

# Learning to Walk Underwater

Short stories written by

Josh Zaentz

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## The Oregano Trail

In 1975, my dad won the Oscar for Best Picture from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, along with co-producer Michael Douglas for, "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*". With time, and money, on his hands he bought himself a boat. It was an 82 foot motor-sailor and he named it the *Argosy Venture*. He called it a "motor-sailor", anyone else would call it a yacht. Perhaps he had an aversion to the word "yacht" and the country-club highlife that the word implies. My father was definitely not "country-club" material and would probably refer to the stereotype as "a bunch of phoneys". So I never realized the boat was a yacht, until now. It looked like a large sailboat with beautiful teak decks and trim on the upper and lower decks. It had a master bedroom, two guest rooms, a sitting room and a kitchen. It could sleep about 10 including the crew. It had two masts for sails, but it had a wide beam, which made it less of a sailboat and more of a cruiser. It was docked at the Jack London Square marina in Oakland, California. My dad wasn't able to handle it himself so he hired a full time crew of two men. Fred was the captain and Mike was the first mate. It was an expensive hobby but my dad could afford it since he didn't really have any other hobbies. He actually developed a taste for a "life at sea" when he served as staff sergeant on army transport vessels during the second world war, in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

He used the *Argosy Venture* for weekend fishing trips outside the San Francisco bay and invited friends, family and business associates. The day trip was more or less divided into a 2 hour journey to the fishing

area, 2 hours of fishing, lunch, and a 2 hour trip home. On one such fishing trip the group included my father, my older brother Dorian, myself, a couple of my father's business partners, and my father's personal secretary (and niece) Nancy. Nancy invited her new friend, Richard.

Being the new guy, Richard brought a gift of a large jar of homegrown oregano and he and Nancy offered to make pasta marinara with salad. When we sat down to lunch everyone was hungry, but when we tasted the pasta the flavor of the oregano was overpowering. There was too much oregano in the salad as well. Unaware of his blunder, Richard was proud, and eager for approval. He asked my dad what he thought. My father commented, "I think it needs more oregano". This elicited laughter from the guests but Richard didn't get it. Instead he rose energetically to fetch the oregano. A chorus of voices beckoned him to stop, and we explained that the oregano was actually a problem. A quick scan of the uneaten food revealed that lunch was a disaster. At that point, Richard began to sink. He apologized and tried to explain, "nothing like this has ever happened before". The group tried haplessly to lift his spirits.

Lunch was over but the topic of oregano was not. If someone wanted sugar for their coffee they would ask for oregano. If someone was feeling seasick, another suggested oregano. Finally, as we were pulling in all of the fishing lines for the journey home, Mike claimed to have a fish on the hook. The group assembled to watch as Mike struggled with the fish. Ultimately Mike reeled in the line and on the hook, was Richard's large

jar of oregano. Most of us were wildly surprised, and burst out laughing, but Richard was now a broken man, and could not even be consoled by Nancy. He looked so sad and alone that I decided to sit down next to him. He looked at me and said, "Your father is a very cruel man". I was shocked. I left him alone and pondered his words.

Although my father sometimes acted that there was no greater tragedy than to ruin a meal, I do not believe that his behavior was cruel. Yes, he was the first to zing Richard about the overuse of oregano. Then the rest of the group joined in, not to hurt Richard, but to find humor in an event that others might simply consider spoiled. Consider the alternatives: say nothing and suffer through the meal; or ask for more oregano and release the tension of suffering? Of course this results in a zing at Richard's expense, but if there is to be a penalty, why not a jest? I don't know if Richard was humorless, but he chose to wallow in self pity. Self pity was not an option for the members of this fishing trip. Perhaps Richard had other qualities inherent in a man of his sensitivity. Maybe he was an artist or a poet? One thing is certain, Richard was not ready to be on a boat; nay, a yacht, with a bunch of anti-country-club zinger slingers.

## Bottom Jobs

As far as my mom was concerned, the boat was a symbol of my father's single-mindedness and inflexibility. So, it came to pass that the boss's wife seduces the ship's captain. Fred was not the brightest light on the tree but he was kind, funny and affable, maybe also 'laughable'.

One night at the dinner table, Mom and Fred and I were discussing the topic of my recent SCUBA certification. Fred mentioned that small boat owners often utilized the service of a diver to clean the bottom of the boat where crustaceans called barnacles grew and needed maintenance. He explained that I could offer my services and all I needed was a burlap sack to scrub off the barnacles. I was interested so the next step was to advertise my services. There was brainstorming around the table, and someone came up with the prizewinning trade name of, "Bottom Jobs". I proceeded to design a flyer for "Bottom Jobs" and include my name and phone number. I posted the flyer at the marinas in Sausalito, and Berkeley. The best thing that happened was no one ever called. I can only imagine the experience of appearing in my full scuba suit and sliding into the murky water of the marina among the spilt oil and gas of small boats. Then, attack the barnacles with a burlap sack in the dark water beneath the hull; and all the while wary of approaching boats and propeller blades. What was I thinking? What was Fred thinking? What was Mom thinking? Nobody was thinking. Bottom Jobs.

## Fool's Gold

On the other hand, the first mate Mike, became a close friend to my family and a role model, particularly to Dorian and me. In addition to sailing, Mike was a musician, and had developed a strong sense of awareness in personal communication, and environmental responsibility. Mike was actually the first person I ever saw scuba diving

and spearfishing. He encouraged me to learn and, he eventually gave me some of his equipment, including his spear gun, and scuba tank.

Before my parent's divorce, Mike offered to take Dorian and I camping to the Eureka river to pan for gold. It's something tourists do but we were all excited to try our luck. Nobody expected much, which was a good thing, because Mike's Volkswagen bus broke down after about 100 miles leaving Marin county. Fortunately, Mike had friends in the area so he called a woman who met us with her truck. The idea was to tow Mike's bus using a rope. Mike drove the truck with his friend and Dorian and I rode in the bus with the instructions to use the steering wheel to keep the bus on the road, and use the brakes only when we were going downhill to avoid running into the truck. (Are you kidding me?) Dorian and I felt a lurch every time the rope pulled tight. Needless to say, the ride was harrowing, but we eventually got to the woman's house. Dorian and I relaxed while Mike went to work on the engine. The relaxing including a smoking a joint that Mike gave to Dorian. I had smoked pot before, but it never had such a strong effect. I had to lie down on the ground. I was experiencing a kaleidoscope of moving colors when I closed my eyes. I was told it was Columbian Gold, what a rush.

Mike managed to fix his bus and we were back on the road to Eureka! We purchased the gold pans at a local souvenir shop and found a place to camp near the river. We each tried panning for gold. This involved catching some sediment from the river's edge and whirling the water and silt out of the pan to allow the heavier materials to settle at the bottom. There were, in fact, some shiny specks left in the pan. This is

what they call, "fool's gold" and comes from a shiny mineral called mica. Then we had a swim and Mike made a fire to cook hot dogs. After dinner we smoked a joint and Mike shared his observations of life. He actually had several insightful quotes. My favorite: "Behind every million dollars is a crime". He told us that he left home as a young man and joined the circus. He learned to be a clown. His telling moment was when he said, "You haven't hit bottom until you've hit rock bottom" Finally, Mike got out his guitar and played us an original song called, "Back Where I Started". We slept. The morning was misty and everything in the tent was wet. We camped too close to the river. As the sun rose we warmed up and Mike cooked us bacon and eggs by the campfire. After breakfast, Mike suggested washing the pans in the river and using sand to scrape them clean. It was a good idea. As Mike and I were packing to leave, Dorian came towards us in a panic, spitting from his mouth, and begging for water. Mike asked what happened. Dorian said that he tried brushing his teeth with sand. Mike and I just laughed. On the way home, Mike asked, "Do I feel like making some sandwiches?" I replied in my typical smart ass way, "Do I feel like it?". But Mike had enough of my quips. He shouted, "Do I have to do everything for you? You're 13, be a man. You can't have everybody wiping your ass for you!" This was the first time Mike ever reprimanded me. Dad was out of the picture so it fell to someone else to give me the straight talk. They say wisdom is as good as gold, but the only gold I discovered on this trip was Columbian.

## Jaws

It was about that time that I saw the film, *Jaws*, about a monster shark. The repercussions were such that it instilled a terrible fear in beachgoers everywhere. This was a problem for me because I have always felt at home in the ocean. This was a fear I needed to conquer, so I read several books about sharks. I read that the incidence of shark attacks was comparable to the incidence of being struck by lightning. I also read that scuba divers are almost never attacked because divers are typically near the bottom and shark attacks typically occur at the surface. I needed to learn to scuba dive, but before that, I needed to come face to face with a shark, underwater.

The summer after the divorce my mom took me, brothers Dorian and Jonnie, and sister Athena, to a new house in Larkspur, in Marin County. Also that summer, I accompanied my father, Dorian, cousin Alan, and a hired crew on on the *Argosy Venture* for a 3 week trip from Acapulco, Mexico, through the Panama Canal to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Of course, there were stops along the way, for supplies, and whatnot. But since the boat was anchored some distance from the shore, I decided to go snorkeling with hopes of catching something with Mike's mini-spear gun. To my surprise and horror, I spotted the head of a shark resting on the bottom, frown side up. I held my breath and dove down about 20 feet for a closer look. The head might have once been attached to an 8 foot body, but the body was nowhere in sight. So, I shot it with my spear gun. That was the easy part. It was a struggle to drag it back to the boat. The weight of the head on the end of the spear kept me gasping for

breath. Once I got the head on board, I was playfully teased by the crew about my brave encounter with a dead shark. My plan was to remove the jaws. My method was to carve it out with my new Swiss army knife. There was no blood, but the head was full of tiny parasitic worms. The work was grueling but I was intent. When I got home I proudly hung the jaws from the ceiling of my bedroom.

The first group of friends I brought home had heard about my house and wanted to see it. The house was unique because it was built entirely of brick and wood. There were interesting features such as curved beams and round glass panes installed in the exterior walls. One of the most interesting features was a bridge that crossed over a sitting room and connected the upper floor to my bedroom. On that particular day, my new friends Mike, John, Tim, and Tom came over after school. Upon entering the kitchen I introduced everyone to Mom. After introductions, Mom went back to her business and someone noticed that a \$5 bill was pinned to the bulletin board. This raised the eyebrows of Tim, who I quickly summoned to the stairs to my room. My room was designed as a separate apartment with a private entrance. I decorated the walls with posters of rock bands like Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. There were also posters of underwater scenes and extraterrestrial fantasies. Suspended from the ceiling was my personal set of shark jaws with sharp teeth, preserved in the customary open position.

The ceiling of my bedroom was peaked and there was a pigeon coop built in the highest cabinet attached to a cupola. The pigeons were long gone, so we installed stained glass for effect, and to keep birds out. My

friend John was interested and wanted to take a closer look. He climbed up a stepladder and opened the door to the pigeon coop. As the door swung open it touched the hanging shark jaws. The contact with the door caused the sharp teeth to cut the string and fall. Standing below the shark jaw was Tim. The jaw landed on his hand between his thumb and forefinger. Blood came quickly. We rushed to the sink and used paper towels to try and stop the bleeding. The paper towels quickly became red. What does a young man do in such an emergency? I called for Mom. She drove Tim to the hospital immediately. The rest of us decided that our meeting for the day was concluded. As my friends were leaving, Mike reached into his pocket and handed me a \$5 bill. The bill was torn at the corner. He said, "Tim gave me this to buy some weed". I wondered. I went back to the kitchen, and sure enough, the remaining corner of the \$5 bill was still pinned on the bulletin board. Apparently, the shark jaws were destined to meet with Tim. Not many can claim to bear the scars of a shark bite, even less from a dead shark. But, there was a karmic sense of justice for the attempted theft of \$5, including the scar, marking the hand of a thief.

### Learning to Walk Underwater

I was now ready to learn to scuba dive. At 15, I was the youngest in a group of 5 and we were taught about SCUBA gear in a small swimming pool. The scuba outfit consists of many parts and is generally uncomfortable. Of course, there is the rubber suit which goes on a lot easier than it comes off. There is a 15-25 lb. weight belt necessary to offset the rubber suit and the natural buoyancy of your body. There is a

buoyancy vest connected to the tank, with a button to fill and release air. This is important because finding the right amount of air is necessary to hover, or swim at a specific depth, otherwise you'll be descending too rapidly to the bottom or ascending all the way to the surface. Finally, mask, fins, tank, and breathing regulator. Once you're able to suit up, and breathe underwater, then you're ready for the ocean. Our ocean dives were in Monterey, California. It's a nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to dive there. That said, the experience of low visibility is important in order to stay calm and trust your equipment. We were taught several ways to enter the water, all of them awkward. From a small boat, you hold your mask in place and roll backwards off of the side. From a larger boat, you hold your mask in place and take a long step off the side. From the beach, you enter the water walking backwards, because walking forward with fins is even more awkward. In Monterey, we used a motor powered rubber boat called a Zodiac. After entering the water, We each went through the appointed tasks: checking our air supply, removing and exchanging equipment, and buddy-breathing, that is, sharing a regulator with your partner in case of equipment failure. After three such dives, I became a certified scuba diver, at age 15.

The next fall, I went on my first dive trip for a 3 day weekend with Marin Divers to the Channel Islands near Santa Barbara. I got a ride with Richard, the director of the school, and we drove in a van with all of the group's equipment. The drive was about 8 hours so we took turns. Richard was dozing while I was driving. He woke up in a panic to find I was driving 90 miles an hour. When we arrived at Santa Barbara, we

boarded the boat and began the journey towards the Channel Islands. The next morning was our first dive. We were permitted to catch fish so I of course I brought Mike's spear-gun. I entered the water taking a long step off of the boat. My fins splashed and I promptly sunk to the 60 foot bottom. I added a little air to my vest to raise me out of the silt, but I added too much and I floated right back to the surface. I let out the air carefully and slowly sank to an equilibrium. And there I was, a 360 view of amazing shapes and colors; fish hovering and darting, fan shaped plants waving in slow motion; truly a different world. Peeking into a crevice, I spotted a spiny lobster crawling under a small stone arch. I raised my spear-gun, took aim, and fired. The 14-inch spear entered just below the shell along the back of the 12-inch lobster; a perfect shot. I was elated. I inflated my vest and rose to the surface carrying my prize. As I boarded the boat, I heard a cheer, but when Richard saw my catch he told me I had to throw it back. What? Because, he explained, it is not permitted to spear lobsters, and I could be fined. So I threw the dead lobster back into the ocean and it sunk, along with my moment as the great hunter.

On the morning cruise back to Santa Barbara, one of the crew, David, offered me some coffee. He was maybe 18 years old, skinny, wore glasses, and looked more like a geek than a sailor. I asked for sugar. He said he preferred maple syrup and offered me some. We started chatting and our conversation turned towards the one woman who was part of the group. We shared a discreet appraisal of her appearance; in other words, "great tits"; because that's what teenagers say. So we continued chatting and he asked about my plans after we get to shore. My plans

were to take a flight back to San Francisco from Santa Barbara, so he offered to give me a ride to the airport.

David's car was something my school friends would call a "beater". It was a large sedan, but the paint was patchy, the interior torn, and dark smoke came out of the exhaust. Since we had a few hours before my flight, David suggested showing me the Santa Barbara boardwalk where there is normally a lot to see and do. Since it was Monday, the boardwalk was empty, but we went for a walk anyway. I had to wonder because here I was with this guy who my school friends would call a loser, but for some reason I liked the way he carried himself. He had inexplicable confidence. He's talking about this girl and that one, and he doesn't seem to have a care or worry in the world. So I come to ask him, "How do you meet girls?" He thinks about it and says, "Well, first you need to know how to walk". "Walk?" I ask. "Look", he says, and proceeds to saunter while lightly swinging his arms. "You try," he suggests. I hesitate, I try. Awkward at first, but he encourages me. "That's it", he says, "just be yourself". I spend a few more minutes "walking and being myself", and then it was time to go. When we get back to his car it won't start. Now I am a little nervous about missing my flight. He says, "don't worry, you'll make it". The hood is open, I don't know what is happening. He disappears to look for something. Now I am sure I will miss my flight, and I begin to curse my luck. Eventually David comes back with a piece of wire or something and gets back to work under the hood. With a puff of black smoke the engine starts. Miraculously, I make my flight. In the airplane, as we reach our cruising altitude, I thought of walking and being myself.

## Message From the Universe

My fascination with SCUBA diving probably began playing with the GI Joe Underwater Explorer set, then by watching James Bond battle with spear guns in *Thunderball*, and finally made real by the weekly broadcasts of underwater filmmaker and environmentalist Jacques Cousteau. As a 16 year-old I was required to submit my name to the US Military Selective Service. Thus, I was not surprised when I received a call from a Navy recruiter. We spoke briefly and I agreed to meet him at my home. My mom overheard our conversation and was worried I might join the Navy. I assured her that I had no intention and I was certain I could outsmart the recruiter. Actually, I was hoping that I might find out something about the elite Navy divers, you know, SEAL team. On the day of the meeting the officer arrived and we sat down. His first question was to ask me why I wanted to join the Navy. I explained that I like to scuba dive and asked if there were opportunities for divers. He smiled and replied, "Do you know what we call the divers aboard the ship?" I shrugged. "We call 'em turd chasers". I was somewhat offended and asked, "Why?". He answered, "Because whenever there's a plumbing problem that's when they get to work". Since it was now clear that there was nothing for me in the Navy, I politely showed him the door.

Mom bought an island in Nova Scotia. She read about it in an article in Money Magazine. This was not her usual choice of reading material but she couldn't resist the cover story, "Buying an Island." The La Have islands on the South Shore of Nova Scotia were included in the profile. Mom arranged a visit and purchased an island with a house, 2 boats,

electricity, and running water. Summer was the best time to visit, because Nova Scotia has a long cold winter. The seawater is cold year round, but I was able to dive there with my equipment. There was not much to see but there was an incredible bounty of sea scallops and lobster for the taking. This went on for many years until 2007 when hurricane *Juan* dislodged and sank the entire boathouse and all of my scuba gear inside. That seemed to be a pretty clear message from the universe that my diving days were over. Yet, an event occurred where I was enticed to speak to a mystic. It was a 'psychic reading' by telephone. The woman asked me about my life's goals. I said I wanted to write music for films. She said, "I don't think so. I see your spirit swimming with the dolphins and whales."

## The St. Martin Years

In 1973, I was 11 years old. Dad had an idea for an early Christmas vacation. It was to take my mother, my older brother Dorian and I to an island in the Caribbean called St. Martin. It was a strange idea for two reasons. One, we would be celebrating Christmas early; and two, my younger sister Athena, and brother Jonnie would be staying behind with a babysitter at our house in Berkeley, California. Celebrating Christmas early kind of meant that Christmas wasn't really Christmas, right? I mean, mom and dad just decided that one random day in December would be Christmas. But sure enough, on that day we woke up, and there were presents under the tree. Then my parents took Dorian and I to the airport.

This was my first trip outside California. Our first stop was New York. My first impression, after ascending from the subway, was an awful odor of garbage. It was also very cold, because it was winter in New York, but Dorian and I suited up and went ice-skating at Rockefeller Center. My parents also took us to the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty, and Dorian climbed to the top of the torch.

Puerto Rico was our next stop. When we arrived at the San Juan airport there were guards with automatic weapons. Welcome to the third world. Then we met a pilot to take us on his private jet to St. Martin. Welcome to the one percent. The reason my dad could afford paying for a private jet was because he recently produced 6 platinum albums with Creedence Clearwater Revival (CCR), a hit rock band featuring John Fogerty. Record sales in the US made my dad a millionaire. Record sales abroad were about to make him a multi-millionaire. Our trip to St. Martin was also a business trip.

The Mullet Bay Resort, in St. Martin, is a vision of paradise. Beaches, palm trees, warm breezes, and icy drinks made with exotic fruit juices. My favorite was the Pina Colada (virgin, of course). We stayed in a double condominium that was purchased by Dad's business, Fantasy Records. Mom made breakfast in the condo. During our first breakfast together, Dad discovered that I didn't know how to hold my fork and knife properly. This is because we rarely had breakfast together as a family. Why? Because mom felt it was proper to serve Dad separate from the children. Why? Because she grew up in home that her mother made into a rooming house, and her mother served meals to the boarders in one room and her children in another.

It was in St. Martin where I developed a love of swimming in the ocean. Mom and Dad taught us to jump over the oncoming waves, as well as the pleasure of floating on your back. Dorian and I took it a step further to ride the waves onto the sand, for better or for worse. Dorian and I were eventually left on our own to walk to the beach, swim in the pools and eat at the bars of the Mullet Bay resort. It was a snap when Dorian figured out that he could simply sign for all of our purchases; paradise, indeed. It was peculiar, however, to find that the political geography of St. Martin was divided in half by its colonial 'founders', Holland and France. Half of the island is considered French and the other half Dutch. In reality, the treatment of the indigenous people is shameful as a result of early colonization. The indigenous people of the Caribbean were more or less exterminated and replaced by Africans enslaved by Europeans. Over time, the Africans became the new 'locals' and were again subjugated by the Europeans for the tourist industry. I was not fully aware of this at the time so, like most tourists, we were able to have a good time. Overall, the island is fairly small and we were able to drive around the island in just a few hours. On this drive, we explored secluded beaches. I found a broken conch shell shaped like a jawbone that was worn smooth around the edges. When we returned to the

condo I found a felt tip pen and wrote, "Jonah was here", on the shell. My parents wondered where I learned about the biblical story of *Jonah and the Whale*. I think I learned it from watching Sunday morning cartoons.

Dad brought us to meet the family of a new business associate. Let's call him Larry the Loophole so nobody gets hurt. Larry knew all about loopholes in the US tax system so he helped my father set up bank accounts and trusts to receive all of the non-US income from CCR record sales. As long as the income was held in the offshore bank accounts there would be no US income taxes imposed. The method of accessing the funds was more complicated so several businesses (called holding companies) were created to make loans to and from one another. These also slipped under the tax radar. These tax shelters held up for about 10 years and enabled my father to fund and maximize the benefits of his next enterprise; the film, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest". I say 10 years because at that time there was an incident of, "Loose lips sink ships", but for now it's still 1973.

One day Larry the Loophole rented a boat and the two families went out for a sail and a picnic. After we had sailed for an hour and picnicked for an hour, I had to use the head (that's sailor talk for toilet). Without going into too much detail, there was no toilet paper, but there were lots of sanitary napkins, you know, menstrual pads. There was also probably a sign that said, "Do not put sanitary napkins into the head." But I had my priorities, and since they failed to provide toilet paper, I used the sanitary napkins. My offense was soon discovered and the toilet was out of service. Let's just say I was not too well liked for the 2-3 hour sail back where nobody could use the head.

In 1975 my parents got divorced. Still, my mother planned one last trip to St. Martin, without my father, but with Jonnie and Athena. When we arrived we went straight to the beach. Dorian and I went snorkeling in the deeper water and we found several large conch shells. We brought them to the beach and discovered that the live conch, like a snail, was still inside. We brought them home with plans to cook them. That afternoon there was a cocktail reception for the condo owners. My mom took Dorian who was now 17. We were told to stay in the condo and play games, or whatever. Dorian and my mother were gone for about 3 hours. When they came back they were both drunk. My mom drank way too much and had to lie down. Dorian offered to make dinner. It would be spaghetti with conch sauce. He managed to extract the meat from the shell but he wasn't sure which parts were edible. So he just chopped it all up and sautéed it in butter. As a finishing touch he added some scotch whiskey he found in the cupboard. He explained that wine was commonly used by famous chefs, so why not whiskey. Jonnie, Athena, and I were having a lot of laughs watching him cook and drunkenly describe this ridiculous meal. Dorian tried to admonish us saying, "You guys play too many games". That gave us pause. Then he lost all his credibility when he said, "but cards is a good game". We continued teasing him while he served himself a plate of his creation. He took a bite and lied, "it's not bad". I tried a bite, and it was almost edible, but the scotch wasn't helping. Dorian's next bite included some of the off color bits so he promptly spit it out. Our laughter exploded. Dorian's recipe was then and forever known as, "Conch with butterscotch sauce".

The next day my mom was full of resolutions, that hangovers generally inspire. She said we all needed more discipline. After a confused silence, I offered to teach a karate lesson. I practiced karate for a couple of years so I new the basics. I lined everybody up, demonstrated techniques, and assisted. Everybody seemed to enjoy it. Too bad that was our one and only lesson. Later, we went on a drive to explore

beaches around the island. At one stop there was a tree with what appeared to be little apples. Dorian, the daring, decided to try one. He actually enjoyed it and persuaded Athena to try it. After they ate several little apples, Athena began to complain about a pain in her stomach, then Dorian. My mom anxiously approached a local man who was walking past to ask him about the fruit. The man explained that the fruit was called something like, "Manzanita". Then my mom explained that Dorian and Athena ate some. He began to shake his head and exclaimed, "No, don't eat the manzanita"! He then directed us to the hospital where Athena and Dorian got some medicine and advice. Life without Dad was going to be different.

Sadly, I became somewhat of a bully to Jonnie and Athena. As a result, they moved back with my Dad to live in Berkeley. Dad was now married to (let's call her) Loose Lips. Ironically, we all liked Loose Lips, mainly because we had a lot in common. She smoked pot and so did we. But she was also easy to talk to. I once asked her what she liked about my dad. She thought about it and answered, "I don't know, he's frivolous". I didn't understand at the time but I think what she meant is because he had so much responsibility, that it was the last thing you'd expect when he decided to act silly, or frivolous.

Life in Berkeley was not going well for Athena and Jonnie. Athena got in too many fights, and refused to return to Berkeley high school. Loose Lips and Dad made overtures to help find her a good private school, but they never delivered. Athena came back to Marin County but still avoided school, so my mom sent her to a boarding school called Feather River. Athena graduated Feather River, but she was sad that my father did not attend her graduation. Jonnie was kicked out of two boarding schools also for fighting. My Dad showed Jonnie a nice boarding school in Maine. Then he took Jonnie a military type boarding school and said if he was kicked

out again, this would be the next stop. Scared straight, Jonnie graduated and Dad even attended.

It was about this time that Loose Lips was earning her moniker. She and my dad were getting divorced and unfortunately, she knew too much about the tax shelters. This in itself was surprising, because if my Dad had a moniker it would be, "Tight Lips". He knew how to keep a secret, especially when it came to finances. But intimacy is intimacy and secrets are shared. So the price for that particular secret was a multi-year lawsuit with the IRS, for taxes owed over a period of roughly ten years; the St. Martin years.

Since that time, the Mullet Bay Resort was twice damaged by strong hurricanes. The first time it was restored to its full beauty and glamour. The second time, someone in another chain of holding companies took off with the insurance settlement. They say fortunes rise and fall like the tide. I went to a beach recently with my niece's 11 year-old son. I held him because was his first time. That was when I remembered that it was my father who first held me as we felt the waves rise and fall.

## The St. Martin Years

In 1973, I was 11 years old. Dad had an idea for an early Christmas vacation. It was to take my mother, my older brother Dorian and I to an island in the Caribbean called St. Martin. It was a strange idea for two reasons. One, we would be celebrating Christmas early; and two, my younger sister Athena, and brother Jonnie would be staying behind with a babysitter at our house in Berkeley, California. Celebrating Christmas early kind of meant that Christmas wasn't really Christmas, right? I mean, mom and dad just decided that one random day in December would be Christmas. But sure enough, on that day we woke up, and there were presents under the tree. Then my parents took Dorian and I to the airport.

This was my first trip outside California. Our first stop was New York. My first impression, after ascending from the subway, was an awful odor of garbage. It was also very cold, because it was winter in New York, but Dorian and I suited up and went ice-skating at Rockefeller Center. My parents also took us to the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty, and Dorian climbed to the top of the torch.

Puerto Rico was our next stop. When we arrived at the San Juan airport there were guards with automatic weapons. Welcome to the third world. Then we met a pilot to take us on his private jet to St. Martin. Welcome to the one percent. The reason my dad could afford paying for a private jet was because he recently produced 6 platinum albums with Creedence Clearwater Revival (CCR), a hit rock band featuring John Fogerty. Record sales in the US made my dad a millionaire. Record sales abroad were about to make him a multi-millionaire. Our trip to St. Martin was also a business trip.

The Mullet Bay Resort, in St. Martin, is a vision of paradise. Beaches, palm trees, warm breezes, and icy drinks made with exotic fruit juices. My favorite was the Pina Colada (virgin, of course). We stayed in a double condominium that was purchased by Dad's business, Fantasy Records. Mom made breakfast in the condo. During our first breakfast together, Dad discovered that I didn't know how to hold my fork and knife properly. This is because we rarely had breakfast together as a family. Why? Because mom felt it was proper to serve Dad separate from the children. Why? Because she grew up in home that her mother made into a rooming house, and her mother served meals to the boarders in one room and her children in another.

It was in St. Martin where I developed a love of swimming in the ocean. Mom and Dad taught us to jump over the oncoming waves, as well as the pleasure of floating on your back. Dorian and I took it a step further to ride the waves onto the sand, for better or for worse. Dorian and I were eventually left on our own to walk to the beach, swim in the pools and eat at the bars of the Mullet Bay resort. It was a snap when Dorian figured out that he could simply sign for all of our purchases; paradise, indeed. It was peculiar, however, to find that the political geography of St. Martin was divided in half by its colonial 'founders', Holland and France. Half of the island is considered French and the other half Dutch. In reality, the treatment of the indigenous people is shameful as a result of early colonization. The indigenous people of the Caribbean were more or less exterminated and replaced by Africans enslaved by Europeans. Over time, the Africans became the new 'locals' and were again subjugated by the Europeans for the tourist industry. I was not fully aware of this at the time so, like most tourists, we were able to have a good time. Overall, the island is fairly small and we were able to drive around the island in just a few hours. On this drive, we explored secluded beaches. I found a broken conch shell shaped like a jawbone that was worn smooth around the edges. When we returned to the

condo I found a felt tip pen and wrote, "Jonah was here", on the shell. My parents wondered where I learned about the biblical story of *Jonah and the Whale*. I think I learned it from watching Sunday morning cartoons.

Dad brought us to meet the family of a new business associate. Let's call him Larry the Loophole so nobody gets hurt. Larry knew all about loopholes in the US tax system so he helped my father set up bank accounts and trusts to receive all of the non-US income from CCR record sales. As long as the income was held in the offshore bank accounts there would be no US income taxes imposed. The method of accessing the funds was more complicated so several businesses (called holding companies) were created to make loans to and from one another. These also slipped under the tax radar. These tax shelters held up for about 10 years and enabled my father to fund and maximize the benefits of his next enterprise; the film, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest". I say 10 years because at that time there was an incident of, "Loose lips sink ships", but for now it's still 1973.

One day Larry the Loophole rented a boat and the two families went out for a sail and a picnic. After we had sailed for an hour and picnicked for an hour, I had to use the head (that's sailor talk for toilet). Without going into too much detail, there was no toilet paper, but there were lots of sanitary napkins, you know, menstrual pads. There was also probably a sign that said, "Do not put sanitary napkins into the head." But I had my priorities, and since they failed to provide toilet paper, I used the sanitary napkins. My offense was soon discovered and the toilet was out of service. Let's just say I was not too well liked for the 2-3 hour sail back where nobody could use the head.

In 1975 my parents got divorced. Still, my mother planned one last trip to St. Martin, without my father, but with Jonnie and Athena. When we arrived we went straight to the beach. Dorian and I went snorkeling in the deeper water and we found several large conch shells. We brought them to the beach and discovered that the live conch, like a snail, was still inside. We brought them home with plans to cook them. That afternoon there was a cocktail reception for the condo owners. My mom took Dorian who was now 17. We were told to stay in the condo and play games, or whatever. Dorian and my mother were gone for about 3 hours. When they came back they were both drunk. My mom drank way too much and had to lie down. Dorian offered to make dinner. It would be spaghetti with conch sauce. He managed to extract the meat from the shell but he wasn't sure which parts were edible. So he just chopped it all up and sautéed it in butter. As a finishing touch he added some scotch whiskey he found in the cupboard. He explained that wine was commonly used by famous chefs, so why not whiskey. Jonnie, Athena, and I were having a lot of laughs watching him cook and drunkenly describe this ridiculous meal. Dorian tried to admonish us saying, "You guys play too many games". That gave us pause. Then he lost all his credibility when he said, "but cards is a good game". We continued teasing him while he served himself a plate of his creation. He took a bite and lied, "it's not bad". I tried a bite, and it was almost edible, but the scotch wasn't helping. Dorian's next bite included some of the off color bits so he promptly spit it out. Our laughter exploded. Dorian's recipe was then and forever known as, "Conch with butterscotch sauce".

The next day my mom was full of resolutions, that hangovers generally inspire. She said we all needed more discipline. After a confused silence, I offered to teach a karate lesson. I practiced karate for a couple of years so I new the basics. I lined everybody up, demonstrated techniques, and assisted. Everybody seemed to enjoy it. Too bad that was our one and only lesson. Later, we went on a drive to explore

beaches around the island. At one stop there was a tree with what appeared to be little apples. Dorian, the daring, decided to try one. He actually enjoyed it and persuaded Athena to try it. After they ate several little apples, Athena began to complain about a pain in her stomach, then Dorian. My mom anxiously approached a local man who was walking past to ask him about the fruit. The man explained that the fruit was called something like, "Manzanita". Then my mom explained that Dorian and Athena ate some. He began to shake his head and exclaimed, "No, don't eat the manzanita"! He then directed us to the hospital where Athena and Dorian got some medicine and advice. Life without Dad was going to be different.

Sadly, I became somewhat of a bully to Jonnie and Athena. As a result, they moved back with my Dad to live in Berkeley. Dad was now married to (let's call her) Loose Lips. Ironically, we all liked Loose Lips, mainly because we had a lot in common. She smoked pot and so did we. But she was also easy to talk to. I once asked her what she liked about my dad. She thought about it and answered, "I don't know, he's frivolous". I didn't understand at the time but I think what she meant is because he had so much responsibility, that it was the last thing you'd expect when he decided to act silly, or frivolous.

Life in Berkeley was not going well for Athena and Jonnie. Athena got in too many fights, and refused to return to Berkeley high school. Loose Lips and Dad made overtures to help find her a good private school, but they never delivered. Athena came back to Marin County but still avoided school, so my mom sent her to a boarding school called Feather River. Athena graduated Feather River, but she was sad that my father did not attend her graduation. Jonnie was kicked out of two boarding schools also for fighting. My Dad showed Jonnie a nice boarding school in Maine. Then he took Jonnie a military type boarding school and said if he was kicked

out again, this would be the next stop. Scared straight, Jonnie graduated and Dad even attended.

It was about this time that Loose Lips was earning her moniker. She and my dad were getting divorced and unfortunately, she knew too much about the tax shelters. This in itself was surprising, because if my Dad had a moniker it would be, "Tight Lips". He knew how to keep a secret, especially when it came to finances. But intimacy is intimacy and secrets are shared. So the price for that particular secret was a multi-year lawsuit with the IRS, for taxes owed over a period of roughly ten years; the St. Martin years.

Since that time, the Mullet Bay Resort was twice damaged by strong hurricanes. The first time it was restored to its full beauty and glamour. The second time, someone in another chain of holding companies took off with the insurance settlement. They say fortunes rise and fall like the tide. I went to a beach recently with my niece's 11 year-old son. I held him because was his first time. That was when I remembered that it was my father who first held me as we felt the waves rise and fall.