Growing up
in Eden
by Philip Weidling
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I wondered how Pop (Carl P. Weidling) knew the man’s name, and where he had met him. I had never seen a “colored man” before, but we had no more got into the Pullman car before he said:

“Hello, George.”

I was only six, and it was December 1911, and we were going to Florida! Tiffin, Ohio, was already a long way behind; we had ridden a day coach to Cincinnati and spent the night in the Grand Hotel before getting on the Pullman and meeting George. He was interesting to me. His skin was actually dark brown, and it made his teeth look white when he smiled. I found out his last name when Mother spoke to him. It was “Porter.” He was awfully smart and pretty strong, too. I could tell from the way he made the two seats into a bed and then lowered another one on top, where Rolf and I would sleep. He did it all in a jiffy and acted like it was nothing at all.

We got off the train in Jacksonville next morning, and I said:

“Goodbye, Mr. Porter.”

And he smiled and said “goodbye” too.

That’s mostly what I remember about our first trip to Florida, though, of course, in Tiffin there had been a cab ride to start with, and the horse “clipp­cloc­ping” along the brick road to the station. When we got to Dania, Florida, there wasn’t any brick road or any cab, either. We had to walk with our suitcases to the house Pop had rented. It was only two blocks. Dania was awfully small compared to Tiffin, and had really only one street.

Dania had a one-room school, but it didn’t meet the standards of what we had known in Ohio, and Mother didn’t trust its quality, so she made Rolf and me ride our bicycles five miles north to Fort Lauderdale to go to school. The trip, over the narrow, white rock road, was no hardship and certainly not dangerous from a traffic standpoint. We passed a mule-drawn wagon occasionally, but I remember no occasion of passing an automobile... and I would have remembered, for automobiles were a source of interest, even wonder, in 1911 in the wilds of Florida!

The only houses we passed en route were at a small settlement called Lake View, probably because it was located on a ridge and one could get from it a view of Lake Mabel far away across the marsh and mangrove. This remote lake would one day become Bay Mabel Harbor, and would then be re-christened Port Everglades.

There was one danger, though slight, on our ride. We were warned not to ride over snakes that might lay stretched out warming themselves on the shadeless road of a cool morning. This was a warning we scrupulously heeded!
Another thing I didn't have in Dania was Sunday school. In Tiffin, we had belonged to the Second Reform Church, which had established no churches in south Florida. While we were in Dania, however, Mother had become interested in another religion. Mrs. Matt Marshall, the wife of Pop's real estate partner and a statuesque woman who was considered beautiful, was a Christian Scientist. She got Mom to read Science and Health, With Key to the Scriptures, by Mary Baker Eddy. Mom was thrilled with it.

Mrs. Marshall was a large woman, strong of will and with quite positive opinions. She took no one else's word for anything. The Marshalls were among the first to have one of those new-fangled automobiles, and I remember riding with her and Mother on a trip to Colahatchee, in the vicinity of what is today Wilton Manors. The bridges on the road were strictly one-way and built for wagons. We came to one that looked too narrow to Mrs. Marshall, who was driving. She had a yardstick in the back of the car, and got out and measured! Her suspicions were unfounded.

Since we did not belong to a church in Dania, we stayed home Sunday mornings, but regularly at noon we went to the beach in the Marshalls' automobile. There, we three children dug clams, and Mr. Marshall presided over a huge kettle on a bonfire. He made clam chowder, which we ate from a grove of seagrape trees, back aways from the beach.

The clams were dug from the edge of New River Sound, a section of the Flor-ida East Coast Canal which came to a dead end at Dania. The sound extended north to Fort Lauderdale, separated from the ocean by a narrow spit. The spit was broken by a shallow inlet to the ocean that shifted with the weather and had no name, though boatmen called it a "haulover" because they could float small craft over it at high tide, but often had to get out and haul their boats over the sandy bottom.

In Dania, we learned a lesson in economics that even a kid could not forget. The entire financial basis for the town was the winter crop of tomatoes which grew on the black muck lands of the East Marsh, a mile-wide strip between the town's one roadway and the ocean. This crop had one major danger—frost. On a cool night residents would stand in the middle of the roadway and bend an ear. If they could hear the noise of the waves breaking on the beach, a mile away, all was well. If not, the wind, however slight, might be from the northwest, a wind that would blow in cold air. If the threat was deemed imminent, it meant a long night's work for most of the populace. Smudges would have to be built along the west edge of the growing fields.

Smudges were small fires which were covered with green pine needles to create warm smoke that would drift across the tender vines to keep the frost away. It took many hard-working hands to keep those fires burning and a supply of green pine needles to cover them throughout the night.

In those days, before the salt marshes had been drained, a person lived amidst a cloud of mosquitoes. At night there was no degree of care in screening that could be 100 percent effective, even though screens were wet with kerosene. If one could breathe comfortably within the smoke from a smudge such as was used to protect the tomatoes, it would keep mosquitoes away . . . and some folks did!

Even with occasional frosts, Florida winters were so different from the cold winters of Ohio. Although I had only vague remembrances of playing in the snow in Tiffin, there were several incidents that lived in my memory. One was my "heroism."

My sister, Justine, and I had wandered down the hollow to the banks of a disused stone quarry, very deep and now filled with water. It was not frozen over, but the banks were slick and hard, and "Dusty," as we called her, had slipped and fallen into the quarry. I grabbed the leafless branch of a nearby willow tree and, with one foot in the water, reached out and grabbed the back of an imitation fur coat she was wearing, which had momentarily kept her afloat. I was able to pull her safely up onto the bank.

Neighbors who saw the incident said I had saved her life, and a piece was printed in the town newspaper about it. The family kept the clipping and told of it to friends in Florida, much to my embarrassment.

Another Ohio incident stemmed from an encounter my mother had with George, our milkman. Like all families, we left empty bottles on the back steps to be filled by the milkman who made the rounds in his wagon, with its tanks of milk and cream, each morning at dawn to fill them. Mom happened to be up one extra cold morning, and met him at the door.

"George," she asked, "don't you get cold these mornings?"

The reply: "Madam, sometimes I feel like I got me no pants on!"

It seemed a bit risque to me, as did the rhyme that was often recited during those early days in Florida:

A wonderful bird is the pelican, 
Its beak can hold more than its belly can. 
It can go for a week with nothing to eat, 
And I don't see how in the hellican.

Things like that wouldn't have been repeated in my Second Reform Sunday School class in Tiffin!

In the six months we had lived in Dania, Mother had become inured to kerosene as the sole public utility. In Tiffin, we had had natural gas for the stove and for the lights. We had also had running water. Kerosene cook stoves were slow and smelly; kerosene lamps made imperfect light and were unbearably hot and smelly. Water drain-
The White Star Auto Line, above, was operated by the Weidlings' neighbor, Charles Swaggerty. In the photo at right, Caroline Weidling stands in front of the newly completed Christian Science Church on South New River Drive. The building is now the L. Clayton Nance Historical Building, headquarters of the Broward County Historical Commission.

ed from the eaves into an elevated cistern and thence through pipes to conveniently located taps. This system was all right when there was rain, but in the “dry” season we had to use a well and pump to produce water that was “hard,” would not produce suds, and tasted terrible. We had to carry buckets of this water from the well to flush the toilets. Also, there was no ice, which made preserving foods difficult and imperfect.

Fortunately, these primitive living conditions were soon to improve. Pop had made a “killing” in real estate. With his partner, Matt Marshall, he had bought two miles of oceanfront land extending westward a half mile to the Florida East Coast Canal, which is now known as the Intracoastal Waterway. This property had cost them $5000, and they had sold it for ten times that much.

In June 1912, we went back to Tiffin for the summer, but Pop made it clear that we were coming back to Florida. He planned to have a house in Fort Lauderdale, and he said he’d have one big enough to move Mother’s piano into it. Promising Mom a house with a piano was necessary if we were to come back to Florida.

On the trip to Tiffin we had a different Pullman attendant named “George.” By this time I began to sort of get wise. All of them were named George. All of them had white teeth and smiled at kids, too. I guessed they liked their job.

As he had promised, Pop used the wealth from his beach land sale to buy us a home in Fort Lauderdale. When we returned to Florida that fall, it was to a small rented house in Fort Lauderdale, while Pop had our first house there built. Almost at once, he built two more houses beside it on Valentine (now Southeast Third) Avenue. The new house meant a great change in our lives, for the piano was shipped from Ohio. This
was important because Pop sang, and Mother was an expert pianist. They had met, in Ohio, when she had served as his accompanist in a musicale.

Music would now be an almost nightly diversion in our home, and, in addition to the piano, the new house would have electric lights and an ice box. Compared to Dania, Fort Lauderdale was becoming modern. It didn’t have street cars, like Tiffin, or paved streets, but there was a bus line that went as far south as Miami and as far north as Palm Beach. In Tiffin, the trolley had gone only as far as Fostoria, fourteen miles away.

The coastal bus line used the new-fangled automobiles. I knew all about them because one of the drivers, Charley Swaggerty, let me sit under the wheel and play like I was driving while he parked his bus in front of his house for lunch. He lived next door to us on Valentine Avenue.

By the time we settled in Fort Lauderdale in 1912, the Matt Marshalls had moved to Miami, but Mother soon knew most of the women in the town, and many became interested in “Science.” Mrs. W. H. (Llwellyn) Marshall, wife of the mayor and Mrs. Matt Marshall’s sister-in-law, was a Scientist, and she joined with Mother and other ladies to form a local church. The upshot was that, on Sunday mornings, they rented the Masonic Hall, a medium sized room upstairs in the Oliver Building on Brickell Avenue, and they began holding services.

This, of course, led to another Sunday school for us kids, and, indirectly, to another source of embarrassment for me. It became the children’s job to put up folding chairs that served as pews. We did this before Sunday school, and it was here that Phyllis Jones from Dania made the remark that was to plague me for months. She told her mother:

“I like Junie (me) because he’s so sweet in the face.”

The parents of both families considered this remark uproariously funny! I thought Mom would never tire of teasing me and calling Phyllis “my girl.” I wasn’t mad at girls, but they just said silly things.

The church remained in the upstairs loft used by the Masonic Lodge for some time, but these people were zealots, and in 1916 built a church of their own on the riverfront.

Growing up in Fort Lauderdale in the 1910s was a series of adventures for an enterprising youngster. Although my father never permitted his family to go without the necessities, he was by nature frugal, and getting a nickel for an ice cream cone could be not only a project but the basis for a lecture. Work was the only remedy for want that he had inherited from his German immigrant father, and one that soon took hold for me.

Perhaps the first money I ever earned, along with my brother Rolf, was in searching for and finding cockroach nests in the house. These nests, or eggs, were roughly an inch long, brown, and pencil-sized. They would be hidden in crevices above doors, around windows, and in any protected and unobservable place. Cockroaches, or palmetto bugs, were the bane of the life of most housewives in Florida of that day, and we kids were paid a penny for each egg delivered to be burned. Sometimes we could make as much as fifteen cents, if we were lucky.

Another idea for earning came when I noted that there were “back door salesmen” in business. Sometimes kids came by with quart pails of huckleberries, which they sold. I tried gathering berries, too, but I soon found this too tough. The berries grew on tiny bushes in the palmetto woods. A bush would have, at most, a dozen of the tiny berries, which were purple when ripe. Several hours were needed to pick a quart, and there was an ever-present danger of rattlesnakes.

Miss Myrtheena Taylor also came by with her little red wagon, selling grocery specialties. An old maid who supported her aged mother she was a much-loved character with a warm smile for all. It was she who introduced oleo-
Broward Legacy

started with a three-for-a-penny fish into the river, to the horror of the hook and grocery store string, until my real fish line! I got to know most of the boats and their operators. There was the Stonewall, captain, soon to give way to the Women's Club.

I couldn't get out to the reefs, but there were catfish in the New River, and I soon learned that they were salable, at three cents a pound, to the tin fish houses that lined the river. These fish houses dealt in catfish brought from Lake Okeechobee by a fleet of fishing boats. This industry had been made possible by the availability of ice in which to pack fish both for the trip down from the lake and for the trip to northern points by rail. The houses were ugly and dumped not only their raw sewage, but also their fish cleanings into the river, to the horror of the Women's Club.

To me, the fish houses were a source of revenue, small though it might be. I used discarded entrails for bait, and started with a three-for-a-penny fish hook and grocery store string, until my business prospered enough to buy a real fish line!

Sitting, as I did, for hours on the river bank, I got to know most of the boats and their operators. There was the Passing Thru, a passenger boat with Clint Stone, captain, soon to give way to the Suwannee, a stern-wheeled steamer that could go through the canals with their series of locks all the way to Fort Myers on the west coast. Captain Dick La Vigne's Excelsior was the excursion boat we rode to the beach each Sunday.

Most of the traffic, however, consisted of barges towed by tugs. These brought vegetables from the farms along the river to the railroad spurs at the vegetable dock. By far the best known of the tugs was the Wanderlust, Captain Larry Crabtree, a man with a club foot that caused him to limp, but who was reputed to be the best mechanic on the river. He was said to have been able to improvise spark plugs from a piece of pipe, some copper wire, and clay.

Notable among the boats on the river was the Jap, owned by Johnny A. Pellett. Sleek, slim, and narrow of hull, she was reported to be by far the fastest and was always used to make the trip to Lake Okeechobee to bring back the baskets full of fresh-caught fish. I particularly recall moon fish, a wide, flat, silver-colored reef dweller so scarce that it was unknown to gourmets, but both delicious and easily prepared.

Another familiar figure on the streets of Fort Lauderdale was Jimmy Vreeland, who rode by on his bicycle with the basket full of fresh-caught fish. I couldn't get out to the reefs, but there were catfish in the New River, and I soon learned that they were salable, at three cents a pound, to the tin fish houses that lined the river. These fish houses dealt in catfish brought down from Lake Okeechobee by a fleet of fishing boats. This industry had been made possible by the availability of ice in which to pack fish both for the trip down from the lake and for the trip to northern points by rail. The houses were ugly and dumped not only their raw sewage, but also their fish cleanings into the river, to the horror of the Women's Club.

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Notable among the boats on the river was the Jap, owned by Johnny A. Pellett. Sleek, slim, and narrow of hull, she was reported to be by far the fastest and was always used to make the trip to Lake Okeechobee to bring back the bodies of those who died to get them to the undertaker in good time.

A common sight on the river was a Seminole dugout canoe adrift. Even we kids knew that it was not a derelict. It was being sent by some member of the tribe to a confederate downriver. If it got caught in obstructions on the bank, it was simply pushed free. Hollowed out cypress logs, these canoes were too tippy for a white man to use. They were poled, not paddled, and they were the only efficient means of getting across the sawgrass. Driven by an airplane propeller, this flat-bottomed craft simply skimmed across the top of the grass, achieving great speeds that would have easily caught any Seminole canoe.

There were two "sport" fishing boats at the Fort Lauderdale docks. One was run by a Captain Otto. The other was the Red Wing, run by Flavius Van Gosen, who was known as the town "socialist" and ostracized by many. He was a fine trumpet player and named his boat after a popular song of the day. Both Otto's and Van Gosen's boats were equipped only with hand lines and did little business. Out at the beach, which was then accessible only by boat, Captain Vreeland had the Kingfisher, a better equipped craft.

Fort Lauderdale offered numerous business opportunities. Pop was a graduate of Ohio State University in law and had come to Florida seeking a career in that profession. Dania had offered nothing, but there was already a move to form a new county with Fort Lauderdale as the county seat when we came, and Pop had succeeded in talking Jacob F. Bunn, a seasoned lawyer in Tiffin, into coming to Florida with
Above are Philip Weidling's grandparents, Matilda and Harry Weidling. Below, Harry Weidling (second from right) and friends in front of the family drugstore, Tiffin, Ohio.
and new adventure. It was an easy bicycle ride, and it was free for all! It would mark the end of my fascination with the river, as I had known it. I had a new love!

World War I was to bring a great many innovations into life in the United States beside women's suffrage and the birth of the tourist industry in Fort Lauderdale. Among them was the birth of cigarette smoking on a wide scale. When I had occasionally worked behind the cigar counter in our store in Tiffin, we had sold them, but only rarely. They were by most "he-men" contemptuously called "pimp sticks." Most of them came in boxes and had Turkish names. What caused the sudden popularity of such as "Camels" and "Lucky Strikes" could have been because the boys in the trenches used them, but that seems unlikely. The "boys" were wearing gas masks a good part of the time. It was more a change in moral outlook or an increase in plain nervousness.

Another manifestation of post-war change was the sudden popularity of what musicians, such as my mother, contemptuously called "rag time," later to be known as "jazz." Although the lyrics were usually inane, such songs as "Margie" and "Who" seemed harmless enough. Even though they were never sung in our musicales at home, I learned the words to both. They were among the favorites at home. I wonder what Mother would have thought of the shrieking dervishes who occupy today's bandstands.

The family business affairs had prospered to the extent that we now had a home on Southeast Sixth Avenue, which is today Federal Highway. The new house was two stories and built of poured, reinforced concrete.

The piano, of course, was a prominent feature of the living room, and frequent guests for musicales were the Kriekhaus family, who had purchased the old Hinckley estate in Dania. Mrs. Kriekhaus, whom my parents called "Pearly," was a fine pianist, and she and Mother often played duets. Another frequenter was Clarence Hector, co-owner of the supply firm, who was developing a riverfront subdivision, Rio Vista, across the street. He and his wife, Harriet, had built one of the first homes therein.

Perhaps the greatest scandal of early Fort Lauderdale occurred when Mrs. Kriekhaus and Clarence Hector eloped, leaving their spouses behind! Clarence, it was said, owned a hog farm in Iowa. It must have been to there that they fled.

All these happenings were, like school, just a sidelight to the main business of childhood — having fun. The road, and bridge, to the beach was our main avenue to enjoyment. Access was by bicycle.

Christmas of 1917 had brought a brand new bicycle... this one with a coaster brake. This meant that one could "coast" without turning the pedals and that reversing the pedals would brake the bicycle to a stop if needed. It was at least as important an invention to bikers as the self-starter and electric lights were to autoists.

In 1914 a thrill for the entire family had been the purchase of our first automobile. It was an Empire, a "Little Aristocrat" model, and we were very proud. Although, at age nine, I was unable to either drive or turn the crank, I enjoyed riding.

Motoring, in those days, was an adventure. Roads were one lane and of white coral rock. If one permitted the driving wheel to get off the road into the soft gray sand, it would simply spin and dig its way deeper. The answer, "Get a horse," in this case really a mule.

There were also land crabs. At certain seasons of the year, these big blue crabs, with a claw spread of eight inches, traveled in huge groups that covered as much as a half acre. They seemed to concentrate on the roads, and the motorist had no choice but to drive across them to the uneasy sound of crunching shells. The males had one huge claw capable of puncturing a thin automobile tire. They crawled mainly at night.

Despite these numerous road hazards, driving was fun, even when we lit the gas headlights. There was a "Pres-to-lite" tank on the running board. A rubber hose connected it to the lights.

It was not until 1917 that we ventured to make our annual trip to Ohio by car. That, too, was an adventure, a muddy one that lasted five days! Many of the roads we traversed, particularly in the South, were still unpaved and made of red clay. Suitable for a horse and wagon, they were rough on automobiles, particularly when the so-called paving was wet. Georgia was notably the worst. On one occasion, Pop, Mom, and Dusty took a train, and left Rolf and me, then in our teens, to drive through the worst of it. By then we were driving an Overland, better than the Empire, but not what, if a racehorse, would be called a good "mudder." We made it at less than 100 miles a day!

But to us, access to the beach was still...
the most important thing. In the late 1910s, the beach had a different meaning to the community than it does now. Herewith a scene:

Their movement along the beach looked like a shadow of a big cloud as the silver mullet, fin to fin, swam past us on their annual migration. It was always in calm weather that they swam so close to shore, and, standing on the beach, you could see their silvery sides in the clear water. There were always gulls darting about above them and diving for remnants left by the mankind predators — sharks, barracudas, etc. — that always followed such an event.

We kids on the beach could see the predators, too, small sharks and barracuda, many just looing along with full bellies, but others striking savagely into the huge mass of fishes.

Even as the gulls screeched at each other over their prizes, there would be flights of pelicans in their inevitable "V" formation. They flew low over the water, and often one would break ranks to dive at full speed into the water, usually coming up with a fish slopping in its bill. The bird would gain altitude and then toss the fish into the air, catching it in a lengthwise position to disappear entirely into its huge beak.

There were other birds on the beach, too. Although they did not participate in the mullet run, there were nearly always frigate birds hanging motionless high above, and of course there were sandpipers racing down with each receding wave and Penny wise as they searched for sand fleas or other marine life. Their shrill, plaintive wailing further enlivened the sound effects.

These were just some of the many dramas played out for our eyes alone, for the long stretch of ocean beach in front of Fort Lauderdale was otherwise deserted. It was ours!

Sometimes we would take blankets with us and sleep the night on the beach, and in season we might be rewarded by watching a huge female sea turtle crawl laboriously up the beach to scoop out a shallow hole in the sand and therein lay her eggs. She was very quiet during the process, not disturbed by watchers, and seemed to drop a tear from her wide open eyes with each egg. When finished, she used her flippers to cover the nest with sand before crawling slowly back into the sea, leaving her progeny to make it on their own.

Sometimes we would dig up the eggs and had "turtle egg fights." The eggs were hen's egg size, but round with a leathery skin that had a dent that would not come out. They would not harden when fried or boiled, but could be made into pancakes.

Storms were impressive, but too uncomfortable to make up for the wild scenery and noise. We loved our playground but mostly for its sunlight and its clean sand and clear water.

At the site where the beach casino was later constructed, there was, first, a rather ramshackle frame bath house. It had about a dozen private cubbyholes that could be rented for changing into bathing suits and keeping safe, supposedly at least, any valuables one might be carrying. It had a larger room for kids where, for free, we could change and hang our clothes on nails protruding from the walls. There was a bench to sit on. A front office also sold pop.

On the bayside there was a dock for the beach excursion boats or any private craft. There were also picnic tables among the seagrape trees beside this "casino," and later a concrete shelter with tables for picnicking when it was raining.

Out in the ocean there was a diving platform. This was a wide board, some ten feet above the water, set on pilings. It was about eight feet long. Nobody used it but us kids, and some of us got kind of nervous when a five-foot barracuda started lying in its shadow during the day. We could see him plainly, even his teeth. We called him "Billy." Barracuda weren't supposed to be dangerous except when in a feeding frenzy, but some of us didn't trust him overmuch.

I was alone on the platform a little late one afternoon, and the barracuda was there. There was only one thing I could do. I made a shallow dive and swam like fury for the shore. When I got there, I looked back, but the sun glinting on the water kept me from seeing if Billy Barracuda was still there. Anyhow, I was safe.

Coconuts were abundant, and free, everywhere on the beach, and every kid knew that the worst way to try to take the husk off one was with an axe. Instead, you threw them down, small end first, against the road, or thebole of a tree, six or eight times. The husk would then be loose and would peel off in three pieces, easily, by hand.

We often followed receding waves into the surf ourselves to dig sand fleas out of the sand for use as fish bait. An inch long when fully grown, these egg-shaped crabs are cream colored and have no pincers.

The Intracoastal waters were also our playground. In the clear waters we could see all manner of marine life. There were blue crabs, and if one waded far from shore, across the shallows, one must look out for stingarees — flat skates with a barbed tail that could inflict a serious wound. Other denizens of the flats included blowfish, which we called "toadfish." They had a brownish, mottled back, human-like teeth which they gritted loudly when caught, and bellies that would puff up like a balloon when tickled. They were worthless for food, as were the needlefish, long, slim surface feeders with pointed bills, green in color. Sometimes, wading in the shallows, we would see a spreading purple dye covering an area that became completely opaque. At first I didn't know what caused this, but one day I caught a small octopus in my cast net. The dye which concealed them was their "protection."

Naturally, fishing was a big part of it all, and most of that was done from the bridge. Mr. Bailey, the bridge tender, was a man sympathetic with kids and an able teacher of fishing lore. He was a small man, well along in years, and we responded by helping him with the chore of opening the bridge for boat traffic. It was a cumbersome task. First, large spuds at the end of the bridge on either side of the road, which held the bridge firmly in place, had to be lifted by large screws. Then a key with a handle eight feet long was placed over a huge cog in the center, and the bridge was turned by turning the key, walking around and around as it turned the bridge on its fulcrum, the center foundation. A system of wooden fenders on piling protected the opened bridge from possible collision by passing boats.

The wooden piling which supported the fender system and the main non-turning portion of the bridge were encrusted with oyster shells, which made it necessary to use wire lines when fishing with the cane poles that were the most practical to use from the bridge. Mr. Bailey taught us to make, and use, such lines. Although mangrove snapper were the prime prize, we also caught sheephead, sailor's choice, and other varieties of edible fish.

A high point came one summer when Mr. Bailey, called back to Ohio, put me and a friend, Carlton Fidler, in charge of the bridge for a week. His wife, Martha, brought us our meals, and we slept in the tiny bridgeworker's house beside the draw span.

I caught a huge, thirty-six pound drumfish during the stay. We boiled its eyes, which caused the lens to turn hard and resemble a pearl. Mrs. Bailey had them made into stickpins for us . . . our week's prize!

The year 1919 was a big one for Fort Lauderdale, for the nation, and for me. The war had ended, Fort Lauderdale got its new tourist hotel, and I started high school.

The hotel got off to a mighty start through circumstances that were for-
tuitous to say the least. First, Pop got a mysterious letter. It was from a man named Gerritt Lloyd in Hollywood, California, and it asked if Fort Lauderdale had three things: good jungle scenery, plenty of either Indians or Negroes to act as extras, and suitable accommodations for a movie troupe to be headed by the most famous director of the day, David Wark Griffith.

Pop had never heard of Gerritt Lloyd, but the letter said that his name had been suggested by John Emerson, an actor and husband of the famed playwright Anita Loos. Pop had never heard of John Emerson, either, but he answered the letter with an enthusiastic “yes” to all three questions. He had heard of Griffith, whose picture The Birth of a Nation was conceded at that time to have been the greatest ever produced. The next letter told Pop on which train Mr. Lloyd would arrive to make preparations for the big event.

The “movies” were, of course, a big thing in Fort Lauderdale, though such a prestigious film as the Griffith classic had never been shown locally. We had two theaters, and they were both well attended. During the pauses in which the projectionist changed the reels, there were slides asking ladies to please remove their plumed hats for the benefit of the person behind them. Slides also admonished: “If you spit on the floor at home, spit on the floor here ... we want you to feel at home!” On the same subject: “Don’t spit on the floor ... remember the Johnstown flood!” These were interspersed with slides advertising local merchants.

All of us kids were thrilled by Mar­guerite Clark, Mary Pickford, Wallace Reid, etc., and laughed at Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, but none of us ever expected to see a real live movie star.

Spectators were not allowed on the movie sets most of the time, and since I was in school anyhow, I didn’t get to watch much of the movie making. Richard Barthelmes, the male star, came by our home a few times, and I met him and both Lloyd and Griffith. They bought property through Weid­ling and Dresbach. The movie was The Idol Dancer, which experienced only moderate success. The town was, of course, agog. Nothing like this had happened before.

At the beginning, John Needham, manager of the brand new Broward Hotel, was a nervous wreck. The troupe was arriving, but the kitchen equipment for the emporium had not. Long overdue, it was still somewhere enroute when Griffith checked in, the first to sign the register at the proud new hostelry. When the highly embarrassed manager explained the situation, Grif­
Griffith blandly informed him that in coming to a wild frontier such as this he always came prepared. He had a portable kitchen in the baggage car of the train!

The movie moved into production smoothly enough. A giant war canoe that was to carry the savages on a climactic chase of Barthelmess and the heroine was being built in a downtown storeroom procured for Griffith by Pop. Apparently nobody realized that the canoe was much too big for the doorway. The front of the building had to be torn away to get it out!

Seemingly being rowed in feverish haste by the local group of Negro and Indian extras with painted faces, the canoe, in the big scene, was actually towed by Jimmy Vreeland's charter fishing boat, with Billy Bitzer, Griffith's famed cameraman, and his equipment set up in the cockpit of the craft.

Bitzer and Vreeland became great friends, and Vreeland learned the art of taking moving pictures from Bitzer. The captain, in turn, showed most of the company the thrills of deep-sea angling.

During their stay, the movie troupe, taking several locals who had served as extras with them, went to Nassau on a chartered yacht, the Grey Duck, which sank in the harbor. Natives rescued all hands.

There were other arrivals in the town that brought glamour to the times. The “boys” were coming home, and three of them were of special interest. One was my uncle on my mother’s side, Ferdinand Louis “Fritz” Schlemmer. He was a first lieutenant, still wearing his uniform with shiny boots and a Sam Browne belt, a truly imposing figure of feet three and strongly built, though living in Canada prior to the war and had set swimming records at Culver Military School.

A second returning veteran was Leigh Britnell, son of the town’s drayman, and its strongest man. Leigh had lived in Canada prior to the war and had become an ace combat flyer during the great conflict. He, too, was extremely handsome in the George Brent style, for those who remember the old time movie star.

A third was Norman Sommers, six feet three and strongly built, though lean. He came to take a job as professional at the golf course that had just been completed. For a time it seemed that the movie industry might move in on Fort Lauderdale. After the Griffith company left, Ralph Ince sent a company, which again included Barthelmess, here to make Classmates, a story featuring West Point graduates. Another film, more important to us, was one starring Mae Marsh and Ivor Novello named The White Rose. Novello, a fine musician, was often at our home. He later became a famed composer in his native England.

Meantime, Uncle Fritz Schlemmer had married Ruth Lawson, a dancer who had come here with Griffith, but life for a struggling artist was not easy. He gave art lessons — Ralph Horton was his most enthusiastic pupil — and swimming lessons, and she gave dancing lessons. He also coached several high school plays. But money was hard to come by. Meanwhile, he watched an old flame, Agnes Ayres, who had been a model at the Chicago Art Institute and his girlfriend during his studies there, rise to fame as Rudolph Valentino’s light of love in his hit movie, The Sheik.

Divorce was not long in coming, and Fritz moved back to his native Indiana, married a department store manager, and became a doting father and, finally, a successful artist, before an early and untimely death.

Another romance that sparked during the Griffith visit but came to naught was that of Steve Calder, fresh from the Army of Occupation in Germany, and Carol Dempster, a movie starlet.

Leigh Britnell got married, not to a movie person, but to a beautiful English girl he met during the war. They went back to Canada, where he became an airplane manufacturing tycoon. So much for romance.

Although movie companies came and went, the new golf course was an enduring attraction. Since Pop and his partner had promoted it and brought Norman Sommers to the scene, I was automatically a member and even received free lessons in the game from Sommers.

The golf course was only nine holes, and, though ostensibly a par thirty-six, it was very short, the distances were somewhat exaggerated. Golf, of course, was a different game in many respects than that of today. Clubs, for instance, had names, not numbers, and had wooden shafts which quite often broke. The professional was a club maker and repairer as well as a teacher and course manager. The game had only recently become popular in the U.S., and most of the top golfers were still Scots or Englishmen.

The game had gotten a big lift when England’s two beat, Harry Vardon and Ted Ray, had come to this country to play in the National Open, expecting, of course, an easy win. They had been tied by a young American upstart, an amateur named Francis Ouimet, who proceeded to defeat them in the play-off.

As a course “regular” and a fairly proficient player, I played with most of the businessmen and doctors in town at one time or another and was with such a group when I scored a hole in one. The fact that distances were exaggerated is illustrated by the fact that I used a mid-iron to tee off, though the hole was listed at 250 yards and par four!

I also won the first golf tourney ever held in Fort Lauderdale. This was a “Sunday Swatfest” in which any number of players teed off, and some were eliminated on each hole until it came down to two on the final hole.

A further honor came that summer when Sommers was back at his northern club, and Jesse Guilford, then national amateur champ, came to play the course. I was chosen as his opponent. Guilford, a long hitter, made the course look ridiculously easy, driving many of the par fours and reaching both par fives easily on his second shot, usually using an iron.

The fact that the course was easy led to a degree of fame, for when President Warren Harding was stalled in town after the yacht on which he had been cruising the Inland Waterway was blocked by a dredge stuck across the channel, he played the course. Lo and behold, he broke 100 (for eighteen holes) for the first and only time in his life!

My “regular” golfing companion soon became Perry Bryan, the son of Tom Bryan who had built the town’s first electric company. Perry and I hit it off so well that we also shared fishing trips whenever we could find time from other activities.

With the first inklings of Florida’s great 1925 boom showing, golf became a “swanky” pastime, and most of the town’s leading citizens took up the game. Golf knickers, which were to become the veritable “badge” of the

Philip Weidling at the Ft. Lauderdale Municipal Golf Course. The Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport now occupies the site of the old golf course.
Florida real estate broker, also began to appear in public. “Golf suits” also became popular, and Pop bought one. These were suits having a coat with a pleated back, to allow a free swing with the club, and knickers, sometimes called “plus fours.” Few people knew what “plus fours” meant, but it was a golf handicap. Golf courses in the U.S. seldom awarded club handicaps, or even held tourneys to decide the club champion.

In high school now, I got my first suit with long pants, and wore it to take a girl to a dance, a sort of tentative stab at adulthood. The girl was Dorothy Raulerson, and I hardly knew her and never dated her again. The dance was held on the second floor of the beach casino. It seemed silly, but it made me feel that I was growing up. “Cap” Reed, often mayor of Fort Lauderdale and one of its most understanding citizens, seemed to sense how I felt. He said to me:

“Kid, you look like a real man out there.”

Thus encouraged, I resolved to go to more dances in my new suit. Margaret Ewing was older than I, but she had long, dark, curly hair, and I considered her the prettiest girl in town, by far. After what Cap had said, I was emboldened to ask her for a date, and she accepted! We “went together” until I went north that summer. When I came back, she was married to Bill Dillard, and part of my past. It was a beginning.

Until 1922, Fort Lauderdale High had only two athletic teams, a track team and a basketball team. Basketball was sporadic, primarily because there was no suitable place to play, but finally a gymnasium was built, a frame structure with seats for 100 spectators.

The five boys comprising the track team had gone to Gainesville in 1916 and won the state meet, coached by the county’s pioneer milk producer, Hamilton M. Forman, who had been a two-mile runner at the University of Illinois. Forman also contacted his former college coach, and asked him to send us a likely track coach if he could persuade one of his “boys” to brave the wilds of south Florida. So, in the fall of 1922, John S. Prescott, a former hurdler, arrived on the scene to teach chemistry and coach.

Fort Lauderdale was still a small town, and we didn’t have enough athletically inclined boys to form either a baseball or football team. Prescott, however, coached a basketball team that beat our real enemy, Miami, on our home floor, and then fulfilled his mission by winning the state track meet. A dynamic, likeable man, he entered the contracting business rather than coach a second year. I captained the basketball team and acted as weight thrower in track, but without distinction as such.

The year 1923 blossomed with bright hopes for the future. The Stilwell family had built a home in the new subdivision of which their father was the leading figure, Idlewyld. It was the first development to be placed entirely on filled land. Winifred, the eldest of the five daughters living at home, was a class behind me in school, but we were soon friends and dating, until I met sister Florence. I switched, but my pal, Perry Bryan, “went big” for Winnie.

Although they came from Anderson, Indiana, certainly not a big city, the Stilwells were more sophisticated than the locals. Fort Lauderdale was still “backwoods.” Mr. Stilwell was a fun-loving man who liked to share his conviviality in all ways, including that “excellent” booze from the Bahamas. Naturally, his hospitality extended to his daughters’ friends. So I found out what liquor was like, in highballs and cocktails. It made me feel sort of like a man of the world, sophisticated. I didn’t like them much . . . at first.

Prohibition, which had seemed totally unimportant locally, at least in its early stages, was assuming a place in the life of south Florida. Yankees were coming here, the first wave of the great boom to come. They were thirsty Yankees, in many cases, and local boatmen were not long in finding ways to accommodate their yearnings for the “good stuff.” The nearby Bahamas were easily reachable, and their inhabitants more than willing to cooperate.

As the 1920s progressed, new real estate developments were springing up throughout Broward County. A man named J. W. Young was building a new town between Dania and Hallandale, in an area of pine woods and sandy subsoil that nobody had thought fit to farm. He called it Hollywood, though there was no holly thereabouts — only pine and, on the beach, palmetto woods. One of the first things Young built was a wide road that ran in a circle in what I guessed was the main street. It was a swell race track for the cars that all of us kids were learning to drive.

It was said that Young was building a golf course nearby. Some buildings had already been started. It all seemed sort of crazy, but the craziness of the Florida boom had not really begun yet. A man named Frank Croissant had extended Andrews Avenue south from Kings Creek and widened it. He was developing what he called Croissant Park, but the important thing was the elegant dance hall he built, the Trianon Gardens.

The class of 1923 was progressive. We put out the first yearbook, for instance. But we still held the senior prom in the old Oliver’s Hall, upstairs, on Brickell Avenue. The beach casino was too far away, some of the kids didn’t have cars, and the new Trianon Gardens was grown-up grandeur to which we didn’t yet aspire.

- Philip Weidling (right) with friends Perry Bryan and Winifred Stilwell (later Mrs. Perry Bryan), 1920s.