

Katherine Jones Edmunds: A Life Remembered



Aunt Kathie was full of life, fun, and laughter. I have video of her from the early 1930s performing home-grown skits with her two sisters and one of her brothers. They were wildly irreverent, pretending to take swigs out of liquor bottles and bopping one another over the head with an old pot.

In the mid-1950s, when I was just starting elementary school, I began the tradition of a week-long, summer visit with Aunt Kathie and her husband, Uncle Bill. They lived at 455 Park Avenue in Belleair Estates in Belleair, Florida. An annual tradition was to mark my increasing height on the frame of her bedroom door. Another was to roll up the area rugs in her bedroom so that I could roller skate on its terrazzo floor.

Aunt Kathie didn't believe in cooking, so our nightly dinner was at the Carlouel Yacht Club. We'd drive across the Clearwater Causeway, past the place where the charter boats were docked on the left. If there had been any

interesting catches (that is, sharks) that day, we'd stop to look. Then we'd turn right on Mandalay Avenue, pass the Beachcomber Restaurant (Why would anyone want to comb a beach?) and then go straight on to Carlouel. One memory frozen in time is driving down Mandalay Avenue, stuffed in the back of Aunt Kathie and Uncle Bill's Thunderbird, with Perez Prado's "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" playing on the radio.

Around 1960, Aunt Kathie and Uncle Bill moved to Miami Beach where they lived on the Intracoastal Waterway at 10001 East Bay Harbor Drive. One year, after arriving for my annual visit, Aunt Kathie said we'd be stopping for lunch on the way to their condominium. I asked her where we would be eating, and she responded, "the Famous Restaurant."

"What famous restaurant?" I asked.

"The Famous Restaurant," she responded, as if I'd know which famous restaurant she meant.

"But which one?" I asked. We were in Miami. There were many famous restaurants!

"The Famous Restaurant is where we'll be eating."

"Which famous restaurant?"

And so went the conversation. I thought she was teasing me, and she was beginning to doubt my sanity. Move over, Abbott and Costello!

I don't think there was anything at all famous about the Famous Restaurant, which was at 671 Washington Avenue in Miami Beach, but the name was pure inspiration. We selected a table against the left wall, and Aunt Kathie and I sat next to each other with our backs to the front door. This was back in the day when women carried compacts in their purses, and Aunt Kathie immediately pulled out her compact, pretending to check her makeup. In reality, she was watching the woman at the table behind us reapply her lipstick. Aunt Kathie seized this opportunity to show me how to use a compact as a rearview mirror and to tell me ladies should not apply makeup in public.

During the years I visited Aunt Kathie and Uncle Bill in Miami Beach, our nightly dinner was at either The Bath Club or LaGorce Country Club. We always dressed for dinner with Uncle Bill in a suit, Aunt Kathie in a cocktail dress, and me in one of my “dressy” dresses. Before leaving, we’d play a few hands of gin rummy while Aunt Kathie and Uncle Bill had their evening martini. It was during these card games that I was introduced to macadamia nuts, for which I continue to be grateful!

Dinner was a formal event, and the dining rooms at these clubs had live music and a dance floor. Aunt Kathie and Uncle Bill were regulars, and their favorite song was “Mack the Knife,” which was enjoying new-found popularity with Bobby Darin’s 1960 arrangement. When we’d walk into the dining room, the band would stop whatever it was playing and strike up “Mack the Knife.” I knew I was in the company of very special people!

Aunt Kathie spoiled me rotten on these annual visits. What she allowed me to do was our secret, definitely not to be shared with my mother! Mom wouldn’t let me chew gum of any kind, especially bubble gum. One year, Aunt Kathie bought a huge bag of 100 pieces of bubble gum, and I found a place to hide out in her linen closet where I could chew piece after piece until my jaws ached!

Another one of our secrets was that she’d let me wear her high heels when we went out to dinner. These were the four-inch, spike heels with pointed toes that were popular back in the early 1960s. (My father called them “cat kickers.”) And I danced away the nights in these shoes as the older men friends of my aunt and uncle would invite me to dance with them so that I wouldn’t be excluded. So, at 11 or 12 years old, I was fox-trotting my way around dance floors in Aunt Kathie’s high heels. By the time I came home from my visits, I could barely walk. But, oh, what a time I had! Thank you, Aunt Kathie. You had such a wonderful sense of fun!

Aunt Kathie primped and preened. (My mother once accused her of

taking a bath with a Q-tip!) She had lovely clothes and jewelry. Her hair was always perfectly styled (she had several wigs). She always looked “like a million bucks.” But there was another side to Aunt Kathie that would be a surprise to people who didn’t know her. She was also an expert angler! She won numerous fishing trophies, and in 1954, she set a world record for a permit she caught off Islamorada. She had the fish mounted, and for many years it was displayed in her home. It’s now at the Key Largo Angler’s Club.



When she was still living in Belleair, Aunt Kathie took me deep sea fishing with her. She and Uncle Bill chartered the boat from their favorite captain, and they had a very successful day. Aunt Kathie caught a large tarpon, about five feet in length, and Uncle Bill caught a black tip shark. As he reeled it up to the boat, the captain shot it with a pistol. They then brought it up and alongside the boat so that I could touch it and feel how the skin was smooth if I stroked it in one direction and very rough if I stroked it in the opposite direction. Despite my being seasick, it was a very exciting day!