

The Vescos -- Is Life A Bowl Of Cherries?

By Jean Sprain Wilson
New Era Features

Shortly after the Emerald Seas left port at Nassau, Bahamas, a powerful 40-foot racing boat shot out after it and then crossed back and forth in its wake, popping up and down with waves like a playful porpoise. Some of the passengers at the rails of the cruiseship took pictures of the daredevil pilot. They probably do not know to this day that they have a rare shot, a photo of a Vesco, Tony, the second son of fugitive financier Robert Vesco.

The Vescos keep a low profile in the Bahamas and Costa Rica, two countries in which the family have made new homes for themselves. Only a part of it has to do with Vesco's flight from the United States as an alternative to being a co-defendant with former Attorney General John Mitchell and former Commerce Secretary Maurice Stans on federal charges arising out of his secret gift of \$200,000 to President Nixon's re-election campaign.

"Bob doesn't need people," says Pat Vesco, his attractive wife. "If he could put his family in a castle high on a mountain and build a wall around us, he could live happily ever after."

There are already walls around the Vesco homes in New Providence, Bahamas, and in suburban San Jose, Costa Rica. There are highly sophisticated electronic protection systems, floodlights and bodyguards to protect the family of a rich and controversial man with many enemies. But Bob Vesco was building invisible walls around his family long before his name exploded into scandalous headlines two years ago.

The former garage mechanic who became a millionaire before he was 30 sequestered his family on an 80-acre estate in Booton Township, N.J., where they did little socializing with the neighbors. With tennis courts, a one-acre man-made pool, a riding stable, and a helicopter pad, and each other they seemed to have all they needed to keep them happy. Townspeople spoke of them as "mysterious."



Robert Vesco, the one-time mechanic multi-millionaire, made a gift to the Nixon campaign that may prove the undoing of many highly-placed people

"A mystery man" was also what financial writers called Robert Vesco when he showed up in Switzerland in 1970 to merge his own International Controls Corporation with Investors Overseas Service, the faltering billion dollar mutual funds conglomerate spawned by Bernard Cornfeld, which eventually led to an investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Today there are few people who have not read about Vesco's alleged attempts to influence government officials to "get the SEC off his back" with his huge campaign contribution. Yet they know nothing about the family which his wife claims is all he ever needs for happiness anywhere.

Robert Vesco was only 17 and still in high school when he met and married Pat, who is a year older.

The son of an automotive worker, Vesco's first job was as a garage mechanic. Then he went to school at night studying mechanical drafting which led to a draftsman's job with Reynolds Metal. Mrs. Vesco remembers how desperately poor they were. "We lived downtown and we never went anywhere, ever. We were just too poor. To go as far as Woodward Avenue (Detroit's main street) was like crossing the border."

The road to riches began for the Vescos when he gave up draftsmanship for sales and marketing at Olin Mathison Chemical Corporation. Vesco was still only 25 when he started his own company selling merchandise to manufacturing firms on a commission basis. When he encountered difficulties collecting his commissions, he made arrangements with his clients for unpaid bills to be converted into shares in their respective companies. Eventually he acquired enough interest in various small companies to merge them into the International Controls Corporation and to set up his family in style and seclusion on the New Jersey estate, now occupied by his parents, the Donald Vescos.

Pat Vesco looks much as she did as a bride — a trim figure, a doll-like face and brown hair that hangs loose around her shoulders or is sometimes pulled into a pony-tail. "She's good at sizing up people. She can spot a phony in a flash," says one of their business associates. "And she's shrewd, every bit as shrewd as Bob."

Vesco appears ten years older than his 37 years. An athletic 6-foot-2, sun-bronzed with a perpetual

five-o'clock shadow, and a dab of a mustache, he wears his conservatively cut hair slicked back. He speaks softly and deliberately and even more so when tempers flare.

Both Vescos are conscientious parents, affectionate with the children and strong disciplinarians. The father has always spent virtually all his free time with his brood.

Their father sees to it that the kids are up early in the mornings and that they show up promptly at meal times. He decides whether they may have permission to go out at night, and what time they must return. But like many another teenager, they have tried sneaking out again by bribing the house bodyguards.

The oldest son, Daniel, 19, is quiet, well-mannered, and like his father, seems older than his years. And he is very straight, no long hair or flam-

*All of Vesco's
free time is spent
with his brood*

boyant dress for him. Also like his father, he has gone into business early in life. His father bought him a clothing store in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Tony, 17, is a speed demon. On Costa Rica he tears around the mountains on motor bikes or rips through the Nassau waters in his racing boat. Sometimes he goes to the Pilot Club in Miami to participate in the boat races there, but he hasn't won yet.

Dawn, 13, is currently in love with horses. It was for her that her father built a barn as big as a ball field, and two riding rings at their New Jersey estate. Now she rides in Costa Rica.

Bobby at age 10 is the baby and the pet. He is a game kid who tries to keep up with the older ones, regardless of their activities.

All members of the family are active participants in outdoor sports and that is where they put their money.

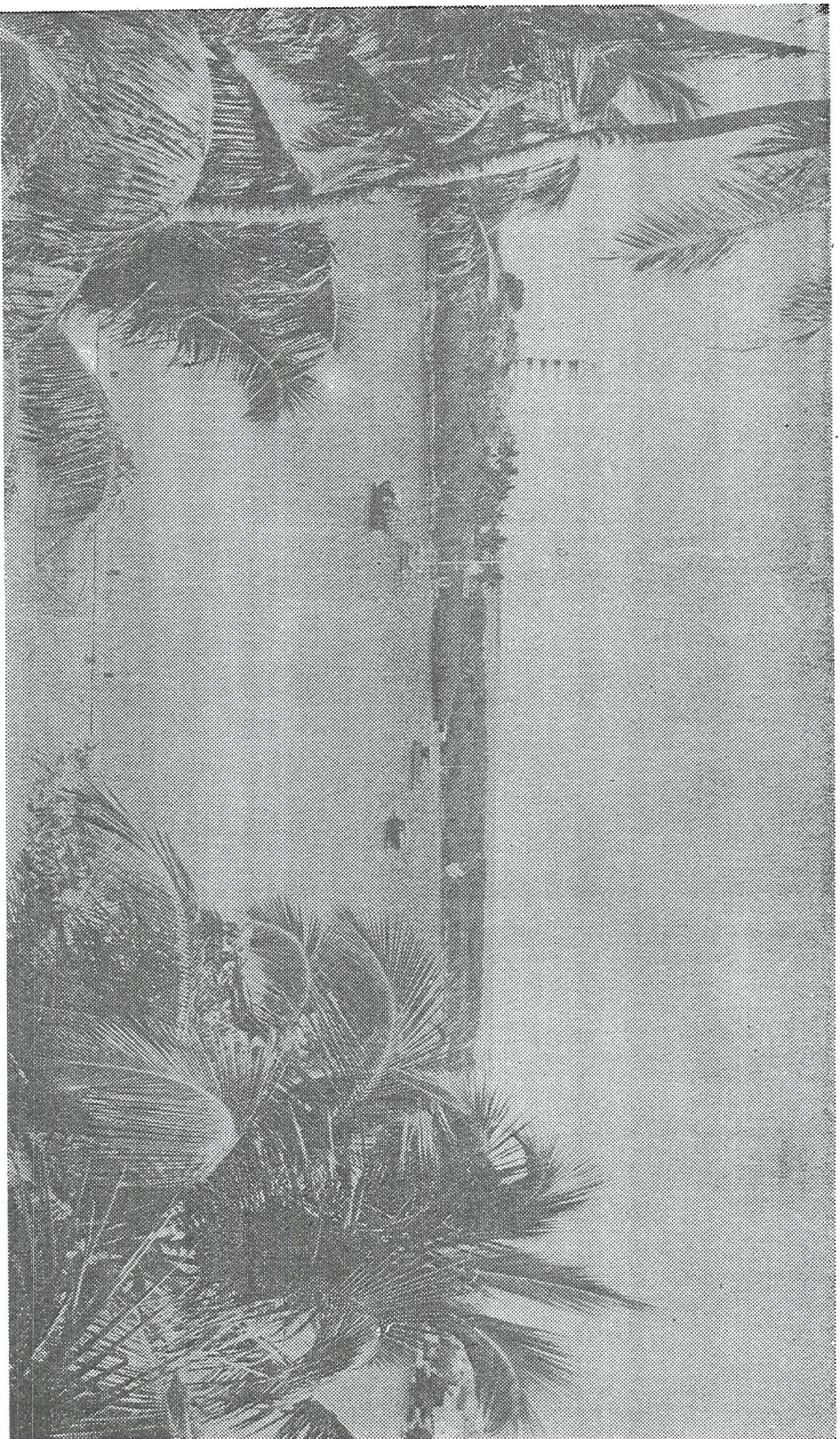
In Nassau the kids find that for the most part being a Vesco is a thing of pride, not shame. In fact,

Tony finds it to be a real ego trip — the way the Bahamians call his Dad "The Big Man" and treat them like royalty sometimes. The press there is largely sympathetic to their father who has invested millions of dollars in Bahamian businesses and whom the government refused to extradite to the United States.

The same once held true in Costa Rica into which Vesco poured many more millions of dollars and from which he also escaped extradition. However, the press has become increasingly critical lately, which has prompted Vesco to buy his own newspaper as his voice.

Sometimes Mrs. Vesco is flippant about their troubles. Once when someone asked her where Donald Nixon, the President's nephew, happened to be, she said, "Oh, back at the house cutting out newspaper articles so Bob will have something to read if they get him into prison."

Sometimes she cries. She cries a lot. She tells friends she does. And these friends believe Pat Vesco wouldn't mind being poor again in a world where there is no need for bodyguards. Once she lamented to a friend, "What's happened to our good old 9-to-5 life, watching television, and drinking a couple of Stroh's beers on a Saturday night? The simple life looks pretty good."



The beaches and waters of the Bahamas give the Vescos their present place in the sun

**The low profile
now includes
a fleet of boats
and two jets**