

Paradise

What could go wrong?



A Tale of Unbelievable
Happenings and Circumstances

DOUGLAS M. HOY



Two lighthearted stories detailing how, even during those beautiful days on the water along the gulf coast of Florida, everything can be turned upside down. This change in circumstances can be due to Mother Nature and her whims. This time, however, these misfortunes are due to a few of author Douglas Hoy's wrong decisions. Although caution and careful plans are laid down before he launched the boat, events dramatically altered those plans.

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Douglas Hoy

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Acknowledgement

We can only guess if this book will turn out wonderfully successful or there will be only a few of these lying around collecting dust, propping up wobbly tables, or starting next winters fire in your fireplace. However it works out there are two very special people to whom I owe so much in getting this book to you.

She is truly a long time very good friend. She brought not only personal confidence to me but the knowledge and experience I never knew was required for such a project. She is someone who lent not only her experience in editing but gave confidence to me when I had little. This wonderful person to whom I owe so much is Kathy Morse. She did all of the thankless tasks to which I never knew had to be done to get a book off the ground. Add to that she was the second biggest believer not only in the stories themselves but also in me masquerading as a writer.

Most importantly to my beloved sister Dianne to whom I can never say thank you enough. Through my entire life you have been my constant, my confident, the only person to whom I could always go to with whatever was concerning me. Simply to my, forever has been and forever will be, best friend. Without you none of this would have been possible. Without you most of my life would not have been possible. I dread to think where I would have been without your council, without you being behind me, without you in my life. Thank you sis, from wherever the bottom of my heart starts to the ending of the stars, which never limited your vision of things to be accomplished, thank you. You simply are the best, without an equal.

About the Author

Douglas Hoy was born in a small Midwestern farm town in Michigan in the early 50's, the third in a family of five children. Raised basically like all children of that location and era, with the same advantages and disadvantages, he graduated from the school system within the normal allotted years. He attended one of the local colleges but shortly decided the military would be more to his liking.

With that he spent four years in the Air Force with one of those years serving in Thailand during the Viet Nam War. Upon leaving the service he spent some time in the West and Midwest before settling in the panhandle of Florida where he has resided for over the past thirty years.

Over these past three decades he has lived an interesting life in Florida trying to enjoy times, events, and the people who aided in the richness of his life. He also has maintained steadfast communication with his friends and family members in Michigan which, with the passage of time, has not always been easy. But he has managed to collect a grand group of acquaintances and friends along the way where stories and situations seem to be no further than the next conversation.

As of this day he still resides in Panama City Florida. His son still lives in the same area and his daughter, married living in the St. Louis area, has blessed him with two beautiful granddaughters.

Beers, Beach, and Buddies

Saturday morning, much like many other starts to the summer weekend, came up bright and warm.

“Going to get up into the low nineties today,” I complained to my neighbor as I walked towards his yard.

“Thank god the humidity will be only ninety percent” Bob barked back as he scanned the tree tops for tell-tale signs of wind.

As a man who is more comfortable on water than on land Bob scans the tree tops for traces of a breeze which is just part of his early Saturday morning routine he follows religiously. At 6 a.m. a small breeze at 65 feet in the tree tops means the possibility of 3 to 4 foot seas in the Gulf of Mexico by 10:00 a.m. with choppy bays. Not that this will stop him from going out he just wants to know what is in front of him. A man with a 100 ton captain’s license just does this kind of thing.

Bob wanders past me heading for my front door. We both are trying to shake off the lingering effects of a Friday night playing friendly poker, having a couple of adult drinks, at maybe too late an hour. It is almost a weekly occurrence which never seems to grow stale. There is a satisfying comfort interacting with close friends in our neighborhood. It seems to be a reassuring collection of relationships which may become rarer with the passing of each generation. Most all are your friends; people with whom you have shared many meals and secrets.

“Well are you heading out?” I said following a non-planned, but almost routine banter of Saturday morning question and answer segment. I know Bob cannot resist a good day of fishing, or, even a bad day of fishing, as long as he can launch the boat and return.

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“Don’t know yet, damn motor will probably cut out on me anyway. I need to have some coffee first. Do you have any ready?”

“Can’t go with you today, just too busy” I informed Bob. We both know I have no intentions of going nor has he had any intentions of taking me. This is an unspoken agreeable contract we have based totally on past bad experiences by me when I did try to go fishing, indeed if that was fishing.

I never have gotten into fishing; it’s never been a big passion of mine. Yes, I know how tens of millions people love it, how great it must be, how beautiful, how peaceful the Gulf of Mexico is, and on and on. I simply don’t care. There is absolutely nothing about the process which I find enjoyable: from getting the boat ready with poles and bait, the launching, going out into the heat, the stagnate smell of the salt air plus being in it, getting the sticky slime of bait all over you, possibly catch the nasty fish, to then going home to clean both boat and the catch of the day, if there was one. So thank goodness for the cookout which usually follows such trips later in the evening. It’s during these cookouts the conversations and life really begins.

“Wasn’t planning on taking you, Mr. Bad Luck” as Bob continues our verbal routine.

I am not real sure how my home became the early morning coffee place. I know it is not because of fine home furnishings, Danishes served, or exotic coffee as I offer none of these. No, I think it is more basic than that. I have a large full pot and it is always ready at 5:30 a.m. We are but simple people.

So now that we both have our full cups of coffee, we settle in front of the TV to watch the sports recap or some car auction. We

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really do not care all that much about the sports; it's just on for noise. The car auction is a bit more interesting, but not by much. A slow parade of old and classic cars as we used own roll across the screen taking us back to a day when they, and we, were both young at heart and in much better shape.

Much of our early morning banter varies in topics from sports, the cars which are being auctioned on TV, to any personal situations. However we do seem to make an effort to try not to let the conversation denigrate into the dreaded abyss of politics. No place for such serious depressing words on a beautiful Saturday morning.

On occasions I do find the discussions of the governmental situations with Bob to be interesting and informative. He is a bit more politically savvy than I and we think on different levels. This could be the result of the paths our lives have taken, the different types of jobs, or where and how we were raised. No matter the reason it lends nicely to our difference of opinion, but yet, our basic core beliefs are similar.

Somewhere along our early morning Saturday ritual our neighbor Wayne comes through my front door. Knocking is not really required, nor is it done. He is a completely likeable man who will do anything for you without hesitation. Wayne is a good mechanic and carpenter, somewhat of a plumber, if any of us truly are, and all around handyman. If you put a rumpled hat and old jacket on him, he would look just like Jed Clampet. I have always known he must be a good man as my son's dog has always just loved him.

As we sit observing the antique and muscle car auction Wayne always has something to contribute being somewhat of a motor head himself. Like all of us with our stories, which have been told

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more than a few times, he will go into a “remember when” on one car or another that he or a neighbor owned. Hell, we all do that. I guess it is one of the good things about this group of friends. No matter how many times you may have heard that tale being told you listen as if you have never heard it before. Respect among friends; is nothing more valued?

The conversation begins to slow a bit. We all have small projects to accomplish before the sun becomes too high in the sky. So about 8:00 the meeting comes to an unofficial end, the company decides to disperse. The coffee is gone; I am not serving breakfast, so there is no additional reason to hang around. There is stuff to be done, major repairs to be handled, and unknown problems to create. The dog sits sadly as she hates to see Wayne leave. She will follow the exodus as far as the edge of the yard, turns with a sigh, and lopes back to the house. I imagine it is hot outside for the dog as well.

Now on this particular Saturday there must have been a crack in the universal time continuum or some planetary shifting. If I had a paper to check I am sure I would have seen that hell had just frozen over. Something out of character was about to happen which would almost bring the day to a tragic end.

Bob, the forever professional boat captain, later came back and asked me if I wanted to go out on the boat today. He wanted to test the boat motor he had been working on over the past few days. He is always working on that motor, just part of the joy of owning a boat I suppose. I guess he needed someone to assist in yelling help if something went wrong. As an inducement he threw in the offer of beer and burger. That is about all it took. We used to do this more frequently in years gone by, but as of late he has done more fishing of which I choose not to participate.

“Just going to take the boat out for a short run, maybe stop at Schooner’s for a burger and a beer. If you aren’t too busy doing nothing why don’t you come along.” Given such an offer with no serious intent of fishing does not come often. This weekend, like most, I had not much going on. So with the beach and beer as inducements, and fishing not mentioned, how could I pass it up?

Launching the boat went smoothly. I recall the initial launch of my sailboat a few years ago which turned out to be anything but smooth. A regular Gilligan’s Island three hour tour type of event except no Mary Ann, just Bob. But that is another lesson for another day. We pushed off about 10:30 A.M. and we were on our way.

Middle of the summer, mid morning, and it is already 87 degrees and rising while racing the humidity to 100. Being on the water does not help diminish the oppressive heat nor my genuine dislike for our summer-time weather. But I am here and out to enjoy the day; best I can, with my good friend and neighbor. Had I only known how the day would end up I would have taken a job herding cats.

We casually moved out of the bayous and into the main bay, which at the moment contained a small chop. This does nothing more than aide the boat in a gentle roll as we skimmed across the top of the bay. The sun shone brightly on the water turning it to that brilliant shade of turquoise blue which truly is quite a unique color all unto itself.

We bounded along the bay. The tree lined shore showing off its cape of snow white sandy beach which is ever prominent along the water’s edge. The serenity of it all provides an avenue to allow one to forget all those problems which were weighing you down just a short hour ago. Each turn and curl along the shore

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exposes something new: nesting of some cranes, mackerel leaping out of the water, and sometimes, a dolphin or two will break the surface. It is all quite lovely and tranquil from this vantage point as we skimmed over the top of the water with the gentle hum of the motor behind us. This is truly a great way to begin a day at the beach. A shame anyone would want to ruin all of this by fishing.

Our first stop along our way is a place called Shell Island. A number of years ago this western part of the island was attached to the mainland. However a few decades ago the Corps of Engineers cut a pass through this section to aid in the shipping. Their efforts gave a deep and wide passage to facilitate the large cargo ships coming to the Port of Panama City. I guess in the late 1890s and early 1900s a good number of ships were lost trying to find the way to the only safe passage into the harbor at the east end. This proved to be a maneuvering task much harder to successfully complete. To that end they cut what is now called the West pass and Shell Island was born.

The island has its own history. I believe at one time it did have one or two private homes on the island. Now just some wild and small deer stay the night and tourists only visit during the day. The people who built their cabins certainly had to be self sufficient as there was, and is, no electricity or plumbing on the island. These small inconveniences seemingly did not bother those hardy folks. I guess these structures served as a good vantage point as they got the first good look at any hurricanes coming ashore. A matter of no electricity or water was of a small worry to those folks who built these structures only one foot over sea level and in the direct path of hurricanes coming this way.

The island holds interest for tourists and locals alike. The east end of the island is where you can see some very large and

impressive boats anchored off as well as anchored together. This is the place in the local boating world to go to see and be seen. For a couple of guys out on a boating adventure this is always a splendid place to begin your day.

Whenever we launch, no matter where we think we may be going; we always take a run by the Island. If not then the trip really seems to be short of at least a basic goal. Today was no different as the warmth of the sun and the distant siren sounds of the island tugged at one's desire to come and join the fun.

Now, as a general rule, it does not take much encouragement for Bob to pull in and anchor off the boat. Certainly a ritual we have completed many times. However today just did not seem like a good day for this. It just seemed like we had another mission in mind, almost a different destiny to fulfill, so lingering on the island today just did not feel like the thing to do.

Nope, no reason to stop here today was Bob's belief. "Want to head down to Schooners for that beer?" he asked. As I felt this is what Bob really wanted to do I was happy to agree as Schooners is a great place and certainly one of the last true beach bars along our section of the gulf coast. From where we were it was only about seven minutes by boat. After conferring on our new plan, we departed slowly, trolling just offshore of Shell Island, ever watchful of the people lingering at water's edge. You never can tell, there may just be a couple of female tourists in need of guides to the area. After a few courteous waves to beach goers on the Island, we turned and full throttled west to Schooners.

As mentioned Schooners is one of the last true beach bars in our area. Let your imagination conjure up any tropical beach movie of such a place. Most people drive to this open-aired structure where, in the past, I have spent endless hours over countless

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weekends just hanging out. On any given sunny, warm, salty air filled summer day, you will find hundreds of sun worshipers hanging out. You have your drinkers, your volley-ballers, and your serious sun bathers (which always seemed like an odd term to me,) from kids to grandparents, and of course women covering every description.

Pulling up to Schooners by boat, all depending on what type of boat you have, one can anchor off at any distance or take it into shore. However the shore landings are pretty much reserved for jet skis or flat bottom boats. This seemed to be a typical day as there were seven boats already anchored off shore before our arrival. One of the major points to consider while anchoring your boat is the distance for the swim to the beach.

It is important to know that there are two small sandbars which run all along the coast line of our beaches. The two of them are about fifty feet apart with the first one being generally one hundred feet off the shore line. Now this is not a constant as the distance from the shore line can vary, the water depth from the shoreline to the first sand bar can change dramatically, as well as the depth between the sandbars. This remains true up and down the twenty six miles of pure white sandy beaches we are so fortunate to have in this area. This whole endeavor is something Bob and I have done many times on many occasions. If I have to give an average I would say four to five times a summer. So it is no big deal right? Anchor off, put your credit card in a plastic bag, jump in the normally very warm eighty-five degree water, and after a five minute swim, there you are on shore.

Bob puts the boat into position between the two sand bars which is usually about eight foot deep on average between them. He brings the boat in, swings it around so the bow is facing south into the waves. Upon his command, I throw out the bow anchor

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which catches the soft sandy bottom. As a good first mate, for which I barely qualify, I do nothing unless instructed-- other than panic. I do that well on my own without any prompting from anyone. A moment or two later, Bob throws off the stern anchor, sets it and we are good to go. We do a bit of house cleaning on the boat before we leave as there is always something to be put away. If nothing else, empty beer cans always seem to be present.

So with the chores taken care of, off we go. A bit of courtesy of the sea I have learned is that, in a situation such as this, you do not leave the boat until the captain is ready to leave the boat. Again Bob and I have done this many times, so the routine is most familiar. So we each are perched on the stern, either side of the motor, and as if Otto Preminger was filming from the shore, we dive into the Gulf of Mexico.

Now, if I did not hate the heat, humidity, salt water, and sea gulls so much, this would be an ideal place as it is probably too many. I know I am the odd man out. I understand my position and I basically keep these feelings to myself or closest friends. But I have lived here three decades trying to become acclimated to it all: I don't think it is going to happen.

The water has the Hollywood color of turquoise-green you have seen in every south sea saga. The temperature of the gulf is an unbelievable eighty-seven degrees. It becomes that warm around the middle of May and stays there until mid October. Now if you love the warm salty sea, you cannot find many places which would be more to your liking than here along the gulf coast.

Swimming to the shore it feels like being immersed in Mother Nature's own warmth and protection. The waves, which are rarely large, were somewhat more powerful today than usual.

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But we are swimming with the waves into shore so they just seem to carry us along and swimming becomes almost effortless.

The swim on this day required so little effort; it was easy to carry on a conversation between us. On many days one could stop and stand on the sand bar closest to shore. Then it begins dropping off to again to about eight feet in depth. The total distance from boat to land was only seventy-five yards. Although I am certainly not in as good swimming shape as I was many years ago (when I was a life guard and taught water safety) I still made it with ease. Again the swim ashore was something which I had done so many times throughout my decades of living here.

Walking up out of the water near Schooners we strolled over the warm, white, powdery sandy beach. This truly is the most amazing sand along the coast. I have visited many other beaches elsewhere in the world but I've never found sand such as we have in this area. I have been told it has been washing up like this for over millions of years and comes around the gulf coast by way of the water currents coming from South America. Not sure how true all that is, but it does not matter. Wherever it comes from, you will never sink your toes into a more comforting powder of snow-white cushion no matter where you travel.

But as you might suspect we were not overly taken with the sand today. Maybe we are a bit too used to it. Living here as long as we have just gives one a jaded view to it all. What we, as very normal men, never become tired of is the collection of women who frequent this area and in particular, the area behind Schooners.

Schooners is just the perfect place for a couple of middle-aged men which, by the way, I will be forever-- no matter what age I am. It is a wonderful cross section of femininity ranging in age

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from “we are invisible to them” to, “man, look at the young stuff.” We hope to gain conversation with a few women who fall someplace in between.

I have talked with many people at this place over my very fortunate years of coming here. You can always, and I mean always, find someone here who will be eager to spend some moments in conversation with you. All the beach goers seem to have this one thing in common. Always happy and always glad to be here, right where they are at, and want to be no place else. Such is the allure of the beaches and Schooner’s well known, and with good reason, as the last local beach bar.

So we begin our ascent towards the bar ever aware of the folks around us. With the call of the sea gulls in the distant background we wander past the smell, and the view, of suntan products being applied to some of the prettiest women you can find anywhere. You feel the heart-warming cries of laughter by folks from five to sixty-five to be only slightly muffled by the variations of individual’s music coming from all of today’s sound producing appliances. A true cross section of locals and visitors, all getting along so wonderfully, makes you wonder how there can there be problems in this world. But our small quest for the day is the cold beer and people to befriend.

There is always someone, or multiple someone, of which to pass a bit of time. However, due to the vast expanses of white sand with the blinding sunshine reflecting off of it, and to the sheer number of bodies to be culled through it is not as simple as one might guess. And, if it is just too much to overcome on a casual walk, then there is always the bar itself, Schooners.

Wonderful place this Schooners. Thankfully, about fifteen years ago, it was almost destroyed by a hurricane which we do see in

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this area from time to time. I say thankfully as before the storm this place was not quite the same. Before that fateful day this place was indeed well known and popular. Much of the activities that had taken place then take place now. However, thanks to the storm, the side facing the water, naturally, took a big hit. Thanks, I assume, to some insurance money they rebuilt the outside deck giving it twice the area capacity, added a couple of higher points of observation, and most thankfully remodeled restrooms. Anyone who had visited the old building will know exactly what I am talking about. Hell, the owners now joke about it as well. The old facilities were just one step up from a port-a-let. But now, as then, no one came here for the restrooms. No it is the food, the drinks, and the view: all fitting in here in the very best kind of a Jimmy Buffet kind of way.

At 12:30, early afternoon on a hot sun filled summer day, the lunch of choice is beer and make it very cold. Oh, well maybe a burger along the way, but for the moment just the beer. Looking back just one more mistake I made which lead to the day's activities. I got the first of what normally are only a couple rounds of beer. To me a beer is a beer, but not to Bob. Due to our past drinking history I know the kind of beer he prefers. Of course this is all subject to change.

Bob is a unique and rare person. He is helpful to a fault. There are so many examples of his kindness and generosity, not only to his friends and neighbors, but he also extends his caring to people who have the terrible task of working for him in the company's chain of command. If need be, he not only gives use of his personal possessions -things to him which are just that things - but he is more unselfish with his time, a finite commodity to say the least.

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During the aftermath of a recent hurricane I have seen him load his truck and personal trailer to pick up badly needed supplies and deliver them to employees living hundreds of miles away. Not just once but four times in a given week of this particularly bad storm. This was all done at his own personal expense. When many stand around wondering what to do to help he is already underway.

At the same time he will pull a practical joke on someone, anyone, and most times you do not know it is happening until the "gotcha" comes slapping you in the face. I have been at the end of those pranks and you admire, if you have the proper balance and sense of humor, the time and effort it took to set many of them in motion. However many of them are spur of the moment and those seemed to be the most powerful.

On any given Saturday night we congregate at his house, thankfully next to mine, where he does most of the work preparing for a cook out. He is truly a man in motion. Food is good, but it is the conversations and the many friends who show up which make each gathering a unique and entertaining evening.

On those nights when the air is just right, stars all aligned, Bob and I seem to try to outwit the remainder of the group by coming up with the most ridiculous stories off the cuff to see who we can pull in, to get them to believe, that what we are telling them is actually based in fact, which of course, it is not. Certainly the only kind of fishing I enjoy. During the years of carrying on in this manner we have learned not to believe one another longer. What would be the point? I know there is only a very slim chance that what I am hearing coming from him, or the other way around, contains a single word in it which could be connected to a truthful statement.

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Yes Bob is a great humanitarian in his own right, a loyal and grand friend, terrific neighbor, and a good teller of tales and can almost make up as good and believable a story/lie, on the spot as I. He may have a rebuttal for that final point.

This brings me back to the point: he also fancies himself as a beer expert. He isn't but we go along with him. Can't tell how much blueberry beer and honeysuckle ale I had to gag down hoping not to have to see it again later. I come from an area of the United States that if it wasn't PBR long neck then it was probably a communistic plot. But here at the beach I did feel comfortable getting our tried and true. Plus, again, beer is never what any trip is all about. It is just a prop for whatever the real goal was in the beginning.

On our walk up to Schooners there were two ladies who met the age and the ever changing and lowering of the standards which we hold dearly. Each lady seemed to be seductively stationed upon her sun chair with a covered top to prevent too much of the direct sun rays. They had brought all of the right equipment for a day at the beach. Well they had to hand carry to the shore what the good lord did not give to them, and with these two ladies he was most generous. We had spoken to them most briefly as not to overdo our first meeting confident we would be returning. The conversation was just enough to know that what they truly wanted, and needed, was a boat ride and we just happened to have such a craft anchored off to make everyone's afternoon just that much better. This has been successful for us in the past. If nothing else we are servants to the community. Our confidence level had grown exponentially on our wandering to the bar. A few friendly jabs at one another, a couple thoughts on what was to transpire for our afternoon and certainly our evening, were set-- at least in *our* minds.

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We made it to the outdoor beach bar and watched from afar, these two gifts to us mere mortals, in the confines of Schooners. After just one beer each we decided it time to move this along. After all there were conversations to be had and plans to be made.

Standing along the rail of the bar you get a panoramic view of the cool blue sky and, looking west as far as you can gaze, there is nothing but miles of pure white sandy beach set in a discernible white haze of light being reflected off the same sand. People covering every part of the tapestry of life stretching far into that single point in the distance. Slowly we consumed our beverages taking in the vista. Plus we also wanted to make sure no unwanted interference would show up in the forms of boyfriends or husbands with the two ladies with whom we had just had such a wonderful conversation. Certainly those showing up would be a thrill killer for the two of us.

Upon waiting what we believed to be the appropriate amount of time, we ordered another beer, drank about half and headed out to the beach for the rest of our planned, spontaneous glorious day. Confidence abounding, an internal smiling heart to be sure, we knew this was to indeed be a wonderful afternoon.

We did not really need that second beer as there was plenty on board plus it is damn difficult to swim with one in your hand. Salt water just does not go well as a chaser for beer. But looking back it must have been fate intervening compelling us to get that second beer. Obtaining our drink gave us just enough of stall time. As we started our descent onto the beach and to our waiting opportunity, it was then, either the dreaded boyfriend or husbands, showed up fifteen yards ahead of us. Buzz killer non-paralleled. We guess it was either one of the two hated groups by

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the warm and friendly greeting they received. Yes, it should have been our greeting, but not meant to be.

After a number of years of this type of activity, of the trial and error, the near misses and the home runs, I have found comfort in the following belief. I know in my heart that this type of wandering contains no exact science. You take your shots and hopefully become smarter, better, or just stay on the boat.

So with our egos dented, but our heads held high as no one knew of our now dashed plans but us, we valiantly made our way to the safe confines of the boat just seventy-five yards away. The welcoming warm blue-green water of the Gulf of Mexico helped soothe and lift our spirits from the heavy hearted rejection which we had just absorbed. We knew the day had just begun and some kind of adventures still laid ahead, just not sure at the moment what kind of adventures they might be or to where they would lead. But this was like every other trip Bob and I had made together.

The swim back was about as easy as the swim in even though you were going against the waves. Unless the waves are over three feet they do not pose much of a situation. By the time we got to the boat all thoughts of our most recent rejection and what was almost to be had disappeared. Off for more positive situations with more positive attitudes. Easy to think at the time but I did not know what was ahead.

Bob, as captain, was first on the boat; not because he is captain it is because he is the only one who knows for sure how to get back into the thing. This is not a pleasure boat as you see on the ads with their open decks, seating for twenty, and their ladders. Yes the ladders.

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This is mainly a fishing boat which does not require such extra refinements. I am usually in agreement with Bob on many things, but come on now, how about at least a ladder. Nope, this is a fishing boat so such luxuries are not allowed.

For those of you who do not know, nor have never tried, it is no small task hoisting oneself back into some fishing boats while you are bobbing about in the water. The stern is the lowest point so that is where you start; but the top of that lowest part is still at least a two foot above your head and reach. So you endeavor to pull yourself up, but the problem is where to place your feet because you are going to need the help of your legs. I can tell you where, there is no such place!

You have only one spot which is just barely wide enough to place a small portion of your foot on in order to give you the leverage and extra strength you will need just to begin your challenge to get back aboard the floating pile of fiber glass. This spot on Bob's cruiser is part of the lower foot of the motor eight inches above the prop. The prop is that thing which pushes the boat forward and can act like a shredder on the human body.

In these two foot seas with the boat going up and down continually, you are trying to hit that four inch square spot with the ball of your foot. Hopefully you do not wear as size 14 shoe.

You have to raise your foot up to about waist high while pulling with all your might on the top of the stern. Then, with a mighty pull and scream, you lift yourself up, swing your other leg over the back of the stern, try not to land on some errant hook which may have been missed in the clean up process, and using your best hip move as if playing Twister, you are aboard. All this is predicated of course on that your foot does not slip off the four

inch spot. I have complete easier and more enjoyable tasks, such as catching a rabid dog

Again here time and experience was a help to me. This exercise in forced aerobics took me only about half as long as someone who had never had to attempt this climb before. All the while, Mr. Sympathetic, is bitching at me; bellowing out commands and comments. He reminded me of the drill sergeant in the first half of the movie *Full Metal Jacket* and how he would just berate one of the slower troops. He would yell at him, cuss at him, and ride his flabby butt, right up to the point when the troop shot his ass dead. The thought, yes the thought.

Well, we are back on board and ready to move out again. Bob fires off the motor, I pull up the bow anchor (I do know a few of the duties,) grab two beers, sit next to the captain and say "What's next"?

The motor not only sounded good but preformed wonderfully. On top of his many talents Bob is an excellent mechanic, auto mechanic that is, but not so much with an out board motor. On almost any project, throwing caution to the wind, spending multiple extra dollars, and having the abilities of a drunken orangutan, yet with the confidence of female praying mantas, just before she devours her mate; Bob will attack it with grand vigor.

Many times, a bit more caution and common sense should have been used, but on most, if not all, weekends they are in short supply in the neighborhood. However to our pleasant surprise the work he did on his motor, this time, turned out to be one of his more correct and successful attempts. Rapidly we were on level surface again, heading west.

Now, if you recall, one piece of the whole adventure in paradise thing was a burger. Well within two minutes of running full out, Bob had a Homer Simpson moment. He turned to me, and with a few expletives, reminded me he was hungry and that we forgot to pick up one of Schooners world famous hamburgers. I guess the euphoria of our perceived afternoon conquest just killed the idea of eating or replaced that same idea. Great thing around here is that every bar with a view of the gulf and sand sitting next to the southern entrance proclaims to have the world's most famous beach burger. So, to me, it is no big loss as there are new horizons that are, well, just off the horizon.

"Not to worry. We are heading directly at Spinnaker and I am sure they will have something to eat which will keep you happy" I told Bob in a half hearted effort in soothing his new found discomfort.

"That's why I have you along" Bob remarked. "No panic, always Mr. In-Control with the right answer and the right course of action". Probably a bit of sarcasm, but it just seems to work with us. Spinnaker it was to be.

The run to this large beach bar known as Spinnaker was brief. From place to place at normal speed in Bob's boat takes no more than five minutes if that. But you are separated by decades in the difference of the style of the two clubs. I guess this may be due to the clientele they attract or the age group which claim these places as their home for the summer sunny season. And next door to Spinnaker is another very large club. Now there are major differences between these neighbors as they certainly attract a different level of age groups. I will try to give you a bit of unauthorized history of these two world famous beach clubs.

Douglas Hoy

Spinnaker is now considered the large Beach Club and restaurant while its neighbor considers itself to be a large “super club” as it likes to be called. Both their heritages reach back roughly about 30 years and go something like this.

Spinnaker was the first of the two large beach clubs in this area. In the early going with its multilevel decks, pool, large open seating along the rail looking out over the beach, and the air conditioned (thank you) inside restaurant and dance arena this was “the place” to go if you were between the ages of 17 to 25. During spring break it was amazing how many young people came into this place.

Spinnakers neighbor came along about five years later. They build a club similar to Spinnaker but never quite the same. The owners were different who had very different ideas. As you might guess a friendly feud began.

Over the years Spinnakers neighbor grew in physical size as well as notoriety to such a point that the building itself is 35% larger than its original construction and has taken over the younger, 17-25 crowd.

So with this, the older more mature Spinnaker, changed it focus and turned into the Beach Club and Restaurant you find today. They closed off the pool, changed their scope to not only attracting the families and crowds of the past but sought after the thirty and over clientele, and in effect attracted more people than ever before. Their neighbor went on to raise the bar with wet T shirt contest and all of its spin offs to whole different standard. Well, you could judge for yourself if the standards were raised or lowered.

PARADISE: What Could Go Wrong

The two clubs have their own identity, their own age brackets, and their own way of going about making thousands of customers happy each year. Spinnaker continues to grow by adding new dimensions both physically and new cuisine offerings to past and new customers. By adding their new Cantina with their own style of food and live music, keeping the overall musical tone to the classic rock and roll along with a mix of reggae and dance music, they have set the tone for years to come.

So the two places now co-exist in a friendly manner like the Hatfield's and McCoy's. However the only shots you hear come out of the outrageously loud outdoor speakers or the T shirt cannons they shoot off. Between the two clubs, they occupy over 500 feet of some of the most expensive, and beautiful, shore line you can find anywhere; which during the summer is usually filled with young hard bodies from all over the world. At the wiser and attained age both Bob and I have achieved we are allowed to look, but don't touch. And through the years, these two Mecca's of the glorious sun seekers have stood the test of time: lawsuits, hurricanes, and an onslaught of named musical groups on their way up to stardom or on their way down.

I say all of this to try to give you an idea of the landscape. Between the two buildings there is over 500 feet of shore line *usually*, during this time of year, covered up with the seekers of skin cancer, catamarans, Para-gliding boats, jet ski rentals, the powder white sand, and an occasional peace officer who pulled the brutal duty of beach patrol on a four wheeler. From shoreline to building is about 100 feet. As with afore mentioned Schooners, many people come and anchor off and swim to shore. Really the only thing that seemed to change was the location, the age of the

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beach goers, and the size of the buildings, but not much else. That unique beach feeling is ever so present.

Bob pulls back on the throttle and lets the boat slow down on its own. Within a few moments, it almost comes to a stop as we begin to idle into position. Waves are a bit higher here than just a few miles down the shore we left no more than ten minutes ago. But again, this is not unusual or any real cause for concern.

As before, we locate the sand bars so we can anchor off and make our swim into Spinnaker. We prefer Spinnaker over its neighbor, I guess. The crowd will be more our age although we still, on average, will be on the more mature side from most of the other patrons. Additionally it is past lunch time and we are after food and not the head banging sounds coming from the club next door. A small plus to being at Spinnaker's is we know a couple of the waitresses here which is always good for a complementary reward.

Bob swings the boat into position between the sand bars as we had previously done at Schooners just a short time ago. As soon as the bow was facing south and into the waves, I threw out the anchor. Upon it catching the bottom, the line becoming tight, Bob dropped the stern anchor and we began securing items on board. You would not think there would be that much to do as we just did the same thing less than ninety minutes ago. But you go through the steps no matter.

As I was finishing my chores I heard Bob yell some explicative of disbelief. "Damn, what the hell just happened to the stern line?" Turning around I notice the stern, which should be pointing almost straight north, was pointing more to the northeast.

“Did you just forget to drop the line or did you drop it only half way figuring we were not planning on staying that long?” I never pass up the chance to be a smart ass.

To which Bob replied, “No smart ass (see) the boat just moved. I guess the anchor did not catch.” The water is usually pretty clear at this depth of ten to twelve feet where the anchor should be resting but for some reason it was churned up today. At the time none of this seemed important. Signs people, read the signs as we did not do that day.

So I pull up the bow line again, watch some of the passing boats, well, gawking at some of the people on the passing boats, the captain repositioned the boat again, and we repeat the drill.

“Think you got it right this time or would you like me to come and set the stern anchor as well to make sure it holds?” I said in my best harassing voice.

“You know I can pull this thing out another 300 yards and you could try to swim it from there!”

“Oh I could make it and would probably have to carry your sorry butt with me for most of the way”

“Just drop the damn bow line and see if you can hit the water”

With this airing of differing points of view, and gathering of our stuff, we are ready to plunge in and see what the club Spinnaker had to offer. About ready to fall in, I hear Bob yell,

“Wait, wait!”

“What the hell is wrong now? You know I am going to stop coming on these trips with you, Bob, if you cannot get your shit together any better than this!”

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Bob steps down off the stern, took a couple of steps back, gave an "oh what the hell that can't be right look," grabbed his forgotten plastic wrapped credit card off the chair and climbed back on the stern.

"What the screw is wrong? Or is it just you- which would not be a surprise" I asked.

"No, something just does not look right. Not sure what it is but just a feeling" Bob said.

"What you really are saying is you damn near forgot your credit card and this is your cover. You know Bob; I do have mine with me."

"Yeah, but I have seen you try to use yours and today is not a good day to go to jail."

"Bring back bad memories for you would it?"

"No, but I have heard how much Big Bubba misses you and I do not want him to give me a personal message to bring back to you."

"Jealous?" I retorted.

With that, the exchange of friendly insults is over, and again on our mark for the movie, over we go. We have the credit cards in plastic in one pocket, your almost mandatory sunglasses somewhere on you, and for me a hat, always a hat. No hair, thank you, Mother Nature. No it is not a fashion statement or me trying to be hip. I just do not understand why men with a good head of hair would want to shave themselves bald. I have to wear a hat anytime I venture outside for any longer than thirty minutes. I hate hats.

Not surprisingly the water was just as warm here as four miles back up the beach. As I said a bit rougher but nothing we have not been in before. After the initial dive, a visual check with one another to make sure there are no problems and we start the swim. We are about ten yards from one another, and to our surprise, there were no other boats. That was curious all by itself given the location, the time of year, and time of day. Again, at the moment, it did not seem all that important.

The boat had been positioned roughly the same distance as before so the time of swim in would be about the same. Stroke, stroke, stroke, with the larger waves pushing behind me; the swim seemed as easy as before. As stated I used to be a life guard, although many years ago, in the northern part of the country and I did teach water safety. Water situations there, although similar in nature, are somewhat less challenging than in the Gulf of Mexico. No matter as I knew I was familiar, if not what you could classify any longer as proficient, in most of the basic swimming strokes. Besides, with such a short swim in, we'd be there in ten minutes tops.

A short time had passed and I stopped to tread water for a moment and see the whereabouts of Bob. I figured he would be a bit behind as he is not quite as strong a swimmer as I. Yep, I was right, about ten feet behind. No big deal. You would think with all of the time he spent in or near the water, he would be a stronger swimmer. Well, different talents for different folks.

Seems odd now, but he decided to do the same thing, at about the same time, checking on me. Never happened before and this seemed to be out of character for both of us. After seeing Bob, I turned around and noticed the boat. Hell, it seemed like I had traveled only twenty feet. It was almost as if I could reach out and touch the stern which seemed huge as it was rolling up and

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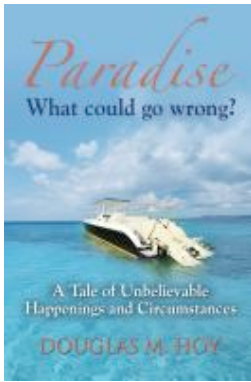
down in seas which seemed much higher from this prospective than they had on board. Even at this point it did not concern me. A glance Bob's way and he motioned he was heading back to the boat as the stern had rolled away again. His boat, expensive boat, and he was going to protect it. Fine, I motioned I understood, I was fine and I was going to swim in. So with quick thumbs up, small wave, and we both headed in our separate directions.

So the swim began in earnest although I did not think anything unusual. I had only seventy-five yards to go: done it many times, piece of cake. So, with a relaxed resolve I put my head back into the water, started my kick and my stroke believing in my heart and mind I would be walking on shore in a matter of only minutes.

Well, ok, this is far enough, time for a placement check. Did you ever have that moment in life, a moment you never wanted to have, and if it did come about you certainly never wanted to experience it again? Well looking around, I got the shock which I had never experienced before. A slight, yet significant, feeling of "Man, you may be in real trouble" came rushing over me.

After about six minutes total of swimming, a time to where I should be able to smell the burgers and hear the people, I looked around and I was alone, all alone. I had covered only a distance of about a quarter of what I should have by now. The boat was nowhere in sight. Later I would discover what had happened. But at that moment, the feeling of I may be in serious trouble, rammed into my heart like a fist from Mike Tyson.

I was not tired at this moment and I knew my abilities. From where I was I understood to make it to shore I would need to work slowly, using the slow and smooth strokes which I knew would conserve my energy, and not panic. Now I thought of that



Two lighthearted stories detailing how, even during those beautiful days on the water along the gulf coast of Florida, everything can be turned upside down. This change in circumstances can be due to Mother Nature and her whims. This time, however, these misfortunes are due to a few of author Douglas Hoy's wrong decisions. Although caution and careful plans are laid down before he launched the boat, events dramatically altered those plans.

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