



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

Fun In The Sun

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W. Burney Overton

Vacation time. Miriam and I took the week of May 12 for ours this year, and in the process, celebrated our 44th Wedding Anniversary. Most of the time was spent on Sanibel Island, near Fort Myers, Florida, known the world over for the variety and number of sea shells found on its beaches.

The drive down was by way of I-75 except for a short section near Tampa that was not finished. The most glowing description of interstate highway driving I have is that it is boring. We traveled on a Sunday, missing some of the heavy traffic jam that often makes I-75 south of Atlanta extremely trying. The efficient layout of the highway pretty much assures that the beauty of the countryside through which it goes is missed.

Air conditioning is a blessing. The weather was warmer than usual for this time of year (hot is the more appropriate term), and Miriam and I rode along in cool comfort, enjoying the boredom. It was in sharp contrast to most of the days in our life.

Sanibel Island lived up to its billing. We didn't go swimming. We didn't go fishing. We didn't play tennis or golf. We didn't sample the night life. We didn't spend time in the shops, and we tried not to eat too much. We did sleep, and rest, and wade in the ocean and hunt shells. Miriam says we collected two gallons of them. I have no idea what we will do with them.

Since Sanibel is off the west coast of Florida, I assumed the beaches would face west and anticipated beautiful sunsets over the water. The beaches of Sanibel face south, except at the most western tip of the island. Each evening crowds gather there to watch the sun set, and every evening it went down into the sea, a blazing ball of fire. There were no clouds to give added color—only the haze. Even so, I have good pictures of the sunsets.

The Wild Life Refuge was a special treat. As soon as the car crossed over the counter bar in the road, we were away from the sights and sounds of civilization. At low tide, the birds congregate on the mud flats to feed. They are accustomed to the people and the passing cars, so they go about their ordered lives undisturbed by the stream of observers.

Near the shore, a snake bird, only its head and long neck showing, dived for a fish, flipped his catch in the air, caught it head first, and dined sumptuously. The flock of roseate spoonbills farther out on the mud flat put pink accent marks on the marsh. White egrets and cranes dotted the area, and on the other side of the road, the brown pelicans put on a feeding show. They were beautiful, graceful, ungainly birds. Effortlessly, they would lift themselves into the air only a few feet from the water surface, then drop like a rock into the water to entrap a fish in their bill and pouch. Occasionally we saw an osprey, the size of a small eagle, sitting in kingly isolation on a high branch away from all the other birds.

Four days of rest and relaxation on Sanibel, and then the northward journey. To vary the trip, we decided to drive up on US19 along the western coast of Florida. I found

out why interstate highways are good for getting from one place to another. I-75 enabled us to cross over Tampa Bay and go through heavily populated St. Petersburg with hardly a stop in 40 miles. But US19 from Largo and Clearwater north was another story. For 50 miles we crept bumper-to-bumper on a wide divided highway lined on both sides by service businesses of every description. Some defied description. It appeared that the movement of traffic was controlled by traffic lights (more aptly called stop lights) timed so that it was necessary to come to a stop at almost every intersection. Sometimes I am very patient, but patience was not my long suit that day. I believe I prefer the boredom of the interstate highway.

Things changed abruptly at the end of the 50 miles. As if a barrier were drawn across the road, the service businesses stopped and the traffic virtually disappeared. Then we could enjoy the Gulf Coastal area of Florida. Flat country. Scrub pines. Marsh land. And mile after mile of empty divided highway pinned to the earth from time to time by the traffic light, service station and convenience store of a tiny Florida community.

Different from the interstate, we could see the beauty of the surrounding country. Off to the east, the sky was darkened by billowing clouds of smoke from one of the brush fires sweeping across Florida at that time. It was an awesome sight.

Both the terrain and vegetation changed as we drove north. The panhandle of Florida and south Georgia is rolling country with tall pine forests. There we began to see pecan groves—acres and acres of stately trees in their rich green dress of summer. The land changed color, too, from the white sand of the beaches to brown loam to the red clay loam of the peanut country of Georgia.

Plains, Georgia is in the red clay country surrounded by fields of corn, wheat, and peanuts. We decided to visit Plains and anticipated spending a half hour or so driving around and seeing the sights in that again sleepy little community. Plains wasn't sleepy that day. We had arrived there just minutes before the start of the parade celebrating the 100th anniversary of the town, and the parade was only part of the celebration. Already there had been some races, and a variety of activities were planned for the afternoon. Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter were actively involved.

We had a big decision to make. Either we got out of town at once, or we stayed, along with thousands more, and joined in the festivities. We decided to get out of town. The drive through the sleepy town of Plains will have to take place at some later date.

Callaway Gardens and Pine Mountain, Georgia, are fascinating places to visit. It was there at the Callaway Inn that we celebrated our Wedding Anniversary. For a day and a night, we emulated the wealthy on vacation. Plush is the proper descriptive word—plush rooms, plush dining areas, plush lobbies and conference rooms, plush grounds, plush people and clothes and cars. Our little car wasn't the smallest one there, but it certainly was the oldest and the cheapest. We enjoyed the taste of plushness.

We also enjoyed visiting the Gardens and, within its grounds, the John Sibley Horticultural Center. How can I describe it? People with creativity and imagination have designed a building and placed it in a setting that brings the outdoors in and the indoors out. There is even a 20-foot waterfall inside the building. The walkways are so arranged that there is no consciousness of moving in and out of the building. Every season of the year is marked by its own unique display of plants and their blossoms.

It was not easy to leave the Gardens, but it was necessary, and our travels came to an end. Our fun in the sun is over for a while.