



KELLY'S CORNER by Jan Kelly

The Dune Shacks conjure up such romantic notions... remote, communing with nature, soliciting the muses, bass fishing in your "back-yard, birding by eye and ear the day long—whether you want to or not—having a real vacation... no phone, no traffic, nobody. Simplicity, that most welcomed necessity, comes readily for most who settle into it gracefully, surrendering more and more each hour until they come to that place of peace. Now getting the visitor to the peaceful place requires a fair amount of work behind the scenes.

The opening and closing of the shacks calls for an engineered program carried out by the chosen few—you know, volunteers—each year. For one

week in May all the usual suspects show up, especially on the first weekend. Through the first week, it's mostly locals but by the second weekend many "city folk, — new to the idea of staying in a small wooden structure close to the sea far from town in all kinds of weather—show up for their first experience with remoteness in the sand. All has been so romanticized for them. We veterans, of course, are incurably romantic ourselves about the shacks.

The first-timers are very good about shoveling out houses and sand fences from their winter sand build-up, dealing with weasel and mouse residue, cobwebs and fine dust—the

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CARETAKERS OF THE DUNE SHACKS



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veils of a long windy winter. Twelve caretakers assume responsibility for the opening and closing of the shacks. The caretaker also drives the guests out to the four shacks on Saturday returning with the guests from the previous week, both parties with their belongings.

Participants are asked to keep their baggage down to a minimum but sometimes an enthusiast can come along with

special cargo like the fellow who wanted to take a full set of drums to the shack. Genevieve Martin, the caretaker that week, had just returned from India and was accustomed to crowding. "I was able to fit so many people, kids, dogs and those drums. 'We can do it,' I said. Nobody complained. Kathy Shorr drove someone out there with a portable TV! Can you imagine?"

Whatever the shift, the caretaker must perform whatever maintenance work may be required. "A window broke at Thalassa," Genevieve comments. "I had to walk over the dunes in a big wind. Carrying that pane of glass back was tricky and as I finished putting the window in, I tapped the last push point and the glass broke. So I had to go back over the dunes. It had to happen on a 'bad jeep' day!"

The caretakers also observe "Hurricane Watch" when a storm threatens. The caretakers must go out and close up the shacks and bring the guests back to safety. Caretakers also cart supplies—paper, soap, matches, kerosene and gas for the stoves and refrigerators. The appliances are checked every shift as are the outhouses.

Checking and maintaining the outhouses has become an easier job since Bill Fitts designed the ones presently in use. They look like a boat standing on its stern, making use of cocoa shells and diatomaceous earth—crushed diatoms like limestone and peat moss—nature's first organic insecticide. There are three bins dug out at the beginning of the season. Bin # 1 is dug out and put into Bin # 2. Bin # 2 gets placed into Bin # 3 and Bin # 3 gets placed into plastic baskets and



carted out. The mother humus remains. Popcorn serves as

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an absorbent deodorizer. That's the chore of one of the

guests—Pop fresh corn and dump it in. It works! We used cocoa shells in the past, but this method is both simpler and cheaper.

Genevieve remembers the days prior to the magic outhouses when lime was used. "It was so heavy we had to shovel that s_ _ _ into plastic bags—it was always heavier at Euphoria—and one day the bag broke and we had to start all over again. We were laughing our brains off. 'They should pay more at Euphoria!' We had the best fun though it was tougher then. They use baskets now and with Bill Fitts' design everything is so much cleaner and easier.

"We used to have bad Jeeps too. Flat tires. Jeeps that could not make that hill to Euphoria. So we had to carry everything by hand—ice for refrigeration. It was difficult but rewarding. So last year when someone called me from the shack on a cell phone to tell me their refrigerator didn't work, I thought of the ice days."

The caretakers, a core group through the years including Will Hapgood, Julie Schechter, Janet Whelan, Bill Fitts & Genevieve Martin, handle all emergencies. Thanks to them and other dedicated additions and subtractions over the years, the four shacks of the Peaked Hill Trust are lovingly maintained and kept ready for use. Will Hapgood maintains the pumps, gas stoves and refrigerators.

And who maintains the bookings, scheduling and membership correspondence for the Trust? Hattie Fitts dubbed the title Executive Director, but I prefer to call her "Empress"—with 565 members, this volunteer work has become quite a task. Peaked Hill Trust is 15 years old now and Hattie has entered her fourth year at the post of "Empress." "The best part of the job is that you can use any excuse to get out on the dunes. The worst part is trying to keep everybody happy. You can have from 12 to 20 people to coordinate in a week.

"The Gelb-Margo Shack is used by OCARC—the Outer Cape Artists in Residence Consortium for 10 weeks, but Peaked Hill Trust still maintains and cares for the Shack during those 10 weeks. The Art Association, Castle Hill and the Fine Arts Work Center take part in selecting the artists."

Hattie continued to add to the list of supplies and duties

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as we spoke, "pump lover Sponges, paper towels, tool kits,

water bottles—another trip to the hardware store. On the way the snow/sand fences at the back of Gelb-Margo were checked. To control erosion, the fences were erected, beach grass was planted and driving into the area was discontinued. One now approaches Boris from the front.

Less dramatic jobs such as washing all the dishes, sweeping the cobwebs and washing windows kept a crew busy. Noon came, the sun was high and appetites peaked in the freshest air. We had a real treat this year: Peter Hanley of Sumptuous Foods in Orleans catered our lunch. Paige Alien delivered the gourmet feast to us at Snail Road and we were off. Nobody's mind wandered far from what would be a gastronomic pampering. With all of us gathered in the one shack, Zara, the conversation turned naturally to reminiscing—humor, stories that always make us laugh, nostalgia... The time the baby weasel was found in the nest at Boris and carefully pushed away from the shack into a Rugosa rosebush...

In 1996 Genevieve took Hazel Hawthorne out to Thalassa. She was 94 then and it would be the last time she ever returned to her beloved dunes where she spent so much of her vital life. Only two weeks after we opened the shacks for this 2000 season, Hazel died. During all those years she spent at the Manor, Peaked Trust members and friends visited and honored her. The High School French students would sing in French for her... the many who love the dunes and the shacks would visit. June 18th we'll have our own dune time in honor of Hazel by walking from Thalassa, her first shack to Euphoria, her second shack enjoying the air, the beauty, the company and a pot-luck supper.

Genevieve summed it up, "I was a complete stranger to the dunes 16 years ago; now I would like to be there as a full-time caretaker. You develop relationships—some people fit right in and become good friends. The work also makes one resourceful and creative. We need some fresh blood now."

"What reward or pay awaits all this dedication, hard work, patience? One week in a dune shack—a fitting gift for those who care so much and love the dunes and the shacks. "You have to have a passion for the dunes and the shacks. You get one week, but you pay your dues!" Genevieve beamed.

