

"A GULF COAST JOURNAL"

JULY 2008

DISCLAIMER:

THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS AN UNEDITED VERSION OF REALTIME CAPTIONING WHICH SHOULD NEITHER BE RELIED UPON FOR COMPLETE ACCURACY NOR USED AS A VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT. BECAUSE THIS DOCUMENT HAS NOT BEEN EDITED, THERE MAY BE ADDITIONS, DELETIONS, AND/OR WORDS THAT DID NOT TRANSLATE CORRECTLY.

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

>>Jack Perkins: FROM BAD WRITER TO VERY GOOD AND SUCCESSFUL WRITER.

MEET THE MAN WHO DREAMED UP DOC FORD.

FLY WITH SOME OF THE TRUE ANGELS OF MERCY TO DESPERATE LANDS OF IMPOVERISHMENT.

AND YOU SAY YOU'D LIKE TO WATER SKI?

WELL, HAVE WE GOT THE PLACE FOR YOU 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, HOW ABOUT A STORY OF A FAMOUS AUTHOR WHO HAS TROUBLE PRONOUNCING HIS OWN NAME?

WHICH DOESN'T STOP HIM FROM TURNING OUT YEAR AFTER YEAR WHAT FANS CONSIDER SOME OF THE BEST MYSTERY ADVENTURE BOOKS OUT THERE.

HE'S BEEN WRITING ABOUT HIS PROTAGONIST DOC FORD FOR SOME TWO DECADES AND STILL HAPPILY LIVING RIGHT HERE WHERE IT ALL STARTED, ON THE GULF COAST.

¶¶

>> SURE HOPE WE MAKE IT BACK ALIVE.

>> ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN.

>>Jack Perkins: OH, YES, ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN DOC FORD COUNTRY.

>> IT'S A GREAT BIRD ROOKERY RIGHT HERE.

>>Jack Perkins: ON PINE ISLAND IS WHERE THE STORY BEGAN FOR THE MAN WE NOW KNOW AS AUTHOR RANDY WAYNE WHITE.

>> BEEN A FISHING GUIDE FOR 13 YEARS ON SANIBEL, TARPON BAY. DID ALMOST 3,000 CHARTERS.

>>Jack Perkins: UNLIKELY STEPPING-STONE TO THE BEST-SELLER LISTS, BUT HIS EXPERIENCES ON THE WATER FORM THE BACKBONE OF NOVELS ABOUT A MARINE BIOLOGIST AND EX-GOVERNMENT AGENT CALLED DOC FORD.

>> I THOUGHT IF I HAVE ONE CHARACTER WHO IS PURELY LINEAR AND UNSYMPATHETIC AND NOT SPIRITUAL, AND IF I HAD ANOTHER CHARACTER WHO IS PURELY SPIRITUAL AND INTUITIVE, I COULD SAY JUST ABOUT ANY DARN THING I WANTED TO AND GET AWAY WITH IT. THAT'S HOW I CAME UP WITH DOC FORD AND TOMLINSON, HIS

HIPSTER PAL.

>>Jack Perkins: FLORIDA ITSELF WOULD BECOME THE THIRD IMPORTANT CHARACTER IN RANDY'S BOOKS, COMBINING MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE AND A BIT OF HIDDEN HISTORY.

>> HOW ARE YOU?

>> I'M WELL, THANK YOU.

>>Jack Perkins: NOW, IT IS 15 NOVELS LATER.

>> SHE'S IN LOVE WITH DOC.

I HAD TO ESCORT HER HERE, OTHERWISE SOMETHING COULD HAVE HAPPENED.

>> IT'S ACTUALLY A GUY BOOK.

WE'RE ALL KIND OF LIVING A LITTLE BIT THROUGH DOC AND RANDY.

IT DOESN'T HURT ANYTHING TO FANTASIZE, DOES IT?

>> ANYONE WHO WRITES A MYSTERY IN FLORIDA IS THE NEXT JOHN D. MacDONALD.

HE TRULY WAS THE HEIR APPARENT WITH DOC FORD.

HE'S A BIG LUG, BUT I LOVE HIM.

>>Jack Perkins: IS HE REFERRING TO THE CHARACTER OR CREATOR?

WELL, THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO THINK YOU ARE DOC FORD.

>> I WISH I WAS DOC FORD.

HE'S A LOT BIGGER, STRONGER, BETTER LOOKING THAN I.

DOC FORD IS AN AMALGAM ACTUALLY OF PEOPLE I HAVE MET OVER THE YEARS.

>>Jack Perkins: WHAT DOES THIS CHARACTER DOC FORD LOOK LIKE?

WELL, IT DEPENDS ON THE READER.

>> LIKE A HARRISON FORD-TYPE CHARACTER.

>> HE'S A REAL HEALTH FREAK.

>> I THINK OF DOC FORD AS A BIG GUY.

HE PREFERS TO BE KIND OF NERDY, AND HE KEEPS HOLDING IN UNTIL HE GETS INTO A SERIOUS SITUATION.

>> THE BOOK NEVER SAYS WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE, NEVER DOES.

INTENTIONALLY AND PROBABLY DUMBLY OR STUPIDLY OR WHATEVER, I DECIDED EARLY ON THAT I WOULD NEVER DESCRIBE DOC FORD.

>>Jack Perkins: FORD'S SIDEKICK, HOWEVER, IS DESCRIBED QUITE PRECISELY.

>> TOMLINSON LOOKS VERY MUCH LIKE A BASEBALL PLAYER NAMED BILL "SPACEMAN" LEE.

PITCHED FOR THE RED SOX FOR MANY YEARS.

ONE OF MY DEAREST FRIENDS AND A BRILLIANT, ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT GUY.

BUT BY GUM, JUST DIFFERENT.

>>Jack Perkins: IT MUST BE ADMITTED, DOC FORD WAS NOT RANDY'S FIRST ATTEMPT AT FICTION WRITING.

WHILE STILL A FISHING GUIDE, HE WAS ASKED TO WRITE A FICTIONAL BOOK ABOUT A FLORIDA FISHING GUIDE.

>> I WROTE THE FIRST BOOK IN NINE DAYS.

45,000 WORDS.

IT WAS RAINY AND WINDY AND NO CHARTERS.

I HAD TWO YOUNG SONS AND NEEDED THE MONEY.

BUT THEY ARE JUST AWFUL BOOKS, JUST AWFUL.

>>Jack Perkins: HE WOULD GO ON TO WRITE SEVEN SUCH AWFUL BOOKS UNDER THE PEN NAME RANDY STRIKER.

>> THAT'S TOO MANY.

>>Jack Perkins: SOME FANS HAVE DISREGARDED HIS WARNINGS AND READ THOSE RANDY STRIKER BOOKS ANYWAY.

>> YEAH, WE'VE ALL SINNED A LITTLE BIT.

YOU CAN DEFINITELY TELL THE DIFFERENCE.

>> THEY WEREN'T IN PRINT FOR MANY YEARS.

THEN SOMEONE FOUND OUT THAT I HAD WRITTEN THEM, AND NOW THEY CAN'T PUT MY DARN NAME ON THEM BIG ENOUGH.

>>Jack Perkins: WHEN HE STARTED WRITING THE DOC FORD SERIES, HE USED HIS REAL NAME, BUT THAT PRESENTED A PROBLEM.

>> THE FIRST TIME I DID AN INTERVIEW, I SAID, HI, I'M RANDY WAYNE "RIGHT."

I'M SORRY. I'M RANDY WAYNE -- IT'S LIKE THE ELMER FUDD HALL OF FAME COMBINED WITH A SERIAL KILLER.

>>Jack Perkins: YOU COULDN'T SAY YOUR OWN NAME.

>> I CAN'T SAY IT NOW.

>>Jack Perkins: BETWEEN THE STRIKER BOOKS AND THE DOC FORD BOOKS, RANDY WROTE NONFICTION FOR OUTSIDE MAGAZINE.

>> INCREDIBLE GIG.

EVERY MONTH, I WOULD SIT DOWN WITH A WORLD GLOBE, AND SOMETIMES SPIN IT, AND THAT'S THE TRUTH.

AND IF IT LANDED ON A THIRD-WORLD COUNTRY, I WOULD PROBABLY GO THERE.

IF THERE WAS A WAR GOING ON THERE, I DEFINITELY WOULD GO THERE.

AND THAT WAS MY JOB.

I WAS IN NICARAGUA DURING THE REVOLUTION THERE AND GUATEMALA.

HISTORY IS IMPORTANT.

TO MISS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING, I WOULD FIND -- I WOULD BE DISAPPOINTED IN MYSELF.

>>Jack Perkins: OVER THE YEARS, HE'S DEVELOPED A LOVE OF CUBA AND ITS PEOPLE.

>> THE FIRST TIME I WENT WAS 1976.

WENT BACK DURING WHAT CASTRO CALLED "SPECIAL TIME."

MARIEL HARBOR CUBA, 1980, I BROUGHT BACK 147 REFUGEES ON A 55-FOOT BOAT.

>>Jack Perkins: ONE OF HIS MOST CHERISHED VISITS INVOLVED BARNSTORMING THE COUNTRYSIDE WITH HIS SELF-PROCLAIMED OLD MAN'S BASEBALL TEAM.

>> WE WENT -- FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, WENT TO CUBA TOOK BASEBALL GEAR FOR THE KIDS AND GAVE IT AWAY.

ONE YEAR WE MADE A DOCUMENTARY.

>>Jack Perkins: THE DOCUMENTARY CALLED "THE GIFT OF THE GAME" SHOWED TWO VERY DIFFERENT CULTURES UNITED BY ONE GAME.

>> ONLY A KOOK WOULD BELIEVE A BUNCH OF MIDDLE-AGED BALLPLAYERS WITH BEER GUTS COULD BUST THE BUREAUCRACY IN A POLICE STATE THAT AMERICA'S EMBARGOED FOR 40 YEARS.

>> WE ASK YOUR LORD'S BLESSING ON THE BOYS OF SUMMER.

WE ASK THAT NOTHING GET PERMANENTLY INJURED.

WE ASK THAT YOU WD-40 THEIR JOINTS.

>> DID WELL.

WENT TO THE WOODS HOLE FILM FESTIVAL.

THE FILM IS DEAR AND FUNNY AND TOUCHING.

>>Jack Perkins: BUT THE WORLD TRAVELER ALSO APPRECIATES HOME

WHERE HE LIVES WITH HIS WIFE, WENDY.

¶¶

¶ MAKE SOME MELODIES SOMETIME ¶

>>Jack Perkins: THEIR OLD FLORIDA HOME IS PERCHED ATOP A

2,000-YEAR-OLD INDIAN MOUND.

INSIDE AND OUT, IT IS FILLED WITH ECLECTIC SOUVENIRS FROM

RANDY'S THIRD-WORLD TRAVELS.

>> IT'S A CUBAN REFUGEE BOAT.

IT'S MADE OUT OF TIN SHEET ROOFING.

AS YOU CAN SEE, IT'S BRILLIANTLY MADE.

IT HAS A RUSSIAN ENGINE, GAS ENGINE.

12 MEN IN A SMALL BOAT LEFT CUBA SECRETLY.

THE ENGINE BROKE DOWN IN THE GULF STREAM.

THEY DRIFTED TO SHORE IN KEY LARGO.

DRIFTED UP AT A BEACH AT A BAR CALLED THE MANDALAY.

THEY GOT OUT AND DRANK AND THEY ARE STILL IN THE U.S.

I ACTUALLY TRADED ONE OF THE FIRST COPIES OF MY BOOKS.

>> THEY ARE RUSSIAN BINOCULARS.

THEY WERE USED IN EAST GERMANY.

BRILLIANT RESOLUTION AND GREAT OPTICS.

AND, MAN, I WISH THERE WAS A NUDE BEACH AROUND HERE BECAUSE
I WOULD HAVE MORE FUN WITH THEM.

IT'S KIND OF NICE.

FRIENDS OF MINE IN CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA, MADE IT FOR ME.

THEIR JOKE WAS, IT WEIGHS ABOUT FREAKIN' 75 POUNDS.

I HAD TO CARRY IT BACK AS LUGGAGE.

IT WAS DURING THE INVASION OF PANAMA "JUST CAUSE," WHICH WAS
DECEMBER '89, JANUARY '90 AND THEN ON THROUGH EARLY 1990.

FRIENDS OF MINE BROUGHT IT BACK TO FLORIDA FOR ME, AND I'M
VERY GLAD.

IT WAS ALMOST AS HEAVY AS THE DAMN BELLS.

IT'S STRANGE HOW IT'S KIND OF LIKE A MUSEUM.

I JUST HAVEN'T LEFT YET.

¶ I'VE BEEN EVERYWHERE ¶

>>Jack Perkins: RANDY SPENDS ABOUT SIX MONTHS ACTUALLY
SITTING DOWN AND WRITING HIS BOOKS.

HE PUBLISHES A BOOK A YEAR.

DO YOU HATE WRITING?

>> I DON'T HATE IT.

IT'S NEVER GOTTEN EASIER.

AND IT IS JUST ONE PAINFUL, POWERFUL DAY AFTER ANOTHER.

AND THERE ARE DAYS WHERE I'LL LOOK BACK AND GO, YOU KNOW,
THAT SENTENCE IS PRETTY GOOD.

I KIND OF LIKE THAT.

BUT I ALWAYS GO THROUGH A PERIOD WHERE IN A BOOK WHERE I GO,
THIS IS THE BIGGEST PIECE OF AWFUL STUFF EVER WRITTEN.

WHY AM I DOING THIS?

I SHOULD BE BACK IN THE BOAT.

IT'S NEVER GOTTEN EASY.

IT'S ALWAYS HARD.

>>Jack Perkins: HARD BUT WORTH THE EFFORT.

RANDY WAYNE WHITE HAS FOUND HIS CALLING.

ON AND OFF THE PAGE, HE IS LIVING IT ONE NOVEL ADVENTURE AT
A TIME.

>>Jack Perkins: RETURN TO A DIFFERENT BREED OF ADVENTURES,
AND THEY ARE THAT.

IF NOBLE ARE THE MISSIONARIES WHO TRAVEL AFAR IN HARSH
CONDITIONS TO SERVE THEIR FAITH, NOBLE, TOO, ARE THOSE WHO
SUPPORT THOSE MISSIONARIES.

AND THERE IS SUCH A GROUP ON THE GULF COAST, AND IT IS
LOCATED RIGHT HERE AT THE AIRPORT IN VENICE.

DELIVERY TRUCKS KNOW THE WAY TO THE VENICE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT
ONE HANGAR IN PARTICULAR.

THE PACKAGES ADDRESSED TO AGAPE FLIGHTS AT 100 AIRPORT
AVENUE ARRIVE DAILY FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY.

CORONA, CALIFORNIA.

MCCONNELLSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA.

SWEDESBORO, NEW JERSEY.

AFTER VOLUNTEERS CHECK EACH BOX, THE CONTENTS ARE RESEALED,
DESTINATION HAITI, THE POOREST COUNTRY IN THE WESTERN
HEMISPHERE.

>> LITTLE KIDS SHOES.

>>Jack Perkins: WITH DONATIONS POURING IN FROM 200 CHURCH
CONGREGATIONS AND THOUSANDS OF INDIVIDUALS, THE SMALL AIR
CARGO SERVICE SUPPORTS THE WANTS AND NEEDS OF 400 CHRISTIAN
MISSIONARY FAMILIES WORKING IN HAITI.

REVEREND CHARLIE GARDNER'S TASK IS TO KEEP THE SUPPLY LINE
RUNNING.

>> THE MINISTRY IS SUPPORTED BY FOLKS WITH UNBELIEVABLE
COMMITMENT.

IT'S BEING WILLING TO FACE WHAT APPEARS TO BE INSURMOUNTABLE
ODDS, THAT WE CAN OVERCOME THE BARRIERS THAT ARE IN FRONT OF
US.

>>Jack Perkins: BARRIERS LIKE THE PLANE CRASH IN
DECEMBER 2007 THAT DESTROYED AGAPE'S STURDY GRAND CARAVAN.

>> THIS PLANE IS A GREAT SUBSTITUTE.

IT'S NOT A GREAT REPLACEMENT.

>>Jack Perkins: THOUGH A CESSNA 414 CARRIES LESS THAN HALF
THE CARGO OF A GRAND CARAVAN, THE PILOT, JEFF YANNUCCIELLO,
IS PROUD THAT AGAPE'S WEEKLY FLIGHT SCHEDULE HAS NEVER
MISSED A BEAT.

>> EVERY TIME WE ARE THERE, LIKE I SAID, IS A BLESSING TO
THE MISSIONARIES DOWN THERE.

AND WHEN WE SHOW UP, YOU KNOW, IF NOTHING ELSE, WE ARE GETTING THEM THEIR MAIL, THEY APPRECIATE THAT.

>> THAT'S 41 FOR KING.

>>Jack Perkins: A LARGER PLANE MORE SUITABLE FOR THE SIX-HOUR FLIGHT FROM VENICE TO PORT-AU-PRINCE IS ATOP THE WISH LIST.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE CARE PACKAGES FOR MISSIONARIES KEEP ROLLING IN, AND SO DO THE VOLUNTEERS, LIKE CHARLIE THOMPSON, A RETIRED FEDEX PILOT.

>> I KIND OF FIT RIGHT IN HERE THROWING BOXES.

I UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM AND THE LOGISTICS INVOLVED IN MOVING THIS STUFF.

IT'S NATURAL FOR ME TO FIT RIGHT IN AND HELP THEM OUT.

>>Jack Perkins: LOCAL MISSIONARIES KEITH AND CLARA STARKEY CAME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR AGAPE FLIGHTS IN 1980.

>> VERY QUICKLY WITHIN JUST A FEW FLIGHTS, AGAPE BECAME VERY REGULAR.

AND THE MISSIONARIES APPROACHED KEITH AND SAID, KEITH, IF YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A REGULAR SERVICE, INSTEAD OF BRINGING THE THINGS THAT YOU ARE BRINGING, HERE'S A LIST OF THINGS WE REALLY NEED.

>>Jack Perkins: SO ALONGSIDE THE MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND ASSORTED SCHOOL MATERIALS, THE REQUESTS FROM MISSIONARIES USUALLY ARE FOR SIMPLE, EVERYDAY ITEMS.

>> COSMETICS.

>>Jack Perkins: MAKING EACH PLANE LOAD SOMETHING CLOSE TO AN AISLE FROM WAL-MART.

>> YOU NAME IT, IT'S SOMETHING, THINK OF YOUR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE, WHAT IT TAKES TO SURVIVE, BECAUSE THEY CAN'T GET IT DOWN THERE.

TWO WEEKS AGO, WE HAD A MISSIONARY CALL AND SAY, HEY, MY KID'S BIRTHDAY IS COMING UP.

WE COULD, BUT IT WOULD BE REALLY DIFFICULT TO GET ONE HERE, CAN YOU GO TO WAL-MART AND GET US A BICYCLE?

BRAND-NEW BICYCLE.

SMALL, 16-INCH FRAME FOR THEIR KID.

PUT THAT ON THE PLANE.

AND IT'S JUST AS MUCH THAT AS IT IS THE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SUPPLIES OR THE EMERGENCY AUTO PARTS.

BECAUSE IF THEIR KIDS AREN'T HAPPY, IF THEY CAN'T HAVE THEIR FAMILY LIFE RUNNING SMOOTHLY, IF YOU CAN'T WORK AT HOME, YOU CAN'T WORK OUT AND MINISTER TO OTHER PEOPLE AS WELL.

>>Jack Perkins: IN A COUNTRY BROKEN AT EVERY LEVEL WHERE MURDER, TORTURE AND RIOTS ARE COMMONPLACE, OPPORTUNITY IS HARD TO COME BY.

>> A FULL-TIME JOB IN HAITI IS HALF A DAY THREE DAYS A WEEK. THAT'S FULL-TIME WORK.

THE AVERAGE INCOME IS \$150 A YEAR.

THAT'S 12 BUCKS A MONTH.

THAT'S NOT EVEN 50 CENTS A DAY.

PEOPLE EAT MUD, CARDBOARD, AND IT'S AN INCREDIBLE,
INCREDIBLE SITUATION.

PEOPLE DIE IN THE STREET FROM STARVATION.

OUR COUNTRY IS BUILT ON HOPE, BUT IT DOESN'T EXIST IN HAITI.

OUR CHALLENGE IS TO OVERCOME THAT.

>>Jack Perkins: WHEN CHARLIE GARDNER FIRST WENT TO HAITI 18
YEARS AGO, ALL THE PROBLEMS AND HUMAN SUFFERING OVERWHELMED
HIM.

>> NOW IT'S INCREDIBLY ENCOURAGING TO HEAR THE REPORTS THAT
COME FROM THE MISSIONARIES ABOUT KIDS IN SCHOOL OR
VOCATIONAL PROGRAM THAT HAS BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL OR
COMMUNITY GETTING WATER FOR THE FIRST TIME OR ESTABLISHING A
CLINIC IN A REMOTE AREA OF HAITI THAT HAD NO MEDICAL SERVICE
BEFORE OR A COMMUNITY HEALTH PROGRAM THAT HAS REDUCED THE
INFANT MORTALITY RATE.

>>Jack Perkins: THE WORD "AGAPE" TRANSLATES INTO GOD'S LOVE
FOR HIS HUMAN CREATION, THE UNSELFISH LOVE OF ONE PERSON FOR
ANOTHER.

IN SUPPORT OF 400 MISSIONARY FAMILIES WORKING TO IMPROVE
CONDITIONS IN THE MISERY THAT IS HAITI, AGAPE FLIGHTS OF
VENICE TAKES WING.

NOW FOR SOME FUN, THE KIND OF FUN THAT THOSE OF US WHO CAN'T
DO IT WISH WE COULD.

AGE SHOULDN'T STOP US.

IT DOESN'T STOP SOME OF THEM.

>> GOOD AFTERNOON, EVERYBODY!

AND WELCOME TO SKI-A-REE STADIUM FOR ANOTHER EXCITING
AFTERNOON OF SKIING!

>>Jack Perkins: SPENDING A SUN-DRENCHED SUNDAY AFTERNOON
WATCHING THE SARASOTA SKI-A-REES WILL SEND YOU TO THE EDGE
OF YOUR SEAT.

>> PRIMARILY, SKI-A-REES IS A SHOWOFF.

>>Jack Perkins: SKI-A-REE STADIUM JUST BEHIND THE MOTE
MARINE AQUARIUM IS HOME TO A SCHOOL OF HUMAN FISH.
THEY FLIP.

THEY FLY.

THEY ARE AS FAST AS LIGHTNING.

AMATEUR WATER ACROBATS WITH NO FEAR, FUELED BY H2O AND A
PASSION FOR SPEED.

>> I JUST LOVE THE RUSH, THE ADRENALINE OF IT ALL.

>>Jack Perkins: THAT ADRENALINE HAS PROPELLED THE SKI-A-REES
TALENT AND TRADITION HERE FOR SOME 50 YEARS.

SINCE 1957, THE SARASOTA SKI-A-REES HAVE THRILLED THOUSANDS
WITH THEIR FAMOUS FREE WATER SKIING SHOWS.

>> ONE OF MY FAVORITE PICTURES IS BACK IN 1962, THE CITY OF
SARASOTA PUT OUT A POSTCARD FEATURING THE SKI-A-REES.

AND IT FEATURES OUR BALLET LINE.

BACK THEN, THEY HAD THE BIG GARISH HATS WITH THE BIG PLUMES
ON THEM AND THEY WERE GOLD AND YELLOW.

LOOKING BACK AND SEEING SOME OF THE OLD COSTUMES AND OLD EQUIPMENT AND SEEING HOW FAR THINGS HAVE COME WITH THE TECHNOLOGY OVER THE 50 YEARS HAS REALLY BEEN NEAT.

>>Jack Perkins: 56-YEAR-OLD FRED JOHNSTON REMEMBERS IT WELL. HE'S THE LONGEST ACTIVE SKI-A-REE MEMBER.

HE SAYS, THOUGH, THAT THE BOATS ARE FASTER NOW AND THE SKIS ARE SLICKER.

HE STILL WON AWARDS AS A TEEN FOR HIS HIGH-FLYING FEATS OFF THE SKI RAMP.

>> WHEN YOU'RE GOING OVER A JUMP AND YOU'RE IN THE AIR, IT'S LIKE YOU'RE A BIRD.

YOU GET THAT WEIGHTLESS SENSATION.

WHEN YOU HIT, YOU THINK, YEAH, THAT'S GREAT.

WHEN MY DAUGHTER WAS BORN, I SHOWED HER HOW MUCH FUN IT WAS.

>>Jack Perkins: FAMILY TRADITION IS A TREND WITH THE SKI-A-REES.

FRED'S DAUGHTER, ERICA, NOW 18, HAS JUST TURNED PRO.

>> IT FEELS SO COOL TO WATER SKI, ESPECIALLY BAREFOOT, GOING 40 MILES AN HOUR ON YOUR FEET, IN FRONT OF A HUGE CROWD, SHOWING OFF, A RUSH.

DEFINITELY A RUSH.

>>Jack Perkins: BAREFOOTING OR SKIING WITH NO SKIS IS JUST ONE OF THE STUNTS YOU'LL SEE THE SKI-A-REES PULL OFF.

THEY JUGGLE.

THEY SWIVEL.

AND THEY DO THE BACK BOE-DOE.

>> THE BACK OF THE SKI IS FACING FORWARD.

AND YOU FLIP AROUND SO YOU'RE BACKWARDS, AND THE BOAT SPINS,
AND YOU GO 360-DEGREES AROUND THE BOAT.

>>Jack Perkins: THAT'S NOT EASY TO DO AND TAKES YEARS OF
PRACTICE.

SO DO THE TWO-, THREE-, FOUR-TIER HUMAN PYRAMIDS, A
HIGHLIGHT OF THEIR SHOWS AND COMPETITIONS.

>> YOU HAVE TO BE REALLY STRONG AND REALLY STILL.

IF YOU MOVE ON THE BOTTOM, IT GOES ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP OF
THE PYRAMID.

>>Jack Perkins: JUSTIN PRUSE IS ONE OF THE YOUNGEST
SKI-A-REES INSPIRED BY BRAD.

>> WATER SKIING IS MY LIFE.

I GET THROUGH THE SCHOOL WEEK JUST THINKING ABOUT IT.

>>Jack Perkins: JUSTIN, JUST LIKE ALL SKI-A-REE PERFORMERS,
THRIVES ON FAN APPLAUSE.

>> FIRST, YOU START AND GET BUTTERFLIES IN YOUR STOMACH.

NOW IT'S JUST SECOND NATURE.

I LOVE BEING IN FRONT OF THE CROWD PERFORMING.

YOU JUST HAVE TO PLAY IT UP FOR THEM.

>>Jack Perkins: IF YOU LIKE TO PLAY OR COMPETE WITH THE
AWARD-WINNING SKI-A-REES, YOU NEED NOT HAVE ANY EXPERIENCE
WATER SKIING.

THEY'LL TEACH YOU EVERYTHING.

THEY SAY IT'S A SAFE SPORT, AND THEY HAVE MEMBERS AGES 6 UP TO 77.

SKI-A-REES SHOW SEASON RUNS FROM FEBRUARY THROUGH MAY AND BACK AGAIN IN THE FALL.

IT'S A SHOW WORTH WAITING FOR, AS THE SKI-A-REES WOULD SAY, "SKI YOU LATER!"

AS WE CLOSE THIS MONTH'S VOLUME OF A "A GULF COAST JOURNAL," WE TAKE A MOMENT FOR WHAT WE HAVE COME TO CALL POETOGRAPHY, A POEM, SOME PHOTOGRAPHS.

THIS TIME, VISITING AN ISLAND CHURCH AND CEMETERY.

>>Jack Perkins: THEY WERE LAID HERE SO LONG AGO, WHO TODAY CAN REMEMBER?

DOES ANYONE ANYMORE CARE?

WHY ARE THEY HERE?

WELL, THEY, OF COURSE, ARE NOT "THEY."

THE "THEY" OF THEM LONG SINCE DEPARTED ASCENDING, DESCENDING, WHAT IS HERE MOLDERING NEATH RAMSHACKLE SLABS IS SOMETHING FAR OTHER THAN "THEY."

SUCH SLABS, IF ATTENDED, CAN BE DEARLY REMINDFUL, THOUGH THESE AT THIS CHURCH ON THIS ISLAND SEEM NO BETTER ATTENDED THAN TENDED.

PERHAPS BECAUSE NOW THERE ARE MANY MORE OUT HERE THAN IN THERE.

THE CHURCH IS LARGE, A RUSTIC GLORY, BUT ITS PEOPLE ARE FEW. FROM PULPIT GRANDILOQUENT HOMILIES FLOW, THE WORD DOES GO

FORTH, BUT TO WHOM?

TO WHOM?

¶¶

REALTIME CAPTIONING BY AMERICAPTION, INC.

>> 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.