

## “A Senior Perspective”

by

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While talking recently to a friend about another friend a comment was made that our mutual friend was “the real McCoy” and very non-pretentious. The phrase “real McCoy” stuck in my mind and I wrote it down in my little red, white & blue notebook without which I never leave home, so I could research the phrase at a later time. Here’s what I found out.

As with every other famous phrase or anecdotal comments there are a plethora of “real McCoy” origins. We have a boxer at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century named McCoy; a famous American cattle baron of the same name; a reference to pure heroin imported from Macau; a diesel lubricant invented by a black inventor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; a Scottish whiskey made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and then there’s the one that you want to yell out as the real, “real McCoy” origin.

My favorite, however, is a Florida rum-runner by the name of Bill McCoy who was an American sea captain and smuggler during the Prohibition days of the United States. He attended the Pennsylvania Nautical School on board the USS Saratoga in Philadelphia, and later served as mate on a steamer Olivette that was in Havana, Cuba when the USS Maine exploded in 1898.

According to my confidential and always reliable source, around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Bill moved to Holly Hill, FL, which was a small town just north of Daytona Beach. He and a brother operated a boat yard out of Jacksonville and Holly Hill. He became famous for his abilities to build yachts and claimed fame as the builder of yachts for Andrew Carnegie.

When Prohibition became the law Bill and his brother sold everything they had and bought a small schooner and began making trips to Havana and other island countries buying rum and smuggling it into the United States. They made enough money to purchase a larger schooner and had it registered in Britain so they wouldn’t be answerable to American laws regarding alcoholic beverages. The schooner’s name was Tomoka, named after the river running through Holly Hill, FL.

Eventually the McCoy brothers owned six or more boats and they hauled whiskey from Canada, and other well-known and expensive alcoholic beverages. It is reported that Bill McCoy became a household name along the Atlantic Coast and among the New York Mafia families who felt this Irish-American cavalier was intruding upon their business. McCoy had the reputation as being an honest, (a little paradoxical don’t you think,) fair-dealing rum runner who didn’t water down his liquor as was the case with most illegal booze... hence the birth of the term “Real McCoy” pertaining to his product.

Bill and his brother were eventually arrested by the U.S. Coast Guard in 1923 and served a year and a half in a New Jersey prison. After they were released they moved back to their

hometown in FL and continued, very successfully, in the ship building business and real estate.

Part of the fun of this job of a writer is getting out and about to meet new people and put their names where everyone can see them. One day while waiting for my number to be called at Publix's deli in Mulberry, I observed two ladies who were having the greatest time sampling various cuts of meats and cheeses. The deli lady would hand over one cut of meat to the customer who would eat one half and pass the other half to her friend.

After several times of this I commented, "I've seen people like you operating like this before... always sampling, never buying... do you make a habit of doing this?" They started laughing and said this was their lunch and they do it all the time. They gave their names as Kathy R. and Kathy M, both from Virginia, and so you won't think badly of them, they actually did purchase a couple packages of cheese.

Eight of us from our neighborhood were out for dinner at Carrabba's and the guys and I went to the bar to order some liquid refreshment. One charming lady on my right struck up a conversation and introduced us to her three other friends. Their names were Char, Dora, Carol and Annie and they were out having a great time, and looking for someone who could help take the chill off the evening. I told them we would love to go with them if they allowed us to bring our wives. They laughed and said they would pass. We had fun talking with them and they really were nice ladies having a great night out. Bob and Ellen were sitting beside them and they were getting a kick out of the dialogue as much as we were.

See you folks next week.

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