

Made an attempt or two to check out a couple of those newly sprouted shops on the causeway, but they seem pretty well buttoned up for now. One's called the Seahorse Trading Center, seems to have jewelry, custom leather, and headgear - another is Driftwood Fashions, announcing on the window "Fine Clothing Outlet". We noticed that the tennis shop is only open Saturdays for now - oh, and the Atlantic Beach Beauty Shop was doing business as usual, proving maybe that glamor knows no season. A couple of shifts - the basket ship has moved into the quarters formerly occupied by the florist. They have more room for their really beautiful baskets. In the shop where they used to be, Judy's Hair Styling is now located. Judy moved her shop there from the Beach shopping center on Salter Path Road in Atlantic Beach.

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Ever look at a sand dollar and pretend it was the first time. And think to yourself how it is a brother of the sea urchin and part of the starfish family - and be amazed all over again at what a magnificently created little thing it is? Hard to believe it gets around as well as it does. At high tide, for example, the sand dollar digs a third of its body into the sand so that its top two-thirds is vertical and exposed to the flow of the tide. During this time it somehow catches part particles of food between its short spines (much shorter than the prickly sea urchin, but, as we said, brothers!) Then, in among these spines are cilia, short hairs that constantly kind of beat, pulling the particles along the route to the mouth. The mouth, for goodness sakes, is on the underside of the shell, but the food is trapped on the topside and gets moved by the cilia til it's reached its goal.

After all this is over, the poor thing falls flat, and digs itself into the sand until the next high tide. What's fantastic is that each sea creature -- each creature of any kind, for that matter, has these marvelous powers to keep itself ticking.

The sand dollar is sometimes called the Holy Ghost Shell - and we all know the legend: the flower design is the Easter lily, and the five pointed star in the center is the Star of Bethlehem, while the five slits on the edge are supposed to represent the five wounds in the body of Christ. Then, on the back is the outline of a poinsettia. Of course, if you can bear to break a sand dollar, out fall five replicas of the doves of peach. Well, all that is perhaps somewhat contrived, but these little coincidences of nature appear again and again, and they do boggle the brain a bit.

What follows ponderings of the above sort is the ability to stop taking oneself so gloomily seriously. I mean, oneself is still pretty much of a speck in the old universe.

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A MEMORY OF CHRISTMAS --- One of the more spectacular and inspiring things that happen at Christmas in Pine Knoll Shores is the lighting of the candles -- not just any candles, even though candle-lighting is a Christmas tradition. These are candles, or luminaries as they are called, placed by residents along their driveways and canal bulkheads, as one of the activities of the PKS Garden Club to add to the good life here.

Even the brown paper bags take on a whole new aura with the candles glowing inside them. We have celebrated Christmas in many parts of this country and abroad...but surely nothing we have seen was more exciting or exquisitely radiant, particularly the display along the canal bulkheads from the Oakleaf Drive bridge this year, our first here. It was truly a memorable sight. - G. W. E.