

TEXAS ISLAND STYLE

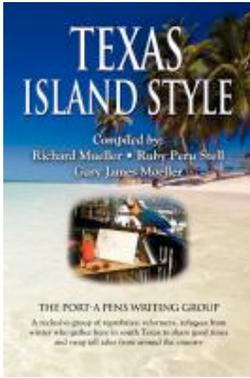
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THE PORT-A PENS WRITING GROUP

A reclusive group of reprobates, reformers, refugees from winter who gather here in south Texas to share good times and swap tall tales from around the country



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Texas Island Style

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First Edition

Orville Ballard

Beach Fairy

“Papa, can you help me dig a hole?”

“Why do you need a hole?”

“If I dig a hole a fairy will come tonight and plant seeds”

“Really?”

“Yes, she lives up in the sky and no one ever sees her. She only comes out at night. If we dig a hole for her she will plant seeds that will make a beautiful rainbow of flowers on the beach”

“What is the fairy’s name?”

“Her name is Sandy”

“Why is she named Sandy?”

“Because she is a beach fairy”

“She lives up in the sky and keeps the monsters away”

“How do you know this?”

“Because one night when I was asleep she came and whispered in my ear. She protects me”

*Discussion between Paige, age 4, and her Papa on the beach
Port Aransas 3/16/08*

Richard Mueller

“Look At The Size Of Those Tomata’s!”

In a stroke of complete irony, dad drafted my brother, Tom, and me, and placed us in charge of putting down the sod for the lawn at our new house.

Looking back, this was pretty much like lettin’ the fox design and build the chicken coop. After all, in the final analysis, we would be the ones doin’ the mowin’ for the foreseeable future.

In truth, we were actually looking forward to the task that Saturday morning as we headed for the yard, with a wheelbarrow filled with rakes and shovels.

“Hold on, guys,” dad commanded, “First we gotta put down a layer of fertilizer.

“Fertilizer?” No one had mentioned this. Tom and I looked at each other and shrugged, “What’s this?”

“Hop in the truck, guys, we’ve gotta go pick up a load.”

This should have been a tip off –but it wasn’t. Riding in the bed of the pickup truck topped ‘*our favorite things*’ list. We scrambled into the back of the truck and were off to pick up the fertilizer.

Imagine our surprise when, instead of pulling up at the Fort Dodge Lawn and Garden Center, we looked up to find the truck parked next to, what turned out to be the drying beds at the Sewage Disposal Plant.

“Start shoveling, boys. We got to fill up the truck so’s we can spread this stuff on the yard before ya’ll lay the sod.”

Turns out, one of dad’s friends had turned him onto the *dried-sludge fertilizer program* as being, ‘the best in the world.’

“Is the stuff good?” Dad had asked.

“Good?” His friend replied, “Just check out the size of the *volunteer* tomato plants growin’ around the pits, they’re almost big as trees!”

Texas Island Style

Over the years, I've heard this line from almost everyone pushing the sludge fertilizer. I've come to believe that this says more about the survivability of tomato seeds as it does about the effectiveness of effluent fertilizer.

Turns out that, when it came to conviction, *Free*, was the magic word for dad. We spent the rest of the loading the truck and spreading the dried sludge over the yard and truck garden.

"Did you see the size of those tomata plants?" He kept askin' as he worked, followed by, "Not much smell to it either, didja notice that, not much smell at all."

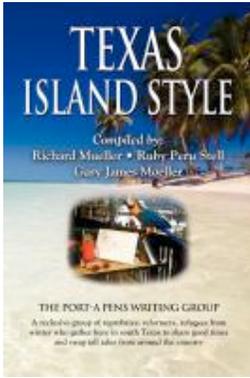
He kept repeating those phrases like a mantra all afternoon as we worked. "Not much smell – free – wonder why more folks don't know 'bout this stuff –did ja see them tomata's?" He might've even been repeating it in his sleep, until it rained the next day. Turns out, water pretty much restores the original odor to sludge fertilizer!"

"Julius!" Mom came storming into the house, "You have to get rid of this stuff." She may have been small in stature, but in this moment she was four-foot, nine inches, of enraged dynamo. "My friend, Jan, can smell us all the way up to Mercy Hospital. That's three blocks away, Julius! My friends are already calling us the *Schmidt House!*"

Dad just stood there with a trapped sheepish look on his face. "Can't do nothing, Alice. We've already got three truckloads on the sod – looks like we gotta live with it for a while. In fact the smell lasted until the first snow in November.

For years several of our neighbors would remark that thunderstorms would frequently cause the odor to shift from the sewage plant to our neighborhood.

Tom and I agree it was the worst job we ever had.



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