

1979

THE PERILS OF PAULINE

Pauline Dickman Lawler

When the Woman's Club took over the Miller home and made it our clubhouse, we were still in the depression. We had gone into debt to fix up the stucco that was coming off or had come off around the windows, doors, and trim of the building. The heavy stucco was in excellent condition; although it had pretty well been covered with a heavy growth of ivy vine which we had removed.

We made two apartments, hiring a carpenter who was doing the work very cheap for us. Cheapness does not always pay. He made a terrible mistake and one that we have never been able to correct. But we had two apartments which we rented for \$20.00 and \$25.00 a month, and had a hard time collecting rent at times. We used furniture that had been left in the Miller home so we were not out much. As the years went by we got the rent up to \$75.00 and kept them rented most of the time. One man paid rent the whole year just to be able to come down in the winter time.

Then things changed and they asked \$125.00 a month and we were not able to keep them rented and at times no one was in the clubhouse. A key was kept on the back porch for the club women to use, but others found it and we had guests that paid no rent. There were blood spots on the bed in the guest room and unmentionables on the stairs. So the key had to be taken away and keys given to everyone that needed to get in the clubhouse.

It is a wonder that during the years that someone hadn't broken into the clubhouse but it never has been. During these years - while I was House Chairman, we found where someone had built themselves a nest under the house out of cardboard boxes and we even found where they had smoked cigarettes. It is a wonder we were not burned down. Another man had made a nest in the large clump of bamboo in the back. Those particular winters we had had very

cold and rainy weather.

About this time the Christian Science Group rented the clubhouse for services, so I was up there at least twice a week and I guess I was janitor; at least I kept it presentable. Some of our Christian Scientist friends were unhappy that they had to walk through the grass to the front door and also because we had no air conditioning. Poor things. Our club at that time gave big suppers, usually chicken or home fried steak. We also divided up into six groups; each group to make \$100.00 or more. I headed a group and we decided to make "shifts." Dorothy Renshaw was president at the time. We went into Tampa at a Yardage Unlimited place and would buy dress lengths at \$.50 a yard. We chose one pattern and got a pattern of every size. We made 131 shifts and with the other groups had enough money to carpet the floors, paper the rooms and put the cement walk out to the parking lot. The air conditioner came later. The carpet has faded but it still looks good and the paper is the answer to our painting problem. For a number of years I was not on the House Committee. They got new drapes and blinds and the air conditioner and fixed up the library - which is now a catch-all. We also got new linoleum for the kitchen and east porch. The walls of the kitchen have not been papered and that will be the next project.

When Belle Dickman became president she made me chairman of the House Committee and this is really where this tale starts. For years they told us we couldn't advertise or we would have to rent even to negroes if they wanted to rent. So we have waited until someone came along and asked to rent an apartment. Fact was: two young married couples asked to rent an apartment. When one of my committee heard that the one couple wanted to rent an apartment she said, "Oh, no don't rent to them - they are the worst house keepers in the world." So I didn't.

The other couple came - they looked like Greek Gods. They were handsome. Handsome is as handsome does, however. He was about 6'2" and she looked to

be 6' in heels. They both worked. He had a regular job and she delivered the Tribune paper here in Ruskin. They moved in and of course, she slept in the day time. They had the west apartment and the bed room is quite a way from the front door. He said she was a very heavy sleeper. I'll say she was. No way could you wake that girl. My first inkling that something was strange came when I was up there and the glass in the hall door was broken. They told me someone had tried to get in and had broken the glass. I accepted that explanation and had the door fixed. It happened again and again. The third time it happened I asked who forgot their key this time and she said, "I did." Finally the day come and they said they were moving to Tampa but they didn't say when. I did not check on them at once. When I did check they had been gone about a week. They had the electricity turned off and had left the refrigerator full of food - all rotten. I took Jimmy up to help me and he promptly got sick and I had to take him home. I think that is the worst mess I have ever gotten into. I got Margaret to help clean the apartment.

Oh, yes, it is an ill wind that blows no good. She left a whole box of large plastic bags they put the papers in. I brought it home and Jimmie said that they probably belonged to the Tribune and I should call them. I wouldn't - he did. They said, no, she had paid for the bags - and that they were wonderful to put food - fruits and vegetables down in a freezer. They are another plus - she would come down to pay the rent dressed in nothing at all. A bra - as Lyle said, "not much bigger than a postage stamp," and two triangles with a cord holding them in place. Jimmie didn't approve - but he enjoyed what he saw, and there was an awful lot to see.

The club asked me to get \$125.00 a month rent for the apartments. The west apartment had been rented for \$75.00 to a woman but for tax purposes she had to buy something so she left. But she had asked the chairman ahead

of me to put up a partition so she did not have to go out in the hall to the bath. The reason was the east apartment had been rented to a girl and there were too many going in and out. The girl had a boy friend and he was living there. The chairman asked her to move.

So when I became chairman there was no one in the clubhouse. At that time an ex-county commissioner who lived in Plant City called me and said he had sold the Whataburger to some Greeks and they needed some place to stay. He said they were wonderful people and would I rent them an apartment at the clubhouse. I said yes I would. So they came over and I asked how many there were in the family. He said that right now there was himself, his nephew, and a brother and they would be working in the restaurant which was just across the street. I thought nothing could be more convenient so instead of \$125.00 I asked \$150.00. Then he said he would give me \$160.00 if I would pay the electric deposit and pay the bill - he, of course, giving me the money for the electric bill. When I reported the arrangements to the club, they were not happy that I was doing that and neither was Jimmy. But I did it anyway.

Then a winter couple came along and rented the east apartment for three months. They were wonderful people and asked no favors. They left the apartment clean, the only ones that ever have.

By now more Greeks had arrived. They had beds from wall to wall and ate over at the restaurant - or so I thought. They asked to move into the east apartment. I said, "you know there is no air conditioner over there and summer is right here." They said that did not make any difference. But first they wanted the apartment papered. I could not find anyone to do the papering so they found someone who papered the two rooms that were just painted - so now the whole apartment was papered and the woodwork newly painted. They moved

and did they move! I went up there and they had moved the refrigerator from the west apartment to the east and I asked why? They said the east refrigerator did not get cold enough. They had taken every table except the dining table over to the east apartment. I never saw such taking ways. They also took what chairs they wanted. I had no idea how many Greeks were living there.' The one that rented originally had gone back to Athens to look after an apartment house they had there after his wife and kids had come home. The brother's wife had come to help in the restaurant and the nephew had gotten married.

By that time it was the hottest time of the year. The wife of the brother would call up and say, "It is so hot my husband can't sleep in the day time and he has to get his rest as he works at night." I would reply, "You knew there was no air conditioning when you moved over there." "But you are supposed to furnish air conditioning." "I am not," and there we would go. This went on and on and finally I gave them two large fans which helped some. When I had advertized and was showing the apartment to prospective renters - I would go up in the afternoon and find Greeks in the west apartment - laying on the bed without sheets or pillow cases and the young man draped over the small settee - head on one arm and legs over the other. It didn't phase them when I walked in on them.

Margaret cleaned up the west apartment and this time I advertised giving my home phone number and asking \$150.00 a month. I was amazed there were so many calls; mostly young people either married or going to get married. I really got a liberal education on renting and who is the boss. I had always thought that the house was the woman's place and she made the decisions. Boy! - was I wrong!!! These kids would come up there together - married or about to be married - look the apartment over - the boy going ahead and the girl following like a little puppy dog. I thought sure I would rent it to

one couple that were going to be married in two weeks, as he worked at the Shell station next door. But, no, without consulting her at all, he said, not it was not what they expected.

Finally a girl came with her 10 year old sister and rented it. She worked at Dr. Schultz's office and it was withing walking distance. The sister did not stay with her. I looked at the girl and thought, I won't have any trouble with her. How wrong you can be! She also invited me up to have supper with her as she loved to cook. That does not sound like I would have trouble with her does it? Well, she had no more than gotten settled when a boy friend appeared. I don't mind boyfriends - in fact, I liked boyfriends, but when it became evident that he was staying all night that is another thing. I had keys to the apartments as I told the renters in case of a hurricane I would have to be able to get in and mop up water, or even a real heavy blowing storm. No one ever shut a window.

Finally, the Greeks did us a favor when they told me they had bought a house and were going to move. I was very happy to seem them go. Margaret and I went up to clean the apartment - it was not in too bad a shape. But we found they had gone down stairs and taken anything they wanted from the kitchen. We found a complete set of six of our china in the apartment, that included sugar and creamer and serving dishes. That leaves a big question mark?

I advertized again - this time asking \$175.00 a month. I rented it immediately to a retired man and he gave me \$25.00 and was going to move in, in two weeks. Two weeks went by and no renter. I called his brother and he said that his brother had been called back north and it was uncertain when he would be back - to go ahead and rent it.

Well, the girl in the west apartment asked if she could move over there. So, I let her move. The boyfriend moved right along with her. They had been there a short time and one morning I went up and she was cleaning the kitchen

floor - she wasn't a bad house keeper - I said, "If you kids will get married, I'll carpet the two rooms in there." She said, "I would rather have new linoleum for the kitchen." I said, "Alright you get married and I'll put new linoleum down." They did and I did, so that is how the kitchen got new floor covering. I had had Babcocks do my floors so that is where I went. They had absolutely no choice, but two pieces in green. I had the one on my kitchen floor so I took the larger design for the clubhouse and it turned out beautiful.

So I advertised the west apartment for \$150.00 again and rented it to a young married couple. He worked in Tampa, always paid the rent on time. But the little girl, his wife, never stayed home during the day. She went with him in the morning and came home with him in the evening. I think she stayed with his folks who lived here in Ruskin. She never wore anything but blue jeans and shirts and went barefooted. They never bought a sheet but slept on the mattress - no pillow cases. I don't think she ever cooked; just opened cans. It worried me that they had no sheets - you know what that can do to a mattress.

This was early summer, the bees had swarmed and had found three holes on the floor of the porch that had been put there to let out the water when it rained in. The bees were not satisfied to settle in the walls, but they came in the porch until these kids would not even open the door. Something had to be done about the bees. We tried to find a bee-man locally, but the only one that would touch them had gone north for the summer. Donna was on my committee so she called the county and found a bee-man and his wife who came out five times before they got the bees cleaned out. They had to tear the walls out and broke the screen, which was just gone anyway. The place had to be cleaned up behind them everytime. Margaret did that. They found 3 hives of bees and three different kinds of bees. What a sticky mess. Some of the honey was good. There were bees in both porches upstairs, but the east porch is not screened so it was not as hard to get to them.

The girl's parents in the east apartment were going to move to Texas and they wanted the daughter and her husband to go with them. So Margaret and I went up on Saturday before the electricity was turned off to clean. The bags were packed and everything was just like it would be if you were moving - but nobody was home. We moved things around and cleaned anyway. I came home about 4:00 p.m. and left Margaret to finish. Margaret came down about 5:00 and said they had come back and were not moving as papa hadn't gotten his transfer. Oh, yes, while they were there we missed some things out of the kitchen - half a gallon of ice cream was one item that had been given for the bridge. The woman had brought 2 half gallon packages and we had used one and left the other in the refrigerator for the next Wednesday. When I opened the refrigerator, the ice cream was gone. There were three others with me and I expressed surprise. One said, "Someone upstairs has taken it." I said, "Oh, nobody upstairs would come down here and take anything." The next morning I went up and nobody was home, so I went in and opened their refrigerator and sure enough there was our package of ice cream. I never told them or anyone else what I knew. I didn't know what to do. One thing I did do and that was I had Julius put bolts on the three doors going into the kitchen so no one upstairs can get into the kitchen or pantry without breaking in. Two weeks later the kids did to to Texas with her parents. But before they left Judy Miller and myself drove up to the clubhouse and she came out to the car and thanked me profusely for being such a nice landlady. I said, "Well, I got you married, anyway." She said, "What do you think I am thanking you for?"

We went up one Wednesday to play cards and someone had taken all the cards off of the tables. They were old, dirty and most of them worn out. But, why would they want 12 sets of old cards? It had to be someone upstairs. I had called a committee meeting and everyone said they would be there except

two. When the clubwomen moved to change the committee from 3 to 7 members, I got up and said, "Why do you want to put 7 people on this committee - you can't get 3 together, much less 7?" They said it was both house and yard and they thought it should be larger. So it passed. I had a wonderful meeting, just Judy Miller came and we agreed on everything. We decided to put the spare room into the west apartment, paper and carpet the room and put an extra door into the west hall making it a two bedroom apartment and ask \$200.00 rent. We decided to carpet the hallway and put carpet down in the two rooms in the east apartment and get \$200.00 for that. We even went and picked out the carpet for the hall and bedroom, also the paper for the spare room. We got this from Jo Mar - they had gotten a lot of menmants and it turned out that what Judy and I picked out was not enough for any of the jobs. We got a much better quality of carpet for the rooms as they had taken up the carpet from a Sun City home the woman did not like when they took possession. I wanted a red carpet in the hall but Judy and I had picked out a green so when there was not enough of the green I got my red carpet after all. I got the work done and I think it looks great. I know that Aunt Addie would be very happy if she could see her home now.

I told them at the Board meeting I was going to advertise and put in the ad that "no Greeks or single girls need apply." Now, I'm not "agin girls". Fact is, I love girls. I have three girls in Ruskin that I feel like I can ask them for anything. If I had daughters I wouldn't ask for anything better.

Well, to get back to the renting of the apartments. I put an ad in the paper hoping to attract teachers, asking \$200.00 per month. The east apartment would house two teachers nicely. No inquiries from teachers, but plenty called. One man called and I asked how many in the family and he said three. I asked how old the youngster was and he said 19. Well, I am not supposed to rent to

families with kids but I thought 19 was not a kid. So I met him to show him the apartment. It turned out the 19 was months and he said the child belonged to his wife; that they were living with friends and they had asked them to move. So I let them move in. That should have warned me, but it didn't.

They hadn't been there but a little over two weeks when the kids in the west apartment came down and told me they were leaving as they couldn't stand all the going on in the east apartment. They really told a wild story, and warned me not to go up there by myself. They had just paid a month's rent and wanted me to return the unused portion which was \$75.00. I ended up by giving them \$35.00 as they said the people in the east apartment had come into their place at night and taken \$50.00 and they did not have any money to eat.

So Margaret and I went to clean up again. We found a pile of dirty clothes - jeans, shirts, sweaters, and socks - all some needed was washing. Also, a refrigerator with some of the most unappetizing food you ever saw. I told Margaret I was going over to the east apartment and find out what this is all about. I did and the girl met me in the hall. I started to ask her what was going on using the phrase, "Your husband,". She stopped me and said, "Did he say that?" I said, "Yes," he did. She said, "We aren't married." I looked at her and said, "Well, I'll be damned, is this the usual thing to do?" and she said, "It makes the rent so much cheaper." I said, "Are you going to get married?" She said, "Why, I wouldn't marry him."

It came time for the next month's rent and I asked them to move. I happened to be at the clubhouse with Faye when a girl came and asked to rent the west apartment. She had heard the kids had left. I asked \$200.00 and told her if she could find a girlfriend to share it that would be alright as there were two bedrooms. I also told her that we didn't mind her having boyfriends but not staying all night. She said she was new here and did not have friends yet.

The girl in the east apartment said Johnny had gone and did I mind if she stayed. I should have said yes, I did mind but I said no, she could stay. What a mistake I made. I would like to say here that the little girl was sweet and pretty and as good as she could be. Well, the two girls got together and both moved into the east apartment.

So I advertised the west apartment as a two bedroom apartment for \$200.00. Among the answers I got was a man who said he was self-employed and was alone. He looked at the apartment, liked it and said he would take it, if I thought it would hold up his water bed. He said it weighed about 3,000 pounds. I had never seen a water bed but one - it was a regular size and made me sea-sick or would have, had I tried to sleep on it. The young man is very small and said his back hurt him until he got the water bed. Well, he moved in. You never saw such a big bed in your life. I know it is king size with 6" padded poles all around it. I said, "Why in the world did you get such a large bed?" He said, "Well, he was married at the time." I think that bed probably broke up the marriage.

It turns out that he does yard work and Mr. Avery had told me he was giving up our club yard the first of the year. We had been concerned about who was going to do the yard and that it would cost us a lot more. Of course, Mr. Heller wanted to do the yard work. I could not make him a deal so he met with the Board. He is to do the yard and odd jobs around the clubhouse. Just one thing I asked and that was when anyone moves out of the east apartment he is to immediately clean out the refrigerator and garbage. Never again am I going to clean up those stinking messes. He will pay \$100.00 a month and do the work. Fact is, he would have taken over the clubhouse and run the renting all for a price. I would not agree - he still has to be proved. The club is paying \$2,000.00 a year insurance premiums and last year the county levied

\$1,000.00 a year taxes. That is \$3,000.00. We had been tax exempt. I told the Board he sounded too good to be true. Now, to hear him talk, he will be there until he dies of old age. So, the west apartment is taken care of, also the yard work.

I really am in the middle of a bad mess in the east apartment with the two girls and the baby. They are both waitresses and work at night. They have a lot of company in the day time - long hair and unshaven. I went up one day and a bicycle was parked on the back porch with a baby chair on the back. I wondered what the clubwomen would say. The next morning Bonnie, the mother, called and said someone had taken her bicycle. I think she knew who it was as she did not complain further. It had to be someone who had gone up those stairs calling on those girls.

It turned cold - the coldest weather we have had this winter. The electric heaters were woefully inadequate. I was sorry about the baby but not the girls. I went upstairs and told them I knew they were cold and if they wanted to find another place I would let them, (They didn't know it but I was going to freeze them out.) stay rent free for a week. The little brown eyed trouble maker said, "You have to give us two weeks." I would give them two weeks to get them out of there peacefully. I didn't say anything. A couple of days later I went up and both girls were there. I said, "I was not born yesterday. I know you are having pot parties, and wouldn't it be cute to have a head line in the paper - "So and So arrested for smoking marijuana at the Ruskin Woman's Club Building." They did not deny it.

The next day, Bonnie and the baby moved in with her sister, leaving the little trouble maker there. I called Bonnie to get her keys and she asked me if the other girl was giving me a hard time. But, Bonnie did me a big favor. She went to the electric company and got her deposit money, leaving the little trouble maker without light or heat. She stayed a couple of days

then left - where I do not know, nor care. I had Julius put a new lock on the back door as I did not know who all had keys. She came back, could not get in the door, so climbed over the banister and then through a window in the pantry and into the apartment. Heller told me this.

Margaret cleaned up the apartment and found the girls had been pretty rough on the gold carpet. I advertised at Christmas and New Year's week and found I should have saved my money. I got plenty of calls, but they were mostly with children which I had to turn down. Then I advertised the following week and had a number of calls that would have been permanent. One was a teacher and would have been permanent but she didn't like it because she had to go out into the hall to the bathroom. I was not disappointed as she was only 22 and I was getting pretty sick of girls. Waiting paid off as a couple who had retired, gone back in the woods and built a house and thought they were in hog heaven up near Crystal River asked to rent the apartment. He got bored to tears, came down here and got a job with one of the farmers as maintenance man. They originally lived in Dover and that is where their kids are. He said they will be here at least two years. So the apartments are rented.

Hopefully the apartments are rented and the Perils of Pauline are over.