

"An analysis of
Brooks Campbell"
Assignment #1
By: Joe Bowers
Folk Medicine

During spring break, I stayed in a small beach community near St. Petersburg, Florida. I was watching the evening news on a Tampa station on Monday, March 11, and was intrigued by a feature story on a man who claimed that he made an ointment that could cure arthritis. The man's name was Brooks Campbell; he lived on Cedar Key, an island on the gulf coast of Florida midway between Clearwater and Panama City. The interview told of how he made the ointment himself and was also working on some other cures.

On Saturday, March 16, a friend and I drove to Cedar Key to talk to Mr. Campbell about his cures. The drive to Cedar Key was about three hours long. The town is a small fishing community about 55 miles west of Gainesville. The nearest town is Otter Creek--22 miles away.

A few miles from the coast, the dense pine forest gave way to swampland and cypress trees draped in Spanish moss. Not many cars were passed, and raccoons, armadillos, and water birds could be seen from the road. Marshes and many small islands could be seen from the short bridge over to Cedar Key.

Mr. Campbell's address was easy to find in the 2 1/2 page Cedar Key section of the phonebook. This was not needed, however, since the attendant at the service station knew Brooks and could give us directions directly to his house.

We drove up to the small white frame house on Whiddon Street and knocked on the door. Mr. Campbell answered the door; he seemed reluctant to talk to us after we stated the purpose of our visit. He said, "You can't say that this stuff doesn't work," and he immediately showed us a large stack of testimonial letters saying how well his medicine had worked for different people. Not only did he have letters from Florida, Georgia, Michigan, and other states, he had letters from as far away as Britain, Uruguay, and Saudi Arabia. We read his letters and explained to him that we were not skeptical of his medicine's curing abilities; we just wanted to know a little more about him and his medicine. After ten minutes or so, Mr. Campbell was talking to us as if we had known each other for years, giving us advice, and telling us about himself, his wife, and his "liniment."

Mr. Campbell, now 76, was a boatbuilder, but now he doesn't have much time for that. He had arthritis for 35 years; it was getting so serious that it was affecting his work and his life. Doctors told him that the only thing he could do was to take aspirin and learn to live with it. "I had to do something for myself because nobody was going to do it for me," Brooks told us, "I just started experimenting and trying things on my own." It took him six years to develop the formula that he uses now. Mr. Campbell says that he has been totally free of pain from arthritis for seven years now.

Brook's medicine is a mixture of a petroleum derivative (kerosene), epsom salts, mentholatum, and iodine. He said that it would take a while to explain the whole process of how the ointment is made, but you have to boil some things a

while and let others set a while before you mix it all together in the right amounts. The kerosene is there to help the medicine sink into the skin better, but it is the Epsom salts that Mr. Campbell says is what is really good for the arthritis or bursitis. "Any doctor who says Epsom salts isn't good for you is a pure liar," he told us. Brooks' wife of 44 years, Elsie, explained to us that the best way to apply the "liniment" is to "dampen the fingers and rub on aching joints and pain twice a day, once in the morning and once at night."

Bottled under his own label, Brooks sells his medicine for ten dollars a bottle. Mr. Campbell does not have a patent on his medicine because it takes 10 to 15 years to get it and he figures that he won't even be around that long anyway. His medicine is, however, licensed by the state government for sale in Florida only. If anyone outside of Florida wants to buy some of the medicine, they must have a resident of the state purchase the medicine and send it to them. A state resident may purchase the ointment through the mail for an additional two dollars for shipping charges. Mr. Campbell said that the demand for his "liniment" is usually pretty good. "Some days you laugh, and some days you cry," he told us. A small shed is set up behind the house overlooking the bay just for the preparation of the medicine.

When asked about what doctors thought about his remedy, Mr. Campbell replied, "I don't care what they think. If they want to buy it, I'll sell it to them." He said that one doctor from Georgia went as far as to come down and buy some of the

medicine without telling Mr. Campbell that he was a doctor. The man later wrote to Mr. Campbell, telling him how well his medicine had worked on some of his patients.

Throughout the interview, Mr. Campbell talked freely about his life and the experiences that he has had. Mr. Campbell is of Scottish descent. "There are only two things in this world worse than a Scottish person--a greedy Jew, and a politician," he told us. Brooks has been living in Cedar Key since 1912. "You can call me a newcomer," he said. "You're an old comer," his wife, Elsie, disagreed. The Campbell's house is full of reminders of the past. Pictures, awards, and plaques hang on the wall, and Mr. Campbell showed us a boxfull of photographs and odds and ends that he has saved over the years. Serving in three different branches of the service during World War II, he received several medals of honor, including one that was given to only two other people in the country.

Even though Brooks has only a forth grade education, he has worked with several doctors, professors, and universities in marine biology research. He has even taught a field class in marine biology for the University of Florida at Gainesville. He took students out and showed them the sea life firsthand, giving them insight and understanding that only a person that close and familiar with the sea can do. "You may think I'm ignorant, but a professor once told me, 'Brooks, I can take this book and tell you everything in it, but, in a way, you're smarter than I am. You can go out and find these things and and figure out how they work and how you can use them on your own,'" Brooks told us.

Brooks has experimented with several other things for medical purposes. He once did some work on an anesthetic for women during labor. A serum made from the brains of a manta ray and a shark. When this serum was injected into one woman, she "had her baby before she even knew what was going on, and she didn't even feel it."

He also says that he has discovered a substance for "free bleeders" to stop bleeding. When a stone crab's leg is broken, a pink fluid runs out that "gels like Jello." If this liquid is injected several places around the cut, Mr. Cambell says that the bleeding will stop within a few minutes.

Brooks and his wife seemed very close; Elsie showed much pride in her husband's accomplishments as he told us about them. They have no children to carry on the remedy. Brooks told us, "The only kid that I have is this little dog, Tiny Tim. He stays with me wherever I go." Brooks freely shared his philosophies with us. He asked if I were married, and I told him that I wasn't. He said, "Well, when you find yourself a good woman, you got to let her know who's the boss--she is! If you don't, your groceries won't ever taste any good."

Brooks believes that living a good, clean life and staying away from the bad things leads to a long, healthy life. "In the forty-four years that we've been together, Elsie has never seen me drink a cup of coffee, smoke a cigarette, or drink a beer." He is a very religious man. One of the philosophies he shared with us goes as follows: "The Lord gave you a kit of tools when you were born--your eyes, your ears, your hands, and your mind.

To make it in life, you've got to use them because nobody else is going to use them for you."

Brooks is working on a cure for the lumps that arthritis causes in the joints. He says that he learns something new everyday, but you never know it all. He was very friendly and sincere in his talk with us. Our visit with him was an educating and enjoyable one, and he invited us to come back and talk anytime. As we walked to our car, he yelled to us, "You can go back to Kentucky, now and tell those folks up there that you've met a real beachcomber now."

In addition to appearing in the news, both on television and in newspapers, Brooks Campbell has appeared in such magazines as National Geographic. The following is an excerpt from the article in which Mr. Campbell appeared:

Cedar Key is from another mold. Located on the Gulf of Mexico, near the mouth of the Suwannee River, it was at one time the queen of all the Gulf Coast fishing towns. It is still of that flavor, of boats chasing to the docks at sunset, of the odor of spiced shrimp in the air, of hurricane alerts and the boarding up of storefronts.

Brooks Campbell is a Cedar Key boat-builder, but he has little time for that now. At the age of 74 he has made what he believes is an important discovery. "Brother, I'm not bragging, but I've got something here no one else has ever come up with," he said. And then he told me.

"I had arthritis for 35 years. I went through the war with it, and they couldn't do anything for me in the service. I came back home and went to building boats, and I got down with this arthritis so bad I couldn't walk. So I sat down to studying, and I came up with this mixture. Within five months I didn't have any more pain. Where the arthritis went and when it's coming back, I don't know."

Among other things his medicine contains a petroleum derivative, Epsom salts,

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menthol, and iodine. Bottled under his own label, the liniment is licensed by the state government for sale in Florida.

Brooks Campbell said he will make no claim for his discovery other than "it knocks the pure hell out of arthritis."

Wm. S. Ellis, "Florida--A Time for Reckoning," National Geographic, 162 (August 1982), p. 210.

This is the note that Mrs. Campbell enclosed with the medicine for instructions.

Dampen finger and
Rub on aching joints
and pain. Twice
a day.

Best way to apply
the liniment