



Interview with Edna Buchanan

Interviewer: Today is September 30, 2016 and we are interviewing Edna Buchanan here in Books & Books on the mall, Lincoln Mall, in Miami Beach. This is for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs Archive. What I'd like to do is just have a conversation about your time – how did you get to the Miami Beach side?

Edna Buchanan: Well I – it all happened because my mother and I had rented a cabin on the beach at Point Pleasant for our vacation and we had a one-week vacation at Point Pleasant in New Jersey and it rained every day and it was awful. The whole beach smelled like dead fish and it was horrible. Like nobody got a tan, it was just ugly and so people we worked had come along to just to spend some time with us there and it was all just miserable. And so we promised ourselves that next year we'll take a vacation where the sun is always shining on the beach.

So we came to Miami Beach and the first minute I saw it from the back of the taxi cab, when we took the – got off the plane, and I saw the Miami Beach skyline and the blue water and everything, like I just felt like I had come home. I never felt at home in New Jersey. It must've just been just a bad accident of birth that I happened to be born up there. I never went, well I went back to pack and everything, but I was determined to live here. So I loved it and it was paradise then. You could drive all the way down Collins Avenue and see the ocean all the way. You could see the mansions there, all the beautiful mansions...


Interviewer: So how old were you?

Edna Buchanan: ...The Firestone.

Interviewer: At this time?

Edna Buchanan: I was like 20 and it was so fabulous and wonderful here and I had worked for Western Electric in New Jersey and they had Western Electric facility here and I thought great, I can just go to work there. When I went there they shot me down and said, oh no. We cannot hire anyone who worked in New Jersey or one of the other plants and hire them here. And I said, why? They said, well, why would anybody work in New Jersey if they thought they could come work in Miami Beach? And you'll just start a problem. And so they wouldn't hire me. So I thought well while I'm looking for a job, I'd always wanted to write novels.

At age 4 I told everybody I was going to write books when I grew up. But I meant fiction, I meant stories that I made up and although I was an avid newspaper reader since age 5. Like other kids wanted a nickel for candy, I wanted a nickel for a newspaper every day. And I loved them and I read about the New York metropolitan papers because we lived in New Jersey, 17 miles from the George Washington Bridge and so all of these dark princes of these childhood, you know, the Mad Bomber [George Peter Metesky] and Lucky Luciano [Charles Lucian], all of whom I wrote about



later and I got to meet the Mad Bomber on the phone, later, he was out of prison then.

Also “Willie the Actor” Sutton [William Francis Sutton, Jr.] who I got to meet when he got out of Attica by faking his death, you know that he was dying. They let him out and they wheeled him out in a wheelchair during a snowstorm and he was hunched over and because he was sort of like a Robin Hood type who would never really hurt anyone he was just Willie the Actor, who was always presenting himself as someone else to get into the bank and rob it.

So, everybody felt bad. They didn’t – the politicians didn’t want him to die in prison. He was really popular. So years later, I met him in Miami, because after he was wheeled out in his wheelchair and they only had like – he had like a week or so to live and they were hurrying up to get him out of there before he died on them. He was down here. He was taking dancing lessons. He had a girlfriend. He got a job working security for a credit card company and I met him.

I sneaked him away from the people that had set up an interview with him over in Sarasota or someplace and I looked for him all day. Well it was interesting, but anyway that’s getting off on a tangent I guess. Maybe we can talk about Willie later. But then we came to Miami Beach and I was determined to stay here. So I came back, went home, packed my stuff, came back.

Interviewer: Just like that?

Edna Buchanan: Didn’t get hired.

Interviewer: Just like that you...

Edna Buchanan: Yeah.

Interviewer: That’s where I’m going to live.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. I had like 200 bucks when I got here so that was plenty. It was 1960 or ‘61 or something. So I thought, well, while I’m looking for a job I’ll go to a creative writing class because I had gone to one up in New Jersey and really loved it and liked it and had been writing short stories.

So, I was in this class, and I happened to mention to one of the other people in the class that I was looking for a job and it would be so nice if it could be writing related, but I didn’t really expect that. And he said, oh, I work for a little paper over on the beach why don’t you come and apply and so I did.

I went over there, and my heart sank because the editor who interviewed me said, “Well, have you – did you ever study journalism? Do you have a degree in journalism?” I said, “No.” He said, “Well, have you studied journalism?” I said, “No.” I should’ve mentioned that I had been reading the paper every day all my life but at least two or sometimes three, but I



didn't and he said, "Well, did you work for your school newspaper?" He said hopefully. I said, "No." And he said, "Well, good. We won't have to un-teach you anything." So then he gave me a press release that I think Jerry, the publicists over here on the beach. Oh I see his...

Interviewer: Schwartz?

Edna Buchanan: Schwartz. Yeah. He's still around. Jerry Schwartz. He brought in some press release about some event that was happening and so the editor asked me to rewrite it. So I rewrote it and he read it and he said he liked it better than the original. And he shook my hand and he said, "Congratulations. Now you're a journalist." And I thought well, gee, I thought there was more to it than that, you know, but that was the beginning.

It was – and I loved it because it was really small paper. We were supposed to have three or four reporters, but we never really were fully staffed and so there were times like five or six months that I was the only reporter. So I was there at seven o'clock in the morning and I would stop by the police station, stop by City Hall. I covered the politics in North Bay Village, Bal Harbor, Bay Harbor and Golden Beach and sometimes here on the beach at City Hall. One of the editors liked to go do that but sometimes I got to do it.

I've learned so much and I even had to write, I picked the dogs because the sports, there was a sports editor, but they needed like three or four people to pick the dogs and so I did. I had never even been to a dog race. I knew nothing about it.

Interviewer: What do you mean pick the dogs?


Edna Buchanan: There was dog track down on South Beach, down near where Smith & Wollensky is. So the dog track was there and every day somebody would pick the winners just like they do for the horse races. People who read the paper would decide, like, who were they going to listen to and who would they bet on? So I did it. I never saw any of the dogs. I never saw the dog race, but I picked more accurately than anybody else there. I think it was just intuition. Like sometimes one of them would almost look like it was in bold face when I looked at the program of the names of the dogs so I would pick that one.

Interviewer: So it was random?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. It was random, and I picked better than the sports editor, and let's see, there was an advertising guy and somebody else, who are also picking the dogs and I won at the end of the year. I didn't get anything for it but it was interesting.

Interviewer: You got readership.

Edna Buchanan: I learned so much. Sometimes, I had to write letters to the editor because nobody else wrote. And so the sports editor, and I would cook up letters



to the editor and I think I used the name Solomon somebody as my pen name on there and he used some other name, and we wrote these letters to the editor and we'd get into arguments with each other about different things and make some more volatile so other people would write. And I learned so much.

I even learned how to set type because the printing press was in the back room and I had – there was hot type, and I learned to read upside down. So you could, and it was fun, great. I learned so much.

Interviewer: You were in your early 20s?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. It was far better than going to journalism school, which is so like sanitized and run by people who couldn't do it themselves. So like some of the people I know since have gone into being – on to be journalism professors couldn't write their way out of a paper bag. So I thought it was interesting, but I love learning it and it was terrific.

During that time, and also earlier I had called the *Miami Herald*, and I had asked when I was thinking about that guy in the writing class made me think about journalism, and I thought well maybe I should call the *Herald*, before I went over to the beach. So I called the *Herald* and I spoke to this woman and she said, "Well do you have a degree in journalism?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, do you have five-year experience on a daily newspaper?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, then we wouldn't be interested and you needn't bother coming in."

So I remember that and right around the time that *The Sun* was being forced out of business because of the new owner, Paul Bruin, who bought it to get even because he had been fired from there once before. I had never met him before that. I never worked for him but...

Interviewer: You put in your five years.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. So in order to get – I was desperate for a job because the handwriting was on the wall and even though we had these lies from the senator saying that he was going to keep the paper and he had no intentions of selling and of course he would never sell to Paul Bruin, I didn't really believe him and I was worried because I did need a paycheck, so I picked the name out on them masthead, it was George Beebe [George H. Beebe] Executive Editor.

Interviewer: Of the *Miami Herald*?

Edna Buchanan: I sent him a letter and it just said. Dear Mr. Beebe. Five years ago I called the *Herald* and asked how would I apply for a job as a reporter? And that was the first paragraph. The second paragraph said as of August 15, whatever the year was, I think it was 1970; it had to be I guess '69. Anyway it, as of August, the date, I have five years' experience at the *Miami Beach Daily Sun*. Now in the third paragraph was just couple of words. It was, how about it? Because editors love brevity and so at least they used at the *Herald*, they have stories now that just go one on and on



forever. People just go snow blind just looking at that grey stuff, but he, I just sent it out into the ether. I didn't even think I would get an answer, but after five years, when *The Sun* was being forced out of business I got a call from Steve Rogers, the city editor, and he asked me to come in for an interview.

So I went in for interview and one of the things they had – they give you a word test and a grammar test and then also have you do a lengthy interview with the *Herald* shrink, a psychiatrist, and I don't think that they do that anymore, but it was really interesting. So we had the *Herald* shrink and anybody could go to him at any time for counseling or something, but I never did until once much later, and it wasn't really because of any pressure on the job, but even the – Felicia, I forget her last name, she was the garden editor, and she claimed a disability because of the stress of working on deadline at the *Herald* as the garden editor and she went out on disability. I think she's still getting a paycheck for that.

Interviewer: So this is what they were looking for probably, to see if you were a person susceptible to high stress, under what it is a stressful job.


Edna Buchanan: Yeah and my most high-stress of all, because I was covering crime and eventually the Cocaine Cowboys and the McDuffie riots and, which I discovered – I'm the one who discovered that Arthur McDuffie was fatally beaten by the police. It wasn't a motorcycle accident. They faked a motorcycle accident, and that's what set off the riots and everything.

Interviewer: Let's go back to, did you get hired?

Edna Buchanan: I did want to mention the psychiatrist. When I was sitting with the *Herald* shrink, he was asking me a lot of mundane questions and then he asked another question and he said, "Do you ever have urges that you can't control?" And his eyes got kind of glittery and he's sort of staring at me. I said, "Yes," because I figured I had to say something. So, and he said, "What are they?" I said, "At least once or twice a week I can't help myself I have to drive to Dairy Queen and get one of those pineapple Hawaiian sundaes with coconut." He said, "Oh." And that was about the end of that. And I didn't hear anything from them for a couple of weeks.

So I was worried because the end was growing nearer for *The Sun*, so I wrote another letter. This one was, I think, just two words I think. Oh one word. It was a one-word letter because editors do love brevity and I wrote to Mr. Steve Rogers because he was the editor who had interviewed me when I came in at the request of George Beebe. I sent Steve Rogers a letter and I just said, "Dear Mr. Rogers," and then in the middle of the page, one word. I said, "Obits?" Like I was volunteering to write the obituaries, and he called the next day. I didn't even think he had enough time to get it yet but he called the next day and he said, "When can you start?"

I was telling him everything and we talked about the job and talk about everything and then we were saying goodbye and I said I had to give two



weeks' notice, but the paper then didn't even last two weeks, but I will give two weeks' notice and then I'll be there Monday such and such a date, and he said, "Okay, but haven't you forgotten something?" And I kind of panicked, like, what did I forget? I said, "What is it?" He said, "You never asked me about pay, about salary, how much we are going to pay you." I said, "Oh." And I knew, I guess I just wanted a job I didn't care how much it paid and I knew it would have to pay more than *The Sun* because *The Sun* was notoriously – they underpaid everybody there. They didn't have any money. We didn't have any expense accounts or anything like that so that was how I got to the *Herald*.

But you know, if they hadn't turned me away at Western Electric I might still be working there or now retired from Western Electric or something. So thank heavens. They didn't hire me when I got here, and that I wound up in journalism, and that I started as *The Sun* and learned so much that it was a fabulous education. I did celebrity interviews. I covered municipal court. I covered accidents, celebrity interviews. I interviewed Joan Crawford once.

Interviewer: Oh, how was that?

Edna Buchanan: It was funny because they started me out covering the society beat. And they wanted to send me to the opera and some of the balls at La Gorce Country Club and things like that. I was worried and told Maude Massengale, this wonderful old society editor who had been there forever and she was so romantic. I'm sure she was pushing 80 at the time but she was always so romantic. She always greeted everyone, no matter who they were, their first question was, how is your love life? And she really wanted to know and hear all the details, and she was a romantic at heart. I love that woman and I said, "Look, I really don't have anything appropriate to wear to a ball at the LaGorce or one of the other country club clubs or big hotel," and she said, "Don't worry about it." She said, "Just get yourself a nice little black dress, because the people that attend these things don't like to be upstaged by reporters anyway." She said, "You're young and you look okay and just wear your little black dress everywhere and they will be happy." And so that's what I did.

Interviewer: Is that one of your earliest pieces of advice?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. I wrote headlines there. I never wrote any headlines for the *Herald* unfortunately, because some of the *Herald* headlines were not very good, but lately – back then we had some real masters who wrote wonderful meaningful headlines that were appropriate and really told you what the story was about.

Interviewer: So what all celebrities did you ever do?

Edna Buchanan: Oh well, John Crawford was wonderful. I met her once at one of the balls here and she brushed up against me and she had a cigarette in her hand and the ash just sort of came off on my dress and she said, "Oh I'm so sorry." She was so sweet and apologetic and nice and we chatted for a while. And I think I quoted her when I wrote Maude's society column the



next day. I never got credit for it but I would write the society column if I covered one of these things. And, somebody else was reading it too, because later when I got to meet Jack "Murph the Surf" Murphy [Jack Roland Murphy], you know the famous jewel thief, he told me he used to read the column all the time, because I would put in there that Joan Cohen, the famous mob lawyer, Ben Cohen's wife, she was wearing her 25th anniversary diamond. This big rock on her necklace around her neck showing it off at the party and all of these things and so I would mention their furs, their – that's what they liked, their clothes, their jewelry...

Interviewer: You sure – they were showing off. So he was reading your column to ...

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. And he would read it find out who these people were that he could rob and he did. So many of them were robbed. Phoebe Morris got robbed and Baroness Von Poushental [Baroness Vladimir Kuhn Von Poushental] and these other people that I met at these parties.

Interviewer: So you found this out years later.


Edna Buchanan: Yeah, when I got to know Murph the Surf it was really interesting. I had no clue at the time. I don't think anybody did, not even the police. So I read the social register all the time and every time somebody got in trouble I'd check to see if they were in the social register. I don't even think those little black books, I don't think they publish them anymore, but it was really fun.

I got to meet, Frank Sinatra was really nice to me and he had just had been in some kind of trouble in New York where he didn't like – he was known not to like reporters, and this woman reporter he disliked came over to try to talk to him in some nightclub in New York and he threw a glass of whiskey or highball or something in her face and it caused a little dustup there that made all the papers and so I was really worried, but they were down here shooting Tony Rome and Tony Rome was a detective movie, and Sinatra played the detective and Richard Conti played his second in command, I think. I got to meet him and I did an interview with him too that I later sold to a movie magazine because he had a great story about the first time he ever came to Miami Beach.

And so Frank Sinatra was shooting a scene in Mount Sinai Hospital. It was a major scene like one of the detectives or something had been shot and he is there. And so we heard he was going to be there and so they asked Ted Press, our photographer, this older guy if he would, they gave him an assignment...

Interviewer: This is *The Sun*?

Edna Buchanan: *The Sun*, yeah. Go there and take our, if you can, over to Frank Sinatra doing whatever he's doing at Mount Sinai. So, he said, "Oh no, no, no. You can't do that. You have to get permission from the hospital and they never let you do it." Of course, I was always like fearless because I figured later of course that I was working for the *Herald* and I was on a mission, and the same thing for *The Sun*, and I always felt that it was



better to just go do it and then apologize later instead of going to ask a committee to decide at a meeting whether you could do it and by that time it is all over so by the time they have two or three meetings over a week or two. So I just went over to Mt. Sinai and I carried a clipboard like I belonged there and I went up to the floor where they were shooting. It wasn't hard to find and there I was. So I had my camera and I was taking pictures. I saw them and they were like shooting a scene and I kept taking pictures of Sinatra. Like surreptitiously, but of course, he noticed and so eventually, he called over one of his body guards, whispered in his ear and pointed at me. I thought uh oh now they're going to throw me out. So the bodyguard came over and he whispered in my – like I was holding onto my camera because I didn't want him to break it and he said, "Frankie says his right side is his best side. Only shoot from that side." I said, "Okay." And they were really nice.

So then later I got even more bold about what kind of pictures I could get and Frankie went – they left the scene they were doing. They finished it and he went into one of the hospital rooms on the floor. And this girl, this woman went in with him and I thought, hm. I wonder what's going on there. So I sort of went over a few minutes later and just opened the door and stepped in, and he was lying on the bed, the hospital bed, and sitting next to him was the woman. She was the script coach and they were – she was coaching him through the dialogue in the next scene. So it was perfectly innocent and everything, but he sort of smiled when I took the picture and everything.

I got the pictures and Ted Press was furious. I used to take so many accident pictures and I got to be a really good photographer even though I had never used a camera to any degree before. And so I really liked it. I won some prizes for photography, and it was... Oh, Ray Milland was wonderful.

I was told to go over and interview Ray Milland, who was going to be at the Coconut Grove Playhouse and he was staying at the big hotel there, not the Biltmore, but another big famous hotel there, and so I got lost in Coconut Grove, because I really didn't know the area, but I finally found it and I went to his room. I knew what Ray Milland looked like because he had a TV series about being in the tropics and investigating cases or something.

Interviewer: He was a big star.

Edna Buchanan: He was a huge star. Yeah. I had seen some of his other movies and I'd seen the series so I knew what he looked like. So when I finally knocked on his door and all of the other celebrities that I had interviewed, except like at parties when I ran into Joan Crawford and at the hospital where I met Frank Sinatra and Richard Conte, but all the other stars that I went out to see were like new younger stars, and they always had an entourage with them. They could be real pains to the neck, but, so that's what I figured would be with Ray Milland, this big huge Hollywood star. He was starring in *Witness for the Prosecution* at Coconut Grove Playhouse.



I think he was opening the following night. I knocked on the door and this guy opened the door and he was bald and he was wearing glasses, and he had a red nose. He was like, had a bad cold or something and he was drinking something like a hot toddy or orange juice or something for his cold, and he had on bathrobe. So I hustled right past him because I was running late and I said, "Is Mr. Milland here?" He turned around and he said, "I'm Mr. Milland." He didn't look anything like the movie star that I had seen before.

Interviewer: He must've have registered some sort of disappointment on your face or a wonder and awe.

Edna Buchanan: A skepticism, but he was a gentleman. He was so nice. He had been married forever, like to the same woman. He was like a real family guy and he was sweet and classy and gentle because I told him I am a cub reporter and I don't know any better. But he was so nice. In fact, after I got back to the *Herald* he sent two tickets for the opening thing the next night at Coconut Grove Playhouse. So I went, and it was absolutely astonishing, because when he walked on stage, I mean this guy was a real trooper, a real star, because when he walked on stage. He apparently was wearing a corset or something because he had been kind of hefty when I had met him in his bathrobe, and he wasn't bald anymore. I realized then that he wore a toupee and he didn't have the glasses or anything.


He was such a classy guy and there he was on stage and there was the guy that I knew and remembered from the TV series and from all of his movies. But he was a real class act. I really liked him a lot and he didn't even take any offense that I didn't recognize him and he didn't have another single soul there and yet as a girl reporter. I was perfectly safe alone in his hotel suite and everything and he was just charming, wonderful guy.

Interviewer: Let's talk about the mayors in Miami Beach that you covered. You mentioned Elliott Roosevelt.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah, Elliott Roosevelt when he came to Miami Beach with his fifth wife, Patty. Somehow he decided, they bought a house, I think it was on North Bay Road and he decided to get into politics. He never had, of course, before even though his father was FDR, and so he lived like this charmed life and being a playboy and marrying a lot. And so, but there he was and he was kind of eccentric but he ran for mayor of Miami Beach and I don't even remember who his opponent was because he won by such a huge landslide, because major voting block on the beach then was senior citizens and they all remembered and loved his father, FDR, who started Social Security, who did all these wonderful things, who got us through World War II most of it anyway and so.

Interviewer: This would have been early '70s or late '60s.

Edna Buchanan: This was in the '60s, because I left in '70 to go to the *Herald*. So this was in the '60s, Elliott Roosevelt won by a gigantic landslide. The seniors loved



him and they would all come to watch him and reminisce about FDR. So I happened to be there when he made his big mistake. They were talking about something that was controversial about senior citizen housing or something and landlords were gouging and things. They were complaining and they wanted more help from City Hall and they wanted some change in the laws about landlord-tenant relations and so he got a big contentious. He didn't agree with them and they all kept yelling out and standing up and talking at length, and he got really bored. He was very impatient and he ran those meetings like it was like a circus every time they had a commission meeting and he was the ringmaster. He was like wielding the whip, and he was the ringmaster and it was all like very interesting to watch, a real circus. So this time he got bored and tired with the senior citizens and told them to shut up.

Interviewer: He used that word?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. They sort of took offense and they were thinking, like, his father would never talk like that to a senior citizens or something and then he said the magic words because they still wouldn't shut up. He said, "Look, I don't want to hear anything more from you because it doesn't matter. In five years you'll all be gone anyway." And when he said "in five years you all be gone anyway," that was it. He lost by a landslide in the next election.

Interviewer: So he was a one-term mayor?

Edna Buchanan: He was kicked to the curb. Yeah. So that was the end of him. Then later on we had Chuck Hall [Charles F. Hall]. Chuck Hall was terrific. He was really interesting, fascinating guy. I think he came from Chicago and he was this tall handsome silver haired, silver eyed, impeccable guy. He had been a school teacher but he had married an extremely wealthy woman and they had moved to Miami Beach and bought a penthouse over on 41st Street.

So he was the mayor of the county first. He was the county mayor. He was elected by just his charm. He was so suave. He loved reporters and he loved attention. He loved the publicity. He loved being mayor. I never saw anybody enjoy his job more. He absolutely loved being mayor. And his wife was sort of not well. So she wasn't out there with him all the time, but he – I would go to the Miami Beach Community Church on Lincoln Road, the oldest place of worship in Miami Beach except maybe for the Indians or something. He was a deacon at our church.

Then one Christmas Eve, for some reason, I went with friends to St. Patrick's up in the middle there, and in St. Patrick's church and we went to midnight mass there and he was taking up the collection. He was like a deacon there. And then I found him at Temple Emanuel, he was there taking up the collection, and he went to every single place and he just loved the attention. He was wearing yarmulke. First time I had ever seen him in a yarmulke. He just loved it.



He had this answering machine, where if you called him, it would automatically because he gave everybody his phone but he would only answer for certain people. So you'd be hearing his message, his voicemail message, but then you could hear him breathing because he couldn't resist picking up the phone to see who it was. I remember one time I called to ask him a question for some story and I called, you know I was on deadline, and I said, "Mayor, this is Edna Buchanan from the *Miami Beach Sun*. I'm sorry you're not there. I really wanted to interview you about this story that I'm doing this afternoon and I'm on deadline. But if you get this message soon, please give a call." He said, "Don't hang up. Don't hang up." He always wanted to answer the phone and talk to reporters and he just loved it. He was terrific.

Once, on election day when he was elected or reelected by a huge landslide because everybody loved that guy, he got home to the penthouse. His wife was with him. They had been to a victory party. And he got home to his penthouse and was greeted by armed robbers who were already in there. These masked guys with guns made him open the safe and take all her jewelry and he was robbed and the first person he called was me. I mean what a guy. I mean he's every reporter's dream.

Then once some kind of vandals shot out the windows of his, it's the most magnificent of the Rolls Royce's and it was parked out front of the penthouse, the building where he lived and someone shot out the windows. Apparently it was a BB gun, although I never knew a BB gun to really knock out car windows, but maybe they're just more solid now or something but anyway, whatever they shot knocked out the car windows.

So I heard about it and I was rushing over there and I got there and I took the pictures. I don't think that picture is in there and I don't know why, but it's probably in one of the other scrapbooks, because there's more in a higher shelf, but he posed for a picture by putting his well-clothed arm with his cufflinks and his beautiful suit and everything through the jagged glass of the broken window on the driver's side and that was a great picture showing the jagged glass all around his arm. And then I said, "Let's see. What else could we do? Has any other photographers been here?" And he said, "Yes. *The Miami News'* photographer has been here." I said, "Well, what did they do?" He said, "Oh, the same one with my arm through the windshield, through the glass." I said, "Oh, what else could we do?" And we looked at each other and our eyes met and he said, "Okay." I got a picture of the mayor with his wonderful coiffed silver hair, leaning out through the jagged window with the jagged part beneath his throat leaning through the window.

Interviewer: And that's the one that ran.

Edna Buchanan: And that's the one we ran. Yeah. It was great. Then the most interesting one of all I think, I've got the picture from that somewhere too, is the mayor had just bought a brand-new yacht and it was over at the marina and he had just bought it and it was huge. It was like this big 45-foot yacht or bigger, I don't know, but there it was. It was moored there and he hadn't even had a chance to insure it yet. And suddenly this black

cloud came across from the west, stopped right over his boat and opened up this major deluge and it sank his boat. It was just so fierce, like one of these monsoon-type things and here, especially back then when the weather patterns were little different, you'd get – I think we're getting back into it, you'd get the heavy showers, thunder shower every afternoon, and sometimes it rains in the front yard but not the backyard. I had that at my house all the time. I look in the back and it's – there's rain going into the pool and I come out the front door and the sun is shining and it's not raining.

So, this cloud hovered right over this boat unloaded and the boat sank. So I heard about it and I was turned over to take a picture. And when I got there, the mayor had already had several guys, a crew working for hours to resurface the boat so they had resurfaced the boat.

So I said to the mayor, I said, "Gee, Mayor. I was hoping to get here – I should've gotten here sooner, because I was hoping to get a picture of it while it was still under water." Because you know it when it was moored there, you could just see the top of the boat and you could see that it was submerged. But now it was like resurfaced, it looked fine. I said I wanted to get a picture of it when it was under water. And he said, "Oh. No problem." He walked away and he walked over to the crew and they started shaking their heads and like muttering and they went and got hoses and started refilling the boat with water to sink it so I could take the picture. And I said to the mayor I said, "Is this ethical?" He said, "Of course. We're just re-creating the scene." Of course in the story with a picture the next day, I mentioned that the mayor re-sank the boat so we could take the picture, and...

Interviewer: Do you think that was because you were a woman – are a woman at the time?

Edna Buchanan: Well almost all the other photographers were men, and they took a whole lot of pictures of Chuck Hall too. He was always cooperative with just about everybody.

Interviewer: But generally speaking did you find it an advantage or disadvantage?

Edna Buchanan: Well, when I started covering cops it was interesting because some of the cops were just awful to me, but luckily I was pretty thick-skinned and some of those same cops are like my Facebook friends today and we are friends but they didn't know what to make of it. They never had a woman coming to the police station demanding information and wanting to see the overnight reports and all that stuff. Some of them, especially the old-timers gave me a really really hard time. They didn't think a woman belonged there.

And one of the first policewoman there, it was this woman Gracie. She was an older woman, a senior citizen, who sort of didn't really count. She had never been to the Police Academy, but they swore her in as a detective so she could do shoplifting details, and she would hang around in Burdines and places like that watching for shoplifters and she was very



good at it, but she was never – they gave her some kind of badge and she had arrest powers, but she wasn't really totally certified. I don't think she ever carried a gun or anything. So Gracie, oh I remember her last name. I can't think of it, but she was terrific, but then they started hiring a few women.

Some of them, Shirley, this woman Shirley. Oh I know her last name. Shirley. I can't think of her. I know her. She was a friend and she was wonderful and smart. First she went to work at the police station as a clerk and she then went to the Academy and she got through the Academy and everybody gave her a really hard time. Some woman who came after her and had such a hard time that they dropped out, but she was really tough and terrific.

Interviewer: Did that open things up for you as a reporter that there were woman policemen?

Edna Buchanan: I don't think so. Although it was really really interesting because I know many places where I would go that were really dangerous, like really bad neighborhoods and civil disturbances, and that kind of thing, they – if male police officers were there, it was more likely to be a confrontation, arrests, rioting, violence, fights, all kinds of stuff and arrests. Where if the woman police officers were there and this was just right in the beginning, I don't know if it applies today, probably not because there are so many of them, but back then, when there were woman police officers, some of these really bad kids and bad guys would go yes ma'am when she told them to go stand up against the wall and show their hands because they were raised in these matriarchal societies where they were raised mostly by mothers and grandmothers and older sisters.

She was wonderful and she was so beautiful and she became Sergeant, she became I think Lieutenant or Sergeant of the horse squad. It's not named the horse squad. It's the police horses and they had several of them patrolling the beach. They were really nice and they were really good. They would pose for pictures with tourists and everything and they were good public relations, and they were great for chasing people down on like the road when they were running from a robbery or something like that.

Interviewer: Oh, speaking of robbery, you said to be sure and ask you about the liquor store robbery.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. Yeah. So but anyway, Shirley Fagin, Shirley Fagin, F-A-G-I-N, was her name. She was terrific, and she really led the way there. She brought in this other one named Ellen Knight and they worked undercover for a while, before everybody got to know them, who they were, and they were really good in narcotics and working undercover and she became chief of the mounted police detail.

Interviewer: And this is Miami Beach Police?

Edna Buchanan: And she loves horses, and she – yeah, Miami Beach police – and the stables were down there near where Joe’s Stone Crab has always been but the stables were down in that area where there’s a parking lot I think now. So she would take care of the horses. She just loved animals. I loved that woman. She was terrific. She used to be mean to me in the beginning because the police are mean to everybody in the beginning but once they get to know you, so we became good friends. And one day, it was so awful, she had ridden her horse and she had told a few people at the station that day that she woke up with a splitting headache. But like, you know everybody has a headache once in a while, I think she took a few aspirins or something and she was out with horse behind the convention center talking to some other people there, and just riding the horse on their beat and all of a sudden she just screamed oh my head and collapsed and died.

She was in her 30s. She died of an aneurysm. I was so heartbroken by that. She was so good. She was so terrific. And she really should have a special plaque or something there to commemorate her. She’s on there like all the other officers, but it’s not the same. Boy I miss her to this day. She was wonderful. Ellen Knight tried to follow in her footsteps but was never achieved the success says that Shirley did.

I went, her funeral was at my church, Miami Beach Community Church, and she was the only child of a widowed mother and her mother was an invalid and she also took care of her mother. I mean, the woman was terrific, and she lived with her mother, took care of her mother and the mother they brought her to the funeral, like, on a gurney because she couldn’t walk or even be pushed in a wheelchair. I think she died not long after that, but how sad. It was just – I miss her still.

Interviewer: You started covering crime a lot, and you became noted for that, right?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. Well, as everything else like writing the letters to the editor and picking the dogs and the celebrities and the politics. I also enjoyed covering the police beat. I remember one day it was interesting. My mother had moved down here, as well, and she called me one day at the paper and said there is police shooting it out with, I think, the Black Panthers on Pine Tree Drive. There is a shooting in progress. I think it was like a Sunday afternoon or something, so I go racing over there and sure enough, this cop named Ed Young had gotten shot in the hand. Thankfully he was okay, but it was a major shooting and stuff and I covered it.

Interviewer: With the Black Panthers?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. And these people were members of the Black Panthers and all this went on and so I got the story and the *Herald* and all the TV stations were furious the next day, and they were saying that I had some special treatment, that somebody must have called me to tell me about it from the police station. If they were going to call me, they should've called everybody. I kept on insisting my mother called me and she's not going to call everybody.



Interviewer: Not special - my mother.

Edna Buchanan: But let me tell you about the robbery at the liquor store. I was really a cub reporter then, but I had a police radio on my desk. That's why every time I heard of a crash, a wreck, a big rescue call, a robbery in progress I raced to the scene. So I found out later that Ted Press, our photographer, he would do all the developing of the films, and he happily - I was taking all these accident pictures, all these celebrity pictures, and I found out later that Ted Press was selling them to insurance companies, to the car owners. He was making a good living selling all the pictures that I took. I didn't even realize it until much later that and that's - I would say, that one picture is one of my favorites can I get the negative back or get a copy, and he'd never do that. And they were pictures that I shot and he was selling them, having a field day but I didn't know.


So, I am sitting there midmorning one day at my desk at the *Miami Beach Sun*, and there is a call going out, a robbery, armed robbery in progress at a liquor store on Fifth Street. So I assumed the cops are already there since it was so close to the police station, which is 120 Meridian Avenue then, the small old station. I go racing to Fifth Street to the liquor store and I didn't see any police or anything there, but I saw - I knew that was the place. So I went to go into the liquor store and this guy comes running out, past me and that was the owner. He comes running past me, so he went and I just grabbed the door and went in.

So all I could find was this guy, there were a lot of broken whiskey bottles over the floor and this guy cringing in the corner. And so I went up to him and I said, "What happened? Which way did they go? Who were they? What did they look like?" And he just kept looking at me and he never answered. And then I looked up, and there were all these cops lined looking through the plate glass window and their beckoning me to come out. And I didn't want to go out because the cops always spoil your fun. I hadn't got any quotes worth printing from this guy yet and they were whisking him off as a witness, and I didn't get a chance to talk to him so I sort of ignore them and I was talking to, so I said, "Wait a minute, I'm talking to this guy."

Finally, the police began to yell and shout to come out. And so I went out and they went running into the store and tackled him. He was the robber. They were afraid, I guess, I would be taken hostage or something and they wanted me to come out quietly so that they could then - but anyway I had no clue and so.

Interviewer: What was he doing hovering in the corner?

Edna Buchanan: What had happened was when he was robbing the owner, the owner like fought back and he pushed over this whole rack of whiskey bottles. That was all the broken bottles on the floor in the guy's way and he ran out. And so that was when I saw the owner come running out and back then you could get anywhere on the beach like in two minutes because it was so little traffic and so I got their pretty fast. I was driving my little Triumph Spitfire.



So they subpoenaed me to his trial and normally newspapers don't want you to go testify but because this was kind of different that I was alone with the robber and all that stuff and *The Sun* didn't really care that much so I went and testified on his behalf that he was the perfect gentleman while I was there talking to him. Unfortunately, he went before Ellen Morphonios [Judge Ellen James Morphonios], who was known as this really tough judge. They always called her Maximum Morphonios, because she would give everybody and she was a former beauty queen. She was gorgeous and smart and had worked her way through law school, carrying her baby in a little basket with her to law school, every night. She would go at night. She was really this wonderful self-made person and she was a terrific judge and so she gave him the maximum so I don't know whatever finally happened to him, but it was interesting.

Interviewer: Let's talk about, you are at the *Herald* when Alex Daoud was mayor, but did you cover from the *Herald* any of the stuff that was going on during his administration?

Edna Buchanan: I don't think so, because well first I was on, the first year at the *Herald* I was on general assignment, but because by then I had a lot of connections with beach police and some other police departments, because sometimes it was overlap if the Miami police chief came over or something like that. I covered a couple of deaths of Miami cops that were killed in the line of duty so it was kind of heavy on police stories.

Then I think a second year that I was there they wanted me to go cover court. So I went and covered court for year, criminal court, and that was the goal of mine. What a great beat that is because you get to meet all the players. The good guys, the bad guys and they're all interchangeable. Some days the judge is the bad guy and the defendants are and the lawyers are and public defenders and prosecutors. I mean, it was just – and the witness and the victims. It was just great. I loved that beat.

That was when I got in trouble with the guys at the *Herald*, because they asked me to lunch one day and I never went to lunch, because how do you go for lunch when you have like a bulldog edition like at four o'clock and you have to...

Interviewer: Who would ask you to go to lunch?

Edna Buchanan: Some of the guys in the newsroom.

Interviewer: Okay.

Edna Buchanan: And so I don't know what that was all of about and I never went to lunch. I always brought a muffin or something with me and that was it. So finally they cornered me and they said that I was ruining it for everybody because you're only supposed to do one story a day. And once you've turned in your story for the day you don't write anymore. I was writing like five stories a day off the court beat because it so many good stories



and how could you ignore them? Like not cover them because you already wrote one story the – it was crazy.

I love stories. I mean stories were my whole life. So they asked me to only ask to write one story day. And you can just like tell me just breath once a day or something you know? So I had gotten in the habit at *The Sun*, because often I was the only reporter, I would start at seven in the morning and sometimes I was still there at one o'clock in the morning. My editor there, Ted Crail, he would just keep saying, like, I remember one night there.

I was there at one o'clock in the morning. I had been working since 7 AM. I was exhausted. And I took notes everywhere I went because we never knew how many stories we'd need so I took notes everywhere went so I would have a notebook full of stories and Ted Crail, we were alone there in *The Sun* building and he was like standing over my desk saying, "Come on. One more story, one more story. All we need is one more story." And I was crying, and saying, "No I can't." And he said, "Yes you can." One more story because I guess not enough ads came in at the last minute so we had to fill the space.

So I went my notebook and I found another story and I wrote it and I had to be back at seven the next morning. But I loved it. I worked six days a week and sometimes I would go there on Sundays just to hang around and look from through my notes and things like that because I really loved it.

And so the guys, they accuse me of having diarrhea of the typewriter and they said that you're writing too many stories and you're getting us all in trouble. And then I was also shooting my own pictures because I shot pictures at *The Sun*. I loved it and once I learned how to do it I was getting pretty and I won some awards and so they didn't want me to use the camera and they really could've gotten trouble for this although I never complained about it, but they had me use one of the big fancy *Herald* cameras, and they were a lot more sophisticated than the box camera that you shake it that I was always using. I always tried to shoot with natural light and everything. So this was a really complicated thing with the flash and everything.

So one night I heard there was a huge fire going on right across from the old City Hall. In fact, it was threatening the City Hall.

Interviewer: This was at Miami Beach?

Edna Buchanan: This was at *The Sun*. So, yeah, it was when I first got to the *Herald*, yeah. So I went over and I climbed up the stairs to an apartment in the adjacent apartment house.

Interviewer: To the old Miami Beach City Hall?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. I went out on the balcony there. Some lady let me go out on her balcony. And everybody always cooperated with reporters. I mean it was

so nice the way people would always respond. So I am out on the balcony and I had one leg over the balcony and I was leaning out to shoot the shots of the flames and the City Hall silhouetted in the flames. It was like good pictures and the first time I clicked the shutter I got an electric shock. They had rigged the camera to give me an electric shock when I used it and I could have fallen off that damn balcony because I wasn't expecting that. It was really like a little wham-o electric shock. So I was really annoyed and I gave back the camera and surrendered and I said, "Okay, I won't take any more pictures if that's the way you feel about it." But there were many times I could've got really good pictures and it's too bad, because I really enjoyed it.

And you could always take a picture that fit the story because you knew what your story you were going to write or sometimes you be writing this tragic story about somebody and they would send some *Herald* photographer out who would like coerces them into smiling for the camera, and it would look crazy with this this goofy smile telling this tragic smile telling what happened to this poor woman.

Interviewer: So, you are with five years of a variety of experience and you are woman and you go to the *Miami Herald* and you're gung ho. You want to go out and cover a lot of stories, so it sounds like you experience some pretty serious discrimination.

Edna Buchanan: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: No?

Edna Buchanan: I never felt like I did.

Interviewer: But you didn't feel like they are rigging your camera to shock you?

Edna Buchanan: Well that wasn't the management, that was the other reporters.

Interviewer: Well not the management but the men there.

Edna Buchanan: And once it was interesting. I had gone to see, what is her name? The famous feminist, not Betty Friedan, the beautiful one.

Interviewer: Gloria Steinem.

Edna Buchanan: Gloria Steinem, who did – yeah started the magazine. She came down to speak with another woman from *The New York Times*, and so I went to hear them. It was somewhere up in Broward County, so a bunch of us went up – when we went up to see what she had to say and we were really impressed and she said you have to find out if the men are making more than you are. And someone said, "Well how do you do it?" And she said, "Oh, it's really easy. You'll find that these young enlightened men that you work with will cooperate and they will tell you." And so we thought, "Huh, we should try that."



So I go back to the *Herald* and there was this guy named Sam Jacobs who have already been there for like three or four years and I had just started. I was in like in my first year. So Jacobs had been there for three or four years and he had been around a long time. He was one of the one-a-day guy reporters and so I said, here's what Gloria Steinem said. And so if you tell me your salary and I'll tell you mine. I figured I would just have to make allowances for his longer time on the job because you get a raise every year. So, he told me how much he made. I was horrified, because it was \$100 a week less than I was making because they didn't have a union. They were able to pay people on their merit, and they were always really good to me because I turned all these stories. In fact, sometimes they were like saying stop.

Interviewer:

This was at the *Herald*?

Edna Buchanan:

Yeah. Especially when the crime rate got really high and we had all those homicides and the perfect storm of the, I probably shouldn't be talking so much about the *Herald*, but when I was covering all those homicides it was really difficult. I was on call 24 /7. I was kind of shell shocked when it was over. It was like being a war correspondent, just going from murder scene to murder scene to murder scene and some of it where in really bad neighborhoods. Some guys tried to rob once on the street and I was just so focused because that deadline is always coming at you like an avalanche.

And I would go into neighborhoods where the men wouldn't go, where male photographers wouldn't go and they would always say it was afraid we'll get our camera broken but they were insured. They were just scared but I would go and just walk in there like I owned the place. And I was just really lucky. These two guys tried to rob me one day and this was in broad daylight, but there was a big crime scene like around the corner and I was knocking on doors, canvassing to find witnesses, and these two guys when I was back out on the street tried to rob me. I just said to the guy and he's going, give it up or something. I said I don't have time. I'm on deadline and I just kept on walking. And they didn't follow me, didn't bother me. I think they didn't know what to make of it.

And another time I was in a parking garage in the pouring rain alone and here is this one guy in the parking garage and he was wearing a long coat. I just, I knew immediately this guy was not good and he immediately sort of bee-lined sort of towards me and I thought maybe he was just going to his car and he didn't and he was getting closer and closer and he finally came up to me like face to face and I could see the look in his eye. He wanted to rob me or do whatever and I just said, "Don't you even think about it." He turned around and walked away, because I had the chutzpah, I guess, or the like if you walk along really scared they're going to target you but if you walk around like you own the place and you're in charge they don't. I just did that because I am on a mission for the *Miami Herald*. I'm on a mission for the *Miami Beach Sun*. No matter what these raucus cops say, or what tricks they play on me.

Once when I went to Surfside, I loved covering all those little municipalities with their politics because the dirtiest craziest politics goes on in these small towns where the voters are only measured by the hundreds not thousands, and I used to cover some of that stuff and catch them in the act and all this stuff. So at Surfside once, the Surfside now suddenly have so many people coming to commission meetings, because I would write after every commission meeting and it was really controversial and they had all these gadflies. These older guys...

Interviewer: This is at the *Miami Sun* again?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah, at the *Miami Beach Sun*, and so there I was covering Surfside and I had my little Triumph Spitfire and they were really angry at me because I had gotten one of their police reports that had been tampered with and stuff and they put it on their front page of *The Sun* and the room was packed. So they always had Jimmy Wendler [James P. Wendler] had a weekly paper. If he's still around, I don't think he is, Jimmy Wendler. He had a little paper up in Surfside that he had for years and years and years, a weekly.

He was sort of a lightweight, but it was a nice little weekly that everybody read and so there I am I show up at this big contentious meeting and the place is packed. I thought, "Oh good the people are getting involved in everything," and circulation was going up. So that was good.

So, when I walked in, they always had this, the press table, like, right in front of the podium where all the commissioners and the mayor sat. And so there was the press table, and where I always went and sat and I would sit there with Jimmy Wendler. We'd shoot the breeze and he would tell me about all the history of the place and everything.

So I go in this particular day, and the press table was missing. It was gone. The place was packed, so I had to stand for the whole meaning and someone later told me because I said what happened to the press table and they said well, the police chief and another commissioner, carrying out the press table before the meeting. Then I got out to the parking lot and some of the cops had picked up my car and turned it sideways in the parking space, which meant I couldn't get out because there were cars on either side. I know was on deadline. I had to go back to *The Sun* and write the story. And so, but it was okay.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Edna Buchanan: I went back in and I finally found a couple of cops who would come back and they could pick it up. They had like only one cop on each end and they turned the car around and I was able to go, because even though they were good cops and bad cops and they were always good cops would come to my rescue. So, but once I mean once they tried to arrest me, and these city cops threw me into the back of a police car to arrest me to get me away from the scene where I was talking to a lot of people and they didn't want me to talk to them yet. And so and I thought, "Gee, how am I going to explain this back at the paper?" And then not even a minute



later, while I'm still thinking about this, another good cop opened the door on the other side and let me out. I mean ones originally that put me in the car never came after me or anything so it was just their little games and stuff.

Interviewer: I would like to ask you your perspective on crime on Miami Beach. When you first started at the paper I understand you did a lot of things, society and all that, and then the police beat was part of that.

Edna Buchanan: I had a lot of energy then. I didn't need much sleep. [Laughs.]

Interviewer: How do you see, and then possibly after you were at the *Herald*, I mean the crime in Miami Beach has always been legendary at times, the occult crime, as well as the overt stuff, so did you see it evolve or did you see some sort of pattern?

Edna Buchanan: Oh yeah. There were always, and there is always some new thing. Like, I remember the one year it was bodies in the trunk. We kept getting multiple homicides with bodies in the trunk and it was one car that had like seven bodies in it. And one of them was a pregnant woman, but it was all like drug-related and there was always some new trend, something going on.

Of course they used to a lot of different papers, oh and the one case that I loved. I used to go cover municipal court, JP Court, every – Municipal Court and then JP Court which was every Thursday with Judge Jason Berkman. I think he is still alive, but I think he has got Alzheimer's or something, but his daughter who is an attorney is still around. She was young and beautiful at the time. She was a teenager, but now she's a lawyer and that JP court was incredible. The stories that came out of there, they were so colorful. They did inquests. They did a lot of senior citizen complaints, the condo commandos fighting it out in the stairwells with garbage cans and everything. It was just, it really amazing. It made me determined not to ever buy a condo, although now I wish I lived in one because my house is like a bottomless pit.

Interviewer: Was that common? To have those kind of skirmishes?

Edna Buchanan: Oh, yeah, yeah. There was always crazy stuff going on with the senior citizens and the condos and feuds and one of them, this great story. And Judge Berkman was so funny. He had a sense of humor and a good heart and he always liked seemed to do the right thing. This was a case where a lover's triangle and we had so many seniors here on the beach. The offender was in his 80s, and he was having a romance with this woman who was in her 70s. And she fell for a younger man, who was in his 70s and she broke up with a guy who was in his 80s. And so he was really jealous lover. I guess passion and love and romance never changes because he couldn't stay way.

He was harassing her and then finally one night a Molotov cocktail comes through her kitchen window and crashes into it and was filled with gasoline and everything. It had a fuse and it crashed and all it did was

scorch her kitchen carpet, her kitchen rug. Her kitchen rug was scorched, but then thank God it went out. And that's a major crime to throw an incendiary device into it occupied dwelling or occupied building. You could get life for that.

So she knew immediately that it was him and they did arrest him. And so I was there in JP court that day and she testified and the judge said, "Well, if you didn't see him throw it, how do you know it was him?" She explained, the Molotov cocktail was made in a prune juice bottle and it was his brand. And so at that point, he admitted it. He confessed, and Judge Berkman sentenced him to life in Boston with his children up there. He could not come back to Miami Beach. That was the sentence. So I'm sure he went up there and further tormented his children but...

Interviewer: That is hysterically funny. I mean it's not funny but it's funny.

Edna Buchanan: Every week there were stories like that. Every week there were stories like that and it could have been catastrophic. I mean we could have had an Avondale fire or something like were 10 people were killed because one guy wanted to be a hero and go rescue people, but he didn't realize the Avondale Hotel was so old and rickety and such a firetrap and the only way out was one way down the stairwell and the stairwell went up first and people got trapped and got killed. And this guy had his eye on some girl or something. He wanted to get some publicity and he wanted to be a hero so he thought he'd set it on fire. Then he'd run through and save everybody and be a big hero and be in the newspaper and he would, but instead 10 people died and some firemen were injured. It was horrible. So it could've been something like that, but thank God it wasn't but they were just and they were so funny.

I guess one, every week they had cases in the JP court where people were suing the dry cleaners for ruining their clothes or losing them. And these senior citizens would come in and they would swear that it was brand-new and Judge Berkman would say, well, how come every come every time something gets ruined at the dry cleaners or lost by the dry cleaner it was always brand new and the first time you ever wore it, the first time you ever had it cleaned?

And this one case, he ruled against this older couple. They were really irate and they left saying, "You're a crook!" to the judge, calling the judge a crook. They felt the dry cleaner must have paid them off or something. And so they left calling him a crook and probably in a real court, they would have been held for contempt, but they were senior citizens. They left. But then they kept telling everybody all over town that Judge Berkman was a crook and they kept calling him up at his office and telling his secretary he was a crook.

So finally, he got mad (and he told me this the story himself, he said that finally, his secretary was upset because they kept calling and so he picked up the phone and called them himself and the wife answered and he said, "This is Judge Jason Berkman and I would like to speak to you and your husband. Could you put her husband on the phone as well?" She



turned around and she called him. I forget his name but she said, "It's the crook." And Berkman said he'd just hung up the phone because there was no stopping them. And it was just a real touch of Miami Beach, what Miami Beach was like at the time.

Interviewer: I want to ask a question about the gambling that went on. This sort of a nudge and a wink that went on and a lot of people turned their heads another way, and this went on, because everybody was making money.

Edna Buchanan: There were two bookies right on Alton Road there. I remember their names – well the one Alfie was there. He retired not that long ago. In fact, I think he recently passed away. And the other one was this other short guy that had a heart condition and he didn't even make a show of selling newspapers or magazines. What he did was, it was strictly a betting parlor and everybody knew about it, everybody knew you could go there bet but every once in a while the police chief would send them down to arrest them, one or both, and then after a while it got nasty, because there was some kind of bookie war. And so one day, we had all these bombings going off and so one day, a bomb went off at the back door of Epicure and blew the back of Epicure out.

Interviewer: That's a popular supermarket.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. And why would anybody would bomb, everybody loves Epicure. They made all the best food, the best stuff. And they were an institution. They had been there since 1945, and why bomb Epicure? But Alfie's and the other bookie were right next door, in that same block. So when they came to plant the bomb they thought it was the back door of the bookie and it was a backdoor of Epicure because it didn't say Epicure in big letters on it.

So we figured that one out and then several dry cleaners were bombed, because apparently a lot of dry cleaners were bookies as well and everybody was getting bombed and this guy Lefty Rosenthal [Frank Lawrence Rosenthal] was like involved very deeply in all of that. He was known for robing post offices and being jewel thief, as well. And he, and it was funny because he was involved in all of this stuff and every once in a while they would arrest Murph the Surf. They would arrest Lefty, and I would go down and cover it in Municipal Court and usually it was some minor charge just to harass them.

Interviewer: Lefty Rosenthal?

Edna Buchanan: Lefty Rosenthal, yeah. And so he lived over, I think, somewhere near the strip near North Bay Village there, but anyway, I knew he was going to be there in court one day so my editor said, "Go down and get some pictures of Lefty Rosenthal." And it had been in the paper the week before that Lefty Rosenthal was at the Orange Bowl at a game and some reporter took his picture and Lefty Rosenthal broke the guy's camera and punched him in face. In fact, I think maybe that's why he was going to Municipal Court. I don't know.

Interviewer: So they sent you to take a picture.

Edna Buchanan: My editor said, "Go there and get a picture," and he said "Bring back a picture of him." I said, "Okay," and I was worried about my camera and everything getting, because this was my camera not the Paper's and so I go to Municipal Court, and there is Lefty Rosenthal in court, and I sat there and every once in a while I would smile at him because I was there to see his case and everything and so we get outside and he had got off with a fine or something. And we get outside and I'm following him toward Lincoln Road and he turned around and he said, "What are you doing? What do you want?" I said, "I work for the *Miami Beach Sun* and my editor told me not to come back unless I got your picture and I'm only a girl reporter." And so he just sort of went like that. He said, "Okay. Where do you want me to pose?" and he posed for the pictures. I went back with posed pictures of Lefty Rosenthal. He just didn't like strangers sneaking up on him and taking pictures, but if you told him what you are doing and why.

So, he was just sort of a nice guy, and then after that there were a number of explosions, and I had moved to a little apartment over in what is now Little Haiti. And so, I heard an explosion in the middle of the night and I knew it had to be one of the bookie war or the dry cleaning. And anyway it was a bombing at Lefty Rosenthal's house. He lived right across the canal there. And I got there just by following the sirens and it was Lefty Rosenthal's house. I got some pictures. And they had bombed his car in front of his house, and his car was destroyed and then a couple nights later I heard it again, another loud explosion, and they had blown up his boat that was tied up at the back of his house. So they were sending Lefty a message and so it was pretty interesting.

And then I realized what was happening. Some of the beach cops on the task force that were – their job was to get rid of the bad guys and make sure they don't come back to the beach and make sure they don't keep on doing what they're doing and to get rid of them. And some of the cops were bombing the bad guys and I found it out for sure, because there was a guy – I forget his first name – a guy that run a little surf shop down at the end of Ocean Drive there across, near the old Press Club there. Anyway, they – he was, I forget my train of thought now, anyway I went down there.

Interviewer: The cops were actually bombing?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. He ran the surf shop, and I took a picture of him once and he threatened me. He had this beautiful girlfriend, who was some kind of Hollywood starlet and she was gorgeous. And one day, everybody is out walking down Fifth Street for some reason in the middle of the street and there she is in a bikini and he is with her. So I took a picture just of this whole group shot and he came rushing over and he said, "You have to pay to take a picture of my wife because she is the Hollywood starlet." I said, "No I don't. I'm just taking a picture in public," and I had this, but he was a disagreeable guy and what I found out later after he got busted is that he was selling cocaine out of the surf shop, and that was how he kept



business going was he was selling cocaine, and they wanted to get rid of him.

So one night, guys from the task force threw a bomb up on to the top of the surf shop to make it explode. But it kept bouncing to the next roof, because they were linked, and it was chicken restaurant on the corner that was open all night. So there were some drunks in there. It was like 3 a.m. or something. There were some drunks in there who had left the bars and they had gone out for something to eat and they were sitting there drinking a cup of coffee or eating something in the chicken store and all of a sudden the roof blows up and a lot of stuff came falling down, but no one was killed. In fact, no one was even badly injured, but they were just trying to send a message to Bruce or whatever the heck his name was from the surf shop, and he did disappear shortly after. They said he left town and so that was how they got rid of him.

So anyhow Bob Swift, my editor, who was later or before the *Miami Herald* editor, but he was my editor at *The Sun* and I called and told him what I had and he said "Well, I want you to go up to the roof and take a picture of the damage up there." I said, "No the damage is all downstairs." And I was taking pictures of sunshine coming in through the hole in the roof and all the damage to the counter, to the stools, to the booths. It was all messed up because parts of the ceiling and everything fell. So I called him and I said "Well, I think I got everything I need here." He said, "Well did you go up to the roof and get a picture there?" and I said, "No. The only way to get up there is to go on a fireman's ladder," because some of them had gone up that way. And he said, "Well no, I need a picture taken on the roof where the thing went off." I said, "But there's really nothing up there," and he insisted that I do it.

It was so embarrassing, because I was wearing a really short miniskirt. They were in style then and high heels, and there I am inside the place, among the wreckage, trying to climb up the ladder to the roof. And I'm really clumsy and have no sense of balance, never have. I have never been able to ride a two-wheel bike or anything or roller skate. I have no sense of balance, and so there I am on this ladder and there was a fireman up ahead of me, who was pulling me up, and one behind that was pushing me up. He had his hands on my rear end pushing me up that ladder and thank God nobody took pictures of all of that because it was just horrible and it was even worse coming down. So I get up there and there's nothing. It's just a plain old tar roof with a hole in it.

Interviewer: With a hole in it.

Edna Buchanan: I mean, nothing, nobody they are doing anything, no action, and so I came back down and after that awful experience I was so embarrassed, and I get back to *The Sun* and Ted Press did all printed out the pictures and Bob Swift was going through the pictures on deadline and he said, oh, you're right. These ones on the roof are no good and he threw them right in the garbage. I said, "Oh geez. I never should've listened to him."

So sometimes after that, like oh, once there was a major plane crash on 36th Street on the other side of the bay [Dominicana Aviation Traders Flight 401] and I was working at *The Sun*, and I immediately heard about it. Somebody called me and I heard it on the police radios because they were trying to send help from everywhere. Big plane goes down, and it just – the guy was and luckily was it the one loaded with Christmas trees, it might have been. It was like a cargo plane and apparently the load was unbalanced, and it started going down and he was trying to like maybe make a crash landing, went down 36th Street. One guy jumped out of his car and tried to run when he saw it coming and the wing cut him right in half.

I mean it was awful. There were a lot of casualties. It was really ugly. It did a lot of damage to 36th Street. I mean the businesses, a lot of the businesses there, oh one teenage boy that was at his father's place of business, a mechanic shop or something, he got killed because the plane was so big. And so...

Interviewer: You covered this?

Edna Buchanan: So anyway, I jumped up and I started running for the door. I said there's a major plane crash on 36th Street. Bob Swift or somebody or whoever was in the editor's seat at the time said "No, no, no. It's not a beach story." You know, because it wasn't like in our circulation area, but it was still a major story to everybody. And, like, I couldn't buy that so I just ignored him and I kept going. And I had some kind of mobile type phone, a big heavy thing around that time, and they kept calling me telling me to come back, because it was not in our circulation area. It was like crazy and stupid.

There was another reporter there, [phonetic][78:26] Clara Pottorff. She showed up later. She had been out on some story and she heard about it and she went running out the door too and they tried to stop her. I met her as I was climbing through the rubble. I ran into her, she was there too. We were both taking pictures. I wrote the story.

And the interesting thing is that the story that year that I wrote about the plane crash and some of the pictures that I took won first place in the Florida Press Association awards that year. Our editor was taking bows for it when we won the prize and everything. He didn't even want us to go but I never told that anybody. That was amazing.

Interviewer: Mitch Kaplan said to be sure to ask you about your coverage of the Versace murder from Books & Books you did a live report or something.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. I wasn't even working for any paper then. I was writing books, but someone asked me to do it. It was so interesting because a friend of mine was a good friend of Versace [Gianni Versace]. In fact, he had gotten her and her boyfriend or her husband really into motorcycle riding, and of course then they had a bad crash and she was recovering for a long time and so was he and I think she dumped him. She was furious.



Interviewer: Did you know him through them?

Edna Buchanan: No, but I knew who he was. He was quite visible because he would always walk every day down to the News Café and he was here and there and everywhere and everybody revered him and loved him and he had a whole following of local people. And so when I went down there, it was interesting because this woman, Margot or Margaret [Maureen Orth] she works for *Vanity Fair* I think, but she was a pretty good writer and she came down and she was asking me to help her. And I had people from the networks calling and wanting me to work on it but I didn't. I had a book deadline, but I did go down there because I wanted to see what happened and I did do a few interviews and things. It was interesting because...

Interviewer: So what's your connection to Books & Books, the story that...

Edna Buchanan: I guess we did the interview here or something. I don't remember. We did a couple interviews maybe. I can't remember, but it was interesting because when I called the morgue or something I found out that Versace had AIDS. And that was not known. It's against the law in Miami or Miami Beach or in Florida I guess, in all of Florida, and probably most places it's against the law to reveal someone's condition even if they are dead, I guess. You're not supposed to put it in the paper. You're not supposed to report it.

When I was talking to her, I said Madeline, I can see her face. She has dark hair and she's married to some other well-known commentator or something but anyhow, so I told her everything I knew just to help her with her story and I mention that. I said, but be careful with that because people didn't know he had AIDS and everything. I thought she knew and she went ahead and reported it and there was some dustup and a flurry of publicity about it, but they didn't prosecute or maybe just because she didn't come back to Miami Beach. She would've been prosecuted here for revealing that.

Then I found out that he had AIDS and then I went down that afternoon again to the site and there, wherever Versace had been shot right out in front, there was still blood splatter all over. In the old days, the cops used to wash it away with hoses or something, but no the blood was still there. A lot of these people, especially these young gays who really revered Versace and were big fans of his, they had brought magazines that had Versace ads in them and they were dipping their magazines, those pages into the blood to have Versace's blood on the thing thinking it was going to be a great collector's item. And I was like wanting to say, you know, you probably shouldn't be messing round with that blood or anything but you're not supposed to tell anybody so I didn't, but that was kind of ghoulish.

Interviewer: Bizarre.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah, ghoulish and bizarre, but they thought that it was a collector's item to have his blood on something. So I doubt if it infected anybody, but it was sort of an oddball thing.

Interviewer: Andrew Cunanan.

Edna Buchanan: Cunanan, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever figure out – did anybody ever figure out what the connection was or?

Edna Buchanan: You know no one ever knows whether he knew Versace or came down here looking for him. He had been to Italy at one point with one of his boyfriends. And there was some speculation that perhaps they had met there because Versace lived in that general area at the time, but I don't think there was any proof that connected them physically, but it was such a failure because they didn't have to die. He could've been saved so easily.

I never really wrote the story because I wasn't working for a paper then, but here's what happened. You know Cunanan was on this cross-country killing spree. He killed somebody out there in California or someplace where he lived. Then he killed somebody else along the way. Then he met this wealthy guy in Chicago, whose wife and kids were out of town and somehow befriended him and got into the house. He killed that guy and stole some rare gold coins from him. Then he continued, and every place he went he would steal another car so he was driving a different car every time which made it a little difficult.

Then he went to New Jersey, and somehow he was in a cemetery and ran into the caretaker at the cemetery. And the cemetery caretaker had a brand-new cherry-red, lipstick-red pickup truck. So he killed the caretaker, robbed him, and took the truck. He dropped off the Chicago guy's car so they kept finding the cars at the last victims somewhere else and they knew it was the same person.

And they were looking for him and he was on *America's Most Wanted* week after week after week. They didn't know his name yet, but they knew he was this killer and he was now driving the cherry red truck of the slain caretaker of New Jersey.

Interviewer: So they had no photo ID of him?

Edna Buchanan: No, but I think they did have descriptions. I don't know if they knew his name yet or not. They might have. I don't know. I think maybe they did, because they probably had prints and stuff by that time, and he did have a record. So anyhow he gets to Miami Beach and he comes driving in and they have been looking and even – you know they thought he might be coming down here. They even had fliers at some of the gay clubs.

They were looking for this guy and if you see him, he is dangerous. He's wanted for multiple homicides. But nobody noticed when he parked his lipstick-red pickup truck, which stuck out like a sore thumb. He never even changed the tag number – the license plate. It still belonged to the murdered caretaker. And so, and he had it parked in a South Beach



parking garage. He was staying at a hotel up in the north end before he moved his car over there.

There was a sandwich shop, a Subway sandwich shop right across the street from the hotel from where he was staying. So one day he's staying there in this reasonably-priced hotel. He walks into the Subway shop for a sandwich, and the guy behind the counter recognizes him because the guy is an avid watcher of – so they had to know who he was and they had to have his picture because it was on the fliers and that's how this guy recognized him. He recognized him from the pictures on *America's Most Wanted* and he tried – he was making the guy's sandwich and he was going to the phone. The sandwich was to go, he didn't eat it there.


He goes to the phone, he's trying to call. And he calls Miami Beach police, and he says when they answer. He dialed 911, he said, "The guy that they are looking for on *America's Most Wanted* for murder, he's in the store right now. He just – he's buying a sandwich." He then – and the guy who answered at 911 said, "Well, I don't watch *America's Most Wanted*, what are you talking about? Who? What?" And just kind of being rude, and he said, "It's him. I'm sure it's him."

So the cop – no cops showed up for quite a time and by the time they did show, they sent one car out to just check it as a tip. Nobody took it seriously. And so he talks briefly to the guy from behind the counter and then they said he left. And they said, "Well, which way did he go?" And the guy said, "I don't know. I was on the phone trying to get you to get here quicker." So the cop drove away. Then Cunanan went to a local pawn shop and pawned a number of the dead guy in Chicago's gold coins, these rare gold coins. He went and he pawned them.

The Beach police had a method then of writing closer heard on the pawn shops in trying to recover stolen property. They decided to expedite it. And every day, the people with pawn brokers had to send a list of what they took in that day, description, who did it, the whole – all the details from anything that was pawned to the police department and they would get it the same day. And supposedly they would look at it that day and see if it matched up with any crimes, but of course, evidently, they weren't looking at it every day. It was just stacking up where people were just giving a cursory look and just not paying attention.

So he used his own name, Andrew Cunanan, and he pawned the gold coins that they were even having pictures of on *America's Most Wanted*, but no pawn broker noticed. Nobody at Miami Police Department noticed. There were so many chances to stop him and they didn't.

And so then Cunanan kills Versace and all hell breaks loose, and it's a major international story. They could have saved him if they paid attention. Because I went to the Subway sandwich shop later and talked to the guy. And when you step out of the Subway shop, if the cop had any smarts any at all, I don't know which cop it was, but he just got in his police car and drove away. He left. But when you walk out, here's this two-bit hotel, who obviously doesn't have room service right across the



street. And so the guy got a sandwich to go, maybe he would have gone at least walk into the lobby and say to the guy. Everybody had Cunanan's picture, mug shot, and he would just say to the desk clerk. "Do you recognize this guy? Did anybody that looks like this guy come walking in here with a sandwich within the last half hour?" They would've had him. He was up in his room eating his sandwich.

So, they blew it and they blew it really badly. And there was a third way that could have caught him. I forget what that was too. I think they were putting tickets on his red pickup truck in the parking garage, because and he wasn't feeding the meter or whatever but they didn't run the tag to see if maybe that's a pretty distinctive description. There aren't many, that many bright red pickup trucks with plates from New Jersey that belong to a dead guy. So, everybody dropped the ball and then Versace got killed.

So then, after the manhunt was going on for a while, everybody had thought maybe he had gotten out of town and was back on his spree somewhere, but he was really hiding out in that boat on Indian Creek Drive. The people who owned the boat were out of town, but they did have a caretaker looking in on the boat once in a while to make sure everything was okay. So he was hiding in the boat for a couple of days and was moored in like the 50s – around 53rd Street and right across from the firehouse there, actually.

And so he's in the boat, and he hears the caretaker come aboard, and he probably thought it was the police because he knew there was a gigantic - I think there was even a TV in there he was using or something. So he knew the manhunt was gigantic. I guess when he heard someone coming on the boat and they were doing methodical searches everywhere and not finding him, so he knew and he shot himself. But they didn't know what that shot was and so the caretaker runs and calls the cops and the cop thinks he's held up on the boat with a gun. It's probably him. They've got them cornered but they didn't want to – so they kept that thing going on for hours and hours and hours, the standoff, and he was dead.

You could think if he shot once and he's not shooting anymore and the cops have got it surrounded so he's probably dead but they were being very cautious about it. I called my friend Marilyn, Marilyn Gadinsky, who lives on 53rd and Pine Tree, and I called her and I said, "You know they've got Cunanan held up on a boat, like right across from you." She said, "Yes, I know." And I said, "What's wrong? You sound funny." And she said, "I'm crawling on my stomach in the living room, and so is Ed," her husband. I said, "Well, what's going on?"

She said the SWAT team came to every door in that neighborhood and you said you either have to evacuate because there may be a major gun battle. You have to evacuate or you have to just lie on the floor until further notice but don't get up because you could be shot, because the bullets would go right across Indian Creek and hit you. So they opted to stay home in the air conditioning, but they were crawling on their bellies trying to...



Then, like this wonderful upstanding couple, she is ill now and Ed died last year, and but they were my longtime friends. She used to be a reporter for the *Miami News*. It was funny because they were this – he was a businessman and she was a mentor to so many women, and was wonderful and a philanthropist and did all these great things. She and Ed would have all of these adventures, because then it was the Tamiami strangler [Rory Enrique Conde, "The Tamiami Trail Strangler"]].

The Tamiami strangler was over along Tamiami Trail there and he was strangling prostitutes. And what had happened was this guy, his wife had left him. He was really upset and he hired a prostitute. The prostitute came to his apartment and they were having a mad passionate love until he discovered that the person, the woman he was having sex with, was really a guy. He went berserk and was furious and he killed the guy.

Then he dumped the body, and so then he – it felt good to him. He felt like he was getting even somehow. And then he began to kill the hookers. He was killing a whole bunch of them and he would get them back into his apartment, rape and murder them, and then most of them came, all of them I guess, came willingly. So it was like this whole feeling of fear and the cops were going out to talk to all the hookers on Tamiami Trail and saying, "Look, don't do it or if you must keep on working then give us all your vital information, your next of kin, because it's hard to find relatives of some of these hookers who are from out of town once they get murdered and we have to find the next of kin. So either stop doing it until we find him or give us your information so we can send you home in a box."

That didn't deter the hookers. They were still working. And so, probably their pimps wouldn't let them stop. I don't know. Or they just needed the money for drugs. But this was going on for a long time. In fact, one of the bodies got dumped on the front lawn of Andy Garcia's mother's house, Andy Garcia the actor, who I interviewed sometime earlier before when he first came here.

So the body was dropped there and he would just drop here, there and everywhere. In fact, one of them he was getting fancy. He wrote on the body of one of them in lipstick, "Call Dwight Lauderdale," because he was the newsmen at Channel 10 at the time. He was doing it. It was just a big reign of terror.

So meanwhile I was working on my current book and I was stuck on this plot point so I went over to Marilyn's house. We could brainstorm together. So we're brainstorming and I had all the chapters of my book out on the bar in her beautiful house there. We're talking about the plot and the doorbell rings and Ed, her husband, was out of town on a business trip.

So I open, so I went to answer the door because she was answering the phone or something. I answered the door and it's these two homicide detectives and they looked at me and said, "What are you doing here?" I looked at them and said, "Well what are you doing here?" They said,

"Well, we need to see Mrs. Gadinsky and Mr. Gadinsky." I said "Well, he's not here. He's out of town," and Marilyn joined me. They wanted to see Ed's car.

It turned out that because they were all worried about the strangler, the hookers were kind of watching out for each other and so this woman the night before refused to get in his car with this guy she just didn't – she had this gut feeling that she shouldn't go with him, but one of her friends did. Her friend went and jumped in the car. So she took down the tag number. So when the woman's body was found with the next day she told the police and the police thought, "Ah, they've got the strangler's tag number." So now we've got them dead to rights.

So they, the tag number was the number of Ed's car. They go and look in the garage and he's got this big white Cadillac and of course the car of the strangler was this little car, some other color, and so and it turned out that hooker might've been a little dyslexic. She had swapped the last two digits of the tag number. It turned out to be Ed's.

It was so funny, but the cops were like really disappointed and they left. Then they were trying all variations of the tag number and everything. So then the phone rang and it was Ed calling from out of town. He was calling just to check in with Marilyn and she said, "Oh, I'm so glad you called, sweetheart." She said, "We have to talk." Because for a while there he was a suspect in the Tamiami Strangler case.

So then he was going on doing it, and finally he made his big mistake. He got this hooker up there and he tied her up and gagged her and he had to go to court and he did want to kill her right away because he wanted to do all the things he wanted to do and he was due in court the next day, in municipal court because he had shoplifted a pair of sneakers from Target or someplace, and he had been arrested for it. This was the morning he had to go to court so tied up the hooker really well and left her in the bathtub, gagged, tied up and he goes off to court to apologize for stealing the sneakers.

And every time he killed one of them he put them in this duffel bag. He had a big duffel bag. He was on the second floor of this apartment house and it was an outside staircase. You know the outside, so the garden apartment and he would like bounce it down the stairs, thud, thud, thud. None of the neighbors noticed it and they never put together that right there in that neighborhood, there were bodies in that bag every time he thudded it down the stairs, nobody ever and the few times they heard screams or something but they thought maybe his wife was back and they were fighting or something.

So he goes off to court and the hooker is tied up in the tub, gagged, and she knows now that this guy has to be the strangler. So she was like banging your head on the wall, banging her feet on the wall, trying to get the attention of some neighbor and finally a neighbor did talk to the manager and they figured they better go look, maybe something had happened to whoever lived there and they needed help. And they go up



and open the door and there she is and couldn't wait to tell them what happened. And so they were waiting for him when he came home, and they got him but that was really interesting.

And then Ed and Marilyn, again, when Don Aronow [Donald Joel Aronow], the guy from the Blue Thunder boats, he would sell his Blue Thunder boats to the drug smugglers and he would sell them to the ATF guys to chase them and then he would just sit back and you know.

Interviewer: Count his money.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. Exactly. He got gunned down there on Thunderboat Row, and that was a big major unsolved case for some time. Don Aronow had just finished, and I knew him. He just finished building this glorious house on North Bay Road, and they hadn't even finished the last part of the house, where you can move in. It was like 85, 90 percent finished. He and his wife and baby were supposed to come move in in the next month or two. And Ed and Marilyn knew him. They were putting in a new driveway, a beautiful circular driveway of old Chicago brick. And the guy that was selling it to them said I'll show you another job we just did and it was the Aronow house.

So they go over to Don Aronow's house, in his big white Cadillac. They take the salesman. He goes there too. I guess he must've gone with them. So they are in the driveway, Aronow welcomes them and they're hanging out and they're examining the driveway and having a cup of coffee with Aronow and everything is nice and they leave. Then like two days later Aronow gets killed by a hit man up on Thunderboat Row in broad daylight and all the neighbors start calling saying there was people there two days ago in his driveway. The house wasn't finished yet, but they were there in his driveway and we saw them. It's a big white car and they were sort of describing Ed's car again and...

Interviewer: Poor Ed.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. So they had to call and fess up and talk to the cops and say we have nothing to do with this murder, but we were over there and here's why we were there. But isn't it funny that this upstanding couple that never even got a parking ticket in their life, they are really decent good people. He's a businessman, she is a wonderful writer, and that they could get involved in three of the biggest cases of the decade here in Miami Beach.

Interviewer: I want to ask you about the Pulitzer, and that was for crime reporting, correct?

Edna Buchanan: Well I think it says on the Pulitzer award that it was for, I don't know, it didn't say investigative. It was for coverage, for news coverage, deadline news coverage or something like that. It was 10 stories out of like more than 200 and some. In that year I had been doing a lot of projects that took longer. I wasn't like covering court, and I didn't go every day to the police station, although I tried. I would go to Miami Beach, to the city

police station and to the Dade County one, up there by the jail and by the justice building. But they wanted me to do more projects so I did some of the big investigative projects of murders and things like that. So they took 10 of the stories that I had done and they entered them for the Pulitzer's and it was interesting because they didn't seem to take me that seriously in the beginning.

Interviewer: At the *Herald*?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah, because I was over at the beach police station one day and I was researching all the recent jewel thefts, oh and I should tell you about Murph the Surf, and I was doing some research at the police station looking through all the jewel robberies, and I heard there had just been – I heard on the police radios that there was an explosion on Lincoln Road in this big restaurant on Alton Road. I can't remember the name of it now, blew up. It turned out to be a gas explosion. Everybody at first thought it was a bomb or something, but it was a major gas explosion and luckily the roof just went straight up and the walls kind of blew out and not that many – I don't think anybody died. You would think that a lot of people were trapped, that there would be a lot of people dead.

In fact, I heard the police, the homicide lieutenant radioed in the medical examiner office to come and bring a lot of body bags because they sure there was a lot of dead people inside that restaurant and it was right around the lunch hour. And this cop that I knew, a motorcycle cop, Jimmy – what was his name? This motorcycle cop was riding by on his motorcycle and it blew him right off – he just happened to pass by at the moment the place blew up and blasted him right off his motorcycle and he was injured.

So I ran right over there and I called the *Herald* and I said send photographers and I was so mad because they made me stop using the camera and I said, "Send a photographer right away," because there were great shots because a few cops had run in there and firemen had, and one came out carrying an old lady in his arms. I itched to take the picture and I didn't have a camera, because they didn't want me to use a camera.

So it turned out that the stupid editor who, Frank – what was his last name? He was like this slow guy, like this giant dopey guy and he picked up the phone and I said, "There has been a major explosion on Lincoln Road. A lot of people may be dead. There's major damage. Cops have been injured. They're rescuing people. Get a photographer here now." He hung up the phone and he called to somebody crossed the room, and he said, "Edna Buchanan just called and she claims that there has been some kind of explosion on Lincoln Road." He called like to the police desk and asked some kid that was manning the police radios, "Have you heard anything about an explosion on Lincoln Road?" He hadn't. Like they waited so long and like other photographers were arriving. I was fit to be tied.

But after that they paid more attention to me and then after Watergate, one of the Watergate burglars was brought down here and I was the only one who knew it, because somebody that I knew from Texas had called



me to say, you know Frank what's-his-name, I know his – I knew him [Frank Anthony Sturgis]. He worked for the CIA and then he was one of the Watergate burglars and he used two different names. I'll know, if you need it later, I've got his name. It's even in one of – a couple my books.

So anyhow, he was coming down here, because his mother had died and they didn't want anybody to know it and he had been refusing to talk to any reporters but he knew me through this friend in Texas. So, he said that he would talk to me and I didn't really want to talk to him, because the friend in Texas was somebody I had, like, I wanted to get a restraining order out against so I didn't really want to get involved with the CIA and those people again. So I told Gene Miller, who is a two-time Pulitzer prizewinner, you know smart, wonderful writer and I told him thinking he could do it.

So they sort of, and I went to Gene's office and I told him, "We've got to this. He's going to be at the cemetery. His mother has died. Here's her name, blah, blah, blah, blah." He's in town and they are holding in the county jail, but I'm not going to go see him because I don't want to be involved with that crowd again, because I got – I had a few close calls with the CIA before that. So this guy started investigating them here on the beach at *The Sun* and I found a CIA boat moored on South Beach and I went over and I was taking pictures of it and then somebody opened the hatch and was taking pictures of me. I had a few little adventures with them that I just didn't want to deal with them anymore.

So Gene Miller knew all about it. And so, two days later apparently he never checked it. He just thought because I was a rookie reporter I was having pipe dreams or something. I don't know why he didn't even check it out and so a couple days later, the Miami News or somebody or some other paper, I think it was the *Washington Post* or something came up with the picture of Frank.

Interviewer: I want to say Sturgis or something.

Edna Buchanan: Frank Sturgis. That was his real name and he used this other name too. Frank Sturgis - you're good. So anyway, I knew Frank Sturgis well and his wife too. So anyhow, they had his picture at the cemetery in Miami (or was it Miami Beach?) but his mother had died here on the beach and she was – and so, Dan and the city desk was in an uproar and our city, our executive editor was furious. And he said, how could he be in Miami, and we didn't know about it and the *Washington Post* puts that picture of him in Miami Beach, in Miami, and everybody was – and he had called everybody in the newsroom to listen to his little tirade. I was just looking at Gene Miller, and I didn't rat him out. He's gone now, but I didn't rat him out because it would've been a nice thing to do.

But I told him chapter and verse where he can find him. All he had to do was call up the Dade County jail to confirm that he was there and nobody did anything. So from then on the few things happened, I know after that Gene Miller paid more attention to whatever I said, and a few other of the

editors, that guy Frank on the city desk he paid more attention when I called and so it was interesting.

Interviewer: Carl, is there anything that we haven't touched on?

Edna Buchanan: Murph the Surf. I want to tell you a great the Murph the Surf story.

Interviewer: Yes, Murph the Surf.

Edna Buchanan: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then we'll wrap after that.

Edna Buchanan: Okay.

Interviewer: And have some lunch.

Edna Buchanan: Okay. Okay.

Interviewer: Tell me about Murph the Surf.

Edna Buchanan: A charming guy. He was a child prodigy, a violin player up in Philadelphia where he grew up. Charming, funny, not so much handsome but rugged, and when I first came down here I met him and the other beach boys, because I just used to go swimming up there every day when I didn't have a job yet. I would go to the beach up there near the Bel Air Hotel, which is now torn down, they built a condo there. And he was up there all the time. He had hung out there.

He and the other beach boys he would make hats for tourists out of palm fronds. He would do that trick diving. He was dressed like a clown and go to all these hotels and do trick diving events. He was a real showman, a real big favorite of the tourists and really popular and funny guy. I really liked him.

Of course after that they did the Star of India theft from the Metropolitan Museum in New York. They were very acrobatic and they were up – and I think they have been doing some other jewel robberies down here as well.

Interviewer: He was involved in that?

Edna Buchanan: Yeah. Yeah. They were. They did that thing up there. He and Roger and Allen Kuhn and what's Roger's last name [Roger Clark]? Roger is the only one that didn't continue to get in trouble after they went to prison that time. So they did this really acrobatic thing like a caper out of one of these movies about international jewel thieves. In and out the windows, never set off the alarm. They got the Star of India, the de Long Ruby and another great great sapphire, a famous sapphire. I forget its name. If you need it later I've got it.

Interviewer: So this persona that he had down here was really sort of a cover for his real profession?

**Edna Buchanan:**

Yeah. Because back when I was writing about the society stuff and everything, he was like – they were doing robberies. In fact, one time, and this was later he – there was a robbery up at the – not the Jockey Club - the Racquet Club, and Eva – one of the – Eva Gabor, one of the Gabor sisters, I think it was Eva, was robbed there at gunpoint by an intruder. I saw the police report, and she said, described him as a Hispanic, described him to a T. I mean it wasn't Jack Murphy who had blue eyes and blond hair, that's for sure.

But she made the police report. There was a little thing in the paper here and then two nights later I see her on the Johnny Carson show and she's describing how she was robbed by Murph the Surf. He was so handsome and he was so kind and he was so nice and before he left he gave her a kiss and she was just using it for publicity. So he often got credit for things he didn't do. He certainly didn't do that one, but he did a whole lot of them, he and all different people.

So he – they got arrested, and they got the jewels back except I think for the de Long Ruby, I'm not sure. But they wound up in prison. They were up there at Rikers Island for a while and they did just about a year, year-and-a-half to two years, something like that and they got out and they came back. It was like this fabulous homecoming.

They came back like royalty, because it was like a Robin Hood-type thing. It was a caper. Nobody got hurt and they were like local heroes. So, my assignment at *The Sun*, I was still at *The Sun*. My assignment at *The Sun* was to go spend the day with them, their first day of freedom. And they had actually had their first night of freedom the night before. So I went to them, with them to the police station because you had to register if you were convicted felons. So they went down registered and I went with them. Then we went to a couple coffee shops and the senior citizens were shaking his hand and take getting their pictures taken with him and they thought they were such nice boys and people were buying us lunch and everything.

And it was – and he had this girlfriend, Bonnie, Bonnie Lou Sutera. It was so tragic, because it was like supposedly he never hurt anybody until later when it proved different, but he had this beautiful girlfriend Bonnie and I used to see her all the time in municipal court, because every time he came to the beach the cops would pick him up for something just to make him leave town, and he'd be in municipal court and I would go down there and Bonnie would always with him and she was crazy about him.

She was this beautiful girl. She had this long thick blonde hair. She wore it in a big braid in the back all the way down her back and she was this wonderful girl and she came from the Sutera family, that was local, and the couple had no children of their own as far as I recall and had adopted about six or seven kids and she was one of the adopted ones. After Bonnie died, all of the other kids did, too. I mean it was amazing and tragic.

And you think, what kind of stuff like this could happen to the same family? Because one was killed in a car wreck, one got killed in Vietnam, another one got killed of a drug overdose, Bonnie. Here's what happened with Bonnie:

When they were going down to municipal court and everything all the time and they were facing the charges up in New York, and they knew they were going to have to do time up there. Murphy said he didn't want her to wait for him because he always played the field anyway. He was kind of a lothario, and so he told her that they would have to break up because he could have her waiting for years for him to come back and she was heartbroken.

And he was still in town, I think. He hadn't gone up there yet to go to trial and be sentenced, but Bonnie was really depressed and heartbroken about Murphy. I'm sure I know like the nose on my face, she didn't want to want to commit suicide. She faked a suicide to get his sympathy and to have him come back to her before he left to do time.

And so she called up her girlfriend Sandy, a redheaded girl who worked in a bar at the Bel Air. The hotel where they all hung out and did all of their stunts and everything. And so she called up Sandy who is the barmaid and she was over on the Miami side somewhere in an apartment and she called and she was groggy and she said, "I just took pills. I don't want to live without Jack," and she said Sandy said, "I'll be right there," and she knew right where it was and everything. So Sandy went rushing to the rescue and I'm sure that's what Bonnie expected. She expected to be rescued.

And Sandy gets in her car and she's driving across the Tuttle Causeway for Miami to go to the rescue and her car has a flat tire or conks out and she's stuck. And there were no, these rangers that go out and help people who are stuck. There were no cell phones then. And there she was in marooned and Bonnie had taken on these pills. And so it was hours before somebody would stop and help her and hours before she could get the car going and hours before she could get there and when she got there, Bonnie was still warm, but she was dead. I know she didn't want to die. She wanted to – just wanted to get Jack back. I was heart sick at that. I mean, it was his own – it was his fault, you know?

Interviewer: Did you – have you used any of this in your novels?

Edna Buchanan: Not in my novels, but I did write about it in *The Corpse Had a Familiar Face*. And then of course, Jack came back and friend of mine, Bob Tralins, who had written more than 300 books. They wanted him to write a book about them and they were hoping it would be made into a movie. And they were saying now they were going to go on a cross-country trip lecturing to kids to stay on the right path and not go down the wrong path and land in jail. They were going to be these do-gooders missionaries against crime, and they were going to do all these things. And Bob Tralins believed them and I said, "Be careful because they're probably going to do



it again." It's too easy. That's what they do. They rob people of their jewelry and their other stuff.

So he was now free and we had these Whiskey Creek murderers and the two beautiful girls in bikinis had been murdered and weighed down and dropped in Whiskey Creek up in Broward. It was unsolved case for a while, but the cops were on it. They never would've surfaced except they didn't figure right on how much weight to put on them. There's a formula for it. You have to know how the person weighs and make sure you match that plus to keep them down on the bottom.

Some fisherman a few days later were fishing in Whiskey Creek and they see this foot sticking up out of the water. It was one of the girls and so they found the bodies. Otherwise they might never have been found. Meanwhile while all this Murphy was free and they were, and Allen Kuhn was complaining, calling me all the time because he bought a Cadillac and how would this guy fresh out of jail afford the new Cadillac. He didn't have a job.

So he bought the new Cadillac and someone, and I'm sure it was the cops, because they even mentioned it to me later, because they have to get these guys off the beach. He parked it outside. I think it was outside the Bel Air or someplace around there. And anyway it was a convertible. And just the whole car just burned up.

Then Kuhn was getting really paranoid and they couldn't stay away from the beach. The beach was their stomping ground. So whenever they were over here and the beach police saw them, the cops would come after them and so one time Allen Kuhn told me that when he heard that the cops were coming because he was there. He just swam all the way across – he didn't even want to get on one of the causeways because they would stop them so he just swam over to Miami to avoid them and they were doing the same thing to Murphy.

So one Sunday, and I'll never forget this day. It was Sunday, sunny day, really nice out. I never told you about Sherwood Griscom, which is a great story, but anyway.


Interviewer:

We can't. I'm sure we can't do all the stories.

Edna Buchanan:

But there they are, Olive Woffard, W-O-F-F-A-R-D, maybe it's E-R-D, [Olive Wofford] anyway I knew her. She was one of socialites I used to party with Maude Massingale when I was first was hired at *The Sun*. She was home with a maid in the house and her little niece, who I think was six or seven years old or something like that, a little girl, and it was a nice sunny Sunday afternoon, and these – a truck comes up like a delivery truck and they tell the maid they have a delivery. They get in the house and it was Murphy and two other guys not Kuhn and Roger. It was some other guys in the little group that he had put together.

So Murphy was wearing a mask made out of woman's pair of black underwear, lacy black pants to cover his face because his face was so well



known. But anyway, they told her to open the safe and she refused to do it because she had a lot of nice jewelry. She was a widow. Her husband owned nice hotels. They had the Wofford Hotel and a bunch of others.

So then they went to the kitchen and they tied up the maid and then they went in the kitchen, and they boiled water, and they showed Olive Wofford that the boiling water, and they were going to pour it on her little niece's face. I mean this isn't Robin Hood anymore. It got pretty ugly.

So this is when he lost his following. They were going to pour the hot water on the little girl's face if she didn't open the safe. So she did. She opened the safe, and gave them everything. But she hit the silent alarm in the safe. The police were like on the way instantly and at that time, the response time anywhere in Miami Beach, you could get anywhere in Miami Beach within two and half minutes. And they came even faster, because she wasn't somebody who just set her alarm off all the time. They figured it might be serious.

So, Murphy was in there. Somebody yelled, "There's cops outside." So they all scattered and ran in different directions. Murphy tried to get out the sliding glass door and the sliding glass door was locked and he couldn't get out and the cops were like closing in from both sides. So he just ran at the sliding glass door and smashed through it, cutting his head, his face and his knee. He burst through the door, and which is an amazing feat, but he was a real athlete and so he just dove like he was diving into a pool from a high diving board and he dove out of the place, broke the sliding glass door and ran but all three were picked up.

So I was there first and then like all the other media began to arrive because it was on the police radios and everything and catching Murphy was a big thing. You know the cops were talking about it on the air I guess and everybody was picking up on it so, not the radio, but their own radios which were monitored by reporters. So, I was there and one of the beach cops because I knew them all. I knew their wives. They knew their dogs' names. I knew their kids' names. I knew them all, because it was relatively small force then. I think the whole force was like maybe 120 and that was all the civilian employees and the jailers and everybody else.

So the cops, they said, "Where did you take Murphy? Where did you take Murphy?" Because they knew he was injured and so one of the cops made an announcement we took him to Mt. Sinai or to Jackson. I forget which one, but they told them. So I was starting to head for my car too and this one beach cop looked at me and said he is really at St. Francis. He's over there in the ER. I said, okay. Thank you. So they all went racing off to the wrong place and I went right over to St. Francis. It was right there on 63rd Street, not that far from the Bel Air and all his stamping grounds.

So I get to the ER, and it's not like it is now where you have to really go through channels to get, I just like walked in and headed for the ER, walked right into the ER and there he was wearing a yellow hospital gown, sitting in a chair, handcuffed to the chair on one side and the cops. A



doctor was in front of him sewing up his knee, the big gash in his knee from the broken glass.

He had always promised me he really wasn't really going to do this anymore. When I went in there because you had to like him, but you knew he was bad and he wouldn't stop. So, I never went out with him, but I did have lunch with him several times and would always see him and have a cup of coffee with him or something. He looked up, and I said Jack, "What happened?" He said, "I cut myself shaving." I mean that was him. I mean that's - "I cut myself shaving." What a great quote. You know, that I was the only one that had it in the morning paper. So "I cut myself shaving."

Then he never was out of jail again, because while they had been investigating him at the Whiskey Creek murders and they found that he and the guy named also named Jack Griffin -Griffin? - Griffith. Jack Griffith had been on this caper and what had happened is these two girls were secretaries somewhere in California at a big financial center, and they had stolen a whole bunch of bearer bonds that are negotiable. They had stolen like \$600,000 worth of them or something and left. They had come to Miami and they were looking for someone to help them sell them and they found Jack Murphy and Griffith.

And so Jack Murphy and Griffith took them out on a boat one day just for a nice little boat ride, killed them both. They had already taken the bearer bonds I guess, and they didn't want these girls to say who they gave them too and I don't know what ever became of the bonds, but they - so while Murphy was in jail for robbing Olive Wofford's house and they caught all three of them. Then they charged him with the murders at Whiskey Creek. So suddenly he wasn't like this Robin Hood type.

Interviewer: He's a sociopath.

Edna Buchanan: Who everybody loves. I mean, he was cold blooded bad man and a killer. And so when he went to trial here he was given the judge, I know the judge. I see his face but I can't remember his name now. The judge, who died not too much after that, the judge died, and he originally sentenced Murphy. He said, "This man should never walk the streets a free man again." And he sentenced him to in order to make that happen he sentenced him to five life terms plus 100 years or 80 years or something like that just to make sure that he never got out.

Then after the judge died because he could no longer protest, the good old parole commission, they found that Murphy had found Jesus. You know they all do in jail, but Murphy had found Jesus and he was now like a missionary. Oh and he sent me two of his paintings. I have two of Jack Murphy's painting. He is a very talented artist as well.

Interviewer: Did that shake you up a little bit, because you knew him so well that he was capable of murder?

Edna Buchanan: No. Nothing ever really shook me up. I was too busy getting the story I didn't have a chance to feel anything about it. I just was covering it and really interested in it.

Interviewer: Did you ever get jaded about the human race covering this?

Edna Buchanan: Never. Never. And you learn something new every day and the job is day different every day. It was a wonderful job. I love it and I miss it but it's – even if I could go back there today it's not the same. They tore down the building. They're not the same paper. They are like a shadow of what they once were.

So Murphy, who sent me two of his little paintings. He was an okay artist. He did like to do seascapes and things like that, stuff to do with the water and surfing. One of the cops have given the name Murph the Surf because they saw him surfing out there time in really high waters. They said that guy's going to kill himself. They said, no, no. That's Murph the Surf and that's how he picked up the name. So he was really good at everything he did except people kept calling him a master criminal ,but I pointed out once, like, he always gets caught. If he was a master criminal we wouldn't even know his name because he gets caught all the time.

And then when I heard he was going to be paroled after so many years. I forget how many. He served a number of years, but nowhere near as many as the judge intended. He was never supposed to be able to be out free. So it seemed so outrageous that he was going to be paroled that I called some of the cops that used to deal him. [Phonetic][129:21] Emery Zurick, this great wonderful old detective who I wished I could've sat at his knee and just taped him all the time. He was so colorful.

He had worked as a bodyguard for Al Capone, because back then when he first became a cop they used to shut down the city. All the hotels would close in the summer and the police department wasn't really needed. They would have like maybe one or two cops. Everybody else would get laid off for the season. And so during that time, Al Capone had been let out of Attica, not Attica, Alcatraz. They let him out of Alcatraz to go home and die because he had syphilis. He was living in this house on Palm Island and so he became one of the bodyguards there. He was getting to know who all the mafia people were and I was getting a lot of information from him and everything.

He was good. He was so smart. And then he went abroad, a couple years and worked as a mercenary doing God knows what but he had major international adventures. Then he lived his out the rest of his life as a beach cop and like he got in trouble once. He went, and I didn't really think he should have, he would go to a lot of DOAs because he didn't mind when somebody was dead for a week going to their apartment, because it was a nasty job. A lot of cops didn't like to go there. They couldn't stomach it, the smell and all that stuff and the mess. So he would go.



He would handle the DOAs all the time. If this DOA had a pair of glasses or something or a bottle of medicine that could be used by some of the senior citizens on South Beach, he would just take them with him. And so he got caught doing that and got into some trouble. But eventually he did retire. He had his pension and everything and what he would do is whenever some senior citizen would come into seeing into City Hall or not City Hall to the police department and be complaining they lost their glasses or their glasses were stolen or they couldn't afford their medication. He would go down to his locker and have them try on all these dead people's glasses until he found. Who would want – nobody else would have wanted them. I can understand his rationale but you're not supposed to take things away from the dead and do something else with them. So he got in some trouble, but he was a good guy.

So anyway, I called [phonetic][131:30] Emory Zurich, and he used to arrest Murph the Surf all the time. I called [phonetic][131:33] "Emory," I said, "guess what? They're going to parole Murph the Surf and the judge isn't here anymore. He can't stop them." And [phonetic][131:39] Emory was so upset he said, you can write this down. He said, "If I see him in Miami Beach I'm going to put a bullet in his head. No more playing. No more picking him up all the time or if I see that – if I see him in Miami Beach on or anywhere I'm going to put a bullet in his head."

So I put that in my story the next day and so then the parole commission got a little alarmed because they thought, well they didn't want to happen, be blamed on them so they added another condition to his paroled just that he not come to Miami Beach anymore. So he is living over in Crystal River. He's still there now.

Interviewer: He's still alive?


Edna Buchanan: He's still alive and he's free.

Interviewer: Does he ever contact you?

Edna Buchanan: Oh yeah. He tried to contact me. People kept calling me and saying Murph the Surf wants you to call him and they kept leaving and I didn't want to talk to him. I mean this is a guy who would have poured hot boiling water on a little girl's face and maimed her for life. This is a guy who killed two young women, and you know hell.

So then, God knows what other stuff he did that he didn't get caught at. So I didn't think once the charm was gone, that devil may care attitude that everybody loved when he turned into soulless killer. You didn't want anything to do with them.

Then he kept – somebody kept sending – forwarding emails that he wanted me to have. What he wanted was Ocean Drive did an article about him. I think Vanity Fair was going to do article about him. And he was hoping to get enough publicity that they would, again, think about making a movie about his career. He could make some money from it and not so much even the money he wants attention. He's always wanted attention.



That's his thing. So that's why he didn't mind getting arrested so often because he loved all the attention. He loved the publicity and he missed it, so.

Interviewer: Maybe that's why he slipped up, why he was – he got caught.

Edna Buchanan: They sure didn't mean those girls to be found because they really did weigh them down and he even cut open their stomachs so the gases wouldn't bring the bodies to the surface because that's another way to deter them coming to the surface but they still did. And he did weigh them down with cinderblocks or something.

So I just, so every time he would use me as a reference, he kept using me as a references and all those reporters from Vanity Fair or from various other newspapers and magazines would call, and say do you think Murph the Surf would make a good story? And I said no, you're just playing into his hands. All he wants is attention. And he's a cold-blooded killer. He's not Robin Hood. It's a funny story. It's not an adventure story. It's mean cold brutal murder and he doesn't need to be aggrandized anymore for it.

And so I've never spoken to him. Occasionally I still get hellos from him, other people who have run into him and ask if – he asked if they know me and he says to give her my regards and all that stuff but I don't want to talk to him anymore. I'm not a reporter. If I was a reporter, I might want to, because I might have something to cover, but since I'm not a reporter. I don't want anything to do with him.