

# Damn the Carnations Full Speed Ahead



'The Gonz' Sammie Mays

Ahhh, another perfect day to stop and stir the grits and smell the azaleas.

Back home on the Gulf of Mexico's Redneck Riviera, while visiting the family over a long weekend, I heard Jimmy Buffett was in town doing the same, visiting his sister LuLu.

And if I do say so myself she is one hell of a fine cook and thankfully, the woman is hospitable enough to open up her kitchen to visitors. Being that LuLu's seafood gumbo is a powerful aphrodisiac, I thought about getting some, so I launched my 1966 Boston Whaler into the dark green waters of Weeks Bay, just northwest of Gulf Shores Alabama, and planned on dropping in on the Buffett family for Sunday dinner.

If ever you find yourself in the Deep South, one rule of thumb to remember: If the morning dew is still on the ground it is clearly too early to stop in for a visit unless otherwise invited. Not one for taking the last piece of fried chicken from the plate - with my trusty photographer/drinkin' buddy, Elbows T. Mumbler at the helm - we cruised down the tranquil bayou spying alligators to pass a little time.

The morning sunlight was hard at work forcing its beams through the massive limbs of the ancient moss-covered oaks. Tire swings awaited the arrival of grandchildren from church, while charming antebellum homes sat proud atop the gentle slope of

the azalea-lined river bank - the occasional whiff of chicory coffee and bacon frying made my stomach growl.

"Enough of this meandering!" I said from the bow as I popped open a couple cans of Dixie beer. "Turn this ship around and set a course for LuLu's!"

Hanging on to my beverage with one hand and my hat with the other - Elbows opened up the engine. Kickin' up a rooster-tail, we watered lawns, slip-slidin' around corners and zipping down straight-a-ways. Gators gettin' up on all fours, belly-bustin' into the bayou just made us go even faster.

Off in the distance and just a little ways under the bridge, LuLu's was coming into view and to my delight so was a rainbow of carnations floating in the cool fresh water. I motioned for Elbows to cut the engine while leaning over to grab one - it stood straight up like it had just been picked.

"Where do you think these came from Elbows?" I asked. Looking around and then up, Elbows mumbled a logical scenario, "I think some bi\*#h was mad at her boyfriend and tossed them out of her car from off the top of the bridge."

Yeah Elbows, you're probably right I said. One man's trash is another's treasure - let's get em!

Shifting gears back and forth from forward to neutral, Elbows meticulously maneuvered the boat from flower to flower while I laid across the bow picking the beauties from the bayou. Not one was left behind - we rescued the entire bouquet including the baby's breath and leather leaf ferns. As it turned out, it was one huge arrangement, a couple of dozen carnations at least.

Laughing and having a good ole time, and with my too-huge-not-to-notice bouquet in hand, we docked at LuLu's and trekked barefoot through the white hot sand, making our way to the shel-

ter of the thatched-roof bar.

We ordered the Sunday morning drink special - two of the "four-you-hit-the-floor" Cadillac margaritas over ice. They were so good we ordered another and another and another and half way through the fourth, Elbows begins to think we're being stared at, in discontent no less.

Shut-up and quit mumbling Elbows before your ice melts, I said.

Tapping our toes in the sand and singing along with the acoustic players' rendition of Cheeseburger in Paradise - our gumbo and oyster po boys arrived.

Simply, there was no excuse for having all this much fun - we were drunk and just gettin' started when LuLu Buffett got up on the stage asking for a moment of silence to remember a friend who had on this very day,

eight-years ago, died in a plane crash on this very bay.

Wide-eyed I looked over at Elbows and he looked back at me and we both looked down at that damn too-huge-not-to-notice bouquet of flowers lying there on our table.

I summoned the courage to look up at the crowd and my worst nightmare was staring back at me. Every single person in the house had drawn a bead on that too-huge-not-to-notice bouquet, the memorial flowers that had been dropped into the water in memory of the fallen pilot.

Elbows began singing an almost imperceptible refrain of Lynard Skynard's "Give Me Three Steps" when everything went fuzzy.

Sammie is a former member of the National Enquirer's elite team of "Foreign Legion of Journalist." She is the feature entertainment /travel writer for Travel Host magazine of the Florida Keys and Key West and the Host for Comcast channel 5 "Spotlight on the Keys." The Gonz can be reached at www.saminthekeys.com.

# History of the Race: Key Largo Steeplechase

The first race was simply a bunch of catamaran folks that got together and sailed the course to see if it could be done. Local sailor and Hall of Famer, Rick White, won that particular race. There were no entry fees, no trophies... nothing! But one of the ground crew had found an old, beat-up lawn chair at Anne's Beach and presented it to White as a joke.

White immediately

pronounced this lawn chair as the Perpetual Trophy for the Key Largo Steeplechase. It is now considered one of the most esteemed accomplishments in sailing to win this trophy.

Every year the Winners names, boat make, and elapsed time is hand-scribbled on the material and now contains a complete record of the event.

Next year's event is scheduled for the second weekend in December.



Picture of the winning team, left is Enrique Rodriguez, right is Mike Phillips. The boat is a Marstrom 20, made in Sweden.



This is team Tiki Watersports with Steve Lohmayer (left) on the helm and Jay Sonnenklar (right) crewing the foredeck.

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