

Beachcomber's 50th Anniversary



It was February 2nd, 1972 when our family moved to Fort Bragg. We came from Southern California with an overloaded, broken-down trailer stuffed with everything we owned.

We pulled into the Beachcomber Motel and as my father and I walked into the office to speak with the woman who still owned and operated it, I glanced back at the car and leaning trailer and could hardly believe we actually made it. After six hundred miles and four days of mechanical breakdowns, we were all very glad to be there.

"Are you as happy to see us as we are to see you?" Dad asked the woman. "Not really" she replied. "I've decided I don't want to sell it."

Being barely 16 years old at the time, I didn't really understand the implications of such a statement. My Dad's calm but straight forward response was, "Well, I'm sorry you feel that way Gladys, we have a contract, and you need to honor it."

She did, and two months later on April 1, 1972, at 2 PM, we took possession and moved into the Beachcomber. The Hunt family, my Father Bob Senior, Stepmother Bonnie, her sons Bill & Mike and myself, Bob Junior, were officially in the motel business. Gladys had completely moved out and her car was packed when we arrived that afternoon. As she passed by us on her way to her idling car she said, "All the keys are on the counter, good luck!"

There we stood, all a little dumbfounded and in shock. She left absolutely no information to anything regarding the property! Room rates, reservations, room layouts, mechanical procedures, nothing whatsoever, and we never saw her again. Five minutes later a car pulled in, a man got out and came into the office. "How much are your rooms?" He asked. "I only need one bed." Without skipping a beat Bonnie said, "Seven dollars." "Okay that sounds fair, I'll take it."

As Dad searched for something to have the gentleman register and sign, Bonnie raced down the front of the building peering into each window to find a room with one bed. Thank God he had the exact amount. There was no cash till, and we could not have made change if we wanted to. In fact, we basically had no money. We had spent every dime we had getting to this day. The down payment, the expense of moving, renting a place for two months waiting for escrow to close, and neither Dad nor Bonnie was working. We actually used those seven dollars to buy groceries that night and was never able to frame our first dollar doing business.



Arrived at the Beachcomber, February 1972



Beachcomber, 1974

Soon after moving in, we had heard that we were a laughingstock amongst the local realtors and other lodging owners. After all, we had just bought a 25-year-old, run down, nine-unit motel that had been on the market for three years without any single offer, for the exorbitant amount of \$54,000!

The truth is, Dad had originally thought the Beachcomber would be just a steppingstone. It would keep a "roof" over our heads, bring in a few dollars while he fixed it up and ultimately sold it. Because of a neighbor that owned a local park, he thought the trailer business was the way to go. None of us had any idea how well the little Beachcomber would do if we just worked it hard and took care of it.

As a family, we all began learning and working the business. Renting rooms, cleaning rooms, laundry, maintenance, you name it, we all did it. I remember Mike renting rooms at the early age of 8. In addition, Dad had been a carpenter all of his adult life, so remodeling began immediately. Every spare dollar that came across the counter was invested back into the business in upgrades. Because of this, we soon began to compete with the other motels in the area.

Almost a year later, Dad and I were standing in the patio area on the south end of the property when the neighbor called over the fence, "Hey Hunt, I'm going to sell my property. You interested?" The neighbor's property encompassed all the land from the South end of the Beachcomber to the Pudding Creek trestle. It included a two-story home and two cabins with almost 300 feet of highway frontage.

"How much do you want for it?" Dad asked. "\$50,000" He replied. "Hell Tom, that's too much. That's what I paid for this whole motel a year ago." That was the end of that.

Over the next few years, we began converting the old car ports that each of the nine rooms had into additional rooms. We also built four new rooms from the ground up. By the end of 1976 the Beachcomber had 22 rooms and I had grown older leaving Fort Bragg to explore the world on my own.

In the summer of 1979, I stopped in to visit Dad, Bonnie, and my two younger Stepbrothers. We were standing outside in the exact same spot on the South patio when the neighbor called over the fence to us once again.

"Hey Hunt, I want to sell my property. You interested?" It was déjà vu. Here we were, six years later, same question, same property, different neighbor. "How much you want for it?" Dad asked.again. "\$250,000" he replied. "Hell Randy, that's too much. I could have bought it for \$50,000 a few years ago." And again, that was that.

As the years went by my younger Stepbrothers grew up and moved on with their lives and Dad & Bonnie continued running the motel. I had moved back to Fort Bragg in 1981 and opened an automotive repair shop and towing service. By the mid-80s my parents had grown tired of the motel business and wanted to retire. In August of 1986 Dad came down to the shop to visit one afternoon. Out of the blue he says, "Bonnie and I have decided we want to sell the motel. You're the only one out of all the kids that has showed any real interest in it, and we were wondering if you wanted it?" "Jeez Dad, I haven't been around the motel for almost 10 years. Let me think about it." "Well, you better think fast." He replied. "We want to list it tomorrow. Maybe you should come over for dinner tonight."

By the end of that dinner, we had made a deal. I agreed to pay them fair market value for the motel, and they agreed to carry the loan at the going interest rate and give me time to sell some stuff and rake up the down payment. On September 8, 1986, the Beachcomber Motel officially became mine, allowing my parents to retire and live fulltime in Clearlake.

The remodel we had done in the early 70's was now 15 years old, so I immediately began the task again of renovating the entire property. I built a huge deck on the North end and installed sliding glass doors in all the rooms to access it. I installed tile and wallpaper throughout the property and replaced the front wall with brick planters. By the end of 1989 the remodel was complete, and the Beachcomber had doubled its sales since I bought it. Although 1989 was a great year for the business, it ended tragically for our family when we lost our father in December.

After his death trying to finish that remodel was next to impossible. Scratching around inside those rooms painting, setting tile, or laying carpet seemed to make no sense at all. I found myself welled up with tears many times wondering why I was there, why I was doing it and what it was all for. Ultimately, I wound up finding comfort in the fact that everything I looked at or touched at the Beachcomber represented my dad and brought me closer to him and his memory. Thirty-six years later, it still does.

Over the next few years, my wife and I lived in and ran the motel. I had been trying to figure out a way to expand and add rooms. We eventually removed the roof over the center portion of the motel and added a second story. By the end of 1993 the Beachcomber had 27 rooms including 5 second story suites.

On September 8, 1996, ten years to the day since I bought the Beachcomber, my oldest sister Pamela became a partner as well as the General Manager. This new partnership was the best thing I could have done for the Beachcomber as well as myself. Her hands on involvement for the next fifteen years brought the family feeling back to "Dad's" Beachcomber.

In the summer of 1997, my wife Cyndi and I decided to go our separate ways. We had two beautiful daughters by then and both had been part of the Beachcomber since they could walk. They stripped rooms, greeted guests but their favorite job was driving the laundry cart! It was a warm afternoon



Bob Sr. and Bonnie Hunt, 1974



Bob Hunt Sr. and Jr., 1975



Bob Sr., Bonnie & Mike, 1974