

## CAROLYN

As I review the work I've done on Bill's Journey I find that I've left out a person who was very important to me. My mind is saying, "Run. Don't do it." My conscience is shouting, "Unfair!!" My heart is whining "Ouch!"

Carolyn and I met at the University of Miami on a fine January day in 1957. I was a sophomore, sitting on the broad steps of one of the campus buildings. I noticed a pretty girl bouncing down the steps toward me with a jaunty toss of her dark curls. Her skirt swirled and, as I caught her eye for the briefest of moments, she smiled at me.

I noticed her books and managed a line. "You taking Freshman Lit?"

She nodded and the sixteen year conversation that included our marriage relationship began.

We met on the steps almost every day and she learned that I didn't have a car. She offered me a lift to my abode on Beacom Boulevard where I lived with Nick Keenan. Eventually I met her parents Chet and Maxine Klepfer. I fell in love with her mom first. She fed me.

Maxine was a red headed domestic goddess and Chet was a manager at a Miami shoe store chain selling Florsheim and Father and Son brands. His primary job was "dressing" the windows. This was an important part of their marketing and I think he loved it.

Carolyn and I never really dated because I didn't have money for movies, restaurants and stuff. We hung out, mostly with her parents although we made it to the beach now and then in her Studebaker.

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Her whole family drove Studebakers because their good family friend Butch Streaker worked for the Bill Ussery Mercedes and Studebaker dealership in Coral Gables.

The Klepfers had a group of close friends that became my friends too. Besides the Streakers there were Mr. and Mrs. Bill Bennett and their daughter Judy, Mr. and Mrs. Tucker and their son John, and "Uncle" Earl Black. Maxine's sister Beverly, husband Bill Bevins and their daughter Nancy moved to Miami somewhere in the early 1960's and we saw them quite a bit too.

Earl was wealthy and belonged to the Coral Gables Country Club although, to my knowledge, he never played golf. Carolyn and I sometimes went to Coral Gables Country dances on nice summer evenings and danced under the stars.

Another favorite watering spot was the Coral Gables Elk's Club where the main activity seemed to be drinking and toasts at eleven PM, "To our Absent Brothers!"

One New Year's Eve, I wore the white jacket formal outfit that I got for my senior prom from brother-in-law Art Newburg. I was a blatant free loader and I finally got the message in the wee hours of New Year's day 1957. Carolyn told me that she could not give me a ride home and that her parents wouldn't give me a ride either because I never paid my way.

This was a pretty strong hint, eh? So I had to trudge several miles home. The busses weren't running after midnight even if I had the fare. I was stopped as I walked along Flagler Street and questioned by the police. They kept in the back seat of the patrol car for an hour while they got on their radio and "called" me in. No one walked about in the city at three in the morning. I guess the crooks all had cars. Sigh. Poor me, I thought.

When the cops were through with me I asked them for a ride to my apartment. "Just a couple more miles," I said. "No Sir," they smirked. "That's not our job. Have a good night."

The sun was about to rise when I trudged up the stairs to get ready for work.

I was working and in school so I had little time for a serious relationship. I was refused admittance to the University of Miami for the fall semester in 1958 because I was unable to pay both the back tuition and an advance payment for the new semester. I was about to lose my student deferment for the draft and worried about becoming a soldier again with those crappy shoes that made my feet bleed in ROTC in New York.

So I was at loose ends when I asked about the Coast Guard Reserve at their downtown Miami recruiting office. We looked good to each other. I was nineteen years old and they were hungry for bodies to achieve their quotas. The six-month active duty program followed by eight years of reserve drills looked good. I passed the physical and aptitude tests and soon found myself on a train to Cape May, New Jersey. My experiences at basic training are recorded in the odd jobs section of this book. Here I will just say that the experience transformed me.

A half a year later, when I stepped off the train, Carolyn and her parents were waiting for

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me. I never had a chance...

Carolyn and I got married in August 1960 and set up housekeeping in a little two bedroom house in South Miami Heights. We got married at the Saint Matthews Luthern Church on Beacom Boulevard and our reception was at the Coral Gables Country Club. It was a wonderful party. Jan and Art were there and Doratheia, my step mom was beautifully pregnant with my half-brother Guy. She wore a green maternity outfit with a memorable green silk pillbox hat.



We started our nest on a shoestring. There were only five or six different home models. Each home had a sodded front lawn, a Melaleuca tree on the grass strip by the street and a ficus tree to the right of the entry walk. Although this is the house we bought, it has changed. Hurricane Andrew toppled the ficus onto the roof in 1992. The tree did considerable damage because it had gotten huge, but it kept the roof from flying away. Carolyn lived in a travel trailer parked in the driveway for about a year while the house was being restored, commuting to the Homestead hospital where she worked as an RN.



Malaleuca tree

The photo is pre Andrew because the ficus is still there but much smaller than its ultimate size. The Malaleuca is now gone. When the house was new the carport was on the left. We closed it in to make a third bedroom in about 1967. There was no wooden fence.

Getting a window AC for the bedroom was a wonderful event.

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This is a great photo to my eye. Chet's animated face and friendly manner toward children jump off the page. Larry Grinnell, my stepbrother is grinning. I think the little one is Chris Newburg. The arm may belong to my dad, Bill Sr.

Gosh she looked pretty.

We stayed married for thirteen years producing two wonderful sons, memories, good and bad, and the sorrow of finally splitting. It was all my fault, of course. Carolyn was depressed and fighting demons I failed to appreciate. She was a wonderful, caring mother but she became bitter about our lack of financial progress, my persistent addiction to cigarettes and apparent inability to do and be the husband of her dreams.

I was working for Siegal Medical Group at that time. I had progressed to Lieutenant, Junior Grade (LTJG) in the Coast Guard Reserve. Carolyn had renounced work outside of our home for herself. By 1972 we had enough income to pay Carolyn's bills and rent a cheap apartment for myself.

There was a kind of precipitating event - I was slated to go to Baranquilla, Colombia for a week to be in on the planning stages of opening a kind of branch office there for the Overweight Medical Clinic. Dr. Curé, who I'll introduce later would run the branch and be co-owner. Carolyn got mad when Lyndol, Dr. Siegal's wife announced that she would go with us. Carolyn was jealous and furious that she hadn't been invited too.

As things unfolded we were divorced in 1973. I paid alimony and child support faithfully for a dozen years, until Jeff turned eighteen. By that time recession was haunting the economy and Carolyn's nursing career went on the upswing as mine took some nose dives.

For me the divorce was successful. I had less criticism in my life. I maintained a relationship with Billy and Jeff which has lasted and grown, and I wooed and won the love of Daisy, the girl of my dreams. Life was an adventure.

Carolyn did not fare so well. She reluctantly found a job and, in time, attended nursing school to become a RN. She never remarried and unfortunately



Carolyn and her mom in Fort Lauderdale at Mom and Dad's house. Maxine had red hair, a regal bearing and was, I think, Carolyn's role model.

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Carolyn circa 1962. On vacation in the Nation's Capital. The kids are Chris and Doug Newburg.

died young in 2001 from a melanoma cancer that spread until she was debilitated.

We saw each other at our sons' weddings and graduations but had little contact after I moved to North Carolina in 1988. The last time I saw her she was in a wheelchair at our grandson Billy's basketball game. She smiled at me and said that we had created something wonderful together through our children and grandchildren. I agreed.

Life in the early 1960's was good for me. At the same time I was always broke, had a modest salary at the bank, two little kids and a wife who refused to work for money at a regular job. Her few

employment experiences were uncomfortable for her.

Carolyn loved to play the piano however her mom refused to let her take the spiffy Baldwin Acrosonic spinet piano she'd grown up with. That was a shock to her. Carolyn was quite sure that the piano belonged to her.



Baldwin Acrosonic spinet piano - internet photo

We were able to buy an upright grand piano from the University of Miami where she had held a job for a about a year. They were selling practice instruments and it only cost \$25.00. It needed tuning and we did some artful and interesting remodeling. It was painted white and our arty friend, young John Tucker, gilded ornamental carvings on the legs. We substituted plexi-glass panels for the front so that you could see the works when it was played. I installed some little interior lights to facilitate this.

Carolyn supplemented our income by giving piano lessons and by caring for children in our home for working mothers. We were not on the path to wealth.

As I remember it I was earning \$65.00 per week at the bank and had to work like a demon to keep the job in a competitive and slightly toxic work environment. There was always a lot of stress. Women were not on an equal footing with the men. There were no blacks. The bank had many rules which were enforced with a vengeance.

I spent one weekend per month at Coast Guard Reserve training and got a quarterly check

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for \$35.50. Given my salary we appreciated the extra income. (This source of income in retirement is still important to me. My retirement benefit from the coast guard is about \$20,000.00 per year now, including the a nice bonus of low cost drug coverage and free medicare supplemental insurance.)

In the beginning we had no furniture or air conditioning for our brand new two-bedroom house. We had needs and desires but just enough money to get by. We used hand-me-down furniture, some salvaged from Chet's employer's warehouse. We bought a really big foam mattress pad for a modest price and mounted it on an inventive foundation platform to create an extra long king sized bed for the larger of our two bedrooms.

The platform was sturdy plywood mounted on top of two chests of drawers. I constructed a large cabinet with two doors at the foot end - so we had a lot of drawers and storage under the bed. Most of our furniture consisted of hand-me downs.

We wanted a TV. Television sets were expensive in those days and we were very happy when we found a way to finance a black and white Philco television set. It was a futuristic swivel tube mounted on a box much like the set illustrated. The picture was black and white, the antenna was built in rabbit ear and only three channels were available. The remote hadn't been invented yet. Future years would enable us to get an outside antenna and cool the entire house with a big air conditioning unit in the living room window.



The rabbit ears on this set are not visible. Our stuck out like...everyone else's

Over the years our best times were probably our camping vacations. Early on we'd use tents. Maxine and Chet always came with us. We'd cook and play cards and walk in the woods. Look at a list of Florida and Georgia state parks that permit camping and we've probably been



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there. After one or two years in tents we would rent a pop-up trailer and the Klepfers bought a VW camper.

**Dogs and Horses** - Sometime in 1960 we bought a friendly Rhodesian Ridgeback type of dog we named Susie who enriched our lives. She weighed about 50 pounds and accidentally bore us eleven pretty puppies one November day. When they were old enough to sell, we got about \$55.00 for the lot of them, just before Christmas. That money went to the vet who ultimately neutered Susie

Susie was so jumpy that Carolyn feared for the safety of little Jeffrey Belcher who she cared for while mom Sue Belcher worked. She loved little Jeffrey so much that we named our second son after him. Susie was given to a nice couple who owned an orange grove in Naranja.

In 1967 or 1968 we acquired two horses we used for pleasure riding. We kept them at a country boarding establishment in nearby Naranja, Florida. We rode several times a week for about year.

Moose, my ride, was a big, gentle, appaloosa-spotted brute who bore my weight with ease. The thing that I first noticed about big Moose was that he had a placid nature. A big plus. His tail however was a mess. It was so matted with filth that it was heavier than a club. Job one was to comb the crap out of that ugly tail. A horse brush and comb didn't do the trick. I mostly used a curved blade carpet knife. His tail actually worked when I finished and he could swish at the ever-present flies. The most I ever did for him was to feed him an apple or a carrot, hose and brush him after a ride and scrape the caked mud out of his hooves. He gave me a lot of pleasure.

Carolyn's mount Candy was a lively chestnut. The horses grazed in a field and we paid very little for their upkeep. After a number of months Candy became unruly for some unknown reason and Carolyn was afraid to get aboard. She was right. Horses are dangerous.

On one memorable day my ten year old brother, Guy, was on Candy when she decided to gallop off with a paved road on one side and a wire fence on the other side. I don't remember the rescue but Guy didn't get hurt. It could have been bad.

Moose had one fear that we knew about. He went into a panic state if a piece of newspaper or white trash blew in front of him. He'd rear and try to run.

So. One fine weekend morning we were showing our horses to Carolyn's cousin Nancy and her husband Tom Riley. We had them tethered to hitching posts made from heavy telephone pole sections resting on two foot high stumps. Our son Billy was playing on the ground under Moose and the poles just as Nancy's billowing white, bell-bottomed pants sashayed past Moose. He went to panic state, reared up and snatched the pole off its posts. It thumped down inches from Billy and Moose was backing as hard as he could, to get away from Nancy's pancys. There were

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six or seven horses hitched to this rail and they were all stomping and milling about as they got caught up in Moose's fearful state of mind. Billy sat just observing with interest as flying hooves and the telephone pole swirled around him. He was too young to get understand his peril.

Billy was not hurt. I had an awful time calming Moose and the tension he was putting on the tether knot made it impossible to untie so I could not lead him away. I seem to remember shooing Nancy away and cutting the leather knot.

Did I mention that horses are dangerous? We sold ours soon after these incidents. Carolyn couldn't ride Candy and we had to keep our little ones away from them.

**CHILDREN.** Billy and Jeff. In that order. Later Kim and Kris. The boys and girls are men and women now. They can write their own stories. So I may say very little.

They were so welcome into the world. Carolyn seemed fulfilled through the boys. As the primary caregiver, first because I was working, and then even more so after the divorce. She did a brilliant job! The proof is in the kind of adults they have turned out to be and in how they care for their wives and children.

Today I feel closer than ever to Bill and Jeff. But also to Kim and Kris, my dear step-daughters. Life, with all its problems is good.

I told a little story about Billy and Moose's hooves. Here's a short story about Jeff.

Once upon a time ago Carolyn went off to do some shopping or other girlie stuff and left me



Here's a shot of the falls at the Venetian Pool.

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in charge of the kids. Jeff was about three and needed a nap. He slept in his loft bedroom that was a part of the carport conversion I mentioned elsewhere. Like a good dad I checked on him after an hour or so and to my horror he was gone.

After searching every part of the house in vain, I proceeded to get neighbors involved in the search. I was frantic, as you can imagine. How could I ever face Carolyn and say, "I lost Jeffie." Just a whisker short of calling the police, I looked in the loft again and found him. He'd rolled off the mattress and was out of sight, wrapped in a cocoon of sheets and pillows.

Did I mention that Jeff was an angelic baby and has grown into a fine Christian man. He's about six feet six inches tall and weighs about two-hundred and sixty pounds. His friends say he's the biggest Christian in Ormond Beach, Florida.

It's no longer possible for me to think of my children without including my beautiful, dear step-children.

Kris and Kim taught me lessons about girls. They were so gentle and quiet compared to the boys. When I became their papa I thought, "Holy Mackerel. It's true. Females are different." I was used to the rumble and tumble of rougher boys.

Kim and I bonded right away. She needed a daddy and I needed her. Shortly after Kris was kidnapped Kim and I took a day to hang out together at the Venetian Pool in Coral Gables. This is a big, beautiful pool with swimming caves, islands, diving cliffs, waterfalls and beautiful palms and gardens.

We swam, talked and spent some very happy hours together even though we were worried about her mother and sister in Lebanon.

Some years later we spent a few days at the Coral Gables Marriott Hotel to attend Jeff and Carol's wedding. Even though there were many family members around, Kim and I found ourselves alone in the pool just like old times. I guess Jordie was clinging to the edge or playing on the steps. I felt unusually close to my now-grown daughter. We talked about life, divorce, marriage and children.

Kris and I began our adventures together before I married her mother. Daisy went to Mexico for work and asked me if I'd like to have Kris visit for a few days at my little apartment on N.W 24th Court. I jumped at the chance to have a four-year old roommate.

Kris turned out to be a delight. I rode my bike here and there in the neighborhood; even so far as the office a mile away on busy 27th Avenue. She rode sidesaddle on the bar, holding the handlebars. She helped me cook and I was sorry when our few days were over. Only fly in the ointment was she shyly refused to speak Spanish to my Cuban neighbors across the backyard fence. She had decided to speak only English.

When we decided to get married Daisy and I made sure to do things together with the kids so that they could become friends. Picnics, sailing and other outings were the norm. It was fun

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for me especially. I loved to be with the youngsters.

Chet Klepfer retired on his sixty-fifth birthday and lived happily for just three years. He and Maxine sold a lot they owned behind their house and used the proceeds to replace their VW camper with a real RV. They used it to tour the great parks in Florida and elsewhere in the south. By this time Carolyn and I were divorced and I didn't participate in his retirement adventures.

Chet worked part time for an old friend Billy who owned the Downtown Hat Shop. The business dated back many years to an era when men wore hats. Billy was ninety years old and not a good driver. So Chet drove him to work and was involved in a fatal accident while crossing Flagler street on the way home from work. The driver's side took a big hit and dear Chet was dead in 1975. Maxine lived to be ninety but at the end of her life was demented and she was somewhat estranged from Carolyn.

### **THE FICUS TREE**

There were two trees on the property when we bought it new; a tiny ficus in the yard and a slender Malaleuca on the curb strip. The front of the house had been sodded but the back was bare.

Hurricane Donna was the most destructive hurricane of the 1960 season. After reaching Category 5 strength in the open ocean in early September, it passed north of the Greater Antilles as a Category 4. Donna hit the Florida Keys, Fort Myers, Florida, the Outer Banks, and finally Long Island, New York, on September 12. Donna caused \$400 million in damage (1960 dollars), and caused 364 deaths, of which 148 were directly caused by the storm. She knocked out our lights for two weeks and snapped the ficus in half.

I was reluctant to lose the tree so I stood it up, taped its little trunk and nursed it back to health. It was a mighty tree at the end when Hurricane Andrew uprooted it. The tree was growing roots under the house's foundation and destroying the roof where it overhung. There was so much destruction in south Florida from Andrew that the damage the tree did was totally eclipsed by the destruction of the wind. I love insurance!

Carolyn got herself together and got a nursing degree. She was devoted to her career and her children to the end. She passed away, too young, in early 2001.