REMINISCENCES
OF A
RIVER

by Robert H. Gore, III

New River scene in front of the R. H. Gore, Jr. home,
drawing by Austin Smith from “Historical, Mysterious, Picturesque New River,”
The Seminole Indian Reservation, located to the southwest of Fort Lauderdale, is the only place in the world where the alligator is the state's official animal. The reservation is home to about 1000 alligators, which are fed by the tribe on a daily basis.

The Seminole Indian Reservation is also known for its beautiful natural surroundings, including a vast array of vegetation and wildlife. The reservation is home to a variety of birds, including herons, egrets, and ibises, as well as deer, raccoons, and other small animals.

In addition to its natural beauty, the Seminole Indian Reservation is also known for its cultural traditions, including crafts, dances, and music. The tribe has a long history of pottery-making, and its pottery is often sold at the reservation.

The Seminole Indian Reservation is a unique and special place, and it is a testament to the resilience and strength of the Seminole people.
later the Spanish missionaries called it "Rio Nova" or "Rio Nuevo." The name "Rio en Medio" (Middle River) appeared on another early map in the late 1700s. Perhaps even "Rio Boca de Ratones" or River of the Rat's Mouth is applicable. This river was prominently featured on many Spanish charts, and the name may allude to the long barrier island that stretched eastward like the snout of a rat before it opened in the inlet near today's Port Everglades. No matter. Whatever the original names, and for however long its history, New River is not new.

AND EVEN ITS LONG-ACCEPTED NAME was not sufficient for some. During the Boom days of the late 1920s, the City Chamber of Commerce proposed renaming the river Himmarshee-hatchee, an unlikely combination of two Seminole names that reputedly meant "New Water River." It didn't take, and the only remnant left today of that redundancy is the old Himmarshee Canal that branches off northwesterly from New River near the old Angler's Club before threading its way up toward East Side and St. Anthony's schools. Many of the Gore and Palmer cousins crossed the bridges over the Himmarshee Canal on their way to school, the orthodontist, the Casino Pool, or the Youth Center. So even the Himmarshee figures in our history. The Himmarshee Canal was itself figured on an 1845 surveyor's map just up the way from the second old stockade to be named Fort Lauderdale.

THERE ARE OTHER "RIVERS" ASSOCIATED WITH NEW RIVER, and in fact New River is hydrologically not a single river, but a series of interconnected flowways and streams all coursing out of the Everglades to the west. Middle River, Tarpon River, North Fork, South Fork, Himmarshee Canal—all are properly part of the New River system. Their different names merely reflect the penchant for humans to call everything geographically separated by a new name. We pigeonhole everything, even things that belong together.

THE THREE FORTS OF MAJOR LAUDERDALE —

FORT LAUDERDALE FITS RIGHT IN WITH THIS SUPERFLUITY of names. The "fort" of Lauderdale consisted of not one but three military outposts that were constructed at various times, and various locations, directly on New River. The oldest picket was located well up river near the North Fork and was soon abandoned when the logistics of keeping it supplied by sea, and protected from the Indians by land, became evident during the Second Seminole Indian War. The second fort was located farther downstream and was soon also abandoned. The third more permanent site was established on the barrier island beach somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Bahia Mar in 1839 because it could be more easily provisioned from the sea.

ALL OF THESE STOCKADES WERE NAMED after the first commanding officer, Major William Lauderdale of the Tennessee Volunteers, a militia outfit posted to the area in 1838. None of the outposts were ever of much military significance. Several search and destroy missions by Colonels James Bankhead and William Harney, and U.S. Navy Commander Isaac Mayo and Lieutenants John T. McLaughlin and William Rodgers were organized from the forts between 1839 and 1842. The army and navy men rowed up New River into the Everglades in pursuit of the wily old Mikasuki Chief Arpeika, also known as Sam Jones. They never found him. At the end of the Second Seminole War the third fort was abandoned once and for all. But the name became part of the geography of southeastern Florida.

FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY after Florida was admitted to the Union in 1845 little happened around ex-Fort Lauderdale. A few settlers and stragglers returned to the area and set up homesteading along the clear, freshwater stream that twisted out of the Everglades. The only other inhabitants were the Mikasuki Indians who had inherited the Everglades after the end of the Third Seminole War in 1858. A truce between whiteman and redman, born of the philosophy of the motto on the
first territorial flags, held sway: "Let Us Alone."

FORT LAUDERDALE WAS RESURRECTED, at least in name, and stepped into the twentieth century primarily through the efforts of one man — an Indian trader named Frank Stranahan. In 1893 he set up his first camp at Tarpon Bend. Just to the north, at the site of the Pioneer [Stranahan] House today, Stranahan built a more permanent trading post, married a girl named Ivy Cromartie, and put down the first roots of the new town. His soon-to-be wife established the first schoolhouse in 1899. The Stranahans were no fools — both could see the potential of the area, particularly in locating a town on either side of the crystalline river that wound its way through the hammocks and swamps to the Atlantic Ocean. But others also had this vision, including a man named Henry Flagler who was building a railroad southward along the Florida east coast, after which he named his railway. The first train arrived at the railhead of Fort Lauderdale in 1896. Prophetically, it consisted of a boxcar and a passenger coach. Three decades later during the boom-time the Seaboard Air Line arrived and the town was really put on the map.

BUSINESS WAS GOOD FOR THE STRANAHANS. The residence that was to be the "Pioneer House" was built in 1902 directly on the waterfront. Four years later Stranahan expanded his commercial base and built a two story "department store" upriver and just west of the present Andrews Avenue Bridge. This store was the nucleus around which the village, the town, the city, and eventually the metropolis of Fort Lauderdale would grow. Brickell Avenue, fronting directly on the river, was the street of business, later to be outcompeted by Andrews Avenue and Las Olas Boulevard. Tourism was already evident, and would play a major part in the town's development for the next fifty years. Agricultural produce and fish, both from the newly opened farmlands in the interior around Lake Okeechobee, swelled the town.

BY 1910 THE FIRST OF SEVERAL BRIDGES across the river was built, a lowrise truss at the point that would someday become thriving Andrews Avenue. Now New River could not only be travelled — it could be easily crossed. A tourist camp quickly sprang up on the south side — a portent of things to come. In 1911 Fort Lauderdale's first newspaper, The Sentinel, went into business on Andrews Avenue. The newspaper's name would change in later years and then finally be resurrected by a wealthy newspaperman from Kentucky, but that was a score of years in the future. By 1912 two other important factors had come into play — Governor Napoleon Broward had begun to drain the Everglades, and in the process clouded the waters of New River forever; and Fort Lauderdale had become one of the largest vegetable shipping ports in the United States. The town on the river was here to stay.

TIME AND THE RIVER —

TRACING THE COURSE OF NEW RIVER is to trace the course of history for Fort Lauderdale in general and for the Gore Family in particular. Upriver, beyond the railroad bridges, the stream twisted and turned through quiet estates, passing under the old Seventh Avenue bridge and then meandering away into the North and South Forks. A boat traveling all the way to the headwaters some ten miles up would, before 1915, have come to the falls, a series of limestone ledges formed by the ancient Atlantic Coastal Ridge. New River shared this feature with a host of other streams on the southeastern Florida coast, including the Little and Miami Rivers and Arch and Snapper Creeks. All were dredged and dynamited when the Everglades drainage projects were in full swing.

DOWNRIVER THE TURNS BECAME LESS TORTUOUS. The first bend became historically marked by the railroad bridges. The next occurred just before the Pioneer House. After that came Tarpon Bend, located just behind the present-day Riverside Hotel on the north bank. The south side formed the subdivision called Rio Vista. Tarpon Bend was itself famous for three features. First, it was the reported site of the notorious Cooley Massacre which

Downtown Fort Lauderdale, looking southeast, with the second Andrews Avenue bridge at far right, 1910.
took place January 6, 1836 during the early years of the Second Seminole Indian War. The second, of course, was its whirlpool. Third, it was allegedly the deepest spot in New River, having been sounded to ninety feet. Fishermen might tell you that there was a fourth claim to fame. The feature wasn't called "Tarpon" Bend for nothing!

IT WAS IN THOSE EARLY DAYS that Fort Lauderdale first became touted as "The Venice of America" because of the numerous canals that had been dredged to make the waterfront property beloved by displaced Yankees. These dead-end channels were created by, and flanked, small (and eventually very high-priced) peninsulas made of dredged up muck, sand, and rock. Nurmi Isles and Idlewyld (1920) were two of the most prominent along the lower reaches of the River. Another well-known landmark was built in 1925 on one of these same peninsulas and became known as the "Angler's Club." Governor R.H. Gore, Sr. made it his home for a while before abandoning it for the air-conditioned comfort and convenience of a penthouse suite in the Governors' Club Hotel in the heart of downtown Fort Lauderdale.

IN THE YEARS DURING AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR II, Fort Lauderdale was still a subtropical paradise, a sleepy little Old Florida town on the Gold Coast, pretentiously wearing Spanish tile and stucco architecture, busily rewriting its pedigree, and trying to ignore its Cracker ancestry so prevalent in the clapboard and shiplapped houses scattered along the River. More a village than a city, it lay undiscovered and as yet relatively undeveloped, languidly relaxing by the River, its most attractive physiographic feature, and showing off its small-townness with remnant southern pride.

BECAUSE NEW RIVER MEANDERS THROUGH DOWNTOWN FORT LAUDERDALE, it both defines and delimits the neighborhoods on its banks. The River is bounded by River Drives on either side, with the Andrews Avenue bridge as the dividing line between east and west. The neighborhoods on the northeast and southeast were genteel, those of the southwest less affluent. The northwest was essentially a commercial district containing several taverns, old hotels and rooming houses, and a variety of fish houses and boatyards. This area was as industrial as Old Fort Lauderdale got.

JUST BEYOND THE END OF NORTHWEST RIVER DRIVE lay the Florida East Coast railroad tracks, and still farther to the west those of the Seaboard Airline Railway. Both railways crossed the New River on bascule bridges that seemed to be perpetually elevated—in deference to the almost constant boat traffic sailing both up and down river. We could always tell when the streamlined Orange Blossom Special passenger train or the Fruit Growers Express Freight was coming because the bridges would slowly bow downward, stretching their black iron plates and curved iron arms across the River just in time for the trains to pass. Bicycle-posses of River Rascallions would ride to the FEC station and look down the track to try and be first to see the weaving headlights of the streamlined diesel locomotives. Bets were made, handshakes given, faith pledged, as to whether the oncoming train was freight or passenger. Prizes ranged from a collection of nickels and pennies to the use of a cherished toy for a day.

THE FIRST ANDREWS AVENUE BRIDGE, the crossroads of the neighborhoods, was an immovable truss. The second bridge was a hand-operated truss. The latter span was set on a large cogwheel which connected to a second smaller cog. Whenever a boat needed passage the bridge tender would lower the gates at either end by hand and then walk out to the bridge center and insert a large toothed rod with a long push arm into the coghole. Then he would walk around and around in a circle and slowly swing the bridge lat-erally open. It usually required ten minutes or more to open, and a similar time to close. But in those days "hurry" was not yet a well-worn word. A second hand-operated truss bridge extended from what is now called Idlewyld across New River Sound to the beach. A third was located far upriver west of Southwest Ninth Avenue. The latter was still in service in the late 1950s; the former two had been replaced much earlier with draw spans owing to the increasingly large volume of traffic on Las Olas Boulevard and Andrews Avenue.

RIVER DRIVE: THE NEIGHBORHOOD ALONG THE RIVER—

THE ANDREWS AVENUE BRIDGE WAS AT ONE TIME the defining point for both the main commercial district of town and the neighborhoods along the River. A prominent landmark on the northeast corner was the old Lighthouse Tavern, a dark, beery-smelling bar that sported a diorama of a working lighthouse and several clipper-type sailing ships on the wall above the bar. Here the charterboat captains, fishhouse operators, and assorted rummies and ne'er do wells spent their time and money, and occasionally purchased newspapers from the braver newsboys in the neighborhood. The doors were always open.

ACROSS THE RIVER ON THE SOUTH SIDE rose two prominent landmarks—the County Courthouse whose tower and chimes could be seen and heard from all along the riverfront; and the Fort Lauderdale Public Library. The latter formed a home away from home for at least one of the neighborhood children and his school chums who spent an inordinately long time reading every book that dealt with World War II in any context, and refought the battles and wrote long epic sagas of poetry about it all.

THE OLIVER HOUSE WAS ANOTHER LANDMARK for the neighborhood, particularly after it had fallen into disrepair and was to
Aerial view of downtown Fort Lauderdale, looking northwest, in the late 1940s. The R. H. Gore, Jr. home is at bottom right, marked with an arrow. Other landmarks in relation to the Gore home include the Bailey house immediately left, the small building used by the Gore children as a western saloon behind, and the Dot Firlit house just to the northeast. The large boat docked in front of the Gore home is Joe Dowd’s “Joey” (courtesy of Paul Gore).

be torn down. Originally, it was a grand home on the corner of Southeast Third Avenue directly on the waterfront. It became an apartment house and then outlived its usefulness. Abandoned, it formed a bombed-out building, haunted house, burned out ranch, and any variety of other imaginary play sites for the overactive imaginations of the neighborhood kids. Beyond the Oliver House heading eastward were two other old apartment buildings, the Yohe House, and then Grover Kline’s two-story frame home. Grover Kline’s wife, whose first name was “Mrs.,” made a fortune in baby-sitting fees from the R. H. Gore, Jr. household. Her commercial advantages were that she was nearby, she was a no-nonsense Baptist who could handle children well, and she was almost always available.

TWO MORE OLD CRACKER-STYLE FRAME HOUSES followed one behind the other across the vacant lot east of the Kline house. The house fronting Northeast River Drive was owned by an old southern widow lady named Mrs. Bailey. Mrs. Bailey’s house was always dark, and smelled of a combination of too-sweet perfume and musty linen. A prominent feature, under the large old oak tree in the front yard, was a bird bath filled with mosquito larvae and pale green water from which the neighborhood children would dare each other to drink.

HOME FOR THE R. H. GORE JR. FAMILY came next—221 Northeast River Drive. It was a typical Old Florida, white-painted, clapboard frame structure, called a “Cracker House” by the natives. Located directly on New River in the oldest section of downtown Fort Lauderdale, at the end of a row of similar homes, the house (like all the others) looked south across the dark, slow-moving, ocean-bound waters toward the equally genteel Cracker-style neighbors on the other bank. All the homes were painted white, but splashes of color were provided by the variegated crotons, the lavender, yellow, and orange bougainvilleas, and scarlet hibiscus that vegetatively ruffled the hems of white wooden lattices. The lattices had a dual function, first to keep unwanted animals (including neighborhood children) from crawling underneath, and second, they attempted to hide the unlovely concrete supporting blocks that raised each house above the ground, and river flood level that rose ominously during the late summer hurricane season.

THE HOUSE AT 221, like many others of that time, had not the questionable benefits of air-conditioning. But fans were abundant, and a wide, screened and breezy front porch opened onto a “living room” (really a parlor because it was so small). Three still smaller bedrooms extended off either side of a central passageway that led to the dining room and then the kitchen at the rear. A single, long bathroom held a claw-foot tub.
THE PARLOR BECAME THE
SEAT OF ENTERTAINMENT on
Saturday evenings when Bob and
Margaret hosted the weekly poker
and pinochle fests. Laughter loud
and long into the early night told the
Gore Jr. children that Sunday break-
fast might be ad libitum. In the early
hours just after sunrise we would
scurry out to the great green circle-
table to eat the maraschino cherries
and drink the dregs of the cocktail
glasses left at each seat. Then, mak-
ing our own breakfasts of Kix, Shred-
ded Ralston, or Rice Krispies, milk,
and tablespoonsful of sugar, became
easy. Sunday morning on the River
— it didn't git no better'n that!

OUTSIDE ON THE SUNRISE
SIDE, a huge banyan tree dominated
the eastern yard. Laurel oaks and
the requisite coconut palms were
scattered in the back, and front
yards. Large, rubbery-green wine
lilies guarded the front walk and pro-
vided seasonal dining for the multi-
colored, orange-bodied, tobacco-spi-
ting lubber grasshoppers in summer.
The banyan, called a rubber tree be-
cause it oozed a milky latex-like sap
when wounded (which was often in
a neighborhood full of kids all of
whom showed some tree-climbing
abilities), was the only tree pro-
viding a modicum of shade to the house.
Together with paddle and window
fans it constituted our only air-condi-
tioning during the summers of the
war years in 1944-45 and thereafter.
The tree rang to the shouts and
laughter of children for another ten
years before it fell ungracefully, and
resisting all the way, to progress.

BEHIND 221 ACROSS A
WEEDY VACANT LOT that was
home to various species of neigh-
borhood wildlife and stray cats was
Dorothy Firlit’s house, known to the
River Rapscallions as “Aunt Dot.”
Aunt Dot’s house faced Southeast
Third Avenue but was less than a
block from the River. She lived here
with her two daughters, Caroline and
Jeanine (called Bonnie), who were
more adjunct than active members of
the local gang. Painted a light or
faded yellow, this house had two
porches, one in front and one behind.

This March 1949 photo shows, in front from left to
right, the R. H. Gore, Jr. children, Bob, Ann, and Paul.
Standing behind is cousin David Krebs. The “Aunt
Dot” Firlit house is in the background (courtesy of
Paul Gore).

The architecture was that of a “shot-
gun house,” so called because a shot-
gun discharged at the front door
would pass all the way through and
out the back without hitting an in-
tervening wall. Porch led to living
room, then to dining room, and
kitchen, and back porch. Bedrooms
extended off the north side. Aunt
Dot’s house became something of a
local shrine to the neighborhood chil-
dren, because it was under her house
that the Guinea Hen sometimes
resided. From where this bird came we
didn’t know. But we did consider it
fair game and whenever it was spotted
we would all rush off yowling and
howling like the pack of filthy little
savages that we were, chasing its ter-
ror-stricken blue and polka-dotted
form from under one house to an-
to another until told to cease and desist
by one of the neighborhood cranks.

NEXT TO AUNT DOT’S WAS
THE LAST HOME ON THIRD AV-
ENUE, the Durwood Hixon house.
Durwood was an older, heavyset boy
who occasionally deigned to play with
us. He had a cousin named Rusty
who stuttered when excited, and
whose last name changed periodically
from Justice to Justinelli. These were
legal obfuscations of little moment to
us. More important was whether we
could cajole Durwood to purchase
boxes of explosive caps for our pis-
tols. At five rolls to the box and fifty
shots to the roll, for a quarter we had
several minutes of noise made avail-
able. When pistols failed, hammers
were the recourse, and the sidewalk
in front of 221 became further
cracked and powder-stained. Pop-
click-click-click-pop-pop-pop-pop-
click-click-click-click-click-click-
click-pop-pop-pop... and so it went on
any given afternoon, ad distractionis.

ACROSS THE RIVER AND
DOWN BY THE BEND was other
Gore Territory—Uncles and Aunts
and assorted cousins. On the south-
east side stood the stony-ridged two
story home of Joe and Pat, and chil-
dren Paula and Mike. Behind was
the elongate stucco frame home of
George and Mickey, then childless.
Adjacent to both was Ted and
Marion’s. Three blocks farther to the
east in yet another Cracker-style
clapboard home lived Fitz and
Bettylou with their children Orin,
Lorena, and Marilyn. All of these
aunts and uncles formed both an en-
clave and a vanguard along the River
as it wound its way eastward from the
Everglades to the Atlantic.

THE RELATIVE CLOSENESS
OF ALL THE UNCLESAUNCHS
and cousins made for an easy family
gathering. Summer holidays were
particularly loudly celebrated with
fireworks. Even impromptu softball
games were formed on the playing field at 221 among the uncles and cousins, while the aunts cheered everyone on from the sidelines. There was in those halcyon days a closeness of kith and kin that soon would diminish as fortunes were made, families moved away, and contacts eventually became stretched and then broken.

SLIGHTLY FARTHER TO THE EAST the old Federal Highway Bridge leaned over the River. This ancient draw span regularly became stuck in the up position thus detouring the heavy U.S. 1 traffic down both River Drives to the Andrews Avenue Bridge—which also regularly became stuck in the up mode. The old Andrews Avenue Bridge eventually was replaced with a higher, wider, more modern span. The Federal Highway bridge was soon destined to become a tunnel, in spite of the crusading efforts of R. H. Gore, Sr. to prevent such a calamity. Crossing back over the River on the northeast side one approached the old Stranahan residence. Once part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Seminole Indian trading post, the house had been converted to the “Pioneer House” restaurant where the R. H. Gore, Jr. children, if exceptionally well-behaved (and mother Margaret simply refused to cook that particular evening), were taken to eat out. The return walk was always along the River to see the River lights.

TWO SHORT BLOCKS NORTH OF THE RIVER just off Las Olas Jack and Betty Lou resided between two favorite landmarks, the Colony movie theater on Las Olas Boulevard (home of the first 3-D movies) and the Fort Lauderdale High School “Flying L’s” football field. Autumn weekend nights meant the brisk walk to the field with fathers and uncles. There in the bleachers beneath the pressbox (to which Jack Gore always gained admittance) we sipped root beer snow-cones and cheered for the Flying L’s, although if they lost we never viewed it as much of a catastrophe.

JACK AND BETTY LOU’S LARGE, OLD, THREE-STORIED HOUSE with its wide gray-floored, coral-rock porch was the most imposing house on the street to the football game, and backed up to an alley where Jack Gore in a moment of weakness taught his oldest son Chris, and two nephews how to ride bicycles by running alongside as we teetered and tipped down the road. Chris, even in those days, eschewed our roughshod Rascalion philosophies, preferring to espouse the gentler theatrical arts. A master of coercion, many of us wound up in co-starring or supporting actor roles in his several productions. We much preferred the imaginary killings of Indians or North Korean Communist “gooks” but could never get Chris to accept our screenplays.

SUNDAYS ALONG THE RIVER were days of rest and visitation. Catholic Masses in those days were said in Latin and only in the morning. Old St. Anthony’s gothic and stone facade was a short two block walk away. There, in a pervasive gloom and un-airconditioned discomfort we fidgeted and fussed while Father John J. O’Looney rambled on in his thick Irish brogue, and large, overweight strangers crushed us slowly to nausea against the pew end. The church interior always smelled of candlewax, smoke, and an indefinable aroma that bespoke sanctity and holiness, however distant. The sacristy held three red lights over the ornately-spired alter, and tier upon tier of flickering blue-glassed and red-glassed votive candles in front of the open-palmed, sad-eyed statues of Mary and Joseph and selected saints. Overhead the morning light clothed the stain-glassed ascetes with diadems of red, blue, and green, and tinted the hypnotic Irish-Latin droning from the alter with the pure prismatic colors of heaven. We counted the seconds toward the second collection because that signalled the beginning of the end, and return to daylight, fresh air, and freedom.

IN THOSE MORE LANGLUID TIMES when walking was still considered honorable transportation, Granddad and Grandmother Gore would make the Sunday rounds along
the River. Visits lasted approximately a half hour, and invariably produced three noteworthy events as far as the children were concerned. First, we would hear all the gossip from Grandmother Gore about the relatives; second, a small gray pile of cigar ashes would inevitably collect by the chair where the Governor had sat; and third, each child received a shiny half dollar at the end of the visit. Fifty cents in the late 1940s would buy a bunch of things essential to the proper enjoyment of childhood. No Indian accepted a paltry piece of silver to remain peaceful with more enthusiasm.

EASTER SUNDAY WAS ESPECIALLY ANTICIPATED because we knew that Grandmother Gore would come around with the inevitable Easter Lamb Cake from Gainey's Bakery on Third Avenue just up from the Governors' Club Hotel. As cakes go it wasn't much in our estimation because the interior was white rather than chocolate. But we scrabbled, squabbled, and scratched to get the two choicest portions—either the white-frostinged lamb's head, or the equally frosting-covered lamb's tail.

That was the only lamb that we would gladly eat—leg of, roast of, haunch of, and chops of, were simply too vile to be considered as food.

BOATS AND BOATING ON THE RIVER —

THE RIVER WAS HUGGED BY SEA WALLS, a non-sequitur that we never had satisfactorily explained to us — why weren't they called "river walls?" we persisted. "Ask your father," was the typical response. Along these seawalls numerous "live aboard" boats were moored. Directly in front of 221, just east of the Florentine concrete steps leading down to the River, was the most famous in our neighborhood—a boat owned by Captain Joe Dowd.

CAPTAIN JOE DOWD lived on what appeared to be an old Lake Okeechobee excursion steamer. All polished mahogany and oak, the "Joey" was a neighborhood meeting place of sorts inasmuch as his two

(Left to right): John Gorno, Joan Gorno, Robert H. Gore III, and Paul Gore, on the waterfront at Northeast River Drive, 1946 (courtesy of Paul Gore).
grandchildren, Joan and John Gornto, who often slept aboard, were also charter members in good standing of the River Drive Rascallions. We knew little of Grandpa Dowd’s background save that he talked with a northeastern accent, always carried a white crockery mug of coffee, had a semi-invalid wife who (so it was whispered) came originally from Cuba, and, most importantly, always kept a large supply of ice-cold Coca Cola and Nehi Grape Soda in the bait box on the back deck.

GRANDPA DOWD BECAME, ALMOST BY DEFAULT, the neighborhood daylight baby-sitter, and from time to time would load all the kids up and motor us down the River and briefly out through the Port Everglades inlet into the Atlantic to fish. There, we would all proceed to regurgitate the several bottles of soft drinks we had greedily consumed in the outgoing, and be allowed to replace them as a means of settling stomach and nerves on the incoming trip. When you are young, and the fish are biting, there is no time in your schedule to bemoan the effects of mal de mer. Of much more importance was just who was going to blow the old gray metal-coned boat horn so that the rusting and relic Federal Highway bridge could be raised for our inbound passage. Grandpa Dowd merely smiled at it all and continued to sip his coffee.

GRANDPA DOWD HAD ANOTHER IMPORTANT FUNCTION. He was keeper of the Riverlights. Strung along above the sidewalks that ran the length of the River from Andrews Avenue to Federal Highway was the Chamber of Commerce’s contribution to Riverside beauty—a series of multicolored lights that resembled Christmas tree bulbs. These lights were controlled by a switchbox located at the corner of Southeast Third Avenue, and were under the care and attention of Joe Dowd. They were turned on every evening at sundown, and their multiple colors danced and shimmered across the darkening waters of the River as twilight turned into night. As darkness fell, the individual families on the live-aboard boats turned on their own cockpit and cabin lights, and soon the entire River became a tropical fairyland of scintillating stars. It was a scene of absolute tranquility and peace as the River seemed to snuggle down between its twinkling banks and prepare itself for sleep. For the children of the R. H. Gore, Jr. family, it was an all-too-real indication that bath time was imminent as well. We could play in the yard until the riverlights came on—then inside and into the tub—and no backtalk.

ANOTHER NEIGHBORHOOD BOAT, periodically moored to the west of the Florentine Steps, was the “Phyllis Joan” from Philadelphia. On board were two tomboys of our age and enlightenment named Joanie and Janie Watson who became seasonal members in good standing of the River Rascallions. The Watson girls came by weekly to share the 221 bathtub (there being only a small marine head on board their parents’ boat), and joined us in our only claim to fame one Halloween when we all, dressed as angels (a profound oxymo-
ron), won first prize at the annual Halloween Costume March held at Stranahan Field. The five dollar prizes we each received were worth the wait in scratchy costumes and the seemingly interminable parade around the football field.

THEN THERE WAS THE “ABEONA,” first of a series of tourist excursion boats that sorted up and down the River. Captain Harry Kestner had the concession all sewed up and we rode the double-decked “Abeona” anytime the relatives came down from Evanston. The trip was exciting in its sameness—the Andrews Avenue Bridge and the FEC railroad bridge now viewable from underneath; the whirlpool that didn’t whirl anymore; the houses of the rich and famous (none of whom we knew, and cared even less about); and finally the “Authentic Seminole Indian Village.” There, at an imprecise locality far upriver we disembarked and followed the crests of tourists through what seemed to be a raggedy cluster of open shacks sitting in the middle of a flat, stumped-down, sun-baked arena. Scattered here and there within the “chickees” were several heavily-beaded and mightily-bored Indian women, none of whom exhibited the cool and haughty serenity we had come to expect when we saw them walking in so stately a manner through Burdine’s. Off to one side of the village a large concrete wall encircled another, deeper arena, in the middle of which was a small, concrete pool filled with evil-looking and even more evil-smelling greenish-brown water. A torpid alligator lay half in and half out of the pool, eyes closed in sleep or total ennui.

THE REST OF THE DAY WAS LOST IN THE HEAT, but recollections are of a burly Indian continually pulling the alligator out of the water, and the alligator just as continually crawling back into it. The wrestle was finally made, the gator was pinned under the heavy-set Indian’s jaw, tourist cameras clicked, and everyone adjourned to the welcome shade of the soft drink stand to buy orange juice, Nehi, and RC Cola.

Invariably we returned to the “Abeona” with half a dozen authentic, hand-carved coconuts with funny faces, several small palmetto fiber dolls, and a genuine Seminole tomahawk handmade from wood of the rare Ply tree, and decorated with green and purple feathers from the now-extinct Great Everglades Os-trich. Later that evening, the “Abeona” made a downriver cruise. Upon her return the house owners along the River would flash their porch lights and the “Abeona” would respond with a couple of toots on her horn. It was a pleasant ritual on a pleasant River, and enjoyed by all.

HUDDLED ALONG THE SEA-WALLS TO THE WEST on either side of the old Andrews Avenue bridge the charterboat captains also once docked in the days before Bahia Mar. From there they carried their cargoes of shouting, sun-reddened tourists down the River and out to sea and to the edge of the Florida Current in what was usually a successful pursuit of sailfish. Indeed, the area offshore of Fort Lauderdale, between Palm Beach and Miami, was known at one time—before pollution and overfishing occurred—as Sailfish Alley, a fishing ground sought by bluewater angling devotees as avidly as any Norsman would seek Valhalla.

The sightseeing boat Abeona (left) and charterboats docked along the north bank of the New River in the 1940s.

THE RETURN OF THE CHARTER FLEET upriver was a daily event of both festive and mythic proportions, with boat after boat passing in review before all the houses fronting the River, often to the accompaniment of applause, blowing of horns, and exchange of witty repartee between boat and shore. It was every bit a triumphal parade, each vessel flying from its long outriggers the blue and white burpees imprinted with sailfish or marlin. Success and fame was adjudged not only by the number of fish caught, but also by the number released, with captains often held in higher approbation not by the tally of billfish they brought back to dock, but rather by those they did not—sort of like the Lakota Sioux “counting coup”—ichthyomatically speaking, to be sure.

THE RETURN ALWAYS TOOK PLACE AROUND COCKTAIL TIME, which is to say shortly before 5:00 p.m. It was always watched by the adults, particularly relatives visiting from up north, giving them occasion to remark in awe and wonder at the number of boats and the number of fish caught, while sipping on prepuberal libations and regaling each other with past piscatorial exaggerations. For us, the events were a time-keeper of sorts, foretelling that evening was nigh, dinner was immi-
nent, and the day had once again too rapidly slipped away. In a vain attempt to halt time in its flight we would run down to the docks next to the Andrews Avenue Bridge, and view upwards of ten and more billfish displayed on the photo-hooks. To aid us in our identifications of the others we had recourse to the glass case at the foot of the bridge in which resided at least twenty different, brightly colored, wall-eyed, buck-toothed, gape-jawed, plaster of Paris game fish, all courtesy of "Al Pfeuger-Taxidermist." Those were languorous times, indeed.

THE RIVER DRIVE RAPSCELLIONS —

THE CHILDREN OF THE NORTHEAST RIVER DRIVE NEIGHBORHOOD were a motley and polyglot group. Bobby, Paul, and sister Ann ruled the east end from 221, with a little help from Rusty Justice. Joanie and Johnny Gorno held the Riverbanks across the street. A tall, dark-haired, thin Hungarian girl named Yolanda Yohe lived four houses to the west. Behind her in another Cracker house was a girl named Louise — a pale, frail, redhaired wisp of a thing who rarely took part in the rough and tumble shenanigans to the east. In later years she would remind one curiously of "Margaret" in Dennis the Menace. Back to the east and just down the road behind the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks Club off Third Avenue behind Fannin Funeral Home resided a short-haired, blue-eyed, freckle-faced tomboy named Judith. Judith entered the neighborhood clan suddenly one summer, and quickly established herself as a formidable presence standing second to none in the group. One day Judith didn’t show up to play, and when we went to her apartment we found out that she and her folks were gone. We never saw her again.

HONORARY MEMBERS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD could come from almost anywhere, and included cousin David Krebs who arrived every spring with parents (Uncle) Hank and (Aunt) Mary Jane and older sister Nancy from Evanston, Illinois. Vacation was the mode, and fishing was the chief reason to come south. Interneceine territorial squabbles were effectively nipped in the bud by Uncle Hank’s commanding, “Hey, Rubel!” which brought either instant silence or instant retribution across the back of the head. Other honorary members included cousins Marilyn Gore from across the River, and Charlie and Patsy Palmer from up St. Anthony’s way, who visited from time to time. Charlie (who came more often than Patsy) was always a welcome addition (another boy) because he had a fine sense of imagination and participation, both important requirements when the banyan tree was to become a military fort, a cowboy saloon, a pirate ship, or an army bomber.

IN THOSE UNBLIGHTED AND BENIGHTED DAYS OF FREE FANCY, imagination was more important than accoutrements. Toys were often the simplest of utensils modified for the specific pretend-purpose at hand. Broomsticks became horses, pieces of lumber were Indian knives or rifles, palm fronds were pirate swords, small coconuts were hand grenades, refrigerator cartons from McFarlane’s For Frigidaire’s trash bin became hand-carved tanks, rocketships, or F-86s. A handful of pebbles from the new parking lot behind 221, dipped in gold paint, became nuggets and thus legal tender to be spent in the “Backhouse Saloon” after the de rigueur barfight and High Noon showdown. Gold caches robbed at capgun-point by neckerchiefed desperadoes aroused the Sheriff-of-the-moment and his town posse who thundered away after the thieves on broomstick ponies and ultimately cornered the villains in the burning chaparral of nearby vacant lots. There they shot them down in a flurry of cap smoke and popping, all with accompanying histronic contortions. Those unfortunate enough to be captured were returned to town, doomed to be hung from a nearby laurel oak—a fate always righteously interrupted by somebody’s mother, or lunch, whichever came first.

WHEN WE TIRED OF PLAYING PRETEND there was always a cane pole with bits of string and a piece of pork rind. We would hie ourselves across the street to the Florentine Steps, there to sit for an hour or two dangling porky baits into the oily black River while looking for manatees to throw lead sinkers at. If we were lucky we snagged several small catfish and long, black, slippery

Bob and Paul Gore and cousin David Krebs (with hat) in front of the building they used as a “western saloon,” January 1948 (courtesy of Paul Gore).
Saturday matinee at the Florida Theater on East Las Olas Boulevard in the late '40s.

eels, and then called for Grandpa Dowd to come take them off the hook. Eventually, we would have a bucket full of gasping and dying trash fish. And eventually a black man would come by (the same one) and ask what we boys was gonna do wif dem fish in de bucket. And we were only too happy to give them away, feeling justified, and good, and satisfied in our hearts.

SATURDAYS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR were days of respite and relief. Downtown Lauderdale sported five movie theaters. The managers of three of these, the Warnor, the Sunset, and the Lyric (the old Queen Theater from the 1920s), in a moment of insanity, agreed to run Saturday Morning Matinees. This was a euphemism for allowing several hundred school children from all parts of town to form a pushing, pulling, and pummeling line in front of the theater-of-the-day for the privilege of paying twenty-five cents (fourteen cents at the Sunset Theater; nine cents at the soon to go defunct Lyric Theater) to see a double-feature cowboy movie, five cartoons, two selected short subjects (one of which was invariably "Behind the Eight Ball") and a Captain Midnight, Sky King, or Flash Gordon serial, plus previews of coming attractions. It was also instant child care as far as the parents were concerned.

ALSO ACCRUING TO THE TICKET HOLDER came the additional privileges of running like Viking berserkers up and down the aisles, sailing popcorn boxes at the screen, stretching well-chewed bubble gum across the arms of the theater's seats, licking caramel Sugar Daddies into long, twisted ribbons that were then permanently fastened to the cloth fabric of the seats, pelting total strangers with jujubes and milk duds, and laughing uproariously as at least one child, overcome with overstimulation, became violently ill in a nearby seat, thus adding an additional and permanent layer of stickiness to a theater floor already coated with several inches of hardened candy, rancid popcorn butter, and dried cola. All of which would suddenly cease when the theater lights came on and Jack the manager stalked out to center stage to threaten total and complete eviction of anyone who DID NOT SIT DOWN RIGHT THIS MINUTE AND BE STILL AND WATCH THE MOVIE! By the end of the afternoon we were as totally spent and exhausted as any crusader who had walked on his knees to Jerusalem. But we were happy.

SUMMERS FOR ALL OF US WERE GREEN BOTTLES OF COCA COLA, chips of froth-filled ice from the patrolling neighborhood ice truck, St. Vitus dances in the toxic clouds behind the mosquito-spray jeep, and miniature glass jar zoos with perforated lids. The usual urban fauna of turtles, goldfish, lizards, grasshoppers, grass snakes, and catterpillars were sought, caught, bought, traded, or trapped for scientific scrutiny and even a bit of real nature study under a toy microscope, before eventually suffering mercifully quick demises from neglectful childhood curation.

WE WERE WALKING ENCYCLOPEDIAS OF MISINFORMATION in the best Plinean sense: "De Historia Naturalis Lauderdalense." We knew which lizards were deadly poisonous (most), where hoop snakes lived (under rotting leaves by old Mrs. Bailey's birdbath), where the Guinea hen could be found (under any neighborhood house), and how to avoid scorpions, wasps, spiders, and grasshoppers, all of which would inevitably do something bad or nasty to you. Along the way we honed and sharpened our hunting and trapping skills, knocking wasp nests down from under house eaves, urinating en mass onto red ant hills, and catching bumblebees deep inside the throats of bright red hibiscus blooms and then offering the flowers to the girls for a smell. Thus we drifted through the warm and golden summers and winters of childhood, slowly filling the cup of experience with the sweet and heady nectars of self-taught nature lore, and spicing it with an occasional hurricane.

EDUCATION IN REAL NATURAL HISTORY WAS A CONTINUOUS PROCESS, maintained during numerous early morning father-and-son walks from 221 in downtown Fort Lauderdale along Las Olas Boulevard eastward toward the rising sun, Atlantic Boulevard, and the deserted beach across from the Elbo Room. Here we took quick swims in a still cool ocean made of silver and blue glass, riding tiny waves that curled
Above is the corner of Andrews Avenue and Las Olas Boulevard after the 1947 hurricane; below, Paul and Bob Gore stand amidst debris at their home on New River after the storm (bottom photo courtesy of Paul Gore).

and licked at the edge of the sand, before we toweled off and made the slow walk home.

HURRICANES WERE AN UNUNDERSTOOD PHENOMENON in our lives. All we knew was that regularly every summer all the boats on the river moved upstream and the city crews came by and cut all the fronds and coconuts off the palm trees. Parents would become rather short-tempered, and spend a lot of time hustling and bustling about and buying inordinate amounts of canned green peas and stewed tomatoes—both of which we thought food fit only for the elephantitis troll that Uncle Ted said lived under Grandpa Dowd’s boat, near the bilge outflow pipe. The saving grace was that we were invariably packed off to the Governors’ Club, suitcase and three carefully-selected toys in hand, there to be firmly ensconced in the upper floors after dining sumptuously in the Or-}

chid Room. Then, for the rest of the evening we listened to the wind howl and wail all night long while asking (again and again) why the hotel was swaying so badly. Mornings-after were always mind-boggling. We had never seen so much water, so many tree limbs everywhere, so many sparkling and cracked powerlines, and so much litter. Nor could we explain why Grandpa Dowd’s boat was resting in our front yard. Wading without shoes and socks became the accepted mode of travel, which bothered us not at all, having lived that lifestyle for years. The high point of all this was the absolutely hysterical sight of seeing outboard motorboats cruising up and down Third Avenue and Las Olas Boulevard. The latter truly and eponymously reflected its Spanish name—the waves.

THE RESULTING TYPHOID EPIDEMIC throughout the city again had little impact—we were simply bagged and bagged up and sent north on the steamliner to Evanston for the autumn until the threat of disease died down. We became more motion sick from the train ride than any three plagues of typhoid. But it was a step upwards of sorts, attending St. Mary’s Elementary in Evanston and sitting in real stone-walled classrooms, not the stiflingly hot, muggy, wooden portables that always smelled faintly of stale peanut butter and banana sandwiches, ancient vomit and urine, sawdust absorbent, and nun’s deodorant.

ST. ANTHONY’S BECAME AS MUCH A PART of the Gore Family as any Mafia godfather, and often along the same lines. Most of the children would walk or bike-ride to school in those days—traffic and crime were both low, and the passage from River to school could (with proper dawdling) take upwards of an hour. Important side events were the bombing of ducks in the Himmarshee Canal with old whiskey bottles, and trying to plink the fiddler crabs on the muddy banks with road pebbles. Once at school we were subject to the gentle ministrations of Celtic nuns, most of whom had fought at the battle
of Balmoral Castle for Bonny Prince Charley, and could wield yardsticks with the same grace and aplomb (and, we suspected, as well and as often) as they did halberds against the forces of the Hated Pretender.

THE SCHOOL DAY WAS DIVIDED into three important parts—Morning, Lunch and Playground, and Dismissal. Mornings were always fresh and cool, and learning came easily if not often. Lunch consisted of standing in long lines to purchase tomato soup made from used rusty battery acid, peanut butter and banana sandwiches, and small, half-pint cartons of lukewarm chocolate milk. And then explaining in tearful voice to the cafeteria nun (who, we felt certain, had been in charge of the shower handles at Auschwitz) why we didn’t have our lunch ticket. The fortunate and wise soon learned to brown-bag it. Lunch/recess comprised a half hour of feverish and dervish-inspired play at highest-heat midday, so that a half hour later, upon returning to the cloying and tepid warmth of the classroom, we could count on at least one child returning his or her lunch to the classroom floor. This repetitive event always insured evacuation of the room until James, the painted colored janitor, could come by with a mop and sawdust and clean things up.

SCHOOL-DAY’S END WAS GREETED in much the same way that the settlers greeted the opening of the Oklahoma Territory land rush. The afternoon trip home might take an hour or more, depending on how long one tarried at Grandy’s corner grocery drinking cream sodas and eating purple popsicles or chocolate fudgiesicles, or prowling the adjacent dime store to watch “Phil the Hocker” shoplift diamond-studded Duncan yo-yos for all his friends.

THE TRUE IRISH GODFATHER TO ALL OF THIS was then Father (later Monsignor) John James O’Looney. He too had fought at Balmoral, but the centuries had been kinder to him than to the nuns. White-haired, blue-eyed, and dressed always and all in black, Father O’Looney’s main function, as the nuns defined it anyway, was to show up and dispense three things: first, short homilies of advice, second, the report cards and necessary criticisms, and then his blessing. A sort of competition arose among those with good report cards to be the first to ask for this benison, while the nuns looked on with hands clasped under habits and smiled beatifically. The more perverser among us often wondered what would happen if O’Looney had said, “No! I’m tired of giving you little spalpeens blessings! It does ye no aithright good whatever! Git out of me sight, every devil’s one of ye!” But he never did—at least not audibly, anyway.

HANGOUTS — HOMES AWAY FROM HOME —

LIVING IN OLD FORT LAUDERDALE was easy. As children we had our choice of several hangouts to which we repaired whenever the press of circumstances or parents required. Walgreen’s Drug Store on the corner of Las Olas and Third Avenue was nearby and allowed us to view exotic tourist geegaws and gimmers and check out candies at the cigar counter as well. Here were clear glass toy telephones filled with hundreds of little multicolored hard candies. Fleer’s chicles came in a small green and white box with a tiny little trapdoor in one corner that allowed the dispensing of a single chicle at a time—a feature we conveniently ignored. Lifesavers were in multi-hued tins behind their exact metal duplicates. A glass bowl full of Fleer’s Dubble Bubble gum (one cent each) sat next to the cigarettes. And various caramel-filled chocolate bars, all of which would pull your fillings out, were piled in gay abandon in the glass case beneath the cash registers. Shoke-Zhing! “Here you are boys, don’t eat it all at once.” “No, ma’am. We won’t.” ...Sure.

THE DIMESTORES AND THE TROPICAL ARCADE offered other exotic temptations. Forrest Eno, the printer, was the only person in the entire Universe whose name was a number spelled backwards! Marvel-
ous! Woolworth's, in addition to making the best hotdog and coke combination for a quarter, had an extensive toy section. Truly a "five and dime," we could wander the aisles and see objects from around the world for which we could discern no earthly use, but which adults (and particularly the multi-hued Seminole women) took a fond delight in purchasing. McCrory's, directly across the street and just down from the corner Royal Castle, was the place to go if goldfish watching was the order of the day. Hundreds of the little fish jostled and bumped each other in furiously bubbling tanks, but our delight was in counting those that swam upside down or rolled languidly back and forth in pop-eyed wonder on the floor of the tank. Our minds were simple and so, therefore, our pleasures.

THE ROYAL CASTLE ON THE CORNER OF WALL STREET was always redolent of grease, fried meat, and cigarette smoke. Here, for fifteen cents, and later for the outrageous price of a quarter, we dined in alphabetic luxury on small, almost black, hamburgers and long strings of greasy onions, all drowned in gobs of bright yellow mustard and uncommonly red catsup. Birch beers, the libation of choice, were a nickel and came in frosted heavy mugs. It was an afternoon snack absolutely guaranteed to spoil our dinners, and we delighted in it. We were still too young for heartburn.

FURTHER TO THE NORTH LAY THE NETHER REGIONS—Burdine's Department Store and the City Bus Station. Burdine's was always good for several trips up and down the newly installed escalators (the only store in town that had them) before being run off by some sports assistant manager. The Bus Station and shuffle board courts gave us a view of the downside of town. Here we could watch from a safe distance, and in open-mouthed wonder and elbow-digging humor, the inebriated antics of the drunks from the several bars around the Greyhound Station across the road. Our trips back to the River then became stereotypic parodies of the realizations and rantings of these unfortunates, replete with falling down, weavings, singings, and stumblings. Charlie Chaplin had nothing on us. We gave no quarter—and asked for none.

NEWSBOYS WE WERE, ONCE, not particularly by desire but by design, inasmuch as parents had decreed this learning process to give us experience in the hard world of low finance, as well as to keep us busy and out of trouble after school. We were part of the large, unwashed and sweaty army of grade-school kids called "gutter sales" by the older, infinitely wiser high-school route boys. But we maintained a perverse pride in sharing the streets with old Pop Crist who held the territory in front of the M&M Cafeteria, across from the Hobby House, with acerbic tenacity; and with Johnny-The-Newsman, who suffered (we learned later) from muscular dystrophy and rode a large three-wheeled tricycle around town in a usually vain attempt to keep us from poaching his customers.

TIME ON THE STREET WAS MEASURED by the large pedestal clock next to the First National Bank building across the street from the Sweet Building. Territory extended from River Drive through center city, with particular attention to the taverns on the River, on Las Olas and Andrews Avenue, and by the Greyhound Station, where tips and sales were equally large. Profits, even at a nickel a paper, came easily enough every afternoon and were spent as quickly in appetite-spoiling chunks of chocolate purchased by the ounce at Woolworth's candy counter. We later graduated to hot fudge and coffee ice cream sundaes at the Colonel's Table, the emporium that replaced Walgreen's. We became such regulars at that corner café that Marie, the waitress behind the soda fountain, would never even ask what we desired, but on our sitting would have the usual sundaes ready for us to eat. It was a feeling of immense power, and we never even had to say "the usual," like Humphrey Bogart did on all his movies.

THE SWEET BUILDING, the tallest building in town, formed the highest site of deviltry. Riding the elevators to the topmost floor, after carefully concealing packages of balloons purchased at Woolworth's, we would hit the eighth floor restroom outside Dr. Kott's DDS office and load the balloons with water. Sneaking out onto the roof, nine stories above town, we struck a typical John Waynean pose, and at the given signal, hollered some anti-Japanese or anti-Nazi slogan, and hurled our water-filled hand grenades out over the roof's edge onto Andrews Avenue far below. Then, shrieking and laughing, we ran down the stairwells to the street, knowing that the building personnel would be riding the elevators up to catch us.

A VARIATION OF THIS SPORT was conducted from the penthouse porch of the Governors' Club. At certain times Granddad Gore went out of town and, on the promise of eating out, we agreed to stay overnight to hear the telephone for Grandmother Gore (who conveniently turned her hearing aid off at night, anyway). The next day after breakfast, while Grandma was at daily mass praying for the salvation of our souls, we would take small bits of concrete and pebbles and clots of dirt from the plants on the penthouse porch and pretend that the hotel was a Flying Fortress and we were high over Bremen or Schweinfurt. The cars on Third Avenue and Las Olas became enemy targets. So the game went until Frank White, the hotel concierge and elevator man, snuck onto the porch and collared us. His threatening to inform our parents had the proper effect and we ceased and desisted—until next overnight stay.

CLOSEST HANGOUT TO HOME WAS BECK'S DRUGSTORE. Dr. Beck was the very model of the kindly old country doctor, although his primary calling was as a pharmacist. He resided with his wife Annie in an old Cracker-style house next
The Governors' Club Hotel dominates this view, looking eastward down Las Olas Boulevard ca. 1938.

doors to his drugstore, located on Las Olas Boulevard, when the Venice of America was still a coastal town without pretensions and portentousness. Although not a corner pharmacy, Dr. Beck's was still the neighborhood hangout where we all were younger, more debonair, and certainly overflowing with savoir-faire. On days of summer, when the sidewalks were concrete griddles, the cool darkness of his marble-topped soda fountain was a Sanctum Sanctorum from the July heat. The counter stretched the length of the mirrored side wall, and was furnished with stainless steel, red-cushioned stools whose seats swirled at the slightest provocation, thereby easily inducing an orbital giddiness curable only through the effects of caffeine, theobromine and phosphoric acid, all residing in a wondrous invention by Joanie Gormo called a "Cherry Smash." This was simply the standard soda fountain Coke, with a splash of cherry syrup. Price: a nickel.

THERE WE WOULD SIT, neighborhood ruffians and ragamuffins, twirling incessantly while discussing affairs of household, town, and the world, replete with advice gleaned through the hard experience of all of our eight to ten years on earth. Advice given, consent decreed, decisions all soundly and roundly behind us, we adjourned meeting and had another round, this time of chocolate Cokes, perhaps the second happiest marriage of ingredients with Coca Cola after the original and ubiquitous rum and lime juice, which we discovered only much much later.

DR. BECK EVENTUALLY SOLD HIS DRUGSTORE to Dr. Tom Dooley (yes, that was his real name). Dr. Dooley was equally long-suffering and tolerated much. He was no fool. He knew that rambunctiously playing children customers might well become paying adult customers in the not too distant future. Thus, he kept in place all policies initiated by Dr. Beck, or established by custom through the auspices of the neighborhood pedagogical parliament, including the well-known Cherry Smash and Chocolate Coke.

His pharmacy was also a reading library of sorts where we could sit in the nearby booths and peruse the latest copies of Saga, True ("The Man's Magazine"), Collier's, and Saturday Evening Post, plus all the assorted comic books of the day including Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, Green Hornet, and Dick Tracy. Escapism in those days cost a dime.

DOWN THE ROAD AND OVER THE HIGHWAY was the Rexall Pharmacy then being run by Uncle Pete Palmer. Because it was at the east end of Rapschallion territory (which ended by definition and parental decree at Federal Highway) we only went there when in the immediate vicinity—such as after filling our bike tires at the corner Firestone garage. Uncle Pete always seemed glad to see us and was good for at least one chocolate soda at the fountain and occasionally a yachtsman's cap from the large pile of tourist-hats he kept on a central counter.

SO WENT OUR DAYS, FILLED WITH INNOCENCE AND BLISS, and just a touch of devilment. High-jinks were mild and none of us ever got into serious trouble. In those days, Fort Lauderdale was still and truly a small town, with a small town feeling and the neighborhoods to prove it. More than that, the neighbors not only knew who you were but where you lived. It made for a kind of mutual restraint—we knew just about how far we could go; they knew just about how much they were going to take.

THE OLD NEW RIVER, FLOWING THROUGH THE GROWING CITY, simply reflected, in a slower and more languid way, our own growing up. Sometimes we played a game called "Fortune Teller." Lying on our stomachs and leaning over the concrete river walls to peer into its dark depths, we saw the faces of our childhood wavering and dissolving on the River's surface, changing with each small ripple and eddy, and being pulled by currents then in the River and later in life toward an ultimate destination somewhere unknown and farther away. We never knew just what it all meant, but we were equally certain it would all happen.

TODAY, THE FLORENTINE STEPS IN FRONT OF 221 Northeast River Drive are still there—as permanent and timeless as the River. But across the street the house, the yard, and the great Banyan Tree, and all the laughter and sounds of the neighborhood children who lived and played there are gone. In their place is a large, commercial, asphalt parking lot where the weeds of memories grow on a childhood's grave and the headstone is a concrete bumper. Along Northeast River Drive, just in from the roadway edge, is a short sidewalk to nowhere. Only a portion of the cracked and hammer-pitted entrance walk to the front door of a house, now also a ghost, remains.