

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Perfect stop to enchant Faith Baldwin

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Unlike some authors, Faith Baldwin had a knack for titles. With some 80 books to her credit over her career Baldwin had plenty of chances to name her works. "Girl on The Make," "That Man Is Mine," "Give Love the Air," "Make-Believe" and "Men Are Such Fools!" sold tens of thousands of copies to young women who would read them on the subway en route to work, and to housewives, with an hour in the afternoon before the children came home from school, looking to be transported to another world through her fiction. Her novels "Self-Made Woman," "He Married A Doctor" and "A Job for Jenny," and "Wife vs. Secretary" were gently aspirational and expanded the idea of what women might do in the world.

That expanded idea was true of Baldwin herself. She had been born at the end of the 19th century to a wealthy family. Consigned to finishing school and afternoon teas, she married well and had four children. But she had a larger imagination and dreamt of being an actress, but instead, quietly began to write. Her first novel was published in 1921 and in 1927 she sold a story to be serialized in Good Housekeeping. An eager following of middle-class and working women quickly exploded. She sold further stories to magazines like Cosmopolitan and Ladies Home Journal. Her romantic tales were in demand, and the magazines began to pay her handsome sums to procure them.

In 1935, she was described as the newest of the "highly paid" women romance writers by Time magazine. In a single year, 1935, during the middle of the Great Depression, she earned over \$300,000, equivalent to more than \$5 million today. Baldwin had no pretension to literary greatness, but she was an extremely able writer, who was also prolific and popular. Most importantly her writing was clever and amusing.

Baldwin made a trip by train to Palm Springs in 1937 to do research for a new book. Palm Springs was a perfect fodder for one of her romantic sagas, generally about the upper set. Her stories were also about human dilemma. Baldwin intended that those less well-heeled could be made to understand that some problems are universal; and being of good character and behaving properly were what led to true happiness.

Her humorous dedication for the Palm Springs book thanked her traveling companions, dear friends, fellow writers, and noted those who had made the trip before her. Importantly, the dedication ended in gratitude to Nellie Coffman, the proprietress of The Desert Inn.

"This book is gratefully dedicated to Gonnie who



The front cover of the paperback version of "Enchanted Oasis."

Author Faith Baldwin's 1938 novel was set in Palm Springs.

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suffered (not without protest) over several thousand miles, for my art: and commemorates trial by flood, blizzard, air-conditioning, stagecoach and sandstorm. It immortalizes (practically) a journey dedicated by Harry Payne Burton, enlivened by the sympathy of Mignon and Alan Eberhart, complicated by the malevolent invisibility of Oscar, and enriched by the great kindness of Nellie Coffman, and the beauty of the desert."

The hardcover edition by Tower Books touted the "best-selling fiction by famous authors" on the dust-jacket. Baldwin was listed in the rarefied company of Pearl S. Buck, Louis Bromfield, John Steinbeck, and Richard Wright.

The back cover of the paperback edition by Dell Books boasted a colorful map of Palm Springs. Fictionalized versions of Pearl McManus' pink mansion, The Desert Inn and gardens, Ruby's Dunes, Rogers Ranch and the La Quinta Hotel are all settings for the action in the novel with the names changed appropriately. The real locations were marked on the map.

The characters were plucked right from the village itself. A wealthy English socialite visiting her elderly aunt falls in love with the unimaginably handsome and entirely honorable cowboy, clearly modeled on Frank Bogert. Baldwin describes in delicious detail the carefree nightclubbing crowd, hardened gamblers, poolside luncheons, wholesome tennis competitions, and floating in expansive pools, all set against the gor-

geous desert landscape experienced on horseback. The story depicts a charming town and a gracious lifestyle in the exotic desert resort. The places Baldwin describes are easily recognizable today, even without the map. The book is perfectly titled "Enchanting Oasis."

By the 1950s, Baldwin had earnings of over \$2 million and sales over 10 million copies in all editions. Several of her novels were brought to the movie screen with stars such as Henry Fonda, Jean Harlow and Clark Gable. She continued to write columns for various New York newspapers and was invited almost daily to give speeches and interviews. In the mid-1960s her column in Woman's Day drew some 300 letters each month from readers, a further testament to her popularity. Baldwin was one of the leading authors of the middle of the 20th century and became even more famous for her witty aphorisms.

Baldwin returned to Palm Springs in 1955 for the first time since her visit in 1937. The Desert Sun covered the visit, "That first trip was quite harrowing...It started in Florida, where she was vacationing between short stories. Her publisher at Cosmopolitan Magazine called from New York to assign a story. They wanted a feature on Palm Springs as a growing resort. Miss Baldwin contacted Nellie Coffman and found she could stay nine days at the Desert Inn. It was February, in the height of the season, and space was at a premium. During the trip up, by train, flooding rivers surrounded the tracks all the way across the country, and there were times when she was afraid her assignment would be called, like a baseball game, because of rain. When she arrived in Los Angeles, she found that Palm Springs was in the midst of a three-day rainy spell that threatened to again cancel the trip. But our sun lived up to its reputation in time, and Miss Baldwin started her nine days of browsing-for-the-brain. She lived as her heroine might...She took a brunch ride, went swimming... every bit of activity she could force into nine days was absorbed, and the feature was ready for the typewriter."

Looking back, Baldwin thought "Enchanted Oasis," written so long ago, was still a fair appraisal of Palm Springs. The village had grown, "but the characters walked the streets then as they do now, there are more shops, but not much different, and style of dress hasn't grown more eccentric. She saw shorts and halters worn on the street when not bathing...but the mountains and sky and desert beauty haven't changed in 18 years. They've just gotten better with age."

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