

Author of 'Visa Required' prefers rugged traveling

By Carolyn Susman

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For Judy Schrafft, exploring definitely does not mean hunting down the best deal on Worth Avenue.

An intrepid adventuress -- she won't use that word to describe herself because she claims it has off-color meanings -- Schrafft has visited nearly 100 countries around the globe. She's off to another, Ethiopia, in April.

But before she packs her one travel bag (if you don't count the shoulder bag she carries), she talks about what makes a successful trip for her.

"I love the reality of third-world countries," she says, as her affectionate dogs, Gatsby and Meghan, cuddle with visitors in her Palm Beach home.

"I like the honesty; you don't get gussied up. I like getting down with people."

And sometimes getting down literally means getting down -- under the oceans. She is an experienced scuba diver whose life of outdoor adventures started with taking lessons from Palm Beach County's acclaimed diver, the late Norine Rouse, and being certified in 1970.

Schrafft founded the Coral Reef Society after she saw these exceptional living wonders being buried by silt from beach renourishment, and she has fought not only to save the reefs but for animal rights, as well.

Her environmental fights at home haven't stopped her from seeking out excitement all over. She has completed three books on her travels, and her latest, the self-published book of adventures, *Visa Required*, is now available at the Palm Beach Bookstore on Royal Poinciana Way. She says this is probably her last book because, she jokes, she is running out of places to go.

Branching out into archeology opened new vistas of discovery for her,

but she doesn't dive as much as before. Her adventures take place more above ground now, to the point where she once slept on a roof top with a group of fellow travelers because no other accommodations were available. She doesn't hold out for five-star service. In fact, she prefers the rugged way to travel and is a member of the elite Explorer's Club -- one of the first three women to be made members.

"I like to be the first footprint on the beach," she says of her fondness for out-of-the-way places. "You can't do that if the rest of the world preceded you there."

Before being entranced by scuba diving, where she was a part of Rouse's first adult class, Schrafft was a landlubber from a New York family of "urbanites." It was this exciting introduction to the sea that set her off on her series of explorations, pieces from which sit around her home.

What was her worst experience?

"I never had a horrendous experience," she said. "I spent the night in an airport in Madras, India, once and lost luggage. But you roll with it. You loosen up and take a minimum of possessions with you."

Her best life lesson? "Travel light."