

A Dream Come True

Cruising the world

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Excerpt 1

The beginning of this boat adventure was recorded in Florida at the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, where the idea of the M/Y Voyager was born and took off.

In October 1993 we spent a month in the United States, where we attended the Annapolis and Fort Lauderdale boat shows. During the shows we lived on the magnificent sailing yacht Mirabella, which I had already become acquainted with the previous summer on the Mediterranean when we'd attended the prestigious party organized by the American boat magazine ShowBoats International in Monaco. The magazine had judged the new arrival to be the year's most innovative sailboat. The strategic dimensions of this beauty, which was built in Thailand by an American owned yard that Pekka managed at that time, were staggering: 130 feet in length, a beam of 29 feet, which is the length of a normal boat, and a carbon fiber mast that rose 165 feet into the air. At its completion, it was the world's largest single-masted modern sailboat, a sloop. Its immense teak decks presented opportunities for basking in the sun, the boat's cook whipped up breakfast, lunch, and dinner for us as if we were in a luxury hotel, our beds were made up in the morning and turned down in the evening, and our clothes were washed and ironed. You didn't need to, or rather couldn't, do anything yourself. In addition to the captain, the boat had a crew of six or seven.

Pekka had always said that if he someday owned a boat, he himself would be the skipper. "I wouldn't like it if someone who called himself the captain dictated where and when to go while I, as the owner, stood idly by and watched. And I also wouldn't like having unfamiliar people bustling around all the time. That's not what it's like at home, either."

The days spent on Mirabella and at the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show led to what happened next. Another guest on the boat was Jerry Lines, who had worked as a technical expert on the Mirabella boats in Thailand. On the final evening, Pekka returned from the show full of excitement and exclaimed to Jerry: "Come over here to the sofa, I have a great idea! Actually, this is such an incredible deal that we also need to have some whisky." And so he walked up to the bar. Pekka made some rough sketches on paper and then said to Jerry: "Take a look!" Both men got excited, one's excitement infecting the other. When one of them got going, the other continued, and vice versa. The evening stretched into the wee hours. The principles were clear. "The boat can't be so big that it requires a crew to operate. However it's got to be big enough for comfortable living with a bit of luxury and that rules out a sailboat. A powerboat is easier to handle with just Pirkko and me. It is also safer, because even in stormy conditions we can close the doors to the wheelhouse and stay inside. It must be seaworthy enough for ocean crossings with big enough fuel tanks to be able to do so. After seeing thousands of boats I have concluded that such a boat does not exist.

Therefore I must design and built it." Pekka announced resolutely.

Later it turned out that everything had to be the best and most beautiful, both in terms of technology and decor, so that he could admit that the boat was his own, even though it wasn't stunning in terms of size. After all, it was amazing enough that a man who'd built his reputation as a builder of the world famous SWAN sailboats would build a motorboat for himself. Through his extensive experience, Pekka had come to the conclusion that being on a boat didn't have to involve sport, only pleasure. Instead, the experience ought to be enjoyed in a decent-sized comfortable space and in pleasant surroundings. A boat should be a floating home, with which you could go everywhere. Home would always sail wherever the weather conditions were best. When you got bored of one spot, all you had to do was pull up the anchor and the scenery would change and home would follow, like it did with a turtle. As we were going to bed, Pekka asked me, "What would you think if we built a home like that?"

I immediately got excited about the idea, although during our short time together I'd already learned that boats were bottomless money pits. The building costs always went over budget and once the boats were completed they required a lot of costly maintenance. Pekka assured me that the boat could be built for a reasonable price at the shipyard in Thailand. At the same time, he was thinking about the future. Boat building might soon come to an end at the yard in Thailand, and then he could start enjoying his retirement, and he needed something to do. With a boat, there would always be work to do. As a businessman he also had an idea at the back of his mind, "This could become a business." He had actually once said to me, "If I ever come up with any crazy ideas, bring me back to the surface of the earth." But what did I do? I got excited and encouraged him. Me, whose only experiences at sea were at a cabin in the Finnish archipelago and a small rowboat with an outboard motor. Our relationship was new, I was in love, and Pekka's ideas always sounded reasonable to me. In my defense I have to say that as I saw it I didn't have the right to destroy his big dream. My job was to adapt and learn new things. I would've considered myself a bad partner if I'd stood in the way of him achieving his big lifelong dream, which in reality had captivated me as well. Only a great deal of ignorance can lead to such a huge decision, but, after all, I had already made another big decision in my life because of Pekka. I'd left my longtime and interesting job as a television journalist as well as my homeland.

So began an exciting project, which Pekka launched immediately after he returned to the yard in Thailand, because he'd always been a man of quick action. I threw myself into it with all of the enthusiasm of inexperience, without realizing what such a decision would entail. The life we'd led up to that point began to move in a new direction.

Excerpt 2

At that time, the South China Sea was one of the worst pirate infested areas in the world. In the newspaper we regularly read news about how some boat or ship had been attacked, its money and valuables stolen, and in the worst case scenario the crew had been killed. We didn't have a gun on board, because keeping a gun was a double-edged sword. If someone were to attack us, and we tried to shoot, unaccustomed to using guns as we were, we were likely to end up the losers. If we killed the attacker in self-defense, in accordance with the laws of Southeast Asian countries it was possible that we'd be the ones put behind bars. Without a gun we were more likely to survive regardless of what happened. During the preceding days we'd talked a lot about what easy prey we were for pirates as we meandered slowly forward on the stormy sea.

After lying awake all night, I got up at six for my turn at the watch and freed Bill, who'd been at the helm for the last several hours holding on with all his might. I made some coffee, and while we were drinking it we gazed at the surging gray sea as day was dawning. At six thirty in the morning we noticed a rather large boat more than half a mile away from us. Two smaller boats split off from it, and one of them headed for us at breakneck speed. There were three men on the boat, and one of them stood in the bow. At first the idea flashed across our minds that Pekka was coming toward us, but that of course wasn't possible. After all, he didn't know our location and he would've first contacted us via radiophone. Then we noticed that all of the men were wearing wide-brimmed Chinese hats with scarves covering their faces. Chinese fishermen used scarves to protect their faces from the sun, but the sun hadn't even really risen very much yet and the morning was completely gray. A moment later there were four boats and they all circulated around us within a radius of about 50 yards. I went to wake up Anneli, Leslie and Jon.

While wondering about and watching our boat being so curiously circled, Pekka contacted us via Hong Kong Radio's radiophone. We told him about the strange activity around us, as we truly didn't know whether they were innocent fishermen who'd come to see out of curiosity what this aimless advancing vessel was, far away from the shipping lanes, or if we were dealing with pirates harboring malicious intent with their faces covered. Pekka listened to us intently and as he spoke his voice sounded very worried. If the men circling about us were pirates, something had to be done and it had to be done right away. Pekka immediately called the Hong Kong Rescue Coordination Centre, which took the matter seriously. Then he advised us that if the situation became dangerous, we needed to throw the EPIRP device into the water. That would then send our precise location to the Rescue Centre, which would send out a helicopter to us immediately after receiving the alert. After hearing all of this information, a miracle occurred. All four boats left as if on a single command and

hightailed it toward the mother boat which immediately sped out of sight at full speed. We were relieved and surprised. If these men were pirates and if they had a VHF radiophone, which they likely did, they would have had to hear our conversation with Pekka. After all, we were on the emergency channel 16 the entire time and our conversation was in English. The game was over from their perspective, so they'd best get out of there, and fast. Pekka couldn't have contacted us at a better time.

We also got instructions from Pekka to head toward Clearwater Bay, which was located to the north of the island of Hong Kong so that we could avoid the extremely busy entrance channel into Hong Kong. We figured we'd arrive at our destination late in the evening and Pekka promised to come to us the following morning, since he understood we were dead-tired after so many sleepless nights.

After dropping anchor at ten in the evening we were tired but happy. We tallied up the good things from our adventure-filled trip. Luckily we hadn't ended up in the grip of a typhoon, the pirates hadn't attacked us, and nothing had happened to anyone. We'd actually had five days of nice, enjoyable cruising. In other words, it could have been worse! It was time to uncork a bottle of Captain Cook sparkling wine, to marvel at the placid conditions provided by the sheltered bay, and to contentedly slip into bed and sleep the kind of sleep that we could only have dreamed of during the previous days and nights.

Excerpt 3

Voyager was awaiting departure from Thailand in Phuket's Boat Lagoon Marina, where we'd gotten our final supplies and done the final engine room checks. The marina was built deep inland, where an immense tin mine had once been located. Before the middle of the 1970s, when tourism became Phuket's main industry, the area survived via the production of tin and rubber. The owner of the marina realized he could make use of the location of the former quarry, where the construction site of a huge marina was then in progress. Vacation homes were being built at breathtaking speed around the harbor, and a few boats had also dared to venture in there.

The dredged channel, which was many miles in length, ran from the sea to the marina. During high tide you could only distinguish the channel via precisely placed channel markers and as you moved inland it looked like trees were growing in the water. During low tide, it looked like a narrow river snaked its way through the middle of the muddy wilderness and the trees swayed in the loamy soil.

The Voyager's draft was six feet and the channel was fairly shallow, so we'd always entered the marina when high tide was at its peak. Even then, we had to know exactly how far we had to stay away from the channel markers. It was the kind of

channel where you couldn't be careless. Pekka had expertly guided the boat into the marina. Daniel said he knew the route in detail and had steered a boat along it several times. Pekka suggested that Daniel pilot the boat out of the marina and that Ray take responsibility for it after that, since Pekka was staying behind.

After waving goodbye on the dock, Pekka jumped into a taxi and headed for the airport. The three of us were on the boat and on our way out to sea. We glided forward slowly and carefully. Right after starting out we briefly touched bottom, but freed ourselves by backing out as the claylike muck seethed around the boat, and we continued down the narrow channel which felt like it would never end. The entire time Daniel maneuvered the boat very close to the channel markers. Either he didn't believe or hadn't heard Pekka's instructions, that the deepest spot in the channel was ten feet away from the markers. About half a mile after we touched bottom the first time, we did it again, and this time we were firmly stuck. Neither shifting the engine into full forward nor into reverse helped any longer. The channel had been dredged like a ditch, with sides that slanted toward the center. We were stuck on the edge of the ditch. Low tide began. The guys got in contact with the marina and asked them for help towing us out.

I was standing on the aft deck as a fast boat sped toward us. Our trip had gotten off to an embarrassing start. I thought that if only Pekka were here, I'd feel safer, he'd know what to do. As the harbormaster's rubber boat approached, I noticed that one of the three men was Pekka. How in the world was that possible, after all, he was supposed to be on a plane to Bangkok. A huge load was lifted off my shoulders.

While he was sitting in the taxi, Pekka remembered that he'd forgotten to mention something important to Ray. He turned back and returned to the marina, because he figured we'd still be in range via radiophone. The office at the marina had just gotten word of the accident, so of course Pekka jumped into the boat with them. We lowered the Voyager's dinghy into the water and with the two rubber boats we tugged at the heavy boat stuck fast in the clay, but it wouldn't budge. We knew that we wouldn't get loose until 24 hours later during high tide. Here we'd stay, left high and dry, with the water level continuing to fall and the boat tilting more and more. In the evening, as the water fell to its lowest level, the Voyager was listing to at least a 40-degree angle on the side of the dredged channel. Walking on the floor was almost impossible, as was sleeping in bed. I tried to snooze, nestling into the sofa in the saloon with the backrest functioning more like a sleeping pad instead of the seat cushions. Pekka made a spot for himself to sleep on the cabin floor using the same solution that we'd tried and tested during our stormy return trip to Hong Kong. It wasn't clear to us how the crew was sleeping in their own cabin, since a deep silence had fallen over the entire party.

During the morning high tide the men checked everything out and tied the boat to the buoys in the channel using long ropes. The morning high tide was lower than

the afternoon high tide and therefore it couldn't help free us. In the afternoon the water rose four inches higher and that was enough to get us loose. Pekka continued as captain now, and he navigated the boat to the sailing club at the southern tip of Phuket, where we anchored for the night since it had started to get dark once we arrived there.

The next day was Sunday. After breakfast we took Pekka ashore and now our long passage finally commenced. The immense Indian Ocean opened up in front of us. We'd tried to start our journey on Friday, but fate had intervened. The old sailors' adage had proved true once more.

Excerpt 4

On the morning of May 1 we arrived in Suez. In accordance with the instructions we'd received from Harbor Control, we went to the boat club buoy, where everyone else was. The canal agent, "Prince of the Red Sea," as he was known to all boaters who travel through the canal, contacted us immediately and soon he was coming toward us, with his assistant rowing, on a rickety, sad little dinghy. The agent was dressed like a prince in a white suit, and every finger sparkled with flashy gold rings. His outward appearance was in stark contrast with that of his dirty assistants. As soon as he came on board our boat, the Prince of the Red Sea asked us to give his oarsman a soft drink and a pack of cigarettes. After hearing that the captain of our boat had been without cigarettes for nearly two weeks, he switched his tune. The Prince promised, first and foremost, to get Ray some cigarettes. To the lady of the boat he uttered flattering compliments while simultaneously admiring the boat. He didn't like that the sides of the boat were dirty, in his opinion the boat definitely needed to be washed immediately. The Prince wanted a bit of extra cash for his men and he was firm in demanding it. The lady of the boat, who'd been lauded as charming, stood her ground and the boat washing ended up waiting until we got to Cannes. After all, we were already on the home stretch of our trip.

The Prince efficiently took care of the immigration formalities, arranged for the permits and pilots needed for transit across the Suez Canal, and also ordered fuel. He invited Ray and me to come on shore at our own risk because we'd given our passports to the local officials, but of course he understood that the lady had to call her husband in Thailand and Ray had to get his badly-needed cigarettes. With this overbearing behavior he wanted to show us that he wasn't just anybody. The prince's office consisted of an ostentatiously decorated apartment, and after we'd sunk down into some armchairs we were speedily served cups of strong Egyptian coffee. It was reassuring to tell Pekka that we were happy to have already made it this far and all

of the formalities at Suez were going smoothly.

On that particular weekend, Muslim countries were celebrating a big four-day religious holiday, so we were really surprised to find out we could fill up the tanks with the fuel we'd ordered on the same day. "But the only way to fill up with 2,000 gallons of diesel fuel is to get it from a barge, and that occurs outside the harbor area," explained the agent. The sea outside the breakwater had turned rough again and we realized right away that anything could happen in the surge next to a dirty barge. We absolutely refused to tank up under such conditions. After some long negotiations and with the help of bribes, the Egyptians agreed to let us tank up inside the breakwater. Now it'd go smoothly and without any risks.

Excerpt 5

Many boaters dream about crossing the Atlantic. That's because the trip isn't too long, and when done at the right time, it's safe and very pleasant. Because of our tight schedule, we had to begin the crossing a month too early, on September 12. We knew full well that it was still hurricane season and if a hurricane hit, it could result in some complications. We set our course first from Las Palmas straight south along the east coast of Gran Canaria toward the 25th parallel. From there we set the autopilot on course straight west toward Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The mild trade winds were blowing from the stern and the autopilot steered the course. The conditions for our trip were ideal. Our watches and routines followed an already familiar schedule. The boat functioned flawlessly, and for days on end the radar didn't show a single ship within 48 miles of its range. The engine revs were kept at 1700 and our speed stayed between seven and eight knots. At this speed, we figured the trip would take about three weeks. Afterward there would be plenty of time to get the boat in shape for the exhibit.

Ray already knew from experience that meals on the Voyager weren't just something to fill up your stomach. For almost the entire passage, lunch was elegantly served at the dining table in the saloon, during which the person on watch could leave the helm for a brief time without having to worry. Sven said that in his galley, meals were in a different league compared to meals here. He'd just open up a can, and if he didn't feel like heating it up, he'd eat it cold, straight out of the can! He promised to fondly remember the Voyager's luscious lamb chops, delicious coq au vin, bouillabaisse, pasta, steaks, baked salmon, etc.

On the tenth day of our passage I switched over to SSB radio's Western Atlantic reception area in order to get weather reports from meteorological stations in the US. The first report said a tropical storm had formed in the vicinity of Cap Verde, and it had already turned into a hurricane named Isidore. It was moving toward the Mid-

Atlantic. We closely followed the weather reports from the radio. It issued reports twice daily and it also gave out predictions about Isidore's future path. Hurricanes move relatively slowly, so if you know a hurricane's path, you can get out of its way. We wondered what direction Isidore would choose. If it headed toward Florida, we'd be directly in its path, and we'd be in danger. Then we'd take off for the Caribbean. Surprisingly, quite early on they predicted that the hurricane would turn sharply toward the north in the Mid-Atlantic, which it actually did. We didn't need to change course, and we were already five days away from Isidore when it crossed our latitude, so we escaped from the hurricane with no more than a scare. After Isidore turned northward we had a few days of heavy rain and the seas turned rough. The rain was good for the boat, however, as the deck got thoroughly rinsed off with the fresh water.

On the evening of the fourth of October, light loomed on the horizon. "Land, ho!" we cried out happily and we stared in the direction of the Bahamas. After a couple of days the Voyager's second ocean-crossing was behind us. On the last night we lowered our speed to one knot, so that we'd arrive during the morning light at the inlet to Fort Lauderdale Harbor. At nine o'clock we went under the 17th Street Bridge and right then we saw Pekka on the pier. We took a detour toward shore and picked him up. He'd flown to Florida a few days earlier to get some things arranged and to meet us yet again.

Excerpt 6

On the morning of December 5 we approached Bell Cay, one of the Exuma Islands. In front of us loomed other islands: O'Brien Cay, towering Little Bell Cay, and in front of it bell-shaped Bell Rock. Approaching the inlet to the bay we could see rocks and a sandbar, so we proceeded carefully. According to the navigation chart, there was a protected anchorage behind Little Bell, and we wanted to stay there for a few days. We had to steer a course very near the shore of the outermost island because there was a sandbar in the middle. When looked at from far away, the shallow sandbars reflected a delicate light green and the deeper the water, the bluer it looked. The boaters that cruise those waters call this "the eye ball navigation". We still had to bypass the last strait before we got to our destination, but there was already plenty of water underneath the keel. We had to trust the depth sounder, because the water gave the eye a distorted perception of its depth. The crystal-clear, translucent water revealed every single clump of sea grass and in the bow of the boat you could've sworn the water was only three feet deep, when in reality it was six or seven feet deep. When we came to a small bay, the scenery was unbelievably beautiful--we'd arrived in paradise. There were only two other boats already anchored there, so there was space and

privacy to spare. One of the boats had been left alone at anchor in the safe bay and the captain of the other boat came over to introduce himself and welcome us.

The purpose of Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park, established in 1959, is to preserve the area in its natural state as much as possible. You're free to anchor your boat in the park and walk on the marked trails on the surrounding islands, but neither anything alive nor dead can be taken from nature. Fishing is also on the list of prohibited activities. In this way, the balance of nature could be preserved while also guaranteeing the chances for increasing plants and animals that in many places were already on the verge of extinction.

The translucent water was sparkling with every possible hue of turquoise, green, and blue. We lowered the dinghy from the deck of the boat, took along our "Bahamian television," and headed out to explore. A Bahamian television is a pail with a see-through bottom. It was easy to explore life on the sea floor with it if a light breeze broke the surface of the water. And it worked--it was like looking at the sea floor through a magnifying glass. There were no signs of fish, plants or any other kind of life. The next morning our neighbors staying on the bay continued their trip toward the south. We were now alone in paradise. Like Adam and Eve we wandered onto the island's sand beach and followed the narrow trail marked with conch shells across narrow Little Bell Cay. The trail was bordered by exotic vegetation, the twittering of birds emanated from the jungle, and above it all a brilliant sun was shining in the blue sky. The beach on the Atlantic side was guarded by the towering, rugged chunk of rock named Bell Rock. The current around it was strong and the edges of the rock were sharp, so we didn't even try to go climb it. However, the highest point on the island reached just as high as the top of Bell Rock and a narrow trail led up to it. Climbing to the peak was worth the trouble, as there was a breathtaking view from the summit.

In the evening we sat on the aft deck, staring at the bright, starry sky. We found the familiar Big Dipper and the North Star. There, somewhere beneath that distant star, Finland was celebrating the 80th anniversary of its independence. We lit a candle on the edge of the fireplace on board and I pulled out the Finnish flag. When the full moon, that big lantern in the sky, popped into view, it lit up the entire landscape with a milky white hue. The sparse vegetation on the sea floor now stood out clearly, and the sand was glistening white. Colorful fish appeared out of nowhere to eat the scraps of bread we threw to them. The dinghy attached to the stern of the boat looked like it was floating on top of a glass plate as it cast its shadow onto the sea floor. We'd never experienced anything like it before.

The waters of the Bahamas remained uniquely clear and clean, which was because only a few of the bigger islands were populated and boaters behaved in an exemplary manner. Even in the bays where people anchored more often you couldn't find a single beer can or bottle on the sea floor. The Atlantic-side beaches contained plastic garbage which had drifted there from far away. Plastic junk thrown into the

sea always sooner or later finds a shore, and it never decomposes.

Staniel Cay is situated a little less than 25 miles to the south of Bell Cay. That became our winter base and over the weeks we cruised from there to different parts of the Exumas. We completely fell in love with Staniel Cay's scenery, its sparkling waters, and its sheltered beaches. The village itself, a settlement of about a hundred people, offered basic services. We went to the office of the local phone company to make calls and to send faxes. There was a "post office" in the village, which meant that the resident of a certain house would accept outgoing mail at his kitchen table whenever he happened to be at home, and he'd then send it onward to the grocery store on the shore. The safest thing to do, however, was to take your own letter straight to the grocery store, because the mail ship, which came once a week, left incoming mail there at the same time that it brought groceries and other supplies. If the weather was bad, the ship didn't come. When the mail ship arrived, the boaters would rush to the stores, because the fresh goods would always run out right away. For some reason very few groceries were delivered, and for example the selection of vegetables consisted of just a few types: potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbage, tomatoes, and sometimes cauliflower and green peppers. The only lettuce was iceberg lettuce, but even that was rarely in stock. The selection was no better in either the Blue or the Pink Store, as they were called based on their building colors. We had nothing to worry about, because once again we were self-sufficient for the entire winter with respect to everything except vegetables. It was completely understandable why small sailboats with very limited cold storage usually stopped for a few days at Staniel Cay and then quickly went on to the bigger town of Exuma, George Town, where the services were much better.

Excerpt 7

During the second week of February, the weather forecast predicted a big storm, because there was an area of strong wind approaching the Bahamas from the north-northwest from Georgia or South Carolina. Several days earlier strong west winds had already violently tossed about the little sailboats in the bay. Most of them had moved to more protected waters and there were only about ten or so of us boats left in the bay. Those who spent time at sea were used to listening to the forecasts from a weatherman who was called Herbie living in Canada on SSB radio and had learned to trust his reports. The really nice thing was that with SSB radio you can both transmit and receive so the boaters could talk with him. Any boater could ask Herbie about the wind conditions before setting out to sea on a longer crossing. He was in daily contact with hundreds of boats in the Atlantic. Every day of the week you could hear him live for several hours on the radio, and you could get information from him that no other

system was able to beat.

In George Town, we were now in contact with Herbie, who volunteered his services for free. The official weather stations described the approaching storm's winds at their peak to only be about 25-30 knots, but Herbie was predicting considerably stronger winds. The day before the night when the storm was predicted to hit was completely calm. "The calm before the storm," everyone thought.

At lunchtime the owners of Northern Lights invited all of the boating parties remaining on the bay to join them for a kind of emergency meeting to talk about and hear the latest predictions about the coming night of the storm. Everyone wanted to be well-prepared in case of an emergency, because in his most recent report, Herbie had talked about winds already blowing at 50 knots from the west, which would blow straight toward us. Everyone returned to their boats and promised to stay put overnight in the bay, no matter what happened.

During his 3 PM report, Herbie reported even more worrying news. He now predicted hurricane-force winds blowing at over 70 knots for the George Town area. After hearing this, the group of boaters in the bay, which consisted of many hundreds of people, grabbed their radiophones and asked their neighbors and friends for their reactions and about what they were planning to do. The members of our dwindling community, who had just returned from its emergency meeting and had promised to stay bravely put, started one by one to lift anchor and head for the opposite shore for protection from the main island, as the hard rain was already beating down and coloring the landscape a dark gray. In addition to us, the only ones remaining on the bay were two motorboats and a sailboat.

We let the anchor chain out more and stayed there, waiting for what would come. Pekka was confident that our ground tackle would hold, because both the weight and dimensions of anchor and chain were planned for a situation like this. After the rain, the wind moderated and the sea calmed down. Everyone was living in an atmosphere of excruciating anticipation. The radiophones were being used extensively now as the worried crews tried to instill each other with hope and courage. "In spite of everything, try to sleep well." "Hopefully we'll see you in the morning." "God bless you." Many people put out more anchors and every boat promised to stay awake and monitor the situation. The evening passed in an unusually calm manner. I retired and went to sleep while Pekka remained at the controls to watch the developing situation. Since nothing was happening and the wind was still non-existent, Pekka crept into bed, too. We set the alarm in case we didn't wake up to the roar of the storm. The alarm clock went off at one o'clock and a surreal silence lingered around us and continued for the rest of the night. We woke up to a calm, bright morning. The front, which according to Herbie was coming toward us, had changed direction. Everyone was relieved to have escaped the hurricane with only a scare, because a 70-knot wind would have been no picnic. As dawn broke, the boats that had

left the bay returned one by one to their previous locations. The fact that Herbie had made a mistake with his prediction this time didn't change anyone's trust in his work. We'd decided that, before we left to cross the Atlantic in the spring, we'd contact Herbie and find out exactly what his predictions and instructions for us were. While sailboats hoped for moderate winds, we wanted calm weather. During the crossing in the spring we'd see then how well Herbie was able to predict the changes in the weather conditions and the winds.

Excerpt 8

The pale morning sun was casting its first rays from behind the island of Milos as we approached its immense crater-shaped bay. Two small rocky islands near the entrance of the bay soared out of the sea like ancient guards of the harbor. From behind them rose up the colorful red, white, and yellow stone wall, whose colors were due to the island's volcanic origin. At the base of the cliff one of the island's many silvery, gleaming beaches was still hidden in dark shadows.

For the first time during this trip to Greece a harmonious cluster of blue and white houses and churches stood out from the landscape, buildings that were typical specifically for the Cyclades Islands. The buildings were literally hanging above us on the dark, dry slope, built high up as the residents of these islands had done over the centuries in perpetual fear of pirates and ill-intentioned invaders from the sea. Above them, at the top of the small hill rose a fortress flying the blue and white Greek flag, known as Kastro in Greek.

As our boat glided through the narrow mouth of the bay toward the protected natural harbor, behind us remained two tall rocks, which when looked at from a certain angle resembled giant-sized bears. It looked like they were saying to us, "Welcome to Milos, welcome to the Cyclades." At the same time we passed by some buildings possessing unique architecture which formed a small fishing village. They were indeed unusual, as we'd never anywhere before seen boathouses like them. The boathouses were carved out of sandstone underneath the houses like garages. The fishermen had first dug the boat shelters out of the earth where they could safely store their boats. Later, they'd built permanent dwellings on top of the shelters, and thus was born the silhouette of this picturesque fishing village.

We turned in the direction of the shore toward the harbor town of Adamas, which was now bathed in the bright morning sun. Although the large natural harbor was located in the crater of a volcano that had erupted long ago, it wasn't deep everywhere, but rather afforded an ideal anchorage even with the strongest meltem, the strong, dry north winds of the Aegean Sea.

Pekka hadn't slept much the previous night, but he wasn't feeling tired at all now. We were finally in the Aegean Islands, which in the opinion of many foreigners represented the most authentic Greece. Every island was different from the others, and they all had their own stories to tell. Despite the increase in Greece's tourism and the greater income that came with it, most people, especially on the small islands, lived like they had for centuries with their old customs, revered traditions, and deeply-held beliefs. Milos belonged to those islands that had been left out of the mainstream of international tourism. Even Milos' summer tourists came mainly from mainland Greece and Athens, rather than from abroad.

A flock of noisy vacationers who had just disembarked from their ship were milling about Adamas' seafront as we motored toward shore in our rubber dinghy. After passing by the numerous seafront bars and taverns that were empty since it was morning, we arrived at the central square of the village, where you could easily take a bus to different parts of the island. We got on a nearly full bus and it climbed up to Plaka, the upper town. A lively hum of voices filled the old bus, since all of the locals knew each other and people were catching up with one another. Most of our fellow passengers were elderly grandparent types and most of the women were dressed traditionally in black. The color of clothing for widows was a joyless black. This was because women often got married to men considerably older than themselves, and it explained the fact that often middle-aged women were already widows and they were expected to wear black clothing for the rest of their lives, or for at least five years after the death of their spouse. If a woman got remarried, she'd be set free from her gloomy clothing. For men it was enough to wear a black armband during the forty days of grieving.

The islanders believed in the future, as attested to by the extensive building in the area between the lower and upper villages. New houses were built to be bigger and were equipped with modern comforts alongside the more accessible travel routes and were no longer built on the highest point of the island. Young people used cars and mopeds. No longer would a donkey do for them, as it had for their parents and grandparents. The higher the bus climbed, the older the houses got, and their whiteness was striking.

Excerpt 9

Our moped sputtered and coughed its way forward. The island had just one road, which we were working away at from one end to the other. The road undulated as it rose on high, and the view opened up toward large, uninhabited valleys and in the distance the sky and sea fused into a misty whole. The neighboring islands shimmered

in the distance: Siros in the north, Paros in the west, and Sifnos in the south. We passed by a man leisurely making his way on a donkey and we waved hello to him, to which he answered with a friendly wave of his cane.

We stopped at the empty square in the small village of Galani in the shade of a large deciduous tree with our stomachs vigorously reminding us that it was lunchtime. The village looked deserted; we'd hardly find a place to eat there. Right then an old woman came toward the square leading a skinny donkey that was carrying two vessels of water on its back. By showing my camera to the woman I tried to ask whether I could take a photo of her and her beast of burden, to which she gladly agreed. After she'd tied her donkey to a tree trunk and posed for the camera, she scurried off motioning with her hands for us to wait. A moment later she returned with drinking glasses in her hand and she scooped up some fresh, cold water for us out of one of the vessels. On the small islands water was often located at the end of a long and arduous path, and there wasn't much of it, so it was precious. The best way for the old lady to show us her hospitality was to offer us a glass of water, which was very welcome in the heat. The poor grandma's life wasn't easy: in addition to getting water for herself she had to also get it for her donkey, as the animal was indispensable to her.

Maybe we'll find a tavern in the next settlement, we thought optimistically and the moped continued its painstaking way. The village of Pirgos lay gleaming white on the other side of the large valley on the edge of a nearly vertical cliff. When we got there, it looked completely uninhabited. Some buildings had wooden boards covering the doorways of abandoned homes. But somewhere a rooster crowed and the cackling of chickens came from the same direction. From behind worn doors we could occasionally hear people talking quietly. The blue doors of some buildings with their brass doorknockers sparkled with newness, but there was no one anywhere in sight. We walked the rough, narrow streets with our stomachs growling, but of course there was no trace of a restaurant. We were just heading back up the main street of the village toward our moped when a couple walked toward us. We asked them about a tavern, and found out one was located in the direction they pointed. We walked up a long stairway and stood in front of a small village store. When we asked about the tavern, the elderly shopkeeper nodded over his shoulder and motioned with his hand toward a table and a couple of chairs next to him. With that the old grandpa scurried inside, said something to his old wife and immediately we could hear the sound of food being prepared coming from the back of the room. The shopkeeper returned a second later with a bottle of retsina and two glasses. We were content. With the wine we got off to a nice start. We gazed at the large valley that lay in front of us with its fields and silvery-green shimmering olive trees, and again we marveled at the abundance of small, simple whitewashed country chapels. We listened to the cackling of the chickens and to the sizzling frying pan on the stove at the back of the store, curiously waiting for what we'd be served. In no time the shopkeeper brought a

tomato cucumber salad and white bread to our table. We seasoned the vegetables with olive oil, vinegar, and a dash of salt, as one was supposed to.

The resinous taste of retsina wine no longer tasted strange to us. After all, we'd had it several times before. Our first experience with it hadn't thrilled us, but we knew that it was an acquired taste. Rarely did anyone love it the first time they tasted it.

For the main course the old man brought out plates of potatoes and eggs fried in olive oil. Being hungry, the modest food tasted delicious and the eggs were clearly fresh and from the couple's own cackling brood. After the plates were cleared away we waited to see what would happen next, because we could tell from the old man's determined steps that lunch wasn't over. Soon plates of grapes appeared in front of both of us, those too from their own garden, as grape vines were growing on the canopy above us with grapes that looked just like these.

After these experiences, the question crept into my mind of what will happen to these already deserted villages on these small islands once the last old people have died off. What will happen to the rural landscape, whose every square foot is covered by irregular patches of field enclosed by stone fences? Who will take care of the villages when the year-round residents are gone, who will paint the buildings and churches, who will take care of the innumerable country chapels? The city people from Athens who come for their summer vacations will hardly do it. They've converted their old home places into vacation homes and want what other tourists want from their vacations: rest and sun.

Excerpt 10

I awoke after midnight and noticed that the northern sky was illuminated with a single bright sea of lightning, but I couldn't hear any thunder. Pekka woke up, too. We didn't react much to what we saw, but we noted that if such a strong thunderstorm came upon us, it'd also bring heavy rain and then we'd have to go down below. Until then we could sleep in peace on the upper deck. As the night wore on both of us woke up several times and we glanced at the horizon, where the lightning continued hour after hour. After four o'clock the wind strengthened a bit, but it was a trade wind that was blowing from the Atlantic behind the island. We again noted that there was no reason for worry. After five o'clock, Pekka got up because the stern of the boat had started to rise strangely, but the movement felt soft and gentle. A while later the same thing happened, and this time it was a bit stronger. Pekka rushed down to the aft deck to give more rope to the dinghy, because if the weather changed, it'd be better to have the dinghy on a long rope. Soon the movement of the boat woke me up, too. We couldn't have guessed what was about to happen and where we were about to be taken.

As a precaution I hurried into the saloon to clear loose objects off the table and put them in a safe place. While collecting the objects the boat pitched even stronger than before and an enormous surge threw a foot and a half of water onto the aft deck. I glanced at Pekka through the closed glass door, he was sitting on the back bench with the dinghy rope in his hands. The expression on the drenched man's face was one of pure surprise. What was this? Nothing like this had ever happened before. Right then the alarm on the bilge pump clicked on, as the mass of water on the deck flowed through the open hatch into the bilge in the engine room. Lauri had also woken up and come down. As soon as the water on the deck had receded enough for Pekka to open the saloon door, he yelled, "Hey, let's go now! Turn on the engine and pull up the anchor!" As the torrents of water were hitting he'd noticed that the whole time more swells were rolling in, and they were growing and were breaking right over us. Pekka gave us instructions. He himself jumped up onto the bow of the boat, because pulling up the anchor in these conditions was difficult. Lauri's job was to stay on the aft deck and watch the dinghy so that its rope didn't get caught in the propeller. I grabbed onto the wheel and steered the boat following the signals Pekka gave me from the bow.

Suddenly the back of the boat rose up extremely high and the bow went deep into the water. Tremendous streams of water washed over the bow. I shrieked in horror because I was sure that Pekka had been washed overboard. When the bow rose up to the surface, Pekka was lying on the deck holding onto the anchor chain tightly. Fortunately he was quick in his movements and was in control of himself. That's what saved him. A split second later the boat turned sideways with the beam into the waves and it listed suddenly and strongly. For a moment it was almost on its side. I saw, as if in slow motion, how the boat was leaning over to one side more, more, and then more, and I was completely sure that the boat would capsize. It'd be the end of the boat and the end of us. A sudden movement slapped me powerfully against the cockpit wall, and I immediately lost my grip on the wheel.

From the saloon, the cabin, and the galley I could hear the clinking, rattling, and banging of flying and breaking objects. After what seemed like an eternity the boat righted herself. An even bigger wave of water had washed over Pekka, but there he still was, hanging on and clinging to the chain. My mind flashed and I wondered how Lauri was--was he still there? Pekka flailed his arms wildly from the bow and yelled as loudly as he could, "Full speed ahead!" The anchor was still stuck on the bottom. Pekka's idea was that the anchor could be dragged behind us on the sandy bottom, but even if we lost it, it wouldn't be anything compared to losing the entire boat and our lives. I did as I was told, but now the boat was tilting onto the other side and torrents of water were spilling into the wheelhouse. This lurch wasn't as bad as the first, but the cockpit door was ajar on that side of the boat and in an instant there was water everywhere and it was running down the stairs and into the cabin. After the boat steadied herself, I quickly increased our speed before we tilted again. Just a short

distance forward and we'd moved out from under the deadly breaking waves. We were now safe and Pekka managed to raise the anchor, to which nothing had happened.

Excerpt 11

On the last day of April we continued our trip from Nassau toward Bimini, the westernmost group of islands in the Bahamas located near Florida. The sun was shining and the sea was as smooth as glass. We were sitting in the cockpit chatting and drinking our morning coffee. Suddenly in front of us on the surface of the calm water we saw big dark blobs. We glanced at each other in surprise. What were they? According to the navigation chart they weren't rocks. At that moment we realized they were whales. Pekka reduced the speed to the bare minimum and changed course so that we wouldn't run into them. The boat glided in complete silence next to the sleeping whales. We stared at them from a few feet away. After a little while the whales woke up and realized that there was something strange next to them. There were three of them, real giants. Slowly, as if in slow motion they slapped the water once with their tails and dove deep into the sea into their own world. We were completely dumbstruck. It was unbelievable that at the end of our years of cruising we'd still get to see something so unique. During the entire five years we'd seen a whale only a single time, and then from afar. Now, on our second to last day we'd almost bumped into three. The largest and most majestic of all the mammals had come to say goodbye to us.

Soon afterward we left the deep sea behind us and we arrived at shallow, flat-bottomed Bahama Bank. The water underneath the boat was only about seven feet deep. I moved up to the bow to sit and gaze at the seafloor, which you could see through the smooth as glass surface of the water as if through a magnifying glass. The sand on the seafloor was decorated with starfish both big and small. A clump of sea grass here and there. A lazily swimming shark even came into my field of view. There were no fish to speak of. This, too, was quite an experience. Rarely did one have the chance to examine the seafloor this closely.

Evening drew near. Instead of continuing to the island for the night, we stayed on the calm bank, where there wasn't even a ripple on the water, and no trace of swells. The white sand glistened on the bottom of the sea. It was exciting and somehow wistful to spend the last night of our long cruise at anchor in the middle of the sea with no land in sight. In the middle of nothing. The sun, in hues of blue, red, and purple, was already on its way into the sea, and soon afterward the dark southern night would envelop us in its warm embrace.

We'd made our big dream come true.