

January 12, 2020

Dear Ms. Johnston,

I am writing this note as a daughter of an old-time Key West family; my grandparents, buried there in the Catholic section of the old cemetery, are James and Letitia Sullivan. My oldest sister, Mary Roddy, is buried in the Infant section across from them, and last April my three sisters and I brought my mother's ashes home and interred them there. I was happy to renew my connection to this beloved island: the last time I'd visited, Mom and I stayed with Betty and Toby Bruce on Simonton St., dined at Charles and Lorine Thompson's house, and ate bollos and Cuban sandwiches on the beach. It was a very long time ago.

I was so concerned when I read that the precious old trees of the town are being cut down, and the stories I was raised on from my mother began running through my mind. Always, the stories she told were filled with the magnificent trees and the vibrant, sweet-smelling flowers of the tropical plants that have grown in Key West for so long. I remembered Mom telling me how, as a girl, she would reach out her window to pick an avocado for her breakfast and how she liked to shinny up the coconut trees to inspect and choose the best coconut. She met my father, a Naval officer stationed there during the War, when he joined a group of the locals one evening to go see the Century plant that had just come into bloom. Mom and Dad were married at Star of the Sea Church in 1944.

When we brought my mother's ashes to the cemetery there last year, all the folks who helped us were kind. They gently did all they could to make the situation easier to get through. What has stayed with me most from that day, though, was what came into focus about half-way through the service as I looked out over the iron railing onto Angela Street. There I saw these beautiful trees lining the fronts of the houses--an avocado, a banana, and a coconut tree, all lined up so close to where my mother would stay. I believe the trees, all this ancient greenery, is what sustains all who live on Key West. Each generation has its time on the island and intertwines with the island, and the trees are what carry us, comfort us, and renew us as we move through our time there.

I hope that the people of Key West are able to protect this heritage, and I am happy to be in touch with people there who are devoted to this effort.

Sincerely,

Cecelia Roddy

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