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## Life's Purest Pleasures

by Cokie and Steve Roberts

**W**hen we first came to Pawleys Island 30 years ago, our kids were eight and 10. We'd watch them dash through the surf or dig in the sand and say to ourselves, someday we'll have grandchildren playing on this beach. And now it has happened. We finally bought our dream house on the north end, and last Easter, all six of our grandchildren spent the holiday with us. The days were cool and breezy, but the children flew kites and built forts, tossed footballs and bocce balls, and competed in a ferocious Easter egg hunt worthy of highlights on SportsCenter. Later one child asked his mother, "Can we live here at Pawleys? And go to the beach every day?"

Seeing the pictures and reading the captions in this book, so artfully and lovingly assembled by Linwood Altman, Lee Brockington and the many folks associated with the Pawleys Island Civic Association, we realized that we are now, for the first time, fully part of the Pawleys community. People now write in our guest book; we don't write in theirs. We care about the newly planted sea oats, rooting in to hold down the dunes. We care about the dredge in the creek, pumping out mud and sand to make the channel deeper. It's our creek, not their creek; our beach, not their beach.

The families who appear in this book take the long view of history. They are connected to Pawleys by their ancestors and their descendants. The same names appear over and over again – Cox and Bull, Marlow and Easley, Lachicotte and LaBruce. The Hambys are now into their eighth generation of island dwellers. When these families build a deck or a dock, they are thinking not just of the present but the future. They have faith that their grandchildren will drink a beer on that deck or catch a crab from that dock. As we were furnishing our own house, we were struck by this sense of continuity.

This book is filled with pictures of tribal rituals, performed on sacred ground, with the smell of sunscreen replacing incense. The *New York Times* archives contain 221 references to Pawleys over the last 80 years or so, and a fair number are wedding notices, reflecting the fact that many couples have been drawn to this island for the most important day of their lives. One June day, we saw two ceremonies on the beach at the same time. So you will see in chapter five this typical caption: "Louis Hamby Jr. and Frances Pate pose at the L.L. Hamby cottage on the north end before their marriage. Hamby Sr. bought the house in 1926, and his descendants own the house today." And then in chapter six, the cycle of life continues with this picture: "Celebrating their golden anniversary in 1958, Mabel Leffingwell Mercer and Samuel Edward Mercer prepare to cut the cake at the beach house *Slamming Doors*."

You don't need a wedding to have a reunion, or a house party, at Pawleys. We remember many July 4<sup>th</sup> weekends when the beach near us filled up with frat brothers from Clemson, and every spring, our new neighbors are hosts for a reunion of the Greenville (SC) High Class of 1952 and invite us over for Bloody Marys. Chapter five features a 1944 shot of the "Kimmie Kottage Kuties," six girlfriends spending time at the beach to ease the anxiety of the war years. The Winyah High Class of 1943 is here, too, with names that include Blookie, Jeep, Burness and Bootsie – in case their Southern roots were not obvious. When your name is Cokie, you notice things like that.



On the steps of a dune crossover, circa 1913, are, top to bottom, Francis Siau, Herman Siau, Myrtle "Spot" Carraway and Elizabeth "Sister" Siau.

But the most telling rituals on Pawleys take place every day, in every house, on every spot of sand. Not long after we started coming here, Steve wrote a piece for the *New York Times* that included this passage: “I particularly love to walk the Pawleys beach in late afternoon, when tiny brown water birds race down to the surf for food, and then scurry away from the next wave. Teenage girls, taller and more colorful than shorebirds, twitter together as they walk, then bend over on their gangly legs, poking the sand for shells. One of our own trophies, a conch, turned out to be still occupied and crawled halfway across the room in which we had left it. Fishermen, six packs nestling in icy coolers, cast their lines and cares into the surf. A grandmother dips a baby into the waves in a baptismal ritual. A boy grabs a dead crab, and shakes it menacingly at a terrified younger sibling.” We like to think that those gangly girls, and perhaps even that boy with the crab, are now dipping babies of their own in the waves.

Pawleys is sea and sand and surf – but it’s also the South. For us, part of the lure has always been geography. Cokie is a native of New Orleans and has deep roots in the region. Her mother’s family, the Claibornes, can trace their origins in America to Jamestown, and one of her ancestors, W.C.C. Claiborne, was the first governor of the Louisiana Territory. So coming to Pawleys was like coming home, and one Southern trait that pervades this island is neighborliness. Every page of this book is filled with families connecting with and caring for each other. Just one example is this caption under a photo in chapter six: “Lois and Joe Reid of Arkadelphia, Ark.; Jelka and David James of Lexington, Ky.; and Mildred and Arch Allen of Winston-Salem, N.C. enjoy cocktails at the *Creek House*.” Even if we’ve been away for months, the checkout ladies at the Piggly Wiggly up the road recognize us and ask after the grandkids. After we bought our house, both sets of neighbors brought us presents – a book of local history from one, a set of cocktail tools from the other – and we turned to each other and said, “Yep, we’re in the South.”

Food plays a big role in this book, and the menus in local restaurants tell you that you’re not in Maine or Minnesota. Not when you can buy okra and butterbeans at the local vegetable stand, or fresh shrimp from the back of a pickup. Or drive a few miles down the highway to Hog Heaven, home of the best barbecue in the area. From the earliest days, fishing and crabbing have been part of any vacationer’s activities on a Pawleys holiday, and not just for the male of the species. A photo at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century records that “Ida Bell, Janie Carraway and Elizabeth Carraway are dressed for fishing in Pawleys Creek.” A newspaper story from 1904 reports that “fishing is good and many fine bass are being caught.”

Hunting was also popular in that era, and recipes for “marsh hen pilau” appear in early cookbooks. Many pioneering vacationers brought their own livestock with them, and cows grazed on the open fields of the north end. When we first started coming here, we made friends with “Doc” Lachicotte, the man who made the Pawleys Island hammock famous, and he taught us the fine art of flounder fishing. After one successful outing with Doc, we cooked our catch just hours later, and the fish was so fresh it was intoxicating. Perhaps a good white wine fueled our feeling of euphoria, but that flounder remains on our top 10 list of memorable meals.

Each photo in this book is like a small mirror, and every Pawleys visitor will see a reflection of his or her own experience. For years we rented *Periwinkle Cottage* from the Workman and Easley families and were surprised to read that in the 1920s and 1930s, the “Periwinkle Tea Room” was located in the same building. After we bought our own home, with the invaluable help of Alan Altman and Julia McCallus, we had to find a name. *Grand Central* and *Six Pack*, both references to our half-dozen grandkids, were early favorites, but we settled on *Lagniappe*, a New Orleans word that means “a little something extra” or a “special gift.” Many of our decorative touches reflect Cokie’s hometown, including a brightly lit Tabasco clock, and we were sure we’d made an original choice. Nope. We read about a house already named *Lagniappe* located farther south on the island.

Pawleys seems like a timeless place, but this book reminds us that even here, time brings change. One of the most welcome is the decline of commerce on the island. Pictures abound of the Wagon Wheel restaurant, King’s Funland and Howdy’s store. And at a time when travel was much harder, having a place

to eat or bowl or buy sunscreen within walking distance made sense. No longer, not when two 24-hour drugstores are located right across the causeway, and since 1985, all new businesses have been banned.

Another positive change is a devotion to conservation. Modern readers might well cringe at pictures of early islanders harvesting sea turtle eggs on the beach or riding a large loggerhead. Today these rare reptiles are fiercely protected by law. And then of course there's the weather. Names like Hugo and Hazel are indelibly etched in the island's history, and the devastation caused by those storms is part of this book as well: houses blasted from their foundations, dunes reduced to sand piles, even a new channel that separated the south end from the rest of the island. These hurricanes, along with rising land prices, led to the biggest change on Pawleys: older, smaller homes replaced by larger, storm-resistant structures. When we first came here, islanders loved to put the phrase "arrogantly shabby" on everything from bumper stickers to T-shirts. No longer. There's nothing shabby about Pawleys today.

But the breathing, beating heart of this place has not changed at all. Life is still lived by the rhythms of the day and the season. The sun still rises over the ocean and sets over the creek. The pelicans still fly, the flounder still bite, the sand is still warm and the tea is still cold. A walk on the beach is still one of life's purest pleasures. As this book shows, that's been true for well over 100 years. So let's raise a glass to the next 100 years on Pawleys Island.

Cokie Roberts is a political commentator for ABC News and a senior news analyst for National Public Radio. She serves on the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, and, among many awards, has been named a Living Legend by the Library of Congress. Roberts is the author of the best-selling *We Are Our Mother's Daughters* (1998), *Founding Mothers* (2004) and *Ladies of Liberty: The Women Who Shaped Our Nation* (2008).

Steve Roberts, the Shapiro professor of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, is a political analyst for ABC radio and an author. His book *My Fathers' Houses* (2005) is a chronicle of his family's journey to America and his New Jersey boyhood.

He and Cokie write a weekly syndicated newspaper column and co-authored the bestseller *From This Day Forward* (2000). Married for more than four decades, the Roberts have been coming to Pawleys for more than 30 years.

