



MAGIC HARBOR

by Don Berry

SYNOPSIS

Puget Sound, in the far northwest corner of the United States, is a gigantic fiord system with approximately 2000 miles of rugged coastline. The Sound includes everything from wilderness archipelagos to the mega-urban strip of Everett/Seattle/Tacoma/Olympia.

Along this island-dotted inland sea there is a small group of people (certainly fewer than 100) who truly live on the water -- not at docks or marinas, but floating free. They live on the hook, out at anchor with no connections to shore and no other homes than their boats. They have no electricity except what they produce themselves, no running water, no telephone. Some are ordinary, some are eccentric, some are plain lunatics. All are fiercely independent. They know themselves and each other as "water rats."

The name of the water rat game was best spoken by the skipper of the scow-schooner OBLIO in Eagle Harbor:

"This is the closest thing to liberty I know. If I knew anything closer, I'd be there instead."

The book MAGIC HARBOR is a memoir of people and events from six years on the Puget Sound waters. Every word is true. Only one person's name and one boat name have been changed. (And believe me, the argument about that among the water rats lasted for two years.)

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ON THE HOOK

At different times in my life I have had the privilege of some of the great harbors of the world: English Harbor in Antigua, the sweet arc of the Anse Mitan in Martinique, Auckland harbor in New Zealand, Quartermaster Harbor on Vashon Island. But in my mind, the jewel among these is the island harbor in Puget Sound where I now live.

Puget Sound is unique among the world's waters, a great canyon of ocean a hundred miles long and ten miles wide, cut into the continent millenia ago by the grinding of glacial ice. As the glacier withdrew, allowing the ocean to pour in, it carved out dozens of inlets, bays, coves and harbors in bewildering profusion, dotting the water with hundreds of islands, some in paradisiacal archipelagos like the San Juans, others in relative isolation like Vashon and Bainbridge and Whidby. All told, there are over two thousand miles of coastline in the Sound.

Thousands of vessels traverse this inland sea every day; it is a strangely urban world. Boats range from leaky plywood dinghies through racing yachts to the gigantic container ships like great seaborne dinosaurs making their ponderous way down the shipping channel. And crossing back and forth dozens of times a day, the ubiquitous white ferries with up to three hundred automobiles aboard.

Among the hundreds of thousands of people who travel the waters of the Sound every day, there is a tiny, virtually invisible community of water people who do not consider the land their home. They do not tie to docks or wharves, nor fit neatly into marina slips. They ride free at anchor; they live on the hook.

In all of Puget Sound, along the two thousand mile twists and turns of shoreline, the number of people living on the hook is probably no more than sixty or seventy; certainly fewer than a hundred. Universally, they know themselves, and each other, as water rats. The water rat's world is a tiny planet, a micro-universe of wind and water, statistically not worthy of anyone's notice.

Living on the hook is very different from, say, living on a boat at a marina. The water rats have, by choice, given up the support systems the landbound, and the dockbound, take for granted. They are not connected to electricity, to heat, to telephones, to running water, to any of the umbilicals of organized society. They live beyond the edge where the dominant culture stops. It is a life that can only be chosen intentionally, because the requirements are unyielding; you either take full responsibility for your own life, or you go under.

For the water rat, a safe harbor is the most precious of the jewels of the sea. It is the physical equivalent of that still, safe place in the center of every being, the place of ultimate refuge that is sought through meditation or science or art or philosophy; protection from the storms that assail us all.

I know of no safer harbor anywhere than Eagle Harbor. It lies on an island, eight miles across Puget Sound from the metropolitan skyline of Seattle. The dogleg channel into the mouth of the harbor requires four changes of course; and the harbor itself zig-zags through another three turns, extending two miles back into the body of the island. No harbor is better protected against the prevailing winds; the holding ground for the anchor is reliable; there is easy access landside for supplies.

But these are only the physical elements of this safe place, easy to describe. There is another aspect, known to us all, but not easy to define, and impossible to explain. Those who know this harbor best

sometimes use the word "magic." And magic, to the water people, means that which protects us from harm.

In this harbor, as in all harbors, vessels sometimes drag anchor in storms -- but here, rather than colliding, or going disastrously aground on the lee shore, they seem to avoid each other with a mysterious marine courtesy. Even when our vessels are in hazard, they do not come to harm.

And the sea people themselves are safe from harm here. Again and again I have seen sailors come to this harbor wounded, in body or mind or spirit, and depart somehow healed. The harbor cares for us, nurtures us, and heals us with its silence and gentleness and beauty.

The water rat community is, inevitably, a community of fiercely independent eccentrics, of solitaires. Crazies, if you like. In such a world there are, of course, all varieties of opinions and philosophies and convictions, some sensible, some quite mad. What the water rats hold in common is that each of them has, at some point, consciously traded off the comforts and securities and anxieties of the mainstream for another game with higher stakes.

The skipper of the schooner OBLIO probably defined the game best when he said, "This is the closest thing to liberty I know. If I knew anything closer, I'd be there instead."

end

On the hook
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DEPARTURE

It is the common wisdom that one's self image should derive from an inner center, a core of clear conviction of individual worth. Philosophically I like to agree with this idea, but it is not, in my observation, the way it works. Most of us derive our actual self-image from two outside factors: how others look at us, and how things are going. Those who don't are often rather dangerous psychotics.

The Bhagavad Gita holds that the truly wise man is equal in victory and defeat. Much as I wish it were so, I am not up to that standard. Defeat gets me down.

Beginning about the time Ronald Reagan took office, all my battles began to end in defeats. (I don't blame Reagan for this, but presidents, whatever else they may be, are a convenient way of dating events.)

These defeats were great and small, and included a number of battles I did not even know I was engaging in. They included, as high points:

1. The failure of my business.
2. Going blind from cataracts in both eyes.
3. The breakup of a thirty year marriage.

I did not react well to these events. Had I been writing a novel, my protagonist would have met these obstacles with fierce determination, chin up and brave. I did not. I became subject to a kind of creeping paralysis of will, and spent most of my time either looking at a computer or a TV screen.

It occurred to me then that I may not even be the protagonist of my own life saga, since I seem to lack the necessary virtues of the true protagonist. Perhaps I am local color, or a sub-plot that could well disappear in any disciplined editing of the story. Who, then, would remain? Whose story is it really? Damned if I know.

The final straw broke on September 11th of my 56th year, when the ceiling of my apartment collapsed, depositing half a ton of rubble on the bed where I had been sitting a moment before.

I had been installed in this comfortable little apartment for three years, unaware whether the wind was blowing or not. I liked not knowing. I liked going to bed at 70 degrees and waking up at 70 degrees. I liked being within ten minutes of anything I wanted to do in Seattle. I liked the comfort of it. But things were gradually slipping away. It lacked all sense of the Real.

The collapse of my ceiling shocked me briefly out of the numbness into which I had been steadily sinking. In spite of my deep reluctance to move at all, it was time for a drastic change. It was time to go someplace where I could sort out what was Real from what was un-Real.

I decided to go back on the water. It was the only place I knew for certain I would have to deal with things as they arose, without evasion or quibbling or self-hypnosis. Life on the water is not easy, but it is rarely ambiguous.

Over a three month period after the ceiling collapse I searched for, and found, a small powerboat I could

live on. It was in the port of Bellingham, a hundred miles away near the Canadian border. On a clear day in mid-December I caught a Greyhound going north and set out on a venture that is always underpinned with apprehension: Picking up the New Boat.

Boats do not like to change hands. Mariners fall into two categories, those who know and dread it, and those who know it and obstinately refuse to admit it. Anyone who is not apprehensive about that first voyage, particularly a solo voyage, is paying insufficient attention.

The bus trip, however, was pleasant, and I was basking in a few small victories. I had conceived and executed a plan of numerous steps, and was feeling satisfied with my patience and persistence. It would have been trivial to anyone comfortable in the mainstream world, but for me it was like clearing the foothills of Everest. The mental refrain that repeated itself in my mind was "This is the first day of my new life."

I find it easier to deal with problems both bureaucratic and physical if I pretend I'm in a foreign country, where I seem to have more patience with the way things turn. So, on the bus trip I pretended I was in the lesser Antilles, remembering ten mile treks to find a boatyard in countries whose language I spoke feebly and whose bureaucracy was actively hostile.

This mild fiction didn't actually work very well. There were neither chickens, pigs, nor large hands of bananas on the Greyhound and all the people were a pale, greyish pink instead of rich, lustrous blacks and browns. And nobody talked to each other. It was still America. However, the fantasy did succeed in creating a certain patient resignation toward the coming events.

After a day of trivial paperwork, satisfying the bureaucracies in their various configurations, there was an abrupt change of world. Suddenly the project shifted gears from the abstract, number-filled domain of bankers and brokers and promissory notes and contracts and licenses, and was plunged into the physical world of wind, water and mechanical systems. I finally got on board ADRIANA in the late afternoon.

The engine wouldn't start, the head didn't work, the radio was inoperative, the shorepower system had the wrong fittings and I couldn't get the missing letter of her name (which I had decided to keep) to stick in place. Of the first five things I tried to do, five failed. And the temperature began to drop alarmingly.

The previous owner had to come over from Lummi Island by ferry to try and sort things out. He was clearly puzzled that his little darling was behaving so badly, but he cheerfully set in to make things right. Over the next three hours he got most things corrected. The broker departed to buy fittings for the shorepower (which had been bugged by his boss) and I settled down with my little sleeping bag to a miserably cold and discouraged night aboard. The temperature that night was 20 degrees, with a 30 knot wind from the north.

In the morning, we set out to clear ADRIANA from her cramped slip in the marina and get her over to the fuel dock. I had never been at her helm. My original intention had been to get her into clear water and practice maneuvering to docks and so forth, but it didn't work out that way.

The departure is best characterized by the broker's wry summation: "Well, we didn't hit anything but pilings." Right.

Time had gotten short, and by the time I departed into Bellingham Bay, I had only about five hours of light,

all of which I would need to reach Oak Harbor.

By the time I had cleared the lee of the northern point, the seas were whitecapping at every wave. The wind remained northerly at 30 knots, and as I turned south I turned into the worst possible steering conditions, following winds and following seas in a vessel with enormous windage.

The chop was extremely erratic and short. I looked at the charts and saw, somewhat to my surprise, that the northerly wind had an unobstructed fetch from the Straits of Georgia of hundreds of miles. Having always thought of Puget Sound as sheltered waters, this was not an agreeable surprise.

The seas were so short there was no real chance to establish a rhythm of steering through them. The farther out I got, the worse the steering became, until it was a serious wrestling match between an indolent and sedentary TV watcher and northern Puget Sound. This is not a match any decent official would allow to continue. It was hard work, too hard for me.

I was heading toward Guemes Island and a series of narrowing channels between islands. Since I didn't know these waters, I had no idea whether the narrowing channels would pile the waves up wildly, as they do in some places, or whether they would act as shelter.

There then occurred a theme that would recur on scales both great and small through the whole period to come. The theme is this: I am right at the edge of my capabilities, and I don't know if things are going to get better or worse.

My mental monitor observed irritably, "What the hell are you doing out here in bad conditions, all alone on a boat you don't know in waters you don't know?" I had no answer, and the monitor only said it once.

After several hours of this unequal battle I swung into the channel between Guemes Island and Samish Island, and the seas began to ease off. By the time I was well into shallow Padilla Bay, it was calm. Immensely relieved, I began to try to find the channel markers leading into Swinomish Channel, the inland passage everyone had advised me was extremely difficult to find. Padilla Bay is basically a huge mudflat, only a couple of feet deep, and if you miss the channel the chances are good you'll spend the tide aground. However, it turned out to be easy to find the channel, and I sailed in just as though I knew what I was doing.

Swinomish Channel was a delight. It is more like a river than a saltwater channel, perhaps fifty yards wide, reminiscent of European canals. I eased past grazing cattle and little farms, and on the left the Cascades loomed up brilliantly white and snowcapped. Contrary to expectations, the dog-leg exit from the channel was also well marked. There wasn't really anyplace else to go.

The exit from the Swinomish channel, past Goat Island, squirts you out into Skagit Bay, the passage between the mainland and the northern end of Whidbey Island. It was middling late afternoon. Now things were the way they 'sposed to be on Puget Sound. The north wind had left skies brilliantly clear. The spaces were vast. I could see fifty miles across the calm waters to the Cascades. In my apartment in Capitol Hill I never knew if the wind were blowing or not. Here I knew, and my eyes were eased by distance.

I had arranged to spend the night with a friend on Whidbey Island. This had been set for three months, and even when the various delays had shown that I was going to be in transit on that day, I had decided

to keep the appointment.

I was not, I think, very good company. After only one day on the water I was both tired and incredibly spacy, spacy from the careening struggle against following seas. But it was glorious to have a warm bed and good food and company after the chilly, hard-edged night before.

I left early the next morning, and the forty miles down Saratoga Passage were archetypal Puget Sound cruising. The skies were crystal clear, and I could see the snow-peaked mountains on both sides, the Cascades to port and the Olympics to starboard. I steered straight south between them on the flat water. I was happy with my engine now, and no longer waiting apprehensively for coughs and falters. She purred.

A sailor I'd talked to when I was looking for the boat had constantly used a cheerful phrase that stuck in my mind: "Cruisin' down the bay."

Well, that's just what I was doing, by god. Cruisin' down the bay. I still had my apartment and gear in Capitol Hill, I still had to deal with my lifelong Nightmare of Moving. I still didn't know if the life-gamble would work, and wouldn't know the answer to that one for a long, long time. But I could tick off point after point that had been visualized, and then realized. And this was the biggest. I was on board at last, and cruisin' down the bay.

I was back on the water.

end

Departure
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PERFECT COMFORT

Three times in my life I have had a night's sleep that was at least as memorable as any waking experience. All have been on the water.

Twenty years ago I was sailing down the Lesser Antilles, from Martinique to Bequia, in a fat little 30' sloop named HORNPIPE, skippered by a world-class single-handed ocean racer named Tom. I had hitched a ride down-island with HORNPIPE, partly because I wanted to go down-island, partly in order to have the privilege and education of sailing with Tom. I'd brought my sextant aboard, and Tom was going to give me his techniques of getting stable noon sights.

When we cleared the mouth of Fort-de-France on Martinique, the wind was rising. In the middle of the night, when I came on watch, I was astonished at the size of the seas. They were enormous, gigantic. The tops were all breaking higher than our mast. Not white-capping. Breaking. Tom was at the helm, contentedly puffing on his pipe. As far as Tom was concerned, he was just cruisin' down the bay.

"Tom, what are these winds?"

"Well," Tom said, looking around thoughtfully, "'bout Force 9, I guess."

I just shook my head. I don't think I had ever seen Force 9 winds, much less sailed in them. I stood my watch, and actually enjoyed the steering rhythm when I wasn't terrified.

After my watch I went below and wedged myself tightly under the saloon table, between the center post and the bench. Totally immobilized, my body couldn't move, and the only sensation I had was the motion of HORNPIPE.

I dreamed. I dreamed I was a porpoise, lunging and turning, rising high and diving almost in free fall.

With Tom's sure hand at the helm, it was one of the most ecstatic physical experiences I've ever had. It was, and is, an indescribable experience of another world. My conscious mind, that pesky bane of my existence, was turned off, and there was only the movement of the sea, and the skill of a helmsman who understood it better than he understood the flow of his own blood.

The second time, on the schooner SOUTHWIND, we were crossing the Anegata Passage in a gale. It was so dark the only time you could see the shrouds was when the lightning flashed. And in those stroboscopic flashes, the surrounding sea was a churning mass of white, and you'd almost rather be sailing blind.

There were three helmsmen: Captain John, Sunshine, and myself. We rotated back through the skipper's cabin, with the crewman whose watch was coming up sleeping the last four hours in the aft cabin where he'd be easy to reach if the on-watch helmsman got too tired. (We weren't into seaborne ordeals, and we'd just change the watch if anybody got too tired.)

Once again I was wedged in, behind the chart table, with my back horizontal on the bench and my legs hoisted up on the table, facing fore and aft. Once again sleeping, but without dreams, my body was purely given over to the rise and fall of the sea. There must be some archetypal world where this ecstatic motion

is the only kind of experience. Perhaps that is why the porpoise wears his enigmatic smile.

The third time, in Eagle Harbor, was less dramatic, but as memorable, and perhaps more instructive.

I had brought ADRIANA down from Bellingham in the middle of December. I had to leave her anchored while I returned to my apartment in Seattle to finish working on a film -- my last gesture in the land life before coming back to the water.

When I returned to Eagle Harbor a week later, the boat was frozen, my engine wouldn't start, and my dinghy had been stolen. In addition, the temperature had plummeted to near zero in the phenomenon we call the Arctic Express.

ADRIANA was not set up for living when I bought her. She had only a little catalytic heater that might have been all right to warm your hands on a cool June evening. But it was no match for the Arctic Express. Coming aboard in these miserable conditions it felt as if I were inhabiting a solid block of ice.

When I was back in Seattle in the working interim, a huge package had arrived. My friend had sent me a leaving-land gift: a white goose down comforter.

Now, on this cold and miserable night, with a broken engine, physically weaker than I had guessed, tied up crippled to a public dock that didn't want me, I knew I was looking at a long uphill climb.

But tucked in a flannel sleeping bag, with the mysterious and magical lightness of the comforter over me, tucked around my neck, and with my cheeks stinging from the cold, I suddenly found a position that was totally, entirely, completely comfortable. I could not feel the muscle strains of the day, the fatigue of my discouragements, the doubts about my own ability to deal with this transition.

In drowsy sleep, my mental monitor affirmed with great clarity:

"This is my perfect comfort."

And during the night, every time I switched over, and came back to that exact position, my monitor said it again:

"This is my perfect comfort."

And that is the third of my memorable sleeps. May all creatures, whatever their destiny, find one position of perfect comfort, and know that they have found it.

end

Perfect Comfort
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TEACHING ME A LESSON

Julia of LEGACY reminds me most of the Wild Woman in Northwest Indian mythology: an explosive and mysterious figure, unpredictable and funny and dangerous in ways you can't even imagine. When Julia is in a wild swing, it is like opening a window into the incandescent heart of feminine energy; the dark goddess Kali. She roars, she screams, she guffaws, she overpowers everything around with raw, uncontrolled energy.

This description is rather far ahead of the story, because my first encounter with her gave very little hint of her Wild Woman persona.

I first met Julia shortly after I came into Eagle Harbor. She was a slim, graceful woman with long, straight blond hair falling down her back -- the very image of a California girl. She was in her early forties, but she looked and moved like a twenty year old. She was not attempting to look young -- her spirit was simply a good deal younger than her chronology. She had a girlish quality that made it seem incredible when I later learned there was a fifteen year old son, living someplace down south with his father.

Julia had no previous experience with the water, or water living. She came into the harbor from nowhere, bought a slim, strongly built little 26' sloop called LEGACY, and declared her intention to live at anchor from that point forward.

This is a gesture of such foolhardy boldness it takes your breath away. The chances of surviving the first winter alone are vanishingly small, and with none of the necessary skills or experience, it seemed inevitable she would be winterkill.

I met her at the dock one day, and our first encounter endeared her to me forever. She came aboard my boat for a while, and we had interesting conversation, on subjects I don't remember. She had turns of speech and mannerisms I couldn't interpret or predict. She often blurted, and was clearly ill at ease. She was not comfortable with small talk, and she often peered at me very closely. Not hostile, but appraising.

When she got up to leave, she said, "Can I come talk to you again?"

"Sure," I said.

"How often?" she said.

"Hell, I don't know," I said. "Whenever you want, I guess."

"Twice a week?" she said. "Is that too much? I don't want to be a nuisance or anything. And I can't tell."

I was in a particularly severe hermit phase at that time, and I said, "There doesn't have to be a number. Just don't push it."

"O.K.," she said. And left the boat with a smile.

I didn't see her again for a year.

During that year she worked on bringing LEGACY up to seaworthy, lived on it much of the time, disappeared for long periods, came back, disappeared again. She didn't live at anchor all the time, but she was definitely not winterkill. It was clear even from a distance that if she lacked specific skills, she had a dogged endurance without limit. For all her girlish appearance, she was tough as she needed to be. And she was as committed to the liberty of the anchor as the most seasoned water rat in the harbor.

She was gone for one period of several months, and I later learned she'd gone to Reno. While she was there she:

1. worked in the kitchens of three casinos;
2. got arrested for drunk and disorderly and went to jail;
3. did public service living in Reno's homeless shelters;
4. rang bells for the Salvation Army at Christmas;
5. was diagnosed by the State of California as paranoid-schizophrenic and awarded a monthly "crazy check" as unable to hold a job;
6. developed a scheme for an underground railroad to funnel the homeless of Reno to the Northwest, with the idea of installing them all on boats.

When I encountered her the next winter in Eagle Harbor, she looked at me appraisingly, and a little smile just sketched itself around the corners of her eyes.

"Is this too soon?" she said.

It was only the first of many lessons the Wild Woman taught me.

end

Teaching me a lesson
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WIND

The first northwesterly gust slams across Eagle Harbor just before two o'clock in the morning. My boat rears back against her anchor line like a frightened horse. A burst of adrenaline wakes me, and I feel a sudden panic as I realize I've been asleep more than two hours.

Too long. I check the pressure water system quickly, and find it's frozen solid while I slept. For the past ten days I've had to run a little water through all the lines every hour or so while the temperature never rises above 20 degrees, and at night is sometimes down to 4 or 5. My water lines are copper, exposed, and above the water line. Keeping them thawed takes all my time, and in the end has proven impossible, because I cannot stay awake enough to do it.

It's now been more than a week since I've had any clothes off. If I stop feeding the fire for even twenty minutes or so the inside cabin temperature drops to that of the outside freeze, a freeze that began a week before Christmas with the first wave of the Arctic Express that mutilated the Puget Sound with a ferocity not seen in a hundred years. On the land more than 200,000 houses are without power, and trees are falling like dominoes.

After the first night of northerlies, on December 18, I woke to an unexpectedly spacious harbor. The 50' ferro-cement ketch on my starboard was gone. The smaller white ketch skippered by crazy Ken was gone. When I looked toward the head of the harbor, the 100' beam trawler GRATITUDE was gone, with my friends Harvey and Debbie aboard. All were gone aground on the lee shore in the heavy gusts as the front moved through.

Harvey, I learned later, had spent the whole night on deck single-handed, afraid to let Debbie come up, simultaneously fighting an uncontrollable boat and 70 knot gusts that blew him into the bulwarks every time he tried to stand up. In the battle he lost both his bower and stern anchors, the frozen lines cut first by dragging against a sharp block, then by the propellor as he tried to power off the beach.

Jerry, on the sloop TARUGA, faced a classic dilemma -- freeze or asphyxiate. Every time he got a fire going in his stove, a heavy gust slammed down his chimney, putting the fire out and filling the cabin with thick smoke. He had to open the cabin to the weather to get rid of the smoke, then start all over again building a fire. The next big gust did the same thing. He never succeeded in building a fire that first night, and eventually collapsed into his sleeping bag, exhausted and nearly suffocated.

That was the first wave. Even when the winds abated after the first hammering, it was still too strong to row against, except in short, twenty minute windows of comparative calm. In those windows, all the dinghies dashed for shore, the water rats trying to get together enough fuel to keep themselves from freezing for another day. In the shoreside park trees had been blowing down at a prodigious rate, leaving plenty of easily available firewood, and the little hand saws were busy.

There is some respite from the winds around Christmas Day and the day after -- a blessed gift of time enough to get fuel in for the next assault.

By now a water line has burst somewhere in the boat, and I cannot find out where. Part of my water system runs along a bulkhead in my engine compartment, isolated from the main cabin and virtually impossible to heat. In theory it's part of a "hot water" system, but since it only operates when hooked to

shore power, I have never used it. Now it is no longer a promise of some future luxury of hot water, but only a liability, because I cannot get the engine compartment above 15 degrees. I disable the fuse switch to the water pump and try to find some way to get heat to the exposed lines. I arrive at an attempt that is nearly fatal.

I direct the exhaust from my little generator to play across the bulkhead where the lines run, hoping the heat will at least prevent another break. Unfortunately, it is the bulkhead separating the engine compartment from the cabin, and while the exhaust heat helps to warm the engine compartment, it also feeds a steady supply of carbon monoxide into the cabin.

Normally there is plenty of ventilation in the cabin. Even in freezing weather I leave the aft partly open to give my cat Barnacle access to the deck and get rid of smoke. But in this freeze, both Barnacle and I are battened in as airtight as I can make us. The result is a fairly well arranged suicide scheme, planned not out of depression but stupidity.

Late that night, after six hours of running the generator, I collapse in what feels like a combination of drunken stupor and partial stroke. I lose all coordination on my left side, and I'm unable to pick up objects, my fingers closing in the air six inches above them. My legs won't hold me up, and I'm disoriented, confused, unable to interpret what is happening.

I stagger back through the cabin toward the aft deck. The door is frozen tightly shut, and I can't coordinate my actions enough to force it free. Finally I am able to break loose enough ice to open the sliding door and get out on the aft deck. I don't know how long I lie there on the ice-coated deck, gasping, trying to force air into my lungs. It seems like a long time. Eventually I get some nervous system control back, enough to get down through the aft hatch to shut off the generator. Most of that night I spend with my head out the aft hatch, gratefully swallowing gulps of the icy air.

When the faculty of reason returns, I conclude it had not been a good plan.

The second wave hits on the Friday night after Christmas. The weather service predicts it will be as bad as the first, but nobody really believes it. Our normal winter storms come with heavy winds from the south, and Eagle Harbor is so sheltered from the southerlies the water rats are unnaturally complacent. Most anchors are set to take a southerly strain. None of us have seen winds here like the hammering northerlies of that first Arctic Express. It almost seems as though the harbor acts as a venturi, funneling and amplifying the northerlies as they slam down over the hill and roar across the harbor.

When the second wave hits, it is astonishing in its violence. The gusts in the middle harbor are 10 to 20 knots worse than the first wave.

Beginning with that first hammer blow at two o'clock, the wind rises steadily as the night turns greyish dawn. By eight o'clock a conservative guess is a steady 50 knots, and I can't even guess the velocity of gusts.

At 50 knots, the surface of the sea smokes. Like a hysterical child, the wind raises a wave and slams it down again, tearing off the foaming top and scattering it downwind in a thick, roaring haze of freezing spray like a low fog.

The waves are not high, flattened by the ferocity of the wind, but each is angrily capped with blowing

white foam that streaks past my hull like the rapids of a whitewater river.

The hardest to tolerate in these conditions is the noise. I am reasonably secure about my anchor, but the noise rises to such a level that the volume alone infects me with fear. The wind roars and slams me around with a sound like three maddened grizzly bears trying to claw my tiny little capsule of a boat to shreds.

At the waterline, the water has ceased to be liquid. The waves crash into my hull like logs, and with every strike the boat shudders as in a collision. The hull and cabin have become the interior of a drum being pounded with hysterical ferocity.

I am isolated in this fragile cocoon, surrounded above and below, on every side, with a manic roaring and hammering that is never more than a foot from my head.

There is no relief. The roar of wind and sea drowns out any other sound. There is no way to stop it, there is no way to hide from it, there is no way to sleep. And it goes on, second by second, minute on minute, hour after hour, without ceasing.

As the hours drag interminably past, the roaring sound becomes the only thing perceivable to my senses; everything else is drowned out. It seeps into my brain like a fog, filling it with a featureless cloud of helpless apprehension. There is no action I can take, none even to contemplate. I've crossed the border into that bleak, volitionless state of Riding It Out. It has only one rule; hang on and hope for the best.

Then, after fourteen hours, the noise drops quite suddenly. The winds abate to 30 knots. The noise is still loud, but compared to what has come before, it is celestial peace.

The exhaustion sets in immediately. I wrap myself up in my sleeping bag and am asleep in seconds. When I wake an hour later, the winds are down enough to row a dinghy. As suddenly as it came, it has gone. By sunset there are no whitecaps at all, and the noise has disappeared as though it had never been.

That evening I stew up a pot of beans and row over to eat on the scow-schooner OBLIO with Dale.

"Wind, hey?"

"Yeah," I say. "How'd you do?"

"I did pretty good," Dale says. "How about you?"

"Pretty good," I say. "I'm still here and I'm still afloat, anyway."

"Sometimes that's about the best you can do," Dale says.

"Good enough for me," I say.

end

Wind
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PRINCE OF THE REALM

There was an aura of doom about the derelict freighter OCEAN CHAMPION from the moment it was towed into the harbor. The little tug FAVORITE brought it in just after sunset one day in early spring. The massive, tar-black hull towered over the tug and made an angular black silhouette against the lights of The City, as though a hole had been cut out of the world.

Half as long as a football field, OCEAN CHAMPION looked like a vessel in the ancient tradition of the Flying Dutchman; a ship of Lost Souls. So strong was the impression I thought for a moment I could hear the moaning of the Damned coming across the water, but it was only the creaking of her rigging. There were no signs of life on deck.

FAVORITE slipped the huge boat neatly alongside the long pier at Trask's shipyard, where it seemed to groan and settle down like a great beast dying. Twenty minutes after it entered the harbor, it looked as though it had been there for twenty years.

Within a few days it was evident the boat was not by any means deserted. In fact, there were several families living aboard. The day after they arrived, lines of laundry began to festoon the superstructure, ranging from children's jeans to bras and panties.

The skipper's family was the more or less permanent center of this little community. His wife was aboard, and his seventeen year old daughter lived with the first mate, also on board. The first mate, Frank, was a lean, hard young man with lanky black hair tied back in a ponytail. The daughter was a stunning redhead whose appearance on deck always turned a few heads in the harbor.

About a week after OCEAN CHAMPION first appeared, the dive-boat VIKING RAIDER came storming into the harbor just after dawn and rafted up to the derelict. The crew of the RAIDER swarmed aboard, and there was a major party that night you could hear across the harbor.

I was already familiar with VIKING RAIDER, one of a fleet of small dive boats that scour the bottom of Puget Sound for sea urchins and sea cucumbers. The boats are pretty generally disreputable, their decks cluttered with dive gear and stacks of white plastic buckets for packing the catch. The uniform color scheme in this little fleet seems to be rust streaks overall, even on the occasional wooden hull. Each boat has a six digit state identification number roughly scrawled across the cabin, giving the impression that while they might have to put numbers on the boat, they didn't have to like it.

The sea urchins are taken for their eggs, a delicacy in Japan, and the slug-like sea cucumbers for their skins and meat. In Asia the skin of the sea cucumber is reputed to have aphrodisiac qualities and brings a good price. The entire catch of this tiny fleet is sold to Japanese buyers.

The urchin divers don't mix much with the other water denizens; they keep to their own world. The divers are all quite young, mostly in their early twenties, because the physical demand is enormous. The urchins are picked off the bottom by hand, one at a time, and an urchin diver may spend as much as eight hours underwater in a day. They breathe directly from compressors on the surface that pump air through long hoses down to regulator mouthpieces like scuba gear. The rig is called a hookah.

These hookah divers seem to share a common temperament. They are not only enormously fit, they are

enormously edgy. They seem to range from sullen to aggressive, and always seem to be on the prod about something. I've been told this is a consequence of breathing highly pressurized oxygen all day. It would make me edgy, too. Oddly, almost every urchin diver I know is a heavy cigarette smoker.

With this general reputation for aggressiveness, it was no great surprise when first mate Frank was picked up at the public dock on outstanding county warrants the second week the freighter was in harbor. Frank got into a hassle with the arresting officer and roughed him up considerably before the other two squad cars arrived as backup. They trundled Frank off to the county jail in Port Orchard in handcuffs, and the local paper duly reported the scuffle as originating in the crew of OCEAN CHAMPION.

The shoreside world reacted to OCEAN CHAMPION much as European villages used to react when the gypsies suddenly arrived and encamped outside town; they began to blame everything that went wrong on OCEAN CHAMPION and its crew.

There were, of course, immediate and persistent rumors of drug dealing. These increased in intensity when it was learned that "O.C.", as the crew called it, was renting out berths at \$10 a night to anyone who happened along.

It was easy enough to imagine the derelict in a late night black and white movie, with ladders of narrow berths stacked up in the hold, thick clouds of gray-white opium smoke, and Humphrey Bogart commenting wryly on the nature of Man and his Dreams.

The theme of Man and his Dreams was not that far off the mark. Over the next couple of weeks I talked to various crewmen, and pieced together a little history. The skipper, Ross Oie, had bought "O.C." for \$10,000 from an owner who was desperate to get rid of it. (Nothing down, pay me out of the profits, but get the damned thing out of here.)

The freighter was intended to be a living base for the dive ventures of VIKING RAIDER and a couple of other boats. It was the consistent opinion of the crewmen and divers that everybody was going to be pretty rich by about October. The figure of a million and a half dollars was often mentioned. The details of how this was going to come about were not clear to the crewmen, but the skipper knew.

Before that, there was the problem of fixing up OCEAN CHAMPION, of course. She had been completely gutted when abandoned by her previous crew, who even cut out and stole every foot of copper wiring in the huge hull. The amount of work was awesome, and nobody seemed to be interested in doing it.

I didn't run into the skipper for about a month. Then, one morning as I was leaving the public dock to row back to my boat, he was coming to shore in his dinghy. We met about thirty yards out from the dock and stopped for a chat. We pulled the dinghies together and I hung one foot over his gunwale to hold the boats together.

Ross was about forty-five, with a leathery face and the characteristic bad teeth of so many water people. His jeans were tar spotted, and there was no telling what color his grimy gray cap had been in the beginning. The dinghy had taken on about three inches of water in the few hundred yards from OCEAN CHAMPION.

"You're OCEAN CHAMP?" I said. "You've got quite a project on your hands."

It amazes me how often the first thing anyone says about themselves is an open vision of their whole inner nature. It happens time and again on the water, and this was one of the times. The very first words Ross Oie ever spoke to me were:

"I am a prince without a throne, without a kingdom, and without any money. So I have to work my ass off."

Somehow I knew he was speaking absolutely literally. He intended no metaphor, but a perfectly factual statement of his affairs.

"How can you be a prince without a kingdom?" I said. "They pretty much go together."

"I'm the true and rightful heir to the lands and possessions of Eric the Red," he said. "It's my family."

I tried to calculate what the empire of Eric the Red would be worth now, particularly if you took Leif Erickson into account.

"Does that include America?" I asked. He seemed pleased I understood there might be some claim on America, but he shook his head.

"Wouldn't work," he said briefly. "I'm a prince, not a fool."

He had, he said, documentary evidence of his rightful claim, a genealogical history written in the front pages of the family bible, tracing his descent directly from Eric.

We talked for a while about Vikings and putting together old boats. I looked over his shoulder at the black hulk of OCEAN CHAMPION, and the persona of the derelict began to change. I could see it as the last remnant of the fiefdoms and estates of a great Viking monarch, a thousand years down the line.

This all sounds rather bizarre as I write it down. But in rafted dinghies in the middle of the harbor it was not particularly unreasonable. Then, too, by temperament I believe whatever anybody tells me about themselves is true.

"What do you think about all that?" Prince Oie said after while.

"Well, I don't know how legitimate your claim is," I said. "But even if it is -- you know it's been a thousand years, man. I wouldn't quit my day job." He laughed.

About this time, the county sheriff's boat came slowly up to the public dock, towing ROMANCE. ROMANCE was another derelict, and abandoned houseboat that had been hanging around in the back harbor for years. It was an old barge hull, kept afloat only by stuffing it full of styrofoam blocks. It was such an eyesore the city police had finally been forced to seize it, a task they're not equipped to do.

ROMANCE caught the attention of the prince. While I was looking over his shoulder a thousand years into the past, he was looking over mine into the future. He called out to the police sergeant who seemed to be in charge of the operation.

"What are you going to do with that?" he said.

"Damned if I know," the sergeant said, shaking his head. "Get rid of it somehow." It was evident he had no clear idea of exactly how that was going to happen.

"Can I have it?" the Prince said.

"Well -- I don't know," the sergeant said. "You'd have to talk to the chief." But it was clearly the first glimpse he'd had of a way out of lousy situation.

"Where is he?" the Prince said.

"Just up at the station," the sergeant said.

"Talk to you later," the Prince said to me. He quickly rowed the remaining thirty yards to shore and set off up the dock. I rowed back out to my boat.

The next morning two of the OCEAN CHAMPION crewmen came and towed ROMANCE away. The prince had somehow talked the city into giving him the abandoned vessel. Naturally, this did nothing about the eyesore problem, since they just tied it off next to "O.C." to serve as a convenient garbage scow. All they had to do was throw the garbage directly overboard from the deck of OCEAN CHAMPION into ROMANCE.

The fleet of Eric the Red had been augmented by one vessel. I suppose, in the inverted scenario that was playing out, adding another derelict was a successful venture. Success, I am told, is getting what you want, and Prince Oie wanted ROMANCE.

The prince took to dropping by my boat for conversation from time to time. I'd pour us out a couple of Scurvy Preventers and we'd drink and talk about a variety of stuff, not always his principedom. I wanted to learn what the heir of Eric the Red considered success; what he wanted.

His vision was on a grand scale. OCEAN CHAMPION, it seemed, was only the first small step toward a mega-corporation that would virtually control the flow of food from the sea. Prince Oie wanted -- and fully intended -- to become the largest, most powerful food processing corporation in the world. He visualized an empire that circled the globe, vertically integrated, ranging from a fleet of catcher boats through processing vessels and into a multi-national cartel for marketing and distribution. It would be, to the seafood industry, what De Beers is to the diamond trade.

"And what does your family want?" I asked him. "How about your wife?"

"Oh, she's tough," Prince Oie said. "But she doesn't care a lot for boats. Basically she wants a little house on land with a picket fence and that kind of stuff."

"How about your daughter?"

"She wants to be an astronaut," he said. "She could do it, too. She's good at math."

end

Prince of the Realm
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BIG AL

On occasion, there is a price to be paid for the privilege of living in the cuckoo's nest, and the price arises when one of the cuckoos starts to bite. So it was when Big Al came into Eagle Harbor.

Big Al arrived in a broad, sixteen foot skiff, and moored to the public dock. The vessel itself was ominous; the hull was gray (though I remember it as black), covered over with black plastic tarps, roughly lashed with ropes over some kind of interior frame that raised its profile a couple of feet higher than the gunwales. It was dark and dismal, looking like a menacing cave you might encounter in a nightmare, and choose to avoid. A little outboard hung at the back, and there was just enough room amidst the junk for Al to stand and steer.

This little skiff was Big Al's home. Sometimes the muttering of a small generator and an eerie blue glow emerged from beneath the tarps as Al watched his tiny black and white TV in the silence of the harbor night. He cooked on a two burner Coleman stove beneath the tarps, and had, for company, two dogs. One of them was a yellow Great Dane named Blondie, about 75 lbs, the other a small, grizzled gray terrier named Missy.

Big Al was about 6'3 and 240 lbs. He had light hair and blond eyebrows on a thick, light complexioned face, making the pupils of his eyes stand out like tiny black marbles. He always wore a red watch cap and reddish-brown sweater that pulled up over his belt in back. Even in the middle of the December freeze, Al was always barefoot, though a couple of times I saw him carrying a pair of shoes for some unknown purpose.

Al made me uneasy from the beginning, but my first encounters with him were not threatening. He was, in fact, overly obsequious, and admired my little Honda generator excessively. On the public dock he engaged me in a long conversation about the relative merits of various generators, how much wisdom I showed, how much good fortune I had, how he envied my obviously high status. How comfortable and luxurious my boat was, "to a fellow like me". He always gave the impression of looking at you out of the corners of his eyes, though I do not believe that was literally true. Metaphorically, he was always wringing his hands in admiration and humility.

While he was moored to the public dock, his dogs were a menace. They clearly regarded the dock as their own property, and challenged everyone who came down, noisily and aggressively, and they bit. Even from the middle of the harbor where I am anchored, you could hear them barking at any late night activity.

The first report of any conflict came in the encounter with Mark of the little ketch CALYPSO. Mark is a big man himself, a piratical type with a somewhat checkered past. (The first thing he ever said to me was, "What made you leave the world?" He has been, by his own account, out of the world for a long time.)

A couple of boats ago Mark had been busted in Port Townsend on drug-and-alien smuggling charges. The charges had to do with cocaine, which I gather was never proven, and 25 Salvadoran nationals, who were somewhat easier to find.

He spent some time in jail, during which his boat, a 58' Sparkman and Stevens yacht called MARANOVA, had put to sea under somebody else's command and been run aground. Phil of the tug FAVORITE

salvaged the MARANOVA, so the story is probably pretty straight. (Others say the alien smuggling never happened at all.)

Anyway, Mark had bought the grey ketch CALYPSO (for \$100 down) in Port Townsend, then disappeared with the boat, ending up in Eagle Harbor. In Eagle Harbor he bought another, larger ketch for the same \$100 down, expressing his intention to bring it up to a seamanlike standard.

In Eagle Harbor Mark worked occasional day jobs at Russell Trask's shipyard, and even some for my son David's contracting firm. CALYPSO was clearly going downhill, rusting at the rigging, the sails drooping sloppily off the booms, uncared for and not much loved. Mark had arrived with a boat that was hours from sinking at best.

He, too, spent a lot of time moored at the public dock while he worked away at CALYPSO, and the harbor's first belligerent contact with Big Al happened there.

Big Al accused Mark of talking about him behind his back and spreading bad tales. This, we later learned, was the basis of all Big Al's psychotic rage. He heard voices. He believed, periodically, that everyone was talking about him behind his back, often about his sexual practices. From within his dismal, black shrouded cave, he could hear them as they came walking down the dock. Water rats, tourists, visiting yachtsmen -- it made no difference. They were talking about him behind his back, he heard what they said, and for that, they were dead meat.

In the early days, before the violence, some water rat would always say, "Well, he's right, isn't he? We're talking about him right now." Which was, of course, true.

Anyway, Big Al accused Mark of CALYPSO of this back-talking, and Mark, basically, told him to shove it up his ass. Big Al went for him, lunging across the dock and leaping aboard CALYPSO. Mark had his work knife sheathed at his hip. He drew it, and described to Big Al what he intended to do with it.

How the rest of the story actually evolved, I don't know, but the upshot was that Big Al himself went barefoot up to the police station to complain that Mark had attacked him with a knife. By the time the cops arrived, the only knives on Mark's person were a little 3" jackknife, and in his sheath an innocuous putty knife.

The cops were of the opinion it would be better if these two guys had nothing to do with each other. Mark allowed as how that suited him fine, he didn't know this guy, he didn't want to know him, etc, etc.

Other than that, nothing much happened, and Big Al went back to his sometimes fawning, ingratiating behavior. Shortly after, Mark took CALYPSO over to Russell's shipyard and put her aground on the tide grid while he worked on his new ketch. CALYPSO tilted farther over at every tide, the disheartening sight of a potentially good boat dying before your eyes.

Scuttlebutt had it that Big Al was supposed to be on some kind of lithium treatment, but forgot, or refused, to take it. This made sense, because Big Al's psychotic episodes of accusation came out of left field with stunning unexpectedness. The water rat population gradually became divided into those who had actively been threatened by Big Al and those who had not.

Those who had been threatened were seriously worried about Al's presence in Eagle Harbor; those who

had not could see no particular harm in his craziness.

The first real violence, however, came because of the dogs. Crazy Ken, whose nameless white cutter is anchored next to me, was bitten three separate times as he came down the dock to get his dinghy.

Ken is a very shy, and quite harmless, crazy person. He is not so much crazy as perpetually disoriented, though he seems to be better when he takes an antidepressant drug like Prozac. He says of himself, "Some people get different color socks on by accident. Sometimes I look down and I don't even have the same shoes on both feet."

Ken asked Big Al to keep his dogs in control, and not let them bite him any more. Big Al got out of the black cave, picked Ken up and threw him off the dock into the harbor. As Ken struggled to get back on the dock, Al dragged him out of the water by his shirt front, threw him prostrate on the dock and stomped him. Then he threw him back in the water again, and repeated the whole episode, inflicting visible damage on Ken's face and apparently cracking a couple of ribs.

After Ken had gotten some medical treatment, he went to the cop shop and filed assault charges against Big Al. A day later he reconsidered.

Those of us who live at anchor are vulnerable. It is true we have a kind of moat, but if someone does get aboard your boat, there's no place to go; you pretty much have to take care of the situation then and there. Ken was afraid that if he let the charges stand, Big Al would come and kill him, so he went back to the cops and dropped the charges.

The water rats watched all this closely, but with divided opinions. It is an unstated, and profound, principle of the water life that we solve our own problems. It goes strongly against the grain to allow any outside authority into our affairs, particularly the law. And however psychotic and threatening Al was, there was still a general acknowledgement that he was One of Us. A real bad One of Us, but still...

About this time, Big Al bought the decrepit little powerboat DENIZ KOPEK from Brian for a thousand dollars, which he apparently paid. DENIZ KOPEK's engine didn't run, so Al lashed the black cave alongside and moved both vessels off the public dock and far back in the harbor. He had been tied to the public dock so long that the cops were paying regular attention, and putting pressure on him.

At first this was a relief. At least you didn't have to encounter Al every time you went ashore. But then he began to develop the disconcerting habit of prowling the harbor just after dark, circling boats slowly and inspecting them carefully with no decipherable purpose.

On one moonless night he circled me a couple of times, and I could hear the buzz of his outboard going around only a couple of feet from my hull. I was writing, and had my generator on to run my computer. I went up on the aft deck.

It was completely dark, with the lights on shore and the iridescent sparkle of the Seattle skyline eight miles away the only source of light. In this eerie, shadowed setting Big Al floated a few feet away from my hull with his engine idling.

I was cool, but reasonably cordial. I hadn't personally had any conflict with Al, but I didn't particularly like being interrupted when I was writing, and most of all I didn't like somebody circling my boat in the dark.

AI started the generator conversation all over again; how much he admired my Honda, how much he admired my boat. It was a creepy conversation, but nothing in it was overtly threatening.

Nevertheless, it made me nervous enough that I bought a padlock at the hardware store the next day and actually chained my precious, precious generator to the rail.

I hated this, passionately. Like all water rats, I cannot tolerate having my actions dictated by somebody else. And in particular, dictated by anxiety about what that other person might or might not do at some fictional time in the improbable future. I disliked myself for the suspicion, and by now I disliked Big AI for giving me the cause. I hated the thought that I had actually taken some action because of the ridiculous possibility that AI intended to come steal my generator when I wasn't aboard. But the bastard made me edgy, no two ways about it.

The hell of it was, I actually felt better when I had the padlock on. I took it off the next day.

By now Big AI had threatened about half of the water rats at one time or another. It was always the same. From his hand-wringing humility he would suddenly lurch out with the accusation that they had been talking about him behind his back. They were just shit, and they were dead meat, and he was going to see to it they could never do that again.

His menace emerged from such a deep well of inner torment, so utterly beyond his own control, you could not help but be moved by his pain. I remember two images that were particularly poignant. One sunny day Big AI was sitting at the bench near the dock, his great buffalo head bent and weaving slightly from side to side, muttering to himself in a low, pain-filled voice. As I passed, I could just make out a few words. He was saying over and over, "Crazy. Crazy. Crazy. I am crazy. I know. Yes. Crazy. Crazy."

And then one night, after another altercation at the dock, he drove the black cave out into the middle of the harbor about thirty yards from my boat. He cut his engine and began to scream at the moon, cursing us all for hateful, backbiting bastards. "Every one of you! Every one! I know you can hear me! Every goddamn single one! You sons of bitches! I know you can hear me!" Lonely in the night, beneath a moon as solitary as himself, he poured out the anguish that poisoned his life. Of all those he cursed, I was the only one who heard.

One day in early February, I passed Big AI at the grocery store, and nodded to him. Shortly afterwards, I had finished my grocery shopping, and headed back for the harbor. Big AI followed me down from the store, past the slide and jungle gym of the little public park. He came up behind me as I crossed the last road before going down the trail to the public dock.

"Hey," he said. "You live in that glass boat out there."

"Yeah," I said.

"You remember about two months ago, you came down the dock when I was talking to that Indian woman?"

I thought back, and did remember passing him and some woman, whether Indian or not I didn't recall.

"Sure," I said, "I remember."

"I heard what you said," Big Al said. "You're talking about me behind my back. You killed my chances with that Indian woman. You're nothing but shit. You're dead meat. I'm going to get your ass."

I was dumbfounded. Even with the scuttlebutt and knowing the history, it was absolutely astonishing. It was so completely random, so wholly fictional, so utterly without reference to the actual world it was breathtaking.

"That is absolutely not true," I said. Not exactly a dynamite rejoinder, but it was the only thing that came to mind. After that we both walked down to the dock by separate routes. I got in my dinghy and rowed out to my boat, Big Al fired up the black cave and slowly motored down toward the back bay.

That evening I thought the situation over as best I could. Point one: Big Al is twenty years younger, seven inches taller and weighs nearly twice as much as I. Point two: Big Al's rage has nothing to do with the actual world, but only with a dark and pain filled imagination that is perfectly reflected in the floating black cave that is his boat. The conclusion I reached ran totally contrary to my convictions, my ethics, my beliefs and my temperament.

Nevertheless, the next morning I went to David's office in the Professional Building.

"David," I said, "I need a weapon."

David looked up from his desk in astonishment. "Jeez, Dad," he said, "What's this all about?"

In our lives together, David and I have had considerable experience with weapons, living as hunters both on the Oregon Coast when he was a boy, and later when I lived in my cabin in the Coast Range. I've bought guns from him and sold him guns, and traded horses for guns. We are both comfortable with weapons, respect them, and understand through experience what they do. I have had no weapons for a number of years, but David is still an active hunter and has a small collection.

I explained about Big Al and his threat.

"What do you want?" David said. "Rifle, shotgun, handgun?"

"Handgun," I said.

"Revolver or automatic?"

"Automatic."

"Forty-five or thirty-two?"

"Thirty-two," I said. "God, David, you sound like a gun dealer."

David laughed. "Well, it's a pretty weird coincidence, Dad."

It seems that just the day before, David had received two handguns from his brother-in-law, my

son-in-law, who wanted to sell part of his own collection. E.J, my daughter's husband, is a former Navy officer and member of the Navy's pistol team. He had sent for David's possible purchase two Colt automatic pistols, one an accurized .45 for competition, the other a small, unfired .32 calibre officer's sidearm.

David was going to buy the .45, but not the .32, which he was preparing to return. E.J. put considerable importance on the fact that the .32 had never been fired, and had said there were only 20 or 30 like it in the world, making it a classic collector's piece.

I asked to borrow it, anyway. Whether I was borrowing it from David or from E.J. I wasn't quite sure, but it was not a point of significance at the time.

David went out the same afternoon and bought a box of ammunition. He rowed out to my boat that evening, bringing the little .32 Colt with him. We had a nostalgic evening, reminiscing about bear hunting in the Oregon Coast Range when David was a teen -ager and our family's primary source of food was our hunting.

As he was leaving, he turned to me and said seriously, "Dad, there's something I hope you'll keep in mind about this."

"Sure," I said. "What?"

"Well, you know this gun has never been fired."

"So?"

"So, if you shoot Big Al, you've bought the gun." He grinned, got back in his dinghy and rowed ashore.

Thus it was that I ended up with something I had sworn I never would have -- a handgun for self defense.

I am a little sorry to report that, as with the padlock on my generator, my philosophical discomfort was not as strong as putting to rest the apprehensions Big Al's incomprehensible mind had raised in my own. I did feel better with a weapon. I am resolutely opposed to being a character in somebody else's nightmare.

For self-defense, so called, I much prefer an automatic pistol to a revolver. The reason for this is that I am willing, but do not desire, to fire it. An automatic pistol gives you, if you so choose, a variety of things to do before you pull the trigger. It is my belief that often the major function of a self-defense weapon is not the firing of it, but the showing of it.

The first stage is to show the weapon, with the clip not engaged. Second, engage the clip, which is a definitive gesture with an unmistakable percussive sound. Third, draw back the slide, lock it, and show the weapon with clip engaged and chamber empty. Fourth, release the slide, and chamber a round, which is the most intimidating sound in the world to one who knows it. Fifth, a round fired into the air.

In the kind of circumstance I might reasonably expect with Big Al, everybody would have at least five opportunities to change their minds before anything irrevocable happened. And if quickness were required, the whole thing can virtually happen with a single motion.

So, that is where things stand at the moment. Big Al is still in the harbor, crazy and full of his dark, private torment. I am armed, slightly against my will, and have had a very detailed conversation with the cops on the fine legal points of self-defense. The cops regretted that Ken had dropped his charges against Big Al, but understood why. Until something further happens, there's nothing they can do.

"After all," the Chief told me, "There's no law against being half-crazy out there in the harbor."

I told him yes, I knew that.

end

Big Al
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THE CONSTITUTIONAL CASE

I lost a Constitutional case in Eagle Harbor the other day. Humiliatingly. Unconditionally. Not only was there the ignominy of losing, the financial damage was devastating. The affair cost me ten bucks out of pocket which, in my present delicate condition, I can ill afford. On the other hand, if I could afford it, there wouldn't be much of a story, would there?

Actually, it wasn't so much a Constitutional "case" as it was a Constitutional "bet." I choose to call it a "case" because it lends a certain dignity to the proceeding; a dignity which is otherwise almost totally lacking. The episode reflects much discredit on me, and I'm trying to salvage whatever personal image I can.

We were having dinner with Rod aboard OPTION, a 42' ferro-cement ketch. Until a few years ago Rod had been a lifelong fisherman in Alaska. Then he noticed that all his friends, all fishermen, were either dead, maimed or prematurely aged by their profession. Rod decided his goal in life was to become a healthy centenarian, and quit fishing. Since then he's been cruising with his 12 year old son Sam in OPTION.

Rod is very light in complexion, looking somewhat Nordic. Sam is dark, the heritage of his Indian mother, who divorced Rod some time ago because he wouldn't become a Mormon. This year OPTION is wintering in Puget Sound, part of the time in Eagle Harbor.

Rod had made up a pot of chili with an experimental side dish of cauliflower in shrimp sauce. This wasn't exactly culinary imagination -- it was what showed up in the free food bin at Helpline. As Rod says, "I never mind trying something new, as long as it's free."

The guests at this dinner party were Julia of LEGACY, Dale of OBLIO, and me. Dale and I had been invited previously, and Julia happened to be passing along the dock at dinner time.

I've forgotten what the exact conversation was, but Dale commented that the Vice-President of the country was originally intended to be the guy who got the second largest number of votes. It said so in the Constitution.

"The hell it does," I said.

"Care to make a bet on it?" Dale said. He was looking at me with an odd expression. I now realize it was only pity, perhaps with a touch of avarice.

"How much?" I said.

Dale leaned forward with his arms on the saloon table. A tendril of smoke rose from his pipe. In honor of the social occasion he was wearing his teeth and he grinned a little grin, an unaccustomed glint of white in the middle of his beard. "I'll bet you the title to your goddamn boat."

To my credit, I was at least too smart for that. To my discredit, I waffled in confusion. "Well, I'll bet you ten bucks," I said.

"Done," Dale said, leaning back contentedly. He then paraphrased the Constitution to the effect that each member of the Electoral college was to vote for two people. The first choice was President, the second choice was Vice-President and, more importantly, the President of the Senate. The idea, Dale said, was that the two most popular candidates have the two most powerful jobs, President of the Senate being then considered a counterbalance to the Executive office.

"I don't believe it," I said. "The President chooses the Vice-President at the Convention."

"Oh, it was amended," Dale said. "Twelfth, I think. But the body of the Constitution says what I said."

You must understand that, even as I scaled down to the ten buck bet, I already knew I had lost. I was completely out of my league. I know nothing about the Constitution, I had no evidence whatever, in fact I had absolutely nothing in my mind that would justify risking even a penny in debate with Dale.

Dale of OBLIO is an Absolute Anarchist, the only one I've ever met. It is his conviction that the only proper government is no government whatever. No taxes, no coercion, no services, no national security, no politicians, no goddam nothing. He uncompromisingly rejects the idea of all groups, all systems of action, all organizations. For Dale the only acceptable form of government is absolute dictatorship -- each person is at once the State and the sole citizen of that State.

In this ideal, anarchic world, individuals are totally responsible for their own freedom and their own welfare. It is what attracted Dale to the life of a water rat in the first place. "It is the closest thing I know to liberty," he says. "If I knew anything closer I'd be there instead."

Dale does not hold this absolutist position merely out of some rebellious emotional preference. In rejecting all forms of government, he has also subjected the forms of government to careful scrutiny. He knows the Constitution backwards and forwards. On the table in OBLIO'S cabin there is always a yellowed, dog-eared copy of The Federalist Papers, liberally sprouting page markers "for the juicy parts." Sometimes even in the middle of the poker game he will grab the book and declaim some absolute principle of freedom to which he subscribes absolutely.

Ultimately Dale has faith only in principles, and none whatever in people. "Principles are forever," he says, "but people are mostly rotten."

Sufis speak of some individuals as Qutub, The Pole. I don't understand what the Sufis mean by that designation, but it reminds me of Dale, somehow. His profound anarchy represents an extreme pole, an absolute position against which all others can be measured. It defines one end of a spectrum of possible human freedom.

It doesn't really matter whether this is a practical position or not. Practicality has nothing to do with it. The principle of freedom is an Absolute Truth, incorruptible as gold, in a conditional world where every freedom, every truth, and every principle is corrupted even as it is born.

As to the role of The Pole, the Qutub: Perhaps no Truth can exist in this mundane world as a mere abstract idea. Perhaps for an Absolute Truth to take root in the relative world, there must be at least one individual who adheres to the Absolute and lives it unconditionally; a Qutub. Perhaps.

This is clearly not the kind of person you want to bet against, particularly where they have detailed knowledge and you are utterly ignorant. Nevertheless, I did. What is worse, Dale offered me the chance to back out of the bet after I'd thought about it, and I refused. Feebly, I demanded proof.

I knew perfectly well I was going to lose. I knew it was going to cost me ten bucks I needed desperately, and still I persisted in my folly merely because I was already headed in that direction.

I wonder how much of the rest of my life has been so determined; plowing ahead into folly just because that's the direction I find myself going. What is most humiliating is the knowledge that I have sailed for sixty years aboard this planet and still don't have sense enough to back out of a sucker bet.

Oh, yes. The Constitution. Article II, Section 1, Paragraph 3:

"The Electors shall meet in their respective States and vote by Ballot for two persons, of whom one at least shall not be an Inhabitant of the same State with themselves. ...In every Case, after the Choice of the President, the Person having the greatest Number of Votes of the Electors shall be the Vice President."

Dale took the ten bucks and bought a pork roast and a jug of wine. People may be rotten, but what the hell. You can live by Principle, but you can't have one over to the boat for dinner. We ate the roast the next evening aboard OBLIO, while we argued on into the night about some damn thing or other. Probably principles, or freedom, or truth. Something like that.

end

The Constitutional Case
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WINTER COMING

There is a poignant, almost tender feeling in the harbor the past few days. Like watching a good friend sail out, not knowing when you will see him again. This poignancy is odd, because it is the result of a warning -- a warning I dread.

Winter is coming.

After a couple of weeks of brilliant sun, high contrast light-and-shadow, glittering waves and bright blue sky, the weather suddenly shifted. The temperature dropped 30 degrees overnight, from the low 90s to the low 60s; halfway to freezing in the blink of an eye.

And it began to rain. A thousand miles northwest of here, a deep bowl of low pressure tucked itself into the Gulf of Alaska and began to rotate slowly. Like a great waterwheel in the sky, it swept up moisture from the ocean and scattered it across the land. Puget Sound again took on the subtle pearly grays that are its natural color; the contrasts softened, the sparkling waves relaxed, the brilliance eased away. It is a little like watching a showgirl remove her makeup. "Good" weather in Puget Sound is flashy and amusing; but it is, plainly, unnatural. Our natural state is softness, not glitter.

Even this early rain is soft. The drops are tiny, and sometimes they sound on my deck as though some giant were dropping handfuls of tiny needles up there, barely perceptible, just enough to say hey, I'm here. But it goes on for days, and there is enough that my dinghy needs bailing every time I use it. Winter is coming.

Those of us at anchor do not expect to come unwounded through hard winters. For us there is a question that will surely seem melodramatic to the shorebound, but is real to us: What will become of me? What will become of my friends?

My friend Carl of SLEEPY JEWELL may not be here this winter. He tells me They are putting him in the Old Soldiers Home for at least a year. He is frightened. He does not understand what is happening to him.

I don't understand either, because all I have is the picture in Carl's mind, and those images are blurred, like a shoreline seen through morning fog.

When he came aboard my boat yesterday under the misting gray skies, he had just been released after two weeks of a detox program at the Veterans Hospital. In the program were not just drunks like Carl, but crack junkies, psychotics, victims of Vietnam combat stress, and the full range of jetsam cast overboard from a sinking society.

It was supposed to be a four week treatment, but he hadn't been able to handle the whole thing, so They sent him back to his boat to get his discharge papers; the requisite paperwork for getting into the Old Soldiers Home.

Carl is a gentle, small man in his sixties with an inner core I can only describe as a kind of innocent sweetness. He might have served as a model for Popeye, and I often think of him that way. His hair and beard are a shining white, his nose smashed flat from ancient battles, his eyes (when sober) a clear, pale blue. When ashore he dresses more neatly than most water rats, in clean clothes from the Free Store.

His only education has been what life as a seaman taught him, but he unquestionably has a natural artistic talent. He's done portraits of me which I treasure, and he got through much of the confusion in detox by doing pen portraits of his fellow addicts. I wish he did more.

Carl first went to sea during World War II, as a sixteen year old. He went through that war, and Korea, and Vietnam, usually as a merchant seaman, Ordinary or A.B. He belonged to both the Seaman's International Union and the Sailor's Union of the Pacific, until he lost his papers for the booze. That was a long time ago. After that he sailed on his passport, or on vessels that did not overly concern themselves with paperwork.

Now Carl lives here, aboard SLEEPY JEWELL, when he is not ashore on long binges with his SIU buddies from the hiring hall. It is the binges, of course, that trip him up and lead to the Old Soldiers Home, because he gets caught driving. In Washington state a DWI conviction leads to a complicated involvement with the law, but most of all with the social workers and the complex of social services that are meant to help, but also confuse and terrify the beneficiaries. The detox program was part of that.

Carl's boat, SLEEPY JEWELL, is almost indescribable. It is one of the most confusing boats I have ever seen; more like a structuralist work of art in progress than a vessel. The hull came from some Boeing experiment in the 60s, but it has been added to and subtracted from so many times it is difficult to see what the original intent was. I know at least one of the cobbled-on cabin houses came from the shore gig of a Navy battleship. The most bizarre structure is a pair of fanciful wings, like the carapace of a great insect, which were designed to shield a pair of jet turbine engines mounted abeam.

The interior is a nightmare; a tiny passage just wide enough to place your feet between heaped piles of rubble and junk; hoses, bolts, lines, wrenches, engines, pumps, oil cans, gears, tarps -- anything in the past twenty years that ever looked as if it (1) might someday be useful or (2) was too much trouble to throw away. Every object in the world fits into at least one of those categories.

SLEEPY JEWELL now rests beside one of Russ Trask's docks, hauled up a few weeks ago so Carl could scrape the bottom. That was before his last encounter with the law, so the bottom has not been scraped and the great hull lies beside the pier where it goes dry on every low tide.

Often when I pass along the pier, the sound of classical music floats up from inside the beached monster. The perfect clear will of Bach, the rationality of Vivaldi, the power and force of the great visionaries who created order from chaos, beauty from the vibrating of a string, and truth from nothing at all.

Now winter is coming, and I think Carl will somehow forget to get to the Old Soldiers Home. I am sorry for that. It would be good for him to be in a warm, dry place, out of danger; out of the wind and the cold and the rain and threats he does not understand. A place where he could do his drawings and his portraits, where he could laugh and his clear blue eyes sparkle, and go to a warm berth and sleep warm and wake up warm. A place where he could be comfortable and a little forgetful and listen to his music and understand from it there is purpose and coherence and clarity and order in the world and all is safe.

But the chaos of winter is coming, and I do not think that will happen. Not to Carl, not to my friends, and not to me.

end

Winter Coming
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FALLING IN

I've been thinking recently about falling overboard. If you live on the water, you're going to fall in the water from time to time. That's obvious. It is not an unusual event, but it has a particular dynamic, a scheme, a pattern, that has somehow escaped the notice of philosophers. An inner meaning, so to speak, that is most often obscured in the splashing and shouting and general hooraw that accompanies falling in the water with your clothes on.

Myself, I've been pretty lucky, lately. I've only fallen in once in the last couple of years. And that wasn't even off my own boat, but off the barge where Phil lives and moors the little tug FAVORITE.

Just after dawn one morning, I was going out with FAVORITE as tourist/deck crew on a salvage call. Not an emergency, but a collision-damaged boat on the other side of the island that Phil was going to tow back into Eagle Harbor for repair.

The fog was so dense I almost bumped into Phil's barge before I could stop my dinghy, and you couldn't even see FAVORITE's wheelhouse from the kitchen window; a distance of no more than four feet.

When the fog settles on Puget Sound, the effect is a like a floating sensory deprivation tank, but one that extends into infinity. In these fogs, infinity seems to equal about an inch and a half, which is, in itself, an interesting twist to put your mind through.

For some reason I decided I wanted to travel through the fog that morning without any orientation at all. I didn't want to see the compass, the radar, the depth sounder, a chart or any other instrument that would give me some bearing on where I was, or what direction I was going. I don't remember why I thought that was a good idea.

So I took a cold and damp position huddled up on FAVORITE's foredeck on a coil of line. We set off down the narrow, dogleg channel that leads into Eagle Harbor, with Phil navigating by radar from the wheelhouse at my back.

While we were still in the comparatively small confines of Eagle Harbor, I could, I thought, sense where we were from familiarity. But once we had left buoy #3, and then #1, to starboard, I began to lose even that illusion of place. By the time we emerged into Puget Sound proper, all sense of direction or position or perspective had disappeared completely.

The water was almost dead calm, and FAVORITE nosed along at an even seven knots as though floating six inches above the water. Beneath my back the deck vibrated with a steady, hypnotic thrum from the 6-71 diesel in the engine room. From time to time I could hear the distant, lugubrious moan of foghorns on the Sound. There were half a dozen different vessels within hearing, each sounding its unique note in a lonely, mournful symphony.

Foghorns sound to me, as to most children, like invisible monsters calling out to each other. I always feel an odd emotional flavor on hearing them, a poignant sweet-and-sour of apprehension and sympathy. Apprehension for their invisible danger, sympathy for their plaintive willingness to be heard, to reveal themselves.

And it is somehow clear they never hear each other at all. They are destined by their own condition to remain alone and unseen and unbeloved. Endlessly they call out across the gray world of invisibles, reaching out in their solitude for others of their kind, unable to utter any other message than the low moan of a breaking heart.

These somewhat bizarre images of invisible monsters were only a part of an increasingly disorganized movie that began to unroll across my mind's eye as I stared into the featureless void of fog. As FAVORITE moved south in the shipping channels, images rose and fell almost of their own volition, mostly based on sound.

In the fog whiteout it became impossible for me to tell whether my eyes were focussed in the near distance or the far. And, almost alarmingly, the formless, colorless world of white-on-white soon begins to dissolve into shifting rainbows.

I could not tell where these rainbow veils were. Did they have some kind of exterior existence? Were they the refraction of light from water droplets in the fog? Or were they something that was happening only in my mind? And, in the end, is there any real difference between physical existence and something that is happening only in my mind?

I concentrate. I look at the shifting rainbows as closely as I can, and there is no way to tell. There is no perceptible difference between an outside world and an inner one. I can't tell which one I'm looking at.

There is clearly a terrific metaphysical truth to be mined here, but for my own part, I am more confused than enlightened. Perhaps I have had the opportunity to become an accidental yogi, but blew it. Again.

However, the fog has not finished providing me with fantasies. Now it confronts me with an always popular moral dilemma, that of Resisting Temptation.

Now, I confess that I have always imagined Temptation in a highly sexist and politically incorrect fashion. I make no apologies for this. It was the way of my generation, and a damned pleasant way it was, too. It gives you images you can treasure, and if you can't even treasure your own Temptations -- what good is it all?

In this case, however, my Temptation did not assume the form of sorceress nor seductress nor temptress, nor even Warrior Queen from Andromeda. It was the damned radar. I really wanted to go back in the wheelhouse and look at the radar. I just plain wanted to know where I was.

At the same time, I didn't want to know where I was. I had intentionally set out to not know where I was, and was doing good at it. The back and forth argument that ensued in the increasing vacuous space of my mind is obvious. Classic Temptation and Resistance-to-Temptation.

In the end I never did look at the radar. I continued to face the fog on the foredeck, getting increasingly disoriented, all the way back around the island to Eagle Harbor. The whole voyage took about four hours, and I don't think my eyes have ever been open so long with so little coming in them.

By the time we got back to Phil's barge, I had completely succeeded in my project. I didn't have a clue where I was. Even when I actually knew where I was, I didn't know where I was. Everything was familiar enough, but didn't seem to be any more substantial than the images in the fog.

We tied FAVORITE off and Phil cooked up some fresh shellfish for lunch and when we finished lunch I walked out onto deck, headed vaguely for my dinghy and walked straight off the edge of the barge into the water. The swirling tendrils of fog that had taken over my mind disappeared instantaneously. All of a sudden, I knew exactly where I was.

Phil came out of the barge-house, looked over the edge at me, and said, "You're in the water."

Yeah, I knew where I was, all right. Sometimes it comes on you very quick. Falling in the water is kind of like waking up, but wetter.

The moral of this story is simple, but elegant: Falling in the water usually has something to do with a dinghy. It's the transitions that get you. Every time.

end

Falling In
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WATCHING TV

I have a little TV aboard my boat. It's a 5" black-and-white of indeterminate vintage that was given to me last year by Ernest of BEAST when he got something decent. It had been given to him some years before under approximately the same circumstances.

The picture is virtually unwatchable. There are always a minimum of four simultaneous images, and without listening to the sound it is difficult to tell whether a program is about people or dogs, or perhaps the wonders of undersea life.

This unwatchability is one of my requirements for TV, because otherwise I get hooked and watch stupid things all the time. It is a kind of detoxification program for TV addiction: it's no fun, but it does the job. You have to want to watch TV pretty bad.

Although unwatchable, this TV appears to be immortal. What it lacks in excellence, it makes up in endurance. At my present age I feel somewhat the same about myself, so there is a certain commonality there. The TV goes through phases where it requires a number of blows at the top and side before it will work at all, and then, after a while, it dies completely. Although I have not personally reached the point of dying completely, it is coming. In the meantime, a couple of sharp blows to the top and sides will usually get me working, too.

So far, during my tenure, the TV has always been resurrected by the process I call Subtractive Maintenance. The basic principle of Subtractive Maintenance is simple: you find out what part isn't working and you throw it away. For personality difficulties it is by far the best system. It also works on cars, sometimes.

Dale of OBLIO, a former NASA electronics engineer, is my TV repairman, because he also practices Subtractive Maintenance. He has brought the TV back to life twice by snipping out the dead part and wiring around it. My conviction, supported by experience, is that there are few things you can't just wire around if you have to.

The last time was almost a religious experience. I had the TV apart when Dale came on board, with the circuit board hanging bare by the wires, and the bewildering web of solder joints pointing at the overhead. Dale looked at the board for a long time, from a distance of about three feet. Then, very slowly, he reached out one grimy finger and, like a fencer in slow motion, touched the board with a light, precise intention. Picture and sound both came cheerfully on. Awesome.

This TV is important mainly because of its role in a ritual conducted by Julia of LEGACY and me, called Hunting for Laughs. Julia likes her laughs. On Saturday nights when she is in the harbor, she comes over to the boat and we watch two hours of TV comedy together, starting with a local program called Almost Live and ending with Saturday Night Live.

Hunting for Laughs is a planned event, not a spontaneous one, for several reasons. First of all, it doesn't even start until 11:30, and there is no way in hell I can stay awake until 11:30. I always try to get a nap on Saturdays by way of preparing for Hunting for Laughs. Even then, nine times out of ten I'll be asleep when Julia arrives. Waking me up is a delicate, sometimes even hazardous, operation.

Secondly, Julia has often been out on the town before she comes aboard, and that can mean almost anything. When she parties strong, she's liable to end up drinking with bikers, urchin divers, and scurvy pirates of all varieties. And she can talk even the most landbound into getting into a dinghy and rowing off into the midnight darkness of the harbor.

Now, I'm definitely not up for being wakened to a bunch of wild characters coming aboard, so Julia and I have a fixed and iron-clad agreement. When she comes to wake me up for Hunting for Laughs, she has to come alone. She can't bring anybody else, even if I know them.

Last weekend we were on for Hunting for Laughs, and, as usual, I was asleep by 10:00. I'd turned on the TV without sound, just to be sure it was working, but the boat was otherwise dark.

Gradually there seeped into my almost inert consciousness the sound of a commotion at my aft deck, too much commotion for just Julia. As I drifted up from the depths, I could hear talking, and it seemed to go on for a long time. I could hear Julia's voice, and realized yes, it was time for Hunting for Laughs -- but she had somebody with her.

As I dimly returned to consciousness I was outraged. She knows perfectly well I can't handle that kind of stuff when I wake up, and yet, my ears were not playing tricks. She definitely had some guy with her.

I let this go on until I was sure it was actually happening, and then surrendered myself to the heat of Righteous Indignation. I stormed out of my berth and into the darkness of the aft deck. Two figures were there, silhouetted against the water reflections, one recognizably Julia and the other looking a little like Rod of OPTION, a water rat from Sitka.

"You're not welcome aboard!" I hollered at her. "You know you can't bring anybody!" Thus, having petulantly exhausted both my Righteous Indignation and what words seemed available, I stormed back off the deck and into my berth.

There was some more indistinguishable conversation, (by now I recognized Rod's voice,) and in a little bit they left, rowing over to the nearby LEGACY. I was pissed.

The next morning I rowed past LEGACY and Julia hailed me to come aboard for coffee.

"Well," she said, as the coffee brewed, "I couldn't've watched TV anyway."

"How come?" I said.

"I was soaking wet."

"From what?" I asked. "It didn't rain all day." But sure enough, there was a pair of jeans drying out behind the stove where the coffee water was heating.

Then she unfolded a story that absolutely horrified me. As she was approaching my boat, her tiny dinghy had somehow capsized, throwing her into the midnight-cold waters of the harbor.

In the darkness, with shoes on and fully clothed, she'd struggled to swim the remaining yards to the boat, crawling up on the swim step with great difficulty. Behind her, Rod had captured her drifting, capsized

dinghy and towed it up to my stern.

She had just managed to drag herself up onto my aft deck when I came raging out of the darkness to kick her off the boat for violating The Rule.

As she recited these events while pouring coffee, my mind utterly resisted hearing them. But there was no way I could avoid understanding. I had actually refused sanctuary to a sailor in distress and near drowning. And not just any sailor, but Juli a, one of the best friends I have in the world.

This is such an unthinkable act of callousness I could scarcely grasp it at the time. I can scarcely grasp it now, in fact, but at least I've gotten used to the idea I actually did it.

As I was leaving LEGACY after coffee that next morning, Julia said, "Nobody at all, huh?"

"Nobody at all," I said.

"O.K." she said.

And that's how we watch TV in Eagle Harbor.

end

Watching TV
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CONFESSIONS OF A PART-TIME TROLL

Just at the point where my finances had crossed the line from hopeless to irrecoverable, I landed a gig as a part-time troll.

The job description for trolls hasn't changed from the beginning of the trade, whenever that was. It calls for a somewhat solitary, grouchy personage to live under a bridge and jump out and scare people from time to time. That seems straightforward enough, but like all specialized functions, it turned out to have unsuspected dimensions.

From the pictures I've seen, trolls usually work bridges in the rural countryside -- in my mind's eye I see rustic hand hewn timbers and wooden pegs, willows bending over a clear, swift stream, planked decking just wide enough for a pair of lovers to stroll across hand in hand.

But times change. My bridge, as it turned out, was not to be a nostalgic timbered span across a little stream. My bridge was on I-90, an eight lane Interstate highway that is a main commuting route east from Seattle. The long, curving concrete spans tower 80 feet over the water of Lake Washington. No strolling pairs of rustic lovers here, but a whish of eighteen wheelers, a clamor of Camaros, a chivaree of Chevrolets.

It was my oldest son David who hired me as a part-time troll. His construction company was building a boat launching ramp beneath the east end of the bridge where it leaves Mercer Island for the last quarter mile jump across the channel to the mainland. His 100' crane barge, loaded with tools and equipment, was anchored between the bridge pilings and highly vulnerable to vandalism, theft, and all the other random ills the big city is heir to. And the 4th of July holiday was coming up.

A troll was obviously called for, and I filled the bill exceedingly well. In addition to being solitary and grouchy, I lived on my own boat that could be anchored beside the crane barge as visible evidence there was a troll on 24 hour duty. On the morning of July 3rd I headed out of the quiet waters of Eagle Harbor across Puget Sound, leaving a salt water island for another island in fresh water.

The Lake Washington Ship Canal cuts an eight mile channel directly through the center of Seattle, connecting the salt water of Puget Sound with freshwater Lake Washington.

Sailing through the Ship Canal takes you on an increasingly urban cruise through the densely packed marine industry of the city, with the skyscrapers of downtown Seattle standing tall to the south. Hundreds of boats make this journey every day, ranging from huge barges and deep ocean fishing vessels down to tiny speedboats.

Traffic is dense. On this voyage to my troll post I had to squeeze over to the shore to avoid two gigantic Foss tugs maneuvering a long section of six-lane freeway down the canal. In a matter of two hours I had crossed over into a bustling, metropolitan world very different from my serene anchorage in Eagle Harbor.

In Lake Washington, I discovered I had unconsciously been harboring a completely false image in my mind. Only one of many false images I treasure, it is true, but this one was particularly dramatic. I had somehow expected that this inland lake would be more placid than the salt waters of the Sound.

It was a madhouse. On this sunny July afternoon the surface of the lake was like watching a beehive, with swarms of bees wildly dashing in every possible direction at top speed. There was a constant roar, whine, wheeze and zip of engines as powerboats skittered here and there on incomprehensible missions.

Most of this nautical bedlam was only confusing, but there were a few boats that went far beyond that; they were awe-inspiring. They were the offshore racers -- great fifty foot missiles with tiny open cockpits perched aft, thunderboats with names like Top Gun and Miss Behavin, designed for open ocean racing at speeds over 100 miles per hour. (I find it interesting that their speeds are most often referred to in MPH rather than knots -- shoreside values seem to prevail here.)

Though I lead a monastic life myself, there are certain areas in which I have a great admiration for sheer excess, and these stupendous machines are excessive in every respect. They are too rich, too big, too powerful, too loud, too fast, too dangerous. Like the unlimited hydroplanes that race on fresh water, these offshore racers probably consume more fuel in three minutes than I use in a year, and for no useful purpose whatever. Being an ecologically sincere troll I can't approve of that, of course.

But I can get off on it, and I do.

I think what moves me most is not the speed, but the sound. The rumbling growl, the ferocious snarl of thousands of wasted horsepower goes without saying -- easy to identify as Engine. But there is another sound, not made by all of them, that seems very mysterious to me. I call it the Boom Bubble.

Some of these offshore racers seem to trail behind them a great, smooth bubble of sound that is not a snarl at all, but a continuous, deep boom without beginning or end. I can't even relate it to engines -- it is more like an aura, an insubstantial sphere of the deepest bass a human can comprehend, and it occurs even when the boats are going slowly. If you could hear the resonance of the earth itself, it would sound something like this. And even when it is overwhelming, it is somehow comforting.

There is a severe price for all this internal combustion marine madness, and I started paying it within seconds of taking my troll post under the I-90 bridge, next to the crane barge. The surface of the water was more like the North Sea in winter than the placid image of a "lake" I had in mind.

My boat tossed and rolled continuously in the confused, choppy wakes and cross-wakes of all the powerboats that roared past. The channel here is only a few hundred yards wide, and every wake not only interacted with every other wake, but was reflected back from the shore until there was no pattern at all, and no way I could anchor to minimize the random violence of the water.

Had I been cruising, I would have immediately picked up my hook and run for another harbor, but my professional troll duties required me to be here, and stay here. This was to endure for thirteen days and nights. You may think living under a bridge with nothing to do but scare people is a cushy job, but I tell you different. We trolls have our own problems.

The rhythm of days began with dawn water skiers about 5:30 A.M. and gradually built to a confused climax late in the afternoon. The center of my troll world was the barge, where a 70 ton crane grumbled and roared, driving steel piles for the launching ramp. During the daylight hours I anchored 100 feet out from the barge, and when the construction day ended, came in to raft up in the shadow of the crane.

At the end of the day, when the construction crew left the site, a kind of eerie silence suddenly descended

around the great crane barge; a mechanical brontosaurus settling into sleep with an almost perceptible sigh. The consciousness of action slipped away, and of awareness only the troll remained, solitary and still.

As the offshore racers had their Boom Bubble, the sleeping crane barge had a Bubble of Silence. There was plenty of physical sound, of course. Traffic on the bridge, the multi-toned grumbling, whining and shrieking of the powerboats streaming past in the channel, but it was somehow distant -- in the Other Place.

At the barge itself there was an invisible barrier, as though in sleep it had quietly slipped into another dimension, slightly crossways to the normal ones. All around it is the bustle and hurly burly of big city life, the dashing back and forth, the frustrations of traffic, the ambitions and fulfillments, the waiting families and cold dinners, the exuberance of water skiers, the triumphs of the power hungry, the quarrels of the irritable, the defeats of the shy ones.

But the barge is silent. It exists within the World, but is not part of it. It waits.

And the troll waits. Enclosed within a bubble of silence beneath his bridge, the troll is unknown to the Others as they pass by on their frantic errands. He perceives it all, and identifies with none of it. The universe is cleanly, precisely divided into what is Self, and what is Other. The distinction is known to trolls. The Self is perceived by knowing what is Not the Self.

So it must be when the baby first says "No" to the limitless universe, and begins to perceive itself as a separate entity. "No," says the two-year old. "I am not this. I am independent of this. I am self. No. No. No." It is by acts of refusal we define the limits of self.

Saying No to the North, and No to the South, and No to the East, and No to the West, the child gives birth to the ultimate separation of the world into Self and Other. And with this limitation begin both the pleasures of conscious experience, and the pain of separation from what is eternal; the exchange of the Self that is universal for the self that is unique.

That is the moment when the troll hides beneath his bridge, partly in the silence of some other dimension, partly in the noisy roar of this one.

The tumult of the waves captures our attention, but what the troll knows, he knows in silence.

end

Confessions of a Part-Time Troll
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GOD'S TEETH

Among the water rats, teeth tend to come in two varieties: bad and false. I don't know why so many of us have bad teeth. And since we also tend to laugh a lot, a social gathering of water rats can become a distressing display of -- dental irregularity. God, how the middle class dreads dental irregularity. It makes a mockery of the perpetual meaningless smile that is the very foundation of their social world.

A more charitable valuation might be that the teeth of water rats display a refreshing, freedom-loving variety in style, shape and color. Politically correct mainstream teeth, when you think about it, are pretty dull. They invariably point north and south, are some shade of white or off-white, and stay in the same place most of the time, much like the middle class mind.

Not so among the water rats. Our teeth tend to a richly varied color scheme of warm earth tones, from the most delicate ochres through profound browns like well-oiled teak, to a kind of mysterious tar color, highlighted with glints of reddish undertones.

And as to direction, our teeth sail full-and-by. (I should probably explain that "full-and-by" is an old term for sailing without a predetermined course -- sails full and by the wind's whim.)

The teeth of water rats do not meekly line up side by side like some platoon of intimidated Boy Scouts. Our teeth have minds of their own, and any given day may find an incisor drifting off to the southwest in a kind of mandibular scouting trip to see what it can see. Our teeth never seem to be satisfied where they are.

A few years ago one of my own incisors went off on such an exploratory trip. It was rather like watching a person trying to get out of a row of movie seats. He stood up, leaned forward, and then started pushing his way past his neighbors, slowly, but with clear determination to be someplace else, closer to the molars. It was apparently not a successful trip, because he eventually dropped out of both the race and my mouth.

The eyes, they say, are the windows of the soul. But I guarantee that when a grown man with no front teeth grins at you, you get a glimpse into the very depths of his being.

Why is it that a three year old with no front teeth is charming and a fifty year old with no front teeth is an object of contempt and pity? Ageism, I say. Fair play for all, I say. If no front teeth is charming, then by god it should be charming for everybody. I would even settle for cute. This is a philosophic campaign I do not expect to win.

Age certainly has something to do with the bad teeth of the water rats. There are not many young water rats, by which I mean people under forty. The young have admirable energy, but they lack the patience and endurance that makes it possible to live successfully on the water. Also, in this society, the concept that people should be responsible for their own lives is utterly foreign, particularly to the young, so the water life has little appeal.

The customary poverty of the water rats is also a major contributor to bad teeth, of course. A visit to a dentist costs more than most water rats spend on food for a month. And I have never heard of a water rat with medical insurance. In choosing a life that is independent of the mainstream, we also relinquish

certain benefits the mainstream takes as given.

Still, for all the glamor and romance of rotting teeth, they do poison the hell out of you. By the time you are ready for false teeth it is more than just a spiritual rite of passage, it is an incredible relief.

When I was getting ready to have my own teeth yanked, Dale of OBLIO commented, "Best thing ever happened to me was sex. Second best was getting rid of those god damn teeth."

I knew exactly what he meant. During my last year with my own teeth I lost 25 pounds, partly because of having my own toxic waste industry, partly because it had become so difficult to eat.

I don't actually mean "my own teeth." I consider the teeth I was born with as merely on temporary loan from God. Those were God's teeth, and it was a bad deal to begin with, and He is welcome to them. Bunch of damn worthless scraps of bone. My teeth, my really, truly own teeth, are honest, noble epoxy, bought and paid for.

Why is it that nobody has ever written a paean of praise to the pleasures of false teeth? Why, for that matter, does nobody even mention false teeth? People with a coronary bypass will chew your ear off about it. Experimental intra-ocular implants are also good for conversation, as are kidney dialysis, chemotherapy and, as used to be, the use of monkey glands for improving virility.

But America as a whole is so deeply, profoundly embarrassed about bad teeth they can't even use the word. At most, somebody may mutter something about "dentures", and scuttle nervously away with their eyes down. But "dentures" is just another word in our obsessive Anglo-Saxon tradition of creating Latin euphemisms around everything we're ashamed of. Well, "false teeth" was good enough for George Washington, and it's good enough for me. He didn't even have epoxy, but he knew false teeth when he wore them.

When I look in the mirror with my false teeth, I see clearly I am of the stuff of Cary Grant; I feel a spiritual oneness with Tom Cruise. I look just like all those ranks of handsome, debonair heroes that parade endlessly across the TV screen, smiling, smiling, smiling. Perhaps not totally, absolutely, exactly like them, but there is at least a little more similarity than there used to be.

And I can bite off a hamburger; a bacon cheeseburger even, if the bacon's done enough.

And I can whistle again, an incredible fog-piercing spear of sound, after years of merely hissing.

And there are even considerable pleasures in not wearing my teeth. Sometimes when I am particularly grieving for the mediocrity, the conformity, the greed, the rotten values and intellectual bankruptcy of this society, I'll go ashore without my teeth. It is an ultimate gesture of rejection.

Because there is nothing in the world so subversive to the American Way as some old curmudgeon in their midst sailing full-and-by, toothless and unrepentant.

end

God's Teeth
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THE CANNON'S ROAR

About four in the afternoon I heard the characteristic rumbling of a 6-71 GMC diesel, a sound that seems to throb in the water and be transferred to my hull, rather than coming to my ears. When I looked out, I saw the bright gold and blue of the little 36' workboat RESOLUTE bearing down on my starboard, a bone in her teeth and her massive steel hull churning the water like a miniature landing craft.

This was not, in itself, alarming. I know RESOLUTE well, as she belongs to my son David; part of his construction company's fleet of boats, barges and cranes whose home port is Eagle Harbor.

Today, however, was Memorial Day, nobody was working, and RESOLUTE was clearly in the hands of pirates. The two worst pirates in the harbor, in fact, Phil of FAVORITE and Mark of CALYPSO. I had a pretty strong idea David had no idea what company RESOLUTE was keeping (or rather, what company was keeping RESOLUTE.)

Mark stood on the foredeck with a line in his hand, his graying hair tied back with a bandana and his long, salty beard blowing in the wind of RESOLUTE's passage. Mark has a characteristic one-eyed squint that makes him look like Wallace Beery in an exceptionally evil mood. Phil -- big, black-bearded, aggressive tugboat skipper -- was hunched over the wheel grinning in the pilot house. Seeing those two guys together on the deck of a boat, you irresistibly expect Maureen O'Hara to be brought on deck in manacles.

I had clearly been cast in a scene from a 1940s pirate movie. And reinforcing the impression, mounted on the foredeck of the doughty RESOLUTE was a polished, black, immaculately gleaming cannon. As RESOLUTE got closer, Mark yanked on the line in his hand, which turned out to be the firing lanyard of the cannon. A thumping blast echoed out over the harbor, and a gout of white smoke spurted from the cannon muzzle.

A shot across my bow, and I was about to be boarded. The best I could hope for was a minimum of rape and pillage.

Phil reversed RESOLUTE's engine with a roar and a big rush of white water at the stern, swinging around to parallel my hull. He leaned out of the pilot house, watching the massive stern of RESOLUTE relentlessly sweep toward my white, virginal hull.

"Hit it! Hit it!" he said, with more glee than the occasion warranted.

The hit was, of course, a gentle tap at the end. Just enough to leave a black mark on my hull from the tires that serve RESOLUTE as fenders. There are quite a few of these love taps on my hull; for some perverse reason Phil likes leaving them whenever he ties a tug up alongside me. He doesn't have to. He doesn't hit anything with his boat he doesn't want to hit. But he always taps me. I think he believes he is educating me in humility.

Mark was grinning as he bent down to reload the cannon. Phil came out on deck and scowled at me. The boats were now side by side.

"C'mon, Donald," he said impatiently. "Let's get going."

"What the hell are you talking about?" I said.

"Just come on," he said. "We're going to go harass the LADY WASHINGTON when she comes in."

My attention had naturally been focussed in the near foreground, and only then did I lift my eyes to look beyond RESOLUTE and the cannon.

There, in the channel just at the mouth of Eagle Harbor, was the most marvelous, miraculous sight -- an 18th century fully rigged traditional brig with her topsails and topgallants just being furled by a scrambling crew. Her massive rigging stood against the sky like spider webs of tarred hemp, and at her stern she flew a colonial flag that looked the size of a football field.

Around her in the water a crowd of small boats began to gather, fluttering like lovesick moths, darting back and forth around the brilliantly painted reds, blues, gold and brightwork of the brig's hull.

This was the LADY WASHINGTON, a perfect replica of the vessel that had accompanied the COLUMBIA REDIVIVA on her exploration of the Northwest Coast in 1792. She had been built down on the Washington coast in Gray's Harbor, a private historical venture .

A couple of years ago some of us, including me and Phil, had gone down to Gray's Harbor to witness the launching of the completed hull, a moment that always sends chills down my back. We got our picture in the local paper with the caption OLD SALTS OBSERVE LAUNCH.

At the launching I also found I had an unexpected personal connection with the building of the brig. One of the shipwrights told me the crew had made a big banner of a quotation from one of my novels, and it had served as their motto during construction. It was from my book TO BUILD A SHIP, and it said BUILD IT OR DIE

At that time the LADY WASHINGTON had neither masts nor rigging of any kind, and to see her completed was a wonderful exuberance. Now she was complete, and sailing around Puget Sound as a kind of living museum, giving tours of the vessel at the dock, and short day sails.

I was spellbound, seeing her really alive, and entering the harbor, until Phil snapped me out of it with a gruff "C'mon, move it!"

I have found through careful study that the only satisfactory way to deal with pirates is to join them immediately. They obviously figured if they had the legal owner's father on board as cannoneer, it would somehow take the sting out of the theft of RESOLUTE. I thought they were right. I didn't think David would agree, but what the hell. If you choose to associate with pirates you're going to lose a vessel now and then. Perhaps it was even my duty to impart this valuable lesson to my son.

I scampered back into my boat, threw a pair of pants and some shoes and a jacket over on RESOLUTE's deck. I jumped aboard the tug, and while I hastily pulled on clothes, Phil swung away from my boat and we headed up toward the mouth of the bay, where the LADY WASHINGTON was just beginning to make her way into the crowded harbor under power.

Shively's tug RELIANT was also paying court to the LADY WASHINGTON, and he, too, had a cannon. His was a brightly polished brass barrel, which had no permanent mount on the RELIANT, and was fired from a position in a coil of towing line. RELIANT's cannon was a muzzleloader, that had to be loaded, powdered and fired with great difficulty. Phil's cannon fires blank cartridges like 10 gauge shotgun shells, and we had a whole box.

I fired off a couple of rounds as we approached the brig, and by the time we got there LADY WASHINGTON's crew was furiously loading and priming their own swivel guns to return our salute.

So we proceeded in joyous convoy down Eagle Harbor to the public dock, with volleys of cannon fire echoing back and forth from the surrounding hills, and little boats skittering about and around the newly come queen like troops of chattering courtiers .

Flanked by the cannonading tugs RESOLUTE and RELIANT the stately LADY WASHINGTON had immense dignity as she led her troop of admirers down the bay. At the helm stood her dignified black bearded skipper in a long black coat, a ruffled white shirt front, black knee britches and white hose. The crew was in various states of period dress, with climbing britches and tunics made of old sail cloth, knee hose, and bandanaed heads.

She was an immaculate reconstruction of a different world, a different way of looking at the world, a different way of being in the world. A relic from a different time.

And I suppose the three pirates aboard the cannonading RESOLUTE are, in our own way, relics of a different time, too. Not in as good shape, perhaps, as the LADY WASHINGTON, but then our launching was farther back than hers. Every year it gets a little harder to refasten our planks, our rigging wears a little thinner, and there are more patches in the sails of our souls.

Still, there may not be so much difference after all. In the era of LADY WASHINGTON, when men spoke of liberty and independence, they had something definite in mind. And so have the pirates of Eagle Harbor.

Let me hear the cannons roar in praise of liberty.

end

The Cannon's Roar
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A MATTER OF COURTESY

Beethoven once said that the secret of all music was in the combination of what was expected and what was unexpected. That is a fair definition of the pains and pleasures of the water life.

Water rats live with almost equal parts of perfect disorder and perfect order. Disorder, in one sense, is the nature of our lives. We can neither predict nor control the wind and the water; sometimes we can scarcely deal with them at all.

But on the water there is a kind of etiquette that is perfectly ordered. And because many of us are somewhat shy, it is comforting to know exactly what is expected of you in a given situation; to know what is a perfectly acceptable action.

One of the points of this etiquette is the procedure by which you board another vessel. It is very simple. First you hail the vessel, by name. Secondly, you receive an acknowledgment that the skipper is aware of your presence. Thirdly, you request permission to board. Fourthly, permission is granted or denied by the skipper.

Some of us do this rather formally (I am one), and some less formally. In most cases, however, the words "Come aboard" are necessary.

I've heard this formal etiquette compared with the simple courtesy of knocking on someone's door before entering a house. But it is more than that. From belowdecks in most boats, it is often difficult to see anyone approaching, and the unexpected appearance of someone on your decks is not welcome. Also, the integrity of a vessel, and the authority of her skipper, is absolute in a way that far exceeds anything on land. A skipper, regardless of how run-down, decrepit, or disreputable the vessel may be, fulfills a function more like a god of a minor planet than a mere homeowner.

So minor points of etiquette are taken seriously, and to board a vessel without the skipper's express permission is not merely an act of discourtesy, but one of aggression.

And that's what caused the trouble two Tuesdays ago.

Tuesday night is currently poker night aboard OBLIO, the massive, hand-built scow schooner built by Dale Cangiamila over the past two years. In Eagle Harbor there are presently only two vessels I consider adequate to the water rat's weekly poker game, OBLIO and the 100' beam trawler GRATITUDE.

When you go belowdecks on either vessel, you immediately lose the time and space of the twentieth century. You could be in any ocean, any time in the last four hundred years. The light is the golden, soft glow of kerosene lamps, casting deep shadows along the hull planking and heavy timber frames that support it. On GRATITUDE massive bolt heads stud the hull; OBLIO is hand spiked.

(I am not certain why we call our lamps "kerosene" lamps. Tradition, perhaps. In actuality, everyone in Eagle Harbor burns paint thinner, because it is half the price.)

Last year the poker game was aboard GRATITUDE, but Harvey re-anchored well out in the mouth of the harbor and on stormy winter nights it is far too difficult to row a dinghy against the cold wind and rain.

Thus the change to OBLIO.

It was not a simple transition, and required a certain ingenuity, a certain political sophistication. Dale Cangiamila does not operate in the money economy, and even for a water rat game of penny ante poker, some money is necessary. Still, it was clear to me that if the poker game were to continue, OBLIO had to be seduced or acquired in some fashion.

I decided that the best course was to stake Dale to the game. Peter Fromm of UWILA agreed, and offered to split the investment, five bucks apiece. We figured that, barring some absolute disaster, some unforeseen displeasure of Lady Luck, ten bucks ought to stake a water rat to a whole winter of good poker.

We formed the FROMM-BERRY FUND FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PROGRESSIVE ANARCHISM, I made up a certificate on my computer, and we awarded Dale our first annual grant of \$10.

Worked like a charm.

So the games started up again, the miraculous combination of pretty good poker playing and boat-rocking hilarity. (That is a bit of a literary scam; both OBLIO and GRATITUDE are far too heavy to rock, even when the players are falling down on the cab in sole from laughter.)

Two Tuesdays ago we'd been playing for an hour or so, missing a couple of regulars. There was only Peter, Dale and myself. We'd been joking about the invasion of the seagulls, as there seemed to be a lot of scrabbling on the deck from time to time.

OBLIO is so massive it is difficult to hear through the four inch thick deck. (Even when Julia screams, which she does with great power from time to time, you cannot hear it abovedecks on OBLIO.) Voices from the outside are very muted.

There was a light thump on the starboard, where the little sloop MARNIE is rafted to the scow. Dale recently sold MARNIE to a merchant seaman named Ray, and it has remained rafted to OBLIO while Ray works on it and waits to pass his seamen's union drug test to get another ship out.

I heard some voices very faintly, a conversational tone, and thought "Good, a couple more players." But there was no hailing call.

Suddenly, to our immense astonishment, Dale was standing at the foot of the poker table with his gigantic .44 Magnum revolver drawn and aimed at the hatch just above our heads. The .44 lives in a holster hanging from a central post next to the galley area and the poker table, and it was drawn and aimed before we even realized Dale was moving away from the table.

Dale's .44 Ruger is a huge weapon. It usually looks to be about the size of a large dog's leg, and in this moment it looked about the size of a large cow's leg.

It is a very uncomfortable situation to be in a small cabin with a man with a drawn weapon four inches from your face. Peter and I, seated side by side on the starboard berth, tried to disappear entirely. We each froze immobile, waiting, trying not to breathe too loudly.

There was an exchange that I do not remember well, if indeed it registered at all. I was not interested in the details, but I urgently wanted to see that weapon back in its holster and intended not to twitch an eyelash until it was.

Of course the invader was eventually identified as Ray, non-hailing, bringing a shipmate home with him to play poker. The gun was put away, and the game continued.

At that point I blew my stack. It takes a great deal to make me angry, but I was furious with Dale. I began to curse his paranoia, and his manners, and his sense of the appropriate response, and the hazard he thoughtlessly put us in. I remember using the word "bullshit" more often than I usually do, and could find no answer to anything Dale said except "bullshit", long and loudly repeated.

Dale was as astonished by my reaction as I had been by his, and naturally he had right back at me. We share the same respect for the details of boarding etiquette, and he couldn't believe I disapproved of his reaction.

All this, of course, was much to the confusion of the poor, stranger sailor Ray had brought to play, who had no idea in the world what was going on.

Anyway, after a while we cooled down from shouting at each other, and proceeded with the poker game. It was the first moment of tension any of us could remember in a poker game in the several years the water rats have played together regularly.

Peter felt the same way I did, but he was much calmer and less vituperative about it. Later in the week he and I decided it would make a point if we both brought weapons to the next game, just to needle Dale. Independently we concluded that it was funnier in the thinking than it would be in the doing, so we didn't do it.

The end of the story came at last Tuesday's game. When I approached OBLIO in my dinghy, I could see Peter's little Peapod dinghy already made off to the starboard rail of the sloop. Nobody was aboard the sloop, as Ray had passed the drug test and caught a vessel for Southeast Asia.

When I was still 20 yards away from OBLIO the heavy deck hatch rumbled back and Dale's grizzly bearded face under his black cap appeared.

"Welcome!" he called, "Welcome aboard!" He spread his arms in an expansive gesture of welcoming and hospitality. "Come aboard, mate, come aboard!"

Belowdecks OBLIO was absolutely beautiful. Her interior is all raw wood; heavy beams and four inch deck planking, massive frames visible at the hull, the huge centerboard well forming the back of the galley. The kitchen-size cast iron stove was putting out about 10 million BTU's and there was a half gallon of Chablis on the table.

There were no fewer than three full size kerosene lamps burning and two small ones, plus two brass navigation lanterns with clear glass. Their chimneys had all been cleaned and polished, and the golden light sparkled on the planking of the overhead and on all the wooden edges of the frames, and on the spice bottles, and soaked into the black iron frying pans and pots that hang on the bulkheads. OBLIO's cabin was completely, extravagantly, opulently lit from far aft to the forward bulkhead, and alto gether a

marvelously beautiful and hospitable sight.

Dale, it appeared, had been deeply hurt that he had made Peter and I uncomfortable. He did understand why, and this rich, warm welcome was his response to our discomfort.

Generosity, in fact, is a primary and essential part of Dale's temperament, and so is hospitality. "Come on over, mate, I've got more beans than I need." If Dale had a religion at all, it would have to include hospitality as its primary virtue, or he would have none of it, of that I am sure. So it often is with those who have no money at all.

But just as we all live on the water between the poles of what is ordered and disordered, it seems to me Dale had been caught between two of the values he holds highest. One value caused him to draw a weapon needlessly, and the other caused him to polish his lamp chimneys immaculately in welcome.

In fact, when you think about it, they were the identical value -- the appropriate courtesy between water rats.

I think that is what Beethoven meant about music being the combination of the expected and the unexpected. At least I can attest that it is so in the music the water rats dance to.

End

A Matter of Courtesy
1995 Don Berry

POWER CORRUPTS

I was about half way through fixing dinner when I had this great idea. I would scoop up all the water rats I could get hold of and take them on a tour of the harbor where they live.

I think this idea, somewhat out of character for me, came about through the interweaving of several small frustrations. Perhaps most spontaneous ideas are formed from small frustrations, I don't know. It's a reasonable theory.

In this case, the first frustration is that I had been dead in the water for almost six months. Going through the ordeal that internal combustion engines inflict on somebody who depends absolutely on them and can't afford to fix them. After six months of patient resignation, the final problems had been solved a couple of days before, and my engine was actually running.

I was mobile again, and it flooded me with a sense of relief and gratitude. I don't move much, and I don't particularly want to. I'm not in a cruising mode at all -- this is just where I live. It is the freedom to move that is a central value in my life. The inner concept of freedom is, after all, a concept of possibilities, not habits. I could feel raw spots on my wrists where the manacles had been chafing for half a year of enforced anchorage.

The second frustration was when the beautiful replica of LADY WASHINGTON came into the harbor. They gave tours of the boat and took people out on short sailing trips, and I couldn't afford either one of them. Just to go on board cost \$7, and a few hour sailing trip was \$20. This is actually a tremendous bargain any way you look at it, but only if you've got the 20 bucks. All my recent 20 buckses had been devoured by the voracious lump of iron in my engine compartment.

So I figured I would give my own tour, and take the water rats with me whether they liked it or not. When this tour idea flashed up in my mind, like a hole card triumphantly revealed, I instantly stopped chopping vegetables, leaving a little pile of peppers and celery and onions and garlic on the cutting board. In its newfound health, starting my engine was not only easier than cooking, it was easier than eating.

There are two steering positions on my boat, one inside the cabin and another directly overhead on the upper deck. Under way, I always steer from the flying bridge outside, a fact that has some relevance in the events that followed.

Julia of LEGACY was anchored closest to me. I cast off my mooring and climbed up the ladder to the flying bridge. Little LEGACY is a 26' sloop, very low in the water, and my boat stands ten feet in the air above her. Frankly, I was hoping that hearing the rumbling booga-booga-booga of a Big Block Chevy 454, combined with the looming tower of my flying bridge, would have an intimidating effect on Julia.

It is only fair to say that Julia is not easily intimidated. I have seen her swinging eight foot oars at people who tried. I have seen unwanted suitors falling all over each other to get the hell off LEGACY when Julia decided she wanted them off. And when she gets rowdy she's like a small scale nuclear explosion.

At this particular juncture, I definitely owed her one on the rowdy account. A couple of nights earlier Julia had been in a wild phase, and she had recruited Dale of OBLIO to conduct an inebriated midnight raid, of which I was the target.

Out of a serene and contemplative sleep I was wakened by the thumping of dinghies at my stern, quite a lot of shouting and laughing by Julia, and a steady giggle that turned out to emanate from Dale. The bearded old anarchist had been swept up in Julia's tornado and was just doing what he was told, which is his supremely successful policy with strong women.

So they came loudly and thumpingly aboard, and there was a lot of arm waving and shouting and criticism that I didn't get into the joyful spirit of the thing immediately.

"God damn trouble with you, Berry," Dale said with disgust, "is you got to be raped before you'll have any fun." There is actually a certain amount of truth in that, so I didn't argue. Argue, hell, I wasn't even fully conscious. I was just sitting up in my berth with my sleeping bag around me trying to figure out what was happening.

In the meantime Julia is noisily pillaging my liquor locker. My own specialite de la bateau is a drink called a Scurvy Preventer, made of equal parts of dark rum and Rose's Lime Juice. Julia knows where everything in my boat lives, and she unhesitatingly targeted the rum and Roses, bringing both bottles out triumphantly and splashing up huge Scurvy Preventers, while she laughed and shouted at my drowsy helplessness.

In the other meantime, my meantime, I am not getting into the joyful spirit of the thing at all. I am just getting more and more pissed off, grouchier and grouchier, and finally I kicked them both off the boat. They took it with reasonable grace.

"I know you have parameters," Julia admitted cheerfully as they left. "I just don't know what they are."

Nevertheless, there was a certain unpaid debt involved from this raid. Serious damage had been done to my rum stores, and in parting I had promised an act of vengeance coming their way very soon. They both knew I meant it.

When I steered the broad bow of my boat up to LEGACY's hull, I was sort of hoping Julia would believe it was the promised act of vengeance; that I was actually going to ram the tiny sailboat with my seven tons of tall, growling power vessel.

Julia, however, was in her other persona this evening, her calm phase. When she is not on the wild side, she is sweet and witty and agreeable; sometimes nearly demure. Not quite, but nearly.

However, even in her calm phase she is not a good candidate for intimidation, and she was grinning when she popped out of the hatch as I approached with my rumbling engine.

I announced the nature of the Eagle Harbor tour -- "Fifteen minutes of heartstopping excitement for only \$87, a thrill you'll never forget, etc, etc." and she scrambled on board over my bow rail.

From there I proceeded over to a transient boat, a little unnamed sloop, and picked up her skipper George and Michael of SEABIRD, who was visiting. In the next few minutes I went up to every boat in the harbor where I thought there was somebody at home.

By the time there were four or five people aboard, I felt the Eagle Harbor tour was off to a good start. I

forced everybody to listen to the unaccustomed sound of my engine running, required them to visualize the propellor turning, and accepted their congratulations with what I considered modest grace.

It is just possible I overdid the engine thing. A little bit. I think it was Rick of TATTOO who wryly suggested that the proper name for this venture was not the "Eagle Harbor Tour", but the "Power Corrupts Tour". The Eagle Harbor water rats are all sailors, and not overly impressed by the finer points of power vessels.

It is true there are comparatively few physical pleasures about a motor vessel. You don't get to play with the balance of forces as you do with sails and keel and rigging. But there are a couple of enjoyments, and one of them is the flying bridge. When steering from the flying bridge, the boat disappears almost entirely. You're looking out from a high vantage point into a worldscape that is only water and sky. The boat itself is just a light blur, slightly beneath your field of vision. There's a good reason to call it a "flying" bridge, because it's more like flying than helmsmanship.

Another pleasure is the strange game of forces you have to play when maneuvering at low speed with a single screw vessel. There is virtually no rudder control at low speed, and every time you go into reverse, your stern swings to port. You have to steer not by the wheel, but by the direction your propellor is turning. If I want to move my stern to starboard, I go into forward gear. If I want my stern to move to port, I go into reverse. I am almost never moving in the same direction I'm pointed, and half the time I'm moving forward with my engine in reverse or vice versa.

It is completely un-logical, but makes for a good game. In this particular game the goal was to get close enough to another hull for someone to step comfortably aboard, while never physically touching the other boat. I did not feel it prudent to remind the water rats this was the first time in six months I had handled the boat. If the Sea Goddess wishes to crunch some water rat, I am willing to be Her humble instrument.

To compound this situation, none of the boats I was maneuvering alongside was standing still. They were all swinging at anchor in different patterns according to the effect of current and wind on their particular hulls. Boats only yards apart were swinging in different directions at different speeds in the eddies of slack high tide.

This world of changing wind and water is truly an Einsteinian universe, because there is no fixed point of reference, nothing that can be relied on as stable. All motion is relative to some other motion, all forces involved are relative to some instantaneous and transitory combination of circumstances. There are so many factors at work in any given second that it would be quite impossible to account for them in a rational way.

If this sounds suspiciously like a nifty paradigm of Life Itself, hey, it's not my fault. But it is good to know that navigating through this intellectually ungraspable web of changes ultimately comes down to just a little forward throttle here and a little reverse throttle there.

By the time I'd taken passengers aboard from nine different vessels, my guest list consisted of 4 dogs, 12 people and 1 cat; the cat was my ship's cat Barnacle, who was making himself exceedingly scarce. Half the people were on the upper deck and the rest clustered either on the fore and aft decks, or in the cabin. The dogs were all wrestling on the foredeck. (Except for Scuppers, who came up to the flying bridge, pooped twice, and returned below.)

Since Julia had such recent experience with getting rid of my rum, I delegated her to dispense the rest of

it as far as it would go around. Starting, of course, with me. I must say she was at her most charming, and undertook her duties as hostess pro tem with sweet agreeableness. She carefully stretched out the remaining rum, trying to be sure everybody got at least a little.

Fortunately, when I stopped at M'LADY to pick up Tom and Nancy, Tom took one astonished look at the population density aboard my boat and immediately came up with a dozen or so cans of beer, which helped a lot.

And so with everybody aboard we set off cruising down Eagle Harbor at idle speed. Eagle Harbor has a sort of zig-zag form, and at each bend there is a sudden, and quite remarkable change of character. From the middle harbor, where we are all anchored, the urban skyline of Seattle, eight miles away across Puget Sound, is the eastern horizon. The ferry repair docks, an industrial plant, four marinas sprouting forests of aluminum masts, a public dock, and two shipyards are all within a few hundred yards. This harbor has been a center of maritime commerce for well over a hundred years, since it was crowded with square riggers transporting Puget Sound lumber all over the world.

But when you turn the first bend, there is a sudden change toward the silent side. The forests of masts are gone out of sight, and only a small boat or two is anchored out. The shoreside houses have docks going out into the cove, reaching away from generous green lawns, often with picturesque dinghies overturned on swimming floats. If Boeing sent recruiting posters around the world, they would probably look a lot like this scene.

But the greatest change happens when you round the second bend. Now there are not even houses along the shore, because this is tidal land. At low tide, the back bay of Eagle Harbor is a half-mile long mudflat. The edges are not tended and manicured, but wet and swamplike, looking like the dream image of an infinitely ancient, prehistoric landscape.

Before the whites came to settle this country, the summer longhouse of the Suquamish people was here on this point. At maximum low tide you can still find the remnants of fish traps set a century ago and more. In the outer harbor that century of white occupation has left much history, but no ghosts. In the back bay, there are ghosts.

And there is silence here. Seattle is gone out of sight, all of the settlement of the middle and outer harbor is behind the black green wall of firs. You can still hear the occasional swish of tires on a landside road, but not much more.

It is now sunset and the sky is pearly gray. The calm waters of the back bay are the same shade as the sky, as though heaven and water were two halves of the same clamshell, reflecting the subtle iridescences of these northern waters; muted, subdued, gentle, serene.

Here a great Blue Heron stands just off shore, calmly watching us pass. Then he springs up, and with long, slow sweeps of his seven-foot wings, he curves gradually up into the bordering trees. There is not much conversation aboard the boat. Even the dogs have quit wrestling.

We are in shallow water, getting shallower. I ask Julia to monitor the depth for me. She stands on deck beside the starboard cabin door where she can see the depth sounder, and quietly calls the reading up to me on the flying bridge. Sometimes she makes no sound at all, but only mouths the reading silently. Nine feet. Eight. Seven.

At six feet of depth I stop, and we drift for a little while, not saying very much. Listening some. Watching some. After a bit, I put the boat back in gear. Slowly we turn, and begin to ease back out of the back bay. It is like moving a hundred years in two minutes. From the silence of the back bay, broken only by the sound of heron's wings, we turn the first corner and see other boats, and in only a few seconds we reach the next bend and re-enter the urban, civilized world, suffused with electricity and ambition and the absence of ghosts.

I don't know if it was owing to that sudden influence of the civilized world, but I think that was where the mutiny occurred.

Michael of SEABIRD was steering, when he suddenly looked over at me in some alarm and said, "Something's happened to the steering. I don't have control any more."

I was a little alarmed, too. On the sea trial after fixing the engine, the steering had seized, and I was afraid it had happened again.

I took the helm and quickly discovered there was nothing wrong with the steering except that somebody else had taken control of it. Somebody was down in the steering position in the main cabin, refusing to let the boat be steered from the flying bridge. When I tried to turn right, this obstinate mutineer turned left.

I got into a ridiculous wrestling match with the damned wheel, trying to snatch it out of the mutineer's hands, and having it snatched out of mine as soon as I succeeded. I cursed anybody who was so crazy as to take control of the steering in shallow waters.

I don't really know how long this struggle lasted, but we zig-zagged out toward the outer harbor like -- dare I say it? -- a drunken sailor. It was almost as though the vessel itself were resisting every attempt to bring her away from the world of ghosts and herons back into the world of engines and exhaust manifolds and gasoline and noise.

At last the mutineer quit, and after I'd had the wheel long enough to be sure it wasn't going to be taken away again, I leaned over the bridge. Four or five people were on the foredeck.

"Who the hell is on the helm down there?" I said. Somebody went to look, and after a moment the answer came back:

"Nobody."

"Probably Dale," I said.

"Don't think so," somebody answered. "He's on the aft deck."

By that time we were approaching the fleet of anchored boats, and I had to turn my attention to letting off passengers. By the time I'd gone back to all nine boats, I'd forgotten about identifying the mutineer, and I had also faced the fact that I wasn't going to get much more cooperation than Humphrey Bogart got aboard the Caine.

I did finally find out, though. Turned out not to be Dale after all, who only said, "Christ, matey, I'd never try

to get away with that."

So who was the ghost who appeared at the heart of the vessel?

Julia. Of course, Julia. Sweet, agreeable, obedient Julia. Serving out my rum, quietly helping me to navigate in shallow waters, being the most charming and cooperative person you could imagine; a true, calm, and civilized companion on a sunset cruise.

And seizing secret control of the vessel the first chance she got. I can visualize her little smile, the glint in her eye, as she wrestles the wheel in the cabin, knowing I am hopelessly bewildered up there on the flying bridge.

I have got to get better at this intimidation thing. It just isn't working.

end

Power Corrupts
1995 Don Berry

A VERY SHORT VOYAGE TO BARCELONA

Julia of LEGACY has set her sights on Barcelona. It is not the Olympic Games that draw her, but the mysterious and other-worldly architecture of Gaudi she wants to see. These extravagant monuments to creative power captured her imagination from the first moment she saw pictures of them.

To this end she has been accumulating what she calls her Barcelona wardrobe for the past six or eight months. Everything is in black -- long dresses, jackets, slacks, scarves -- dress that is elegant as well as functional. She wants to be able to work when she is there, possibly as a waitress, and has outfitted herself accordingly. The basic plan has been to go to Florida and find a crew job on a yacht making the Atlantic crossing.

Yesterday afternoon she rowed up to my boat with her face alight, excited and exhilarated.

"I've got my ride!" she said. "First to Baja, then the Canal, then Barcelona."

"Hey, good news!" I said. "Somebody from around here?"

"Yeah," she said. "Can we talk about it?"

"Coffee?"

"Rather have a Scurvy Preventer," she said.

It was late in the afternoon, and a Scurvy Preventer suited me fine, so we got out the rum and lime juice and I settled down to hear the story.

It seems that a couple of days ago she ran into this guy at the marina near the mouth of the harbor... "a person of the male gender" was, I think, the way she put it. A man of about her age, with excellent manners and a fiberglass sloop in good condition, about 30' long and only a couple of years old. She'd been sailing with him for the last couple of days, around the south end of this island, at Blake Island and the port of Manchester on the Kitsap Peninsula.

O.K. So far so good. Or, at least, within the realm of possibility. In the right season good mariners have made the Atlantic crossing in craft no larger than that.

But as she unfolded the story -- about a minute and a half in, actually -- the realm of possibility suddenly receded into vast, almost infinite, distances. The gentleman, who "wanted to be called Gerhardt", had a remarkable past, which he had freely recounted.

It seems his parents had been German, and had been mysteriously killed at some indeterminate place and time. Gerhardt himself had then been raised by the United States government as a kind of general espionage agent. He had recently ceased to work as an international spy, and was now a filmmaker. He was planning to do some film here in Eagle Harbor, but quite soon expected to be working for the National Geographic.

What, I ask myself, is wrong with this picture?

"Well -- " I said, "There are probably a few things you ought to check out." I was basically stalling for time, because I didn't quite know where to get hold of this bag of rubbish.

"That's what I came to talk about," she said.

"Resources," I said. "Where does the money come from? What happens when the engine breaks in Acapulco? How does it get fixed? How do you get home?"

I waffled on in this wishy-washy practical vein for a while, not wanting to puncture a pleasant bubble of excitement too callously, trying to treat the thing logically rather than truthfully; a social idiocy I'm unfortunately subject to. I love to see Julia excited and happy about a project, and was reluctant to use the word "bullshit" too early in the conversation.

As it finally turned out, I got off this self-impalement rather easily. As Julia recounted her sailing experience with Gerhardt-the-international-spy we left the slippery mire of mere logic for the more substantial ground of seamanship. There was, it seemed, just a bit of a problem with Gerhardt's seamanship.

Understand, Julia is not nearly so naive as this account implies; but she had been on holiday, for christ's sake. She was along for a nice weekend sail, just taking things as they came, not in any critical frame of mind, thinking of Gaudi's magnificent spires twisting and towering in the sunlight of Barcelona, shining in her mind like a hypnotic charm.

As she told the story of their weekend sail it got funnier and funnier. You could see it in her eyes as one piece after another clicked into place. He'd showed her around the boat, telling her he had two reefs in the mainsail, which Julia questioned .

"There was only one set of reef points in the main," she said. "How can you put two reefs in if there's only one set of points?"

"You can't," I said.

"Oh," she said, and sighed a little. The glittering, fantastic colors of the Gaudi towers were fading rapidly.

The last nail in Gerhardt's coffin came when she described stopping for breakfast at Manchester. As they came into the dock, she was concerned about the depth of water, but Gerhardt said they had plenty. They tied up alongside the Manchester dock and went ashore for breakfast.

"We weren't using my brain," she said, "We were using his. Hell, it was his boat."

Then she described coming back to the boat to find it aground and heeling badly away from the dock. It seems Gerhardt had somehow overlooked the fact that the tide was ebbing when they tied up. Perhaps international spies don't need to know. But when a boat goes aground at the dock, something other than a security clearance is probably involved, something that rhymes with "fool."

In any case, they had to wait another full hour even to get to full low tide, and then another few hours waiting for enough water to come back to float the boat. At this point I decided to break my cover, and

share with her a deep secret from my own past.

"Julia," I said seriously, "when the KGB was training me to infiltrate the water rats, my cadre leader said 'Comrade Berryshki, first thing you got to know is, the tide comes in, the tide goes out. Don't forget'."

About this time another dinghy came alongside. It was Dale of OBLIO, headed for shore and the grocery store, wondering if anybody was interested in a barbecue aboard OBLIO and how big a piece of meat he ought to get.

"Permission!" he called.

"Come aboard," I said, pouring another Scurvy Preventer. "Julia just had a great adventure," I said. "See what you think."

Julia, with a straight face, began to tell the story as she had told it to me. Now, Dale is not handicapped by my unwillingness to be blunt, so Julia only got about fifteen seconds into the story before he interrupted.

"It's not my way to tell anybody what to do," Dale said. "But I absolutely forbid you under any circumstances to even think about this. No, no, no. Absolutely not!"

At that point everybody broke up, and we decided a barbecue was just what we needed. Oddly, the fiasco had put us all, including Julia, into a very cheery mood.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I needed a shot of adrenalin, and this got me up. I'm going! I'm going to get there! Yeah!"

In Julia's characteristic way, she had taken what anyone else would have seen as a defeat, and turned it on its head. She was more exhilarated after the bubble burst than she had been before, more certain of her goal, more energized to make it happen. In Julia's studio in Port Townsend she has a motto on the wall that says "Success through greater failure."

It was sunset when I rowed up to OBLIO, and nobody was there yet. I shipped my oars and lay back in the dinghy, setting myself adrift on the calm water of the harbor, looking at the clouds over my head, drowsing off to the gentle rocking. It was serene and peaceful, as the change of day so often is in the harbor. After half an hour the tide had moved me only a hundred yards from OBLIO.

As I dozed in the drifting dinghy, my mind wandered in a half waking reverie. Julia's adventure had not only been the day's entertainment, but a kind of lens, a focus on what is different about life on the water.

In the end, the most ludicrous part had not been the clownish grounding itself, but simply the idea that "Gerhardt" would try to present himself as something he was not. We're not used to that.

The water life permits us the luxury of certain illusions, and denies others. There is no deceiving of the waves, there is no persuading the winds. Deviousness, on the water, is unthought of, because it is non-survival. On the water you either know, or you do not know, and the difference is plain to everyone.

I think this is why we tend to be rather simple in our outlook; with the water rats, what you see is pretty

much what you get.

By and large, those who have chosen to live this life seem to have adopted as their banner the wisdom of America's greatest sailor, Popeye. It may even be specially appropriate that he, himself, is merely a cartoon, an imagination, a figment.

Popeye's wisdom is, "I yam what I yam."

That's the way it is with most of us. That's why we're here. And -- of course -- every day the tide comes in, the tide goes out. Don't forget.

end

A Very Short Voyage to Barcelona
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TOO MUCH POWER, NOT ENOUGH RUDDER

You make your living from successes, but you get your education from failures. You don't learn much from a success because you seldom ask "Why?" You scrutinize failure more carefully.

The most fertile ground for learning, though, is a failure that you somehow manage to bring off in spite of everything. I think living on the water tends to spawn events like that. This story is about one of those times.

I've written fairly often here about the scow schooner OBLIO, current home of the poker game, and her skipper Dale, last of the Absolute Anarchists.

After two and a half years of building, the time had finally come when OBLIO had to touch shore. Most vessels are built on land and are eventually introduced to the water; Dale, naturally, did it backwards. OBLIO's keel was laid inside a floating barge he got from Russ Trask for work in Russ's shipyard, and the lumber, hardware and other stuff came from the same source.

By the time Dale and Russell came to the inevitable parting of the ways, Dale had only gotten as far as the bottom and a few hull planks. Suddenly one day, the barge disappeared. It was no longer floating at Russ's dock, and at first I couldn't figure out where it had gone. Then I discovered it moored alongside the derelict freighter OCEAN CHAMPION, which had been forced out to anchor in the harbor because of unpaid debts of numerous kinds, mostly moorage fees. Dale had made a deal with Prince Oie to moor alongside, in exchange for which the Prince would get the barge itself when Dale was finished building OBLIO in it.

This arrangement only lasted for a couple of months, during which Dale sealed the broad, flat scow bottom, and got the hull planking a couple of planks above water line.

Then word got around that, after numerous warnings and paper servings and threats of various kinds, Kitsap County had gotten really serious about getting rid of OCEAN CHAMPION. As I heard it, they had given Prince Oie about two choices -- get out of the county or get out of the county. They were about to send a task force of Sheriff's deputies to serve the final papers and seize OCEAN CHAMPION as a public nuisance.

What they were going to do with this vessel, more than 150' long and in constant danger of foundering, no one knew, including, I imagine, the county. But they were going to do it, and Dale was caught in the middle. He had to get his barge and the half-built OBLIO out of there in a hurry.

At the time this crisis came up, the State ferry system was doing some large scale construction on the ferry docks at the head of the harbor. Manson Construction had their big Number Two crane on the job. Dale made a deal to have Manson Number Two pluck OBLIO out of the barge and put the half finished hull in the water on its own.

With the skeletal OBLIO precariously afloat, but only a couple of planks above the waterline, Dale signed over the papers on the barge to OCEAN CHAMP's skipper and got the hell out of there just ahead of the Sheriff.

Somehow or other, Prince Oie got a tow and actually sneaked away with OCEAN CHAMPION the day after the county had officially seized her and tied her up at an empty dock. She wound up ninety miles north at Port Angeles. The county was probably grateful, but they still ended up with the barge and eventually made a breakwater of it.

OBLIO went back to the middle harbor, where Dale moored her in five different directions. This was serious overkill on anchoring, but everybody appreciated it. The thought of this massive scow loose in a winter storm was enough to make anybody's spine tingle.

Over the next year he worked with OBLIO afloat, planking up to deck level, building the cabin and laying the deck. But now he had to get at the bottom to fit a cutwater forward, and a skeg aft. He also needed a more stable platform for putting on the small tree he was going to use as a bowsprit.

He decided to careen the scow on a gently sloping beach near the head of the harbor to do the work, and that was where I came in. We were going to use my boat, recently restored to power, to put him on the beach.

One of the things Dale and I share is a liking for a certain pace. We both like to have things go slow. In waterborne matters we like to think about a move, and then think about it again, until we know exactly what we intend to do if the wind comes up, or a flaky current grabs us, or we can't get around the corner, or whatever. People who rely on engines don't think this way. It is the mentality of wind sailors who are usually dealing with forces much stronger than they, and have a substantial history of getting into trouble. I have such a history, and so has Dale.

The night before the move I took my boat down to OBLIO and rafted up. We had a good supper and good wine, and took our time setting up spring lines for the tow. With my newly running engine there was at least no question that there was plenty of power available. Control was a different question.

My choice was to lash my boat far aft on OBLIO's starboard quarter, with my stern projecting out beyond the hull. The reason I chose this configuration was because it had worked for me the last time.

The last time I'd had a dubious tow had been in the Lesser Antilles, when I was trying to get a 55' ketch out of the doldrums off Dominica with a little dinghy. When I tried to tow from forward, the dinghy just swung around wildly and I had no control at all. But when I made the dinghy off to the quarter of the big boat, I could move it.

Well, this time it didn't work. It only took about fifty feet to realize that my little postage stamp rudder, made for turning a boat at high speed, was hopelessly inadequate to control the bulk of OBLIO at low speeds. No matter how far I cranked the rudder to starboard, we swung off to port from the drag, and making a turn to starboard was out of the question. Even going straight was out of the question. The only thing I could do was turn left. To get OBLIO in to the beach I knew I had to make one full right angle turn and maneuver between a set of dolphins and a dock.

There was one thing I could do to change direction, but it had to be done in reverse. If OBLIO was not dragging through the water, I could pivot my stern around to port with the propeller in reverse and start off again in a different direction. It was not a turn, exactly, but it got me headed off to starboard until OBLIO's drag took over again.

And that was what I did. We took off down the harbor in a series of left-turning semi-circles. After about a hundred feet, I'd go into reverse, kick my stern around, and take off again in another semi-circle.

It was plainly ridiculous; a clown parade. As the sun came up I prayed the other water rats would oversleep on this morning of all mornings, so there would be no witnesses to my incompetence in a simple tow.

However, as we traveled down the harbor, I got pretty good at this bizarre technique. It seemed vaguely Oriental to me, like a strategy from an ancient, devious military manual; a mysterious marine koan. Perhaps it would even seem inscrutable to an observer, rather than idiotic. Then again, probably not.

By the time we'd gotten opposite the beach I actually felt in control of the operation. It was a most peculiar crab-wise course, but I could, in fact, get where I wanted to go -- as long as I did it all in left turning semi-circles. Heading off to starboard was just a matter of waiting longer in reverse until my bow came all the way around.

Maneuvering in the narrow passage between the dolphins and the dock was almost an anti-climax. I didn't come anywhere close to hitting anything, or driving the great bulk of OBLIO into the dock. I just slipped her in and deposited her on the beach, turning left in semi-circles the whole way. Slick as a bean.

Now the morals I derive from this failure-that-worked-out, are simple, but useful:

1. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But it isn't the only way to get there.
2. What worked for you last time may not work this time.
3. Power ain't everything.

I didn't say they were profound. I just said they were useful.

end

Too Much Power, Not Enough Rudder
©1995 Don Berry

KILL WITH A SINGLE BLOW

If you're tired of hearing stories of well laid plans ganging agley, you might as well skip this one. It's about the best hand of poker I ever played, and how I lost it.

Poker Season is a major phenomenon for some in Eagle Harbor. It usually runs from the time it's dark by 7:00 P.M. until it's light by 7:00 P.M. That is, sometime in October until sometime in April or May.

In addition to a generous hilarity, the poker play is, itself, pretty good. The current hard core players, when we're all in the harbor, are Dale of OBLIO, Peter of UWILA, Tom of M'LADY, and myself.

On the night I played the perfect hand, we also had Tom's brother John, who had just arrived from Kansas, of all non-maritime places. John was starting to take up residence in the harbor by rebuilding an old derelict boat that had been abandoned near the public dock.

Now John is a man of immovable and fine convictions, including strict vegetarianism, celibacy, non-smoking, ecology and other admirable positions. He is also frequently on the wagon, but reluctantly. He'd only been in the harbor a day or two when I had him working on my dead engine. He worked very well indeed, particularly considering the pittance I was able to scrape up to pay him.

John was the first mechanic for whom I've ever had to brew herb tea instead of popping a can of beer. At first it was difficult to figure out what to feed him for lunch, as it couldn't have any animal content. Eventually we arrived at a lunch consisting of a bowl of mashed potatoes with soy sauce instead of gravy, and maybe a little margarine. This simple dish is amazingly appetizing, and fast. I've gotten to like it better than the more conventional quickies, by a good margin.

I realize this description of John makes him sound more than somewhat spartan. Physically, I guess he is. I get the impression it is partly a kind of atonement for a previous existence of rout and revelry, but wouldn't swear to it.

However austere his physical life, John's mental world is richer than most of us by at least five and a half dimensions. At times the only listener who can keep up with his warp-drive mind careening in and out of hyperspace is himself. Sometimes he will spend the better part of the evening talking to himself quite happily, exploring various philosophies, commenting on present and past company, evaluating the mental, moral and spiritual character of all those present. While there is a current fancy that one must not be judgmental, John has never heard of it.

When he is soliloquizing, John does not seem to require a lot of feedback. He does, however, sometimes require a very strong signal from planet Earth to call him back from whatever star he may be orbiting at any given time.

John is not, of course, the only one of us who needs a good Earth call from time to time. At one point we even had a ceramic bell to be used in cases of extreme absent mindedness. This need often coincided with the presence in Seattle of Southeast Asian freighters, whose crews did a tiny but lively smuggling trade.

But back to my perfectly played poker hand.

Most of our hard core poker players are better than I. The characterization we usually give visitors is that we're four beginners trying to get the hang of the game, but that's just to get their money; we're a bit better than that. I do win from time to time, and when I lose I figure the price is negligible, whether you figure the cost per laugh or per hour of entertainment. Any way you calculate, the weekly water rats' poker game is the greatest entertainment bargain around.

Near the beginning of last Season I decided it would be a good idea to devise a scheme of vengeance and trickery; to abandon the moment-by-moment tactical moves for the longer range strategic approach.

My plan depended on being absolutely, uncompromisingly consistent in play. It was, basically, an educational project. I wanted the other players to know exactly what the rhythm of my betting was, how I valued every hand, what every reaction meant. I intended, in short, to be perfectly transparent, an open book, an easy read. And I needed to do it for long enough that the other players had absolute confidence that they understood me backwards and forwards.

This was my chosen persona: I was the guy who always folded early, hated raises, collapsed at the least sign of resistance. The guy who would clearly take no risk whatever. The perfect wimp, the sad sack, the companionable but ineffectual jerk. I was playing, you see, on their preconceptions of my true character.

I played this part, and played it perfectly if I may so observe, for six weeks, all in preparation for The One Big Hand. It did not matter to me how much I won. I was out for soul-destruction; I was out to demolish their faith in themselves, absolutely; I was out to introduce the fatal worm of Doubt into their lives, Doubt that would haunt them in every moment of confidence from now until they moldered away in some dusty, forgotten grave. Every time they were perfectly certain of something, they would think of Berry and the perfect hand of poker, and their certainty would blow away like the sands of the Sahara.

I wanted to Kill With a Single Blow.

What I need to complete this scheme was a particular opportunity, and after investing six weeks to set the stage with my poker playing persona, I was willing to wait. I was patient, I was cool, I knew my moment would come.

The opportunity I was looking for is one that sometimes occurs in a game of five-card draw, in the middle of the evening, just after a few hands of nothing-much-happening. The water rats get a little bored and loose and silly. Guards are down.

At moments like this a kind of jocular, high stake betting suddenly jumps up on the first deal, a kind of "Come on, let's make this interesting" attitude. Everybody raises on their dealt hand, even before the draw, then raises again, and as the mood gets sillier the bet can go around four or five times. It degenerates into a nine-year-old "Oh, you're pretty proud of that hand, huh?"

Everybody knows it's a joke, but when that little fever strikes the table, you can built up a pretty good pot (by our standards) before the draw.

This was my moment to strike. The pot was the largest I'd ever seen accumulate before the draw. I went along with the betting rounds, raising a little, keeping it going, milking the cosmic cow, but not getting too far out of character.

This all went perfectly. None of the other players had any notion I was controlling the game with an absolute authority that made Genghis Khan look like a pimply adolescent. This sense of power, this clear evidence of superiority, must be the reward of the great scammers of history, and I was about to join those ranks.

Finally I allowed a round of calls to stop the betting, and called for cards. As best I remember, John drew three, Tom two, Peter three, and Dale three. All that incredible betting had been on lousy pairs. I had them. They were in the palm of my hand. All that remained was, metaphorically speaking, to push the Big Red Button.

"I think I'll play these," I said.

Dale was dealing. "Knock it off, Berry," he said. "How many cards?"

"None," I said. "I'll stand pat."

Peter looked at me, then looked at his own hand. Tom's hand stopped cold in the middle of raising a glass of rum, and he looked at me over the rim. He put the glass down carefully on the table and picked up his cards. "You stand pat?" he said.

Dale, sitting next to me, squinted sideways. John, who was about 23 light years away in outer space, paid no attention at all. He was looking up at the overhead deck as though there were a magical television screen up there. The table got pretty quiet.

"Stand pat, huh?" Dale muttered.

My hand, of course, was absolute rubbish. I hadn't even looked at it, and don't remember anything about it. I think there was a black deuce someplace, but that's about it.

I was sitting next to Dale, the dealer, and after the draw the bet was to me. Conspicuously trying to look inconspicuous I said, "Check."

The table was really quiet now. I had their full attention, and tried not to meet their eyes.

Finally Tom sighed, and without taking his eyes off me, he said, "A nickel," and pushed five pennies forward one at a time as though he were depositing a million bucks in a Swiss bank account.

The others called, and pretty soon the bet was back to me. Now I know what it is like to be a movie star. Nobody takes their eyes off you for even a second.

"Think I'll raise," I said, studying my garbage hand and trying to look innocent.

Dale grunted. "Uh-huh," he said. "And how much?"

I finally looked up at them and met their eyes. "Think I could get you to go a quarter?" I said. Nobody answered.

"Maybe even four bits?" I said, letting just a trace of triumphant glee enter my voice. Nobody answered.

"Well, hell," I said. "Let's get rid of this damn clink-clink and hear some paper rustle. I'll raise a buck."

I reached in my pocket and elaborately extracted a dollar bill, smoothed out the wrinkles, and deposited it carefully atop the pile of coins already in the pot.

"I fold," Tom said.

"I fold," Peter said.

"I fold," Dale said.

John said nothing. He was still staring at the ceiling and smiling to himself. His lips were moving.

We waited for a long moment. "John? Hey, Earth to John! You in this? Berry just raised a buck."

John gradually refocused his eyes. "Oh, yeah," he said. "Sure, why not? I'll raise you thirty-seven cents."

"John," Tom said patiently, "Berry just stood pat and raised a buck."

"Yeah, right," John said. "I'll see that and raise thirty seven cents."

John had barely glanced at me when he returned from hyperspace, but to my horror I saw in his eyes that -- he Knew. He Knew I had a garbage hand. He Knew it had nothing to do with the cards. Somehow the bastard had returned from his outer space adventure with the perfectly clear knowledge that I had nothing at all.

"I'll see your thirty seven and raise another buck," I said bravely. I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach.

"O.K.," said John cheerfully. "And I'll raise that twenty eight cents." He smiled his ingenuous, vegetarian, celibate, ecological, non-smoking, hyperspace smile.....

.....and I was dead. Oh, I muddled around a little, but it was clear from the moment he re-entered atmosphere he wasn't going to quit. He Knew the truth of the matter. John didn't appreciate the implacable logic I had laid down, the superb history I had established, the profound knowledge I had shown of my partners' psychology. The son of a bitch wasn't paying enough attention to be affected by any of that.

He beat me with a pair of nines. God, how I hated it.

There are two morals to this story:

1. You cannot con a man whose mind is in outer space, no matter how well you play.
2. You can get a hell of a lot of entertainment out of a buck if the game is right.

end

Kill with a Single Blow
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CHOCOLATE MILK, SACRED FLUTES AND V-DRIVES

Dead in the water. Again.

This time I was on my way to my troll gig at the crane barge on a Friday afternoon in mid-August. I got just outside the mouth of Eagle Harbor when I lost thrust. Turned around and started back into the harbor, and within a minute or two had lost power entirely. My old nemesis engine was running fine, but clearly the V-drive that transmits the power to the propeller shaft had given up the ghost.

The worst of this was that it was all occurring directly in the middle of the ferry lanes coming into Eagle Harbor, a channel only a couple of hundred feet wide. It does not take much imagination to realize that being adrift in the middle of the ferry lanes is as close to a living nightmare as you can get. On top of which I'm bankrupt, and the way in which the power went sounds like a lot of money.

But Problem Number One is definitely getting someplace I'm not going to be run over by a vessel longer than a football field and carrying 300 automobiles.

The place I lost power completely was barely inside the corner of a right angle turn in Eagle Harbor's dogleg channel. The tide had just passed low slack, and was sluggishly beginning to flow into the harbor. That moved me slightly away from the ferry lanes. That's good.

The wind, however, was pushing me at right angles to that, deeper into the ferry lanes. That's bad.

The game at this point became one of balancing how long I dared let the tide carry me out of trouble before the adverse wind put me in worse trouble.

When I figured I'd gone as far as I could I dropped the anchor and prayed it wouldn't drag much before getting a bite on the bottom.

When the anchor had set, and my emotions settled down a little, I took stock. Not too bad. I was slightly off to the side of the path taken by the ferries approaching the dock, with plenty of room for the gigantic boats to get by. Hell, they'd probably think I was out there fishing or something. I seem often to be wishing people would think I was doing something other than I'm actually doing. Still, the only real hazard in the next few hours was the wake left by big powerboats moving into the harbor at high speed. O.K. I've lived with wakes before.

I called the Seattle Marine Operator on VHF Channel 25, and asked them to connect me by land telephone to my son David's office. I explained the situation, and David said he'd see if he could locate some assistance. At worst, his company's work skiff would be coming into Eagle Harbor at the end of the day, and if we couldn't get a tow any other way, they could pick me up. It would only be a few hours wait.

That was how it worked out. About five o'clock the work skiff came whizzing happily into the harbor, took me in tow, and deposited me illegally at the dock in Russell Trask's shipyard.

I chose Trask's place rather than going back on anchor for a very simple reason: My friend Gerome, engineer for David's company, was going to have to look at this damn thing, and Gerome (even though he's from the island of St Vincent in the Lesser Antilles) absolutely hates dinghies. If I'm going to get any

help from Gerome, I'd damned well better be on a dock he can walk to.

Now it is a fact of water rat life that any disabled vessel being towed into the harbor gets noticed by everybody. So it was not a great surprise when, not more than five minutes after I'd tied off at Trask's dock, I saw a familiar dinghy coming up alongside. It was Julia of LEGACY.

"Hi," she grinned at me from the water. "Looked like you might need a little cheering up."

"Come on aboard," I said. "Whatever cheer there is, I'll take."

"I brought you some chocolate milk," Julia said, holding up a half gallon wax carton. "How 'bout that?"

"Sounds wonderful."

A few minutes later Jerry of TARUGA showed up at Trask's. He hadn't seen me come in, but knew perfectly well what it meant to see me tied at that particular dock.

"Hey, Chuck," he said cheerfully. "Pretty soon you're going to have a whole new engine, piece by piece."

Jerry hadn't come to comfort me, but to do some work of his own. Jerry is one of the new breed of shaman, working with a variety of traditional Indian medicine circles around the western part of the country. Much of his year is spent learning and practicing the songs, the lore, and the healing arts of the Indian spiritual renaissance.

Last year had been a particularly potent one for Jerry, partly because of his involvement with a Sacred Flute society in the Southwest. The society is widespread among western tribes, and has a number of different levels of initiation. Jerry had spent several previous years in apprenticeship with an Ojibway flute maker and medicine man in Arizona. On Jerry's trip to Arizona last winter, his teacher had granted him a grade of initiation that now gives Jerry the right and power to make and sell Prayer Flutes; to know the rituals that make them sacred; to pass the spirit knowledge through the breath of the flute.

He had come in from his boat to sit at the dock in the sunset and work on the flutes he was carving from aromatic yellow cedar.

In the late evening the waters of Eagle Harbor calm. Even the smallest ripples disappear, leaving only an iridescent plane reflecting the purpled sky of the setting sun like a mirror of polished platinum. In the dusk the wings of a blue heron sweeping past are the loudest sound.

The smoky red sun suffuses sky and water with a deep, brooding color like live coals. Serenity is like a tangible cloak that envelops us; stillness spreads great dark wings over the harbor.

After a day of struggle and uncertainty, three water rats sit on a rickety dock in a deserted shipyard under a red sky. Drinking warm chocolate milk from a wax carton, talking softly of broken V-drives, and the living spirit of the sacred flute, and crazy folks we have known. Trolls and shamans and wild women.

I think about friendships a lot. And sometimes, gratefully, I can see through the eye of friendship that these are the good old days before world's end.

End

Chocolate Milk, Sacred Flutes and V-Drives
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THE LOSS OF PARADISE

It was another typical day in Paradise. The temperature had dropped 20 degrees from the day before. The weather had been spring-like for a week, and suddenly turned winter-hard again. A steady, implacable rain began before dawn and continued all day.

Though this is Puget Sound's acknowledged image for this time of year, it is actually somewhat unusual. Even when it's raining, the pattern is usually a couple of hours of rain, a couple of hours of nothing much, then rain again. A day when it rains so steadily there's not even a break to go ashore is rare.

We were having a celebratory dinner on OBLIO that night, in honor of Dave and Anka of TERRAPIN. I'd gotten some pork steaks the day before, and Dale of OBLIO marinated them in his own special mix for a day. Because of the unusual steadiness of the rain, nobody went ashore for last minute supplies.

So we were short on back-up wine, and everybody was soaking wet when we straggled aboard OBLIO about 6:00. (Actually, Dale did have a bottle of back-up wine, and made the mistake of asking Anka to give her opinion of it. She said it tasted sort of like greasy milk. I equated that with having no back-up wine, and was not interested in confirming her judgment.)

The party had originally been intended to be larger, because the occasion was important. However, Anka has a limited tolerance for too many people and too much noise. Last Thanksgiving she and Dave had to leave Rod's dinner aboard OPTION when things got a little too frenetic in the small cabin. So this particular party was a quiet dinner for the four of us.

There were two occasions for celebration. Dave and Anka made the last payment on TERRAPIN, and Dave quit the job he'd held at the pizza place in Seattle for the last ten months. The two events were, of course, connected.

What both of them are hoping for now is to get an occasional day job cleaning out a blackberry patch or digging somebody's garden, or doing odd jobs of any available kind. Nothing too regular, of course. The main criterion is that it be a job with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.

Anka is a young, very pretty German girl with Slavic features and a smile that lights up the harbor when she paddles past in the morning, taking her new puppy Scuppers to the shore for a romp on land. She is shy and happy, and TERRAPIN is her first boat. I learned last night that her nickname as a teenager in Germany was Tiger Anna, for her energy and stamina. Good stuff for a water rat.

Dave is quiet, dark bearded, with wire-frame glasses and something of the air of a Talmudic scholar. I think the stint in the pizza place was hard for him, though he hasn't ever said so. It's a tough commute every day from this island over to the mainland, adding around three hours to your workday. But the pay in the pizza joint was better than he could find on the island, and they wanted to get TERRAPIN paid off as soon as possible.

I don't know exactly what Dave did before coming into the harbor with TERRAPIN. He's from Southeast Alaska, and was involved in high tech in some capacity. I know at one time he wrote communications network software for Vax computers, working for Digital Equipment Corporation.

Later he taught a University of Alaska course in Artificial Intelligence, which was conducted Alaska-wide by computer network, using his own communications software. The course was not technical, but on the philosophical underpinnings of the theory of Artificial Intelligence. We spent part of the evening discussing Marvin Minsky's theories of operator groups and the insights of Hofstadter in Godel, Escher, Bach, which Dave had used as a text in his course.

Working in a pizza joint doesn't seem a completely logical progression from Dave's past, but most water rats have not arrived in their present lifestyle by logical progression.

Dale of OBLIO is another example. His present paying job is nominal. Four hours a week he cleans the kitchen of a local restaurant. He frets under the regularity of it, though he has already told them he's quitting in June or thereabouts to work on his boat. There's still a lot of work to do. Dale has built the scow-schooner OBLIO by hand over the past two years, spiking every timber and plank with a six-pound hammer, shaping every piece of wood with hand tools, using no power at all.

In his previous life Dale was a field engineer for NASA, specializing in electronics and communication. From his post (also in Alaska) he managed a satellite tracking station. About the only remnant of his high tech life is a shortwave radio high on a shelf in OBLIO's cabin.

It is certainly possible to look at these two men, highly intelligent, highly educated, and wonder at the stubborn perversity that seems to be the core of the water rat life.

From the viewpoint of mainstream values, it is perverse. Where the landbound would celebrate getting a good job, the water rats celebrate losing one.

And it is probably inconceivable to one with normal American values that the big event of the day is taking a puppy for a walk on the beach.

And yet, of all the weirdly various groups I have known and lived with over six decades, ranging from the Maoris of New Zealand to the proud remnants of European aristocracy in Vienna, the water rats have one extraordinary attitude in common. They accept as normal that they are living in Paradise.

It reminds me of a conversation I had twenty years ago with Joshu Sasaki Roshi, a Zen master of the Rinzai sect.

Roshi said to me, "Berry, I don't understand Christianity. Adam and Eve lose Paradise."

"Yes," I said.

"Why?" he said, genuinely puzzled. "Zen student never lose Paradise."

I had no answer, (but that is not an unusual condition in conversations with Zen masters.) The exchange remained with me over the years, because the idea of Paradise and the loss of Paradise is not a fashionable one in my century, and it rather glances off my rational mind.

In the Western world we assume either that there is no Paradise, or, alternatively, that there is a Paradise and we are not there. Most people are working diligently to progress from the state of non-Paradise to the state of Paradise, which is, by common agreement, never to be achieved.

The three great motivators we have invented in this intentionally endless quest for Paradise are guilt, greed and ambition. On the surface these driving passions appear different, but they are, at root, the same principle; Your Life is Unsatisfactory and You Are Unsatisfactory. You are not doing what you should do, you do not have what you should have, and you have not accomplished what you should accomplish.

Whatever your efforts may be, they are inadequate, because by definition you have not achieved Paradise.

In a culture whose fundamental premise is that Paradise is permanently lost, the most subversive, dangerous, and revolutionary of all principles lies in the simple statement, "I have everything I need."

When we define Paradise as that place where we are not, we dedicate ourselves to lives of perpetual scurrying. We catch a glimpse of Paradise, like a beautiful woman just turning the next corner, and we scurry to catch up, only to find she is just turning the next corner, always some unbridgeable distance ahead of our best speed. Only a few dollars more, we think, a few more possessions, a little more Achievement...

And since we never overtake that elusive beauty, we eventually decide that scurrying is somehow good for its own sake, that the goal of all this scurrying is more scurrying. It is The Right Thing to Do, and those who do not scurry are derelict in their pursuit of Paradise.

Therein lies the true perversity of the water rats. Mostly, they refuse to scurry, because they think they are already where they ought to be. They have what they ought to have. They are what they ought to be. In the midst of the storm they congratulate each other on choosing this life, on the beauty of the moon and the water, on the foolishness of puppies.

They live as though they possessed the most secret knowledge of all. They have everything they need. Nothing has been lost.

At the celebratory dinner for Dave and Anka of TERRAPIN, I brought up a sailor's rhyme I had just heard

*Wind before rain
Sun soon again
Rain before wind
Reef your small sails in.*

No one else had ever heard of it, so I resolved to keep track and see if it held good in our waters. We had just had 24 hours of rain with no wind and the barometer was very low. A good test. If the rhyme proved true, we were in for a hell of a wind.

About an hour before dawn the next morning it hit. One sudden gust of 35 knots overturned the little cat shelter on my aft deck, spewing cat litter and shit all over the deck, blowing the molded plastic canopy off into the harbor. I was wakened by the noise, and saw the canopy silhouetted against the reflection of shore lights, blowing downwind as fast as it could go.

I grabbed my skiff, almost full of water after the night rain, and set off after the canopy in just sweatpants

and a shirt, with the rain slashing down in a frigid 25 knot wind. In seconds I was soaked and my hands felt frozen to the oars.

I managed to catch the canopy blowing downwind without any trouble, but when I turned to row back to the boat against the wind, it was a beastly struggle. I cursed the wind, the rain, the cold, the cat, myself, and everything else I could put a bad word on.

But, hey. Whoever said the wind would not blow in Paradise, or that there would be no cursing?

end

The Loss of Paradise
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don George Berry (January 23, 1932 – February 20, 2001) was an American artist and author best known for his historical novels about early settlers in the Oregon Country.

He was born in Redwood Falls, Minnesota^[1] but moved to Oregon as a young man and came to think of himself as a native of that state. He attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon. During college his housemates included the poet Gary Snyder, who shared Berry's interest in Eastern metaphysics.

In 1960, he published *Trask*, a historical novel about Elbridge Trask, an Oregon settler in the 1840s who was the first white homesteader on Tillamook Bay. He also wrote two other historical novels based on Oregon settlers *Moontrap* and *To Build a Ship*. His other works include *A Majority of Scoundrels*, a history of the fur trade in the Rocky Mountains. Besides writing, his lifelong artistic pursuits included bronze sculpture, sumi-e painting, and blues guitar playing.

Berry was also an early adopter of the use of the Internet for writing, creating a large body of literature that exists only in cyberspace.

He died in Seattle in 2001.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Berry_\(author\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Berry_(author))