

Go With the Flow

By J. Conn Janerbo '22

I remember hearing from my Mom who had heard from my stepbrother, “Start stock piling--ramen noodles, Vienna sausages, toilet paper--the end of days is upon us.” Where do you go then? Well, for my family, that was easy: Key West. No one knew what was going on and it wasn't long until we realized no one would be returning to school that year. I was 1,100 miles from where I had left my truck in the previous weeks, and 950 miles away from my mountain top home in Tennessee. I suppose I should have felt trapped, but I felt as free as ever.

Meanwhile, my parents did not feel the same. In previous days they had nearly been arrested by the Key West police. They avoided jail but were sentenced to in house quarantine for two weeks, and if the police saw or got a report of either of them outside of the house they would be immediately taken to jail. If my brother or I had pulled a stunt like this we never would've heard the end of it, but these were the parents. Even though I was 20 they still wrote the rules.

The encounter started with something as simple as a phone call. “Thorpe” my stepfather, “I just got this new boat, you've gotta come check it out, and I've got some exciting news about the company.”

“Steve” Thorpe said back, “where are you?”

“Key West! I just picked up the boat in Destin and brought it down immediately.”

“I thought the Key West harbor wasn't permitting vessels because of COVID-19?”

“They are if you're having engine trouble” you could almost hear Steve wink as he said it “and don't you remember? I'm a doctor.”

“Fair enough, what marina and slip?”

The parents put on some out of the house attire and said they'd be back in a couple hours. They were going to meet up with one of Thorpe's business partners. The partner, Steve, is an incredibly brilliant man, but as it turns out his people skills are regrettable. Off to A&B Marina they went. My little brother and I looked at each other as if we smelled a rat.

It was several hours before we heard from the parents- much longer than we had expected to wait. When they walked through the door there were gasps from mom, “You will not believe what just happened”, “Thorpe, go take a shower”, “Thorpe, I've got to take a shower.” It was as if they brought a dust storm through the door, but we would not figure out what had happened until the dust settled.

“Well, we were walking down to his boat, it was a really pretty blue boat, and people in the surrounding slips started telling us that the boat we were heading to was quarantined and to not go in there. John greeted us despite the nay saying on lookers and shouted back at the people saying stuff like ‘You people are morons leave us alone.’ It was the worst thing I have ever seen. We went in, sat down, had wine, blah blah blah, Then the next thing you know there is a cop knocking on the

boat. Can you believe it? One of the neighbors must have called them. The cop tells us to go to his car, and then we hear Steve yelling ‘You people have the smallest fucking brain I have ever seen, I’m a goddamn doctor!’ We then had to wait while the cop lectured John and took his information to register with the city. Then the cop came back over to his car. He lectured us, took our information, and explained that if either one of us is caught by a police officer outside of the house we will have to finish our quarantine in the Key West Jail.”

Thorpe grumbled, “looks like you boys get to do all the fishing.”

The next morning, I met Tommy, our fishing guide, at the Garrison Bite Marina. Immediately upon arrival Tommy asked me if I had seen the paper this morning, he knew I hadn’t. —Tommy prides himself on waking up every morning at about 4 am. He does this for a couple reasons; He likes to be awake for at least three hours before getting on the boat, tying flies, reading the local paper, and checking the weather. — “Well,” Tommy said, “Steve made the front page of the paper!” I couldn’t believe it. While we idled out of the marina, I searched the internet to see, and found a story on the front page of *The Key West Citizen* about a disturbance broken up by the police on an unwelcome vessel in the A&B Marina. “Jeez Tommy! This is way worse than the story mom told last night.”

Tommy and I headed for the flats (a type of water between 3-5 feet deep where one visually sees and attempts to catch fish). The warm Key West air is a dream, its salty enough to know the place is seasoned, but it is not rank. The water is clear, so clear, as if you were looking through wavy glass, at times visually capturing life at depths of over 20 feet. We fish on a small boat, 17feet, to make maneuvering the flats easier. The boat does not go fast and its perfect for Key West because time passes slowly down there- it’s a good thing. It’s like Vegas but in a good way. The current, however, does move fast, and it is very helpful to us on the flats. I stand on the front of the boat looking for fish while Tommy stands on the back with a push pole guiding the boat down the flat. There is nothing more tranquil than standing on the front of the boat as it flows down the flats.

When I got home, I found the parents right where they were supposed to be; they were obeying the police officer’s orders from last night. “I don’t guess either of y’all have talked to Steve today?” I asked, “Yeah, I did. I called him right after I saw he was on the front page of the Citizen,” Thorpe said. I was curious how Thorpe got his hands on a newspaper, but it turns out he called the yard man, Bubby, to bring him a paper. “The craziest part is” Thorpe said, “John is still on his Boat at A&B Marina! He said they’ve been trying to kick him out all day.” I could not believe the fell clutch my parents had gotten into.

The next morning, as with every morning in Key west, I met Tommy at Garrison Bite Marina. As I approached the boat was casting ripples in the water, but Tommy wasn’t moving- he was excited about something. Tommy exclaimed at a wicked pace “You won’t believe it! The story from A&B marina has traveled all the way up the Keys and it was put in *The Miami Herald!* You seen the Facebook page?” Tommy had ADD as bad as any person I have ever met—it is perhaps what makes him the guide he is—so random questions were something I had become accustomed too. He knew I hadn’t seen the Facebook page. Tommy explained, “The whole city of Key West is in an

uproar! They're all on the city of Key West's Facebook page cussing Steve. Thorpe is lucky his name was kept out of the papers."

It was amazing to me how the chain of the command was working in this situation. Here I have my fishing guide telling me what people thought was going on, then you had my parents who told me what had happened, and then you had the Keys, spanning from Miami to Key West, telling people their interpretation of what was going on. Each story seemed to be its own tail; none of them were consistent. Authority had been lost on me. These were the early days of COVID and as it turns out it would not be the last time authority was lost on me in the coming months. It was a healthy way to introduce me to the distortion COVID brought with it.