

CHAPTER 9

BASTILLE DAY AND THE ENGLISH VAGABOND

There is an island legend that says when you visit Tahiti a string of elastic is made fast between the island and your heart, so that the further you journey from the islands the stronger will be the pull for you to return.

Other people who have been to Tahiti have told me it is spoiled by commercialism, and that it's "a dirty place".

They had also mentioned that the second time they came back they felt that it had become spoiled. I guess the greatest damage was the building of the International airport in 1960, which did away with the Sunderland flying boats.



*Black sand beaches of Matavai Bay where Capt Cook landed.
The Island of Moorea in the distance*

Then in 1961 the film "Mutiny on the Bounty" took the Tahitians away from their fields of taro, vegetables and fruit to give them good money for playing and having a good time being extras. Almost all Tahitians were in that film and most never went back to work again.

Captain Cook, in fact, on his second voyage there, said that Tahiti was being spoiled, and I imagine the process has been continuing ever since. But people who look for the worst will always find it, and will never see the beauty all around them.

Papeete means 'Water basket' in Tahitian and the water is the best you could imagine. There were two 'port' charges, one for the 'Pilot' and the other for water. Our luxury was fresh water 'on tap' from a hose on shore to the cockpit.

Being in port but living on our boat it was also necessary to set up a flush loo of sorts. For this we used the outboard well in the cockpit which, being

somewhat screened from the shore, gave us the privacy it was important to observe around civilized people – rather than our less constrained ablutions at sea with our naked butts hanging off the edge of the boat. A bucket dipped overboard and thrown through the well was our flushing system.

But the greatest luxury was to use the deep self draining cockpit as a bathing cubicle. At sea we heated up water in the kettle and used a bailing sponge to wash ourselves, but here in Tahiti we just poured that lovely fresh water over ourselves and soaped up. After being at sea for a while we liked nothing better than fresh water.



Scrubbed and squeaky clean I decided that first off I needed to check out the infamous Quinns bar where Noeline was supposed to have spent much of her time.

The blue wood and bamboo shack nestled pride of place along the waterfront quay with the beautiful umbrella of a Royal Poinciana tree giving shade outside.

However we were not yet true men of the world, and since I had never especially enjoyed pubs and booze just for the sake of boozing I was initially a little reluctant to walk into the bar. So for several days we sat down at Vaima's outdoor café some distance away to observe and gather courage. Vaima's is a favorite with locals and visitors alike as a place to sit and relax, have island coffee and croissants and watch the passing parade, and there was no better place to do it.

Eventually the time came to move closer and walk inside Quinns Bar. A big tall hefty Tahitian woman came to meet us. I guess we looked sort of looked lost and most definitely out of place.

“E! Me Suzy No-Pants what you want?” she asked running her sentences together in the way some people do when speaking what is basically a foreign tongue..

“I’m wondering if Noeline is here”

“Noeline no here she gone”

“Where to?”

“I no know she gone”

I felt sort of relieved; I wasn’t used to meeting girls like Suzy No-Pants and I really did not want to run into any of her sisters. It just wasn’t my cuppa tea in there and the fact that Noeline had apparently gone elsewhere saved us any further embarrassing situations. Others gamer than us told us of the communal toilets and, well, I won’t go into it.

More importantly, we were here for the Bastille celebrations.

Bastille Day is the

French national holiday, celebrated on 14 July each year. In France it is usually called *Fête Nationale* (National Holiday). It was established in 1790 to celebrate what would be a short-lived constitutional monarchy but it is also called Bastille Day because of its association with the storming of the Bastille. (Some modern writers suggest that since there were only seven prisoners in the Bastille at the time, the storming was a set-up to provoke retaliation against the peasants and in turn cause them to revolt and overthrow the monarchy which would then enable those behind the scenes – mostly banking families with no allegiance to anything but money – to take control of yet another country). [THAT STUFF MIGHT BE BETTER AS AN ENDNOTE TO THIS CHAPTER OR IN THE CAPTAIN’S LOG – OR DROPPED ALTOGETHER].

By the time we arrived in Tahiti this great fete had become an integral part of the French empire and France itself had gone from the horse and buggy to being one of the world’s nuclear powers – and its possessions in the South Pacific were chosen as an ideal testing ground, far away from home and far from the public eye or world attention.



Just as Russia has its May Day parade of military might through Red Square and the United States celebrates its Independence Day on July 4, French military might has always been associated with Bastille Day. So it was no surprise to see legionnaires of the French Foreign Legion parade before us during the celebrations in Papeete. But they seemed to bring a seediness with them that the French had imported for their atomic testing on the outer Tuamotu atolls. Their imposed arrogance on these legendary and pristine islands and the Tahitians had earned them the Tahitian name "Farani Taiero" "Farani" is the Tahitian word for French. "Taiero" means uncircumcised. As a phrase it is meant to be highly derogatory. Oddly enough, a future TV series called Star Trek would use the word "Farangi" in an uncomplimentary manner as well - but there's probably no connection.

All around us Tahiti's celebration of Bastille Day was under way. The festivities were opened on July 14 by a parade of decorated floats, only these were real floats----they floated on the harbor! Every one of them was covered in thousands of flowers. Then there were dancing and sporting competitions between teams from Tahiti and all the other islands in the region. Running races, races up a tree to get a coconut, running with specified loads of fruit, races for bicycles, races for paddled canoes-male and female - and races for outrigger sailing canoes.



For those who were not competing there were dozens of sideshows, coconut shy stalls, and other contests. There was a number of small colored canvas dance pavilions where you could go with a girl, pay 20 francs — Pacific francs, equal to about 20 cents — and dance a set of two songs. Then everybody was hustled out to pay another 20 francs to enter, when the music started again. These establishments used to play from Sundown till often 4.00 am the next morning — real tests of endurance for the musicians.

Back home in Blenheim our lives had revolved around work, my bike riding, and then after the accident that put an end to those dreams, creating a new one by building our boat which I believed would take us to a South Pacific wonderland where the women were at least approachable.

Dreams do come true.

During the Bastille Day festivities two French girls who apparently felt that two New Zealand blokes were worth the effort pulled up in a car early one

morning, beckoned us over, and in their broken English invited us to the Ball that night.

It turned out that it was one of the highlights of the festivities, the prestigious open air July 14 Ball where all the dignitaries would be present including their parents who were local French officials.

Somewhat stunned we gladly but dubiously accepted. So out came ties, shirts, suits and shoes that we had almost forgotten. It was a very grand occasion held on an immense wooden floor laid over a lawn and with banquet tables spread out among the trees.

I think it was from that experience in what I thought was making a complete arse of myself doing the Tamure at such a formal ball that I decided I was going to learn how to do it with the décor befitting a genuine South Sea Bum.

However, my social gaffe aside, we thoroughly enjoyed the place, particularly the novelty of the French atmosphere. Transportation was by way of "le truck", a flat-bed truck made into an Island bus by the simple addition of some wooden form seats and a colorful canopy.

Le Truck's use the markets for their departure and arrival Depot on the 117km round the Island tour. You can share Le Truck with Tahitians from the country villages all around the island together with the odd pig and produce loaded on the canopy. As well as trading, gossip and news would be exchanged and by the time they got home, the latest gossip, otherwise known as "the coconut radio" had done its job with all the happenings of the night and day before having been exchanged in animated and cheerful conversation punctuated by many a peal of laughter.

I think gossip is primarily designed for them by the gods as entertainment whereas many a time I heard it said that white people use gossip to hurt, and therefore find it difficult to live on an Island. Frankly I suspect that white people's gossip is nothing more than an emotional addiction to pumping up their own pathetic need for self importance at the expense of others.

Life in the islands is completely different. We would wander through the huge colorful markets taking in the sights and listening to the chatter, being swept up in the bustle, and trying the various foods that made such a change from the usual Kiwi fare of mutton and spuds and peas and carrots – not to mention canned food at sea. Here we saw people buying live fish from little tanks on wheels, vegetables, freshly baked bread, and relatively inexpensive continental imported cheese, "Rough Red" Algerian wine in barrels and Cologne from bulk containers.

Then, when the market closed about 8.30 am we would make our way through the back streets of town via the bakery, pick up some hot Baggett bread and continue on to the boat. On deck under a warm morning sun we would make breakfast from our still warm bread and indulge in what was a new experience for us.

New Zealand has its Weetbix or oatmeal for breakfast or its limp lettuce and marmite white bread sandwiches for lunch, but in Tahiti we discovered a much tastier way to start the day. We would dig a hole in one end of our Baggett

bread, insert a banana in it and call it a banana fuck. Breakfast was our main meal and the time when we would discuss the day's activities and make our plans before we either went our separate ways, did whatever needed doing on the boat, or plotted our next imaginary rendezvous with some exotic femme fatale.

My dreams were however almost shattered when I met one rather vocal randy yachtie on his way back from the hospital.

"I just had the big needle. Fuck them girls, I'm not going near them again" he winced in pain. "You know, 87 percent of the girls here have the clap."

The word picture he gave in his loud American accent conjured up visions of peeing barbed wire and razor blades and almost convinced us that we should cut ours off and put them in our pockets.

There must be some correlation between the extreme pain of childbirth and having the dreaded Gongo Dongo for just as a good religious woman will ignore the pain of child birth and go on to have another and another whether the family can afford it or not, two days later I noticed he'd forgotten the experience and he was back at it again. Maybe the allure of the hairy magnet was enough to overlay the recent pain. Whatever the case he was obviously years ahead of me. I decided I was going to keep myself to myself and I made that decision partly because as I looked at him I realized I had no idea where he'd been and maybe he was part of the reason why 87 per cent of the women had venereal disease. Being randy might be fashionable but I felt that being fashionable could also be stupid.

My big hopes were in tatters when who should turn up but the Rarotongan "Tere Party". The dance troupe had come to represent the Cook Islands at Bastille fete. They were friendly, attractive and so much fun to be with. They also spoke English and told us of the extreme differences they had observed between Rarotonga and Tahiti - mainly in the health department as one of them was a health officer back home. Perhaps that was why the visiting Raro girls were required to observe a curfew while in Tahiti.

With them we did the rounds of all the clubs, like popular Zizou, and Pitate Bar close across the waterfront Rue de Gaul near where Highlight was moored.

The tropical atmosphere with many people wearing flower leis, the whiff of the many street vendors cooking their own enticing BBQ treats mixed with sounds of the bands competing with one another was a far cry and a world away from cold evenings on New Zealand streets where somber members of the Salvation Army would beat their tuneless tambourines. We recorded the sounds coming at us and reveled in the tropical magic of Tahiti which drew so many outer island people and yachties to the Bastille celebrations.

Many of the nightclubs and bars featured New Zealand and Australian acts, and we became friendly with Lionel Kennedy from Australia and New Zealander Sonny Day, two members of a band playing at the Taaone Hotel. So for us the Taaone became a popular venue, and Lionel and Sonny introduced us to a couple of the other Hotel/night clubs that continued long into the night after the Taaone had closed. The mélange of French and Tahitian was never more complementary than in this sphere of entertainment and way of life spread before

us.

The 'fete' continued in full swing for several days with all the local dance and hotel bands playing sometimes till four in the morning.



In those riotous days and nights Dick was as happy as a pig in mud, a fish in water – a Kiwi in a pub – because there was an endless supply of grog on shore and he was determined to find and empty the last barrel. Perhaps I exaggerate. But stories always go over better when they're exaggerated, especially without malice. Anyway, this is how the story goes. The rest of us were taking time out on the boat one evening after the chaperoned Rarotongan girls had returned to their camp because they were under strict supervision and had to be home before their curfew. Some guys off another boat had come over for the evening and we sat on the cabin top eating cheese and Baggett with wine under the awning while fixing up Tahiti's political problems and all and sundry late into the night.

Then we heard "Ahoy 'Highlight!" It was Dick arriving home from a night on the town. He was as pissed as a newt standing on the shore wanting us to come and get him, but no one offered. We had the dinghy tied to an endless line through a pulley onshore and off the float deck. I pulled the line and the dinghy made its way to the rocks on shore. Dick clambered in and I began to none too gently pull the other line with him standing up holding a bottle of wine and trying to tell us about the great night he had.

Halfway out he lost his balance and went arse over kite into the drink. By now we were all lined along side laughing our insides out when Dick came to the surface spluttering something about a lost Beatle wig.

"Your what?"

"Me bloody Beatle Wig, I had a Beatle wig on and it's gone"

That caused more uproarious mirth. But Dick wasn't finished with being one.

He floundered alongside, wine bottle still firmly clasped in one hand and we pulled him aboard. Sopping wet, he stood up, wavered like a tree in a strong gale, took a swig of briny wine, made a face, belched loudly and staggered aft and over the cockpit coaming down into the outboard well. (Remember – the fancy spot for our loo now that we were in port because it had tapered sides with a copper lined board and could easily be flushed with a bucket of water?)

Dick had clearly lost his sea legs. And his land legs as well. There was a loud thud. And then a loud silence – except for our laughter at his self-induced predicament. But the silence continued too long. So we went to investigate and saw that Dick had fallen three feet through the hole and was jammed in there solid. We gathered around still in great mirth before David tried to pull him out, without success. We all gathered around to have a closer look; laughing had now stopped and the situation took on a rather more serious view. Drunk as a skunk, Dick was firmly wedged in a ship's head tight jacket---spaced out in another world.

David was closest so he did an inspection of Dick's condition and suddenly said with an edge of real concern in his voice: "Oh shit. Looks like we have a problem. He has ripped the skin and flesh up as he fell. Look at it!"

I passed David a torch and we all looked closer at the apparently mangled body below us. There was certainly a roll of something around his waist.

All of a sudden it came to me.

"Did someone just use the toilet?"

"Yes, I did" said Oleg rather sheepishly.

"And you didn't flush it?"

Living in Papeete was tremendously expensive, and we had to resort to shipboard fare the whole time we were there, apart from the delicious warm Baggett we bought straight from the bakery situated amongst the maze of narrow streets lined with old wooden buildings, giving a charm so unique for us. This with wonderful French cheese was to be our main diet. Mind you, we very soon learnt that the bread had to be eaten straight away or we could use it to beat off

those vagrant Tahitian women who kept trying to leap aboard. Ha!

One of our favorite pastimes was to see if we could get aboard one of the many cruise ships that called into port. We heard that the meals had lettuce salads and great food. It remained however, a wonderful thought.

Yachties were here from the four corners of the world, sailing the seven seas of adventure, and the wanderlust sparkled in their eyes. Many of them had had to battle and break convention to attain the worthiness to enter these Islands. And that set them apart from the mediocre.



“Highlight” next to “Valrosa” Papeete waterfront

Most were as poor as church mice but rich in experience. With few exceptions, their intent was to visit and meet with the people of distant lands. Prejudice toward the people and types of boats, they had none, but the interesting conversations we had with them over wine on deck in the balmy evenings didn't stop us from straightening up the politics of the place. They too did not judge us by us having a multihull. We could have had an old barge and in fact what looked like one pulled into port and there was no discrimination, only marveling that they accomplished the voyage. We were all out there cruising as opposed to talking about it. And we made many acquaintances with other cruising people that were later to deepen into firm friendships. We would keep in contact, re-unite or in other cases we would hear via the coconut radio where they had been.

Take it as a pun if you like, but yachties are drifters. They are characters. Many are misfits ashore because they tend to be loners who can enjoy their own company and their own thoughts rather than constantly measuring themselves against what society believes is “proper” behavior. To them, long and sometimes dangerous voyages into the unknown are what life is about, and when they get there they pause a while, meet and make new friends, become wise and canny about people in general, and then the call of the sea lures them on to yet another adventure.

Some of these people warned us that a ‘Weird Englishman’ who wanted a lift to some remote island in the Northern Cooks might approach us. They said he seemed suspicious, and all the other yachts he had tried had turned him away. We were intrigued.

After a few days the man found his way aboard Highlight. He introduced himself as Michael Swift, and we sat down on the cabin top under the awning out of the sun to chat. He was a tall, bearded Englishman, and so thin that he looked as though he would have to run around in the shower to get wet, and he looked as though he hadn’t done much of that either. He had thrown up his studies at a London art school seven years earlier to accept a bet that he couldn’t get to India from Paris for less than \$10. He had made it, and since then had been hitchhiking through South-East Asia and the Pacific.

He said he now wanted to go and live by himself on the uninhabited atoll of Suwarrow in the Northern Cooks group. Another bloke, Tom Neale, a New Zealander who we had met in Rarotonga, had lived there for six years and written a book, “An Island to Oneself”, about his experiences.

In contrast to other people’s reactions, we found Mike a really pleasant, intelligent guy, though reserved. Our immediate reaction to his request was: “Well, we hadn’t planned on going that way, but it sounds like fun. Sure, we’ll take you”. So he moved his few possessions aboard and we quickly became friends. The fact that he wanted to go to the atoll was the only justification we needed for taking him. We didn’t ask him his reasons, or wonder if there were deep motives. As far as we were concerned he didn’t have to explain himself, but eventually his story came out.

He was a very reserved guy whom people didn’t take to easily. The son of an English- university professor he had, after hitching to India, worked at odd jobs all through South-East Asia. The job, of which he was most proud, was being the big white Doctor in Malaysia. He walked around with an Indonesian selling drugs, milk powder etc to the unsuspecting local women. He didn’t speak their language and didn’t have to. He just had to smile and nod his agreement.

He was working in Hong Kong when he heard about a new Cook Islands trading schooner, the “Tagua”, being delivered to her owners in New Zealand. On impulse he got a job as crew, and eventually found himself in New Zealand.

On the trip he conceived the idea of living by himself on an island. The “Tagua” crew suggested Suwarrow would be the ideal spot. So Mike gave away money he had saved to get him home to England, and made his way to Tahiti.

He was a guy who couldn’t see any point in working to make money and buy a lot of material goods. He was tall and skinny, wore drab brown Indonesian

type clothes, but was an arresting figure. He had long brown hair, almost matted, a long beard to match, and a lot of liberal attitudes that people often didn't like. Because of his life and his attitudes most people, thought he was everything from a nut to a criminal and disliked him. So he wanted to go live on an island to get away from it all for a while. . It was the Robinson Crusoe life that I would like to try sometime if I ever have the strength of character to give away all the pleasures and material goods I enjoy, with the reservation that it would be with a Polynesian girl who knew what to eat and how, what fish were safe to eat and how to find cures for ailments if it happened.

Mike had done some research and found that it was not only possible to live on Suwarrow, but that he could make quite an idyllic life there. He could get all the sustenance he needed from coconuts and fish, with added supplements from birds' eggs — the island was a bird sanctuary. Fresh water was the only problem, but he had learned that there was a 400gallon water storage tank for collecting rainwater.

As we walked around Tahiti we worked out what utensils and equipment he would need by observing the bits and pieces the Islanders themselves used. The essentials included fishing gear, machetes and devices for scraping the meat out of coconuts, and as one Reuter's news agency later would have one believe, 2500 lighter refills.

However, we were not tied to a schedule and we had things to attend to before we could put to sea again.

Our first job on arriving in Tahiti was to remove the jury rudder and build a new one.



The jury rudder blade lined with copper

Aside from our days of jury rudder drifting our experience with the coral passes both in Rarotonga and Tahiti had also convinced us we needed to do something about our auxiliary power situation. Although it had become a matter of pride with us to go anywhere, even to tack through crowded anchorages onto moorings under sail like we did in the congested yacht filled bay at Russell these coral passes with their strong currents were a problem and could render an Island taboo to us.

Although we carried our own insurance in the form of good ground tackle which had proved so useful at our anchorages around Norfolk Island we knew a reliable engine would be a good investment and this was the place to buy one.

For once we had enough money, the remains of my building society bonus and without the high import duties that we had become accustomed to in New Zealand we were able to buy a 15 horsepower Work Twin Evinrude outboard of a type designed for powering heavy loads. It cost 33,000 Pacific francs, about \$340, and had ample power, with a fine-pitch propeller and was capable of pushing Highlight at 6 knots. And the dinghy at---goodness knows, ----it flew. We were to break several bottoms in it with the pounding it took in the ensuing years.

I then had to enlarge the well in the cockpit to take the much larger motor

and we found a new home for our old outboard motor. Spare parts were in demand here.

With these additions and the rudder once again replaced we were ready to explore Tahiti and its surrounding islands. The balance of the building society bonus money bought canned goods at the ships' provisioning store in Papeete. We've never felt that we needed much money — whenever gear, food or clothing has been needed we have somehow been able to scrape enough money together. We never had a lot but we always had enough. With the little we had we never did consider ourselves poor. We learnt to make a little money spin out a long way. We would sooner be cruising for along time with little than cruising for a short time with plenty. Truth is, we just weren't that addicted to work.

After all, we had no rent or housing costs. No insurance, no clothing for the four seasons, no shoes, and no car payments. As for food — well in places like Papeete only food and the cost of fresh water from the nearby hose were essential expenses while in Rarotonga and in less "commercialized" islands we lived native style and it cost us next to nothing.

If we had an extravagance it was color film and clothing. Our footwear requirements were simple. Bare feet. Sandals we did have to protect our feet from sharp coral in case we had to again jump over the side entering a coral pass.

The rest of our wardrobe consisted of light and simple underclothes and a couple of pairs of shorts or light trousers. However we "splashed" on some of the gaily colored, boldly patterned pareu print shirts, some of which were hand printed and beautifully tailored by Chinese seamstresses under the local French influence. Give 'em one thing; the French women know how to dress with neatness and style, often quite simply but certainly with flair.



Criterion cycle race through back streets of Papeete

After a couple of weeks in Papeete Johnnie moved off the boat to stay with relatives. Oleg flew home to Auckland where he eventually married a nurse we had introduced him to before we left. Dick's headache and holidays ended at about the same time and he returned to Rarotonga on a 12,000-ton ship. Then my father arrived from New Zealand to spend a few weeks with me and David. It was time to go further afield than just Papeete.

We hired a Vespa motor scooter and took off to tour the 75 miles of road that encircles the island, stopping off here and there to swim in the fresh water rivers before they entered the sea.



It was the sortie that every Tahitian we met made from time to time to look over the islands they love so much. Tahitians love life and color, a fact evident in their dress, and they surround their homes with flowering shrubs and trees that contribute to the beauty of the island. Though their homes may appear ramshackle they are always bright and clean.

Having done the sortie, we decided it was time to sail and see the nearby Leeward Islands.

Tahiti is just one of a chain of beautiful islands, and we set off to sample the others — Dad, David, Mike, myself and an American tourist named Ernest who came along for the ride.

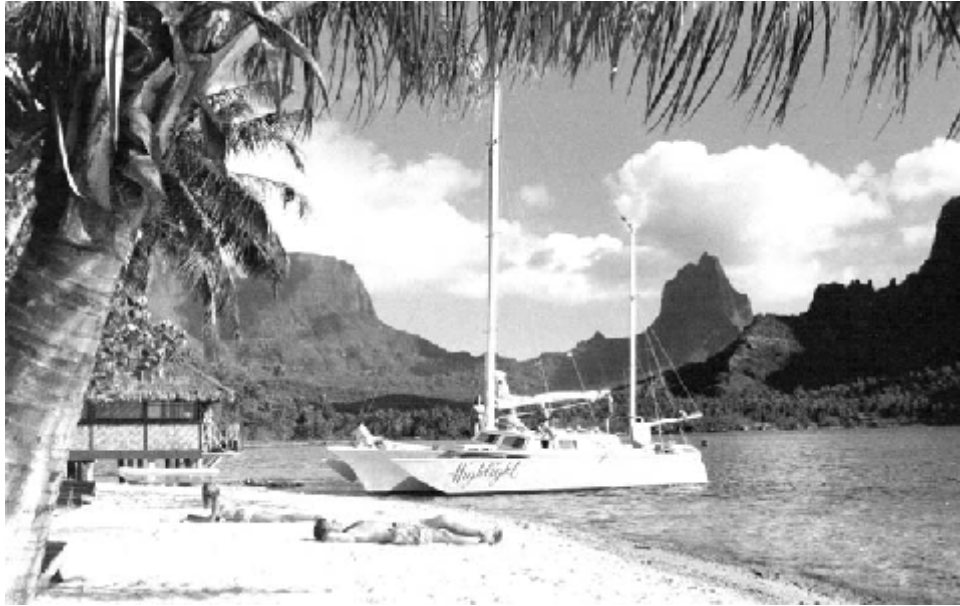


Moorea, the nearest island, was immortalized as Bali Hai in the film South Pacific.

Each evening we stopped, and in a magical almost mystical allure we watched, entranced as the sun had set over Moorea from the Papeete waterfront. No twilight here, darkness came quickly, lulling one into serenity to prepare for her glory. A half-hour later Moorea was enveloped in a deep scarlet bouquet, and with the lagoon reflecting its hue, it was a wonder to behold.

We were about to enter Hiscock's preserve of the most beautiful Island in the world.

In the first of the two large "Baies" of the island we found the very plush Eimeo Hotel. It has a perfect situation among palm trees and overlooking the quiet of Cooks Bay. With youthful exuberance we murdered the serenity of the place. We approached the hotel's private beach, gunned the outboard motor and ran Highlight up on shore so we could step off the bows onto the hotel's lawn.



There followed all sorts of gymnastics on the lawn, and climbing of the hotel's coconut palms, and playing of bagpipes, all of which the hotel management and staff studiously ignored. When we got no response we unbeached Highlight, and glided around to the most perfect inlet in the world, Robinsons Bay.



Its surroundings — the hills, and the trees — are breathtakingly perfect. The greenery is offset by a narrow strip of white sand, dividing it from the dark blue bay, which in here is rarely stirred by draught of wind or ripple of wave motion. The white sand beach — one of the few in this group of black volcanic islands — shelves so deeply that even deep keel yachts can tie up so close that their crews can step off the bumpkins or bowsprit ashore.



Not even the chore of tending mooring lines mars the perfection of the place, for it has a tidal range of only six inches, and high water is at noon every day. One of the two places like it in the world.

We defiled this place, too, by working in it. We beached Highlight to replace our "jury" rudder, and repair sails. But we didn't work too hard. This was the place that I was looking forward to, and from the photos I had seen, I pictured myself just relaxing, time out to just sit and drink in the scenery. We wouldn't have to move from it, not even for shopping. That was not to be though. I was too young and exuberant. On our racing bikes, David and I were off around the Island taking photos of the sunrises over Tahiti and in search of that unspoilt village and the girl that had been overlooked in the passing of the jet age. We never gave up and we never found her here. Undaunted, we returned one day to find a grocery shop on wheels parked by the yachts. The little jovial, Chinese/Tahitian man, came around every day with a van loaded with fresh bread, meat and groceries, delivering to homes around the island, and yachts in the bay.

An American schooner had arrived in and tied up alongside.

"What a great place for a barbecue," one of the crew said.

The deliveryman was there just then, selling us the day's bread, and one of the Americans called him over.

"Say, man," he said, "We wanna have a barbecue.

Can you tell us where we can get a whole pig?"

"No pig," said the little man. "Pig cost much. Can get a dog". The American shook his head in disgust.

The next day, on his rounds, he was again called over to the big schooner, questioned about pig, and replied that dog was much better value.

He was called from the schooner again the third morning,

"Hey man, you say this pig costs much. How much? Ten dollars?"

The little man shook his head, "Twelve dollars?" Another shake, "Fifteen dollars?"

Nods,

Next morning he brought the much sought pig, a scrawny suckler, and went off happy with his \$15, We were happy for him too, since he had probably got five times as much for his pig as usual, but now he probably thinks that all yachtsmen are rich and able to throw money away. \$15 was a lot of money in those days.

We kept a rendezvous in Moorea with a girl the yachties in Papeete harbor had nicknamed "Supermouth", a beautiful Australian airline stewardess whom we had met in Papeete, traveling the world on her free pass. She was a very nice girl, when she stopped talking. She could speak French and a little Tahitian as she had been living with a Tahitian family in Papeete, so in search for silence we told her about Ernest.

I said to her, "We got this American bloke onboard, who's away at the moment. We'll tell him you're French when he comes back, and we'll have some fun with him". She excitingly agreed. And have fun, we did. We told jokes, and even though jokes fall flat when translated, Ernest did his best. Ernest took this seriously, and began to teach her English.

Supermouth played along with the game at first, and then realized she was committed to acting French-Tahitian and couldn't speak any English without making Ernest feel foolish, and she was much too nice for that. But at least we had peace on the yacht, and Ernest had a beautiful, willing pupil, which was what he wanted.

We sailed back to Papeete after a week in this paradise, to find most of the other yachts leaving. The American yachts had to catch the season for favorable winds to return to Hawaii and then to the mainland. Other yachts would be on their way through the Cooks, Tonga, Samoa and the Fiji Island to be safely in Australia or New Zealand before the hurricane season, and the strong equinox winds on the beat home.



With so many yachts gone, we acquired a berth facing the main quay in town. With a gangplank from the stern and a water hose of beautiful clear Papeete water we were living it up. While most people we met worked eleven and a half months of the year to have a two weeks holiday we did the opposite—almost. In fact we would find that we only needed work for an average of three months a year. Judging by some of the million dollar luxury yachts we either visited or passed in the night, rich we were not. But rich we were. And quite frankly I liked to see myself as living on the fringe of society.



David, Marc Danois and Des kerns on "Val Rosa"

Our next-door neighbor at our new Papeete mooring was a beautifully maintained big black Schooner "Val Rosa". At 100ft long it dwarfed "Highlight." Des Kerns, the Australian crewmember we met introduced us to owner/ skipper Mark Danois, a quite famous and colorful Frenchman, sporting a peg leg, tanned body and silver/white hair, looking for the entire world as though he had just stepped out of an old Errol Flynn film of the South Pacific. He loved his ship and we were told that they were waiting for Bridget Bardot to arrive that weekend to go for a trip around the Leeward Islands.

Des showed us over the boat, and we marveled at the fittings, running rigging and beautifully classic teak main cabin, in vivid contrast to our futuristic looking trimaran lying alongside sporting its jet age twin headlights and plywood construction. As small as we were alongside Val Rosa, we tended to stand out in our bright light blue fiber glassed attire.

"Val Rosa" was lost a short time later to a reef in the Tuamotus, the Dangerous Archipelago. Des was at the helm that night.

Like all South Pacific islanders Tahitians are proficient musicians. They love song and dance and we added to their musical history by introducing them to the early morning sounds of a different instrument – the bagpipes.

I say that somewhat tongue in cheek because as time went by Highlight was getting a little too well known. David's early morning bagpipe playing never did get too popular in Papeete. In fact, after dire threats about watery graves for

a certain musical instrument he eventually gave up his early morning practice.

But he brought the pipes out one particularly dull Sunday afternoon and his informal recital brought out a crowd of yachties and locals, and soon he had quite an audience. A bagpipe player seldom stands still because the music is so appropriate for walking or marching, and David soon tired of simply walking up and down in front of the crowd. So he started off along the Quay.

The crowd thought it was a game and followed him and before long, cores of people, all in single file were being joined by others, all of them amused and intrigued; Frenchmen, Islanders and yachties none of whom had probably heard this ancient Scottish battle instrument before.

David and his followers formed a crazy parade that ignored whatever traffic was on the streets of Papeete, crossing the road while a fascinated gendarme stopped all traffic to let them pass.

I'm not sure if they knew about the Pied Piper in Tahiti, but David led them up the Post Office steps, in and out of the pillars, and down the steps again, back towards port with the gendarme again holding up the cars, around and around the gendarme with the wail of the pipes echoing over the drawn-up ranks of halted cars. No one blew a horn.

The Hamelin display ended in the waterfront park, and as if to say, "I'm the Pied Piper, and pray what might you be willing to pay me" an audience gathered in a ring watching "Supermouth" doing a grotesque but extremely funny version of the Highland fling. In this and other ways we became known to more of the local people, and began to have a number of Tahitian visitors.

There was a bit of a language barrier, but we had noticed that on other boats there were guitars, which the Tahitians picked up almost as soon as they stepped aboard to begin a song session. So we went out and bought a guitar of our own. I had learnt a few chords to "Little Brown Jug" years before and I taught them to David. The song sessions these naturally musical people put on for us stimulated our interest in their music. I began to learn more words in the beginning of a study of the Tahitian language and David began to take guitar lessons from the Tahitians.

Both these skills would stand us in good stead and enlarge our lives in times to come. And the time had come to move on again.

It was now time to re-stock our food supplies. Tahiti had a wonderful Ships Supplies warehouse that we could take advantage of. We never made a 'List' of what we needed. Instead we would take a shopping trolley and throw in 3 cans of everything that looked good on the picture label, or canned food we had tested and knew was good.

This system never let us down and we never ran out of anything. Plus, we got a good variety because every country has different foods and surprises. We could buy canned food like butter, cream, and bully beef from New Zealand made for the Pacific Islands and not usually available back home.

Leaving a port usually entails some formalities. But leaving Tahiti is a real business. No one has ever got through paying water bills, mooring charges and clearing the formalities of Customs, Immigration, Mayor's Office and gendarmes in less than a day. All those people had different offices in different parts of

Papeete, and the hapless skipper had to walk backwards and forwards between them all, because all the clearances had to be obtained in proper sequence...and...six stamped and signed copies of each. As long as you had lots of pieces of paper for them to stamp it seemed you could write anything at all on them and they would be happy I was sure.

We thought we would beat the system. Just walk in to the gendarmes office with our money, crew lists, passports and other papers, throw them on the counter, say "no parley Francay", and look dumb.

It didn't work. It had been tried before and it still took us a day to get our clearances completed.



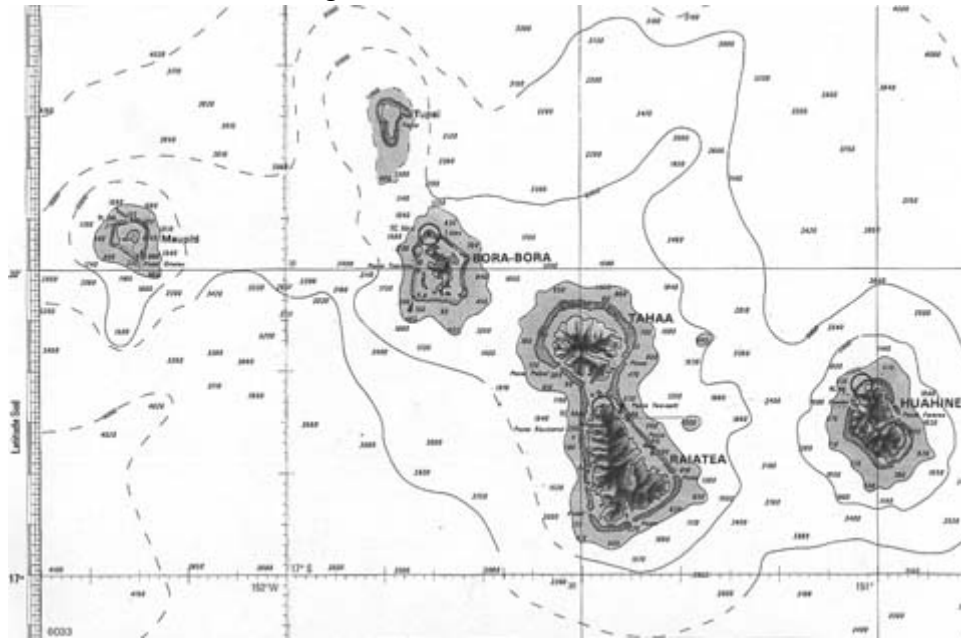
We had a clearance to go to Huahine, but a friend wanted a lift to Moorea so we returned there to drop her off, and then set off for our official destination, 70 miles northwest of Tahiti. As well as Dad, David, Mike and myself we had an Australian couple Bill and Greta Hare with us. They wanted to see some of the outer islands, and, since we were going that way...well, why not take them along?

It was a good, easy trip, except that we broke our "new" rudder. Five down. Rudders we kept repeatedly making from Piver's original plans in plywood. But at least, we were getting plenty of practice in making new ones.

Regulations said we had to check in with the gendarme in Fare, (pronounced Fah ray, meaning house) the main village on Huahine. He stamped our passports and we set out to wander down the jetty, attracted by a beautiful 48-foot long American ketch moored alongside. It turned out to be the floating home of Paula and Earl Schenk, a warm hearted couple who proudly showed us over their Alden designed yacht built in steel. The "Eleuthera" was the complete

cruising home, kept immaculate and one of the prettiest yachts I had ever seen.

The Eleuthera had just returned from a cruise down through the Austral group and the Schenk's told us this was a group of beautiful unspoiled islands. If we had continued our trip to Rapa we would have also visited the group, and now we determined to visit that region in the future.



We were told that Huahine, the first in the chain of Leeward Islands was seldom visited and it immediately became more enticing to us than the more frequented visited islands. The Huahine people though educated and far from primitive still relied on the land and the sea for their living, and knowing there would be few tourists, we wanted to make the most of this opportunity.

So we quickly left Fare behind and sailed quietly down inside the reef of the lagoon to begin what turned out to be one of the most memorable periods of our cruising in those Islands.