

TRY TO IMAGINE THOSE ISLANDS IN THE DEEP CARIBBEAN SEA SOME FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE WEST INDIES, BORDERED A NEW BY THE AMERICAS AND AN EXCITING HISTORY; THEY WERE VOLCANIC AND FULL OF PIRATES. MOST OF THE ORIGINAL ISLANDS ARE STILL THERE AND MOST OF THE PIRATES ARE GONE

FOR INSTANCE, THE ISLAND OF ANTIGA, THE MAIN HARBOR is known as “NELSON’S DOCK YARD,” BUT DO WE ALL KNOW THAT THIS LEGENDARY

ADMIRAL HORATIO NELSON , SAILED WITH HIS FLEET FROM THE TINY ISLAND TO TRAFALGAR OFF THE SPANISH COAST IN 1805 TO ENGAGE THE SPANISH-FRENCH FLEET IN THAT NAVY “BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR” WHICH RESULTED IN THE DEFEAT OF NAPOLEON’S NAVY AND WITH THAT THE RULE OF THE SEAS BY THE BRITISH NAVY FOR SEVERAL SEVERAL HUNDRED YEARS. MOST OF THOSE ISLANDS IN THE CARIBBEAN SEA ARE OR WERE SMALL PARTS OF THIS FABLED

HISTORY. HOWEVER, I CHOSE OR HAVE CHOSEN TO MAKE UP MY OWN SEAFARING HISTORY AND WITH AS FEW BATTLES AGAINST NAPOLEON AS POSSIBLE

THUS, GET A SAILBOAT, LEARN TO SAIL, AND EXPLORE THE CARIBBEAN. AND WHY NOT SAVE MONEY BY HAVING YOUR FAMILY AS CREW, LEARNING TO SAIL, YES, WIFE AND CHILDREN. AND IT SOUNDS EASY ! AND GOOD EXPERIENCE.

SAVING COST HOWEVER!!, WE ACQUIRED A 50' FOOT CUTTER IN 1960, MADE IN FLORIDA, AND AT CHRISTMAS TIME THAT YEAR SAILED OUR MAIDEN VOYAGE TO NASSAU TO LEARN WHAT THIS "SAILING" WAS ABOUT. BEING A SMALL PART CAREFUL, WE HIRED A TWO MAN CREW FROM BEQUIA TO WORK WITH US, TEACH, COOK, AND KEEP US OUT OF TOO MUCH TROUBLE. THEY WERE BAZIL HAZIL, A PROFESSIONAL SEAMAN OF ABOUT 40, VERY FAMILIAR WITH THE ISLANDS, AND HIS ASSISTANT, JAMES ALBERT, A TEAN-AGGER FROM THE VILLAGE; AS OUR "FIRST MATE." AND COOK.

AFTER QUITE A TRIP, THE MAIDEN VOYAGE OF THE ARGO (OUR NAME FOR THE BOAT) FROM SAINT PETERSBURG TO NASSAU AND THEN ON TO ST. VINCENT, LOOSING GEAR OVERBOARD (THE WAVES RUSHED OVER THE WHOLE BOAT) WE FINALLY MADE IT IN TO BEQUIA, OUR NEW HOME, THAT IS FOR THE BOAT, THE KIDS RETURNED TO CINCINNATI A FEW WEEKS LATTER, AS HOME AND SCHOOL WERE STILL THERE IN OHIO. BUT IN

BETWEEN, AND BEFORE SCHOOL STARTED, WE HAD QUIE AN EXPERIENCE. “LET’S LEARN TO SAIL AND GO SCUBA DIVING “DOWN ISLAND,” SOUNDED GREAT, LIKE FUN!

OUR LITTLE CREW WAS THE FIVE OF THE SENA FAMILY AND BAZIL AND JAMES AS TEACHERS AND HELPERS.

NEEDLESS TO SAY THERE ARE LOTS OF ISLANDS, AND OF ALL SIZE AND WORTH EXPLORING IN THAT PART OF THE OCEAN-SEA. WE HEADED FOR THE TOBAGO CAYS, AND THE ISLAND OF MAYREAU, SOUTHWARD ABOUT 20 MILES FROM BEQUIA. SAILBOATS ARE NOT LIKE CARS OR SPEEDBOATS, NOT VERY FAST, ESPECIALLY WITH “OUR CREW.” BUT WE DID MAKE IT AND ONLY TOOK ONE FULL DAY.

THE TOBAGO CAYS ARE A SMALL GROUP OF ROCKY OUT GROWTH, SOMEWHAT LARGER THAN THE REEFS SURROUNDING A FEW LARGER, BUT NOT VERY BIG, OTHER ISLANDS OR CORAL GROWTH. BUT THE DIVING AND FISHING WERE SUPPOSED TO BE VERY GOOD. OUR “LARGER ISLAD “BASE” WAS MAYREAU . SO IN NOT TOO LONG A SAIL WE MADE IT, LOOKED ASHORE, PLANTED OUR FLAG AND MOTORED BACK TO A LARGE KEY TO SETTLE IN, THAT IS ANCHOR THE BOAT WHERE WE HOPED TO SLEEP, EAT, SWIM, AND DIVE FOR A EW DAYS OR A WEEK. IT WAS TRULY BEAUTIFUL PLACE, A SETTING FOR AN ADVENTURE FILM I AM SURE.

WELL, WE SOON DISCOVERED THAT WE WERE NOT ALONE ON OUR LITTLE KEY OR ISLAND. THERE WERE TWO OTHER BOATS TIED UP ON THE ROCKS OR CAY A HUNDRED YARDS OR SO FRM US. THE KIDS, OUR THREE CHILDREN WENT ASHORE AND, OF COURSE “EXPLORED”, MOSTLY LOOKING FOR OTHER PEOPLE OR WHO WERE ON THE OTHER BOATS. THEY CAME BACK IN ABOUT AN HOUR AND REPORTED THAT THERE WERE THREE BOYS, PROBABLY TEEN-AGERS, LOCAL FISHERMAN FROM BEQUIA, WHO WERE “CAMPED OUT” IN TENTS, SORT OF LIVING THERE FOR A FEW DAYS, AND FISHING!

NOW, I HAD TWO TEEN AGED DAUGHTERS, PRETY AS ANY FATHER COULD EVER HAVE, AND THEN A SON A FEW YERS OLDER THAN THE GIRLS. OF COURSE I DISCUSSED THE BOY FISHERMAN WITH BASIL AS HE WAS AN IMPORTANT GUY IN THE ISLANDS AND FOUND OU THAT THE BOYS WERE “FINE, NOT TO WORRY.” BUT I HAD TO SEE FOR MYSELF.

OFF I WENT TO MEET ‘THE BOYS’ THEY WERE IN DEED TEENAGERS, NICE KINDS, AND QUITE INTERESTING.

YES INDEED, THEY WERE FISHERMEN; THEY HAD PITCHED THREE TENTS, HAD A COMPRESSOR, FOR WHAT I DID NOT KNOW, A FIRE GOING AND THEY WERE PLAYING BACKGAMMON, A LOCAL FAVORITE.

I WORKED EASILY AT FINDING OUT MORE, AND SINCE WE DID NOT SEE THEM GOING OUT TO FISH IN THE MORNING OR DURING THE DAY AND NO FISHING GEER IN SIGHT, I HAD TO FIND OUT.

“WHAT ARE YOU FISHING FOR, I DON’T SEE YOU GOING OUT DURING THE DAY, JUST WHAT DO YOU REALLY DO!” I ASKED.

ONE OF THEM WAS A LITTLE OLDER AND APPEARED TO BE THE LEADER AND SPOKES MAN, HE ANSWERED, “ YES MON, WE FISHERMAN,” “ME: WHAT FOR, WHEN, HOW, WHY, ETC.” HE WENT ON, “WE A TEAM, WE FISHIN’ FOR CONCH, DIVING, “ THEN HE EXPLAINED FURTHER. ”WE GO OUT TO GET CONCH IN THE EARLY MORNING OR IN THE EVENING” WHEN THE SUN IS SETTING OR , AS IT CUTS THRU TO D’A BOTTOM FLOOR IN ‘D OCEAN AND EASIER TO FIND ‘D CONCH.

“ HE, (POINTING TO ANOTHE ONE OF THE GROUP” IS D’ DIVER, ‘WEARS ’THOSE TANKS (POINTING TO COMPRESSED AIR TANK GEER) AND HE GOES DOWN TO THE FLOOR TO GET “FISH”;

POINTING TO THE THIRD GUY, HE SAYS, “HE IT THE “FLOATER”” AND WEAR ‘DAT MASK AND TUBE” AND FOLLOWS HIM (POINTING TO THE DIVER/ WHEN HE FILLS HIS BASKET WIH CONCH, HE COMES UP HALF WAY, ’THEN THE OTHER GUY, THE FLOATER , GOES DOWN HALF WAY AND THEY EXCHANGE BASKETS, FILL AND EMPTY. HE TAKE FULL BASKET TO BOAT,

I'M DRIVING IT AND FOLLOWING DHEM, CONCH DUMPS FISF IN BOAT, AND ON WE GO.

WHAT NEXT? I ASKED. THE BOY SAID " THEN WE GO SHORE. OK BY WHY, WHAT " HE REPLIED" YOU SEE OUR CAGE ON SHORE?" THEN I REMEMBERED THE CHICKEN WIRE FENCE OR PEN IN THE WATTER NEAR SHORE. " WE KEEP THE LIVE CONCH INSIDE THE CAGE 'TILL WE READY' FOR WHA, I ASKED, TO TAKE THEM, WE GONNA SELL THEM! ' YOU NOT VERY SMART,' HE SAID, REFERRING T ME, BUT THEN, I WOKE UP.

THEY WERE SELLING LIVE CONCH TO HE RESTAURANTS. GOOD IDEA, QUITE EXPENSIVE, VERY PROFITABLE. I STILL DID'T REALLY UNDERSTAND IT ALL, BUT HIS EXPLANATION WAS SUFFICIENT. MY KID, THE GRLS ARE OK, THESE ARE PRETTY GOOG BOYS.

BUT STILL MORE: THEY HAVE OTHER TEAM JOBS, THE DIVER JUST LIES ABOUND DRINKING AND SMOKING, THE GUY DRIVING THE BOAT TAKES CARE OF COOKING FOR ALL THREE, KEPING THEIR CAMP IN GOOD ORDER AND CARING FOR THE BOAT.

THE THIRD FELLOW, FILLS THE AIR TANKS FOR THE DIVER'S USE ON THE COMPRESSOR THEY HAVE WITH THEM AND ASSISTS THE OHER WWO IN ANYTHING THEY NEED. THEY WERE A THREE MAN

TEAM, A NICE LITTLE BUSINESS , BUT WHAT REALLY HAPPENS NEXT, WHY?

FEW DAYS LATER, MORE ACTION WITH THE THREE FISHERMAN, MY SON CAME OVER TO OUR BOAT AND CALLED OUT, “DAD HE FISHERMAN GUYS ARE GOING TO LEAVE!” WELL, I HAD TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON, WE WENT DOWN TO THEIR CAMP, THEY WERE ON THE BEACH AT THE “PEN,” ONE WAS PULLING THE CONCH OUT ANOTHER HAD A SPECIAL TOOL TO KNOCK OFF THE TIP OF THE CONCH SHELL, ANOTHER TOOL TO REACH INSIDE IT, AND PULL OUT THE LIVE CONCH, ANOTHER HAD A BIG BASKET FILLED WITH SEA WEED INTO WHICH THEY PUT THE LIVE CONCH, THE BASKETS WERE THEN PUT IN THEIR BOAT.

“WHAT YOU GONNA DO NOW.” I ASKED, THE HEAD GUY SAID, WE’RE GOIN TO MARTINIQUE TO SELL OUR CONCH ON DA’ DOCK TO THOSE FRENCH COOKS, THEN THEY IS FLY’IN TO PARIS!” “WHAT! I ASKED?” YEA, THEY LIKE CONCH OVER THERE!!!” “HOW TO YOU GET TO MARTINIQUE QUICKLY ENOUGH? I ASKED, “NO PROBLEM” HE SAID, THEN “ I OPINED THAT;S ALMOST 50 TO 75 MILES!” “NO BIG DEAL” he said.

THEN I LOOKED AT THEIR BOAT, A BEQUIA MADE TEAK BEAUTY, BUT? THEN I NOTICED THAT IT HAD (2) TWO YAHAMA 250 HP OUTBOARD ENGINES ON THE BACK! “YEAH, I GET IT NOW!”

“HOW MUCH DO YOU GET FOR THE CONCH,” OH, HE, THE HEAD GUY OF THE TEAM SAID, “OH, ABOUT \$25,000 TO \$30,000 US\$\$” AND WE SPLIT IT THREE WAS, WE EACH THE SAME.” NEEDLESS TO SAY I WAS FLABBERGLASTED!

THEN HE, THE HEAD GUY, SAID BACK TO ME:
“MON, YOU AMERICANS GOT IT ALL WRONG, YOU WORK FOR A YEAR OR SO TO SAVE ENOUGH TO COME TO OUR ISLAND, WE WORK FOR A FEW WEEKS TO MAKE ABOUT \$,7,5.-8,000 OR SO, WE GO BACK TO HOME AND PLAY FOR A FEW MONTHS, RUN OUT OF D’ MONEY, MAYBE, THEN GO BACK TO MAYREAU TO GO FISHIN’ FOR A FEW WEEKS AND THEN HOME TO PLAY AND REST AGAIN.

CAN’T SAY IT DIDN’T MAKE ME THINK! BUT I DID WANT TO CONVINCING MY KIDS THAT THEY NEEDED A GOOD EDUCATION! AND THEY DID GET ONE, ALONG WITH SOME SAILING EXPERIENCE!

BILL SENA