

# GRINGO

## Gazette

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Photo by: Klaus Kommos

## Honcho Of Fish Conservation Org. Caught Gillnetting

■ Is unapologetic, belligerent

BY GARY GRAHAM

For many years now, the practice of inshore gillnetting has been a continuing issue throughout the Sea of Cortez. It is so efficient that it devastates the fish population near the shores and beaches. It is legal, but a permit to do it is required.

Gillnetters set their small mesh nets either in a straight line or in a circle. If they are set in a straight line from the beach, as an example, it becomes a fence that any fish swimming along the beach bumps into, is caught by its

gills in the small mesh, and dies. Set in a circle over shallow water, the nets have the same effect – that of killing every fish, from the smallest to the largest. The fish becomes trapped and dies regardless of its commercial value. Gillnets are considered one of the most indiscriminate forms of commercial fishing known.

In April 2002, a meeting was held in East Cape, two hours drive north of Cabo San Lucas, an attempt to put an end to the inshore

gillnetting. Government officials, along with the principals and representatives of the East Cape Hotel Association, (consisting of Hotel Buena Vista Beach Resort, Hotel Palmas de Cortez, Hotel Playa del Sol, Hotel Punta Colorada, Rancho Leonero, Rancho Buena Vista Hotel and Martin Verdugo's Beach Resort), met at Rancho Leonero Hotel with Mario Leal, of La Ribera, and a few others who represented those who were gillnetting. Many local residents who were concerned with the constant netting of juvenile fish were also present.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a compromise was reached between the gillnetters and the concerned attendees, mostly those in the

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## Trailer Park Shuts Gate Forever

■ San Vicente is closing up shop, and the Alvarado family will be leaving a lot of memories behind

BY LINDSEY DONNER

San Vicente Trailer Park, located at kilometer marker three on the fourlane entering Cabo, will close its gate for the last time on July 31 of this year. A hotel developer from Las Mochis has bought it and will build a five story hotel on the property. Most of the tenants are long gone, having received notice of the park's closure in January. A sign that hung outside now rests near the semi that will cart it, and other memories, away for good.

The park itself looks, in owner Lili's words, "like a bomb went off." Because it

was agreed that tenants owned everything from the ground up, only renting the land, many have dismantled the homes, palapas and structures they built over the years to take it to their next resting place, and to be assembled again.

The closing of San Vicente, which has been in operation since 1981, is momentous for two reasons. One, it marks the end of an era— an era during which you could drive down the Baja in your motor home, with no Home Depot or

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Jose Leal, son of the owner of Pescadores del Cortez bait company, flips off reporter photographing his gillnetting activity. He charged at the boat, demanding the camera, and then sped off.

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# FROM THE PUBLISHER

BY CARRIE DUNCAN, H.H.

When I started publishing this paper almost 14 years ago, I ran into a lot of opposition from my advertisers every time I would print anything the least big negative about our tourist destination. As one Realtor told me when he saw a hurricane preparedness article on these pages, "How am I going to sell my real estate if people know an occasional hurricane blows through here?"

Well, I don't hear that fear anymore. Never. Not for several years has even one reader nor advertiser ever complained about my whining about our problems. Or as famous former local Realtor Lulu Jacobsen put it when she told me to leave town, "We don't want a newspaper in Cabo San Lucas to air our dirty laundry."

But these days I get nothing but encouragement to write about the bad and the ugly along with the good. And I wonder why.

Well, 14 years ago this was a small village, every foreigner knew every other foreigner, and most expats were here because they were fed up with living under too many rules in the United States. They liked Mexico for how loose it was. You could get away with nearly anything here, and that is kinda neat. It's like living in Never Neverland, where you never have to grow up and take responsibility. The foreigners here bent the laws to the max, and saw nothing wrong with the government doing the same.

It worked when we were a small town. It doesn't work so well now that we are a metropolis with nearly 400,000 people.

That attitude of "wink, wink, let's break this law and that law" and "we don't gotta show you no stinkin permit" creates mayhem in a small area where a lot of people are packed in. And either we foreigners have matured and come to understand that and demand rules, or we are so fed up with the havoc that creates that we're now willing to grow up and observe the rules of a civilized society in exchange for our safety and comfort.

No longer are we so willing to pay off the occasional cop because these days there's a cop on every corner with his hand out and it's become expensive.

With 400,000 people dumping into a sewer system that never worked in the first place, it's no longer just one of those charming Mexican things, now it's become a health hazard.

When there were only a few thousand cars on a few mostly dirt roads, they couldn't do much damage to us if we kept somewhat alert, but now ignoring traffic laws has become deadly.

We've grown so big, and there are so many people here, that we simply must set rules and we all must obey them if we are going to live an orderly, comfortable, and safe life-style.

But these days in Cabo there are not more rules, nor more enforcement, there are arguably fewer rules and way less enforcement. I think there are two reason for that.

Because we are at the end of a peninsula, with not much fresh water, we were never destined to be much of a farming area. And because of the difficulty and expense of shipping goods 1000 miles down the peninsula or over on the ferry, we were never destined to be much of a manufacturing area. So with no way to make a living here, there were not many people. And without many people, there was not much public education. Until just a few years ago, sixth grade was it. Finally high schools were built, but until only about three years ago, anyone seeking a higher education would need to go to the mainland. So the best and brightest of our Cabo San Lucas citizens migrated to mainland Mexico, leaving mostly service personnel here as tourism grew. Any town needs good universities if it expects to produce people sophisticated enough to run it.

I hoped that since the last two years we are getting sophisticated, well educated youngish people moving here from the mainland, that they would put down roots here and start getting involved. But now I see that if that is ever going to fix our problems, it's going to take more time than we have, because it takes two days of standing in line to move their voter registration here, and few of them are doing it.

But there are others who are moving here from the mainland who are having an effect on our local politics: They are old money Mexicans who are here to harvest the tourist dollars pouring in. They are hugely wealthy, well educated, smart, sophisticated, and used to getting their way. And they do. They build whatever they want wherever they want, and show zero social responsibility. It's just not in their culture. I'm thinking they don't even know what that phrase means. Why don't the fortunate Mexicans feel any social responsibility?

I don't know. Maybe it's going to take me another 14 years here to figure that out. But they don't feel any social responsibility to use their skills to make things work for all of us.. All they care about is making more money. That's why we're in the pickle we're in now. Because the smart, well educated, affluent Mexicans don't care about their community and we can't make them care.

We can't even shame them into caring. ✎

*Carrie*



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## TRAILER PARK... *continued from page 1*

Wal-Mart in sight, and set up camp for 10 bucks a night, trading ideas and fishing tips with your neighbors, your mind bursting with visions of what might become of this sleepy fishing town on the southernmost tip of the peninsula. Many of San Vicente's residents did just that, and they went on to become some of Cabo's most prominent entrepreneurs and household names.

Also, the closing of the park marks the end of another, parallel era in the lives of a single family. The family's lives have diverged and converged many times

the ties that took them from Cabo to San Diego to Cabo and, finally, back to Santiago where it all began.

It all starts with Vicente, the park's namesake. Vicente was born in Santiago, a tiny agricultural town on the eastern cape of this peninsula. (It's still a tiny town today, a tourist stop-off only for its tiny zoo and the glittering waterfalls just beyond its humble downtown.) The land on which the park now sits was Vicente's, who first arrived in Cabo around 1946. At the time, most of the land was for barter, and there were few signs of what Cabo would become.

Unfortunately, Vicente died young from a heart at-

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over the years, until they at last settled again beside one another beneath the shady palapas of San Vicente, so christened in honor of the parcel's original owner (and its matriarch's late father). More than two decades after owners Lili and Moises Alvarado first arrived at this site, they will leave and retire in Santiago— not coincidentally, the original Vicente's hometown. So this is the story of the Alvarado family as much as it is the story of Cabo's tremendous, seam-bursting growth, and

tack just a few years later. The family now suspects that the heart attack was not the cause but a symptom— Vicente perished before his time because, in those days, food poisoning was often treated with a dehydrating enema, and that may have been what killed him.

His daughter Lili (known in town by her matronym, Aballo) was one of several children. Growing up in Cabo, she and her sisters were known as "the seamstresses," because her fam-

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Tenants from San Vicente were allowed take everything they built from the ground up: trees, palapas, houses, windows, etc.

**TRAILER PARK...**  
*continued from page 2*

ily prospered by doing a little fishing and, in turn, sewing more than a few fishermen's clothes and equipment.. Lili met her future husband, Moises, when he stepped off of a commercial tuna boat in Cabo bay, looking for someone to mend his clothes. Moises was working as an engineer on the big commercial boats, and fell for Lili. The couple was married in Cabo's main church—which at the time was just a palapa. Newlywed Moises left again on the boats, and when he returned, the couple moved to San Diego, where they spent the next 30 years, from 1951 to 1981.

When they drove into town in 1981 on the then dirt road in their motor home, they had already sold everything in the States. ("It was probably the first motor home in the Baja!" laughed Martha, Lili and Moises' daughter.) Their intention was to retire here, by the sea in their native country. Moises was already 62 at the time. But they took one look at the land, and saw that his work wouldn't be quite over—yet. He would have to clear the land (back-breaking labor with a machete), bring in electricity, and get to building, so they could be comfortable.

What happened then was accidental (or fateful, depending). By 1981, Cabo was still under the radar, but Baja's charms and fish-full waters were increasingly well-known north of the border. Soon, other motor homes started making the trek. Motorists would stop at Lili and Moises' humble encampment, and inquire, "Mind if we park here?" Attracted to Lili and Moises' laid-back attitude and good English, and the notion of safety and security imparted by neighbors, the tenants kept coming. And coming. Before they could comprehend what was happening, Lili and Moises were back on the job, operating a full-time RV park. Lili set up her first "office"—a plastic table with a few chairs, next to her house, which at the time was a tiny one story structure.

Tellingly, Lili still owns the original logbook that she started keeping more than 20 years ago to keep track of tenants. "It's in with all my papers now," she says, protectively, and gestures at one of two semis the family has enlisted to move their entire lives from Cabo to Santiago. She started by charging 10 bucks a night. The last quoted overnight price, in 2008? 10 bucks a night. Lili and Moises didn't raise their rent— not once.

Many of those overnight campers became full-time residents. Some spent 20 years on the property. While some of the first tenants have passed away, many others are still alive and well—and well-known. Mike Grzanich, owner of the Latitude 22 Roadhouse, started off his days in Cabo as a San Vicente resident. (When he opened his first Latitude, he was still living in the park. The current location, near Costco, opened in 2004.) So did Ed and Beverly

Moore, among many others. Those original tenants sought out San Vicente as a home, and were privy to some of Cabo's most drastic changes over the years. As soon as the highway was paved, there were terrible accidents, often right at San Vicente's gate. Hotels, like the Santa Fe, which practically abuts their property, grew up like mushrooms.

In the space of a few short years, it became pretty clear that the RV park was a



This sign is the last remnant of San Vicente's heyday. It now sits inside the park, next to the truck that will take it away.

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**TRAILER PARK...**  
*continued from page 9*

dying breed. There was little money in it, and developers were eager to snatch up parcels on the beach side of the road. Ironically, yet another Alvarado relative who died young, Carlos, owned the parcels that Cabo Country Club and Golf Course now sit on (across the road from San Vicente), along with the parcel on which Hotel Finisterra was constructed, one of the first big hotels in town. Unlike many others, this relative had an inkling of what Cabo would become, and acquired his properties accordingly. But he died young, long before he could cash in on what might have made him wealthy. From a toothache—really.

The family's reasons for selling out were obvious, even if it tore apart many of the long-time residents. "We got kind of squeezed out," said Martha, wistfully. "And my parents are too old for this business. They could have made a lot of money here, but they didn't. And now it's time to move on. But it was my father who really

poured his heart and soul into this business."


When we walked around the property and I noticed that the pool was still full, Martha caught my eye. "My dad can't quite bring himself to empty it yet," she said. "When we empty the pool, it will really be over." Her father and a close family friend (Javier Lieras, whose son still comes by to help out) built the pool themselves the old-fashioned way—with a shovel. "I call him my handyman," says Lili, laughing.

Martha's grandmother lived on the property until her death, and her brother Juan moved in with the parents to help out early in the park's history. Martha and her older sister moved here from San Diego, too. "It's funny, we always seem to wind up in the same town, or next door to each other," she observed. Even Lili's brother and his wife are next door at Vagabundos, a park her brother opened after he saw how well San Vicente was doing.

Now that the family business is closing shop, you might think the family would move apart, too. But not the

Alvarados. They bought a huge parcel of land in Santiago, with mango groves on the property, overlooking the town that was the birthplace of Lili's father Vicente. They plan to turn it into a family retreat, with six casitas—one for Lili and Moises, and one for Juan, Martha, and the other three sisters in the family, two of whom are in the States. They're calling it "El Descanso." In Spanish, that literally means "rest," something the Alvarados haven't done much of in the past 60 years.

But Lili was eager to thank all the residents over the years. "My mom wants to thank all the tenants we've had over the years," Martha says. "But this is going to be very hard on my dad," she sighed. The two women grew quiet, looking around the property that had given them so many memories.



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Moises, not surprisingly, didn't sit down once. He was too busy working, to the last.

In an ironic coda to the story, resident Kenny Sewell (who used to own Cannery Row restaurant in downtown Cabo), one of the last tenants to leave, has plans to start his own RV park in Pescadero. About 10 of the San Vicente residents are coming along with him. "I didn't really decide to make an RV park," he laughed. "It's more like people I knew decided to make an RV park out of my property."

Perhaps they're hoping to keep some of the spirit of San Vicente alive, where family reigned, everyone knew their

neighbors business, and a big Thanksgiving feast took place beneath the Alvarado's beautiful palapa every year.

"You meet everybody here," said Sewell, when asked about what he would be leaving behind. "Everybody that's everybody lived here. It's quite a story." ✎

**THIS OLD CASA...**  
*continued from page 12*

considerably more than you invested, even if you had to fire sale it. That's an increasing value asset. That's the kind of investment I like. Holding dogs denominated in a declining currency doesn't have appeal. Holding stars in a market where international demand is bringing in buyers with strong currencies (like Canadians) to replace the Americans who are licking their currency wounds does.

I knew I wouldn't change her mind, as rationality often doesn't have the comfort of one's preconceived notions. A lot of money was lost by those who held onto their farms during the 30s, ultimately selling them for pennies on the dollar. My sentiment is that it's better to be buying farms at pennies, than selling them.

The good news is that, in my opinion, while the waters out there have never been

more treacherous, one can navigate them safely with some common sense and impartiality. True, the market here is softening. True, the market in the US is largely in a mini-collapse (driven by irrational lending and foolhardy interest rates). True, the dollar is bleeding out, and likely will continue to as long as massive deficits have the country spending more than its GDP, and more currency is printed every year than the last (that dilution is called inflation). I would love that all to turn around, however don't see any fundamental change until fiscal responsibility returns, and there's a linkage between GDP and money supply. The dollar has to decline, if there are more dollars every year, and the same or less GDP. Simple economics. That will translate into continued currency weakness, and commodities requiring more American dollars to buy them every year.

So I'm soft on the dollar's future, but bullish on the region's. Because wealth doesn't disappear when it departs one set of pockets for another. What happens is that the new owners of the wealth are now the buyers. Which is what we are seeing, as Canada and Europe and even the Far East come into the market as buyers, not sellers.

C. Philip Osso is the Director of BuildCabo Design & Construction, and is currently designing and building multiple oceanfront homes, as well as showcase homes in Puerto Los Cabos, Cresta Del Mar, the East Cape, and other marquis communities. You can contact the author at [Phil@BuildCabo.com](mailto:Phil@BuildCabo.com). Past installments of This Old Casa are available at the BuildCabo.com website. ✎



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