

westways

\$1.25

APRIL 1983



A THUMBNAIL PARADISE

Text by Zan Thompson

"My name is Jennifer," the sign reads. "I am the uptown cat. I am not related in any way whatsoever to Leroy, who is the downtown cat." And it's signed with a pawprint.

The sign is in the window of a children's shop on Crescent Drive near Scari's Hotel and restaurant in Avalon on Catalina Island. Jennifer herself is also in the window, a large tiger-striped, gray tabby cat sleeping on the back of a large stuffed dog. Occasionally, she opens an eye to count the house and to see how many people are standing in front of her window.

Jennifer and Leroy are two of the happy creatures who have discovered Catalina Island, its limitless opportunities for relaxation and fun. The clear air and diamond-bright skies and vast untouched backcountry—which looks much as it must have when the gentle Indians greeted Spanish explorer Cabrillo in 1542—are delightful anomalies in the Southern California world of crowded freeways and mustard-colored smog.

The island is about 20 miles off Los Angeles Harbor and is 21 miles long, with a rugged spine of mountains down the middle. The backcountry is held in place by two mountains, Mount Black Jack and Mount Orizaba.

William Wrigley, Jr., the chewing gum tycoon from Chicago, bought the island in 1919 and it was the happiest fate to befall this thumbnail paradise. He resolved to keep the interior of the island pristine, with the salt sea breeze blowing through the oak trees, and to develop two areas: The city of Avalon where 90 percent of the population is located, and the settlement at Two Harbors, on the west end.

Frank and Lois Martinez are typical of the real Catalina aficionado.

Photographs courtesy Santa Catalina Island Co.



Mapping out their adventures on Catalina, bicyclists and tourists in a gasoline runabout exchange information. In the background is the Catalina Island Casino

Dr. Martinez is president of Cuesta College, a California Community College in San Luis Obispo and they have been visiting the green and russet island since 1955.

"We brought our children, three boys and a girl, when they were babies," Dr. Martinez recalls. "Some years, we rent a house, sometimes an apartment and sometimes we stay in a hotel. Our kids used to dive for coins the passengers tossed for luck when the old steamer came in. Then they got a little red wagon and helped tourists with their lug-

gage. They worked in the hamburger stand, all over.

"It's a marvelous family place. Our kids think it's the greatest possible place to spend growing-up summers. I used to start the day by going down to the bakery at 7 A.M. and getting the cinnamon rolls as they came out of the oven. Then a day on the beach, swimming, walking, sunning, fishing."

Dr. Martinez plays golf on the course which is toward the tip of the Avalon triangle, nine holes of narrow fairways and view-site tees.



It must have been designed by someone with a sense of humor and an appreciation of the scenery.

Avalon snuggles next to Crescent Bay, spreading from one headland to another, and marches tidily up a canyon until the town runs out up near the Wrigley Memorial and Botanical Gardens.

The downtown streets have fine hotels and restaurants with a wide range of prices. The residential streets are lined with turn-of-the-century beach cottages, freshly painted and standing on the tiny lots cheek-to-cheek. These are where the permanent residents live, those happily freed souls who discovered island living when the cot-

tages were still affordable.

There are now several condominium complexes, all of them looking as if they belonged hanging on a cliff below Sorrento, and tumbled with bougainvillea vines. One such condominium is available for visitors' rental, designed so that each unit feels as if it were your own villa overlooking Capri.

Eighty-six percent of the island of Catalina is managed by the Catalina Island Conservancy, a non-profit foundation formed in 1972 to keep Catalina in its natural state. They do not intend to make it into a frozen museum. They want to husband it as a treasure island, unique in the world, where a wild goat can feel at home and a backpacker can walk the trails and listen to the quiet.

In 1982, the Catalina Island Conservancy started a bold experiment. Some young ornithologists and naturalists from western universities, under the guidance of the conservancy, brought some eagle pairs to Catalina. They are doing superbly, and according to Conservancy

**Catalina offers clear air,
diamond-bright skies
and untouched backcountry.**

President Doug Probst, they've laid their eggs and hatched them and launched the awkward fledglings into the currents moving down the high ravines.

The Catalina Island Conservancy conducts the Island Tour, a three-and-one-half hour trip into the heart of the island. There are steep canyons in the rugged mountains and miles of limitless vistas of hidden coves and rugged skyline. Guests see Middle Ranch in a green valley and get a cool drink at Eagle's Nest, where stage coaches used to stop. The tour takes you to Rancho Escondido where purebred Arabian horses put on a show.

There are a number of tours

available through the visitors bureau offices.

The Glass Bottom Boat shows you underseas gardens through clear water on the lee side of the island. The fish and plants are varied, more fanciful and colorful than an artist could design. That's because Catalina is situated in an area where both northern and southern sea life converge.

A Scenic Terrace Drive Tour of 50 minutes takes you around town, along the beach and high above the bay. The high point is the grounds of Mount Ada, named for William Wrigley's wife. The 22-room main house was their "beach cottage," and is in front of the 16-room house he had for domestic staff.

In 1978, the Santa Catalina Island Company presented the buildings, elegantly imposing and the color of Devonshire cream, to the University of Southern California for its Marine and Coastal Studies Center. The Center's main installation is at Two Harbors; Mount Ada is used for meetings and seminars.

There is a Sunset Cruise with cocktails and a buffet and music. It takes two hours at dusk and you don't have to get near the Love Boat to feel that romantic tingle.

The Casino Tour takes guests through a museum and shows them the old landmark, the place the big bands still occasionally play.

There's a coastal tour and a flying fish tour and a tour to Two Harbors.

Hikers and campers must have permits from the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation for Black Jack, Little Harbor and Avalon. For camping permits at Little Fisherman's Cove and Parsons Landing, contact Doug Bombard, telephone (213) 510-0303.

There is a miniature golf course in Avalon, and there is the Wrigley Memorial Botanical Gardens' collection of island plants.

Campgrounds have rest rooms, barbecue braziers and water. Best of

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WIT & WISDOM

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He'll never know the whole truth. There's little joy in constantly pushing on imaginary brakes or watching boulders slough off of my side of the road to go crashing down—on what? Some unsuspecting person—or squirrel, perhaps—munching on a picnic? So I imagine that somewhere thousands of feet below someone's enjoying a last holiday. And whirling around yet another curve, on a road that couldn't be more than two inches wider than our car, I wonder when we'll meet a car head-on.

But I've discovered methods of cushioning the fear. Before we head for the mountains, I remind the children to say "Yes," when their father points out the car window asking, "Do you see that log cabin or ski lodge or mountain goat on top of that mountain over there?"

"But what if we don't see it?" they want to know.

"Please, for the safety of us all, lie just a wee bit. Daddy won't be able to concentrate on his driving until we've all seen IT."

"But isn't that wrong?" they ask, remembering the strictly enforced no-lie policy at our house.

"Yes," I have to admit. "But under the circumstances, I believe God will forgive us."

"Oh," they say, unable to believe what they've just heard. "It's OK to lie on vacations," one comments happily to the other as we load heavy coats and gloves and pile into the car to leave.

It isn't that my husband is a bad driver, but I feel it never *hurts* to take these little precautions—and to pray a lot. Sometimes, between prayers, I close my eyes and envision vacation spots with beaches and palm trees. Places that can be reached by driving down straight-as-an-arrow highways.

To the girls, these dreams are almost tangible. Optimists that kids are, I know that inside each small suitcase there's a carefully packed swim suit that will never get wet.

—BERNICE MADDUX

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all they let the visitor walk the backcountry, much of it untouched.

You may travel to Catalina by large cruisers out of Long Beach and San Pedro, by helicopter and by early morning express boat. In the summer, a boat even leaves from the Balboa Pavilion on Balboa Peninsula.

The Avalon Chamber of Commerce, telephone (213) 510-1520, can provide information and put you in touch with transportation and hotels. Some of the old landmark hotels have been restored to their ocean resort elegance of 80 years



Roaming buffalo await island visitors

ago—they're warm, nostalgic and yet provide contemporary comfort.

If you like the mountains, fine food, a period hotel restored with hand-carved oak paneling or an ultra modern condominium, horseback riding, tennis or sitting on the terrace at Solomon's Landing at cocktail hour, Catalina is your special island.

The goats originally came over with the Spaniards, the wild boar were brought over by the Indians, the buffalo came from Central Casting for a Western movie shot in the '20s, and that man sitting on the sea wall is probably a college president.

Jennifer and Leroy are there, too.



THE EMERALD ISLE

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O'Brien clan, and restored it as a hotel. McDonough, who lives in the U.S. but makes frequent visits to Ireland, said it took a crew of more than 400 workers to accomplish the conversion. They did a regal job. *Esquire* magazine called Dromoland one of the eight finest resorts in the world.

Blarney Castle, in County Cork, not only has the stone (which isn't that easy to kiss), but interesting grounds with rocks dating back to the Druids. The castle is unrestored, but it is interesting to prowl the dungeon and secret rooms.

Bunratty Castle, in County Clare, is Ireland's most complete medieval castle. The owners stage feasts, medieval-style (without forks), for crowds of visitors. In restored cottages on the grounds, spinning, weaving and similar folk crafts are demonstrated. A real winner is the thatched cottage where they bake brown bread on the hearth.

Brown bread is part of Ireland's delicious "country cooking." Fruit scones, oatcakes and gateaux are some of the traditional dishes served, along with Irish bacon, fresh vegetables and potatoes—usually two varieties. Not to be forgotten is the Irish stew, corned beef and cabbage, cockles, mussels, salmon and lobster. The Irish have a way with lamb and pork, too. Gourmet cuisine, designed to please the sophisticated palate, is featured in hotels, resorts and castles.

Food is one thing; drinking is another. In Ireland, drinking is a social activity, a way of getting acquainted. It's also a way of taking the edge off a disappointment, or of celebrating. And the Irish are willing to celebrate almost anything—parties, even funerals.

The Irish delight in happy endings. Though they hate to see you leave, they always wish you a good, safe journey. As you leave Ireland, you may find that in addition, you have acquired "great gra" for the old sod.

