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Losing The Blues
On Green Turtle Cay



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LOSING THE BLUES ON GREEN TURTLE CAY

BY JIM KERR



DAVID STRAHL

Waves crashing on the inner and outer reef protect Long Bay Beach from storms.

Several times a year, Lee LaPointe of Vero Beach goes home across the Gulf Stream to a special island in the sun; back to a tranquil place of childhood memories on an ocean beach, where the surf crashes in from the world's third largest barrier reef, the sun rises with soft glowing rays and the full moon comes up like it's on fire.

The island is Green Turtle Cay, an emerald isle of small resorts, harbors and history no more than a half-mile wide and 3½ miles long in the archipelago of islands in the Bahamas known as the Abacos.

They lie about 200 miles southeast of Lee's front door in Vero Beach, where she and her husband Brian and their 12-year-old son Sebastian have lived since 1999. But while her life has taken a circuitous route to

Vero Beach's island life off A1A, Lee's roots will always be attached to a whimsical island retreat her parents established for their children almost 50 years ago.

It is known today as Linton's Beach & Harbour Cottages, three small, idyllic getaways that are rented to vacationers when Lee and her family, normally occupied with work or school, can't be there themselves. "My father dreamed of being a writer," she remembers. "He and my mother had reconciled after a separation, and believed that finding an island in the sun might be the start for a new way of life together."

It was 1960, and after taking several trips around the Caribbean and Bahamas, the Lintons wound up in Marsh Harbour, Abaco's largest town. There, they heard about a property for sale on Green Turtle Cay,

an island 30 miles north.

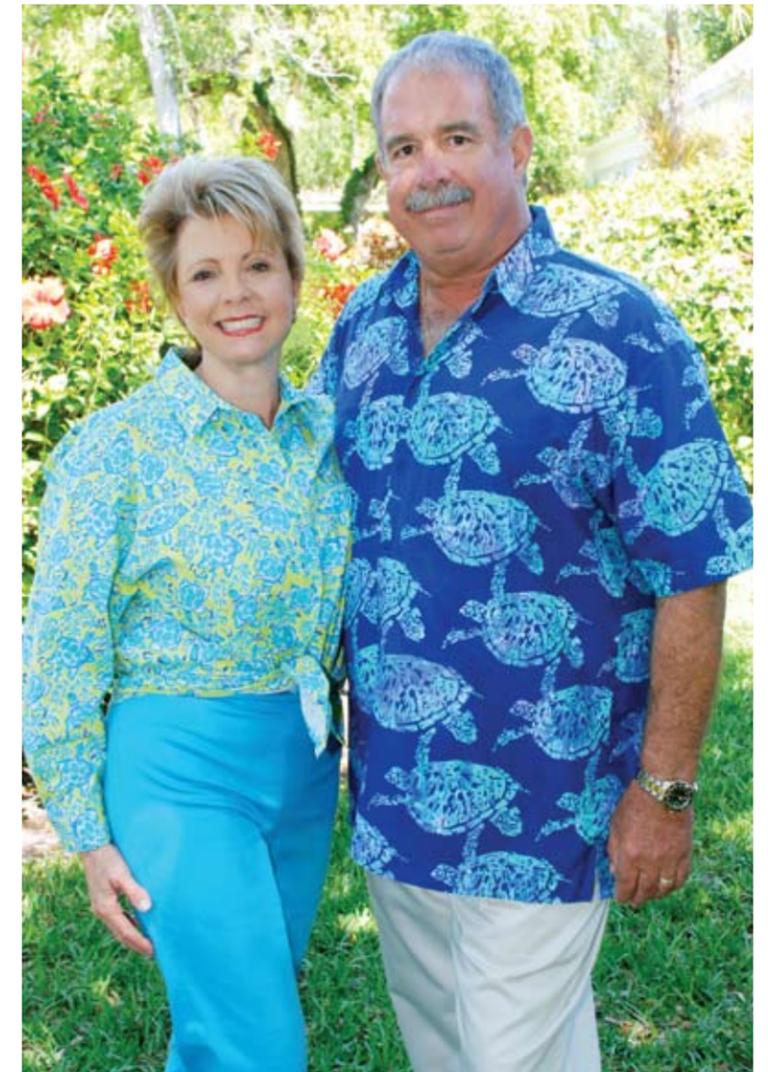
At the dock in the picturesque settlement of New Plymouth, the Lintons stepped off their chartered ferry to find a tiny settlement of shipbuilders, lobster fishermen and modest tourist facilities. The town's clapboard architecture and sandy-haired residents had a history dating back to the American loyalists, whose affiliation with Mother England and George III required them to flee the Carolinas and New York in 1783 after the American Revolution. A couple of hundred years later, the town was charming and friendly, but it was beach property that Lee's parents, Donald and Louise Linton of Nashville, Tenn., had come to see.

"They were met by Sheila Cliff," says Lee, "an Irishwoman who led them through jungle-like island growth to a house on Long Bay Beach. Sheila plied them with rum cocktails, then sent them for a walk on the beach, suggesting they keep an eye out for treasures such as glass Portuguese fishing net floats."

To this day, Lee thinks Sheila may have planted the prize. The green glass ball, now a rarity along the eastern beaches of the Bahamas, still adorns her Vero Beach home, and she likes to think it helped shape her life.

Her parents were so taken with the place and its ambiance, not to mention the thrill of finding such intriguing beach wrack, that Donald immediately wrote out a check for the original 11 acres and three cottages. An Abaco dinghy came with the purchase; it had a 5½-horsepower Seagull motor, one of the first outboards on the island.

The L-shaped property, now 22 acres, runs from the ocean to Black Sound. The two beachfront cottages were originally named



Lee and Brian LaPointe are bonded by a shared passion for island life. Going from one extreme to another, they live on Big Pine Key and Sawyers Island in Booth Bay, Me., with Vero Beach and Green Turtle Cay in between.



Lee and Brian's first time together on Green Turtle Cay, 1990.

“Sheila” and “Stephen” after the couple who had designed and built them. Stephen was a much-decorated British pilot during World War II, but in the mid-1940s, he and Sheila fled traditional British society and sailed into Green Turtle from Nassau on a 28-foot sailboat. There, they purchased Crown Grant land and within the first few years built the two beach houses. Eventually, they added a third, smaller cottage on the harbor as a hurricane refuge.

Lee’s own father, Don, had also been a decorated World War II pilot, in his case with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific. Tragically, he suffered from a post-war syndrome that impaired him long after the war ended. His fancy for islands and dreams of becoming an out-island author were financed largely through his family business, the Linton Pencil Co., of Lewisburg, Tenn.

Lee Linton was 8 years old when she first set her bare feet on Green Turtle’s sandy beach in 1960, along with her sister, Cornelia, 6, and brother MacRae, 4. “The very first night we arrived it was spooky, with no lights and fiddler crabs skittering through the leaves,” Lee recalls. “We cried, refusing to walk the leaf-strewn path from the dock to the beach. So our parents carried us, and the luggage, in the dark. The next morning we all awoke to breathtakingly beautiful views of the island.”

Despite Louise and Donald’s attempt to reconcile,



Catching the blazing sunrises and sunsets of Green Turtle Cay is an awe-inspiring way to spend a few moments everyday.

the marriage ended in 1964. Louise continued to own the property and absolutely adored island life. Lee and her family spent every summer from June through August there with a steady stream of visiting friends.

“The two beach cottages changed names,” Lee recalls. “Sheila’ became ‘Palmetto’ and ‘Stephen’ became ‘Seagrape.’ Palmetto was often a virtual dormitory filled with cots and kids; Seagrape was where we all gathered, and gourmet meals of fresh seafood were prepared daily.”

Eastbourn and Clarissa Roberts, the caretaker couple the Lintons initially hired, had many children



Narrow concrete streets, clapboard, pastel colors and gingerbread trim accentuate the historic Loyalist settlement of New Plymouth on Green Turtle Cay.



Seagrape Cottage and the surrounding 22-acre property look essentially the same as they have for decades.

“and they became an interesting part of our summer experience,” Lee says.

Clarissa’s brothers, Marcel and Joe Sawyer, were well-known local fishermen who, in their younger days, took Lee’s family and friends fishing or diving almost every afternoon. “We caught snapper, grouper and mackerel, snorkeled for conch and speared crawfish, otherwise known as Bahamian spiny lobster,” Lee says. “It was a marvelous way to grow up.”

The Lintons’ fishing skills grew as their tans deepened from days in the sun. But the summers were not endless. Lee went to secondary school in Nashville, college in Boston, and earned a BFA in environmental design from Parson’s School of Design in New York City. Stimulating career opportuni-



Watercolor of Seagrape Cottage, a 19”x13” painting by Anne Kerr, 1986.

ties followed, but the Bahamas was always on her mind, drawing her back. When Louise Linton died in 1981, Lee and her brother inherited their childhood summer home.

“Mother understood that our sister was not as passionate about the property or island life,” Lee says, “so Cornelia was spared the responsibility of ownership. Mac and I love the place, and the memories of

our early adventures are still very special.”

After her mother’s death, Lee took over and developed the cottage rental business, assuming more and more of the management responsibilities, including reservations, as of two years ago. Mac became a doctor and lives in Nashville with his wife Kelly and their four sons. They too love the cottages and commandeer all three for the first two weeks of June every year.

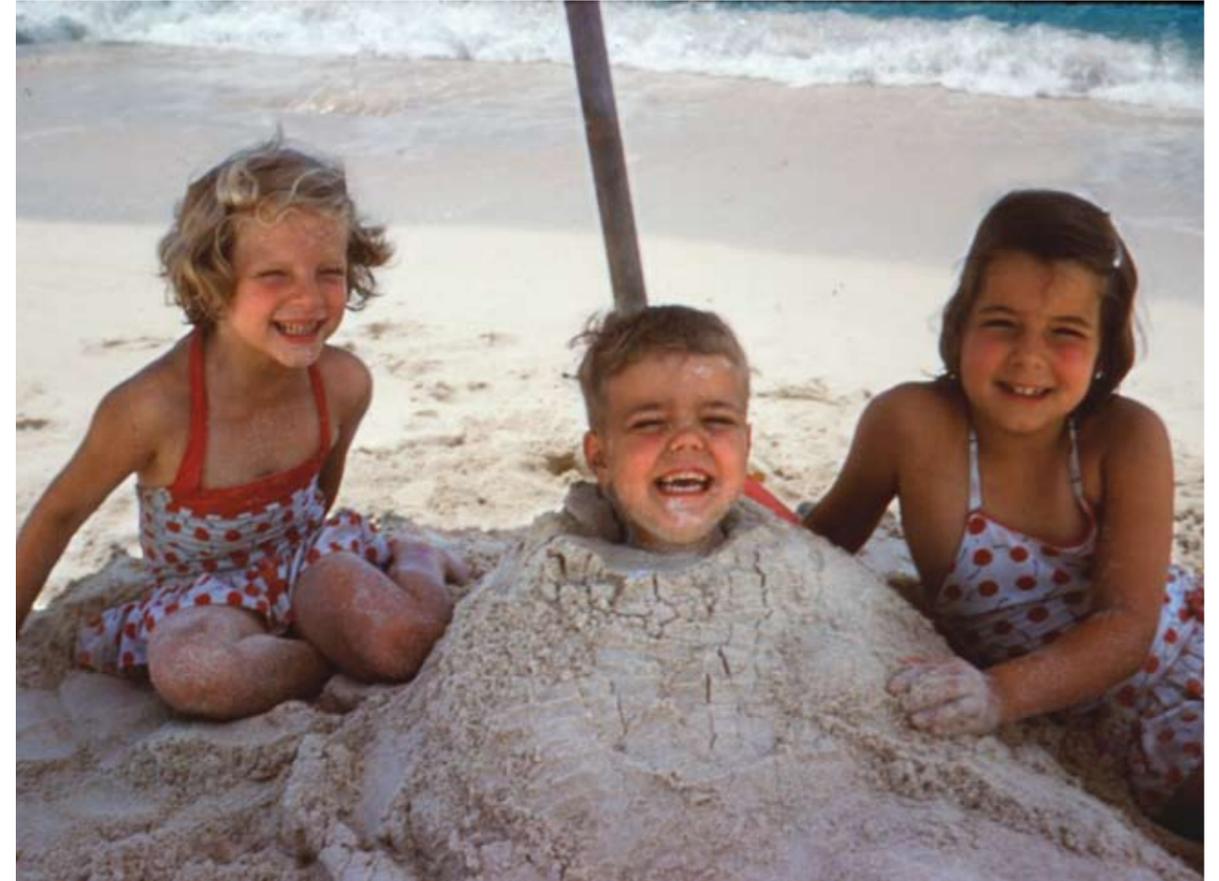
For the past eight years, Lee’s trusted caretaker, Fanny McIntosh, has taken care of cottage guests, about 75 percent of whom are repeat visitors. “They don’t always come back every year,” Lee



The Harbour Cottage on Flat Rock and the dock on Black Sound are where guests are first greeted by Fanny McIntosh as they step off the Green Turtle Cay ferry.



Palmetto Cottage, designed by Sheila Cliff to be a bit more protective during the winter months, sits just behind the crest of the dune.



The Linton children, Cornelia, MacRae and Leontine (Lee), spent their first summer of fun together at their new island home in 1960.

says. “Many return every two or five years, and often they come at specific times, requesting their favorite cottage. One couple always reserves Seagrape during the full moon in May, so they can watch the moon rise behind Pelican Cay, which creates the disturbing illusion that the little island is going up in flames.”

Timing is everything, whether it’s coordination with the full moon or with friends and fate. In 1990, Lee met her future husband, Brian LaPointe, a noted marine scientist whose expertise is in the field of water quality. The two were introduced by Lee’s close friend, Pat Pepper, a former mayor of West Palm Beach who had only recently met Brian herself through a business contact in the Florida Keys.

“Another friend of mine had told me that she believed if I was genuinely interested in being in a deep, meaningful relationship, I must communicate that information to my closest friends, and not assume they necessarily knew that about me,” says Lee, who at age 38, had never been married. “So I did. I told Pat and within a few weeks she introduced me to Brian.” It



Brian, a noted marine scientist, enters the water to collect video transect data on the Abaco reef.

was love at first sight, and they were married exactly a year from the day they met.

It was Brian's work as a senior scientist at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution in Fort Pierce that brought the couple to Vero Beach, where they purchased property in 1996 with the intention of building a house on Riomar Drive. A year later, they bought their current home nearby to position themselves down the street for the construction period, but have yet to find the time to go ahead with the Riomar house.

Today, the home is Lee's headquarters for her volunteer work with The Garden Club of America. This year she will end a two-year term as national chairman of the flower show committee that oversees every GCA flower show in America. As an approved flower-arrangement judge and exhibitor, Lee takes frequent trips across the country. Her own arrangements have won several major awards and have been published in books and magazines. She also teaches flower arrangement at demonstrations and workshops.

Brian, 56, is one year older than Lee, and, like her, had never been married. While they have many things in common, love for the islands has been a special bond. Brian's area of study has for 16 years included Green Turtle Cay and its portion of the 100-mile-long reef.

"Brian studies algae and is particularly interested in its effects on coral reefs," Lee explains. "His work and studies around the world are well documented, and often cited as the definitive research on certain water-quality issues. By osmosis, I've also learned a lot about the detrimental effects of human impact on the near-shore environ-



BRIAN LAPONTE

Skimming over the Elk Horn Corals on the Inner Reef, Sebastian is an avid snorkeler and scuba diver.

ment. My days 'before awareness,' as I like to call them, included a large collection of shells. Now I realize that even dead ones found on the beach and in the water should be left alone."

As you might expect, wading in ankle-deep water off Green Turtle Cay, endlessly turning up and sometimes collecting shells, still remains a passion for many, including the guests at Linton's Cottages.

At Seagrape and Palmetto, the view to the east includes an expansive panorama of the Atlantic Ocean and a tiny private island called Pelican Cay that is just a strong swim away. Beyond lies 4,000 empty miles of ocean before the first landfall in the Canary Islands off Africa. Sunrises are as spectacular as moonrises, and both invite walks along the deserted beaches that are nothing less than spiritual. On pitch black moonless nights, the enormity of the universe, with its billions of stars, is as evident as it is mind-boggling. Daylight brings more adventure.

As did his mother, Sebastian is growing up here among the locals. "He already has great friends on Green Turtle," Lee says. "This will be the fifth summer that he and several others from the island will attend Camp Greenbrier for Boys in West Virginia. He also enjoys the chance to introduce his friends from Saint Edward's School to the island."

It isn't all fun and games, of course. There is always work to be done on the cottages and outbuildings, and after hurricanes Floyd, Frances and Jeanne, everyone pitched in to put things back together, so that now the cottages are better than ever. But aside from the occasional need to restore and maintain, life can be a series of memorable days at Linton's Beach & Harbour Cottages, as it has been for the past half-century. ❁