

15 MINUTES

Tales of an adventuresome author

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In 1981, Fort Myers-born insurance salesman, Leon D. Smith, dated a double agent while on a two week trip to Columbia with his cousin who was involved with a drug cartel there. Smith didn't know that, though. He thought his cousin was flying to Columbia on legitimate business, and that the girl was as she appeared: a beautiful third-year medical student.

"We just happened to meet this girl who became my friend," Smith said. "Luckily, I survived that trip."

Smith came back from Columbia and resumed his life in Fort Myers, still unaware. The next year, after a divorce, and personal reflection, he decided to temporarily move to San Jose, Costa Rica. During his more than two years there, Smith learned the truth about the girl and his cousin, who ended up being killed in the mid 1980s. He also — amazingly enough — became involved with an organization called M-3, which sought to overthrow the Nicaraguan government and create democracy there.

Now 69 years-old, Smith moved back to Fort Myers with his wife, Leonor (whom he met in Costa Rica), about 10 years ago, after living in California, then Utah. He continues working in insurance, and enjoys coffee with old friends at Edison National Bank in downtown Fort Myers once a week.

"Believe it or not, I was able to reestablish myself pretty easily because I had all these people who knew me and hadn't forgotten me," he said. "It's easier to do business



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO BY EVAN WILLIAMS

Leon D. Smith with a copy of The Tico Times (San Jose, Costa Rica) from 1982 with a story about his dramatic capture of a gang of muggers.

here. At my age, you can't keep reinventing yourself. Now that's not to say I wouldn't still like to have some adventures, just not of the same kind. I was young, having a good time, and I don't think I knew the danger I was in."

This first-time novelist is writing a book about his escapades and lobbying to have it published.

"I knew that this would make a great story and a great book," he said. "And I'm trying to get a screenplay done. I'd like Spielberg or someone like that, to direct it."

The book, which is still in its early stag-

es, details a childhood in old Florida, and how a few years in the early 80s provided adventures which have continued to unravel throughout his life, satisfying a lust for adventure, and also fueling Smith's imagination. The book is to be a fictional account, he said. And, as one might expect, all the names have been changed to protect the innocent, and the guilty. In the pages of Smith's book, tentatively titled "Living with a Terrorist," he is Jack Carter, his cousin is Tyrone, and the girl is Carmen (Smith suspects the real-life Carmen is dead).

Smith's mild and unassuming demeanor is

sometimes reflected in sentences he wrote, like these: "My birthplace was a sleepy little town located on the Southwest Coast of Florida. Our home on Jeffcott Street (still there) was a large frame house with four bedrooms and two indoor bathrooms. Quite modern for 1938."

And, for most of his life, Smith said, friends have thought of him as "an average guy."

But a newspaper story in The Tico Times (a San Jose newspaper) from 1982, one of the many documents he collected about his experiences from that time, suggests otherwise. It tells of another adventure on some other day, with a different girl ("I had so many girlfriends," Smith said, "She was one of many, a lovely girl"):

"A North American who saw a violent mugging on the streets of San Jose last Thursday became a real-life hero when he chased the criminals, caught them and turned them over to police," Linda Frazier wrote. "Leon Davis Smith, Jr. from Fort Myers, Flor., has lived in Costa Rica for only four months. He was driving through downtown San Jose with his girlfriend on Thursday afternoon when he saw two young men hurl a woman to the ground, kick and beat her, and strip her of valuables..."

Future adventures will be reserved for the pages of his book, where Smith is free to relive adventures equal or greater than life itself.

"One night I was sitting at Barnes and Noble and writing it by hand, and it's like you're reliving all these experiences over again," Smith said. "It's like you're there, you know?" ■

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