

3/13/75

A day for Martin

...with Anne Skillman

Today is Martin Z. Mollusk Day in Ocean City, N.J.

If everything goes off on schedule in the family resort shore town south of Atlantic City, Martin, a hermit tree crab, will determine summer's arrival time. To make his prediction, Martin will be transported from City Hall to an appointed spot on the beach via a covered pie plate gaily decorated in gold and blue, Ocean City's colors.

At 10 a.m. Mayor Thomas Waldman will open the cover and to the strains of the Ocean City High School Band's rendition of "Pomp and Circumstance" (Martin's favorite tune) Martin Zambisi Mollusk will crawl onto a red ribbon made crawling smooth by volunteer ribbon lackeys and sand smoothers. If he sees his shadow, summer will arrive a week early. If he doesn't, summer will arrive on time.

Now, you may be wondering what Ocean City's first Martin Z. Mollusk (M.Z.M.) Day has to do with Glen Burnie.

First, the whole idea was irresistible to your writer and her editor who both have Jersey sand between their toes.

Second, it was a necessity since M. Z. M. Day (the idea of Ocean City's Public Relations Director, Mark Soifer) had its inspiration from my Millard Fillmore lady, Jane Rowley, formerly of Glen Burnie and now of Virginia Beach, Va.

In addition to keeping me posted of her Millard Fillmore birthday activities this past January, Jane wrote to Mark Soifer concerning Millard. She also sent her poem, "Millard Who" (first published in this column in January '73) to Soifer's "Support Your Local Poet" corner in the Ocean City Sentinel Ledger. Like everybody else Jane has approached with her Millard Fillmore recognition project, Mark reacted in the same zany spirit. He wrote an article and published the poem.

Mark then wrote Jane saying she had inspired him to create a day just for Ocean City that was being held on March 13. It would be titled, Martin Z. Mollusk Day, he said and gave her an outline of the event.

In Friday's mail was a letter from Jane giving me all the details and asking me to write a letter to Mark. I did. But, that wasn't enough. I had to share the whole wacky idea with you. After all, what better way to brighten an "ugh" March day.

Then I had another idea. I would call Mark Soifer to get the lowdown on Martin.

Martin is a three-inch crab who has been kept in plush quarters at the Public Relations Office in the City Hall for the past month. Mark described Martin as being a very "unreasonable fellow" who insisted on eating only his favorite foods, three-day-old bread and lettuce curled at the edges. I asked if I could interview Martin for the column.

"No," said Mark, "He's a snappish and moody fellow. He won't talk to reporters."

Being the unreasonable crab he is, Martin has also stipulated that humans must stand eight feet away when he walks off the pie plate and they must not talk while his song is being played.

To keep Martin's fans or foes (it seems the Ground Hog People in Punxsutawney, Pa. have called Martin a pretender and even threatened to sue him) away, Harry McIntyre, the town's Dog Warden will be standing by with his net.

Now, before someone out there decides to come for me armed with a net, let me tell you one last thing about M. Z. M. Day. Like all historic firsts, it will be recorded. NBC's television affiliate in Philadelphia, Pa., will be on hand with the station's weatherman, Bill Custer, to record Martin's first stand at weather forecasting.

Martin writes

with Anne Skillman

4-3-75

Every newspaper office I've ever been in has had a collection of art work decorating the walls. The Maryland Gazette office is no exception. In addition to the staffers' personal bulletin boards and memorabilia, there are maps, plaques, citations, awards and other miscellaneous items of interest.

Soon our office will have another object of "wall" décor." Within a month we are scheduled to receive an autographed picture of Martin Z. Mollusk.

You haven't forgotten Martin have you? He's the hermit tree crab who made his debut as a weather prognosticator in Ocean City, N.J., on March 13. A debut that was engineered and masterminded by Mark Soifer, Ocean City's director of public relations.

Last week the Gazette received a letter from Martin. Written on Ocean City's official Department of Public Affairs stationery, the letter was addressed to all members of the Martin Z. Mollusk Fan Club at the Gazette. And, it really was from Martin, himself, via Mark Soifer, spiritual advisor.

It said:

"Dear Friends," (Friends? Three weeks ago he wouldn't let me interview him because he was a snappy and moodish fellow who wouldn't talk to reporters.)

"Thank you for your good wishes on Martin Z. Mollusk Day. My venture onto the Ocean City sands proved to be quite successful as we all knew it would be, right? Right!" (modest little crab isn't he?)

"I saw my shadow and so summer will arrive a week early in Ocean City, America's Greatest Family Resort. Please make your vacation plans accordingly." (This crab is really catching on fast. Soifer better watch

out. Martin sounds like a crab on his way up the public relations ladder).

"I am preparing autographed pictures, suitable for framing, which will be mailed to you within a month. Please be patient. Good things are worth waiting for." (His modesty seems to be disappearing fast.)

"I have been very busy in past weeks preparing for the big day and that's why you have not heard from me sooner. However, I am now able to devote some time to catching up with my correspondence. I enjoy writing to you ('the little people' — those three words are Martin's. Not mine!) my fans, etc. Without you, I would be just another Hermit Tree Crab, trying to claw his way to the top in this 'Crab Eat Crab World'. (And, you better not forget where you would be without us, Martin.)

"When you visit Ocean City, please stop at City Hall to see me. I'll enjoy meeting you and I think you will enjoy it, too. Many folks say my bright little, beady eyes make me irresistible." (I think Martin's modesty has disappeared.)

The letter was signed: Sincerely, Martin Z. Mollusk, Director of Weather Prognostication, Ocean City, New Jersey.

Somehow I'm a little worried about Martin and his fame. Maybe it's because I remember the sad case of Wally the frog.

About a dozen or so years ago, Wally took some first place honors at a Glen Burnie Pet Show. Wally, like any other frog would be, was all puffed up with happiness, self-confidence and his new found fame. But, apparently it was too much for poor Wally to handle. He expired while returning home from the pet show.

Take care Martin.

3/14/75

Martin's wedding

...with Anne Skillman

Over the years I've received some invitations to "far-out" weddings. But, the one I received the other week has to take the "far-out" award for this year. And, possibly next year.

The invitation came from Ocean City, N.J. It read: Mr. and Mrs. Caleb Shellfish of Tepid Swamp, La., are pleased to announce the wedding of their daughter, Mollie, to Martin Z. Mollusk, relatively famous Hermit Tree Crab, exact origin now under investigation.

The formal invitation went on to say that the ceremony would be performed at 1 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 19 in the vicinity of Ocean City's 10th Street Beach with Ocean City's Mayor, B. Thomas Waldman, officiating.

The invitation also said, "No RSVP — Just Be There — Bring Rice.

Also stale bread and cucumber rinds.

For those of you who have never heard of Martin Z. Mollusk, let me introduce you: Martin made news in various parts of the country on March 11 when he made his debut as a weather prognosticator on the sands of Ocean City, N.J. A debut that was masterminded by Ocean City's public relations director, Mark Soifer. In addition to coverage in the Maryland Gazette, Martin's debut was well-covered by other newspapers and television.

After reading the invitation and the accompanying press release on the event, our receptionist, who has become an avid Martin Z. Mollusk fan, said, "Anne, I think we should send Martin a wedding form."

I agreed and she sent it off that very day. Almost by return mail came the typed information as requested.

After checking the information, I dialed the telephone number on the form to verify the information. When the extension I requested answered. I followed directions and asked for Cage 1. There was a laugh at the other end of the line and the voice said, "Mr. Soifer is not in." I left my name and telephone number. Later that afternoon my call was returned. Mark assured me everything on the

form was true. He also mentioned the fact that invitations had been sent to many newspapers including the New York Times. And, that interest had been expressed by several including the Times. That did it. After all, we couldn't let a paper like the New York Times get ahead of us.

With the wedding form clutched in my hand and visions of a day at the beach at company expense, I pranced into my editor's office seeking official sanction to cover the forthcoming event.

His response, as usual, was immediate and to the point.

"No, you can't cover the wedding."

Nothing I said changed his mind.

Since I can't give you a first-hand report, I'll just have give you the highlights of the event from the information I have.

For her wedding Mollie will wear a white satin gown with a chapel-length train and a lace veil. Her bouquet will feature swamp petunias draped with seaweed and laced with cucumber rinds. Serving as maid of honor for Mollie will be Susan McCandless, former Miss Ocean City and Miss Cape May County, wearing a string bikini with a goodluck horseshoe of roses draped over her shoulders. Also attending Mollie will be various sea nymphs wearing brief beach attire and carrying sand buckets full of forsythia petals.

Serving as best man for Martin will be a gentleman named Harry McIntyre dressed as a giant mouse.

Mark Soifer will carry the cigar bands for double ring ceremony.

Immediately after the ceremony, the couple will be at home in their spacious cage in Ocean City's Public Relations Office on the second floor of City Hall where Mollie will serve as goodwill ambassadoress for the city and Martin will continue with his job as weather prognosticator.

If any of you readers out there would like to attend the wedding, you're welcome. Mark Soifer would be delighted to have you there.

And, if you do go. Please tell me all about it.



A crabby couple 8/21/75

Readers of Anne Skillman's *Conversations* may be interested in knowing that the crabbiest wedding of the year went off on schedule Tuesday in Ocean City, N.J. The above photograph, released by the City's Public Relations Department, is the official wedding portrait of Martin Z. Mollusk, official weather prognosticator for Ocean City, and Mollie Shellfish. Basking on satin, Mollie (right) clutches a bouquet of swamp petunias draped with seaweed lace. Martin (left) attempts to straighten his corsage of miniature lilies of alley. According to Mark Soifer, Ocean City's Public Relations Director and the man behind the attention getting event, which drew more than 400 people to the sands of Ocean City, the day's festivities went off without a hitch.