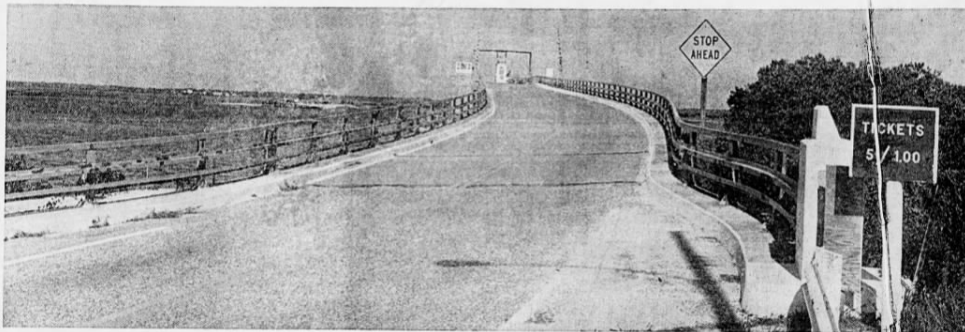


The Way We Live

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It's lonely, until Charlie the sea gull comes around

By DENNIS M. CULNAN
Courier-Post Staff

Charlie the Sea Gull sweeps in with the wind off the ocean and circles high above the long and naked Ocean City-Strathmere Bridge.

He lets out a long, sad cry that seems to say that no creature can be as lonely as he. Charlie continues to circle the old two-lane drawbridge. It's empty now—not a car in sight to bombard. But it's late October and any sea gull knows that the bumper-to-bumper traffic of the summer is over for another year.

CHARLIE CONTINUES to circle the bridge, peering the salt air with his cry while his eyes stay fixed on the door to the toll collector's booth sitting ever so lonely in the center of the bridge below.

"Come on Charlie," George Yankus the Toll Collector says, pulling the door open on his booth with a special smile on his face.

Charlie swoops down to a perch by the door and peeks away at the broad George holds in the palm of his hand.

THERE'S something very special about Charlie the Sea Gull and George the Toll Collector. They're two lonely creatures who have found a friend in each other.

During the summer months the Strathmere bridge is so busy with traffic that two men can hardly collect the 25-cent tolls fast enough. Even a misrouted sea gull can splutter a dozen cars without aiming.

"You don't even get time to sit down—

particularly during the day," George says. "About the only break we get is when we stop traffic to raise and lower the drawbridge for boats and then we have to rush to clear up the backed up car traffic."

THE SUMMER working hours passed quickly for George, a retired bar owner from Philadelphia who looks remarkably like former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. "A lot of people tell me that," he says.

Then comes winter and the shore resort goes into slow motion and the minutes working collecting tolls on the Strathmere bridge tick by . . . slowly.

George is 61 and in the five years he has been collecting tolls on the bridge it has been the same thing every winter. Very monotonous. It's not too bad during the day shifts but during the graveyard shift at night it's boring . . . lonely . . . and long.

"DURING THE day we can watch television or listen to the radio but at night the television goes off at 2 a.m. and you're just all alone with no one to talk to," George says.

"One night I had only six cars cross all night. That's pretty lonely," he says. "Of course I do some reading. Someone even gave us some Playboy magazines but one of the guys took them home and we've never seen them since."

"Most of all you do a lot of thinking—



George Yankus hopefully looks for car, or Charlie the Sea Gull, at his lonely stand on the Ocean City-Strathmere Bridge.

thinking about fishing, the kids, the wife, bills, what you did in the past, where you're going tomorrow, the future. You just think about anything that comes into your mind."

LONGLINESS IS tough to handle but in the winter with the icy winds gusting off the frigid Atlantic Ocean it can be downright scary.

"It gets so cold out here you just don't want to open the door and let out all of the heat," George says. "One night the wind was blowing so hard that it lifted the booth a foot and a half into the air. The toll collector got out of it real quick and spent the rest of the night in the drawbridge shack. That's all concrete and part of the bridge."

"The commission (Cape May Bridge Commission) had to pour concrete and anchor the toll booth down to the bridge."

THE COLD and winds can be locked out (except when a toll collector has to make that cold-but necessary dash to the portable john sticking up out over the water's edge). But the loneliness is always there . . . and so is Charlie the Sea Gull.

"You really get to look forward to a regular customer or just anyone coming across. It's great just to hear a real live human voice and if a customer wants to talk a bit that just great—real great," George says. "But at least we can depend on Char-

lie. Charlie just flies around hunting for a free meal," George says. "He's almost family. We feed him and kind of talk to him. He's a companion and a friend."

"HE COMES right over and eats out of our hands. I guess he's probably the best friend we got when we're out here with nobody to talk to. That old seagull just flies in and gets his food and flies around."

Some folks might not consider Charlie the Seagull very good company but they haven't spent many long lonely nights waiting to collect a 25-cent toll from a car that seems never to come.

To George the Toll Collector Charlie the Sea Gull is a friend.

Armor and alarms fashionable in crime time

By SUE ROLL
Special to the Courier-Post

Move to potential muggers and other street criminals. That well-turned-out old or young lady walking down the street may be dangerous to your health.

For businesses have made it possible for a woman's clothing to become her armor, and her accessories her alarm system.

Take the "alarm bag" announced recently by Sears, Roebuck and Co. and featured now in its Christmas catalog.

It remains to be seen whether this most unusual holiday offering will become popular as THE gift for the woman who

has everything. But, one Sears spokesperson claims, in these crime-ridden times the alarm bag at \$17 is a bargain.

THE SECRET of the bag is a burglar alarm device operated by two AA size batteries. The bag screams a warning described as "shrill" if the flap is lifted.

A switch in the side of the bag turns the alarm off and on, so the owner need not trigger a fire drill each time she reaches for her handle.

The handling comes in shoulder-strap and double-handle styles in camel tan, black or brown and can be found in most larger Sears stores.

THE WOMAN who wants to protect her body as well as her valuables, might find just what she needs at the Protective Apparel Corporation in Englewood Cliffs.

The first garment in its expanding line of women's apparel is the "armor vest" made of DuPont's marle fiber Kevlar, the same fiber used in the bullet-proof vests President Ford is reported to be sporting on his trips.

The vest, barely visible under jackets or even blouses, protects a walkable victim from pushouts and knife slashes.

The armor vest retails for from \$125 to

\$159, the price varying depending on the thickness of the ballistic Kevlar lining. It is available in sizes extra-small to extra-large and can be purchased only by contacting the Protective Apparel people.

A CLASSIC for the well-dressed walker is the whistle. Though dime store varieties are available for from 50 cents to \$1, a fashion-conscious woman can wear a sterling silver model on a chain from Tiffany's for \$21.50. The even more discriminating shopper may prefer her whistle in 14-carat gold, retailing for a breathtaking \$30.

For the budget-minded woman who wants to blast for help, a London Robber's "Blow For Your Life" whistle is sold by mail order through Protection, Box 993P, Marina Del Rey, Calif. 90291. The Heaton gold-plated whistle comes with a 24-inch chain or key ring and sells for \$19.95.

The determined woman can also send away for a variety of other whistles and protective devices. But before she buys a spray deersnot or weapon she should check with her local police department to make sure that buying and carrying the protective device is legal in New Jersey.

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