

WE HAD IT ALL

By John F. Hall

On our honeymoon to Florida, so many decades ago, I did not realize that Paula and I had it all, like in the song “Key Largo.” I was two months away from my three-year enlistment in the 101st Airborne Division coming to an end. We did not have any money, we just had each other. My used Oldsmobile had air conditioning and electric windows too. Gas was not too expensive back then. There is a special beach in Florida that I would recommend to young and old folks alike. I never considered myself a hopeless romantic or even a song writer too, but this story may surprise you, it even surprised me too.



Before I tell about this special beach, I'll tell about the song, “Key Largo.” It was written by Bertie Higgins and Sonny Limbo. These are their lyrics” Wrapped around each other, trying to hard to stay warm. That cold winter together lying in each others arms. Watching those old movies, falling in love so desperately. Honey, I was your hero and you were my leading lady. We had it all just like Bogie and Bacall. Starring in our own late, late show, sailing away to Key Largo. Here's looking at you kid, missing all the things we did. We can find it once again, I know, just like they did in Key Largo. Honey, can't you remember? We played all the parts. That sweet scene of surrender, when you gave me your heart. Please say you will...play it again. “Cause I love you still, baby, this can't be the end. We had it all just like Bogie and Bacall. Starring in our own late, late show, sailing away to Key Largo. Here's lookin' at you kid, missing all the things we did. We can find it once again, I know, just like we did in Key Largo. We had it all, just like Bogie and Bacall. Starring in our old late, late show, sailing away to Key Largo.”

A few things about Key Largo are worth mentioning. It is known as the diving ‘capital of the world. It is home to the world's largest artificial reef and the famous John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. You can scuba dive, take a glass bottom boat, and just enjoy the waterfront beach views at the Park. It's a great bucket list item to those that want to be in a beautiful paradise, just one more time. The special beach is located in the John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park. All Visitors are required to pay an entrance fee to enter the Park. It is \$8.00 per vehicle. The limit is 2-8 people per vehicle. There is a Monroe County Surcharge of \$.50 cents per person. Always make reservations, on line, before going to the Park. The Park is open from 8:00 am until sunset.

The special beach is called “Far Beach.” It is the most popular public beach in Key Largo and it is in the Park. Scuba diving, snorkeling and some underwater exploration are very popular on “Far Beach.” I believe that you can find Christ in unusual places. On August 25, 1965, four months after Paula and I were married on Fort Campbell, Kentucky, a nine-foot—tall bronze statue of Christ was lowered into 25 feet of water by the John Pennekamp Coral State Park. This submerge statue of Christ sits on top of a concrete

foundation. The top of the statue is about 8 to 10 feet below the surface and is visible to snorkelers.

The statue is actually the third of its kind cast from the original Italian mold. The bronze statue of Christ is the work of Guido Galletti. It was inspired from a concept of Italian diver Duilio Marcante. It represents Christ in the new world below the waves. It is a memorial for all those who lost their lives at sea and a monument to those who dive beneath it. The statue of Christ was donated to the Underwater Society of America by the Italian dive equipment manufacturer Egidio Cressi.

When I was three years old, John Huston directed the movie "Key Largo." It starred Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, and Lauren Bacall. She was only 19 and Bogart was 44 when the movie was made. I always liked the movie and I liked Bogie and Bacall. Their love on screen was not acting, they really loved each other. They were married and they had two children. After 11 years of marriage, Bogie died of cancer. The film was not made in Key Largo. It was made in a film studio in California.

A few things about Key Largo, it is 30 miles long and one to two miles wide. It is the largest island in the Florida Keys. You can watch Bertie Higgins sing the song "Key Largo" on YouTube. There are four Videos of Higgins singing. I like the 3-minute, 10-second video, with lyrics, made on February 17, 2016 that begins with a scene of a palm tree. It has several pictures of Bogie and Bacall. She was scared when they were making the movie. Bogie told her to just look up to him and it calmed her fears. If you should decide to go to Key Largo, hotel rooms range from \$80 to \$1,300 a night. Don't waste your money on an expensive room. The magic is found on the beach and in the sea.

I was searching for another song with lyrics to match my theme. I was not satisfied with anything that I found. The ancient philosopher, Plato said: "A need encourages creative efforts to meet the need." I have been blessed, over the years, with grace upon grace upon grace, and inspiration from Christ, to come up with some interesting stories. So I decided to write my own song for this story. It is called "We Had It All." For the first time, ever, I can say these are my lyrics: "Key Largo is my favorite place to be. 'Cause it's the largest island in the Florida Keys. Earnest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, to name just a few, all lived south of Key Largo in a place called Key West. I've been there a time or two. And the statue of Christ beneath the sea at Key Largo, is such a sight to see. His out stretched arms beckons us all to love one another because life, like love, is sometimes short and full of uncertainty. Key Largo is a place that everyone should see. The soft warm sands and the palm trees, giving off shade for you and me. But Paula and I, we had it all, just like Bogie and Bacall. We had no money, but our love, and that's all that matters on the beach in Key Largo. Sitting on that soft, warm sand, holding on to each other, as we watched the sun go down. Here's looking at you kid, 'cause, back then, that's what we were and we were so desperately in love down in Key Largo. Now the years have changed us, we have gotten old. I'm missing the things we use to do. The roles that we played when I was your soldier and you were my wife to be. But I'm not Bogie and you're not Bacall. But we still love each other, and we had it all, just like Bogie and Bacall down in Key Largo."

On our 25 Wedding Anniversary, I put on my white tux. Our son, John put on his black tux too. Paula had on a dress, worthy of a princess. She sat in a fancy chair fit for a queen. We had a large family picture made, to hang over the piano, inside the front door, for all visitors to see. The glare from glass on the picture makes it hard to see. The picture is a reminder of how things use to be. Paula is still my leading lady, and she always will be. I'm now a retired soldier, part of history. Yet that magic love, we can find it again, somewhere in the Florida Keys. We had it all, just like Bogie and Bacall.



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