Key West, he is hard at work on his autobiography while simultaneously belying his 94 years in many other ways.

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE of a coming centenarian sketching a conclusion from the passage of all that time: "In my early days people didn't think of social consequences. The great failure of capitalism lies in not taking account of the possible disadvantages attendant on so-called progress. Consider the automobile. If someone floating in the sky looked down and saw our highways crowded with innumerable trucks driven by

one or two men and carrying perhaps 40 tons of goods, might he not ask, 'Why on earth don't they invent the railroad and put that load in a freight car and save a hundred men's wages a trainload? I understand that truckers' wages are very generous considering that they need no skill whatever

except the knack of staying awake while they keep a simple vehicle from running off a superhighway."

Footnote: At the age of 92, Burt Garnett, a widower, remarried. Mr. & Mrs. Garnett now spend summers on her farm in Virginia. ■

Rex --

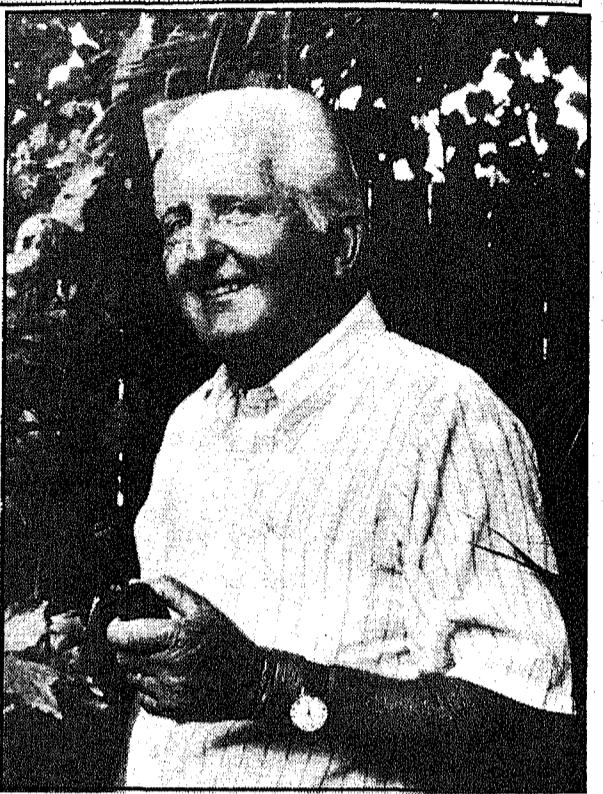
The One and Only, In Person JANUARY, 1985

by Bud Jacobson

IF THERE'S ONE character whose name is synonymous with Key West and its mad campy style, the sort of character you'd mention to anyone who'd spent any time here, it would be Rex -- and if they didn't know Rex, you knew they hadn't *really* caught onto the swing of this town.

His full name is Rex Brumgart and he's called Rexie by his old friends, and other names by others. He is as sporty and dapper today as he was when he first came ashore in Cayo Hueso in 1942, a Navy man with a rolling gait, decked out in his blues and ready to trade blows with those sneaky Japs -- or anyone, for that matter ...

BACK IN CIVILIAN life, Rex was one of the snowbirds back in the late '40s and '50s, and some years he even stayed through the summer, enjoying the local scenery and salty air. It gave him plenty of time to dream up ideas for parties which, in time, made him famous as a "party inventor."



Feisty Rex Brumgart poses with his pipe. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

The one party he originated which has now become a nationally-hailed celebration is the sunset party on the Mallory docks. What it's become today, however, is a far cry from the way it all began in the early '50s.

The Mallory docks then were a tumbledown melange of old wooden buildings used by the shrimp boats to unload their precious cargo, although smelly most of the time. The docks were a collection of old warped planks, rusty nails, open holes in some places where you could sit down and drop a fishing line into the water below. Children, cats and dogs and elderly fishermen would while away the hours there in the shade of the old building, fishing and telling stories.

THE NIGHT OF the party, you walked up the driveway in the dark, turned the corner and there stood a somber-looking "undertaker" -- Uncle Earle dressed all in black -- who collected your \$2 for drinks, labeled "formaldahyde," and to the side was a coffin lit by flickering candles.

In the coffin, beautifully composed in a white gown, was Rex.

"Approach the coffin, please," came the sepulchral voice of Uncle Earle.

When you did, Rex raised up, pressed a concealed button and a wreath of tiny fairy lights woven through his wig sparkled and splintered planks, on the rusted bollards, while Rex would pour the martinis from his crystal pitcher, while in the background a scratchy gramophone played a sorrowful dirge.

Word got out about the party. It caused a sensation and wasn't repeated ...

"To old friends," he said, and a tear trickled down his sunburned cheek ...

Thus, the sunset party in Key West ...

IT WAS IN 1957 when he was seized by another party brainstorm that has since become legend. The famous (infamous?) Von Kosei party.

It was a spooky takeoff on the case of the old crazed necrophiliac, Von Kosei, a technician at the old Marine hospital, who took a shine to a fading teenage patient,

Elena Hoyos, then dying from tuberculosis; the time was in the late 1930s. After she died, Von Kosei slipped into the graveyard one dark and stormy night and took the body and coffin out of its grave. He brought it to his darkened wooden house on Rest Beach, where using wax and restoratives, he "rebuilt" her body. When he was finally exposed, the gruesome story made international headlines.

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Carolyn Gorton Fuller:

The Lady and the Wall

SEPTEMBER, 1987



Carolyn Gorton Fuller adds another bottle to her artistic, functional glass wall. Photo by Richard Watherwax.

by Ann Boese

AS THE CONCH Tour Train rounds the corner of Margaret Street and Passover Lane, the guide points out the unique wall of bottles constructed by "the little old lady who lives there." Resident Carolyn Gorton Fuller refutes this, explaining that she's just three inches shy of six feet tall, became

eligible to receive social security only this year, and, given certain circumstances, can stretch the definition of "lady" to its limits. At 65, Carolyn has assembled a nice, neat package of art, philosophy and humanity. And she offers it in the best of all possible forms. Namely, herself.

Key West knows Carolyn best as the creator of the bottle wall. Actually, she's the

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creator of two bottle walls--both constructed in the same spot, in front of her house, across from the cemetery. Carolyn built the first wall--a 50- by 2-foot structure--about fifteen years ago when her newlywed daughter Becca and son-in-law came for a visit. "I just wanted to stay out of their way," recalls the handsome woman, sitting calmly and comfortably in a Victorian chair. "I also wanted to prevent people from cutting through my yard and knocking down a hedge I put in. It took me four months to build. People aren't malicious, but accidents seem to happen. A fire truck hit that wall."

Round 2. Today Carolyn is assembling the replacement. This wall will be shoulder height and a little longer than the last. A large, sparsely furnished room in her 130-year old home holds the key building material--bottles, hundreds of them. Clear, colored, simple, elaborate, tiny, cumbersome, worthless, valuable--the bottles come from many sources and represent many tales. One such vessel is clear and round and holds a rolled up secret message. A cap stamped with the Heinz 57 logo seals it safely inside.

"EVERYBODY'S GOTTON involved in the bottle thing," she explains with a genuinely warm smile. "Somebody from Pittsburgh sent me miniatures. Another mailed the champagne bottles from her wedding." Anything from wine and expensive liquor bottles from The Reach, Perry's and Casa Marina to peanut butter jars from the neighborhood kids find their way to the wall construction site. A diver

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brought her a bushel basket filled with sunken bottles he had retrieved from Guantanamo Bay. Street people make the occasional donation, too. But the backbone of bottles comes from larger establishments like The Reach. Carolyn says that each day her porch is like Christmas morning with little groups of fancy bottles and big boxes of plain.

Before becoming a segment of the "three-dimensional stained-glass structure," as Carolyn calls it, each bottle is washed, freed from labelling, sun-dried, and corked or capped "so it doesn't become a mosquito breeding ground." Then it is incorporated into the free-style arrangement of bottles, mortar, and coral pieces from Key West's shorelines.

Probably the most obvious question about the wall is: Why use glass? Carolyn got the idea from her refrigerator. "I had things like nearly empty catsup and mustard bottles and jars with one pickle in them. I had been trying to think of things an old lady could pick up and use to build."

CAROLYN HAS USED bottles for more than walls. Imagine sculptures, icons and oracles created with a futuristic flavor, based on Greek aesthetics, and constructed primarily of recycled materials--bottles, broken glass, bits of mirror. That's what adorns Carolyn's backyard. She's quick to dismiss suggestions of symbolism or surrealism. But it's difficult not to read something into a heart the size of a beach ball made entirely of bits of broken mirror, reflecting the observer in scattered fragments. And what of an enticing palm

tree bearing multi-colored glass leaves sharp and jagged enough to carve your hand wide open at the slightest touch? Or a row of transparent posies capable of an equally damaging slice? ...

When asked to describe her work, her style, Carolyn says, "It is varied. I'm not one of those people who draws little girls with big eyes and continues to draw that same little girl for the rest of their lives. It would bore me to extinction. I'm more like Picasso. He had a blue period and a pink period and he worked with clay and in metal and he painted and he did abstract things."

Indeed, Carolyn's style is experimental, unpredictable and unrestricted. Take a look at her works as a whole and you might not guess they were produced by the same artist. Viewer participation, however, is one element that links many works. Specifically, this idea runs through pieces done during her 26-year residence in Key West. There's an oil depicting a street scene in Frederick, Maryland, a town rich in Civil War history. Basically, the content consists of three earth-toned rowhouses with a dog and a trash can in the street in front of the houses. Nice, but not too exciting--unless you reach up and touch the dog and can. They're magnetized. You can put the can on a roof and throw the dog out the window, if you like. The same holds true for the bright orange and red oil painting of a western bar and desert. Three identical men in three different sizes can be placed anywhere and in any position. The sizes can be viewed realistically or symbolically; the possibilities are endless. Then there's the huge red flower. Georgia O'Keeffe

painted big flowers, too. But Carolyn's spread out, just beyond the frame ...

CAROLYN HAS TAKEN advantage of what the world has to offer. From private pupil of art, music and dancing lessons to serious student at The Chicago Art Institute to highest award recipient at Syracuse University to mother with baby in University of Oregon's Master's program, Carolyn has proved achiever and pioneer. She's orchestrated "out-of-school" exhibits and built her own house. She's sailed around the world, living in India for nine months. She's taught school, been married and divorced. And she's nursed her terminally ill mother from 1981 to her death in 1985--a trying experience which Carolyn looks back on as a period of personal growth.

Carolyn launched her career as a professional as a portrait artist. Her first commission came when she was a junior at Syracuse. "It was a couple from New York; they were somewhere in their 50s," she recalls, her slow serious speech bordering on theatrical. The woman had peroxide hair and a heavy tan. She was plump and short. When it came time to start working, both the husband and wife told me that they wanted (the wife) to look tall and thin. Well, I sketched the man first. And

he had a very prominent hooked nose." Based on the couple's attitude about the woman's physical flaws, Carolyn assumed she should doctor the man's nose, so she did some refining. "When he saw what I'd done, he told me it was wrong and that his nose looked like this." She holds a beak-shaped hand up to a profile view of her own nose. And laughs. Since then she has painted many fascinating people--a doctor, a conductor, a survivor of Hitler's Germany--just as they are.

Unlike the couple dissatisfied with the wife, wishing for her to be what she was not, Carolyn has avoided "if only's" or "I could have been's." Complaining, she calls it. But she confesses spending some portion of her life focusing on the drudgery of work, failing to enjoy the process. Certainly, though, any negative attitudes Carolyn may have harbored were overruled by the more powerful and constructive drive which is such an obvious aspect of her character. Then again, complaining may be a symptom of youth. Something to be remedied through experience--success and failure, reflection. At this point in her life, Carolyn allots no time for complaints. She makes her decisions based on growth and productivity.

"I'm a pig about life," she said, smiling, satisfied and confident. ■

many who clearly remember the high lonesome sound of his trumpet wafting over the treetops of Key West. The summer nights were perfumed then, just as they are now, breathing an intoxication all their own.

"Evenings were so quiet at that time," recalls Harriet ("H.A.") Chipchase, "not at all like they are now. I remember so well the sound of 'Cody's' trumpet floating on air. At first, when he was trying to get the scales just right, we would say, 'Oh, why doesn't he STOP?' But as time went on, we realized that 'Cody' had music in his soul. Soon his beautiful, clear sounds, as they came pouring out of the loft at 828 Thomas Street where he practiced, inspired and delighted us. We would love to sit out and listen to him." ...

IT WASN'T LONG before all of Theodore Navarro's time and energies paid off, and he had become quite expert at his wind instrument. Though too young to drink legally, even too young to be inside a nightclub or lounge, still "Cody" was not too young, at sixteen years of age, to blow trumpet as a member of Harry Chipchase's first band, with Willie Austin (who is now playing on the West Coast) on piano, Kermit Saunders on drums, Harry on trombone, and Oliver ("O.B.") Butler (uncle of Key West's own Coffee Butler) on saxophone. With this band, Navarro played a number of gigs by special permission at Sloppy Joe's, played at high school fetes and celebrations, and at private parties around the island.

"Navarro was my ACE," confides Harry Chipchase. "I could never replace him. Those were the times when we were getting fifty cents an hour and considering it good money. Plus tips, of course. The tips were good when Hemingway was in town. 'Cody' Navarro would blow the cue, Saunders would start tap dancing, and I'd reach in my pocket and throw down the first silver dollar. Then all the people would start to throw money, and 'Skinner' the bartender would help out by giving us a few extra drinks."

WITH WILLIE THOMPSON and George Dean as his school music teachers,

"FATS" Navarro

AUGUST, 1980

by Eileen Moore Quinn

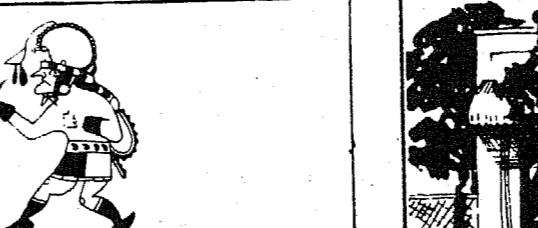
HIS NAME IS Theodore Navarro, Jr.

Dizzy Gillespie calls him "wonderful." Bobby Bradford says, "I thought he was God." Many others consider him to be "bebop's most perfect trumpeter." The recording industry refers to him as "Fats," but those in Key West simply remember him as "Cody," a childhood nickname that endured throughout his teens.

Theodore Navarro, Jr. was born on September 24, 1923, at 828 Thomas Street in Key West, Florida, the firstborn child of Theodore and Miriam (Fernandez) Navarro. Theirs was a traditional musical family, with a vast exchange of cultural rhythms ranging from African to Spanish to Chinese. Theodore Navarro, Sr. wanted his son to be a musician, encouraging him to follow

along the same lines as his third cousin, trumpeter Charlie Shavers. By the age of six, "Cody" was playing piano. For his twelfth birthday, his parents bought him a second-hand cornet. Young man and horn proved well-matched, for by the time of his graduation from the old Douglass High School in 1941, Theodore Navarro, Jr. had already played on the road, having been sought after by the best professional leaders in the traveling big bands. By 1950, Theodore "Fats" Navarro was considered by many of his contemporaries as one of the greatest trumpeters in the highest echelon of New York City Jazz.

No doubt his Key West boyhood was instrumental in provoking his genius. Growing up in the aforementioned era, young Navarro seemed to filter what he saw and heard through his horn. There are



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Navarro played in the Douglass High School Jazz Band and The Welters' cornet Band, as well as performing for the "jitney dances" at Sloppy Joe's, etc. In addition, he loved to sing. Ms. Ellen (Welters) Sanchez, of Chapman Lane, daughter of Frank Welters (of Welters' Cornet Band fame), and director and accompanist of the Island City Choral Singers, has this to say:

"He had a beautiful voice, high and fine. I always called him Theodore, and I was so proud to have him in my group."

The Island City Choral Singers were formed to entertain visitors being lured to Key West as part of a recovery program conducted by The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, which ran the city government in the thirties.

"As I recall," continues Ms. Sanchez, "Theodore Navarro loved to sing. He was interested in every type of music. Those were the good ol' days, when we performed all over the island, for all the churches, Catholic, Methodist, Zion and Baptist. We sang at all of the uptown programs. Theodore loved the 'highbrow' music, especially the Hallelujah Chorus! He was a fine young man, nice, rather quiet. He always seemed to keep busy at his music..."

NAVARRO LEFT KEY West to become a member of Sol Albright's Band out of Orlando, Florida, on tour throughout the South and Midwest. It was not until this particular juncture in his career that Navarro was able to find a trumpet teacher. In Cincinnati, Ohio, he received his first "real" instruction.

In Indianapolis, Indiana, the following year, "Fats," as he was now beginning to be called, joined Snookum Russell's Band, with whom the famous J.J. Johnson was associated. The New Orleans influence upon Navarro at this point was extremely significant. In addition, he was shaped by the music of Roy Eldridge, with whom he often played, and by his third cousin, Charlie Shavers, whom "Fats" has described as a "real trumpet player."

By 1943, "Fats" Navarro's name was known extensively in the North and in the East as a member of Andy Kirk's Clouds of Joy Band, with which he stayed for three years. On the heels of that stint came Dizzy Gillespie's recommendation to Billy Eckstine that "Fats" take over Dizzy's chair in Eckstine's band. When Gillespie left to join Oscar Pettiford, "Fats" took over.

Their ideas and feelings were of such similarity that they caused people to remark that one would hardly know Gillespie had left Eckstine's band, because there was just as much swing with Navarro.

For the next few years, Theodore "Fats" Navarro lived his dream of traveling in the company of the great giants of jazz. Then, at the height of his career, on July 7, 1950, the young trumpeter died ...

"IT SEEMS LIKE he fulfilled a Divine Purpose," says his mother, Miriam Williams. "You know, he died so young. I often ask myself, 'What if he had lived longer?' But he came to do a great work, to give of his musical ability, to influence and have an effect on others. He had so much warmth and feeling, I know he conveyed it through his music, and tried to reach out to the whole world."

The jazz critics have agreed. Theodore "Fats" Navarro, in the words of Leonard Feather, is hailed as "one of the gifted and original stylists ... in the development of jazz ..."

BY HIS TWENTY-SIXTH year, he was gone, a victim of a latent tuberculosis and other complicating factors. He has left behind him a legacy of legend, influence and recording which has not yet been fully uncovered to this day. He has stood next to the great Charlie Parker, and matched him in brilliance and style. He has been the inspiration of many, including the sensational trumpeter Clifford Brown, who also, at twenty-six, lost his life. And he has lived on, to enchant and persuade and delight those of a half-century later, who go on living and remembering him ...

can fill the prescription just as efficiently. She shakes her head. "I'll wait for Victor," she says.

A man comes to the drugstore and tells Victor his dog is dying. "Go to a veterinarian," says Victor. "No," the man replies. "The veterinarian says my dog is going to die no matter what. You've got to give me something." Victor shakes his head, then mixes something for the dog. The dog recovers, enhancing a reputation Victor would rather not have.

Victor Vargas is more than a pharmacist. He is a Key West institution. For more than half a century, Key Westers -- particularly those in the Cuban community -- have been going to "Vitico" for medicine and advice. Some people won't let anyone else fill their prescriptions. Some won't take any kind of medicine until "Varguita" -- another of his nicknames -- approves.

"PEOPLE COME IN here with personal problems that only Victor can solve," said David Alea, who once trained under Victor.

Alea now owns Dennis Pharmacy (corner Simonton and United), where Victor has worked for 15 years. "He's very well respected and loved in the Latin community," said Alea. "People are willing to wait for hours just to Victor can fill their prescriptions. They come to him for everything. A woman came in with a sick parakeet one time and wanted Victor to do something. A doctor will prescribe something and the patient will ask Victor if it's okay."

"The Spanish people are notorious for going to the pharmacist before they go to a doctor," he said, "because in Cuba pharmacists are almost physicians. They trust Victor's judgement on everything, so they believe if he makes something with his hands, it's got to work."

Danny Martinez, a well-known Key West businessman who grew up with Victor, said Victor Vargas is "the father of medicine for the Latin community. He is always reaching out and helping people," said Martinez. "I don't know how anybody

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could say anything bad about him."

SUCCESS WAS NOT handed to Victor on a silver platter. Born in Key West in 1912, Victor grew up in poverty. "My father was a cigar maker," he said. "He came from Cuba for a new life in the United States. It was better here, but we were very poor. He was making from twelve to fifteen dollars a week and there were seven children. All of us children worked as soon as we were old enough. My sisters worked in the cigar factories preparing the tobacco to be rolled into cigars. We all did what we could. Sometimes I didn't have shoes to wear or decent clothes, but I am not ashamed now that I was poor. I'm proud that I worked my way out of it and could give my children what I didn't have."

When he was thirteen, Victor went to work for Quintin Garcia, a pharmacist who had drugstore on Duval Street. "I washed bottles and cleaned up and made deliveries," said Victor. "I made about three or four dollars a week, and I would give all but fifty

Dr. Victor

MAY, 1980

by Mack Dryden

AN OLD CUBAN woman comes into the drugstore with a prescription slip in her

hand. She asks for Victor and is told he won't be in for two hours. "I'll wait," she says. The young pharmacist assures her he

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cents of it to my parents. I got interested in pharmacy and little by little Mr. Garcia taught me how to mix this and separate that. He let me borrow some pharmacy books, and I used to stay up until 12 or one o'clock in the morning studying them."

When he wasn't working, Victor went to school at the old San Carlos school on Duval Street. He also studied English under a Miss Napoles, but ultimately got only about six years of formal education. He got his real education on his own, by reading and working in the drugstore.

He learned more and more by doing, and finally he was dispensing drugs right along with his employer. Then the legislature enacted licensing laws, and Victor was forced to get a certificate to continue his profession.

"I took up a collection among my relatives so I could make the trip to Gainesville," he said. "That was in 1939. I hitch-hiked up there, and the professor gave me a test. I knew a lot. 'What university did you go to?' he asked me. I told him I didn't even go to high school, and he couldn't believe it. He told me I had to have the equivalent of two years of high school before I could be licensed."

So he hitch-hiked back to Key West and went to a Professor Schultz. "He asked me how much English I new and I said, 'a little.' He asked me how much Spanish I knew and I said, 'a little of that, too.' He said, 'I like you because you are honest and don't boast that you know everything. But you are wrong. You know a lot.'"

VICTOR STUDIED WITH Prof. Schultz for a while, and soon earned the equivalent of a high school diploma. "I went back to Gainesville to take the test. In those days you had to mix just about everything, even baby aspirin. Now 90 percent of the medicine is already made up, mixed at the factory. The man who gave me the test questioned me very closely. He would say, 'Mr. Vargas, I want you to put this and this and that together for this compound.' And I would say, 'No, I can't do that.' He would say, 'Why not?' and I would say, 'That's poison when you put it together.' He tried to trick me every way he could think of, but I always knew when the compound was poison. Finally he said, 'How do you know so much?' I said I knew so much because I wanted to be a pharmacist. I got my license.

He went to work at the old Oriental



Victor Vargas, Key West's favorite pharmacist, mixes some powders. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

Pharmacy (now Medical Aids Pharmacy) at the corner of Duval and Truman with Eugene Martinez and Emilie Romero, and worked there for several years. Then in 1945 he went into business for himself. He opened Central Pharmacy in the old stone building at the corner of White and Truman. He was in business there for 20 years, but went bankrupt in 1965.

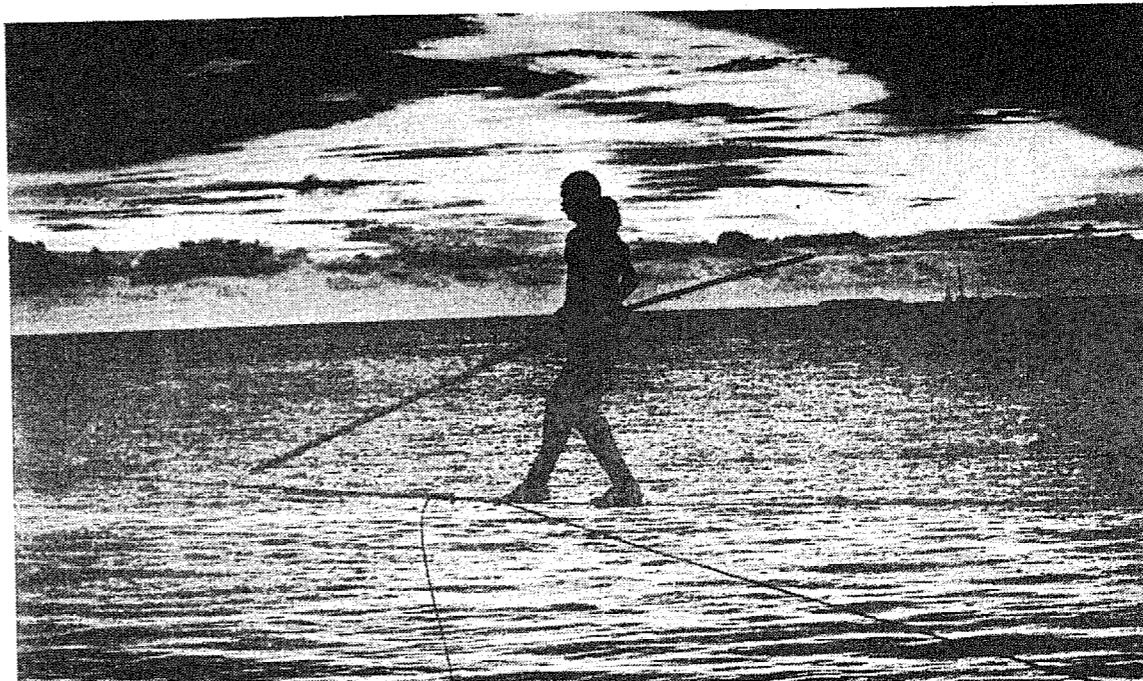
"I went bankrupt because I couldn't say no," he said. "They would say, 'Victor, I'll pay you next week but I have to have medicine for my baby now.' I couldn't say no, and most of them never paid. I was too easy."

Victor admits that in those days he sometimes bent the law prohibiting pharmacists from practicing medicine. "I used to give shots when people needed them, especially asthma shots. Or someone would come to me with a child with a high fever and say, 'Victor, I don't have the money for a doctor, please help me.' What was I supposed to do, say, 'No, let your child die?' So I did things the doctors didn't like. In the old days, though, the doctors and the pharmacists worked together for the patients a lot more. Money is more important now than it used to be."

After Central Pharmacy folded up, Victor went to work at Dennis Pharmacy, where he's been ever since. At 68, he has no intention of retiring. "If I live to be a hundred I want to keep working," he said...

"Before doing a high walk, I always dream my death. It's imperative to do this and be prepared to die (to accept your own end) in order to relax enough to perform this feat. The fear of dying is too overwhelming and disruptive and so it must be accepted. When I'm up five or six stories, or over a lake, I don't really have crowd contact; except maybe it's ultimate crowd contact, when you draw the attention of the whole place down to the head of a pin.

"The moment I get above three stories something really incredible happens. If I



During high wire performances, Will Soto walks a thin line between life and death. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

fall, there's not much of a chance, especially if I'm over concrete. The hardest thing to do is to keep yourself calm. Try not to pump too much adrenalin. Breathe real deep. Try to relax yourself as much as possible. Once the adrenalin gets into you it's real hard to control it. It wants to wire you out. I try to stay as calm as I can and breathe deep and do a little Tai Chi.

"The minute the walk starts, it's incredible. Like when they put you out and take your tonsils. Suddenly you're in a bubble. There's no up and no down. There's not even an end to the wire. You're only aware of maybe the ten feet you're

attached to. It doesn't feel like you're walking across wires; more like you're floating and this wire is like a little bit stuck to the bottom of your feet. A bomb could go off next to you and you wouldn't know it. Your survival instinct takes over. It says, 'Don't worry, I'm getting you out of here.'

"You wouldn't believe how blissful it is, one of the most peaceful states I've ever felt. The minute you put your foot on the other side it's like someone shot you with a gun. All your adrenalin comes on at once, like a bucket. You're high for days after a walk." ...

Floy Thompson MAY, 1983

by John Leslie

SHE LAUGHS WHEN it is suggested that she bears some comparison to the fictional Scarlett O'Hara. It is a slightly wicked laugh, a young woman's laugh, redolent of the clink of ice against glass along the cocktail circuit in the company of this island's best and brightest literary talent. "I just love the way she says, 'I'll worry about it tomorrow,'" says Floy Thompson, referring of course to Scarlett O'Hara's continual emotional procrastination.

Whether the comparison between them is apt or not the external facts are there. Floy was born and raised in her grandfather's antebellum home in Columbia, South Carolina -- a colonial mansion on ten acres of ground complete with stables and magnolia trees. It was one of the few homes left standing after Sherman's pyromaniac march through the South during the Civil War. Her grandfather fought in that war for the Confederacy and returned home to buy the house where Floy was born. She remembers her grandfather best during World War I when they entertained troops from nearby Fort Jackson every Sunday and her grandfather would carve the turkey announcing, "I never thought I'd see

AT THE END of the 20's, along with the rich and the expatriate artists, she made the Transatlantic crossing aboard the Cunard liner *Aquitania* for four months of European travel. While in London she had champagne and cookies with one of King Edward VII's mistresses, Rosa Lewis, who ran the fashionable Cavendish Hotel.

Today, at the age of 74, Floy Thompson is foremost among Key West's social elite and literary doyennes. She has entertained England's acclaimed poet Stephen Spender ("He's so nice," she says), and at a poolside luncheon Vincent Price called her shrimp salad the best he ever ate and took a second helping.

In 1939, she arrived in Key West respectably armed with letters of introduction to Mary Louise Spottswood

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Bill Huckle and Floy Thompson, one of the reigning society belles on the island, with friends and old pals. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

and Pauline Hemingway. She met both women at a cocktail party the following day before she had a chance to use the letters. Why Key West? To escape the cold, naturally. "I was staying at a house on Captiva during one of the coldest winters ever," she says in her euphonious southern accent. She came on down here and remembers all the charcoal burners warming the shops along Duval Street. Like many later visitors she fell in love with the town and later when she moved here she knew that she never wanted to live anywhere else in her life. "I'm rabid about Key West," she says today. "I love the people -- the newcomers as well as those who have been here all their lives."

BETTY BRUCE, HISTORIAN at the Monroe County Library and Floy's friend since the latter's arrival in Key West, describes her as being a naturally gregarious person. "She can go into a room full of people and things will happen to her that no one else would ever experience. She lives people and people love her." The first night Floy was in town she was with Katrina Johnson (a local author) and Katrina's husband, when they ran across the local rhumba teacher who was a friend of Katrina's. They invited him to go and have

a drink, but he was on his way to a birthday party so they all cajoled him into taking them along. Floy said the mahogany bar in the two-story house was the prettiest she had ever seen, and the food that was laid out the best she ever ate in Key West. It wasn't until a line of beautiful women in elegant gowns began descending the stairs that they realized they were in a brothel known as "The Square Room," one of many that flourished in town during the war. Katrina acted shocked, but her husband told her "to sit down and act like a lady."

In 1940, Toby Bruce, Betty's husband, arranged with his pal Ernest Hemingway for Floy and Joan (Knight) Thompson and Martha (Sauer) Watson to visit Hemingway's "Finca" outside Havana while the author was hunting in Africa. Joan's brother, Jack Thompson, who was running the family pineapple plantation in Matanza in Cuba, decided he ought to go along as a chaperone. As Floy tells it, she and Jack fell in love in Hemingway's swimming pool. A year later they were married.

Jack was handsome and rich. His father, Norberg Thompson, had founded huge shrimp fields between the Marquesas and the Dry Tortugas that soon brought the shrimp industry to Key West. In addition,

the Thompsons retailed marine hardware, sold ice and imported pineapple for canning from their plantation in Cuba.

ACCORDING TO FRIENDS Jack was extremely shy. It took Floy, who was just the opposite, to create in him "one of the best hosts" in Key West, says Betty Bruce. Floy describes her own marriage as one in which there was never a cross word between the couple, a perfect marriage that lasted for 30 years until Jack died of cancer in 1970. Despite her proximity to many of the stars of the literary world, it is characteristic of Floy to sum up her life by saying, "I've been a good housewife most of my life."

She and Jack had one son, Norberg, nicknamed Beau, who was killed in a car accident when he was twenty. Floy attributes Catholicism, the religion to which she converted after her marriage to Jack, with assuaging her grief after the loss of her son. Twenty years later, however, she humorously concedes that, "God made a mistake. He should have put us on this earth old and let us work backwards."

Memories of the happy times before Beau's death and her husband's are stirred by photos showing them all together on horseback at the Eaton Ranch in Wyoming where they often vacationed, but Floy is reluctant to dwell on the past. "I love livin', she says with that charmingly wicked laugh. But there are things that she will never forget. Like the time years ago when they were all dining together at the Key West Yacht Club. A man came in and Beau, who was in his early teens, asked if it was Ernest Hemingway. Floy and Jack said that it was and asked him if he would like to meet the writer. Beau had read all of his books, and when Ernest came by the table and was introduced Beau said, "Are you really Ernest Hemingway?"

"Yes," Ernest replied, smiling.

"Did you really write *The Old Man and the Sea*?" asked the still skeptical boy.

A somewhat startled Hemingway replied that he had. But once the author's credentials were established, the young fan puffed himself up and said: "Boy, you're really a great writer!"

WHAT IS IT that makes Floy so esteemed among the artistic community? She freely admits that she has no artistic ability of her own yet she has been a patron

of the arts in Key West now for forty years. She has been called the "Grande Dame of Key West," a term she abhors. "It burns the hell out of me," she says. "If anybody is the grande dame of Key West, it was Jesse Porter Newton," referring to civic activist and granddaughter of one of Key West's earliest residents. Perhaps Floy has simply recreated something of the salon society of 18th century France where a distinguished woman gathered artists and noted individuals at regular receptions -- with the distinction that Floy's receptions are likely to mingle beats along with the "haute monde" ...

If anyone had mentioned that chocolate cake is fattening, she might have added that she would worry about that tomorrow! ☐

LUNCHING AT HER favorite

Curtis "Bop" Brown

NOVEMBER, 1981

by Eileen Moore Quinn

"A LEGEND IN his own time." This motto applies to many distinctive personalities who call Key West home, and who are known, locally and/or nationally, for their lifestyles, their endeavors, their accomplishments.

Not the least of these is one Curtis Brown, "Bop" to those who have the good fortune to call him friend, a man whose lifestyle, endeavors and accomplishments inspire respectful admiration and even awe. For here is one who is more than a living legend; here is the combination of so many diverse facets that it is difficult to believe that they all exist in one human being.

"But it's 'Bop' Brown we're talking about."

"Ah, well, that's different." ...

"BASEBALL ALWAYS WAS my first love," Brown reveals. "As a kid, I'd always have a stick for a bat, a paper bag for a glove, and a tennis ball. We played nine to six, never stopping to eat. When I think about it now ... no spikes, no gloves, just the love of playing ball!"

At English Park and behind the Army

barracks on the base, sometimes at the old American Legion Home ballpark, "Bop" Brown learned the fine art of the first baseman.

While serving in the 870th Artillery Division in Okinawa, in the China Sea, and in the Hawaiian Islands, "Bop" Brown took advantage of the opportunity to try out for the baseball league over there. His prowess as first baseman served him in good stead, for, by the time his service career ended in 1946, he was soon to be playing professionally in New York City.

"I'LL ALWAYS SAY the Army taught me something," "Bop" declares. "Most of all, though, I learned how to play baseball."

Upon returning home to play for a local baseball team, "Bop" Brown was scouted from Tampa to New York by the old Boston Braves. From 1946 to 1978, he played first base position for the New York Black Yankees.

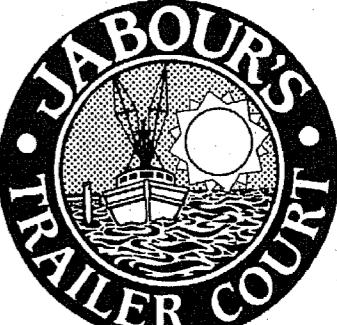
In those pre-integration days, before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in sports in 1947, teams and players were segregated. Color rather than talent was the determining factor. With George Crow as

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his understudy, "Bop" played ball in New York City with such notables as "Junior" Gilliam, Jethro "Suitcase" Simpson, and Luke Easter, later of Cleveland Indians fame. He was scouted by the major leagues and he made it, but his heart was not in New York City, so he returned home.

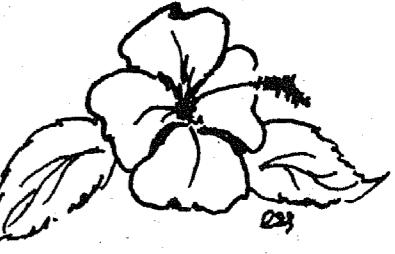
"No, I didn't like New York," "Bop" confesses. "By then my wife had gone out to Spokane, Washington, and they were calling me 'Spokane' for short. I came back to Key West in '48, playing on the Florida Baseball League for the Key West Conchs. We traveled around on the International League, also, playing ball in Cuba, Tampa, St. Petersburg and such."

"I've only been in jail once in my life, and that was because of my love for baseball. In a fight over the Yankees and the Red Sox! I'm a Yankee fan." "Bop" proudly displays his Yankee fan cap. "I agreed to pay the medical bill after it was all over." ... ☐



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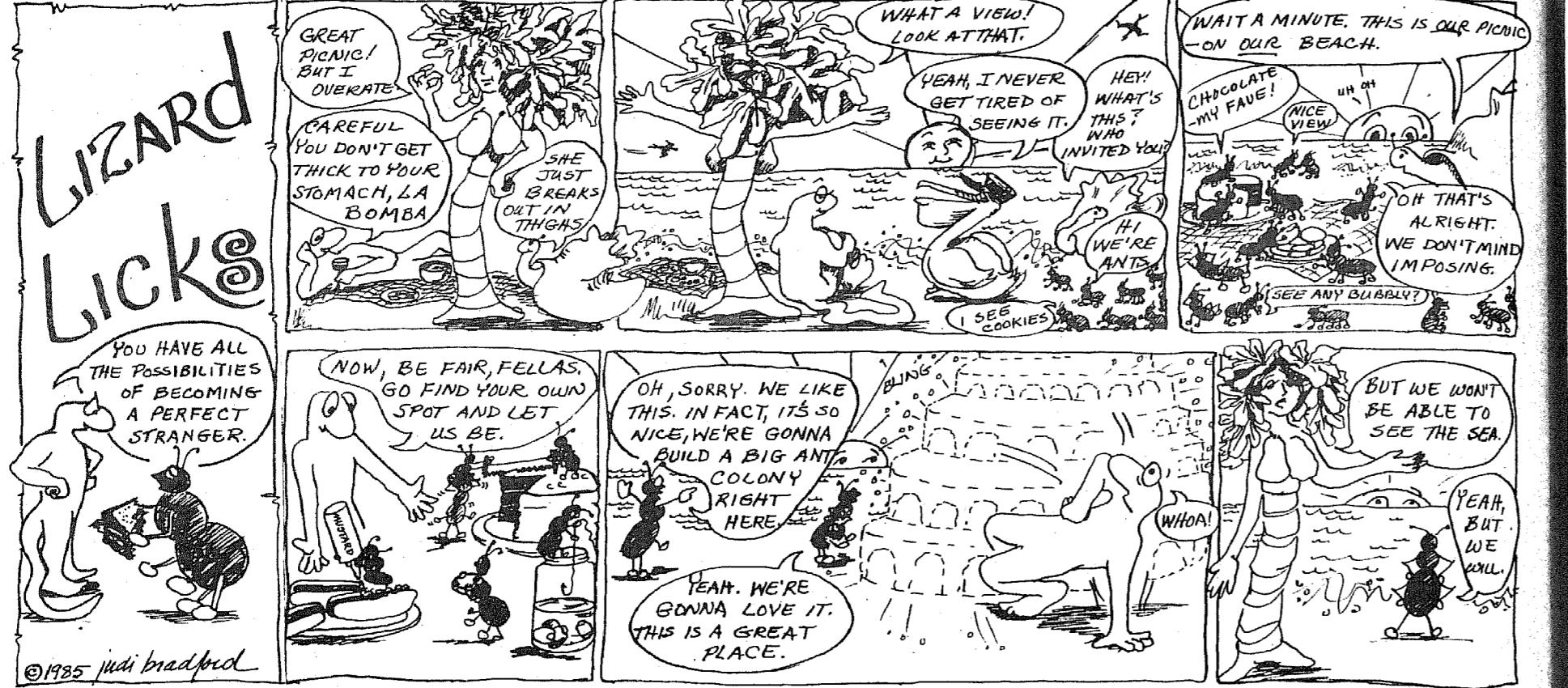
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Island Humor

Creating humor on paper is a rare talent. Key West, it seems, is fortunate to have a sampling of resident writers and story-tellers able to turn a clever phrase, to capture the quirks of human nature that warm the heart and make us laugh. These edited selections were written by a couple of these lucky souls.

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Los Angeles? Where's That? A Travel-Ogle

DECEMBER, 1985

by Joe Crumpet

THERE WAS THIS guy we knew pretty well who had been living in Key West most of the years of his life when he suddenly took leave of his senses and moved to Los Angeles to seek fame and fortune. Where, we thought, have we heard these words before?

It turned out to be a learning experience in more ways than one. After some delay, the postman came through with a letter, and our friend had a few words to say:

If you've never driven a car across this continent, some 3,200 miles from Key West to Los Angeles, you've got a great

adventure waiting for you -- just be sure your car is working.

THAT FIRST DAY, as the sun came up blearily over the White Street pier, I turned the key in the ignition and -- nothing. A few clicks. Dead battery. That was the omen but I refused to hear it. Got a new one and we're off and away heading east on U.S. 1 across the flatness of Boca Chica, through the Lower Keys, enjoying the sparkling jade and azure tones of the water, distant sailboats, fishermen out there early, the boiling white foam wake from the speedboats, then the splashy come-on messages from the billboards as we got closer to Key Largo.

Up near the top of Florida, you hit U.S. 10, the long, winding concrete ribbon that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in

gradually, color seeps into the landscape, from a monotone come the palest green and pink. Lights of old mountain homes are specks of white miles and miles away. Signs start to appear. One says:

Then onto the rolling natural beauty of the tree-lined Card Sound road, the one unspoiled beauty spot along the whole highway in the Keys.

The engine purred. Up to a point. Way out in the boonies, the purr changed to a bronchial growl, slowly into a sputtering cough, then a breathy wheezing as the forward motion fell to zero. The gas pedal was damn near jammed through the floorboards. Dead on the side of the highway. The sun blazed and the sky was molten brass. Other cars went whizzing past, throwing up dust and needles of gravel into our sweaty face and red-rimmed eyes, their drivers blissfully ignoring the breakdown.

What to do? Sell the damn car on the spot!

Where was the AAA towing service? Nowhere to be found. Then along came a good ol' boy in a towing truck. A bearded face leaned out the window:

Jacksonville to the Pacific, in Santa Monica, California. It's the southernmost superhighway across the country and it's a marvel of engineering that'll carry you through the outskirts of Mobile, Gulfport, the vast sweeping waterways and swamps outside New Orleans, the pungent refinery smells of Lake Charles, towering stacks topped by steam and stink and flaring fires burning the waste chemicals; then into the old charms of Baton Rouge, on to Beaumont, Texas, and now you're in the biggest state in the Union ...

TRAVELERS, THESE DAYS, are only "sort of friendly;" they tend to be either highly suspicious of others, or else overly chummy, in which case, watch out. The rule you start following is to stop truckin' an hour in front of sunset, get some rest and climb out in to the world, again, when the dew is on the rose (an old English saying).

The early morning sky is black velvet

Solares Hill--July 1988--Page 17
GENUINE ANTIQUES - Custom-made
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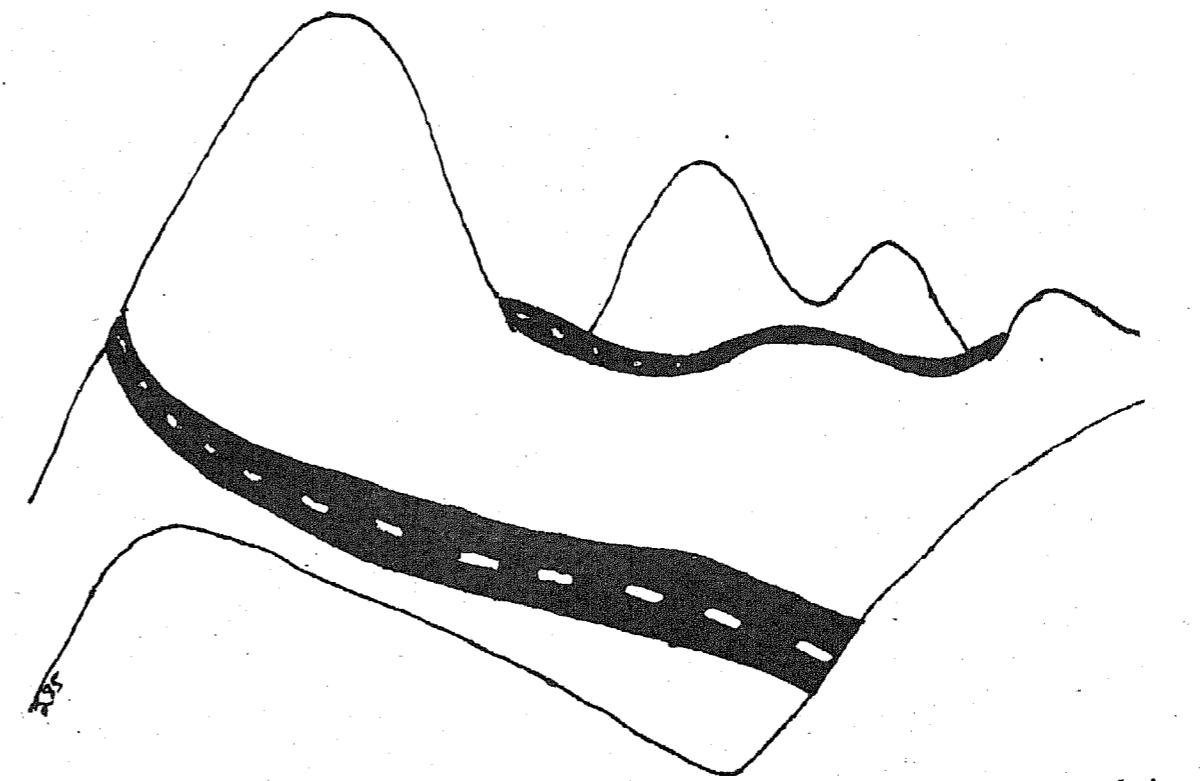
You start seeing the hundreds and hundreds of grazing cows, cattle and horses; the old rusty painted barns and stained corrugated roofs. You think: what's all this nonsense about grazing land is disappearing -- it looks like millions of miles of it, out there. You're in the west and now you start seeing old-fashioned choo-choo trains, again -- except they're not so old-fashioned. These are behemoth trains, we counted 231 cars, plus the caboose, dragged huffing over the groaning tracks by five (count 'em) diesel engines.

Car-hauling trucks, heading for the Earl Duncans of our lives, now carry up to 10 cars on their humped spindly backs and if you're behind one of them, brother, the loaded cars wiggle and wobble on their restraining chains, you figure fast how you can get around that mess ...

ON THE WIND, now, our noses are tweaked by the gamey scent of stockyards somewhere just beyond the next hill and curve. Sure enough, comes Las Cruces, N.M., and for miles and miles you drive past the strong, heady, unforgettable smell of those cattle, standing as far as you can see behind the fence line ...

ENOUGH OF THIS bucolic dreaming, you hit San Berdo and the hard facts smack you in the kisser.

This is the start of the metropolitan area for Los Angeles, far away and building fast. Traffic thickens, imperceptibly. This Los



"My day off, pal, but I seen yer in trouble." A redneck angel; what a break. After a little talk, the whiffed-out car was hoisted on the back, and we climbed in front and settled on charges. Many hours later, we unloaded that misery and started out again, in a brand-new car, grimy and dirty and, not in the mood for sweet words, we headed for the outer reaches.

Up near the top of Florida, you hit U.S. 10, the long, winding concrete ribbon that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in

crammed with a billion stars and it reluctantly is torn into midnight blue, then paler, the ragged shapes of clouds appear, black on dark blue. The air is cold and we're shivering for a steaming cup of hot strong coffee.

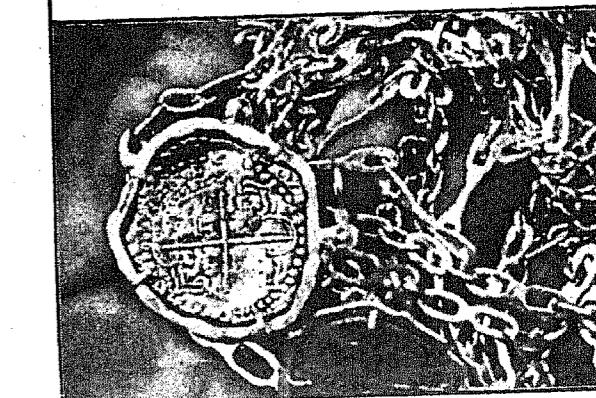
Gradually, color seeps into the landscape, from a monotone come the palest green and pink. Lights of old mountain homes are specks of white miles and miles away. Signs start to appear. One says:



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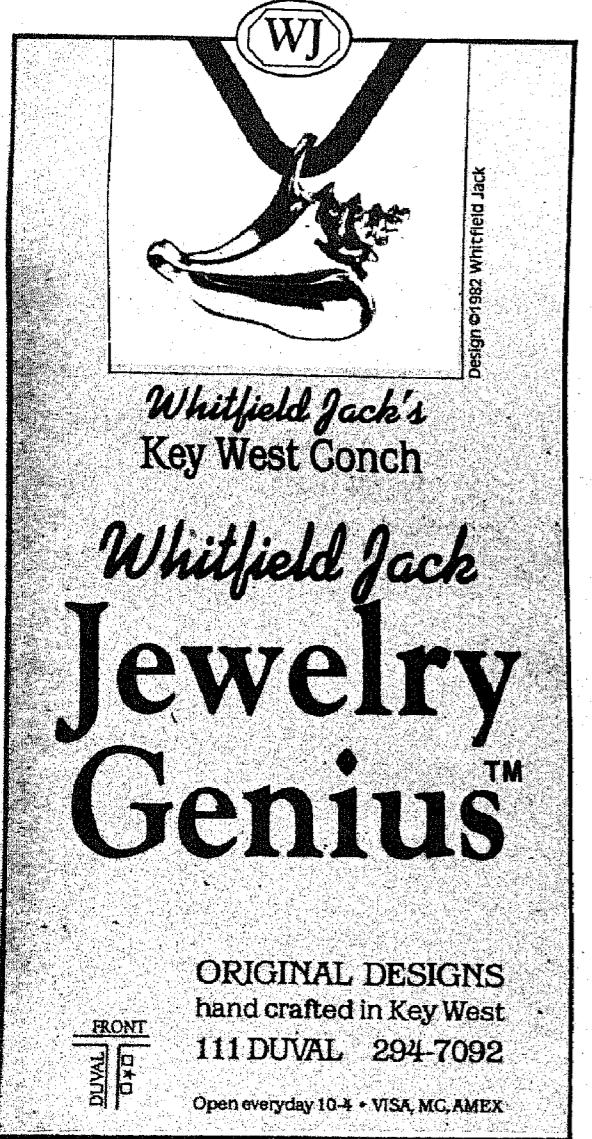


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Angeles is home for 13.8 million human beings who have cars, trucks, vans, jalopies, mopeds, buses, and motorbikes that number, according to the AAA, close to 10 million on the road in two counties, embracing that megalopolis.

Now, you're winding into the famous freeway system that grabs LA around the neck and squeezes tight. Vehicles are rushing alongside you, all of the drivers sneering at posted speed signs. Traffic is doing an easy 65 to 70 and more and you better be there or you're a spot of blood on the pavement. Direction signs whiz past. Exit. Left. Don't Enter. Go Right to Turtleville. Lane Stops in 50 Feet. Drive Courteously. Arrows point all over the place, even at you. Some point straight up!

There are lines painted on the concrete, presumably to show you where the traffic lanes are. Don't believe them. Cars and huge trucks dart past, dash and zip from one side to the other, horns yammering, arms flailing out the windows making X-rated gestures hardly fit for mixed company.

This part of the journey could be compared to being thrown into a bag with 10 wildcats. Our nervous system is not quite up to it, but if you learn to drive in LA traffic it's a fair bet you could drive anywhere in the world -- even in old Havana where suicide is the watchword.

You gotta learn the tricks. Drive with

one eye looking ahead, the other in the rearview mirror, foot poised between gas pedal and brake.

Parking is the nightmare. Some streets are set aside for "permit parking," meaning residents-only and it'll cost you \$28 if you're caught there, or on a red-lined curb; yellow is for 3 minutes and you better pick up a passenger; green is for free and there's very little of that around. You'll get 24 minutes for 25¢ on a meter, so carry lots of change; if you run over, the ticket costs \$13 and they're watching like hawks.

The result of this, of course, is that valet parking is a major industry in LA, so shell out.

If you're going to make a left turn at a crowded intersection, and they're all crowded, you have to creep out into the middle of the road and angle to the left. You find yourself about 6 inches from another car, aiming in the opposite direction, engine revving up, drivers have a frenzied look. The light changes. All the cars in the middle of the roadway are now blocking the drivers on the crossroad, so you gun the engine hoping it doesn't conk out and roar across, speeding away in the other direction.

To answer the question, where's Los Angeles? Bubba, it's on the far side of the moon. ☺

Confessions of a Brownie Eater

AUGUST, 1984

by Ed Bixby

AS A CHILD, my mother worried, impressing on my immature mind that "something would get me if I wasn't careful," so I became so square that I'm practically cubical; take only one aspirin if a headache is killing me, no salt or pepper on my food, and only a few tablets of oral insulin when diabetes was found. I did some social drinking as a student, as students do, but since I hated the taste of beer, and anything stronger gave me a depressing feeling that I'd be sick in the morning, I gradually stopped drinking thirty years ago.

My first, and I hope final, experience with illegal drugs came when a tall, attractive (and a bit weird) blonde tenant of mine moved away and I was cleaning the apartment early in the morning. I unplugged the refrigerator and checked the contents, finding a large and delicious looking brownie there, wrapped in cellophane and bulging with nuts. I'd had no breakfast, so heated a cup of coffee and ate the brownie, mentally blessing my tenant for her thoughtfulness. Since it was almost time for work, I cleaned up and went.

Until ten I was fine, but then I suddenly discovered that I had read a simple directive five times and had absolutely no idea of what it said, so I read it a couple more times and still found it incomprehensible, just as if it had been written in a foreign language. At the same time I became conscious of a sinister presence lurking somewhere in the office, which seemed to be under the desk

until I looked, and then slipped behind the filing cabinet, then behind my back; and all the time it was plotting some horrible fate for me. After some twenty minutes of this, I went to the office and told my boss that I was sick and had to go home on sick leave.

I WAS BEGINNING to suspect the brownie by this time, but had little difficulty getting to my car and getting it started, but immediately found myself on the streets of San Francisco in a wild ride through tunnels, up and down the roller coaster-like hills of that lovely city and narrowly escaping huge buses and trucks while pedestrians were wandering off curbs and into my path. I drove at top speed in abject terror, but I knew I couldn't be in San Francisco, so I narrowed my eyes and summoned all my faculties into getting safely home, which I did; ran into the house with the awful shaggy horror after me, and climbed into bed fully clothed.

I instantly found myself in a small boat, floating on huge waves, which burst beyond me onto a rocky beach while various birds screamed and swooped at me trying to tear the flesh from my body while I cowered in fear. After about two days of this, it seemed, I finally fell asleep exhausted and woke up in a total darkness with some of my terror gone, dropping back into a sound sleep until morning. I got up, showered and had a good breakfast -- the first since the brownie twenty-four hours previously.

I felt jittery during the day and for a couple days afterward, but had a reasonable

working day, pushing the wild fancies back in my mind that crowded my head. These hallucinations gradually subsided, and I was almost normal by the end of the week.

What a Drag

MARCH, 1979

by Amy Lee de Poo

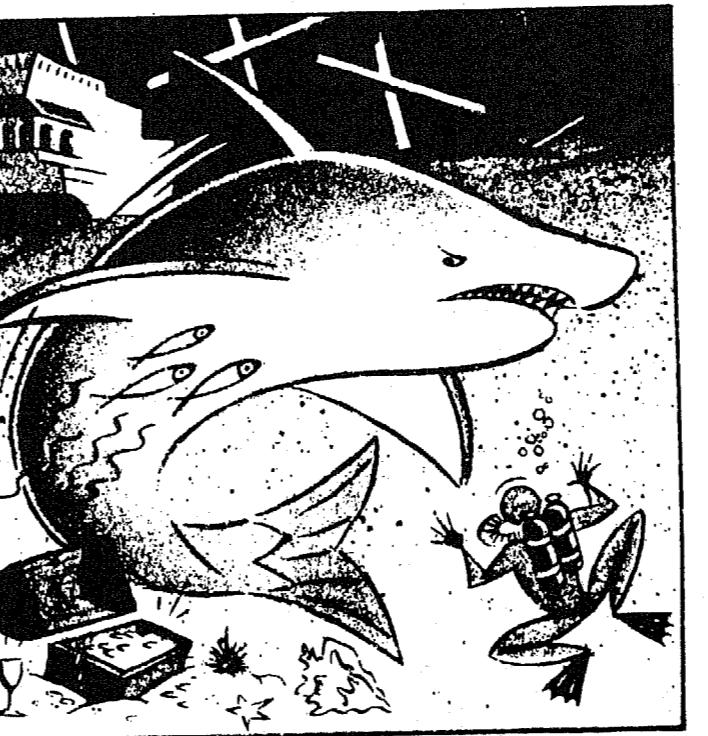
WHEN A COLD winter arrives in Key West, it seems as if a person can never get warm.

We live in a house very close to the shrimp docks and really felt the chilling bite of a nor'wester as it whistled through the cracks of our old Conch home on Dey Street. Conch homes were never insulated very well because it was superfluous to prepare for a dwelling for extended periods of severe cold, simply because the southernmost city had such a benign and tropical climate. However, as I said before, very cold winters were possible and

occurred every few years, and the old Conchs who lived in the old Conch homes just adapted to these spells with tremendous nonchalance.

My mother, having been raised in upstate New York, knew cold weather and did everything humanly possible to alleviate our frozen outcries with various methods. Her standard remedy to the inclement weather was a portable kerosene heater, three layers of woolen socks and so many sweaters a body could barely move enough to scratch one's ear.

THERE WAS GREAT ceremony surrounding the advent of the first cold snap



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-- cleaning the wick of the little kerosene heater, moving wooden furniture safely away and lengthy lectures on the dangers of kerosene and its purported demonic ability to leap into flames if a child even walked near the can.

My sisters and I took in all of this with great excitement and interest because it seemed so exotic to us to have to go to such complex measures to keep warm. We were true believers that civilization ended at the Stock Island Bridge. (You can imagine our shock when we learned of a place called Marathon and our total astonishment to one day actually visit a bizarre land known as Miami.)

Anyway, when it got that cold we were all excused from taking a bath to save us from contracting some ungodly case of incurable pneumonia, my mother holding the strong conviction that it is better to stink than to die. My father, John de Poo, was also not very enthralled with personal hygiene when the small craft warnings went up. Being a creature of generally

meticulous personal habits, he rarely if ever missed his evening shower and shave after working all day in the machine shop at Boca Chica. He did it like clockwork.

ON THIS PARTICULAR bone-chilling evening it was absolutely out of the question to even consider putting your hand under the faucet, it was that cold. Consequently, John ate an inordinately large meal and proceeded to pass out in a reclining chair in the living room. We girls were entertaining ourselves, as was our custom, by seeing who could get the long tissue paper string out of a Hershey's Kiss without ruffling the foil, an activity indicative of our collective innate intelligence -- not to be underestimated by the reader.

But even that can become quite a bore after a while. We girls were hard pressed to find another game quite as entertaining.

Out of the blue, my older sister, Kathryn, looked over at the grizzly visage of our very dear and revered dad and decided he could certainly use a shave. Where she got the gumption to disturb an old grouch like him when he was all cozy warm, snoozing soundly and more likely than not dreaming of spearing a 200 pound jewfish out at the reef, I'll never know. But

sure enough, much to the amazed delight of Martha and myself, we watched her tug on his sweater and ask if he would like a shave, right there in the chair. My God, I thought, he's surely going to give her a good clout for THIS! Miracles do happen, as we soon found out, because he snorted a few times and murmured something to the effect of "What the hell ... why not?"

This pleasant encouragement was all we needed to hear. Each girl made a mad dash for all the necessary tools for shaving our beloved father. Mind you, he was still mostly asleep, or should I say well into the hypnagogic condition. This was thrilling to us, slathering on the foam and rinsing the blade in a saucpan of hot water.

Well, when the job was finished, he looked just like a newborn peach to us, and we could not bear to stop with just a plain old shave. No, he was too good for that, so we put our heads together and decided to give him the *Full Beauty Salon Treatment*.

WHILE HE DOZED innocently we scurried around the house collecting all our earthly resources and materials that we could find. Combs, brushes, scarves, bobby pins, nail polish, rouge, mascara, powder and those grubby little Avon lipstick

samples that those weird women would hand out to us thinking our mother would be swayed to purchase more. (We never showed them to her anyway because Martha ate them.) With more than enough encouragement from our mother, who wanted to get on with her knitting at that point, we went to work transforming Johnny de Poo into Johanna The Beautiful (and that would take a small miracle of sorts.)

Kathryn slipped off his shoes and socks and painted all of his toenails, each one a different color, and then tastefully decided to do his fingernails monochromatically in a generous gesture of good breeding. Martha, being generally inept at anything that required much manual skill, was delegated the task of transforming John's wispy locks into something presentable. It was I who possessed the necessary cosmetic skills to make John into some semblance of the female gender, and I mustered all the knowledge I had at that time to make this man into what I could call a reasonably attractive woman.

After twenty minutes of picking, fixing and fussing, we all stood back to examine our beautiful specimen of womanhood. He was still gassed out and oblivious to the

ensuing miracle of cosmetic metamorphosis, but my mother was become quickly aware that the husband who had dozed off only a

was delighted at how absolutely cute he looked.

"YOU GIRLS HAVE certainly made an improvement on your father, I'll say. Maybe a scarf tied like a babushka would help." She showed us how to fold the scarf into a little triangle and we tied it around his chin. Boy! Was this ever the finishing touch we had all been waiting for!

Giddy and exhilarated with our tremendous achievement, we rousted poor old John from his fishy dreams and presented him with a hand mirror so he could become acquainted with his new self. I half-expected to be beaten and sent to bed right away, knowing his limitations for taking a joke, but evidently the coldness of the evening had numbed his better judgment. He held the mirror up to his face, and a strange twinkle appeared in his eyes. He obviously liked what he saw.

short time before was no longer, and a strange old woman had taken his place. She

Key West is where "yes" means "yes," where "no" means "no," and where "I'll try" usually turns out to mean "no."

Key West is million of worms inching frantically down the poinciana at dawn, with migrating warblers getting there first.

Key West is bullfight music trying to get out of your neighbor's radio.

by Thurlow Weed

Keys Wise

by Eleanor McKinlay

WHY...

... Do strangers who only stare from a passing car, smile and wave from a boat?

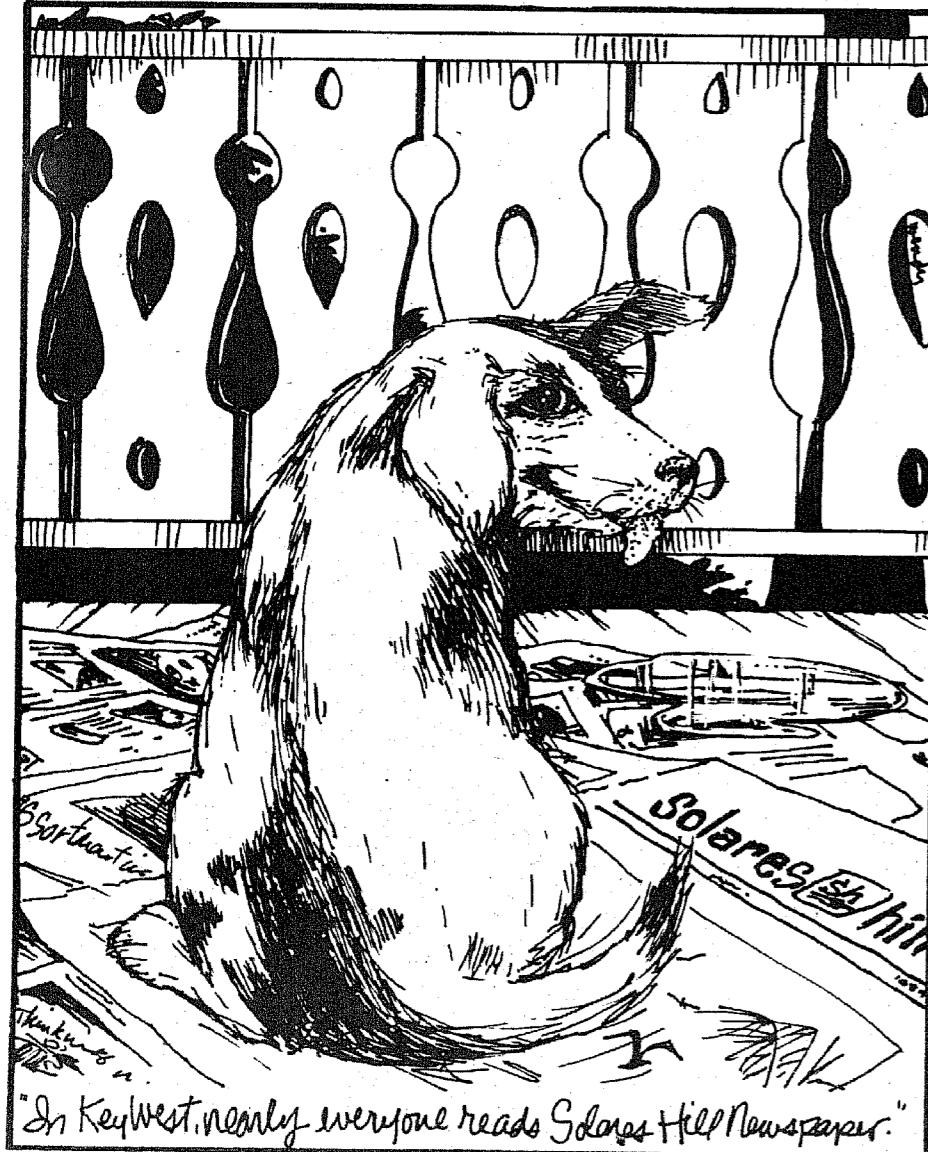
... Do there seem to be more out-of-town licenses from Michigan than any other state?

... Did we go in for one last drink, although we had not been in there in years, before a new drug store forever closed the old Idle Hour?

... Do we feel refreshed after a day of odd jobs, yet feel exhausted after a day of relaxing in the sun?

... Does an occasional roach actually run towards us during a midnight raid on the fridge?

... Do we have inner qualms from June 1st until November 30th, as we re-read Dr. Neil Frank's warnings each year?



My Dog

by Ernest Hathaway

I have a dog, you've seen him around,
He's short and he's squat and quite a bit hound.
He's white and grey and a little bit black,
With brown and red up and down his back.
His papers are done and everything's legal,
It says right there he's primarily beagle.
Granted, it's hard to determine each facet,
But between you and me he's a good deal basset.
He's slow and lethargic, but he still gets around,
You'll see him out cruising both uptown and down.
He's got a full schedule, there's places to be,
Hydrants to check, and garbage to see.
He'll root out a bone or roll in the dirt,
And before he moves on, he'll give it a squirt.
He's not getting younger or any less fat,
But there's one thing he hates and that is a cat.
He growls when he sees one and he'll chase it a lot,
If the cat is asleep and the weather's not hot.
My dog's never lonely, he's never alone,
There are fleas by the thousand who call him a home.
Together they march all over the land,
Proclaiming their presence and making a stand.
If you see my dog out just give him a nod,
There's no need to shoo him or poke him a prod.
He's up to no good but he's up to no bad,
He's utterly useless, the best dog I've had.

March 1980

Decorative Home Stencils from *Private Collections*

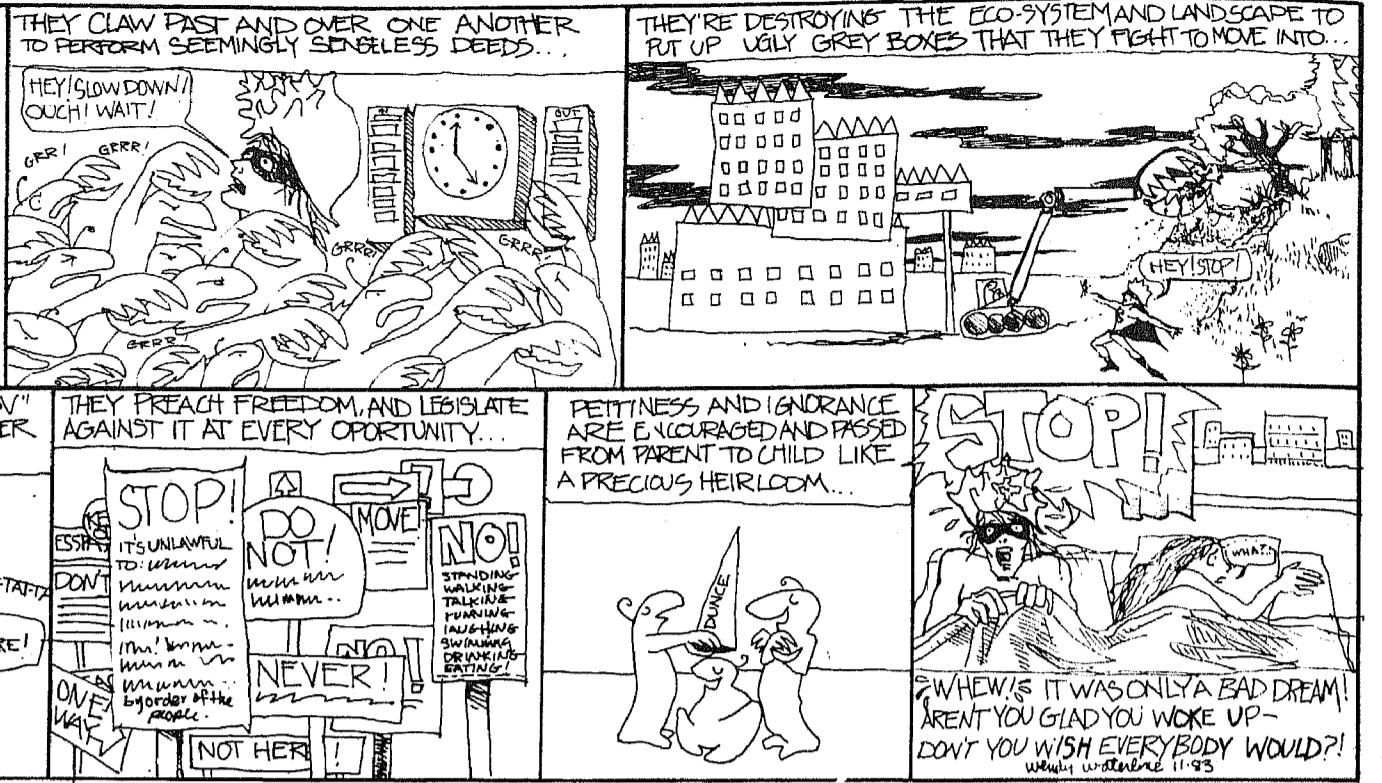
UNIQUE INTERIOR MOTIFS

Walls & Floors & Ceilings
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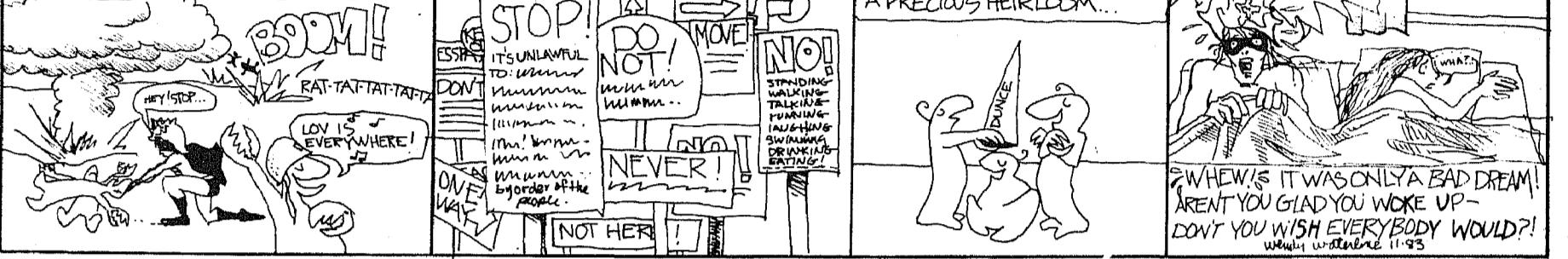
Key West 296-1816

CONCHFLASH

CONCHFLASH FINDS HIMSELF ON AN ALIEN PLANET--PEOPLED BY BEINGS WHO SEEM TO BE UNAWARE OF EACH OTHER, THEIR SURROUNDINGS, OR EVEN THEIR OWN GOOD...



THEY WORSHIP A DIETY CALLED "LOV" AND VIGOROUSLY EXTERMINATE EACH OTHER IN THE NAME OF THEIR LORD...



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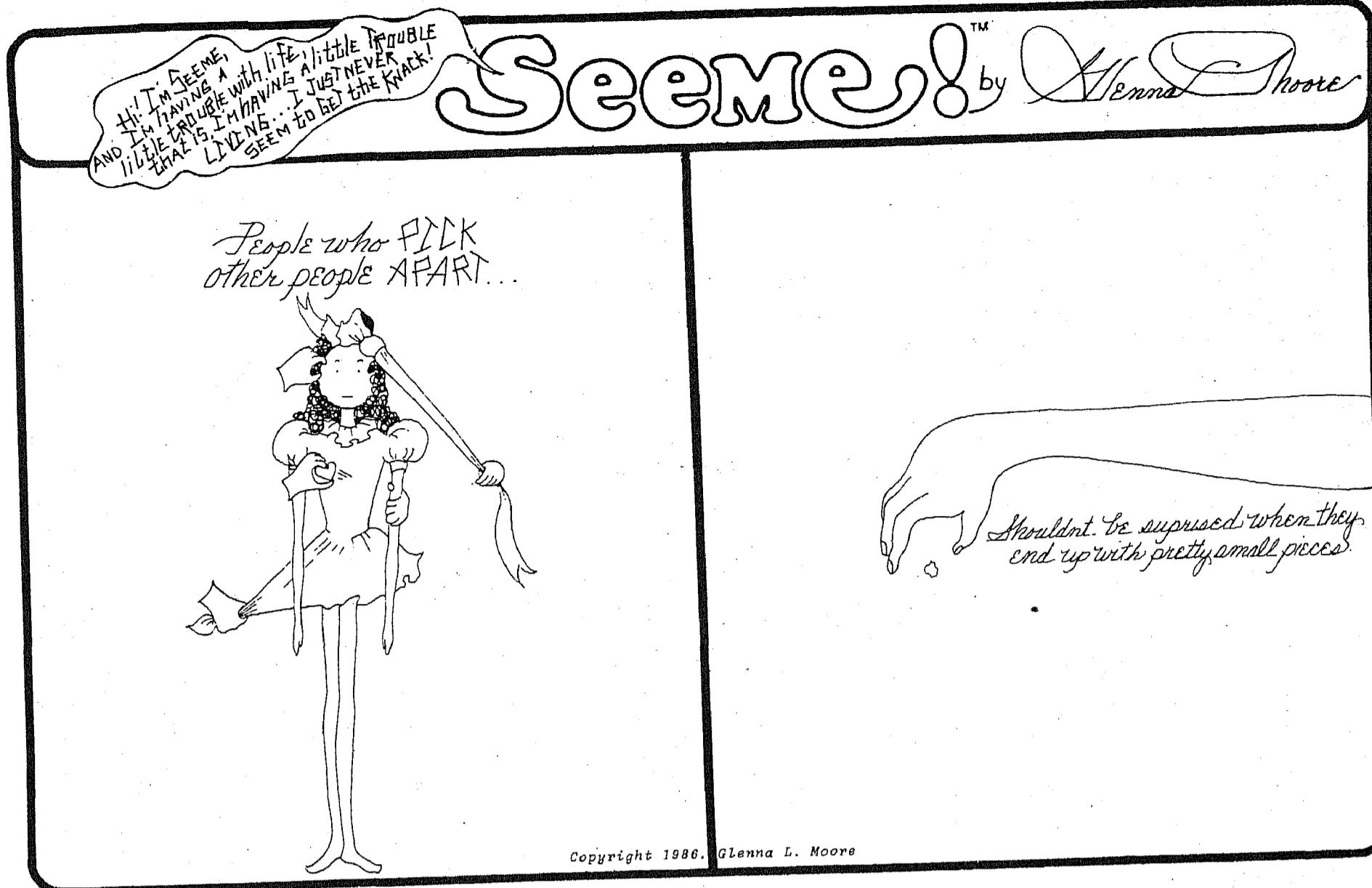
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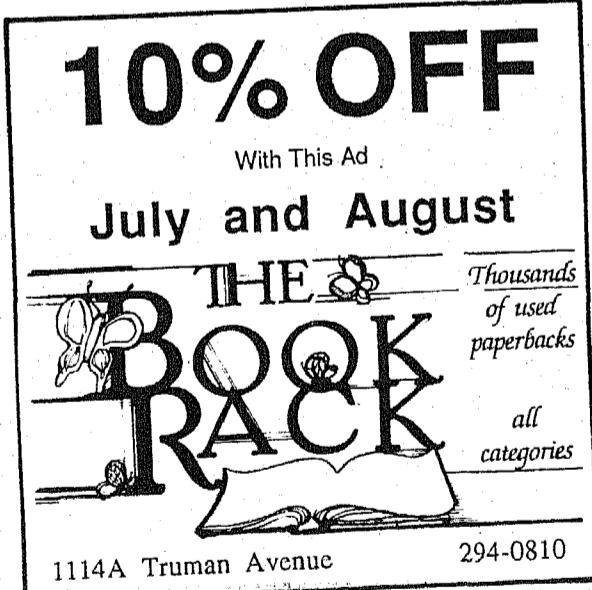


Drifting Sands

by Viola Veidt

Hands of children --
Playing with sands --
Looking for treasures --
Shells and things and
Dreams that their parents
Knew long ago --
Dreams that drifted
Through their hands --

March 1980



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The Best of Bud Jacobson

Known for a witty and direct-hitting style of journalism, Bud Jacobson has kept readers amazed, amused, informed and, on occasion, enraged over the years. His contributions include profiles, retrospectives, and political editorials. Here are edited versions of a few of Jacobson's finest.

High Jinks and Low Comedy A Heady Mix in the 1950s

MARCH, 1988

WARM, HUMID, DAMP tropical air with barely a breeze stirring. A tangy, salty smell, pungent with the ripe scent of shrimp and fish near the oil-spattered boats around Front Street and near the Thompson docks on Caroline. An infectious virus in the Key West atmosphere: craziness.

Over on the other side of the island, near the ritzy hotels, lived the rich and politically powerful, the socially acceptable, in their comfortable homes, aired by the trade-winds, enjoying sun-splashed beaches, frangipani and hibiscus, shady trees. It was infectious even here. Craziness with dollar signs.

In another part of town, called Little Havana, the gamblers and bar owners and some faded politicians, hovered around dinky coffee stalls sipping rich black Cuban coffee, made syrupy with sugar and condensed milk, from thimble-sized cups. The gossip was as strong as the coffee. Stucco Cuban slang, black mustaches, gold chains, fat cigars and hands going a mile-a-minute.

Que pasa? Loco!

NEARBY, DOWN A broken street partly paved, partly dirt, overlaid with the startling crimson beauty of Poinciana blossoms, dappled with pools of water in muddy potholes, you were in another part of town. Tippy wooden houses, not much paint and most of it peeling, burned out by years in the sun. Here shone an abundance of black smiling faces.

Men and women leaned on the porch railings or tilted their chairs back in the shade. Sunday morning voices rasped thick from the night before.

"Crazy, man."

Under some of the dim flickering lights along Caroline Street, near the military base, bobbed a milling profusion of white sailor hats. Seen from above, where some of the gambling rooms were, they looked like a rolling tide of milk slipping and sliding along, drawn like a magnet toward Hector's wailing tenor sax, Johnny's thumping piano rhythms and Buddy's bongo drums.

Easy ladies with magenta hair and luring smiles hung out in the doorway at the Conch Gardens, or in the dark entrance to the Mardi Gras where a pimply-faced blond guy measured out cocktails with a faint aroma of kerosene.

AT THE MIDGET, at Simonton and Greene, Woodsy and his pals ran through pool games with Pancho Russell, Tooney

and wizened Conch cab drivers hanging around with Doo Doo and Tinky.

Over on the cool side of Front Street, a rail-thin black man, somberly dressed in a black suit with a stark white shirt, neatly divided in half by a black string tie, would politely doff his hat as he greeted his fellow night crawlers, saying:

"How do. My name is Doctor Mudd and I am taking up a collection for my birthday party. Thank you so-o-o-o much."

He was Enrique Saurez, one of the better known dudes in town. His imagination was famous.

One day when the military presence was uptight due to some ruckus with the towns, Dr. Mudd took it on himself to straighten out the picture.

He strolled into Pop's uniform store, across from the Brown Derby (now the Green Parrot) and with a little help from some friends, he dressed up in a Navy officer's whites with a ton of gold braid, a flashy red-white-and-blue sash across the front, a sword in his belt and marched up the street to the Main Gate.

The Marine Guard on the gate, dazzled by the gold and flashing steel, saluted smartly and Dr. Mudd was piped aboard.

About 15 minutes later he was piped out, in the opposite direction, with an armed guard escort ...

INTY LOUIS YOUR
DIST County Commissioner 2nd Dist.

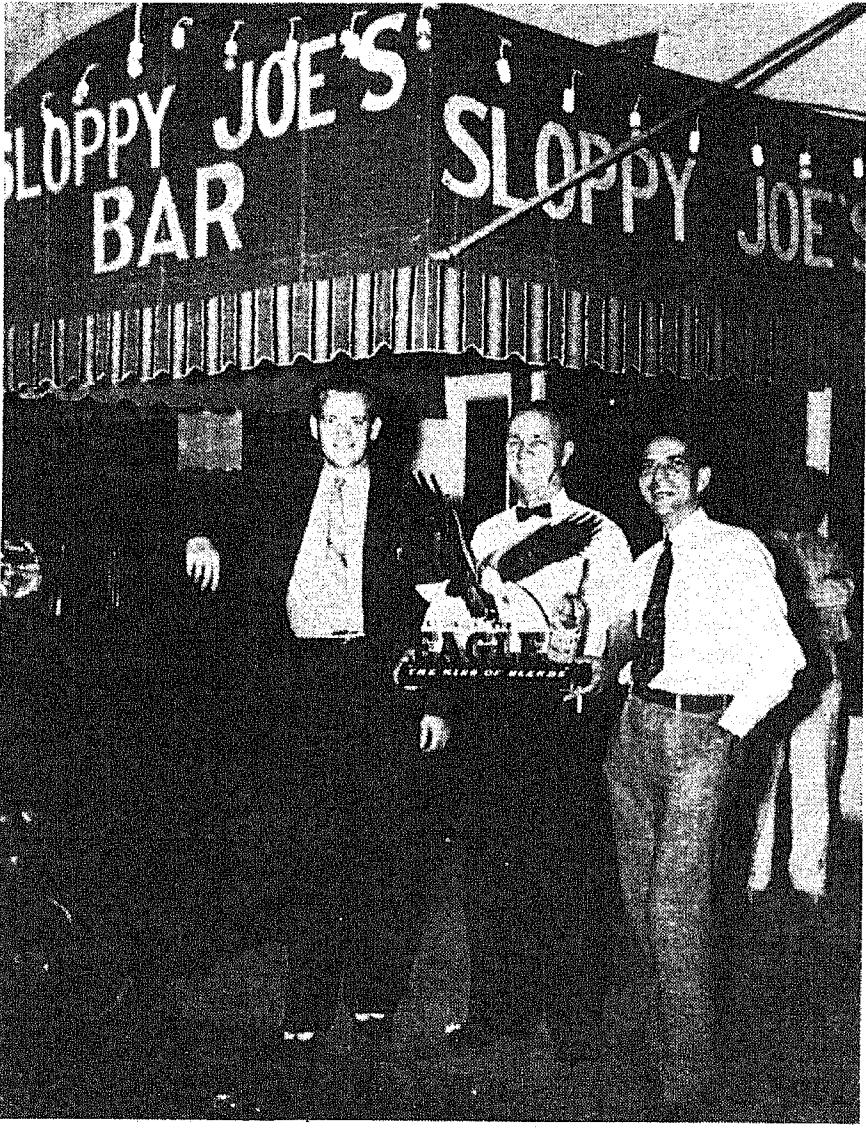
ITALIAN DINNERS PIZZA
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The Old Guard Along Saloon Row

MAY, 1982



Sloppy Joe's and other local bars were the scenes for social events of all types -- from award ceremonies to secret love affairs. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

BACK IN THE dim and distant days when Key West was mostly a Navy town and tourists were a sometime occurrence and when commercial fishing was a major industry (we're talking about the 1940s and '50s) there was a loosely formed circle of bar owners who catered to the everlasting thirst of the white hats, the officers and most of the red-nosed locals. Many of those "elders" in the saloon game are still around.

They're still "hanging out," as they like to say, swapping tall tales whenever they meet, laughing and poking fun at the troubles they used to have, and some of the recollections bring faraway look in their eyes. Old rivalries are forgotten in the comradely spirit of having survived the drastic changes the town has undergone in the last 10 or 15 years, over which they merely shake their heads.

In this group of survivors there's a liberal mix of old-family Conchs and "freshwater Conchs."

The attraction to Key West in those years, they recall, was the glory brought to Key West when President Harry S. Truman put the village on the world map as his chosen home in the winter months. The Navy then was already a dominant presence and it strengthened while he was here.

"IT WAS A great place, then," remarks Leon (Rudy) Strauss who arrived here in 1951 and opened the old Jungle Bar on Duval and Petronia. Behind him on Petronia was the famous Dew Drop Inn, run by Manuel (Currito) Ortega, the bondsman, and down the street was the well-known Red House where the bollita top dogs ran their counting operation.

It was known as the "hot corner" by a number of the politicians, because across Duval Street, and down Petronia a few steps, was the notorious Cave Inn voting precinct where it was not uncommon, on election days, to see suspicious cars parked and hands moving in and out of the windows as the voters passed by before going in to cast their ballots ...

RUDY'S BAR WAS one of the most popular with the sailors and featured a bevy of beautiful gals behind the bar and happy hour prices all night long. Then, in the late '50s, the huge, sprawling three-story wood-frame, historic Jefferson Hotel, near Rudy's, burned up in an electric fire that sent smoke clouds billowing over the city. The firemen, getting their breath during the battle, would run across to Jack Gray's for a cold beer on the house ...

SLOPPY JOE'S HAD been bought from the original Joe Russell by a tough old couple named Mama Joe and Papa Joe Galaskis. They had no truck with the fancy stuff. When they opened the doors at 7 am, the thirstiest of the out-all-night shrimpers, cab drivers and a select few of the reporters from *The Key West Citizen* would appear like ghosts at the rickety bar. Twenty-cent beers and 40¢ for a shot of Four Roses would usually straighten out a few eyeballs so they could stagger back to their typewriters and get out the sports page or even cover the police beat ...

ONE OF THE main entertainers at Sloppy's was a pug-nosed chief in the Navy, Bob Moore, who played a hell of a rinky-tink piano and fancied he could sing, too. His girlfriend was Sunny, the bartender, a bleached blonde number who had seen her best days, but with a heart of gold and teeth to match.

Moore was a stickler for a well-tuned piano, and one day he talked Mama Joe into letting him get the old upright in shape. To her sorrow, she agreed.

Moore set to work right away. He "tore down" the piano (as they like to say in the Navy when repairing something), spread out the keys on the bandstand and then filled a pail with water and soap.

He went at it with vigor, washing the wooden keys, and scrubbing the strings inside the piano. It was midsummer and Moore was in his sweat-soaked skivvies by the time he finished.

Came the moment of truth. Put the piano together again.

Well, the soap-and-water treated wood curled up and warped into fascinating shapes, not to mention in the process of getting that piano back in shape, Moore forgot where the keys belonged. It was nearly midnight by then. In desperation, Moore started drinking.

Mama Joe, also in desperation, threw him out and told him not to come back.

"You hear-a me, you bum," she yelled.

The piano with all its innards laid out on the bandstand remained where it was, a fading spotlight overhead. Moore, of course, came back to make amends but he never had the nerve to look up there where the piano stood in silent, naked shame ...

TOMMY THOMAS, A blond giant of a man back in the 1950s, ran the only strip joint in town, the Mardi Gras, at the foot of Duval (now the site for Rod's seafood restaurant). His chorus line of slinky, slithering beauties were mostly imported from Havana and sported such colorful sobriquets as China Doll, Mother Pat, Cindy Lu Just for You, Betty Boop, and others.

Tommy used to say, "the girls are from good families, but a little down on their luck." Some of them were supposed to be supplementing their income with "specialty acts," so they could further their "education in college." The strippers worked the darker corners of the old dimly lighted club, selling pink champagne at \$5 a bottle, a high price in those days for a bubbly that was suspected of being something else.

One of the darlings became the overnight

favorite when she revealed she was pregnant and she roamed the strippers' ramp till the seventh month. It was a family place and collections were taken for the poor dear's confinement ...

ONE OF THE best known of the late night bar denizens and a performer of no mean talent was "Cuco Bobo," a local Cuban whose love for flashy uniforms, shiny medals and a military cap was famous -- but more legendary was his imitation, usually performed on top of the bar, of the Overseas Railroad as it chuffed and puffed its way down the tracks from Miami to Key West.

Cuco Bobo would move his arms like the engine gathering steam, shuffle his feet and toot-toot, then he'd sound the whistle and call out each stop -- Tavernier! Islamorada! Matcumbe! Grass Key! Eventually we'd get to Key West, hopefully before Cuco, who had been sipping his favorite rum drinks bought by the fascinated "passengers" around the bar, fell off the platform. Arrival would be greeted with a huge round of applause and laughter.

One of his proudest decorations was a gaudy, flowing satin sash, with tassels, in vivid blue and yellow, proclaiming:

"Drink Merita Rum," in spangled letters. It had been given to him by his friend, Hilario Ramos, Sr., distributor for the potion.

ONCE, WHEN PRESIDENT Truman was in town with his family, Cuco Bobo cooked up a platter of black beans and yellow rice and delivered it to the Little White House -- across the top, spelled out in red pimientos, was "Harry S. Truman."

So mad about the Truman family was Cuco Bobo that he put out the word he was going to marry Margaret. That led to a run-in with the Secret Service and from then on Cuco cooled it -- but he loved them, all the same ...

PROBABLY ONE OF the most colorful of the old locations for a saloon is Capt. Tony's on Greene Street.

It was once owned by the original Sloppy Joe Russell and was the place where Ernest Hemingway used to hang out in the mid-1930s and was the site for some late night drunken fights, according to many of the town's elders. When Russell sold it, it became the Blind Pig and then the Duval Club.

In the '30s Key West was the host for a number of the WPA writers and artists and they decorated the old wooden walls of the Duval Club with bright-colored murals depicting anything that came to their minds and some of the subjects were, to say the least, not fit for a family newspaper.

It remained the Duval Club well into the 1950s and got a reputation among the then-quiet "gay" community as being simpatico to their persuasion. There was a small bar near the door and assorted tables to the side while the rear room was blue-lighted and became something of a dance palace on Sunday afternoons.

AROUND 1961, DAVID Wolkowsky and his family inherited much of the square

block where the Duval Club was located. David remodeled and changed the face of that whole neighborhood and sold the Duval Club to Morgan Bird, an imaginative and happy young man who threw some of the classiest parties the town's ever seen, and attracted most of the town's society set to his Oldest Bar, formerly the Duval Club.

Morgan named it the Oldest Bar because that location was, in fact, the site for the first of the booze licenses issued in Key West. In the years Morgan ran the place it was famed for the beauty of its barmaids and the rugged handsomeness of its bartenders -- the combination was a surefire success.

After Morgan died in the late '60s, the bar came into the hands of Tony Tarracino who, at the time, was skipper of a party

Solares Hill--July 1988--Page 27
fishing boat in Garrison Bight.

TONY HIMSELF WAS enough of a character to appreciate the promotional value of the place and he redubbed it Capt. Tony's Saloon and hired such lovelies as Tray and Stacy behind the bar and kept the high-spirited flavor to the saloon that seemed to come to it down the years of its existence.

As the actress said to the bishop: All good things come to an end, and that was the way it happened to Key West when the military departed in 1974-75 -- at least, in the view of the Old Guard.

"We had our day," philosophized Rudy Strauss, "now it's somebody else's turn. But I still preferred the town in those days -- it had more character, more color, and there seemed to be more stability to it. Oh, well..."

Bon Voyage, Bonne Chance: To Margaret Foresman

AUGUST, 1984

Margaret got involved with *The Citizen* around 1950 when she, as a Navy wife, was looking for a sometime job. The military presence here accounted for about 70 percent of the economic boom and President Harry Truman was making Key West his winter hangout, drawing worldwide publicity to the island.

The Key West Citizen was owned then and run by a tight-fisted gentleman of the old school, L.P. Artman. Branches of the family covered some of the old names in Conchdom, most of whom are still around. After L.P.'s death, the newspaper went to one of his sons, Norman D. Artman, and the gradual process of improvement and expansion started.

One of the aspects of the newspaper (it was printed then on a flatbed press) needing a sharp eye was in the proofreading department -- someone to catch those incredibly humorous gaffes made, accidentally, by a sleepy linotype or maybe

WHEN YOU WALKED into the newspaper, then, you found a kind of jumble of departments. Bookkeeping and circulation (the bane of Rayford Roberts' life) were up front along with a sometimes sparkly ad department. In a corner, Norman ruled from a tiny office. Floors were dusty cement, the ceilings scattered with cobwebs.

The next room, toward the rear, was the newsroom. Fans were all over the place. Desks were strewn with old newspapers, yellowed copy sheets, notepads, broken pencils, mugs black from the dregs of Cuban coffee from Pepe's Cafe, Coke bottles with flies. In a corner was Donald



Members of The Citizen after hours club -- (l. to r.) Bud Jacobson, Dorothy Raymer, unidentified man, and Margaret Foresman. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

IN THE PHOTO department, Don Pinder ruled as chief photographer. He took almost all of the shots for that day's edition, besides doing the casual photos that truly caught the flavor of the town and its places, its scenes, its colorful characters.



Margaret Foresman with Tennessee Williams and friend at the opening of the young playwright's *Orpheus Descending*. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

But Pinder couldn't work 24 hours a day, so there had to be an assistant hired to give him a hand in some of the night assignments. They included Charley Perkins, Jack Burke, Rod Birkett, and more. One of them (not among those named) was a dreamy elderly type who covered those macho military parades, and so forth.

His nickname was "Miss Petunia," because he'd lean against a utility pole like a flower on a vine while the parade passed, smiling goofily, the camera unused. Dorothy raved to Margaret about it, but then

The news staff, in the meantime, covered everything.

ONCE, THE REPORT came in about a shrimper who'd had his leg severed in an accident on the boat. The headline came out:

"MAN LOSES LEG IN WENCH"

Crash! Bang! Stop the press! Recall those copies!

The last word was changed to read: WINCH, but not after a number got out on the street. One reached the *New Yorker* magazine and made droll reading ...

Autograph signing, from left: George, Paul, John, Ringo, and then-County Commissioner Billy Osterhoudt. Clustered around them, backs to camera, Farnie Spottwood, Marcia Bevis, the three daughters of Commissioner Osterhoudt, and others. Photo courtesy of Farnie Spottwood.

THE BEATLES HIT KEY WEST-1964

FEBRUARY, 1983

THE WHOLE THING was caused by a freak of nature -- a hurricane.

It was September, 1964, and there was a hurricane hovering around out there in the Atlantic heading toward the Bahamas -- the same landing place the Beatles had in mind when they wrapped up their immensely successful first tour of the U.S., and were seeking sun, sand, and solace for their aching bones.

Their huge chartered four-engine aircraft, carrying what were now the world's best known musical stars, their managers, their tons of equipment, their staff and assorted friends, was finally, after almost six months, headed back to dear old blighty.

ALL THE BEATLES wanted was a few days' well-deserved R&R -- a rest from the insane clamor and near hysteria they'd endured since their February appearance on Ed Sullivan's Sunday night TV show.

And now, of all things, of all places, they'd be in Key West? Unbelievable.

THE ISLAND CITY went bananas when the word got out during the late afternoon of the day they were to arrive. Cars carrying the first of the Key West fans began showing up at the airport; quickly all the parking spaces were taken and they were lining up along South Roosevelt.

George Faraldo, manager of the Key West International Airport, then, recalls that the Beatles had been going toward Jacksonville first for a concert, then diverted to the Bahamas due to the storm and then to Key West. The pilot of the Beatles' aircraft, considering the value of his cargo and the capricious way hurricanes have of ignoring puny human considerations, called Key West for landing information and motel reservations.

That calm radio voice triggered an avalanche of response ...

FARALDO WAS LIKE a man with 16 different jobs at one time. Phones in his office were ringing, his short wave radio was zeroed in on the Beatles' aircraft and outside the terminal building, the welcoming



hordes were overflowing the grounds. Cars, trucks, vans, campers, cameras, autograph books, records, albums -- all over the place. Families were having picnics on the lawn in the parking area.

The usually spooky quiet of the airport terminal, in the early morning hours, was shattered by the noise and lights as the fans kept looking for the best vantage point. Some of them managed to find a way to the roof and before anyone could say "stop," they were scrambling on the roof, standing three-deep on the balcony overhang.

The night dragged on and it was 4 a.m. when the landing lights of the huge aircraft could be seen making its approach from the north side of the island. Some said the screaming and yelling and whistling could be heard in Marathon.

"THERE THEY ARE!"

The aircraft zoomed over the crowd and slowly floated toward the ground, coming in from the west end of a short runway.

But it looked like there'd be a problem for the huge aircraft, then making extreme speed on the ground.

You could see the pilot was bearing down on the brakes, flaps were down and the engines were screaming in reverse but she still seemed to move too fast for a runway only 4,800 feet long.

"Jesus," muttered one of the airport officials, "he's going too fast."

Sparks and blue smoke were coming out of the wheels as she screeched to a halt with her nose almost touching the mangroves at the end of the runway. A sigh of relief from the crowd.

THE PLANE TURNED and taxied back while the crowd surged forward and went totally nuts. They were throwing flowers, waving flags, yelling, screaming and whistling when the door opened and The Great Ones descended into pandemonium.

Limousines were standing by and whisked the whole bunch off the field and over to the Key Wester to the accompaniment of sirens and flashing lights from the police and sheriff's cars, and that was the start of a gaudy week-long flirtation Key West had with the rest of the world.

Three Gifted Women

When it comes to writers, Key West is best known for men -- Ernest Hemingway, Phil Caputo, Tom McGuane. But it's been Solares Hill's experience that a hefty portion of the creative energy here stems from women. Frances-Elizabeth Signorelli, Dorothy Raymer, and Helen Chapman are of the cream of that gifted crop.

that this is one of them. Granted, I moodily remember that, indeed, we were the best of girl friends when we were youngsters. Arms around each others' shoulders and whispering into each others' ears, giggling. I was the only girl who would spend the



BY FRANCES-ELIZABETH SIGNORELLI

LAST SPRING, A Texas woman from days long gone calls. After a dust-throwing sentence or two, she announces that she is coming here to Similar Sound for a five-day visit. Her self-confidence is respectable. She cannot, she proudly testifies, drive worth pea-turkey. After hanging up, two gloomy thoughts strike me: I shall have to transport her everywhere. And, I am being faced with a live-in visitor in only a one-bathroom house. I resort to a chilled glass of Perrier water with a snick of lemon in it and to reading four pages of Iris Murdoch. These exercises always have poultilized disasters, like rejection of my short story in the mail, impetigo, or heartbreak.

It has been 23 years since I last laid eyes on this lady friend. There are absences which are fatal. And I am desperately afraid

night with her, as she kept the bones of a dug-up Comanche Indian chief in a hat box under her bed. We shared making a white cotton brassiere for the Home Demonstration teacher who was in the outlying ranch areas to teach sewing. Of course, one side came out larger, and together we bore the hoots and laughs from that trauma.

She turns out to be rather handsome, a woman who always wears bing cherry-colored clothes, even at night in bed. As

cre-a-tive, n. having the power to create; inventive; productive; as, a creative mind, creative power.

cre-a-tivity, n. artistic or intellectual inventiveness.

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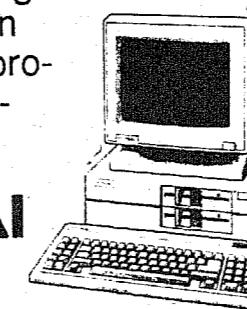
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she gifts me with a jar of her grape ketchup, she seems feet taller. I sigh deeply and look down my little length. By the second day, we are spreading a conversation out thin. There at my dining table containing the black box of her coin collection from 37 countries. I: "Yes, I know that your Aggression cookies will win the bake-off. Now, you said that your husband was in Rotary Club and you married in '45?" She: "Swans mate for life." Something about her dentures gives a small, genteel click.

By the second night of the house guest, I lie awake planning impossible dreams. If only she would move to a motel, I solemnly will promise: To fix up an appointment for her with Senator Paula Hawkins. To pay for a vet to alter her cat, Peter O'Toole, that she talks about interminably. To cut her toe nails. These conjurings are unworthy and unrealizable. I'll be several hundred years old by the time this visit is over.

THIRD AFTERNOON: I return with more groceries than usual in my shopping bag which really is just holes held together by string. Sounds upon entering the cottage: Faucet running. Gentle, alien thumps. Steam is seeping out the cracks around the bathroom door. Open the bathroom door. Through a cumulous cloud of my hot water and my lavender talc, observe her sitting like a wet head of lettuce on my slipper chair. I emit a fake, "O,

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excuse me." I won't regain possession of that room for hours. She is slow by nature. Once the deep fryer in her folks' kitchen caught fire. I recall that she decided to write to the fire department instead of calling them. Well, anyway, her mother, who had been away at the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show, got a new kitchen out of it, built over the charred cinders of the old one.

I flounce into my bedroom. Lie on my bed rigidly regarding a pine rose halfway up the wall. I have discovered this awful lack in me. I perceive that houseguests, however decent they may be, are intruders. Entry into my space is an affront. I have the grace to be vastly ashamed, true. I realize that my soul has lost pounds of spiritual weight over my appall at houseguest. My state of hebephrenia continues. That night, I dream of her falling out of or being pushed out of a Ferris Wheel. Then, wake-up, go back to sleep. Dream Number 11: She is para-sailing, her big, white purse affectionately dangling until she drops down just off Dog Beach.

Next morning, when I can discern bumps and slight movings of a chair or a suitcase in the next room, I come all unbuttoned. This is my chair and my floor the chair is moving over. And, my guilt at feeling this way about this poor Texas lady innocently folding her big cherry nightie in

For a Friend

AUGUST, 1982



Editor's Note: Dorothy Raymer, whose column "Notes and Antic-Dotes" ran in Solares Hill for over five years, died in 1982. Margaret Foresman, former managing editor of The Key West Citizen, wrote these very special words on Dorothy and they appeared in the Citizen. For years, Dorothy's column, "Conch Chowder," ran in that paper every day.

AS A JOURNALIST, Dorothy covered a wide range of newspaper activities, writing almost every kind of newspaper story -- obituaries, wedding reports, hard news stories, interviews, feature articles, sob sister pieces, night club reviews, restaurant criticism, drama reviews, concert critiques, book reviews -- the whole gamut of newspaper coverage -- and she did it all well.

During my time of working with her, Dorothy wore many hats (to say nothing of many flowers over her ear to conceal her hearing aid.) She could go to the police station in the morning and gather up all the crime news, come back to the office and write it up for that day's paper, interview a visiting VIP, and then turn out in the afternoon a meticulously crafted wedding story calculated to sell lots of extra Sunday papers to the families of the bride and groom and all their friends. She put together the Woman's Page of the *Citizen* daily for a number of years and later was in charge of the entertainment section, happily returning to a function she had previously carried out for the *Miami News*, keeping readers of the paper posted on what was going on in town.

there is eating away at me. I don't drink. I have never in my life had more than a few social sips, but I am liable to be found down at the Boca Chica Bar knocking it back at 9 am.

FOURTH MORNING: She sits around, massages her fingers doing five-finger exercises, opening and shutting the refrigerator door, reciting poetry to herself. A little, foreign person that lives in my depths is smiling wickedly and advising, "If you are a nail endure the hammering; if you are a hammer, pound."

While she again is closeted in the bathroom an hour or two, with a smile like on the face of a shark, I leave a note atop the big cherry bathrobe before I glide away out the door: "Am called out to a Methodist conference on Summerland Key. All the best, F.E." I have not been a Methodist since I was 12 years old, so this Summerland Key conference is a very low type of fib. I can visualize her reading it in my Kennedy rocker, impassively popping a Vitamin C mint into her mouth.

I know full well that within a month from now, I shall shot off a letter to her in Dallas containing sentences like this: "Dear, darlin' -- It's been dishwater here without you."

I REMEMBER ONCE when there wasn't much going on around town for her to use as subject matter, she wrote a column describing, of all things, a vacant lot which she passed on her way to work. That sounds like the pits, doesn't it?

But Dorothy made a work of art describing tiny, tiny blossoms in the weeds, making them each clear and colorful in the mind's eye.

She told about the miniature animal life she saw in the lot -- lizards and ants and beetles scurrying about their daily or hourly business -- the scraps and trash denoting the passage of humankind, the springing up of new plant life stretching toward the sun.

All in all, it was a masterful piece of writing which made a little old Key West vacant lot take on beauty and meaning to the reader. (And a not very sentimental old ex-editor still remembers it.)

"Conch Chowder" was sometimes jubilant, sometimes mournful, sometimes routine, but it was always on my desk at about the same time every day to be copyread and sent to the typesetter ...

Notes and Antic-Dotes

NOVEMBER, 1977

by Dorothy Raymer

KEY WEST HAS always been photogenic, and through the years, with the help of Larry Rogers at the Chamber of Commerce, it has attracted camera crews from all sorts of publications to shoot background scenes as well as action. We have become accustomed to seeing high fashion models, including Margaux Hemingway, posing for advertising agency work.

Several movies have been filmed here; more of that angle will be forthcoming in a later column. For the present here's a sidelight of one mad adventure involving an ace photographer who came here in the early 1950s for the now defunct *Life*.

Columnist Dorothy Raymer relishes a hearty chuckle. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

She knew the glamour aspects of newspapering, and she also knew the drudgeries -- keeping the clip file, researching to be sure her facts were straight, proofreading, and the myriad of other tedious jobs which are all a part of the newsroom -- or were in Dorothy's and my day -- but she never learned to change a typewriter ribbon.

BUT I'M SURE her most remarkable contribution and the one which readers of the *Citizen* most closely identified her was

THE CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER was George Leavens, who was at that time married to Marion Light, now familiar to Key Westers as Marion Stevens. His main job was to take a series of pictures to go with a *Life* article dedicated to what were then new sonar methods of detecting submarines. At that time, in the 1951-1953 period or thereabouts, experimentation was being conducted on anti-submarine warfare, coordinating subs, surface craft, planes and helicopters. Technical details were supposed to be very "hush-hush," as the expression went then.

INTREPID GEORGE DECIDED to try for a from-the-floor angle. He slid out on the dancefloor, lay face up and took aim.

Leavens, who came from Australia to America, decided to add extra-curricular photography just for a sidelight. He dropped in at the *Key West Citizen* to look into feature possibilities of the night club beat in the area.

SINCE I HAD recently been an entertainment editor for the *Miami Daily News*, and was also acquainted with the island's taverns, pubs, and so-called nightclubs, I had been recommended as guide and source of information of after-dark action. I submitted a list of sites which Leavens might find interesting.

George had already ventured entry at the Habana Madrid and the Mardi Gras, two of the most famous (or infamous) "joints," and several of the Duval Street bars, as well as numerous waterfront haunts, but he wanted

I found out later that she was the wife of

... she wore a minimum set of breast pasties and only a heart-shaped shield over her ...

to sample a few more places on his last night here.

Sloppy Joe's, corner of Duval and Greene Streets, was much like it is today: huge bar and canopy of parachutes. But back then there was a small dance floor where special acts were performed. On this particular evening a bit of exotica/erotic called the Mystery Dancer was billed, so that was our first port of call.

I had to get permission from the manager for George to take photos, and did so with ease when the proprietor was told that his establishment might be part of a *Life* magazine layout.

We traipsed into Sloppy Joe's with enthusiasm and a camera and light paraphernalia. I guarded what George wasn't setting up when we seated ourselves on stools barside to await the appearance of the star performer. I assumed, of course, that she had been given the magic password -- *Life* Magazine.

THE OVERHEAD LIGHTS dimmed, a taped recording of "Caravan" vibrated in the barroom, and from the nether regions of the ladies' rest room there emerged a mysterious figure completely swathed, head to toe, in black gauzy veiling.

Gyrating, slowly at first, to the desert rhythm, the dancer began hootchie-kootchie movements with swirls and twirls, bumps

and grinds, but with a difference. She threw a little light on the subject. She held a flashlight in one hand under the enveloping black veil. The big cylinder was capped with red glass at one end and green at the other terminal.

As the dancer's footwork progressed, she aimed the light, in alternate stop and go signals, to encircle various parts of her anatomy. Since she wore a minimum set of breast pasties and only a heart-shaped shield over her -- ah -- most strategic zone, the roving light was quite illuminating.

AND NO SOONER were the words out of his mouth when he was belied. Over in a corner of the room where a bunch of Navy men jammed a table near another crowded with stalwarts of the U.S. Marine Corps, there began a row, at first with verbal thrusts, then exchange of followup punches. Bottle throwing added to the stir which rapidly whipped into a real mix-masters brouhaha. The slugfest spread and developed into the violence of a riot in seconds.

I prepared to duck under the table, because glasses were flying through the air and chairs were being tossed. But George

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discouraged. "Same old stuff. All blah! No real action," he said.

AND NO SOONER were the words out of his mouth when he was belied. Over in a corner of the room where a bunch of Navy men jammed a table near another crowded with stalwarts of the U.S. Marine Corps, there began a row, at first with verbal thrusts, then exchange of followup punches. Bottle throwing added to the stir which rapidly whipped into a real mix-masters brouhaha. The slugfest spread and developed into the violence of a riot in seconds.

I prepared to duck under the table, because glasses were flying through the air and chairs were being tossed. But George

I prepared to duck under the table, because glasses were flying through the air...

grinned in happy anticipation, hoisted his camera and took aim.

He may have taken a few shots, but not more than that, when a bouncer grabbed his arm.

"None of that, bubba! We don't want no pictures. Just get out," the hulking guard ordered.

In the distance came the wail of sirens and squad cars. "Please, let's go," I pleaded. With a gesture of contempt, George once again collected the cameras. As we jostled our way to the exit, we met the first arrivals of the Shore Patrol wading in to break up the fracas inside.

We finally found a taxi and I relaxed, murmuring, "No action, eh?" George laughed. "Maybe I got a few worthwhile shots, but I doubt it."

I SUGGESTED WE had better try for a more peaceful slice of night life. He agreed. We went to the Casa Marina Hotel, where sedate social dancing was the order of the evening.

The moonlight patio, just off the Bird Cage Lounge, was rimmed with local people. The music was furnished by an excellent Latin American band. Leavens executed a skillful rhumba and then cast about for a photo sequence.

We were relaxing with cool drinks when up came a Royal Air Force officer with whom I was acquainted. I introduced Leavens to him and smiled in anticipation of a pleasant chat.

But the RAFer stiffened and asked, "Are you one of the chaps with the *Life* magazine crew?"

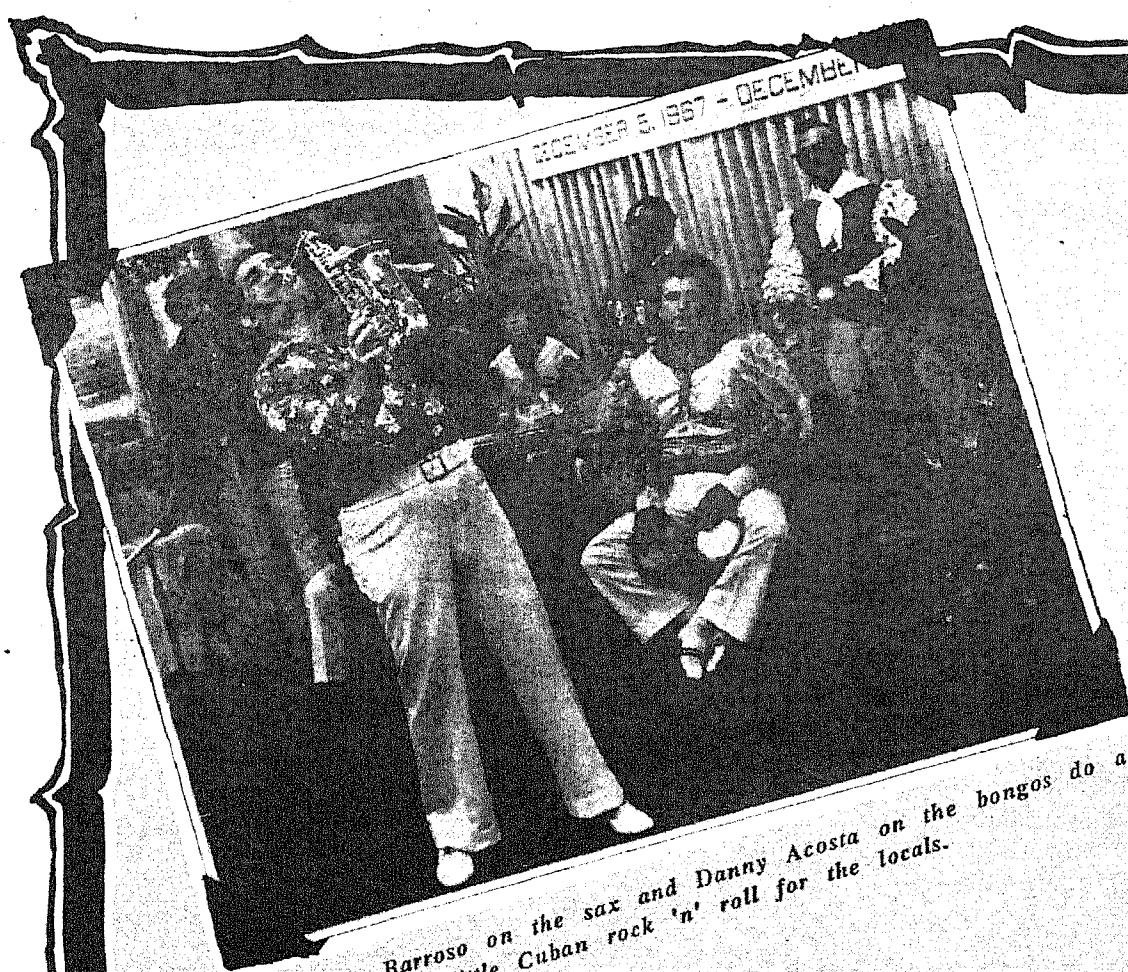
George, still standing after introductions, so identified himself.

"Well, sir," intoned the RAF officer, "you have invaded what was supposed to be a military secret. You are little more than a spy!" He turned abruptly and left us. I was flabbergasted. George was indignant. We left the otherwise placid setting. George

Continued on page 34

ROM THE ARCHIVE

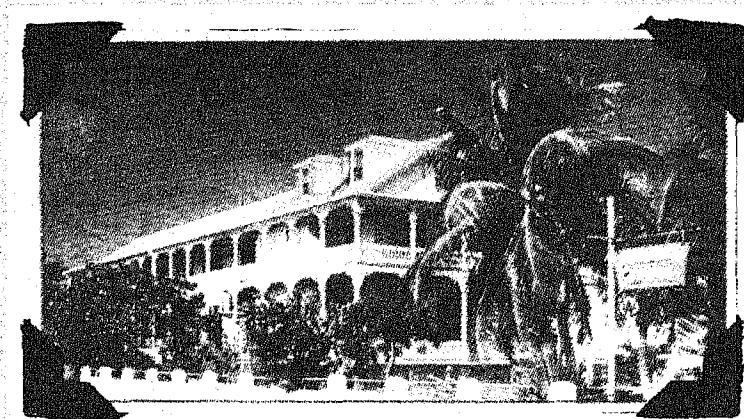
by Bud Jacobson



Hector Barroso on the sax and Danny Acosta on the bongos do a little Cuban rock 'n' roll for the locals.



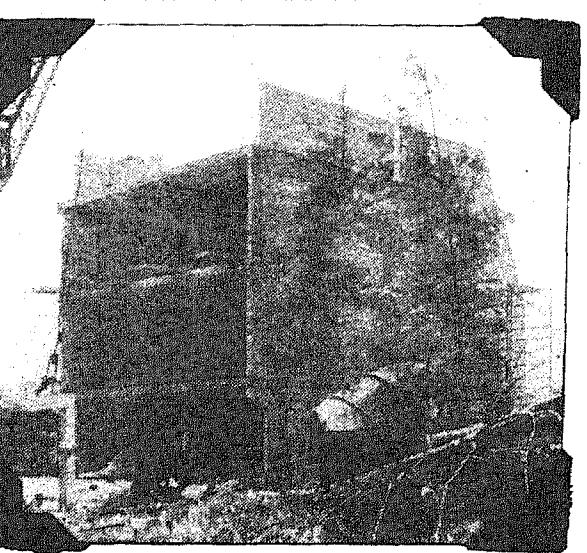
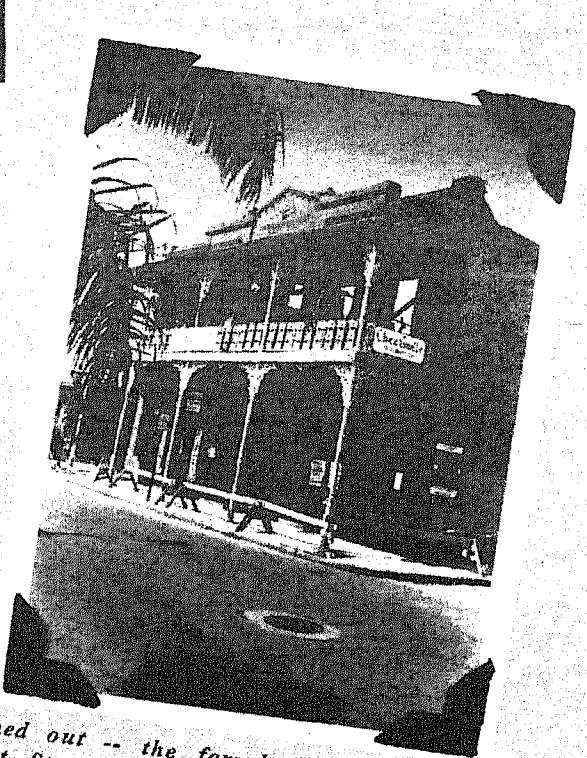
"Curie" Garcia, top chef at the original Pepe's Cafe, Greene at Duval, whipped up the best chili and sousa on the island for many years.



The North Beach Inn, at Garrison Bight in the 1940s. Yet another landmark that burned down.



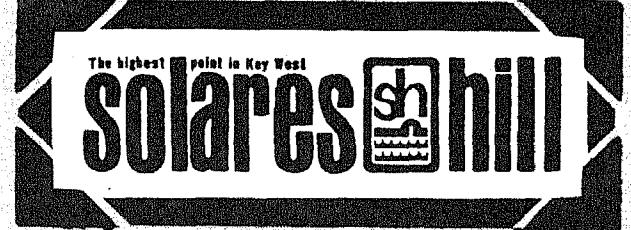
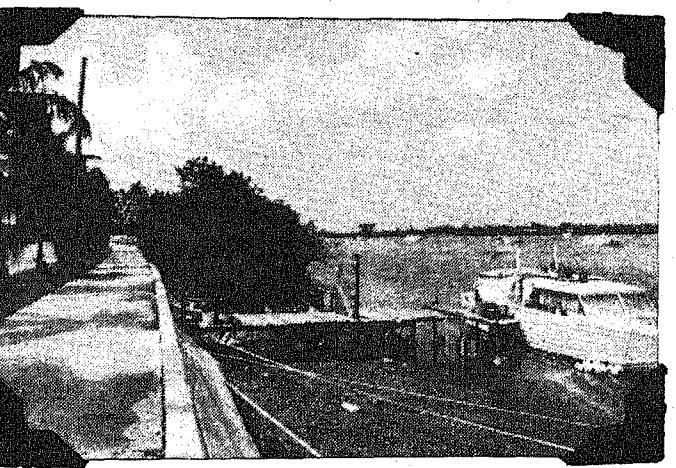
Members of the Save Our Shoreline bunch take a last look at a shrinking beach, courtesy of more development.



First of the high rise condos that now cover Rest Beach; this one courtesy of Carl Rongo, a developer of note.



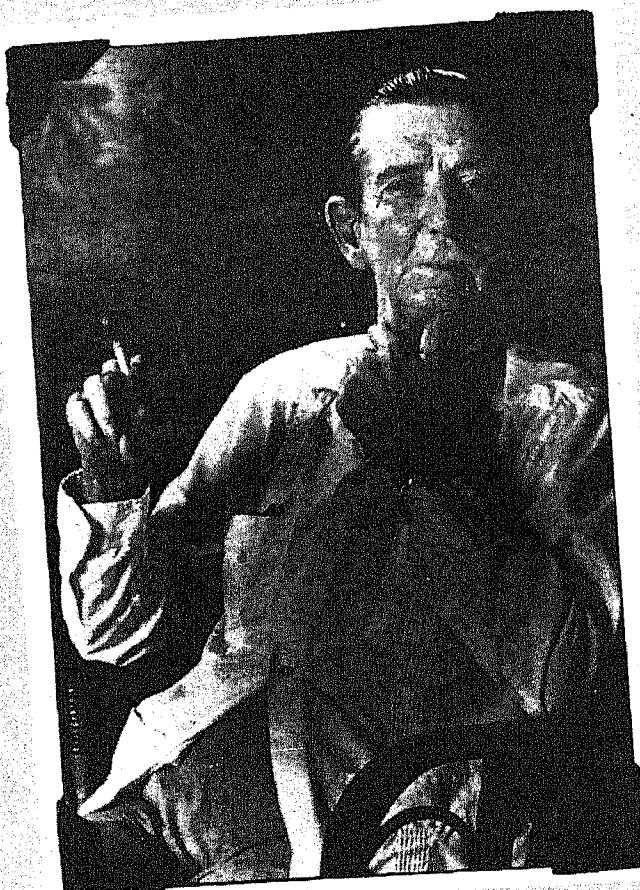
Burned out -- the famed Harbor House on Front Street was once the scene of early restoration and the first home of Key West Handprints.



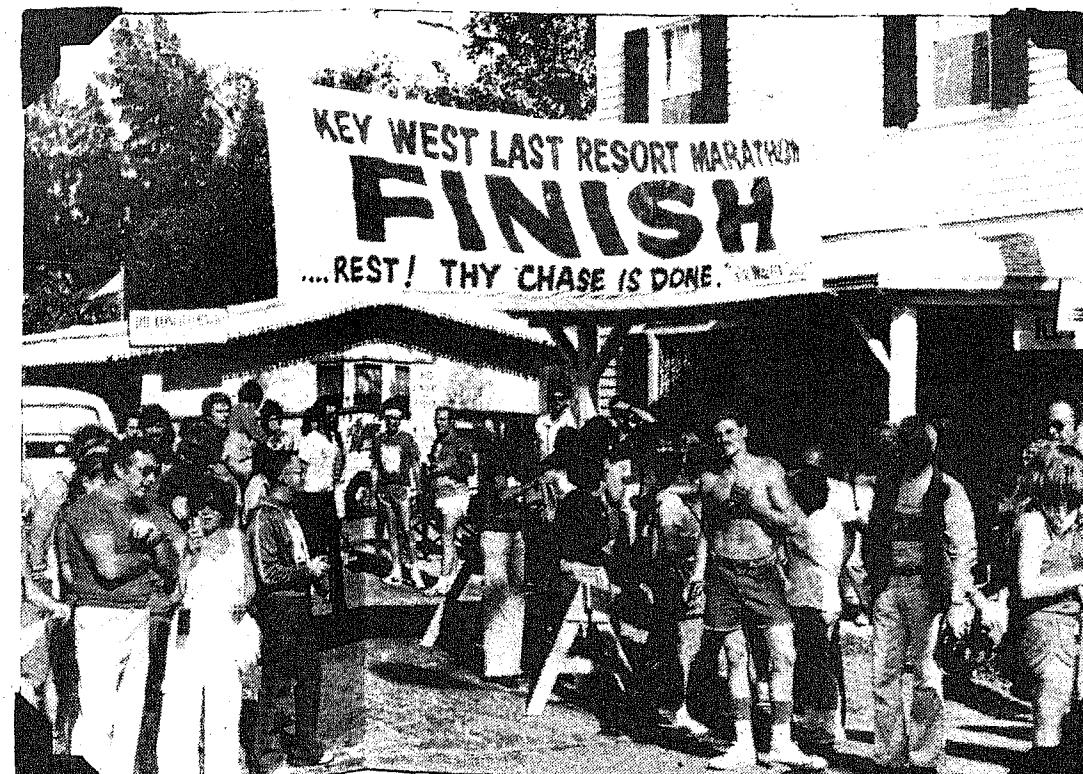
The highest point in Key West
solares sh hill



The late great Tennessee Williams warming up for a bike ride to meet some friends at Claire's



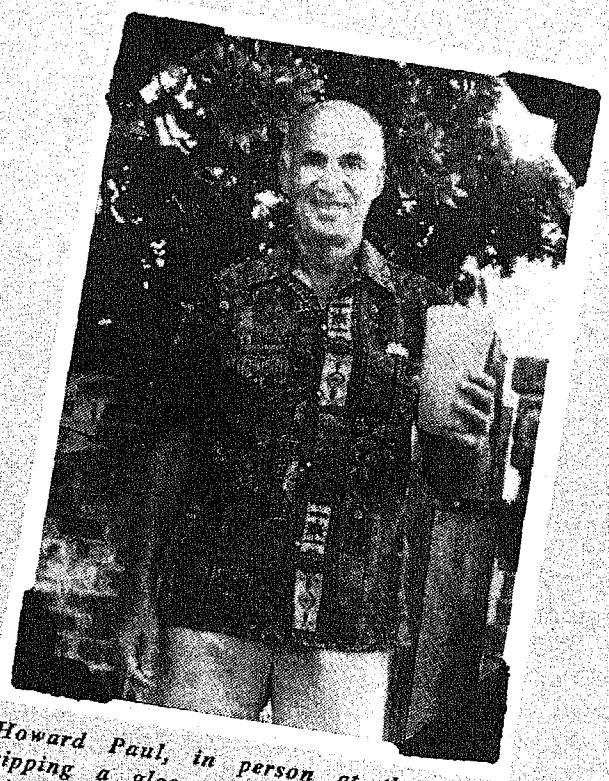
Toby Bruce, best liked of the storytellers about bygone days.



Thirsty runners in an early marathon see the finish line and a cool beer.



Colin and Nancy Jameson, a favorite couple, relax on a cool winter day.



Howard Paul, in person at the Backyard, sipping a glass of iced tea!

All photos from Solares Hill archives.

vetoed any further forays into life on the night set.

JUST A FEW weeks later, *Life* magazine did come out with a front page

Waste Not, Want Not

OCTOBER, 1982

by Helen R. Chapman

ARE YOU TIRED of dragging out the garbage? Are you tired of dragging out the garbage the night before the morning the garbage isn't scheduled to be picked up? Are you tired of picking up garbage on the morning after the wrong night on which you put it out and that the dogs have torn asunder? If you enjoy all of the above, read no further. However, if garbage is one of your primary frustrations, the following suggestions may ameliorate the problem.

Coffee grounds and egg shells probably compose the bulk of edible waste. I once heard that the flavor of coffee is enhanced by the addition of egg shells to the grounds. That takes care of egg shells, except you still have the grounds to dispose of. If you have a cat, you will find it expedient to spread your coffee grounds in the sun to dry and then use as kitty litter. When once again the grounds are moist, you will have the undeniable fragrance of ammoniated coffee. This is where the melon rinds come in. Just mince melon (preferably cantaloupe) rinds and mix in with the litter. You now have such a malodorous concoction that you get rid of the cat. But that's okay. All those catfood cans have been eliminated and you can use the litter to kill cockroaches. Everyone knows roaches just adore cantaloupe. What to do with dead roaches is discussed further on.

All that fat you trimmed off those \$5.39-per-pound steaks you had last night has an excellent disposition. Render it and use as a lubricant to keep your grapefruit rinds from drying out. Grapefruit rinds make lovely candy dishes, but tend to shrivel up. The fat from the steaks will keep the rinds in shape and retain their cheerful yellow color. You need eat steak only twice a month to have enough fat to cover 368 rinds. (But if you have a dog, he'll chew up the candy dishes. The dog will have to go the way of the cat.) If you are on a diet, the candy dishes make fine ashtrays and cigarettes sizzle out nicely. But then, of course, you're wasting perfectly good cigarette filters.

Cigarette filters, cut and molded to the proper size, are perfect for stoppers for those bottles of analgesics that only a child can open. Once you get one open, throw away the lid and use the filters instead. When the aspirin bottle is empty, use it for a *se-size* cologne bottle and dye the filters pretty colors. Everybody will want one!

FISH BONES MAKE marvelous mobiles which provide you with a function for all that string you've saved. The bones

cover showing a plane towing a sonar sub detecting instrument in the ocean on anti-submarine maneuvers.

Snorted the British, "Top secret, hush-hush, my arse! You Americans allowed a national magazine to come out with the whole thing!"



are very light and swing and spin and turn beautifully in a breeze. To decorate the mobile, spread out the wings of the roaches that you killed with the kitty litter and attach.

The translucent quality of the roach wings gives an ethereal effect and makes the roaches look very life-like. Of course, you may gild the roaches if you're into rococo decor.

Used-up toothpaste tubes of a person who does not believe in rolling up the tube as he uses it, are very useful as pastry tubes. Be careful not to clean the tube too well as the fluoride contained therein will help prevent cavities caused by the rich frosting on the cake. If several kinds of toothpaste are used in a household, really gorgeous cakes will result. Use white minty toothpaste tubes for the frosting and adorn with red gel roses and blue gel leaves. And for the Fourth of July, just think of the flag that can be produced!

Wet tea leaves, I have been told, are excellent for cleaning rugs. A tea bag is approximately three square inches. It takes only 1,728 tea bags to clean a 9 x 12 rug. Not bad at all. And you can make money on the side telling fortunes. When the rug is covered with the wet tea bags, have your client walk over it barefoot and his fortune can be told from the leaves that stick to the bottom of his feet. (Try to avoid flatfooted

people as their feet pick up too many leaves and will leave part of your carpeting uncleaned.)

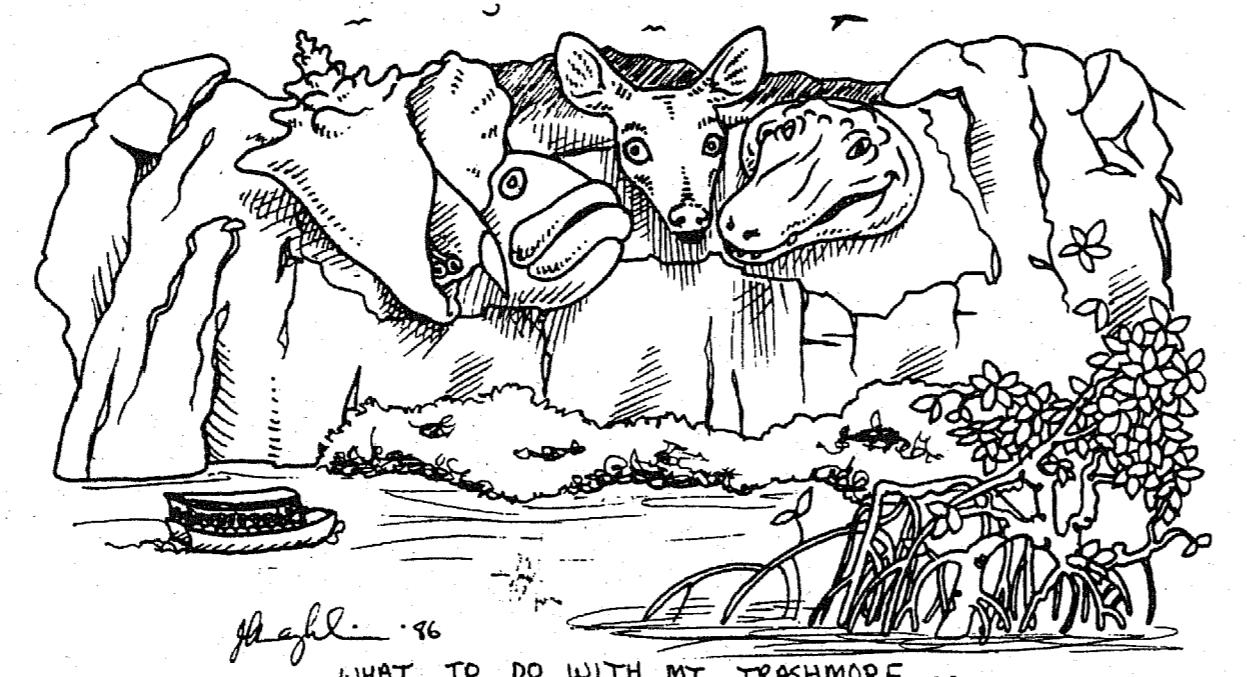
Newspapers hound us all. Even if only one newspaper a day is subscribed to, newspapers still pile up rapidly. Hoboes have known for a long time that newspaper is warm. Therefore you can put away blankets that involve washing or dry cleaning and use the papers until they begin to get too wrinkled (or you begin to dream about the classified ads). Then what to do with them? It's obvious. You raise dogs. But be careful they don't get near the candy dishes.

I AM ASTOUNDED by the amount of aluminum frozen-dinner plates that are discarded. If saved, you would have service for four in no time. Traditional Alcoa can be passed on from generation to generation. Just think of your granddaughter using your Swanson Hungry Man dinner plates when she gets married. Or serving her special moussettes in your chicken pot pie dishes. Dinnerware of this kind reflects beautifully in candlelight which also lends a romantic air to the gilded cockroaches flying and whirling overhead.

And while we're on the subject of mobiles, let me suggest using empty cans as wind chimes. All those thousands of wire coat hangers you've amassed over the years can be employed to hold the cans at varying distances, thus eliciting different tinny tonalities. And in case of hurricane, the wind will tear down the chimes and carry them out to sea where they will create lovely little hideaways for fish.

THERE ARE MANY types of garbage I'm sure I've neglected to include, but these ideas may help you to develop your own ingenious solutions to the trash problem. I would like to mention one final nuisance, however. Junk mail. Junk mail addressed to you personally can always be returned, designated as Addressee Deceased. But after you've done this a few times, the post office may stop delivering your mail entirely. So restrict yourself to junk mail addressed to Resident. Simply return: Resident Deceased.

Or you could raise pigs. Think of all the silk purses you'd have -- in time.

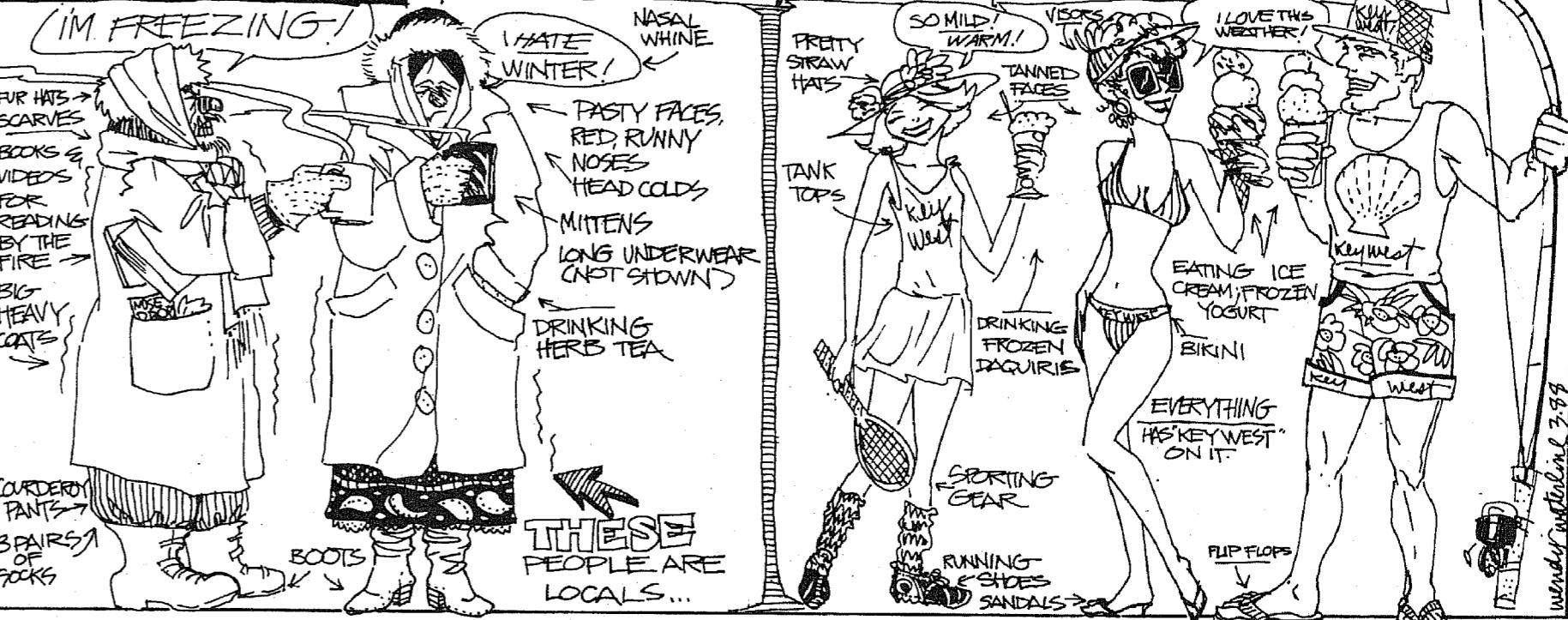


Mayhew '86

WHAT TO DO WITH MT. TRASHMORE...

CONCHFLASH

How to tell a local from a tourist in winter (65° or less)



Fiction: Fruit of the Mind

Few community papers are as fortunate as Solares Hill when it comes to fiction and poetry. We've published wonderful stories by well-recognized professionals and shy, anonymous writers, alike. The poems have come from the heart of Key West. All are very special.

Dark Side of the Moon

AUGUST, 1987

by V.K. Gibson

Tonight the moon's so bright it almost hurts my eyes. It's two a.m. and the boy and girl down the lane have started again. Surely they must levitate in love. They log many hours in the air, they are tireless, they will straddle the night once more. I've gotten out of bed and, a creature of habit, have gone to my desk. I want every thought in my brain to spew out like a ticker tape in a stock market crash. Up from my roiling thoughts surfaces the image of human beings, young men in couples and groups, walking together downtown. Key West is a variety of towns, according to the time of day, and right now it is a village of thieves. The boys will be doing what they fondly call "making the rounds," trying to steal that magical, extra hour which lies hidden between midnight and dawn. They want to take it home with them, take it to bed, wrap their clean limbs about it. This extra hour is a charmed fare, a flight to some mythical, half suspected, final stop called Paradise. Alas, I cannot join them anymore. I have, as they say, missed the plane. The only thing in my life that now makes the rounds is the Hunter ceiling fan over my head. It whirls as I write this, making me feel slightly chilly, although the temperature on this sub-tropical island is in the eighties of Fahrenheit. I'm dressed in the white silk ladies' pajamas which someone got for me at Fastbuck Freddie's. My attire does not represent some queer sense of irony, or

camp. These days I dress for comfort. My body speaks for itself and what it says is not pleasant, or campy. Body ... body ... Oh! The other night I dreamed that a mighty whisper blew the tin roof off my house. In



the dream someone -- my Father? -- told me that I could determine the date of my liberation by counting the spots on my body. Perhaps the wind from my dream is rustling the banyan trees outside my window even now. The Banyans know everything. These house-size plants spend their lives dripping feelers which turn into ropes, arms, legs. No death hangs between those sinuous thighs which root themselves to the earth. In this way they walk about the Island, five feet in twenty years. I can scarcely imagine their roots, which burrow into the coral bedrock so industriously that the underground portion of the trees are broader than the visible parts. One of them is fifty feet high and eighty feet in circumference, upheld by dozens of great and small trunks. Its root system must encompass an entire block, penetrating and choking sewers and tapping the lore of our bowels. The trees know my secrets better than any lover. But trees are safer than boys

these days. Except, of course, for the paper playmates.

On the desk, next to my notebook, is the pornographic magazine which I asked my brother, Brad, to get for me. I had thought to run off a batch by hand, gazing at the slick photographs of handsome fantasies: boys next door, surfers, midtown whores, pizza boys and soda jerks, cowboys and kid brothers... There's a vast industry for people like me; those who, for various reasons, cannot or will not reach out and touch someone. My apologies to the phone company for borrowing their slogan, but plagiarism is the least of my indiscretions. Brother Brad, who sees salvation lurking behind every signpost of convention, would carefully delete that borrowed phrase, divide this rambling narrative into paragraphs, would be mindful of its beginning, middle, and end, would put in and take out words until his head hurt. But I know my real guideline: to relieve myself. We are all borrowed phrases. I've never been overly concerned with beginnings or middles, and it is only recently, the past year, that I'm bothered by endings: I am dying. (I've just lifted up my pajama top to look at the spots on my stomach and chest. In this light they resemble patches of tar on creamy alabaster. Should I obey my Father and count them?) My attention shifts to the torso reproduced on the cover of the porn mag: a stud about to lower his Calvin Klein shorts: naughty hints of things between the covers. He seems vaguely familiar and I try to place him among all the young men I've known. So many boys, so many rest stops, so many ways. Their names have dropped from my mental diary like loose postage stamps from the album I owned in my childhood. There were stamps from scores of nations: Algeria, Egypt, Morocco... I see that I have North Africa on my mind, memorable because of all the brown, accommodating youths I encountered during my first Grand

Tour, taken ten years ago, when I was twenty-two. There's nothing left of those early adventures but the faintest remembrance of musk, the curves of upturned buttocks which might also be the crowns of hills in the Holy Land in the cool hours of an evening. Floodlights go on and

Our Father Which art
in Texas disowned me
when I told Him
the truth about myself.

off in my head and with each illumination I see a different... I want to say "person," but there is merely a succession of human shards arranged upon piles of Moorish rugs, or atop immense antique beds, or spread urgently across sex-stained and torn mattresses in otherwise empty rooms: here a pair of splendid legs, there an exemplary back, and now a wonderful manchild's face whose eyes are glazed with the submissive power of the sexual victim. Enough body parts for hamlet of bitter-sweet nothings. I shake my head and they withdraw like props in a skinflick, pulled out of camera range by hidden hands. I stare at my own bed, its rumpled sheets. Someone will make it up tomorrow. My friends have become my hateful and loving domestics. Yes, they turn like barbecued chickens in the heat of tenderness and loathing. They come each day to check on me, to restock my larder, to tidy up the house, to transport me to the doctor if I have an appointment, to make sure that I take my medication. My medicine is very good for them. Whenever I take it they feel much better. They do their best to cheer me up. In the past I've "known" most of them, and now they're afraid for themselves. Yet they come, they perform their kindnesses. (Why? Would I do the same? I'll never know. But now, of course, I would like to think so.) Even my brother has come to Key West to stand by me. This is obviously a temporary dislocation. We have never been close, and I realize that his motivation is a horror of that ultimate gap, that blankness and separation which far exceeds the distance that has characterized our relationship. We have always found it convenient to not worry excessively about "family." We both have suffered the same denial of the promised land, and remind one another of our years of wandering in the wilderness.

Our life stories share the same prologue, and communication between us is a buckled, twisted, bloodied belt with only one side, a loop without end. The story? Our Father Which art in Texas disowned me when I told Him the truth about myself, when I was twenty and in the throes of what I took to be love, the sort of undying love the young are brutally taught to expect: True Love. I believed that my infatuation was worth any demonstration of sincerity, any risk. I wanted to shed what I felt was a three piece suit of lies, to give myself totally to the wide horizons of devotion. I remember floating in that first boy's arms, flying with him, giving and taking for the first time

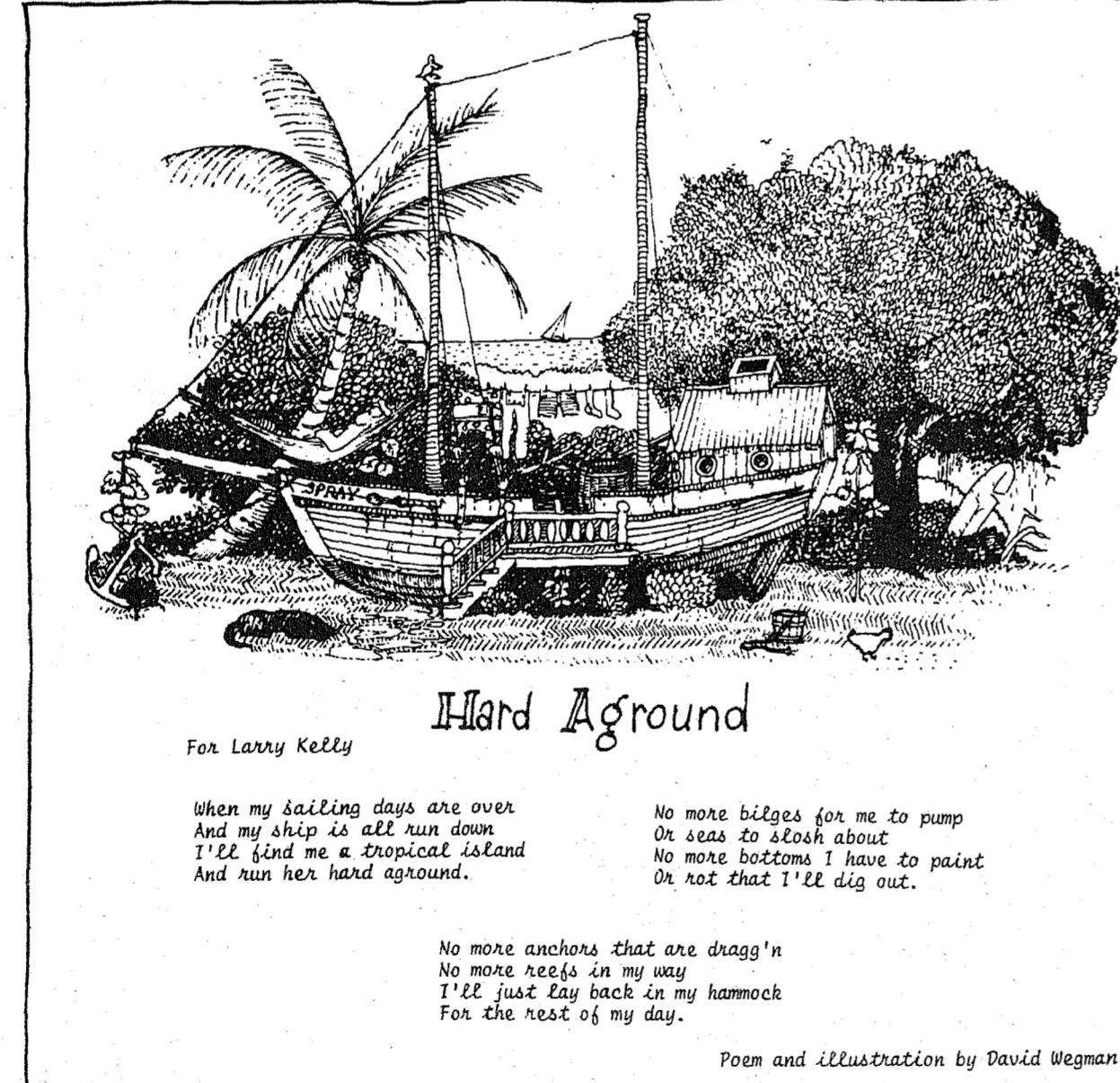
those physical liberties which seemed so wicked and so pure both at the same time. His smooth skin against mine, his sweet breath in my ear -- those things were heroic then! After my silly confession to Father, and His rejection, I traveled with my beloved across the continent, to California. Within three months we had lost sight of one another amid the golden hoards of gods on the beach at Malibu. I like to think that he still graces those pagan sands in glory, ageless and half divine. Had what we shared really been love? Again, now, I would like to think so. Brad, who is infinitely more sentimental than I, categorizes his first experience as "unadulterated lust," a passive/aggressive grappling, with himself under the high school athletic coach in the locker room after classes. Brad will never forget this encounter. His journal details every moment of that surrender of innocence. The very hairs on his first trick's head are numbered by the pathetic calculus of misplaced nostalgia. I think Brad is still searching for

remaining just out of reach, haunting... Oh! My house is haunted! It was built by a sea captain over a century ago. The rooms are tall and everything is made of Dade County Pine, a very hard wood containing much resin. The termites do not like it. They prefer oak floors, good books, furniture. Dade County Pine was much in demand in times past but is now virtually extinct. That's the problem with being hard. There's something to be said for tenderness. I almost wish that my own little termites, those viruses which now lazily riddle my body, would eat me down to the last mortal crumb -- but quickly! -- like greedy children at a birthday cake. But they have sailed the world in cakes. My life has been a pastry cart. And, which sweet thing killed me? Brad's flings are as rare as moon landings. I have known a thousand. Oh, freedom, what have you done to me! I mourn that glittering, doomed decade of the seventies, when we applauded ourselves like the jaded crowds at resplendent La Scala! The noise still swells, but is now the sound of hands

My life has been a pastry cart.
And which sweet thing killed me?

True Love in that event, hounded by a suspicion that it was lost in the folds of those moments when passion had smothered reason. He had shut his eyes, you see, and love slipped past him and ran away! It calls to him even today, always

slapping faces, the fluttering wings of dying swans. Brad confesses that he's known only five men intimately. He writes to them regularly -- carries their photos in his wallet. Lucky Brad, safe in the arms of alienation, doubts, and the sort of romantic ideals



which can never be realized. It's been a year since the first spot of tar appeared on my perfect body. But tender Brad would go in a month, considerably saving everyone all this trouble. He'd make a fine spook for this house. Sometimes I think I see them, those earlier residents of this, my last home. I fancy there's a nice old lady sitting in a rocking chair, over there in the corner. And

which please me as much as the naive conceits of my own first love. I've dissected them with all my doubts, yet there's no hint that they will ever fall from grace and suffer the decay of rapture into disillusionment. The prognosis is forever. Almost, I am seduced into abandoning my cynicism before it becomes eternal. It's as if their nocturnal frenzies and daytime domesticities

... the men at the card table lift their misty eyebrows benignly and toast me with their beers.

a group of working men at a card table, playing rummy, drinking beer, their faint tableau intermingled with the atoms of my bed. Sometimes they pause, they listen. I've realized that ghosts are haunted by the living. I think I'll enjoy being a ghost. I picture myself popping from my shattered body like a baby from a womb, into the gossamer arms of a poltergeist midwife, to begin a new, clean existence which will last as long as this island dangles below America. A pure voyeur, I'll take my pleasures in second-hand thrills. First thing, I'll glide down the lane to peek through the window of the little garage apartment where the boy and girl live. My aviators of amour! They're very young, so young I have to wonder if their arrangement is legal. There's no sign that they attend school. The boy works at his uncle's garage and the girl makes sea-shell souvenirs for tourists. Their home, not much larger than a horse stall, is too small for company and visitors sit outside in old aluminum chairs, or sprawl on blankets: brothers and sisters, cousins and uncles and aunts, mothers and fathers. Life in a Key West lane. Their situation, which would be perceived as a tragedy in most other towns, attracting social workers and even the police, seems idyllic here. How I adore this place for permitting such thing! Brad would say the kids are in love. It's nice to think so. I suppose one day they'll make a baby. I can hear one of them now, as I write. Her (or his?) rhythmic animal cries are leisurely rising in a crescendo: "Oh... Oh... Oh-h-h!" They have seized the fabled extra hour of the day. I'm addicted to their routines,

have flown through the ceiling of mortal life and onward to... whatever unspoiled thing there is above the common, fragile understandings which frame our hopes, to some lost and legendary touchstone beyond the sky where we can believe that life is worth -- everything! Thinking this, I am mysteriously uplifted. I am tired, I am sick, I am dying, yet I get up from my desk and stand by the window. The old woman in the rocking chair smiles like a personified cloud, the men at the card table lift their misty eyebrows benignly and toast me with their beers. I slowly take off my silk pajamas and stand nude in the ivory light which floods the room. Mr. Moon glows yellow beneath the black parasol of the night. He winks at me -- and suddenly I realize where True Love has hidden all these years! I must tell Brad! Love is being held captive on the dark side of the moon. All we have to do... is to spread our wings, like the children down the lane. To soar above the stone-hearted cities and their human cocoons, their deserts of souls, their lakes and rivers of people, above the seven seas and the pirates who sail them, leaving behind all those bitter histories which inscribe the maps of betrayal and innocence lost. Sweet hope! I run my hands over my body and dare to think that I am beautiful again. I am happy, I am drunk with moonshine, and for a while I can fear no evil. Yes! Yes! It's time to count my spots!

Editor's Note: This story won the Hemingway Days Short Story Contest in 1987.

Conversation in a Bar

AUGUST, 1981

by Helen R. Chapman

SATURDAY MORNING, HOT, sticky. Ben sits at the bar staring at his rum and coke. It's a slow morning. The barmaid has plenty of time to talk to her boyfriend. A couple of summer tourists drink beer at the other side of the bar from Ben. Ben has things on his mind, the man he is to meet here at noon who might want to buy him out at a good price. And his wife. She's always on Ben's mind. Ben pays no attention to the neatly dressed man who sits down next to him and orders a beer.

"HOT, ISN'T IT?" the man says to Ben.

Ben turns his head slowly and appraises the man before answering. He sees a man in his fifties, pleasant roundish face, dressed in a blue sports shirt and gray slacks.

"Yeah," Ben replies and gestures to the barmaid for another drink. She moves slowly to make it, waving a fly away from her nose. The Bahama fans overhead whir like unenthused bees.

"You live here?" the man asks.

"Yeah," says Ben.

"IM JUST VISITING, myself," the man says. The barmaid brings Ben's drink and starts to take money from the bills in front of Ben.

"No, no," the man says. "Don't take his money. I'll get that one." Ben doesn't respond. He doesn't want the man to buy him a drink. But he drinks it anyway.

"Whadya do here? I mean, for a livin', the man asks.

"I run a bar," Ben says.

"Oh, yeah? I used to run a bar up north." Ben shows no interest. "In Lebanon, Pee Ay." Ben just nods and sips his drink. "What kinda bar you got?" the man asks.

Ben shrugs. "Just a bar, not much. It's nothin' tourists would like."

The man signals the barmaid. Ben doesn't offer to buy the man's drink.

"I GUESS YOU think I'm too friendly," the man says. "I've never been down here before and I'm just kinda curious about the people who live here."

Ben turns to him. "Look, it's just I gotta lot of things on my mind. Usually, I'm friendly, too. Gotta be, in the bar business."

The man gives Ben a sympathetic smile. "Well, I guess we all got problems these days. I gotta few myself."

Ben tries to be interested. "What you do for a livin'?"

THE MAN GIVES a small embarrassed laugh. "Well, I'm sorta between jobs right now. Havin' a few domestic problems. You know."

Ben doesn't respond.
He doesn't want the man
to buy him a drink.
But he drinks it
anyway.

"Yeah, I know," Ben replies, nodding understandingly. "Wife problems, huh?"

"Somethin' like that. Say, my name's Jim Benson. What's yours?"

"Ben." They shake hands.

"Ben what?" Jim asks.

"Just Ben. We don't bother much about last names down here. Can't ever remember 'em anyway."

Jim waves at the barmaid. "What's your name, honey?"

"Marilyn. Want another round?"

"Why not," says Jim jovially. "Too hot to do much else today."

MARILYN MOVES LAZILY away to make the drinks. The two tourists have left and Marilyn's boyfriend is playing the pinball machine. The streets are empty. The heat rises up from the pavement with a seemingly impenetrable quality. The only sound is the occasional ding of the pinball machine. Ben feels that they four in the bar are the only living people on earth at that moment.

Over the next beer, Jim begins to wax philosophical. "You know, Ben, the trouble today is there's just no more challenges for a man. Like a frontier or somethin'. Know what I mean? You just have to go on pluggin' away at the same old job, gettin' nowhere. Boy, once upon a time, I had big ideas like you wouldn't

believe. That's when I had the bar I mentioned." Ben lets Jim run on, happy to be relieved of conversational obligations.

"Yeah, boy, I'll tell ya," Jim says. "I was gonna get me a big place, couple of bars, restaurant, live band, you name it. And my wife, we'd just gotten married then, well, she went along with the idea. Then you know what happens, don't ya? Kids. One right after the other, seemed like, and I never could get outta that rut." Jim pauses speculatively. Ben nods and drinks.

"You got kids?" Jim asks.

"Yeah, two."

"You get along with your wife okay?"

"Okay enough," Ben downs his drinks

"... Kids. One right after the other, seemed like, and I never could get outta that rut."

and calls Marilyn. "Let's have a copule more here, Marilyn."

JIM FINISHES HIS beer. "I've had enough beer. Make it a bourbon and soda this time, honey."

"Marilyn," says Marilyn. Ben reaches in his pocket and pulls out a fifty dollar bill.

"Well, you're doin' okay," Jim says, eying the bill appreciatively. "I got my steadiest," Ben says. "They keep me goin' through the summer."

Marilyn returns with the drinks and looks questioningly at Ben. Ben nods towards the fifty.

"You can break it, can't ya?" Ben says to her.

"Smart ass!" she retorts. "You're not drinkin' in your own bar now, you know." Ben laughs.

Jim raises his glass. "Well, cheers and all that. Sure glad I ran into ya." They drink. Both men are beginning to feel more mellow.

"NOW, SERIOUSLY, BEN, like I was sayin', don't you agree that men just don't have any challenges anymore?"

Ben nods, this time firmly. "Sure, I agree all right. But maybe I'm gettin' a little old to give a damn."

"Aha!" Jim explodes, holding up his right arm, index finger extended, the pose of an orator about to make a point. "That's where you're wrong. You're never too old. Now I'll bet there's some deep down longing you've had all your life. Somethin' you wanted to do and never did and still could."

Ben stares at his glass, thinking. Jim waits expectantly.

"Well, yeah," Ben finally says. "There's somethin'." He doesn't continue.

"What?"

Ben laughs. "Oh, it's too damn silly." He still stares at his glass, but sheepishness has replaced thoughtfulness.

"Now, Ben, it can't be silly if it's a lifelong ambition. Come on, tell me." Jim lays an encouraging hand on Ben's shoulder.

Ben glances around. Marilyn is reading a newspaper on the opposite side of the bar. The boyfriend is still dinging his way to thousands of points on the pinball machine. The fans whir.

"WELL," BEN SAYS, lowering his voice, "I've always wanted to steal a car."

"You what?" Jim rears back on his stool, his mouth hanging open.

"Steal a car," Ben repeats.

"But that's not an ambition," Jim accuses.

"I didn't say it was," Ben says. "It's just somethin' I always wanted to do."

Jim begins to laugh, a slow laugh at first which increases in volume until his face turns red. Marilyn turns toward them with curiosity. "That calls for another round," Jim booms. He keeps laughing until Marilyn brings the drinks. Ben is chagrined. He doesn't notice Jim nod toward Ben's money when Marilyn goes to collect.

"WELL, HOW WOULD you go about it?" Jim asks when he finally controls his laughter. "I mean, there's only one road off this island."

"You really want to know?" Ben asks him uncomfortably.

"I really want to know."

"Well, I'd pick a nighttime. That'd be easier. I guess it could be done durin' the day, but nights'd be better. I'd wait outside someplace like a bar and watch for

"... I'd specially look for a couple, you know, a hot date where the guy is trying to impress the girl ...

Then I'd steal the car."

somebody to park in a good spot, like a sorta dark spot, outta the way. I'd specially look for a couple, you know, a hot date where the guy is tryin' to impress the girl and you know they're gonna stay in that bar for a while, maybe a couple hours. Then I'd steal the car."

JIM IS SERIOUS now and listening intently. "You mean, hotwire it?"

Simile Around Me

by Christina Harwood, fifth grade student of Mrs. Jan Donaldson in Creative Writing at Sigsbee Elementary School.

The Everglades hum like a crowd whispering a song.

The fish swims like a racing car.

The palm fronds wave like a bird taking off.

The seaweed sways like your cat's tail.

The spiders' legs move like they are marching in a parade.

The lightning bug glows like a polka dot in the sky.

The jellyfish stings like needles poking you.

The hitchhikers' stick like bubble gum on your shoes.

The raccoons scavenge like someone looking for buried treasure.

The deer freezes like a stone statue.

The leaves flutter to the ground like golden snow falling.

The sun shines like an orange fireball.

* A "hitchhiker" is a furry seed pod which sticks to whatever brushes by it.

"Sure." Ben's drinks are taking hold and so is his confidence. "It'd be easy. Before they knew the car was gone, I'd be in Lower Matecumbe."

"And then what?"

"Whadya mean, and then what?"

"I mean, what would you do then?"

Ben guffawed. "Well, dummy, I'd keep on goin', that's what."

"But by now the cops'd know. Grand Theft Auto is serious."

"Course it's serious," Ben says righteously. "You think I'm gonna mess around with penny-ante stuff? I'd get up to Dade County and get me some Dade plates and keep on goin' like that till I got to Alabama where I don't need the title, and I'd trade it in on another car and keep goin' till I didn't want to keep goin' anymore."

BEN POLISHES OFF his drink and sets the glass down with a resounding thud. "Nother round here, Marilyn." Jim sits quietly, pondering.

"Well, now," he says, "Ben, that's some idea all right. But what about your wife and kids?"

Ben starts laughing so hard that he almost chokes. "You dummy, I'm not gonna steal a car. I just said that I wanted to." He keeps on laughing until he does choke. Jim slaps him on the back.

THE BAR STARTS to fill up now. Young couples, whooping it up, buy pitcher

give me a lift. See, I'm trying to track down this guy I know lives here. Owes me some bucks. I'm pretty broke right now and I sure would like to find 'im."

Ben nods. "Yeah, well, I wish I could, but the reason I'm sittin' here is because I gotta meet a guy at noon on business. He's interested in buyin' my place and if the price is right, it's important to me. Plus my wife is havin' her hair done and she wants to go shoppin' later and I'll get holy hell if she can't find me."

JIM LOOKS FORLORN. "Guess you'll be tied up for a few hours then, huh?"

"Yeah, guess I will, worse luck." They both finish their drinks silently. Then Ben says, "Well, look, Jim, could you use twenty? Till you catch up to that guy?"

Jim gives him a grateful smile. "I sure appreciate it, old buddy. I'll get it back to ya, I sure will."

Ben waves the thought away with his hand. "Don't worry about it. Good luck."

JIM GETS UP, pocketing the twenty, and calls out goodbye to Marilyn, but she is

too busy to hear him. Ben glances at the clock. It's just noon and his appointment walks through the door. They move to a table where they can talk business better. At one forty-five they shake hands on the deal and Ben returns to the bar alone to wait for his wife. He is out of cigarettes and remembers the carton in the car. He calls out to Marilyn, "I'll be right back, Marilyn. Goin' to the car for cigarettes." But Ben is not sure if she heard him or not, as busy as the bar is now.

BEN COMES BACK a few minutes later, slumps in his seat and dejectedly holds his head in his hands. Marilyn notices him.

"What's the matter with you?" Then suddenly realizing that Ben is alone, she says, "Say, what happened to that guy you were sittin' with?"

Ben looks up at her and gives her a silly grin. "Well, honey, I reckon he's in Lower Matecumbe by now."

Editor's Note: This story won the Hemingway Days Festival Short Story Contest in 1982.



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Baseball

MAY, 1985

by Chris Gantry

DUNCAN CUT AN odd figure at the plate. He was naturally sway-backed and



long of neck which accentuated his protruding face. A shock of brown hair hung constantly between his wide-set eyes.

He stamped his foot impatiently, waiting for the pitch. The ball curved, catching the inside corner. "Strike two!" shouted the umpire. Duncan stepped back from the plate. The flies were annoying him. He shook them off. Planting his feet firmly, he doubled over in that renowned crouch of his. The pitch was a fast ball. To Duncan, the ball came in slow motion.

Duncan remembered his childhood, dreaming of a baseball career. His whole life had led him to this moment. It was

Wind

JUNE, 1985

by Chris Gantry

FROM LACK OF exercise, the old couple had lapsed into total physical atrophy. He supported his gnarled, rigid

body by grabbing onto the creaky furniture scattered about the shambling farmhouse. In this way, he moved from room to room. She, an ill-tempered crone, dragged her useless form about on two discolored,

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knotty canes. Their eyes were cobwebbed and airless. Only on rare moments did they recall an ancient, carefree time of mirth and lightheartedness. But a silence crept between them over the years, rooting them to their chairs with a merciless gravity. There they'd sit, pathetically staring.

IT WAS A full moon that night. The spring wind snorted and pawed like a wild horse, ramming the farmhouse with an obsessed fury. The beams and braces moaned like the hold of a ship. The couple hardly stirred, clinging to the armrests of their chairs; heads pressed into the greasy cushions.

Suddenly, the wind threw open the back door with the wail of a female wolf. It exploded down the hallway, snatching the couple out of their chairs like two rag dolls. The man and woman screamed, flailing out their arms for balance. The room was a wall of thunder.

WITH THE WIND careening about their

Indians MAY, 1985

by Chris Gantry

JERRY CULLIN WAS fascinated by Indians. Besides reading all he could find out about them, he haunted the antique shops looking for memorabilia and relics. He even went as far as decorating his apartment like a tepee. He would experiment with war paint while watching

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bodies, the couple spun in a succession of semi-circles and triangular turns, crying out in futile hoots and howls. The wind split apart against the ceilings, diving beneath the man and woman's feet. In back-bending dips and arcs, they were blown through the bedroom out into the hallway, where they painfully collided with each other.

Somehow, they managed to lock arms as a furious blast of air pushed them out through the open rear door into the back yard. In acrobatic swoops, they were hurled toward the hilly fields, splicing, somersaulting, and stretching.

IN A MOMENT of awakened abandon, the couple suddenly began laughing. Their lungs hungrily sucked in the cold night air, as their legs churned faster. Their clothes were in shreds and falling off.

They made a series of strange cries, softly biting each other on the necks and shoulders, before galloping into the hills of frost, the moonlight on their nakedness. ■

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"That's not what I said," snapped Jerry, "... you're putting words in my mouth."

"You're just trying to get our money like you did all the other dogs," snipped the pomeranian. "We're on to you, Chief," yelled a scrawny black labrador. "Look," said Jerry, "I don't have to do this ... I'm just tryin' to help you guys out ... all I'm asking for is a measly hundred bucks ... I know you guys got that much."

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"That's not what

Days Gone By

The richness of Key West history aptly lends itself as fodder for the curious appetites of writers here. Trains, wreckers, seamen, smugglers, hurricanes -- all of it happened on this island.

The Anchor Inn

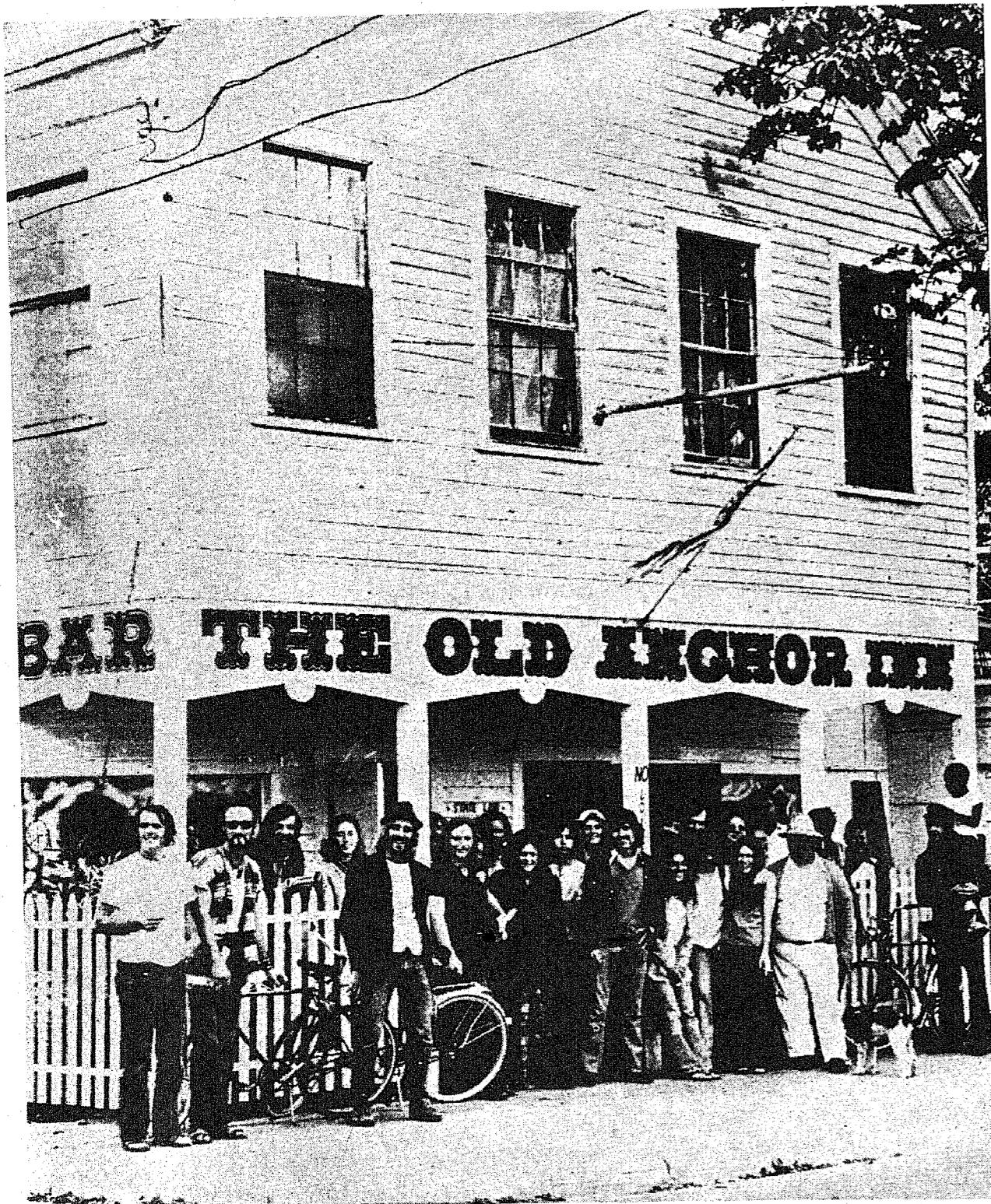
SEPTEMBER, 1977

by John Hellen

MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTION of anything happening at the Anchor Inn is while having eggs and toast one morning at Shorty's. Seated in my favorite chair, the second one down the right hand aisle in

what had always been Irish's section, I had viewed many times the shuttered building diagonally across the street. Despite a much neglected exterior and a five year accumulation of trash around it, I always thought the building to have an inviting facade.

On this particular morning Irish and I



A smiling crew at the Old Anchor Inn -- a local bar which, in its short time, brought together people from all walks of life. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

were both surprised to note a tall, stout man with a proportionately large dog standing in front of the solidly shuttered 208 Club. "Oh, Saint Joseph," said Irish, "maybe they're going to open back up that old pub."

The 208 sign was a cobweb of unnoticed weathering that hung crookedly from the underside of the building's upper porch. Irish went on to relate that the bar had been closed for five years, and she remembered it as a pleasant spot to sit on hot afternoons after she got off work.

With both of us spying on his intention, we saw the man carefully set down on the window ledge a glass of red liquid he held in one hand. In his other hand he carried a wrecking bar with which he proceeded to pry open several nail-tight shutters, which, when swung open, revealed the musty interior of the long-cloistered bar ...

"MORNING," I SAID. "See you working hard here. What are you planning to do?" "Oh, hi there," said the man in a friendly tone, setting down his paintbrush and picking up his glass. "Gonna open a bar here. Come on in and look around." He introduced himself as Bud, and his shadow -- the Great Dane -- as Hercules. "Like a glass of wine?" he offered. "Sure, thanks." The interior of the building was freshly painted, and the bar itself curved around in an unequal octagon that took up most of the room. "When do you think you might be opening?" I asked. "Oh pretty soon. Maybe next week," he said. "Well, the building looks much better since you opened it up. Good luck." "Yeah, well, thanks. Why don't you come by for the opening party?"

THE OPENING NIGHT of the Anchor Inn saw a great many people from all walks of life in Key West mingling in an informal cocktail party atmosphere, with Bud and his gracious wife Dorothy happily moderating the festivity. The throng of guests were mostly people who had been in Key West for some time, for in those days (early 1970) the island was not so frequented with short-time visitors as it is now. The attire of those present ranged from the natty to the ratty, and little did I realize then that this spectrum of styles was to be the very influence that would make the Anchor the congenial, and later on zany, bar that it was to become. People who never came into social contact with each other on this 2 x 4 island were readily drawn that night into the suspended time warp of equality enkindled by the equanimous and jovial Bud and Dorothy. Theirs was a graciousness that was evenly extended to the Mayor, to construction workers, to fishermen, to celebrities, and to hippies. They were never too preoccupied or self important to listen and laugh with anyone. If any one factor was to make the Anchor a legend, it was the unprecedented array of personalities that claimed Bud and Dorothy as friends.

From opening night on, the Anchor was

seldom to witness a slow day. No matter what time of day or night, there usually could be found an avid discussion garnished with eccentric gestures, or a cross bar mock serious argument, or a poker-faced game of billiards played by players good enough or drunk enough to risk a dollar on the outcome, or a solitary seat on the sill of the large Monkey Tom mural shutters, where Duval Street could be observed floating past. On a crowded weekend evening one was likely to see everyone one knew locally. Two or three friends soon would become a group of six or seven when joined by other friends. Acquaintanceships were struck up between strangers -- if not through introduction by mutual friends, then through the taproom diplomacy of bartender Bud. The octagonal Anchor was more often than not casually surrounded by a brigade of merry-faced conversationalists, some seated, some standing, some leaning on elbow, who, fueled with tropical concoctions of rum and juices, would while away happy hours in what developed into a gregarious seance intent on celebrating the here and now ...

GIVEN SUCH A blend of different personalities alloyed and tempered in the melting pot of Bud's affability, the Anchor developed a personality of its own. Much of this personality was the spontaneous flash of a happening: an event that could cause a group of forty people -- forty very different people -- to laugh with side-splitting emphasis at a barrel-voiced actor reciting a soliloquy from *Hamlet* while balancing a mug of beer on his head, or to give an impromptu round of applause to an outraged Californian motorcyclist who strainingly managed to right his Harley horse after it had been knocked off its pegs by a careless motorist, or to pass like a communion cup the beer-filled hollow leg of a man who had lost his real one in the war. One evening upon entering the bar, the then not so well known Jimmy Buffett catapulted himself into an impromptu mime and dance to the accompaniment of Sammy Davis' "Candy Man." Jimmy jumped up on the



SPK
People from all walks of life

stage and assumed the theatrical postures of a Jolson minstrel, as he dropped to one knee and threw his arms wide out. The lip-synchronized dancer then leaped down from the stage and up onto the bar, where, still in time with Davis, he traced a flawless hopscotch around and over drinks. He ended the song in a torso-writhing evocation that mimicked the most passionate accentuations of opera.

During the two and a half years of its existence, the Anchor became a kind of gallery for future-shocked bohemian artists. With all value judgements suspended, the initially bare interior walls of the bar gradually were covered with a quiltwork of canvases, driftwood paintings, portraits, caricatures and indescribable representations of altered consciousness. The hodgepodge included works by the artist Forshier, who during the days of the Anchor moved from his surreal penchant for My Lai massacre scenes of random legs, eyes, and bloated organs to a much serener and more visually palatable style of realistic seascape. Both of Forshier's periods were in evidence at the Anchor with his shrimp boat at primary color sunrise and his hauntingly blue-black moonset constituting two of the three large shutters that opened out on to Charles Street. His more surreal attempts and agonized self portraits hung randomly around the bar.

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Bob Windisch, who for some years operated a gallery on Greene Street, was once commissioned by another bar in town to paint a mural on some newly installed panels of plywood. Upon seeing the results of Windisch's labors, the bar owner gasped and reached for a can of white paint in order to reseal what he felt to be an obvious mockery of art. Windisch was saddened to learn that the owner could perceive no serious reaction in the mural and shrugged his condescension to the owner's whitewash censorship. But in the nick of time, the knowledgeable publisher of this newspaper, Bill Huckle, arranged to have other new panels of plywood replace those painted on, and quickly introduced the mural into the company of the Anchor's unrestricted collection. So large was the mural that it had to be cut in two in order to fit into the only walls large enough to accommodate it -- those in the poolroom.

A GOOD PART of the time I spent at the Anchor was given over to watching or playing pool. The pool room annex contained, besides a pool table and Windisch's mural, the trunk of a banyan tree around which the room was built, a large fan which had to be taken into consideration on certain shots, for its gust could affect the course of the ball, a sign warning "No wagering," which was mitigated by the finer print, "that means no money on the table," and a collection of interesting souls whose common bond was appreciation for a perfectly played round of 8 ball. I never had played much pool prior to the days of the Anchor, but a friend and co-worker of mine, Louis Knowles, and I used to have a few beers each night after work, and whenever the table was free he'd challenge me to a game. It was partly due to Louis' style--an un hurried but preconceived attack that took him around the table at a minimum of walking, and which easily allowed him clear shots each time due to my own financial inability to fuel the table with a quarter each time Louis cleared it, that I took an avid interest in this game of tangents and angles.

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Page 44--July 1988--Solares Hill

Another teacher of mine, Gil Grady, was not only an excellent shot but also a superb showman. Feigning perplexity at each shot he encountered, Grady would excessively chalk his stick, shake his head and mutter about the inconsistencies of cruel fate, call a seemingly impossible shot, offer to forfeit the game, and then with much concentration and up to ten practice strokes would masterfully launch the cue ball into the muddle of colored ones, where, before the eyes of all, the object ball he called would somehow go in. A sly smile was the only gesture that would betray his otherwise perturbed visage.

The most technically perfect shooter to play regularly at the Anchor was Michael. To receive one shot when playing him was to be lucky. He ran the table at will, but with a benign air that didn't scare off competition. Whenever he played, there appeared many more challengers than normal, not so much with hopes of beating him as with aspirations of learning from him. I once won a game against him, but only after he had beaten me some twenty games over several months.

THE FIRST YEAR of the Anchor, as mentioned, saw many people from both sides of the tracks frequent it. Local officials, professional people, fishermen, tourists, restaurant owners and entertainers all found the Anchor a pleasant and interesting spot. Its location on the main street, its quaint picket fence, which had a bar along its backside, its absurd art

nightmarish cover-up for the brash peculiarities of those on acid, or those belligerently drunk, or those subverting by high wagering the camaraderie of the pool table. It became a snake pit. Notice, of course, was taken by the community of the gradually louder, dark bar where people never before seen in the community stood along the outside picket fence jeering Conch Trains or impaling empty beer cans on the picket points. Drug transactions took place in the lot behind the building, and people with nowhere to go took refuge in abandoned cars on the lot. Notice of such things breeds complaints. Many complaints. Key West was beginning to view the anchor as a nuisance. More complaints. A raid was staged. A minor violation was found. Bud was arrested. Legal hassles ensued. The Beverage Department got into the act and, incredibly, decreed that the Anchor be torn down. The license finally was revoked.

During the time between the raid and the revocation of the license there passed three disconsolate months when nobody knew what fate awaited the bar. Business dropped off as Bud and his bartenders put the cap on the gusher of transient hedonism and howling soirees. Trouble makers were expelled, the back lot policed, and the decibel of hilarity was kept in check. Nevertheless, many local patrons never returned. The bar sat empty much of the time. It plummeted from the number one seller of beer in Monroe County to near last. The day the revocation notice was received

by Bud and Dorothy they realized they were out of business. They told Tom the bartender, who had been with them from the beginning, to give away, drink by drink, what remained of the stock. Word spread fast, and soon a throng of thirsties filled up the Anchor for the last time. Of those present on that last afternoon only a fraction had known the bar all the way through its short and stormy life, while a sizeable percentage of those belting down Bud's free liquor had never bought a drink there at all.

OVER EGGS AND TOAST the next morning I gazed at the again shuttered

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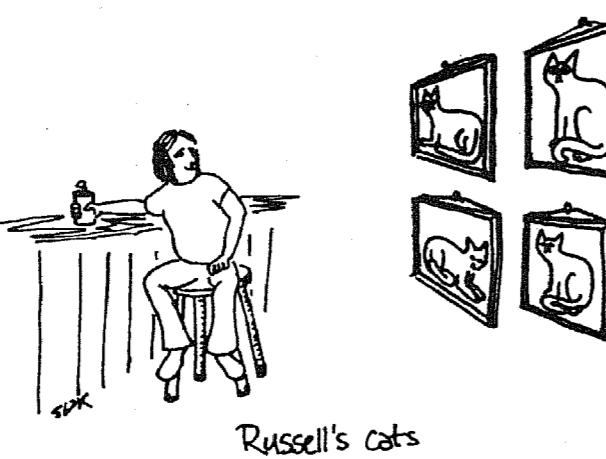
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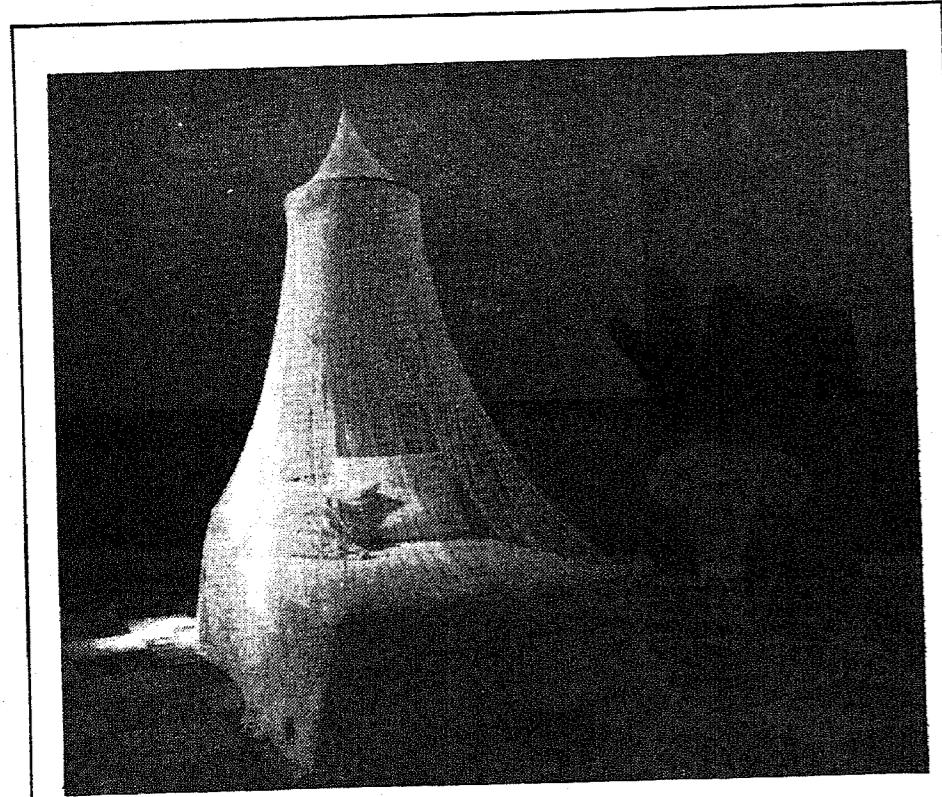
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Russell's cats

collection, and its assortment of waterfront characters were all reasons for going there. But just as predictably as the seasons change so do bar rooms. There really needs to be only one fight or one witless foulmouth to drive away some customers forever. It was not thought of as slumming to go to the Anchor in its first year and a half or so of business. But gradually, as more people found the Keys, the Anchor was found. The long standing goodwill of the Anchor did its best to accommodate the inflow season people, but the newcomers brought with them a proportionate number of homeless children, wise guys, acid freaks, and shysters. The place evolved into a crowded free-for-all where loud screams and pushy manners eclipsed conversation. The juke box became a



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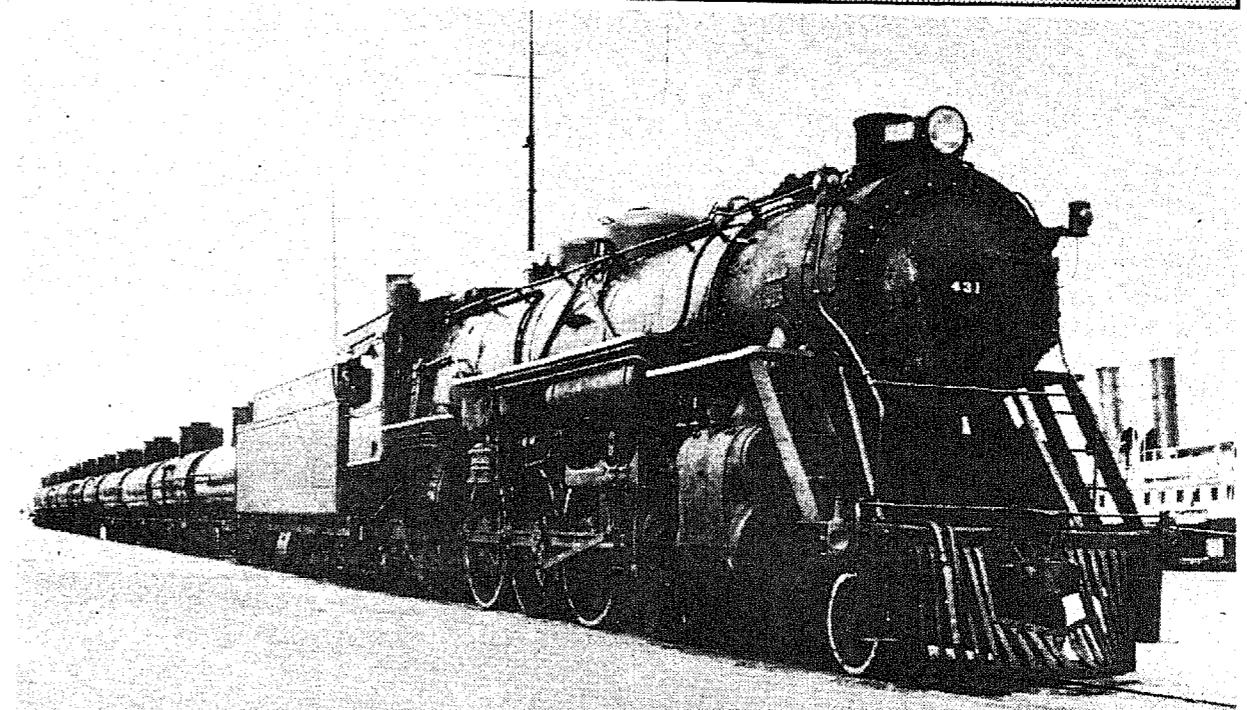
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Key West, The "Havana Special" and Dylan Thomas APRIL, 1987



Locomotive #431 on Trumbo Point. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

by Albert Perez

KEY WEST WAS a delightful experience of discovery in the early 1930s, when, for me, the island city was the setting for the essence of Dylan Thomas' poem, "Fern Hill":

*Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,*

*The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes ...*

The poet's exuberance had a pastoral setting; mine had Key West in the railroad days.

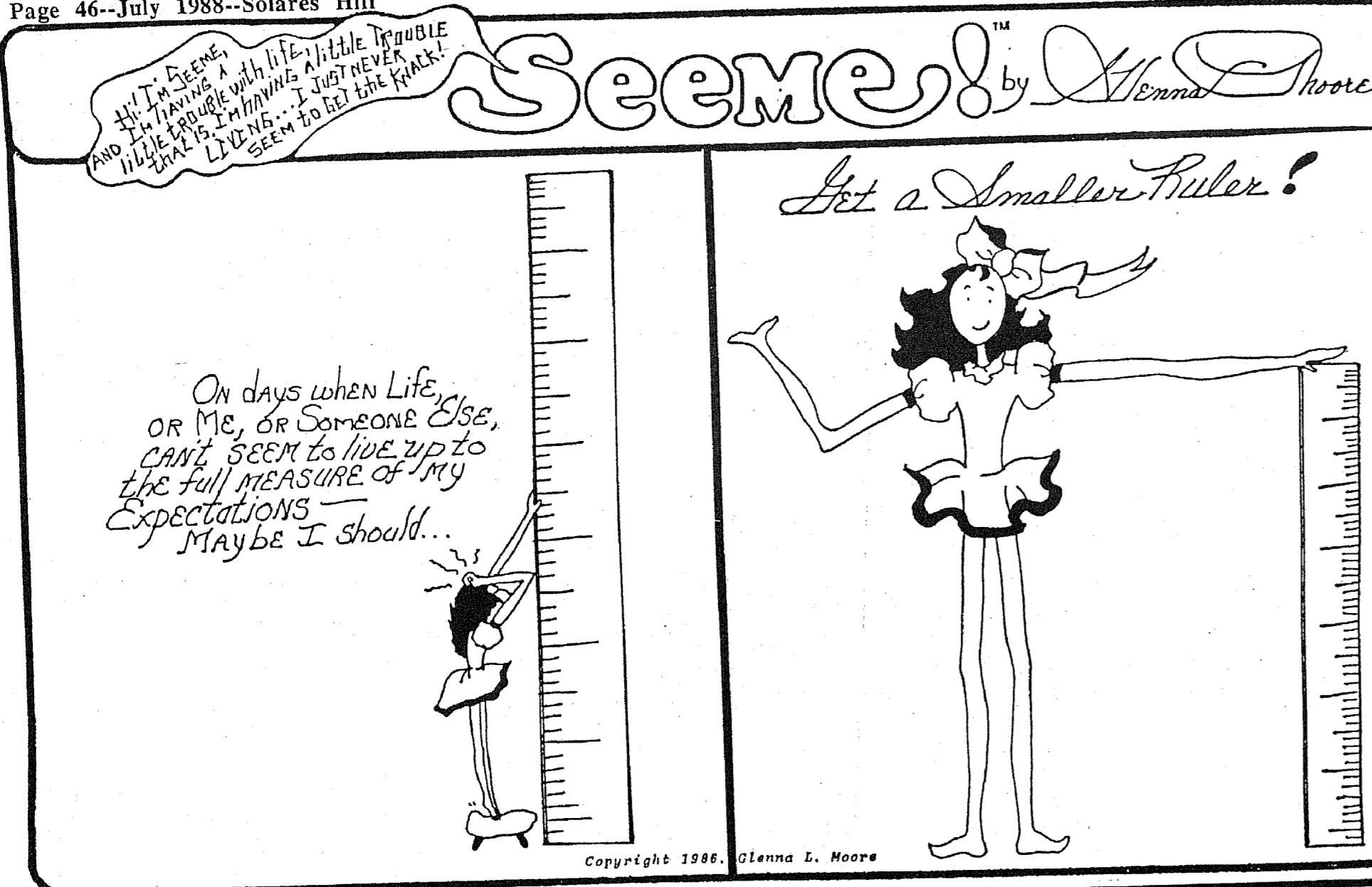
*And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades,
that time allows
In all his tuneful turnings so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace.*

Key West lacked something forever gone and irreplaceable when its 100-mile transmarine link to the mainland no longer resounded to the "Havana Special." Thereafter, the mangroves were lorn and

formidable, the streets deprived. Of course, my senses had responded to other stimuli, but none had approached the sights and sounds of the iron horse that ran over the sea.

*Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.*

AUTOMOBILES HAD NO drivers -- a car was a fantastic contraption with a will of its own. Pirulís were pointed lollipops sold off a cart by Gregorio Vández. Coast artillerymen wore campaign hats and puttees as they shuffled to Sousa. City Hall was red bricks and a staircase entrance of filagreed iron. Perinkee's compressed air hose startled most anyone but those who were amused by it. The open ice truck had big cakes of burlap-covered ice and men standing on rear running boards snapping the bell rope. Crip Lastres sang "Spanish limes and I got 'em sweet!" Fishermen sold their catch of the day door-to-door, a mess of crawfish selling for a quarter. And the towered bell in the cemetery tolled for fires and whenever a fireman died.



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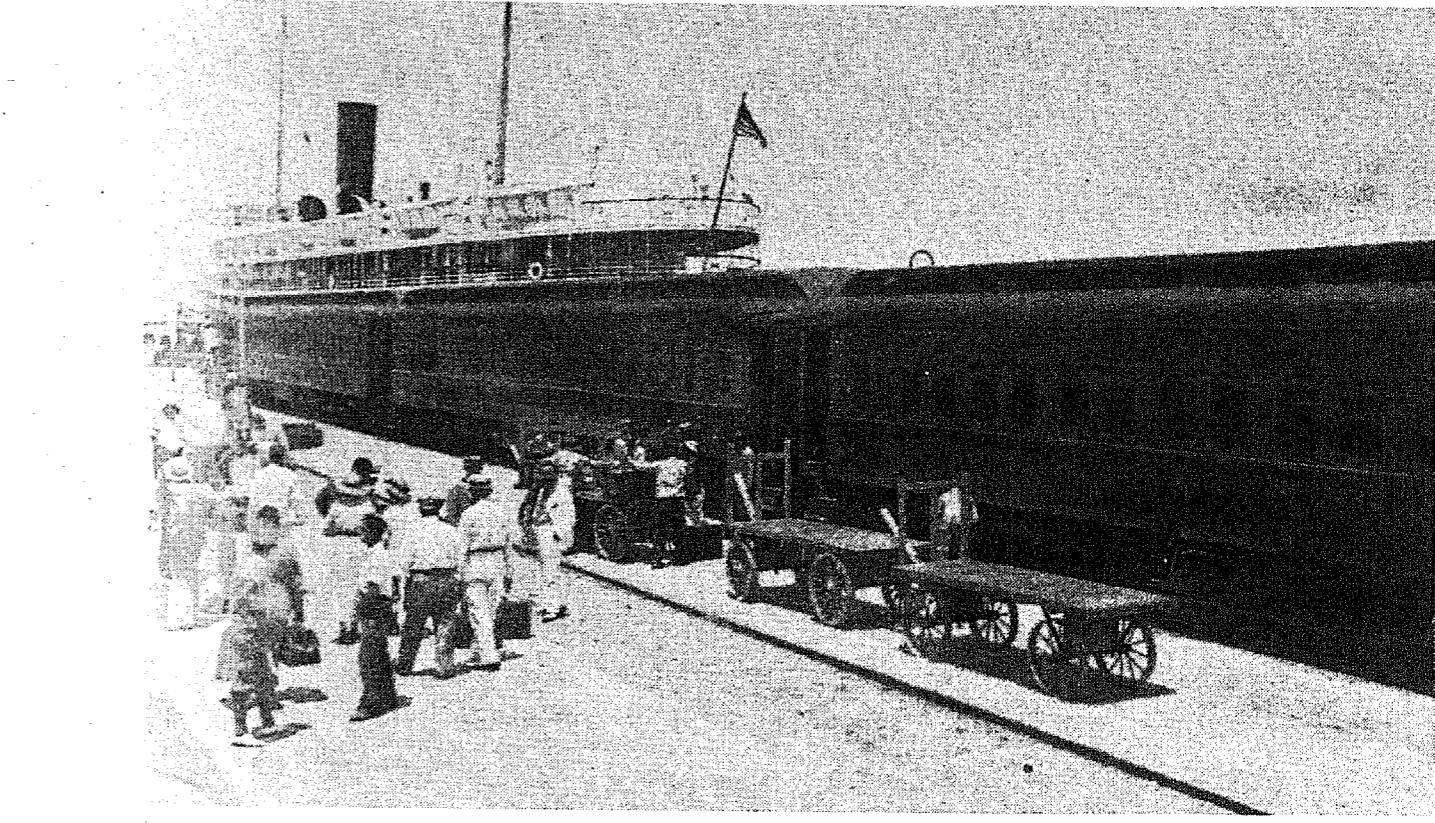
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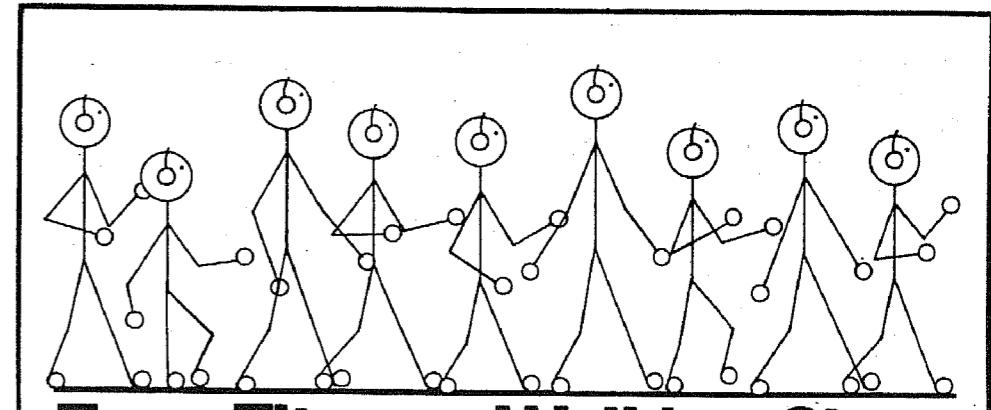


The Strand theatre had big, bright pictures that moved and talked -- a fantastic recreation of life on a grand scale, made to order. In them were: Will Rogers, a cowlick on his forehead; Gable and Beery, who flew biplanes and traded punches; and Ginger and Fred, who danced the continental. When the Strand burned, the projectionist's young son died in the fire.

The cadence of the locomotive and the deep blast of the steamship were omnipresent, for those emanated from Trumbo Point, where Key Westers went to look at trains, ships and travelers. There, the station was a splash of Flagler yellow on a sea of turquoise, and the trains were the muted umbers and blacks of a solid vitality. Those umber coach cars with the elongated white lettering proclaiming that they were of the Florida East Coast, Flagler System, somehow seemed incongruous in Key West; yet, there they were, solid, exciting and important. Where did they come from, and how did they get here?

I ARRIVED AT Trumbo just in time for the Special's locomotive to greet me with its relaxed power, clanging away as it pulled into the sunny incongruity of Key West. It spilled a trail of water and stressed the rails as it ground to a halt at the far end of the pier, where its big driving wheels assumed a poised dynamic to its steaming boiler and stoked firebox. The S.S. Florida, flying the checkered ensign of the P&O, lay hard by the Special to board its passengers.

Later, with the glowing light of the setting sun and the strange sound that voices take on in the isolation of open water, I studied the train as it pulled out of the pier, the locomotive spinning its drivers as it gained traction. I felt the sensation of moving with the train briefly, and averted my eyes to see what would become of this vision as it moved in space and time. When I looked again, the train had diminished,



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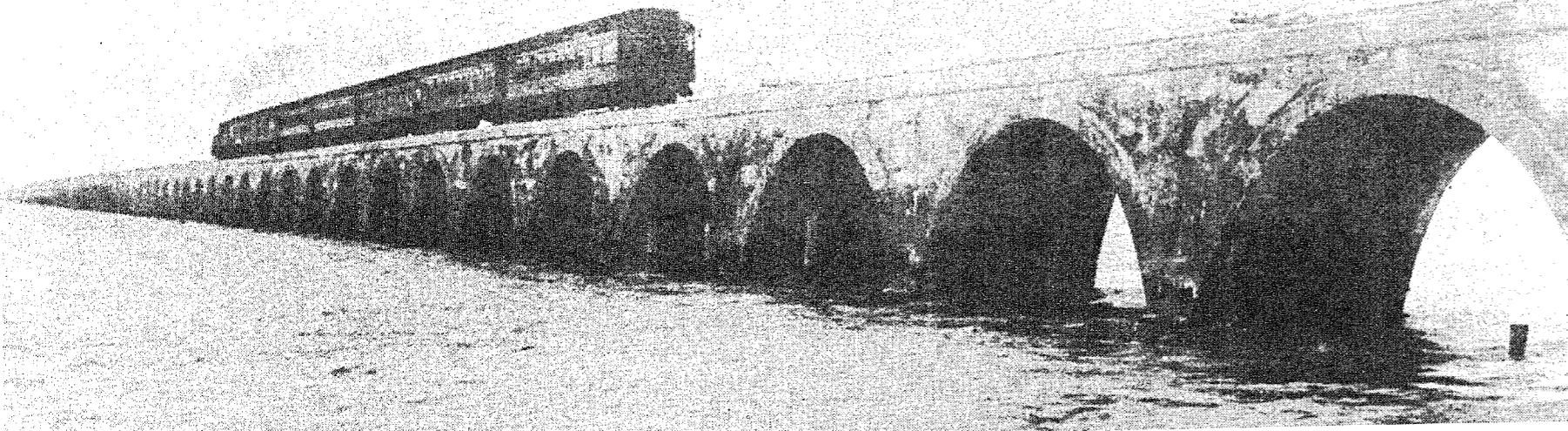
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The "Oversea Limited" in the extension's early years. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

and soon the distant vegetation swallowed the exposed vestibule of the last car and the lingering smoke vanished in the fading light. When Key West declared itself bankrupt and went on relief, I joined the exodus.

IT WAS MORNING and, as I boarded the train, I carried a cage with a canary in it. The train was next to another, and in between were loaded luggage wagons. Yardmen pried open wheel journal boxes and inspected them. Redcaps hustled. As the birdcage amused the passengers, my

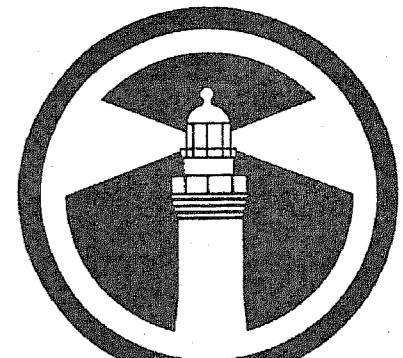
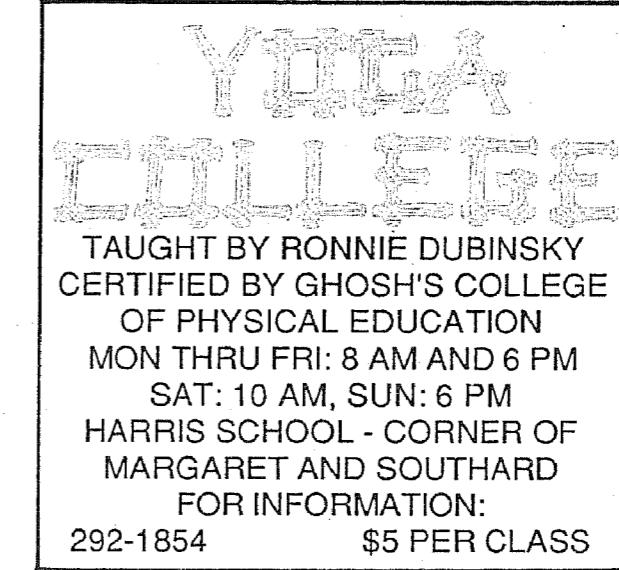
father remarked that a vagrant had been recently crushed by a train.

The railroad embankment that led from Trumbo formed the enclosure of Garrison Bight. The engine pulled its train across this with the rhythmic staccato of pounding cylinders and its whistle deep and plaintive -- poignant sounds that transcended their island outpost setting. The Special spoke of romance, and appealed to the spirit as it crossed Roosevelt Boulevard, penetrated the mangrove marsh to Stock Island, and gained the straight iron up the Keys, with their stench of rotting seaweed and every

gradation of hue from green to violet embracing the shoreline.

The engineer sped on the stretches of land and crept on the bridges. Mangrove islands accented the horizon and lush vegetation nestled a flagstop station whose official Flagler yellow with white trim and maroon base combination leapt out against the green. The train-watchers on its platforms were back-dropped by the yellow verticles of the station walls' moulded seams. The bridges, which were just wide enough for the track, had no guardrails.

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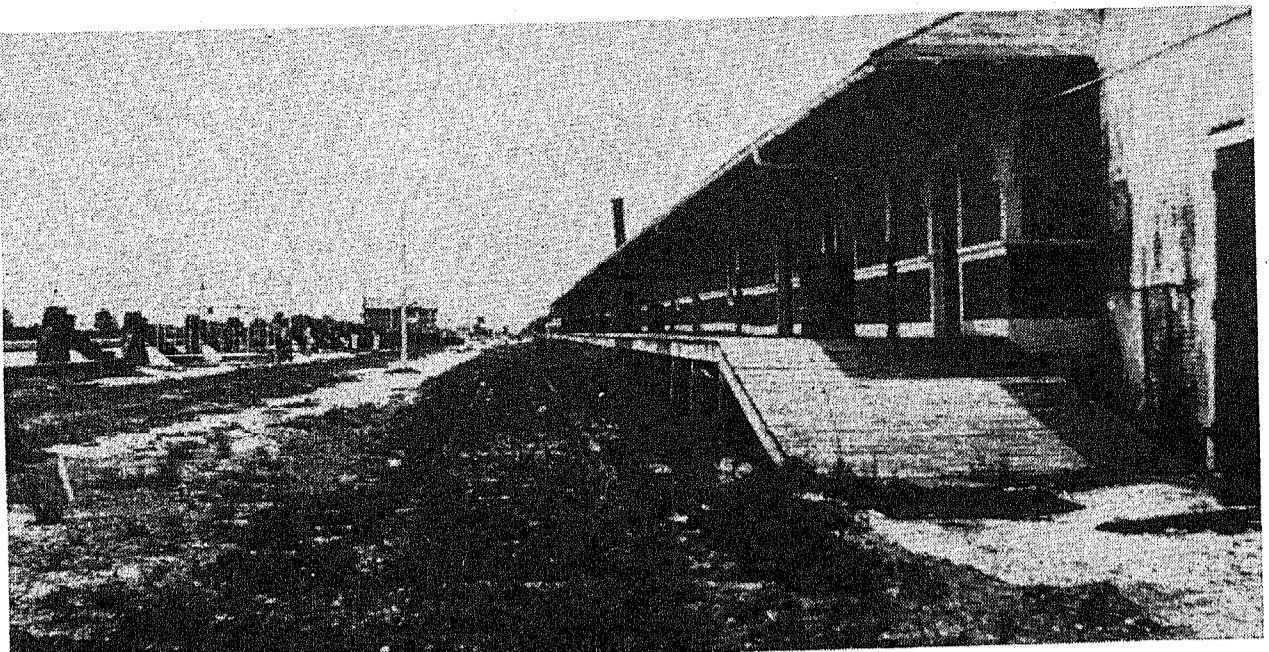


STORE

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 turquoise glass insulators and strung wires were the only evidence of the long bridge under the train. As these projections went slowly over the beautiful blue-green menace of the ocean, the effect was that of gliding over the depths below with the precarious sway and steady beat of the rails. Windows and mosquito screens were raised and the coach became one with the seascapes panorama. The butcher smiled as he appeared in the aisle with a tray full of goodies, among which were glass pistols filled with tiny balls of candy. When the wingwalls of the abutment went under, the train had crossed the bridge, but the camaraderie of the crossing stayed with the passengers.

NOT LONG AFTER my return to Key West, the neon sign of the Sociedad de Cuba on Duval Street swung in the rain as the Labor Day hurricane slammed into Matecumbe. The next day, the tracks at Islamorada stood up in a surreal twist of ties and steel. A string of coach cars lay on their sides. Below their elongated white lettering that said Florida East Coast, most of the windows were smashed. Volunteer workers wore gas masks to avoid the stench of rotting corpses. Bloated bodies of WWI veterans, many of whom had converged on Washington to form the "Bonus Army" in 1932, were burned in funeral pyres amid salvos of National Guard salutes and Salvation Army taps. The railroad company ordered its repair crews out of the Keys.

The citizens of Key West started a



West end of passenger pier after abandonment when the tracks at Trumbo lost their sheen to rust and weeds. Photo from Solares Hill archives.

petition to keep the railroad; however, to the F.E.C. the disaster was an opportune out. Roadbed washouts (the bridges were unscathed) in the upper Keys were enough for the company, in receivership, to abandon its line south of Florida City.

The clean-up and beautification efforts of the F.E.R.A., the depression-era agency that undertook the revitalization of Key West, had prompted the F.E.C. to give its passenger station a fresh coat of paint for the 1935-36 winter season, but the Flagler yellow no longer greeted the clear bell and clanking drivers of locomotives, and the tracks at Trumbo lost their sheen to rust and

weeds.

Tommy Bennett's rhumba combo no longer serenaded "Havana Special" passengers and Pedro Aguilar closed his pier kiosk. The access road to Trumbo that angled off Caroline Street led to silence.

*Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days,
 that time would take me
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the
 shadow of my hand.
 In the moon that is always rising,
 Nor that riding to sleep
 I should hear him fly with the high fields
 And wake to the farm forever fled from
 the childless land. □*



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West Side of White Street

April, 1980

by Jim Coan

THE WEST SIDE of White Street around Virginia and Catherine and Eliza is one corner of Key West where the relaxed home town ambience of the "old days" remains intact. Warm greetings in English and Spanish -- hi bubba! and que tal? -- are as familiar as the faces, and everyone seems to find time to stop and talk for awhile.

The M&M Sandwich Shop and Laundromat, at Virginia and White, is the scene of continual arrivals and departures by car, bike and foot from dawn 'til dark every day. Carpenters, politicians, office workers, housewives, firemen, and people on their way to the beach all stop just long enough for an espresso and some conversation.

Three or four hundred *buches* (little swallows) and cafes con leche are pumped out of the espresso machine daily. The cafe cubano and sandwiches are dispensed by owner Emelia Fernandez, her daughter Irene, and busy workers Antonio and Roberto. It's a very alert and alive scene with all the laundromat bustle and one of the best jukeboxes in town as a backdrop. "Ambiente cubano" is the way Emelia describes the intangible ingredient that makes this very social crossroads such a pleasant daily experience for so many Key Westers.

JUST A SHORT walk down the street is the tidy barbershop of 85 year old, bright blue-eyed Santiago Vandes. He started cutting hair when he was 17 and is the oldest working barber in Key West. He moved his barbershop to this location in 1953, and before that had been at the same location, 728 Duval Street, since 1914. In those days a shave or a haircut was 25¢ and he lived quite comfortably on \$17 a



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week. His business has helped him raise two families of five children each in his lifetime. Santiago still has a vivid memory of life on this island from the turn of the century on.

Berena's Fourth of July Restaurant is one of the most popular eating and meeting spots in Key West. Three to six hundred meals are served each day, and there's always a crowd from breakfast through dinner. The food is always good, and they feature such entrees as Paella Valenciana, Roast Pork, Palomilla Steak, black beans and rice and Berena Sangria (a secret recipe). Berena is a most gracious hostess, and the friendly atmosphere, as much as the consistency of the fine food, is the reason so many local people consider the Fourth of July their favorite place to dine in Key West.

Page's Paint Store is a very old Key West family business that moved over here from Caroline Street and Peacock Lane several years ago. Arnold Page is quite knowledgeable about old Key West and an astute observer of the local scene.

THE LATIN QUARTER pool hall is another very social setting. It's a place where men from the neighborhood hang out for awhile, shoot pool or play dominoes with their buddies.

Roland and Ocilia Ortiz have his and her shops across the street from each other. Ocilia's Fashions is for women and girls, and the other is for men and boys. Roland was a barber here for fifteen years and knows a lot of people in town. He would like to see the city put in some palm trees and planters and generally try to spruce up the street.



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Ofilia's Beauty Salon has been run by Ofilia Castillo for the past fifteen years. For several decades before, there had been a beauty shop in the same location. Ofilia, from Santa Clara, Cuba, has been here 22 years and from her window seat has a great view of the passing White Street scene.

JUAN MAYG'S, THE oldest family grocery store in Key West, is run by the founder's grandchildren, Estela, Juanita, and Lauretta. Juan Mayg, who started the business at Catherine and Watson in the 1890s, came from Guanabacoa, Cuba, where his family operated Mayg Bros. Furniture Store in the last century. His daughter, by the way, was Dolores Lopez, who was one of the founders of Mercedes Hospital which has recently been restored by Richard Lischer at 1209 Virginia Street around the corner.

After a hurricane took the roof off the old store it was moved to where the Kleen Wash is now -- at Catherine and White -- and finally to its present location.

This is a real neighborhood grocery and gathering place, and it's not unusual to see one of the local softball teams celebrating a



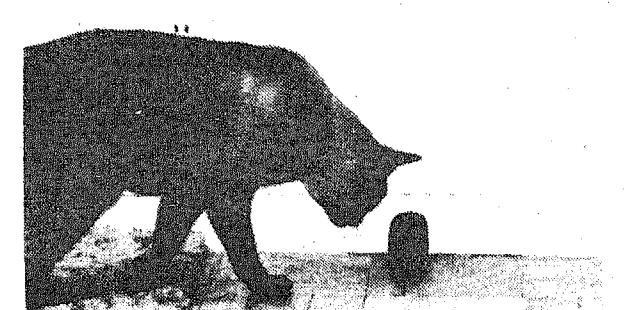
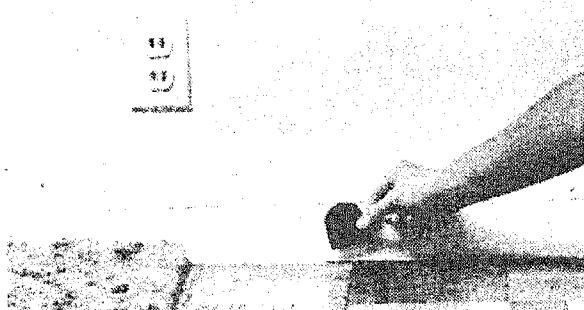
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victory out front at night.

Just down the street is La Plaza grocery run by Pedro ("Gallego") Tolmo, who, incidentally, was the first proprietor of the Fourth of July. He's had a grocery for 12 years (the first seven at Elizabeth and Fleming until the building burned), and his store is an excellent reproduction of a neighborhood grocery in Cuba. There are open bins of favorite Cuban produce such as yuca and plantains. There's bacalao, jasajo, lechon, unto and a 100 lb. sack of black beans. Chorizo and salchichon, tasty Cuban sausages, hang from the wall. There are pastries such as pastel de guava, pulpa de tamarindo and galletas de guava. You can buy a cuban coffee maker and plantain soup, an orange peeler or set of dominoes,

12-, 24- or 72-hour devotional candles, or fresh little cuban breads that are baked daily in large ovens in the back.

ONE OF THE oldtimers on the street for 43 years, whose father was a barber at the old Jefferson Hotel on Duval Street, says the pace of life here is pretty much the same as it's always been, even though there have been many physical changes on the block.

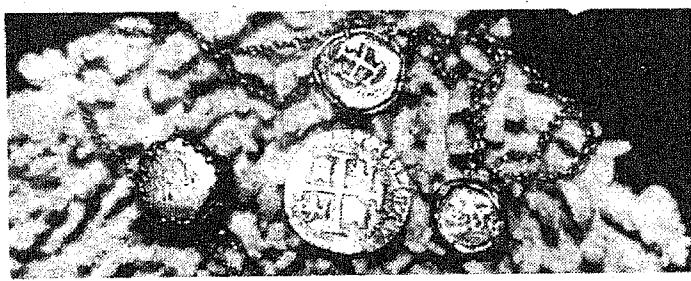
Before Gulfstream Food Store was built in 1949, there was a neat row of Conch houses across the street which were moved away. For many years, her uncle, Peter Torano, had Pete's bait shop where Gulfstream's parking lot now is. The Willie Menendez Ice Cream Parlor and Rubio's Barber Shop were at Truman and White

where the gas stations are now. She remembers the electric trolleys going by and recalls that the little houses on the block rented for \$3 a week during the Depression. There were many street vendors in those days before licenses were needed, and at all hours people would come by with fruits, vegetables, fresh fish, conch, housewares or whatever.

There's a definite vitality and aliveness emanating from the little cluster of Latin businesses that's hard to match anywhere. There's also a warmth and genuineness in the people you meet that's really what Key West is all about. Hopefully, in this area at least, which is relatively untouched by the tourist industry, it will never vanish. ■



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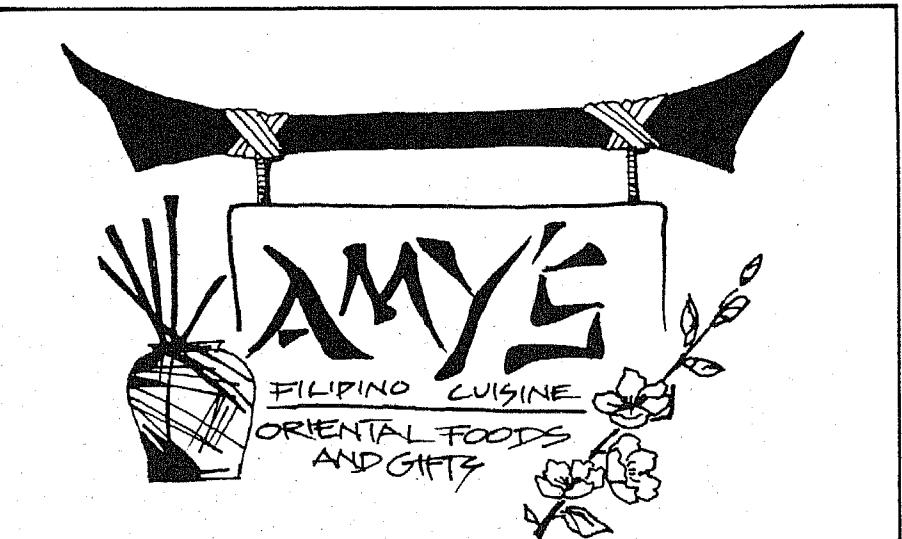


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First to Fly the Florida Straits

MARCH, 1981

by Colin G. Jameson

MORE OF THE early exploits of aviation were connected with this small island than is generally recognized. For example, three Key West-based pilots established world over-water distance records prior to World War I. And in 1919 a Key Wester and his crew hung up the non-stop over-water record which was bested later in the year by Alcock and Brown's transatlantic flight.

None of these four record-holders is featured in the Aviation Hall of Fame at Dayton, Ohio, or listed in the *World Almanac*. The first of them was indeed a Canadian by birth and perhaps not eligible, though the *New York Herald* referred to him as "a Canadian by birth but an American by aviation."

His name was John Alexander Douglas McCurdy. Key West, at least, has good reason to honor him.

At 7:00 a.m. January 30, 1911, almost every ablebodied Key Wester was swarming over Trumbo Island. The remainder of the populace had climbed to their roofs to circumvent the stern warning of President W.C. Maloney of the Chamber of Commerce, to wit: "Mayor Fogarty has kindly tendered the police to keep those off Trumbo Island who have not obtained tickets."

THE EVENT SO patronized was a matter of bread and butter to the 25-year-old McCurdy, already a prominent barnstormer. There was an odds-on probability that the weather would keep him from trying for the \$8,000 prize offered by the City of Havana and the *Havana Post* to the first aeronaut to transit the Florida Straits. Nevertheless McCurdy figured that if the wind didn't die he could still perform enough aerobatics to justify charring \$1.00 for a ticket.

He had rented Trumbo Island, warning that he would not take to the air unless 500 admissions were tallied. Hence Mayor Fogarty's cossacks.

But now the weather had suddenly relented, and the much esteemed meteorologists of a Jesuit school near Havana had prophesied 24 hours of calm.

RALPH LAUREN
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The pilot began to warm up his engine, as the ticketholders cheered and their cheapskate friends jeered from the nearest rooftops.

The aircraft was a glistening Curtiss biplane concocted of Philippine bamboo and piano wire, with bracings of spruce. The wings, which boasted a span of 12 feet, were sheathed in rubberized silk. Fully loaded, the thing weighed less than a grand piano. But it made a lot more noise, boiling along at the wizard velocity of 60 miles an hour.

The flier took off with accustomed ease. Before launching himself into the skies he could not resist circling the island and the shouting crowd. He did it once. He did it twice. He expended ten precious miles.

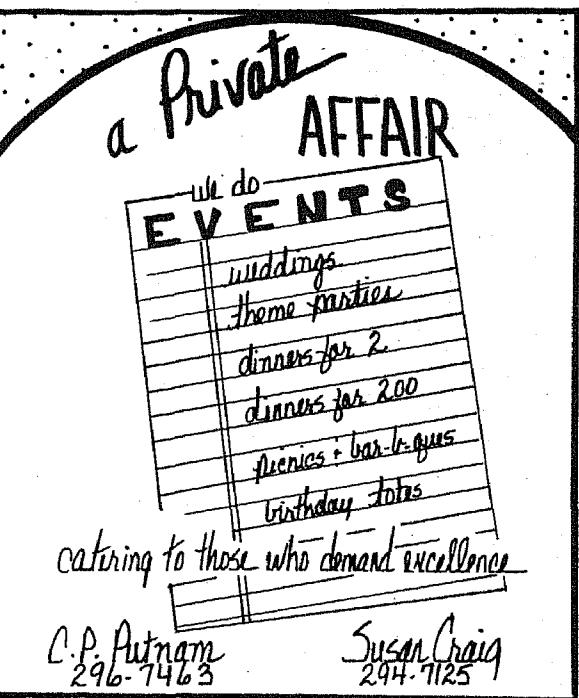
As we shall see, this proved to be a mistake.

J.A.D. McCURDY'S FIRST teacher of aeronautics was Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone. Bell, who had been lured to Cape Breton Island by a travel book written by Charles Dudley Warner, Mary Twain's collaborator, bought a house at Baddeck from McCurdy's grandfather.

One of the earliest memories of the flier, who was born in 1886, was the Bell place. Wednesday at Mr. Bell's was "education night," frequented by distinguished guests to whom the famous inventor served raspberry vinegar, his preferred tipple. The host sought the help of his guests in sound-recording experiments. As he grew older, young McCurdy, the constant visitor, was often involved. Perhaps infected by example, he ran a few scientific tests on his own.

Once Bell, holder of an honorary degree in medicine from Heidelberg, prevented local surgeons from amputating the boy's hand when he almost blew it off while investigating the properties of black powder.

Mrs. Bell observed later experiments of Bell, McCurdy and friends with kites. She decided to finance the group as an "Aerial



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Experiment Association," with her husband as leader. Glenn Curtiss, then a motorcycle manufacturer, joined them. On moving to the Curtiss factory at Hammondsport, N.Y., the "associates" produced a manned glider and eventually powered one of these with a Curtiss motorcycle engine.

IT WAS IN this period that McCurdy and a friend invented the aileron. The latter got its name from the fact that when a famous French inventor, Farman, heard it described, he called it "a little wing." During World War I, Bell gave the patent to the U.S. Government.

Bell himself never flew, and McCurdy, being the youngest of the "associates," was the last to take to the air. In the *June Bug*, which he helped design, he flew the first figure eight. The *Silver Dart* was his own creation, in which he embodied the lessons he had learned from the *June Bug*.

The only injury suffered by McCurdy in his long career was when he cracked up the *Silver Dart* while demonstrating it to the Canadian military who were understandably unimpressed.

Unable to score with the generals, McCurdy turned to barnstorming. This is what landed him in Key West in January of 1911.

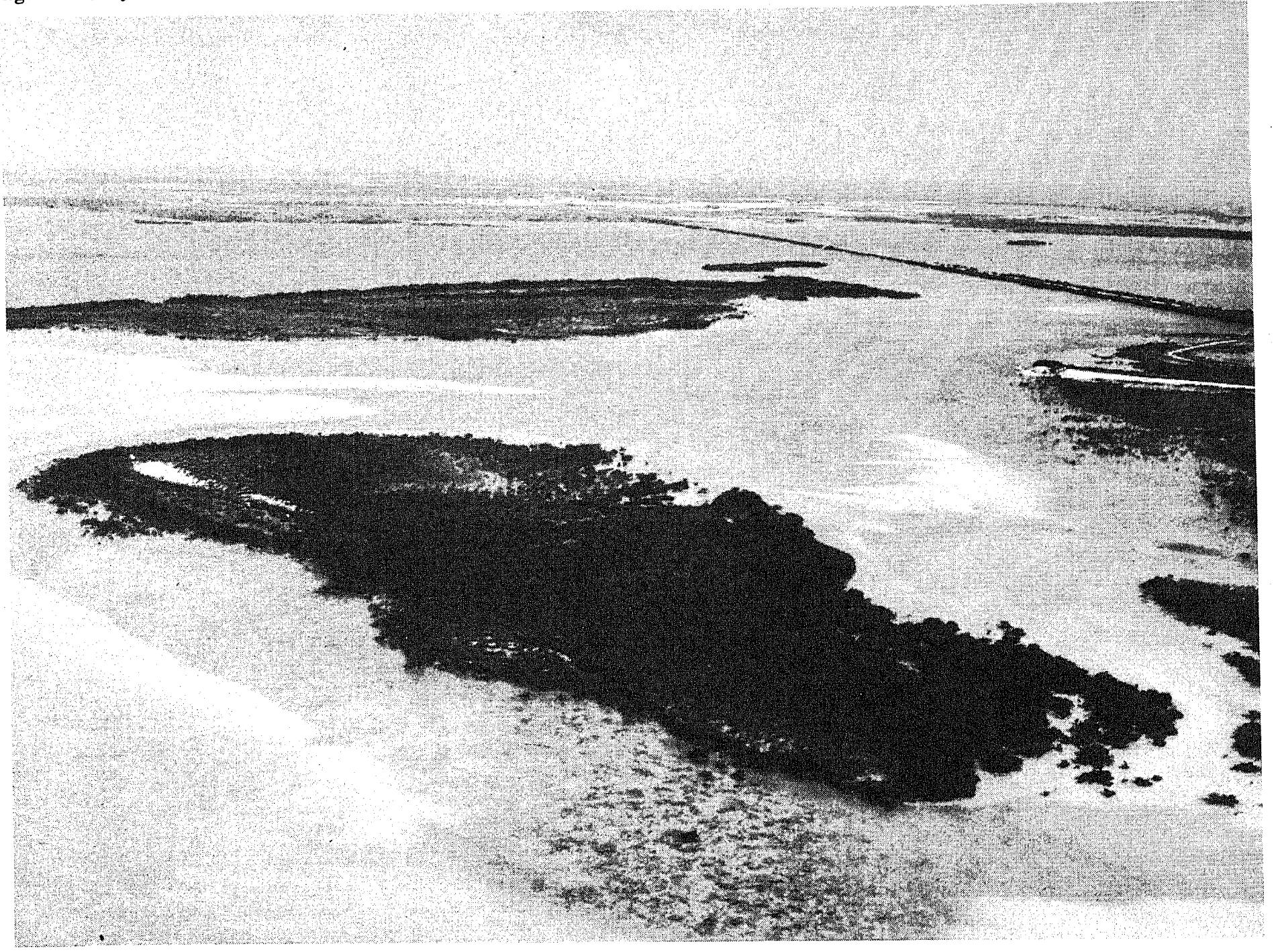
THE PRIZE OFFERED by the City of Havana and the *Post* was a spinoff from the first Cuban Air Meet, January 29 to February 5. In preparing for his attempt to nail it down, McCurdy enjoyed the enthusiastic cooperation of the U.S. Navy. The *Key West Citizen* describes how the destroyers *Paulding* and *Drayton* conveyed the flier to Havana "to acquaint him with the course and to do some experimenting on the manner of marking [it] by means of smoke from the destroyers" (they were relatively untried oilburners) "and also to give Mr. McCurdy an opportunity to select a landing place in Havana."

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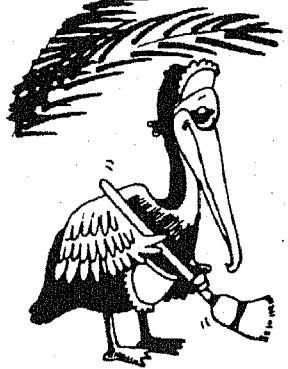


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McCurdy hoped to put down at Camp Columbia, site of Batista's seizure of power of 1933 and one of Havana's present airports.

The *Citizen* reported that a platform was built on the *Paulding* to "make a new start in case the machine is not badly damaged [by landing in the water.]

"The plucky aviator does not intend to let a little thing like a dip in the water stop him,

if he is at all able to make a fresh start from the deck of the destroyer."

CONCEIVABLY THE SHIP would run at top speed (30 knots) into the wind. This, with a good breeze blowing, would get McCurdy near flying speed even without the efforts of his glorified motorcycle engine. It was a prescription for operating the world's first aircraft carrier.

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Each wingtip of the plane was equipped with a pontoon, manufactured by a Key West tinsmith. It was an entirely new aeronautical departure. Supposedly, if the aircraft went down, the pontoons would keep it more or less afloat until rescue came -- preferably from *Paulding* with the platform. Planning was so thorough that a backup demonstration plane had been stationed at Camp Columbia in case McCurdy reached Havana without anything to stain in.

During the preparations and for many days after the flier was all set to go, the weather remained unpropitious, as anyone familiar with January in the area might have anticipated. The wind blew constantly, the Cubans -- the better-protected *habaneros*, at least -- failed to understand how mere weather could keep McCurdy grounded. They began to call him a faker and a coward. The Havana Weather Bureau (not the above-mentioned meteorologists) chimed in with a claim that for more than a week the Straits had been as calm as a bowl of gazpacho.

Hearing the allegation, McCurdy was stanchantly, the Navy, dispatched a destroyer which discovered a near gale off Havana. Thenceforward, no one on this side of the water paid any heed to Cuban innuendoes.

Actually, McCurdy was bored to death and eager to fly. Future exhibition engagements loomed and must be fulfilled. So at the first hint that the winds were moderating his shipped his brother Lucien to Havana via the ever-present Navy. Lucien, who had watched hardened sailors get seasick, radioed, "Take your bath today in the Jefferson Hotel!"

But it was only a matter of days before the destroyers deployed themselves across the Straits and the great adventure began.

McCURDY, UNLIKE HIS French forerunner, Bleriot, conqueror of the English Channel a year and a half earlier, would be out of sight of land. The Navy had doped out a way to find Havana for him. If electrical activity in the engine made the compass go haywire (as happened with one of his successors on this route), he could guide him by the plumes of smoke from the destroyers spaced at 20-mile intervals.

Once on course the aviator was faced with an unforeseen and bizarre situation. As Key West dropped behind, he was astonished to find that apparently the sea was in front of him, instead of below. This visual falsehood has been observed by the writer, who ventures to think it explains some of the Bermuda Triangle disasters.

"I beheld a mirage," McCurdy reported, "not as seamen see the phenomenon, but as though I were part of it."

Instants later the sight of Sand Key straightened him out. The U.S.S. *Roe* was also ahead. Passing over at 500 feet, McCurdy could plainly see the white-uniformed sailors at quarters.

When the aircraft was observed by the *Reid*, the third ship, the CO rang up flank speed. The destroyer poured on the oil and let go for Havana. Her arrow-straight white wake would point the aviator to his correct heading.

AS McCURDY CHUGGED over her at 700 feet, he waved his cap to acknowledge the crew's visible if inaudible cheers.

One of the *Reid*'s men wrote that "coming overhead [McCurdy] looked very much like a weaver spider in his web, for he was literally surrounded by a mesh of wire struts holding the machine together. The plane had no fuselage, no cockpit, neither any form of windshield. He wore no goggles -- just met the breeze head-on."

But after two hours of winging along as effortlessly as a wish, an oil line broke. Shades of that time-consuming circling in Key West! Havana was right over there. It seemed close enough to swim to.

Nothing to do but dunk all hopes in the ocean. Even in the light chop the weight of the saddened McCurdy, plus that of the sadder engine, partially submerged the custom-built pontoons and much of the craft itself.

"But I didn't even get my feet wet," McCurdy later recalled, with justifiable exaggeration.

He was standing on a pontoon, smoking a cigarette, when a boat from the U.S.S. *Terry* arrived. He was only two miles from land.

THE PLAN WAS undamaged, but the sailors were unaccustomed to dealing with such fragility. Furthermore, the arrival on the scene of three 14-foot tiger sharks made them understandably nervous. In hoisting the aircraft aboard, the inflicted significant damage.

Ashore, the Cubans were now all adoration. They carried the hero to Camp

Columbia, where McCurdy immediately put on a magnificent flying exhibition in the spare plane stationed there. He didn't even pause to change his clothes.

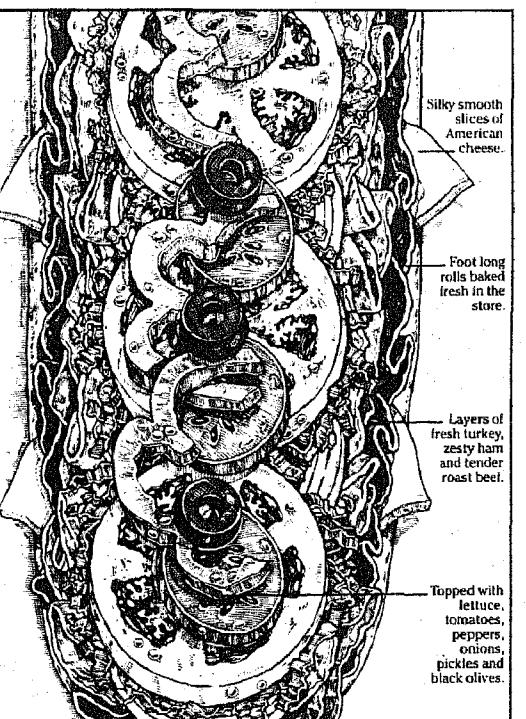
The *Havana Post* noted that while the aviator had not made it all the way to Havana, he had flown "over Cuba's territorial waters" and was therefore ethically entitled to its \$5,000 share of the reward. The City of Havana also guaranteed its \$3,000 slice.

In return for advertising his wares, the proprietor of the Romeo y Juliet cigar factories presented McCurdy with a \$1,000 check. President Gomez of Cuba threw a fabulous party at which all local notables rejoiced. During the proceedings, the president handed McCurdy a brilliantly decorated 8 x 10 envelope containing, he said, a special \$10,000 reward from the Government.

When McCurdy got back to his hotel room, he discovered that the envelope actually was stuffed with newspaper clippings. Neither the city's nor the *Havana Post*'s prize was ever received. Next day the daily *El Figaro* printed a picture of Gomez' nonexistent check.

The Romeo y Juliet draft did, however, prove to be cashable. And McCurdy insisted that he "had a whale of a time anyway."

BETWEEN FLYING EXHIBITIONS and partying, McCurdy and his brother Lucian kept on having such "a whale of a



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time" that they missed the boat for Tampa, where the flier was scheduled to put on his next show.

Crisis! J. Pierpont Morgan's son-in-law to the rescue. He offered his private launch to pursue the departing steamer. Catching up with it was easy, a lark in fact. But the vessel's captain refused to let the McCurdys board. Something about regulations. And by the orders the skipper gave to his crew, he seemed to mean what he said.

As the launch drifted astern, the pair observed that the ship's coal scuttles, aft near the waterline, had not been secured since refueling in Havana. They scrambled in. Once topside they faced a hopping mad captain, plus catcalls from the passengers, who were delighted with the effect of coal dust on white linen suits.

The captain raged that what the brothers

had done was a serious crime. Havana passengers were not allowed to enter the United States without a physical examination before sailing. Though no cases of yellow fever had been diagnosed in the temperate zone since the previous year, the dread disease was still endemic in the Western Hemisphere.

Attracted by the commotion, the ship's doctor appeared and solemnly swore that he "had examined [the suspects] that morning," thus saving them from the brig and an expedited wind-up of their tour.

IN THE COURSE of his barnstorming career, McCurdy developed a number of exhibition techniques. During the period of his Cuban adventure perhaps the most famous was what he called "battleship

bombing," where he carried aloft a basket of oranges and amazed the public by mentally calculating the trajectory that would land an orange on a square of cloth in a field.

He also pioneered the use of radio in flight. At Palm Beach he tied towels around the head of the wireless operator, thus blanking out the deafening roar of the plane's engine and enabling the technician to understand messages from as far away as Key West.

McCurdy improved his expertise in demonstrating to the military. In Washington that same year of 1911, taking off from a field behind the State, War and Navy building, he circled the Washington Monument three times, then followed with an assortment of aerial feats. While the notoriously conservative U.S. Army officers were little more enthusiastic than the

Canadians had been before them, the Japanese showed intense interest. They contracted for eight airplanes on the spot. This not-so-inscrutable oriental ploy probably provoked more merriment than suspicion, though Japan had recently astonished everybody by wiping up the Russians in the Far East.

McCurdy graduated from stunting to manufacturing. This enabled him to make a solid contribution in the early part of World War I. The U.S. neutrality laws forbade this country to sell planes to Great Britain, but an aircraft without ailerons was not considered a plane. McCurdy manufactured the ailerons in Canada, then shipped them to England for installation on the "non-planes" exported from the United States.

The factory metamorphosed into a flying school, which trained 600 pilots without injury. It also turned out the first twin-engined bomber, so it is told. But it was not until 1922 that Canada established the air arm first proposed by McCurdy at his unlucky 1909 demonstration for the high Russians in the Far East.

During World War II J.A.D. McCurdy was Canadian Assistant Director General of Aircraft Production and Supervisor of Purchasing. From 1947 to 1952 he served as Lieutenant Governor of his native Nova Scotia. History still acclaims him as Canada's "first pilot." For us he is still the "first man to fly the Straits of Florida." ■

biggest cities of the USA as well, wowing them at the World's Fair in Chicago, and always shouting his motto, "Keep the Fighting Spirit Up, Don't Let It Die!" wherever he went. It was good ole Cayo Hueso for Pete Nebo too, then as well as now. To mention the word "boxing" here is to conjure up the image of the Key West-born legend, who together with his brother John, a boxer and a boxing promoter, lived on in the annals of local fistic lore ...

THE SOUTH, AND Florida in particular, developed fine fighters who were eager to don the gloves and challenge the contenders. Intra-city fights became more popular as national fights acquired more broadcasting and press coverage. Key West played a dominant role in this sports picture, its proximity to Cuba providing a steady flow of handy toughs who were more than willing to show their power-punching skills. The Navy had its own boxing teams, and those stationed on Cayo Hueso participated in the popular boxing events as well. From Tampa to Miami, from Miami to Jacksonville, from Jacksonville to Key West, from Key West to Tampa -- the matches and rematches were arranged for an ever-ready populace. Pete Nebo devotees emerged *en masse* to cheer their hero to victory, eagerly awaiting the punishing jabs, furious rounds, stinging pressure and staggering retaliation. Yes, indeed, Key West was a great boxing town!

Both Nebo brothers -- Pete, who dazzled the crowd with his footwork, hand speed, punch power, and ring pressure, and John, who, though a fine jabber in his own right, became better known locally as a boxing promoter, and who built the popular portable ring arena in the center of town to encourage boxing matches -- have passed on. They were not the only heroes of Key West, however; there are still those remaining who call to mind the heyday of uppercuts and solid rights, who know how to sting a man with a combination and who

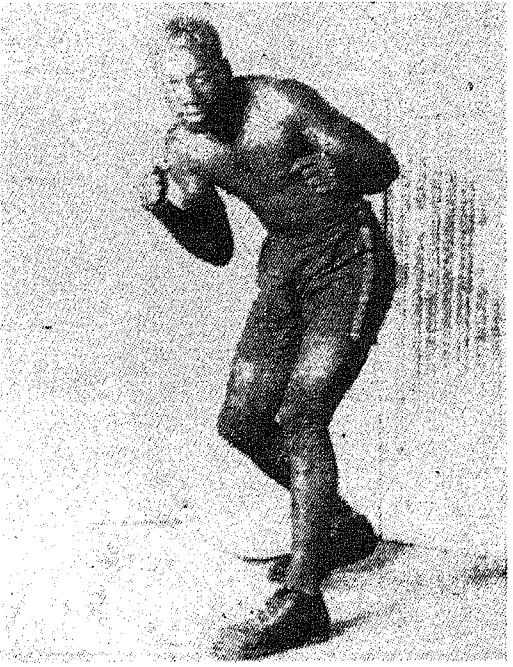
And in This Corner ...

AUGUST, 1979

by Eileen Moore Quinn

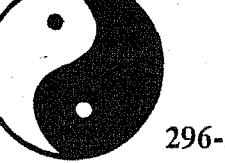
"Any fan who has any kind of bet to make that Nebo wins Monday's boxing contest against Jimmy Wade will be covered if the person calls the Casa Marina Resort and asks for Mr. Boxing Fan."

Key West Citizen
February 22, 1935



"Iron Baby" Roberts.

THEY WERE ON their feet in Key West that night, as Pete Nebo, the hometown boxing hero, defeated the Orlando whirlwind Jimmy Wade in a ten-round decision that shook the local sports world. "Nebo, Nebo, Nebo," they cried, chanting the name of the Seminole Indian who reputedly rejected a \$1,200 New Orleans purse fight against Eddie Kid Wolfe, which was offered just hours after he had signed to fight Jimmy Wade. "It's good ole Cayo Hueso for me," declared the immortal Pete Nebo, who later continued to box his way through South America, fighting in the

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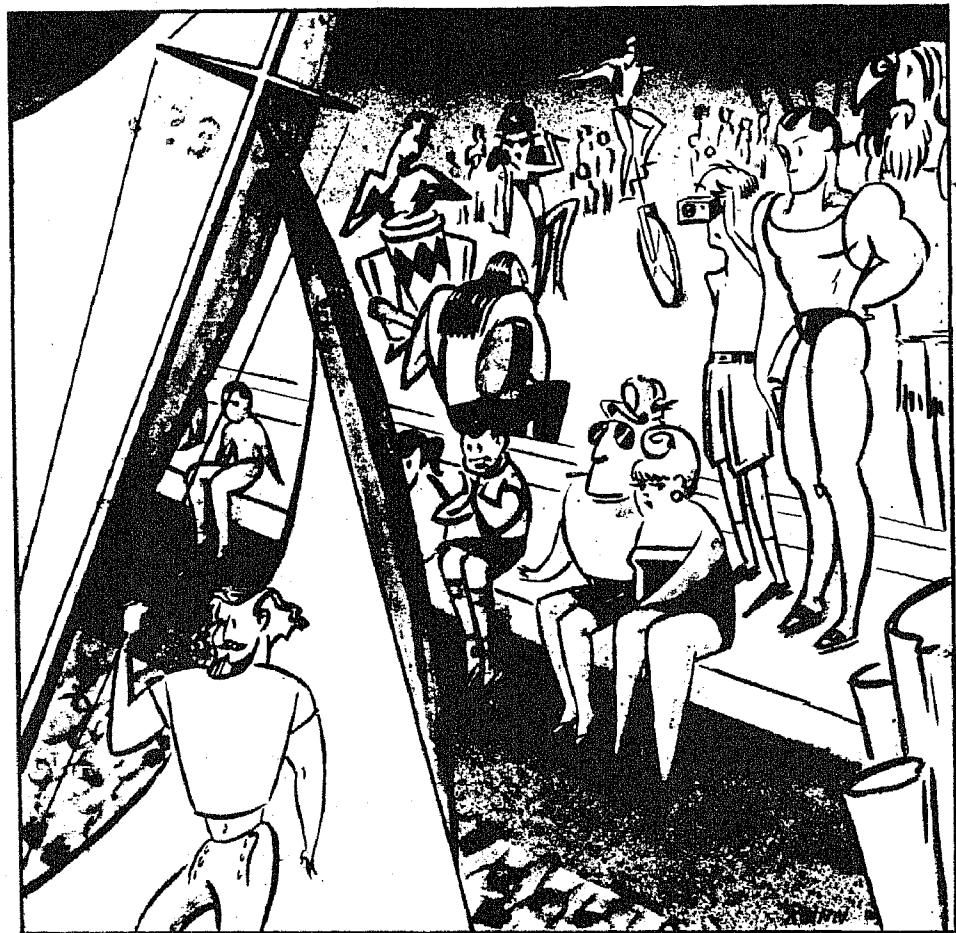
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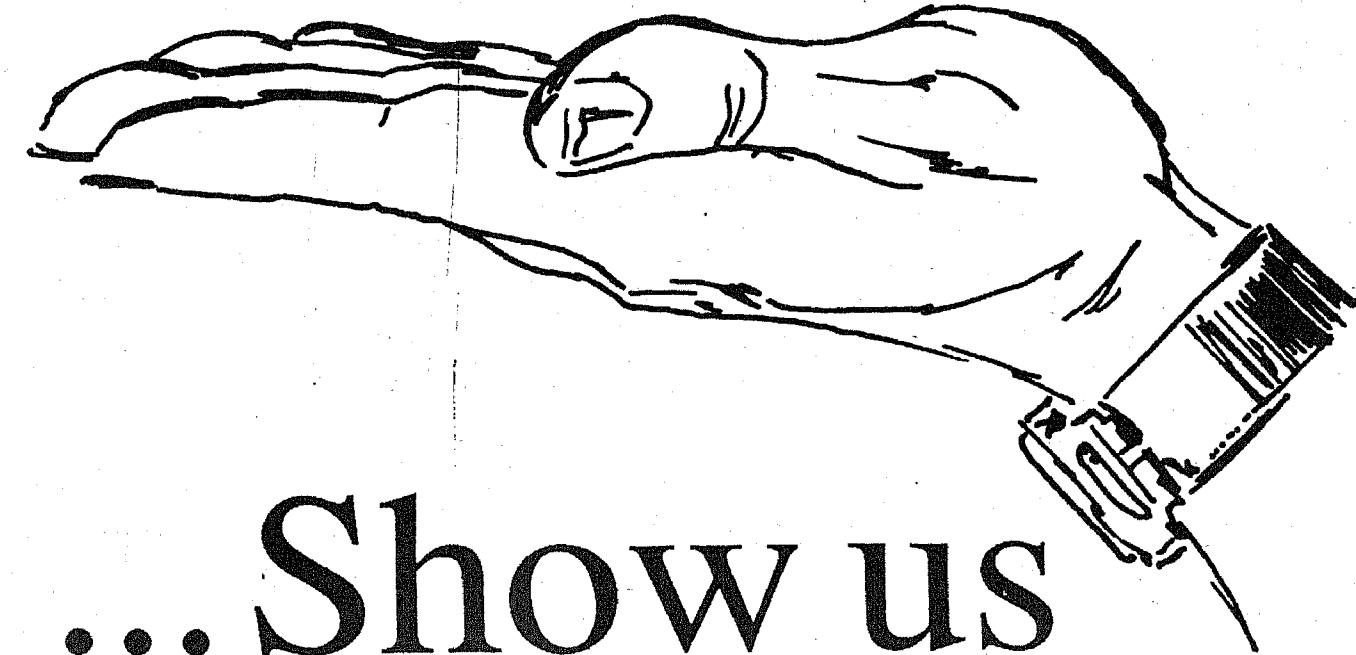
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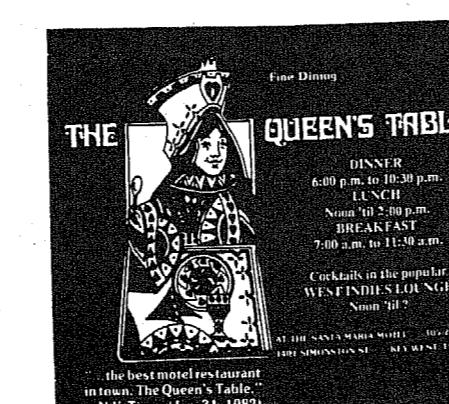
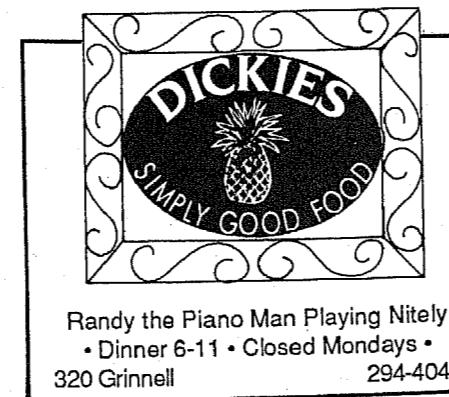
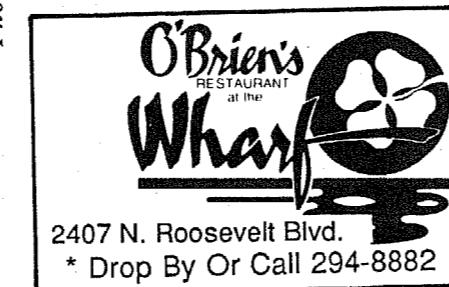
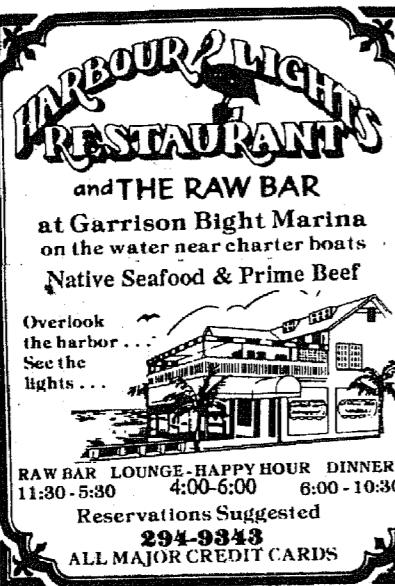
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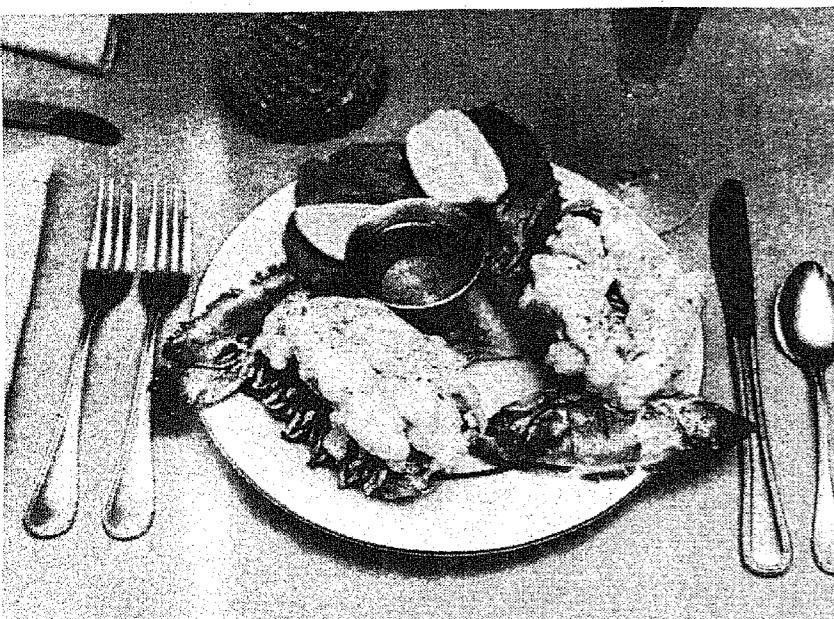
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