



Meet Your Hostess:

HOW MY ADVENTURE BEGAN
by Margaret Ann Weller

Born on the island of Trinidad...in an oil refinery camp...to an English father and a Trinidadian mother of French, German and Scottish descent, I was off to an already interesting start. My family and I moved to Venezuela in 1944, and a couple of years later I started kindergarten ... in Spanish ... so I learned that language from a very early age. I completed my education many years later, attending Brenau College in Georgia and then Webber College in Lake Wales, Florida. Neither school exists today.

Returning to Venezuela, because my parents still lived there and it was the only home I knew, I eventually married my first husband. He and I had two sons together, Alan and Robert. After we divorced, I moved the boys and myself back to the United States in 1965. Holding various jobs while supporting my little family, I eventually took a position with Bill Haast at the Miami Serpentarium in 1967. This is where I met Bob Weller and the adventure began.

In 1969 I took scuba diving lessons (didn't everyone in Florida?); little knowing where that would take me.

I knew nothing about snakes when I started at the Serpentarium, so I had to learn very much, very quickly. It was exciting work, and I met many famous people there. Working my way up to senior tour guide and gift shop manager, I helped the Haasts with venom extractions, cleaned out the snake pit, the crocodile pit, and the lizard pit...and much more. They truly had a "jack-of-all-trades" on their hands. I didn't mind doing all this, but I did not like the spiders in the snake pit!

While working in the gift shop, I was trying to find the vendor for the reproduction treasure coins that we sold there. We had not seen nor heard from him in a very long time, and our inventory was low. His son used to sell us the merchandise, and he had not stopped by for quite a while. About this time, I walked this man, Bob Weller. He began stopping in quite frequently, and when he finally asked me out... I turned him down. This increased the frequency of his "sales" visits. He persevered... and I eventually relented. But that was the weirdest date I had ever been on in my life. He asked his best friend to pick me up and take me to the Lady Bug Club in Coconut Grove, Miami. He was also to take me back home later. We never could figure out what Bob was thinking all those years ago.



The very first time Bob took me diving, he thought he was going to have to teach me snorkeling, scuba, and more. He was very surprised when I unloaded my own equipment.

Bob had been salvaging down in the Keys and had already found treasure, hence the reproduction coins, so I was promptly introduced to the wrecks. The 1733 *El Infante* was almost pristine with her rib cage almost intact, and you could see the whole outline of the ballast pile! It was the same on the *San Pedro*. Those were the days... We would take the boys down to the Keys with us on the weekends, where Bob taught them to snorkel. At that time Bob no longer had a dredge, or even a salvage boat, so we did a lot of hand-fanning and digging. But... we did find some artifacts.



We were married on June 1st (so Bob could remember the date) 1974. We would stay with my parents at their home in Ft. Pierce, and my father became a real armchair treasure diver. The other divers would look forward to seeing him waiting on the dock for their return and to find out what goodies they had found. My Dad died in 1981, my Mom in 1982. In between, I gained significant experience in staging treasure exhibits and guiding viewers through them.

Our first large treasure exhibit was held in the Science Museum in West Palm Beach, and it ran for one month, bringing over 10,000 people into the tiny venue. We had our own artifacts and treasures on display, quite a bit from the state, and more from our diver friends. We repeated similar events two more times over the years, while setting up smaller exhibits for the various coin shows up and down our coast and in the Florida Keys. Eventually we took our collection to museums in St. Petersburg, Florida and Fresno, California, where we gave speeches and tours. The collection is currently "on the road" to exhibit venues around the country and in Canada.

Bob bought the salvage boat *PANDION* from John Halas in 1985, and we refurbished her after that dive season. We continued to use her for several more years; she was a great little boat and, it was said, that for her size she had found the most treasure. It was while diving from the *Pandion* that I found my first silver coin,

first ring, and, of course, my first gold. My crowning glory was the recovery of a "royal" four-escudo gold coin. Talk about excitement! These are things that you never forget for as long as you live.

We did have an exciting life together ... "Frogfoot" and me. Treasure is not all gold and silver and great artifacts, but the friends you make as well. Those memories of the people and friends we met along the way meant more to us than all the gold we found. —MAW—

