

## I Wish

*Sarah Helen Pouncey Peach*

*Adapted from a "Letter to the Editor" courtesy, the Boca Beacon.*

I love Boca Grande as it is today, but I wish I could take you on a trip back in time, just for a day or two. Since a "real" trip isn't possible, will you let me share with you all the things I wish?

**Captain W. C. Sprott, circa 1946, at the helm of the *Catherine*.** (bghs #01-0101)



I wish I could ride the ferryboat *Catherine* with my granddad, Captain W. C. Sprott again. I wish I could go to Grande Impressions and find it was Crumbley's Grocery. I wish I could buy a chocolate ice-cream soda at Fugate's and a ticket to Tampa in the Loose Caboose. I wish Crowninshield's Estate was still intact and I could go there on Christmas Eve with my Girl Scout leaders, Margaret Fugate and Betty Jo Thompson, to sing Christmas Carols to Mrs. Crowninshield and be invited in for hot chocolate and fruitcake. (**Fugates in Art Deco finery.** (bghs # 01-0153)



**Guide boats in front of the Pink Elephant.** (bghs# 06-0060)



I wish the guide boats were still moored in front of the Pink Elephant and I could see all of the old guides again, George Knight, George Capling, J. D. Riggs, Coram Lanier, Lonnie, Nat and Shug Futch, Ed Lowe, Jim Willis, Mack Mickle and my dad, Roy Pouncey.

I wish the Community Center was still my school and I could play in the bottle band and be a part of another piano recital on stage. I wish I could attend another Sunrise Easter Service sitting on the bleachers of the outside basketball court and hear the "Colored" choir sing, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"

I wish my friend Joyce McKeithen still lived in the lighthouse at South Boca Grande and we could sit up in the light and do our homework together.

I wish I could go to the Community House on a Friday night and listen to the jukebox playing, "Don't Fence Me In," or dance there again at my high school Prom, and I would want Jennie Davis there as "our chaperone."

I wish I could go to Helen's and find it was the Post Office again or to the Barnichol and find it was Gaines' Garage and I could watch Ernest Gaines working on an old car. I wish I could go to Parsley Baldwin Real Estate and find it was the Barber Shop again with Barber Lane cutting my uncle Troy Speer's hair.

I wish I could go to the Temptation and listen to Dora Addison playing the piano, or to the Kozy Kitchen and have a hamburger, or to the Pink Elephant and have Forest Stover mix me a "Shirley Temple."

I wish I could ride my bicycle to Gasparilla and find the Charlotte County portion of the road still deep sand but with a fish house and an IGA store at the end. I wish I could row across to Cole Island and visit my friend Bertha Lee Hampton who lived in the only house.

I wish I could ride the school bus to LaBelle for a basketball game and walk the railroad trestle late at night to get home.

I wish I could go to PJ's and sit on the first row to watch a Roy Rogers movie and eat roasted peanuts that I had bought from Murdock. I wish I could see Murdock again, riding his bicycle with his pet monkey on the back, and buy one of his mosquito switches to use everywhere I went in the summer because we had not heard about Mosquito Control. I wish I could stand under the tap of the rainwater tank to shampoo my hair or just to cool off because we had not heard of air conditioning either.

**The McKeithen girls with their mother, all dressed up for Easter. Joyce is on the right.**

(bghs #01-0103)



**Murdock and his pet monkey. (bghs #01-0047)**



I wish the elevator at the Gasparilla Inn was still manually operated so I could have my old job as operator. I wish Archie Gardner was still the Head Bellman so he could bring me cream puffs from the dining room after everyone had finished dining.

I wish I could have another 10th birthday party on the porch of the Palm Hotel or a 16th birthday at the "Narrows."

I wish I could take a Sunday evening ride in Aunt Nellie Sprott's old Buick piled high with as many island kids as she could stuff in there and then on to her house for homemade ice cream.

I wish the Boca Grande Hotel were still there, but I guess I wouldn't want to go through the 1944 hurricane again within its shelter, although at the time I thought it was fun, being too young to realize the danger. I don't guess I would want to relive the night the Little Inn burned down either, although it was a night of heroics and we were proud of our new fire truck and the volunteers who manned it.

I don't guess I want to relive the day I locked my friend Delores Darna in the walk-in safe upstairs in the railroad depot either, but I will always remember with gratitude the Tampa locksmith who was able to open the safe after many hours, and release my friend alive and only a little less than well.

I do wish, though, that every child in the world could have a childhood as full of happy memories as mine was and I wish all of the people who went out of their way to be so good to me could understand how much I appreciated it then and now. I was not particularly easy to love but they did it anyway.

**The author at age 10 in front of the Palm Hotel in her first gown. (bghs #02-0023)**

