

Thank you to Maria Del Rosario Shroyer Zuniga, my granddaughter,  
without whose help this book would not have been done.

## Our Original Voyage South, 1963

When Mac and I married, I should have known boating was in our future. All our dates were dock-wanders as he looked for the sailboat of his dreams. In 1961, as soon as we were both employed as high school teachers in the northern California town of Fortuna, Mac decided to build his own boat. He settled upon a Piver designed trimaran. Every dollar over rent and dinner went for materials: sheets of plywood and lengths of lumber, glue and nails, rolls of fiberglass and matte, jugs of resin.

We lived in a three-room shack on a farm in the woods where the bathtub drained directly out the floor and tree frogs came up the drain and perched on the mirror. Because it was cold and wet outside, all the frames for the hulls were assembled on a long counter built under the windows in our kitchen. Mac built the jig to assemble the two outer hulls, called amas, catercorner in the small room; we stepped in the front door and over the amas to go to the living room.



The center hull, at 24 feet, was too long for the kitchen, so in the Spring construction moved to an open shed down the driveway. The next winter he transported the hulls to a rented warehouse in town where they finally assumed the trimaran shape under the curious and unbelieving gaze of other teachers. The Sunday we launched the boat, still very much unfinished, using the deck of the Eureka Yacht Club to step the mast, the principal and vice-principal of the high school came in their coats and ties to lend a hand.

In 1962 and '63 Piver designed trimarans were in backyards and empty lots everywhere. Piver's designs, building materials, and methods were accessible to people without much experience or much money, and we were among them. Our plan, like that of many others, was to sail off around the world. The world we could consider sailing around shrank considerably when, in May, just before school let out, we found out I was pregnant.



Now what? We decided to sail off to Mexico anyway and let further plans make themselves as circumstances dictated.

When I first started writing this in 2003, forty years had passed since that trip, and the photographs we took and the letters I wrote home—sitting in the cockpit with a portable Olivetti on my lap—had been lost in hurricane Lisa in La Paz in 1976. We still have the skipper's log of the trip, notations of the date, the anchorage, the hour, the weather, but aside from that only the most vivid memories remain.

As soon as school was out in June we trailered the boat (her name, *Haulani*, never stuck) to San Francisco Bay, first berthing in Alameda, later in Sausalito, where we sailed and more or less finished her. One typically windy San Francisco Bay day we whipped across the bay with spray blowing in through the as-yet-unglassed front windows.

Our cruising kitty, definitely a kitty and not a full grown cat, was \$1,000.00 dollars withdrawn from the California Teachers' pension fund upon my retirement after three years of teaching. We lived a no-frills life, but that was not new, having lived simply while every extra penny for two years had been invested in the boat and its equipment. Even so, our kitty came close to being emptied before we began, due to our own hubris and a bit of bad luck.

We berthed for a few days in the heart of Sausalito to have a specially designed sail fit by Don of Sutter Sails. We returned from a test run and decided to dock under sail. That's hubris. To get to our slip we had to make two turns, and before we could make the second turn, bad luck struck; one of the gudgeons holding the rudder failed, and under the eyes of all the patrons of a dockside restaurant, we put two of the three pointy ends of the trimaran into the stern of the biggest, shiniest Chris Craft in the marina. The repair to the transom, stripping all the varnish, matching the boards, replacing the gold leaf paint and half a dozen coats of varnish cost just under \$1,000.00. Because our boat was under 25

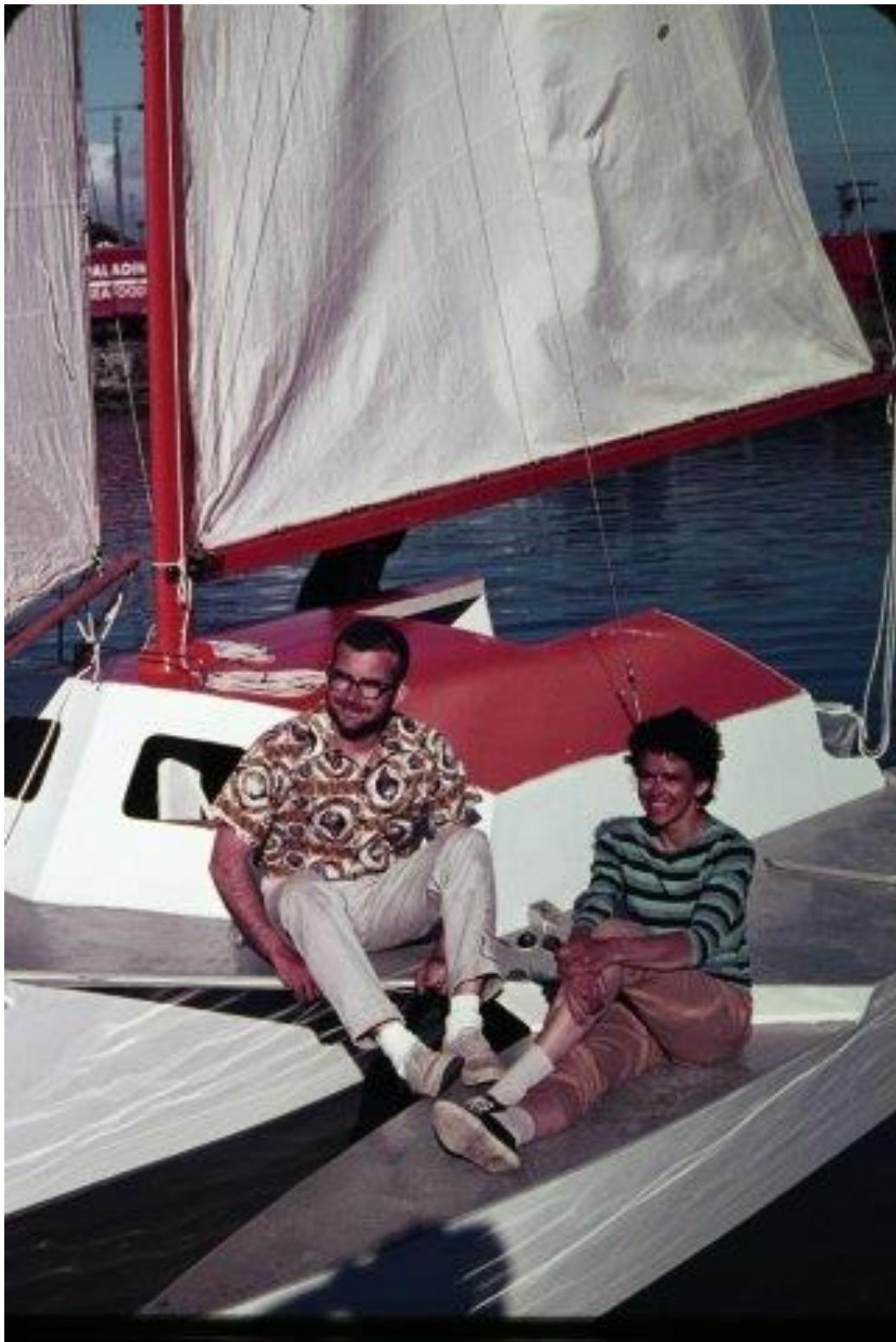
feet long, and because our home-owners insurance policy had not yet lapsed and we hadn't remembered to cancel it when we moved out of our rented house, our trip was saved.



In August we sailed out under the Golden Gate Bridge and turned left, as the cruiser saying goes. For navigation and safety gear we had a Zenith Transoceanic radio, a Heathkit direction finder, a compass, a sextant, a sum log, the *Coast Pilot*, and some charts. The propulsion was a 5 horsepower Seagull outboard on a bracket on the stern and the dinghy was a (so-called) 4-man yellow rubber ducky with oars. As our last ditch safety precaution we painted the decks and mast a bright orange, to make it visible from the air. The galley was a two-burner alcohol stove and an ice chest, empty most of the time. Twenty one-gallon plastic jugs of water were stored under the bunk in the bow. The toilet was a bucket when the hang-over-the edge method was not appropriate.

We gunk-holed the California coast from San Francisco to San Diego, learning to navigate by dead reckoning and spending every night at anchor, with only one memorable incident. Sailing around Point Conception, exhilarated by our speed, Mac stood on the bow holding the jib stay, howling his pleasure until we out-sailed the wave we were surfing and buried the bow in the back of the previous wave. We were lucky; Mac wasn't washed off the deck. The worst we suffered was a mess inside when the water cascaded through the roof hatch into the galley. I found onion flakes and pipe ashes in every corner for weeks.

On September 24, after really finishing the boat, we sailed out of Mission Bay, friends and relatives waving tearily from the end of the quay. By then I was entering my second trimester and a gynecologist had pronounced me healthy of body, although perhaps not quite sane. We told everyone not to call the Coast Guard, planning to plan a day at a time, mostly 50 miles a day, a different port every night.



We stopped at the Coronado Islands, Ensenada, and the Islas Todos Santos, where we met Lane and his wife on another small sailboat, whom we would meet again at a fortuitous moment at San Quintin. On to Bahia Colonet, Isla San Martin, and San Quintin, mostly motoring to the rattle of the Seagull, sometimes with a little help by the hot off-shore wind. In the outer bay of San Quintin we met our recent acquaintance, Lane, who had a hand-drawn chart of the route into upper San Quintin Bay. We followed them, weaving

from Clorox bottle to stick planted into the sand bar, to little red buoy, to the next Clorox bottle until we dropped anchor in front of The Old Mill Motel. There Al Vela and his wife treated us like the royalty we weren't, taking us to fill our water jugs at an artesian well and out to the "highway" to buy gasoline. We poked around the ruins of the old mill and marveled at the determination of the English investors who tried to dam the tidal flow of the bay in hopes of being able to generate electricity.

After three days we threaded our way out to the ocean again and continued to Punta Baja. We skirted Sacramento Reef and Isla San Geronimo and, for the first time on the trip so far, left the coast, heading straight for Isla Cedros, which we passed at dawn after a clear moonlit night sail. On to Turtle Bay, Bahia Asuncion, Punta Abreojos, and Punta Pequeña. Most days we motored or motor-sailed at best, pulling into the shelter of whatever point was nearest just before—if we were lucky—sunset. Too many times it was just after, and we had to sense our way into the anchorage by lead line and by ear. Most of the coves had small fish camps, three or four skiffs, and three or four families in plywood and tarpaper houses.

The cannery at Punta Pequeña was closed, but the camp was cleaner than most and we found a pick-up owner who spoke just enough English to understand that we needed gasoline and was willing to drive us to the nearest source of gas some fifteen dusty kilometers away. We never came close to using up our 20 gallons of water before resupplying, but because of light winds we motored most of every day to make an anchorage every night, quickly depleting our 10 gallons of gas. Among our few surviving photographs is one of the new school in Cadeje, built by federally supplied materials and local donated labor, with all the students and teachers lined up in front of it; we were enough of a curiosity to play hooky for.



After Bahia San Juanico came Bahia Santa Maria, which was then, as it is today, one of the most beautiful bays on the Peninsula. After the long stretch of rather dreary coast and beige beaches, the half-moon of true white sand beach and tall dunes are startling to the eye. We put on life-jackets and surfed the boat ashore to walk the beach and plan a get-away-from-it-all house on the point above the north end of the beach. We watched fishing skiffs run over the bar and knew there must be a fish camp up the estero, but didn't investigate. Fifteen or more years later, during our whale expedition years in Bahia Magdalena, we visited this camp by land and rode pangas over the bar into the bay, still as beautiful and deserted as it had been in 1963.

Next stop, Bahia Magdalena, and the anchorage at Belcher's Cove, where we poked among the rubble of the old whaling station, then to Puerto Magdalena to look for a Port Captain and something fresh to eat. No luck with either.

Thus far in the trip we had done nothing that hadn't been done by numbers of cruisers before us. This is against Mac's nature. After all, we could have stayed home and continued teaching. The southern lobe of Bahia Magdalena, Bahia Almejas, looked to him like a new area to explore, and he was right; the next few days became among the most memorable of the whole trip.

The chart showed a cannery and a Navy base on Isla Margarita. Few cruisers visited the south end of the bay because much of it was, and is, shoal and un-buoyed. Since our boat had a pull up centerboard we could poke around with the board down as an antenna, and when we felt it touch bottom, pull it up, back off, and try some other route.

We had some sketchy information, mostly negative, about the cannery village, such as problems with thievery and drunkenness. Knowing what we do now about Baja California Sur fishermen, we should have ignored the gossip. However, we decided to sail by the cannery and go directly to the Navy base at Puerto Cortez.

The base itself was unprepossessing, a sprawling collection of dust-colored, mostly one storied buildings on a flat, dusty brown, treeless expanse of desert. The Navy was even less impressive; the largest boats were 20' skiffs used to cross the bay to Puerto Cancun to pick up mail and groceries. Air support was two or three left-over WW II planes. The purpose of the base, we were told, was to protect the West Coast of Mexico. We learned later that a more probable reason was political; when the US turned back to Mexico the bases that had been granted them for their use as coaling stations in WW I, the agreement was that Mexico would continue to occupy these military bases for a certain number of years.

As unimpressive as Puerto Cortez appeared, its personnel provided impressive hospitality. I had been struggling with communication in Spanish for the past few weeks of our trip, dictionary in hand and one year of high school Spanish lurking in the far recesses of my brain, but I didn't have the means to say more than a few sentences, or more accurately, fragments of sentences. Luckily, as often happens, someone walked up to us who spoke better English than I spoke Spanish. Not surprisingly, it was the base doctor. Through him, on our first visit ashore to ask the Comandante for permission to be on the base, we learned the meaning of "mi casa es tu casa." The officers were incredulous and probably appalled that a woman in my embarrassing condition (which is the most common Mexican expression for pregnant) would be traveling at sea, and particularly on such a tiny boat. They asked if we would like to sleep on the base during our visit. Can you imagine that happening?

The room we were offered was over the main office, in the only two story building. We rowed out to the trimaran for supper and brought our bag ashore at dusk: comb, toothbrush, pajamas, flashlight. We were escorted up the stairs and bid good night. Too

late to back out. The room was clean but absolutely bare except for a double bed with a mattress pad on it. Although it was early in October, on the Pacific coast it is too cold to be blanketless at night. We put our clothes on over our pajamas and huddled together under the mattress pad. After we used the toilet, the first since San Quintin, we discovered the plumbing was waterless. The next day we brought ashore bedding and asked that water be pumped to the storage tank on the roof, and enjoyed the comforts of civilized life that night.

The second day of our visit a *chubasco* (sudden squall) blew in; within minutes the air was swirling with dust so thick we could barely make out our boat anchored a hundred feet offshore, dancing in the instant chop and straining at the anchor. Mac rowed out to let out more scope and prepare a second anchor if it should be needed. We didn't have the Spanish to make clear that we didn't need more help, and about the time the chubasco blew out, the marines were boarding with a pair of sixty-five pound anchors much too large for a water spider such as ours.

We spent four days at Puerto Cortez. One day we took the officers for a sail. Another afternoon we went on a picnic to the Pacific coast to see the elephant seal colony. Children, wives, dogs, privates and officers piled into jeeps and sedans and jounced across the saddle between the two high rocky ends of Isla Santa Margarita. We crawled to the edge of the cliff and looked down on the strip of sand below, where the seals lolled and postured.



We had wanted to repay the hospitality of the base with an American style picnic and took canned hot dogs and a huge potato salad, since their commissary had eggs, potatoes, and mayonnaise, but the women brought all the Mexican picnic fixings as well: carne asada, frijoles, taquitos, beer, and soda. Our hotdogs and salad went begging as being much too strange for their tastes, and we became their guests once again.

On the last night on the base we sat in on *Loteria*, a Bingo type game played with a deck of picture cards and boards with matching pictures. *El Alacran, La Palma, El Violoncello, La Chalupa*. With each call, the caller pointed the picture in our direction and

our neighbors helped us find the matching picture. We played for a couple of hours, slowly and carefully. Then we quit and the crowd continued to play, now at eye-popping speed. The caller called, slapping the cards down on the table one after the other, bottle caps flew and we realized that for two hours they had played at a childlike speed to accommodate their guests.

Before we left we asked the Comandante if there was anything we could help them with. His one request was for parts for their propane refrigerator. When we reached Cabo San Lucas we sent a letter to Mac's father in Illinois and we know that eventually the parts reached Puerto Cortez because the senior Shroyers received a thank you note from Comandante Luna. We also found two last favors from him in Cabo San Lucas. He had telegraphed both the cannery in Cabo San Lucas and the Capitania de Puerto in San Jose del Cabo to be on the lookout for the señor with the señora embarazada and treat them well.

Before we learned that, we had an intervening adventure. Mac did not want to retrace our steps north in Bahia Magdalena to the main entrance, as we could save a day of motoring by leaving through the Punta Tosca entrance south of Puerto Cortez. We had been told that shrimpers and other fishing boats sometimes left that way. If there was enough depth for them, we should have no problem. The problem turned out not to be depth, but height...the height of the waves. As we motor-sailed south and west along the coast of Isla Santa Margarita toward Punta Tosca, we began to see breakers curling around the southern tip of the island, and all the way across the entrance. All the waves weren't breaking, only some of them.



With the sails up and the Seagull running, we motored straight into the swells, riding up and over each until one turned into a breaker. As water ran over the decks and through the cockpit, the spray hit the exposed spark plug on the Seagull, killing the engine. I

pointed the bow off to the southwest, parallel to the swells on the highest point of sail I could manage, nervously peering over my left shoulder where that wave broke several more times on successive sand bars on its way to the beach. Mac wrenched out the wet plug, stuck in a dry one, and restarted the engine so that we could head west into the swells and that safe, deep Pacific Ocean again. Those sand bars were much too close, and every time we had to bear off they seemed closer. Eventually we gained on the bars and before sunset set a course for the night which would take us well off shore. I was free then to throw up over the side with the first of two tension migraines of the trip.

At daylight we changed course and before dark the next night, between Cabo Falso and Cabo San Lucas, plotted a course that would take us clear of the rocky point of Cabo San Lucas. Typically, we reached the bay and put down the anchor in the dark. On shore we could see a light and hear a voice hailing; we thought it must be for us but were too tired after thirty-six sleepless hours to pump up the dinghy and row ashore. Mañana was soon enough, and we learned then of the Comandante's telegram, in which he had said we would arrive at 8:00 a.m.

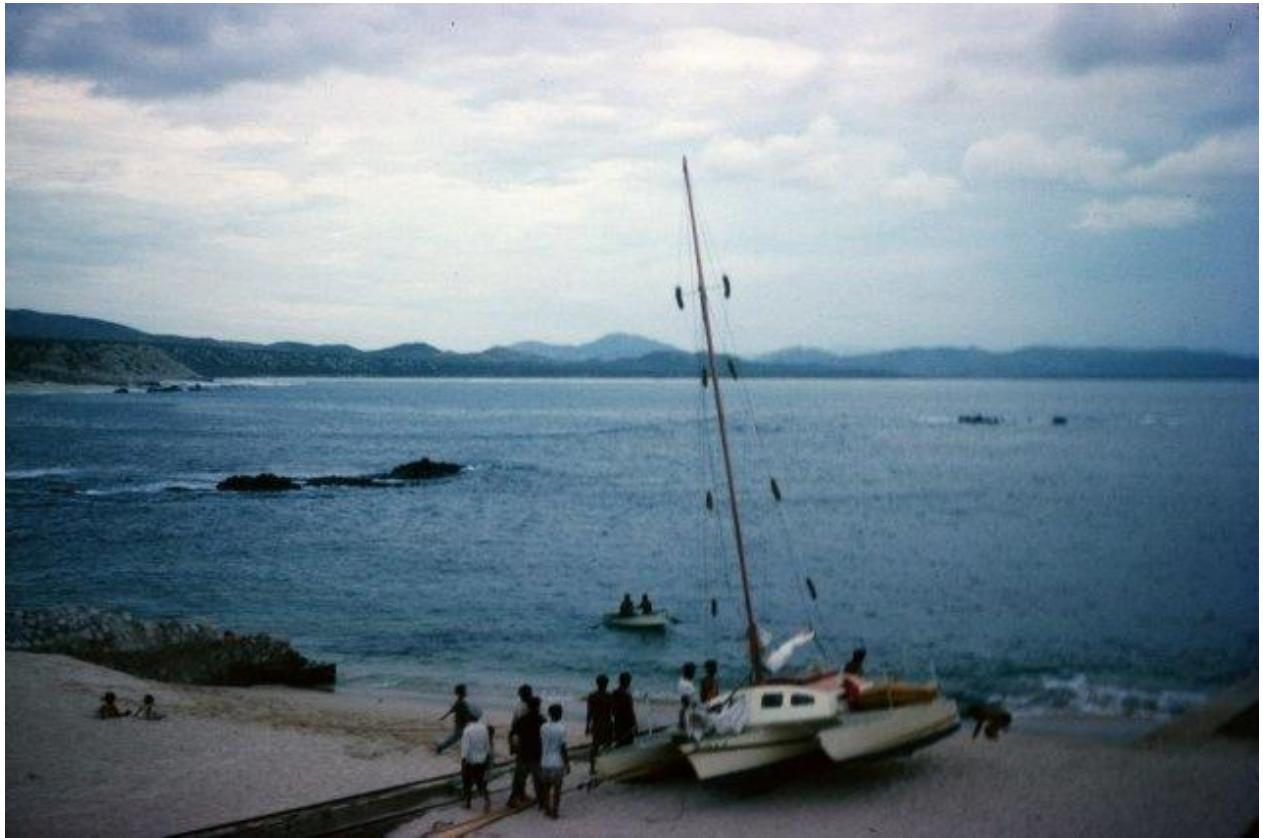
Cabo San Lucas wasn't much of a town in 1963. The cannery, a house-front store or two, an airstrip. Hotel Hacienda was under construction and three Americans making an underwater film camped in the unfinished building. The office of the Port Captain was an hour taxi ride away in San Jose del Cabo. In the evening we walked to town with the filmmakers for popsicles; it was a double treat, to speak English and eat something cold.

Before we left Cabo San Lucas we were told a hurricane was south of the Cape. Even we could read the signs: heavy humidity, thick clouds, a swell coming in from the south. Although the eye was predicted to pass to the west of the Peninsula, the anchorage at Cabo San Lucas is open to the south, no place to be in a hurricane. We left for Los Frailes. In mid-afternoon, just north of Punta Palmilla, a small sportfisher veered out of his way to hail us. "Haven't you heard? There's a hurricane coming". We back-tracked to Punta Palmilla, hoping to find a bit of shelter behind a small reef shown on the chart. Hotel Palmilla's fishing boats had been drawn up on their railway, and because our boat was so light (and probably because I was pregnant) the fleet manager agreed to pull us high enough on the beach beside the railway to avoid the biggest expected waves. We cleared chunks of coral from the beach and with a couple of men on each ama as guides, were winched slowly up the beach. Barrels under the amas kept us level, but fore and aft we sloped downhill. We sat in our tilted cockpit and watched the wild full-colored sunset and the spray from the waves as they hit the rocks at the end of the point.

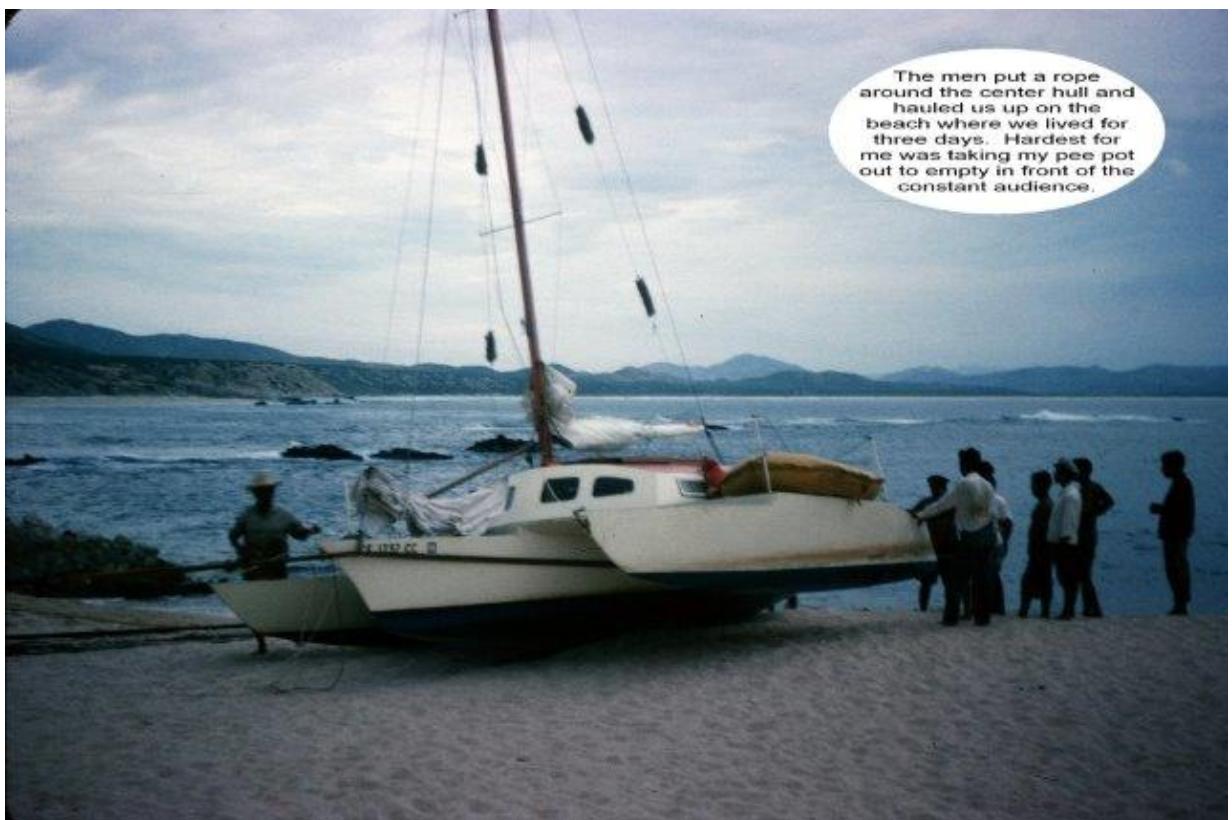
The next morning, before full light, the captains and mates of the sportfishing boats gathered on the beach to watch the effects of the storm and speculate on its whereabouts. In those days no one knew exactly; the only reports came over KMI marine broadcasts and were updated only every eight hours, not much use to people within a hundred miles of the eye. News was passed on the crystal radio channels used by boats and hotels. In the meantime we faced the problem of how to dress and where to dispose of waste with men standing all around the boat. Eventually I hung a towel over the cabin door and crouched in the bow, then waded knee deep to empty the fruit juice can.

After lunch we walked up to Hotel Palmilla. White arches framed long tiled verandas with wood and leather rockers. Tall palms, trunks bending, leaves lashed by the wind, swayed over lush tropical vegetation and sprays of vermillion bougainvillea. The windows were boarded over with sheets of plywood. A skeleton crew was there to feed and clean up for a pair of out-of-season, wide-eyed, lonely, and very conservative liquor store owners from Santa Rosa, California. They spotted Mac for a gringo, a speaker of English, right away, and invited us to eat dinner with them, even though, they told us later, they thought

he was a hippie with his pregnant Mexican girlfriend. We paid for dinner with entertaining stories.

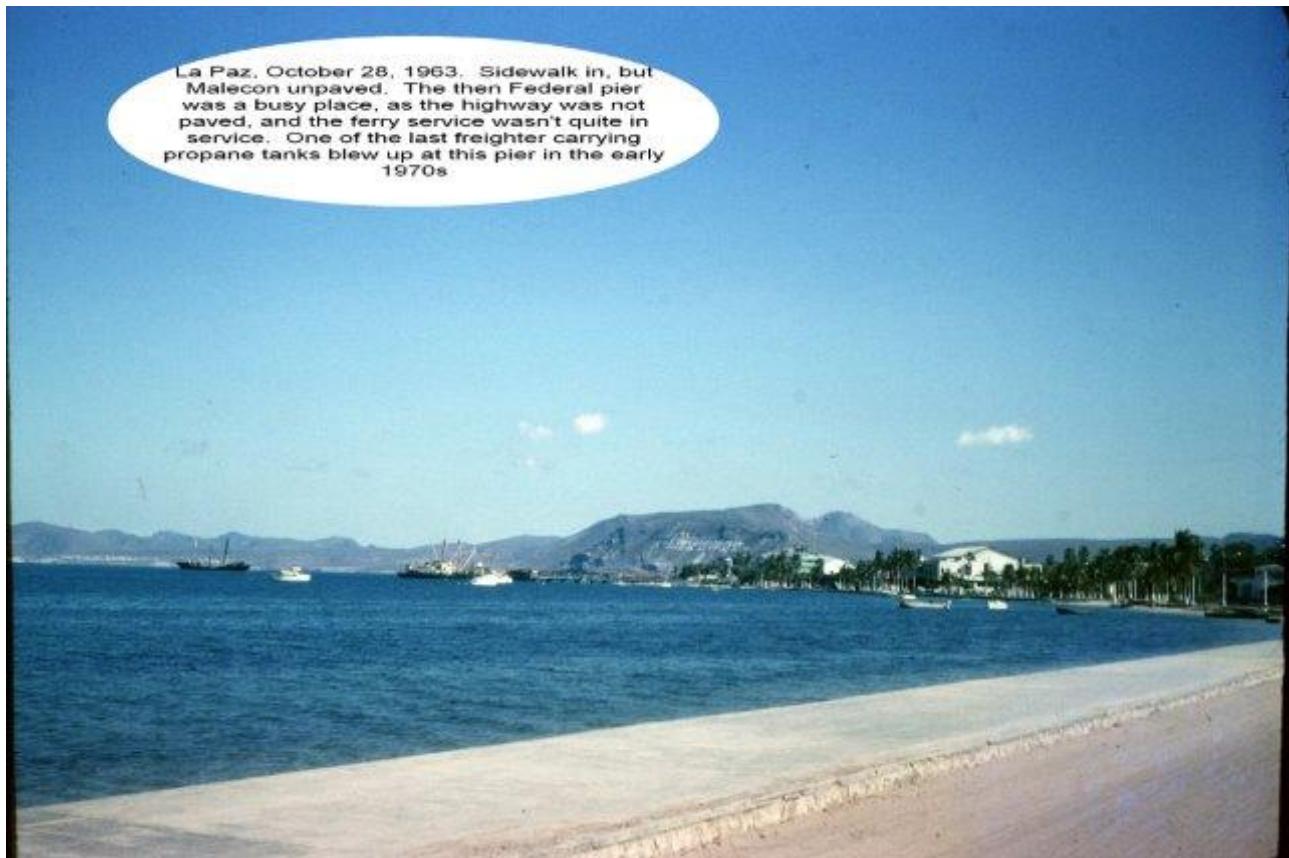


By the next day the skies cleared, the humidity dropped; it was the last storm of the season and it missed us.



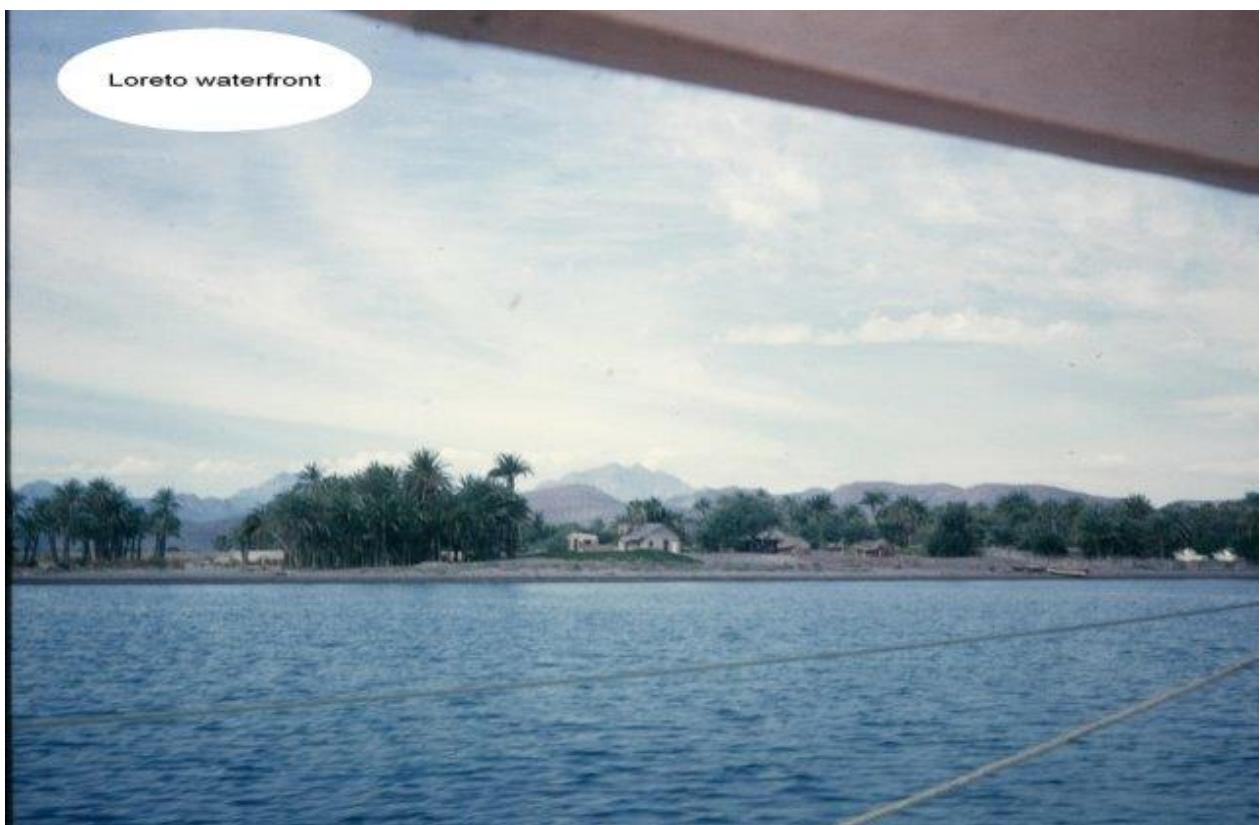
It is one thing to mechanically winch a boat up the beach; it is another to get it back in the water. The winch couldn't help us there. The jefe of the boat captains called in his troops, we bought the beer. We lightened the boat by removing anything portable and the crowd of men swarmed around the boat. Uno, dos, y tres! they heaved in unison. It was good to be afloat with some privacy again.

The next night, anchored on the north side of Los Frailes out of the remaining effects of storm waves from the south, we experienced one of those perfect evenings you can picture in your mind forever. The sun was setting off our stern; over the bow we could see the beach, the low hills behind it, then the rugged peaks of Sierra de la Laguna in the background, all misted by a drizzle of rain. We sat in the cockpit in swimsuits and wide brimmed hats to keep the rain out of our dinner plates. We heard bells, then hallooing, and over the dunes came a herd of cows followed by two real cowboys, dressed in the leather outfits we later learned were typical of the Baja California ranchers. The men chivied the cows across the beach in the light mist and disappeared "up a cloudy draw" as if they had been conjured by Ghost Riders in the Sky.



We spent a week in La Paz, the first lengthy visit to one place on the trip so far. We followed the land-based range markers down the channel. We could see palm trees and not much else. Only the twin towers of the church and countless windmills showed we were approaching town. We wandered the cobble streets shaded by giant Indian laurel trees, and ate bananas and popsicles. Seated on wrought iron benches on the yet-to-be-paved Malecon, we practiced our Spanish with passers-by. We were invited to the home of an American for a shower (cold) and I spent an hour making lopsided flour tortillas with his local lady friend and her sisters. Who would think something she did so effortlessly would take so much skill; they found my shoe sole shaped tortillas amusing. When we left La Paz we didn't know we would be back permanently, but it was the only place we considered possible when we did start planning a change in our lives a few years later.

We continued our day long hops up the inside of the Baja California Peninsula. Isla Partida, Isla San Jose, San Evaristo, and Nopolo all run together in my mind, except at the animal-sharing water hole at Nopolo we decided NOT to augment our water supply. The inner bay at Puerto Escondido was so deep we found it difficult to anchor, with our 20' of chain and 100' of line. Finally, in front of the northernmost "window," we dropped an anchor off the stern in 40' of water and tied the bow line to a rock on shore.



Then Loreto, nothing more than a straggle of houses set back from the beach and a mission-era church in ruins. We looked for and found a huerta, an in-town farm lot, but nothing green was ready to harvest. Our last night before crossing the Gulf to mainland Mexico was at Isla Coronado, just north of Loreto. The water was so thick with living micro-organisms that a flashing phosphorescent bucketful of water felt gelatinous to my hand.

Most of the trip so far we had motored more than we had sailed, plagued by windless days. And so it was, crossing the Gulf of California for the port of Topolobampo, with the result that, once again, we approached the coast in the dark. We knew generally where we were from the radio location beacon picked up by our radio direction finder, but we didn't know how far from the coast we were. I stood on the bow with a lead line, dropping it over periodically until it touched bottom at 20'. After the anchor was set and the motor stopped, we could hear the surf breaking on the beach and feel the gentle rise of the swells beneath us, so we stood watches through the night, worried we might end up on the beach.

In the morning we found ourselves a half mile off shore; to the southeast we could see a smudge of brown which we judged was Topolobampo. We headed in that direction, planning to course back and forth like a bloodhound until we found the channel. Before we could get into trouble a panga with three men in it came up from behind. "Are you looking for the channel?" one asked in passable English. They showed such interest in the boat that we asked if they would like to come aboard. Two did, and that is why the Port Captain of Topolobampo and the Captain of the dredge deepening the channel for the new ferry terminal sailed us into port.

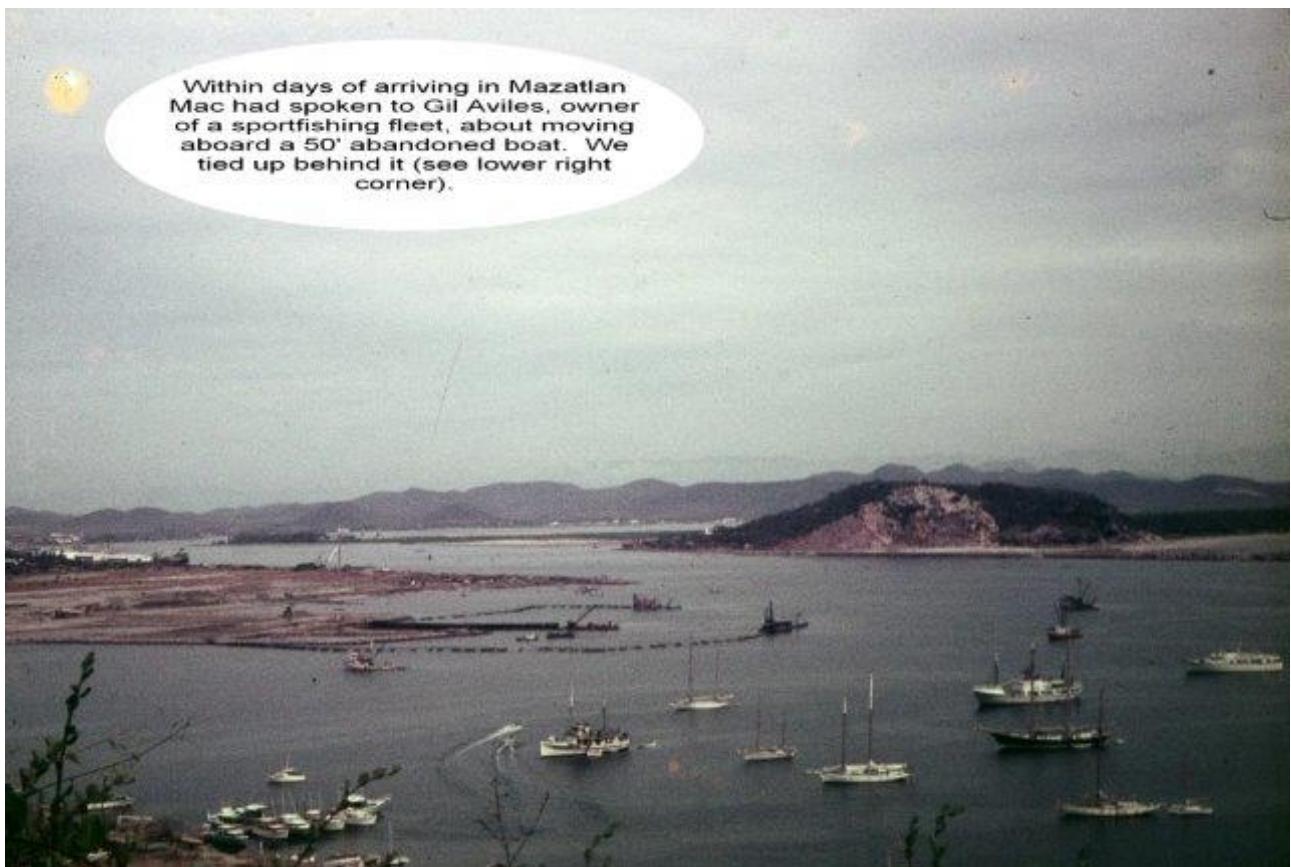
"Topo," as the locals called it, was a dirty street of shabby houses trailing dustily up the road leading out of town; in contrast to this, someone's abandoned dream, a huge thatched roof, a stone parapeted balcony, with a view in three directions on a point jutting into the inner part of the bay. Before leaving port the next noon we stopped in a literal hole-in-the-wall eatery, one of a series of caves dug into the cliff behind the docks, for smoked mullet. We knew enough to drink only a bottled soft drink and to eat with our fingers after we saw the waitress wiping the forks on her apron, but it wasn't caution enough. A few hours after leaving town we lost all we had eaten.

The mainland coast south of Topo is an undifferentiated slope to the Sierras rising far from the coast. It is not easy to tell where you are, but the charts showed several entries, bocas, to a series of mangrove channels behind sheltering coastal islands. We thought if we could find the most northerly boca by dead reckoning, once inside we could wend our way south along this inland waterway to one of the bocas closer to Mazatlan.

We didn't do so badly on our dead reckoning. The surf wasn't running very high but from the back of the waves we couldn't spot the boca. That didn't deter Mac, however, and we surfed the waves, pulling up the centerboard in the troughs. When we finally spotted the surf-free boca, I burst into tears and threw up. But that was the last time. Once in the lagoon we anchored, ate canned chicken noodle soup, and slept.

After breakfast we picked the most likely looking opening between the low, dark green clumps of mangroves and pointed south. We hit bottom, pulled up the centerboard, backed up, tried another opening, hit bottom, backed up. By the time we had covered every opening on the southern perimeter of the lagoon, we knew we were defeated and would have to go out the way we had come in. I swallowed a couple of anti-migraine pills and prepared for the worst, but it was a waste of resources. From shore-side of the breakers we could see clearly the surf-less pass to open ocean and Mazatlan.

Again we had a windless day, clear skies, and mirror-flat ocean. We spotted a turtle sunning, then another and another. Soon we were motoring through a flock, a herd of turtles. In every direction they were scattered like raisins on blue frosting, hundreds of them. Although we were watching for them, eventually we hit one, crack! severing the shear pin on the outboard. That mishap and problems with the spark plugs which were well past their shelf life combined to put us late into Mazatlan, in the dark once again, motoring around the end of the breakwater. A boat on anchor shone a spotlight on a possible place to drop the anchor. That helpful action was the first sign of the cohesive and cooperative semi-permanent floating foreign community in Mazatlan.



At this point in our trip, in mid-November, six-months pregnant, I was huge in the belly and couldn't turn over in the cramped cubbyhole of the bunk in the bow. It was time to start planning for the arrival of a baby in mid-February. Knowing nothing about either Mazatlan or Acapulco except that Acapulco was a thousand miles down the road, I opted to stay in Mazatlan. Three months in Mazatlan taught us most of what we still know of cruisers and not-so-cruisers, and variations on the tales collected there are similar to stories from any port where foreign boaters collect.

Our first priority was to find somewhere comfortable and inexpensive to live. After a discouraging, half-hearted search in town near the harbor, we changed our focus. A 50' Ulfa Fox designed steel hulled schooner anchored near us had been left in the care of a sport fishing fleet operator some time before, and the owner hadn't been heard from since. Gil Aviles agreed to our living aboard. Such luxury, such space, such comfort. Mac mucked around under the floorboards and repaired the plumbing for the toilet, shower, and galley sink. He untangled enough of the wiring so that we had lights, and filled the propane tank for the stove. We tethered the trimaran off the stern where it followed us around obediently on the turns of the tide.

Our second priority was to find a doctor; I liked the doctor recommended by Gil Aviles, made appointments to see him every few weeks, and located the clinic where the baby would be delivered. Those tasks taken care of, we entered into the social life of the harbor.

The undisputed center of our life was *Catalyst*, an 85' ex-revenue cutter with the Langley family aboard. Jack and Pat and six of their seven children, from two teen-aged daughters to four stair-step boys from ten to five had been in the harbor for a month before we arrived. Jack was full of stories. The one I liked best, and still tell now and then, was about the day a neighbor came riding up to his house in a pick-up. "Hey, Jack! he yelled. "One of your kids is tangled up in the barbed wire fence with his bike." "Is it one of the good ones?" Jack asked.

The boys were known all over the harbor because they rowed from boat to boat cadging cookies and cokes, and in return, we congregated on *Catalyst* several nights a week for the same. Pat and Jack had befriended Los Pingüinos, the musicians who played at The Shrimp Bucket (the original Carlos 'n Charlie's) who joined us on *Catalyst* on their free nights. They would sing, we would sing—not nearly so well—and the kids would eventually fall asleep in the corners.

Larry and Brian, a father and son combination, had gotten this far and no farther on a hog-backed derelict that should have been put on the beach long before. A prevailing myth in the US in the 60s was that the US was soon to be enveloped in a mushroom shaped cloud, and Larry was prepared for Armageddon. He let it out that his hold was full of gold bullion, maybe one reason the boat was hogged.

Brian eventually left Mazatlan as crew on another boat, his father seemingly feeling he had gotten far enough from the nuclear threat for the moment. However, one night a month or so after Brian left, Larry decided it was time to leave Mazatlan. Drunk, he forgot to raise his anchor. Round and round he motored in the dark until a friend intercepted his circle and removed an injector from his engine, the theory being that when Larry was sober enough to diagnose and rectify his problem, he was sober enough to leave, which he did. After we left Mazatlan, we learned through the Langleys that Larry had made it to Costa Rica, his goal.

Before this happened, one night we were wakened by a noise that sounded as if someone had slammed a steel bar into our steel hull. Bam! Bam! We bolted out of bed and cautiously stuck our eyes over the edge of the cockpit. A spotlight shown over the breakwater, back and forth, then swung back into the anchorage and stopped on an empty panga. We heard the outboard on Larry's skiff start and saw Brian follow the beam of the spotlight to the panga and tow it back to their boat. In the morning we heard the story from Larry, who drank heavily and snored and slept in the pilot house. Behind his head in a glass case he kept three or four rifles. He had been wakened by the soft thunk of a panga knocking against his hull and sat up. By the time the boarder stepped into the cockpit Larry had a rifle aimed at him. The would-be thief jumped back into the skiff and his buddy began to row away. Larry put the first bullet into the water, the second through the middle of the skiff, in one side and out the other. The men flung themselves into the water, swam for the breakwater, and scrambled over it out of sight. In the skiff was a pair of shoes. In a couple of days, when a man went to the Port Captain to reclaim his skiff, stolen, he said, a few nights before, the shoes fit him. We never knew what the outcome was.

And then there were Walter and Maria. They arrived on the same boat, with their respective spouses. The couples had been marina neighbors for years back home and decided to join forces for a cruise to Mexico. The day the boat motored into the harbor, the anchor went down, the skiff dropped over the side followed by suitcases and two people;

Maria's husband and Walter's wife disappeared and vivacious Maria and quiet Walter lived happily ever after...maybe.



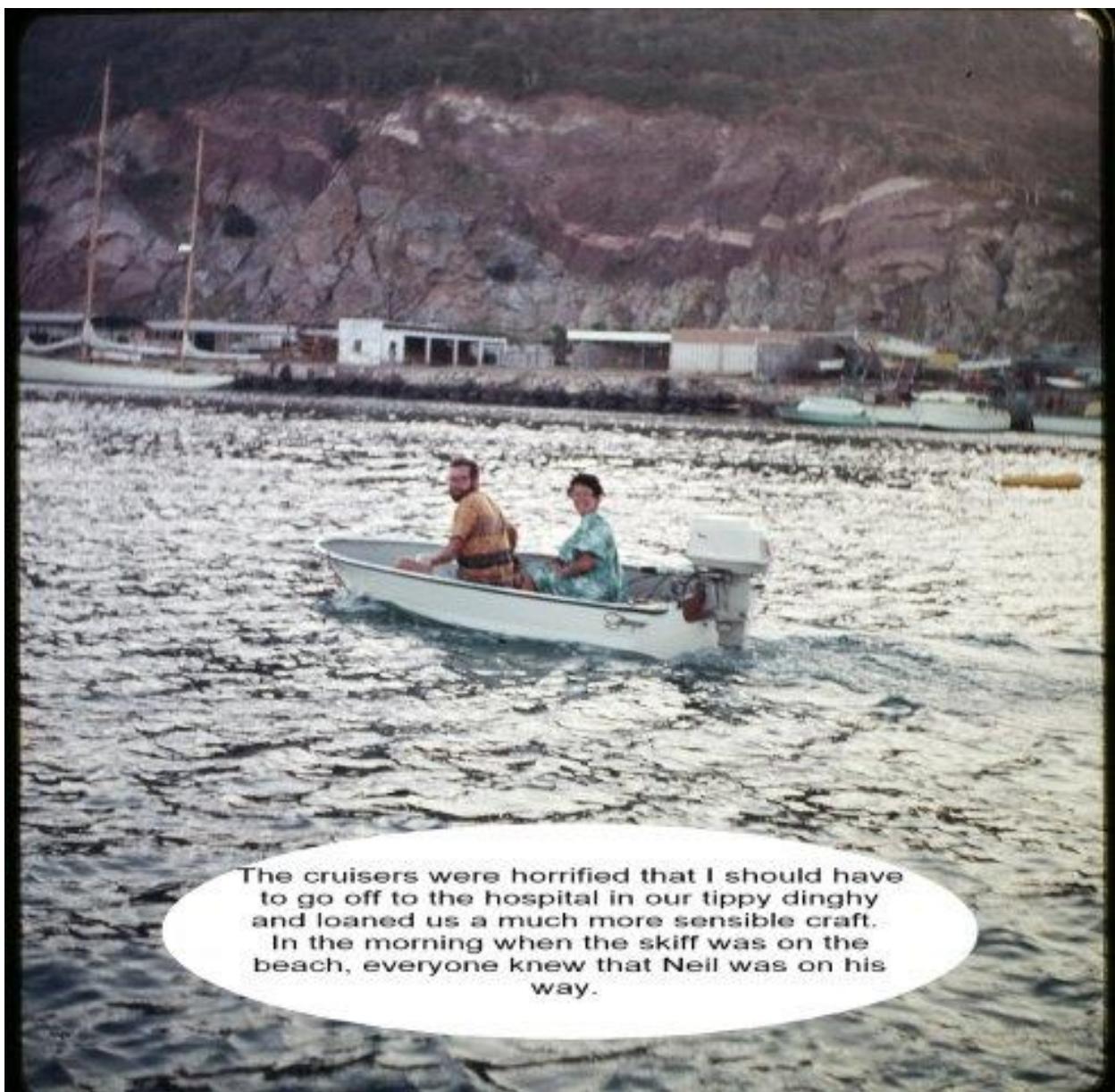
A source of scandal and gossip to the rest of us was a large power boat owned by an oil company which used it to reward its top salesmen and best clients. The men fished during the day and entertainers were brought aboard at night, until the night one of the men, drunk and disgruntled about the entertainment, tossed the woman overboard. After that, men who wanted entertainment were taken ashore. When the crew had no guests aboard, they would join our parties on Catalyst, responsible men with wild stories to tell.

Alcohol was also responsible for our other midnight awakening. The noise of an outboard out of control is frightening; we could hear it circling us, the noise louder as it approached, then fading away. Just as we reached the cockpit with our flashlights the outboard roared directly at us, glanced off the rounded stern of Duet and snagged in the lines tethering the trimaran. The skiff tilted there, trying to continue its careering journey. We had the choice of listening to it until the gas ran out, or boarding the skiff and pulling the plug, which Mac gingerly did. In the meantime Jack fished out of the harbor the drunk who had started his engine in gear and been tossed overboard, lucky in that the outboard in its circling had missed him.

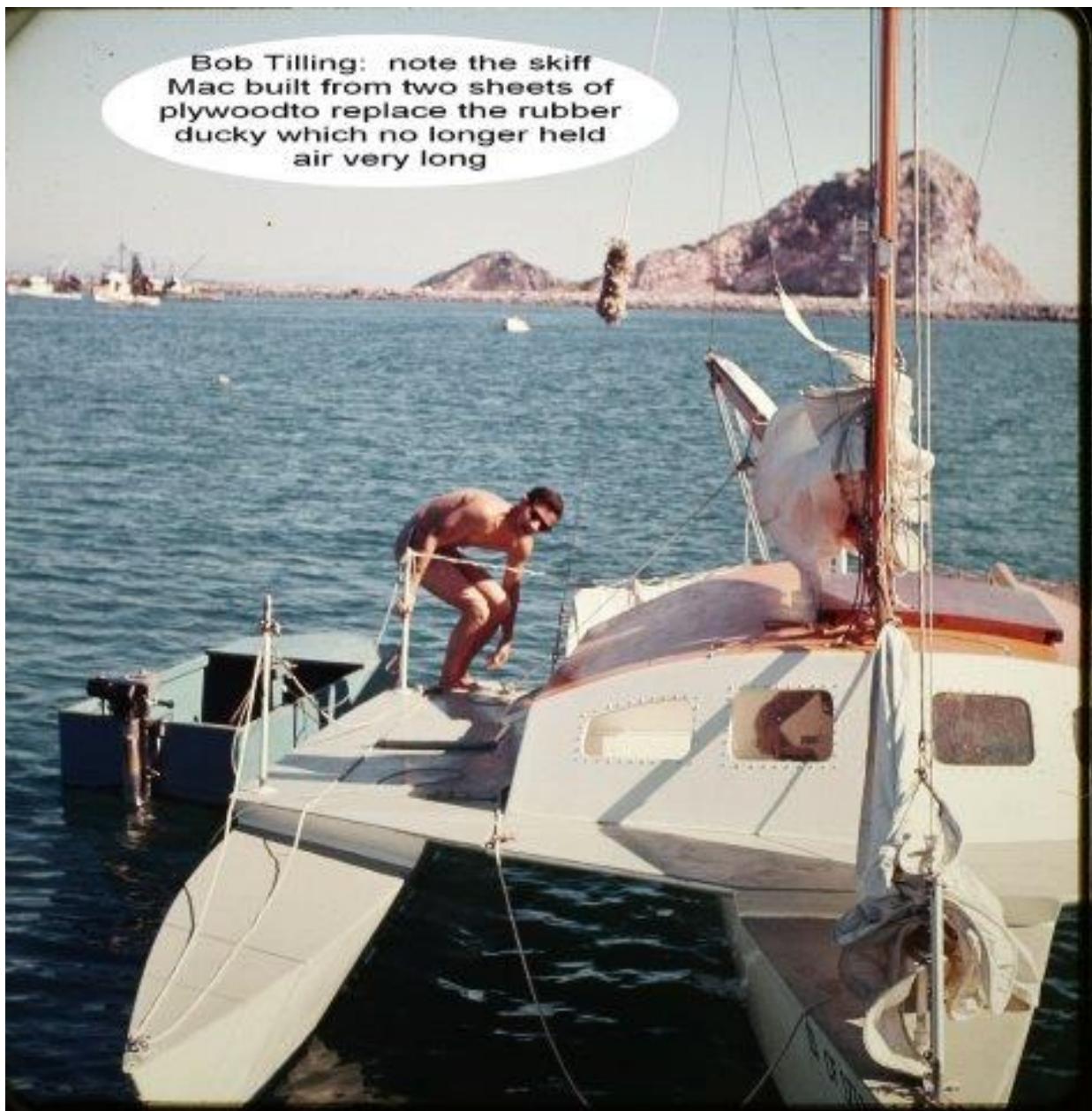
Mazatlan harbor was an active commercial harbor, not just a tourist hangout. Three or four sport fishing fleets took men out at dawn for marlin and sailfish which, in the afternoon, were left hanging by their tails to rot after picture taking. The turtle fishermen came in with their pangas so loaded the boats would have foundered if the sea had not been flat calm. We wouldn't go ashore when the turtles were being unloaded, not wanting to see them baking in the sun upside down before being trucked off to the interior of Mexico. Shrimpers anchored to off load their catch. A bottle of tequila, a couple of Playboy

magazines, or five pesos would buy a gallon bucketful. We ate shrimp instead of hamburger. With a green salad and a pot of rice you had a party.

By this time our cheap yellow raft was faded and shabby. We sold it for a few dollars to a pair of young men financially worse off than we were on another small trimaran heading further south. As a replacement Mac built an unidentifiable floating object from two sheets of plywood, four feet wide and eight feet long, flat on the bottom and flat in the bow. It carried the Seagull and was stable in a straight line, but go round a corner too fast, and it would dump its passenger overboard. After watching me get dumped as my delivery day approached, Larry loaned us his second skiff and the spare keys to his car.



February is Carnaval time, a week of celebration before the solemnities of Easter, and Mazatlan was known country-wide for its Carnaval. Every night during this week we walked or hitched a ride over the hill to the waterfront Olas Altas section of Mazatlan to participate in the *alegría*. Car traffic was blocked off from the Malecon and the Malecon was shoulder to shoulder with locals, venders, tourists. The venders, both in stalls and *ambulantes* sold fireworks, shawls, hats, masks, food, and *cascarones*, the dyed eggshells filled with confetti that are broken on the heads of passers-by.



Intermittent rockets lit the sky. A human bull with strings of firecrackers on its horns charged through the crowd. Kids sent *serpientes*, snakes of fireworks flashing under our feet. Best was the main fireworks display. Mazatlan's Malecon follows the curve of the beach with hotels, restaurants, and stores only on the shore side of the street. In a simulated naval battle, rockets are fired off from each end of the Malecon. The on-shore wind blew sparks and spent fireworks over the crowd, and kids ran screaming through the throng with pieces of cardboard over their heads. With only days to go before my delivery date, I cowered around the corner, hugging the wall, using Mac as a shield and wedge.

Neil is a *Carnaval* baby. The evening of February 10 I felt a little puny and asked to be taken back to the boat before the fireworks. A few hours later we were in the skiff and on the way to shore. When people woke that morning and saw the skiff on the beach and the car gone, they knew I had gone to the clinic.

The clinic, attached to a convent and staffed by nuns, was located behind a high stone wall in an anonymous section of old Mazatlan. We knocked on the gate and asked for Dr. Palacios. The next six hours to me is reportage. The doctor was found quickly, but not the anesthesiologist; he was off celebrating *Carnaval*. Eventually, however, I was in a

room shared with another woman who had been, I am sure, screaming in tandem with me as our babies were born just an hour apart. It was then I learned we were expected to provide for our own baby and that Neil was wrapped in charity clothes, saved by the nuns for the needy. He was also wrapped in charity protection. I said "no" when the other mother asked if the baby was going to be baptized; she sighed and pointed to the crucifix on the wall above our beds. "He looks after little babies," she said. I also think she was sorry for this bald pink thing; her baby had a full head of lovely black hair.

Every evening when Mac came to visit, he heard another patient in the clinic, an alcoholic cellist drying out, playing the cello in the garden as the nuns sang vespers, their soft, sweet voices drifting out of the chapel.

In three days I was back on the boat and we began the process of leaving town. In order to receive a birth certificate, Neil had to have proof of a smallpox vaccination. At the health center we were told that Neil couldn't be vaccinated until he was several weeks old. Since we were foreigners, however, and since we had tickets to fly out of the country in a week, the nurse issued a certificate. *Viva Mexico.* Getting the birth certificate itself was a bit Dickensian. In the public registry office, across from the plaza in an arch-fronted building with fourteen foot ceilings, we sat across a desk from two women, each with an opened ledger with maroon binding in front of her. While the registrar asked us questions and we answered, the women copied the information into the ledgers, in longhand, struggling over all the incomprehensible names. (Shroyer Schoen Wood Cleaver Neil Malcolm). We left with a full legal-sized page document, single spaced. When we left the office we felt Neil was truly a Mexican citizen.

Registering his birth in the US consulate was anticlimactic; we emerged after twenty minutes with a half-sheet pre-printed form of no interest at all.

Earlier in the month, as grandmothers are wont to do, my mother had sent a large box of baby stuff, all the things we should have taken to the clinic. Flannel receiving blankets, jackets, diapers, cotton knit undershirts. Total declared value: \$50.00 dollars. Customs duties: \$50.00 dollars, which we did not have to spare. After discussions behind the post office counter, the box was given to us, no fees. When Neil was a week old we took our first ride downtown; we went to the post office where Neil disappeared behind the counter for fifteen minutes. I can only assume he was chucked under the chin and patted on his bald head by every woman there before being handed back to me.

Mac, in the meantime, hauled the trimaran out of the water (I have no idea how that was accomplished) and set it on barrels until his return, the following July. The day we flew out the Langley clan and Los Pingüinos came to the airport to see and sing us off, ending a six month interim more vivid in my mind than any other similar stretch of time since.

We flew to California, then on to Hawaii, where my mother, worried that she and my father were going to have to support us, had found a teaching job for Mac.

Our Mexican story takes up again three years later, in 1967. In the intervening time, Mac trailered *Haulani* from Mazatlan back to the San Francisco Bay area where he had taken another teaching job.



We also became pregnant again in the interim and a second child, David, was born in a Kaiser Hospital in Santa something or other, California.

Mac soon sold *Haulani* and bought a 50' trimaran. She was designed by Bay Area artist Louis Macouillard, who had had the hulls built and assembled in the Orient, then shipped as deck cargo to San Francisco where she was rigged. By the time we bought her, she was several years old and suffering from dry rot around the mast and a few spots in the hulls, which was why we could afford to buy her. We (make that Mac) had been reading classified ads and walking the docks all around the Bay on the weekends, as we had done when we were dating five years before.

We moved our new trimaran to Pete's Harbor in Redwood City (Mac was teaching at Hillsdale High School) and worked on her every weekend and holiday for two years. The third June he "retired," and we moved aboard *Morningbird*, which had a name that stuck; from then on through the following fall he worked full time on the boat. We planned to take *Morningbird* to La Paz and charter it. We went at it blind, investigating nothing, getting no permits, working on pure desire and this time, on the \$1,000 Mac withdrew from his California teachers' retirement fund after *his* three years of teaching.

At times I worked as a substitute teacher, standing in the Bay area fog waiting for the public phone outside the café to ring. Not much to remember about that fall.

In late April of 1967 Mac sailed out under the Golden Gate Bridge with a pick-up, unpaid crew, a crew which amply proved the maxim "you get what you pay for." I filled our van with personal gear, two kids a year and a half and three years old, and two friends to do the driving, aiming for Mazatlan to take the ferry to La Paz. As if it had been planned, our two groups arrived in La Paz within a day of each other.

## The Charter Years

*Morningbird* was a beautiful boat, even if she was a trimaran; in the 60s multihulls were built for sleeping multitudes, not for sleek racing lines as they are today. She looked like a water spider, especially next to the behemoths that were being constructed near us in Pete's Harbor. ( They were aimed for use in the Caribbean as charter boats.)

The center hull was 8' at its widest point, with alcoves built out over the decking about 3' on each side to form a spacious main cabin. In the bow was the typical double-wide V-berth, wide at the shoulders and cozy at the feet. Aft of that on one side of the hall was a cabin with upper and lower bunks and across from it was the head, followed by the "salon" where a table could be set up for meals. If necessary. Once the boat was in La Paz, I don't think the table was ever set up. Instead, all meals were eaten in the center cockpit which was raised over a storage area and a passageway from the front to aft cabin which could be used, in heavy weather, but never was. Aft of the cockpit was the galley and the crew bunk, a platform over the diesel engine. The decks were wide and almost flat, making them a wonderful place to sleep and sunbathe. The pontoons were for storage only, and accessible by hatches on the deck. For those who care about such things, power was provided by a Lister 25 HP diesel engine which could be, and sometimes was, hand started, like an outboard engine. (Mac could do it, but I had to ask someone else to do the pulling, while I provided the know-how.)

Before we left the USA we arranged two "practice" charters with friends, and placed an ad in sailing magazines to find other clients. During our first year in La Paz, Mac captained all our charters. However, within months we learned that what we were doing was illegal, and there was no way in which we could ever charter *Morningbird* legally. Mexican maritime law prevented foreigners from chartering their own boats; from working as crew on their own boats; even from using boats without three crew aboard, one for each eight hour shift. That was just for starters. Because we wanted to stay in La Paz, we began immediately to look for some other way in which we could be legally employed.

(2014 note: Laws in Mexico regarding boating in general, not just chartering, have changed tremendously.)

Our First Mexican Lesson: if no one else is working at some so-clearly-wonderful-and-fortune-making business, find out why.

In May 1968 when we legally registered Embarcaciones Baja Californianas, a boat-building company, Mac no longer had time to skipper and cook for all the charters. For a while I skippered some, and cooked, and for the last few trips we hired a Mexican power-boat captain (Loreto Castro), for crew (not cook). Eventually we sold *Morningbird*, as we didn't want to jeopardize our legal working status, which had been, not difficult, but labyrinthine, to obtain. A couple who had never sailed bought her; the husband and a friend hired a crew to teach them how to sail on the way to Hawaii. The crew, Peter, returned to his boat in La Paz, so we know *Morningbird* made it, but we continue to wonder what her next chapter was.

In the meantime, a local businessman, Francisco (Paco) Garcia de la Garza, with an office overlooking the waterfront, became enamored with the idea of a charter business. He signed an agreement with American Marine, the builders of Grand Banks trawlers, for the purchase, over time, of four 32' and two 36' Grand Banks. And so began the first legal charter business in Mexico, Yates y Servicios Marinos, S.A. de C.V. American Marine carried the paper, Paco was responsible for legal matters and accounting, and Mac and I for advertising and daily operations. Neither of the Mexican parties had an easy job.

Permitting and accounting was Paco's responsibility; he spent hours on forms and phone calls, and trips to Mexico City. We delivered to him all Facturas (in Mexico there is no such thing as a receipt; every expense, in order to be included in accounting must be by invoice in the name of the corporation). Day-to-day operations, crew hiring, and maintenance of the boats fell to Mac and me. Because the boats went out overnight, the law required at least two licensed crew on board for each of three eight-hour watches (to protect crew on commercial vessels). Therefore, the letter of the law required our boats have six crew aboard. Local authorities agreed to bend the law, given the circumstances, and only required two. Except for groups of men on fishing trips, one would have been plenty, as the crew, with a few exceptions, didn't cook.

Our second Mexican Spanish lesson: learn the phrase "ni modo", which means accepting that which you cannot change. Living with the crew, all good men, was a circumstance the charter party had to be willing to accept (charterers accustomed to bare-boat charters were out of luck). The crew pretty much hung out on the fly-bridge all day, and slept there, as well.

In the early 1970s, maritime traffic in La Paz consisted of a half-dozen coastal freighters of varying sizes, day-use sport-fishing boats, small commercial fishing skiffs, and a handful of seasonal foreign-owned pleasure boats. The fishing skiffs and sport-fishing boats worked off the beach, the freighters off the federal pier. No dock was available to small pleasure craft, and no waterfront land available from which to provision or maintain boats. The first years we Med-tied the Grand Banks to the side of the rock fill where Marina de La Paz is now and walked down the rocks and across to the transom step of the boats on a double wide plank with every case of beer and pop, every block of ice and tank of propane. The supply room was in the building where Paco had his office, on the corner of the Malecon and Calle Bravo, a half-dozen inconvenient blocks from the boats. Most of the time the boats were on moorings and were only tied to the rock fill on the days they were being prepped for a trip, and the day after, for cleanup. Later the company rented a building at the foot of Sinaloa Street and the company helped pay for the construction of a small dock at the "Little Abaroa Yard" where the fleet could Med-tie permanently. It also rented a small building across the street for a storeroom, which eased logistics a bit,

Yates y Servicios Marinos was the only overnight charter company in the Sea of Cortez. Even though the Grand Banks are power boats, this make was an acceptable choice for sailors, where another make might not have been. They were shippy looking and comfortable, and given the lack of prevailing winds, most guests would have been motoring most of the time anyway.

We wouldn't book charters for less than a week, mostly for the good of the charterers. On any vacation it takes the first three days just to relax properly. Add to that unpredictable weather—north winds in the winter and southerly Coromuels in the spring—a shorter charter had little chance of being pleasant. The best clients were the would-be cruisers, people who had their own boats in the US and had dreams of seeing something new. Many years later, when we had the marina, people would arrive in the office saying that the first time they had been on the water down here had been on one of the Grand Banks.

The fishermen we had to accommodate for the money. They would come in June and July when the weather was too hot for cruisers, because that was the season of fish biting here. They were hard on the boats and hard on the crews. They wanted to be up at dawn and fish until dark, and expected the crew to do everything, including the cooking. Many of them were "heavy drinkers," to use a polite term. They would stagger and pull the grab rails off the ceiling, fall onto the table and break off the extension, tip over the dinghy

and douse the outboard motor. (John Steinbeck may have had nothing but scorn for the "Sea Cow" he and Ricketts used on the *Western Flyer* in 1941, but the Seagull outboards were dependable and simple to repair on board by the time we used them.)

All the charter fishermen were not from the same mold, of course. One group came twice a year as long as we operated. They sent ahead by air freight four footlockers full of fishing gear. Raise the lids and there were trays full of reels, full of lures and line and weights. Oh, how they loved to fish.

We actively supported the "catch and release" program introduced to us by Marty Goldsmith, a program sponsored by the US Fisheries department and kept aboard tags which could be darted into the billfish before they were released; when the fish were caught by other fishermen (often Japanese commercial fishermen) they would cooperate by mailing the tags to the Fisheries department, because they were interested in the statistics being generated. Even after releasing the billfish, the charterers usually went home with several ice chests of fillets.

Mexican maritime law was designed for commercial traffic, not for pleasure boats, as until Yates y Servicios Marinos came along there wasn't any other kind. All boats for any use were forced through the same funnel. In addition, the Mexican bureaucrat is no different from any other and is unwilling to make decisions about something new. By the end of four years, when we, including Paco, threw up our collective hands, threw in the towel, surrendered, gave up, and left the ring, Paco was left with a six-inch-thick file for each boat, and we were still operating with temporary permits for the boats and still hadn't received registration numbers from the Secretary of Communications to make the land based or boat radios legal.



## Why We Came, Why We Stayed

When we first came to La Paz, we were looking for warm weather and a small town on the water. That combination wasn't possible in the USA, at least for a young couple without money. Although we stayed in La Paz only a week on our first visit in 1963, we saw it was a small town and it was on the water. On that first visit we had just spent the past month sailing the Pacific coast of Baja California south from San Diego on a small trimaran with no amenities. We'd had very little cold to drink or fresh to eat during that month, the last week of which was one of the hottest and most humid of our experience. In La Paz we sat on a bench on the Malecon, under a palm tree, eating bananas and paletas (popsicles); the water shaded off to the horizon in pale tones of cerulean, cobalt and ultramarine, flat and translucent, glinting silver, the sand in front of us coarse grained and speckled beige. People passing smiled and stopped to try to make conversation.

That trip, which culminated in a three month stay in Mazatlan waiting for our son Neil to be born, eventually ended. But returning to Baja California, specifically La Paz, was in the back of Mac's mind from the moment we sailed out the La Paz channel. He never changed his mind during the next three years while we were back in our old lives, living on the peninsula south of San Francisco, as teachers. Mac made a token investigative trip to La Paz over one Easter vacation; he found out nothing of value as, of course, all offices were closed, and all government officials on vacation. No matter, we were committed, whatever he might have learned about the practicalities of doing what we were planning to do (live in La Paz and support ourselves by chartering *Morningbird*).

When we left San Francisco in March of 1967, we pretended we weren't making a permanent move, that there was a Plan B on page two of our itinerary; we rented a storage unit for most of our personal gear and talked of "seeing how things go." But somewhere inside we must have known we were making a cut-the-cord move, because we stayed through thick, thin, and thinner, never turning the page over to look for Plan B.

It could be that we stayed because there never was a Plan B; or perhaps there was no place else we wanted to be, and nothing wrong enough to drive us away from La Paz.

On the other hand, what was right with La Paz? La Paz at the end of the 1960s was ten years behind the USA in some ways. The move here was a return to the unsophisticated town life of my high school years in the 1950s. In the California we left, if a woman wore a skirt at all it was a mini or a droopy hippy, and many young men sported beards and long hair. Only the most daring Paceña wore a two-piece swimming suit of any kind, much less a bikini; the mustachioed men were beardless and all cut their hair short, regardless of age.

Television had not reached La Paz and families provided their own entertainment. People sat on the sidewalks in front of their houses in the evening and talked to and about their neighbors. The teenagers collected at the square to size each other up. One smelly movie theater showed terrible movies for a few cents. I watched "Mutiny on the Bounty" with reels two and three reversed. On Sundays in the warmer months the beaches of the Malecon were crowded and the paleta, tamal, and raspado vendors supplied lunch.

We had left a country in conflict over the war in Vietnam, with growing recreational drug use, and talk of the generation gap. Now we lived in a backwater of a third-world country, a backwater only tenuously connected to both its own capital via a twice a week ferry to Mazatlan, and the USA, a thousand miles away on a frayed string of an unpaved road. What news we heard of life up north was months old. Tequila was the drug of choice. Men flirted and whistled but didn't threaten violence. A female visitor was subject

to murmured words of endearment and attempted pats, but she was expected to remain aloof unless she wanted the whistler's further attention.

The process of shopping was slow but friendly and a constant source of free Spanish lessons. There were no serve-yourself supermarkets; you walked up to a counter and asked for what you wanted: vegetables in one shop, canned goods at another, bread somewhere else. Meat arrived early in the morning at the central market, fresh from the slaughterhouse, un-aged. The quarters were hacked into unidentifiable chunks, and in company with the head piled unrefrigerated on counters. The wise shopped early. All hunks were the same price, whether shank or filet mignon. I learned to ask for filete and palomilla (top sirloin), as the rest was unchewable unless stewed. Fruteria Capri was the only store which sold a few imported food items: lettuce, mayonnaise, ham and cheese, and chocolate bars spotted white, crumbling with age and exposure to heat. Mostly you learned to do without these things because they were very expensive, or you asked visiting friends to bring them in their suitcases.

Before they started school, my children went with me everywhere. At first, not understanding what was being said to them turned them into skirt clingers. Although it took me years speak anything but slow and bastardized Spanish, by the end of a year my children were completely bi-lingual and Neil, the oldest, was translating for me and everyone else. When he disappeared at a hotel one day, I found him in the bar being go-between for a fisherman and the bartender. Neil had heard them struggling with a few words in each other's languages and had broken in, in a tone of disgust, saying "He said 'What did you catch today?'" and all attention then focused on this child who spoke both languages with ease.

A few horse-drawn carts still appeared on the streets of La Paz in those days, bringing alfalfa and vegetables to town from the ranches, although car tires had been substituted for wooden spoke wheels with iron rims so they wouldn't rut the few paved streets. The streets in the old section of town, shaded by ancient Indian laurel trees, were cobbled. Charming, but hard on cars and ankles. Fish venders walked the streets of the barrios with cabrilla, sierra, and dorado hanging from yokes across their shoulders. The garbage truck passed every day, preceded by a man on foot ringing a bell to let the housewives know it was time to bring out the garbage. If you forgot something somewhere, it was there when you went back. La Paz was so safe that when one of my children was so fascinated by the gaily painted paleta carts with their tinkling bells, and by the idea of earning a little money, that he wanted to hit the streets, I let him, although he was only 8.

La Paz's educational system consisted of half a dozen elementary schools with their appended three-year pre-schools, one in each barrio; four junior high schools (two of them private); one public high school; and one of the nation's few teachers' training colleges. Schooling began for Neil and David with two years in a public pre-school. We intended to have them attend public schools for philosophical reasons, but philosophy and ethics were adjusted to practicalities. Neil's first grade classroom didn't have enough desks for the 40 students enrolled. Two children practiced writing their abc's standing at the teacher's desk, others at the window sills. While Neil knew the alphabet and numbers, there were children in class who had never held a pencil. After I had watched him fill out several pages of circles and lines it was easy to decide it was ethical to free a desk and a 40th of the teacher's time by enrolling him, then his brother the next year, in a private school.

Because of the overcrowded conditions in the public schools and the limited choice in private schools, we periodically considered sending Neil and David to live with relatives in the USA for a "better" education. But as my children matured, so did La Paz's

Department of Education, with more choices of schools, better teachers, and more scholastic materials. More important, the stories filtering south of parental disenchantment with the US schools encouraged us to keep them close to hand. We had the confidence to believe that we could adequately augment their basic education and that our influence was more important than anything they might gain scholastically by leaving home.

A school in a town where the values of the parents were not in conflict with the desires of the children, where the emphasis on acquisition was minimal because even the most wealthy were not very wealthy, seemed to us preferable to an outside education no matter how enriched. We also liked a place in which our children were acquainted early with some of the rougher edges of the world, rather than protected from them as most middle class people in the USA are. They could see every day that not everyone was the same as they were, economically or otherwise. Today some sections of town have homes in narrow economic bands, but most of the town still follows the old heterogeneous patterns: fancy house next to modest house next to small business, all kinds stirred up together. This heterogeneity also meant they saw the rougher edges of people: drunks staggering down the middle of the street, the blind beggar outside La Perla de La Paz department store, and crazy Mariana who had an epileptic seizure at the taco stand next door to our house. (It also meant that noise was a fact of life, roosters crowing before daylight, the crash of metal from the welder across the street at 10:00 p.m.)

The population of La Paz, 27,000 when we arrived, started to increase when the ferries began operating and the Federal government began pouring money into the peninsula and, in particular, to the development of agriculture in "El Valle," the area north of La Paz, especially "El Crucero" which grew into Ciudad Constitucion. This belated attention from the mother country had more effect on the changes in La Paz than the shrinking of the unpaved sections of the Baja highway, but the biggest social changes happened when Sr. Pancho King of radio brought us television. Within months, it seemed, the time gap in fashions and fads had shrunk from years to days, and other changes came as well. No longer were families on the streets in the evening; they may have been on the sidewalk to catch the evening breeze, but their backs were to the street as they watched television through the door or window instead of interacting with their neighbors.

We have never regretted coming to La Paz and making it our home (well, only once, briefly, when we had to close the boat-building business). Our children are bi-lingual and bi-cultural; we and they don't consider "work" a four-letter word. Mac and I have been able to work together and stay married. Although we have remained on the fringes of the local life in some ways because of our gringo-ness and limited Spanish, and although La Paz is not the quiet village it once was and we don't like a lot of the changes—anachronisms that we are—it provided us what we were looking for so long ago, a safe home and a climate where a long-sleeved sweatshirt is heavy winter wear.

## First Letter Home

I kept a copy of my very first letter home to both my parents and to our closest friends, filed under "first letter from La Paz." It was dated March something or other, and must have been from 1967, as the couple from Palo Alto whom Mac met with *Morningbird* in Mulege, was our first charter.

March 1967

I sit on a pillow on the floor, the portable Olivetti I used in college on one upturned vegetable crate, the flickering yellow-flamed kerosene lamp on another. The boys are asleep behind me, the three year old (Neil) on a makeshift bed, the year and a half year old (David) in a port-a-crib.

*I know it has been a long time since I have written you all, and there is a lot to tell.*

*We had only two weeks to find a place for Mac, me, and our two sons to live in when we reached La Paz on March 6, 1967.*

*As if it had been planned, Mac arrived by water on our 50' trimaran, Morningbird, just a few hours after the kids and I had disembarked from the ferry from Mazatlan with our van and the few possessions we had been able to carry in it. Our first charter group, friends from the Bay area, was to meet Mac in Mulege on April 1, which meant our temporary home was leaving town. Rentals in La Paz were scarce, with none on the waterfront and few within our means. Finally we were directed to a piece of property beyond town proper, owned by a man from Mexico City, on which he had built a two-room caretaker house.*

*There wasn't much to the house, but it was on the waterfront, built of cement blocks with a red tile roof supported by big wooden beams. The windows had wrought iron bars and wooden shutters which opened inward. No glass, no screens. Four steps led up the land side of the house to a narrow verandah, one end of which was enclosed to make a storeroom with a counter. This became our kitchen. A hall crossed the middle of the house with a room to each side, one for living and dining, the other for a bedroom. Four steps across the porch, down on the beach side. Best was the front porch from which we could look out over the scrappy beach grass to the beach and Morningbird riding gracefully at anchor.*

*For two weeks we lived aboard Morningbird while working to make the "house" (I use the word loosely) habitable. We scrubbed, using bucket after bucket of brackish water pulled up from a well, and painted the interior white. We chopped weeds back from the walls to discourage snakes and other wild creatures. We bought bricks and sheets of plywood for shelves and bed bases. The mattresses we had brought down in the van, along with a porta-crib for David. Behind a screen of scrubby mesquite trees we dug a pit for the outhouse. During the first days after finding the house, we went into town to locate a couple of items essential to survival. Drinking water first. At the bottled water company I arranged for purified water in five gallon green glass jugs to be delivered twice a week. Aside from that, we have brackish water bucketed up out of a well for a little laundry and dish washing, and sea water which, twice a day, we tote up from the beach for mopping the floor and general cleaning.*

*Second, ability to prepare a meal. First I have to find out the name of the kind of store in which I can buy an estufa or stove. Once the estufa is found, I have to find the fuel, petroleo. When I did, on an unnamed, unpaved (well, frankly that describes most of the streets in La Paz) street in a hidden back yard, under mango trees, in fifty gallon*

drums, I learned I had to return to the Ferreteria for my own containers in which to take the petroleo home. As the seller didn't have a proper spout for pouring, I then learned that the splash method is generally used for all such jobs, from kerosene to milk. At home, after a futile bit of pounding with one side of the hammer I learned how to remove the cover of the petroleo can with the claw end, and splashed some passionate purple petroleo into a smaller can, and thence into the stove. With stove and fuel mated, I spent the next half hour with the dictionary, translating the operating instructions into an approximation of English. Anyone who hasn't matched brawn and brain and sheer cussedness with an estufa de petroleo hasn't had lessons in coping. Now, with the help of another boating wife, I think I have the high heat mastered, and with practice over the next months can hope for equal success with simmer. Cooking rice is an art with the best of stoves, and in the meantime we will live with crunchy or soggy.

Two weeks later, as Mac left on Morningbird after stocking up for a ten day charter beginning in Mulege, about 180 miles north of here, Neil, David, and I waved from the beach. We walked back through the prickly grass and burrs to the house where we would spend our first night ashore.

Late that first afternoon a muchacha appeared on the porch, asking if we wanted a muchacha to trabajar. That simple conversation took quite a while as she no habla inglés and I no habla español. She doesn't write Spanish much, either, not having been to school beyond third grade, so asking her to write a word that can be looked up in the dictionary is not an option. I asked her to return en la mañana, and walked down the beach to ask advice of an American woman who has lived here for fifteen years. Two pesos (16 cents) an hour is the going wage, with bonuses every now and then. With this information I was also given the advice to not get involved in their family affairs. When you become acquainted with the family system here (you have one, you have them all) you understand why. The muchacha, Antonia, is thirteen.

Light is from kerosene lamps. Putting together the cooking system gives you an idea about shopping and marketing. No supermarket, no shopping center. Most of the shops are dark doorways opening off the street with an eclectic collection of goods on shelves behind a scarred countertop. Each store has a few canned goods, bottles of soda pop, maybe pasteurized milk, and lard which the proprietor dishes out into your container from a big container. You go from store to store, asking "donde." Where can I find rice and beans, canned tuna, mayonnaise (ha ha). The store in which I finally found a mirror (foolish woman to want a mirror) after trying the hardware store, a dry goods store, and several home-furnishing places, leaned heavily to glassware (milk-shake to liqueur glasses) but also sold baseball bats. I didn't see any baseballs, just bats. Balls must be in the fishing supply stores.

To find anything we need takes hours. By the time I have gone through three or four shops with my limited Spanish vocabulary, sketches and pantomime, not to mention lifting two kids in and out of the car at each stop, we are all exhausted. However, there is still the day's marketing.

The mercado for fresh food from fruit and vegetables to meat and fish and bread and tortillas is two aisles running the length of a city block. You pinch here and pinch there but there is very little bargaining and prices are similar, so you soon pick a stall with a proprietor you like and do most of your buying there. We found a cute young girl (who should have been in school, of course) who always gives the kids a banana or tangerine. You also find your rice and sugar and salt here, weighed out by the kilo or medio kilo into paper bags you are lucky to get home without tearing. By now I know to provide my own cloth shopping bags. You must remember to buy your potatoes first and tomatoes last,

because they all go into your shopping bag in the order they are bought. Thunk, thunk, thunk. Fresh fruits and vegetables are chancy. One week everyone will have grapefruit, the next, no one will.

*In the meat section, steer quarters hang behind the counter, the eyes in the skinned head looking blindly at you from the counter top, piles of unidentifiable pieces lying next to it. That would be manageable, except for the smell, even at eight o'clock in the morning. Just outside the Mercado is a small place more to American taste. The owner even speaks a little butcher English. So far I have had the best luck with pork chops, and hamburger, which is tasty and very lean and tough. I guess your meat would be lean and tough if you had to walk miles through the desert every day, looking for something beside cactus to eat. Meat must be used the same day you buy it or the next, as it is un-aged, butchered at 5:00 in the morning, and doesn't stay unspoiled even in our ice-chest. (You can add "buying ice" to the every-other-day chores.) The second day we can wipe the exterior of a chunk with vinegar (the useful things you learn when you need to) to kill the odor, and it is edible. All beef, from filet mignon to hamburger is about fifty cents a pound. Ham and bacon, if they are available at all, are more expensive than they are in the USA, of course, as they are imported. Even chicken is scarce, and eggs.*

*Odd things are not available at all: strike-anywhere matches and dustpans, for example. Turns out the latter are home made out of five-gallon tins sliced cater-corner and nailed to an old broom-stick. Matches? We will have to make do with the tiny wax things used to light cigarettes.*

*After a visit to the fresh food market we go to one or both of the larger dry-goods markets to see what they have on the shelves that day. One market belongs to the Ruffo family, the Perla de La Paz, and the other, owned by the Aramburo family, is called, by the small foreign community, Three-Pump-Charlie's, because it is one of the few, and maybe the original, gas stations in town. I have temporarily misplaced the location of this one, so can't shop there until I see someone I can talk to. No one gives directions by address, there is no town map. It is always "turn left at the blue store and right at the place with the battery sign", and since most of those words are not in my vocabulary yet, I have to stop at each corner and request a point-in-the-right-direction. It takes about two hours to finish the simplest shopping and the kids and I arrive at the house at lunch time, feeling we have put in a full eight hours.*

*It is now siesta time, the kids are napping off the morning, and the morning's hunk of beef is stewing for dinner. I sorted more of the personal items taken off Morningbird into piles on upturned boxes and beds. We bought a table before Mac left for Mulege, but we have no other furniture.*

The next day:

*Yesterday Antonia showed up and cleaned for a while, then left with the kids' clothes which she is going to wash for forty cents a day. Of course she does not have a washing machine and will scrub the clothes by hand on something called a lavadero (We have one outside under the kitchen window. It is a slanting cement platform with molded in washboard, and a cement trough attached for the water.)*

*After she left I loaded the kids into the car for another tackle on town. Aside from the usual stops at the bank to change dollars to pesos, the post office (hopeful ever), the butcher, the baker, the ice plant, I wanted to find some chairs. After several futile stops (what is available is heavy, dark, ugly, and too expensive for our budget) I gave up. After our siesta, I took the big laundry to "the other laundry lady" and asked where she had bought her chairs. Que milagro! on the way in the general direction of her hand waves and the sketch made in the dirt, I found a man sitting on a corner with four straight back*

chairs. They have woven palm seats, wooden slat backs; two are painted chartreuse with blue trim and pink flowers, and the other two are blue with red trim and pink flowers. They cost about two dollars each. My spirits lifted considerably to have solved that problem with so little effort. Now we can eat like civilized people and I can type like a secretary sitting on a beautiful chair.

On the way home we stopped at the corner tiendita for soda pop and bread (yes, I give my kids sodas) and walked to the beach to drink and eat them. The beach is brown sand, littered with the bones and heads of the fish the sport fishermen catch, which, after the requisite photographs of the big game hunters, are given to the locals who butcher them on the spot, leaving the guts and bones where they fall. The vultures, which sun themselves in the morning sun on the stunted tree and fence posts in front of our house keep the guts cleaned up. The vultures, by the way, are really quite scenic in the morning. The ones in the tree, where it is a bit crowded, open their wings half way, as if you were to hold your elbows up at shoulder height, while the ones on the fence posts stretch them all the way open and stay that way for a good ten minutes before going off to scavenge for breakfast. The hotel next door, where the fishermen lodge, keeps their section of the beach fairly clean, but swimming off it is not appealing.

On the beach in front of our house we are joined by two or three nursing señoritas and dozens of children. A teenaged boy and girl are swimming (in shorts and tee shirts) and I couldn't resist. It did feel good, and gave me the strength to go home and fry up some hotdogs for dinner.

Still later:

This morning Antonia came with an eight year old brother who is hardly bigger than Neil at three. She rinsed the stinky diapers in the bay, swept, mopped the floor with salt water, and assigned a couple of chores to brother Augustin, as well. I asked if she knew of a carpenter who could build some shelves, and of course, she has a tio who can do such things. By asking around, there is always a tio or tia to fill a gap. We drove the few blocks to his house which is the usual two room scrap built hut, but distinguished by marvelous vines and plants, a rarity here in a neighborhood of no running water. A wooden arch covered with vines shaded the entry and pots of nasturtiums and geraniums stood by the door. Tio wasn't home, but will come by mañana.

2016: the shelves were made without benefit of a tape measure and were not the same height all the way across; you had to keep the shorter books at one end, the taller at the other. We finally replaced them ten years later.)

To town again, but places are straightening themselves out and I found Three-Pump-Charlie's before I ran out of gas. The trick is to keep the chores to one-a-day. One of these days that chore will have to be to look for a floor covering, and screening and maybe even curtains for the windows. Mañana.

There are surprisingly few flies in spite of the garbage and fish guts on the beach, and few mosquitoes, considering the well outside our kitchen is full of larva. A square building outside our kitchen has a tank on its roof and I assume the idea is to pump water up there from the well to use on the lavadero, or cement scrubbing board, just below and hose over to the kitchen by gravity feed. Projects #1 for Mac on his return is to clean out the slightly brackish well and install a pump so we do not have to bucket up the water, which can then be used to clean the house, do the laundry and wash the dishes. We will also have "running water" to the outside sink where I can bathe the kids, Project #2 will be to make screens for the windows. When we have the screens, I will make curtains, assuming I can find a store that sells yardage. I have already figured out how Neil can turn the wheel on the sewing machine so we can sew without electricity. Before he left Mac had

*dug a hole for the outhouse behind some shrubs and under the dead tree where the vultures dry their wings in the morning. Project #3 will be to build some wall around the pit.*

*I have just discovered a public water faucet a few blocks down the road where I, along with my neighbors, can fill our bottles with drinking water. Every day brings a little more knowledge and its accompanying relief. Antonia lives in a kind of squatter's camp which has grown up on a piece of federally owned land near the water faucet. It is not a slum by local measures. One or two room huts are built of anything the owner can scrounge, palm fronds, cardboard, flattened fruit shipping boxes, but they are kept neat and private. There seems to be some kind of self-maintained lot system so that the houses are no closer together than they would have been on our block in Redwood City, if the houses had all been the size of our bedroom. La Paz doesn't have the crowded, squalid living areas that you find in border towns, and I would guess that nothing much but complete garbage goes to the dump.*

*For lunch we had fried plantains, very tasty. Please send recipes for cooking bananas, but remember, no oven, although I have a heavy cast iron pot which can be used as a Dutch oven. Now it is time to delve into the dictionary for words suitable for use with a carpenter who will come this afternoon. My vocabulary is growing, but no grammar. That will be for another año.*

(The following is something I did not write home to my parents, about the first night in the house on the beach, but wrote to friends later.)

*By 8:00 our first night in the house the boys had been fed, tooth-brushed, read to by lantern light, and tucked into their new beds. I set the typewriter on a box, sat on the floor in front of it, and began a letter to close friends back home. I began much as I started above, describing the house and our activities of the past days, my eyes on the page as I typed. Taking a mental break and thinking how to continue, I stretched, looking up as I did so. In the dimness beyond the circle of lamplight, I saw dark spots on the white walls near the ceiling. Scorpions! Scorpions were crawling out of all the cracks between the bricks and the roof beams. I grew up in the tropics and am not overly squeamish about crawling things in general, but this was more than I was ready for. I jerked my feet up off the floor and set them on the box on either side of the typewriter and began to type furiously between my knees. THIS IS TOO MUCH!! , etcetera, etcetera. Tomorrow I am going to check us into Hotel Perla. I don't need much, but....etcetera. Several paragraphs later, I went to bed.*

*In the morning I made sure to shake out our clothes before dressing the kids and myself, and reason returned. A hotel room for ten days would take a goodly part of the little money we had. Investment in a flit gun and bottle of insecticide was more within our budget. A dose of poison in the cracks during the day, each day, and an energetically wielded broom and shoe at night reduced the population to the occasional bug by the time Mac and our friends returned to La Paz.*

2014: A story on myself I have told many times, but again, never told my parents or Mac's.

Every morning before leaving the house I made a list of the chores, the stops I had to make in numbered order, always with ice at the bottom. At every stop the kids had to be taken out of the car, David on my hip, Neil by hand. Into the store, deposit them both on the counter, buy whatever it was, pay for it, and back to the car. This particular morning at least ten stops were planned. At maybe the sixth stop, I thought, "hmmm, where are the kids? They were with me this morning!" Scan down the list...they were there, and there, and there and there. Oh, I must have left them in Berlanga's gift shop, which was three stops back. There they were, eating paletas (popsicles). ("I told you she would be back," Katie said to the kids.)

### Life in La Paz

Mornings came to be devoted to chores. The logistics of a camping life-style are time consuming. Water must be pumped up to the storage tank; lime for the outhouse could not be counted on to be found in the same place this month as last, lamp chimneys need to be cleaned, and shopping lists made with the help of the dictionary. Transactions were slow because of my Spanish and because the boys were a distraction; everyone wanted to pinch and coo over the little *gueritos*, who hated the attention.

In the afternoons, however, we enjoyed ourselves. The boys would paddle and play in the shallow water while I picked through the sand for minute shells, no bigger than a grain of rice. These were small, but even smaller were the shells found by a friend who put a handful of sand under a microscope. Each grain of sand was not a grain of sand but a perfect shell instead. The clams, scallops, olives, cones and turrets from our beach were repeated endlessly in perfect miniatures smaller than the head of a pin.

The beach in front of the house was literally paved with Catarina scallop shells, no two exactly alike. Reds, oranges, browns, creams. In the morning, wooden skiffs, some still made from hollow logs, but mostly of planks, would paddle or sail west past our house to the inner La Paz bay. Men would free dive with baskets and fill their boats with scallops which they shucked on the way home in the early afternoon, tossing the shells into the bay.

Over the time it would take the shells to migrate from mid-channel to the beach another bivalve, one we called the jingle shell, would attach itself inside the scallop shell. These too were shades of pink and orange, yellow and tan, but were thin, translucent, and convex from having grown inside the scallop. When the scallop shells reached the tidal area the piggy-backing bivalve died and the jingle shells collected on top of the paving of scallop shells. Our first gifts to family back home were mobiles of the tinkling jingle shells.

These first hard and lovely days living on the beach came to an abrupt and ugly end after eight months. Perhaps from something we ate, perhaps from the bay water, most likely from the well, we all came down with hepatitis. The boys and I were hospitalized in La Paz briefly and released with instructions to eat lots of hard candy and no fats. Mac felt ill enough to fly back to the States for treatment for a month, leaving me to make the move to more civilized and sanitary quarters in the only subdivision in town. Luckily for Mac and our marriage I don't remember much of that month except making the move; hiring a *tio* to load the van at the old house, driving the van to the new house, sitting while the *tio* and Juan (more about Juan later) unloaded every brick and board, then driving back for another load. Some things we do because we have to.

For exactly a year and a month after we all contracted hepatitis, we lived in what passed in La Paz in those days as a “tract home.” The downstairs—really under the stairs—bathroom was the most notable feature; you could only use it by backing in while sitting down. My father, who had retired from teaching, visited to help us with this and that while we recovered our strength.

In November of 1968 we moved into a “real” house on Rosales Street between Isabel la Catolica and Felix Ortega. The kitchen, not built in gringo mode, had a “lavadero” style sink, which is a deep tub in which to store water, with a shallow part for scrubbing clothes. We inherited a huge 1940s or 50s stove, which I loved and transported to our next two houses and only gave up in the 2000s when we could no longer buy parts to make the oven work. For hot water we installed an outdoor wood-burning water heater, which an impatient friend eventually blew up by stocking it with too many wood scraps. We added a palapa roof on the back and side of the house where my father built swings for the boys. There was a round cement water storage tank in the back yard that we never used, except to try to confine, unsuccessfully, a female dog in heat who was driving our dog, and our neighbors’ dogs for blocks around, crazy.

From our front porch we watched the fireworks on September 15, hoping the sparks wouldn’t set the palapa roof on fire.

From an undated letter:

*The Quince de Septiembre celebration took place in front of the State government buildings half a block from our house; the pyromaniac in me loved it, although the more cautious Mac was sure the sparks would burn up the palapa roof. Rockets and pinwheels in the air, and paper mache bull’s heads running through the crowd, fireworks spurting from their horns...oh, I loved it all and missed it when we no longer lived across from the State buildings.*

We also watched the construction of Centro Comercial California, the first supermarket of La Paz. Shortly, the days of searching all over town for a jar of mayonnaise, a head of lettuce, a pencil, were gone. This new way of shopping confounded many people for many reasons. One day all the plastic-wrapped, American-cut and labeled meat disappeared. The open-market butchers had protested, some buyers had protested because you could not finger and nose-test the quality of the meat, but within a couple of days some agreement was reached and plastic-wrapped meat was back on the shelves and accepted by shoppers.

An English speaking haven in La Paz in 1968 was the Kennedy Library, run by Carlos Carmona, who had somehow acquired a library full of books in English which were housed in an old building on the corner of Abasolo (the Malecon) and Cinco de Mayo. While in the Library one day I met a woman who was looking for an English-speaking someone who would board a child in town. This boy’s family worked at Las Cruces, a private resort south of La Paz. The boy, Juan, had been listening in to the home-school lessons the woman gave to her own children while at the resort, and she thought he deserved a chance to finish his own education. Juan was 12, but had only attended school through the third grade. I volunteered and the woman, who turned out to be Kathy, Mrs. Bing Crosby, said she would come to our house to talk the next day.

Next morning, along the beach and through the prickly grass came two women dressed in white. Kathy and I sat on two of our four chairs and discussed logistics and money. She agreed to buy a bed and desk and the wood and screening to close in a section of the verandah for a bedroom for Juan, and to pay school and uniform expenses. Our expense would be to feed him.

(While Kathy and I talked, Mac and the other woman chatted. Mac said "you look familiar to me." "Well," answered the woman, "maybe you have seen me on television, I'm Rosemary Clooney.")

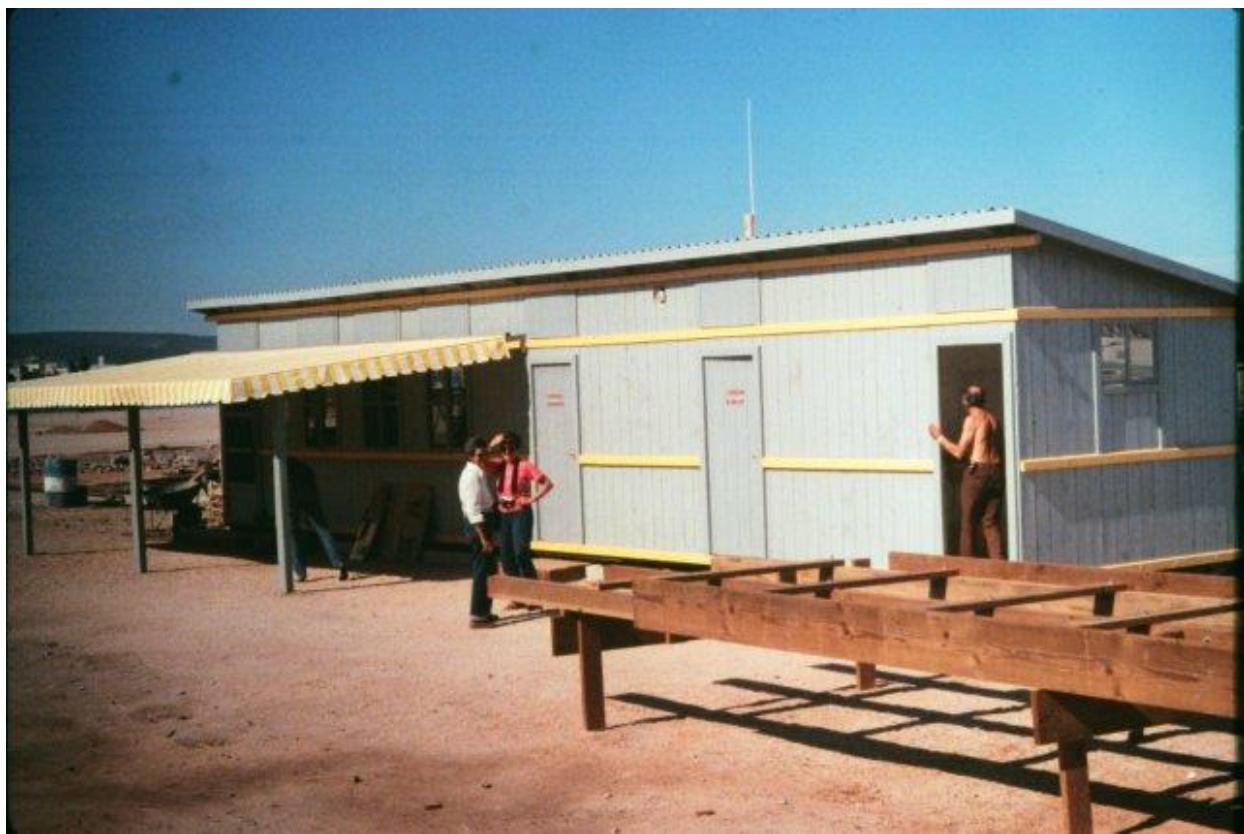
For two and a half years Juan lived with us. I would come home with a twenty-five pound block of ice in my arms and Bing would open the door. We would chit-chat in the airport, waiting for a flight. Mac and I once even ate a formal lunch at Las Cruces with Kathy and her kids: canned chicken noodle soup, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and a dessert, served in courses by the maid. I had to admire that. She felt that her children had to learn how to eat and behave properly when they were expected to.

I went with Juan to SEP (the Department of Education) where he took a test that allowed him to skip grades four and five; while living with us he completed grades six and seven.

By December 18, 1968, we had been in the "tract house" in Fraccionamiento Zu Casa for six weeks. Mac had returned from his stay in La Jolla recovering from hepatitis, Neil and David had not yet started school.

Another business opportunity arose, the building of fishing skiffs, so interspersed with personal maintenance chores were dress-up-and-be-serious chores, which put an even greater strain on my meager Spanish.





Mac takes up the history of Embarcaciones Baja Californianas:

Within a very short time of our arrival in La Paz, I was approached by a gentleman who had become the La Paz dealer for Volvo Penta diesel engines. He explained that a local fishing cooperative wished to purchase as many as six skiffs in which his inboard diesel motors could be installed. Salvador Castro had an office in town with space at the back for building the skiffs. Having built one 24' trimaran, I agreed to join him in the venture and drew up plans for a 16' open boat with the small diesel inboard turning a propeller, steered with a rudder aft. It soon became clear that more space was needed, and land with a shed near the Bay was found within La Paz. Everything connected with the venture ... materials located locally or imported, hiring and training labor, establishing an office, setting up accounting, all were accomplished without a smidge of Spanish on my part, much waving of hands and pantomime, and by working side by side with the work force of about ten men.

It soon became apparent there was an interest in boats designed for sportfishing. The first four were 24-footers with Volvo motors. Next came 31' and 36' sport-fishers with Cummins V-8 diesel engines. Next came 31 and 36 foot sport fishers with Cummins V-8 diesel engines. The design of these boats was secured from a New England naval architect. Up until this point, all the boats were of plywood over frames and covered with fiberglass cloth, then painted.

Next I was visited by a hotel owner who wished to have six sportfishing boats constructed for use in Cabo San Lucas which was beginning its boom years. (Here a comment by Mary: when we had anchored in Cabo San Lucas four years earlier, Hotel Cabo San Lucas was in its first stage of construction. On the beach, we had sheltered from the wind in the excavation that was to become the hotel's swimming pool.) Their hulls

were to be molded of fiberglass resin in a mold of 28'. The mold for the hull was provided by the person purchasing the boats. Once the hull mold arrived, we began production. Next I designed a deck mold and cabin and built in-house. In addition, a variety of molds required for the interior were produced at the factory. The engine was a single GM 4-53.

At this same time, one of our best employees, Jesus (Chuy) Castro, convinced me that there was a need for a skiff for local commercial and sport fishing. I looked closely at what boats were currently being used, the outboard power available, and the way fishing was being carried out. Out of this information came my design of a 22' open boat powered by a single 45 HP outboard engine, the maximum horsepower available at the time. The company constructed a mold of this design, which became the prototype for thousands of fishing pangas for commercial and pleasure use. Because of this demand, the company moved to a building which had once been a tannery, owned by the family of the man who was the Mexican partner for the charter company.

Other molds suitable for sportfishing were acquired from builders on the West Coast of the USA. The largest was a 31' hull from Uniflite which was trucked from Bellingham, Washington, to La Paz. This hull mold, as well as a deck mold, proved useful when we built boats for the Mexican government for use by various port captains around Mexico.



The 28' model continued to be popular for fleets of sportfishing boats used at Cabo San Lucas and the East Cape. Panga production continued as fishing Cooperatives along both coasts of Baja California expanded. Other fiberglass products were attempted, for instance, large water storage tanks, saunas, and even skate boards, but these never flourished. Obtaining supplies of materials and parts was a constant problem, requiring my traveling to San Diego several times each year.

Local personnel required training, but the nature of the work allowed employees to be productive quickly. Several proved to be the skilled carpenters needed to cut and shape wood parts. The office staff came with required skills, including, increasingly, English. Lacking was a strong management team, bilingual, and experienced in Mexican law to deal effectively with various State and Federal agencies. This cost the company heavily, financially. We weathered several monetary devaluations and anti-USA presidencies, then one contract for boats with the Federal government that brought the company to its knees. The financial crisis in Mexico caused the Mexican government to take over the banks, change dollar accounts to pesos, and then devalue the peso. With a lack of skill in dealing with government agencies, I felt it necessary to close Embarcaciones Baja Californianas in the fall of 1981.

Panga production continued for several years, carried on by several individuals, and small companies which had acquired and/or constructed their own molds.



In Mexico, waterfront land cannot be privately owned, only leased by concessions from the Federal and/or State government. At the same time of the financial crisis, Embarcaciones Baja Californianas had acquired a concession on a small piece of land on the waterfront of La Paz and we had put in a small dock in order to launch and install engines and parts in larger boats and prepare them for delivery. This lease allowed the segue from boat building to dock building for a marina, which is our mainstay today.

## Letters Home, 1969-1972

The first two or three years we lived in La Paz, we had no telephone. Just before my parents died in September 1971, we bought a phone line from a man who was leaving town. That was the only way one could acquire a line in those days. Before that, on a small typewriter—the Olivetti I had used in college—I would write letters home to my parents about once a month; more frequently, if there was time.

After my parents, Fred and Eleanor Cleaver Schoen, died in American Airlines flight 1866 (which crashed into an island west of Juneau, Alaska), on September 4, 1971, my sister Pat and I went home to Hilo to “take care of things”: to remove personal items and prepare the house for rental. In a drawer I found letters I had written (most all type-written) from La Paz.

Here they are, augmented by a few more saved by Mac’s sister from the same era.

I did not date the year that the letters were written, and the post-mark on the envelopes are not legible. Having rediscovered the letters in a file, I typed them into the computer. The lesson learned is that you should include the whole date, not just the month and day, as it was a struggle to arrange them chronologically.

January 28 (1969, I think)

*Dear folks,*

*The crackers and cracked seed came. The kids sneak into it every time I am gone. They think those little packages are a treat.*

*The weather was awful in La Jolla and here it is beautiful, good to be warm again. Unusually good for Jan. as this is often one of the worser months.*

*Had a good time in San Diego. Had good visits with the Murphys, who hope you will be here when they are around. They should be leaving San Diego tomorrow for here, to arrive in 2 weeks. They are just the same; Fred is as funny as ever. Also had a good visit with Pat Langley, who is back after a year. She might help Mac ferry the two boats down. So might Howard Wormsley and Sue; I think between the man at the shop and friends, we will have no trouble.*

Feb. 3 (same letter) 1969

*Tempus fugit and how it does.*

*Since I took this out, I have had the typewriter repaired; maybe that will help my typing.*

*Several funnies. I am using the little Olivetti again, that has been packed away since college days, as in between we have been using a big old royal that Mac had...you remember? We rearranged the living room and had the typewriter on the drop leaf of the old desk. Neil wanted something (a mistyped word here)) (repairs didn't help, I see) from the cubby holes so he pulled out a drawer to climb up and reach. The whole desk started to fall over, the typewriter crashed on its head, Neil was scared and me too, but except for the mess and the machine, nothing got hurt. Oh yes, the little clay dove that the wife of the odd relative, remember in Kona, some time back...what were their names?...got a bit chipped. So back to the Olivetti, which needed a tuneup.*

*Last night about 11pm I heard noises...checked the kids and Biscuit, who was in the living room. I thought I saw the front door move, but as it was dark I decided it didn't. Started back for bed and that time I knew the front door was squeaking. Thought it was the wind moving the screen door, when the wood door actually did start opening. I flung myself on it, yelling for Mac (and of course I was in my usual sleeping apparel...nothing!) Then I stopped yelling who is it in English and switched to Spanish. I recognized the voice that answered as a young kid who hangs around and plays with the kids, sells gum, polishes shoes, etc. By then Mac had snuck around the back with a stick and he scared the kid. As far as I could gather...he was near tears and not very coherent, his mother had beat him cause he gave her 10 instead of 20 pesos and then kicked him out of the house. We sent him to the bathroom to wash up and put a mattress and blankets out on the back porch, fed him breakfast this morning and now he has gone, who knows where. Boy, some of these kids grow up hard. He must be 10-12, I don't know. I don't think there is any agency that looks out for these kids, but I am going to go over to the orphanage to see what they can do. If it is not one thing, it is another.*

*(2014, February: What innocents we, were, mostly me. This kid went on to steal first an alarm clock, then my Olivetti (which we got back, as he left it in some bushes to come back for, then he moved up to our cars, that's right, plural. First it was the Safari, but someone saw the car in the market parking lot and called me, so the kid didn't get very far). Second time it was a van, which he and another kid took and ran off the road. The kid got old enough to be put in juvenile hall, so every time something turned up missing, we knew he was out. I don't know whatever finally became of him.)*

*There was a third thing, but I can't remember at the moment what it is.*

*Life is getting complicated at the moment. We have three charters scheduled in the next month and a half, and then the ferrying of the two boats here at the same time. It looks as if Mac will be gone for at least one of the charters and I will have to go in his place. We have a new neighbor, where the bread store used to be, a young couple without kids. Neil and David go over to visit her about twice a week and she tells stories and gives them candy. I think she and her husband might be willing to move in for a week if I have to go. I will ask her if it looks like dates will conflict. We contemplate this rather than Mary Gidley, frankly, because her place is so chaotic...if you think our house is wild, you should see hers. It is overrun with neighbor kids from 8 in the morning until 9 at night.*

*Did some horse-trading with Laura Sweet and have gotten some nice shells. Now to find time to build a table to put them in. Maybe that can be your project, Pa, when you come, cause I don't hold out much hope of it being done rapidly. We are also talking double bunks for the kids. It is a matter of finding time to get them built.*

*Got another boat in the water. If we get all the money we are asking as the second payment on the 35' boat, we will have an income of 100,000 pesos this month! Isn't that impressive. Mac suspects that Parr will only give 4,000 instead of 5,000 for the second payment, however. The boat looks really good, with varnished mahogany trip. It is way too big for the daytime sportfishing they are going to use it for. We could live aboard it; for their use it is a big empty room.*

*Oh, I remember the other funny, if I haven't already told you. We had some flyers printed to use at the boat show in LA. I read the proof, then we had 5,000 printed. The enclosed was the result. When I yelled, the printer showed me the copy I had done the proofreading on...and there they were...he had printed exactly as I had left it! Mac about killed me, and he sure won't let me live it down! We had to have another 5,000 printed! I carried them, and three tools, and two dresses in my suitcase to San Diego.*

*Enough of this. I have to get moving. Off to the bookkeeper. Love, Mary*

(2014 addition: I forgot that I had gone to the boat show, staying with my sister in Los Angeles. Got lost trying to go home in the middle of the night, in a bad part of LA, couldn't find a police station or fire department. Only lights on were in a liquor store, so went in for directions. Some desperate-for-a-drink woman was impatient for her bottle, but the vender told her to dry up and shut up and got me located.)

January 1970

*Pardon the long silence. I scribbled a note, but then have forgotten to mail it the last two visits to el centro. There is lots to tell; for once I have something to say. Let's see. We had a marvelous week beach hopping with the Shepherds and their daughter Odette. None got badly burned, all adults, but one had a touch of the turista, flu, whatever, which slowed people down for a couple of days, but all in all it was a success. The beaches are marvelous and I hope when you come you will plan to spend more than two days here so we can go out to them. We are also interested in driving the circle of the tip, if you are willing to bear the rather expensive accommodations en route. We returned on Saturday in time to meet the plane with Bob, the son of the man Mac is meeting next Sat. (too hard to explain all the details) who has consequently sailed with Mac up the Gulf to Mulege. Mac left Tuesday morning. In the two days he was here we supplied Morningbird with stores and water for a week and a half and did a little toward my occupancy (Mac built me a bed and Neil a bed) in the house. We slept here Monday night and Mac left in the morning. My ancestors would be hard put to match the tales I will have to tell when I am an ancestor.*

(I give up on transcribing this first letter, as it is not legible enough, and the high points have been covered already.)

5 January

Dear folks,

*Sorry for the long silence...I'm not sure really whether it has been extraordinarily long or not. We have been either up til midnight, or I have fallen asleep while reading the kids bedtime stories, leaving Mac to get them in bed. Nothing special going on, just thises and thatses. Thatses.*

*On Sat. we got another boat launched. Mac and one of his men worked on it yesterday, then we all went for a ride. It has a gas engine, and it is much faster and quieter than the diesels. We went up to 30 knots, a areal spin (in the rain), and I decided that is what we need for us...we could get out to the islands in an hour, making a weekend trip feasible. The engine is so much less expensive than diesel...but the fuel costs sure make up for it. Maybe if we ever get the trimaran sold, we can build ourselves one like this.*

*This other business of "organizing" is...don't know where to start explaining. Paco, the Ford Co. man, has bought two 32' powerboats. He is setting up a new company, the sole purpose of which is to operate a charter fleet. Mac will provide the maintenance and handle the advertising, Paco will handle bookkeeping, and we hope to get other people, Americans mostly, naturally, who will buy boats, put them in the company, keep them in La Paz, use them when they want them and allow them to be chartered the rest of the time...for a share of the profits. The organizing has been in trying to get the Americans with an interest in this together with Paco and so on. We finally got a deal with Grand Banks (look in any boating mag) who is selling the boats at cost to Paco and featuring in future their boats cruising in the Sea of Cortez (in their ads). We have recently met another American*

in mining here and on the mainland who just brought a 32' Luhrs down...and Mac is going to build extra tanks for the boat...who is interested in adding his boat to the fleet. Now we have to see if he can get it legally imported. And if this all develops well, we will be able to put pressure on those who come down here and charter illegally, or with the aid of mordida. This is still a sideline, the boat building is still going strong and is the mainstay.

We are also working in conjunction with a man named Ted Tate...he and his bro. are Cadillac dealers, in So. Cal, and boat on the side...they are bringing a fiberglass hull down and we are going to finish it off...and if things work out, we will bring in their mold and go over to making the whole fiberglass boat here...but that is a long way off. In the meantime we are plugging away at the other boats, as usual.

I don't remember if I wrote you after Christmas. We had two boat couples for dinner...baked ham instead of turkey; a very nice meal. Kids had stacks of things...which reminds me, three pkg. from Hawaii came...two from you, with clothes (or

Start that paragraph over. We got three pkg. Okay. But one was from you, with clothes and one big toy, a twister, with Neil's name on it. Is there another pkg. that we are missing? It is a favorite. Nan and Bill gave them a big tractor, so between the two there is no friction. The Osborn's sent us a box of candy...I shall write one of these days...don't know why we rate.

New Year's Eve we joined a bunch of people (none of whom you know...boaters and tourists) and went to a night club...first time in our lives. But we cut out early, about 1:30, and missed the buffet. We heard later it was good and were sorry to have missed it. The next day we all went sailing in the 21 foot sailboat, over to El Mogote for a picnic and back. Obviously we were a light-drinking bunch the night before, or we never would have made it. They were to have come for supper Friday night, but the ladies got tourista, so they didn't come. I had spent the better part of the day cooking; just before dinner some friends brought a friend by to discuss a boat repair job, and we talked them all into staying to eat up all the food. It really wasn't dinner...onion soup (made from scratch), Flan, bean salad...but if we hadn't had help, we would have been eating soup for weeks. As it is, we just finished the flan for lunch today.

A Christmas note from the Wolfords was more encouraging about Juan. He seems to be doing well in school, except for Algebra, and is in Scouts...and catechism classes.

(2014: While living with us Juan completed sixth and seventh grades and learned basic English, but then seemed to be stalled. As he entered the teen years, and I had less time, it became more difficult to pay attention to Juan. He had a moderate grasp of English, and Kathy found a family in the USA who would take him, and see to his schooling, in exchange for light ranch work. Later we heard that he was there only a short time, as he just wanted to "goof off." He was sent to a Crosby ranch property for a summer, which was not successful either. Juan returned to La Paz and at 18 joined the Navy, but we don't have an "end of story".)

I seem to be on Mrs Crosby's permanent Christmas gift list. This year it was a red velvet case with lipstick and pressed powder. Very useful. The Crosby deal would mean living in Ensenada, which would be pretty bad...if anything ever came of it. Rodriguez is Rod, son of an ex pres (and ex Pomona, by the way), co-owner of Las Cruces, etc.

Doug is in the states now with the cookbook. Haven't heard much from him except that he rode up, with two other gringos in the plane that took the next pres. Wife to TJ...after a 5 hour delay at the La Paz airport. Typically Doug.

We heard from Patsy, that "they" wouldn't be here until later...whenever that is. I would just as soon she came alone.

*Today is sunny for the first time in 4 days...it finally rained yesterday and last night, and cleared up. Beautiful and cold...60-65. We have been discussing the possibility of a fireplace it has been so bad. And not so long ago, sweltering! Yes, I could use your slacks...was wishing for a wool dress this morning, of all silly things. But don't buy one. I'm 110...that isn't bad for me.*

(2014 note: We did put in a "fireplace". It was one half of a fifty-five gallon drum, with a stovepipe going out the living room wall.)

*Time for business letters.*

*By the way, when are you coming here again? Spring? (added by hand: Pa: thanks for your Christmas checks. I bought Mac a \$35 sweater-cable knit, from Austria, a real beauty. He made a mahogany dining table, so we eat in style. Did I tell you he made the kids wheelbarrows from Santa—really cute and well used. And did I say we ate our first zucchini out of my garden, and the corn is about ready.*

Feb 2 1970

Dear folks,

*This isn't a letter, just a quicky to prevent there being another 6 week lag between notes. We are busy busy busy. Friends here for a week; they went off to the cape in a car for two days, then we are going out in the boat for 2 nights with them. Then have to get the tri ready for a charter, which I am skippering—only 4 days. In between, have to have a party for Neil; I think I am going to ask only boys, since the mob would be horrendous if I tried to ask everyone. Mac is going to beard the Gov. in his den tomorrow with Paco. On several matters. Land on the water front; importation of boats by a hotel (we want to block it), and general introduction to us and the chartering.*

*One of the boats is filled solid from mid April until mid July and the second is picking up the late comers. The tri we aren't sending out because we don't have time to crew it.*

*The kids are holding out; Neil gets his cast off this next weekend. The arm must be well because he was hanging off another ladder on it yesterday!*

*The harbor is full of boats; we got a 28' mold; we're building an 8' dinghy (3 of them) out of a mold; we are working on 5 boats simultaneously and about 3 little repair jobs. The other shipyard is building floats for us that we are going to put in front of the property we get (Paco gets); etc etc*

*And that is how it goes. Maybe will write to you again next August when things calm down and I am sitting front of the air conditioner.*

Mary

Feb. 16

Hello:

Other pkg. have been arriving. The last one was sesame seed candy, and before that a box of varied goodies, and at the same another great long dress. I live in them in the evening. I am going to cut off one of my old ones, not that I have a new one.

I have been working on another dress, for about 15 min. every morning before breakfast; at this rate it is going to be too warm to wear it, as it has long sleeves. But in the evening I am too pooped to sew, so that is the only time I have energy to do it.

Also got your last monies. We had a lovely (noisy) party for Neil with piñata, loteria, hot dogs, and grape juice. Total of 33 people, 7 adults, another 4 half-grown. I had planned a group of about 12 all boys but the women don't have anyone to leave the extras with, so they come with all four or five or eight as the case may be, from 1 to 12.

Neil had fallen off a ladder and cracked both bones above his wrist, without displacing them. He's all mended now. Our funny story is a friend on a boat who hooked his baby toe on something in the engine room and broke it; the dr. put a cast on it halfway up his leg. Three days later he caught the other toe on the binnacle and broke it exactly the same as the first...the x-rays couldn't be told apart! The dr. took the cast off and bound up both feet like a Chinese maiden's, and laughed and laughed.

The second boat is a Luhrs sportfisher type, 32' long. Pretty soon we hope to have another GB, bigger, and another sailboat. Got three charters the next two weeks; I go out on one from the 20-24, then from the 1-5, then Mac on one from 6-12. We are busybusybusy.

Which sailboat? We have about 6 boats in our care now...and are having to put out more moorings, to boot. Takes Manuel all morning to check them all over.

Doug still here but not doing much. Has been selling his books in the states, but the pressure is on him about chartering.

Frances will be here from the 27th till about the 14th, most of the time down at Buena Vista, with another lady friend.

Time to get the kids at school. Thanks for all the goodies. Glad Pats got a job; Billy sounds deep in...maybe he would like to come and build ours. We got a quote of \$28,000.00 for all the cement work, including the underground plumbing for the Puerto Mejia house. Little over \$2,000.00 US. The whole thing will be about \$4,000...split between the two of us, that's not bad (as if we had any of it!)

Love, Mary

Feb. 16. 1970 (one of the few letters which includes the year in the date)

Dear Frances and Ma and Pa: (Frances is Mac's mother)

To the carbon paper! To tell you about yesterday, which was the day we picked to celebrate Lupe Gidley's and Neil's birthdays. Neil the 11th, Lupe the 17th. We had the party here instead of at Mary Gidley's as their house is overrun with kids.

We worked on the trimaran all morning, until 2:30, then came home. Mac did dishes while I baked an orange chiffon cake...which turned out about 2 inches high...like rubber, but under the chocolate frosting no one seemed to mind. Mac drew a donkey, I cut the tails; Mac made a barbecue, I set out paper cups, plates, napkins. How the world got on before their invention, I don't know. And people arrived. Vern with Randy, Mrs. Morales with 4 of her 6 kids; the neighbor girl with her cousin and one little girl from Neil's class and her cousin; finally Mary and Cass with Guillermo, Lupe, Froggy, and Kelly (a visiting friend),

and two of the maid Lupe's little sisters. And Margo Nataros. 17 in all. Before the last batch arrived we started pinning tails. Raisins and candy bars for prizes. Then roasting hot dogs over the fire on coat hangers. Smearing bread with mustard, and dishing up coleslaw and deviled eggs and pouring out cups of Pepsi. Then roasting marshmallows, at least a dozen per kid. Then the piñata, which was only half a madhouse. Neil cried because Mac wouldn't let him get more than two handfuls. The piñata was a duck. Margo's big sisters and the two Escherich girls arrived in time to pull the rope on the piñata, but we forbade their participation in the scramble. Then package opening time, luckily very few...I have decided I don't like that part, here at least, where it just emphasizes the have have-not gap. And in the general overflow of sweets I forgot all about the cake, so we turned out the lights and lit the candles and sang cumpleaños feliz. Everyone wanted a candle on his piece, so we went through the box of candles, Cass lighting each one. By then we had moved into the house because that was where the packages were, and we were too warm to go outside again. So every room in the house and the patio are all a mess. Thank heaven for Chuy and Lupe this morning. But all in all it was a highly successful birthday... bilingual...watch out and cuidado, un mano no mas, only one hand (to pin on the tail) quien no tiene pastel, vita, bombones, etc., no tire el polvo. At the end the little boys were playing with the racing cars and the girls were playing jacks. In July, I am glad to say, we can go to the beach, for David's bash. Mrs. Morales counted 72 at her last piñata, so we can consider ourselves fortunate.

Our other bit of news is that Juan is coming back. He has just not buckled down; so here, he will work if you keep after him, but otherwise he goofs off. Then he started smart-talking to Mrs. Wolford, and that was that. He should arrive today. This news came via the Crosby's who stopped in one day next (last) week. They went to the Padre at Ciudad de Los Niños who said he would take Juan. If he doesn't like it there, he can go home!

He will come to visit us, I suspect, probably with his side of the story, but you can all relax as we are not going to take him back. He's had enough help and now he had better get going on his own if he wants to salvage any of it.

We have been working hard to get the trimaran ready for Thurs. Have been cooking up a storm; I make enough for the trip and some leftovers so we can have supper off it, too. I don't remember if I told either of you of our embarrassment last weekend. Don Jose didn't get around to pulling us out, so we went up by his dock at high tide last Sunday and stuck barrels under the pontoons; when the tide went out we (some men from the shop) scraped and cleaned the bottom and painted it; changed the propeller, etc. Monday at high tide, the water was 8 inches lower than it had been! And there we sat, therefore, with the skeg stuck down into the mud about 8 inches! They shoveled and winched and rocked. A fishing boat was desperate to get out on the ways on the same high tide. They sent their dinghy (huge and strong, with a tow post) and they pulled while we shoveled and rocked and winched, and ran our motor. The tide passed full and started down. The fishing boat then tied itself to us with a long nylon line, got in gear and pulled. Groaning and grinding, the trimaran began to move, with all predicting that the boat would pull in pieces before the mud gave out. Two dinghies were tied at the end of the pier, and a sports fishing boat. I decided to move the dinghies, and as I tried, the boat broke loose. It was as if it had been shot with a slingshot...all that stretch in the nylon line...and it shot by me at about 10 knots. The pontoon ran over the dinghy, which luckily was motor-less and the heavy Mexican kind, and missed the sport fishing boat by inches. The skipper had run on the bow to fend off, I guess. If we had hit the boat, that sharp pontoon would have gone straight thru it. What we need is a 1970 tide table! So we don't repeat ourselves.

Ma, you mention coming before or after your trip. Hopefully we will have charters later in spring and summer as well as now, so for us, either would be convenient. Do it by

the weather, I think; March is nice, I think you said your trip was April and May; June is nice, and even into July, tho it may get too warm for your tastes. If your trip is May-June, April is nicer here than you would find it in July-August. Let me know when you can; our friend Salvador Morales is building bungalows, in town, with one bedroom, all furnished, etc., and will be renting for \$150.00 a month. They are going to be popular, so the sooner you can get your bid in, the better. Will you be con or sin carro? If we have both running (we do now, by the way) you can have one. We have been told it is only 6 hr. drive to Santa Rosalia now. Gotta go, Love Mary

(hand written) P.S. Picture book came, and cards, etc.

March 9, 1970 (determined from the subject matter)

Dear all:

Mac sailed off today with the Krogs and their two daughters, so I have a long, slow week "alone". After moving at 90 mph and shouting a lot for the 4-6 days it takes to get the boat organized, the silence on the beach when they all leave is overwhelming.

You have probably heard via Frances that we have finally passed the first barriers. We celebrated with sidra (bubbly apple cider, the local champagne) the arrival of the telegram saying that our request for imigrante inversionista permits had been granted and that we might go to the San Diego consul any time to pick them up. I can't describe for you, bliss, ecstasy, and jubilation...we danced up and down the beach, much to the wonderment of the natives.

With the assurance that we won't be kicked out of the country for a while we can really begin to act on many of the projects that we have been talking about this last month. First we want to move into a building that is large enough in which to build boats...Mac is negotiating for about half a tannery which has been inoperative for many years. It is just across the street, practically, from where we now live, which is convenient except that we want to move, and may, in 4 or 5 months. Second, there is an order for sports fishing boats hanging fire, which will now be able to be assured. Third is a cooperative venture between Mac and a friend to build a boat out of two hulls the friend has, to be used to transport the passengers from the luxury cruise ship to shore...at the moment they have to use their lifeboats and don't like to. There is a loan available for this, but until now it would have had to go through a Mexican name, with us doing the work and coming out on the short end financially, and now we can bid for the loan independently. Finally, there is a group interested in developing the land we used to live on, at the beach, along the lines which Mac originally thought up...a combination on sale and rental of houses and lots, combined with a "club" and full marina facilities...the last of which La Paz needs desperately. Then just in the last day or two we have become interested in a lot, very small, but again on the water, which is owned by an American 5 year old girl, born here in La Paz specifically as a potential owner. The owners have not come back for over a year and have done nothing with the property; we are writing to see if they would be willing to sell...and Neil would buy it like a shot. It, combined with the lot behind it, which might be available, is a perfect spot for us. So a glass of something or other in our honor is appropriate!

(2015: I had forgotten all about this lot, our interest in it, and, in fact, the upper lot is the property on which we now live.)

We have enjoyed getting all your letters, second hand, through Frances. Nancy, do you have any pictures of what is going on, on your lot? I wish we could see inside your house, Merr. If and when we ever get to build, I shall canvas you all for ideas.

*Our friends at the Centro de Arte Regional discovered a guy working for 30 pesos a day in the cotton fields who has a loom he built himself and who is a real artist...he was weaving the material they use here for their mops...they have gotten him a loan and he has moved to the school where he makes beautiful rugs. We hope to get one for us soon. But the miracle is in finding this man. Now all the school needs is a grant for Merr to come and teach welding.*

*(hand-written addition) Nancy, the pictures we take of the kids I mostly send on to Ma—but I will look around.*

*The theater arrived while I was in Hawaii; some day I will put it together for a party for Neil's friends; it will be a real innovation here. Other gifts also came, Mac opened them all and doesn't remember who sent what. Just great. So for books, angels, clothes, whatever was your share, we thank you. It is a crumby day; poor Mac, stuck on the boat with 3 guests to entertain, and poor me in the house with two kids. But, I forget, you go thru this all winter! Love, Mary*

December 11, 1970

*Instead of getting less frantic, every day seems to get more so. This last week has been a dilly. Mostly we have been getting Paco's boat ready for crossing to Guaymas; within an hour now they should be on their way. As Mac says, it seems the Mexicans can't do anything without reaching a point of near hysteria. Because the boat is crossing into a non-free zone (customs) from a free zone, the paperwork is different. We went months ago to see the head aduana man here to find out what to do. He says one thing. Then the man who inspects the boat says something else. The whole thing was finally settled because Paco's father, the sub-jefe in Paco's shop, and the head aduana were all Masons! On the one hand Paco's father is telling Mac he should have gotten all these things straightened out long ago and on the other, he is saying that Americans have to understand how Mexicans do these things and there are differences in temperament, etcetcetc. It is just lucky Mac is as patient as he is...if THEY can't get a straight answer, how do they think we can!*

*Then we have had a certain number of social commitments...with some friends of the Gidleys, who are (were...they left today) very nice, and some people off a boat whom I can take or leave.*

*Pa, if you sent Dec. check, it hasn't arrived. Better put a stop on it. Got your anniversary gift. Thanks—will do something. Mac is in states again—after barely getting on plane—2 hr at airport yesterday and 1 1/2 again this a.m. getting the guy from the shop on—then ran out of gas on the way back—then David left his shoes in the car of the people who gave us a lift!! I'm going home, lock the door and get in bed. Love, Mary*

December 18, 1970

*Dear Folks,*

*Will give this a start, anyway, tho I don't know when it will get interrupted and/or finished.*

*Pa, the rice pot, the brass, and something else arrived. The other 5 haven't. Probably the season for delay. Tho the pot said not until Christmas, I opened it and have been using it anyway. I have to experiment to see how much water this rice takes; it is different from Hawaii rice, wherever that comes from.*

*The kids big present this year is a big red wagon (one each) from Frances. She gave us one of those cassette tape recorders as our Wollensack finally give out. Mac took*

it to the states and the shops there told him it would be impossible to repair. So now when anyone is in a pinch for ideas, they can give us a tape for it. The tapes are about 2" wide, 4" long, and 1/2" thick. It is nice to have some music again.

After about 4 evenings of work, we finally got our Christmas tree decorated. Rather nice, if I do say so myself.

We have three charters coming up after Christmas, two over-lapping on two boats, with the third immediately following. Help. I am pricing things now, to see if any of the stores will give a discount, since we are going to buy a lot of case lots of food. We still don't know if Mac or I am going to take out the charter on the tri after Christmas. I hope me, cause Mac is needed around to get the other boat underway: I can prepare the food well enough ahead, but not the innards of the engine and things.

Kids have parties at both schools today: don't know how I can attend both. I'm sort of sorry, because that leaves them on my hands all morning! Maybe will have to do as Mac did; one at the shop and one home with Lupe. Off to school now; will pick this up about 10.

A madhouse around here; just got the kimono pkg, but won't open it til 25th.

Spent the morning with a warehouse man, getting wholesale prices on groceries for the charters. Then went around looking for gifts suitable to give the men for Christmas; since all but 2 are married, got kitchen-y things: pyrex juice pitchers, salt-pepper-sugar sets, hors d'oeuvres trays, and sets of glasses. Naturally, couldn't find 13 of any one thing.

When this Christmas mess finally dies down, would you mind sending a couple more of those ti plant starters. The one I have left is outgrowing its pot, finally; may have to transplant it and hope it survives, and Janet Ketron's died, for some reason. I think Esteban's is still thriving.

Both kids had piñata parties at their schools today, I decided not to try to go to either of them. Probably should have put some time in on each.

Have to buy a birthday present for a party for the kids tomorrow. Again, I have to dump them, when I should accompany them, as it is not only payday, but Christmas bonus day, and unless Mac makes it home, someone has to hand out the loot. We bought his ticket here before he left, all confirmed, only in Tijuana they had never heard of him. Par for the course. Frances said they'd go to the airport on the chance they'd get today, otherwise it won't be til Monday, as every plane is filled to the roof with the Christmas crowd.

Also have to look around for something for Lupe and her family. Lupe has been taking a sewing course at the orphanage, learning to make your own patterns, etc. so I thought I would get her a length of pretty material. The kids (Lupe's sis and bros) are easy, as the town is full of cheap Japanese toys.

And that should take care of my Christmas shopping. Via Louise Griffith, a book should arrive for you, Ma, tho probably not until well after Christmas.

Must get to some more fruitful activity. In case this is the last word for another 6 weeks, have a merry Christmas happy new year, and all the rest. When are you planning your next trip down this way? Or have you given up, considering what we put you through.

Love, Mary

P:S: Pa, all of a sudden the kids have taken to the swings again. They will swing for a half hour non stop, playing games, and talking in Spanish the whole time. The greatest is to swing until their feet hit the ramada roof. Frances is going to send for some jungle gym plans; then we hope to get one made up out of pipe. If you know where we can get any plans, let us know.

Mary

Jan 11 (hand-written)

*Going to start this writing as the kids are doing lessons and keep needing help.*

*Well, the wildest is over. Mac got back from the States on the last trip (can't concentrate) in time for Christmas. Had cocktails w/friends Xmas eve and Vern and Randy and another boater for Xmas day dinner. Hildebrands and Ketrons came by Xmas day and another family who wanted to use the phone. The 28th I went out on charter and a second trip went out with Martin as skipper on the 31st. It was a hectic few days getting 2 boats ready, but we managed. Next hectic time is March when we have 2 at the same time—again in April and May.*

*The trip was harder work this time—2 doctors and the 14 and 10 year old sons of one of them. The 10 year old did some helps, the 14 year old was useless and one man got terribly seasick. Neither was as good a sailor as he thought so I had to be on my toes. The weather was windy and cold—but they were good sports about that and we had a good time. The day we came home we put up sails, then discovered we had way too much up and there was a frantic half hour while Russ and I tried to get them down—huge seas flopping us around, the 14 year old resting and the other man flat out on the floor unable to stand up. Once the main was down we had a beautiful sail all the way to Pichilingue—where we proceeded to sail up onto the beach! We cam within 10 feet of going aground! But with the motor got straightened away. Got home after all and slept 10 hours—the 1st full night's sleep for a week.*

*While I was gone, several more pkg came—don't know whether it has been 5 or not. Books in the last—shirts and a long dress for me (which I have been living in) The weather has been icy and these cement floors! It is warmer outside than in at mid-day.*

*A man came in the shop today to leave some magazines for a boat. He said he had to look up some guy who owned a fleet—a friends sister was married to the fleet owner—I thought a while who it could be—then he said the guy had a trimaran and I said but that's us and realized it was Bill's friend. Got our pictures took and they were off—next time they might go boating.*

*Took most of the week to get caught up on shop work. Now am going to get some Christmas letters written and mailed. Looks like this charter thing is going to catch on.*

*When is your next trip? Going to get down here? We're talking to contractors now about the Puerto Mejia house so come Spring you can spend some time there.*

*The book was gracias me and Louise Griffith. Janet Ketron got a funny letter from her—George's maiden aunt died and left a chalk box full of jools—turned out to be real. Sold some and is having a ball with the rest—like left 22 diamonds with a man to make a wild ring. She said it was like kids in an attic with an old trunk.*

*Mary Morrison had her baby—Hildebrands are going to show us movies some evening of their trip. Kids are well as could be expected—Neil fell off a ladder and his arm is still sore—a miracle he didn't break it. Got in our last checks, thank for them and everything else.*

Jan 24 (hand written)

*Ma and Pa—a few spare min. before going picnicking—got a bunch of letters this morning—Wow! Help, etc. We are signing up charters so fast we can't keep up! We've got to get another sail boat, one we don't have to crew, because we haven't got the time to spare. We have money-down charters for Feb 1, Mar. 4, April 3 charters, May 4 charters, June 1 charter, July 1 charter. We also have a half-dozen hanging fire, juggling for space*

in between. I have 1085 bucks worth of checks in my purse to deposit with Paco! Wish it were mine!

Big vacation plans—Frances is taking all Shroyer kids and families for a week on a dude ranch in Colorado in June. Sort of bad for us, as that is prime time—but it is a big reunion and can't be missed. Horses for the kids, loafing for the adults.

Next day (typed)

We went out yesterday and put in the stakes where we want our house at Puerto Mejia. Then talked to the abañil (mason) who is going to do the cement work. He is to give us an estimate some time this week. Maybe a month from now he will be able to start. He is the same man who built Dr. Gibert's cottages there.

Must get back to work. Sorry to be so uncommunicative.

Pa, the latest check and brass sheets arrived. Thanks. We keep having to make tanks for boats who decide they haven't enough capacity and keep using it up.

You're going to have to come down to supervise the construction of a jungle gym... we are not finding 10 minutes to do it. Love, Mary

Mar. 4 (on Yates y Servicios Marinos, S. A. letterhead paper. This was the name of the charter company)

Dear folks,

Thought I'd treat you to some of our fancy new notepaper. Life has been even worse than usual, recently. Sure you don't want to come down and stay permanently? We could use the extra hands, feet, everything!

As you know, Jan. 22-27 I was in California (must have been the LA boat show). Two and a half weeks later, Mac went out on charter, and it was a dilly: they wouldn't eat... not because of bugs, but they didn't like pork, bacon, eggs, grapefruit, pineapple, tomatoes, cucumber... I could continue, but you get the idea. Two were men, and more old-maidish than any stereotypical school teachers in any joke. Ghastly for Mac. And the shop kept me busy and busier. He got back the 27th and left yesterday for LA... with half done projects floating all over. The biggest is about 50' long and 20 years old, an old Chris Craft which the men are working on, and while Lupe and I are cleaning after 4 bachelors. But Lupe was sick today, and the generator apart, so I couldn't vacuum, and had to WASH MY OWN DISHES) (I used paper plates and went to eat out to dinner tonight!!) hope she is well tomorrow) Also had to get a small boat we were watching packed up and loaded on the freighter to Ensenada... the guys worked til almost 7 so the stevedores put us last, then threatened to quit at 6 and not take us at all, and we had to pay 4 times the regular fee for overtime! Arg.

And now all our ads in SEA, and the LA times, and at yacht clubs, are bearing fruit, and as we haven't a brochure yet (Mac hopefully will get that, among other things, arranged this week) I am hand typing answers to the letters. And we have been selling local hand drawn charts of the anchorages like crazy, which means more typing and drawing (tracing the old charts), and the machine and paper you brought are working overtime. But at 10 bucks a bunch, I can't kick. Last week did 391 bucks of work on another sailboat; nice thing about these gringos, they're rich... and we haven't got much competition! If we seem to be running in circles, we are. Mac should be back the 7th, then go on charter the 14th (4 men), back on the 21st, then out from the 26th to the 1st of April! I shall forget what he looks like, and shall be an expert at boat building by the time the month is up. Thank heaven for Esteban, who is so loyal, and for Chuy, who knows what he is doing, and a reasonably well trained bunch!

Among the things Mac has going is still the Grand Banks deal. We had 4000 (we... ha ha ha...Paco) US down on a boat and since the papers didn't come thru, they sold the boat out from under us; so now we have the papers, no boat, and they are raising the price 2500 for one in April. Mac is meeting Paco up north and I think going to trace down a used Grand Banks or two, which are advertised in Sea.

Also, the last engine from Cummins for the last 30' boat hadn't arrived. Just by chance, our friend Bill Callahan stopped by the broker in San Ysidro and noticed a Cummins there addressed to Jeffreys Nash, Co (which is one of the many companies the Cape has used, and now is defunct) and the broker didn't know where to send it. If the Cape owners weren't so rich, they would have gone under long ago...the way they operate is beyond comprehension. But we get our money. (You remember the last fiasco, where it took 6 mo. to get the lumber as it was addressed to Cabo San Lucas and the freight co. had no boat there so just let the wood sit without telling anyone they didn't ship there, etc, etc, etc.

A tragedy. After all we went thru with the cat, Ruby, getting her fixed and all; the operation must have screwed things up, as she got a funny lump on her stomach, I think a cancer, and she disappeared a week ago Sunday. We now have another half Siamese from the Morrisons, but this is a little Tom (asleep on my lap now) so hopefully won't have such a sad history. We have to keep the dog out (that damn dog has eaten 5 of my 6 roses...am going to have wrought iron fence made before I buy another plant...) as this cat is much too small to chew on as he was accustomed to chewing on Ruby. This one is named Murphy, more or less in honor of Fred and Doris I guess, but I think when grown will be Murphyish. They arrived, safe and sound; that is another story, there. They had refrigeration problems, we called Domenech, and the upshot was that Dom. said he got the thing fixed and Fred said it wasn't, and I was in the middle, trying to translate as they yelled at each other...louder and louder, as if each could understand better that way. Very embarrassing. Both parties apologized (to me, not each other), but still...

The weather has turned gorgeous...just as we traded a set of charts and some parts for a heater off a boat (electric plug in kind). Next winter. By the way, I have lived in the brown dress you sent, all winter. Have the slacks on now, but almost too hot. Talk about not writing! Is all this substituting keeping you away from the typewriter, Ma? When am I going to receive an example of your macramé? Or a rock? We haven't even had time to put in another garden and I was counting on it. Such is life, as Jorge says.

People: Doug still not back; Frank is in and out, but all fine; Mary Morrison had a blowout and the truck rolled over two times...no hurts except Mary's elbow which was sticking out the window! Say, it occurs to me that you might be able to rent the Hildebrand's house ... will ask when you can tell me when you are coming and for how long.

Enough. 10 and bedtime. Love Mary

March 16

Another note in haste. I'm outside waiting for Cass Gidley to come back with my car and my kids. (at the shop) He came in on a big power boat last Sunday, as skipper; Mary and the kids are back in San Diego on the YoHoHo. He will be around for about 3 weeks before heading out...\$200 a month he is making as skipper. Not bad.

Finally got Mac off to Hermosillo, then he is going on to San Diego from there for a week. It has been a wild few days around here. I was out on the boat for a week...am still trying to get caught up on paperwork...Frances came back from Buena Vista for two nights before going home, we were getting the Lupita ready for a charter, David pulled another of

his fever stunts...either we are getting better at catching him, or he is growing out of it, because we got away with just oral penicillin, aspirin and cough syrup instead of injections, and the fever never went above 103.5, a minor fever where he is concerned. But he has been out of school the last two days, and now I am having trouble keeping him down, tho he is by no means well (this typing standing does nothing for my accuracy) In between times we have been installing motors and all the other daily chores. If you thought we were busy before, you should see us now.

One of our boats is going to be launched tomorrow (one we are building) Mac isn't here; hope it all goes well. Esteban went to the Cape this am and hasn't returned yet; expected him by 2-3...hope the car hasn't given out on him or something.

March 17 (same letter)

Esteban returned, the boat got launched successfully, things seem to be moving along okay, tho I expect an emergency any moment. Still am keeping David home from school, tho it gets harder and harder to keep him quiet. This bug is hitting everybody down here; pretty nasty. Be glad when the weather changes for good, and it stays warm (don't quote me 2 mo. from now)

The brass got here, Pa, and thank you. We have a goodly supply now, so no more for a while. It seems to me some other things have arrived that I have't acknowledged, but for the life of me I can't remember now! Also stuff (I think clothes? Or was that you? From Aunt E.

About June. We leave here the 18th, leave San Diego the 19th, leave Colorado the 27th and come straight back to La Paz, hopefully the same day. That is smack in the middle of our busiest time, we shouldn't be going at all, and if it didn't mean so much to Mac and his mother, we wouldn't go. I would rather plan something for late August or early Sept., if you really can't get down here; perhaps the kids and I can get to Hawaii for a couple of weeks. Unless Frances is gone, I don't want to stay in her house for that long a period with the kids; they drive her up the walls with their crying and fighting (me too, but after all, I'm paid to stand it!! Ha) and I have no idea if Bill's is practical for a meeting point or not. However, June is out for me, so what other time do you want us, if you do!

Got to stop blithering.

One more thing; we are working on the "thing" with Sea Magazine, they will use our Lupita for a cruise in April, and another Grand Banks owner is loaning his boat, and American Marine (who builds Grand Banks) is paying airfares and it looks as if we may get good coverage for a series of articles in SEA. Pretty neat, for us. However, we may not need the plugs, the way we're going; what we need are boats! Bye bye Mary

June 16, 1970

Dear folks and assorteds;

I have sort of more or less vaguely sent off into the wilds a note or two, to hotels here and there, but not with any idea of them actually reaching you. I think this is the best bet (tho I am amazed to see that your last card took from June 12, when you dated it, to today, to get here...I think that is pretty efficient of someone.

In case you haven't gotten any of the notes, here are the highlights.

The Grand Banks made the trip south fine; the kids and I joined it at Chileno and had a ball the 20 hours or so it took us to get here. Nice boat; now it is all registered, Paco has been out on it twice, we have taken a publicity man for American Marine (builders of the boat) out and are going to get writ up in their bulletin, and have a charter lined up for it for the end of July. Two boats, 7 men, so Mac will have to be skipper this time.

David got sick again and this time we decided that was it and as soon as he recovered we had his tonsils yanked. Then he spent a miserable 6 days, didn't eat a thing...and I mean it absolutely, nothing at all for 5 days, then maybe two pieces of macaroni at lunch and a quarter of a piece of bread at night. He got all pale and skinny, but then he started in at his old pace and has gained it all back and is fine. I hope that is the end of his problems.

I took a charter out, just at the end of David's convalescence and had my usual good time. Now we are sort of hanging on several threads. No new contracts have come thru...recession of everyone...so money is touch and go. But on the plus side is that Paco thinks maybe Don Jose Abaroa will rent or sell the boatyard and if he does, Mac will most likely be the runner of it, with salary for a change. Pins and needles.

We have two black kittens added to our flock, and since about 3 days ago, two pale blue parakeets...Mac's idea, not mine, I tell you, but you know who changes the water they poop in and the newspapers at the bottom!

The air conditioner is a godsend (pa-send) and we turn it on at noon and turn it off at 9. I hate to think what the electric bill will be.

Cass and Mary finally got off, after much hair-pulling. The Saltveits with their 3 boys will be here next Sunday for two weeks. The female Shepherds arrive (by air) Sunday as well, with their friends, and hopefully the men folks (by truck) shortly after. They will be at Puerto Mexia for 3 weeks, then with us on the boat for a week (just the Shepherd's not their friends). And Lisa Gillard from Fortuna arrives the 25th. I have to take a shovel to the back bedroom pretty soon so that she will be able to sleep in it. Hope we can find someone around to help entertain her.

So much for life in La Paz; it has been as wild as ever, if not more so.

Oh, one other item; Neil had his mouth plastered this afternoon and in two weeks will go back to get a retainer to wear (how much of the time I don't know yet) to get his teeth back into his mouth. He finally lost his first tooth, and a second is loosening.

Pat Langley showed up again; they had gotten the motor "fixed" at the Cape and got 16 hours north when it went out again. They sailed back to the Cape and thence to La Paz...sail along, and loved it. Anyway, the owner came down, the motor is being repaired, it will be left on a mooring here in our charge for the summer, and every one is flying home. Pat was very ill...the Dr, which insisted she get to right away, says acute secondary anemia...and she is getting blood and pills. If she doesn't get worse diseases from the blood, she will be vastly improved.

So off to the races...it is 5 to 8 am and go-time. Hasta luego, Love, Mary

PS What is happening to you, Bill and Nora? Or does it all still depend if and who you get sold to? (Braniff) Will always be sorry never to have seen your farm. And Patsy, where are you off to?

July 6, 1970

Dear folks and Frances:

Pardon the carbon paper, but that is the only way I am going to knock this off. We haven't had a Sunday around here hardly worth mentioning, and too many Saturdays. Two weeks ago, in fact, the week went Monday Tuesday Wednesday, Thursday Friday Saturday Saturday Saturday Tuesday. I can't remember what all went on those three days and it is probably just as well. For one thing our friend Bill Shepherd and his friends arrived in the truck, about 2 in the afternoon. People kept coming to the house, on business, til about 7 or 8 and we all ate and went to bed.

Sunday we had some project or other, then in the p.m. Betty Shepherd and the other 10 in the party arrived. Hoteled them, then fed them. Monday spent the morning getting them shopped and in the p.m. drove them to Puerto Mexia (just me and the kids). Tues morning came back and began to get ready for a charter arriving Wed. Of course, the boat they were going to use came back in Sunday with a broken shaft, and by the time we located a replacement, it was Wed. noon. The shaft came from a place that had been closed by the gov't for debts or something, but Esteban knew the man who had the key and he finally agreed to take our busted shaft and put it in place of the new one if we would pay for the new one. So while I am off meeting the plane (which was an hour late) and taking them to buy cowboy hats and beer, the men are madly replacing the shaft. They got off by 9 the next morning amid general collapse. That afternoon (Thursday) Lisa Gillard arrived...her plane was an hour late, too, and I spent the time in the new cocktail lounge chitchatting with Bing-baby who was going out on the plane I was waiting for. Relative calm for the next two days.

Lisa is a jewel, tho' we haven't seen much of her, as you will see. Sat. we were to go to Puerto Mejia, but the charter didn't get back til after 8 so we couldn't leave til nearly 9. Mac slept or read all Sunday, entirely unsociable, recuperating. Sunday evening Mac and I left, leaving Lisa and the kids at the beach. Oh yeah, we brought back most of one family, as they were to leave Monday. Ate out with them in style and peace. Monday morning Bill brought in the rest of the family and my two kids. That afternoon Mac flew off to Bahia de Palmas to view a boat that had sunk there; the owner wanted him to salvage it. I took the owner's wife, daughter, and friends to the beach, to take their minds off the fiasco. Tuesday was spent gathering forces and in the afternoon Mac and men returned by truck to Bahia again. Wed. and Thursday morning were rescue days, and Thursday night Mac came back to get the boat ready to go down to tow the salvaged boat back. Shop for groceries, get linen, etc. They left about 10 am. Mac, the kids, and I drove down to Bahia that night. The boat had arrived and was harnessing he other boat. No dinghy on the beach, so Mac (in undies) and I (fully clothed) swam out to the boats. Checked things out and the men were ready to go by 10. Left the hotel at 7:30 and got to La Paz at 9, just in time for the radio check; the boat was at Pichilingue, it had leaked very badly underway and the two men aboard had had to hand pump and bail for 12 hours straight. Whip off to get the trailer ready and find a grua to tow it out of the water; by noon the boat was in our shop and we drank beer and closed up, done in.

Bill and Betty had by then arrived in town with the second family, who were to fly out Sunday. We did the Shepherd's shopping for the week, waited for bread until 4, then took off for Puerto Mexia again. This Sunday was a lot better, but we had to leave after lunch as we had paper work to catch up on before Monday. Lisa stayed on at Puerto Mejia again; the Shepherds want to adopt her and Lisa's folks are going to have to fight to get her back.

We talked to John Newsom (the Hildebrand's house that you visited, Ma and Pa, is the Newsom's). The Balboa Angling Club owned the two houses up on the hill by Puerto Mexia, and all the next beach. It is a membership thing, a Mexican Corporation, and membership is \$3,000 to join. With membership you have the right to put up a house on the property. We are going to find out more about it, as this might be a way we can afford to have a house on the beach.

(2014 note: the order here does not make much sense to me, as in the earlier part of the letter I am talking as if we already have a house there. Did the Shepherds and all camp out?)

Anyway, back in town and paperwork. We are still trying to hustle buyers, but have no definite contracts. The likeliest possibility at the moment is Paco's father and brother

who have a hotel at Bahia Kino on the mainland. Mac talked to the father, the brother will be here in about a week and a half. Parr is still stalling and the third group still thinks they can get things faster and cheaper from the States. If they had given us the order when they first started talking, we would have had a boat in the water by now. One of the most frustrating deals is the boat we have in the shop now, ready for the engine. It is paid for up to that point, but the owner hasn't got the engine here, nor has he paid for its parts (so we haven't ordered them). If we can find a buyer we are going to sell it and begin on another for him.

The kids are well and not doing too badly by their vacation. A family has taken over the restaurant next door; they have three boys the same ages and spend most of their time over here; really nice kids, much politer than mine, by a long shot, and they all play out in the sand for hours at a stretch. The only bad thing is the mother kept feeding them. If I refused them anything, a second bottle of pop, a third or fourth mango, they went over to the restaurant and got it. So I had to lay down the law...only one glass of something to drink over there! They have been swimming a lot, with us, with Saltveits, with Vern and Randy, and Neil is beginning to pick up a rudimentary crawl.

We now have: two bowls of fish, 1 full time and 1 part time dog, and 3 cats. Supposedly the female was to have been given away but we haven't got around to it, and they are all so cute.

Well, it is now morning again, July 7, and we are off and running. Mac is going to get up north sometime July, but we still don't know when.

Hand written below and on sides: Well, how is the clan: Bill and Nora's plans? Patsy? You haven't been as communicative this trip as last. Thanks for the print. Hope we get it mounted before the year is up. Love, Mary

An undated letter hand written from Mac to my parents, sent after my return from California for a hysterectomy. Must have been sent the last days of August.

Dear Eleanor and Fred

Aside from the hot weather, all is fine, and the air conditioner takes care of the weather in the house. Mary has returned in good spirits, but moving slowly. There are no good crash programs or entertaining to do so that Mary is not being pressed into service. Tomorrow the boys start school. I'll get them started and with them gone the house will be very quiet during much of the day.

Mary put in her frantic hours in the States prior to the operation! Business is slow—enough to pay the bills for now. We look forward to the fall and spring when, with brochures out we hope to have charters lined up. Our boats are ready. Now we need to sell them. The brochures will be very good, I feel giving a good idea of what Baja on a boat is like.

With the new mold for fiberglass boats it is expected that potential sales will be attracted to this form of construction. Our gamble is on the future of Baja and it still looks good to me.

Most important I want you to know your kindness does not go unnoticed. I know, Fred, you would not want me going on about what you and Eleanor have done for us, and I'm not sure what to say—other than thank you very much.

I hope that perhaps for a holiday like Christmas or any time when we are back to full strength you will feel free to visit.

Sincerely, Mac

Sept. 1, 1970

Dear folks and Frances (and various frens and relashuns):

Today I made my first journey out of the house since I got back on Friday. The trip took more out of me than I expected and I spent the rest of Friday and all Saturday on the couch being waited on by Neil, David, Mac, and Lupe in turn and together. A lady who came for dinner on Sunday evening (Mac cooked all the dinner, don't worry) said "play it for all you're worth." Her husband left town when she had hers done (it turns out that 50% of all the ladies over 40 have no more innards...like tonsils, these days) and her brother had to come wait on her.

The weather, I gather, is pretty miserable. The kids play in the water all the time and when they aren't wet that way, they are wet with sweat. But me, in my air-conditioned cocoon, am happy. School starts tomorrow and I don't envy the kids having to be out in the heat...walking home at noon will be especially ghastly. But they really seem pretty oblivious to it. I am anxious to meet Neil's teacher, see how large the class is, etc. Hope things aren't too discouraging. Already know David's teacher, the same lady Neil had last year, and she is very nice. Then we will have to set up some kind of schedule for English lessons ...either both together before Neil goes back to the afternoon session, or one at a time, while the other "rests" in his room, as David did last year while Neil worked.

There are several pieces of business that are tantalizing, but not definite. There is word, through Paco, naturally, that Don José will actually sell his boat yard. No price yet. At this point Paco is getting a little bit of cold-feet over the money that means; we could easily find American backers, but he really wants it to be a Mexican enterprise. We can only sit back and wait. Another bit revolves around an American, Paul Cook, who is putting the money behind a Mex. Corp. that wants to get the franchise to run the sportfishing fleets at several of the Cape hotels. First he has to talk at least three of the hotels into turning the fleets over to him (which would be sensible), then hope he will use our shop and already organized company to produce the boats. Mac is also in contact with Whittaker Corp. which has long been interested in Mac getting into Mex. Production of boats...this is really a far-off sort of possibility, but there. All this business of salesmanship and martini lunches, etc. of the business world is so foreign to our lives, but Mac is learning fast.

Bill Shepherd heard from Mr. Wood who is the head of the Balboa Club bunch (Puerto Mejia property) that we are acceptable to them as members and please send our \$1,000.00. However, there are more details about what that \$1,000.00 will entitle us to to be settled before anything is signed and sealed. We'll keep you posted on that, too.

How is your trip going, Frances...and Louise and Dorothy. Dorothy, thank you again so much for the use of your house. We enjoyed it immensely and having it made our week much pleasanter than it would have been stuck in some motel room. (hand written on the back)

Thanks again, Pa, for your first-rate nursing. Rest assured that I am taking it very easy here, ordering everyone about and in general behaving like a first class invalid.

In case I don't get a note off to Connie, tell her I have been using the cologne and that it was very thoughtful of her to send it. Keep me posted on Bill and Nora's move and on Patsy. Hasta Luego—Love, Mary

September 9

Dear parents and grandparents:

I must get a new ribbon for this machine; you practically need a magnifying glass to read this.

Great news: we can now be communicated with. The shop number, as I told you, Pa, is 2-16-46. In addition we "bought" the phone from the man who was the skipper on an American boat here; the boat spends about 6 mo. Here and 6 mo. In the States. He is in the States now, and sold his house because his family moved to Guadalajara or some such for a year so the oldest daughter could go to university; but because of the difficulty of getting a phone, and the expense, he didn't want to give up the phone. So it was moved here. The number is 2-12-17, listed under Alberto Vargas.

Neil just came back; Mac had dropped him off at school, and then he (Neil) found out there was no school. That is so typical of this place; why didn't they tell the kids yesterday (unless they did and in typical Neil fashion he wasn't listening) I think I am going to see if there is some kind of calendar of days on and off.

We have been doing a half-to-one-hour of school in the afternoon, after nap-time, of some arithmetic, and the reading, using books Betty left. By the way, no more learning books; I now have at least two of everything printed. When the kids get bored with one, I can switch to another. After Neil has picked up a few more letters, he can begin to work on a few of them on his own. David isn't ready yet. He can't remember (recognize) letters of the alphabet 2 days running, so mostly we piddle around, playing games with letter cards, and writing.

I am going to make my first solo journey into town today, try my sea legs, as it were. The usual: bank and post office, and to buy a new ribbon for this machine.

The weather has changed, I hope permanently. Since the last storm it has been gorgeous. Too hot for working in the middle of the day, but not bad sitting still, and morning and evenings really nice. We have taken to eating the noon meal outside again, because it is so pleasant, and haven't used the air conditioner more than a couple hours a day for the past week. It has been perfect beach and boat weather.

Sunday we went out to Puerto Mejia again to look at "our" property and to have a swim. It was overcast and even "chilly"... There has been less rain out there than here, but the first half of the drive out is green, for here, with lots of Mexican creeper, grass, and new leaves on all the spiny bushes.

No startling news. Glad you are enjoying yourself, Frances (and Dot and Louise, hello). Love, Mary

Sept. 23, 1970

Pardon the paper; I am at the shop and using what is on hand. Mac is off in the states again, as Paco's brother finally came thru with the down payment on two 26' boats. He went up to order the parts. While there he called Bill McKinley, who has been toying with the idea of buying a boat to be used in Salvador Morales' fleet, and Bill made up his mind to go ahead...this is a 22,500 dl boat!! Full kitchen, etc, 37' long, for both fishing and overnight use. That should keep us off the rocks for a few more months anyway. Celebrate everybody.

The first 9' skiff has been turned out of the mold the men built here, and I think we have an order for about 6 of them. Mac bought a mast and sail for this first one, and we'll wait to see how it works before we buy more. (I talked to Mac on the phone last night)

I can't remember if I told you the latest development on Neil and school. I went to visit his class one day about 2 weeks ago. The teacher was very nice, things were in good order, BUT there were fifty 6 year olds crammed in the room (and I have since heard that some schools in town have up to 70 in the first grade. (This typewriter is one we bought from a boat, and you can see it has some problems...beyond my usual ones) So I went to

see Mr Carmona and his library, where I had heard he had something going. There are three little girls who were in the "school" last year, the 5 year old brother of one, and now Neil. The girl, who is Carmona's latest "companion" as he puts it, is a local girl, graduate of the normal school here, an ex-teacher in the local school system, well known and well thought of. She is very pleasant and calm and Neil who naturally didn't want to make the change, was happy to go back the second day, and hasn't said once, "I don't want to go to school." Naturally, with such personal attention, he has learned more in the past week than he did in the two weeks at the other school. Plus she has them do drawing and painting and things that are fun, that you can't possibly do with 50 kids. I wish there were few more in the class...especially some boys, to give a more normal social group, but that is a minor complaint.

David is still at the school by our house...he walks home everyday although I usually drop him off in the mornings. He has only 32 in his class...the usual is 40...but since they don't bother to teach much more than some of the social graces...clean your fingernails, brush your teeth, and salute the flag, it doesn't much matter. Both kids know who Don Miguel Hidalgo is, but not George Washington; can sing at least three songs about the Mexican flag and not one about the American. It is like Bob Tilling; he doesn't know any of the fairy stories American's tell their kids, since he grew up in China. When Neil starts really reading, we are going to have to get some historical stuff for him.

(2014 comment: what I remember about the original school is that the "extra" kids didn't even have seats or desks. Some were standing at the teacher's desk writing, others writing on the window sills. The biggest reason for making a change, however, was that the kids were just learning to write, on the wide line-spaced paper, making pages of slanting lines, pages of circles. Remember how we oldsters all used to learn to write? Neil had already learned his letter, could write simple words. He would finish his page full, then have nothing to do while the first-time pencil holders struggled. Too much free time would, I thought, lead to nothing but trouble.)

As for me, I seem to be well recovered, and lead pretty much the life I had led before. And sleep 10 hours a night. I read somewhere that those who sleep over 8 hours a night are trying to escape. So much for psychoanalysis...they didn't consider that perhaps one might be tired.

A box with candy, cheese and seeds came, but nothing else so far. I don't think Mac will be here by the 27th, so will celebrate mid-week. Happy birthday, Pa, very late. Patsy sent the birthday card to me that we have been sending back and forth for maybe 7 years. Soon we're going to have to replace it. Hope she gets some work soon. Love Mary

17 October 1971

Dear Frances:

I feel very harried and disorganized. The past two weeks were incredible, even for us.

Our first charter of the season came upon us...we got the letter announcing it only 10 days before it was to begin, which didn't help, but wasn't impossible, except for details like whomever took the seat covers to the laundry last July had them washed not dry-cleaned and when we went to put them on two days before the charter, they were 5 inches too short, and the people were on board ready to leave when the new covers were delivered to the boat. Lucky for us the people were very nice people, the kind who can take this sort of thing in their stride (have been to Mexico before). That was Ring One of the circus.

*Ring Two. The GO DEVIL, the boat Mac salvaged last year, was finally ready to go and had to get off on the 10th and that took 3 – 4 days of concentrated effort, getting all the details finished.*

*Ring Three. The man who is to operate the boats we are building for Hotel Finisterra showed up, and as he was short of money, he stayed with us, sleeping amongst the laundry, sewing machine, and typewriter, allowing himself less than a week to see that the boats were finished and delivered ready to use; the truck with the parts was late, there was no one to handle the paperwork, there were not enough crewmen, etc., so guess who had to do it. Boy, are we going to charge them for it! It really wasn't Jim's fault, a lot of it, just the late arrival; but he should have foreseen some of the difficulties and been better prepared.*

*Ring Four. All the big muckymucks of El Rincon, the new big hotel – marina development Mac has been "advising" for the last two months showed up. Meetings, etc. Wed. night they said about straight out that they were going to go ahead, have us produce boats (more or less buy us out), have Mac manage the marina, etc. But by Thursday night they were back shilly-shallying around and saying more or less the same things they were two months ago; that is, they don't know really what the hell they are going to do. Mac is really feeling pretty bad about it, naturally. He wrote them saying to write him if they ever make up their minds what they want to do. Jerks.*

*Ring Five. The Gardiners (remember them from Mazatlan?) showed up. They thought they would stay a month but the weather got through to them so they went on to Guadalajara (they stayed in a hotel, not with us) But for a few days we enjoyed their company...what little time we had.*

*Ring Six. We have gotten started going again on the house (beach house) and have been juggling carpenter (to put the wooden beams on the roof and to build all the cabinets, tables, beds, etc.); the abañil (who is laying the tile floor, building a barbecue, outside wash table, and fish-cleaning shelf) and the roofers, who are bringing in the palm fronds, date palm pieces, and making soyate, however it is spelled, which is the natural twisted fiber with which the palm is tied onto the carrizo (bamboo) which is the basis of our roof. It seems I have paid the carrizo brother money which should have gone to the palm brother and paid a third brother money which should have gone to the carrizo brother, to the end that, while I have paid for the total of the cost of the materials, they can't straight among themselves who is owed and who is owing. I am counting on Papa, who is going to do the actual tying of the roof, to get it all straight.*

*Ring Seven. The smallest. We have sold Morningbird. The couple who bought it came down on a little sailboat (26') and decided they needed something bigger. Married three months, she has never sailed before; he is a black retired LA policeman, shot up in the line of duty. Nice couple. We got paid \$4,600.00 cash and took the rest in trade, their boat and a Johnson diving buoy. I have never been aboard the Mican (My Can) and Mac has been aboard once for about 10 minutes. Some way to buy a boat.*

(2015: They decided they needed to hire someone to take them across to Hawaii, teaching them to sail in the process. Peter returned to La Paz for his boat, telling us they made it to Hawaii, and I am very curious about what might have happened to *Morningbird* after that.)

*And in between rings, life goes on. Kids in school, Lupe cleans the house, I type letters. The grand-daughter of the woman who runs the restaurant has been sleeping with us weekends...a compromise. Since the woman comes at 6:30 and goes home at 10:30, Mari hasn't been getting much sleep. (She has to go to the school near us as there isn't room in the school near her house). Her grandmother asked if Mari could stay with us*

every night! But I just couldn't see taking that responsibility. So either we take her home about 8:00 or the Shepherd's take her home about 6:00, when they come to pick up their mail.

Tomorrow I am going to fight for one of Lupe's sisters. She should be in the 5th grade, but was told there was no room in either of the two schools within walking distance. A criminal situation, that the poor can't get to school...and it is against the law, supposedly, to not go to school if you are under 12. So I am going to take them off to the Dept. of Education and find out what can be done. Most of the kids of my neighbor aren't going to school, and I suspect it is for the same reason. It's not hard to believe they turn kids away; there are 50 to 55 kids in every class. But there are better solutions that they are making, I should think.

This morning was the first we have drunk hot coffee for breakfast; weather is improving. Please pass this letter around...I sure am not going to be able to repeat it all.

October 17, 1971 (written on the back of a proposed Ad for "adventures in Baja)

Dear folks:

Did I tell you the box with toys and shirts have (has, I mean) come? It did, but I have been mean and have not given the kids the toys or shirts yet. The yellow pants and the top you gave me were too small; I hope you don't mind, I gave them to friends who have twin 13 year olds...who fit it. The red one I have on now; have lived in it in the past month.

The weather has slackened. We haven't had the air conditioner on for two weeks, tho we often still use the fans in the living room and when we go to bed...tho I have to get up to turn them off and pull up the spread in the middle of the night. And somehow the storms have seemed to pass us by this year. We had one "coronazo," a thunder and lightning storm that dumped about 3" of rain in an hour, and blew gusts up to 50 knots for 30 min...setting loose a couple of boats (not ours) and closing the shop two hours early...no electricity. And everything, even under the roof, wet.

Mac is off again in Calif for another week; another contract, and to tie together the advertising for chartering. I am spending 3 hours in the am and one in the pm here (boat shop), Lupe does most of the cooking, and life is fairly calm. The men have lots of work; a pleasant change after the last 2 months of piddling around.

Our toilet just gave out...another part of it; I think I am going to give up on it entirely and buy a whole new one; this one hasn't really worked since we moved in.

The new kitchen is going to be built in cupboards and a huge two-sink sink catty corner where the old sink is. Drawers galore.

And we're down to one towel rack in the bathroom. The kids were horsing around last night and both grabbed it and tried to hold themselves up. They lit on the back of their heads on the raised tile around the shower. And had matching raised heads...half an inch high. Scared me; put icepacks on them, and today they seem no worse for wear.

Juan came to the shop one day last week, then came to the house for supper. Hadn't much to say; still needs a lot of growing up; says he may get a job at the Los Cocos Hotel.

Kona sounds ghastly.

Neil is going to school...tho it doesn't sound like one. The teacher is good and Neil can read simple Spanish already. The best part is he doesn't have to go back for the awful 3-5 session.

*I never put on any weight, but I am feeling fine. Our day may sound strenuous, but when you consider we sleep 8-10 hours a night and don't have any wild nights on the town, the exercise comes down to about the same over 24 hours.*

*This is a bits and piece-y letter; not much really exciting doing; just the ordinary worries.*

*Esteban just said that we need more bronze (or is it brass you send, Pa?) It is used to make connections on fuel tanks.*

*Time to pay the sueldos. Hasta luego. Love, Mary*

Added to the above letter on Oct 23 and written over a proposed advertising flyer

*We got another confirmed charter for Morningbird. Mac will take Dec. 10-24, I hope to take the 29th to 4th one. Have one for April on the Grand Banks. Great. A bad news ex-Fortuna friends (now in Mich...with 2 year old child after many mis-carriages now she has lung cancer and is not expected to live very long. A good news...Neil can read Spanish now...can read our simple 3 bears book.*

*This got lost in my purse—now it is almost time to pay sueldos again.*

Nov 30

Dear folks:

*I was just thinking that you must be worried, and that it has been about 3 weeks since I wrote. No news is good news, true, but still I should write. We have been working day and night, Sundays and holidays, on this and that. I have been spending more time here in the shop mornings, then after the kids lessons, coming back again; and giving an English lesson to the accountant for an hour 3 days a week, and the boaters are arriving for the season and they take time, etc, etc. Frances came with turkey last Tuesday; we had to cook it in the restaurant next door as our oven is out of commission. Frances has a man in the states tracing it down and hopefully when Mac goes up next month, it will have been found. Rather inconvenient not to have an oven. We had the Ketro's for Thanksgiving and enjoyed ourselves. Frances has been doing most of the cooking; not much of a vacation for her. We went to Puerto Mejia yesterday; calm, warm, a lovely day. The only fly...Mac decided to take Biscuit...who was sick two times on the way out and once on the way back. Had to hose the car out from top to bottom when we got back. At least it didn't stink like people throw-up for some reason, or we might just have left him in the middle of the desert.*

*One night we went for cocktails on an 83' boat...ha. It was like walking into one of those 60' "mobile" homes, only with 3 stories. Washer, drier, water-maker, dishwasher, walk-in freezer, master bedroom fancier and bigger than ours (that's not hard) They think they are going to print a cruising guide in conjunction with Yachting mag (the shore boat has a 2 1/2 foot draft) and just before we left I told the lady it was too bad they were doing it on a boat that size as they couldn't go to some of the best places. Sour grapes, maybe?*

*Have two charters for the week after Xmas...Mac will take one, a Mex. The other. Then one in March and one in April. Hope we can fill things in more solid between now and June. Getting lots of inquiries, but not so many takers. Maybe everyone is feeling poor this year.*

*The pup at the shop had pups, maybe I told you. This is the week they leave us, and we've got to do something about mama. They are cute but mess and trouble.*

*Biscuit we found was sneaking out at night and coming back all beat up. We had to keep him in the house, and now he seems to have recovered from the streak.*

Another boat launching tomorrow; it has been delayed 3 weeks because of shipping and the owner is breathing down our necks. Another boat has been delayed because of a manifold...hard on the nerves.

Neil stepped on a nail at the shop; had to rush him off for a tetanus shot. David has had some kind of eye infection for a couple of weeks. If it isn't better by the time Mac goes to the states, he might take David with him. Odds and ends, but no real news. Love, Mary

PS Rice pot arrived, and two others.

December 18 (no year, but think it must be 1971)

Dear Folks:

I'll begin this now; it is 6:15 and Mac isn't home yet...I'll give him another 15 min and then eat our soup without him. He has been wheeling and dealing lately, getting local money and business org. behind the purchase of a boat to be used for charter...and getting the boats from the US. It is easier to build than organize, I tell you. The letters I have written, the telegrams, etc. are uncountable. What is this we have been hearing about a storm? Was the Kona house washed away?

This year I have been better than usual about getting ready for Christmas. Chrsitmas? We went out last Sunday and picked a branch off an elefante tree...it even smells like an evergreen. The kids and I made salt dough cookies and painted them, and popcorn strings, and colored paper chains. We bought a string of lights and a box of tinsel and the tree is as gorgeous as anything in La Paz. As Neil says "it's a perfect beauty".

Questions: 1. Juan c/o Wolford, 8 Arbor Circle, Novato. He will love hearing from you.

2. Hildebrand's are in Europe, last I heard was Morocco. If you write, use Calif. address and it will eventually be forwarded. I suggest you wait. 3. Nataros' are here; kids are in school and being tutored. The friendship has cooled considerably, I am not too sure why..... continued 19th, other typewriter... except that I think perhaps Frank got tired of trying to get Mac to play his games, and can only play by his rules. The kids, theirs, go to public school mornings and are tutored all afternoon, plus Kathy practices piano for 2 hours every day; all in all they do not have too much time for entertainment. Be that as it may, I do not have an address... perhaps you have their PO number, or I will deliver a card if you send it here.

3. As for the sweaters, underarm to bottom of 11 is ok, shoulder tip to shoulder tip about 12, and sleeve length about 12 from shoulder tip to wrist. Weather is chilly...use jackets until 10 or so and in the late afternoons. Not complaining, it is great to be wearing slacks and long sleeves and something other than shifts. We all have colds...all of La Paz has them, and the kids have missed a day or two of school because of them. Today is the last day, and a Posada at school, so they are all dressed up and looking very handsome. I'll try to remember to take a picture of them for you when they come back from school.

(rereading your letter: Morrison is Peggy, and children are Mary and Charlie. There is no mr. She is teaching in a public school, one class a day, and finds it fun but wild, as discipline is so unheard of. I gather the usual procedure is to try to out-yell each other; but she continues to talk softly, which confounds them...at least for the time being.

What shop is Connie working at?

Your comments on Nadi came at the same time as an article in a recent Atlantic on the place...

All the kinders had a huge Christmas party earlier this week. It was a mess, and I swear, every time I get caught up in these things, never again. David was a Roman in a

*little fashion show (because he is the only boy as tall as the little girl who was the Roman girl) at a money-raising tea for our school. So for entertainment (for 500 4-5 year olds?) at this party they did the show again.*

*The thing was for 10 o'clock. Well, el candidate for PRI, the party here, has been visiting...the whole town is, has been, in an uproar...and he picked this morning to visit the kinder, our kinder (however, we had gone directly to the place of the party and missed him) so all the kids at school and the teachers couldn't leave until his visit was finished, which was 11. Then there was no transportation, but by the time they asked me, and I drove across town to the school, they had found a truck and had loaded them in, like cattle. Back to the party and wait some more. Finally, a puppet show, then the fashion show, and then the piñata. Can you imagine that mess...the hoard of kids pressing around, the swinging broomstick...then they discovered they had forgotten to put anything in the piñata...stop the show, put in two handfuls of peanuts. Then it turned out the clay jug was too hard so one of the teachers had to bust the thing and the circle of kids swarmed onto the pitiful pile of peanuts. Tears, etc. and then into lines and they passed out bags of the usual awful sweets.*

*"Arriba y Adelante" Echevarria is the PRI party's candidate, for Pres. of Mexico, and as you know, will be elected...some 8 months from now. This really ties the hands of all public officials as the ones in office can't do anything and know it will be followed up, nor can the new do anything. The whole kit and caboodle came here for 3 days and everything came to a standstill. They come with vans and 4 wheel drive and now the mob has driven off up the peninsula, destination Mexicali. I wonder how many of the reported 400 will make it. You can't get a car repaired in La Paz as all mechanics have accompanied the train. He is either gutsy or nutsy.*

I flew to Hawaii with the kids for a couple of weeks in July, came back to La Paz, my parents flew with them to San Diego where I met them for the drive to La Paz. My parents then began what turned out to be their last trip, flying to Alaska, so that May 19 was my last letter home.

This was essentially the end of an era, the end of Letters Home. My parents were killed in the Alaska Airlines crash outside of Juneau in September 1971.

January 1972 (hand written by Mac to his mother...this was 4 months after my parents had died)

Dear Mom;

*This Christmas was different from the past years. David decided he wanted a special Christmas tree, aluminum wire and white flocking all over. They were being assembled at the market and he spent many hours across the street watching. David went over with Mary to the bank, drew out his savings and bought his tree.*

*The whole affair caught Neil's attention so he bought his own tree, smaller and green, for he didn't have as much in savings.*

*On Christmas day Marty and I got a charter party off. Before noon the family, including Pat and Connie, drove to Puerto Mejia. I arrived later, after seeing the charter off. Much the same setting as Thanksgiving, including boneless turkey. The Shepherds and the Amendola family, visiting them, made up a large group. The day was perfect and everyone was at the beach swimming and fishing when I arrived. Our (beach) house is ready less the mattresses, which will be done this week. Pat and Connie slept there using air mattresses.*

*Christmas dinner was great, especially at the end when we sang carols, including several songs in Spanish lead by Neil and David.*

*With New Year came clouds and now today rain. Mary and I bedded the kids down at the Shepherd's house and went to La Posada hotel for drinks, expecting to be home by 10:00. We joined a couple who had been on the charter the week before and decided to greet the new year aboard Lupita. So with champagne bottle we sat in the cabin and listened to the music of the nearby night club. At midnight we let go a few blasts on the ship's horn and called it a night.*

*Everyone has been most generous, sending packages and writing. We have neglected this, but hope to send cards during the coming week. It was our intention to send photo albums of our gathering in Colorado. Getting the photos printed and back here in time has been a problem. We hope this can be completed soon.*

*The charter business has taken a real turn. We are importing five new boats instead of two. American Marine, the builders, are financing the venture. Ads will increase and hopefully we can fill the boats they will be operating in April.*

*Boat building is slow now. Several hotels wanting boats will not be able to sign contracts for at least a month. The molds will be sent from Uniflite in March so that production will not start until April. In the meantime I am producing from the molds I already have. Plans for a new factory, or use of the deserted tannery have to wait until contracts are signed. The hotels that have been waiting for the government to grant their importation rights for a total of seven boats have been turned down. They will have to buy from a Mexican builder.*

*I plan a trip to Guaymas the end of the week to see what market may exist on that side.*

*Mary wants you to know that in January there is no difficulty getting rooms except if you wish to stay at Buena Vista; they have been packed all year long. When we know what day you wish to visit this resort we can try for a reservation, others when you arrive.*

*On Christmas morning we opened your gifts. Mary and I are now outfitted and wore the shorts New Years, along with my red pants. Mary used the money for Christmas, purchasing two large Tonka trucks, and decorations. I made stilts for the boys and the Shepherd's daughter. Pat and Connie produced a tether ball which is the center of outside activities for the neighborhood. Neil and David can now hang on the cross bar by their*

knees, and go off to the park with their skates. They still use only one at a time, but it won't take long. They also have boxing gloves and really go at it. We are all set for the coming year, and this is due in large measure to your generosity and sincere interest in what we are attempting.

May your year be full of joy. We look forward to seeing you in mid-January.

January 27, 1972

Dear all:

We have been having almost as many adventures as Alice and Chas recently and I am glad that they are all over.

First a young American couple on a boat were run down by a woman driver as they were on a Sunday bicycle ride. The girl was killed instantly and the man was dragged under the car, losing a lot of skin and getting cut up, but miraculously, nothing more than that. The running around tidying up the legal ends, getting the girl buried, seeing that hospital care was acceptable, and closing up the boat kept several of us busy for a few weeks. Then another woman on a boat was laid up with a bad back; no specific fall or anything to blame, just pain and not being able to walk. Sent an ambulance to the pier and her installed and went thru the whole mess of doctors, nurses, etc for her. The hospital care is pretty shoddy, and unless you have someone watching out for you, you could die in your bed and nobody would do anything for hours. Anyway, she was finally flown out yesterday on a stretcher, and no loss to anyone as both she and her boyfriend are dead losses. He couldn't bring the boat into the harbor without going aground and she was a ding-dong.

And in the middle of this we were robbed, twice in two weeks. The first time I didn't do anything about it because I knew the police couldn't trace money or my clock. But the second time he took my typewriter, and that made me mad, as well as helpless. However, it turned out to be the same little bastard who had robbed me before; he came in in broad daylight and was seen by the old man who waters and rakes the garden, who then identified a mug shot the police had. After 5 days I got the machine back...it couldn't be released until the boy was remanded to the juvenile authorities. He's 12 and a boy I have tried to befriend although I knew he was a thief. A sad case, and tho there is a juvenile hall here and the people in charge are good, there isn't an opportunity for rehabilitation...like teaching a skill or preparing for a job. They do give the kids lessons, but when they are in and out, it isn't very effective. It would be better if they would sentence them to a year, instead of three or four months. All rational thought aside, what I wish they'd do to the kid is tan his bottom and ship him off to the mainland so he can rob someone else. It is habitual for him to rob me now, and as he has an adult who provides him with a master key and is his fence, I haven't got a chance to protect myself when he is let loose again. Most discouraging.

2015: This kid did keep upping the scale of his robbery of us, ending with our Ford van, which he wrecked. The only good that ever came out of the kid was our second dog (a pup he probably stole from someone!).

Nancy, your last Christmas present arrived; since I haven't a bathtub I don't know how to enjoy your cucumber bath salts...not that I think even such drastic measures would do me any good at this stage of the game. We have finished Charlie and are into The Trumpet of the Swan. The kids chant "Augustine Gloop you nincompoop," as they think that is the funniest word they have ever heard; somehow we'd never used the word before and they think it's great.

Mac went off on the ferry boat that is now running between here and Guaymas, to see if he would scare up some boat orders on the other side. With this running, it means that someone in the vicinity of Santa Fe can be here in just a two day drive, assuming it is a one-day drive from Santa Fe to Tucson. Sunday night in Tucson or Nogales and leave early enough to arrive in Guaymas at 3 pm Monday afternoon and get on the ferry a 5 (\$5. dl sit up, \$10 a bed) in the afternoon, and arrive La Paz Tuesday morning, having left the car in Guaymas. How about it? The beach house is now habitable...plumbing, butane stove, beds, even mostly painted...so we have lots of room to stash you.

We are waiting for the arrival of 5 more charter boats some time next month. This will give us 6 Grand Banks to keep running. We are spending lots of money on advertising (Paco's money) to try to get them filled up. Had a lovely picture on the cover of Sea Magazine and will be in Sunset's new "Where to Go Boating" book. Hope it does some good. It is hard to know what advertising will be effective, but that is mostly being handled by other people in the US now, so we don't have to worry about it.

The boat building is at an in-between point now, with nothing happening until March or April. Uniflite of Bellingham, Washington is making molds for glass boats which they will ship down here and we will be building under license to them. The boats would be for two hotels south of us at the Cape, providing they ever get their financing straightened out.

We went to the King Bros circus last Friday night, four families all told. The best act of all was the elefante peeing on the clown, much to his surprise. Oh, well, every occupation has its hazards.

Nancy, have you heard of Ranger Rick? Nature clubs. The kids were made members by my aunt and receive a monthly magazine. It sounds like something that would be good to have in connection with your nature center...sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation. Gives records and books, and where to find other nature centers and so on.

The other half-owners of the beach house have gone up to Laguna San Ignacio this week where they have heard the whales are in force, breeding and borning. Wish we could have gone along and are anxious to hear what they found. This is just south of the famous Scammon's Lagoon and is less visited so supposedly has more activity. Mexico has just declared Scammon's a wildlife refuge; I hope that means that it is not going to be dredged, as the salt company was proposing to do. Love, Mary

February 14, 1972

(on charter company letterhead)

Dear Mrs. Shroyer:

Welcome aboard. (I can't say "Lupita" as I usually do, as we haven't named the new boats. All the rest of Paco's female relatives have rather ugly names.

I have enclosed a menu sheet and will appreciate any suggestions you can make as to your preferences, especially in main meals and beverages. The more you tell me, the better I can stock the boat for you. (Will you be doing the cooking? Or sharing it? How much do you want to do? Will some of the ladies eat big breakfasts, or are they cereal eaters, like you? I can't get your Kellogg's 19 down here, and although we can carry some fresh milk, I don't think we can take enough to last all the trip...tho' maybe 3 quarts would be enough.

I'm too lazy to go through the rest of my spiel to first timers. I just heard via grapevine (ship's radio) that Mac's trip to Guaymas has been a success and we have a contract. Whoopie. Hope it is not false good news, but as Mac has not returned yet, I

think it must be. He would have been back Sat. or Sun. if there was no contract; but I think he must have gone to Mazatlan to buy the resin and glass cloth so that we can get started right away. If the boat is to be sold on the mainland of Mexico, we have to have special permission from Industria y Comercio, because we don't pay duty on imported materials in this state, and they do, unless it is 100% Mexican materials. That's another reason he is buying this stuff in Mazatlan, besides being able to ship it over here on the ferry in a week. Hopefully, Mazatlan isn't too closed down because of fiesta week, so that he can't buy the stuff now. Hope he could find a bed or a boat to stay aboard.

Carnaval has been the usual beer drinking here. The kids and I stayed up to see them Quemar el Mal Humor on Sat. night, at 10:30. The audience was mostly teenagers, walking around eyeing each other, and little kids playing tag, and not too bad. Mal Humor was a figure surrounded by firecrackers that pooped. We were about 25-30 feet away. The last line of crackers didn't go off, so they lowered the figure and lit it; they went off, then the whole thing went off in an explosion that stunned...it was incredible; as far away as we were, we were showered with debris...I don't see why those in front weren't knocked down by the blast, or hurt by flying pieces.

Last night I let the kids go over by themselves (2015: at the time Neil was just 9, David 7.5) after we returned from Puerto Mejia, about 5:30. First indication I had that things were different from the night before (aside from the fact that there were lots of people there already, so early) was when David came home in tears because someone had ripped his mask off. I made masks, just eye masks, for them and a half dozen neighbor kids, and they went back for a few more minutes and David returned again crying because someone had tried to snatch his bag of eggs and had broken some of them. Made the kids come home then and said I would treat them all to cotton candy later.

After dinner I went back with them and two of the smaller neighbors in tow. It took us about 20 minutes to make one turn around the park. It was jammed, and an entirely different crowd, say 20s and 30s and an older bunch of young kids than had been there the night before. They were smashing eggs on heads hard, not really in a spirit of fun, and there was more sand in the eggs than confetti; and when the bags of eggs had been crushed, they were using the bags to bean people with. I bought the kids their cotton candy and we were all glad to get home. I heard that later there were all kinds of fights; we had a drunk fallen in front of our house. I kept the cars closed in the yard. It really wasn't bad, nothing destructive was done, it was just the result of too much beer and nothing to do or see. No queen, no parade, no entertainment. Oh, well, it doesn't happen many times a year. There are still 2 nights to go, but Sunday is the big night, so it is all downhill from here on, and we'll pick up all the beer cans that decorate our front sidewalk all at once and be done with it.

Am anxious for Mac to return with all the news.

Latest news on the Grand Banks is that the boats arrive in Ensenada on the 26th and that we are responsible for meeting them. Probably Paco will go up to do the paperwork a day before and Mac will go up about the same time to do purchasing and organizing. Will try to give you some advance notice, but you can assume Mac will be there some of the time between the 26th and the 3rd or 4th. (2015 Frances lived in La Jolla and probably went down for a visit while Mac was there.)

Poor Neil was rather slighted on his birthday; I had neither time, money, or strength to organize a party. Baked a cake and bought a present he has been begging for for a month, and that was it. We thought we were going to have 2 charters going out that weekend, and for different reasons, neither went. That is a story in itself, and taught me a lesson, or reinforced a lesson I already knew: money first. Isn't that always the way.

*See you soon, love Mary*

December 6, 1972

(Part of a letter from Mac's Aunt Louise to his sister Nancy, after Louise visited us.)

*Well, of course I had a wonderful time with Mac and Mary and the boys! Mac and Mary make a wonderful team and I am full of admiration for them both. I had quite a lot of time to myself as Mary was very busy and I was glad of this for I caught up on some writing and did some reading too. Mary took the boys to school a little before eight and brought back Lupe who brought order out of chaos to the house and washed up all the dishes. There was a nice hippie staying in the house – a friend of friends of Mac and Mary. He did odd jobs around. We spent three nights in the beach house which Mac and Mary have built with another couple. A stiff north wind pretty nearly blew us off the bluff and made the Gulf look like the Pacific Ocean, but we had a fine time. I feel so satisfied to have seen Mac's ship yard and to get a vague idea of how you build a fiber glass boat. They are of course awfully busy with handling the 6 charter boats. My last evening we took drinks out onto one of the charter boats which had just come in, and Mac took me all around the Harbor. The little boys are fine – bi-lingual, of course. It is lucky that the super-market is just across the street from the house, as this makes things easy for Mary who can send the boys over to get anything that has been forgotten. I only hope Mary did not have me too much on her mind when she was so busy.*

May 2022: Notes and Explanations: Summers were (are) long and hot in La Paz. Mac made a number of business trips connected with Embarcaciones Baja Californianas every year. For relief, I looked for ways to spend at least a month away from La Paz during the summer. Sometimes we parked the kids with one or another of Mac's sisters (he had three), sometimes in a summer school program, once in a while with other friends. Usually, shortly after school closed in early June, I would pack the kids into whatever pickup with a camper shell we owned and drive north, spending two nights on the way, usually on the beach at Bahia Concepcion (hot and buggy, the water temperature almost the same as the air) and near Cataviña, cool and with a number of places to pull off the highway and camp. Some years we had a cousin exchange and one or another cousin spent time with us in early summer.

July 2, 1973

The following letter was written by Mac's sister Nancy while Neil was visiting Long Island, NY during the summer. The next summer, David spent a month on Long Island. Bill is Nancy's husband, Neil's cousins are Mac and Billy.

*Dear Mary and Mac:*

*Neil has been out mowing the lawn with Bill. It didn't take us long to begin exploiting cheap Mexican labor.*

*Sometimes it took both Bill and Neil to push the machine up the incline. One or the other of them must have gotten tired because now Mac and Neil are raking furiously. I went out and said, "Heh, that's great." Mac said, "Well, we need it." I asked them what they were going to do with it. Mac said "I don't know. Hey, Neil, what're we going to do with it?" Neil said, "I don't know. Maybe we should roll in it."*

*Bill and I are just crazy about Neil. Can't imagine how he could fit into this place so quickly. But he is very independent. When he got off the plane and came through the gate he said "hello" in passing and kept right on walking as fast as he could through the crowd.*

*I thought we were going to lose him before we ever got him. Apparently he had his baggage on his mind and we could hardly keep up. All the way home in the car he and Mac talked and wrestled and giggled. They have been like peas in a pod ever since.*

*Neil was disappointed that our highways were so small and overpass bridges so old. I told him that San Diego was a lot newer than New York. He said, "If it's so old, why do they call New York new?"*

*We notice that Neil likes bugs and animals and things like that which is a relief because we signed him up for an insect class with Mrs. Lerner, the teacher Matt Proctor had and liked so much. Mac will be in the same class. We also notice that Neil is concerned about creatures' welfare. He caught a toad outside and brought it into a large, empty aquarium in the dining room. He was worried that the toad would hop against the glass and hurt himself. He stuck around to see and he was right, so we noticed that he took the toad out and let it go.*

*Right now the two boys have run outside to catch fireflies. They have a glass jar with them. Neil said, "I'm going to make a glowing bottle."*

*Today when we were talking about insects Neil said "Insects are all guts. They don't got no bones. Neither do they got teeth. They got tweezers that stick out in front. Ever see them? They don't chew their food. They take their tweezers and crunch it up and suck it in."*

*Bill says that Neil is very curious and asks a lot of very intelligent questions. A kid like that, says Bill, is going to wind up knowing an awful lot.*

*The sling shots you sent with Neil are great. The boys spent a long time this morning setting up and hitting aluminum cans that accumulate around here til we get enough energy to take them to the recycle place. Love, Nan*

## Hurricane Lisa, 1976

Toward the end of hurricane season in late September 1976, everyone in La Paz knew hurricane Lisa lurked somewhere to the south of us. Oppressive humidity, heavy cloud cover, dropping barometric pressure. Without satellite views we couldn't tell the location of the eye, the velocity of the winds, or their direction. Early on the morning of September 30 government radio announcements suggested everyone stockpile water, flashlights, food. Schools closed mid-morning, stores closed after lunch. No wind yet, but it had rained hard all morning and the water ran ankle-deep down the unpaved streets to the bay.

Mac, in Chicago at a boat show left me responsible for buttoning up the boat building works, a not too difficult job. Employees made sure no tools or parts lay around loose and lifted the most important document files onto the desks, then went home to take care of their own families.

At this time we also managed a charter fleet. The six Grand Banks trawlers had to be provisioned and anchored in a safer part of the bay. Two crewmen boarded each boat with spare anchors and fuel filters, food and water. They topped off the diesel tanks from jerry cans, tested the radios, and prepared to spend the night aboard. By the time the last crewman had dinghied to his boat, waves were breaking over the sandbar which protects La Paz bay and were washing over the Malecon, the waterfront drive, and I drove to our house on the waterfront. Two blocks from our house on the beach, the pickup stalled out from water splashing up under the hood and had to be abandoned.

While I was at the shop and provisioning the crews, Neil, twelve and a half, and David, eleven, prepared at home. In their ground floor bedrooms they cleared everything off the floor and onto their beds. Bikes, favorite toys, and tools they carried to the second floor. Buckets and large pans of drinking and wash water lined the kitchen counter, candles and kerosene lamps were ready on the dining room table.

We ate an early supper in the dusk, played Go Fish, Rummy, War, and watched the trees thrash until it was dark. The gradually increasing wind blew the rain straight at the plate glass windows and French doors of the living-dining room. For a while I tried to keep up with the flood coming in under the doors, but eventually gave up the mop; we and the disconsolate dogs splashed around barefoot in an inch or two of water. Sometime after dark, the lights went out. Neil and David went to sleep in our bed and the dogs, looking guilty, each picked an armchair to curl up on. Like a fool I sat on the couch in a trance, watching the windows flex under the pressure of the mounting wind. Later I heard stories of shards of glass driven six inches into wooden posts.

Some time in the night the eye of the storm passed over La Paz, then the wind blew, but not so fiercely, from the other direction. By dawn it was calm. I let the dogs out and looked out over the balcony. The bay was muddy brown (it stayed that way for weeks). Downstairs the mud-line was a foot up the walls, and six inches of mud covered the floor and yard. We had no running water, no electricity, no telephone.

Our Volkswagen parked in the driveway wouldn't start, but it didn't matter, as the dirt road to the highway was still running a river, so we headed toward town along the beach, wading each river-street as we came to it. Trash from leaves to whole trees washed down from the arroyos. Clothing and toys and bits and pieces of who-knows-what littered the beach and floated in the bay, and it did not occur to me what this meant. Rubbish draped a meter high around the trunks of trees and electric poles. The next street toward town ran even deeper; with water up to our knees we clung together to cross, struggling not to lose

our balance, or our shoes. From that point I could count the six Grand Banks back on their moorings, so knew they were fine and the crews gone home.

The boys and I walked the three blocks inland to the boat works which had lost a few pieces of tin roofing. The boats under construction were intact, the office dry. Employees showed up and filled barrels with rainwater collected in the hulls to take hope for clean-up, and I did the same. Altogether what I had seen so far didn't seem so bad. Only later in the day did I begin to hear just how seriously the hurricane had damaged La Paz. Winds had blown up to at least 150 miles per hour. It had blown down signs, ripped trees out by the roots as the ground softened, and carried off roofs. But the wind was not the primary cause of grief to the community.

Several years before, La Paz had received money from the Federal government for a flood control project, including a series of earthen rock-faced dams linking the Diamond Head-like hills behind town. An opening left at the west end led to a drainage canal stretching from the hills to the back end of La Paz Bay. This was meant to divert the water that ran through the middle of town and funnel it through an undeveloped area to the west of town.

The plan went awry for three reasons. First, the dam was never completely faced with rock, and much of what rock had been put in place was carted away by people for their own use. Second, the area behind the dam did not drain well enough in the right direction. Over that rainy summer I watched the pond behind the dam grow to a small lake several acres in extent. No one thought to clear the accumulating debris, brought down by earlier rainstorms, from the drainage-channel end of the dam. Third, and worst, after five or six hurricane-less summers, squatters began to build in the drainage canal below the dams, building their tarpaper shacks on the flats of the canal. No one stopped them.

There will never be agreement on what happened at the dam, whether it was dynamited by the Army on purpose, as the depth of the water began to reach the top of the dam; or whether the water began to flow over the top at the drainage end. Whichever it was, about 10:00 p.m. during the worst of the storm, the dam was breached with a noise described variously as an explosion, or train rushing through. A block-wide, ten-foot high wall of water raced down the drainage canal, the excess flowing down the cross streets. The inland end of each street became six foot deep arroyos as the force of the water ate away at the sandy soil, the dirt and sand lost there was deposited at the bay end of the streets. A car parked on one of these streets slowly sank, you know, the way your feet do if you stand on the beach in the waves, only to be recovered with sand as the speed of the water diminished.

People stepped out of their houses in the morning to look for their cars, only finding them when they noticed the radio antenna sticking above the sand. Others, trying to escape their homes were swept away and buried in their vehicles. Slowly, survivors like me who had passed the night safely, learned that an area of town approximately three blocks wide and twenty blocks long had disappeared. Vanished, washed into the bay, buried. In the upper end of the floodplain the jagged roofless walls of a grammar school stood alone in a broad white, sandy arroyo. A once heavily populated area was now a treeless desert. One row of a six-row subdivision stood stark, surrounded by sand. While the official death toll was 620, that number only reflects the identified and legally buried bodies. Other estimates are as high as 6000, many buried in mass graves dug by bulldozers.

After the storm a few phones still functioned, strangely enough, but the ham radio operators were responsible for most of the communication with the rest of the world. I found a way to send a message to Mac's mother in California who was able to locate Mac

at the boat show. He arrived in La Paz two days later, furious that the airlines let tourists on the plane to La Paz before residents.

Mac and the boys dug out the pick-up I had abandoned on the road, luckily only buried to the floorboards. As the mud on the ground floor of the house dried, it cracked into mud pancakes which they shoveled into wheelbarrows and dumped into the empty lot next door. They brought water in barrels to wash down the walls and floors. Over time the thicker mud in the yard dried also, into thicker cakes, which could be lifted off the gravel base.

While some entire families left town, others sent their children to live with relatives in other parts of Mexico. Everyone who stayed found ways to help, whether it was digging graves or ferrying supplies to the worst affected areas. I donated my time at the Red Cross office, sorting useful medicines from the useless. I learned a lesson in the futility and wastefulness of unorganized generosity. Medical supplies arrived looking as if a volunteer had walked down a street with a box and all the neighbors had scraped everything from the backs of their medicine shelves into it. What was most needed were antibiotics, drops for eye infections, sterile dressings. I threw out or set aside a boxful of junk for every handful passed on to the doctors and nurses.

Space on airlifted supplies was wasted on useless items. A hill of shoes dumped helter-skelter on an empty lot—high heeled pumps in any color you wanted, if you didn't care they were a matched pair. Bags of dried food for a population without a pot to soak them in or a fire to cook them over. We needed drinking water, ready-to-eat food, blankets, tents, appropriate medical supplies. Much of this was supplied by the Mexican Army and Navy, equipped to serve in times of disaster.

Since that year, La Paz has not been tested so severely again. With excellent forecasting and attention to the drainage system, we should not be.

## Grand Banks, Lupita

The biggest news story out of the few years we ran a charter fleet in La Paz was the loss of *Lupita* one of the four 32' Grand Banks in the fleet.

Skipper of *Lupita* was Martin Sandoval, married with a young child, living with and supporting his mother. Young, personable, he was slated to go far in the world. Paired with him was a younger crewman-in-training. The guests aboard for this trip were two well-known couples from the San Francisco Bay area with boating experience who chartered the boat for two weeks. One couple had connections with the chemical company taking phosphate out of Isla San Marcos, just south of Santa Rosalia. They talked of visiting there, and asked if we had a booking backed up to theirs, in case they should like to stay out for a few extra days. Since the week following was open, we told them they could stay out longer if they wished. The charter was in mid-November, the second best month to boat here; warm water for swimming, cool nights for sleeping, but also a time when provisions must be made for early seasonal north winds.

The day the boat was scheduled to return passed, but we were not concerned. Another day passed. The third day I received a telephone call from a relative of the charter party, asking if we had heard from them, and with that question, my stomach clenched. If someone was worried, it meant they had a schedule, and sure enough, the older of the men had missed an important meeting.

I did keep the log I kept from that minute on, but perhaps it was among the papers lost later during Hurricane Lisa. I remember in general terms what happened. We called the Mexican Navy, then the U. S. Coast Guard, which received permission from the Mexican government to enter Mexican airspace for a search using planes from their base in San Francisco. Once the Coast Guard had received permission to land at the La Paz airport for refueling, the number of miles they could cover in one day increased.

We began land inquiries with the Port Captains in Santa Rosalia and Loreto, trying to trace the boat's movements, and we made radio announcements on the channel listened to by rural ranchers and fishermen, asking for information. At that time the only boat to shore communication was line-of-sight on VHF radios.

We received our first concrete news from Puerto Escondido, from the naval personnel stationed on the dock at the entrance to the inner bay, then from some private yachtsmen anchored in the inner harbor. We also later heard from the fishermen in the village at Agua Verde, more or less 28 miles south of Bahia Escondido. The story we pieced together was this: about five days after leaving La Paz the boat anchored in Agua Verde and spent the night. The next morning the boat left early and was seen pounding north into strong north winds and heavy seas. That evening, near sunset, they anchored in the inner harbor at Puerto Escondido. Early the next morning, in spite of continuing strong north winds, and the charter party's stated intentions of visiting Isla San Marcos, and in spite of the time still remaining to their charter, they headed south out of Puerto Escondido. The navy guard noticed the distinctive stern of *Lupita* with the dinghy tied athwartship on the transom platform. We will never know why they changed their plans.

We were impressed by the methodical way in which the U.S. Coast Guard conducted their search. They said the area was very easy to check compared to the U.S. shoreline; because the beaches were so clean they rarely had to back-track with the helicopter to check out the beaches: no wood, no life jackets, nothing worth a second glance.

Finally, after several days of intensive air search, the Coast Guard observers spotted some wreckage floating to the west of Isla Monserrat, an island south of Puerto

Escondido and north of Agua Verde. The Mexican Navy destroyer which went to the scene identified it as the cabin structure of Lupita. Later the same day the Coast Guard spotted the hull beached on the southern bight of Isla Monserrat. It had burned to the waterline.

Bits and pieces of evidence, of clues, followed, but nothing that led to a solution, to a definitive answer. Part of the reason is that people are reluctant to "get involved". For instance: How did a San Francisco Yacht Club Blazer turn up washed and pressed in a cave south of Loreto? Why did the dinghy from Lupita turn up on the rocks just north of Las Cruces, well south of La Paz? Easy answers, I would say: fishermen picked up and took home the clothes; a fishing boat cut the dinghy, which did not burn, off the floating, burned hull. There was an occupied fish-camp that week on the northern beach of Isla Monserrat; the fishermen saw nothing, heard nothing, said nothing.

One of the hardest parts of the affair was dealing with the rumors. The distraught wife and two mothers of the crewmen kept coming to us with stories "someone" had told them. That the crew had been picked up by a shrimper and were safe in Guaymas, working to get the money to come home. That Martin had been seen on the beach near Los Barriles, south of La Paz, leading a horse and looking mentally deranged. That an American the size and description of the younger man had been seen hitch-hiking on the road to Loreto. These rumors were cruel, and time consuming, as every story had to be investigated as best as it could.

And of course, in the U.S. suspicion fell on the two Mexican crewmen, with suggestions of involvement, even that long ago, with drug running. The accident even was included in the Congressional Record. To us, knowing the crew as well as we did, and the charter party not at all, it was easier to assign blame there. Mac and I and the family of the two young crew felt there had to have been something unknown going on between the Americans. We were told that the younger man was involved in a lawsuit resulting from an alcohol related boating accident on Lake Tahoe where someone was killed. A relative of that man who visited the hull, took a bag of debris home for forensic study, looking for evidence of firearms. A lot of money was at stake in the estate of the older couple. What seemed strange to us was that only one relative, a sister of the younger woman, got in touch with us in any way, in person, or by phone. We heard a rumor that the son of the older couple flew over the area in a private plane, but that was all.

While we can all speculate, in the end, it may have been something as prosaic as a propane explosion, which would account for the cabin structure found floating unburned.

As unfinished as this sounds, that is the end.

## San Lorenzo Blows Up

One morning in July, 1974, about coffee time, the residents of La Paz thought they felt an earthquake, but that wasn't it. It was the explosion of San Lorenzo.

San Lorenzo, a coastal freighter which supplied La Paz with propane in 45 kilo tanks, had arrived the night before from Guaymas with her hold full of propane tanks. She tied up to the municipal pier for unloading the next morning. Although no one can know for sure, speculation is that when the cook turned on the generator to make coffee, the propane from a leaking tank accumulated in the bilge exploded. Six blocks worth of windows on the waterfront shattered onto the Malecon. Flames burst from the hull, followed by intermittent explosions as individual tanks exploded. Slowly San Lorenzo tilted and sank until the hull sat on the sand as flames continued to spurt out the windows topside.

Although the surface of the water was aflame, crew members who could swim jumped in hoping to be picked up by sport fishing boats which had been nearby preparing to receive their clients. One or two heroic skippers approached the burning hull through the flames, in spite of the risk of further explosions, to pick non-swimming crew off the deck. The end of the pier itself was ablaze, preventing fire trucks from approaching close enough to douse the flames, even supposing a few hundred gallons of water would have an effect at all.

All morning unexploded propane tanks floated serenely on the tide to be scavenged by anyone who could grab one. By the end of the day the fire had burned itself out and glass had been replaced in the windows on the buildings nearby. Three men had died. The town was left with the logistics problem of disposing of the hull, making the pier, vital to La Paz commerce, accessible to other freighters; and also figuring out how to keep La Paz supplied with propane.

We had our own bad luck that same day. A visiting teenaged daughter of a friend, driving our Volkswagen Safari, went through one of La Paz's many unmarked stop streets and was struck by a pick-up driven by another teenager driving too fast. The Safari was propelled into a stop-sign and telephone pole. Janet was shaken and shaky and the neighbors offered her a tot of rum to calm her nerves. She was smart enough to refuse. The Safari, which I loved dearly, was bent and bruised, and the traffic department made us pay for the damaged stop sign.

Several months passed before enough repairs could be made to the hull to float San Lorenzo; and those repairs were only enough to keep it afloat briefly. Those who made such decisions felt it was too risky to tow it out the long, narrow, and shallow channel from town to open Bay waters. Instead, she was towed into the inner bay and beached on the bar where her funnel can still be seen today.

### Martin (Marty) Goldsmith

Friends we made through the charter business were the best long-term result of it.

I met Marty in Bahia Agua Verde. A good skipper always sets his anchor before dark. But, delayed by good fishing, it was full dark by the time I tiptoed *Morningbird* around the reef and into the north anchorage. I could see the lights of several anchored boats spread along the curve of the north beach and picked a spot between two where the gap was widest. One of the passengers stood on the bow, ready to drop the anchor. Since *Morningbird* had a draft of only three feet, I was accustomed to anchoring shoreside of everyone else in any anchorage. As we came parallel to and drifted by a dimly lit boat a quiet voice said: "I think you should stop now, you're in pretty close." Confidently I responded, "I only draw three feet." "My stern anchor is on the beach" the voice came back. Whoops. We dropped the anchor and backed off to set a stern anchor ourselves.

Early next morning I spotted my neighbor on his deck with a cup of coffee and rowed over to thank him for looking out for me. A wiry man of about my own age, who worked in Pasadena at the Jet Propulsion Lab, he camped and fished from his 24' Skipjack for relaxation. He asked a lot of questions about what we were doing, and before he left the anchorage gave me his address and telephone number, "just in case you need a stateside connection for the charter business."

Within a few months after that Yates y Servicios Marinos, S.A. de C.V. the mostly Grand Banks charter fleet was in full operation. Mail service in and out of La Paz was slow and telephone service unreliable; we realized we needed a base in California if we were to operate efficiently. We also learned that travel agents were not a substitute for an office with a knowledgeable person on the phone. One of the first agents we tried told a client that, yes, of course he could travel from La Paz to Mazatlan and back in a week, in December.

Mac flew to California to discuss possible arrangements with Marty, and on the second visit, over a handshake, a business relationship was established, as well as a friendship that outlasted the business by decades.

We called Marty our Bookie. Thin, energetic, organized, and knowledgeable about boats and the Sea of Cortez, he was just what we needed. He installed an answering machine at home and made his return calls in the evening. He kept an accurate calendar so that wasted days were kept to a minimum, but allowed enough time for maintenance between trips. He knew the fishing seasons for the fishermen, the best shelling beaches for the beach walkers. And when the charter business closed after four years, we kept in touch through his visits to Baja Sur and our summer visits to the States. The friendship continued to the next generation; our son Neil was the first person to see Marty's oldest son's baby after she was born.

### Meeting Nora White

We had moved from a house in town to a house on the beach only a block or two from our original shack, but situated similarly, back from the beach a short distance, over the same scraggly thorny growth we knew. From the veranda on the second floor one afternoon in late May 1976 I watched two girls pick their way toward the house. Nora and Beth, cousins, had trailered their 18' Alpha Cat to Puerto Escondido. Somewhere along the line they had met Marty Goldsmith, who gave them our name and how to find us. They came in for a chat and probably a meal, then went back to wherever they were staying, with an invitation to return and camp out in our lower story.

The next morning, the phone rang. It was the US Coast Guard. They had received a health-and-welfare call from a concerned parent, looking for two girls who were supposed to have called home the day before. He launched into a description of the girls and the boat which I interrupted: "I know, I know, they are having dinner here tonight. You give the parents my phone number if you want to." Nora and Beth hadn't called home the day they said they would because the friend who was to have brought their trailer to La Paz had not yet appeared; and they didn't want to cause his parents any worry.

Within a short time Nora had become a semi-permanent (later a permanent) resident of La Paz. She became part of the staff of Baja Expeditions, running various trips, but especially, in spite of the disastrous end to the exploratory Sierra de San Francisco trip in 1978, the coordinator-liaison on the mule trips into the Sierras. She still lives in La Paz as an artist and ex-teacher of English at the University although she would prefer to continue doing crazy things.

### Gordon and Blanche

The name on the upper left corner of the black-bordered envelope was Helen Rogers Delfanti. I assumed the announcement inside would tell us that her mother Blanche had died. When we last saw Blanche and Gordon Rogers, aboard their boat in Port McNeil, Vancouver Island, B.C. Blanche was healthy in body, but lost in mind to Alzheimer's disease. We were shocked to read that it was Gordon who had died suddenly of heart failure.

Our friendship with the Rogers went back nearly thirty years. We met them in the late 1960s when they chartered our trimaran, *Morningbird*, for three years in a row, then one of the Grand Banks fleet we managed for another three. Gordon and Blanche, then in their mid-70s, were not newcomers to the Sea of Cortez. They had been exploring the Sea in their own trawler, Skookum Maru, every spring for years, but finally had come to feel the trip from San Francisco was too hard on them. They were delighted to see our ad in Sea Magazine, even though our *Morningbird* was a sailboat.

Mac was their skipper the first year they chartered. Aboard, in addition to Gordon and Blanche was their old friend Bill with his wife. Bill and Alice had been friends in high school. After high school, Alice went to New York for a career as a concert pianist, and Bill, like Gordon, became an engineer. Alice never married; Bill lost his wife of fifty years shortly before returning to Texas for his 50th high school reunion, which Alice also attended. Months later they married, and a few weeks after that they honeymooned in the Sea of Cortez.

The second year the second year they chartered, I went along as "skipper", only because we required it, not because they needed me. They knew the anchorages of the

Sea of Cortez better than we did; they were much more knowledgeable fishermen than we were, and they knew more of the natural history of the area than we did. We benefitted from their years of experience and became friends because of shared interests and ethics.

On board they began their day with exercise on the bunk in their cabin, and after breakfast rowed the dinghy ashore and walked the beach. They always wore long pants and long sleeved shirts, and Blanche wore a hat reminiscent of a beekeepers. Way back then, while the rest of us baked in the sun they were aware of its destructive nature. They ate healthy meals, were moderate in their cocktail consumption, took care of their bodies and above all were healthy of mind. We never heard them argue or say an unkind word to each other, or about anyone else.

When the Grand Banks charter boats were sold, Gordon and Blanche had to give up their spring cruises in the Sea of Cortez. We kept in touch by means of Christmas newsletters, so we knew that they had moved Skookum Maru permanently to Seattle and took her north to the Gulf Islands of Canada and up to Southeastern Alaska for three months every summer.

One year their Christmas letter included an appeal for crew. They could no longer handle the boat by themselves, the letter said. The previous summer they had hired a Sea Scout as crew, a very competent and amiable young man, but the combination of a twenty year old with over-eighty year olds had not been completely successful. Were there any boat knowledgeable, healthy, middle-aged people among their friends who would like to cruise with them any part of the summer next year? We raised our hands, yes, yes, yes. This would be an opportunity for us to explore an area we had long wanted to visit with people we would enjoy being with, and in a boat well-suited to it. Skookum Maru had been built in Japan to an Ed Monk design shortly after World War II, long before such trawlers began coming off assembly lines.

Gordon and Blanche met us at the head of the dock in Port McNeil. Blanche clung to Gordon's arm and we knew immediately that the Blanche we had known was only partly there. She beamed at us, and hugged us warmly, but we could see she didn't really know who we were or why we were there.

Mac stayed aboard with Gordon to help with boat chores while I took the shopping list to the market. The list covered all supplies for two weeks, as we were heading east into the maze of islands and passages across the channel from Vancouver Island.

When I returned Blanche was sitting in the main salon watching Gordon show Mac how to check the oil in the engine and the water in the batteries and where to find the tools and spare parts. Blanche looked up at me, smiled, and very cordially invited me to come in. I put the groceries away and acquainted myself with the galley, which was to be my responsibility, before going to the bow cabin to put away our personal gear. When I returned to the main salon, Blanche greeted me once again as if it were my first appearance.

In his foray into the bilge Mac discovered that, thirty plus years after she had been built, all the equipment put aboard originally was still there. The tools had been Gordon's fathers. The AM radio was still there, although Gordon had added a standard VHF when he could no longer communicate with any of his friends who had all given up the AM sets. The charts we used were his original charts, with a few hand-written changes for lights and buoys, and with a mark for each location in which he had caught a salmon.

Gordon knew where to set the traps for Dungeness crabs, how deep to set the traps for shrimp, where to dig for clams. He knew what day the cinnamon buns would be baked at which hidden cove. He knew when the tide would allow us to make the run between two

islands only 50' apart. He knew how to smoke salmon, and how to can it to take home. In short, once again we would be the beneficiaries of years of experience.

For two weeks we navigated the intricate channels of the islands just east of Vancouver Island. We watched two eagles, locked talon to talon, whirl like out of control pinwheels in a mating dive, and another swimming to shore with its wings, its talons grasping a salmon too heavy for it to lift out of the water. We learned that you don't swim unless you have a wet suit, or go ashore much because of the heavy growth and the presence of bears. And several times a day we renewed our acquaintance with Blanche. When she came to breakfast in the morning she said "how are you, how nice to see you." When we rose from the table after a meal, she said "how nice of you to join us for dinner, and I hope you will see us again soon." While most of what she knew had been erased from her memory, the social graces remained. She was unfailingly cordial, as courteous and thoughtful in her language as she had always been.

But the only face that meant anything at all to her was Gordon's. If he went to the back deck to fish or to tend the smoker, she struggled down the two steps into the aft cabin and stood in the doorway to the cockpit where she could see him. If he went to the head, leaving her in the salon, within a minute she wanted to find him, and it would have taken force to keep her from doing so. Through it all, Gordon's tone or expression never showed a sign of impatience or aggravation. He said only "she took care of me for many years, now it's my turn."

After our departure, other friends joined the Rogers for the return to Seattle. As it turned out, this was their last trip aboard Skookum Maru.

In later years, Mac and I returned to the waters off the eastern side of Vancouver Island to enjoy the Northwest wilderness feel to which Gordon and Blanche first introduced us. At two different times in our lives, and in two different locations, they had increased our knowledge, but most important we had appreciated their attitude of respect for each other and for the places they loved.

## 1978 First Cave Painting Trip to Sierra de San Francisco

November 1, 1978

*Dear assorted family and friends:*

*After a long hot summer we have finally had a return of decent weather, and, for me, anyway, something to write about. I am just back from a nine day trip to the Sierra de San Francisco, a mountain range about halfway up the Peninsula, just north of the town of San Ignacio. In these mountains are cave paintings done by some indigenous group which pre-existed that which was here when Cortez arrived. The Jesuits in the 1600s saw a few of the paintings, a French geologist with the mining interests in Santa Rosalia saw a few in the late 1800s, and in 1963 or 64 Earl Stanley Gardner zipped in my helicopter, the fink, to see another few. In the 1970s Harry Crosby of San Diego ran into some by chance while researching his book on the Camino Real, the Catholic padres' road that ran from Cabo San Lucas to upper California. Since his first visit he has visited over 200 cave sites, some with paintings, some without. All in all perhaps two or three hundred outsiders have seen these over the years. Ever since we got wind of them I have wanted to go, and we finally got organized.*

*We were six gringos. My friend Nora and her cousin Beth (whose Alpha Cat is stored in front of our house, but that is another story) and Bruce Berger (a writer and adventurer in Baja) and Bruce Simballa (who works for Baja Expeditions) came south from the USA. Driving north with me from La Paz was a young (19) friend who lives on a sailboat. Our guides were Tacho Arce, 67, and two 20ish brothers, Chuy and Mayo, all three born and bred in the Sierras. In addition to our riding animals, some burros, some mules, we had five pack-carrying burros.*

*Day one we met in San Ignacio and the next morning we made a three hour drive in pickups over a rutted dirt road to Rancho Santa Marta at the base of the Sierra. We camped in the arroyo for the night where Beth read the first chapter of Alice Thru the Looking Glass by the light of the campfire. By 10:00 the next morning the animals were loaded; we had seen immediately that we had way more food than the animals could carry, and did some hasty eliminating, with the result that we had some pretty funny meals. In addition to our supplies we had dried salted goat meat, goat cheese, and ranch-made tortillas, which are heftier than store-bought.*

*The ride up the mountain was the worst of the trip, whether because we were new at it, or because the trail was honestly the worst, I don't know. I just know that we had to walk (well, the animals had to walk) straight up most of the trail, and passing a dead burro which had slipped and fallen a hundred feet the week before didn't help. We stepped aside at a wide spot in the trail to let two different pack trains heading out of the mountains pass us.*

*By late afternoon we made our camp above an arroyo to visit our first cave. While the paintings to me were not very exciting, the setting was something else. The terrain is volcanic. The mountains are really mesas which have been eroded over the centuries, like a giant jelly mold. Softer and harder layers of rock alternate, cliffs and slides, and the caves are erosions in the side of the cliff, rather than deep cave-ish caves. The ledges in front of the caves are not very wide, anywhere from 15 to 30 feet. At some of the sites you feel you would like to back off into space to get a better view of the paintings. The view from the cave is sometimes just pretty, at others spectacular, with vistas over the receding ranges of mesas and arroyos.*

*The paintings are fairly simple, variations on a few themes, with some notable exceptions. Most are representative: men and women, deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, rabbits, fish, turtle, whale. A serpent, a checkerboard, astrological seeming shapes are*

exceptions. Many of the drawings are larger than life-sized. Many are high on walls or cave ceilings in places that would defy gravity, even if the painter had a ladder, with the painter hanging out over the cliffside.

The colors used are reddish (volcanic cinder) and black (lava rock) and rarely some white (limestone) or yellowish. The fixative for the colors is harder to judge. What did the painters have that has resisted wear all these centuries? Who, how, when is not known. The one figure that could be interpreted as astronomical is similar to North-American Indian drawings purported to be of the birth of the Crab Nebula in 1074. The where or location of the drawings is a little easier to guess at; the most highly decorated arroyos are those with the best water and those that provide the best highway from the sea to the upland areas where seasonal food is available.

What happened to the culture able to create such works is not known; the indigenous groups living here when the Spanish arrived did not have the capacity to produce such works.

Early the next morning, when we were barely out of bed, a gang of kids came trooping through, school bags in hand. We found the ranch the kids came from an hour's mule ride away. We took pictures of the rancher and his hogs, of which he was very proud. The guide also gave him the shoe-making tacks he had paid for a month earlier when the last tour-group had been by.

The next ranch was not so picturesque. All life, human, and animal, both domesticated and wild, shared the same pond of water behind an earthen dam. The husband and wife were first cousins, not rare in isolated areas anywhere, with the unfortunate result in their children of borderline intelligence, nervous tics, eye disorders. We were glad to move on after trading tacks for goat cheese.

Late October is the end of the rainy season. On the high mesa sections of the trail you could look out over what seemed to be green pastures, but on closer inspection the grassy meadows turn into leafy plants just slightly taller than the tumbled lava boulders they disguise. This is not an area to fall from your mule. The day ended in a ride downhill almost as tough as the ride up the previous day; straight down, zig-zagging across the face of tumbled lava slopes, through defiles in the less disintegrated lava flows, across 45 degree or more angled slip-rock where side canyons come into the main arroyo, and into the paradise of Rancho Santa Teresa.

Figs, guavas, pomegranates, grapes, citrus of all kinds; grass and all the flowering tropical plants. We stopped for a visit, for more dried goat meat, more cheese, to trade more shoe tacks. The grandfather and grandmother had started the ranch in 1943, and several sons still lived and worked there, with their children as well as several unmarried daughters. The original pair built up the soil behind terraced and hand-built rock walls along the edge of the arroyo, above flood level, by digging out pockets of soil on the higher mesas, filling hide panniers on their burros, and carrying the soil home.

We moved on down the arroyo and halfway up the next hillside for the night. This time it was in a cave with a floor of thorns and dust and burro dung. In the dark before dawn, looking to take a pee in private, I caught my toe in the dish box and sent the cups, tableware, and Dutch ovens clattering down the hillside. So much for privacy.

Although we all were then awake, we made a late start, as the mules and burros, even hobbled, had wandered almost back to Santa Teresa and greener pastures. Mayo rode back to find them, buy more tortillas, and incidentally, to do some courting of one of the unmarried daughters. Meanwhile, Tacho and Chuy took us downhill to the cave called locally, Las Flechas—The Arrows—as many of the figures, both animal and human, are pierced with arrows or spears. From there we continued to the bottom of the arroyo and

part of the way up the other side and into a long side canyon with a spectacular view and another cave; then down again and up the other side of the main canyon to Cueva Pintada, the Painted Cave, "discovered" by ESG and named by himself for himself, Gardener Cave. This is the most painted cave in the Sierra, and obviously used by generations of painters, with walls and ceiling so over-painted as to make the figures hard to distinguish. For a description of the paintings, you will have to look at Crosby's book.

Back to the bottom of the arroyo again, and water. While the men walked back to camp, Nora, Beth, and I stripped, washed off the grit and campfire smoke of the past three days, and, without enthusiasm, again put on our well-seasoned pants and socks and boots. Back at camp we found that the courting young man had not yet returned. Some of the group went with Chuy to raid a beehive. By the time they returned, smokier and with honey and bee-sting swollen hands, Mayo, the animals, and the tortillas had returned as well. Although it was late, we packed and saddled up and rode down to the arroyo and the best camp of all.

This campsite had two advantages, bedrock and running water. The pressed ash stream bed has been scoured by centuries of flash floods and the water runs down the middle year-round. And frogs, tiny green ones no more than an inch long but with voices loud enough to drown out the mosquitoes. Every time I woke in the night and stuck my head out of the sleeping bag I could hear them, and we had to shake them out of our clothes and shoes in the morning.

Next morning we took off on foot again, downstream and up another side canyon to Cueva La Musica, so named because the figures are barred over with what we could interpret as a musical score. Or maybe the lines represented the scaffolding used by the painters? Back down to the canyon floor again, farther downstream and into another side canyon, up the hill and into Boca San Julio. We had been told there was a swimming hole down canyon and had gone prepared. Where two canyons came together there was a pool maybe 50 feet long and 15 wide, and in places 8 feet deep. We all shampooed, swam, sunned. We then split up for some quiet time, some to bird watch and write, some to revisit one of the caves, some to snooze. I soaked again in a natural bathtub, letting the water run over me and watch the palms against the blue sky. That night we baked our first Dutch oven cake and to his day there has never been better.

Next morning it took two hours for the guides to track and round up, and pack up the animals. We by now knew there was no such thing as an early start although we all rose at first light. This was to be a long, long riding day, beginning with a rugged pull up out of the canyon, back and forth across the faces of the cliffs, driving the burros, across the upland mesas, a brief stop for a lunch of leftover tortillas, goat cheese, and trail mix, and a swig out of fast-emptying canteens. We paused at Rancho San Pedro, another of the uninspiring upland ranches to buy more cheese and leave more tacks, and finished the day an hour before dark with another long drop down into San Gregorio canyon and another mini-paradise.

We set up camp in an abandoned corral and Nora, Beth and I walked with Tacho a mile up canyon to Rancho San Gregorio to announce our presence to the owners. The buildings were high on the sides of a steep, deep arroyo, the walls going up 30 feet on each side. Terracing and filling had created garden areas around the houses, water was piped from a spring another half-mile up canyon, then down-stream to the huerta, or farm area. In addition to the usual goats and cheese-making and fresh vegetables, this ranch and its people were leather producers and made shoes and saddles, bridles, canteens, and general cowboy gear. Hides were tanned in the old way, in hide tanks from their own animals and bark from local trees.

There were astounding things at this ranch. A huge wood burning stove, 20 foot lengths of plastic pipe, commercially made chairs and tables, all of which came in, somehow, on burros. One man of the second generation is blind, and does much of the leather work. We talked with the family about medicinal plants, children, caves, cheese making. Altogether a marvelous family. The next morning we hiked to two more caves, then returned to the ranch for a tour of the huerta. As a parting gift they gave us a watermelon, our first fresh food, with the exception of onions and limes, in the last 8 days. We loaded the pack animals and left at 2:00 to get a start on the last long day's ride to follow, and camped in a wide flat arroyo full of giant palo blanco trees, but with no surface water.

Goat stew for dinner again, and goat cheese and tortilla crumbs for breakfast. More up and down arroyos, more trail mix for lunch. After lunch the pack animals headed for camp and us to Los Cerritos. Here we found real caves, on two levels, connected by a chimney, but not any interesting paintings. We could only stay briefly, as we had a long climb to reach camp. This site was a wonderful place to spend the last night. It was on a narrow saddle, not 50 yards wide, with abrupt drop-offs on both sides, and a view to the Gulf and Las Virgenes. It was one night off the full moon and when the moon did rise, it was exactly behind a chimney of rock at one end of the saddle.

Our last dinner was true ranch machaca, made by Chuy and Mayo. Dried goat meat is cooked on the grill, and rinsed in water to remove some of the salt. The meat is then put on a flat rock and pounded (machacado) into threads with another rock. It should have been reheated with onions, chile verde, and tomato, but this late in the week all we had were the onions.

The next morning the loaded burros took off early and we hiked around the side of the mountain to a cave to which Tacho had not yet taken Harry Crosby. We left him a note. On the way down the mountain we visited Cueva Palmarita, which is probably the cave seen by the Jesuits and by Diguet, the French geologist. It is one of the caves that is most accessible from Santa Rosalia where the French had a mine.

Now the trip was all but over. Three hours into Santa Marta, bills to pay, toss gear into the truck, and the numbing two and a half hour ride out of the back country to San Ignacio. High on the trip, none of us could face a night in the crumby motel where we had spent the first night of our trip, not after the nights we had spent in the open. For a start, we bought some beer and put on our swimsuits and jumped into San Ignacio Lagoon. At one end of the lagoon the sun sank into the palms, and out of the other end of the lagoon came the moon, with a path of light over the water from it to us. I cannot say we watched it in splendid silence. We whooped and splashed and repeated all the in-jokes a group develops after living closely together. The ducks were scandalized.

The letter should end here, but it doesn't. We went to have a drink at the Presidente Hotel, then all but Nora and Beth ate dinner at a small place on the highway, and to camp under the trees along the road toward home. I wish our story had ended there, and happily. Instead, the two girls in their VW bug missed a turn on leaving town, went off the road and into a palm tree. We were wakened at 11:00 by someone from town and the next 12 hours were a nightmare of trying to get Nora and Beth out of the country by air. San Ignacio has only a small clinic, one doctor barely out of medical school, doing his required two years of social service, and a nurse-assistant. For starters we had to pay to have the town generator turned on, for light. Eventually each girl and her IV was put on a stretcher, one in the back of my pick-up, one in the doctor's van, and driven in the dark three hours north to Guerrero Negro, where there is a dirt strip airport. By sheer luck and access to a radio, Scott pulled a small plane piloted by an American doctor out of the sky; the doctor

*took one look at the girls, aborted his trip to La Paz, took the back seats out of the plane and flew back to San Diego. Beth has a broken collar bone and ruptured spleen; Nora a broken thigh and arm and cracked ribs, but they are both recovering.*

*As for me, I returned to San Ignacio, then to Santa Rosalia to handle the red tape. But no complaints: the Federal Police let the girls leave town within hours after the accident, in the middle of the night, and with no assurance but my word that I would be responsible for fines, forms, hospital bills. In spite of this, I am ready to go back again, any time, at the drop of a boot or a saddlebag. Now that I am clean, my socks washed, and my stomach full of fresh fruit and vegetables, all I need is the excuse of someone else to take back there.*

2022 Note: I did return, four times, with husband, kids, sister, in-laws, and anyone I could talk into it. Beth, Nora, and Bruce did as well, Nora and Bruce as employees of Baja Expeditions, which began offering commercial trips.

## Hitch-Hiker and The Coyotes

The uphill grade from Santa Rosalia to San Ignacio is one of the steepest on the Baja highway. The road zigzags across the face of two cuestas with a sheer drop on the right, a cliff face on the left. Many vehicles pant and puff to get up the incline, but imagine what that climb means to a hiker fresh off the ferry in Santa Rosalia with a 50 pound backpack and the blazing sun beating down on him.

Although Jay peered at me suspiciously (after all, he was from New York City!) through the window when I stopped and offered him a ride, he must have crossed his fingers and decided this stranger was smaller than he was, older by a good deal, and probably unarmed, so he climbed in after heaving his pack into the back of the pickup. After all, if you have been told to watch out for bandidos in Mexico by everyone who has read about any incidence of violence in the country, whether in Ciudad Juarez or Toluca, or Tijuana, you shouldn't take any chances.

Jay, about 25, had crossed the U.S.A. by Greyhound, traversed Chihuahua and Sinaloa by train, and the Sea of Cortez by ferry. He had hardly ever been out of The City and had one goal, to see the *Indria columnaris*, the cirio to locals, the boojum to many gringos. He came these thousands of miles to see a tree.

The cirios grow only in a narrow strip across the Baja California Peninsula, starting a bit north of San Ignacio, my stop to deliver supplies to an expedition heading into the Sierra de San Francisco the next day to see cave paintings. My expeditioners were not expected into town for their supplies until 4:00 p.m. and the next bus that would take Jay into cirio country left at 8:00 p.m. To fill time I decided to search for the *ojo de agua*, the spring that feeds the permanent water of San Ignacio Lagoon. The trail led first out across the desert, then dropped off the mesa to the marshy edge of the lagoon. Orioles chattered in the palms, warblers skittered through the mid-sized bushes, and yellow-throats disappeared behind clumps of razor grass bordering the marshy shallows.

Jay followed closely behind me while I asked the usual mildly nosy questions. Looking back over my shoulder I noticed he had his hands in front of his chest, the forefinger of one hand pinched tightly between the thumb and finger of the other.

What's the matter?

I cut myself.

I didn't understand how he could have cut himself on a flat and completely unobstructed trail, but asked, how badly?

It's bleeding, he said, clutching the finger even tighter.

Let's see it. I was thinking quickly what could be used to bind it, to stop the bleeding, how long it would take to get back to the clinic. He loosened his hold and held his hand out. A thin beading of blood seeped from a razor grass cut about a half-inch long. Hmm. I tried to think of something polite to say. He accepted my assurance that he wasn't going to have a permanent scar from this.

I've never seen blood before.

Never? Never skinned your knee as a kid? Never seen another kid's skinned knee?

No.

The *ojo de agua* was an anticlimax after the drama of injury. It was hidden in weeds, not springing clean and inviting from a rocky cleft as springs do in stories. When Jay

boarded his bus that evening I asked that he come to see me in La Paz on his way south to tell me how he had fared in his search for a cirio. And he did.

The bus driver didn't want to stop at midnight in the middle of the desert, but was finally convinced to leave Jay on the side of the road near the turn off to Bahia de Los Angeles at the southern limit of the cirios. He walked off the highway a few hundred yards into the desert. There was no moon but the stars flickered in myriads, to the wonder of a city boy who had never seen the Milky Way. He stretched out his ground cloth and pad and crawled into his sleeping bag to wait for dawn. A short time later he was awakened by a tug on the foot of his sleeping bag. Alarmed, he grabbed his flashlight and by its beam saw a coyote at his feet looking back at him.

Shoo, shoo, he yelled. Until daylight he sat there, sleeping bag clutched around his shoulders, flashlight getting dim and dimmer, revolving it around him to watch the pairs of eyes, he says, watching him back.

In the morning he checked out the cirios, took some pictures, walked back to the highway and thumbed down the next southbound bus.

## Memories of Bahia Magdalena

For four or five years in the mid-1970s I spent 4 or 5 weeks, every other week during January, February, and March, at Bahia Magdalena, and this is how it all began.

Several years after we moved to La Paz a long-time American resident, Bill Curry, casually mentioned that whales, he didn't know what kind, hung out during the winter months where he had a cabin he used when he was fishing and shooting Black Brant on the northern estuaries of Bahia Magdalena. We invited our friend Marty Goldsmith and family to meet us in Villa Insurgentes in early March to investigate the area. They drove south from Pasadena while we drove north trailering a panga for the drive into San Carlos.

San Carlos was little more than a grubby fish camp where boats could be launched at high tide over a dirty brown beach. No hotels; camping was either out in the desert or on the bay amid the detritus of the fish camp. Neither was a satisfactory campsite for us and five boys between the ages of seven and ten. We attempted to whale watch for one day but, as we learned later, the whales preferred the area near the main entrance to Bahia Magdalena, a long ride in a panga with five restless and energetic kids. We packed everything back into the trucks and drove to Puerto Lopez Mateos where we spent the night in the detritus of their fish camp, but with a glimmer of hope because before sunset we had seen whales cruising past the front of town.

In the morning we abandoned town for the dune island across the bay and the next three days were more than what we had looked forward to. We didn't develop good whale-watching techniques until several years later, but whale watching is too sedentary anyway for fidgety boys. With a sandbox that stretched farther than those boys could run, who needs whales? Climb the back side of a dune and roll down the steep front and do it again. Push your mother off the front of the dune and do it again. Climb the face of the dune and let the sand cascade over you, then jump in the bay and flush the sand out of your ears, and do it all over again. Run down the shore and sink to your knees in the soft places. Follow coyote tracks following rabbit tracks, scare the shorebirds, roast marshmallows and eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch and in-between meals. Before our long weekend was over I had a list of people I was going to call and order to fly to La Paz in two weeks so I could do it all over again.

Mac was not free of the boat-building business then, so our group of seven hired a skiff in Lopez Mateos with a driver, José, who knew less about whale watching than we did. He was so cautious that it was only by being underhanded...you aren't afraid, are you?...that we were able to induce him to move to the middle of the waterway where the whales drifted, swam, fed their babies, dove, spy-hopped. Every move they made was new to us, but you can only gasp and say "did you see that?" or "look over there" so many times; we asked the driver to take us up an inlet we hadn't yet explored. "Why? he asked. "There's nothing there but birds."

Birds! The three visitors from the USA were serious birders. José couldn't have said anything to make them happier.

We turned out of the wide entry to the Pacific at Boca de Soledad and into the calmer more restricted waters leading north. On our right several sand islands grew larger as the tide ebbed. Hundreds of Brown Pelicans, after fishing out in the open ocean, preened, beaks pointed at the sky; they craned their necks like cobras, then hunkered down and tucked their beaks under their wings. They shared the flats with a sprinkling of

terns, seagulls, cormorants and the occasional oystercatcher. The shyer and less common White Pelicans formed flotillas in the distant shallows where we couldn't follow with the outboard, keeping company with the bird of interest to my hunting friend in La Paz, the Black Brant. In the dune grasses and on the exposing shore in the swampy spots of the barrier island to our left, all the herons and egrets and the waders, with long bills and short bills, long legs and short legs, scurriers and stately probbers fed. Unexpectedly, and confounding the experts who assemble the bird guides, we spotted White Ibis, unmistakable with their heavy downward-curving red bills.

After exploring the inner estuary side of the island we walked around the tip to the wild and windy Pacific side. Waves broke over the succession of offshore bars. The deepest part of the channel, where the whales entered the bay, was closest to shore on the north side of the Boca. Whales spouted and spy-hopped in the entrance channel, slowly rising vertically out of the water for almost half their length, seeming to check their location to see if they were where they thought they were. The whales gathered outside the Boca to come in with the tide, and cow-calf pairs already inside the bay ranged back and forth just inside in innermost sand bars, as if the mothers were showing the calves that all of life was not as calm and peaceful as it looked.

We zig-zagged back and forth across the beach from the wash of the breakers to beyond high tide line, scavenging for treasures. We never failed to find more than we could carry: shells, bones, even a message in a bottle. We mailed the card in the bottle to the address and learned that it had been dropped from a Scripps Institute research ship checking the currents a hundred miles away. Huge Grinning Tuns, with their serrated jack-o-lantern teeth at the opening; fragile Figs, palely purple-brown; and best of all, pale pink Venus clams with their long, delicate spiny projections. Strangely, out of a hundred shells found, ninety-seven would be one side of the clam, and only three of the other, so if you could assemble a matched pair, you had something special. Whale bones, graceful porpoise ribs, sea lion skulls, the male told from the female by the high-crowned occipital ridge, all joined the mini-museum around the campfire.

We returned to the waiting skiff driver in time to return to camp, we thought, before dark; but our inexperienced guide ran out of gasoline, and worse, had no oars. Before the last sputter of the motor he managed to bring us close enough to shore to wade, but we weren't paying him enough, I guess, to do the wading. Overboard my sister and I went, hauling the skiff like Volga boatmen the last half mile to town. The next day we made sure he had two tanks of gas, and oars.

## Working for Baja Expeditions

Baja Expeditions, a company which had been bringing tourists to the Sea of Cortez from San Felipe to La Paz on large ex-fishing boats, began to look for ways to broaden its itinerary. I knew Tim Means, the owner, and in fact, was working for him. It cost me no effort at all to convince Tim that a whale-watching trip to Bahia Magdalena would be popular, and consequently, the January after my first two trips, (and many Januaries after that) I was back again on the dunes.

The flights from the USA to La Paz arrived in mid-afternoon and it was always sunset by the time the bus turned off the paved highway onto the roller-coaster, sometimes flooded, dirt road to Puerto Lopez Mateos; and pitch dark when we stepped out of the bus onto a dock more accustomed to fishy rubber boots than tennis shoes or hiking boots. Waiting at the dock was a fishing boat stripped of its piles of nets and scrubbed of most of its workboat smell. With a black and rusty hull, Alejandro II was unprepossessing by daylight, but at night under the dim light of one bare bulb hanging from the winch boom overhead, she seemed romantic.

When the tide was in, the guests stepped from the dock onto the rail of Alejandro II, but when the tide was out everyone had to be guided by the crew down a six foot rusting ladder to the deck, and all luggage and a week's worth of supplies were bucket-brigaded after them. Dinner of seafood soup, salad and fresh bolillos was served from a long table on the deck and eaten perched on the rails as the boat motored slowly across the mile wide inlet to the tent camp in the dunes which would be home for the next week. The crew set Alejandro II's anchor a few yards off the beach where a kerosene lantern swung on a pole.

Island dunes don't stand still. They migrate at a surprising rate over the stable base of the island, with the result that one year a flat area suitable for camping is near shore, and the next it is inland behind the first set of dunes. Those years access to the camp is a trudge up and over the dune. Personal luggage and camp supplies, load after load, duffles and camera bags, cases of pop and beer, bars of ice, crates of oranges, apples, pineapples, potatoes, tortillas, flats of eggs: over the rail of Alejandro II, to the beach in pangas, then 100 yards inland by human hand. Laden, we make trip after trip, sinking to our ankles in the soft sand until we are finished and gratefully head for the light of the campfire to dump the sand from our shoes and enjoy a tot of rum.

In the center of the clearing loom two large tents, one a kitchen, the other, biggest of all, for crew sleeping quarters and a place for socializing when it is too rainy and windy to be outside around the campfire.

Scattered at the perimeter of a quarter acre of flattish land, camp is a dozen two and four person tents of dull olive surplus World War II vintage. In the tents are home-designed cots of wood and canvas and a kerosene lantern. A few of the guests drop their bags in their tents and join the crew around the campfire, but most, exhausted from a long day of traveling and totally displaced from all they were used to, disappear into their tents and collapse. I cannot wait for morning to see their reactions to their surroundings.

The early risers are out of bed before the coffee finishes perking. From the kitchen tent I watch them walk silently up the dunes in front of camp and sit, perfectly still, contemplating the expanse of sand to the north, south, and west of them. In front of them, the bay, and dimly across the bay, town. Pink, all shades of pink, changing by the minute. And drifting with the current a few hundred yards off shore, the whales.

In the windless dawn the water is mirror flat. Wisps of gray mist rise and disperse. Motionless upon the surface, drifting in the current, a long shining black back, next to it a

smaller one. From one end of the back, a puff of spray, and a split second later the sound of the blow reaches the watchers on the dunes. One pair, two, then more becoming visible the longer the watchers sit there.

By the time the sky has changed from pinks to gray-blue and the mist has evaporated, the crew has cut up watermelon, pineapple, cantaloupe, and bananas for the breakfast salad and the smell of coffee and bacon and eggs has dispersed through camp. Everyone is awake, sipping coffee and jostling for a place in the breakfast line, anxious to get out on the water.

The twenty or so guests divide themselves between the three whale-watching pangas. Dressed for any weather in shorts under jeans, long sleeved flannel shirts over tee shirts and under fleece jackets and windbreakers; backpacks filled with binoculars, sunscreen, trail mix, and water bottle; camera bodies and binoculars dangling from their necks; and lenses long and short, fat and wide nestled in padded bags under their feet, they are ready.

The boats spread out, each headed for a different whale mother and baby. After the first few years of whale watching we learned that the whales prefer to have the outboard engines running (in neutral) rather than off. But in the first seasons we assumed that the whales would be scared away by the noise of the engines. The skiff driver took a position up-tide from the pair, turned off the engine, and with oars quartered toward the animals. When luck and skill was with us, we were within 30 or 40 feet of the whales and parallel with them. The babies were as long as the panga, the mother twice our length. Binoculars and cameras focused on the whales.

The calm and sleeping mother is motionless, only puffing a breath of water-laden air every two or three minutes. But children will be children and the baby whale cavorted at her side, pushing up onto the mother's back and sliding back into the water or swimming across her tail, then diving under and swimming back. Only if the baby becomes aware of us and too curious, heading in our direction, will mother sound and come up again between us and the baby and herd him away. In later years the whales became so accustomed to the presence of skiffs of whale watchers that mothers watched from a distance when babies came up to the skiffs to be touched. And still later those babies as adults take the presence of whale watchers for granted.

When we felt that a whale was nervous about our presence, we let her drift away, then motored down the bay until we spotted another pair or group. Although cow-calf pairs were the larger part of the population, there were a few males and females so that once in a great while we were able to observe calves being born or adults mating.

A typical mating group is a female and two males; those who study whales feel that the second male helps support and position the courting male. A hint that mating activity is taking place is the presence of three full-sized whales and lots of thrashing about. When such a group is spotted, all skiffs in the vicinity slowly converge on the active group, forming a slowly circling ring of boats a hundred yards from the lovers, so intent on their own needs they ignore their audience. For several hours they swirl and twist, rubbing against each other, diving, surfacing. Eventually you can tell which animal is the courting male because the penis begins to appear when he rolls on his back. First a small pink protrusion, later six feet of bright pink flesh, raising and flapping like a silken banner in the wind. All the while the skiffs circle, an enthralled audience of voyeurs.

After several hours of confinement in the skiff, everyone is ready for a beach break, to stretch and walk and release the morning's coffee. At a bright south of camp called La Florida, an indentation separated from the main channel by a small mangrove covered islet, we beach the skiffs and go ashore for lunch.

The dunes behind La Florida are the highest and whitest on the island. From their tops you can see the mangrove islands and channels spread out to the east, north, and south, with whales spouting everywhere. To the west is the Pacific. Some people walk across in a group, but if you are one who likes to be alone, you can lag behind until the rest are out of sight. Then, if the wind is blowing hard enough, you can stand on the top of a dune until all trace of human life is gone, even your own footprints.

Those who walk together call to point out each of the visual delights. Mouse and lizard tracks skitter from clump to clump of verbena. If a track ends mid-clump, perhaps a hawk has swooped from above to catch a meal. A rabbit darts from under a bush, zigzagging evasively. Feather-light shells of land snails collect in a wind eddy at the base of a dune, and sunbaked seashells which have traveled inland with the moving dune crumble at a touch. After a rain which has packed down the sand, the drying sand blows off the surface, revealing the plywood pattern of the living dune, fine sinuous striations in shades of gold and cream and tan.

Sometimes we walked across the dunes to the Pacific at night, from camp, especially when there was a full moon. At night the sand shines golden, and the moon casts shadows almost as definite as the sun. In the distance a family of coyotes howls, answered by a loner farther away. When we reach the last row of dunes and look out over the Pacific, the lights of the shrimp boats dance along the horizon bobbing and dipping as the waves pass under them.

Sometimes joggers run to the Pacific for a swim before breakfast, arriving back at camp in time to beat the slug-a-beds to the head of the breakfast line.

Most of the people who come on these trips are experienced campers and wilderness travelers. They travel with duffle bags rather than suitcases, filled with rugged clothes and hiking boots, day packs, and water bottles. It is the kind of adventure travel trip which is light on adventure, the kind you can take your kids on. But I remember one woman who stepped out of her tent every morning in a starched and ironed white shirt and pants, and whose white sneakers never got wet because her husband carried her across the slushy stuff and set her carefully in the panga.

One winter Nora of Baja Expeditions advertised an all-women's whale-watching trip. Most of those who signed up were friends: there was Heidi and her ten year old daughter Robyn from Santa Barbara and Isla Pardito; Sylvia from San Diego, Gail who once had worked for Baja Expeditions, my sister Pat from Los Angeles, plus two or three women who responded to the company ads.

We had hoped to manage the trip completely by ourselves: we could erect the tents, dig the latrine, start and keep a campfire going and cook over the coals. We could row ourselves across the inlet into the mangroves in the rubber dinghies or the kayaks for bird watching, but none of us was strong enough to start the 75 HP outboards on the 22' fiberglass skiffs used for whale watching. When we wanted to float on the bay for several hours, we hired skiffs and drivers from town.

This particular day was clear and calm, not a ripple on the water. Our two pangas drifted quietly on the current, 100 feet apart. Two women were in kayaks near us. "Breech!" someone called. Whales often breech three or four times in succession, so we all focused our binoculars and cameras on the whale perhaps a quarter of a mile down the bay; a rise of gray-black out of the water and a spray of white water as it hit the water again. The whale rose again, then again, and yet again. With each breech she gained yardage, closing the distance between us, and growing larger in our lenses with each leap. The 16th breech was less than a hundred feet from us, close enough to make us gasp, and when she fell we looked anxiously for her back, and the spout, the signal that she had

made her last leap. When no spout appeared we only had enough time to voice half a worry when she appeared once again. She rose, 10 feet, 15 feet, 20 feet of her, a tower of speckled gray, out of the water, not 15 feet from the skiff with half our party in it. They had time to look her in the eye and see her look back at them before she was falling. She changed the arc of her fall just enough to hit the water parallel to the skiff, rocking them on her displacement wave; the whale's back, then her tail thwacked the bottom of the hull once, twice, as she dove to distance herself from them.

Nora has a set of slides: the first slide is of a small gray dot in the corner of a picture of blue sea and sky. Each succeeding slide has a bit more gray in the corner and a little less blue. In the last shot the colors are reversed, a small corner of blue and a field of gray. My sister has no pictures; she, in a kayak, had left her camera in Nora's skiff, where it would be safe.

Halooooo

“Halooooo, Tim!”

“Hey, Tim, can you hear us?”

Each call was greeted with silence. Fog shrouded Magdalena Bay. Only straight overhead could we see the misty glimmer of the full moon. Back at camp the paying guests were either tucked into their tents or determinedly drinking rum around the campfire. Tim was on the raft somewhere in the dark, anchored in the middle of the bay south of camp, living in the middle of the whales, and Bruce had promised to bring him some drinking water.

These days in Bahia Magdalena, near the cannery town of Puerto Lopez Mateos, permits are required if you want to blow your nose during whale season, but then, in the early 1980s, Baja Expeditions had the Bay to itself. Every year the company experimented with one variation on whale watching or another. Some variations didn’t last out the season.

The Raft was six huge sausages of black rubber laced together, left-overs of Colorado River river-running gear. On a plywood floor the expedition company had set up a large tent for a kitchen with minimal cooking facilities including a half-barrel charcoal barbecue grill. The Raft was an attempt to offer the more whale-besotted guest of the era the opportunity to be with the whales close up, twenty-four hours a day. Tim was a guinea pig, a hitch hiker the owner of Baja Expeditions had picked up, exchanging labor for an experience he couldn’t pay for.

Bruce ran the panga south along the shore of the bay and knew approximately which sand dune to use as a marker for the left turn to The Raft, but between the fog and the tide we soon were no longer tied to our landmarks. We floated in a limbo extending a few feet in every direction, hemmed in by drifting wisps of fog which beaded our jackets with water. Between halloos we stamped our feet on the bottom of the panga, confident the whales wouldn’t run into us if they knew we were there. Still, it was eerie to watch their phosphorescent con trails as they dove under us or slipped by a few yards away.

By the time we gave up on finding Tim, we were lost ourselves. We dropped a piece of paper overboard to judge the drift of the current, tossed a figurative coin to decide which way the tide was running, and headed perpendicularly across it. Moments before we hit the beach we caught the glint of foam in an eddy a few inches from shore. From there a speed run north took us back to camp; in the morning a skiff full of whale watchers found The Raft and delivered the water.

On a night a few weeks later we would not have had a problem finding The Raft. The occupants had left a log fire burning on the barbecue for a homing beacon in the dark. A log burned until it unbalanced, and charred a hole through the plywood, then The Raft. The burst of air under pressure shot flames 30 feet in the air. The campers, who were drifting among the whales in a skiff, could do nothing but watch as their home tilted and hung, half-submerged.

## Mag Bay with Pat, Connie, and Yanmar

Many years after our first trips to Bahia Magdalena Mac became interested in selling Yanmar diesel outboard engines. He installed the first one in a 26' panga he designed. He visualized it as a perfect whale-watching skiff, much quieter than the large gas powered outboards on all the other skiffs. We invited my sister Pat and her partner Connie to join us on a trip to Bahia Magdalena in February, and promised they would achieve their goal, to pet a gray whale. On Pat's first visit in the early 80s, the whales had not yet learned to be friendly, that is, they did not approach the skiffs of their own volition. But now, in the 90s, newspaper and magazine articles and tour company ads were all illustrated with photographs of whales with their chins resting to the gunnels, having their chin-whiskers scratched. In addition, Mac and I had long wanted to make the run south from Puerto Lopez Mateos through the mangrove channel, part of which was called "The Devil's Elbow" to San Carlos, and to climb over the dunes to visit Bahia Santa Maria, which we hadn't seen since our trip down the Pacific coast in 1963.

We set up our camp in the dunes well south of Puerto Lopez Mateos and in the morning set out to capture our whale. Much to our chagrin, the whales didn't like us. All around us whales were having their chins scratched by people in other skiffs, but every time we approached a whale, it would sink out of sight. We could only conclude that the whales were accustomed to the sound of the faster revolution of the gas engines, and the sound of the diesel was new and made them nervous. We packed in the whale watching and went into the mangroves to watch birds instead.

The next morning we headed south through the channel in the mangroves to the main part of Bahia Magdalena. In the beginning, the channel is easy to negotiate. At The Devil's Elbow a few markers give some hints to the channel: a twig stuck in the edge of a sandbar around which to make a turn, a buoy on the right to mark the next turn, then a long run that debouches into the upper end of the main bay. It was Sunday and several skiffs full of picnickers from San Carlos were on the mudflats, clamping, poking sticks into worm holes, and turning over rocks. We left the skiff near the others and squished across the sand flats, then donned our shoes to climb the dune. From the top, the breath-taking sweep of Bahia Santa Maria: white sand from the rocky headlands on the north to the far southern tip of the Bay, vista of sand unbroken except for a beached shipping container directly below us, and some black spots scattered around it.

We wandered in the dunes, photographing the flowers, speculating over the piles of nearly fossilized shells scattered among the plants, and making up stories about the journey of the container. Once down on the beach we found the container had been broken open, and the black spots were television tubes. We wondered how long the container would mar the landscape and composed threatening letters to Mitsubishi, requiring them to come clean up their mess.

By the time we climbed back over the dunes, the other skiffs were gone, and we were high and dry. The tide was still slowly coming in, creeping inch by inch around the skiff, but the flats were so flat it was obvious there would not be enough water to float us. We took everything we could out of the skiff, used the oars first to dig a trench until we could turn the panga bow to face the bay, then used them as rollers under the bow. We lined up across the stern with our backs to the transom and 1-2-3 pushed in unison. Inch by inch we gained on the sea, and inch by inch the sun sank toward the horizon and the light dimmed. In the last of daylight we headed north-east toward where we knew the channel should be. With the help of binoculars we were only just able to spot the marker for the right passage between several mangrove islands. Minutes after the sun sank

behind us, a glow grew behind the mangroves ahead of us, and minutes after that a huge full moon rose. By its light we picked out the dim shapes of the channel markers, and when we finally did run aground in a cul-de-sac we could see enough by moonlight to compare our flashlight lit hand-drawn chart with the mangrove islands around us and head for camp.

One dune looks pretty much like another, especially in the dark, so we crept along 20 feet from shore until we saw the stick my smart sister had stuck into the dune in front of our hidden campsite. First a cup of hot chocolate, then a quickie tuna-noodle dish, then a hot rum drink, then bed.

## Paul Winter in Bahia Magdalena

They arrived, the groupies, by thumb, by foot, by bus, by camper, by car, and even a few by private plane, which landed at the dirt airstrip at Puerto Adolfo Lopez Mateos, a fish-cannery village at the northern end of Bahia Magdalena. The musicians were expected, most of the others were not. I don't know how the word spread, but by the end of February, a varying cast of up to 70 people was camped in the dunes at La Florida, a bight on Bahia Magdalena south of Lopez Mateos. Spread across the dunes were the colorful tents of their colorful inhabitants, and at the center of the beach on the face of the dunes the olive drab tents of Baja Expeditions lent a deceptively sober aspect to the scene. Along the shore just above high tide line were heaps of gear, some of clearly identifiable objects, others not.

The focal point of the gathering was Paul Winter and his musicians. Paul composed music which incorporated the sounds of nature recorded in situ. He had contracted with Baja Expeditions to provide the logistics for making music with, and for, the whales. Paul and his group were extraordinary musicians and fairly ordinary people, but his groupies leaned toward the hippy, the exotic, the out and out fringe. The camp followers were not interested in whales in any down to earth sense, i.e. census taking, feeding habits, population numbers, mating processes. They wanted to *commune* with the whales. Most were "into" things like nudism, vegetarianism, pyramid power, and inter-species communication.

One of the piles on the beach in front of the camp was a heap of clear plastic intended to be a whale. The idea was to float down the bay inside the Whale while playing Paul's music. Baja Expeditions provided the practicalities: a generator and a vacuum cleaner, hose on backward, to inflate the Whale. To everyone's great disappointment, the inflated Whale rolled over on the first launch, spilling naked musicians, music, and instruments on their sides. Once the Whale had been safely beached once more, the Whale's chin was placed on shore where the musicians could keep their feet planted on the sand, while the dancers (have I mentioned nudity?) didn't care whether they were on their heads or their tails.

Another heap was a brightly colored hot air balloon with its wicker basket; again the generator and vacuum came into use. Participants wanted to hover over the whales playing their music, but there were technical difficulties. On the first attempt, the panga was too light for the lift of the balloon and was dragged stern first over the mud until several hundred pounds of people jumped aboard to balance the equation. On another attempt, when the winds failed, the balloon drifted down into the middle of the mangroves; the rescue took several hours of labor by the panga drivers who hacked their way into the mangroves with machetes. Do you know what damage insects which thrive in the mangroves can inflict on unclad bodies?

A third heap was the material to build a pyramid on a small barge made of leftovers from the fishing cannery in town. To quote Wikipedia, "pyramid power refers to alleged super natural or paranormal properties of the ancient Egyptian pyramids and objects of similar shape." This pyramid concentrated energy from the universe, and under it sat the campers, humming.

In an attempt at interspecies communications, Paul approached a young sea lion which lived seemingly half-tame on the beach. Scrunched down on the sand, playing soothingly, Paul inched closer and closer to the pup, the watchers whispering how music soothes the savage beast, until the sea lion left tooth marks on the sax and retreated to sea.

Baja Expeditions was prepared for 20 campers, but daily more people arrived at La Florida. The growing vegan and vegetarian crowd had to be fed. My job was to purchase the groceries when the shopping list was sent to La Paz on the weekly bus. Twenty-five pound sacks of beans and rice, crates of oranges, bananas, cabbage, carrots, and onions; cases of beer and soft drinks; rounds of cheese and flats of eggs. That was easy. Harder to find was brown rice, and impossible was kelp and bee pollen. I commiserated with Bruce, camp coordinator and cook. "Oh, no," he said. "It's easy. A big pot of beans, another of rice, spread the rest over the table and they graze."

Another of my jobs was meeting people at the airport in La Paz, setting them up in a hotel for the night, and seeing that they boarded the bus in the morning with the groceries. Bobbie was the strongest woman I have ever met. She could climb up the anchor chain of Don José (the 80' flagship of Baja Expeditions) feet first, and hoist herself over the bow pulpit onto the deck. Her friend Amy, her antithesis, was twig-thin. Wearing a wafting negligee gown, she drifted out of the hotel room a half-hour late one morning, saying in a wispy voice to match her gowns, "Look at my feet, they're swollen. The last time this happened the doctor said I was anemic, but I don't think I'm anemic, do you?" Unhappily, not too much later, back in the USA, she died of the extreme vegetarianism she lived by.

By the end of the month via the local panga drivers, enough rumors about the camp at La Florida had circulated north up the bay to Lopez Mateos and back to La Paz to attract the attention of Immigration officials.

The one day I visited the camp by panga with a boatload of "straight" tourists (La Florida provided the shortest access route to walk to the Pacific Ocean) I was aware as we approached the beach of a certain amount of scurrying on the dunes; by the time we beached, everyone was clothed. I think the same thing must have happened the day the Immigration officials arrived. When Bruce, who met the officials, told everyone in camp to find their tourist visas, everyone disappeared into the nearest tent where they knew someone of the right sex had a visa, and produced it. By the time Immigration officials organized their second visit, the camp was gone. I suspect the officials were disappointed not to have had a better show.

On the last night Paul Winter and his musicians were in La Paz, my children, who were about 10 or 11, and I joined the musicians for dinner, sans groupies. In the middle of the meal I looked up to find the son across the table from me staring at my neighbor in the classic stare position, mouth open, fork suspended in midair. My table neighbor was nonchalantly pulling yard after yard of colored silk from his mouth, a magical musician.

## Ship Dismantlers

Camp was set up on the dunes of Isla Magdalena, the barrier island which forms the upper reaches of Bahia Magdalena. The guests had been fed and were gathered around the campfire getting acquainted. Well after dark Tim tapped me on my shoulder, cocked his shoulder and raised an eyebrow, a typical Tim gesture, and beckoned for me to follow him. My questions—where are we going, what are we doing—went, typically, unanswered, but I knew him well enough to trust that, whatever he had in mind, I probably wanted to be part of it, as it would not be boring. I grabbed a windbreaker and followed him over the dunes to the water's edge where we scrambled into a panga as we pushed it off the beach.

It was a moonless night but the lights of the cannery at Puerto Lopez Mateos gave us a point of reference across the channel. We motored down the pathway of dim light toward town, but slowly, as it was February, whale season, and we did not want a mid-channel collision with a whale. In the middle of the bay we shut off the outboard engine and listened for a whale breath, but the only sounds were the lapping of wave chop on the side of the hull and an occasional drift of ranchero music on the wind from Saturday night in town.

We pulled the panga up on the beach near the cannery and dug its anchor into the sand to hold it against the rising tide. Still wordless, Tim strolled (his normal pace) off into the dark with me at his heels. We walked a dozen blocks on the dirt streets through Lopez Mateos, the little wooden houses of the cannery town closed tight against the cool winter night, the glimmer of blue light from a television screen showing through an occasional window. The town would be completely dark before we returned to the panga; the town generator turned off at 10:00.

We turned a corner and in the red, flickering light of a wood fire were a half-dozen unshaven and roughly dressed men. I caught my breath. What has Tim gotten me into, I thought. Two men were turning tortillas on a sheet of metal over the flames; that meant no women were around to do the cooking. In the shadows other men sitting on over-turned plastic crates and backless stools passed around ballenas of beer. Blankets and old sleeping bags were tumbled under a makeshift tarpaper shack lit by a smoky kerosene lamp. I said *hola* and tried to look confident and nonchalant. After the small talk that precedes any business discussion, Tim worked around to the subject of our visit, which I still did not know. He had heard that a freighter was beached on the Pacific coast of Isla Magdalena about 40 miles south of our camp. These were the dismantlers. Tim wanted to visit the site. One of Tim's charms is his propensity for doing the different.

About halfway down Isla Magdalena, at Cabo San Lazaro, is a lighthouse. We learned from the dismantlers that transportation to the freighter was provided by the lighthouse keeper, so we went back through town and knocked on the door of the de la Toba house and introduced ourselves. More small talk, then explanations, and when we walked by through the now dark town we were discussing (if that is what it could be called) the details of the adventure that had been arranged for the next day.

Isla Magdalena is at least 50 miles long and 2 to 3 miles across, wider some places, narrower in others. Except for the rocky outcropping of Cabo San Lazaro, the island is all sand in constant motion. As the prevailing northwesterly winds blow, the dunes move eastward, the tidal currents of the inner bay eat at the face of the dunes and carry the sand out the Boca Soledad at the north end of the island to be re-deposited on the Pacific side. We had hiked across the dunes on previous visits and knew that vehicles drove on the Pacific edge of the island at low tide, because we had been startled to see their tracks, and

the rusted out hulks of several abandoned and partly buried pickups. Now we were to learn how they got there.

After breakfast the next morning the pangas deposited us at the embarkation point for the trip to Cabo San Lazaro, south of our camp. The tide had just peaked. The dismantlers, who had seemed so scary the night before of course, by daylight, were just ordinary workmen with oil-stained hands and blue jeans. Evidence of their work, rough-cut chunks of metal, pieces of freighter which had not yet crossed the bay to Puerto Lopez Mateos, were piled on the beach above high tide line. True trash—old line and nets, a doorless refrigerator, plastic buckets holed and handleless—were thrown on the sand.

The lighthouse keeper and his cousin had their heads under the hoods of two ancient stake-bed trucks backed up on a slight rise of the dunes. From a few resistant spots of paint here and there on the cabs we could tell that one had once been red, the other blue. In the back of each truck was a splintery wooden bench and a couple of shovels.

Out of the pangas and into the trucks went 45 kilo propane tanks, ice chests, outboard gas cans, bags of groceries and blocks of ice. Us furriners stood around dressed in our backpacks and various states of astonishment. Camera shutters clicked and buzzed; two guests backed out when they realized what the transportation consisted of, re-boarding the expedition pangas and departing for the comparative safety of the camp and whale-watching.

The de la Toba cousins fiddled some more under the hoods; they dried the carburetors damp from the heavy morning dew, and primed them with gas. They lashed the hoods down to the bumpers with rope. Protruding from under each hood, the fuel hose of an outboard motor. The gas can itself was tied on the hood and connected to the hose, in this way bypassing the fuel tank of the vehicle which had long since rusted out.

We were lucky this morning. The trucks started on the first turn of the key and rolled down off the dune. A couple of the expedition women accepted the offer of a seat in the cab with the driver; the rest of us climbed or were boosted onto the bed of the truck, found a place to sit or stand, and we were off toward the Pacific. This spot on the bay had been chosen for the crossing point of the island because the dunes were lower here and didn't change as rapidly as the larger classic Barchan dunes where we camped.

Tim and I stood at the front of the truck bed with a view over the cab. The track was sometimes visible as two dirty ruts through the sand; in other places all trace of track had been obliterated by the foot of an advancing dune. As much as possible the drivers maintained a steady 10 mile an hour pace, following a winding route among the dunes, always staying at the lowest possible level, speeding up for the spots where the sand was loosest. We could see the trouble spots coming, marked as they were with lumber, sheets of metal, even clumps of scraggly dune plants and palm leaves. Knees bent to ease the jolting, we clung onto the front rail with both hands. The trucks churned and lurched along, everyone holding on to anything that seemed steady, trying not to depend too much on the side rails which flexed and creaked. It was important that the trucks not stop, or it would take shoveling and pushing and more trash on the track to get moving again.

After 20 minutes we caught a glimpse of water, then the breadth of the Pacific was before us. The drivers sped up to gain momentum to climb over the final set of dunes and bump across the last stretch of soft sand before they could safely stop on the hard packed sand left by the out-going tide. The Pacific stretched gray and gloomy to a vague gray horizon. Four or five rows of breaking waves too small for surfing broke on the sand bars off shore. A cloud of sandpipers, plovers, and sanderlings down from Alaska to spend the winter rose, circled and landed down the beach a hundred feet and continued to probe the

sand, skittering from one likely bubble to another. To the south the beach stretched as far as we could see, until it faded into the fog, flat, slightly curved, silver gray, reflective as a mirror where the water ran and cream-colored after the water sank into the sand.

The drivers asked if we needed a break, but we really had to keep moving; we had to reach the freighter and return before the tide rose over the beach stranding us.

We flew down the beach at 40 miles an hour, wind whipping our hair and scarves and jackets around us. Sometimes the drivers had to slow a little, to allow a particularly big wave to recede before we could pass, and sometimes there was a slight jolt as a tire sank into a soft spot, throwing us off balance. We squinted into the wind behind our dark glasses and watched the waves to our right, the low dunes to our left, and the long long beach unreeling in front of us out of the fog as it reeled up behind. We passed an occasional boat hull or whale skeleton or dead sea lion and wondered how we could manage to see this beach up close, shell by shell, bone by bone.

Eventually we began to discern the high point of Cabo San Lazaro as an uneven dark smudge high in the thin mist and later, at beach level, a dark shadow became the freighter.

The beach ended abruptly where the rocks began in a ragged cliff thirty or forth feet high. The freighter had been run on the beach at high tide and stood there almost perpendicular, buried only slightly off its normal flotation line. A breeches buoy ran from the top of the cliff to a hole carved into the side of the freighter, and I could see Tim eying it, planning an assault on the interior of the vessel. That would be another day, however.

The dismantlers stayed in the truck with their gear, to be driven to their camp on the mesa at the top of the cliff. The rest of us clambered down, stiff in the bone and salty faced; we stretched and bent and cleaned our glasses, and drank water from the bottles in our backpacks. The group, having been packed like goats for market in the truck, was glad to scatter, glad to be able to stretch their legs. We agreed to meet at the camp on the bluff for lunch and separated, the camera buffs continued to click and whirr, shellers to scour the high tide line, beachcombers headed for the dunes, and birders wandered back the way we had come to see what they could identify. The waves swirled around the wreck itself, but we couldn't see much except the tall rusted side and MONARCH II in faded letters on the bow.

After lunch we climbed back into the trucks, this time perched even more precariously on jagged sections of metal cut from the freighter skin which rattled and ground together under our feet. We glanced over our shoulders to watch the freighter, then the Cape fade. Just before we turned inland to re-cross the dunes, a flock of pelicans rose and circled above us, before us, beyond us, at least a hundred and fifty of them, a reward for the risks taken.

Over the next four or five years we continued to make the dune crossing and beach run to the freighter and the lighthouse, and to the fishing camp on the estuary east of them. We saw the first freighter reduced to an outline barely showing above high tide. We saw the second freighter join the first only to be left practically intact, a labyrinth to be explored by the boldest (not me) But the trips were civilized and safe compared to the first, arranged just for us; no more propane tanks, no more rusty hunks of iron threatening our ankles. The trip never became ho-hum, but watching the face of each new visitor as he eyed the truck in disbelief, and hearing his intake of breath when we first reached the Pacific, helped me regain a little of the excitement of that first wild ride.

## Islas Partida and Espiritu Santo

Once upon a time—long, long before the first footprint appeared on a beach on the Baja California peninsula, in fact, long before there was a beach upon which a footprint could appear—a cataclysm shook the part of the globe where we now live. Water levels rose and fell, mountains crunched skyward and subsided, water flooded and ebbed, and at the end of this time a sprinkling of shards of land, minuscule in the overall scheme of things, sat alone in the middle of a turquoise sea. Then somewhere in recent history a pair of these shards acquired names: Isla Espiritu Santo and Isla Partida.

These islands are two only in that a narrow channel of water, which can be waded across at low tide, separates them. They stretch twenty miles along their north-south axis, and are a mere six miles across at their widest point. Hikers can easily cross in an hour. Located only twenty miles from the town of La Paz, Baja California Sur, these islets lure tourists and residents alike because they offer activities for many tastes.

The islands are mostly alternating layers of black lava and pinkish volcanic ash. On the eastern side of Isla Partida steep, tumbling rocky cliffs drop sheer into the water. Within a half mile of the eastern shore the water's depth is 50 fathoms. The broken cliffs are a geology professor's delight, with obvious signs of faulting and "major unconformities." Only one or two rocky beaches can be used to land a skiff, and only the indentation between the two islands is an acceptable anchorage for overnight cruising boats.

On the western side of the islands the layered geology is equally interesting. Look for places where the layers of softer ash have been cut by ancient rivers and filled in by subsequent lava flows, or where a softer layer has eroded beneath a harder, leaving pink frosting dripping over the rocky cliffs. While the study of their geology is an attraction to some, others are drawn to the islands for boating, fishing, camping, hiking, snorkeling, scuba diving, and the study of natural history.

The gently inclined western slope is dentate, like the fingers of a spread hand, a series of rocky points separated by deeply indented shallow bays. The fine-grained coralline sand is a creamy white. The water is as clear as the finest Paraiba tourmaline, and though in winter it may drop to 68 degrees, from July through October the water temperature climbs to over 80.

Reef fish abound along the rocky points which form each bay. Angelfish, Wrasse, Moorish Idols, the chameleon-like Trumpetfish, and more, large and minute, drab and bright dart or drift according to their natures. Float over the shallow reefs and the Rainbow Wrasse will nibble at your legs. This particular small wrasse is normally striped horizontally in yellow, red, and black. However, if the school lacks a dominant male, the largest female increases in size and metamorphoses into a male with green-blue and yellow horizontal markings. You'd never know they were related. Many Angelfish also change colors as they mature. Even the inside of the mouth of the Parrotfish, named for its horny beak-like mouth and colorful scales, is colored.

Beaches on the south and southeastern end of Isla Espiritu Santo call to shell collectors. If you would like to make your own "puka shell" necklace, scootch along the lower tide line on the small south beach of Bahia Bonanza and you should be able to find the 150 it takes to string a necklace. Search these same beaches in February and March to find an unbroken paper nautilus shell, not a true shell but an egg-carrying case of an octopus like creature which discards the case after the eggs hatch. It is prized for its fragile beauty.

Each beach is backed by a canyon, steeply inclined on Isla Partida and gently sloping at the southern end of Isla Espiritu Santo. Behind the southern beaches are

mangrove swamps in which brackish water rises and falls with the tide. On the flats exposed by low tide, fiddler crabs scuttle as they clean out their tunnel homes, leaving a starry pattern of tiny sand-mud balls around the central door. Shore birds skitter along the water's edge, dipping their bills into the sand in search of dinner, and the stately great blue herons and snowy egrets slowly flap their way to a farther shore as you approach.

Long lines of Brown Pelicans roller-coaster across the bays, gliding and rising in undulations like streamers from a flagstaff. In the early morning and late evening they feed in the shallows, falling in gangly and awkward-seeming dives. A flip of the beak signals a successful catch. Brown pelicans nest on Isla Espiritu Santo and on the rocky islets off shore in the late winter. The nests are untidy bowls of rough twigs looking hardly comfortable for the featherless hatchlings.

Beaches backed by steep arroyos invite the hiker. Here on one small pair of islands is a microcosm of the desert peninsula as a whole. The arroyos are waterless except for a few days or a week after summer rains. However, permanent water remains in the wells hand-chipped through rock in the lower section of the canyons in Bahia Candelero and Bahia Cardoncito, and the giant zalate (wild fig) trees and palo de arco bushes show the presence of year-round underground moisture. Caves further up-canyon attest to the strength of falling water over time. Hummingbirds dart through the trees and ring-tailed cats shelter in the cool canyons during the day and wander down-canyon to the beach to forage at night. Still farther up canyon typical desert growth takes over, all the scrubby, hardy, thorn-full plants which have adapted their habits to long seasons of drought.

El Embudo (the funnel) canyon at the northern tip of Isla Partida ends abruptly with a volcanic fault. Below the cliff lies a dry lake large enough for an airstrip. The gently sloping bowl grows waist high grass in the rainy season and the ground is littered with the droppings of feral goats and black jackrabbits, the only mammals of any size living on the islands. These jackrabbits are found nowhere else in the world, and one wonders why a dark-colored jackrabbit has evolved in a hot climate, where you'd think a lighter coat would be more efficient.

Snakes and lizards and dozens of small insects inhabit the islands. How did those snakes and lizards get there? An especially interesting insect is a wasp which lays its eggs only in the fruit of the zalate. Without this particular wasp to cross-pollinate the blossoms, the zalate would never bear the fruit needed by the birds and ring-tailed cats.

Beyond the north point of the islands lies a shard of a shard, Los Islotes, a jewel with its own facets. Observe the sea-lions from a boat or snorkel toward shore until the females and young swim out from the rocks to pirouette below you in curiosity, while the massive bulls bark "don't come any closer" from the rocks. Swim through the arch where orange fan and white fire-corals sway in the current and Sea Horses cling to ribbons of seaweed. Overhead, common Brown Boobies perch on guano-dotted cliffs, with sometimes a rare visitor among them, a Blue-footed Booby.

Out beyond the arms of the bays of Isla Partida and Espiritu Santo porpoises play and feed, and in their seasons other cetaceans: Orcas, California Gray Whales, fin and sei whales, sperm and humpbacks, and the giant of them all, the Blue Whale, which migrates into the Sea of Cortez in February and March.

A visit of a day is not really enough in which to find all the treasures of this pair of small islands have to offer. Wherever your interests lie, you will find something to draw you back again and again to this fascinating hunk of lava and ash only a few hours north of La Paz.

#### Addendum of May 2014

The description above was written some time in the early 1980s, and certain things have changed. Reef fishes once seen everywhere have become rare. I am not sure the Brown Pelicans (which are certainly less numerous than they once were) nest on Isla Ballena and the point across from it on Isla Espiritu Santo any more. Goats gone feral are causing destruction of the estuaries. The Brown Booby has almost completely disappeared, replaced by the once-rare Blue-footed Booby. And the sea-lions have become so inured to human presence that even the bulls hardly trumpet at all.

#### Addendum of May 2023

And of course in the eight years since the last addendum, the use of these islands so close to La Paz have changed even more.

## Pres. Vicente Fox Visits La Paz

President Vicente Fox, the first non-PRI president of Mexico in 71 years, as we are told ad nauseam by the press, is coming to La Paz. As an established member of the business community, Malcolm E. Shroyer of Marina de La Paz, S.A. de C.V. receives an invitation to attend a luncheon in the president's honor. In Mac's absence, I ponder whether or not to attend in his place and trepidation sets in. Not "what shall I say to him" nor "what do I want him to say to me", but "what shall I WEAR!"

The concept of what is appropriate dress varies from community to community and from sub-community to sub-community. The idea of appropriate dress in the sub-community of my economic level in La Paz is different from mine, but I usually don't care. But by abandoning my particular sub-community of foreigners and boaters and by joining the larger political sub-community, my confidence deserts me, and my dress cupboard becomes bare.

I ask friends who blend into the sub-community of president meeters and learn of Boutique Moda Activa. Abandoning two natural instincts, to head home for dinner after office hours and to avoid "boutiques," I grit my teeth and "go shopping."

"Tengo un problema," I say to the shop owner. "I am going to eat lunch with El President and I can't go like this." I point to my stained white pants and saggy tee shirt. Racks of intimidating suits surround me. "Anything but black," I say.

Suit after suit comes over the transom into the dressing cubicle. Jackets reaching the length of my fingertips, skirts scarcely longer. Lapels as wide as those on zoot suits, pants too tight to zip all the way up. I begin to sweat, I begin to doubt my suitability to this role I decided to play. Navy blue, bright red, matronly purple, tweedy browns, all in indestructible polyester. But at last, a gray-green affair with a short jacket, some elastic in the waist of the pants. Together the shop owner and I comb the rack of blouses and find something that will "do" with a slight modification I can make at home. I leave a down payment and pick up the suit the next morning.

Wednesday is warm, the sky clear. At 1:00 p.m. I flash my letter of invitation at the first set of security guards. That allows me to park in the big dusty lot in front of Hotel Crown Plaza. I line up with workmen with tool boxes, a few confused tourists, and the several other hundred of special invitees to pass through an airport-style metal detector, then we all stand around in the few fringes of shade for an hour of chatting and listening to others chat until we are let into the air-conditioned dining room at 3:00.

Inside the dining room the tables fill slowly. Waiters wearing white gloves, white gloves in La Paz! pour non-alcoholic Jamaica-ade into our wine glasses. Inside jokes in Spanish, most of them beyond my comprehension level, fly between my table companions. At 4:00 p.m. the people at the table closest to the door rise, the rest of us follow. President Fox, tall, relaxed, shakes the proffered hands at the first table and circles the room in our direction. He shakes hands all around at the table next to us. He shakes the hand of the woman next to me, then mine. I blend into this sub-community so wonderfully in my new suit that he takes no notice of it or me. Well, if there is a next time I will wear my faded pants and tee shirt and be a stand out.

I never wore the suit again.

## Melon on the Post or Do We Speak the Same Language

At 4:00 a.m. one morning, Juan and Angel, the night watchmen at Marina de La Paz found a young woman wandering on Dock A with nothing on but tiny underpants. They turned her around, walked her back to the boat a friend had let her stay on, and lifted her aboard, declining her invitation to join her. I had no idea who she was or why the watchmen knew which boat she should be put aboard. And I thought I knew what goes on here at the marina!

After a few questions later that morning I knew she was staying aboard Judi K, to take care of the owner's parrot while he was gone. I found her standing in the companionway of the boat, placidly eating a rotten banana. She was slender, blonde, standardly pretty. Her voice was soft and her responses vague; I wasn't sure if she understood what I said, which was, in brief, don't do that again. Later I saw her sitting at the counter in the restaurant drinking a cup of coffee. The waiters told me they had paid for her dinner the night before. Well, I figured she had drunk too much and that would be that.

Within the hour, however, her dock neighbors called the office on the VHF radio; she (her name turned out to be Harriet) was paddling a dinghy between the docks, bare breasted. By the time I reached the dock she had tied the dinghy to an unoccupied boat and climbed aboard. She stood in the cockpit preening in front of a tinted window, smiling at her reflection, turning her head from side to side and lifting her hair over her ears like a woman sitting in front of her bedroom mirror. I took her by the shoulders and walked with her back to Judi K. She felt strangely unresistant, but once we were at the boat I had to lift her feet one at a time up onto the deck, then lower one foot after the other into the cockpit. She went down the companionway ladder by herself. "Don't leave the boat again without your clothes," I said firmly. I had not yet reached the office when the radio announced that she was on the loose again.

Now she was in the little toilet room at the head of the dock, naked. She had covered the drain with a little hand mirror and was preening again, alternately sudsing down her body and scrubbing a very brief pair of pink bikini underpants. A crowd began to gather: Mac, Yolanda from the office, various workmen and marina clients. It was obvious there was more here than a hangover.

Yolanda went to call the police: Mac went to Judi K to find some clothes and returned with a T-shirt to go with the sarong lying on the floor of the bathroom. I didn't want to close myself in the room with her, so the ensuing non-struggle proceeded in public. When I tried to rinse off the soap, she gleefully slathered more on; when I took the soap away from her, she tossed her undies into the watching crowd; when I wrapped her sarong skirt around her waist (thank heavens for Velcro) she playfully flipped handfuls of water around the room and over me. When I attempted to put the tee shirt over her head and her arms into the sleeves, she turned limp, unresisting as a doll. Only with Mac's help could we get her shirt on.

By the time the police van arrived we knew she needed to be at the hospital, not the police station. Yolanda climbed in first, to make sure Harriet arrived safely and to translate. We lifted Harriet into the van foot by foot where she slumped spinelessly against Yolanda until the policeman climbed in. Quick as a snake-strike her hand darted out to grab at his balls. At the hospital she continued the passive-grab activity until she was sedated. The hospital personnel recognized her, the culprit, cocaine, and she was sent to the Psychiatric ward for treatment.

A search of Judi K turned up her passport and tourist visa. She was a British citizen, had been in Chiapas, and had arrived in La Paz about two weeks earlier.

I called the British Consulate in Mexico City, which first told me that, as she was over 18, they couldn't call her parents, whose address was in the passport. However, the Consulate contacted the hospital, then did contact her family. Five days later, about the time Harriet had detoxified, her brother, who worked in Mexico City, arrived to escort her home. Later the owner of Judi K received a letter from Harriet thanking him for having taken care of her. She remembered nothing from the time she had arrived in Chiapas until she regained herself in La Paz.

Before picking Harriet up from the hospital her brother came to the marina to thank us. He said she had always been fey, but the family wasn't aware of any previous drug use. The brother's last comment as he left the marina was "Well, I guess the melon just fell off the post."

### Breaking Neil in Easy, 1987

Twice a year Joe traveled from La Paz to the USA, and while there he bought videos, the best available, of operas, to share with the small group of friends with his taste for opera. Aside from opera, he had one other passion, alcohol.

Joe was a quiet person, a good marina client who came to the office once a month to pay his bill, and each afternoon about 4:00 to check his mail, after which he would head uptown. Invariably he was neatly dressed in dark long pants, a white shirt and dark shoes and socks. Impeccable. Neatly combed and shaved, almost natty, he walked with a bearing that reflected his military past. A gentleman, none of the sloppy attire of many drinking boaters. I was never around when he returned in the evening. I saw him drunk only once, the night I was called to the hospital near midnight.

If the phone rings at home after 10:00 p.m. it means trouble. The Marina watchmen had called the Red Cross ambulance to pick Joe up. He had walked off the side of the launch ramp and fallen six feet onto the cement below. The hospital staff had patched him up, no serious damage, and called me to come to take him home. He was incoherent, and I refused, promising the nursing staff to pick him up in the morning.

Where am I and why am I here, he asked, when I arrived at the hospital at 6:30. The staff was relieved. Mild Joe had been aggressive, trying to drag the female nurses into his bed and abusing the males. Finally they put him in restraints and let him scream until he slept. After that one time, he returned to his old pattern.

By the summer of 1987 arrived, Neil had been back from college long enough for Mac and me to feel we could leave La Paz and the marina for a month during the summer. We packed up the car and made the two-day drive north. Not ten minutes after we walked into our condo in Chula Vista, the phone rang. It was Neil.

Without any preliminaries (how was the drive, how are you) he said "You know Waltzing Matilda, the boat by the launch ramp? I think Joe is dead. What should I do?"

"What do you mean, you think he is dead?"

"Well, yesterday his friend Jane came to look for him about 6:00 p.m. because he hadn't shown up for his 5:00 o'clock drinking date. She asked me to check on him. I looked down the companionway and he was asleep on the bunk in the main cabin, snoring. Now today, a few minutes ago, another friend came looking for him for the same reason. I looked down the hatch again. He's still on the settee, but he's not snoring any more, and he looks funny."

"Call the Red Cross, let them decide if he is dead or not, and they know what to do next. Then you call some members of Club Cruceros, his friends, who will know what to do after the officials have finished." Neil did both. He found a relative's name in the file and the rest of the decisions were out of his hands.

### Miss Bare Bather

She was befriended by Mort, the manager of the restaurant at the marina. She needed a place to stay and someone to feed her, so Mort, a push-over for needy young women, provided both. She also seemed to have the need to strip, and was eventually picked up on the Malecon, near the municipal pier, taking a saltwater bath.

Under the law, Mexican immigration authorities, at their own expense, have to return illegals and undesirables to the border of the country of their origin. Since the budget, determined in Mexico City, is tight, the local officials often don't bother to deport people; they prefer to warn the culprits and give them a limited number of days to leave Mexican soil, and hope they at least disappear from their jurisdictions. But some, like Miss Bather, who are not reasonable, must be dealt with by the local authorities.

Immigration officials put Miss Bather in their van and drove north, only stopping for meals. In Tijuana, they drove her to the border, watched her walk through to the US side, turned around and drove home.

Almost before the authorities arrived back in La Paz, Miss Bather was back at the Marina and undressed. Back to the USA the officials drove her, this time in restraints, as she fought to jump out of the car whether it was moving or parked. This time when they reached the border they did what they should have done the first time; they took her to US immigration officers who called 911 and delivered her to the ambulance when it arrived. This time she did not come back.

## A Colonia Unto Its Own

If it weren't for the men in black pants and shirts carrying walkie-talkies, you would think you were in an urban shanty town. Only occasionally do you notice the corner watchtowers and unpainted cement walls delimiting the Centro de Readaptación Social, the CERESO, the Baja California Sur State Prison.

Our group of five American women left several bags of used clothes in the social services office, and Claudia, the social worker assigned to lead us through the prison, and a female warden (she wore a uniform and Claudia had on street clothes) took us through the first of a number of barred doors into the prison proper. It wasn't until we were well into our tour that I realized that an armed male guard was also accompanying us.

A man with a mop saturated with pine-scented disinfectant stepped to the side of the hallway in the first area we visited. Rooms lined the hallway, each packed with four double deck beds hung with scraps of cloth for privacy. A room, so small that not all eight men could stand on the floor at the same time, was home to the occupants from 8:00 o'clock in the evening to 6:00 o'clock the next morning. Claudia told us that the Center's philosophy was to provide a life "inside" that approximated as much as possible life "outside." Considering the probable background of most of the men and women we saw, the lives of the prisoners did not appear miserable.

We poked our noses into more rooms along the way: here was the gym, where we persuaded one of the men to demonstrate one of the weight lifting machines, much to the amusement of his friends; across the hall was a classroom where the inmates could participate in classes, when they were offered, in painting, or any level of schooling, or group therapy. Most of the teachers were inmates, although occasionally people from outside volunteered. Further on was the infirmary, with eight beds, staffed by a dentist, a doctor, a psychiatrist, and a psychologist. Any seriously ill prisoners are taken under guard to the general hospital.

Still in the central area we visited the kitchen where food is prepared for the 850 inmates in pots the size of Macbeth's witches' caldrons. We worked our way around the central island, inspecting the pots of rice and the simmering vegetables which were to be added to the unbelievable piles of shredded chicken, the main luncheon meal. It smelled wonderful, as cooking onions, garlic, tomatoes and peppers always do. The cooks, inmates all, served three meals a day. I didn't ask, but from the lack of cutlery I think the eaters provided their own plates and then did their own washing up. The prison also has its own bakery, and the bakers are allowed to make extra pan dulce (sweet bread) to sell.

We left the central buildings; Claudia pointed out a room which was used by the Evangelical Christians as a chapel. Further along, in its own building, was the Catholic Church, and even further along we heard singing, accompanied by a guitar. I recognized enough words to know it was a hymn.

All this was fairly standard, albeit much more poverty stricken, if compared to any prison or other group living accommodation in the United States, I suppose. The rest was not, and fell into the category of "like life on the outside."

A shanty town collection of wood framed, cardboard walled rooms contained the businesses of the inmates. Row after row, room after room, each man who wished it had his own space and, according to his skills and the materials and tools provided to him by family or friends, he was at work. One showed us a belt he was decorating; his neighbor didn't raise his head from the matting for a frame he was decorating with a delicate brown inked design. Many men were making picture frames, complete with pictures. Another,

fabricating a jewelry chest out of carefully inlaid scraps of wood, and others carving, painting, and polishing abalone shells. Still another made doll houses, complete with furniture. The items they made are sold in a gift shop outside the jail, or by family members.

The inmates were mostly petty thieves and low-level drug transporters. For example, the belt-maker, a penurious fisherman from Sonora State on the other side of the Sea of Cortez was caught with a panga load of marijuana destined for the US market.

In the women's area we could buy tortas (sandwiches) or candy. Women with babies keep them with them for some months. The husband of a woman who had twins spent daylight hours with her to help care for the babies.

Over the high walls in the women's area we could see the guard towers of the high-security area of the prison, but could not visit it.

## Unsolved Mysteries

Dear David and Neil:

Mostly life goes on here at an even pace, but every once in a while there is striking news to pass on, even though you do not know all the participants. Person #1, Abe, is kind of a different man, not very socially adept, in his mid 50s, whose love is snakes and other reptiles. He is also the son of very wealthy people and has money to spend on such things, not work 40 hours a week. Best thing about him is that he does not choose to spend all his money on himself. I have known him peripherally through Tim for a number of years. Just recently he built a serpentarium (reptile zoo) on the lot across the street from the house where we lived on the beach.

Person # 2, who did most of the work building the fiberglass cages and cases for Abe is Steve, another gringo, who has lived in La Paz for years and years and is married to a local girl. Jimmy and Steve knew each other as they had both worked as divers, cleaning boat bottoms, in the USA.

Person # 3 is Jimmy, the black guy who had a Texas barbecue rib place on Abasolo not too far from the Marina. Jimmy played tennis occasionally with Mac until he left La Paz for the USA to find the money to buy equipment to make his dream of a real restaurant in La Paz a reality. He obtained the money by taking up with a woman who came back to La Paz with him, and they started to make a part of the building behind Don Jose's boatyard into the restaurant. I think he pretty much ran through Carol's money, as she disappeared before long, back to the USA.

When Abe decided to build another serpentarium on some property he owned just north of Cabo San Lucas on the Pacific side, Steve and Jimmy went along, Steve to build the units and Jimmy maybe to install a restaurant as part of the serpentarium, or maybe as a laborer.

Wednesday night Abe spent the night at the house of a neighbor's. In the morning about 8:00 he walked the 100-150 yards to his own property where the three men lived most of the time. There, perhaps there might have been some argument between Abe and Jimmy, maybe over money, who knows, and supposedly Abe, started walking back to the neighbor's house. He never arrived and has not been seen since.

In Mexico a Missing Person Report cannot be filed for 24 hours, so Friday morning the neighbor made her report. The police came and questioned Jimmy and Steve. About 4:30 that afternoon Jimmy put some personal things in his car and told Steve he was taking them to the house of his girlfriend, Dora, in La Paz. We had met Dora once or twice; she and her family make piñatas for a living. Jimmy never made it to La Paz; instead, according to police reports, at about 9:00, at Km 36 on the highway between Todos Santos and the Todos Santos-Cabo-La Paz junction, he swerved into the wrong lane in front of a bus. He lived a few hours, but died about midnight in the Salvatierra Hospital.

So questions and speculations abound. Was Abe kidnapped? Was he mugged by local thugs who, when he resisted, killed him? Did Jimmy kill him, then commit suicide? Or was it an accident, pure and simple?

Although many of us who knew Jimmy thought of him as outgoing, friendly, and amusing, there were other stories: that he was in trouble here on his first visit because, when he caught a young man trying to steal his bike he beat the man badly with his tennis racket, stopping only when he was pulled off. And his first girlfriend in La Paz left him when she felt personally threatened. And someone else remembered that he had done time in

the penitentiary in the USA, supposedly for activities with the Black Panthers as a younger man; or maybe for some more violent activity against a wife.

So there is the possibility that Abe pushed the wrong buttons and some pushing and shoving went too far. But wouldn't Steve, working at the back of the property, have heard something? Wouldn't there be blood somewhere? And where was Jimmy between 4:30 when he left Cabo San Lucas and 9:00, when he went off the road? Abe's body has not been found.

Steve is the best person of the bunch, and the police roughed him up some, but he knows nothing, and has a lawyer living with him to keep him safe.

So what is my part in all this? The first I heard of the story was from a frantic call from Cabo San Lucas from Steve's wife, worried about his safety. A couple of hours later Dora, near hysteria, came to the office. She had known, from a call the night before from Steve that Jimmy was on his way to La Paz, but he did not arrive. At 10:30 in the morning the police came with the news of his death, and gave her a letter of permission to claim the body. She wanted help locating Jimmy's family. She knew his last name, Presley, that he came from Fresno, and that his mother's name was Bertha. A call to Information showed that among the eleven Presleys in Fresno, one was Bertha.

The woman who answered the phone was Jimmy's sister, luckily not his 92 year old mother. There is no gentle way to break the news of a death, but because I began with questions about who she was and did she know a Jimmy Presley, she must have had an inkling before I said "I have bad news." That afternoon and all the next day I was the phone intermediary and translator between Jimmy's sister, Jimmy's son, the sister's son, and Dora, and finally the Funeraria, which is responsible for the arrangements of shipping the body to the USA, as was the family's wish. Jimmy's son said he had to see that it was his father to believe it. No family member could come to La Paz.

Jimmy's body was flown to Los Angeles this morning and I will phone the family this evening, at Dora's request, para asegurar que todo salio bien.

## Tale of a La Paz Streetwalker: How and Why I Became One

I got off the plane yesterday afternoon in La Paz and checked into a nice hotel on the waterfront. Down the street a bit, in the late afternoon, I watched a sunset to knock your eyes out: glowing oranges (I know, I know, just pollution) and a strip of blue just above the horizon. I'd been told that La Paz was a safe town, so decided to walk up to the main square to see what was happening there, and to see the church. I watched the kids playing, running up and down the bandstand steps, and the other oldsters talking to their friends. A bunch of people were playing some version of bingo, a caller yelling out words I couldn't understand in Spanish. By the time I had seen what I wanted to, and eaten a dish of mango sherbet, it was 7:30 and full dark. I looked at the map I had picked up and figured I could walk back to the hotel by a different route, and see what the neighborhood was like.

So I was walking along, rubber-necking over the fences, speculating on what the families inside the houses were doing (mostly watching TV, it seemed, from the blue glow), when BAM. I staggered back and realized I had hit my forehead on the corner of a low-hanging air conditioner. Luckily I had a not-tao-greasy dinner napkin in my pocket, so I could staunch the blood I could feel trickling down my forehead into my eyebrow. That's what comes of being so nosy.

At the next house I dodged their air conditioner, but wasn't watching my feet and caught my toe on a piece of metal. Turned out to be a length of rebar sticking out of an unfinished set of steps. I don't think my toe is broken, but will check it out when I get back to the hotel.

At the next lot the house seemed to be under construction; at least there was one pile of sand and another of the pink rock that they use a lot of here. My hands took most of the weight when I tripped, and I don't think my wrist is more than sprained. Then, when I fell over the log in front of the next house, I only scraped my knee. I didn't have another napkin, so just had to let the blood run down my leg.

The following house must have been owned by someone quite prosperous. At least there were two pretty new cars parked across the driveway (and it was paved, not dirt), and I am sure it was a purebred Doberman pinscher which lunged at the fence and grabbed my elbow when I squeezed between the cars and the fence. Mostly he just tore my shirt ... it had long sleeves; and I had a sewing kit back at the hotel to make a repair with.

By the light of the streetlight I checked my map; only a couple of blocks to the hotel. The napkin I held to my forehead was pretty soppy by now, and my limp was getting worse. Maybe I did break my toe. Maybe I can tape it to the next toe to stabilize it, just in case. With my next step I realized there was nothing underfoot, and the world turned black.

The hospital room was pretty decent, and the nurses were efficient and clean. When they let me out of here in a day or two I'll go back to see how big the drop-off was in that sidewalk, and I'll remember that it doesn't take frowsy hair, a pretty face, and a big bust and bottom separated by a tiny waist to become a streetwalker in La Paz. What it does take is common sense and a strong sense of survival.

## Butterflies in Morelia

Cruisers sometimes forget that there is a Mexico beyond walking distance of the seacoast and anchorages. Many interesting side trips are available on day trips, by bus or rental car. The wineries of the Valle de Guadalupe outside Ensenada, the village of Todos Santos out of La Paz, Mission San Javier out of Puerto Escondido, and the caves of San Borja inland from Mulege are a few examples. The possibilities for trips inland on the mainland of Mexico are endless.

After years of visiting the best of Baja California Sur, we decided it was time to become acquainted with some of the top spots of mainland Mexico, and took a mid-winter vacation to do so. February is the month in which the Monarch butterflies, which have migrated in steps from places north, congregate in sanctuaries in the central sierras of Mexico. To see them we flew to Guadalajara where we rented a Suburban large enough to accommodate our group of seven. We spent two days exploring Guadalajara, then drove the toll ways and byways of the small village, the dying mining town, of Angangueo where we spent the night in a hotel with the pretensions of its earlier prosperity. Before dinner we struck a very poor bargain with the owner of a vehicle, sight unseen) to take us up into the mountains, at 10,000 feet elevation, in the morning.

In the morning we climbed into the back of a rickety, asthmatic, sun-bleached blue pickup with bench seats and no hand-holds. It was easier to take the jolting standing than with the spine, sitting. It was cold; the boiling water spraying from the radiator froze into ice droplets on the windshield. The driver broke the ice of the surface of the stream we stopped at to replenish the radiator. Then he shook a couple of tablespoons of chili powder into the radiator to, maybe, plug the holes.

As the truck panted upward, spray flying over the hood, we could see that what had once been forested hills had been stripped bare for planting crops. The steeply sloping fields were ready to be planted with corn. Even after we reached the sanctuary boundary and information display, and began our own slow, panting, ascent by foot into the forest, we could hear the tractors and chain saws. The Mexican government is trying to save some of these areas, and is hoping that seasonal tourism will provide some income for the people who live here, but the people continue to multiply beyond the capacity of the area to feed them, so more acres every year fall to the modern machetes.

We arrived at a clearing with a few butterflies wafting about in the still chilly air. The sky was overcast. Across the clearing we entered the pine forest again and continued to climb until the guide pointed ahead. What we saw, when we finally knew what we were looking at, was great clusters, masses of butterflies, an innocuous pine bark brown, clinging to the trunks of the pine trees, and hanging in clumps like great wasps' nests from the branches.

We had not realized until we actually came face to wing with the butterflies that they did not fly unless the sun came out and the air warmed up. In the cold they huddled together, clinging to each other to keep from freezing. Like fish which school for safety, the butterflies mass for survival. We missed seeing the air full of orange and black wings but what we saw was spectacular in its own way. We sat by the trail for half an hour, broken butterflies littering the ground, huddling in our own jackets, trying to warm a butterfly or two in our cupped hands, hoping the sun would break through the clouds to warm us all.

Down the trail, down the mountain, and off to more citified explorations in Patzcuaro, Morelia, and Guadalajara again. Mexico is geographically huge and culturally diverse, and it will offer us many winters of exploration without repetition.

## The Invasion

The sidewalk leading up to our bungalow in Tikal Nature Preserve is made of stone set in cement. A landscaped garden in front of the bungalow is raked every day and bright with flowers; in back a cleared space thirty feet wide separates us from the jungle, dense, green, almost impenetrable. We spy on the birds from the edges of the clearing. In the afternoons we sit on the small front porch, our bare feet on the rail, reading, resting up from the morning's exploration, waiting 'til near sunset for the birds to begin to settle in for the night.

Gail glances into the garden. "Look at that", she says. "That plant is covered with ants."

So it is, and then we notice lines of ants, three or four files of them about three ants wide, tracking across the bottom step of the bungalow cater-corner to ours where no one is at home. I rise and step down onto the walk to have a closer look. Ant files follow the cemented hollows between the stones, dipping into little holes and coming back out again. Innocently I think they are looking for a new nesting site. We have already seen lots of leaf cutter ants on their compacted earth paths in the jungle and crossing between the hotel and the Visitor Center, grassless trails traveled by ants struggling with pieces of leaves bigger than they are, moving at a stately pace.

Today's ants are not stately, they look more like warriors marching in double-time to the front lines. The ants thicken; the earth between the two bungalows begins to move. Our skin begins to crawl. A few ants begin to climb the porch column of our bungalow. We put on our shoes and Gail runs to the office for reinforcements, maybe a broom, while I grab a towel and begin to whisk ants off the porch. The few multiply, I whisk faster, help does not arrive. I drop the towel and run toward the office and find the deskman seated on a sawhorse in the driveway, watching the howler monkeys in the trees above, who says "Ants do that. It's best to leave them alone; spray them and they go crazy. In half an hour they'll be gone."

We abandon our bungalow, leave it to the ants, who are now swarming up the back wall of the bungalow, near the bathroom. The insects and lizards are frantic. Little pools of ants form around the fallen bodies while the rest race on, looking for their meal. We join the small crowd of visitors outside the office listening to the howler monkeys bark and growl and settle into the branches for the night, a group of males and one small one who tries snuggling up to each of the others in turn, only to be spurned.

We check our room before dinner; just a few lines of ants in the corner of the bathroom and clustering under the bathmat, which Gail throws out onto the porch. After dinner they have moved on, and we visualize their silent march through the jungle behind us, debugging as they go.

## Mayra's Huipil

The year before I joined her on a trip to Guatemala Gail visited the Sunday crafts market in Antigua where she found and paid for a huipil, an embroidered blouse/serape made from a rectangular piece of hand-woven cotton cloth with a hole in the center for the head, used by Mayan women. The one she liked was an "everyday" huipil with subdued embroidery and colors which she thought she would be willing to wear once she was home in southern California. The huipil was not yet sewed up under the arms. The creator and seller, Mayra Hernandez, agreed to sew up the side and Gail could pick it up later in the afternoon. By the time Gail returned that afternoon, the market had closed and Mayra was gone. The next morning Gail left Antigua before the market opened.

From home, Gail sent photographs of Mayra to the receptionist at the hotel she had stayed in, asking her if she would look for Mayra and pick up the huipil. The receptionist tried once, with no success.

On our first morning in Antigua a year later, we headed for the market, duplicate photographs in hand.

No, Mayra isn't here, said all the other huipil-selling ladies. But her sister Elena is. Smiles and hugs and laughter and the universal Latin gesture of thumb and forefinger held an inch apart, indicating "wait a minute". We strolled around the market fending off the other vendors, and soon enough Mayra appeared with a teen-aged daughter and a baby wrapped in a beautiful piece of blue cloth. More hugs and smiles. She still had Gail's huipil at home, would we pay for a taxi to go there and get it?

Before we found a taxi, Mayra found an acquaintance who agreed to take us to Mayra's house in San Antonio something-or-other, a pueblito just outside Antigua. Gail and I and the teen-aged daughter climbed into the back of a rattling and dented Toyota pickup. Fifteen minutes later we left the pavement and jounced into a warren of cobble-stoned streets just wide enough for two vehicles to pass and stopped at Mayra's door.

In the patio at the center of the house another daughter was washing clothes and hanging pieces on lines criss-crossing overhead. Several smaller children stopped playing to stare at us. Mayra disappeared into the house and brought out Gail's huipil, then asked if I wouldn't like one, too. What could I say? Soon the table was heaped with huipiles of extravagant color and complexity, representing hours and months of work and creative ideas. I bought one embroidered with flowers in all shades of red, orange, umber and lilac. It was as different from Gail's, which was of just two colors and one line of design, as could be. Even if I don't wear it (since then I have worn it twice), I can appreciate it as a work of art, view it as a reminder of a good story, and love it as a lesson in trust and honesty.