
Chapter Thirty Six

Florida Spring Break 2008 – HBE expatriates gone wild.

Brad Heinz Wayne Zimmerman, Wes Morgan, Charlie Lee. Bob Koester, George Rill, Frank Cupola, Mitch Miller, Jack Kennedy (host).

Provisions

A ten-year tradition has some cadence to it. Bob is graciously opening his house to the gang but his hospitality doesn't end there. He's the advance man. Arriving early, he does the grocery shopping for the crew. Just important stuff. A giant bottle of Crown Royal for Charlie. (Ed likes Crown too, but he's out on doctor's orders this year). Vodka for George. Captain Morgan Coconut Bay Rum for Frankie, Beer, oreo cookies, potato chips, and donuts for breakfast and coffee. Soap didn't occur to anyone – so that became a separate mission.

Tee Times

Jack Kennedy retired to *The Villages* more than five years ago. He has the rules of engagement down to a science when it comes to tee-times. I'm afraid my brother's "no show" for Saturday morning might have cost him 3 points. (The computer system at *The Villages* will mark you lousy if you abuse your privileges.) Still, well in advance we had a plan for Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday morning rounds. Afternoon rounds for the golf junkies (I count myself among them) would have to made closer to intended tee times. (Wayne's cheat sheet with phone numbers came in handy for this drill. And Charlie has the right temperament to negotiate with the seniors who typically work the pro shops at *The Villages*.) Arnold Palmer Legends, Cane Garden Country Club, Hacienda Hills, Baseline (the short course), Glenview Country Club, Nancy Lopez Legacy Golf Course, and Tierra del Sol. Seven rounds in four

days.

Mind if I stand back here?

Brad is starting his swing routine. He's been around the game since childhood. In fact, he grew up on a golf course in South County, before it was fashionable to buy property adjacent to a golf course. He learned how to play with balls he was able to shag from the rough, out of bounds and skimming the bottom of a shallow water hazard behind his house. Today he hits the balls a long way and every hole is a par or birdie opportunity.

"Mind if I stand back here?" asks Wayne from directly behind Brad on the tee box.

"No, you're fine." Mumbles Brad trying not to break his concentration.

"Huh?"

"No, You're fine"

"Okay, 'cause it's easier for me to see where the ball goes from back her and..."

THWACK! Brad's ball travels with an easy draw right to left, carries the traps and comes to rest about 290 yards on the left side of the fairway.

"Wow, good shot." says Wayne.

"Good Shot." says Wes.

"Way to go, Brad." Adds Charlie. But Charlie knows this is typical of Brad and he also knows that on a good day hew can give Brad a run for his money.

Since Brad works for Charlie (Drury Inns), they're playing partners. Brad, Charlie, Wayne and Wes are a foursome at the Lopez Legacy Golf Course at The Villages – Florida's Friendliest Hometown.

Back at the frat house.

Bob Koester and his wife Laura were good enough to purchase a vacation home in Florida's Friendliest Hometown. The pad is newly furnished and ready for the expatriates to crash between rounds. Such a deal. Frank and Jack started this golf getaway tradition with a trip to Lou Cipolla's place

in West Palm Beach, Florida ten years ago (Trains Planes and Automobiles). Now the posse includes me. (Back for year two.)

“A beautiful picture.” says Frank. “I think I will take a picture of that wet towel hangin’ on the lampshade and send it to Laura” (Bob’s wife). “And maybe she’d like to see this sink full of dishes too (mostly glasses)” he adds. Frank is teasing of course. What can you expect with a house full of unsupervised guys – even if they are all adults ranging from 50 to post retirement age? Linda might enjoy the tin foil ash tray overflowing with cigar ashes and butts too. Not to mention the sight of sleeping accommodations of the nightly snore fest from Thursday through Sunday. Frank and Wayne share a room and both have breathing apparatus that make the room sound like an iron lung. Bob is sharing the master bedroom with George. Brad and I are in the guest room. Charlie has the couch and Mitch brought his own air mattress for the living room floor.

Ow Ow Ow

It can happen to anyone. Bob slammed Mitch’s fingers in the door of the rented mini-van.

“Ow Ow Ow.” Mitch can’t articulate what’s happened to him and it takes Bob a full three seconds to open the door so he can shake off the pain and shock of the mishap. It happened before he had a chance to hit a single golf ball off his new Taylormade knock-off clubs he purchased on e-Bay. Mitch was flexing his fingers and practicing his interlocking grip on an imaginary golf club all night hoping he’d be in playing shape by morning. “Ow Ow Ow” brought fits of laughter everytime. It was a good device to bridge the gaps between laughs. Mitch is Frank’s favorite foil. “We went to the pool and Mitch was like Steve Wonder over here...with his head rocking back and fourth with the earphones...and playing air piano...He looked like a special child...and everyone at the pool moved away thinking he was retarded...” the routine turns into a fictional scenario set on the plane ride back home. “What’s a matter with Mitch? ...somebody shoved an iPod up his ass...” This and other jabs. Frank hit Mitch a little below the belt too. Mitch would have to

get another Coor's Light to give him enough time to think of a comeback. But Frank would only make it more personal before the comedy was suspended for the evening.

Belly Dancing at the Bed and Breakfast outside Sioux City, Iowa

The truth is stranger than fiction. In the van, coming back from dinner one night, Koester, George, Frank and I tried not to listen in on Brad as he was consoling his wife who was with a girlfriend, her sister and another girl on a trip that included belly dancing lessons.

They found a place advertised as a bed and breakfast outside Sioux City, Iowa.

We couldn't help eavesdropping.

"Linda, it's probably just squirrels. They are probably as frightened of you as you are of them. They won't come in the house....Well why don't you call the guy you rented the place from?...How much did you pay for this place anyway?...Well, if you are really worried....Is there a motel nearby? ..." The four women were mortified to be in a rented cabin, at night, in the middle of Iowa and hearing scraping below the floorboards of the house. Brad was doing his best to calm his wife. But finally caved to the pressure of the moment.

"Dr. Morgan wants to know if you all have had your rabies shots."

"You asshole, CLICK"

The helplessness of the situation, the Dr. Morgan joke and the efforts to keep the snickers under control exploded at that point. By the time Linda called back, the girls were laughing too.

"We are gonna set a trap with bon bons...it's all we have...We scared them away with our finger cymbals...they're heading for the hills"

Needless to say the girls survived the night and we were back on the golf course by morning.

The Mouse and Grandkids on a T-Shirt

George drove in for the golf weekend from New Jersey but

made plans to visit Disney World with his wife and grandchild. So George was already gone by Sunday. Wayne invested blocks of time investigating the T-Shirt imprint of a family photo of his three grandchildren but failed to produce. Grand kids. Yikes!

FSK

The urge to tell or retell a Fred Kummer story cannot be denied on these trips. Fred is a unique individual who has left an indelible mark on all of us. He started his company in 1960. All of us spent some time at HBE. Career flypaper. The opportunities are undeniable but the trade-off is you have to deal with FSK. By Fred's own account. "Fidel Castro and I came into power around the same time." And now, on the eve of his 79th birthday he has outlasted Castro!

Just a few examples:

Charlie offered an account of a presentation on the big island of Hawaii. Charlie, who had the local knowledge, suggested that suits and ties at a meeting of healthcare administrators was a bad move. Charlie suggested they would be dressed in customary Aloha shirts. "Dammit Gary, How come you didn't mention that? Is there a gift shop around?" Sure enough the HBE team showed up in Aloha shirts and were appropriately in style for the meeting. (Last year Charlie told me an FSK story that involved a human error – miscalculation on a hotel construction project. We all make mistakes but FSK has a way of making sure you never forget. He yelled at Charlie for his blunder and presented him with a Chinese abacus. "Maybe you should use this next time!" Charlie lived long enough to attract an offer from the Drury Inns. (He worked for HBE for 19 years.) He's now head of construction at that family owned business. Upon departure from HBE he was able to return the abacus to Fred.)

Frank had a similar story last year about Fred's unreasonableness over the construction progress of the Denver Adam's Mark hotel. Fred is a great man. He is never at fault.

He is likely to ask you in such situations “Are you Stupid or is it that you just don’t care? Huh? Huh? Answer me.” Frank now has a thriving post-HBE career as a mentor for project managers at Clayco. But Frank and I know that Clayco founder Bob Clark is just a kinder, gentle version of the great man he worked for 22 years before busting out.

George was working on New Jersey projects while at HBE so George had limited exposure to the great man but he and Frank did share a few meals with project developer Jack Kennedy. Jack likes a good steak and is happy to include George and Frank on his expense account while traveling on Fred’s dime. “Let’s meet for dinner in little Italy, okay Tiger?” George and Frank are in for the duration. George’s drive home is 2 hours but duty calls. Jack smoked Kent Light Cigarettes at the time. On one occasion, he asked a waiter to buy him some smokes. Confused the waiter wanted some change for the cigarette machine...“Am I going anywhere?” It’s a funny story about a different time. Maybe Jack was planning to include the cigarettes on the dinner tab. Who knows?

Jack is still very likely to send back a steak or a bottle of wine not up to his standards. It’s part of his DNA.

Brad flew to Bogalusa, Louisiana with FSK on the company Lear Jet to present to a group of healthcare executives at a hospital. Brad is an architect and civil engineer but knows the rules. Only the great man talks in such meetings. Brad reports that Fred’s plan for this particular hospital included a parking garage they did not want.

“Mr. Kummer, You don’t understand. People down here, they don’t want no parking garage. They want to look out the window and see their cars. They don’t want to be driving around in no circles in no parking garage.”

You can picture the Louisiana administrator talking in that accent parodied so well in Brad’s story. And we all know FSK well enough to know that he went right on presenting the scheme, with the parking garage, insisting it was vital to the hospital.

Wayne is as fastidious and as detail-oriented as you could ever wish for in a construction estimator. But even he has a story about Fred accusing him of carelessly leaving two full floors off an estimate. Wayne was with HBE for 30 years. As head of estimating he was a “go to” guy. Fred would rely on his swift calculations to conjure up a number for a project that would eventually become a guaranteed price. (A value driven, no-nonsense, price that might not change more than a few percentage points upon completion of working drawings.) On this occasion though, Wayne was working with less than full information and in classic crisis rush created by the great man.

Bob Koester doesn’t elaborate much on his experiences with FSK. It might be lawyer-client confidentiality but it is more likely that he’d rather not relive some of those finer moments in his legal career. In fact, the State of Missouri still shows Bob as an officer of the firm – a clerical error he intends to clear up as soon as he returns from this trip.

When I get back to St. Louis I’m gonna send Charlie Lee the YouTube link to the famous scene from *On the Waterfront*. Marlon Brando’s character is in the back of a taxicab with his brother. It’s a great scene and it is such a great illustration of how lives and careers are influenced by experiences and associations.

“You could have been another Billy Kahn. That Manager brought you along too fast.”

“It wasn’t him, Charley! It was you. You remember that night in the Garden, you came down to my dressing room and said: ‘Kid, this ain’t your night!’ We’re going for the price on Wilson. ‘You remember that?’ ‘This ain’t your night!’ My night! I coulda taken Wilson apart! So what happens? He gets a title shot outdoors in a ball park – and whadda I get? A one way ticket to Palookaville.

You was my brother, Charley. You shoulda looked out for me a little bit. You shoulda taken care of me – just a little bit – so I wouldn’t have to take them dives for the short-end money.”

“I had some bets down for you. You saw some money.”

“You don’t understand! I coulda had class. I coulda been a

contender. I coulda been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am. Let's face it ...it was you, Charley."

It's good to be home. Happy Birthday, Fred.