

CHAPTER ~~VIII~~ IX

~~FLORIDA WILDOOSE~~

CAMPING ALONE IN THE EVERGLADES

"Give me solitude - give me Nature -
give me again, O nature, your primal
sanities." Walt Whitman

In June, 1952, three years after leaving the wildflower nursery, I attended the outdoor Writers Conference at the Hotel McAlister in Miami and soon found myself involved in what to me was the fish story of the century. Never in my wildest dreamings, in the days when I cast flies with ease in northern streams, did I imagine such piscatorial goings on with me in the middle of it.

There happened to be a couple of gentlemen at the Conference whom I knew from up north; they decided to hire a fishing boat for a try at deep sea fishing, and invited me to go with them out into the Gulf Stream. We embarked on the "Riptide", a fifty-foot charter yacht, with diesel engines, owned and run by Captain Ollie Knittle, out of the Miami Chamber of Commerce Docks. His yacht had two chairs and gear topside of the stern, and two in the larger stern space below. There was a small attached observation platform off the bow, which I am sure had a nautical name beyond my vocabulary but it was to be an important adjunct to our adventure.

Dr. E. Laurence Palmer and his friend insisted I take one of the chairs in the lower stern, where we were all gathered. The fishing "rod" if such it is called, looked so heavy and strong, more like a flagpole to me than a rod, ~~in fact~~ I didn't see how I could handle it despite the fact it was securely braced in a socket fixed to the deck. A light fly bamboo rod was my way of fishing life, with a fluff of a feather-fly on the tip end of the line for bait. But the men wouldn't hear of my not trying my skill at catching something bigger than a brook trout. Judging by the conversation they had in mind something like a pompano or a bonito, and that was the tackleweight we were using. I don't remember what they had on for bait; I was just sure it was not a bit of a feather nor a garden variety earthworm.

Just as we got out beyond the last buoy on the edge of the purple Gulf Stream, which looked even more like ink to me out there, something hit my hook. I grabbed tight onto that huge, thick pole, and with everyone yelling at me to set the hook I did what seemed the right thing though with so much line out, and such a heavy rod, I couldn't see that I had much control. I knew there was a contest on along the waterfront with special publicity and a prize offered for the day's biggest catch.

Captain Knittle left his wheel long enough to lay down the rules to me, in between his shouting a stream of advice on what and not do to do. I must never let go of the rod, and if I so much as let anyone else touch that rod I would be disqualified for the contest and so would he and his boat. With the whole group ^{of men} yelling at me like I was a football player dashing down a field, and a very un-

familiar giant-size pole for a rod, and a line which seemed half a mile out, I wished from the very bottom of my soul that the fish had struck the other fellow's hook, not mine. I didn't want to let anyone down yet I didn't see how I could handle the situation with my damned weak female muscles and small hands. It was years since I'd wielded an axe, pulled a saw or pushed a wheelbarrow. Here was my chance to prove women could do as well as men at outdoor activities but I knew very well I wasn't going to last very long. How could a fish only two to three times the size of a trout be so difficult to pull in from so far out?

Something big jumped away out. It looked to me like a gray phase of Moby Dick cavorting out at sea. It never occurred to me that was what was on the other end of my line. But all the men were now yelling at the tops of their voices, and I could, out of the corner of my eye, see that Palmer's friend had left his chair and was adding to the din of rooting for me and my fish. It finally penetrated my dazed thinking that they, too, had seen that big creature jump, that they knew it was on my hook even if I didn't, and that it was probably a blue marlin, the kind of fish that wins prizes, and makes the headlines.

I hung on, and fought it, with incessant ^coaching from all sides, including from the captain, for about fifteen minutes. But I was afraid I would lose the fish by not keeping the line taut enough and even though to give up meant losing a prize it would be worse to lose the fish. At the moment I made my decision to turn

the pole over to someone else the person at my elbow happened to be Palmer's friend, whose name I later learned was Kelly. I quickly jumped up and let him take over; he grabbed on deftly, preventing the line from going slack. Once on my feet Dr. Palmer appeared at my side and let me know, by his groaning and sharp scolding, that I should have given him the pole. But at the time I didn't see where he was, I had to act fast so I felt I had no choice. I just knew that no one on that boat, especially the captain, would ever forgive me if I lost the fish. Little did we know, at the point of my giving up, that we would still be fighting that fish after dark and miles beyond ~~xxxxxxx~~ Biscayne Bay.

Kelley fought that fish like a Trojan for five hours! Sweat poured down his face; the others took turns feeding him cold drinks and wiping his face, though most of the time Captain Knittle stuck to his wheel to do his bit keeping the line taut. Finally, Kelley, knowing we wouldn't win a prize anyway, decided he had to have a respite. He turned the rod over to Dr. Palmer, who was by then admitting, just from watching Kelley's straining, that he himself couldn't last very long with that rod. Palmer stuck with ^{it} exactly ten minutes, which made me feel better as I'd lasted longer than he. But he was the oldest of the men present, and was physically soft from a desk and teaching job all year. He was in ~~x~~ no shape for such a struggle any more than I was.

That fish towed us all the way to Ft. Lauderdale, a bout twenty-six miles north, and six miles off the coastline. By then many boats were circling us, but keeping well away so as not to tangle our line. We learned later that our adventure had gone out

over the radio; bets were laid all over the waterfront as to whether or not we could land the marlin. The fish had jumped so often by then, and had been seen by so many fishermen and boat captains, it was confirmed to be a blue marlin.

Captain Knittle had to radio for refueling. He said he knew how to bring the marlin in but he couldn't do that and steer the boat too. None of us on board, other than Knittle, had any of the skills necessary under the circumstances. We were by now admiring the twinkling lights in the streets of Ft. Lauderdale. Then over the radio a well-known marlin fisherman offered to come pull in our fish for us. Knittle decided to accept his offer else we'd be out there all night, for all were agreed that the marlin must be foul hooked to not be tiring by now. It took the new but experienced man one half hour, with the help of an assistant he had with him, to bring that marlin up alongside the "Riptide."

Dr. Palmer and I stood out of the way in the smaller upper fishing deck and held flashlights on the action below. The marlin-men used the little platform off the bow part of the time while manoeuvring the fish. As the great creature rose up to the surface against the side of the boat I was almost mesmerized by the glorious purple-blue rainbow colors glistening in the beams of our big flashlights. The men held the monster tightly against the side of the "Riptide" and all pronounced it twelve feet long! A twelve-foot fish on MY hook? Weighting, they estimated, 250 pounds?!

There was no word in the language to express how I felt. The closest was "Wow!" We could all see that the fish was foul-hooked

on the outside of the belly, which was why it didn't tire. Then, just as three of the men were trying to gaff-hook the fish up into the boat, with Dr. Palmer and I now deftly keeping the lights on the beautiful marlin, the rainbow-hued leviathon dove under the "Riptide" and instantly the propeller cut the wire leader of the line. For a reason I have forgotten Captain Knittle said he could have turned off the boat motor but he, and also the marlin man, had decided it best to keep it turned on.

We were supposed to be back at the Miami dock at 5:00 p.m. It was now ^{nine} ~~xxx~~ hours and twenty minutes since the fish had snagged my line, and was one hour before midnight. Only a handful of people were waiting at the dock for us, instead of the crowd we'd heard were there earlier. The radio had told the whole town of Miami of the loss of our twelve-foot marlin. We learned it would have won the prize for the day if I could have brought the fish in.

I was lucky to get the last bus home to my sister's in Ft. Lauderdale. Me being me, as I drifted off to sleep that night there was a big smile on my face. I loved thinking of that huge, gorgeous marlin free and wild out there in the sea. It was a much preferable memory than having to think of him strung up on a dock scaffolding. It would have haunted me the rest of my life to have to remember that great, handsome blue creature as dead meat, by the hand of mankind, for no other ^a reason than ^a ~~ply~~ boy fishing, of which I myself had been guilty.

When we were children at home, in the days before modern insulation was invented and the best of houses were drafty, a familiar saying of my parents was that when their ship came in they would move to Florida. My father's ship must have come in when ~~he~~

he retired, or at least he had more adventurous spirit than most folks in their sixties at the time, for he bought his first car, took driving lessons and drove off to the sunny south with my very dubious mother. They stayed near relatives in Atlanta, Georgia, the first two years, but finding Atlanta not very balmy in mid winter they pulled up stakes again and moved to Lakeland, Florida.

They were the ones who started it. Yet, I suspect I would have found my way to that latitude eventually because of my curiosity about the outdoors. It was there at Lakeland that we visited them our first winter going down from the wildflower nursery. I was so homesick those first months in Florida for the ecology of the north that the novelty soon wore off of the beautiful blue-green sea and the exotic palm trees. I had to go to Florida to learn that my favorite evergreen tree was the hemlock. I always knew my favorite hardwood was the sugar maple. Other people get homesick for a house or specific people, but I found ~~it~~ that I yearned to stand under a maple or run my hand over the soft foliage of a hemlock.

The flat countryside of the Florida sand^dplains produce^d in me an overpowering nostalgia for the hills and dales of my native north. Later, remembering how I felt that first winter in the sunny south, I felt it must be that same homing instinct which propels birds vast distances up and down the continent. For the day did eventually come when I was homesick for palms and the sparkling green-blue sea. Gradually I developed an interest in the great variety of tropical plants for I learned there were many more of them in one small area than are ever found north. And I became enamored of the Florida sky, especially the trade wind clouds behind the purple-blue line of the Gulf Stream, where they piled

up like white-capped tiers of mountain ranges, or at times they looked like a long row of scoops of ice cream piled one atop another.

Lured back by such memories to the land of the palms the fall of 1955, with the goal of trying to camp out with the birds all winter in the sub tropics. I stopped in at the Everglades National Park office on Krome Avenue in Homestead. I was seeking advice for or against camping alone out on the Keys, where I would be most likely to see shorebirds. To my pleasant surprise, Dan Beard, Superintendent of the Park, offered me a part-time job, with low pay, if I would help edit the Natural History Magazine. To keep my expenses down I could camp in the Park, though there were as yet no developed campsites. The Park lands had only recently been acquired, and nothing was yet developed for public use other than a boardwalk at Anhinga Trail, developed by a garden Club. But the Park was open to visitors, at their own risk.

Before settling in the Park
I went shorebird hunting on the Keys and camped behind a mission church. It was just before the population explosion hit Florida so I had a delightful time, having the birds all to myself.

When I returned, I stopped to visit Kacy Payne, and her fourteen year old son, ^{Peter} who lived on the Fairchild Kampong in Coconut Grove, whom I'd met ⁱⁿ the past on an Audubon trip. They insisted they knew the right spot for me to camp in that vast Everglades Park, where there was a fresh water pond. I was dubious, thinking it to be a slough, not the best of camping sites. Most the land in the eastern part of the Park was limestone ledge, Miami oolite, and I wanted to stay on that ledge and not get involved with mangroves which I'd struggled with ^c before.

But Kacy had a real surprise for me. She directed me along narrow lanes until we arrived at a Fire Tower. There, we turned right, into a one lane set of car tracks on the hard limestone rock surface. I drove slowly through a stand of Caribbean pines. I was astonished when we suddenly came out of the pines to an open area with a small lake, or what might be called a large pond. At an instance's glance I recognized another Eden. Wilderness on all sides; even the Fire Tower was out of sight. Not an electric wire, not a building, no traffic, only free, wild, beautiful sky and pine lands, a tropical hammock in sight over to the left, and that amazing expanse of fresh water spread out in front of me.

The only man-made thing in site ^{sight} was the pit in which the water had accumulated and a long high ridge of crumbled limestone gravel over along the left side of the pond which had obviously been gouged out of the pit. This, I was to learn, was south Florida's way of obtaining road surfacing material. It was limestone gravel which had surfaced the road to Park Headquarters and on out to the Fire Tower.

~~For~~ For a woman camping alone this was ideal. Rangers patrolled the approach roads, so no tramps, no juvenile delinquents looking for trouble. no crackpots, no escaped convicts, no despoilers of environment. It was unbelievable to find such w_ild spot so close to civilization in the second half of the Twentieth Century; and I had a part-time job to boot, to both finance my venture and as a legitimate reason for being there.

I had just set the car brakes, to take my time looking out the windshield at this new Eden, when a tremendous bird lifted himself up from the water's edge, from where he had been partially hidden by

by a small mound of gravel, and flew slowly toward the hammock over to the left. "An eagle!" Kacy and I exclaimed together. He alighted on a tall dead, bare, pine near the hammock, and turned to face us. His snow-white hood flowed further down his shoulders than I had ever seen on any other eagle, alive or stuffed. Little did I know then the importance of that tall shaft of dead wood to the close-by bird world. There was one stub of a branch near the top and the eagle was perched on that.

Almost at the moment I saw the eagle I spotted my campsite, - the far edge of the pond, opposite where we were sitting in the car. That was IT. No question.

Everything in sight was exciting. I suppose to most people this would be a desolate spot; but here, at last, I was to live with the birds among the southern Caribbean pines, under the vast open sky of the Florida sub-tropics. The everglades, which came right up to the far side of the hammock, and to an area just beyond the Fire Tower, stretched many miles to the ^Weast, to as far as the Ten Thousand Islands just south of Marco, and northward even more miles to Lake Okeechobee. Homestead was seventeen miles to the east, and Miami just beyond the horizon from there.

We drove over to my selected campsite on the hard limestone and sized it up for what was needed. It was poisonous-snake country, with countless limestone solution holes wherein hid such things as ^tratlers, the mild tempered but fatal-biting coral snake, and other lesser such denizens. I could see I had to get my tent up off the ground, and that meant having to find or buy boards and uprights.

As it was still only mid morning and we had our lunch with us, we spent the rest of the day driving along roads looking for dis-

carded pieces of wood; one great find was the town dump, where several boards had been thrown away. All ~~we~~^{we} bought was some nails. Peter, a boy scout with some training, took over the building of a framework on which we laid down the boards, and attached uprights to that. A small dead tree we found made an excellent rooftree. Fortunately, I had all the tools we needed in the car. Peter fashioned a rail of small logs on each side of the tent to tie the tent fly to.

My umbrella tent had been stolen off my car bumper, to which it had been lashed, so I'd bought and remodeled a small all-netting tent. I had sewed a canvas floor on it, and felt it was a better outfit for the warm sub tropics. It wasn't quite tall enough to stand up in it but the tabs along its upper edge tied easily to the rooftree, stretching the tent as high as it would go. The doorway was two open-side edges, adjacent to each other, with tape-finished edges; I rolled them together and fastened them with clip clothespins, which I felt was safer than a jammed zipper. It was a practical system, keeping out the smallest to biggest of ants and other unwanted beasties.

As my netting tent was open to the sky, and I knew a shower could happen now and then in winter in Florida, and there might be times when I would need privacy, I threw my big 10 ft. by 18 ft. tarpaulin up over the ridgepole. Its sides ^Ylaw down over the railings on each side, which Peter had made, holding it out from collapsing against the netting tent. Later I clipped small sheets of plastic over each of the open ends when rain threatened.

The tent occupied just a little over half of the tent floor leaving space under the tarp for orange crates, which I eventually acquired to use as shelves for towels, soap, clock, books, and such.

~~which left space for orange~~

Having already learned of the aggressive success of ants and other Florida creatures, I bought two metal garbage cans with tight lids. In one I stored all my extra clothing, bedding, towels and the like to keep them from becoming nest-lining material. In the other can I stored food, such as crackers, bread, sugar and anything not protected by cans. Later, when I learned about clever resident raccoons, and adventurous boy scouts, I added chains and locks to keep the lids down.

My masterpiece, which I made a few days after Kacy and Peter left, was also made of scrap wood, some left over from the tent platform, some found along Homestead roadways, might be called a kitchen cabinet, though that was a glorified term. I erected it at the rear of the tent, a little to the left so I could see part of the pond without the tent obstructing the whole view. It consisted of a top shelf, on spindly uprights or old two by fours; there was a high back board, and an underneath shelf. The right hand half of the top shelf I used as a kitchen counter for preparing food and washing dishes. On the left hand side was my new oil-burner cook stove. The underneath shelf held pans and dishes.

This was the most elaborate and practical set-up I ever had at any camp where no picnic table was provided on which to place things. But seen from across the pond by anyone entering the area it looked like the worst piece of furniture ever concocted in Shanty Town. It's amazing how a few pieces of wood, fastened together in useful fashion, can look as if it came from Tobacco Road, while the same pieces, put together in more skillful fashion, and painted, could grace a Home and Garden

magazine. Of such is the difference between the top and the bottom of the social scale in humandom, with no other values considered.

My own guests, of whom there were a surprising number during the winter, one even camping out for a week with me, got a bigger kick out of that kitchen contraption than I did. But for all its junky crudeness, I frequently had occasion to exult in its usefulness.

It had been late October when I set up camp. The last of the mosquitos surprised me by trying to get into my plate of food. I had a short but wide-diameter log out front of the tent, and a stool with a board on top of it. This was my chair and table. When I sat there at my waterfront view the mosquitos even tried to eat my cooked vegetables! The rockpit was filled from summer rains, and I knew that it produced some mosquitos, but so did many of the water-filled limestone peck holes. But I had learned that most Florida mosquitos close up their shop for the winter, so they wouldn't bother me much longer.

The limestone ridge on which I was camped runs all the way down the east coast from Ft. Lauderdale, through Miami, southwest out to the Park; it has been found to be from a few inches to fifty feet in depth, but seldom is it as high as two feet. This ridge dams out the salt water of the Atlantic; but now and then heavy machinery used in construction has broken through it, threatening the drinking water supply of southeast Florida. This natural dike ended just a short few hundred feet past the Firetower, westward.

About three miles back eastward, nearer to the Ranger Station, was the Anhinga Trail and its boardwalk. Often I drove in there from the main Park road to go out on the boardwalk over the Taylor Slough, where alligators, masses of gar fish, and congregations of

of eagle tree and whack the life out of the fish with a side head motion. Once I clocked his performance of whipping the little fish against the tree limb and found it lasted seven minutes, with pauses, no doubt to rest, between every two or three whacks.

Just as I despaired of ever seeing many birds ~~there~~ there a flock of ten tree swallows flitted out over the pond and hovered around for several minutes. Then it began. From then on, Eagle Lake, as I was now calling my new habitat, was a bird stage and I a spectator right down in the front row.

For soon an immature eagle became a visitor. I looked up from my typewriter and there he was, standing on a low pile of oolite gravel which formed a small island half way down the pond with only the width of a foot of water from the shoreline. He gave the impression of standing around doing nothing, after awhile, like most teenagers, just waiting to grow up.

Early the next morning I heard such a yell as my ear membranes had never vibrated to before. "That must be an eagle!" I muttered out loud, though I had never heard an eagle before. I hurried from behind the tent with field glasses in hand. There, in the exact direction of the strange, wild sound, at the far end of the pond, near the entrance to the area, perched on two water-front pines, were the handsome mature eagle with the super-long mantle, and near him the dark_{er}-colored immature eagle. Somehow I couldn't think of that yell as a scream as it is described by many. It seemed to me more like a powerful hawk yell with an extra wild timbre to it. But the two eagles sat there, almost motionless, for the next half hour, before they took off in silence. I never heard that yell again although both eagles became companions for the winter.

Young boy s_couts came to camp at the far end of the pond, where the beach was wide, almost every other week-end. I saw that my wild retreat wasn't as isolated as I had supposed. But their appearance and disappearance gave me a lesson in bird behavior in relation to human activity, and showed me why I hadn't seen any birds my first three days there. For whenever the scouts appeared all of the birds disappeared, and not until the fourth day after they left did they reappear. Which of them kept watch? From where?

I also learned much from some of those s_cout groups. Their behavior was according to the inclinations and motives of their leaders. It was a surprise to me to learn that some s_cout masters earn community prestige by "service" with the scouts, but once out of sight of civilization and anyone to monitor them they loll around listening to ball games on blaring radios with never so much as an eye toward the kids. Male nurturing!

One would think that out in such a wild area boys couldn't get into much trouble, but besides throwing pebbles from the pond at one another, risking eye injury, they were sometimes turned loose with hatchets to bang away at not very abundant Caribbean pines. I arrived home from work one day to find my most costly and useful cooking kettle bashed in beyond use, kerosene poured all over the place from my storage can, and my matches all struck and burned out. My camp was out in the open where any boy could be seen going over or coming back from there, by "headquarters." When I had to go ask a scout master for a match so I could cook my supper there was firm denial that any little s_cout had gone near my camp. Checking next day with the Fire Tower, no car had come in or out ^{that} all/day except the departure of the s_couts.

Two scout groups appeared now and then which were properly supervised and had constructive programs which kept the kids busy. They vindicated the idea of permitting the scouts to camp in the everglades. But there were two other sets who couldn't have been more coddled than if they had stayed home in plush apartments. They brought in a big generator on a car-towed dolly, which made it possible for them to set up flood lights at night as if on a city street. They had an electric pump bring up water from the pond for bathing and dishwashing. There were barrels of oil for cooking.

Everything was flamboyantly new, - tents, blankets, cots, sleeping bags, ~~blankets, cots, cots~~ even uniforms. ^{officials} Their troopp/had done fine by them. Even their hatchets were brand new. The youngsters in those two groups had so little to do related to camping life one could only feel sorry for them. No wood to split or carry, no water to be scooped up and carried, no pineneedles to collect for a softer bed, not even any darkness to make the stars shine. Live, healthy, active kids, in a set-up ideal for invalids. Needless to say, they ^a came from an upper class section of that Babylon known as Miami.

Three crows appeared and became very active my second week at Eagle Lake. They stayed together most of the time; I came to think of them as We Three. One of them adopted me as an extra friend. It could be he was young enough to have become imprinted by me. Much of the time I was "at home" he would sit on a low nearby pine limb, or stand on the bare pebbly beach facing me, and whisper and talk and croon. He had a sort of whisper song which I couldn't hear unless I was close to him. Occasionally, when I was hanging up clothes on a temporary line between two nearby pines I would become aware of his presence by that low whisper from a

small pine branch. This ability of some birds to whisper I'd known of and had long hoped to be favored with a whispering song someday. But I never expected to meet up with the phenomenon in a species with so coarse a voice as the crow possesses. This particular bird was also versed in producing the cat-like "mrrrow", which is said to be common with southern crows, but I never heard either of his companions "mrrrow" or whisper.

One of the first birds to come to my notice at my camp was a red-shouldered hawk. This species, in southern Florida, is very pale in color. If you are familiar with the cinnamon-washed red shoulder of the north, which is as richly colored as the red of the robin, the first time you see and hear this bird you think both your eyes and ears are deceiving you. You waste time hunting through a field guide for a new species. This pale insular form is genetically interesting for it intergrades with the darker form as you travel northward; by the time you reach the Georgia border you again see the rich rufous shoulders and underparts. What causes such a color change? It is also known among other species, such as the towhee.

At my campsite one of these pale hawks perched atop a nearby pine one morning three or four days after my arrival and just yelled and yelled, bobbing and bowing on his branch, seeming to look right at me as he filled the air with his strident voice. I soon had reason to suspect he had been among the local bird residents which had been watching from the wilderness fringe before deciding I was safe to have around. He looked and sounded as if he were swearing at me.

The hawk repeated this performance the next several mornings. He would yell first from the pines at the back edge of my camp, then, after several minutes he would disappear for the day. Then

one morning, instead of disappearing right away, he followed up his initial scoldings by flying to the top of Eagle Tree; he continued his yellings from there for nearly half an hour. By this time I had noticed he was giving his first yell in the morning over near the hammock before coming to a pine near my camp, as if he were giving what is known of some birds as an awakening ~~song~~ ^{SONG}. I had often gone outside early, just before the crack of dawn, to listen to the dawn chorus, but I had never thought of, nor heard about, a bird of prey having a routine awakening call.

Curiosity led me to start taking down the time of his first early morning calls, and date, and time. He was now giving his first call every morning from over by the hammock, apparently no longer feeling he had to scold me first. But ~~at~~ after his first call he flew directly up to the top of Eagle Tree to continue yelling for another half hour or so, apparently more at the rest of the world instead of at me. In writing down my hawk's first morning alarm I was fully aware it wasn't spring; that it wasn't even breeding season yet in sub-tropical Florida, so his early calls could not be related to the awakening songs of the birds in the north at the approach of breeding ^aseason. I felt a little silly the first couple of times I wrote down the hour, thinking he is going to disappear any day now so my notes are a waste of time. But I didn't want to risk losing an opportunity, just in case; and it wasn't many mornings before I had absolute proof that ^{this} hawk was on an awakening time schedule, changing with the clock as the sun rose higher a minute earlier each day. I was soon thankful I kept those notes, for his calls continued on regular sun-time ^eschedule for weeks that extended into months.

One bit of odd behavior by this hawk occurred one early morning after a night of extra heavy dew. My tent fly was dripping as if it had rained. After his early awakening call the hawk flew to the top of Eagle Tree, where the rising sun glowed on him before it got over the tree tops out back to reach my camp. To my surprise he stretched out his wings, probably to dry, like an anhinga or a cormorant. He held that position in the warm, drying sun for a clock-timed half hour. Maybe others have seen it but that was my first, and last, sight of a hawk hanging his wings out to dry.

A few palm warblers were almost constantly present near my tent, jumping from the ground at the seed heads of weeds too weak to hold their weight.

I yearned for shorebirds, but suspected that the raw mineral of the shore edges provided little food for them. A travertine type of algae was forming messy looking mats; I hoped that macroscopic animals were living in or under the mats, but I didn't have a ~~xx~~ hand lens or a microscope with me. I did see crayfish now and then in the evening, and they, combined with the presence of minnows, led me to hope there was at least some food for shorebirds.

One morning, as I was half dozing, half gazing out my netting tent, not quite awake yet, a spotted sandpiper walked across my line of vision down on my shore. Up I got, instantly. I wasn't dreaming! To my great delight the sandpiper remained the rest of my stay at the pond, disappearing now and then for a few hours, maybe seeking more substantial food elsewhere, but always returning.

The first day after the sandpiper appeared a palm warbler flew close to his head, and dove around and around, as if trying to chase it away. But the sandpiper paid no heed. Later that week four

blue birds took a bath in front of my tent, talking all the while in the sweetest of sibilant tones, which seemed exquisite after listening to the hawk. A palm warbler flew in among them, too, but the blue birds also paid no attention.

A red-bellied woodpecker began hanging around the pineland in back of my tent. Once I saw him with a huge walking stick in his bill. He placed it under one foot against a tree trunk and pecked at it woodpecker fashion. I swear I could hear each of the legs patter down onto the dry pine needles below.

I drove back into camp one week-day to see fourteen little blue herons at the corner of the lake near the deserted scout camp. Twelve immatures, in white plumage, one mottled, the other an all-blue adult. They were timid and flew off as I drove around to my camp. They did show up half a dozen times again, and stayed long enough to accept my presence without getting skittish. But they remained strangers to me, and I to them.

The mature eagle, with the flowing white mantle, came in almost daily, except when the scouts were there; ^{he} ~~they~~ waited the usual three days before returning after the scouts left. The immature eagle appeared a couple of times a week. I presumed both did their feeding elsewhere, as they prefer fish and couldn't live off what this little pond had to offer.

The tree swallows suddenly flew in again from out of the blue one afternoon. At first there were twenty-five to thirty of them, but new recruits kept streaming in from the everglades. Soon, about two hundred swallows were circling above the pond, leisurely, arranged like a great wheelabout forty to fifty feet above the water. Once I had seen an educational film which included circling swallows. The man who had shown the movie, a professional ornithologist,

said he never did discover what the great wheeling and dipping down to the water was all about. To me it was a new adventure.

I watched to see if this group would tilt their wheel, as had been true in the film, so those at the bottom of it could touch the water. In anticipation, I climbed up onto the top of the long ridge of crumbled oolite on the north side of the pond, which brought me a few feet nearer to the circling swallows.

Gradually the tempo of their moving circle increased. Excitement seemed to grow in the flock. They wheeled a little faster, then faster. Soon they were circling in a frenzy. Then suddenly the whole wheel tipped up toward the sky so that the lower section of it was down close enough to the water so that the very bottom birds cut the water with a swish but they were instantly swung back up into the air like people on a ferris wheel.

By concentrating with my binoculars on the area of their contacts with the water I could see that they were not drinking on the wing as I had been supposing. Obviously they were not catching insects off the water as they remained in the same spot and that many birds would have scooped up the bugs in no time. I decided they were taking a very limited bath on the wing while taking part in a rhythmical bird ritual which required split second cutting of the water without one bird getting out of line in the wheel. No bird really got wet, there were no collisions. I was watching a n ultimate clock-like precision behavior which was made possible by flock-flight skill. What kind of radar kept them from colliding? Or falling in?

It made me dizzy watching them. They kept up this precision wheeling for about fifteen minutes. Then small groups of the birds peeled off from the ascending arc and flew back over the everglades

from where they had come. Within less than half an hour of the arrival of the first swallows not one of them was in sight. An ethereal experience for a watching human, which takes on the quality of a dream. As if it had never happened.

After I was camping there for about a month an immature white little blue heron dropped into the water's edge near my tent. He looked me over, as I sat by my typewriter, and sidled away slowly with his head and neck twisted slightly to one side. I soon forgot him as I pecked away on my typewriter; looking up a little later I was surprised to find him food hunting near me along the shoreline. He turned and sidled away again. I returned to my typing, wondering what on earth a bird with a bill big enough to grab and swallow frogs and fair-size fish could possibly find to eat here. Out of the corner of my eye I could see him nonchalantly probing in the bits of gray matted algae as he worked his way back to me. I learned something. Which I soon realized applied to the other birds, too. The rhythmic clicking of the typewriter apparently was an "all's safe" sound to wildlings; perhaps it resembles the staccato of a woodpecker's rhythm or that of a katydid.

This snowy young fellow came to accept me without alarm as I moved about my own territory, for he stayed on. I got the impression he spent his nights with relatives over at Taylor Slough, as he flew off in that direction late afternoons. But he returned the next day, by himself. I took to calling him Mr. Independence.

A flock of killdeer began frequenting a small gravel bar island half way down the pond on the hammock side. They first arrived one afternoon, acting sleepy and tired. They preened a little then settled down for the night. One of them seemed more active and worked his way up to my end of the pond as if feeding.

. But he soon returned to the others. I am sure that is the one, which from then on, came to feed at my end of the pond every day I was "at home." I am sure I didn't imagine it, either, that as I arrived back from a trip to town he flew in ahead of my car on purpose, and gave a soft killdeer greeting as if he had been waiting for me to come home. It happened too often to be coincidence. And these shorebirds convinced me that there was more food present than I had assumed, for they spent many hours feeding there, though sometimes they flew off somewhere else for part of the day. They usually returned before sunset and spent the night at the pond.

On the full moon night in January, the killdeer held some kind of vocal revelry all night. Their usual staid, modest voices took on an excited bacchanalian tone and intruded pleasantly on my sleep, waking me now and then. Hearing them when I was half asleep I sort of imagined someone feeding them a strong alcoholic beverage. By dawn, however, they were strangely silent. I stepped out of my tent and looked over at them on the gravel bar from my tent platform. Could those quiet little birds, squatted there motionless and voiceless, on the oolite gravel, be the same ones I heard engaging in boisterous revelry all night? They spent most of the day sleeping off their debauchery. But they repeated the performance the next night, when the moon was still almost full round. The nights after that were quiet and the little killdeer returned to daytime talking.

I was washing my hair in a basin on the stool one afternoon, enjoying, as I always did, viewing the world upside down, with the sky on the ground and the pond in the sky, when suddenly a terrible shrieking filled the air off toward the hammock. Trying to wipe soap out of my eyes it was moments before I could investigate. I walked along the top of the gravel ridge to the vicinity of the

awful sound, and soon was looking down, near the water's edge, at a scattering of countless white feathers. I looked up quickly for Mr. Independence. He had been there when I started washing my hair. Now he was gone!

Most of the time I can accept nature's raw deal that larger creatures must feed on smaller ones else die of starvation. But this time I didn't see why the eagle, or the hawk, or whatever it was, couldn't have made a dinner out of something which wasn't a personal friend of mine, what with the whole expanse of the everglades to choose from.

Two days later I looked up from my typewriter, as I saw something moving. Mr. Independence was flying in and landed not far from my feet! Leisurely he folded his angel-white wings. I'm sure my smile went around to the back of my head. For the first time in my life I felt like throwing my arms around a bird and kissing it. He quickly settled into his usual routine of real or fake food-hunting at the edge of the pond near me and my tent.

What a coincidence that he should have been missing for the first time, right after that shrieking. Did whatever attacked the white-feathered bird frighten Mr. Independence away? Those scattered white feathers will remain a mystery to me the rest of my life for I never found a clue to what happened. But they were proof positive that something dire had happened, and I collected a few of the smaller softer ones as a memento of the unknown owner.

Three hooded mergansers came in one afternoon, apparently a pair and an immature. A dog with a visitor soon scared them off for good. But they proved a record-that-far south for me. Another unexpected record was a golden plover which came in and stayed

half an hour. It should have been in Patagonia at that date. Maybe it was too weak, or was injured, as it passed over with its migrating flock, though it now seemed in good condition.

We Three often made a noisy fuss over nothing but once they sounded so persistent I looked up. They were circling a huge immature eagle which was standing on bare limestone in the track where I drove in to my campsite. This eagle had some white in its tail so I knew it was a new individual. When the crows forced the bird to move I saw that it limped badly. The eagle stopped, bent neck and head down and seemed to study its feet; then it took wing and flew off to a pine tree perch different from those my other two eagles ever chose. Next time I looked up it was gone.

One Saturday night south Florida had a freeze. The scouts arrived unprepared for the cold. About two O'clock in the morning I was awakened by a great wild Indian whooping of many voices, there was the ring of an axe, followed by a great crashing hollow sound. At daybreak, suspicious, I got up in the chill and looked over in the direction of Eagle Tree. The dawn truly came up like thunder, for there was a great empty space where Eagle Tree had stood and the crash of its middle of the night fall thundered in my ears. If I had been younger I would have cried, even though I knew that a bunch of cold little boys could have come down ill without the heat that tree provided them. Again, I felt there are some scout managers who make better baseball rooters than ~~managers~~ ^{managers} of kids' needs.

Something nameless was lost to the birds, there at the pond, ^eforever; to the local residents, to ~~x~~ passing shrikes, and grackles, flickers, sparrow hawks, and numerous others I had seen resting or food-scouting there, to say nothing of my hawk. All because a

scout leader hadn't check^{ed}, or believed, the weather report before starting out. An important stage prop was turned into ashes for an unnecessary reason.

I was up and around about an hour one morning when seven large, gawky-looking wood storks dropped in at the scout camp end of the pond. We Three immediately flew off^{over} to the visitors but remained silent before such a phalanx of biggies. I was soon amazed to see those huge wood ibis line up in single file, and, with slow, measured steps, as if in ~~rith~~ rhythm with some kind of music, march around the oval fireplace left by the scouts. Twice they gracefully stalked around it, in perfect step. The three ~~dark~~ black imps just stood watching, as if ^{as} astounded as I. It looked for all the world like a staged scene from a Walt Disney movie. After the second round they stood together in a group, as if consulting one another, then they took wing and flew off toward the everglades. How many strange enactments occur in the wild which human eyes never see? If I had not been camping there.... It reminded me of the rose in the wilderness, which if a human isn't there to see it, it doesn't exist. Like saying dinosaurs never existed because none of us was there to see them. The animal and bird world is full of dramas unseen by the human species. For us, it is a matter of a happening to be there at the right time.

One day in late January three pairs of snowy egrets dropped in and put on a mating display as they stood in the now shallower water, jumping over one another, plumes flying. A black-necked stilt, a bird I had never seen alone before without a flock, stood in the middle of the egrets as if coaching the exhibition. A silly-behaving pair of flickers moved into a nearby pine as if mimicking

the egrets. Spring had surely arrived in the evergalde. Even We Three split up. Two of them waved their heads and necks around one another while the third kept to his perch in the pine near me and crooned to me. Was he a bachelor, a wallflower, or an immature? Or was his problem the lack of a fourth crow in the area?

I woke up one morning, having to get to work on time, to discover my clock had stopped. I'd forgotten to wind it. I was due in Homestead at 8:30. I was hustling with breakfast when there came the hawk yell from over by the hammock. Quickly I picked up yesterday's record, - 6:40 a.m. Ah! I had plenty of time. I set my clock one minute ahead, for the sun was still climbing the ksy and the hawk's call was responding to that minut-a-day change. I took the clock to Homestead with me; an hour and a half later I checked it against the huge clock at the Radio Broadcasting Station across from the Park office. It was one of the most satisfying experiences of my life to see my clock exactly right. Hawk and sun were still synchronized; the universe was in tune with itself.

By now I had been collecting hawk awakening-time data with serious intent. One day in February, however, a forest fire, started by a careless swamp buggy operator about a mile south of the Fire Tower, raced through the now dry grass and pinelands. It reached within a quarter mile of my camp, west of the hammock, but lose enough so that the billowing smoke looked ominous and I could already smell it. A shift of wind in my direction could be dangerous. I packed some of my belongings and moved out to a new campsite near the Ranger Station; leaving my tent behind I retrieved my jungle hammock from one of the big cans to use for the night. I tied it up between two trees, earning some quizzical looks

from a trailerite family who had also pulled in to the new temporary campsite. The night was uneventful, as I expected it would be.

At dawn I folded my hammock ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and stole back to my pond campsite, not wanting to miss the hawk awakening call. I had missed his call a few times before, having gone to visit my family in Ft. Lauderdale for the holidays, and having camped a few days at Flamingo. But this time I wondered if the fire, which had put up a tremendous amount of smoke, had affected the hawk. But I was the earliest of birds that morning so I had to wait for his usual sounding-off time. His alarm came at 6:58, ten minutes later than the previous morning. And this time his voice came from a different direction, ~~■~~ from a pine between me and the hammock, thus much nearer to me. This was the first time since the end of October that his call came from a different location.

The following two mornings the hawk surprised me by calling from the opposite end of the pond, from a pine near where the ibis had paraded. After this he moved around almost daily as if testing the safety of different spots; but he always remained in the northwest arc, never crossing over to the other side of the pond. His regular calls continued as usual; nothing changed except the location, for he went back to his regular timing. I often wondered if the gap left by the felling of eagle tree affected his choice of first morning call, ^{perch} though he had never given that first one there.

It was a challenge to be so near Anhinga ^Trail. Now and then I drove over there at three or four in the morning to be on hand for first early morning squawks. I stayed all night there once. Dressed in my northern woolens against the night chill, I went over there the night of December 31st, to be on hand to ^aher the waterbirds

greet the New Year. I lay down on the boardwalk in my sleeping bag, out over the slough, and waited silently to hear any night talking. But it was rather quiet in the midnight world of the anhingas, the coots, little blue and green herons, American egrets, Louisiana herons, snowy egrets, purple and Florida gallinules, and the alligators.

I dozed off now and then. The early dawn light seemed to come early, and almost immediately there were strⁱngs and moving about, and low-throated soft voices. In no time the slough denizens were all awake, but rather quiet, unaware that a pair of human eyes was taking it all in. Soon there began a soft chicken-like cackling similar to the sound of a chicken house at dawn, a very contented sound and a magnificent experience to a tuned-in human ear. They were all clucking or talking at once but no one any louder than anyone else. No excitement. No disturbances. An ecstatic encounter with wildlings which have dropped their defences.

~~XXXXXX~~ Not long after dawn, footsteps approached on the boardwalk. Hastily I got out of my sleeping bag, rolled it up and leaned on it against the rail. I raised my binocualrs and used them as if I had just arrived. Instantly the birds were as conditioned in their behavior as I. The soft talking ~~instan~~ ended, replaced by silence, or an occasional coarse squawk, and several of the bigger birds busied themselves preening.

The first time I had ever gone out on this boardwalk, just as I approached the railing above the deeper water and I was thinking there was nothing to see in the form of wildlife, something dark moved slowly up to the surface in the pool below me. It stuck a long, snake-like neck up out of the water and looked hastily around as its large dark body rose to the surface. Quickly the

black and silver bird half lifted itself into the air and shook itself like a wet dog. It flapped noisily and rather clumsily over the surface of the water to a large shrub and hopped up onto a bare branch. There it spread out its great wings to dry in the sun. I doubt if many people have such an introduction to the anhinga, the bird for which the trail was named.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ I had only seen an anhinga as a museum drawer specimen, with legs folded up under it. I did know it swam under water and chased fish but I certainly hadn't expected to see it rise up out of water like a mythical creature. I also knew it had no oil gland for dressing its feathers, hence it had to "hang them out to dry" after a sub-surface swim.

I saw my first limpkin here, too. I was sitting on a narrow portion of the boardwalk, near its entrance, dangling my legs overboard as no one was around. Some creature suddenly gave an agonizing cry in the dense slough shrubbery. I jumped to my feet, for it sounded like a child screaming, as if an alligator had it by ~~the~~ a leg or arm. I didn't know what to do. How deep was that slough water? Would an alligator grab me if I stepped into it? I waited motionless, hoping something would thrash around so I could tell where to look, or try to help. Suddenly that same pitiful cry split the air again, in the same direction, not far from me in the bushes. Then the cry was repeated several times, and I caught a bird-like timbre to it which was definitely not human. Soon all was quiet. It was as if nothing had happened. For I saw nothing.

While the screams went on a great blue heron, two American egrets, and a Louisiana heron had stood around preening, so I quickly realized it had to be something with which they were familiar else they'd take off in alarm. Not until several weeks later was I able

to put voice and body together. I was near the boardwalk with a birdwatching group from Miami, when a limpkin flew up in front of us and landed on a shrub branch. It instantly let out that awful agonizing yell, while we were looking right at it. These strange, brown-streaked birds occur from Florida to Argentina; they live almost exclusively on the ampullaria snail which is becoming so scarce today.

As the dry season progresses and the water holes in the everglades gradually dry up, there is always some water at Anhinga Trail. Birds and gators move in, making them easy to see by winter visitors. When spring rains begin most of them return to the everglades, fanning out to favorite rookeries to as far west as the ten thousand islands near Marco^{and}/_{to} Okeechobbe far to the north.

Some of my friends were concerned about my camping out in such well-known snake country. By coincidence I never saw a live snake while camping there that winter. One week-end afternoon, however, when the scouts were camping opposite me, I looked up from my typing to see three little boys struggling along the top of the gravel ridge toward me, carrying something heavy and looping down between them. I walked around the pond edge to meet them. I could quickly see they had a beheaded, skinned five-foot rattler draped between them, which obviously the larger boys in the camp had killed against Park rules. One of the little boys said, as I caught up with them, "We thought you would like some fresh meat because you live so far from the store." Of course I sent them back to their scoutmasters, with a "piece of my tongue" about needlessly killing wildlife and suggesting they do the cooking and eating. I was sure those leaders had expected me to scream and throw a fit in fright.. If I were that kind of dame I would not be camping alone

in snake country.

It was about this time that I went out to Flamingo again. The road was a narrow two-lane, oolite-gravel-surfaced one, at least surfaced part of the way. It had originally been worn down and cut through by settlers and exploiters. No electric wires, no houses, no signs of mankind anywhere along its 35 miles, except a canal along most of its northern edge, from which had come the road surfacing. This had the presumptuous name of the Ingraham Highway. The story was that at least two speeding cars a year, the drivers acting wild out in such wildness, wound up in the canal, usually with their passengers drowned. The canals were cut into the oolite

There were many hardwood hammocks, like islands, out in the everglades grass, especially on the north side of the trail. After many miles you come to Paurotis Pond, Mrazek, and West Lakes. Then the mangroves appear, heralding the approach to the salt water of Florida Bay. Two ^a canals had to be crossed if you wanted to get to Flamingo and they did not have bridges. Only two planks each. I drove up to the planks, got out of the car and looked to see if my wheels were lined up with them, then drove across. If I'd missed, and the car went into the canal, it could be a week before anyone came out there and found me dead or crippled. But such thoughts didn't deter me. Living my kind of life I had learned the difference between daring caution and foolhardiness. I went over those planks, going and coming, to Flamingo more times than I can count.

I stayed out there for a week, with the shorebirds and waterbirds; the sandpipers, plovers and other shorebirds stood around on the sandbars at low tide in great masses. The only sign of humanity was a crude, empty ranger shack on stilts on the bank

above ~~the~~ Florida Bay. I arranged a crude fireplace of sand and shells, with my cake rack for grate, on the edge of the bank. There was a wide open area where some coconut palms and a few scattered trees offered a bit of shade but none were close enough to tie up my hammock between them. I stretched the hammock on the ground, placed the boat air cushions in a row in the bottom, as usual, spread my sleeping bag on top of them, and tied the head end up to a handle of the car door. Nary a mosquito nor a snake could get in.

The days flew sliding into one another. I reveled in being in such wild, undisturbed place at the bottom edge of the North American continent. There couldn't have been more shore birds in the Pleistocene. This was the next best thing to being an explorer. I was so safe from my own dangerous species. At moments I fancied that other humans had not been created yet. I was part of Nature and this was where I belonged forever. A Cro-Magnon miss, maybe even Neanderthal.

But I didn't have so much as a fish hook with me, so I couldn't play Robinson Crusoe. I was tied, as if with a rubber band, to stores and other civilized inconveniences. I had to pack up for the precious week was suddenly gone. But I interrupted the trip back by driving out to Snake Bight. I had been there once before, on a birding trip with Peter and Kacy. The lane in off the Ingraham highway was but one set of tracks through dense shrub jungle, with no way to turn around until you got out to Florida Bay. I arrived there without incident, and, as I usually did under such circumstances, I turned the car around on the wide, upper, firm beach so that it headed back out in case I needed a hasty retreat.

~~I xxxxxxxx in xxxxxxxx final xxxxxxxx with xxxxxxxx Florida Bay islands xxxxxx~~

I reveled in these last extra hours with the Florida Bay islands. I walked a short ways out on the flat, but it soon became too riskily

wet-soft under foot. It was a marl beach, which I knew to be treacherous, for it acts like quick sand, ~~for it was~~ ^{being} oolite ground to powder by wave action. I soon started to sink in to the top of my sneakers so I backed out in a hurry having heard of people being caught up to their knees in it, unable to move without help.

As mosquitos were beginning to gather, being present at all seasons in the Flamingo area, I decided to eat my supper in the car and ~~to~~ sleep on the back seat for the night. I knew it would get dark early, for the nearer you are to the equator the more ~~even~~ even are the days and nights. I wanted to get up at dawn and put those canal planks behind me as soon as possible.

Just as ^I started undressing in the back of the car I became aware of something moving outside the windows. Reflex made me grab what I had just taken off and start to wrap it around me. Then I remembered as there was no other car in here there couldn't be anyone here. I leaned forward to look out at what was moving. It was a big barn owl, wings full spread, hovering like a hummingbird, looking in the window at what it could see moving. I had to laugh all by myself. No doubt the owl was resident there and was puzzled by this big obstacle in which something was in motion. ~~He~~ hung out there in the air for about ten minutes. I read for a while after supper and as it began to get too dark I went to bed with the birds.

It was late February by now and I was eager to be off to other things before I had to head north. Once back from Flamingo I was restless. But I decided to stay a couple of more nights to check up on my hawk and other resident denizens.

How different was my departure from my arrival at this camp.

I was about to leave very close friends. We Three were still almost always in sight. One or both eagles were usually around, resting, preening. The hawk was occasionally to be seen in the daytime though he had now stopped his morning awakening call. He left a silence in the early morning air. The tiny palm warblers now flitted in and out of my tent breezeway with bold familiarity; myrtle warblers had joined them recently. My special killdeer friend was but a curve of the beach away. A mockingbird had become a regular resident percher on the back end of my ridgepole; he had been silent his first few weeks but now he was talking. Mockers in Homestead were singing, but not this one, yet. Mr. Independence was still an important member of the bird cast on my special stage. Many transients flying over now, dropped in, no doubt on their way north. Least appreciated among them were cowbirds, though they gave me another farthest south record.

I had a date with Kacy and Peter at the Fairchild Kampong. I wanted to try paddling down the coast from South Miami to Homestead, not having used my kayak all winter other than to fool around once on my camp pond, which offered no place to paddle to. Mrs. Fairchild had insisted I launch my boat from their canal, which ran in from the salt water to the bottom of their yard.

I'd by now been in Florida enough winters to know that cold spells can come down from the north much as you get heat waves up north. I phoned the Miami Weather Bureau the day before departure, asked if there was cold wave in sight and told them of my projected trip in the kayak. Should I start that week, or wait for another week? The weatherman who answered said. "No sign of a cold wave. You might as well start along in the next day or two."

With Peter's help I packed my sleeping bag, canvas tarp,

✓ warm clothes, lifesaver cushions, netting tent, paddles, and food into the kayak. Eagerly I started out for this new adventure. Peter untied the painter, gave the kayak a push with his foot, and I was off. He and his mother waved me bon voyage until we could no longer see each other as I reached the end of the canal and turned right into Biscayne Bay.

One of my goals was to record the conditions, almost foot by foot, of the coastline for I had become aware in the few short years of coming to Florida how fast construction and other human activities were decreasing shorebird habitat. Already the shorebirds were about halved in numbers since I first came down in the 40's, less than a decade ago. Were the birds moving inland, to small sandy spits long inland marshes and waterways to escape people who were preventing them from feeding along the shore, or had the birds diminished in numbers because of lack of feeding habitat?

As no one was waiting for me in Homestead, and as I was between jobs, I paddled leisurely, stopping to jot down details about the shore line above the beach. In case of emergency I was to phone Kacy and she would pick me up in my car, which I had left with her. We knew I'd not get beyond Cutler's Ridge the first night out, so it would be easy for her and Peter to come for me there if necessary.

All the descriptions of tide level that I'd ever seen about the south Florida coast indicated there was but a one foot tide rise in normal weather. With that in mind I kept an eye out for on some small island a night mooring rather than pull up on a beach where wise guys could too easily bother me.

There were not very many birds in sight, other than a few seagulls, and some Cormorants on posts out in the Bay. I did, however see my first Ward's, or Wurdemann, Heron among shrubs ashore,

looking like a very white-mottled great blue. At that time it was considered a cross between a great white heron and a great blue, but since then, ornithologists, in their special wisdom, say it is a color morph between the two, if you want to get picky-specific. But any first that you see in the wild becomes a life-memory.

The weather was ideal. Like a northern June day. The ^{blue}purple Bay sparkled in the sun; small white-ship clouds sailed slowly overhead. My progress was slow, there was so much to look at, - pine groves, casuarinas with great pendulous branches, small ~~marshy~~ marshy inlets, ~~stone~~ seawalls, sandy nooks almost big enough to call beaches; it took a lot of notes to describe every three feet or so.

As the sun began to slide down the western sky I started watching for a mooring, what with twilight being so brief at this latitude. Soon I saw a very small island, about thirty feet long and ten feet wide, a short way out in the Bay but with a few green scraggly bushes on it. It looked ideal for it appeared to be about three feet above the water in its upper center. I'd be out under the stars, yet away from beach prowlers.

When I reached the small island, which proved to be a protuberance of Miami oolite, it looked very damp to me for having been so high and dry in the sun and breeze all day. Maybe the salt in the damp air caused it, salt absorbing moisture so easily. Surely it was well above the one-foot tide and there were no real waves. I pulled the "Shorebird" up to its highest part by ^{ing}swimming it end for end, and tied it fore and aft to the greenery, which turned out to be very young mangroves.

Kacy had given me so much prepared food, in addition to what I had brought, I decided I didn't need to cook a supper. All I had to do was sit in my dry boat on my sleeping bag, as I'd done

all day, though now I could half lie down while eating.

Just as the sun started down its last few degrees, and I was anticipating a gorgeous starry night, a stiff breeze came up. In no time the Bay was whipped into small white caps. I wondered what it would like ^{be} like by morning. One thing I didn't want to happen was to be washed out to sea in a cockle shell.

As the dark started to enshroud the earth in earnest I made a quick decision, for the wind, if anything, had grown stronger. Better to move now, while still easy to see, than in the middle of the night. I untied the painters, swung the boat back into the now choppy water, and paddled to shore. There was a high sea wall to the right, at Cutler's Ridge, a boat ramp, ^{and} then a wide, high and dry beach to the left. I had to choose between camping on that high beach for the night, or paddling down along the coast until I came to something safer than near a car ramp. Could I find what I needed in the dark?

The wind seemed even stronger now. I had to make up my mind. Maybe no one would come down here in such threatening weather. If anyone did come, I'd have to sacrifice the boat and run hide somewhere, or try for someone's house as I knew there were streets up back of this beach.

The upper part of the beach was powdery dry, I found. Once again I moved the boat up away from the water, turning it end for end. It was so loaded it was a bit heavy, but it pivoted well. Then it took a very long rope to reach the nearest bush, a seagrape; I had to tie three ropes together, but I wasn't taking any chances of having the kayak blown out to sea., with or without me.

Not only was the wind amazingly strong but it was growing quite chilly. Knowing I had to sleep out in it for the night, I

fussed with my bedding, in the bottom of the kayak. The three life cushions were already in place, and the sleeping bag spread out over them. I tucked my blanket in around and over them. Then I spread the tarpaulin out over the whole opening of the boat, and tied it down with ropes extending under the kayak. Not a flap did it make in the wind.

By the time my snug night-nest was done the stars were out, so it wasn't cloudy. I could see high white caps all the way out to the horizon, covering the Bay. Knowing there was no hope of building a fire, although I had some dry wood with me, the only thing to do was to snuggled down into my sleeping bag, clothes and all. I ate some of the handy food, tested the edges of the tarpaulin, listened for a short while to the wind, and was off to sleep I was so cozy.

I woke up a few times in the night, and peeked out from under the tarpaulin to make sure I was still on the high, dry spot. ^{though I couldn't hear water slapping} As I had angled the kayak into the wind, the wind did not hit it broadside, though now and then there was a slight jiggle from the heavy gusts. I was so thankful I had gotten off that little island, for though I really couldn't see it, waves were high over in that direction. No wonder it was wet. A foot of high tide, plus rushing, foaming waves, could easily bring the water up to that island's center. But I sure was puzzled why the Weather Bureau had no warning of a norther.

When I awoke not long after dawn the wind had dropped down a bit, but the Bay looked like a sailor's nightmare. It was wild and lashing. When I sat up I discovered it was mean cold! I scrootched down under the tarp, and being part way ~~of~~ out of the sleeping bag I scrounged around for food within easy reach. I had a crazy breakfast of crackers, cookies, peanuts, handfuls of cold cereal, again washed down with canned fruit juice.

By the time I was ready to step out into that cold wind the sun was well up. The sun, being always warm this far south no matter the air temperature, was warm on my back as I walked in the soft sand up to the nearest Culter's Ridge street to look for a telephone in someone's house. I was lucky right off in choosing a friendly neighbor, who at first couldn't believe I had spent the night on that windy beach. Mrs. Fairchild herself answered the phone, not her maid as I had hoped. "Where are you!" she almost shrieked. "We have all been so worried about you in that wind."

I quickly explained about my very comfortable night in the kayak and gave her the message to have Kacy and Peter come pick me up. I'd known when I went to bed that night I would have to give up paddling down the coast that year, in such unsettled weather. I never did get the chance to try it again.

I couldn't resist calling the Weather Bureau that day, and reminded the same man, whose voice I recognized, of his advice that it was safe to start kayaking down the coast to Homestead. Not so much that I wanted to rub it in but I was very curious as to what happened to his fair-weather prognostication. How could there be such a quick turnabout in the weather when they had such skillful storm tracking possibilities? He was very apologetic. "Once in awhile," he said, one of these northers sneaks in without any warning ahead of time." He asked me how I had fared. When I told him he ^{sincerely} said "I'm glad you go in out of the wind." He sounded concerned.

It was a long time before I trusted Florida weather forecasting after that; I eventually realized that the Miami Weather Bureau was famous for tracking hurricanes, which come up from the south. They didn't have that kind of skill for northers until many years ~~later,~~ having to wait for space age satellites.