

APRIL 9, 1986

For several days I've been edging up the Atlantic Ocean side of Georgia, taking a spring break. Please don't worry about my becoming involved in the college students celebration of spring. The islands that I am staying on are quiet and orderly. By luck and design, I've taken long walks along private beaches and had long, undisturbed naps beneath huge oak trees and in good hotel rooms.

The weather has been mild. I did have a storm scare yesterday. I had walked from my hotel on St. Simon Island across a long causeway to an old resort on Sea Island. After the meal, I wandered into a game room off the main lobby that had of all things, two bird cages built into the corners.

Bridge players were matched in what appeared to be their customary foursomes. Two polite children were playing checkers on a cocktail table. And right off the room on a sun porch, an old gentleman was reading a thick newspaper that I think was the New York Times.

I am certain that the man's privilege to the table was settled. From the way his arms held the paper and the way the mushrooming cloud of blue cigar smoke encircled him there was no question that the checker and no-trump crowd had better leave Mr. So-and-So to read his Times undisturbed as he had for many seasons.

Not wishing to be obtrusive or chance bothering the card players, I feigned an interest in the caged birds. It turned out to be an easy act. The birds were skittering about their cages exactly like water fowl and coastal animals do before a hurricane. Yet by glancing out the tall French windows of the card room, I could see clear skies with a breeze barely strong enough to rustle the palm leaves.

Under closer examination, however, I began to see that most excited birds were the yellow breasted canaries. By taking a quarter of a turn from the door of the cage, I was able to detect a trace of the old man's cigar smoke drifting our way.

It wasn't a storm warning at all. Those yellow breasted canaries were descendants of the canaries that coal miners carried on their shoulder ages ago to warn them of toxic gases deep in the mines. After these many years, they instinctively recognized the danger of cigar smoke. Once I realized the cause of their unrest, I rolled a window open and diverted the course of the smoke screen. It was astounding how fast they settled on the perches and began to tidy up their feathers.

The names of the islands around here are fascinating. Sea Island, St. Simon, Little Simon and Jeckyl Island. Ruins from the Spanish and English ruins remain. Also, on Jeckyl Island, there are lines of mansions that such rich hombres as J.P. Morgan and the Rockefellers built when they used the island as their private retreat in the first 25 years of the century.

The pace and the food on the islands are easy to fit into my training routine. I like wandering around watching the tennis matches and the golf games. It sure is restful after all those March winds we've been having at home.