

A Detective's Life: Reality Outweighs Romance

By FRED GRIMM

Special Staff Writer

Travis McGee was in a deep sleep aboard his houseboat docked at Bahia Mar.

"Alone in a sweetly dream of chow, fear, and monstrous predators. A shot rang off steel bars. Another. I came flurrying up out of sleep to hear the secretive sound of the little bell which rings at my bedside when anyone steps aboard.

"It could be some kid crawling the decks for a forgotten camera, portable radio or a bottle of Scotch. Or a friendly drunk. Or a drunken friend. Or trouble."

— The Devilish Lemon Sky
by John D. McDonald

Or it could be another detective. The real variety. The Bahia Mar Hotel has been crawling with private detectives trying to solve the \$200,000 heist.

"How do you do it, McGee?" one might ask his fictitious cousin, boarding the imaginary houseboat writer McDonald situated at the Fort Lauderdale hotel marina.

"How the hell do you avoid the \$200,000 liability insurance required by state law?"

McGee might do some 38 caliber lobbying. The Florida Association

of Private Investigators, which ended a three-day convention at the hotel Saturday, talked in less exciting terms.

"IT'S BORING," admitted Gary Carleton, a Clearwater detective with 30 years on the soap. "That it's essential."

Carrel leaned back in his chair, trying to pay attention to a discussion of lobbying methods. A huge, hairless man with a gruff, stony voice, he could have sprung from the pages of a paperback mystery.

Armed? "You've covered," said Carleton with a smile. He pulled his hand from a taler pocket in his baggy-blue leisure coat. There was a Drifter in that a big fat, the same fleshy humor that took him to a national amateur boxing championship before World War II.

"Just a belly and ear gun," he said. "You've got to shoot 'em in the belly or ear to do any good."

"Ever shoot anyone?" "Sure, I've been in the business for 30 years."

THOSE 30 YEARS have seen the business evolve from the peddling of two-bit information obtain by peeping through keyholes and over transoms to an age of corporate troubleshooting.

Carleton, for example, has picked up a couple agricultural do-

gones and specialists in solving such crimes as the theft of livestock — he recently solved a crime by studying brands on more than 10,000 hides of slaughtered cattle, "exactly business" — to raids on South American sugar beet plantations.

He just returned from the Midwest, where he solved the systematic embezzling of meat from a meat packing chain.

Other conventioners gave the program varying degrees of attention. Some looked like young businessmen. And were. Examining some of the security operations that has blossomed into the state's largest licensed industry with 35,000 guards and twice that many without licenses.

OTHERS CAME FROM the tough side of the business, their personalities shaped by night after night of tagging shrewing hearts or sliding away fast lane action.

There were specialists, geared to investigating fraudulent insurance claims, or car repossessors. One small Miami operation claims to have "reposed" 21,800 cars in the last 19 years.

John L. Muzzell of Orlando was circulating his new book, "Incidental Repossession or Is the Moral of

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Detectives Find Romance, Reality

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the Night," including "How to Buy a Car" and various locked journals in the GM, Ford and Chrysler zones in two minutes or less.

Bob Jane has had his reputation as child snatching, an an agent for the verbiage, seeking to recover custody of their children from divorced spouses, a guy? well, "what's the legal way to litigate?"

DOMESTIC DISPUTES still hang in a large percentage of a divorcee's money. "Used to be most of our clients were women. Then after the introduction of the pill, husbands got straight and started to go to jail on their women," said Jane, also from Orlando.

It's evening, scattered children or cars in the night. "To name men, their car is their sex object," says Rausell. It's dangerous. The pay is good, the hours modest.

The insurance is there, not as different from those trays of paper, book detective novels, but really comes with hazard. Sam Speer rarely encounters. Those adventures, he says, however, dominated the conversation.

Like Rausell, Jane said he was paid \$2 hours in one year.

AND INSURANCE. A few years

for under \$200,000 umbrella coverage, company for every 30,000 and all his employees.

And if there were massive real estate, figures have liability problems, figures what is done for periods such as the Tom McCar or Volney Thomas' gas-station Mike Hammer (Tom "The Jury").

"The rest of the 45 about the room, Charlotte stepped back a step. Her eyes were a sympathy of incoherence, an understanding in Jane, Speer, one looked down at the light counting in her rubber belly, where the but-let went in. A thin trickle of blood oozed out. "You" she purred.

"I only had a moment before fishing in a corpse, but I got it in." "It was easy," I said.



BOB JANE AND GARY CARRETSAN AT BAHIA MAR

Bob Jane, Gary Carretson at Bahia Mar
... but what about that \$200,000 insurance cap?