



GREAT ESCAPES

The Best Golf Trips Don't Always Revolve Around Where You Go But Who You Go With

A LAUGHING MATTER

By Patrick Jones

It was less than 48 hours after pledging in front of God, family and friends to endure “for better or for worse” that my new bride flashed her true colors. Our sacrosanct wedding vows still hung on our lips when she flaunted just how effortless it was for her to deceive her less-aware half for self-amusement. Our unmitigated trust was almost immediately jettisoned out the window like a misfired wedding garter belt.

We were newly wed and neophyte golfers who elected to spend our honeymoon at the Sea Pines Resort on Hilton Head Island. To dodge a motivated slap when my wife reads this, I dare not classify the trip as a golf getaway since the ultimate priority of the excursion was to

consummate the marriage if – wink, wink, nudge, nudge – you know what I mean.

I advocate beer-swilling, sultry-storytelling golf junkets with the boys, but the non-intimate details of this nuptial spree has had more meaningful lifetime implications. Besides, undiluted testosterone formulates predictable anecdotes in a female-free vacuum. On a guys-only golf trip, standard scenarios include constantly abusing that ugly hag “Alice” for lag putts left 10 feet short and later, back at the hotel pool, judging who can manufacture the most prolific intestinal gas after consuming margaritas and chimichangas at the clubhouse grill.

Many newly hitched couples

escape to private destinations. We, however, opted to share our honeymoon with hordes of hardcore PGA Tour fans who had descended on the shores of Calibogue Sound at Harbour Town Golf Links during the week of the 1991 MCI Heritage Golf Classic. The just-minted Mr. and Mrs. Jones – try registering under that surname at a hotel without getting a sly grin and a knowing wink from the desk clerk – watched the tournament and booked tee times at the resort’s Ocean and Marsh golf courses.

In those days, my golf swing was better suited to hitting topspin lobs and, oftentimes, yielded similar results. My wife, while an excellent overall athlete, had an incurable

stone-handed putting stroke that would have confounded short-game guru Dave Pelz.

Despite our low levels of competence, we were obsessed with the game. And, as my story unfolds, we were also rookies in the etiquette and comportment demanded by upscale golf resorts.

Fourteen years of marital bliss have passed since those rounds, so I recall just a few of the shot-by-shot details. Not even early Alzheimer's, however, can erase the alarming image of my toed 5-wood shot that hurtled dead right towards some highball-sipping pool loungers. They scrambled for cover as my disoriented and humiliated Top-Flite angrily rattled around their pool deck. There were no tragic stories in the local Island Packet newspaper the following day, so I'm still moving forward with life under the assumption that all escaped uninjured.

But there was a more defining shot in those rounds that will forever stay with me. It was one that has undermined unequivocal marital trust throughout eternity, and it came on the very first tee box of our honeymooner's golf outing.

Trying to impress the opposite sex with your virility by showing length off the tee (humor me with one

cornball innuendo) is a humbling error if you've never been introduced to the concept of golf's swing plane. My first tee shot in front of the future mother of my child was clubbed to the bottom of a lake fronting the tee box with the rapidity of a plunging submarine evading kamikaze attack.

The next sailed high and right like a Julio Franco homerun at Turner Field. It, too, was no longer in play. A dreadful clanging noise, not the ball, rebounded back to us. My best guess is that the ball whacked and disfigured someone's metal chimney cap, likely delaying Santa's worldwide delivery schedule later that December.

Then, it happened. It was the shot heard 'round our marriage.

I was out of golf balls on the tee box. My supportive new bride lovingly tossed me another one. As I mumbled and reloaded, the golf marshal drove up. Fortunately, he had not witnessed my initial false starts.

This time my backswing felt slow and smooth. My downswing was perfectly on plane as the clubface approached a square and powerful impact.

Poof.

As I posed in my follow-through, a white shower of particles rained on

my shoulders like some gruesome case of dandruff. Chalk powder the consistency of 20 Mule Team Borax hung heavily in the air.

Honey, Dearest, My Sweet Pea, had slipped me, her skeptical, always-on-guard hubby, an exploding ball. I was duped by golf's equivalent of the whoopee cushion. Duh, the ball didn't have a logo on it, was closer to the color, weight and scent of a Vidalia onion, and I, blinded by her radiant loveliness, was lured into the sucker's vortex.

She howled in the golf cart as the white talcum transformed me into Casper the Gullible Ghost. The marshal, likely never a witness to such municipal course-like shenanigans, sat dumbstruck and completely unamused. We somehow survived expulsion; otherwise, we would have spent the remainder of the honeymoon in the back of my Ford Bronco at interstate truck stops on our way home to a new and dysfunctional life together.

We have ventured on many other dedicated golf trips since then. But know that if we make it to our 50th wedding anniversary, any object of any kind that she casually tosses to me since that devious day on Hilton Head undergoes the scrutiny and cynicism worthy of the Hope Diamond going up for bid on eBay.