

S.O.S.[®] Carefree Times

Hello, Stranger, It Seems Like a Mighty Long Time!

It has been a while since the last newsletter. *Too long.* I've been on a treadmill of travel and have a million and one excuses that you don't want to hear. It boils down to the fact that as soon as I got back from the S.O.S. Spring Safari it was time to go to work on the S.O.S. Golden Oldies party and I got behind the eight ball and just never caught up. Also, I've been holding up this issue a bit to determine just what was happening at the Beach. *See my editorial on this.* Anyway, we're back in the swing of things and I'll try to get out the promised total of 6 to 8 issues of *Carefree Times* this year!

A Media Blitz This September!

The long awaited Tom Brokaw TV segment shot at last September's S.O.S. Fall Migration should air in early September this year on N.B.C. national news as best "Bubber" Snow can determine.

More National Publicity! Atlantic Magazine

I just finished reading the galley proofs of Robert Crease's major feature article, *The Return of the Shag*, which will appear in the September issue of **Atlantic Magazine**. You will not want to miss this article which was two years in the making, as it captures the spirit of the beach, the shag and S.O.S. very well. Pick up a copy of Atlantic as soon as the September issue hits the news stand. It should be a sell-out in these parts. We'll reproduce the article in Carefree Times in the fall, after it's published in Atlantic.

People Magazine Ran Article on the Shag

Michael Small and Linda Marx's feature article ran in the June 6 issue of *People Magazine!* If you missed the article, check it out at your local library. We'll run a reprint in the next issue of Carefree Times.

Red's Beach Club to Honor S.O.S. Cards ...

All out of town S.O.S. members are welcome to Red's Beach Club in Raleigh! Just show your S.O.S. card ... no cover. (*Does not apply to Raleigh residents*). Be sure to stop by Red's large, plush beach club the next time you're in the Raleigh area!

Don't Miss It!!!

The BIG Shagger's Ltd. 4th Annual Summer Shag Explosion in Greensboro - July 15, 16 & 17. For more info, call Susie Beaver-Gibson at (919) 841-SHAG.

"Shag," the Movie to Premier at the Beach During S.O.S.!

"Bubber" Snow reports that he is trying to co-ordinate the world premier of the movie, "Shag," to coincide with the S.O.S. Fall Migration and that it will premier at a theater in either Myrtle Beach or North Myrtle Beach. More on this later.

Deadline

for mail-order S.O.S. memberships in time for Fall Migration: *in our hands by August 15!*

The First S.O.S. Outstanding Achievements Award

will be presented to the Honorable John J. "Bubber" Snow of Hemmingway, S.C. at the September S.O.S. for his tireless (and countless) contributions to, and promotion of, the State Dance of South Carolina ... the shag! *Congratulations, "Bubber!"*

Going to the Beach This Summer? Don't Forget You Get a Year 'Round 10% Discount at These Leading Restaurants!

Show your '88 S.O.S. card before ordering!

**Don's Pancake House
Ship's Bounty
Sea Merchants
Marina Raw Bar
Haley's**

The S.O.S. Golden Oldies party was one of the best ever! I think all will agree ... the 39 and over party held at O.D. May 19-21 was great. The weatherman did a great job along with the crews from Fat Harold's and Lulu's Lilly Pad! If you're 39 or over this is the one beach party you shouldn't miss next year. A good size crowd, but not overly crowded.

Beach Music Awards Show Dates Changed

The big Beach Music Awards party and show originally scheduled for early June in Raleigh and Chapel Hill has been changed to the late fall. Probably November. We'll fill you in as soon as we get the new dates.

EARLY SUMMER 1988

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SOSers, Stand up & be Counted!

Any large group of people will eventually have splits, splinters and spin-offs. Political organizations. Even churches. It's inevitable. It's human nature.

S.O.S. has had it's share of splinter groups. They come ... and they go. None, so far, have had the tenacity to last. Building a viable, lasting beach party organization is a slow one-step-at-a-time process. Believe me. I know.

Last fall and this spring the splinter was The Grand Party - a private party, of sorts, with good intentions, that held their own 10 bucks a head *by-invitation-only* bash during S.O.S. at the Galleon. Most Grand Party people walked back and forth between Fat Harold's and the Galleon and attended both functions. Come this September, the Galleon indicates The Grand Party won't be held at their facility.

Every year S.O.S. has been on tender hooks as far as partying space is concerned. We've played musical beach clubs for a number of years - always sticking with Harold Bessent at the club he would have at the time, because he remained our friend ... and loyal to our S.O.S. group.

This year the tender hooks get even sharper. The question marks loom larger than ever before.

Here's what's coming down as I understand it: Harold Worley, who owns the Galleon (and the O.D. Motel), has exercised his option and has purchased the Fat Harold's property from the owner, Herbert King. There are eight years left on the Fat Harold's lease which Mr. Worley contends is invalid and he indicates he will attempt to legally evict the tenant, Fat Harold's, very soon. However, the Fat Harold's ownership and management contends that they do, indeed, have a valid lease and have operated under it for a number of years. Which one is right is a fine legal point and could be decided by the courts.

Mr. Worley has advised me that he has been approached by a group of "five influential North Myrtle Beach shaggers" to form their own organization (T.A.P.S., or something like that), to *compete with S.O.S.*, and that the Galleon will not be available to S.O.S. members during the Fall Migration, but only to members of his competing organization.

Many of you will be receiving (or have received) a letter soliciting memberships in this new organization. I'm sure their list of membership advantages will be long and their dues will be much less than S.O.S. Worley will pump the big bucks into the T.A.P.S. endeavor for they need to make a big impact very quickly.

Mr. Worley did give S.O.S. first

refusal of using the Galleon, *provided that I give up control of S.O.S. by making him a partner and leave Harold Bessent.* Then S.O.S. could use the Galleon as headquarters, or use the Fat Harold's building if Worley is successful in evicting Fat Harold, and before Worley tears the old building down to build his planned ultramodern mega-complex, complete with high-rise motel and enlarged club facilities. S.O.S. would then have a permanent home. No more musical clubs.

Shouldn't we go with Mr. Worley? He has a proven track record of fantastic financial success. He says he would bring a lot to the S.O.S. table. Play it safe and go with Mr. Worley, the man with the plan? Right?

Wrong! You "roll the dice!" You maintain your freedom! You keep the options open. And you stand by an old friend who has been loyal to the S.O.S. for years!

The big question is: *Will Harold Bessent be operating in his old location come this September?* Mr. Worley makes a case that Harold will be out.

The Fat Harold's ownership and management contends they will fight any eviction with vigor and even if they lose in court, the proceedings will *drag out long past this September's S.O.S.*

Anyway, we'll stick with the fat one ... we'll sink or swim with the man who has done more for shaggers and beach music over the years than *anyone* at Ocean Drive Beach. He stuck by us ... and with beach music, through thick and thin. And believe me, like S.O.S., Harold Bessent has seen his lean years and payed his dues.

No, I do not know who will win this one. But *this I do know* - Harold Bessent helped the S.O.S. in those years when we were struggling and losing money and needed his help. Were it not for my friendship with Harold Bessent, I would have folded the tent after S.O.S. III for I was ready to throw in the towel. Harold encouraged me to keep it going - for just one more year.

S.O.S. and Harold Bessent worked in tandem to develop much of today's adult beach party shaggin' scene. We didn't swoop in to skim off the cream but labored long and hard together to make it a reality.

Harold needs us now and he has my wholehearted support, and I sincerely hope, *yours*, too!

In the worst case scenerio, *if* Harold Bessent is squeezed out of his present location, there will be other places than the Galleon available for you to go in Sept. Maybe not quite so nice... maybe not as convenient. But there will be options. And the options will grow between now and Sept.14.

It is damn ironic, and wryly amusing, that T.A.P.S. plans to hold their beach party on the *same weekend as S.O.S.* Don't they have the creativity (and the guts) to pull it off on their

own? Must they piggy-back on the ability of S.O.S. to draw a crowd?

If Mr. Worley really has the confidence that his organization will be such a success, then why doesn't he pick *another weekend for his party* and take advantage of *two crowds* at the Galleon and O.D. Motel - both the S.O.S. and the T.A.P.S. weekends?

I know Mr. Worley. I know him well. I admire his uncanny ability to make money. He's very organized and ultra cool. He is a great results-oriented business-man. He's also somewhat impatient. If his new T.A.P.S. doesn't meet his goals, and quickly, he'll move on to something else, in my opinion.

The S.O.S. philosophy is in direct contrast to the cool businesslike approach of Mr. Worley. S.O.S. started as a lark. It's a fun organization. It was never intended to be a business. S.O.S. just evolved. There was no plan. The business aspects took a back seat. The fun had to come first. The priorities were, and are, completely backwards and defy logic. S.O.S. is a wacky, kooky, creative operation. *A hard-nosed businessman could not have pulled it off!* Only a compulsive eccentric could have made S.O.S. work (and that just happened to be me).

Many of you know that my plans have long been to walk away from S.O.S. after the 10th anniversary in 1990. Perhaps this new challenge will provide the stimuli ... the impetus ... and the renewed energy, to carry on.

If the S.O.S. is not providing you with the fun and breaks from your pressure-packed work-a-day world ... and at a price that you're completely comfortable with, then *I should walk away ... and now!*

If you don't care if the S.O.S. becomes fractured and fades away, then join T.A.P.S. and march (and shag) to the beat of a different drummer ... at the Galleon.

SOSers, it's the time for you to stand up and be counted. I'm curious. Do you really care? We need to know who our friends are. We need to draw the lines. We need to find out who feels loyalty to the S.O.S.!

Over the years, hundreds of you have thanked me and asked how you can help. Now I'm calling in your markers. *Here's your chance!*

If you want the S.O.S. to continue, then you *can help* by *sticking with us*, and with Fat Harold. Support *only* the S.O.S. participating clubs at this SOS Fall Migration. Show solidarity! Put up with the over-crowded conditions and inconveniences this September... but *stick with us*. Tough it out. Cast your lot with S.O.S. and Harold Bessent ... *stick with "the ones that 'brung you' to the dance!"*

The future of the S.O.S. is in your hands ... and shaggin' feet. And, that future, my friends, is *NOW!*

The choice is yours.

On The Tee with Driver

by Harry Driver

After W.W. II ended and all the servicemen returned to the States, a great many of them were stationed at Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune awaiting discharge or to "re-up."

Carolina Beach was a favorite place for them to spend their week-end passes. It was a time alive with activity and beaming with excitement. There was a mixture of seasoned veterans and fresh high school and college students all trying to get the few summer jobs available.

It was a time of much turmoil for those who had been through the hells of war and for the younger guys who had been fed a continuous diet of kill or be killed, enlist and be a hero. The propaganda never let up for over four years, so everyone wanted to emulate their favorite hero - war or Hollywood. The reality of that emulation was most evident at the resort areas and Carolina Beach was typical of what went on

during a Saturday night when the sun went down.

Calling Bingo was one of the first jobs I had during my early years on the beach. Most of the time it was a lot of fun, but on Saturday night all the crazies would hit the beach and it was on! My shift started at 6:30 as a barker trying to get people to come in off the boardwalk and play free games at 7:00. At this time I would call the games and take a fifteen minute break about every hour and a half.

It was during these breaks that I would run around the corner and up the stairs to "Bop City," scoot past "Bear" on the door, and grab Clarice or Marilyn, and hope that Jimmy Carvalo and Bobby Wrenn would play some of my favorite numbers.

Dancing to live music was one of the pure pleasures of growing up in those days. It taught one how to be innovative, to improvise, enjoy and listen to the music.

The jukebox music was great for that period, but you always knew what note was coming next, as you do today.

The dance floor was always crowded with servicemen on those Saturday nights and their tempers matched the hard-driving tempos of the

music. The fights were so numerous that two policemen and two M.P.s were always around to keep the club from turning into a war zone. When the fights started they were quick, brutal and always bloody. The intent was not to win a short bout, but to inflict permanent damage and they did not care how it was done. Bottles were always a favorite weapon.

After spending some time in these "jump-joints," as they were called, you learned to duck, do some fancy footwork, and most importantly, how to spot the trouble makers and totally avoid them.

Yes, these areas were truly a melting pot, but paratroopers, marines and long haired jitterbugs do not mix well. The exception to that were the dancers and some of the friendships I made during these years endure today. It would invariably begin with their willingness to show you a step from their section of the state or country. After the ice was broken, introductions were made to each other's friends and soon they were weekend "beach bums."

One of these many friends was Dave Sturdy from Chicago, with whom I sailed from Bermuda to Wrightsville Beach last

summer on his 54' Hunter. Dave and his wife, Joyce, are always at S.O.S. parties and easy to spot. She is the great dancer always trying to get him through another record. By the way, Dave is the inventor of the cruise control, and Steve McQueen was one of those weekend "beach bums" from those early years.

Richard "Dick" Smart was one of the friendships developed out of the Raleigh area, and having just spent a couple of weeks with him and his wife, June, in Palm Springs and Maui, I can tell you that old friendships die hard.

Joe and Lou Halo from Goldsboro have remained lifelong friends and, to this day, I do not remember the first time we met. I do recall that I met their sisters and cousins first at a dance at the Lumina Ballroom at Wrightsville Beach.

I guess what made all these friendships so special is that common bond of dancing, becoming friends because you choose ... not because of geographical circumstances and the need to belong.

Ava Clyde always said, "Be careful who you choose for friends, for you are judged by the company you keep."

Thank goodness!

2001 to be S.O.S. Fall Migration Participating Club!

The large 2001 Club will participate in the upcoming S.O.S. Fall Migration IX this September. The 2001 Club will have beach music on Friday and Saturday nights and there will be no cover charge for '88 S.O.S. members. This will take some of pressure off the Fall Migration crowds and will be a welcome change of scenery for many SOSers. We look forward to working with the 2001 folks!

Crazy Zack's to be an Afternoon S.O.S. Fall Migration Participating Club!

Marshall Stewart, owner of Crazy Zack's has agreed to be an afternoon participant during the Fall Migration and we will be holding some of our afternoon beach music parties in his classy establishment. If you haven't been in Crazy Zack's lately, there have been some major changes. It's been enlarged and prettier than ever. *Thank's Marshall!*

Fat Harold's, Lulu's Pad, The Beach Club,

(formerly the Barefoot Bar)

Duck's and Rock Options

(formerly Duck's Across the Street)

to be the Major S.O.S. Fall Migration IX Participating Clubs!

Fat Harold's, as always, will be the Official 1988 S.O.S. Fall Migration Headquarters. Don't forget the dates, officially Sept. 14-18, 'tho many of us will start partying several days earlier this year!

S.O.S. Carefree Times

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Gene Laughter

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Columnist, Advertising
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(804) 741-1926 after 6 pm -
Mondays thru Thursdays.
Other days: gone fishing!

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BACK to the BEACH

Society of Stranders
gathers for 'high school
reunion without the nerds'

By KATHERYN HOPPER
Staff Writer

NORTH MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.-
Just call it the reunion of born-again
beach bums.

Between spring break and high school
graduation, an older breed of revelers
takes over the beach. Outfitted in
Weejuns and chinos, they come laden
with 45s and loaded with memories.

The annual event, going on this
weekend, is officially called The
Society of Stranders Spring Safari.
S.O.S. founder Gene Laughter
(pronounced Law-ter) says it's just an
excuse for anyone who's forty-
something to act like a kid again.

"We get surgeons, lawyers - all types
of professionals who want a spring
break, just like they used to have in
school," says Laughter, 55, a business
executive. "This is our pressure valve.
Back home we have to be professional,
calm, collected. Here we can get wild,
and nobody will care."

About 300 Greensboro-area residents
are expected to be among the more
than 5,000 bopping beach-lovers from
Newport News, Va. to New Port
Richey, Fla., who are hanging out at
their old haunts. They go to Fat
Harold's to shag with lost summer
loves and frequent The Pad looking for
ingrained initials.

"This is wonderful - it's like a high
school reunion without the nerds,"
says Ginny Foster, 40, of Greensboro,
who works for a real estate firm, "It

makes me feel youthful."

Glory days

They talk about Harley Joe's and
wonder whatever happened to the
Eighth Avenue Grill. They reminisce
about steering wheel knobs, Johnny
Ray and the smell of peroxide. Those
were the times that bind.

The dance, then and now, is the shag.
Battered bucs, loafers, ballet slippers
and a few Reebocs step out the nine-
count dance to old standards such as
"My Blue Heaven," "Jelly, Jelly," and
"Meet Me With Your Black Drawers
On."

Dave Moore, a Greensboro shag
instructor, says the shag is the group's
common ground.

"Back in the '60s when I was coming
down here, you couldn't meet girls at
this beach if you didn't shag," Moore
says. "That's why we all had to learn
to dance."

Foster, who spent a summer working
in the Gay Dolphin Gift Store, says
the person most remembered by most
beachniks is Merlin Bellamy, the
former police chief of Ocean Drive.

"He locked most of these guys up
when they were kids," Foster says,
pointing to the dance floor. "He
usually got 'em on either public
drunkenness or indecent exposure."

Because of his contributions to their
upbringing, S.O.S. honored Bellamy
several years ago with a place in the
group's Hall of Fame.

Such rowdiness is rare today. Jim
Sutton, a 50ish Winston-Salem
stockbroker and president of The
Greater Triad Shag Club, says the
assembly of middle-age partiers is
pretty tame.

"This is such a friendly bunch. There's
never any fights, or lewd behavior.
They just don't do that anymore."

"You mean they *can't* do that
anymore," says Janie Bolin, a
Greensboro ophthalmologist's assistant
who wears a button that reads 'Don't
Blow Your Lead and I'll Follow You
Anywhere.'"

Looking for love

Bolin spent the summers of 1957
through '60 at Ocean Drive. She got
married and stayed that way for 23
years. Now divorced, she says she
likes to come and meet men her own
age who share a common background.

"I don't want to go back to those
times, but it's fun to be with so many
people your own age," Bolin says. A
lot of these people got married right
out of high school. Now they're
divorced and going back to the old
places, the same ones where they met
their first mates. "It's like you're
already friends with everybody. That
makes it so easy."

A recent inductee into the Shagging
Hall of Fame in Greenville, S.C., the
retired Barkoot danced at the Big Apple
(Club) in his home town of Columbia
back in the '30s and '40s. The wood
framed building, then a black club that
was hip for white kids, is now on the
the Historic Register as the place that
gave birth to the Big Apple (a fore-
runner of the shag).

People pay attention when the gray-
headed man wearing red suspenders and
black loafers hits the floor. He spins
around and occasionally dips. He seeks
out women under 40 for his partners.
Older ones don't have the stamina.

"I just love to dance," he says. "It
keeps me young."

A way of life

Like the constant tide, generations of
Carolínians come and go to Ocean
Drive. The bars remodel and names
change, but the feel remains the same.

"This is part of our culture," says
businesswoman Ellen Stringfellow, 40
of Greensboro. "My parents taught me
how to shag, and I taught my son. It's
a family tradition, something you can
pass on."

She's even run into her parents at past
S.O.S. parties. She says doing what
she loves with the people she loves is
what makes S.O.S. so special.

"There's a certain feeling here, a
warmth, a bond, and we come down
here to have that feeling. It's more
than a hobby. It's a way of life."

For want of a pair of shorts, group would have been lost

By KATHRYN HOPPER

Greensboro News and Record Staff Writer

NORTH MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. - None of this would have happened if Tom Lilly had kept his pants on.

In the late '70s, Lilly and Gene Laughter were trying to stage a reunion of folks who spent their summers back in the 50s at Ocean Drive Beach.

The North Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce wouldn't grant them an audience.

Local merchants laughed.

No one was interested. So Lilly, president of a Hickory textile company, and Laughter, also a business executive, decided to give up.

They headed for a local bar for a cold beer.

While they sat at the bar trading war stories, a man came up to Lilly and told him he liked his shorts, which were patterned with small sailboats. "You like 'em, you can have 'em," Lilly said.

The two men went into the bathroom and traded shorts. Once back at the bar, the other man asked them what they were doing in town. They told him their troubles, and he smiled.

"I own the biggest hotel at the beach," said Gordon McMean. "It's yours."

The Society of Stranders was born. Its first reunion was in the fall of 1980 at the Oak Tree Inn.

"I thought we'd have that first reunion, then we'd walk away," said Laughter, an Albemarle native who worked summers as a lifeguard at Ocean Drive before graduating from the University of South Carolina in '54.

Seven Spring Safaris later, S.O.S. is still going strong with more than 3,500 members. There are only two requirements: \$20 and a minimum age of 21. There's an age limit because most functions include alcoholic beverages.

Laughter, the society's current president, says applications show an average age of 43.6.

"It's probably slightly older," says Laughter with a Paul Newman smile. "The women lie about their ages."

Charlotte has the most members, with the Triad close behind. Columbia comes in third.

Aside from The Spring Safari, S.O.S. sponsors a Fall Migration, dubbed as the "the granddaddy of all beach parties." This year it's set for Sept. 14 through 18. There's also a Golden Oldies weekend in May for folks 39 and over.

"People really need this," Laughter says.

"There's such a demand. I think we need our spring break just like the kids do."

Editor's Note: For the sake of historical accuracy, we feel that we should point out a few minor discrepancies in the side-bar article: (1) The time was early spring of 1980, not the late '70s. (2) Tom Lilly was wearing long pants, not shorts. (3) The pants were covered with embroidered airplanes, not sailboats (4) Gene Laughter's smile is more akin to that of Alfred E. Newman (of Mad Magazine's "Wot, me worry?" fame) than to the Newman named Paul.

Flotsam and Jetsam ... washed ashore

We attended the Tidewater Shag Club's Birthday Bash at Fat Roger's in Virginia Beach in May and are happy to report that it was a roarin' success. President Barbara Ambrose and all her crew are to be congratulated for a job well done! Be sure to head up to Virginia Beach the next time they put on a party, 'cause these folks know how to put one on!

Harold Bessent and Rick Hubbard are just back from the J.B.B.A. Party in Jacksonville and are both ravin' about what a great party it was. Sorry I couldn't make this one!

A true story: At the S.O.S. Spring Safari, Fat Harold's was packed. Jammed to the walls. I took a break and strolled into Harold's office to relax and get away from the mass of shaggers and noise. A stranger (to us) walked in and handed Harold a money clip filled with large bills. "I found this on the floor by the front bar. The money clip has initials, 'E.C.' on it. Probably the guy would like to have this back." Harold had the D.J. to announce that a money clip had been found and "E.C." came forth and claimed it. All his money was there! Only at the S.O.S.!!!

I still can't get over how the S.O.S. Golden Oldies party reminded me so much of the early Fall Migrations. Just hanging around Lulu's Pad and chatting with old friends like the Treadway brothers (Ronnie and Maurice), Joann Shoup Burleson, Tom Lilly, Johnny Raker, Larry Blake, Jerry Morris, et al, makes it all worth the effort. Seldom does a generation like ours get the opportunity to return to the haunts of their youth and see their buddies from decades gone by ... again. We are truly lucky!

S.O.S.! May Day! Can anybody help? We want to get on the mailing list for *Carolina Class*, a magazine published by a radio station in Salisbury, NC (*I absolutely refuse to mention their call letters 'til I get a copy of their 'zine*). So far none of my straight forward methods seem to work. They made my photo last September and I gave the *Carolina Class* guys my card. They promised I would be put on the mailing list for the magazine. Since then I've talked with two different executives of this nameless radio station to no avail. Still no *Carolina Class*! Like Rodney Dangerfield, S.O.S. just gets no respect. Do any of you have any pull with this station? My name is: *Gene Laughter* and my mailing address is: *SOS, Box 8343, Richmond VA 23226*.

Wanted: 1982 S.O.S. Fall Migration T-Shirt. Any size in mint condition wanted for framing. \$75. Contact S.O.S./ Box 8343, Richmond VA 23226

For Sale: 1981 "I Survived the S.O.S. 1980 Fall Migration T-Shirt. Size M. Olive green. \$125. Contact S.O.S./ Box 8343, Richmond VA 23226

1/8 Share of Plush 4 Bedroom Oceanfront Condo left. \$20,000. Contact S.O.S.

The Money Bag

By Jim Money

Each winter, all the "beach jitters" struck out from Morehead City toward the inland cities.

Some of my friends had money, automobiles, clothes, etc. and could go inland anytime they wished and stay anywhere they wanted. Some of my friends had girl friends pick them up and take them inland ... all expenses paid.

I had to pawn everything I owned to get enough money for gas and food for two days and nights.

In other words, my total personal wealth was 74 miles and 6 hamburgers (no fries). I had to drink water or beer ... I couldn't afford a Pepsi. It didn't quench your thirst and wouldn't make me drunk, so I had to leave it off my menu.

I couldn't get fat or drunk off my entire personal wealth. I was so poor that I had become a specialist at four letter words to get my message across if I were writing letters because I couldn't afford wide paper. I couldn't afford to have a dog because I was never able to buy a pork chop to tie around my neck to get him to play with me. Poor and ugly too ... now that's a hell-of-a-way to go through life!

I had to find someone that would make me laugh, to keep my mind off my problems. Comes the plaintiff ... Billy "Red Ryder" Carlisle. It was worth pawning my considerable wealth for enough money to watch this guy cook hamburgers. If there is a "Hall of Fame" for hamburger cooks, Billy Carlisle will get my vote. To those of you who never had the distinct pleasure of watching this blessed event, I will try to paint you a picture with words.

Picture, if you will, a 50's hamburger stand ... "T" shaped, with cars parked diagonally along the car-hop island. Kids sitting on their hood and fenders, watching the cruisers go around and

around the restaurant to see and be seen; car-hops delivering hamburgers, fries and Pepsis to the fortunate few with money; a few groups spread out on the outskirts of the lights drinking beer or whiskey and getting rowdy. Now look up into the grill area at the freckle faced kid cooking those burgers. ... Billy "Red" Carlisle.

I never knew who owned that hamburger stand, but it had to be a close relative of Billy's.

The boy would start off with a round ball of hamburger about 3" in diameter. He would toss it into the air once or twice to get everyone's attention, slap it under his arm and squeeze it between his arm and rib cage, slap it down on the grill and pound it with a spatula a time or two and reach for another hamburger ball. Ohooooo my ... sweat dropping off his forehead onto the grill ... and Billy chewing that bubble gum as fast as he could, just singing and dancing to the music playing on the speaker system, in a world of his own.

Along about this time, McDonalds had only sold about 50,000 hamburgers and proudly posted a few hundred more each week. I have always suspicioned that Billy Carlisle was the person directly responsible for McDonalds' "meateoric rise" in sales in North Carolina.

I can see Billy "Red Ryder" Carlisle today ... yellin', cussin', sweatin' ... flipping those burgers and daring anyone to say something about it.

Personalities like Billy Carlisle are no longer around visa-vis the County Board of Health, but I never heard of anybody dying from hamburger poisoning, did you?

I haven't seen or heard of "Red Ryder" in over 25 years.

Goodnight, Red, wherever you may be! A lot of old hamburger junkies thank you for the memories. And, I'm sure McDonalds sends their very best regards.

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