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Touring Lincolnvile: A Celebration of Historic  
Black Business

Professional and Public Writing

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Spring 2022

**83 Bridge St, Saint Augustine, FL 32084**

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By: Erin Kelbaugh

### Foreword

In writing about the F. H. Kelley Tourist I was particularly inspired by what a tourist home actually is: someone's personal home that they are opening up for transient strangers to rent. I loved the idea that this was a person's own home, the place they lived their everyday lives, and they wanted to open that up to people so they can have a home to stay in for even just a night in a new city. One thing that I wanted to convey in my story was the feeling of home and comfort that a tourist home can provide to someone just passing through. But, more than that, I was inspired by the article "A Connection to the Past" by John Sealey from the St. Augustine Record, which discusses tourist homes in St. Augustine. In the article, Sealey quotes a local historian David Nolan: "The Kelley Tourist Home was still in operation in 1964...Many out-of-town civil rights supporters who came here for demonstrations and other events stayed there." I wanted to write about these protestors, the ones who came from far and wide in order to fight for their rights. And I wanted to connect these people to that comforting feeling of the tourist homes. How did these tourists' homes make these protestors feel? What did they offer them in this uncertain time? These are questions I hope I answered through my story.

"83 Bridge St, Saint Augustine, FL 32084"

The first thing I noticed were the chamfered posts.

They were a creme color, reminiscent of an egg shell, and though I know they are much sturdier the growing areas of flaking paint make them appear to be just as fragile. Maybe it is

simply the age of building speaking through these small disrepairs, for no building as long lived as the Kelley Tourist Home would be without some sign of a growing age.

Despite this first impression, I know the posts' looks are deceiving me. They hold true to their position and never falter in their support of the roofing above the porch, like Atlas holding the weight of the world. Unmovable. Unbreakable. They are the guardians to the entrance of the house, ready to protect any travelers from rain or shine on their journey to St. Augustine.

I walk up the stairs of the porch and knock on the entrance to the house, three short raps, and hope that I have gained the owner's attention. While I stand, I listen to the movement from inside the house—music (from a radio? Or maybe a record player?), indistinct chatter, and a shuffling of feet on the floor—from an open window nearby and reflect on how I came to be outside the F. H. Kelley Tourist Home.

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There were protests going on down in St. Augustine.

In the papers, on the television, through the radio, and even in magazines I could see what was going down and I knew I wanted in. But I had one problem.

I had nowhere to stay.

At first, I was unsure of whether I could even find a place I knew would accept me. Afterall, I could always run the risk of not being accepted at motels and hotels, especially with the tensions at the moment. But I knew, with a curl of anxiety in my gut, that I needed to find a place. And quick.

Being alone, with nowhere to stay, during racial protests was just asking for trouble from some of the more...*enthusiastic* clan members loitering around the city.

Thankfully, the protests going on were all my friends could talk about at the moment. Through them I met a few other girls who would be making the trip down to St. Augustine as well, so I figured it would be a safe bet to ask them who they were staying with and whether they could ‘*pretty please put in a good word for me?*’

Of course, they laughed at my foolishness. But they gave me my invaluable advice, worth more to me than any amount of gold in that moment.

*Use a damn Tourist Home, ditz.*

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The shuffling of feet increases in volume as the person within the house makes their way closer to the door. I can hear the steady *thump, thump, thump* of heavy feet making their way to me— a soothing pattern that calms my sudden nerves at the face of meeting new people. I focus on the repetition and fix my face into a friendly mien. It wouldn’t do for the owner to think I’m some rude broad.

I hear the latch of the lock pop, my only warning before the door is swinging open.

“Welcome! Welcome! Come right on in here, little miss! By the looks of your bags you must be here for a room and we got a few open for ya—oh, let me help with your stuff, I couldn’t let a lady hull this thing around. What would my wife say?”

The man barely waits for a response before he is grabbing my suitcase and hurrying back into the house, chattering to me all the while.

I’m left hovering by the door, stunned by the sudden onslaught of energy from the man, before my brain quickly processes everything and I rush inside to keep up with his brisk pace. As I’m hauling it through the door I try to tell him that I don’t need any help with my luggage—that

I've been carrying my own junk since before even the Korean War—but I can't get a contrary word in. The man just won't hear anything he doesn't want to hear.

We finally come to a halt in the middle of what has to be the living room.

It's a beautiful room with a large window looking right out the front of the house, letting in all of the natural light and sounds from the neighborhood. One of the first things to catch my eye though is the large floral patterned couch pushed back against the wall.

I can tell immediately that it is a well used seat—the fabric of the couch seems almost faded and I can see faint imprints left behind that stubbornly refuse to smooth away. As I look closely at the sofas skirt I can see where there must have been tears gingerly stitched back together, keeping the couch in good condition. It isn't much, but it feels homey. Comfy. Soothing.

It's just what I need to calm myself in all the hullabaloo around me.

“You doin' alright, little miss? Oh, goodness me, I forgot to introduce myself! I'm Franklin Kelley, but you probably already knew that if you came to our home. Who are you, sweetie?”

Franklin's introduction broke me out of my thoughts, and I quickly turned around to greet him properly, not wanting to seem rude by not facing him. If my grandmother found out I ever did something so ill-mannered she would have tanned my hide and had me writing lines to apologize.

“My name is Joanne, but just Jo is fine. And I'm here to join the protest, sir.”

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I kept on walking, arms linked tight with women I had just met today. I don't even know their names, but I feel like I've never been closer to another person before. I know everything about them and nothing at all. They are me and not me at the same time.

I keep walking.

The press of bodies against my side grounds me to this moment. It gives me the strength to stand tall with my head held high. I won't falter, nor will I break. I know—*have known*—that this is what I wanted to do and I'm nothing if not stubborn.

I keep walking.

I can feel the sweat dripping down my body. Though it's nighttime the Florida heat is relentless, the muggy air almost suffocating, especially pressed so close together to another's body.

I keep walking.

I can feel my heart through my entire body: the rushing in my ears, the throbbing in my legs, the pounding in my chest that I can't escape from—that I don't *want* to escape from. It tells me I'm alive. It tells me that I'm doing something. It tells me that I'm making a change and I love it. Nothing can stop me.

I keep walking.

I can begin to hear yells from a distance, and though I can't make out any words I don't need any to tell me that they are angry and vicious. They aim to hurt and tear us apart, bring us back down to make them feel better. I've heard these same taunts and jeers and screams my whole life and if they think I'm gonna stop now they have another thing coming. I don't move an inch out of my line and no one else does either.

I keep walking.

There is a ripple in the crowd, sudden and violent. The marchers around me suddenly look panicked, resigned, then determined so quickly I almost give myself whiplash trying to keep up with what's going on. I'm not left in the dark for long, by no choice of my own.

I keep walking.

There are fists flying through the air, the dull smack of flesh hitting flesh before anguished groans and pained grunts pierce through the frenzied noise. I try to move away instinctively, but the women I'm with keep a firm grip on my arms to prevent me from skittering away and causing a panic. I try to keep calm in the face of violence, but all I can see as I look around are scenes that have been repeated thousands of times: the white people standing over us, taunting and angry, assured over their superiority and confident in their innocence. After all, they're only putting us in our place, we were the ones who started all of this by marching down their streets.

I keep walking.

It makes me sick, absolutely ill to my stomach, witnessing their hypocrisy as I see blood trickle down a marcher's face, their body on the floor as both hands and feet rain down on them. The rocks that are flying by my head, nearly hitting me and slamming into another's shoulder. And we can't do a damn thing without making ourselves out to be the bad guys. If any white person got a whiff that we were fighting back they'd take that as proof we were the ones in the wrong, that they were justified in attacking us. Our goals for ending segregation tainted by the images of "savage negroes" despite us only defending ourselves. So we do the only thing we can do.

We keep on walking.

Down St. George Street, Bridge Street, and King Street, all the way to the Old Slave Market.

*We keep on walking.*

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My feet ache all over, blisters at my heels and toes, a deep throbbing from my marching as I limp myself back to the Kelley house. Despite my pain, I know I'm one of the lucky ones, so I don't give myself a minute to mope or complain about my feet. At least my only worry *is* my feet.

Too many people were pushed down to the ground, handcuffs placed tight on their wrists, taken away by those pigs for simply marching along. Didn't do a damn thing and they were whisked away with the hundreds of others. All the while they let those clanies stand around and terrorize us for just wanting to exist in their line of view, throwing rocks and bottles, beating down us knowing we can't—*won't*—fight back. I feel defeated and elated all at once in one big confusing mix. The one thing I feel certain about is that we made an impact tonight. I guess it's only up to time whether it's going to be good or bad, and I'm praying for the first time in who knows how long that it's going to be a good one.

I can feel my body almost collapse on itself as the Kelley house comes into view—the rickety home telling every part of my body *safe, safe, safe*. And now, more than ever, the chamfered posts are a guardian to the house. They stand just as firm as they did when I first arrived, but they look different as they're illuminated by the moonlight. They no longer look fragile, with their dings and peeling paint concealed by the night, but they look imposing. They are ready to protect me from all threats.

I'm barely on the porch before the door swings open, no knock even needed as Mr. Kelley ushers me inside. For once, he seems to be quiet. Perhaps he knew all I needed was calm and quiet after tonight.

With a start, I'm pushed gently down onto the sofa in the living room. Mr. Kelley takes off into the kitchen, and a few minutes later both him and his wife, Emma, are bringing out some lemonade and sandwiches on a little platter. The sight of it almost makes me want to cry—their parental-like care for me, a virtual stranger. I sink into the cushions of the sofa with a shuddering sigh, blinking to keep the tears at bay.

Mr and Mrs. Kelley sit down gently on either side of me, handing me a drink and a sandwich, and content themselves watching me eat slowly. They don't say a word, but I'm sure they knew by now what happened tonight. I appreciate their silence even more knowing they must be dying to ask me what I saw.

By the time I'm done with my food they're gently guiding me up and directing me to my bedroom. Mrs. Kelley only says softly, "Get comfortable, girl. Go ahead and sleep, you deserve it."

I feel like I'm home.

