



The Adventure

by John S. Pritchett

Preface

Mark Twain described the Hawaiian Islands as "the loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean".

This is true. However, Honolulu, the capital, is the eleventh largest city in the United States and comes with all the ills one might find in a large metropolis.

Having lived and worked in Honolulu for the better part of a decade, I found myself yearning.

Someone told me that the New Hebrides were the last unspoiled tropical islands left on earth. With that in mind, I set my sights in that direction.

This writing describes the events that followed. This is a true story of a South Pacific adventure

Honolulu

The small classified ad in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin May 7, 1984, read: CREW WANTED share expenses trip Fiji, New Hebrides.

I had learned that New Hebrides (Vanuatu) were unspoiled tropical islands in the South Pacific. I called the number and made an appointment. At a house in Palolo Valley,

I met Peter Denton and his girlfriend Judy. Peter explained that his ship, Endurance, was anchored in the harbor at Port Vila, Vanuatu, that it was well equipped with scuba gear and that this would be a fantastic diving and sailing adventure. He said the plan was to fly to Port Vila, stock up with provisions and sail from there, exploring islands along the way and ending up in Fiji. From there, Judy would join Peter with a new crew and funding and go on another excursion.

Peter said that Judy would let me use her Nikonos underwater camera and another Nikon 35 mm camera to document the trip. It sounded good to me. I gathered enough cash to give to Peter for expenses and for the air fare to Port Vila.

On May 21, 1984, Peter and I arrived at the Honolulu International Airport where we were joined by crewmembers Jim O'Malley, a former coast guardsman, and Tori Jenkins, a young lady who was originally from New York. We boarded the Air Nauru jet, surprisingly the only passengers on the plane, and took off around 8:30 in the morning.

I had never heard of Air Nauru, but the fare was very reasonable. I later learned that Nauru, officially the Republic of Nauru and formerly known as Pleasant Island, is an island country. The tiny Pacific island lies just 26 miles south of the equator about halfway between Hawaii and Australia. The island is an ideal stop over for migrating sea birds and for thousands of years the guano from these birds combined with limestone left by coral, producing the highest quality phosphate in the world. Nauru soon became the richest country in the world, body for body and acre for acre. With all that money, the government bought a fleet of Boeing passenger jets and thus, Air Nauru.

The weather was bright and beautiful. Below, rows of little white, puffy clouds marched in straight lines across the blue ocean surface. Before long, we were circling Majuro Atoll. Looking down, the island was littered with what looked like toothpicks. Turns out it was palm tree trunks blown down by a recent hurricane. There wasn't a standing tree on the atoll. The plane landed, refueled and we were back on our way.

Soon, we were circling the island of Nauru. To me, it looked like a giant marshmallow, round with a high plateau and I could see large cranes and equipment. The jet landed and we went to customs. I remember it was incredibly hot there. After paying the \$10 departure fee, we boarded another Air Nauru jet and were off to Port Vila. From there, the weather completely changed. Now, it was cloudy and gray.

Having traveled more than 3,500 miles from Honolulu, our jet began circling the island of Efate, Vanuatu. Looking out the window, the island was all green. I didn't see any buildings at all, just trees. It almost felt like going back in time to a lost world.

Vanuatu



Vanuatu was formerly called the New Hebrides.

The islands were discovered in 1606 by the Portuguese navigator Pedro Fernandes de Queirós. In 1774, James Cook explored the islands and named them the New Hebrides because their mountainous coastlines reminded him of the Hebrides Scottish archipelago.

Governed jointly by the British and French since 1906, independence came in 1980 when the island nation was renamed "Vanuatu." It is one of twelve independent island nations in the Pacific

The plane landed at the small airport and we took taxis for the short ride to Port Vila town and down to a pier called Yachting World. The Endurance was moored a short distance across the harbor near a small island named Iririki.

It turns out that Peter's yacht had been locked up by the Harbor Master, probably for some unpaid mooring fees or something like that. Peter found the Harbor Master and made arrangements to unlock the yacht. He then rented a skiff with an outboard motor and he and Jim took a load of gear out to the yacht. Tori and I stayed on the dock and talked as the light faded. Peter and Jim returned and then Peter, Tori and I took the remainder of the gear out to the yacht.

It was dark now and there were no lights onboard. We did our best to stow the gear and then motored back to the dock where we joined Jim and then went to a quaint local restaurant for a bite. After dinner, we went back to the Endurance, and fumbling around with only flashlights we found bunks and bedding and went to sleep.

In the morning, I got my first real look at the yacht. I was a little disappointed in its condition. I did question Peter about some of the rigging but he said it didn't matter. I dismissed my concern in part because I was excited about the adventure and I didn't want anything to get in the way.

The Endurance was a 59 foot, 40 ton, gaff rig. At that time, I was not aware that the hull was ferro cement. Below deck, the woodwork, cabinets, galley and trim were very impressive. Peter was a carpenter by trade and he had done a beautiful job outfitting the cabin. I later learned that other carpenters were involved with the work besides Peter.

The following week, much of it rainy, the four of us cleaned the yacht, painted the deck. We fixed things, took on food supplies and generally tried to put things in order. One night we were lying on top of the cabin looking at the night sky. It looked different. There was a thick, hazy band of stars going across the night sky, it was the Milky Way. Then Tori said, "Look, there's the Southern Cross!" So, I saw the Southern Cross for the first time. Like the lyrics of the Crosby, Stills and Nash song.



The Endurance at Yachting world Port Vila, Vanuatu



The Endurance anchored off Iririki Island

Captain Bligh

Near the end of that week, Peter gave Tori and me the assignment of retrieving a skiff and outboard that he had left with a friend when he last departed Port Vila. We were to go to the Eastern side of the bay where there was faculty housing and look up Peter's friend Martin Horrock, a professor at Malapoa College. Peter took us into town in the rented skiff and gave us some vatu (Vanuatu money) for a cab. We were successful in finding Martin who invited us into his house where his wife brought us refreshments.

We were chatting briefly when Martin turned to Tori and me and said, "So, do you know about Peter?" Tori and I looked at each other quizzically. "What do you mean?", I said. Martin said that when Peter was in Port Vila the latter part of 1983, he was arrested and put in jail for brawling, that his wife from Australia had left him, and he had contracted cerebral malaria, went crazy and tore up the hospital. Martin went on to say that Peter was a Captain Bligh. To that I said, jokingly, "If he's Captain Bligh, then I'm Mr. Christian."



Peter Denton

Martin also said that once the ship was under way. Peter's personality changed. He went on to say however, that Peter was a good yachtsman and navigator.

We finished our drinks and then loaded an outboard motor and gas tank into Martin's car. He drove us to a nearby gas station where we filled the gas tank and then drove a short distance to where the skiff was moored in shallow water. I waded out to the skiff, mounted the motor and hooked up the gas tank. Martin waited to see if the motor would start. It did. Tori and I thanked Martin, waved goodbye and we were on our way back to the Endurance.

As we motored across the bay, I told her that regarding what Martin had said about Peter, I wasn't going to hold it against him or say anything about it. She agreed. But it did raise questions about the circumstances surrounding Peter's previous departure from Port Vila.

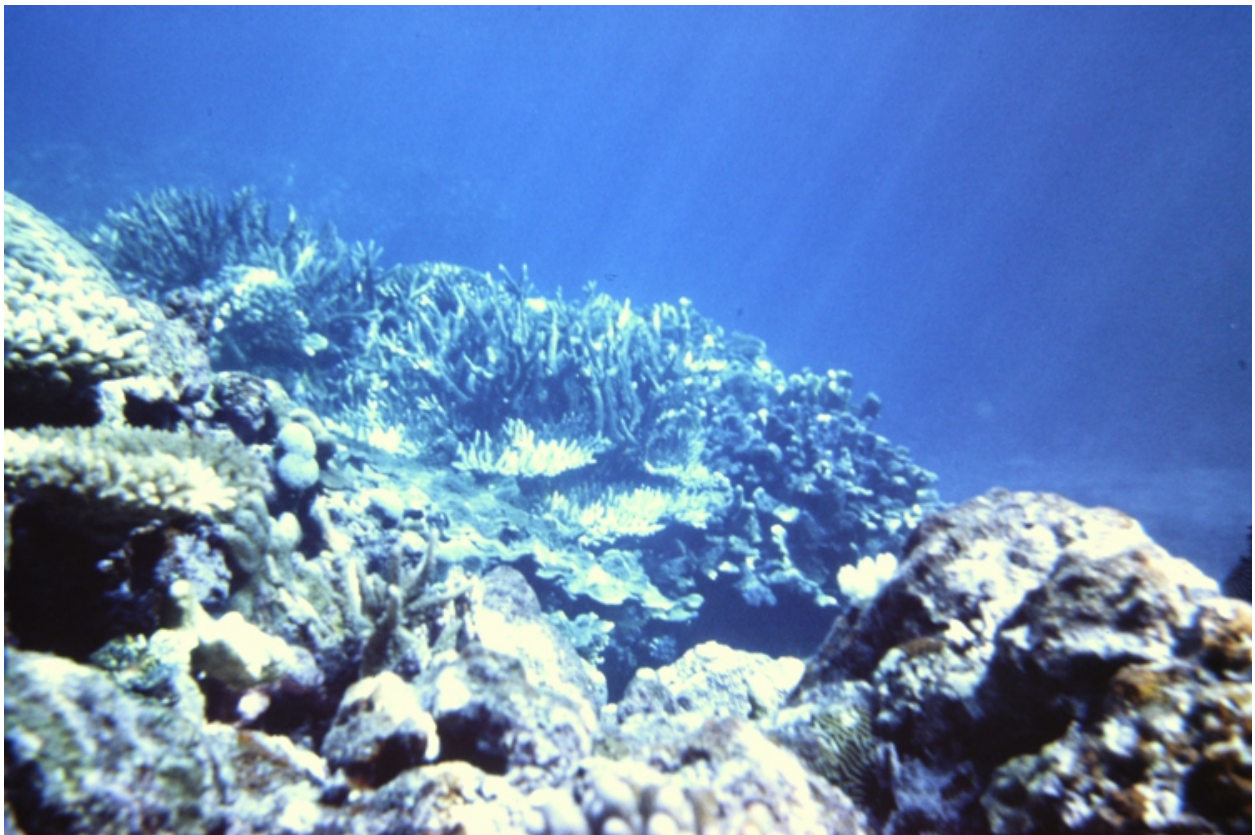
As we approached the Endurance, Peter was standing on the deck smiling. He was happy that we had succeeded in retrieving the skiff and motor. Of course, this meant he could return the rented skiff and eliminate that expense.

The skiff was about 14 feet long, made of wood and it was pretty heavy. There was a method by which, with great effort, the skiff could be hoisted up and tied to the top of the cabin when we were sailing.

Port Vila

We continued our work on the yacht and had time for a few dives and to explore the town of Port Vila.

Our first dive was in the late afternoon. Jim, Peter and I loaded scuba gear in the skiff and Peter took us to a spot just outside of the bay. Jim and I peeled over the side. When I got in the water, I was amazed! It was beautiful, so clear and so colorful with many types of coral and fish. I had dived on reefs in Hawaii and Florida before, but that was nothing like this!



A day or so later, we hoisted anchor and motored the short distance across the harbor to Yachting World where we took on diesel, fresh water, motor oil and kerosene.

The next morning, we motored out of Port Vila Harbor and then sailed about seven miles north, across Mele Bay to a new anchorage at a cove near Hideaway Island called Hidden Bay.

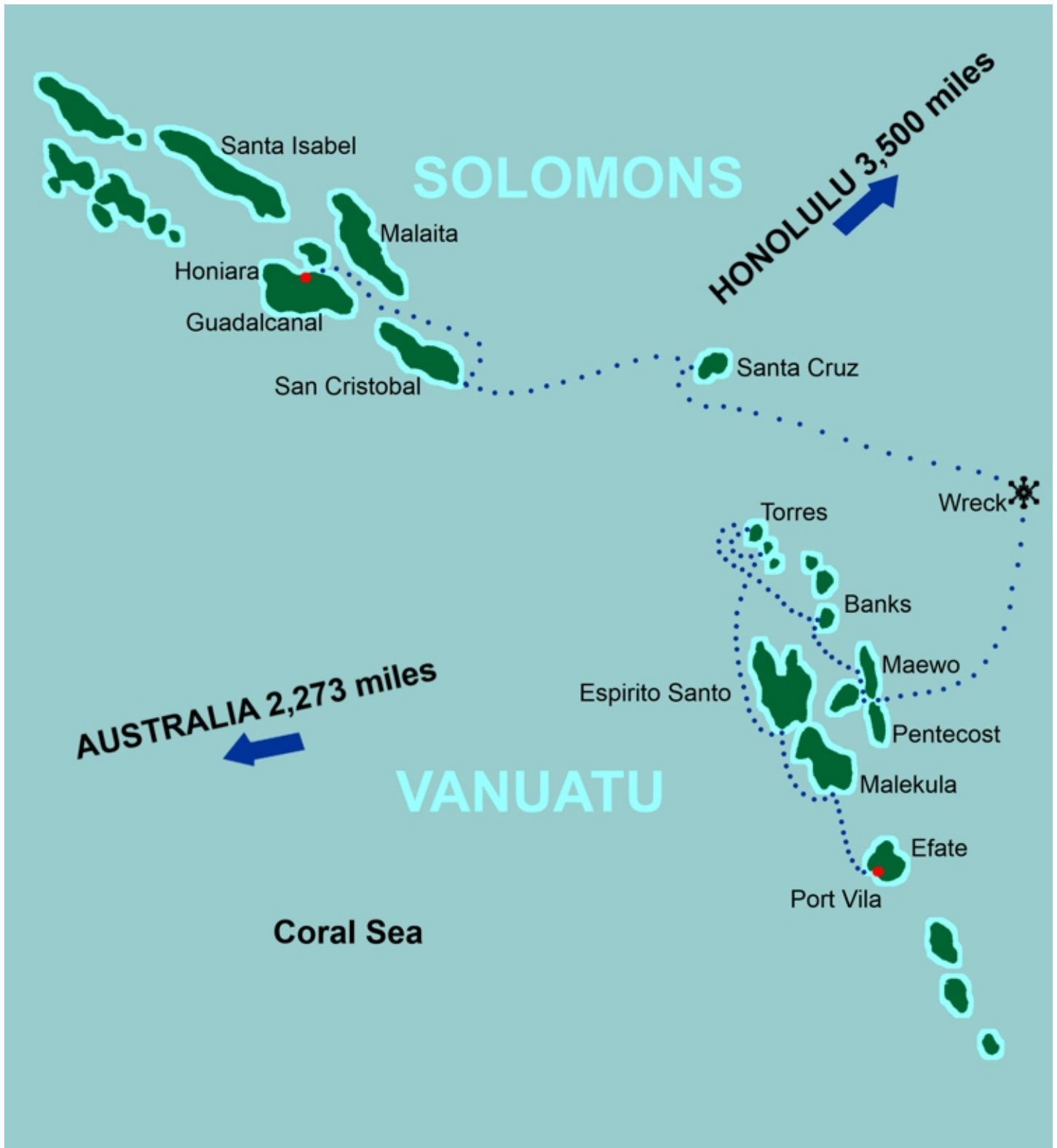


Hidden Bay, Efate Island, Vanuatu

I'm not really sure why we made this move. Later on we saw three people on the beach waving. It was the Harbor Master and our last two crewmembers: Calvin Maxfield from Alberta, Canada and Cedar Kehoe, a graduate of the University of Hawaii in the field of oceanography.

On June 8, we all went ashore and took taxis to town to check out at immigration.

On the morning of June 9, we departed Efate. With moderate winds, we sailed north along the western coast of Malekula stopping at Melip. As was always the case, when we anchored off these islands, locals would paddle out in their outrigger canoes, smile and just watch us.



For reference, it is 801 miles from Port Vila to Honiara.

Sharks!

We went for a dive. There was a reef with lots of fish including giant bump-head parrot fish. The reef fell off sharply into deep water. I lifted my head out of the water and near me, Jim O'Malley, with his head out of the water said, "There's sharks here!" I went back under and swam out into the deep water. I was staring into the deep blue when like a ghost, a grey reef shark came in and out of view. That was the first time I had ever been in the water with sharks, something that later would become routine.

The next day we hoisted anchor and sailed to Tasiriki at the southern end of Espiritu Santo. We got the skiff in the water and several of us went ashore to a beautiful sandy beach.

On my own, I started hiking north up the beach. I came to a fast moving stream, got across it and continued on eventually climbing up a small hill to a little village overlooking the ocean. I met one of the locals and he showed me around the village. As we were walking and talking, he looked at me with a big grin and said, "Do you like pig?" I thought maybe he was going to offer me some roast pork, but he was just affirming that I, like he, thought roast pig was one of the best things on earth.

People in this part of the world love roast pig, but they don't enjoy it very often and it's a special occasion when they do.

I joined three men sitting in front of a hut, under the thatched overhang. It was raining and I was trying to get out of the rain. We talked and complained about the rain. Vanuatu is primarily inhabited by Melanesians and they all speak pidgin English.

Because it was a bit crowded at this hut, I crossed over to the adjacent hut where a woman was standing. The men were aghast. Evidently that was a major cultural faux pas. I thought it was time to leave and as I walked down the hill, a woman with a basket of mandarin oranges shouted at me and offered the oranges. I said “Thank you” and kept walking. They do grow some very sweet mandarin oranges there at Tasiriki.

Back at the Endurance, Tori had done some exploring of her own and had brought some mandarin oranges and some yellow colored cocoa pods. She showed us that you can eat the jelly surrounding the cocoa seeds. She said the locals roast the seeds and make cocoa. I think it’s an agricultural effort to expand and diversify the local economy.

The next morning we loaded the scuba gear into the skiff and motored south to a good diving spot for some spear fishing. I was cruising around the reef when I saw a huge coral trout and then I nailed him! I was so excited. I started swimming back to the skiff trying to hold the fish out of the water because, you know, sharks.

It seems like you could be cruising along not seeing any sharks. Then, you spear a fish and sharks suddenly appear.

I got the fish to the boat. Peter was impressed. I cooked it up for dinner that night and it was delicious. But, there was a problem. Because the coral trout eats a lot of small reef fish it is likely to have a high concentration of the ciguatera toxin. It didn’t bother me but that night Cedar became very ill. She couldn’t believe it when Peter told her he didn’t have any aspirin on board. I had brought aspirin and I gave some to Cedar and it did help her.

Lost

We continued sailing along the Western coast of Espiritu Santo, the largest island in the Vanuatu group. Espiritu Santo is a high island with its peak, Mt. Tabwemasana at 6,165 feet, one of the tallest mountains in the Pacific.

As evening approached, we rounded the tip of Espiritu Santo and the wind picked up considerably and the seas got rough. The yacht was listing to the starboard so much that I found myself sleeping on the right side of the hull, more than in my bunk. In any case I had to be holding on to something, or wedged in, just to stay in place. I could hear Peter at the helm cursing and saying, “we’re lost.”



Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu

Torres Islands

By morning the wind had died down and Peter had managed to get us to the island Loh in the Torres group. It was a relief. Again we were greeted by locals in their canoes, smiling and watching. All of a sudden a sea turtle popped up near one of the canoes. The man at the front of the canoe sprang into action. With a choker strung between both hands, he was ready to pounce on the turtle, but then the turtle was gone.

A little later we hoisted anchor and sailed a short distance to another island in the Torres group, Tegua. There was a beautiful little cove that was a perfect anchorage. No locals came out to greet us here. We could see one small dwelling on the island. Dave, Rick and Calvin formed a landing party and when they returned, they told us that the island was uninhabited except for two people. A young man named Leonard who owned the island inherited from his father, and another younger man.

They lived by spear fishing in the shallows, and they ate fruit bats they shot with a 22 caliber rifle. Also, the island was inhabited by coconut crabs, also known as robber crabs, which are considered a delicacy. We stayed at this location for several days.

One morning we woke up and the ocean was like glass. Leonard and his companion quickly mounted a high powered outboard to a small aluminum boat and with a cache of coconut crabs they were off to nearby island markets to sell the crabs. That's how they made money. Coconut crabs are such a big deal in Vanuatu that the image of a coconut crab adorns the Vatu coin. On another trip to Leonard's house, Dave and Rick came back with a coconut crab. We cooked it and ate it and it was great!



Rick Perkins with coconut crab



Tegua Island, Vanuatu

The spear fishing was good here. Large parrot fish would swim right up to you, I think because they had never seen a diver before. The crew and I took the skiff to a tiny island called Ngwel about a half mile from where the Endurance was anchored. I think we all wanted to get off that boat, if just for a little while. I speared a fish and we built a fire and roasted it. We sat around the fire eating and talking and having a good time.

Another day, I was exploring the south west end of the island. The ground was muddy with lots of trees and gnarly roots and there were land crabs all over the place. I got the idea to harvest some of the claws to eat and if we only took one claw, the crabs would grow it back. I recruited Tori and got a bucket and about half filled it with crab claws. While I was chasing land crabs, I came upon a small brown snake curled up in the roots at the base of a tree. I was very surprised to see a snake and I just left it alone. Now, in hindsight, I should have killed it. It was probably a brown tree snake but at that time I didn't know about the damage brown tree snakes can cause on tropical islands.

Tori and I returned to the Endurance and when we showed the bucket of crab claws to Peter he scoffed. We boiled them and they were tasty but I have to admit they were a bit small. When I told Peter about the snake, he laughed and said there's no way a snake could be on such a remote island. He said I had a wild imagination, but I did see it.

Peter was trying to get our refrigeration system working and I tried to help him by soldering some wires. The refrigeration system was important to Peter because he thought we could spear a bunch of fish and keep them fresh so we would have food along the way. I was good at spear fishing and Peter encouraged the others to spearfish the way I did so he could stock the freezer. At one point, we thought we had the refrigerator working, but eventually the smell of rotting fish convinced us otherwise. We gave up on it after that.

It was finally time to leave Tegua but we couldn't get the anchor up. I had to free dive down about twenty feet to free the anchor and then we were on our way.

Banks Islands



Twin Waterfalls, Vanua Lava, Vanuatu

We sailed south towards the Banks islands, looking for the twin waterfalls. After sailing for a day or so, we approached an island and as it got closer, there they were, the twin waterfalls, on the island of Vanua Lava.

We anchored off shore, lowered the skiff and a group of us went ashore. The waterfalls are big and as they cascade from the plateau above, they empty into a large pool, right on the shore. Some of my mates and I jumped in the pool and it felt great to bathe in fresh water. Yachtsmen are known to come here to replenish their water tanks. We left the pool and walked south to a place where we had seen a hut surrounded by trees with bright yellow flowers as we were sailing in. An old man there greeted us and told us that there was a celebration taking place that night in the village up the coast.

That sounded good and we went back to the Endurance and gathered up a few things and told Peter where we were going, although he was quite indifferent about it. Dave, Rick, Jim, Calvin and I were taken ashore and we found the old man who was leaving for the celebration. He told us to follow him and he took off like a jack rabbit. We tried to follow him, but he was soon out of sight and we never saw him again.

The trail to the village went up and down small hills, over streams. Green parrots darted about in a beautiful tropical jungle setting. Sometimes the trail went along the beach. I remember walking for a long distance on this beach and never seeing anything man made. No bottle caps, plastic utensils, fishing gear, everything was natural. It seemed like it took forever but eventually we reached the village as the sun was going down.

Some of the younger villagers greeted us with smiling faces as we came out of the jungle and then we met a very friendly man around our age who said we would need to talk to the chief to get permission to stay and join in the celebration.

It was twilight when he took us to the chief, a tall Melanesian man. I asked if we could stay. With his arms folded across his chest, he granted permission but said we couldn't join in the big dance, or something like that. I thanked him and was walking back to the other side of the village when one of my mates, Dave or Rick shouted, "John! Come look at these mushrooms that glow in the dark!" I thought they were full of it. But there, on a black, rotting log were mushrooms glowing with a bright iridescent blue light. I had never seen anything like it.

The village was comprised of grass huts surrounding a perimeter with a few more huts closer in and a large community hut in the middle. There were dirt paths connecting the different huts and the rest of the area was grassy. I was struck by how tidy it was.

There was some moonlight and the party was starting. In front of a hut in the grassy area, a hole had been dug in the ground and there was a flat piece of wood partially covering it. A villager with a long pole pounded on the flat piece of wood creating a steady drum beat. Dave, Rick and I went into one of the huts where men were making kava. They strained it through coconut fibers and then poured it into coconut shell cups. We all drank some and I could feel the effect. I later learned that kava is very bad for one's liver.

We went outside on the grassy area and then I saw Dave bending down looking at the ground. He had lost one of his contact lenses. With a flashlight, which the locals call a torch, Dave finally found the lens.

We then went into the large community hut where the dance was taking place. There were guitars playing rhythmically. I noticed that the guitars only had one or two strings but it sounded pretty good. In my experience in this part of the world, I never saw a guitar with more than two strings.

Young men and women were dancing their traditional dance which seemed like a kind of line dance. It was a very festive atmosphere. Maybe it was the cava but at some point I took one of the girls by the hand and started dancing the jitterbug, spins, twirling and so on. It seemed to fit the music and she looked like she was having fun, but then the Chief came in and shut it all down. Was this another cultural faux pas on my part? I blame it on the kava.

We later joined one of the village elders who made us something to eat and offered us a place to sleep. He apologized that there was no mattress, just a platform covered with a grass mat. We had a good night's sleep and in the morning started the hike back to the Endurance. As we were leaving, one of the villagers climbed up a nearby coconut tree, cut down a nice green coconut, and with one motion, he cut off the top of the coconut so we had something to drink.

When we got back, Jim wasn't feeling well. I shared papayas I had found on the island with him, and gave him a large opihi shell to use as a spoon. I also gave him a penicillin pill which really helped. I had given Jim a penicillin pill when we first got on the Endurance after drinking the water in the ship's "fresh water" tank. The water at the village is risky too. At the village, there were a few metal pipes with faucets on top of them coming out of the ground and we might think they're connected to some water supply, but they are not. The water that comes through the faucet just comes straight from the ground, groundwater. I noticed that one of the faucets at the village was near an outhouse. I took a penicillin pill also.

The next day we went diving out on the reef and I speared a nice size parrot fish. Back on the yacht, I fried it up with lime juice and celery salt. It tasted really good and Peter raved about it. Later on though, I felt really itchy. It was the ciguatera. Peter said that in Australia they call it "the grunge."

Maewo

We soon pulled up the anchor and departed the Banks islands. As we neared our next destination, Maewo, there was little wind and we weren't moving. Peter cranked up the diesel engine and then almost immediately shut it down. He looked in the engine compartment and then came up on deck complaining that GM engines were notorious for leaking oil.

His discovery of the problem sounded too rehearsed and I think it was a problem he already knew about. So we bobbed around looking at Ambae Island to our west while we were trying to go east. Ambae Island actually looked like it was getting closer. Peter said, "If it weren't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all." At that time, Ambae Island was called Aoba and Peter told us it is the island that inspired the mythical Bali Ha'i in James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*.

Eventually, we got a little breeze and made it over to Maewo. We anchored near a reef that Peter knew about. We put in the skiff and loaded it up with scuba gear and motored over to the reef. When I got in the water, I could see that the reef had a vertical, cylindrical shape with lots of fish swimming around it. I didn't see any sharks but when I speared a blue trevally, there they were, although they didn't seem too aggressive. I speared another trevally and put it in the boat. I then went back to the reef and started swimming around it about half way up the side.

Looking out away from the reef the water was deep and blue. Then from the blue came a giant Ulua. It was huge. I put my back against the wall of the reef and prepared to spear it. I was trying to hold my breath but could no longer and the scuba bubbles scared it away. Peter was swimming my way coming from the opposite direction and he saw it. He later warned us that if you spear a really big fish, make sure you get the spear in good and get ready for a ride. Maybe it's just as well I missed that one. Large Ulua really aren't that good to eat anyway.

Cedar didn't join us on the first dive, but the next day she dove on the reef but when she got back to the yacht she said that the sharks were very aggressive on that day. I didn't go on that dive but I know how menacing gray reef sharks can be.

The next day I was working on our broken air compressor when Rick and Dave loaded Cedar's things in the skiff. Cedar had decided to leave the expedition due to the many breakdowns, Peter's unpleasant demeanor and probably some other things as well. Rick and Dave took her down the coast to where we had seen a man with a motor boat the day before. The shore party returned and that was the last we saw of Cedar.

We pulled up anchor and sailed south, then cut through the gap between Maewo and Pentecost Island heading west and then northwest on a course for Tuvalu, about 874 miles away. This is where Rick wanted to go, based on what he had read about the island.

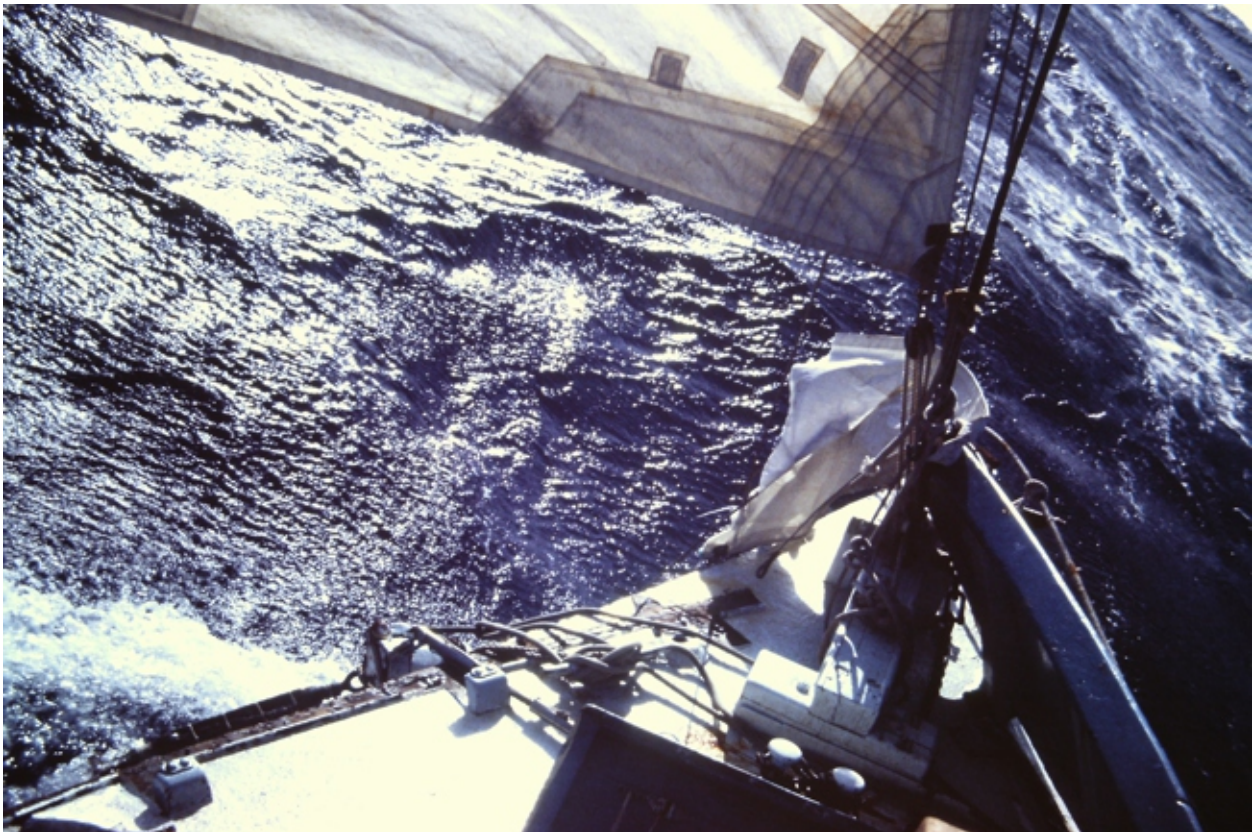
As Maewo and Pentecost faded in the distance, the wind picked up and it started raining. It was delightful to drink the fresh rain water that collected in the furled mainsail. The water in the ship's hold was virtually undrinkable. The mainsail was furled because this vessel just didn't sail well with the mainsail. We mostly sailed using the main jib.

The wind got stronger and it was getting stormy. We were excited that the strong wind might give us some speed. But the ship didn't move much faster. I have since learned that boat hulls made of ferrocement are known to be heavy and slow. What the strong wind did, however, was to put great stress on the rigging. It wasn't long before the steering cable broke. Fortunately there was an emergency tiller that we quickly installed. It took two of us to hold the tiller while Peter went below and threaded in a new steering cable. At least he had a replacement cable.

The Wreck

The course of the Endurance was maintained by two crewmembers in shifts of six hours each. My shipmate Richard and I were on the six to midnight-shift. As the wind raged on, the boat creaked and moaned under the stress. At midnight, Jim and Calvin came up to relieve us. We warned them that we heard creaking noises. I went below to my bunk and had just drifted off to sleep, when there was a loud bang and the sound of ripping canvas. I went back on deck and I could see that the port side bulwarks and bow sprit were hanging off the side and rigging and sail were dragging in the water. Jim went below and alerted the Captain.

Peter came up on deck and said, “My ship is falling apart” and then returned below to his bunk. Jim and I looked at each other bewildered. Jim said something about calling the Coast Guard, forgetting that we were in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, far from civilization. Stunned, we went below and asked the Captain, “What do we do now?!”



With the broken bowsprit, the bulwarks, the sail and rigging cables all dragging in the ocean like a sea anchor, the boat was dead in the water. It was clear that we needed to get all that stuff out of the water and onto the deck. As the dawn broke, I put on my harness and made my way to the bow, with the ship rolling and tossing, I pulled on the cables and was eventually able to get the derelict boat parts out of the water. Calvin thanked me for my bravery and then I threw up while the Captain looked at me in disgust.

At this point, we put up the Yankee jib, the only usable sail left, and the Captain charted a course for the nearest land, Santa Cruz Islands, at the Southern end of the Solomon Islands.



Calvin and Dave

We limped along with a following sea. Actually, a little bit sideways to the following sea. This made the animation unbelievable. Once a huge wave went right into the cabin and doused Peter while he was sleeping in his bunk, which is where he stayed most of the time. I was trying to get some rest, wedged into a spot at the galley table. I say “wedged” because the animation was so bad, nothing stayed put. Dave came into the galley and said, “I’m hungry. I’m going to cook something.” He opened one of the galley cupboards and the pot and pans flew straight out into his face as if they were alive. We both laughed, and needless to say, Dave changed his mind about cooking.

As we lumbered along towards Santa Cruz, I remembered that there was a case of canned tomatoes we had bought in Port Vila stashed at the bow of the ship. I found the tomatoes, located an opener and a spoon. And, Oh! Those tomatoes were good! Dave saw me eating them and said, "Tomatoes!" Dave got himself a can and dug in.

A few times during the next five days, the Captain came on deck and took a reading with his sextant. In the afternoon of the sixth day, we could see the faint image of land up ahead. As we got closer, we could smell it. If you're always on land, you don't realize that land has a smell. In any case we were happy to see land.

It was getting dark as we approached the channel to Graciosa Bay. The channel into the bay was narrow and hazardous so we anchored and turned in.

Santa Cruz

I awoke as the first hint of dawn shone through the porthole over my bunk. On deck, the sweet earthy smell of land and its shadowy image off the stern gave me a feeling of comfort and relief. Looking up, in the colorless morning twilight, the shredded jib sail continued its desolate flapping sound. The bow was draped with the broken bowsprit, bulwarks and tangled rigging. Starboard, the Eastern sky warmed into a soft pink glow revealing a pyramid shaped island, pastel clouds trailing from its peak. This was Tinakula, an active, conical volcano at the north end of Santa Cruz.

In the dim morning light, the shoreline silhouette spawned a small object. As it came into view, I recognized it was a canoe. It was a Solomon Island man going about his morning fishing, diverted by curiosity. He held his single hull canoe a short distance off our starboard. He waved and called "Hello." I returned the greeting. Rick joined me on deck and we sat on the sail box and watched the fisherman watching us.



From the shore another canoe appeared and drew near. Three Solomon Island children, two girls and a boy probably no more than 10, talked and giggled as they occasionally dipped their paddles to hold their position. Their curiosity satisfied, they began to paddle back towards shore. As they paddled, they broke into a song. The melody was enchanting and strangely different. As their image quickly faded into the morning haze, Rick and I looked at each other in awe.

“Did you hear that?” I exclaimed.

When Spanish explorer Mendaña was searching for the Solomon Islands, they first saw a great bank of dark smoke, the source of which was Tinakula. On September 8, 1595 they came to the island of Nendo which Mendaña named Santa Cruz. On the subject of Mendaña, as Jim O’Malley tells it, while on the island of Santa Cruz, he was washing some clothes at a small fresh water stream near the coast when a local man walked up to him and said, “Did you know this is where Mendaña died?” Jim, being the educated gentleman he was said, “Yes. I know Mendaña died here on the island of Santa Cruz.” To which the man said, “No. I mean he died right here where you’re standing.”

Eventually, everyone was up and on deck, except for Peter. Tori made oatmeal for everyone and we talked and joked, relieved to be near land again. The water off the port side was clear and undulating with vivid colors. Steve put on scuba gear, grabbed a speargun and went over the side. He soon surfaced with a fish that had wide yellow and white bands. We had seen this type of fish before and I called them the “taxi cab” fish. Then two young locals in a single-hull wooden canoe paddled up to our port side and we asked them if this fish was okay to eat. They said, “That fish makes you feel good.”

Dave wanted to see if he could balance himself in the canoe. The two local boys got out and Dave stepped into the canoe and immediately capsized it. We all had a good laugh.

Later, when we were in Graciosa Bay, we saw longer single-hull wooden canoes that had a cross piece in the front, like a small seat with a hole in it. We learned that when a Solomon Island man wants to get to the other side of the bay, he cuts a palm frond, sticks it in the hole and off he goes with the palm frond as his sail. When he gets to the other side, he discards the palm frond. On the subject of canoes, we noticed that all the canoes in Vanuatu had outriggers while the canoes in the Solomon Islands did not.

A sail appeared on the southwest horizon and a yacht quickly came into full view. It was a 40 foot ketch flying the flag of New Zealand. It was the Hibiscus III.

She lowered her sails and motored to within around thirty yards off our port side. “Looks like you’ve had some trouble”, the man at the helm yelled. “We’re going to Graciosa Bay, do you need a tow?” We yelled and waved that we were alright and able to motor into the bay on our own and that we would probably see them there. Soon more sails appeared on the horizon and another yacht sailed past us on its way into the bay. This was the Hedonist from Australia followed by the Wave Walker, an English ship.

Finally, about 10:00 a.m., Peter stuck his head out of the main hatch and called us in for a meeting in the chartroom. We gathered around the chart table and waited to hear what Peter had to say. Peter said that under the circumstances, we would not be able to make it to Fiji as originally planned. He then suggested that we rest up at Graciosa Bay and then, without making any major repairs, sail the 300 miles northwest to Honiara, the capitol city of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, where we could build a new bowsprit and bulwarks and then sail to Australia. Peter added that he understood that two of the crewmembers, Rick and Jim had requested to

Confrontation

Up to now, the crew had said nothing. I was the first to speak and I told Peter I wanted to leave the Endurance and to the best of my knowledge so did everyone else. Dave then joined in and questioned Peter regarding refunds. Peter began to tremble with rage. Peter said he had no money, that he had spent it all on supplies in Port Vila. He said he could possibly give us a small refund, maybe \$200 each, if he could contact Judy from Honiara and have another crew flown in. But even this he said was uncertain. Several of us explained that we wanted to leave the Endurance right here at Graciosa Bay and not tempt fate a second time on a 400 mile voyage to Honiara.

Peter argued that there was nothing here, no transportation, communication or anything, and he made a frantic bid to hoist anchor right then and sail on to Honiara. I recommend that we, the crew talk it over and make a decision. The mood was tense and Peter was belligerent making derogatory remarks from the stern as we discussed the situation on the foredeck. After the discussion, the crew unanimously decided to go ashore at Graciosa Bay.

At around 11:00 a.m. we motored through the narrow channel, and then across the bay to the southeast side. During this short jaunt we saw a twin engine aircraft land and take off from Nendo and also noticed a radio tower. These were hopeful signs. We dropped anchor near the shore and several of us including myself went below and packed our belongings. We lowered the skiff and gathered our passports. With no room for gear, we all piled into the skiff and motored a short distance down the coast to a small pier. We walked across the pier and set foot on land for the first time in three weeks. It felt good.

We then began the two mile walk down a dirt road that led to the government station.

It was a beautiful walk. The dirt road paralleled the shore and was flanked by tall coconut palms and exotic foliage. On both sides of the road were huts where Melanesian and Polynesian villagers went about their lives. I mention Polynesian because in the Solomon Islands, you will find a few Polynesians and even Gilbertese among the Melanesians.

Villagers waved to us with friendly smiles as we walked by. Naked children giggled and waved and ran about while dogs, pigs and chickens completed the picture of village life. As we walked along, some of the islanders joined us and soon we had a small entourage of young people talking and asking questions in pidgin English. One young man who stood out in the group was walking beside me.

Without thinking much about it, I asked him, “What does your father do?” He looked at me quizzically. He didn’t understand the question. And then he understood and he laughed and said, well, some days he goes fishing and some days he works in the garden, he does whatever he wants to do. Then I realized the folly of my question. These folks don’t have jobs or careers, they just live.

On several occasions, visiting different islands, I had told locals that I was from Honolulu, Hawaii. I asked them if they had heard of Honolulu and they always said “Yes.” Then I asked them if they would like to go there and they always said, “No.”

Peter had taken off ahead of us walking very fast. I was thinking he probably wanted to be the first one to arrive at the government station so he could tell his side of the story before we got there. I picked up my pace and so did Jim O’Malley, then the other crew member got the idea and closed the gap. After walking up a hill, Peter, Jim and I reached the government office first and entered a small room with a single desk behind which was seated the customs man. His name was Tom.

Peter began with his phony, toothy grin to describe a routine immigration procedure as if everything was just fine. I then interjected and began telling Tom about our trouble with the yacht and its unsafe condition. In the middle of my sentence, Peter became furious and used profanity, telling me to shut up, that he would handle this. He then returned to his syrupy dialogue.

Tom glanced at me with wide-eyed astonishment at Peter's outburst.

The other crewmembers joined us and we completed the customs transactions.

As it turned out, the law of the land stated that a ship's captain was responsible for his crew and we must depart with him when we left Graciosa Bay, unless we could find other transportation. It so happened that the only aircraft that visited this island, the one we had seen earlier, was booked up three weeks in advance. We were trapped! I felt sick to my stomach.

With heads held low, the crew followed Peter, single file down the path back towards the Endurance. Steve and I were reluctant to follow, searching our minds for some other alternative. We were just about to give in and follow the rest of the crew when Tom caught my eye.

He signaled us over. He said that he knew something was wrong because the captain of the Hibiscus III who had checked in earlier had told him about seeing us on his way into the bay. Also, he was shocked at Peter's outburst. He asked to hear more about the Endurance and its suspect condition.

We walked over to the police station just a short distance away. There, Steve and I told Tom, a police officer named "Kava", a Polynesian from Tikopia, and the Chief of Police, about what had happened and about the trouble Peter had gotten into the year before in Port Vila.

They were all very understanding and after much discussion, Tom decided it wise to go have a look at the Endurance. He procured a vehicle and he, Kava, the Police Chief, a driver and Steve and I piled into the small pickup truck and headed down to the wharf where the skiff was docked.

The sun was setting as we walked onto the wharf where Peter, the rest of the crew and a few local onlookers were milling around. The crew looked happy to see the official uniforms, but Peter was furious. He said, "What's going on, John?" I said we felt there was some question regarding the seaworthiness and safety of the Endurance and wanted to get an official opinion.

Peter was unable to contain his rage. He ran over to me and took a swing right in front of police officer Kava. I ducked back and his swing missed. Peter was restrained and the government men and Peter boarded the skiff and motored out to the Endurance. At that time the crew saw some hope. But, when the skiff returned, Peter announced that the Endurance was found to be seaworthy, at least enough to

make it to Honiara. It could be that the government of this tiny island didn't want to be stuck with us and so the "seaworthy" verdict made sense. Later on, in Honiara the Endurance was inspected by officials and found to be unseaworthy. Customs man Tom informed Peter that he could not leave until the next morning, after an official authorization.

Because of Peter's violent display earlier, the officials offered to let Steve and I stay at the police headquarters overnight. We eagerly accepted. Back at the police headquarters, Steve and I were served up a delicious local dinner and we continued to discuss the situation with the officials.

Tom thought of a possible solution. As of that day there were two sailing yachts anchored in Graciosa Bay, besides the Endurance. They were the Hedonist, the Australian yacht and the Hibiscus III. Both yachts were destined for Honiara. If the captains of these two yachts could be persuaded to take on extra passengers, we could transfer our passports to their yachts and sail to Honiara leaving Peter without a crew. Steve and I liked this idea very much. Kava said that we would get up early in the morning and he would provide us transportation out to these yachts to try and make arrangements. The Police Chief gave us with sleeping mats and Steve and I retired with hopes that our plan in the morning would be successful.

Early the next morning, Steve and I were awakened and provided a light breakfast and coffee. Kava gave us each a half of a green coconut and showed us how to pry out the cocoanut meat with our thumbs. It's called "spoon meat."

I noticed that at the rear of the police station building, which was very small, maybe 400 square feet, there was a jail cell. I could see a couple of men in there but I noticed that the door was wide open. At one point one of the inmates walked outside of the cell and the police chief told him to go back inside. I guess if you break out of prison here, there's really no place to go anyway.

Steve and I got into a small truck with Kava and we drove to a dwelling where a smiling, young Polynesian woman greeted us. She might have been Kava's wife. There was a hefty size outboard motor stored there and we loaded the motor and gas tank into the truck and drove a short distance to a beach where there were long fiberglass canoes on the shore. Kava mounted the outboard, hooked up the gas tank and soon we were flying across the bay.

When we came into view of the anchorage, we were disappointed to see that the

When we came into view of the anchorage, we were disappointed to see that the Hedonist was gone. She probably departed during the night. But the Hibiscus III was still there.

We motored alongside of the Hibiscus III. On board were the Captain, Derek Preece, his wife Dorothy, their 12 year old daughter Lesley and First Mate Graham Hathway. We explained our situation to Derek and he consented, under the circumstances, to take a maximum of three passengers on to Honiara at \$50 a head, to cover food expense.

Kava, Steve and I then went back to the beach and picked up Tom who carried the papers necessary to transfer passports to the Hibiscus III. We then motored to the Endurance. We all boarded the Endurance and I gathered the crew on the foredeck. I explained that I had tried to get us all off the Endurance and onto two other yachts but that one of the yachts, the Hedonist had departed during the night, and now only three of us could leave the Endurance.

The crew was disappointed that we all couldn't leave but then it became a question of who would stay and who would leave. While we were discussing it, Peter walked up to the foredeck and made belligerent, derogatory remarks to me right in front of the government officials. suggested that he and I go ashore and fight. I ignored his challenge and it was determined that Rick, Calvin and I would transfer to the Hibiscus III. Tom completed the necessary paperwork and gave Peter permission to sail but told him that he must radio the Marine Division in Honiara every two hours to ensure their safe progress. I gave Peter back Judy's two cameras and Rick, Calvin and I loaded our gear into the fiberglass canoe, waved goodbye to the rest of the crew and Kava motored us back over to the Hibiscus III.

We thanked Kava and Tom for their help and boarded the Hibiscus III. I felt bad having to leave the rest of the crew behind but I was happy to be off the Endurance. Further, Rick, Calvin and I agreed that if we got to Honiara before the Endurance, we might be able to initiate some legal action against Peter.

The Hibiscus III and the Endurance stayed at Graciosa Bay for a day or two. The two yachts were only a few hundred yards apart and at one time I could hear pounding noises coming from the Endurance as they tried to make some kind of repairs. The Hibiscus III had a small landing boat and we used it to go ashore just a short distance away. There was a beautiful fresh water pool right near the beach with a small waterfall adorned with hanging ferns and other tropical foliage. It almost seemed manmade, but it wasn't, it was natural. The water was sweet and we filled a few containers and I took a dip in the pool.

The Hibiscus III

During this time we got to know the crew of the Hibiscus III. Derek was a joiner by trade and he had built the yacht himself. He was a stocky, good looking New Zealander and he told us about building the boat.

It was a wooden ketch with a beautiful curved teak deck. Derek explained that wood was the best material for boat building because wood floats. Even if a wooden boat fills with water, it will usually still float. Derek said he used Kauri wood for most of the construction. Kauri is a very slow growing tree and, as a result the grain is very tight. It's mostly impervious to rot and is a great wood for boat building. Derek said that ounce for ounce, it is the lightest, strongest wood there is. By 2009 nearly all the native Kauri forests of New Zealand had been logged out and Kauri trees are now protected.

Derek told us about curving the ribs for the boat using an old water heater and how the smaller ribs near the stern were the most difficult. He explained that the hull planks were two inch thick Kauri and how they pounded cotton wadding soaked in tar into the spaces between the planks to make it totally water tight. Derek was truly a master craftsman. The hatch near the front of the yacht was a work of art. Derek said he spent more time on that hatch than he did building the whole boat. I think he was exaggerating there. We both remarked about how important water tight hatches are for a yacht. If water can get through a hatch, you can be in real trouble. Dorothy or "Dot" was Derek's wife, a charming lady, their young daughter Lesley was as cute as could be. Always-smiling First Mate Graham Hathway was as good-natured gentleman. Sadly, Derek and Graham since passed away.

The Hibiscus III motored out of Graciosa Bay at 2:00 a.m. on July 18, 1984. The early morning departure time was calculated so that we would reach our next landing during daylight. Rick, Calvin and I were awakened and Rick and I were put at the helm while the others got some shut eye. This yacht didn't have a wheel

were put at the helm while the others got some shut-eye. This yacht didn't have a wheel like the Endurance. It had a tiller instead and it had automatic steering. The mechanical self-steering gear, mounted on the transom, keeps a sailboat on a given course towards the apparent wind and frees the helmsman from the steering job. It also keeps the sails at an optimal angle to deliver the best propulsion.

As Rick and I sat across from each other at the helm we really didn't need to do anything and we might have nodded out for a while. We just needed to look at the compass now and then to make sure we were on course. Once, the compass showed a slight deviation and we made an adjustment using a cord with knots in it connected to the tiller.

What a difference this was compared to the Endurance where the helmsman had to constantly steer the boat. I noticed how swift the Hibiscus III was. The yacht seemed to always be surging forward instead of plowing through like the Endurance. It was easy to say that these two yachts were as different as night and day.

The Hibiscus III was a ketch, having two masts, the main mast and a smaller mast at the rear. Each mast had a mainsail and there were a variety of jibs and spinnakers that could be employed between the bowsprit and the main mast. In addition, there were sails that could be strung in between the two masts. As we made our way, Derek and Graham tried different configurations of sails. They seemed to never be quite satisfied.

From the helm, one could look into the cabin through a glass porthole and see two large gauges. One was the wind speed and the other showed the speed of the yacht through the water. They were usually pretty close together in their readings, but when they dropped below a certain level, Derek lowered the sails and turned on the motor.

We sailed for another day and the next morning we spotted the island of San Cristobal. As we drew closer, we could see by the waves that there was a reef between us and the shore. Derek and Graham knew there was a channel through the reef but it was hard to see. Derek turned on the Satellite navigation system and guided us to the opening of the channel.

Before we got to the edge of the reef, Graham threw out a trolling line. The edges of reefs are known to be teeming with fish. As we entered the channel, we got a fish on the line. Someone yelled, "Pull it in!" Someone else yelled, "Give it some line!" But in an instant, the water behind the boat boiled red and we briefly saw a brown fin slash across the surface and the line went limp. One for the sharks!

We sailed into a small cove near Tavanipupu Island. There was a white man wearing a lava-lava standing on the white sand beach in front of an A-frame house. He waved to us, we waved back exchanging greetings and then we anchored a short distance away on the other side of the cove.

Later on, we visited him and he invited us into his beautiful A-frame house. He was an Englishman named Charles Humphries and he lived there with his wife Myfanwy. He told us that he was here during the war and decided to stay. He later became an important figure in the relationship between the British government and the Solomon Islands. Sadly, he has now passed away.

Graham produced a small speargun and I jumped in the water and swam to the center of the cove to see what I might find. When I stuck my head out of the water, Charles shouted and asked me not to spearfish right there. It was kind of like his front yard. So, Rick, Calvin and I launched the dinghy and rowed out of the cove and around to the side of the island. There I speared several small fish and we brought them back and Graham cooked them up for our lunch.

As the sun was going down, another sailing yacht entered the cove. They were Australian yachtsmen sailing a fiberglass boat. I got in the dinghy and they threw me a line. I rowed to shore and I tied it to a tree. The little beach here was embedded with old, giant clam shells. I looked up to see a Cockatoo flying above as the sun was going down. Later, crew from the Hibiscus III and the Australian yacht sat around a fire and told stories and we laughed and talked had a great time.

In the morning we set sail continuing on our way to Honiara. We soon reached Maru Sound. We anchored and spent the rest of the day, the night and the following morning there. We sailed again that afternoon and anchored off a small island where we spent the night.

My experience onboard the Hibiscus III was a good one. These New Zealanders were the most polite and considerate people you could ever know. They wouldn't have a cup of tea without asking you if you wanted one. Before we set sail again, we had something to eat and Derek brought out cans of Heineken beers. Dorothy told us how you can keep eggs fresh without refrigeration by coating them with petroleum jelly and we learned that in New Zealand, hotdogs are called "mystery bags" and that they don't have tomato ketchup, it's just tomato sauce. We even got to try some vegemite for the first time.

Honiara

On the morning of July 22, we sailed for Honiara. We arrived around mid-day and as we approached, I thought I recognized the mast of the Endurance anchored near the coast. I grabbed the binoculars to get a better look. It was her!

The Hibiscus III had made several stops along the way to Honiara, but by sailing non-stop, the Endurance had beaten us there. They had arrived only a few hours earlier. We moored the Hibiscus III at a pier near the Port Cruz Yacht Club.

As we were securing her lines, the Endurance crew, without Peter, motored by us in the skiff loaded down with their gear. They unloaded on the beach. Rick, Calvin and I joined them and we all walked the short distance over to the Yacht Club where we sat in the open air patio and had a happy reunion.

We found accommodations for the night and the next day we met with customs and immigration officials to explain our situation and to complete the necessary transactions. We also met with a local attorney to discuss possible legal action against Peter. But in the end, there was nothing they could do to legally force Peter to give us refunds or air fare to Fiji, although they did pressure him.

On a tip, Jim and I went to the South Seas Evangelist Church where we met a wonderful lady named Val Pratley who was a missionary from Australia. She ran a boarding house called the Transit House. We made arrangements to stay there and Tori and Calvin joined us there later.

One of the crew heard that Peter had called Judy from the International Telephone Office, just as she was about to board a flight to Fiji and told her that the crew just got tired of the yacht and that's why we were in the Solomon Islands and not Fiji. We soon after learned that Peter had left Honiara on a flight back to Honolulu.

One day I was walking by the harbor at Point Cruz, when I saw the skiff from the Endurance lying on a concrete boat ramp all busted up, its transom torn off. At the time, I didn't quite know what to make of it. Later I learned that after Peter had left, Steve Willett took the skiff out to the Endurance, and confiscated the diving tanks and other equipment which he brought to shore and sold to pay for his flight out of Honiara. Smart!

I was at the Honiara International Telephone Office where an older gentleman had just completed a phone call. His name was Herb De Graff and he was there with his wife Audry. Herb had contacted someone in Australia who was supposed to fly to Honiara to crew on Herb's motor yacht The M. V. Jessica. Herb had just been informed that this person was unable to travel because of a marijuana conviction. I was standing right there and Herb looked at me and asked me if I would be interested in the position. I told him that I might be.

Later Herb and I were at the yacht club and he pointed out his yacht which was anchored just to the northwest of the yacht club. He said that they planned to visit Truk Atoll for some hookah diving and eventually cruise on to Honolulu. He said I would need to wear a uniform. That was a little off-putting for me. Dave later joined me at the yacht club and I ran it by him. He said, "I just got off of one unhappy ship, I don't want to get on another one."

I still wasn't quite sure. If I went back to Honolulu, would I even have a job to go back to? I went to the International Telephone office and I called the ad agency where I had worked before I left. I spoke to Gasper Patrico, one of the principals of Ostrander Patrico and Blu Advertising. I asked Gasper, "If I come back to Honolulu, do I have a job?" He said, "Yes." With that, I decided I would return to Honolulu.

While most of the Endurance crew was still in Honiara, we all got together for a farewell dinner at a quaint Chinese restaurant near a stream just south of town. For several of the crew, it would be the last time we were together.

Over the next few days, Calvin, Tori, Rick and Dave all flew out of Honiara. On Monday, July 30, Jim departed on a flight back to Honolulu. With Jim's help, I made arrangements for a flight out of Honiara but the earliest flight I could get was for August 6, a week later.

Having some time to explore the town of Honiara, I found a small diner a few blocks inland from the yacht club that served fish and chips. The fish was deep fried ahi (tuna), and the chips were sweet potatoes, because there are no russet

potatoes here. And there was no ketchup for the fries, but there was tomato sauce. It was fantastic and I ate there several times. Once when I was eating there a young, local boy looked at me and told me that out in the bush, on some of these islands there were still people that will eat you! Having some knowledge of the history of these islands, I was aware that they were once cannibalistic. So, I didn't doubt him.

Guadalcanal

While still staying at Transit House, a young man from Australia checked in. His name was Steve Potter. He was an angler and had brought his light tackle which was designed to compact into a small canvas bag.

Steve and I decided to do some exploring and hitch-hiked north up the coast. A pickup truck stopped and we jumped in the back. The truck went speeding down the dirt road. Soon we stopped at a little store on the side of the road and bought a couple of six-packs of beer. We continued speeding on down the dirt road drinking the beers. The locals in the cab drank their beers and threw the cans out the window. Among this group was a heavy-set Melanesian man who seemed to be the leader of this party. He told us that they were on an assignment to reach some remote villages for an official reason.

Eventually, we arrived at the end of the road, parked the truck and got out. We met another man there and we all piled into one of those very long fiberglass canoes that had a powerful outboard engine. With our new member controlling the outboard motor, we shot out across the water and rode at high speed along the coast. Steve and I were having a blast, but when the canoe pulled up on the beach at the first village, there was no one there. The boat driver complained about Steve and I saying that we were the reason the villagers were gone. The villagers see white people in the canoe and they disappear into the bush. The leader understood and we had to go.

For hundreds of miles along the coastline of Guadalcanal, and other islands in the Solomons, to this day, there are still tribes of islanders that live the same way they have done for thousands of years.

We had already traveled quite a ways up the coast in the high-speed canoe and there were no roads going back, but the group leader managed to find a young local boy to guide us back to where the road had ended. His name was Tomba and he seemed to be always smiling. Tomba started out ahead of us and we followed.

Sometimes there was a path and sometimes we walked in the shallows along the coast.

Once we walked through a beautiful grove of very tall very old coconut trees. In pidgin English, Tomba told us to watch out for falling coconuts. Falling coconuts are one of the leading causes of death in this part of the world.

Looking at the spacing of the trees, it was obvious that this grove had been planted by humans. There was a time when coconut oil was in high demand and elders encouraged the planting of coconut trees and that's one reason why there are so many coconut palms growing on these islands. Earlier I had seen ships anchored very close to shore rolling and yawing in the waves and I learned they were copra boats, loading the dried coconut meat, known as copra. In villages you would often find the small smokehouse-like structures used for drying the coconut meat. This was a source of income for the villagers.

As we were walking along we saw some rusting hulks near the beach, remnants of World War II. I asked Tomba what he thought about war and he said, "very dangerous." Once I bent down and picked up a feather and showed it to Tomba, he called it, "hair-um pigeon" (hair of the pigeon).

It was late afternoon when we came to a rocky point at the south end of a large bay. There was a cave in the rocks facing the bay, with wooden canoes stored in it. Tomba said we would sleep here for the night. The three of us walked to the end of the point that was a low rock shelf. Tomba sat on the shelf while Steve did some casting. I had my snorkel and mask in my pack and I went for a dive. I found a large, orange colored clam. I swam back to the shelf and handed it to Tomba, then continued to snorkel around. When I came back, I asked Tomba where the clam was. He said it was good.

It was now dark and we were in the cave. The sky was filled with stars and that was the only light there was. The bay was dark and the land was dark except for two very tiny campfire lights spaced far apart. This view was unusual to me in that it was almost completely black. Sleeping in the canoe, in the cave wasn't very comfortable for me, but I didn't hear Steve complain. Actually, I never heard Steve complain about anything.

When the sun came up we resumed our journey down a long sandy beach and we came to a small stream. At the head of the stream, inland, was a lagoon. Tomba told us that the lagoon was full of crocodiles and that some villagers had been eaten there.

We soon neared the end of the trail and we said goodbye to Tomba and thanked him for his help and he headed back the way we had come. Right near the end of the trail, we found a clearing with a single hut and a fenced corral that had an avocado tree growing in it. In the corral were two very ugly, very black, fat pigs looking up at us. A man and a woman came out of the hut and we learned they were Peace Core volunteers. We had some light conversation and then walked on to where the dirt road began.

Just before the dirt road began, there was a water catchment tank and we helped ourselves to the fresh water. Nearby we talked to some locals who told us that soon a truck would come that could take us back to Honiara town.

Before long, the truck showed up and people climbed onboard. It was a flatbed truck with wooden side railings and soon it was overflowing with passengers. Steve and I got on board and the truck started down the dirt road. I noticed two local men chewing betel nut. It made their teeth and gums red. It is one of the most popular psychoactive substances in the world, in fourth place after nicotine, alcohol, and caffeine. But while betel nut is an important cultural and social tradition in many countries, growing evidence points to serious health effects from regular use.

The truck stopped at a village on the coast and Steve and I decided to get off and explore. I found a little Chinese store and bought something to eat. Throughout the region, even in some pretty remote places you can always find a little store selling canned goods and other packaged items run by Chinese. They're kind of like the Seven Elevens of the South Pacific.

We met some of the villagers and they showed us to the guest hut and we stored our packs there.

As the day was ending, I stood on the beach with Steve as he repeatedly cast his fishing line out into the ocean. The sun was going down behind us and it made the crystal clear water sparkle as it lapped the shore. I found myself staring at it, almost hypnotized.

Steve continued fishing as I left the beach and went to the guest hut. Lying on the rack in the guest hut, I felt a little sad, a little lonely and a bit hungry. The packaged food I had bought at the Chinese store wasn't very satisfying.

Then, two local girls entered the guest hut along with Steve. Steve had caught some fish and the girls had cooked them up for us. We ate the fish and it was

delicious. Steve and I slept in the guest hut and in the morning we caught a ride into Honiara town and then made our way back to the Transit House.

On Monday, August 6, I went to customs to check out. I talked with Immigration Officer Joses Sanga who had checked me in on my arrival and who knew the story surrounding the Endurance. He told me that Honiara officials had inspected the Endurance and found it to be unseaworthy. He gave me the single page report reproduced below.

INSPECTION REPORT.

YACHT ENDURANCE.

REGISTERED PORTLAND OREGON.

2/8/84.

The Yacht anchored at the Market area east of Point Cruz (Honiara).

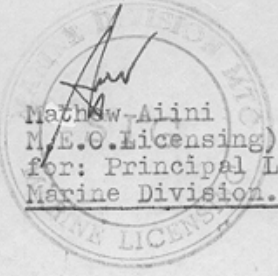
During boarded this Yacht I had found that her boom, had completely broken off.

Port and starboard bow timber at side and pipe railing (preventer) with fasting at the deck areas also broken and loss.

At front bow the cement cracked or hole about four (4) to five (5) inches wide and two (2) to three (3) inches deep, with corrode iron steel above sea water line.

A Yacht is built of ferro ciment, therefore at this stage she must be attended for repairs, to with stand the weather and sea at her voyages around the Pacific etc or on foriegn going trips.

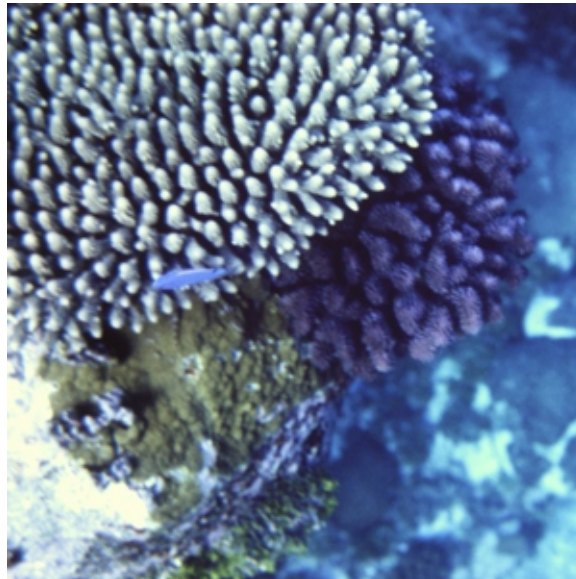
If she is under our own registration she must not go, as she is unsea worthy stage.


Mathew Ajini
M.E.C. Licensing)
for: Principal Licensing Officer
Marine Division.

That afternoon, I boarded an Air Pacific flight at Henderson field and flew to Fiji. There was a two-day stop-over in Fiji before the six hour flight to Honolulu. We landed at Nadi Airport and I got a cab to a hostel nearby that I had read about.

The next day, I took a taxi into Nadi town to check things out. Everyone there was Eastern Indian. Early on, Fiji was a British colony and businessmen set up sugar plantations there. But it turned out, that the Fijians refused to work in the sugar cane fields. So, the plantation owners imported Eastern Indians to do the work. They flourished and soon became the dominant population of Fiji.

On the morning of August 9, I boarded the flight to Honolulu. Landing at Honolulu International Airport, I exited the plane and got in line for the customs inspection. I handed my passport to the uniformed customs officer. He looked at it and handed it back to me and then said, "Welcome home."



Epilogue

In writing this story, I used notes I had taken when I first returned, as well as my memory. As I recounted the adventure, more memories would emerge. Maps and references gathered online were also helpful. I was able to contact Dorothy Preece by email in New Zealand, the wife of the skipper of Hibiscus III. She provided me with information from that ship's log that helped fill in the gaps.

While writing this story in 2020, I tried to find my shipmates using online searches, to no avail. I did find an article about Cedar Kehoe although there was no contact information. According to the article, after returning to Oahu, Cedar moved to California to care for her ailing mother. Eventually she became an expert in waste management in California.

Several years ago, I did find a web page about Peter Denton. He was working as a writer in Connecticut. The article did mention the Endurance and Peter said he lost the ship in a hurricane. The story I heard was that a galley cook in Honiara bought it.

Since I published this story online, I thought some of my shipmates might find it and contact me. So far, no luck. However, On February 25, 2021, I got an email from Sherron Skeelee living on the Big Island of Hawaii. She thanked me for writing about the Endurance and explained that the ship was built by her husband, David Skeelee and his brother Gary along with Peter and a couple of other carpenters in a barn in Oregon.

The builders were co-owners and the plan was always to share time on the boat but that never happened. Sherron wrote that she met the crew after they sailed to the Big Island. There was a big brawl between Peter and the crew in Kailua Bay, and the coastguard got involved. At that point, she wrote, dealing with Peter had become unbearable, so the crew left not knowing if they would ever see the Endurance again.

On April 1, 2021 I received a phone call from Karen Miyano who also had an experience on the Endurance in 1983. She wrote: While exploring Australia I answered an ad in the Brisbane newspaper for Cook/ Research Assistant on an Oceanographic Ship. My services were in exchange for a sailing adventure in the Coral Sea.

After a month getting the ship ready and welcoming the paying crew we set sail on June 2, 1983 down the Moonaboola River to Hervey Bay, en route to the Coral Sea. Due to the cunning navigational skills of Peter Denton we hit bottom. We were stuck in the mud, listing, for 5 hours. The tide was going out! Finally underway we reached Kenn Reef 500 miles off the coast of Australia.

By June 25th we approached the Passage Islets. Next, underway to the Middle Bellona Reef, Chesterfield Islands, onto New Caledonia. From Noumea we sailed to Isle de Pines, which was the French Navy's R&R respite. At that time it was pristine, now a resort. Luckily there we met a trimaran soon to return to Brisbane.

Peter had made another bad decision. While on a barrier reef, he ordered us to set anchor. A fierce storm came up and he refused to move. It was then that our nurse and I swore that if we survived the night we would leave Endurance. Upon return to Noumea we joined the trimaran for a calm and sweet trip back to Brisbane.

Two weeks later Peter Denton was arrested in Noumea. He was crawling on the floor and under tables at a discotheque yelling obscenities. They impounded his ship. He was not fit to sign people's passports. We were safe and finished with Endurance Oceanographic.

Thanks to Sherron and Keren for sharing their "Endurance" experiences.

On July 23, 2021, I received a phone call from a lady by the name of Damienne Cahalan in Sydney, Australia. She thanked me for writing about the Endurance and said she enjoyed reading the story. She told me she is the sister of an Endurance shipmate named Paul who went missing at the Banks Islands, and that she was looking for information regarding the circumstances surrounding his disappearance.

I told her about my contact with Karen Miyano and that Karen had mentioned she knew that a former Endurance shipmate had gone missing. Karen said she heard that Paul went for a dive and never returned.

I connected Damienne and Karen in hopes that more information might come to light and bring closure to Damienne and her family.

About the Author



John S. Pritchett was born in Gainesville, Florida, 1950. In 1965, living in Cocoa Beach, Florida, he learned to surf and went on to frequent many popular surf spots along Florida's east coast.

Searching for larger waves, John moved to Honolulu, Hawaii in 1974.

In Honolulu, he worked in the advertising industry as an Art Director and later became a prominent illustrator and editorial cartoonist. He has received awards for his cartoons and illustrations from *The United Nations Correspondents Association*, *Best of the West*, and *The Society of Professional Journalists*.