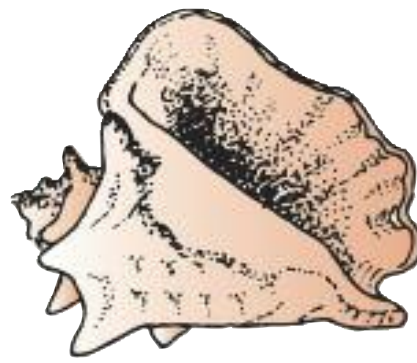


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Stacie Krupa in her studio in Islamorada. Krupa is featured as Artist of the Month, see page 9.



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Deadline
for the
Coconut Telegraph's
March issue is
Friday
February 20, 2009

Call Denise at
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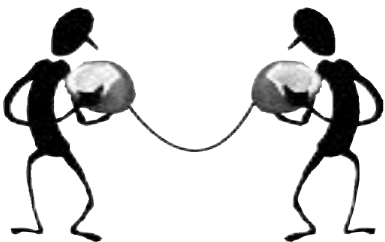
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Entertainer of the Month
Pete Schinella
"Holy Rock and Roller!"



Pete Schinella is a retired Baptist Minister and former missionary to Haiti, and until 15 years ago played only Christian music. After he lost his church due to Hurricane Andrew he began playing all different types of music. Several years ago Carol Rogers and Tyler Everett organized a benefit for him and his family when their 93-foot sailboat used to deliver supplies to Haiti burned and sunk. Pete, his ex-wife and five of his nine kids were homeless.

"Pete has always been a giver," says Carol Rogers. The Coconut Telegraph agrees. He stepped up to the plate and ran the show at the Benefit for Trina. His band, the Blues Lagoon consists of his number fourth son Ron on the drums,

Cadillac John playing sax and Irish whistle, Mr. Fabulous Steve Park playing lead guitar, Patrick Knox on lead guitar and vocal, and his brother-in-law Steve Dunlop plays percussion. At the Pilot House Tuesday night Pete whipped out a banjo when his guitar string broke to the delight of the crowd.

Blues Lagoon (see picture below) has played at the Pilot House, Paradise Pub, Hog Heaven, the OV and as many benefits as they can.

Carol Rogers says, "Pete's spirit is to give." After his divorce, he and Carol got together and will be married on April 18. Now that is a match made in heaven! For booking information call Pete at 305-731-3190.



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Editorial: Everyone Wants A Benefit

"You should have a benefit for me!" is a phrase I heard often over the last month while working on The Benefit for Trina that was held at Sundowner's on January 18th. My standard reply is "Really? Why?" The answer, "Because I need the money". Yeah, well who doesn't in this day and age? There has to be some kind of criteria, so I would then ask them, "What have you done for the community?" That would stop them dead in their tracks.

In the case with Trina Birnie who had been a non-paid volunteer foster parent over the years, founded the "Upper Keys Youth Association" as well as jumped in when anything else was needed, that wasn't the issue. When she had her heart attack we had to talk her into letting us do it. Givers aren't used to taking and takers aren't used to giving. Takers don't have the word "embarrassment" in their vocabulary and so they are not capable of experiencing it.

Speaking of givers, Chris Fleming is one of the biggest and was recently diagnosed with Acute Leukemia. Chris has been a long time volunteer fire fighter as well as President of the Fire Department and serves on the Board of Directors. He was in charge of the welding crew for the Spiegel Grove and served as Auctioneer and Master of Ceremonies on too many benefits and events to mention. As the owner of Davis Fire Equipment he has been one of the first to offer donations of his goods and services. Now it is time for us to help him. There will be more information in next months Coconut Telegraph but for now if you want to help contact the Red Cross and donate some blood in his name.

I can't tell you how many times people come up to me and tell me how much they love the Coconut Telegraph. That is much appreciated, however it is the advertisers that keep this thing going. If you want to

show your support go shopping or take a friend out to eat at any of the fine establishments in this issue.

If you are still interested in helping Trina Bernie contact Sundowner's 305-451-5566. Make checks out to Florida Keys Youth Sports Foundation (F.K.Y.S.F.).



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Letter to the Editor: Can You Sponsor an Activity?

Dear Denise:

First and most important, this letter is to thank the Coconut Telegraph for its support in helping us to continue on with Sunday Bingo at PKCC. Everyone here looks forward to that time, and we do appreciate your sponsorship.

We love your Coconut funnies, all your pictures, stories, useless information, conch characters and animal items.

Keep up the good work, and thanks again.

Sincerely,
Joseph Del Buono,
President, Residents'
Association
Plantation Key Convalescent
Center

Letter from the Editor:

Dear Readers,

Many local individuals and organizations donate their time, funds, and talent to Plantation Key Convalescent Center. This support is invaluable to PKCC residents. There are more activities that PKCC would like to provide. Your sponsorship can give these folks the ability to visit local attractions, get supplies for arts and crafts, and bring in entertainment.

Most importantly, PKCC

would like support for local school programs. Students bring band music and vocal concerts to PKCC. The kids would like to do it more often, but need funding for the buses.

Another major activity is the monthly birthday party. A sponsor is needed to provide a gift of a haircut or manicure for the residents who have birthdays in the month. Contributions of cakes and cookies are also appreciated.

And, of course, the residents love Bingo. The Coconut Telegraph is sponsoring Sunday Bingo. Can you sponsor Bingo another day?

If you, your business or organization can sponsor an activity, please contact the Activities Coordinator, Vicki Leedy at 852-3021, ext. 5.

In addition to funding, PKCC would love your talent. If you can offer a program or some form of entertainment to the residents call Vicki.

You can also share your talent on Thursday at 2 p.m. Dick Venezia plays banjo and sings. He'd love accompaniment. It's a great venue with an appreciative audience. Give Dick a call at 393-0993.

Thanks for your help,
The Coconut Telegraph

Thank You to Ladies of Key Largo Moose Lodge

An Open Letter to say "Thank you" to the Women of the Moose, Key Largo Moose Lodge.

"Let me see, how do we count the ways?" Thank you for caring. Thank you for remembering us. Thank you for going to the trouble. Thank you for the expense...

You will never appreciate the many smiles your generosity has provided to the residents of Plantation Key Convalescent Center. We are referring to our new and Wonderful "Bingo Game".

Our old set, where the painted numbers on the balls were rubbing off the marble-sized pieces, has bitten the dust. The new ping-pong balls with black, permanently

-painted numbers, will last us forever. We play Bingo five days a week - at 3:00 P.M., excluding Tuesdays and Thursdays. Please come join us for a cup of tea or coffee, and make some new friends.

We would also like to say thanks to Ray Eubanks for his help in arranging this gift.

Thank you to everyone who helps to make this a delightful part of our day.

Sincerely,
Joe del Buono
President, Residents'
Association

Gina Cherry
Vice President, Residents'
Association.

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Metal Fest for Local Youth

Club Coconuts is now the home of the "Metal Fest", featuring up and coming musicians seeking exposure. The Metal Fest is an outlet for Teenagers and young artists to enjoy not only playing the music in their repertoire but to be invited into a club atmosphere, experiencing the feel of a real show. Colleen Mountain, the Owner says "We feel that we are giving back to the community, by providing an environment that allows the young folk to, once a month, get out and rock with their fellow peers in an actual Night Club". We like to keep these kids involved, and give them an incentive to work hard at their hobbies.

Although it is an afternoon "gig" (3:30pm until 9:00pm), with the hurricane shutters being put to good use, the darkened interior allows the band to shine on stage - as well as protecting the dinner crowd from hearing too much! So far, there have been two Metal Fests, December 3 and January

25. Sundays, being the opportune day of the week, because there is no school! Bands that have played include Corinne Place, Fiendish Effigy, Chapters Unfold, and Hate Machine.

Founded by the lead singer of "The Regs", "Philth", and his newest band "Blame Johnny", Little John, wanted to put

together a venue where the up and coming musicians in the Keys could get a "taste" of playing in a club atmosphere, on a stage, and even get paid. Having mentored many young talents, Little John has inspired many through his bigger than life performances and outstanding stage presence. Little John says, "I realized that younger people in the Keys could have at least one day out of the month to have something fun, that belonged to them".

Cover charge of 7\$, goes to the Bands, and the support of the community is greatly appreciated at the Coconuts Metal Fest.

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The Garden Walk is Back, February 27th

Members of the Upper Keys Garden Club are hard at work on their upcoming Garden Walk, scheduled for February 27, 2009, from 10am to 4pm.

The Garden Walk is one of Key Largo's favorite events, and this year promises to be bigger and better than ever before. Eight gardens will be featured. "There's a nice mix of small and large gardens," said Garden Walk chairperson, Jerri Grossmann. "It's a one of a kind event with wonderful plants and flowers in unique settings."

"In addition to all the gardens, our clubhouse, the Francis Tracy Garden Center at mm94 will feature live music by

Dave Feder, a Garden Tea Party, an art show and a plant ramble. It's a wonderful day to save the date and come join us."

A special bonus will be the opportunity to enjoy refreshments and browse landscape and garden design ideas at Beach House Gardens Landscape Center.

Tickets are available at Key Largo Floral and Gift Shop, 451-3702, Key Largo Chamber of Commerce, 451-1414, Shear Paradise, 451-7110, Islamorada Chamber of Commerce, 664-4503, Cover to Cover Books, 853-2464 or any Garden Club member. Call 453-3907 for more information.



Photo Caption: Julie Mead, Jerri Grossman, and Evelyn McGlone are spearheading the popular Garden Club Walk this year, scheduled for February 27, from 10am to 4pm.

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Staying Afloat Riding the Wave of Life

Our lives are continually in motion, buoyed by the wave that is the universe's flow. As the wave rises and falls, we are carried forward, through life's high and low points. The universe's flow may take us to a place in life where we would rather not be. As tempting as it can be to fight the direction and size of this wave that propels us, riding the wave is intended to make life easier. When you ride the wave, your life can evolve naturally and with minimal effort. Riding the wave, however, is not a passive experience. It is an active process that requires you to be attentive, centered, and awake. You must also practice stillness so you can flow with, rather than resist the wave's motion.

Because life is dynamic and always changing, it is when we try to make the wave stand still or resist its direction that we are likely to get pulled under by its weight. If you try

to move against the wave, you may feel as if you are trapped by it and have no control over your destiny. When you reach a low point while riding the wave and find your feet touching bottom, remember to stay standing so that you can leap forward along with the wave the next time it rises. Trying to resist life's flow is a losing proposition and costly because you waste energy.

Riding the wave allows you to move forward without expending too much of your own efforts. When you ride the wave, you are carried by it and your head can "stay above water" as you go wherever it takes you. It can be difficult to trust the universe and let go of the urge to fight life's flow, and you may find it easier to ride the wave if you can stay calm and relaxed. Riding the wave will always take you where you need to go.



Reprinted from DailyOM - Inspirational thoughts for a happy, healthy and fulfilling day. Register for free at www.dailyom.com.

Restaurant of the Month Pilot House

Story by Edward Carboni

A place never makes the moment --- only the people do. When you go to the Pilot House you will instinctively know the difference. There is an air of friendliness and camaraderie that does not occur with such abundance in most other venues on Key Largo. And again there are the people. From Bush to D.J., Amy and Rebecca, Paulie on the inside bar to the new management crew of George Wilson and Jaclyn Kelley, the Pilot House is the place to enjoy a wonderful meal or simply to have a drink and meet friends---be they old or new.

The menu is traditional Keys fare, fresh fish options with a few twists to tempt the palate. Try the Tuna Steak appetizer

and you will be pleasantly surprised to find a hearty sampling of Asian Slaw (Calamari and sea weed salad). Or have a taste of the Mahi (Dolphin) Vallarta. For those who know, the jerk shrimp basket (not on the menu, but you can order it anyway) is the way to go. The wine list is modest but impressive.

At the outside Tiki bar you will discover what the keys are all about---off the water anyway. Good people and vibrant conversation. On the weekends there is the music of Grateful Ted and Jimmy Hawkins shows up from time to time. So if you're new in town or have been around a while, stop by and enjoy a taste of what Keys Largo is all about.



The Pilot House's employees Rebecca, George and Bush raise the Conch Republic Flag that flies outside the waterfront tiki bar. Also picture are child patrons Mia and Bella.



A BIG THANK YOU

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Thank you to everyone who helped with setting up, selling tickets, making announcements, playing music, making & putting up posters, spreading the word, buying raffle tickets, bidding on items, and otherwise coming out to support the Benefit for Trina!



Jimmy Hawkins with "The J.K. Project"

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Artist of the Month Stacie Krupa

Stacie Krupa has it all. She is as exceptionally beautiful as are her creations. She is a mom, a brilliant businesswoman, a creative genius, she's famous, has a generous soul and is just a plain down to earth nice person.

Last month Krupa was the first to call and offer to donate to the Benefit for Trina. I was intrigued and couldn't wait to meet her. She showed up at the benefit and I spotted her right away. She stands out in a crowd just as her art does. When I went to her studio I didn't want to leave. Although we all probably drive past her studio at mile marker 83 in Islamorada a million times, you have to walk through the gates to discover a magical garden and the glow

that lingers long after you leave. How I could have lived in the Keys so long and not treated myself to this before! It is truly the most intense New York, SOHO style fine art gallery in the Keys. Eye candy at it's best.

What jumps out is the reflection of light from each eclectic creation. From the wall size painting that were in the HGTV house, down to the small "Krupettes". The Key West Symphony has chosen one of Krupa's paintings for the cover of their magazine and she has been contacted by the producer of Saturday Night Live.

For more information contact Stacie Krupa at 305-517-2631 or visit her website StacieKrupa.com.



Artist Stacie Krupa in her studio located in Islamorada at mile marker 83 on the bayside.

RIGHT: Some of Krupa's smaller pieces have lovely been named "Krupettes".



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Keys Sailors Do Well in Major Regatta

The Tradewinds Midwinter Open Catamaran National Championships were hosted by Founders Park Watersports at Founders Park in Islamorada over Martin Luther King Weekend. Nearly sixty high-speed, high-tech multihulls sped around the triangular courses on the Bayside of the Islands.

The weather was very cooperative despite some nasty forecasts. While the days were cool there was good 15 mph winds on Saturday and winds close to 10 on Sunday. As usual, it was perfect Florida Keys sailing.

There were seven different classes of boats participating. In the Hobie Wave Class (the second largest fleet involved) local Key Largo sailor, Leah

White, took the victory with the best score after seven races. Husband, Dave White, took third place, only a point behind the second place finisher from Ruskin, Florida. Leah continues her winning ways having just won the Wave Nationals in early December.

In the Open Handicap Class, Kelly Davis of Key Largo sailed a Hobie 17 and won that class. This was a good showing for the Florida Keys sailors.

Sponsoring the regatta was Catamaran Sailor Magazine, OnLineMarineStore.com, SailingSeminars.com, Calvert Sails and Zhik Sailing Apparel.

The event is held annually over the Martin Luther King Holiday in January each year. Attached Picture is of Kelly Davis



In the Open Handicap Class, Kelly Davis of Key Largo (above) sailed a Hobie 17 and won that class.

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Lansden Vow Renewal



Dr. and Mrs. Lansden with their sons David, Michael, and Tommy following the renewal of their wedding vows.

Dr. True and Mrs. Lisa Lansden reaffirmed their wedding vows at sunset on the beach in January. The ceremony was held at the home of Mrs. Bonnie Riehl in Key Largo and was performed by the Reverend Bonnie Frost of Coral Isles United Church of Christ. Dr. and Mrs. Lansden were celebrating their sixth wedding anniversary. They have resided in the Keys for five years and are the parents to five sons, Ken, Tommy, David, Tyler and Michael. They are the grandparents to one grandson, Perry. Dr. Lansden practices at The Florida Keys Center for Plastic Surgery and is currently Chief of Surgery at Mariner's Hospital. Lisa is the Practice Manager of their medical clinic's three locations and has recently enjoyed representing the Keys as the very first Mrs. Florida Keys America.

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Bartender of the Month Richard "Dicko" Cooper



The Coconut Telegraph welcomes Snapper's very own Dicko to the Bartender of the Month Hall of Fame. Dicko stopped in Snapper's one night about 15 years ago and bet the owner, Howard, on a sports trivia question. He won. Howard coughed up a case of beer, they became friends and soon after he hired him. The rest is history.

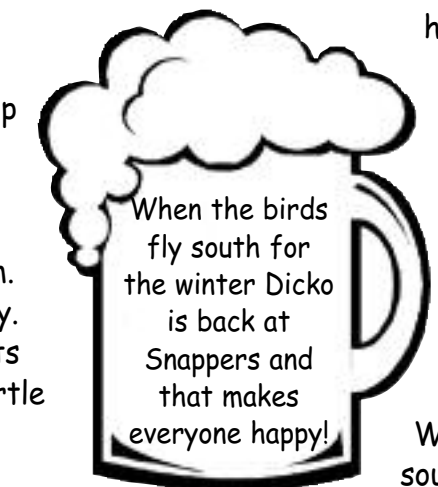
Thursday nights at Snappers is Turtle Club. Everyone in town shows up for discounts on drinks, the Sun 103 live radio show, mouth-watering dinner specials, and great entertainment. It's a little chilly on the ocean but Howard has the outdoor heaters going and its standing room only cozy. Dicko is as quick to make a drink as he is with a sports quip. He really keeps them coming. Dicko's co-worker and former

Bartender of the Month, Kirk, tells us, "Dicko is a walking, talking sports encyclopedia". He is amazing!

For the last few years Dicko has been spending the summer months in his

hometown Horseheads, New York, to spend time with his family. I only know of 2 people living in Key Largo from Horseheads, Dicko is one and I am the other one. When the birds fly south for the winter Dicko is back at

Snappers and that makes everyone happy, especially his co-worker Michelle who tells us, "I'm glad he's back because when he is here the Turtle Club rules that are posted on the wall say "Don't encourage Dicko instead of Michelle". I say get there early and encourage both of them!





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Currently, there are no medications for treating cocaine addiction, so this remains one of NIDA's top research priorities. Researchers are looking for medications that help alleviate the severe craving experienced by people in treatment for cocaine addiction, as well as medications to counteract other triggers of relapse, such as stress. Several compounds are currently being investigated for their safety and efficacy, including a vaccine that would sequester cocaine in the bloodstream and prevent it from reaching the brain. Research so far suggests that addiction medications are most effective when used as a part of a comprehensive treatment program.



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Take advantage of festivals and holiday weekends by registering and having your keys cruiser, collectible vehicle, naval craft of any kind, etc, on display for onlookers to see when they come to Key Largo and visit our military headquarters. Additional specials will be offered to military members at all gatherings.

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Coconut Conch Characters of the Month



A black and white photograph of a man and a young girl standing together outdoors. The man, on the right, is wearing a dark polo shirt with a small logo on the chest. The girl, on the left, is wearing a light-colored shirt with a graphic. They are both smiling at the camera. The background is dark and indistinct.

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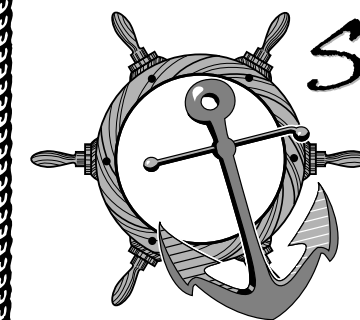


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Useless Facts You Should Know

Compiled by Rachel R. Peine

- Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park on Rt. 905 contains one of the largest tracts of West Indian tropical hardwood hammock in the United States. The park is home to 84 protected species of plants and animals, including wild cotton, mahogany mistletoe, and the American crocodile.
- Lignumvitae Key Botanical State Park in Islamorada is accessible only by boat. The park is located one mile west of U.S. 1 at Mile Marker 78.5. Ranger-guided tours are given twice daily, Thursday through Monday.
- Windley Key Fossil Reef State park, located at 849000 Overseas Highway (U.S. 1 - bayside) in Islamorada, is an island formed of Key Largo limestone, which is fossilized coral.
- Flamingos are not native to Florida. They may come up from the Caribbean (snowbirds in reverse?) to fish, but they don't live here.
- Speaking of birds, the Eagles are destined for Superbowl 2010. I'll put 10 bucks on them.
- You can tell the difference between a Great White Heron and an Egret by the color of the legs. Herons have yellow legs, while Egrets have black legs.
- The "wrecking industry" that provided an income for many Keys residents began when a fleet of Spanish treasure ships was wrecked on the reefs of Islamorada during a hurricane in 1733.
- Tarpon can grow up to more than 6 feet in length and be 350 pounds.
- John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, located at Mile Marker 102.5 in Key Largo, has a 30,000-gallon saltwater aquarium and a theater that shows nature videos.



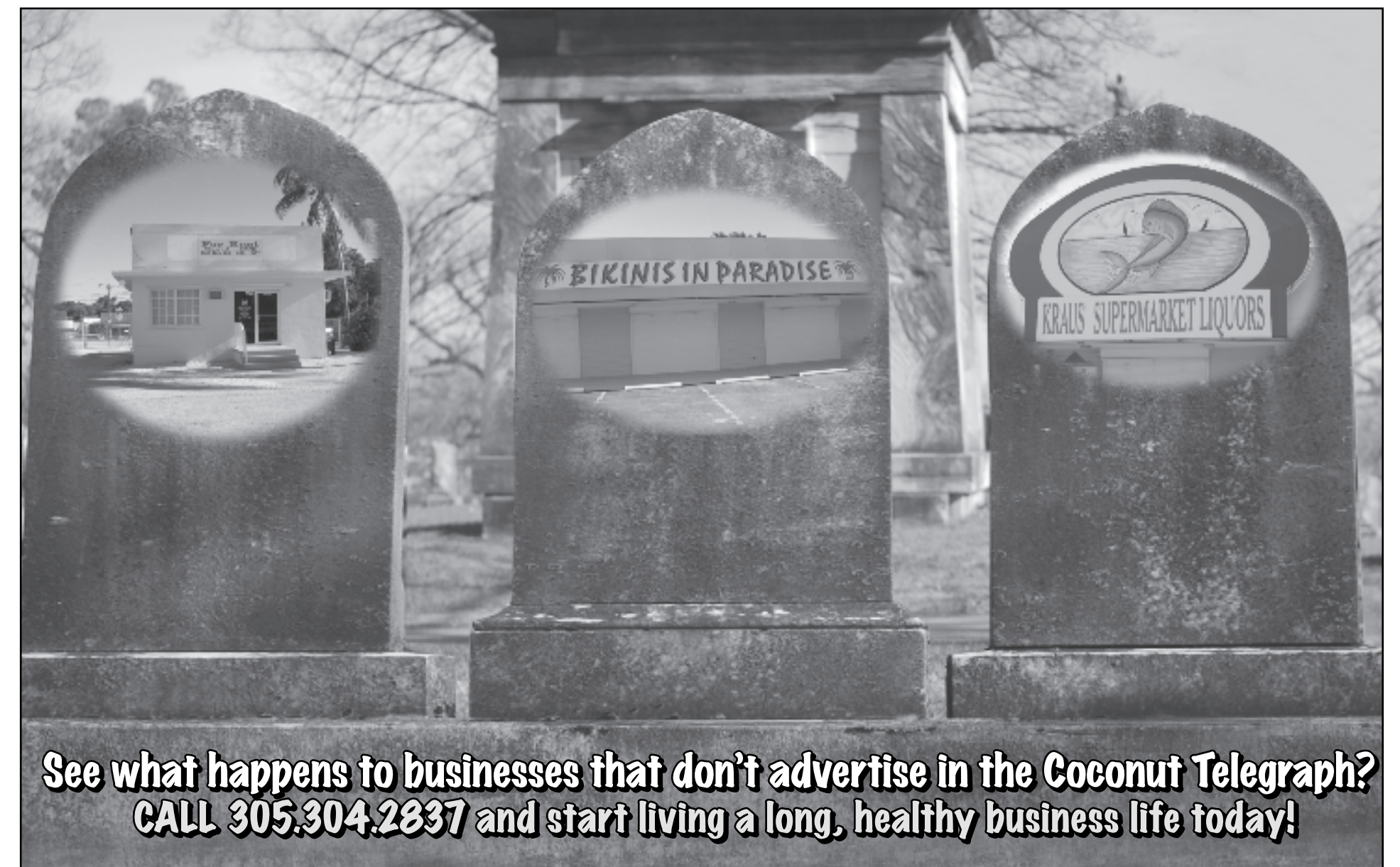
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A Decade of Magic in The Upper Keys

Not only has the Michael Trixx magic show become a MUST-SEE for ALL Florida keys visitors, even the locals keep coming back for more. Ten years ago Trixx started performing here in the keys with local musicians Case and Davidson on the Lor E Lei stage. Fans have followed Michael on his magical journey, watching him grow, both as a magician and as a person. "The show is always changing and improving" says Trixx who visits Las Vegas once a year to study with award winning magician/mentor Jeff McBride, founder of The McBride Magic and Mystery School in Vegas www.magicalwisdom.com.

Speaking of award winning, After 12 years of performing magic, in October, 2007, Trixx finally made his way to Daytona for the "Festival of Magic, State Magic Convention" his first convention ever. One year later Michael returned to the Festival to enter in the magic

competitions, Trixx took 2nd place in the adult stage competition and 3rd in the "Close-up Magic" contest. "Not bad for my first competition" he said, and adds "In these competitions you perform for only 7 minutes and I found it difficult to establish my character in that amount of time." Trixx plans to "tweak" his competition act and return to future conventions. Seven minutes was a lot longer than the 90 seconds they give you on "America's Got Talent" which Trixx also appeared on this past season on NBC. The local show runs about 40 minutes.

Michael Trixx is "All Fired Up" for his TENTH straight season performing in the Keys!

You can catch all the action Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at the Island Grill MM 85.5 ocean side 305-664-8400 or Mondays and Wednesdays at Lor-E-Lei, mile marker 82 bayside 305-664-4656. For booking or info visit www.michaeltrixx.com.

Boss Ralphie

The story continues...

Story by Edward Carboni

Boss Ralphie (Archangel Raphael) is having a bad millennium and has been demoted to being the angel in charge of recruitment. We first meet him when he tells Sam Miller, a retired trackless trolley driver, that he will soon be an angel working on Ralphie's crew. Bigz (God) gives Ralphie the task on Christmas Eve of reforming a life long thief (Bugsy Sullivan) and getting the thief to help a little girl (Breezy) who is known as a pure spirit. The girl is so special that if Ralphie fails, his position as an archangel is in serious jeopardy. With the help of another angel who enjoys quoting mob movies (Finch), they find the thief and set out on Christmas Eve to complete the task they are assigned.

On the way, they encounter a homeless man who Bugsy judges to simply be a bum. Ralphie explains to him that the man is a doctor who used to lament the plight of the homeless without doing anything but now spends time on the street to help.

So the good doctor realized that without action his sympathy was just sentimentality and nothing more. That year he decided to stop making himself feel better about himself by feeling bad for others and he started coming to the streets for two months every year—the really hard months for most of these people. He's been beaten and he's been robbed, and he has also saved many lives, so when you speak of him, you will speak in a respectful tone," Ralphie said.

"Sorry, I didn't know," said Bugsy. "That's right. You didn't know, but you made a judgment anyway, didn't you?" said Ralphie.

"A guy like you doesn't have a lotta room for judgments, pal," said Finch.

"Don't worry about it Bugsy, you didn't know any better, and besides it's not your problem...is it? You're just....what was it you said...oh yeah, 'just getting yours'. That was it, wasn't it?" Ralphie said.

Bugsy Sullivan looked at the snow covered pavement as he walked. He was a bit embarrassed by what he had said about the man in the doorway. He didn't know people would do something like that. He had no understanding that someone could do something like that.

"You're not the only one Bugsy, a lot of people feel that way," said Ralphie.

"Could you stop answering what I'm thinking, it's very annoying," the thief said.

"You don't like it when someone else is in there, do you?" Ralphie asked.

"It's just annoying is all," Bugsy began to kick snow as he walked.

Just passed Spruce Street Ralphie, Finch and Bugsy turned into an office building and walked past a night watchman sitting at a desk reading a paperback novel while Wayne Newton's voice came out of a small radio. He sang about how cold it was out there.

"That guard didn't even notice us," said Bugsy, he was no longer constantly contemplating running. They would find him again. That resignation would do for now, until he could find some other opening.

"Nope, he can't see us—go ahead, check it out for yourself," Ralphie said. Finch was playing with the elevator buttons, pushing 'up' on each of the four. Bugsy went over to the watchman

and waved a hand in the guard's face. No response. He clapped his hands, not a twitch. The thief looked back at Ralphie with a childlike grin on his face. Ralphie smiled back. Finch was running around pushing the buttons again.

"How did you do that?" Bugsy asked, still excited, "Nobody at all can see us?"

"It's part of being with Bigz, discretionary visibility. You were a little more difficult but not much. Some people can see through it, though. The pure spirits," said Ralphie.

They got off the elevator on the 13th floor and headed for the offices of Dearborne Real Estate.

A company Christmas party was underway. Well dressed people were mingling around tables filled with food, cocktail glasses in hand. The conversations that were overheard consisted of gifts received and given and the worthiness of each based upon its expense or value.

"Okay mister angel guy," said Bugsy Sullivan, "these are the type of people I steal from; rich, pompous people." He felt good saying it. He liked to convince himself that his discerning stealing had an air of moral virtue.

Ralphie looked at the thief and shook his head.

"You're telling me that because these people are pretentious and arrogant, you think it's a righteous act to steal from them, is that it?" said Ralphie.

"Well yeah, they think they're better than everyone else. Why not bring them down a peg or two?" said Bugsy.

"There you go judging again—you do that a lot, don't you?" asked Finch.

"Bugsy, the point is not who you steal from, it's the fact that you steal at all. It has nothing really to do with anything outside you, and everything to do with what is inside you. When you draw conclusions like that it is only a few steps until you justify stealing from another set of people because it satisfies your wants. That's how evil gets going, my friend. But like you said, that's not your problem is it, Bugsy? You're just getting yours, right?"

Ralphie said, "Finch, are we done here?" "Bada-bing boss, were outta here," said Finch, and they walked out of the room and out of the building and into the night with no one having known they had been there.

The three continued their journey on 5th Street as the snow fell around them. Bugsy was feeling particularly uneasy. His thoughts of running were nearly gone—replaced with a strange sense of wonder after having gone into the office building unseen. He could not explain the two men with him who claimed to be angels. But the events of the evening made it impossible for him to deny the fact that something very weird was going on and it was beyond his comprehension. He resigned himself for the time being to whatever it was they had in store for him.

After trodding a few more blocks through the deepening snow, Ralphie stopped at the door of a pub, a yellow glow flowed out from the paned windows and reflected in the white snow.

"Feel like a drink?" he asked. The pub was half full with patrons who were all, in some way, celebrating Christmas Eve. Ralphie, Finch and Bugsy

Continued on page 22...

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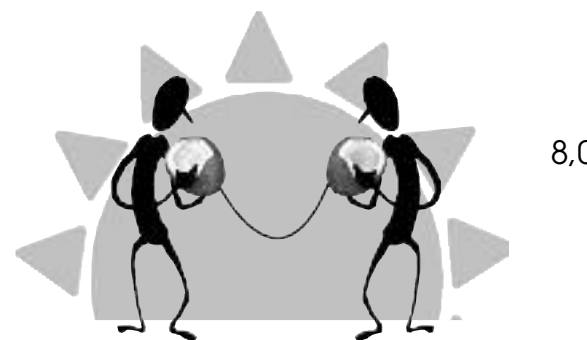
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...continued from page 20
took a small table at the far end. Ralphie and Finch sat and relaxed. -Bugsy was again perplexed.

"You guys can drink?" he asked.
"Yes and no. We can drink but it doesn't really have an impact, the body that you see is only a manifestation. We can eat too, but we don't need food. It's more of an enjoyment, not a necessity."

Bugsy said nothing. He was finished with trying to figure these two out.

"Besides, we're here on business," Ralphie said as a waitress came up to the table and smiled.

"Yeah, it's business," said Finch, "it's not personal."

"What can I get for you?" the waitress asked. She was in her late twenties, with raven hair and blue eyes. A flashing Christmas tree button on her white shirt flickered red. Her demeanor was that of genuine kindness.

They ordered drinks and declined a food menu.

"So what's the business here," asked the thief.

"Her. Lisa Jane." He pointed at the waitress. "She has three kids at home and she's really hurting in a financial way. But you'll also notice that she is not carrying that around with her. She's here being cheerful and kind on a night when she would absolutely rather be home with her children. But to provide for them, she's working and she doesn't say a thing to anyone about how much she would rather be home.

"So what does that mean?" asked Bugsy.

"It means that she is brightness—a small glowing radiance in the gloom of the world of man," said Ralphie.

Lisa Jane returned with three green bottles of beer and Ralphie paid her.

"Oh, and another thing. You robbed her house six months ago. Remember the place with the green shutters in Grey's Ferry? You took her jewelry as well as the cash she was saving for, yep, you guessed it, Christmas." Ralphie said it in a very general tone, without accusation, as if he were relating a story on the weather.

Bugsy was in silence, stunned. He vaguely remembered the house being a really good score at the time, but now there was a face to what he had done. In his line of work a face was never a good thing. He looked down dejectedly at his bottle of beer.

"But that's not your problem Bugsy, is it? You were just getting yours. Right?" said Ralphie.

When they had finished their drinks and were about to leave, Ralphie stopped Lisa Jane as he was heading out of the door. In his hand an envelope appeared with her name on it.

"Excuse me, is your name Lisa Jane?" he asked the waitress. She said it was.

"You must have dropped this or someone must have left it for you. I found it behind the drink menu on the table," said Ralphie as he handed it to her and walked out. Bugsy kept his head low. They were a few steps down the street when Lisa Jane opened the envelope to discover it contained \$5,000 in cash.

"What was in that envelope?" asked Bugsy.

"A bunch of money," he answered.
"Really? I wouldn't have thought angels to have a lot of cash."

"Then you'd be thinking right. We don't have any money," stated Ralphie.

"So where did the cash come from? Did you just conjure it up out of thin air?" he said and flailed his arms around to dramatize the statement.

"Not exactly. I conjured it out of the fake air duct in your house. You really

should be more clever about hiding you valuables, Bugsy, there are some very bad people out there." Ralphie said and smiled.

They continued to walk and Ralphie regaled Bugsy with stories of the thief's career. He told Bugsy how, yes, he had stolen only things but in those acts he had also stolen trust and hope. Bugsy simply accepted it. The stories were true and he could not deny them. They gave Bugsy a new sense of himself, a strange new sense that if he could get over himself, over his want and over the need to take from the outside to fill himself—that insatiable never-ending need—then there might be a new day for him. Ralphie answered his thoughts with a yes.

Just on the south side of Chestnut on 5th Ralphie, Finch and Bugsy stopped in front of a store where in a large window a neon sign hung suspended by wire. The sign read Danny's Flowers and festooned around it were red and white poinsettias, green garland and silver tinsel. Behind the window the two angels and the thief could see people inside. The shop was owned by Dan Columbo who had a special appreciation for the season.

"Want to go in?" Ralphie asked Finch. He didn't address Bugsy.
"Danny's on Christmas Eve? I wouldn't miss this for the world," said Finch who was wearing a huge smile.

Inside the small flower shop were about twenty people. There was also music, talk and laughter. When the three entered they were greeted with a loud "Merry Christmas!" from all. Mrs. Columbo, a small round woman with dark curly hair brought them glasses of bright red wine. On a work bench, among green plastic buckets of fresh flowers were trays of food; fried cod and haddock, crab claws, scallops and shrimp, calamari and scungilli. Other trays had sweets; Russian tea cookies, pizzelles, macaroons, and cannoli.

The aromas in the shop were overwhelming to Bugsy. He could smell the melting snow on a rubber runner mingled with the sweet scent of flowers and earth. Then there was the aroma of food and the scent of the sweet red wine. He felt himself go, for just a moment, into a state of dizziness. When it had passed he was surprised to find himself smiling wide.

"It's something, isn't it, Bugsy?" Ralphie said, "the pure aroma of human kindness." Ralphie breathed in deep. "It's has so much...promise in it, doesn't it?"

After a moment Ralphie told Bugsy how, on every Christmas Eve after the last orders were completed and all the deliveries were done and the drivers returned, the Columbos would put up a feast of food and any who entered were welcomed as family. In their minds all were one on this night, and none refused. They even gave away any flowers that happened to be left over.

Bugsy was still slightly high from the visceral experience but he managed to ask why they could be seen here, at this gathering, and not be seen at the other party.

"Because this is where you want to be seen," said Finch, ambling over to the food. Mrs. Columbo came up to them again and handed them each a flower. A red rose to Ralphie and Finch, a marigold for Bugsy. She smiled demurely and said "Merry Christmas".

While the three were standing and eating, a middle aged woman and a young girl with long dark hair were passing and they paused when the girl saw them. The mother and child were dressed in heavy coats and were about

to leave. The little girl clutched a pink carnation to her chest.

"Hello sir," she said softly with a quit smile.

"Hi Breezy," Ralphie and Finch responded almost at the same time. Bugsy just said 'hello'.

They exchanged Christmas greetings and some small talk when the girl's mother motioned it was time to leave.

As they walked through the door, the girl's mother asked Breezy who the three men were. She replied that she wasn't sure, but she thought she knew them somehow.

"Who was the kid?" Bugsy asked in between bites of food.

"She," replied Ralphie who was considering the simple beauty of the flower he held in his hand, "is Brianna Bradley and she, my friend, is your problem."

Ralphie, Bugsy, and Finch did not stay much longer until Ralphie said it was time to go. Finch laid the rose he held on the table and reached for one of the sweets from the tray.

"I'm gonna leave the flower and take the cannoli," he said, and the three of them left the warmth of the flower shop and walked into the cold night. The snow had accumulated to a few inches and the footing was somewhat slippery. They walked west in silence on Chestnut Street. Ahead of them they could see Breezy and her mother walking on the same side of the street that was surprisingly void of traffic on this Christmas Eve. The mother and child stopped in front of a convenience store where Mrs. Bradley wanted to buy milk before heading home. Breezy did not want to go in. She told her mother she wanted to stay out in the falling snow. Her mother told her to stay right there, she would be only a minute and that was where she was as Ralphie, Bugsy and Finch approached.

"So what does she need help with?" Bugsy asked, still unclear as to what was desired of him on this strange night. He had now resigned himself to whatever was required.

"You'll know when it happens," Ralphie said, still carrying the rose in his hand as did Bugsy with the marigold. Finch was finishing his cannoli.

And as he spoke those words, Ralphie could see in the distance a bus careening down the narrow street toward him. The bus moved in an awkward way, jerking left and then right, and then left again on the snow covered street. They were now only about a quarter of a block away from Breezy. Bugsy looked at the little girl who was enjoying the falling snow and the flower she held in her hand, then he looked back up the street as the bus came barreling toward them. It was empty, Bugsy could see, except for the driver who didn't seem to have control of the vehicle.

Bugsy was nearing Breezy and he became swept with a feeling of dread. "That bus...she's in danger," he said looking to his left and right for Ralphie and Finch. They were gone. He was alone. And this little girl was in trouble. As he spoke he could see the bus turn and head straight for the child on the sidewalk who was unaware of any peril. He raced toward her in the snow. In his mind he could think of only one thing. This is my problem.

And so on a snow covered Christmas Eve, Bugsy Sullivan, a self absorbed, self serving thief who had always been concerned with simply getting his, for the first time in his life, considered another human being before himself. He was just to the girl as the bus rolled up on the

sidewalk.

It had been so fast that Bugsy really didn't remember any of it. He saw Breezy sitting on the sidewalk in the snow with a dazed look upon her face. He heard police sirens and he saw the bus in the wall of a building next to the convenience store. A single yellow marigold lay crushed in the snow behind a front tire. The thief stood looking and wondering if it were all real or not. Then he saw Ralphie and Finch standing across the street and he went to them as police cars came and officers piled out and Breezy's mother ran out of the store looking for her daughter. The policemen did not notice Bugsy as they passed. "You did well, Bugsy. Good job," Ralphie said, smiling.

"Thanks. It didn't seem too hard," Bugsy said as the police went to the front of the bus. They were talking of how the vehicle had been stolen from the depot not ten minutes before, but they ignored the white haired man who was walking off it. They were more interested in something else, some thing in front of the bus.

The white haired man walked toward Bugsy and Ralphie and Finch. The now numerous police paid no attention to him. One officer came around from the front of the bus shaking his head. Others were talking to Breezy and her mother. She was pointing to the bus.

"Those new buses are something else. All kinds of buttons and lights and stuff, they're nothing like my old trackless trolleys. I wasn't sure I could do it," said the white haired man.

"You did fine Sammy, well done," Ralphie replied.

"You know this guy?" Bugsy asked. "Of course I do. This is Sam Miller, and he works for me. Sam, I'd like you to meet another new guy on the crew, Bugsy Sullivan."

Bugsy Sullivan thought for a moment. There was confusion on his face.

"You mean..." he looked over at the bus again

"Yep, you sleep with the fishes," said Finch.

"Was that what this whole night was about? This was your special assignment?" asked Bugsy.

"It wasn't really a special assignment. Like I told you before, I'm in recruitment," said Ralphie, "this is what I do. I get angels. You needed some work before you could make it in, but you're in now."

"Yeah, you're a made guy now. The technicality clause. You give your life for another and you're in---the greatest gift," Finch said, "you know, like the Kid did."

On the sidewalk across the street, police were milling quietly. There was no hurry now. A few of the officers recognized the dead man in front of the bus. He was a known perp. A thief. When Breezy told them how he had rushed up just as the bus was upon her and then pushed her aside in the nick of time, the officers no longer referred to Bugsy Sullivan as a thief, he was now a hero, a man who had given his life to save a little girl.

And if there was an unwritten sentiment on the force it would have been that 'little girls don't die at Christmas'. This man, a thief, had brought that sentiment to life. Breezy looked across the street and saw the four men standing there. She stooped to pick up her pink carnation that had dropped into the snow and walked over to the gathering of angels.

She stood in front of Bugsy and looked up at him with warm brown eyes.

"Sir," she said, not sure what she should say, "thank you for helping me."

The End

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9. Fox is starting a new show about you, "Americas Least Wanted".

8. The Pope asks you for tips on celibacy.

7. You get a heart shaped box filled with palmetto bugs.

6. Instead of roses you get a poisonwood plant.

5. The last time you had sex was during the Kennedy Administration.

4. Everyone admires your beard - and you're a woman.

3. The local tattoo artist wants to ink the letter "L" on your forehead.

2. You hear voices all around you whispering..."She is not taking her meds..."

1. The tag on your lingerie reads "Victoria's Secretions".



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A blonde decides to try horseback riding, even though she has had no lessons, nor prior experience. She mounts the horse unassisted, and the horse immediately springs into motion.

It gallops along at a steady and rhythmic pace, but the blonde begins to slide from the saddle. In terror, she grabs for the horse's mane, but cannot seem to get a firm grip. She tries to throw her arms around the horse's neck, but she slides down the horse's side anyway. The horse gallops along, seemingly impervious to its slipping rider. Finally, giving up her frail grip, the blonde attempts to leap away from the horse and throw herself to safety. Unfortunately, her foot has become entangled in the stirrup, she is now at the mercy of

the horse's pounding hooves as her head is struck against the ground over and over.

As her head is battered against the ground, she is mere moments away from unconsciousness when to her great fortune... Frank, the Wal-Mart greeter, sees her dilemma and unplugs the horse.

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Tues-Thurs, Feb. 24-26	Bruce Isaacson
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