

## Surfside Golf

By Hunter Ellis

The humidity could not be more suffocating. I am standing next to Herbert Drake II who is placing his tee into the ground. The sinking of the wooden wedge driving slowly into the sandy topsoil reminds me that I would be so much more comfortable buried just a few feet below ground.

Holding his three wood in hand, Herbert takes a few practice swings before finally hitting his ball. The shot sails in the direction of the clearing before us where a flag can be seen unwavering in the distance – visible evidence that there will not be any sign of reprieve from this humidity.

“How about that shot,” says Herbert, “If I knew taking your money was this easy, Thad, I would have ripped apart your mattress years ago.”

I cannot think of a retort at the moment. Sweat slowly drips from my brow as I walk forward to tee up my ball. With a three stroke lead, Herbert has this one in the bag. He is twenty years my senior, yet when he is playing golf he becomes my peer.

Upon completion of the hole I hand my putter and seven iron to my caddie and the four of us – Herbert, his caddie, my caddie, and I begin the trek towards the clubhouse. Fresh from another victory, Herbert is the first to speak.

“Well, I guess I can afford to buy you a drink today, Thad,” he says, “After all, it is your money.”

I nod and smile not willing to relent to his usual post-game antics. It appears that Herbert notices my disinterest with the present topic and dismisses it.

Turning to his caddie Herbert says, “What’s your agenda for the rest of the day, Charles?”

A moment of time elapses before Charles says anything. I expect the worst.

“I plan to caddie a couple more games this afternoon, and hopefully, sleep on the beach tonight without getting chased away tomorrow morning, Sir,” says Charles.

“And I plan to screw Marilyn Monroe after supper,” says Herbert, “What are you really up to this evening?”

“I told you. I will finish out my shift and get whatever scraps I can at the clubhouse before heading towards the beach.”

“Are you trying to get a rise out of me?” says Herbert.

Not sure what to make of this conversation, I decide it is time I interject. Herbert is a big fan of cars so I decide to bring up the latest Oldsmobile I saw on the cover of Car and Driver at Ekerd’s Pharmacy recently.

“Hey Herbert, have you seen the new Oldsmobile,” I say, “I think it was called the Starfire. Sure looks spiffy.”

Herbert ignores my comment and motion towards Charles to continue their previous conversation.

“I am not trying to get a ‘rise’ out of you, Sir. I am just answering your question,” says Charles.

“I know your game. You are trying to get me to feel sorry for you so I will give you a bigger tip.”

“Sir, what I said was...,” says Charles.

“What? The truth? I am supposed to believe that a caddy at Surf Golf & Beach Club is sleeping out by the ocean?”

The conversation ends abruptly as we approach the side of the club house. The two caddies take our golf bags into the locker room. Herbert and I walk into the bar after using the restroom. We both order whiskey sours and club sandwiches. While waiting for our lunch, I confirm my earlier suspicions.

“What was that tirade about earlier when we were walking back from the 18<sup>th</sup> hole, Herbert?” I say.

“Thad, you must realize I am a man of principle. I don’t like being lied to. How is it that such a fine employee of this golf course is unable to purchase a home?”

“I don’t know,” I say.

The bartender overhearing our conversation leans over and says, “Charles was your caddie, Mr. Drake, correct?”

“Yes,” Herbert says.

“He isn’t poor. In fact, Charles has been working here for over ten years as a caddie and saved a good deal of money. He just has no place to store it.”

“See!” says Herbert, “that negro was playing a game with me.”

The bartender walks back into the kitchen and retrieves our lunch.

“That’s the thing,” the bartender says delivering our food, “Charles hasn’t ever done any real wrong. He just keeps getting denied by the local banks because they

demand to see his birth certificate before they will open a bank account or give him a loan. He once told me that his certificate was lost in a bank fire during the Depression.”

“How is that remotely fair?” Herbert says.

“You got me, Sir. I’m just glad I’m white so I don’t have to put up with that bull,” says the bartender.

Herbert and I finish our lunch without conversing any further.