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Southern
Snaps

Meet an area innkeeping couple for whom Southern Hospitality is a way of life.

by Connie Barnard



**The Sea View Inn
Pawleys Island, SC**
*“Where time stands still,
but you just keep rocking.”*

This quote appears on a 2005 Sea View Inn tee shirt with a watercolor rendition of the rambling 68-year-old inn so beloved to families who have claimed their annual week since the Sea View opened in 1937. Perhaps it gives the unwitting reader just a hint of what can only be described as Old Pawleys Island. Until recent years, this was the Pawleys way of life. No air conditioning. No television. No telephones. Only a luscious sea breeze flowing through the screened windows of a relatively “beach basic” guestroom, visitors who greet one another as old friends year after year, and three daily bountiful meals of distinctive Lowcountry cuisine. In our current high-speed, chop-chop culture, the Sea View is truly like going back in time, and for those who appreciate this mindset, therein lies its charm. After all, how is it a vacation, if you spend your time doing exactly what you left home to get away from?

Brian and Sassy Henry are a delightful young couple who manage the Sea View. Well, sort of. The Henrys make it very clear that the longtime employees and guests are the real owners; they are just there to continue the traditions established over its long history. Originally built by the Clinkscale family, the Sea View was owned and operated by Page Oberlin for over twenty years. Sassy, who grew up in Atlanta, spent most summers at her family's Pawleys Island home. Brian, a native of South Louisiana, met Sassy after college when both were working in Atlanta. They married and had two delightful little girls and a busy, successful life in Atlanta. Then a few years ago, while vacationing at Pawleys, their friend Mary Dean Johnson shared with the Henrys that Page was ready to give up the Sea View, if she could find the right new owners. Brian and Sassy toyed with the idea but decided it was impractical for a young couple with little children. The next summer, however, they decided to just take a look at it, and well, the rest is history. Both were drawn in by the Sea View's wonderful old charm, pickled cypress walls, huge screened porches, and breathtaking panoramic view of the Atlantic. And somehow they knew this was, indeed, the perfect place to live and raise their young family.

The Henrys entered into an agreement with Oberlin that has allowed them to get their feet wet slowly, and both have done so with hard work and enthusiasm. Their skills complement one another perfectly. Brian, with his strong background in business, manages the inn, setting up work schedules, etc., for the staff of ten. Sassy is the creative one who draws on her background in floral design and culinary arts. Yet these lines often mesh as they multi-task running the inn and raising six year-old May May and four-year old Camille. Both Brian and Sassy admit it took a little while to get used to the idea of working and being together all the time. And both say they still need occasional "date nights," when they are not playing tag team between the inn and the children. It helps that at the end of each day they can leave the inn in the hands of a capable night manager and go to their own home just a half-mile away. Also, it helps that the Sea View closes the Sunday after Thanksgiving and reopens the first of April each year, providing a period of down time in which to recharge their batteries and prepare of the next season.

The Sea View has 100% occupancy and a waiting list during summer months. Most of its guests have been there before, many for up to four generations. They tend to choose the same weeks and the same rooms each year, some passing these on to their children when they are no longer able to travel. All of this lends to a convivial atmosphere reminiscent of a genteel summer camp, yet friendly and open to new guests as well. The spring and fall months are not as busy and offer special events such as artist weeks, girls' weekend getaways, and kayak nature tours.

Certainly, the bountiful and delicious food is one reason so many guests return to the Sea View each year. Cooks Myrtle Edwards and Vertrella Brown, along with many of the dining room staff, have been at the inn for over twenty years. The Henrys are the first to acknowledge that these workers are the heart and soul of the inn.

Like the Ruddicks, Brian and Sassy Henry say operating an inn is hard work. "But," Brian says, "it is good hard work." And Sassy – looking around the dining room as the guests wander out after a mid-day meal featuring fried chicken, squash casserole, and pecan pie – says, "Yes, it's a lot of work, but I really can't imagine us doing anything else."

To learn more about these this delightful inns, visit their web sites at www.seaviewinn.com.

E-mail your questions, comments and feedback to info@sasee.com or write to us.

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