



Lillian White - As Published in 1978 in "The Loxahatchee Lament"



## Lillian White

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The natives were restless last week. All those I contacted in regard to an interview for this column were either busy with preparations for the traditional Thanksgiving feast or getting ready for an out of town trip for the long holiday week-end. With no one to talk to until things return to normal, I decided to improvise and talk to myself.

I am not a native of Jupiter nor a pioneer. I am what you might call a converted Yankee but I have been well acquainted with this area for more than thirty five years. I will give you my impression of Jupiter when we were introduced.

We, Jupiter and I, became acquainted on Dec. 23, 1938 two days after my marriage. I must admit I was a little bit nervous for I am a Yankee and I had never met my husband's family. My worries were groundless for I was welcomed with open arms.

The first person I met was Mary Moore Carlin, my husband's eighty-eight year old Grandmother. She was, absolutely, enchanting and one of the finest women I

have ever known. Everyone called her Grandma Carlin and she was quite active for a woman of her age.

Despite her failing eyesight, she loved to read which became a common bond between us for I have always been a bookworm. Even fine print didn't keep her from reading for she solved that problem by using a magnifying glass. I was amazed when she told me she had read "Gone With The Wind" five times. She said she enjoyed it because it was so authentic. Having been born and raised on a plantation in South Carolina, it brought back a lot of pleasant memories.

Her stories of the early South, the Civil War and the lovely ladies in their hoop skirts were fascinating to me and I could sit and listen to her by the hour.

One by one, I met the rest of the family, My mother in law and her husband, Fred Turner, a dignified southern gentleman in every sense of the word, aunts, uncles, cousins, their children and last but not least, a big husky black man named Adam Bryant who was affectionately called, "Old Daddy." He was an ex-slave and it was plain to see that he adored Grandma. He loved to fish in the river and I never saw him return to the house empty handed from one of his trips.

We stayed in a small place on the grounds of the Carlin House containing a bedroom and bath. Many newlyweds in the family had stayed there, so it was nicknamed the "Honeymoon Cottage."

On my second day in town I was taken to the heart of Jupiter. It was located in the vicinity of Center Street and Old Dixie Highway. There was a post office and grocery store in the building on the southwest corner. There were a few other places of business scattered here and there and that was Jupiter! I, jokingly, called it a dent in the road.

Harry Aicher was the postmaster but there was no mail delivery in those days, so everyone had a post office box. A lot of the citizens would congregate at the post office shortly before ten o'clock each morning and wait for the mail train to come through town and drop off bags of mail. Waiting for it to be sorted gave the people a chance to chat and catch up on the news of their friends, for local newspapers were non-existent in those days, too.

It was at one of these gatherings that I met a lot of my husband's friends and former classmates. Bessie and John DuBois, Anna Minear, Shirley Floyd, Audrey Lieb, Ruby McGehee, Herbert Wilkinson and many many more. They were a friendly group of people and made this Yankee feel right at home.

I had never gone fishing in my life, so later on that day my husband and Dan Ryan took me out for the first time.

Bob Wilson loaned us his boat, called the "Pop Along." They relaxed in the sun and handled the boat while I did some trolling. I caught three beautiful blue fish before we reached the Damon bridge after leaving Grandma's dock. Needless to say, I was overjoyed but that elation did not last very long.

Shortly after I let out my line to try again I heard a "wooshing" sound. I looked at my companions and they were both wearing the strangest expressions. They looked as though they were trying not to laugh. When I asked about the sound I had heard, they replied that they hadn't heard a thing. I looked over my shoulder there in the river, just a few feet from the boat, was the biggest creature I had ever seen. The first thought that came to my mind was, "It's a whale!" and I started to yell it aloud. The boys just about broke up with laughter

while I kept begging them to take me back to shore. When they had calmed down, they explained that it was a manatee or sea cow. I told them I had never heard of one before, let alone seen one and how ridiculous for a cow to be out in the middle of the river!

It took me a long time to live down that little episode, believe me. Especially with Dan. Every once in a while he would look at me, chuckle and then I would hear him

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mutter "Lillie and the whale." Come to think of it, we have lived here since June of 1968 and I haven't seen a manatee since we moved down, so they must have become pretty scarce.

My first Christmas Day in Jupiter was almost unbelievable to me. It was unusually warm so we went swimming before dinner. I was always accustomed to waking up to a white Christmas so I found all the warmth and sunshine a bit much to get used to.

I could never find the words to describe that Christmas dinner, for I had never seen so much food on one table before. Grandma had thirty people for dinner and even at that she must have had enough food to feed a hundred. Everything was perfectly delicious and, when I had finished, I was sure I would never have to eat again.

Before our wedding the folks had written to tell us that we had been invited to attend a formal dance while we were down here. It was to be held on New Year's Eve in West Palm Beach. When I learned about it I decided to buy a new evening gown for the occasion. I spent two or three days, on my lunch hour, going from shop to shop in New York trying to find exactly what I wanted. I, finally, found the dress of my dreams. It was the prettiest shade of aqua, floor length with a full skirt made of yards and yards of a new synthetic net material. As soon as we got around to unpacking, after our arrival here, I hung the new dress in the back of the

closet away from our everyday clothes so it wouldn't get wrinkled.

On the day after Christmas Mary Ryan, who had, also, been invited to the dance along with Dan, asked me what sort of gown I planned on wearing. Rather than describe my new purchase I took her out to the cottage to show it to her. I reached in to the closet, brought out the dress and both Mary and I were speechless for a moment. We just stood and stared with utter disbelief.

My beautiful new dress had about four or five holes, the size of silver dollars, in the skirt. I was close to tears and Mary kept asking, over and over, "what happened?"

We soon discovered the culprits. They were some big old Florida roaches. Putting two and two together, I soon realized that what happened was my own fault. On the way down here we had stopped at a roadside stand for a glass of orange juice. Their oranges looked so good that we brought a few to eat in the car while driving. When we took our luggage to the cottage after our arrival we put the bag of left over oranges on the top shelf of the closet and forgot about them due to the exciting welcome we received. The roaches discovered the fruit and when they finished that, they had part of my dress for dessert.

Fortunately for me, all the women in the family were very handy with a needle and thread. Especially Aunt Edie Bradeen. That woman could design and make clothes that would make Edith Head sit up and take notice. Well, by pooling their talents and using some aqua thread they were able to repair the damage to my gown. Due to the fullness of the skirt and the many layers of net the flaws were hardly visible. The bride dried her tears, went to the dance and had a marvelous time.

The women of this family never ceased to amaze me. They could do anything and had their specialties, too. Aunt Sue Albertson was the baking expert. Her cakes were out of this world. They were so light and fluffy that I'm sure the only reason why they didn't float in to space was the fact that the thick, luscious frosting held them down. My mother in law was the lady mechanic. One Christmas I presented her with a frilly nylon nightgown. She liked it and expressed her appreciation, of course. However, when her son presented her with a

set of socket wrenches, she reacted as I would have if he had given me a mink coat.

One of my happiest memories of that first visit to Jupiter was a moonlight cruise up the river on Captain Frank's boat. The Loxahatchee River by moonlight was a beautiful sight to behold. Including the Captain, there were fifteen of us and the girls had prepared a picnic supper for the occasion.



The moon was so bright you could almost read by it and the mullet were so plentiful they reminded me of silver sequins popping in and out of the river. We talked, we sang and some of the boys did some trolling. I remember that one of them hooked a tarpon and although our fisherman put up a good fight the tarpon got away.

Captain Frank was a perfect host and pointed out many interesting sights to me. I saw alligators for the first time in my life, plus turtles, cranes and cypress trees that looked eerie by moonlight because of the Spanish moss hanging from them. That night I added Captain Frank to the list of people I admired a great deal. He told me all about himself and was quite a remarkable fellow. He was a bachelor of German descent who came down here from the northwestern part of the United States while still a young man. His health was failing, so his doctor advised him to move to a warmer climate or he might not live much longer. It was good advice because it wasn't long after moving to Florida that he became a healthy man once more.

Those of you who knew him will recall that he lived in good health for many more years.

Frank had a camp on Kitching's Creek, where we ate our supper. He had some picnic tables with benches and the area was lighted by kerosene lanterns. Once again, I became a trifle wary, for I kept one eye on my food and the other on my feet, waiting for a Florida native I had not met yet. A snake! They must have retired early that night for we weren't destined to meet until a few years later.

I have heard that things happen in threes and I began to believe it after what took place a few nights later.

It was somewhere around midnight when I was awakened by a strong stench of some sort. I knew it wasn't a skunk because I was familiar with their scent. Then I recalled my visits to the Bronx Zoo in New York. I was terrified so I reached over and shook my hero awake.

I asked him about the awful smell, he lifted his head, sniffed a few times and then told me to go back to sleep for it was just a panther.

A panther!! In so-called civilization??

I couldn't believe it.

That was all I needed to add to my disillusionment. I was so frightened that I laid awake the rest of the night with visions of that beast jumping through one of the windows for they were almost at ground level.

The next morning at breakfast my husband asked Grandma if she knew that old "Toeless" had been roaming around during the night.

She laughed and said that she was aware of his presence. too.

They explained that everyone called him "Toeless" because since he had lost one of his claws, his tracks were easy to identify.

I swore I would never sleep in that cottage again unless we had some protection, so Carlin asked Grandma if she still had his Grandfather's gun around. She told him it was up in the attic and we were welcome to use it, if it became necessary.

To please me, that gun was kept by the bed for the rest of our stay and I slept blissfully. Ignorance is bliss, though.

A few weeks after our return to New York we were at a

dinner party when I overheard my husband telling a friend of ours about my experience with the panther. I decided to be a good sport about their hilarity at my expense and pretend I had not heard the conversation. He hadn't finished his story, though, for he went on to say that his Grandfather's gun wasn't even loaded. It was so old that bullets for it were no longer available and, even if they were, the gun was so rusty inside that it would never fire.

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Long before we returned to New York I began to suspect that, although my husband loved me very much, I had a rival named Jupiter. He was crazy about the place. I was convinced of it when he informed me that when he retired, this was where we would buy a home and settle down. I was skeptical for I felt that even though you could take the girl out of the city you could not take the city out of this girl.

I liked Jupiter, I liked the friendly people and I had grown to love my in-laws but I didn't think I could live in a place that had no doctors, dentists, drugstores, telephones, supermarkets, beauty shops, theatres, department stores and all the other things that were available to me in New York.

I was very young and when you're young you have a tendency to think that time will stand still, so the possibility of progress didn't even occur to me. I decided not to worry and to let the future take care of itself for I was sure I could talk him out of living in Jupiter.

A strange thing happened, however. I discovered that Jupiter has a way of growing on you.

We came down here on vacation once a year unless we were living overseas because of orders from the United States Navy. It wasn't long before I found myself looking forward to those visits.

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I used to resent it when people said "New York Is a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there." My way of getting even was to say the same thing about Jupiter.

They say it's a woman's prerogative to change her mind and I am not ashamed to admit that I have changed mine. Please don't misunderstand me. I am not being disloyal to the city of my birth for I will always love New York but I wouldn't want to live there.

Not anymore!