



# *Murder, Lust, and Betrayal in Baja California*



**AUTHOR  
ALEX KERESKES  
IN MEXICO**





# **Murder, Lust, And Betrayal In Baja California**

**By  
Alexander Kerekes**

**Published  
Carmel, California**

# Murder, Lust, And Betrayal In Baja California

Copyright © 2011 Alexander Kerekes  
[www.storiesbyalex.com](http://www.storiesbyalex.com)

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American copyright conventions. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

ISBN 978-1-935530-41-1

Printed in the U.S.A. - First U.S. Edition August 2011

Published by  
Alexander Kerekes  
Carmel, California



## Preface

Some people have said that you should not judge a book by its cover. Others say, why would anyone want to read a book about Murder, Lust, or Betrayal? So, let me propose an alternative. I have a story to tell you about adventure, love, and following the stardust of your dreams. Come with me onto a road of discovery and meet the wonderful people, land, and life of Baja California. I will share with you my story of swimming with whales and dolphins. Of finding the last Descanso – A Final Resting Place – at the very tip of lands end where Baja California tumbles into the Pacific. Accompany me as I embark on a journey of what I thought was a leisurely sail along the Baja coast only to almost lose my life to a seafaring madman. Share with me the terror and joy of having survived a short and furious storm in the Sea of Cortez that dashed other boats upon its shores.

So, close your eyes and let your imagination illuminate a path behind my footsteps as I recount my tales of adventure in Baja California. And then I will ask you, “Which story would you have preferred? Death or the beauty that life has to offer?” Judge for yourself.

**Chapters**

Preface.....9

**Part 1- Touching Silk InThe Baja**

Dramatic Sunsets of Guerrero Negro.....9

The Journey to Guerrero Negro.....16

The Salt Works of Guerrero Negro.....23

The Whales of Guerrero Negro.....25

The Chorus of San Ignacio.....33

Egret, Mosquitoes, and A Dream  
Realized.....37

**Part 2 – Descansos of Baja California**

Crosses, Shrines, Monuments, and Prayers  
For The Departed .....51

**Part 3 – Sailing With Captain Bligh**

Knockdown.....89

Two Weeks Earlier.....102

Iguanas of Mazatlan.....105

The Rooster Fish.....108

Bahia De Tortugas.....110

Cabo Falso .....113



**(Part 4 - Continued )**

# Chapters

Continued



## Part 4 – Log of the Sailing Vessel “No Regrets” In The Sea of Cortez

A Beginning.....	122
Spaceships, Ancient Caves, and The Vermillion Sea.....	128
The Lost Goldmine of Isla San Jose.....	134
Raindrops and Shipwrecks.....	151
Cortez the Cat, Ghosts Towns, And The Holy Spirit.....	162
Random Memories.....	173





# *Part 1*

## *Touching Silk In The Baja*

*This is my story of traveling to Baja-Mexico in search of a whale to touch*





## Chapter 1

### Dramatic Sunsets Of Guerrero Negro

Normally, the tale of my journey begins from the point when I begin traveling. But this time I think I'll start with the story of my dramatic sunset adventure in Guerrero Negro. After making reservations for a trip into Scammon's Lagoon I found a small motel called Las Ballenas, which means "The Whales." I wanted to see the sunset and found out that there was a dirt road leading from town along a dike through the salt ponds, which ended at the old salt works pier. I was lucky to have found the road, as there were no signs pointing out the way to the pier. I was the only person traveling on the old pier road and

noticed when I arrived that I was the only one there as well. It was a very rustic place, with an abandoned lighthouse, a large warehouse, several buildings adjacent to the lighthouse, and a dilapidated pier. When the sun began to set into the Pacific Ocean I took some wonderful photographs of this peaceful, scenic, tranquil, and interesting place.





Guerrero Negro



Lighthouse and Old Pier, Guerrero Negro, Baja,

Starting to explore the grounds around the lighthouse, I found a heaping pile of very large fan shells. The mound was over ten feet tall and twenty feet wide. There were thousands and thousands of shells in that pile, some of which measured eight inches across. I had heard that clams were plentiful in this area, but wondered



if our oceans' well being will outlive man's insatiable hunger.

I remembered when I had sailed into Cabo San Lucas and landed at the docks there. As I walked along the pier I came upon the area where sports fishermen were hauling in their catch of the day. I was saddened to see several truckloads of marlin being loaded and taken away. There was blood everywhere. The number of marlin that had been killed that day was unbelievable. This could not go on indefinitely, I thought, the sea would not be able to sustain our ferocious appetite. And I could not understand the sport of catching beautiful creatures such as marlin. It would be one thing if these fish were caught for food as a matter of survival.

In fact, however, many were killed for a photograph, and the pleasure of the hunt.





I digress – let us return to my sunset adventure in Guerrero Negro.

The sun along the old pier had finally set and it was beginning to get dark when I suddenly heard a loud blast, the sound of many vehicles speeding down the road, and saw lights flashing as these fast-moving vehicles barreled into the area of the old pier. I saw about eight trucks and SUVs come to a screeching and dust-filled stop around the old boat launch ramp. Some trucks faced the bay and others pointed outward toward the road and lighthouse. The vehicles stopped and men armed with machine guns jumped out. Some ran down to the launch area and others faced out with their weapons at the ready. Luckily, I had not been seen and quickly ran into the lighthouse tower. It was old and dilapidated,

but the stairs spiraled upward. I immediately climbed up to the first-level window and looked out in time to see a fast-moving powerboat skimming along the bay toward the launch ramp. The boat bore down at full speed and at the very last moment, cut its motor and glided into the ramp area. Immediately, men from the truck ran to the speedboat and started off-loading the small bales that were being thrown to them from the boat. These items were quickly loaded into the vehicles. Everything about this operation worked with military precision; within ten minutes the speedboat, was off-loaded and roared back into the bay. The armed men quickly jumped back into their trucks and took off at a high rate of speed. I think I held my breath through the whole event, stunned by what I was watching. By the divine heavens, I had been spared the agony



of discovery. I quickly descended the deserted lighthouse, got in my vehicle, which was parked behind the lighthouse, and drove back into town. That was one dramatic sunset!



*Surviving A Sunset In Guerrero Negro*

## Chapter 2

### The Journey To Guerrero Negro

A year before embarking upon my journey to Guerrero Negro my girlfriend and I were sipping coffee and eating breakfast at the French Bakery & Restaurant in Cabo San Jose, Baja. During our breakfast I explained to her that I have always loved the ocean and all those interesting things that it brings us. Particularly, I always wanted to see the migration of gray whales from the Bering Sea to the warm Pacific lagoons of Mexico. The waiter spoke very good English and upon hearing that I was interested in seeing the migration of whales recommended that I visit San Ignacio and Scammon's Lagoon at Guerrero Negro, Baja. He then said, "You

know, it has been said that the laziest people in Mexico are in Guerrero Negro." He went on to say; "It has been told that two guys from Guerrero Negro were sitting on a park bench when they spotted a brand new 100-peso note across the street. One looked at the other and said, "I hope the wind blows it over to us." I had a good laugh and was reminded that earlier this year a well-seasoned Mexico traveler had told me, "Beware of people from the state of Michoacán—they are very sneaky people. And hold onto your belongings around people from Guerrero, they are known by all in Mexico to be thieves." Although these warnings were spoken with humor and a laugh, they actually reflect the continuing division among humanity: man's sense of tribalism—his desire to be associated with a group. My observation is that associations

and connections that occur through religion, location, ethnic ties, political, or some other type of grouping have always resulted in conflict throughout history. Mankind seems to identify itself in small groups as opposed to a global, one-brother perspective. Sometimes one wonders if there is any hope for global peace, goodwill, and the fraternity of mankind.

After we drank our coffee my girlfriend and I rode the city bus from San Jose to Cabo San Lucas. During the ride I recalled my first trip to the Baja in 1989. At that time I had a forty-foot sailboat that I had sailed from Newport Beach to Cabo San Lucas and then through the Sea of Cortez. I'd brought along a small moped, which I would unload during landfalls and use to explore the region. At that time there was nothing between

Cabo San Lucas and San Jose; both were small villages. However, in the last twenty years this area has become a vacation destination and has undergone massive development. On my first moped trip from San Lucas to San Jose in 1989 I had come upon a burned-out vehicle lying alongside the road. I could tell that the car had apparently run off the road and had flipped over several times. Nearby there was a cross, indicating that someone had died in the accident. I was surprised at the time that the fatal wreckage has not been cleared. As I sat on the bus recalling these events while looking out the window, I was stunned to see that very same wreck. I quickly stood up and again briefly looked at the wreck. That wreck had now lain there for at least *sixteen years*. The strange thing about this sight was that when I first saw the wreck it lay in

the rubble of a barren desert. Now the town had completely built itself around this very wreck. Some things still stay the same, regardless of progress.



*Photo of wreck I took in 1989 - It's still there!*

Later, when I returned to California, I knew that one day I would return to Baja to see the migration of whales to Guerrero Negro.

Several years later, in early January I had a dream about the time I swam with a pod of whales in the South Pacific. The next morning I left my home in California and started driving south to Baja, Mexico. I had no specific plan except to follow my dream to Guerrero Negro.

As I crossed into Mexico I was amazed at the juxtaposition of poverty and wealth. On the one hand you can see poor people walking around who own nothing but the clothes on their backs and fueled with nothing more than their hopes and dreams for a better life. At the same time you can see someone drive by in a \$40,000 car. The middle class in Mexico is emerging, but it

still has a long way to go. Regardless, I truly enjoy the country and being among the local people. The genuine kindness, interest, and friendship I have experienced in my travels in Mexico gives me hope and continued optimism that the basic human characteristic of people is their good nature.

Arriving in Ensenada, I took a wrong turn off the primary route and ended up in a suburban area where many of the town's streets were dirt roads. I saw live wires dangling from power poles and also on the ground; others were connected to various shanties and homes. I later read in a local paper that a little girl had been electrocuted when she stepped on one of these wires. I wished that, for every time I had heard one of my former colleagues complain about their wages,

they could experience the fear of a parent sending their children out knowing that the surrounding area is strewn with live electrical wire. Or that a dirt road to their home is the best they could ever hope for.

Again, I was struck by the melding of Third World with modern conveniences. Driving down the main street I saw a brand-new MacDonald's, a Costco, a Burger King, all side-by-side with Mexican shanties and street carts where tacos, tamales, and tortillas were being hand-cooked and sold to passersby in the same manner as a century ago.

The journey from Carmel to Guerrero Negro was 900 miles and I arrived in the late afternoon of my second day of traveling. I learned that Guerrero Negro is the location of the largest salt

ponds in the world—and that there were now ten whales in Scammon's Lagoon.



I immediately signed up for an afternoon excursion to see the whales. The guide told me that it was early in the season (mid-January) and that there were three distinct behaviors that the whales would display in the following two months. Apparently, as the whales start arriving



in the lagoon during January they are primarily exploring the lagoon and sounding. Therefore, most of the sightings of the whales will involve observing their flukes. In February as the whales settle in, they engage in breaching activities. And then in March after the baby whales are born, they engage in friendly behavior where they float next to the tour boats and allow themselves to be touched.

I was somewhat surprised by this information. With so much said about the whales in Scammon's Lagoon, it had seemed like whales were being petted there every day during the entire season. So much for the power of advertising and folklore. Perhaps, my lack of research also played a role in this. Nevertheless,

as my father once told me, "It's the hunt that is exciting." I decided that no matter what happened, I had a dream and a vision that I was pursuing and what followed after that would only be karma!

I checked into my \$22 motel and went to see the sunset of Guerrero Negro— and that is where I began my story.

It had been a long journey and that evening I turned in wearily and dreamt of the whales of Scammon's Lagoon.





## Chapter 3

### *The Salt Works Of Guerrero Negro*

Before going out to Scammon's Lagoon I decided to visit the salt works at Guerrero Negro. I learned that these salt works were the largest in the world; twenty-five tons of salt is harvested daily. The operation is in partnership with the Japanese, who initially financed the operation in 1954. Back then there were no paved roads into Baja and the salt was loaded on barges and with a tugboat pulled out to Cedros Island, which is located several miles from the southern tip of Vizcanso Bay. Apparently, the lagoon was too shallow for ocean-going vessels and freighters from Japan, Africa, and several South American

countries, which forced them to pick up their salt from Cedros instead. Salt was produced by flooding ocean water into low-lying marshes that are encircled by manmade dikes. The water was then left to evaporate under the sun. These dried salt lagoons reminded me of a Canadian winter scene. The salt operation was vast and encompassed several thousand acres.

I recalled that when I had sailed through the Sea of Cortez in 1989 I had come upon several deserted islands that were once producing salt through this evaporation method. These islands were very interesting to explore because when the operations ceased, everything was left in place. There were abandoned homes, offices, small towns, lighthouses and on one island, a complete church. The church was several steps

from the ocean and I remember being awestruck by the beauty of the blue skies and the Sea of Cortez as I looked out from the church doors.

Exploring that church, I entered the sacristy and

found a gold chalice and crucifix, green silk vestments, and a very large and antique looking Bible written in Latin. For a moment I was tempted

to take the Bible as a souvenir. But I then

thought that the wrath of God might descend upon me in the form of a storm at sea. And so I made the sign of the cross out of respect and left everything just as I had found it. That memory is

forever with me.

Later, I learned that the salt works in the Sea of Cortez were for the most part abandoned because they were small operations and became unprofitable when the large salt

works in Guerrero Negro began production.



## Chapter 4

### *The Whales Of Guerrero Negro*

After visiting the salt works I met up with our whale watching tour guide and loaded up into a Mexican panga, which is like a large skiff. Our boat driver then took off like a bat out of hell. Unfortunately, I was sitting on the front seat and was getting bounced up and down as the bow of the boat skipped over the waves.



We finally reached the mouth of the lagoon where it met the ocean. We circled around for about thirty minutes and did not see anything. I was beginning to think that it was too early in the season and remembered that the guide had said that so far only about fifteen whales had been spotted arriving into the lagoon. Considering that the lagoon is several miles wide, I started feeling that our chances of a whale encounter were slim. We started to slowly troll along the shoreline. I was sitting against the side of the boat with my right hand hanging over, but not touching the water, when all of a sudden I felt something lightly hit my hand and then something wet and smooth brush up under it. Startled, I jumped up and saw a dolphin just below the surface of the water in front of the boat.





This dolphin had apparently seen my hand and playfully brushed up against it.



The other passengers in the boat also jumped up when I did, but they could not see anything.

Since I was wearing polarized sunglasses I could see two dolphins crisscrossing the bow of the boat, just below the surface. They then surfaced and dove and by then everyone saw them. I quickly pulled out my camera and climbed onto the foremost bow area and tried to take some pictures. The problem with digital cameras is that there is a slight delay between the time the camera focuses and the shutter snaps. I looked at my photographs later and ended up with a picture of the dolphin about a foot underwater. My sense is that he was looking back at me and smiling. Several minutes later the dolphins left. I felt like I had just met "ET." A close encounter of the third kind with a dolphin. I felt elated and thought that no matter what happened with the

whales, my trip to Guerrero Negro had already been successful.

We kept slowly trolling around the mouth of the lagoon when all of a sudden I heard a loud exhalation to my left. I saw a large whale spouting and floating along the surface. Two other whales then joined that one. And so for about an hour we circled the area watching as the whales rose to the surface, spouted, and then slowly dove back under.

That day there were no dramatic displays of breaching, close encounters, or deep diving to show off their tails. But I had taken a path less traveled and was enjoying the journey as it unfolded with its many twists and turns toward the fulfillment of a vision, a dream, and a desire.



This in itself made my journey a wonderful experience.

That night in the Motel Ballenas I had a dream. It took me back to the time I was in the South Pacific visiting the Cook Islands. I was on the island of Raratonga and had made acquaintances with an ex-pat New Zealander who was leading diving expeditions around the island. He mentioned that there was a whale pod swimming around the island and showed me several photographs he had taken the previous day. They were incredible, and showed divers actually swimming adjacent to whales. At the time I was not even aware that whales were familiar to that area. I later learned that whales migrate to various places in the South Pacific from the cold winter waters of the Arctic.

Unfortunately, as in many places in the world, the whales had been hunted almost to extinction. But a small pod had made its way to Raratonga and was now circling the island. I signed up and the following morning we loaded up his large skiff with dive equipment and headed out to the spot where the whales had last been seen. I sat in front of the skiff looking forward at the soft blues of the South Pacific and the lush green island to my left. All of a sudden a large whale leapt from the water, its full body extended out from the ocean. It fell back into the water with a resounding cascade of splashes. I was caught completely unaware—and dazzled. The whale then came back out again and again. Like a pirouetting ballet dancer, all the while coming closer and directly toward us. The New Zealander immediately cut the engine and we

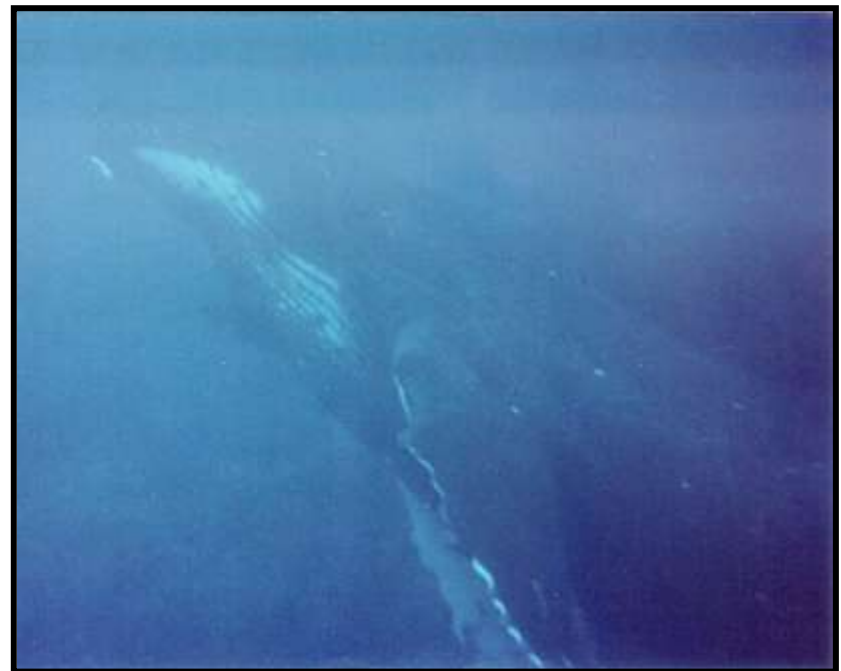
went into drift mode. I calculated that the forward motion of the whale and our drift could set us on a course where our paths would cross. The whale was now very close and I pulled on my flippers and donned my diving mask and snorkel. I then dove into the Pacific. The sun beat down on my back and cast a golden and blue prism of light into the depths. I floated, looking to my left, my right, and then ahead. From the blue mist a shadow started to appear directly in front of and below me. I immediately took a breath and kicked downward and ahead. The sun was sending penetrating golden rays through the soft blue waters and it seemed I was diving to the apex of a lighted vortex when all of a sudden from the apex of this prism a whale appeared. We were on converging paths. I then spread my arms and legs, floating underwater, waiting and

accepting where fate had brought me. The whale continued on its path without any deviation and as it came closer I could see that it would pass directly under me. I continued to hold my breath as the whale passed below. I could see all its features and was amazed how it moved silently forward without any motion of its body. I felt as if I was in a state of suspended animation, as if my thoughts were separate from my body and I was seeing everything from another dimension. This scene unfolded around me in silence. I twisted around as the whale passed under me and watched, as it turned left and continued downward. Deeper and deeper, into the dark blue it continued, eventually fading and fading until it disappeared into the depths of the Pacific. I was completely mesmerized.

As I surfaced I felt very elated and grateful. I sometimes wonder why these types of events always seem to bring us such great elation. I am sure that the answer is that somehow we are all connected. Science indicates that we may have evolved from the ocean and perhaps that is why man has always been drawn to the sea.

When I got back in the boat we continued our journey. About ten minutes later we spotted a pod of whales spouting and moving forward in our direction. Again I could tell that our paths would intersect on a parallel course. This time as I pulled on my mask and snorkel I remembered I had brought along a \$5 disposable underwater camera. As the whales continued to swim toward us I jumped out of the boat and started to swim perpendicular to the whales as they swam by.

I took a deep breath, descended to about six feet, and continued forward. A mother whale and her calf passed directly in front of me. I snapped several photographs.



In one picture, the whales are so close that all you can see is the eyes of the mother whale and the outline of the baby whale's head as it swam alongside her. These events actually occurred. But, in my dream that night I was able to reach out and touch the baby whale as it swam by me.



Baby Whale





## *Chapter 5*

### *The Chorus Of San Ignacio*

The following day I set out for the town of San Ignacio, which is described as an oasis in the desert. A dirt road heads west out of town for about thirty-six miles, ending at San Ignacio Lagoon. Whales also migrate to this lagoon. However, my primary interest was visiting the town's Spanish mission and trying to arrange a tour to see the primitive cave paintings located in the Sierras, situated about twenty-five miles east of San Ignacio. Apparently, San Ignacio is situated in a small valley fed by a thermal spring that flows through the valley, which accounts for its designation as an oasis in the desert. As I

drove from Guerrero Negro the landscape was barren and reminded me of the Arizona desert. I could see the tops of thousands of swaying palm trees as I approached San Ignacio. Turning off the main road, I gained my first impression of San Ignacio, which was that it looked like it was situated in a large gully, not a valley. But then our preconceived notions and home influences often colors, our thoughts and expectations. And sometimes this difference is one of the elements that make a journey such a pleasure. I have often thought that the flowery language of guide books and tourist brochures create a series of visions in our mind that are bound to change once we see a place in real life.

As I followed the road into town, I saw a forest of palm trees. About a half mile down the road a

beautiful lagoon opened up to my left. It was a very tropical and tranquil setting.



I continued into town and noticed that groups of townspeople were picking up trash and cleaning the roadside. I was somewhat surprised; this was the first time I had seen this type of activity. These people take pride in their town, I thought. When I entered the town square I felt like I had transported back in time. To my immediate right I saw a beautiful church built in the old Spanish mission style. I pulled over to look at the structure and photograph it. Approaching the church I heard a chorus of young voices melodically singing from within. I entered and saw that the townsfolk were gathered for Sunday mass. It had been a long time since I had attended service, but something was drawing me there. I saw the men and women whose faces were carved by the toil and the desert elements. I wanted to be there and felt both a great kinship

and a great sadness. Tears welled up in my eyes as I heard the chorus of young people singing. It sounded like a sad, longing prayer for the dream of better days to come. People were lifting up their arms to God and praying as they received the holy sacrament. All the while a heartfelt, happy, soulful, and sad chorus sang. I made the sign of the cross and thanked the Lord for my good fortune.





## Chapter 6

### *Egrets, Mosquitoes, Mosquitoes, and*

### *A Dream Realized*

After settling into the Posada Hotel I decided to return to the San Ignacio fresh water lake to enjoy a cold beer. There I started talking (in my broken Spanish) to the owner's wife and learned that the lake was about one and a half kilometers long and that it ended at the source, which bubbled up from an underground spring. She said that the water was only waist deep at the source and that it would be delightful to swim there. With my very limited Spanish, I was amazed that we were actually able to carry on a conversation that covered a full range of

subjects. We used simple words, sign language, and a lot of smiling and laughing. Communication is as much about laughter and goodwill, as it is about the effort at the spoken word.

It was a beautiful, sunny day and the lake was tranquil and surrounded by lush palm trees and all manner of greenery. The scene was too inviting and the adventure too interesting to pass up. So I quickly changed into my swimming shorts, got into a kayak, and started paddling to the source.

The lake was filled with a variety of birds, some of which had migrated all the way from Canada. The paddle up the lake was very easy and pleasant. I was the only person there. Oh, what solitude. Arriving near the source, I noticed an egret along the bank fishing for its meal. I



decided to float the kayak as close as possible to the bird and then try to photograph it as it spread its grand wings for flight. I drifted closer and closer to the bird, holding my camera at the ready, eye at the lens finder and finger on the shutter button. All of a sudden the egret started to spread its wings. I quickly pressed the shutter. The bird started flying directly over me and with the camera still to my eye and with my head, neck, and back arched upward, I followed the bird as it was flew directly above. Now, mind you, this all takes place in a matter of a millisecond. Well, just as I was about to take my next shot the egret decided it was time to relieve himself. And the center of my forehead was the intended target. Oh, egad! Holy smoke! I immediately put my camera in a plastic bag and jumped into the

lake. And that is how I came to swim in the source of San Ignacio's warm water lake.



After my lake swim I went to the town Internet café, which is where the town guide organizes whale and cave painting trips. He told me there were no other tourists in town that wanted a cave



painting excursion. But there was room for another person to see the whales in the Bay of San Ignacio. Although I had already done the whale-watching excursion in Guerrero Negro I decided to take the San Ignacio trip as well. After all, the genesis of my journey had been stories from this lagoon.

That evening as I turned in I felt content and grateful that good fortune has smiled on my life and that I was able to experience this journey. I lay there in the dark drifting off to sleep, but then I began to hear a slight screeching sound in the air. It came closer and closer. If anyone has ever heard the sound of tiny wings flapping a million times a second, they would shudder knowing that a mosquito is overhead—and is observing its next meal. That sound is like chalk grating and

screeching over a chalkboard. I went from twilight sleep to an immediate state of alertness. I froze and listened and readied my hands. All of a sudden with lightning speed I swatted the air with all my might, hoping to squash that intruder. Then there was silence. Ah, I got him, I thought. I then started to doze off again ...until ever so lightly I could hear that mosquito's return. Fully alert, I again chased the evil intruder. The battle raged all night. I remembered that one of the worst nights I spent in my life was lying on a jungle floor in Vietnam covered with mosquitoes. The mosquitoes were horrid and there was no winning, for they owned the night. It was sheer agony. After that experience when someone would complain frivolously I would tell him or her to go sleep on a jungle floor for a year and then come back and complain. Some things never

change, as the mosquitoes of the La Posada Motel were masters of the night. I finally gave up and threw the cover over my head and fell sleep. However, throughout the night I could hear the mosquitoes flying overhead trying to penetrate my defenses.

I awoke the following morning to clear skies and a sense of anticipation about the start of my journey. It was about thirty-six miles to the lagoon along a dirt, gravel, and washboard road. The journey was slow and I was thankful for the soft seat and good suspension system of the van that was taking us to the lagoon. My fellow travelers were an Italian couple from Torino and an elderly gentleman from Munich. However, I must remind myself to use the term “elderly” with caution. When I was fifty I bought a ticket at the

movies and the sixteen-year-old boy in the ticket booth asked me if I wanted a senior ticket. I was actually speechless when he said that to me. And the clock keeps ticking, in only one direction—forward. So my wisdom to share for those dreaming of grand voyages and designs is simple: Just do it!

The landscape along the route was desert-like with magnificent vistas abounding everywhere.



Also, along the way there were signs that pointed out various dirt roads leading to small villages and other settlements. A precise road map of Baja California would show that there is only one major north-to-south road through the peninsula. And it seems that the great majority of roads that lead to the small villages are dirt and gravel. Some of these are almost impassable.

The trip to the lagoon took almost two hours; we were very happy to reach our destination. Looking at the lagoon gave me a great sense of joy, anticipation, and happiness. A complete whale skeleton lay along the shoreline, with many of these bones strewn about. We immediately put on our life jackets, loaded into the panga, and motored off to where the lagoon met the ocean.



We were out for about ten minutes when I saw several whales spouting in the distance. As we neared them I got my camera ready and was looking at the water in front of the boat when our guide yelled to us. I turned around and saw a whale with a third of its body sticking up vertically in the air, watching us. This behavior is called eye or spy hopping. Some think this behavior is actually related to a whale rising up from the

water to observe something. It seemed as if the whale hung in the air for several seconds and I was able to take a photograph during that time.



We started off and within several seconds the whale had circled our boat and repeated the same vertical behavior. It was a magnificent sight—I was elated. In the past I had seen whales showing off their flukes, breaching, and spouting, but this was the first time I had personally witnessed this vertical behavior.

We continued toward the ocean and encountered many whales spouting along the way. There was one set of whales that were being followed by three playful dolphins. As we neared the dolphins they came over to our boat and frolicked about, swimming along our side, under, and around the boat. Sounding, jumping, twisting, turning, and diving. Watching these friendly creatures was delightful and I could not feel anything but kinship with them.



The whales were apparently late arriving into the waters of Baja California and I realized that my grand expectation of having a close encounter with a whale might not occur. Nevertheless, I was very content and thankful for my experiences along my journey to San Ignacio.

We kept slowly trolling in the lagoon and spotted a large whale that was accompanied by a smaller whale. As we drifted closer I could see a large



gray mass floating about three feet under the water, next to the boat. This whale was at least thirty feet long. As our boat drifted so did the whale. Since I was wearing polarized sunglasses I could easily see through the sun's reflection

over the water. Another whale then started to come into focus. Both whales then started to simultaneously rise to the surface alongside our boat. It was a mother and her calf.

## Mother Whale





The mother whale's head was encrusted with barnacles, which gave it a sand, brown, gray, and white color. The whale stayed there, right next to the boat. I could have reached out and touched it. I felt it was calling to me, "Touch me—I want a close encounter with a human." I was busy taking a photograph and then the mother whale started sliding back, and down under.



Amazingly, it only went down about three feet and continued to follow the drift of our boat. We started splashing the water with our hands; the small whale then surfaced next to the boat. I could see it was a baby, a calf. It looked like it was the length of a Volkswagen bus, but thinner. Its skin had no barnacles and was a shiny dark gray or black color. It surfaced at the mid-section of the boat and the Italian lady was able to reach over and pet it. I was in the forward section of the boat and as I leaned over the whale dove under, and I missed touching it by inches. Another whale watching panga came along and our guide stood off to the side to let them experience an encounter. The two whales continued with their friendly behavior and I heard one of the passengers exclaim that she had petted the baby whale.

**Baby Whale**



That boat slightly rocked out of the water as the large whale arose under its front bow. I then started splashing the water with my hand trying to entice the whales back over to our boat. It worked! They turned around and started gliding over toward us. The mother whale came directly alongside our boat and started to rise up. Her baby eagerly came along and floated over its mother as she rose out of the water.

The baby whale was literally lifted out of the water and started wiggling on its mother's back. Gently, it slid off its mother near her fluke area and away from the boat. The mother whale then swam under the boat. I was transfixed, staring at her midsection. The whale guide yelled and I turned around to see that the whale had lifted its head and was looking at my backside. I quickly

turned around, leaned over, and placed my fully extended hand against the whale's head. It then slid gently forward and under.

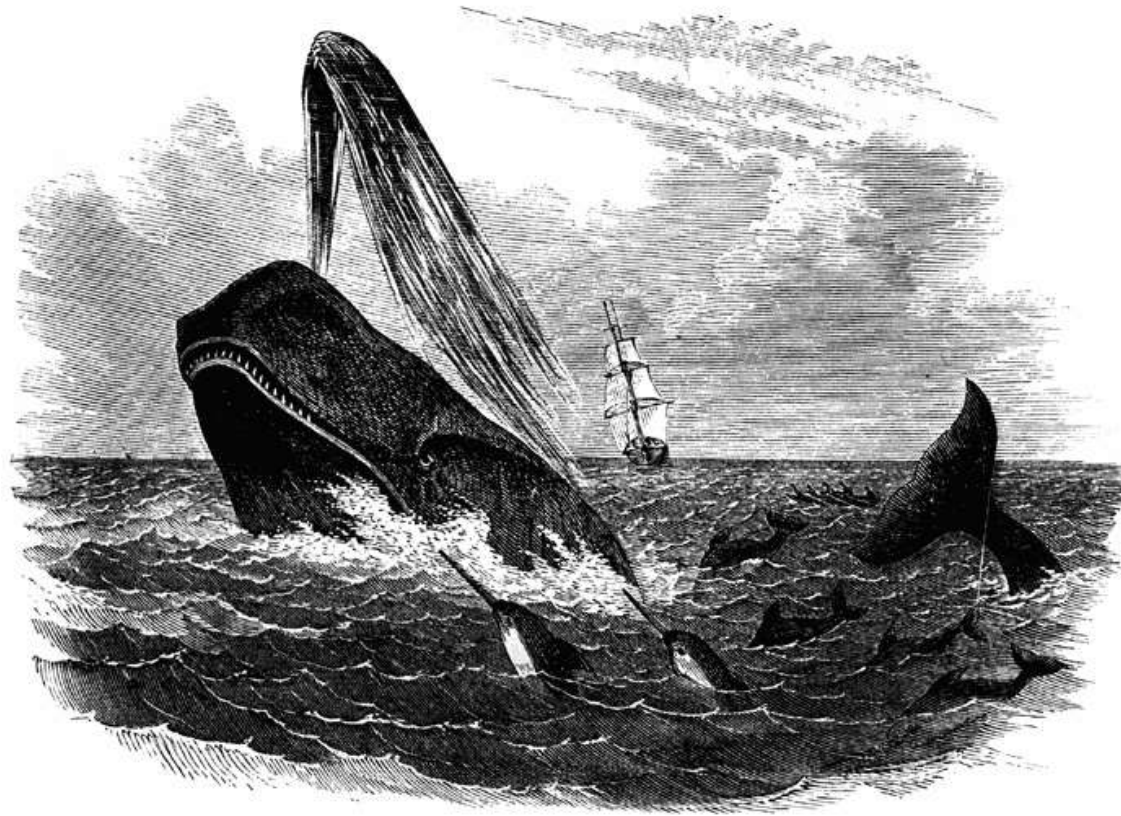
How can anyone describe in words the sights, sounds, and feelings that an encounter such as this can bring about? I can tell you this. Before I touched the whale I would have guessed that it would have felt like placing my hand against a hard, wet car tire. However, it felt like soft silk!

I had a vision, I had a dream, I had a desire, and I followed it to San Ignacio. In my memory I can hear the sad chorus of the young singers in that church, and I can feel the tears well up. I can also see smiling and happy faces. I have seen the salt of the earth, and know that there is a promised land—for everything.



## *Touching Silk In The Baja*





**In the winter of 1859-60, Captain Charles Scammon, in the bark *Ocean Bird*, along with several other vessels, entered San Ignacio Lagoon to the south where he discovered the last unknown Gray whale breeding lagoon. Within only a couple of seasons the lagoon was nearly devoid of whales.**



## *Part 2*

# *The Descansos of Baja California*

*This is my story of Crosses, Shrines, Monuments and Prayers for the Departed  
in Baja California-Mexico*





## Crosses, Shrines, Monuments, and Prayers For The Departed

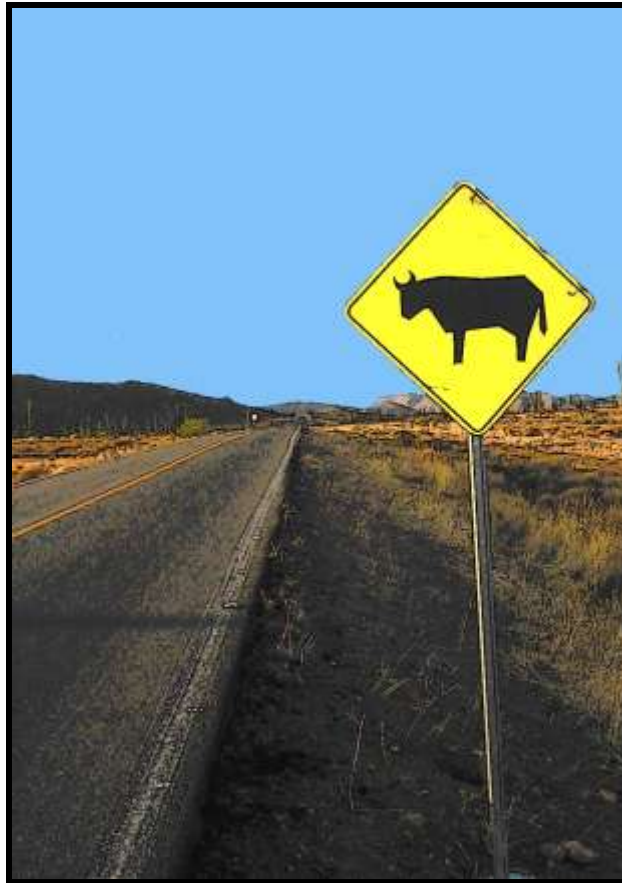


In American culture afterlife homage for the departed is usually reserved for places of worship and the cemetery. The latter, often tucked away behind fences, walls, and tall shrubs are visited by the sad, the grieving, and the solemn. However, as I traveled along Baja's principal southerly route the numerous roadside crosses, shrines, and monuments fascinated me. Surprisingly, while rock climbing I found Baja's last shrine when I reached the peninsula's most southern tip, where the mountains tumble with majestic splendor into the sea.

Mexico Highway 1, also called the Carretera Transpeninsular, or the Baja Transpeninsular Highway, stretches for approximately 1,050 miles from Tijuana to the tip of Baja California at Cabo San Lucas. This roadway is narrow compared to highways in the

United States and road shoulders are nonexistent along many stretches. Above all, the region's travel books recommend in bold type, do not drive at night. The road is unlit and animals congregating on the road after sunset pose an ever-present danger.





I have often heard that livestock can be found on Mexican highways after nightfall. Later, I learned that after sunset many animals seek asphalt roads because the pavement radiates the desert heat that has been absorbed during the day. Animals are on the road during the night to stay warm!



Along the roadway I saw several dead animals that had been killed by vehicles. These collisions often occur at a high rate of speed and end tragically for both the animal and driver. Without the benefit of a road shoulder, vehicles often careen off the highway, frequently with terrible results.

At this accident site a horse apparently was standing in the middle of the highway before it was struck. You can see the skid marks detailing the point of impact and the vehicle's route of travel. Fortunately, there was a road shoulder.





Roadside memorials are called “descansos,” which means “resting place” in Spanish. Some believe that the practice of erecting these memorials, also referred to as “crucitas” or “memorias,” may have its origins in Mexico. The dictionary defines “descanso” as a roadside marker or memorial to a victim of an automobile accident. But not all descansos are along highways; the practice also memorializes the place where the soul left the body.



This descanso was erected with rocks from the surrounding area. Some researchers believe this practice comes from a Spanish tradition of placing stones where pallbearers rested between the church and the cemetery. Later the stones became crosses. An interesting aspect of descansos along Baja's peninsular route is that remnants of the accident's wreckage are sometimes left alongside or included in the descanso. Notice the car hood to the right of the stone memorial. More wreckage was strewn about the area, which seemed to be a very old site.





This descanso was created using the remnants of the “Green Angel” truck in which the driver met his untimely, violent end. Green Angels patrol Mexican highways to help motorists needing mechanical assistance, towing, adjustment or changing of tires, travel information, first aid, and other assistance. Sometimes, even these road wise angels of mercy are reminded that no dispensation is offered to the inattentive or careless traveler.



Although there are many straight and level stretches along the Baja route, the roadway also follows the dictates of the mountainous terrain. Consequently, there are many 90 degree and severe S-turns on Mexico Highway 1. At almost every one of these treacherous areas is a descanso.





This descanso rests at the bottom of a downhill, 90 degree curve. Notice the rock barrier erected to prevent vehicles from hurtling off the road. The brown object behind the crosses is a car door, most likely from the vehicle involved in the fatality.



Beyond this S-turn are two descansos. The photograph on the right depicts a simple wooden cross and a pile of stones to mark one spot. Note the side view mirror (no doubt a remnant of the wreck) that has been left on the stones.





Remnants of wreckage of a fatal accident are located behind shrine and strewn around the area. A testimony to the sudden and violent departure of the soul from the body. In the photo on the right You can observe a wreath lying atop the wreckage.



Driving defensively is required in Mexico, according to the country's AAA tour book. "Always be alert to road conditions and other motorists. Bus, truck, and other drivers who are familiar with local routes will drive faster and negotiate maneuvers more boldly than tourists." Driving in Mexico requires patience and intuition, and foreign drivers often find that the Mexican driving culture is far more complicated than in their own home country. Local drivers tend to weave in and out of lanes as they please, often without the use of turn signals; they also frequently ignore red lights or drive the wrong way on one-way streets. And so on. This photo shows a van passing a truck on a curve with a small cliff to the left as both vehicles head downhill on a mountainous road approaching a 90-degree blind turn.





A fascinating thing about these Mexican roadside shrines is that they resemble gravesites. In American culture a gravesite identifies the final resting place of physical remains. But, as previously mentioned, a descanso in a spiritual context is intended to memorialize the place where the soul left the body. The souls of Oscar, Rogelio, Gabriel, and Israel departed here on 25 May 1994. May they rest in peace.





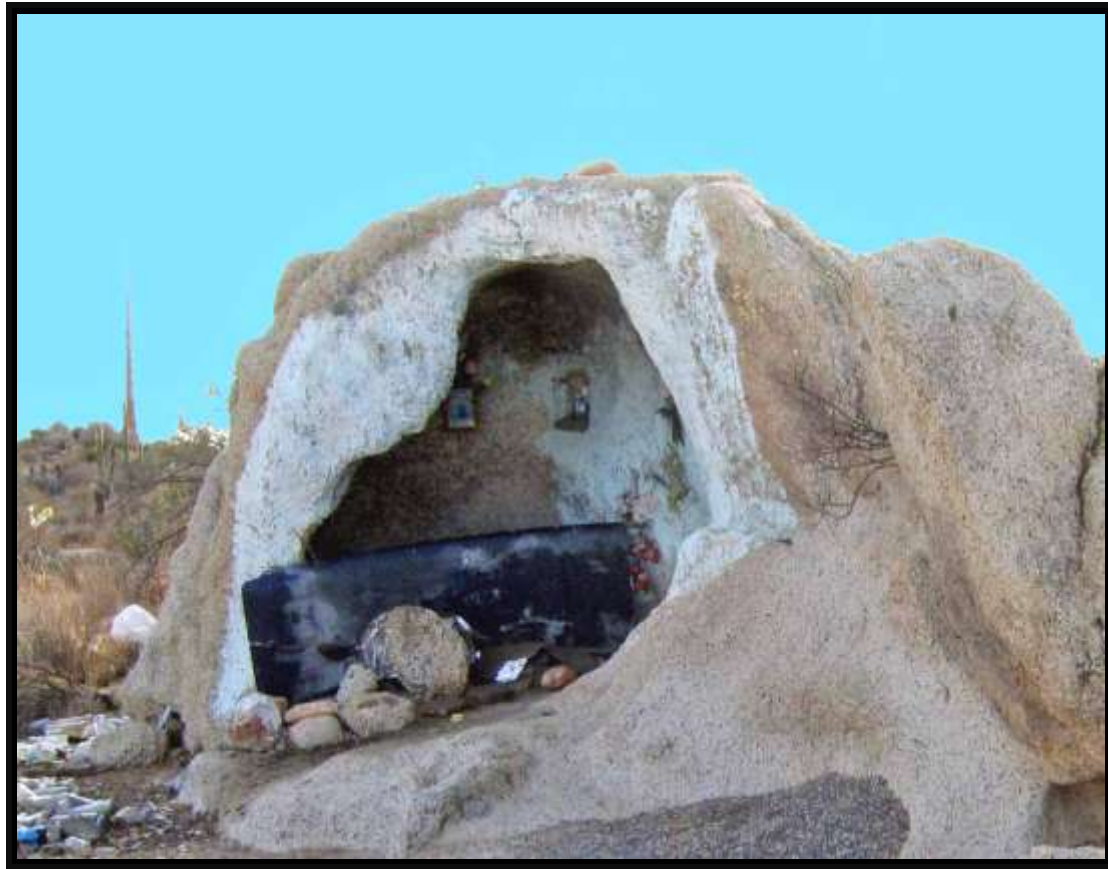
Descansos can sometimes be found on clear, level, and roadworthy sections of the highway without any hint of the circumstances. Thomas Mann said, "A man's dying is more the survivor's affair than his own." So families and friends place a cross on the site, build a shrine, light candles, lay wreaths, and pray for departed souls—perhaps feeling a little better knowing that the mournful place has been blessed.



And so at the final resting place the mourners mark the spot and bless the soil with holy water. They are comforted knowing that the lingering soul is on *camposanto* (holy ground) and that their departed will be remembered.

Tibetan Buddhist saying: “When you are born, you cry, and the world rejoices. When you die, you rejoice, and the world cries.”





Along with the tradition of erecting crosses is that of building roadside shrines. The shrines, which resemble small chapels (or, as shown here, a hollowed out sandstone boulder), provide a place to pull over to rest and pray for the protection of travelers. The shrines are often dedicated to a particular saint, and include an altar filled with lit candles, flowers, and religious folk art.



This shrine, carved from a sandstone boulder is dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe.





The vehicle involved in this fatality was a gray, 4x4 truck, indicated by the fender leaning against the descanso railing. More wreckage was strewn behind the shrine.





Vidal Gonzalez Sandoval. Born, 21 February 1970. Final resting place, 16 December 2001.



There has been a fatality at almost every curve along the sierra (mountainside) route. For the most part there were appropriate roadway markers along the Baja route, but I never saw a Mexican highway officer during my travels. The lack of police presence results in the rules of the road, speed, and safety precautions being self-regulated—and largely ignored. Considering human nature, my sense is that the situation would be no different in the United States. Were it not for law enforcement, we would all be traveling like madmen. Remnants of the wreckage related to this descenso can be seen to the left of the shrine.





Elizabeth Felix. Born: 30 May 64. Fallen: 22 June 02. Descance En Paz – Rest In Peace



The 90-degree turns effect lanes of traffic in either direction. There were descansos on both sides of this curve, almost opposite each other. Note the skid marks. The gully behind this cross is littered with vehicle wreckage.





Warning sign for an upcoming 90-degree turn. See the wrecked guardrail. The remnants of several truck wrecks litter the slope. A lady in a red shirt at the left of the photo is laying a wreath alongside a descanso. There were three on this hillside.





Leaning against the cross in this memorial is a car door from the fatal crash. Other remnants were strewn about the site.



This descanso was located on a straight and level part of the highway that ran through a small village. To slow traffic, speed bumps (known as “Topes”) are placed on the highway at a town’s entrance and exit. It is always wise to slow down in these areas; Topes are not always marked and can severely damage a vehicle traveling at excessive speeds. Descansos are also erected for other types of fatalities, including those of pedestrians.



This descanso memorializes the final resting place of a truck driver. A computer search for Pena Trucking yielded a listing under [getadrivingjob.com](http://getadrivingjob.com)., Al Pena Trucking, Baja California Norte, Mexico. Who, I wondered, replaced this driver?





The inscription reads, “In memory from your brothers, sisters, and cousins.” The literal translation of the word “recuerdo” is “souvenir.” However, in the context of a descanso it would be more appropriate to translate it as “in memory.”



A path from the highway led to this natural monument, which depicts the Virgin of Guadalupe. Below the painting was an altar of natural stone on which many candles were lit in homage or as an offering to travelers.





While standing along one of Baja's lonely stretches I thought about the unexpected, violent, and sudden deaths that had happened along this route. A quote from Proust came to mind: "We say that the hour of death cannot be forecast, but when we say this we imagine that hour as placed in an obscure and distant future. It never occurs to us that it has any connection with the day already begun or that death could arrive this same afternoon, this afternoon which is so certain and which has every hour filled in advance."



This is Baja California's southernmost monument, located at the high point of the Baja spine as it tumbles spectacularly into the water where the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez meet. I climbed to this spot in 1989 while anchored in the small harbor of Cabo San Lucas after sailing here from Newport Beach, California.



The southernmost tip of Baja California. The Arches is one of the most dramatically beautiful meeting places of land, sea, and sky. This view is from where the Pacific and the Sea of Cortez converge.





View from the Pacific Ocean. The town of Cabo San Lucas and its harbor comes into view after sailing around the Arch, where the Sea of Cortez converges.





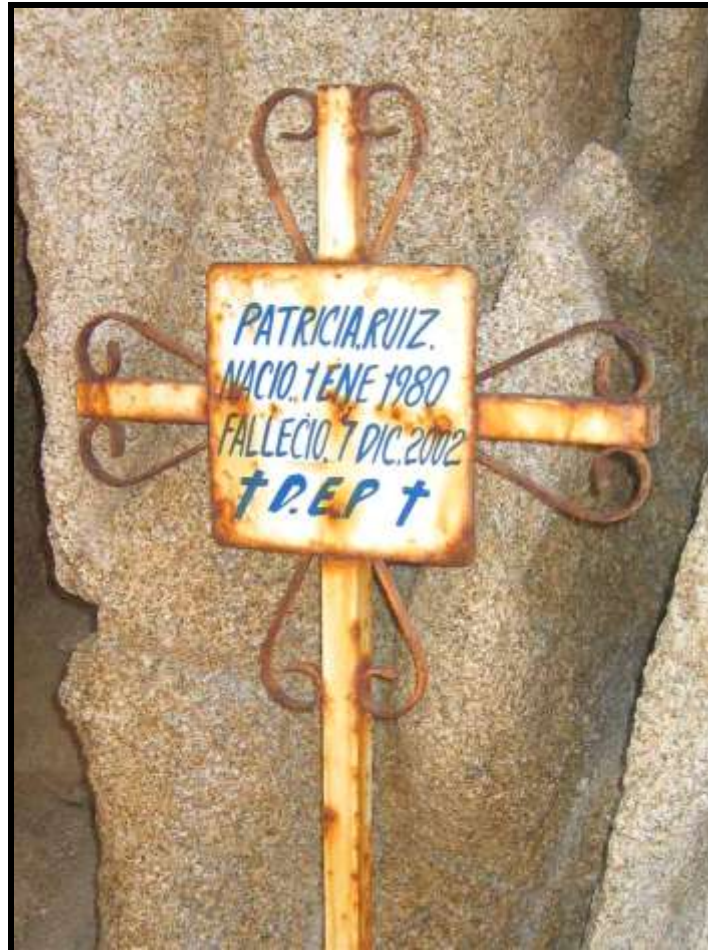
Another view from the western side, where the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez converge and Baja California ends. Locally, this area is known as “Divorce Beach.”



Harvest moon over Cabo. I found Baja's southernmost descanso while climbing through a cliff pass to where Baja California, the Pacific Ocean, and the Sea of Cortez converge.



Baja California's southernmost descanso located on the Pacific Ocean side of a cliff trail leading to a final meeting of land and sea.



The descanso was adjacent to a trail that was treacherous and threatened climbers with the potential of falling rocks and boulders. Patricia Ruiz. Born 1 Jan 1980, Died 1 Dec 2002.





Arriving safely at Land's End. Are Mexican highways dangerous? In the United States there are approximately 50,000 traffic fatalities a year. And in most cases, both in the U.S.A. and Mexico, the primary factor involved is human error, which includes driving too fast for road conditions, inattention, alcohol, and so forth. So before drawing any conclusions about Mexico, consider first the universal law of karma: action and reaction, cause and effect, sowing and reaping.

*“In the course of natural righteousness, man, by his thoughts and actions, becomes the arbiter of his destiny.” Paramahansa Yogananda*

## *Part 3*

# *Surviving The Sea With Captain Bligh*

*This is my story of signing on as a crewmember on a sailboat that was supposed to be on a leisurely cruise, but almost sent me to Davey Jones locker!*



## Chapter 1

### Knockdown

I am tired, hurt, and hungry—and this is my story.

I was taking part in the Baja Ha Ha rally, which is supposed to be a leisurely sail down the coast of Baja California. This is not a race, however to win a race you usually fly a large sail called a spinnaker. Attached to the spinnaker is a large aluminum pole about 20 feet long, which is connected to the mast and the spinnaker. Flying the spinnaker sail downwind and managing the pole takes a lot of experience and knowledge because of the strong forces the sail can exert over the boat's maneuverability. Depending on

the wind and sea conditions, a spinnaker can cause a sailboat to spiral out of control and possibly broach or capsize.

I didn't know why, but for some reason Captain Tom was sailing this rally like it was a race. Most boats were simply cruising down to Mexico and their crews looking forward to making new friends and acquaintances along the way. In past years all but two of the boats in the rally had turned on their engines and dropped their sails because of lack of wind.

On the first day we sailed out of San Diego flying the spinnaker and continued to use it throughout the second day. During the evening the seas became unpredictable and the winds were shifting and gusting to 30 knots. Large swells

tossed the boat from side to side making it difficult to control. Inside, the boat felt like a washing machine and on one occasion crewmember John was thrown from his bunk onto the cabin floor. Captain Tom, meanwhile, was sitting in the cockpit watching the wind and waves. He was hoping that weather conditions would improve, but that was a dream. His obsession with sailing in as the first boat in his category into Bahia De Tortugas (our first landfall) impaired his judgment.

I was on watch from midnight to three in the morning. I felt uneasy because I do not like the feeling that I am being put at risk, which is what I believed Captain Tom was doing. Instead of dousing the Spinnaker he decided to shift the spinnaker pole with the Spinnaker deployed.

Depending on the angle of the wind one of the things sailors do to harness the wind and sometimes increase maneuverability is to shift the spinnaker pole from left to right of the Spinnaker sail or vice versa. But this can be very dangerous. On this night, we were sailing during an extremely dark evening and although the boat had deck lights, we could not see beyond the deck to give us a good horizon, which is important to maintain a good balance.



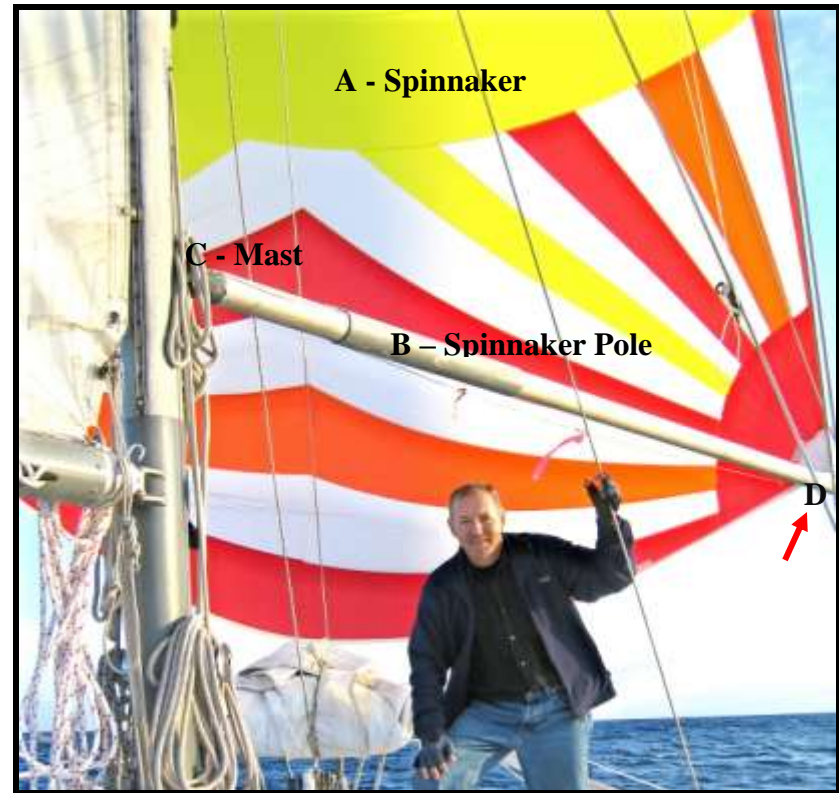
**View of deck at night from wheel**



Also, the boat was slewing from left to right and heaving up and down. In addition, the deck was wet and slippery, making everything even more difficult.

When the pole is shifted the spinnaker sail can be doused or the boat maneuvered in a way that the wind is not controlling the sail. But instead of dousing the sail Captain Tom decided we could change the spinnaker pole position while underway. This is risky; the pole is attached to a Spinnaker line and when it is disengaged in windy, rough and heaving sea conditions the pole can swing violently and cause serious injury.

At around two a.m. Captain Tom and I put on our safety harnesses and began to move forward toward the spinnaker.



The above photographs shows (a) the Spinnaker sail, (b) the Spinnaker pole, (c) where it is attached to the mast, (d) where it is attached to the right side of the Spinnaker.

It was a cold night and although the deck light was turned on it seemed like we were looking into a dark hole beyond the boundaries of the sailboat. The boat felt like a bucking horse and inside, it was like a cauldron with equipment and crew being tossed about. We moved forward on the slippery deck, and I felt great trepidation.

When we reached the mast Captain Tom decided we should disengage the pole from the line controlling the left side of the spinnaker.

When we unhooked the pole from the line, the motion of the boat took control of the pole and it started to sway violently from side to side. We both grabbed hold the pole, but the violent motion of the boat lifted us off the deck and shook us loose from the pole. Then a large wave threw the boat high and to the left, launching me off the deck and to the right. Although I was

wearing a safety harness I was nonetheless about to fly overboard. Just then another wave lifted the boat and slammed me into the lifelines and a stanchion.

That saved my life, but broke my lower left rib.

Captain Tom had braced himself against the mast and behind the pole. We had no other option but to continue and try to disengage the pole from the mast. I crawled back to the mast as the pole continued to swing wildly. Once, twice, and a third time we grabbed the pole, but each time it threw us violently back onto the deck. On the fourth try I jumped up from the deck and grabbed the pole while Captain Tom finally disengaged it from the mast. After crawling forward, I doused the spinnaker, and hooked the

front of the pole to the right spinnaker line.

Dennis then maneuvered the boat into a neutral wind position as I started to release the spinnaker and Captain Tom attached the pole onto the mast.

Suddenly, a series of waves turned the boat into a bucking bronco. Several wind gusts simultaneously took control of the spinnaker sail and once again the pole became an uncontrollable battering ram. As I crawled back to the mast, the pole was still swinging violently back and forth. Captain Tom grabbed it; I then jumped up and grabbed hold of the pole and tried to hook it onto the mast. But the pole slipped from my arms and struck my left middle finger against the mast like a battering ram. Blood spurted, but there was no pain and I had no idea

how badly my finger had been injured. I'll never forget Captain Tom's expression at that moment. He had that forlorn look of resignation when a man knows he is facing the inevitable. The two of us were drenched in sweat and frightened. I remember thinking that death was lurking in the shadows. But we had no option but to continue. We waited for our moment and when it arrived we both let out a primal scream and with our last ounce of strength grabbed the pole and hooked it to the mast.

Our struggle that night was no different than a struggle for life over death. Shifting the spinnaker sail almost killed us; I concluded that Captain Tom was an obsessed, reckless man with little regard for his crew.

As dawn approached the winds began shifting wildly and Captain Tom finally decided to lower the spinnaker. Around noon he started talking about raising the spinnaker again, but I was against it. I asked him what the purpose would be for doing that. He said we could get an extra knot of speed from the boat. Can you imagine his thinking? That it was worth putting everyone's life at risk for an extra forward motion of about one mile per hour? As the name implies, there's a laid-back attitude that goes with the Baja Ha Ha; it's supposed to be a cruisers' rally, not the America's Cup. I'll never sail with someone like Captain Tom again, I thought.

Regardless of the conditions, Captain Tom went ahead and raised the spinnaker.



*Surviving my first night aboard Captain Bligh's sailboat*

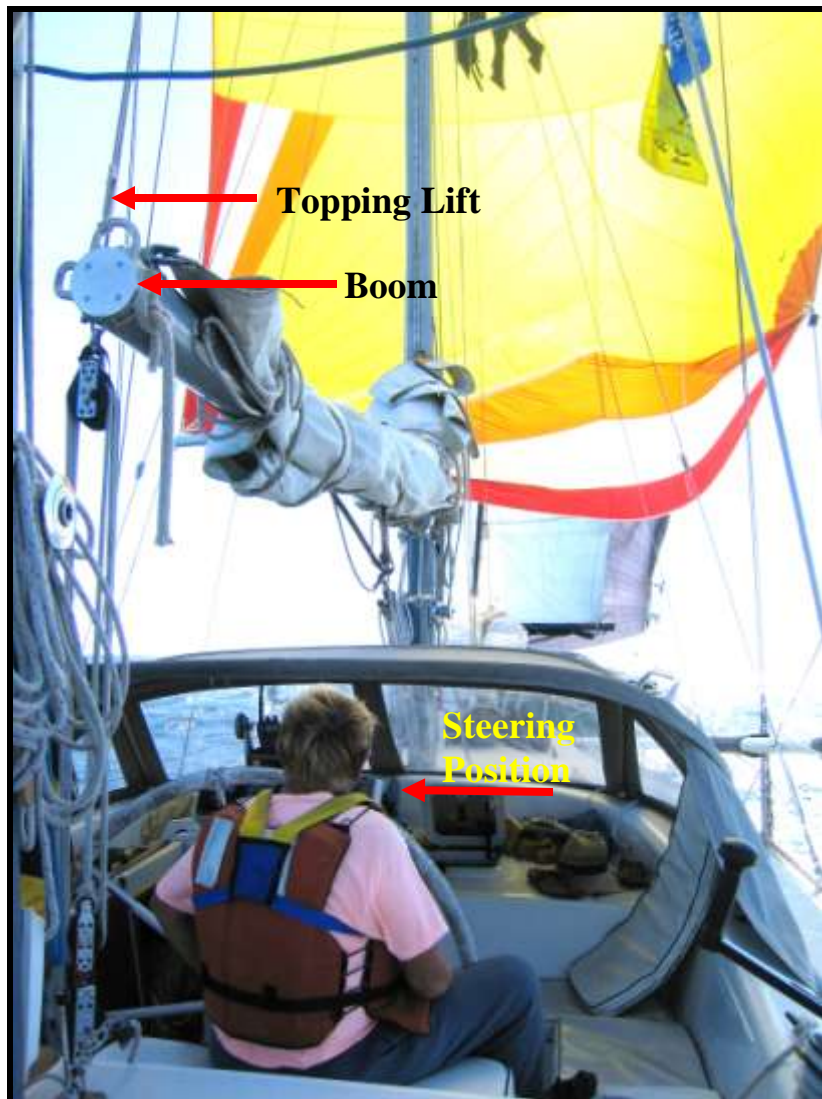


Later that afternoon I was at the helm as we sailed past Cedros Island (off the Baja coast). The winds were blowing at 20 knots and gusting to 25. The seas were starting to build up and the maneuverability of the boat was being affected by the swell, cross-waves, and local wind conditions. After we passed Cedros Island the winds started gusting to 30 and 35 knots. Dennis, who was in the cockpit with me, went below to tell Captain Tom about the deteriorating weather conditions. Captain Tom ordered us to engage the automatic pilot to a higher sensitivity level. I complied, but as the boat and spinnaker started to slew from side to side, I felt that Captain Tom was once again exceeding our safety margin. He was the only person onboard with experience handling a spinnaker in this type of weather. The motion of the boat became so severe that

Captain Tom left his cabin and came up beside me next to the helm. He watched out toward the horizon studying the winds and the condition of the sea.

His only comment was that he hoped we could sail to the finish line at Turtle Bay with the spinnaker running.

I thought that was insane and just at that moment I heard a loud “snap!” and was hit violently in the head and stunned. A line called a topping lift, which lifts the boom high and perpendicular to the mast, had broken. The boom is made from heavy-gauge aluminum, holds the main sail, and weighs more than a hundred pounds—and had fallen directly on my head and slid down my right shoulder.



We were all astonished, shocked into silence as time stood still for a moment. To this day I do not know why I was not killed or seriously injured. Captain Tom quickly took control of the helm and turned off the automatic pilot as I staggered to the side of the cockpit.

At that very instant a strong gust of wind blew into the spinnaker as a cross-wave simultaneously struck the boat on the port (left) side. True to its name—Mustang—then started turning into a port spin. Right then, another large wave hit our upturned left stern. This caused the boat to continue turning onto its port side until we were into a full broach: The port side of the boat was laying flat and water was pouring into the cockpit. We were hanging on for our lives and trying to hold the boom in place so it would not

slam into us or get pitched into the sea. Captain Tom was screaming and yelling, trying to get hold of the wheel to steady the boat. We were literally at death's door. Nobody was wearing life jackets or harnesses; if anyone of us had fallen into the water, it would have been the end. I remember hanging on for dear life and looking at the sea below. The spinnaker sail was submerged as the boat laid flat on its side with the mast in the water. It seemed like I was looking down an abyss. The scene unfolding before me was mesmerizing, yet I was not frightened and had resigned myself to destiny or the gods.

Suddenly, the boat righted itself. But no sooner had I breathed a sigh of relief than another gust of wind hit us and again the boat broached. And

again we hung on for our lives. Captain Tom was yelling and screaming that he didn't know why the boat was not responding to the helm. The truth was that the elements had taken over and we were no longer in control; now it was up to the gods and fate.

Captain Tom had taken us to the razor's edge—and lost.

While we were all hanging on for our lives he was able to reach over and turn on the motor. Fortunately, the engine started right away. (Motors have a tendency to stall in these types of violent conditions.) The boat started to right itself and Captain Tom powered it downwind. But the elements took over again and for the third time the boat was thrown about on its port side and in

danger of capsizing or rolling over. The spinnaker was back in the water and the force of the wind and water in the spinnaker was keeping it there. Our position was precarious, to say the least. If another large cross-wave had come along at that moment, the boat would have continued to roll further into the water.

Fortunately, fate smiled on us and the boat righted itself for a third time. We then quickly loosened the lines to the spinnaker, causing the wind to spill out of the sail. Although I was still somewhat shaky from my head injury, I knew that Captain Tom and I would have to bring in the spinnaker.

We quickly put on our lifelines and life preservers and fought our way forward to pull in the spinnaker. My feeling at that moment was no

different than when I was in the infantry fighting my way forward in a battle: You know you're going into the breach and might not return, but you had no choice but to go forward. When we finally made it to the bow we could not pull the spinnaker sock over the sail. The sail, the sock, the lines, and the top of the mast had all been in the water, which was now causing things to jam. But the spinnaker had to be doused; we were still in jeopardy of another possible broaching.

Captain Tom ordered that the starboard line holding the sail be let loose so that all the wind would spill out of the sail. It flapped furiously and was in danger of being violently shredded by the merciless wind. To save the sail Captain Tom decided to pull it into the cockpit. After several tries I was able to attach a shackle and line onto the spinnaker clew. We passed the line into the



cockpit and crewmembers Dennis and John started pulling in the sail. As the flogging sail was being pulled into the cockpit, the anchor (which had been hanging over the bow) came into contact with the sail. The heaving motion of the sea and gusting winds were sufficiently violent that the anchor acted like a razor blade and started shredding the sail. And never in my life had I been so happy to see a sail tear.

After the boat stabilized I heard someone say that Ruby (Captain Tom's girlfriend), was hurt. During the broach she had been thrown across the interior of the boat violently and was lying in a heap on the cabin floor. Captain Tom, amazingly, still wanted to sail into Bahia De Tortugas; he did not want to be penalized for running the engine. But we convinced him that we needed to run

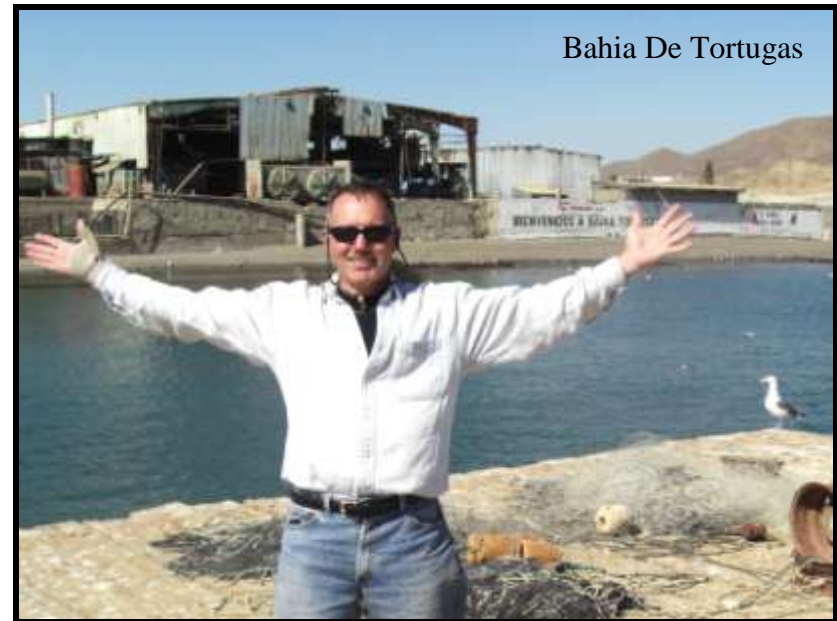
under full engine power to Bahia De Tortugas to get medical attention for Ruby.

As for me my finger, it bled a lot but the injury seemed minor. The top of my head was tender and I had a large bump and bruise where the boom had crashed into me. And I still don't know why that boom did not knock me out or kill me except that maybe the straw hat I was wearing saved my life because it allowed the boom to slip off my head at the same instant it struck me.

Many experienced sailboat racers have sailed in much more severe weather conditions than I have described. However, in our case the boat was wide and somewhat flat bottomed and developed for Caribbean recreational charter boat sailing. Also, the crew was not experienced

in the handling of a Spinnaker, in gusting winds, cross swells and large following seas.

James Joyce said, “One of the great things about surviving is that you get to be born over and over again.” Later that evening, in my dreams, I swam with mermaids.





The hat that saved my life and the boom above which almost killed me

## Chapter 2

### Two Weeks Earlier

I flew to Mazatlan to join the sailing vessel Mustang. My plans were to sail the boat to San Diego to join a cruisers' rally called the Baja Ha Ha. One hundred and eight boats and about six hundred sailors had signed up for this rally, known as a fun sail from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. During the cruise the boats anchor at Bahia De Tortugas and Santa Maria for beach games, drinks, food, music, and a shared sense of adventure. I had wanted to participate in this rally for a long time and felt very happy and fortunate to be able to be there after so many years.

As I left Monterey thoughts of my new friend Carol and the time we spent together moved in and out of my mind like a soft, misty fog playing in the morning sun. I was surprised and wondered why. Is it the uncertainty of a new voyage or perhaps strange surroundings that bring us back to a point where we last felt contentment? Or is it something else? Francesco Petrarca, an Italian scholar, poet, and humanist, said that events appear sad, pleasant, or painful, not because they are so in reality, but because we believe them to be so and the light in which we look at them depends on our own judgment. Maybe, I thought, time and my forthcoming adventure will provide a better perspective.

When I landed at the Mazatlan airport and began



walking toward the Custom control point, I wandered without much thought until the line stopped. Then I looked down and was truly amazed that the first thing that I noticed in Mexico was a dead cockroach lying on the marble floor. How strange, I thought, that this should be my first impression upon arriving in Mazatlan. Was this an omen?

At the airport I met two of my shipmates, Ruby and Dennis, who had arrived on a separate flight. We then took a taxi to the Marina El Cid, where our boat was docked. Sitting next to Dennis, I felt the seat under me rumble. He was passing gas, something he did throughout most of the taxi ride. Upon arriving at the marina I met Captain Tom, the owner of the

sailboat. He and Ruby were apparently a couple and lived together. Within a short period I began to notice that Captain Tom was cantankerous and seemed verbally abusive toward Ruby. And Dennis kept passing gas.

Later that evening we went to dinner and the same pattern continued. Dennis sat next to me and passed gas. Captain Tom did not seem very kind to Ruby. When we were ready to order our meals—including salads—Captain Tom loudly proclaimed that Mexicans couldn't make good salads because they had not learned to mix the proper ingredients! Of course our Mexican waiter heard this and was annoyed. I felt embarrassed.

I promised myself I would not let first impressions sway me. Life is a series of balances, acceptance, tolerance, understanding, and a continual effort to coexist. And that, I told myself, is what I would try to do.

However, in the end I have to say that my first impression of Captain Tom never did change. He remained cantankerous and verbally abusive on a daily basis. What I ended up doing was to tolerate and coexist with someone whose company I did not enjoy.

Many things in life are learning experiences and my time with Captain Tom did have some value. Kalihil Gabran a philosophical essayist and poet summed up my feelings about Captain Tom when he said, “I have learned silence

from the talkative, tolerance from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strangely, I am ungrateful to these teachers.”



**Marina El Cid, Mazatlan, Mexico**

**Captain Tom's boat in the foreground**

## Chapter 3

### Iguanas of Mazatlan

The following day, I learned more about Dennis and I liked him. He was seventy years old and survived cancer of the neck when he was in his mid-fifties. Later, he also survived double bypass heart surgery. He had been married for thirty-four years and cared for his wife for the last eight years of her life as she drifted away to Alzheimer's. He was single for four years after her death and on advice from his friends, went on Yahoo Personals and met his current wife, Grace, on the Internet. They dated for three months and then married. When I met Dennis, his wife was seventy-three. She had problems

with ankle swelling and was on medication for bronchitis. I learned with some concern that she would join us in San Diego and sail back down to Mexico as a crewmember. Dennis said that people could age, but still stay young. My hope is to maintain a positive attitude and try to stay young as I age. That is the secret!

At the time of our adventure Ruby was sight impaired and in her early sixties. It was a mystery to me how she put up with Captain Tom—a verbally abusive and cantankerous person with a short fuse. Why do people settle for less? Why do they put up with abuse? Is it because that is all they have? Or is it the fear of loneliness and the unknown? Ruby told me that she and Captain Tom argue every day—but get along. I felt sad for her.

Years ago the Marina El CID was a swampy estuary where waters flowing from the mountains east of Mazatlan congregated. Later, as developers drained the estuary and built a hotel complex and marina the local iguana population made their home among the marina's rocky banks. I had heard that a group of these iguanas lived at the headwaters of the former estuary as it streamed out into the ocean. So I went there and was surprised to immediately see a very large iguana basking in the sun. It was about five feet in length from tail to head and its body was as thick as my thigh. I spotted six others among the palm trees and grass. Since there was a pool in the area I went swimming to cool down and soon forgot about the iguanas. I then dozed off on a lounge chair. Later I awoke to see an iguana slowly crawling toward my right foot.



I then noticed a movement to my right and saw another iguana making its way toward me too. They were hungry and wanted me to feed them. An elderly man showed up at that moment and started throwing bread onto the grass behind me. Slowly, and in mass, the iguanas moved toward the bread pieces. The man bent down and started petting the iguanas. When he petted an



iguana and scratched it on its side or under the chin the animal would close its eyes in pleasure. The man told me that the iguanas were friendly and would not bite. I then slowly rolled out of my lounge chair and crawled onto the grass toward the iguanas. I moved slowly and stayed low to the ground. Eventually, I was lying among approximately ten feeding iguanas. They were to my left, to my right, and front. They were all at eye level and a hair's breath away from my face and head. Lying among the iguanas I slowly reached over to the big five-foot iguana and started stroking its side and the top of its head. The iguana's skin felt like smooth sandpaper. My face was inches from his and I'm sure he was purring as I stroked him.



## *Chapter 4*

### *The Rooster Fish*

Early in the morning we took our sailboat to the main dock and began fueling it in preparation for our journey. Captain Tom was filling the tank when all of a sudden he cursed and let out a yell. I looked over and noticed that the diesel nozzle did not automatically shut off and diesel had spilled all over the side of the boat and into the cockpit. Captain Tom then moved over to another tank and started to fill it. He soon loudly cursed a second time as more fuel spilled out onto the boat; the shut-off had failed to work again. The Mexican dockhand then apologized because he'd forgotten to tell us that the

automatic shut-off did not work. Captain Tom swore up a storm while I chuckled to myself. We were in Mexico and events like this are common. The maintenance and upkeep of Mexico's infrastructure and services is not up to the same standards as the United States. And in some ways this is the charm of Mexico. People in Mexico accept and make the best of what they have and for the most part still maintain a friendly and humorous disposition. Although he had spent a good amount of time in Mexico, Captain Tom still had a lot to learn about the country's heartbeat.

Later, a tourist fishing boat arrived at the dock and an American climbed out of the boat. As he walked down the dock he told me he had caught only one fish, but that was OK with him. He

explained that he had wanted to catch a "Rooster Fish" his whole life, and that was what he had caught. I looked at the fish. It was not a rooster fish. A characteristic of this type of fish is large quill-like fins sticking out across the top of its head and back. I spoke with the fishermen and could tell that except for some basic words, they could not speak English. I had to laugh to myself and could visualize the conversation between the gringo and the Mexican fisherman. After catching the fish the gringo asked, "Is this a rooster fish?"

The Mexicans, not knowing what the gringo was saying and wanting to be polite, said yes. And so the gringo left very happy, eager to tell the world about catching a "Rooster Fish." I did not have the heart to tell him that he had simply caught a plain old bottom fish!



Rooster Fish

## Chapter 5

### Bahia De Tortugas

We made it into Bahia de Tortugas where a local doctor and nurse met us. They determined that Ruby had sustained *six broken ribs* as a result of the broach off Cedros Island. The following day she was in great pain—so much so that she was screaming. It was very disturbing to hear; also unsettling was the inability to offer any immediate assistance. We finally got hold of the local doctor and a nurse, who rowed out to the boat and administered morphine to Ruby. Captain Tom and Ruby determined that we would all continue on to Cabo San Lucas. But the doctor cautioned that if Ruby fell on her ribs, it could be life

threatening. At this point I felt like abandoning the sailboat, but didn't want to leave the crew shorthanded. I was very concerned because Ruby had suffered a heart attack the previous year during the Baja Ha Ha. In that incident she was evacuated while at sea by the Coast Guard. She was also a diabetic and insulin dependent. Her eyesight was extremely poor and she was not steady on her feet. In another year in Mazatlan she passed out, fell, and broke her wrist. Another problem was that she wanted to do her fair share on the boat and would not stay put. She therefore put herself at risk, which also put us at risk. My inner sense, which had served me well in the past, was telling me to get off the boat. But I felt committed to helping sail the boat to our destination. I was physically the strongest on board and so believed I was needed.



However, I resolved that I would not allow Captain Tom to put us at risk anymore.

### ***Bahia De Tortugas***



***Village of Bahia de Tortugas***



*Baja Ha Ha Fleet Anchored at Bahia Santa Maria and departing for  
Cabo San Lucas*

## *Chapter 6*

### *Cabo Falso*

From Bahia de Tortugas we sailed to Santa Maria and then onto our final destination at Cabo San Lucas. The night was pitch black as we were approaching the finish line near Cabo Falso, and again we were flying the large spinnaker sail. Luckily the wind and sea conditions were manageable. But we were close to shore and approaching Cabo Falso and the headlands, where winds fall from the mountains and create unpredictable and strong gusts as they funnel down to the seashore. It was the early evening; John was steering the boat while I kept him company. Captain Tom and the rest of the crew

were below, fixing dinner. When the meal was ready Captain Tom called for John and I to set the steering on auto pilot and come below deck to eat with the crew. He loudly proclaimed that no one was needed to stay on deck and watch the boat. This was madness, I thought. Although we had an electronic self-steering system and radar, a person was still required to be on watch to make sure another vessel did not collide with us or that the spinnaker sail did not overpower the boat and send us into another broach. Also, the approach to a cape such as Cabo San Lucas features winds, currents, and seas that are contrary and unpredictable. My last rounding at Cabo San Lucas had been frightening: a freak wave had arisen behind my boat and sent it surfing down a 20-foot-high wall of water.

John and I agreed that we would not leave the wheel unattended. He remained on deck while everyone else sat down for dinner and I went down to grab a bowl of salad. As I was about to relieve John, the boat slowly started to heel to the right and John started yelling for Captain Tom. Since the boat was heeled over it was a struggle for Captain Tom and Dennis to climb out from behind the galley table. However, I was able to immediately jump up into the cockpit. I quickly looked up at the spinnaker sail and saw that a series of unpredictable wind gusts had rushed in upon us and that the spinnaker was starting to overpower the sailboat and was ready to knock us down again. I jumped behind John, who was hanging onto the wheel for his life. As I flew over him I reached for the line holding the right side of the spinnaker to a cleat on the boat. As I grabbed

the line I immediately let it fly free so that all the air would spill out of the spinnaker and release us from its downward plunge into the ocean. The boat immediately righted itself as the spinnaker flapped furiously in the wind. I knew we had to take the spinnaker down and clipped on my harness and ran forward on deck. Captain Tom had made it to the deck by that point and quickly followed me as I grabbed hold of the line to pull a sock/chute over the spinnaker in an effort to douse it. He then moved the spinnaker pole to the front of the boat and over my head. This pole is very dangerous and could easily kill someone. As I was securing the spinnaker I sat down on deck under the pole, which was about 7 feet in the air. All of a sudden I heard a loud whoosh and bang as the spinnaker pole fell. By the grace of God the full weight of the pole, which was



hurtling toward the top of my head, was stopped by the forward bow stanchions. Almost every time I went forward when the spinnaker was flying I felt like my life was at risk. I knew I would be happy when this journey ended.

In Cabo San Lucas I met three people who either knew Captain Tom or had heard of his sailing exploits. All three told me he was not a safe sailor. One person had known him for 13 years and said he wouldn't sail with him. Well, great sea stories, yarns, and tales are the result of extraordinary situations and experiences. Other than claiming survival, I'm not sure what – if anything – that entitles me to, other than to reflect, wonder and appreciate my good luck, and hope that you find some interest in my tale.



***Cabo San Lucas, The Arches***



***Sunset***

## Photo Log - Dolphin Inspecting Our Sailboat



## Photo Log - Dolphin Racing With Our Boat While Under Full Sail



## Photo Log - Crewmember John And I Celebrating Our Survival





## Photo Log - The Scenery Was Spectacular



## *Part 4*

# *Log Of The Sailing Vessel “No Regrets”*

*This is my story of sailing along the coast of Baja-Mexico*





## *Chapter 1*

### *A Beginning*

Often, sailing stories are chronological, which is to say that they are linear. They have a beginning, middle, and an end. And my story certainly does have that. However, let me propose something different. Close your eyes and transform yourself to someone listening to a tale, a yarn, a story. And as the storyteller tells you one story, that triggers a memory of another, which the storyteller also shares. And as the yarns and tales are told throughout the evening without any sequence except for the wonder of the moment, you are truly transported to a time and place that gives you a moment of joy, or a

chance to pause, think, and feel.

My first story:

It is early evening and I've sailed into the anchorage on the island San Francisco. The anchor is lowered and set, sails furled, and a quiet calm has descended upon the boat. The water around me is still, flat, azure in color, and at the same time crystal clear as I look down to the bottom under my boat. The island is deserted, untouched, beautiful. I can hear birds chirping and the soft rustle of the wind as I watch the sun begin its descent beyond the horizon. I am the only person here.



The anchorage is crescent shaped with steep hills surrounding the shore. The island looks like the remains of an ancient volcanic crater.



As the sun set to the west, the full moon came into view from the east and cast a bright silver glow over the bay.

I so much wanted to share that moment with

another person. I sat down and wrote this to my girlfriend back in California.

**Dear Debbie:** Today, I left La Paz for the island of San Francisco. As I set sail I was somewhat sad and felt lonely. It's interesting how a dream or desire can sometimes be a stronger driving force than the actual event. I've always wanted to sail – it's a great adventure. But there is something missing for me. I thought that doing this alone would be no problem – I do enjoy my moments of solitude – but I'm finding that I also want to have someone to share all this with. When I see a wonderful sunset, or a falling star, or a dolphin swim by, I want to turn around and say, "Did you see that?" I want to share that moment of joy. I wish you were with me.

As I was writing that letter in the cockpit of the boat I heard a loud “whoosh,” like a large volume of water being expelled. I immediately jumped to the starboard side of the boat and looked down. As I did this I was covered with a large spray of water. At the same time I smelled a very strong odor of fish in the air. And I saw a large killer whale brushing up against my boat. Talk about bad breath! The whale then went under the boat and continued to frolic around my boat and the anchorage. At first I was worried; my memory conjured up tales of whales ramming and sinking boats.

I was also very surprised that killer whales frequented the Sea of Cortez. Under the full moon I could clearly see the large dorsal fin and white markings that killer whales are known for.

Eventually, the whale swam off to the depths of the sea as I fell asleep under the stars.

One of the marvelous things I will always remember about that period is that my life revolved around the elements. I went to sleep after the sun fell and the stars were at their brightest. And I did not wake up to an alarm clock. Rather, the soft rays of the rising sun gently caressed me as daylight brought about a new beginning. Nature put me to sleep and nature gently woke me up.

After breakfast and some maintenance work I decided to row ashore and climb up to the ridgeline that surrounded the anchorage and walk along its crest. By the time I rowed ashore the gentle breeze and the air around me was at body temperature. I felt as if I were in a cocoon

gently caressed by the breeze wafting around my body. I took off all my clothes and began to climb up toward the ridge. When I reached the top a strong breeze enveloped my body. It swirled around me, in me, and through me. It held and caressed me. The sun, the wind, the island, and I were all connected. I felt so free.



I walked along the crest until it started a downward descent to the beach. I continued to walk directly toward the bay. I did not stop as I walked onto the white sand of the beach – or when I reached the water's edge. I continued to walk until the water reached my chin. Then I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and took several steps until I was completely under water. I let myself go and sank to the bottom. And as I lay there I spread my arms and legs and like a soaring eagle; I let myself float upward. Like the outside air the water was close to body temperature and I felt as if the elements around me were connected to the womb that bore me life. And as I floated upward I journeyed back to the beginning.

As I walked out of the sea and back onto the shore, I felt as if I had been reborn.

This is my most vivid, sacred memory of the island of San Francisco, in the Sea of Cortez.





*Isla San Francisco*





*Chapter 2*  
*Spaceships, Ancient Caves*  
*and*  
*The Vermillion Sea*

Baja California itself is one of the longest, most isolated peninsulas in the world, second only to the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia. The Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortez or Sea of Cortés or Vermilion Sea, is locally known in the Spanish language as Mar de Cortés or Mar Bermejo or Golfo de California. The Sea of Cortez, which contains 37 islands, is a body of water that separates the Baja California

Peninsula from the mainland of Mexico

And this was one of the wonderful aspects of sailing in the Sea of Cortez - exploration of the lands and areas where I sailed to and anchored .

It was a long day's sail when I entered a very small and shallow cove nestled along the northwest tip of the Island of La Partida. After dropping anchor in the center of this cove, I estimated that the cove was not much wider than the length of my boat on either side. Somewhat of a precarious anchorage, but as long as the seas and weather were calm, it would be a peacefull.

Later that evening while sleeping in the cabin, a bright light entered through the portholes and

completely lit up my cabin. I quickly rushed up to the cockpit of the boat to see what was happening. Upon entering the cockpit I looked over the side and noticed that there was a bright light emanating from the underside of my boat. I saw a large, circular shape under my boat, which looked like a spaceship with a series of pulsating lights moving in a very slow, circular and hovering pattern. My boat was 39 feet in length and that object covered the length of my boat. I did not have any fear; I was somewhat mesmerized. I kept thinking, "It looks like a spaceship." After several minutes the object moved to the stern of the boat and eventually drifted into the depths of the sea and disappeared.

The following morning I was still somewhat

perplexed by what I had seen and checked the entire perimeter of the boat, but did not notice anything unusual. I then closely examined the shoreline of the cove and saw that there were steep rises on both sides of the cove. Alongside one of these rises I noticed a small cave.

Curious, I got into my dingy and rowed ashore. As I came upon the cave I had to squat down to look inside. It was about 3 feet in height and about 4 feet wide. Daylight lit the front entrance area and I could see that the walls had been blackened by smoke. I could also see several bones lying on the ground. My initial impression was that the cave was a small shelter used by the local fishermen. I began to enter the cave in somewhat of a sideways crouching motion because the cave entrance was low. I placed my

left hand on the floor and tried to brace myself by putting my hand up and against the ceiling. When I placed my hand on the ceiling I felt a ledge. As I continued to enter, I half-turned toward the ledge and reached inside. I felt something akin to a bag, grabbed it, and pulled it out. I then sat down at the entrance and examined the object. It was a burlap bag with a string wrapped around the opening. I could tell there was something in the bag and shook it. I heard the jingle of coins – immediately my imagination soared. I declared to myself that I had found a pirate treasure of gold coins. I quickly loosened the string and poured out the contents. To my great dismay, there were not gold coins.

What I had found were old silver Mexican coins.

For some reason I did not believe the coins to be valuable and came to the conclusion that the coins probably belonged to some poor Mexican fisherman who needed them more than I did. So I returned the coins to their hiding spot.

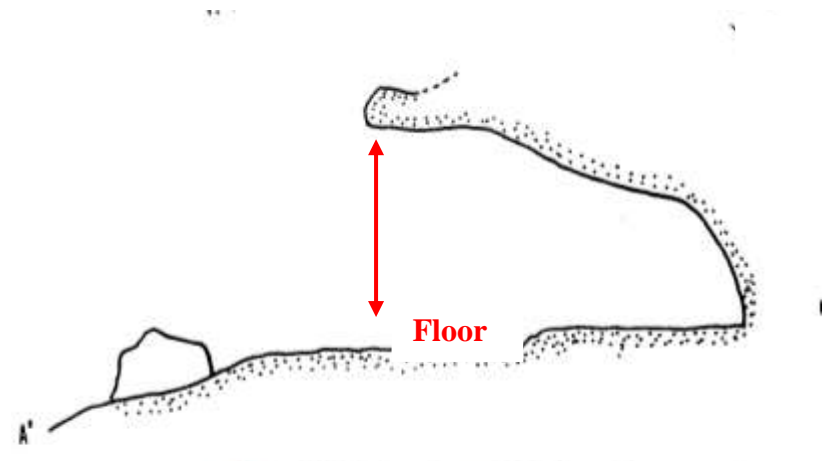
One of the great things about exploration and adventure is that we gain knowledge. We might not understand it at first, but we see, encounter, or interact with something we have not experienced before. And somehow this formulates itself within us to form a part of who we are. And sometimes something later happens that may re-connect us to what we have previously experienced to give us an even greater knowledge. And so the cycle of inner growth and understanding continues.

Years later, and by coincidence, I learned that there was some archaeological significance to the cave I found on La Partida.

In the years 1883, 1905, and in 1981 archaeological explorations of the Islands of La Partida and Espiritu Santos, which are separated by a small channel, resulted in the discovery of various archaeological sites and artifacts. Of particular interest were the funeral and habitation caves found along the eastern shore. The characteristics of the Funeral Caves were low, hidden entrances, which contained human, land and sea animal bones, and various associated artifacts. An examination of these findings by archaeologist suggested that these caves were used by what is referred to as the Las Palmas Culture, dating from AD 1200 – 1700. And

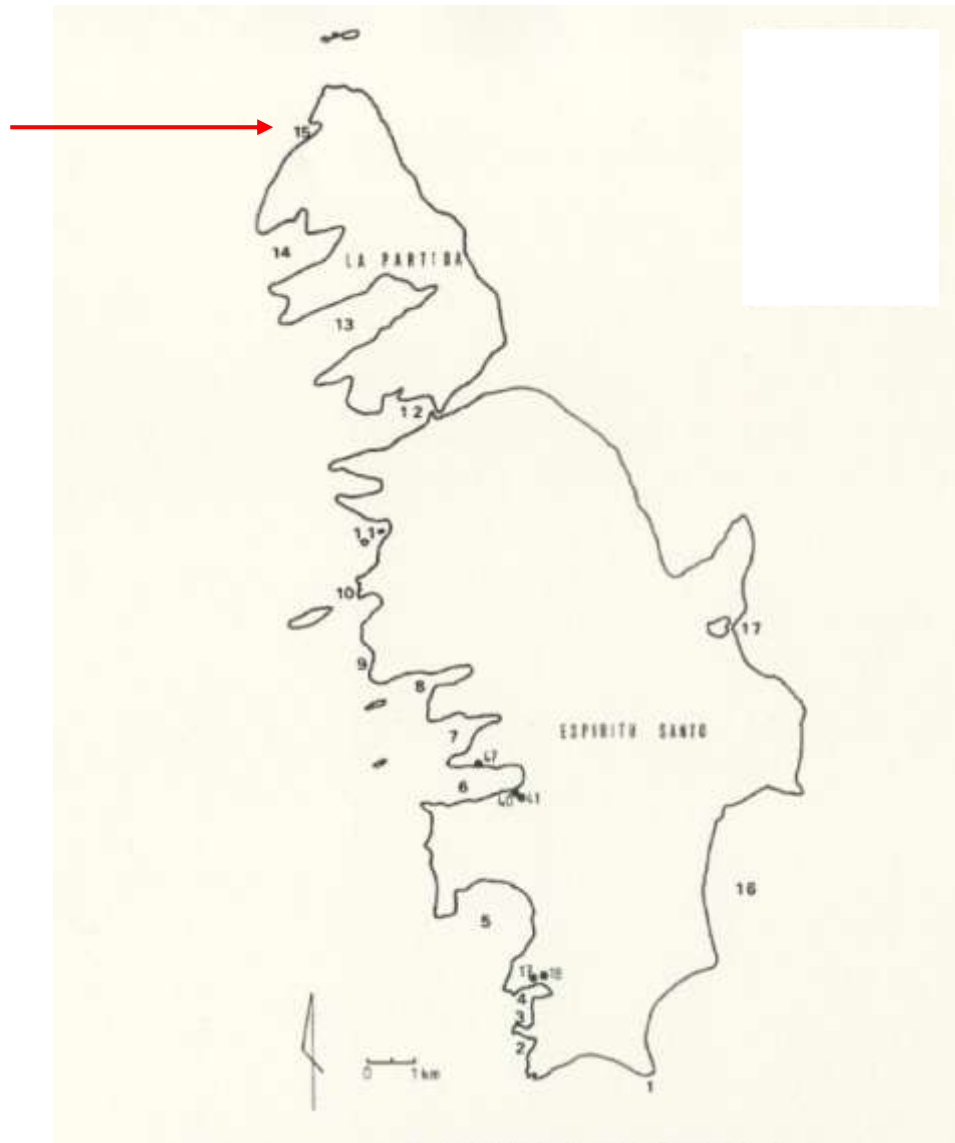
perhaps many years before.

By chance, I located one of the archaeological maps of the excavations sites and saw that Site No. 15, which is where I found the cave, had been identified during the archaeological survey.



**Diagram – Similar to cave I encountered**

*Sea of Cortez*

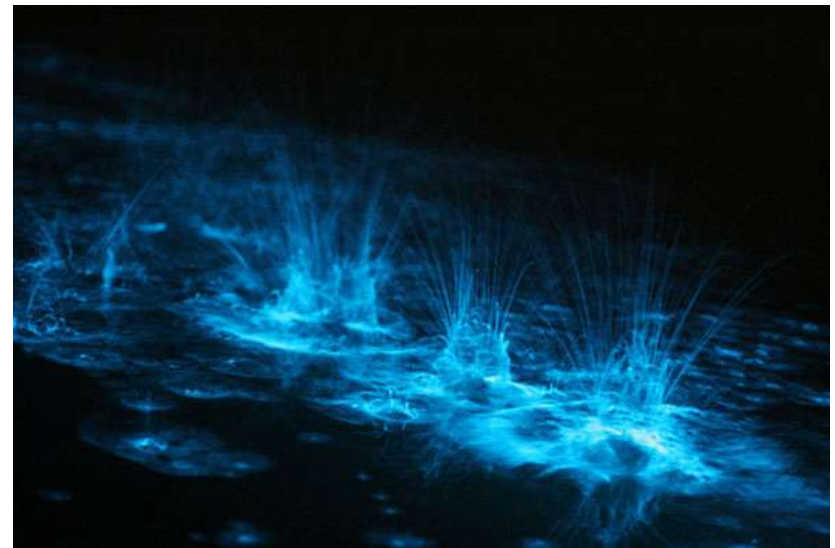


Arrow points to anchorage at La Partida where I found the cave and saw an illuminated object under my boat. Numbers on map indicate archaeological sites.



At about the same time that I learned of the archaeological findings on La Patrida I found a Spanish map that referred to the Sea of Cortez as the Mar Bermejo (Vermillion Sea).

Apparantly, the Gulf of California was also referred to as the Vermilion Sea from the presence of billions of tiny microscopical one-celled animals that are classified under the name Noctiluca.. Some of these produce light, hence the name Noctiluca. These are spherical protozoa, about one millimeter in diameter of a faint pink color. When they float near the shores, often in inconceivable numbers, they give the sea the appearance of being red. I learned that there are also color variants that produce a bluish florescence similar to what I observed.



**Several Photos Taken of Noctiluca**  
These creatures are sometimes referred to as "Sea Ghosts" and "Fire of the Sea." Or, in my case, "an alien spaceship hovering under my boat!"

*Chapter 3*  
*The Lost Gold Mine of*  
*Isla San Jose*

One of the charts or books that I had as a reference for sailing in the Sea of Cortez contained an annotation that said, “evidence of gold mining.” Although I was intrigued I did not research that annotation and forgot about it until I ventured onto the Island of San Jose.

On that sailing voyage I was accompanied by Raphael Salamanca, who had joined my boat in Cabo San Lucas. Raphael was from Switzerland and was on a vision quest to travel around the world. He had already traveled through South

America and the United States when I took him on as a crew member. We quickly became friends and to this day we still have a bond cemented together through the adventures we shared in the Sea of Cortez.

When we sailed to San Jose we found an anchorage in a place called Punta Amortajadove, located at the southeast section of the island. After dropping and setting the anchor we lowered the dingy and went ashore. At the north end of the hook I noticed several abandoned buildings and what appeared to be several salt ponds.

The best way I can describe the structures we saw is that they reminded me of the Old West. Some were made from wood and others from adobe. One building seemed to have been a

small church or worship place; it contained an altar and a picture of the Virgin Mary. Below the picture were burnt candles and small stacks of Mexican coins left there as offerings. Some of these coins were very old and had been there for quite some time as the stacks looked like they were stuck together through oxidation.



One of the buildings contained old office furniture and appeared to have been the main office. The incredible thing was that many of the salt work documents were still lying on the floor. One document was dated 29 February 1964 and showed that 205,000 kilograms of salt had been produced that month.



Things like that have always fascinated me. I asked myself, "When did the people leave?" Why did they leave? Who were they? What happened here?

Unfortunately, the only answer forthcoming were the documents on the floor.



**Old safe contained documents**



After exploring that area we continued to follow the beach in a southerly direction. In the distance I noticed a large rusted-metal object lying in the water at the shoreline. We went over to investigate and saw that it was some type of grate that seemed to have been part of a large furnace structure. Exploring the area around the object I found another large and rusted circular object that looked like a boiler or large smoke stack. We saw a manufacturer's plate on the object and were completely flabbergasted to see the inscription: "Made in 1893, San Francisco, CA."

At that moment I recalled the annotation I had read on a chart or book several weeks previously that said, "Evidence of gold mining."



**Mine Equipment Found On Beach-Dated 1893**

We continued our search of the area and found a herd of goats under one of the few trees on the island. Near the tree I noticed a well and pulled up some water from a pail. With my finger I tasted the water and noticed that it was somewhat saline. The goats appeared domesticated although we did not see any signs



of human life. We continued our search and found several foundations in the immediate area of the well. The layout of the foundations and area indicated that at one time this spot had been some sort of inhabited work or dwelling zone.

It was early evening and we decided to return to the boat and continue our exploration the following day. When we returned to the boat we decided to go for a swim to cool down. As I was floating near the boat I saw a low-lying ledge of rock, stone, or coral interspersed with connecting holes. As I floated over one of these holes I saw some movement and dived down to see what it was. As I lowered myself to the hole I looked right into the face of a lobster hiding out in a small outcropping. What I had seen were his two

antenna feelers sticking out from the overhang. I returned to the surface to continue to float and noticed that there were dozens of lobsters lying under these small outcroppings. I returned to the boat and got an old broom handle to which I taped a kitchen knife. I now had a spear.

That night and many more afterwards Raphael and I feasted on lobster.



The following morning Raphael and I set out in my dingy to explore the southeastern mangrove area of the island. While there we encountered several fisherman who lived on a very small island just south of San Jose called Isla Coyote, but known locally as Isla Pardito or El Pardito.

It was a very hot day and we asked them if they had any cold beer. They said no, but that a half day sail along the north shore of the Bay of La Paz would take us to an old lady living in a pink house who sold cold beer. Since it was already 100 degrees and the refrigeration unit on my boat was broken, we decided to take advantage of the wind to pull up anchor and sail to some cold beers.

We sailed a short distance offshore scanning the

horizon for a pink house. After several hours we saw a yellow house and decided to drop anchor at that spot. After coming ashore we walked over to the house and encountered a 65-year-old American who had a 22-year-old wife and three children. Next to the house was a small adobe structure where the very old and weather-beaten father and mother of the young wife lived. We asked them if they knew where we could get a cold beer and they pointed out a path that we should follow, which they said led to a pink house where we could buy beer. Raphael and I followed the path until we reached a pink house. Upon reaching the doorway I looked inside and saw an old woman lying in a raised bed. Raphael and I greeted her and asked her if she had any beer for sale. She said that she had and that we should sit down on her front porch. Several

minutes later she emerged from her house with two quart bottles of Pacifico beer. I remember being somewhat astonished as the house was in the middle of a desert landscape with no electricity, running water, or any other modern conveniences whatsoever. She sat down with us and we began talking.

Fortunately, Raphael's heritage was Spanish and he was completely fluent in the language. I was able to speak French, which has several words that are similar to Spanish. So, using sign language, French, English, hand motions, and Raphael to translate, we were all able to understand each other.

Curious as to the reference to gold that I had read about, I asked the old lady if there was



a gold mine on the Island of San Jose. In a matter of fact tone she said “Yes, my husband worked there.” I was a little stunned, and very excited. I then gestured as if I was digging a hole

in the ground and asked if the mine was an open pit or a cave. The old lady nodded and said the mine was a cave. She explained that many years ago there was much gold found in the mine and then one day operations ceased and the mine was closed. But, she insisted there was still a lot more gold to be found in that mine. When the mine closed all the workers left. At that time there was a lot of timber used for the construction and operation of the mine, and it was all intact when the island was abandoned. However, over the years the buildings, equipment, and all the lumber had been scavenged by the local fishermen and inhabitants from the region. She explained that the Baja was primarily a desert, and that wood was a scarce and expensive commodity.

I then asked her if she could give me directions to the mine. She said she could, but that the last time she visited the mine was in 1949. She explained that upon approaching the island I should drop anchor near the salt ponds. From there I should walk in a southerly direction and near the shore until I came upon a water well located near a tree. The water from the well would be saline, but still drinkable. In the immediate area of the well we would find some structures and then follow a road, which turned into a dry arroyo climbing toward the mountains that rose to the east. We should follow the arroyo as it meandered uphill and keep looking to our left until we come upon the entrance to the mine.

Raphael and I then drank another very cold beer and marveled at her story. We were both very

excited and eager to return to the Island of San Jose to find its lost gold mine.

One of the things I have always enjoyed about traveling is the people I met along the way. The old lady was kind, open, willing to share, and accepting of these two strangers showing up unannounced and asking for a cold beer.

The following day Raphael and I sailed back to San Jose and began our search for the gold mine. We traced our way back to the saline water well and were able to discern what appeared to be either a road or the bottom end of an arroyo, which had flushed down from the mountain during the rainy season. As we followed this trail I noticed on the ground a wide variety of stones lying on the ground that are often used for

jewelry. I found blue turquoise, green malachite, different colored quartz and many pieces of pyrite, which is commonly referred to as “Fool’s gold.” I took this as a good sign; I had read that many of these types of stone deposits are found in conjunction with gold. As we followed this trail we noticed that it started to branch off in many directions as we started uphill. Which should we follow? It was now the dry season, but during the rainy season there are torrential downpours that carve new paths as the water tumbles its way down the mountain and into the ocean. We searched all day, up and down numerous arroyos. We climbed many hills and worked our way to the top of the mountain.





### **On Mountain Top Searching For The Lost Gold Mine**

From the mountain top we used our binoculars to search for any signs of man or a mine, but the trail and gold mine remained elusive. Although we did not find the gold mine we were not discouraged because we knew it was there and we had an eyewitness account of the general location. When I returned to the boat I scanned

the downward slope of the mountains for any signs of human activity. I could tell that there were many arroyos or washouts along the western slope. Continuing to scan the mountain I formulated an idea for a search pattern. Essentially, what Raphael and I had done that day was follow arroyos in a linear or vertical pattern up the mountain. And that was unsuccessful because there were too many washouts that tumbled down from the desert mountain. I remembered that the old lady told us that the mine was located a “short walk up” the arroyo. So, what I thought would be more effective was to choose a spot about 200 feet north of the well and then walk up toward the mountain and climb its initial slope for about 100 feet. Then we would walk south in a straight line using the top of the mountain and the shoreline

as a guide and point of reference. This way we would cross, down, up, and over each arroyo we would come across. And while we did this we could scan each arroyo for signs of the mine.

The following morning we were both excited to continue our search. I felt very confident that we would somehow find that mine. As I tell this story, I am reminded of those people who have spent their whole life searching for something they knew was “just around the corner.”

As I began my search pattern Raphael split off to follow his own instincts. Amazingly, within a very short period of time I came across a mound that appeared to be an area used for crushing large rock excavated from a mine. I searched the pile

and found pieces of quartz, turquoise, pyrite, and many other colored stones. I walked around this mound and when I looked further south I saw a pillar and walked over to it. The pillar contained various grid coordinates etched into the concrete. I knew I had found the mine. I called out several times to Raphael and luckily he was within my voice range. We re-united at the concrete marker and then went into an arroyo, located just south of the marker.

We started to climb upward toward the mountain and within five minutes we saw a cave entrance adjacent to the north wall of the arroyo.

I was amazed that some prospector in the late 1800's had somehow worked his way up to this

arroyo, literally in the middle of nowhere, and decide to dig for gold in this spot. Later, I found out that hundreds of mines similar to this one had been dug in the Baja during the era of the California Gold Rush.

As we came closer to the mine entrance I noticed that the mine was actually a shaft dug into and down the arroyo wall. Raphael and I looked down and could not see the bottom. We then threw a large rock into the shaft and eventually heard a thud. Near the front of the mine entrance shaft was an old tree, which presented us with an opportunity to enter the cave. We did what most young men, explorers and adventurers would do. We returned to the boat and got about 150 feet of boat line that we would use to climb down into the gold mine shaft.



**Gold Mine Entrance**

In retrospect what we did was foolish. There are 101 reasons why our venture could or should have spelled our demise. I am sure if we had disappeared in that mine that day, we would not have been found - ever. In fact I would not be

surprised if a present- day exploration of the mine would uncover some human skeletons.

When we returned to the mine entrance we secured a loop around the tree stump and dropped the line into the shaft. While Raphael watched the line, I began to rappel down into the mine shaft. I noticed that the tunnel wall was composed of hard sand formation containing many pebbles and large rocks. As I rappelled down some of these rocks became loose and tumble down with me. I continued to rappel down and finally reach the bottom. The shaft entrance from the arroyo was approximately 5 or 6 feet in diameter. But, as I stood at the bottom of the shaft gazed upwards to the top entrance, it looked like the size of a pie. I then examined the ground I was standing on and noticed that one

corner of the floor was concave and appeared to have been the lateral entrance to the mine. Over the years the lumber shoring up the shaft walls had been pilfered, and now the entrance was filling up from its collapsing walls. Consequently, the entrance to the mine was only 3 feet in diameter.



**Raphael Looking Down Shaft Opening**

While examining the entrance I heard a strange noise from inside the mine. I knelt down by the entrance and listened carefully. It sounded something like this, “Ooooh-shhhh-ooooh-shhhh.” It reminded me of the sound we make while impersonating ghosts and water being sprayed out of a garden hose

I pulled out my flashlight and decided to crawl into the entrance. I went in several feet, turned on the flashlight, and immediately let out a frightful yell. What I saw within a hair’s breath of my face were hundreds of bats flying about my body! The noise I’d heard was the sound of a million bats flapping their wings as they flew around the inside of the mine.

I quickly retreated and heard Raphael yelling

down to me, asking if everything was OK. Although I was momentarily startled we still decided to enter the mine. Raphael then rappelled down into the shaft and volunteered to be the first to enter.



**Raphael Entering Gold Mine**



As we entered the mine we followed the downward slope from the accumulated debris at the entrance to the floor of the mine. Using both our flashlights I could see that the main entrance was a large, cavernous room. There were hundreds of thousands of bats flying around, but because of their sonar/night vision capabilities they did not fly into our bodies. But, they came frighteningly close.

Inspecting the cavern, we saw that there were multiple levels to the mine with tunnels and shafts leading to many directions and levels. We also saw that many timber pieces had collapsed. At one time there must have been multiple stairways and a lot of timber to support the various shaft levels, but over the years the beams had simply been stripped away.

We decided to explore further and entered one of the tunnels. As we followed the tunnel route, bats were continuously flying over our bodies and very close to our faces. They were flying so close that we could actually feel the breeze from their flapping wings as they flew between our arms, our legs, and around our heads. With the light shining directly in front of us we could see these bats as they flew directly toward us. As we continued to follow the shaft, I noticed another tunnel directly to my right. I aimed the light to the new tunnel ceiling and was about to step into it when I pointed my flashlight onto the floor. I immediately stopped - what I was looking into was an abyss! It was not another tunnel; rather it was a very deep shaft leading to the very bowels of that mine.



### **Bats Flying Around Tunnel**

Undeterred we continued to slowly walk further into the tunnel. The ground beneath us felt soft, and I focused closely on what we were walking on. It was then that I realized that we were

walking on 40 years of bat guano! The build up of this guano was well over several feet from the original mine floor. While examining the guano I saw a dead bat on the ground and asked myself if that bat had died from rabies, which can be fatal to humans if not immediately treated. I then remembered watching a TV documentary on rabies that suggested that rabies can possibly be contracted in caves by breathing infected bat guano dust particles. At that point, Raphael and I decided to exit the mine. As we were leaving the tunnel I noticed a glint along the tunnel wall and went over to examine it. To my complete joy and surprise, I realized I was looking at a gold vein. It was very distinct, and there was no doubt in my mind that there was still gold to be found in this mine. When we returned to the cavernous main entrance area, I picked up several rock

specimens that looked promising. I wanted to have them assayed for gold.

While in the cavern I heard a low-sounding rumble and noticed a light coating of dust or bat guano filtering out from one of the tunnels. Perhaps a cave in?

Raphael and I then crawled away from the collapsed main entrance and out into the entrance shaft. Using our rope we then climbed hand-over-hand back up to the arroyo.

Some people have asked me why I entered that mine. "Was that not a foolish thing," they ask? Perhaps, it was, but I am always reminded of what Edmund Hillary said about his explorations:

"Nobody climbs mountains for scientific reasons. Science is used to raise money for the expeditions, but you really climb for the hell of it."



**Gold Mine Tunnel**

## *Chapter 4*

### *Raindrops and Shipwrecks*

My good friend Raphael decided to continue his journey around the world and left my boat in the city of La Paz. I was now sailing “No Regrets” single handed and leisurely working my way north visiting spectacular anchorages and deserted islands along the western shore of the Sea of Cortez.

During this period the weather was perfect. The Sea of Cortez was calm and clear and I was enjoying spectacular sunsets, breathtaking sunrises, and lazy and warm summer days.

Under these types of conditions one can forget that prudence and vigilance is needed while sailing. Tristan Jones, a well-known adventure sailor, when asked about his relationship with the wind, sea, and nature replied “bugger them.” And after what happened to me and two other boats on the island of Montserrat, I know what he means.

Here is what happened:

Along with two other boats, I sailed to the island of Montserrat, where we set our anchors on the north shore. My habit of anchoring was that when my anchor hit bottom, I would back the boat and lay out approximately 125 feet in chain length. I followed this practice because the more chain length from anchor to boat, the stronger the

holding power of the anchor during times of strong winds, currents, or storms. However, because of the tranquil seas and no forecasts indicating inclement weather, the other two boats anchored close to shore and only let out about 50 feet of line or chain.

After laying out my anchor and securing my boat I went ashore to explore the island. As I was nearing the northwest corner of the island I began to smell a very foul odor. Curious, I followed my nose and found an abandoned fishing camp that stunk to high heaven. What lay before me looked like some sort of massacre. There were piles and piles of shark heads, moray eels, and sting rays. The scene was incredible. The sharks were hammerheads. The eels and rays seemed intact and I assumed they had been

caught in fish nets and then later discarded as sea garbage. The sharks appeared to have been killed only for their fins.

The scene saddened me because mankind continues to deplete the earth's resources without much regard for the future. Catching sharks for their fins is akin to killing cattle for their tails and then tossing out the rest!





Later that afternoon I went snorkeling along the island reef and caught two lobsters. The other couples picked clams and mussels and we all decided to gather on one boat that evening where we would cook our catch and enjoy each other's company.

I looked forward to that evening; one of the enjoyable aspects of sailing is the camaraderie among fellow cruisers met along the path less travelled. There is an old saying about sailing that rings true and is one of the reasons why fellow sailors often share a bond. It goes something like this, "Ninety-nine percent of people who dream of sailing never buy a boat. And 99 percent of people who buy a boat never embark on a journey. And 99 percent of those who start a journey do not complete it."

Anyway, that evening was wonderful. We ate well, watched a fabulous sunset, drank some great cocktails, and shared many stories.





**"No Regrets" At Sunset, Island of Montserrate**

It was a hot evening, and as had been my custom while in the Sea of Cortez I went to sleep on the deck of the boat.

All of a sudden I felt something. A raindrop on my head and movement under the boat. My senses awakened me and immediately brought me to full alert. I sensed that something bad was about to happen.

This type of premonition had happened to me before; I recalled an incident in the jungles of Vietnam. I was on a five-man night patrol in Viet Cong territory where we had set up along an infiltration trail. We rotated our sleep with one man on guard while the other four slept. I was sleeping on my back with my rifle lying across my chest and my hand around the trigger and

handle. All of a sudden I sat up with my rifle at the ready, even before the guard on duty could distinguish anything. I heard the sound of footsteps approaching our position – the enemy. Yes, we do have a sixth sense and it has served me well in the past, and it served me well that evening on Montserrat.

I concentrated on the sensation under the boat and felt a vibration. Standing, I noticed that the wind had picked up considerably and was getting stronger by the second. I then looked out to the far horizon and saw frightening flashes of red, orange, white, and green emanating from a very dark sky to the northeast. I then ran to the front of the boat and saw that my anchor chain was as tight as a bow string from the anchor to the boat. I looked down and saw that the wind was stirring

up tiny waves. I then placed my hand on the anchor chain and felt the vibrations. My anchor was dragging against the pressure of the wind and the mounting waves!

I immediately ran to the cockpit and started my engine. I then ran back to the front of the boat and tried to raise my anchor using the electric winch. However the pressure of the waves and wind against the boat was much greater than the force of the winch.

Before I go further, let me say that everything I am about to tell you happened in less than several minutes. This is how things often happen. Without any warning.

I looked up again and saw a dark line rapidly approaching. The wind kept getting stronger and stronger as rain began falling furiously. Then all of a sudden and in a ferocious onslaught, the sea around me became a boiling cauldron of large waves. A horrible darkness fell. The wind began howling and was so fierce that it was now raining horizontally.

I jumped back into the cockpit and looked down at my lighted compass. I took a heading directly facing into the path of the storm and engaged my motor into forward gear. My thinking was that even though I was still anchored, the forward motion of the propeller would keep me in place and neutralize the effort of the waves and wind to dash me on the shore.

In the cockpit it felt as if I were inside a washing machine. The boat was pitched to the left, to the right, up, and down, until I lost all sense of direction.

I realized that my plan would not work and that the anchor was a death trap. My only hope was to free the boat from the anchor and head out to the open sea to battle the storm. Otherwise, the storm would shipwreck me.

I needed to cut away the rope line attaching the end of the chain to the anchor post located inside the boat. Then I'd have to free the chain from the chain lock, which was on deck.

I quickly jumped down into the galley, found a kitchen knife, and ran to the forward v-berth area.

I opened the chain locker and cut the rope line attached to the anchor post. I then ran back to the cockpit and onto the deck.

The wind was howling, the boat was being tossed around like a bucking bronco, rain was falling horizontally, and it was as dark as the inside of a coal bin. But I did not hesitate; there are times in life when the only option is to forge ahead. Disaster may lie ahead of you, but you have no other option because disaster is surely a step behind you.

I made it to the forward chain lock and grabbed the anchor chain running through the lock. With both hands and all my force I jerked the chain up to lift the chain lock latch, which lay over the chain. The chain started to fall into the sea, and I

began running back to the cockpit. But, because of the motion of the boat the chain lock fell back down into a locked position.

I ran back forward and again broke the chain loose from the latch. I ran back to the cockpit and the chain lock again fell back down into a locked position. At the moment my depth alarm began to sound a warning. It was set at 15 feet, and I was about to be dashed on the rocks.

I then heard an explosion and saw several distress flares firing from one of the boats anchored close to the shoreline. Then, on the radio I heard the pleading voice of a 12-year-old boy from one of the boats say, "Help, help! We are sinking."



I don't know how I knew, but felt that my boat had been turned around by the wind and sea and that my bow was now facing the shore and was seconds from being thrown against its rocks.

Although the boat was still attached to my anchor and to 125 feet of chain, I threw the engine into reverse and with full power I started backing up toward the open ocean. The engine gauge showed that my engine was starting to red line. By instinct I kept going back and back until my depth sounder alarm went off. Then I threw the engine into forward and under full power swung my steering wheel to full starboard until I turned the bow toward the open sea and started heading out. I then shifted the engine into neutral and quickly ran forward to the chain lock. I gave the chain one great pull and unlatched the chain

lock. I quickly ran back to the cockpit and threw the engine to full speed ahead. I could hear the chain rattling as it was falling overboard. Finally, I was free of the anchor. I powered full force into the storm, knowing that that the depth of the sea offered safety.

And then, all of a sudden, just like it had started, it was over. The seas were flat, the winds were calm, and the sun was beginning to rise.

I quickly ran down below, got on the radio, and sent out a distress message. "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, this is the sailing vessel 'No Regrets' off the island of Montserrat. Two boats sunk along the shoreline. Mayday, Mayday, Mayday."

I repeated this several times and stood by the radio. Then I heard a barely audible response. The signal was weak, but my Mayday was acknowledged and help from Puerto Escondido, which was close by, was on the way.

I remember standing on the deck after the storm in a dead silence. My boat looked like it had gone through a battle. Everything was strewn about and upside down. And on the shore, two boats had been cast upon its sands and rocks.

I looked around for my sailing companion, "Cortez" the cat. I rescued him from the city of La Paz and he had been my constant companion since that day. "Cortez, Cortez!" I yelled and then listened. I called out to him several times, but

there was no answer. Sadly, I concluded that the storm had taken him.

I then turned the boat around and headed back to Montserrat. I came in close and saw that the crews from both boats were onshore and alive. I yelled out to them that help was on the way. Because I had no anchor I went back out to sea and let the boat drift as I worked on my spare anchor and line.

I was glad to be alive and brewed myself a hot cup of coffee as I worked on the anchor. While on deck I heard a faint sound. "Meow, meow, meow." I jumped up and ran into the cabin, all the while yelling, "Cortez, Cortez!" Emerging from a nook Cortez came over and rubbed his head

against my hand. It's hard to describe how happy I was. We forged a lifelong bond that day.

After securing my spare anchor I motored back to Montserrat.



**My companion boats thrown upon the shoreline of Montserrat**



Standing on the deck and looking out to the horizon, I could see the outline of several boats making their way over to us. My radio was crackling with the names of various boats, each one sounding off with the name of their boat and saying, "Help is on the way, we are coming." I never felt as proud as that day to be an American. The Sea of Cortez is a lonely, lovely, and desolate place. There is no one there to help you except your fellow compatriots.

They say art imitates life, and when I look back at what happened and see the imagery of the events in my mind, it is no different than the media imagery I have seen of other people surviving tragic events. Perhaps that is why I remember every second of what occurred during that evening.



**Salvage operation - one boat was a ferro-cement type and was punctured by a large boulder and sank on the shoreline**



**Shipwreck on the Island of Montserrate**

*Chapter 5*  
*Cortez the Cat,*  
*Ghost Towns, and the Holy Spirit*

During my travels in the Sea of Cortez I kept hearing vague rumors of a town on an island there that was once inhabited, but was now deserted. According to this legend you could wander this town and enter homes where plates were still set on tables, as if the people had simply vanished.

So, one day my companion Cortez and I set off to sail to the island of Carmen. Studying a nautical map, I decided to sail to a protected

cove called La Lancha, which was located at the north end of the island.

As usual, the sail to the island was glorious. The sky and seas were bright, blue, crisp, and a wonder to behold. The Baja peninsula is a desert landscape and most of the islands in the Sea of Cortez are in close proximity to the peninsula, which provides a beautiful and mountainous backdrop. I have always said that sailing along Baja's eastern coast was like sailing in the Grand Canyon.

When I arrived at the Bay of La Lancha, I was the only boat there. One of the nice things about a quiet, hot, and deserted anchorage is that you can take off all your clothes and fully enjoy the



sun as it envelopes your body. After I dropped anchor, I put on my diving mask and fins to check it. Once I was in the water, a jellyfish stung my left arm. I got out and soaked the area with vinegar to neutralize the stingers. Then I put some Benadryl cream over the area. No big thing, I thought. After several such incidents I was used to this. So I dove back in the water and checked my anchor.



**Island of Carmen**

After checking the anchor I made radio contact with a fellow cruiser I had befriended. He and his family were anchored in a cove east of La Lancha and invited me over for lobster that evening. I gladly accepted.

That afternoon I studied my charts and saw that south of my anchorage and on the other side of the island was the Bay of Salinas and the town of La Salina. Since La Lancha was a well-protected bay, I decided that instead of sailing into the Bay of Salinas I would set out across the island and walk to this mysterious ghost town. I estimated that the walk would take about 90 minutes and decided that I would trek across the following morning.

I also checked the nautical chart to identify the cove that my friend was anchored in and saw that I could easily motor over to his boat with my dingy.

In the late afternoon I set out to meet my friend and left my trusted companion Cortez the cat to guard the boat.

Cortez and I had become great friends and he always was on deck when I left and returned. We had a ritual when I would return to the boat: he would come out to rail as I tied up the dingy alongside the boat, and before climbing in he would stretch out toward me and we would touch noses as a sign of affection.

It took about 20 minutes to dingy over to my friend's boat, and upon arriving I was greeted

with a cool and refreshing beer. Later, we all went snorkeling and had a wonderful time exploring the anchorage. When we returned to the boat we prepared a delicious meal of lobster and rice. Afterward, we sat back with a few drinks, sharing our life stories and watching a colorful sunset. A quarter-moon then rose over the horizon and cast a low, silvery light across the sea.

Around 9:30 I decided to return to my boat as I knew that the quarter-moon would soon set behind the Baja Sierras. While sailing the Sea of Cortez I noticed that in these latitudes, when the sun or moon drops below the western slope of the Baja Sierras, darkness enshrouds the landscape quickly, almost as if someone turned off a light switch.

About half-way back to the boat I saw that the crescent moon had dropped behind the mountains. And just like that, it got as dark as the ace of spades. I could barely see to the end of my dingy. Unfortunately, I did not have a flashlight or anything else that could have illuminated my return. I put my motor in idle and stopped; the shoreline from my friend's boat to my anchorage was somewhat mountainous and strewn with large boulders.

The sea was calm, but I could hear the gentle lapping of the water against the rocky shore. I decided to try using my sense of hearing to guide me back to my boat. I quietly listened to the sound of the sea brushing up against the shore and then motored several feet in a parallel

course to the sound. Slowly, but surely, I inched my way forward.

When the tone of the sound changed, I knew I had entered the small Bay of La Lancha. For some reason I thought I would be able to see my boat in that small anchorage, but that was not the case. Slowly, I started crisscrossing the bay. Several times I crossed back and forth to no avail. I couldn't find my own boat!

Holy Moses, what happened? Where was my boat? The imagination can conjure up many things—and quickly. I thought, "My boat has dragged its anchor." "It's floating out in the Sea of Cortez." "Someone stole my boat!" I thought of all this in about three seconds and then started thinking more rationally. I shut off the dingy's

engine and let all my senses return to an inner calm. I yelled, "Cortez, Cortez, Cortez!" And then I listened. I thought I heard something—faint, a weak "meow." I again yelled, "Cortez!" And heard a stronger "meow," call back to me. I started my dingy motor and edged forward in the direction to where I heard Cortez. After several yards I turned off my motor and again yelled out to Cortez. My great companion responded, "Meow, meow," as I edged closer to the boat.

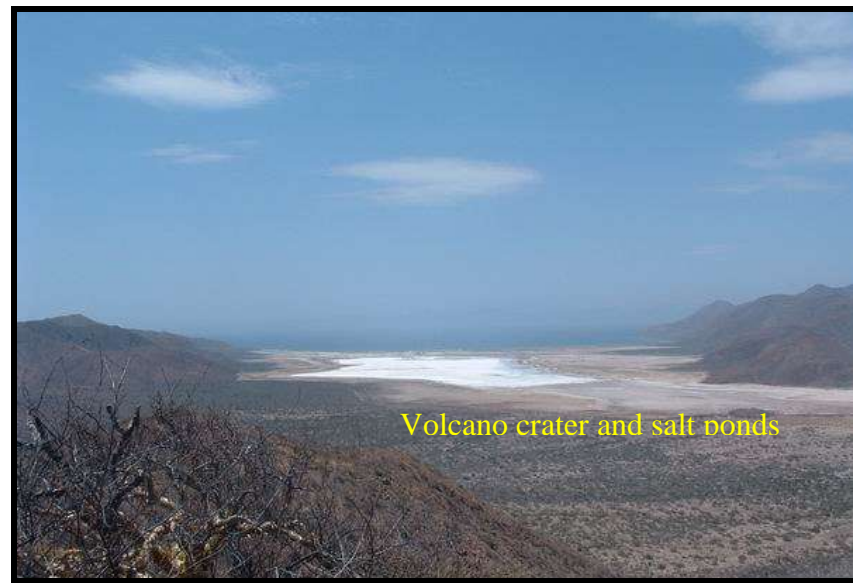
When I finally reached the boat, Cortez, my faithful companion, friend, and savior, was at the rail and leaned over to rub my nose to greet me.

And that's how I found my boat on a night that was darker than a coal miner's ass!

The following morning I rowed ashore and began walking across the island to the town of La Salina. The area between the anchorage of La Lancha and La Salina was flat and desert-like. After awhile I came across abandoned salt ponds, which I began to walk over. In some areas the salt ponds were pure white, hard, and felt like ice as I walked over it. In other areas the ground was red and still contained red-colored and brackish water covered with a thin layer of salt. The water was only several inches deep, but very hot. Already the outside temperature was close to a hundred degrees, and I worried that the water was becoming too hot to walk in. But, at that juncture I was at the halfway point and in the middle of the salt ponds. My only option was to quickly move ahead.

Several years later I found an obscure reference in a scientific journal that the island contained rich and abundant salt deposits that were extensively mined from the mid-1850s to 1980. I also learned that when I walked from La Lancha to the ghost town of La Salina, I had actually walked across a volcanic crater that formed a huge natural salt pond. Apparently, the daily rise and fall of the tides generated thick layers of salt in the crater area. For centuries the Indians had harvested the salt, followed by the Spaniards and after that the Mexicans.

As I approached La Salina I could see that the town was abandoned. There were rusted trucks and various types of equipment out in the open and rusting. It looked like several homes had been torn down, but others were still standing.



The rumor that had lured me to this ghost town was that the homes still contained furniture and dishes on the dinner tables, as if the town had been abandoned in haste. And so I decided to see for myself. I entered several homes, but time and scavengers have taken their toll. All the homes were empty and void of any signs of life.



However, in many other buildings, items were left intact and did appear as if there had been a hasty departure. Also, many of the buildings contained signage that described the structure function.

One of these was the Port Captain's office. It was located at the shore side of a long and dilapidated pier. I tried to open the door, but it was locked. I looked in the office through the window and saw that everything was intact. I then pulled at the window and to my great surprise, it swung open. I climbed inside the office and saw an old Remington typewriter with a document inserted in the roller. I was astonished that whoever was using the typewriter had stopped typing in mid-sentence. Looking at the communications equipment, I

saw a large console over a special desk that held a microphone. The radio equipment looked like the old tube type, similar to what I'd seen in World War II movies.



**Pier and Port Captain's Office, Bay of Salinas**

Another interesting building was the Medical building. The shelves of the doctor's office were still lined with drugs. On a desk I saw a large ledger-type book. I opened it and found that it

was a daily ledger of patients seen on a specific date, their ailment, treatment, and prescription.



**Abandoned Town of Salina, Island of Carmen**



**Medical Treatment Room**

However, the most interesting building was the town church. It sat along the shoreline and the front doors opened to a white sand beach and azure waters no more than 30 feet away. When I entered I was surprised. The altar was completely set up; it looked like mass was about

to begin. In the middle of the altar there was a golden chalice. Next to it was a large golden crucifix. To the left was a very large bible on a stand. It was at least two feet in length. The cover was red, and the pages were trimmed in gold. When I turned the pages I saw that it was written in Latin. Candles, altar cloths, and religious pictures adorned the altar.

Behind the altar was a small alcove. When I entered that alcove I was again taken aback. To my amazement I saw a large, beautiful green silk outer garment that was similar to the type I have seen Catholic bishops or Cardinals wearing during a High Mass. Other priestly garments were also in the room and were all in pristine condition and hanging on wooden garment racks.

Although scavengers had stripped away certain elements from this ghost town, not a single dust particle had been moved in that church. I am sure that the fear of the Holy Spirit descending upon any malefactor kept many would-be thieves honest.



**Abandoned Church, Town of Salina, Island of Carmen, Sea of Cortez, Mexico**

I spent a fascinating day exploring La Salina and admiring the natural beauty of the area. For many years I wondered what had happened to the people on that island. At the time my guess was that the owners of the salt ponds one day decided to cease operations and ruthlessly evicted all the workers.

Several years later I learned that my hunch was right. Apparently, for many years, La Salina was a company town built to support a small community of workers who processed salt from the evaporation ponds. As with other salt works in Baja, the salt was for the preservation of fish and was sent off to the many fish processing plants in Baja.

The workers and their families grew to a point

that a small schoolhouse and a church were built. Apparently, a sufficient amount of salt was produced by the ponds and the workers to justify the construction of a salt-processing plant and a dock for small transport boats to pick up the salt and deliver for its distribution via the town of Loreto, which was once the capital of Baja California. However, in 1982 the venture became unprofitable and the company decided to shut down the operation. The decision came without warning, and the workers and their families were forced off of the island. Since the town was a company town, the only thing the residents could take were their most prized possessions. The people were then loaded on one of the company supply ships and, without so much as a thank you, were dumped onto a mainland dock.



So the tale of the deserted town on the island of Carmen with furniture in the buildings and plates still on kitchen tables was essentially true. I am a witness to that.





## *Chapter 6*

### *Random Memories*

As I have mentioned before I could have written a linear account of my days on “No Regrets” and the Sea of Cortez. Instead, I’ve recounted random thoughts and memories. Some are short and some are detailed. Nevertheless, each was a special moment.

#### *Walking on Water:*

I was anchored in the Bay of Los Frailes and, as had been the case throughout my travels in the Sea of Cortez, the water was crystal clear, the sun was out in its full glory, and the scenery was spectacular.

I had decided to take a walk on the beach and instead of rowing my dingy ashore I dived off the side of the boat. At that point in my life I could hold my breath for a long time and dived down to about 10 feet and continued toward shore. I did not wear a mask, but it did not bother my eyes and I could see the bottom and the way forward clearly. All of a sudden I felt a ferocious sting, like an angry wasp had dug in to my right shoulder. My left arm shot up instantly toward the pain. Then I felt another sting on my lower back; I arched my spine reflexively. Then I felt another on my abdomen and I doubled over. At the same time I felt another sting on my side and rolled over. All of this was going on underwater. I was terrified and shot up toward the surface like I’d been fired from cannon. At the surface I furiously flayed away with my arms and feet to

make it to shore. I felt like I was almost walking on water — and I probably broke an Olympic record getting to shore.

Getting out of the water I inspected myself. I saw something that was white and jelly-like on my arms and legs. This was the first time I'd been stung by a jellyfish. Until then I'd had this notion that jellies were large and that you could see them. I was also unaware that there were a hundred different varieties.

Standing on shore I knew I had to return to the boat to neutralize the jellyfish stings. With great reluctance and yet with great speed, I earned another Olympic medal swimming back to the boat. Fortunately, I was not stung again.

Onboard I pulled out my book on “medical emergencies at sea” and saw that baking soda or vinegar would neutralize the jellyfish stings. It worked.

Later, I went back in the water with my mask, fins, and snorkel and was able to see that the jellyfish I encountered were translucent, almost invisible, and the size of a silver dollar. There were millions of them in the bay floating several feet below the surface.

And that was the day I almost walked on water.



### *Sailing to Disneyland:*

My good friend Raphael and I were sailing back to the Bay of La Paz, when off in the far distance we saw something large and white. We were curious and continued to sail toward it. It grew larger as we neared, but I could not figure out what it was. Was it an island I asked myself. If so, why was it all white? And then as we sailed closer, it started taking the shape of a castle. From afar it reminded me of the Sleeping Beauty Castle at Disneyland.

Eventually, we came upon two islands. One was small; the second, even smaller. These islands were essentially large rock outcroppings rising from the sea and both were completely covered by bird droppings. The small island had a sea

arch cut through the middle and I could clearly see the bottom. Most of the island's shores consisted of vertical cliffs, but there were also rock shelves inhabited by hundreds of California Sea Lions.





Raphael and I dropped anchor and put on our masks, fins, and snorkels to investigate the sea life. We dived under the arch and through to the other side. There were hundreds of sea lions and their pups in the water. I started playing with the curious pups when all of a sudden I saw a black blur barreling straight at me and at the last second, within a hair of my head, it turned 90 degrees. It scared the heck out of me and I instinctively coiled back at the onrush.

Apparently, a male bull was trying to warn me off or being protective of the pups. This happened several times, but after they got used to my presence they stopped charging me. The pups were fun and curious. They would swim right up to me and just about at the moment that I could touch them, they would bolt away. I found that by lying on my back in an open-arm position, the pups would come closer. But I never got to touch more than a whisker.

We returned to the boat and lowered the dingy to circle the island. As we rowed to the east side of the island, we saw a large boulder that was flat and about 3 feet out of the water. On this boulder we saw a sea lion with a net wrapped around its neck. The net was so tight that it had cut completely through the skin around the animal's

neck. It was terrible looking — essentially an open wound.

Slowly, we started edging the dingy over to the boulder. The sea lion saw us and was sitting back on its hind flipper swaying back and forth. We continued to edge forward, ever so slowly. Finally, we made it to the boulder, just to the left of the sea lion. We sat still for a while and then slowly stood up and put our hands on top of the boulder. The sea lion swayed back and forth but did not dive into the water. Very slowly we continued to inch our way toward the sea lion. We were about two feet away when it reached down with its snout and quickly sniffed my hand. Raphael and I then inched our way to the top of the rock and sat side-by-side with the sea lion.

That moment was incredible and I'm still amazed that we were able to sit next to this wild animal.

We looked at the sea lion's neck; it really was a terrible wound. My impression was that the nylon net had wrapped itself around the animal's neck when it was younger. And as the sea lion grew, the net became tighter and tighter. Essentially, the net was slowly killing the sea lion.

Raphael and I thought up a possible plan to help the animal, so I returned to "No Regrets" and got a large toe nail clipper. Because the net had cut through the outer skin, the wound was simply too deep to use a knife or scissors.

What I saw when I returned to Raphael and the sea lion will always be imprinted in my mind.



Raphael was sitting next to the sea lion with his feet hanging toward the water. Next to him, the sea lion had laid his head across Raphael's knees.

I inched my way back to the boulder and sat

next to Raphael. The sea lion accepted me and remained in place. The net and wound were a tangled mess and I was not sure where to start. I then saw one loose strand of the nylon net and



slowly eased toward it. I was able to get the clipper teeth next to the nylon, but as soon as I touched it, the sea lion jerked upward as if it had been shocked. I tried again, but the sea lion was watching me and started swaying back and forth. I

tried again, but this time it dove into the sea and disappeared. We felt sad for the sea lion because it was eventually going to die from that wound.

### *Mexican Hot Dogs*

Raphael and I sailed into the Bay of La Paz and berthed “No Regrets” at the Marina La Paz. We were eager to explore the city and the surrounding area. Fortunately, I’d brought along on the boat a small, 100cc Bridgestone motorcycle I’d purchased in Newport Beach, on the Southern California coast, for \$125. My boat had a large center cockpit area and the motorcycle fit nicely on the bench seat behind the steering station.

That evening Raphael and I winched the bike out of the boat, onto the dock, and off we went to downtown La Paz.

Arriving at the Plaza Constitución, we parked the motorcycle and walked around the plaza area.

My sailing venture into Mexico was my first exposure to Mexico, its culture, and the language. For example, when I first arrived in Mexico I heard people ordering “Cerveza,” which I thought was a brand of beer. So when I was at a restaurant and the waiter asked me in English if I wanted anything to drink, I said, “Yes a Cerveza.” He then asked me what kind and I said, “Cerveza.” The waiter responded, “No, what kind?” And again I said, “Cerveza.” We had a great laugh when the kind waiter said that “Cerveza” in Spanish meant “beer” and was not a brand name.

Walking around the plaza area I noticed many portable hot dog carts. That's strange, I said to myself. I thought that hot dogs were uniquely American. I then went over to look at how they were served. Inside the cart there seemed to be a steamer that kept the buns warm and moist and at the same time steamed the hot dogs. I watched as a local fellow ordered one with all the dressings. The first thing the vender put over the hot dog was several scoops of diced tomatoes. Diced tomatoes! Surely, that won't taste good. Then some onions. OK, that's good. Then some mayonnaise. Holy smokes — mayonnaise on a hot dog! That can't taste good. Next came the ketchup. Wow, I thought, that sure is different.

But having previously travelled and lived in foreign countries, I was game. So I ordered,

“One more, with everything!” Bueno!

Before the night was over I ate five more Mexican hot dogs. And now whenever I travel in Mexico I keep a lookout for hot dog street vendors because I am going to say, “Uno más, con todo.”

### *Cortez the Cat*

One day Raphael and I were driving around La Paz on the motorcycle when out of the corner of my eye I saw a man throw something out of his front door. I yelled to Raphael, “Look, he's throwing away cats!” We turned around and headed toward the house. At the front door there were several newly born kittens meowing up a storm. I said to Raphael, “Let's see if we can take

one.” Raphael knocked on the door and we introduced ourselves.

The man said, “Yes, I was throwing away the cats.” Raphael then asked if we could have one of the kittens. “Of course, no problem,” replied the man.

And that is how Cortez the Cat became a new crewmember on “No Regrets.”



### *Food Fight*

When I sailed out of La Paz my good friend Raphael left “No Regrets” and continued with his quest to travel around the world.

My only companion onboard was Cortez the Cat. Cortez quickly gained his sea legs and he turned

out to be a great guy who loved to sail and never complained. I had only one issue with him and it was just a slight matter concerning lobsters.

When I left La Paz I'd bought Cortez a bag of Mexican dry meal for his food. However, he did not seem to enjoy this. So, one evening while eating supper at the galley table, I shared a piece of lobster with Cortez. Well, after having tasted fresh lobster, Cortez refused to eat his dry food and planted himself right next to my plate the following evening. At first I didn't mind — except for that one moment when I was distracted and turned away from my plate... when I looked back again I was missing one lobster tail. Cortez was nowhere to be found.

So the next evening when I sat down to eat I

curled my left arm around my plate and kept my head low. And Cortez tried to grab another piece of lobster. We've all seen those movie scenes showing hungry men covering and hovering over their plates as they gobble down their food.

Whenever I remember that dinner incident with Cortez, I have to start laughing.

The next day I had an idea. On the boat I had a water pistol and decided to fill it with water and set it next to my plate as protection against Cortez.

Well, that evening I cooked my last two lobsters, set-up my plate, and sat down to eat with the water pistol next to the plate. By now Cortez figured out that he would have to use trickery to get to my lobster. He initially acted like he was



asleep on top of the table-bench cushion, but after several seconds when he thought I wasn't looking, he snuck closer and closer to my plate. Then he popped his head over the table and started to slowly climb on it. When he finally got on the table I pulled the water pistol and started squirting him. Cortez just put his head down and kept inching forward. Like a madman I kept squirting water on the top of his head. He was drenched, but he kept getting closer as I kept spraying. And then, within an inch of my plate, he finally broke and ran away.

I saved several lobster pieces for Cortez, which he appreciated —after my meal.

We remained good friends and that evening I heard him purring as I went to sleep.



## *Ocean High Jumping*

I was on the Pacific Ocean side of Baja California sailing south toward Cabo San Lucas. That morning the weather was what I call a “Gray Out.” Essentially, there was no wind, the seas were flat, and a dark overcast hovered several hundred feet above. This made it difficult to distinguish between the ocean horizon and the sky above. Everything blended in and looked gray. I was running with my motor on and my radar set at the five-mile range.

While my son Troy was at the helm, I noticed faint “blips” on the screen several miles ahead of the boat. These “blips” are radar contacts and usually indicate a hard surface object. I went out on deck and looked forward, scanning the

horizon. But I couldn’t see anything. I then went below deck and again checked the radar. Several more “blips,” now closer, started appearing in multiple instances.

I went back on deck and again scanned the horizon. At first I could not see anything, but then I thought I spotted something. I couldn’t tell what it was and continued scanning. Then, ever so faintly, I thought I saw “things” jumping out of the water in a wide band to the horizon of the boat. It kept coming closer and closer to the boat until I could clearly see what I was observing: hundreds of fish jumping in the air. It also seemed like the ocean around them was being stirred up into a froth. As I kept watching, the fish started to come into focus and I was completely awed to see that they were actually dolphins.

There were thousands of them moving in a wide swath toward my boat. I was amazed to see the quantity and speed of this herd. It looked like an old Western cattle stampede. Many of the dolphins only surfaced at ocean level to keep their forward momentum going. But there were also hundreds that seemed to jump as high as they could and then splash down. Some even did somersaults. When they came upon the boat they simply parted to the left and right—and kept going.

Those high jumping dolphins had been the “blips” on the radar!

Every day aboard “No Regrets,” something memorable happened.

### *The Ghost Freighter*

I was sailing in a northerly direction on the Pacific side of Baja returning to San Diego from my days in the Sea of Cortez. My motor had died somewhere along Cedros Island, but that was not a problem since I was on a sailboat.

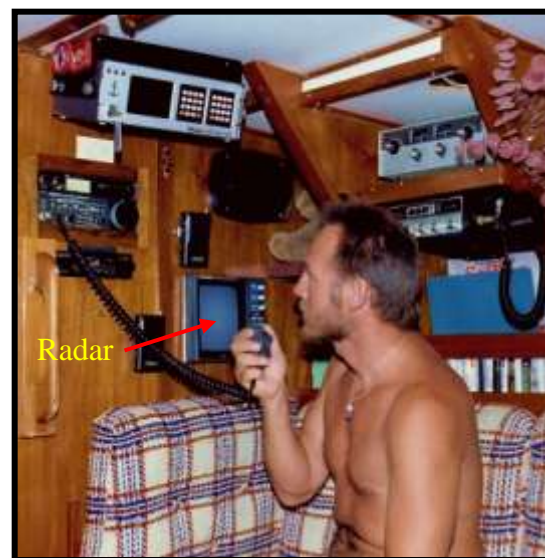
However, one morning about 10 miles offshore from Ensenada the winds died, the seas became flat, and a fog as thick as clam chowder descended upon “No Regrets.” I could not see further than 10 feet from the cockpit. The radar was turned on and set to its full range of 15 miles.

Along with me was my friend Gil, who was helping me sail the boat back to California. We were both sitting in the cockpit when I went

below to check the radar. Directly in front of “No Regrets” I saw a large “blip.” I watched the object for several minutes, and it seemed to be rapidly heading directly toward us. I called to Gil to come down and take a look at the target. When he saw the target he immediately rushed out to the cockpit and grabbed the emergency air/sound horn. I followed him out and he immediately started blasting away with the horn in a continuous series of short blasts and long blasts. Gil recognized that an unloaded freighter, travelling south at a high rate of speed, was barreling down on us. I checked the radar again and saw that the target was going to merge with us in several minutes. I ran back to the cockpit and told Gil to brace himself and get ready for an emergency evacuation. I then heard the distinct motor of a large freighter immediately to my front

and then to my left as it continued ahead at full speed. The freighter came so close to us that its wake immediately started rocking the boat, and I could actually hear water dripping off its propellers as it pushed forward.

The freighter never answered our warning blasts. It just kept going on automatic pilot...



**Navigation Station**

### *Closing Comments*

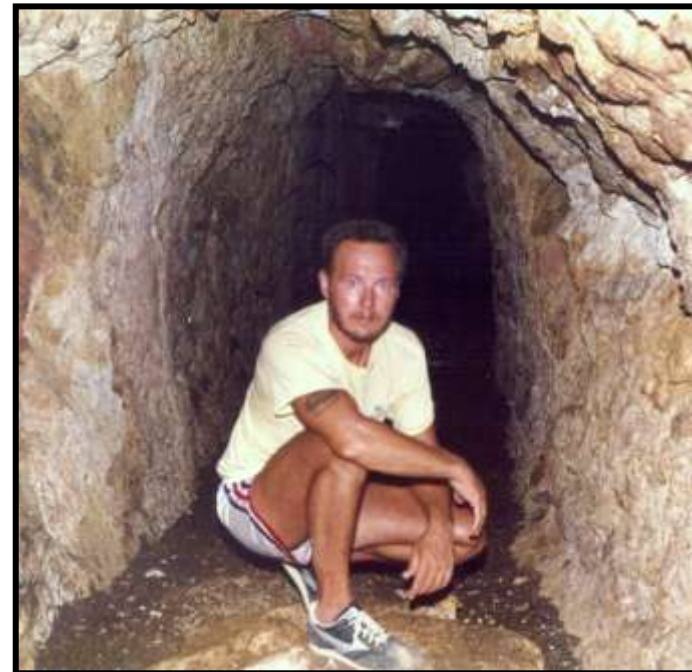
I have often spoken to people who have dreamt of sailing or going on some grand adventure. In response I would always say that I am from the school of “Just Do It.” And I often urged them to just do it!

In my journeys I did have a goal, which was to go, see, meet, and explore. But these were general, guiding ideas; I never knew where my path would actually take me. And that is what makes the path less travelled so exciting.

In closing, let me share what Daniel Boorstein, an American social historian and educator, observed: A traveler is active, he goes strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of

experience. The tourist is passive, he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes “sight-seeing.”

I encourage everyone to always be a traveler, and may the spirit of adventure be with you!





## Photo Log



**Swimming with Dolphins - over, under, and around me - captured with a disposable underwater camera.**

## Photo Log



Originally, the boat was named "Puka II."



"No Regrets" was a, center-cockpit, sloop rig, 39' in length, 14' beam, and modified full keel. When I purchased the boat it was fully equipped for long distance cruising. I re-named the boat "No Regrets" and painted a new stripe on the boat in La Paz, Mexico. When I returned to the USA from Mexico I docked the boat in San Diego, CA, and eventually sold it.



# Photo Log - The Cast

Cortez The Cat



Raphael



"No Regrets"



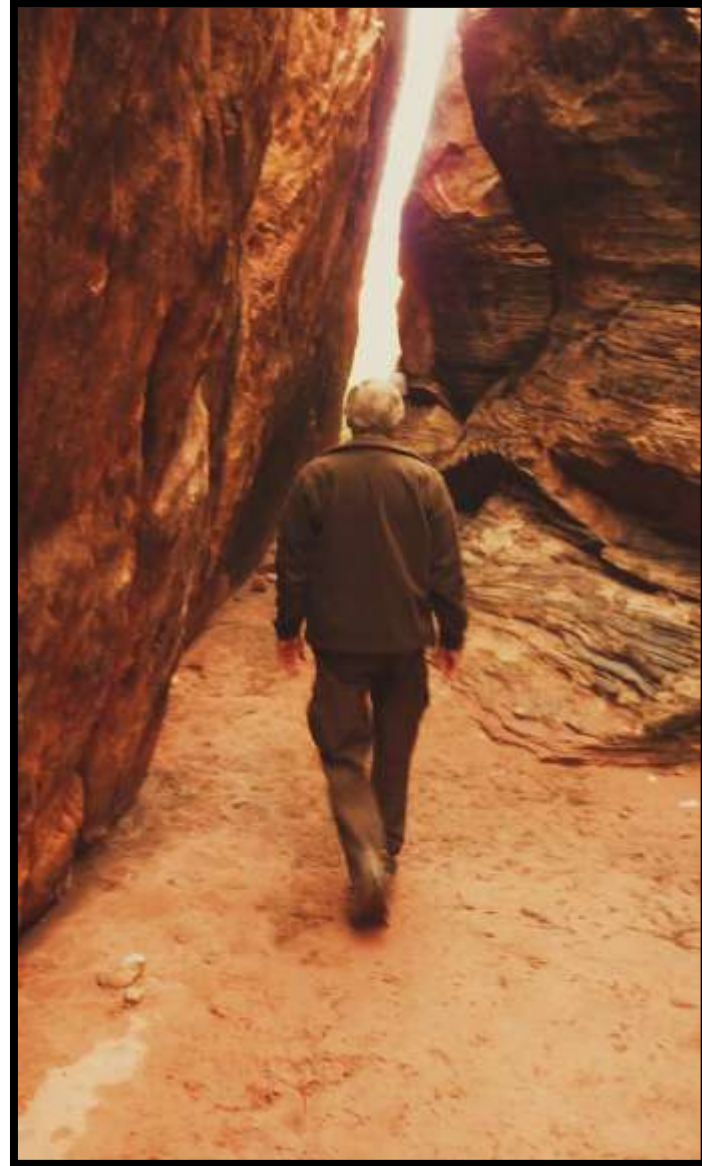
Alex



"I see my path, but I don't know where it leads. Not knowing where I'm going is what inspires me to travel it."

Rosalia de Castro quote

The Journey Continues - Alex



# *Murder, Lust, And Betrayal In Baja California*

*This is a story of finding myself by touching silk  
in the Baja, seeing the Descansos of Baja  
California, sailing with Captain Bligh, and living  
the dream.*

*The only way to know something absolutely is to  
experience it for yourself; anything else is theory,  
speculation and belief.*

TRAVELS IN BAJA CALIFORNIA

DISCOVER ROADSIDE SHRINES

SAILING WITH CAPTAIN BLIGH

SEA OF CORTEZ STORIES

ENCOUNTERS WITH SEA CREATURES

## THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

