

# Pioneering in Suburbia

## Part II

by Nixon Smiley

### Our Pond the Living Thing

A pond is irresistible. In a garden it becomes a center of interest; in a glade or swamp it is sure to draw your eyes. It is always a wildlife center, where all kinds of living things congregate—things that swim or slither, crawl or hop, walk or fly. Our pond on Montgomery Drive was a haven for a variety of such creatures. Whenever we sat on the breezeway of our house, at lunch time or in late afternoon, there usually was something happening on or about the pond to draw our attention. There was never a moment when the dark surface was completely quiet. A pair of wood ducks might paddle about the pond at noon. At dusk the wood ducks arrived in twos, fours or sixes, plunging out of the sky to spend the night. During winter, a dozen or so lesser scaup ducks often dropped in to raft on the quiet surface. Occasionally a flight of mallards plopped in.

The pond was host to other kinds of birds besides ducks—kingfishers, herons, egrets, even ospreys. A green heron considered the pond its private domain, driving other green herons away. Grackles came in flocks to feed along the grassy banks, searching for frogs, snails, insects. Kingfishers came occasionally to feed, picking up aquatic insects when they came up for air or catching minnows that swam too close to the surface. A gray kingbird also fed on water insects,

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This article is the second part of the late Nixon Smiley's memoirs. Part I is in the 1990 edition of *Tequesta*.

watching from its perch among the willows for an opportunity to pick up some hapless creature that surfaced at the wrong place and wrong time. In the evening we often heard the raucous "kwawk" of a night heron on its way to the pond where it fed until just before dawn. When it left it "kwawked" its signal as it went to hide during the day with its companions of the night, the owls and the chuck-will's-widows. Early of a morning and late in the day the Carolina doves came in droves to drink in the pond, particularly during the fall migratory season. From time to time, a great blue heron, common egret or snowy egret dropped in, staying for two or three days if the feeding proved good.

With a multitude of predators, you might think a small body of water, 70 feet in diameter would soon be depleted of living things. But, no. The water was kept in constant agitation by the multitude and variety of life that inhabited the pond. Every season of the year the pond was extraordinarily rich in animal life—aquatic insects, minnows, small fish, snails, crawfish. Hoping to attract limpkins, I introduced the large aquatic apple snail from the Everglades, but we were too remote from the wilderness for limpkins, and so the snails became the food of other things, particularly grackles and raccoons. The green heron may have fed on the immature snails, for this ever-hungry creature seemed non-selective in its food preferences, grabbing any living thing that it could swallow.

If it were feeding as you approached the pond, it would take to the air with raucous squawks, alighting on a branch of a tree where it stretched its long neck to watch you warily. As you got within a few feet of the bank, a leopard frog might take a long hop into the water, followed by smaller spring frogs. Dragonflies and damselflies left their perches atop shoreline weeds to dart about like miniature airplanes. A giant toad (*Bufo marinus*) might plop awkwardly into the pond from its hiding place and swim ungracefully underwater until it concealed itself beneath a patch of water weeds. Fish darted away, putting distance between you and themselves, but the ever-hungry minnows schooled about the surface near your feet, expecting that the activity might mean food. The voracious gambusias were ready to consume anything that fell prey to them, and nothing was too big for them to tackle.

Now, standing quietly and studying the pond, you began to see another activity, that of the water-inhabiting insects. On the surface were side-paddlers, palmetto bugs, ebony mellow bugs, swimming in their endless circles, which gray water-striders propelled themselves across the surface on pontoon-like feet. Dragonfly larvae made tiny

rings on the surface upon coming up to breathe. Countless surface rings were created by insects too small to be seen by the human eye.

The dragonfly, is but one of many insects that spend the immature part of their lives in the water. I constantly saw all kinds of life in the pond that I did not recognize. Only a specialist, through arduous collecting and study, could have identified everything that lived there.

One afternoon, a pretty little girl with freckles came into our place on a small bicycle, peddling with all the vigor and push that adults sometimes put into the driving of Volkswagens. Stopping abruptly, she dropped the bike on the lawn.

"Could I see the pond?" she asked a little breathlessly. "I'm in a hurry," she added, apologetically. "I've got to get home."

Jena Lowry was no stranger. We frequently exchanged greetings as she peddled to and from Pinecrest Elementary School. But our acquaintance was like that which exists between many adults and children—limited to knowing each other's faces and names. This wide-eyed, confident child's spontaneous personality was irresistible, and naturally I showed her the pond. Thus our friendship was immediately established about a natural wonder, which is subject where adults and children have a common fascination. Afterward we always had something to talk about when we met, and I recall I would try to think of something that had happened at the pond which would be of interest to her. If Evelyn and I remember Jena Lowry more than we do any other child who visited the pond, it is because she lost her life in an automobile accident in California that also took the life of younger sister, Denise.

When Karl and I began digging the pond in 1951, we had no idea it would develop into a wildlife bonanza. Although we did stock the pond with gambusia minnows to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes, we made no studied effort to make it attractive to wildlife. The willows were introduced accidentally when we collected some ferns and other bog plants from Big Cypress Swamp to set along the pond's edge. When willows grew from seeds brought in with the soil we did not remove them, because it was our hope to make the pond look as if it had always been a part of the natural landscape. For the same reason, we planted cypress, red maple, laurel oak and cocoplums behind the far shore from the house—to form a backdrop for the pond. We also planted royal palms, as well as the native paurotis palm, a cluster-type palm found in Big Cypress Swamp. We introduced several kinds of aquatic weeds, particularly the native water lily. Meanwhile the willows grew tall,

making several slender trunks, then toppled into the pond. They did not uproot; they simply fell gently, imperceptibly, until their tops dipped into the water.

The addition of chara, an aquarium plant, quickly took over the pond, growing so dense you wondered how the fish could swim through it. Two dozen tilapias obtained from Herb Hiller, a writer, gradually cleaned out the chara. The fish grew from the size of minnows to fourteen inches eating the enormous amount of chara. Then one day I saw a large bird half-submerged in the middle of the pond, struggling and flapping its wings. At first I thought it was a pelican. But when the bird lifted free of the water, carrying in its talons a tilapia more than a foot in length, I could see it was an osprey. I was dismayed to see so large a chara-consumer being carried away. After that we watched closely for the fish hawk, clapping our hands to frighten it. The fish sensed the danger and fled to cover beneath the willows.

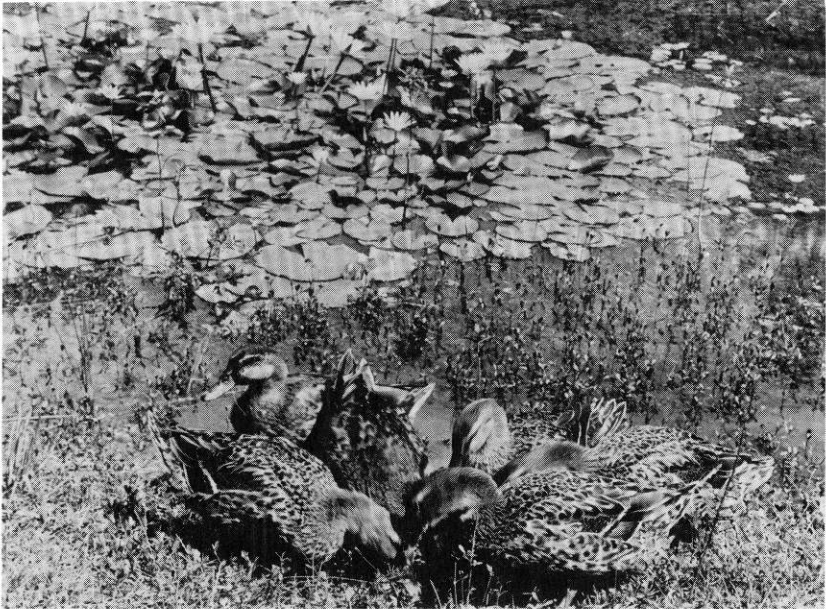
While the tilapia were scared of the osprey, they were unafraid of the wood ducks, which splashed in at a speed equal to that of the fish hawk. How could the tilapia tell that much difference between these birds, which they viewed from beneath? I do not know; but when it was time for the osprey to arrive the tilapia could be found huddled beneath the willows, safe from the eagle-like talons. Eventually the discouraged osprey stopped coming.

With the pond now clear of chara, the wood ducks resumed their spirited play when they arrived in the evening and when they left their willow roosts early in the morning. They cavorted, chasing each other, throwing silver spray as they cut across the surface at unbelievable speed. The wood duck population was greatest in the fall, when the migratory birds arrived. In summer we often had only one or two pairs roosting among the willows.

One April our neighbor Dr. George Venis and his daughter arrived with a surprise—a wood duck mother and her brood of nine chicks. The ducks had walked into the screened patio of a friend of Venis. The friend had shut them up, fearing the little ones would fall prey to cats. Venis remembered our pond.

The baby ducks could have been no more than a few days old. Where they had been hatched was a mystery, but they took to the pond as though it was home. We fed them the kind of food recommended for baby chicks, and they grew rapidly. A month later, the little ones were nearly as large as their mother. Meanwhile a colorful drake took up with the brood. The mother tolerated him interposing herself between the

drake and the food pan. On June 13, the young made their first attempt at flight; and a week later, we were given a demonstration that we never forgot. Late in the afternoon all the young ones were on shore with the mother and three or four other visiting adults, searching for insects



**Visiting mallards unashamedly accept a handout at supertime.**

among the grass. Suddenly one young duck took off and flew toward the house. He made a circuit through the pines and returned to splash into the pond. He was followed by another and another until several young ducks had made the circuit. One duck had trouble hitting the pond and flew on, circling wildly about the trees and palms behind the pond before returning in a rather ungraceful splash. To see an adult wood duck weaving through the pines at 30 miles an hour is a thrill; but to see these immature ducks, without fully developed wing feathers, threading through the pines, made us want to cheer. We felt almost like proud parents. Surely we had had a part in their development by supplying them with nutritious food. Soon the young ducks were going and coming as they pleased. After another two or three weeks, we were unable to distinguish them from adults.

In the early years while we were developing the pond, and before Karl went off to college, we sought to introduce all the frogs native to the Everglades. On several occasions we scooped up buckets of

Everglades pond water containing tadpoles and minnows and what else we would never know and dumped them into the pond. We introduced leopard frogs and spring frogs, while cricket frogs and "hammering frogs" simply appeared. We were unable to catch bullfrogs.

"I don't think I could catch a bullfrog either," said Charlie Brookfield, of the Audubon Society, "but I know somebody who can—Glenn Simmons of Florida City."

One night a week later we lashed Brookfield's canoe atop a car, picked up Simmons and drove to a drainage canal south of Florida City. With a spotlight fitted on his head, Simmons sat in the bow as Brookfield paddled from the stern. I sat in the middle, a burlap sack in readiness. It wasn't long before a pair of glaring bullfrog eyes was caught in the beam of Simmons' spotlight. Pointing the bow of the canoe toward the frog, Brookfield paddled silently. The frog, floating with its head just above the surface of the water, was blinded by the light. When Simmons was within reaching distance he shot his right arm forward and grasped the frog with his fingers. The frog uttered a surprised "oink," but it was on its way into the sack. Within an hour Simmons had caught more than a dozen bullfrogs. I took them home and released them in the pond. Within two years we must have had a 100 bullfrogs. Occasionally, as you approached the pond, one would hop from the bank, uttering an "oink" before plopping into the water. Most of them remained in the pond, only their green heads floating above the surface. Sometimes when I awakened in the middle of the night, I could hear their characteristic deep grunting, which has won them the name of "pig frog" among professional wildlife people.

One night after an unusually heavy rain, I heard a new sound welling up from the pond—a sound much like that of a fast-moving train clicking its wheels along the junctures of steel rails. Next morning I walked down to the pond and saw several tropical toads—*Bufo marinus*—depositing their eggs. Although dismayed, there was nothing I could do. The pond had a new inhabitant; we would have to accept it.

This huge South American toad is larger than a bullfrog and many times the size of the common toad, weighing as much as three pounds. A voracious insect consumer, it has been distributed around the world to help control pests in sugarcane fields. Although the toad had been introduced in South Florida several years earlier, we had not seen it at Montgomery Drive. It had become notorious in some areas of Miami, because of the poison sacs on its back that occasionally proved fatal to dogs and cats that attacked the ugly creatures. There was talk of a campaign to rid Florida of the toads.

Before *Bufo marinus* took up with us, I constantly battled cockroaches that lived among the palmettos and large slugs that ate the ground covers. Scorpions too were numerous, and we had to watch every time we picked up something outdoors. We even had to avoid walking barefoot in the house at night. Gradually the roaches and slugs disappeared. I couldn't believe the toads were eating them until one day when I saw a toad gobble a huge cockroach. Quick as lightning the toad lashed out its tongue and swept the roach into its mouth and down its gullet, and without so much as a demonstrative gulp. Then, upon finding a slug—a slimy "snail without a shell" nearly two inches long—I placed it on the ground near a bufo and watched from a distance. Soon the toad hopped out of hiding and gulped the slug with less effort than most persons exert in swallowing a pill. I never saw one snap up a scorpion, yet I'm sure they did, because after these toads became numerous we never saw a scorpion again. Other night-crawling insects also disappeared—sow-bugs, millipedes, even the skinks. A species of Bahamian lizard that had multiplied about the place in great numbers managed to hold its own. Although the lizards were not completely safe from the toads, being daylight hunters they were in hiding at night while the bufos were active.

While we were sorry to see the colorful skinks disappear we were gratified for the disappearance of the cockroaches, scorpions and slugs. We were more disturbed however about the dwindling population of the bullfrogs. While no bufo could swallow a bullfrog, the two competed in the pond for breeding space: and the toads appeared to be winning.

Eventually a strange thing happened: the bufo population began to dwindle. Having cleaned up the night-crawling insects, the numerous toads must have been forced to move farther afield in search of food. They did return in considerable numbers after a heavy rain to mate in the pond. On such occasions, all the neighborhood frogs and toads assembled for a night of song and frog love. We never saw anything attempt to gobble a *Bufo marinus*. The pond was a constant source of enjoyment and education while we lived at Montgomery Drive.

High water brought all kinds of aquatic birds, including great blue herons. On one occasion, four woodstorks stopped to feed for a time. Changes occurred constantly, in dry seasons and in wet seasons, in winter and in summer. Our enjoyment was never ending, our education never complete.

But the pond had a tragic ending. After we left it was filled. All the wild things that lived in it—fish, frogs and aquatic insects—were

snuffed out. The ducks, herons, egrets, kingfishers, grackles, kingbirds and other winged creatures had to find another sanctuary.

## Our Companions, The Wildlife

I remember vividly how impressed the three of us were—Evelyn, Karl, and myself—the first time we walked through our property on Montgomery Drive. But I also remember our disappointment over the apparent absence of wildlife. We did see a brilliant cardinal for an instant before it flitted into the palmettos and disappeared. We did not see another living thing of the feathered, furry or slithering kind that day. The woods were silent except for a few buzzing insects and the rasping of one or two cicadas. Not until we began living there did we realize the woods contained several kinds of birds, quail, screech owls, woodpeckers, mockingbirds, and cardinals—as well as wildlife—foxes, possums, skunks, rabbits, snakes, land turtles, and even a bobcat that left prints of its broad pads in the soft earth of the swale as it passed through on its nightly prowls. Knowing nothing of survey lines, they came and went in the extensive wilderness of which our woods were merely a part. But they were extremely shy.

The snakes seemed shyest of all. I don't recall that we saw a snake during the many times we walked through the woods before building our house. But seeing no snakes failed to relieve us of the fear that a diamondback rattler might be lurking under the palmettos, so we stepped carefully during our walks. I was even more fearful after a South Miami policeman told me he had seen a six-foot rattler while farming the swale during the Second World War. On a warm day in late fall following a cool spell, he walked up on the rattlesnake stretched out between two tomato rows, sunning itself.

"I went to my car to get my service revolver," said the policeman, "but by the time I returned the snake had crawled into the palmettos."

Although I avoided repeating the story to Evelyn or Karl, I tried to impress on them the danger lurking in the palmetto-covered woods. Whenever I walked through the woods myself, I recalled the policeman's story and goosepimples raised the shirt from my shoulders. We encountered no rattler, however, until we had lived on the place for a



couple of years. Evelyn was alone one day, doing laundry. As she went to the clotheslines she almost stepped on a four-foot diamondback. She dropped the basket and ran to get a neighbor. The neighbor was not that close and had trouble finding ammunition for his rifle. By the time they returned, the snake had disappeared. A few days later, a rattler of the same size was killed on a nearby street by an automobile. We did not see another rattler until 1955, when Karl and I encountered one, slightly less than five feet long, sunning on the edge of the swale near a large clump of palmettos. We killed this one. A few years later, I saw the broad, sinuous trail left by a large rattler that had crossed the swale; but none of us ever saw another diamondback on the place or any signs of one. The largest rattlesnake I saw was hit by an automobile on nearby Red Road in the late 1950s. A motorist stopped, finished killing the snake and took it with him for the skin. The snake measured 6 1/2 feet long.

We turned our place over to the wild things, which we encouraged to remain wild. While welcoming the wood ducks, we never sought to become friendly with them, thinking that, if we did, we might be doing them a disservice by inducing them to be unwary of mankind, their worst enemy. We did occasionally feed a gray fox that had a den in the palmettos. For a time, we maintained a bird feeder; but we created an unnatural situation. Scores of raucous bluejays and as many as three dozen migratory Carolina doves waited at the feeder at handout time in the fall. Desirable birds were discouraged by the aggressive jays and doves. A month after we stopped putting out feed, the bird population was back to normal. Through this experience, we discovered that we preferred things closer to nature's own balance. Late in the day, as dusk approached, cardinals came out of the scrub to feed in the lawn. A pair of flickers often searched for insects about the bases of pines. Mockingbirds spreaded their white-marked wings to scare insects from the grass. And in the fall, these birds were joined by towhees and catbirds, sometimes by thrushes.

Over the years the wildlife gave us much enjoyment. But there were times when nature could be trying. One morning, we heard an animal crying in distress. Evelyn hurried outside to discover that a large coachwhip snake had caught a small rabbit. Afraid to enter the palmettos from where the cries came, she had to watch in utter helplessness while the snake wrapped itself about the rabbit in a tightening, deadly embrace. This was nature's way, she told herself.

Who was she to interfere? We saw the snake several times afterward, slithering across the lawn as it held its head six inches above the grass. With a long, slender, brown body, black neck and head, the coachwhip was a formidable-looking reptile, harmless to humans if not to rabbits. Like many of the other snakes, it lived mainly on the fecund woods rat. Eventually the proud coachwhip disappeared.

When we first moved to Montgomery Drive we seldom saw a gray squirrel. We might see one or two in the late summer, fattening themselves on pine mast, the winged seed that showered from opening pine cones. In time, a pair of squirrels took up residence with us, and eventually several lived on the place. They ate the fruit before it ripened—the lychees, mangos, avocados and macadamia nuts. They chewed up the green pine cones in search of maturing mast. They ate mushrooms from the lawn and from dead trees. They even ate the flowers. I began to wonder if there was anything in the vegetable kingdom a squirrel wouldn't eat if he could get his teeth into it.

During our early years at Montgomery Drive, the pine woods was a quiet and protected place for foxes to live. The hunting of foxes in the neighborhood, once popular, had ceased. A fox could live in peace, without molestation by dogs or humans.

For several years a gray fox lived on the place. We caught glimpses of him from time to time, especially early in the evening as he loped across the lawn on his way to his nightly prowls. On rare occasions we saw him with a female, a smaller, sleek vixen; and on one occasion we caught a fleeting glimpse of their frisky young as they scampered through the shadows.

Then came the rapid settlement of the neighborhood. New people moved in with their dogs. The animals ran loose, contrary to county law, and county authorities made no effort to enforce the law. The nightly chase of the fox brought up a question in my mind: What rights does a wild animal have? In time the fox began to show the effects of the nightly chase. He became poor and bedraggled. One day a neighbor called to report that the fox was down in his yard and apparently couldn't get up. We took food and water and set them as close as we dared. Next morning the fox was dead.

I have said that when we moved to Montgomery Drive we saw few birds in the pinewoods. One can only surmise that food was scarce. Even in the fall when the pine mast began spinning earthward from the opening pine cones, we had few additional birds. The winged seed fell among the palmettos or among the thick layer of pine saw on the ground,

and the birds had trouble recovering it. Over the years, however, the bird population increased greatly due no doubt to the changes we imposed on the five acres. We opened vistas through the palmettos, planted trees and shrubbery about the perimeter, raked the pine straw from the lawn. Meanwhile countless kinds of weeds invaded the centipede grass, including creeping beggarweed. We did nothing to control them except mow; and these little weeds not only produced seed but were hosts to insects attractive to birds. Eventually we had all the ordinary birds of suburbia. During the migratory periods of fall and spring, our place was host to flocks of hungry birds. Among the first of the migratory birds were the doves that came in late summer and early fall to feed upon the pine mast. At times a hundred or two hundred Carolina doves could be seen on the lawn. After the pine mast was gone the doves departed, many of them heading on south toward the Florida Keys.

A great many of the migratory birds, after gorging themselves in South Florida, fly on south to spend the winter in Cuba, the West Indies or as far as Venezuela and Brazil. But the Carolina doves go no farther than the lower Florida Keys, where they turn around and head back north.

Robins came, too, but mainly during unusually cool winters. They traveled in large flocks and fed on the red fruit of the Brazilian pepper tree and any other small fruit they could swallow. A flock of several hundred robins can clean a place of small fruit in a single afternoon, ignoring the distressing complaints of local birds as they fly from tree to tree, bush to bush, bending the branches under the weight of their numbers. I've seen as many as 500 robins gathered in the swale about the pond, taking turns to drink their fill, rest awhile and drink again. I've heard reports of robins getting giddy from eating the fermented fruit of the Brazilian pepper tree, and I wouldn't challenge this observation, although I personally have never seen a tipsy robin. When traveling in winter flocks, however, the robin is a much different creature from the fairly tame bird northerners see searching for insects in lawns. In the South the robin may seem a little giddy, but no more so after eating pepper tree fruit than in Crowder where, as a boy, I watched great flocks of the red-breasted birds descend upon our fields in the fall. We were not averse to eating robin; and, as I recall, the dark meat wasn't bad. So large were the flocks that a single shotgun shell loaded with number seven shot would bring down a dozen or more birds. From all reports, the enormous flocks I remember as a boy no longer come south in the

fall. The robin, mainly an insect feeder in its summer habitat, is highly susceptible to insecticides applied to lawns. As a newspaper reporter, I was once called out to see more than 100 dead robins on and about a lawn that the day before had been sprayed with a powerful insecticide. DDT was particularly fatal to the robin because the insecticide was stored in the bird's flesh.

While we had screech owls when we moved into the pine woods, they increased in number over the years, probably because of the increase in the food supply. We would see them late in the day, after the other birds had gone to roost, feeding on night insects. We had both the yellow-bellied sapsucker and the red-bellied woodpecker, and occasionally the larger pileated woodpecker. Several flickers lived on the property. One of our most colorful birds was the spotted-breasted oriole, which we called Guatemala oriole. Much larger than the Baltimore oriole, this yellow and black bird was at first believed to be an annual visitor from Central America. It established itself in Coconut Grove and eventually spread through the county.

Before the pine woods about us were developed we often saw covies of quail feeding through the lawn. But by the late 1960s the quail had virtually disappeared. Sometimes in the fall, seeing so many game birds about, I would get a little hungry for the white breast of quail and the dark breast of dove. How easy it would have been to trap these birds, as I once did in Crowder. I could not have brought myself to catch, kill and eat these birds even had the practice been legal. But what if one of them should kill itself accidentally, by flying into the plate glass of the breezeway as some other birds had done? Would I eat the hapless bird? Early one morning a quail did fly into the plate glass with an enormous thud. I hastened to the breezeway to see the bird fluttering on the concrete stoop. What an unexpected breakfast, I thought as I went outside to pick up the brown feathery form, now limp and lifeless. But the bird, a male, was poor with little meat on its breast. The quail may have been chased into the glass by another male, because the fatal thud occurred during the mating season. These birds, having traveled in friendly conveyances through fall and winter, begin pairing off in the spring. Where there are more males than females, fights are sure to occur, sometimes to the death of one or more birds. Because it was the mating season probably explained why the quail that flew into the glass was so poor. More interested in fighting and love-making than in eating, he had been reduced to skin, bone and feathers. And I did not want to eat any fought-out, loved-out quail. I fed the poor quail's remains to the fox.

It was different when a large dove flew into the glass. The time was September and the dove was fat from gorging itself on pine mast. I was sitting before my typewriter on the breezeway when the bird hit the glass, making a sound like that of a football thrown by Bob Griese. I went outside, picked up the dead dove and turned it over in my hands. What a fat bird, I thought. To waste a wonderful gamebird like this, I thought, would be a shame, as well as being highly disrespectful to a species that provided so much pleasure during my boyhood. So, not five minutes after the dove thumped into the glass, I had it skinned and the thick, meaty breast laid open, ready for the frying pan.

Evelyn prepared the dove for my supper; she would eat none herself. How delicious! Many times afterward I found myself drooling while watching the plump doves as they picked up pine mast. Were I still a farm boy back in Crowder I certainly would have feasted on breast of dove from time to time. But, alas, I had become citified. My instincts had been tempered by civilization, my hunting nature sublimated. The doves knew this. They had no fear of me.

## The Weather

Poets have written countless lines extolling the trilling of song-birds, though so far as I know the mewings of the catbird have failed to inspire a single lilting phrase. But at Montgomery Drive there was no music sweeter than the mewings of the first catbird in the fall. We needed no calendar to tell us that the long, hot months of summer were behind us, while before us were the prospects for several months of mild, pleasant weather.

For practical purposes, I like to divide South Florida's seasons into two—summer and winter—rather than into four. Summer I think of as beginning May 1 and lasting until October 31, and winter from November 1 to April 30. South Florida's wet season coincides with its long humid summer. This area receives about 50 inches of rain a year, most of it during these months. November, the first of the cool months, usually brings dry weather following the year's wettest two months, September and October. These months, when South Florida usually receives two-fifths of its annual rainfall—some 20 inches—are of

utmost importance. The water table is raised to its highest level of the year and the underground fresh water reservoir, upon which South Florida is dependent during the long dry season ahead, is recharged. There are, however, exceptional years when rainfall may be below or above average. When September and October rainfall is below normal, the area's fresh water supply may become dangerously low before the beginning of the next rainy season, resulting in curtailing water use for lawn sprinkling and other presumed essential but non-critical demands. On the other hand, excessively heavy rainfall may occur during normally dry months. We have years when spring rainfall raises the water so high in the Everglades and in Big Cypress Swamp that alligator nests are drowned. Aquatic life is so greatly diluted that wading birds are unable to gather enough food for their young, resulting in one of nature's bitter tragedies when entire rookeries are abandoned and thousands of helpless fledglings are left to die.

Since we made our garden in October toward the end of the rainy season, plants had a good chance to become well established in the moist soil before the beginning of the cool dry season. It was a nearly perfect situation. With the beginning of cool weather, it was a pleasant time of the year to make a garden, being a little like spring in the North.

During our early years at Montgomery Drive, we were without air-conditioning. In summer we depended on fans for cooling when the southeast breeze failed us. Mosquitos began coming in late May or early June; and at times their numbers were so great that the hum outside our windows was enough to disturb our sleep. Whenever you opened a door, day or night, there was always a swarm waiting to attack you. Once outside, you faced the problem of getting back into the house without the aggressive biters accompanying you inside. During the mosquito plagues working outside was virtually impossible. I am certain that the development of South Dade was delayed by the prevalence of so many mosquitoes. Living became more comfortable after enough people moved into South Dade to have the political clout to bring the spray planes over and spread inland when the mosquitoes swarmed out of the coastal marshes.

The sandflies abounded in such fantastic numbers in the 1950s that it was virtually impossible to work outdoors either early morning or late in the day. These tiny pests got into our hair, eyes, ears. Many were small enough to penetrate the screens during those years before we could save enough money to install air-conditioning. We sprayed the screens with oil-based insecticides, but a few pests still managed to find

their way through. We were troubled less after the screen mesh became partially filled with dust and lint. After a time, Evelyn could tolerate the dirty screens no longer, and she would remove the screen and wash them. For the next few weeks, the sandflies would be almost intolerable. To sleep, we covered ourselves with sheets and kept a fan blowing over us. But the sandflies were not the only insects that penetrated the screens. A variety of tiny insects attracted by the night lights found their way in, making a nuisance of themselves whenever we sat near a light to read or to work. Looking back, I am inclined to think that air-conditioning gave us almost as much comfort in keeping the insects out as it did in cooling us.

With the installation of air-conditioning, we replaced the wire screening and aluminum shutters of the breezeway with plate glass doors and sliding screen panels. Although the glass ended the original function of the breezeway, we retained the name because many times of year we opened the glass doors to let the southeast breeze flow through. While we missed the outdoor sounds when the glass doors were closed—birds, frogs, insects, sometimes the bark of a fox—we were compensated by hearing the automobile traffic less. Part of the year, though, when the weather was cool enough, to cut off the air-conditioning, we opened the glass doors.

Before we could enjoy the cool season—the best time of the year in South Florida—we had to survive the hurricane season. This begins in June and lasts until November.

Three storms of hurricane force hit us while we lived at Montgomery Drive—Donna in 1960, Cleo in 1964 and Betsy in 1965. These storms did minor damage. The swale flooded, and the place was a mess of littered pine branches. A few trees were wrecked; but in most instances, they were reclaimed by pruning.

Nature takes a remarkable turn after a hurricane. Trees and shrubs that have been denuded of foliage and branches quickly burst out in bright new growth like springtime. Veterans of the 1926 hurricane remembered the spectacular recovery of the trees. Some credited the display to the hand of a beneficent providence. Everyone talked about the phenomenon—how Miami had spring in October and November. That quick recovery of the trees boosted the spirits of those who had lost heavily in the storm. It may have induced many to stay in Miami who otherwise might have departed. We went through such post-hurricane “springs” at Montgomery Drive. After Betsy hit in 1965, I wrote in *The Miami Herald*:

“Everything is coming back, including a denuded carambola tree that was heavily laden with yellow fruit when the storm hit. Every fruit was blown to the ground; but now I notice bright purple flowers appearing, hidden among the new foliage. So we’ll have star-shaped carambola fruit for Christmas, something we never had before.”

Only the rich enjoyed central air-conditioning in their homes when we built in 1951. The equipment was not only expensive but bulky, and generally restricted to commercial buildings. Nor were houses insulated as was the practice after the environmental revolution of the 1960s and the staggering rise in the cost of heating and cooling in the 1970s. Under the guidance of Al Parker, we had used all the tricks available to cool our house. We faced the house southeast to get the prevailing breeze, installed numerous windows to insure a free passage of air and covered the roof with white gravel to reflect the sun’s rays. We had wide eaves to protect the windows from the sun during the middle of the day. Still we suffered from the heat throughout the long summers, especially during the evenings when the air was still and the heat of the day, captured by the cathedral ceiling, pressed upon us. Paddle fans, having gone out of style, were unavailable and would have merely stirred up the hot air. Moreover the white gravel on our roof soon became covered with mold and lost its reflective quality. The result was a very hot roof that not only admitted the heat but radiated it upon our heads. By the middle of the 1950s, the room air-conditioner was becoming popular. We installed a cooling unit in our bedroom in 1956. Although large and cumbersome compared with later units, it gave us unbelievable comfort.

By 1959 the cost of air-conditioning equipment had come down enough for us to think about having a unit installed to cool our living room and breezeway. The salesman who came out immediately discouraged us. “An air-conditioner isn’t going to work unless you insulate your roof,” he said after walking through the living room as the heat from the cathedral ceiling radiated upon his head. “And if you want to air-condition the breezeway you not only must insulate the roof but have the aluminum jalousies replaced with sliding glass doors—and I recommend tinted glass. Tinted glass will keep out about forty percent of the heat.”

“How would we insulate the roof?” I asked, dubiously.

“Tear off the present roof, lay down three inches of insulation, and put on a new roof over that,” he replied.

“That would cost more than the air-conditioning,” I said.



“Yes, I know,” he remarked, nonchalantly.

Although he was in our house no longer than an hour, he figured out exactly what we would have to do to prepare for the air-conditioning installation. He gave us a firm price for the equipment, ducting and work for which he would be responsible, down to dollars and cents. The air-conditioner, a Westinghouse unit, would be installed on an outside wall, with cool air or warm air fed through a duct that ran through a soffit on the wall between the breezeway and the living room. The covering of this duct would be my responsibility. Returning air would enter a vent that would be covered by a screen he assured us would not be objectionable. Ducts would open into the living room and into the breezeway. I couldn't believe that a duct shooting air from one end of a thirty-six-foot living room would carry all the way to the other end.

“It will, I promise you,” he replied, “and, if you keep your kitchen door open, some of the coolness—or heat if its winter—will get into the kitchen.”

We had saved a little money. We had sold some property near Homestead, had paid off the loan on our house and had some funds left. I had unexpectedly made a little money off a book, *Florida Gardening Month by Month*, that the University of Miami Press had published in 1957. So I called a contractor whom I knew, Carl Stevens. He came out and I repeated what the air-conditioning salesman had told me. I was relieved when Stevens agreed with everything the salesman said. Yes, he would do all the work, except the roofing, and that he would subcontract. He would see that everything was done properly. When he gave us a price, it was so surprisingly low that I asked how much it would cost to build a 12X20 storage house. We went ahead with everything. They were certainly right about the roof: insulating it made a world of difference.

Living through the summer during the years before air-conditioning, with the humid heat, mosquitoes and threats of hurricanes, made sweeter the coming of the cool, dry season. The sun is far to the south in November and shadows point northwest in the morning and northeast in the afternoon. November usually is a delightful month, with cool nights and pleasant days full of sunshine. The vegetable garden, which we began planting in the swale in October, grew rapidly and generated comforting thoughts of harvest days ahead. And there were always a few rows of annual flowers—marigolds, zinnias, calendulas—that promised to brighten the interior of our house. It was pleasant to work in a cool and dry atmosphere. We felt glad to be alive, watching the

tomatoes, beans, peppers, sweetcorn and cabbage grow and to think we were making a contribution to the life thriving in the orderly rows of the garden.

With the advent of cool weather and short days, the lawn grass and the tropical plants slowed down their growth and required less attention. The centipede grass needed little or no mowing all winter; and if I started the mower, it was to cut weeds that thrived during the cool season. Although there may have been little rain during the winter months, the ground—especially the lower swale—remained moist for some time after the October rains. It was not until February and March when the desiccating wind began blowing day and night that the lawn and tropical plants suffered severely from lack of moisture. Plant mites and scale insects took advantage of the dry weather to multiply, and their voracious feeding helped to weaken ornamentals and fruit trees.

Some tropical fruits, particularly the mango, require a period of dry weather to bloom and bear fruit. In tropical countries where the rainfall is heavy every month, the mango may make a large tree but produce no fruit. Citrus also requires a dry season and cool weather to produce high-quality sweet fruit with characteristic acid flavor. Too much rainfall and high temperature may cause oranges and grapefruit to be low in sugar and acid and consequently have a flat, unsatisfactory flavor. The banana, on the other hand, thrives where it has an abundance of moisture and high temperature all year.

Promoters of Florida have referred to Dade County as frost-free. Yet one winter while we lived on Biscayne Drive, near Homestead, we had seven frosts. We spent so much time covering plants to protect them that we became discouraged. Then one day a bone-chilling wind began blowing out of the northwest, the harbinger of a predicted hard freeze. We harvested all the vegetables we possibly could and cut armfuls of flowers. As sunset approached, Karl and I covered over 200 small mango and avocado trees with bean hampers. Next morning the garden was white with frost, and an inch-deep pan of water outside was frozen solid. The sun rose warmly in a clear blue sky, but the damage had been done. Our garden wilted then turned black. For several days the interior of our cottage was colorful, with vases, pots and fruit jars filled with marigolds, zinnias and calendulas. They were such painful reminders of what we had lost that it was difficult to enjoy them.

Although we seldom had frost at Montgomery Drive, and one freeze while we lived there, the thermometer did drop occasionally to the low 50s and even mid-40s. Plants that require strictly tropical

conditions may suffer from these temperatures, mainly from the dry atmosphere accompanying the cold. Even we were cold. We always kept a plentiful supply of firewood on hand—wood that cost us nothing except for the labor of cutting it.

Over the years that I wrote a column for *The Herald*, I talked several times about our fireplace. These columns never failed to bring letters of appreciation from persons who had grown up in homes with fireplaces. Many older readers found the columns nostalgic, reviving bitter-sweet memories of evenings long past—sitting before a fireplace with other members of their families who since had become scattered about the world or were no longer living. The responses to those columns gave me great satisfaction because I knew the letters were written in sincere appreciation for remembered pleasure. As I grew older I could better understand such nostalgia, because when Evelyn and I sat before a fire in the evenings I sometimes found myself recalling when our son was home, particularly during those years; when he returned from college or medical school to spend Christmas with us.

I have wondered if a fireplace has some mysterious attraction barely explained by the physical qualities of the blaze. The attraction must go deep into the unconscious, into the dark, fathomless regions of the mind. Both Evelyn and I grew up in homes that depended on fireplaces for heat in the winter; and both of us remember the comfort or “roasting” before a fire after coming in from the cold outdoors.

Poets claim man must return to his primeval surroundings from time to time in order to remain sane; that he must return to the deep woods and streams to regain his balance so he can cope with concrete-bound civilization. I'm not sure but I do know it helps to sit before a fireplace and ponder the depth of the flames, the red embers, the flickering shadows, the curling smoke. You can never return to anything more primitive whether a campfire or a fireplace. When I sat before our fireplace at Montgomery Drive, warm, drowsy and comfortable on a cool evening, I was aware that generations of individuals were growing up who never sat before a hearth and never would in all their lives.

## Art and Artists in Our Lives

Time magazine called him a “Renaissance virtuoso”—artist, landscape architect, jewelry designer, sculptor, ceramics and tile glazer, decorator, plant collector, traveler, intellectual, man of the world. We knew Roberto Burle Marx, a Brazilian, who frequently stopped in Miami on his way between Rio de Janeiro and some point in the United States at the beginning or end of one of his lecture tours. Marx’s slide-lectures highlighted the colorful gardens he had made famous in Europe and America. Plant collecting was to Marx a hobby as well as a business. He and Bob Wilson could talk all evening about rare tropical plants without tiring or exhausting their enormous fund of knowledge. It was a coincidence that both had philodendrons named in their honor—*Philodendron wilsoni* and *Philodendron burle-marx*.

After the Wilsons sold their nursery and moved to Costa Rica, Marx, who loathed the loneliness of hotels, often stayed with us during his Miami stop-overs. He was comfortable at Montgomery Drive. The atmosphere pleased him; he liked the food Evelyn served; we usually had a recording or two that were new to him, and, furthermore, one of us would drive him to the airport. On one visit we had just acquired an album by the great Brazilian pianist, Guiomar Novaes. Upon seeing a photograph of her on the cover, Marx was touched.

“She was a close friend of my mother’s,” he said. “How many times was she a guest in our house. After dinner she would sit at our piano and play. Hearing her was one of the unforgettable experiences of my early life.”

I remember vividly Roberto’s first visit to Montgomery Drive. I was then director of the Fairchild Garden and had taken him on a tour of the botanical garden before bringing him home for lunch. Our driveway, upon leaving Montgomery Drive, threaded through a jungle of jumbee trees, then opened upon an expanse of lawn where the eyes were carried to the pond on the right. After skirting the pond, the driveway turned abruptly left, rising gently on higher ground. It wound through large, rounded clumps of saw palmettos as it approached the house. When we entered the palmettos, Marx exploded:

“Ola! Stop the car!”

I braked to a quick stop. By that time Marx had opened the door

and was out, heading for the palmettos.

“How interesting!” he exclaimed as he looked about. It took me a moment to realize what Marx was raving about. Never before had I seen anyone get excited over saw palmettos, the first plant most people remove when preparing a site for building a home. After lunch we collected seeds that Marx took with him, and he later reported they had germinated. Presumably Florida’s native saw palmettos are now growing in Brazil.

Over the years, I did a number of articles and columns about Roberto Burle Marx, mainly as a landscape designer. He began his professional life as an artist, under the influence of the Impressionists and Abstractionists before developing his own way of looking at the world. It may have been his interest in plants that sent Marx to nature in search of design. Certainly nothing is more varied or challenging to understand and appreciate than many of the designs in nature—the multiple trunks of the banyan, the curving roots of the red mangrove, large leaves of the aroids such as the monstera, the sinuous lianes of the Brazilian jungle or the buttressed trunks of the giant ceibas. The artist in Marx was sensitive to every opportunity, as his drawings and paintings reveal. Marx studied natural lines as he flew over marshes and deltas where streams made their own designs as they wound tortuously to the sea. He sensed that the lines created by nature were immensely different and a great deal more interesting than anything he had seen in abstract and stylized paintings by artists under whose influence he had worked. Thus was Marx led to the use of nature’s “free-flowing” line, which was to become a characteristic of his landscape design, as well as his paintings.

“Satisfactory free-flowing lines are hard to contrive,” he said in an interview in 1957 while staying with us. “Unless you have studied them in nature, such lines may look extremely artificial when you contrive them altogether out of your imagination.”

Marx also was influenced by the patterns of towns and farms over which he flew, and these patterns found their way into his art as abstractions. A painting of his that we own shows the result of such influence. After studying it for a year, I concluded that its rectangular patterns represented a village surrounded by farms, while Evelyn decided it was the center of a large community, probably a small city. Did Marx have something else in mind? You can see in the painting whatever you have an inclination to see.

That Marx influenced our lives there can be no doubt. He extended our vision and gave us new insights. It was a treat to walk over the grounds at Montgomery Drive with him, sometimes in silence, again listening to his comment—about the plants, about nature, perhaps about the desirability of preserving as much of the wilderness as possible. He was concerned about what he called the wanton destruction of Brazil's forests without any effort to preserve endangered species. He looked upon the Fairchild Tropical Garden as an outstanding example of landscape art, the plantings, vistas and open spaces held together by superior design. He liked the way the families, genera and species of plants were segregated botanically, yet without the loss of garden design. This was the effort of William Lyman Phillips, the landscape architect. Just before leaving the Garden as director, I managed to get Marx and Phillips together for a stroll through the botanical garden. It was a disappointing experience. If these two men could have had time to get better acquainted, they would have had a great deal to talk about. To throw them together as I did was a mistake. Phillips, in his late seventies, had but a superficial acquaintance with Burle Marx, while the artist was at a loss to know how to convey his feelings to the older man who he greatly respected.

In June 1973, two months before my retirement, I wrote my last piece about Marx. As had happened so many times in the past, he had popped in without notice. Although he was to be in Miami only one day, leaving the next morning for Brazil, he wanted to visit the Fairchild Garden, Montgomery Foundation, plant nurseries, private gardens and a clothing store downtown "to buy some things for my people in Brazil."

"Marx," I wrote after his departure, "is one of those individuals who affect the people about them with a rare vitality. It matters not whether he is talking about something that pleases or displeases him, you are caught up in the subject matter and made keenly aware of the world as his artistic rock.

"I have known Marx since the 1950s, when his hair was jet black. Today he is a white-haired, distinguished sixty-three, riding the crest of a brilliant career and worldwide adoration that might incline many to assume the aura of a god. But not Marx. If he has changed I can't see it. Nor has age robbed him of any energy."

After a day long tour of gardens and nurseries, including Dr. Alex Alexander's rare foliage plant collection on South Miami Avenue, he still had energy to walk again through our grounds. We stopped at a large shrub, an *ardisia*.

"I don't have this one," he said, finding a cluster of ripe fruit. "What ardisia is this?"

It was *Ardisia revoluta*, the seeds of which I had collected several years before in Honduras.

"Do you mind if I take some seeds?" he asked.

Well, of course not.

"It was getting late when we finished the day long 'plant watching' tour," I wrote. "By now he had boxes of plants and suitcases stuffed with seeds and orchids. Two cars were needed to get him and his luggage to the airport."

Although an Egyptian folding table stand we own can hardly be classified as a work of art, it is a worthy piece of craft. The stand was given to Evelyn by Marian Fairchild one day while she was visiting the Kampong. Mrs. Fairchild was getting together some things she intended to give to the Ramble, and the folding stand, which had come unglued, was among them. But Marian was having second thoughts about parting with the stand.

"I don't know what to do with it," she told Evelyn. "My mother bought it in Egypt while on her honeymoon. But it's falling apart and wouldn't bring a dollar at the Ramble. I could give it to one of my children, but I doubt any of them would want to fix it. Evelyn, why don't you take it home and see if you can glue it back together? There was a copper tray that came with it, but that disappeared long ago. I'm sure you can find another tray that fits just as well."

Evelyn took the stand home, and, after gluing it back together, removed what was left of the flaking black paint, then repainted and polished until it must have been very much like the original. In the meantime she found in a gift shop a heavy round tray of beaten copper made by an Egyptian craftsman. The tray stand occupied a conspicuous place in our living room at Montgomery Drive.

Irma Bachelor was a retired physical education instructor from New Jersey, and, when we met her, was the wife of Gordon Bachelor. Some years before she had taken up art as a hobby, and although she never ranked herself among the professionals, she was superior to many, her oil and watercolor paintings as well as her woodcarving. She also taught painting and won a reputation as an excellent teacher.

Irma got Evelyn interested in testing her own talents in art, first in painting and then in woodcarving. It proved to be a turning point in Evelyn's life. Painting seemed to interest her little at the time, but she took to carving "like a duck takes to water." The first thing she ever

attempted, a frog, was worth keeping, and so far as I know she never turned out anything she had to throw away because of a lack of quality. Unfortunately, arthritis in her hands cut short her career as a wood-carver. It was useless to tell her that she should be content to do a little work each day, for once she got started on anything that interested her she became so engrossed she would work for hours without stopping. With Karl away in medical school and with me working long hours on two jobs, she had many days by herself. She often would chip away all day with mallet and chisel. Finally an orthopedic surgeon ordered her to put away her carving tools and touch them no more.

What do you do when your mallet and chisel are taken away from you? Evelyn turned to sculpturing in plaster of Paris. One of her teachers was Bill Stetzer who encouraged his students to be original. Original? That can head you off in any direction. Evelyn turned out some things that weren't bad. One was a fat duck that, to Evelyn's surprise, got lots of admirers. Burglars took it, which, I suppose, one should consider a compliment, especially when more valuable things were passed up. There were problems with arthritis in sculpturing, too, so Evelyn turned to ceramics. Within a couple of years she had her prize winning works displayed about the house. By this time the person who had started it all, Irma Bachelor, was no longer living. A heart attack had taken her out. Unfortunately, we have only a couple of Irma's paintings, and they are small, little more than sketches. We are sorry we failed to collect more, especially when we see excellent paintings of hers hanging in friend's houses.

Lee Adams was a student at Rollins College when discovered by Dr. George H. Opdyke of Winter Park. Struck by Adam's ability in painting fruits and flowers, and certain he had found a genius, Opdyke introduced the artist to David Fairchild. The enthused plantsman, always on the lookout for an "Audubon of the plant world," invited Adams to spend a few weeks at the Kampong to paint the tropical fruits. Several days after Adams had settled in at the Kampong, Fairchild called me at The Herald.

"I want you to come out and write up a promising young artist," he said in his customary commanding way. "He's a rare discovery. He's going to be a painter of plants as Audubon was a painter of birds."

"A botanical artist?" I ventured.

"No! stormed Fairchild. "I said nothing about a botanical artist who draws dead plants. This a painter of living plants—and his paintings are alive. Come out and you'll see. I've never seen another artist as good as he is."



I drove out to the Kampong where Fairchild took me to a cottage that had been transformed into a studio, and here was the artist at work on an elephant-sized watercolor of a green branch of a tropical *Diospyros* species from which hung several apple sized fruits covered with a rust-colored, velvet like fuzz. Looking at the fruit, at the painting, and then at the artist who was in his early twenties, I wondered how anyone so young could possibly be good enough to reproduce in watercolor—opaque watercolor that is unforgiving of error—this fantastically difficult fruit that Fairchild had brought back from one of his plant exploring trips to the Far East. Skillfully brushing lighter hues over darker colors, the artist had produced an effect that gave the fruits as well as leaves and stems a kind of transparency, so that you had the impression of being able to see beneath the surface. And so weightily did the fruit appear to hang from the branch that you might have reached out and picked one. In recording the branch and the fruit on paper, which was mounted tautly on stretchers of the type used for mounting canvas, the artist had not copied; he had used the living specimen only as a guide to create his own composition as well as his own interpretation of the surfaces of stems, leaves, and fruit. Although the branch depicted could not have been misidentified as a *Diospyros*, a relative of the persimmon, it possessed a quality that was lacking in nature's product. It was an unforgettable moment as I gazed upon the artist's work for the first time.

Such was my introduction to Lee Adams, whose career I was to be privileged to follow for the rest of his short life.

In an interview, I learned that Lee had been such a sickly child that he was unable to attend public school or to mix with other children in rough-and-tumble games. Much of his early education he got with the help of a tutor. In order to occupy his spare time in those days before television, he took up drawing and painting. His subjects were the things around him—fruits, flowers, animals, birds. As he grew older his health improved enough that he could attend the University of North Carolina and later Rollins College. Although he studied biology and botany, his major interest was art. Knowing he would have to make a living, he was unsure as yet whether he would be able to continue his art after leaving college. Invited to the Kampong, Adams found himself in an altogether new kind of world—a world of strange, interesting, and spectacular plants that Fairchild had collected from round the world. By the time he was ready to leave Adams was sure that no other career than art would ever interest him.

As a result of Fairchild's encouragement, Lee Adams set out to

paint a large collection of tropical fruit pictures, which the aging plantsman hoped to see published in a large volume similar to Audubon's *Birds of America*. To hasten the project—for Fairchild hoped to write the picture captions—he collected and sent to Adams boxes of tropical fruits, along with the branches from which the fruits hung. But this proved unsatisfactory. A perfectionist, Adams wanted to see the fruit where it grew. Moreover, he wanted fresh specimens. But it was a long distance from Jacksonville, his home, to Miami, and in the meantime the artist had to make a living. And making a living was even more of a concern after Adams married Mimi Stockton, also of Jacksonville. Then, in 1954, Fairchild died, and for Lee Adams a major inspiration was gone. Forced to paint what would sell, Adams had to abandon his preoccupation with tropical fruits, and so Fairchild's dream of an elephant-sized book in the style of Audubon vanished.

Adam's "meat and potato art," as he called it, was a decorative combination of beautiful birds and flowers that he did in a stylized way that made a big hit with upper middle class housewives who thought these pictures added new grace to their elegant homes. Meanwhile the three Adams girls came along, first Marian (named for Marian Fairchild), then Camille, and Ann. They had to be raised and educated, further tying Lee to his studio doing the pictures that put meat and potatoes on the table. The result was a hiatus in his relations with South Florida. Traveling down to Miami to paint tropical fruits was a luxury he no longer could afford. Moreover, his clients wanted things they could identify; they were unacquainted with the tropical fruits. At that time Adams had not become widely known in South Florida.

Having remained close to Adams, I was well aware of his desire to get away from strictly decorative art. After becoming director of the Fairchild Tropical Garden in 1956, I wrote to Adams and asked if he would be interested in "painting the palms," as he onetime had painted the tropical fruits—provided we could find an angel to support the project. He replied with enthusiasm. The palms are a fascinating and colorful family of plants, and Adams was well acquainted with them, as a botanist as well as an artist. We had some correspondence. My idea was for him to do a painting of a palm in each of the fifteen or more groups in this large family of plants. Hopefully we would see them published in an elegant edition, with Dr. Harold E. Moore, Jr., palm authority of the Bailey Hortorium at Cornell University, writing the material to go with the plants.

Meanwhile I discussed the proposed project with Dr. Arthur

Montgomery, son of the Fairchild Garden's founder, and with Moore. Both were enthusiastic. Arthur agreed to pay for the paintings while Hal agreed to work with Lee in the selection of the palms to be included and in the method of presentation. The result was a fine collection of palm portraits that today hangs at the Fairchild Garden. Nell Jennings paid for the framing, which was done in New York under the supervision of Harriet Hansen, interior decorator. Our ultimate ambition, of having the collection published, was never realized. Although it's not too late to have that hope fulfilled, someone besides Hal must write the descriptions, for the botanist, like the artist, no longer lives.

As a result of his palm paintings, Adams began receiving numerous orders from Miami and Palm Beach. Adams found himself in a dilemma. He had charged \$350 a piece for the palm paintings, his going rate in Jacksonville. How much should he charge for the new orders he was receiving?

"Double your price," I suggested.

Lee Adams did double his price. He soon had more orders than he could have dreamed of getting. Moreover he was doing more of the kind of work he liked.

Some months after the last of the Fairchild Garden palm paintings was delivered, Lee and Mimi came to Miami to deliver several pictures to customers. Lee brought Evelyn and me an elephant-sized painting of a colorful *Ptychosperma* palm. I recognized it as the first painting in the palm series Adams had rejected because it did not come up to Hal Moore's botanical specifications. It was a beautiful and memorable gift; and as long as we lived at Montgomery Drive, it occupied a prominent place in our home.

By the late 1960s Lee Adams was approaching the pinnacle of success. He maintained a comfortable home on Avondale Avenue in Jacksonville and bought a house on St. Johns Avenue where he had his studio. Eventually he and Mimi decided to abandon Jacksonville and move to the old Adams home on the St. Johns River at Mandarin, where Lee was born. Building himself a fine studio, Lee found new energy and inspiration to work. The children were happy, too, for here they were free of the smog that in those days before the Environmental Protection Agency, often settled over Jacksonville, making the breathing of the sulfurous, stinking air an unpleasant experience.

On November 16, 1971, Lee and Mimi were returning to Mandarin from a party in Jacksonville when he suffered a heart attack. Slumping under the steering wheel, the weight of his body forced his

right foot heavily on the accelerator. The vehicle shot forward at giddy speed. Although Mimi—according to witnesses—sought to gain control of the wildly speeding, careening car, her efforts were futile, and the vehicle, leaving the pavement and bounding down the highway shoulder, crashed into a utility pole.

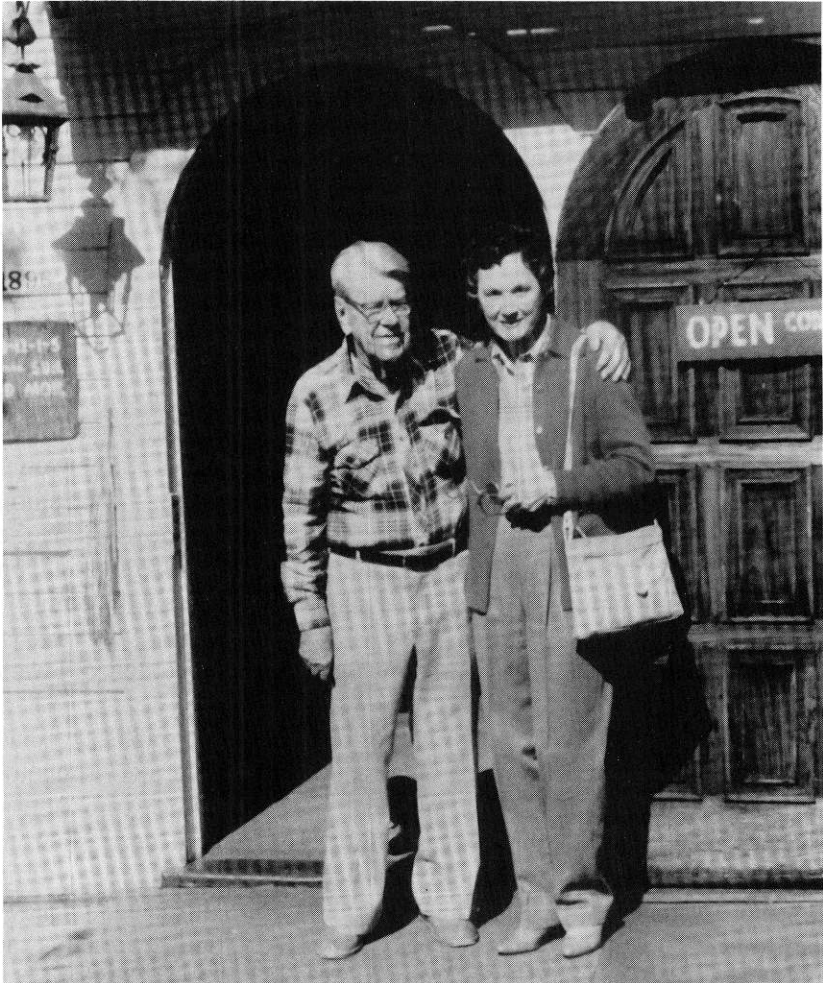
Mimi died instantly. Lee probably was already dead.

I met James F. Hutchinson through Beanie Backus in Fort Pierce. Jim was engaged in the study and the painting of Seminole Indians, and he and his wife Joan had spent several months living among the Cow Creeks at the Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation. The Hutchinsons at that time owned a unique cottage, of original design and workmanship, in a pine and palmetto setting at Port Salerno. Evelyn and I were captivated by the Hutchinsons; our liking for them was immediate and complete. One reason, perhaps, was because Jim was a brother of Beanie Backus' wife, Patty, whom we thought so much of. I did an account of the Hutchinsons' experiences with the Seminoles and of Jim's aims in recording artistically the character and life styles of a people who were rapidly changing under the onslaught of the white man's cultivation. The Hutchinsons not only became our friends; we bought land adjacent to theirs where we hoped eventually to build a weekend cottage. But human plans are subject to change. Jim did so well from the sale of his paintings that he and Joan could build a waterfront home on Indian River at Sewall's Point. Consequently they sold their cottage in the pines. We later sold our property for a good profit.

A.E. "Beanie" and Patty Backus also visited our Montgomery Drive place before she died in 1955. I had written several *Miami Herald* articles about Beanie's art, recognizing early his outstanding ability to paint Florida landscapes.

We have three paintings by Hutchinson and there is a story behind each. In the early 1950s, while in Gainesville, I called upon the anthropologist, Dr. John Goggin, University of Florida professor. I recently had been in the Bahamas where I had done several stories, which Goggin had read in *The Miami Herald*. He told me about a group of "Seminole-Negroes," most of them former slaves, who fled Florida after Spain ceded the peninsula to the United States in 1821 and settled at Red Bay, Andros Island.

"Their descendents live in Red Bay," said Goggin. "When you're in Andros you should interview them. The leader of the original group was Scipio Bowlegs, a legendary personality. He must have been quite a person."



**Evelyn Smiley with A.E. "Beanie" Backus at his Ft. Pierce studio.**

Goggin gave me what he had gleaned in a study of these people in 1946 and published in a journal of anthropology. But when I journeyed to Andros I learned that Red Bay, located on the island's west coast, could be reached only by water, and that it was quite a distance from Mastic Point, the nearest place that a boat could be rented. Lacking funds for the venture, I turned away from the story. But I did not forget, and some 20 years later when I was in Andros I discovered that a new road had just been built to Red Bay. Renting a car, I drove to the village, talked with the residents, and, with notes given me by Goggin—who since had died—I wrote my story.

To illustrate the story, I contacted Jim Hutchinson and asked him if he would do a portrait of Scipio Bowlegs, which would have to be drawn from his imagination, of course. Jim came up with a striking portrait of a black man in Seminole shirt, with a red kerchief bound about his head, and a single silver gorget hanging from his neck. This painting appeared as full page color illustration with my story in *The Herald's* magazine *Tropic*, and it was my good fortune to acquire the original.

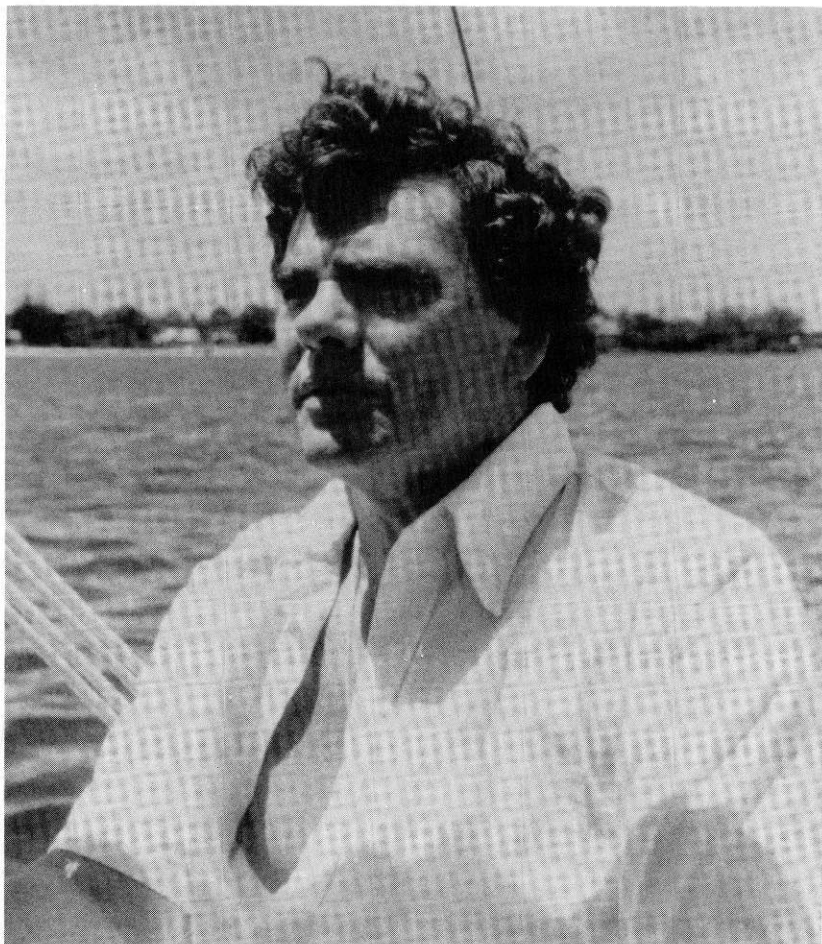
Admiring Jim Hutchinson's portraits, I wanted him to do one of Evelyn. After we agreed on a fee, the problem came up about whether we should drive up to Port Salerno for Evelyn to sit, or whether Jim should drive down to Miami. Neither way was possible at that time, so Jim made a suggestion. We would send him several photographs of Evelyn. From them he would paint a likeness of her. Then he would drive down to Montgomery Drive where she could sit for the finishing touches. Some weeks later the Hutchinsons drove down with the unfinished picture. Jim brought the painting into the house and set it on an easel. With him was his box of oil paints. When I saw the painting I said:

"Don't open the paint box. I don't want the picture touched. I want it just as it is."

In painting a likeness of Evelyn from the photographs, Jim had recorded a characteristic facial expression of my wife that no photograph had ever caught. How had the artist captured this expression—a particular look out of the eyes? Evidently he had done so from memory, although he was totally unaware of having done anything special to the picture. Had I let him, Jim Hutchinson would have improved the painting, from the standpoint of art, but I feared that the expression so important to me might be lost, and so I preferred to keep the painting as it was.

Virtually the same thing happened when Jim did a portrait of Billy Bowlegs III, the great Seminole, of no relation to Scipio Bowlegs. Billy Bowlegs died in 1965 a few days before his 103rd birthday. A week before his death, I made an exceptional photograph of the Indian hunter and leader. When I photographed Bowlegs he was coming down with the illness that was to kill him. Although he was jovial and cracked jokes, he obviously was feeling poorly, and his tired eyes showed it in the photograph.

Jim had known Bowlegs well, having made sketches of him at the Brighton reservation. He turned out a magnificent portrait. When I saw



**Jim Hutchinson—a well known Florida painter of Seminoles.**

the painting only the head had been finished; a part of the background had been brushed in, while the chest had been indicated with a few hasty strokes, leaving areas of white canvas showing.

“What kind of background do you want?” asked Jim. “And how do you want him dressed?”

“Don’t touch it!” I said. And so I had the picture framed by Gordon Bachelor and hung it in our living room at Montgomery Drive. Nearly everybody who saw the painting was struck by the way Hutchinson had caught the venerable old Indian. He not only caught the eyes, he had gone deeper—evidently from memory—and caught something no camera can depict: in the painting the eyes have a way of looking at you

hauntingly. And if you look long enough you may see in those eyes the tragic history of the Seminole Indian.

**To Be Continued**