

# Hilton Head Island: Unpacked & Staying

Island Writers' Network  
Hilton Head Island, SC



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Edited by:

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# Living with Alligators

by

Norma Van Amberg

"Guess who's coming to dinner?" read the headline for a story and photo in *The Island Packet* showing a six-foot alligator standing on its hind feet against the front door of a home in Sun City.

The incredible shot photographed in June 2006 by Richard Holinski, a neighbor in the retirement community, made its way around the world via the internet.

Residents of the subtropical Hilton Head Island area learn to live with alligators by leaving them alone, not feeding them, and respecting their territory: the brackish creeks, rivers, numerous fresh water lakes, lagoons and the grassy banks by them.

Alligators are remnants of a prehistoric era, contemporaries of dinosaurs that have survived into the 21st century. Sometimes the gators decide to wander from their habitats, and reptiles that go meandering among the people often make the front page.

An alligator startled drivers on Pope Avenue one sunny morning in the '90s after it ventured from a pond by a bank and crossed the four-lane road. It then settled into a water hazard at the Legendary Golf course by the Circle Center shops. Some patrons playing miniature golf got a bigger bang

Norma Van Amberg

for their buck watching the alligator being captured and hauled away by local wildlife officers.

Another one, a ten-foot alligator, caused quite a scene after beachgoers spotted it swimming in the surf near Villamare in Palmetto Dunes. Lifeguards ordered people out of the water and placed orange pylons on the beach by Villamare to keep people back near the dunes.

Dozens of visitors and islanders with cameras and video recorders kept up a two-hour vigil, waiting for the

## Living With Alligators

Services proceeded after parishioners used a different doorway to enter the church, and Critter Management removed the gator.

Visitors to Hilton Head who miss seeing live alligators during their stay will have an opportunity to see a statue of one at Compass Rose Park on Pope Avenue. The model for the proposed statue is the 1962 *Saturday Evening Post* photo depicting Charles E. Fraser, the late visionary developer who created the nature-blending, planned unit development (PUD) concept, walking beside an alligator during the development of Sea Pines.



Photograph by Art Cornell

# Birds Like Lovers

by  
Frederick W. Bassett

On long legs they take what they need  
from the saltwater marshes,  
each submitting to its own blood.  
The great blue heron stands alone  
at water's edge, waiting  
for something good to come to it,  
the way I once waited for a woman  
to bring her love to me.  
And there's the snowy egret,  
the showy one with yellow feet  
always on the move,  
looking for what pleases it.  
A woman like that once found me  
plump for the taking—  
hardly broke her high-stepping stride.



# Emergency Landing

by  
Will Anderson

Hilton Head Unicom, Cessna 1-3-1-9-7, state your active runway," I said into the mike as calmly as I could. My five-year-old daughter in the seat behind me grew stiffer by the moment. Seated beside me, my wife had turned to comfort her, but nothing would help.

"Cessna calling Hilton Head. Winds favor runway 0-3. Altimeter, 2-9, 9-2."

That message told me which way I would land on Hilton Head airport's single runway, as well as the setting I would dial into my altimeter so it would read correctly. Now I needed a radio check to make sure there were no other aircraft in the area. We could not see any, but light airplanes at a distance are difficult to spot.

"Hilton Head traffic, 1-9-7, ten miles south, straight in, landing runway 0-3 Hilton Head."

I listened for a response. There was none. Good. That meant the runway was mine alone, and I could land in the shortest time possible. I kept the airspeed at its max limit while we descended, adjusting power to come in on a high, short, final leg. My daughter began to moan. My wife's face showed the pity she felt.

In 1980 Hilton Head Airport had no control tower. Nor did it have a commercial terminal building. Operations were conducted out of a small building on the east side of the roughly north/south runway. A radio frequency designated as Unicom allowed pilots to communicate with that building to obtain airport advisories. Pilots used the same frequency to communicate with each other and state their intentions—taxiing, taking off, landing, entering or departing the pattern, whatever.

Today there is a tower where operations are controlled by the air traffic controllers. There are advantages that come with tower operations, but if one needed to land as quickly as possible, as I did on this day, the old system was best.

To encourage its employees to learn more about airplanes and flying, NASA allows the use of private airplanes for official travel. Reimbursements to employees for expenses incurred are determined on a cost per mile basis, not to exceed the price of an airline ticket. With today's inexpensive airline fares relative to the high cost of private flying, this is not a realistic option; but in years past most of the expense could be recouped.

So it was that in early April 1980, needing to be at the Kennedy Space Center for two days, I chose to fly down the coast from Virginia to Florida. The airplane I would use, a Cessna 172, could carry four people. My wife, Jane, suggested she and our two youngest children, John, 11, and Corrie, 5, go on the trip. The two days would give ample time for them to explore Cape Canaveral and the surrounding towns; a third day would let me accompany them on the KSC tour and visit the museum and book store.

We left Patrick Henry Airport in Newport News, Virginia, on April 3rd. and flew south to Grand Strand Airport just north of Myrtle Beach. My logbook says it was raining, and I had to make an instrument landing, something not uncommon on the east coast. It also says, "Jane had too much coffee." No need to elaborate on meaning, but symptomatic of small-plane travel and prophetic as will be shown.

## Emergency Landing

With full fuel tanks we departed Myrtle Beach, flew the second leg of the trip and arrived at our destination, the Titusville-Cocoa Beach Airport, known then as Tico and today as Space Coast Regional. After making arrangements we tied the airplane down, locked it and headed for the hotel.

Following two days of Florida sunshine, exploring, shopping and hanging out at the pool, Jane and the kids were ready for the tour and museum visit. I had finished my work and would take a day off. We boarded a bus outside the visitors' center and rode to the Vertical Assembly Building, the largest building of its kind in the world. The guide discussed the assembly of the Orbiter, external tank and twin solid rocket boosters to form the Space Shuttle. Nearby we saw the crawlers that slowly take the Shuttle to its launch complex, LC-39. We followed that route, disembarked and walked around looking up at the giant steel and concrete facility while our guide explained the launch sequence. After a tour of more facilities, lunch at the visitors' center, time spent wandering through the museum and bookstore, we were back at the hotel and, to the kids' delight, the pool.

A call to the local flight service station the next morning confirmed the weather would be perfect for the flight home. At the airport, inside the general aviation building, I gave my usual lecture to John and Corrie about the importance of using the facilities before boarding the airplane, as there were no such facilities on the airplane. They both assured me they had.

We took off and headed up the Florida coast, enjoying views of the ocean and beaches. After crossing over Jacksonville we entered Georgia and watched as its coastal islands passed beneath us, the best known being Sea Island with its famous and expensive "cottages" and the Cloisters Hotel.

As we approached the South Carolina border, my daughter Corrie, sitting directly behind me, who had become unusually quiet for the last few minutes, blurted out in her five-year-old voice, "I've got to go to the bathroom, Daddy. Bad!" At which point, having given my preflight lecture about using

the facilities prior to takeoff, thus giving me the moral high ground, I answered, "You should have gone before we left. You'll have to wait till we reach Grand Strand. Should be another half-hour."

Jane had turned and looked back at our daughter. "Take a look at her," she said with an alarmed motherly tone. "We need to land. She can't wait that long."

I turned and looked. My log book says, "Corrie drank her Mountain Dew too early!" We had bought the kids canned drinks at the airport to be consumed at the end of the leg. What I saw I will never forget. She was as straight as a board in the seat, arms and legs rigid, hands clasped together, eyes closed tightly, head back and a grimace for a mouth.

We had to land. Immediately, if not sooner.

When my wife and I fly together, I use instrument maps and the navigation radios to practice flying in bad weather when there is little or no outside visibility. Jane uses VFR, visual flight rule, maps which show towns, ground features, airports . . . to follow our progress and identify what she sees out the window.

"There's an island just ahead with an airport," she told me. "It's called Hilton Head. It's shaped like a foot. The airport is at the northern end."

She handed me the map. It did look like a foot with the airport at the ankle.

"There's no control tower," I said, tuning the number-one radio to the Unicom frequency shown on the map. "I'll head straight in." I pushed the nose over and let the airspeed build, trading altitude for speed. And then to Corrie, "Hang on, sweetie. We'll be on the ground in a couple of minutes."

When the airspeed had climbed as high as was safe, I cut back on the power. We crossed Hilton Head's south coast, the island rushing by below us as we descended. When I spotted the airport runway, I made my radio calls.

After the calls, knowing we were number one for landing and coming in high, I killed the power, raised the nose to let the airspeed drop and lowered the flaps. The landing

## Emergency Landing

flaps on the Cessna 172 extend to 40 degrees. They are nicknamed "barn door flaps." Fully extended, with the throttle pulled all the way back, the airplane decelerates quickly and drops like a rock with the nose pitched down.

After landing and moderate braking, I pulled off the runway onto the apron and parked next to the operations building. I helped Corrie out of the back seat, and she and Jane disappeared into the building. John and I followed and arranged for fuel. We watched the lineman fill the wing tanks with 100-octane avgas, then walked out among the large number of private airplanes parked on the apron.

"This island must have a lot to offer," I said as Jane and a fully recovered and smiling Corrie joined us ogling a beautiful twin-engine corporate jet. "Judging by the number of airplanes."

"Did you see the poster inside advertising the golf tournament?" she asked.

"Missed it."

"Full-fledged PGA tournament called the Heritage," she told me. "Played on the south end of the island in a gated community called . . . Sea Pines, I think."

I had yet to take up golf, but knew PGA tournaments were only played on premier courses in top-notch locales. "Let's take a look at the island before we head north."

While John helped me with the pre-flight, Jane and Corrie went back inside and found a map of the island that gave the names of the communities and the local bodies of water.

After taking off to the north, I made a right turnout and headed south along the beach at 500 feet. We noticed several gated communities, called plantations, that bordered the beach, each with one or more golf courses—Port Royal, Palmetto Dunes, and Shipyard—before reaching the southernmost, Sea Pines. Following the curve of the shoreline brought us over a small harbor—South Beach—and around to a northerly heading above the east coast's inland waterway.

"Do you see that silly looking red and white lighthouse?" Jane said. "Marks the entrance to a harbor surrounded by condominium buildings—Harbour Town." I looked down at the harbor and a small number of boats tied up to its docks.

Farther north I spotted a body of water that almost split the island in two. "Broad Creek," my wife told me when I pointed at it. We could see three marinas, the farthest inside another harbor.

"Shelter Cove," I was told. I counted only three boats in that large harbor.

Next came the bridge. "Only the one bridge," I reflected, looking down on a two-lane swing bridge. "I'd hate to get caught trying to get off that island at rush hour with the bridge open."

"There's the last of the large communities," Jane said, pointing to the right as I added power and we began to climb to cruising altitude for the leg home. "Hilton Head Plantation."

Over the next few months, that enchanting island we would come to call "Fantasy Island" popped into our thoughts quite often. Come early fall we made our second visit. This time in a Piper Arrow, a faster airplane that cut the travel time to a little more than two hours. We spent a long weekend at the Holiday Inn on Coligny Circle. The weather was perfect, the ocean water warm, the people pleasant.

In the spring we made our third visit, pulling off I-95 while driving from Florida to Virginia. We stayed only a couple of hours, but long enough to put a down payment on our first piece of Hilton Head—a condominium near Folly Field beach. Crazy? Maybe, but we never regretted it. After the well-used condo came a lot and then a house. We have lived on the island full time since 1995. Every time we travel we compare the locale to Hilton Head and ask ourselves, "Is this as nice as Hilton Head?" The answer is always the same. Guess what it is?

# Spanish Moss

by  
Norm Levy

## Day

Elephantine oaks—  
Limbs grey and gnarled  
Claw skyward.  
From leafy branches  
Incongruous beards  
Of tangled moss  
Hang limply  
Long, wispy, unshorn  
Stroked by the wind  
Nourished by the air  
The color of shadows—  
Sepulchral.

## Dusk

From sturdy branches  
Mossy veils drip and flow  
Like melting garlands of gossamer.  
Ethereal grey/green shawls  
Drape girder-like limbs  
Blurring craggy lines.  
Enrobed—the mighty oak stands passively  
Awaiting the dark.

Photograph by Art Cornell



# Island Therapy

by

Sansing McPherson

Lois kept flunking Gas Pumping 101. Her first time filling her tank after moving to Hilton Head she stood at the pump, mouth agape, eyes searching for any clue as to how to begin. She vowed her husband, Ed, would be with her next time. After five minutes of fumbling with the gas cap and trying to insert her credit card into any possible crevice, she saw a rumbling red pick-up with a Confederate flag on the front tag pull up behind her. A burly man in a NASCAR t-shirt got out. Not the type of person Lois wanted to annoy.

"Yew need some hep, ma'am?" he drawled, hitching up his jeans.

"Thanks. How could you tell?" she asked.

"Saw yer Jersey tag. Y'all don' git to pump yer own gas up air, do ya?"

"It's my first time." She smiled, hoping her response fit whatever he had just said.

"Jiss turn yer card over. 'At air lil strip's gotta go to th' leff. No, 'ats th' printed receipt slot, ma'am. Put 'at lil sucker in 'at slot over air on yer leff. Lookee. Rightcheer."

So intent was she on translating his words into English, she did not commit the physical process to memory and was

doomed to make the same mistakes next time, unless Ed came along; but it was becoming harder and harder to get him to leave the house since retirement.

After wrestling the boa constrictor gas hose back into its cradle and replacing her gas cap, thanks to Bubba's reminder, she headed to the supermarket.

"Don't you wonder how many millions those movie stars pay their plastic surgeons?" said a total stranger staring at magazines behind her in the check-out line.

Was the woman talking to her? Lois glanced around and saw no one else. The woman smiled expectantly. Lois had just become accustomed to trusting supermarkets with names like Harris Teeter and Piggly Wiggly, and now she had to comment on movie star secrets?

But she was determined not to flunk Intro to Check-Out Lines.

"I guess it's a business expense," she replied. "Maybe they deduct it?"

The woman patted her arm—an incursion into personal space by New Jersey standards—and whispered, "See that little old lady bagging? Her name is Rose. She's 92."

"Really? She's well preserved."

"That's because they keep it as cold as a morgue in here." Her comrade-in-line shivered.

Lois eased her cart up to the checker and heard the little old bagger lady tell the departing customer to have a nice day. The customer made no reply.

"Some people just won't talk to you," sniffed Rose. "What's the matter with them anyway? Paper or plastic, Sugar?"

"Plastic's fine," Lois answered and watched Rose dunk produce into sacks.

"Cantaloupes and honeydews are buy-one-get-one-free this week," Rose said. "Go get yourself another one."

"Do I have time to go back?"

"Sure. Go get 'em, Honey. I can wait."

## Island Therapy

"I'm in no hurry," the woman behind her said, wiggling her fingers in an agreeable wave.

↔↔↔↔↔↔↔↔

"Make any new friends on your jaunt?" Ed called as she entered the house.

"Yes. Bubba helped me pump gas, a 92-year-old bagger lady made sure we got our share of the melon market, and I discussed plastic surgery with a total stranger at Harris Teeter."

Ed was unimpressed. "I made a new friend. He's here on the patio. Come look."

She peered out the window. "Holy smokes, he's a big one. Where'd he come from?"

"Probably that pond beyond the fairway."

"Lagoon," she corrected. "They call them lagoons. I don't like this. Call Security."

"We're getting a reputation with Security."

"Just call. He's a lot bigger than the snake in the garage. I'm not used to all this wildlife. We move to Paradise and find out we have all four kinds of poisonous snakes known to North America, spooky Batman birds in our lagoons . . ."

"Those are aningas," Ed said.

". . . plus a half-ton alligator on our patio."

"They're more afraid of you than you are of them."

"That's debatable. Their little brains can't hold the depths of fear I'm experiencing."

Before Ed could call, the gator ambled toward another lagoon.

"So what's for lunch?" he asked.

"Melons," she said.

"I was thinking shrimp."

"I didn't buy shrimp. Let's go to the Boathouse. Their shrimp and grits is legendary."

"Wouldn't that be 'are legendary'?"

"No, a man at Harris Teeter told me 'grits' is singular."

"But you have a compound subject . . ."

"Just get in the car."

At the Boathouse they sat outdoors under the trees overlooking the sparkling waters of the Intracoastal Waterway. Next door, at the actual working boathouse, a tyrannosaurus-sized fork lift stayed busy bringing boats out of dry storage, hauling them down to the water. Noting the gleam in Ed's eye as the watercraft paraded by, she fantasized about getting a boat to snap him out of his retirement funk. Then she pictured having to fuel it. Better hold off on the boat.

"My name is Matt, and I'll be your server today. And how are y'all doing on this lovely afternoon?" Their waiter flashed them a smile from a youthful, clean-cut face, set glasses of ice water in front of them and gave them menus. Ed opened his without response.

Compensating for his discourtesy, Lois beamed. "We're doing great today, thank you. We just moved here, and everything is wonderful."

"Where'd y'all move from?"

"New Jersey."

"Where 'bouts?"

"Morristown."

"Hey, I was born there. Grew up in Chapel Hill, though."

"What brought you to Hilton Head?"

"Summer job in Paradise. I'm a senior at Duke this fall."

"Our son got his degree at Duke Law. What a gorgeous campus."

"Yes, ma'am. And what can I get you to drink?"

"Amstel Light," said Ed, barely looking up.

"Sweet tea for me," Lois said, proud of herself for ordering something so Southern. She liked this young man and hoped Ed would raise his head to join the conversation, but he was locked onto his menu.

The waiter left, and Lois scowled. "You could have been more polite. He goes to Duke."

## Island Therapy

"He's a waiter. You don't have to have conversations with waiters."

"You do here," she said.

"Besides, there's something . . . odd about him."

"How so?"

"He didn't seem official. He needs an Italian accent."

She swatted her napkin at his menu. "Ed, just breathe this air! Look at that sky, these twisted old oak trees, the egrets, the pelicans!"

"The crab cakes."

"Huh?"

"Crab cakes. That's what I want."

Matt had returned with their drinks and jotted down Ed's order. "And for you, ma'am?"

She ordered the shrimp and grits, took a long draw on her tea and forced eye contact with Ed. "The Intracoastal goes all the way up to the Manasquan River in New Jersey. Shall I put you on the next boat?"

"No, thanks. Nothing for me back there any more. The boat idea's not bad, though."

The next day she talked him into a kayak trip with Outside Hilton Head. Kayaks were boats, after all. The group gathered at the landing beside the Old Oyster Factory on Broad Creek, chatting sociably while the guide gave out equipment.

A woman in Teva sandals and a Salty Dog t-shirt turned to Lois. "Where are you from?"

"Hilton Head," Lois crowed. "We just moved here. Where are you from?"

"Ohio. We come here every year. We think we'll retire here when we get these two guys out of college." The woman gestured toward two sunburned teenagers grinning under Hilton Head baseball caps. "So where'd you move from?"

"New Jersey. Morristown."

"We're from Jersey," another woman spoke up. "Ramapo. Don't you just love it here?"

By the time their guide had distributed life vests and paddles, the census count stood at four New Jerseyans, six Ohioans, two Michiganders, plus the guide who grew up in Bluffton.

Their kayaks slid through the silky green water beside oyster beds and islands of mud and spartina grass. Someone spotted dolphins arcing slowly up ahead, and they paddled furiously to follow them. Before the tour ended they had seen a dozen dolphins swimming lazily, a pair of bald eagles soaring overhead, and a snowy egret trying to swallow a small eel that kept wrapping itself around the bird's beak. The egret eventually won. Lois twisted around to see Ed in the seat behind her. His mouth opened in wonder and then closed with a smile.

She dragged him to Savannah a week later. As the red trolley rolled around tree-filled squares and over knobbly cobblestones to the riverfront, Ed stayed riveted on the architectural beauty of the historic district and the jovial narrative of their tour guide.

She counted the day a total success until she got in the car the next afternoon and saw the gas gauge on empty.

"Well, dang," she said, echoing the strongest expletive she had heard anybody use since moving to Hilton Head.

With a sigh she pulled up to a pump at the Sunoco station, got out and fumbled for her Visa card. She found the slot, inserted the card and squinted at the electronic readout that turned invisible in the sun glare. Did it say, "Begin fueling"? She hoped so and unhooked the nozzle.

*Double dang.* She had forgotten to unlock the gas cap door. She leaned into the car to pull the filler cap lever; then she twisted off the cap, stuck in the nozzle and squeezed.

Nothing. She turned accusing eyes on the pump. A red pickup pulled in behind her. Not Bubba. No help. No obvious SOS sign either because they had taken their New Jersey plates off yesterday and put on their South Carolina tags.

## Island Therapy

She threw up her arms in despair, and the door of the red pick-up opened. The skinniest man she had ever seen got out and called, "Pump outa whack?"

"No, I'm the problem. I'm from New Jersey."

"Oh, yeah. Lemme see." He shaded his brow and peered at the electronic display. "It says 'Select grade'."

*Grade? Surely an F again.*

"Ya want reggaler, ma'am?"

*Reggaler? "Regular! Yes!"*

"That air's the reggaler button. Lookee. Rightcheer."

*Has he been talking to Bubba?* She thanked him, pushed the lowest octane button and vowed to remember next time. Stringbean maneuvered his truck to a different pump.

"You left the gas cap off," Ed said as he helped her bring packages in from the car.

"Well, Bubba wasn't there to remind me. And neither were you. You never are when the tank gets empty."

"Did you at least retrieve your credit card?"

Panic struck her face. She groped for her wallet, snapped it open and sighed in relief.

↔↔↔↔↔↔↔

Ed had begun keeping score as to how many conversations on Hilton Head began with "Where are you from?" They were in line for ice cream at Bruster's when the woman ahead of them asked the standard question, and Ed whispered, "Fourteen."

When Lois said they had just retired and moved from Morristown, the woman asked, "Were you with PanoTech?"

"Ed was."

"My husband and I both were. Chicago office."

Now Ed was listening.

"We're Nancy and Tom Cook, just moved from Evanston."

Instant bonding occurred. Lois had not seen this much kinetic energy vibrating from Ed since the Giants beat the Patriots last year. After a round of name-dropping, they found

a half-dozen people they knew in common. All three were vehement in their loathing for Tucker Raft, the CEO who shot PanoTech down the tubes and forced early retirement on 2,000 employees.

"I keep praying they pay his bonus in PanoTech stock." Tom gave an evil laugh.

"I never saw it coming," Ed growled. "You're there 30-something years, you've shelled out money for dozens of other guys' retirement dinners, and you don't even get a lousy retirement bagel? No dinner, no send-off, not even a stinking gold-tone Timex?"

"You know what we Chicago guys did our last day of work? We took ourselves out for pizza and spent the afternoon playing rhyming games with old Tucker's name."

The men shared a laugh as Lois and Nancy discovered they lived four streets apart in Hilton Head Plantation. They ordered their ice cream and made a date to go to dinner.

They had a party of six for the Early Bird at Charlie's Crab. John and Laura Susan Cox, the third couple, were PanoTech expatriates from Cleveland. John was a native Ohioan, but Laura Susan had grown up in Atlanta. She wore a pink knit shirt with G.R.I.T.S. written on the front in rhinestones. It baffled Lois until Laura Susan turned around and revealed "Girls Raised In The South" on the back.

"It's great being back in the South. Don't y'all just love it here?" Laura Susan exuded. "If you ask me, PanoTech did us a huge favor."

"I'm still churning over Tucker's king-sized bonus after cutting all of us loose," Ed said, furiously spreading salmon pâté over sesame flatbread. "I hope he can't sleep at night."

"Honey, Tucker Raft could put his scruples into a thimble and have room for whipped cream, bless his heart." Laura Susan gave a charming smile and buttered a biscuit.

"He laid off so many of us, couldn't he at least have had an appreciation luncheon or something?" Ed asked.

"Ed," said Lois sharply, "I have just one word for you."

"What?"

## Island Therapy

"Enron."

The men nodded. "We do have our pensions," John Cox said quietly.

After dinner they walked out onto the dock behind Charlie's. At low tide the water had receded dramatically, leaving a wide swath of mud and spartina grass where thousands of fiddler crabs scurried into tiny holes. Laura Susan inhaled deeply. "Ahh, smell that marsh."

"This place would be nicer if the swamp didn't stink so much," Ed replied.

"Honey, it's called a salt marsh, not a swamp," Laura Susan drawled with the patience and smile of a good tour guide. "What you smell is pluff mud. That's where the spartina grass decomposes and forms the food chain for all those fish and shrimp and oysters you love to eat. If you buy your shrimp at Benny Hudson's in the afternoon, it was swimming in the ocean that morning. They all feast on pluff mud."

"Pluff mud? You have a specialized vocabulary here," Lois said. "A lagoon is really a retention basin, a plantation is a gated community, a villa is a condo."

"And a palmetto bug," Laura Susan added, "is a roach."

↔↔↔↔↔↔↔

Their best PanoTech friends from New Jersey, David and Alice DeSalvi, were coming to visit, which cheered Ed up enough to accompany Lois to Harris Teeter.

"Where's the Italian bread?" he asked, scanning the bakery shelves.

"Back in New Jersey. I'll get La Brea bread. You'll like it. Trust me."

"Bagels?"

"By the deli counter, but you won't find onion-garlic. I'll e-mail Alice to bring some."

"Never mind. Probably wouldn't pass airport security."

After traversing the aisles Lois headed for Rose's check-out line. "That's the little bagger lady I told you about," she said. "She's 92, and you'd better talk to her."

"Sugar, go get another six-pack of Co-Cola. They're two-for-one," Rose said as she began sacking purchases.

Heading back from the soft drink display with the mandatory six-pack, Ed saw Lois talking to the elderly man behind her.

"Think I'll come eat at your house," the white-haired man commented with a grin. "Y'all got better stuff in your cart than my wife lets me eat."

"This nice man just told me how to do grouper on the grill," Lois explained to Ed. "I think I'll do it the first night David and Alice are here."

"I put lime juice and fresh grated ginger in the marinade," the man said.

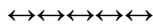
"Add a little soy sauce," Rose advised. "Grill some fresh pineapple rings too."

"Have a nice marinade," Ed grumbled as they gathered their bags and left.

"That was good, honey." Lois praised him in the car. "You interacted."

"Does everybody here butt into your business when you shop?"

"Only the nice ones."



They picked David and Alice up at the Savannah airport, and Ed drove home by the shortcut through Bluffton, slyly pointing out the local-color intersection with the Piggly Wiggly, the Squat & Gobble, and The Sippin' Cow Café. As the car crossed the bridges from the mainland to Hilton Head Island, he rolled down the windows and told them to inhale.

"That's the smell of pluff mud," he said. "Nutrient base of all our local seafood."

David and Alice oohed and ahhed appropriately at everything, from magnificent blue herons fishing in lagoons to

## Island Therapy

the moss-draped trees arching over the roads. The mood was too upbeat for Ed to start grouching over PanoTech yet.

Lois offered peel-and-eat shrimp as an appetizer while she put the grouper into the lime-ginger marinade and sliced the fresh pineapple.

"These shrimp were caught locally," Ed said. "They were probably swimming in Port Royal Sound this morning."

"Tomorrow night we're taking you two out," David said. "You name the place."

"Saint Tropez," Lois said without hesitation. "I'll call for reservations."

The women left Ed and David on the screen porch rehashing PanoTech injustices and came inside to phone the restaurant.

"Is David as morose as Ed has been?" Lois asked.

"Terribly. That's why I pushed for this trip to see you," Alice answered.

"Misery loves company. I think I'll expand our little dinner party." Lois made two other calls before dialing the restaurant and then reserved a table for ten at Saint Tropez.

The next evening the maitre d' led them into a private dining room with a charming Mediterranean décor. When Ed saw the Cooks, the Coxes, and a third couple already seated at the long table, he turned to Lois and whispered suspiciously, "What's going on?"

"Group therapy. It'll be fun. Trust me."

The Coxes introduced the third couple as PanoTech friends visiting from Cleveland. After wine and hors d'oeuvres, more wine and good food, still more wine and Grand Marnier soufflé, Laura Susan stood up and intoned, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here tonight to honor the many years of loyal service given to PanoTech by these poor Raft-shafted castaways and to give old Tucker the send-up he deserves."

"Hear, hear!" The women applauded.

Laura Susan set a flip chart on the table with a caricature series she had drawn. The first showed a raft full of shipwreck victims approaching Hilton Head. In the second

panel they were all lounging under palm trees, sipping wine, and wearing t-shirts that said, "Tucker who?" Next came a cartoon of the hated ex-boss playing golf. Boos and hisses abounded.

"Poor Tucker never knew where to invest or where to play golf," she said as spontaneous laughter greeted a picture of the boss teeing off on a grassy raft about to go over PanoTech Falls. The last panel showed a wet Tucker on the rocks saying, "I wish I'd moved to Hilton Head."

Laura Susan closed by giving the six former PanoTech employees little plastic watches she had gotten at the Dollar Store and certificates of appreciation made out to "The Raft Shafted."

When Tom Cook led the group in a sing-along of Tucker Raft rhymes, all invented over pizza and beer somewhere in Chicago, a dignified waiter discreetly closed the French doors that separated them from the main dining room.

Still humming the Chicago songs, Ed drove over the Cross Island Parkway toward home. "Let's picnic at the beach tomorrow," he suggested.

"We'll need to stop for sandwich bread," said Lois.

He pulled up to a gas pump at the convenience store on the corner of 278 and Gum Tree Road. "Just for you, I'll pump while you go in for bread."

"Oh, no," said Lois. "You get the bread. I'm still working on my pumping skills."

Ed got out of the car. "Come with me, David. You gotta hear the conversations we have here in the check-out line."

# Pine Island, Hilton Head

by  
Marilyn Lorenz

Other beaches, further north,  
had higher waves, wilder storms,  
years of dreams washed in undertow.  
But this is my beach now, my island,  
it knows the secrets of my heart,  
husband's and grandchildren's laughter.

And this is where I walk.  
Wading through tidal pools,  
thinking about what is left to do.  
Increasing speed, trying to reach  
a pace worth effort as gulls call  
encouragement, again and again.

Sand stretches wider at the bend,  
toward the sunset, toward the pines,  
and the sea of diamonds barely moving.  
I plead for time, "Please," I pray,  
"things are not perfect yet."  
Fearing, "nor will they ever be."

I seek redemption in the fading light,  
and leave believing  
hope will survive the night.  
When love prevails, redemption's free.  
Be kind, oh Lord, be kind  
to me.



Photograph by Art Cornell

# Payback

by  
C.S. Thorn, Jr.

Antwon tried to doze, but he could not stop thinking of the huge wave that came from nowhere. One minute the sea was calm, but in less than an hour he was caught in a maelstrom. The wind shrieked and mocked him as he fought to maintain course in the near dark.

He felt it coming before he could see it. The wall of water advancing from the east sucked the sea out from under him. The bow of the *Jessie B* lurched upwards, perpendicular to the surface before she fell off to port, pitch-poled, and rolled bottom up. When she struggled to right herself, Antwon fell against a bulkhead where a gaff hook ripped open his arm. With no time to wrap the wound, nor to don a life jacket or transmit a Mayday, he had to get out. The boat was going down.

He swam out of the wheel house and clambered onto the overturned hull. He held fast to the keel to keep from sliding back into the water. He was not perched there long when the boat settled on her beam and slipped into the depths.

There were no lights from other boats. He could not tell east from west. Clouds obscured the stars, but he swam just to keep moving. He was cold, and he slipped under at one point. A mouthful of seawater caused him to gag and may have

saved his life. He found his second wind, but soon he was numb and exhausted. That is when he heard the voice.

"Hey you, over here, swim dis way."

Antwon peered into the blackness but saw no one. He knew that people sometimes hallucinate when they are close to death, but he would not succumb to madness.

"Cain't you hear me? Over here, dis way."

The voice was so natural, so real. Was it possible he was just imagining it?

"Who are you? What you want?"

"Jus' follow my voice and swim to me. My name Gabriel."

Antwon pulled with his good arm in the direction of the voice.

"Dat's right. Keep comin'. You almost here."

A dark form appeared twenty yards ahead—one of the big ice chests that were common on commercial fishing boats. Becoming animated, he stroked, kicking furiously until it was within his grasp. He struggled to climb in but fell back, exhausted.

"Okay, I'll he'p you get up." Gabriel gave him a push, and he was out of the water.

Antwon was barely conscious. "Where you come from?"

"My boat went down, same as you. I knowed you needed help. I figured we could share the cooler."

"What boat? Where you from?"

"The *Sweet Mary* out of Beaufort."

Antwon was dog-tired. Time and again he would nod off and flop out of the chest. The cool water would keep him awake until Gabriel boosted him back in. His eyes were flagging just after dawn when something brushed against his leg, knocking him back into the water. He caught a glimpse of a dorsal fin and ducked his head under the surface for a better look. A tiger shark was circling back, but it veered off when Antwon kicked its snout. He scrambled back to the relative safety of the ice chest.

## Payback

"Gabriel, Gabriel, you see the shark? Where are you?"

"Right here man, right next to you. I didn't go nowhere. Man, get out'a dat shirt, it got blood all over it. Take it off, and trow it far as you can."

Antwon's fingers began to cramp. He could not open the buttons.

"Rip it off. Tear it off, but get rid of it, now," Gabriel ordered.

He struggled out of the shirt, rolled it into a ball, and pitched it as far as he could. When it hit the water with a small splash, the shark turned to investigate. Signaled by some primordial stimulus, the beast lunged and swallowed it, disappearing beneath the surface with one sleeve trailing from its jaws.

"Gabriel, my arm still bleedin', and I must have the fever. I got chills bad."

"Here take this." He handed up a silver pocket knife.

"Cut some strips off your trousers, then wrap 'em 'roun' your arm. Dat'll fix it. When you done, you start to pray."

Again Antwon did what he was told. The strips of denim covered the wound and stanching the bleeding.

"Gabriel, what we do now?"

"Nuttin' to do now but pray. Wait and pray."

"Gabriel?"

"What, what is it now?"

"I ain't know how to pray."

"Dat's crazy, man. What you mean you cain't pray? Look up at the blue sky, look how gentle are the seas, now the storm is gone. Turn your face up and say, 'Lawd, thank you for sparin' me. Lawd, please see me through 'til someone come find me.' Antwon, when you pray you just talkin' to God an' he always listen. You got to learn to pray."

Antwon was exhausted, "I got to rest a minute."

"No, not now," Gabriel raised his voice. "You come this far, you ain't givin' up now. Antwon, you stay awake, you hear me."

C.S. Thorn, Jr.

"Awright, I'll try . . . oh my God, Gabriel, now dere's two sharks."

Gabriel ducked under the surface. They would break off as long as he could kick or punch them.

Antwon was shivering noticeably now, and he began to see things that were not there. A sandy beach appeared to his left, only to disappear abruptly. A small sailboat came by but vaporized when he grabbed for it, and he was in the water again.

Gabriel boosted him back up. "Now, stay in that cooler, you hear. I got all I can do with dese sharks. Don't be distractin' me."

Antwon's arm was very painful, but he focused on staying in the chest. Then, through his half-open eyes he caught sight of his parents in their skiff. They were praising him for the many fish he had caught and begged him to come to them.

"Antwon, Antwon, don't listen to them," Gabriel pleaded. "They ain't real. You know they ain't real. Listen to me."

He was tired, much too tired; he didn't listen. His parents would take him home to Skull Creek. He slipped out of the ice chest for the last time.

When next he opened his eyes, a Coast Guard officer reached down as two others dragged him up a ladder. He managed to blurt, "Get Gabriel, don't forget Gabriel; the *Sweet Mary* went down, too."

That was all he could manage. He collapsed on the deck.

Antwon woke up the next morning in the hospital at Hilton Head. A nurse offered him some water.

"How you feelin'?" she asked.

"Awright, I guess."

"You one lucky man bein' out there in the water all that time and bein' found. You must live right. By the way, a man from the Coast Guard want to talk to you. I'll bring him in."

## Payback

In minutes a uniformed officer appeared at his bedside. "Good morning, Mr. Williams. I'm Captain Rogers from the Marine Safety Office in Savannah. I'd like to ask you a few questions about the sinking of your boat if you feel up to it. Your home port is Skull Creek on Hilton Head. Is that correct?"

Antwon looked troubled, "Dat's right, but what about Gabriel, you find him?"

"I'm sorry sir, the crew aboard the cutter searched the entire area but found no one else in the water, and there's no record of a fishing vessel named *Sweet Mary* out of Beaufort. Can you tell me about the circumstances of your sinking?"

As if re-telling a dream, Antwon described the rogue wave that had come from nowhere and the sensation that the sea was dropping out from under him. He described the turmoil and related how the *Jessie B* was tossed about like a toy before she capsized. His eyes fixed on the window, and he told of swimming for his life, but he said nothing more about his encounter with Gabriel.

"Well, I'll add this to the report," the officer said producing his card. "If you think of anything else, please call me at this number. Thank you for your time."

In the afternoon a doctor came by. "How do you feel, Antwon?"

"Awright. My arm feel better."

"Antwon, do you still think that a man named Gabriel appeared to you in the middle of the ocean and saved your life?"

"I musta dreamed it, but I would swear he was dere."

"Well, Antwon, the mind plays tricks on us in situations like this. It happens to lots of people. There's nothing wrong with you; it's just that your mind created an ally to help you to cope with a desperate situation."

As the doctor spoke, Antwon began to realize that Gabriel might have been an illusion after all. But he knew he could not have survived for so long in the water on his own. He did not know what to believe.

"Now, Antwon, there is something you should know. The Coast Guard reviewed their records, and a boat named *Sweet Mary* was lost at sea, as you claimed. Her captain, Gabriel Simmons, was lost as well."

"I told them. I told everyone, but no one believed me."

"Antwon, she was lost in 1995, twelve years ago. You probably read about it or heard about it on the news. It must have stuck in your mind. Do you think you feel well enough to go home?"

Antwon sat silently for a moment. He was bewildered but responded, "Yassuh, I'm ready to go."

"All right, I'll sign the release."

In minutes his nurse appeared with papers for him to sign. She wished him good luck and left his personal belongings in a brown paper bag on the bed. It was folded at the top and bore his name in block letters, Williams, Antwon, admitted 7:18 p.m., August 2, 2007. Along with his wallet and his keys, it contained a silver pocket knife inscribed with the initials G.S.

Antwon stared hard at the object as he held it before his eyes. He was dumbfounded. When the orderly appeared with a wheel chair, Antwon rode to the lobby without a word and walked out into the daylight, clutching the knife tightly in his good hand.

He was back on the water in just a few weeks, working on another man's boat. Antwon was making money because the fishing was good. He worked six or seven days at a stretch, and he once worked seventeen days straight. He was determined to have another boat of his own and saved every nickel he could.

A month later he took a day off to run errands in Savannah. It was near dark when he headed home on the two lane highway. He was following a blue Camaro when a deer darted across the road. The driver of the Camaro swerved but lost control. The car veered off the roadway and sideswiped a tree, then returned to the pavement and rolled over on the opposite side of the road. When it stopped spinning on its roof, everything was very quiet. There was no other traffic in sight.

## Payback

Antwon jumped out of his pickup and saw smoke coming from the back of the car. He ran to the driver's side and pulled on the handle. The door cracked open, but the top of the window frame scraped on the pavement and would open no more. Smoke was filling the interior, and Antwon worried that the gas tank could go at any minute. He struggled again with the door but it would not budge. The young woman inside could not help. She was unconscious, and blood was pooling on the inside of the overturned roof from a head wound. Getting to his feet, Antwon pushed on the side of the car. He rocked it back and forth, pulling on the door. Gradually it yielded inch by inch until there was just enough room to pull her out. He gagged on the smoke and stepped away for a moment to fill his lungs with fresh air. The victim was suspended in her seat belt but Antwon could not reach the release. Then a small flame shot up near the left rear tire. He tried again to reach the release by lunging against the door opening, but it was no use.

Desperately he looked around for a tool of some sort before he remembered the knife. In seconds it was out of his pocket, and he was sawing at the tough fabric of the belt. When it parted, the girl crumpled to the roof. Antwon grabbed her arms and pulled her towards him. He had to turn her on her side, but he managed to extricate her from the wreck. There was a nasty cut on her hairline, but he could not worry about that now. He reached down and picked her up, carrying her over his shoulder to the other side of the road. He was across the center lane when he heard a thwump as the gasoline tank ignited. Black smoke curled upwards, and flames billowed out of the now wide-open door.

He had used all of his strength and the reserves of energy stored in his muscles. His arms were shaking from the effort, but he ran with his burden until they were both safely away from the fire. He put the girl down on the grass at the side of the road and tried to stanch the bleeding with his handkerchief. Another motorist had stopped and called 911. Soon they heard the sirens of approaching emergency vehicles and saw the blue lights of a state police cruiser.

The EMTs took charge of the situation. They strapped the victim onto a gurney and lifted it into the back of the ambulance. In just minutes they were back on the road on the way to the hospital.

Antwon waited while the wrecker removed the Camaro. He was tired, but the trooper needed to ask some questions. He sat on the shoulder of the road relating the details of the accident.

"Mr. Williams," said the officer, "you did a brave thing. That car could've gone up at any second."

"I ain't think about that. I just had to get her out."

"You saved her life. You really did. If not for you, she'd still be in there." The trooper pointed to the still smoking wreck.

Antwon nodded. "You sure she be awright?"

"I'll call the hospital and check."

The trooper walked to his cruiser and punched some numbers into a cell phone. After a brief conversation he walked back to Antwon. "The girl is alert and out of danger. She wants to see you. Any chance you could run over to the hospital? It's just a few miles from here."

"It's gettin' late, but I guess I could go."

"It won't take long. She just wants to thank you. You can use the emergency room entrance."

"Awright, I'll go over dere."

Antwon walked through the self-opening doors of the emergency room into the pale green interior. He approached a nurse at the desk. "That girl in the wreck they brought in here, she want to see me."

"Oh, you're the one. It's a good thing you came along. Follow me, she's right over here."

She ushered him to a small examination room just off a wide corridor. "Look, honey, here's your hero."

A bandage covered most of her forehead but the young woman smiled at Antwon.

"Hi, I'm Lashawn. What's your name?"

## Payback

Antwon shuffled nervously. "Uh, Antwon, Antwon Williams. Pleased to meet you."

"Antwon, we are just very, very lucky that you came along. I don't know how to thank you."

"Uh, what you mean we? You was the only . . ."

"I'm going to have a baby. It's a boy. His name will be Gabriel after his grandfather. Gabriel Simmons. That's a good name for a boy, don't you think?"

Antwon stood staring at her, his mind struggling with what she had said.

He stammered, "I'm glad you okay, but it's late, and I got to get up early to go fishin'. I need to go."

"Of course, but what a coincidence, my grandfather was a fisherman, too. Thank you Antwon, thank you so very much. We'll never forget you."

Antwon could only wonder what had influenced him to pick this of all days to run errands. His mind raced as he walked out the door. He stood silently for a long while looking up at the stars with his fingers wrapped around the silver knife in his pocket. From somewhere deep inside him words came to his lips, and he began to pray.



# The Perfect Gift

by  
Jane P. Hill

The day had started out pleasantly enough, with plans for a short get-away from my home in Atlanta. My car was loaded down with beach chair, bicycle, tennis racquet, and golf clubs, as I was speeding along I-16, vigilantly keeping the speedometer below 80. I was looking forward to several days visiting with a friend who lives in one of Hilton Head Island's lovely gated communities, called "plantations" by the locals.

Far from the oppressive, smoggy congestion of Atlanta, I-16 is a section of highway between Macon and Savannah that could hardly be more rural. Most of I-16 might as well be in the middle of the desert for all its scenic attractions. Not to mention 50-mile stretches between "services."

Driving along, listening to Jimmy Buffett sing about sponge cake, cheeseburgers, and margaritas, I reached over for a snack. Just as I was biting into a chewy chocolate chip cookie, I realized that the temperature warning light had come on, and steam was pouring from under the hood. Pulling to the side of the road, I attempted to call AAA, but I was unable to get a signal on my cell phone.

I put up my hood, rolled down the windows of the car, and poured some iced tea—sweet, of course. Settling in with a

Jane P. Hill

Patricia Cornwell novel, I waited for the Georgia State Patrol to come to my rescue.

Not really expecting another motorist to stop on this isolated stretch of highway, I was pleasantly surprised when a gorgeous silver Porsche pulled up behind me, driven by an equally gorgeous young man—young enough to be my son, but gorgeous nonetheless.

He walked to the passenger side of my car, and he asked through the open window if I needed help.

"My car has overheated, and I was just waiting for a trooper to come by," I replied.

"It's awfully hot out here, ma'am. Why don't I give you a lift to the next exit where you can get a tow truck?" he asked, as I mentally noted what nice manners he had. Disregarding the warnings that I had relentlessly given to my twin daughters not to go with strangers, I readily agreed to his kind offer.

"Would you like to drive?" he offered. "The car is real new, and I haven't gotten the feel of the clutch yet."

*Drive his new Porsche? What a lovely young man!* I thought as I accepted the keys. I had owned a Porsche many years ago, before diapers, nannies, and tuition payments. What a pleasure it was to shift through the gears as I re-entered I-16, admiring the innovations in German engineering and added comforts since my 1970 model.

Charlie, my new friend and rescuer, was a delightful companion. As we discussed current events, books, and movies, I thought to myself, *Why can't my daughters meet a fine young man like Charlie?*

As we approached an exit, Charlie suggested that we pull off of I-16. "I doubt that there will be a tow truck service at this exit, since it's so far from anything, but we can at least get something to drink," he said.

Charlie told me to remain in the car and stay cool, while he went inside to get our drinks. Again I thought: *What a considerate young man.*

## The Perfect Gift

It seemed like Charlie was taking an awfully long time in the minimart, when suddenly he bolted from the store and came running toward me. Jumping in the car and buckling his seat belt in what looked like a single motion, he yelled, "Hit it, Granny!" while pointing a Glock 9 mm at me.

Not questioning his intentions or motives, I complied, leaving rubber in the minimart driveway. Roaring back on to I-16 with words like *armed robbery*, *accessory*, and *assault* running through my head, things got worse. After sifting through the cash from the minimart, Charlie pulled a baggie from under the passenger seat. To my previous list of offenses, I now added *possession with intent*.

"They will have seen us getting on the Interstate going west-bound, so we need to do a U-turn in the median. Can you handle it?" asked Charlie.

Afraid to do anything else, I threw the car into a skid and bumped across the median. "Where'd you learn to drive like that?" he asked, impressed.

"BMW driving school," I croaked, with a mouth as dry as sawdust. "Aren't you worried about damaging your nice new car; it's awfully low to the ground to go plowing through medians."

"Isn't my car," Charlie said with a laugh.

To my growing list of felonies, I now added *grand theft auto*. How did I let myself get into this mess? Now I was truly terrified. If Charlie didn't kill me, who would ever believe I wasn't his accomplice? After all, I drove the get-away car—the *stolen* getaway car. I could wind up in prison for a lot of years. At my age, that probably meant life.

He instructed me to take the next exit, then directed me onto a narrow, winding road. But at least it was paved. Suddenly, behind me I saw flashing blue lights. "Don't even think about it," said Charlie as he read my mind. With Charlie's Glock near my face, I decided that I had no option but to run. Flooring the Porsche, I navigated the turns amazingly well, given my state of panic, putting more distance

## Jane P. Hill

between us and the heavier, less agile Crown Vic with the flashing blue lights.

Suddenly, Charlie told me to make a quick left. Downshifting with my right hand, and pulling the wheel with all my strength with my left hand, I somehow managed to make the impossible turn into a rutted, dirt road. Abandoning the Porsche, we ran across a dry streambed into a grassy meadow with a shabby barn at the far end. Charlie shoved me into the barn, where I found a rusted old Pontiac Firebird. What my daughters would call a real klunker. Charlie demanded that I climb into the trunk.

At this point, I was sure Charlie intended to kill me, but with no other options, I climbed in awkwardly. At least the trunk was relatively clean. There was even a threadbare blanket, which provided some padding as Charlie backed the car out of the barn.

He then began to drive down a dirt road at a leisurely pace. *How can he be so cool?* I marveled.

When you believe you are going to die, the most incredible thoughts go through your mind. Regret that I would never see my twin daughters again, anger at myself for getting in a stranger's car. Those thoughts would be expected. But I also had ridiculous thoughts: *Did I remember to turn off the coffeepot before I left home? Had I remembered to leave a check for the housekeeper?*

Not only was the exterior of the car in sad shape, but the suspension and exhaust systems had also seen better days. I was convinced that Charlie was not going to have to shoot me. Either I would die from the exhaust fumes, which were finding their way into the trunk, or I would get beaten to death as the car bounced through potholes.

On one particularly bad bump, I felt something hard jab into my thigh. My cell phone! I hadn't realized that I still had it in my pocket. Holding down the "9" key, I got an immediate response: "9-1-1, what is your emergency?"

Explaining my predicament to the 9-1-1 operator, I had no concerns about being overheard by Charlie. The Firebird's exhaust was deafening. The 9-1-1 operator told me

## The Perfect Gift

to stay on the line, and she kept talking with me, asking me where we had been and getting a description of the Pontiac. We talked for quite some time, as Charlie casually drove to whatever destination he had in mind.

Suddenly, Charlie made a sharp turn and slowed to a stop. "This is it," I told the operator. "He's going to kill me!"

Instead, much to my amazement, I heard a metallic voice saying: "Welcome to McDonald's. Can I take your order?"

Having stolen a car, robbed a minimart, and with an old lady in the trunk of the car, Charlie had actually stopped for a Big Mac, fries and a Coke.

He never got his order, though. I suddenly heard sirens and the *whop, whop, whop* of a helicopter as the car was surrounded.

As a sheriff's deputy helped me from the trunk of the car, I was amazed to see that I was in Hilton Head—hardly the way I had planned to arrive! "How did you find me?" I asked the deputy.

"We tracked you using the signal from your cell phone," he responded. The cell phone that the twins had given me for my birthday.



Photograph by Art Cornell

# Morning Jog

by  
Art Cornell

The path seemed longer this day;  
Perhaps the chilling wind  
Played a role  
Or, more likely,  
That last glass of wine  
The night before.  
My rhythm,  
Never pretty at best,  
Was labored,  
Feet slapping asphalt,  
Moving air,  
Heat building within.  
Oak branches dripped and  
Jiggled with moss  
As the marsh grass swayed to  
An old dance tune  
Only it could hear.  
Birds voiced their first of  
Many spring songs  
While gripping newly budded limbs  
That seemed to wave hello  
With each gust of wind.  
We were all caught this day  
On the edge of anticipation  
For yet another season to begin,  
Delighted to be part  
Of the pageantry.



# Patrick and Me

by  
Dee Merian

**I**t is another hot August weekday in South Carolina. I decided to leave my apartment complex and walk to the Tiki Hut, set on a strip of sand near the Hilton Head public beach. I wanted a cool beer to drown my disappointment.

Another refusal letter had arrived with the morning post. Frustrated, I raised my voice to a screaming pitch, reading aloud to my patient wife the details of a condensed one paragraph reply. "An interesting story. Sorry, we can't accept your manuscript. The story happened too long ago. Our readership wants more current events. Good luck with your pursuit in finding a publisher." My voice cracked as I finished the last sentence.

I receive similar responses to my query letters nearly every week. I am about to drown in paper. The accumulated rejection letters are piling high in my small corner office. I try to comfort my ego with the knowledge that many writers receive similar replies. I expected the transition from syndicated news reporter to freelance author would be easy. Recently, I have come to believe, if you are not a celebrity, it takes insider connections. Most of my friends in the news stations are gone.

They retired years earlier. Today, it is a tight little world in publishing playland.

Sometimes I share a bar stool with a fellow writer at the outdoor, palm-frond roof, Tiki Bar. Last summer he received an acceptance from an agent. I shared his enthusiasm. At last someone was finding literary attention. He had completed his first fiction novel. The agent's name was the same individual who had answered my query letter. I remembered the name because the agent flatly stated I was not a competitive enough writer for today's market place.

"I had to rewrite ninety-five pages, nearly a third of the book, before I received a written contract," confided my companion. "That was nearly a year ago. The manuscript still isn't sold." He shrugged his shoulders with disappointment.

One of my favorite authors wrote a funny novel set in Manhattan during the 1930s depression. The characters in the story all lived in a beautiful penthouse on Park Avenue. The writing was witty and fun to read. The author told me, when I met him, that he worked hard selling his manuscript.

I met this author, Patrick, in San Diego. With some friends I was returning from a bullfight in Tijuana, Mexico, a border town just south of San Diego. In the 1950s everyone attended the bullfights. We stopped at a hotel restaurant for nourishment before continuing our hot summer drive back to Santa Monica. In the hotel bar was Patrick. He was celebrating.

"The drinks are on the house, courtesy of Mr. Dennis over there," the bartender told us pointing to a man talking to a group of people.

I raised my glass of beer in his direction when I caught his attention. Patrick was a young man about my age, medium height, wearing a tan jacket with worn edges around the sleeve. I noticed them when we shook hands after he acknowledged my toast and approached me.

"Thank you for the beer. What's the special occasion?"

"I've finally found a publisher who actually likes my story."

"Congratulations. Is this your first book?" I asked him.

"My first published book. I've been repeatedly told my stories are charming, but no one wants to read about the depression. Hell, what do those editorial kids know about the depression?" He laughed out loud. "What about you? Do you live around here?"

"I live in the Los Angeles area. I'm a reporter for the *Evening Outlook* newspaper. Maybe someday I'll find time to write a book."

"I received about a hundred rejections," continued Patrick. "Then a guy decided to take a chance and publish my recent manuscript when I least expected it. That's Mr. DuLuca over there." Patrick's eyes twinkled when he pointed to a man wearing a light blue linen suit with a dark blue silk tie. The man wore typical San Diego attire. I surmised he was definitely a local guy.

"Here's to good luck," I said raising my beer glass once again.

"I'm going to need it. I found out this small publisher has very little money for publicity."

We clicked our glasses together. "I'll ask someone in my office to review your book, if that will be any help."

He nodded his head and drifted away to speak to someone else. Even though I never saw Patrick again, I'll always remember that afternoon.

It was the end of the summer and the bullfights were over for that season. I was examining some books in a local drugstore. My intent was to find something to read later that day. I saw Patrick's book. It was a small soft cover book placed on a circular spiral rack with several other nondescript books. It cost two dollars.

That same afternoon, I sat next to our apartment swimming pool reading one hilarious page after another. I belly laughed so loud, a man living in a nearby apartment came over to me. He wanted to see the book. By this time I was sitting on a lounge and throwing my legs and feet up in the air because I was laughing so hard.

"What are you reading that's so funny?"

"It's a story about a rather dysfunctional aunt who inherits an orphaned nephew. She's rich and generous but irresponsible." That is all I could tell him since I had just completed reading chapter two. "I'll give you the book when I finish reading it."

He was not willing to wait. He was a troubled Hollywood director/producer something or other, divorced and broke. His ex-wife, true to California laws at that time, took everything and left him. He said he needed something to cheer him up. Yeah. Yeah. I heard that many times before. He wrote the name of the book, *Auntie Mame*, on a scrap of paper and departed to purchase the book himself.

As they say in Hollywood, the rest is history. Thinking back on that incident, I should have charged a finder's fee. The guy whose name I do not remember, along with another man, wrote a screenplay. It soon became a movie starring Rosalind Russell. She also lived somewhere in the area. I would see her attending services at my church on Sunset Boulevard. I wonder if Patrick ever figured out that a group of his admirers, on the edge of Los Angeles, made him famous. We were far from New York, where he lived with his wife and two children.

The movie was a big success. The screenplay followed Patrick's story exactly as he wrote it, unusual practice for Hollywood. I saw the book for sale again, in hard cover, with a cartoon drawing of Ms. Russell wearing a red 1920s flapper gown. In her fingertips was a long gold cigarette holder. The second book cover was a lot better than the original. It was jazzy looking, and readers were buying this more expensive edition. I hope Patrick received his fair share of royalties. I regret I did not keep the small book I had purchased so long ago. It would be a collector's item today. I remember Patrick Dennis' being very happy his first little book was coming out in print.

He wrote another book called *Travels with Mame*. It did not sell as well. I believe sequels are always a bore. Maybe it was his agent's idea to capitalize on the first book. Another

story Patrick wrote, I did like. It was also very funny even though it was a bit raw and vulgar in parts. The book was titled *The Breakup, His and Her Reasons*. The book started in the beginning telling why the couple was getting a divorce. It began with the wife's story ending in the center of the book. Then the reader turned the book upside down and backwards and started reading the husband's reason for the breakup. The husband's story also ended in the center of the book. By then the reader knew both individuals were too selfish to care about their partners. I thought the story was fun, and displayed some thoughtful insights about American marriages and divorces. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, international film stars, bought the book, but nothing came of their plans to make a movie. No doubt a big disappointment for Patrick.

Nine years after the *Auntie Mame* movie, the Broadway musical *Mame* opened starring Angela Lansbury and Beatrice Arthur. The two of them sparkled together with great dialog, accompanied by music and lyrics written by Jerry Herman, who previously created the musical, *Hello Dolly*.

The book, *Auntie Mame*, was still selling at a record pace in the stores. Patrick was around to enjoy the celebrity life for another ten years. He died when he was only 55 years old. I was still with the *Outlook News* when I read about his death in the Associated Press release.

Patrick wrote about twenty books, but *Auntie Mame* was his only big hit. Considering the story was a best selling book, movie, musical, and a television movie starring Lucille Ball, that is a real plus any author would relish happening in his career. And to all those publishers who steadfastly refused to publish his book? Patrick must have smiled to himself. I think that is the primary reason I admire him as one of my favorite authors. He had persistence because he believed in himself.

In some of my refusal letters, the editors stated my story was charming, while they had to pass on it. I immediately e-mailed my editor in Atlanta asking if the word charming was a code for another four letter word . . . I can't print? She never answered me. She always did before. I asked myself the obvious

question. Does my story really stink, and the publishers will not tell me?

I sat staring into space contemplating all the refusals Patrick Dennis endured pitching his story of Auntie Mame. A group of young boys interrupted my thoughts. They were carrying long surf boards, the type I would see at Santa Monica beach. They must be tourists. The teens around here used a shorter skim board. It brought back memories when I was younger, surfing in the late afternoon while the tide was high.

I sat waiting for my drinking buddy to appear. A daily beer was a ritual for him. He usually arrived from the beach, walking barefoot along the water from his seaside condo. I glanced at my watch. It was twelve thirty, and he was late. Maybe he received more news about his manuscript. With an impatient gesture, I ran my hand over my gray hair looking out at the water. I was about to order another beer when I saw my wife coming toward me.

"You received a phone call from a publisher in Torrance, California. They want you to call them back," she smiled.

What a surprise. It was just as Patrick told me a long time ago. Someone takes a chance with your story, when you least expect it.

# Ballad of Salad

by  
Norm Levy

Line in Ad in Hilton Head Yellow Pages:  
"Prescott's Restaurant—Amazing Salad Bar"

Belly up to the bar—the salad bar  
And witness behavior quite bizarre  
As normal humans bark to the bleat  
"All You Can Eat—Yes  
All You Can Eat."  
What started out as a simple need  
For a leaf of green or crunch of seed  
Has gone beyond mere good nutrition  
To frenzied forms of competition.  
Pile it high—pile it higher  
Create a herbivorous pyre.  
Start with a builder's dedication  
To put in place a firm foundation.  
Take celery stalks and carrot sticks  
All neatly stacked in rock-solid ricks.  
Fill them with greens—pack all the spaces  
Locked in tight with cucumber braces.  
If you detect too steep of a slope,  
Just cantilever some cantaloupe.  
Heap it all up—the ceiling is high.  
Just stack it up 'til it touches the sky.  
Haul it back to your groaning table.  
Behold—your own "Salad of Babel."  
Sprouts, fruits and veggies—greens by the ton  
So mixed up you can't taste any one.  
Now you invoke one final blessing  
Viscous glops of cascading dressing.  
Where will it end? (that's a good question)  
Look for the likely—indigestion!



Photograph by Art Cornell

# Nowhere to Go

by  
Art Cornell

I took a picture  
Of an aged and  
Gentle boat  
Yesterday—  
Tired, worn thin,  
Bleeding water,  
No good to anyone  
Anymore  
Except perhaps me  
And my camera—

And as we sat together  
He told me a story  
Of a life of toil  
And courage  
And water, rough and calm,  
And of a man  
Harvesting life  
To feed life  
And of that person's  
Worry  
And his strength  
And his pride.  
Oh so many things  
Did this  
Gentle wonder  
Tell me  
As we sat in the  
Marsh grass  
Together  
Alone.

Art Cornell

From time to time  
I would stop  
And visit  
To see how my  
Friend was faring—  
And each time  
He would show me a  
New side of his weathered  
Flanks, having struggled  
From the marsh mud  
Each day, floating safely,  
Quietly.  
In his watery dance  
Of life and  
Death.

The last time, not long  
Into fall, he was gone.  
What I had failed to see  
Was that he had moved  
Closer,  
Foot by desperate foot,  
To the fast-moving currents  
Of his youth—  
Oh, his determination was  
Staggering.  
I, of course,  
Searched  
But knew in my heart  
That was his way—  
To leave in obscurity.

Sitting on the bank  
I heard  
The wind music  
Play in the trees,  
Watched the stalks  
Of the marsh grass  
Sway—and  
Said my silent  
Goodbye.

# Serendipity

by  
Barbara Vernasco

**T**he examining area was quiet. I was not conscious of the muted sounds of the waiting room conversations and the occasional laughter of the nurses. The doctor and I were transfixed by the attempts of my ninety-one-year-old mother to write her name. The graceful handwriting of long ago had disappeared into abrupt starts and stops of scribble. With a sigh, Mother surrendered the pencil.

The physician confirmed my fear, "There's been a series of strokes," he said. "She needs full time care."

Years before Papa had told me, "I will look after your mother as long as I can; then, it is up to you." He was true to his word. In spite of his death 16 years before, his invested funds were still caring for Mama. Thus began my distressed search—a nursing home for mother.

My mother was not so much "maternal" in the sense that this word evokes an image of warm, comforting arms extended in protective watchfulness. She was first of all a beautiful woman who valued and cared for her beauty. It was her great gift, precious to her, and she nurtured it. But the years had passed and the beauty faded. She now lived with her

memories, isolated from her surroundings, and I continued to try to make my mother happy.

When I neared the entrance of the Golden Years Homestead, a three-storied, yellow brick building just a mile or two from my house, I took a deep breath. Feelings of guilt and sorrow accompanied me. Could I have done something to avoid this? Is this how it had to end?

I asked for the administrator and was directed to the reception area. From across the room came a high-pitched soprano voice.

"Hello!" said the occupant of a regal black wrought iron cage. The dome-shaped cage, topped by brass finials, sat near an embossed rose brocade loveseat and to the side of two Queen Anne chairs. A perfect fit for the Victorian setting. A sign hanging from the cage read, "My name is Radar." When I approached the enclosure, a gray, red and green parrot, nearly 18 inches tall, slowly turned on his perch, stretched his wing like a magician unfurling his cape, nodded his head, and began his high-pitched parrot lingo. "Hello! You're a pretty bird," he said. I knew Radar would be my friend. He would soften my feelings of helplessness each time I entered this residence.

Totally enthralled with my new friend, I was startled by the nursing home administrator. "He entertains all of our folks," she said. Then she guided me down the hall to one of the available rooms. I glanced into one of the occupied rooms and noticed a homemade quilt on the bed, a crocheted afghan and a few pieces of memorabilia in several of the other rooms. This was their home. Another cage rested near one of the vacated rooms; two brilliant green lovebirds nestled together—partners for life.

Immediately I recognized the sign Papa was giving me. He knew Mama would be happy with the birds to entertain her. When the admission papers were signed and I neared the exit, a deep baritone voice called, "Good-bye!" It was Radar switching to his manly voice. From then on his verbal treats greeted me on my arrival and departure at the nursing home.

## Serendipity

For years Papa had fed the birds. The bird feeder hung in the beech tree that he had planted nearly thirty years before. When the snow drifted through the back yard, Papa shoveled a path to ensure the birds would not be hungry. In early spring he waited for the robins and gold finch to return. According to Papa, it was Mama who loved the birds. He just wanted to please her. Pleasing her was his life's mission.

When Papa left this earth, Mother found a multitude of reasons why she could not feed the birds. I think Papa had a need to feed all God's creatures. After saying my goodbye on that cloudy, drab day in June, I left Papa in the Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens and returned home.

When I glanced out the window, my thoughts returned to Papa. I pondered his life, his death, his homes, schools, church and employer, all contained in one square mile of the small town of Mishawaka. That was Papa's life. Then, perched in a spindly tree on the patio, a cardinal caught my eye. Then a sparrow appeared. Next a gold finch hopped along the ground. A junco chirped from a nearby bush. As if by magic, there was a house finch, a robin, a wren, a starling and a black bird. And with a gust of wind they vanished. I knew Papa had sent me his promise. He would still be with me in spirit to share the burden of caring for Mama.

Shortly after I moved Mother to the full-care nursing facility, her health deteriorated rapidly. The strokes continued, paralyzing her right side, and hindered her ability to swallow. My daily prayers continued, "Please Papa, help Mother. Welcome her to your realm."

Radar continued to greet me each and every visit and wish me well on my departure. Each crackled squawk calmly lifted my heavy heart—"Hel-lo, purty girl, how are ya?"—poetry from a parrot. On my last visit I bid him a fond farewell and silently thanked him.

A few weeks after my mother's death, my daughter, Carol, asked me to accompany her and her family to Hilton Head Island. She felt the warm waters and intense sunshine would heal my exhausted spirit.

On our arrival at the rented condominium, I inhaled the moist, fragrant ocean breeze and began to relax, releasing the pent up stress in my shoulders. When I entered the sliding glass door, sunlight spilled through the skylight, and my eyes were drawn to the beautiful view—blue sky, sailboats and cerulean waters. Carol stood at the top of the stairs.

"Mom, the bedroom at the left is your room, the kids to the right; Jim and I will take this room." Not wanting to miss a moment of the waning tropical sunshine, she rushed us into our rooms to change into our bathing suits and head for the beach.

After three plane transfers, one cab ride and now a "hurry up" call from Carol, I felt like the March Hare in *Alice In Wonderland*. "You're late, you're late! For a very important date." I dragged the bags, purse and vacation paraphernalia to the bedside. With a pull and a tug, I removed my moist tee shirt and glanced at the painting above the bed; from the depths of my being, I heard, "Hel-lo purty girl, how are ya?"

There was Radar in all of his vibrant watercolor glory. And to add to the serendipitous moment, my brilliant green lovebirds were cuddled in the framed picture over the other bed. I gasped and called out, "Papa, welcome to my world."

### Epilogue

"Barbara, several years after your mother's death, I visited my grandmother in the very same nursing home. I, too, was intrigued by Radar, the parrot. In fact, last year I took my kindergarten class to the Golden Years nursing home. The children sang Christmas Carols and then spent time talking to the hero of your story. Radar must be here on this earth to help all of the residents and their families in their time of transition."

Linda Vernasco  
Daughter-in-law of the author

# Island Christmas

by  
Marilyn Lorenz

No snow or ice, no freezing cold.  
No plastic shovels used or sold.  
And rooftop Santas poised for flight,  
make really quite a silly sight  
amid the palms and old crepe myrtles,  
great blue herons, sleeping turtles.

Green and tan magnolia leaves  
gently stir in island breeze,  
tied with ribbons, bows and berries,  
holly branches, sugared cherries.  
I don't believe the Christ Child cares,  
how we share the love he bears.

We older, wiser, slower kings,  
receive the gift our savior brings.  
Accepting undeserved grace,  
transcending world, and time, and space.  
Our eyes wide open searching night,  
for East's bright star, for that true light,  
hope's promise born from heaven's glow  
placed in the darkness, long ago.



# Anchored at Hilton Head

by  
Vicki Barnhill Winters

I was standing on the bow of a sailboat, at the brim of the ocean, on the rim of the world. It was dusk, and the horizon was swallowing the sun.

Behind me, on the shore of an island the chart named Hilton Head, a family prepared for supper. Their cabin, on the edge of marshland and a small beach, was lit by an oil lamp which spread a warm yellow glow over the sand. A mother, thin, barefoot, with an infant on her hip, lit a barbecue by pouring gasoline over the coals, striking a match and throwing it into the pit. She jumped back quickly as the fire roared high. A father, with a beer in his hand and a small boy at his side, came out of the cabin and lifted binoculars to stare at me staring at him.

Headlights from a car illuminated the cabin and the water beyond. I stood in the shadowy half-light and watched as the lights went out and a man got out of the car. He walked over to the father and shook hands, then waited while the father went into the cabin and returned with another beer. The two men walked down to the beach and along the lip of the sand, talking. The boy stayed with the mother.

The stars came out one by one, little pinpoints of light in the sable twilight, and suddenly I was aware of a full moon over my left shoulder. The enormous orange orb floated over the beach, the cabin and my boat, lighting us all like a spotlight in a theater. On the beach I could see the men clearly now, their arms swinging, their feet throwing up small sprays of sand. One of them threw a beer can into the water, then the other threw hard, trying to hit my boat, but it fell short. I stood like a statue and pretended I had not seen them.

The mother called out, "Marty, come back and put the steaks on, unless you want me to cook 'em my way."

The men hurried back to the cabin. The moon spread a ribbon of gold along the water on my left and up to the beach like a brushstroke of butter on a steak. My stomach growled.

My husband had taken the dog ashore in the small rubber dinghy. I panned the binoculars across the water, beach and marsh but could not spot him. He must have pulled the dinghy into a little inlet and gotten out with the dog, away from the house. I went below to get some wine, cheese and crackers. When I came back up to the cockpit and looked through the binoculars at the shore, the family and their guest were all standing around the fire, drinking beer and talking. Their voices rose, and I strained to hear what they were saying.

"If you can't pay, just give me the keys to this cabin and we'll call it quits."

"Not on your life. This shack will be worth real money some day. Give me some time, man."

"Marty, the steaks are burning."

"I'm not waiting any more. Your time is up. You knew what would happen."

"Not now, man. We'll talk after dinner." I could clearly see Marty, bending over the steaks. The wife walked to the cabin, still holding the infant. The little boy stood near his father, in the shadow of the barbecue.

"I'm not staying for steak, Marty. I came for money."

"Lay off, man. You'll get your money."

"Time's up, Marty." I watched the man carefully. I was suddenly, inexplicably frightened, although I was a hundred yards away from the scene on the shore. The man turned back toward his car, as if to leave. Out of the corner of my eye, I finally saw my husband and the dog in the dinghy between the beach and the boat, right in the center of the smear of yellow moonlight.

The man suddenly turned, and a loud gunshot smote the gathering darkness. A second noise, like a tire blowing out, echoed in the shattered night. I sucked in my breath and turned the binoculars to find Marty. He stood beside the barbecue, the tongs in one hand and the beer in the other, transfixed. I held my breath, waiting for him to drop dead.

"Shit, man, what'd you do that for?" Marty's voice quavered and rose like a terrified bird.

"A warning, Marty. I'll see you on Monday." The man got in the car, turned on the headlights and backed out of the clearing.

The wife had come running from the cabin, the baby still on her hip. She ran to Marty and put her arms around him. The little boy came out from behind the barbecue and slipped under his father's arm. The family stood, a tableau of incredulity, and watched the taillights disappear.

I put the binoculars down and looked over the side of the boat for my husband and the dog. They were swimming in the water toward the boat. My husband had one oar under each arm. Behind him, the small rubber dinghy, with a hole blown in its side, was slowly sinking into the black water. A beam of moonlight, like the sun glistening off a mirror, reflected off an oarlock and caused me to turn away.



Photograph by Sansing McPherson

# The Bridge to Here

by  
Marilyn Lorenz

I never come home to Hilton Head Island without thanking God for the gift of living here. When my first husband died he was only 54. He never got to enjoy life without responsibilities, and he should have. I kept the life we dreamed in my heart, to be opened when I got to retire.

Gratitude is making a better being of me. In retirement every sunset is a benediction, every day a promise. Human imperfections are tolerated more often with strange affection than with useless hostility, a fact I attribute to living in this special place.

I am protective of Hilton Head, proud to live here, strongly resistant to anything or anyone seeking to change or harm what we respect here. I love the gentle spirit of island inhabitants; the close harmony that exists between humans and the gators, turtles, bees, butterflies, rabbits and deer as they share this Lowcountry life. The sun in the tree tops lighting a heron floating overhead, the peace in a beach walk, the dark night skies are things I cherish and will never take for granted.

While I have life and breath, let me hold this place in reverence. Trusting that you will care for it when I am gone.



Photograph by Jane P. Hill

# Islander

by  
Melinda Copp

Every time I drive across the bridge that connects Hilton Head and Pinckney Islands with the mainland, the view surprises me. From the car, I can't see anything but sky and the power lines that run along either side of the roadway. Then in an instant my car reaches the top of the grade, the horizon opens in all directions, and I can see for miles across the water and coastal marshes. Depending on the moon's pull, my gaze may fall on black oyster beds and sand bars exposed by the receding water or the calm, slate blue Skull Creek lined with the vivid green landscape. For the most part, I can't see any houses or other signs of human presence—everything is tucked into the greenery, hidden behind sagging live oaks and towering pines. Even on rainy days, at least a boat or two can be seen navigating the Intracoastal Waterway below the road. Regardless of the view, I love rolling down all the windows in my car so I can feel the cool brackish breeze on all sides of me. The heavy Lowcountry air feels weightless and refreshing at fifty-five miles an hour, a hundred feet over the water, as I leave the island.

For three years, my fiancé Matt and I have lived on Hilton Head Island. But I've known the place since I was a kid.

Driving over this bridge, after a sixteen-hour drive from Ohio, used to mean our family vacation had begun. We'd pile out of our vessel—a full-sized maroon Ford van—and the thick air would surround us. Now that I live here, I drive across the J. Wilton Graves Bridge once or twice a week on my way to Bluffton, Savannah, or Beaufort—the bridge is simply my way of getting off the island. My son is strapped in his car seat behind me, and the wind is blowing his blond hair in a fun mess. However, my trip today is more significant than any other drive off-island has ever been. We're on our way to look at a house for sale in Bluffton—possibly the first house I own in my lifetime, my family's first home.

When I vacationed on Hilton Head Island every year for ten years, I never thought I would live here—I don't even remember a desire to. I don't golf, and although the beaches are wide and serene, I always thought I'd settle somewhere with a faster pace and a younger demographic. Looking back, I suppose I had no idea where I would end up. And when I started thinking about where to go after graduating from college, I decided to stay on Hilton Head until I found a job because my parents were in the process of permanently relocating there. I still hadn't decided where I wanted to live, but I thought that if I found a job in a city somewhere in the southeast—Atlanta, Charleston, or even Savannah—then I could stay close to my parents and start building my professional life in an exciting new place where other twenty-somethings were doing the same. I could reestablish everything I left when I graduated college—a big social circle and a list of favorite hangouts. I needed to find myself against a colorful background, and although I love the natural landscapes of Hilton Head Island, I wanted something new.

Plus, Ohio transplants like me are somewhat of a cliché on Hilton Head—we're regarded as the stereotypical tourist. I've lost track of the number of times that I've heard someone say, "Everyone here is from Ohio." And every summer, many island residents whisper an I-wish-they-would-all-go-back-to-

Ohio mantra whenever traffic gets backed up or some other crowd inconveniences them. As an Ohioan, I wasn't sure how to handle these comments. I felt as if, regardless of where I get my mail, I would always be a tourist. Hilton Head had reached its Ohio transplant quota. Needless to say, no one always gets what he or she wants, and life tied me to Hilton Head for much longer than I expected to be there.

I grew up in a rural area of northern Ohio, and my town, Wellington, was landlocked. Most of the roads were laid out in a comfortable grid with predictable perpendicular angles—no waterways or marshes impeded direct routes. And the landscape was a patchwork of farmhouses, giant barns, and fields of corn and soybeans. Everything was connected by straight roads and embedded in the mainland—no bridge required. I felt connected to this place, too. I knew the terrain, and I knew what to do against that backdrop.

Coming to Hilton Head Island was like coming to a different, more manicured world. The landscape, although just as green and flat as Medina County, Ohio, felt more like a resort than a place where people actually lived. In Ohio, the skies are wide and everything seems to grow up from the ground. The tree crowns have an airy lightness that rustles crisp in the breeze. On Hilton Head, the trees seem to hang from the sky itself, with green spilling onto the ground. The town regulates appearances, so the signs are low to the ground—even the famous Golden Arches are tucked into the shrubbery. And instead of farmers working fields of crops, landscape crews blow leaves and plant master-planned gardens.

At the same time, the Carolina Lowcountry has a wildness that lies in wait for the landscapers to leave. When my parents were house hunting, we visited a fixer-upper in Shipyard Plantation that didn't look like it had been occupied since the seventies, although it had really been empty for only a couple of years. The exterior walls were covered in mold, moss, and vines that didn't waste any time taking over. Golden silk orb-weavers had spun intricate webs between the gutters and neighboring trees. And pine needles fallen from towering

heights covered the roof. The interior of this relic was decorated in veneer and harvest gold—an odd juxtaposition of mod inside and impending nature outside.

I was amazed at how quickly the wilderness had taken over. I grew up traipsing through acres of fields and woods, splashing in creeks, swinging on vines, and climbing trees. I never felt uncomfortable outside, surrounded by trees and wildlife, or even around old houses. In Ohio, old houses are farmhouses with white paint peeling and chipping off the sides and usually a barn in similar disrepair nearby. The trees keep to themselves and let the houses crumble on their own accord. Every dirt road has one of these abandoned farmhouses. But when I looked at the house in Shipyard, or even just peered into the marshes and woods of Hilton Head, thick with ferns and pale moss and pine straw, I felt like I shouldn't hang around for too long.

My parents always loved Hilton Head and its long stretches of beaches. We started vacationing here when I was in sixth grade, and returned every year at the same time to coincide with a seminar on home health care management, which was our family business. We always stayed in a house on Sand Dollar Drive on Folly Field Beach so my parents could walk the beach to their seminar, which was held at the Westin Resort. I read paperback books from a beach chair all day, and in the evenings after showering all the salt and sand away, I sat on the back porch of our rental house to let the ocean breeze dry my wet hair. Then at night my brother and I walked the shoreline with flashlights to spot the ghost crabs.

And I can remember my mother always said that she never wanted to go home to our landlocked Ohio. She could sit on the beach all day every day without feeling restless or bored. When she got too hot, she walked across the sand and into the salty water to cool off. For her, a week or two on the island was never enough.

By the time I reached high school, my parents had bought a villa on the south end just outside the back entrance to Sea Pines Plantation—an airy place on the second floor of

Treetops Villas. And rather than coming just for the annual conference, we vacationed here several times a year. When I was in college, my parents sold their share of the home care company to their partner. And without the business binding them to the Cleveland area, which was always my mother's excuse for never wanting to move south, my parents started to leave Ohio.

As a new college graduate, I planned on staying with my parents until I found a job. So the day after my commencement ceremony, my mother and I packed my car and drove to Hilton Head, where I thought I would wait tables, write poetry, and hang out on the beach. I wanted my transition into the professional world to be leisurely and well-tanned. And although I didn't know where I would find my first job, I figured it wouldn't be on the island. As far as I knew, Hilton Head was a place where people came to vacation—not to start a career.

Starting a new life is never easy, even if the place is familiar from childhood. I can remember a distinctive sense of angst rolling around inside me during my first summer here, and I spent most of my free hours in between jobs sitting on the couch wishing I were somewhere else. I struggled to establish rhythms and a routine, and felt physically awkward without my usual surroundings. And that was before Matt graduated from college and before my parents' house in Ohio had sold, so my mother and I were living together in the condo while my dad negotiated with prospective buyers. My mom and I hadn't shared a residence for more than three years. And we argued over menial things as if I were fourteen again and back in the phase where I took everything out on my mother. Being in a place where everyone was on vacation didn't make it any easier.

Although the resorts and beach houses are relatively new, Hilton Head has been a vacation spot for centuries. Like my family and other vacationers who flock here every summer, the first Hilton Head Island visitors were seasonal. Native Americans rowed boats to the island as early as 8000 B.C.

Their shell rings constructed from oyster shell fragments and arrowheads chipped from stone remain as evidence of their visits. In 1521, Francisco Cordillo, a Spanish explorer, was probably the first European to visit the island. In 1663, William Hilton sailed to the island from Barbados to explore the area on behalf of King Charles II, but none of these first visitors settled on the island. From these early explorations, through the Civil War, and into the early 1900s, people came and went with a vacation spirit—marveling at the island's natural beauty, hunting the wildlife, and relaxing on the beaches. Freed slaves established and maintained communities, but they were almost the only ones until later in the 1950s when the first bridge was built. Even then, when Charles Fraser started developing Sea Pines Plantation, the island was marketed as a resort destination. And although the bridge brought new permanent residents, I'm not sure what it means to live in a place where most people only stay for a week or two at a time and the rhythm of life is based on a weekly changeover schedule—every Saturday one week's tourists leave, and another week's arrive. Wellington, Ohio only had one motel, which offered weekly rates. And no one stayed there unless they had nowhere else to go.

When my father sold our house, I felt relieved because he'd be joining my mother and me. But our house was gone. My father was a bricklayer before my parents started their home health care business, and he built that house when I was a freshman in high school. He built all the houses I lived in as a child, but that house was the house he'd always talked about building. It stood tall and wide with spacious grandeur. And it had lines of windows on all sides that looked out over the woods and fields. Even today, he still calls it his dream house and says my mother will never have another house like that one. My mom, brother, and I used to go visit him while he worked, often there by himself, trowel in hand, scraping mortar onto brick sides and setting them into place.

Without our house, my family officially lived on the island. My dad drove down, and my parents bought a place

that looks like a tree house on the north end of the island near where we stayed on our first Hilton Head vacations. The house has a long wooded staircase leading to the front door and thick live oaks rise right through the porch. And despite a job search that seemed to cover the entire eastern seaboard, I found my first job on Office Park Road, a mere mile and a half from our condo on Cordillo Parkway. When Matt graduated college, he moved in with me and eased into island life.

Matt found a job before he'd been here a week, and he's still working there today. The job requires him to travel all over the island, inspecting peoples' homes. In a matter of weeks, he knew the area better than I did. And although he doesn't look back on the experience of his move with much sentiment, he studied wildlife biology in college and immediately loved the Lowcountry fauna. When I ask him to move away from the island with me, he says, "But don't you like being around all the cool birds?"

I do like seeing the snowy egrets fly over with their long legs trailing behind them like kite tails, and brown pelicans bobbing like ducks on one of the largest ponds in the world. And I liked my job, but almost everyone in my small office was from out of town, and our clients were located all over the country. So we didn't have many people stopping by, and I always felt like I was viewing the island community from the other side of a window.

Now I've lived here for three years, I have since left my job, and Matt and I have a son whose only home has been Hilton Head Island. Myron was born at Beaufort Memorial Hospital, about twenty miles north of the island. On his third day of life, I strapped him into his car seat for the first time and Matt loaded him into the back seat of his Jeep Cherokee. The boy was so new and bleary-eyed, with his hands curled into little fists. Matt and I talked about the novelty of his first car ride. That August day held all the promise of sunny weather, and driving across the J. Wilton Graves Bridge—the third bridge on the trip from Beaufort to Hilton Head—felt more

comforting than it ever had before. Our family was coming home together for the first time.

Today I am driving to Bluffton to look at a house that we want to buy—essentially getting what I have wanted since I drove over this bridge with my mother the day after I graduated college. And although I'm looking a little closer to the island than I thought I would, I am finally getting my new beginning. But island life has a way of growing on a person; at least it did for me. The span of water secludes you, until it feels like the mainland is a trip that requires packing extra supplies. It becomes a hassle to leave, or an adventure depending on the purpose.

I can see my connection to the island in glimpses. It resides in the buildings where I used to work and among the people I used to work with, whether or not they're still around. I saw it when the grocery store manager greeted me with familiarity whenever I passed him in the aisles, and in the trail we walked to the beach every time we wanted to see the ocean. It's in memories of Saturday mornings at my parents' house, my first professional job, and Myron's first steps—all the moments that pass on the road are clear in my rearview mirror.

# Jennifer and Julia Discuss Sunburn on South Forest Beach

by  
Norm Levy

Jennifer

I never burn, I never burn,  
I never burn, not really.  
I just turn tan, a toasty tan  
Not puffy, patchy, peely.

Julia

I'll never learn, I'll never learn,  
I'll never learn, not really.  
I just turn red, a rosy red  
And squirmy, scorchy, squealy.



# The Lighthouse Spy

by  
Rick Hoel

Tommy Riley was leaning into the wind at an impossible angle, arms outstretched, as he fended off palm branches that cut through the night and threatened to cast him out to sea. Tommy had not expected to see anyone on his patrol tonight, not this night. With his dog, Vincella, uncharacteristically whimpering at his side, Tommy was ostensibly on the lookout for German spies or perhaps a U-boat surfacing off the shore; but with the worst storm in years raging about him, he was confident that not even enemy agents would venture ashore this evening. Little did he know that this would be the most eventful patrol of his life.

Tommy was stationed on Hilton Head Island in 1942 with the Coast Guard's beach patrols, scanning the horizon for German U-boats and scrutinizing the shore for enemy spies. Reported cases of Japanese shelling along the coasts of Oregon and California and sightings of German submarines on the East Coast had prompted J. Edgar Hoover to declare that "the spy, the saboteur, the subverter must be met and conquered."

Fantastic, and as it turned out, mostly false stories of German agents scampering unrestrained through America's coastal cities followed. The beach patrols, dubbed "sand

pounders," with their specially trained spy-detecting dogs, represented the nation's first response to the threat. Tommy was always a bit anxious that he would actually run into a spy one night, but the truth was Tommy rarely saw anyone on his evening patrols. Hilton Head was as remote a place as he had ever been, and he certainly wanted it to stay that way this night.

Hilton Head Island in the 1940s had changed little over the past 100 years. Hunters periodically visited the island, but few others; and there were less than 1,000 permanent residents, mostly black farmers living on the north end of the island. The southern two-thirds were completely covered with dense forest, although much of it had been severely damaged in the devastating storm that submerged the island in 1940. It was reported that Charlie Simmons' 55-foot ferry, the *Edgar Hurst*, which started operating in 1930, was pushed all the way across Broad Creek by the storm and grounded. There would be no bridge to the island until a primitive swing bridge was constructed in 1956, so Charlie's and a couple of other mechanized ferries were the only means of reaching Hilton Head.

Other than the storms, the only disruption to this placid setting had been the transitory presence of war. Following the battle of Port Royal Sound in 1861, Hilton Head Island served as a headquarters for the Union Army and was even referred to as Port Royal during the Civil War. Subsequent conflicts brought forces to Hilton Head as well, a detachment at Fort Walker during World War I and the marines and sand pounders in World War II

The few who wrote about visits to the island at this time sounded as if they had just returned from a trip to the Amazon, alluding to the island's "jungle-like terrain" and "easy-going natives." Only a handful of homes had indoor plumbing, and there was no electricity or telephone service. All supplies reached the island by boat; and until World War II, travel on the island was primarily by horse drawn cart on rutted dirt paths. The marines and Tommy's unit built Hilton Head's first

## The Lighthouse Spy

paved road, running nine miles from the Skull Creek boat landing at Jenkins Island to Camp McDougal in the center of the island.

In the late 1930s the marines started developing Camp McDougal as an advanced training camp and defense outpost in the area where the Leamington community sits today. The 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battalion was the first to occupy the base in May of 1938. As the camp grew, five-inch anti-aircraft and other guns were routinely fired into the Atlantic during target practice as thunderous reports from "Big Betsy," one of the largest guns, shattered the island's familiar tranquility.

There were occasional stories from frightened locals of marines with fixed bayonets roaming the island on the backs of trucks, all suggesting that perhaps the soldiers had too much time on their hands. To fill that void in part, the marines built a boxing ring near the base of the lighthouse, and it was here that Tommy established himself as one of the best boxers in the area.

Tommy's parents died when he was too young to remember, and he lived with his grandmother until he was eighteen. Then, when he had the chance, he enlisted in the Army as a paratrooper, training at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Tommy excelled as a paratrooper until, on one jump, his parachute drifted off target, and he landed hard in a cornfield, embedding a stalk deep in his right knee. It was enough of an injury to disqualify him from jumping. Fortunately Tommy had befriended a colonel who was a boxing fan and with his help was able to pull off the near impossible and transfer to the Coast Guard instead of leaving the service for good. He was sent to Hilton Head in 1942.

It was actually Tommy's dog, Vincella, who played a big part in landing Tommy his transfer to the island. Tommy was leaving a liquor store one evening at Fort Bragg when he noticed Vincella sitting next to the door looking curiously like he, too, could use a drink. The dog was as much a little mutt as one could imagine, a brown hyperactive creature who took to

Tommy immediately. Tommy bent to pet him, and the dog followed him home and never left.

From the first night Tommy knew that Vincella liked to drink as much as he did. Once back to the base Tommy poured him a cup of beer, and the dog drank it quickly, rolled on his back and, Tommy swears, laughed out loud. He drank right along with Tommy for the next two years and was his constant companion. For adventure they parachuted together. Tommy fashioned a pouch with four leg holes that he strapped to his chute harness, and Vincella would join in the jumps. With his ears pointing straight up to the heavens and his wide eyes filled with joy, Vincella loved jumping more than Tommy. Ironically it was this trick that earned Tommy some recognition for his "canine expertise" and smoothed his transfer to the beach patrol in Hilton Head. Never mind that Tommy's prowess with this mutt was most likely related to the dog's almost constant state of intoxication. With this addition to his resume, Tommy became a dog trainer with the beach patrol.

In 1942 the Coast Guard had recognized the value dogs could bring to the shore patrols. The keen sense of smell and relative ease with which dogs could be trained was seen as a real asset for the patrols. The Coast Guard eventually received about 2,000 dogs for these duties. The canine training that took place in Pennsylvania and at Hilton Head prepared enough dogs to support all of the coastal districts.

Vincella was fearless, and it was very strange, even on a night like this, that he was not running ahead of Tommy as he was trained to do. All of a sudden Vincella stopped and let out a howl as if he had been shot. Tommy looked down and was shocked to see Vincella's ears at attention, like they used to be on a parachute jump. His eyes were fixed straight ahead; and when Tommy turned, he froze as well. Through the storm Tommy could clearly see a young woman in a long blue dress and wide brim hat running towards the lighthouse. He would not have been able to make her out if she had not had a certain radiance to her, a glow of sorts. Could this actually be a spy? Marlene Dietrich flashed to mind, and Tommy wondered if he

## The Lighthouse Spy

might be staring at an enemy with a flair for style. For the first time since he had set foot on the island, Tommy was actually frightened. He blinked hard several times, but there she was, and Tommy and Vincella watched as the young woman ran into the old Hilton Head Lighthouse.

Tommy's training and sense of duty quickly returned, and with Vincella he made his way to the lighthouse. This could not be a spy, Tommy told himself. Any respectable agent would know that there was no other way out of the tower, only up. Still he was cautious. He had originally been heading for the lighthouse anyway. Though out in the storm chiefly to assure that no German agents had decided to pay them a visit on the worst night of the year, he had secreted a bottle of Irish whiskey in his pack and was going to the lighthouse to bring John Harris, his marine friend on duty up high, a nip to ward off the wind. He mused about the marine's reaction when the "spy" reached the top of the lighthouse.

The Hilton Head Lighthouse was built in 1871 out of steel, wood and cast iron. It was 95 feet tall, 136 feet above sea level, and hexagonal in shape with a 112-foot circular staircase leading to a lantern room constructed completely of cypress. The lighthouse had been deactivated in 1932, but it still served as an excellent lookout tower for the marines. As a result the camp was built immediately adjacent to the lighthouse and consisted of a headquarters building, barracks, a mess hall, a small medical center, a recreation room, an exchange and several other sheds for boilers, ammunition and vehicles.

Tommy entered the lighthouse and started up the staircase slowly at first, listening for footsteps ahead. But he heard nothing, which could only mean that the woman had stopped part way up. But what for? "Miss, this is Tommy Riley. I'm with the United States Coast Guard here," Tommy shouted up the tower. No answer. "Can I help you?" Nothing. Tommy noticed his hands were trembling, and he prayed that he would not need to use his gun. For a brief moment he considered simply walking back down and denying he had seen anything.

But Tommy continued up the stairs, a little more cautiously now. He noticed that Vincella, who always took the lead on their patrols, was behind him now and seemed to be mulling over a retreat plan. Tommy pulled out his pistol. A bit further up Tommy called out again, his voice shaking. There was no answer, but he heard a faint noise, something brushing against the wall, and not too far ahead. Tommy now expected to see someone or something at every next step, and he took each one slowly until he reached the halfway point. He looked back and Vincella was gone.

Tommy yelled again, loudly, this time for John.

"Is that you Tommy? Where you been? I'm thirsty."

"Is there a young girl up there, John? She just came in out of the storm."

"Yea, sure, Tommy," John sarcastically replied. "Fancy me got a date tonight, Tommy. They all come out for me in this kinda weather." Tommy was not amused.

"I'm serious, John. She just ran in here, and if she's not up there, she's somewhere between me and you. Don't be cute now. Remember why we're here. Something's not right. Start down the stairs slowly with your gun and meet me."

As Tommy now very slowly started up the 60 or so steps remaining, he spoke once more to whoever it was who was poised somewhere above him. "Miss, I don't know who you are, and we're happy to help you, but if you're looking for trouble we are ready for it. Last time, Miss, just let me know where you are now. We're coming to you." Not a peep.

The next thirty steps or so seemed to take forever. Each step brought a new turn and view, and Tommy was certain that he had bought himself trouble. He realized that he had only seen this woman at some distance and through a blinding storm. It very well might not be a woman at all. In fact the further he went, the surer he was that he was walking into a trap. And then above him a person suddenly appeared, and Tommy leapt four feet off the ground and awkwardly charged. John screamed, too, as he saw Tommy coming toward him.

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And there they were together at step 90 with a very confused Vincella now at their side. Tommy would walk up and down that staircase four more times that night and spend most of his time in the lantern room with John trying to convince him that he had only had a few tastes of the Irish whiskey. John never did believe him about the lady in blue.

What Tommy did not know this evening was that a battle of another sort had occurred at the Hilton Head Lighthouse on a similar evening over 40 years earlier during the horrific hurricane of August 1898. As the old island saying goes, "June too soon, July stand by, August come it must;" and that year the quiet early summer months played decoy for a late season storm that tore the island apart.

Adam Fripp was the lighthouse keeper in those days, and his was as grueling a job as one could imagine. During the evening he was up and down the 112 steps repeatedly transporting kerosene from the oil shed to keep the lantern lit. In the morning Fripp was up again to extinguish the flame, and during the days he was tasked with cleaning the windows, trimming the wicks and any other duties to ready the lighthouse for another evening.

It was an important assignment. The channel, sound and unpredictable waters that surrounded Hilton Head Island, otherwise unlit at night, created one of the most dangerous sections of the routes north to other Carolina ports and south to Georgia and Florida.

There are numerous versions of what occurred that evening; but it is clear that very early, probably before 7 p.m., things started to go terribly wrong. It had already been dark for hours, and the howling wind found its way through the windows to extinguish the flame, again and again. Fripp worked frantically to keep it lit but tired quickly. From her vantage point in the keeper's house at the base of the lighthouse, Fripp's twenty-year-old daughter Caroline knew that her father would need help that night. She worried about his age and bad heart, so she tried to ease the strain by carrying extra wicks and kerosene from the shed to the lantern room.

When she felt he had enough supplies, she ran down again to bring him food.

Caroline was fearful for her father. She knew that water would seep through the windows and rise in the lighthouse, and he would be worked to the bone to keep the lamp lit, risking his health. She stayed with him into the evening, both working frantically as the wind and water whipped through the windows, blowing out the lamp repeatedly. Each time it would go out, they would light the lantern again until suddenly a fierce blast of wind shattered two of the windows. Despite this they struggled to keep the lamp lit and at times succeeded.

But it was not to be. Adam Fripp could not take the storm and the struggle anymore and, grasping his chest in pain, fell to the floor. Caroline did the only thing she could, straining to lift her father to a table, propping his head with a pillow and covering him with a blanket. And she bravely continued to work all night to keep the lantern lit. By morning, there were four feet of water in the tower, and they were trapped.

Accounts differ. Some say they were both found two days later dead in the tower. Others say that Caroline waited by her father for two days trapped by the water and when it had receded went for help. Of course it was too late, and Caroline herself was seriously ill by that time and died within two weeks, though it was later said that she "grieved herself to death." She was buried in her favorite blue dress and wide brim hat.

Tommy served out his time with the Coast Guard on Hilton Head and with Vincella trained many dogs that would serve the guard honorably up and down the East Coast. Tommy never did see a German submarine or, as far as he knows, a spy. That threat was largely overblown. After leaving the service he boxed for a while in and around Savannah with mixed results and later settled in Statesboro, Georgia, where he found a new dog that was his constant companion after Vincella passed on. He named her Lady, and together they opened a pet store, "The Blue Lady."

## The Lighthouse Spy

It turns out that Tommy was not the first or the last person to swear to have seen a young woman in a blue dress with a wide brim hat run to the Hilton Head Lighthouse during a serious storm and then simply disappear. The Hilton Head Lighthouse still stands today in Palmetto Dunes. Adam and Caroline Fripp's "keeper's" home was moved to Harbour Town where it now houses a popular café.



Photograph by Art Cornell

# The Burglar

by  
Jane P. Hill

*W*hat in heaven's name is going on out there! I grumbled to myself as I lay in bed, tossing and turning. Living in one of Hilton Head Island's serene gated communities, I was accustomed to peace and quiet at this time of night. But I could hear cars going by and distant music, which was why I was still awake. Awake enough to notice when the burglar entered through the kitchen window.

*Quick, where's my gun?* I thought. *Don't have one. What about a knife? In the kitchen, with the burglar. No good. What about my tennis racquet? Paid too much for it to damage it, and I'll need it in the morning for my match. What about a golf club? Yep, that would be the highest and best use of a golf club. For me, at least. Which club? Close quarters? Need a sand wedge.* I carefully extracted my sand wedge from my golf bag, not wanting to make any noise that would alert the burglar.

SCREECH!!! No need for me to have been so quiet. He found the cat. When Kathy left me, why couldn't she have taken that stupid, ill-tempered cat with her? I listened intently as the burglar disengaged the cat from some part of his body. Nice to see the worthless cat had some talent.

More footsteps. Then crude, but appropriate, expletive as the burglar tripped over Kathy's outrageously ugly coffee table.

I thought to myself: *Silver's in the dining room; art's in the living room; cash and jewelry are in the bedroom. And this guy is in the family room? What is he thinking? He's got to be the most inept burglar in history. I only hope he realizes that I have an indoor poo . . .*

SPLASH!!! Guess not.

Running to the pool with my trusty sand wedge, I realized that the burglar was struggling. "Can't swim!" he gasped.

"Relax and put your feet down. The pool's only four feet deep," I replied.

"You saved my life, but I'm still gonna have to kill you," announced the burglar.

"Kill me? Why, you sorry ingrate?" I demanded.

"For not paying your gambling debts," he sputtered, still struggling to get his footing.

"Since when has Father started sending out leg breakers? The only gambling I do is bingo at the Catholic church," I declared my innocence.

"That's not what my boss says, Vince," responded the burglar.

"Vince? I'm not Vince!"

"You're not Vince Valenti?"

"Hell, no," I replied. "He's the sorry S.O.B. who lives next door. You were sent to whack Vince? Here, let me get you a towel, and some coffee, or something a little stronger. And would you like some dry clothes? Extra large, right?"

When the burglar was comfortably dry, warm, and fortified with some French roast, he and I sat down at the kitchen table to map out a strategy. "You don't want to whack Vince," I suggested. "That's writing off a bad debt. You want to take away something that he truly values, preferably something of sufficient value to recoup some of what he owes your boss."

"What do you have in mind?" asked the burglar.

## The Burglar

"Well, the thing he values most is probably Kathy, my wife, but I don't want her back, and I doubt your boss would want her either. There's a newly-acquired silver roadster in Vince's garage, though, and he worships that car. I wouldn't be surprised if Vince sleeps in the damn thing."

"But how are we gonna get to it? There's one mean lookin' Doberman in the yard, and I assume Vince doesn't leave the keys in the car and the garage unlocked."

"The Doberman may look vicious, but Rudy's actually a creampuff. He's my buddy. We'll give him a little something to make him mellow, though, just in case. I'm sure some of Kathy's Valiums are still around here."

"As to the car keys, I secretly made imprints of all the keys on Kathy's ring. Had duplicates made, so the car key is no problem. Getting in the garage may be a little trickier. Hold on a minute; I need to get some things from my workshop."

I returned a few minutes later with some tools and electronic devices. As I was spreading them out on the kitchen table, the burglar stared at me in awe and asked: "What are you? A second story man, spy, jewel thief?"

"Nope. Electrical engineer," I explained, while searching for the exact devices that I needed. "Ph.D., 1971."

Looking in the refrigerator, I found some 93 percent lean ground beef, which I laced with Kathy's Valium. "Before we get started on the hard part, let's take care of Rudy." After softly calling Rudy over to the fence, I gave him the doggy equivalent of Beluga caviar and scratched behind his ears until he drifted off into a peaceful sleep.

Returning to the house, I tossed the burglar a fresh pair of latex gloves and pulled on a pair myself. I gathered my equipment and sneaked into Vince's yard, the burglar following closely behind. Then using one of my electronic gizmos, we were able to open the garage door as easily as if we had had Vince's own remote.

Climbing into the driver's seat, the burglar fastened his seat belt, adjusted the mirrors, and turned the key. "Houston, we have ignition!"

Jane P. Hill

I could still hear distant music as my new best friend drove away in Vince's prized roadster, while Vince slept soundly, my wife by his side.

# The Ocean

by  
Norm Levy

A towering wave  
Roars across the trackless sea  
Relentless, surging—  
Unaware that on a distant shore  
It will be dashed into foam  
At the feet of a child  
On Folly Field Beach.



# Murder at the Sandy Point Lighthouse

by  
Kenneth Stuart

One cold, stormy and foggy night the skies were black; no moon or stars shone over Sandy Point Coast Guard Lighthouse near Hilton Head Island. The lighthouse beacon cut lightly through the fog as the rain dashed against the beach. Occasional foghorns from the few boats still out to sea could be heard just barely between the crashing waves hitting the sand at the foot of the lighthouse.

Captain Lester Johnson, a strong thirty-something experienced sailor and fisherman, was caught out at sea in his one-man fishing boat when the storm came up suddenly. It took the former Coast Guardsman nearly an hour to get his craft back under control against the raging storm's waves. Calling it a night because of the dangerous conditions on the sea, he began his journey toward his dock at Shelter Cove. The seas were getting even rougher by the time he got half way to his slip. Realizing that the dock at Sandy Point Coast Guard Lighthouse was closer to his current position, he headed toward it, grateful that the muted light from the tower could guide his way. He thought that if he could just get there, Joe Beacon, the lighthouse keeper, would put him up for the night because of the storm.

When Captain Lester, as he was fondly called, finally reached the dock at the edge of the lighthouse's sandy protrusion, he tied up his fishing boat carefully in the driving rain. Scanning the beach, he could barely see Joe's bulky amphibious vehicle (half boat, half car) parked on a little stretch of beach near the keeper's house situated next to the lighthouse itself. Walking into the wind, the captain reached the house and knocked on Joe's front door. By now cold and wet, he waited anxiously for Joe to answer, but there was no sign of life. He was getting colder and even wetter standing in the dashing storm, and the waves were rising higher on the sand near his feet. Still, no Joe. He banged harder on the door and yelled Joe's name, but in vain.

His eyes now used to the foggy light, Captain Lester glanced around through sheets of rain. Everything seemed okay, except the door to the lighthouse tower was standing wide open. He struggled against the wind to reach the lighthouse and called again for Joe. Still there was no answer. Stepping through the open door to get out of the rain, he tripped over something and nearly fell back into the storm. Steadying himself against the doorframe, he reached down carefully to find out what lay there in the shadows. Something cold and rigid met his grasp. He gasped. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he could see the keeper of the lighthouse, sprawled out on his back and non-responsive, dead at his feet. Joe, clothed in his work overalls and boots, was lying with his head at an odd angle to the rest of his body in a pool of coagulated blood at the bottom of the steps. His hands still clutched an old piece of rag.

In shock young Captain Lester made his way back to his boat to call for help on his ship-to-shore radio. The Coast Guard Master on Tybee Island, Georgia, answering his distress call, asked calmly for Lester's location. The captain, upset and near hysteria, shouted back that he was at the Sandy Point Coast Guard Lighthouse. The lieutenant asked in a controlled tone what the problem was. Captain Lester screamed that he

## Murder at the Sandy Point Lighthouse

had just found Joe Beacon dead at the bottom of the lighthouse steps.

"Send help," he demanded.

"Calm down," the lieutenant said. "It will take some time to get a boat up in these conditions, but we'll get there as soon as possible. In the meantime, don't touch or disturb anything."

Recovering his wits but reluctant to go back to the body since there was nothing he could do now for Joe, Captain Lester trudged through the driving rain back to Joe's house. Hesitantly he tried the door and found it unlocked. He went in cautiously, turned on a small table lamp, and sat down in Joe's favorite chair near the door, impatiently but gratefully awaiting the arrival of the Tybee Island Coast Guard's men. The place was spooky with wind rattling the windows and the lamp's shadows dancing on the walls. Lester worried that there might be a murderer still lurking about. He did not think that Joe Beacon could have died by missing his footing on the steps that he traveled so many times a day for so many years.

It took over an hour for anyone to reach Sandy Point Island. Once the Coast Guardsmen had beached their craft and come ashore, they trudged without so much as a look into the lighthouse with its still open door. Rather they followed the lamp light from the house's window and made their way straight there to get Captain Lester. Hearing them approach, he jumped up from the arm chair. Still in his wet and soggy gear, he moved quickly to the door to meet the Coast Guardsmen, eager for human company and their help. With a look of relief on his face, but uttering no words, Captain Lester led them silently to the site of Joe Beacon's body.

As they all neared the lighthouse, Captain Lester finally spoke. "I came here tonight because I needed a safe place to stay. I knew I couldn't make it back home in the storm. This was the closest place, and I knew I could count on Joe to shelter me until this blows over." He went on, "But, when there was no answer at Joe's house, I looked around and found the door

open at the lighthouse. I went over there to get out of the rain. This was when I found Joe at the bottom of the steps—dead."

Dismissing the captain for the time being, the Coast Guard officer told Lester he would need to see him back in the Tybee Island Coast Guard Station first thing in the morning to ask him some questions. Captain Lester replied that he would report to the Coast Guard's office in the morning, just as soon as he delivered his boat load of fish to Nick at the Hilton Head Diner. He then asked if he could stay the night at the house to ride out the rest of the storm and get some sleep.

"Under the circumstances, that's okay. If we need you any time during the night, we'll call the house. Be sure to answer the phone."

Due to the sudden and unusual death and its surrounding circumstances, the Coast Guard officers went back to their boat to call for their special investigation unit whose boat was set up with a preliminary crime scene lab. After an hour or more, the Coast Guard crime scene experts arrived and moored their boat at the lighthouse's dock. Then they secured the site so they could collect any evidence. Having given the body a cursory look and determining that it was certainly that of the well-known lighthouse keeper, they called the coroner to come and pronounce the man dead. Arriving two hours later after a hectic run to a deadly crash scene on Hilton Head, the coroner quickly did his work and removed the body, taking it to the town's morgue.

After a restless night, Captain Lester woke the next morning to see the sun out. Still shaken by the events of the past evening, but somewhat able to function, he put on his clammy fishing clothes, grabbed a bite of stale pizza from Joe's fridge, left the house and firmly closed the door. He walked steadily and determinedly past the lighthouse over to his boat, unmoored her, and headed her toward his dock in Shelter Cove.

The run took him 20 minutes under calm seas to reach his dock and another 15 minutes or so to load his iced-down fish from his boat into his refrigerated truck parked nearby.

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Then he pulled himself more or less together and drove toward U.S. 278 and the Hilton Head Diner. He arrived at the all-night diner around six a.m. and walked in to let Nick and his staff know he was there with their fresh fish order. Owner and daytime manager, Nick, was not in yet, so he was greeted by the head waitress, Ginger Jones.

Captain Lester said with soft sadness in his voice, "I'm here with your fish order."

Ginger replied, "We were waiting for you all last night, wondering if you were okay in the storm." Noticing that the fisherman's eyes were red and bloodshot, and that his clothes were damp and smelled like fish, Ginger realized that something was very wrong. "Have a seat at this table," she said, "and I'll get you a cup of hot coffee. Since it is real slow this early, I'll sit with you and have one, too. You don't mind do you? You can tell me what happened out there in the storm."

Wearily, he said, "Okay."

When Ginger came back with two cups of black coffee, she put them on the table and sat down across from him. Lester said, "I should have started back sooner, but the storm came up really suddenly. I guess I was making too good a haul to notice in time. Anyway, when I realized how bad it was getting, I headed to the lighthouse at Sandy Point to ride out the storm. But when I got there, no one was at the house. The lighthouse door was open, so I went over there to get out of the rain. Just inside the door, I fell over Joe dead on the floor."

Captain Lester knew that Ginger and Joe were close friends. He said: "Oh, Ginger, I am so sorry to give you the bad news this way!" Then he asked, "Was Joe in here lately?"

Trying to hold back her tears, but beginning to sob, Ginger said in a broken voice that the last time she saw Joe was nearly two weeks ago.

Another waitress, Flo, overhearing their conversation, walked right over to their table and interjected, "Ginger went over to the Sandy Point Lighthouse on her day off." Flo continued, "Earlier I heard Joe say he had something important to ask Ginger that couldn't wait."

Captain Lester looked at the weeping Ginger and asked her if this was true. She whispered, "Yes." Then he asked her gently to tell him what she and Joe had talked about.

Flo, realizing her intrusion into the conversation was not exactly welcomed by Ginger, moved on to tend to some waiting customers.

Ginger wiped her tears away and cleared her throat a little, so that only her companion at the table could hear what she had to say. "Captain Lester, this is what happened. I borrowed a friend's boat and sailed over to the lighthouse, as I have done sometimes before. It was late afternoon when I got there that day. I met Joe at the house. He invited me in and made some coffee. He said he wanted to talk. As we were sipping some coffee, Joe told me in confidence that he was having a problem with the guy everybody around here calls One-eyed Peter. I asked him, 'What kind of problem?' Joe just said that he couldn't have Peter stay with him this winter at the lighthouse. Because he is so friendly and his place is a haven for folks in storms, he said he didn't know how to tell One-eyed Peter this." Ginger continued, "I said the best way is to come right out and tell him that he can't just row over here and stay anymore unless he has a real emergency with nowhere else to go. Then we finished our coffee and went up to the top of the lighthouse to see the pretty view of the boats on the sea."

Ginger continued, "While we were gazing out at the calm water together and I was sipping a glass of sherry, I asked Joe one more time to marry me. Joe turned his head determinedly and looked me square in the face. He said, 'This is no place for a woman like you. It's lonely, and the work is too hard around here.' So Joe said, 'No' firmly." Ginger said she then turned around and ran down the lighthouse steps, out the door, over to the dock and got into her borrowed boat. She said she didn't look back; she just set sail straight for Hilton Head Island.

Captain Lester sat up straighter suddenly and said, "Ginger, I have to go and get the fish order from my truck." He hurried out the front door of the diner and quickly returned

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through the back door with the order. By then the boss had arrived. Captain Lester hardly bothered to greet Nick. He just had him sign the paperwork for the order and left. Lester got into his truck, gunned it and drove speedily down to the Coast Guard office on Tybee Island.

On the way there he thought it very strange that Joe would have asked to see Ginger at the lighthouse at this particular time. He was not sure exactly why, but he sensed that he needed to find One-eyed Peter right away. He wanted to see what the man knew. It seemed that the drive took forever. By the time he finally pulled into the Coast Guard office parking lot, he had decided to keep his mouth shut about Ginger and One-eyed Peter. He would just go in, listen to the Lieutenant and answer the questions he was asked. He did not want to tell the Coast Guard what he knew until he talked to One-eyed Peter. But as he parked his truck and headed toward the office door, Lester's head was racing. He did not know what kind of questions he would be asked or if he could be totally truthful.

At the office Captain Lester found the lieutenant in charge waiting for him. He greeted Lester and rose to close the door for privacy. They sat down opposite each other at a long table. The lieutenant turned on the tape recorder next to some papers in front of the chair he seated himself in. Looking directly at Lester, he asked, "Tell me where you were yesterday, starting with the morning and continuing until you found the body."

Captain Lester said he got up around five o'clock a.m. and got ready to go out fishing on his boat. He left his house at 5:30 a.m. and drove over to his dock, where he got the boat ready. He was out on the water all day. However, just as he was turning back from a good day of fishing, the unexpected storm came up. He had sought shelter, but found Joe dead. Right away he went to his boat and called the Coast Guard.

"Is there anyone who could corroborate your story?" the lieutenant asked. Lester answered, "No. Nobody was around when I left the dock in the early morning. I was alone

in the boat and on the water, so I didn't talk to anybody all day long."

The lieutenant said he had to ask because the coroner said that Joe Beacon died somewhere between 8:00 and 10:00 in the morning. His report, fresh on the lieutenant's desk, also stated that Joe Beacon had died of a broken neck, but he also had other bruises inconsistent with a fall. The lieutenant asked Lester a few more questions, and then said that he should be available if they needed him again. "You can go for now."

Captain Lester left the Coast Guard office and headed directly back to the Hilton Head Diner to see Ginger. Unknown to him, two plain clothes officers from the Coast Guard followed at a discrete distance in an unmarked car. Once at the diner he asked to be seated at one of Ginger's back tables. Ginger came over and took his order for coffee. The two plain clothes men discretely requested to be seated near Captain Lester's table.

When Ginger arrived with his cup of coffee, Captain Lester thanked her and asked if she could take a few moments to talk with him. Ginger said, "My break is in about five minutes and then we can talk." While waiting Captain Lester noticed that the diner was deserted, except for the table that he now occupied and one nearby where two impeccably dressed men who had arrived just after he did sat rather stiffly. He observed that it was somewhat unusual that both of the occupied tables were in Ginger's section and neither party was seated in Flo's section, but he then thought nothing more of it.

Ginger came over with a cup of coffee for herself and sat down across from Lester. He told her that while he was driving over to the Coast Guard office that morning he had realized that the story she told him earlier was somewhat puzzling. He wanted some more answers.

Rather irritated Ginger asked, "What more do you need than what I already told you?"

Captain Lester replied, "Why did Joe Beacon ask you to sail over to the lighthouse to see him and not ask his question over the phone or when he was here at the diner?"

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Ginger said, "I guess I should tell you that Joe and I were seeing each other as lovers on my days off. We thought it was better to keep our relationship under wraps for the time being since Joe kept saying that he was not sure that we had a future together because of the kind of work he did."

Lester replied, "So that is why you went to see him?"

Ginger nodded, "Yes. I also went to let him know that if he would not marry me, I was calling the whole thing off."

Ginger suddenly glanced around and noticed that the two men at the nearby table had stopped talking and seemed to be straining to listen to her. When she looked flustered, Lester asked her what the problem was.

She whispered, "Those two strangers at the table over there are eavesdropping on us."

Abruptly changing the topic, Ginger said that One-eyed Peter, who usually came in everyday about this time for a free cup of coffee, had not been in lately. That reminded Captain Lester that he must find One-eyed Peter. He wanted to know if he had rowed out to the lighthouse recently to see Joe Beacon, and if he knew anything that might help Lester understand what had happened there.

Just as he was making his excuses to Ginger about having to leave for something important, one of the officers got up to call the Coast Guard office and check in with the lieutenant. The officer reported that he and his partner were at the Hilton Head Diner and that their suspect, Captain Lester Johnson, was talking to a waitress named Ginger about her trip out to the lighthouse to see the victim earlier on the day in question. The officer said, "Then it makes sense. The lipstick found on a glass at the top of the lighthouse must belong to her. But we still don't have any leads on the sleeping bag that we found there." The lieutenant replied, "It looks like we have a new suspect. Keep me updated as things happen."

The officer returned to the table and finished his coffee. Then the two officers exchanged looks about the phone call and waited for Lester to leave the diner.

Giving a surprisingly warm, supportive good-bye hug to Ginger, Captain Lester got up from their table and walked over to the other waitress, Flo, who was standing at a distance pretending to be busy, but obviously watching the goings on at Ginger's end of the diner. Lester asked if she had seen One-eyed Peter lately. Flo said, "He's not been around for several days. I heard somebody say that he was hanging around the new park just around the corner." He thanked her and left.

Captain Lester walked down Yacht Cove Drive toward the park, hoping to find One-eyed Peter, bring him to the diner for a cup of coffee and ask him some questions. The two officers followed the fisherman out of the diner and keeping a distance, tailed him. Hearing footsteps and realizing that he was being followed, Captain Lester turned back just enough to see that it was the same two men he noticed at the diner. Now, seeing them from the front, he recognized them as two Guardsmen he had seen at the Coast Guard station. Changing his plan, Lester doubled back to his truck, got in and drove around the island for several hours trying to lose them. When he could no longer see their car out of his rearview mirror, he changed his course, and headed back to the park. He left his truck parked on a side road and walked around until he spotted One-eyed Peter lying asleep on a picnic table. Going over to him, he found the man smelling of booze, with a big tear out of the front of his dirty shirt. Captain Lester shook him to wake him up.

Startled, One-eyed Peter sat up and started to fight him. Surprised, Captain Lester was knocked to the ground, and suddenly One-eyed Peter had his hands around Captain Lester's throat. The stronger of the two, Lester easily threw him off and forced Pete to sit down at the table to cool off.

Then Captain Lester said, "Pete, let's go have some coffee at the diner. We need to talk." Just then the two plain clothes officers pulled up, got out of their car and came over. "Looked like you two were having a fight. We thought we could help, but we see that the situation is under control." Without

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saying anything more, the officers left them and went back to their car. Captain Lester and One-eyed Peter took off for the diner in Lester's truck. Unnoticed the two officers followed them. Once at the diner Lester and Pete got a booth where they could sit and talk. Captain Lester ordered a pot of strong coffee to sober up One-eyed Peter. When Pete was feeling better, Lester asked him if he had talked to Joe Beacon lately. Peter said, "Yep, I was over at the lighthouse the other day and spent some time with him."

When Captain Lester told One-eyed Peter that Joe Beacon had died of a fall down the steps which broke his neck, Pete said, "Really? Too bad. Nice guy. Hadn't heard that."

Lester continued, "So when were you there and what did you talk about?"

"Well, I don't remember what morning it was 'cause I was kind of drunk, but I remember Joe said that I couldn't stay there in the winter any more. Said the Coast Guard found out about me being there pretty much permanent in the bad weather. I begged Joe to try to change their minds. When he said he couldn't, I thought maybe it isn't the Coast Guard. I think Joe is lyin' to me. He's sweet on that waitress. I see her get into a little boat and sail over to the lighthouse a lot. I bet he wants the place to himself and her. Then I punched him and I guess we got into a little fight at the top of the lighthouse steps." One-eyed Peter said he left then. He got into his little old boat and rowed away as fast as he could because he was drunk and scared, and knew that it would not look good for him.

Now the two officers came over to the table where Lester and Pete were talking in low tones so Ginger could not hear what Pete was saying about her. The officers, though, had picked up enough of the conversation to be very interested. They asked if they could pull up some chairs and join them. Sitting down, the two men identified themselves as Coast Guard officers wanting to find out what happened to Joe

Beacon, the lighthouse keeper. They said they thought that Captain Lester and One-eyed Peter might have information they needed, and they wanted to ask them some questions.

The officers said that Joe's death was under investigation because they were not sure he died from an accident. After listening to them a little longer, One-eyed Peter finally admitted that he had been at the lighthouse, had gotten into a fight with Joe and had pushed him down the steps. "But I didn't mean to hurt him," he said vehemently. "It was just that I was drunk and in a state of rage that somebody might take my friend, Joe, and my winter safe place away from me, especially some woman!" He continued. "I knew that Joe was hurt real bad in the fall, but I didn't try to kill him. I guess I was just scared in a drunken rage and mad that he ripped my best shirt, so I ran away."

On the spot the Coast Guardsmen arrested One-eyed Peter, hand-cuffed him and put him into their unmarked car. They drove him directly to the Tybee Island Coast Guard station for more questioning. Then they called the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office to come and get him and book him for the murder of Joe Beacon. Captain Lester and Ginger, who themselves had been under suspicion in the death of the lighthouse keeper, were asked to drive over in Lester's truck to corroborate what One-eyed Peter had told them of the events leading up to Joe's death.

Later at the station, once the lieutenant got One-eyed Peter to repeat the facts he had admitted at the diner in front of a deputy sheriff, he left his office and went into the hallway where Captain Lester and Ginger were drinking some leftover coffee and fidgeting. He told them that he was sure that now they had the right man. With Lester's help, he said, they caught Joe's killer and their case was closed.

Addressing Captain Lester, the lieutenant said, "Thanks. While we were tailing you, you searched out the true killer for us."

Lester drove Ginger back to her car parked beside the diner. They said a friendly good-by and then he went off to

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make some inquiries of the county coroner. Once there Lester was advised by the coroner that he had gotten word of the arrest of One-eyed Peter in Beacon's murder, so Joe's body would now be released to the funeral home and he would be given a full Coast Guard burial. They would take care of all the arrangements since he had been one of their own and he had no known relatives. Satisfied that his friend would be given a proper burial, Captain Lester drove back to the diner.

Ginger was still there, having yet another cup of coffee. Just freshly made this time. Relieved at hearing about the Coast Guard's handling Joe's final arrangements, Ginger asked Lester what was going to happen to the Sandy Point Lighthouse and to One-eyed Peter. He told her that he did not know about the lighthouse, but that One-eyed Peter would probably stay in the county jail until his trial. Captain Lester then said, "Ginger, I am fully qualified, so I am thinking of giving up fishing for a while and asking the Coast Guard if I could take over as the lighthouse keeper in Joe's place." Ginger smiled slightly at him, but said nothing.

Before he could even bring it up officially, Captain Lester was asked to take over the lighthouse duties immediately to fill in until they could locate a full-time keeper. About six months later, following Joe's burial and Pete's arraignment for his murder, Captain Lester got the Coast Guard's okay to become the full-time keeper of the lighthouse. During this time Captain Lester stopped delivering fish to the diner, but he began spending his free time with the waitress, Ginger, on whom he had had his eyes even before Joe's unfortunate demise. Out of respect for Joe, however, he had never let his interest in Ginger be known earlier. Eventually he popped the question to Ginger. Unlike Joe, Lester told her he would be glad to have her as his full-time companion at the Sandy Point Lighthouse. "Would you consider leaving your waitress job to be my wife and my assistant in running the lighthouse? I could teach you the ropes there and I promise to make you happy," he said earnestly.

Still grieving for Joe, Ginger is weighing her options.



# Dry Bones

by  
Frederick W. Bassett

One March morning years ago, I stopped  
to study three yellow-crowned night herons,  
bobbing in the breeze  
like buoys flung from the stormy sea  
into the coastal willow—  
their eyes as empty as tranced monks.

As I watched, a fourth yellow-crown  
swooped down with a stick for a new nest.  
Satisfied with the placement, it sprang  
to wings as its mate glided in with a load.  
Stick by stick they built that nest,  
while those empty eyes sat by  
without sound or motion—waiting,  
I thought, for that primordial fire  
to blaze once more in their old dry bones.  
But having waited long in silent gloom,  
they vanished like a late morning fog.

Day after day, the skipper, hunkering  
low over the blue-green eggs, steered  
the willow through gentle days and nights  
until four bald heads wobbled in the sun.  
As the days of summer rolled in,  
the two surviving chicks  
began to out-fledge the nest  
with forays into the wider world.

Neither young nor old return these days,  
but on passing, I always peer  
into that lonesome willow,  
haunted by those glassy oracles of March.



# His and Hers

by  
C. S. Thorn, Jr.

The long winter was over, and spring was in the air. We rejoiced. We could feel the warmth each time the garage door opened. Shafts of sunlight flooded the normally dreary space and peeked under the door to the closet where we had nestled all winter. A thin film of yellow/green pollen coated our exposed surfaces, but we did not mind. Our spirits were buoyed. We knew that one day soon the family would come for us. They would load us in the back of the van, and we would share another glorious season with the grandchildren at the beach at Port Royal. It seemed so long since the last time we saw them. We told each other it would be any day now, and we tried to be patient.

Forgive me. I should have made our introductions. My name is His, and this is Hers. Jenna magic marked the names on our backs after seeing the words embroidered on her grandparents' beach towels.

But back to the story. The big day finally arrived. Pop Pop opened the closet door and moved a few tools out of the way. "Here they are," he muttered to himself, "right behind the rakes."

He lifted us out of the closet one at a time and opened us on the floor of the garage.

"Well, these don't look so bad," he said as he reached for a broom.

We did have some minor imperfections from so many seasons with the family. There were tiny indentations where Little Jon chewed on the end of my arm when he was teething, and we both had dings from the beach shovels that Alec, Jenna and Alyssa wielded like samurai swords. In some small spots our underlying wood had turned a dusky brown. We knew that we were not youngsters. We knew that our arms and legs had pits and scratches, and that our shellac that once glistened had dulled. The bright brass bolts and grommets that hold us together had faded to a soft luster. But we were made from solid birch, and we looked pretty good for a couple of senior citizens.

We felt proud as Pop Pop swept away the dust, the pollen and the cobwebs before returning the broom to the corner.

"Now for the real test," he said, as he settled into my lap.

All of a sudden there was a terrible rrrriipp as the stitching of my fabric gave way. Pop Pop ended up sitting on the floor. The years of sun, sand and salt had taken their toll. Our seams had weakened.

"Well," he exclaimed, "what a shame. But I guess nothing lasts forever."

His words give us a chill. What did he mean? We were not as attractive as when we were new, but we were as strong as ever. Surely it would not be too much trouble to have our covers re-sewn.

Without another word Pop Pop folded us up and returned us to the closet. The door closed, and we were back in the dark where we had spent so many months. Hers was dejected and apprehensive.

Later that same day the garage door went up again. Pop Pop opened the closet and stacked two brand new chairs in

front of us. They were aluminum and covered with clear plastic that revealed the gaudy design of their covers: mauve and iridescent red and neon green. Sort of like tie-dying gone wild. We would never wear such things. But our once brilliant and bold stripes in the primary colors were faded; our stitching was rotten. We could say nothing.

It was getting warmer by the day, and the new arrivals must have been uncomfortable in their plastic wrapping. Another two weeks went by when suddenly the closet opened wide. It was a beautiful, sunny day on the outside. Pop Pop reached in for the new chairs and put them in the back of the van. We could hear the grandchildren laughing, playing and getting ready for a day at the beach. We watched in silence as the closet closed, and we heard the garage door come down. We were alone and heartsick.

Hers stifled a sob, "I can't believe it has come to this."

At the end of the day, light streamed into the garage once more as the family returned. The door opened, and we were carried out as the new chairs took our place in the closet. Pop Pop put us in the back of the van and closed the tailgate. We looked at each other. Where were we going? Was he taking us to the recycling center? Could this be the end?

Minutes stretched into hours, but the van had not moved.

"Maybe they're waiting until morning," said Hers.

"You're probably right," I answered. "It's getting late."

We spent the long night worrying about our fate and hoping that morning would never come. But right on schedule, dawn's first light peeped through the window. We knew it was just a matter of time.

When CiCi came out from the kitchen, we braced ourselves. But she started the other car and backed out of the garage. We were alone with our thoughts until she returned a few hours later. Without so much as a glance in our direction, she walked into the house with a package under her arm. Another hour passed as we wondered again why we were put in the van. What were they waiting for?

As if he had read our thoughts, Pop Pop appeared with the package that CiCi had brought home. He got into the van and started the engine, and off we went. We huddled close to each other and could only imagine the worst. The van crossed the bridge to the mainland and stopped after another five minutes or so. We were somewhere in Bluffton. We were afraid to see where we were, but Hers peeked out the window.

"We're parked in front of a shop of some sort. This doesn't look like a dump to me."

"Nor to me," I responded after peeking myself.

"Oh, Lord," she said, "what if it's a consignment shop? We'll never see the family again."

I tried to be encouraging. "If we were taken to the landfill, we'd never see anything again."

Just then the tailgate opened. Pop Pop took one of us in each hand and carried us into the shop where he leaned us against a wall. He was talking to a man behind the counter when he opened the package that CiCi brought home. We could see it was new fabric in big red, white, blue and green stripes.

Hers was animated, "Oh, His, it's beautiful. Do you suppose it could be for us?"

"Sssh, let's listen," I said.

"Jim, they just don't make anything like they used to," said Pop Pop. "Those aluminum chairs are so light they blew over every time we got out of them. And the fabric is paper thin. I doubt it would last the season. Little Alec bumped into one and bent the frame like it was cardboard."

Jim came around the corner and picked us up one at a time. "These are in good shape except for a few scratches. I'll give 'em a light sanding and a fresh coat of shellac before I replace the fabric. They should be good as new."

"Oh good. We've had them so long they're like part of the family."

"I'll give you a call just as soon as they're ready," Jim said.

"That will be fine," said Pop Pop as he turned to leave.

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He was barely out the door when Hers sighed, "Honey, I'm so happy. We'll be with the grandchildren again soon."

Neither of us said another word. She nestled closer against me. We could look forward to another summer at the beach after all.



# The Mugging

by  
Jane P. Hill

**I**t was certainly the last place I wanted to be tonight—the sheriff's office!

It was my 68<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I had been out with friends to celebrate. After a few drinks and an excellent dinner of delicious Lowcountry specialties, I was returning to my car when a mugger grabbed the strap of my purse, wrenching my shoulder. Excruciating pain shot through my arm, and my first thought was about my ability to play tennis tomorrow. After all, it was the state playoffs for super-seniors, and I needed to be in Charleston early the next morning. Stumbling to the ground, I had other concerns as I banged my knee sharply on the tabby paving, just before striking my head on a "landscaping feature," better known as a rock. Wet, warm, sticky goop ran down my face, into my eyes. Tomorrow's tennis was looking less and less likely.

I got one last look at my attacker as he dashed away with my purse: *tall, slender, white, about 20, with greasy blond hair. Jeans and T-shirt, expensive tennis shoes. No hat. Was that an earring? Left ear.*

Almost immediately, passersby came to my rescue, with their cell phones already in use. It was only minutes before a young deputy arrived and began asking me about my injuries and my attacker. As the pain began to subside, I thought how ridiculous I must look, sitting on the ground, my hair a wreck and my clothes torn and bloody.

I refused the deputy's offer to call an ambulance and instead accompanied him to the station to file a report. I was greeted warmly and with much concern at the station, where an investigator called me by name and poured me strong coffee, knowing without asking that I wanted it with cream only. He then fetched a first aid kit, and he began cleaning the cut on my head.

"Now ma'am, I really think you need to have a doctor take a look at this. We wouldn't want any scars on that pretty face," he said as he gently wiped away the blood and grit.

The sheriff's office had become my home away from home over the last several months, as I had been dealing with a stalker. At my age! As a widow with two grown daughters, I wrote occasional articles for the newspaper, volunteered for several charities, and played tennis. What could possibly motivate someone to stalk me? But I had hang-up phone calls, dead rats in my mailbox, a rock through my window, slashed car tires, and even a fire on my back porch. All in all, very frightening for a woman of my age, living alone.

The sheriff's department had been courteous and thoughtful, meticulously filing each report and inspecting my home to be sure that no one had broken in. However, they had much more serious concerns, and a stalker can be very difficult to apprehend.

I was telling the investigator that there was really nothing of value in my purse, that I had my money and credit cards in my pocket. Then I realized with horror that my house keys were in my purse, along with my driver's license. The mugger knew where I lived and could get into my house!

"We'll dispatch a deputy to your house, but you must promise me that you will see a doctor," said the handsome

## The Mugging

young investigator who was bandaging my forehead. "By the way, have you heard any more from your stalker?"

"Nothing this week. Maybe he's on vacation," I joked.

"Still no idea who it could be?"

"No idea at all. Who'd want to harass a senior citizen whose only vice is playing too much tennis?" I responded.

Another deputy walked in, shocked to see the condition of my face, which was apparently beginning to swell and bruise. "Your . . . your stalker?" he asked with alarm.

"Oh, no. Just a mugger. I don't think he meant to hurt me. He was just after my purse."

"I wouldn't assume that it wasn't your stalker, ma'am. You don't suppose your newspaper articles have upset some of the local developers? You've come down on several of them pretty hard," he suggested.

"Oh, no. Those developers I've been writing about are just greedy and don't give enough thought to how their plans would affect the fragile ecology of Hilton Head Island. I can't imagine any of them resorting to violence."

"I wouldn't be so sure," countered the deputy. "You seem to have some pretty incriminating information. You must have some awesome sources."

*Yep, I surely do, I thought. Playing tennis with a certain developer's ditzy mistress provides enough material for several columns.*

Finishing my second cup of coffee, with my report filed, my face bandaged and iodine on my skinned, raw knee, I prepared to go to a friend's house for the night. I couldn't face staying in my own house until I had a chance to get the locks changed.

In walked the deputy who had gone to check my house, grinning from ear to ear. *Pretty insensitive, under the circumstances, I thought.*

"I don't think you need to worry about your mugger or your stalker anymore," said the young deputy with a laugh.

"Whatever do you mean, young man?" I asked, more than a little miffed.

"Well, ma'am, apparently your mugger entered your house just before your stalker broke in. There was quite a scuffle, and I'm afraid your living room is in a bit of a mess. That silver tray you won at last year's state tennis finals has a few dents, and your fire poker isn't quite straight anymore," he added with a crooked grin.

"Where are the perpetrators?" I asked with alarm.

The young deputy responded with a smile, "Oh, they're both over at Hilton Head Regional in the ER right now, ma'am. As soon as the doctors finish with them, we'll book 'em. With the list of charges we'll have against them, I don't think you'll see either of them for a while. And we'll give the prosecutor some fun figuring out whether he can prosecute two felons for assault and battery on each other."

# News in Rhyme

by  
Norm Levy

(Excerpt from description of a guestroom,  
*Coastal Living Magazine*)

"Termite-Tracked Wood Lends Texture to  
The Guest House—A Former Garage"

Like mystic alchemists of old  
Transmuting baser lead to gold,  
Designers take discarded trash  
Transforming it to ready cash.  
The wall is streaked with termite tracks.  
The ceiling's likely full of cracks.  
The concrete floor is stained and cold.  
The air's perfumed with oil and mold.  
It's now a place where guests may lodge  
Ensnconced in some one's rank garage.  
It's never old, never tired  
When tagged "Designer Inspired."



# Beach Day

by  
Charlie McOuat

Ellen left her car in the parking lot, climbed the wooden staircase to the boardwalk and passed the shower on her right where she noticed a tall blond woman rinsing sand from her young son's feet. The woman wore heavy eye makeup and bright red lipstick. Large breasts exploded from her tiny yellow bikini.

"Roger," she said, "we've got to wash this sand off. You're not getting in the car like this. Your dad would kill me if he finds sand in his brand new Mercedes."

She grabbed the boy's arm and jerked him under the shower. The boy, slim, about six years old, a frown on his face, protested, "Yeh, but Mom, that water's cold. A little sand doesn't hurt anything."

"I wish just once you wouldn't give me a hard time." She waved a finger in the boy's face and screamed. "I bring you to the beach, sit out in the hot sun for hours, and all you do is complain. I get so sick of this. Can't you help for a change?" She ran her long fingers, with nails brightly painted, up and down Roger's shivering legs.

Ice cold water gushed from the shower head, soaking the boy from his blond brush cut to his feet. His lower lip

turned down. He wiped a tear from his face with his wet, sandy hand. "I hate the beach. I hate you."

The woman ignored the comment, as if she had heard it so many times that it no longer meant anything to her. She continued scrubbing the boy's legs.

Ellen stood by, quietly watching the mother's face turn redder as her voice got louder. "Excuse me ma'am. Can I help you?"

"What the hell do I need your help for?" The woman rose to her full height, hands shaking, feet spread apart as though she was ready to defend her turf against the world.

Ellen took a step back. "I'm sorry, but I hate to see the boy unhappy, especially over a few grains of sand."

"A few grains of sand, huh." The woman stepped towards Ellen and continued. "My husband works hard. He just leased a brand new Mercedes, and now this little monster is determined to turn it into a piece of junk." She stopped, thought for a moment, "Besides, what's it to you? I don't remember asking you for advice."

"Please ma'am," said Ellen, "I don't mean to interfere but the boy is hurting. Surely a little sand isn't worth the boy's tears."

"O.K. now, let's get this straight. This is my kid, my Mercedes, and nobody needs your lousy advice. Why don't you keep on walking down to the beach, cool off, and stay out of my life. C'mon Roger, let's get out of here."

The boy, still whimpering, looked at his mom, then at Ellen. "Yeh lady. Why don't you leave us alone? Nobody asked you. You stink."

His mother grabbed his hand and pulled him up the boardwalk towards the parking lot. Ellen watched the retreating pair, staring in disbelief at the mother, beach bag in one hand, herding her reluctant son up the boardwalk with the other. Each one seemed accustomed to this misery. *How can any parent be so unhappy about raising a child*, she thought.

She turned away from the pair and walked towards the beach. The handrail cast a dark shadow at her feet. She

## Beach Day

stopped, leaned against the railing, looked out over the tough halophytes firmly rooted into the sand, protecting the dunes against wind and waves. *That's what I need. Some firm footing, a purpose. I feel more like that tall grass that bends with the slightest breeze, or even the dead spartina grass, washed up on the shore, lying dead, useless, ugly.* She continued her walk. *When am I going to stop feeling sorry for myself? It's a beautiful sunny day, and I'm stewing in my own misery. Stop it now.*

She stopped at the end of the boardwalk, removed her sandals and felt the warm sand crunch between her toes. The tide was out, exposing the hard packed tidal flats, already filled with suntanned bodies. She took a few steps, looked around, saw no one she knew, and unfolded her beach chair. She took off her sundress and sat facing the ocean. The hot sun burned the exposed skin of her stomach.

*Don always wanted me to wear a bikini. Now I've got one and he's not here to see it. What a waste.*

It seemed that everyone on the beach was with someone except her. Couples read together, occasionally looking up from their books to admire the day. She closed her eyes and tried to calm herself by prayer, but her thoughts ran to past heartbreak, worries of the future, today, yesterday and tomorrow running together, in and out of her mind. The young boy crying in the shower, his angry mother, the Mercedes, the mutual resentment, and then . . . *the knock at the door, the sheriff, the sorrow in his voice, "I'm sorry Ellen, there's been an accident, a drunken driver. Your husband, Donald, your daughter Gretchen. Killed. No, I'm sorry, they never made it to the hospital." Then the horror, the empty bed, the deathlike silence of the house, Gretchen's bedroom, friends so kind but unable to fill even a little bit of that eternal emptiness. The loneliness so strong that it was like hunger in her stomach, dominating all thoughts, making any action impossible.* A tear ran down her face, into a corner of her mouth. *I've got to do better than this,* she thought.

With effort she opened her eyes and saw a seagull before her perched on one leg. It hopped ahead a couple of steps, stopped, looked back, cocked his head towards her as if asking for food, then flew away, leaving her alone again.

The rhythmical sound of the waves breaking on the beach was interrupted by two people singing the song, "Zippity Doodah Zippity A-A-A," over and over again. "Zippity Doodah, Zippity A-A-A, My oh my, what a wonderful day."

About ten feet away from her, a man and young boy about three years old, put down their cloth bags and sang that song as though nobody else was on the beach. The boy raised his arms; the man pulled the boy's T-shirt over his head getting it momentarily caught under his chin.

"Where's Aidan?" joked the man.

"I'm in here," responded the child.

The man laughed as he gently pulled the shirt up the rest of the way, revealing blond hair, chubby cheeks, a broad smile and big blue eyes that made Ellen want to yell, "Wow!" After he took off the boy's shoes and socks, sensing freedom, Aidan ran to the water but stopped suddenly when his toes touched the cold ocean. He ran back to his friend, laughing, squealing, running circles around him, yelling, "Richie, Richie, it's a beautiful day. It's a beautiful day," as if that was some kind of mantra between them.

Aidan picked up some sand, examined it, then let it flow through his fingers. "Wheee," he said with delight.

Richie picked up some sand and let it flow through his fingers, "Wheee," he exclaimed with enthusiasm equal to the boy's.

Ellen noticed that whenever the man talked with Aidan, he crouched down to his level so he would not tower over the boy. Richie was maybe fifty years old with broad shoulders, graying hair, and constant smile. His short legs and middle-aged paunch made Ellen think that his body was an enlarged version of his young playmate. She sat back in her chair, smiled, and thought, *I think I kind of like these two.*

She watched them run up the beach together, in and out of the waves, stopping to admire a pelican flying overhead or a dolphin passing offshore. Soon they turned back, running, splashing, laughing together until they stood nearby. Aidan ran into the water and Richie followed close behind. When Richie

## Beach Day

crouched down, Aidan leaped up on his shoulders and held tight as they walked into deeper water. Ellen walked to the water's edge, picked up some salty foam, ran it through her fingers and watched the bubbles disappear in her hands.

*What a beautiful day. I'm so glad I came to the beach.*

She looked out in time to see Aidan and Richie, heads covered by an unusually large wave, stand up dripping, startled, but safe, still clutching to each other, now returning to shallower water. Richie put Aidan down and they walked hand in hand to the shore.

"That one sure got us," he said, "Let's go make a castle."

Aidan forgot the fright of the waves and ran past her to retrieve a plastic shovel they had brought with them earlier. Richie walked past without saying anything and picked up his own pail and shovel. They sat together, Richie digging a hole, Aidan trying to help but filling it in, and the incoming waves making the whole effort futile, but they did not seem to care. Without warning, Aidan stood up, watched Richie dig for a minute then threw his arms around his big buddy's neck, and the two of them hugged their sand laden bodies together. Not a word was spoken. Both were laughing.

Ellen kicked away the salty foam that was sticking to her legs. The sun warmed her back; the water cooled her feet. For the first time today, she noticed the deep blue sky, the white crests of the waves, the swimmers splashing and yelling. Out beyond the surf, a pelican dove into the water, then floated on the surface, enjoying the fish dinner as his reward for hard work. Contented, constant, water and bird united, up and down, the building and breaking of the waves, surging and receding, their rhythm beating to the rhythm of life.

She stared as if in a trance, focusing on the ebb and flow of water and life. Behind her the boy and man, laughing, digging with their shovels, throwing away the sand, digging, throwing to this same rhythm.

*I've got to meet these two,* she thought. She took a step towards them, hesitated, took a step back, ran her fingers

through her hair, looked away, then without thinking, approached them.

"I'm sorry to intrude, but I have to tell you, I don't think I've ever seen two people enjoy each other as much as the two of you."

Aidan looked up at Ellen, "What did she say, Richie?"

"Oh, it's okay, Aidan. She's just being friendly." Richie looked up from his hole in the sand to her beautiful face. His face turned red; his head turned down. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. He stood up, rubbing his hands together, brushing away the sand. "Well, that's a nice thing to say. I'm Richie," he said, reaching out his hand. "This is my friend, Aidan."

Ellen crouched down until her face was level with Aidan's. "It's so nice to meet you. I saw you playing in the waves. What a big boy you are."

The boy grinned with self-pride and stepped towards Ellen, "We're making a castle."

"I see you are," said Ellen. She scooped up some sand, ran it through her fingers and watched it blow away in the breeze. "I like to play in the sand. I really don't want to interrupt your fun, but I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed watching the two of you."

"Us?" said Richie. "We're just having fun. We come down here all the time. I'd rather come to the beach with him than do anything else."

Aidan smiled. Ellen said, "That's pretty obvious. It's just so nice to see an adult having such fun with a child like that."

"It's funny, but I usually don't think of us as man and child. I just like a lot of the same things he does. I love the beach, and being with him gives me license to act like a kid. He's a very special person." Ellen looked affectionately at Aidan, as if already realizing how special he was. "Do you have children?" asked Richie.

## Beach Day

"No," she looked away for a second, beyond them, beyond the beach, to a different time and place. Richie pursued this innocent question no farther.

They both looked down at Aidan and watched him walk away towards a boy about his age who was playing nearby with a toy truck. The boy pushed the truck through the sand, making the "Hmmm, Hmmm" sound of little boys playing with trucks all over the world. Aidan took a step to the boy, paused and crouched as if he was stalking a prey, then another step forward, another crouch. He picked up a nearby truck and started making his own "Hmmm, Hmmm," sound. Within minutes they were playing as though they had been friends for years.

"We adults can learn so much about having fun by watching kids. I love it." Ellen realized she was talking faster, using her hands, her voice loaded with emotion, something changing within.

"I had no idea we were being watched. I don't mind. I don't think we're much of a show. Look at that. Now he's playing with a whole bunch of kids. He's such a happy guy. If I wasn't playing with him, I'd probably watch him like you were a while ago. He has that wonderful freedom of a child. No inhibitions."

"What a great way to be. I wish I was more like that," said Ellen. "I don't know how I got the courage to approach you. I know I talked to you first, but really, I'm pretty shy. I don't know what got into me."

She looked away towards Aidan, then back at Richie, trying to avoid eye contact. He touched her arm. She didn't want to step away but felt she should. His touch was gentle. He dropped his hand to his side. "Would you mind if I sat with you? We could watch Aidan and his friends together," he said.

"I'd like that." Her quick response revealed her glee. "My stuff is right here. I can't offer you a chair."

"That's OK. I never bring a chair. The sand is fine." She sat facing the boys. Richie plopped in the sand beside her, hands clasped, forearms resting on his knees.

Her heart was pounding, but she felt a calmness that was unfamiliar to her. "I usually don't walk up to guys. Try to pick them up on the beach. I don't know what got into me."

"Sure you do," Richie joked. "I know your type. That sweet innocent act doesn't fool me." They were both laughing. "The only thing is, I know if you had your choice, you'd rather be playing with Aidan than sitting with an old guy like me."

"He is a doll. I can't believe those big eyes. They were the first thing I noticed about him."

"I can't compete with him," said Richie. "He's excited about everything. I find myself staring at him, too. He comes over to my house every day, always happy, 'Wanna play trucks Richie?' He talks, and I melt. Whatever he wants to do, I do it."

"Do you mean he's not your son? From the way you were both acting, I assumed you were father and son."

"No, it just feels that way sometimes. Actually, I'm his neighbor. His father died. His mother works. I watch him whenever I can."

"That's pretty nice of you," said Ellen staring into his face.

"Not really. It's a pleasure. Some days I'm with him for eight hours; his mother comes home from work, takes him. I miss him immediately. He's an unbelievably good person."

Ellen stifled her reflex to say, *I think you are too*. Instead, she said, "I guess there are worse things than bringing a kid to the beach every day."

"There sure are. I used to be a dentist. Thirty years. Twenty-five were good but the last five . . . I was ready to quit."

She touched his hand and withdrew it quickly, "You don't look like a dentist."

Richie wrinkled his forehead, trying to look hurt, but he could not hide a broad grin. "OK. Now you've said it. What does a dentist look like?"

Ellen's brown eyes sparkled, "I don't know. I guess I never thought about it. Serious, I think. They're always serious. And glasses and gloves and masks. And combed hair, polished shoes. You know, a dentist."

## Beach Day

"You know, I never, ever wear gloves or mask to the beach. A drill maybe, but never a mask. And I stopped combing my hair when I retired. Never again will I comb this hair. I may rinse the sand off, maybe, but comb? Never."

She felt a laugh explode that had been lying dormant for too long. She sat up in her chair, reached over and touched his hand.

"You know, I'm probably the only person in the world without a dental story. I've never had a cavity. Never needed anything but a cleaning."

"Well, that's good for you, I guess, but how about me? If everyone was like you, I couldn't have made a living. No retirement. I don't mean to make you feel guilty but you really didn't do your share."

"I guess I never thought of it that way. Me being selfish because I didn't have any problems. Hmm."

He looked at her tight curly hair, the way her mouth turned up at the corners in a natural smile, her flashing eyes that sparkled with every word. He sighed, "It looks like you're perfect. No cavities, no dental horror stories."

"Yes, I am perfect. And I'm shocked it took so long for you to notice." They were both laughing. Their hands touched and instead of withdrawing, they intertwined and stayed together.

They smiled at each other but looked up to see Aidan walking towards them, struggling to carry a huge red plastic truck, almost as big as he was. He peeked out from behind, eyes bulging, breathless, "Richie, Richie, Look at this. Look what I found. A truck, a truck, a big red one."

Richie responded, "Wow, Aidan, you and me, Buddy. I guess we both got lucky today."

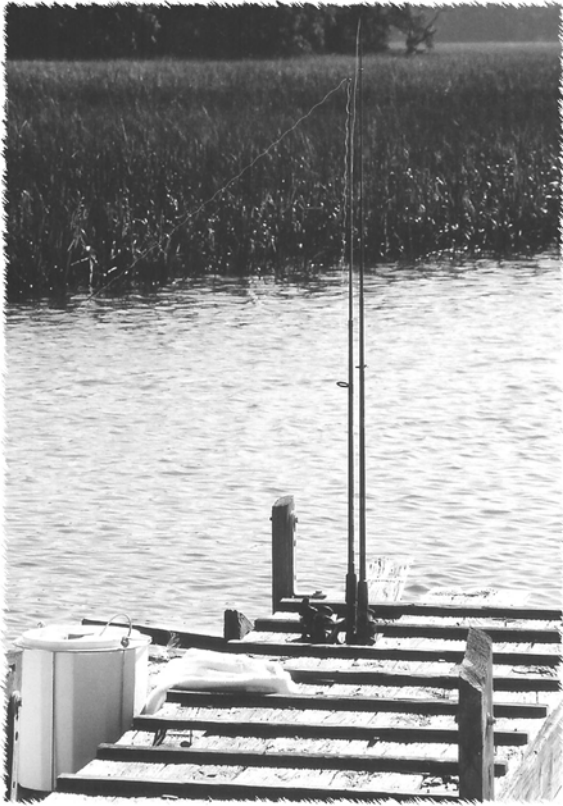


Photograph by Art Cornell

# Nature

by  
Art Cornell

Nature's sounds  
Fill the morning  
This summer day  
With lazy air—  
And heat so wet  
It's like sucking soup  
Through a straw.  
Even the birds fly  
With tempered wings  
As life slows  
To a rhythm  
Of indifference.



Photograph by Art Cornell

# Retro Summers

by  
Raymond P. Berberian

Our parents did not have much years ago, but they made sure we children spent at least one or two weeks "down the Jersey shore" during the summers. During the 1950s and 1960s, the crowds at the shore were still larger than the tourist-filled months on any of the beach front resorts on Hilton Head Island today. In July and August the Jersey beaches were literally blanket-to-blanket with beach-goers from the boardwalk entrances to the ocean's edge. As a kid back then, I enjoyed seeing if I could endure the foot-scorching hot sand, while sprinting zigzag to the water without kicking up too much sand on the prone multitudes.

Fifty years have passed since those youthful summers in New Jersey. Now I am a Hilton Head Island parent with my own kids. Visitors to Hilton Head Island do not have to wait until July or August to partake of the island's charms. The opportunity to swim and sun bathe exists from April through October along at least ten miles of pristine beach from the Port Royal Resort at the northern end of the island to the Sea Pines Plantation at the southern end. Even with the island's summertime influx of vacationers, the fine beaches have more than enough room to accommodate biking, horseshoe contests,

surfing and fishing as well. Romantic couples routinely arrange for beach-oriented wedding receptions at the Dunes House in Palmetto Dunes and at other island resorts.

Sometimes, though, I grow a little nostalgic for the masochistic old days. Mother would pack the car with our large and heavy beach umbrella, beach blankets, towels and clothing-filled suit cases on Friday night before our trip. The anticipation of fun and mayhem with our friends and cousins the next day made our sleep almost impossible.

My sisters and I would wait anxiously for Mom to enter our bedrooms to rouse us on Saturday at 6:00 a.m. to get an early start. I visualize departing from our turn-of-the-century house in Hackensack, New Jersey, to begin the hour-and-a-half to two-hour torturous, bumper to bumper drive south on the toll-laden Garden State Parkway to the Jersey shore in our old car. Today a vacationing family from New Jersey or from most states east of the Mississippi can fly into the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport and drive effortlessly and toll free to Hilton Head in forty minutes. Now that is convenient.

In those early years of my childhood, the family vacation destination was Asbury Park, New Jersey. It had a huge beach spanning miles of shore front, along with a two-mile boardwalk containing arcades, rides, food joints, miniature golf, bumper cars and the Ferris wheels. The boardwalk also had a huge convention center used for rock and roll and other concerts. The Asbury Park boardwalk fortune teller's tiny kiosk always emitted a mysterious neon glow, while the store-front psychic palm reader on U.S. 278 entering Hilton Head Island seems much less forbidding by comparison.

My current patriarchal attempts to explain to my children how my youthful summer vacations differed from their experiences on Hilton Head are met initially with patience. They take for granted the diverse amenities in each of the island's seven major resort communities. For instance, the Palmetto Dunes Resort offers three miles of beach front, world class beach-oriented condominiums, villas or houses, along with three golf courses and over twenty tennis courts. Kids merely

## Retro Summers

have to open the front door of their suite at the oceanfront Marriott Beach and Golf Resort or the Villamare or Barrington villas to access an awaiting pool or the inviting ocean. There is no need to lug the family beach umbrella, nor any need to explain why one has lost another one of mom's colorful beach towels. The resort provides the umbrella and beach towels.

In my effort to relate my earlier summer vacation experiences to my children, I mentioned that Asbury Park was a vacation mecca. Luxury hotels faced the beachfront street which was named Ocean Avenue. A variety of theatre and motion picture people were vacationers, as well, due to the close proximity of the early motion picture industry's location in Fort Lee, New Jersey. Numerous three-or-four story wood-framed hotels lined the first three blocks leading to the beach and boardwalk. By the time we vacationed in Asbury Park, all of the hotels were past their peak in style and amenities, except a few ocean front giants. The one still luxurious hotel was the Monte Carlo, I tell them. My children's reaction to my nostalgic rendition has now sunk to respectful ambivalence.

In a further effort to contrast my childhood summers with those of my children on Hilton Head, I continued relating a vacation ritual as follows: On the chosen Saturday, we would pile into the old Oldsmobile with Mom behind the wheel for the drive south along the Garden State Parkway. Of course my two younger sisters and I did not make it easy on poor Mom. With all the kidding around, pinching, name-calling and cramped seating, it is a wonder there were no accidents along the way. Nevertheless, it was a family tradition to interrupt the torturous parkway drive in order to have breakfast ten miles short of Asbury. We would always complain to Mom about stopping, in spite of our hunger pangs, because we knew our playmates probably would beat us to the hotels. Our complaints, however, soon dissipated when the pancakes arrived with the scrambled eggs, bacon and glasses of milk. There was something indescribable when a nearly starving kid

tasted that first slice of maple syrupy pancake. The whining stopped.

Although my children listened politely, they seemed unable to relate to my experiences. They are accustomed to taking a paltry three minute drive down U.S. 278 to Stacks, The Hilton Head Diner or Signe's Bakery and Café for breakfast here on the island. My kids miss out on the hunger pangs and sibling cat fights in such a short drive.

I tried once more to evoke a little sympathy from my children for their dear Dad about the hardships of yesteryear's vacation experiences with a story about the Van Hotel in Asbury where we stayed. Looking back, it was a dump; but kids in the post war generation did not know better. The hotel was a wooden structure of four stories. There were nine steps up to the front porch. We struggled up those porch stairs with all the hard box luggage, beach toys, umbrella and sometimes a steamer trunk. The old folks were sitting up on decrepit wooden rocking chairs and wicker chairs, almost smug in their joy that the newcomers would have to now toil up those stairs. As a youngster I could not help but feel that the elderly were the long-term residents of the old hotel and felt proprietary when their space was being invaded by us. Once past the porch, we would storm into the lobby where the reception desk lay with its pigeon hole room-key box display to the rear, just like in the old 1940s movies.

I would slam the metal arrival bell which was positioned on the well-worn reception desk. "Bing! Bing! Bing!" Creepy, bi-focaled Sam, the hotel owner, would crane his neck out from some cubby hole. His lascivious smile would lighten his moon-shaped face as he saw another paying customer. "What's our room number?" I would impetuously inquire. As usual we would be relegated to the upper reaches of this precursor to the Bate's Motel. This was our punishment for stopping at the breakfast joint while the early arrivals secured the lower hotel floor levels. Of course there was no elevator, which necessitated our luggage-laden climb of all four flights to our designated chateau. It was a noisy, sweaty affair even with

the help of the five-foot bellboy who resembled Igor of Frankenstein fame. By the third flight we were all moaning from the effort. The poor bellboy probably would have to file for disability due to the volume of guest luggage and torturous four-flight climbs he would endure on Saturday registrations. Years later it was rumored that the bellboy opened a string of ground floor motels due to his earlier experiences in luggage handling and its less than therapeutic consequences.

The décor of the Van Hotel was early medieval. The dreary walls displayed a variety of startled-looking dead creatures. The lounging area was festooned with worn yellow and greenish couches. The cushioned arm chairs were stuffed with some uneven material which after about five minutes caused the annoying sensation of things crawling on me. I am certain a cast of thousands had previously deposited themselves on these depleted resting devices in anticipation of the notorious dinner gong. The lounging area was the assembly point for the dining room which occupied the remainder of the first level along with the lobby and reception area. At the ring of the gong, a horde of older guests would make a bee line for the dining tables nearest the large floor fans, so that they could consume the meal without sweating into it. Canes and leg braces were often used by the senior citizens as makeshift weapons to secure choice seating during the stampede for the day's *haute cuisine*.

In an embellished contrast is Hilton Head's current reservation and dining process at establishments such as the Marriott, the Westin or the Holiday Inn Oceanfront. Nothing could be finer than being a guest at resorts which provide guests with swimming pools, golf and tennis facilities.

At this point in my story I noticed my children fidgeting. Their ambivalence finally morphing into incredulous looks, my kids laughed at their father's story. There was no way they could relate their experience with Hilton Head Island accommodations and amenities to the reality of "Dad's ancient history."

Yet, stubbornly, I persisted. The moment we entered our Van Hotel suite, I said, we threw our suit cases upon the large but sagging double bed that Mom and Dad would occupy in the same room with us. When the metal springs of the bed stopped creaking from the weight of the luggage, we spied the two or three military-style cots lavishly supplied by old Sam in anticipation of our arrival. I remember sometimes at night, as I slept on the cot, how I would hear the rusted springs of the cot twang as I turned my head or shifted. Sam did not hold back on the amenities for his cash paying customers. Only the best! By contrast, of course, vacationers' accommodations on Hilton Head often include ocean view suites with separate bedrooms, two-and-one-half baths, central air conditioning, cable T.V. and plush carpeting.

Our Van Hotel suite did not have an ocean view. Instead the suite overlooked the dumpster in the alley that separated all of the hotels. The overhead fan whirled with a weak wobble. Our bathroom, if contained in our hotel room, did have a shower and sink, but the faucets would emit a strange hiss and sputter as rusty water would initially flow from its first use in months. If we were not lucky enough to secure the suite with the primordial running water, we could always saunter down the dark hallway to the communal toilet and shower, which was available for the multitudes at no extra charge.

Extra ventilation was also available if one opened the window at night and ignored the plethora of mosquitoes which found their way through the porous metal window screen. Air conditioning was not on Sam's list of anticipated upgrades.

But what did we kids care back then? Our friends were probably already in the hotel or in another hotel close by. So we ignored the water-stained wall paper and fled on the threadbare carpet in search of fun. Cautious Mom however forced us to wait until after one o'clock to hit the beach for fear of severe sunburn on our first day. Without doubt we objected to her wisdom. What did mothers know of fun? The delay to the beach, of course, meant lunch would have to be eaten in

the dining room of the hotel rather than the hot dog stands stationed on each block of the beach. At least we got to see a few friends in the dining room on the main lounge level.

Old Sam was cost conscious in his operation of the hotel. Maybe there was alimony to pay. I guess that is what accounted for the nondescript soggy sandwiches he provided for the kids to eat. I always ordered iced tea to hide any traces of the rusty water. My children however are spared such dubious drinks. The Hilton Head Island restaurants have plenty of substitutes for the rusty water, which was standard fare at the Van Hotel. Dining at fine restaurants such as The Old Oyster Factory, Red Fish or Charlie's *L'Etoile Verte* is a gourmet experience for all. The number of diverse restaurants and the pristine surroundings of the island make vacations always unique, but certainly less traumatic than Asbury Park.

I cannot blame my parents too much for the awful hotel lunches, which also featured watery vegetables, sweaty chicken and sliced ham steak with more sinew than a weight lifter has. I guess they feared the sun's damaging rays more than Sam's cuisine. My wife and I have the same fear now of the island sun, but the chances of food poisoning seem scarce to non-existent here on the island.

Another thing that is different on Hilton Head Island is that there is no real boardwalk. Though each resort community or plantation like Sea Pines or Port Royal is self-contained in a way, I do miss the mobs of humanity which would sweep down to the seemingly endless Asbury Park boardwalk day and night. The mingled smells of cotton candy, hot dogs, fried onions, French fries, pop corn, sausage, sauerkraut and beer cannot be resurrected. One could walk miles down the wooden planks, see kids from everywhere, play skeet ball or miniature golf, ride the roller coaster and eat until late at night. Each of these activities pulsed under the neon glow of the arcades and shops.

On Tuesday nights during the late spring and summer season, Hilton Head provides a real treat at Shelter Cove. It reminds me of the good old days. There is a fire works display,

food, beer and entertainment, usually attended by thousands of islanders and vacationers. It is well worth the effort to take the family.

I make one more desperate attempt, one final memory revealed to gain empathy from my children, but I notice they have grown beards and left the room. As kids, we all had heroes. I got to meet mine in Asbury Park one summer afternoon when my parents bought tickets for the Monte Carlo Hotel, which was the last of the luxurious beach front hotels. Admission was collected at a gate under the hotel at street level and permitted entrance to the huge open private pool on the interior of the brick walled hotel complex with its tasteful surroundings. There were cabanas to lounge in and café areas in which to dine. This was where the remnants of the New York City theater people and New Jersey film industry vacationed. There was really nobody of real consequence coming there anymore, except maybe a nostalgic former patron or an older patron who was unaware of the trendier haunts popping up on Long Island or further south in New Jersey.

The Monte Carlo pool and cabana area was uniquely connected to the public beach by the hotel's private tunnel running under Ocean Avenue. The Monte Carlo Hotel patrons were issued a metal tag for use of the hotel's connecting tunnel and free access to the public beach. Public beach goers did not receive the exclusive Monte Carlo beach tag for access to the hotel's pool or property. When we got to the hotel pool area, a whole new unexplored world of splendor appeared before us. Everything was Art Deco in design. The fountains, the chairs, the cabanas, and the café were a far cry from the Van Hotel. We used our hotel tags to run back and forth all day between the ocean and the hotel's fresh water pool while our parents drank strange-looking fruity drinks.

The day we went to the Monte Carlo Hotel I saw Buster Crabbe! Buster was an Olympic champion in swimming, but I recognized him because he was the Flash Gordon of T.V. and movie fame. Today we have had four

Supermen, five Batmen and any number of repeat cartoon or comic book heroes. Back then, however, there was only one Flash Gordon, and he was my hero. I saw him at the beach heading back into the tunnel link to the Monte Carlo. He still had his huge chest, blondish brown hair and tanned, muscled physique. Neither Flash's interstellar girlfriend, Dale, nor his scholarly buddy, Dr. Zarkov, was present, but there he was. I rushed over before he could reach the hotel tunnel and hand-saluted while I yelled, "Hi Flash!" He stopped, turned, stepped up to me and said "Hi, kid," returned my feeble salute, and disappeared into the dark tunnel in an instant. Wow! He was probably on a mission to catch the evil Emperor, Ming the Merciless, or to save his girlfriend, Dale, from the cave dwelling mole men.

I do not see much of Flash anymore, but I sure think he would appreciate the accommodations on Hilton Head Island as my children do. We could all have rust-free iced tea together before blasting off on another space adventure. There are no toll booths in space.



Photograph by Jane P. Hill

# Hangin' Out Island Style

by  
Sheila Gale

Coffee mug in hand, I sit on the deck of our villa in my pajamas and watch dawn break in an explosion of gold and orange. Chickadees and a lone woodpecker fight for space at the bird feeder a few feet away. The woodpecker wins and grips the feeder as he searches for dried cranberry morsels. Live oaks surround the villa, their crooked branches dripping with Spanish moss. They will provide welcome shade as the day heats up. Squirrels chase each other up and down tree trunks in a mad frenzy of activity; in the garden beneath a raccoon roots through a forgotten trash bag. Beyond the oak trees the lagoon shimmers in the sun's glow, its crystal smoothness broken when a blue heron's long beak spears the surface, sending tiny ripples across the water.

Ted joins me on the deck, carrying a jug of coffee, croissants, and freshly-squeezed orange juice on a large tray. After breakfast we cycle to the white sandy beach. It is low tide, and we hope to spot dolphins as they frolic in the ocean. Sometimes they leap out of the water, their silvery bodies arcing in unison. Pelicans hover overhead, searching for fish, and a flock of sandpipers peck vigorously in the wet sand. We

sit near a sand dune where sea oats sway in the light breeze, and watch.

Beyond the dunes white-capped waves crash on the shore, leaving behind odd-shaped bits of wood and hundreds of shells. A man and woman, wearing windbreakers against the brisk morning air, remove sandals and dip toes in the icy brine, jumping back as a surge of water splashes over their feet. They wade in a little further but soon give up. Turning around, they see us and gesture how chilly it is. We wave and smile.

Clipping on bike helmets, we cycle along the beach to Coligny. The temperature begins to rise and the sun is warm on our backs. By the time we reach Java Joe's, we are ready for a break. A group of friends sits at one of the tables, so we order coffee and join them. They are discussing where to eat tonight. With over two hundred restaurants to choose from, it is a challenge. In the end we decide to make it a casual night and arrange to meet at the Wild Wings café.

Arriving home, we ride through the Palmetto Dunes plantation. It is cool under the lush canopy of green as we cycle down quiet side streets where gracious homes stand, half hidden in trees. We take a path to the beach and notice a group of people staring out to sea. Hand shading eyes, I peer at the ocean and see the familiar fin of a dolphin. We grin at each other and join the dolphin watchers.

Back at the villa I make a pitcher of iced tea. We settle on the deck in comfortable chaise lounges and sip the refreshing drink through straws. A combination of exercise and sun makes me drowsy. Through half-closed eyes I watch turtles climb onto the side of the lagoon to sun themselves. An alligator lies motionless on the far bank. A golf ball lands near him, but the golfer and his friends are not taking any chances. They give the alligator a wide berth.

Smiling, I fall asleep.



## Saw Palmetto

by  
Norm Levy

Clusters of shiny, emerald-green daggers  
Splay in menacing fans of vegetative aggression.  
Slender leaves, needle-tipped  
Saw-tooth edged, erect, vigilant,  
Challenge in every direction  
Fiercely guarding root and crown.  
Yet, stealthy forest creatures  
Find refuge deep within its spiny keep.

Photograph by Sansing McPherson



# Pick an Island

by  
Anne S. Grace

"Eenie, meenie, minie, moe,  
Catch an island by its toe!"

**T**hat is how I felt when trying to select a beach somewhere to "call my own." I have always wanted to live near the ocean, ever since I vacationed at several beaches when I was a child.

As an adult, however, with my husband in the military, we usually moved where the US Air Force needed us, a couple of times near a beach. After twenty years and eleven moves he retired, then worked for an aircraft corporation for seventeen years. This involved moving several more times, none near an ocean. (Once, while living in Arizona, I saw the sand and palm trees and cried, "Where's the beach?")

In 1995 I lived in St. Louis, Missouri, and my husband lived in Saudi Arabia. He came home for our middle daughter's wedding in September. We decided to sell our condo, and he asked, "Where do you want to go?" Immediately I answered, "The beach!" He asked, "What

beach?" I thought, *Who cares? Point me in the direction of the ocean and I guarantee you there'll be a beach somewhere.* Then I remembered living in Sumter, South Carolina, while in the Air Force. I really liked the warm climate there and hoped we could return someday.

So I decided to check on the beaches of South Carolina and Georgia. I did not want the colder waters of North Carolina or the hotter climate of Florida. I also ruled out Myrtle Beach because my family had gone there when I was a child, and my husband and I had taken our children there in the summer months. I know there are many people who live there year-round, but to me it was a vacation place. Although my husband had played golf twice in the Heritage Tournament on Hilton Head Island, I had never been there. My mother and some of her sisters had vacationed there several times. They thought it was a lovely place to be.

I considered the Charleston area for its unique history and Hilton Head because it is an island. I subscribed to the Saturday and Sunday issues of *The Island Packet* for a month to learn about places to shop (clothing and food), population, weather, churches, and restaurants. It was a worthwhile endeavor. I contacted the visitors' bureau and received information from several realtors. One responded, asking my preferences for areas, type of houses, and prices. At the time I was not aware that much of Hilton Head Island was divided into gated subdivisions, known as plantations.

During this time I realized I had not prayed and asked where God wanted me to be. I guess I assumed where I went would not matter to Him. But God had been involved in the last three moves we had made, providing just the right houses we needed in the area of His choice. My daily reading of The Bible at that time was the book of Isaiah. Because it is my favorite book in The Bible, and the chapters and verses are so familiar, I chose to read it backwards—66, 65, 64. On October 9th I began reading chapter 23, but I had to turn the page to finish. When I did so, my eyes fell on a verse in chapter 24 that I had read the day before, but I had not really noticed. This

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day it jumped off the page at me: "*Therefore glorify the LORD in the east, the name of the LORD, the God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea.*" I wrote, "YES!" in the margin.

I flew to my sister's home near Jacksonville, Florida, the first Friday in December, and together we drove to Hilton Head. Driving through southern Beaufort County and seeing the lacey moss hanging from the old oak trees ignited my imagination. I expected to see hoop-clad Southern Belles and Tara-type houses any moment! Just after sunset a great blue heron flew over the car. I knew I had entered a fascinating land. After we checked into our hotel room at the Hilton in Palmetto Dunes, we ate a great seafood dinner of shrimp and grouper in their restaurant, Mostly Seafood. I believed I was close to Paradise.

The next morning my sister and I walked on the beach in front of the hotel, breathing in that fresh, healthy salt-laden air. Wow! Later we met with a real estate agent who showed us a few houses and condos for sale. Because I had never been to the island, I knew nothing about the "plantations," their locations or the particulars of living in any one. I was disappointed that she did not show me all of the island so I could get a feel for where I wanted to live. Once she found out I would probably be renting instead of buying, she lost interest and recommended someone else.

On Sunday my husband joined me from Arabia and asked if I had called our friends who had retired on Hilton Head Plantation. I forgot they were on the island. We visited with them and contacted their realtor. As a result, I rented a large beach-type house on the marsh in Port Royal Plantation. It was perfect because I had access to the beach on the Atlantic Ocean where I love to walk, frolic in the surf, and contemplate life.

In January 1996 I moved by myself to Hilton Head Island. Living on Port Royal Plantation was a treat. What a view from the upper level of the beach house! I could see part of Port Royal Sound, watch the planes land and fly from Hilton Head Airport, and mark the seasonal changes in the marsh

grasses. The back yard swimming pool provided many hours of leisurely laps. One summer day around five o'clock as I looked out my kitchen window, small crabs the size of U.S. quarters came out of the marsh and converged on the pool deck. Many fell into the pool, and some climbed the tabby pillars under the house. I felt like I was in the movie, *Elephant Walk*, only this house was in the way of crawling crabs! The ones in the pool lived for several days, one claw growing larger than the other. The black pool surface made them difficult to see, so each day I scooped them out with a net before my swim. I usually tossed them back into the marsh. In addition to crabs I shared my island space with marsh bunnies, red-winged blackbirds, and the ever-present blue herons. I only saw one snake, but at eventide the no-see-ums were everywhere. During thunderstorms I watched a virtual laser light show. Many times the storms were raging off island, but we received no drops of water.

I loved walking on the beach, inhaling the fresh ocean air, and getting inspiration for writing articles and my upcoming book, *Grace Upon Grace*, later published by Author House. Late one afternoon I decided to stroll the beach, not realizing it was high tide. The birds that usually lined the sandbar where the Atlantic Ocean and Port Royal Sound merged were all on shore. Because I was alone on the beach, it was frightening, bringing back images of Alfred Hitchcock's movie, *The Birds*. Of all times *not* to have my camera!

Having fresh fish available to eat was always a treat, especially shrimp and flounder. I tried many of the island's restaurants that year, enjoying all of their various styles and menus.

My husband and four children visited often from Saudi Arabia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Pinehurst, and College Station, Texas. Plus, I was now just three hours from my sister and seven hours from my mother in Virginia. It was a good year. I made new friends, found a church, joined several organizations, took a watercolor class, and put down roots. One reason I liked the island was because it reminded me of

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living on an Air Force base: a small city (25,000 at that time), secure, and convenient.

Because we had not decided where to live after my husband retired, in October I let him know how much I really liked Hilton Head Island. When he came home in December, nearly ready to retire, we bought a house on the Nicklaus golf course at Colleton River Plantation in Bluffton. In February 1997 I left my beautiful island but am thankful I did not have to leave the area. My motto has become: "My body may be in Bluffton, but my heart's on Hilton Head Island!"



# A Mockingbird Morning

by  
Frederick W. Bassett

Everywhere I biked, mockingbirds  
were lifting the world  
on the back of their songs.  
Who, with ears to hear, would not soar  
with them on such a glorious morning?

Cloaked now in the solitude  
of this study, I regret I only stopped  
to admire a black-faced fox squirrel,  
slighting the common grey ones,  
as if numbers could diminish the stars.

Why didn't I stop for a stomp  
with the firethorn, all ablaze  
with bright red berries?  
The cedar waxwings will have  
many a good drunk this winter.

And why were the mockingbirds  
so excessively joyous?  
Praise for surviving a drought-plagued  
summer here in the Lowcountry?  
Cause enough for me.

The doctor said it would be optimistic  
to think I could make it this far.  
So every new day is a tasty table  
of diversity, every starry night  
an ever-flowing fountain of wonder.

How I'd like to be a mockingbird  
perched high in a tree  
this very moment, tripling  
each bar of my *day-clean* song.  
Look at me. I'm alive. Yet alive.

# The Other Man

by  
C. S. Thorn, Jr.

I first noticed the other man in the winter of 1986, when I was new to the Island. We walked our dogs on the beach early in the morning. He would take the "high road" near the dunes, while I preferred the water's edge. He was spry, sported a goatee and held his chin high. A Greek fisherman's hat sat atop his full head of gray hair. I guessed he was in his middle sixties.

I waved, but got no response. I suspect he dismissed me as just one more of the mounting wave of newcomers. That was fine with me. I relished the solitude.

In the cold months northerly gusts skip off steel-gray waves chasing flurries of sand down the deserted beach. Some of the grains pile up behind sea shells or bits of detritus creating otherworldly formations in the long shadows cast by the low, winter sun.

Legions of sandpipers patrol the shore, while cormorants dive beneath the surface just yards away. Clusters of colorful branch coral and seaweed, torn from the depths, form a ragged line marking the extent of the tide's most recent advance.

Some of us are drawn to this bleak prospect. The communion with the timelessness of the sea resonates in our souls. The only sounds are the souging of the surf and the cries of gulls. The bite of the wind is a small price to pay for the sense of being virtually alone, when the sight of even one or two others somehow diminishes the experience.

And so it went until one morning in February. The tide was swollen by a full moon and pushed even higher by a stiff northeast blow. There was precious little beach between the waves and the dunes as the other man approached from the opposite direction.

His dog was an older female he called Sam. Mine, not quite a year old, bounded up to greet her. But Sandy's exuberance was met with a snarl, and although twice the size, she acquiesced, allowing the older dog to claim dominance.

"Sam, Sam, knock it off," ordered the man gruffly.

"I guess she's not used to puppies," I offered.

"Guess not," he replied continuing down the beach. He gave a shrill whistle followed by a barked command, "Sam, let's go."

We saw them every morning after that, but the moon and the wind did not conspire again to bring us into close proximity.

One day, perhaps a month later, he did not appear. I found it ironic that I was disquieted more by his absence than by our wordless passing like ships in the night. A week went by before he reappeared one morning, alone. It was a gray and mournful day, a particularly nasty one for mid-March. He was close to the dunes, as always, but Sam was nowhere to be seen. Sandy seized the opportunity and ran to him, ignoring my calls to come back.

He stopped, dropped to one knee as he scratched her ears, and allowed her to swab his face with her tongue. Tears welled in his eyes as I caught up to them.

"I'm sorry," I said. "She's still a puppy. She's not very well trained."

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"It's okay. I lost Sam last week, but I never met a dog I didn't like."

He got back to his feet and continued on without another word or a glance back in my direction.

Afterwards he would return my wave from high on the beach as Sandy rushed to greet him. She would get a few pats and a few scratches and he would be gone, a proud figure marching down the beach against the backdrop of the dunes.

There was another stretch of four or five weeks when I did not see him at all. Then, on a Friday morning, he was up near the dunes. At first glance I thought it might be someone else. His shoulders were hunched slightly forward, his cheeks were hollow, and he looked older. But Sandy bounded to him as usual.

I approached him. "I haven't seen you in a while."

"Haven't been here."

He lingered longer than usual before straightening up. His voice faltered as he rubbed Sandy's coat, "Good girl," he rasped before moving off down the beach.

As the distance between us increased, I had a premonition that we would not meet again. I suddenly realized that I did not know his name or where he lived. I felt a need to know more about him, but when I turned, he had disappeared from view.

Did he have a family? What were his passions? What brought him to the Island? Why had we not shared the memories locked away inside us?

I did not see him again. Days became weeks, weeks stretched into months, and then it was June. The changing seasons worked their magic, and the beach was again teeming with life. At night, loggerhead turtles lumbered ashore to lay eggs at the base of the dunes, etching tank-like tracks that remained in the sand until the next tide. Close to the beach, the water was alive with schools of mullet and menhaden. Dolphins cruised by just a stone's throw away, but seemed indifferent to the feast closer to shore.

Summer followed spring, and tourists began again to encroach on our private hour. They congregated near the waves, so I moved closer to the dunes, but Sandy scampered excitedly from one new face to the next, her tail spinning like a furry propeller.

And then summer was gone. The beach was all ours and we walked again at the water's edge. Overhead, columns of geese winged south, and the wind off the waves began to nip. In the intimacy of those mornings, I found myself thinking of the other man. What if I had reversed direction and walked with him? What might I have learned from him? What if we had become friends?

On a warm but damp morning in December, dense fog rolled in from the sea. Visibility was perhaps fifty yards one minute, but not fifty feet the next. There was not a trace of wind, but the sea birds were content to stay grounded rather than confront the unseen aloft.

I tried in vain to pick out familiar landmarks simply to determine how far we had walked, when suddenly the cloying blanket lifted sufficiently for me to get my bearings. I caught sight of two figures near the dunes—wraith-like images of a man and a dog near a windbreak.

The perception lasted just a second before the fog tumbled back in, but I was sure it was he, and I adjusted my direction in order to intercept him. I became animated. I had so many things to ask. Where had he been? Had he traveled? Did he like to read?

In minutes we reached the dunes, waiting patiently where the sand sweeps eight feet upward. I peered into the gloom as Sandy sniffed the now somewhat unfamiliar territory.

I imagined the conversation we would have, and I waited, hoping to surprise him. I would suggest that perhaps we could walk together tomorrow or the next day. I would be glad to come earlier and wait for him.

When he did not appear, I walked towards the windbreak, but still, I found no trace of him. I was so sure I had seen him. Where could he be?

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As the fog began to lift, I looked up and down the beach. The birds were taking to the air one or two at a time, and a faint breeze stirred the sea oats standing sentinel above the dunes. With profound sadness I realized that the only footprints on that lonely stretch were Sandy's and my own.

It must have been two months later when a stranger appeared on the beach. He followed the same path along the dunes as the other man, but he looked much younger. I continued in my tracks for another minute and then, on impulse, I walked towards him.

"Wait, wait just a minute," I called as I hurried to catch him.

He turned and stopped as he watched me approach.

"I'm sorry," I said as Sandy made her introduction. "We don't see many others on the beach this time of year. It gets a bit lonely. Do you come here often?"

"No, I'm just here for a few days. I'm handling my dad's estate. He used to walk this beach every morning with his dog, Sam. Did you ever meet him?"

"We spoke briefly on a few occasions, but I'm afraid I don't even know his name.

"It was Robert, Robert Chambers. I'm Bob Junior."

I extended my hand. "Paul Roark. It's nice to meet you. I'm very sorry about your loss and I feel badly that I didn't get to know him better."

"He was always a private person; he didn't make friends easily."

"Do you mind if I walk along with you?" I asked. "I would like to know more about your father."

"Not at all, I'm glad to have the company."

"What did he do for a living?" I asked.

Bob stooped and picked up a shell. "He was an inventor. He specialized in devices that have to do with the human hand, prostheses, for example. He had over sixty patents, but recently he did more consulting than inventing."

"I've never heard of an invention consultant. I've always thought of the process as a bright light switching on in someone's mind."

Bob chuckled, "He didn't consult on inventions *per se*. He advised on ergonomic designs for steering wheels, or computer keyboards—things that are manipulated or controlled by the hands."

"That's very interesting," I responded. "How did he get involved in that?"

"You may not have noticed, but his right hand was malformed. It had only three fingers. The middle one was quite wide, like a small paddle. When he was a boy, he was very self-conscious about it. He was reluctant to shake hands and I suppose that's why he became somewhat introverted."

"He was naturally right-handed, but he wouldn't even consider writing left-handed or batting lefty. I guess he was a little stubborn. He designed a kind of bridge that helped him to hold a pencil and he learned to write beautifully. I guess that got him started on other gadgets, and he made it his life's work."

"That would make an interesting book," I said.

"Oh, he wrote several books, including an autobiography."

"I'd love to read it. Is it available locally?" I asked.

"I doubt it," Bob said, "but there's a copy at the house. You're welcome to borrow it."

"You're very kind. I'll take you up on that."

"If you'll be here tomorrow, I'll bring it along with me."

"I'll be here, thanks very much."

Bob was true to his word. When we met the next morning he produced his father's book. After a very pleasant stroll on the beach we parted company. Bob was leaving for home later in the day, but we would get together again when he was back on the Island. I was anxious to learn more about his dad and hurried back to the house.

Robert Sergeant Chambers led a busy life. Although he grew up less than fifty miles from me in Ohio, our lives took

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very different paths. From his beginnings as a tinker/inventor, he became a well-known expert on the mechanics of the human hand. He earned an engineering degree, but one of his texts became required reading for orthopedic surgeons. A widower, he was well-traveled and frequently jetted to Europe or Asia to consult with the manufacturers of automobiles or computer equipment. He was even called in by one of the leading golf club manufacturers to help design a new grip. But the significance of those achievements paled when compared to the accounts of the hundreds of malformed or mutilated poor and third world children who wore his devices without cost.

I reflected on my own accomplishments, but I failed to come up with a single one that was remotely as noble as his. The more I read about the man, the more questions I had. Every open door seemed to lead to several others. And then, before I knew it, I was finished with the book. I kept it for a few more days, reviewing several chapters, before I mailed it back to Bob Jr., as promised.

Although the crowds were here again, Sandy and I walked closer to the water's edge. Somehow, solitude had lost its allure. Flights of pelicans floated overhead as ospreys circled the shallow waves ready to dive on unsuspecting targets. Small black-tip sharks scouted the inches-deep water near the beach where an easy breakfast was always available.

At ten or eleven the wind began to stir, and by three or four, the sea breeze, fueled by the day's heat, churned the surf to a frenzy. Almost on signal, lobster-red sun lovers surrendered their spots on the sand and retreated to climate-controlled condos that smelled of damp towels and sunscreen.

It turned out to be a very hot summer. To make matters worse, all of the Lowcountry was affected by severe drought. Mandatory restrictions on landscape watering reduced many a lush lawn to burned stubble. The dearth of precipitation persisted until late September, when a tropical storm brought relief. Three days of unrelenting rain drove away even the most stubborn tourists, and the island was ours once again.

On the first sunny morning afterwards, Sandy and I made our way past the dunes. We had the expanse to ourselves. The storm's surge had pushed the water much higher than normal, leaving puddles far from the waves. The contour of the strand had changed, too. Some areas had lost considerable amounts of sand while others had accreted. Sandy's nose was busy exploring the new territory, when I noticed a familiar figure walking towards us. It was young Bob Chambers. He waved with his free hand and quickened his pace.

"Hello, Paul. I was hoping you would be here," he said.

We shook hands, as he explained that he had come back to the Island for a few days to finalize the sale of his father's property. Most of the furnishings were going to Habitat for Humanity, but Bob was packing personal papers and effects to take home with him.

I learned that he had married his college sweetheart and that they had two children. They lived in Atlanta just minutes from where I had spent ten years before moving to Hilton Head. We swapped tales about the traffic, the Braves and the Falcons and discovered that we knew several people in common. I thoroughly enjoyed his company, but the time passed all too quickly. We said good-by at my beach walk, and agreed to meet again.

The next morning was one of those brilliant early October offerings with low humidity and an unsullied azure sky. The visibility was unlimited, and one could easily make out the water towers and even a few beach houses at Fripp Island to the northeast. The birds seemed to rejoice in the light breeze. Perhaps they sensed the impending change of seasons. Even the usually lethargic dolphins swam more energetically.

We waited only a couple of minutes until Bob appeared on the beach. He waved with one hand and seemed to be carrying a volume in the other. Sandy greeted him with her usual exuberance before getting back to the business of sniffing. We exchanged greetings.

"I came up with something that might interest you," Bob held up the book. "It's my Dad's journal. I didn't even

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know he kept one, but there are a few pages in here that have to do with you."

He opened the volume to a bookmarked page and handed it to me. The script was precise and elegant. I began to read:

Jan. 22 - There was a new fellow on the beach today. He had a golden retriever pup with him. Looked like a nice enough chap. Maybe we'll see him another day.

Jan. 24 - Saw the other man again today. He was down by the water's edge. I didn't get close enough to speak to him.

Feb. 14 - Tide was way up this morning. Hardly any beach to walk on. The other fellow was right up at the dunes. Sam snarled at his dog. I guess she was jealous. I should have said something but I didn't.

Feb. 20 - I see the other fellow every day now. I probably should stop to talk but maybe he'd rather be alone.

Mar. 11 - I lost Sam today. She ran out in the street after a cat and was hit by a pickup. It breaks my heart, but at least it was quick.

Mar. 17 - Went back to the beach, but it's tough without Sam. Saw the other chap again. His dog, Sandy, gave me a kiss. She's a sweet thing. I should have said something to him but I didn't have the heart for it.

Mar. 21 - Saw him again. We wave at each other now, and Sandy runs up to say hello. One of these days maybe I'll ask him his name. I wonder if he's read any good books lately.

Mar. 25 - Got bad news from the doctor today. I've got a tumor behind my left eye. He said it's too far gone and it's inoperable. He gave me about six weeks. I don't know how I'll tell Bobby.

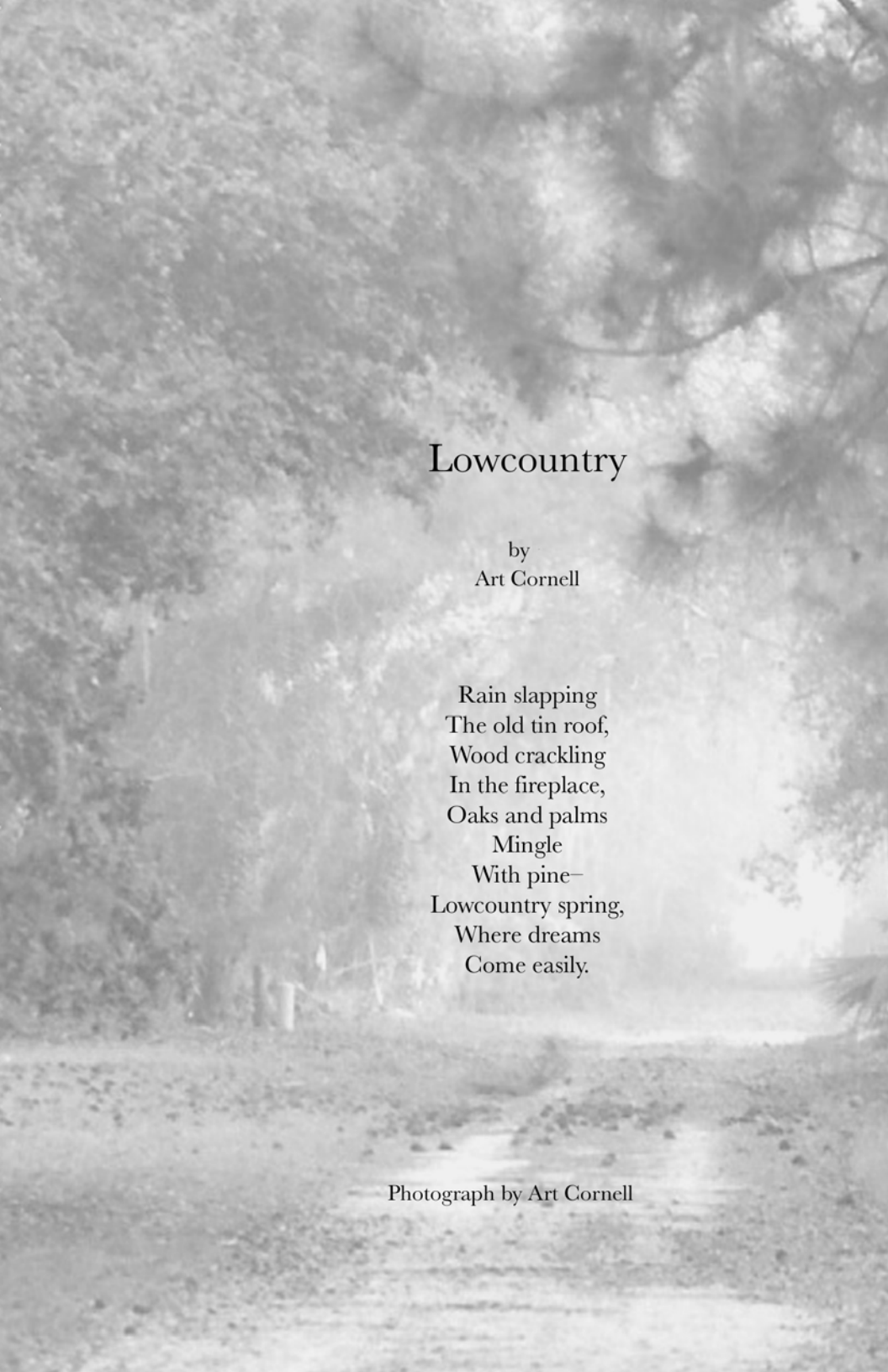
Apr. 28 - Went back to the beach today. It took all the energy I had. Saw the other fellow again. I meant to start a conversation, but I was just too tired. I wish I had made an overture when I first saw him.

That was the last entry Robert Chambers made in his journal. I closed the book and handed it back to his son and we said our good-byes. As Bob disappeared down the beach path,

a chill wind off the waves signaled the imminent change of seasons. I was overcome with melancholy as Sandy and I continued our walk

On another morning about a week later, we were well into our walk when another golden retriever appeared from nowhere. He was a beautiful male and looked to be about the same age as Sandy. The two said hello, as two dogs do, as I wondered where he had come from. All of a sudden a new fellow came over the dunes, not twenty feet in front of me. Waving, he walked in my direction and introduced himself.

He was new to the Island and looked forward to daily trips to the beach with his dog, Sunshine. We chatted for quite some time as we made our way up the beach and back. We agreed to meet again the next day and shook hands. As we parted company I heard myself say, "I'm glad to have met you. The beach can get pretty lonely at this time of year."



# Lowcountry

by  
Art Cornell

Rain slapping  
The old tin roof,  
Wood crackling  
In the fireplace,  
Oaks and palms  
Mingle  
With pine—  
Lowcountry spring,  
Where dreams  
Come easily.

Photograph by Art Cornell



# Sea Pines Wildlife Preserve

by  
Shanti North

**T**he Lowcountry of coastal South Carolina offers visitors a wonderful opportunity to explore its unique and exotic subtropical climate. Beaches, marshes, forests and meandering waterways provide a constant source of habitat discovery. Nature's abundant gifts are many with mild easy winters and cooling ocean breezes to moderate the hot summers. Here one can enjoy mossy-draped forests, expansive white beaches and warm gentle surf.

To get a real sense of this natural world one can visit a wildlife preserve in the area and explore the essence of this coastal environment. These natural sanctuaries show visitors what used to be here and give them a chance to reflect upon Mother Nature and human nature in response. After all, it is the natural beauty of the forests, rivers and beaches that summons so many people here. There are three such areas available on Hilton Head Island, each one a worthwhile window into the natural world: the Audubon Newhall Preserve, Pinckney Island and the Sea Pines Wildlife Preserve.

The wildlife preserve in Sea Pines is a special place with 605 acres set aside within the plantation community; it is a sterling example of how development can incorporate both worlds: the natural and the man-made. Sea Pines was among the earliest developed areas on the island. Its emphasis on

## Shanti North

retaining the forests and the natural qualities of the beach is a testament to the enduring appeal of Sea Pines as a place to visit and to live. The wildlife preserve is an expanse of forest where the stroller can retreat to beautiful, safe surroundings that seem to disconnect from the rest of the world; a place where one can take a little time out.

Any time of year is a good time to visit. The preserve is well managed with opportunities to walk beautifully maintained trails, fish in three well-stocked lakes, picnic and boat. It is easily accessed by car, by bicycle or on foot. The area offers opportunities to ride horseback and to cruise the lakes exploring for alligators. A walk through this habitat will just about always turn up an opportunity to observe alligators, exotic birds or leafy vistas on the forest trail. The 605-acre habitat is mostly inaccessible forest and swamp which is home for many endangered species, with some acreage set aside for recreational purposes.

A dirt road leads into the preserve where one is surrounded immediately with tall pines and overarching live oaks. The refreshing cool shade has an immediate effect, especially on a hot day. Proceeding down the roadway, one soon realizes that the regular world has been left for a special place. The road winds its way through the center of the preserve, making points of interest easily accessible. Dirt roads have a way of taking one back into history, making a more tactile connection to the land, giving hints as to how life was lived in a simpler, dustier time before pavement.

The road takes the visitor past three lakes. The first, Lake Joe, is a good place to pull over and observe alligators. The bank opposite the road is one of the favorite lounge spots for ever-fascinating, leathery reptiles. Sunny winter afternoons will find several alligators lined up on the bank to catch a few warming rays. But just about any day gators, large or small, can be observed here. A steady line breaking the placid lake surface will mark the barely visible head of a gator, snout first, on the move, patrolling his watery domain. A healthy alligator can grow a foot a year up to about ten years, and then the growth

## Sea Pines Wildlife Preserve

slows down. Some of the gators in the preserve are possibly 50 years old, so babies to great grandparents can be seen. One of the largest I ever observed, affectionately called Big Elvis, was about twelve feet long, had an enormous girth, and weighed close to a ton.

It is important for visitors to respect these animals and never feed or interact with them in any way. Their heritage has perhaps the oldest lineage existing in the world today, tracing their ancestry back two million years when their enormous relatives roamed alongside dinosaurs and other immense creatures of the Reptilian Age.

Whether walking, biking or driving, one can follow the road which winds past two more lakes, affording ample opportunities to observe a wide variety of species. Frequently turtles can be seen cooperatively sharing a water-logged branch along the lakeside as they sit tranquilly in a row, communing turtle style in the warm sun. From the sky above the shrill cry of an osprey is often heard announcing the hunter is on the way, scouring the lake for a tasty fish dinner. It is not unusual to find oneself looking face to face with a deer; these shy and gentle creatures retreat quickly into the thicket.

One of the great treasures of the preserve is the wildflower field, which lights up with color during the spring months. Approximately an acre or more, the field is planted with many species of wildflowers that seem to explode into a riot of rich, scintillating color in March, April and May. This fragrant vista sits on a low, gently sloping hill, which from a distance seems to rise like a floating cloud of countless hues and shades of pastel, a stirring feast for the eyes.

The two-mile network of trail walks take one through a remarkable number of habitats: maritime forest, swamps, open fields, archaeological and historic sites. On entering the dark shade of the forest, the visitor may take trails past massive live oak trees that stand poised like ancient sentinels throughout a forest of pines, cypress, sweet gum, hickory, wax myrtles and many other tree species. These ancient oaks with their broad girth and massive branches reach outward and upward,

creating remarkable cooling shade in the heat of the summer season. Lacy patches of finely fringed green resurrection fern adorn their branches, lending a sense of dignity to their age and beauty; each one is a living treasure. Resurrection fern is a remarkable little plant so named for its ability to appear dead with shriveled, brown leaves when conditions are dry and to transform itself into a vibrant, delicate green fern when it rains.

One trail passes Night Heron Swamp, which undulates through the eastern side of the preserve. In the winter the water appears thickly carpeted with a fuzzy, emerald-green plant called duck weed. A little bluff along the swamp marks a perfect place to sit and absorb the greenness and silence of this enchanting spot; it is a good place to watch turtles basking in the warm sun on a chilly day. Musing, one could easily imagine a water sprite or diva emerge from this velvety surface and momentarily sparkle in the air.

Lake Chapin is on this trail. It is a small lake with a nice bench beside it. This makes a comfortable place to sit and observe the quiet activity of blue herons fishing for a tasty morsel. It is an inspiring little spot for taking photographs or just relaxing and uncluttering the mind. Further along the trail is an archaeological site that is approximately 4,000 years old. A large circular wall or ring created from discarded oyster shells marks this ancient place of human activity. The wall is made of dirt and oyster shells left there thousands of years ago by the early inhabitants. Naturally questions surface in the mind. What took place there so many years ago? Was it a village, a seasonal camp or a temple complex? Did the shell wall represent a need for protection or a need to define an important space? Benches positioned around the outer portion of the shell ring make a convenient place to view the site and contemplate the possibilities and vibrations of the remote past.

On the west side of the preserve is a trail through more swampland, forest and alongside remnants of rice paddies from the plantation era to Vanishing Swamp and Boggy Gut. Such names evoke a wisp of magic that is felt as one walks through these inspiring landscapes. Vanishing Swamp is just that; in the

## Sea Pines Wildlife Preserve

winter rain floods the low ground covering the dark leaves of the forest floor standing undisturbed around tree trunks. On bright, sunny days the still water mirrors reflections of the trees and vegetation skyward, creating shimmering dark images. In the summer the water sinks into the ground to nourish the tap roots of the trees, thus the name Vanishing Swamp.

A boardwalk through the swamp keeps visitors' feet dry, and benches provide an elevated angle for habitat viewing. Once on dry ground that trail leads to Boggy Gut, and here the forest canopy opens up to a vista of this swampy waterway. It is easy to imagine being in the midst of an oriental painting as large graceful white and blue herons pick their way around the watery edges of a pond adorned with pink lilies and blue water iris.

Beyond Boggy Gut the trail leads out and around the ancient rice paddies, remnants of the plantation period. It is hard to imagine how people were able to work in such swampy places. Today these old rice fields are wild, happy homes to many species of animals. Elevated observation stations are set around this complex to enhance the experience for viewing and photography.

Walks through these habitats will usually become an adventure with nature, small or great. One such turned up on a summer morning as I was walking down the Rice Dike trail. As I passed a stubby wax myrtle tree with its thick branch protruding toward the trail, my eye caught the image of something very large and dark beside me. Quietly stopping my forward motion, I slowly turned around to see what it was. There within a few feet of me sat a great horned owl on a tree branch. We were eye to eye. I did not move, nor did the owl. Undisturbed, it sat there swiveling its head effortlessly from side to side. The bird was a magnificent sight and all of three feet tall from talons to pointed ear tips. The creature's yellow eyes were huge and hypnotic; its big curved beak looked razor sharp. The owl's glistening talons were enormous, the lethal weapons of its livelihood. Its splendid coat of shimmering feathers looked more like woven strands of variegated brown

and gray glossy silk threads. The bird sat there both fearless and fearsome, ignoring me.

The minutes passed, and I stood in a vacuum of wonderment, face to face with one of the masters of the bird realm. Nature had rewarded me with an unforgettable experience. Gradually I sensed that I was occupying its space and that I should be off, so very slowly I turned around and quietly walked away. For many long moments afterward, I felt that I was walking on air, savoring the joy of this extraordinary experience.

As I left the swampy area to reenter the woods, from far across the open space of the old rice fields, the air suddenly trembled with a series of small sonic booms as the owl hooted out his important message of the moment. With pure and simple power, the great horned owl seemed to say simply, "I am." At that moment an understanding crystallized in my mind. We both, as members of different species, have equal rights to live peacefully sharing space on the planet. As humans it is our obligation to be stewards of nature, respecting all of God's creations; and by doing this, we respect the Creator. Today with so many species of animals losing their natural homes, it is urgent that we create and maintain wild areas in the ever-shrinking natural landscape.

A walk in a forest or nature preserve can be a blessing, especially when one walks with someone who loves all of creation: Mother Nature. Seen yet unseen, she is always ready to teach her earthling children something valuable as all good mothers do. My lessons from her have been many, and respect for other species is one of the greatest.

Wildlife preserves are beautiful, open classrooms just waiting for students to show up and walk the trails. The simple act of walking on natural ground rather than on pavement is a reconnection of the beneficial energy that flows between two living things: humans and the Earth. How fortunate one is to sit quietly and listen to birds sing their beautiful songs and ponder their message, or to picnic beside a lake and watch the fish jump while cooling breezes ripple through one's hair. A lush

## Sea Pines Wildlife Preserve

sub-tropical environment awaits discovery for visitors and residents alike. The wildlife preserve at Sea Pines is a stellar example of the natural heritage of this island in the sea.



Photograph by Roger Benning

# The Sun Sets on the Native Islander Shrimper

by  
James Borton

On this late Saturday afternoon, 63-year-old ardent and sturdy Captain James Murray is in the process of painting his *Pretty Woman*. From a glance at her stained salt-and-sun-weathered deck, stern and frayed rigging, the skipper is in much better physical shape and less in need of any makeover than is his trawler.

"I've been a shrimper for over 43 years," shouts Murray. He quickly adds, "you can't be in this business for the money today; this is what I know and it's my only life."

Murray seems to be racing against time in his devotion to *Pretty Woman* and another aging vessel, *Little Lynette*, securely tied up at Hudson's Seafood dock off Squire Pope Road on Hilton Head Island. Although the native islander does not appear the least bit weary, a glance at the nearby docked aging and dilapidated trawlers, once proud and colorful with their stretched outriggers, reveals the current decline of the industry.

These facts speak volumes about South Carolina's shrimpers: In 2000 they hauled in more than six million pounds; but at the end of 2005, the catch was just over two million pounds. Already, the prospects for future seasons appear even bleaker.

James Borton

The local fishermen know all too well the swift currents of tide and time flowing from the labyrinth of South Carolina's much chronicled black-water rivers, often sunk deep but in many places very shallow with ancient cypress and oak, gracefully flowing into redolent salt marsh creeks and sounds, then spilling into the dark blue cool Atlantic waters.

With a shout the hopeful captain summons his crew, "strikers," to drop the nets suspended from two twin outriggers, balanced by heavy iron- and wood-laden doors which pull the 40-foot-long net deep down into shimmering, diamond-like morning waters for the long day's trawling ahead.

These shrimpers, their fathers, and even grandfathers, have long recognized both the hardscrabble life and romance of casting off their lines before sunrise; the throttle of the familiar single Cat diesel engine; their faithful vessels nosing effortlessly through Calibogue and Port Royal sounds as these seasoned boat captains navigate their way near shore in sight of Hilton Head Island's beautiful beaches, golf courses and resorts.

In the early morning hours, *Pretty Woman's* worn bow ploughs a vanishing furrow upon the sound that often has the surface and shimmer of an undulating piece of gray silk, flecked with sparkling diamonds.

"It's never been an easy life out here on these blue waters, but fishin' and shrimpin' it's all I know," says the spirited Murray.

This shrimping business was never easy work, but in recent years these South Carolina mariners, some still relying on their innate common sense and others on the latest technology—sonar and GPS—and most bolstered with lots of lady luck, hit upon their shrimp haven, where thousands of schools of shrimp faithfully jump and spring away as the trawler's huge swooping net, like some mystical crane, gathers them up.

"These days most of the good captains are either dead or retired, but I am still here," reaffirms Murray from his well-

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worn wheelhouse, its weathered patina now peeling. He proudly gestures towards the sound from the vista of the trawler's close cabin with his well-calloused, meaty hands.

The fate of the once thriving industry has been cast in a spiral downturn for years; and now these fishermen, most in the sunset of their own lives, hidden from the surface of the island's exquisite golf courses and numerous gated resort plantations, face even more acute challenges: rising fuel costs, tougher environmental regulations, closures of many sensitive harvesting grounds, and, of course, the steady increase of shrimp imports. No wonder many of the remaining Lowcountry's shrimpers are calling it quits.

From New England's Stonington, Maine, to the Chesapeake Bay and the Gulf's bayou, the commercial watermen are under attack not only from environmental regulatory issues but also from globalization. Certainly the available aquaculture (farm-raised) technology, frozen packaging, and air transport have brought the world's fisheries to our doorstep.

"We spend a lifetime catching these shrimp, finding the markets and then the public turns around and buys frozen imports from Thailand, rather than our fresh catches; this hurts me and many other fishermen," sighs Murray.

For the past decade the alarm bells have been tolling the decline of the world's ocean fisheries and its enormous worldwide significance. The oceanic fish catch yields almost \$7.5 billion to the U.S. economy and \$82 billion worldwide.

But, one must ask, where is the sustainability?

The native islanders understand all too well the world's irresponsible destruction of marine populations. Since the late 1960s the ocean's fish population has been cut in half and coral reefs destroyed by the increased numbers of fishing trawlers. All this damage inflicted on the marine environment is attributed to large scale illegal fishing by long liners, aided by the latest generation of technological advancements.

Witness Captain Arthur Orage, an 84-year-old Lowcountry native. With a ready smile and a strong back, he still enjoys his life as a consummate shrimper. At 17 he began his hardscrabble life as a waterman. Standing proudly against the rail on the dock at Hudson's historic seafood operations, he recalls using just a lead line to check the water's depth and a compass for navigation.

"Oh sure, we had many good days and years; it was not unusual back in the '70s to have a thousand dollar payday for our shrimp, but that's the past," says Orage in a tired and raspy voice.

Seated on the nearby park bench outside Hudson's seafood storefront, another fisherman, Eddy Singleton, born in 1944 on the island, was forced to abandon his fishing life a few years ago when he had to have his deteriorating knees replaced.

"It's a tough, back-breaking job, and it requires that you be limber or sometimes accidents happen," remarks Singleton.

"Darn if that isn't the truth about this fishin' life on this island," adds another local, Ben Stewart. Eighty-one-year-old Captain Ben Stewart, a proud native islander, often joins his mates for coffee on the Hudson's dock. The older men sit on the hard worn benches with their coffee in hand. It takes very little encouragement for Captain Stewart to reminisce about the former glorious shrimping opening days.

"Out there in Calibogue Sound, it once looked like a floating city and even back around Port Royal, the shrimpers came from all over Georgia and South Carolina. Man, what a sight, what a brilliant view. There were hundreds of trawlers on the water," beams Stewart.

The blood, sweat and back-breaking labor of these local fishermen, many direct descendants of the Gullah or Geechee people, have made a lasting imprint on the region's tidal river ecosystems. These descendants of enslaved Africans, mainly from west and central Africa and transported as human cargo on schooners, were all survivors destined to work on

## The Sun Sets on the Native Islander Shrimper

plantations located in coastal South Carolina. As a community they preserved their African traditions and developed a distinct Creole language.

Like the fishing industry itself, the few remaining Gullah communities are increasingly threatened by increased real estate development and a diminishing population. These days it is easier to sight a dolphin swimming up Palmetto Bay than native islanders unfurling their traditional handmade castnets. Way out there on the Calibogue, maybe it is only the wind that knows this spiritual connection with the water.

"The water seemed clearer, and there were far more fish and shrimp in these waters before them developers started building golf courses and gated resorts," adds Stewart. "Things now seem totally out of whack with the natural currents of island living."

Seasoned shrimper, Captain Gene Orage, a 67-year-old native islander, is also more than a little dispirited about the future and the prospects for another year of fishing.

"It seems like the shrimp catches around the island have continued to go down steadily, and maybe it's 'cause of the direct fertilizer runoff from the golf courses on Hilton Head Plantation which flows directly into the streams and then into the sound," laments Orage.

Among the island's many estuaries, baby shrimp float effortlessly into tidal creeks. During the high tide they migrate stealthfully to the rich marshes. It is their playground nursery. Spot tail bass, blue crabs and white shrimp dwell in these abundant salt marshes where smooth cordgrass, stems, leaves and resilient roots provide ample food and shelter from predators. Without benefit of the marsh plants, few younger shrimp would survive to adulthood. It is a tribute to the delicate balance of the island's hidden ecosystem.

As thousands of new homes, condos, and townhouses rise on Hilton Head Island, the scene is dramatically different from what the island's pioneer and celebrated developer, Charles E. Fraser, envisioned back in 1957 when Sea Pines and Harbour Town were master planned. In spirit Fraser was an

environmentalist who recognized the beauty and pristine qualities of the island's wilderness and sensitive wetlands. Local environmentalists realize that excessive pollutants can overburden the cleansing capabilities of marshes. The marshes also act as buffers for the mainland by slowing and absorbing storm surges, thereby reducing erosion of the coastline.

Who can deny that the storm water from the scores of golf courses streams into the nearby ponds and wetlands, carrying the surplus of fertilizers and pesticides and spills directly into the former pristine ecosystems? The result is the closure of tidal creeks as pollution settles into the clams and oysters and kills off the baby shrimp.

"There's no safety net for any of us out here making our living on the water, but it seems like no one cares about the future of the sound, and that makes me angry," says Murray.

For several decades, Barbara Hudson, the 61-year-old enterprising grandmother whose family name is synonymous with the island's abundant fresh seafood, has watched the seismic shifts in the industry. Although Barbara and her late husband, Benny, sold Hudson's Restaurant in 1975, the Benny Hudson Seafood operation on the island has been providing fresh locally caught shrimp and fish for decades.

"The foreign imported frozen shrimp sets the market price these days, and it does not make any sense," exclaims Hudson. Barbara and her energetic daughter, Tonya, persist in carrying on the family's wholesale operation.

"After all, I am one of the few wholesale fish dealers allowed to ship anywhere in the world. Our product is chemical free," adds Hudson.

Most consumers are not aware of the economic impact their purchases of frozen shrimp imports from the big box stores like Publix or Sam's Club place on the local shrimper. Americans consume over 1.4 billion pounds of the shellfish, making it America's best selling seafood, according to the American Seafood Distributors Association.

## The Sun Sets on the Native Islander Shrimper

America's appetite for seafood is staggering. Nearly 4.9 billion pounds of seafood were consumed by Americans in 2006, and almost 83 percent of it was imported.

United States producers, including South Carolina commercial watermen, now account for barely fifteen percent of the market. A recent price check at the island's local Publix supermarket confirmed this discouraging fact: 21/35 count farm-raised frozen white shrimp from Ecuador sells for \$7.99 a pound, and the 21/25 count wild American shrimp sells for \$13.99.

Just a few years ago, shrimpers formed their own band of brothers to bring pressure on the United States Department of Commerce to examine the dumping of shrimp imports in the country.

Meanwhile, Hudson with her sharpened business acumen and political conscience in tow, often sets her own market price.

"These local shrimpers are not shown the respect they deserve. They certainly deserve all the trade protections this country offers other industries like the farmers," asserts Hudson.

She is the landlord with the big heart for shrimpers who for more than 30 years has provided the only available and affordable fishing trawler dock space.

As an astute business owner, she gets a daily fax-transmitted printout of the market prices for foreign exported shrimp. "I still attempt to purchase from these local shrimpers at least between \$.75 and a dollar more than fair market price," interjects the spirited and indomitable Hudson.

Hudson's large fresh American jumbo-size shrimp sold at \$11 a pound in the 2007 season.

Eddy Gordon, executive director of the new branding program, Wild American Shrimp, is also hopeful that it will succeed in driving up the price of locally harvested product through a certification system positioning domestic shrimp's higher quality over imports.

"The Wild American Shrimp effort is helping to make the public aware of the difference in good tasting, safe, ocean caught domestic shrimp. 'Fresh Ocean Caught.' It don't get any better than that," adds Clay Cable, vice president of the South Carolina Shrimpers Association. No one knows for sure if there might be a rise in new business for the local shrimper with the import alert on contaminated frozen shrimp, catfish and eel raised in Chinese ponds and shipped to the United States.

Out on the Sound, the shrimpers' boats with the stretched outriggers resemble wings of hope. For sure, Barbara Hudson's generous and fair subsidies reinforce her position as the local shrimpers' angel. Her son, James "Butch" Hudson, is also a commercial fisherman.

"He often goes out for two or three days on his 89-foot, steel-hulled trawler, *Be Brief*," adds the proud mother.

The bells are not yet tolling for Lowcountry shrimpers as the sun sets. But these not-so-famous men, whose family blood runs with the tides, may require more than an angel to weather any perfect economic storm blowing in during another hurricane season.

# A Phenomenal North and South Encounter

by

Dorothea Perry Lieberman

**D**istant lightning on the horizon of the ocean jarred my mood. But warm breezes soothed my skin and shifted the sand on the beaches of Hilton Head Island. Wispy clouds floated past the hazy sun and eased my restless mind. A few seagulls flew high in the sky, then suddenly dived to glide a few feet above the ocean waves at Coligny Beach.

For the first time in ten years, the Hodgkins family, Mom, Dad, my two brothers, and I, decided on a vacation together. We drove south from Philadelphia in Dad's SUV, happy to be together and away from our hectic lives.

For the first few days, we explored Hilton Head Island from the bridges to Harbour Town, including the Sea Pines Preserve. Today was a day off to loll on the beach, but I felt restless and decided to take Dad's SUV to look around for myself.

Mom protested, "She'll get lost."

As Dad relaxed on the balcony chair, he supported me. "There's only one major road here. Let her enjoy. She's 19 years old. She probably has something to do." My two younger brothers shrugged their shoulders indifferently. They were gathering up their beach gear.

Dad was absolutely right. For some strange reason, I felt drawn to drive over the bridges on Route 278 to 46 and the May River in Bluffton. I slowly drove down the old Main Street

in the quaint historic town and decided to make a left turn. At the bend on All Joy Road, I found a quiet beach with a small boat launch and picnic ground, where I pulled in and parked.

"How delightful," I thought. "I'll take a walk and check this place out."

Somehow I knew it was more than that. When I had awoken that morning, something was drawing me like a magnet—a powerful magnet—and I did not know what it was or why! As I crossed the street and approached a small cluster of woods, I felt a strong inclination to walk into the bushes.

*How odd!* I said to myself. *I'll get my new clothes dirty.* That thought quickly left my mind when I saw an opening in the bushes that led to a splendid large, white plantation home with typical Grecian pillars about fifty yards away. A number of people in 19<sup>th</sup> century garb were bustling about as if someone important were either coming or leaving. I hoped immediately that the plantation was open to the public as a tourist attraction.

*Dam,* I thought. *I left my wallet in the trunk of Dad's car.* At that moment, a lady in a pink and white flowered Southern hoop skirt dress with a cincher on her waist approached me and said snobbishly, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" There was a pause. "What are you wearing?" she demanded in a shocked voice.

I happened to be wearing my newly acquired white cropped pants, a T-shirt with palm trees and "Hilton Head Island" printed across it. On my left shoulder I wore a costume jewelry pin with the gold and blue printing of Hilton Head Island and a dolphin swimming underneath.

Before I could answer, a slightly stooped, distinguished older gentleman with long white sideburns, a white shirt and dark knickers, walked over to me and with a polite smile, said, "I am Mr. Ethan of the Esquire Plantation. May I ask who you are, my dear?" He graciously bowed, and the lady with the hoop skirt sharply turned around and left without a word.

"I am Heather," I replied, doing a curtsy. He played the part of a plantation owner well, and I responded.

We passed some remarks about the weather and health, while in my peripheral vision I saw that there were not any people in the area dressed as I was. There were no tourists, no 21<sup>st</sup> century-dressed people, just 19<sup>th</sup> century folks talking, working, and expecting someone important. It occurred to me that this scene was out of the ordinary.

"Where do you reside?" Mr. Ethan asked me.

"I am staying at the Westin Resort on Hilton Head Island," I smiled.

"I have never heard of that inn. How did you arrive here?" he asked.

"I drove here, myself," I replied. *How else could I get here?*

"Drove?" he asked quizzically.

"Yes, in my Dad's car," I replied.

"Car? What kind of car?" he asked, more perplexed.

"An automobile," I replied with sarcasm. "You know, four wheels and a motor."

And I thought, *This man is over-doing his role of a 19<sup>th</sup> century plantation owner.* Then, thinking I should approach him differently, I smiled and politely asked, "Would you like a ride in my Dad's car . . . automobile?"

"I'd be delighted," he replied, appearing apprehensive.

"Come," I said, and led him down the path to the clearing of the road. As we walked through the bushes, I felt a strong, invisible, magnetic force move around my body.

I was getting anxious, feeling the car may have disappeared. But, sure enough, Dad's SUV was there. I feared the whole area might turn into a 19<sup>th</sup> century scene.

Mr. Ethan stopped and glanced at a couple with two children dressed in 21<sup>st</sup> century shorts, T-shirts, and sandals. He gazed at several parked cars. He stared straight ahead, his mouth open in astonishment as a car passed us on the street. I opened the passenger door of the SUV, and he sat down very cautiously, looking bewildered at me. I walked around, opened my door, got in, started the engine and slowly drove on All Joy Road.

When he caught his breath, he asked with wide-open eyes, "Where am I? This is not my neighborhood . . . though the land and river look familiar."

I pulled the car over to the side at a convenient part of the road, as another car passed by. I realized fully we were both from different time zones. It appeared that the magnetic force we were both in juxtapositioned the time zones so we could communicate.

The best I could come up with was, "What year is it?"

He looked at me dumbfounded and replied, "1855." After a long pause, he asked me, "What year is it for you?" And then I knew he was aware of what I had sensed.

"It's 2007 for me."

Dumbfounded looks were on both our faces. "Impossible!" was our mutual reply as our minds swirled in disbelief. We stared at each other. We both acknowledged that we were baffled as to what was happening and why we were meeting.

"What is your full name, Heather?" he asked me slowly.

"Heather Hodgkin. And yours?"

"Ethan Hodgkin."

We looked at each other again.

"What is happening in your life, Mr. Ethan? Who is that important person you were expecting?"

"Well, actually, we were searching for my grandson, who refused to take over the plantation responsibilities, since I can no longer manage them alone. We think he ran away from home," he said, disturbed and downcast.

"I'm sorry to hear that. What is your grandson's name?"

"His name is George."

"That was my great-grandfather's name. He lived in Philadelphia, moved to Pittsburgh, and then Boston. He loved the railroads, worked his way up into an important position, started a trucking or . . . what you'd call a delivery service. He

also did some journalism. He was married and had four children."

I continued, piecing fragments of ideas together as I spoke, "Actually he was George Hodgkin, III. I was told that he spoke on occasion about the South where the family originated in this country. We never knew the exact location." I looked at him in amazement, and spoke softly, "It appears that my great-grandfather is your grandson, George Hodgkin, I . . . or something like that."

"Thank you for telling me this! Is there anything else I should know?"

"Probably a lot. One big event that affected the South and the North was the Civil War which began around 1861. Your grandson could have died in that war if he lived here. Who is to know but God? Perhaps intuitively he moved to save himself. That thought just crossed my mind, Grandpa, if you don't mind my calling you Grandpa."

Mr. Ethan Hodgkin, with tears in his eyes and a big smile on his face, said, "Thank you, Granddaughter. I now know why we met today. You came to give me this message. You have given me hope that all will be well, and that George is doing what he thinks best for the family to come. Granddaughter, we have bonded today, disregarding time, age, and location." He looked suddenly younger and happier. Then he took a big breath and said, "What is this Civil War of which you speak?"

I looked affectionately at the older man, who was worn from work and care. I found it difficult to sense his beliefs and to summarize the conflict in a few minutes. Events were ahead for him that we could do nothing about. I wondered what I could say in this limited amount of time we have together.

Finally I said slowly, "It was a terrible war that should have been understood completely on both sides and settled amicably and reasonably, before it started. There were problems between state governments and economies, planting and harvesting tasks, skilled and unskilled jobs, colonial work

and slave labor. The South and the North had strongly differing views."

Mr. Ethan, my Grandpa, looked over the magnolia trees and into the troubled sky, "Yes, things are brewing."

After a moment, I asked, smiling, "Do you have any other children or grandchildren, Grandpa?"

"Yes, I do, Granddaughter," he smiled in return, "I have two sons and a daughter and six grandchildren. I just happen to like George the best. We get along well. I will certainly miss him." His large, worn hands showed his own participation in the plantation work.

He put his head down, and then raised it. "I prayed for enlightenment to this terrible problem, and you have brought the reasons why life is the way it is, and why my grandson, George, has left me. Now I can see from what you have said about the future that George made the correct choice to run away. My sons and I will take care of ourselves, the family and the plantation. Thank you very much for coming from the future and telling me these things. Since I know what is coming, I'll take care. I prayed for enlightenment, and you came."

We gave each other a reassuring smile; we both felt relieved.

"I think I better return to my place before time runs out," Grandpa said.

"I agree," I said, "Here, take my pin of Hilton Head Island with you to remember me." And I gave him the pin with the gold and blue printing of Hilton Head and a dolphin swimming underneath.

"Fine, thank you," he replied. He kissed it and I pinned it on his white shirt.

He reached into his pocket and brought out a folded paper. "Here is a paper with my plantation heading on the top, my name and a list of some items I bought yesterday. It is the only thing I have available to give you."

"Oh, thank you, Grandpa. I'll always treasure this, you, and the memory of this event."

## A Phenomenal North and South Encounter

"I will always remember you, this pin, and what you told me today. You know, I think the important person we were waiting for today was YOU. Thank you for setting me straight. A peek into the future goes a long way."

He glanced at my face and said with a chuckle, "George has dimples in his cheeks when he smiles the way you do. You're a Hodgkin all right."

With that, I drove a little way on All Joy Road, turned around, and parked back at the picnic grounds by the May River shore. I helped him open the car door, and we walked over to the magnetic circle in the small woods. We bid each other good-bye with a hug, a smile, and some tears.

I saw him walk into the bushes. I glimpsed the white plantation that he was walking towards, and I knew he was home safe.

Grandpa turned around and waved good-by with a big smile on his face.

I waved and gave him a big smile in return.

Then I slowly walked back to the car. My mind was on this wonderful experience and the way I was drawn to this place—to meet an ancestor and help him in a way he could understand, and to discover a missing piece of my own family roots.

I suddenly swung around and looked at the shrubs in the woods. They were there and nothing else. No Grandpa. No plantation. That was it.

I smiled with a tear in my eye and said in a whisper, "Grandpa, I am so glad I met you. We'll meet again some day. Isn't life a marvelous mystery?"



# Loblolly Pines

by  
Norm Levy

Stilts of pine  
Emerge stiffly from the earth  
Naked-shorn of branches  
Clad only with barky brown scales—  
A towering cohort of slender sentinels  
Set among the bristling palmettos.  
At top, piney sproutings  
Unruly clusters  
Of green, spiny brushes  
Studded with pine cones  
Tickle the underbelly of the sky  
As the lanky trees sway to the muted music  
Of a gentle summer breeze.



Photograph by Kenneth Stuart

# On the Use of Chairs

by  
David F. Kelly

As one leaves Hilton Head Island, just after one crosses over the second bridge, there are two metal electrical towers on the right whose spars accommodate hundreds of birds. They must like it there. There are several other identical towers far less popular. The birds stand about a foot apart from each other and seem interested in nothing in particular. I wonder, as I drive by, what they think of the passing highway traffic.

Birds' knees do not bend in the same direction as ours; they cannot sit. People, on the other hand, prefer not to stand on telephone poles, but since our knees flex in the opposite direction from our waists, we do like chairs. People are made for chairs.

American ingenuity has designed an astonishing array of different kinds of chairs. In our bedroom in our new Palmetto Dunes home is a green and white chaise lounge that some interior designer decided would look good there. It must, because we have not yet moved it out. Ken and I spent some significant amount of time deciding what kind of chair to buy for my office, where I am writing this. Office chairs adjust up and down, and back and forth. The arms go up and down independently, and even come off if, as now, I find they will not

go under the keyboard shelf, which Ken stopped from wiggling yesterday.

There are three high and uncomfortable stools in the kitchen that we never use, but we know our renters used to use them because the wall in front of them always needed to be repainted after the rental season. There is a superbly comfortable sofa in the living room along with two marvelous arm chairs. We spend a lot of time in them.

The den is my favorite room. I put a stereo system there and like to listen to classical music. I turn the chairs so I can look out over the back yard to the inland waterway system in Palmetto Dunes, an eleven-mile series of interconnected lagoons. I have set a pair of binoculars on the window sill for looking at snowy egrets, blue and gray herons and anhingas, those strange birds that dive in the water for fish and then hang out on the dock with their wings stretched out to dry. Ken read that if they do not do this they cannot fly—something about not having oil in their wings. These comfortable chairs also offer Lorie and me a place for snacks and drinks before dinner.

The bedrooms really do not have a good selection of chairs. Ken bought an office chair for his bedroom office, the same kind as mine. But the other three bedrooms lack decent chairs. Soon the Pittsburgh mover will bring down the rest of our furniture, including a few chairs that we can put here and there for sitting on while we put on our shoes and socks. They have to be small and useful rather than comfortable. They have to fit in small places.

We have a set of four stacking canvas chairs that we do not know where to put. They were in the dining room, but other furniture from Pittsburgh has crowded them out. I may put a recliner in my bedroom for watching TV or for reading late at night. We are going to keep the master bedroom for guests when we have them and for us when we do not. It will stay uncluttered, probably keeping its green and white chaise.

Outside chairs are more interesting, somehow, than inside ones. Hilton Head Island is one of the world's top resorts because of its beaches. The golf courses were an addition, but

## On the Use of Chairs

the beaches were always here. Our beaches are good for bicycles and for walking, but mostly, especially in the summer months, people like to sit on them. Rather they like to sit *off* them. So people bring chairs. Often they bring so many chairs and other things that they cannot carry them and have to make several trips from the car. They buy SUVs in order to carry all the beach stuff. You can buy bags for carrying things, including folding chairs, to beaches, which are for some reason claimed to be different from bags you buy to carry things to places other than beaches. I worry about the veracity of this; as a (former) professor of medical ethics it seems to me we should be informed, before we consent to buying these, that they are, after all, just regular bags with the word "beach" or a picture of a pail and shovel on them. Some years ago we each bought one of those chairs in bags that one carries over the shoulder. We take them to Cape Cod each summer, mainly because they are more comfortable than the chairs on the patio of the timeshare unit. I do not think we have ever carried them to the beach, either there or here on Hilton Head Island.

Beach chairs have to fold, and they do this in a variety of ways. Some are long enough for the whole body to get off the sand, but they are harder to carry, so others are short. They get the torso just a bit off the sand while the legs stretch out on the beach. This usually means that one needs a beach blanket that one carries to the beach in a beach blanket bag. Beach blankets differ from regular blankets because they are sold to be used on the beach. Beach blanket bags are different from regular bags—well, by now one gets the point.

Over the years, renters have left a variety of beach chairs here, in the yard, under the beds. Perhaps they had no room in their SUVs to take them home. I often watch families struggling to get all their equipment onto and off of the beach. This, I am convinced, is why parking spaces near beaches are so much in demand. We really cannot lug all this stuff any farther. At a number of places near the major hotels here, beach chairs are for rent by the hour. The beaches are free, but it costs you to sit off the sand.

I very much like the chairs on our back deck and in our back yard. They give us a great view of the aningas drying off on the dock. Lorie and I like to sip cheap champagne and nibble on cheese and crackers on the deck. The pool and deck chairs came with the house when we bought it furnished as a rental, and the deck chairs had pads on them that were soaked when it rained. Then we bought pads for the pool chairs. So we had to buy boxes to put the pads in and signs for the boxes, informing renters what was in them. Ken laminated the signs, but they fell apart anyway. A colony of red ants along with a tribe of palmetto bugs took up residency in one of the boxes after some renters left the lid open. The insects are now gone and the pads are in the cellar.

There are two wooden benches on the dock. Every once in a while we sit there to get an even closer look at the birds, but they usually will not come when we are there.

On the front porch is an inviting wooden bench that I sat on once just so that I could say I did. I somehow felt it should enjoy its proper natural function. When we bought the house, it had a nice cushion, but that deteriorated. Lorie and I had a hard time finding one the right size, but we finally found one, at Home Depot, I think. Since we never sit out on the front porch, the bench is now mainly a place to put packages on while we unlock the front door.

When I grew up in Massachusetts, in Worcester, people used to sit on their porches, especially on the three-deckers in the working class neighborhoods. We did not have a front porch, and the back one was narrow, but I remember sitting there on a kitchen chair studying for my high school exams. In Worcester we had a real breakfast nook with a table and two benches. As a child, I used to play board games there. After my aunt sold the house 15 years or so ago, the buyers wrecked the breakfast nook to make a bigger kitchen—bad idea.

When I was a child, my mother and I, and my aunt and her mother with whom we lived after my father was killed in France in 1944, went each summer to the beach in Lynn or Swampscott north of Boston. Nana had her favorite wood and

## On the Use of Chairs

concrete bench on a green grassy area between two beaches in Lynn. On a clear day one can see the Boston skyline over the Nahant causeway. Nana's bench was still there the last time I drove by.

I do not find people on Hilton Head sit on their front porches much. This is true even in houses with massive front entrances designed to impress, often replete with inviting white rocking chairs. Possibly this is because, as is the case for us, the back yards are prettier and more interesting. But it does tend to isolate people from their neighbors. On the other hand, in Palmetto Dunes at least, fences are prohibited between houses, and neighbors can and do chat across the back yards.

The most unusual outdoor use of chairs I have ever seen has to do with what is probably the main reason we decided to retire here instead of in Pittsburgh. It snows there. After a snowstorm, people shovel out a space for their car on the street in front of their house. Since it is a public street, anyone else can grab the space while the shoveler is away. So Pittsburghers put old chairs in the street to keep others out. They are periodically warned that it is illegal to clutter up the streets; the police, or anyone else, can remove the chairs. But no one dares. And, as far as I know, no politician who promised to enforce the rule against putting chairs in the streets has ever won local office.

It does not snow much on Hilton Head Island.



Photograph by Jane P. Hill

# Greetings from the Land of Golf and Alligators

by  
Andrea Koenig

*"You can fall in love at first sight with a place as with a person."  
- Alec Waugh*

When we moved to South Carolina, there was an unfortunate rumor going around back in New York that my husband, Ted, and I had sold our home, retired, and decamped one moonless night to the boondocks, where alligators roamed free, and people were hit by treacherous golf balls, swung at by angry golfers. This was not true! Actually, we moved to Bluffton, South Carolina, which is 12 miles from Hilton Head Island. My husband and I both still work, and this is hardly the boondocks. Alligators and golfers are rampant, however.

We did sell our house up north, after having come down for an exploratory visit with our daughter's mother- and father-in-law. We were here five days and fell in love with the people, the landscape and the delightful spell of Hilton Head Island. For practical reasons, however, we bought a house in Bluffton.

My husband and I spend a lot of our leisure time on Hilton Head, shopping, going out to Sea Pines, eating in the wonderful restaurants, and exploring the landscape, even in the winter; and here, there is not much winter. What winter there is, is delightful to this Northerner.

When our son, Audie, who would prefer to spend the rest of his life on a golf course, learned that we were going to be just a

bridge away from Hilton Head, he became very wound up and stammered, "You're moving where?"

"To Hilton Head."

"Really?"

"That's the mecca of golf."

He did not waste any time getting down for a visit. Even though he had a direct flight from Newark Airport, the airline lost his golf clubs. While we were out showing Sea Pines to Audie, the golf clubs thankfully were delivered to the house. A little while after we came home, I noticed that Audie was nowhere to be found. I asked my husband where he was, and Ted replied, "Oh, he's out in the garage, caressing his golf clubs." That is how much Audie is mesmerized by golf and really appreciated that he was actually next door to Hilton Head Island.

Just like Audie, millions of people have been captivated by Hilton Head Island, where golf and alligators really do reign. Sometimes they can even be found together. As for golf it is everywhere. There are over twenty courses on Hilton Head Island. This is the only place that I know of where some students actually wear golf shirts to school instead of tee-shirts. The schools are closed for a week every year for the big golf tournament, The Heritage Golf Classic. It has been explained to me that this is because they want to give the students a chance to work at the tournament, and there is too much traffic to allow for safe movement of the school buses.

The Heritage is more than just a golf tournament, nonetheless. People on Hilton Head find The Heritage a great excuse to party-party-party, with many families making it a yearly tradition. Some groups are even into the third generation loop of Bloody Marys and golf, even with babies and toddlers in strollers enjoying the carousing.

In 2007 The Heritage provided spectators with a unique experience, and it generated quite a bit of excitement. On Sunday, April 15, Beaufort County and Hilton Head Island were pummeled with thirty-five-mile-an-hour winds, with gusts up to fifty miles an hour. Final round play had to be suspended, and sky boxes had to be evacuated and partially dismantled because of the fear that they might come down onto the course and injure players and spectators. One large tree branch actually fell onto a seventy-

## Greetings from the Land of Golf and Alligators

year-old volunteer marshal, knocking him on his back and puncturing his right arm. The marshal had to be treated at Hilton Head Regional Medical Center. Fortunately his injuries were not life-threatening. Yes, golf can be a really electrifying game, sometimes. "Golf is like life in a lot of ways; all the biggest wounds are self-inflicted," said former President Clinton. However, Mother Nature certainly caused some additional trauma that year.

Besides the exhilaration of the Heritage tournament, having so much golf around can also provide some out-of-the-ordinary personal experiences. One day Ted and I were driving on 278, the main drag on Hilton Head. A golf ball came out of the woods, swirled around, hit our car, bounced, and then moved on down the road.

Golf and alligators cannot be separated. Gators are all over the place, especially on the golf courses. Periodically a picture appears in the paper of an alligator with a golf ball in its mouth, or an alligator with a golf ball on its tail. "On one hole I hit an alligator so hard that he's now my golf bag," joked Bob Hope. There is no surprise there. They also like ponds, especially at sunrise and sunset, and will sometimes even come right up to people's houses. This was rather graphically demonstrated in the now famous "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" photo with the alligator ringing the doorbell.

People give the alligators nicknames, such as "Big Bubba" and "Colonel Tom," if they stay in the neighborhood long enough. Pet owners must beware, however. A small dog is just an *hors d'oeuvre* to an alligator, and many owners have found their doggies missing because they allowed their pets to swim in a lake or a pond that had become home to an alligator. Birds are in danger, too, along with fish, frogs, and small mammals. Only cats seem to escape the gators' hunger. Maybe cats spook the alligators, or perhaps they are just too bony for the reptilian taste.

Spring is when the alligators make their "Love Connection." While gators are usually reactive, rather than proactive, it is not a good idea to approach a horny male alligator. They have their own mating dance; and, while it is quite unappealing to a human observer, it is Romeo and Juliet to an alligator. With their really big mouths, male alligators roar as they

wander from pond to pond looking for female companionship. This holler can really get on your nerves.

One evening, my friends and I actually had the opportunity to watch two alligators having a lover's quarrel. One slunk out of the pond onto the lawn of a neighboring house. Sometimes the male alligator is "lookin' for love in all the wrong places," and winds up inside of a screened-in porch, in a garage, or under a car. Alligators cannot move backwards, so they are stuck. When the dating game is over, it is not impossible to find a nest of alligator eggs right in one's own backyard. Be careful digging under the shrubbery, though. Remember, it is now "Big Momma's House;" and she is not far away, guarding that nest.

While having to deal with the alligators and the rare dangers of golf, thankfully Hilton Head Island has managed to escape the impact of the hurricanes, such as those that have plagued Florida and Louisiana. There is local legend that a Gullah woman who lived on Daufuskie Island and practiced voodoo declared that a hurricane would never hit Hilton Head Island. Amazingly, there has not been a major hurricane here in over 100 years! While I do not believe in voodoo, *per se*, one can only hope that the people, the golf courses, and even the alligators remain relatively safe.

Even though we did not have time for a vacation the first year that we lived here, we have never regretted our decision to move to the Lowcountry and Hilton Head Island. Broadway shows, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Fifth Avenue are far away, but there are egrets, herons and frogs on the ponds. There is the Atlantic Ocean with its beautiful beaches, Calibogue Sound, and the Intracoastal Waterway. We gaze at incredible sunrises and sunsets. The wonderful ocean breeze cools off even the hottest of days. When you have all of this loveliness, bellowing alligators, runaway golf balls, and windblown tournaments do not appear to be so scary, and every day seems like a vacation.





## The Authors

**Will Anderson** earned a Doctor's degree from MIT, served as an army Captain, and spent 29 years with NASA as an engineer and senior executive. He has written two techno-thriller novels: *The Backdoor* and *The Anomaly*. (Preview on [www.willandersonauthor.com](http://www.willandersonauthor.com).) He drew on his knowledge of aerospace systems, piloting, and related experiences, relationships and travels to write these exciting, believable novels. *Emergency Landing* brings back fond memories of a family trip taken nearly thirty years ago.

An Alabama native, **Frederick W. Bassett** has lived on Hilton Head for nineteen years. Having long aspired to become a creative writer, he found the support and inspiration he needed from writers he met on the Island. His poems have appeared in more than thirty anthologies and literary journals. Paraclete Press published two books of "found" poetry that he arranged from Biblical lyrics. He is looking for a publisher for his first novel, *South Wind Rising*.

**Raymond P. Berberian** is an attorney living in Beaufort County, SC. He is a graduate of New York University with a B.S. degree in economics and a graduate of St. John's University Law School with J.D. degree. Originally from New Jersey, he practiced law in New Jersey and New York for over 35 years before relocating to Hilton Head Island.

**James Borton** is a veteran journalist who has reported for *The Washington Times* and *Asia Times* and is a regular commentary contributor for Radio Singapore International. The author of *Venture Japan*, he presently teaches in the English Department at USC Sumter. When not traveling to the Mekong River in Southeast Asia, he can be seen sailing his vintage Lightning sailboat out of Palmetto Bay Marina in Hilton Head.

**Melinda Copp** is a writer and editor who lives with her family in Bluffton. She studied journalism and creative writing at West Virginia University, and is currently working on her Masters of Fine Arts in creative writing at Goucher College. When she isn't reading and writing, she enjoys being outside, doing arts and crafts, and working in her garden.

**Art Cornell**, an acclaimed photographer, poet and painter of abstract art, has been creating images and poetry for nearly forty years. His poetry books *In the Wind*, *Heart Rhythms* and *Riding on a Rainbow* incorporate his black and white photographs. His paintings and photographs can be viewed at the Hilton Head Art League, Calhoun Street Art Gallery, Pink House Art Gallery, and at [www.artbyartcornell.com](http://www.artbyartcornell.com). His art resides in private and corporate collections throughout the United States.

Originally from North Wales, **Sheila Gale** immigrated to Canada and worked as a college professor for 28 years, teaching English grammar and creative writing. Since retiring five years ago, she and her husband Ted spend winters on Hilton Head enjoying cycling around the island, walking on the beach, and socializing with the many friends they have made here, both Canadian and American. Now pursuing a writing career, she is working on her third novel.

Through Gift of Grace Ministries, **Anne Grace** publishes articles at [www.giftofgrace.injesus.com](http://www.giftofgrace.injesus.com). She has authored two books: a devotional, *The ABC's of Grace*, and her journey of faith, *Grace Upon Grace*. Anne is a graduate of Radford University, Writer's Digest School, Christian Leaders and Speakers Seminars, and MITT: Mastery in Transformational Training. Anne is actively involved locally with Aglow International, Island Writers' Network, and attends Christian Renewal Church. She and her husband reside in Bluffton, SC.

With degrees from the University of South Carolina, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Georgia State University, **Jane Hill** has published numerous technical works in the U. S., Canada, and Europe. A native South Carolinian, she is now writing about the Lowcountry, where she spent many happy childhood vacations. Her recent works include two young adult novels, *Clarendon Island* and *Only a Ghost of a Chance*, published by Salt Marsh Cottage Books, [www.smc-books.com](http://www.smc-books.com).

**Rick Hoel** practiced international law in Chicago and Hong Kong before moving to the Lowcountry in 2003. Now a real estate broker with Seashore Real Estate and a freelance writer, Rick is working on a book about his father's experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany in Stalag Luft III, the site of "*The Great Escape*." Rick's interest in this time period was the genesis of his story set on Hilton Head during World War II.

**David F. Kelly** is professor emeritus of health care ethics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. He earned three graduate degrees in Louvain, Belgium, and a Ph.D. in Toronto, Canada. He has written four books which are still in print, all on bioethics. The most recent is *Medical Treatment at the End of Life*. He is highly regarded as a speaker on medical ethical issues. Recently retired, he lives in Palmetto Dunes on Hilton Head Island.

**Andrea Koenig** was born in Washington, D. C. and grew up in Illinois. In her mid-twenties she moved to suburban New York City. Andrea has a bachelor's degree from Illinois College and masters' degrees from both Roosevelt University and New York University. She has taught secondary school in Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and South Carolina and college in New York. She has published newspaper articles. She moved to Bluffton in 2004.

**Norm Levy** retired as Director, Advertising Development, of Procter&Gamble and moved to Hilton Head Island in 2004.

He is a published song writer (Blues and Country Western—sorry, no hits. He writes mostly topical light verse; but the Low country's natural beauty has inspired a more lyrical exploration.

**Marilyn Lorenz** has been writing since she was in third grade, when her teacher encouraged her to read her stories during "show and tell." A graduate of the program in Writing in the English Department at Northwestern University, she has previously published short stories and poetry. The Beaufort County Arts Association awarded Marilyn a grant towards the publication of her children's book, *Great Blue Gert*, due out in December 2007.

**Margaret Lorine** (aka Lorine M. Getz, Ph.D.), Moderator of the Island Writers' Network, conceived and guided this, IWN's first joint writing project. A member also of the Queen's Writers Group and the N.C. Writers' Workshop, and for many years a university professor of Art, Literature and Religion, she has authored numerous works of fiction and non-fiction. Best known for her volumes on Flannery O'Connor, she co-edited *The Kissing Bough* with Judith Simpson. Her short story, "Bardo Winter," has been published in *Tales for a Long Winter's Night*.

**Charlie McOuat**, a retired dentist, practiced for twenty five years on Cape Cod. Since moving to Hilton Head, he spent two delightful years having fun at the beach with his grandson Aidan. He has published magazine articles for *United Planet* about his volunteer experiences in Africa and for *Hilton Head Monthly* about tutoring English with Literacy Volunteers of the Lowcountry.

**Sansing McPherson** grew up in Montgomery, AL, is a graduate of Auburn University, and holds an MEd from Kean University. She taught English and writing from middle school through college level. After 25 years living in New Jersey, she and her husband, Terry, retired to Hilton Head Island. She has

been a staff writer for *101 Things to Do on Hilton Head*, is looking for a publisher for her first novel, *Entangled Ties*, and finishing her second, *Sweat Sisters*.

**Dee Merian**, a native of Santa Monica, California, holds a Master's degree from New York University. She has lived on Hilton Head Island with her husband John for 10 years. A former airline hostess, nurse, dietician, college professor, and award-winning story teller, she has published three books: *American Mosaic*, *Counterfeit Horserace*, and *Flying High*.

**Shanti North** is a parent, traveler, teacher, and general veteran of life's experience. From this perspective she hopes to express some of the deep seeded lessons, concepts and valuable insights into the ongoing mystery of life. With a keen interest in the natural world, and a wish to illuminate the fullness of its inherent value, her writing is laced with elements of the philosophical, the sensory, and the mystical. She has been published in magazines, and is working on a novel.

**Kenneth Stuart** (aka Kenneth Getz) is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He currently lives on Hilton Head Island and writes short stories set in the coastal areas of the Atlantic seaboard, from Maine to Florida.

Originally from New York State, **Charlie Thorn** served in Army Intelligence before enrolling at NYU. After a year he transferred to Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism. He began his publishing career at the *Daily News*, moving on first to *Newsweek*, and then to *Forbes* in New York and Atlanta. Semi-retired, Charlie conducts historical tours of enigmatic Daufuskie Island and recently completed his first novel. With his wife Carole, he has lived on Hilton Head since 1986.

**Norma Van Amberg**, editor of *Coastal Sport & Wellness*, a regional magazine, is an award-winning journalist who wrote for various papers in her native New Jersey as well as for the

Hilton Head *Island Packet*. She is a graduate of Douglass College, Rutgers University. She has lived in the Hilton Head area since 1984 and is an avid sports and outdoors enthusiast.

**Barbara Vernasco**, by Emily Hammond, age 8: "My Grandma said she had two careers. Number one was being a wife and mother, and number two was working as Manager of the Microfilm Department for the city of Fort Wayne, Indiana. She enjoyed doing both jobs, but being a good mom and wife was the hardest job. She wrote a book called *Pass the Blessings Along* for her grandchildren." *Serendipity*—making a fortunate discovery by accident.

**Vicki Barnhill Winters** grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, graduated from Smith College, and earned an MA from the University of Houston. After living 22 years in Houston, Texas, she became a syndicated columnist for the seven-newspaper Acorn Press in Wilton, Connecticut; owned a restaurant and art gallery in San Juan, Puerto Rico; and spent a year on a 40-foot sailboat in the Caribbean. She now splits her time between Hilton Head and Lenox, Massachusetts.

# The Hilton Head Island Writers' Network

The Hilton Head Island Writers' Network aims to support, inspire, and mentor writers in both the business and the craft of writing. Its members write in all genres, including fiction, nonfiction, memoir, children's literature, and poetry. They range in experience from the aspiring neophyte to the multi-published author.

The organization came into existence in 1999 when new Hilton Head resident, Jo Williams, ran an ad in the *Island Packet* seeking people interested in establishing a critique group. Eighteen people responded. As the membership grew rapidly, the group helped launch the careers of several founding members who gained contracts with commercial publishing houses. Notable alumnae of IWN are Kathryn Wall, the author of seven Bay Tanner mysteries for St. Martin's Press; Vicky Hunnings, who has three mysteries published by Avalon Press; and Jo Williams, whose novel *The Song My Soul Remembers*, was published by Coastal Villages Press. Many additional members have experienced the satisfaction of seeing their work in print through various print-on-demand and self-publishing venues.

Through the years IWN has hosted several one-day workshops and a three-day writers' conference at Palm Key in 2005. Meeting programs have included local writers and poets, journalists, editors, book reviewers, and noted authors like John Jakes, John Maxim, and Sandra Brown. Members have served as volunteers in local schools and community literacy projects.

*Hilton Head Island: Unpacked & Staying* is IWN's first venture into anthology publication. Guided by moderator Lorine Getz, members have gained hands-on experience by following the publishing process from the germination of an idea through writing and revision, all the way to the selection of a publisher and marketing the finished product.

The group meets on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Heritage Library on Hilton Head Island.

