

"A GULF COAST JOURNAL"

MARCH 2008

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>> THIS SPECIAL PRESENTATION WAS PRODUCED IN HIGH DEFINITION BY WEDU, TAMPA, ST. PETERSBURG, SARASOTA.

>>Jack Perkins: WE GO TO A RACE OR RATHER LET THE RACE COME TO US.

>> THAT'S THE SOUND THAT DRAWS IT IN FOR FEED.

C'MON, BOYS.

>>Jack Perkins: MEET AN EXTRAORDINARILY TALENTED YOUNG ACTOR.

>> THERE'S MY SON.

>>Jack Perkins: GROWN FROM EXTRAORDINARILY TROUBLED TIMES.

>> THESE ARE STERILE SPONGES WHICH ARE LIKE GOLD TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE A CLEAN DRESSING.

>>Jack Perkins: AND HOW CHILDREN FAR AWAY ARE BEING HELPED BY THE CARING OF ONE WOMAN RIGHT HERE IN THIS VOLUME OF "A GULF COAST JOURNAL."

>> THIS WEDU PRODUCTION IS EXCLUSIVELY BROUGHT TO YOU THROUGH A GENEROUS GRANT FROM THE GULF COAST COMMUNITY

FOUNDATION OF VENICE, BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES,  
LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP, AND ENDOWED PHILANTHROPY.

¶¶

>>Jack Perkins: DEAR JOURNAL, OUR TENDENCY AS HUMANS WHEN WE  
MEET SOMEONE IS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY'RE LIKE, WHAT TALENTS  
THEY MAY HAVE, WHEN THE GREATEST STORY MIGHT BE HOW THEY GOT  
TO BE AS THEY ARE, THEIR BACK STORIES.

GABRIEL ORTIZ IS A YOUNG ACTOR.

HE WORKS THIS BEAUTIFUL ASOLO THEATER AND OTHERS ALONG THE  
GULF COAST.

HE IS A VERY TALENTED YOUNG MAN, BUT HIS GREATEST STORY, AND  
ONE HE TELLS SO MOVINGLY, IS HOW HE GOT TO BE THE WAY HE IS.

>> NOW TAKE THREE STEPS FORWARD.

PICK UP YOUR CLOTHES.

TAKE THREE STEPS BACK.

NOW TURN TO YOUR LEFT AND MOVE INTO THE NEXT ROOM.

>> I HAVE HEARD THAT SEVERAL TIMES OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS,  
AND NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I HEAR IT, IT STILL SHOCKS ME.

>> THE FIRST DAY OF PRISON IS ALWAYS THE HARDEST.

THE FIRST DAY OF PRISON, THE HALLWAY THE DARKEST.

>>Jack Perkins: THIS IS THE STORY OF ONE MAN'S JOURNEY  
THROUGH PAIN, SURVIVAL, FORGIVENESS, AND ACCEPTANCE.

>> WHEN I WAS THREE YEARS OLD, MY DAD WAS ARRESTED AND  
CONVICTED TO 17 YEARS IN SAN QUENTIN STATE PRISON FOR 43  
COUNTS OF ARMED ROBBERY THAT HE ADMITTED TO.

>>Jack Perkins: THE ONE-MAN PLAY CALLED "MY PRODIGAL SON"  
WAS WRITTEN BY ACTOR GABRIEL ORTIZ.

IT'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ABOUT HIS LIFE GROWING UP, TOLD  
THROUGH 13 YEARS OF LETTERS TO AND FROM HIS FATHER IN  
PRISON.

>> DAD, I KNOW I HAVEN'T WROTE YOU FOR A LONG TIME, SO I  
HAVE A LOT TO TELL YOU.

>>Jack Perkins: HOW GABE ORTIZ GOT TO THE GULF COAST CAN BE  
TRACED BACK TO HIS OLD NEIGHBORHOOD IN SOUTH L.A.

>> I WAS GROWING UP WITH MY MOTHER WHO WAS A HEROIN ADDICT.  
MY FATHER WAS IN PRISON FOR THE FIRST PART OF MY LIFE.

>>Jack Perkins: HIS FATHER, MANUEL ORTIZ, WAS A GANGBANGER  
AND A CROOK.

JEANIE, A FAIR-SKINNED GRINGA IN LOVE.

>> MY FATHER INTRODUCED HER TO HEROIN WHEN SHE WAS STILL  
PREGNANT WITH ME.

>>Jack Perkins: BOTH HAD CHILDREN FROM PREVIOUS MARRIAGES.

>> I HAVE SIX BROTHERS.

FOUR ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE.

THERE IS TWO ON MY FATHER SIDE.

FOUR OF MY BROTHERS HAVE BEEN IN JAIL FOR EVERYTHING FROM  
ATTEMPTED MURDER TO ARMED ROBBERY, MANSLAUGHTER, ADDICTIONS,  
SALES AND POSSESSION.

>>Jack Perkins: YET YOUNG GABE MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE  
INFLUENCE OF HIS SURROUNDINGS.

>> MY FAMILY WERE MY ANGELS IN A STRANGE WAY.

I HAD ALL OF MY BROTHERS TO PROTECT ME.

THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANYONE TO PROTECT THEM.

¶ AIN'T NO SUNSHINE WHEN SHE'S GONE ¶

>> WE USED TO CALL THIS HOUSE THE SHOOTING GALLERY.

AND THAT'S WHERE MY MOM WOULD COP FROM DIFFERENT DRUG DEALERS IN TOWN.

I'VE SEEN PEOPLE DIE IN THAT HOUSE.

>>Jack Perkins: DISTURBING SNAPSHOTS OF THAT LIFE ARE REVEALED IN THE PLAY.

¶ SHE GOES AWAY ¶

>> THE FIRST THING IS THIS DRUG, YOU KNOW.

I GOT TO DO THIS, SON.

AND I CAN DO ALL THESE OTHER THINGS.

AND I CAN BE THE MOMMA YOU ALWAYS WANTED ME TO BE.

>>Jack Perkins: HE COULD CRY VICTIM TO HIS CHILDHOOD, AND RIGHTFULLY SO, BUT HE DOESN'T.

>> I ALWAYS TALK ABOUT CONNECTING THE DOTS WHERE WE CAN -- WE CAN LOOK BACK AT OUR LIFE WITH REGRET OR WE CAN LOOK BACK AND SAY, WELL, THAT EXPERIENCE CONNECTED ME TO THIS EXPERIENCE.

AND BECAUSE OF THAT, I WENT THERE, AND BECAUSE OF THAT, I'M HERE.

AND I CAN'T RESENT MY MOTHER FOR HER LIFE.

I MEAN, BECAUSE OF HOW I GREW UP, IT'S MADE ME INTO THE MAN

I AM TODAY.

¶¶

>> COMING AROUND THIS CORNER HERE, I'M REMINDED OF A PART OF MY PLAY WHERE IT'S TALKING ABOUT MY DAD'S ARREST.

AND MY BROTHER ACTUALLY WAS LOOKING OUTSIDE OF THAT CLASSROOM WINDOW, TIM WAS LOOKING OUTSIDE THAT CLASSROOM WINDOW AND HE LOOKED DOWN AND THERE WERE THESE COP CARS THAT WERE ALL THE WAY AROUND THE CORNER.

SO, MAN, I GOT UP, RAN OUT OF THE CLASSROOM.

TOOK OFF DOWN THE STAIRS.

THIS PUNK TRIED TO CATCH ME, BUT I JUMPED THE FENCE AND I WENT TO THE HOUSE.

AND HE WAS ALREADY IN THE COP CAR WHEN I GOT THERE.

I WALKED UP TO IT, AND HE SAYS SOMETHING LIKE, "YOU KNOW, I'LL BE BACK SOON.

REMEMBER WHAT I TOLD YOU."

AND AS THEY PULLED AWAY FROM THE CURB, I PICKED UP SOME ROCKS AND STARTED THROWING THEM AT THE CAR LIKE BAM, YOU KNOW.

HE NEVER CAME BACK.

>>Jack Perkins: MANUEL ORTIZ SPENT THE NEXT 12 YEARS IN SAN QUENTIN.

>> I LOVE MY DAD.

I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIM.

HE AND I HAD A SPECIAL BOND, AND HE REALLY RAISED ME FROM

PRISON.

I WANT YOU TO LISTEN TO ME, ESE.

OKAY.

HEY, LOOK AT ME WHEN I'M TALKING TO YOU.

PRISON AIN'T EASY.

>>Jack Perkins: NOR WAS IT EASY FOR A 13-YEAR-OLD TO WATCH HIS FAMILY FALL APART.

>> I REMEMBER THIS WAS A SPOT WHERE ON THE LAST DAY THAT WE WERE EVICTED FROM OUR HOME, MY MOTHER SAT ME DOWN HERE. SHE SAT RIGHT NEXT TO ME, AND SHE SAID, "YOU KNOW, SON, I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT IT'S NOT ALWAYS GOING TO BE LIKE THIS."

AND SHE SAID, "BUT FOR THE NEXT COUPLE OF MONTHS, YOU KNOW, I MAY HAVE TO START TAKING UP PROSTITUTION.

I MAY HAVE TO -- WE MAY HAVE TO LIVE IN A HOTEL."

AND RIGHT AT THAT POINT, MY GRANDMOTHER DROVE UP AND THEY SAT IN THE CAR, AND I SAT AND WATCHED THEM FOR ABOUT AN HOUR.

>> I TOLD HER THAT SHE COULD COME LIVE WITH ME, BUT SHE COULDN'T HAVE ANY MORE DRUGS.

AND SHE STAYED FOR A WHILE, BUT SHE WENT ON HER WAY, AND I HAD MY BABY BOY THAT I TOOK CARE OF.

>>Jack Perkins: MORE DOTS, GABE SAYS, CONNECTING HIM TO THE NEXT PHASE OF HIS JOURNEY.

>> AND THAT WAS, I THINK, A REALLY LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE,

BECAUSE SUDDENLY I WENT FROM ALL OF THIS, YOU KNOW, THIS ENVIRONMENT RIDDLED WITH DRUGS AND VIOLENCE AND GANGS TO A PLACE THAT WAS SAFE AND WARM AND A PLACE THAT I THINK REALLY CHANGED MY LIFE AT A POINT THAT I NEEDED THAT TO CHANGE. BECAUSE HAD I NOT, I DON'T KNOW WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED. SO --

>> WHENEVER YOU LOVE SOMEBODY AND YOU WANT TO DO WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THEM, IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE HOW MANY CHILDREN YOU HAVE.

>>Jack Perkins: GABE'S GRANDMOTHER WAS STRICT. RESPECT WAS MANDATORY, SO WAS CHURCH. CHURCH IS WHERE GABE FELL IN LOVE WITH THEATER.

>> I SAW THE POWER THAT IT HAD ON THE COMMUNITY, AND IMMEDIATELY, I WAS HOOKED.

AND I THINK THAT OPPORTUNITY GAVE ME AN OUTLET FOR ALL THE RAGE THAT WAS GOING ON INSIDE OF ME.

>>Jack Perkins: MORE DOTS CONNECTED, MORE DOORS OPENED.

GABE GRADUATED COLLEGE AT CAL STATE NORTHRIDGE.

GOT HIS MASTER'S DEGREE IN ACTING AT PENN STATE.

THE FIRST IN HIS FAMILY TO GO TO COLLEGE, THE ONLY ONE TO GET A DEGREE.

>> MA, MA, LOOK AT ME.

MA, LOOK AT ME.

I PROMISE YOU THAT I'M NEVER GOING TO LEAVE YOU.

OKAY?

MA, LOOK AT ME!

>>Jack Perkins: PART OF HIS THESIS WAS TO WRITE, DIRECT, AND PERFORM HIS OWN ONE-MAN SHOW.

>> WHAT, YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, RIGHT?

YOU THINK MAMA IS A LIAR.

>>Jack Perkins: DAVE CREATED AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BASED ON CONVERSATIONS WITH FAMILY MEMBERS AND LETTERS WRITTEN WHILE HIS DAD WAS IN PRISON.

>> THAT'S THE LAST THING I WANT MY ENEMIES TO SEE.

>> MY FOCUS WAS TO TAKE THAT STORY AND TRACE THE EFFECTS OF INCARCERATION ON THE FAMILY.

>> I WAS TELLING YOU, MAN --

>>Jack Perkins: BUT AS GABE BEGAN TO WRITE, HE REALIZED IT WAS LESS ABOUT INCARCERATION AND MORE ABOUT HIS OWN SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.

>> THROUGH THAT PROCESS, I REALIZED THAT FOR ME, 100% FORGIVENESS IS IMPOSSIBLE, BECAUSE THERE WAS SO MUCH THAT I HELD ON TO.

BUT WHAT WAS IMPORTANT WAS THAT I COME TO TERMS WITH THEM.

I COME TO ACCEPT THEM.

AND SO ALTHOUGH FORGIVENESS WASN'T POSSIBLE, 100% ACCEPTANCE WAS.

>>Jack Perkins: HE NAMED THE PLAY "MY PRODIGAL SON" AFTER THE BIBLICAL TALE OF THE YOUNG MAN WHO LOSES EVERYTHING AND RETURNS HOME TO SEEK FORGIVENESS FROM HIS FAMILY, MUCH LIKE

HIS OWN DAD.

>> SURE, HE WAS THE ALCOHOLIC AND THE DRUG ADDICT, AND THE BAD HUSBAND AND THE BAD FATHER AND THE WIFE BEATER AND THE SCAMMER AND THE SCHEMER.

BUT HE WAS MINE.

HE WAS MINE.

AND HE WAS MY PRODIGAL SON.

>>Jack Perkins: AFTER COLLEGE, GABE BOUNCED FROM EAST COAST TO WEST PERFORMING IN REGIONAL THEATER.

A CONNECTION TO SARASOTA'S ASOLO THEATER LED HIM TO THE GULF COAST.

>> I MET SO MANY WONDERFUL ACTORS.

I LEARNED SO MANY THINGS ABOUT HOW TO WORK PROFESSIONALLY.

>> ONCE SHE SEES YOU, SHE'LL ACT DIFFERENTLY WITH YOU.

>>Jack Perkins: HE'S PERFORMED IN SEVERAL PRODUCTIONS AT THE ASOLO.

THE BACKLOT AND THE BANYAN THEATER COMPANIES.

>> GOOD MORNING, GOOD MORNING!

LET'S GO!

>>Jack Perkins: BUT HIS LATEST LEADING ROLE IS THE ONE HE PREFERS MOST.

>> ELEVEN BENEVOLENT ELEPHANTS.

>>Jack Perkins: THE ROLE OF EDUCATOR.

>> BENEVOLENT.

GOOD TRY.

>> Jack Perkins: AT OASIS MIDDLE SCHOOL, HE IS MR. ORTIZ,  
VICE PRINCIPAL.

THE TITLE REQUIRES TEACHING, ADMINISTRATING, AND  
TRANSPORTING STUDENTS TO AND FROM SCHOOL.

>> YOU'RE SAYING, THOU JULIA, THOU HAS METAMORPHOSED ME.

>> HE'S A SUCCESS STORY WALKING INTO THE CLASSROOM EACH DAY  
THAT HE DEALS WITH THEM.

AND BECAUSE HE'S SO GENUINELY LOVING AND CARING AND  
SUPPORTING OF THEM, THE CHILDREN IDENTIFY WITH THE THINGS  
THAT THEY DEAL WITH THAT THEY SEE THAT HE'S OVERCOME.

>> WHAT ARE SOME DIFFERENT WAYS THAT YOU CAN LOVE SOMEONE?

>> I SEE MYSELF IN MOST OF THOSE CHILDREN.

I'M BLOWN AWAY WITH WHAT THEY BRING IN.

I'M BLOWN AWAY WITH THE EXPERIENCES EVEN AT THIS AGE,  
ELEVEN, TWELVE, THIRTEEN, THAT THEY'VE ALREADY -- THEY'VE  
SEEN MORE LIFE THAN SO MANY CHILDREN IN AMERICA TODAY.

IT REALLY TOUCHES YOU IN A DEEP, DEEP WAY.

ARE YOU READY?

>> JUST BECAUSE THEY SEE A GUN IN FRONT OF ME, THEY WIND UP  
TAKING ME TO JAIL.

I DID NOT DO ANYTHING.

AND I KNOW I DIDN'T EITHER.

>> MY HOPE IS THAT I WILL WORK WITH CHILDREN FROM 13 TO 22,  
ALONGSIDE PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS IN THE CREATION OF ORIGINAL  
URBAN THEATER.

THAT'S MY GOAL.

>> HI, DAD.

I'M OKAY.

YEAH, SCHOOL IS FINE.

YOU KNOW, I HATE MATH.

>>Jack Perkins: FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON, MANUEL ORTIZ FINALLY SAW GABRIEL'S PORTRAYAL OF HIS -- OF THEIR LIVES ON STAGE.

>> YOU SAID THAT YOU NEVER WANTED TO HAVE ME.

AND I CALLED HER A LIAR, BECAUSE IT ISN'T TRUE.

RIGHT?

>> THERE WAS ONE POINT WHERE I'M TALKING ON THE PHONE TO MY FATHER, AND I'M LOOKING OUT TOWARDS THE AUDIENCE, AND HE'S SORT OF IN THE BACK BY HIMSELF.

AND I WAS LOOKING STRAIGHT INTO HIS EYES WHEN I SAID THIS.

AND -- AND WHEN I GET THERE, MIJO, I'LL BE THE BEST DAMN DADDY IN THE WORLD, OKAY?

I PROMISE YOU.

AND MIJO, I LOVE YOU, SON.

>>Jack Perkins: MANUEL ORTIZ DIED SIX MONTHS LATER.

GABE ACCEPTED HIS REDEMPTION.

>> SO OFTEN PEOPLE LOOK BACK AND SAY, OH, I REGRET THAT.

WISH I HAD NEVER DONE THAT.

BUT THE EXPERIENCE IS WHAT MATTERS.

AND EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE DONE, I'VE BEEN ON A SPIRITUAL

PATH, YOU KNOW, AND EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE DONE IN MY LIFE HAS LED ME TO THIS POINT.

¶ HALLELUJAH ¶

¶ AMEN ¶

>>Jack Perkins: WE ARE NOT ALL GIVEN TO TELL OUR STORIES SO TOUCHINGLY, OF COURSE.

JUST SO WE'RE AWARE OF THEM, JUST SO WE KNOW.

AND THEN KNOWING OUR BACK STORIES, WHAT THEN?

WHAT TO MAKE OF THE REST OF OUR LIVES?

WELL, THIS WAS ONE GULF COAST WOMAN'S ANSWER.

¶¶

>>Jack Perkins: JUDY KRAUT IS A RETIRED NURSE WHO LIVES IN VENICE, FLORIDA.

>> GLOVES.

>>Jack Perkins: HER STORAGE SPACE DOESN'T HOLD FURNITURE FROM UP NORTH THAT WON'T FIT IN HER FLORIDA HOUSE.

>> THESE ARE SIMPLE GAUZE SPONGES, ALCOHOL PADS.

>>Jack Perkins: IT HOLDS MEDICAL SUPPLIES, BOXES AND BOXES OF THEM DESTINED FOR HOSPITALS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

>> THERE'S A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO NEED A LOT.

I JUST SAID, YOU KNOW, I THINK, WELL, MAYBE WE COULD FIND, YOU KNOW, A STETHOSCOPE OR A BLOOD PRESSURE CUFF OR SOMETHING LITTLE AROUND.

I'LL ASK A FEW FRIENDS.

>>Jack Perkins: SHE COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN WHAT THAT INITIAL

IDEA WOULD GROW INTO.

SHE GOT HER HUSBAND, BILL, A RETIRED NEUROSURGEON, INVOLVED.

>> WELL, WE BOTH HAD THE MEDICAL BACKGROUND.

AND IT JUST SEEMED LIKE A RELATIVELY EASY THING TO DO.

>>Jack Perkins: SOON, THEY WERE DRIVING UP AND DOWN THE GULF COAST COLLECTING SUPPLIES.

>> GOOD MORNING, HOW ARE YA?

OKAY, FINE.

>>Jack Perkins: ON THIS DAY, THEY VISIT A WAREHOUSE FOR TIDEWELL HOSPICE.

>> FEW ITEMS FOR YOU HERE TODAY.

>> THAT'S PERFECT.

PERFECT.

>>Jack Perkins: SUPPLIES ORDERED FOR HOSPICE PATIENTS WHO HAVE PASSED AWAY GET A SECOND LIFE.

>> THE MAJORITY OF THESE WOULD BE SCRAPPED.

THEY WOULD BE THROWN IN THE DUMPSTER DUE TO EXPIRATION DATES OR SIMPLY NOT HAVING ANY NEED FOR THEM.

>>Jack Perkins: AS JUDY AND BILL BEGAN THEIR WORK, THEY DISCOVERED MUCH OF WHAT IS SO USEFUL OVERSEAS WOULD GO WASTED IF IT STAYED HERE.

>> THAT WAS DRAMATIC FOR ME BECAUSE I'VE WORKED IN HOSPITALS FOR 30, 40 YEARS, AND I NEVER REALIZED THE LOGISTICS OF CHANGING EQUIPMENT AND WHAT HAPPENS TO VERY GOOD EQUIPMENT, WHICH IS CONSIDERED, QUOTE, OUTDATED IN AMERICA.

BUT ACTUALLY IS VERY BASIC, VERY FUNCTIONAL.

>> SO IN THE LONG RUN, EVERYTHING THEY THROW AWAY IS OUR GAIN.

THESE ARE ALL STERILE GAUZE SPONGES WHICH ARE LIKE GOLD TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE A CLEAN DRESSING.

>>Jack Perkins: JUDY AND BILL'S EFFORTS ARE PART OF A LARGER ENDEAVOR CALLED PROJECT C.U.R.E.

IT'S AN ORGANIZATION THAT DELIVERS MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO NEEDY HOSPITALS AROUND THE WORLD.

FIRST IT SENDS A TEAM TO MAKE SURE A FACILITY CAN MAKE PROPER USE OF THE GOODS.

THEN PROJECT C.U.R.E. TEAMS RETURN TO HOSPITALS THAT GET SUPPLIES TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE USED AS INTENDED.

>> I WOULDN'T DO IT UNLESS THEY HAD THESE CHECKS AND BALANCES.

THIS IS VERIFIED.

THAT'S WHAT I LIKE.

>>Jack Perkins: IT GIVES CONFIDENCE TO DONORS, TOO.

>> IT'S NICE BECAUSE YOU CAN TELL THE PEOPLE, YOU KNOW, I CAN GUARANTEE IT'S GOING WHERE WE SAY IT'S GOING TO GO.

>>Jack Perkins: ON THIS BREEZY MORNING, JUDY, BILL AND SOME OTHER MEMBERS OF THEIR CHURCH ARE READY TO UNLOAD TWO STORAGE SPACES.

>> I THINK IF WE DO IT LIKE A CHAIN THING, WE COULD PROBABLY GET IT RIGHT IN THERE.

>>Jack Perkins: THERE'S NO GLAMOUR IN THIS WORK.

THERE'S LITTLE GLORY.

>> YOU GET TIRED, YOU STOP.

>>Jack Perkins: BUT STILL RICH IN REWARDS.

>> JUST EMOTIONALLY SATISFYING.

WE HAVE THE TIME.

AND WE THINK IT DOES GOOD.

>> ANYBODY CAN WRITE A CHECK, BUT I THINK IF YOU JUST PUT FORTH A LITTLE BIT MORE EFFORT, YOU KNOW, YOU CAN DO ALL KINDS OF THINGS.

TOMORROW, WE'LL FILL UP AGAIN.

THAT'S THE BIG THING.

>>Jack Perkins: A CHILD LYING SICK IN AN AFRICAN HOSPITAL WILL NEVER MEET JUDY KRAUT, MIGHT NEVER KNOW THAT HER ROAD TO RECOVERY BEGAN HALF A WORLD AWAY IN ONE WOMAN'S HEART.

¶¶

>>Jack Perkins: HERE ON THE JOURNAL, WE HAVE OFTEN COVERED RACES, ATHLETIC COMPETITIONS OF MANY KINDS, BUT NEVER A RACE QUITE LIKE THIS.

NEVER RACERS AS BEAUTIFUL AS THESE.

IN THE REMOTE PLACE A HUNDRED MILES NORTH OF SARASOTA COUNTY, IT'S SHAPING UP TO BE A FINE DAY FOR THE RACES.

THIS WEEKEND'S PIGEON RACE BEGINS WITH VERY LITTLE FANFARE.

HUNDREDS OF BIRDS BURST FROM THEIR CAGES.

IT'S A BREATHTAKING, BEAUTIFUL SIGHT.

EVENTUALLY, EACH BIRD WILL FIND HIS WAY TO A FINISH LINE,  
MANY, MANY MILES AWAY.

>> C'MON, BOYS.

>>Jack Perkins: 119.26 MILES AWAY TO BE EXACT IS WHERE DICK  
BACHMAN WAITS AND WATCHES.

>> THAT'S THE SOUND THAT DRAWS THEM IN FOR FEED.

>>Jack Perkins: DICK HAS 39 PIGEONS COMPETING IN TWO RACES  
THIS DAY.

ALL ARE FLYING TO THEIR DESTINATION, DICK'S BACKYARD IN  
ENGLEWOOD.

>> EACH PIGEON HAS A PERCH HE CLAIMS AS HIS OWN.

AND HE'LL FIGHT TO DEFEND IT.

THAT'S WHERE HE SPENDS THE DAY AND SLEEPS THE NIGHT.

AND THIS IS WHAT HE FLIES HOME FOR.

>>Jack Perkins: DICK HAS BEEN RACING PIGEONS MOST OF HIS  
LIFE.

HE IS A PROUD MEMBER OF THE CHARLOTTE HARBOR HOMING PIGEON  
CLUB.

TO HIM, EVERY RACE COUNTS.

THAT MEANS EVERY SECOND COUNTS.

>> THE TIME.

IT'S 10:45 AND 22, 23, 24.

>>Jack Perkins: NEARLY THREE HOURS HAVE PASSED SINCE DICK'S  
PIGEONS AND MORE THAN A THOUSAND OTHERS WERE RELEASED TO  
RACE.

HE SAYS SOON THEY'LL BE IN SIGHT, AND WE HAVE A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW.

MODERN PIGEON RACING GOT ITS START IN EUROPE IN THE MID 19th CENTURY.

THE PIGEON LOVED AND RESPECTED FOR ITS STAMINA, FUELED BY THEIR TREMENDOUS PECTORAL MUSCLES, THE PIGEON CAN FLY UP TO 70 MILES AN HOUR.

WHAT IS MOST MYSTERIOUS AND AMAZING TO EVERY PIGEON RACER, NO ONE IS EXACTLY SURE JUST HOW THESE FLYING ATHLETES FIND THEIR WAY HOME.

>> CORNELL UNIVERSITY HAVE A PROGRAM GOING FOR YEARS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW PIGEONS AND BEES AND OTHER BIRDS NAVIGATE THEIR WAY BACK, AND NO ONE CAN FIND OUT HOW THEY DO IT.

>>Jack Perkins: YET IT'S THAT UNDENIABLE UNKNOWN THAT KEEPS PIGEON RACERS SO EXCITED ABOUT THE GAME.

>> C'MON, KIDS.

>>Jack Perkins: HIS PIGEONS MUST CROSS THE OFFICIAL FINISH LINE, THIS SMALL TRAP, WHICH IS ALSO THE FRONT DOOR TO THEIR HOME.

>> AT THE BASE OF THIS TRAP ARE THE SENSORS.

AND EACH PIGEON HAS A CHIP RING ON HIS LEG.

WHEN THAT PIGEON WITH THE CHIP RING STEPS ON THE SENSOR, IT GOES ELECTRONICALLY AND IT'S REGISTERED IN THE CLOCK.

HI, DAVID.

THIS IS DICKEY.

>>Jack Perkins: DICK DIALS UP HIS COMPETITION TO SEE HOW FAST THEIR FLOCKS ARE FLYING IN.

>> HOW MANY BIRDS DO YOU HAVE?

OH, YOU HAVE NINE.

GOOD.

VERY GOOD.

I HAVE 25 NOW.

>>Jack Perkins: AND AS THEY FEED IN A FRENZY, DICK DASHES INSIDE TO HIS COMPUTER WHERE HE ENTERS HIS RACE RESULTS TO CLUB HEADQUARTERS.

>> WELL, THE RESULTS ARE UP HERE.

IT LOOKS LIKE I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO WIN.

THE TIME WAS FAIRLY FAST.

1179 YARDS PER MINUTE.

>>Jack Perkins: DICK'S PRIZE-WINNING PIGEONS MAKE IT BACK HOME IN LESS THAN THREE HOURS, ENOUGH TO WIN HIM A FEW BUCKS, AN EVENTUAL TROPHY TO ADD TO HIS COLLECTION, AND BRAGGING RIGHTS, AT LEAST FOR THE WEEK.

>> I JUST GET A BIG KICK OUT OF IT.

IF I DIDN'T WIN ANY RACES, I WOULD DO IT.

>>Jack Perkins: CHARLES LINDBERGH ONCE SAID, IF I HAD TO CHOOSE, I WOULD RATHER HAVE BIRDS THAN AIRPLANES.

DICK BACHMAN AGREES.

>>Jack Perkins: OCCASIONALLY AS WE CLOSE A VOLUME OF "A GULF COAST JOURNAL" THANKING YOU, HOPING YOU'LL BE WITH US NEXT

TIME, WE LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT FOR WHAT WE HAVE COME TO CALL  
POETOGRAPHY, A BIT OF POETRY AND A PHOTOGRAPH.

ON THE GULF COAST, THERE'S ALWAYS BEAUTY AROUND THAT WE  
OBLIVIOUS PASS BY IGNORING.

WE'RE TOO BUSY, BUT IF ONLY WE'D FOUND THOSE ORCHARDS  
SUSPENDED, IF WE HAD GONE EXPLORING WITH EYES FULL OPEN AND  
HEARTS AWARE, WE WOULD HAVE SEEN THE RADIANCE STAINED GLASS  
HUES OF PLANTS WE DIDN'T KNOW WERE THERE.

AND THE MAGICAL MOONSET AND EGRET VIEWS, BEAUTY TO DEVOUR  
THAT WE DISREGARD, SETTling FOR A FAR LESS NOURISHING SNACK,  
LESSON TO LEARN, HMM, NOT REALLY HARD.

WHEN OFFERED A BANQUET, WHY EAT A BIG MAC?

NO MORE TO SAY.

FEAST ON BEAUTY TODAY.

>> ALL RIGHT.

READY?

BA BA BA BA BA BA BA BA BA BA BA BA.

BUTTAH GUTA BUTTAH GUTA BUTTAH GUTA BUTTAH GUTA.

OKAY. -- FOOLISH FATHER FIXED A FEATHER TO THE FENCE OF  
FATHER FINLEY.

REALTIME CAPTIONING BY AMERICAPTION, INC.

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THROUGH A GENEROUS GRANT FROM THE GULF COAST COMMUNITY  
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LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP, AND ENDOWED PHILANTHROPY.