

Last month I shared with you a short story about Julius Bryant and one of his floundering adventures in the mid-50's. Below is a more recent photo of Julius and a 21 pound flounder he caught several years ago.

Julius Bryant & Flounder, photo courtesy of Ann Ehringhaus:



This photo was taken by Ann Ehringhaus, and is included in her book Ocracoke Portrait. When you have a chance to look at Ann's book be sure to read the accompanying story. It is a hilarious account of Kenny Ballance and Julius' sister Babe taking the frozen flounder on a plane to New York City.

All of us at Village Craftsmen hope you had an enjoyable summer. In spite of several rainy spells, especially in early August, the weather on the island has been generally warm but pleasant. We are looking forward to a very nice Fall as it begins to cool off a little.

We were informed recently that "Bon Appetite" magazine will be publishing an article in their November issue that features two craft galleries in each of several regions of the U.S. We were pleased to hear that their staff had discovered our web site and intend to use the Village Craftsmen as one of the two shops for the Southeast region.

We have sent them a Hatteras Peppermill for them to photograph. Look for the article-and the picture. It should be on the newsstands by mid-October.

Bon Appetite also requested some of our Wild Cherry and Stainless Steel Kitchen Utensils. We understand these will be included in their December issue.

Many readers of this newsletter will remember when Jack Willis ran a small grocery store on his dock on Cockle Creek (now sometimes called Silver Lake). O'Neal's Dockside tackle shop operated in the building for a while and Rudy and Donald Austin continue to tie their boats to this dock for their excursion tours to Portsmouth Island.

Jack's Dock



More than forty years ago this dock was the scene of a funny encounter between my father's youngest brother and an unnamed island visitor. I hope you enjoy the following story I wrote several years ago:

"Uncle Homer, my father's youngest brother, was known by all as a wild and crazy character. Even as a youth, among his own kin, he had a reputation for unpredictability and foolishness. The youngest of the fourteen children, he was spoiled and pampered by his aging father. Unfortunately, at an early age he flirted with and was seduced by alcohol.

The island was legally dry when he was growing up so store-bought beer, wine and hard liquor could be difficult to come by even after Prohibition was repealed in 1933. As his addiction progressed, "Little Homer" as he came to be called, sought out unconventional, and often dangerous sources of alcohol. After-shave lotion, cough syrup and vanilla extract were perennial favorites in those days. At first, the booze only heightened his playful nature, providing hours of stories and good-natured tales for the old men who sat on the porch of the general store or on benches out on the docks, whittling small birds. These birds were carved out of cedar with wings cut from the appropriately curved wooden ice cream spoons provided with every small container of the now-available Mayola ice cream. (Lemon was my favorite!)

On one occasion before tourism had become a major industry on the island Homer was standing on Jack's dock. Jack Willis ran a small grocery and general store that was supported by creosoted pilings out over the harbor. The dock ran past the store and wrapped around beyond the back door, providing copious space for embarking or disembarking from the fishing boats that tied up there, as well as room for cleaning fish, swapping stories or just hanging about to visit. It was a warm summer day. Homer was leaning with his back against the store, his left leg bent at the knee, the sole of his left foot resting lightly against the building. He was wearing a white tee-shirt, the tattoos on his muscular arms advertising his status as a seasoned mariner. His dungarees were rolled up to mid-calf so he wouldn't step on them as he walked barefoot through the deep soft sand lanes that connected the homes and stores in the village. Of course he wore his traditional white sailor's cap. He had served in the navy and he often wore his distinctive hat. Beside

him stood his friend and companion, "Little Edward."

Presently, a stranger wandered by.

At that time the mail boat made the trip from the mainland only once a day. In addition to mail, ice, pepsi-colas, and a limited number of groceries, the "Aleta" carried a few passengers. Mostly these were islanders or relatives who had moved away and were returning to visit family and friends. Occasionally, however, a brave soul from the mainland found his way to this strange land that time had temporarily forgotten.

Everyone noticed a stranger.

As the newcomer approached Homer, his mischievous mind pondered the possibilities. Without a word, he stood up straight when the stranger came alongside him. Just as quietly, he turned with a fluidity of motion and stepped forward in the same direction as his new companion. And then, as if it were not only socially acceptable, but also expected, he wrapped his left arm around his new friend's waist and proceeded to accompany him on his journey down the dock. It happened so suddenly and so nonchalantly, that this bewildered fellow was too startled to hesitate or resist. Joined in newfound, but congenial camaraderie by a curious but perversely likeable native he could not imagine what lay ahead.

Trustingly and naively, this gentleman from the land of courtesy and good manners was not prepared for Uncle Homer's island humor. He could hardly believe it when, at the very end of the pier, Homer held tight and they continued to walk, like two quintessential cartoon characters, directly out over the water until even Homer's good humor could not sustain them and they plunged, side-by-side, feet first, into the harbor."

No one can remember how the stranger reacted, except to note that he did not drown, and he was not injured! In those days no one was concerned about lawsuits. It was just one more excuse to enjoy a good laugh thanks to the unpredictable and impish nature of one of our own. And, of course, it was one more story to pass down through the generations.

The next time you walk out onto Jack's dock try to imagine what you would have thought if Uncle Homer had been your first introduction to Ocracoke!

Those of us who live on the island frequently hear folks tell us how much they wish they could move here. (Frankly we're glad not too many do--there just isn't enough room on this tiny sand bar.) But just in case you are thinking seriously about such a move we have decided to show you a little inside peek at island life.

Below is a recent photo of Travis relaxing in the Village Craftsmen employee lounge.

Travis in the employee lounge:



And a close-up of our modern, high-tech lounge chair.

Village Craftsmen employee lounge chair:



We present these photos just in case you might be feeling smug about your fancy office building in one of our great metropolises. We want you to know that we enjoy nearly every luxury you have—and maybe a few more, besides.

Until next time, all of the staff at Village Craftsmen send you our wishes for a great fall and we hope to see you soon, or at least next season.

Philip