

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### The Diplomat Years

Sometimes in life, **LUCK** is on your side. This was the case when I got my first big break in the long road, which is your business career. I had been the Controller of the Kenilworth Hotel for about three years and the last year and a half, added the title of Assistant Manager. The property had expanded while I was there from 160 rooms to a 260-room resort. My Monthly Salary was \$600. Bookkeeping was still being done all by hand in journals and ledgers. I had been the President for two years of the largest local Chapter of the *Hotel Greeters of America* and served one term as President of the *Hotel Accountants of South Florida*. Then, I had moved up to International Secretary of the national organization. I had traveled quite extensively to many cities staying in some of the best large hotels - Boston Statler, Chicago Ambassador, Denver's Brown Palace and the Statler St. Louis. At the Kenilworth, our outside accountants were the World renowned CPA firm of *Horwath & Horwath*. Since the depression, this CPA firm had been providing accounting services for hotels in most big cities. Florida was similar to other states in which they had clients.



#### *Horwath Christmas Party - 1959*

They had resident controllers at the Eden Roc Hotel on Miami Beach - 'Berry' Barinson, above with Roger, the Everglades Hotel in Miami and the Pier 66 Hotel in Ft. Lauderdale. So, in

1958, when I again felt it was time to seek a new and larger hotel and with the hopes of increasing my income, I leaked this to my CPA's. Should they need anyone with my background and skills, I would be interested. Ivan deNary, the Supervising Partner, met me one Saturday for lunch at the Kenilworth, wearing dark glasses incognito. He was not supposed to take an employee away from a client. Miami Beach was in the midst of the period – known as – *This Year's Hotel*, a term for one new large resort to open each year. He told me that this year there may be two and they may need Controllers for one or perhaps both – The Carillon and/or The Diplomat.

Time passed until the fall, when I was summoned down to the Horwath Office in Miami. It seems plans had changed. They had planned to reassign the Controller from Pier 66 Hotel in Ft. Lauderdale to the Diplomat Resort in Hollywood but the Owner, Sam Friedland, did not want to have two 500-room properties open on the beach at the same time. So, he had decided to delay the completion of the main beachfront property until 1960. This created the need to find a Controller who would take the job at a much lower salary. The Diplomat Country Club in Hallandale and The Envoy, a 150 room motel across the street from the under construction ocean front hotel on Hollywood Beach, would be opened in the fall of 1958. By looking at the long term, I decided to take this assignment; working for the CPA firm at the same salary I was already making \$600 a month.

Our accounting office was to be at The Diplomat Country Club. I had to hire an assistant, Ray Witkowski, a secretary Gloria and several other staffers including Harvey and Arlene. Soon, I had a staff of 10 people and we installed an NCR accounting machine, the first in Florida.

We had a beautiful 18-hole golf course, a big banquet dining room, used for lunch too, the 150-room motel - The Envoy, with a restaurant and bar on the west, facing the ocean front hotel still under construction. In the office, I installed an NCR 2000 ma-

chine to post local charge accounts, used by the golf members and lunch guests using The Diplomat Country Club. We had over 1000 local *city ledger accounts*. This is the hotel term for charge cards, before the days of American Express, etc. We had a second NCR 2000 posting machine at the front desk of The Envoy Motel. I had to staff the night auditor and restaurant cashiers too.

This first year, 1959, went very smoothly. Soon, I was planning the accounting office layout for the main hotel, near the lobby, adding more staff for the new hotel, which was scheduled to open November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1959. Two more NCR 2000 machines were ordered. Three more night auditors, had to be hired and four front office cashiers plus promote one of the front office cashiers, Jean Fish to head cashier. By the time the hotel opened, I had a staff of twenty.



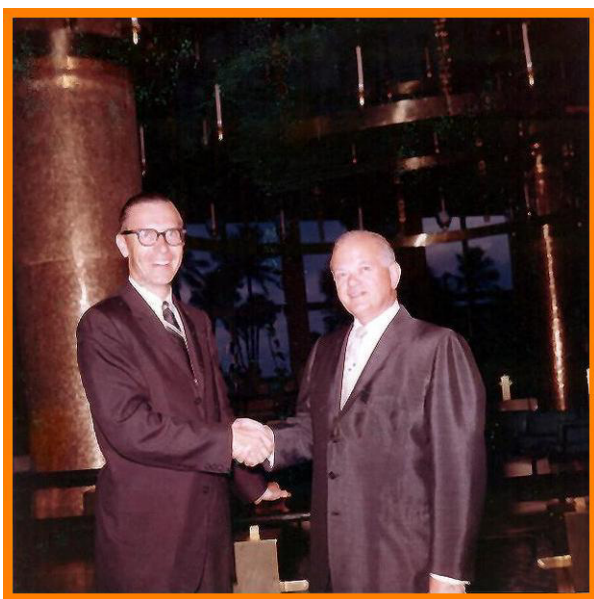
***Bob Cummings stops by the Accounting Office***



***Accounting staff - 1960***

The Diplomat East had 520 rooms, the west motel of 150

rooms, was renamed The Diplomat West. The Diplomat Resort and Country Club opened as scheduled with a big Gala Weekend for the Press and Travel Writers. The Café Cristal Night Club opened with Tony Martin and hundreds of invited guests. During the opening luncheon, there was a funny incident. The construction superintendent, a relative of the owner, was making a welcoming speech, when the roof gave way (it was raining very heavily at the time) . The speaker said, ***“I’m not a public speaker, I’m just a buildeeer”*** and the water poured in.



***George Fox shaking hands with Roger - July 1960 - Diplomat Lobby***

### ***The M. Self Story***

George Fox, our first General Manager came to us from the Eden Roc Hotel, Miami Beach. Before that he was the General Manager of the Drake Hotel in Chicago. He was a very experienced Hotel Manager and a nice guy too, so, as a result I learned a great deal from him.

It became his habit to stop in the Tack Room Lounge after work and have a drink or two. Our entertaining procedure called for the host to note on the back of the bar check, the name of the guest you were entertaining. Mr. Fox generally was there alone, so he had a habit of signing "M. Self".

When Mr. Fox was succeeded after the first winter season, by the Jacobs Family, well known resort operators from Miami Beach, he stayed on for the remainder of his year contract, performing the duties of 'credit manager' only. Walter Jacobs, our new President & General Manager, called me into his office one time (Mr. Friedland, graciously gave up his large Executive Office to Walter Jacobs, so George Fox could remain in his 'Managers Office' while he worked out the remainder of his contract. Walter Jacobs and his brothers, Al and Milton had joined the Diplomat Hotel with Resort experience, since they for years had run the Lord Tarleton Hotel on Miami Beach in the winter, and up North for the summer at the Lake Tarleton Club, Pike, N.H.

On this occasion Walter Jacobs, had been looking over the A.B.P. (Advertising, Business Promotion) bar checks and had noticed the repetitive checks signed by George Fox on the front. He wanted to know who the guest was by the name of M.Self. Embarrassed, I had to tell him; it stood for – my self!

The hotel business has quite a track record of managers, turning over every year or two. George Fox was our first, Walter Jacobs, lasted one season too and was replaced by Jean Suits, who also came from the Eden Roc. And interestingly, George Fox took Mr. Suits' job back at the Eden Roc. Mr. Suits stayed two years and moved to the Doral Country Club Resort until he retired. The Doral out on W. 36<sup>th</sup> St. Miami, is well known for their three Championship Golf Courses and the Doral Classic.

The Les Ambassador dining room, seats over 1,000 guests for dinner. The front section, known as the Café Cristal, could be closed off for 270 guests in front of the stage. Now, my staff num-

bered over fifty. The Night Club opened again on December 22nd with Sophie Tucker and Vic Damone. I had to work every night to get the nightclub under control. This was in addition to a full week in the office. The nightclub seated a thousand fifty four for each of two shows each evening, the first one with dinner. We only had one big show on New Years' Eve. Everything was cash, no credit cards and no computers. I saw Sophie Tucker 19 times and enjoyed each performance. After each show she would sit in the lobby autographing copies of her book. Some of the Café Cristal stars were Robert Goulet, Tony Bennett and Peggy Lee.

Each day for lunch, Mr. Cowan, President and son-in-law of the owner, IrvTillis and myself would go over to The Presidential Country Club or The Diplomat Country Club. Mr. Cowan would drive his Cadillac. This gave the three of us fifteen or twenty minutes without interruptions each way to talk business.



***Irv Tillis with Roger***

After our lunch on some days, we would stop and play on the

putting golf course for a few minutes out in the sunshine and fresh air.

Irv Tillis, Sales Director added the title of General Manager, just about the time I became Operations Manager in addition to Controller. Mr. Tillis a former New Yorker and journalist was very experienced in sales and very level headed as Manager. Every evening around 5 o'clock he would hold court in the *La Petite Chose Lounge*, which had several alcoves with circular banquettes and little cocktail tables in front. Executives would come and go, each not having more the two drinks. Irving Cowan would at time join us too. Things that happened during the day could be discussed openly and if you needed a quick decision, it usually was forthcoming.

Mr. Tillis was always available during the day too, to discuss problems.



Golf Party - Jim Bishop, Mike Morgan, Roger Lane and Irv Tillis

### ***Diplomat Country Club Meeting***

Mr. Friedland built another 100 room motel across from the golf course on Diplomat Parkway and Hallandale Beach Blvd. named the **Diplomat Golf & Racquet Club**. It had a nice pool, restaurant and lobby bar and an a nine hole pitch & putt golf course on the other side of Diplomat parkway.





Sam Friedland, Elsie Porter, Roger Lane and Irving Cowan

My work at the Diplomat was good. After two years working for Horwath & Horwath, Mr. Sam Friedland the owner of the hotel hired me directly as Controller. Soon, I added the title of Operations Manager.





### *The Diplomat West 4 story addition*

Another addition was built across the street at **The Diplomat West**; a four story building of 150 guest rooms.



### *Roger at his desk - before computers*

Another year, they built a second country club - **The Presidential Golf Course**, off of State Road 7, five miles from the hotel. We now had over 900 rooms, 2 golf courses, 10 restaurants and 10 bars and a night club seating 1054 dinner guests.



The Diplomat Executives in 1962

### ***The Executives of the Diplomat - 1962***

***Front row:*** John Kwart...Reservations Mgr.,  
Roger Lane...Comptoller, Milton Jacobs...Food/Beverage  
Director, Irving Cowan...Vice President,  
John Monahan...Sales Mgr., Irving Tillis...Sales Director,  
Carl Barbalat...Inn & Country Club Mgr.

***Second row:*** Joe Farris...Bar Mgr., Thelma Holt...Coffee  
Shop Mgr., Joe Ciriago...Supt. Service, Domenic  
Zaccardi...Catering Mgr., Mary Vogel...Housekeeper,  
Peggy Gillespie...Chief Telephone Operator, Oscar  
Hatcher...Diplomat West Mgr., Tony Ruane...Chief Eng.  
Nick Bersan...Golf Pro,

***Third row:*** Don Cuddy...Publicity Dir., Elsie  
Porter...Purchasing Agent, Joe Fitch...Cabana Mgr., Al  
Marino...Chief of Security, Al Zager...Food/Beverage  
Control, Eddie Massa, Head Doorman,  
George Foster...Social Dir., Brynece McLachlan...Youth  
Counselor; and Martin Gold...Banquet Maitre d',

After the first five years, Mr. and Mrs. Cowan invited all employees and their guests to a Gala Reception and Banquet in the Convention Hall. Employees with five years seniority were presented with a **Gold Diplomat Pin**. There were a eleven of us as shown in this picture.



***Roger, Marge and Irving Cowan and Irv Tillis, center***

About 1963, we installed our first computer from **National Cash Register Co.** It was the first successful computer installed in a hotel in Florida.

We processed Reservations and Forecasts on a daily basis. Once a week we prepared the payroll for 800 employees which took 8 hours on this NCR computer.

This was just the beginning of a series of new computers every three years, from 1.2 K stand alone, the NCR Century 16K Proto-type, then the NCR Century 96 K main frame COBOL on-line system. We then changed to a 4MB mini Basic Four Com-

puter - CLS system with PC network. The computer room was installed with raised flooring, dual Air Conditioning Cooling Systems along with fire extinguishing systems. These were the pioneer days with computers.



### ***Professor Ilvento presents FIU certificate***

Computers became my life as we progressed and I was responsible for the installation of the first on-line hotel system in Florida. My computer staff included; a Data Processing Manager, System Analyst, Cobol programmers, keypunch operators and 24-hour computer operators.




### ***Roger, Robert Goulet and Ray Witkowski***



Another early entertainer was Robert Goulet, who came to the accounting office to get his check and had his picture taken with a few of us.

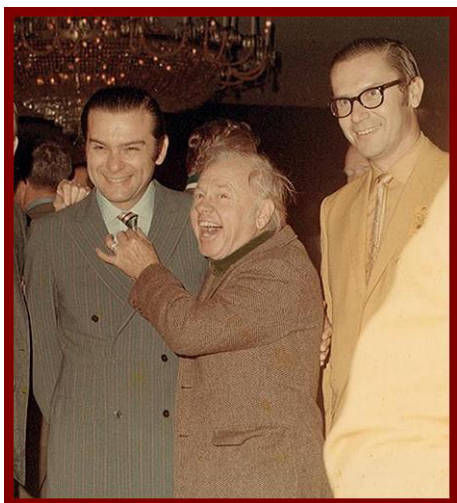
*The  
Big*



*By  
Don  
Cuddy*

**PRIDE AND JOY DEP'T:** We have any season's greatest stars, the Celebrity Dining Room, two great golf courses--and **Roger Lane's** computer. He's comptroller and operations manager. His money office's new Electronic Date Processing unit even rates "sitter" services. But Roger's faith shook when the first executive payroll was run through, and guess who got short-changed?

February 7, 1965



***Mickey Rooney***

### ***Danny Thomas Golf Open***

On December 4-7, 1969 we held the first Danny Thomas Golf Open at **The Presidential Country Club**. A large banquet was planned for the guests and held at **The Diplomat Country Club** to honor the winners with Danny Thomas and Mickey Rooney as Guests of Honor.



Danny Thomas Open at Diplomat Country Club -1970

### ***Our group of hotels kept growing***

By this time we now had a small chain of hotels, starting with the large **Diplomat Resort-East** 500 rooms, **The Diplomat West** 300 rooms, **The Diplomat Golf & Racquet Club** 100 rooms and

**The Diplomat Country Club** in Hollandale/Hollywood plus a second golf course - **The Presidential Country Club** in North Dade. Three other hotels - **The Shelborne Hotel** at 17th St., **The Monte Carlo Hotel**, 62nd St. and **The Marco Polo Resort** 192nd St. were all on Miami Beach. We provided all of them with central accounting from the Diplomat. We also provided accounting for **The Diplomat Mall** in Hallandale.



### ***The Shelborne Hotel***

#### ***The Julio Fernandez Story***

The Shelborne Hotel was involved in an interesting embezzlement by their Sales Manager, Julio Fernandez. These were the days of 'Package Tours', about 7 day vacations handled via travel agents who also booked the air flights. The Shelborne with its location, just two blocks north of Lincoln Road, the main Miami Beach shopping strip, was ideal for South American tourists. The Shelborne almost totally catered to these guests, except during the winter season.



Julio, was a very ambitious sales person. So, when he could not talk the Manager into an advertising budget for these South American Tours, he took it into his own hands and started to promote business by offering the 7<sup>th</sup> day free. This meant that the travel agent booked a full week, but only paid the hotel for 6 nights.

To Julio, it sounded good as at that time the hotel was not always full in the summer. His problem though, was how to get the accounting department to write off the extra day. He did this by collusion with the auditor. As it sometimes happens, the first auditor, passed away, taking his knowledge of the “set-up” with him. A new auditor was assigned by me to the post who did not speak a word of Spanish. Julio also did favors for everyone. Cuban Cigars for the Manager. A promotional trip to Lima, Peru with the Manager and a large group of Miami-Cuban violinists sent on a “fully paid trip to the Capital of Peru”, and “Free” vacation air tickets for the new Auditor.

At one point, because the sales were increasing at an alarming rate, but so were the accounts receivables due from over a hundred travel agents, including many false names Julio made up in South America. The Manager sent Julio on a “collection trip” to go down and collect money. Julio came back with ‘exchange orders’ (drafts drawn on South American banks signed by the alleged travel agent owners). Later, we found out that he had printed up the forged documents and switched the country of the bank to a different country, so the drafts would not clear. They all ‘bounced’. Now we knew there was something major wrong. The FBI and the Miami Beach Police were called in. Spanish was the cover of this whole plot. All correspondence was in Spanish and Julio and his secretary, the only Spanish speaking employees at the Shelborne, would falsify the translations.

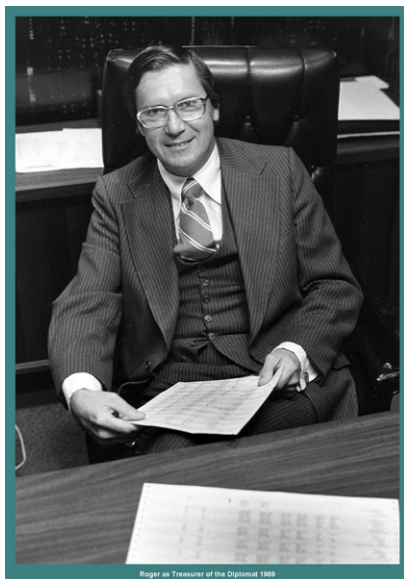
One time one of the owners of a travel agency who owed the hotel on the books \$25,000. was visiting the Shelborne, only to be asked by the Manager “When are you going to send me the \$25,000?” Julio translated this as “When are you going to send me \$2,000?” The Owner of the Travel Agency responded in Span-

ish “[Manyana](#)” (Tomorrow). This pleased the Manager.

The story ends, with a police chase through Miami in his red T-bird, Julio arrested, only to get out on bond. Later the FBI had him rearrested. He was put on trial in a week long court case by the Federal Government for “[Transportation of Forged Documents in International Commerce](#)”, and served several years in Jail.

I was not involved as I had written extensive monthly reports on how Sales were going up, but money due the hotel was also too high. The Manager lost his job, only to be reassigned within our chain and eventually to become a V.P. at the Diplomat Hotel.

It is interesting to note that Julio did not personally benefit from the embezzlement, but only wanted to promote the property. I had a very large box of all the details of this episode stored for many years, as I thought it would make a great movie script. Unfortunately someone without my knowledge sent the box to the dump!



***Roger deWardt Lane, Treasurer***



***Pioneering in the hotel computer field, the Diplomat Hotel, Hollywood, Florida signs agreement in 1972 with NCR.***

***Seated: President of the Diplomat, Irving Cowan, Left: "Ham" Jones, NCR Manager, Controller Roger Lane, and "Pete" Radeka, NCR-Sales.***



***Roger deWardt Lane, Managing Director***



### ***Roger with first NCR on-line computer***

In 1972, I was invited to attend the ***Ezra Cornell Week*** at Cornell University and address the Hotel students on Computers.

Mr. Tillis, the manager was having health problems. They did not know it, but he had Alzheimer's.

When the property was ten years old, they decided to add another tower building. Construction of the basement started, when the South Florida hotel business had a bad year, so, construction stopped. By this time my title was Treasurer of the Diplomat.

Mr. Cowan offered me the position of Managing Director of the Diplomat. Mr. Tillis retired and I received the new title and responsibilities of ***Managing Director*** in 1970.

I still retained my Treasurer title, but hired an ex-Horwath & Horwath accountant as Controller. All of my old accounting staff continued. My Operations Manager was Bill Forest, a long time friend of Mrs. Cowan but also a very creative guy. We worked well together.



***Bill Forest, second from the right - Celebrity Room***

The hotel had a great winter season, under my supervision. I added \$600,000 that year to the bottom line. We took the lounge across the street and made it into a sing-a-long piano bar called ***The Great Years***. It did so well, profit-wise that it was an embarrassment to the owner, who booked the entertainment for the main lounge *The Tack Room* at the ocean side hotel.

The two years I managed the property were a real challenge. I enjoyed the work but once an accountant always an accountant. When the fall came, the owners restarted the construction of the 300-room new tower addition. They hired a new Managing Director from Chicago and I moved back to my old office as Treasurer with no change in salary. The new Manager lasted 18 months, but he was a nice guy. I got a bonus each year.





### ***Diplomat Hotel at Night***

In addition, I was responsible for risk management (Insurance Programs) of all hotels and the three high-rise apartment buildings; [The Diplomat Towers](#), [The Presidential Towers](#) and [The Sea Air Towers](#) owned by the Friedlands and Irving Cowan near the hotel on Hollywood Beach, plus [The Diplomat Mall](#) and [Cross Roads Shopping Center](#) in St. Petersburg.



***Over the years we saw most of the nightclub shows***



***Roger, Marilyn & Sam Friedland***

Marilyn remembers the great parties, bar mitzvahs and weddings we were invited to attend, starting with Mr. Friedland's 60th birthday party. We also attended Jackie Gleason's Birthday Party at the Diplomat. President Nixon telephoned Jackie, which was piped thru to the Banquet guests.



***David Charlton and Mary Cotton - Cafe Cristal Nightclub***

Mr. Cowan would over the years, call me at the last minute to fill out his table, by saying, ***"What are you doing tonight?"*** and tell me about the Jewish Theological Banquet or the Chamber of Commerce Banquet. I would have to call Marilyn to quickly go out and buy a new gown for the evening. I would come home and put on my tux. We would drive back to the hotel, in the company Lin-



coln Town Car which was part of my deal. They gave me a new rental vehicle every six month, paid the insurance and gave me a gasoline card too. It was always kept on the ramp ready to go.



***Al Marino with Roger - He always had a great story***

Every time Marilyn and I went to the Night Club, I would have to make my rounds, **‘See and be seen’** I use to call it. My co-worker, Chief of Security, Al Marino would take Marilyn into one of the bars to stay with her, while I preformed my duties. He was an ex-New York City detective and was a great guy. Al would always have an interesting story to pass on.



Roger as Managing Director with Mike Morgan

***Roger with Mike Morgan, Sun Sentinel Columnist***

One of my good friends was Mike Morgan, a newspaper columnist for the *Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel*. He wrote an item about my computer for the newspaper.



Milton Berle after lunch with Roger at the Diplomat

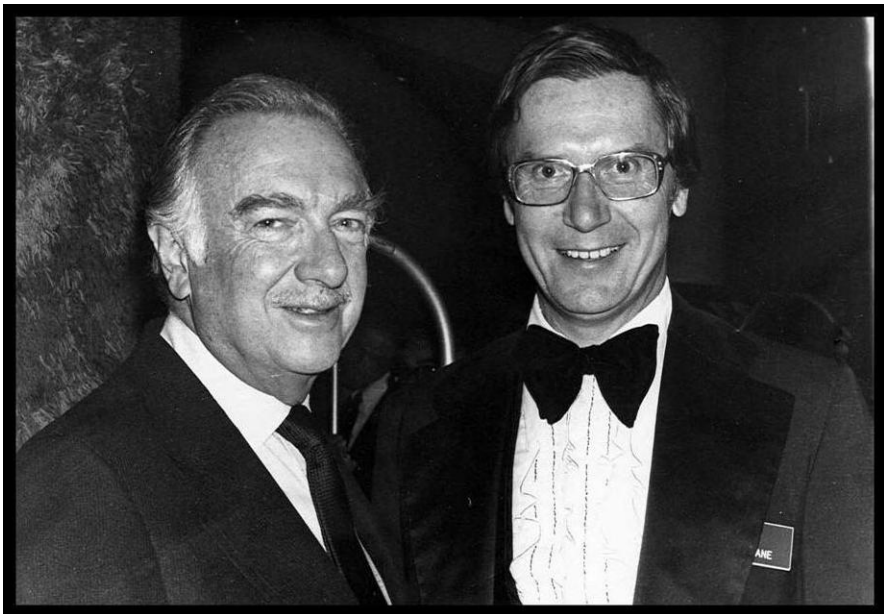
### ***Milton Berle and Roger***

I took **Milton Berle** to lunch one day and had my picture taken with him. He was just as funny in person as on the TV and such a nice person.

When **President Carter** was visiting The Diplomat Hotel during his election campaign I was in a picture taken of several people outside my office



### ***President Carter at the Diplomat***



### ***Walter Cronkite and Roger***

Walter Cronkite visited the Diplomat Hotel when I was the Managing Director.



### ***Marilyn & Roger with the Mintz' in the Celebrity Room***

One of my responsibilities included working with our attorney Herb Mintz on labor contracts. We negotiated all the union contracts for the hotel over a number of years with the union president, until it was time for Mr. Cowan to sign the new contract. We also handled union grievance cases and sometimes had to go to arbitration.

Looking back, I worked very hard with long hours but life working at the Diplomat was very good.

The Diplomat story continues. The demise of the World Famous Diplomat Hotel was a long time coming. There were the fires; the convention hall, the TV Theater and the big one in the warehouse which closed the property twice. First to clean it up and reopen to handle the March conventions, only to close again in June for four months of renovation.

I had collected twenty million dollars from the fire insurance but Mr. Cowan spent an extra five million to re-do the property. Mistakes were made in how to spend the money. Emphasis was on the social side of the resort but they forgot to improve facilities for the convention business



### ***At the 25 Year Party***

Each year after the first five, Mr. & Mrs. Cowan invited all employees with five years seniority to a Gala Holiday Party. A banquet dinner followed a reception. Marilyn attended them all with me. At the first one, we all received a five year pin. At ten years, another pin with a little red ruby (the last drop of blood, it was called). Awards continued at each five-year interval. For the twenty five-year anniversary, we all received a beautiful gold watch.





### ***The 25th Anniversary Party - 1982***

South Florida hotel business started to decrease. Social guests had many more places around the world to vacation. The convention business was very competitive with Orlando a new market with many hotels.

It didn't help that we kept getting a new Managing Director every two years. Some only lasted a shorter period, one for only a week. All during this time, I worked with the second in command manager - Jay Rosen, General Manager who was Mr. Cowan's favorite. Together we co-signed all the checks and had an arrangement that if either one of us were not comfortable with the payment, one would skip signing therefore obliging Mr. Cowan to sign. We always reminded him that unless one of us was on vacation, he had better look at any checks presented to him.

The loans from the bank which started with the extra \$5,000,000 used to renovate after the big fire had now grown by

another \$20,000,000 from losses. A new loan was provided by the construction trade unions and they eventually took over the property with a new management company in 1987.

I had been at the Diplomat Hotel thirty years. The owners gave me a six months severance arrangement. It took me quite a long time to find another position. I went to interviews in New York City, the Bahamas and one at Naples on the west coast. I flew out to Arizona and back one day to meet with the Japanese owners of a hotel to be built on the Island of Guam. Nothing came of these interviews.

The Diplomat Hotel & Country Club was now operated by the unions and for two years lost money before it closed. A few years later, the property was imploded. I watched it on TV.

The union owners eventually built the new **Westin Diplomat Resort** on the site of **The Classic Diplomat Hotel**. They invested \$800 million and I understand they are not making some of the mistakes we did during the later years. They are making money and running a very successful resort.

### **The Great Night Club Shows at the Diplomat**

We opened with Tony Martin. The next performer - Sophie Tucker - **Last of the Red Hot Mamas** was on for 19 shows and I didn't miss a single performance. She would then go to the lobby, after a sold out show and autograph her book for guests who would buy a copy from her.

For the next 29 years, I continued to be there on Opening Night and again either Friday or Saturday evening in my tuxedo, keeping an eye on the waiters and my staff. To **'see and be seen'** was my expression for the dozens of staff members in the kitchen ringing up dinners and drinks. This was before credit cards; therefore, it was all cash - \$30,000 or more a night for the first ten or so years. We were one of the last large resorts to accept credit cards.



Over the years, Marilyn and I could go to the nightclub on a slow night and have dinner and see the show. We were always seated ringside. Each winter, we would invite Marilyn's mother Mary Cotton for some shows. Occasionally her sisters; Maxine, and Amy and their husbands, would join us too.

A few of the best entertainers included; Buddy Hackett - I tried never to miss one of his performances even though I had seen him many dozens of times. He was so blue but very very funny.

Judy Garland - we were never sure if she would go on, after drinking a quart of vodka mixed with a gallon of apple juice each night. Judy's daughter Liza Minnelli, played the Café Cristal Night Club each winter for a number of years as did Sammy Davis Jr., as headliners. They performed together for a New Years Eve Gala as did Aretha Franklin (who bombed) but Milton Berle saved the day as opening act.

For security reasons, we scheduled four to six off-duty Hollywood Police Detectives all dressed in tuxedos, so, the guests would think of them as Dining Room Captains but we knew who they were and they were armed, just in case of trouble.

Sometimes a guest who had too much to drink, would give the waiter a hard time when it came time to pay the check. So, the waiter would call over one of these big HPD Detectives in a smart tuxedo. To end it all, the guest sometimes would say ["I don't care if you call the police"](#), so, the Detective would display his badge and the event was over quickly with the guest gladly paying his bill.

Victor Hugo - Cuban-American Matre'd in the Café Cristal was always at the Les Ambassador entrance to welcome the Night Club Guests to the main dining room each evening and command a cordial group of Captains ready to seat the thousand guests for each show.



### ***Victor Hugo, Roger and three of Hollywood's Finest***

I remember an interesting episode Mr. Cowan relayed to me. It was opening night and Mr. and Mrs. Cowan were seated with their usual party, including Sterling Levine, Manager of our Presidential Apartments and Mrs. Levine a special friend of Marge Cowan. With them would be Dr. & Mrs. Ernie Sayfie and other close friends, ringside.

Mr. Cowan dressed smartly in his Tux had to get up for some reason, possibly a telephone call. Leaving his table which was center ringside, he walked towards the side entrance. At this point Mr. Cowan was approached by another patron, who offered his hand for a quick handshake. Thinking he might know the guest, Mr. Cowan reached out to accept the handshake, only to be surprised by the \$20 bill trussed into his hand, with the remark "[Can you please see if we can get a better table?](#)" Mr. Cowan had been

mistaken for one of the Captains. Not to embarrass the guest or himself, he replied, “Just a minute I’ll see what can be done.” Quickly contacting Victor Hugo, who got a big kick out of Mr. Cowan receiving this tip (which was passed on to Victor), the guest was reseated. Everyone was happy and the guest never knew he had just tipped the hotel owner.



Amey Mary Roger and Marilyn-Diplomat Nightclub

*Sister Amy, Mary Cotton, Roger & Marilyn*

CAFE CRISTAL

The hottest stars of show business like to spend time at The Diplomat. Not only do the famous and beautiful like to dine here, but the top stars of television, high society and the screen. The Diplomat is a place where you can find the most famous of people. The Diplomat is a place where you can find the most famous of people. The Diplomat is a place where you can find the most famous of people.

Reservations: 1000 10th Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20004  
Telephone: 525-1111  
Menu: 525-1111

Special packages for Christmas and New Year's Eve. Make your reservations today.

**JOEY HEATHERTON**  
January 17 thru January 18

**ENGELBERT HUMPERDINK**  
January 28 thru February 6

**DIONNE WARWICK**  
January 28 thru February 6

**KAYE STEVENS**  
February 10 thru February 18

**SCOEY MITCHELL**  
February 10 thru February 18

**ROBERT GOULET**  
March 1 thru March 6

**JOAN RIVERS**  
March 17 thru March 18

**PETULA CLARK**  
April 6 thru April 17

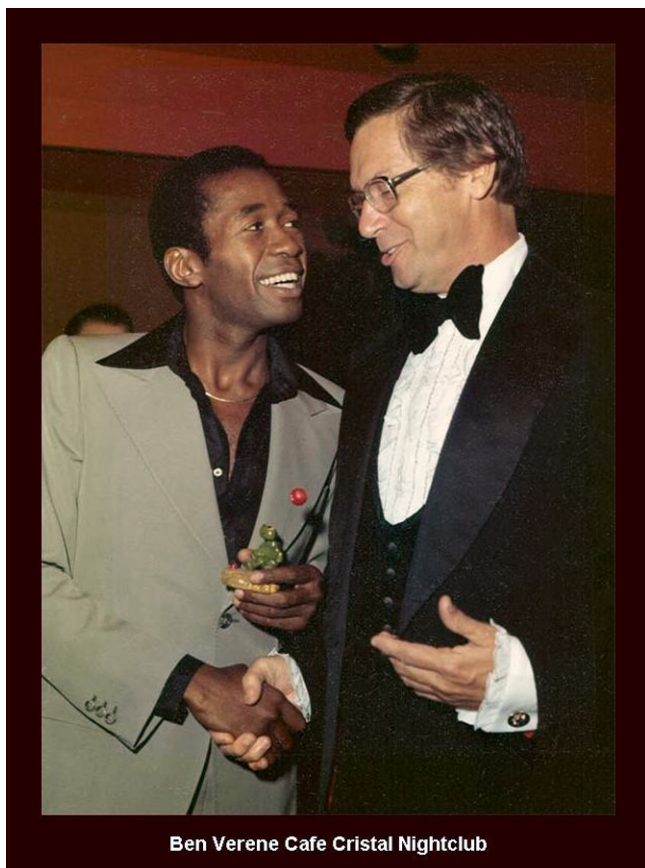
**JOEY BISHOP**  
February 10 thru February 18

**Tack Room**  
The famous and the famous like to spend time at The Diplomat. Not only do the famous and beautiful like to dine here, but the top stars of television, high society and the screen. The Diplomat is a place where you can find the most famous of people. The Diplomat is a place where you can find the most famous of people. The Diplomat is a place where you can find the most famous of people.

PLUS 'MANY MORE OF SHOW BUSINESS' GREATS... TO BE ANNOUNCED!

Roger was Managing Director when all these played the Cafe Cristal Night Club

*Every Winter Season - Great Shows at the “Dip”*



Ben Vereen Cafe Cristal Nightclub

### ***Ben Vereen greets Roger at the Press Party***

Ben Vereen was one of the early nightclub entertainers after he became famous in the TV performance of *Roots*.

Almost always, a sold out show had a thousand guests for the first show with dinner. Then the room would be reset for the second show at 11PM for upwards of another 1000 guests for show and drinks. The lobby would be very crowded with these two thousand visitors, half waiting for their cars and the others lined up to get into the nightclub.



Dionne Warwick with Roger at Diplomat



For a few acts, we watched young stars moved from the Tack Room Lounge to the big stage of the Nightclub, including Jack Jones and Dionne Warwick. Jackie Mason who did many one-nighters in the lounge, never made it to our nightclub but later became a big star on Broadway.

Another old-timer was Maurice Chevalier, who got a standing ovation during each show. By this time, we had switched to one show on opening night and then two shows each night for a ten-day run. Some acts ran two weeks. One of my favorites was Tony Bennett, who performed at the Diplomat many years. Before his great come back with the song *San Francisco*, I even walked out of one of his shows, when I thought he was having an off night. Later, I never missed a performance.

The start of the winter Night Club season was the period known as **Christmas Week** (Actually more like ten or dozen nights, ending with one big New Years Eve Show). This meant the restart of the nightclub with usually a new staff. I worked a double shift during this whole period and finished up each night staying till after midnight for the close of the nightclub's second show. At ten o'clock, I would go into the small lounge next to the club, have a filet mignon, two glasses of white wine and a Greek salad for dinner. My company car was on the ramp. ***Not a bad life!***

The last entertainer I'm going to mention is Ray Charles, because he had a very special arrangement in his contract. He was to be paid in cash - \$170,000 for 10 performances. So, each night, before he went on stage, I had to take \$17,000 in hundred dollar bills to his dressing room back stage in a small paper lunch bag.

Of course he was blind, but his manger was with him, who would say, ***"here comes the man."*** Ray Charles and I would shake hands and I would give him the stack of money. There were hundreds of others - singers, dancers, comedians and even songwriters and musicians, all great to see.

### ***The Diplomat's Resident Mafia Man – T.P.***

I do not remember when I first met T.P. I know the grapevine was don't cross him. It was ok to buy him a drink in the Tack Room when we were there with Convention clients. I'd heard that if he wanted to use a room (with a girl, I guess) that the front desk would give him a key, put the room o-o-o (out of order) and when he returned the key, call housekeeping to put the room back in order (make the bed, fresh towels, etc.).

T.P. stood for Tony Plate. A search of the web found this quote – “Florida law enforcement authorities reported to other police agencies in October of 1973 that Anthony Plate was known to them to be an associate of the Gambinos.” Another search had a small reference with people connected to Al Gore. – “A Miami representative of the Gambino organized crime family was Anthony Plate.” The Italian Mafia web lists - Anthony “Tony Plate” Plata soldier (1913-1979) (Healthy). U.S. Social Security Death Index – Anthony Plate b. 2 April 1913, d. Aug 1979 s.s.no. 258-18-2780 Bal Harbour, Dade, Florida.

Another search found the missing part of my story. How T.P. met his maker. “There was no doubt *Willie Boy Johnson* had been involved in the murder of Anthony Plate in Florida in 1979. Plate worked in a loan sharking operation in Miami. He once jumped on the desk of a debtor, spit in his face, and threatened to bite him. Plate had been indicted in the death of another loan shark. The family was afraid that the mere presence of the sinister looking Plate at the defense table would hinder their chances. Plate walked out of a Miami Beach hotel one August morning and was never seen again. Shortly after this Gotti and Johnson appeared with deep suntans. Plate's murder helped the case win an acquittal”.

The last time T.P.'s name came up, was when two FBI agents were in my office with a subpoena for some telephone records in an unrelated investigation. While waiting for the microfilm to locate the records, one of the agents turned to me with the following quote – “**You must have known Tony Plate?**” Not wishing to be

untruthful, my answer was - "I use to see him taking the elevator to the solarium."

The agent's response was - "You will never see him again." The family told his wife "He didn't suffer." And, the agent continued - "I guess he just knew too much."

Now to my mafia stories never told to anyone up to this time - the grapevine had T.P. taking one of our hotel managers B.R. as we called him into an executive wash room and almost choking him! Bernie Resnick also known as the **white knight**, due to his always wearing a white suit, no socks and man tan suntan, had some trouble with the cabana boys and their asking guests for tips. T.P. told him to layoff the cabana boys. Resnick got the message.

Another grapevine story had T.P. giving our music director Van Smith late one night in the lobby, *a big black eye*, telling him to stop over-charging for music to some of his Italian friends.

My personal run-ins were almost as bad but some how I got out of them without being hurt. As the Treasurer, I was responsible for money and hotel property. One day the beverage manager Joe Ferris came to me with the information that T.P. had been down to the liquor storeroom and got a case of scotch, by just demanding it. Joe was scared to death and just gave it to T.P. My duties now required that I pass on the details to my boss Mr. Cowan. I guess you could call me naive, as thinking back, I should just have forgotten about it and fixed the books.

Anyway, days later, I was in the boss's office at 5 o'clock (you never saw him in the morning if possible, as by this time he would be a little mellow, having had a couple of drinks). Well, I told Irving the story. His response was kind of like this - "*Roger, we cannot let this happen again. Next time you see T.P., just tell him to cut it out.*" Irving knew T.P. probably better than I did. At this point there is a great Jewish word for my actions - **shmuck!**

A couple of days later I was in the Tack Room cocktail lounge when I saw T.P. come in. I took him aside and passed on the word. *"You can't take any more bottles from Joe."* T.P. took my hand as if to shake it, saying, *"What did you say?"* as he squeezed it to where I thought it would fall off. Backtracking quickly, I said, *"I'm sorry and forget about it."* Fortunately for me, T.P. knew I was just the messenger. The episode was over.

My next run-in was a lot more serious. Fridays, I worked a double shift, staying till the nightclub closed after 2:AM. So, Saturday was a half-day for me. I would come in late and stay through lunch. The reservation office had two parts, the outer office for social reservations was manned on Saturdays but the larger inner office was empty, as we did not book convention reservations on the weekends. This incident occurred, as I was ready to leave the property. I was standing in the middle of the inner office, looking at the reservation manager's office with its closed door. Unbeknownst to me, T.P. and Jack Muchi, our Reservation Manager were in there and T.P. was having a cup of coffee. The door had a non-see through glass, so, I could not see them but they could see me.

The door opened and T.P. said *"Roger come here. Why were you looking at me? I ought to throw this cup of hot coffee at you!"* Backing up and slowly departing the office, I said, *"I'm sorry, I didn't know you were in there."*

The grapevine around the Diplomat was *"what did you do to T.P. – he's mad at you!"* Now, I had to figure out how to get through to T.P. and straighten this mess out. Fortunately, I remembered that I had heard that our new Assistant Chief of Security was from a Mafia family. I spoke to John and he said he would see what could be done. A week later, word came back that everything was ok between T.P. and me.

I never had any more contact with T.P., other than buying him a drink once in a while. The FBI's advice *"You will never see him again"* was true.

**IRVING COWAN**  
PROUDLY PRESENTS  
**MR. FRANK SINATRA**

**NEW YEAR'S EVE**  
In the  
**REGENCY BALLROOM**

Irv and Marge Cowan have delivered the entertainment coup of the year to Diplomat Hotel guests -- Frank Sinatra, the star of stars, will headline the gala, elegant New Year's Eve show in the Regency Ballroom.

Sinatra, who was just named "Male Singer of the Year" by the American Guild of Variety Artists, has promised an unforgettable show. Also on the bill will be noted comedian Pat Henry, who will officially ring in the New Year at midnight. At the magic hour, 5000 balloons will drop from the Regency Ballroom ceiling.

The entire evening will be golden. Ballroom doors will open at 9 p.m. New Year's Eve. Later, a gourmet supper will be served and the superb menu includes Avocado Acapulco, stuffed with seafood; prime sirloin of beef with a sumptuous sauce; white asparagus and potatoes biegniet; a fruit and cheese plate; and a delicious Grand Marnier soufflé glace for dessert.

A 300-foot service bar will provide all the

beverages the diners could desire during the festive evening. An assortment of favors will be at the table for every guest, along with a gold velvet commemorative menu.

Even arriving for the evening will be thrilling. Kleig lights in the front of the hotel will spotlight the sky. Blinking lights in the lobby will flash on and off with the name "Frank Sinatra." Red velvet ropes will lead the way to the Regency Ballroom, where golden tablecloths will decorate the scene. More than 25 seating captains in tails and white gloves will escort you to your table.

All in all, it will be an evening to remember. Tickets are \$100 per person and include the dinner, show, tax, tip and favors.

You can't afford to miss spending New Year's Eve with Frank Sinatra! It could only happen to you at the Diplomat! Call the Catering Department for reservations.

Van Smith and his 28 piece orchestra will play New Year's Eve.



**New Year's Eve December 31st, 1974**



## **FRANK SINATRA NEW YEAR'S EVE**

It was the summer of 1974; Irv and Marge Cowan were visiting New York City and attended the Madison Square Garden "Coming out of Retirement" performance of Frank Sinatra. They were invited to attend the Press Party after the show, so, they had an opportunity to have a conversation with the Star Entertainer.

They eventually hit it off during this meeting and shortly thereafter a contract was drawn up for Frank to play the Diplomat Hotel on New Year's Eve at the opening of the new Ballroom – Regency Room. This new large ballroom - Regency Room, seated over two thousand people with a very large stage in the apex of the L shaped room which was on the ground floor of the new tower addition to the Diplomat Resort.

The Regency Room adjoined the large convention hall kitchen and on the other side of the kitchen was the thousand-seat convention hall. For functions like this Gala, the convention hall was set up as a service bar with multiple bartender's areas and cashier stations. The cash registers - now electronic, had to be rewired to the computer system.

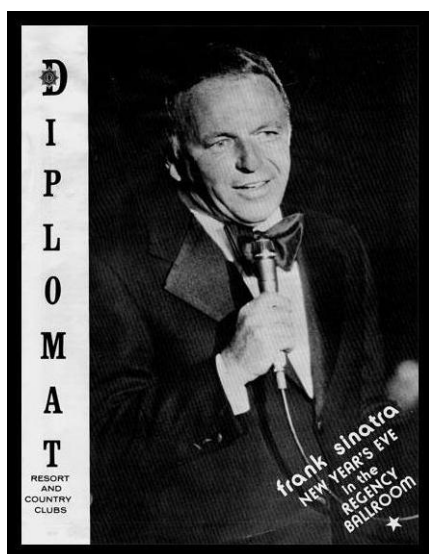
Frank arrived that afternoon via his personal jet, checked in to a penthouse suite and later went to a special backstage dressing room in the convention hall.

His contract called for a payment of *Two Hundred Thousand Dollars*, so, it was my responsibility to have the check ready and present it to him before he went on stage.

Sharply at 11PM, he appeared on stage and put on one of his greatest shows before an audience of 2,000 guests. Tickets, including dinner, tax and gratuities were; - Ringside \$200 (about 200 seats fanned out around the large round stage), Middle section (over a thousand three hundred seats in tables of ten) - \$150 and the back section (sometimes called in the trade – *the bus section*) - \$100 had seats for 500 guests. These seats were so far

back from the stage, you could not see much but the sound system was excellent.

Fifty-five minutes later, Frank turned the microphone over to the Bandleader to bring in the New Year. With a police escort and a large box of New Year's favors he went down to the garage and the waiting limo for a fast motorcycle police escorted trip to the Ft. Lauderdale Executive Airport and his Lear Jet. For the next three hours he raced against the clock to arrive at his home in Palm Springs again before midnight for his own New Year's party



***I gave him a check for \$200,000***

While this show was going on; there were 1000 guests arriving for the Dinner & Show in the Night Club with Comedian Dick Shawn and singing beauty Erica Trevor, three shows scheduled for the Tack Room Lounge, which seated over 200 guests. Other restaurants serving that night include the *Distillery*, the *Royal Rib Room* and the *Demi Tasse* Coffee Shop. Other food services were; at the marina side – the *Dinghy*, at the Golf and Racquet Club – the *Via Veneto* and at the Presidential Country Club – the *Steak*

*House.* The Diplomat Hotel had their biggest revenue night with over half a million dollars. All night long there were thousands of guests in the lobby. Getting your auto parked took two hours and about the same to have then bring it to the ramp when you were ready to leave.



***Ring Side Seats - \$200 - Frank Sinatra New Year's Eve***

See a ringside gold ticket priced at Two Hundred Dollars, one of originally only 200. Roger still has a dozen of them but sold some recently on eBay. The first one went for \$63.00 and was sent to England to a Sinatra fan.

All the regular nightclub waiters were promoted to Captains for this event - the Frank Sinatra Gala. We had over two hundred extra waiters from the union too.

My assignment for the evening, in addition to presenting Frank with his check, was to handle ticket problems. The show was sold out but you always get a few dissatisfied guests, who want a better seat. I had about 20 unsold ringside tickets in my pocket. Complaining guests were directed to the cashier's window in the main lobby to see "Mr. Lane." Of course, I had to remind them that the show was sold out but, I had a couple of cancellations

available at Ring Side for \$200, if, they would like to pay the difference. When this would happen, we immediately put the turned-in \$150 tickets on sale and they would *go like hot cakes*.

At show time I stood at the center doorway and watched the whole show. Frank put on a great performance. This special New Year's engagement was the start of a regular series of big name entertainers over the next dozen years, including; Liza Minnelli with Sammy Davis, Jr., again Liza by herself, Joan Rivers, Dolly Parton and Aretha Franklin.

### ***My First Computer***

In October 1964, I installed the first computer in a Florida hotel at the Classic Diplomat Hotel on Hollywood Beach. The computer was an NCR 395, built on an accounting machine design with a 1.2 K of ram computer memory. Master files and transaction records were both IBM 80-column tab cards. The program was written in machine language. Print formatting was done with little plastic plugs inserted into a long board running down the back of the printer carriage. I was the analyst, the programmer and the computer operator for an in-house payroll system. We processed a payroll for 800 employees every week.

The employee work hours had to be keypunched into transaction cards, edited for errors and then merged into the previous payroll's master card file. It wasn't ever until Thursday at 5 p.m. that the data was ready to run and payday was Friday. So, I "volunteered" to stay and run the payroll each week. I would load up the card reader hopper with a few hundred-tab cards and hit the run button.

In those days, our PBX was an old-fashioned crossbar switch. We had 10 telephone operators on duty during the evening shift. Using the telephone nearest to the computer, I would call and *shanghai* one operator into becoming my assistant. I would place the instrument near the computer and say, "Can you hear the noise?" As the printer made a thumping sound, she would say,

“Yes.” Her job was to keep the line open and check every 10 minutes for that same thumping noise. If she didn’t hear the thump, her instructions were to call me in the Tack Room Bar. When all went well, it took only eight hours to process 800 paychecks. But, things didn’t always go well. I drank a lot of Cokes waiting in that outlet and spent a lot of sleepless Thursday nights with that NCR 395. But, the employees were always paid on Friday.

### ***The \$6 a week walkup to the Plaza Hotel***

It was a short walk across Central Park south from Columbus Circle to the Plaza Hotel, which only took twenty years.

In 1947, as a young veteran just back from a tour in Germany in the Occupation Troops, I settled in Manhattan and a \$30 a week relief hotel clerk’s job, including two nights as night auditor at Number One Fifth Avenue Hotel. Morton Downey “The Irish Nightingale” was the popular entertainer in our Number One Lounge. My brother had an elevator operator’s position at the Waldorf Astoria and a \$6 a week room at W. 56<sup>th</sup> St, a half a block off Broadway. So, I moved in with him, sharing the *rent frozen expense* at \$3 each a week. Only one bed, which meant that one of us, could not go to bed, until the other arose. This worked out fine, with me as I only slept six times each week, because of constantly changing my schedule from AM to PM and the midnight shift. Breakfast was in the room; cereal, milk and canned peaches, all of which had to be consumed in one day between the two of us, as there was no refrigeration. My lunch was provided by the hotel and, supper was at the White Castle for a hamburger 25c. and coffee 5c. Recreation was a day in Central Park walking with my small battery powered radio. The nights I worked started at 10PM walking down Broadway, dressed in my Tuxedo, window shopping and watching the other people headed for restaurants and shows, many of them tourists. As midnight approached, I would take the subway down to Wanamaker’s at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Then walk the short distance west to Fifth Avenue to begin my shift as Night Auditor. This was hand bookkeeping, posting and summarizing all the guest transactions for the day on large ruled sheets called transcripts.



We had 200 suites so this work took most of the eight hours from midnight to 8AM. Lill the night telephone operator up off the balcony above the lobby and Sam the colored bellman were the only other employees. During the night the beat policeman would come in a take a nap behind the French doors in the dining room right off the lobby.

The 8AM return trip took me up to Columbus Circle and the walk a short distance down Broadway to our one room apartment on the fourth floor. I was still dressed in my Tux. One time I asked the regular night auditor an older gentlemen of say 40, "Why do you take time to get back into your civilian cloths?" His response, "A young guy like you can ride the subway in your tux at 8 o'clock in the morning and all the young girls will think you have been out all night partying, while for me, they would think I was a 'waiter'.

Jump ahead twenty years. I had to spend a week in New York City to consolidate our New York Reservation Office with the Israel Office of the small chain of Dan Hotels, Sam Friedland had just acquired in Israel including the King David Hotel.

It so happened, Mr. and Mrs. Irving Cowan were headed for NYC for another occasion at the same time. So, our two trips were combined. The Cowan limo driver picked me up at the Diplomat Hotel on the morning we were to leave. We then picked up the Cowan's at their home and headed for the Fort Lauderdale Airport. The first class airplane ride was very smooth to LaGuardia.

A quick taxi ride took us to the Plaza Hotel, Central Park South and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, New York City. Mr. Cowan had reserved a large suite for us. We had had dinner on the plane, but it was still early, so, they suggested we take a walk near the hotel. We found a popular restaurant and went in for a late night sandwich. Mr. Cowan would order room service for breakfast, after which I would say my goodbyes and walk to our New York Office to take up my accounting duties.