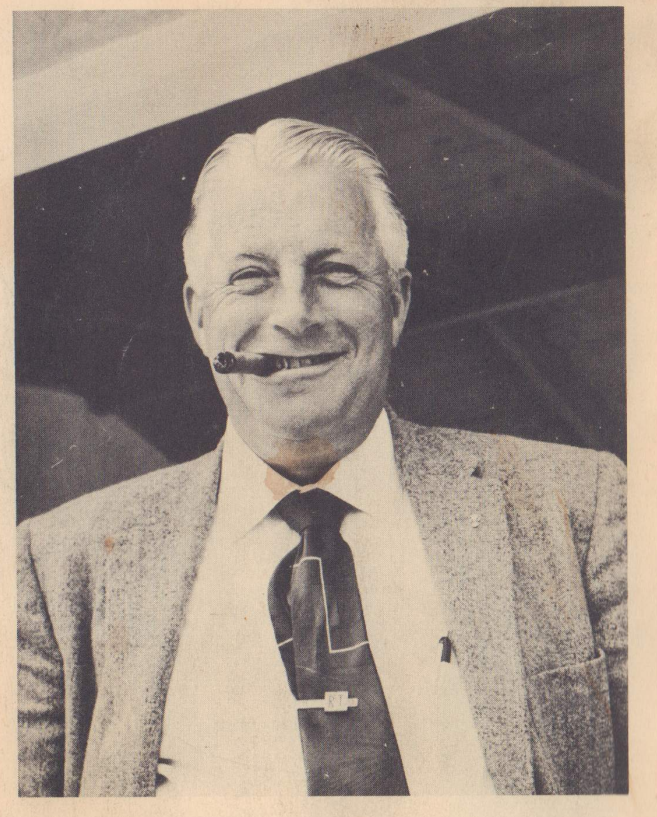

The "dean of trailer park managers," Rex Thompson, earned his title in less than a decade after emerging from twenty-one years in the electrical department of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

He has designed, built, and operated some of the most fabulous trailer parks in the country and has recently formed his own designing and engineering firm for mobile home parks.

Mr. Thompson lives in a mobile home in California, is a grandfather, and finds time in spite of his endless schedule to fish, play golf, and indulge in lesser sports.

Characters on Wheels

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Characters on Wheels

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With deep appreciation to all those lovable characters who live on wheels, this book is dedicated . . . but most of all to Jack Kneass, whose collaboration, guidance and patience made it possible. May the wheel of life give them all a long and happy spin.

Characters on Wheels

1

Dealing with characters is my business. According to park operators, of whom I am one, a generous supply of the four million citizens who live in mobile homes fall in this category.

These trailerists universally admit that all park operators are characters.

Both park operators and trailerists agree unanimously that managers of luxury mobile home parks are not only characters, zany, and pixilated, but are also crazy in a curiously pleasant sort of way.

I operate a luxury park, and I agree with other operators and with the public. Only a few individuals would enjoy this kind of work.

Take the way I started.

In Southern California's famous coastal resort area, down at Laguna Beach, I saw a four-acre plot of land right on the ocean. It was love at first sight.

I simply had to have that four acres of sandy beach. So a company was formed, which I headed, and the property was purchased.

It was then I found the Orange County Planning Com-

mission would grant no permit for houses, hotels, motels, factories, or stores on this particular beach. It would seem that on occasion the tide had not only lapped over my ground, but completely covered it, and in the past had actually flowed over Coast Highway 101, below which my property lay.

After being turned down by the Planning Commission I asked them for suggestions. "You," they told me, "can put any sort of development you choose on that beach . . . just so long as it can be pulled off in case of an emergency."

I went home and cogitated. After one cigar and six Scotches an inspiration came to me. A trailer park!

I knew absolutely nothing about trailers except that they had wheels and got in my way when I was trying to hurry home from work. However, as a technician in Hollywood for many years, I had found out that the best directors knew nothing about the subject of their films. This didn't keep them from doing a bang-up job; in fact it aided their direction. How could they make an authentic African film if they knew anything about Africa? Or a good American comedy if they had a sense of humor?

It was obvious to me that the less you knew about a thing the better you can direct it. This would make me the best trailer-park director in the world, for I knew even less about trailers than a good picture director knew about love.

So we floated another loan, lined up a draftsman who also knew nothing about trailer parks, though he had designed some wonderful restaurants, and blueprinted a park to end all parks.

Then I went before the Planning Commission, but not alone. I had plenty of company. Over 150 people from the

South Laguna and Laguna Beach area were gathered to oppose granting us a variance for the construction of a trailer park. We even had another trailer-park operator in the crowd. It was an overflow audience, and we recessed from the commissioner's regular quarters to one of the large Superior Court rooms across the way.

At one end of a large oblong table the "applicant" sat. That was me. Eleven solemn members of the commission took their places around the table, with the chairman staring at me from the other end. I felt like a great auk at a bird-watchers' convention.

They started to read letters of protest. There were so many letters that I interrupted. I was perfectly willing to admit that the other 6,843 letters were of the same general tenor of protest.

Then came the unkindest cut of all. A protesting park operator got up and stated that my property was owned by a bunch of Hollywood characters who intended to make a Hollywood joint out of the place.

The chairman asked me what I had to say to that. I told him I wasn't from Hollywood, I couldn't afford to live in that town. Furthermore I wasn't as familiar with joints as my friend the park operator seemed to be. But I could say this, if I had a joint it would be the finest in Southern California, and Laguna Beach would be proud of it.

This almost broke up the meeting, but not quite. Some of the property owners protested that the only access to a public beach was through my property. They proposed that I be required to grant a public easement through my property to that public beach.

Seeing that my property was long and narrow, a public

easement would have meant I had no place to build a trailer park. But I was game. I told the honorable commissioner, who also owned beach property, that if he, two protesting movie stars, and a hundred other persons living along the south coast would all grant easements to the public, I'd do the same. If they didn't mind the public walking through their gardens I certainly didn't mind people going through my property.

That ended the discussion.

After all, despite the shouts and the clamor, there was nothing much the commission could do about my application. I'd checked the law, and they could not prevent me from making some constructive use of the property. They had refused me permission to build anything known to God or Man except a trailer park, so a trailer park it had to be.

They granted me the variance. I was in the trailer-park business.

2

Being in the trailer-park business my wife, Helen, and I thought we should learn something about it. Everywhere we went we saw other poor unfortunate property owners who had been forced to build trailer parks, and we turned to them for guidance. They were agreed on only one thing; trailerists eat, sleep, and breathe.

Most park operators also thought that adequate park facilities should be installed, and these operators were unanimous in the opinion that such installations cost too much money. We tried to find out what "adequate park facilities" meant, but no two owners agreed.

I was still working in Hollywood, so I turned to a friend of mine, Dr. Hanson. He had just purchased a trailer and was going to take a long trip: he was willing to let me know all about the park facilities he found along the road.

Dr. Hanson and his wife started off, all right, and at first everything was wonderful. They maneuvered through city traffic and out onto the Coast Highway without incident, and set sail for the Redwoods.

When evening came they did not want to stop, so the doctor turned over the driving to his wife. Then he him-

self went back to the trailer, undressed, put on pajamas, pulled out the divan, and dropped off to sleep while the miles fell behind.

Soon they came to a stretch of bumpy pavement. It was so rough that Mrs. Hanson stopped the rig and got out to look for a flat tire. The stop woke the good doctor. He stumbled sleepily out of the trailer and started looking for Mrs. Hanson but she was circling the trailer to the right and so was he. As a result they never caught sight of each other, for whenever the doctor turned a corner so did his *Frau.*

At the back of the rig the doctor stopped and leaned wearily on the trailer. But not for long. Mrs. Hanson had climbed back in the car, satisfied that there were no flat tires. When she drove off the trailer pulled away from the doctor, and there he was, lying in the road clad only in pajamas, nineteen miles from the nearest city.

You'd think any motorist would stop when he saw a dignified, pajama-clad man in the middle of the road, but apparently motorists have been bled of the milk of human kindness. They slowed up, all right, and took a good look, but after that they leaned on the horn and stepped on the gas.

Some driver however, must have been courteous enough to notify the police, because within a matter of minutes, a police car with red light flashing and siren shrieking pulled up alongside the angry doctor. Before he knew what was happening he was handcuffed and on his way to jail.

Eventually the police reluctantly radioed on to stop a Mrs. Hanson, whose existence they obviously doubted. After that they booked the doctor for indecent exposure.

A hundred miles up the highway Mrs. Hanson, blissfully unaware of her lord and master's disappearance, was flagged down. She returned to town, but her mate was too unhappy to talk to her; he only gurgled.

In the morning a judge listened to my friend, and expressed a sympathetic concern for his disturbing experience. Nevertheless, regardless of the situation leading to the contretemps, he expressed regret that the doctor was guilty of indecent exposure and fined him a hundred dollars.

Hanson sold his trailer and returned home, vowing he would never again have the slightest contact with such instruments of the devil. On reaching Los Angeles he immediately contacted me. His report was not very helpful. Neither was his suggestion that I either forego all plans to build a trailer park, or consult a psychiatrist without delay.

So I ignored both suggestions and went ahead full tilt with my plans. The fact that my life savings were already in the project may have influenced my decision to proceed.

At last plans for the park were completed and I started my search for a contractor. I received bids from many, but finally selected one whose main qualification was that he was the father of a friend of mine. I shall always be grateful to this fellow. He educated me in such important details as contractors' bonds, or the lack of them, and mechanics' liens.

Our contract called for a turn-key job. To this day I don't know what a turn-key job is, though at that time I was under the impression that I would only have to visit my park when the job was completed for the key to be turned over to me. That was not the case. I spent more time at the park than the contractor himself did.

After several months, construction came to a crashing halt. I found that the contractor not only was without funds, but that he had not even paid his sub-contractors, such as plumbers and electricians.

Then, going through various legal maneuvers and paying off a few liens, I decided to finish the park myself.

Each night Helen and I would walk from one end of the park to the other, inspecting everything. The park, somehow or other, was getting built. Still, one evening I looked at the buildings and said to Helen, "My golly, do you think we'll ever get any tenants after we finish this thing?"

Right then my good wife showed she was a worthy assistant to a trailer-park operator. She kissed me and said, "There's nothing to worry about, honey. If we don't get tenants we'll have forty of the prettiest rest rooms on the coast all to ourselves."

Soon after that we were almost ready to open. I priced the lots for rental and went after tenants. Our rates were exorbitantly high, running about $150 a month on a lease basis. No trailerist with full possession of his faculties would even consider moving into the park. Most people I attracted had never owned a trailer. This was an ideal situation. I was completely ignorant of trailer-park operation, and so were they. We could learn together.

3

Most of my prospects expressed amazement at the high rent quoted. They had been under the impression that living in a trailer was economical.

I pointed out to them that the only hobby comparable to trailering was yachting. If you bought a rowboat and kept it home you had an economical hobby. But if you moored a fifty-foot yacht at a high-class yacht club, that cost real money. The argument was logical, so I had no trouble getting a long list of prospective tenants.

Soon the great day arrived. We opened like a Hollywood première with lights, fanfare—and hors d'oeuvres. The gala affair was attended by press, prospective tenants, and civic dignitaries. An excellent floor show was followed by oratory from well-fed speakers, each outdoing his predecessor in praise of the park and predictions of the future. Finally the festivities broke up, and not until then did a light rain begin to fall.

I went to bed without a care in the world. At five in the morning I woke as the skies split wide open. In a few minutes what amounted to a cloudburst was dropping on our park. At the same time the wind was freshening.

Soon it was blowing a gale and ocean waves lapped greedily at the park. Every receding wave was dark with sand from my beach.

When daylight came I saw that one end of the park was completely washed out, leaving the elaborate rest rooms hanging, clinging to what soil was left, twenty feet in the air and out over the waves. Only a pathetic vine of plumbing held them in place. A little creek which normally meandered through the property looked like the Mississippi in flood, and carried about as much topsoil per cubic inch.

It wasn't long before the photographers came, and that afternoon our park hit the headlines. What's more, its picture was on many a front page. I had sent out for cranes. The cranemen anchored their rigs, threw chains around the rest rooms, and held them as steady as could be right in mid-air, despite tide, creek, and wind.

I watched the little Mississippi rip and tear at my park for five days. The only time I ducked out of sight was when a member of the Planning Commission came by, gave the scene a knowing look, smacked his lips, and shook his head knowingly. One session of that kind was enough for me. I never did like people who say, "I told you so."

It took me sixty days to haul in a few thousand tons of granite and build a sea wall and, when this was done, roll in a few hundred tons of fill and gingerly set the rest rooms in place once more. To repair the park was easy enough; to get our prospective tenants to move in was impossible. As one of them told me plaintively, "I like the place fine, but I can't swim."

I held a conference with myself. With practically no deliberation whatsoever I raised my rates still higher, eliminating a few of the lower-priced spaces, and started another prospect list. Eventually, without lights, food, stage show, oratory, or fanfare of any kind, the park opened.

My first tenant was an old friend, Buddy Twiss, who wrote the best seller *The Long, Long Trailer*. Before writing that, he had been with the National Broadcasting Company, in charge of special events, and was one of their top men.

It was Buddy who originated the coast-to-coast broadcast of the return of the swallows to Capistrano. Buddy had done very little checking before suggesting this idea, and right up until a few days before the broadcast he was positive that the swallows always returned to Capistrano on St. John's Day in June. Then he went to Capistrano and talked to a few of the natives. He found that the swallows always returned, but not necessarily on the exact day his broadcast was set for. The old-timers at Capistrano were insistent on this. As one of them put it, "How can a swallow tell what day of the month it is?"

To this Buddy had no answer. He had never met a swallow. But Buddy was seldom at a loss, especially when he had money, and in this case he had plenty to operate with, for N.B.C. was on the spot. They scoured the United States before locating about twenty swallows in the East. These birds were shipped by air to Los Angeles. Buddy took them to Capistrano on the morning of the broadcast and planted a prop man with the cageful of swallows behind the mission wall.

Thousands of persons were attending the ceremony and, promptly at the stroke of a gong, the broadcast went on the air.

The natives were right . . . no swallows.

Buddy pressed a signal button, the prop man opened the cage, twenty swallows sailed over the wall, and the assembled thousands cheered vigorously.

This stunt was typical of Buddy's operations and Buddy would have been the first to admit he was a typical trailerist. A typical trailerist, as Buddy told me later, was a fellow who varied just a little from the norm.

Buddy picked out a space at the far end of the park. It had a southern exposure, and its fenced-in patio included a private stretch of sand. Perhaps Buddy's selection was influenced by the fact that I had despaired of renting this space, and had groomed the plot of beach until it looked as if each grain of sand had been washed and carefully put back exactly where it came from. Buddy wanted to make this into a show place, for his guests were to include officials of the National Broadcasting Company and executives from various studios.

He pulled in on schedule, zigging and zagging his way through the park like an old pro. He wheeled his monster into place, blocked it up, and tied onto the utilities in a matter of minutes. The whole thing looked like child's play.

After watching Buddy, I went back to the office, phoned the experienced park maintenance man I was about to hire, and told him his services would not be required. I would do this simple work myself.

4

I made an exact layout of the park. Everything was to scale. Then I cut blocks of various sizes; these were the trailers and my new jeep. It was certainly easy to maneuver them, and I saw how Buddy had managed everything so neatly.

I sat up until three o'clock, fooling around with those blocks and my layout. When I went to bed it was to a well-earned sleep. In the future I would park the trailers, jack 'em up, and connect up the utilities. There was nothing to it.

The first rig came in next morning; a big job for those days, somewhere in the 38- to 40-foot class. When I hooked the little jeep onto this boxcar, it looked like a minnow on the end of a deep-sea line. I pulled in, reversed, cut my wheels hard, reversed again, and shoved the trailer into place exactly as Buddy had done. There was one difference. Where his trailer had slid into place, mine had come to rest in an impossible position. In hours of practicing with the blocks I hadn't been able to get them placed catty-corner in the plot spaces, but that's were my new tenant's trailer sat.

It took me two hours of backing and filling before the trailer was in position. There was no power steering on that jeep, and I was a tired man. But I still had work to do. Not much, but a little. I had to jack up the trailer, set it on blocks, and hook up water, sewer, and electricity.

For years I had worked around studios, and had seen stagehands jack up sets that dwarfed the trailer, but there seemed to be a difference. Perhaps it was the equipment I lacked. Or it may have been the experience. At any rate I had troubles.

I jacked the rig up, set blocks under it, and removed the jacks. Everything was perfect, except that the front door wouldn't open.

So I jacked again, leveled again, let down again. The back door wouldn't open.

Eventually, after four hours of crawling around under that trailer, with perspiration rolling out of my hair and into my eyes, and dripping over my nose into my mouth, the trailer was leveled. To this day I don't know how or why. Perhaps the frame bent. I neither knew nor cared. The rig was level.

All that remained was to hook up to the utilities.

I crawled under the trailer and looked upward, discovering that the trailer manufacturer had neglected to finish the job. The water lines were in their proper positions but they weren't connected. I prayed, gently, and tied them together; then hooked up the sewer line and the water hose, plugged in the electricity, and my job was completed. It had taken me six hours and thirty minutes to back the trailer into place and hook it up properly, but it was a task well done.

I told my tenant she was all set, and went home. Five minutes later, dirt and all, I was in bed and asleep. Ten minutes after that Helen was shaking me awake. "Your new tenant wants to see you."

I went to the door. "Yes, Mrs. Kay?"

"Mr. Thompson, when I turn on my hot water only cold water comes out."

I was relieved. "Is that all? Don't worry about it. Probably something wrong with the hot-water heater. In the morning I'll phone the factory and get a service man out here."

I started to turn away, but Mrs. Kay had something else on her mind, so I stopped. Her face got a little red, then she said, "We don't mind not having hot water, Mr. Thompson, but our toilet splashes."

I was tired, disgusted, and in no mood to worry about splashing toilets, but Mrs. Kay was my second tenant.

"I'll have the service man fix that, too," I told her. "In the morning."

Mrs. Kay shifted from foot to foot. "But it's most uncomfortable," she said. "It might even be dangerous."

I felt the blood come to my face. I was too exhausted to take much more, even from such a chubby, good-natured lady as Mrs. Kay.

"What's dangerous?" I asked.

Her face got redder than mine. "When that toilet splashes," she said, "it splashes boiling water."

I took Mrs. Kay gently by the arm, turned her around, and headed her back toward the trailer.

"It'll be fixed inside an hour," I told her, and started for a telephone.

Five minutes later a plumber was on his way, and I was trying to get in touch with a good maintenance man.

Next came the Gambles, the Craibs, Davis, and Binswanger. We had no trouble parking and blocking up these four except in the case of the Gambles. In some way we split their living-room floor, either because of improper blocking or because the manufacturer didn't know quite what he was doing. I won't argue the point. All I say is that one of us didn't know enough about trailers.

My next tenant was a wealthy physician from the East, Dr. Earle. No novice, this fellow. He reserved two spaces, one for a large, riveted Spartan and another for two sixteen-foot travel trailers. With this much space reserved I expected a large party, but there was only the doctor, his wife, and an asthmatic hitch-hiker he had picked up on the way out.

From the moment they came in until they were finally installed I heard nothing from Earle except praise of his trailers. According to him he had customized them, and every manufacturer in the country should look at those trailers to see how their products should be designed in the future.

After an hour or so of this boasting, I could hardly wait to see the inside of the trailers. Finally the doctor unlocked the Spartan's door and I followed him into the interior. It was like no Spartan ever made. All the fine living-room furniture was gone. In its place was a church pew, placed in front of the coach and reaching from one wall to the other. In the dinette was a card table and four straight-back wooden chairs. The modern kitchen was no more. In place of the kitchen range was a single-burner gas plate.

But it was the bedroom that made me turn pale. I'm not too tall, and medium well padded, but I couldn't have slept on that bed, padding or no padding. Its chassis consisted of two-by-fours, and the bed springs were a chunk of wood made by gluing two-by-twos together.

The doctor looked at me, obviously waiting for praise of his masterpiece.

"It's certainly unusual."

"This is nothing; come see my sixteen-footers."

His travel trailer looked like any other sixteen-footer; a davenport across the front, double bed across the back, and a stove and sink squeezed in between. The doctor stood in the middle of the floor, pointed around proudly, and said: "What the trailer industry needs is foresighted designers who understand the needs of trailerists."

"Yes, sir," I said, remembering I was still short of tenants.

"Trailer designers are stupid."

"Yes, sir."

"They have no imagination."

"Yes, sir."

"They never live in trailers. They never travel in trailers. That's why they don't know how to equip a trailer properly."

"Yes, sir."

"Look here," he said, walking to the back. He raised the bed and hung it to a ceiling hook I had not noticed. Beneath the bed were a full-sized bathtub and a toilet.

My mouth hung open. But the doctor was waiting for me to say something. So I said it.

"What do you do when there are two of you in the trailer, say you and your wife, and she's in bed?"

"I've been waiting for you to ask that question."

"You have?"

"Yes, I have."

He leaned down, pulled open the cupboard door under the sink, and hauled out another toilet. He moved it all around the trailer, proudly. It was hooked up to the sewer outlet by a flexible rubber hose, and could be used, I presume, anywhere in that trailer, if you wanted to.

This was enough for me. Two toilets in a sixteen-footer, and one a portable job. I went away from there before I could say anything more sarcastic than "Yes, sir." After all, his rent was paid in advance, and as long as he didn't extend those rubber toilet connections to the patio he could do anything he liked.

5

The park was far from full, but I was beginning to see daylight. More and more people were coming from Los Angeles to see this better mousetrap we had built. Some were friends of our new tenants, but most were friends of friends of mine.

One couple in particular examined the park closely, asking many questions. These were the Zelons, whose letter of recommendation was excellent. Mrs. Zelon was a large woman, well groomed, apparently sophisticated, and accustomed to good society. She was also exceedingly vocal. Her husband was quiet and mousy. In the course of an hour-and-a-half interview he said nothing except "Yes, dear," and "No, dear." Usually, when asked a direct question, he contented himself with shaking or nodding his head.

Mrs. Zelon should have been a district attorney. Every question was a trap for me to fall into, and her chief worry seemed to be that I might be running a disguised barroom. Time and again she returned to the subject of liquor. Was I certain there was no bar in the place? Was I sure no liquor was allowed in the lounge?

Repeatedly I assured her that the people in this park were as sober a group as one could find anywhere. Most of them took a drink now and then, but I had never had a single complaint about drinking, nor had I ever seen one of the guests in an inebriated condition.

Finally Mrs. Zelon picked a space at the far end of the park. A few days later their trailer was towed in by a convoy service and we got it parked and set up. The next day the Zelons themselves moved in.

Contrary to my expectations they were model tenants—for six days. On the evening of the sixth day Helen and I, and about twenty tenants, were in the lounge watching television when Mrs. Zelon came in. She called me out of the group and said loudly, so most of the people around could hear, "Mr. Thompson, you lied to me."

"What's the matter?"

By this time everyone in the place was listening. Mrs. Zelon stormed on. "You assured me there was no promiscuous drinking in this park. But there's a man lying by the curb not far from my trailer. He's dead drunk. I not only want you to get him out of there but I want you to know that a disgraceful situation like this will not be tolerated by Mr. Zelon and myself. Tomorrow morning you can disconnect our trailer. We are leaving."

It didn't take me long to grab a flashlight and follow Mrs. Zelon to her trailer. Along with us went eight or ten of the male tenants. A fellow was lying in the gutter. He didn't look drunk, he looked dead, but the odor of Bourbon hit me in the nose when I got close, and I knew Mrs. Zelon was right. We had our first drunk and he was sleeping it off right in front of her trailer.

I shone the flashlight on his face, and Mrs. Zelon let out a shriek. It was Mr. Zelon.

Mrs. Zelon screamed again and dashed into her trailer. We knocked on the door, trying to get her to take care of her husband. No response. We called. She didn't answer. So two or three of us picked up Mr. Zelon and carried him back to the lounge, where he spent the rest of the night.

The next morning Mr. and Mrs. Zelon drove out of the park. That afternoon a truck came to get their trailer. We never saw the Zelons or the trailer again. We had lost our first tenant.

Mr. and Mrs. Hanston were a fine couple who decided to sell their house, buy a trailer, and move into our park. He bought the largest, most modern, and most luxurious trailer available. Among his purchases was a tremendous awning running the full length of the trailer. It was the first time I had ever installed an awning of that size, but with the help of our expert maintenance man, and the usual group of trailerists who gather to give a hand at a time like this, we finally had it in place. Altogether, the better part of a day was needed to get this couple properly set up.

After this Mr. Hanston, unaware of my inexperience, turned to me for information. He was the first person I had met who knew absolutely nothing about trailers, and who thought I was an expert. Naturally I answered his questions as an expert should, explaining the workings of everything from butane tanks to the heater and range. It was a pleasure, and he was grateful to me.

During the next few days I ran across this couple often, and it was gratifying to see how they were enjoying their

new way of life. They seemed to be growing younger as they realized the burden of a big house was off their shoulders and now at last they had practically nothing to do but amuse themselves.

Late one afternoon I happened to be wandering by their trailer and saw him backing his car up to the trailer hitch. Even from a distance he looked hot and weary. When I got close I saw perspiration streaming down his face. The big awning was dismantled, thrown on the ground. Sewer, water, and electric lines were disconnected. All blocks were removed from under the trailer. He was ready to hitch up and pull out.

I rushed up to him. "What's the matter?"

The air turned blue. I knew the words and the tune, but the effect Mr. Hanston achieved was unbelievable. He was referring to friends who had inveigled him into selling his house and buying a contraption like this. He had been working since six in the morning, and it was now one-thirty in the afternoon. All because he had run out of butane.

"A h— of a note. A man wants gas and he has to pull seven miles into Capistrano."

I said nothing. A word might have brought on a stroke. I walked over to the trailer, disconnected the butane tank, and put it in the back of his car.

"Get this filled at the butane station, bring it back, and we'll put it on the trailer. And while you're gone we'll start hooking you up again."

Mr. Hanston's flow of language ceased. His face reddened then turned purple. When he could move, he got into his car and drove away without saying a word. I got my maintenance man and we started to put things in shape again.

In later years I was to hear Mr. Hanston tell this story many times, but it was always someone else who was the simple neophyte trailerist.

A few vacant spaces were left. One of them was rented by a Mr. Jay, whose Airfloat was parked at Lot 59 in the El Moro Trailer Park, about five miles from our park.

I agreed to send my jeep over and haul it in, and the maintenance man and a helper went over to pick up the rig. They took down the awning, unblocked the Airfloat, disconnected sewer line, water hose, and electricity, and pulled the trailer over to our park where they proceeded to set it up.

We prided ourselves on the service we gave our tenants, and went to a great deal of trouble to get this trailer blocked until it was steady as a rock. We countersunk the awning poles in the ground, and got the awning pulled taut as a topsail in a high wind. Mr. Jay was a well-known man, and we were sure he would be a good tenant, so we even washed and waxed the trailer. It was a good job well done.

About midnight I was awakened from a sound sleep by a knock on the door. There stood an irate old couple accompanied by two policemen. They finally made me understand that my men had dismantled an Airfloat on Lot 58 at the El Moro Park, instead of Mr. Jay's Airfloat on Lot 59.

It was their trailer we had moved, and they insisted the police arrest me immediately. They were perfectly willing to swear out a warrant.

After a while I got them to listen to me for a minute. Finally they agreed to dismiss all charges if I would return the trailer.

But not in the morning. Oh, no! At once!

So, at 2:00 A.M., I aroused my maintenance man and we started dismantling the Airfloat.

The old couple stood grimly by, but after a while I persuaded them to go to the Laguna Hotel, where I made reservations and picked up the tab.

It was ten o'clock in the morning before we got the trailer back to its home lot, hooked it up, blocked it in position, and erected the awning.

When we were all done my maintenance man looked at me squarely for the first time since I had awakened him and said, "It's too bad we waxed that trailer."

A most unusual couple were Mr. and Mrs. Rheinfield. He was a spindly little dried-up man weighing about 110 pounds dripping wet. He was retiring and bashful; when he stood still you could hardly see him, he was so unobtrusive. Even his chin and forehead pulled back from his nose. Mrs. Rheinfield was a different type. Once she had been director general of an international women's club, and for years she had taken an active interest in civic affairs. She was big. You wouldn't call her fat, because she was solidly built and kept herself well girdled; but she weighed about 230 pounds, although she was only about five feet eight inches tall.

She wasn't ashamed of being a big woman. In fact she seemed proud of it. All the time we were setting up her rig she kept telling me what a hard time they had had getting a trailer in which she could be comfortable. In those days trailers were built to scale; they were like small houses pulled down in size. Everything from sitting room to hallways, from kitchen to bathroom, was exactly in proportion. Some of the trailers she looked at, she said, had aisles so small she couldn't walk through them. In others she couldn't get through the bathroom door. I could tell she was still a little doubtful whether her own really luxurious trailer was spacious enough for comfort. But at least, she said, she could navigate in its interior, and the furniture and household equipment were of the finest quality. She could hardly wait for me to get through hooking it up so she could try all the gadgets.

When at last I was sure everything was in working order, I went home for dinner. After eating, Helen and I watched a couple of television shows, and at eleven I was ready for bed.

Someone knocked at the door. It was Mr. Rheinfield. He looked worried, and his pants and shirt were wrinkled and crumpled.

"I'm in bad trouble," he said.

"What's the matter?"

"It's Mrs. Rheinfield."

"What's wrong with her?"

"She took a bath."

"No hot water?"

"Lots of hot water."

"Won't the water drain?"

"It drained all right."

"Well, what's wrong?"

"It's Mrs. Rheinfield."

I was getting impatient.

"You said that before. What's wrong with her?"

"She can't get out of the tub. She's stuck."

I made it over to their trailer in five seconds flat. The tiny tub, not as big as the tub in a present-day trailer, was filled with Mrs. Rheinfield, who had a couple of towels thrown over her.

I tried to look modestly away, but I couldn't. A sight like this I'd never seen, and I never hope to see again.

I gurgled. Mrs. Rheinfield gritted her teeth.

"She's been like this for two hours," said her husband. "I can't get her out."

"Give me a hand," I said.

We pulled, we tugged. Nothing happened. The tub was still full of Mrs. Rheinfield.

I was embarrassed. Mr. Rheinfield was embarrassed. To say that Mrs. Rheinfield was embarrassed would be to understate the case. I was sorry for her; I was sorry for her husband; most of all I was sorry for myself. If experience was any criterion I was making a lifelong enemy, although I was only trying to help.

Finally I had a thought. In the storeroom was a gallon of liquid soap. I got that. We poured it in the tub, working it all around Mrs. Rheinfield, and then Mr. Rheinfield and I hoisted together. It worked. Mrs. Rheinfield was out of the tub.

In two seconds flat I was out of the trailer.

I thought they would move after that, but Mrs. Rheinfield was a big woman in more ways than one. She forgave me my intrusion on her privacy, considering the circumstances. Nevertheless I spent most of the next month convincing her she had done right in selling her house and moving into a trailer.

6

I read every book I could get my hands on that concerned itself with any phase of trailer-park operation. After a while I decided that the fellows writing those books were like the chap who flew over the African jungle on a dark night, thereby becoming an expert on the subject of African natives. None of the writers seemed to recognize the trailer-park operator's intrinsic problem. You house seventy-five to a hundred people in an area that would normally hold three or four families. It is like holding an Elks' convention in a telephone booth, except that all the tenants are not sworn brothers.

The park was full now, with the exception of one space. My problem: how to keep it that way. This meant keeping the tenants, my private band of "Elks," happy. I spent all my spare time visiting other parks, but learned little. No pattern of operation exactly fitted my requirements.

My guests were business executives, doctors, lawyers, and movie personalities. Most were listed in *Who's Who.* They had moved into the park by choice, and if they decided to move again there was nothing to keep them from doing so.

We were not convenient to Los Angeles and their places of business. Our rents were high, in fact about five times the going rate at other trailer parks. Entertainment was not free. Some parties cost the guest nothing, but others, where we brought in outside talent and served full-course dinners, were as expensive as an evening on Las Vegas' famous Strip. One tenant told me he could easily afford the rent—it was the "free" extras that kept him broke.

We had to have a plan, and idea: we had to operate this park according to a system. The trouble was I couldn't decide what system to use. So we decided on a form of modified anarchy. We had only one rule, and that was an unwritten one. If your late party kept the neighbors awake they were at liberty to join you, and drink your liquor and eat your food. Our motto was: "Fun and Entertainment."

The caliber of guests was so high that we needed no restrictions on their actions, and practically everyone got along with everyone else. Some guests were retired and some actively engaged in business; some were religious and some weren't; some liked late parties and others were always in bed before midnight. None of these people were responsible to the park operator for any action, yet our park ran on a more even keel than any other park I have ever seen.

One way we got people acquainted was by means of the so-called "potluck" dinner, long beloved of trailerists. Each guest who wanted to, took leftovers from his last three or four dinners, warmed them up, and packed them over to the "rec" hall. They were all put on a long table and other tenants, carefully avoiding ther own scraps, selected the

most indigestible of their neighbors' contributions and ate them with relish. Open a can of dog food and some brave soul would sample it with gusto.

We scheduled movies, slide shows, dances, and bingo games but, except for the really big parties, potlucks were our most popular form of entertainment. Strangers marveled at them. Not every day do you see a group of wealthy people, including more than a few millionaires, scrounging up and down a table in search of scraps.

This kind of thing is contagious. One night I was telling Helen about the wonderful stew I'd eaten at the potluck when I noticed a peculiar look on her pretty face. Apparently the stew I'd liked had been our own. What's more, it was the same stew I had refused to eat the previous night.

Any long-run entertainment program that is successful requires music. There was talent in the park and I started to gather it together. Eddie Fisher, a retired executive, was the key man, playing both organ and piano. Our violinist was a member of the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra. It was difficult to convince him that jazz was music, but we finally succeeded. On the banjo was Zurno, a veteran of years of one-night stands and county fairs. He advertised himself as the "World's Fastest Banjo Player," saying nothing of the quality of his music. "Two Gun" Repp, a leading Western writer with hundreds of pulps and movie scenarios to his credit, was the guitarist. His playing was even more Western than the characters he created. This group was called the "Aristocrats," and their five-year stand at one location is probably a record of some sort.

Singers were plentiful, though the quality of some soloists

left much to be desired. I was unable to comment on this because the Aristocrats used me as their closing vocalist. The routine was always the same. I would be called to the stand after hours of music. No sooner did I open my mouth than the crowd would silently steal away. As the last one left the hall he would flip the light switch, and the show was over.

In addition to Two Gun Repp and Buddy Twiss we had several other writers in the park. One was Art Binswanger, who composed our Alma Mater song to the tune of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." This was sung at every major party, with the last two lines of the last verse being sung loudest. It went like this:

> Take me down to Aliso,
> Take me down to that park,
> Jack up my trailer and park me in,
> Get me away from the Big City's din;
> Steaks taste better when eaten
> Grabbed right off the old grill;
> And it's one, two, three hundred a month
> When you get your bill!

Those last two lines always brought tears to my tenants' eyes.

Our first party featuring the Aristocrats was semi-formal and held on the recreation hall patio. A bar was set up in the lounge.

I acted as master of ceremonies, broadcasting from a microphone near the serving tables. As guests came up they were introduced, asked something about their past,

hobbies, future plans, etc., and in this way every tenant learned something about every other one. Later, during the floor show, a half dozen or so guests were asked to say a word or two.

A new arrival was Mr. Sheridan, a gentlemen of parts and a well-known speaker heading up the Dale Carnegie Institute of Public Speaking in Southern California. Mr. Sheridan had recently purchased his first trailer, taken a cross-country trip, and was now registered in our park. I asked him to say a few words.

Sheridan was a master of brevity. He said, "I will answer all your questions in one sentence. I traveled from Los Angeles to New York City in thirty-two days; stayed overnight in thirty-two trailer parks, and it was the first time in my life that I ever took thirty-two showers without taking my shoes off."

Any old-time trailerist will admit that a more succinct description of a trailer trip in those days would be impossible to compose.

After this show Helen and I went to Lake Tahoe for a vacation, leaving our maintenance man in charge. On our return we found he had rented the last space in the park to Mr. and Mrs. Jackson from Bear Creek Junction, Arkansas. But they were unhappy. If they couldn't move to another space they intended to leave the park. Every space was full, so we couldn't move them. We had lost only one tenant since opening, and we certainly didn't want to lose the Jacksons, so I went over to see what the trouble was.

They were having a barbecue, and a dozen people were on their patio. I found Mrs. Jackson—who looked exactly

as you would expect someone from Bear Creek Junction, Arkansas, to look—introduced myself, and asked why she was unhappy.

"It's the people next to us," said Mrs. Jackson. "They look right down in my rest room from their upstairs window." Her voice cracked when she said "rest room."

Now her next-door neighbors owned a two-story trailer with bedrooms upstairs, and this was parked at right angles to the Jacksons' trailer, so there was no doubt they could, if they chose, look down from the bedroom windows and see what there was to see.

I tried diplomacy.

"That trailer is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Moline. He is an executive in a large industry and they are socially prominent. Before we rented that space we took them on a tour of the entire park. They saw every tenant we had and decided you were the one they would most like to see in a rest room. You ought to feel honored."

Most of Mrs. Jackson's guests, who had gathered around us, started laughing. Even Mrs. Jackson chuckled.

I immediately excused myself and went over to Mrs. Moline's trailer. I asked Mrs. Moline if she had met Mrs. Jackson. She said she hadn't. I told Mrs. Moline that Mrs. Jackson was having a barbecue, and had told me that she would love to have Mrs. Moline attend if someone would introduce them.

Mrs. Moline powdered her nose and we went over to the Jackson's patio, and I made the introductions. Whereupon Mrs. Moline said that if Mrs. Jackson's invitation was still open she would be glad to stay for the barbecue.

There was nothing Mrs. Jackson could do but extend a

cordial invitation—and look around for me. But I was going away from there—fast.

Later the two ladies became the best of friends.

Which shows that it pays a park operator to be diplomatic in his approach to personal problems.

7

In the beginning we devoted most of our time to getting guests settled and acquainted. I stopped by every trailer at least once a day, and made it my business to see that every guest in the park knew everyone else. Regular gatherings, such as potlucks and movies, helped bring them closer together, but all this was just a warm-up for bigger events to come.

As the day of our first big party approached I began to have misgivings. Nothing we could offer in the way of entertainment would be new to my guests. They had been everywhere and seen everything. Most of them had been in every top night club in America and Europe. These were the people I had to amuse.

Competition with the night spots of nearby Las Vegas was out of the question. If I tried it, I was licked before the bell rang. I had one advantage: the guests knew each other well, so we could insert a personal touch in everything we did. This was an edge, and this was the weapon I intended to utilize to the limit.

We held meetings with tenants and groups of tenants, and we laid plans, but one thing I never did. Never, at any

time, were the guests asked what kind of party they wanted. They knew nothing of what was coming next until the program was announced by the park office. The park was not turned into a debating society.

Our next social event was a "come-as-you-are," a semi-formal party held on the recreation hall's patio. We set up a microphone near the serving table as we had before, and when the guests served themselves they were asked some personal questions.

Some even volunteered a few words. Mr. Sheltz, for instance, said, "In this age of reality some folks will never believe that a patch of sand can be transmuted into gold until they rent a space in this park."

As the summer season got into full swing we stepped up our activities. The Aristocrats held nightly jam sessions, and we either had a steak fry or a group breakfast almost every day.

About this time we began to publish our park newspaper, the *Aliso Abalone,* (which can be freely translated as "All Baloney").

In this paper we announced The Famous Fish Derby. The announcement read like this:

> The Famous Fish Derby. All ardent followers of Isaac Walton and Red Grange should get in touch with Dwight Corbina Snauers and register for the annual Aliso Fish Derby. No entry fee charged, but all contestants must be equipped with pole, sinker line and hook, and be at the starting line, which is 7½ feet from the surf line. The contestant remaining the long-

est and catching the most will be awarded the coveted Aliso Trophy.

To be a winner you must beat last year's record. This contest was won by Don Ameche, who stood for 89 hours and caught 219 fish.

Food may be brought to each contestant but they must eat and fish at the same time. No chairs or pots are to be used. Lights are permitted between sunrise and sunset. All contestants must be in a standing position at the end of the derby. Sitting or lying down is considered a foul, and is checked against each entrant.

For further information concerning this great Aliso Tournament, the FISH DERBY, see Dwight Corbina Snauers.

Actually this was a legitimate contest, and excellent prizes were awarded the winners.

After the contest was over, and trophies distributed, a genuine fishing fever hit our little community.

One guest so infected was Bob Stoker, head of Columbia Studios' still-camera department.

One week end his grandson, Bob III, was visiting him, and was insistent on learning how to fish. So Bob, Sr., bought a small spinning outfit and took the boy down to the beach. After an hour or two of instructions they were on the way back to the trailer when they were greeted by a game warden. He wanted to see a fishing license, and Bob, Sr., didn't have one.

He protested, "I wasn't fishing. I was just giving my grandson lessons in casting."

The warden put away his book. "Next time you give

lessons," he said, "do it away from the water. Or else buy a license."

Bob grinned weakly. Just then his wife came out of the trailer. Bob courteously introduced her. "This is the game warden. I'd like you to meet Mrs. Stoker.

"Glad to meet you," said Mrs. Stoker. She turned to her husband. "I told you two weeks ago that if you didn't get a license you'd be caught."

"Oh, ho," said the warden, whipping out his book, "so you've been warned, have you?"

With that he wrote out a citation.

The wifely warning cost Bob twenty-five dollars.

The fishing frenzy hit almost everyone in the park. Among its victims was Mr. Johnson, who was not only living in his first trailer, but was also on his first trip to the Pacific Coast. His home town was in Oklahoma, far from salt water of any kind. Every day he would look out of his trailer window and see a hundred or more boats cruising offshore, or anchored in the good fishing grounds right off our park. Some were private boats and some were live bait boats with fishermen packed in like sardines in a can. Even without using a glass you could see that fishing was good, although most of the fish caught were perch, or small bass.

One day Mr. Johnson came over to the lounge and asked what type of fishing equipment he should buy. He was booked for one of the live-bait boats, and was leaving early in the morning to fish off our park.

Several tenants were clustered around me at the time, and I was busy trying to answer some of their questions. Without giving the matter a second thought I told John-

son that the largest fish in the Pacific Ocean were caught right off Aliso, and advised him to buy the strongest tackle he could get. No tackle, I insisted, was too heavy to hold the monsters boated off our park.

Then someone asked another question and I turned away before Mr. Johnson could demand more detailed information.

About three hours later he came in and invited me out to his car to see the equipment he had just purchased. He had a big Ocean City reel about ten inches in diameter. Pole, line, and all the rest of his duffle were in direct proportion to this monstrous piece of machinery.

I was amazed, because bait-boat fishermen aren't after yellowtail. For shore fish they use light tackle much like that used on inland streams.

I pointed to the reel. "How much did that set you back?"

"It was a bargain," said Mr. Johnson. "Only one hundred and forty-five dollars."

I didn't even ask what the rest of the stuff cost. This was one practical joke that had gone too far. When Mr. Johnson got back from his trip I knew what I was in for. The only way out would be to buy his expensive tackle. There was nothing else to do unless he could be persuaded to take up deep-sea fishing.

Luckily someone called me to the office at this point, and it didn't take me long to get there. Anything was better than looking at that tackle and trying to say something to Mr. Johnson.

The next morning he went to Newport to board his half-day boat. At two in the afternoon he returned. When I saw him driving into the park I started to duck out of

sight. But he saw me, slammed on the brakes, jumped out of the car, and came running over, yelling like a wild man.

"Mr Thompson," he gasped, "that advice you gave me about tackle."

I thought he was going to have a stroke. I tried to calm him down by using a soothing tone of voice. "Yes, Mr. Johnson?"

"They made fun of me all the way to the fishing grounds."

"Yes?"

"They laughed at me all the time I was fishing."

Perspiration stood out on my forehead. My hands were clammy. I felt a pain where my pocketbook rested in a hip pocket. It was all I could do to sit still while this wild man jumped up and down. I managed to get out another "Yes?"

He laughed and I saw every tooth in his head.

Voicelessly I swore to myself that I'd never rib another guest. He was practically insane.

He yelled. "When I pulled in that hundred-and-sixty-pound sea bass and won the forty-five dollar jack pot, they stopped laughing. I want you to know I appreciate the advice you gave me. If it wasn't for you I'd have missed the biggest thrill of my life."

Grunion are fish which seem mythical to most Easterners. At certain times of the year, and on specific high tides, they come in to the beach, stand on their tails, bore a hole in the sand, lay their eggs, and on the next wave are carried back to sea. Forecasters predict the exact time of this procedure, and are seldom wrong. But sometimes the grunion run on one beach and not another, and there is no way

of telling which of their regular beaches they will visit. All you can do is choose a likely stretch of sand and wait until an hour after the grunion run is supposed to have started. Either the grunion run where you are . . . or they don't.

When they don't run, and an Easterner is with you, you are likely to hear unkind remarks about "a fish badger game."

On California beaches the run is always at night but, strangely enough, on Mexican beaches the grunion come up only during the day.

All you need to catch grunion is a fishing license and your bare hands. Of course a net, a dishpan, or even a pit dug in the sand would be helpful, but using anything except your bare hands is a violation of the law, and if a game warden catches you the courts will show no mercy.

Now it happened that Aliso was a favorite spot of the grunion. Some of my guests were so unkind as to say all poor fish liked the sands of our park, and that the grunion were only trying to find a parking space.

However that may be, when the grunion ran, Helen and I, and practically everyone else in the park, were always on the beach, and we usually had a fish dinner the next day.

On this particular night Helen was unlucky. She not only failed to catch any fish, but she stepped in a hole, fell down, and badly strained her leg.

That night she couldn't sleep, which meant that I couldn't sleep, either. About three in the morning the pain grew too much for both of us, so I set out to find a doctor. We had seven doctors in the park at the time, but the closest was Dr. Bogue. Now I knew he was not in his trailer, because

he had gone out of town on business. However, I had been introduced to his brother, also a Dr. Bogue, who was visiting him in the park for a week or two, so I went to their trailer anyway.

I pounded on the door for about five minutes before a light went on inside. After more pounding and after another five minutes or so, a sleepy, nightshirt-clad man came to the door. I explained our troubles to him.

After listening attentively to my tale of woe, he said, "I'm sorry we didn't tell you I'm not a doctor of medicine, but a doctor of divinity."

He paused a moment, then with a perfectly blank expression said, "However, if you wish, I'll come over and look at your wife's leg."

"Never mind," I told him. "I'll look at her leg myself."

8

One of our major events was a Halloween party, a masquerade with activities starting early in the afternoon. Everyone competed for the most outlandish or the funniest costume.

Perhaps the best of all were worn by Mr. and Mrs. Braun. Both were about five feet tall, and almost that much around. Their masks, shoes, and costumes were reversed, so that they appeared to be walking backward.

Following the afternoon activities, and before the evening party, Mrs. Braun decided to play trick or treat, and went from trailer to trailer with basket in hand. Naturally she collected something from every trailerist. It was humorous to see her and Mr. Braun munching at the goodies, apparently eating through the backs of their heads, as they moved from trailer to trailer. For a while I watched them, but there was work to do, and I had to keep things moving.

About nine o'clock that night Mrs. Braun came to the office. She was worried. Someone had put a handful of pills in her collection, and Mr. Braun without looking, had eaten a dozen or so of these. Now he didn't feel so good. I thought

of the sweets Mrs. Braun had collected, and the way Mr. Braun had been eating them, and didn't wonder at that.

We found Mr. Braun going from trailer to trailer. "I've been to nineteen trailers," he said in a worried voice. "I must find out what kind of pills I ate."

I patted him on the back. "Don't worry," I said, "you don't look too bad. If you go home and lie down you'll probably be all right in a day or so."

"But what kind of pills were they?"

I shrugged. "They couldn't be anything that would kill you."

He groaned, and his face got paler than ever. "I must find out what was in those pills," he said, and started up the steps to George Swatter's trailer. Mrs. Braun knocked, and George let us in. Mr. Braun asked his mournful questions, and George gave him the right answers. He freely admitted that he had put the pills in the basket.

"What kind of pills were they?" asked Mr. Braun.

George shrugged. "They couldn't do you any harm."

"But what kind of pills were they?"

"Just some *pills* I got from the vet."

Mr. Braun sat down suddenly.

"From the vet," he groaned. "What kind of pills were they?"

George said quietly, "They couldn't do you any harm. They didn't hurt my cat."

We could hardly hear Mr. Braun's voice as he asked once more feebly, "What kind of pills were they?"

"Well," said George, "my cat was constipated, and the vet gave me these pills. They worked real fine, too."

Mr. Braun grabbed at his stomach, jumped out of the

chair, and ran wildly toward his own trailer. Mrs. Braun tore after him.

I turned to George. "What kind of pills were they?"

George grinned. "Vitamin pills. That's all, just vitamin pills."

The Brauns called a doctor. When he came we intercepted him and gave him the entire story. Then we all went over to their trailer.

Braun was sick, doubled up, with faintly greenish skin and wheezing breath. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. The doctor checked him over and told him that the only thing wrong was the amount of sweets he had ingested. He also told him he had checked with Swatter and the pills were only vitamin pills.

To no avail. Braun was sick, and sick he remained. Nothing the doctor could do or say had any effect. Poor Braun missed the party, and was in bed for three days.

9

It was winter now and some of our trailerists had left for the desert resorts, especially Palm Springs. Despite a little more seasonal fog, wind, and rain than usual, the remaining guests had a good time. All of them, that is, but Dr. Towner.

Yet perhaps he would have enjoyed himself more if it had not been for Mrs. Towner. Every time there was a cold spell she left their trailer and went back to their home in Bel Air. Twice, when staying in the trailer during cold weather, she had contracted bronchitis, and this had convinced her that a trailer was no fit place for man or beast when the weather turned chilly.

In the lounge one night Dr. Towner got into a heated argument with some other trailerists. He insisted that he had lived in a trailer for nine months, and knew that the heating systems in mobile homes left much to be desired.

"The only place you can keep warm is in the kitchen," he said.

He was hooted down, but this didn't change his convictions.

I knew the Towner trailer was a fine one with an excel-

lent heating system; so in the morning I took my maintenance man and went over there.

We switched on the heating system and let it run. Sure enough, the kitchen turned into a hotbox, and the rest of the trailer remained as cold as a refrigerator.

We crawled under the trailer and pulled off the false bottom to get at the heat ducts. To our amazement we found that the factory had left out a section of the flue. None of the heat was going to either end of the trailer. Instead all of it was flowing back to the kitchen, up through the drawers, and into the room.

We immediately called the factory and they sent out a man to install the mysteriously missing flue. From then on every room in the trailer was warm.

But to this day, when a cold spell strikes, Mrs. Towner heads for town.

By April our wintering tenants returned, every space was filled, and the show was once more on the road. An election was scheduled, shuffleboard tournaments started, two Arthur Murray instructors were engaged to give ballroom and square dance lessons, and of course the potlucks and entertainment by the Aristocrats continued.

At our parties I tried to persuade different guests to contribute talent to the show. I felt this brought all of the tenants closer together. Also, it was surprising how many good acts we actually uncovered that way.

Mr. Rhubaker was one guest who would never appear before the mike, though I called on him at practically every show. Then one night he got up immediately. He came

boldly to the mike, and I asked him if he was going to sing or dance.

"Neither," he said, "I want to tell about the first time I met you."

"Go ahead."

He grabbed the microphone and started in.

"I came into the park early one afternoon and Mr. Thompson greeted me. I told him I was interested in a trailer space, and he said he would be glad to show me around the park.

"As we walked from trailer to trailer he told me: 'A millionaire lives in that space. A millionaire lives there . . . a millionaire lives over there . . . a millionaire lives there.'

"Finally I said to Mr. Thompson, 'Do you mean to tell me that millionaires are the only people living in this park?'

"Thompson said, 'Well, no, they aren't *all* millionaires.'

"About that time a fellow walked out of a trailer. He looked like a bum. He hadn't shaved for a week, had on dirty old clothes, and his dirty old shoes had holes in them. He was a mess.

"I said to Mr. Thompson, 'Is that a tenant of yours?'

"Thompson answered, 'Yes.'

"I said, 'Well he certainly isn't a millionaire, is he?'

"Thompson answered, 'No, he certainly isn't a millionaire, but he was when he came here.' "

One of our activities was shuffleboard. With only fifty parking spaces we could not be expected to have too many expert players. Also, most of our people played for fun and relaxation. Sometimes you would see players on the courts

with a shuffleboard stick in one hand and a highball in the other.

But in certain other parks shuffleboard was almost a way of life. Intrapark and interpark tournaments were an everyday feature, and to win a regional or state tournament was the aim of the park's best team.

In such places players practice religiously, and as a result achieve a degree of skill completely beyond that of the average person who relaxes on the court and spends more time kidding than shooting.

Treasure Island Trailer Park, a 208-space park a half mile down the road from Aliso, was a shuffleboard hotbed. One day a committee from there called on us. They invited us to take part in an interpark tournament. The committee was insulting, in a pleasant sort of way, and the invitation was more than a simple offer, it was a challenge and a dare.

Naturally we accepted. And just as naturally we tried to figure out a way to ruin the show they expected to put on at our expense.

The tournament was to start at 7:30 P.M. on a Friday night. We waited until 7:35 before getting ready to leave home base. We sent our rooters ahead to get good seats before the Treasure Islanders monopolized the front rows. With the rooters went a hired band and cheerleaders.

Then we loaded all the shuffleboard sticks in the park into golf bags and caddy carts, and put them in a pick-up truck. Driving this was Al Fernette, one of our guests, wearing white coveralls with "Aliso Park" embroidered on the back. With him went a helper, another tenant wearing an identical set of coveralls. These gentlemen led our procession.

Following this impressive setup was a Cadillac driven by

Bob Gramble. Bob was our water boy. He wore white pants and a sweat shirt with our insignia on the back, and carried a towel and bucket of iced champagne.

Seated alongside Bob was another tenant. He was the official doorman, and his rented costume was identical with that worn by the doorman at the Waldorf-Astoria.

After this entourage came six more chauffeur-driven Cadillacs, each with a team member lounging on the back seat. As each Cadillac arrived at Treasure Island the doorman opened the door and handed out the player. No sooner was the player on his feet than the custodian of the cues carefully wiped off a stick with a linen towel and handed it to him. Then the water boy ceremoniously poured a glass of champagne, and the player gracefully sipped it while moving languidly toward the shuffleboard court!

The stands were in an uproar. Our band played marching songs. Our rooters followed the cheerleaders in slightly ribald cheers. Pandemonium, Aliso style, raged unrestricted. During the turmoil I pilfered the National Shuffleboard Rule Book, the only one on the grounds.

As play got under way we began to protest shots. Soon we were objecting to rulings on every shot, and asking to see the rule book proving our points were ill taken. As the rule book had vanished we continued the match under protest.

When the tournament was half over we announced that we would not continue since we were forced to contend with officials that were not only inefficient and unfair, but obviously corrupt.

I called up the six Cadillacs. One by one our players took their seats, sitting mournfully and with bowed heads. Our cues were gathered into the truck. The band and cheerleaders

departed, followed by our rooters. Cadillacs and trucks followed them.

The match was over.

The day after the tournament George Slauger, one of my tenants, told me a friend was coming to the park with two distinguished guests from Georgia. One was a state senator, and the other an executive of the famous Southern newspaper, the Atlanta *Constitution*. George wanted me to give them a typical Aliso welcome.

We did.

Next to George's trailer we improvised a flagpole. We rented a Confederate flag and hoisted it to the top of the pole. When the guests arrived they had no difficulty finding their host's trailer: the Stars and Bars could be seen for over half a mile.

They were gracious guests, and that evening practically everyone in the park dropped in for a word and a drink.

Early the next day I got a telephone call from the commander of the Laguna Beach American Legion Post. It seemed that as he went by the park that morning he had noticed a foreign flag flying on a pole. He was pretty annoyed, and informed me it was illegal to fly any foreign flag unless the Stars and Stripes was flown above it. He recited almost the whole code book on flag flying.

I explained that this was not a foreign flag, and he should read further in his code book before getting all steamed up. I said, however, that there might be a few people as ignorant as he about flag flying, and to keep them from wasting any more of my time with telephone calls I would remove the Confederate emblem.

Then I went over to George's and told his guests of the

call I had received, and said that under the circumstances I would be forced to haul down the Stars and Bars.

The Georgia senator stood up, raised his glass to arm's length, and said: "Sir, when it was legal to fly that flag no flag flew above it, but since we are in Yankee country, my friend and I will retire to the trailer while you strike the colors."

10

We now had two major projects ahead of us. One was our park election; the other a play in which we planned to use our local talent.

One of our tenants was writer Arthur Binswanger, who wrote a really humorous play for this occasion. From among our people we recruited a full cast, and started rehearsals.

As a gag I started telling everyone that the entertainment would be in the form of a radio broadcast, and would be on the air from coast to coast. As time went on this story snowballed. More and more people asked for details, and I got more and more involved. Finally I realized it was impossible to untangle myself from the web I had unwittingly spun. So I fitted all the parts of the story together in a way that made sense—even to me, if I didn't listen too closely to myself.

For instance, I told everyone that the show was going over the Coast Network through the local station at Oceanside. This sounded good, unless you knew there was no radio station at Oceanside. Apparently I was pretty convincing, because shortly before the show was to go on Helen and I were riding up the coast when she turned to me and said, "Let's

turn off at Oceanside. I want to see the radio station that's supposed to broadcast our play."

Rehearsals went on almost every afternoon and evening. It was serious business, with the lounge closed to non-participants in the play, and all tenants asked to refrain from making unnecessary noise near the recreation building.

One of our tenants wrote a singing commercial for the "sponsors" of the show, Rappaport's Rough and Ready Dog Food. Four little girls, about five years old, rehearsed this commercial time and again, while a guest played the organ.

One afternoon Leonard Johnson, head of Columbia Studios' music department, who was visiting Dorothy Manners, a well-known writer, came into the lounge. He listened to the kids rehearsing their song and finally went over to the organ, picked up the music, and examined it closely. He made a few changes, and finally became so interested that he called the studio, took the rest of the week off, rewrote the music entirely, and spent most of each day rehearsing the five-year-olds. As a result, their singing commercial was the biggest hit in the show.

I started to worry as the fateful night approached. Practically every guest in the park was inviting friends down to see the "broadcast." By this time I was actually afraid to tell anyone the truth.

In desperation I called Dorothy Manners in Hollywood, and asked if she would invite down two or three people well-known in show business who would be willing to work in my simulated radio broadcast. Like a good sport she agreed to try. She got hold of Buster Collier of movie and television fame, Skeets Gallagher, and John Sutton. I did my part to make the thing look authentic, renting several

tape recorders, six microphones, and various and sundry pieces of sound equipment. I assembled so much stuff that when Collier walked in and saw the mass of equipment he said, "My God, you've got more equipment than National Broadcasting and C.B.S. combined."

This was at 5:30 in the afternoon and he and I, with Sutton and Gallagher, got everything lined up. At show time we had a half-hour warm-up, with John Sutton acting as master of ceremonies. We had an overflow audience of perhaps two hundred people. The lounge couldn't accommodate them all, and we were forced to remove windows so some could stay on the back patio and still see and hear what was going on.

Sutton explained how a radio broadcast worked, pointing out the red light hanging from the ceiling and the sign saying "On the Air." He also explained the purpose of big placards reading SILENCE and APPLAUSE.

He emphasized that the show was not only a direct broadcast, but was to be recorded for rebroadcasting at a time more convenient for some other stations.

Part of his warm-up was humorous, as is the custom, and intended to put the audience at ease. He read several telegrams in his impeccable British accent. The last telegram he held up, saying: "I cawn't make anything of this, but I'll read it anyway. It goes like this: 'Drop Dead.' It's signed 'Treasure Island.'"

Suddenly the red light began blinking. Sutton warned, "When the light goes on steadily we're on the air." Our prop man held up the SILENCE sign. It worked like magic. You could hear a pin being pulled out of a pincushion.

The show was even funnier than we had hoped, but the audience's reaction was wonderful. The SILENCE card drew total and absolute silence. When the APPLAUSE card was shown the din almost tore down the hall.

This was the best-received show I've ever put on, and fortunately I escaped with my life, thanks to Dorothy Manners, Skeets Gallagher, John Sutton, and Buster Collier.

To this day there isn't a soul in that park who doesn't think we were on the air from coast to coast. Many times I have been embarrassed by tenants introducing me to their friends and explaining that I was the man responsible for the first broadcast from a trailer park. When this happens I always try to change the subject or find an excuse to go elsewhere.

Almost every day one or the other of our park committees met. After such a meeting Mrs. Grable invited us to her trailer for a cup of coffee. She went ahead, and Lieutenant Commander Bratley and I, with two or three other tenants, followed.

It was always a pleasure to visit Mrs. Grable's trailer. She had spent six years in India and gathered some impressive works of art, and her trailer was beautifully decorated in an Indian motif. Every stick of furniture in it was a collector's item. Every time I visited her she seemed to have added another antique or curio to her collection, for her friends in India were constantly sending gifts.

This day she entered the trailer, screamed, and came running out. She was trembling so badly that I took hold of her arm. I thought she was going to faint.

"What's the matter?" asked Commander Bratley.

"A rattlesnake. A rattlesnake coiled up on my marble table."

Bratley reached down, picked up an iron pipe that was part of an awning frame, and stepped inside. I was right behind him. On the marble table was a coiled snake with pink eyes flashing in the sunlight.

Bratley, with the true heroism of an old sea dog, stepped forward. He raised his arm; the iron pipe flashed in the light streaming through the door, and he struck the snake violently. In an instant he had demolished the snake, and also the marble table, a priceless antique.

The snake was a plastic one, sent as a gift from friends in India, and Mrs. Grable's son had unpacked and placed it on the table, not even dreaming that anyone could think it was alive.

The shocked dismay on Bratley's face was something to see. Mrs. Grable looked perfectly blank and perfectly white. She said nothing except, "My poor table." Fortunately she was a good sport and did not blame the Commander for his heroism.

Some time later she wrote her friends in India telling them what had happened. She showed me the letter she received in reply. It said: "We are sending you another snake. Sorry we can't afford to send you another table."

11

Soon after this the tenants decided the park was being run like a dictatorship, and insisted this situation should be changed immediately. A group gathered as a nominating convention for various offices, among them those of Mayor, Fire Chief, and Tide Watcher.

My guests decided that one party would not be much better than the autocracy that already existed, so they formed two others. Each offered a full slate of candidates, and each was headed by a prominent trailerist.

Harold Buckmazor guided the Black Top Party; Pearcy Bean represented the Silk Stocking Party; and Esther Townser headed up the Women's Party, commonly called the Fair Fem Party, or the Fair Fems.

The Fair Fems could, if they held their members in line, easily dominate any election, for there were far more women than men in the park. Therefore the main effort of the other parties was to win votes away from the Fair Fems. Bribery and corruption were the order of the day; not individual bribery, but a mass attempt to buy votes by means of parties and social events.

First the Silk Stocking Party gave a dance, then the Black

Top Party (from Incinerator Row) gave a dance followed by free refreshments. It got so there were no nights available for me to give a party of my own.

The most successful parties were given by "Buck" Buckmazor's Black Tops, and he seemed to be winning voters right and left until the fatal night of the Big Blow Out. For the Blow Out an outside orchestra was brought in, along with a first-class floor show, and Buck threw a party to end all parties.

Buck was master of ceremonies. As the entertainment drew to a close he put new life into the party by offering a loving cup, filled with olives, to the woman who could make the funniest face. The result was some of the oddest facial contortions seen this side of a midway. Finally, Buck announced that the judges had selected as winner Esther Townser of the Fair Fem Party.

Esther walked up to the stage and waited patiently while Buck made a flowery presentation of the cup. Then it was her turn. She stepped to the microphone. "Ah, pshaw," she said demurely. "Ah can't believe Ah'm the winner. Why, Ah wasn't even playin' the game."

Our big Western Party was scheduled about this time, but my politically minded tenants wouldn't let me use the recreation hall. This was an odd situation: a park manager begging his tenants for an evening's use of the lounge so he could entertain them.

It took a great deal of effort to arrange a truce enabling me to go ahead with the party, even though it was to be one of the biggest events of the year.

Finally I arranged a date, and we mailed printed invitations to all the tenants. At a meeting of everyone in the park

we made general plans. Because we expected a large crowd we decided to hold the party outdoors. That would make it possible to accommodate four hundred people.

One of my tenants was a retired studio set builder; he took complete charge of the staging. The stage was a raised section of the patio. We built an orchestra "pit" on the clubhouse roof. The decorating committee transformed the lounge into an old-fashioned Western saloon. This had a sawdust-covered floor, a thirty-two-foot bar, and a small dance floor with a stage at one end. No Western movie ever had a more Western saloon than this one.

When the tenants saw the layout they began collecting all the Western gear they could get their hands on. We were sure of having the most wildly dressed Westerners ever seen on stage or film.

At a Western party as authentic as ours there could be only one main dish, barbecued buffalo. Two tenants, experienced in giving big barbecues, took charge of this. They dug a pit at the far end of the park, and the day before the big show the meat was wrapped and placed in the pit, and the hole covered over.

Reservations poured in. Our guests were allowed to bring friends at a charge of six dollars per person, and the forty tenants requested over five hundred tickets. I had to limit the number, because we could handle only 440 diners.

Part of our property was across the Coast Highway and joined to the park by an underpass. On this land we laid out a parking lot. Our car attendants were Hollywood cowboys, and for transportation to the park proper we had burros. As guests arrived their cars were parked and they were assisted, by force if necessary, to a burro's hurricane

deck. Pictures were taken of this great adventure, and later mailed to the guests.

The meat was delicious, and for many of our guests it was the first time they had seen, much less eaten "buffalo." They must have liked it, for they cleaned up practically a whole animal.

After the feast everyone went into the saloon, which was complete with Western band, extra fiddlers, ten-cents-a-dance girls, a top TV Western floor show including the Cass County Boys, and a bar over which passed 2,400 drinks in that one day. Strangely enough, no one seemed to get drunk.

We started our floor show by proving that Aliso was always first with the latest. Two cowgirls on burros rode onto the dance floor, their arms loaded with the latest edition of the *Aliso Abalone* which, unlike less progressive papers, printed the news before it happened. This particular edition contained a full report on the Western Party now getting under way.

Our guests enjoyed reading what they were going to do before they did it, and I am sure a large metropolitan daily operating on this principle would have an exceptional increase in circulation.

It took us two days to clean the place up after the Western Party.

By then the election campaign was really hot.

Slogans appeared on banners scattered around the park. Every trailer was plastered with placards. The most dignified campaign was conducted by the Silk Stocking Party, headed by Pearcy Bean, whose slogan was: "Long, Lean and Clean—Elect Bean." But the red-hot battle was between Esther Townser and her Fair Fem Party, and Buck Buckmazor and the Black Top Party. Neither of them missed a trick.

The Fair Fems printed posters with such slogans as "Down with the Men—Vote for the Fem." Not only did they plaster these miniature billboards on every trailer, but they covered some of the oddest places with their election literature. One morning a six-foot pennant waved from the TV mast, and this slogan slapped in the breeze: "Be a Smart Investor—Pass up Buck and vote for Esther."

Buckmazor corralled the best writers in the park, and conducted the most vigorous political campaign since the War Between the States. Every trailer in the park was liberally plastered with cards bearing his sales pitch, and people drove for miles just to read the posters. We had so many visitors you would have thought we were running our own Festival of Arts.

Buck's campaign slogan was: "Three Olives in Every Martini."

A few of his other slogans were:

"Men, wherever you roam be the boss of your home: Vote for Buck."

"Laugh and Grin with a Shot of Gin: Vote for Buck."

"If your wife is a meany give her a Martini: Vote for Buck."

The whole place was in an uproar and I often wonder what prospective tenants thought as they strolled through the park. Perhaps they imagined that Aliso was a nuthouse, and all the tenants first-class nuts. Sometimes I got to thinking I was either the head keeper or a privileged inmate. I wasn't sure which.

On the night before the election the Fair Fem Party re-

served the lounge for one last big party. When this broke up at 3:00 A.M., the women formed a torchlight parade. They started at one end of the park and went through every trailer in the park, entering by the front door and leaving by the back door.

A few of our tenants were trying to lead normal lives, and had gone to bed long before the party broke up. Most of them took it as a joke. A few became mildly indignant. And one, Don Graib, decided to have his revenge on the party members and their adherents.

Don was an executive in a large mail-order house, who came down to the park on week ends to get away from business pressure. He and his wife were sound asleep when the celebrants wound through their home, and awoke with an unpleasant start.

At 5:00 A.M. the paraders returned to their trailers, completely exhausted. Don gave them time to get in bed and, he hoped to sleep. At 7:00 A.M. he rose, dressed, got a tire iron, and went over to the trailer of one Fair Fem he had recognized in the semi-darkness. He crawled under the trailer, located the plumbing, and began to beat on it with the tire iron.

The clang of iron on iron, multiplied and multiplied again by the boxiness of the trailer, which acted as an echo chamber, turned the interior of the rig into a boiler shop. The occupants shot straight up in bed. Without bothering to throw on robes they rushed outside and peered under the trailer.

There was Don Graib . . . pounding.

Nothing would induce him to stop but the name of another parader. Without hesitation they gave it to him. He

then withdrew from beneath the trailer, bowed graciously, and went on to the next Fair Fem trailer, where he repeated the performance.

He soon gathered a following. Almost thirty people tracked him from trailer to trailer. As each couple was rudely awakened they joined the group.

The last trailer he attacked was a brand-new monster, one of the latest models with all plastic plumbing. Don crawled into position just below the toilet, hauled back and struck the pipe a mighty blow. It shattered into a thousand pieces, and he was drenched from head to foot.

A howl went up from the crowd. Don wriggled his way out from beneath the trailer, picked up his tire iron, and quietly returned to his own home. The next day he paid without comment a forty-two-dollar repair bill.

The election was to be held at 2:00 P.M. and an inaugural ball was scheduled for the evening. At 1:30 the candidates paraded through the park. The Fair Fem Party led off with Mrs. Townser riding on a float. She was dressed as a queen and surrounded by four princesses. Next came the Buckmazor Band Wagon, led by a ten-piece brass band. After the Band Wagon came floats, each bearing a candidate of the Buckmazor Black Top Party. Following this impressive entourage came a giant highway sweeper bearing a banner reading: "Sweep it clean with Bean." On this rode Pearcy Bean, head of the Silk Stocking Party. Behind him fifty women marched in close formation, each with a broom on her shoulder. Now we knew why the Fair Fem portion of the parade was so small. A deal had been made. Buck was in the soup.

The parade continued, winding in and out and around the

park. Traffic on the Coast Highway, just above the park, came to a halt. Soon cars were backed up for a mile on each side of Aliso Park.

Then the cops came. The sergeant hopped out of a patrol car and wanted to know who was in charge. That was me. Out came his book and he said something about a citation for disturbing the peace.

I told him the parade was almost over, and we wouldn't hold another parade for a long time, so he put his book away. Perhaps he couldn't think of the particular law we were violating.

For all practical purposes the election was over, but Buckmazor was not one to take defeat easily. He fought to the last olive. He had had a stand built near the voting booth, and as each tenant came up he handed him a Buckmazor badge and a martini with three olives in it. But the result was inevitable. Buck got only three votes, although he had four campaign managers.

Only one candidate was unopposed. This was eighty-six-year-old Dad Barlum, one of those rare characters everybody loves, who was unanimously elected to the job of Fire Chief.

Originally Dad pulled into the park from Oregon to visit friends. I happened to have a small space unoccupied at the time, so I let Dad pull his travel trailer in for a day or two. It was my custom, when a trailerist came by to visit a tenant, to put him up free of charge for a few days if I had a vacant space. So I told Dad that his stay was on the house.

He was extremely grateful because he definitely could not afford to live at Aliso. After a day or two of his company we felt we could not afford to let him go. So Dad stayed, al-

ways the first to volunteer to help anyone, always the first to take part in our parties or shows.

A few days after the election we gave him a birthday party. There were two gifts that he prized: One was a fire chief's hat and the other a framed scroll with a verse addressed to him. It went something like this:

> In a little green trailer set out on the street
> Lives a swell little feller so dapper and neat;
> He minds his own business but is friendly and kind,
> With regards to the rent he is never behind;
> As a shuffleboard player he bends a mean cue
> And tells all the experts just what to do;
> Let's drink a toast to his birthday,
> Hold your glasses up high.
> To George P. T. Barlum, just a regular guy.
>
> The Gang from Aliso

The morning after the presentation a tenant went by Dad's trailer to say hello. No one answered his knock. He opened the door and went in. There lay Dad, dead, his new fire chief's hat in one hand, the scroll tightly clenched in the other. Dad had outlived his birthday party by only a few minutes.

In his will he said that his time at Aliso had been the happiest of his life. He instructed me to sell his trailer and use the money for burial expenses. But first we were to take ten dollars and buy something which would remind us of him. He said he wanted no period of mourning: it would please him best if we continued with all our activities exactly as if he were there to join in the fun.

We turned the trailer over to his relatives and took up a

collection in the park. Dad Barlum had the type of funeral he deserved.

Ten dollars was set aside, and with it we purchased a leather-bound scrapbook. In this was kept a record of park parties and shows, just as Dad would have wished. I never touched this book without thinking of him.

12

One of my associates had a friend in the park. When this trailerite went out of town for a few weeks my associate made arrangements to borrow his trailer for his brother to use during a vacation.

The brother and his wife arrived. I showed them to the trailer, and they moved in. That night, while making my usual rounds, I stopped to inquire how things were going.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "could I talk to you for a few minutes?"

"Certainly." I went into the patio, and he invited me to sit down.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "you know I am a retired missionary?"

"Yes."

"You know my brother is of the same faith?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Thompson, I notice you sell beer and tobacco."

"Of course."

"I looked on your bulletin board and saw that you are having dances on Friday and Saturday nights."

"That's right."

"Do you know we are strongly opposed to smoking, drinking, and dancing?"

"I've heard something of the sort."

"Now, Mr. Thompson, I'd like to ask a question."

"Go ahead."

"How much business would you lose if you were to stop holding dances, and if you discontinued the sale of beer and tobacco?"

"I think we could dry up the swimming pool and none of our tenants would move out."

"Mr. Thompson, have you ever considered giving up your beer license and forbidding people to drink?"

I thought a moment. One of the things I'd learned in the park business was never to say "No." Finally I answered. "Yes, I have considered it. But I polled my tenants in the park and found most of them are Mormons. Now they are opposed to drinking coffee, and as they are in the majority here it seems to me we should first forbid people to drink coffee in their trailers. Then, if that works out, we can go on to the smoking, drinking, and dancing."

My new guest's face slowly turned red. "Well," he said, "I'm going to take this up with my brother."

This was the last I heard of the matter for a long time.

One of my best-liked tenants was Tom Granger. He and his wife, Wilma, could always be counted on to assist at parties, shows, or any other park activities.

Tom came from a well-to-do family. We understood that once his people had been very wealthy but because of Tom's activities their fortunes were now somewhat depleted. Not that Tom dissipated, or got into trouble with women, or

wrecked automobiles. He just had an unfortunate habit of rushing into new business ventures. Without exception these were failures.

Seldom did any of his business transactions or experiments last more than two weeks. So varied were his experiences that his wife started to write a book entitled: *What's Tom Doing Now?*

Some of the others in the park followed his activities intently. These fellows made book on his deals, giving odds as to how long he would pursue a given activity, and how much it would cost his family to get him out of it.

Typical of Tom's projects was one that had its beginning at the Festival of Arts in Laguna Beach. When a group of us attended the festival, Tom saw a candlemaker plying his trade. The man fascinated him. Tom stayed in the shop long after we left, and we smelled a deal brewing.

Several days later he called me to his trailer. Papers were strewn all over his table, and enthusiasm was in the air.

"Rex," he said, "this is definitely it."

These were the words he always used when figuring out a way to lose money. I had heard them countless times. So had everyone else in the park, including our amateur bookmakers.

I sighed. "What's it?"

He began to talk. This was a merchandising scheme. He was going into the mail-order business. The candlemaker would make a perfumed candle three inches in diameter and four inches long. Tom had given him an order for nine thousand candles; the fellow had leased additional property, ordered larger kettles, and would be in production within a week.

Tom had designed a wire rack for the candle. This was no ordinary rack. Not only would it hold the candle, but the base would accommodate plates of food and cups of coffee.

Tom was not content to merchandise candles and racks. So long as he had to advertise to sell these items he figured he might as well include something else that would sell easily at the same time. He showed me a magazine ad offering a magnetized pot holder that would stick to a stove without hooks. These were offered wrapped as Christmas gifts and shipped on receipt of a dollar bill. Tom figured that he would get a rate on these if he ordered in wholesale quantities, so he intended to advertise them as well as the candles and racks.

Tom bought full-page ads in most of the trailer magazines. Letters addressed to him flowed into the park office at the rate of fifty a day. It looked as if he would get rich on this deal. After a few days I went over to see him. He sat at a desk covered with letters and dollar bills, yet he was the saddest-looking man I have ever seen.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He handed me a letter. I read it quickly, for it was short and sweet.

DEAR SIR:

We thank you for your letter of the first. We regret to inform you that we are sold out of our patented pot holders but will be pleased to make some up especially for your account. Your cost F.O.B. Dayton, Ohio, will be $1.75 each.

Very truly yours,

Since Tom was advertising these pot holders for one dollar each, a cost of $1.75 did not leave him much margin of profit.

"How many candles have you sold?" I asked. "If you sell enough you won't have to worry about the pot holders."

Tom grunted.

Wilma came in from the back of the trailer.

She answered my question. "This is our only order. Look at it." She handed me a letter.

It was a request for one candle and holder. I looked at the letterhead. The order was from a rival candlemaker at Laguna Beach.

I quietly left the room.

Tom received, and returned, 2,400 dollar bills. He got no more orders for candles. The manufacturer of the candle racks sued, and was paid off by Tom's folks. The candlemaker had no contract, and no firm order, so he did not sue. Instead he went bankrupt, and if you happen to want 8,999 candles I know where you can get them cheap.

But it was in our park that Tom caused the greatest commotion. Our bookmakers didn't want to pay off. They had given odds of three to one that Tom wouldn't last thirty days in this business experiment. The bettors wanted their money. They claimed that Tom wasn't out of business until the wire-rack manufacturer sued and the candlemaker went out of business.

The bookmakers would have none of this. They refused to pay off because they claimed that this time Tom had never really been in business at all.

13

We settled down for a quiet time. No official activities, no big parties. Nothing, Helen and I thought, could possibly upset the even tenor of our ways. But our tenants were capable of making their own excitement; they needed little assistance from me.

Take the case of Ed Fuller.

Mrs. Fuller went off to see her parents. Ed stayed behind. He would rather fish than eat, and a visit to Mrs. Fuller's mother held no appeal for him.

Ed fished every day but Sunday, and sometimes on Sunday too, after church. On this particular Sunday he was returning from church when a friend walked by with a big corbina fresh out of the surf. When Ed heard that corbina were being pulled in right and left he hurried down to the beach. Sure enough, corbina were being hooked: two were battling in the surf at that very minute.

Ed, a true fisherman, went wild with excitement. He got out on the wet sand, so close to the surf that a wave soaked him to the top of his pants. This didn't disturb him. He hurried home, changed his clothes, turned on the stove, threw his wet pants over it to dry, and hurried back to the beach with his fishing equipment.

Two of our practical jokers saw him rush in to his trailer sopping wet and come out with dry clothes. When he was gone they peeked in the trailer. There were Ed's pants on the stove. They removed the pants, got some old rags, reduced them to ashes and strewed the ashes over the stove. When Ed returned he assumed the stove had gotten too hot and his pants had burned. He was so sure of this that he called in all his neighbors to show them the tragic sight.

Naturally they commiserated with him, but each and every one said it was a wonder the trailer itself hadn't burned to the ground.

When Mrs. Fuller returned Ed repeated the whole story. She told him he was stupid to use the trailer for a drying yard, and there the matter was dropped.

Two weeks later a package, addressed in a dainty feminine hand, arrived from San Diego. It was for Mr. Ed Fuller. Mrs. Fuller opened it, and found Ed's pants.

The air turned blue. Mrs. Fuller was ready to pack up and return to Mother, for good. This is a dreadful threat in the land of Community Property, and Ed tried in vain to convince her of his innocence. Finally he turned to me.

I spent hours with Mrs. Fuller giving her all the details of the joke, which she found far from funny. But after two or three days she agreed that perhaps, after all, it was a joke. And if it was a trick of our park funsters, then, of course, Ed was not at fault. In that case she would forget the whole thing. To this day, though, I don't think she fully believes that Ed didn't forget his pants in San Diego.

One of my better-known tenants was a Mrs. Branton. Her grandfather was one of the founders of a major oil com-

pany, and also founder of one of the colleges on the Coast. Mrs. Branton followed in his path. She had given over eleven million dollars to this same college.

Despite her fabulous background Mrs. Branton was a regular gal. When she was "at home" in her trailer, neighbors were always welcome to drop in for a cocktail, and almost every night a half dozen or so of them did.

One afternoon she asked me to tell the people who were in the habit of calling that she would not be "at home" that night. The President of the college and the entire Board of Regents would be out for a barbecue. I passed this information on, and forgot the whole matter.

I went to bed at midnight, leaving the lights shining in the patio and around the swimming pool. Some trailer lights were still on around the park, and Mrs. Branton's trailer was lit up. Evidently her guests had not left.

About two o'clock I woke with a start. People were on the patio and around the swimming pool. I threw on a robe and went down to the lounge. It was dark there, and no one could see in, but I could see out.

Mrs. Branton, the President of the college, the Board of Regents, and all their ladies were standing around the pool, laughing and talking. Both men and women were formally dressed, and might have been at the Waldorf or St. Regis instead of Aliso Trailer Park.

The President's wife moved close to the pool. The other women followed, looking down at the submerged lights and the rippling water. Suddenly the President put his hand on his wife's back and shoved.

She hit the water with a splash, threw up her hands and sank, came up and sank again. No one moved. She went down for the third time.

One of the members of the Board of Regents, without so much as taking off his coat, jumped in, dived down, and towed her to the shallow end of the pool.

The crowd gathered around. Two of the men half led, half carried the victim to Mrs. Branton's trailer. The President followed.

I went back to bed.

Several weeks later the President and his wife returned to the park, and he spoke to me as I passed Mrs. Branton's trailer. During our conversation I told him what I had seen that night, and asked why he had done it.

He laughed. "Mr. Thompson," he said, "ever since I was a little boy I've had an almost uncontrollable urge to push anyone standing near a swimming pool. The other night I yielded to the compulsion, and I feel better than I have in years. I believe a great weight has been lifted from my subconscious."

I wanted to ask his wife, who was inside the trailer, what she thought of this method of unweighing the subconscious, but I refrained.

I did ask the President, "Have you ever thought of buying a trailer and moving into Aliso?"

He looked at me strangely and shook his head. Apparently he didn't understand the reason for my question.

If his wife hadn't come out just then, I might have sold him on mobile living. It was too bad. If ever a man belonged in Aliso he was the man.

Mr. and Mrs. Wills did a lot of entertaining, and their patio was one of the park's show places. Mrs. Wills was also very active in their church. For years she sang in the choir; as a matter of fact, she still does. Most of her parties

were for church members, and while everyone had a good time the parties were in the best of taste and on the dignified side.

In all the time the Wills lived in the park Mrs. Wills had only one complaint. The lock on her rest room door would not work. She mentioned this to me a dozen times, and I always said it would be fixed within a day or so. But for some reason I could never remember to order another one. As a result she commented that I had the perfect system for managing a park: Promise them everything and give them nothing.

On one particular Sunday she was expecting a group of church people down to visit. She happened to see my maintenance man and reminded him of the lock on the rest room door. He came over to the office and told me of the conversation. Mrs. Wills was quite insistent that the lock be fixed at once.

We got an idea. One of our tenants had gone on a three-months trip, and certainly had no immediate use for the lock on his rest room. We went over to his place and dismantled it. We installed the lock on Mrs. Wills' rest room door.

We had forgotten to bring a key, so we left the door ajar and I went back to the office to get a master key and make sure the door would work. If everything was O.K. I'd leave the key with Mrs. Wills. She would certainly be pleased at the prompt service.

I got the key, walked back to the Wills patio, which by now was filling up with guests, went up to the rest room, put the key in the lock, and flung the door wide.

There, sitting quietly, was one of the Wills' guests.

She turned red. So did I. It must have taken me over a minute to slam the door, remove the key, and get out of there.

Later that afternoon I was walking by the Wills trailer when Mrs. Wills noticed me. "Come in, Rex," she said, "I want you to meet my guests."

The first one I saw was the lady of the rest room. It was too late to back away.

I said, "Pardon me, madam, but I believe we have met before."

Mrs. Willis said, "How could that be? Mrs. Engle has just arrived from Chicago."

I said, "I remember you, Mrs. Engle. Do you remember me?"

Said Mrs. Engle. "If I live to be a hundred years old I'll never forget you."

14

Next on the schedule was the biggest party of the year, our *luau*. This demanded a lot of committee work. One night one of these committees was meeting in the lounge when Mrs. Muller came running in.

"There's a skunk in my rest room." She was very pale and shaking noticeably.

We all went down to her patio and stood around outside the rest room.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Muller.

"Mrs. Muller," I said. "I leased the property to you. It's as much your responsibility as if you owned it. I have no objection whatsoever to your keeping skunks in your rest room, or anything else you might want to keep there, but I don't consider it a park operator's job to get rid of your guests when you get tired of their company."

What I meant was that I wasn't about to go in there and tangle with a live skunk.

My wife Helen said nothing. She walked over to the rest room door, and we all faded back.

She opened the door and went in. No skunk was in sight.

Since each rest room had a closet, it was apparent that the skunk had retired there.

Helen got down on her hands and knees and began talking. It sounded as if she were coaxing a kitten. She kept talking, and we saw her gently open the closet door to its fullest extent. The closet was filled with clothes, and the skunk was snuggled down among some dresses that had fallen to the floor.

Helen kept whispering baby talk. We listened attentively. The skunk listened attentively. We could see it turn its head so as to hear better. This went on for five minutes. Finally, whatever Helen was telling the skunk must have sunk in, for the animal decided the coast was clear. It got up leisurely, walked out of the closet and right past Helen. She reached down and picked it up by its tail and the scruff of its neck.

I had heard that a skunk was harmless if you kept its tail up, but I never expected to see my wife prove the theory.

Some one said, "Take it down to the end of the park and we'll kill it."

Helen stamped her foot, but her grip on the skunk's tail never weakened. "No," she said. "This skunk was nice to me and I'm going to be nice to it."

She carried the animal down the beach, walked a little way up the hillside, and turned it loose. We all stood back—far back—and waited for the blast. It never came. Apparently that skunk wasn't going to be outdone when it came to courtesy. It sauntered away into the brush with only one polite backward look.

We returned to the lounge and tried to go on with our meeting, but we couldn't, even though we parked Helen at

the opposite end of the room. The skunk had acted like a gentleman—or a lady—but our noses wouldn't believe it. We smelled skunk, though there was no skunk.

The meeting broke up and Helen took a bath, protesting all the time that the skunk was as sweet and clean as a kitten. Maybe so, but it was a week before I could smell Helen's hair without wincing.

Much work remained to be done. A committee of women was appointed to make *leis,* another to decorate the lounge. The men were organized to work on the stage and stage-set for the *luau.*

The *lei*-making turned into quite a production. Every afternoon women gathered in the lounge and went to work threading *leis.*

Another group of women also used the lounge, and the fact that a social group of *lei*-makers was present worried them not a bit. This second group consisted of females who had started a reducing course, and nothing this side of Hades was going to stop them from reducing. The contortions they went through were awful and wonderful to behold. A favorite group exercise was to stretch out on the carpet and kick upwards and outwards. This was one of the more dignified exercises, and even this would cause me to turn my head and stuff a handkerchief in my mouth. If they caught me laughing my life would not be worth living.

It is surprising how much beefier a heavy woman looks stretched out on the floor, kicking, rolling, and twisting. Even more surprising is the effect when a dozen women

with a rather unequal distribution of weight kick and roll in unison.

But the *lei*-making went on, and quite a few people came in to see them work. The *lei*-makers, I mean.

It was an interesting sight.

We built an enclosure of palm fronds and bamboo around a half-acre plot adjoining the patio. A stage, raised about six inches, was set against the pool. The pool itself was used as a backdrop.

The day before the party a pig, beef, fish, and other eatables were placed in the barbecue pit and it was covered over.

Then came the great day.

The *luau* was typical of any other you may have attended —if it was at Aliso. The guests came early. We opened the bars early. We had two Hawaiian-type cocktail bars and served the so-called Hawaiian drinks. These concoctions taste like fruit juice and kick like an Arkansas mule. When it was time for the *luau* proper, the guests were in great good spirits. The celebration started off with a torchlight parade zig-zagging like a giant snake down through the park. Its leader wore an authentic costume copied from one worn by King Kamehameha.

The parade wound up at the pit. Six Hawaiians knelt, forming a circle around the pit. They went through all the impressive ancient ceremonies, the songs and prayers their ancestors had used down through the centuries when thanking the gods for food. Then the pit was uncovered and the food removed to the dining area.

The guests, naturally, followed the food.

Everything was excellent, except the pig. The chef had never barbecued a pig before, and had put cold stones in its innards instead of hot rocks. As a result the pig was raw.

That was the first time I had ever seen three hundred people eat raw pig.

Now came the floor show.

Ten Samoan natives, only three weeks in America, had been hired through a booking agent to put on an exhibition of native dances. None of them spoke English, and I had to converse with them through an interpreter. First they gave us a rather unimpressive slow dance. Next came a faster, but not much more interesting dance. Even though the stage was practically at ground level, and the first row of us feasters a few inches from the stage, we found nothing very exciting about this.

Suddenly one big fellow pounded his foot on the stage and grunted. Another Samoan reached back and came up with a knife. It had a small handle and about sixteen inches of razor-sharp blade.

He whirled it through the air, from one end of the stage to the other, and the fellow who had grunted caught it, whirled it around his head, threw it across his back, caught it in the other hand and slammed it back across the stage. It went so fast it looked like a flying dart and made a little keening whistle, something like a baby jet plane.

I ducked. I was right in the line of fire.

But he caught it and whirled it back to the other end of the stage. It looked like a wind blowing through a wheat field the way the audience ducked, except that some went to the right and some to the left.

Then the air was full of sharp knives whirling and darting from one end of the stage to the other. A dozen were in mid-flight at once. This was the famous Samoan knife dance, not the prettied-up show put on in this country, but the real thing. It was a genuine war dance, and the natives, sweating from their terrific exertions, shouted, pounded rhythmically on the floor with calloused bare feet, leaped high in the air, and flung spinning knives from one end of the stage to the other, often throwing a knife with their right hand as they caught another with their left.

What made it interesting to us was that the knives flew through the air exactly at head level. A miss would have meant one less tenant at Aliso, or a new park manager.

I can't say that anyone enjoyed the act, because it is pretty hard to enjoy anything when you're scared to death. Speaking for myself, all I can remember about it is that the knives were sharp enough to use for shaving, and all of them seemed to be coming right at my head.

The Samoan women were an odd-looking lot, tall, husky, and almost as big around as they were tall. Their teeth were black from chewing betel nut. It was the first time I ever had a girl flash her black teeth at me when she smiled.

After the show we had arranged for a couple of dance contests. In the first one these girls were to teach our women how to hula. This was something to see, because the Samoans did the native dance as it should be done, and the Samoan hula is a far cry from the Hawaiian hula. The Hawaiian hula tells any one of a hundred different stories. The Samoan hula tells just one story, and that one isn't hard to understand. The Hawaiians shake like a playful kitten. The

Samoan girls may be playful, but there's nothing kittenish about the way they shake. One of our girls managed to do a good imitation of this standing-swivel dance, and we gave her a beautiful prize.

Next came the men's contest. This was rigged in advance so that the poorest dancer in the park would win it. Not only was Ed Smith the poorest dancer in the park, he was probably the poorest excuse for a dancer who ever stepped on a dance floor.

I called him up to receive his prize. While I was making the presentation the tallest, fattest Samoan girl—she was also the one with the blackest teeth—walked up quietly behind him. When she was well settled I said, "Turn around and take your prize."

Ed turned, the girl grabbed him, crushed him to her bosom and planted a passionate kiss on his lips.

The crowd howled. Ed turned red and struggled to get loose, but the girl was bigger and stronger. She kept her lips pressed to his. It was a good three minutes before we could pry Ed away.

I have never seen a madder man. Nothing I could say would convince Ed the long kiss was not part of the gag. He kept saying: "I know you, Rex Thompson, I know you." The rest of his language can't be printed.

Next on the program was a gorgeous young Hawaiian girl M.G.M. had just brought over from Honolulu. When she danced on the stage every male in the audience took a deep breath. I asked an expert cameraman, Art Brown, to take a few pictures. He went up in front, set up his equipment, and proceeded to take a shot every time she moved

a hip. Only one thing went wrong. In his concentration he took sixteen pictures and only wound the film four times.

When we saw the pictures later Brown was given a new nickname. To this day if you go in the park and ask for Mr. Brown some one will say, "You mean Double Exposure Brown? He's right over there."

15

After our *luau* the park settled down to a normal existence. That is it was a normal existence for us, consisting of a movie a week, bingo, potlucks, dance instructions, and Saturday night dances. I was relaxed to the point of boredom, and was soon looking for a little excitement.

It was then that a group of park operators from the surrounding territory came by. They had a letter for me to sign. This was to be sent to all the trailer-park tenants on the Coast, and was to be signed by every park operator. The gist of the letter was praise for the coast climate, claiming it was the best in the world and could not be compared to weather enjoyed by those poor unfortunates who wintered in the desert.

Furthermore, said the letter, of all the desert weather, and of all the dusty, windy places, no place and no climate could be found to compare with that miserable spot, Palm Springs. That was not the exact wording, but after reading this epistle two or three times I got this general impression. In fact I almost believed Aliso was in the midst of Paradise, and Palm Springs was the capital of a desert Hades.

I knew the whys and wherefors of this masterpiece. During the winter most of the coast parks practically emptied, and most of the evacuating tenants went to Palm Springs. The park owners were trying to prevent this.

I refused to sign the letter. I did give them a list of my tenants so they could mail this round-robin affair to them if they wished. This was never done, and I certainly had no regrets.

But the incident gave me an idea. I immediately started writing copy for my next issue of the *Aliso Abalone*. This was the Palm Springs Edition, and came out about ten days before the big Palm Springs Rally and Show.

My lead editorial went like this:

> From November 5 through 8 it might be well for any vertigenious characters who have a tendency to disapprove of trailers to stay far away from Palm Springs, the fabulous winter playground, for it is on the above-mentioned dates that a flock of trailer magazine editors will descend on this oasis in the desert. The ball and hitch devotees will assemble at the Palm Springs Polo Grounds, and it is certain that this year's disturbance should out disturb any previous trailer get-together.
>
> The *Aliso Abalone* suggests and pleads that all inmates of Aliso Park make it a must to not only visit Palm Springs during this trailer rally, but to remain there for the entire winter program.
>
> It will prove interesting, educational, and enlightening to behold the galaxy of new model trailers that will be on display, and also to listen to the reports,

lectures, rumors, and gossip which will flow like water from the lips of some of the biggest tycoons in the trailer industry.

You will listen to trailer-park owners and managers from far and wide. These are the lovable folk who do so much to make your stay pleasant while you are shacked up on their 10×20-foot hunk of dirt.

Hark ye to the tall tales narrated by veterans of trailer travel who have piled up the mileage lugging their mobile homes all over the country for want of something better to do.

Yes, boys and gals, this Palm Springs Trailer Rally should be a humdinger, and when you return from the desert in the spring, and see the green country behind you and the blue Pacific in front of you, remember we told you so.

We went on to plead with our tenants, begging them to go to Palm Springs. We told them they would see the latest model Pan-American, a trailer famous for its huge sliding-glass entrance doors. The latest models, we told our readers and tenants, were all glass except the hitch.

We suggested they see the new Expando-Home, a trailer eight feet wide while on the road that expands to fifteen feet wide when parked. We offered them more than a preview of the latest model. We told them the latest brainstorm of Ralph Knott, Expando-Home president, was the Blimp. You could blow this up to any size your lot permitted, for it was made of rubber.

After gently maligning these excellent trailers we went on in a more serious vein, describing Palm Springs' beautiful mobile home parks, the interesting events, and the entertaining park programs which no true trailerist could afford to miss.

Apparently I didn't do a good selling job, for I was Aliso Park's only representative at the Palm Springs Rally. However, we didn't lose a single tenant that winter, and no other park along the coast could come close to making a statement like that.

One of our best-liked guests was Al Fernette, a foreign-car distributor from Riverside who was also crazy about boats. While staying with us he bought a twenty-one-foot Chris Craft, which was moored at Newport Beach.

After our usual Saturday night festivities, Al always made the rounds of the park to see who would go out boating the next day. This was routine. Every Saturday night he asked me, among others, to go out on Sunday, and every Sunday he and some of the other tenants went out—without Rex Thompson.

I have great confidence in automobiles, and none at all in boats. Also, Al had been driving a car for many years but the Chris Craft was the first boat he had owned.

One Sunday morning Al dragged me out of bed. He and some guests were going out. It was their first time in a small boat, and Al thought it would be wonderful if he added me to his collection of novitiates. Reluctantly I consented, mainly because this time Al wouldn't take no for an answer. But I knew he was going to have trouble. It was impossible that a crowd of amateurs would ever take a boat out and get back without trouble, especially with me along. Something is always happening to me, and when it

does I like to have firm ground under me so I can fall safely, or at least fall solidly.

The boat was one of hundreds at Newport, and very nearly the smallest. We all got aboard but Al. He took off his shoes and socks, threw them in the boat, rolled up his pant legs, shoved the boat out to deeper water, and crawled in. The whole operation was neat and quick, and the water never reached Al's knees.

We cruised easily out of the harbor, took a spin out to sea, dropped down and had a look at Aliso Park from the ocean, and then returned to Newport. Everything went perfectly. We rolled up to within a few feet of the beach, eased in expertly, and Al rolled up his pant legs again and stepped out of the boat so that he could nose it into the beach.

I was idly watching as he stepped off the stern. There was a splash, and the only thing visible was his hat floating on the water. While we were out at sea a dredge had come along, and where the water had barely covered the sand it was now a full fathom deep.

Al came up, floundered, splashed, and we pulled him back in. Wet and dripping, he drove back to his home in Riverside for a dry outfit.

I made my way home quietly, reflecting on the things that always happen to people who stay at Aliso.

The following Friday Mr. Wright came to see me. Wright was a good man and a good tenant. I liked him, but we didn't see eye to eye on many things.

Some people called Wright an honest, upright, righteous

man. Others, more uncharitable, said he was a religious fanatic. He did not understand people who enjoyed drinking, smoking, dancing, or the movies.

I verily believe he thought Aliso Park a den of iniquity. As I considered our guests the finest people in the world, who probably got as much or more from their religion as Wright did from his, Wright and I naturally had had a few friendly arguments in the past. At least they were friendly so far as I was concerned.

This afternoon he had with him two minister friends. I invited them into the office.

"What can I do for you?" I asked.

Wright smiled. "You have always contended that the guests at Aliso are as religious as any group in the country?"

I gave him a noncommittal "Yes."

"This is Friday, and your movie night, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"My friends have brought down one of the finest religious movies ever made."

"So?"

"I dare you to put it on tonight. I don't think six people will attend if you do."

"I already have a movie scheduled."

"But you haven't announced it yet," said Wright triumphantly. "Put this on instead, and see how many of your 'religious' tenants will come to the movies."

He had me. I got up and lit my cigar. "All right. You get ready to roll your movie. There'll be a good turnout."

I have never seen more skeptical expressions than those

worn by the two ministers and Wright. Actually I had few doubts that people would come to see the movie. It was Friday night, the usual movie night. People set that evening aside to see a show, and I didn't think it made much difference what we put on.

I started out as usual on my regular Friday night routine. It was my custom, in order to insure a good turnout, to notify everyone in the park that a show would soon be on and that I expected them to be there.

I went up to the first trailer.

"In forty-five minutes," said I, "we'll be showing our movie."

"What kind of a movie is it?" asked my tenant.

"Mr. Wright has obtained a wonderful religious film. It's the best of its kind ever made."

"Gee, Rex, I'd sure like to see that. But we expect company, and you'd better not count on us being there."

I nodded and went on to the next trailer. My reception was practically the same. I could see Wright having a good laugh at my expense. So I changed my tactics. At the next trailer they were just finishing up an outdoor barbecue. I strolled up casually.

"Hello folks."

"Hi, Rex."

"How would you like to see Gene Autry in technicolor?"

"Fine." "Wonderful." "Great."

"Glad to hear that. Our movie starts in the lounge in about thirty minutes."

This routine I used at every trailer. As a consequence the lounge was jammed. Our movies always drew well, but tonight the turnout was phenomenal. Wright and his

minister friends were surprised, and told me so. They started to get the projector ready and I closed the doors and turned off the lights.

On the screen flashed the title:

PRODUCED BY THE BIBLE CLASS
OF THE X CHURCH

The crowd didn't groan, but a rumbling, mumbling undertone spread through the room. Every head turned my way. But then the show was on. Surprisingly enough it was a good movie. I enjoyed it, and I think most of the audience did too.

When it was over and before Wright had started to re-can his film, I opened the doors, turned on the lights, and left. I wasn't quick enough. Before I'd gone ten steps I was surrounded. "What," they demanded to know, "did you mean by inviting us to a Gene Autry film and then showing a religious picture?"

I waved my hands, and after a while they quieted down.

"Listen," I told them, "I didn't invite you to a Gene Autry show. All I said was, 'How would you like to see a Gene Autry show in technicolor?' "

Someone chuckled. They all laughed. A voice said, "Rex never lies. He simply stretches the truth to the breaking point."

While they were still laughing I left, this time for good.

The next morning Mr. Wright came to see me.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "I must apologize to you. The magnificent turnout last night proved you were right and I was wrong. My thinking has been too narrow."

I shook his hand. "Mr. Wright," I told him, "think nothing of it. We all make mistakes."

Our publication, the *Aliso Abalone,* was used almost exclusively for humorous purposes, and we often ridiculed our guests, especially the new ones. About this time we went almost too far.

Mr. Janey, a retired Chrysler executive, was welcomed to the park with a feature article which went like this:

> We welcome Mr. and Mrs. Janey to our park as new inmates, although we were disheartened when they first arrived. Their new Chrysler Imperial looked completely out of place among all the new Cadillacs which are a "must" tradition here.
>
> The strained relations caused by Janey's unreasonable praise of his Chrysler have, we are happy to report, improved. Janey was in the lounge the other night in a slightly inebriated condition. When asked how he really felt about owning a Chrysler in a Cadillac community he said, "Well, folks, to be honest, and strictly off the record, I feel exactly as I did when I was a boy and slipped out the window for a night on the town. It was darned good at the time, but afterwards I felt just a little bit ashamed of it."

I knew nothing of this article until Janey stormed into the office the day after publication. He slammed the paper down on my desk.

"Read that," he said.

I read it.

"Are you responsible for that?"

What could I say? Although this was the first I had seen of the article I was forced to admit my responsibility.

Said Janey: "Give me fifty copies. I'll send them back to the home office and let the so-and-sos answer this one."

16

The trailer-coach industry, now beginning to be called the mobile-home industry, was experiencing an amoeba-like growth, doubling itself almost day by day. Industry associations also expanded at a fantastic rate.

On the Pacific Coast the Trailer Coach Association was the largest, strongest, and for practical purposes the only effective industry association, although, like all overgrown children, it had its defects.

This association, familiarily called T.C.A., was started and controlled by mobile-home manufacturers, although many of its members continued to make travel trailers. For years to come 95 per cent of the travel trailers manufactured in the United States would be built in the Southern California area.

The second important group of Trailer Coach Association members were suppliers of raw materials to the manufacturers.

The third faction of the industry T.C.A. represented was the dealers.

The organization was operated on the same vertical line as an industrial union—and now it decided to take in park operators. The first I knew of this was when a sleek-looking sedan, complete with splashing decal on its side informing all and sundry that the car belonged to the Trailer Coach Association, pulled into the park. A tenant directed the driver to the trailer beneath which I was lying, trying to hook up a sewer line, and the driver said: "Mr. Thompson?"

I looked out, saw the emblem, crawled out from beneath the mobile home, and walked over to the car. The driver told me that he was Jim Ewald, representing the Park Division of the Trailer Coach Association.

"Come on over to the office," I said, "I'll clean up and be with you in a minute."

Ewald got out of the car and followed me at a discreet distance. I pointed out the office, showered, changed clothes, and went back to my inner sanctum. Ewald wasted no time getting to the point: "I am Secretary of the Trailer Park Division of the Trailer Coach Association." The way he rolled his title he might have been saying, "I am Grand Mogul of the Supreme Lodge of the Mystic Brethren."

I nodded my head.

He went on. "The Board of Directors has voted to invite a select number of trailer-park operators to join their association. You are one of the fortunate operators."

I learned later I was one of the 3,500 select operators chosen from some 4,000 park owners in California. This was an exclusive group, limited to those persons having checking accounts. However, at the time I was impressed and I said, "I would be happy to join such a select group."

Ewald said, "You show a rare insight into the problems of our growing industry." He whipped out an embossed application blank, dropped it in front of me right side up,

thrust a ball-point pen into my hand and said, "Sign here."

I signed.

He rose from his chair, gave me an anemic handshake, and turned on his heel. I followed him to his automobile. His parting remark as he dropped behind the wheel of his car was: "You'll be advised of all details of our next convention by the T.C.A. office." Then he said, as if it were an afterthought: "Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you . . . mail your check to the address shown on your copy of the membership application."

He let the car into gear and pulled out of the park.

I rushed back to the office and read the application over carefully. I wanted to see what I had signed, and how much it had cost me; also, what I was getting for my money.

Before I was half finished with my reading, Helen was leaning over my shoulder.

"What's this?" she asked.

I looked up nonchalantly. "I just joined the Trailer Coach Association," I told her.

"What did it cost you?" she asked.

Hastily I turned a page. There it was, in big black letters. "One hundred dollars," I informed her offhandedly.

She sniffed. "And what do we get for our hundred dollars?"

I admitted I didn't know.

She sniffed again, but this surprisingly was a cheerful sniff. It is easy to tell the difference between a wife's angry sniff and her cheerful sniff.

Helen laughed, surprising me even more. "Don't ever again let me hear you say anything about my buying things from peddlers."

She was referring to a cabinet-type gas heater purchased from a peddler a short time ago at the bargain price of fifty dollars. It fitted beautifully into our living room except for one small factor: we had no gas.

I mailed my check for a hundred dollars. In due time I received a letter from T.C.A. thanking me for the money and informing me that the following week a T.C.A. convention would be held at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills, and I was cordially invited to attend.

A woman greeted Helen and me at the door and ushered us over to another gal sitting behind a table half concealed by a big sign reading REGISTRATION DESK.

This charming creature shoved a card at me and said, "Fill this out and sign here."

Helen grabbed the card and said, "I'll read it first."

She perused it carefully before saying, "O.K., Rex. You can sign it."

Then we looked around, saw where the largest crowd was headed, and crossed the lobby to the convention hall. This was a night-club type of room holding about 150 tables. At one end was a stage, complete with long banquet table, chairs, water glasses, and mike.

Like every other table in the room the head table was lavishly festooned with bouquets of flowers.

We were led to a beflowered table by a gentleman with a badge like ours except that his boasted a dangling blue ribbon. I peered around the mass of blooms and found another couple. We introduced ourselves. Our tablemates were Mike and Irene McWild from Sacramento.

I took a quick liking to Irene. She was a gushing type

of blonde, and the first thing she said was: "Oh, Mr. Thompson, I read the article about your park in the last issue of one of the trailer magazines, and it certainly said nice things about you."

Before I could accept this compliment modestly, Helen spoke up. "It should have said nice things about Rex," she agreed. "He wrote the article."

I was about to disclaim authorship, although it was true I had supplied most of the material for the article, when someone banged a gavel and said, "The convention will come to order."

With that a complete silence fell, and Ray Clay, then president of the association and manufacturer of a well-known travel trailer, went up to the mike. He launched into an elaborate welcoming address, explaining with great detail the reason for creating a T.C.A. Park Division.

I was greatly impressed. When Clay sat down to a rustle of applause I whispered to Helen, "What he said really makes sense."

Helen rolled her eyes at me. "Maybe so," she said, "but not a hundred dollars worth of cents."

Jim Ewald, acting as head of the Park Division, followed Clay to the rostrum. He explained that we were to elect officers of the Park Division and three members of the Board of Directors of the parent association, T.C.A. A nominating committee had made recommendations for the various offices in the Park Division and Ewald read them off. He then read off the names of the nominees for directors. After this he asked for nominations from the floor.

Our table companion, dear gushing Irene McWild, immediately rose and was recognized. "I nominate Rex Thompson," she said.

I almost swallowed my cigar, and immediately lost a lot of love for Irene.

The balloting was to take place after lunch and results announced at a banquet to be held in the Blossom Room that evening. The steak dinner was elegant; it was the first and last banquet I attended where the food was more than passable.

After dinner Ray Clay took the mike and announced results of the voting. I was now a member of T.C.A.'s Board of Directors; the round of applause when I was introduced gave me a fine spiritual lift.

Helen didn't share my elation. On the way home she said: "When you figure out what it will cost you to attend all the conventions and functions you'll find out the hundred dollars you paid for initiation is pretty small potatoes."

Helen is the practical one in the family, so I admitted to myself that she was probably half right. I was wrong: she was *all* right. If you figure the time lost from my job, the money I spent as unpaid director would have bought us a trip to Europe with six gay weeks in Paris.

The following day I received a T.C.A. bulletin advising me that the next board meeting would be held at the T.C.A. offices in Los Angeles on the following Tuesday.

The day after this I got another announcement: it said the same thing, but this time with colored ink on colored paper. Every day until board meeting day I got a bulletin. This was one meeting I had to attend. Anything that brought forth so many bulletins must be important.

That's what I thought at the time. Later I learned this bulletin routine is a normal T.C.A. procedure: the association is strictly bulletin happy. They must have a hidden employee whose sole function is to send out bulletins, and

he or she is intent on proving what an important section of T.C.A. the BULLETIN Division is.

You never get lonely if you belong to T.C.A. If your wife and friends desert you, and you never get a letter, don't worry. The Bulletin Secretary will keep on sending you billets-doux.

On Tuesday I went down to the T.C.A. office. The receptionist indicated the way to the directors' room, where all the rest of the directors were already gathered around a large conference table. Ray Clay introduced me to them and showed me my seat.

In front of each of us was a mimeographed sheet of paper headed: AGENDA.

Below this heading was a long list of titles and subtitles, such as Minutes, Old Business, Magazines, Legislative Budget, and New Business.

I looked around. Surprisingly enough the manufacturers, suppliers, and dealers assembled looked as normal as the park operators. So did John Combs, T.C.A. executive director, Pat Wilson, T.C.A.'s legal representative, and the official stenographer.

Clay welcomed the new members of the Board of Directors and declared the meeting open for business. Combs immediately opened his brief case and dumped a pile of papers on the table. This acted as a signal to Attorney Wilson who did likewise. I had never seen two such impressive piles of important-looking documents. In fact, I had never seen two such piles of any kind of documents.

Clay rapped his gavel and asked the secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting. The minutes were read and Clay declared the meeting open for old business.

Harold Stone, owner of Perfect Trailer Manufacturing Company, reported that T.C.A.'s efforts to help the city of Cucamonga remove a squatter in a trailer from a vacant lot in an exclusive residential district, said vacant lot having no sanitary facilities except a half-buried barrel, were meeting with no success. It was voted to send Attorney Wilson to Cucamonga to check this and report back to the Board of Directors.

A half-dozen more items were reported on, then the meeting got to "Magazine." This was *Trailer Life,* an association publication, and I sat back to learn about the publication business. But not for long. Some of the board members had read my monthly, the *Aliso Abalone,* and to my surprise I found myself elected chairman of the Magazine Committee. My job was to see that the magazine was improved editorially, circulation increased, and a substantial operating deficit eliminated.

Combs and Wilson now reported on legislation. A few minutes of this was depressing to a country boy like myself. It was obvious, even to a novitiate, that if half the proposed bills were passed there would be no more trailer manufacturing in California. My park problems shrank into insignificance. After an hour of discussion of legislative problems I wondered if the manufacturers had brought us into their association for sympathy or for help.

Next came the budget. Budget problems are the same the world over, and the Association was no exception. T.C.A. members did over a hundred million dollars' worth of business a year (nowadays they do considerably more than this), but never had quite put enough in the till to carry out their ambitious program.

The budget was twisted and turned, wiggled and waggled, folded and kneaded, but it never took the right shape though the other members of the Board of Directors did let me know that we would be better off if the chairman of the Magazine Committee eliminated that deficit.

I began to squirm internally. Deficits I knew about; magazines were out of my line, despite the existence of the *Aliso Abalone,* or perhaps because of it. The *Aliso Abalone* always ran at a loss.

Ten hours and twenty cups of coffee after I entered that meeting of the Board of Directors, it was adjourned. I was tired, worn-out, whipped, beaten, and fortunate not to drive over a cliff on my way home. I realized I had learned the ABCs of the mobile-home business, taken my college course in park management, and was now studying for a Ph.D.

The next day I gave a lot of thought to my initiation into the Trailer Coach Association. It was obvious I knew little about what was going on in the industry, and I decided that I should devote the next few weeks to learning more, especially about other park operations.

I went in to talk this over with Helen. She was washing dishes.

"I've got an idea," I told her.

Carefully she laid down a teacup, hung up her towel, turned around, looked at me thoughtfully, and braced herself against the kitchen sink.

"What is it now?" she inquired.

"We'll take a trip through California, Oregon, and Washington, and swing south through Idaho, Montana, Nevada,

and Arizona, looking at park operations as we go. What do you think of it?"

She cocked her head to one side. After a moment she said, "I think it's wonderful. When do we start?"

"Just as soon as I buy the trailer."

She sat down on the kitchen stool and looked at me blankly. Finally she said, "You're crazy."

It was true I had never towed a trailer but I knew it was easy. Men and women seventy-five years old towed them every day, and what they did I could do.

A friend of a friend of a friend of mine knew a dealer who would sell me a trailer at wholesale. That is the customary procedure when buying either a trailer or a mobile home, always go to a dealer who will give it to you wholesale. Wholesale, in this case, was exactly one hundred dollars over retail, but I didn't find that out until some time later.

The dealer had the model I wanted on his lot. I agreed to take it and wrote a check on the spot. We shook hands on the deal and I started to get in my car, or rather Helen's car, because I was driving the big Buick she bought to match her favorite coral dress.

The dealer gave the car an approving glance. "You'll never know you're pulling a trailer," he said, "when you hitch that baby on to it."

I beamed. Secretly I'd been a little worried about the Buick towing a trailer.

He went on. "What kind of hitch are you going to use?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "How many kinds are there?"

He laughed. "About thirty different brands. The best, though, is an Excel."

"An Excel?"

"Yeah. That's the kind I handle."

"You got one here?"

"Sure. Come over here and I'll show you one."

The Excel was a big hitch, and heavy. I could hardly lift the part that ran under the car up to the axle.

"How about one of the standard weight-equalizing hitches?" I asked him. "Aren't they lighter than this?"

He patted me on the back. "I see you know something about hitches," he said. "Yes, they are lighter. And they do a good job when it comes to taking the weave and sway out of a trailer, but not as good as the Excel. It's the best."

I tried to back out. "You know," I told hm, "I had an idea a regular old-fashioned hitch would be enough to handle a trailer the size I'm buying."

He laid a big hand on my shoulder. "You're right," he said, "but you value your life, don't you?"

I nodded.

He went on. "You like to be comfortable, don't you?"

I nodded once again.

He continued. "This hitch will take out all the trailer's weave and sway. You drive car and trailer as if they were one solid car. A passing truck won't jar you. Side winds won't bother you. You can go downhill as fast as you go uphill, and you'll never jackknife. This hitch is accident-proof. You want that, don't you?"

I nodded once again.

"I knew you would," he said, and turned away. Over his shoulder he added; "I'll phone the welder and see if he can get the hitch on today."

"How much is this Excel?" I asked.

He picked up the phone. "A hundred and sixty dollars. Plus installation, of course."

I gulped.

Ten minutes later I was at the welder's. I thought I could wait and in an hour or two be on my way, but the welder soon disabused me of such silly ideas. There were two things that went to the frame at the front, and two at the back, and a stiffening plate to go on; and then the long, hollow chunk of metal I could hardly lift was bolted and welded to these pieces; and then the whole thing was welded to the car.

The way the welder told it only a genius could get the Excel on a Buick because, while all installations of Excels were difficult, that on a Buick was impossible. I learned later this was standard welder's jargon; whatever car a welder is working on is the most difficult in the world on which to install the particular hitch he is installing.

This data was fed into me slowly, by Oklahoma drawl, with the welder's long, lean face screwed up in what appeared to be suffering, and his faded blue eyes moist with self-pity. I expected him to burst into tears.

I could have joined him in his sorrow when I found out that the car wouldn't be ready until three o'clock the next day. My first thought was to call Helen. She could pick me up in my car. Then, remembering her dislike of the whole project, I decided to call a cab. It was only thirty miles home.

When Helen saw me get out of the cab the first thing she said was "Where's my car?"

"At the welder's," I said, trying to get past her and into the office.

"What did you break?"

"I didn't break anything. I'm having a hitch put on."

Her voice got higher and shriller. I winced. When Helen's voice loses its sweetness she's really angry.

"You took my car to the welder to have a hitch put on? You mean you are having a hitch welded on my beautiful Buick?"

"Not exactly; some of it is being bolted on. There's only a few little places where it's being welded."

Then the buzzer in the lounge sounded. I jumped up immediately and answered it, with Helen right behind me.

It was Dorothy Mennon with an invitation to a steak barbecue at their mobile home. I accepted immediately.

"It will be wonderful, won't it, Helen?" I asked.

She nodded and with a great effort managed to smile and say, "Yes, dear. It will be wonderful."

We strolled over to the north end of the park, toward Dorothy's lot, and noticed quite a few tenants getting ready for barbecues. They all spoke to us, and Helen and I replied. I was proud of Helen. If you didn't look closely enough to see how white her lips were, and how the left corner of her mouth twitched, you'd never guess what she was thinking about.

Just before we got to Dorothy's lot we stopped for a moment to talk to Irving Sustine, who had recently moved into a new location in the park. He had a number of guests, and they were a gay and happy lot.

We went on and stopped at Dorothy's outside bar for a

Scotch and soda. Dorothy's husband, John Mennon, had just laid thick New York cut steaks on the barbecue, and was basting them with a sauce of his own concoction. I sipped at my drink and sniffed at the wonderful aroma of sizzling steaks, aromatic sauce, and smoldering charcoal, which was exactly what all the other Mennon guests were doing.

I was on my second Scotch when Irving Sustine barged in. He didn't even look at me.

"Is Dorothy Mennon here?" he asked brusquely.

Demure Dorothy jumped up. "I'm Dorothy Mennon," she said.

"I'm Irving Sustine," he said. "I have the trailer next to you, and I've got a complaint."

Conversation stopped. John quit turning the steaks. I couldn't even swallow the Scotch in my mouth.

Embarrassed, Dorothy slowly turned red. Finally she said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Sustine, what's your complaint?"

Said Irving: "I have some very important guests down to dinner. It is the first time they have ever been in a trailer park. I was preparing the evening meal, extolling the wonderful virtues of this type of living, and had about convinced them that the meal I was cooking would taste better than anything they could get in a restaurant. As they reached contentedly for their wieners the wind shifted and the odor of those lousy steaks you are cooking completely obliterated the smell of my wieners."

He paused for breath and I managed to swallow my Scotch.

He went on. "My guests are now on the way to the Laguna Steak House, and I am following them. But before I left

I thought you might enjoy knowing you have completely loused up my whole evening." With that he turned on his heel and left.

There was dead silence on the patio for perhaps thirty seconds, then a roar of laughter.

The next morning a friend dropped me off at Newport. After lunch I went over to look at Helen's car.

Such a mess you never saw. The upholstery was completely burned out, and the back end was a twisted and blackened mass of metal.

I looked at this, started to cuss, thought better of it, and managed to ask the welder: "What happened?"

He shrugged. "The gas tank blew up when I was welding on the hitch."

I groaned feebly. Then I did a little fancy cussing.

The welder said, "What the devil are you hollering about? I was underneath that heap when it blew up. I might have been killed."

He was right, and I shut up. But I couldn't move. All I could do was look at the car and think of what Helen had said.

She was right. I was crazy.

I finally got going. The welder loaned me a car and I went down to my insurance company. An adjuster listened to my story.

I was fully covered, he told me. They would have my car fixed.

"But I don't want it fixed," I told him. "I want a new car."

He got my policy from the file and pointed to the fine print. "This covers cases like yours," he said.

I looked at the end of his finger. It was resting on letters so small they looked like ant tracks in sand. I would have needed a magnifying glass to make out that printing. But I knew what I wanted—a new car for Helen. The coral Buick had been new, and she was absolutely certain to want it replaced. That's what I told the adjuster.

He said: "You get three bids, *Then* we take the lowest, and *then* you get your car fixed. Under no conditions do you get a new car."

I sat down and began to argue. At the end of an hour of conversation, mostly on my part, I got a concession. I could have the work done by the dealer from whom I bought the car.

I phoned my dealer and he agreed to go over and look at my wreck right away. I settled down in the adjuster's office to wait until the dealer phoned back.

In an hour and a half he called. For $550 he would fix Helen's Buick. "You won't be able to tell it was ever in a fire," he said.

I had a thought. "After you fix it up," I asked, "what will you give for it in trade?"

He grunted. "Nothing. Nothing at all. A car that's been in a fire like this one is no good for anything."

"You just told me you would fix it so nobody could tell it had been in a fire."

"That's right."

"Then why won't you take it in trade?"

"You won't be able to tell it's been in a fire, but it still won't be any good."

I put the adjuster on the phone and had my dealer tell him the story. The adjuster's expression never changed, his forehead didn't wrinkle, nor his little mustache quiver.

Naturally his fish-gray eyes didn't change expression: there was no expression to change.

All he said was: "Five hundred fifty sound about right. Go ahead and fix it up. We'll pay."

He hung up, swung around in his swivel chair, and said: "That takes care of you, doesn't it?"

"Yes," I said mournfully, "that takes care of me."

I went over to the dealer's. He was friendly, but he didn't want my car. Finally I wore him down, or maybe he wore me down. Anyway, he was to take my car, plus the insurance money, plus fifteen hundred dollars of my hard-earned cash, and give me a new car.

It took two hours to get the new car serviced, and it was seven o'clock when I finally drove into Aliso. Helen was waiting for me. She took one look at the new Buick and said, "What happened to my coral car?"

I tried to laugh. "Well," I told her, "I knew your coral dress wore out, so I bought this black car to go with the rest of your clothes. Black goes with anything, you know."

Helen ignored this chitchat. "What," she demanded, "happened to *my* car?"

"It burned up," I said.

She waited, saying nothing, so I told her the whole story. When I was through she laughed.

I was relieved. But I didn't feel so good when she finally said, "Oh, well. Now we can take our trip without an old trailer hanging on behind."

The next morning I called the dealer and told him I wouldn't be able to take a trailer on my trip. I told him I wasn't about to bring another new car down to have his welder burn it up. I wanted to know what he would give

me for the trailer I had bought from him. He told me he would buy back my trailer, but for $250 less than I had paid for it.

"Have the check ready," I told him. "I'll be right down."

Next day we left on our trip. We were gone two weeks, and called on fifty or sixty park operators and about as many dealers.

When I got back I opened my mail and found a bill for $160 from the trailer dealer. It was for the hitch I had bought. I immediately wrote the dealer and told him I would never pay for that hitch.

Two days later I got a letter from his attorney threatening suit if I didn't.

I went to my attorney and told him the whole story. "What I want to know," I asked him, "is do I have to pay for this hitch?"

My attorney thought a moment. "Frankly," he said, "I don't think they have a case. However, I would advise you to pay the hundred and sixty dollars and forget the whole thing. It will cost you more than that to fight the case."

"I'm not going to pay," I told him. "It's a matter of principle. Will you defend me?"

"Well," he said reluctantly, "if you want me to fight this case I will. But I'd advise you to pay and forget the incident."

"Never," I insisted. "Never. We'll fight."

The case was tried in the Santa Ana court. I got in the witness chair and told exactly what had happened. Then the dealer told his story. Our stories were identical except I thought I should not pay for the hitch, and the dealer thought I should.

When the trial was over, the whole fifteen minutes of

it, the judge rapped his gavel and said, "Judgment granted to plaintiff."

I was out $160 plus court costs and attorney fees.

My attorney whispered to me: "I think the decision incorrect, but there isn't enough money involved to appeal the case, even though I'm certain this ruling would be reversed by a higher court."

I went home, poured a drink, sat down and told Helen the whole story. "So you see," I ended up, "I simply must appeal this case. It's a matter of principle."

Helen set her chin. "You will not appeal. You will pay. After all, half the money you are spending is mine."

It's odd how, after twenty-five years of married life, you know from the tone of your wife's voice when there is no more room for argument. I paid.

My cost for not trailering went like this:

Loss on trailer	$ 250
Loss on car	1,500
Loss on hitch	160
Court costs and attorney fees	365
Total	$2,275

17

Next day I made my usual rounds, putting all thought of trailering out of mind. It was obvious I was not meant to take to the road. In the future I would stick to mobile homes and mobile-home parks.

To take my mind off my troubles I stopped by the Jordans' place. They were not typical trailerists although, come to think of it, I can't give you a definition of a typical trailerist. There isn't any such thing, any more than there is a typical home-owner, or a typical apartment-house dweller, or a typical hotel resident.

But in most luxury parks such as Aliso the majority of tenants are elderly retired people. At Aliso we had less than our share of such tenants, and more than our portion of fairly young persons still active in business. The Jordans were such a couple: young, active, and with money enough to live wherever they wanted to.

Between sips of coffee I asked Jordan: "Why do you live in a trailer when you can easily afford any type of home?"

Mrs. Jordan spoke up. "That's an easy question to answer. We live like this because this is the way we hope to live when we retire."

Jordan elaborated. "People work all their lives in order to live easily and comfortably. That's exactly what we are doing in Aliso, isn't it?"

I had no answer to this, so I accepted another cup of coffee.

Back at the office, sorting the mail, which from constant practice took no thought at all, I let my mind dwell on the various types of tenants I had.

There was Mr. Willis, a man with a one-track mind. Let the day be gorgeously beautiful, with the ocean a deep blue, and fluffy white clouds overhead, and Mr. Willis still had his standard reaction.

You said, "It's a fine day, isn't it Mr. Willis?" and he replied automatically, "What's good about it?"

This rhetorical question was always delivered with a ferocious scowl.

Then there was Mr. Raines, a professor on sabbatical leave. Every morning at 6:30 A.M., wearing a turtle-neck sweater and swinging a cane, he started up the beach for a walk. At 7:05 he re-entered the park, and 9:15 found him half way between his trailer and the laundry. At 2:30 P.M. he emptied his garbage.

Mr. Stout was entirely different. He kept no schedule at all. Wearing his costume of Bavarian leather britches and pointed Alp-climber's hat, he wandered from trailer to trailer looking for a conversation companion. Mr. Stout loved to talk and spent every possible moment visiting one of the other thirty-nine mobile homes in Aliso.

Dr. Ciro was an exact opposite of Mr. Stout, caring nothing for conversation except on one subject, the stock market.

Every morning he grabbed the paper as soon as he got out

of bed and turned to the financial page. If the market was down he worried how far it would drop. If the market was up he worried because wild inflation was obviously imminent. If there was no change, he really worried. According to him a stable market meant that something was brewing and we should all prepare for the worst.

Dr. Ciro was the only tenant I had who looked forward to Monday morning. To him Saturday and Sunday were days of no consequence because the stock market was closed. He could hardly wait to get the Monday morning radio report on the first hour of trading.

Interestingly enough, the good doctor had not, according to his own admission, bought or sold a single share of stock in over ten years.

Next to him lived the Slagels. Mrs. Slagel was the type I would have voted least likely to ever live in a mobile-home park, a woman who believed in formal living. She even dressed for breakfast.

This good lady had a phobia for washing; you never entered her home that she wasn't washing dishes, walls, sinks, or herself.

When you finished a cup of coffee or a cocktail in her trailer, and made the mistake of setting the glass or cup down, you never got a refill. Mrs. Slagel had it in the sink before you could open your mouth.

And then there was Mr. Ryan, who had built up a good-sized fortune in the stock market. Each morning he left his mobile home with a cribbage board under his arm, looking exactly like a bank president—if you didn't happen to see the board.

Full of dignity, and a moderate number of years, he

strolled from trailer to trailer looking for a cribbage match. Usually he found it, at a dime a game. It was rumored around the park that anyone needing a dime for a cup of coffee should seek out Mr. Ryan. For despite his love of the game, he was one of the worst cribbage players it has ever been my good fortune to meet.

Mrs. Ryan operated the Aliso rumor factory. This high-strung dame had inside information on everything—you name it and she told you. The ladies loved to visit her. She gave out the latest dope on events coming up in the park, details on how Slagel made his money, and inside information on the social life of dear old Mrs. Peabody, who never left her trailer except to empty garbage or visit the lounge.

One day Mrs. Ryan started a rumor that the next night would see Aliso's highest tide, a full seven feet over normal. At regular high tide the trailers parked at Aliso were not too far from the ocean, and an extra seven feet meant the waves would be lapping at the row closest to the beach.

The rumor made the rounds. Next day it got back to Mrs. Ryan and, as is usual with rumors, it had grown as it traveled. Now the high tide that night was to be fifteen feet over normal.

She came to me and wanted her trailer moved back from the ocean. I refused, but told her I would be responsible if anything happened to it.

"You'll be responsible," she snorted. "But what about me? What about Mr. Ryan? Who'll be responsible if we're drowned like rats in a trap?"

So Mr. and Mrs. Ryan packed their personal belongings and jammed them into their car. That night they spent in a motel at Laguna Beach. When they returned in the morning

I think Mrs. Ryan was disappointed to find her mobile home high—and dry.

While these thoughts about my "characters" had been going through my mind, I finished sorting the mail and Helen placed the letters in their proper slots. Then I adjourned to the lounge. Here were gathered our regular congregation of tenants, for here, each morning, we settled the affairs of government. We were just about to solve the last governmental crisis when in walked Mr. Jasper.

Mr. Jasper was a tall, bowlegged gentleman who always wore shorts. As his legs were long and his body short he looked like a walking clothespin. He was attached to these shorts . . . at least I think he was, because he never seemed to change them. They were the dirtiest shorts this side of a hobo jungle.

Mr. Jasper had been the president of a large building and loan association and a director of several corporations. He finally retired, he said, in order to relax. Mr. Jasper relaxed. In doing so he disproved the old wives' tale that a man active in business will either die or have a nervous breakdown if he lets go all holds.

Mr. Jasper avoided energy-consuming tasks. Even in his amusements he made a project of doing hard things the easy way. For instance, he played shuffleboard sitting down.

Like many Alisians he was a fishing nut, and owned a small skiff. Whenever he could coax someone to push it out on the beach he would take off into the surf for a little languid fishing, but for some time now he had been complaining about coming back to shore. There was never anyone around when he landed, and Mr. Jasper found it a great effort to pull his skiff up the beach and away from the waves.

He strolled up to us now, grunted and dropped into an easy chair. After a while he said, "I've figured a way to save a lot of wasted effort."

"How?" I asked him.

He leaned back further in his chair. "If your maintenance man will sink a post at the edge of the beach, and put a shive on it, I can attach the rope to the boat, put the other end through the shive, and attach it to the rear end of my wife's car. Then she can pull the boat up on the beach without any effort at all."

"All right," I said. "I'll have my man put in the post, and I've got five hundred feet of three-quarter-inch rope you can have, but you'll have to get the shive yourself."

"O.K.," said Mr. Jasper. "Where can I get one?"

"At the marine hardware store in Newport Beach. It will take you about twenty minutes."

I started to get up. "By the time you are back I'll have the rope and the post, and my man will be ready to go."

Mr. Jasper waved me back into my seat. "No hurry, Rex," he said. "Don't bother right now. I can't go into Newport today."

"Why not?" I asked.

He straightened out, joint by joint, and laboriously rose from the easy chair. Slowly he started toward the door. Over his shoulder he said, "This is Tuesday, and I shave on Tuesdays. I can't shave and make it into Newport the same day."

Every neighborhood, and every trailer park, has its tinkerer. Mr. Hank Gord was our tinkerer.

Hank couldn't keep his hands off anything. He was one of those fellows you see at Christmas time in every big department store standing under the sign that says, "Do Not Handle the Toys," methodically dismantling every mechanical contrivance in sight.

His experience with the Gimbles should have cured him.

Mr. and Mrs. Gimble were planning on a fishing trip to Mexico, and had just taken delivery on a new twenty-one-foot Boles Aero travel trailer. The Boles was a quality trailer, one of the first travelers to be equipped with Stromberg hydraulic brakes.

These brakes are connected to the car's hydraulic system by means of a slave cylinder, and when you put on your foot brake, car and trailer stop smoothly and easily without jar, swerve, or squeal.

When you hook the car up to the slave cylinder you force back a lever on top of the cylinder. This put the brakes off. There is a hole in this lever, and through it runs a chain which is connected to the bumper. If by any horrible mischance you hook up improperly, and the trailer hitch jumps from the ball, the chain slips the lever and 40 per cent of the braking power of the hydraulic brakes is applied to the trailer wheels, stopping the trailer.

This type of brake has another use. If you park and unhook, and leave the lever in a "down" position, you leave the brakes on, and they'll hold a trailer for days on end, even on a grade. This saves looking for a level spot, and carefully blocking all wheels before unhitching.

Naturally, when the Gimbles pulled their new traveler up next to their mobile home they didn't bother to block the wheels, but simply unhitched, leaving the trailer perched on its running gear and front hitch wheel with the hydraulic brake on.

Hank, as usual, was fooling around, looking over the mechanical intricacies of the new Boles. He started at the back and worked forward to the hitch, tapping and testing as he went. At the hitch end he paused, fascinated. It was the first time he had ever seen a trailer equipped with hydraulic brakes, and he examined the cylinder carefully. Then he began to work the only moving part, the lever.

The Gimbels, who were in the trailer packing for the trip, paid no attention though they should have been warned by Hank's sudden silence.

No one but Hank Gord could have released the brakes without knowing what he was trying to do, but Hank did it. He shoved the lever back, it caught, clicked into place, and the trailer began to roll forward. Hank, not knowing what he had done, or what he should undo, jumped out of the way.

The trailer rolled ten feet, bounced into the rear of the Gimbles' car, bounced off, and rolled down the street.

Mrs. Gimble, caught with an armload of groceries, shrieked, dropped everything, and was flung to the floor, where she lay spread-eagled, screaming. Gimble dropped a load of clothes and tried to get at her, but was thrown off his feet. Under him were clothes, dishes spilled out of an open cabinet, groceries . . . and Mrs. Gimble.

Her screams even though muffled by half a trailerload of necessities were loud enough to rouse the entire park.

The trailer zigzagged down the street, missing me by inches, smashed between two other trailers, crushing in its own sides and caving in the ones it hit, and wound up tearing into a rest room. There it came to rest, half in and half out of the little building. Rest room and trailer were both in need of drastic repairs.

Three of us reached the wreck at once, just as Mr. Gimble rose groggily to his feet. Together we began to pull things off Mrs. Gimble: pillows, cushions, radio, electric coffeemaker, blankets, clothes, and groceries.

It wouldn't have been such a messy job if Mrs. Gimble hadn't been carrying three cartons of eggs when the trailer started to roll. She had thrown everything away when she began to fall, and the eggs went straight up to the ceiling and came right back down. Every egg broke, and there wasn't an article of clothing, a piece of furniture, or a can of food that wasn't slimy with raw egg.

We finally uncovered Mrs. Gimble and got her out of the wreck. Surprisingly enough she wasn't hurt, but she was mighty angry.

I said, "Thank the Lord you're not hurt, Mrs. Gimble. It's a miracle you weren't killed."

Said she: "It'll be a miracle if I don't kill that G—— D—— tinkerer Gord."

The word got to Gord. "Make yourself scarce," he was told, "or you'll get an electric iron bounced off your head."

Hank slipped over to our place. When I got back he asked me to call his attorney, a Mr. Craven. Hank wouldn't leave the safe haven of our home for a second. Finally the attorney agreed to come down to the park.

He and Gord went over to the Gimbles' and assured them Hank would make everything good. Then they came back to the office and told Helen and me that not only would Hank take care of the Gimbles' expenses, but he would see that the damaged trailers, and the rest room, were put in perfect condition at no cost to the park.

As they turned to leave the office Hank glanced down at our newly painted counter and carefully read the sign say-

ing: "Fresh Paint." He hesitated, read the sign again, and gingerly touched his finger to the newly painted wood. Helen looked at the mark he left and the coloring on his finger, sat down, and said in a resigned tone of voice: "I guess tinkerers are born, not made."

Hank flushed, and left quickly, followed by his patient attorney.

An hour later I walked by the Gimbles' trailer. Gord, his attorney Craven, and the Gimbles were hoisting highballs together.

Some people always try to out-Jones the Joneses. Mr. Gilbert was one of these characters. Walking through his mobile home was like taking a conducted tour through a pawn shop.

He would stop, point, and then say: "This cost four hundred dollars." Or, "That davenport cost three hundred. The rug you are standing on is a genuine import. It cost six hundred. That picture is an original. It cost me eight hundred and fifty."

He had a price for everything he owned, and it was always on the tip of his tongue, ready to spill out. He didn't always give the same price to the same object, but he always had a figure, in dollars, ready.

Sometimes his pet picture cost him $850, and sometimes "over a thousand," depending on whom he was talking to, but it always cost more than any other picture in the park.

If you had a highball in his mobile home he reminded you that he served only twelve-year-old Scotch, specially blended, and that the glass in your hand cost four dollars.

Naturally his was the most expensive trailer in Aliso. It

had to be, and probably was, by virtue of a few special gimmicks added at the factory.

His Cadillac was completely powered, as were other Caddys in the park. But his was the only one with two special movable spotlights that "cost eighty dollars apiece," and a radio with two rear-seat speakers, "eight inches each."

When the lobster season opened, several of our park fishermen purchased small outboard boats and tried their luck at trapping lobsters. Lobster trapping, the way it was done at Aliso, is the easiest of sports. All you do is take a trap, which is about three feet square and made of wire mesh, bait it with squid or fish heads, and drop it to the bottom. A rope is attached to a float and to the trap, and each day you go out to your float, pull in the rope, open the trap, remove the lobsters, throw back the undersized ones and put the legal-sized lobsters in a sack. Then you rebait the trap and lower it to the bottom.

Some of our more ambitious lobstermen had as many as eight of these traps out during the season.

About the most difficult part of lobster trapping is throwing back the undersized ones. Sometimes they are a bare fraction of an inch under the legal limit, and if trapping has been poor the temptation to keep them is strong, especially when you know the Fish and Game Department is woefully understaffed and your chance of meeting a game warden is small.

One day I went down to the beach to look at our growing assortment of boats, and there was Harry Gilbert studying them, a yardstick in one hand and a notebook in the other.

"What are you doing, Harry?" I asked.

He said, "I'm going to buy a boat. I just thought I'd

check and see what size to get. I see most of these fellows use fourteen- or sixteen-footers."

"That's right," I said. "This size boat is easy to get in and out of the surf."

Harry nodded thoughtfully and wandered back to his mobile home. About an hour later I saw him drive out of the park.

That afternoon he came back with a brand-new boat trailer. Mounted on it was a beautiful boat, one of the prettiest I have ever seen. Harry stopped in front of the office and I went out to look over his equipment.

"How about this?" he said. "Eighteen feet long, coated with glass, will never need painting, and cost nine hundred dollars."

I nodded, and he went on without drawing a breath.

"The trailer was four hundred and fifty, and I bought all new fishing gear: three hundred dollars."

I nodded again, trying to let awe and admiration light up my eyes.

He beckoned me over to look in the boat. There were two brand-new lobster traps and two heavy canvas bags. I pointed at the bags.

"What are those for?" I asked him.

"They cost me thirty-six dollars," he told me. "One's for fishing gear, and the other's to put lobsters in."

By this time other tenants had come up, and Harry proudly showed them his new equipment, making sure each knew exactly what every piece of it cost.

When everyone had seen the new Gilbert boat, Harry invited George Sulfur and myself to go out in it the next morning. George had a boat and some lobster traps, but we

figured on using Harry's new craft, inspecting George's traps, setting Harry's new traps alongside them, and then doing a little fishing beyond the breakers.

Harry got in the boat first, and George and I shoved it clear and jumped in. Harry started the outboard motor and we cruised out to the lobster grounds. First we baited and set out Harry's new traps; then we pulled up George's traps. The haul was disappointing, three full-sized lobsters and three undersized ones with tails less than the legal three-inch length.

We rebaited and reset George's traps, put the three legal-sized lobsters in the canvas bag, and then George picked up one of the three undersized lobsters.

"What are you doing?" asked Harry.

"I'm going to throw these back. There're undersized."

Harry pondered a moment.

"Don't do that," he said. "Put them in the bag with the others. I want them."

The argument started.

Neither George nor I wanted any part of illegal lobsters. Harry insisted it was not morally wrong to take them, and claimed we had not one chance in ten thousand of being caught. Finally George broke down.

"All right," he said. "If you want those lobsters you can keep them. But remember, they're yours, not ours. This is your boat, and these are your lobsters."

Harry nodded and threw the babies in with the full-sized lobsters in the canvas bag.

I looked at George. George looked at me. Both of us had lost our stomach for fishing.

"Let's go in," I said.

"That's a good idea," said George.

Harry protested. He wanted to try some fishing. At last we agreed to go with him in the afternoon, but not this morning—not with those illegal lobsters in the boat.

We powered our way back to a point outside the breakers, and George, the expert, got up in the bow with me, leaving Harry to run the motor. George was an old hand at getting in and out of the breakers. The trick is to wait for just the right wave and then make your run. First come three big breakers, then a lull, and then three small waves. You wait until a fraction of a second after the third big wave has passed and then make your run before the first of the three small ones catches up with you.

The third big wave passed, George dropped his hand, Harry gunned the motor, and we were on our way in. Then I saw the sedan with the Fish and Game Warden's emblem on its side.

It was too late to turn back. I yelled at Harry, "Hey! get rid of those lobsters quick!"

Harry grabbed the canvas sack and heaved it over the side while I breathed a sigh of relief. We were still two hundred feet from the beach, and the warden would never find the lobsters.

We ran in to the beach, jumped out, and pulled the boat up on the sand before the warden reached us.

He said, "Can I see your licenses, please?"

We showed them to him and he nodded.

Then he said, "I saw you were setting and pulling lobster traps. I would like to see your catch."

Harry said, "Those were my traps, and the lobsters you saw me take were undersized, so I threw them back in."

Said the warden "That's perfectly O.K., but if you don't mind I'll take a look at your boat."

"As a law-abiding citizen," said Harry sarcastically, "and a member of the Izaak Walton League, I not only will allow you to check my boat, but I insist that you do so."

The warden nodded, stepped into the boat, and picked up the canvas bag. Harry grinned and looked at us. The warden turned the bag upside down and out tumbled six lobsters.

The sack Harry had thrown full ten fathoms deep had contained his expensive new fishing equipment.

The warden looked at the lobsters, measured the three runts carefully, and turned to Harry. "You said this was your boat, those were your traps, and these are your lobsters. That right?"

Harry nodded glumly.

"Now, if you don't mind," said the warden, "you can take a little trip with me."

George and I started our car and followed Harry and the warden to Santa Ana, where Harry was booked and had to put up three hundred dollars' bail. This he subsequently forfeited rather than appear in court.

All the way home Harry kept telling about his political connections. He was going directly to the Governor with his troubles.

George finally tired of this conversation and said to Harry. "Forget it. The closest you'll get to the Governor will be that game warden."

Back at the park we tried to drag the water for the fishing gear and the canvas bag, but had no luck. When we quit, George said to me: "It figures. Everything Harry has, costs

more than anyone else's, and now he's got three lobsters that cost three hundred dollars cash, and three hundred dollars' worth of fishing gear. That's two hundred dollars a lobster, and certainly the highest price ever paid for a crustacean."

Harry overheard this, and it seemed to cheer him up. Perhaps he felt that for once he had bought something at a price no one could top. I carefully refrained from mentioning that he didn't get the lobsters.

We wound up at Harry's trailer for a drink of his twelve-year-old special blend served in the four-dollar glasses.

18

The National Society of Hitch and Ball Artists was formed at Aliso by five of my tenants, and now boasts several hundred members throughout the United States and Canada, although there is no doubt that candidates worthy of initiation into this outstanding group can be found in England, France, Germany, and, in fact, any country boasting trailerists within its borders. A trailerist can, according to the bylaws, become a member if he has a true verified experience which "would not occur in the normal process of trailering."

The history of this organization is as interesting as some of its members. It all started when the Nobles, Smiths, and Garrets, who owned mobile homes and lived at Aliso, started talking travel trailers. The idea was that they would keep their homes in Aliso, but during the winter months would trailer forth in search of adventure and warmer climes.

This made a lot of conversation which no one took seriously. Then George Slater and Jack Rustine entered the act. George and Jack were experienced trailerists. Each had trailered twice to Palm Springs and back for a total distance, counting both trips, of 480 miles. But both were good sales-

men for the mobile way of life. In the end their persuasive discourses on the ease and comfort of trailering won out. So Noble, Smith, and Garret each ordered a twenty-four-foot travel trailer delivered to the park, and the dealer guaranteed delivery in ten days.

Each day while waiting the appointed time of delivery the five couples gathered in the lounge. The lounge was adjacent to the office, and I could heard the murmuring of their voices practically all day long. Finally they all agreed on a trip. First they would go to Texas, then cross into Mexico, and spend two or three winter months making a leisurely tour of that country, before returning to the United States and trailering down to Florida for a few weeks.

But it was early fall, too soon to enter Mexico. Besides, they needed a little experience, or at least most of them did before taking off on an extended trip, and they decided to make a test run up to the High Sierras.

They got their trailers and loaded up, with the assistance of every Alisian in residence. We all decided that George Slater would lead the group and be followed by the Smiths, Nobles, and Garrets, with the Rustines bringing up the rear. Thus our neophyte travelers would be safely encased in a front and rear guard of experienced trailerists.

The eve of the day of departure came. We put on a regular Aliso-type party for our valiant *voyageurs*. Everyone came. From the enthusiasm you would think this was a park-sponsored tour. At 6:00 o'clock the next morning the trailers pulled up in formation before the clubhouse. I put our famous and raucous "Aliso Farewell Song" on the P.A. system, most of the tenants came out to cheer them on, and they were off on their two-week trip.

The caravan pulled on to Bishop, stopping only at Little Lake for gas and lunch. The first night was spent in a good trailer park on the far side of Bishop, and they left the next morning early to pull up the grade into the Sierras.

Crowley Lake was reached early in the afternoon, and the rest of the day spent there. At a campfire that night a decision was made to take the turn-off and tour the Mammoth Lake country, as none of these trailerists had ever been through that scenic area.

Early the next day the caravan left with George Slater in the lead. It wasn't too long before George came to a big billboard with an arrow pointing to the right. In letters three feet high this message was printed:

VISIT DEVIL'S POSTPILE
ONE OF AMERICA'S SCENIC WONDERS
Trailers

Allowed

George turned right and, one after the other, the rest of the caravaners followed.

At the first turn George looked down at the steepest, crookedest road in America, heading toward the bowels of the earth and the San Joaquin River far below. He negotiated the first right-angle turn and Mrs. Slater said "Eeek," and opened the car door. She was ready to leap at a moment's notice.

After a few minutes of eternity and twenty or thirty right-angle curves, they reached the bottom, the four other trailers slowly creeping after them. At the camp ground, nine other trailers were parked, although only one was unhitched, and

the Slaters felt better about their little trip. But color didn't return to Mrs. Slater's sheet-white skin for ten minutes.

Slater got out, as did the other drivers in the caravan, and they were quickly joined by the parked trailerists.

"How the hell did you get down here?" Slater asked them. "And how the hell do we get out of here?"

A trailerist said, "We got down here the same way you did. No other road goes out. This is it. You've had it."

"How are we gonna get out, then?" asked Slater.

Said the trailerist: "We've unhitched one of the cars, and the driver has gone for a ranger."

About three hours later the ranger arrived. He looked at the fourteen trailers. "My God," he said. "Can't any of you read? The sign says 'Trailers Not Allowed.' It's a miracle any of you got down that road."

"It's a miracle, all right," said Slater. "But it'll need more than a miracle for any of us to pull back out of here. So the question is, how do we get up that thing?"

The ranger answered without a second's hesitation. "The only way you can get up is by tractor. Every tractor we own is up on Yosemite Summit, and we don't know when we can spare one."

Slater was persistent. "So what do we do?"

"Unhitch and get out of here," said the ranger. "Leave your names at the ranger station in Bishop, and they'll notify you when we pull your trailers out, and you can come get them."

Slater felt something wet on his cheek. He looked up. Snow was falling. He began to unhitch and the rest of the caravaners followed suit.

At the top of the grade they stopped and went over to look

at the sign. At close range they saw that some practical joker had painted out the "Not" from the sign. What originally read:

Trailers
Not
Allowed →

now read:

Trailers

Allowed →

The ranger restored the "Not" and the Aliso caravaners, now minus caravans, returned to the park. The trip took less than six days.

Forty-eight hours later, letters came from the ranger service informing them that the trailers would be pulled to the top of the grade sometime during the winter, and they would be able to retrieve them when the roads opened about April 15.

A few nights later the Smiths, Nobles, Garrets, Slaters, and Rustines met in the lounge and formed the National Society of Hitch and Ball Artists. A couple of the trailer magazines publicized their club and before long applications were pouring in from all over the United States.

Later, when the trailers were picked up, it was suggested that the tractor driver who pulled the trailers to the top of the grade should also be given an honorary membership. He parked the trailers with one wheel in a ditch, and one wheel on level ground. After a winter of being parked like this, every trailer was out of line, and our Alisian caravaners pulled back to the factory for an extensive frame-straightening job.

While there they also bought new tires, for several hundred miles of waddling down the road sideways is enough to scuff the tread off a trailer tire. It seems they are built round to roll, not slide.

All in all, the first trip of the Alisian could hardly be considered a success.

19

One morning the secretary of Dr. Smith, one of my associates, phoned and asked me to come in to Los Angeles for a budget meeting. At 10:00 A.M. the next day I was shown into Smith's office, and, as usual, I found little Dr. Jones perched in a chair alongside the desk, peering over his glasses. Smith, also as usual, had his overly plump frame stuffed into a underslung swivel chair three sizes too small.

The secretary drew up a straight-backed chair, opened a notebook, and we were ready to take up the budget. First on the agenda was our projected net income. I submitted my figures and they were approved. Well they might be, for they were three times the normal returns on any type of mobile-home park.

Next came "Repairs and Improvements."

Dr. Smith glanced at the figures, threw them back at me and said: "Dr. Jones and I are agreed that no improvements are warranted."

I looked at Dr. Jones. He said nothing, keeping his head slanted at its usual angle. The girls in the doctors' office said it got that angle from his habit of nodding "yes" to anything Dr. Smith said.

I would try to describe Dr. Jones, but no description is necessary beyond saying that he was a prominent officer in an international temperance association.

Speaking directly to him I said: "It is imperative that we plow back part of the profits into improvements. Aliso is now one of America's top parks, if not *the* top park. But it can only be kept at the peak by improving it a little each year."

Dr. Smith answered for Dr. Jones: "It's ridiculous to spend money on a park that's full, and has a long waiting list. Dr. Jones and I vote against it."

"Even Aliso can become obsolete if the necessary repairs aren't made," I said despairingly.

"Dr. Jones and I vote against it," Dr. Smith said.

I gave up on that point and turned the discussion to "Activities."

Dr. Smith looked at the heading, leaned back in his chair until it groaned, and said: "Rex, we have decided to take a firm stand on entertainment. Dr. Jones and I do not now and never did approve of dancing, smoking, or drinking in the park. Our faith does not permit such activities. We have investigated other parks and are convinced that entertainment is unnecessary. We want it eliminated."

My heart dropped. Our park was acknowledged to be the leader in the field, but without maintenance, improvement, and some entertainment for the guests it would soon be just another trailer park, and an out-of-date one at that.

I tried once more. "By any chance did your investigations disclose why we get three times the rental any other park gets? We offer only one thing not offered by other parks . . . entertainment.

"Furthermore, you have never risked a dime in our en-

tertainment program. I have personally underwritten the whole thing."

I thought of something else. "It seems a little late to speak of religious principles. Your religion has never prevented your profiting from our programs. Don't you agree, Dr. Jones?"

Replied Dr. Smith: "Dr. Jones is opposed to further entertainment. Dr. Jones and I vote against it."

"Gentlemen," I said, "as long as I manage and have an interest in Aliso Park our current program will be continued."

"You," said Dr. Smith, "leave us no alternative. We will arrange to take you out of the picture."

I turned to Dr. Jones. "Is that the way you want it, Doctor?" I asked.

He squinted over his glasses, opened his mouth, and I thought I was finally going to get a word from him, but all he said was, "I've got to have a glass of water."

The secretary immediately bounced from her chair. In seconds she was back with a glass of water which Jones swallowed with the air of one sipping ambrosia, retaining each mouthful as though he were savoring the flavor to the fullest. He didn't answer me. He couldn't, with his mouth full of water.

Since Jones obviously had nothing to say, I addressed myself to Dr. Smith. "In that case," I told him, "I'll give you six months to get another manager."

"That," said Dr. Smith, "will be satisfactory to Dr. Jones and myself."

Helen and I talked things over. Six months would see the end of our winter season and the start of summer. Our

winter program was already planned and we decided to keep it running. We scheduled a weekly dance, with our Aristocrats as the orchestra, potluck dinners, dance-instruction sessions, and movies. An occasional party was thrown in for good measure.

Many of our tenants looked forward to winter. Although at that time of the year we did not have as many activities as during the summer, the events were more intimate, being almost wholly confined to actual tenants in the park.

November, as usual, brought whales, lots of whales, passing by on their way to the breeding ground off the Mexican coast. For some reason, perhaps a vagary of warm ocean currents, many paused not far off our beach to indulge in water play, or perhaps a preliminary courting, and many guests spent most of the day on the beach watching the cavorting whales.

One evening as I was passing Mrs. Purdy's patio she called me over and said, "When I came back from the beach I saw a dead whale on the sand."

"Are you sure it was dead?"

"Certainly I'm sure. I reached over and touched it. You couldn't do that to a live whale, could you?"

I agreed with her. It wasn't likely anyone would be able to touch a live whale.

"Come on," I said, "let's go down and look at it."

I was interested in this whale. Whales present a challenge to any landlord whose property fronts on the water because if the whale lands he immediately becomes the landlord's property and must be disposed of in some way or another. This is a big job.

We walked to the end of the park, down to the beach,

and over a little rise. On the other side of this hummock Mrs. Purdy had seen the whale.

We looked all around. No whale. Then Mrs. Purdy grabbed my arm for support. She was trembling. "Look out there," she said.

About fifty feet from shore a whale was swimming seaward.

"My God," moaned Mrs. Purdy, "I walked right up to that thing and touched it. I thought it was dead."

I helped her back to her trailer, explaining that sometimes whales come to shore to scrape off a few barnacles, but my explanation did not calm her. Mrs. Purdy still thought that a dead whale had come to life.

Leaving her at her mobile home I sauntered back toward the swimming pool, but before I got there I ran into Mr. Jacklin, one of my most valued tenants. Mr. Jacklin is a Los Angeles stockbroker, an ex-U.S.C. left tackle and track man who has never lost his love for the athletic life, although he cushions his current athletic endeavors with most of the creature comforts. During the summer he surf-fishes, bathes in the ocean, and does some boating, but his great love is our heated pool. After a few hours in, near, or on the briney deep he always relaxes in its warm water. So fond is he of the pool that all during the winter he drives down from Los Angeles to enjoy its warmth, and swim a dozen or so laps.

As I passed by the pool, Mr. Jacklin was on the near side attired in a bathing suit, dripping wet, his skin the blue of glacier ice, and goose pimples as big as Alaskan mosquito bites standing out on his flesh. He was mumbling a few words and his language was startling. A group of Alisians

stood nearby, entranced, as Mr. Jacklin expressed in no uncertain terms his opinion of a certain muckleheaded, half-witted sot, whose father was a moron and mother a Mongoloid idiot, and who had, in the dead of winter, turned off the heating apparatus in our pool.

Mr. Jacklin was referring to me.

The day before I had turned off the heater so my maintenance man could work on it, and I had forgotten to turn it back on.

The freezing man paused for a deep breath and I stepped up to him. "Better get dressed, Mr. Jacklin," I said, "before you catch pneumonia. While you are putting your clothes on I'll try to find the crazy nut who turned off the heat."

When he vanished around a corner I sneaked into the lounge. Helen looked up at me from a big chair.

"Some day," said she, "people are going to get wise to who it is that makes the idiotic mistakes around here, and then you'll be the one shivering in the pool."

"I hope not," I told her. "I can't swim."

The next day was like every other "normal" day. At 6:00 A.M. the garbage truck made its customary rounds and I was awakened by the usual slam-bang serenade of iron cans bouncing off concrete. This, as always, brought me bolt upright in bed and out on the cold floor in my bare feet.

I went to the window and looked out, making my usual mental note to invent a rubber garbage can. The salad wagon custodians, as they termed themselves, were giving their customary startling performance, heaving fifty-gallon cans into the wagon fully loaded, and tossing them back,

empty, in such a way that they revolved three times in the air, bounced on the concrete, and skittered into their reserved stall.

It was a downright phenomenal exhibition. Why it is only on display at 6:00 A.M. is the philosophical question I have long pondered.

There must be thousands and thousands of garbage wagons in this country because, no matter where I am, there is always a wagon on the premises at 6:00 A.M., sharp.

Now I was awake—not willingly, but awake nevertheless. I took a shower, shaved and dressed, and made the rounds of the park. This was necessary because the park designer had stupidly failed to include a central switch in his plans. I had to turn off each light individually, every morning, and turn on each separate light every night. I could only blame myself for this extra bit of work—I was the park designer.

Then I took my usual breakfast of orange juice and coffee. This was part of my strenuous reducing diet, and Helen saw to it that I stayed on the diet for breakfast; every night I fell off the diet wagon, but over this she had no control.

It was now eight o'clock, and the maintenance man came on duty. I started him on his rounds, going over all details of the day's work, and then it was 10 A.M. and mail time, so I hung around while Helen sorted letters into their respective boxes.

At 10:30 the procession started; no Alisian ever left a letter in his or her box any longer than necessary.

To read the mail, or to console themselves for not having received any, the men congregated in the lounge. Shortly thereafter the daily bull session started. Today we

solved all major problems facing the United States, decided on the score of the upcoming Army-Navy football game, and spent some time wondering why eggs were so high-priced in Bulgaria. I don't remember how Bulgaria got into the discussion, but one of the boys had probably been there, and had kept posted on such vital statistics ever since his trip.

After about an hour of this educational conversation I started the usual daily round. I had coffee at the Davises' trailer; coffee at the Craibs' trailer; coffee at the Fisher trailer; and used the rest room at the Reeds' trailer.

In the lounge Mr. Jamison greeted me with a complaint. "Rex, there's a terrible smell around my trailer. Will you come over and see if you can figure what it is?"

"Yes, sure," I said, and added, "Have a cigar on me."

"Thanks," he said, and took one of my stogies. We lit up while strolling over to his trailer.

As we approached his space, Jamison said, "I smelled it right about here."

"I don't smell anything," I told him, "do you?"

"No," he said, hesitating, "but I sure as hell did smell something this morning."

I pretended to sniff. "Well," I said, "let me know if you think you smell anything later." With that I returned to the lounge.

When you smoke one of my cigars nothing can penetrate the odor, and I knew it. I always used the cigar gag when I didn't want to crawl under a trailer and straighten a vent. I made a mental note to have the maintenance man fix the Jamison vent in the morning, and looked around

the lounge. It was 3:00 P.M. and the Shuffleboard Committee was just leaving.

I grabbed a couple of them to help me arrange tables and chairs for the evening entertainment. We were having as our guest a Mrs. Florin, president of the Art Guild of one of the beach cities. Mrs. Florin was an acknowledged cultural expert, and had just returned from a world trip during which she had taken thousands of colored slides of unique *objets d'art*. She had been invited to the park by Mr. and Mrs. Javis, who traveled in the same set as Mrs. Florin. All the art lovers in Aliso, of whom I was not one, looked forward with pleasure to seeing the pictures and hearing Mrs. Florin's lecture.

We arranged, as was our custom, a big dinner in honor of our guest, and the tenants began gathering early to partake of a special punch we made that was guaranteed to enhance their normal appetite for barbecued spareribs.

Soon Mr. and Mrs. Javis came in with their guests in tow.

Mrs. Javis said, "Rex, I want you to meet Mr. and Mrs. Florin."

"I am pleased to meet you," I said.

Mrs. Florin flashed a toothy white smile. "Chawmed," she said, and I led them over to the punch table.

Mrs. Florin was tall, dripping with jewels, and carried her head at a regal slant that could only be achieved by years of practice. The impression she created was that she had not only seen all the sights of the world, but all the sights of the world had seen her.

Her husband looked like a man who had married for money and been caught in the act. A glance at him and you

knew he carried the camera and his wife shot the pictures.

After a few glasses of punch I ushered the Florins through the crowd, introducing them to the assembled art lovers. Mrs. Florin acknowledged each introduction with a flash of white teeth and a "Chawmed."

I was "chawmed" when we finished the rounds.

I seated the Florins at the head table with Mr. and Mrs. Javis. The dinner was good and everyone enjoyed it except Mrs. Florin. I stopped at her place to see how she was getting along.

"I'm slightly ill," she told me. "Besides, Mr. Florin and I never eat pork."

I looked at his plate. It was clean as a whistle. Mrs. Florin followed my glance, and I could see her make a mental note to inform Mr. Florin that he did *not* eat pork.

After dinner, tables were cleared and chairs rearranged facing the stage. I set up the screen and slide projector, and tested the microphone. Then I stepped to the mike and made the formal introduction. Mrs. Florin now took the stage and waited until the applause subsided. Then she said, "I am chawmed with Mr. Thompson's introduction."

The first picture was of an Indian statue, a many-armed image of Shiva the Destroyer. A devotee of the Upanishads or the Bhagavad-Gita might have thought it impressive. Mrs. Florin thought it beautiful and artistic and spent fifteen minutes dramatically describing its various attributes, illustrating each adjective by pointing with her cane to one of the writhing curves.

I overheard someone in the second row say that the statue looked like the result of a misspent life. Our art expert

went merrily on, but told us nothing at all about the religious significance of the statue.

Then I noticed her turning pale, and I started up to the stage to see if she wanted a glass of water. At that instant Mrs. Florin nodded and Mr. Florin switched slides. Now we were looking at a desert scene. Visible was a long waste of desert sand sliding off into the horizon. The only relief from this barrenness was a pile of rocks in the left foreground.

As I reached Mrs. Florin she grabbed the mike and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, you will have to excuse me for just a moment. I will be right back."

I nodded at Helen. She and Mrs. Javis met Mrs. Florin as she stepped from the stage and escorted her to the rest room off the lounge. I turned and looked at the desert and the rocks. The audience gazed at the desert and the rocks. There was nothing else to do but wait, look—and listen.

The lounge is part of an old building, and the walls are not thick. Mrs. Florin obviously was sick to her stomach. After a few minutes we heard a sound of flushing water. At that precise moment Mrs. Florin screamed: "My God! My teeth!"

Mrs. Florin absolutely refused to leave the rest room until I cleared the hall. Then she grabbed Mr. Florin and dashed out to their car.

I still have a colored slide showing a desert scene with a pile of rocks in the left-hand corner. Some day I hope to find out what that pile of rocks is, and why anyone would take a picture of it.

For the next few weeks life went on as usual, with bridge parties, potlucks, bingo, movies, two birthday parties, and football pools. I got out the fall issue of the *Aliso Abalone* and spent a lot of time wondering what I would do if my associates didn't change their minds, knowing all the time that there wasn't much chance of that.

My tenants knew nothing of my plans, and I knew little more, but I confided the facts to a few friends in the industry and they started looking around for me. I began getting phone calls from people with propositions; some good, some bad, some indifferent. I investigated all of them, but nothing was better than the job I was leaving.

I was worried. Mrs. Thompson's boy Rex was in a spot.

One morning I woke to the usual garbage serenade, dressed, left the lights on for the moment, had breakfast, and stepped outside. At that instant my personal troubles became unimportant.

I took a deep breath—and almost choked. Soggy, moist, and richly rotten air was filling my lungs, and my nose and sinuses. You could slice the atmosphere with a knife, wrap the slice in tinfoil, put it in a freezer, and have ready-made poison gas for the next war. I knew immediately what the trouble was, but not who was at fault, nor what to do about it.

When we built the park no sewer lines were available, so we hooked on to our own septic tanks. Later, citizens of the South Laguna Sanitary District, including me, voted bonds to put in a modern sewer system. I knew all about this system, because the treatment plant was a few hundred yards to the rear of the park; alongside it was the pumping station. The outfall ran along the creek down our

north boundary and extended some twelve hundred feet out into the ocean, and the main sewer line went right down the middle of the park.

For months part of our streets had been torn up while they were putting in that line and other adjuncts to the nearby plant. Since most of the heavy construction was in or near our park I built a makeshift grandstand, and every tenant had a reserved seat in it. They called themselves the Sewer Supervisor's Committee, and many of the seats were occupied every working day for a full eight hours.

When the sewer was completed we connected to it, as the law said we must even though our septic tanks were still in good condition. They had a formal dedication ceremony and I was invited to be a speaker, but I declined because I couldn't figure out what to say at the dedication of a sewer. After listening to the speakers at the ceremony I decided they didn't know what to say, either, yet they said it anyway.

This plant had been in operation exactly ten days when I stepped out of my quarters into an atmosphere calling for a gas mask. Something was obviously wrong with the sewer system.

Tenants started running up to me. Some of them hadn't been out of bed at that time of day for twenty or thirty years but that odor got 'em up, and the thick air didn't stop them from speaking to me in no uncertain terms. Whatever was causing that stench, I was responsible for it. I finally got rid of them and went into the office to call the head of the Sanitary District.

"I'll be right down," he said.

A half hour later a new pick-up truck rolled into the park

and stopped before the office. A sign on the door said: SANITATION ENGINEER. A well-dressed individual got out of the car and I recognized him immediately. It was Joe Roakes, who for several years had worked for me as a laborer. I knew he was no engineer; at times in the past I had thought he wasn't a laborer, either.

The tenants flocked around Joe and he swelled visibly with an importance worthy of greater things.

He said to me negligently, "I'm sure it's nothing serious, but I'll check."

I nodded and went back into the office hopelessly, but Joe was followed by practically everyone in the park as he went from trailer to trailer, nose in the air, giving a perfect imitation of a hound on a hot trail. It took him over an hour to make the complete tour.

"Joe," I said, "did you find the trouble?"

He gave me a look worthy of a seven-thousand-a-year Los Angeles grammar-school teacher talking to an Alabama high-school principal. "Certainly," he said loudly, so the crowd could hear him, "there's nothing for you to worry about. It's only the sewer that's smelling."

And he drove off.

The next evening I attended a meeting of the South Laguna Sanitation Board. I told them of the horrible condition existing at Aliso and said that if something wasn't done about the situation my tenants would be moving out, and I'd be going with them.

They sympathized with me, but pointed out that construction costs for the sewer system exceeded the amount of the bond issue. They didn't even have funds enough to call back the engineer from Bean and Co., who had designed

the system, and find out from him what the trouble was and whether it could be remedied.

I was desperate and offered to pay the engineer's fee if they would let me call him in. The Board agreed.

Three days later the engineer, a Mr. Rich, arrived. By that time most of my tenants were spending their nights in motels. Mr. Rich was a capable engineer, had worked on the system, and I felt sure he could help me. He made a quick trip around the park. Instead of sniffing like a hound, he held a handkerchief to his nose. After this quick tour he went over to the pumping station across the street. In a short time he was back with information. The pumping station could not handle peak loads and they were using the main line, which ran through our park, as a storage tank. As the only vents near the station were in the park, gas forced itself through our traps and out through the vents. The remedy? Put vents on the main line before it entered the park. The cost? About one thousand dollars.

I thanked Mr. Rich and he took his leave. I sat down to think. The sewer district was bankrupt. If they had money we might force them to put in proper vents, but if we wanted immediate relief, we would have to put the vents in ourselves. This meant spending the thousand dollars ourselves.

Knowing Dr. Smith's reluctance to part with money, I phoned him in fear and trepidation. I explained the situation. He grunted once or twice pompously, and said: "Dr. Jones and I will pay nothing. It is up to the Sanitation District."

My six months was coming to a close; I did not want to spend a thousand bucks out of my own pocket, so I

had to figure out something to give us temporary relief. I had the maintenance man cut tapered wooden blocks to exactly fit our sewer vents. We then wedged these into all the vent pipes in the park. When this was done I strolled back and forth among the trailers, without protection of my cigar. The only scent on the breeze was the sweet smell of the ocean.

Hurriedly I went from trailer to trailer, rapped on the door and told each tenant to forget the motels, at least for this one night. Aliso, I told them, no longer smelled like a sewerage plant with a nervous breakdown.

It is remarkable how alike people are. Mr. Johnson's reaction was typical of each and every one of my tenants. He gave me a knowing look, stepped gingerly out of doors, sniffed, and made three complete rounds of his mobile home, sampling the air as he went in almost exact imitation of Laguna's Sanitation Engineer.

Satisfied that there was no smell, he said, "What happened, Rex?"

"Trade secret," I said.

He gave me a skeptical glance, said, "Thanks for telling me," and slowly went back inside his mobile home.

That night I went to sleep feeling good for the first time since the odor had descended on us.

At 3:00 A.M. a cannon shot boomed through the park. I was out of bed, if not fully awake, in one second. I grabbed my pants and reached for my shoes. Two more shots banged out. A woman screamed.

My pants were on. I dropped my shoes and rushed into the street. Half the tenants were ahead of me, gathered in a milling group, and the rest were pouring out of their

mobile homes attired in pajamas, nightgowns, and robes of all kinds and descriptions. It looked like a "come-as-you-are" party.

Mrs. Hamison grabbed me. "Some crazy person is shooting in here," she said. "Call the police."

This was her opinion. Every other tenant had a different explanation for the sounds; one blasé gentleman thought the noises were caused by a Diesel backfiring on the nearby highway.

I didn't know what made the sound, unless one of our gagsters had secreted a portable cannon in the park and was operating it by remote control.

I thought of calling the sheriff. At that moment there was another *bang* within a few feet of us. Like the rest of the tenants I went straight up in the air. Either a Diesel was hidden in the park or somebody was firing an extremely large-caliber gun.

I stood undecided for a moment. There was a clattering at my feet. I looked down. One of my wooden plugs was struggling to get out of its vent. It succeeded, and there was another *bang*.

The mystery was solved.

I explained things to the tenants, we all had a good laugh, and I went back to bed.

In the morning I made more plugs and hammered them in solidly.

After that when I heard a loud report I would start down the park, making sure my cigar was left at home. If I could walk to the end of the park and still breathe I knew it was a Diesel backfiring. If I choked I got another plug and started looking for the offending vent.

20

Although I was almost an ex-park operator I was still a member of T.C.A.'s Board of Directors, and my first real board meeting was at hand. I felt like a veteran as I breezed by the receptionist with a cheery "Good morning" and turned into the directors' room.

I greeted the other thirteen directors and sat down in my seat. Although this was to be one of the year's most important meetings it seemed like old stuff to me.

The agenda was the same.

Mr. Clay called the meeting to order; the minutes of the last meeting were read. Then came "Old Business."

Mr. Wilson reported that he had gone to Cucamonga and tried to reason with Mr. Jacks, the party who had his trailer on a residential lot and was using a sunken barrel as a sewer.

Mr. Wilson reported: "I pleaded with him; for the good of the industry I asked him to move his trailer into a legitimate trailer park. But Mr. Jacks is a very difficult person. He said it was none of our business where or how he lived. However, if it would make us happy, he would remove the barrel, but not the trailer.

"I intend to visit him again, accompanied by the attorney for the City of Cucamonga, and will report on what progress is made."

Next Mr. Lee spoke up for the dealers. According to him, they had held various chapter meetings throughout the Western states and had asked him to make two requests of the Board of Directors.

"What are they?" asked Mr. Clay.

"We want to put on dealer trailer shows in our eleven districts," said Mr. Lee. "We need a thousand dollars per show, or a total of eleven thousand dollars."

Mr. Stone, a manufacturer, said, "I so move."

Someone said, "Second."

Clay said, "All in favor say aye."

This sentence sounded like one word, the way he said it.

A murmur rose.

"Opposed?"

No sound.

"Motion carried," said Clay mechanically.

This was the way T.C.A. meetings went. The suppliers felt that in order to get what they wanted they must support the requests of manufacturers and dealers. Dealers and manufacturers felt the same way, so that was how the log rolled. Politics and politicians are alike the world over, and T.C.A. was not only big business, but big politics as well.

Said Mr. Clay: "What is your second request, Mr. Lee?"

"We think," said Lee, "that a board member should attend all out-of-state chapter meetings."

"I so move," said Mr. Stone.

There was the usual second, the usual murmur, and Clay said, "So carried."

I was thinking of something else when Mr. Clay addressed himself to me.

"Can you attend the next chapter meeting, Rex?"

"Where is it?"

"In Seattle."

I thought of Helen. "How much expense money do I get?"

Mr. Clay gave me a stern look. "The bylaws of this association prohibit a board member from being reimbursed for chapter meetings."

I thought of Helen again. "Sorry," I told Mr. Clay, "but my wife prohibits me attending meetings away from home."

After some discussion a Mr. James agreed to attend the Seattle chapter meeting. It seems his brother's cousin lived in Seattle, and he hadn't seen her for some years.

Next came the Supplier's Report, made by Mr. Water. He launched into an oration about the increased cost of raw materials and the critical situation the suppliers faced because of the new plumbing code This, he vehemently insisted, would make valueless thousands and thousands of dollars worth of fittings suppliers now had on hand.

As I listened to Mr. Water my heart began to bleed for the poor suppliers. He made a final passionate plea for ten thousand dollars to fight this destructive legislation, and sat down.

Mr. Stone said, "I so move."

A faint murmur sounded and Mr. Clay said, "So carried."

Mr. Muntz introduced a problem. Who would direct the spending of this fund?

I spoke up. "Mr. Water should handle the fund. He is

a supplier and obviously knows more about the complicated intricacies of plumbing codes than any one of us."

Said Water: "I don't know one end of a pipe from the other, or anything about codes. I am a supplier of insurance. I know my limitations; I am a damned good insurance man."

Al Shaw, sitting next to me, said *sotto voce:* "You are also a damned good orator."

We dropped this subject.

Mr. Clay rapped the gavel and asked me for the Park Report.

I got up. "We need to hire two field men and supply them with cars. We also need a trailer-park consultant and an extra girl in the office. It will cost fifteen thousand dollars."

Mr. Stone said, "I so move."

Mr. Clay said, "So carried."

Next came the manufacturers' report, presented by Mr. Stone.

"Our immediate problem is to get more trailer parks. We should send representatives to Washington to fight for legislation enabling FHA to underwrite trailer parks. This will aid prospective park owners to get financing. I suggest we send Mr. Combs, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Shaw to help our Washington representative. We should allot ten thousand dollars for this.

"We manufacturers also want the Stanford Research to make a complete survey of the industry. This will cost another ten thousand dollars."

He stopped for breath and began to fumble with some

of the many papers in his brief case. Mr. Grist spoke up. "I move we vote the twenty thousand dollars before Mr. Stone comes up with suggestions that will break us completely."

I seconded the motion; there was the usual faint murmur, and Mr. Clay said, "So carried."

It was getting late. Mr. Stone was still fumbling with his papers. We set the report on the budget over to the next meeting. A move was made for adjournment. Mr. Clay said, "So carried," and rapped with his gavel. The meeting was over.

As we filed out I glanced back. Mr. Stone was gathering up his notes and I heard him mutter something about not having half finished his report.

21

The following morning I received a call from a Mr. Al Duke in Las Vegas. He said he was one of the officials at a new race track being built there, and wanted to know if I would come up and look over a trailer site they intended to develop as part of the project.

He said he understood I planned to change jobs, and felt certain he was in a position to make an offer I could not afford to reject.

This was all very flattering. However, my past experiences with Las Vegas had been sad, very sad. I told him I would talk to my wife, but was doubtful if either of us would be interested in his proposition.

He said he would check with me later, and hung up.

The following Sunday a big blue Cadillac drove into the park. I went out to meet it. It was my policy never to let anyone in a Cadillac wait.

As I walked up on the side away from the driver, a hairy hand was shoved my way. "I'm Al Duke," its owner said.

He got out of the car, an immaculately groomed Hollywood fashion plate with glistening white teeth, apparently made by the same dentist who makes teeth for most of the Hollywood stars. On his hand was a diamond ring bigger

than a headlight. When he moved his arm the reflection blinded me.

Then the driver got out of the car. He was a shriveled-up little guy with bloodshot eyes.

My new-found friend said, "Meet Chuck Downing."

Chuck removed a huge cigar from his mouth and shook hands languidly. On his skinny mitt was a duplicate of Al Duke's ring.

I invited them into the lounge, where we could talk. I pulled up two easy chairs, but they passed them by for uncomfortable straight-backed chairs. The visitors then had their backs safely to the wall.

Al said, "We'll come right to the point, Mr. Thompson. We are building a multi-million-dollar race track in Las Vegas. We want a twenty-acre de luxe trailer park built on part of our property near the race track and facing the Strip. We think many of the jockeys, trainers, owners, and fans attending the races will want first-class trailer accommodations.

"We want a first-class man to head this up. You are the man, and we'll make it well worth your while to come in with us."

I was elated. This sounded better than anything Helen or I had anticipated. So I got her and explained the proposition.

The more I explained the darker her face grew.

I ended up by saying, "I don't think we can afford to pass up this opportunity. What do you think?"

"I think," said Helen, "that we can't afford not to pass up *anything* connected with Las Vegas."

Despite her opinion I said, "It won't do any harm to look the situation over."

The following week end I took a plane to Nevada. That night I made the customary contributions to the hotels on the Strip, and the next day at 10 A.M. Duke and Downing were waiting for me, along with Mr. Frost the general manager of the syndicate. They got right to the point, laying their cards on the table. No more can be expected of a Las Vegas gambler.

I soon discovered it was not my exceptional ability they wanted, but my name. Several trailer publications had run stories on me, and on Aliso Park. So when Frost ran into park permit trouble with the local authorities he decided I was the man he wanted, because I was the only trailer-park operator whose name he knew.

One of the reasons the permit had been denied was "lack of experience," and the syndicate was sure that if I were the designer and operator of the park this objection would be overcome.

We talked things over for about thirty minutes and then Mr. Frost said, "Let's look at the property."

Mr. Frost's car and chauffeur were waiting at the curb. The four of us got in and drove off. A bodyguard named Joe trailed us every foot of the way in another chauffeur-driven car that never dropped more than fifty feet behind ours.

The property was in a far better location than I had imagined in my wildest dreams, right on the Strip and practically adjoining the fabulous Gay Paree Hotel. After walking over the property from one end to the other we went

into the Gay Paree for a light lunch of lobster thermidor and Scotch and soda.

Four of us sat at one table. Ten feet away, at another table, sat the two chauffeurs and Joe. They also ate lobster and drank Scotch.

During lunch I asked for an outline of their proposition. They said I could write my own ticket: could design, build, and operate the park exactly as I thought best. First, however, I had to get permission from the county to build it.

I asked them to put their proposition in writing, so I would have time to study it. It was then I learned gamblers never put anything in writing, and never sign anything. A handshake, they told me, was as good as a contract.

We finally decided I would go back to Laguna, think the whole thing over, and return to Vegas the following week.

Helen met me at the Los Angeles airport and I filled her in on the details as we drove back to Aliso. She was unimpressed. Furthermore, she said, she didn't like Las Vegas; didn't like gamblers; didn't like gambling; and was beginning to think she didn't like me.

I thought the thing over for a few days and came to two conclusions:

1. I did not want to be associated with gamblers.
2. I did want to build that ultra de luxe park.

I went back to Vegas on schedule and was met by good old Joe. Mr. Frost was waiting for me, I shook hands, sat down, and before I was settled in my seat he said, "Mr. Thompson, after much consideration we have decided to give you stock in the race track, and a contract to operate the park."

"I do not care to be directly connected with your opera-

tion," I told him. "However, several of my friends will go in with me on this, and I will make you a counter offer. We'll lease the land from you, and build the park ourselves."

"I'll have to take that proposition up with other members of the syndicate," said Mr. Frost.

We shook hands and I went back to the Desert Inn.

About six that night Mr. Frost called. He informed me, very politely, that it would be at least two days before he could get his group together. I spent the next three days depleting the Thompsons' joint bank account. Finally I got a call from Al. He told me to come on over to the office.

Guarding the door was Joe. Inside were Mr. Frost, Mr. Dowling, Mr. Duke, and two other members of the syndicate whom I had never met. They weren't introduced to me, they said nothing during the meeting, and to this day I don't know who they were.

Without any preliminaries Mr. Frost said, "Mr. Thompson, we will accept your offer with one proviso. First you must get the County Board permit to build the park."

I remembered their policy: no signatures, but handshakes were binding. I stuck out my hand to Mr. Frost.

"Shake with Al," he said. "He's a member of the syndicate."

I shook with Al and the meeting was over.

I went into Las Vegas and up to the County Board's office. I introduced myself to the Board's secretary, told him my reason for appearing, and asked for a date to be set for a hearing on my request for a zoning variance. It took him only a few moments to check his records and set a date.

Immediately I returned to Laguna Beach.

When Helen heard the good news, she almost threatened divorce; but we'd been married so many years, and lived through so many idiotic acts on my part, that I knew she wasn't serious at this late date.

I contacted my friends who had promised to support me in this venture or, for that matter, in any park operation in which I might become interested. They assured me their word was good, perhaps not to the last dollar, but to as deep in their bank accounts as it was necessary to go. Then I completed my plans for the new park, just in time to return to Las Vegas for an interview with the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioners always meet in a big room with a large table in the center. They always regard an applicant for a variance with assorted frowns. And they always regard any application for construction of a trailer park with dismay, consternation, and dislike, all of which distills into a vigorous "No" whenever possible.

In a few minutes I realized that Las Vegas commissioners did not differ from their counterparts elsewhere. I changed my approach immediately, and began showing pictures of Aliso, and explaining how much better our Las Vegas park would be. Finally, I terminated the conversation; the variance was brought to a vote, and passed.

I thanked the gentlemen, went back to the hotel, called Mr. Frost's office and left word I would call in the morning. Morning came and Mr. Frost was in his office. I told him of our success with the commissioners and asked that the syndicate draw up the lease we had agreed upon.

Mr. Frost said, "You made the deal with Al. You'll have to take up the details with him."

There was one catch. I couldn't find Al. It was a week before I caught up with him, and it took him another week to line up the rest of the syndicate. They agreed it was necessary I have a written lease, because you can't put a handshake into escrow. They instructed their attorneys to put our agreement into writing. This was done, and the lease went into escrow the day before the track officially opened.

They work fast in Vegas.

The race track opened one day and closed the next. It appeared that healthy outdoor betting was not popular with the gambling set who frequented this health spa in the desert. They preferred smoke and green tables to fresh air and green grass.

The syndicate was heavily in debt and all their property, including the trailer-park site, was immediately plastered with creditors' and stockholder' liens.

I went home the next night, perhaps not a wiser man, but certainly a poorer one.

Helen was her usual sweet self, except that she said nothing to me for three days, and I caught her scrutinizing our bank statement with the utmost intensity.

When I recovered a slight trace of my usual self esteem we plunged into plans for the Christmas party. We knew this would be our last big party at Aliso and we wanted to make it one that would never be forgotten. We debated whether to put on a floor show or a play, finally deciding on the latter. In the past our stage shows had been most

successful and we hoped to outdo ourselves this time. We agreed that we would avoid the corny comedy stuff we had done in the past. Instead we would put on an honest-to-goodness drama.

I called together several of our key tenants and asked them what they thought of our plan. They were enthusiastic. Mrs. Walker was delegated to go into Los Angeles to the Playhouse Library and pick out a three-act play she considered appropriate.

She returned with eight copies of *Love Finds a Way*. This is a dramatic and heart-rending story.

I called a friend of mine, Mr. Willis. He was an experienced director of Little Theater productions, with several outstanding movies to his credit, and had promised to direct a play for us.

He came over and looked at one of the scripts.

"Marvelous," he said. "I've always wanted to do *Love Finds a Way.*"

The group was elated, but somehow I didn't share their feelings. I had a foreboding.

"Mr. Willis," I warned, "You must remember that the so-called actors you will work with are strictly amateurs—and I mean *strictly* amateurs. Perhaps we should stick to corn and comedy."

"Heaven forbid," said Mr. Willis. "By the night of the performance the characters will be living their parts."

"Let's put it to a vote," I said.

I was unanimously voted down.

So we went to work selecting the cast of twelve. Selecting meant convincing my tenants that they possessed hidden thespian talents. I finally accomplished the job.

After the first try-out Mr. Willis said, "Rex, I believe the lead in this play should be done by a professional. John Slav has played in several of my productions and I am sure he would love to play the lead role of Clarence."

I knew John well, having worked with him on a couple of pictures at M.G.M., so I promised I would contact him in the morning.

John replied that since he was at liberty he would be happy to come down to Laguna Beach and stay with us for the month's rehearsal. I made reservations for him at the Surf and Sand Hotel and told them to bill me. When John arrived he informed the manager that he would take care of his own bill.

I never could figure out actors. They want either five thousand dollars a week or nothing. And they work just as hard for nothing as they do for the five thousand.

Mr. Willis held daily rehearsals for two weeks, and from then on had two rehearsals every day. Never did a group of tenants take anything so seriously. Friends with whom I once spent hours drinking interminable cups of coffee now barely glanced up from their scripts as I passed by.

Thespians wandered around the park at all hours of the day and night muttering lines. A stranger would have thought he was on the grounds of an insane asylum.

Rehearsals were secret, and only the cast was permitted to enter or leave while they were in progress. Al Lorry, a retired studio grip, enlarged our stage and made the props, as well as taking a fat part in the show.

I installed more lighting effects than were used in *Gone With the Wind*. This was an all-out production, and nothing, not even my pocketbook, was spared.

Posters were made and put on the bulletin board and scattered around the park. Engraved invitations to the party before the play, and to the play itself, were mailed to all tenants inviting them to bring their guests. I asked some of my studio friends, reporters from local and Los Angeles papers, and the industry press. All accepted. We were assured of a capacity house of 150, and warned tenants not to bring guests without reservations.

The night of the show arrived and we had our pre-play party while the cast ate early in our private quarters, for it took them over an hour to put on costumes and make-up.

The show finally got under way. The curtain went up, the lights dimmed, and the first words were spoken.

It was a boy-meets-girl drama. They were torn apart in the first act and, after unbelievable hardships, disappointments, and strife, touchingly reunited as the curtain dropped.

The first scene of the first act was proof that our actors had a complete grasp of their trade, at least so far as this play was concerned. By the end of the first act I was convinced that a better production could not be seen on Broadway. Mr. Willis had done a wonderful job of producing and directing, and John Slav was turning in the performance of his life.

The second act was better than the first, and the audience's interest mounted, a tribute to a marvelous performance. As we went into the third and final act, a dropping pin could have been heard between lines. Then came the big scene, built up to by three acts and almost three hours of acting—not to speak of a solid month of preparation.

The heroine, Maybelle, was alone on stage as Clarence made his final entrance to effect a lasting reunion. There was

a tense moment of silence; then the audience broke into hysterical laughter.

I looked at Mr. Willis. Mr. Willis looked at me. We both looked again at the stage. There was John Slav as Clarence, our only professional, with his pants unzipped. In his hurry to make a change he had forgotten to use his zipper.

I signaled our prop man to lower the curtain. It dropped with Clarence halfway through his final speech. The audience was still roaring with laughter.

Mr. Willis and I went backstage. I was laughing myself, but Mr. Willis was not. He grabbed his hat, turned on his heel, and left before I could thank him for his genuinely fine work. Over his shoulder he said: "Whatever made you think this bunch would appreciate real art? You better stick to comedy."

On this note of laughter—and of sour disappointment—ended our last great party and show at Aliso.

22

I was eating breakfast when the telephone rang. A voice said, "This is Mr. J. L. Watson of Phoenix, Arizona. I would like to speak to Mr. Thompson."

"This is Thompson," I said. "What can I do for you?"

"I would like to make an appointment with you for this morning. I have a piece of property in Phoenix I would like you to inspect."

I was near the end of the line at Aliso, still had nothing to do, and you might say I was getting desperate. I was ready to grasp at straws.

"I'll see you at ten o'clock," I told Mr. Watson.

At ten an elderly gentleman came walking into the park and headed toward the office. I walked out to the patio.

"Are you Mr. Watson?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said, "and I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. Thompson."

There was nothing outstanding about Mr. Watson; he was of medium stature, reddish brown coloring, sun-tanned, and rather poorly dressed.

He must have noticed me eyeing his clothes because he said, "You'll have to excuse my appearance, Mr. Thompson. I flew into Los Angeles yesterday and they misdirected my

luggage to San Francisco. This is an old suit I always wear in-between points, so to speak."

I invited him into the house and Helen brought us coffee.

"What can I do for you?" I asked.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "I understand from the trade press that you are looking for a new location. I've got, without a doubt, the finest possible location in Arizona."

"Where is it?"

"On the edge of Phoenix on Camelback Road, right in the midst of the resort area. How much land would you need for your park?"

"Fifteen or twenty acres would do."

"Fine. I have thirty acres of ground and you can have any part of it. I have finished my business in Los Angeles and can leave with you this afternoon to look it over."

He was putting the pressure on. I don't like pressure, probably because I don't have much resistance to it.

"Mr. Watson," I said.

"Call me Joe," he suggested.

"Well, Joe, I will give it some thought. Also I'll check with some of my acquaintances to see if they'd be interested in financing a park in Arizona."

"Mr. Thompson," said Joe, "I fully intend to invest in this park with you. I'll put up all necessary funds to get the park started."

I called my wife in from the kitchen.

"Helen," I said, "Mr. Watson not only has land in Phoenix but will help finance a park if I like the location. It sounds too good to be true."

"You're right," said Helen. "It is too good to be true."

She turned to Joe. "What's the real story, Mr. Watson?"

I was embarrassed, but realized that Helen was thinking of the jolt our bank account had taken in the Las Vegas venture. I apologized for her to Mr. Watson.

I was relieved when he said, "Think nothing of it. I know your wife is under a terrific strain."

We kept talking and finally I agreed to think it over and let him know in the morning if I'd drive to Phoenix. After that I dropped him off in front of the Hotel Laguna.

He said he would telephone me the next day, so I went back to the park and tried to convince Helen that this was a proposition we really should investigate. She did not agree.

But Helen never prevents me from doing anything. She merely states her own opinion and then lets me go my own way, trying to prove her wrong. Some day I'll do just that.

The next day old Joe came walking in to the park before I had a chance to call the hotel. I told him I'd been thinking the whole thing over and I couldn't get away right now. But if he wanted to meet me in Phoenix the following week I'd drive over.

"I have to go East next week," he said. "If you are interested you'll have to come over now."

I tried to argue him out of his position, but he wouldn't budge. Finally he stuck out his hand and said, "It's been very nice meeting you, Mr. Thompson, but I don't believe we can do any business."

He turned away and I saw opportunity walking out the door. "O.K., Joe," I said, "you win. We'll leave this afternoon."

I got hold of my maintenance man and laid out a week's work. Helen reluctantly cooked lunch for us, and I noticed she made no attempt to impress Joe with her cooking.

After the meal I took my car down for a grease job and tune-up while Helen packed my bags. Then we were off.

We drove through Riverside and Banning, and arrived in Palm Springs about three o'clock. It was almost four hundred miles more to Phoenix so we decided to spend the night in Palm Springs. I knew the manager at the Lone Pine Motel and he fixed us up with two very nice thirty-five-dollar cottages.

We checked in, got settled, and went in to dinner. To eat with Joe was an experience not likely to be forgotten: he was a true gourmet. To him every meal was an adventure. He ordered pheasant under glass with baked snails on the side. I had hamburger called by a name fancy enough to justify the price, which was exorbitant.

After dinner we retired to the bar and indulged in more than a few highballs. Joe did all the talking; I did all the listening. The conversation was exclusively about his property on Camelback Road. After a few drinks and several hours of his excellent stories I was convinced that only a fool would have stayed at Aliso so long when a setup like Joe's was available.

We finally returned to the dining room for a midnight snack—Monte Cristo Sandwiches I think it was—and then to our private cottages. I left a call for 7:00 A.M., undressed, went to bed, to sleep. The phone rang, I got up, showered, dressed, carried my bags to the car, returned to the dining room; and there was Joe, waiting for me.

I ordered ham and eggs. He ordered something French. It was a casserole made up of asparagus, cheese sauce, and eggs.

When we were finished we went to the office to pay our

bill. Joe said he would give me a check for his share when we got to Phoenix, so I forked out $140.00.

It was a hot day on the desert; we stopped every fifty or hundred miles for a cool drink. I always took a Coke, and Joe would have a highball. Sometimes he had two or three. I began to hope my money would hold out either until Joe had all he could drink, or until we reached Phoenix, where I would be reimbursed.

Joe got hungry at Glendale, about fifteen miles out of Phoenix, so at his suggestion we stopped for lunch. I had a hamburger. He had an exotic salad made with six kinds of fruit, including avocado and papaya, mixed at the table with two dressings. It looked beautiful, but like nothing I'd ever eaten or wanted to eat.

After that we were on our last lap. I was going to stay at Joe's house, so I wasn't worried about reservations.

We entered Phoenix.

"Stop at the next gas station," said Joe. "I'll call my wife so she'll be ready for us."

This was a good idea. Besides, I needed gas.

I told the attendant to fill her up and went to the washroom. When I came back Joe hadn't returned, so I paid for the gas and settled down to wait. After about fifteen minutes I looked in the telephone booth. No Joe. I knew he had wanted some cigarettes; probably he had gone across the street to a drugstore. I went back to the car and waited.

After a while the attendant came out of the station. "Is there anything more I can do for you, sir?" he asked.

"No thank you," I told him. "I am waiting for my friend."

"You mean that fellow that was with you?"

"That's right. Do you know him?"

"Sure. Everybody knows Joe. He lives across the tracks in one of those tin shacks."

"What are you talking about? I brought this fellow from L.A. to show me thirty acres of land he owns on Camelback Road."

The attendant shrugged. "Don't get sore at me, but I can tell you old Joe hasn't got thirty cents, let alone thirty acres. You're the fourth one in the past year that has brought him home. The last one was from San Francisco. That sucker thought he was coming to look at Joe's fabulous gold mine in the Superstition Mountains.

"He really had a better right to get sore than any of you other guys, because on the way down Joe promoted him for an expensive one-night outing in Palm Springs."

The attendant looked at me thoughtfully. "By the way," he said, "where did you spend last night?"

"At my home in Los Angeles," I lied, and drove away.

I was broke. I had to go downtown to cash a check, so I stopped at the Westward Ho, where I was known. But before I cashed my check I went into the bar, sat before the big mirror, ordered a beer, and stared at myself in the glass. I was trying to figure out what characteristics marked a sucker. The image in the mirror looked like all the other images, so far as I could see. There were no outstanding differences; nothing obvious, at least.

I gave up, finished my beer, cashed my check, and started home. I was in no hurry. No matter how slowly I drove, the five hundred miles to Laguna Beach would be covered before I could think of a good story to tell Helen.

It was late when I pulled into the park and the tenants were just finishing a square-dance session in the lounge.

I walked in, Helen saw me and came running over. She kissed me, stepped back, and laughed. "Don't tell me," she said. "Let me guess. Old Joe didn't have thirty acres."

I started to explain the whole thing to her, and the square dancers came crowding around, so I found myself telling the story to half the park. They thought it was one of the funniest stories they had ever heard, and kept interrupting my tale with whoops of laughter.

Even Helen, despite the beating our bank roll had taken, joined in the fun.

You can't beat a girl like that.

23

Helen and I were glum, later that evening. We tried to talk "of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings," but the conversation always veered back to one point: What were we going to do next?

Through circumstances beyond our control we were about to be removed forcibly from the trailer-park business—and therefore from the lovable characters who had enriched and enlivened our lives.

What's more, our financial cushion was losing its padding. I'd spent far too much money searching for rainbow's end: the site for a perfect luxury park. Between Las Vegas and Arizona, and this and that, I'd squandered a few hundred here and a thousand there until now I really needed some sort of employment. My bankroll was, to put it mildly, badly depleted.

I was despondent and even Helen had difficulty keeping a stiff upper lip. However she could look back at the course of events and dismiss them with a shrug, but when I looked back I could see where I had made many foolish mistakes. I should have had a better understanding with my associates at Aliso; should have had my expenses paid to Las Vegas;

should never have gone on a wild-goose chase to Arizona; should never have even thought of buying a travel trailer.

I was so blue that Scotch tasted like Bourbon, and my usual before-bed cigar made me cough.

I didn't sleep well that night, and actually welcomed my early-morning round of inspection. Although I was up so early that few of my guests were awake, one was up and about. That was Mr. Arnold Haskell, always an early riser.

Arnold Haskell was, and is, one of the pioneer land developers in California, the dominant management interest in two great corporations devoted to developing and leasing, and a personality worthy of a book of his own. A small part of his activities were described in a recent volume, *The Men of El Cajon*. Arnold is wonderful company—he listens rather than talks.

As I passed his trailer, he came to the door.

"Come on in, Rex," he said, "and have a cup of coffee."

"Thanks," I said, "that's just what I need."

I chattered a little and Arnold, as usual, listened. After the second cup of coffee he said, "I've been wanting to show you a piece of property near here that I think would make a good mobile-home park."

"You're kidding," I said.

"Not a bit of it," he smiled. "If you have a few minutes I'll show it to you. It's only a couple of miles down the highway."

I looked at him closely. He was not a drinking man; he didn't have a fever; his eye was clear and his hand steady. But I knew there wasn't a piece of property within miles suited for a park. Still, when a man like Arnold Haskell says something, you feel hesitant about contradicting him.

"All right," I said. "I've got plenty of time. Let's go."

In fifteen minutes we pulled up to a gate. Arnold unlatched it and we drove in onto a dirt road. Then we stopped. Before me was the most magnificent beach I have ever seen. I was looking down at this beach from an almost sheer cliff.

"Wonderful," I grasped. "Beautiful, gorgeous. But where do we park the trailers?"

Haskell smiled. "Simply bulldoze terraces out of the bank," he said. "It shouldn't take more than a couple of hundred thousand dollars."

Now I could see the picture. Here was the site of the most marvelous mobile-home park in the world. Suddenly I was on fire.

"Would you lease this property to me?" I asked.

He looked thoughtful. "Perhaps," he said, "but it would take a lot of money to develop it."

That day I wandered about Aliso in a daze. In my mind's eye I could see a magnificent park clinging to the terraced bank, with a huge recreation hall and swimming pool below and, down toward the beach, a row of extremely elaborate cabanas complete with fifty-foot mobile homes.

I could also see an office. On the door was a sign. It said, "Rex Thompson, Manager."

Mechanically I spoke to my guests and went on about my business. Toward evening I passed John Moller's trailer. John was sitting in the yard and he waved at me.

"Come on in, Rex, and sit down."

I accepted his invitation, and we exchanged a few words. Finally he said, "What's the matter, Rex? You looked worried."

I tried to laugh. "Not worried, John. I'm just trying to figure out how to raise five hundred thousand dollars."

He whistled. "Five hundred thousand! What for?"

I told him the story and he leaned back in his chair. Then he said, "Rex, I don't think you'll have much trouble raising money for a deal of this kind."

I grunted. "It's easy to talk."

He went to a phone. To the long-distance operator he said: "Get me Mr. Robert Holz, Houston, Texas."

As the call was going through he looked at me and grinned. I knew Mr. Holz (which is not his right name). He was a wealthy investor who had often expressed a desire to own a trailer park, and he was a good friend of both John and myself.

In a few minutes Holz himself was on the line. He had a sharp voice, and I could hear him as well as if I were on an extension.

John said, "Bob, Rex Thompson wants to build a new trailer park out here and needs five hundred thousand."

"What's the story?"

"Rex has located a beautiful piece of property right on the coast; he might have a chance to lease it. I figure we can get ten investors to put up fifty thousand each."

"I'm not interested," said Holz.

My heart fell right through my stomach. John looked surprised. "Why not?" he asked.

Holz's voice came crisp and clear over the wire. "I don't like these deals where ten or fifteen people have an interest in one property. If Rex wants me in on this you tell him I'll take the whole half million, or nothing."

"Okay," said John. "When everything's set I'll phone, and you can fly over and set the deal up."

"Good," said Holz briskly. "Tell Rex the money's ready when he is."

When John hung up I was still trying to get back my breath.

John smiled at me. "It looks as if you're going to stay in the park business," he said.

I nodded dumbly.

His face clouded. "Only one thing wrong," he said.

"What's that?" I asked.

"I wanted a piece of that park myself," he said sadly.

The next morning, after rehearsing my speech all night, I went over to Mr. Haskell's trailer, and received the usual invitation to coffee.

Over the second cup I said, "About that property down the road that you might lease to me——"

He waved a big hand. "Forget it," he said.

I gargled the hot coffee three times before I could say, "Forget it, Mr. Haskell?"

He nodded. "That's right. I won't lease it to you."

I put the cup down. I couldn't swallow.

He went on. "Here's what we'll do. I'll give you my ideas, and the report of the engineers on the terracing and other details. You design and build the park, and then operate it. Now this is what I want."

For two hours I sat and listened to Arnold Haskell, the usually silent man, outline point by point a program of development that would forever lift mobile living from the realm of ordinary life. What he wanted was an exclusive

club, unsurpassed anywhere in the world, that would also have all the informality and grace of mobile living at its best.

I listened, entranced. For once I had found a man with even bigger ideas than my own.

That night we held a dance in the lounge, and it was then I told my tenants I was leaving.

The next Saturday night they gathered together and held a big party for Helen and me. From the gifts we received you would have thought it was Christmas combined with both our birthdays.

The next day we left Aliso and moved into a trailer at the new park site. There was work to do—and it was done.

Today Dana Strand Club stands complete with uniformed gateman, coffee shop, cocktail bar, P.B.X., room service, maid service, closed television circuit, central television antenna, hi-fi installations, club room complete with professional-type stage and lighting, sixty-six-foot swimming pool, and one of the most wonderful private beaches in the world.

It's a monument and a tribute to a man who not only had vision and money, but the nerve to back up his vision. What kind of people are members of the Dana Strand Club? Well, like I said, dealing with characters is my business. Take our opening party, for instance. We . . .

$3.00

Characters on Wheels

Rex Thompson

What goes on in a modern—and expensive—mobile home park is here recounted by its director, known throughout the industry as the dean of trailer-park managers. Aliso, his maiden venture, was strictly a Cadillac type set-up. Once a mere Chrysler Imperial got in, but since the owner was a retired Chrysler executive, it was tolerated.

Aliso was full of "characters." There are four million citizens now living in mobile homes. Many of these people and nearly *all* directors are "characters." At Aliso there was Dr. Ciro, the stockmarket expert, who lived for the market reports and hated Saturdays and Sundays because the board was closed. He hadn't bought a single share of stock, or sold one, in ten years. And Mr. Stout, attired always in Bavarian leather breeches and pointed Alpine hat, who wandered all day from one to another of Aliso's trailers in search

(CONTINUED ON BACK FLAP)

Jacket design by Paul Galdone

(COTINUED FROM FRONT FLAP)

of conversation. Mrs. Ryan operated a rumor factory; Mr. Jasper avoided energy-consuming tasks and could never make plans for a Tuesday, because that was the day he shaved. Hank Gord was the park tinkerer, an expert at methodically dismantling every mechanical contrivance in sight.

There was trouble and there was fun—but more fun than trouble—when Mr. Thompson introduced professional entertainment along with luaus, movies, bingo, dance instruction, potluck dinners, cocktail parties, and Hollywood stars mixed in with local talent when plays were presented.

The hilarity comes through in Rex Thompson's breezy story, the best about trailers and the strange people who live in them since *The Long, Long Trailer* by Clinton Twiss, a best-seller and a very popular movie. Twiss was, incidentally, the first guest at Aliso. Even those of us not on wheels can at least roll with laughter at the goings-on, and for much less than it would cost to buy all the elaborate and expensive equipment—to say nothing of paying Rex Thompson's high rents for all the high jinks.

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