

THE GARLIC CLOVE INN

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First Published in serial form in the Deep Creek Dispatch. All characters and incidents are fictional. Any resemblance to anyone living or dead is purely coincidental.

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Introduction

In the fifteen years that I have worked for the EPA, I never had an occasion to stumble into a place quite like the Garlic Clove Inn. Stumble may not be the right word. I was directed to go to the wetlands of Georgia's low country by my boss to do some data collecting. But looking back, stumble is probably how I got there.

My name is John Slater, 41 years old, born and raised in New York City. Although I consider myself an "urbanite", I appreciate the outdoors having sailed and boated on Long Island Sound for many years. I studied geology at NYU and, after graduating, landed a government job with the newly formed Environmental Protection Agency. Not many were really sure what our function was or would be, but lawmakers were passing laws left and right to "protect" the environment. At first, I believed that our environment needed help and was eager to protect the whales, dolphins, spotted owls, piping plovers and what seemed like an endless list of naturally occurring flora and fauna throughout the world. Now, I'm not that sure. It may be that man needs to be protected from the environment more than the reverse.

I never married and have some close female friends but for one reason or other, our friendships never made it to the altar. I mention this as some will assume that all I do is observe my surroundings and never commit to be personally involved. It is true, I do make a lot of observations; after all that is what I get paid to do. Maybe I fear that by observing, you alter what is being observed. I learned that in particle physics. It is the Heisenberg Principle concerning sub atomic particles. How arrogant must we be to accept the fact that, just by observing, we have the right to alter the observed?

Well, this is not about that. It is about my trip down to Georgia, to some nondescript backwater that I can't even locate on a map. In fact, it is not about Georgia as I'm not sure at all of where this place is. I know that wetlands are an important natural resource and that they hold a special place in the EPA's heart. My job is to document and collect data on how best to protect this area and so I drove south from D.C. to the lowlands of Georgia. The rains that wore away the once mighty Appalachian Mountains deposited their sediments for hundreds of miles, extending them way into the Atlantic

Ocean. The sea rose and tidal wetlands formed. Wetlands, which used to be called swamps, formed behind the barrier islands that were themselves built up by the ceaseless ocean swells of the Atlantic working on those sediments.

The result of all this is a coast line of almost undetermined length due to the innumerable lagoons, irregular inlets, half submerged bogs, shifting islands and part time sandbars. Charts and maps are rarely updated and even satellite photography is usually obscured or tricked by the shifting mists and fogs that frequent the area. Tall pines and dense underbrush obscure the shoreline so that the distinction between land and sea becomes subjective. Life here finds its own rhythm in the tides and currents and, for the most part, has little regard for those who claim home on a more substantial footing. South of Savannah, I drove into such an area.

Getting off the interstate and taking State roads that soon became barely paved paths through the pines I felt like I was heading toward a different country. Few houses or businesses existed in the area and my GPS soon gave up trying to identify the roads I was on. What started out as a warm sunny day became humidly thick with a misty overcast that enveloped my car. I saw glimpses of water between the green trees and knew I was approaching the wetlands I was interested in. The road divided and both even looked less maintained than the one I just traveled on. No road signs or markings identified where I was. My GPS was of no use, as the signal seemed to come and go. I flipped a coin to determine which road to choose and then slowly turned right down a fog and mist shrouded path. A few twists and turns later I arrived at a large building on the edge of what looked like a lake. The sun broke through the low clouds and I found myself in front of a place named the Garlic Clove Inn.

These are the stories, call it the data, that I observed.

Chapter 1

I sat and watched the face of the transient, much like a spectator at a boring sports game. A transient, for those unfamiliar with the term, is someone just passing through. He, or she, or they, arrive in their own boat, stay a short time, and then sail on to other harbors. It is a life style not unknown to many boat owners. This transient looked new to the game.

Nothing was going to happen that would be unexpected as he stood at the bar standing next to a cup of limes; both seemingly waiting their turn to be stuffed into the next Corona. But then the blustery Boatman cruised in. There is no mistaking when the Boatman walks in, just like there is no mistaking an approaching squall. I've seen people just like him many times before in the dock and club bars that line all waterfronts. Standing a full fathom tall, six feet, he had arms and legs as thick as a mast on a China Clipper. His shoulders were as wide as yard arms and the tattoos looked like they were etched eons ago. When he spoke, his voice carried across the room like a warning fog horn, both clear and piercing, yet soothingly reassuring. The women divert they eyes from any engaging conversation they are having with their mate - could be about life changing revelations, it doesn't matter. Their eyes catch the gleam in the Boatman's eye, the swagger in his walk, or catch the whiff of adventure rolling off his sleeve. The transient had the look of desperation somewhat like finding yourself too far from shore in a small dinghy with a dead motor while the Boatman plows by like a clipper ship 90 days out of Canton. Some guys make big wakes.

The Boatman pulled up to the bar, maybe ten feet away from the transient but miles away in all other respects. He orders a drink that I swear could remove varnish and downs it in one gulp. The glass disappeared in paws this man calls hands. Almost at the same time he yells out to Salty, the bartender, the current weather in language only sailors can appreciate.

“Damm blow'n like a Bitch's Tit outside, Salty”.

It was windy and rainy outside. Funny thing was, he didn't look like he just came out of the rain. He couldn't be that good, could he?

The women eventually go back to their own conversations as they know their own mates wouldn't approve of them running off in the middle of the night with some

Boatman. Maybe later that night they will fantasize. They also know that if they did run off, they would be alone again once the sun broke the horizon. Such is the fate of shooting stars.

The transient's mate walked in after having finally assembled the required attire back in their cabin. Shirt, pants and some cologne; it didn't take men long to get ready. But for women, it's like the start of an ocean passage. Hence their separate arrivals at the Garlic Cove Inn.

The Boatman was still at the bar and you could feel the universe of space and time start wrapping around him. All those too close would soon fall into his universe and so the transient and his mate were eager to head to the other side of the room where the safety of their table waited. It was then that Boatman cast a stare at him, and then asked if he owned that little black skiff out on the back dock.

Fearing ridicule for owning such a humble craft, but proud of the little skiff, he nonetheless admitted that yes, it was his. I don't think the Boatman could even fit in the skiff by himself. The transient was ready for his roar of indignation that such a small craft should darken his doorway, or be allowed to roam the same seas as he does.

But to his surprise, the boatman leaned over to him and, in a low and almost hushed voice with just the right amount of genuine concern, said he added a few dock lines. Due to the wind and rain he would hate to see it lost in the tempest. The transient looked surprised. He said thanks and realized that for all his bluster and bravado, the Boatman was like most boaters he met on his travels. They will throw you a line when you are in need even if you don't ask. On the other hand, they did move to a table at the far end of the Inn and watched as the Boatman spun up his universe and, much like a hurricane, swept up all in his path.

I smiled to myself and thought this was typical of the Garlic Clove Inn and the stories I heard while staying here for the last few weeks. A place not easily found and once, here not easily understood.

To this day Lou and Sally never fully understood how, a number of years ago, they became owners of the Garlic Clove Inn. It was named Bartholomew's Inn at the time they were carried into the lagoon on the winds of hurricane Emily. Although that storm did not make much of an impact on the surrounding countryside it did divert both of them from their intended journeys. It was as if the Inn sprung from their imagination during an

exceptional windy night. Perhaps it was a consensual reality that satisfied each of their inner wishes for a road less traveled. Bob Chilton, the previous owner, certainly played a part in convincing Lou that he should take over the Inn and encouraged Sally to be a great chef and Inn keeper. But there must have been more than that.

Lou was sailing away, or escaping, from a snowy New England winter and the cold prospect of calculating margins on cars that had to be sold in Portland. His grandfather sold Buicks in Boston before the war and the family was in the car business ever since.

“Sell to the well heeled and you’ll always do well”.

That was the family’s motto and it seemed to work. They now sold BMW’s to well heeled Bostonians that serve to validate a person’s income and status.

But Lou was heading to the Caribbean for a few years and saw his life as a Jimmy Buffet character; a cheeseburger in paradise with Heinz 57. But there are times that alternate paths are glimpsed at, out of the corner of your eye. At those times, chances are taken. Slipping out the back door while others danced to life’s fiddler to catch the last rays of a setting moon, the first sighting of a shooting star, or maybe the sight of a kindred soul across a distant lagoon, who is to say they are foolish paths that should not be followed?

Sally was always mystified by the place and why her cell phone never really worked around the Inn. Bob seemed to have an answer to most things but she was skeptical as to his expertise despite his assurances. True, her skill in the kitchen proved to be more than sufficient in serving the clientele of the Inn, who ranged from boisterous windbags to luckless drifters and those that seem to float through life with no visible means of sanity. The Inn seems to lie in the middle of what I call the Banana Peel Path; half way between disorder and obscurity. But her ambitions ran more to an urban environment than this, at best, a back water retreat from modern civilization.

“Exactly where are we?” asked Sally when she first came to the Inn.

“Exactly where we want to be!” proclaimed Salty, the Inn’s bartender. “How many people can say that?”

At the time, not many thought Sally. Her journey from Pittsburgh to New York, to Paris and now here were leading somewhere; although she was unsure of where.

Consensual reality around a distant lagoon surrounded by the pines of the southern low country may be the best description of where she was; where this Inn was.

Life, she thought, like love is where you find it. Does it matter where it is or how you found it? Do you really believe you had a hand in determining where you found it? Sally knew the color of the wallpaper that would look great in the halls of the Inn. Maybe that is all that mattered. And at that point she decided to stay.

Monetary performance was not the motivating force around the Inn. Maybe that is what attracted the likes of Lou and Sally and the others who drifted through the lagoon and pines. Surely, bills were paid and money changed hands but lunch was served because people were hungry. Boats were fixed because they needed fixing. Fish were caught for the sport of it and a good meal. In this way, the inhabitants of the lagoon were far removed from the rest of the country.

Lou couldn't get excited about watching a bank account grow as much as listening to Sally tell him about a new garlic recipe or watching a boater trying to keep the no-see'ums from driving him insane. Sally was adept at making anyone feel at ease with her infectious smile and artistic soul and the ability to send boaters on their way with unforgettable memories of an uncharted lagoon on the Banana Peel Path. In any other place Lou and Sally would be lost in the crucible of the marketplace. The Inn was like a ship at sea that sailed on its own terms. A visitor's own crucible disappeared while staying at the Inn.

The story I heard is that after Lou signed the papers to transfer the Inn's ownership, Bob didn't hang around too long. The stipulation that Sally was to be included was never disputed. The wind picked up and Bob, having already packed his bags some time before, was gone. The Garlic Clove Inn became the new name which featured the high garlic content of Sally's dishes and home of the tales that arrived on winds that blew through the pines surrounding the lagoon.

"Is this where you want to be?" asked Lou shortly after taking the Inn over.

Sally looked into his eyes and saw the snows of Portland but knew they could melt with the aroma of garlic butter and the soft touch of a southern breeze.

"Yes, as long as there are friends that believe rationality is over rated and that good food should taste good."

Lou never fully understood that, but it seemed to make life at the Garlic Clove Inn with Sally a place like no other.

Chapter 2

Joe “no-luck” Eddie walked into the Garlic Clove Inn looking like he just ran his boat into a brick wall. His long dark tangled hair and rumpled ripped shirt matched his faded and patched jeans. Actually, he looked like that much of the time, hence his “no-luck” moniker. But when he ordered a Coors lite instead of his usual Guinness, Salty the bartender, knew something was up. Joe proclaimed that nothing was up. In fact that was the problem. The weather wasn’t up to be called summer, his salary at the old used sail loft wasn’t up to the rate of inflation, but the worst thing was that the Creek River Bridge wasn’t up when he tried to go under it.

With luck, Joe’s sloop could have made it at low tide. Low tide was six hours ago. Six hours ago, Joe was fast asleep under a full moon with visions of palm trees dancing in his head. An hour ago, he watched the mast of his sloop try to take down the Creek River Bridge. It lost.

“There’s not much you can do with a broken mast and a tangle of shrouds”, Joe lamented as he chugged down his Coors.

Joe, being Joe, knew the down side of boating ever since he bottom painted his first boat with the best Benjamin Moore’s glossy wall paint that money can buy. Maybe he thought the bright yellow color would scare the barnacles away. In any case, six months after he painted it, it sank from excessive bottom growth and fisherman still call

where it lies, Benjamin's reef. If the sun is at just the right angle and the tide is low, you can almost see the yellow glow of the hull. They say blackfish fishing is great there.

Marine Officer Krupke pulled up in his Boston Whaler patrol boat, blue lights flashing and all. They say a Boston Whaler can be cut in half and either part will still keep you float. They never saw officer Krupke in one, so they might not have accounted for all the paraphernalia one marine law enforcement officer can carry. It doubled his weight, neither of which can float. Officer Krupke, the butt of too many bad West Side Story jokes, took his job very seriously. He tracked Joe Eddie to the Garlic Clove Inn using all sorts of sophisticated marine police equipment. This included the color radar and GPS enabled depth sounders, infrared trackers and long distance sound scoopers. Fortunately, the bridge attendant knew Eddie's boat by sight and informed Krupke where he could be found. It reduced the tracking time considerably. Spotting a demasted sloop is apparently not that difficult.

The late afternoon crowd gathered around Krupke and Joe Eddie, to hear what the officer had to say. With his best official marine officer demeanor, Krupke asked Joe if Joe Eddie was his name. Joe replied that to the best of his knowledge it was. He asked if he owned a certain 24' sloop. Joe said yes, although at times it felt like the boat owned him. He asked if he ever sailed in the dark. He said he did but mostly after sunset.

Krupke then proceeded to find out if, "said boat attempted to pass under or otherwise transverse the channel directly beneath the Creek River Bridge on or about 1500 hours on the date in question with a certain Joe Eddie directly in command".

At this point most onlookers were ready to break into a song about "being down on our knees 'cause no one wants a boat with a social disease". Krupke could feel the pressure in the air weighing heavily on his suspect; although the weight of the 25 lb grappling hook hanging off his 3" utility belt combined with all the other official gear could have had the same effect. Joe Eddie did confess to Officer Krupke that indeed he did run into the Creek River Bridge, and as a result was demasted and had to limp back and drown his sorrows in the only way he knew: amongst friends at the Garlic Clove Inn.

No one knew what Krupke was up to. Joe didn't break any laws as far as anyone knew. All the damage was to Joe's own boat and the bridge was hit many times before without causing a fuss. Besides, Joe's 24 foot fiberglass sloop couldn't put a dent in a four lane steel and concrete bridge. But Krupke was there for something. He reached for

his Marine Officer's Summons Pad in his back pocket, and carefully pulled it out of its clear waterproof plastic case with the special waterproof pen, and began writing out a summons for Joe "no-luck" Eddie.

"What's this for?" enquired Joe.

"Littering", replied Krupke.

"Littering?" asked Joe with a look of disbelief.

"Yeah", said the officer, "Seems that the bridge attendant found a tricolor mast light in the right lane of the Creek River Bridge this afternoon. Does this belong to you?"

With that he pulled out an old dented tricolor masthead light from the duffel bag slung around his neck. He had that satisfied look of a prosecuting lawyer when he unequivocally proves the defendant guilty beyond any reasonable doubt. Justice triumphs again!

Joe Eddie paid his fine and eventually got his mast fixed and went out sailing again. The talk around the Garlic Clove Inn is always about boat stuff and the odd situations people get themselves into. When the talk comes around to littering, Joe "no-luck" Eddie's name always pops up as the sailor who, one day, got a summons for littering a highway while out sailing.

Sam Biglow, on the other hand, never relied on luck to draw attention. He was always out and about looking for things that were out of place and never thought he was lucky finding them.

Sam really stirred up the pot one day when he set his sights on alien life forms around the Inn. Sam knew invasive species: those pesky fish and mussels that freeloaded a ride across the ocean by ship and land on our shore unannounced. Being part Native American Indian, he was of the opinion that European settlers were also an invasive species that arrived by ship and overran the native population. Word around the Garlic Clove Inn however, was that he was just covering up his true ancestry of horse thievery down under but nonetheless he always had his eye on new arrivals.

His interest wasn't limited to people, as nowadays it was focused mostly on whatever he pulled out of the bay. He always brought odd looking creatures and things to the Inn and asked around if anyone knew about them, or where they came from. It was on one such occasion that he brought in a small crab that he never saw before.

"What's you got today?" asked Salty, the bartender and local historian.

Salty's been around long enough to remember the origins of most things that interest people who frequent the Inn. He has been tending bar ever since it opened 30 years ago and through all of its ownership changes. Originally known as The Gaelic Inn, when ownership changed, along with the clientele, its name also changed. Bartholomew's Inn was only just one of its names when Bob Chilton owned it. The name Garlic Clove Inn was both a corruption of the original name and in deference to the high regard that Sally DiAmber had for garlic in all her dishes at the Inn.

"Don't know. Might be some new style crab out in the bay. Never saw it before. Any idea?" asked Sam.

Salty looked at the specimen. It was about 3 inches long with yellow and blotchy coloring and small claws. It was definitely something he never saw before.

"Nope, never saw anything like that!" replied Salty.

"Huh, wonder where it came from? Tomorrow I'll go and see if I find any others and see where they're hangin' out".

With that, Sam left to go to his house that was not far from the Inn.

A week or so later Sam ran into the Inn and shouted, "There all over the place!"

Of course no one except Salty had any idea what he meant. He proceeded to tell everyone at the bar that he found a whole nest of them deep in the marsh and followed them out into the shallows around Robbins Neck. Salty was impressed and eventually filled in the details of what Sam was talking about.

"Invasive species, that's what they are!" proclaimed Sam.

Everyone's eyes rolled as they were getting prepared to hear Sam's rants about some new arrivals and how they will upset everything. Sam began his long prognosis that these new crabs will destroy all in their path and come to dominate the bay by overtaking the marsh, the native crabs, fish and all wildlife. Life, as we know it, is doomed. According to Sam, the universe might as well fall into a black hole.

Just about this time, and before the patrons of the inn ran out to increase their life insurance and settle old debts, Sally emerged from the kitchen and said she wanted a bucket of those new crabs.

"Hell, we could use something new on the menu", she exclaimed as the patrons chuckled in acknowledgement.

Well the next day Sam did bring a bucket of the crabs to Sally, and sure enough she worked her magic and came up with a great tasting soup. Maybe a little heavy on the garlic, but with a slight sweet taste that only Sally can boil up. The Garlic Clove Inn had a new soup! In short order it became quite a hit with the local folk. Business was up and Sam and some of his friends were kept busy rounding up the new found crabs to keep Sally's soup in production. And it did become a production, as it became a popular take out item. It was even being sent out by UPS in mason jars as word spread how good it was. The Garlic Clove Inn was never busier.

But like the excitement of a summer thunderstorm, it only lasted a short time. After a few months the crab stock was depleted. After a while, not enough of those invasive crabs were around to fill the soup bowls and other crabs just didn't cut it. Sally tried other substitutes but nothing was quite as good as those invasive mystery crabs.

Eventually things went back to normal around the Garlic Clove Inn but people still talk about the invasion of the mystery crabs and the way the situation was handled. Some say it was a good thing that they were wiped out before any real damage was done. Others say it was Sam's ingenious plan to get rid of them by encouraging over-fishing. In any case, they are no longer around although you can still see Sam out on the bay, every watchful, for any new inhabitant either above or below the water. And for those who missed the great invasive crab soup, Sally is always offering new dishes that somehow include a good dose of garlic.

Chapter 3

I met many characters around the Inn that may not fit in well in other places.

They all seemed to come from other parts of the country and they all brought something memorable to the area. The Boatman is no exception.

Last week the talk down at the Garlic Clove Inn was about the new marine motor shop that just opened in Backwaters Bay.

“Can’t say I know the gent runnin’ the place”, reported Salty, to no one in particular.

The Boatman was there drawing a crowd. He was bragging about how he got his 150hp Merc outboard to purr like a kitten, and wouldn’t go near the shop in Backwaters. The previous owner had a bad reputation and apparently never got along with the Boatman.

The boatman explained the intricate details of how he tweaked and cajoled his engine to run like a fine tuned racing machine. He revealed that, with his expert ear, he could hear the inner workings of any mechanical beast. Just by listening, he could tell exactly what adjustments were required. It was as if he had x-ray ears. But, whenever the talk centers around engine repairs and mechanics, the story most often told is about how Sam Potter, also known as Slime Pot Potter, almost sank the Boatman’s boat while changing spark plugs.

Sam was the previous owner of the repair shop down in Backwaters. He had been in business for 30 years before his untimely death in a freak outhouse accident that is still somewhat controversial. The fact that he owned property, with a working outhouse, was a mystery in itself. How it one day exploded while Sam was seated, as it were, on the working end of the apparatus, was still the talk of the town. Many thought it was also a mystery that Sam could be in business for 30 years despite his reputation of ineptitude at engine repair. His nick name of Slime Pot was earned easily.

But the story of the Boatman’s spark plugs and Sam’s mechanical skills go back about 15 years. At that time the Boatman had just arrived from up north and had a down trodden 28’ former lobster boat named *Monkey’s Fist*. It had seen much better days. It was powered, when it worked, with an inboard flat head six from some bygone era few remember. In order to keep it running, the Boatman pulled into Sam’s place soon after arriving and entrusted his beloved *Monkey’s Fist* to Sam for engine maintenance. Being

new in town, he didn't know of Sam's reputation and so was unaware of the danger his boat was in.

Sam was the kind of guy that could talk a turtle out of his shell. Maybe that is why he always had new customers but few came back. When he saw the Boatman's boat and ancient engine, he hadn't a clue what he was looking at. That didn't stop him from expounding on his expertise, in getting this old gal up and running like a "champion race horse *Monkey's Fist* obviously is" under the layers of old paint, rust and salt.

"Never saw an engine I couldn't fix", was Sam's words that he uttered to the Boatman, and to everyone who ever walked into his shop. He also said that parts for that beauty might be hard to find and, therefore, be a little more expensive than others; but "trust me, I know what I'm talking about".

After a few days, the Boatman checked up to see how the repairs were going. Sam said he was still at it and give him a few more days, as parts for the "old girl" are hard to come by. Days turned to weeks but the Boatman finally cornered Sam to see what he was up to.

"Ya' see, I'm working on it now. All that is left to do is to change the plugs."

That sounded simple enough and Sam promised the boat would be ready the next morning.

The next morning, the Boatman went down to pick up the boat, but was startled to see *Monkey's Fist* with a definite port list and laying low in the water. Sam was in the office drinking his coffee when the Boatman burst in and asked what the problem with his boat was.

"No problem," replied Sam, "it's ready to go."

"It's ready to go under!" screamed the Boatman.

Sam looked down the wharf to where *Monkey's Fist* was tied up to the dock. The lines were taut and seemed like they were the only thing preventing the boat from sinking further than it already had. He immediately jumped up and ran down to the boat, followed quickly by the Boatman.

Fortunately, *Monkey's Fist* being an old lobster boat, had a huge manual bilge pump. The Boatman manned it, and started pumping furiously to keep the boat from going completely under. Sam ran to his shop and got a gas engine pump to help pump the water from the boat. By the time he got it started, the exhausted Boatman was almost

finished pumping. After all the water was pumped out, Sam opened the hatch to the engine compartment. He stared at a small but steady stream of water shooting out from a thru hull fitting. The engine's raw water intake hose was supposed to be attached to it but that was now somewhere in the bilge.

"How could that have happened?" demanded the Boatman.

Sam, after a lot of questioning by the Boatman, admitted that after he changed the plugs last night he closed the engine compartment, started the engine and then shut it down and went home. Apparently, the hose was loosened when Sam sat on it to change the plugs and when the engine started, it popped off the thru hull. But Sam never checked the compartment after he shut it down. By the next morning the boat was half filled with water.

After that, the Boatman never went to Backwaters and made sure he did his own work on his boats. Sam not only charged for the work he did, including the cost of the hose he broke, he charged for the use of the gas engine pump he used to help bail out the boat. Sam had a habit of profiting from his ineptitude like no one else.

Not that all the stories I heard concerned people I met. Some were just voices on a radio.

"Cataclysmic changes are in the air" boomed a voice on Channel 68, early one morning as the fisherman and boaters gathered around the Garlic Clove Inn for breakfast. Salty always has a marine VHF radio on, to listen to the gossip from the boaters and the occasional call from a transient in the lagoon looking for some information.

"Sounds like the Preacher. Haven't heard him in weeks", announced Lou D'Angelo.

No one knew who the Preacher was on the VHF. On many mornings, at 8 AM, he would come on CH 68 and give a short fire and brimstone lecture to all those in radio range. Of course, this is technically illegal. But the feeling is that he isn't doing too much harm, as long as it doesn't interfere with more urgent messages. Most people would defer to the Word of a higher authority in their normal ranking of what they said on the VHF.

The fire and brimstone lecture was aimed at the expected audience of fisherman and boaters in the area. There was always a reference to the fishes and loaves, the parting of the sea, walking on water, the casting of nets, and all leading to the sins of man and how the fires of hell could not be quenched by all the waters in the oceans. Out of

respect, most of the audience listened to the lecture and agreed that what was being said was true. They also thought that no one else follows the good road like they themselves do. They promptly return to their normal routine once the lecture was over. Losing customers is not one of Satan's fears.

But this morning was a little different. Instead of the fire and brimstone lecture that everyone expected, the Preacher was talking about melting ice caps, dying frogs, rising sea levels, stronger hurricanes, floods, and other things that seemed more immediate than the hereafter.

But then he became fixated on counting carbon. Counting carbon was something new that not many heard about. Counting calories was known as many of the women of the area did that. Some even carried small pocket calculators that listed the exact count of calories they consumed each day. Somehow those numbers were taken as an indication of how good they looked or how long they would live. Spirited competitions developed and all sorts of magic calorie counting methods were developed that, to an outsider, was completely incomprehensible.

Apparently, according to the Preacher, carbon counting should be done in the same way; but not what you eat but anything you did. If you drove a car, it produced a certain amount of carbon. If you turned a light bulb on it counted. If you cooked, another amount was counted. Using an outboard motor, recharge batteries from shore power, washing machines, TV's, radios, heat, and air conditioning all had a certain carbon number. By adding this all up you had what you contributed to the carbon inventory of the earth. It was quickly realized that everything you did resulted in some carbon; some more than others and much like counting calories, the lower the better.

“There will come a day, my brothers and sisters, when not only will the chickens come home to roost, but the carbon will take revenge on your sinful ways.”

The Preacher managed to link fire and brimstone to counting carbon. Actually it was not much of a stretch as without carbon there would be no brimstone or fire. And so with all the talk of counting carbon, and trading carbon credits, the Preacher saw Satan manifest himself in a most modern way. And that “way” will be when all this carbon takes revenge by dramatic climate change.

“If you don't believe in the fire and brimstone in the hereafter, then by all things holy, you will see it in the hurricanes, droughts, flooding seas levels, melting glaciers that

will come as sure as tomorrow's rising sun." The Preacher was never subtle.

It seemed like an odd mix of religion and science. Glaciers were melting, record temperatures were being set, hurricanes were more powerful, and coral was dying. All this was being documented by scientists around the world. Is the time of fire and brimstone at hand? The Preacher, on channel 68 seemed to think so.

It was not lost on those down at the Inn that the less you did, the less carbon would be generated. In many ways the old adage that you could never be "too thin or too rich" was turned into never being "too inactive or thrifty".

"Hey Sally, put some more red pepper in the soup. That'll keep people warm without heating the soup up on the stove. We all need to do our part." Salty always had an answer to everything.

Lou looked around at the folks listening to the Preacher and said, "Well if we follow the Preachers advice on this carbon counting, as well as we follow his other advice, we might as well get ready for some historic changes!"

The radio went silent and the Preacher was off the air. The folks at the Garlic Clove Inn returned to what they were doing before the onslaught from the VHF. Climatic change may be as inevitable as new customers for Satan's lair.

Chapter 4

Not many people, other than Salty and a few others, know the story of how Lou and Sally became owners of the Inn. I came to know about it after staying at the Inn a short time. Between running around to do my survey work and meeting the locals, I got

to know parts of the story. I pieced the whole story together over a few weeks and, at first, found it very odd. But being here for a while, it seems less so.

Emily brought Lou and Sally together, but since Emily was a hurricane she made all the difference.

Lou D'Angelo was making his way down the coast in a 28' Alden designed sloop that he and his father sailed during the summers on Cape Cod Bay. He was just out of college, and needed to do a little exploring before settling down and getting into the family auto dealership business. A few months down in the Caribbean, knocking about and hitting the Tiki bars and beach girls, should satisfy his wanderlust. That wanderlust took hold of him early on while gazing at the low rollers caressing the bluffs of the Cape. He often asked himself, where exactly did those rollers come from?

His plan was to go down the coast in late summer and be in the Bahamas by Christmas, and in the Islands by February. His career, in the car dealership, would have to wait until next spring; or maybe next summer. Setting out from Buzzards Bay, Lou sailed south, stopping overnight in harbors both busy and obscure. He stopped at ports as busy as Newport, with its mega yachts parked like cars at a Walmart's before Christmas, and as obscure as a mere indent on an unremarkable shoreline, populated only with waves from passing boats.

Teresa Mellon Fitzgerald Cullen was a woman on a mission to define herself. A distant relative of the Mellon family she inherited some of the family's money. She had an artistic streak that always turns something ordinary into something special. Never a top student in the exclusive schools she attended, she nonetheless impressed many with her natural abilities. Her long dark hair, high cheekbones and good looks didn't hurt either, but she had enough good sense not to rely on such a superficial trait.

Teresa, who was known as Sally, dabbled in the arts but was never quite satisfied by the colors she chose, or in the key she sang in, or in the men she befriended. So she was on the road. Just back from a summer cooking course in Paris, she was looking to see where she would fit in at the time Lou was heading down the coast.

Emily, at this time, was just a dust storm in western Africa. She was ready to make a leap as a wrinkle in the trade winds over the warm waters of the Eastern Atlantic as Lou meandered down the Chesapeake. Sally was slowly threading her way out of Savannah, and was going to try her hand at some upscale touristy restaurant. The

restaurant advertised that they were looking for some faux French food to serve the summer set along with the local catch of prawns and jack. Sally and Lou were at a stage in their lives where there was no pressure to be somewhere, or to be someone else's hand maiden. Their future could accurately be predicted: one, a successful businessman selling autos in Portland, the other a minor socialite working the PR circuit for a big city non-profit. Then Emily intruded.

Lou first heard of tropical storm Emily barreling across the South Atlantic sometime after passing Hatteras. He thought it would be prudent to head inshore and take the ICW, just in case Emily decided to come up the coast. As it became clearer that Emily would indeed run the coast, he made plans to explore the creeks and "hurricane holes" among the low country's back bays.

Sally was driving her Jetta toward the coast when she heard the governor's evacuation order of the barrier islands. The sky was already banding, with the outer clouds of Emily, when she pulled off the highway to take a look at the guide book she was using to reach the coast. Map reading was not her strong point. But that didn't stop her from heading down a misty road, presumably toward a town, that could offer her a room for the night and protection from the approaching storm. As the sky closed around her and became darker the road twisted, forked and became shrouded in a gray mist that was totally unfamiliar. She soon realized that the maze of red lines on the map had little relationship to the roads she had traveled. Out of the darkness, a Bed and Breakfast appeared and she quickly decided to stop there. The refugees from the coast had not yet moved inland, or to this point of refuge. Pulling up around the back she didn't notice that the wind was already kicking up a stiff chop in the waters behind the Inn.

Lou was buffeted with gusty squalls as he headed toward a swampy coastline, punctuated by open waterways and low pine covered islands. The GPS was giving conflicting readings as the satellite's signals became obscured by the thick bands of rain encircling the sloop. The driving rain, lightning and an odd gray mist was wrapping the sloop up in a cocoon of malevolent weather he had no control of. It was at times like this, he thought, that maybe this adventure was a bit more than he signed on for. The wind dictated where he was headed. It drove the boat up unmarked creeks and around uncharted islands. It finally deposited him, and the boat, between two sand shoals in a pine tree enclosed lagoon. Instinctively he threw out an anchor, although it didn't much

matter. Although the wind was approaching hurricane strength force, oddly the boat stayed in the middle of the lagoon, like a cork in the vortex of a draining tub. His thoughts quickly overran him. He thought of being home, in the safety of his house. He thought of the rollers he saw as a kid, and realized he was in their secret lair. But mostly, he imagined he was with Dorothy, spinning around and around while being transported to a land he knew nothing about. Lou didn't see the dim lights of an Inn among the pine trees as darkness enveloped the lagoon. The wind howled, the lightning flashed, the rain pounded and the waves rocked the sloop as Lou drifted off to sleep in the lowering pressure of Emily. There was nothing else to be done.

Sally, drenched from the short dash from her car to the Inn, was greeted by the old Inn keeper who immediately offered her a room on the second floor. Tired and soaked, she proceeded upstairs without any hesitation. She didn't enquire as to why no other guests were around. Removing her wet clothing she glanced out the window overlooking a dark and stormy lagoon. She didn't see the sloop twisting in the middle of the lagoon as the piercing winds took stabs at the Inn. She drifted off to sleep wondering where she was as Emily moved closer. There was nothing else to be done.

The first thing Lou noticed when he woke the next morning was the stillness. After the storm tossed night, he expected some of the chaos to remain in the lagoon that Emily deposited him in. But it was not so. The sky was clear, and the air was still as if the storm not only passed but also swept away all traces of its passage. The surrounding pine forest looked fresh and unaffected by the hurricane winds that swept through only hours ago. His sloop rested peacefully in the middle of the lagoon, with only the sounds of morning song birds off in the distance. Opening the hatch boards, he squinted at the rising sun as it streamed into the interior of the sloop. It illuminated a jumble of sailing gear, books, clothing, rope, food, and sails. All his belongings were tossed, washing machine style, in the boat during the storm. Oddly, only the interior of his boat showed evidence that a storm had passed this way. He noticed a nearby dock that led to a two story building along the shore. There was a woman staring out of the second story window. He thought she was naked.

Sally was not an early riser, but this morning was different. She was anxious to get back on the road but was concerned that the storm would make the trip to the coast impossible. The view out the window over the lagoon startled her. Expecting a scene of

toppled trees and piles of wind and water swept debris, she was as surprised as Lou was to see a tranquil lagoon, bathed in the morning light, and a small sloop anchored peacefully in the middle. It was as if yesterday never happened, or it took place in a far different land. She then realized she was naked.

Sally found some dry clothing, dressed quickly, and went downstairs to find out how bad the storm was. There was no radio or TV in the room and her cell phone didn't seem to be working. As she left her room, she took note of the details of the Inn. The second floor of the Inn had six guest rooms with stairs down to the main floor at the end of the central hallway. The stairs also extended up to the attic. The blue carpeting was well worn, and a faded paisley wall paper covering seemed out of place. But the place could not be called shabby. Maybe it just needed some freshening up and some minor repairs. She always seemed to have an idea or two on how her surroundings could be improved.

“Good morning Miss Cullen”, said the older gentlemen, on her entrance to the lobby which also served as a foyer to the dining and bar area.

“Good morning Mr...”.

“Chilton, Bartholomew Chilton, although people just call me Bob, except Salty over there, who just calls me ‘old man’. Were you comfortable last night?”

“Yes,” replied Sally, “slept like a log and didn't hear much of the storm that passed through. I must have been exhausted.”

“Well, you did look sort of beat when you came in last night” replied Bob. “Not much of a storm though. But I think it did deposit another visitor in the lagoon. Funny how these things carry people along, plop them down here and there and then evaporate with the morning light. Salty, got some hot coffee for Miss Cullen?”

“Mr. Chilton... Bob, it does seem strange that the storm moved through without disturbing much around here. Did you hear how the people from the coast made out? Did they all evacuate?”

“Haven't heard. We don't have too much in common with those folks ever since they built the Creek River Bridge, and the road directly to the shore. No, we don't get too many visitors here except some boaters who manage to find their way into the lagoon or travelers like yourself that manage to find us. Maybe that's not a good thing to advertise

when you are trying to sell the old Inn! You're not interested in buying it, are you Miss Cullen?"

"Call me Sally and no, I'm not in the market for an old Inn, although it does seem quite nice. No, nice is not the right word. It actually seems very comfortable."

Sally took a good look around and actually thought it was comfortable, if slightly dated. She added, "I think a buyer could be very happy here."

Lou's boat engine was dead, or nearly dead, and he definitely needed to feel dry land beneath his feet. Since the dock was a short distance off, he decided to get the oars out of the inflatable dingy and just row the sloop to the dock. Rowing a 28' full keel sloop involved acrobatics which Lou was not familiar with. His undertaking drew the attention of Sally, Bob, and Salty. They watched as he made his meandering way to the dock. Muffled words of despair were heard, as the sloop veered off course one way and then another. At times it looked like Lou would remain in the center of the lagoon, with the boat getting the best of him. But he was getting closer. If a thousand mile journey begins with a single step, it may have looked like this at the end. Weather worn, tired, hungry, and smelling like he slept in a can of sardines, Lou stepped ashore on the dock of the Inn. Sally had an amused look on her face as Lou stumbled up the dock.

"Welcome to Bartholomew's Inn", boomed Bob.

Lou, a little startled, looked at the three of them standing there and then smiled. "I'm glad my navigation was accurate. For a time there I thought I was lost, but the kind lady in the window convinced me that this was where I should stop."

At first, Sally didn't get it, but then realized what he meant.

"As long as you know where to stop," echoed Sally as they exchanged glances.

"Come in and get cleaned up", offered Bob. "Breakfast will be ready in about an hour. Miss Cullen, you'll be staying for breakfast won't you?"

For some reason the road out of town was not beckoning, and Sally thought that breakfast sounded good. The tourists at the shore can wait a little longer for their faux French food with Jack fish. Her cell phone still wasn't working, although she had a feeling it didn't much matter. Lou went upstairs to take a shower and put on some clean clothes Bob found for him. He was looking forward to breakfast with the lady in the window and, with the passing of the storm, his plans to continue south might be delayed.

Lou put on the dry clothes Bob had given him and came down to the dining room where Bob, Salty and Sally were already seated for breakfast. He sat down in the middle of Sally's tale of driving through the horrendous storm while heading to the coast and the seaside restaurant, finally stumbling into Bartholomew's Inn. She said she was determined to get through and finally start a real career after her short time in Paris. A little thing like a storm will not sidetrack her ambition, or persuade her that it was not the right thing to do. Lou thought her self-confidence was commendable, if slightly over bearing, but detected a certain detachment from reality. He surmised that she traveled in different circles than he did, and never had the pleasure of meeting sales quotas for selling cars in Portland in the middle of winter. He was, therefore, startled when she said that perhaps the restaurant didn't survive the storm. Should she continue to the coast? What if the hurricane wiped everything out? How could she contact them with the cell phones down?

"Bob, when do you think the phone service will be back up? The storm didn't seem to do much damage around here."

Bob didn't have a chance to answer Sally when Salty, the Bartholomew's Inn bartender and sometimes cook, said, "Phone service was never good here. But ever since Rita O'Malley left, we don't really use them."

Rita O'Malley worked in the local telephone company office, first as a receptionist then as an operator, and worked her way up to district manager. But it was a small company and even though party lines and operators were long gone, the people around the Inn always thought of Rita as the telephone company. Rita moved away a few years ago to follow her career path and now works for some cable company. She is the sales manager in charge of their home shopping channel, specializing in small kitchen appliances. In many ways, Rita did take the phone system with her when she left. The people around the Inn and surrounding waterways found that without a personal contact, they had little use for a system that seemed so impersonal. It was either that, or maybe they just didn't feel that what they had to say to each other was so urgent you couldn't wait until so you saw them in person.

"Miss Cullen, I mean Sally," replied Bob, "I'm sure that if you go to the coast all will be well. If not, there are other restaurants and hotels that are looking for talented people like yourself, and you will find what you are looking for."

Lou saw in Sally's face, despite all her self confidence, a look of hesitation. Braving the storm in a little boat by himself, he was a little more than surprised that Sally seemed so unsettled as she was. Although he did not think about not continuing his journey down the Islands due to this delay, he wondered where Sally was headed.

"Sally, let me introduce myself", interrupted Lou, shortly after taking his seat with Bob, Salty and Sally. "I'm Lou D'Angelo, and I guess I ended up here much like you did. Just passing through on the way south until Emily came along. It does seem strange that all that wind and rain didn't seem to affect much around here. Yesterday and last night seems like a different world compared to the tranquility around here."

Tranquility is a word not often uttered in many places. Bob, Salty, Sally and even Lou were a little taken aback by how naturally it seemed to flow off Lou's tongue, spread out on the table like some mythical mist and obscure the reality that they knew existed. But the tranquility didn't last long, as just then, the Boatman stormed in. If anyone had any doubts about last night's weather he need not look any further than the whirlwind that sailed through the door.

"For the love of King Neptune himself, what a blow was that!" bellowed the Boatman. "Hey Salty, you got any hot coffee left or did that witches brew blow out your pilot light. Damm, I don't remember the clouds so low since I made that trip around Hangers Point with the *Monkey's Fist* taking on water faster than a bear running for a bee hive."

Before he launched into a soliloquy about the danger of the open waters, he caught the sight of Sally, her eyebrows furrowed and looking like she was ready to come out swinging. That delighted him and instead of going on about his maritime exploits, he introduced himself to the strangers at the table.

The art of being the Boatman, like a hurricane enveloping a coast, is that he immediately transports you to his world. Independent references matter little as you are caught up in the whirlwind of his world view. The fact that this happens without you really realizing it, enables him to carry you along for a ride that is sometimes joyous, sometimes not, until you find yourself circling his universe, like a wooden horse on a carousel. After a time most people get off without injury, but a few stumble, which lends an air of danger to any encounter.

Lou saw the winds building and wondered how Sally would handle the obvious eddies of attention the Boatman would send her way.

“Pardon my intrusion, I didn’t know anyone would be brave enough, or pretty enough,” looking at Sally, “to make it to the Inn”.

Bob made the introductions and mentioned that Lou sailed in last night, leaving the comical morning rowing description out, and how Sally was on her way to the coast to perform culinary miracles.

“Well I’m sure she can. Miss Cullen, if you need any assistance I’m sure I can help direct you as some of the roads may be impassable and I wouldn’t want you to be stopped on your journey” offered the Boatman.

“Oh, I’m sure Miss Cullen knows where to stop”, replied Lou with a look toward Sally.

“Thanks for your offer, but I think a dose of tranquility may be in order”, replied Sally as she turned to Lou and offered him a smile that could deflect any eddies that might disrupt her intentions. Tranquility was not what Lou was sailing toward but neither was it an uncharted lagoon. But he found himself with both and maybe a reason to stop.

After breakfast, Lou walked out to the dock at the back of the Inn to where his boat was tied up. It looked like it just came through a hurricane, which it did, but seemed so out of place in the quiet lagoon. Stepping aboard, he realized it must be sitting on the bottom as it didn’t list very much and proclaimed to no one in particular, “Just great. Not only I’m nowhere, I’m aground in nowhere.”

“Oh, is that where we are?” replied Sally.

Lou didn’t see Sally follow him out and almost fell off the dock when he spun around to see her. Catching his balance just in time, Lou grinned and said that he apologized for leaving the table. He didn’t want to get caught up in another wind storm. Sally agreed, and then looked inside Lou’s boat and burst out laughing and said, “You really should take better care of your boat, you never know when you will have company.”

“Well come on aboard and help me straighten it up before the company comes.”

Lou and Sally spent the next few hours going through the boat. Tossing water logged blankets and clothes to the dock to dry and throwing much of the water logged

food away. The beer and wine were still good, and after a time, the boat did look like it could accept some company.

Lou told her how he sailed from Maine and was heading for the Islands. Sally told him how she just came from Paris and was headed for the coast. But since neither of them were in any particular hurry, they didn't see any need to rush off right away. The day was warm and in the afternoon some wine was opened and they talked about selling cars in Portland, the best way to grill garlic, the French distaste of Disney, the snows of New England, the lure of the Islands, and the invisible hand of money.

By the time the sun was low in the western sky, over the dark green pine forests and a deepening blue sky, just before the brightest stars began to appear, a roar of unimaginable laughter erupted from within Lou's boat. Sally and Lou couldn't contain themselves as they watched water bubbling up from the galley's drain and water flooded the cockpit from the scuppers. For some reason, the boat was stuck in the mud at the dock but the tide had risen without pulling it up and now the water was coming in through every opening in the hull. Lou and Sally frantically looked for a bucket to bail out the boat when Sally, between fits of laughter, asked what if they don't bale it out?

"The boat is already on the bottom, where is it going to go?"

Resigned to the fact that rising tides do not raise all boats, they made their way to the Inn for dinner.

Sally gave Salty a hand in the kitchen and made a French sauce for the baked Red Snapper that was the special that night. A few of the regulars made it to the Inn and also tasted the sauce and gave it high praise. Bartholomew Chilton sat in the corner thinking back to when he first bought the Inn with his wife, since passed away, and how much he enjoyed his stay here. He never considered it permanently his. It was just a stage in his life. Maybe it did produce a mist that covered reality dense enough to give a sense of tranquility despite the intrusions and eddies that sometimes pass through. He thought the Inn would be in good hands with Lou and Sally. They both had what he had years ago: that sense of adventure even when they were stuck in nowhere. Or where they thought was nowhere. He was certain that Lou and Sally would continue their journey eventually, but life's road takes unexpected twists and turns and leads to places and times quite unexpected.

Later that evening, Bob started to gather up his memories and belongings as somehow he knew his time had come and he would soon fade into the mist of tranquility as others venture forth in his place. The adventurous roads he traveled would be for others to travel now and for them it will be uncharted territory. He was convinced that is the way it always was, and that is the way it will always be. It was their time now, he thought, even if they didn't realize it yet.

Long after the sun set, the dishes washed, the guests departed, Lou took a room at the Inn down the hall from Sally. The boat was too soggy to sleep in. The night air drifted through the open window as he drifted off to sleep. Visions of the Islands covered in the cold winter snows of New England filled his head. It didn't seem odd, just cold.

"That is why they need four wheel drives" proclaimed Lou's father just before falling fast asleep.

"I'll order them in the morning, before the tide comes in, but don't tell Sally. She'll just laugh and say something in French." Lou dreamt he could speak French but no one understood French in Portland.

Sally tossed and turned in her bed and didn't fall asleep easily. For some reason the wallpaper in the room kept her awake. The paisley wall paper was bothering her and she wondered why anyone would travel in small boats. She thought about the restaurants on the coast. Could they all have been destroyed? She wondered why Rita O'Malley couldn't come back to fix the phone system. In the morning, she thought, she will be on her way and so all this didn't matter, although the sauce did turn out very well. As the night air drifted into Sally's room she noticed the gathering mist. She left the window ajar nonetheless.

What happened that night and the following days is subject to some speculation but some of the details I learned from Salty and Officer Krupke. The way Salty told it the days turned into weeks as Lou and Sally kept delaying their departure from Bartholmeu's Inn. It was obvious Lou didn't want to see Sally leave and as she would never sail to the Islands with him he had a reason to stay. Sally became more interested in the Inn and the possibilities of having a job she really had control over. She could use the experience before moving on. She liked Lou, but he wasn't the reason she stayed, at least not at first. With each passing day the world outside the lagoon and its influence slipped further and further away. After a while it didn't seem strange that communications were sparse, if

any at all, and the mist and fog that always seemed to hang just down the road acted like a blanket between the outside world and the world around the lagoon.

It therefore wasn't too surprising that the idea that Lou and Sally were going to take over the Inn became almost expected. Bob Chilton knew it would happen like that, as he and his wife experienced the same thing years ago.

"I remember the day Bob left", Salty said in a melancholy way. "I was just cleaning up after breakfast and there was a wicked dense fog outside. It even seemed to seep into the Inn. Lou and Sally were sitting at that table right over there when Bob came in and sat down with them."

"So you folks ready?" asked Bob, shifting with eyes to both Lou and Sally.

"Ready for what?" replied Lou.

"Your next great adventure, the thing you both want."

"I'm not too sure what you are talking about". Sally had a quizzical look on her face.

"You're both on a journey to find something. To make something of your life. It was your script that you followed and now by chance or luck or fate you are here. This is the something you wished to find."

Lou thought Bob was being more than a little presumptuous and yet he didn't feel he was being talked down to. It was more like hearing his father giving him pointers on the best way to sail while they were out on Cape Cod Bay. He trusted that advice and knew it would serve him well. It surprised him how little surprised he was at the thought of staying and running the Inn.

Sally was a little more skeptical. Besides having no money to even think of buying a place like this, she thought her journey had just begun. How could it end so soon?

"Sally, don't worry about the money. Life goes on whether you have it or don't. I'm not expecting to leave this world with anything in my pocket other than a thank you note."

How did Bob know I was thinking of the money, thought Sally.

"Well, the idea does have a certain charm to it" she replied.

It always seemed strange to me, Salty said, but I saw it before when Bob and his wife came here.

“The previous owner just seemed to pass his sprit over to Bob and Judy. It happened the same way with Lou and Sally. By the end of their conversation I swear, I could almost see through Bob. It was like he was evaporating before my eyes. He got up, picked up his bags and walked out the front door. Lou and Sally thought he just faded into the fog and mist before loosing sight of him. I don’t think it had anything to do with the mist, I think he just disappeared.”

Lou and Sally were the new owners of the Inn and renamed it the Garlic Clove Inn. They became the best of friends, then lovers and finally husband and wife. The stories they told about the goings on around the lagoon kept me amused for many nights.

Chapter 5

I first met Officer Krupke while surveying the marshland around the lagoon. Actually met is not the right word, it was more like ambushed. As a County Marine Law Enforcement Service Officer, he patrolled the waters around the area. He patrolled with vigor. Suspecting I might be up to no good, he managed to track me down and, after extensive questioning, was satisfied that I was not a threat to the wildlife, fish or humans in the area.

Officer Krupke had an obsession with tracking people down. His use of local knowledge is legend in this area although he is not perfect. That is evident by one of the stories I heard about him from Salty.

Krupke just finished his tour of duty patrolling the waterways, making sure the boaters were obeying the law and standing by to lend assistance in case anyone needed the help of the County Marine Law Enforcement Service. Officer Krupke was the entire

Service, but if anything really serious developed, he could always count on the Coast Guard to help him out. Their base is about 10 miles away, although the boaters around here are more than willing to come to anyone's aid when needed.

Measuring and counting fish takes up most of Krupke's time. He is also responsible to ensure that the fisherman obey the fishing regulations in the county's waters. Even in the pouring rain like this day, he was out on the water because, as Krupke often said, "The law must be maintained".

To no one's surprise, Krupke is often seen dashing off in the Boston Whaler and heading out to sea in search of the law breaking fisherman. For those not familiar with his routine, he looks down right schizophrenic. Without warning he catapults himself from whatever he is doing, whether it is in the middle of a conversation, dinner or even during church services. The not-so-secret secret is a marvel of technology that the County Law Enforcement Service provides Officer Krupke.

What looks like a hearing aid is actually a wireless earpiece to a marine VHF radio on the Krupke's Law Enforcement Boston Whaler. Wherever he goes, he maintains a constant watch on the marine VHF channels. Some say he even sleeps with it on but his wife, Irene, has never confirmed this. The fact that he is happily married with two kids may be taken as he definitely turns it off at some point. On the other hand, some say that it proves that it is on all the time and gives him a great excuse to officially run off from family commitments.

How he uses this device to monitor fisherman is quite simple. Most fishermen, either because they are bored or just like to hear themselves talk, turn on their VHF radio as soon as they get on their boat. Calling buddies or others to find out what the weather or seas are like, or maybe where other boats are headed, is the major discussion amongst the boaters. No one, of course, directly reports on how good or bad the fishing is or the exact spot they are in. Therefore, much of the talk is vague or seems that way to the casual listener. However, Krupke has a knack of figuring out exactly what is going on after constantly monitoring these conversations for years. He has learned that certain fisherman use specific words to describe when fishing is actually good or poor, or if the fish are small and illegal or big and plentiful. He learned, for example, that a certain fisherman always mentioned his mother-in-law when he was catching "trash fish". Another one might mention his ex-wife while describing gasoline cost which means he is

pretty far off shore. When talk turns to religion it is a sure bet that the fisherman landed in a school of big game fish.

Of course this is all local knowledge and you have to know your fisherman as well as the local waters. Krupke is a master at both, and so for him it is not too difficult to decipher who is catching undersize fish and where they are located. He then jumps into his boat and waits in ambush at the dock to catch the lawbreaker. He may even run out to meet him on the water at the scene of the crime. Most fishermen are not lawbreakers and obey the regulations. Nonetheless, Officer Krupke savors the thrill of the chase and the occasional inadvertent lawbreaker out on the high seas. Either that or he has to justify all the equipment the County has provided him. The locals, of course, are aware of Officer Krupke and sometimes enjoy the hound and fox hunt. It was such a chase that led him out on this rainy day.

Earlier in the day, Krupke heard a fisherman on the VHF talking about the low bowling score he had the night before. The other fisherman reported that he did alright and had three strikes in a row. The first one then mentioned that he heard from his ex-girlfriend and maybe they should get back together again. The second one said to forget her as she burned him once and she was not worth it. When they signed off on the radio they mentioned the rain and were hungry for some hot Mexican food back on the dock.

To officer Krupke, it was plain as day what was happening. The first fisherman was catching undersize flat fish. The reference to bowling meant he was bottom fishing. The other fisherman was doing ok with good strikes and legal fish. The first fisherman was in the new bottom fishing area, which Krupke knew about from seeing boats fishing in that area a few weeks before. The fisherman was thinking about going back to his old fishing grounds: "ex-girlfriend". The second fisherman was probably there already and warned the first to stay away. The clincher was how they signed off. The reference to Mexican food on the dock meant they would be ready for Krupke to check for any undersized fish on the dock. The County Marine Law Enforcement Service was popularly abbreviated as CoMarLes, pronounced Comarlees rhyming with Tamales, a good Mexican food. Clearly they knew Krupke might be on the dock checking the fish and so they would need to take care of them before they reached the dock.

In order to outwit the fishermen, Krupke jumped into his Boston Whaler and raced out to the new bottom fishing grounds in search of his prey. Much to his dismay

there were no boats out there or anywhere around. No fisherman wanted to go out in the nasty weather for some flat fish.

While Office Krupke was going around and around in circles using the latest gear to find the culprit who was catching and keeping illegal fish, two fishermen were enjoying some tamales made with a heavy dose of garlic at the back table of the Garlic Clove Inn. Their hand held VHF radios were not far away. They were finishing when Krupke finally walked in after a fruitless run in the rain. They waved to him as he passed by and recommended the special on the menu: tamales. Krupke realized he just witnessed another version of Montezuma's revenge.

After being “ambushed” and meeting Krupke for the first time we became friends and had many dinners over at his home. His wife Irene, their two kids, Jimmy and Bobby and a dog called Wolf seemed to live comfortably on the limited income that was available. The home was tucked into a far corner of the lagoon. It was out of direct eyesight of the Inn, hidden behind a small island, and had a small dock where he kept the county boat. A few rowboats, used by Irene and the kids, were pulled up on shore. Fish and crab traps line the side of the house, hand-me-downs from Irene’s father.

“Yeah, I’ve seen plenty of weird stuff around here”, Krupke would say whenever he was about to tell some stories about the Inn and the surrounding countryside.

“What’s the story about that guy Potter. I hear he passed away in a strange way?”

“Potter? Not strange at all. He was blown to bits when he used his outhouse.”

His dead pan delivery must have come from years of hard boiled police investigations. Either that or these things were not strange occurrences around here.

“Really! Remind me not to use any outhouse around here.”

Sam (Slime Pot) Potter’s demise didn’t surprise anyone. The circumstances of his demise, while utilizing his own out-house, may have been unusual, but it was in keeping to the way in which he ran his boat repair business. Everyone around the Garlic Clove Inn knows the Boatman’s story about how the *Monkey’s Fist* almost sank in Sam’s boatyard after he changed some sparkplugs, but there were other stories just as incredible. Since Sam took credit for most of the work himself, it was not hard to see how people came to blame him for everything wrong with their boat, whether he worked on it or not. Actually in most cases, he employed underpaid drifters to do the actual work. He didn’t have too many repeat customers but Mary was one of them.

Mary Degraw, the widowed wife of Charlie Degraw, blamed him for shrinking the mast on her sloop *Penny Whistle*. After Charlie died at the ripe old age of 82, Mary kept sailing their boat but left the maintenance to Sam, who was Charlie's sometime friend. She kept the boat in Sam's yard for the winter, while she visited her grandkids in Texas. It was one such winter that the incredible shrinking mast mystery developed.

Sam stored the *Penny Whistle's* mast over the winter when it apparently shrunk by about a foot. When spring rolled around it was about a foot shorter than what it was in the Fall. Mary noticed it on the first time out on the water. She hauled the sail up to the top of the mast and yet there was still a bundle of sail along the boom. Sam insisted that the sail must have stretched over the winter and blamed the local sail loft for the stretching. He told Mary to get the sail loft to recut the sail so that it would fit. Most of that summer there were incriminations back and forth, but the mystery was never solved.

Krupke figured out what had happened but he would not say or accuse anyone without sufficient proof. According to him and unknown to Mary, Potter stored the *Penny Whistle's* mast near the wood pile for the stove Potter used in the winter. One dark and cold December night Krupke speculated that Potter ran out of firewood and had to cut some wood for his wood burning stove. In his haste and possible stupor, as he was known at times to lift a few too many cups of rum, he started cutting all sorts of pieces around the wood pile. Unfortunately, the *Penny Whistle's* mast was laying a little too close to the woodpile and Sam managed to cut about foot off the bottom. Not wanting to waste a good piece of spruce, it ended up in the pot belly stove used to keep his cabin warm. Unfortunately the ashes that Krupke sent to the State's lab couldn't confirm that it contained spruce from *Penny Whistle*. A key piece of evidence was missing!

But if Potter ever did remember it, he completely forgot about the incident by the Spring.

The next winter Potter managed to cut another foot off the bottom like he did the previous year. No one knows if he ever knew that a piece of mast went up in smoke that night, but when it came time to restep the mast in the Spring, it was again a foot shorter and again the sail didn't fit. Mary, being an astute sailor, noticed that the boom was also lower and had to almost go on her knees every time she tacked so the boom could pass over her.

Confronting Sam again was useless as he again claimed that the sail loft shrunk her sail. Mary figured that at this rate she would have no mast left in two or three years. Something had to be done. The next winter she duck taped a tape measure to the mast and made sure Potter knew the length of it in the fall. As it turned out she had nothing to worry about. The outhouse incident took place that winter and Potter never got a chance to cut any wood.

Potter's outhouse was situated just off the road, in a low spot between his cabin and the boat yard. Why he never bothered to install indoor plumbing baffled everyone but the outhouse suited Potter very well. Since he never married, he may have assumed there was never a need to upgrade to indoor plumbing. On the other hand, maybe that is why he never married.

The full investigation never did determine why the outhouse exploded with such force. The explosion was heard all the way to the Garlic Clove Inn, 2 miles away. It was large enough to send the small building and most of Potter hither and there. Maybe it was just happenstance that he was employing its intended purpose at the time or it was just his misfortune. Many said he was an accident waiting to happen. The main police theory, put forward by Officer Krupke, was that a discarded cigarette from a passing trucker on the highway made it down to the outhouse and ignited the methane under the building. This "single butt" theory was disputed by those who thought a conspiracy of several was more likely. Traces of marine flares, duck tape, and remnants of a measuring tape were reported but after many years no one ever proved anything.

Krupke finished the story by saying "There were many suspects, all of them at least one time customers, but nothing could be proven. Mary Degraw was pleased that the next year the mast on the *Penny Whistle* didn't shrink nor has it shrunk since. Most people around the Garlic Clove Inn are religious enough to believe that in the end you get what you deserve. In the case of Slime Pot Potter, he did get it in the end."

Chapter 6

When I was back at the Inn after talking to Krupke and before I needed to do some more surveying I asked Salty about the Penny Whistle and what he thought of the way Potter died.

“Not many people thought much of him. Who they remember and miss the most was Mary and Charlie, the owners of the *Penny Whistle*. Now only Mary is alive. Sorta’ like only half the team”

Mary and Charlie Degraw were married on *Penny Whistle* while it was laying alongside the old Gaelic Inn dock. At that time, a good 60 years ago, the Inn and dock were the social center of the small backwater lagoon hamlet cradled by tall southern pines and persistent mists that seemed to buffer the inhabitants from the outside world even more then today. It was a great afternoon for a wedding with flowing drink, food, music and laughter.

Sam Potter, the best man, gave a rousing toast to the newly married couple:

“May you sail forever and never let go of the tiller! May the wind blow fair and carry you both far - or at least until the next open bar! But never loose sight of the love you show her!”

The honeymoon was all of six days sailing to “uncharted” territory, or territory not noted in the captain’s log book. Like a stone skipping along the water, the young couple hit the shore front towns spending just enough time ashore to get noticed and then sailing off into the sunset. It was the beginning of their lifelong adventure.

That was many years ago, before Bob Chilton took over the Inn and before Lou and Sally took it over from Bob. Mary and Charlie were high school sweethearts and after they were married lived in a small house tucked in the pine forest and within walking distance of the Lagoon. Over the years they raised three kids, Danny, Wanda and Patricia, and saw many changes around the lagoon but that didn’t seem to affect them at all.

Penny Whistle was always a major part of their lives. Danny was born in the V berth when the wind died and Charlie and Mary couldn’t sail back to the lagoon in time

to make it to the hospital. People were amazed to see the new born baby disembark from the boat after it docked. Many got their start in life on a boat but not exactly in that manner.

Wanda, always an independent spirit, tried to sail *Penny Whistle* by herself when she was 6 or 7 years old. Mary, seeing her young daughter sail off by herself jumped in the lagoon and swam as fast as she could after her. Fortunately *Penny Whistle*, knowing something was amiss, grounded on a sand bar not too far along. Wanda thought it was great fun watching her mother swim after her. She was truly “grounded” after that incident.

Patricia, Patty as she was known, was the one who did the best repair jobs on *Penny Whistle's* multicolored hull. Each year she painted the hull a different color. It became somewhat of a guessing game what the color would be. People down at the Inn wagered what the season's color would be. It was all in good fun as Patty painted the hull in one night and parade the boat around the Lagoon the next day.

Eventually Danny and Patty moved away while Wanda stayed in the hamlet. She and Joe No-Luck Eddie, a Louisiana boy with zydeco in his blood, are sort of a couple. He infuses Wanda with the mysteries of the bayou and with his incredible bad luck. Getting a ticket for littering a highway while sailing was only one of his bad luck endeavors. The mists surrounding the lagoon fit perfectly well with Joe's misty back round.

Mary and Charlie sailed *Penny Whistle* as faithfully as others went to Sunday church services. It was hard to tell what drew such commitment.

When Danny went off and joined the Army and found himself shooting blindly into some distant jungle, only to be wounded by an enemy he never saw, Mary and Charlie took the news in stride. They were proud of their son but they sailed late into the evening that day tempting the unknown to take a swipe at them and leave their son alone.

When Patricia left for college and found happiness in an Arizona Commune they sailed with the Arizona State Flag flying proudly from the spreaders. Their hearts were broken when they heard of Patricia's death in an auto accident in the middle of the desert. After the funeral they sailed for two weeks with untold number of tears filling the sea which seemed to mend their hearts.

They looked to Wanda to bring Joe some luck and hope at least one of them has enough sense to ask the other to get married. They could live with the zydeco boy from Louisiana, whatever his past was, as long as Wanda was happy. They still had the wedding bows from *Penny Whistle*, used so many years ago, just waiting for another wedding aboard the boat.

Their lives were not remarkable other than the consistency of maintaining a boat, especially a wooden one that was already old when they were young, over the same period of time. Routine maintenance would be expected, but there must have been something more. After spending uncountable hours maintaining *Penny Whistle* how can it return the affection that another person can?

“What is it that a boat inspires? The world changes, their kids go off on their own and yet the boat stayed a central part of their lives and carried them forward.” Salty asked rhetorically.

Sam Potter’s advice to Charlie on his wedding day was taken seriously. Charlie, Mary and *Penny Whistle* vowed unending commitment to each other that day which seemed to serve them all well.

“Sam Potter, of course, was not as fortunate as he met his end in an out-house explosion that many think involved Mary and *Penny Whistle*. I can understand that. But some lifelong commitments are beyond understanding. Especially those to what some consider, nothing more than a penny whistle.”

It was almost lunch time as Salty started to set up the tables for the lunch crowd. That usually consisted of no more than four or five people from the boatyard or local bakery. But there seemed to be a commotion out back

The *Sapphire Slipper* slowly circled the lagoon like a mouse sniffing the baseboard for some morsel of food. But this was no mouse of a boat. The 55 footer was a cross between a sport fisherman and a UFO. The deeply tinted bridge windows and ports, the sleek outriggers, the mass of antennas and satellite domes, could be seen on many newer power boats but the glowing protrusions and mechanical arms sticking up at weird angles was definitely not OEM stuff.

Sally watched the strange craft as it turned and headed toward the dock at the back of the Garlic Clove Inn. She called out to Salty to go out and catch the lines of the craft if its intended destination was the dock. Salty thought it was coming in much too

fast and was ready to abandon his post before the dock became a splintering mess of driftwood in the prow of this alien craft that was headed directly toward him.

The roar of the engines in full reverse sounded like a lion announcing his intention to claim this piece of territory. The boat quickly stopped dead in the water, perpendicular to the dock, no farther than about ten feet away. It slowly turned in its own length until it was parallel to the dock, as if it were on a turntable and then bodily moved sideways to within inches of the dock. Fenders dropped down from the glowing protrusions to just the right height to protect the hull from the dock's string piece. At the same time, lines shot out from deck pods falling within inches of the cleats on the dock. Salty quickly looped the lines around the cleats and then within seconds the boat was secured.

"That was some boat handling!" proclaimed Salty, just as Lou was walking down the dock to see what all the commotion was about.

"Did you see this thing dock?"

"Yeah! This is some piece of work!" replied Lou.

They stood there waiting to see the captain emerge from the bridge and wondered who owned such a strange craft. And they stood there for a while. Finally, Lou called out, "Hey, Captain, welcome to the Inn, how long you plan on staying?"

There was no reply. Lou and Salty looked at each other and wondered if this thing was really a UFO. The lagoon is well known to attract the odd and strange but a UFO, and a floating one, would be a first. Finally a voice emanated from the bridge area. It was not like a person calling out a port hole or even a voice from a loud hailer, it was as if the boat itself was talking.

"Oh hi! Sorry I kept you waiting but I had a call on my other line. Say, this looks like a terrific place but there may something wrong with my GPS because I seem to be mislocated. We're not in Arizona are we?"

Lou, with a tinge of disbelief that he seemed to be talking to a boat, said "No, not at all, but many people have trouble with their GPS here. I think it has something to do the power plant up river from here."

The power plant up river was always cited as the cause of many of the oddities of the lagoon. It was assumed that anything that generated that much power had to affect the surroundings.

“Come on in and have dinner. I would love to hear about your boat.” Lou thought the boat itself would attract people to the Inn as he was curious about this strange looking craft himself.

“Well that sounds inviting but I don’t think I can get down there right now”

“Dinner is served until 9PM, so come when you can” offered Salty

“Well what I mean is that I’m in Singapore right now and have a meeting in a few minutes and then later this morning, which is, I guess, your night, I’m off to Rio for some remote demos.”

Lou and Salty looked at each other with disbelief. “Capt’n, who is on the boat?”

“No one really. It’s a remote controlled craft that I designed and built in Italy. I love boating but my schedule doesn’t permit me the luxury of spending hours out on the water. With this I can enjoy boating at any time. I usually operate the boat when I travel and find the hours in the air a perfect time to sit back and remotely pilot the boat. Say, who was that fine looking woman I saw in the kitchen when I was circling the lagoon?”

“That was my wife!”

Lou was used to strange conversations, but talking to a boat that just docked itself while the captain was half a world away was beyond belief. The fact that his wife was the subject of attention was not unusual. But was the boat hitting on his wife?

“Look fellas, I would love to chat with you. It looks like a great little place you got there but I really must be going. You can text me what dockage I owe as I will probably pull out in a few hours on my way to Rio. I booked marked this location so maybe we’ll meet and I’ll take you up on the dinner offer.” With that the boat fell silent.

“What’s this, some rich guy’s toy? Where’s the crew? Are they coming for dinner?”

Sally wanted to get ready for the professional crew who always ate heartily and left big tips, especially when it was on the boat owners tab.

“Sorry honey,” replied Lou, “Looks like we were just invaded by the next generation of recreational boaters. It’s amazing what they can do with electronics today.

“Yeah, but you still have to cook your own eggs!”

Chapter 7

By this time I was at the Inn for what seemed like a few days, surveying the wetlands for my report back to the EPA. It was actually a few weeks, maybe longer, but time seemed to pass at a different pace around here. I once asked Sally how she managed to keep track of time and how she communicated to the surrounding county. She said at first she had problems but after a while it didn't much matter. She then told me about Greg Norwell.

When Sally arrived for the first time at the Inn, during hurricane Emily, she noticed that her cell phone did not work. She assumed it was due to the storm and the damage that it caused. At first it was a major concern but after a short time other things preoccupied her time and thoughts and, like someone going cold turkey, she became independent of the electronic biblical cord. Not so for Greg Norwell.

Greg was the grandson of Rita O'Mally, the last telephone operator for the community and was fully connected with the entire world. At least it seemed that way. His Blackberry was a backup to an iPhone that was programmed with constant GPS positioning and friend alerts. He was on FaceBook, his own web page, twitter, and watched the constant video feeds to the iPad on the dashboard of his car or mounted in each room of his house. A special baseball cap that he wore fed live video to this network. While he slept his "answering machine" took over all functions and rebroadcast highlights of his day's activities along with live streaming REM movements of his eyes. Some thought the addition of pulse and blood pressure readings were a little too personnel but he thought it was a good way to keep everyone informed of his physical state at all times.

The big power station up the creek from the lagoon was always suspect of interfering with everything electrical around the lagoon. GPS readings gave inconsistent results, VHF radios sometimes died and at other times acted like short wave radios picking up stations thousands of miles away. Even telephone landlines couldn't be trusted given the soft ground as many poles fell in the slightest breeze. So it was no surprise that when Greg Norwell walked into the Garlic Clove Inn he complained that he had "no bars".

"There's a gin joint down Old Rut Road if you're real thirsty," answered Salty the bartender. "But I can offer you some fine tavern brews and potions here if you prefer clean glasses and eatable food".

Salty always had a way to distinguish The Inn from The Joint.

The Boatman, leaning against the bar like a bollard dressed in overalls on a que chimed in, "Don't let old Salty sweet talk you into not going to the Joint. Some of my best brawls were there and the owner owes his last remaining finger to my quick action when the steel door to the pig shed crashed down on him. Fortunately the 'shine he was pouring at the time didn't spill. Would have made a real mess to clean both blood and 'shine off the tavern's floor."

"Ah, no, what I mean is that my Blackberry seemed to lose signal and I may have lost contact", replied Greg.

His face was turning pale as he began to realize that not only his Blackberry was off line, his iPhone was dead, his cap camera stopped sending live feed, and his car GPS indicated he was in Arizona. He was nowhere near a 4G network, let alone WiFi.

"Your mom Rita said you would be passing through." announced Sally emerging from the kitchen. "I'm Sally, part owner of the Inn. Your mom sent me a letter a few weeks ago. I've learned that is really the best way to communicate around here. Other than talking to someone! Grab a table and I'll bring you a menu."

"That's Sally, for you," the Boatman proclaimed, "always getting the latest news by courier. Did I ever tell you about the time I had the courier's letters of transit that Rick used to get out of Casablanca? I got them from some Lisbon custom agent who sold them for a few Italian lira after the war. That was some time..."

By now Greg's head was spinning. He was trying to reorient himself from being off grid for the last few hours. He imagined his buddy list was a-buzz with his

disappearance. What if someone needed to know where he was and what he was doing right now? How can he inform them of the meal he was about to order? He couldn't download the restaurant review of the Inn to order the most cost/benefit meal of price vs. calories. He was going into EIS – Electronic Isolation Shock. There will be no emails, twitter, live video or VOI. In short, he was alone and living on the edge.

“I'll have some water”, he said as Sally handed him a menu.

After studying the menu for a while, he asked for a glass of beer and was about to order the plain burger and fries. But then he took a chance. Without consulting or informing his friends, he decided to order the Garlic Burger with anchovies and salsa sauce, the Inn's classic entrée.

It didn't take too long for the Inn's influence to have an effect on Greg. He began to recover from EIS by listening to Sally, the Boatman, Salty, and the other denizens of the Inn. He filled in Sally about his grandmother Rita and the stories she had about the Lagoon. He mentioned that he could never find anything about the Lagoon on Google. For the rest of the evening he made his way to the bar and enjoyed the stories Salty and the Boatman told as if they were as real as wikipedia.

When it got late, he went out back and saw the moon rising over the lagoon and wished his video cap was working so he could record the scene for his friends so far away. But then he thought that they could never really experience that view, and this night, on a tiny LCD in the palm of their hand. Maybe not even on a 52" LED HDTV.

He walked back to the Inn and asked the Boatman where Old Rut Road was. The Boatman smiled and said that this may be the start of a beautiful friendship. But really, how long could Greg live on the edge and off the net?

“He still comes in here every so often.” Sally continued. “He seemed to kick his electronic habit since he moved into a cabin on the other side of the lake, near Officer Krupke's place. Rumor is that he is sweet on Krupke's daughter as they are often seen out on the lake staring at the moon. But the strangest thing is he often shouts, ‘Can you hear me now’, for no apparent reason.”

Chapter 8

I was nearing the completion of my surveys but the persistent fog and mist kept me within the limited boundaries of the lagoon and area just outside the lagoon. I could see why the charts and maps of this area were not too detailed. The last chart updates were noted as being done in 1938. It seemed it would be difficult to relate this location with the surrounding area if that fog and mist never dissipated. It was not surprising that when boats found their way into the lagoon they were a bit surprised at what they found. The inhabitants were often equally surprised at what came in.

Transients travel in their own universe, with their own sense of time and place. They are the people who were somewhere else in the past and will be somewhere different in the future. They only occupy the present time and place for a short duration as theirs is the journey, not the destination.

“Hey Sally, looks like we got some transients out on the back dock” shouted Salty, the Garlic Clove’s bartender, the other day.

“Yeah, I better grind up some more garlic for dinner” replied Sally, as she came out of the kitchen and into the Garlic Clove’s dining room. Sally was finishing preparations for the evening meals which all included her trademark garlic sauce and fresh fish platters.

The transients were an older couple, maybe in their 50’s, and looked like they have been on the water for years. The boat had that lived in look with just the right amount of hand made accruements mixed with light rust stains, deck mounted jerry cans wedged up against a whirling wind generator, rusted bicycle, oversized anchor and a well worn American flag to certify that the boat has been around for a while.

Lou was up on the roof of the Inn fixing some shingles that had come loose in the last rainstorm and saw the transients pull up to the dock. Many pull up to the dock

while others stay at anchor in the lagoon. Each reminded him of his own journey and how he ended up with an Inn in a hard to find lagoon somewhere south of Hatteras and north of Florida. If he had any regrets of not continuing, he never said anything as Sally was his mooring and that was just fine with him.

The transients introduced themselves to Sally and asked if they could tie up overnight. They would eat dinner at the Inn as their contribution to the dockage fee so Sally said it was ok.

“Fill up your water tanks”, offered Sally, “and electric is available if you have a long extension cord.”

The Transients didn't need the electricity. Sally had the feeling that the boat radiated enough electricity to power the Inn by itself.

Joe “no-luck” Eddie was at the Inn at the time and was with his sometime girlfriend Wanda Evans. They walked down to the Transient's boat, which they noticed was named *Graceland*.

“Where you folks from?” inquired Joe.

“Well we just sailed up from the Keys but before that we sailed from the Islands but before that I think we were in the Azores. Maybe it was the Canaries; anyway it was one of those Atlantic Islands. At least I think it was the Atlantic.” He turned toward the companion way and shouted, “Hey, Babe, when did we go through the canal? Was it last year that we ducked the hurricane and had to go south to Rio or were we out by the Galapagos?”

The Transient known as Babe emerged from the companionway and said that they were in Rio because that is where she broke her finger trying to get the outboard motor on the dinghy to start.

“Oh yeah! I remember. Lucky for us the doctor at the medical center had a boat at the marina and helped us get back on board after all the medical red tape.”

“No, that was in Barcelona when the storm flipped our dinghy over and we went to the marina and met a doctor who took us back to our boat.”

By this time Joe was sorry he asked. Wanda smiled and said it must be exciting to get to travel and see the world.

“Where are you heading?” she asked.

“Well, Babe and I are heading for this Inn to have dinner. If you have a recommendation as to what to order we would be very appreciative. You can even join us at our table as we don’t often get to talk to too many people when we are out on the water.”

Joe had misgivings about sitting at their table but Wanda seemed interested and so he said that the fish platter with the garlic sauce was a good bet. With that the four of them walked back to the Inn and took a table near the back.

They spent most of the evening talking about Elvis Presley. *Graceland*, the boat, had a complete collection of Elvis’s recordings and films and the transients knew the “King’s” life like he was their son. They frequently broke into song as they recounted little known stories and facts about Elvis’s early career, the Colonel, the time spent in Germany in the Army, the dancing, the Vegas period and the tragic end.

“Elvis was more than just an entertainer. He defined the way America saw itself. All innocent and sexy at the same time. He moved people and was a heart throb. He made money, and he spent it. In the end he consumed himself and left a void that others can’t fill.”

It was funny how someone who transits the world like a hop on a cross town bus was fixated on a singular inhabitant of that world. This was way too heavy for Joe and Wanda and they realized that the Transients were definitely in a different world.

“And where are you headed now,” asked Wanda as they were finishing up their deserts.

“Well we’re headed to the Cape and then Nova Scotia. We’ll either end up in the fiords of Greenland or Norway. Depends on the Gulf Stream I guess. I would like to make Gibraltar by November. What do you say, Babe, think the winter in Palma is ok or should we head back to Madera. You know how you love that wine we got there last time.”

“We didn’t get wine in Madera, that was where the transmission broke and we sailed into the anchorage with just a jib. We got that great wine in Tunisia although I still say it was smuggled from Italy.” They continued their banter as they headed back to the boat.

It was late at night when Joe and Wanda watched the Transients climb aboard their boat at the end of the dock and begin to sing Blue Suede Shoes. Joe and Wanda

were used to transients passing through but rarely remembered any of them. And then sometimes their passage leaves footprints on the brain.

By day break, *Graceland* was gone but someone played Blue Suede Shoes on an old jukebox somewhere around the lagoon. Maybe it was Greg Norwell blasting an MP3 player. The sound drifted in and out until it ceased to be heard above the wakening rustle of the Garlic Clove Inn.

Chapter 9

After a few weeks, (or was it months?), I gathered up the data I collected and took a long hard look at what I had. In my small room at the Inn, on a table not much bigger than a few loose leaf binders, it amounted to piles and piles of numbers on spread sheets. Each detailing winds and tides, trees and sand, what is known and what is unknown. It was supposed to describe what this place was. But I knew it didn't.

I looked around the Inn, then walked out to the back dock and saw the still quiet waters of the lagoon reflecting the green pines of the distant shore. I lost that sense of urgency to get back to my office and finish the job I came here to do. I'm not a transient and yet I am not a resident either. Am I just an observer? The stories I heard, the people I met, seemed so different than those back home. And yet they were no different. Each had their own stories to tell but it did seem that they were less concerned with an outside world. Was it that mist or fog that kept them separate or was it more? I don't know.

Yes, I was an observer in this place walking down a path maybe less traveled and wondering if I affected anything here. I suspected that it was the reverse.

I heard footsteps on the dock behind me and turned to see Lou and Sally, hand in hand, the early morning sun illuminating their faces. They looked like they were going to say good bye to me as I mentioned to them that I was finished with my work here and would soon be leaving. But they looked different, like they just finished a long task. Their expression was one of satisfaction of a job well done.

The other night at dinner they had talked about the fun times they had working on the Inn and getting it in the shape they envisioned after they bought it from Bob. Their wedding was only a year or so after they met at the Inn and realized that they didn't leave the Inn or the lagoon since then. They never thought about leaving or even taking a trip back to see their family or friends. The Inn seemed to encompass the only road they were on. But they then said something strange to me that night.

“All of a sudden John, you come to the end of the road and just know you have to keep walking even though there is no more road. But you see others on the road and you just smile and wish them well.”

As we stood there on the dock the mist and fog closed in, although the sun was still visible above the trees. It seemed that the outside world was as far away as it ever would be. I then realized that it was Lou and Sally who had come to the end of their road but would keep going anyway.

Lou asked me, “Are you ready?”