

On August first, providing a pre-departure weather briefing in Portland bodes well, I will leave Maine and begin a voyage to the Carribean. Reflection on the past four summers of cruising Downeast leaves me with a pleasant delemma caused by an overwhelming abundance of subjects and memories. It seems proper and fitting that I pause, before closing this chapter of my love affair with Maine, to offer a farewell salute.

#### IN THE BEGINNING:

As a wide-eyed and slightly terrified ten year old back in 1950, I awaited a camp train at Penn Station in Baltimore. The train had already picked up campers along the Atlantic Seaboard from Florida to Virginia. The scene upon boarding was one of pandemonium. Friends who had not seen one another since the previous summer jubilantly shouted greetings with nick-names and catcalls. For a newcomer, terror was not an inappropriate response. By nightfall, however, contact had been made with a number of friendly peer and the transformation of the coach seats into upper and lower Pullman berths portended high adventure. Lights-out at ten served as a cue for the onset of an annual ritual that pitted counselors against campers and set the tone for the eight weeks that lay ahead. Water battles, fire-crackers, spit-balls, screams and howls, toothpaste fights, horror stories - anything the adolescent mind could conceive, and more, were present.

After arriving in Portland the next morning, our exhausted party boarded buses for the hour-and-a-half song-filled ride to Naples and Camp Skylemar. In the course of that magical summer, I learned about archery, riflery, "boners", color wars, lanyard-making, sex, the wonderful smell of forests of Balsam Fir, boxing, dances with Camp Winona, kissing, and, of course, dirty jokes ("Did you hear what happened to the fly on the toilet seat." "No, what happened to the fly on the toilet seat?" "It got pissed off." Or, "What's the strongest thing in the world?" "A brassiere, it holds up two milk factories.")

We canoed the Songa River and lake Sebago, climbed Mount Washington, explored Lost River and the Gorge, and heard wonderful old Indian legends and ghost stories at camp-fire cookouts. Bunk 7 that year developed a rather unique method of disciplining its sinners. There were eight of us. Two, although treated like brothers most of the time, had a propensity to be slovenly. When the head counselor made his inspection rounds every morning and the same two bunks were repeatedly noted for not bouncing a coin and having hospital corners that looked more like sagging drapery than neat folds, we realized that radical action was required. What hung in the balance was often free ice cream on our weekly ride in an open truck to Naples, or an extra visit to Canteen. By the third week of deprivation we had created the Bunk 7 Torture Chamber. The favorite torture

method I recall involved tying the naked victim's wrists to the rafters as he stood on the bent tubing that formed the foot of his bed. Once this position was achieved, the variety of inflicted humiliations was limited only by available paraphernalia and imagination. Tickling, soap, towel snapping, hot water - anything that would not permanently maim or leave a mark was legal. And no one ever told because the penalty for squealing was decockalization, and decockalization was taken lightly by no one. Decockalization involved the application of a mixture of toothpaste and wintergreen on parts of the body that, even to ten-year-olds, were considered important. It was on these same parts, with these same bunkmates, during the next summer in Bunk 11, that we placed bets of candy bars to see who could balance a golf tee for the longest period of time.

It was during my second year as a camper in Maine that I first glimpsed the coast. We went deep-sea fishing. I had never been on the ocean before and I still remember the awe I felt at the huge relentless waves that threw themselves in endless procession at our fifty foot boat. Our all-day trip ended at about noon because only three of the thirty of us aboard had not gotten sea-sick. It was on this trip, in fact, that I learned a truth that anyone who spends time at sea comes to know about people who get sea-sick - the lucky ones die!

In the years between 1951 and 1980 I visited Maine perhaps six times. Those visits, from the vantage point of the present, take on the color of a Proustian journey through the stages of my life: a trip to Newport to see the America's Cup races, and then through Maine and New Hampshire and on to Quebec with my best friend in college after our sophomore year. A journey, when Josh and Shawn were 9 and 11, to visit Skylemar, North Conway, and all the wonders of the White Mountains in New Hampshire. Our first ski trip to a very icy Mount Killington. A September week in Camden at the beautiful coastal estate of a friend shortly after the death of my father in 1973. A vacation at a rustic inland resort, memorable for the peace of long walks in the mountains. A wilderness canoe trip on the Alagash with three friends who had not spent time together since high school. From places and people, when viewed through the kaleidoscope of memory and meaning, much can be learned. Maine, for me, has been a touchstone.

#### TO SEE THE SEA:

When we moved to River Bend some eight years ago, I temporarily gave up sailing. I leased Aurora to a friend for several years and lost myself in all that was required to run the farm. Lin and I separated in the fall of 1980. As spring approached I realized that I faced psychological doom if I didn't find some spring activity in which to lose myself. I had long dreamed of a real sea voyage. The time seemed right. I arranged for a slip in Baltimore's inner harbor and began a complete refitting and refinishing. In late June, with a crew composed of my children - each with a friend - and Steve Glick, I headed

3

up the Chesapeake, through the C & D Canal, and out into the ocean toward points North.

Standing in a class by itself among poignant sailing memories, I recall how I felt as we glided under sail past the Statue of Liberty in New York's busy harbor. You see, I was not the first in my family to view this lovely old lady from a ship's deck. Some 90 years earlier my grandparents had viewed the same scene from the deck of a steamer bringing refugees from the pogroms in Poland and Russia. With them they had a few prized possessions, the clothing on their backs, and hopes for starting a new life in a new land. Whether someone translated for them into Yiddish or Polish or Russian, "Give us your tired, your weary, your humble masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shores...", I do not know. I remember how the power of these lines brought into focus for me the miraculous capacity life has to renew itself and to succeed. Here I was, the child of their children, sailing under the skyline of New York with my children, on a summer vacation from the business I owned and in my 36 foot yacht. It takes no more than a few such experiences to keep one in touch with the great debt we owe to this imperfect land of ours. Turmoil and discontent may rage around us. Eternal vigilance may be required from each of us. The injustice and callousness of some of our leaders and institutions may infuriate us; yet, there is much comfort to be taken in the realization that we owe a great measure of thanks for the gift of our freedom and for the opportunities this land has provided for so many of the world's dispossessed and disenfranchised.

On we went, up the East River and through Hell Gate, into Long Island Sound and up the Connecticut Coast to Newport, into Buzzards' Bay, through the Cape Cod Canal and, finally (additionally graced by the sighting of several whales), across the Gulf of Maine to our final destination.

#### CRUISING DOWNEAST:

That first summer in Maine I had allowed myself four weeks for cruising. I had brought a partner into my business partly to allow extension of my traditional one-week vacations. It was finally time to take advantage of the freedom I had created for myself. Different groups of friends joined me in one-week increments to explore the rocky bays and islands of Maine. At the end of that season I brought the boat back to Baltimore.

Over the three years since then, I have returned each summer to Maine, realizing at the second summer's end that it made good sense to leave the boat in Maine for the winter. Aurora now has a second home at Brewer's Boatyard On Ebenecook Harbor in Southport - an island separated from Boothbay Harbor by Townsend Gut and accessible by only one small and tradition-filled trunnion bridge.

The place-names of Maine have a magic all their own. Woven into

4

the warp of the regions history of rugged settlers and native Indian tribes, are such names as Penobscot, Eggemoggin Reach, Pemiquid Neck, McGee and Hupper Islands, Muscongus Bay, Arrowsic Island, Damariscove, Monhegan, Vinalhaven, Matinicus, and endless numbers of Southports, Eastports and Westports.

Volumes have been written on the geology of the Maine coast. For centuries, geologists were puzzled by the presence, only on the surface, of rock, with sizes ranging from the small rounded stones in the Penobscot and Muscongus Bay areas, to the huge boulders precariously perched on solid granite cliffs in Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island. Some of these non-native types of rock were not found within three hundred miles of their Maine locations. It was not until this century that the mystery was solved. Overlaying eons of upheavals from cataclysmic events that brought to the surface huge masses of granite, marble, and stratified sedimentary rock, lies the rubble carried into the coastal region by glaciers that withdrew and melted during the last ice-age, ten thousand years ago.

The tidal range in Maine averages nine feet. Twice every day, in a cycle caused primarily by the moon's gravitational pull on the oceans as the earth turns beneath it, the water covers and then lays bare the tidal zone. Evolution, as if to prove the remarkable adaptability of life and the preciousness of space, has graced this area with a unique flora and fauna that can live totally in neither air nor water, but require the tireless cycle of the tides for survival. It is in the few feet below the tidal zone that mussels are most easily picked. A part of cruising in Maine that I particularly love is awaiting a low tide so that the dinghy can be taken ashore and we can wade in the icy water and collect mussels for that nights appetizer.

My favorite anchorage, about four hours from Aurora's mooring in Ebenecook Harbor, is Harbor Island in Moscongus Bay. A typical day there involves anchoring in the snug, and usually empty harbor between Hall Island - an islet on which two lobstermen, who are generally willing to sell part of the days catch if we happen to be around when they come in, camp with their families for the summer - and Harbor Island, and then going ashore for the afternoon. Harbor Island is perhaps 100 acres in size and has one house on it. It is owned by a delightful gentleman named Lev Davis, whose primary residence is in on the mainland in nearby Roundbay. Mr. Davis, who delights in knowing every tree, bird, trail, and rock and cranny on his island, has provided me, over the course of a few casual meetings in the past three years, with a wealth of information about the wonderland with which he is entrusted.

A walk around the island's rocky perimeter, which involves climbing among most of Maine's native rock types and a wonderful collection of glacier rubble, takes about two hours. On the way, if one knows where to look, and the summer is well along,

5  
6

there are wild gooseberries, raspberries, and blueberries in abundance. Harbor Island is covered with vegetation typical of Coastal Maine forests, and includes peat bogs, Balsam Fir, several species of pine, wild roses, and an abundance of wildflowers. The smell is like nowhere else on earth.

Three-quarters of the way around the perimeter, just past the cliffs that cover the island's north shore, and slightly inland, is a rock formation within which lies a maze of caves and grottos that have occupied countless hours of exploration. On a few occasions, when time has allowed, I have made these explorations with compass, rope and flashlight. The first time I wriggled my way - facing total darkness - into the most major of these caves I had enough adrenaline in my system to fire up a small army. It was one of those enchanted moments that will remain in memory as long as time and life hold out. Past the caves and just before Mr. Davis' house appears, nestled in a clearing on the edge of the woods, lies a pine woods unlike the wilder southern two-thirds of the island in that its floor is not a mass of competing tangled undergrowth, but is a clear bed of pine needles. Half a dozen trees in this wood have large burls near the base of their trunks unlike any I have ever seen else-where. Two years ago Josh and I discovered that one of these trees had died and fallen during the previous winter. We went ashore the next morning with Aurora's hack saw and cut off an eight-foot section which included the burl. I carried this hunk of tree on Aurora's deck for the entire summer and then down the coast and back to Baltimore. It now sits in the barn awaiting the time and inspiration which will enable me to make it into some magnificent sculpture by which to trigger memories of Harbor Island. Dinner aboard, after an appetizer of very fresh mussels, usually includes either lobster or something cooked on Aurora's stern-mounted barbeque. The kerosene lamp that hangs on a bulkhead above the table and has been with me on different boats for twenty years, radiates a golden warmth as its light reflects off the teak that panels the main salon. With final background enhancements of wine and Rampal playing Mozart, I rarely get closer to heaven.

From Harbor Island we usually head for either Mount Desert Island or to the Camden-Rockport area. Rockport is a small harbor that lies two miles south of Camden in Penobscot Bay. It has two distinguishing attractions: Andre and The Sail Loft. Andre is a seal that was abandoned by his parents and adopted as a pup by a Rockport resident. He winters in the Boston Aquarium and is released each June to swim (on his own and unaccompanied) to Rockport where he voluntarily spends the summer in a fenced-in floating enclosure and, under the guidance of his adopted father, puts on two shows every day for the tourists that gather at the dock to watch. The Sail Loft, in my opinion, is one of the best restaurants in the world. Their fare features native seafood and is prepared with such consistent perfection as to make most other Maine establishments pale by comparison. For blueberry muffins and home-baked pies The

6

Sail Loft has no equal.

After dinner, if the weather allows and my companions are game, we walk the two miles to Camden for the eight o'clock performance of the Camden Shakespeare Company. In 1929 a well-to-do Camden resident donated an amphitheatre to the community. It was rarely used until the present resident company was founded in the late 70's. The theatre - more a daytime park than a theatre - overlooks a beautiful boat-studded harbor that is surrounded by the shops, restaurants and businesses that make up Camden's primary raison d'etre. Its semicircular center is surrounded by hillside groves of native shrubbery and beautiful massive white birch. As you enter the theatre, a grass walkway at street level leads to three rising steps which are formed from immense horizontally cut slabs of granite. Beyond the stone on each step, and leading to the next, is an area of grass, perhaps three feet deep. The top step introduces a large lawn which, in a semicircular shape, yields to more and deeper tiers (areas that become the stage) which are also framed by leading edges of granite and enhanced by masonry pillars topped with torcheres and sculptures. On most evenings between July 4th and Labor Day, risers on which the audience will sit are erected on the lawn, and the tiers that surround the lawn are transformed into a setting as magical for Shakespearean Drama as any I have ever seen. The sets are simply Maine greenery with a minimum of props and furniture. The rustic natural background makes scenery unnecessary, and for those who care for Shakespeare (I no longer take offense or feel responsible when someone I'm with falls asleep) the entire experience is very special.

It looks like you'll have to put up with more on Maine in next month's RBR. Time, space and energy are depleted, and I have yet to talk about fog and navigating therein, lobstering and lobster pounds, a friends admission on a week just concluded that his family has a claim on the entire state of Arizona, and the discovery of Maine's newest fish - Yeahbut.

NOTE: The second meeting of our new Literary Society will be held on Friday, September 27th, at 7:30 at River Bend. The book under scrutiny will be Swann's Way, the first of the seven novels that make up Proust's Remembrance of Things Past. We will be using the new Moncrieff/Kilmartin translation. Anyone who reads the book is welcome.

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## RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

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Clear, clean air. A splash of medium gray pancake clouds line the northern horizon. Sunset. Boats on moorings, mostly sail, of all sizes and description, form two rows which line the half-mile channel into Brewer's at the head of the harbor. Aurora - I am aboard alone for the first of three days - lies two-thirds of the way out. Low tide. Granite ledges, bearded with sea-weed, stand out like miniature mountain ranges from the rippled-mirror waters. Floats, signifying location and owners of lobster pots, dot the surface in a random rainbow of colors. A mackerel breaks the surface and glides by in water so clear that I can follow its movements and cast a spinner in its path. The radio brings me Garrison Keillor (The Prairie Home Companion), a kindred spirit to most who let him in, doing his News From Lake Wobegon in an auditorium in Louisville, Kentucky. He acknowledges his audience, with genuine sincerity, for allowing him to create himself, for supporting what he's doing: helping keep us in touch with the quiet values that form the soil in which the best in us can grow.

The radio just quit - could mean a dead battery. Caught a mackerel (thanked him and let him go). Two six-year-olds walk a dinghy across one of the just-submerged ledges, gathering mussels or just looking around, I'm not sure. A cormorant surfaces with a small herring, swallows it, shakes off its wings, and dives again. The smell of the forest and the sea surround me. My world here is very beautiful tonight.

This will be the seventh RBR that has gone out into the world. Six months marks a small, but meaningful, anniversary. I feel justified in reflecting a bit on the past six months with the entire canvas in view rather than a corner here, and an occasional glimpse of the center, sneaked in bashfully, there.

I have chosen to direct a great deal of energy to writing. A large measure of that energy has gone into RBR. When I have come home from Maine for a few days now and then, I have devoted most of my time to getting a new issue out. More than once I've felt like I often did when, in school, a paper was due in two days, and I was absent of the least notion of how I was going to approach it or what I was going to say. Sympathetic friends wonder why I don't just skip an issue rather than come home to torture myself for the better part of two or three days. Although I am more often than not dissatisfied with the result, RBR has forced me to write, whether I felt like it or not. And, one thing that I do know for certain, is that to be a "writer", writing is high on the list of things one must do. Writing brings experience toward meaning for me. Moments and states of

2

mind gel in a different sort of way when I commit them to paper. Writing of the kind I'm most inclined toward (although I've surprised myself at finding humor what I most enjoy) forces my focus. We don't usually bother to write about the normal moment-to-moment meandering leaps of our awareness. Writing should be about what we think has meaning, and what we think has meaning should be reflected in how we carry ourselves in the world.

So, although for most people, questing after some elusive dreamed-of goal is a private affair, and disappointment is suffered without public display, for anyone who aspires toward having his writing taken seriously, it is much like the risk taken by an exhibitionist who exposes himself to a group of teen-age girls and finds that he may invoke laughter rather than fear.

The criticism of RBR that has most surprised me is that I include too little of what I "really" think. I have cut endless lines of copy because I thought them inappropriate. Inappropriate because it's close enough to the edge of good taste to dare to do a project like this, and over the edge to throw a lot of advice and strong opinion at innocent people who, mostly, receive the fruits of my labor because I send it, not necessarily because they hanker after it. Perhaps when the number of subscriptions overtakes the number of conscriptions I'll become more bold.

In the meanwhile, I will persist, and hopefully create higher levels of quality with time and experience. RBR is one of the most dead-earnest things I've ever done. If I take it more seriously than most think reasonable, it is because it's my ass and ego on the line. As for profound thought, I offer this for today: My Dad used to remind me now and then that, "It is better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." On the other hand, there is no such thing as a fool who knows he's a fool, and a fool who always remains silent is much more likely to remain so.

#### SLOBSTERS:

Dotting the coast of Maine, from Cape Elizabeth to the Canadian border, are perhaps three dozen establishments that have mastered the preparation and serving of the king of crustaceans - the Maine lobster. They are the lobster pounds, where, for about ten bucks, one can enjoy a meal (provided you like lobster - and anyone who doesn't is hardly worth talking to, anyway) that can not be found anywhere else on earth.

These establishments have in their favor the fact that they buy directly from the lobstermen and have the freshest catch available anywhere, that the shellfish are kept fresh in large tanks that circulate the same water they live in (the pounds are always on the water so a pump and an intake pipe hanging below

3

the low tide line are all that are required for an infinite supply of circulating ocean water), and most important, enough volume to enable a cooking method that cannot be imitated elsewhere.

The meal of preference consists of a lobster (which weighs anywhere from one to two-and-a-half pounds - depending on the state of your appetite), an order of soft-shelled clams and an ear of corn. The edge that the lobster pounds have in the preparation of this conglomeration, is that the whole meal is boiled in one huge cauldron. The components are put in net bags and dropped into the water at the appropriate time for a common completion (lobster - 15 minutes, clams and corn - 10 minutes). By evening, the water in which the boiling takes place, has born witness to the expiration of thousands of clams and has become more clam broth than water. The sweet flavor of this broth imparts a taste to the lobster that makes the unique difference between Maine-eaten lobster and Maine lobster eaten elsewhere.

My first visit each year to Robinson's Wharf on Southport Island (where I initiate this annual ritual) is preceded by joyful anticipation and a lot of Pavlovian salivating. We sit, after a fifteen minute wait that seems to take hours, at a wooden picnic table, a cardboard tray in front of each participant loaded with paper baskets holding lobster, napkins, melted butter, a nut cracker, clams, an unshelled ear of corn, a bib (for only the uninitiated), a seafood fork, and a bag of - as if this were not already overkill - potato chips (I think the potato chips are added to remind you that human taste in food has infinite variety).

There are different schools of thought on the proper method of attack once one is properly anchored and ready for action. Some - the same anal-retentive types who get a steak dinner and methodically consume all of the baked potato, then all of the steak, and so on until each part of the meal is ingested without being tainted by the taste of anything else - eat all their clams, then all their lobster, then the corn. Those of freer spirit blithly strike here and there, never able to decide which item they like best and which combinations most please their palate.

This meal is not for the meek, who, although they may inherit the earth, will never enjoy, at the visceral levels attainable in a true appreciation of the experience, this engorgement. The bodies of the recently departed shellfish become impersonally strewn about with unconscionable abandon. Once you learn the proper way to dismember a lobster-pound lobster, you realize that delicacy and dry fingers are the enemy of spontaniety. Finger licking is not only preferred, it is essential. The lobster is presented in its entirety. The first step is to twist off the tail and chew or suck off the mustard that will inevitably remain attached to the meat. Next, the fins at the end of the tail are broken off, exposing an oriface which allows (no, invites) the

insertion of a finger to push the meat out of the shell through the twisted-off end. the large claws are then wrenched free and cracked open. The small claws, after they have been broken off the carapace, are then eaten with a combination of chewing and vacuum pressure. All that remains is the large shell which houses the head, the mustard (fat), eggs (should one be on a lucky streak), and bits of assorted meat and white "stuff". As this is my favorite part, and most people don't bother with it, I usually enter my highest state of nirvana as the meal winds to a close, and I feel uninhibited in snatching these untouched treasures.

It has occurred to many of those who have born witness to the events described above, to ask which, if the choice were forced upon me by some malevolent power, I would give up: sex or lobster. I'm not really sure. No one ever complains if I fall sound asleep after lobster...

#### ON LITTLE CAT'S FEET:

The average July on the coast of Maine will last for 744 hours. During 200 of these hours, more or less, fog will be present. Fog is generated by warm moisture-laden air, usually from the South or East, passing over the colder coastal water. In the depths of the offshore ocean, water is stratified in thermal layers, the warmest - heat rises - at the surface. The waters become churned up and lose this stratification as they approach the shallows of the continental shelf or coastline, and are therefore coldest near land. As a result, the surface air is quick-chilled and its moisture condensed into fog.

An understanding of this phenomenon makes it apparent that, among the attributes which make fog so devilishly difficult to deal with, is the fact that it can appear as if from nowhere on beautiful, bright sunny days. Anyone who has sailed Maine waters knows how you can be sailing in the best of weather one moment and find yourself, in the next, in fog so thick that you can barely make out the bow of the boat from the cockpit. And, as if that were not frustration enough when it occurs, sometimes you can see the masthead still in bright sunshine and know that you are in a pea-soup that is only thirty or forty feet deep. Novices to Downeast sailing usually stay where they are when fog sets in. In time, however, you come to realize that whole weeks of treasured vacation can be wasted at anchor, and that the harbors and islands that are usually one's destination, are often fog-free. You also come to realize that you can sail out of a fog bank as quickly as you can sail into one.

So, as with most repeated experiences that stop you in your tracks, you learn a few tricks, and even come to welcome and enjoy the challenge. First, you learn to stay pretty clearly in touch with where you are at all times. It's difficult enough, sometimes, to navigate in clear weather. When fog is added you

want to know exactly where you are when it overtakes you. The primary sense that substitutes for sight in such conditions, is hearing. The bells and gongs and foghorns that are incorporated into the buoyage and lighthouse system on the coast are often all you have to go by, and are listened for with more than passing interest. After a two hour run on a compass heading, when you have figured every angle of drift and wind to the best of your ability, and have timed your estimated arrival at a mark to the minute, the sound of the buoy you're aiming for is even more comforting than the mumblings of your crew below, praying to whichever dieties they fancy are interested in the outcome.

The other trick you learn - often to the astonishment of those aboard who have, they suddenly realize (and occasionally with horror), entrusted their safety, and perhaps their lives, to your competence - is to head for sheer cliffs or steep, rocky shorelines. You learn which shorelines allow you to hug their coasts on the way into an anchorage. This tactic enables you to come close enough to see such a shore without hitting bottom and, often, the roar of the surf forewarns you that you're almost there. Once you've found a piece of land that you can identify, the rest is fairly simple.

Then, there are the lazy days in which you accept being fogged in as a gift. There are always a million-and-one chores to do - a bit of sanding, a pile of laundry, a book to get into, a nap... Fog then becomes an old friend who simply insists that you slow down and unwind. I have tried repeatedly to lure companions into an all day game of Diplomacy on such days, but thus far to no avail. Instead, the range of activities usually becomes a function of the whims of the players.

Some highly memorable moments have come out of fog days. Of the ones that a family publication of this genre can appropriately include, a few stand out as worth relating.

There was the time that the six people aboard walked through rain and fog to reach a particularly wonderful bakery in Northwest Harbor, on Mount Desert Island, and returned to the boat laden with all the ingredients for a steak and potatoes dinner, and a still-warm blueberry pie. Maine blueberry pie, incidentally, stands in a class by itself, because Maine blueberries are very tiny, very sweet, and have much more personality than the grape-sized and usually mealy commercially grown variety. Maine blueberries grow in the wild and are collected, preferably by small boys with freckles and red hair, therefrom. So, a still-warm blueberry pie has all the promise of all that specialness, plus its right-from-the-oven irresistibility. At any rate, we rushed through dinner with more than one covetous glance turned in the pie's direction. Sue Glick, in a fit of very uncharacteristic behavior, suddenly found that she could no longer refrain from attacking this defenseless pastry in a fashion so brutal as to astonish all who witnessed the event. There are some things that you must know about Sue. Sue is the

6

wife of Steve Glick, who has been previously introduced. No, make that, "Steve Glick, who has been previously introduced, is Sue's husband." Sue is almost always a perfect lady. No, make that, "Sue is almost always a perfect woman." (Sue, you see, is also a bit of a feminist, and I must mind my language in deference to the abuse I am bound to receive at her hand no matter how I handle this narrative). The table had, but seconds before, been cleared. Someone made the grave error of placing the pie on the table. There were no clean utensils to be immediately had (Aurora only has room to carry six forks). I was at the sink rinsing the dirty ones when cries of disbelief rang out around me. Sue had dug out a hunk of the pie's center with one hand, and was, by the time I turned around, using the other to go for a more representative portion of the crust from the near-edge. It was clear that anyone who didn't move fast was to go pieless. In fact, if memory serves, she calmly garbled through a mouthful that the rest of us better join her or risk getting no pie, either forked or unforked. As a result, amid cries of, "gross", and, "foul", we all dug in and consumed all but the plate - with our bare hands - in something less than two minutes. For the record, I would add that eating a gooey pie with your hands is definitely worth trying if you like sensual experiences. At least two of the participants in that caper (I happen to have been told this in confidence) have since, and secretly, consumed whole pies in this fashion in closets, bathrooms, and attics.

More recently, it was over a game of hearts, while socked in at Northwest Harbor (same island), that we learned that Sylvan Feldman's family had a "pretty valid" claim on most of the state of Arizona. "There is, you know", Sylvan provingly informed us, "a Feldman, Arizona." It seems, if one is to take Sylvan as seriously as he does himself on this matter, that in the famous Jewish Immigration to Arizona ("What, you don't know about the Jews who landed in Arizona?") at about the turn of the century, a distant uncle made his fortune and bought thousands (perhaps millions) of acres of Arizona land. The story gets a little foggy once specific questions are introduced, but rest assured that somehow, and illegally, the progeny and kin of this uncle lost title to the land. The chore of defending this claim has fallen to the present generation and Sylvan is pretty sure (he thinks) that one of his cousins is (or already has), at this very moment (or very recently), involved in the long, hard fight through the courts of Arizona (or perhaps the Federal Courts) to win back the family treasure. Those readers in Arizona, however, need not be alarmed. Sylvan admitted that he would forego his claim in exchange for the State's dental plan, and we all feel certain that some negotiation can be worked out to satisfy all involved parties.

As if this story were not enough to bear on a foggy July afternoon while socked in at Northeast Harbor, Jake (of, "Crock got McDonalds and I got the fish," fame) picked up mercilessly on Sylvan's oft-repeated style of responding to the questions that

7

followed his highly unsatisfactory answers to previous questions. Someone would say, for example, "Sylvan, do you really know how large Arizona is?", and Sylvan would reply, "Yeah, but...", followed by some highly sophisticated proof as to the facticity of his preceding answer. So each time Sylvan would have the opportunity to field a question, Jake would interject, before Sylvan could open his mouth, "yeahbut". For much of the remainder of our time together, each time Sylvan had a chance to make a statement, more than one of us would, before he could utter a syllable say, "yeahbut". Yeahbut then deteriorated into Maine's newest fish species (unfortunately, the restaurant that night in Northeast Harbor had Halibut on the menu), and will, I feel certain, remain part of the vernacular in certain circles for a long time to come.

Done! And off to Bermuda and the Carribean. See you in September with, I hope, stories of a calm and restful voyage.

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River Bend Reflections is published monthly by Stanley Dorman from River Bend Farm, 1449 Corbett Road, Monkton, MD 21111. Annual Subscriptions are welcome at twenty dollars per year. Sample issues will be forwarded upon request.

## RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

September, 1985

Vol 1, No 8

### MAINE-BERMUDA, LEG 1:

The trip to Saint Thomas was, although not entirely smooth at every juncture, successful. We left Maine at 10 A.M. on August first in a 30 knot breeze from the north. From the mouth of the Sheepscot River we sailed south across the Gulf of Maine and reached the Cape Cod Canal at 11 A.M. on the second. At six that evening we rounded Cutty Hunk, left Buzzards Bay and the Mainland behind, and headed southeast for Bermuda. Shawn (daughter, 20), Shawn (Shawn's very good friend), and Travis (Gompf, 11 year old son of Art), became seasick immediately upon leaving Maine. By Cutty Hunk, Art and I were exhausted, and the others, with varying degrees of wonder at what they'd set themselves up for, gamely (if a little greenly) took on the responsibilities of our thus-far ignored formal watch schedule.

Art, a sailor and navigator with remarkable resources and ideal temperment, has navigated the Newport-Bermuda race twice and has an affection for the Gulf Stream that borders on lust. It holds a lure for him, I think, like an irresistible lover who can be either warm and giving or violent and angry, and you never know until the action begins which mood you'll find her in.

This fickle flow of water, born of equatorial currents created by the westerly trade winds, is a warm river that flows in the ocean out of the Gulf of Mexico and northerly along the coast to Cape Hatteras where it turns to the northeast and continues its journey toward the coast of Europe. It ranges from about 60 to 100 miles in width, flows at 2 to 4 knots, and wanders within the North Atlantic at slightly varying distances offshore. As The Stream flows northward, eddy currents sometimes split off to form secondary circular currents that move in a counterclockwise direction toward the East Coast and then back to The Stream. These eddy currents often run at speeds of two or three knots and it is very useful to know exactly where they are. In crossing the Stream on the way to Bermuda, if you catch the southern edge of an eddy, you can pick up a free two or three knots for 40 or even 60 miles. If you wind up in the northern edge, you face a current that slows you down to the same extent. The Newport/Bermuda race is often won or lost on a navigator's ability to properly play the eddies.

We had gotten the Stream's coordinates and the eddy locations from the Short Wave Coast Guard broadcast out of Portsmouth, Va. on the afternoon of the 4th, our second day offshore. We had, purely by luck, picked up the favorable edge of an eddy current and reckoned we were about 40 miles from the western edge of the Stream. From then on we periodically took the oceans

2

temperature (by putting a thermometer in water flushed through the head) so we'd know when we were in it.

I happened to be at the helm at 1145 P.M. when we reached the Gulf Stream. No one had to tell me we had arrived. The seas, very suddenly, were huge and confused and the fetch between wave crests was short. Aurora pounded and lurched like an angry stallion. After getting over my initial fear - we were under full sail in a 20 knot breeze - and realizing we were probably in no danger, I began to sing (as I often do when exuberance overtakes me at the helm) the Marine Hymn, "Eternal Father strong to save, Who's arm doth bind the restless wave, Who bids the mighty ocean deep, its own appointed limits keep. Oh hear us when we pray to thee for those in peril on the sea," when the Gulf Stream decided to dampen my high-spirits with a solid wall of warm water that drenched me from head to toe. For the next two hours we pounded our way toward the more consistent seas deeper inside the Gulf Stream.

The balance of the eight day passage to Bermuda was uneventful except for a nervous episode with completely dead batteries (no engine, no lights, no electronics) discovered at 0600 on the fifth. We pulled the Honda generator out of the forepeak and after an hour of charging, were very relieved to be back in business.

In the late afternoon on August seventh, Bermuda came into view. We faced the choice at that juncture of making our landfall at St. George's Harbor after dark, or heaving to and waiting 'til morning. We decided to go for it, and informed Bermuda Harbor Radio over the VHF radio of who we were and what we intended. As we entered the buoyed channel through the reefs on Bermuda's western shore, we watched a beautiful sunset and found ourselves in the dark with a rather confusing array of flashing green and red buoys ahead of us. We successfully figured out how to run these buoys and, as per previous instructions, upon nearly reaching the harbor entrance, we called Bermuda Harbor Radio again to find out where they wanted us to dock to await clearing Customs in the morning. We were told to raft up onto another newly arrived sailboat which we would find on the back end of Ordnance Island.

Saint George's Harbor is a fairly large basin (about a mile in diameter) which has deep water right up to the shoreline along most of its circumference. The town nestles on its northern shore and Ordnance Island - about the size of a football field - sits just off the town and is connected to the town-center by a small bridge. The bearing from the last entrance buoy to the tip of Ordnance Island was 302 degrees magnetic. The first time we ran this course we decided to turn around and start over as we were about to hit shore. The second time we ran a slightly higher compass course and turned before getting to the shoreline, following the harbor toward the west and reasoning that we had to come to Ordnance Island. We wound up

instead almost hitting two wrecks and cruising, in total darkness, through an area cluttered with old pilings and boats on moorings. As we turned and headed back toward the entrance buoy I called Bermuda Harbor Radio with a request for assistance. After turning on the masthead strobe so that they could find us, they led us verbally to the very tip of Ordnance Island. As we came up on its stone bulkhead we were told to turn to starboard and stay 75 feet off because there was a reef between us and it. By this time we could see, across the island, the mast of the boat to which we were to raft. Art had put the transmission in neutral as we slowly approached, and I was on the bow with a flashlight directing his steering. When we saw the mast around the corner and could clearly see the outline of the Island, I told Art to turn more to starboard and then round the stone-bulkheaded tip of the island. Art's reply, as I heard the engine rev up, was something like, "We got no forward gear!" At this moment a gentleman appeared on land and began to tell us how much he had enjoyed listening to our landfall on his VHF radio. He then, after expressing his surprise at the fact that we were not already on the reef, advised that we turn further offshore. We dropped the anchor, called Bermuda Harbor Radio, and sat to await a tow for the last fifty yards of this leg of our journey. We had gone, keep in mind, 830 miles without the slightest problem, and lost our transmission fifty yards from our destination.

The next morning, after clearing customs, Art and I worked on the transmission to no avail. We knew the problem was in the linkage but couldn't figure out how to adjust it. I called a local engine dealer who promised to have a mechanic aboard at 8 A.M. on the morrow. I also called a shop which specializes in electrical systems because it was taking an inordinate amount of time for the batteries to charge. The electrician arrived that afternoon and, after getting some bad output readings, removed the alternator to test it in his shop.

After spending our first night at Ordnance Island and then wandering around St. George's during the following day a few things became clear. The dock to which we were tied was old and falling apart. There was one hang-out in St. George's which seemed to attract every derelict on the island. It was twenty yards away and directly across from Aurora on the mainland. It's primary attraction was a shade tree that seemed to have magical powers for inspiring linguistic forays into the use of shouted expletives in their purest form, i.e. without the benefit of any other parts of speech.

Among the other attributes that made Ordnance Island memorable, was the complete absence of water. To say that we all needed showers is to grossly understate the case. With the alternator removed we had no choice but to remain, hot and dirty, for another night. As if this were not punishment enough, we also discovered, as the sun began to set, that rat-sized cockroaches were lining up on the rotting dock and making mad attempts to

leap onto Aurora's pristine deck. On Friday the transmission was easily repaired and I learned that the alternator was terminal. There was one potential replacement on the island that could be modified to fit my Perkins engine at a cost of a thousand dollars. The proper alternator from the States would cost about \$250.00. Even if I gave the go ahead it wouldn't be until Monday that it could be installed. Monday would be the twelfth, we had planned to depart on the tenth, and the hurricane season officially opened on the fifteenth. While commiserating with Art, who was, in any case, going back home with Travis over the weekend, about whether I was a total fool for not postponing the second leg until early November, I called Leonard Sachs in Baltimore (Leonard and my son Josh were to replace Art and Travis for the second leg to The Virgin Islands) and asked him to try to locate an alternator of the proper make and vintage to bring with him if I decided not to abort the journey. Art, with a degree of hesitation in his manner that was anything but calming, thought that as long as we didn't depart on the thirteenth, which is not only bad form but a supreme insult to the Gods, we may as well play it out.

Then, with the old alternator reinstalled (it had sufficient output to keep us going but wouldn't fully charge the batteries), we bid farewell to Ordnance Island and went to the St. George's Dinghy Club to luxuriate, while tied to a new pier, in showers, a nice club house with bar, and dockside water. Josh arrived that afternoon on the theory that even if we didn't leave Bermuda he'd not mind a few days there. Leonard advised late Friday afternoon that he had found an alternator in New Jersey and that, if the trip was on, he could arrange to meet it at the airport before departing from Baltimore on Saturday morning. I decided, "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead," we'd leave on Monday and trust the odds - overwhelmingly in our favor - on meeting a premature hurricane.

The entire weekend it rained. We were not, however, dissuaded from taking our fleet of mopeds to several beaches and to Hamilton, Bermuda's largest city. After all, I surmised, we may never be in Bermuda again - or for that matter ever see land again. Bermuda's beaches are breathtakingly beautiful. So what, that each time we returned to the boat we had to wring out everything we had taken with us.

Monday arrived as scheduled but with ominous skies and a fifteen knot breeze out of the west. The electrician boarded at 9 A.M. and installed the new alternator. Shawn and Leonard left at 10:30 to find a taxi and buy the long list of provisions and ice that would see us through the 9 to 14 days we'd be at sea. The wind picked up to 25 knots.

The St. George's Dinghy Club, nice as it is, is at the easternmost end of the harbor. We were tied on the outside of a dock so that the wind was blowing us against it. The dock was adjacent to a rocky shoreline no more than 60 feet away. Under

normal circumstances a few fenders would have been sufficient to keep us off the dock (as they had for two days). The circumstances were increasingly becoming less than normal.

Bermuda Harbor Radio reported that Hurricane Claudette was, at that moment, 130 miles Northwest of Bermuda. Winds of 25 knots were forecast along with scattered thunderstorms. As the morning drew on and we awaited Shawn's and Leonard's return, the cloud-filled sky turned a sickening pink and blue. The wind was now gusting to 35 and we were being driven, by the wind and the four foot seas they created in their fetch across the harbor, hard onto the pier. The fenders were riding out from the side of the boat and occasionally we'd smack hard against the pier. As the three of us who had remained aboard tried to hold the boat off the dock, our situation was becoming increasingly perilous. About 30 yards to seaward of the dock were a string of mooring balls. When the Dinghy Club is crowded, boats tie up stern to the dock and bow to these moorings. A kind soul in a fishing boat, who was passing and saw our predicament, offered to take a line from our bow and secure it to a mooring so that we could pull ourselves off the dock and lie head to the seas. Not having a single line long enough to reach, I tied two together and soon we were sufficiently removed from our first dilemma to breathe a bit easier. The wind was now blowing a steady 40 knots and the seas, for so confined an area, were impressively high. We were secured, with old lines that were tied together, onto a mooring, whose strength I knew nothing about, with a rocky reef-infested shoreline 60 feet behind us. I swam another pair of knotted lines to a second mooring as the wind started gusting to 50 knots.

I had called Bermuda Harbor Radio in one of the adrenaline-filled moments of leisure to explain our situation and ask where we might find good holding ground off a lee shore. They had suggested that we move to Smith's Sound which I promptly found on the chart. It was only about a mile-and-a-half away. My log entry at 3:30 reads, "For good reason we managed to get two lines out but they will complicate matters in trying to motor out of here. If we foul the prop, we're on the rocks. Getting anxious for Shawn and Leonard to return. The wind seems to be freshening and it's 3:30 already. I won't wait past 4:30."

At 4 P.M. they pulled up with about 30 bags of groceries and 100 pounds of ice. There was no way they could get aboard so I told them to see if the Club could refrigerate the perishables and ice for us, and that, should they wish to try to find us, we'd be in Smith's Sound. If they didn't find us I told them we'd pick them up at the Club in the morning. I then swam out to free one of our two mooring lines, came back aboard, and, using all the power we had, cast off the other line and headed out into the blow. After a few minutes of hair raising bouts with the wind, we were in the lee of a channel surrounded by small islands and the seas were calm. We found our way into Smith's sound without further incident, anchored, and wondered

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why people go to sea in small boats. Shawn and Leonard found us and managed to get a ride out to the boat. After putting the provisions aboard and clearing Customs on the morning of the thirteenth, we left Bermuda and headed due South down the 64th meridian toward the Virgins.

#### BERMUDA-SAINT THOMAS, LEG 2:

Aurora carries 80 hours of fuel. I was anxious enough about the weather - the fact is that for the first three days I was pretty sure we were all destined to die some unpredictable, yet surely miserable death, by virtue of my poor judgement - that I wanted to make one hundred mile days but I also wanted to reach the half-way point - 420 miles - with at least half our fuel left. By the fifteenth - we had a party aboard to welcome the hurricane season - we had used 20 hours of fuel and it was dead calm. On the 18th we crossed 25 degrees, 21.5 minutes North Latitude, the half-way point, with more than half our fuel unused. In the summer, the Bermuda High often suppresses the Trade Winds north of the 25th parallel. South of there, however, the Trades can almost always be counted on. On the 19th, as promised, they arrived. Our hope was for easterly winds, but the first gusts came from the southeast. We were making good time but the boat was heated at about 30 degrees and it was very hot. When we left the ports and hatches open we could count on water coming in below periodically. As the days passed the wind did eventually shift further east but we retained the choice of either wet or hot, and it became so hot that there really was no choice at all. We had started out by issuing everyone their own sheet and pillow. By the 20th everything below was so wet that no one bothered with such civilized amenities. If there was an empty bunk, and it was on the lee side (enabling you to lie against the hull rather than against a less-comfortable lee cloth that kept you from falling across the cabin) you would try to fall asleep in it.

To make a long story short we were on a close reach from the 18th 'til our arrival at Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, on the 21st. By the time we landed no one had any dry clothing left and cushions, pillows, and everything else aboard that would absorb water, had. We had 1700 nautical miles under our belts and we felt like we had really done something big! It was in that exuberant frame of mind that, singing "Impossible Dream" from "Man From LaMancha" I steered toward customs in Charlotte Amalie.

The Customs building is on the town quay which serves as a dock for the large work boats that ply the islands with cargo - anything from cars to goats. It is an unsheltered area where seas are too rough for small boats to lie comfortably. To its west is a ramp where sea planes come ashore on small wheels after landing in the harbor. Tied in front of the Customs shed was the Harbor Pilot, a steel boat of some 70 or eighty feet in length,

then an open space of about 60 feet - easily long enough to comfortably approach and tie up Aurora, and then, with its bow facing our direction of approach, an eighty foot aluminum ferry which makes the 45 minute run to and from Tortola four times a day.

A sea plane had just landed. I had chosen to approach the quay from the west to be heading into the easterly wind as we docked, and was directly in front of the sea-plane ramp. We were moving as fast as we could to clear the ramp the sea plane would need, but, as I moved down the harbor, the seaplane seemed to be heading on a collision course with us. Now, I am not intimately conversant with rules of right-a-way when a seaplane meets a sailboat, but I was very clear about the fact that the two propellers I was now very close to would definitely make a distinct impression on Aurora. I sped up. It sped up. I turned. It, to my great relief, held course and passed us, in a great rush of wind, on its way to tie up against the quay very far from the ramp.

Our second approach was a bit more composed but no less exciting. The engine was at idle as we slowly approached the open space between the Pilot boat and the ferry. I put the transmission (remember the transmission that had been repaired in Bermuda?) in neutral and noticed that there seemed to be a very strong current moving us rapidly forward. As the dock, (and the bow of the ferry) quickly approached, I put the transmission in reverse and raced the engine. We were, a realized almost too late, flying toward a spot between the bow of the ferry and the dock at full speed! My crew, stationed with various and sundry dock and spring lines on the bow, came running in panic toward the cockpit. If we were going to hit, they astutely and simultaneously realized, any human effort to stop our thirteen thousand pounds at six knots would have been futile. Without a second to spare I threw the helm to seaward and we glided under the bow of the ferry and cleared it with little more than a coat or two of paint to spare. The transmission, I discovered moments later and under calmer conditions, was locked in forward.

For our third attempt we chose a big open space about two blocks from Customs. As we approached I killed the engine and we tied up. The transmission mechanic had not securely bolted the cable to the transmission lever and it had worked loose somewhere between Bermuda and St. Thomas. After an easy repair, we cleared Customs and headed across the harbor to Yacht Haven to shower, do six machines-full of laundry, and dry out. As we motored across the harbor the engine overheated for the first time since leaving Maine.

In the interest of brevity I will only mention that for all of our three days in the islands I was primarily a diesel mechanic nursing an as-yet unsolved overheating problem. Aurora now rests in a lovely marina on Tortola with her engine removed

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and getting torn apart at God knows what expense. I will return later this fall or early winter to cruise through the Virgins and then move on to the Windward Islands of St. Martin, St. Bart, St. Christopher and whatever other Saints strike my fancy.

There is nothing, absolutely nothing, nearly so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats; but, for now, I'm delighted to be back home and facing an overwhelming amount of earth-bound work to be done at River Bend.

#### AND IN CLOSING:

Among my original intentions in writing RBR, was to candidly report my state of mind as I moved through the changes in my life that would inevitably result from the sale of my business. It is 4:05 A.M. at the moment, and I have tossed and turned with a 102 degree temperature since waking up in a cold sweat about an hour ago. Looks like I've picked up a late-summer virus. I returned from Saint Thomas on August 24th, which means that I've been home for just over two weeks.

Labor Day, it seems very clear to me, should be switched with New Years. New Years really signifies little but a change in the calendar. Labor Day marks all the beginnings of a new year: the migration to colleges and universities, the beginning of a new round of committee and board meetings, the start of fall classes, the opening of the new cultural season - symphony, theatre, choral groups, movies, opera, etc. - and a fresh round of parties and renewal of summer-neglected acquaintances and friendships.

Labor Day loomed even larger for me this year than it normally does. I have been in a frenzy of activity all summer with sailing in Maine and making preparations for the voyage South. Suddenly, upon returning, I have found myself in a new and very different reality. How I use my time is entirely up to me.

My intention has been to consider the time until September '86 as a sabbatical year; a year in which to discover how serious I really am about writing, about confronting a higher degree of solitude, and about finding out whether I really enjoy all the work (and time) involved in dealing with the farm. There will be time for working in the shop, getting the house into a less-disheveled condition, working with all the machines I seem to have collected over the years, getting the grounds looking like I'd like them to, caring for a few farm animals (if I choose to), and generally examining whether all the avocations I've become attached to retain or lose their magic when they are not indulged within stolen moments in a previously much busier schedule.

I am now, after two weeks in this new life, emersed within the reality of some of the anticipated pitfalls inherent in my game

plan. First, I am constantly wrestling with priorities. Do I write or mow the lawn, go downtown to deal with personal business or work at home, find someone to spend an evening with or go it alone? The hardest part has been the solitude. There have been times when it has been delightful to have no distraction to my own company, and times when I find my own company dull and distasteful. The catch 22 in the solitude issue is that in order to have structured contact in the outside world - and most of us need it, I suspect, more than we realize - commitment is required. Commitment to charitable work, or school, or teaching, or a business venture, is, in many ways, contrary to my intentions. If I fill my life with committed involvements I will not be able to learn about myself what I'd like to know. So I sit in a self-imposed semi-paralysis of evaluation, giving myself time to adjust and permission to hold this time as a period of learning and adjustment.



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## RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

October, 1985

Vol 1, No 9

Recently, at the witching hour on a night bright from the light of a full moon, I strayed from the house and found myself at a favorite spot by the bank of the river. As I have never had much success with prayer, I have come to use such times to chat with myself, the moon or stars, the cosmos, or with someone who has left this sphere. Bright moonlight has always had a magical effect upon me - probably a throwback to our evolutionary ancestors who emerged from the tide-bound sea. On this particular occasion, I felt moved to acknowledge my gratitude for being alive, and was thinking (talking, if the truth be known) about how nice the past few weeks had been and wondering if I could trust my present sense-of-self. Suddenly, my reverie was interrupted by a frail but forceful female voice which came at me from across the river... But I am ahead of my story.

During August, while the North Atlantic and I were getting acquainted, a favorite niece returned to Baltimore for the first time in a year-and-a-half. She was to be home only briefly, and I was anxious to see her before she returned to finish two years of study at Cambridge University in England. Pam and her mother, my sister Sheryl, were in Ocean City when I got back home. I drove up on Wednesday to spend the afternoon and evening with them and returned to River Bend Thursday afternoon. Upon reaching the farm the usual joyous reunion between my dogs and myself was played out, complete with pats on the head (my pats on their heads), kissing, and general falderal. I learned upon entering the house that during the previous afternoon the dogs had successfully treed and totaled a racoon whose behavior was noticeable lackadaisical - for a racoon. Baltimore County had been notified and had picked up the dead animal to determine if it had been rabid. We had, in fact, appeared on the late news Wednesday evening in a story featuring the current epidemic of rabies in Baltimore County.

I thought little of these events until I received a call from the County two days later informing me that the racoon had indeed been rabid, and that the dogs should immediately receive a rabies booster and were under quarantine. On the following day the fever I mentioned in last months closing remarks first reared its ugly head.

Being fairly certain that the gestation period for rabies was considerably longer than three days, I made no connection, and upon feeling better two days later, set out to go jogging, split some firewood and generally exhaust myself in physical labor. Next day the fever returned with disquieting 102-degree intensity. Again, after two days I was back to normal and embarked on a second frenzy of activity. The fever returned for a third time accompanied (as if to clearly announce that I was not dealing

2

with your average ignore-it-and-it-will-go-away type fever) by a headache that renewed my respect for headaches and had me thinking about the need to review my will.

After spending a miserable night - the kind in which half-sleep paralyses all ability to come to full consciousness and shake an oppressor - it took only brief reflection for me to know that I had in fact contracted rabies. The next morning I made four calls. The first was to cancel a lunch date with Charles, my ex-business partner, and to inform him that we were probably speaking for the last time because I was likely to die. That call led to a second as Charles speculated that, although he was glad I was very well insured, his household had recently experienced a similar scare, and that he doubted, from the little he had learned in the process, that I could have rabies. He suggested that I call his wife, Jeannie, who in the past week had become one of the nations leading experts on this dread malady. Jeannie turned out, as advertised, to be well abreast of the subject. Her diagnosis did not confirm my own, but she suggested - partly, I suspect, because she would have felt particularly badly had I died of rabies - that I call a Dr. Hopf, a County health officer who had been very informative and helpful to her.

Dr. Hopf confirmed her diagnosis. In the course of these two conversations I learned several interesting facts which I now pass on for those who live in this epidemic part of the country. There are no known cases of a human contracting rabies from a racoon (venereal disease occasionally, but never rabies). It is suspected that the rabies virus varies slightly between species and that contact with many rabid animals is harmless. If a domestic animal is infected, but is not displaying advanced symptoms, the odds are overwhelming that the pet will die before it is too late to begin human treatment. The virus in saliva lives for only a few moments (not a day, as would have had to be the case in my case) once it is outside the host. The feared series of abdominal injections that constitute the only preventive treatment for rabies, are much less painful than they used to be. The original vaccine was extracted from the brains of monkeys. The newer vaccine is incubated in eggs and, unless one is allergic to eggs, is more inconvenience than pain.

Well, now that I knew that I could rule out rabies, I moved on, without skipping a nanosecond, to heart attack, tuberculosis, mononucleosis, or of course, AIDS. It was then that I made a forth call to my beloved doctor. He was in Europe for the third of three weeks - would I prefer to await his return or would I be seen by someone else in the office? "No, I'll wait, but could I maybe get a prescription for tetracycline?" A doctor would call me back. The first day on tetracycline led to a night no better than the one previous, and I decided, as I watched the sunrise through eyes that made me think a toothache would be comparative pleasure, that I'd see any doctor.

A fevered, shaking, stupefied drive downtown was followed by an

examination, blood tests, a pretty firm diagnosis that I had picked up a currently-prevalent virus and a second prescription for tylenol with codeine - a wonderful drug that I highly recommend. I was feeling so physically miserable at this juncture that I vowed, should I ever feel well again, that I would take it easy until I knew for certain that I was disenvirused. And so, after compulsively creating a plethora of "matters of consequence" through which I had been very busy since my return from sailing, I finally had reason to give myself permission to rest and relax.

The few weeks that followed this feverish period - and pretty much to the present - have been almost too nice to be trusted. I am either very much at peace or very self-deceived and, of course, I don't know which. My pace had become less frenzied, I have done a lot of very enjoyable reading, and I have had more than enough activity and contact with the outside world to ally my fear of becoming isolated and falling into hermithood.

It was precisely this untrusted frame of mind that I was chattering about with the moon when the voice from across the river interrupted my soliloquy with the comment, "For my people the moon is a touchstone, a sort-of greeting card."

Now, lest you think that I have finally taken one liberty or one drink too many, or worse, that I have, as was inevitable, stepped off into a world of my own imaginative madness, I beg you to hear me out. As suspect as this may appear, it really happened. I've spent more than a few nighttime hours wandering around River Bend Farm and have always felt entirely secure in my privacy. When you live on a place like this one, you come to trust that you are safer in its environs than any intruder could ever be. You know the land, the woods, the running water - at levels that no stranger could begin to equal. I am extremely sensitive to other inhabitants of the space around me as I walk at night. I have met a few rabbits, several birds and frogs, occasionally a deer, but, never in eight years have I encountered another human being.

Last year the abandoned railroad tracks that form River Bend's southern boundary were deeded to the County to be made into a nature trail. The four-wheel drive pick-ups and other rough terrain vehicles that often used to roar through the valley on the road adjacent to the tracks have been replaced by an occasional hiker or biker. The trail is accessible from Corbett Road about a mile from the farm. The path (as did the rail-bed) crosses the river by way of a bridge that forms the southeast corner of the farm. Eight acres of my property lies between the river and the trail.

In response to the questions that I threw at the owner of the frail apparition who had spoken, I gained but little information. It seems that Dawn Runningwater (recognize, please, that even were I bold enough to invent this adventure I would have

7

better sense than to pick the name "Dawn Runningwater") is one of few remaining descendents of an obscure indian tribe that once inhabited the fertile land (near Hanover, Pennsylvania) through which flow the many small streams that make up the source of the Gunpowder River. The river flows through the farm as it courses its way across the Maryland countryside from Prettyboy Reservoir to Loch Raven Reservoir and on to the Chesapeake Bay. Dawn is 68 years old and still works, as she has for most of her life, in a pretzel and potato chip factory in York, Pennsylvania - about an hour north of River Bend on I-83. It has been her lifetime habit (for reasons, as you will see, less absurd than one might imagine) to spend time by a river or stream on nights of full moon. While exploring the nature trail last fall, she took a byway (a small path that leads across my land from the trail) that led to the river's edge. She particularly liked the spot, and has returned frequently since then, whenever the moon was full and the weather was inviting.

Whether it was the magic of the moment - I have rarely stumbled across an old indian woman while walking late at night, or any other time, for that matter - or the simple eloquence of her words that left me with a feeling that there is much to wonder at on this planet, I don't know. I have tried to recapture the story she told me as faithfully as possible, but I fear I have failed miserably...

"When I was growing up, my family lived in a tenant house on a large farm. Behind the house flowed a small stream. My father made his living doing long-distance hauling and, when I was very small - perhaps four or five - he made up a game which we could play together even while he was on the road. I was to sit by the river at a precise time, just before bedtime, whenever the moon was full. My father said that if I allowed myself to be very still and listened with all my attention, I would hear him greeting me from wherever he was. When my father was away I would await the full moon with no less anticipation than must have my ancestors. At the precise time of our agreement I would sit by the river full of excitement - every muscle alive with anticipation. At first I made-up hearing him, but I really knew I was making it up. As I grew older, and what had been novelty became habit, this childlike ritual took on many different meanings. There were a few times when I even succeeded in being very still and listening with all my attention, as my father had instructed me. At those times I felt that I was listening, not just to my father, but to all of the earth and sky.

"For many months before my thirteenth birthday my father teased me with the promise of a very special birthday present. He said that he would give me a gift that I would keep with for all the rest of my life. Imagine my anticipation! On the morning of my birthday he told me that he would give me his gift at my spot along the bank of the stream that night, just before midnight. My day was a counting of moments! At last the time came. We sat

by the stream. He told me that his gift was a simple one, but that it was very important. He told me that if I had children of my own I must pass the gift on to them and that I would know how. For all the years over which we had played our game, at the appointed time, he had also found a quiet place by flowing water to stop and rest. He told me that the moon kept, forever, the thoughts and the feelings of every living thing that has ever gazed at it. That through the moon we could tap the being of all living things that had ever been. He said that all the flowing waters on the earth were connected; that the waters had magical powers. That I could learn how to travel the waters to any place I wanted to be. He said that he had been with me on the moonlit nights of our meetings; that soon I would be able to travel the waters and listen to the moon and that then I would understand. He told me that he had learned this from his parents and that for untold generations this tradition had, in this fashion, been passed on. He told me that I might not understand how special his gift was until I was older, but assured me that I would come to understand it, and that he was sure that I would give the same gift to my children when they, in their turn, became thirteen. He told me that a time would come when he would no longer be present to me as he was now, but that if I remembered the moon and the waters he would be with me always.

"My father died many years ago. My own children have left home and have scattered to the four winds. Some of them have children of their own. We talk frequently on the phone, and holiday visits are wonderful, but somehow, it is only when the moon is full and we are together across the waters that we truly know one another. And that is why the moon is a touchstone, a sort of greeting card, to my people."

She wouldn't stay. I begged and pleaded for her to tell me more about herself. I used my very best stuff, but she wouldn't stay. She told me, though, that she'd be back; that if I wanted, I could meet her by the river, just before midnight, on nights of full moon. I'll be sure to let you know if I meet her again. In the meantime, I'll be there even if she doesn't return. If you'd like to get together some time, just before midnight when the moon is full, find a little stream to sit by and gaze up at the moon. Be very still and listen with all of your attention - perhaps we will hear one another.

#### COBWEBS AND CLUTTER

I have finally tackled cleaning up the shop. The weather at this time of year is wonderful for riding a motorcycle, and my 1967 BMW R60 has not run since I used it while teaching a Senior Seminar at the end of my son Josh's senior year of high school. As part of an exploration of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance we took apart some assemblies of the BMW to understand such things as points, valves, carburetors, pistons, etc. It has not run since I reassembled it in June of 1984 and it would be nice, for a change, to actually repair a machine rather

6

than learning about how to do so.

Starting any project in a clean work space enhances its possibilities for success. The shop is usually a chaos of remains from jobs done on the run - making a teak bookshelf for Aurora while home for two days, changing belts on two mowers in order to cut grass already a foot high, charging a battery, sharpening a chain-saw blade. When the benches, tools and parts cabinets are vacuumed, when every hand tool is where it belongs, when the floor is clean: that is the time to tackle a really hard job.

I wondered, while happily clearing the litter, what whoever has the job of dealing with my shop in my inevitable absence someday will do with the "stuff" that I have compulsively collected over the years. My paternal grandfather, in addition to being a remarkably inadequate father, was an inventor. He lived, with my father and his sister, behind his less-than-prosperous grocery store and worked on inventions. Some of the cabinets I use were his, and I have never been able to throw out the boxes and trunks of odd bolts, tools, and broken dreams that he passed, through his son, to me.

Who will know, I wonder of my own lifetime collection, that the parts in that lower wooden drawer are from a 1959 powder blue TR3 with dual carbs and knock-offs that won its class in the University of Maryland Sports Car Club Gymkana in 1960, or that the tools in the drawer above it are from my watch repair period (circa, 1968) in which every broken watch owned by anyone I knew was unsafe from my greedy appetite for practice, or that the repair manual for the Remington T109 Chain Saw was kept because, whoever borrowed it 1970 is likely to remember, at some point, who they borrowed it from.

I am unable to throw away screws, bolts, nuts, washers, partly used sandpaper, nails, damaged screw drivers and chisels, wire connectors, links of chain, pieces of rope and wire, antennas, phone parts, drill bits, tape, paint, old gloves, spark plugs, points and condensers, broken power tools, and shop manuals. Once in a rare while I think, "You haven't had the slightest need for that thing in 20 years. Throw it away." Inevitably within a week I face a task in which I wish I still had whatever it was. As time has passed it has become increasingly difficult to maintain room for all of it. My left lobe says, "lighten up, get rid of stuff, unclutter your life," while my right lobe begs me to leave the delicate balance intact. As my fears of outgrowing the barn are augmented by an occasional flash-picture - like the subliminal message, "buy pop corn," flashed across a movie screen - of this lovely valley covered by a sea of buildings holding mostly worthless and unused paraphernalia, I realize that I can't keep going on this way. I've got to clean up. Maybe have a yard sale. But, for now, it's all in place and there's no immediate rush. Next Spring, perhaps...

A NOTE FROM THE ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT:

Last Thursday fate struck me a dastardly blow. I had just completed a final edit of this month's RBR. As the speller finished checking the final piece, I proceeded to save the corrected copy and inadvertantly erased the entire disk. I had no back up, and lost my mailing list and six other completed articles in the bargain. It was, believe me, a heart-rending experience! for four days I have been at work recreating this issue and, as fate would have it, wound up with exactly six pages of copy, leaving no room for my delicate commercial closing:

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To put just those few lines on a fourth otherwise blank piece of paper offends my sense of propriety. I have therefore elected to include it in this fashion with a reminder that RBR is my sole source of earned income and that the holidays are rapidly approaching.

Imagine your friend's joy as the thought of your kindness pleasantly surfaces every month of the year with the arrival of RBR. "Gee," they will exclaim with the arrival of each new issue, "wasn't it nice of \_\_\_\_\_ to put this little ray of sunshine into my life." Gift subscriptions are accompanied with a letter explaining what RBR is about (What is RBR about?) and a note advising the recipient of the identity of their benefactor. Keep it in mind as you rack your brain for an appropriate gift for birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, Christmas, Hanukkah, Founder's Day, Michaelmas - or any other occasion you deem appropriate.

You see, the commercial side of RBR is important to me. I started with a conscription list and promised "occasional" issues. I next gained enough confidence to be certain I could get out an issue monthly. Then came a bunch of subscriptions. Soon there will be a new format complete with logo, better quality printing and occasional appropriate graphics. My fantasy is to enable RBR to supplement my income and to be able to write off most of my activities. After all, I have to collect new experiences to keep my readers awake and interested! And then, when I incorporate and make my first public offering, who will I think of to bless with getting in on the ground floor? Those readers who have supported my madness, of course!

Meanwhile, should you be less inclined to play than my own enthusiasm warrants, keep watching from the sidelines, but don't be reluctant to let me know what you think. I love getting mail and pay careful attention to the comments, criticisms, and complements I receive.

## RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

November, 1985

Vol 1, No. 10

RBR goes to press this month leaving every previous record for lateness behind. The month began with a week-long visit from Eddy Siegel, a childhood friend who lives in San Francisco and with whom I haven't spent any time since 1959. We were joined late in the week of Eddy's visit by Morty (now a resident of Miami), who was the third member of the inseparable trio we comprised from infancy to adolescence, and Nard (also a Florida resident), who lived a block away, but joined us in most endeavors from age ten or so until the end of high school. It was a wonderful week (our reminiscences and visits to old haunts will be described in a future issue), but included almost no sleep and no time at all for writing.

By the time I had to seriously confront getting RBR out, my forty-fifth birthday was upon me. Aside from being amazed that over a third of my life was probably spent, and that fifty, like thirty and forty before it, really didn't seem to be that old, I fell into a post-natal anniversary funk that inspired very little creativity. Thoughts of inventing a special Thanksgiving issue were considered but were eventually dismissed as being too devicive to be acceptable. Fortunately, I had received a call from Bernie Kablish in late October, and knew that once I mustered the energy, the copy I needed would all but write itself.

And so, in keeping with forty-fifth birthdays and all other less-than-uplifting events, I have given this issue over to life's lighter side. For those of you who expect RBR to be laden monthly with profound observations of life and thought, I extend my apologies. You will find little within these pages worthy of serious rumination. On the other hand, Bernie's proclivity for accidental chaos is no laughing matter to either he or to Claire, and our ability to laugh at ourselves is a refreshing reminder that life taken too seriously usually leads to very serious living.

### BERNIE KABLISH REVISITED:

When Bernie Kablish called at one A.M. on a Sunday night late in October, it took no master of Aristotelian Logic to quickly realize that he had a bad cold, that he was three sheets to the wind, and that he was in need of a sympathetic listener. Bernie, you may recall, is my ill-fated friend who lives in Chicago. As reported in April's RBR, Bernie cleverly tied a rope from the rear bumper of his wife's car to a ladder he was using on the far-side of his carport roof. He was repairing a few damaged shingles and used the ladder to stabilize his foothold. His wife, Claire, emerging innocently from the house to do a few

errands, drove away. Bernie wound up in the hospital with multiple injuries after the ladder was pulled over the peak of the roof, down to the macadam, and behind the pontiac across most of the length of the driveway. Since April news from the Windy City has been rather bland. Bernie, having recovered from his injuries by early June, spend an idyllic summer without mishap.

In the course of this recent late night conversation, between the drunken tears, and pleas such as, "Stan, it could have happened to anyone.", I pieced together the bizarre story that follows. Although someone among my readers confessed to me that he went to the trouble of trying to locate Bernie through Chicago Information back in April, I assure you that I have again honored my pledge that any RBR inclusions will disguise Bernie's true identity.

The den in Bernie and Claire's rancher features, recessed into one of its walls, a 300 gallon fish tank populated by an assortment of tropical fish that is, by almost any standards, superb. Bernie built the tank himself four or five years ago and spares no energy in maintaining it. The live plants are always healthy and luxurious. Effectively placed rocks and driftwood make up an underwater wonderland through which swim beautiful specimens of the most exotic fish that will live in peaceful community with one another. Not being one to skimp on details, Bernie even installed a laundry tub and shelves for supplies in an adjacent closet so that water and all necessary paraphernalia would be nearby.

On a chill October Saturday morning, a day of last minute preparation for a dinner party of some six couples that evening, Bernie was in the den working on the tank when Claire, on her way out with a long list of things to do, breezed through and asked him to please unclog the garbage disposal when he had time. She told him that she wouldn't be back until about five so there was no rush.

The fish tank had suffered an outbreak of ich. Ich, as anyone who has ever had tropical fish surely knows, is an easily treated disease caused by a parasite. The modern remedy is arethromycin, but Bernie, a fancier for many years, had treated his tank with methylene blue, an antiquated but effective medicine that is, among other things, a very powerful dye. He had just drained off about a third of the water from the tank and had set up a hose from the sink in the closet to refill it. After turning on the water and regulating the temperature he went to the kitchen to examine the disposal.

Claire is a cook of some local renown and the kitchen reflects her talent. The double stainless sink is mounted in a large central island that serves as a huge open work surface and has a thick maple butcher-block top. Aside from the freshly-washed lead-crystal goblets in the dish drainer, the island had been

immaculately cleared for use that evening. Bernie made sure the disposal's switch was off and attacked the problem with his usual confidence. Probing deep into the bowels of the disposal, he felt the culprit. A chopstick from the previous night's chinese dinner had lodged between the housing and the grinding wheel. Bernie easily freed the chopstick, delighted that the task had been so simple.

There is an age old trick used by natives in tropical climates to catch monkeys. A hole is cut into a coconut and a favorite monkey-food is placed within. When an unsuspecting monkey spots the food, it reaches into the hole, grabs the food in its fist, and finds that it can't extract its paw because the hole, although large enough for an open paw to enter, is not large enough for a closed fist to exit. The hidden trap-maker then approaches and the poor monkey doesn't have the presence of mind to let go of the food.

Bernie faced, he thought, a parallel situation when he found that he couldn't remove his chop-stick-holding hand through the mouth of the disposal. It did not take him very long - Bernie, in addition to being very handy, is also very bright - to realize that the situation was not, in fact, parallel at all. When he let go of the chop-stick he found that he was still unable to get free. During the first minutes of his imprisonment, he was amused. With the passage of time he became frustrated. His frustration then led to anger and his anger to fiercer struggling. This struggling led, in its turn, to the swelling of his now captive appendage. After about 45 minutes of this, he realized that he was hopelessly stuck. It was now ten A.M. and Claire was due home at five!

The next few hours were spent, punctuated with an occasional renewed effort to free his hand, reviewing the resources he had available to try and secure assistance. The phone was a hopeless distance away. No neighbor was close enough to hear shouting. Bernie was thinking about how he would remain sane until five P.M. when he first noticed the pale blue water that was trickling across the floor of the kitchen from the living room. Although he couldn't see around the corner, he knew that this blue water had to have crossed the white carpet and the Tabriz rug in the living room on its way through the tan shag in the den.

Some years ago Claire assaulted Bernie with a hair dryer. She had left him sleeping and had quietly gotten out of bed to go to the bathroom. Bernie, unbeknownst to Claire, was not really asleep. What he really was, was hungry. Claire had gone to the guest bathroom in the hallway outside the master bedroom so as not to disturb him. As he returned through the darkened hallway from his snack in the kitchen, Claire was just exiting the darkened bathroom. The first thing she could grab was her hair dryer...

Shortly thereafter, Bernie installed a zoned burglar alarm system

complete with dialer. The logic behind this move always struck me as a bit convoluted but it seems to work for them. Its foundation principle is an assumption that any noise heard in the house can be assumed to be safe if the alarm system is on. The doors are armed by a key that is turned on or off as they enter and exit. The windows are on a separate circuit that is left on in all but the finest weather when windows are kept open.

Before the pale blue water from the overflowing fish tank had created so strong an impression upon him, Bernie had realized that there was one desperation resource available to him if his plight became unendurable. There is, you see, a five-by-seven thermo-pane picture window in the kitchen that overlooks the yard. The window is protected against intruders by a perimeter band of alarm-tape. He had earlier considered breaking the window in order to set off the alarm, but had dismissed the thought. It was just too great a price to pay for, at worse, a five or six hour nightmare of not-too-serious inconvenience. Once the forgotten fish tank came back to mind, however, he felt he had no choice but to act.

Although Bernie is not a bad athlete, he was somewhat handicapped by the fact that his throwing arm was in the disposal. In addition to having to make his pitch with his left hand, he had the added pressure of needing to use a crystal goblet as his ammunition. He hurled the first goblet as hard as he could at the five-by-seven window and watched in horror - these goblets were purchased in Saint Thomas on their honeymoon some twenty years ago, were very expensive then, and were probably no longer made - as it shattered on the window sill. His second throw hit the mark. He could hardly hear the tinkling of the glass raining onto the patio above the immediate shrill, "whoop, whoop, whoop," of the siren.

Bernie's neighbor, Lionel Brown, was the first to respond. Lionel had been awakened by the alarm, and seeing Bernie's car in the driveway, called to find out what was going on. Of course he got no answer. He then got dressed and cautiously stole his way to the kitchen door. Explanation above the sound of the alarm was impossible, so Bernie pointed frantically to the smashed window hoping Lionel would understand that this was the best means of ingress. After breaking out sufficient glass to allow himself to climb across the sill without endangering his reproductive hardware, Lionel entered the kitchen. Bernie, without taking time to explain the subtle nuances of the entire situation, shouted at Lionel to first turn off the water in the den and to then turn off the alarm in the hall closet with the key which he would find in the top drawer of the dresser.

It was while Lionel was executing the second of these instructions that the police surrounded the house, spotted the broken window and saw Lionel rummaging through the dresser drawer in the bedroom. Fortunately - I am told that the Chicago Police Department has been known to shoot first and ask questions later

- they had dogs with them.

The next few minutes, as Bernie described them, went something like this: He heard the front door being smashed open. He then heard sounds that reminded him of a western he had seen in which a horse was galloping down the bed of a shallow river. He next found that he was staring at a snarling German Shepherd with very healthy looking pink gums and teeth that seemed to stop at some location between the back of the dog's throat and his anus. Lionel had met an almost identical fate except that his German Shepherd had elected to hold Lionel's wrist between its teeth.

The police, guns drawn, quickly followed the dogs into the house. The scene they met was not easily sized up. Lionel, still in the bedroom, could explain very little, partly because he didn't know what was going on, and partly because he was paralyzed with fear. Bernie, on the other hand, was lucid, but his quickly-related story (told at gunpoint with the snarling dog at his side) was hard enough to understand and even harder to believe. A conference of all concerned was convened in the kitchen. Eventually the police were convinced. Bernie proudly told me that the only time he lost his cool during the entire episode was when one of the policemen asked if he would allow them to call a local T.V. station which, the Officer was certain, would love to air the story.

After refusing the Police Departments offer to call in the Fire Department, Bernie and Lionel began their efforts to free the captive. The disposal body, mounted to the sink by a threaded flange, was easily removed. This allowed Lionel to lubricate, manipulate and twist the ensnared hand while Bernie pulled - all to no avail. Next, Lionel removed the locknut that held the flange to the sink, and Bernie, although now wearing a rather cumbersome bracelet, was finally free.

The trip that Bernie then took through the wreckage was anything but uplifting. Those of his fish still in the tank and alive did not look improved by the treatment, and those still occasionally flipping about on the wet carpet seemed ready to join the motionless bodies of their fellows which were strewn about as on a battlefield. The den carpet was a sorry-looking greenish tan. The living room carpet, previously snow-white, now had a pale blue tint, and both rooms - including a good part of the hallway which leads to the bedrooms - were sopping wet with pale methylene-blue water. And, as if this were not sufficient punishment, the front door was in serious trouble to say nothing of the kitchen window and the two smashed crystal goblets.

Claire, as promised, arrived home at five, laden with all the ingredients for a magnificent feast. Bernie met her at the car. He felt pretty certain that a verbal picture would lighten the blow she was about to suffer. Before he had a chance to begin his strange tale she asked him what in the world he was wearing on his wrist. As Bernie helped unload the car he began

his story. Before he was allowed to finish a remarkably composed and uncharacteristically silent Claire turned her back in his direction and entered the war-zone.

Claire is no stranger to Bernie's mishaps, but this time her good nature must have failed her. She walked, without uttering a sound, through the kitchen, across the living room into the den and then into the bedroom. She pulled a suitcase from the closet and, as Bernie babbled away about his innocence and the strange ways of fate, she packed for a visit of unknown duration to her mother's quiet home on Long Island. As she got into her car Bernie pleaded, "What about dinner. What about our friends. You can't just leave..." He told me she even had the cruelty to say as she drove off, "Fry them some fish!"

Bernie cancelled the dinner on the pretext of a sudden onset of virus, rented a wet-vac from ABC, and set out, still wearing his new bracelet, to clean up the house. The only surprise he received in the process of doing so regarded the heating system. The heating ducts, he realized, are built into the slab and were filled with water. The system's fan, spinning furiously but unable to move any air, burned up. There was no heat. The good news was, that because the fan could move no air through the house, the smell of the burnt motor was confined to the laundry room.

It was during the night of the Sunday following these events that Bernie called. He needed to talk to someone, and, other than sworn-to-secrecy Lionel, he could think of no one but me to cry to. Claire had safely reached her mother's, but refused to talk to him. Her mother sympathetically told him that she was sure Claire would return home in a few days, but that she did seem to need a rest. Bernie was bemoaning the fact that he couldn't bear to go to work in the morning (he had an eight o'clock appointment with a new client) wearing the disposal flange, when he realized that for the same reason that he had been wearing the same shirt for two days, he would be unable to put on a suit even if he elected to show up at his meeting. I suggested that he find an early-opening machine-shop, take two aspirin for his blossoming cold and try to get some sleep. As I hung up I heard him incoherently muttering something about whether or not I thought there might be a fish heaven.

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## RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

December, 1985

Vol 1 No. 11

### CHRISTMAS CIRCA 1948, P.S. #64:

A Hanukkah menorah was always present. So was the singing of "Rock of Ages" - the token song which everyone knew and which had a Jewish flavor. The two weeks of "Christmas Vacation" were almost upon us! From Thanksgiving on we sang carols in preparation for the final ritual - an assembly of the entire school caroling around the Christmas tree. But, the large cardboard Menorah was lost as background to the grand lighted tree with its balls and bells, its tinsel and trimmings of ribbon-bedecked reindeer and blown-glass figurines and the huge three-dimensional silver star that graced its crown. At its base were heaped the presents we exchanged with classmates by the drawing of names from a shoebox. Just before the noon bell rang - the final harbinger of freedom - we would rush the tree and collect our presents. Each child was then given a candy-cane, and off we would go into a world consumed by the spirit of a festival to which those of who were Jewish were legitimately only spectators.

But, Christmas in America is not to be escaped. It is as much a part of our culture as is the Fourth of July. Shopkeepers of all religious persuasions stand in their store windows rubbing their greedy hands with glee. The business journals and newspapers are full of reports detailing retail sales. The music of Christmas surrounds us, taking on more and more meaning as the time of our lives moves relentlessly on: the old songs gathering memories and connections as they roll with us through the years. And there is the visual lure of Christmas. Lights abound! From Christmas trees to decorated skyscrapers, America is illuminated at Christmas time. A Jewish child's memories of Christmas may be different from those of Christian friends, but Christmas in America is equally inescapable for all of us.

### AND ON ELLAMONT ROAD:

The Siegels had an unfinished basement: whitewashed stone, open wooden steps which led down from the hallway, a few bare light bulbs, an asbestos covered furnace. For ten months of the year it was not among the neighborhood haunts that Morty, Eddy and I frequented. But come December, it was the hang out for every kid on the block. The Siegels' trains were as essential a part of Christmas on Ellamont Road as were the simple dim white lights that graced every window of the Nichelsons' house. A miniature world would come down from the Siegels' attic in November, each piece neatly labeled in the box where Hillard had put it during the previous January. Hillard was Eddy's older brother - one of the "big kids" on the block. We would watch, day after day through December, as this twelve-year-old wizard worked his

annual magic.

First, the plywood platforms would be set up, always with great debate about the shape of this year's creation. Next, the bridges, rivers, mountains and tunnels would be born in Hillard's imagination. Then, after the green grasscloth was secured, the track, switches and cross-overs were laid - each section lovingly nailed with tiny brads. Finally from their boxes would come: the log and cattle cars, the coal siding that dumped real make-believe coal through its electrically controlled chute into waiting coal-cars, the water tower with its moveable boom for filling the steam engines, the stationmaster who opened the station door and walked to the tracks as a train came in, the freight siding at which barrels would automatically roll down a ramp into freight cars that would return them on a future pass, street lights, buildings, people and animals, farm fencing, barns and silos and to ice the cake, the exciting addition that Mr. Seigel had bought to add to the new year's collection: a sleek silver locomotive perhaps, or a siding device that would work some startling new magic to the "ahhs" and "ohs" of the bedazzled juvenile onlookers.

Yet, in spite of all the preparation, there was always a papier-mache mountain to be made and painted or a farm scene that had not yet been removed from the box in which it had resided since the previous January. Whether we were needed by design or by accident I do not know - Al Siegel's powerful masculine presence was never a match for Fanny's subtle feminine manipulation. But, always under Eddy's careful supervision, the "little kids" would have their part to play in one way or another.

At the left side of the sprawling set-up was the engineer's station. Rainbow-colored wires would wend their stapled way along the bottom side of the platforms to their terminations at an awesome bank of transformers and control switches. There, Hillard, the master puppeteer, would sit in his black and white striped railroad hat and run the show. There were controls for blowing the whistles of the trains - each engine having its own unique pitch; controls for making smoke billow and for throwing the switches that would route the trains; controls for each siding device and for lighting each farm and town along the route through which the trains would tirelessly circle. Eddy tells me that Hillard still sets up his trains every year. I've thought many times about paying him a visit. Something always stops me. There are some things better left alone in the trunks and attics of distant memory...

AND OUT IN THE SNOW:

"Stanley," Morty hollered as he climbed the stairs to my bedroom, "There's an igloo in the Sunderland's back yard!"

"Wow, who made it?"

"Hillard, Allen and Richard. They did it last night."

Hillard told Eddy if we shoveled my walk and the Siegels, they'd let us in it."

"Let's get Eddy and go look."

A heavy-wet December snow had fallen the day before - just two days into vacation. Morty's older brother, Allen, along with Hillard and Richard Sunderland (who lived up the street in the corner house at Ellamont and Dorchester), had discovered that the snow was heavier than any they had ever seen. Heavy enough to build with. The igloo was barely large enough to hold the three of them, but, even down to the short tunnel that led to its interior, it was unmistakably an igloo. It was beautiful! We begged them to let us in, but Allen and Hillard, whose manipulation of the three of us had been practiced to a fine art, would not relent. First the walks had to be shoveled. And so, we labored through the morning hours, telling Mrs. Siegel and Mrs. Blumberg that we were doing the walks because we wanted the exercise! Part of the deal was that we would not tell.

Finally, our task accomplished, we marched back up the street to Richard's yard. We knew they were in the igloo, but they wouldn't respond to our calls. Eddy crawled into the tunnel. Shouts of "Get out of here!" surrounded him as he hurriedly backed out on all fours. The three of us held a conference and came to a decision. Eddy hollered into the entrance, "Hillard, you promised. I'm gonna tell mommy on you!"

To "tell" on someone was a threat neither lightly made nor lightly taken on Ellamont Road. Consequences could be long-lived and catastrophic - especially in the Siegels' household.

Through experience collected from innumerable minor offenses we had learned that Morty, Ina, and Allen Blumberg were never punished. Harry and Esther were incapable of deliberately making their children miserable. This phenomenon both amazed and disgusted Eddy and I. We firmly believed in the "Spare the rod..." theory; not to believe so would have been to invite questions of parenting beyond both our grasp and our inclination. Of the three families, my parents held the middle ground. Sheryl, my older sister, was, in dire contrast to me, a superb student and a model of deportment ("Of course I never wanted to play with you. You always had a runny nose, dirty fingernails, filthy cordoroy held up by ugly suspenders and some snail or worm or something in your pocket.") My father used corporal punishment only rarely - more as a means to assure that it not be precluded when we invisioned just deserts for some anticipated abhorrance, than as a primary tool in teaching right from wrong. More likely, we would be confined to our bedrooms for some endless and always unreasonable period of time. In the Siegel's household, however, anything could happen - and often did. Mr. Siegel was very clear about the roles and responsibilities of his offspring. He spared neither their feelings nor his own with acts of temperance. The justice he meted out was always swift and to the point...

Following Eddy's threat, Hillard, Allen and Richard angrily emerged. It hadn't taken Hillard long to convince his buddies that his future hung perilously in the balance. Lengthy negotiations followed over the amount of time we would be granted inside. In the innocence of our earlier discussions we had never addressed that important point. We settled for six minutes as measured by Eddy's Mickey Mouse watch - a generous concession to our well-founded distrust. In we went. An eerie dim blue light surrounded us as the sunlight filtered through the snow and ice of the igloo's walls. It was very quiet and very dark. Morty and I had to pee... Out we went. "You can't piss on my snow!", Richard exclaimed as soon as he realized the gift fate had handed him. And so on we went to Morty's back yard. By the time we got back, our time had run out.

#### AND IN THE MINDS OF OUR PARENTS:

For us, Christmas was pure delight in those early years of childhood. Our parents were the ones most confused by the Holidays. They had been reared, in most cases by parents born in Eastern Europe, to believe that even an acknowledgement of Christmas was something of a sin. The whole society, including their own children, was lost in the spirit of Christmas. How could they help but be schizophrenic in their reactions? Dampening the enthusiasm of children is not part of the mindset of good Jewish parents; participating in Christmas revelry was equally unnatural for mine.

Every Christmas Eve, Sheryl and I would hang hopeful stockings on the mantlepice in our living room. Every year we would go off to bed on Christmas Eve with visions of wonderful presents that might appear during the night. Every Christmas morning we would run downstairs to find a stocking stuffed to overflowing... with fruit. Bananas, oranges and apples make up my memories of Christmas mornings at 3406 Ellamont Road.

In later years of adolescence, Christmas came to take on different meaning. In high school I sang in the City College glee club. City was The all-male school in Baltimore and this was not an ordinary singing group. We were superb! At City, only the best voices made the grade, and almost anyone who thought they could sing went out for Glee Club. Our eighty members - twenty each of basses, baritones, tenors and altos - were the cream of the crop. We sang all over the state and always brought down the house. At Christmas we sang Handel's Messiah with the girls from Eastern High. We sounded like a chorus of angels.

The Christmases of childhood are far behind me now. I have raised children of my own, and with mixed feelings not unlike my own parents as regards Christmas. There have been no Christmas trees. When presents have been exchanged, Hanukkah, not Christmas served as the *raison d'etre*.

Still, no Christmas has passed since those days without the observance of my own rituals. A Christmas without a performance of The Handel Choir doing The Messiah is unthinkable. I still get chills as the orchestra plays the first notes of Handel's overture. Still, under the pretext of having to blow my nose, I disguise the appearance of the tears that inevitably appears as the chorus breaks out into the Hallelujah Chorus. And what Christmas day is complete without listening - as I have since John Merkel, a teacher who long ago opened my eyes to poetry, gave me the recording in 1960 - to Dylan Thomas reading A Child's Christmas In Wales:

One Christmas was so much like the other in those years  
 around the sea-town corner now;  
 Out of all sound except the distant speaking of the voices I  
 sometimes here a moment before sleep;  
 That I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and  
 six nights when I was twelve,  
 Or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when  
 I was six...

It is impossible to have grown up in this country and not remember Christmases past. Too much of each personal history is bound to memories which are wrapped in its presence.

I am a dedicated supporter of separation between church and state. Religion has no legitimate place in our schools. Yet, I am sadly aware that my children don't know the music of Christmas as I do; that they don't know the Psalms which have become embedded in memory from scripture readings all through school. But, every form of freedom has its price, and we are not yet wise enough to revere the bible as a part of the heritage of Western civilization without connecting it to belief...

For the first time in my life I bought a Christmas tree this year. A balsam Fir. A whisper and a scent of Maine woods. For a few weeks River Bend will become Harbor Island, Boothbay and Camden - Mount Desert, The Alagash, Camp Skylemar and the White Mountains.

Barb, my housekeeper/housemate, has always had a tree at Christmas time. All the tinsel, lights and decorations we would need, she told me, were in boxes in the barn. My children's values are secure. They are, in fact, probably the best work Lin and I have ever done. And so, I bought the tree as a Christmas present for Barb; but, if the truth be known, it was a welcome excuse. I've come to relish touchstones; and rituals, for whatever else they may be, are certainly also touchstones. The fact that many hold to ritual gives some permission to escape it: each inclination assumes and depends on the other.

## A YEAR-END THANK YOU:

1985 has been an exceptional year. The first issue of RBR was dropped into a mailbox last January with a considerable portion of my ego inside each envelop. I wondered, among other things, how many people might laugh at me, how many might no longer find me appropriate company for introduction to single friends, how many would bother to read it and how many would wonder if there would really be a #2, #3, and so on.

When I began this adventure, I knew little more than that I wanted to write. It is only a year later, and both my goals and my understanding are very different. I set out fantasizing over recognition as a powerful writer. I now know that in the unlikely event that such indefinable potential exists within me, there are thousands of hours of hard work ahead in developing and tapping it: writing when I don't feel like writing; writing regardless of mood; writing when I feel discouraged and disconnected; writing when I've lost faith in writing; writing, writing, writing...

To those who have supported this act of folly, and there are many who have done so in many gracious ways, I offer a sincere, "Thank you". The phone calls following a piece that caught your fancy, the act of sending a subscription to a friend, the letters in response to something you particularly liked or didn't, the brutal frankness and subtle kindness - all of this has meant a great deal to me.

To those who unwittingly found RBR in their mailboxes one day, a gift from a mutual friend or result of a casual conversation, I don't quite know what to say. Some of you, I know, have been kind in simply welcoming the spirit of the thing. Some have actually enjoyed it. Some few have made no pretense over outright rejection. Through all of you, I have finally had a glimpse of the process of writing and being read.

The entire staff of River Bend Reflections wishes you a joyous holiday season and a happy and healthy 1986. You've been an impeccable audience!

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## RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

January, 1986

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### THE CRISIS:

Little heaps of newspaper clippings adorn the radiator adjacent to my desk. There are piles on the Farm Crisis, on Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, on Pat Robertson waiting for God to inform him whether He supports a run for the Presidency, on the deficit in the Federal budget and in foreign trade, on the very serious and almost ignored problems within the reserves of the FSLIC and the FDIC, on Paul Volcker's entrapment between a soaring M1 and the chaos a rise in interest rates would cause and on Louis Farrakhan and rising anti-semitism in the Midwest. All of these issues are strangely linked in my mind, but the farm crisis stands in a class by itself.

Over forty years our legislators have slowly poisoned the viability of our economy's agricultural sector. They have done this by supporting what was mistakenly perceived as the special interests of both farmers and agri-business. The Department of Agriculture, as a matter of national policy, has supported chemical farming and energy-intensive methods while ignoring alternatives. Pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers, aside from the enormous environmental damage they have done, have lured our farmers into an expectation of ever-greater yields with proportionally lower costs. Malthus concluded 150 years ago that population expansion would exceed man's capacity to produce food - eventually there would be mass starvation. It appears he was wrong. Even China is now a net exporter of grain. We are faced with a degree of overproduction that has brought agriculture to the brink of total collapse.

Greed. What red-blooded American doesn't want "more?" From the message of Sesame Street's Cookie Monster - "Cook-ie, I want more cook-ie" - to almost every ad on T.V., we are trained that more is better. Farmers have no natural immunity to this disease. Subsidies are by definition the rendering of financial aid. Usually a case is made for national security or public welfare, but a subsidy is a payment that encourages production which is not profitable - it's that simple. For two generations - since Roosevelt, at least - agriculture has undergone a government subsidized revolution that is at the inevitable end of its misguided tether.

There's a World War Two story about two defense contractors who find themselves chatting in the lobby of the Armaments office in The Pentagon. One makes armor plating for tanks; the other makes armor piercing munitions. Month after month, each has been called in to look at the results of field tests. Neither's product is ever satisfactory. Orders keep rolling in, but they must continually reach higher and higher into new technology

to meet stiffer specifications. In the course of their conversation they come to realize what's been going on: each time the armor-maker betters his product to resist new shells, the munitions maker develops improved shells to pierce the newer armor. And so it goes...

Agriculture has been chasing its own tail in similar fashion - how sad that there are ultimately to be no winners. We've created whole industries in farm equipment, fertilizers, chemicals and plant genetics. We've learned how to geometrically increase yields and reduce man hours. We've also polluted our water supply, created overproduction and turned one of this nation's proudest institutions - the family farm - into a tragic national disgrace. The farmers have been no less guilty than the government; that's the greatest tragedy of all. We elect those who most effectively get more for us. It's hard to place blame when their effectiveness at playing our game turns against us.

For a long time I've felt that supply and demand should be turned loose to do the required dirty work. The farmers brought this on themselves. Why should a society that can ill afford it continue to pay billions every year to support the production of commodities it can't even find room to warehouse? Is the farmer entitled to more relief than a laid-off steel worker? To a garment industry worker? To any of the others who have lost jobs due to cheaper foreign labor? The leveling of wealth on the globe seems inevitable. It will, however, work its own timetable. If the farmer's time is now, do we all share responsibility for the dues?

#### THE FARMER:

Grayson Scarff operates a dairy farm up near the Pennsylvania line. He's the only authentic farmer I know. I visited Grayson in hopes that doing so would help me find a unifying focal point for my thoughts on the farm crisis.

I stood shivering in Grayson's milking barn for two hours. We talked about lots of things. Barley's cheaper than corn this year - \$1.90/bushel compared to \$2.53 for corn. Grayson is selling the 6000 bushels of corn he grew and buying barley for feed. Picks up sixty-three cents a bushel that way. Besides, barley's sixteen percent protein and corn's only twelve. Milk's only bringing \$12.35 a hundred-weight (about twelve gallons). That's off a bit from last year, which is off a bit from the year before... Then the government subtracts a fifty cent surplus tax. With the increased cost of energy, feed, machinery, repairs, and every other expense he has to absorb, Grayson's having a tough time making ends meet. He works hard and it just isn't good enough to turn a profit. Still, there's food on the table. Clear Spring has a little debt for the first time, but only a little. Not nearly as bad as some. Not nearly as bad as