

Reef Perkins is a man of mystery

A character in a town of characters, Key West man records his life in new book available digitally

By Michael Haskins

Reef Perkins has been a brazen character knocking around Key West since the 1970s—a notable achievement in a town full of brazen characters. Anyone that knows Perkins, understands his life is more akin to an adventure movie than the life the rest of us have lived. Perkins has set his story down on paper for all to read and he doesn't really care about any judgment that may follow. If it's all true, than he proves truth is stranger than fiction. Let him tell it in his own flippancy style.

Q: You've just published your autobiography—"Sex, Salvage & Secrets." Can you tell us a little about the book, please?

A: Well, I can say that I am quite familiar with the subject.

Q: Does the book explain how you became known as Reef? How about telling us as a tease for buying your book?

A: CooChee CooChee! The book does reveal that I earned my name while sitting atop an irritated coral reef north of Andros Island in the Bahamas.

Q: Why did you decide to do an autobiography?

A: A few years ago, my son asked me about my dad. My information was a little sparse, to say the least. I didn't want him to have the same experience with his kids. Plus, no one else would write it.

Q: It's some title. What are the secrets? Can you share one?

A: It used to be that if I told you, I would have to kill you, but with today's "new rules" if I tell you, I have to kill myself. That's put a damper on my willingness to share. So the answer, of course, is no.

Q: Is there anything you wish you'd left out? Did you really want to tell the world you worked on a dude ranch?

A: Yes, the story about me at the dude ranch should have been left out. But a curious and insatiable audience demanded to know more and, yes, I am proud of my "dude-hood."

Q: In hindsight, is there anything you wish you'd put in the book?

A: Yes, more pictures of me.

Q: Where is your book available and in what format?

A: Electrical format (batteries not included), absolutely amazing on books.com or amazon.com

Q: What would you say was more dangerous: Vietnam, smuggling or salvaging?

A: I would have to say smuggling salvaged goods in Vietnam, or was it salvaging smuggled goods... I'm not sure, but bullets don't help.

Q: Writing is something new to you. Do you think there's a second book coming and will it be another non-fiction book or have you thought about fiction? I ask this because sections of your autobiography could've been chapters from a fascinating thriller.

A: Yes, Young Haskins, thank you for asking. I do have a half-finished, fictionalized work that shrinks with each honest edit. It is so difficult for me to write that I will call my next book a work of "friction." The first story involves a protagonist named Blu Yunger, a dead buzzard and a Pogo stick modified for military use. The title is "Screwed, Blu'ed and Tattooed." Then there's the one about the worm farm...

Q: You were a Navy captain Vietnam. What interesting item about your time there might be surprising to people that know you?

A: I don't think anything will surprise people that know me, however, I was in the Army, but trained by the Navy in deep-sea salvage. At 23, with a battlefeld promotion to captain, a Bronze Star and my colonel's parting words, "Where you going, son? The war ain't over yet! It's never over!" I became a diligent, civilian fool.

Q: You graduated from both the U.S. Army Engineer Officers Candidate School and the U.S. Navy Salvage Officers School, can you tell us a little about them?

A: Well, in the Army school you could die dry. In the Navy school you could die wet.

Q: What first brought you to Key West and when was that?

A: I left Andros Island, in the Bahamas with my sailboat and another experimental diver named Bobby "The Leaper" Leeman. He was well connected on the rock. It was the year 1970 OD.

Q: How did you get in the salvage business here in Key West and why?

A: I got into the salvage business because that's all I knew how to do. It was legal adventure and I was fully qualified under the provisions set forth in Bartholomew's definition of marine salvage:

"A science of vague assumptions based on debatable figures taken from inconclusive experiments and performed with instruments of problematic accuracy by persons of doubtful reliability and questionable mentality.

Q: Will you be doing a signing of your book in the Keys?

A: I like to think so. Is the Cow Key Bridge available? I need shade.



Reef Perkins