

## The Cruise of the YASME

Departure had been set for noon. Yasme was ready, or at least as ready as she would ever be. I was anxious to get away from the seething crowds, the well-wishers, the photographers. The knowledge that so many could be interested in a venture such as mine was hard to assimilate, in fact, my mind became like a firecracker with thoughts jumping out at all angles like sparks, each one bursting into a puff of smoke as my subconscious discarded it as being executed. The lists of things to be done had been torn up. I wanted to feel that nothing had been forgotten, but somehow gnawing at my mind was the fact that something really important had been omitted...how could I think straight? Those last few minutes were absolute chaos as Yasme cast off her ties to the bank that had been her home for so long. We were under way down river. Bob Bishop, a friend of long standing had offered to tow me out. We both had grave doubts as to the efficiency of my tiny engine, and the thought of the embarrassment should I run aground on the numerous sandbanks with a dead engine was too much of a chance to take. Bob's launch was packed overflowing. The tow rope attached to a post in the center of his boat twanged like a bow string as the gentle waves in the river jerked us apart. Worse was to come. The weather report was lousy and I had already reefed my main sail in preparation for meeting the open sea. Slowly we cruised down the narrow channel towards the sea. The photographers in the stern of the launch were trying hared to balance against the roll and yet train their cameras, sometimes they would be almost swept overboard as the tow line would sweep across their heads. I suppose it was funny, but I didn't laugh. There in the center of the crowd I could see my mother's wan face. She was trying so hard to smile, but beneath it all I could sense the utter misery. Only those that knew her realized how tough she could be. I knew that the mere thought of entering a boat at its moorings would make her sick, and yet here she was in this launch heading out to sea with a gale blowing up. I'd have given anything to be with her then, but I had made my choice, and this was only the beginning. The entrance to the bay appeared, and there packing the quay wall, thousands of people stood in the blustery wind waving and cheering. Around me, tiny sail boats, launches and row boats all tried to keep pace, the crews of each shouting encouragement to me. I know I had a twisted smile on my face, my hand waved automatically to all and everyone capable of seeing it, but no face did I recognize except that tiny white blur dead ahead. The person who was my mother. To me, the only one who really cared and would remember this day of imitation revelry, of pretended friendship. Oh, I knew that many were friends, but so many were the type who wish you good morning automatically..."Pleasetermeetyou" types who forget you completely seconds after you've met. I had no false illusions about myself. Today I was news. Tomorrow Ancient History, but to that one frail person in the launch, I was an individual, someone more important than anyone else in this whole world, and it was to her, that all my thoughts were centered.

Clearing that narrow channel we hit the open sea. The English Channel it was called, and I was to remember it for many a day. Clear of the protecting hills, Yasme threw herself around like a cork and I had great difficulty in standing upright. Looking ahead, I saw Bob waving, then his shout to cast off the towing line. This was it. This was to be our parting for how long? I just didn't know. Grabbing the rail, I worked my way forward and cast the line adrift, and within minutes, the reefed mainsail was up and the jib flying. Yasme heeled as the wind filled her sails and bore away towards the west. Scrambling back to the cockpit, I released the tiller and looked astern. Bob was circling the crowd was waving, the cameramen doing their darndest to stay upright, and in the center, my mother. Gone was that smile. The effects of the parting and the seas had done their job. I couldn't take it. Tears came to my eyes as I turned away and looked ahead. Why had I done this? How did I get here? What was the purpose of trying to be the first Englishman to sail around the world single handed? These thoughts passed through my mind as Yasme fought her way seaward into the beyond.

I am a Londoner, generally known as "Cockney", being born within the sound of Bow Bells, and it was here that I trained as first a watchmaker, this being a family trade, and secondly, by choice, a

mechanical engineer in which I graduated. With this knowledge I joined the Air Force and spent some ten years amusing myself some in peace, others in World War II, eventually escaping unscathed. After this little experience I decided to open a business in watchmaking, choosing Bournemouth in the south of England as a base of operations. It was away from all the smog of London, I had a fine business location, the climate was fine, and most important of all, so were the women...it was a seaside resort. My business was a great success, but sitting at a bench all day, delving into the insides of defunct watches, listening to old ladies give me their life's history drove me almost nuts. I tried many ways to divert my mind from its deep dismal rut –dancing, skating, motor cycle and car racing; they all took their course, but to no avail; I had run out of legitimate sports, or so it seemed then. Now, the ways of the sea were unknown to me, although in my leisure hours I had often watched small sail boats cruise up and down the beautiful River Avon. I think the urge to attempt this form of pastime came to me because it seemed so very different from any other form of sport, and so it came that one fine day I purchased for myself an eight foot sailing dinghy.

To make things quite legitimate, I joined the local yacht club, and it was a fine Sunday morning that, armed with a basket of food, a flask of...none of your business...and a pair of oars, I boarded my craft, hoisted the yacht club's burgee to the top of the mast, then with a dirty grin at the local sightseers, hoisted the mainsail.

Very quickly the wind filled that tiny scrap of canvas and I leaned back into the stern of the dinghy, holding the tiller and feeling very proud of the whole set up. The boat heeled at an alarming angle, and I put my entire weight on the side to prevent a spill, but for some unknown reason we didn't move. I think it must have taken me a full five minutes to realize the fact that I had failed to cast off the mooring line, and in my endeavors to appear quite normal to the very amused crowd, I cast off the line holding the boat, but failed to release the rope at the same time which in turn, decided to pull me into the water. For some unknown reason I endeavoured to hang onto the rope AND the dinghy, and it became a tug of war between myself and the wind, which was doing its level best to sail the dinghy into the quay wall. It finally penetrated my mind that I had better release the rope and board the dinghy, but the dinghy had other ideas. The sail jibed, the boat took off on another tack, and with the sudden motion, I was forced to release the side of the boat and drop into the water. My embarrassment was such that I hoped I should sink and be allowed to fade from the picture, but fate hadn't quite finished with me. I attempted to dive deep in the vague hope a snappy bit of swimming might take the attention of my public, but what I forgot in the heat of the moment was, the water was very shallow, the bottom being thick black glutinous mud, and as I propelled my whole body into this mess, it was too late to withdraw in time, and as I came to the surface looking like a horror from the deep, the entire crowd of sightseers, which incidentally had now enlarged to a hundred or more, burst into such a roar of laughter that I would have willingly given my right arm to be someplace else at that time. The dinghy meantime, had sailed itself to another part of the harbour and after gouging out a series of holes in other people's boats, finally ran aground in a big mud patch. With the crowd screaming with laughter and the irate owners of the other boats screaming with anger, I think you have a real good idea how I felt at that time.

I will gloss over the aftermath of that incident by saying I retrieved the dinghy with the aid of other members of the club, and after getting into the shower, was able to attempt once again to sail this confounded boat. To avoid a repetition of the event, I had the dinghy taken to a tiny creek away from the crowd this time, and feeling a little ashamed of myself, I boarded and hoisted the sail...first releasing the mooring line this time. The wind was light in the shelter of the trees of the creek, and I had to assist the dinghy along with the oars, but I found my attempts at rowing were so bad that the dinghy made better headway without my interference. Gradually, I entered the river proper, and with the sail filling and the tide in my favor, off we went cruising along merrily without a worry in the world. My old enemies the sightseers now waved and gave a few grins, and the owners of the damaged boats gave me dirty looks and quickly sheered out of my way, but

by then, I was happy, and couldn't have cared less as we swept away down the river. Now this river is most picturesque as it winds and twists for five miles before it meets the open sea, and one has to keep strictly to the buoyed channel to avoid running on a sand bar, but in my blissful ignorance, I ignored the buoys and took the shortest distance between two points which, I found out to my regret, whilst constituting a straight line, is not necessarily the quickest route. Oh that business of running into the mud. One has to clamber over the side and stand there and push, but whilst it sounds so easy, when one's feet sink up to the knees, and the dinghy is held as though in a vice with the suction, it makes things really tough. On an average, it took me about fifteen minutes to get the thing off the mud each time, and on every occasion, I brought into the boat a whole load of this horribly smelling mud. I had omitted to bring a can to bail out the boat, so had to put up with all the dirt and water slopping around in the bottom, but apart from all that, I was beginning to learn that the buoys had a purpose, and for the last two miles, managed to sail without any further mishap. It was a perfect day for the sailor, the wind still blew steadily, the water was calm, and I was sailing in the right direction without a worry in the world. As I neared the entrance to the sea, so the current increased its speed, and the faster I went, so grew my enthusiasm for this sailing racket. The entrance, known locally as "The Run" came closer, and I could see the water bubbling and seething through this narrow entrance, and to my uninitiated mind, it looked like real good fun...that's what I thought...Now up to this point, apart from the earlier incident, I couldn't see why everyone made such a fuss about the technicalities of sailing. There was I, the first time at sea, sailing along without any bother at all...it was just too easy. The mere fact I had slipped up at the beginning was simple to understand, but to actually sail the boat...well at the time, I couldn't see any point in it. Nearing the Run, I waved to holiday makers on the beach, and as they waved back, there was some old codger screaming his head off at me and pointing in the direction of the Run. I swung the helm to close the shore, and faintly came his raucous voice..."Yer can't go art there yer darned idiot in that b...y thing, yer'll get yerself drarned". I was astounded to hear this utter stranger telling ME what to do, and I lost little time in telling him what I thought...in no uncertain terms. After venting my feelings...I'd had just about enough that day, what with losing the dinghy, diving in the mud, and being laughed at, not counting the fact that I was then feeling wet and dirty, and the revolting smell from the mud and slime in the bottom of the dinghy was beginning to make me feel a little sick. To endeavour to show disdain with my face spattered with mud and hair waving around was a little difficult, but I did the best I could and swung the boat back into the main channel, fully determined to ignore any further insults. This slight repartee between my 'friend' on the shore had attracted no little attention, and as I entered the run, quite a crowd had collected to see the results. I can assure you, they were NOT disappointed. The ebb tide coupled with a fairly stiff breeze had increased my speed considerably, and as I hit the Run, so the water boiled and seethed with the terrific undercurrents. The few seconds taken to shoot past the quay wall were most exhilarating, and I grasped the tiller with both hands to maintain control over the bucking boat. I'd show these cocky blighters how to sail. As the run began to widen into the open sea, so the water became rougher. There was a sudden flurry on the surface, and the tiller was snatched from my hand. Unseen forces took the boat over, and we twisted and spun in this maelstrom of eddies. One second we were flying backwards, next sideways...the boat was completely out of control, and so we were swept slowly and definitely out to sea with the waves getting bigger, and the dinghy resembling a matchbox more. My enthusiasm for sailing was quickly replaced with fear, then with the urge to survive. I grabbed the tiller and, using all my strength, gradually brought the boat under control. Whilst I hated to admit it to myself, I knew then that I had bitten off a little more than I could chew, but was determined to get that boat back without any help from the shore...I just couldn't face any more ridicule...I just HAD to return unaided. Several attempts at turning the dinghy shoreward were unsuccessful, the wind and current had taken over completely, so I decided it would be wiser to keep the thing on an even keel and try to prevent the big seas from breaking into it. Cupping my hands in an attempt to remove the bilge water was a slow job, but I did manage to keep it at a reasonable level. By this time, the sun had started to fall, and lying there in the bottom of the boat with wet clothing was hardly comfortable, neither was it very warm. Try as I might to turn the dinghy, it just refused to budge from its course out to sea. I realized that this *state of affairs* could

hardly be allowed to continue, but what to do about it I just couldn't figure. My knowledge of tides and currents was exactly nil, but I did know that at sometime it did change, but then, once again, I hadn't the vaguest idea which way I would go when the tide turned. What a hell of a spot to be in. My basket of grub had been floating around in the bilges for some time now, and the contents were hardly edible, even if I had felt like eating...my stomach felt like nothing on earth, and continual bouts of seasickness had weakened me to the state that I just couldn't care less what happened. I had on an earlier occasion dropped the sails, but that had caused such an upheaval, I quickly hoisted them again. As I lay there in all my misery, the action of the sea smoothed, and the wind dropped altogether. What next? Lack of wind caused the dinghy to set up a roll that nearly tossed me over the side several times, and the sea without the controlling influence of the wind went haywire. Shivering, hungry and thirsty...just dying for a cigarette, I decided that I would have to row...but, my knowledge of rowing was also NIL. Slipping those long cumbersome pieces of wood into the rowlocks with the dinghy bouncing around like a cork became a chore I should never want again. To use both hands to hold the oars and balance my body seemed an impossibility, and were it not for the fact that the oars were tied to the boat, they would have been lost in the early rowing attempts. It seemed every time I stuck the blades into the water, just as I pulled back to propel the dinghy, as the water would disappear completely from around the blades, and I would land backwards in the bilges. Other times, when I didn't quite dig deep enough, I would somehow scoop up large quantities of very wet, salty and freezing cold sea and completely douse myself. To say this was demoralizing would be the biggest understatement of the day, but I plugged on in the vague hopes I would make some slight headway in the right direction. Night had long since fallen, and my only guide was a line of faintly blinking lights which I surmised to be the beach. No sound came to my ears except the occasional break of a wave and the slatting of the sails which I had failed to lower. What agonies passed through my mind and body, no one will ever know...my arms ached with the unaccustomed use, my hands were slowly becoming raw with the blisters that had burst...even the effort of rowing failed to keep the biting cold from penetrating to the marrow of my bones...I slugged on, every stroke of the oars calling for every ounce of strength. How many times I thought I heard voices from the shore is hard to say...sometimes a dog would bark...or so I thought...was that an engine in the distance? Maybe I should be lucky and meet up with one of these crazy fishermen who spend all night teaching worms to swim...Not a hope...and not a sound either...my imagination was sure playing me tricks...I had to keep going. All semblance of time had long since vanished. I knew it was very late but the hour I just hadn't a clue. I suppose I must have made some sort of headway, because later...very much later, the motion of the boat changed, I heard the very definite roar of the surf on the beach, and within a few seconds, this tiny matchbox with me perched on the seat was lifted high onto the crest of a wave, and without any undue ceremony, I was smacked straight onto a very hard and unyielding sandy beach. Several nasty bumps were experienced, a deluge of water over the stern which completely swamped the dinghy, and in a fraction of a second, I found myself sprawling face down trying hard not to swallow gallons of water and mouthfuls of sand. Another bang on my side told me the dinghy had also arrived by the same route, but, we had arrived...I had actually made it, regardless of everyone else, and that satisfaction helped a little to allay the discomfort of my present undignified position. I remember crawling higher up the beach to get clear of the incoming surf, holding also, the very light line attached to the bows of the dinghy. I sure didn't want to lose that now. I suppose I stayed there for quite a while collecting my strength...maybe I went to sleep, am not quite sure now, but later, was brought to my senses by the surf breaking over me. My befuddled mind worked out this fact to mean that the tide was rising, and unless I got the heck out of it very quickly, I was going to be in a very awkward spot. In the half light from a watery moon, I noted that I had landed on one of those stretches of beach where there is no exit to the road, and at high water, the beach would be flooded, so I decided there and then that I had better get cracking to a safer spot. Dragging myself along, every muscle aching, my hands hanging limply, afraid to make contact with my clothing, their rawness causing excruciating pain, I endeavored to push the dinghy into the surf using my hips and elbows. That tiny dinghy, weighing only 150 lbs seemed to me to be immovable. As I pushed it out, so the sea would pick it up and plunk it back, knocking me over at the same time. Tears came to my eyes in



exasperation as I struggled against the elements to win. Somehow, the beach became completely flooded and without any assistance from me, the boat floated off and drifted out to sea with me sitting, bowed down with the weight of the responsibility of my life. Manning the oars again, a piece of fabric torn from shirt over each hand to allay the pain, I struggled on towards the Run. The journey there became a nightmare. Trying all the time to keep out of the surf, and yet not to get too far out to sea. Watching the faint coast line for some mark I should recognize... how I cursed every boatbuilder. My aim was to reach the Run whilst the tide was rising... I knew if I hit it at that time, it would be child's play to enter the river and safety, but time was going fast, faster than I could row, and I sensed that I should never make it in time. My hands were now sticking to the oars with dried blood, and I knew that to release the oars was going to be as much agony as grasping them earlier. This whole idea was hopeless, I just had to reach the shore, regardless where I struck, and with this thought in mind, slewed the dinghy around and paddled shoreward. As before, the surf picked me up and bounced me unmercifully on the beach... every jolt sending pangs through my weary body. I'd had enough... let 'em all laugh... I just couldn't take any more. Not moving from the dinghy, it sat on the beach with me still holding the oars... I was beaten. Fatigue had taken all my reserves and I slept. Once again, the biting cold brought me from insensibility... My whole body had become stiff, the oars still glued to my hands as though part of me. I had to get clear of it all, but the attempts to remove my hands sent such agony through my body that I passed out. That last act of falling unconscious had done for me what I could never have accomplished in my normal state... my body had fallen full length in the boat and in turn, my hands had become wrenched from the oars. The light was still too bad to see them properly, but I knew then it would be a long time before I should be able to use them again. Climbing out, I surveyed the beach and found that I had struck it at a point where I could, with any sort of luck, walk along the edge of the Run and get into the river area proper. I could see that the tide had started to ebb again, so all thought of rowing through was most definitely out. Well, I thought, if I can walk through the shallows, what's wrong with trying to tow the boat through at the same time? Tying the painter around my waist, I pulled the boat into the shallow water and started my trek. Entering the Run with the dinghy dragging astern was tough going, the current doing its very best to knock me flat, tugging at my legs... anything to prevent my entry. Slowly I plugged on, every inch boosting my morale. Half way through... only another 100 yards and I'm in the clear, but... Fate hadn't quite finished with me... I still feel it was out to teach me a lesson I should never forget. Stumbling on the uneven surface, with the dinghy bucking around, I suddenly lost my footing, and in a fraction of a second, I had tumbled into the water with the dinghy dragging me astern. As much as I tried to struggle to the surface, so the pull of the rope around my waist dragged me down. The rushing torrent, caused unseen hands to massage my body as the undertow twisted and writhed, forcing and pushing, always to keep me down. Lungs gasping for life giving air, only to receive cold sea water... this couldn't last much longer. So this is what it's like to drown. According to the books, one is supposed to think of one's past life and picture the whole thing... I can assure you, all I thought about was to get out of that damned water and reach the dinghy. All thoughts of pain where my hands were concerned was forgotten in the panic of the moment. With every last atom of strength, I started to pull on the rope. It was my life line to safety, and I hoped and prayed it wouldn't break with the terrific strain imposed on it. Holding my breath to the bursting point, I hauled away. The weight of my body, coupled with the terrific pressure of water made me weight several hundred pounds more, but love of life gave me superhuman strengths, and very gradually, I drew my body closer to the dinghy and safety. Never in my whole life have I greeted the back end of a boat with more enthusiasm. As it appeared, so I gulped in the air my lungs had been crying for... safe at last... but what next? With a final burst of energy, I dragged myself over the stern and lay prostrate in the bottom, but, my mind now fully alert, I realized that I would have to do something pretty soon else I should find myself in a similar predicament as before. Callously ignoring the pain from my torn hands, I grabbed the oars and pulled for my life in an endeavor to reach an area where the pull of the current would give me a reasonable break. I had learnt that the beach near the Run had been quite calm, so, with a glance over my shoulder to get a rough position, I aimed this little cockle shell never daring to look around again in case I lost hard-won ground. Slowly, the surging of the water around the boat

ceased and I knew then that I had won the battle. Pulling further over still, I found without using the oars at all, I was nearing the beach. This time, I landed on the opposite side of the Run, and, beaching the boat, I tied the painter to a nearby rock and struggled up the sloping beach to safety and terra-firma.

This final escapade had aroused my senses, and with a purposeful stride I made toward a nearby house. What the time was I neither knew nor cared...I was ashore, and by some means, I was going to get home.

Irony has a funny way of appearing...I learnt that a few minutes later. Banging on the door of a tiny house, a light appeared in the window above, and who should pop his head out of the window...complete with red flannel night cap was my old 'friend' who had screamed at me from the beach. Needless to say, his adjectives at being aroused at 3:30am by ME are totally unprintable, but after managing to get a word in and explain my predicament, his whole attitude changed. He came down, brought me into his warm living room, and did everything possible to make me easy. He bound my hands, gave me food...he was an angel in disguise. We talked for a long time after that...I found he was an old Master Mariner, and now one of those "Crazy Fishermen" plying his trade on the local coast.

## Chapter 2.

As can be well imagined, my enthusiasm for small boat sailing had received a large sock in the ear, my friends had in their own twisted way pulled my leg unmercifully to such an extent that I dare not show my face around the yacht club without receiving numerous asides which caused me no little embarrassment. My attempts to forget the whole matter became so impossible that I finally sold the fated dinghy and went back to ice skating.

Plugging away at the shop daily, back in the same old groove, things began to pall again and I knew that sailing, however dangerous it appeared to be was the only solution, but all the time at the back of my mind was that thought of being made ridiculous in front of the crowd...nothing is more demoralizing than to be laughed at, particularly in front of my favorite fruit...gals, so decided then that whatever I did would have to be done in secrecy. Wandering along the way side, hands in my pockets just apparently aimlessly day dreaming, but all the time noticing and trying to learn a little more of the art of sailing a small boat, I finally decided I had gleaned enough know-how to have another bask at this "Harmless" sport. I had watched points very closely, noticing how skilled helmsmen swung the tiny craft around in enclosed spaces, how they took every advantage of patchy wind...all these little points I tried to get stuck into my head for future use, then...off to another part of the county to purchase another boat. I'd had my eye on a particular type of dinghy known as the 12' "International" class, and decided this was the boat for me. Had located one in Sandbanks, a tiny place in Dorset, and there on a Sunday morning I surveyed my latest purchase.

Not daring to let the last owner know my lack of knowledge, I talked for some considerable time on other people's exploits trying to give him the idea that I was an experience sailor. Quite frankly, I don't think I took him in one little bit, but I will admit he was a good listener and never once disputed any of my very vague facts...after all, he was trying to sell me the boat, but at the time I thought I had really conveyed my "deep knowledge" to him...I know now I didn't fool him one little bit. The trouble was, I was so intent on giving him my ideas that I didn't listen too closely to his, and that is where I made my big mistake.

Well, I bought it...with his help, it was loaded onto the trailer astern of my car and off I went back to Christchurch, back to a little creek I knew of...a little tiny spot away from the gadding crowd of morbid sightseers, where I could unload my acquisition and stick the mast in...make all the stupid mistakes I wished without having any bright remarks made every five minutes. Anxious to get the boat into the water as quickly as possible, the mistakes I made in rigging it were numerous, but

impatience had always been a habit of mind and the job took three times longer than really necessary.

Around noon on that fine Sunday morning, I had finally tied every cord, fixed every shackle, rigged the sails and mounted the alloy center plate in its slot in the center of the dinghy. She looked beautiful lying there in that quiet tree shaded creek. Built entirely of mahogany with a spruce mast, varnished from stem to stern she was wonderful. This is what I had always wanted...a real racing dinghy...something that would flash through the water, sunlight gleaming from the highly polished sides and the spray flying in all directions as we swept past all the other boats. I stood there and thought all these wonderful thoughts...eager to go, and yet hating the idea of disturbing my dreams. Running to the car, I quickly locked it up, ran back to the dinghy and gingerly climbed aboard...she was very touchy, very light and every inch a fine bred racer. The creek was narrow, very shallow and very muddy. Trees bowed their branches to meet those on the other side as with the tiny paddle we moved slowly to the entrance into the river. Several times the branches caught up with the mast head, but no damage was done in that short trip.

Being lunch time, the area around the creek entrance was deserted and this really built up my morale 100%. Taking things slowly, I paddled to the center of the river before pulling up the mainsail. High up the river, the effects of the tide were not apparent, and with the gentle breeze blowing, I had no difficulty in hoisting up both main and jib. "Sprite" as she was called, spun like a top as I swung the helm...the sails filled, and gracefully, like the lady she was, sped along barely seeming to touch the surface of the ruffled water. The bow wave made a faint chuckling sound, the mast gave the tiniest of creaks as the wind increased and as she gently heeled, so I gradually let out the main sheet to suit the wind. So as the river widened, so we sped along faster...other craft sailing seemed to remain stationary as "Sprite" planed over the water, and, seated on the floor of the dinghy, holding the helm lightly I fought a silent battle with myself not to give any waves of derision...it was tough not to, but I had learned my lesson the hard way and just couldn't face another load of dripping sarcasm. Rounding the bend of the river, the yacht club hove into sight, and slightly offshore rode all the club member's dinghies at anchor...the members lying all over their boats quaffing beer and grub. I knew that this would be the test for me...I knew the tack had to be changed owing to the sharp bend of the river...I also knew that this was the place where many experienced yachtsmen had met their Waterloo. The wind always increased suddenly at this point, seeming to gust to almost gale force as it swept unimpeded across the marshland area. I had watched others negotiate this area many times, had seen so many capsize...had seen them cling to their upturned dinghies...sails that had proudly swept the ship along lying flat in the water...bedraggled, dirty and dead. This must not happen to me. My audience, owing to my previous exploits, had enlarged by the time I hove into sight, and they all knew the dinghy was a stranger by its racing number...and much to my chagrin...they also knew I was the skipper. I knew every-man-jack was hoping and praying I would make the bend and I also knew I stood a 99% chance of muffing it. My brain whirled with what I had seen in the past. I tried hard to remember how each and everyone had negotiated that bend and tried so hard not to become flustered. The bend came nearer...my hand gripped the helm as though my life depended on it...it did...I just had to make it...the other hand held the main jib sheet ready to release it at precisely the right time...the center plate I knew would be OK as the river was quite deep at this point...the wind still stayed at the same speed but I knew that this was only to give me a false sense of security...the big gust was to come, but at exactly what spot I just didn't know. Those thousands of eyes were boring into me...it seemed as though every person could actually see my thoughts and I sweated. It poured down my face, stung my eyes...I couldn't see and dare not release either the helm or the sheet to wipe it away...shaking my head to free it of spray and sweat I entered the bend proper. Ahead I could see the surface of the water had changed and knew that would be the spot it would hit me. "Sprite" swept ahead and I, preparing for the change of tack, had brought myself into a crouch...ready at the instant to throw myself to the windward side when the gust hit her...seconds passed seeming like hours...my whole body tense and ready for the moment...so the line came nearer...this was it...WHOOSH...the wind screamed as it hit

the frail dinghy...I seemed to be years late as I swung the helm to get on the other tack...the sheets got tangled around my feet as the mainsail ran out with the rope screaming through the block...my hands tingled with pain as the sheet slid through it. "Sprite" staggered under the pressure, the mast at an angle of 30° to the water as she heeled...I threw my whole weight on the starboard leaning far out over the water to counteract this unseen force...the jib sheet had come adrift from my hand and the jib was doing its very best to thrash itself to pieces...please come up...in those fleeting seconds I prayed for Sprite to right herself. I was on display...I was the center of attraction for thousands...millions...it seemed as though the whole world was there to see me then...I just had to succeed. Thoughts flashed through my head...had I carried out all the things I had learnt from watching others? Had I omitted any tiny detail? I just couldn't think any more, she had to come up, and as I strained there holding the tiller with one hand and trying hard to graph the flying jib sheet, the water boiled around us as the wind blew the tops of the waves into my face. Sprite gave a sudden jerk as though to cast the wind aside, then almost coming upright, she took on a new angle of heel and sped away on the other tack.

My entire thoughts were now centered on the boat. Everything else had been forgotten...the crowd, the penetrating eyes; my previous thoughts all disappeared as I concentrated on trimming the sheets to get the best out of her. The wind eased very slightly and I pulled in the sheets to counteract any luffing, then with everything all set we planed past al the members boats, the yacht club and so on down river...I had succeeded and never again would anyone jeer at me...I had passed the test that all were expected when racing...I had earned my racing colors and I was happy.

The excitement of the past few minutes had reduced me to a physical wreck, and as I gradually lost sight of the clubhouse, I eased the sheets and settled into the bottom of the dinghy to rest my weary body. Sprite continued on her way down river acting like a lady all the day, and I, from past experience, kept to the main channel to avoid the sand banks. Feeling I had learnt a good lesson, I decided there and then to come about and return to my official moorings which I then felt I could tie up without inviting comment. Bringing Sprite about was simplicity itself...she pointed up into the wind as though it were abeam and not almost dead ahead, and returning to the moorings she certainly showed her paces to other small sailboats.

Now taking up a mooring is hardly an easy chore at any time and I knew that I also had to prove myself in this to remove all the stain from my yachtsman's copy book. We rounded the bend going fairly fast...too fast to take up a mooring, and I decided then that I would have several dummy runs up before finally making the attempt. One has to approach a mooring at a speed which will enable you to pick up the buoy and yet not fast enough to permit you to over-run it which will either pull you into the water, or permit the boat to continue its way into some other bloke's boat...neither of these things being very wise. I cruised up and down past the club several times, tacking and weaving all the time figuring out exactly the right speed to make the approach.

Finally, I reckoned that I had had enough tries and made the attempt. Heading up wind, I dropped the mainsail quickly, and forging ahead slowly with jib alone approached that tiny buoy. Holding the jib sheet and the helm at the same time, trying hard to keep some way on the boat was no easy task for me, but things were panning out very nicely and the final test came off 100%. As I came within a yard of the buoy, the helm was swung over, the jib dropped with a flurry and I ran forward and grabbed the buoy...not too fast or too slow but exactly right. For the first time in my life I had actually done something right and I felt good...so good in fact that when I got ashore I treated the whole club to drinks.

Now Englishmen are funny...whilst I made all the mistakes they were ready to jump on me, make fun and generally pull my leg, and yet when I succeeded...not a sound from them...not a word of praise...just NOTHING; but, being an Englishman I know what it means, and to be in the Club



House with the members talking about anything else but me gave me the biggest kick I'd had for some time. I knew then that I had been accepted.

Now as many of you are aware, most clubs are devoted to racing, and as I had a racing dinghy it was expected of me to compete with others, but somehow the idea of it never quite appealed to me, and I was quite happy to cruise up and down the river, sometimes going out to sea on a calm day, but always to be alone with my thoughts.

Whilst I only had the dinghy for two months, it taught me how to capsize in ten different ways, but I learnt a lot and was still dissatisfied with life generally. To backtrack a little, I had taken up this sailing lark as an escape from my humdrum life ashore, but could see that whilst it had acted as a temporary outlet, I was still getting fed up. The solution was hard to find, but I reckoned that were I able to travel further afield it might help matters, but with a 12' boat that was impossible, so I decided then that I would aim a little higher in size.

My knowledge of boats was still skimpy although I had learnt enough to run around a bit and avoid smashing other people's boats up, that was it. I sold Sprite and tried to decide what would be the next move. I had plenty to do in my own business and spare time was at a premium. Always preferring to take my own counsel, I was in a dilemma how to approach the angle of another boat. The classified columns in the local rag described all sorts of boats...some good, some bad, but I couldn't decide what size I wanted so figured I would wait until something came up that I liked.

Wandered around the yachting clubs asking questions, watching boats, looking at the "For Sale" signs until one day I saw "Spindrift"...have always wished that I had broken a leg that day or had someone to put me off buying the thing, but as I said before, being a little headstrong and knowing all the answers I bought the thing.

Oh yes, she looked wonderful. 20' overall...solidly "looking" and all the etceteras that are put on a boat to attract the "MUG"...I was the MUG.. As before I bought the boat secretly away from the club location and had it brought around y trailer to my favorite creek...I wished afterwards that I had insisted that the original owner sail it around to my Club...I have a strange feeling what his answer would have been.

As before, I rigged the "Spindrift", but this time I had also acquired an outboard motor to assist...more about the outboards later...this is hardly the time nor the place to have the editor blue pencil my script.

Needless to say the outboard failed to function to push the boat out of the creek and I resorted to the oars...darned great cumbersome thins that seemed to get tangled up with all the undergrowth at each side of the creek. After a great struggle I poled the boat out, naturally losing one of the oars in the attempt, and on arrival at the entrance to the creek, I had the beautiful job of wading through the mud and slime to recover that oar...actually, as I discovered later, I need not of bothered, but I am running ahead of myself so will try to settle down a bit to get the facts down.

Being almost twice the size of 'Sprite', 'Spindrift' was quite a handful and I was loathe to hoist all the sails in the confined space of the upper reaches of the river, contented myself with the jib until such time the river widened enough to give me tacking room. I did on numerous occasions try to get that outboard going, but apart from barking my knuckles, breaking the starter cord and using quite a lot of R.A.F. language, never got a peep out of it, so had to content myself with cruising along at three knots with the jib and a light breeze to help me on my way. It was hard for me to realize that being a bigger boat it wouldn't have the speed in light airs that my 12 footer had, but I knew that being bigger, it would have a better chance out at sea than the more frail racing craft. As the river broadened, so I felt it was time to hoist the mainsail and really let 'Spindrift' show her paces. As this oversize chunk of canvas gradually climbed to the top of the towering mast, she

picked up speed. Slightly heeling, the sails pulling and the sheets thrumming with strain, we sped on down to the famous bend.

All ready for this, I released the main jib sheet holding them in one hand as I steered with the other. What I forgot was, the extra amount of sail up increased the pull on the sheets to such an extent that I found it almost impossible to hold them both even in the slight breeze that was then blowing. Decided to lash the jib sheet to a cleat and handle the main alone...it was the only thing I could think of at the time. Nearing the bend, I watched for that telltale patch of water, and as we hit it threw my whole weight to starboard. Quite frankly, I may as well have climbed the mast and waved a red flag for all the good it did. My puny weight against the pressure of that wind and the weight of the boat did exactly nothing, and with a wild shriek as the wind took over, Spindrift proved to me that she could capsize just as easily as any other boat regardless of size and appearance. Good fortune smiled on me inasmuch as the mainsheet snapped with the excessive strain. The boom swept out at right angles to the boat, the mainsail flapped itself to pieces, and with the gunwales under the water taking in about a ton or so of local wetness, we righted ourselves. Utterly disgusted with the whole turn out, I dropped the remains of the sail and armed with the oars, paddled slowly to the mooring to survey my present predicament.

What a spot to be in. A fine day for sailing with a fine boat and no mainsail to use...did I feel fed up...the sail was pretty rotten, also the ropes on the boat, in fact, I was beginning to feel that things were not as the original owner had described them...to put it bluntly, I felt I'd been well and truly caught, but to the extent of the swindle I was still unaware. My friends at the club then showed their true feelings at that time, and when they saw my predicament, lost very little time in coming forward to give a hand on patching up that forlorn looking sail. My knowledge of sewing at that time was exactly NIL, so all I was able to do was to bilge out the boat and reeve some new sheets. Between several of the lads, the sail soon took form again, and within an hour we had it bent on the mast and boom ready for sea again...I wished later that the sail had completely disintegrated itself beyond repair at that time, but it didn't, and I learned my next lesson.

Pulling away from the moorings again, all canvas hoisted, we bowled along down river showing a clean pair of heels to all the other smaller craft, and I knew then that my earlier dilemma had been answered...the bigger boat had proven it. By now, after being accepted by the club, I was in the fortunate position of being able to wave at other boats and getting one in return...maybe a silly thing to those uninitiated to the ways of sailing clubs, but to me, it was a feeling of honor.

This was to be the test for Spindrift. I headed down river keeping strictly to the channel, and after half an hour sailing saw the entrance of the river keeping strictly to the channel, and after half an hour sailing saw the entrance of the river in sight and beyond it, was the sea...the wide open sea where I knew I should be happy.

Entering the run was made with far more confidence than ever before and my friend the old sea captain gave me a friendly wave as I sped through that narrow entrance into Christchurch Bay and the English Channel.

I had checked my tides and direction of current before leaving, but the thought of that defunct outboard engine worried me a bit. If the wind should drop, I knew I should be unable to propel this heavy boat for any distance, so decided that I wouldn't travel too far afield, but to just go out to sea a short way and then return on the incoming tide an hour later. Sweeping through the run with all sails drawing, Spindrift made a wonderful sight as she bounced over the choppy sea throwing spume around her and heeling further as the wind grew stronger. Clearing the bar...a long sandbank that extends far out to sea. I swung the helm to port, and Spindrift answering immediately came around perfectly to starboard laying a course parallel to the coast. Ahead lay Hengistbury Head, a long jetty extending far out to sea with a light at its end warning all ships that

there were dangerous rocks in the vicinity. With our shallow draft, I had no worries, although the rocks could be clearly seen below us.

Speeding past the head, I felt that I had come far enough. The wind had increased considerably, and I felt that my sparse knowledge of the sea was insufficient to cope with adverse weather should it arise, so with this thought in mind, I swung the helm to take me home again. As she turned onto the other tack, so I noticed a sluggishness that was not apparent earlier, and looking down, saw that quite a considerable amount of water was in the bilges. I knew I had drained her dry before leaving the club, and apart from a few dollops of spray over the side coming through the run, she had no solid water come aboard. To say the least this was disconcerting, and I pulled up the floorboards in an endeavor to see where the water was coming in. Apart from a dirty greasy mess, little was seen, and with each lurch of the boat, so the water came higher. I grabbed a bucket and started to bail out, but although I worked solidly, the leak was too bad for me to compete with. Realizing I couldn't win, I swung the helm towards shore feeling the wisest plan would be to beach her, find the leak and then get back home...that's what I thought.

Whilst the shore had seemed so close before, now I had to reach it, it seemed to be miles away, and though the wind was blowing full strength, we seemed to be creeping through the water at a snail's pace, each minute making the boat sink lower in the water as the leak grew worse, and also slowing us up. This was to be a race for life at least the life of the boat, but as each minute passed, so my doubts grew.

The water had now reached to my knees and all thoughts of bailing were cast aside. The oars had floated up to the surface, and with the lurching of the boat had been swept over the side...the bucket had gone the same way with other odd pieces of gear...to be quite frank, I was getting a little worried about the whole deal. As is usual under the circumstances there wasn't another boat in the vicinity, and the people ashore were not aware of my predicament, so I had to rely entirely on myself to get that boat in. The wind increased in strength and I was forced to drop the jib to prevent the boat's heeling too much. The sea was now within six inches of the top of the gunwales and I knew that one more lurch and she would fill and sink. The shore was still some distance off and I realized then that I wasn't going to make it in time. Tearing off my storm coat and jersey, I prepared myself for the jump over the side. I had to get clear before she took the big dive, and I wanted to be absolutely sure at the time that I was well clear of all the rigging that would float about the surface when she went down...I sure didn't want to take the dive with the darned thing. Now the water was just lapping over the edge of the gunwales...better jump now. With a spring, I put one foot on the stern and jumped clear. As I hit the water, so the old Spindrift gave a lurch and sank immediately with hardly a gurgle. Looking around for another boat to help me was a waste of time, and I felt pretty sure that had anyone seen me they wouldn't be able to reach me in time to do any real good, so I struck out for shore the best way I could. Hampered with sea boots which I had omitted to remove, long flannel slacks and a shirt that would insist on filling with water and acting like a parachute the going was pretty rough. The water was bitterly cold and as I am subject to cramp very easily, had my doubts then whether I should make it in time before my legs gave up doing their job. Kept trying to get those boots off, but the heavy woolen socks had expanded to such an extent that every time I reached down to get them off I just sunk with the effort. Found all this thrashing around wasn't getting me any place, so forgot the boots, slacks and shirts and used all the energy to make it ashore. I reckon I tried every stroke in the manual to make that mile, back side, crawl, even dog paddle...I just had to keep moving all the time...my body had no inherent buoyancy owing to the clothing so I had to keep moving. Would that shore never come closer? I could hear the surf breaking now, but so at the same time one of my legs was also giving me hell...would it last out for that last 100 yards? Still no one about to give me a hand...just couldn't figure it. This was summer time and there should be thousands of holiday makers using this particular stretch of water, but my luck dead out...I was alone and it looked as though I was going to go down alone. Would I ever learn my lesson? Looked as though I had learnt the final lesson, but wasn't going to be in a position to use it.

Should have brought a lifebelt with me...ridiculous thoughts passed through my brain as I swam automatically. I had swallowed gallons of water and I could almost hear it swilling around inside of me...this was getting tougher every minute but I just had to make it. Resting for a minute my legs dropped down...Oh God, they touched something solid...I had actually reached the shallows, but the surf was still breaking over my head...one leg had become utterly useless by now, and flaying my arms about and hopping on one leg, I endeavored to maintain some sort of balance whilst fighting my way inshore. With each surge of the sea, I tried to synchronize a jump with it so that I should be carried in, and slowly, the beach shallowed. Several times I fell groveling in the sand...trying hard to balance my lopsided body I staggered forward into the faint line of surf, and with a final heave flung my body full length onto the dry sand.

Lying there gasping and choking, my leg twisting me in agony as the cramp took hold...this was absolute hell. I couldn't move. My body shuddered as I retched and brought up gallons of sea water. If this is what drowning was like then I'd sure choose the gas oven if I ever wanted to commit suicide.

I suppose I must have drifted into a coma for a while. The sun was strong, the sand was warm and I was dead tired and nature took its course. Some time later I was awakened by someone shaking my shoulder, and twisting myself around looked up into the face of my old pal the retired sea skipper. Seemed to me he was always turning up at odd moments...not always when I really needed him but at least at the times when a little comfort helped a lot. He told me he had seen me sink, but by the time he had managed to get hold of a suitable boat to come to my aid, I had made the swim ashore, so he had taken his time in getting along assuming I was OK. I gave him a rough idea what had happened and as we looked seaward, the mast of the Spindrift showed above the surface. The tide had fallen considerably, but it was far too deep to walk out there to retrieve the boat.

He gave me a hand to get up, but I had to spend a while giving my leg a massage to rid it of the cramp, then we both climbed aboard his dinghy to check on the situation. With his tiny boat there was nothing that could be done, so rowing around to his big fishing boat, he got several of the local fishermen to come aboard and off we went on the salvage job. Arriving at the spot, he cast his anchor over, then one of the boys jumped over the side to get a rope on the Spindrift. Between us all, we got most of the junk off the boat that was weighing it down...the outboard came first, then the heavy centerplate, then finally the chain ballast. According to the book of rules, she should have then floated to the surface, but it appeared as though the boat were made of iron and not wood. Pulling the anchor in, he started the engine and very slowly towed Spindrift over the sandy bottom into the shallows. This was the actual idea we had in mind, but Spindrift had other plans for us. As we pulled so she gradually fell to pieces under the water.

The answer struck all of us in one tiny instant...Spindrift was ROTTEN from stem to stern, and the slight strain put on her had caused her whole structure to collapse. As old George gradually pulled a little more, so Spindrift broke up still more and by the time we had pulled a hundred yards very little of her remained. Looking astern, white pieces of wood floated sluggishly on the surface...too rotten to bounce about...pieces of rotten canvas mixed up with cordage swirled about in the shallows...none of it fit to salvage. I strongly believe that all of us offered a silent prayer then that I hadn't gone further afield...it would have been my finish besides the boat.

Well, that's the way it goes. All my pals passed condolences etc., but I felt so bitter about the fact that I had been caught for a sucker that I decided there and then it would be the last boat I should purchase in my life...Never buy a boat without knowing what it is actually like under the glossy surface...I learnt that lesson.



It seemed to me that my yachting pastime was not only becoming an expensive hobby but also a very dangerous one and I decided to give it the go by until such time as I should either be able to buy a new boat or get more knowledge. Falling back into the old rut again gave me a big pain, and I found that on those off days I would wander down to the boat yards gazing enviously at all the yachts moored up, yachts capable of traveling long distances without any worry, but my pocket book was far too small to cope with my big ideas.

My home library was packed with books on circumnavigators, racing men of years gone by when the "J Class" yachts over a 100' long would cross the Atlantic and compete against the Americans. In my sleep I would dream of trips around the world going to the exotic places, the south seas, the Indies, but they were only dreams, and those sort of dreams cost a lot of money. I had read of people who had built their own boat. Slocum, the American who was the very first to sail the world alone...he built his own boat in Boston and did the job...the "Spray"...it was a fine boat. I had read his book so many times I could recite it backwards, but always came the thought that he was an experienced mariner, both in navigation and boatbuilding, whilst I was a watchmaker and mechanical engineer...hardly allied trades to the sea.

The idea of owning a seagoing boat became an obsession, so much so that the search started in a gradual way for the right boat for the job. I had the feeling that without the knowledge so very necessary, I would still know the boat when I found it, but to find it was another question. I had on many occasions in the past covered most of the boat yards in the South of England and couldn't remember any of them that had my heart's desire, but somewhere it was lying, just waiting for me to find. I was sure that I couldn't design my dream, neither could I build it, in fact I just didn't know what the heck I had in mind, so just kept searching at every spare moment that came available.

Trudging through muddy boat yards in the middle of winter, rowing out in dinghies with the rain pouring down, sometimes snowing, freezing cold, clothes soaked through always seeking for that illusive boat. Some were big, others small, here a ketch, there a sloop, some old some new, some without a mast, others lying in the mud waiting for a new owner to rescue them from their immobility...to paint them and turn them into a thing of beauty again...all of these I passed by, every day feeling more despondent, fed up with the thought that my dream boat was non-existent. Yacht brokers poured their lists into me. The phone rang constantly with owners who thought they had "just the thing for me", but still the right one didn't come.

It was around Christmas time in 1950 to 51. The festivities had ceased, business had collapsed and everyone had relapsed into his normal dismal rut. The weather was typically English, sleet and snow, a damp cold that penetrated one's bones to the marrow,...everyone fed up and gloomy and praying for the summer to arrive. It was a day like this that my mother and I took off to tour the few boat yards left in Southampton. Sliding and slithering over the icy roads we crept along at a snail's pace, through the New Forest watching for the stray ponies that run wild there, trying hard to keep warm against the icy blast of the wind which somehow seemed to find every crack in the car. My mother's thoughts whilst not verbal, were nevertheless passed to me by her attitude and actions, but I was oblivious of all that just thinking of what I might find in the next place.

It was truly a lousy day, not fit for a dog to be out, but to me, it was a day off from my usual grind and therefore the time to carry on my search. Coming from the forest, we finally hit town, then winding our way through the narrow streets, came to the sea front and the boat yard. Pulling the car up into a hard packed snow drift, I eased my cold stiff body out leaving the engine running to warm the car whilst my mother snuggled up into about a dozen rugs...nothing would have removed her from that car. By golly it was cold! The wind ripped the door from my hands and swung it hard against the stop almost tearing it from its hinges. My coat wrapped itself around my neck, the snow forcing its way into every crack in my clothing. I tossed up in my mind whether to stay or not...this was utterly crazy. The Boat Yard was deserted, all the doors were closed, and the few yachts lying at the pier and their moorings had a thin film of snow covering them.

Straining my eyes through the biting sleet, I noticed a tiny shack near the end of the pier with a funnel of smoke spiraling in the air which was whipped away in to the flying spume off the sea. Creeping along, shoulders hunched and head bowed, I trudged to this tiny haven...several times my feet slid from under me as I touched an icy patch...this was hardly the place for smooth light town shoes...my chilblains...itchy feet to you, and ailment suffered with for years in cold weather were driving me mad. This was winter in all its glory...to heck with white Christmases...give me the sunshine anytime. Reaching the hut I banged on the door with my elbow, my hands were too cold to take from my pockets...a low mumble of voices came from the depths, indecipherable against the shriek of the wind...another bang then a shuffling towards the door. More waiting, a clatter of wood then the door opened enough to slide a visiting card through..."Watchyerwant?" a voice like one from the dead slid through the crack..."Open the b...y door y'old fool, its damned cold out here" I grunted back...slowly the door opened and as the crack widened I slid my bulky frame through only to have the door whipped shut again as I entered. The fug inside could be cut with a knife. A pot bellied stove was gleaming a dull red, all cracks in the shack had been sealed with sacking and paper, and as I looked around saw just an old work bench for the rigger and two wooden cases as seats. The dirt floor was littered with scraps of cordage and wire, coils of rope piled up the walls, old blocks, pulleys miscellaneous pieces of boat gear strewn everywhere and the strong tarry smell of the sea seemed to overthrow every other odor in the place. Two old men seemingly about 90 years old stood there, straggling beards adorned their faces and greasy peaked hats atop their heads...they looked like twins from the oldest windjammer afloat, and as I stood there, they both sat down, the boxes creaking, and gazed at the stove the smoke from their old clay pipes wreathing their faces. The sudden heat after the intense cold crept though my body and I suddenly felt tired, leaning against a bale of rope I yawned and started to talk.

The old riggers gave no sign that they heard me but still puffed away filling the shack with rancid smoke. Once again I started talking...trying to tell these old fossils about my quest. Slowly one turned his head, gave a few meditative puffs and started talking. He had a friendly voice, a slow Dorset accent, never taking his pipe from his whiskered mouth—I found it difficult to follow him at first, but slowly I got it. I learnt that the boat I wanted had never been built. Every sailor had been looking for his dream boat all his life and always had to compromise...there never was the perfect boat, and whilst they sailed, and men went to sea, the ideal yacht was still a dream. He told me of boats that were there ont he pier, boats that were in other basins...his memory for fine detail was fantastic...he appeared to know every boat for miles around---where they were built, who owned them, their records---right down to the finest detail of when they were last slipped---what a memory, and what a sailor too...he also had sailed with my old friend George, and for some reason I started to tell him about all my experiences in sailing. I stopped half way through one of my incidents telling him that all I had to say was rubbish and he could hardly be interested in that sort of thing, but he pressed me to go on, and very soon I even noticed his "twin" turn his head and take heed of the flow of words that came from my mouth. Before I realized it, I had told him everything, things I wouldn't normally have the nerve to tell my best friends, but there was something about him that made me want to pour out my heart, my dreams everything. How long I spoke with them I don't really know but sometime later when he let me out of the shack, the expressions on my mother's face when I finally reached the car was enough for me. Saying nothing, I drove ooff and pulled into a small restaurant to eat. There I told my mother of the story and what had happened. She was a good listener, and after a good meal, we set out again on the quest. For some unknown reason, the car seemed to drive itself back to this old shack and to those decrepit looking boats along the jetty. Stopping the car, I walked back along the path and past the shack onto the very shaky jetty. The rain and snow had stopped and the wind had quieted to almost nothing as I gingerly picked my way along that ice covered jetty. The first boat was tiny and stubby also very dirty, the next was long and rakish with a towering mast, but it looked dead with its big canvas cover enveloping the decks covered with snow. Further on an old motor boat with the decks caved in and half full of water, then a couple of ancient dinghies then open water looking out over Southampton Water.

I was tired, fed up, this search was killing me and I stood there feeling very despondent and gazed into the sluggish muddy water at the end of the jetty. My mind went completely blank as my eyes stared at that surface---then they penetrated the surface and looked below. Faintly I could see an outline of a boat. The shimmering of the water gave me no solid definition, but there was the actual shape of a boat, its outline standing out beneath the good money on a futile project. Now as you are well aware by now of my nature, I refused to accept their advice and became more than ever determined to get this rotten hulk to the surface. They both refused to have any part of it and told me as far as they were concerned I could do whatever I wished with the thing if I got it up, in fact they would be very grateful if I would remove it, but, apart from that, they refused point blank to even suggest any means where it could be raised. Having got their OK about its removal, the next job was to find someone who would have no qualms about taking my money for the work involved. I found that was VERY easy, and it was then decided that the firm concerned would raise it on a cost basis but would accept no responsibility---if it broke up, then I should have to pay for their time anyway. After giving them a sizable deposit, the job was put under way. The old men I think were so disgusted that they never left their shack once to view the proceedings. Four day went by on the salvage operation, then my phone rang at the office---They had raised it almost in one piece and if I would be so kind as to pay up the balance of the money owing for the work, they would be very happy to get the heck out of the place and forget the whole thing ever happened. I was overjoyed at this and lost very little time in getting to the boat yard. The foreman in charge of the operation met me at the entrance of the yard with the bill and made me pay up before I got to the salvaged boat...I understood why afterwards and he told me as well just so there wouldn't have been any misunderstanding between us. After I had got my receipt, we both walked over to the beach where he had pulled the wreck. Whilst the air had been reasonably OK before, as we neared the wreck, so it became almost impossible to breath. The stench from that wreck was like nothing on earth I had ever smelled before, and I quite thought I should have to pay the salvagers danger money on top of the original fee. It was awful, it was a boat in shape. It was 40' long and it was an old fishing boat...all these things were solid facts, but oh the sight of it. It was one mass of green slime. Barnacles covered its entire surface. Inside it was full of revoltingly smelling black mud. The decks, what there were of them had completely collapsed into the hull, and the hull was almost falling to pieces. Approaching it very gingerly and with a handkerchief around my face, I prodded it with a piece of wood...the wood went straight through the planking and also through a 4" beam as though they never existed---it was sure rotten; but---it was mine. I thank my lucky stars that my mother was not present at the unveiling ceremony otherwise I think she would have voiced her opinion without further ado. The more I looked at this derelict hulk the more I wished I had taken the old boys advice, but I had bought it with a vengeance, and unless I wished to get into trouble with the local sanitary authorities, I had better get the thing away from the beach. Now this was something that hadn't come into my calculations, and was food for thought, so, getting the foreman away from these unpleasant surroundings I enticed him into a local pub where I gave him a real skin full. I pleaded with him, almost went on my knees to get him to tow it around to my home in Christchurch, and it took precisely twelve pints of local beer before I got him into the mellow mood where he would accept the job. He agreed once again to get it there entirely at my risk on the cost basis plus gas for his boat, but assured me that the chances at that time of the year getting it around were next to impossible. Storms were prevalent at that time, and it needed very little to bust up my boat, but having gone so far with it, was determined to follow it through. Making sure that I wouldn't have trouble at the other end I contacted the local boatbuilder and got his OK in WRITING to take my boat up on his slipway for the purpose of rebuilding---he didn't know what was coming else he would have turned me down without another word, but I kept my big mouth shut and thought that there would be time enough to argue with him when the time came. The salvage foreman doubting whether the boat would float had hosed all the mud out first, then filled the hull with oil drums, and full of hope and pessimism he started his trip---30 mile in the English Channel, one of the nastiest pieces of water in the world and towing a half sunken rotten wreck at three knots. I sailed with him and I know what he went through. I swear it must have put twenty years on his life and I feel he will never forgive me for getting him drunk and accepting this crazy deal. That

journey was a real nightmare. The hulk was a dead weight and had no steerage. It yawed all over the place making the towing boat a tough job to steer. As we plowed through the waters of the Solent, so the weather kept calm, but in the east, the clouds were building up for a real blow. It was bitterly cold out there on the water, and I for one was ready to cut the whole thing adrift and go back home, but having got so far the skipper of the boat decided to go on. All my enthusiasm had disappeared and I knew then that I had a responsibility on my hands for life—a responsibility I could lose and forget by just cutting a rope, but I held on hating to feel beaten. Hurst Point hove into view and the strong current started to take over. With the throttle wide open we plugged through the narrow channel, trying all the time to stop the launch from swinging into shore. The tow line became so taut that I felt sure it would snap of its own accord. With every rise and fall of the sea, so the line would thrum and jerk. The launch shuddered with the strain imposed on it, and I had grave doubts whether its engine would be man enough to get us through that seething maelstrom. We took four hours to round the point only making about one knot against the current, then, sweeping into Bournemouth Bay, the surge ceased and we throttled down to a steady three knots. The trip across the bay was uneventful, but all the time the clouds were building up, a portent of a big gale. Six miles to go to reach the Run, that narrow entrance into the bay where we should be safe, but that 6 miles was to be the toughest we had encountered. It started to rain, the rain turned to sleet, then to blinding snow. It swept across the decks and we huddled together the three of us in the tiny wheel house. All the landmarks disappeared in a second as the blizzard took over and we were forced to steer by a very doubtful compass. Speed was cut to 1 ½ knots to ease the strain on the tow line, but there was no way of knowing whether we were making headway. Four hours went by, still steering by compass and we reckoned that we should be near our haven, but still the snow blotted out everything—visibility was NIL. We held a confab in the cabin and decided it would be wise to drop the anchor. The waters in the area are not very deep and it would be the safest thing to do under the circumstances, so suiting our words to actions, tow of us crawled along the duck through the snow and cast the anchor over. There was a rattle as it dropped in the depths, then, checking it with the winch, we held the chain. Still we seemed to be moving forward, there was nothing we could check with, but as we had 1020 fathoms of chain out, it was pretty sure that it was holding somewhere as the maximum depth around there was only 20. Closing the throttle to idling speed we decided we would wait for the weather to lift before proceeding further.

This was a tough decision to make as the weather was getting worse, but it meant riding out the storm at anchor or plugging on into the unknown waters. Naturally there was no radio aboard so we were alone out there with only our thoughts to keep us company. We brewed up some cocoa on the tiny Primus and laced it with rum just to keep out the cold, and with the galley stove going full out, we settled down for the long wait.

Around three p.m., the shrieking of the wind eased a bit, and we cast a weather eye out to see what was happening. The sea had remained flat calm through all of this blow for which we were really grateful, and after a while, the snow eased up too and gave us a chance to see the land again. Precisely one hundred yards away from our bows was the first marker buoy to the entrance to the Run. This was sure lucky as had we decided to carry on, we should have run straight up on the sand bar and lost the lot...us too.

The anchor soon came in with the power winch, and in a few minutes we were under way entering the Run at high water with an ingoing tide to help us through. Through the entrance, through the channel and into the safety of the bay. We all breathed a great big sigh of relief when we got into those calm waters, then slowly we wended our way up the winding channel to the boat yard that was to be my yacht's home for a long long time. Coming up alongside the boatyards quay was a simple matter, and fortunately for me the owner of the yard was out at the time, so wasn't able to see what I had brought around. I wasted very little time in paying off my salvage skipper and then handing the relic over to the boat yard foreman. His words were totally unprintable when he saw what had been towed from Southampton, but he had his orders and the slipping gang started their



distasteful job. I know for a fact that the foreman tried to reach the owner several times by phone to get his OK to hold up the job, but very fortunately for me, he couldn't be reached, so he slipping carried on as per orders. Needless to say, the remarks that were passed to me and the rest of the gang by the few sightseers can hardly be put here, but I can assure you they were not complimentary by any means. Finally, the wreck was dragged from the water and displayed in all her filthy glory. It was a terrible moment for me because although most of the green slime etc. had been washed off, there was still that abominable odor which caused everyone thereto beat a hasty retreat. The foreman got it off the ways and had it dragged into the farthest remote part of the yard he could, then shoring it up, made a hasty retreat to his warm office. We had a long talk about the whys and wherefores on the deal, but somehow I couldn't convince him that I fully intended to rebuild this ugly hulk. He reckoned that I would be cheaper for me to have this thing taken out and sunk and spend my money having a new one built, but how could I convince a man of my inner feeling...impossible. The owner arrived later and when he saw what had happened, went straight up in the air about the whole thing. I hated to do it, but had to impress on him the fact that I had his OK in writing to do the job and whilst he didn't like it one little bit, he had to fact it...I almost lost a good friend, but better the friend at that time than my beloved ugly hulk. Naturally, I was the butt of all the jokes at the club, they even went as far as to put a few crude cartoons in the local yachting journal, but all of this only made me more keen to carry out my ideas on rebuilding it, and whilst everyday I had caustic comments passed, I tried to turn a blind ear or eye. The time must come when I would HAVE to start on the project to allay public opinion, but I had lots to do before that happened. Timber was the biggest trouble in my mind. The war had hardly finished and one of our greatest scarcities was just that one thing. There were others, but good seasoned timber was like gold dust and I just didn't know where it could be obtained. The know-how was another thing. I could handle machine tools with dexterity but what about woodworking tools? Wood is softer than steel so it must be easier, but I knew there was more in it than that, but without help of the right sort, I would have to make my own way on the job. I had a good friend who was a yacht designer...Derek Haswell, and Derek held down a good job at Camper & Nicholsons our top yachtbuilders, so decided to get his help on the timber angle. He introduced me to a friend of his who had a big timber yard in Poole, and very soon after that, the timber problem was solved, now for the tough part...the actual rebuilding...how to go about it and what to do first. The mess I had facing me was so big, so fantastic that I just couldn't figure at which end I should begin. I knew once the initial start was made I should be well away, but how??? That was the question.