

# THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

## Palm Springs gadfly Frank Tysen's wild ride might surprise you

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Indisputably, no one has had more fun than Frank Tysen. Since some think of him as a gadfly, nuisance, and pesky conscience for local government, the idea of joyous, rollicking, bon vivant may seem inconsistent. Yet, it is so. Detailed in his new book, "Born At The Right Time," Tysen tells tales that are so wild, they are hard to believe. But he's got the pictures to prove it.

Ironically, the book is the result of COVID. Tysen, now a very lively 92-year-old, had enough time during the pandemic to sort through his many files. He'd often been told that he should write a book about his remarkable life. With the lockdown came the freedom to do so.

Tysen's ability to remember is unusual, but then so is his peripatetic life. He describes it as a "wild ride through postwar Holland, America, India and the world."

Born in April 1932 in The Hague he writes, "Even at the age of eight I did a lot of long-distance walking and exploring, usually with a friend. One day in May 1940, my neighbor Wim Borsboom and I took a long walk to Wassenaar, a very affluent community north along the coast not far from The Hague, with lots of lovely estates and castles originally built by Dutch nobility. We noticed a lot of intense travel by Dutch military vehicles. Something was going on. The next morning, I was awakened by loud airplane noise. The sky was filled with low-flying planes with very visible Nazi crosses on them, dropping paratroopers at the nearby Ypenburg airport, only a few miles from my house. Holland was being invaded by Germany."

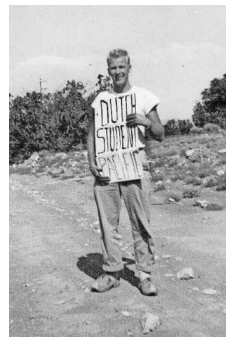
The story of Tysen's family and his early life is a fascinating peek into a time where character mattered, material wealth wasn't worshipped or expected, and community was treasured. He attended the Christian Lyceum school now called Zandvliet College. The academics were rigorous. When he graduated he was able to read, write and speak Dutch, English, French and German.

Tysen survived World War II. His recollections of the harsh conditions, the Hunger Winter and the incessant bombings are searing. His post-war coming-of-age understandably concentrates on fun and travel around Europe after fearing for his very life. Music was everywhere after the war. Most of the world was celebrating its survival and all things American were stylish. America had saved the world, and the world, including Tysen, were duly fascinated with America.

Tysen and his friend Wim spent as much time as possible in Paris,

"which by then had become famous for the existentialist movement, centered mainly on the Left Bank. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir hung out at the famous sidewalk cafe Flore, along with Juliette Greco, who was a popular, beautiful singer at the time. We didn't really know what existentialism was all about but we loved to go around in black shirts and jeans with little skulls on chains around our necks."

"The great attraction were the jazz cellars, such as the Club de St. Germain de Pres in the Rue Benoit where American trumpet player Little Roy Eldridge blew his trumpet as the music bounded off the centuries-old vaulted curved ceilings, and the Vieux Colombier, where French bandleader Claude Luter played with famous American soprano sax player Sidney Bechet...the cellars drew an affluent American college crowd, the men usually dressed in seersucker suits. We often escorted American college girls into clubs, and when they gave us taxi money to go home, we would walk instead and use the money to eat another day. About half a dozen of us shared a crowded hotel room on the Rue Bonaparte, on the left bank."



Tysen hiking in Claremont in 1948.

Tysen's exposure to American tourists further piqued his interest in the United States. He watched American movies and dreamed about swimming pools, palm trees and beautiful women. He wrote to American colleges in search of scholarship opportunities to no avail. Then, the cultural attache in the U.S. Information Agency in The Hague suggested Tysen apply for a Fulbright Scholarship.

"Fulbright saw a good use for the money the United States had collected under the wartime lend-lease program, supplying military equipment to the Allies and wanted some of it used to facilitated student exchanges between the United States and the world..."

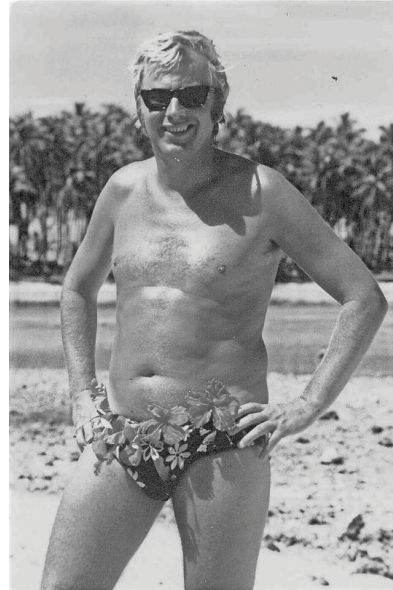
Being selected for a Fulbright Scholarship changed everything. Tysen first attended Wesleyan University, then Claremont College in the paradise of Southern California. While at Claremont, he saw the desert for the first time.

His classmate Bob Ellsworth's father was in the real estate business and "had a lonely little cinderblock office in the middle of nowhere. It was along Highway 111 in Palm Desert, fifteen miles down the highway from Palm Springs, and had just started to develop." Tysen saw the Shadow Mountain resort and was smitten. It's huge figure-8 pool was even more fabulous than anything he'd seen in the movies.

Graduate school at Princeton and years working in India would consume the next two decades. He accepted a position as research assistant with the Metropolitan Planning Organization in Calcutta and went on to teach at USC's School of Urban and Regional Planning. His work and travels would take him quite literally around the world and are too numerous to recount here.

By the 1970s Tysen had a home back in Southern California. He writes about his experiences in the swinging '70s of Los Angeles, the sexual revolution and nudism. The salacious nature of his stories caused the first editor of his book to resign. Tysen tells all ... and then some.

He was regularly visiting the desert and launched into the redevelop-



Frank Tysen hiking in Claremont in 1948. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY FRANK TYSEN



Music was everywhere.



Capitol Hill business in the 1950s.

ment of a small hotel, the Casa Cody. He would renovate and restore the spot and cultivate a cosmopolitan clientele including many celebrities. Tysen recounts an easy and open time with quite a bit of graphic detail. Several chapters have more details than a supermarket tabloid and compare starkly with the serious urban planning and quality-of-life issues discussed in others.

For those who are acquainted with him only from public meetings the book will be surprising, maybe even shocking. The long-time proprietor of the Casa Cody, governmental watchdog, crusader for preservation and thorn-in-the-side of developers, Tysen doesn't blush at all about his other adventures. It's been big fun.

Tracy Conrad is president of the Palm Springs Historical Society. The Thanks for the Memories column appears Sundays in The Desert Sun. Write to her at pshstracy@gmail.com.