

by my great-grandfather and his brother, who both worked and made their money in the aerospace industry. The brother went on to start a chain of gas pumps. See, that's who Flying J was. This guy, the brother, Jay. He was a recreational pilot and he died in a plane crash a few years ago. So now Flying J is no longer both a man and a gas station, he's just a gas station.

From what I've heard, read, and been told, I guess The Island was a very nice and very secluded family getaway in the 1950s. And my great-grandfather and his brother probably called it Peanut Island back then. But usually they just said The Eleventh Estate, since this was the eleventh property they had bought together and because it was just one in a series of elegant-sounding, exclusive and somewhat palatial estates, dotting the international map, each with its own set of trampolines and gardens and horses and probably the trademark garage full of wooden kiteskis.

Now, when my dentist asks about The Island, he's not asking about The Island or about The Eleventh Estate. Though I suppose there's a certain glamour to those things, I can see the look of mirth with just a touch of very loving condescension in Dr. Bloodcastle's eyes. You see, he's asking about Chuck West.

Chuck is Jay's son and he moved on to the island in the seventies. Of course, The Eleventh Estate was never meant to be anyone's permanent home, although it was cared for year-round by hired help, various housesitters and locals from the neighboring islands. But that all changed when Chuck moved in. He was going to care for the house year after year, as the steward of The Eleventh Estate. A full-time caretaker, who had wasted away his youthful summers on the island and knew, I gather, all of its secrets.

I should point out at this time that there were never eleven simultaneous estates. The peak was when the estate count hit five altogether. So estates came in and out. But still, why did Chuck choose the Eleventh when there are so many? And why is it such a point of feuding and debacle?

Because it was the only estate that had its own island. And what could anyone want more than their own island? Their own city. Their own country, almost. Their own untouchable sovereignty!

And so, Chuck proceeded to, with great care and devotion, drive that island into the quagmire. It became not just his home, but the home of every friend and lover and college buddy that Chuck could collect. You know, not family. Other people. For a little while, family vacations to The Island continued as normal. It took