the ten neighboring farms he's seen go belly-up in the past eight years. And things are bound to get better. Why, the corn still in the field is worth more already than it was in September...

Grayson hasn't missed a milking since the Scarffs bought Clear Spring Farm in 1962. That's twice a day - five a.m. and four p.m. - every day for twenty-three years. Each milking takes three and a half hours. That's about 59,000 hours of milking - and milking ain't the easiest work around, neither. Out of a warm bed at 4:45. Across the road to the milking barn. Call in the cows, "Com'on. Whoa, whoa. Ho." Mill the corn or grain as the Holsteins sleepily wander into the barn. Get them lined up in the milking stalls. Portion out the feed to each animal - some getting more, some less, based on monthly tests of each animals productivity. Wash each of 176 teats with a cloth bathed in disinfectant solution. (45 cows time four teats per cow is 180 teats. Grayson has, however, one cow with only two teats and two cows with only three teats - thus 176 rather than 180.) Attach the four-pronged suction tubes from the vacuum system to each teat. Move out the milked cows and go through the whole procedure three times. Clean the suction tubes and the vacuum system. Clear out the manure. Hose down the concrete barn floor. Run over to the other farm down the road. Feed the 45 steers and heifer you're raising for market (cows have to be "freshened" every year or milk production dries up: the resulting calves are raised to replace inefficient cows and for beef). Home for breakfast. Between breakfast at ten and lunch at two - plant 127 acres of corn; mow, rake and bale another hundred of hay; work on machinery; repair buildings; pick up supplies; do a little custom farming for neighbors; deliver some corn or hay; work on the books; mow the lawn; and on and on and on... After lunch, do the second milking. Eight p.m. Two hours to bedtime. Time to fit in all of the rest of what life has to offer...

Twice a day every day, for twenty-three years, Grayson has followed this routine. He didn't miss a milking when a cow crushed him against one of the metal stanchions of a milking stall and broke his collar bone: "Doctor said he never seen a break like that one before. One end was drove clear inside the other. Took two docs to pull em apart fore they could set it." He didn't miss a milking when another cow broke two of his ribs: "Damn, Stan, it was like a stick broke. Cracked jest like a stick broke in two. Wierd feelin, knowin that noise come from your insides."

Grayson Scarff, Sr., Grayson's dad, shared the work at Clear Spring 'til he had a stroke four years ago. When they bought Clear Springs, Mr. Scarff informed his family that he was O.K. with a dairy operation, but that milking cows was not something he considered appropriate work for himself. Since his stroke, though, he just can't do the work he used to. He'll do a little mowing, run the tractor to spread manure when he feels up to it, sweep the stray grain back into the feeding trough to help out a little; but Grayson pretty much works the place himself

these days. He used to have a hired hand: "Damn hard to find anyone who'll show up, much less give a hoot 'bout their work these days. Besides, gets harder each year to make a buck. Got to save wher' ya can."

The Scarffs bought Clear Spring in 1962. Farming was on the come in those days. Hard work and a lot of experience paid off. The place was free and clear by 1970. There was enough left over for new buildings and machinery. Even for new cars and color T.V.'s. The dairy subsidies were generous. Every gallon of milk they produced was guaranteed profitable - so, of course, they increased production. Who wouldn't.

THE WAY THEY WERE:

I met the Scarffs in 1976. We had bought a farm up in Parkton with our friends Steve and Sue Glick. I was lost in the romance of country life. Through my reading, I learned about the annual hog-slaughtering that almost all family farms used to practice. In addition, I felt that if I was going to remain a meat eater I had a responsibility to see the actual process - supermarkets and plastic-wrap tend to remove the consumer from the blood and guts inherent in eating animals. Art told me that he knew a family in northern Harford County who still slaughtered hogs every year. He got me an invitation - camera and all.

Seven pigs became history on that cold day in January. Four belonged to the Scarffs; the other three were Tony's. Tony lives up the road a piece. His weathered trailer is nestled in the woods on the four acres he owns. Tony was in his sixties at the time. His steadiest work was digging graves in the cemetery nearby. He also did odd jobs in the neighborhood. That's how he came to know the Scarffs. Every year Tony raises three pigs - his entire meat supply for the coming year. Hogs work out particularly well for Tony because he doesn't have any refrigeration. He processes all of his meat with salt.

By the time Art and I arrived, the veterans had everything ready. A 55 gallon drum of water, mounted on blocks over a blazing wood fire, was at just 190 degrees. Every year a discussion between Mr. Scarff and Tony ensued:

> Mr. Scarff would start off with, "Never heerd a dippin' no pigs in water over one-hunnerd-aity. Damn hair cooks to the skin you get any hotter an 'at. Spen' haff the day scrapin'."
> Then Tony would retort, "Grayson, damn if I don't think yer gittin' a tad fergitful. Why, ever' time I ever kill pigs - over fifty years now, Ah reckon - we always use two-hunnerd degrees water. Sof'ins up the skin so much, hair come off easy as blowin' foam off a warm brew."

And so it would go until they would agree on 190 as they always

had. It was the spirit of the exchange they both relished. Neither really cared much about the outcome. Fact was, by the time the first pig had been dunked, the water never got over 160 for the rest of the day anyhow.

Grayson, Art and I were sent off to the hog barn up the lane to kill the first pig. Grayson had a .22 rifle ready for the occasion. "If ah don't mess up," Grayson told us, "one bullet'll do it. Got to hit er jest right, tho. Ya pictures an "X" between the ears and the eyes and ya shoots wher the lines cross. Stops um dead. Hit it right and they never feels a thing."

I watched the killing with a degree of detachment that frightened me. The thought of it still frightens me. I felt nothing. In an instant of time, life was deliberately taken from a fellow creature and I felt nothing. The transformation from "life" to "thing" was immediate. I've thought a great deal since then about the implications. How disturbing a potential of human consciousness. Is it possible that this same transformation can take place in the minds of men violating other men? Is this the quality that allows the justification for torture? For killing children? For death squads? For Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Chelmno, Trablinka...

But the final assault on my absent sensitivities was still to come. After the bullet in the brain, Grayson slit the pig's throat to drain the blood. As we left the hog-barn, dragging the dead animal behind us, the other pigs went into a feeding frenzy. They fought with fury over the blood-drenched straw we left behind! I only present this in the interest of honest reporting. Make of it what you will. I was stunned by my lack of reaction to this first witnessing of slaughter. I still don't know what to make of it.

After hanging the pig on a hook suspended from the front-end loader of a tractor, we drove down to the slaughtering shed and dunked it in the hot water. The hair seemed to me to come off about the same - not easily - no matter what the water temperature was. Next the carcass was hung by its hind legs from a rafter. A neat incision was made and a string tightly tied around the bowel just below the anus - if you miss this step, when the carcass is cut open in the following step, you subject yourself to an odor and a mess not soon forgotten.

By sunset we had butchered all seven hogs. There was still much to be done - cleaning the intestines for sausage casing, pickling ears and feet, making sausage and scrapple, smoking bacon, salting hams - but the worst was over. Pigs are incredibly efficient farm animals. That's why this annual fete became tradition to generations of American farmers. Pigs will eat anything and efficiently convert it to meat. They require little care and every bit of their weight is usable.

But that day stands out in my memory far more for the people I witnessed than for the activity that provided their excuse to celebrate another successful year of life. All day long Tony and Mr. Scarff bickered back and forth over every step in the process. They told jokes and stories about all the hog-slaughterings that had ever been. They worked like a well-trained team of surgeons who had a job to do, but by God, they were going to have a good time doing it!

The Scarffs don't slaughter hogs any more. Mr. Scarff can't handle the work and Mrs. Scarff is not as strong as she used to be. Besides, there's no time for raising pigs and going to all that trouble. It's really just as well, Grayson told me: the doctor doesn't want them ingesting all that cholesterol, anyway.

Tony's crippled up with arthritis. For him, also, the days of backbreaking labor and smokey January slaughterings are left to fond recollection. Times have changed. There aren't many people who care about such things any more. Most don't know how and the rest are too damned busy just trying to make ends meet...

AND NOW:

Our country's farmers have just succeeded in filling the national larder with record crops in corn, wheat, soybeans and cotton; to say nothing of the huge dairy surplus that can always be counted upon. "Oh", said the Mad Hatter to Alice, "that's too bad." Commodity prices are a shambles due to overproduction. Farmers throughout the country are emersed in a sea of debt that our government encouraged them to incur.

Last spring, 15% of the short-term loans made by the Farm Credit System were made to farmers who were already insolvent. The operative theory behind these loans was that the only way the farmers could save themselves was to have "a good year"; but an idiot could see that a "good year" would only further depress the prices of farm commodities. A byproduct was the additional time these loans gave the Farm Credit System to keep its ungainly head buried in the sand.

The Farm Credit System is not a government agency. It is owned by its borrowers who must purchase stock with five percent of the loan proceeds they receive from the 37 main banks. These borrower/stockholders in turn elect the hundreds of local Farm Credit officials who make the judgments on loan applications in their areas. Sounds very comfortable, don't you think? Money for the loans does not come from the government and carries no Federal guarantee. Capital is raised by the sale of bonds to private investors.

Prior to 1971 the limit on a loan was 65% of a farm's appraised value. In that year congress increased the percentage to 85 and in 1980 had the good judgement to raise that figure to 97%. In 1980 farm land was still valuable. A farmer could make a government-guaranteed profit on every bushel of whatever he produced.

The American farmer, like so many of his city-slicker cousins, has gotten lost in the American Dream. Farm land is now dirt cheap. In many Midwestern towns 70% of the "Main-street" businesses have closed. A record number of banks have closed also. The appraisals that yielded big bucks which got turned into buildings and tractors and new houses are more than a little bit lower now than they were in 1980. The Farm Credit System can't call the loans, however, without causing its own collapse in the bargain. By its own estimates, 15% of its 75 billion dollar portfolio is currently uncollectable. The rest of the banking system has at least another 25 billion in worthless agricultural debt; and a total figure of 100 billion is probably closer to reality.

Our congressmen are now lined up to sponsor legislation engineering a "bailout" of the Farm Credit System. This generous and unrequired item is outside the budget process, but could cost us 100 billion by the time it's all over. Recently a price support package was passed which will cost an estimated 169 billion through 1990. This new legislation is, at best, a desperate "punt and hope" compromise. Through it, the farm economy of the nation will be given time to shrink up slowly rather than suffer a more dramatic death. This, at least, will create less immediate impact on the rest of the banking system and the economy. But, what's the next step? All of the least viable farmers will remain in business and will be out there, dawn to dusk, producing their asses off. The farmers who had the good sense to stay liquid and are still barely holding on, will then be driven into bankruptcy. And what then? When the 50-or-so billion becomes 200-of-so billion? Another bail out?

The farm problem has become so severe that no one knows what to do. This years farm bill cuts painfully deep in some areas - dairy supports among them. But tobacco, a chief product of Jesse Helms' home state, and sugar beets, a product which is a foreign relations disaster in the Caribbean Basin, have been left untouched.

I don't pretend to have the answers. I do know, however, that we ignore the economic clouds on the horizon to our peril. I believe, I guess, that we do all share a responsibility in the displacement of our farmers and of our labor force - at least to the degree that we give these people a chance to learn new trades; a chance to put their lives back together even if at a lower standard of living. The world is shrinking; it is naive to expect other nations to witness our disproportionate prosperity without passion. The economic choices we make - from tariffs to

subsidies - are choices we make as a community and carry a responsibility for its individuals.

Before visiting Grayson I was feeling that the marketplace should be turned loose to do its ugly work. Supply and demand may not create the cleanest solution to a problem as sick as our agricultural system, but it does work. Present farm-related legislation is a frustrated attempt to buy time. Our legislators are too cowardly to be innovative and 1986 is an election year.

Sadder still is the fact that most of the money will go to huge corporate producers rather than to family operations. Efficiencies of scale - in large part due to the way support programs have been designed over the years - have encouraged a shift in farming to large corporations.

Our farmers, once an archetype of American independence, have tragically accepted a new role as government dependents. Disturbing as this may be, they simply can't be written off. Too much is at stake, not the least of which is the history and tradition of family farming. "Politics as usual" led our farmers into this crisis; it is heartlessly callous to expect them to suffer the entire brunt of their federally-inspired naivete.

People like Grayson have no complaint with their work or with the severe lifestyle it forces upon them. Farming is all they know. Perhaps they are entitled to the small slice of the pie they need to keep their fading dreams alive.

REAL LIFE, A LIGHTER DIMENSION:

By the time this issue reaches you I will be in the Caribbean for two months of cruising. This trip has only one ocean passage - the eighty mile upwind run from Tortola to St. Maartin. My time in the islands should be more relaxed than last summer's passage from Maine to St. Thomas. With St. Maartin as a home base, I will be lazing around all the tropical waters of St. Barts, St. Christopher, Saba, Nevis and perhaps farther south. Part of February's RBR is done. My intention is to do the balance aboard Aurora and send it home with friends. If these logistics work out, February's issue should arrive on time. If they don't, forgive the interruption - I'll catch up in March.

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RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

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THE VIRGINS, 1962:

As wedding nights go, May twelfth, 1962, was neither more nor less than most. We had driven to Washington following our wedding, and spent the night in the motel at D.C. International Airport. As if normal distractions were not sufficient for sleeplessness, we contended all night with the comings and goings of an endless number of planes. At seven a.m. we awoke in earnest to the hum of jackhammers working on the uncompleted new section of the motel. Our plane for Puerto Rico left at ten.

Lin learned of Marina Cay from a patient who put out the information with guttural enthusiasm as she cleaned his teeth. It sounded perfect! A six-acre island in the British Virgin Islands with eight A-frames built into a hillside facing the eastern trade winds. It had: Electricity until ten p.m. when the generator was shut down; no hot water; meals served on an open patio protected from showers by a thatched roof; a bar at which you kept your count of drinks consumed by putting slash marks on the notebook page bearing your name; a lovely beach and nearby reefs for snorkeling; day trips to pristine beaches - dropped off with a picnic lunch in the morning and picked up late in the afternoon. All of this at a reasonable cost and produced and directed by a lovely English couple: Jean and Allen Batham.

In Puerto Rico we transferred to a Piper Apache. We were to fly to Beef Island International Airport where a boat would be waiting to take us to Marina Cay. For reasons related to the fact that air travel was considered a more formal matter in the early sixties then it is now, we were dressed in our "going away clothes": Lin's white wool suit was perfectly appointed by a wide-brim hat; from the trouser bottoms of my black mohair suit peeked out the mirrored tips of the only patent leather shoes I have ever owned.

The forty minute flight was glorious! The pilot pointed out one fabled place after another: Saint Croix, Saint Thomas, Saint John; Peter and Salt Islands; Tortola, Caneel Bay, Fallen Jerusalem, Virgin Gorda; Norman Island - inspiration for several stories by Robert Lewis Stevenson and legendary hiding place of much of Bluebeard's treasure; Dead Chest - the small island where fifteen mutinous sailors were put ashore with one bottle of rum for provisions and their captains best wishes for painful and thirsty deaths:

Yo Ho Ho and a bottle of rum,
Fifteen men on a dead man's chest ....

all followed by our touchdown on the grass field that was Beef Island's runway.

Tortola is mountainous through its entire length and breadth - no possible site exists for a landing field. Beef Island is flat and is only a stones throw from Tortola's southern extremity. In 1962 the only way off of Beef Island was by boat or plane. In 1966, in a ceremony worthy of a visit from Queen Elizabeth, a bridge was opened between Beef Island and Tortola. Visitors spending any amount of time on Tortola came to know this fact by the plethora of pictures that still adorn the walls of public buildings showing the Queen cutting the ribbon - this was the biggest thing that's ever happened on Tortola.

We climbed down from the Piper in a state of disbelief. There was no waiting boat. There was no one in the customs shed. There was no one anywhere else on the island! The pilot pulled our bags from the luggage compartment and pointed to a sand beach where he suggested we wait for our boat. He'd buzz Marina Cay on his way out. As the sun began to set we stood, formally attired for the occasion, amid a pile of suitcases on a flea-infested tropical beach that would, we were certain, serve as the location for the first night of our honeymoon.

At last, as daylight began to fade, a distant runabout came our way and approached the beach. After establishing that we were the expected couple, we were invited aboard. We waded into the surf, threw our luggage aboard and climbed in. Carroll - our captain - was a very gentle native Tortolan who we came to know over the course of the next week as cook, gardener, bartender, equipment repairman, small boat captain, maker of wonderful picnic lunches and general man Friday.

Robb White - author of "My Virgin Island" - brought his new bride to Marina Cay in the thirties. His book describes the trials and tribulations of establishing a beachhead in what was then a tropical wilderness. The house he built serves now as Marina Cay's library and museum. When the Bathams assumed their 99 year lease from the Crown in the mid-fifties, this single stone structure with its huge underground cistern (for rainwater collection - the only fresh water on Marina Cay) was the only building on the island.

Allen and Jean Batham had pulled up stakes in New Zealand and sailed to The Virgins in the early fifties. They were among the pioneers who saw in this part of the world a potential vacation paradise. David Rockefeller, at about the same time, developed Caneel Bay on Saint John and Little Dix Bay on Virgin Gorda. The Bathams quickly overlaid Robb White's dream with a few of their own. They built a few A-frames for guests, and opened for

business in the mid-fifties. Their graciousness and the primitive magic of the area assured their success.

The Virgin's lie east of Puerto Rico in a crescent of Islands that begins on Florida's east coast and ends with Trinidad, off the coast of Venezuela. North of Cuba lie the Bahamas. Continuing eastward are the Turks and Caicos followed by Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Puerto Rico. From The Virgins - to the east of Puerto Rico - the crescent turns southeast toward Saint Martin and the area called the Leeward Islands or the Lesser Antilles. The Windward Islands, still further south, begin at Martinique and continue on to Trinidad.

Being closest to the States, The Virgins have been the first of these islands to see major development. They are made up of six major land masses and a dozen or so smaller Cays. They have become a center for sailing because they are clustered together to make easy half-day sailing trips, and because they abound with beautiful beaches and wonderful anchorages.

From The Baths at Virgin Gorda - a natural seaside rock formation of tunnels and caves swept by the unrelenting surf - to a first visit to Charlotte Amalie on Saint Thomas, the trip was unforgettable. We were at that time in our lives when the world was new and experience bore fewer associations to other adventures already played out - a time, for example, when carrying home the legal limit of wine and liquor from Saint Thomas was reflexive behavior.

Marina Cay had a guest register. Everyone who had ever stayed on the island inscribed upon departure; their names, the date, their home port and a comment or two which ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime. Next to our names in the column labeled "1960 to 1964" you will find the profound comment, "We shall return!"

TOO, IF BY SEA:

We did return - once to Marina Cay and several times sailing. Our first of many sailing trips with Steve and Sue Glick was aboard the fifty-two foot steel charter yacht Ivory Gull. Brian and Ursula, our captain and first-mate, had purchased the yacht six months earlier from an estate. It was in a state of severe disrepair. By the time of our embarkation the Ivory Gull was functional but just barely so. Fortunately, however, Ursula's "happy-hour" snacks made up for the deficiencies as did the fact that she had a body which was lovely to look at as she glided about the ship engrossed in a multitude of first-mately tasks.

As a result of the confidence we gained during our week aboard the Ivory Gull we chartered a bareboat out of Tortola for the following February. A new charter fleet - something that had never been tried before - had been opened by Ginny and Charley

Carey in Roadtown, Tortola. The moorings had six Pearson 35's. They now have a fleet scattered throughout the Caribbean of hundreds of boats - all of which are larger and more commodious than these first sloops.

For several years in a row that was how we spent our week of vacation time. We loved it! The only thing imperfect about these trips was my awareness that I was not on my own boat.

A boat often becomes a valiant reach for a kind of perfection unobtainable ashore. A small cruiser like Aurora is large enough to provide sufficient space and comfort for a lifestyle that is sparse yet luxurious. It is also small enough to foster any illusions one has toward creating perfection.

From choosing the books incorporated in a sixty or so volume library, to selecting and mastering the tools, appliances and navigation equipment she had aboard, a boat affords the opportunity to maximize minimum-type living.

I set out a dim slow-burning candle on my alter of dreams when I first saw The Virgins in 1962 - I would someday return on my own boat.

AURORA:

As luxury vessels go, Aurora ranks low on a list of what's available. She's slow and was built even before the phrase "state of the art" was in the vernacular - fifteen years ago: 1971. For thirteen of those years she's been mine. Following her trip from Hong Kong across two oceans on the deck of a freighter she spent a year and-a-half in her cradle. She was caught in a dispute between a buyer who had ordered a red stripe on her hull (instead of the blue she wore), and a broker who insisted that that was insufficient reason to violate a contract. The blue stripe was painted red, but still the battle raged on.

I became the path between the horns of this dilemma. I saw Aurora in November of 1972 and fell immediately in love. For fifteen years I had sailed an assortment of compromises - some of which were invested with more blood, sweat and tears than they were worth. Here was a real boat. A boat whose range beyond the Chesapeake Bay was only limited by my knowledge, experience and imagination.

We dickered like a den of Arab traders. Finally, the other two parties agreed to split a four-thousand dollar loss and let me steal her. She's worth more today, by a little, than I paid for her. She owes me nothing!

The name Aurora, incidentally, is not one I would have chosen. It was the name on her transom when she arrived from Hong Kong,

and it is a serious violation of tradition to change a ship's name. The spirits that jealously guard the seas are often vengeful about such things. They pretend to excuse you and then, when you least expect it, get even in the most imaginative ways. I have had sufficient trouble while paying homage to these Gods to tempt their ire by thumbing up my nose at ancient nautical tradition.

Aurora is thirty-six feet soaking wet. Actually, she's thirty-five feet seven and a-half inches. Chinese rulers are slightly smaller than ours, and boat sizes tend to be rounded up rather than down. Sticking off her bow - like a nose - there is a bowsprit - a spar which passes through a notch in the tip of her bow and ends at the Samson post - a beam which is attached to the keel and passes through the deck. It is used for attaching lines to the bow (rather than cleats).

> We must, I fear, indulge a slight digression at this juncture. Among the things I have learned from you, is that some readers love to follow long threads of descriptive detail and others do not. I have also learned that my propensity for the use of parentheses serves both of us ill - you would notice, had you a mind to, that the last several issues of RBR have seen the end of this parenthetical habit. In difference to both types of readers heretofore mentioned, and with deliberate degradation of prose-style, I will put nautical detail in parentheses. Those of you with limited time or inclination may skip the parentheses without losing the drift (a term which describes the movement of a vessel independent of her measured distance, through the water - current for example).

To return to Aurora's bowsprit: With her bowsprit included, her length is forty-feet, ten inches.

She is ketch rigged - she has two masts (of laminated spruce - spruce being the best wood for spars. It is light, very flexible and very strong. When laminated, these qualities are maximized.) The way a sail boat is rigged yields terms like: Ketch (aft mast shorter than fore mast and stepped in front of the rudder), yawl (aft mast shorter than fore mast and stepped behind [abaft] the rudder), schooner (aft mast taller than fore mast), sloop (the most common rig - one mast), and cutter (regardless of mast arrangement, a rig that has two foresails (jibs). These terms must be combined to accurately describe some rigs. Aurora, for example, is a cutter ketch: Her aft mast is smaller than her foremast and is stepped in front of the rudder, and she has two jibs (for any sailors who are also detail devotees: The helm - which is linked to the rudder either directly, as is a tiller, or indirectly, through a quadrant, gears, hydraulics, or what have you - does not correctly define a ketch or yawl. The location of the rudder does).

Alas, like most things in this world, Aurora's rig has pluses and minuses. She is very easy to handle alone or with one crew. Her sails, there being four, are all nicely manageable. In winds that would uncomfortably heel most sloops, I can fly my staysail (the hindmast jib) and mizzen (the sail hoisted on the hindmost mast - called the mizzen mast) and be very comfortable. On the downside, due more to her hull shape (about which more later) than her rig, she is very slow when her course is less than fifty degrees off the wind and, under full sail I have four sails to trim, hoist and furl rather than two.

She was designed by Bill Luders - a naval architect of some stature, in about 1965 . She was built at Cheoy Lee Shipyards, Hong Kong, in 1971.

A Bit of Ancient History:

My first boat was a canvas-on-wood canoe. I bought her for thirty-five dollars when I was seventeen. After recanvassing her outside and refinishing her ribs and planks in varnish, I painted her and joyously paddled her around the Magothy River for a few years.

At nineteen I traded up to a seventeen year old, Eastern Shore built, bronze-splined cedar-planked, seventeen foot Comet. I refinished her, in Morty's garage, as I listened to news on the radio about the Bay of Pigs Invasion. In her, I learned my first meaningful sailing lessons: It is easy to drown and/or terrorize innocent people in a sailboat.

Stuart Fine sailed with me on my very first trip as skipper of my own sailboat. He had never sailed before. I had sailed twice.

A Comet is a day-sailor designed to very exacting specifications. It was created as a racing class and is very tender - a sudden gust of wind can easily cause a knockdown (boat lying sideways instead of vertical). Stutz (as he was known in those pre-doctor days) was sitting with me on the windward rail as we sailed down the river on a close reach (the wind just off the bow). Suddenly a gust hit us.

The Comet had hiking straps. These straps of belt-webbing were attached to the inside edges of the deck, and ran across the small cockpit. In a strong wind you could lock your feet under the straps and get all of your weight where it was most effective to keep the boat - which would be trying to heel - upright. Macho hiking-out entailed holding your body horizontal with your feet (or one foot) hooked under the hiking strap and all of your horizontally erect body's weight on your calves which lay on the windward deck.

A strong wind was blowing when we left the mooring and I instructed Stutz as to the use of these appliances. We were both hiked way out when the gust that had hit us suddenly disappeared. The boat immediately leveled and, as I moved my weight inboard, Stutz began a maneuver for which I know of no nautical term. He sort of bobbed in and out of the water, laughed, choked, and screamed all at the same time. His calf muscles were insufficient to bring him inboard and his foot was too enmeshed to allow him to go completely overboard.

To assist him would have required allowing the boat to come into the wind; and doing so would have reduced the occasional emergence of his head to complete submersion. We sailed on like this for several minutes. Eventually I was able to extend a free hand by which he pulled himself, half drowned, aboard.

A bit further along down the river the wind intensified. Another gust hit us. The proper strategy in such an instance is to simply turn into the wind, allowing its increased force to hit the boat more dead-on. To do so, I had to allow the tiller (which turns the rudder) to go toward the lee rail - which was under water and almost directly below me. The tiller was also an important element in my balance - it countered the weight of my body, which was mostly out of the boat.

My choices - more reflexive than conscious - were to allow the boat to turn over and swamp, or to let go of the rudder - allowing the boat to right herself - and fall overboard. With an elegance befitting both my age and the situation, I allowed the tiller to satisfy its natural pull toward the lee rail and simultaneously dove overboard between the boom and the much-below-me leeward deck.

The boat immediately righted herself and Stutz went sailing off down the river with an expression on his face that I will never forget. Here I was swimming along behind an ever more distant boat, shouting instructions to someone who didn't know a tiller from a jib sheet. As Stutz prepared to jump overboard - he could swim - the incident came to an abrupt close as the Comet ran aground on a sandbar. I very humbly paddled back to our home port using the rudder which had broken off in the impact.

As time passed I did learn to sail. By the time I bought <u>Aurora</u> I was trading up from a Columbia 28 I had bought new and had named <u>Rozinante</u>. Cervantes had nothing on me in the realm of romantic illusion!

Here and Now:

The harbor of Marigot on French Saint Martin is the loveliest I have ever known. Aurora rides quietly at anchor as I put the finishing touches on this month's RBR. My original intention was to describe the arduous journey here from Tortola and to briefly cover the beautiful harbors, towns and coves of my travels over the past month - Saint Martin, Saint Bart and Saint Kitts. I seem, instead to have gotten lost in the longer term history of how I came - over the choices and accidents of some thirty years of sailing - to be here. The adventures of this trip will have to wait until next month's issue.

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RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

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Over the course of eight weeks in January and February Aurora served as vacation headquarters to over a score of visitors. The groups ranged from four women who used at least a gallon of sun tan lotion in every gradation from four to twenty-two (twenty-two being a French variety made specifically for anatomical areas particularly delicate, and legally exposed to sun only on beaches where cameras are forbidden) to a quasi-honeymoon couple who spent sufficient time in the forward cabin to bring to mind that classic French cliche "vive la difference".

The first week of shaking down the boat, cruising a bit, and getting to Saint Martin, had been spent in the company of Shawn and Josh and our cousin, Kim Wolf. Kim had just very gamely completed her first ocean passage. On the way over, most of the food she'd ingested for the past few days had been donated to Father Neptune. Despite this, she stood all of her watches and even managed to smile occasionally.

Saint Martin is half French and Half Dutch (the Dutch side being properly called Sint Maarten). Phillipsberg, the principal town on the Dutch side, was the point of our landfall after a brutal twenty-four hour sail from the British Virgins. I had chosen Bobby's Marina in Phillipsberg to serve as home base - very sensibly, I thought - because it was the only marina on the island. In November I had called and reserved dock space. I had been impressed by their friendliness and by the fact that they didn't require a deposit. Upon going ashore I learned that they had no space immediately available, that they had never heard of me or Aurora, and that all of their moorings were Mediterranean style - a system in which an anchor is dropped from the bow as boats are backed into a single long pier.

For years I have had nightmares about just such a circumstance. Aurora goes backwards, governed by principles which defy predictability, in a fashion independent of the will of the helmsman. As I returned to the boat, anchored in the large cove that is Phillipsberg's harbor, I tried to mask the depression that was quickly overtaking me. With no known alternative, I was stuck in a harbor that gave new meaning to the word "rolling". What little sleeping we did that first night was done either flat on our backs or on our stomachs. In any other position there was no risk of falling to the floor, it was a certainty. As if that were not enough, eighteen friends were holding non-refundable tickets to join me over in Saint Martin over the next seven weeks.

After explaining our situation to my exhausted crew, we returned to shore in our inflatable dinghy, cleared customs and rented a car. Before driving around the island I attempted to call the travel agent in Baltimore who had made arrangements for the

entire future contingent. She wasn't in. The message I left was an inquiry as to whether it would be possible to shift everyone's destination to Tortola in the Virgins. I already knew the answer, but this particular travel agent (Judy Kishter of Roland Park Travel) has pulled off so many miracles for me in the past that I thought I'd at least share my panic.

Marigot is a town about three blocks deep and six blocks long that nestles on the shore of Marigot Bay in French Saint Martin. It is a perfect natural harbor when winds are from any direction but the west, and westerly winds are rare in the Caribbean. It has a delicious French flavor and, although it lacks many yachting amenities, it seemed far superior to Phillipsberg as a home base. On the day following our arrival we half-heartedly moved Aurora to Marigot. From that time on things got decidedly better. Marigot turned out to be both a wonderful home port and a town of unforgettable charm.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS:

The cruising grounds within practical distance of Saint Martin proved to be more sparse than anticipated. Although additional adventure lay only fifty miles to the south - Saint Kitt, Statia and Nevis, two full days of sailing were required to reach them and return. Most opted to forgo this journey. As a result, most weeks were spent lazily plying the towns, anchorages and restaurants of French Saint Martin and Saint Bart.

HAIRPOWER

Aurora, unbeknownst to several first-time visitors, has only twelve volt D.C. current available - and scant, at that. One particular couple arrived with a full duffel of equipment which included: a T.V. (Aurora had never seen a T.V. before), a compact digital disc player complete with two sets of headphones, a video camera (that required frequent recharging), and, as if with five people aboard that were not enough, a hair dryer (this was Aurora's first look at a hair dryer, also). I assumed that the groans which greeted the proud display of this assortment would be sufficient to discourage its use. I was wrong. The gentlemen in question, handy little bugger that he is, discovered that there was a Honda generator buried in the forepeak under mountains of gear and anchor line. While a miscellaneous assortment of rechargeable batteries were being energized and most of those aboard were busy below, a young woman sneaked out to Aurora's foredeck with her pink hair-dryer. Five days had passed and she was desperate for a fix. Her embarrassment was obvious as I invited everyone to make suggestions while I photographed the event. The picture turned out to be one of wonderful contrast. In the background is pristine pale blue Caribbean water seen beyond teak decks and furled white sails. Juxtaposed in the foreground is a woman perched alongside a red and white generator, smiling guiltily, with a pink hair dryer in one hand and an erectly elevated middle finger on the other.

TIGHT, BUT LOOSE

The last night of a delightful week spent in the innocent company of four women, including my sister Sheryl and ex-wife Linda, found me sitting at twilight in the cockpit telling bawdy stories and nipping at a bottle of apricot brandy. Although I rarely drink too much, this evening was an unarguable exception. We dressed for our last night ashore and headed into Mullet Bay to find food and dancing.

Loosened by alcohol and feeling good, I was in rare form and yapping ceaselessly to the delight of all but Linda. She has, in her defense, seen me center-stage a sufficient number of times to last a very long life-time. My sense of humor had degenerated to such a point that, for example, upon seeing a parked Datsun, I cleverly remarked, "Dat sun (pointing to the car) is not as bright as dat sun (pointing to the sky)." We had been searching for what seemed an endlessly long time when we finally found "Le Gourmet" restaurant. Our approach was across an empty courtyard surrounded by expanses of tinted glass. As we walked toward an entrance to the restaurant I found that I was facing a very attractive steel pole on which was mounted a light fixture.

I have known since late adolescence that I am blessed with certain dubious talents, among them is the ability to suspend myself horizontally from poles. With one hand grasping above and the other below, I can tuck my lower elbow into my side and faultlessly raise my body to lie parallel to the ground. A strong pole of perfect diameter - about two inches - is as irresistible to me as are Rheb's milk chocolate cherry candies from Baltimore's Lexington Market. Despite my slight inebriation - or perhaps because of it, I went for it! Whether it was dampness or the pole's slick plastic coating, I'm not sure, but, in otherwise perfect form, I slowly descended - body erect to the side - down the pole until my elbow stopped me at ground level. This side show was rather well received, I thought, until I realized that Linda was heading back to the car with smoke pouring from her ears. She had been the first to realize that from behind the dark glass dozens of diners had just witnessed my performance.

Remembering what it felt like to know that I had been a "bad boy," I sulked back to the car. Lin was not moved by any of our arguments - she was not going to eat in a place at which I had publicly made a fool of myself (and by association, I suppose, humiliated her). Unlike the others, I knew enough to remain silent. Off we went to a sullen last supper of third rate pizza and spaghetti at which, "may I have the salt, please," covered an hour of conversation. Is it a strange perversity of my nature or some obscure interpersonal dynamic that assures me that this is the memory, and somehow, with pleasant association, which will remain strongest of my week with "the girls"?

THE SEARCH FOR FANNY GOLDBERG

Among the activities that were occasionally indulged during each week of cruising were late night readings of stories by Poe, and my solicitation from each group of a single true story that each person thought was among the funniest he or she had ever heard. The prize, not unexpectedly, goes to Jake (remembered by regular readers for his Aspen line, "Crock got McDonalds, Watson got IBM, and I... got the fish!") in his telling of Sylvan Feldman's little known entry into the lawncare business.

Some years ago Sylvan made the mistake of telling Jake about a dramatic skid he had taken off Park Heights Avenue - across the lawn of some innocent homeowner. It was an icy winter night and Baltimore was enshrouded in fog due to a sudden rise in temperature. As Sylvan was returning home from his dental office he lost control of his car and wound up sledding across a lawn that had unexpectedly replaced the road bed.

Two weeks later Jake sat by as a lady friend - particularly good with a Jewish accent - called Sylvan's office and asked to speak to Dr. Feldman. When she was told by the receptionist that Dr. Feldman was with a patient, she said, "I'm not caring if he's with Moishe Dayan, he's guing talk to Fanny Goldberg right now or to mine luyer this afternoon." In short order Sylvan was on the phone.

Fanny informed him that a neighbor had seen him "run trecks in mine lawn," and that she wanted his check by that evening for the four hundred dollars it was going to cost to repair the damage. Sylvan thought he was sure which house had been blessed by his visit but, when he checked following his misadventure, he had been unable to spot his tracks. In thinking that four hundred dollars was a lot of money to repair damage he couldn't even find, he told Mrs. Goldberg that he would take care of it himself on the following Sunday. She accepted this resolution with a warning, "I vunt you shud use good seed und good topsuyal."

Jake had plans with Sylvan and Suzie that Saturday evening and decided he'd let Van stew till then before telling him that he'd been had. The weekend came, and Sylvan's usual Saturday morning basketball game was unexpectedly canceled. He decided to get this unpleasantness over with a day ahead of schedule. After donning a torn sweat shirt, an old pair of jeans and his ragged fatigue jacket, he loaded the station wagon with a borrowed tiller, a rake, shovel and hoe, and went to the garden shop for a bale of potting soil and some grass seed. Thus prepared, he headed for the scene of his crime.

The chic young woman who answered the door at the first house he visited informed him - through the slot which the safety chain allowed between the jamb and the ornate oak door - upon being asked to see her mother, that her mother had died seven years ago and that, no, an elderly woman with a Jewish accent did not live

in her house. Furthermore, she suggested that he leave promptly unless he wanted trouble with the police.

Although he could not discern any damage on the two adjacent lawns - he was dead certain one of the three was correct - he tried these houses anyway. Alas, no one had ever heard of Fannie Goldberg. Bewildered and confused he returned home.

That night Sylvan related this strange adventure over dinner. After probing for every savory detail, Jake confessed. Although years have passed and the promised revenge has never been meted out, Sylvan swears that one day the score will be settled.

BETSY'S BIGHT

During the last few days of my time in the Caribbean, Art and Betsy Gompf remained with me. They had volunteered to spend a few additional days in the Virgins and help prepare Aurora for her lay-up until my likely return next winter. We were anchored near Marina Cay (which we had learned earlier had closed last April and was for sale).

On one of my trips to the Virgins in the sixties I spent an afternoon with friends exploring a tiny cay called George Dog. I harbored a vague recollection of seeing a cave there that, for reasons I couldn't recall, we were unable to approach. Something had been gnawing at me with an insistence that I return.

The sea was calm, we had no required schedule, and George Dog was only an hour to our west. Off we went. On the way toward the sheltered side where we intended to anchor, we passed the dimly remembered cave. It rose gradually from sea level into a sheer rock cliff. It appeared that there would be no place to land the dinghy - the surge along the shoreline was ferocious even though conditions were relatively calm.

Betsy was delighted with the opportunity to have a bit of time alone, so after anchoring, Art and I set off in Aurora's inflatable dinghy. Equipped with fins, masks and shoes, we ventured around the point to do a bit of surf-side spelunking and see how much trouble we could get into.

The cave was clearly unapproachable. It was centered in an indentation on a rock face that extended across the entire northwest side of the island. At the southeast corner of this rocky cove was a tiny stone beach that formed the floor of another cave, less exciting because the inside was entirely visible - perhaps thirty feet wide and ten feet deep. As each swell reached this tiny negotiating point between sea and land we heard the tumbling of stones.

We flirted with making a landing several times by backing toward the beach and then returning to safer water. After a few minutes of closer scrutiny, while dodging coral heads and ledges that were just below the surface, we moved on. The surge seemed

sufficient to wreak considerable damage on both us and the dink, and we hoped to find a better landing point further along the coast. Alas, there was no other possibility - and so we went back to take another look.

Although Art and I have both left behind much of the bravado that in earlier years would have required us to fight the unbeatable foe, there was something in the air that set us both back about twenty years. For me, a closer look had recalled that time long ago when I first saw the cave from a turn in the coastline at which continued progress overland was impossible - our dinghy ride in search of another landing point had cleared the haze which shrouded my memory. For both of us the risk seemed likely to be manageable and the worst consequences less than life threatening. With sufficient adrenaline coursing through our veins to guarantee peak performance, and in impeccable timing with the surge, we headed for the rock beach.

We made it! As we emerged from the surf we found ourselves on small stones which rolled up and down with each rise and fall of the water. We pulled the dink to the back wall of this tiny beachhead and spent the next several minutes examining our surroundings.

Over millennia, stone had fallen from the face of the cliff which formed the small indentation we were standing under. In the fury of the surf - relatively mild on the day of our excursion but more normally rather violent - this rock had been broken and rolled into smooth stones. In addition, the spot we were on was the only place in the larger cove where the bottom was sufficiently sloped to invite the collection of rocky debris.

I have seen similar beaches in Maine, but never before understood the principles at work behind their formation. As rocky shorelines inevitably erode under the patient and persistent onslaught of the sea, storms shift and grind the fallen rock that results from this erosion. Eventually, the stones break up and become rounded from friction. Storm-tossed rocks then find their way to the deepest recess in the adjacent shoreline where they are held captive by the steep walls of coastal indentations.

Our fascination at these hands-on lessons in geology inspired us to do two things: first, in a gesture reflecting our unconscious realization that human existence is mere futility in terms of such processes, yet additionally, that without the awareness we brought to this encounter these processes have no meaning and arguably no existence, we named this tiniest of Virgin Island beaches "Betsy's Bight"; second, our examination of the stone beach deteriorated into a search for the "perfect stone" - a stone of perfect symmetry that could be treasured as a memento. An egg-shaped stone (of metamorphic rock we think) now rests on the mantlepiece at River Bend. Art found it and, in a gesture of benevolent self-sacrifice, gave it to me.

It was finally time to launch our attack on the cave that was really the object of the entire excursion. speculations about the number of people who have landed at Betsy's Bight and explored the cave yielded the conclusion that we were probably the first to do so in several hundred years.

Only swimming could bring us to the cave's entrance. After several timid and abortive attempts to enter the water from various places on our tiny stone beach, we finally succeeded by throwing ourselves into the sea. Once past the surf, we found the violent thrashing of the water against the walls of the cliff much less threatening than it appeared. Although accompanied by much sound and fury, the movement was mostly up and down. Our fears of being tossed against the rock subsided each time we were gently lifted and lowered by the sea.

Anxiety became delight as we realized we were in a wonderland of ledges, canyons and coral. The snorkeling was so unexpectedly good that for the next hour we swam around the entire length and breadth of the cove. There was an aura surrounding us which reflected nature in her purest form. We were even adopted by a pair of handsome grey and red fish - at least as fascinated by us as we were with them. They would almost let us pet them, would dive when we dove and would wait and rest when with us when we paused. As we swam among the ledges that rose perhaps thirty feet from the sand and coral bottom almost to the surface we came to another geologic realization. The ledges were the larger chunks of stone that had fallen over eons of time to form the cove itself. We were the beneficiaries of thousands of years of work by the tireless sea.

At last, as the time at which Betsy had been told we'd return began to creep up on us, we approached the cave. We climbed precariously across the urchin-infested underwater ledge that rose to its mouth.

Upon closer examination we realized that the cave was a fissure in the magma that had erupted long ago to form the island. Its floor rose gradually to a platform that led to a tunnel leading back out, at a ninety degree angle, to an opening in the cliff face that was not visible from the sea below. The only treasure that we found - and left undisturbed - was a quaint wooden plaque crudely nailed to a crack in the driest part of the tunnel. It read, "Mye name is endless Tyme, king of kings. Looke on mye werks ye mighty, and dyspaire."

AND NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN

Both space and good taste argue against inclusion of what could easily become a much more detailed recounting of my voyage. It seems a shame, however, to leave unmentioned a few things that were particularly delicious: A long walk with a lady friend in bright moonlight on an unknown goat-path along the cliffs behind Baie Colombier on Saint Bart - very scary!... A pentathlon of shot put, broad jump, leg wrestling, and breath-holding on the

beach at Ille Pinel, followed by an intense pick-up-sticks tournament aboard... Dinners at La Vie en Rose... Breakfasts at Port Royale waitressed by a young woman who left no doubt in my mind that had I been Adam and she Eve, the world would be in far greater trouble than it is... The phone system in Saint Martin - like most things French, absurd in both design and execution, yet full of charming personality... Naf Nafs... Ann Gallant's discussion - in impeccable French - with a Marigot customs official, which led to a heated argument, fear of imprisonment, and the payment of never-before-heard-of fees... Thirty-six hours of extreme gastric distress following Phil Gallant's arrival with an irresistible array of Charleston Chews, Swedish Red Fish, Goldenberg's Peanut Chews, and two Hebrew National Salamis... Nude bathing and bathers at many French beaches... Riots in Marigot precipitated by Chirac's sending the Heineken kidnappers there in yet another convoluted French attempt to see justice done (they were to be captured by the Dutch police who somehow missed there cue)... Sailing six hours to Saba and discovering, after a hair-raising swamping on a rocky beach, that there was no way we could get ashore... Sunsets... Rainbows... Good friends... Laughter...

***** RBR SPECIAL EVENT *****

Central America's explosive potential is increasingly troubling. My own confusion about the players and the historical background which led to the present chaos seems to be mirrored by most of the people I talk to.

On Tuesday, April 22nd, at 7:30 p.m., an expert on Central America will be visiting River Bend to lead a program dealing with the issues surrounding the area's conflicts and U.S. positions on these issues. No previous expertise is required, as we will begin with basics and build from there. Special attention will be focused on Nicaragua - the speaker has recently visited that country and will show slides he feels will properly flavor our perception of the issues we will be examining.

If you would like to join us please contact me promptly. Space will not permit too large a crowd and people will be accommodated on a first come, first served basis.

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River Bend Reflections

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The ad read, "1958 Mercedes Benz 220S Cabriolet. Black with tan interior. Poor condition. Runs. Best offer." I had placed it three weeks after consummating a seven year love affair by the purchase of this same vehicle.

THEY MEET:

In those days of the early seventies my route to work took me on a winding path through a lovely old suburban area of Baltimore called Mount Washington. I would frequently pass this prize of aesthetic automotive perfection as it sat, always in the same spot, on a corner opposite Greenspring Avenue's only grocery store. It was magnificent! The first time I laid eyes on it, I knew that it was the most beautiful automobile I had ever seen. I was sufficiently impressed to stop a few times, walk around it and take a closer look.

The dashboard was of a light satin-varnished mahogany. This same wood, in a gracefully curved three-inch moulding, trimmed the top of the four-seat cockpit and formed the transition between the soft perforated pleats of the tan leather interior and the window wells. Even the control knobs on the dashboard were elegant - sculpted chrome, inset with facings of dull black to eliminate glare.

The seven hand-rubbed coats of black lacquer that graced the body were accented with two thin delicate lines of chrome that followed the sides from front to back. The first began at the headlamps on each side and ran the length of the car, ending in a delicate curve on the quarter-panels. The second band of chrome - exactly the same width as the first - followed the rocker panels and the wheelwells along the bottom of the sides. The hood rose to a pronounced crest before dipping down to the slightly rounded fenders. On its tip, just behind the massive chrome grill, was the Mercedes logo - spring loaded so that it couldn't break off. The top center-line of each fender sported the turn-signal lights mounted in a tapered heavy chrome medalion - an elongated tapering arrow with the widest part facing forward. In the deep curve between the grill and the front of the fender nestled six-inch chrome fog lamps.

THEY WED:

This pinnacle of Continental design and engineering became a part of my life - I passed it twice every day for seven years. But alas, not even a beautiful Mercedes is impervious to time and weather. I sadly watched as the car deteriorated before my

eyes. It was never driven anymore and sat, dusty and rusting, by the curb. One Friday I whimsically left my business card under the windshield wiper. On the back of the card I wrote, "If you'd consider selling this car to someone who would love it, please call." On Sunday an elderly gentleman called to inform me that by the oddest quirk of fate he had sold the car to a neighbor the day before finding my card! He found my note as he was turning over the keys to the new owner, and was calling to tell me that he had passed my card along to her. He suspected that she didn't realize the magnitude of the project she was undertaking. I learned in the course of the conversation that he had sold the car for six hundred dollars!

The car was gone now, and within a few weeks I stopped kicking myself and forgot about it. Fate, however, had other plans. One Saturday morning I received a call. It was from the woman who had purchased the Mercedes. Part of the left wheel assembly had collapsed and the car had been towed to a garage. A bit of welding was required to make it right. The bill from the garage, including storage for two weeks, was $125.00. If I would pay her $600.00 for the car and settle the garage bill, the car would be mine. With perhaps enough delay to catch my breath, I accepted the deal.

The car had not been inspected so I had to devise some means to tow it home. I made, at that point, my first purchase of equipment that was somewhat extraneous to the actual process of restoration. It was not to be my last. I bought a towing rig by which one car could pull another. My visit to the garage was a bit disheartening. Although the Mercedes ran, the noises it made more resembled an agonized roar than a purr. The body was much worse than I had imagined. Rust was everywhere. Tiny holes in every sheet metal surface had been patched with filler. The hood, its metal ribbing broken, hung pitifully askew when it was opened.

ALL THAT GLITTERS:

I arrived home, my new acquisition in tow, and drove it into the garage which had already been transformed in three second-shift evenings of joyous anticipation, from a wood shop/watch repair emporium to an automotive restoration center. Knowing nothing about restoration, I had induced two knowledgable acquaintances to visit me over the weekend. Their judgement was rendered with frightening speed and unanimity: it was beyond saving - get rid of it for whatever price I could get.

The ad I placed was in dejected compliance with this advice. Two calls came in. The first was from a woman who, upon receiving somewhat greater detail in our phone conversation, heaped an undeserved pile of abuse on me for advertising such a shabby rust-heap; it ended with my hanging up on her after informing her that I thought she was a very weird lady. The second was from

Madame Rose, a gypsy fortune teller of some renown in the Pimlico area of Baltimore. Madame Rose decided she'd come out and take a look. Her arrival was spectacular! She rolled up the driveway in a red Cadillac convertible bearing hugh fins on the outside and several grubby looking male gypsies on the inside. The strings of reddish hair that hung from beneath her fruit-bedecked straw hat conjured up images of eerie seances and blazing trail-side campfires in the Black Forest. The entire entourage emerged briskly from her car and fell upon the sad black hulk. Tire kicking, fender tapping and crawling around on the ground ensued - all done as if by a trained crew of crack experts. A Hungarian huddle was then called by the trunk lid and the collective judgement rendered: they made an offer of three-hundred and twenty-five dollars.

WORKING OUT A RELATIONSHIP:

During the twelve years since then I have had ample time to chastise myself for refusing that offer. It was the only offer - and not for want of trying - that I have ever received; and, my total loss could have been a mere four hundred dollars. She left me her card, "Madame Rose, private readings," and drove off inviting me to call should I change my mind. I was simply incapable of allowing myself to lose four hundred dollars in that fashion over the course of only three weeks. I was a good mechanic; I was certainly capable of learning how to weld and fashion metal. I would show the skeptics how much could be done with just a few bucks and a large dose of gumption.

The next several weeks were a time for what the legal profession would call "discovery." I discovered that the windshield was not safety glass: two hundred dollars. I learned that headlight assemblies which had reflectors and high-intensity bulbs would not pass inspection - sealed beams were required: eighty dollars each for new housings and lamps. I found that the muffler, resonator and exhaust pipe all needed replacement: three-hundred-fifty for parts, one-hundred for labor. The tires wouldn't pass and the brakes had to be reshod. A cracked tail-light lens had to be replaced and the directional signals repaired. And so it went - I have maintained superb records - until some two thousand dollars later my Mercedes passed inspection and was reluctantly declared acceptable for travel on the nation's roads and byways.

Mechanically, however, most systems were still a bit short of the mark. As I became more familiar with my new toy, the realization dawned on me that what was really required was a complete tearing down and rebuilding of the entire car - a "ground-up" restoration, as we in the trade would call it. The body was more rust than metal. The electrical system was a maze of after-market goodies, including an air-conditioning system that didn't work and hung off the dashboard, between the two bucket seats, like a giant brown wart with louvers. The speedo-meter - which jiggled within a fifteen mile per hour range - read

a more-than-dubious 58,000 miles, and the original owner really didn't remember if it was the second or third time round. The engine purred like a concrete mixer filled with scrap-metal. Any pressure on the brakes released strange gasping noises from the vacuum-assist brake unit mounted under the hood. Not being one for half-measures, I proceeded with all the aplomb of a kamikaze pilot.

IT'S HARD, YES, IT'S HARD, YES, IT'S HARD:

The steps in tearing down a car for a ground-up restoration follow a pretty obvious logic. First, the interior is stripped of all removable parts including door panels, dash, trim and instruments, seats, side-linings and carpets. Next, the body is removed so that the frame is exposed and can be sandblasted, straightened and strengthened as necessary. Last (or simultaneously) the engine (including all its support devices), brake system, drive train and steering system are disassembled for rebuilding.

The interior went fairly easily. The yield was: a pile of cracked and torn leather seats and seat-backs (all of which had to be saved to create patterns for replacements); a large carton of rotten carpet, crowned with a tattered top and headliner; several boxes of instruments, knobs, visors, handles, ash trays and the like. It was in starting work on the left front fender that the real trouble began.

The fender was held to the car by an impressive number of tiny square-headed metric bolts and nuts that were almost impossible to get to and even harder to remove. Every free night for a month I would finish dinner, don my grubbies and enter the shop to be mocked again by that fender. I tried every trick I knew. When quarts of liquid wrench were consumed without result, I started buying gallons. By the time I got that first fender off I had purchased almost every type of Vise-Grips that was made (including a really impressive array of the needle-nose models), a few square-headed socket wrenches and enough band-aids for my constantly bleeding and battered knuckles to give Johnson and Johnson record earnings for the quarter. After a degree of frustration that saw more than one tool hurled across the shop, I managed to get both front fenders off the car - to learn that they were not salvageable.

I had already become something of a novelty to the guys at Towson Valley Mercedes's parts department, so when I came back in after an absence of about a month, I was greeted with cat calls and general here's-that-sucker-again type humor. What I wanted this time was to know if the factory still had fenders and quarter panels available for a 1958, 220s convertible; and what they thought they might be willing to sell them to me for. They dusted off a few old manuals and began to collect parts-numbers while comparing the yield to their microfiche cards. Half an

hour later they concluded that, if the two front fenders and two rear quarter panels were still available, they would collectively cost about thirty-two hundred dollars. I left in a state of depression and told them I'd let them know.

As it now sat the car was worthless. It looked like a refugee from a demolition derby. The front fenders were off and could never be remounted, the interior was gutted, the engine was partially dismantled and every exposed surface was covered with rust. I had but two options: haul it to a junkyard or continue to throw money at it.

In the time between ordering the new sheet metal and its arrival, I purchased oxy-acetylene welding gear. This new addition to my arsenal of destruction consisted of two large gas bottles, hoses and regulators, a torch with a set of tips and nozzle files, some welding and braising rods, and a dark translucent face shield which, aside from making me feel like one of the guys in a beer commercial, would protect my face from flying sparks and my retinas from burn. I practiced on some concrete nails, and then set out to burn off the quarter panels (which were welded to the chassis - unlike the front fenders). Amid billowing smoke and occasional flash fires I removed the quarter panels and found that the rear wheel wells and the walls of the trunk looked more like reddish-brown swiss cheese than metal.

The next step was to wire-brush all of the exposed rotting metal to minimize the amount of sand-blasting that would be required - sand-blasting reduces the thickness of its target and some of the areas were already pretty thin. This process took another month and an enormous expenditure of energy. Finally, the frame and chassis were ready for sandblasting.

By this time I had come to realize that with each new step, I seemed to wind up deeper and deeper over my head. I had already invested several hundred hours, and the next step - when the car was finished being sandblasted - required some welding that was of a very delicate nature. The rear quarter panels had to be precisely aligned with the body, and the lip to which the front fenders had to be bolted required a degree of precision beyond both my equipment and expertise - a thin strip of metal which had to be replaced and drilled to match the fender bolt-holes. Thus began my long, expensive and painful acquaintance with Charlie Rogers.

ENTER, ANOTHER MAN:

Charlie worked at Bethlehem Steel as a pipe-fitter (a job which required a great deal of welding, but, I was to learn, not of the exacting precision type). He spent his evenings and weekends in his garage working on cars. A friend, for whom he had done some Minor body work, recommended him to me. The most attractive thing about Charlie was that he was cheap. At seven-fifty

an hour, he estimated that he could have the whole job done, including painting, for under a thousand dollars. He even did me the favor of picking up the car from the sandblaster.

There are three ways to add sound material to rusted sheet metal. In two of the methods, a patch is welded to the weakened area. In the third method the patch is riveted (rather than welded) to cover the problem. Welding is both superior and more labor intensive. It assures that moisture has no resting place around the repaired area. It also requires a fine touch, because it is easy to burn through the thin surface being heated. Riveting is much faster - holes are drilled at the corners of the patch and through sound metal adjacent to the hole, and pop-rivets are then used to secure the patch to the body.

Charlie opted for riveting, and I, unfortunately, didn't know then what I know now. By the time the job was done, the underbody was a quiltwork of dozens of riveted patches - all waiting, upon exposure to moisture, to begin rusting under the most perfect of conditions: two untreated pieces of metal just barely touching and hidden from the drying sun and circulating air. The damaged areas of the frame were them patch-welded and Charlie was ready to begin the exterior body work - hood, fenders, doors, trunklid, quarter-panels. All of this work was done, incidentally, in a two car garage which matched perfectly the state of the Mercedes. Charlie was one of those mechanics who did not require neatness to produce his best work.

By this time I had learned the reason that some of the easy explanations tossed at me didn't make sense to my inexpert mind was simply that they didn't make sense. I stayed closer to the work and forced those issues where "going along" could mean a real difference in the outcome. As the body (unpainted) began to look like a car once again, I became more aware of how important alignment is. A door, for example, that meets the body without a space of the same width all the way round draws the eye as would a lady in a men's room. Alignments on all of the body parts except the quarter-panels were adjustable. The quarter-panels were welded to the rear sides of the body and, once fastened, were there for good. To avoid anger that rises anew every time I think about Charlie's welding of the quarter-panels I will avoid laying before you the gory details. Suffice it to say that they assured that this phase of the restoration was to yield a less-than-perfect product. Being a slow learner and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, I listened to the reasons why the quarter-panels could only have been mounted in the way that they were mounted, and compounded my error by leaving the car with Charlie for priming and painting.

Three weeks later I towed home my shiny black prize. The paint was not perfectly smooth and had ripples because, Charlie carefully explained, "Lacquer always runs a little - can't be helped." I wondered aloud as to how the factory manages to deal

with this problem, gave Charlie his final check, and left him forever behind (although, as money goes, much ahead).

The interior was still out, the engine had yet to be worked on, there was no top, but from a comfortable distance the car was beautiful. For all the pain and strain, I had a glimpse of why I had loved it in the first place.

AND NOT THE LAST:

Our next rendezvous with destiny involved the services of yet another moon-lighter named Heinrich Sigfried. I decided that I would visit the workspace of future contractors - Charlie had made me a bit wary of slop. You could eat off the floors of Heinrich's garage. He attacked the engine with great gusto and obvious expertise. When I picked the car up two weeks later, the engine sounded and behaved like a mercedes engine should. The rings and bearings had been replaced, the valves and seats had been resurfaced, the carburators were bebuilt and a general cleaning and tune-up and been affected. Heinrich restored my dwindling faith in the underground economy, and inspired the search for a similarly appropriate entrepreneur.

It was time for the interior. (The 1958 Mercedes 220S Cabriolet was upholstered in leather - "360 square feet of code 1079, surface dyed and prepared as original" to be exact. I know this because a bill from February of 1983 reminds me that I purchased three such hides at $450.00 each - but that takes us ten or so years down the road and the intervening years did not, as you will see, pass without event.) I had the good fortune to find a small upholstery shop in a low-rent district. It did upholstery, carpeting, tops and liners - everything I needed in one convenient location! I will mercifully leave it unidentified on the odd chance that it has survived its incompetence. A leather interior, I was informed, would cost about five thousand dollars and would not match the original because the perforations were impossible to duplicate - the original leather interior had pleated, perforated seat coverings. Good "virgin vinyl" (I have long wondered how non-virgin vinyl loses its innocence) unpleated and unperforated, would cost $1200.00, and would be washable and more durable.

By this time I had abandoned all illusions of making the car factory- perfect. I now knew that I didn't have enough money to accomplish the task, and an imperfect interior seemed to conform nicely to the imperfect body. Vinyl was selected, a top was ordered, and a headliner fabric was selected. The colors chosen to wrap the package were red for the interior accented by black carpeting and beige for the top and liner. Aside from the headliner which hung limp and almost torn through from stretching, the missing visor which I was told was never delivered with the car, the piping which surrounded the seats and seat-backs and ran in waves between the two surfaces it joined, the interior

looked rather nice. I drove home looking forward to starting work on the window mechanisms which didn't work and the reinstallation of the wooden dash - already painstakingly refinished during stolen late-night moments in the master bedroom with at least a dozen wet-sanded coats of satin polyurethane. The wood trim that framed the cockpit needed to be reveneered, but, beyond that and the instruments, the job was almost done.

After exercising my spacial-relations ability for hours, I realized that the dash could not be reinstalled unless the windshield was removed - I had removed the dash in the time between the exit of the old windshield and the installation of the new one. Certain that I could extract and reinsert the windshield on my own, I proceeded to pry and pull, to twist, and to lubricate the rubber moulding that stood between the edges of the glass and the metal, and subsequently, I succeeded in removing the windshield. Unfortunately, in came out in several pieces that managed to hang together only by grace of the sandwiched sheet of plastic that keeps safety-glass from shattering. If nothing else, this property of the new windshield enabled me to easily dispose of the corpse.

The dash did fit through the hole I had created - and it was magnificent. The window mechanisms (called "registers" I learned through a bill I received in 1982 for the refabrication of one driver's side window register) were made barely workable - I could do no better - and aside from the wood mouldings and a few pieces of exterior chrome, the car was "finished".

THE SEPARATION:

At about this time I moved to River Bend. Aside from a rare evening or Saturday of tinkering, the Mercedes sat under its cover in the barn. Tags were renewed each year, insurance was paid, and I took it for an occasional drive. No matter how I tried to ignore it, however, it asserted a constant disturbing presence. It was a thorn in my side, an ache in my heart, an offense to my sensibilities. It just wasn't "right" and we both knew it. It was enough of a tease to remind me that it had deep intrinsic beauty (occasionally I would wash it and look at it from twenty yards away. In those moments I recalled what had originally drawn me in, but I knew that it was really just a Chevy in Mercedes clothing). From 1977 until 1981 I regarded it as one might a bastard stepchild that tries pretty hard but somehow never makes the grade.

In the fall of 1981 I made my second serious attempt to dealbatross myself - I ran another ad. It read, "1958 Mercedes Benz 220S Cabriolet. Recent ground-up restoration. Mechanically excellent. Best offer over $10,000.00." This time, not even Madame Rose called. I took the car to Hershey (one of the biggest antique auto shows in the country), and put a similar sign on it; again, no buyers appeared.

In the fall of 1982 I learned of a local automobile collector who owned two Mercedes Gull-wing 300SL's. Both had been restored by a shop in New Jersey with a superb reputation and that did nothing but Mercedes restorations. I called the shop's owner and agreed to pay his train fare and pick him up if he'd come and take a look.

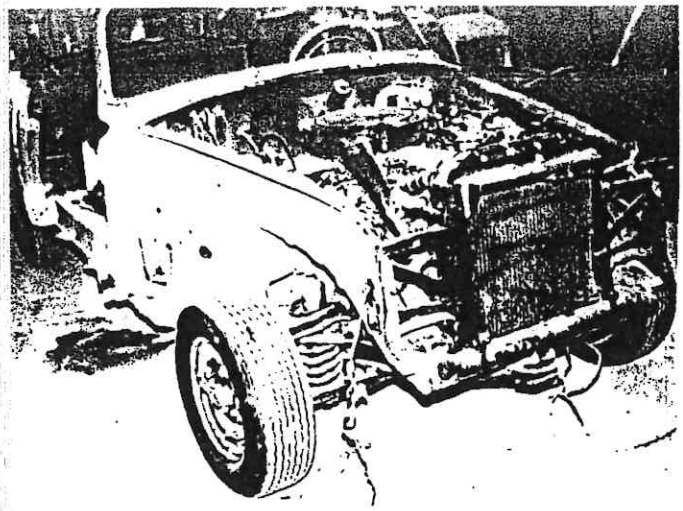
He poked around the car with an air the authority befitting a true expert. He took several pages of notes detailing missing chrome, pings in the body, damaged hubcaps, the cracked steering wheel, broken heater controls, etc., etc., etc. He was delighted that new factory fenders and quarter-panels were present - replacements were no longer available, and to fashion a fender from sheet steel (a job he regularly did) could cost $5000.00. At last, after half an hour with pencil and calculator, he gave me a range within which he was certain that he could properly restore the car. We talked about what it would be worth upon completion. For the equivalent of what a small house would cost, I could have the car perfect, and it would only take five or ten years for its market value to catch up with my investment. That fateful day in September of 1982, Richard Peltz drove off with my Mercedes. It would be finished in the Spring of 1984.

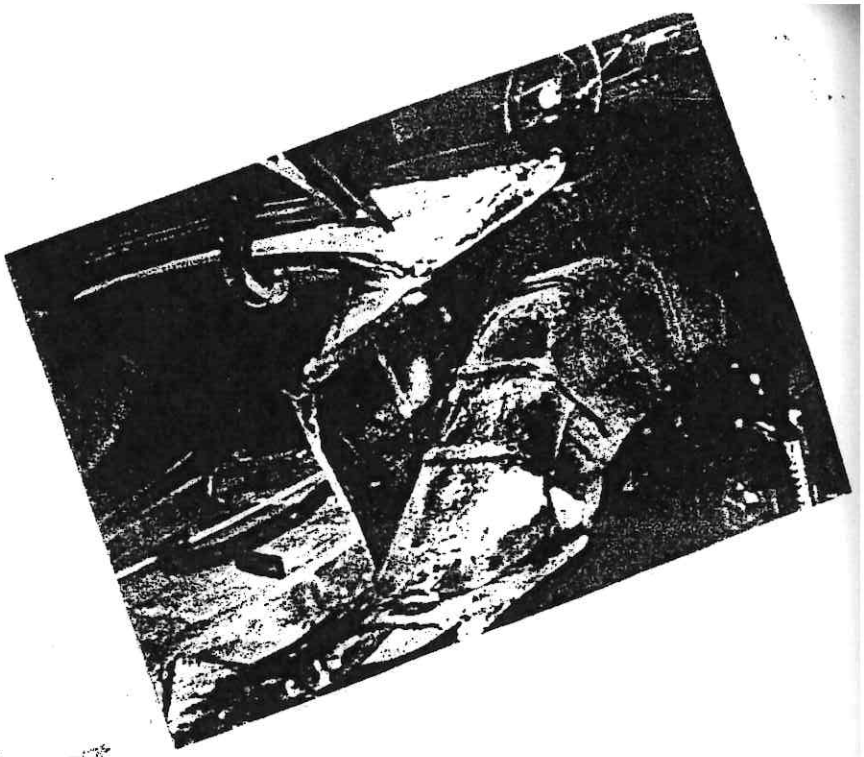
You will have to wait until next month to learn what has transpired since that original estimate in 1982. I have been promised since September of 1985 that the car will finally be ready in three weeks. It is currently at an engine shop for a rebalancing of the new flywheel. The Hydrak transmission - the first almost-successful attempt at a semi-automatic transmission in automotive history - has been removed and replaced by a four-speed column-shift. The new transmission required the installation of a new flywheel which, it was discovered in a long-awaited road-test, was not balanced upon installation. Although at least ten promised delivery dates have come and gone since the original promise of Spring, 1894, I have good reason to believe that I will really have it back before June.

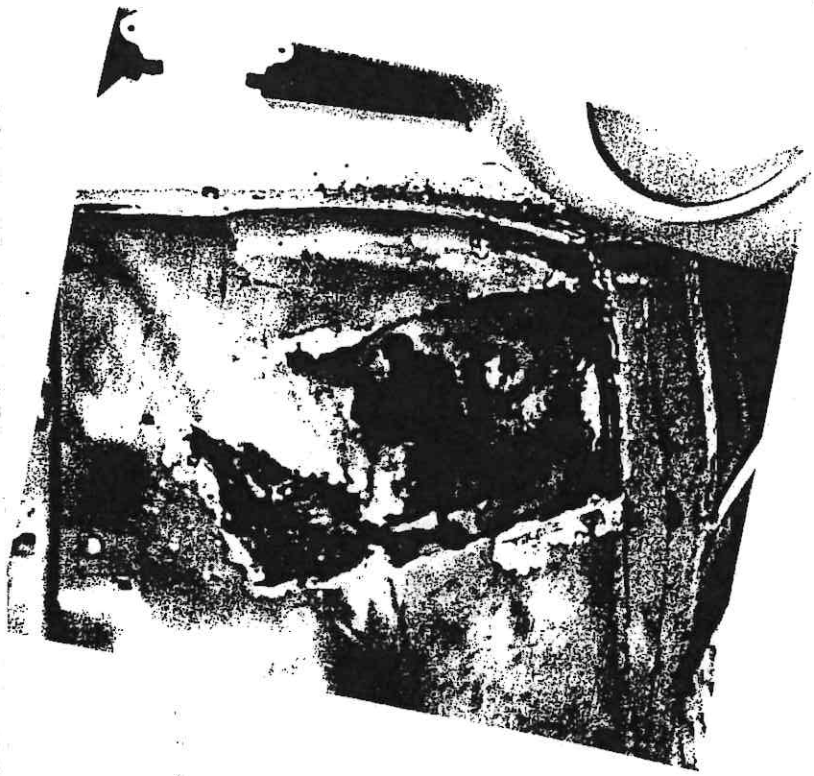
I am thoroughly embarrassed by the entire episode. A first-rate mistress would have been far cheaper, a lot more fun, and probably a whole lot less trouble. People are starving on planet Earth, I have been throwing money at an antique Mercedes Benz for twelve years. If we are each granted (and hopefully forgiven) one obscene overindulgence in a lifetime, this one ranks as my masterpiece!

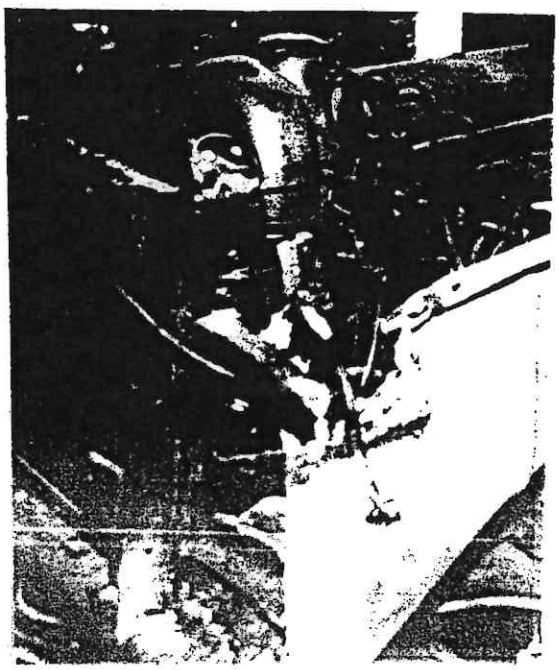
TO BE CONTINUED...

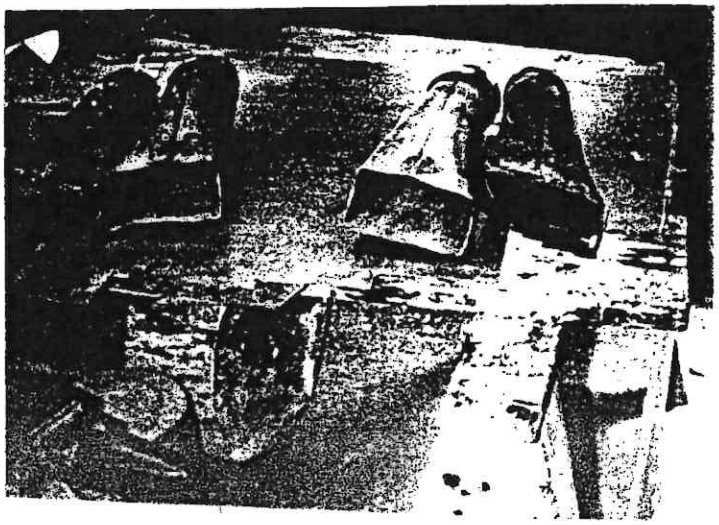
River Bend Reflections is published monthly by Stanley Dorman from River Bend Farm, 1449 Corbett Road, Monkton, MD 21111. Annual subscriptions are welcome at twenty dollars per year. Sample issues will be forwarded on request.











RIVER BEND REFLECTIONS

SEPTEMBER, 1986 Vol 2, No. 4

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS AN RBR:

It seems that RBR's entire staff took the summer off without even a note of explanation to readers. The simple truth is that it has been impossible to get a lick of quality work out of anyone.

The summer began with the very best of intentions. Confidence about finally getting my antique Mercedes back was high. April's closing comment on the unfinished story, "TO BE CONTINUED..." represented both a committment to May's subject matter and yet another misplaced act of faith in Richard Plitz's promise of a delivery date - this time, Late May. Fifteen uninterrupted months of RBR had instilled a high degree of confidence in our ability to get an issue out every month. In addition, the saga of my ten-year restoration project was loaded with untold anecdotes, and was within a hair's breadth of conclusion. Although April's issue was not mailed until the month's last day, I intended to get back to a mid-month mailing schedule in June. If I wrote the conclusion of the Mercedes story in a hurry, I could wrap it up after actually driving the car late in the month. This would leave me over thirty days to work on the issue I intended to mail out in mid-June.

Why these plans never reached fruition is too long a tale to be told here in its convoluted entirety. If retirement from the business world was to serve as grist for the mill of self-confrontation, the summer has proven my success beyond question.

THE BEST LAID PLANS...:

As RBR had grown from a very tiny publication to a tiny publication, demands on the staff had increased geometrically. Late last winter, additional hiring became necessary. Aside from editing everyone else's work every month, I have still insisted on doing much of the writing myself. Since May, however, it has been more than enough work to simply keep this team of high strung professionals from stepping into the chasm that marks the dividing line between those left free to roam the streets and those confined to institutions with names like Phipps and Shepherd Pratt.

The copy boy, a bright young man who sold his share of the family's fruit and nut business in order to be near the excitement of a major publishing operation, had started hinting about some very complicated business dealings as early as mid-January. He was able to take on his RBR responsibilities at very low wages because his income was fairly secure without it. As winter turned to spring, and spring to summer, he became preoccupied with finance to the point of total distraction. He has begged me

not to replace him and has stopped in periodically to report on his progress. He has, to the present, however, been about as valuable as warts on a dead-dog's ear.

Our humor writer, a middle-aged gentleman of most dependable habits, made the mistake in a fit of spring melancholy of going for a long walk with the fellow who does political commentary and dabbles now and then in philosophy. The result of the malignant intercourse that took place between them was paralysis for both parties. As the humorist related the feelings of impotency that had recently surrounded his writing efforts, the philosopher became enmeshed in speculation about the unlikelihood of ever "making a difference" through writing of any kind.

The humorist has long felt that using a delivery vehicle that captures the reader's attention is central to being heard. With this in mind, it has been his purpose to master the skills of story-telling so that he could occasionally slip in ideas he thought important without anyone noticing. The commentator, on the other hand, has always felt that readers' sensibilities need to be assaulted with a club rather than with a feather. As their dialogue progressed, it became increasingly apparent to both that if the rack on which they were hanging their make-a-difference-in-the-world hats was RBR, they were likely both indulging in a form of mental masturbation.

The humorist has continued half-hearted work on material that, despite his feelings of dejection, I think is rather promising. In an effort to inspire him, I introduced him to Bernie Kablish. Events in the Kablish household following last falls flood and Claire's visit to her mother have not been at a stand still. I am doing my best to encourage a completion of this narrative for inclusion next month, but getting this poor fellow to invest the time required to get the story finished has not been an easy task.

Our staff philosopher, while suffering a similar ebb of creative juices, has not, as is almost always the case with him, been without other options. This man has a mindset that would hardly be worth putting up with were he not so disarming a combination of Job and a four-week old puppy. He too had given up a rather consuming career to try his hand at writing. Septembers in his life have come to represent renewal: that time of year when, unlike the season, inner life awakens - to the broader responsibilities of living in community with other beings.

He already knew, last December, that September would come. In anticipation, he applied to several graduate programs. School has a wonderfully cathartic effect on this Socratic hero. Since March, he has been choosing between the study of law and an MBA program. This self-generated choice has enabled him to spend the entire summer agonizing over which path (if either) to take. The decision seemed a major juncture - not simply another fork. His inability to focus much sustained attention on anything other

than this decision (and a more than generous helping of real-life dilemmas) has left him with the beginnings of several dozen pieces, the middles of a few, and the endings of none.

And these are only the intellectual and emotional circumstances that have surrounded RBR's silence since early May. During this same period, while it has taken no small amount of energy to simply keep these others from stepping over the edge, events in my own life have done little to foster the flow of creative energy.

A BOAT IS A METAPHOR FOR LIFE:

By late May I realized that it would be impossible for me to take the three weeks required to bring Aurora back from Tortola. My time in the islands had fulfilled a life-long dream, yet the process had made it clear to me that my spirit was more naturally in sympathy with northern climes. Week after week of perfect weather, beautiful beaches, and tropical scenery did not suit my nature. I discovered that I prefer the uncertainty of changing skies, of sudden Maine fog banks, of dramatic tides, and of cool nights - all a part of sailing this continents northern coast.

Before leaving the British Virgins in March, I was informed by Customs that leaving Aurora for over six months would be a costly mistake: a new law had been passed that would impose a levy of fifty percent of a vessels total value if it remained in Virgin Island waters for over six months. In order to avoid this ridiculous expense I hired Annapolis Captains, a professional yacht service agency, to bring Aurora back to the bay.

I paid a large deposit, and a licensed skipper from the agency was to fly to Tortola a few days before the June 30th departure date. He was to make last minute preparations and see that Aurora was ready for her two to three week voyage back to the Chesapeake. In mid June I telephoned Nanny Cay (the marina that had served as British Virgin's home port) to advise them of my plans and to ask that the boat be made ready. (Aurora had been hauled in April and put ashore in a cradle.)

A week later I received a message on my answering machine from Ashton McCall - the same gentleman who rebuilt my Perkins Diesel after our overheated arrival in the Islands last summer. I was no stranger to either his dubious talents (the engine had given me constant trouble after his repairs) or to his propensity for rendering huge bills to absent owners (the conversation about the $3200 invoice for the estimated $1500 of work for the overhaul ended with my inviting Ashton to call the police and send me to jail because I simply was not going to pay). Just before leaving Tortola in March, I had noticed an exhaust leak. Ashton repaired it in my absence before Aurora was hauled in April. The message on my answering machine informed me that there was a problem with the engine and that I should call him back. I knew beyond

question that this was the kind of message that was more appropriatly delivered by uniformed telegraph boys to peaceful suburban front porches in old World War II movies.

I learned from him that evening that the engine had not even been started from the time I left until the time I called to ask that the boat be launched, despite the fact that I had paid for a twice-weekly check for the period between my exit and the time it was hauled. After the June launching it was discovered that the engine wouldn't turn over. Ashton's expert analysis revealed that the exhaust had backfed water into the engine and that the cylinders were full of it. According to Ashton, the engine had to be torn down, cleaned and rebuilt, and the partly new exhaust system had to be completely replaced. He was, of course, completely innocent, and was not sure what the repairs would cost. This time he had me! In less than two weeks, just before the onset of the hurricane season, four men were due to bring Aurora home. If they missed their departure I would lose my deposit, face a fifty percent tariff because no one would move the boat between mid-July and September (hurricane season), and be without my boat until next summer. I told him to go ahead. When rape is inevitable, I have been taught, it can be fatal to resist.

The next two weeks passed - Ashton missed deadline after deadline. His work was finally finished on the day the captain, Bob May, arrived. My conversation that monday evening with Captain May was anything but heartening. The engine was running very roughly, he couldn't figure out how to work the stove (Aurora has a kerosene stove - I am very fond of it and everyone else has trouble operating it), and the boat was filthy and in total disarray. He felt certain, however, that by the time of the crew's arrival on Friday, all would be ship-shape. We agreed before hanging up, that he would call on Wednesday night to give a final status report and to authorize flying the three remaining crew members to Tortola. On Wednesday he reported that only a few minor items were incomplete, that the engine was fine and that the crew should join him on Friday as planned. Feeling that all was well, I left on Friday for a five day cruise on a friend's Hinckley 41 from Buzzard's Bay to Mount Desert Island in Maine.

When I arrived back home on Tuesday, I found a message on my machine from Bob May. He had called on Sunday to inform me that he wasn't comfortable with the engine, that there had been a minor galley fire and that he was returning home with his crew by air. Aurora lay abandoned and bleeding at Nanny Cay. The end result of this misadventure is still hanging around in the "contingent liability" column of this summer's balance sheet.

Tortola customs informed me by phone that they would wave the feared tariff and would confirm their waiver by mail - I am still waiting for the letter. Annapolis Captains feels that I should pay all the expenses for the brief four-man vacation in

Tortola, and Aurora will remain in the Virgins until I bring her back myself early next summer. (Applications for crew positions are welcome!)

...AND SO ARE ANTIQUE CARS:

The absence of one major toy turned my thoughts toward the other. Shortly after learning that I was to be without a boat for the summer, I called Richard Plitz for an update on the Mercedes. The engine problem which had caused the most recent delays, turned out to be not quite as simple as anticipated. The car was now at G.A.B. Enterprises in Ambler, Pennsylvania. The crankshaft needed to be reworked and new bearings had to be installed. Richard told that he would have the car back for final detailing in about three weeks. That was in early July. I did visit it at G.A.B. (I needed to confirm that it really existed) and it is beautiful. I'll probably have it back in time to put on chains and drive it in the snow.

As went the big items so went the incidental. In early July the front wheel of the tractor fell off while I was mowing the hayfield. During the last week in July I left for a week of cruising on a chartered boat in Maine. It rained from the moment of our arrival and until we left six days later. The only aspect of this trip worth relating: my fear of Maine being spoiled by an overpopulation of tourists is unfounded - the weather Down East is sufficiently fickle to make this State a vacation paradise for only fools and the stoutest of heart.

Early August saw the demise of half of my flock of chickens during a night raid by a fox. In mid-August one of my guinea fowl elected to leave domesticity for the wild, leaving a flock consisting of three chickens and one guinea hen (it may really be a guinea cock - there are no longer any guinea fowl eggs). On the brighter side, recent conversations with Richard Plitz have been heartening. The Mercedes should be ready for me to pick up in about three weeks...

And so the summer has come and gone leaving Murphy's Law intact and me, a bit scarred and unstable perhaps, but still hanging on - even if by my fingernails.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS - THERE IS NO BOTTOM LINE:

As the summer's end drew into sight, a decision could be put off no farther. My desire to be back in school had to be tempered, I concluded, by a more pressing need to make this involvement only part-time. Law school would consume three years and would leave little room for other activities. The passage of time since my return from the Caribbean had brought me to the realization that I needed to become reinvolved in the work world. From both the standpoints of future income and recognition that too much of my

time was solitary, it had become obvious that I was not ready to spend the rest of my life in "retirement."

The resulting decision was my enrollment, in early August, in Loyola's XMBA program (Executive Master of Business Administration). The course is structured around the needs of working executives. We meet for all-day sessions on alternating Fridays and Saturdays, thus allowing a nearly full-time work involvement. The program thus far has proven to be very intense and an enormous amount of work. I have found getting back at math-based subjects more fun than I expected. In accounting and statistics there are actually real answers to problems!

After much soul searching I have had to recognise that I miss the diversion of working. A recent frenzy of activity directed toward a real-estate deal and the purchase of a business has gotten me back in touch with spreadsheets, projections, and finance. After a lay-off of over a year, I have remembered that the hustle and bustle of creative business activity can be fun. The outcome on both ventures is still open, but even if neither works out, I will persist until something eventually does.

This issue has already been too long in the making. You'll have to take my word for the fact that what's left out would make a much better melodrama than what's included. More important, I can now move back to lighter topics feeling that I have, at least within the bounds of good taste, retained a semblance of honest reporting.

Hopefully, monthly issues will ensue and this "summer of my discontent" will become historical ground for future reflection. In the future I may skip an occasional issue rather than put out copy in which I take little pride. The volumes will still contain 12 issues albeit they may span a period exceeding a calender year.

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