

A Guide to Second-Hand Clothing Stores, P. 4

# READER Vol. 6, No. 26 July 1 - 7, 1978 SAN DIEGO'S WEEKLY

—Bruce Gibney—

As an assignment for a private investigator, it was almost too good to be true. The job guaranteed several weeks' work at full pay with no risk at all to the investigator. Naturally T.J., a San Diego private eye, snatched up the job. In these lean days, not many jobs like this come your way.

An insurance company suspected a car accident victim was claiming a false injury to collect more money. The company turned the job over to a lawyer who retained T.J. as a private investigator.

It was a piece of cake, really T.J. The job involved nothing more than telling the guy and seeing where he went and what he did. And to make it easier, the guy was confined to a wheelchair. "I had to report in each week. And after two weeks I had a strong suspicion the guy was not what he claimed he was."

T.J. called the suspect, an unemployed Pacific Beach man in his twenties, to beach restaurants, downtown bars, and up to Sharp's Hospital where the man received physical therapy.

He never once got out of the wheelchair. All day he played the part of the crippled accident victim. That is, until he got home to his Pacific Beach apartment. Then he was out of the chair and walked without crutches or any type of assistance into his apartment.

T.J. called him for five weeks, and after he had reasonable proof the man was a fraud, T.J. called him on the phone.

"I laid down a few facts to let him know that I was on to him. I told him who his attorney was, what he was claiming, and that I had followed him for five weeks and had film of him walking around as healthy as anyone."

T.J. of course had no film, but saying he did sounded good. The next day the attorneys met and the case was dropped.

"Even his attorney was taken right to the end. The attorney wheeled him in the wheelchair and then the guy just stood up to the astonishment of his lawyer. He didn't figure his client for a nut."

It was a perfect case for T.J. He uncovered an insurance chicanery, received five weeks of work, got the chance to ply his skills as an investigator, and to this day the claimant does not know who did him in.

Unfortunately for T.J. and the dozens of other private investigators here in San Diego, well-paying cases such as this one are few and far between. A private eye, even with good connections, might wait months for a case. The last more than a few days. And between cases, there is a lot of dead time when the phone doesn't ring, and the bills pile up, and the investigator starts to wonder if it's all worth it.

The private detective, the subject of thousands of fiction books and dozens of movies, is in the real world having a tough time. What Raymond Chandler called "the small time dick" is on the

way out. As *Atlantic Monthly* writer Clifford Mays puts it, "He is a dying breed. He is being mauled out by the growth of the big securities outfits such as Pinkerton, Harris, and Wachusett, by the increasing use of advanced and expensive investigations technology, by changing times and a merciless economy."

In San Diego, even the big agencies are having their share of troubles. The local Pinkerton Agency hires only two full-time detectives, while Wachusett supplements investigative work with security guard service and the sale of electronic gear.

"The solo operators are dying out," says Frank Nugent, former director of the California Association of Licensed Detectives. Nugent is a casualty of the business crunch. After opening his own agency three years ago, specializing in courier service and domestic investigations, he was forced recently to close down. Now he operates out of his apartment in Mission Hills, and supplements his income by teaching business courses at City College.

One reason for the demise of the "small time dick" is the paucity of clients in general. The fee that investigators must charge. Rates vary, but a licensed detective charges between \$8 and \$15 an hour for such work as background checks, industrial snooping, and missing persons investigations. The price can escalate if there are heavy out-of-pocket expenses or if the case

looks as if it might be dangerous. "In Los Angeles bodyguards are getting between \$15 and \$50 an hour," says Nugent. "Standard rates in San Diego are between \$8 and \$12 an hour."

Any way you slice it, investigative work comes out to be a costly venture, and many prospective clients simply can't afford to hire a bodyguard or pay to have their missing children returned.

Another pit to the solo operator and the small agencies was the liberalization of divorce laws. Telling spouses suspected of adultery was bread-and-butter for detectives. A former House photographer, now retired from the detective business, told me he used to make a profitable, if dangerous, "witness out of gathering evidence against adulterers. A detective would scout out the motel room used for the lover's rendezvous, and persuade the manager to lend him a master key to open the door. Then came the photographer's turn. He waited outside all day, camera lens pre-set, and at the right instant he ran through the door, camera clicking shots of the couple *à la carte* divorcé."

A change in divorce laws wiped him out of a job he mostly enjoyed as "the most interesting I've ever pursued."

Yet if prices seem exorbitant to the public, the investigator feels he is obligated to charge these rates for his services. "After all, it is his life on the line," says Nugent. And considering that



**"A private investigator should be a combination of Sherlock Holmes, James Bond, and Don Quixote."**

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## SMALL-TIME DICK

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plumbers and construction work, make that much and more, the pay is not out-of-line.

Money is one limiting factor. But oddly enough, private detective work is one of the lowest paid professions. According to a private detective makes something less than \$4,000 a year. Most are guards inside plants or apartment buildings, of those who do case work, almost all are restricted to pre-employment background checks on personnel, background checks on insurance and credit applications, plainclothes undercover work to detect employee dishonesty and customer shoplifting and investigation of insurance claims.

But this is only part of the story. Many large businesses who might have been shopping for private detectives in the past are now hiring investigators on a full-time basis. Insurance companies have their own investigators though there is a yellow, as in the case of T. J. Department stores, find it is cheaper and easier in the long run to hire their own rather than go to an outside agency. Despite the shortage of business, the number of private eyes keeps increasing. There are over one thousand "ops" in the state who have passed the strict requirements for licenses. There are another three or four thousand detectives who work without the license, alerting the law by fleecing their services to lawyers and insurance companies.

"About seven years ago, the market was flooded with investigators," observes Nugent. "The tired FBI agent, police, military investigator... I don't know the reason for it. There were just quite a few looking for work."

Private investigation find themselves either going into the larger agencies or learning up with lawyers. Almost all investigators speculate out of necessity. If they go with Pinkerton or Wackenhut, the two largest in the country, the investigators can count on spending most of their time doing background checks.

"We will not do any investigative work concerning marital problems," maintains Howard Pinkerton agency. "Pinkerton will not investigate a marital, possibly grabbing case. If an alleged adulterer across a kidnapping, murder, whatever, he will do the legal authorities immediately."

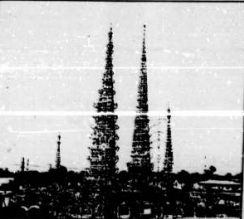
"The private eye's client has a charge, against some work, against some crime beat. It is not a straight charge but a wealthy sociologist who looks like Mary Anne. Most clients of private detectives are large corporations. They may want their corporate secrets protected from the acceptance of a rival company. They may want to know that the board room isn't bugged. They may want to find out who's peddling marijuana in the employee cafeteria or how to stop employee pilferage."

Rarely will the investigator get to see the kind of wild action that in the public's mind goes hand in hand with the job. More often than not, he will spend a lot of time on the phone checking past employees on going through official records, looking up names, dates, and places. Often, the job has all the glitz of an account, but it is an outside agency.

"The fallacy of detective fiction," says Harold Lipner, a famous San Francisco investigator and one of the few who operate to make it big, "is that writers think they have to deal violence. I don't want a gun, and I wouldn't hire anyone who packs a revolver or gets his ideas about the business from the movies and books. I'd prefer to hire an investigative reporter, someone like that."

But if the job is less than it appears to those naive souls who believe that the private eye spends most of his time sipping a bottle of bourbon and waiting for a blonde to walk into his office with a handful of greenbacks and a heart full of woe, it is not as hard and tedious as some investigators report that they are doing background checks.

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## Private Worlds

Rick Garry

Almost every town has one: a neighborhood haunted with empty backyards hanging from empty houses, some of them with colorful flower containers, or a house covered with intricate paintings and maybe surrounded by monuments of borage, or, along the highway, a sculpture garden of crude cement forms.

These self-sustaining private worlds are almost always erected by isolated eccentricities. A certain primitive work alone and with obsessive focus.

Art and folk historians, people who study such phenomena, usually don't think of work as "idiosyncratic," "eccentric," "quirky," or "idiosyncratic." They see it as "idiosyncratic," "eccentric," "quirky," or "idiosyncratic." They see it as "idiosyncratic," "eccentric," "quirky," or "idiosyncratic."

Now, private worlds, in the form of greatly enlarged photographs, are currently on display at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art.

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to be called. His arched walls and domes, key points have been linked to architectural roots as disparate as the Cathedral of Chartres and the Temple of Angkor. Rodia began with a structure of steel rods coated with cement, then covered every surface with multicolored mosaics of tile, wall-to-wall, broken china, and bottles. In 1954, when the art world was beginning to pay serious attention to his work, Rodia, then about 80, joined his land to a friend, quietly left Los Angeles, and never returned.

CLARENCE SCHMIDT, a retired plasterer and mason, in 1948 began building onto his one-room cabin on a five-acre plot near Woodstock, New York. By 1964, he had put together a sprawling, labyrinthine structure of seven stories, hundreds of rooms, and miles of narrow passageways doubling back on each other and ending abruptly. The wooded grounds, encased in light bulbs, scraps of cardboard and fiberoptic all covered with silver and gold foil. It embodies Hampton's all-consuming belief in the second coming of Christ.

He began his project about 1950, after a series of vision, and worked with single-minded passion until his death in 1964.

FRED SMITH, farmer, tanner, logger, and lifelong resident of Phillips, Wisconsin, worked from 1949 to 1964 on his "Wisconsin Concrete Park," and quit only when a stroke forced him. The park is a pine cone filled with 200 bulky cement taxidermy and larger, of people and animals, all of them richly embellished with colored fragments of bottles and mason.

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Forty-two signs, painted on planks of wood and masonite, the headboards, even window shades, give a delightful indication of the man's fiery spirit. With the exception of Clarence Schmidt's house, all of these works are still intact and accessible, though many of them, not built with eternity in mind, are gradually disintegrating due to vandals and the elements. Four of the most

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The eternal appeal of primitive or naive art is the idea that, as Cézanne said, it cuts the Gordian knot that more conscious art tries to untie. Entering any of these enclosures, one is obliged to cross an invisible boundary into a pocket of purest imagination, one of posturing and showmanship, to be sure, but refreshingly devoid of guile and ambiguity.

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Forty-two signs, painted on planks of wood and masonite, the headboards, even window shades, give a delightful indication of the man's fiery spirit. With the exception of Clarence Schmidt's house, all of these works are still intact and accessible, though many of them, not built with eternity in mind, are gradually disintegrating due to vandals and the elements. Four of the most

survive: Schmidt and Smith in nursing homes; Ruch, Howard, and Grandma Prunty still on their property, still moving on, and wonder. All of them have been called crazy (Dumoulin and Howard, in fact, fairly thrived on the hostility of their neighbors), and, indeed, there is something slightly mad about a person who chooses to live in a handmade structure. These eccentric men became nothing less than the physical realization of the psychic space in which their creators functioned, as such, they continually challenge our assumptions about what is "fantasy" and what is "reality."

The eternal appeal of primitive or naive art is the idea that, as Cézanne said, it cuts the Gordian knot that more conscious art tries to untie. Entering any of these enclosures, one is obliged to cross an invisible boundary into a pocket of purest imagination, one of posturing and showmanship, to be sure, but refreshingly devoid of guile and ambiguity.

neurons it. There, in neat, precise arrangement, Ruch has erected some 45 brick and cement structures of widely varying sizes and configurations. Of chief interest are a graceful, 168-foot long arched fence, several other arched structures, and two 20-foot towers, or "Sun Spire" and "Moon Spire," both of which are made of concrete blocks, and are topped with five-pointed stars, have the simplicity and direct mysticism of the astrologically-inspired monuments of the ancient New East.

LOUIS C. WIPPIK, retired railroad worker of South Rapids, Minnesota, worked for 24 years, until his death in 1973, on a rock garden, a hoary, primal landscape of the ancient New East.

PERSONALITIES raised to mythological stature. All of them are idiosyncratic, positioned in seemingly random groupings that suggest a backwoods primitivism. "Nobody knows why I do them," Smith says, "but even me."

HERMAN RUCH, another Wisconsin farmer, retired in 1956 to devote full attention to his "Prairie Moon Museum and Garden" near Cochrane. The actual museum is not as intriguing as the grassy, two-acre garden that

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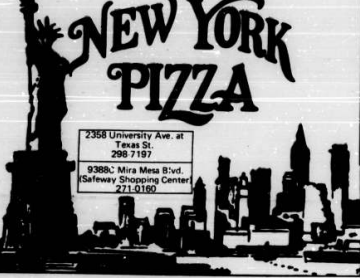
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