



Life & Times, 1922 – 1979

Kate V. Scott

Edited by Carli Scott



Book 1

Life & Times, 1922 – 1979



Kate V. Scott, mid 1940's

Cover photo: Letter from Kate with envelope for a letter she wrote to her Uncle Frank in 1956

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The four books in this series are dedicated to the people of Belize, who received the Scotts with a warm welcome and lasting friendships, and who accepted our family as an integral part of the community in which we made our new home.

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Forward

Back when people relied on letters sent through the world's postal systems to keep each other informed, my mother, Kate V. Scott, was a prolific correspondent. For decades, her delightfully written, newsy letters and reports enchanted and entertained family and friends. Following her death, and with the help of family and friends, I collected as much of Kate's writing as I could find. This is the first in a series of four books that I assembled from the collection:

1. Life & Times, 1922 – 1979
2. Life & Times, 1980 – 2014
3. Travels, 1961 – 1994
4. Travels, 1995 – 2007

Books 1 and 2 consist of letters of general interest and other descriptions of incidents in Kate's life; Book 1 also includes a draft memoir and essays describing her first few years living in Belize, British Honduras. I've organized this material into chapters that I present in roughly chronological order to tell Kate's life story in her own words. Books 3 and 4 consist of Kate's reports of her various trips, mostly vacations but some including business as well; again, the reports are ordered chronologically.

For additional information about the source material that I worked with, see page 373.

If some of Kate's descriptions are not historically accurate, they are true reflections (perhaps embellished for literary effect) of how she experienced places and events or how she remembered them years later. Her draft memoir includes the following note:

This is an account of an untraveled Midwestern young woman's moving with her family to an obscure little Central American country, the British Crown Colony of British Honduras, in the 1950's. It mirrors an unfamiliar world through her eyes. It is not a sociological study of life in British Honduras at that time.

When a narrative in this book refers to a trip that is described in one of the *Travels* books, a footnote gives a reference to the trip report in that book.

I have maintained Kate’s usage and spelling and have modified her original text only where necessary for clarity or to remove redundancy when combining related material from different sources. On the first occurrence of any acronym or foreign word that may not be familiar to all readers, any word whose use in Belize is different from its use in standard U.S. English, or any word or name whose pronunciation may differ from what some readers expect, I have added a footnote to “translate” Kate’s meaning or to indicate how the spoken word or name sounds.

I have not “corrected” descriptions that differ from my own memories. My occasional comments on Kate’s narrative or her wording can be found in separate editor’s notes (page 379).

When the Scotts moved to Central America, the country where we settled was *British Honduras* (or *B.H.* for short) and the city was *Belize*. The country’s name was officially changed to *Belize* in 1973, in anticipation of independence. To avoid confusion, the city thereafter was called *Belize City* (though, when the context is clear, it sometimes still is called simply *Belize*). Throughout most of this book, Kate uses *Belize* to mean the city, not the country. However, in the essays written after 1973 and in chapters describing later years, she uses *Belize* to mean the country and refers to the city as *Belize City*.

— Carli Scott

Saginaw to Atlanta

1922 – 1952

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Kate, early 1930's

Family

My father, Jackson “Jack” Willard Van Brunt, was the youngest of five children of his parents, Hattie Buck and Walter Wright Van Brunt. I do not remember what business my grandfather was in. Grandma had been an almost-concert-level pianist in her youth. They lived on the West Side of Saginaw, Michigan, in a roomy gray Victorian house, which they rented from the nearby Catholic Church. Aunt Mary was the oldest and only daughter. The other three boys, in order of seniority, were Uncles Fred, Frank, and Walter.

The family was of very modest means. Grandpa Van Brunt died young, before I joined the family. After his death, Grandma Van Brunt went into full mourning dress and continued the antiquated style for the rest of her very long life.

Her ankle-length dresses were black, gray, or white, depending on the season, with tiny prints in the same monochromatic shades: high necks edged with lace or with a small collar; tiny buttons down the front; long sleeves, often with a ruffle of lace around the cuffs; high, buttoned black shoes. When Grandma went out for a drive in Uncle Frank’s car, she wore a black bonnet with a shoulder-length heavy black veil edged with two inches of black satin binding.

One of my favorite stories about my Grandma Van Brunt tells of a time she had trouble getting the rent money to the church because the priest in charge of collections failed to arrive. In her old-fashioned “widow’s weeds,” she marched the two blocks down to the church, flounced into the Confessional, and told the astounded priest that it was the only way she could find him to pay her rent on time.

Jack was the only one of the children to attend college. He was within days of graduation when he was drafted for World War I, lacking only his

final camp session. His professor refused to graduate him and other classmates in the same predicament.

While Dad was in the army somewhere in France, standing in the chow line for lunch, he heard someone call out, “Jack.” Turning around he found his brother Walter standing just behind him. Walt’s army unit was camped nearby. According to Mother, their conversation in full, typical of the laconic Van Brunts was:

WALT: Hello, Jack.

JACK: Hello, Walt.

It took years for justice to prevail, but the year I graduated from college, Dad received his diploma from the University of Michigan. His recalcitrant professor had died. The Dean rectified his meanness. Dad said he should have worn a cap and gown to meet the mailman at the door.



My mother, Katharine “Kitty” Carlisle Church, was the older of two daughters of Anna Carlisle and Edgar Damon Church. They lived in a large gray Victorian house in “The Grove” on the elite East Side of Saginaw. Grandpa owned a foundry and prospered. He was something of a town celebrity, being the honorary police chief. While his own family had not been well-to-do, the Carlises were both wealthy and prominent. Mother and Aunt Helen grew up in the top echelon of Saginaw society.

Mother attended boarding school at Emma Willard, a prestigious Eastern girls’ school. She studied to become a kindergarten teacher. Mother was an inspired teacher, filled with imagination and able to communicate with children of any age.



Mother and Dad married soon after he returned from France at the end of World War I. After a few childless years they adopted, first me, and five years later, Mary.

Adoption was unusual in the Twenties and was not universally approved. Aunt Helen went to the extreme of resigning from the prominent Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) because she knew that neither Mary nor I would be eligible for membership because we could not prove that an ancestor was active in the Revolution. Mother had not joined the DAR, but she was very proud of and grateful for her sister's stand.



Jack and Kitty Van Brunt
(Kate's parents), late 1940's



Kate and sister Mary, 1920's



Kate (right) with cousins Johnny and Helen Anne Symons, 1920's



Kate (center) with sister Mary (left) and cousin Helen Anne (right), 1930's

Childhood Memories

1920's – 1940's

Both grandmothers made fried cakes each Saturday. In the morning, I walked the block to Grandma Van Brunt's house, watched her fry the fragrant dough, and secured her offerings in a brown paper bag, which quickly acquired grease stains from the rich pastries inside it. Joe, Grandma Church's chauffeur, brought a bag of her fried cakes to Mother late in the day. Learning diplomacy at an early age, I carefully never told either grandmother that I preferred the rich, irregular crustiness of Grandma Van Brunt's fried cakes to the more traditional ones given us by Grandma Church.



The only Carlisle relative I remember fondly and well was Grandma Church's only sister, our Great Aunt Kate Roberts Carlisle. *Aunt Kee*, as we called her, never married. Mother said that she had been engaged twice; both times her fiancé drowned before they could marry. Aunt Kee eventually decided she was intended to build a life for herself alone.

Aunt Kee was deeply involved with The League of Women Voters and other interesting civic organizations. She was a Suffragette; along with other young women protesting for voting rights for women, she chained herself to downtown railings during demonstrations.



Aunt Kee was usually at Higgins Lake with Grandpa and Grandma Church when my cousins and I stayed with them. Aunt Helen and Uncle Ben Symons' two oldest children were within a year of my age; I was six months younger than Johnny and nine months older than Helen Anne. As children, the three of us were inseparable.

Aunt Kee, slightly younger and much more mobile than Grandma, took us down to the lake, waded with us (which most of that generation did not do), and was informally in charge of the grandchildren.



Aunt Kee was fascinating to us when we knew her as children; Johnny, Helen Anne, and I adored visiting her on Saturdays. My sister, Mary, and their sister, Josephine Symons, both five years younger, were not included in our special play days, so they missed knowing Aunt Kee as wonderfully as the three of us did.

My impression of Aunt Kee is of someone who loved children, but did not toady to them. I know we behaved ourselves at her house, but I don't remember her ever fussing at us. She told stories. She let us help make gingerbread men. She never talked down to us.

A standard pastime on our Saturday visits was sitting in child-size chairs on an open back veranda, blowing soap bubbles. Aunt Kee had a constant supply of small white clay pipes and a master's touch at putting the right amount of Ivory Liquid in water to make a viscous mixture for the manufacturer of bubbles by enthusiastic children.



Aunt Kee lived in the old Carlisle home, a great, tall, rambling Victorian gem with sudden passageways, staircases, and rooms of wildly different sizes.

We adored the enormous, white-tiled master bathroom. It had widely spaced, heavy white porcelain fixtures, including a foot bath—a heavy, low piece about a yard square with hot and cold water faucets. We begged to use it for our baths instead of the gigantic tub.

A smaller bathroom down the hall had our favorite toilet. It was a large white-painted chair with wooden arms and caned back and seat. The seat was lifted. The caned panel between the front legs opened like a door on

hinges to reveal a standard commode. After use, the fixture was re-hidden within its discrete painted chair.



Aunt Kee *traveled!* While travel was a favorite occupation for wealthy Americans in the Twenties, it was unusual for a single woman to take off for the far reaches of the globe by herself.

Proof of Aunt Kee's adventures resided on a mantle in one of the Carlisle's several parlors. It was a wide, elaborately worked North African silver bracelet, studded with semi-precious stones. We children admired it and always made viewing it a primary stop on our visits to the house, though I don't remember that any of us ever dared touch it.



As I remember, Aunt Kee died suddenly in her fifties, maybe early sixties. When the Carlisle home was broken up after her death, a great trunk of clothes dating to the turn of the Twentieth Century and a bit later ended up at Grandma's, and eventually, at our house.

I can remember Helen Anne and I spending ecstatic hours going through the voluminous gowns of burgundy taffeta, pastel plaid sheer silk, and even Grandma's wedding gown of ivory rep. There were stays, leg-o'-mutton sleeves and billions of tiny buttons, dog-collar necks trimmed with rouches or lace, and skirts with flounces or pleated inserts.

We dressed up, paraded down Grandma's wide front staircase, and staged "scenes" on the huge landing overlooking the main entrance hall.

One of our most versatile pieces was a hip-length evening cape of stiff black velveteen lined with white satin. We took turns using it.



I think I considered my sister, Mary, a sort of living doll. She was a very pretty child with curly blond hair that Mother fixed in long curls. I loved winding the willing locks around a finger to create those curls.

Mary was the principal in our game of “Princess.” Aunt Kee’s trunk of dresses was now at our house; the velveteen evening cape that Helen Anne and I used play with now made a lavish floor-length robe for Mary when I dressed her as the princess. I seem to remember some sort of crown or tiara, but am not sure about that. We had elaborate dialogue to go along with our playlets. Mary was remarkably patient through my fussing over her, possibly pleased to have some sort of attention from her older sister.



Sunday afternoons our family gathered around a card table in the living room for games. This was one family project that welcomed Mary as a full partner, much to her delight. I seem to remember beginning with Parcheesi, a simple, benign game, but suspect we may have gone the Snakes-and-Ladders routes earlier. When it came on the market, Mother bought one of the first Monopoly sets. This may be the point at which I stopped enjoying our games afternoons. From the beginning, I thought that Monopoly gave free rein to the least seemly of players’ personality traits. Mary remembers our Sunday games as a high point of her childhood. I remember them as a weekly obligatory ordeal.



When Mary was a suitable age, Mother set up a small nursery school for her with some four or five young children of friends. As I remember, it was not the only small group of toddlers she gathered and taught through the years.

My own experience with Mother’s teaching was in our Episcopal Sunday School. Much to my dismay, Mother promoted herself along with me each year so that I always had her as an exceptionally demanding teacher from whom I could not escape. Fumble-fingered as I was, unlike my artistic mother and sister, I never was free of the burden of doing every project to Mother’s imaginative specifications.

My major recollection of those times is of Mother's asking the class to carve from soap something related to the church—a font, a candlestick, a chalice, for example. Making one of the wiser decisions of my non-artistic life, I chose to turn a bar of Ivory soap into a Bible. Mother did not applaud the level of my achievement, but admitted that it filled her requirements.




My beloved cousin Johnny Symons was killed when a tire blew out on Aunt Helen and Uncle Ben's car as they were driving home from Higgins Lake one Labor Day. A piece of glass pierced Johnny's brain. He had just turned 12. It was the year before safety glass was invented. Helen Anne was supposed to drive down with them, but at the last minute, it was arranged that she would go on ahead with our grandparents.



Mother was not happy when we moved away from her active social life in Saginaw. No one knew them in Grand Rapids, and it took time to make new friends. Mother never realized that two of their closest friends, Dorothy and Jerry Ford, were parents of a president-to-be. At the time, their son Jerry was the star of the University of Michigan football team.

Our Grand Rapids house had a nice back yard. Mother, an inveterate gardener, soon had it outlined with flowers. Every winter through my teen years, Dad built dikes of snow at the edges of the gardens. Day after day, he sprayed them and the snow-covered grass with our garden hose till the ice was a useful thickness for a skating rink.

A dozen or more of my junior-high-school friends gathered after school every day to skate. I never was a dedicated athlete and still remember fighting with reluctant ankles, trying to keep them stiff and straight. When the cold became too much for the skaters, the boisterous crowd adjourned to Mother's kitchen, where she thawed us with hot cocoa and cookies. Dad repaired the rink by sprinkling over skate marks.



Mother adored circuses and carnivals and county fairs. How Dad felt about them, I never knew, but he cheerfully drove us to the rutted parking fields and, usually carrying Mary, did his best to keep me within range while he followed his wife on her charge through the milling crowds.

I became the temporary focus of family pride when I won a ham at a fair during the Depression. During the same period, Mother or Dad won a live turkey in a pre-Thanksgiving raffle. I remember going down into our basement and finding my frantic father chasing the terrified bird past the furnace and around the normal basement miscellany. Dad won the race while Mother screamed up in the kitchen. She had a full-blown phobia about birds after having been attacked in childhood by her grandmother's jealous parrot. Mother was paralyzed with fear that the turkey would fly up the back steps and attack her.

I grew up a circus *aficionada*. As for fairs, I could tolerate the displays of vegetables as long as I was given ample time to admire the cows, pigs, and horses. I wonder, however, whether my dislike of crowds, almost to the point of claustrophobia, might have originated with the masses of humanity that so enchanted Mother.

Years later in Grand Rapids when I was in my early teens, Mother organized a sleep-over for me, three of my friends spending the night with us so that we all could get up in the dark to be out at the circus grounds in time to welcome the arriving Barnum and Bailey's circus. Watching the intricately organized erecting of tents, placing of trailers, setting up of the side show, and settling of animals either in tents or in stout cage wagons was a stark panorama in the uneven lighting. Elephants moved silently about their required tasks like great, gray ghosts. By the time the circus was in place, dawn had broken, and we tired spectators were ready to return to the warmth of our kitchen and to Mother's delicious breakfast.

When we returned to the circus to watch it that night, Mother sent a note to the Wild West Show star, former Western movie favorite Tim McCoy.

She reminded him that they had known each other years earlier in Saginaw. Mr. McCoy sent back a note asking our family of four to visit him in his dressing room after his performance and enclosing complimentary tickets to his Wild West show.



Dad managed the family brick factory, first in Saginaw, and then when I was 12, in Grand Rapids. The Grand Rapids plant was in trouble, and Dad was sent to straighten it out—which he did despite and after the Depression.

During my teenage summers, Dad made the ultimate parental sacrifice and let me substitute for his secretary during her vacation. I loved it and had no idea the degree of chaos in her bookkeeping Paula returned to annually.



Mother had a weight problem as long as I knew her. In the mid Thirties her doctor suggested a new weight-loss drug. Tragically, Mother became one of the people in whom the drug caused serious cataracts. She was legally blind for eight years.

Mother could see light and dark and major shapes. She was terrified of cataract surgery, afraid she would lose what little sight she had. Instead of relying on the medical profession, which she felt had betrayed her, she turned to various versions of faith healing—Christian Science, an Episcopal minister in Denver, and another in Los Angeles.

I was away in college when Mother jaunted by herself across the continent to see the minister in California, hoping he could help heal her. How Dad let her do it, I never could imagine. Mother was afraid to fly, so she traveled by train. She had a wonderful time. She told later of meeting a German and speaking his language with him all the way across the country. It was her first long chance to use the German she had studied years earlier in school.

Mother finally had the cataract removed from one eye in 1943. It was the year I graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University. Mother told me that she made the sacrifice so that she would not be a burden to me and interfere with whatever future I planned. Cataract surgery had more dangers at that time, so she never had the second eye done, fearing that it might not track properly with her operated eye.

The cataract operation was a great success. Mother told of her amazement at the world she suddenly could see for the first time in eight years. Dad led her from the hospital toward his car. Mother remonstrated, “Jack, don’t be silly!” thinking he was teasing about which car was his because it was so much grander in style than cars had been when she last could see them.

With a thick lens, Mother regained near-normal sight. Proof of this lay in the mountain of exquisite hand-embroidered baby clothes, dressy aprons, Christmas stockings, and Christmas-tree skirts she made in the years following her surgery. The work was surprisingly delicate and accurate, considering that Mother could see from only one eye.



Mother and Dad had the trip of their lifetimes after both Mary and I had left home. I never heard how they decided to visit Bermuda. I never knew what tremendous self-discipline it took for Mother to force herself to fly. I only know that they had a wonderful vacation. Their happiness is attested by a tiny tourist spyglass with a minute picture of our beaming mother showing on the lens when it is held up to the light.

New York

Mid 1940's

I worked at the Grand Rapids Herald for about a year after graduating from college. I went home after work one evening and, to my own astonishment, announced to my parents that I was moving to New York City. I had not thought about it. I was perfectly happy at the paper. I still have no idea where the decision came from. Although they were disappointed, Mother and Dad rallied and supported my surprise decision.

A month or so later, I was established in a modest apartment in New York with two friends. I set out to look for a job in publishing or news. On the second day, I was standing at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street by the library, trying to figure out which way to turn to find The New York Post. A truck driver, stopped by a red light, called out asking if I were lost. I asked him which way it was to...unexpectedly... the Daily News. He waved toward the right, nodded acceptance of my thanks, and drove off.

I disliked the Daily News with its lurid tabloid style and had no intention of applying for a job there. However, given directions, I shrugged and turned right as the friendly truck driver had indicated. At the handsome News Building, only one person entered the elevator with me, a nicely dressed man. He asked if I were looking for a job and introduced himself as the manager of United Press (UP) Radio. That's how I ended up doing radio news for the rest of the War years.



Letter dated October 23, 1944

At last I am firmly settled in the Big City...with apartment and with job.

Before I left home, I had the apartment and roommate lined up. Betty Fearheiley went to school with me. She is perfectly swell, a writer, and is now working for *Parents Magazine*. She was living with her sister till the

latter got married (which took place a week ago), so in the meantime, I have been living with a friend of hers in our apartment. The second girl, Marjorie Hope of Cleveland, is also a writer and has had a few things published. She is grand, and I couldn't have found anyone I would have preferred being with. Betty moved in with us yesterday, so we are really settled at last.

The apartment is on 14th Street, just on the edge of Greenwich Village. It is a street at least as wide as Washington or Michigan Avenues in Saginaw, and is all stores except for our very new and modern apartment building. We have three or four uniformed doormen and three locked doors between us and the City.

The apartment itself is very nice. The living room is largish, with two rust-colored studio couches, blond wood furniture, and Degas prints on the walls. The bedroom, at present, has a surplus of suitcases and trunks and a lack of bedspreads and curtains, but it definitely has possibilities. The bathroom and kitchenette couldn't be smaller, but the first is beautifully tiled and the second compact and efficient, so we don't complain. Altogether, we like it very much.

I looked for a job the first week I was here and found that I had sort of overestimated the anxiety with which New York publishers were waiting for my appearance. There were a few possibilities left when, completely by accident, I happened into United Press. The minute I hit it, heard the teletypes and the typewriters, and saw people rushing around with copy and yelling "flash" at each other, I realized that in spite of all I had said, I was still a newspaper woman.

I took a job in the radio news department. Here we write all the news and feature broadcasts that are sent to radio stations all over the country. It is a style of writing very different from that of a paper. Since it is to be spoken, the sentences must be shorter, more vivid, more concise. It is wonderful training for me. I had to start as a copy girl to learn the business, but I hope to be promoted to the writing staff within a month or so. It is the sort of opportunity every young writer in the city is crying for,

and I walked in, as I said, by mistake and snatched it from under a long waiting list. In fact, he even had to talk me into taking it because I wasn't sure that it was what I wanted. I love it now though. Already some of my stories have gone over the wire as I wrote them. The people are marvelous, and I love the city.



Kate in New York City, mid 1940's



Before Kate & Bucher's wedding, May 2, 1945.

Left to right: Bucher's sister, Deezy Scott; Kate's sister, Mary Van Brunt;
Kate and her father, Jack Van Brunt

Starting a New Family

1945 – 1952

One of my colleagues at United Press was Deezy Scott, a fascinating young woman who just had transferred from UP in Atlanta. We became close friends. She asked me to join them for dinner when her brother Bucher* came into port from one of his North Sea convoys. So the happiest marriage anyone could hope for came about because I turned the wrong way on 42nd Street.



It was War, and time was speeded up. Bucher and I met, fell in love, and decided to marry immediately. I had met his family on a visit to Atlanta, ostensibly as Deezy's friend and United Press Radio associate. They restrained any misgivings they may have had when Bucher called to tell them our plans.

My family was another matter. Tears and storms and a request to think it over and call back in a few hours. We spent the intervening time getting blood tests and getting a marriage license from a fatherly civil servant, who sat us down and quizzed us firmly before agreeing to provide it.

A charming movie showing at that time, *The Clock*, described exactly the sort of panic running around through the rain that we went through.

When I called Dad back, he reported that Mother was on the train to New York. We met her in trepidation (on my part) and terror (on Bucher's). It was not a comfortable taxi ride back to the apartment that I shared with two friends. They had vanished, either because of their own plans or by design.

Mother wept, she stormed, she wailed, she threatened. Nothing she said shook our determination, no matter how much it shook us emotionally.

* *Bucher* is pronounced *BOOK-er*.

Suddenly Mother looked up, beamed, and said, “I brought a dress to wear to the wedding.”

She also, it developed, had brought a hard-to-find bottle of whiskey. She sent Bucher out to buy soda. He met Deezy on the stairs.

“How is it going,” Deezy asked.

“Rough,” replied Bucher, “but at least she brought some Bourbon.”

Bucher continued on his errand, and Deezy came up to the apartment to meet Mother. They were instant soul mates. Both women could be difficult, but both had enormous charm. The rapport between Mother and Deezy was a big help through the next two days.

Soon Bucher was back; we all were relaxing with drinks, which were more curative than social; and Mother began planning.

First, she asked us to wait one day to give Dad and my sister, Mary, time to get to New York. That gave her one day to set up the kind of informal wedding that had been in vogue when she was a girl. She booked the Bride’s Chapel of The Little Church Around The Corner. She made reservations for a wedding breakfast at Del Monico’s. She tracked down the Personal Shopper who had helped outfit her for boarding school. She ordered flowers, including a bouquet of Lilies of the Amazon.

The Personal Shopper, whose name I have forgotten but whose whirlwind sweep through the stores I never will, was a minute little person whom I mentally classed as a contemporary of Methuselah. Shopping was not easy during the War, but she found what they called a “dressmaker suit” in soft blue wool. A satin-and-lace gown and peignoir set and other lingerie items followed. She was unsuccessful in finding the flared-leg satin-and-lace panties, beloved by Hollywood, which I wanted.

I forget the rest of the day. Mother was Organizing. So was Deezy. With hotel rooms almost impossible to find, Deezy called a friend who was manager of the Hotel Astor in Times Square and secured a room for us for the week remaining before Bucher’s ship sailed. I assume that Mother, Deezy, Bucher, and I had dinner together, but have no idea where. I don’t

even know where Mother stayed. Possibly Deezy helped find her an hotel room.

Dad arrived early the morning of the wedding. He was his usual self-contained, comfortable self, more concerned with his daughter's happiness than with his reservations about so giddy a marriage.

Mary arrived soon after, breathless and half-paralyzed after an all-night train ride from college in Ohio. She was delightfully supportive, but obviously shocked at her older sister's uncharacteristically impulsive behavior. Grinning as she opened her overnight case, she handed me a book she said I should have: *Sane Sex Life And Sane Sex Living*—the classic hush-hush reference book for college girls at the time.

A taxi deposited us at the church before ten. It was a gloomy day with storm clouds billowing overhead. I retired to a small chamber to check the seams of my stockings and the shine of my nose. Through the door swirled the indefatigable Personal Shopper. She beamed as she thrust a small paper bag into my hands. She had found the last item on my wish list! There in the antechamber to the church, moments before the ceremony, I stepped daintily into my glamorous panties.

Meanwhile, Bucher arrived at the church with Deezy and his best man, one of Deezy and my best friends from United Press. As Bucher told the story, a strange man with a dour expression and Midwestern accent walked over to him, extended a hand in welcome, and said, "I guess we should get to know each other. My name's Van Brunt."

The Bride's Chapel of the famous small church is a tiny wedding cake of a room, elaborate in decoration, but intimate in feeling. I walked down the short aisle on Dad's arm to meet my love, unfamiliar in his new officer's uniform with its three gold stripes on the sleeves. The silver-haired minister, dignified in his embroidered robes, had a deep, rolling voice, which anchored the hastily arranged service in devout tradition. Fortunately, the service was brief. Even so, when we were asked to kneel, my Presbyterian bridegroom, unfamiliar with the ritual and exhausted by emotion, sank back to sit on his heels as I knelt upright at his side.

In moments, the service ended. The minister quietly prompted, “You may now kiss the bride.” Bucher did. It was a fervent kiss, one in which I rather suspected he collapsed against my lips, much as he had collapsed on his heels earlier.

The minister leaned forward and gently commented, “There’ll be other times.”



Kate and Bucher leaving the chapel, May 2, 1945

Bucher and I broke, grinned, and retreated from the chapel, nodding to family and friends as we went. As we emerged from the front door of the church, the sun broke through the overcast. A great shaft of light fell exactly where we were standing, as if promising in that moment the happiness granted us through the years of our marriage.

We moved on to Del Monico's. It was an elegant, staid old restaurant with excellent service. I have a faint recollection of our round table, lovely flowers in the middle, gleaming silver and crystal. What we ate, what anyone said, I do not know. All I remember is Bucher's and my looking at each other and holding hands whenever we could.

Somehow we reached the hotel where our pleasant room overlooked Times Square. About an hour later, my very embarrassed roommate knocked on the door, sheepishly delivering a gift bottle of wine that she thought she had arranged to have put in the room before our arrival.



We married on the Second of May, 1945. Two days later, Times Square erupted with joy as the first, false report of the end of the war in Europe burst on a waiting country. To our amusement, we learned that Bucher's best man, Jay Breen, was the one responsible for sending the message out on the radio wire a few hours earlier than it should have been released.

Times Square was a sea of wildly celebrating people. There was no traffic for blocks. Service men mingled with the crowd, grabbing and kissing every female they could find, from little girls to grannies—all in an excess of happiness that meant no offense and gave none.



After three days of honeymooning, both Bucher and I had to return to work. He was standing night watch on the ship, which was under repairs somewhere in the New York area. I was working the overnight shift at UP. Bucher left at midnight, and I went out an hour later. The hotel doorman refused to let me walk to the nearby subway alone through the milling thousands, but sedately accompanied me to the stairway leading down to

my train, night after night. Bucher and I often wondered what the hotel staff thought about the strange midnight behavior of their obviously enraptured honeymoon couple. A few days later, Bucher sailed back to England, a happier, safer trip than the ones he had made for the past five years.



After the War, Bucher and I returned to Atlanta, where his family lived. He built up a small-boat-and-motor business.

Our son, Alex, chose his birthday carefully...Christmas day, 1948. I returned with him from the hospital to our apartment four days later. It poured that morning with one of the gray deluges that, in Atlanta, usually wait until after final Christmas festivities to begin. The thin young men in my ambulance enveloped stretcher and me neatly in an enormous sheet of plastic. Feeling ridiculously like the Christmas turkey I so recently had taken home from the market, I made my inert but joyous return.

I do not remember my first hour at home clearly. I have an amused recollection of the oh-so-decorous way the two young attendants lifted me from the stretcher and, with a deft flick of the encompassing blanket, deposited me under my covers intact.

There were people...my parents down from Michigan for the holidays and for the birth of their first grandchild: Dad almost stern in his attempt to keep out of the way of the frantic and intimate activity surging in our small apartment, but with his eyes shining; Mother sailing through the storm in full command, her hat unnoticed despite the apron around her waist.

And I remember Bucher refused to relinquish his son to anyone after the father-neglecting treatment he had received in the hospital. Then, magically, it was calm. Alex was asleep in his beribboned bassinet at the foot of our bed.

Three years later our daughter, Carli, arrived on February 4th, 1952.

Kentucky Accident

Summer 1949

Bucher and I had driven from Atlanta to Michigan to present to my ailing maternal grandmother her first great-grandchild, 7-month-old Alex. Grandma was a resident patient in the hospital after a series of strokes. I put Alex up on the bed next to her. She took his hands as the baby tried to stand up and remarked, “I don’t know who you are, but I know you are mine.”



Bucher, Alex, and Kate in Michigan, 1949

We invited my 13-year-old cousin, David Symons, to accompany us on the trip home and spend a couple of weeks with us in Atlanta.

We were deep in the mountains of Kentucky, driving a narrow, winding road at night in heavy rain, when a car materialized out of the murkiness—backing up around a curve at us. The cars crashed. Although

Bucher was driving slowly because of the poor road conditions, he did not have time or space to avoid the ghost car.

Bucher assured himself that all of us were safe, then ran to the other car to make sure that the driver was not hurt. The woman was shaken but sound. Bucher examined both cars and found no real damage. Somehow it was agreed that we would follow the driver of the guilty car to the nearby town.

Details are a little foggy here. I don't remember police. I know Bucher parked the car in front of the combination police station and courthouse. He disappeared. A short time later he stuck his head through the back window where I was sitting next to the baby's travel bed and hissed, "Don't say a word!" Then he vanished back into the night.

A wide-eyed David peered over the back of the front seat at me. I whispered that I didn't know what was going on, but obviously he and I were not to comment. How I entertained my scared cousin, I don't remember. I do remember being grateful that the baby slept happily through everything.

Some thirty or forty minutes later, Bucher eased into the driver's seat without saying a word. Dave and I assumed that the ban on talking was still in force. Bucher found his way back to what Kentucky considered a main road. Safely en route home, he finally explained what had happened.

It was the sheriff's daughter who had run into us. Considering her exalted position in the community, fault was not an issue. Bucher said he was standing in front of the judge when the Sheriff himself arrived, afire to protect his daughter. The lawman made his painful way down to the front of the court on crutches. The judge explained that the sheriff was the hero of the community. He had spent months in the hospital after being wounded severely in a shootout with a local gang, most of whom he took out.

Bucher said that he realized the only thing he could do was plead guilty, pay the \$150 fine, and be grateful to escape.

Sarasota

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Kate and family in front of the cottage on the Gulf,
Sarasota, 1952



Alex on gangplank between shore and boat
during construction of The Screen Cage, 1952

Move to Siesta Key

1952

After six years in Atlanta, Bucher decided that he could not live out of sight of blue water. So he sold his business in Atlanta, and we moved to Sarasota, Florida, in 1952. Alex was 3 and Carli, just a few months old.

We bought a lot on a “sand spit” pumped up island on Siesta Key in Sarasota Bay. We first stayed in a cottage on the Gulf of Mexico. Then Bucher bought an old live-aboard boat, moored it to our property, and proceeded to act as his own contractor building the house we intended to live in for the rest of our lives.

It was an imaginatively designed home, which we dubbed *The Screen Cage*. House and gardens were to be enclosed within a massive cage of screening that excluded bugs, enclosed children, and filtered sunshine.

The building crew consisted of workers from Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus, idled for the winter season. They were a fascinating lot. The tales they told, true or not, paid us back in entertainment more than we ever could have paid them in wages.

Swimming in the Gulf

Letter dated September 2, 1952

What fun we had swimming when we stayed in the cottage on the Gulf! Alex, of course, loved it. He didn't do much swimming with the waves, but lay in his tube and rode along happy as a little king. He swam, with the tube on, over some of the waves and deliberately ducked under others, so we felt he was getting good practice at feeling secure in the water.

Carli was the funny one. Buckled into Alex's outgrown life jacket, she splashed in the waves as eagerly as he did. We could balance her with one hand, and she flipped up and over the waves like a tiny cork.

We had one very rough day just before we left. When I was out just waist deep, the waves were breaking over my head. Both children adored it. The salt water is so buoyant that it was easy to jump over the waves, but an occasional one would trick us and break right on top of us. Even when that curling white deluge of foam landed on her head, Carli came up laughing. And she adored jumping up one side of the waves and sliding down the other. Alex rode over the waves easily in his tube, though once in a while, one would toss him under. Bucher and I took turns watching each child, so one of us always had a hand on each; there was no particular danger to them in the rough water, and we all had a marvelous time.

Important Purchase

Letter dated Friday, August 29, 1952

“Your house just sailed past my house!”

It was Bud Raoul arriving breathlessly at the cottage to tell me that Bucher had turned into Coconut Bayou with our new boat. I dropped suitcases and brooms and grabbed children to go meet him. Bucher secured the boat as we got there, and we all sat on the bank looking at him rather helplessly across the few feet of water that separated us. Able to stand it no longer, I waded out carrying the children, and we were hauled dripping and bedraggled onto the afterdeck.

Our boat is an Elco, built in 1930, 35' length, 11' beam (neither as long nor as wide as we hoped). Bucher had found her in Bradenton a couple of days earlier. He took her out in the Gulf, and he put her on the ways to make sure she was sound. This morning, I had driven him back to Bradenton so he could bring her down to our property on Siesta Key.

She is a sound old boat, not bad looking but no glamour-puss. She has a small after-cockpit, large enough for two deck chairs. Double sliding doors open into the deckhouse. It is poorly arranged with settees facing each other along the sides, a high, well-upholstered helmsman's seat and a matching seat on the other side of the cabin.

We already have plans for tearing out some of the built-in stuff to give us more room. The deckhouse will be a good size when we do. Down two very steep steps is a compact but quite roomy galley with the tiny head (bathroom) and a hanging locker (closet) across from it. Beyond that is the forward cabin with two very comfortable lower bunks and two usable upper bunks. There are lockers under the bunks and, at the end of each bunk, a tall locker with several shelves. The hatch, which opens at the extreme end of the cabin, has a good set of screens and a canvas wind-sail that makes a good air sheet and keeps it very comfortable. The hatch opens into a forward cockpit with very comfortable seats for three people to sit while cruising.

She isn't as large as we wanted. However, she is about the size boat Bucher wants to keep, and he is talking about cutting down the deckhouse later to make her a sport-fisherman (much longer after-cockpit to make room for a couple of stationary fishing chairs). We'd still have bunks for four in the forward cabin if we wanted to be gone overnight. However, this boat won't be for extended cruises (West Indies) and we can't do that till the children are older anyway, so the lack of cabin room doesn't matter too much.



Alex, Carli, and Bucher aboard the new boat, 1952

We have lots of work to do. Bucher had her bottom painted while she was out of the water for inspection, but he is going to do the hull over. And the decks have some bad varnish work that we are going to paint, since it will brighten her up and is easier to take care of. Inside, the forward cabin, galley, and head need scouring, but the paint is fresh enough to do for some time. The deckhead (ceiling) in the deckhouse needs paint, and the floor will need new linoleum when we finish remodeling. The previous owner has redone all the upholstered things in the deckhouse in Duran (which is wonderful)...but plum color (which isn't). I'm warming on a decor that can begin with purplish Duran and end without being bilious.

Since we don't have electricity on the lot yet or water in the tank on board, we have decided to spend the night in the little cottage and move tomorrow.

[Editor's Note 1 on page 379]

Our New Home

Letter dated Saturday, August 30, 1952

We're afloat.

Bucher's first move was to construct a gangplant...two 2 x 6's, a long one and a short, extending from the boat to the shore, meeting in shallow water on Alex's little sawhorse. After the first frightened crossing, it got easier and easier to navigate, no matter what size suitcase or what wiggling child I carried.



The most pleasant note of the day was to learn that the electric company wouldn't connect our line, even though all the equipment was here. Holiday...today, Sunday, and of course, Labor Day. That leaves us without lights or cooking facilities. We have solved it for the present by Bucher's borrowing a Coleman stove from his friend at the Mercury Motor Proving Ground. (We have an old alcohol stove aboard, but the Coleman is much easier to use and gives a hotter flame.) There are two good kerosene

lanterns, a large battery lantern, and a flashlight aboard, so we can handle the lighting all right.



Alex has fallen overboard twice already.

The first time, he was walking down the gangplank, watching a pelican circling overhead, and walked into the water. I heard the splash, and when I got out, there he was hanging onto the rudder, treading water, and looking rather unhappy about the whole experience. I waded out and retrieved him, and he decided the fall was funny rather than serious.

Not an hour later, he started around the deckhouse on the outside of the boat (there's a little catwalk about four inches wide) with Bucher watching him. Alex didn't watch where he was putting his feet and fell overboard amidships. He came up swimming. Bucher was so pleased about that, he hasn't been able to talk about anything else since. Bucher is convinced that if he hadn't been there, Alex would have swum back to shore by himself. We are glad he has found out early how easy it is to fall in, because already he is being much more cautious.



Bucher went to the Pass (Midnight Pass...Mercury Proving Grounds) but forgot to get the stove. We are having a cold supper...which is much easier on me after the mess of trying to get settled.

Life on Board


Letter dated Sunday, August 31, 1952

Compact...that's the word for our life now...compact.


We have spent our first night aboard. The children settled down in the forward cabin without a murmur, Alex in one lower bunk, and Carli caged in the other like a junior-size lion. The settees in the deckhouse pull out into a hard but comfortable bunk for Bucher and me.

Tragedy struck this morning early. We realized that no stove meant no coffee. Bucher almost knocked us over, dashing ashore to rub two twigs together to build a fire. He perked us a pot of coffee and cooked Alex some bacon and eggs in the most beautifully efficient way. I was very much impressed.

[Editor's Note 2 on page 380]



I think after this morning, my favorite room on the boat will be the head. It is a marvel of efficient use of space. To begin with, the seat, occasionally called “the throne,” actually is one in this case. It is on a dais, some six inches higher than the (minute) floor of the room. That leaves ones legs dangling, but the discomfort is more than compensated for by the convenience of being able to brush teeth, comb hair, wash, and if you like to be tidy, clean the room, from your seated position. Privacy in the room is a possibility, unless you suffer from claustrophobia. Also, it is not advisable if you don't have a hard head. Since this room is the only place to keep the broom, and it is propped against the wall that the door slides back along, sliding the door closed brings the broom clunking down on top of you.



Settling is not the problem that I thought it would be. Once all the lockers were scoured and papered, our things fitted into them beautifully, with space (but not much) to spare. And to my complete amazement, the suitcases themselves and one trunk were disposed of in the hold, as convenient storage shelves aft of the engine.

Settling In

Letter dated Monday, September 8, 1952

Eagle, our Beagle, has developed into quite the fish. She won't swim in the Gulf because the waves worry her, but back on the bay or bayou you

can't keep her out of the water. Bud Raoul has been keeping his sister's dog, and Eagle runs down to the tip of our island every morning, swims across the bayou to Loke's house, and plays with Tia.

The first time Eagle ventured across the gangplank onto the big boat, she dashed along the catwalk, up onto the deck of the forward cabin, and lay down just in front of the windshield. It was slightly unnerving to see a dog staring in at us from eye level. Anyway, when we got ready to leave on an errand, we called and she couldn't figure out how to get down. She didn't have sense enough to go all the way forward where the catwalk leveled off, but jumped for it from where she was. There was a splash that rocked the boat, and she swam on in to shore. She hasn't been up on the trunk-cabin deck since, either!

We have been using an old boat from the Proving Ground and a Mercury for running around. (I don't see how we could get along without their help!) Eagle simply adores riding in it. Alex, Bucher, and she take off in the little boat and are gone hours, literally. Bucher says that she just stands up on the front seat with her nose in the wind and grins.

She has been sleeping in the little boat, too, up under the decking in the nose, and until a couple of days ago, we could tell what time she woke up by the splash she made jumping ashore and missing. Now she has learned how to jump up the boarding ladder into the afterdeck, then go ashore on the gangplank. She's getting awfully spry now that she has run some of that excess poundage off. When we first got here, she had trouble jumping into the Ranch Wagon when the tailgate was down. Last night, we saw her leap nimbly in through the open top half of the rear door.



Labor Day we went for our first cruise. Bucher had promised Alex he would take him. The evening before, Alex was so excited he hardly could stand still. He paced the floor of the deckhouse for two hours, talking the whole time in his most adult, most self-possessed, most business-like way, to Bucher's and my complete delight.

Bucher let Alex turn the key, punch the starter, and do a few other things to help us get under way. He was simply beside himself with importance and excitement. Soon after we leave the bayou, we have to go under a drawbridge, and Bucher let him sound the horn to make it open for us.

Carli and I sat up in the cruising cockpit ahead of the trunk cabin and enjoyed the ride. She was dressed for the occasion in a special cruise outfit designed to keep her cool, but protected her from the sun. I didn't get a picture, but will next time; it was a sight. She had on a long white baby nightgown, tied at the bottom and at her wrists. And on her head was that precious white nylon bonnet Mother bought her for Higgins.

When we got out through the Pass and into the Gulf, we had some gently rolling water, small waves. It was just a very pleasant amount of motion. Alex got very quiet, crawled up in the high seat across the cabin from the helmsman's seat, and just sat. I put Carli up next to him, telling him that he would have to take care of her because it was her first trip in a cruiser. He wrapped both arms around her as if he were protecting her from the devil himself.

She got restless after a few minutes, and I put her to bed for her regular noon nap. A few minutes later I missed Alex, looked below, and found him sound asleep in his own bunk. He wasn't sick, and he wasn't actually scared. He just apparently had the feeling that he was way out of his depth in this adventure and wished he could go to sleep and wake up back at the dock. And that's exactly what he did!

Meanwhile, Bucher and I had a lovely cruise. We just circled Siesta Key, but it took us two hours because we came back through Little Sarasota Bay, which is a narrow, shallow, and twisty channel.

Bucher loves the way the boat handles. She has only one engine, which he really didn't want, but he says she "smells the bottom," squats down, and simply won't go fast in shallow water. I thought it was a lot of seaman's yarn when he told us that, until he explained that a single-engine boat has an extra large rudder that gets very sluggish as it sucks close to the bottom and actually does keep you from going aground. Also, the boat is very

economical to run for her size, and the bottom is perfect. She hasn't taken on a drop of water since we have had her, and we really did roll her around a bit in the Gulf on our little trip.

We spent most of last week beginning to renovate her. Bucher tore out half of the deckhouse, and we are rearranging bunks. He built in a new seat business, did some very fancy cabinet work on some drawers under it, paneled one side where we had torn something out, etc. We have an awful lot left to do. And I hope he can get it pretty well finished this week because we start on the house Monday. Our master carpenter wanted a little extra time, which suited us beautifully. We really wanted to put it off till another week so we would have longer to work on the boat. We're in no hurry now.



We love our lot more than ever. Right now, with no other houses out on our island, we have a 360-degree view. The sunsets are dazzling. Mullet jump all around us day and night. (You can't catch them on a hook; have to use a net.)

During low tide, great flocks of egrets feed on the flats across from us, and occasionally, white cranes join them. Since there is nothing to interrupt it, we get any breath of breeze there is...which has been a steady, strong one...enough to keep us blissfully cool no matter how hot the day and enough to discourage any mosquitoes. We have had only an occasional straggler of them so far. The weather couldn't have been nicer, but it is cool enough today that I'm going to have to dig out some blankets before tonight.



Carli and Alex in The Screen Cage, 1953

Screen Cage

From letter dated March 11, 1953

We have been having a wonderful time in this peculiar new home of ours. It is a weird-y, but ideal in this climate. The screen, which entirely surrounds the house...roof and all...not only keeps the mosquitoes out, but cuts the glare of the sun amazingly. The house really is the most livable thing in the world and the easiest thing in the world to keep clean. I can fasten the two doors of the screen "cage" and turn the children loose. They have a large sandpile in the middle of the lawn, and they can wander in or out of the house without my ever having to worry about them. Since it has been warm enough to keep all the doors open, entire walls of every room are open and wandering in or out is a pretty easy matter.

We are planning to go to Michigan late in June (at least that's the tentative time). I don't suppose we'll really be through with the house even by then. Bucher let his building crew go while Mother and Dad were here at Christmas. We kept a handy-man for another six weeks or so, and he and Bucher finished up some odds and ends, and all three of us continued painting. I have been chief of that end of the work...we are doing it all ourselves.

The entire outside is done and some of the inside. However, we are staining the paneling with a mixture that you paint on, let set, then wipe off. I have discovered that the grain is prettiest if you let the paint get pretty tacky, then rub as if you were polishing fine furniture, really working at it. It takes almost five minutes of rubbing to do each board, and it is hard work at that. However, we think it is worth it because the paneling does look terrific when we finish.

The staining has gone very slowly, especially since I have only the time during Caril's nap to work and have to fit in a certain amount of housework besides. Furthermore, we haven't been able to stay at the work too well because we've had guests almost constantly since Christmas.

The past two weeks are the first time we have had longer than six days between visitors. Of course, it is lots of fun and we love having them.



Carli with Bucher's mother, Marie Alexander,
during her visit to The Screen Cage, 1953

Life by the Water

Letter dated March 11, 1953

Summer is here as far as Florida is concerned. Until last month it really was quite cool. Then suddenly it turned into the most beautiful of weather...hot and sunny during the day with cool, crisp nights.

I wish you could see the children! It has been warm enough for them to run around in bathing suits less than a month, but already Alex is turning a light mahogany-color (which is quite a deep tan for that little blond burr-head); when he smiles you see bright white teeth against the tan, bright blue eyes, and that almost-shaved head of his, and he does look awfully healthy and happy. Carli gives almost the same impression. She naps during the day so hasn't been outdoors as much, but she is a beautiful light gold color and her hair...new cut in a little Dutch bob...is bleaching whiter every day. With her blond bangs, blue eyes, and chubby little figure she really looks like the original Hollander.



We have been going to the beach regularly or letting the children splash around in the bayou. They both almost go crazy the minute they get near the water. I think that as soon as we get into our routine of really swimming (it sill is a little cold for Bucher and me these days), Alex will



Kate with Eagle the Beagle and Carli, 1952

be paddling around pretty well. The few times he has been under water this year, he came up grinning without burbling at all, so apparently he has learned to catch his breath before going under, and it doesn't worry him.

Carli adores both the water and the sand, of course. Every time she takes off for the water, she looks back over her shoulder to see who is going to stop her and seems amazed that no one minds.



Our latest activity is going over to the “Fiddler-crab beach,” a low, sandy spot that is under water at high tide, at the side of the house just beyond our lot line. There are tens of thousands of Fiddlers there. They are small crabs ranging from the size of a dime to the size of a quarter, roughly. They have one pincer, but it doesn't hurt much. And they are delightful to watch since they run any direction, forward, backward, or to either side without ever turning around.

Alex, Bucher, and I catch the crabs, hand them to Carli, and she drops them in a bucket. Most of the time, she tucks them tenderly under her chin in her version of a hug before depositing them. She got nipped for the first time the other day, and it deterred her only slightly. Now she won't carry them quite as far, and if the bucket is too far away, she'll carry them a few steps toward it, stop, look at the crab speculatively, and then drop it and chase it the rest of the way toward the bucket trying to recapture it.



We have been working like mad for the past couple weeks on the boat. We planned to put a fresh coat of paint on her and then take off on a cruise. Then Bucher decided that the paint was so thick on the boat we had better burn it down to bare wood with a blowtorch and start over. It sounded rather simple the way he said it, but that's the worst job I ever have seen. In the first place, we had wind every day...nothing you would notice otherwise, but it kept blowing the blowtorch out. And you have to get into the swing of doing it just right...heating the paint, and then moving the

torch slowly ahead as you peel the paint off with a putty knife. It is a mean job, standing in waist-deep water, holding that heavy torch over your head half the time, and digging off the paint. It took over a week to finish, partly because many times the wind would be so high Bucher would have to quit, and partly because he couldn't work longer than four or five hours at it a day.

Meanwhile, I painted all the decks, did some staining and varnishing, refinished the cabin floors, and sanded the first side Bucher finished. Right now we have one coat of paint on each side, and have one side and half the other re-caulked. Now we have to re-sand her and put on one or two more coats. Also, Bucher found mahogany on the transom (back end) and we are going to varnish it instead of re-painting. That means it has to be scraped perfectly and every spec of old varnish and paint sanded off, re-caulked, stained, and varnished three or four times, with wet sanding in between coats. Really, this boat up-keep is something! But at least we are out in the sun working on it...even Alex helps...and it is fun.




Carli has been feeding herself some lately. She started a month ago, and while she certainly can't be considered accurate, she is doing a reasonably good job. At this point, she eats most of her breakfast alone, and part of dinner and supper. However, I usually have to help her finish these. And Alex sometimes takes over and feeds her for me. She also holds her own cup nicely, but isn't trustworthy, since she is liable to decide to look at the underside of the bottom of it without warning.




Alex's prayers are very interesting these days. When he gets through with the routine prayer he has a little chat with the Lord. Sometimes he does what he calls "the God-blessing" and sometimes he doesn't feel like blessing anyone. New people show up each night and some of the regulars get dropped. And furthermore, if he doesn't feel like blessing someone, they don't get blessed.

Then he goes on to tell the Lord whether he has been good or bad and, allegedly, to ask His help in being good the next day. The dialog goes something like this: “You know, I was pretty good today, Lord, yes I was. (*much nodding of the head*) I expect that with Your help I’ll be just as good tomorrow. Probably better, even.” And last night he practically convulsed me with his comment, “Yes, Lord, I’ve been pretty slow between bad things lately.”



From letter, probably written in late 1953

Alex makes up little rhymes all day long. Sometimes he will be chanting, in perfect rhythm, and will ask me if it rhymes. I have explained to him that it doesn’t always, but that not all poetry rhymes, and that, sometimes, all you need is rhythm in the words to make poetry. So he goes on and composes in “free verse.” Furthermore, I have yet to hear him make up a rhyme and make a mistake in his meter. Apparently he just “feels” the number of feet in his lines the way he “feels” mathematics. I hope the knack lasts!



I know you have been reading about our “Red Tide.” We haven’t been bothered back here in the bayou except for an occasional whiff of fish smell from far off. It has been bad at some other places around here, but a strong off-shore wind last week took the mass of fish further out in the Gulf, so it has been a lot better. Of course, no one is swimming, but we have had a run of cool, rainy weather, so we wouldn’t be swimming anyway.

Ed the Pelican

From letter, probably written in late 1953

Ed the Pelican really is part of the family now. He has learned to swim, goes all over the bayou and even around the island to the bay, but he always comes back in an hour or so.

He has a roost outside the screen cage beyond the living room. He roosts there most nights, sometimes on the tool shed, sometimes on the lawnmower, and sometimes just on the back step, where he squawks madly whenever anyone walks into the laundry room. He divides his time among the roost, the corner of the house by the big double jalousies between the kitchen and living room (where he squawks at us and pecks at the glass to remind us it is his mealtime if we forget), and the carport.

Ed “patrols” the front of the house sometimes, and I’ve considered putting up a sign, “Drive Slowly...Pelican Crossing.”

To anyone not expecting him, Ed is something of a shock. He tends to rush madly at anyone he sees, squawking and half-flying.



Alex and Carli with Ed, a pelican who became part of the family,
October 1953

Children's story, probably written in late 1953

The Peculiar Pet

Once upon a time...as long ago as last week, because this is a very true story...a little boy and a little girl had a very strange and wonderful pet. This pet was named *Ed*, even though he was not a “he” but a “she” pet. Ed was a baby pelican, but because she was as large as a full-grown goose, it was hard to realize how young she was.

When Ed came to live with Alex and Carli, their mommy and daddy explained that she was a wild bird and might not want to stay. Ed was timid at first. She crouched wild-eyed, with her tail feathers trembling, when the children gently scratched her head. Soon she realized that they wanted to be friends and would waddle up along side of them and crouch down, weaving her head back and forth on her long neck, inviting them to scratch her.

The first day Ed lived at the children's house, Daddy had to feed her by hand. He held Ed's long beak and tossed small pieces of raw fish into her pouch. Then Daddy tilted Ed's bill up into the air and rubbed her long neck gently until the fish slid down it. The children would watch the lumps of fish travel all the way down until they disappeared into Ed's plump body.

After feeding Ed, Daddy put the young pelican outside the screened-in yard. The children watched Ed waddle across the driveway and disappear into a clump of mangrove near the bayou's edge. They waved goodbye and called to her to visit them tomorrow.

The next morning as Carli and Alex were grading a road in the sandbox with Alex's big construction machines, they heard a high squawk outside the play-yard gate. Alex ran to open the gate and in waddled Ed, flapping her wings and saying thank you in pelican language. She stepped awkwardly up onto a corner of the sandbox and perched there quietly, watching the children as they continued their work.

At noon, when the sandbox road was completed, Mommy called the children for lunch. They ran into the house. No one noticed Ed jump down from her perch. She waddled after them flapping her wings and taking little hops as she hurried.

Mommy just had served the children their lunch when a sudden “Awwwk” sounded behind her. She jumped straight up into the air and made a noise herself, which sounded very much like “Eeeek!” She turned around and burst out laughing when she saw Ed trying to tell her how hungry she was. Her wings were waving wildly; her head was weaving from side to side; and she was making hollow, snapping noises with her long bill.

Mommy took some fish from the refrigerator. She cut it into small pieces...grown-up pelicans eat whole fish at one gulp, but Ed was just a baby...and coaxed Ed out to the yard to eat. This time Mommy tossed the pieces of fish to the ground one by one. Ed pounced on each, picking it up with the sharp hook at the end of her bill, tossing it into the air, and catching it in her pouch. She flapped her big wings with each bite and snapped her bill noisily several times, tossing the morsel of fish around in her pouch. Then she threw her head back and the bit of fish slithered down her stretched-out neck.

After her dinner, Ed wandered back into the house to explore. But when Mommy found her poking her long neck into the closet, she shooed her into the yard again. Ed perched happily on her corner of the sandbox and stayed there for the rest of the afternoon. Daddy put Ed outside the yard that evening, and she returned to her roost in the mangrove for the night.

Every day after that, Ed appeared early in the morning. She loved company. She followed the children around as they played. She took naps whenever she felt like it. Once she startled one of Mommy’s bridge-club ladies right out from under her prettiest party hat when she woke up yawning and stretching her wings, practically under the lady’s feet in the front hall.

One day when Daddy was watering the lawn, Ed ran squawking into the spray from the hose. She snapped at the stream of water with her big bill, making happy little noises as the drops trickled down her throat. She turned round and round under the spray, flicking her feathers and twitching her tail in delight. After that, Alex and Carli gave Ed a shower every day. If they forgot about it, Ed would waddle over to the hose and peck at it to remind them.

For a while Ed had green feet. Daddy was painting the boat, and Ed, who couldn't bear to be left out of any family activity, flew up to perch on the newly painted deck.

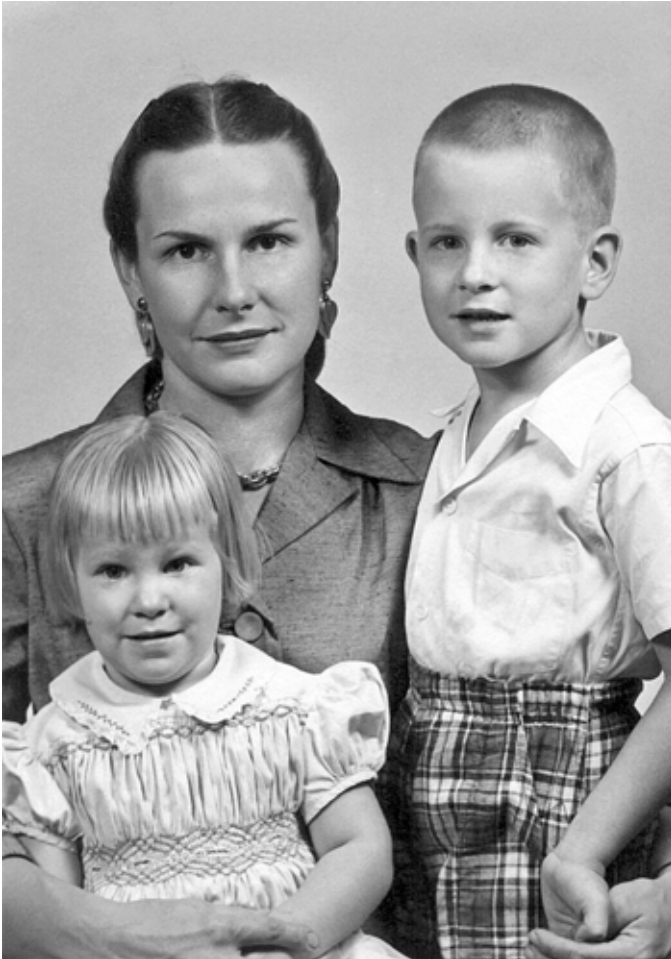
Ed still lives with Alex and Carli. She is older now and can catch her own fish for dinner, swimming in the bayou in front of their house. Although she flies off sometimes, she likes to spend part of her mornings watching the children play. She still sneaks into the house when Mommy isn't looking. She still takes baths in the garden hose. And she is fonder than ever of having Alex and Carli scratch her head.

If you ever should happen to be in Florida in the city where Alex and Carli live, and if you should happen to drive out the little road and across the stone bridge to their tiny island, you could scratch Ed's head, too.

First Stay in Belize

1954 – 1956

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Kate's passport photo for trip to British Honduras, 1954

To British Honduras

January – February 1954

Our only neighbor in Sarasota, a Delta pilot, asked Bucher if he would consider flying to British Honduras with a friend, also a Delta pilot, to take delivery of a sailboat he had built there. Bucher had both sea and small-boat experience and jumped at the offer.

Bucher's Adventure

In January of 1954, Bucher and Chuck signed in on the first page of the register of the recently completed Fort George Hotel in Belize, the first modern hotel in the colony.

Next day they took passage to Caye* Caulker on a stout local sailboat. They sailed northward behind the reef, sans motor, on a moonlit night, enjoying the view of endless small islands while one of the other passengers sang in Spanish, accompanying himself on a guitar.

On Caye Caulker, Chuck learned with dismay that the 28-foot sailboat, for which he had paid in full, was instead an unfinished 18-foot sailboat. Bucher, who had been building boats since he was a boy, bullied the shipyard owner (son-in-law of the then president of Guatemala) into letting him supervise completion of Chuck's boat. In two weeks it was ready to sail, not fully finished, but seaworthy.

Chuck and Bucher set sail up the northern coast of British Honduras. Off Mexico, they were hit by a heavy Norther, a wind-and-rain storm that had them sheltering in Bahía de la Asención for three days. Bucher told me they lived off coconuts, but I never believed him.

They finally were able to continue their trip, sailing into harbor at the Isla de Cozumel on a stormy night. Chuck's vacation time had run out so he left the sailboat to be sent on to Florida by freighter. He and Bucher flew

* Caye is pronounced *key*.

to Mérida, capital of the Mexican state of Yucatán, the closest place to get a plane back to Florida.

Exciting Plans

My blond Bucher returned with a full reddish beard to announce enthusiastically, “You have to see that place. It’s like walking twenty-five years into the past.”

“Shall I start packing?”

“Not until after I shave.”

As I remember it, I was holding the paintbrush with which I still was staining paneling in our not-quite-finished house. The first thing I did was firmly seal my tin of paint.

My second project was to try to behave like a calm, meticulous mother as I planned and packed, when all I wanted to do was dance and sing, the last being an activity forbidden me by the family in self-defense. Bucher took care of details I neither knew nor wanted to know about.

While Bucher had been off on his adventure, the children and I developed a daily ritual of kneeling together on the floor looking at the Atlas and tracing Daddy’s trip. Now five-year-old Alex was almost as excited as I at the unexpected vision of our own visit to Central America. Carli, age two, mirrored our delirium without understanding, because elation is its own excuse for being.

I took the children to the pediatrician for what both of them considered an unnecessary episode with a needle. He gave me some baby-strength calming tablets, which I did not think were necessary, and some advice that I knew was.

When the feverish pace of work threatened tempers, Bucher and I took the children for a swim, wading in the shallow waters or watching the scuttling lines of fiddler crabs migrating from one side of our sandy point to the other.

Two weeks after Bucher's return, the house was closed; we were packed and set off for what we thought would be a three-month visit to British Honduras.

[Editor's Note 3 on page 380]

Journey

Two starry-eyed children and their exhausted parents piled onto the plane from Sarasota to Tampa to spend the night before catching the plane to Mexico. It was glory piled on glory for Alex, his first airplane ride and his first hotel. I awoke around midnight to find both children perched on the window sill staring raptly down at blinking city lights and bustling nighttime streets.

Next morning our flight took us first to Havana, where in-transit passengers were marched past a series of bond shops and given an unwanted thirty minutes to buy things that could only be a burden to carry. We were transferred to another aircraft and continued to Mérida.

We checked into the gracious old Gran Hotel de Mérida, gleaming with colorful tile work and great carved mahogany columns and doorways. After the children's naps, we had ample time to meander to the nearby plaza, absorbing the charming foreignness around us.

The next morning we were up at 3:30 and installed in a packed old DC-3 by five o'clock. The children wondered what had happened to their old American habit of breakfasting. Bucher and I were close to violence at not having had our coffee. The aircraft took off, chattering with the tinny vibrations I later learned to love in the World War II workhorse of a plane still being flown in Central America and Mexico. Irritating pinpoint of light on the pages of my book disturbed my reading. I was horror-struck when investigation revealed that the light came from sunshine streaming through holes where rivets were missing from the plane's bare metal fuselage.

The flat green of the Yucatán Peninsula became the white-capped azure of the Caribbean. We landed in the barren, sandy wastes of the Isla de Cozumel, just off the coast. It is a tourists' dream haven now, but I remember it as sand, rocky roads, and a dust-covered, drab village of weathered board shacks. We found a small shop and bought the closest thing to breakfast we could find for our wilting children—bottles of soda, violent orange in color, and sealed packages of limp cookies.

The jeep returned to take us back to the airstrip, and Carli, our sunny little blonde doll, metamorphosed into a shrieking Fury. Too many new experiences too quickly had unhinged our happy baby. Bucher fought to pacify the rigid, sobbing shape that he cuddled helplessly. I extracted the pediatrician's sneered-at tablets. It took both Bucher and me to deposit one of the pills within Caril's protesting mouth and wash it down to where it might be of use.

Moments later Carli was so profoundly asleep in Bucher's arms that I thought she was dead. Wary passengers around us lowered their voices lest they precipitate the screams they had feared would accompany their flight. Obviously they did not realize that, thanks to modern science and a prescient doctor, such precautions were unnecessary.

Carli was still sleeping soundly when we landed in Chetumal, Quintana Roo, just over the Mexican border from British Honduras. A friendly taxi driver took us to a little family hotel to await our charter plane from Belize. My school Spanish, rusty as it was, proved adequate to explain to the welcoming hotel owner that the children had not eaten. She shooed us into the simple dining room and provided coffee and fresh orange juice instantly. Hot scrambled eggs, toast, and canned natural milk for the children followed quickly. Carli was still limp from her enforced slumber, but was not groggy, we were relieved to see.

The taxi driver returned to whisk us back to the airport, where a four-place Cessna from Belize waited to take us on the final leg of our journey. I kept telling myself that our trip was a lot more plush than a trek in a covered wagon, but then I never intended to be a pioneer.

The plane banked steeply before steadying and slowing in descent. Below my window rushed a dizzying blur of winding river, pink rooftops, white picket fences, riotous tropical foliage, the greenest of grass, and the bluest of sea. The plane leveled out and flew low over a long, grassy stretch bordering the Caribbean, scattering the horses and donkeys peacefully grazing there. The pilot took the plane around and came in for a cushioned landing on the now-empty grass.

The scene of whirling colors and shapes outside the plane was no dizzy than the kaleidoscope of exhilaration, anticipation, and disbelief I felt as we approached Belize, capital of the British Crown Colony of British Honduras. Less than a month before, the name *Belize* was unknown, and the country of British Honduras was but a shadowy memory from grammar-school geography.

Arrival

For a fee of 35 cents, we took a taxi to the Fort George Hotel on Marine Parade, overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Within twenty minutes of landing, we walked up two comfortable flights of hardwood stairs and along an outside walled walkway to our accommodations on the third floor.

The Fort George Hotel was a three-story concrete building, painted cream and trimmed with terracotta tones. The long bedroom wing, lined with balconies, faced the Caribbean. A large veranda curved in a gentle arc across the dining room and past the bar. Doors on the wall of the bar folded aside, opening the room to the veranda, the lawn, and the sea. The Fort George was built by the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC), a British government agency set up to pour money and economic stimulus into the Colonies and, with luck, to realize returns on its investments.

Our identical adjoining rooms were simple but pleasant, with mahogany twin bedsteads and bureaus. Across the entire seaside wall of each room were wooden-louvered windows and louvered doors opening onto private verandas. We gave the exhausted children a quick lunch in the empty

dining room, then tucked them into bed in the room next to ours for badly needed naps.

By the time the young ones awoke, excited at realizing where they were, the hotel manager had helped us to hire Sonia, a quiet young nursemaid. She was waiting to dress them and take them to the nearby park. In that short walk, Alex and Carli moved from the freedom of life on the Sarasota sands to the more structured British Colonial world of nursemaids who gathered promptly at Four at Memorial Park to chatter together while their charges romped on the grass with friends whose mothers were at home hosting Afternoon Tea.

Sonia brought our two happily dirty children back to the hotel late in the afternoon. Trying to help, I turned on the water in the tub while Sonia undressed them. The tub was a gem, at least a foot longer than a U.S. tub, half a foot deeper, and narrow enough to suggest that the obese might be in trouble if they tried to immerse themselves. I studied it with delight while the water gushed.

Hearing the noise, Sonia rushed in to close the tap in a panic.

“No, Mum! No, Mum! Not so much water,” she gasped, staring in horror at the three inches of water already in the tub.

This was my introduction to the perennial water shortage that was a part of life in Belize. Sonia explained that the country’s only water supply was rain collected on rooftops and held in vats. Every drop was to be cherished.

I ordered dinner for the children from Room Service, and within a short while, a smiling young woman was at the door with their trays. Sonia settled them at the table on their veranda, and they ate unfamiliar food enthusiastically as they watched the activity on the sea beyond the railing.

A short while later, after Sonia had settled the children in their beds, Bucher and I went in to kiss them goodnight. When the children were asleep with Sonia quietly watching them, Bucher and I went down to the Dining Room for our own dinners.

Afterwards, we sat in the light, warm tropical breeze on the hotel veranda with a liqueur, toasting each other and our surroundings, and watching a full moon paint the waves silver. Small clouds drifted across the sky, teasing the moonlight, as southern winds sped small sailboats on their way past on the rumpled water.

It was Valentine's Day, 1954.

Getting Acquainted

February – March 1954

The golden glow of a rising sun glinted off the sparkling sea and awakened us at dawn on our first morning in Belize. The process of returning to consciousness after our exhausting trip was spurred by the exhilaration of our two ecstatic children. They raced from our bed to the balcony overlooking the Caribbean and back, so that Alex could report what they had seen. Carli had walked at seven months, but by age two, she had not decided there was anything she needed to say. Her grin and giggles underlined Alex's excited discourse.

“There are five sailboats.”

“Two boys are throwing a puppy off the seawall. The puppy is swimming back. The boys are pulling him up onto the seawall. Uh-oh, they're throwing him back in the water.”

“Someone left a big pile of rags on the seawall. Carli, look, it's moving. Oh, it's a man. He washed his face in the sea, and now he's walking away.”

“Here comes another sailboat. I waved at the people in it, and they waved back to me.”

In the interests of limiting noise in the somnolent hotel, we quickly dressed the children and ourselves and took them out for a walk.

We strolled through the lobby, out the main entrance with its porte cochere that protected arriving and departing guests from sudden tropical squalls, and down the drive to Cork Street. The sea was perhaps a hundred yards away. We turned to the right at the seawall, and strolled past the graceful lighthouse and along the untidy Customs freight wharf, where small tugs, barges, and “bumboats” were moored.

Alex pulled his hand out of Bucher's and left us, sauntering over to speak to a tall British Honduran in a greasy T-shirt who was sitting on the steps

to the wheelhouse of one of the tugs. We watched our five-year old in surprise as the ill-assorted pair carried on what seemed to be a serious conversation.

Alex returned to remark casually, “He’s one of my new friends.”

[Editor’s Note 4 on page 381]



Within twenty-four hours of our arrival, we had been welcomed by a variety of people, many of whom became life-long friends.

We met Mike and Gene Maestre almost immediately after our arrival. The brothers owned and operated a cigarette factory, located across from Customs, a block from the hotel. They also had jalousie and woodworking factories and were agents for Aerovías Sud Americana (ASA), an air-cargo line.

Ebullient Gene welcomed our entire family as if he had been waiting for us all his life. He was friend to the world. Mike was the practical one, able to turn his hand to anything. He grew the finest fruits, vegetables, and herbs in the Colony, as if by magic, in small plots of soil too poor for landfill. Bucher soon began dropping by the cigarette factory to visit with Mike and Gene.

Meanwhile, the Maestre wives took me in hand. Liz, Mike’s diminutive wife, who became one of my closest friends, helped me meet people by including me in their daytime activities: Coffee Mornings, Tea Afternoons, and later, under duress, Bridge Afternoons. Liz held a special place in the hearts of all who knew her as someone who gave endlessly of her time and concern, made light of her own problems, and brightened whatever room she entered.

It was Gene’s beautiful wife, Celma, however, who invited me to my first afternoon party, a meeting of her sewing group. There was a moderate amount of needlework in evidence, a great deal of friendly conversation, and an incredible display of Celma’s pastry-making prowess.

Smiling maids passed tray after tray with mountains of dainty sandwiches, butterscotch pie in a flaky crust topped with chilled and whipped Nestle's tinned Thick Cream (the closest British Honduras could offer to whipped cream), feather-light chocolate éclairs and cream puffs. The hours progressed with the parade of delectables, and it was time for me to dash across the street to the Fort George to order dinner for the children. I tracked my hostess down to thank her for a happy afternoon and found her back in her pantry, spooning ice cream into crystal goblets.



Bucher and I marveled at the country's eerily accurate news network via grapevine. In shops, the clerks greeted me by name and seemed to know who we were, where we had come from, and when we had arrived.

One afternoon soon after our arrival in Belize, Bucher was at the cigarette factory near closing time when Liz called to ask Mike to pick her up from a friend's home where an afternoon of bridge was ending. Our car had just arrived, so Bucher offered to do the chauffeuring.

When Bucher returned with Liz, Mike hurried out to meet them, laughing heartily.

"It took you about six minutes to get here," Mike said, "but that was long enough for two friends of mine to telephone to say they had seen Liz driving around town with 'that newcomer Scott'."



Our new friends explained to Bucher and me that it was customary to sign the book at Government House. This was the equivalent of a formal call on His Excellency The Governor, the top official in a British Colony.

Bucher and I duly took ourselves to Government House, where the Governor and his family lived and where "H.E." (His Excellency, in common abbreviation) had his offices. It was on the other side of the river that divides the city.

We walked up the curving, graveled driveway, and stopped at the sentry box to tell the uniformed guard that we were “going to sign the book.” He smiled, and waved us toward the porte cochere that sheltered the front entrance.

Government House was set back on a wide lawn facing the sea. It was a beautifully maintained Colonial-style building surrounded by manicured grounds with lush tropical bushes and shaded by flowering trees.

Disguising our timorousness, we climbed the broad, gray steps and entered the foyer. An oriental rug covered the floor, and just to the left was a table with a large book open on it. We carefully entered our names, home, and the date, and were relieved to escape a formality that was more imagined than real.

The ritual of signing the book at Government House was socially obligatory as soon as possible after the first day of each new year. Again, one signed when one left the Colony and when one returned. This custom dated back to the time when holidays involved months or years. The practice became a little silly in the days of air travel and short trips.

[Editor's Note 4 on page 381]

Bucher Goes to Work

From letters dated April 4 and April 25, 1954

Our stay here in British Honduras is lengthening. We came down for two or three months; now it looks as if it could be six or eight. Bucher feels that there are fine possibilities, and while everything is slow starting (*why do today what can be put off till tomorrow* seems to be everyone's motto), he finally is beginning to see some progress.

He was not able to start building his big cruising-racing sailboats because the man he wanted to supervise the actual work has his ways tied up. So instead, he has taken over operation of the Colony's only woodworking factory, on a percentage basis, and is making jalousied doors and windows, picture frames, water skis, small skiffs, and a lot of other odds and ends.

The main trouble has been reorganizing the factory. There must have been \$100,000 worth of excellent machinery, some of it never used in the five years since its purchase, and none of it ever oiled, greased, or sharpened. Furthermore, when he set out to clean the factory, Bucher found several thousand dollars worth of tools and small machines literally buried under piles of junk and sawdust. By the end of last month, however, he had the factory overhauled, began production on some back orders, and started feeling encouraged about the machinery and the men.

The idea of a production line of any sort was completely unheard of. Each man built completely whatever he was working on...like a cabinet maker. Now Bucher is turning out ten and twenty times as many articles in the length of time it used to take to do one.

In the mean time, the children and I are having a lovely, lazy life. We couldn't find a house anywhere and were lucky enough to be able to rent the only one now being built in Belize. It should have been finished a month or six weeks ago, but I won't guarantee that we'll be in this week! It is hideously expensive living in the hotel, of course, though it is very plush.



From letter dated February 21, 1956

Bucher is getting on nicely with his boat building and is setting up a production line on a 16-foot open fishing boat, hoping to be able to ship more than one a week. And meanwhile, the sport-fishing company has started fishing commercially and is shipping to Guatemala.

Alex Goes to School

March 1954

After the novelty wore off, hotel life was a straitjacket for the children.

Friends advised us to enroll Alex in nearby St. Catherine's Elementary, an excellent school operated by a group of Sisters of Mercy from a Rhode Island convent.

Alex had attended nursery school in Sarasota and was pleased at the idea. I proceeded with the formalities of enrolling him. My short walk took me down Marine Parade, in front of the hotel, for three pleasant blocks. On my left, I passed Memorial Park and old Colonial-style white frame houses with green blinds and red corrugated metal roofs faded to pink by the tropical sun, standing high on stilts behind white picket fences. On my right, a walking-width seawall was splashed by waves silty with the effluence of the nearby river's mouth. Not far out from the seawall, crystalline Caribbean waters flashed their ever-changing sequences of blues and aquas. Mangrove islands edged the horizon unevenly with a deeper green.

I turned left, away from the sea where Marine Parade came to a dead end, not dreaming that one day in the distant future we would own the house on the corner I was passing. The school was a short block up Hutson Street, just to the seaward side of the United States Consulate.

St. Catherine's was a group of buildings in Mediterranean style with wide, pillared verandas, soft buff and beige in color. The school was surrounded by spacious lawns, or at least what was accepted for lawn on Belize's saline soil, pumped up from the sea.

Wandering along an arcade and asking for help from whomever I could find outside the classrooms, I finally found my way to the Headmistress's office.

Sister Patricia was easily recognized as unalterably Irish, even before she said a word in the brogue that confirmed the impression. She was a tall,

robust woman with blooming cheeks and twinkling eyes that belied the severity of her black habit.

We quickly finished the formalities of enrolling Alex in the equivalent of U.S. First Grade, and I paid the modest fees. Sister Patricia said that he would start school the next morning, no foolishness about waiting for a Monday.

The following day, I dressed Alex carefully in sport shirt and shorts, and escorted him down the seawall and up to school. The nun who was to be his teacher met us at the door. She welcomed Alex warmly and dismissed me firmly. Our five-year old had been both excited and apprehensive about being thrust into a group of unfamiliar children in a foreign country. His last glance toward me was a mixture of slightly scared reassurance and an acceptance of a force beyond his control in his new teacher in her strange dark garb.

I went home to suffer for him for the rest of the school day.

By the time I returned to St. Catherine's to meet Alex, he had found friends to join him on the walk back down the seawall. One was the slightly older son of the Comptroller of Customs, an Englishman from the Fiji Islands.

"How many countries have you lived in?" the boy asked Alex.

"Two," Alex replied.

"I've lived in five," his new friend boasted and proceeded to list what sounded like half Britain's more distant colonies.

Alex, who had been overwhelmed with pride at being in his first foreign country, was deflated, to the dismay of his hovering mother.

Sonia arranged for a seamstress to make Alex's school uniforms of khaki pants and short-sleeved white shirts. He settled in happily, made friends, and walked back and forth to school on the seawall feeling remarkably adult. Carli was vocally unhappy at being left behind with Sonia.

Life at the Fort George

February – May, 1954

We settled easily into a schedule for hotel living. After Bucher acceded to the Maestres' request that he reorganize their furniture factory, he was busy daytimes. Alex spent most of his time in school. I played with Carli or read to her; Sonia took her to the park to meet friends. I read, visited new friends, read, attended Coffee Mornings and Tea Afternoons, and read.


Before long, Bucher learned of a house being built not far from the hotel and arranged to lease it on completion. The owner was a delightful young British Honduran, Dickey Bradley, a Customs officer who was being transferred to Corozal, near the Mexican border. Naturally, the house was not ready on schedule. We remained in the Fort George Hotel for three months.



The staff of the Fort George, an engaging group of young British Hondurans, lavished attention on Alex and Carli. They fussed over them in the dining room, invited them into the kitchen, stole moments to tease with them. Concie and Babe in the dining room, Junior and Hector at the bar, remained friends of ours through the years.


One night soon after we arrived, one of the staff hurried up to Bucher and me in the dining room to report that Carli was crying. We dashed to our rooms and found that Carli had wakened, frightened either by a bad dream or by unfamiliar surroundings, and had gone to Alex's bed for comfort. She was seated squarely on his head, wailing piteously, as Alex slept on undisturbed.

Many nights the Scotts were the only guests. A favorite memory of one such night was of watching a redundant waitress waltz enthusiastically with the barman on the veranda outside the dining room.



On other nights we shared the honor of being sole inhabitants with the pilots of the cargo airline, ASA, who overnighted in Belize before returning to St. Petersburg, Florida. We became friends with the pilots, gasped at their tales of aerial derring-do, and listened to their get-rich-quick schemes. One of them, I think it was a man nicknamed Bud, caused a local sensation. He drove up in front of the Maestres' (their agents) office in the airline's van and workers went out to unload it in the usual way. Bud threw open the back doors and people screaming "Wowla!" scattered in every direction. Just inside the opening was a ten-foot-long, wildly lashing boa constrictor, his head securely tied to a support in the corner of the van.

Bud had seen the snake on the road in from the airport and had stopped to catch it. *Wowla* is the Creole name for boa constrictor. The non-poisonous snakes are relatively common in the country. They do the country a service in keeping down the far more dangerous rat population, but their size and slitheriness count against them in terms of popularity.



The people who came to the Fort George to stay while we were there were an interesting lot: United Nations experts of one sort or another, who had come to give the country a hand; representatives of neighboring Central American republics; British Government officials; and businessmen from a variety of corporations and countries. Few women representatives came, and wives seldom accompanied their traveling husbands. Most evenings I was the only woman there.

Because there usually were so few of us there, we often gravitated into small groups who gathered nightly throughout the visitors' stays. Most of these men were well traveled and knowledgeable and had a wealth of information about colonies in general and British Honduras in particular. For the first time, I became aware of the insularity of my life in the United States.

Bucher and I considered ourselves well read. We both had college degrees, always had read daily newspapers (including the editorials), subscribed to a weekly news magazine, and followed the radio news. The librarian at Belize's Jubilee Library did not understand how we could borrow, read, and return several books weekly. Still, our new acquaintances opened up an entire world of unfamiliar problems and interactions. I felt a bit like Dorothy waking up in Oz.



Among the people we met was Frank Richards, the capable British engineer who had supervised construction of the hotel, as well as of the new Barclay's Bank building in the center of Belize. Frank told delightful stories about his problems with the builders.

"You should have seen the way they laid the tiles on this veranda," Frank laughed as we sat outside the dining room having coffee one starlit evening. "You couldn't walk two feet without stubbing your toe on a tile set half an inch above its neighbor. I told the contractor to rip it up and do it over. Shirty he was about it, but he did the job."

Frank continued, saying that the second job wasn't much better than the first. He made the outraged contractor redo it again.

"I was eyeing the third effort a bit skeptically, and thinking about a fourth when the contractor protested, almost in tears, 'All anyone's ever going to do is walk on them'."



One incident from those three months of evenings at the Fort George still haunts me. The manners learned from my mother and grandmother fought a battle with my admittedly reactionary code, and lost.

Among the hotel guests at the time was the newly arrived Consul from Guatemala. Communists just had taken over the government in that neighboring country. One evening soon after his arrival, when we went down for dinner we were invited to join a group, including the Consul, in

the bar. I refused, graciously but firmly, and stalked on into the dining room followed by a baffled and outraged husband.

“I will not sit with a Communist. It is a point of honor.”

Bucher was neither charmed nor impressed by my explanation. He saw, as I did not, that my Cold Warrior gesture was priggish, self-righteous, and inappropriate.

Diplomacy has its own rules, and I was naïve enough to ignore them. Looking back, I realize what a pleasant, inoffensive young man the Guatemalan Consul was.

Exploring the Country

Early 1954

“The Ranch Wagon’s here,” Bucher exclaimed when he returned to the Fort George for lunch one noon about ten days after we reached Belize.

Our car had been left behind us in Florida, to follow by freighter. Bucher and I got along quite nicely using our feet through the friendly streets of Belize, but the children, who never had lived anywhere near a city street or sidewalk, felt crippled in a carless family.

Bucher took the car to the Police Station to have it licensed. He returned with a broad smile and a three-digit number on his new plates. British Honduras had fewer than 1,000 cars in the entire country.

We set out to explore British Honduras (*B.H.* for short). Two roads led from the city of Belize to the various parts of the country: one north through Orange Walk to Corozal and on to the Mexican border; one west to Cayo, Succotz, Benque Viejo, and the Guatemalan border. A third highway branched to the south from the western road about fifty miles from Belize. It wound through the Maya Mountains to the town of Stann Creek about a hundred miles down the coast. It would be years before the road would continue to the southernmost district of Toledo and the town of Punta Gorda.

Once we had explored as far as surfaced roads permitted, we held our excursions to briefer runs. The roads were rough, gas was expensive, car-repair services were rudimentary.

About that time our Century inboard boat arrived, and we turned toward the blue waters, glowing reefs, and uninhabited cayes that captivated us all forever.

[Editor’s Note 5 on page 382]

Cayo District

The children scrambled over each other and us getting into the car for our first Sunday expedition. We headed out of Belize on the Western Highway, through Lord's Ridge Cemetery, with its white crypts and crosses. The road had one roughly paved lane, with passing bays at regular intervals, and potholes at more frequent, irregular ones.

We drove through savannah—flat, sometimes marshy, country studded with scruffy pines—and past angular calabash trees with contorted limbs. To the south was an eruption of small, separated hills. These were limestone domes covered with foliage and studded with caves, many full of relics from the Mayans who used the caves in past centuries.

Gradually the road led up into the low hilliness of the pine ridge. Tall trees, luxuriant bushes, and vines formed rough green walls close along each side of the road. Lianas laced the undergrowth together. Soon we were in high bush and tropical rain forest. We drove mile after mile without a hint of human habitation.

Years later, when the Western Highway was widened and repaved, the heavy growth that formed the narrow tunnel of the old road was cut down. Suddenly groups of houses, thatch-roofed, adobe huts, and simple frame cabins, appeared along the road on both sides. Most had been there for years, hidden from sight by a few feet of jungle.

As we reached Cayo District, heavy forests gave way to open fields. We passed the government agricultural station, Central Farms, where British experts experimented with crops, breeds of cattle, and citrus, training British Hondurans as they worked. We passed groves of orange and grapefruit trees. Scruffy, angular local cows and newly imported Brahman and Santa Gertrudis cattle grazed peacefully under the tropical sun. Spectacular cohune palms lofted their great fans of fronds in open fields.

Past the farms we came to "Cayo," the informal name for El Cayo de San Ignacio y Santa Elena, twin towns built on opposite sides of the deep ravine created by the Macal River. The improbable Hawkesworth Bridge,

one lane with board tracks across a steel grid, was suspended from one high side of the gorge to the other. We could not believe that rainy-season floods sometimes crested within inches of the bridge, dozens of feet above the river bed. We understood that these were known as “top gallon” floods. Later we read that the phrase originally was “top gallant” floods, taking the name from the highest sails on the British ships that, in earlier days, plied back and forth between far-off England and Belize.

Following the twisted, rocky trail past Cayo, we reached the picturesque small village of Succotz, with the Mopan River bubbling and gurgling its tumultuous way alongside the road. The women of the village, many of them direct descendants of the storied Mayans, did their laundry on the rocks at the river’s edge in happy community while children splashed nearby.

At a short distance from Succotz, on the other side of the river and up a series of steep hills, stood the Mayan ruins of Xunantunich. Archeologists had partially cleared the main temple. One side showed parts of rooms while on the adjacent side, a tall bas relief of Mayan figures was exposed. I do not remember whether we visited the ruins on that trip, but certainly we did so several times, crossing the river by dory (dugout canoe) or on an antiquated ferry, hand-cranked back and forth on sagging cables.

A little farther on we came to the charming little town of Benque Viejo del Carmen. Small frame buildings were set close together on streets with names like Victoria, Elizabeth, and Churchill.

Stann Creek District

The next weekend we took the newly completed Hummingbird Highway south to Stann Creek Town.* The town is approximately thirty-five miles from Belize by water and over a hundred through partly virgin forest by road.

* *Stann Creek Town* is now named *Dangriga*.

We had to retrace half the road leading to Cayo before turning south onto the new highway. His Excellency the Governor had dedicated the long-needed road the preceding day, but to me, it looked like an old, worn-out county road between two off-the-track Michigan towns.

At first we were shocked at the poor grading and paving. But as the road pushed farther into the mountains, through the most incredibly overgrown and tangled jungle, we wondered that it had been built at all. We passed workmen and, watching them, realized that the road quite literally had been paved by hand.

What appeared to be the very first steam roller ever invented, with a funny old tar kettle rattling along in its train like a smelly caboose, moved slowly over the new road. Behind it came the “pavers,” one man spraying hot tar from a hand pipe and a dozen workmen following, broadcasting gravel by the shovelful from roadside piles.



During the drive we kept an excited watch for wildlife. Bucher spotted a boa constrictor basking in the sun on the edge of the road. Later near Stann Creek we found two small iguanas when we all got out of the car so that Bucher could take a picture of the children on an enormous mahogany log.

“What looks a little like a pig and a little like a rabbit?” Alex suddenly asked from the back seat of the car on our way home.

“Nothing,” I replied.

“Oh, yes it does,” Alex answered positively. “I just saw one.”

Bucher and I joked with him about it, but let him enjoy his fantasy.

That evening, hotel conversation happened to turn to game and an animal locally called a *gibnut*, (technically an *Agouti paca*, one of the larger members of the rodent family). It was described as having pig-like hooves and ears and sitting in a hunched position like a rabbit. Alex was vindicated and awoke the next morning to our apologies.



Alex and Carli on mahogany log, 1954

Years later when Queen Elizabeth made her first visit to Belize, she was served gibbon at the state banquet as a special Belizean delicacy. Avid London tabloids picked up the story and headlined “Queen Served Rat,” with an accompanying file photograph taken, at another time and in another situation, that showed Her Majesty peering downward through her glasses in utter loathing.

Chetumal

Our third expedition took us north through the sugar plantations and over the border to the Mexican town of Chetumal, where we spent a happy weekend as almost sole guests in a new motel. The children were ecstatic at having a swimming pool for their private use. Growing up on the water as they had, both could swim, though Bucher and I kept a careful eye on

our enthusiastic mermaid, two-year-old Carli, paddling about in her life vest.

Blue Waters, Reef, and Tropical Isles

The arrival of our boat freed us, when we wished, from our new-found shores and gave us new worlds to explore. The Century was a roomy, sea-kindly boat, ideal for family day trips.


British Honduras' barrier reef is the longest in the hemisphere and second longest in the world (after Australia's reef). It is studded with dozens of islands that seem to be waiting for a travel agent to photograph them. In the Fifties, the larger ones had fishing villages. Some small cayes held lighthouses and two or three simple frame houses for the lighthouse keeper and his family. Most were uninhabited patches of fine coral sand studded with coconut palms. The sparse grass and bushes on the cayes, like the palms, had grown from seeds or nuts washed ashore by the constant action of the waves. We found, to our surprise, that peaceful as the small cayes looked, they were noisy places. Constant winds crackled through the palm fronds with a sound like rain, and the waves rasped on the sandy shores.

The oceans were Bucher's home. He had joined the Navy during World War II. After a diving accident caused permanent damage to one ear, he left the Navy. He then entered the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. On graduation he was given a berth as second mate, rather than as third, on one of the freighters supplying war materiel and food to the beleaguered United Kingdom. He spent five years at sea, most of them on the North Atlantic run. One reason we left Atlanta after settling there at the War's end was that Bucher could not live out of sight of blue water.

Alex and Carli had been brought up on boats, so 1) safety rules were ingrained, and 2) the Captain's word was law to them. They might "discuss" matters of disagreement with their parents at home, but at sea

both obeyed instantly. There was no argument over the edict that they wear their life jackets at sea.

[Editor's Note 6 on page 383]




Bucher brought the first face masks, fins, and snorkels ever seen in Belize. Our forays with them in Sarasota's cloudy waters had not prepared us for the crystalline world of the tropical reef. Multicolored fish darted past faster than we could memorize their shades and shapes to look them up in our books at home.

I swam with a finger hooked into the straps of Carli's life-vest while she paddled and peered at the busy piscine life in the water below her. Most of the time she was content to play in the shallows or on the sand, searching for shells or, more excitingly, for her "friends," fiddler or hermit crabs.

Alex was more adventurous. Peering below the surface from his floating perch, he learned to identify each kind of fish and to see how differently they behaved. In places the reef came right up to the sands, and water was wading depth, so he could feel like a part of the strange marine world.

"What's that thing waving from a cave," Alex asked, sputtering as he pulled his mask aside. Bucher dove to investigate and returned with a thrashing lobster.



Ford Young, who with his wife, Callie, became close friends, frequently joined us on our trips to the cayes. Ford was an enthusiastic photographer so, soon after we all began exploring the reef, he bought an underwater camera. Callie, Bucher, and I thought his pictures were exceptionally good, but Ford was not satisfied with them. He sent an envelope of his best photographs of fish and the reef to *The National Geographic* for criticism and suggestions. They wrote back saying that his pictures were better than theirs and asking, "Please tell us what you are doing."

One sunny afternoon when we were snorkeling in shallow water near the reef, Ford called to me and said, “Kate, there’s something I think you would enjoy seeing in a cave down there.” We were in an area where two or three long ridges of coral, pitted with small openings, stretched toward the nearby sandy caye in water of wading depth. I promptly replaced my mask and ducked beneath the wind-ruffled water to search the coral. Almost immediately I found myself face-to-mask with a wary Moray Eel. Apparently I unsettled him as much as he did me. The sinister head with its gaping teeth withdrew into the darkness of the cave as rapidly as I paddled out of its way. Ford roared with laughter as I surfaced sputtering with salt water and fury.



Bucher had brought our spinning tackle to British Honduras with us, so one bright weekend we decided to try the bonefishing. Bucher was amazed to see the multitudes of bonefish that inhabited grassy flats inside the reef. “Sport fishermen travel half way around the world to find concentrations of bonefish one-tenth as great as these,” he marveled.

One afternoon on the bonefish flats I tired of fishing and decided to take Carli back to the boat, which was rocking gently at anchor a few dozen yards away. Our guide, a handsome young British Honduran, Bert Foreman, who had an encyclopedic understanding of the waters and its denizens, waded back with us. Suddenly Bert leaned down, made a quick grab, and stood up holding by its tail a squirming fish a couple of feet long.

“What is that?” I asked him.

“Just a Nurse Shark,” Bert replied, as he leaned over and quickly pulled a second, smaller one out of the water.

This Michigan girl was reluctant to share her wading area with sharks, and appalled that her innocent baby was literally toe-to-jowl with the fish of evil reputation. I snatched Carli up into my arms. Obviously I remained at risk; Bert had no more spare arms to catch other lurkers-of-the-

shallows. I danced through the water as quickly as I could, leaving Bert laughing behind me, tossed Carli unceremoniously over the gunwale into the Century, and crawled aboard myself with more speed than grace.



On windy days when waves were too high to make either boating or swimming a pleasure, we often took the boat up the Belize River. Technically, the branch that bisected the city was the Haulover Creek. It flowed south from the main river just before the latter debouched into the sea a few miles from Belize.

Alex and Carli were as charmed as Bucher and I at moving slowly up the river from the wharf, seeing our adopted city from an unaccustomed perspective. Riverfront homes with verandas overlooking the water alternated with run-down warehouses. Not far from the city, the ruler-straight Burdon Canal ran south from the Haulover to connect through lagoons with the Sibun River down the coast. Trees overhung the river so that, in narrow spots, one seemed to be moving through a dappled green tunnel.

We often cast or trolled for fish during these river runs. Sometimes we even caught them. The noisiness of our family group probably scared off more fish than our bait attracted.



One day Carli was “fishing,” a procedure that involved my holding a rod, with or without her companion grasp. A Frigate Bird, attracted by her lure, dove and devoured it. We barely saw what was happening until the massive bird soared upward, and Carli’s reel began humming. Bucher, white-faced, leaped to the stern of the boat and cut the line with a knife that appeared as if by magic in his hand.

Carli was screaming with excitement, “I caught a bird. I caught a bird.”

Bucher quietly remarked to me, “All I could think of was one of the children without an eye if he had spit out that plug.”

Easter in Belize

April 1954

Easter approached. The holiday vied with Christmas celebrations in importance to British Hondurans, and probably came out ahead. Lent was observed quite strictly by both Catholics and Protestants, and the end of it was an enormous occasion. The four-day Easter holiday closed Belize down completely. Workers escaped as soon after noon on the Thursday as employers would permit. Good Friday was observed with solemn devotion, and after that, it was pure celebration that lasted until early Tuesday morning.

Pete McNab with his wife, Kay, a delightful Canadian couple, arrived at the Fort George Hotel to fill in while the manager was on holiday. They were about our age, from Toronto, and had an enchanting four-year-old daughter, Colleen, who fitted nicely between our children's five and two years. The McNabs had been operating a Colonial Development Corporation hotel on Eleuthra in the Bahamas. They were enthusiastic about the opportunity to see Belize and were still aglow at having recently won many thousands of dollars in the Irish Sweepstakes on the first ticket they ever had bought.

Kay and I joined forces to make a traditional Easter for our combined children.

Dyed eggs were the prime requisite. Belize always ran short of eggs at Eastertime, either because of the heavy demand for them for holiday baking or because the hens gave up work early along with the rest of the populace. Even the prestigious Fort George was cut short on its egg order.

Kay put her basket over her arm and, with her maid in tow, departed from the hotel, determined to rout out any eggs lurking in the market. Each vendor insisted that she had none. Finally Kay found a hefty Creole woman who agreed to supply two eggs. As she was fumbling for change

to pay for them, Kay heard a hen cackling. Kay insisted on inspecting the well-hidden nest and found three more eggs, which she promptly purchased at a price that horrified her watching maid.

Back at the Fort George, Kay coaxed a dozen precious eggs from the reluctant chef. We sent both nursemaids, with all three children, to our rooms and used Kay's veranda for our dyeing operations. We had a wonderful time reverting to a cherished childhood activity and wondered how old our three should be before we let them take over the fascinatingly messy project.

Thoughtful Gene Maestre, without telling us, had included our families in his order for Easter baskets brought down by the ASA pilots. The colorful gifts were large, elaborately filled, and unavailable in Belize shops. Kay and I wondered to each other if it would mean as much to the children to have traditional Easter baskets as it did to their mothers to be able to provide them.



The McNabs and Scotts conferred that evening after dinner and decided that Easter morning was one time we would not be ogres about hushing the children. Both families normally tried hard to keep domestic noise to a minimum. The hotel had few guests, as it happened, over the four-day holiday, but the children were surprisingly good Easter Sunday, despite their excitement.

After church we asked Kay, Pete, and Colleen to join us in a drive. Both nursemaids had the day off; Pete's assistant was on duty; and we all thought that after the early morning Easter Egg Hunt, we could do the hotel the courtesy of removing the children temporarily. We loaded the two families into the ranch wagon and took our first run over what became our favorite short drive.

We started out the Western Highway, through Lord's Ridge Cemetery, where the road divides briefly, and continued west for about twelve miles. A turn to the right took us on a slow drive over a poor road through

scruffy, wild country, past isolated small frame houses on stilts, to the wooded green shade of the lush growth bordering the Belize River in the little village of Burrell Boom.

The name came from the chain or *boom* stretched across the river to catch mahogany logs drifting down from logging sites far inland. At the boom, logs were chained together in rafts hundreds of feet long in preparation for being towed down the river and out to ships waiting in the harbor.

A wooden ferry, laboriously cranked by hand, carried passengers and one or two vehicles at a time across the river. From the far side it was a short ride to the main Northern Highway, and back to Belize. The entire triangular trip was about twenty five miles long and took two hours or more.



Residents of Belize enjoyed Easter in a variety of ways. People who owned vacation homes on St. George's Caye, a few miles from the city, not far from the reef, packed up their families and moved out for the holiday. People with ties to the villages along the coast piled into sailboats and went home for visits. Those whose families lived inland took less comfortable transport in stake-body trucks, sitting on bare boards stretched from one side to the other. They shared space with cages of poultry and occasionally a cow or pig, wedged sideways between the board seats.

Those who remained in the city paraded. The informal processions of families strolling along the sea walls on Easter Sunday began around dawn and continued until dark. All of the churches—and there were many—had services off and on throughout the day, so there was always a crowd going to or leaving church. It was a tradition to promenade about town, enjoying the spring breezes, and showing off new clothes.

Men, women, and children seemed newly outfitted. British Hondurans were very style-conscious and fought to get hold of British and American fashion books. Seamstresses were skillful, copying from pictures and

working without patterns. A wide range of materials was available. Easter outfits were marvels of style and good taste.

The parading children were enchanting. Solemn little girls wore pastel dresses with lace-edged round collars, fitted bodices, puffed sleeves, and full skirts of dimity, organdy, net, or dotted Swiss, over billowing petticoats. Sisters, whose proud heads formed a series of stair steps as the girls diminished in size, walked daintily down the sea wall in identical dresses. Often little brothers wore crisp short-sleeved shirts in colors to match their sisters', over short white pants. I remember counting families of seven, eight, and nine children in stately single file, greeting the holiday bedecked in pristine outfits alike in cut and color.

Each year brought a different favorite color. One year there would be a preponderance of yellow; another year, pink; and another, aqua or lavender or spring green.

Through the years I watched the Easter parade with undiminished pleasure until, in time, the parades themselves disappeared.

Parades

April – May 1954

From letter dated April 25, 1954

The parade on the Queen's Birthday was, for Belize, magnificent!

Two things made it distinctly different from any other parade I've ever seen: 1) it began on time, and 2) the quite enormous crowd was completely orderly and at no point pressed forward beyond the line loosely established by the police.

When we arrived, the entire parade was lined up in front of the Governor's stand. His Excellency made a formal review, walking past each row, immaculate in his white uniform with a helmet topped by an enormous, waving white plume.

After the review, the Governor made a short speech in honor of the Queen, and the soldiers gave a triple "Hip, hip, hurrah," taking off their caps. (You should have seen the Police trying to get their helmets back on quickly and correctly without losing grip on their guns.)

Next was a rifle salute to Her Majesty, with the Infantry, Home Guard, and Police firing together. The first two volleys were perfectly synchronized, but on the third, one of the Police beat the signal. Gradually the rest of the bunch fired, and the final salute sounded like a nest of machine guns rather than a volley of rifles.

In the parade were our resident battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry; the Police in tight black trousers, beautifully fitted white tunics, and white helmets; the police band in the same uniforms; the Home Guard, dressed in khaki uniforms and strutting even more impressively than the Cornishmen; the Firemen, with their trousers tucked rakishly into shiny black boots; several troupes each of Boy Scouts, Sea Scouts, and Girl Guides; and a group of uniformed Red Cross women, led by a Red Cross man whose shouted commands to his marching females were the

loudest, most military, most clipped, and most masterful of the entire procession.



From letter dated May 10, 1954

One of the children's favorite occupations is watching the "parade" on Mondays and Thursdays when the Home Guard train at the barracks a block away. Last week was particularly exciting because, in addition to the regular drills, the Police had a review and parade on Friday afternoon. Alex had been telling me about it, but did not know what the parade was...he just knew that Sonia had told him she was going to come back early after their naps so that they would be sure to be there on time.

The Governor was to present medals to the police; when someone mentioned the word *medals*, Alex mistook it for *metals*. Just as they left that afternoon, I discovered that Alex was expecting to see Knights in Shining Armor. I had to do a quick job of explaining and pacifying, because he was terribly disappointed. He enjoyed it, though, because the police always look impressive in their sparking white uniforms.

Then Saturday the children went to another "parade," though they didn't know what it was. Sonia and the McNabb's nursemaid Ella took our two and Colleen McNabb to watch because they thought the children would enjoy it. It was a huge funeral. An elderly nurse from the Belize Hospital had died, and since she was much loved here and a very active member of her lodge, they really had a wing-ding send-off for her!

The police band played a funeral march; there were mounted police and literally hundreds of men and women in lodge uniforms. The women wore white dresses with blue belts and wide blue ribbons on their white hats. Children were in similar white and blue outfits. Men wore black suits with variously colored things that were a cross between a stole and a waistcoat, along with medals, ribbons, sashes, etc.

The hearse was drawn by two horses with flowing manes. The hearse itself was a glass box mounted in wrought-iron with black plumes floating

high above each corner post, and a bronze casket covered with flowers within. (Alex was very much impressed with that, but had absolutely no idea what was in it.)



And in case you're wondering how we like living in the house, with luck I'll live long enough to find out. This is the sixth weekend that we "couldn't fail" to get in! There's every reason to believe that we will spend tomorrow night there...but I'll believe it when I see it.

They have been finishing the floors over the weekend; Bucher blew his top Friday, and we got some action. However, there still is the long wait between sanding, caulking, and the different coats of oil or whatever they use on the floors.

Half our stuff is piled in the kitchen, and the rest has been riding around town all weekend locked in the back of the car. I got it out of the stores that had been holding my purchases since Easter because we hoped to move in last Saturday.

And even when we do get in, we will have carpenters under foot indefinitely while they build kitchen cabinets, the divider between living room and dining room, screening (they put screens in the living room and left the rest of the house unscreened!), picketing under the house (the houses are on stilts, and white pickets enclose the carport and underneath mess and also make a cool place for the children to play), and then finish the fence. You have to have a high fence around your entire yard because there is so much petty thievery.

Home of Our Own

May 1954

“It’s moving day.”

Alex’s excited exclamation brought Bucher and me out of bed in a hurry after three months in the Fort George Hotel. It was late May when we finally carried our suitcases up the newly painted steps of our rented house on Eyre Street.

There was still a lot to be done. The varnish on the floors had not quite dried in the humid weather. We avoided the living room for a day and a half (which wasn’t difficult since it didn’t have a scrap of furniture in it) and walked stickily through the bedrooms, not giving a darn for the eventual looks of the floors because we were so annoyed at having been kept out of the house so long.

The house was closer to Alex’s school. Almost directly across the street from the house, a short lane leads to Memorial Park where the children play in the afternoon under Sonia’s watchful eyes.

House and Yard

Our new two-bedroom, one-bath home was built up on stilts in the common style intended to protect homes from flooding during monsoon-type rains or, worse, hurricanes. A driveway led to a sheltered area under the house, where we parked the ranch wagon. The house was wooden with clapboard siding painted white and with dark green shutters and trim. The roof was unpainted corrugated galvanized steel—locally called *zinc*—that reflected the brilliant sun.

It really was a very nice little house. The rooms were quite large, with ten-foot ceilings for coolness, large windows, and adequate closet space.

Bucher and I took the front bedroom and settled the two children in the other. Alex may have missed his private bedroom, bath, and his own

small, screened yard opening from them in the Sarasota house, but Carli probably was happy to have company in her strange surroundings.

We had repainted the living / dining room area before moving in, replacing an insipid pink with dark green walls set off by stark white ceiling and woodwork. Bucher designed and had built a mahogany bookcase, large enough to be used as a room divider, but able to be moved from one to another of what became a long procession of rental houses in Belize.

Some while after we moved in, our kitchen was outfitted with apartment-size appliances that we had bought second hand in the U.S. and shipped down. The gas stove was a special delight and relief. Before it arrived, I was a hazard to myself, the house, and most of wood-built Belize, operating our borrowed Coleman stove. Mother taught me too well that matches were dangerous, and their tiny flames have been a horror to me all my life. Perhaps that is one reason I never smoked.

The stove-lighting routine of turning a knob, pumping up the fuel tank, priming the burner, lighting a match, and waiting to make sure that the stove was operating correctly, intimidated, but did not defeat me. In justice to that Coleman stove, which we were grateful to have had loaned to us, I must admit that although it was older than I, it was a gem, once I accepted its idiosyncrasies, and my own.



The house was not screened; most weren't. The mosquitoes were bad at night, and the flies became ghastly shortly after we moved in (they are somewhat seasonal). There were the equivalent of two or three lots behind us before the next house, but everyone kept poultry, so I had visions of typhoid, yellow fever, typhus, malaria, and Other Hideous Tropical Diseases with every bug I saw.

Bucher quickly ordered the traditional wood-framed screens that could be fitted into the lower opening of a double-hung window and removed when the window had to be closed against sudden, torrential tropical

rains. Somehow the rains preferred to come in the middle of the night and waken only me, so I was the one who had to stand half-naked in blowing rain while I wrestled screens out of the opening so I could close windows against the deluge.

Bucher also screened the front porch. Open to the prevailing breezes, it became a favored spot. Bucher reinforced the screening with heavy hardware cloth so that with the porch door bolted, we could leave the living room door wide open for extra ventilation without worrying about intruders, winged or shod.



The proposed fence of white picketing had not yet been built by the time we moved in. Without a fence, we were at the mercy of casual thieves. My Midwestern propriety was outraged when Bucher's underthings disappeared from the clothesline under the house. A little later someone walked off with a new pair of slacks that Bucher had bought on a quick trip to Atlanta. I had hand-washed them to make sure they were handled carefully. When the police asked how much they had cost, I could not answer because we had not yet received the bill. We spoke to Dickey, our landlord, again about our missing fence.



When we were settled, Bucher built a playhouse for the children. Their grandparents sent from Michigan a set of playground equipment with swing, climbing rope, ladder, and teeter-totter, which delighted our two and attracted playmates because this sort of yard "toy" is rare in Belize.

Alex was a new person. He had his tools, and there was the usual scrap pile under the house that you get from a new building, so he stayed there in the shade two-thirds of the day.

And two little boys that Alex met in the park came calling the day we moved in and came to play frequently thereafter. They were beautifully behaved children and Alex was happy as a prince playing host and having company.



Carli on playground equipment, 1995

Each school day, Alex walked the curving half-block to the grilled gate into St. Catherine's. Carli missed Alex through the hours when he was in school, though fortunately, she had a few playmates in the neighborhood, and Colleen McNabb's nursemaid brought her over from the Fort George at least once a day, so Carli had company.

Laundry

In the Eyre Street house I was faced with a problem I had not had in the hotel—laundry. The work was laborious and time-consuming. Sonia could not add it to what she already was doing. It was obvious that I would have to hire a laundress. Rose joined our menage.

Rose was a large, quiet, rather shy woman, a fine representative of the honest and honorable British Honduran people I so rapidly was coming to respect and cherish. She set about doing our laundry in the Belize fashion. She washed everything—clothing, sheets, and towels—by hand in large galvanized tubs. She scrubbed the laundry on an old-fashioned scrubbing board, rinsed it in carefully rationed water, and hung it on clotheslines strung under the house, out of the sun, to dry in the constant breezes.

Sheets and pillowcases, however, Rose took dripping from the soapy water and spread flat on the grass to bleach as they dried. She rinsed the bed linens in water tinted with bluing and hung them on lines for a final

drying. Later Carli's white school uniforms received the same careful attention.

I learned never to run short of the little square blocks of laundry "Blue" that were Rose's second line of defense against yellowed sheets. Cakes of bluing disappeared so quickly that one would have thought they were candy-coated.

We had an electric iron, to Rose's delight. She was used to the kerosene-heated irons most people had.

Neighbors

When we moved into the Eyre Street house, we became friendly with a family who lived half a block away on the corner of Eyre and Cork Streets. Marie Gabourel Roe, a British Honduran whose father was a high Customs official, and Gordon Roe, who had been stationed in Belize in the British Army and returned to marry Marie, welcomed us to the neighborhood. Their three sons fitted nicely with our children in ages. Brian was older than Alex; Malcolm, exactly Alex's age; and Adrian, Carli's. They walked to and from school together and played at one home or the other regularly.

Marie was straightforward, a superb cook, and the sort of mother whose house and heart expand to fit the number of children available. Gordon was a businessman who, in the near future, would go out on his own, to great success. They were warm, delightful friends and invaluable guides to life in Belize.



Carli and Alex by stairs of Eyre Street house, 1955

Mealtime Challenges

June 1954

My first major adjustments to living in a house were planning meals without access to half the foods with which I was familiar, and learning to shop in the public market.

Our staff swelled to three when Bucher hired a man to build a fishing skiff at the house. He stayed on to do carpentry and odd jobs around the house. We had known Hector at the hotel, where he was a barman until being laid off for the slow summer season. He approached Bucher for a job, saying that he was a shipwright and carpenter by training. At the end of Hector's first day, I was amazed to find that I had acquired the magazine rack I had wanted in the bookcase, and that he was working on much-needed shelves for my bathroom cupboards.

My domestic experience to date had involved a family of four, one of them small and one an infant. Suddenly I was catering for seven. With no direction on my part, a two-pot system evolved. Sonia stopped her housework at 10:00 every morning and retired to the kitchen where she cut, pared, chopped, and boiled, creating great pots of food for the staff. Somehow she also managed, grudgingly I suspected, to prepare simple U.S.-style meals for us.



Sonia did most of my marketing, stopping at the city market early in the morning on her way to work. She knew what she wanted, from whom to buy it, and what it should cost.

Despite my first revulsion at the city market, I learned to shop there when necessary. I found that the odor wasn't quite as repugnant once I had figured out its components. It was a pungent mixture of freshly killed meat lying exposed along wooden counters in the humid heat; of quickly over-ripening, unwashed fruits and vegetables; and of dirty, dusty,

trampled, stained, never-swept floors. The blend of aromas was tinged for the better by the faint, clean, salty scent of freshly caught fish.

I found some stands I liked in the market. Gracious as they were, and whether the vendors were Spanish- or Creole-speaking, I had a feeling that they were laughing at me. It was obvious that I did not know what I was doing.

My first visit was to buy eggs. I searched up and down the rows of stalls, finally found a dozen, paid for them, then waited for the squat little Spanish vendor to give them to me. Finally I made a futile sort of motion toward the eggs.

“Where you bag?” she asked.

Naturally I was empty-handed, and I hardly could fit a dozen eggs into my pocketbook. I ended up buying a paper bag, for 2 cents, in which to carry my eggs home.

Sonia had bought a large straw market bag to carry for marketing, but I usually forgot to take it. The paper-bag lady always broke into a happy smile and reached for her largest sack when she saw me coming.



Our new neighbor Gordon Roe, as much to keep his family supplied as to supplement the family income, raised laying hens. He offered to sell us eggs. I was delighted at acquiring a steady supply of fresh eggs.

Until we started buying eggs from Gordon, I expected to find three or four rotten eggs in each dozen. We had limited our use of eggs to cooking, rather than eating them in splendor for breakfast because, although they looked like eggs, the ones we bought in the market had almost no flavor. Gordon’s eggs not only actually tasted like eggs, but the whites sat high in glorious coherence instead of flowing freely, a watery slime. Acquiring a steady supply of Gordon’s lovely, dependable “proper” eggs was joy untold.



Bucher and I invited Frank Richards, whom we had met while living at the hotel, for dinner soon after moving. His wife had returned to England to have their first baby, and he was lonely. I asked Sonia to pick up lobster at the market on her way to work. To my horror, she arrived that morning without my main course, explaining that it was so expensive she refused to buy it.

“A shilling, Mum, for a tiny, little one. That’s too dear.”

I appreciated Sonia’s care about prices, even though 20 cents (U.S. dollar equivalent) for a lobster tail, instead of the usual 15 cents, still looked like an incredible bargain to me.

I went back to the market myself, but by that time, the lobster had been sold. I decided to settle for king mackerel steaks. The fishmonger had about a third of a nice mackerel lying alongside another fine, complete fish. I pointed to the latter.

“May I please have three thick steaks from that fish.”

“Yes, Mum, I cut them from this fish. Plenty left,” he said, raising his knife over the cut fish.

“There isn’t enough of that fish left for steaks as thick as I want them,” I protested.

“Oh, yes, Mum, plenty fish left.”

“Fine,” I replied, adding firmly, “but I want my steaks cut from *that* fish.”

The man happily set about exactly what he had planned to do all the time. He sliced two steaks off his cut fish and then ran into the bony head.

“Sorry, Mum, just two,” he said, starting to weigh them.

I told him firmly that he could keep them.

“You didn’t cut them as thick as I wanted, and you didn’t cut them off the right fish. Now you can get busy and do as I ask, or I’ll buy my fish from someone else.”

He looked as startled as if a rabbit had attacked him, shrugged, and gave me exactly what I wanted. I felt like a successful general.



Soon after we arrived in Belize, while we still were living in the Fort George Hotel, Bucher began importing certain foodstuffs through ASA, the cargo airline. The hotel chef was his main customer. Some things were too expensive to import. Freight on lettuce was far more than the cost of the lettuce. Chickens were expensive, but it was worth it to the hotel to have fryers amenable to attack by tooth. Imported eggs, surprisingly, were cheaper than the local ones, even with freight charges added.

Furthermore, they were reliably good.

Our imported hams were sweet and cheaper than the Belize variety. Local hams were small, dry, and smoked to hold without refrigeration in a country where most homes were equipped only with food safes. These were screened cupboards on tall legs designed to protect food from the usual assortment of household pests—rodents, roaches, and flies.

Imported beef was expensive, but it was tender and did not have the faintly spoiled flavor of cooked local beef. The hotel was happy to have it available.

After we moved into the Eyre Street house, I continued to plan meals around generous use of fish and seafood, but we were delighted to be able to spoil ourselves occasionally with imported meat. As it happened, the importing lasted only a short time for reasons I have forgotten, so I learned to cater using the foods available locally.



One of my first adjustments in planning menus was learning that the values of meats were exactly the opposite of the ones I had become used to during and following the War. Here, chicken and pork, including ham, were fantastically expensive. Beef was the cheapest. It wasn't very good beef, but it was edible, which was more than could be said for the chicken. Of course, fish and lobster were the best buys. It was a joy to live

where lobster not only was an economic possibility, but where it was so cheap that one couldn't afford not to eat it.

Belize lobster was elegant. Technically it is a crayfish like the Florida "spiny lobster." We found it sweeter and more tender than the Florida variety, though not as rich as its cousin, the Maine lobster.

We fixed it in a variety of ways, hot or cold, plain or with a sauce. Amusingly, Alex, our funny little boy who never willingly ate anything but hot dogs or peanut butter, could have eaten Lobster Mayonnaise every day...and did while we were in the hotel.



The first time I asked Sonia to buy a chicken it was with the happy idea that I was ordering an economical meal. It wasn't, and the chicken she brought home was squawking as loudly as I wanted to squawk when I saw it.

I was a city girl. I was used to having my chickens arrive at my home cleaned, dismembered, and packaged in cellophane. The cackling creature in my kitchen unnerved me. Sonia tied its legs together, tossed it onto the back porch, and got on with her housework.

Somewhat later, I heard Sonia and Alex walk down to the back yard, accompanied by a great squawking and flapping of wings. I gathered up daughter Carli and got very busy in my bedroom, the door tightly shut as an ineffective barrier to sound.

When we could hear Sonia and Alex in the kitchen, Carli joyously escaped from my unwanted protection to join them. She dashed back to me a few moments later shrieking, "Sonia is burning the chicken."

Sonia had poured boiling water over the defunct bird to loosen the feathers. Neither child was the least bit upset by the entire procedure so there was no point my giving them the impression that killing chickens was not one of life's prettier aspects. And I couldn't help thanking my stars for Sonia. Heaven knows I never could kill and pluck a chicken.

The chicken, cooked, was no more attractive than it had been alive. It was fryer-size and plump enough. However, I never had touched anything that felt quite like that chicken before cooking. It was firm and it looked like a chicken, but it was cool and unyielding like an unripe plum. I decided to boil it.

The cut-up chicken was put into imaginatively seasoned water and boiled for two hours. A long-tined fork barely would pierce it. Another hour of boiling brought to the table a well seasoned, well-smothered, thoroughly cooked, tough chicken whose cost would have provided us with several succulent lobster dinners.



One day before the arrival of my gas stove, Sonia bought a nice beef roast. The Coleman stove offered me only one option for cooking it. I browned the roast in hot fat, simmered it for a couple of hours, drained it, re-browned it, added cooked vegetables, made a gravy, and cooked it a little longer as a pot roast. It was delicious in flavor and unbelievably tough. Using a pressure cooker helped tenderize later beef pot roasts.

It was physically painful for me to take a beautiful sirloin tip, tenderize it overnight in the refrigerator with Adolph's, and then cook it for three hours. However, the meat came to the table tender, and delicious to anyone who likes well-done beef. This did not include our family. We preferred our beef pleasantly pink.



Conch fritters were one of Sonia's specialties. Conch meat was tenderized by pounding and by marinating in lime juice. Then the finely minced conch meat was combined with chopped onions and hot peppers in a regular fritter batter, and fried golden in lumpy patties. Carli would eat them until she burst.



Although we did not often serve dessert, we all adored Sonia's coconut cream, served instead of unavailable whipped cream. She grated coconut very fine, squeezed the juice out with her hands, poured a little water over the coconut meat, and squeezed it again and again. The resulting liquid was strained carefully, then refrigerated. The thick coconut cream rose to the top, was skimmed off like cream and was spooned over desserts.



We settled into a pattern of meals that combined whatever American-style dishes we could manage with the abundance of the tropics.

Tropical fruits enriched breakfasts, lunches, and dinners—pineapple so delicate it could not be shipped out of the country; sweet and juicy citrus; mangoes; bananas and their larger cousins, plantains; papayas; melons of all kinds; and buttery-smooth avocados that British Hondurans ate as a breakfast fruit. In addition, there were fruits unfamiliar to us: soursop, which was made into ice cream; custard apple; mamee apple; and tiny, acrid craboo. City streets were hazardous during mango season because of the slippery skins carelessly dropped on walkways.



One locally produced item quickly became a favorite of the children's—"Squash." This was not the vegetable I had hated as a child, but a bottled sweetened concentrate of citrus juice that could be diluted with water to make a refreshing soft drink. The same product line, improved, and expanded to include lime and tangerine, as well as the original orange and grapefruit squashes, is bottled and exported today.

Lucky Win

Mid 1954

The government made a pleasant profit from the lottery. Vendors made a killing. At five cents per ticket, the lottery was within reach. I kept thinking of how quickly nickels could multiply into dollars for people who could not afford to throw them away.

My sanctimoniousness was undermined when Sonia arrived one morning to announce breathlessly that she had won first prize, \$130, a fortune to her. She admitted that she had bought a ten-cent ticket every Sunday since the lottery began.

After I swallowed (unchewed) my noble lectures about the evils of gambling, and after we both had congratulated her warmly, Bucher and I asked, almost in unison, “You’re going to take care of the money, aren’t you?”

“I’m going to buy a cycle,” Sonia replied proudly.

Bicycles were the common form of transportation. Alternatives were walking, donkey carts, decrepit taxis, and a relatively few private vehicles. Bicycles were treasured possessions. Good English bikes sold for the equivalent of about US\$45.

Sonia lived on the other side of the river at some distance from her work, and she walked back and forth four times a day. (She was off for three hours every afternoon, as per local custom.) We felt she would be making a fine investment.

When Sonia arrived for work on Monday after collecting her winnings, she had a receipt for the bicycle. She took her purchase to the police station to be licensed that afternoon, and from then on, she was one of the elite.

U.S. Independence Day

July 4, 1954 and 1955

Celebrating the Fourth of July in a British Crown Colony was a delightful incongruity.

The United States had a consulate, not an embassy, in British Honduras. It was in a colonnaded old Colonial frame house at the corner of Gabourel Lane and Hutson Street, with its side fence adjoining St. Catherine's Convent and School. The battle between tradition and termites necessitated regular repairs, but the lovely old building has survived to the present.

The year we arrived in Belize (1954), the Consul celebrated Independence Day with a large cocktail party held in the Fort George Hotel. Danny Powell, the new Fort George Hotel manager who came from Montego Bay, Jamaica, to take over when the McNabbs left, swathed the hotel completely in red, white, and blue bunting and hung the biggest and newest of American flags in the lounge where the party was held. Naturally, the British flag was flying properly on the hotel flagpole, as protocol required.

Because the Fourth happened to be on a Sunday, His Excellency the Governor, Her Britannic Majesty's Representative in the Crown Colony of British Honduras, was not able to accept his invitation—policy forbade it. He sent a message, however, congratulating the Consul on the national holiday, adding, "Britain considers the United States her most successful colony."

[Editor's Note 7 on page 384]



The following year (1955), Bucher and I left the cocktail party at the consulate and went to the hotel to meet some friends who had been stranded by the weather. Over the preceding weekend, a large crowd of TAN airline officials had come down from Miami with their wives and

families for some fishing and skin diving. The brother of one woman had flown up from Guatemala (in his own plane) with a friend who also lives there and a most attractive girl from New York, who had been visiting her mother. The TAN people left on Monday on the regular flight back to Miami, but the private pilot, Chris Hempstead, and his group got only a little way down the coast before the weather got so bad that they had to turn back. That left them stranded here, knowing no one but us...and we barely had met them. Anyway, we called and asked them please to join us for the annual club Fourth-of-July dance and then dropped by the hotel after the cocktail party to see if they would accept the invitation.

They all were about our age and very good company. Chris had been here before and had talked to Bucher at length about possibly building a boat, making more-or-less final arrangements for a 25-foot cruiser. The other man, Tom Kean, didn't seem to have any business here other than as a sort-of copilot and friend, so I gathered that he just came along for the fishing. And Joan Gerli was a most attractive and pleasant girl, who I was amazed to learn has an apartment with her mother in New York directly across the street from our favorite apartment on 73rd Street. I even recognized the names of her delicatessen men!

We talked them into going to the dance with us, and Bucher loaned Chris a shirt and tie, since they had come down just for a sport weekend. It was a good dance, though we spent a lot more time sitting around and talking than dancing. And really, we had a much better time having the Guatemaltecos* ...who all were Americans...with us.

[Editor's Note 8 on page 385]

* *Guatemalteco* is Spanish for *Guatemalan*.

Rainy Season

From letter dated July 10, 1954

The rainy season really is here.

It began early this year, and it looks as if most of the lumbermen will go broke. They spend the dry season cutting mahogany trees way back in the jungle...working their way through incredible underbrush with bulldozers. It is such an arduous job that they literally wear out a bulldozer in one season and always buy new ones each year. They drag the logs out to the edge of the large rivers or to the highways at the last possible moment.

If, as has happened this year, the rains begin early, the logs still are lying in the forest where they were cut, and the dozers cannot get through the mud to get them out. They stay there till the following season. The lumbermen have to get out eighty percent of their logs just to break even, and make money only on that last twenty percent. Since most of them got out only about half of their logs this year, a lot of them are going under. The big operators probably can stand it, but a lot of the smaller ones will be out for good, particularly since they operate on extremely high overdrafts from the bank as it is and have nothing with which to cover their losses.



Most of the time the rain quite conveniently appears during the night with, characteristically, first about half an hour of stifling, breathless calm, then a sudden cold wind developing almost to gale force, and finally a deluge that begins and ends with the force of a pail of water being dumped without any slackening, either before or after the downpour. However, last week we had the most amazing rain I ever have seen. For two nights and one entire day it rained steadily without even a momentary let-up...a steady deluge, one solid sheet of water coming down unbroken for approximately forty hours.

~ ~ ~

Aside from the rain, the weather is lovely. We did have one very hot and humid spell about a month ago. It wasn't quite as bad as some I remember in the States, however. And since then, this rain has kept things cool enough so that even on hot, cloudless days you aren't particularly uncomfortable. The amazing thing is that it feels as cold as it does. After that first night of severe rain, we all got up half frozen; I pulled out long-sleeved shirts and sweaters for all of us, and then we noticed that the thermometer showed 82 degrees!

~ ~ ~



Carli and Alex with Louis the Beagle, 1955

Dog Days

July 1954

In July after our arrival in February, our “family” increased by three. Our Beagles arrived from Sarasota. In honor of their appearance, the long-promised picket fence was erected. However, the dog pen under the house was not finished in time. We kept the dogs on the screened porch for a day while their enclosure was completed. This suited all of us, dogs and humans alike, because we were so delighted to be reunited.

They all looked wonderful...perfect health, shiny coats, and with a friendliness that showed that they must have had a certain amount of affection as well as pure professional care during their five months at the vet's.


The senior female, Eagle, was Alex's christening present from his Godfather, Louis Bondurant, a long-time Atlanta friend. Alex was two by the time Louis found the promised puppy; Georgia Beagle owners were reluctant to part with their dogs.

The name was little Alex's own: “Beagle name Eagle.” That was not acceptable to the American Kennel Club, so we registered her as “Mr. Alex's Eagle.” When he was small, our son was called *Mister Alex* or just *Mister* almost as much as he was called *Alex*. The usage originated to differentiate him from his grandfather, for whom he was named, Georgia Tech's famed “Coach Alex” (William Alexander).


The other two dogs were Eagle's puppies. “Caril's Uncle Louis” was a handsome dog, perfectly marked, with a loving disposition and an utter lack of brains. Courage was not his middle name.

“Kate's Miss Minx” was the puppy I had insisted on keeping though Bucher and I had agreed to keep only Louis. She was a sassy thing, as adventurous as Caril's Louis was timid, and I fell in love with her. Carli, age about two and a half, insisted that she and I trade dogs. She adored Miss Minx on sight and said that I could have Louis.

As it happened, I “had” all three dogs. Not only was I the one responsible for feeding, bathing, and training, but I would have fought any of the family for the privilege. Bucher and the children were perfectly content to bask in the dogs’ enthusiastic affection and let me take care of details.




Louis had one quaint habit that drove me crazy. He would get into the dogs’ water pan (which was the size and shape often used as a baby’s bath pan) with all four feet and dig as if he were in dirt. Of course, it scattered the water everywhere and left the pan filthy. When he tired of that, he would get Miss Minx on his team, and they would play tug-of-war with the pan all over their pen.



Bucher bought a ton each of rock and sand to surface the dogs’ pen, which was a mire of mud. The rock came from the government quarry, where it was broken up by prisoners. The sand was dug from the bar at the Sibun River mouth, loaded into heavily built lighters, and sailed back to be unloaded shovelful by shovelful over the city seawall.

After the rock was dumped into place, I took a rake and started trying to spread it. The rock was too heavy for me to shovel, and I barely could rake it. After exhausting myself doing about two-thirds of the job, I sat down on the highest pile of rock, surrounded by the dogs, and began tossing rocks lightly to the far side of the pen. It was slow work but restful. I sang as I worked, and it was only later that I realized I was sitting on the rocks, lustily singing:

*If I had the wings of an angel,
Over these prison walls I would fly...*



Eagle, who had been impossible on a leash in the States, apparently looked over the situation in Belize and decided that her only chance to

leave the yard was to behave. Without training, she began to “heel” as if she had been doing it her entire life.

The only problem with taking Eagle out was that the puppies howled the entire time she was away. They never had been separated from her and were sure she would not return. It must have been unnerving for the neighbors, but Belize was one place I did not have to worry about that. Nearby yards harbored yapping dogs plus cacophonous roosters, turkeys, ducks, and geese.

One day I took Eagle with me to do a quick errand. The first shop did not have what I needed, nor did the second, third, or fourth. I ended up having to go to almost every shop in town accompanied by my well behaved dog. I knew that most Belize families kept dogs to protect their property against the rampant petty thievery, but had not realized that a preponderance of people in Belize were terrified of strange dogs. Crowds on the narrow sidewalks parted in great waves like the Red Sea as I walked by with my innocent Eagle.



Someone left the gate open one day. The dogs got out. We searched the neighborhood frantically and fruitlessly. After a time that seemed endless to me, but probably brief to the dogs, Eagle returned, tail waving happily, followed by her puppies.

That evening Miss Minx was more quiet than usual and would not leave me. In uncharacteristic fashion, she laid her head in my lap, looking at me lovingly, and refusing the children’s invitations to play. The next morning I found her standing stiff-legged and shuddering in the pen. Belize had no veterinarian back then.

Soon after, Minx died of the poison she apparently had found on her foray outside our protected yard. I was shattered and Carli, inconsolable.



Eagle and Louis laid claim to the rear third of the ranch wagon on our Sunday drives. One weekend we drove up the road to a small creek we had found, a spot far from any signs of habitation. I always was uneasy about turning the dogs loose to run, but my Georgia husband, who had grown up with packs of Beagles, was even more strongly opposed to confining them.

We parked, and Bucher opened the tailgate of the ranch wagon. The dogs leaped out and raced in happy tandem across the field to disappear behind a slight rise. Within moments—before we had time to get Alex and Carli out of the car and lock up—the dogs were racing back toward us, chased by a wildly gesticulating man brandishing a stout stick.

Bucher opened the tailgate of the car, allowed the dogs to jump to safety, and turned to soothe their outraged pursuer. I stayed with the children while Bucher walked away with the irate stranger.

He returned after a few minutes with an expression halfway between laughter and sheepishness, five very dead chickens dangling from his hands. Bucher told us that our docile dogs had dashed directly into the poor man's poultry yard where Eagle slashed to one side, then the other, disabling the helpless birds while Louis followed behind to kill them. Bucher had paid double their value to the outraged farmer, had promised never again to turn the dogs loose in the area, and had been given the scrawny victims.

Bucher and I found that marriage is much happier if you ban the phrase "I told you so." We all managed to combine laughter with chagrin on the drive home. The dogs were utterly delighted with themselves and disgustingly bloody about their mouths. They obviously could not understand why they were treated as pariahs, rather than heroes.

Back at home the dogs were locked in their pen instead of being brought into the house as they normally were when we all were home. Bucher carried the chickens into the kitchen and without a word from his steely eyed wife, proceeded to draw and clean them so they could be refrigerated overnight.

Battle of St. George's Caye Day

September 1954

September brought the annual celebration of The Battle of St. George's Caye. This, according to occasionally debated history, was the glorious time on the Tenth of September, 1798, when slaves joined their Baymen masters to rout a Spanish armada that had the lack of good sense to sail into the shallow waters inside the reef, where they could not maneuver. It was the final futile attempt of the Spanish to seize the British settlements.

The Festivities surrounding celebration for the Tenth (which is spoken of in capital letters as we Americans speak of the Fourth) are wonderful. To begin with, they last almost two solid weeks. Beginning on the First of September, the town is draped with red, white, and blue bunting and pennants; the larger stores and public buildings and homes sport the most elaborate decorations and enormous Union Jacks; and even the humblest rickety shanties carry some tiny flag or crayoned bit of color. Nearer to the Tenth, palm fronds are cut by government employees and wired to the Swing Bridge that connects the two halves of the city and to every telephone pole along the main streets.

Enormous signs are festooned across the streets:

We Mingle the Baymen with God Save the Queen
 God Gave Us This Land; We Work to Keep It Ours
 God Save the Queen
 Shoulder to Shoulder the Baymen Fought


...and dozens of others

Children and adults alike decorate their bicycles (and there are thousands in Belize) with colored crepe paper. Cars sport signs and fly the British Flag. And everywhere there is a holiday spirit, plus a huge influx of people coming from the Districts to celebrate the Tenth in the Big City.

Each night from the first of the month on there is at least one, and usually more, scheduled activities...beauty contests (to choose Queen of the Bay),

singing contests (Voice of the Bay), band contests, essay contests, story contests (to fictionalize the Battle of St. George's Caye), radio-script contests, a float contest.

The pretty young women vying to be crowned Queen of The Bay are usually sponsored by Belize businesses. On the Tenth, the Queen and her court ride on a leading float in the colorful St. George's Caye Day parade.



We lived in a fairly strategic place to enjoy things. We were just one block from Memorial Park, where most of the contests or rallies were held, and could hear everything perfectly. Still, we were not so close that it was overwhelming. For example, we could hear the singing from the Voice of the Bay contest beautifully. It would have been very pleasant except that most contestants chose to sing the same song and invariably flatted the same notes. And the band contest was fun...at a distance. God knows what those brasses would have been like any closer up. They weren't in very good time, and I'm not convinced that they were all in the same key.

Furthermore, the parades began or ended at Memorial Park, and if we didn't want to go out to see them, we could sit on our front porch and watch them pass down the street about three doors away at the intersection. Since the houses are build up on stilts, and our front porch consequently was one floor above the street, we could see very easily.

The children saw even more of the activities than we did because some of them were staged in the park during their usual afternoon time there with Sonia. All the government (or in our terms, public) school children staged a big review in front of the Governor one afternoon. Bucher and I enjoyed just sitting on the porch and watching all the immaculately dressed little ones walking with their proud mamas to the park. And the floats were judged in the park another afternoon. However, they paraded past our intersection three times and then entered every parade for the rest of the Tenth celebration, so we had ample time to see them.



Two British Navy ships were in port during the festivities...both destroyer class. One brought the Regimental Band of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (we have a battalion stationed here). They beat Retreat one night and had a band concert another night, plus playing for some dances and one Regimental Officers' cocktail party. The other ship was doing some marine survey work in the area and stayed on. Anyway, there were dozens of sailors mingled in the crowds...most of them National Service boys of about 18 (you could spot them easily; they were the sailors without full beards!). Their uniforms were strange to us, of course...all white, shorts with white knee socks, unfitted boat-neck middie, and pancake hat sitting square on their heads.



The high point of the Celebrations came on the night of the Ninth. Every club in town has a dance. We actually went this time...principally because it was the Pickwick Club's traditional "Barn Dance," a euphemism meaning sport shirts for men and reasonably informal cotton dresses for women. Mike Maestre had invited us to every dance the club had since we arrived, and we had refused steadfastly, mainly on the grounds that we didn't have dress clothes with us.

We had a wonderful time. It was a normal festive occasion until midnight. Then the band began playing British Honduras' traditional patriotic songs and marches. Couples formed as large a circle as the room would allow and began a characteristic prancing-shuffling march around and around the room in time to the catchy music. Periodically they would break to fill the floor with dancing pairs, but soon would regroup into the marching circle.

If Bucher and I ever were allowed to dance together, I do not remember it. New friends grabbed us, danced and talked and told us how pleased they were that we had stayed in Belize. We were passed around to new partners so quickly that faces became a blur and names became impossible. It was the loveliest of warm welcomes. Bucher and I finally found each other again and were the first to leave...at one-thirty. Thereafter, people started

moving from one club to another and probably greeted the dawn still marching.



The morning of the Tenth brought official ceremonies at Memorial Park, with patriotic speeches and music by the Police and Volunteer Guard bands. The British Governor represented Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, resplendent in his choke-collar white dress uniform with a tall white plume dancing gracefully in the breeze from the top his white helmet. British troops attended him. And, of course, he traveled to and from his activities in his black limousine with grandly uniformed chauffeur, escorted by three uniformed well-mounted Mounted Police before and behind the car.

I really got to feel rather sorry for H.E. (the familiar nickname of His Excellency the Governor). I can't imagine how many parades he reviewed or how many awards he presented.

As the ceremonies ended, the parade moved off. There were uniformed squads of Police, Volunteer Guards, British troops, the Red Cross, Black



Tenth of September parade, 1950's

Cross Nurses, Volunteers of World War I. Bands small and large, were interspersed with elaborately decorated floats. Bicycles sped up and down the parade line, strips of colorful crepe paper fluttering in festive coils in their wheels. Large floats were on trucks; smaller ones were on donkey carts, the kind that swarm through the city...nothing but the rudest sort of platform built of unmatched lumber with the ends not even sawn off straight, mounted on wheels, and drawn by anything from a dainty-footed donkey to a husky mule or sway-backed horse.

The most elaborate was the Public Works Department float, a replica of its dredge, mounted on a good-size truck chassis. However, until my better-informed son corrected me, I thought it was a railroad car and wondered how anyone in Belize knew what a train looked like, why they would make one, and what a funny derrick it was on! Alex straightened me out with some disdain.

My favorite float was built on a donkey cart. It had an adobe hut, thatched with palm fronds, and almost life size (in height) in a little fenced yard with a Creole man apparently snoozing in his chair in front of it—all on



Float in Tenth of September parade, 1950's

the donkey cart pulled by a tiny animal. It was charming and would have won applause in any parade in the States, it was so well done.

British Hondurans marched. Great phalanxes of people, ten or twelve abreast, filled the spaces between floats, men in their groups, women in their own. They were happy celebrants, singing and moving together with a foot-shuffling, hip-swinging strut.

Great masses of people lined the streets of the city as the parade passed. Over and over, along the route, a few people would drop out of the parade, to be replaced by ten other joyous marchers who had been waiting for its arrival. The parade took an hour or more to pass as it wound its way through the main streets of Belize.

The children's parade followed in the afternoon. Teachers and children from all the schools in the city marched solemnly, each uniformed group separated slightly from the next. This time there was no music, just the endless shushing sound of soles on pavement. The little ones marched through the hottest part of the afternoon, the raging sun beating down on them. (Teachers and parents protested year after year, but it was another decade before the children's parades were abolished.)



Float in Tenth of September parade, 1960's

Storm Warning

September 1954

Letter dated September 27, 1954

Hurricane Gilda—I'm not sure that's her correct name, and anyway, I much prefer the more dignified and matter-of-fact phonetic-alphabet title of *George*. Furthermore, she held status as a hurricane for only a few hours after her birth and then diminished to the ignominious rating of "a small tropical disturbance."

We learned yesterday noon that she had made up just off the coast of Spanish Honduras and was headed this way. There wasn't too much excitement. Everyone brought his boat up into the river. Bucher helped tow some sailboats. People with power boats went out and warned people who had gone to the Cayes for the day, so they would come back to town. Merchants boarded up their stores, and some people boarded up their homes. We located a Coleman lantern and our flashlights, praised ourselves for having gas stove and icebox, checked our supply of beer, and stayed tuned to the local radio station. However, by eleven at night the storm was sixty miles away and we went on to bed.

Belize is leery of hurricanes. To the best of my knowledge, they've had only one...1931...but that almost leveled the town and killed 5,000 people. I have been hearing about it ever since I got here...it is that immediate in people's minds! And I got a really terrifying description of it this morning from Rose, who was a child at the time. As Bucher commented after being out for a little while this morning, "It's a wild-eyed bunch of people parading the streets this morning...but they're all out wandering!"

This morning the storm was reported forty miles from Belize and headed straight this way. However, we've had no barometric change, and there are reports from Stann Creek, some forty miles south, that they are having increasing wind and rain there. So, the storm may be passing inland below us.

To Bucher and me, the high point of the hurricane excitement is a peak of inconsistency that could be reached nowhere else in the world, I'm sure. To quote directly from the eight o'clock weather broadcast: "The storm is expected to move inland at Belize between nine and ten o'clock this morning. Our next weather report will be at ten o'clock this morning, and we will inform you further at that time."

Happy Children

October 1954

Letter dated October 26, 1954

Any of our earlier worries about whether it was fair to the children to bring them down to British Honduras certainly seem ridiculous now. They adore Belize, have dozens of friends, and have more activities than they can crowd into each day.

School is Alex's main interest in life, of course. He bounds off happily at least half an hour ahead of time, morning and noon, because he has to meet his friends and play before class begins. He enjoys doing his homework (i.e., writing...for example, "A is for apple," written six times) and I can't keep him out of his reader. He not only wants to read ahead of the class, but has "story hours" with Carli when he reads to her from the books he already has finished.



Alex walking to school, 1954

Alex has some friends who visit here and whose homes he visits. They are the Maestre boys, ages 4, 6, 8, and 8...two of them Mike's sons and two of them Gene's.

The first time they came over was something of a shock to me. Frankly, I was trying to pull a fast one. Alex was at home for a week's holiday, and the days had become pretty dull for him. I was feeling pretty shaky after being in bed a couple of days with flu, and I told him he could go over to the Maestre's to spend the morning. I thought I had life solved beautifully...till half an hour later Alex returned with all four boys. You know, six children are a lot in this little house, particularly when one is sick.

To my undying amazement, they were angelic. Not once in the three hours that they were here did one of them even raise his voice to another. They shared toys, picked up everything when they were through playing, didn't get wild for one moment, and while loud in a happy sort of way, never were boisterous.

They promised faithfully to come back the next day! And they did...plus every day till school began again. And I've never changed my mind about them. They are perfectly darling little boys, and among the best behaved I've ever seen to be such big, husky, boyish children. Carli is madly in love with Richard, the youngest, and spends all her time showing off her toys and her accomplishments to him.

I let Alex go over to their houses, which are a couple of blocks away, and he is terribly proud of his competence at walking through the streets alone. It always is fun for Alex visiting them, since there are four children in one family and five in the other, and they all usually end up in the same yard.



I wish you could see Alex with the Girls! One of our major pleasures is watching him come home from school. While occasionally he is alone or with one of his friends his age, more usually his is in the middle of from three to ten Big Girls. *The Convent*, as St. Catherine's is often called, goes through high school, and he apparently has friends in all classes. They are perfectly darling to him, and it is ridiculous to see that little boy happily holding two bigger girls' hands and chattering away down the street as

other girls on either side and behind the group try to get into the conversation.

As he left for school the other morning, Alex had trouble trying to latch the front gate. (We have to be very careful of it to keep the dogs in, now that the entire yard is fenced in, and we no longer have them in the pen all the time.) The two little Pérez girls, daughters of a doctor here, came dashing across the street to help him. Juana María, the elder, closed the gate for him, and Rosemary put her arm around Alex. Juana María threw another arm around Alex's shoulder, and off the three of them went to school.

The little Pérez children don't speak English too fluently, since they were born in Spain, have lived here only two or three years, and their mother still speaks only Spanish. However, Alex apparently gets along beautifully with them. He recently went to both of their birthday parties.



I really don't see how the Sisters at St. Catherine's manage. Some of the children start school (where only English is spoken) speaking only Spanish; others know only Creole, which while basically English, is (to my ears) such a slurred, sing-song version that it is a slight problem to understand. At first Alex said he couldn't understand half of the children, but now he can get along with any of them.

I'm beginning to find out more about his school. There are approximately fifty children in the grade...I think they call it Pre-First*...but they have two teachers and two assistants and are divided into three rough groups for academic work (reading, writing, and arithmetic), but have their games, music, dances, and story-telling, etc., together. And they don't necessarily stay in just one section the whole time.

* The equivalent of U.S. First Grade is actually called *Sub-Standard One*, or *Sub I* for short. Second Grade is *Sub II*; Third through Eight Grades are *Standard I* through *Standard VI*.

I know Alex is in the advance reading group, but back with the secondary group in writing. Actually, they get a good bit of individual attention this way, because they can be broken down to as few as ten to a class.



Now about the children's new accomplishment. Bucher and I have been on a solitaire jag. The children's great delight has been "putting out the aces." We each play the game and give them the suits we are building as they appear. They love it.

However, Alex has gotten so that he actually can play an entire game through...from laying out the cards to (in one case) winning it first time through the deck. He is slow, of course. But when he is concentrating he can do it without a mistake.

And Carli has devised something which she calls "Carli Solitaire." She goes through the deck and sorts the cards into suits, turning them slowly one at a time. She usually begins with about six piles, but gradually gets into the proper four, and she never makes mistakes.

Thanksgiving

November 1954

British Honduras did not celebrate the United States Thanksgiving, of course, but Bucher and I agreed that it was important for the children that our family mark the day. We invited Callie and Ford Young to join us in whatever I was able to produce as a traditional Thanksgiving dinner.

Multitalented Ford, a geologist originally from Oregon, was manager for Gulf Oil Company, which was drilling in the Yalbac area near the Guatemalan border. Callie embodied the graciousness of her New England background. She and I found that our grandmothers might have been soul-mates, their admonitions were so similar. Although they were U.S. Citizens, Callie and Ford had spent years in Colombia, Nicaragua, and British Honduras. They had drifted away from celebrating U.S. holidays by themselves. Callie in particular looked forward to helping us celebrate the traditional holiday.

Just as eggs had been the main ingredient in celebrating our first Belize Easter, so a turkey was the prime requisite for Thanksgiving. My attempts to find one were fruitless. I finally admitted the sad possibility of our having chicken for Thanksgiving Dinner.

I told the whole story of my plans and problems to my hairdresser, Anita Lindo, when I went in for my regular Wednesday appointment. She was a warm, capable person who had become a good friend. I was relaxing under Anita's soothing ministrations when she suddenly stiffened, shrieked "Your turkey!" and dashed out of her shop, leaving me lathered and lost.

About twenty minutes later she returned triumphantly to announce that she had my bird. She explained that she had glanced out her riverside window as she was teasing my shampoo into suds. She saw a dory being paddled past with a load of live turkeys. She raced out of her house and down the few blocks to the public market, where she intercepted the dory

man as he docked at the market wharf. Anita had first choice of the gobbling birds.

Anita finished my hair, and I paid her for her usual services plus her extraordinary one. She handed me the trussed but vocal turkey, which I tenderly placed on the back seat floor of my car. I drove home elated.

Sonia was given charge of the bird. In due course it emerged from her less-than-tender attention. I had never seen as funny-looking a turkey in all my life. Plump it was not. If it had been a person, I might have described it as rangy, with all the implications of muscle and sinew of that word. I was nonplussed at the breastbone, the ridge that should have topped a flare of fleshiness. It was a strong, curving “S” from one end to the other.

There was no time to worry about beauty or even toothsome-ness. Thanksgiving was upon us. I stuffed the peculiar bird with my mother’s traditional dressing, and put it into the oven. It emerged some hours later, the most perfectly cooked golden glory of my lifelong cooking career.

Our Thanksgiving dinner was a success. Callie and Ford joined us in laughing at our *pièce de résistance*, which was a joy to behold and a pain to chew.

Christmas Trip

December 1954

As December of our first year in Belize approached, we decided to go home to Sarasota for Christmas. Bucher and Alex flew to Tampa in the air freighter with our ASA friends. I followed a more complicated commercial route with Carli and Sonia.



My two excited companions and I arrived in Mérida on the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico in the early afternoon. We checked into the now-familiar Gran Hotel de Mérida, with its colorful tile work and heavily carved mahogany. I settled Carli and Sonia for much-needed naps and went off to shop. Browsing through the quaint little shops on the streets near the hotel was a happy dream. I returned to the hotel a couple of hours later with what I considered an absolute treasure of Mexican crafts for Christmas gifts.

We flew into Miami the following evening. Sonia, looking out the window of the plane at the sparkling lights crisscrossing the ground below for as far as one could see, asked incredulously, “All this is Miami, Florida?”

I replied in the affirmative.

“All this is *just* Miami, Florida?” Sonia reconfirmed in awe.

Bucher met us just outside Customs. Our exhausted Carli, clutching her cherished satin-covered pillow, rushed toward him. An alert Customs guard yelled, suspecting a common smuggling ruse, grabbed at her unsuccessfully, and signaled me to capture the speeding child. He examined both Carli and the pillow carefully before smiling an apology and letting her pass through to her waiting father.

We were traveling light. Both Carli and I had clothes in Sarasota, so I had packed only overnight necessities. Sonia had brought a small, soft bag

with her things, and I had put it into my weekender with ours to save having extra things to handle. The only other item was a bottle of Scotch that Bucher had suggested I buy in bond as we left because it was so much cheaper in British Honduras than in Florida.

The Customs officer looked at my documentation and noted that we were a party of three.

“Where is the rest of your luggage?” he asked.

“This is all we have,” I replied.

“For three people?” he queried in disbelief.

“Yes, Sir,” I assured him with what I hoped was commendable respect and politesse.

“But your declaration shows a bottle of whiskey. Where is it?” the suspicious officer challenged.

“In the suitcase,” I replied.

“This I gotta see,” the Customs man said as he motioned to me to open the bag. When he had investigated its meager contents to his satisfaction, he grinned at me and apologized, “I never woulda believed it.”

John Innes, our Siesta Key neighbor, thoughtfully had flown Bucher down to Miami in his plane to meet us. We had a beautiful moonlit flight back to Sarasota. Carli slept the entire way. It was exciting to all of us finally to find ourselves back in our beloved, barely used home.



My parents came down from Michigan to spend Christmas with us. Mother was terrified of flying, so they arrived by train, to the children’s delight. Planes were routine to them, but a train was something from a book.

Mother and Dad were ecstatic to see their grandchildren, impressed by the house, unbelieving that we intended to return to the far-off, exotic country we inexplicably had fallen in love with.



Carli, Kate, Bucher, and Alex, Christmas 1954

The children were overjoyed at having their grandparents with us. We were an early “nuclear family” and all were aware of what we lacked in not being surrounded by relatives. Dad treated Alex like a contemporary, discussing engineering sorts of things. Mother had endless ideas for stories or activities for both children. She was an inspired kindergarten teacher—her academic training—though she taught only sporadically. Through friends, Bucher and I arranged for Sonia to meet people, so she had activities of her own during her ample free time.



When it was time for Mother and Dad to start back to Grand Rapids, Mother announced that the children “needed” to ride on a train. She told us (there was no asking involved) that she and Dad would take the children with them as far as the next stop, Bradenton, a few miles away. We could meet the train and collect them there.

Alex and Carli were overwhelmed with excitement, dressed carefully for their fifteen-minute ride, and disappeared into the compartment with their grandparents with all the poise of world travelers.

Bucher and I did a brief errand, then drove the short distance to Bradenton, located the train station, and settled down to wait. No train. The waiting room was locked, and there was no one in the ticket office. We waited. I could see my babies hurtling northward on iron wheels, lost forever. Bucher, somewhat more practical about the matter, knocked loudly on the ticket window.

A pleasant, mustached face appeared, and at Bucher's carefully modulated inquiry about two missing children, reported, "They aren't missing at all. They're right here. You hadn't arrived when the train came through so your parents left them with me for you to collect. I told them it wouldn't be any trouble; I have eight of my own."

The ticket agent disappeared around a corner and emerged quickly, shooing Alex and Carli ahead of him. They said an affectionate farewell, we gave him our relieved thanks, and we all piled into the car for the drive back to Sarasota. Alex and Carli talked the entire way home. Correcting each other and piling event on event, they retold the tale of their magical journey.



Packing to return to Belize was a more complicated project than it had been for our first departure. This time we took all the things we had wished we had taken the before.

We left the house with an agent, asking her to rent it. I glanced wistfully at its space, its pristine modernity, the great screened yard and private gardens that melded indoors with out. Still, I was as excited as Bucher and the children about returning to our funny, quaint, little beloved Belize.

A year or so later we made the final commitment to our new land and sold the Sarasota house.

Flying, Part 1

Mid 1954 – April 1955

My adventures with aviation unfolded in two phases in two different decades. The first began in 1954, when Bucher learned about the Belize Flying Club from Ford Young, one of its founders. A small group of pilots and would-be pilots bought an old Luscombe and talked Ian Fadden into being the club's instructor. Ian was a much-decorated RAF pilot who flew York bombers over Germany and later taught young RAF pilots. He was a handsome, stocky man, calm, steady, and meticulous.

Bucher decided that we both should learn to fly. I wasn't at all sure my life needed this extra dimension and was even less convinced when I realized that the Luscombe's engine was started by the arduous and dangerous old-fashioned method of spinning the prop by hand. Nevertheless, deciding that whither-thou-goest included whatever-thou-doest, I joined Bucher in applying for a British Honduras Student Pilot's license. A few days later we both were presented with handsome, blue, passport-size, hard-cover books declaring that we were free to invade the ether.



Bucher adored flying and transferred his skills at sea lore into air competence with little trouble. For him, learning to operate in a new element was a simple matter of translation. Navigating was easy and automatic.

As for his wife, from the beginning it was obvious that earth was my element and that it was going to take superhuman force to separate me from it. In the first place, at 5 feet 2 inches, I needed seven pillows, behind and underneath, to put me in position to peer over the high dashboard and through the windshield to see the ground for taxing, taking off, and landing. In the second place, I was paralyzed with fear at having to swing the propeller to start the engine. In the third place, we flew off a

rough grass strip that was no more eager to let go of the plane's two main wheels than I was to rush up into the air.



Bucher soloed after only a few hours of instruction and worked hard to accumulate hours and proficiency. He got his U.S. Private Pilot's License when we were in the States for Christmas of 1954.

I muddled through, untouched by the magic of the skies. After babying me for the first couple of sessions, Ian insisted on my swinging the prop. The Luscombe met my tentative ministrations with stubborn resistance. I flew and flew and flew and neither Ian nor I expected ever to be parted from our dual occupancy of the cockpit. Suddenly on the afternoon of April 19th, 1955, when I made one of my more successful landings, Ian opened his door and jumped to the grass, shouting above the roar of the engine, "You're on your own."

I could not think of anything to do, other than to dissolve in highly unsuitable hysterics. Instead, I reached over, locked the co-pilot's door, turned the plane around, waddled it to the far end of the strip, and took off on my first solo flight. When I landed, long before my mind grasped the reality of my having flown successfully, Ian took my log book and, with a flourish of impressive script, signed in my solo in red ink.

I did not touch the controls of a plane again until faced with an aircraft of our own nearly ten years later.

St. George's Caye

Summer 1955

Our first summer after settling in Belize, Bucher and Ford Young rented a house on St. George's Caye under a repair-lease arrangement.

St. George's Caye was just inside the reef and about ten miles from Belize, along a course that wound through mangrove islands. It was the island where several Belize families built vacation homes and spent holidays.

Early in the colony's development, British naval forces were stationed at St. George's Caye, on guard against the Spanish who attacked the country periodically and unsuccessfully. The country's prime holiday celebrated the Tenth of September in 1798, when the British routed the Spanish for the last time in what became known as The Battle of St. George's Caye.

The Young and Scott females were as excited about the work to be done to make the house "suitable" as they were about having it for vacationing. The men probably considered it a job to be done and went ahead with practical efficiency, though both Ford and Bucher enjoyed "projects" and probably shared some of Callie's and my pleasure. The Scott children were ecstatic at the thought of being, even temporarily, on the beach.

The men were in charge of mundane things like carpentry repairs, while Callie and I settled on color schemes and curtains. After consultations that were as much fun as the painting, we chose an aqua exterior with white trim and white interior walls. We decided to paint battered furniture turquoise or cherry, picking up the accent colors from the pattern in our simple curtains.

The two families spent many happy working weekends. Callie remembers my turning from the sink after dinner one night, watching her wipe off the kitchen table, and remarking, "That's the first time anyone has done that to my satisfaction."

Artist I was not; frustrated house painter, I was. Callie said I spent far too much time meticulously mixing a bit of this color with a bit more of that, and stirring the paint in a great bucket to get exactly the right shade of turquoise.


Callie and I concentrated on refurbishing the interior. Both of us enjoyed painting, but her style was a bit too precious for me. I accused her of painting our derelict furniture with an artist's brush. Actually, she was addicted to one-inch paintbrushes. Her results, slowly accomplished, were gorgeous, whether or not the piece deserved the perfection she achieved.

Sometimes we alternated, rather than shared, weekends. Bucher, the children, and I always were excited to see what Callie and Ford had accomplished during their stays. The four Scotts held family conferences to decide what we should do during our sojourn to surprise them on their next visit.

We repaired and scrubbed and painted until we had a fresh, albeit elderly, cottage with a certain rakish charm to enjoy for the rest of the summer.



Kate with Carli and Alex at St. George's Kaye, 1954



Mama (Bucher's mother) arrived for a visit in July, and we moved out to St. George's for two weeks. Concie (Olive Constance Arnold) had come to work for us soon after we returned from our Christmas trip to Florida. For a number of reasons, Sonia and we had parted company. Concie was a waitress at the Fort George when we lived there, a slim, sprightly young woman who indulged the children and delighted us. We all were happy that she was free and able to join our menage. Concie, who was as much a family friend as our maid, and her young son Nelson, went out to St. George's Caye with us.

At St. George's Caye, Turtle Grass covered most of the sea bottom near the island. People built *kraals*, swimming-pool-size enclosed areas formed from palmetto-palm trunks driven into the sea bottom and laced together to make a tight fence. The area within was cleared of grass, and often filled with clean sand to cover the slightly soft, faintly distasteful, marl-y surface. The kraal supposedly also protected swimmers from sharks and barracuda, which showed little interest in eating swimmers in our experience. In fact, the kraals may have appealed more to the British desire for privacy.

Many kraals had elaborate dock and mooring facilities, with roofs, thatched or wooden, to protect swimmers and loungers from the blazing tropical sun. Ours had a short dock, but was unshielded. Mama was not prepared to be herded into a Designated Area when she had the entire sea in front of her. With the children following her, she minced through the mucky, grassy shallows, expecting each step to take her to hard sand. Her explorations lasted for the first half of the first day. From then on, she used the kraal.



The caye house did not have electricity, but we supplied ample kerosene lamps and candles. The kitchen had typical Belize facilities: a kerosene stove, no refrigerator, a small sink, and a small hand pump to bring water into the sink. Water was far more limited than in the city. A large square, slightly slanting shelf, called a "dresser," extended outward from the sill

of the open window above the sink. Washed dishes, pots, and pans drained and dried on it in the sunshine.

Catering was difficult. Everything had to be planned meticulously and brought out to the Caye from Belize. Nothing was available locally except the fish and lobster that Bucher and Alex provided in increasing abundance. I was not used to coping without refrigeration. Every item of every meal became sacred to me.

Therefore, when a dinner during Mama's stay appeared on the table sans vegetable, I asked Concie, "Have you forgotten the carrots?"

"No, Mum. They went out the window," she replied politely.

This made no sense at all so, suspecting that I had misunderstood her, I asked again.

"I threw them out the window, Mum," Concie explained patiently.

It was time for show-and-tell. I excused myself from the table, escaping the family's unbelieving stares, shooed Concie into the kitchen in front of me, and asked for a demonstration. Concie picked up an empty saucepan, placed the cover on top, leaned out the window, and slowly slid the cover aside as she tilted the pan, pretending to drain off the liquid. Obviously her hand had slipped when she drained the carrots, as the neat orange pile on the ground far below attested.



From letter dated February 21, 1956

We all are enjoying skin diving a lot. The reef is about 12 miles from Belize, and there is an abundance and variety of fish in the clearest possible of water, which is unmatched in this hemisphere. It's a lazy sport, floating along with goggles, fins, and a snorkel to breathe through, and simply sight-seeing. The fish are fascinating and come in more sizes, shapes, and colors than I ever could describe.

Christmas in Belize

December 1955

It would be our first Christmas in Belize because we had gone back to Sarasota the year before.

Shopping was not easy. Stores had neither the quantity nor the quality gifts I was used to, and the children's highly specific Santa requests complicated matters.

Carli wanted a sewing machine. I found a charming small one for her. For some unimaginable reason, she also wanted a cow. Ro-Mac's, our first supermarket, a modest but well-run store, came to the rescue. Their Christmas toy offerings included a charming farm scene, complete with barn (to be assembled), fencing, and assortment of plastic animals, including the required cow.

Alex had his heart set on a book about King Arthur, fifty pages long (specified). None was to be found. A mother's frantic search was rewarded by a metal medieval castle (to be assembled) with enough plastic figures—kings, knights, mounted and afoot, in various stages of battle, ladies fair, archers, foot soldiers—to stage whatever scene his imagination asked. The day before Christmas I found a simple King Arthur story book with handsome colored illustrations. The combination of castle and book was accepted by Alex, despite the lack of fifty pages.



This was our first experience with Christmas trees in Belize. The government cut scrub pines and brought them into the city just before Christmas day. They were displayed in the Holy Redeemer school yard. Bucher bought the largest and fullest he could find, but it was a sorry excuse for a tree to his Christmas-fanatic wife who had grown up with the scented luxuriance of Michigan pines.

Bucher put the tree up, guying it with several wires to keep it in position. The children and I got out our precious traditional lights and ornaments, and decorated the tree. Next day we had our first meeting with what we came to call “The Christmas Bush.” Overnight the tree had shrunk in on itself, acquiring a rounded, rather than pointed, shape. No matter; it was up, it was gaily decorated, it was ours.

Later I saw huge and handsome fresh trees in friends’ homes, trees that stood boldly upright, their tapered limbs topped by star or angel held stoutly erect. I learned that these trees were cut from private lands. They were either larger or different varieties—or both—than the trees we bought on the street.



Callie Young had gone to the States to be with her father for the holidays. For business reasons Ford could not get away, so we invited him to spend Christmas Eve with us. We did not think to warn him that Christmas Eve equals “to be assembled.”

We had supper with two excited children. There was a moment of crisis when they realized that there was no mantle from which to hang stockings. Bucher produced some cord, secured it to the bookcase, and hung up the two large, beautifully embroidered and appliquéd felt stockings that my mother had made for the children. Alex and Carli went off to bed happily enough when asked to do so, under the assumption that the sooner they retired, the sooner they could arise to their gifts.



Ford, Bucher, and I had a leisurely drink while we waited for the children to fall asleep. Then Ford, something to his horror, was co-opted to the business of assembling Christmas toys. I filled stockings with the great pile of small gifts I had squirreled away through the year. Mother came in for her annual mental scolding for designing the children’s stockings with side gussets that allowed them to expand to hold an incredible amount.

Apples were not available, but I stuffed an orange into each toe to help take up space.

By the time I finished, the men were laughing and fussing and disagreeing about the right way to make metal castles and plastic farms hold together. Fortunately, the three of us succeeded in erecting two charming scenes to surprise the children the coming Christmas dawn.



Scott's 1955 Christmas card. Alex, Bucher, and Kate dive to hang ornaments on a coral Christmas "tree" while Carli bobs on the surface in her life vest, holding more ornaments for them.

From letter dated February 21, 1956

To answer the question in your recent letter...yes, as usual I made our Christmas cards. As you can see easily enough, I still can't draw! But I try valiantly.



Alex in minuet costume, 1956

Minuet

February 1956

St. Catherine's Elementary School planned an "Entertainment." Alex was in the Minuet.

"I don't dance much," Alex warned Bucher and me sheepishly. "I'm up on a shelf."

We did not pretend to understand and decided privately that we could wait for The Night to find out what he meant.

I was appalled when Alex gave me a sketch of the costume he was to wear, but Concie politely took the instructions from my shaking hand and assured me she could make it if I would just get the materials for her. I had not realized that her accomplishments included costuming.

In a surprisingly short time, Concie produced a handsome costume of cerise satin frock coat over tightly fitted knee britches. The coat had rhinestone buttons, a full lace stock at the throat, and flounces of lace at the wrists under wide cuffs buttoned with "diamonds." Alex wore long white stockings and black shoes with large and luminous pink buckles. The *pièce de résistance* was the remarkably authentic-looking white wig that Concie had made of cotton batting with three curls over each ear and a short queue in the back tied with black satin ribbon.

When the evening finally arrived, we dressed Alex carefully in elegant array, and drove to Holy Redeemer Parish Hall where The Entertainment was to be held. We followed other parents and small performers to a classroom where costumed children sat at desks with hands folded, quietly waiting for instructions. We had never dreamed of such order and discipline backstage. Shining eyes and bright smiles bespoke excitement, but training and the presence of a couple of watchful nuns cautioned restraint.

Bucher and I left our slightly overwhelmed son, removing his adoring sister with some difficulty, and found seats in the nearby auditorium.

The various acts were staged artistically. In the Minuet, three small raised platforms at different heights behind the main group of dancers held costumed couples who bowed and turned, making both a background and an accompaniment. Alex's tall, slim figure carried his cerise costume well. His pretty little partner was gowned in mauve satin, each a pleasing foil for the other.

As for Bucher and me, nothing could have made us happier than having Alex "up on a shelf" where his proud family could see him perfectly above the solemn group doing a graceful Minuet stage front.

Alex performed creditably. He glanced over his shoulder during turns, as if not quite sure where he was going and whether his next step would be on wood or air. He yawned widely and unembarrassedly several times, due to either excitement or the late hour. However, he "made a leg" in his bows as elegantly as any of the boys.

For some reason the curtain was not drawn promptly when the dance ended. The dancers looked frantically at each other, none with enough stage presence to just stand and smile. Mister Alex in his bright pink, perched where no one in the audience could miss him, assumed an expression of the most devastatingly comical what-the-hell's-the-matter-with-them sort, and signaled wildly with his arm, lace fluttering gaily as he gestured. The curtain rang down to cheers and laughter as Bucher and I hugged in hysterical collapse.

Life in Belize

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First Impressions

1954

British Honduras is a quaint little “English Island” cozily established on the edge of Central America, below Mexico and to the north and east of Guatemala. In almost no respect...politically, economically, ethnologically, nor linguistically...does she resemble her neighbors. Geographically, she is a country of coastal plains, swamps, jutting limestone “mountains,” and foothills and low mountains that, farther south, become the great mountain ranges of Guatemala.

Belize, capital of British Honduras and its only city of better than village size, is practically any old south Georgia town put up on stilts. Most of the houses are white frame with red roofs and green shutters; each yard is enclosed tightly with its own high white picket fence. The screaming scarlet of Flamboyante replaces the gentler orange of mimosa, but hibiscus, ixora, aurelia, croton, tall pines, and palms are here.

As for those stilts...rumor has it that Belize is built on rum bottles and mahogany chips, and since seeing water in the holes dug in the lawn by land crabs and finding our street completely flooded for days any high tide, I am inclined to believe it. Deep drainage ditches trim the edges of all the streets in town, and the sea flows through the “outlets” in the seawall and backs up into them much of the time.



We are connected with the rest of the Colony by two “highways.” One heads north, past the airport, a one-lane road with passing bays. The other, west of the City, runs southwest past the Country Club and later branches so that one leg continues to the town of Cayo and on toward the border of Guatemala and the rich Petén lumber forests, and the other leads over the recently opened Hummingbird Highway through virgin forests, a paved slit through a towering mass of mahogany, sapodilla, pine, palms, and

dozens of other varieties of trees, all laced together by liana and other jungle vines.

Hidden in the forests are jaguar, ocelot, puma, and tapir. The monkeys often swing along the edge of the road where you can see them, and the trees are bright with parrots and macaws. Occasionally you pass a python sunning on the pavement.



The lumber camps are in painfully hacked-out clearings, settlements of thatched-roofed huts overflowing with whole families...workers, wives, dozens of children, chickens, goats, pigs, and dogs. The logging trails are curving black tunnels thrusting back into the jungle. It is incredible that they can pull the enormous mahogany logs, some almost a man's height in diameter, through the mud, even with D-8 Caterpillars.



As far as we are concerned, however, life in Belize centers around the sea rather than the bush. The town is built on a peninsula, and you are constantly aware of the Caribbean, glassy blue and studded with emerald mangrove-covered cayes inside the reef. The longest coral reef in this hemisphere stretches over a hundred miles from Honduras past British Honduras to the Yucatán peninsula of Mexico. We have fish in profusion unknown anywhere in the world except along the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

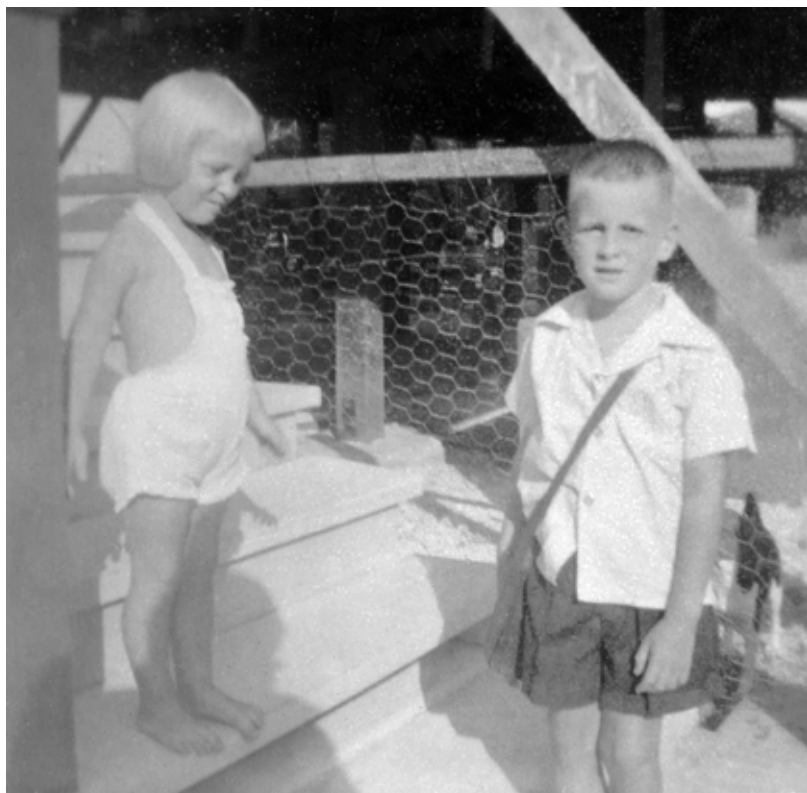
The tiny jewel-bright reef fish dart in and out of the coral, completely unafraid of us as we swim among them with mask and flippers. And to be quite honest, we are almost equally unconcerned by the rather impressive barracuda swimming alongside.

Oval silvery-and-yellow grunts move along in "herds" of hundreds. And the parrot and trigger fish manage to show us a new color style each time we dive. There are dozens of varieties of them, and the shades are endless.

We really do very little actual spear fishing...except to retrieve a lobster for dinner...because the fish are so abundant that it would be like shooting cows in a pasture, and it is more fun swimming among them and watching their antics.

As for surface fishing, it is excellent. Our tarpon are fairly small, but a 12- to 30-pound tarpon on spinning tackle is a lot of fish to handle, and you may hook as many as twenty of them in a day's fishing. The snook are back up the river in eager quantities that we never have seen elsewhere. An occasional sailfish or marlin is caught, but frankly, we prefer smaller game fish on light tackle, so we haven't really made an effort to find them.

And the bonefish...I hadn't realized how lucky we are here with them. We have found several flats where they feed in great numbers, and while you can't ever depend on catching any fish at any time anywhere, you certainly seem to do better here. In other places I have heard that fishermen may work for a week for the thrill of getting just one and be satisfied.



Carli sees Alex off to school, 1954

School Days

1950's and 1960's

The major reason Bucher and I felt able to stay in Belize was that excellent schools were available. By U.S. standards, Belize schools were limited in their programs, but Bucher and I never stopped crediting St. Catherine's and St. John's with giving our two the academic foundation they needed to build successful lives.

If later the children told us that much of their early learning had been by the discredited "rote" method, we still knew that they had learned forever basic arithmetic, spelling, and grammar. If they did not have access to the wide variety of subjects available in U.S. schools, still they received firm grounding in core courses.

Both children were valedictorians of their high school classes. They entered U.S. universities academically level with, or ahead of, their U.S. contemporaries.

Alex

Alex loved school, earned good grades, and for the most part was a cooperative student. There were exceptions.

One noontime Alex was very late returning for our midday dinner. He finally arrived, flushed, ruffled, collar askew and shirttail out, with a muttered explanation that Sister Aloysius had kept him after school. Alex ate a hasty half-meal and returned to school.

Soon after one o'clock I received a telephone call from the Principal's office asking me to meet Sister Patricia later that afternoon. It was the first time I had been called to school about an errant child, but I was more curious than concerned as I walked up to school.

Our apparently wayward son, looking far smaller than usual, sat wide-eyed and solemn on a chair too large for him in the bare anteroom. Sister

Patricia swished forward forbiddingly, black robes rustling, and stiff white linen framing a stiffer visage. She motioned me into her office, closed the door, leaned back against it, and began shaking with soundless guffaws.

When we both were seated, she described Alex's misdeeds in her Irish brogue, broken with quiet laughs. "Alex didn't finish his arithmetic," Sister Patricia began. "Sister Aloysius knew he could do it and was annoyed that he hadn't been paying attention. When class let out for lunch, she told Alex he had to stay until he turned in his work."

According to the laughing Principal, Alex protested that he *had* to get home, that his mother would worry about him. Sister was firm. Alex was frantic. Finally he threw down his pencil and, disregarding his arithmetic book, open on the desk, dashed out the door.

"When I saw them," Sister Patricia continued, her smile broadening as she enjoyed the memory, "Alex was bolting down the veranda with Sister Aloysius flying after him like a great black bat." She flapped her arms in the loose, dark sleeves of her habit to illustrate, then fell back in her chair laughing aloud.

Sister Patricia proposed, and I agreed, that Alex would be lectured sternly, but that his terror had been ample punishment. I was sent out to the anteroom to wait as the Principal, her face refrozen into its mask of sternness, summoned my quaking son to her inner sanctum. Alex cast a last, desperate glance over his shoulder at me as he followed the swishing black skirts.



Only once more was I called in to confer with Sister Patricia about Alex's misbehavior. This time she was less amused. History class had reached Henry VIII and his untidy marital record. The teacher described his divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, according to Catholic teaching. Our Episcopalian (in Belize, Anglican) son could not agree with the Nun's version of English history and would not remain in discrete

silence. He raised his hand, was recognized, and gave a polite but cogent description of that period of history as he had read it in other books and heard it in Sunday School. Sister was shattered, Alex was banished, Mother was summoned.

Carli

We registered Carli to enter the Infants' Class at St. Catherine's after Christmas of 1955, shortly before her fourth birthday the following February.

Preparations for school vied with Christmas activities that year. I had to make several sets of uniforms, white jumpers made of sheeting, worn over high necked, long-sleeved white blouses of a softer material. My initial reaction to the idea of white school clothes was pure horror.



Carli and Alex ready for school, 1956

However, in the tropics, white was both suitable and practical. Rose's system of bleaching our laundry kept Carli's uniforms pristine, where colored ones would have faded quickly.

That Christmas, despite the lavish array of gifts, mostly from grandparents, Carli's favorite was a new school book bag to replace the cherished worn-out one that Alex had passed down to her. Into it went a new box of school crayons, a couple of pencils, some of the paper that she would use in class, and a little pencil sharpener shaped like a tiny merry-go-round.

The forever-fateful First Day of School arrived. I walked down to St. Catherine's with Carli, accompanied by Alex, seven years old on Christmas day, who protested that there was no reason for me to tag along. Whether or not Carli wanted me I did not know then and don't know now. She didn't have a choice. However, Alex took over chaperone duties thereafter as I watched the two small figures wistfully from our gate.



From letter dated February 21, 1956

Carli started school in January and adores it. She's only in nursery school, of course, and goes only in the mornings, but besides all the little songs and games and dances she learns, she is getting the beginnings of her letters and numbers. She amazed us to bits the other day, coming home and sailing through her A-B-C's from beginning to end without the slightest hesitation. We hadn't known that she knew the first three letters! And the real shock was when she ended them with what sounded, to our American ears, like a dull thud, "X - Y - Zed!"

Later Years

St. Catherine's drew students from among British Hondurans from the City and the Districts, British Army families, and the myriad of foreign nationalities represented in Belize for business or personal reasons. By

about age eight, many British boys were sent back to England for “proper” Public School educations, often at serious financial strain for their families. Some local sons were sent to private schools in Jamaica or Barbados. By the equivalent of U.S. Seventh and Eighth grades, Alex was one of two boys in his class. This exclusivity came just as little girls began to notice little boys. The result was that the boys became crown princes with fawning courts. The two years of schooling were a complete waste.

Then came high school and the Jesuits of St. John’s College. Pampered princes rapidly were cut down to size by the hard academic work and stern supervision of the Fathers.

Years later, listening to Alex reminisce, I learned that at St. John’s College, Alex had to take exams and do his homework in fountain pen, *not* ballpoint. Father Cull addressed the freshman class on their first day, saying, “You are men now, and there are two things a man always carries—a wallet and a fountain pen.” The boys soon learned that the wallet was a repository for their demerit cards.

Alex said that when he turned in his first homework at George Tech, his professor exploded, “What are you trying to prove?”

Alex explained about the St. John’s rules. The professor shook his head in disbelief and said, “Boy, you had better learn to use a pencil.”



Regarding lawn care in Belize, I wrote relatives in 1955:

The local yard men cut grass with a machete...a perfectly enormous one...even on a regular lawn, not just on tall roadside grass! They swing the blade up against a steel rod in some way, I guess just so that it won’t continue the swing and hack off a leg!

In the late 1970’s, I watched Alex cutting grass with a machete and asked how he ever had learned to do it.

“Do you remember all those times I was late coming home from school?” Alex asked with a smile. “I was juggled.”

“Jugging” was St. Johns’ punishment for sins bookish or behavioral, and involved the wholesome, cost-effective assignment of offenders to cut the grass on the extensive school grounds with the standard “Belize lawn mower,” a well-sharpened machete.



Major shopping district in Belize, 1950's.
Note three-digit number on car's license plate

Adjusting

1950's – 1990's

British Honduras in mid Twentieth Century was not paradise. In the early part of that century, author Aldous Huxley wrote, “If the world had any ends, British Honduras would certainly be one of them.” We had, as Bucher said, stepped back into the past in some ways. We missed certain amenities. Learning to love the country was an adjustment that involved balancing human values against physical ones.

In Belize, the streets were muddy in The Wet (season) and dusty in The Dry. Roads were potholed despite the best efforts of Government. Canals, which had been cut through the city decades earlier to alleviate flooding, had become stagnant by silting where they debouched into the sea at either end, and polluted by the public latrines perched over them. The contents of “night buckets” were emptied daily into the canals or into the sea itself.

We had only rare access to theater, concerts, art exhibits, and none to first-class sports events. The head librarian asked me one time what we did with the 300 books we took out each year and could not believe it when I replied with surprise, “Read them.”

Staying in Belize meant selling our lovely home in Sarasota and living in a series of rented houses of varying styles.

However, what British Honduras lacked in modern conveniences, it possessed in the friendliness of its people and the restful tenor of its life. The physical drawbacks of the City were abundantly compensated by the blues of the surrounding sea, the warmth of the trade winds, the luxuriance of tropical foliage, the darting or soaring color of its birds.

Bucher and I both traded things we would have enjoyed for a strange, old-fashioned life, which we loved. The pattern of life suited us. The main meal was served in the middle of the day; children came home from school to eat, and Bucher came home from work. Businesses closed at

4:00 PM. Our time together was broken only briefly by morning and afternoon school / office hours. In the early days, there were almost more evening parties than we enjoyed.

In letter after letter, our family and friends protested about our failure to return to the States and about our “primitive” surroundings. We enjoyed the problems as much as the solutions as we settled into our remarkably comfortable and stimulating life.



From letter dated July 20, 1954

We really are having a good time down here. Some things about the place are frustrating in the extreme...the fact that stores don't have things you want, the poor food, the filth of the city, and the happy-go-lucky, do-it-tomorrow attitude. However, we love it and find it most interesting. I expect that when we get home, we'll occasionally look back longingly to the lazy life of Belize!

Alex is back in school...they have vacation from the middle of April till the end of June. He still loves it, and I feel that he is getting a much better start here than he would in our crowded Sarasota first grade. Not that I wouldn't trade! But I might as well recognize the fact that this schooling is one thing about Belize that is better than home.

Don't know when we'll be home. First we thought late spring, then June or July, then September, and now it looks like Christmas.

Language

British Hondurans spoke Creole, a sing-song dialect similar to the speech in the British West Indies. In the schoolroom, private or public, pupils were taught (forced) to speak English. Still, they emerged with strong Creole accents and reverted to pure Creole among themselves.

Creole is a colorful language, based on English, but with altered grammar and pronunciation and an abbreviated vocabulary. Perhaps because of the

latter, phrasing can be quaintly colorful. Although the gracious old British Colonial ways of speech are disappearing, not long ago [mid 1990's], a neatly dressed young boy approached me begging, "Please for half a dollar that I might catch a bus."

Our Children

A major problem for Bucher and me, as our two impressionable children settled into life in Belize, was language. Bucher had a soft Georgia accent, and I was easily recognized as having been brought up in the Midwest. We both were educated and made sure that Alex developed a sense of proper grammar as he acquired a vocabulary somewhat faster and more extensive than we expected.

By the time we moved into the Eyre Street house, Bucher and I were becoming alarmed at the change in Alex's speech from American to Creole. He did what any child would do, adopted the speech patterns of the school friends and most of people around him. After worried consultation behind closed bedroom doors, Bucher and I devised an answer.

"Alex," I announced one day, "English is your first language. When you are in the living room with us, we expect you to speak it. When you walk through the door into the kitchen, or when you are with friends, you may speak Creole, if you like." To our delighted amazement, it worked. Alex was perfectly happy with the new rules, and we had our little Southerner back.

As for Carli, she decided it was time to start talking and did so, in long, incomprehensible, Creole paragraphs. Alex had to interpret for her for about six months. By that time Carli, too, had learned the bilingual house rules and out-performed us all by developing a beautiful, soft voice with an accent in English tinged with both British and the Georgia-Southern acquired on her regular visits to Bucher's Atlanta family.



From letter dated July 20, 1954

Carli is just as lively as ever...and growing so fast! Just wait till you hear her talk! She still was talking relatively little when we came down, so she is learning the local Creole from Sonia and her little playmates. It is hysterical to hear her. Her A's are broad *ah's* (*Dahddy, mahn*); she swings the end of each sentence up in the air in the sing-song Belize way, ending on a high, almost singing note. And she uses all sorts of quaint local expressions, just as Alex does, of course:

What you want I must do now?

I'm going to give Peggy a hail.

I don't like that a-tahl* (at all), a-tahl, a-tahl!

Adult Americans

Language could be more perplexing for the adults. British Hondurans were not as familiar with American accents as they were with British. I was completely adrift with Creole. Even when shop clerks, bank tellers, and post office employees spoke to me in English, we found ourselves stumbling through endless misunderstandings.

One day when Mama (Bucher's mother) was visiting, she left me in the grocery store and bravely crossed the street to Brodie's, one of Belize's largest stores, to buy some emery boards. She found the right counter and made her request of the pretty clerk:

"Do you have emery boards?"

"Yes," was the polite reply.

"May I please have a package?"

"They're finished, Mum."

Mama began again: "Do you have emery boards?"

"Yes, Mum."

* The emphasis is on the second syllable so *at all* is pronounced *a-TAHL*.

“May I please have a package?”

“No, Mum,” the clerk replied patiently, “They’re finished.”

Mama became a little heated. In her best dowager manner she asked very slowly, very distinctly, and somewhat loudly, “Will you be kind enough to give me a package of emery boards.”

Fortunately, I arrived as the clerk was replying, “They’re finished,” and just before my beloved mother-in-law erupted like an overdue volcano.

“Mama,” I explained soothingly as I led her away from the counter to the clerk’s great relief, “She is telling you that, yes, they normally carry emery boards, but no, they do not have any in stock right now. They are *finished*.”



A more complicated conversation took place in October of 1969 when I telephoned the General Post Office (GPO) to find out the new schedule of mailing times for foreign airmail. Usually the GPO printed the schedule so that people would know what time mail was collected for the few weekly flights. Each of the airlines Transportes Aéreos Nacionales (TAN) of Honduras and Transportes Aéreos Centroamericanos (TACA) of Salvador had two or three flights a week between Belize and the United States. However, their schedules had changed, the GPO had not issued a new mail-closing list, so I decided to get the information for myself.

This proved a major mistake. I felt that I was in a time warp as I tried to make sense of the surrealistic replies to my questions. By the time I hung up in bafflement, I was so amused that I went directly to my typewriter and reconstructed the conversation as nearly verbatim as I could. The brown-edged and tattered report is in front of me as I copy it here. Except for indications of who is speaking and how, the following is exactly as I wrote it, without editing.

Kate dials 2330: Post Office, The General Office, Paslow Building.

CLERK (*liltingly*): Post Office General Office.

KATE: Will you please give me the new schedule of airmail dispatches?

CLERK: ????????????????

KATE: The new schedule of mail closings—the times mail must be deposited at the Post Office to go out by air to other countries. The changed schedules since the airlines have put in new flight schedules.

CLERK: Oh, you will have to call the Post Office for that.

KATE: I'm sorry. I thought this was the Post Office.

CLERK: ?????????? I'll call him.

HIM: Post Office. May I help you?

KATE (*now we're getting somewhere*): Will you please give me the new schedule of airmail dispatches?

HIM: You drop it in the slot.

KATE (*attacking from a new direction*): The Post Office publishes a list telling what time a letter must be mailed to catch the plane to go to other countries. Do you have one of those lists? Or can you just tell me over the telephone what times the mails close for transmission to the United States, or Canada, or England, or Mexico?

HIM (*happily*): You can get a schedule from TAN.

KATE: Is TAN the only airline that takes airmail out of Belize or does TACA carry mail, too?

HIM: You can get a schedule from TAN and another one from TACA.

KATE: Fine. Now can you please tell me how far ahead of flight time the letter must be mailed?

HIM: Twenty minutes.

KATE (*astounded at newly unearthed Belizean efficiency*): Do you mean that twenty minutes after I mail a letter through the slot at the General Post Office it has gotten itself up the airport road, onto the plane, and into the air?

HIM: Yes. The plane lands and twenty minutes later it takes off.

KATE: All right. Let's go back to the Post Office. Do you have the new list...

HIM: Yes, at the Post Office, you drop the letter in the slot, and it goes into a mailbag when it is time...

KATE (*breaking in frantically*):...and about the *right* time...

HIM:...we take the mailbag out and dump the letters on a table, and we look at the addresses, and they go through a sorting machine, and we put them back in mailbags, and the mailbags go to the airport and are put on the plane.

KATE: I seeeeee! Well then, how far ahead of time do you want me to mail my letter so that it will be sure to get on that plane?

HIM: You ought to bring it in right now.

Telephone

When we first lived in British Honduras, its telephone system was like a charming step back into my early childhood summers in Michigan. Telephones were hand-cranked. At that time, Belize had a population of about 30,000 but it operated like a far smaller town. The telephone operators functioned like well trained private secretaries to the entire city. If the party you were calling was not at home, the operator told you so and without being asked, would switch the call to another home where your friend might be enjoying a Coffee Morning or a Bridge Afternoon.



Thirty-odd years later when Belize had long had a modern telephone system, several of the long-distance operators who helped with my calls to and from Atlanta during Bucher's terminal illness—disembodied, familiar voices whom I never had met—telephoned to offer their sympathy after his death. Belize has grown and changed, but its beautiful sense of family has not been lost.


From letter dated August 9, 1996

I tried to call a lodge at Placencia this week. There was a long wait, then some funny switching sounds, then a man's voice.

MAN: This is your AT&T operator.

KATE: What is AT&T doing in Belize?

MAN: Where?

KATE: Belize, in Central America. Where are you?

MAN: I'm in Charleston, South Carolina. Are you placing a call from Belize to the United States?

KATE: No, I'm calling from Belize City to one of the Districts.

MAN: You must have dialed our access code by mistake.

KATE (*indignantly*): No, I didn't. I dialed 06-23239.

MAN: That's not ours!

KATE: Of course it isn't. Obviously the wires are crossed. That still happens here. I just don't want to be charged for the call.

MAN (*ingratiatingly*): You won't be charged for the call. You didn't reach your party.

KATE: We talked. That's enough for the Belize operator.

My new friend was making noises about rectifying the situation in some way as I bade him a polite farewell.

I called the Belize operator and explained the crazy connection. She sounded harried as she admitted that they were having trouble with their Placencia circuit. I wondered what other interesting tales she already had heard before mine.

Radio

In the mid 1950's, the local radio station, owned and operated by the government, was on the air for only a couple of hours at noontime and for three hours at night. It carried local newscasts in both English and Spanish and occasional BBC rebroadcasts. A momentous addition to our life in Belize was the arrival of the shortwave radio Bucher had ordered.

The first evening we had the shortwave, Bucher tuned in to Armed Forces Radio clearly. It was a strange and welcome sensation to hear a newscast cover world events almost as they were happening.

The morning after the arrival of the radio, I turned it on when Bucher and I settled down with our first cup of coffee. To our horror, a record show blared forth. Although we both leaped at the offending device as if it were a raging beast to be captured and tamed, turning the volume down instantly, we were sure we had blasted our unsuspecting neighbors out of their beds at an unseemly 5:00 AM.

Party Attire

After living in the relatively informal Sarasota, we found ourselves in a bastion of Britain, rather than in the relaxed tropics we expected.

In Sarasota among our informal Siesta Key friends, one wore one's "best" shorts and shirt, and possibly not even shoes, if it was just a matter of a couple, or two or three couples, gathering at a friend's home. I took a limited wardrobe for my presumably brief visit to Belize. It was instantly apparent that I need not even unpack my shorts, except for boat trips. They were inappropriate around the hotel and unthinkable on the street. Bucher's wardrobe was long on washable slacks and shirts (fortunately, because there was no dry cleaner) and short on dress shirts and suits.

Almost immediately upon settling in at the Fort George Hotel, we found that interpreting Belize dress codes was a frustrating puzzle. Our gaffes were many and mortifying.

We made our first misjudgment the evening we invited three couples to have dinner with us in the hotel. Bucher wore fresh sport shirt and slacks, and I chose a crisp new cotton, bought for the trip. It could have gone almost anywhere on Siesta Key, but obviously had no business going to dinner in the finest hotel in Belize. Our guests arrived in suit and tie (men) and elegant cocktail dresses (women). I felt like Cinderella, especially since my dress was brown, a favorite color that, set off by white, had felt crisply smart until we were joined by our dinner guests.



Another evening soon after our arrival, Bucher came back to the hotel to say that a new friend, Russell Grant, had asked us to stop by for a drink around 6:30 PM. Russell was an affable Scot whose family had been in Belize for years. His delightful wife Lois had grown up in Belize, the daughter of a British couple who were in business in the Colony. (In the 1960's Russell had to return to Scotland to manage the Grant family's distilleries.)

When we approached the Grant home, facing the sea on the northern shore of the peninsula that is Belize, we saw the house ablaze with lights, cars lining both sides of the street, and most ominous of all, policemen in white uniforms on guard alongside the governor's vehicle.

Thinking quickly, sport-shirted Bucher drove past the house, around the first corner, and back to the hotel where he quickly put on his best suit. I felt adequately gowned, considering my deficient wardrobe, in a new two-piece Guatemalan dress with elaborate embroidery shot with gold, copper, and brass threads (on brown, of course).

We returned as quickly as we could to park at some distance from the Grant's home, aware that to arrive after the Governor was a major social sin, but realizing that for Bucher to have shown up in a sport shirt would have been worse. We slipped through the door as unobtrusively as possible and apologized to our forgiving hosts who thought the contretemps highly amusing.

Much as we appreciated Russell's gracious invitation to newcomers, we wished we had known that we would be two-among-a-hundred instead of just an informal foursome.



We were caught out only once more; this time Ford Young was having a business cocktail party. Again, it was a matter of our having been invited verbally at the last minute. Party invitations normally arrived far ahead of an event on formally printed cards.

For the Young's we're-having-a-few-people-in evening, Bucher discreetly wore a suit, and I selected a new dress, designed and made by one of the most highly recommended of Belize's many talented seamstresses. I rode to the Young's home in a glow of smug satisfaction at finally having guessed right.

We arrived. It was an enormous party. I took one look at the gowns worn by the other feminine guests, far more elaborate than most I wore even in Atlanta, and made my way, as quickly as I graciously could, to the veranda that ran across the full front of the house. Other guests were out there to enjoy the sea breeze; I sought the dark. Bucher brought me a drink, laughed in amusement at my cowering, and returned to the lively group inside the house. To my delight, dimly seen people on the veranda introduced themselves in what I hoped was complete obliviousness to my garb, and ensured that I enjoyed the evening fully, making new friends and learning more about life in our new town.



Once I accepted how dressy Belize was, I enjoyed returning to a style of attire I had left behind in Atlanta when we moved south to Florida to live on the beach.

Through the years, Belize fashion changed. Gradually, British governors were brave enough to put climate before tradition, and made it acceptable for men to wear shirt and tie, without a coat, to certain parties. Then some, with Bucher in the vanguard, adopted the handsome, cool guayabera worn

by our Latin neighbors, fine embroidery and tucking compensating in elegance for the casual comfort of an open collar.

The Seventies brought an incongruous fashion era in which women wore long, often low-cut gowns, and men, sport shirts, for cocktail parties. It was a little like make-believe. Still, what woman doesn't enjoy a chance to float formally in floor-length skirts, the short, feeling taller; the stout, slimmer; all, more glamorous.

By the time long-skirts-for-cocktails gave way to the more traditional short party dresses, Belize hostesses were in a panic over their printed invitations. The discreet "Black Tie" note in lower left-hand corner of invitations for a formal dinner or dance was adapted to the cocktail-party invitation in a futile attempt to give guests some idea of the degree of formality desired by the hostess.

Notations became:

Formal (coat and tie)

Informal (tie without coat, guayabera)

Casual (?)

Plantation (?)

Leisure (?)

No one had any idea what any of the terms really meant, as eclectic as dress had become. In the end, the men who preferred suits wore them. Those who felt undressed without ties wore them, even when they deferred to the tropical temperatures by forgoing suit jackets. Those who liked guayaberas, long sleeved or short, felt well dressed regardless of what the invitation said. And the rest appeared in sport-shirted comfort, secure in the knowledge that the Colonial era had ended.

The women, meanwhile, fitted their costumes to 1) their assessment of the formality of a particular party, or 2) their fashion impulse of the moment. From the most elaborate cocktail dress to the skimpiest sun dress, from a smart pants suit to the most flamboyant of trousered garb, almost anything was acceptable, and almost nothing raised eyebrows. I would

have been perfectly comfortable in the dresses that had so embarrassed me at my first Belize parties.

Cubbo

1950's and 1960's

Belize, we found, was charmingly kind to eccentrics. “Street people” who lived in their own little worlds, were smiled on, rather than scorned, by those around them.

After we had moved to our house on Eyre Street I had my first run-in with one of Belize’s most notorious characters. During one of Sonia’s morning cooking marathons, she rushed wild-eyed into the living room, wailing, “Cubbo’s in the kitchen.”

I didn’t know “Cubbo,” but it was obvious that Sonia did, and that his place was not anywhere near her. I straightened my back and strode through the swinging door to see a gaunt man, bent, and grubby in earth-tone rags pettishly removing Sonia’s pots from the stove and putting an old condensed-milk tin of water on the flame in its place, using the jagged, partially attached top of the tin as a handle.

“And just what are you doing?” I demanded, breathing from the diaphragm and letting the tones resonate as if addressing the last row in the theater.

“Boiling water for my tea, of course,” came the impatient reply in the clearest of Irish brogues.


Sonia and Rose huddled together in the farthest corner of the kitchen, obviously terrified and hoping that if anyone were attacked, it would be me.

“Boil your water, take your things, and go,” I declaimed, “and don’t ever, ever set foot in this yard again.”

Cubbo looked straight at me, pale blue eyes expressing absolutely nothing, and without hurrying, without any indication that he was operating under any rules but his own, made his tea and departed.


The girls fluttered like wind-blown butterflies as they explained that everyone was terrified of Cubbo and his bad temper. They were dumbstruck that I had braced him in what they recognized as an idiotic lack of understanding of the danger he represented.

Apparently, my act was effective. We were all relieved that Cubbo never came back.




Years later Carli told of her own childhood run-in with Cubbo in the early 1960's. She was playing with her friend and neighbor, Sissy Tattersfield, when Cubbo appeared at the gate and demanded, "Give me a tin of milk. I don't want an old tin. I don't want an open tin. I want a good, fresh tin."

Fortunately the little girls were safely enclosed behind the fence in Sissy's yard. Sissy called their maid, Ella. Stout Ella, on her strong, bowed legs, muttered at Cubbo, but produced the tin of condensed milk that he demanded. The girls remarked later about Cubbo and his badgering that "He was not a very pleasant person."



Cubbo bathed in the sea. The problem was that he chose the seawall outside St. Catherine's elementary school windows for his ablutions. Nuns fluttered in dismay. Little girls who should have been concentrating on spelling and arithmetic were distracted by the sight of the gaunt Irishman peeling off layer after layer of rags to stand in the unattractive buff as he sloshed salt water over himself.

Police were called regularly, and Cubbo regularly was hurried off clutching his wardrobe, to the temporary relief of the Sisters.



Actually, Cubbo didn't represent a danger to anyone at all. Everyone was afraid of him for no reason except his obvious disdain of humanity. While children, in particular, cringed at the sight of Cubbo, he never threatened

anyone. He tended to yell if people seemed to be encroaching on his movable domain(s). That was enough to keep his reputation afloat.

Cubbo was a relic of Colonial days, an out-of-century remittance man. From all we could learn, he had been banished by his embarrassed and unforgiving Irish family for unknown sins and was sent regular remittances, of an apparently insufficient amount, to stay on the other side of the Atlantic.

An educated man, Cubbo appeared regularly at Red Cross headquarters to read their airmail copy of *The Times of London*. He was incensed if someone had read and rumbled it first. The Red Cross staff, as fearful about Cubbo as the rest of the city was, tried to guard the newspaper until he arrived to claim it with his accustomed brusqueness.

In the late 1960's, one of the last of our British police commissioners called Cubbo in, had him cleaned up, outfitted him in a suit and tie, and shipped him off on a one-way ticket back to Ireland.

Grabbity

1950's and 1960's

From essay written October 28, 1992

The boy appeared, just barely tall enough to look over the fence; we were moving into our first house in Belize after having spent three months in an hotel. A glorious grin gleamed in a black-black face, as he shyly handed me a single flower.

His name was Dennis Moguel. He asked if we had any shoes we wanted polished. From that beginning, he became a minor fixture—keeping Bucher's shoes in better shape than they ever had been, running errands, playing with the children, lending a hand in the house once in a while.

I taught Dennis to paint. He was not pleased at the idea of putting one coat on at a time instead of doing the job as if he were plastering. He was even less pleased at cleaning brushes thoroughly after each session instead of leaving them standing in water (not solvent, water). If I display any patience now, it is because of the discipline of directing Dennis those many years ago.



By the time Dennis was in his late teens, he worked for us only sporadically. Sweet natured as he was, he was not very bright. Bucher resisted my suggestion that he find Dennis a job on one of the tugs. I sent out a call for Dennis whenever I accumulated a bunch of minor tasks around the house.

One day I asked him to replace the bottom hinge on the front picket gate. Those bottom hinges have a very short life. Male dogs have an affinity for them. Very soon, Dennis reappeared at the front door, calling me:

“Missus, oh Missus.”

“Pardon, Mum, but those screws have no gravity.”

I asked Dennis to repeat. He couldn't possibly have said what I thought I heard. He repeated. He had. I never had considered gravity a major characteristic of screws, so I walked down into the yard to make an on-site investigation. My sometime handyman trailed along happily.

At the gate Dennis proudly displayed the six sturdy screws, which he had burred beyond use. He was right: they had no *grabbity*.



As Dennis approached twenty, he drifted away. He greeted me effusively when we met occasionally on the street. I did not know whether he was working, but he no longer was interested in odd jobs.

A curt radio news report told us that Dennis Moguel, age 21, had been stabbed to death in a dispute among domino players over 13 cents.



I haven't thought about him in a long time. I started writing the *grabbity* anecdote as an amusing addition to a letter. What was supposed to be a funny story ended as a bittersweet one. After I wrote it, I considered omitting the final paragraph. However, it may be that this little story is the only memorial to Dennis' life that there ever will be.

Swing Bridge

1950's – 1990's

From essay written September 10, 1991

The Swing Bridge is one of Belize City's most venerable and beloved features. It is a narrow, two-way bridge with high sides; it spans the Haulover Creek, a branch of the Belize River that bisects the city. The bridge carries traffic between the commercial center on the North side, centered around the Paslow Building, where the Post Office is located, and the larger commercial center on the South side.

Twice a day, at 5:30 AM and 5:30 PM, or as close to those hours as is convenient to the bridge tender, the bridge is swung to allow river traffic to pass. Men fasten a chain across the street at each end of the bridge, while bicyclists push over, under, and past the barricade to prevent being stranded while the bridge is open, and pedestrians race along the enclosed sidewalks at each side of the span. The bridge crew fixes a pipe with long bar handles into a slot in the center of the bridge, and men slowly walk around in a small circle, pushing the bars that crank open the bridge.



Crew starts to swing the bridge, 1986

Occasionally the bridge sticks, stopping traffic. It no longer is the disaster it used to be, because several years ago Canada assisted Belize in building a second bridge across the Haulover, just at the entrance to the city.



Through the years, the Swing Bridge has flaunted an eccentric series of paint schemes. I do not remember the color it was painted when we first arrive, so assume it was gray. Possibly sometimes it was refurbished in dull green.

Just before Independence in 1981, I was entranced one morning to see a polka-dotted bridge. Overnight the bridge had been repainted the same chrome yellow as a Caterpillar tractor. The vanes (structural stiffeners) on the insides of the high walls separating vehicular traffic from pedestrian had been painted white. This was a good idea, I thought, in terms of safety. But most precious of all, each and every rivet in the entire steel bridge had been picked out in pristine white. I had the feeling that a dainty robot was waiting around the corner, ready to whisk the entire structure around her as a summer dress.

When the new government came in they repainted the bridge a handsome, conservative forest green, with white vanes. The problem was that the dark color made the narrow bridge seem doubly narrow to the drivers creeping across it.

Of late, the bridge has been solid bright yellow, cheerful and unobjectionable.

Recently on my way to work, I paused in front of the Post Office, turned to check oncoming traffic, and was so startled by the bridge that my foot slipped off the brake, and I rear-ended the car in front of me. The irate driver emerged, as I did with embarrassed apologies. There was no damage; I was barely moving when I hit him.

As for the cause of the contretemps, there stood our traditional bridge looking like an Easter Egg in the brightest of aqua trimmed with the brightest of yellow.

Baron Bliss Day

1980 – 1992


From essay written March 9, 1992

Today is the Ninth of March, Baron Bliss Day, a major Belize holiday honoring one of the country's great benefactors. A British gentleman by the name of Baron Bliss sailed into Caribbean waters in his yacht during the Twenties. He spent some time in Barbados, then set sail for Belize. A radio message was passed from one country to the other saying that the Baron was elderly, not well, and determined to leave his fortune to the country of his choice. When he arrived, he was met at the pilot station by the full complement of boarding officers, not the usual crew, but the Heads of Departments, bowing and scraping and welcoming him to the country.

The yacht duly entered harbor and anchored a hundred yards or so off what is now my veranda. The Baron, in his wheel chair, remained aboard, receiving a stream of ingratiating officials. A few months after his arrival, the poor dear dropped dead. His first and only landing in Belize was when he was brought ashore to be buried on a knoll overlooking the harbor, a couple of blocks from our house.

He left his estate in a trust fund for the country of British Honduras, now Belize, with instructions that the Baroness was to receive a set amount annually for her lifetime. One Ninth of March many years ago, the radio account of the Baron's largess included the astounding comment that during World War II, income in the trust diminished severely, and there was some problem paying the Baroness. The account continued, "Fortunately, the dear lady died..."

Baron Bliss funds have built our library / auditorium, the School of Nursing, the Fort George lighthouse, with an elegant black crypt for the Baron at its feet, and numerous other civic improvements throughout the country. It think the old boy would be pleased.




Baron Bliss Day is celebrated with a sailing regatta, a kite-flying competition, and bicycle races. Alex always has been involved in the regatta. At one time he bought a dory, a local dugout canoe, outfitted with top-heavy sails, and raced by a three-man crew—one to sail, one to bail, and one to *hang king-dola* (hang outboard in a trapeze to keep the fragile craft from overturning).

Competition among the dories always has been hot. One blissful year, Alex's boat sailed what the race announcer, a shipwright, termed "a perfect race," leaving the others far behind after some split-second maneuvers around buoys.

Alex had a Belizean crew for the dory, but sailed his locally built sloop himself. He usually won or placed, until some of the people competing in that class started building very expensive boats purely to win races. He not only wasn't interested in that kind of competition, but he had met María and no longer was that involved in racing.

[Editor's Note 9 on page 385]



I used to spend the Ninth of March watching the races from my veranda with the telescope Alex gave Bucher, his binoculars, a good book for the dull periods, and an occasional beer. It was fun when Alex was involved. Today, I simply glanced out from time to time and smiled at the familiar sight of boats of all sizes and shapes bobbing in the choppy waters, their multicolored sails set for the strong March trade winds. I did not realize that Alex, for the first time, was crewing in one of the wonderful, heavy old sand lighters. These are forty-five-foot-long boats that normally carry loads of sea sand, dug by the shovel-full from bars at river mouths, to the Belize City seawall, where the men shovel the sand ashore to be picked up by contractors. The race of these behemoths vies with the dory race as the regatta's most exciting.

Miami

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Return to the States

August 1956

We had been in Belize for two-and-a-half years when Bucher realized that, for business reasons, we had to go back to Florida. We all had mixed feelings about leaving the country, but joined in preparations for departure cheerfully enough.

Ready, Set, Go!

From letter dated December 10, 1956

This move developed very unexpectedly. Bucher was in Miami in August, trying to sew up a boat-building contract that would have set up his British Honduras Industries, Ltd. for 1957. He couldn't find out anything definite and returned to Belize after two weeks. He went back to Miami about ten days later, both to follow on that contract and to straighten out some trouble he was having with U.S. Customs on the appraisal of his boats. He had been in Miami a couple more weeks when he wrote me to:

1. Pack enough china, linens, kitchen equipment, clothes, and toys to take a house in Miami indefinitely.
2. Pack up the good things that I was leaving so that they could be stored safely in the factory warehouse where they wouldn't disappear one by one during our absence.
3. Rent the house.
4. Sell the car. (It had bad brakes and bad tires; the body was rusted through here and there. I couldn't have been gladder!)
5. Find someone to take the two dogs temporarily.
6. Get the children and myself on the plane for Miami four days later.

I went into a minor collapse at the idea, then managed to do practically everything. I packed my precious silver, fine china, and best books for shipment, and arranged to store almost everything else.

The heartache was the dogs; we knew no one in Miami and would not have facilities to keep them. I spoke to our good friend Father Urban Kramer of St. John's College. He was a large, hearty Midwestern priest who liked the dogs and had joked about dog-napping them. His enthusiastic agreement to take Eagle and Louis made us feel that, at least, we had arranged a happy home for our beloved friends.

I drove the dogs out to St. John's and, stifling tears, turned them over to Father Kramer. I returned woefully to my car to find a flat tire. Father Kramer saw my look of dismay, hiked up the skirts of his cassock, and set about swiftly and efficiently changing tires for me, to my combined relief and embarrassment.

After a whirlwind of activity I succeeded in getting to Miami with children on schedule.

Our Rental

At the Miami airport, Bucher apologetically told me that he finally had found a garage apartment for us. My heart sank as I remembered my palace in Belize, but I bravely assured him that anything was perfect.

We drove up a lovely, quiet street of comfortable homes with well tended yards, and turned into a driveway. I saw the garage, but there certainly wasn't an apartment atop it...just a rather large house attached. As it turned out, Bucher had been very lucky finding the house. Some woman in Illinois just had bought it and didn't want possession till the next summer, so she was delighted to get a rental immediately.

I was still a little baffled as Bucher unlocked the door upon a large living-dining room "paved" with acres of white tile. It was furnished in black furniture with plastic upholstery in the severest modern manner, and with pleasant bamboo-and-glass furniture in the dining area.

If the kitchen, dining area, and living room rather shrieked at us with colors...blue, lime, and red in the kitchen; cocoa, lime, and green in the dining area; and gray-green, green, and red in the living room...at least

they belong in a modern house, and there is enough neutral in the black furniture and white floor to cut the impact. Besides, personally I prefer strong colors to dull ones.

The kitchen opens through a door and a pass-through from the dining area, so that I can either wash dishes or iron and watch television (the TV came with the house). There are large, very new Frigidaire electric stove and refrigerator, a double sink, miles of cupboards, an ample broom closet and pantry. The kitchen is fully tiled...floor, countertops, and the splashboard between countertop and overhanging cupboards.

The living room even has an adobe-brick fireplace, complete with gas logs, which will be heavenly come cool weather. The mantle, equipped with two lushly planted black vases and a black panther stalking between them, has a large to-the-ceiling mirror above it. Black iron room dividers break the area on each side, and have elegant vines twined on them. I only hope I can refrain from killing all the plants that help make the room attractive.

The children's bedroom is blue with their twin beds upholstered in shrimp-pink plastic. They have an enormous double closet, and each has a chest of drawers.

The bathroom is fully tiled in pink and aqua, with the fittings aqua. It is small, but the water is both plentiful and *hot*, and there is a built-in electric heater. The owner even bought a new and attractive shower curtain for us.

Our bedroom is a sensation. Not that this room isn't in permissible taste, it just make me feel slightly loud every time I walk in. One wall is gray, with the other three citron yellow. Against the gray wall, the double-bed headboard is upholstered in citron plastic. Each of the two black bedside tables has a huge yellow ceramic lamp with even more enormous oblong yellow shade. There is a tall black bureau and a two-chest-and-dressing-table unit, also in black, with yellow vanity bench. There's a great black-and-yellow occasional chair, a full-length mirror on the door to the walk-in closet, and large unframed mirrors over the dressing table and bureau.

The windows along two walls at the corner have venetian blinds and good-looking modern print draperies, with gray cornice boards.

P.S.: There's an air conditioner.

For extras, there is a linen closet, a linen-and-clothes closet in the hall, and a huge extra closet with shelves on two sides off the dining area.

There's a small, furniture-less den with floor-to-ceiling shelves on two sides, which we're using for a playroom; a garage with basin, toilet, and shower; small concrete back porch; and enormous, lovely, fully fenced yard.

Life in the Big City

Fall 1956

From letter dated December 10, 1956

I entered Alex in school immediately. He's with his age group in the third grade though, academically, he is ahead of them in most subjects. Still, there is some adjustment going into a new school, and this gives him time to get settled without having to fight to keep up in his studies at the same time.

He brought home his first report card last week...the first I have seen since I used to take my own home. All *S* for satisfactory, with five *E* for excellent. That was fine with me. Alex loves school and is absolutely thrilled by things he never imagined in Belize, like the library, auditorium, cafeteria, and organized games on the playground. He was lucky in getting a splendid teacher...one of the old school, you know, discipline along with lessons. He loves her and goes off to school eagerly every morning.

Carli was probably the saddest little mite in the world to find that she no longer was a "school-age child." You know she had started last January and loved it. Here she is even too young for the only preschool group near our house. So she is staying home, playing, helping me do errands, and gradually beginning to enjoy not being in school.



Naturally, there are lots of marvelous things about being back in the U.S. I still can't get used to talking to Mother and Dad long distance. In Belize the telephone system barely makes it across the street, and there is no international hook-up, as there is in most countries.

The supermarkets are breathtaking. I love every minute I spend in them, and marketing is my favorite sport these days. We are eating like gourmets on approximately half what we paid for pretty makeshift food in Belize. The children finally are bored with ice cream, but I haven't quite made up for my three-year fast.



Miami is a wonderful town for us to happen to land in. Business-wise, it is the logical one, since it is the southern center for commerce with Central and South America as well as with the Islands. It is a huge boating center, of course. Bucher was able to get a splendid job right away with the biggest marine hardware store here...and after six years without a regular paycheck, nothing looks lovelier. Meanwhile, he is peddling his own boats and lining up business for the Belize companies.

Being in a large city is heavenly after Belize. Everything on earth is available here. Miami has all sorts of museums and tourist attractions that you wouldn't find in most cities. We try to plan some sort of excursion each Sunday.

We have seen the Seaquarium (the largest marine aquarium in the world), Serpentarium (with a large display of snakes and reptiles plus a show of extracting venom from king cobras for use in making medicine), amusement parks, and zoo. We also visited some destroyers and submarines that were in port and have driven through the fabulous Miami Beach hotel district.

We still have the Parrot Jungle, Monkey Jungle, Rare Bird Farm, Jungle Cruise, and more to do in the future. And we can always start over if spring doesn't come soon enough so that we can go swimming at the beach instead!

Christmas Plans

December 1956

From letter dated December 10, 1956

At first we had hoped that we could get up to Grand Rapids for Christmas, but with Bucher just starting a new job, he couldn't get any vacation time. Then we tried to talk Mother and Dad into coming down here. They decided not to, partly because Mother hasn't been feeling well and partly because they would prefer to come later in the spring when the weather is meaner in Michigan. However, we are used to Christmas with just the immediate family and will have a simple little celebration among ourselves.



This is Alex's electric train Christmas (which is one reason I was so anxious to have my Dad here). Alex hasn't admitted to us that he no longer believes in Santa Claus, but I've heard him talking with the "gang." I do observe that he doesn't talk about "if" he gets a train for Christmas, but "when" he has his train for Christmas. We lucked into a marvelous sale on American Flyers and were able to get a more elaborate starter set than we had hoped. And I think my parents are going to get things to go with his train as their present.


Mother and Dad are giving Carli a bike...which is the one thing on earth that she wants. I've explained carefully to her that we can't afford to get her one right now, so I know she hasn't the slightest suspicion. Furthermore, I have had a time talking her out of asking Santa for one...that really would cause complications. Now she is going to ask him just to surprise her since there isn't anything else she is really set on having. The "surprise" is going to be a little table with two chairs. We left Alex's nice table in Belize, and the children don't have anywhere in this house to color and draw as the love to do. I'll probably get a new set of doll dishes to put on the table, just to fancy it up for Christmas morning;

we left Carli's old and broken set in Belize. That is one toy she really would enjoy having.

So, I guess we are pretty well set for Christmas.



Carli and Alex with his new train set, Miami, Christmas 1956



Our weather has been elegant, except for one or two short cold snaps. If I had time, I could keep a nice tan just getting out for an hour or so in my back yard every day. However, housekeeping U.S. style, without any nice helpful hands around, is something of a change for me. I find that I don't have as much free time as I did in Belize.

Siesta Key Beach House

Summer 1957 – Summer 1960

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Carli and Alex at Siesta Key beach house, 1960

At the Beach Again

Mid 1957 – December 1958

After a pleasant nine months in Miami, we packed up and returned to Sarasota. We rented a house on Siesta Key's long, lovely beach and returned to the informal life we once had known.



From letter dated January 19, 1958

I've been in quite a rush since I got back from Mother's funeral last November. Some of our closest friends from Atlanta had planned for months to come down here for Thanksgiving, and after hesitating for a bit when they heard the sad news, they decided to come anyway, arriving the day after I got back from Michigan. They rented the house next door, so I didn't have any burden, but it made a very busy week. Actually, I think it was the best thing that could have happened, because they realized how I was feeling, and it was very comforting to have close friends here.

Once they left, I got busy on my Christmas shopping and mailing. As you know, Dad was with us for Christmas and my birthday.

Of course, I had left my housework pretty much to itself, so I had a major job getting ready for Dad's visit. This little old cottage is in a heavenly location right on the Gulf, but it is old and shabby, and dirt seems to come out of the walls or blow in from the beach as fast as I sweep it away.

Christmas Visitor

From letter dated January 19, 1958

Dad made excellent time on his trip down and didn't even seem too tired from it. He had decided (most wisely) to stay at a motel half a block away rather than use the little guest house in our back yard, since it didn't have its own bathroom. He had a nice unit with kitchen facilities for his coffee-making and even a TV. I think he was quite comfortable there, and it was a very short walk for all of us back and forth.

I wanted to finish as much of my shopping, wrapping, decorating, and baking as I could before Dad arrived. As it was, he drove up just as I rolled out the first lot of cookie dough...I think he hid around corners for the first couple of days for fear I'd invite him to help cut out cookies and frost them!

I hope the visit was as pleasant for him as it was for all of us. The children adored having him here...Carli really made a pest of herself kissing and hanging on him. He was such an easy guest to have...seemed so happy, would come and go as he liked, and seemed to like our easy-going informal way of life. We just loved every minute.



Christmas itself was lots of fun, of course. Carli asked Santa for...of all things...a pogo stick and a doll washing machine.

Alex got a kit (which means lumber, nails, etc.) to build a table for his train layout. So after all the excitement, he adjourned to the guest house and started building. I think Dad enjoyed it more than anyone else, because it wasn't his responsibility, but whenever he had an idea or wanted to lend a hand he could do so.

Through the succeeding day, they finished the table and designed a layout; I painted the track-bed and sprinkled it with sand to look like cinders; Bucher nailed down the track, wired everything (hideous job); and I painted in streets, a pond, and river.

Dad had given Alex a huge and wonderful new transformer, which he needed badly, a handcar that really flies around the track, and some working parts. (The big loading thing he brought was for Lionel, not American Flyer, so had to be exchanged, and since they didn't have the same thing, Alex picked out a cow that goes across the track and stops the train and a crossing gate that drops as the train goes by.)

I really was so glad that Dad was here to work on setting up the train, because it is lots of fun, and he obviously enjoyed it. However, he agreed privately with me that he could have worked out a lot better track pattern than the one Alex chose! Not that the thing probably will stay this way much longer than it takes the paint to dry!

Carli can't manage her pogo stick too well yet, but she is trying.



Another Christmas present is in our future. My Uncle Frank sent a Christmas check. After seeing the pile of gifts under the tree, I decided to add that check to our television fund, since I knew it would mean more to the children as well as to us that way. Dad gave me a check, and my Aunt Helen sent one, so I really think it won't be too long before we can get a set...possibly a used one to begin with. We all would love it, and so far, we just plain haven't had the money to buy ourselves one. There was one in the house we rented in Miami, so we all became addicts and really missed it when we moved here.

Birthday to Remember

From letter dated January 19, 1958

The last night of Dad's visit he gave me one of the nicest birthday parties I've ever had. He talked to Bucher about taking me out to dinner and whether to take the children or get a sitter. Bucher mentioned a new restaurant here I've been dying to visit that has a circus floor-show and caters especially to children, so he made reservations there without telling me anything about it.

I knew we were going out for dinner (they had to tell me before I went marketing), so I made the children take good naps. Even so, I think we all were nervous as could be during dinner, wondering if the children could stay awake till nine when the show started.

The food was Italian and really quite good and the decorations in the place very glittery and attractive. There was a big circus ring in the center, floored with wood, with a carpeted path around the edge, just inside the curbing. A three-piece orchestra, on a balcony above the ring, played for dancing during dinner.

The children managed to stay awake, thank goodness, because we saw an hour and a half of the best show I've ever seen in what (despite the children) I'll call a nightclub. As you know, several circuses, including Ringling, winter in Sarasota, so the best circus acts in the world are available.

An old circus family runs the restaurant, and they all are in the show. Papa Canestrelli is a perfectly splendid juggler, and he finished up his act with a front flip that had Dad's eyes popping, since he seemed about Dad's age. Mama Canestrelli is a great, blondined Italian matron with an enthusiastic, trained, opera-type voice. She sang a few songs, led a community singing (with Dad joining in loudly), and won everyone with her personality.

One daughter did a modified bump-and-grind routine that nearly finished off my astounded son and had Dad and me in hysterics over having brought him. (Dad said he was going to tell my sister, Mary, the sort of entertainment I took my son to...completely ignoring the fact that he was the host.) A son and daughter did a wonderful balancing-on-ladders-and-juggling act. There was a slack-wire act, some girl aerialists, and showgirls strolling around the ring between acts, beautifully and briefly dressed.

One of the best routines was a circus horse for the children to ride. You know how huge those horses they ride bareback look...Well, imagine one pounding by your table at a canter! They started the act with a tiny little

girl, obviously a grandchild of Papa Canestrelli. She was buckled into a fleece-lined belt attached to a stout rope that went up through a pulley on the ceiling. Assistants hauled on the rope to hoist her onto the horse and it cantered around with her. After she was through, she was hoisted down and Papa Canestrelli called for volunteers from children in the audience; he was still speaking when Carli reached the center of the ring! So off she went on that enormous horse, hanging on for dear life, but having a wonderful time. I wish you could have seen Dad's face watching her! It really was adorable to watch.

Two little boys rode after Carli (I don't know if everyone realized those two were part of the act). Then they called the Canestrelli grandson (age 6, I would guess) and he even stood up on the horse as he rode around; at the end they jerked the rope, lifted him off the horse and high into the air where he swung around in huge circles as they let him down to the ground slowly. It really was a delightful act.

And the real high point of the evening (if anything could surpass that one) was a tumbling act...I think their name is Roberti...which we all had seen on Ed Sullivan's show. They seem to be a father and two sons, who can't be out of their teens. The father is a comic and the whole act is the fastest thing you ever have seen. They really are fabulous and Dad got so tickled over them that I didn't think he'd ever be able to talk again. I honestly don't think I have seen him laugh that hard in all my life.

It really was a toss-up who enjoyed the evening the most, the children, me, or Dad (of course, Bucher was right in there, too). But really, I can't remember seeing Dad as enthusiastic and as completely entertained with anything, ever. He apparently had a whale of a time, and I was thrilled just seeing his pleasure (though, circus-mad as I've always been, I was having a glorious time myself).



We hated having Dad leave, but he had to get back to the brick company, and furthermore, like most men, he was getting jittery. Bucher is the same

way about visits. Still, I think he enjoyed it and know we all loved having him here.

Chicken Pox

From letter dated March 13, 1958

We just have had a lovely visit from Becky—Bucher’s youngest sister. She’s wonderful company and we loved it, of course.

And right now we have a most unwelcome guest—the chicken pox. Carli broke out Sunday after carefully exposing the entire church school. She felt pretty sick at first, but is bouncing back now, though she looks ghastly.

Alex is frantic to get them now, not that he wants to suffer, but he’s green at the idea of Carli’s watching our new TV all day long. He’s sure to have them soon, as I assure him daily when he wakes up claiming to be much too sick to go to school.



With Carli sick, the bathrobe situation got desperate, so let me tell you what I did. That robe of Grandma’s, which my Uncle Frank send me last fall, really didn’t fit me. I wore it twice and it was a little too tight through the shoulders and arms to be comfortable. So I cut it up, reversed the material so that the white side with lavender print was showing, and then trimmed collar and front with eyelet embroidery. (I keep my sewing machine set up all the time in my room because that is one of my favorite activities.) I styled it slightly differently for Carli—letting it button up to the throat instead of having the shawl collar, since it is a little warmer that way.

Now Carli has a precious new robe. The cord belt is perfect, and it is very sweet on her. I think Grandma Van Brunt would be pleased at having one of her great-granddaughters wearing her robe.

Making Friends

From letter dated December 15, 1958

Carli has had the worst trouble about friends since we moved to Sarasota. There were two darling little girls on the block where we lived when we first moved back here from Miami. They moved out of the city about the same time we moved into this house on the beach. She found another little girl...a precious child; Carli played with her almost constantly till she moved away in October. Then Carli found another sweet little playmate...and she left Florida a week ago.

Now Carli has made friends with twins who live a couple blocks away. They were here Saturday and seem very attractive...they look exactly alike except that one is a blonde and the other a brunette. I want Carli to try to have more than one friend at a time (twins, in this sense qualify as a single friend!), but I can't seem to get her to do it.

Alex's Job

December 1958

From letter dated December 15, 1958

Alex has his first job. A friend who lives down in the next block asked him to keep her yard watered for her this winter, since they have moved to their town house. He sets the hoses and does part of it by hand every second or third day, depending on our weather. He has been very reliable and interested in his work, and I have thought he was doing a very nice job of it. He's thrilled, of course, and practically a millionaire with his \$1 per week. Even I consider it a very generous pay, though I guess it is about in line with what is paid these days.

He made some extra yesterday, too. We had used up all the firewood Bucher chopped earlier and were having a cold spell, so Alex started sawing off fireplace-sized lengths from some great pine limbs that our next-door neighbor donated to us after they fell on his house. Bucher paid Alex 5¢ per log, and he made 50¢ yesterday afternoon. I'm not sure it is much cheaper than buying firewood, but Alex needs the exercise, the responsibility, and the money, so it is nicer this way.



For the first time, Alex is selecting Christmas presents for the whole family and buying them with his own money. The other day he came tearing in, saying he had picked something out and had to get the money to pay for it, since he had told the woman in the shop just up at our little shopping center to gift wrap it for him.

I suggested that he ask me about it first to make sure it was a wise selection, but he said he couldn't, that it was for me. I was thrilled, really speechless.

And Alex was the proudest little boy you ever saw when he brought it home a few minutes later. He couldn't wait for Bucher to get home so he

could tell him about it. And he insisted on telling me the things he had looked at and then decided against. I can't wait to see what he bought. Of course, whatever it is, I've already had my best Christmas present just seeing his happy little face at getting a gift for me by himself.

Christmas in the Beach House

December 1958

From letter dated January 12, 1959

Alex has been past Santa for a couple years now, but it hasn't been discussed until this year. Bucher let him help smuggle some Santa things for Carli into the house Christmas Eve, and Alex was so proud to be taken into the adult half of Santa's activities. Carli really knows there isn't a Santa Claus, but has no intention of believing it, and we did everything possible to protect her faith in the magic of it. Whether we'll manage another year, I don't know.




We had a lovely, quiet Christmas. It began, excitingly enough, somewhat ahead of time, when the fully decorated Christmas tree fell over, delicately trailing tinsel. The children frantically picked up presents so that they wouldn't get soaked by the water pouring from the tree stand. I pushed the tree upright, where it stood slightly askew in rather drunken dignity until Bucher could guy it properly with wire. Alex picked up the debris of broken ornaments. Fortunately we had a good many plastic ones and even some of the glass globes bounced without breaking, so it wasn't too bad.



Christmas Eve we all went to the Children's Carol Service at church late in the afternoon. It is a sweet, informal service, with all the little girls bristling with brand-new organdy and the boys shining and polished.


The minister tells the Christmas story, asking questions as he goes, and letting the children fill in parts. Then he has the children volunteer to help place the figures in the Nativity Scene. Since it is a rather large set, most of the children get a chance to participate. And they all love it. It really is

a very nice way to start Christmas, with the emphasis on the Nativity rather than on Santa Claus.



After church we went over to the home of some of our closest friends, Hope and Shorty Long. They always have a small, informal open house on Christmas Eve, but we never have gone before because we have felt that it was a night to be with the children. This year, they particularly asked the children, and Hope even had a lovely cut-glass punch bowl and snacks just for them. We were home by nine and for once; the children went to sleep right away.

Even so, they were up at five-thirty the next morning and ready to open presents.



In addition to their stocking presents, Alex got an Electrical Workshop. It really is a fine toy, and I got it this fall on sale for half price. It has two test panels and a large master control panel with a couple of beacons, buzzers, lamps, etc., to be hooked up. In addition, Alex has incorporated a motor he got from my Uncle Frank.

The set includes plans for 1001 experiments, which involve hooking things up in such a way that throwing one switch lights a lamp or throwing another one buzzes a buzzer...that sort of thing. Among the experiments are a railroad lantern circuit (controlling two lamps by means of two switches), diesel engine control (motor with speed control for forward and reverse), police signals (remote wiring between master control panel and small test panel), and automobile engine starter (motor controlled with one battery and switch).

Alex just loves this set, and he's learning a lot about electricity with it. I noticed that, at first, he usually had at least one short circuit, which Bucher would have to locate and show him, but now he seems able to work things out perfectly by himself.

Carli had been driving Alex crazy messing with his master control because she liked lighting lights and buzzing buzzer. So yesterday he worked out a little one just for her on one of the small test panels, with a light on one switch and a buzzer on the other. He figured it out for himself without any instructions and couldn't have been prouder.

Alex's other choice present was a microscope from my Dad. He has worked with it a lot and just loves it.



Santa Claus gave Carli basket, kickstand, and horn for her bike and, best present of all, two turtles. She promptly named them Tom and Tim.

Tim enlivened the day after Christmas by disappearing after Carli had him on her bed playing with him. She dissolved into tears, and we tore her room apart looking for him until she happened to look upward and saw him quietly crawling to the ceiling, straight up her curtain. Never, with all the turtles I have had, have I seen one do that!



Now let me tell you about Alex's present to me. I told you about the day he brought it home. Well, he gave it to me before either he or Carli opened the first present. If I had tried for a thousand years, I never could have guessed what it would be. It is a small incense burner, shades of gray with a fire-breathing dragon in bas-relief, and gold handles shaped like dogs on both sides of the pot and on its top. The second package was the incense, of course. Alex couldn't have been happier over his choice. I like incense, though it gets a little overpowering in a small house. Naturally, it will always be one of my cherished possessions.

[Editor's Note 10 on page 385]



The children both were thrilled with their presents and played happily throughout their holidays, even though we had a run of bad weather, which kept them penned up a good bit of the time. Alex managed to prolong his vacation by coming down with German measles the day before school started, but it was a light case, and he was back in school last Thursday. Carli is due to get them this coming weekend, and I hope she does and gets it over.



In the cold weather, this house is apt to be damp and chilly. This year, fortunately, we have a little gas heater in the living room, and this, with our nice fireplace, has kept us reasonably comfortable. There isn't much wind and it is quite pleasant outdoors in the sun, so the children have been able to play.

Easter Surprise

Spring 1959 – Summer 1960

We had a never-to-be-forgotten Easter in 1959. It may have been the only time Bucher and I created a problem by not communicating, all in the interest of having happy surprises for the family.

We all missed our Beagles. I had an inspiration. What we needed, I decided, was a nice, lovable, controllable playmate for the children. Besides, it was my last chance to provide some live bunnies and make Carli believe the Easter Bunny had brought them.

I read the Yellow Pages, jotted down two addresses, and discussed my plan with my father, who was visiting us. Living alone now after a lifetime of adjusting to Mother's sudden whims, Dad was prepared to help me—not necessarily to encourage, but to abet. He agreed to keep the children away from the house and entertained while I carried out my scheme.

I set off to do my Easter marketing. To my delight, when I emerged from the supermarket, I saw a stand on the corner where a leathery man had baby rabbits for sale. He was surrounded by excited children with uncooperative parents, so I eased my way to the front of the crowd and began negotiations.

The Rabbit Man proved to be one of the names on my list. He not only bred rabbits professionally, he cared about them. He had several Dutch rabbits for sale, and with his help, I selected a breeding pair. Both had the characteristic broad white collars encompassing their shoulders and front feet. The male was predominantly blue-gray in color and the female, black. The man gave me advice on their care and sold me a modest bag of rabbit food.

I put my two furry purchases into the paper-lined box awaiting them in the car. Back home, Dad had the children far down the beach, so I could put the rabbits into the little back house that we used as a store-and-play

room. I had prepared an impromptu cage earlier. I provided food and water for the enchanting little creatures and left, padlocking the door behind me.

Dad returned with the children, and we all were sitting together on the front screened porch when Bucher drove up. The children raced out to meet him, and Dad and I followed. Bucher opened the back door of his car with a flourish and, with a broad grin, said, “Happy Easter.” A puppy raced out into the children’s waiting arms. The puppy was a beautiful little Beagle, grandson of our beloved Eagle, whom we sadly had to leave in Belize. Alex named him *Pedro*.

Dad and I looked at each other in comic dismay. When we had the children and puppy safely incarcerated on the porch, I motioned to Bucher to follow me. We quietly walked around to the little house at the back where I showed him my contribution to the children’s Easter. I think the word “consternation” best describes my husband’s expression.

We kept the rabbits hidden until Easter morning. The children were enraptured. So was Pedro, who decided that they were playmates to be cherished. Alex named his male bunny *Dwinc* after a “club” he and his friends had formed named **Dirty Works, Incorporated**. Carli called her little black-and-white beauty *Lizzie*.

Bucher built a large double cage on legs, which took up one entire end of the front porch. We let the rabbits out of the cage to play on the porch with Pedro when we were there to supervise. They raced about at dizzying speed in play that never hinted at a Beagle bunny hunt. Dwinc would stop, turn to face Pedro, sit up on his hind legs, and box the puppy in the muzzle with his front paws. When Pedro tired of the game and sprawled out to rest, Dwinc hopped over to him and thumped on his head to try to encourage him to resume the game.

We let the rabbits share a cage most of the time until size and maturity made it advisable to separate them.



Our first litter of rabbits was awaited rapturously. When the moment arrived, Lizzie obviously did not need the assistance I was so eager to provide. The children came home from school that afternoon to find nine, rather than two, rabbits.

When the babies were large enough to be let out of the cage, I turned all the rabbits loose on the porch at once. I brought Pedro in on a leash, but released him when it was obvious that he considered the dizzying pogo-ing of countless black and white and gray little bodies an entertainment arranged just for him. He was as gentle with the babies as he had been with their parents.

Obviously we could not keep all of the rabbits. This was no problem. We had three prospective adopters for each bunny. I explained gently to the children's eager friends that I could not agree to give them a rabbit until I talked to their parents. Some never were heard from again. Gradually, however, the little rabbits left us, tenderly cradled in happy arms. The last to go, because I so hated to part with him, was my *Jack of Diamonds*, a little male with a perfect white diamond on one black hip.



The major problem came when we decided to return to Belize. The pair of rabbits could not go with us. Fortunately, one of Alex's school friends arrived with her mother, who was willing to take over the responsibility. The delighted child and dedicated mother left with the two rabbits, all the left-over feed, and the well-cleaned cage lying on its side and protruding from the rear of their station wagon.



Bucher feeding rescued pelican, 1959

Summer Plans

Spring – Summer 1959

From letter dated June 10, 1959

Early this spring I started repainting. This little cottage has been delightful in its location and its inherent charm. But it was pretty darned shabby. Unfortunately, while Bucher had spare time to help, we didn't have the money to go ahead with our redecorating. As soon as we could afford it, Bucher was up to his ears in work so that I had to do it almost completely by myself. It has taken all spring long, but room by room, I've finished it.

It still is a modest cottage, but it is bright and gay and clean instead of dark and stained with mildew and sulfur fumes. The children's bedrooms, which were dark, mottled little caves, are now bright, sunny, sweet, and inviting. The porch, which was more bare wood than paint, is clean and white and fresh. I get a lift just walking through the house and seeing the change in it.



Spring in Florida means lots of guest, and we have had some lovely visits.

My Dad was here for Easter. My Uncle Walt and Aunt Lou Ella were in town for a while, and we saw them a few times.

Patty and Kendall Price, our close friends from Atlanta, came down with their four children and rented the house behind ours for ten days. While the Prices were out in the boat, they found a young pelican tangled in fishing line, rescued it, and brought it back here. We were able to untangle the poor creature and are feeding and caring for it until it is strong enough to fly away.

Bucher's sister Deezy stopped by with her new husband, Frank O'Neill, on their way to Nassau. (She just married for the first time at the age of 41.)

One of my dearest friends from college spent a day with me on a visit from California.

Pat Goodrich, who was one of my closest friends in Grand Rapids, and her husband spent about three weeks.

It was all so much fun. After our years out of the country, it still is an unbelievable privilege to get to see friends and family once in a while.



The children are out of school now and are trying to settle down to enjoying themselves. Alex spends most of his time out in his boat with his new fishing tackle. Carli has a darling new friend whose family has rented the house behind ours for the summer.

The children and I will be going to Michigan some time this summer. We don't know yet when it will be; it depends on Bucher's plans. He won't be able to be with us because he just has gone to work for the Kiekhaefer Corporation (Mercury outboard motors). Bucher used to be a distributor for them and has kept a close friendship with Carl Kiekhaefer. Bucher's in charge of a fairly elaborate building program in central Florida and can't possibly leave. However, we hope to plan things so that we're away sometime when he would have to be out of town anyway.



Carli finally lost her first tooth last night. It has been loose for several weeks, and she was pretty annoyed that it wouldn't come out. She's way behind most of her little friends at losing teeth, so it has been a serious issue with her.

Lake X

Summer 1959

From letter dated November 2, 1959

Carl Kiekhaefer, the owner of Kiekhaefer Mercury, was building a secret test base at a private lake (which he called *Lake X*) in the center of Florida. Bucher was in charge of construction. As time went on, new things were added to their plans so that the whole project took longer than originally planned. Each year, Carl invites a couple hundred people to a press party to see his new line of engines. This year, he scheduled the party for mid September at Lake X, so they had a deadline to meet.

They were working twelve to fourteen hours a day, seven days a week when the children and I got back to Sarasota from our visit to my family in Michigan. Bucher was only able to steal an occasional moment off to be with us. So he moved the children and me to a nice motel in St. Cloud, not far from the base, for the rest of the summer. We had quite adequate accommodations, a lake for swimming, shuffleboard courts, other children for our two to play with.

We could spend as much time as we wanted out at Lake X, where the wife of the test manager made pleasant company for me and where her two children were companions for Alex and Carli. Bucher took Alex's outboard engine to the lake and rigged him out with a small boat. Alex and friend Chuck had a marvelous time with the whole lake to play around in without another boat on it.

Even being close by, we didn't see Bucher too much after the base restaurant opened, because he had his midday dinner there. Many times he didn't get home until after the children were in bed, and he was gone before they were up in the morning. Still, we were more or less together, and we did enjoy it.

I brought the children home for the beginning of school, and Bucher was able to spend the Labor Day weekend with us before going back for the

last whirlwind work on the base. We went up for the open house of the completed base, which Carl held on a Sunday after his press party. The place was already all fixed up for company, with all their boats rigged so that company personnel could take guest for rides around the lake.

They had a Tommy Bartlett ski show to entertain, so Carl decided he'd throw the place open to the townspeople of St. Cloud as a good public-relations gesture. He had a wonderful turnout. I think that after all the secrecy that had surrounded the construction, it was a splendid idea to show people just what it was and tell them briefly what he planned to do there. Of course, from then on the place has been kept locked, and you practically need security clearance to get near it.



Carl bought land to build a plastics division up at St. Cloud and wanted Bucher to build it for him, but there was some delay in purchase of the site, and then the steel strike caught them. Meanwhile, Bucher had a chance to get home and rest...which he needed badly. He was completely exhausted after almost nine months of “panic-project” work, with long hours and only rarely a few hours off on weekends.

The break gave Bucher a chance to see how his own business was doing and figure up what he is paying out in salesman's commissions while he works for Kiekhaefer. He has decided that he can now do almost as well working for himself so that he doesn't need a salesman.

Bucher's two best accounts are expanding production this year, and he is getting some new ones, so he is pretty sure that British Honduras Industries, Ltd. is well out of the woods finally. This is our worst time of the year; every year until now we have had to shut down completely for almost three months because boat builders slow their operations down to just minimum production until after the first of the year. However, this year our dead time was only about three weeks, and now we're rolling again at close to capacity production. Bucher plans to get one or two other lines that tie in with his boat parts and that he can work easily along with them and operate strictly as a manufacturer's representative.

Epilogue: Bucher's Work at Lake X

From letter dated June 6, 1993

When Alex returned from his recent trip, he told me that he had brought a book, a biography titled *Iron Fist*—and he slowly spelled out the initials of the person: ... E ... C ... Just before he got to K, I figured it out: Carl Kiekhaeffer. The name of the book could not be more appropriate.

Carl developed the Mercury outboard engine. He was a typical inventor, a whirlwind salesman, and a basic paranoid. Bucher worked for him off and on for years. I knew Carl and liked him. I never had sense enough to be afraid of him. He undercut himself with me when he more or less forced me to talk to his wife in Wisconsin from Sarasota one time, and I realized it was purely to legitimize his presence. Both Bucher and I knew he was there with his private secretary / mistress, Rose.

Bucher probably would have ended up a very rich man if he had stayed on with Carl. But he would have been a shell of a human being. Carl put Bucher in charge of building his top-secret testing ground at Lake X in mid Florida. I resented the endless hours, so it was not a perfect time.

The day of the public opening, Carl blew up because there was no cleansing powder in his bathroom. My adored, exhausted Bucher started scurrying around to find some and I decided this was no life for him. A close friend of ours, Kendall Price, happened to be visiting, and he was as appalled as I was. Between us, we made Bucher see what Life-With-Carl promised for him. He quit.

We went off to our own up-and-down life in Belize, as happy during bad times as during good ones. Bucher told me later that Carl would never forgive his quitting. I know now that it was true. I think Bucher was grateful (as am I) to have known so unusual a person, but he was relieved to be out from under Carl's "iron fist."

Beach-House Life

Fall 1959

From letter dated November 2, 1959

Since Bucher got home from St. Cloud, we have been making up for lost time in being together as a family. We have had our weekly picnics in Alex's boat; Bucher has taken Alex fishing after school several afternoons; we have had our late afternoon swims together as we always enjoy; and we have done a lot of work around the house and yard all together. It has been marvelous.



It now looks as if we can stay on in this house until into next year, so we are going to do it. The house sold last spring, and at first, the new owner thought he would want possession no later than the first of January. Now he has said that he would like us to stay on with 60- to 90-days' notice, so we are jumping at the chance.

This house is small and inconvenient in some ways, but we are used to the inconveniences. We repainted the entire inside last spring, made new curtains, bedspreads, etc., and have it looking quite pleasant. It is still a rough little cottage, but the location on the beach is ideal, and we love it.

We really didn't want to buy a house just now. To begin with, we don't have any furniture since we sold ours with the screen-cage house, and that would be a big expense. Then, we couldn't afford the kind of house we really want. Since we are just now getting into the clear after all those years of trying to make good our Belize investment, we would much rather rock along a little while longer in this low-rent house instead of saddling ourselves with a mortgage, furniture, taxes, insurance, repair bills, and all the other expenses that are part of buying a house.



Alex and Carli on road between beach house and beach, 1960

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One of the best features of this house is a converted garage that we have used as combined storage and playhouse. Through the months, it has gotten to be more of a junk room, so last week we got busy fixing it up again. Bucher and Alex fixed Alex's train table so that it could be pulled up against the wall when Alex wasn't using it. I went through all our stuff, making up a big box for the Goodwill Industries, getting rid of torn-up or outgrown toys and clothes, and repacked things, organized so that I could get at things I occasionally want. I got most of the mess tucked away neatly in the big cupboards at the end of the room.

I find that as the children have grown, their toy needs have diminished. The kinds of things they now like tend to be games and gear of the sort that can be kept neatly in their rooms...not the big miscellany little children use.

We now have the playhouse fixed up with my two large trunks in corners, where I can get into them if I need to, two children's card tables with

chairs set up for the children to work or play at, a cot that is all right for lounging or even for Alex to sleep on if we have overnight company, a rack to keep Alex's motor on, and a chair and lamp that won't fit in the main house and that look nice out there. It is not gorgeous, but it is neat and pleasant...and it represents an enormous amount of long-overdue work.



Friday we added one more thing to the playhouse...a gleaming new Kenmore washing machine. I couldn't be more thrilled. My old washer and dryer were sold with our house, of course, since we couldn't have used them in Belize. We haven't been able to buy one since we got back. We wouldn't have bought this one now except that when I took my clothes to the laundromat on Thursday, they told me that they were closing up until January. That really finished me. I came back, told Bucher, and we agreed that somehow we'd install one in the playhouse.

I had already decided on a Kenmore, but to my amazement, they were running a special sale of the new 1960 model. So, I got exactly what I wanted at a lower price. It is divine, with special settings for all sorts of fabrics, including wash-and-wear and even my delicate nylon lingerie.

Installing it wasn't as hard as we had thought. We found hot and cold pipes outside the play house and were able to attach hose connections to them quite easily. Bucher laid a twenty-five foot drain field for the waste water. That was a hard job and showed him he had muscles he had forgotten, but he enjoys physical exercise and had the time to do it.

This house has a tiny hot-water heater, so actually the machine never has water as hot as it should; however, our clothes were washed in cold water for three years in Belize and were cleaner than they ever have been before or since. So I guess that for a temporary installation, this will do quite nicely. Besides, I can always heat a bucket of water on the stove to add to the machine if I particularly want hot water for it.

I've been washing constantly since the machine was installed, as if it were a new toy. And Saturday afternoon when I wasn't looking, Bucher even put a load in just so that he could play with it.



Our weather has been perfectly divine this fall. We still are swimming every day; we all got sunburned on the beach yesterday noon. But we have found, just within the past week or so, that it really isn't pleasant to swim late in the afternoon anymore. I hate to think that this warm weather will have to end before long. Maybe we'll have a mild winter. I hope so.



The children are happy in school. Alex has been bringing his grades up some. He has an extremely high I.Q. and his achievement tests put him on the average of one to three years ahead of himself in various fields. But he doesn't do daily work quite in line with his capabilities, and his behavior is a whole lot more like a normal little boy who doesn't take kindly to long hours of school than like a quiet studious type! Bucher takes the blame...he says that he never behaved in school for a day in his life! However, Alex is happy and is learning, and I'm not going to fuss too much. Carli does excellent work, and while she is slow and methodical, sometimes to her own disadvantage, her grades are fine, and she behaves perfectly.

Alex, Salesman

Early 1960

From letter dated March 9, 1960

The first of this year, Alex sent in a coupon asking for a sample sales kit for greeting cards. I was awfully dubious about it, since they usually are pretty shoddy, but I didn't tell him so. I figured that if he were interested, he might as well go ahead and find out for himself.

As it turned out, he was right, and I was wrong; the outfit has the Good Housekeeping seal. Besides the boxes of greeting cards (which, as I suspected, were not particularly attractive), they handle inexpensive name-on stationery similar to what you can get in most department stores for \$1.25 to \$1.50 a box, gift paper, all sorts of note paper in varying designs, and an assortment of novelty items...including a very attractive gold-embossed, white-plastic-covered combination address, telephone, Christmas-card list, and anniversaries record book for \$1.50. The last is really handsome and has been a fine seller for him.

Anyway, Alex set out around the neighborhood while I sat home with my fingers crossed. He was back within half an hour brandishing a five-dollar bill and asking for change. He had made a \$3 sale...some imprinted stationery and one of the address books. He made another similar sale later that afternoon. Actually, he has yet to go out selling without making at least one sale.

He does not work at it too consistently, and I don't urge him to. This is his own project, and he'll enjoy it most and stay with it longest if he can follow it at his own rate of speed. Then too, after he sent in two orders to the company, I was willing to have him hold off until we got at least one shipment back so we could be sure everything was in order.

One thing please me a lot. Alex started studying all the printed material that had been sent to him with his initial order and discovered that he could get a 50% discount on samples. He decided to reinvest part of his

profits in samples, figuring that he might make more sales, and if he didn't, he still could sell off the samples themselves for a 50% profit. All of this he worked out without any help from me, though I did advise him on which things to order, having a better idea than he did about which looked like good sellers.

The box with his new samples arrived in the mail today, and I can't wait for Alex to get home from school and open it.

Incidentally, the envelope I'm mailing this in is one of his items...a special that gives you 100 envelopes with your name imprinted for \$1. That's the same price I've been paying for the stamped envelopes I buy from the Post Office, and they are ideal for letters and for mailing checks, so I ordered 200 from him.

Belize Before Hattie

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Kate's passport photo for return to British Honduras, 1959

Back to Belize

Summer 1960

We enjoyed a few years with Florida friends before new business opportunities called us back to Belize. Bucher was to take over operation of a fish and seafood processing plant that would export frozen products to the States. The children were as excited as Bucher and I about returning to our beloved, backward, little British enclave in Central America.

Bucher took Alex and went on ahead to find a house, then Carli and I followed.

Almost the first move Bucher made when he returned was to look up Concie and ask her to come back to work for us. She agreed and was busy settling the house when Carli and I arrived. Concie was a bright, quick young woman, above average in many ways, and furthermore she knew us, remembered our ways, and was willing to adopt them. We all were delighted to have her with us.

New Opportunity

From letter dated August 27, 1960

We are back in Belize for the summer. Bucher was here off and on with his shipping business since the first of the year. His boat, *Golden Duchess*, was wrecked off the coast of Mexico in a storm late in April. We still are waiting for the insurance check, though all the papers finally are in. The insurance company has assured us that they are completely satisfied with every aspect of the claim and sure that every proper procedure was taken to try to save the boat. Meanwhile, of course, we have been out of the freight business.

We joined Bucher down here in July. He's had a hard, disappointing year, with his business showing the most brilliant promise just before the shipwreck. We have had to be apart almost continually, so Bucher really needed the children and me with him. Since I'm lucky enough to have a

husband who takes pleasure in my company after fifteen years of marriage, I expect the least I can do is be with him when he needs me. Of course, the trip has been exciting and fun for us as well. You remember that we loved this funny little country, and we all are enjoying being back.



Bucher was offered a share of a fish business here, Baymen Fisheries, plus a modest weekly salary to set it up and get it into operation. This actually is a matter of new capital taking over a company that folded before it really got into operation. They have a nice little physical plant with two good-size freezers and room for processing (filleting fish and cleaning lobster and cutting their tails off).

Since the Miami partner has a large, well established wholesale fish company in Miami, we also have an automatic outlet for our fish, though right now he would like about 50 times what we are able to produce! Furthermore, once Bucher can get another boat into operation, the Miami man will help him get refrigeration equipment for it so our little Caribbean Navigation Company will be able to ship the fish and lobster to him. The new boat is owned by a friend and business associate of Bucher's here and, at present, is up just over the border in Mexico.

As usual, all our loose ends tie in together. Accepting this meant more or less getting stock in the company for no capital investment plus a salary—which was more than we have had since the boat sank on us! It also gave us a chance to be down here to supervise and expedite fitting-out of the new boat (neither of which has happened yet).

New House

By Belize standards, Bucher did extremely well at renting accommodations on short notice. But it was a shock to my U.S.-softened system! When Carli and I arrived, I took one look at our new abode and wondered whether to take the next plane back to Sarasota or, to save time, jump off the veranda into the adjacent sea and simply swim back.

We had the top two floors of a huge old Colonial house on the Southern Foreshore. The street ran alongside the seawall for a few blocks, from the river's mouth at the harbor almost to Government House, home to the succession of British Governors. The list of our new house's good points was completed with note of its location and basic style.

The house was a large, three-story wooden structure on 12-foot "stilts." Its exterior, sadly in need of paint, was a weathered gray. Open verandas ran the full length of the front on first and second floors. Dormer windows broke the third-floor facade. Wooden stairs at the northern end of the house led in "Z" formation to our veranda. French louvered doors, rattling with ancient slats faded to a soft, grayed version of their original forest green, gave onto glassed French doors that opened into a large living room. Bucher had rented the house "furnished" but the things in it were rudimentary in quantity and questionable in style.

Living and Dining Rooms

The living room walls were varnished mahogany louvers, fixed shut for visual privacy. Auditory privacy was not a feature of the house. Full ventilation was provided by walls that stopped two or three feet short of the 12-foot ceiling so that breezes could circulate, along with the faintest of whispers, from one room to another.

Four uncomfortable armchairs of undistinguished design made of the finest mahogany constituted living room seating facilities.

At the back of the living area, the dining room was separated in the old Belize style by mahogany dividers with ceiling-high posts at either side of the entrance between the rooms. The dining room held a large, dark table and chairs.

Kitchen

A wide hall ran along the back wall of the house, beyond the dining room. Stairs with mahogany railings led to a downstairs kitchen. Bucher had turned a back bedroom opening off the end of the dining room into a makeshift kitchen. That there was no running water in the new kitchen hardly mattered; there was none in the old downstairs kitchen either.

Together Concie and Bucher had equipped the kitchen with our old stove and refrigerator, a screened “safe” on slim legs to hold food, and a washing center on an old marble-topped table: two galvanized dish pans and two buckets, one for fresh water and one for slops. The idea of a sinkless kitchen paralyzed me at first. It was many days before I was comfortable with it. But Concie managed with no trouble.

The idea of throwing the dregs of my morning coffee into a bucket half full of dirty dish water offended me until I realized that I had no option other than tossing my undrunk last sips off the veranda. Given the alternative, it was an adequate system. I never grew comfortable with that kitchen, but I learned not to panic when I stepped through the door.

Bedrooms

Our bedroom opened to the right off the living room and ran almost the full north side of the house. Carli’s bedroom opened to the left, taking up the front half of the south side of the house while the ex-bedroom / present kitchen filled the back half.

Carli’s bed was a monstrous old four poster with a straw mattress laid on slats. We padded the center area as best we could for our tiny daughter. She cried herself to sleep the first night, but rapidly came to cherish it instead of to complain.

Stairs led upward from the far end of the back hall to a third floor, Alex’s province. He was installed in a great iron double bed of Early Cottage design with slightly sagging springs, but a tolerable mattress. The room took up about three-quarters of the entire floor. Dormer windows on three sides gave him views of the sea and of nearby rooftops, and captured the

tropical winds. It was a magnificent bed-and-play-room. Alex loved his private aerie.

Bathroom

The bathroom opened off our bedroom and had a door to the back hall, making it easily accessible to the children. It had the usual fixtures. Water was supplied from a 55-gallon steel drum bracketed near the ceiling. The drum was filled by a hand-cranked pump that brought rain water up from the large wooden vat in the back yard. Unfortunately, the pump showed its age as much as did the house itself, and it took an hour's pumping per person per day to supply our barest needs. Bucher and I quickly convinced Alex and Carli that pumping was an adult job, and only with a great show of reluctance agreed to let them participate. The children's energetic earning of the privilege of pumping made life much easier for their parents.

Bucher repaired the pump three times during our first ten days in the flat, always to the accompaniment of frantic complaints from our neighbors (and soon-to-be friends) in the first-floor flat. Whenever he dismantled the pump, water dripped through our bare wood bathroom floor into their bathroom below. Ultimately Bucher was able to borrow this and that, invest a couple of dollars in hose and fittings, and rig up a tiny pump and electric motor that kept the tank filled with approximately ten-minutes' operation daily. It probably was the most glorious piece of equipment that ever had entered my domestic life.

At Home

Despite the house's shortcomings, I felt at home from the moment when I walked through the door into our bedroom. There, already installed, was my great grandmother's bedroom furniture. I had left it behind in trepidation when we returned to Sarasota. Here, to my delight, were the heavily carved mahogany double bed and matching bureau and dressing table with their large oval mirrors.

Many nights when the wind died down, mosquitoes swarmed through our unscreened windows, and I thought about my sinkless kitchen and hand-pumped plumbing, only the soothing comfort of my own familiar mattress kept me from packing up and taking the next plane home.

View

The view from our porch made up for the many discomforts. The street and seawall were directly below us; small sailboats moored all along the seawall; larger sailboats anchored a little farther out, particularly off to the left in the mouth of the harbor. Some government launches, including the Governor's yacht, were out nearly off the lighthouse across the harbor. The small freighters that came to the port sat even farther out, with two or three almost always in view.

Sitting back in the living room (in one of our typical Belize chairs, intricately and inartistically fashioned from mahogany and designed so that you can assume a sitting position without ever enjoying it), looking out through the spokes of the veranda railing, you could see only water and feel very much as if you were at sea yourself.

Warm Welcome

From letter dated August 27, 1960

You can't imagine how many people have gone out of their way to welcome us back...not just people whom we knew well or even casually, but delivery boys riding down the streets on their bikes, or girls in the little shops, or the women in the stores where I shopped regularly. At first just walking into a store seemed to be a signal for all the girls to descend in a flock to say hello and tell me that they had missed me.

Many of them even remembered my name and asked about the children.

It is much the same thing as having left a small country town, but here, where I'm a foreigner and a Yankee at that, it is terribly sweet and heart warming. People who used to work for us stopped by to "call." A young

boy who just ran errands for me once in a while dropped by my first day back (heaven knows how he knew I was here), and even a girl who used to be a waitress at the hotel when we lived there came by one morning to say hello.

Getting Settled

Summer 1960

From letter dated August 27, 1960

Bucher has been working long days, but he does come home for his midday meal. We have our heavy dinner then, both because he likes it when he is working this way, and because it is simpler to manage with Concie here. She and I share the cooking, though more and more she is doing most of it very nicely and with only a little direction.



The food available here now is much better, more varied, and less expensive than it was when we were here before, so we manage a fairly good menu without too much trouble. You can't depend on having what you want just when you want it, but allowing for that, you can manage quite nicely. Lettuce comes in once a week where we used to have it once every six months or so. The beef is better quality and fairly low in price. We had what they call a roast last weekend—a 4-inch-thick sirloin at the U.S. dollar equivalent of about 45 cents per pound—and it was elegant.

Since Bucher has lockers for rent at his freezer plant, he also has access to many foods at wholesale prices...chickens, eggs, fish, and lobster. That helps. Canned things still are high, and the children are back to drinking canned sterilized natural milk from Holland, at a cost of about US\$1 per day...but expensive or not, they're going to have their milk!



We have been a little handicapped having neither telephone nor car, but for the past three years, Bucher's partner in B.H. Industries, the boat-parts factory, has been in the States, so we have been using his car. One weekend we drove up to the Sibun River and picnicked in one of our favorite spots. The river was in flood, but there were shallows where we

could play in the rocks, build dams, etc., and it was not so swift that we were prevented from swimming cautiously in the deeper parts.



Last weekend we drove up to Chetumal, just across the B.H. border in Mexico. It was a fascinating drive through low bush country, fields of bananas, scraggly corn, and sugar cane. As you get farther north, the little thatched huts turn to adobe, and most of the people you see are Mayan.

Chetumal was leveled in that hurricane just before we left B.H. three years ago, but it has been rebuilt beautifully and very imaginatively with handsome public buildings, parks, statuary, and every road a boulevard. It is still a small border town, but it is neat, clean, and colorful. The philosophy seems to be that if one color is pretty, two will be twice as pretty, and so on. Not many houses have fewer than three or four, and one gem, an older frame house that apparently survived the hurricane, took top honors with every post on the veranda railing a different color.

Their hotel has been renovated and modernized. To one side, down a terraced hill, are four motel-type buildings with four units per building, overlooking a lovely small free-form pool. We had two units, each air conditioned, with private bath and piped-in music. Since we were almost the only guests in the hotel, we had the pool to ourselves most of the time. The children adored it, of course.

We wandered through town before dinner, all the shops being open for Saturday evening, and I did all the conversing for the family. My Spanish is ragged, but I manage to get by. The meals at the hotel were simple but nicely prepared real Mexican cooking...not pseudo-North-American, which you get at so many places. Of course I was sick the day after I got home, but it was well worth it. We had a perfectly lovely weekend for practically nothing, financially speaking.

Home Improvement

Summer 1960

The house on the Southern Foreshore was not screened, and being as large as it was, we had no intention of installing screens ourselves. Mosquitoes were not a regular problem because our flat was so high off the ground. Normally, the strong sea breezes kept insects away.

But when the wind dropped...

A friend explained that I must make mosquito nets. This was not something life in Grand Rapids, Michigan, had taught me to do. I listened to her instructions, decided that (awful as it sounded) I had no option, and set about the task.

First, Bucher was delegated to supply a barrel hoop for each of our three beds. I bought enough mosquito netting to drape a large stage for a fairytale production.

For each bed, I wrapped a hoop in torn strips of sheeting. I cut out a circle of sheeting slightly larger than the hoop and stitched the gathered netting around the edge of the circle, allowing enough material to envelope the bed. Last, by hand I awkwardly sewed the circle with its net to the sheeting wrapping the hoop. The hoop with its great folds of net was suspended from the ceiling on ropes strong enough to prevent its breaking loose some unexpected night and slicing the sleepers below into small pieces.

Bucher never got used to the net, but I loved lying inside its tent with a light on for reading. The bottom of the net was tucked firmly under the mattress all around, and I listened to the winged monsters buzz in helpless fury outside it. Mosquito nets added a special, warm dimension to tucking the children into bed at night.

Friends and Neighbors

Summer 1960

In a small community like Belize, one makes friends with a wide assortment of people of differing backgrounds. Names and faces spin past as I write, reminding me of the friendliness that has been one of Belize's greatest gifts.



The Tattersfields, Lia and Tom, lived next door to us. We had met them soon after we arrived in Belize in the mid Fifties, but did not become close friends until we moved into the house on the Southern Foreshore in 1960. Tom was a tall man with a quirky sense of humor. Formerly a major in the British Army, he never lost his officer's bearing and demeanor. At the time we met, he was the country's only Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA).

Lia was a beautiful blond Latvian—enthusiastic, endearing, and glamorous. She and her parents had fled Latvia on thirty-minutes' notice one Sunday during World War II, escaping just ahead of the Russian Army's advance. They made their long, painful way through Poland to Germany, where they ended in a camp for Latvian refugees in Hamburg. Tom was the Officer-In-Charge of the camp. Lia, in her late teens, spoke good English and became interpreter for the Latvian internees.

The Tattersfield children and ours became inseparable when we were neighbors. Studious Tony was a bit older than Alex, and Sandra, called *Sissy*, was between Alex and Carli. Tiny Debbie, at age almost 3, was soon everyone's pet.

When Lia and Tom went to England on holiday, they left the children in the charge of the devoted and capable Ella, who had taken care of the family for years. During their parents' absence, the Tattersfield children were in our house more often than in their own. Little Debbie, confused at hearing half her playmates call Bucher *Daddy* and the other half call him

Mr. Scott, solved the problem to her own satisfaction and Bucher's delight by dubbing him *Mister-Scott-Daddy*.

The Tattersfields and Scotts spent increasing amounts of time together. The "T-fields" invited us to spend the odd weekend with them at their house on St. George's Caye. We invited all of them for boating holidays.

Lia insisted that we join them each year for her big family Christmas Eve dinner. Active games, which included the children as well as the adults, enlivened the evenings. One year when Belize was shivering under an unaccustomed Norther, Bucher was on what he was sure was his death bed with what he called pneumonia and what I considered a hard cold. Lia insisted that he come anyway. Tom met us at the door with something he introduced with a flourish as a "Boston Bracer." The hot concoction of brandy (so as not to clash with Christmas dinner wines) and beaten egg whites turned my ailing husband into the life of the party.



Another life-long friendship that began when we moved into the house on the Southern Foreshore was with Juanita Pérez and her family, who lived below us in the first-floor flat.

The Pérez family was from northern Spain. Tuto Alamilla, who was courting Juanita, had grown up on Ambergris Caye, British Honduras's northernmost island. His family came originally from Mexico.

Juanita, just out of her teens, was a shrewd businesswoman, voluble, excitable, and entrancing. Tuto, a successful shipping agent, was a quiet, amused foil for Juanita's explosions.

We had the fun of watching their courtship grow to marriage and of taking part in their wedding festivities. A year later we were drafted to help with preparations to welcome their first child, Aleda, when Juanita brought her home from the hospital.

The hospital released Juanita unexpectedly on a Saturday morning. Juanita's mother, Sra. Perez, whom we privately called *The Señora*, came up upstairs to consult to us in a panic because they did not yet have all the

baby supplies they needed. Bucher and I dashed downstairs with her, made our own rapid inventory, which was somewhat more comprehensible than her excited Spanish, and compiled a shopping list. I sent Bucher off to buy bottles, nipples, a sterilizer, baby powder, lotion, oil, cotton, and a few other things.

I remained with The Señora to set up a nursery area in Juanita and Tuto's bedroom. Fortunately, the crib was ready, and they already had sheets for it. Bucher returned, breathless, to deliver his purchases and then fled to the quiet of our flat upstairs. I threw myself into my work with all the enthusiasm of a former new mother about to become a proxy aunt. The Señora, half undone by the imminent arrival of her first grandchild, brought out her store of family photographs and tried to show them to me as I raced the clock.

By the time a beaming Tuto gently led his happy wife, cradling their infant daughter in her arms, into their home, all was ready for them. I cooed briefly, then left to let them enjoy the homecoming together.



When we moved into the Foreshore neighborhood, we began to know Emilie and Eric Bowen better. They lived a couple of blocks north of us, just to our side of the curve that takes the Foreshore past the Supreme Court building. Emilie's and my friendship grew even closer in later years.

Eric was from an old Belize family and had established himself as one of the country's leading importers. Emilie's family was French. She was born in British Honduras, but grew up in California. Emilie returned in her late teens, and she and Eric married somewhat younger than their parents might have wished. They had four exceptionally handsome children, two boys and two girls, all slightly older than our two. The youngest son, Bruce, became a close friend of our Alex.

They were an attractive couple, Eric poised and gallant in an old-fashioned way and Emilie, vivacious, charming, irrepressible.

Packing and Shipping

Fall 1960

After our family was reestablished in Belize, I returned to Sarasota alone to pack up things to be shipped, to clean our rental house, and to reclaim our Beagle Pedro from the vet.



From letter dated November 6, 1960

Dad, bless his heart, let me stampede him by a series of cables and special-delivery letters into driving all the way from Michigan to Miami to meet me. He arrived with his car jammed full of things I might need in Belize. From Miami, he drove me back to Sarasota and stayed to help me. It was pretty hectic, of course, with dozens of errands from one end of town to another most of the day and packing at night.

Packing is a dismal business, but having Dad's help and companionship made it a pleasant time. This was the first long visit we've had in years with no one else around, and we both enjoyed it. I had planned to give him some home cooking for a change, but he preferred to take me out noon and evening to save me the work...which was pretty luxurious, I must admit.

There are still lots of things I can't get in Belize; I had to buy those things first so that I could include them in my trunks and boxes as I packed. Once I had most of my shopping out of the way, I went through one or two rooms a day, moving everything to be packed into the living room and leaving the room fairly well cleaned for the final time.

By evening, the living-room floor and tables would be piled so high with stuff that there was barely a narrow aisle to walk through, and Dad would be shaking his head and muttering, "You can't do it. You'll have to let the packers do it." By the time we finished our evening's TV shows, all but a few stray items would be packed; the cartons would be sealed, labeled,

listed, and stacked neatly along a wall. Every night it was a new miracle to Dad.

Packing never bothered me; it was the cleaning out that was trouble. With all the nice cartons I had and all the proper packing materials, the packing itself amounted to little more than something to occupy my hands while I watched TV and talked to Dad. We had a wonderful visit together, and I loved every minute of it.



Dad and I had been told that we could get a cage for Pedro from the airline I would be flying from Miami to Belize, but the airline, TAN, was obdurate about having none. Dad designed a wood-and-hardware-cloth traveling box and had it built.

I learned that to fly from Sarasota to Miami would involve two changes of aircraft and endless problems with the dog, so at my practical father's suggestion, I applied for a rental car. National had a beautiful convertible that they had to return to Miami, so they offered me a good rate to drive it down. I took off with the top down, the radio playing, and Pedro ensconced in his cage in the back seat, where he spent the trip blithely scattering cedar chips over the interior.

Somehow I found the Miami airport in a blinding rain storm and was able to discharge dog and luggage, return the car, and check into the airport hotel, where I had made reservations for Pedro and me. The front desk clerk was remarkably affable in greeting us. His true feelings became apparent when I realized that he had given us an entire floor to ourselves.

The next day Pedro was returned reluctantly to his cage and delivered to TAN. I stood on the tarmac with him until he was loaded into the cargo hold. As we took off, I could hear the baying of my Beagle above the roar of the engines.



Let me tell you about the maddening part of shipping my stuff down here. I worked everything out on the Sarasota end with no trouble. The same two enormous, capable packers from the moving company who had come when I vacated our Sarasota home returned and took everything, stored certain things, and delivered the rest to the warehouse in Tampa. Bucher's agent there, who had handled his work when the late *Golden Duchess* was sailing, took care of all the paperwork and saw that everything got onto the *Belize Trader* to be brought down here. Bucher had arranged with the owner of that boat to carry the things for a set figure, a perfectly valid one.

As it happened, Bucher was in Mexico on business when the boat got into Belize. And that shift character presented Bucher's partner, Buzz Bradley, with a bill for three times what he had agreed to ship the things for...apparently assuming that Buzz and I would not know enough to see what he was doing.

We refused to accept the bill, and the man got mad and said he wouldn't even unload the things...that we would have to do it ourselves. That is simply ridiculous, and Buzz told him so and forced him to unload them and put them in the Customs warehouse. The man tried several times before he sailed to talk Buzz into paying the full bill and finally left town before Bucher got home.

Bucher was furious, of course, and at first thought that he could get the things released. Both the local agent for the *Belize Trader* and the whole crowd at Customs were completely on our side, thinking it was a shabby trick. But it turned out that the scamp had put the things in bond, so the only way to get them was to pay the entire bill or wait for his return to Belize.

So, for two-and-a-half weeks, my possessions have been sitting in the Queen's Bonded Warehouse while I think about all the things I want and need so badly in this house...principal among them the lovely one-year-old refrigerator that Dad bought for me to replace the one I have now, which won't make ice and which swarms with cockroaches.

I understand the boat is due back tonight or tomorrow, and Bucher will see the owner and get it worked out. The bill is outrageous...over a thousand dollars. I could have had everything sent down air freight for less than half that amount and had it within a few days of the time I packed it up.

I told Bucher I was going to make it my dedicated purpose to spread the story...without any trimmings...as far as possible among people I know in Belize. He just laughed and said I didn't have to bother, that their own agent and Customs men already had spread it farther, faster, and more colorfully than I ever could do.

I've been sort of living in limbo, hoping daily that we could get our things released and that I could start fixing the house up. I've done a little painting, sewing, etc. in the mean time, but haven't been able to get too excited about anything. This all will be settled soon, I'll have my things, and I'll forget the inconvenience soon enough. It gives me one more gem of a situation to file away for telling about later.

Birthday News

Late 1960 – Early 1961

From letter dated November 6, 1960

I was fascinated to learn from Uncle Frank that my Grandma Van Brunt kept house for so long in the same without-modern-conveniences way that I have here in Belize. Having known only a pretty soft way of living, we can't realize how recently those conveniences all came to be part of the general standards...and how relatively tiny the percentage of the world's population that even considers them "standard."



The children are having a wonderful time here. They both have lovely friends and lots of activities. Alex's crowd has been having "chip-in" parties where they all plan the food, decorations, and activities, and have as much fun ahead of time as they do at the party itself.

The first one was something of a fiasco for Alex, since he hadn't realized that it would involve dancing. He stepped on the little girl's foot, she started screaming at him, everyone laughed, and he was so upset he left. At his request, I gave him dancing lessons all the next week, and apparently he had a wonderful time at the next party (two days ago) and wants to continue his dancing instructions.

I think not-quite-twelve is a little young to be starting these parties, but since they are carefully chaperoned, it is a lovely crowd, and all his friends are included, I can't very well arbitrarily forbid him to go.



Bucher's business is growing fantastically, and it really looks as if finally he's settled in one that will justify his work and hopes.



From letter dated January 17, 1961

I had a lovely little family birthday party on the fourth. It began with my hairdresser presenting me with a huge bouquet of flowers at my appointment with her in the morning. Anita is something of a gem. She's intelligent, trained in the U.S., and has given me the best all-round view I've gotten of the life, points of view, background, etc., of Belize. I have loved my weekly indulgence of a hair appointment...which I never had in the States. Her prices are incredibly low by U.S. standards, and with my long hair and a scarcity of water, I don't feel that it is too extravagant. Anyway, she was leaving the following weekend for Detroit, where she is taking a refresher course and planning to work for a while to earn money to expand her shop in Belize. Although she wasn't working that last week, she insisted on my coming in on my birthday. Her giving me the lovely flowers was deeply touching.

I baked my own cake, of course...more to please the children than because I felt the need for it...and decorated it elaborately with Carli's help.

Bucher came home early, and we had tea, and I opened my presents then. The children had gone shopping that morning, each separately, and there had been quite a frenzy of hiding packages behind backs, sidling into the house, locking themselves in the bedroom with the gift-wrapping supplies, etc. Honestly, both Bucher and I were so impressed with their selections.

Alex had bought me an elaborate set of Evening in Paris toiletries...soap, bath salts, dusting powder, and perfume. Actually, I wasn't too surprised. He had given Carli a smaller set for Christmas, doing the shopping himself, and was terribly pleased with the delighted reception it got both from her and from me. So I just knew that was what he would get. I was thrilled, however, I *need* almost nothing, but I do so adore frivolities like that, which I won't buy myself.

Carli had outdone herself, too, buying me a set of brooch with matching earrings...a large brownish stone set in "platinum" with rhinestones. Children's taste in jewelry is liable to be extremely dubious, but this set is

charming. I wear a lot of brown and tan shades, so the things go with many outfits. She was so excited, herself, about it, and I was deeply pleased.

After the presents, we all went to the Pickwick Club for supper. We have our main meal in the middle of the day, so we eat very lightly in the evening. Bucher and I had a drink and ordered Cokes for the children, and then to their complete surprise at first, we all danced to the jukebox, Bucher with Carli and Alex with me.

Wednesday is a very dull night there, and we had the main room to ourselves. The other people were just a handful of men, mostly oil-company personnel dropping by for a solitary drink or a few men playing snooker by themselves.

Our dinner was U.S.-style hamburgers, which they do very nicely...quite ordinary, but still a treat to the children. Bucher had offered to take me out for the evening, but I really preferred to have a just simple little evening with the whole family.

We were home by eight and had the birthday cake then. I thought it was a lovely little celebration.



The children started back in school a week ago Monday, and it was high time. Not only had it stretched plenty long for me, but they, too, were bored and at loose ends and quite ready to return.



Baymen Fisheries has been keeping Bucher very busy. There were the usual delays in getting the refrigeration equipment installed in the new boat, so his partner left last Wednesday for Miami to hurry things up. They have a full load returning, and all the merchants here are hoping their goods will arrive soon. All of them (jokingly) insist that it is my fault they don't have the things I want to buy.

Meanwhile, the grouper run is starting, and the fishermen are working extra long hours to make up for the holidays plus a stretch of bad weather. Bucher is working till almost midnight every night. However, things were so slow for two weeks through Christmas that their backlog of fish and lobster tails ran out completely, and he's delighted to be getting back into production.

For about two weeks now, they will catch incredible numbers of grouper. Bucher's plan is to buy and process as much as the plant can manage, and as soon as the boat returns, fill her up and turn her around to Jamaica. It's quite amazing that, for some reason, Jamaica is an even better fish market than the States, buying more fish at a better price. Just why a large island would have to import fish, I can't imagine.

Epilogue: Bucher's Work at Baymen Fisheries

From letter dated July 22, 1995

At a recent party, I visited with Harry Lawrence, an old friend and the editor of one of the local newspapers. He just had attended a large celebration by one of the fishing cooperatives when they acquired a new shrimp trawler. Harry said that over and over again fishermen told him how much help Bucher gave them thirty-some years ago.

Bucher offered them loans when the American scamp who ran a freezer plant tried to starve them into accepting too little for their lobster. Government encouraged the fishermen to organize into cooperatives to protect themselves. They were delighted to have Bucher take the initiative in helping them organize. I remember well the time he spent on it. Even after the co-ops were running, we continued going out to the various cayes so he could attend meetings of the cooperatives. It involved an enormous amount of education, diplomacy, and direction on Bucher's part.

Man after man told Harry that Northern Fishermen's Cooperative never would have existed without the encouragement and guidance Bucher gave

them. Naturally, it was gratifying to hear Bucher remembered so warmly by the fishermen he cared a great deal about.

Summer Recap

Summer 1961

From letter dated July 31, 1961


The children and I had a wonderful time visiting my family in Michigan. We left Higgins Lake the morning of the 18th, terribly disappointed that the space flight had been postponed. Alex was desperately anxious to see it, but of course we missed it completely as there is no TV in Belize.

We left Grand Rapids the next morning, had a little over an hour in Chicago, and were in Miami slightly before four in the afternoon. The weather was not too good, very cloudy and often rainy. We had our seat belts fastened for half the flight, but the little rocking and rolling the plane did was really more pleasant than not. However, during the afternoon, as we were lashed down and tossing about a bit with clouds closed in so that you could not see the wingtips, the Captain came on the intercom to announce, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we have just passed over Cape Canaveral, and perhaps now you see why they didn't shoot off Captain Grissom this morning."




We stayed overnight at the Airport Hotel. In the morning when I checked in with TAN for our flight to Belize, the agent said that "Carolyn Jones" had been asking about me. Well, I asked him to repeat the name, thought about it, and finally said I couldn't possibly imagine who she could be. He rifled through his tickets, found the right one, checked the name and repeated, yes, it was Carolyn Jones. I just laughed and said I'd better try to remember her, turned around, and there sitting with my two children was Callie (Carolyn) Young, my close friend and the wife of Bucher's partner in the wood factory here. I had known she was going to Miami, but thought she had gone back to Belize a week earlier. I told Callie about the confusion at the desk, and she, nodding happily with the assurance of many more years than I of living in Central America, said, "That's right,

Carolyn Jung; that's the way they always pronounce it." No wonder they lost me! Anyway, we sat together on the flight south and had a wonderful visit.




Bucher was still in pretty much of a madhouse business-wise when I got back. Lobster season just had started, and he was buying, processing, and shipping as fast as possible. He looked well; Concie had the house in nice condition; and Pedro-the-Beagle went completely to pieces when we all returned. Bucher quite literally had thought a couple time that Pedro might die, he grieved so while we were away. He looked just awful, though I know he'd had perfect care. But withing a day, his eyes were bright, his coat shiny, and he was in wonderful condition.



We came in just ahead of Hurricane Anna. Bucher has had a good bit of experience with hurricanes; we had "evacuation" plans; he listened to the shortwave radio reports from ships near the storm, plotted its course, watched the barometer, and decided that we probably were safe. As it happened, we had a lot of rain and something of a blow, but less wind than we've had since then on ordinary nights.

But the town prepared for the worst. Women packed away silver, china, pictures, lamps, rolled up rugs, locked their clothes in trunks, and literally headed for the hills. Not only were large glass shop windows boarded up, but people nailed boards over the shutters that protected the glass in the windows of their homes. The owner of a small family hotel turned out all guests, locked up, and drove the family up to the Guatemalan border. I've never seen anything like it.



This weekend Bucher's partner from Miami, Don Eckis, has been here. He is having a seventy-some-foot yacht built, and he brought his designer down to confer with the builder. The designer, John Atkin, is the son of one of the top naval architects, William Atkin; John himself has something of a national reputation in the field. He's just slightly older than we are and couldn't have been nicer. He loved Belize and, after the first shock at the casual way Denys Bradley's boatyard operates, decided that Denys really could do a fine job on Don's boat.

We had a great time with Don and John, of course, but the really happy person was Alex. He's seen Atkin's designs in *Yachting Magazine* for years, and the idea of meeting *Mr. Atkin* was about the most exciting thing that could happen to him.

Bucher took Alex with him Sunday morning, and John asked Alex to show him around Belize. So, the two of them set out on foot and spent two hours off by themselves. Later John was very complimentary about Alex's interest in, and knowledge of, boat design. John even mentioned that Alex asked some good questions and, more important, listened carefully to the answers. John also said that if he had paid more attention to details, he should be able to tell us the owner and past history of every boat in Belize, since Alex filled him in on every one of them. Alex even pointed out a boat designed by John's father and told him how the local builder had changed the design building it. As you can judge, it was a big weekend for Alex!



I have a busy week or so ahead of me now. After several poor solutions to the problem of a bookkeeper, Bucher has hired me to do it...and I, who throughout my school career never had been completely convinced that two plus two equals four, only hope I justify his faith.

I have had only some patchwork training for it, but I've been working over the books from the first of the year on, have learned the system, and have even gotten far enough to know *why* I'm doing something as well as

what I have to do. I'm behind, of course, because of our trip, so I'm getting June and July caught up.

Since the fiscal year ends today, I have to get everything balanced out and ready for the auditors. I'm really awfully glad, since it has given me a chance to learn the system and make my mistakes and corrections in the old books. They will start me off for the new year with a verified balance and a new set of ledgers. Instead of the loose-leaf ledgers, they use the old-fashioned bound ones here, so all the trial and error stuff of getting the books the way they wanted when this company was bought a year ago will be out of sight from now on. And I do love to have things tidy!

Marooned

October 1, 1961

From letter dated October 6, 1961

This is the story of the Swiss Family Scott.

On Sunday, Bucher and I decided to have a family picnic at a little mangrove island just inside the reef. Preferring privacy, Bucher makes exploration a part of every outing, looking for bits of beach, no matter how small, where we could swim and picnic in our little family group.

Sissy Tattersfield, the lovely blond eleven-year-old daughter of our next-door neighbors and close friends, Tom and Lia Tattersfield, was with us for the weekend. She had a long Saturday rehearsal for a school program, so when her parents decided to take the other children and spend the weekend at their house on St. George's Caye, we suggested to Lia and Tom that Sissy stay in town with us.

Twelve-year-old Alex was absorbed designing a skiff he planned to build and was not charmed by the idea of "wasting" his free time on an ordinary outing. He had agitated for months to be allowed to stay home alone.

With some disappointment and a noticeable lack of graciousness, Bucher and I gave him permission to stay—in the house, and without company.

With Tuto and Juanita Alamilla in the flat downstairs, we did not feel that he was completely adrift in the metropolis.



Sissy, nine-year-old Carli, Bucher, and I took off in our skiff around eleven in the morning, heading for a little cove we had discovered a few weeks earlier. It was a crescent of sand on a mangrove-covered caye near one of the cuts that wound through the maze of small islands to the reef.

Frigate birds made graceful circles overhead, watching for schools of small fish. Pelicans floated slowly in the air just above the sea, folding their wings and diving, making lightening-swift 180-degree turns as they

hit the water, and emerged moments later, heads adrip, to arch their great throats upward as they gulped their catches of fish.

The ground on our private little caye was high. There was shade in open patches among the trees. The sea bottom was sandy and grass-free for a long stretch near where we anchored. We had been cleaning up the underbrush and carefully burning trash each visit, gradually clearing a larger and larger beach for ourselves. Since the entire island was mangrove, uninhabited, and most of it below tide level, there was no danger of our starting an uncontrollable fire.

We pulled our half-burned logs from the previous visit out from the sand with which we had covered them, moved them to another clear spot, picked up a good supply of dried limbs and twigs, started our mosquito-repellent fire, and then all headed for the crystalline water.

The little girls took off through the tangle of mangrove roots to a place a few yards away where they found a natural swing of mangrove limbs from which they could swoop out over the water and jump. We were satisfied that they were within view; they felt safe from adult supervision and had a glorious time.

Bucher and I used snorkels and masks, though there was not much to see in an area with little coral. We swam, had lunch, and gathered more firewood, as much to keep the girls occupied after lunch, when we did not want them to swim, as to acquire more fuel for our smudge. Around what must have been 3:00 or 3:30 that afternoon we packed up to leave for home.



The outboard engine would not start. Bucher was a pro with outboards. He had sold them, repaired them, raced them, and owned a series of them that stretched from one end to the other of our marriage.

Bucher was infuriated (mainly with himself) to find that his toolbox was not on board. Taking care of the tools was Alex's self-assumed

responsibility. When Alex decided not to join us, neither he nor his father thought about the tool kit.

Bucher found some implements to use as makeshift tools and tried every trick he ever had known attempting to get our reluctant engine purring. By the time he gave up, I had completed my mental lists of What To Do, so I could go into action on Operation Castaways without delay.

During the aggravating hours, as Bucher fought with his recalcitrant engine, I warned the little girls that we might have to spend the night on the island. Their only worry was that Bucher might get the outboard started and cheat them of their adventure.

Our first project was to gather an enormous pile of firewood. The girls did most of that, proudly returning from their forays into the underbrush with heavy old logs, along with the usual dried limbs.



We had the girls take off the wet shorts and shirts that they had been wearing over their bathing suits as protection against the sun, and Bucher dried them by the fire.

Fortunately I had a few bits of lunch left over. Near sunset I gave Carli and Sissy each a plump piece of chicken, half a bread-and-butter sandwich, plenty of carrot, celery, and green pepper sticks, and a full glass of fruit juice. Bucher and I did not eat. We had ample water left plus the reassuring thought of two still-icy beers, to be preserved until the more dismal hours of the night.

After supper the girls brushed their teeth with twigs and salt water—Carli's contribution to our survival techniques. They put on their dried clothes, and we gathered around the fire, sitting on our boat cushions. The firelight made a cozy circle against the blackening sky; its smoke kept mosquitoes and sand flies under control. Far in the distance we could see the glow of the lights of Belize and, flashing regularly, the red beacon of the Fort George lighthouse at the harbor mouth.

I offered to tell the girls stories then realized that they had outgrown the standard fairy tales and were too sophisticated for most of the stories I could think of. In desperation I hit on the Iliad and the Odyssey.

Quite naturally I found that under the pressure of circumstance I could not remember details that once were so familiar. Still, I spun a fairly good yarn out of each of them. The girls were entranced. The close interplay of gods and men fascinated them. Even Bucher enjoyed the story hour whose colloquial, expurgated versions of his classics would have horrified poor Homer.

When finally I had felled Troy and brought Odysseus home, the girls decided they were ready for bed. Fortunately we had thought to have them share one towel after their last swim in order to keep a towel apiece dry for them to use as blankets. Carli and Sissy stretched out on the seats of the boat with cushions for pillows and the towels as coverlets, and that was the last we heard from them. They both later insisted that they were awake the entire time, far too excited to sleep.



Bucher built up the fire as a signal to anyone who might come looking for us. We took turns tending it. I napped awhile, amazed at how warm and soft hard coral sand could be with firelight flickering nearby and a boat cushion under one's head. I arose after about an hour, insisted that Bucher try to sleep, and went out clumsily foraging through the dark underbrush for fuel for our blaze.

Bucher and I felt sure we would be rescued. Alex was home to give the alarm, and he knew where we probably were. Furthermore, the Tattersfields were certain to do something about their beloved daughter when they got in from the caye.

On the other hand, any number of things might prevent rescue. Our sleepyhead son might have fallen asleep and not realized that we were missing. The T's might have decided to spend Sunday night at St. George's.

As the evening went on, Bucher and I had our last beer, deciding that if a boat did not arrive within a reasonable time, one wasn't coming. It did not matter. We were safe, warm, and the worst that could happen to us would be our being drenched by one of our frequent nocturnal squalls. It wouldn't be comfortable, but it was not dangerous.

Most important of all, Carli and Sissy, now apparently asleep, had enjoyed our predicament, or at least were hiding any private qualms under sunny smiles.




Back in Belize, Alex had a perfect day, enjoying his freedom and solitude. He read, fixed lunch (I had left part of it ready for him), and worked on his designs. It was only as light faded in an early twilight that he realized he had become a family of one.

Alex went down to the lower flat to talk to Tuto about our being overdue. He never admitted it, but Juanita later said that Alex looked pretty sad and lonely when he appeared.

Tuto was reassuring. The delay, he propounded and Alex agreed, had to be due to engine trouble, and we would come stumbling back before long. It was an exceptionally calm day, so there was no need to worry about the weather. Alex returned to our flat and his restless watch from the veranda.

As soon as he saw the Tattersfields' launch chugging up to their mooring, next door, Alex ran down to consult with them. Again, they all decided to wait and see. Juanita had invited Alex to stay for dinner, but when Lia also asked him, Alex decided to remain with the Tattersfields, since they all were concerned with the rescue. As I had anticipated, Alex and the T's joined forces to worry and respond.

After an uneasy supper, Lia and Tom decided that they had to take action. Tom called their close friend, Russell Grant, whose boat was larger and faster than his own, and within a short while Tom, son Tony, and Alex were aboard Russell's boat and headed out toward the reef, with Alex acting as navigator for the expedition.




Back on our mangrove strand, Bucher and I continued to take turns tending the fire. We had ample logs to keep a glow through the night, but the brush that blazed more brightly was disappearing fast. Bucher established a schedule of our building up a high blaze every fifteen minutes in case anyone was looking for us. Each time I built the fire up, I stumbled off into the underbrush searching blindly for fuel. The rescue party saw our signal fire fairly quickly, but had to wend a careful way among coral and islands to get to us.

Suddenly I thought I saw a light off in a funny direction through the mangrove. I stared, but could not find it again. On my next trip away from the noisy crackle of the fire, I thought I heard a distant engine. Although I was afraid it was wishful thinking, my suspicions grew, and I hurled everything except Bucher and the children onto the fire, Just In Case. The light and noise of my roaring blaze awoke them all shortly before the sound and spotlight from the approaching boat reached us.

Carli and Sissy decided that the excitement of being rescued made up for missing waking up next morning on a desert isle. We piled aboard Russell's boat, tied the skiff behind, and took off for Belize. Thoughtful Lia had sent warm clothes for the little girls, sandwiches, and two thermoses of blissfully hot coffee. The girls talked steadily all the way home.

Lia met us at the seawall, clutched her missing daughter, and chattered in her ever-charming Latvian accent as she collected family and gear and herded them into the house.



We Scotts headed next door to an unexpected reception.

I had noticed The Señora (Juanita's mother) pacing her veranda, lights ablaze in the windows behind her. Still, I was not prepared for her torrent of queries, gasps of horror, moans of relief, and wild gesticulating. It was

near midnight, I was exhausted, and my command of Spanish lapsed under stress to that of an inept first-year student. I mumbled a fragmented explanation, but need not have bothered. The Señora took my few words and embroidered them into a minor novel before I was halfway up the steps. As I reached her veranda, she did something that can only be described as Clasp Me To Her Bosom, not once, but eight or ten times. When she felt I had been embraced sufficiently, The Señora apparently decided we all were safe at home again and tearfully, she said “Buenas noches” and retired. I was as touched by the sincerity of her concern as I was amused at its extravagance.



Next morning Juanita filled me in on the shore-side part of our adventure. In view of the calm weather, Bucher’s marine expertise, and the built-in break-down feature of outboard engines, Tuto was convinced that while we were late, we were not in danger.

Not so The Señora. Juanita told me that her mother decided that we had hit a coral head, opened up the skiff, and were sinking; that the engine had caught fire, and our charred corpses were floating in the sea; that the sharks and barracuda had bitten off a leg here or there as we were swimming...and so on into the evening until Tuto, probably in desperation, took Juanita to the first movie he had consented to see since they were married. The Señora apparently had been pacing her veranda for hours by the time we returned to relieve her fears.



Carli and Sissy went to school eagerly Monday morning to spin increasingly elaborate tales of being shipwrecked. Alex and Tony had only slightly less dramatic tales of the rescue operation. And Bucher and I laughed about the episode, proud of the way all the children had displayed grace under pressure.

Living Through Hattie

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Hurricane Hattie

October 30 – 31, 1961

Hurricane Hattie was supposed to hit Cuba.

By midday on the 30th of October, 1961, we knew we would have a heavy storm, although the hurricane would pass Belize, well offshore, on her curving course to the north. At Bucher's urging, I took Carli and went to the nearby shops to buy canned goods, batteries, and other supplies. Most businesses closed as soon as hurricane preparations were made and storm blinds were in place, and people, including Bucher, left work and returned to secure their homes.

We took porch furniture into the house, wired blinds and nailed windows shut, disinfected the bath tub, then filled it with water. I put out warm clothes for all of us. We made sure that hurricane lamps were full and ready for use and that flashlights had fresh batteries.

At four in the afternoon the radio announced that the storm had passed above our latitude. We all sighed with relief and said a little prayer for the hapless Cubans in its path. No one knew about the strong cold front just north of us. It stopped Hattie in her tracks. The storm made a U-turn and roared south toward Belize.

We had supper. I put the children to bed, tucking them into their mosquito nets. I set up the coffee tray with our cups and a percolator, ready to be plugged in, and put it in its accustomed place on the table next to my side of our bed. Bucher and I retired, knowing that there was nothing to do but go to bed and pretend to sleep until the storm passed.

The blinds rattled with increasing fury in the mounting wind and woke us both a little after midnight. Bucher pushed past reluctant doors onto the veranda to study the clouds with his seaman's eye. He returned to announce that we were about to have a visit from Hurricane Hattie.

We both were fully awake so I plugged in the coffee pot, knowing that the electricity was sure to go soon. Bucher and I sat reading and drinking

coffee inside our mosquito-net tent as the storm intensified. We chortled when we realized that I happened to be rereading *Gone With The Wind*.

Alex, nervous at the way the house was rocking, called from upstairs. I went up to reassure him and his uneasy companion, our Beagle Pedro, then returned to our room. I realized how much quieter it was down on our floor. Even though Alex's dormer windows were closed and the louvers outside them wired shut, the wind and the rain on the galvanized roof were deafening. I went back upstairs, brought Alex and Pedro down, and settled our son on the Hide-a-Bed in the living room.

The lights went out.

About thirty minutes later we heard a terrific banging upstairs. Bucher and I leaped to investigate. Alex's blinds had torn open, though they were bolted top and bottom and lashed in two places with wire. We tried unsuccessfully to catch and re-secure them. Glass from shattered panes was beginning to blow into the room. We had no interest in being slashed to bits. We fled. The shutters continued to bang for another ten minutes before they tore away completely. The gentle tinkle of breaking glass was with us for some time, like haunting wind chimes.

With Alex's windows shattered, water poured into his room. Quite soon it was dripping down into our bedroom below. I threw an old shower curtain over our bed, so we stayed more or less dry for a little longer. By then sleep obviously was past for the night, so we fumbled our way into the kitchen, made instant coffee on the gas stove, and sat in bed under our plastic sheet, being elaborately casual about the whole situation.

The wind howled louder and louder; the house rocked under its onslaught. Bucher admitted that it must be up past one hundred miles per hour, and much higher in gusts.

The front doors blew open, heavy French doors with a pair of wooden louvered doors secured outside them. It took the two of us and both children to hold the inner doors against the force of the wind while Bucher re-bolted them top, bottom, and center, and nailed them shut with four-inch nails. Moments later they burst wide open.

The wind switched direction by about one hundred degrees in an instant as the edge of the hurricane's eye passed us. The front windows in both Carli's bedroom and ours blew in, frames and all.

Bucher yelled at us to forget the door. We grabbed children, pillows, blankets, air mattresses, and Pedro, and hurried down the back stairs to the little landing at the bottom, where we were lower in case the house fell down, and were protected from flying glass.

Bucher and I made alternating quick trips upstairs for one reason or other. I realized that my own urgent trips to retrieve this-or-that were inspired more by nerves than need. The warm clothes, so carefully laid out before the storm, already were sodden.

The view in our living room was incredible, horrifyingly beautiful, and beyond anything I had ever dreamed. Heavy, dark "rain" dropped from every joint in the ceiling. We later learned that roofing had blown away in two places. A fine mist of wind-blown rain swirled through the room. It was as plainly visible as if it had been a different color, coming in through the still-secured louvered outer doors, soaring up toward the ceiling, making a perfect loop, and then washing through the rest of the room.

Belatedly I draped a shower curtain over the bookcase, but decided that it was far too late to do anything more to protect things. Bucher came up the stairs and opened a back window. The pulsating of the house in the wind slowed appreciably. The only reason the house did not go was that the storm (and Bucher) opened it up so that the wind could sweep completely through—that and the fact that we were spared from the small whirlwinds within the hurricane that demolished entire houses, leaving neighboring homes untouched.

By this time thick, muddy water was almost ankle deep on the living room floor, though we were some twenty feet off the ground. The water began pouring down the back stairway, so we moved downstairs into the little former kitchen, which we used as a storeroom. One end of the room had only louvers, so it was wet with the misty rain blowing in, but we hardly cared.

Dawn of October 31st was breaking. I noticed that a house behind ours had moved about six feet closer than we were used to seeing it.

The wind shrieked deafeningly. I expected the shuddering of the house; a passing truck could cause that. I expected chattering blinds and a leaking roof. I did not expect the thunderous noise of the wind. We learned later that ten miles away, at the British Army base, the wind-speed indicator, which had been holding at one hundred sixty miles per hour, jumped to two hundred, and then went on swinging back around, broken.

We settled into our new refuge fairly comfortably, in a hurricane-y sort of way. The children huddled under a blanket, sharing a cot. Bucher and I were under another blanket on an air mattress on the floor, with Pedro curled up in the bend of my knees. Alex, restless at sharing the cot with Carli, took the second air mattress and settled himself in the small entry, one step lower than the room.

We all dozed fitfully.

Daylight and heavy, shuddering thumps directly under the small part of the house where we were sheltering brought me awake. I raised an eyebrow at Bucher, and he suggested that I run upstairs and get coffee makings while he lighted the old kerosene stove. We were savoring that first hot, delicious sip of our morning beverage when he grinned and motioned to me to look out the window.

I had always heard about the high water you get with a hurricane, but the view out the window was quite a shock. Brownish water with high waves sloshed in frenzy a few inches below the window sill, although we were a full story above the ground. The fence between our house and the next was visible only in the troughs of the waves. As I watched in disbelief, the fence tore away, section after section joining the other debris swirling in the rising water. A fifty-five-gallon drum surged back and forth in the water below us, repeatedly striking one of the posts that supported our room with heavy, jolting thumps.

Water began pouring through the floorboards of the entry where Alex was lying. He got up, dragged his air mattress up the step into our room, and

wearily asked, “Where now, Dad?” We let the children look out the window to see what was happening, then we gathered our things and started to get away from the rising water.

We had one scary moment. Bucher tried to open the door leading upstairs, but the shifting of the house had wedged it shut. He could not move it. After struggling for a few moments, he battered out a lower panel with a hammer and succeeded in opening the door. We all applauded his successful housebreaking.

Through the long hours I had wondered about two things, but thought that my good husband would not appreciate an interrogation under the circumstances. First, why did he clutch that hammer so tightly throughout the night? Second, why was he so tense about the air mattresses? They were comfortable to have, but not, I thought, vital. Bucher explained later that if the house had collapsed, he planned to put Carli on one air mattress and send me off swimming and pushing her, while he followed propelling Alex on the other.

As the water rose, the wind diminished. It must have slackened to about one hundred miles per hour, a mere nothing. We parked the children on the stairway that lead up to Alex’s aerie from the back hall off our kitchen. It was on the lee side of the house, as dry as anywhere, and safe from flying glass.

The children settled themselves on the stairs with the air mattresses, pillows, and blankets. I hastily found warm things for all of us to put on because we were blue with the cold and wet. Drawers and cupboards yielded clothing that miraculously had stayed dry. I grabbed a handful of wet comic books from Carli’s room and told the two to relax and enjoy the books in their cramped perches.

Bucher and I did the only thing that seemed appealing as we sat out the storm—opened a still-cold beer.

Throughout the hurricane and its aftermath, Alex and Carli were bright, responsive, helpful, and apparently unconcerned. Pedro, however, knew that the entire ordeal was devised by us in an inexplicable attack on his

well-being. He sat in the middle of the kitchen, long ears back, glaring at us.

As it became fully light, we opened the back hall windows on the lee side of the house and looked out at the terrifying but fascinating scene around us. Water swirled ten or twelve feet deep between the houses and behind us as far as we could see. And we could see much more clearly than usual; almost every tree, fence, and shack between us and two streets back was gone. Great sections of fence, furniture, the corrugated sheets of galvanized zinc roofing, gas drums, trees, and an endless jumble of lumber billowed in the pounding waves. Someone's cherished automobile washed back and forth with slow dignity.

Carli called out excitedly, "There goes a water vat."

I looked out another window and moaned, "Don't laugh. It's ours."

As scarce and precious as water was in Belize, we had to watch helplessly as our vat floated like a capsizing keg, then splintered into just another mass of lumber washing back into the middle of the city.

Hideous as they are, hurricanes do end eventually—though for a long time I didn't think this one ever would.

Surveying the Damage

October 31, 1961

Slowly the storm abated. The four of us climbed up to Alex's room for a better view. It was unnerving to look out to sea and find that the water continued uninterrupted right past the house and far behind.

We saw, to our horror, that hurricane-shattered shards of glass had slashed Alex's mosquito net to shreds and littered the bed where he had slept until almost the moment when his windows blew in.



From the empty window frames in the dormers we saw that Lia and Tom Tattersfield's house, next door, was still standing, safe on its high stilts, although the front steps had been torn away. Most of the walls enclosing the ground-floor area that had housed their maid, Ella, Tom's workshop, and the car, had washed away. Water poured out of the windows of Ella's room, two inches from their top. The fence was gone.



Looking behind our house, we saw that the older, smaller houses were shifted, sagging, or down completely. Almost every roof in sight was gashed open or gone. Debris was everywhere.

Incongruously perched in the newly denuded branches of our huge old mango tree was a scarlet macaw who had escaped from a cage somewhere. His feathers were slightly ruffled, but his long tail swept down in brilliant scarlet, blue, and green glory, and he looked out over the water as if it were his sovereign realm. The same tree held a 1" x 4" board, split half its length, impaled on a branch.

We were marooned. Both our front and back steps were gone.



Throughout the storm, rain had poured through our living room ceiling, and the wind had screamed through the doors. However, a large table lamp and a floor lamp still stood solidly in place, unmoved by the chaos that had raged around them. Late in the afternoon a gentle zephyr from an opened door laid them both flat.

A bowl of flowers on the dining room table, in a direct line with the wind, was undisturbed, except that the bowl overflowed with rainwater.


By the time the wind dropped to gale force, rain no longer blew into the house. Our first task was to sweep out several inches of muddy water. I used a push broom to shove it down the back steps while Bucher and Alex attended to blinds, blown-in windows, and broken glass.



By early afternoon we decided to leave our stair-less house to explore the neighborhood. We slid awkwardly down the back banister and found ourselves in knee-deep water. Our carefully donned rubber boots instantly had as much water inside as out.

Poor Juanita's flat on the floor below us was demolished. Fortunately the whole family had gone to Mexico and had missed the hurricane. Water had knocked out doors and windows, crushed sections of wall, torn off siding, and even pulled up sections of flooring. Furniture, lamps, and bric-a-brac appeared to have been stirred by a remorseless mixer. The toilet had torn loose from the bathroom, washed out of that room, into the adjacent bedroom, and had blasted out through the bedroom wall, leaving a huge, round hole. Their veranda had vanished.


Bucher waded through the roiling water to examine each of the supports of the house with an engineer's eye. The posts were upright, intact, and undamaged. Everything that had been on the ground level was gone—picketing, locked rooms, Alex's skiff, the children's bikes, and all of Juanita and Tuto's things. However, somebody else's boat and outboard motor were snugly parked in Juanita's side of the storage area, berthed by a storm with a sense of humor.



Of about twenty-three houses along the Southern Foreshore, only about six were standing and habitable. Ours was one. Bucher explained to the children that when every door and window was boarded up, a house literally could explode because, during the storm, the air pressure outside dropped below the pressure within the house.

Entire facades were ripped away from some homes so that we could look in as if they were doll houses. Some of the finest-looking homes were the worst damaged. One Foreshore house that had lost its third story in the 1931 hurricane lost its second in Hurricane Hattie. It was repaired later as a one-story house on stilts. Several houses disappeared completely, leaving nothing to show where they had been but a few inches of stubby columns or an empty concrete slab.

We walked south on the Foreshore to our brick Cathedral of St. John's, site last century of the coronations of three kings of the Miskito tribe. The interior was a shambles—altar, pews, lectern, and floorboards mixed up with colorful shards of stained glass. The floor next to the open side door was jacked up to waist height. Water swirled underneath. I had to climb into the Church and slide down the ramp of flooring to get inside. Only the walls were familiar. The marble tablets mounted in memory of people who had died dozens of decades earlier remained, stained but intact.



When we returned to our house, we shinnied painfully back up the banister and assessed the situation.

We were safe. We had more-or-less intact living quarters. We had a gas stove with a cylinder of fuel in use and a spare on hand that should last for a while, plus a kerosene stove for emergencies. We had kerosene lanterns, candles, and flashlights. The toilet still worked, and there was a sea full of water a few steps away to supply flushing water. Convenience was not at issue; sanitation was. The children helped to “back” (carry) sea water without protest.

The clean water that we had saved in the bathtub had to suffice for drinking and cooking. We taught the children to take a refreshing bath with half a saucepan of water, standing on a towel. Our dish-washing practices would not have won medals at a health conference. Dirty water was saved to be reused for successively less vital purposes.

Both our cupboards and our refrigerator were stocked adequately for our immediate needs. Three days later we still had a bit of ice. The family was delighted at the rapid series of fine meals served them due to the need to use frozen meat quickly.



There was no electricity, and we knew that there would be none for the foreseeable future. Radio and telephone communications were cut. A few ham radio operators were getting news out. Locally, news circulated so efficient that it seemed like a strange psychic ability to pass messages without aid from science.

Looting

October 31 – Early November, 1961

The winds were still strong and the water outside, hip deep, when the parade began. Carli and I first noticed the stream of people passing the house as we struggled to arrange bedding and rugs on the veranda to dry. Not dozens, but hundreds of people waded past northbound carrying empty sacks, baskets, boxes and then returned southward with the same containers, now bulging. Someone shouted to us that they were looting Harley's warehouse. Harley's was one of Belize's two largest stores.

We watched in disgusted fascination as bolt after bolt of cloth, pails of paint, machetes, pots and pans, plastic goods, all the miscellany of a general store except the food that they might need in the days ahead, were carried past, proudly displayed by grinning people who a few hours earlier had been in terror for their lives. Children paddled through the water, frantically trying to keep up with their parents, not sure that anyone would drop contraband to help them if they stumbled and floundered over their heads.



After we turned back from the Cathedral on our afternoon walk, we continued northward along the Foreshore past our house and saw the looting at close range. Most of the side of Harley's warehouse had been torn off by wind and water. Men swarmed into the yard, up the side of the building, and over the shelves inside like a procession of driver ants. It was unbelievable.

Looters at the top threw things to the ones on the ground. A clanking series of chamber pots, losing enamel on the way, thudded down as we watched. The looters robbed each other as enthusiastically as they stripped the warehouse. Packs of four to six pounced on successful looters, whom they left floundering in the mud while they made off with their twice-stolen treasures.

Friends who lived within view of the scene told of one monstrously fat woman who waddled away from Harley's with dozens of pots and pans clanking down her back, sides, and waist from untidy loops of rope. As she passed, other looters grabbed at her pots, pushing her down. She pulled herself out of the mud, but as she stumbled up, others grabbed more pans. Finally she was left with a few wisps of rope, shredded clothes, and a mud-coated hide.

Alex walked over to a policeman who was standing quietly to one side, watching the looting. "Why don't you do something about this stealing?" he asked. The policeman turned to our twelve-year-old son and explained, sternly, "They aren't stealing. They're taking."



After the mob emptied Harley's warehouse, they moved down the street to Bowen & Bowen's. Emilie told us that all their own goods—the flour, bicycles, linoleum, and cloth for which they were commission agents—had floated up the street with the tide, but that their empty warehouse was refilled by goods washed into it from the broached Queen's Bonded Warehouse across the harbor. Headstrong Hattie re-crammed the Bowen warehouse with battered but luxurious things.

Eric tried to get help from the police, "But," he explained wryly, "they were too busy looking for transistor radios among the debris to be bothered."

Eric finally got his revolver and tried to stand off the mob. He was having a poor time of it and admitted that he felt sure they would stomp him to death any minute when someone upstairs in the Bowen's house, not realizing that the plumbing drain had broken off at high-water level, flushed a toilet. There was an incredible stench, a shower that fairly well covered the crowd, and as Eric later described it, "There I was stoutly defending myself against an empty street."



On our walk home, we passed the hulk of the Bellevue Hotel. The ground floor was a shell filled with muddy rubble. Back and forth across the opening, daring looters to approach, strode the glaring owner, Bernard Dinger, hand resting on the revolver strapped to his belt.



The following morning I realized that people must be looting Brodie's, our other major store, when from my veranda I noticed a man go by with a board across his shoulders like a yoke, supporting four gallons of Brodie's brand of paint. Behind him came a second man carrying not one, but two three-burner kerosene stoves—with legs.

We learned what happened at Brodie's from one of its directors, our entertaining friend Nobby Lewis. Nobby said that the morning after the storm, he went down early and let some of the clerks into the store. He told them—thinking of food, medicine, and essential clothing—that if there were any items their families needed, they might help themselves. He thought no more about it until he noticed one man struggling toward the door with Brodie's largest suitcase. Nobby suggested that the employee open it. The man was understandably reluctant, but eventually gave in. It was crammed with dozens of expensive plastic-wrapped shirts, lingerie, blouses, silverware, and cameras. Nobby remarked that he hardly considered the assortment to be relief goods, and sent the man off empty-handed. From then on he insisted on seeing what the clerks took. A few clerks responded by taking out only a few acceptable things, but hiding their choice items in out-of-the-way places; most of this loot was discovered later.

Meanwhile, a mob was gathering outside the store. Nobby sent for the police. They arrived and Nobby watched in disbelief as the peace officers hammered down Brodie's door for the mob. He pleaded with the looters, but they stripped the store just as they had plundered Harley's warehouse the afternoon before.

Nobby later described the scene as a sped-up old-fashioned movie: In through the front door, four or five abreast, empty-handed; out through

the side door, four or five abreast, staggering under their loads, in an uninterrupted progression.

When the store was denuded, the looters, now armed with hammers, hatchets, and machetes, turned to storm the Brodie's warehouse. Nobby said they seemed to climb up the sheer walls of the building trying to get in.

Inspector Brown, a very able British Honduran police officer, arrived. He was a large man with a commanding presence. Inspector Brown ordered the mob to get out of the building within one minute or, he warned, he would set off tear gas. The mob howled that they would "get him" first.

Inspector Brown put his hands on his massive hips, glared at them, and bellowed in the best approved police-training fashion, "Come on!"

They didn't. But neither did they leave. Brown fired the tear gas, cleared the building, and got a fantastic dressing down from his superiors, both police and political. Bucher met Inspector Brown coming out of the Police Station not long after the incident, and Brown ruefully said that he probably would be a corporal after the emergency.




"Come on, let's hit Bata's," someone in the mob yelled as they finished stripping Brodie's.

Bata's was our largest shoe store, owned by a Czechoslovakian chain. A friend who lived across the street from the store told me that the looters climbed up Bata's vat and broke in through windows and the roof. The young rioters were covered with blood, great dripping gouges on arms, legs, and backs, but in their frenzy, they seemed completely oblivious to their injuries.


From Bata's they went up and down the street, breaking into every shop. A slight young shop owner tried to block the mob from entering his tiny yard-goods store. The looters threw him down, tore his clothing off, battered him, stole \$500 he was carrying, and took every bolt of material from the shop.

London and Chicago newspapers ran pictures showing two policemen fighting over a camera while looters stormed around them.



The looting continued for about three days, and then martial law was declared. People wondered why it had taken the authorities so long to react to the chaos. In retrospect, it seems that there was deep concern about further traumatizing a populace already devastated by the storm. In addition, with some police and volunteer guards enthusiastically cooperating in the looting, the authorities may have felt that the local security forces were not completely reliable. In their concern for the majority of Belize residents who were working hard to retrieve what they could of their possessions, clean their homes, and care for their families, the authorities let a loud and visible minority run amok.

British army and navy reinforcements reached the country from Jamaica. Soldiers began patrolling throughout the city. A curfew was imposed; marauders were imprisoned; and vagrants, forced into labor gangs.



The second-in-command of Public Works Department, Douglas Manning, an extremely able and tough British Engineer who was a friend of ours, told of noticing a parade of men carrying dripping tins and bottles as he was going to the Inflammable Liquids Depot. When he arrived, he saw with horror that looters had broken in, indiscriminately pounded open the various drums, and were filling their containers with gas or kerosene. Drums of aviation gas opened in error were dumped on the floor. The gas was pouring out into the yard, into the river, and washing through the swamp that surrounded the city.

Doug pulled his gun and ordered them out.

A spokesman whined in surprised offense, “Mon, I jus’ won mi lee bit ile.” [Man, I just want my little bit of oil (kerosene for his stove).]

Doug finally succeeded in running them all out, sent a call for the soldiers, and posted a guard.

Doug did not magnify the danger. The entire city of Belize was built of wood. The storm had destroyed or damaged fireproof roofs. Piles of lumber and debris, rapidly drying in the tropical sun, were everywhere. There was no public water supply. A single match could have made *Belize* simply a forgotten name on old maps in a moment.

News of Friends

Early November 1961

Gradually we learned how friends survived the hurricane.


Our neighbors Lia and Tom Tattersfield and their children sat out the storm with Liz and Mike Maestre on the opposite side of the harbor. Part of the Maestre's kitchen roof blew off, and some windows went, but aside from the screaming wind, the intrusive rain, and the shuddering of the house, they all were secure.

Around dawn, as the water began to rise, they heard banging on the front door and loud cries of "Rescue, rescue." They thought it was someone come to save them, which they did not think they needed, but discovered that it was soldiers from the Volunteer Guard post across the street who had formed a line holding hands and made their way from the rapidly submerging Militia Headquarters to the nearest house.

Liz talked to the Officer-In-Charge and asked if she could make them some coffee and sandwiches. Upon his enthusiastic affirmative, she turned to her kitchen and found that the stalwart defenders of the nation already had eaten every bit of bread in the place, had broken into her liquor cupboard, finished a bottle of brandy, and were stuffing their pockets with her canned goods.

Tiny Liz and Nobby Lewis, who had spent the hurricane night with the Maestres, straightened out the situation quickly, promising to toss the entire detail out the window and into the water if there were any more foolishness.

A little later the poor soldiers, who had begged for shelter so desperately, swam through the raging water to break into the Queen's Bonded Warehouse across the street. They broached cases of wine and made successive happy trips back and forth to the Maestre's house, carrying their loot.




Denys Bradley, a talented young British Honduran boat builder, took his wife, six children, aunt, and uncle upriver on one of the large sport-fishing boats owned by Vic Barothy. Vic was an internationally known fishing-camp operator who moved to Belize after Castro confiscated his establishment on the Isle of Pines.

The Bradleys weathered the first part of the storm safely, but as the water rose and whole trees were tossed about in the water, something pierced a hole in the boat, and she began to sink rapidly. Denys grabbed one of his children, leaped overboard, and struggled ashore in neck-deep water. As he went, he felt a plastic clothesline that had been strung on the deck, and clutched it tightly. He secured the line on shore, swam back to the boat with the other end, and secured it.

He made repeated trips between boat and bank, each in more than five feet of water, carrying his children, his wife, and his aunt ashore. A sailor on board with them helped his uncle reach the river bank. Denys and his family managed to get into Barothy's lodge and waited out the storm there.

Meanwhile, the boat that Vic Barothy had taken upriver with his wife, Betty, and their young son, Vic Jr., also sank. The family managed to claw their way to the mangrove lining the river bank and spent the rest of the night and the morning of the storm perched, wet but safe, in the tree limbs.

When the winds moderated, Vic trudged through many miles of swamp and then swam the river to get help to bring out his wife and child, an arduous trek for a man close to sixty years old.



Bucher's freezer plant was used as a hurricane shelter by dozens of people. They were jammed up on top of the storage rooms, well protected, and above the highest water. However, early in the storm a

freon line broke. The night watchman, a happy, blubbery young scamp who had been in and out of trouble all his life, saved the day. He located a gas mask and went outside into the hurricane winds. In the dark he fumbled his way to the cut-off valve because he was afraid that the children sheltering in the plant might be asphyxiated. By gracious miracle, his gallantry was not repaid by his being decapitated by the lumber and galvanized roofing sheets flying through the shrieking storm.

The morning after the hurricane, Bucher found at the freezer plant a 1" x 4" board that had been driven through the zinc of the roof, through the boards below it, and halfway through the interior wall.

Cleaning Up, Helping Out

October 31 – Early November, 1961

Our veranda was intact and steady. Carli helped me as I hung rugs over the banister and put mattresses out in the increasing sunshine. We sopped up water from furniture and mopped floors as best we could without using fresh water.

Once the dining room table was dry, Carli and I emptied the bookcase, standing our cherished books and the volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, my Mother's *Harvard Classics*, and the children's *Book of Knowledge* upright, opened to let pages dry. My impromptu shelter-by-shower-curtain had kept them from being soaked. Most of the books dried, stained with honorable hurricane mementos, but with pages separate and readable.


Surprisingly, clothes in closets and dresser drawers were dry and undamaged. So were linen-closet stores.



We all tired early the evening after the storm, partly from aborted sleep the night before, partly from excitement, and partly from relief. Bucher brought the cot up from the downstairs storeroom, and we made it up for Alex in Carli's room. She had no glass in her windows, but most of the louvered blinds were intact.

Our bedroom was not usable, and the Hide-a-Bed in the living room was still saturated with muddy water. We put our mattress on the floor of the living room, made it up with dry mattress pad and sheets, and collapsed in grateful exhaustion. That night and for many that followed, squalls punctuated the darkness. The rain came in through the living room ceiling. Our peripatetic mattress was moved from site to site as we sought new locations that would remain dry for more than a few restless moments.


On November 1st, Bucher and I awoke at dawn with a sinking realization of the work ahead to repair storm damage. Coffee helped. By the time the children arose, our addled brains had organized themselves.



Alex assigned himself the primary task of building a ladder where the back stairs used to be so we could get in and out of the house more easily. Bucher went off to try to find materials and men to repair the open roof. That was the published purpose of his expedition; the true one was that he wanted to see first-hand the condition of the city, and I was equally eager for a reliable report.

Carli, a capable and mature nine-year-old, worked with me in the house. Once the floors had dried, we swept—and swept—and swept. It was months before the last of the powdery hurricane mud disappeared.

The hurricane mud gave off a pungent odor unlike any we ever had smelled. It was sharp, acidic, pervasive. It haunted us for years, as long-stored objects or forgotten files emerged with their aura of the never-forgotten smell. We learned that a main ingredient was tannic acid in the mahogany chips on which the city of Belize had been settled. The mud came from the shallow, silty bottom of the sea surrounding the peninsula that was Belize. It was dark gray in color, slimy in consistency, and somewhere between distasteful and compelling in scent.



Watching the activities of our children and their neighborhood friends was heartwarming. The young ones went into action finding the treasures that had washed into their yards. Wearing heavy rubber boots and muddy blue jeans, the children searched gingerly for easily retrieved items. When an owner claimed something, it was relinquished happily or, sometimes, traded. A passing fireman paused to compliment the children on the clean-up job they were doing.

To Alex's delight, receding waters left two dories stranded in our yard. The larger one was neatly painted *POLICE* and was retrieved quickly by a

passing constable. No one claimed the other, so Alex appropriated it provisionally for himself. It partially made up for the discovery of recognizable parts of his skiff in a pile of debris a block away.

Alex and Carli proudly brought home their finds. Alex presented me with three wonderfully useful five-gallon jerry-cans. He found a shovel, an oil can, a quart of motor oil. Carli brought home a tin of dusting powder, a tin of paint, and a galvanized bucket. They located a two-burner kerosene stove, though they had to have adult help to pull it from under the debris.

Both children worked from dawn to dark, like adults. They were an enormous help to Bucher and me. Alex and Carli both “liberated” several empty fifty-five-gallon drums. Alex used a cold chisel and hammer to take the tops off two of them. He scoured them with sand and seawater and I finished the job with Mr. Clean and fresh water. We set them under the eaves to catch rain water to supplement our dwindling supply.

Together Alex and Carli cleaned up under the house, piling usable lumber, guttering, and pipe neatly, throwing rubbish into the sea, and raking up the seaweed. It might not have passed garden-club inspection, but made us feel dignified again.

At Bucher’s suggestion, Alex rigged a block-and-tackle on the veranda, using pulleys and rope from our vanished boats, so that he and Carli could fill jerry cans with sea water for flushing the toilet, and we could haul them directly up instead of someone’s having to lug them up a ladder, then up a flight of stairs.

It was amazing how quickly the house returned almost to normal.



Digging out from the hurricane was a crushing job. However, it was lump-in-the-throat-making to see the swift help British Honduras received. Mexico had planes in the country almost before the storm ended, with boats following more slowly. The British sent reinforcements from their Army Garrison in Jamaica, aboard Naval vessels. The United

States sent planes by the dozens, ships, and an aircraft carrier with a fleet of helicopters that were invaluable in reaching isolated villages.

Almost immediately the city was peopled by soldiers and sailors, sleeves rolled up, picking up and digging out, beginning the long task of renewing the battered capital.



Within a few days after the hurricane, British Army medical personnel set up an inoculation station in the Baron Bliss Institute just up the Southern Foreshore from our house. That was the first time my needle-allergic husband ever himself suggested going to get shots. The four of us walked down and lined up for our “jooks,” as British Honduran children said.

We met Lorena and Claudie Bradley standing in line, people we had known in business and at the club since we first arrived in Belize. They were tattered, dazed, almost speechless. Their house had gone, and they had lost everything but the clothes they were wearing. We helped them get their shots, then took them home with us.

I raided the closets and collected a reasonable supply of clothes for their immediate use while Bucher provided more immediate aid in the form of a precious liquid bottled in Scotland.

A surprisingly short time after the hurricane, Claudie had sorted out his affairs, invested in equipment, and with Lorena’s help, opened a fine little butcher shop called Sunshine Delicatessen.



Bucher’s freezer plant had a good supply of frozen chickens when the hurricane hit. The next day he began giving them away. Bucher asked for an armed guard and insisted that the crowd waiting for chickens must form an orderly line. When they pushed forward in a mob, he locked the doors and refused to hand out any more that day. He also noted troublemakers and refused to give them anything. From then on, for as long as the temperature in the freezers remained low enough to hold the

chickens safely, Bucher distributed them regularly to a surprisingly quiet crowd.

Bucher brought a large bag of chickens home. I cooked two, and the children delightedly delivered the rest to neighbors.



Hurricane Hattie gave Alex and Carli a matchless lesson in how people behave under stress. We did not need to preach; the children themselves remarked that people they would have expected to bull their way through undaunted often were the ones who turned into aimless idiots for days, while the most unlikely people showed miraculous resources of courage and strength.

One acquaintance whom Bucher and I both had considered to be a spoiled, selfish, rich-man's-son was one of the first to go to work digging out his store, laughing, and helping others. Another man we would have expected to take things in stride wandered around in a semi-daze for almost a week, telling his troubles to anyone who was polite enough to listen.

The people who lost homes, businesses, everything had a perfect right to be stunned. But it was hard to stomach the sight of a father and son moaning to each other for almost two weeks as if the hurricane had singled them out, and not lifting a finger even to dig the muck out of their store.



Many merchants were firm in their belief that nothing should be touched until the insurance adjuster had seen it. In a storm of this scope, that could be weeks. Meanwhile, perfectly salvageable things were spoiling; the stench and contamination, increasing. When the first adjuster arrived from England, he made it clear to a meeting of town businessmen that they should get busy and start digging out.

“If you think I am going to wade through mud to inventory your stock for you, bean by bean, you are bonkers.”


When the adjuster lightly mentioned that failure to salvage their property to the best of their ability could be grounds for cancellation of the policy, he lit fires under the worst of them.

Life Amid the Debris


November 1961

Bucher's partner arrived from Miami on the first passenger plane into Belize. Don Eckis was a warm, kindly person, a fine business man. He arrived with a suitcase stuffed with pound after pound of Kosher Salami, which would keep without refrigeration, and even more glorious, with a 1.5 KW Onan generator.

Bucher quickly hooked up the generator, which we christened *Betsy*, and we took an unexpected leap back toward civilization. We found that *Betsy* would run for two-and-a-half hours on a tank of gasoline. We turned her on in the morning to make coffee and to provide a shot of chilling to the refrigerator. We cranked up again during the day so that Concie could do her ironing and, again, the refrigerator could have a boost. We turned the generator back on at night when full dark fell, and we had light until bedtime, plus the usual pick-me-up for the refrigerator. We could not make ice with that routine, but our food stayed cool and safe.



Our second unexpected post-Hurricane aid came from Bucher's family in Georgia. They sent an enormous box by air freight with an incredibly imaginative assortment of food and personal items that they correctly guessed might be in short supply.



Bucher came home one day and announced that Ro-Mac's, our newest and best grocery store, was giving away hurricane-damaged canned goods. Alex and I put on our rubber boots, took two large burlap bags, and trudged through the mud five blocks to the store. There we picked up an eclectic selection of label-less, mud-coated tins, filled our bags, and carried home our precious gifts.

Meals were interesting when we did not know what we were adding to the menu until a tin was open. We had some strange and wonderful combinations. However, with the refrigerator again operating, we could always open another tin, chill the completely incompatible food, and plan the next day's menu around it.



A standard supper favorite became the “Hurricane Goodies” I invented to take advantage of the Kosher salami Don Eckis had given us. Concie made lovely biscuits, so I asked her to make more than Bucher and the children would eat at our main midday meal. In the evening I split the biscuits in half, spread them with mustard, and added sliced Kosher salami, onion, and cheese. The “goodies” went into the oven long enough to heat through and melt the cheese.



Tom Tattersfield was alone next door. A close friend from Miami had flown his plane down to Belize as soon as the airport was opened after the storm and had taken Lia and the children back to stay with them until living conditions improved. We asked Tom to plan to have supper with us every evening. It was good for all of us to join forces daily. Laughter came easily, a welcome antidote to the abysmal mess around us. More often than not our supper was a large plate of my “Hurricane Goodies.”

One memorable evening before our children left for the States, I was able to tell Tom that we were having steak for supper. This may have been a last gasp from my formerly frozen stores or Bucher may have provided it from his freezer plant. Tom arrived tenderly carrying a tiny crystal bowl. He had brought “proper English mustard” for the steak because he (quite reasonably) assumed that I would not provide it.



I was relaxing on the veranda hemming one afternoon after an aggravating day. Three times I had interrupted young men trying to steal Alex's dory from under the house. Suddenly there were shouts and gun shots. A soldier being paddled toward the seawall in a dory was yelling at some men who were struggling along the street carrying a huge sack. A young boy, whom I was startled to recognize, paddled a second dory alongside them, obviously waiting for them to drop the sack into his little dugout.

The soldier landed, intercepted the men and with much shouting and flourishing of his gun, forced them to open their sack. Watching from the veranda, Carli and I thought it was full of radios. The young soldier sternly rebuffed all the protests and self-justifications from the men he had apprehended.

As the soldier rounded up the looters, I called down to tell him that the boy in the dory was the one who had tried to steal my son's dory that morning. The soldier thanked me, though he already had realized that the boy was part of the gang. The soldier asked if I would send my man down to watch his dory and the (presumably) stolen one while he took the men and their accomplice off to the Police Station. I agreed.

As they moved off down the Foreshore, I realized that "my man" was the roofer Bucher finally had found after a week of our being rained on nightly. I wanted him right up on the roof where he was.

I sent sweet little nine-year-old Carli down to sit on the seawall and guard the dories, promising to cover her from my post on the veranda with our shotgun. Carli perched on the seawall next to the dugout canoes, and I stood in a corner of the veranda, the gun, unloaded, at hand, as I continued my sewing.

Not two minutes later a man in a dory paddled over near Carli, reached into the stolen dory, and took out the paddle. I leveled the shotgun at him, locking it under my arm in a menacingly competent fashion because it was too long for me to brace against my shoulder, and in my best sergeant-major's voice bellowed at him to drop the paddle.

He looked upward in horror, threw both his own paddle and the one he was stealing into the stolen dory, and using both hands to propel himself, splashed off as quickly possible.

Loungers along the seawall looked upward in fascination.

Just at that moment, around the corner chuffed the garbage truck with a load of muck to be dumped into the sea. It pulled up with a flourish, a man jumped out to direct its backing up, he heard me, looked up, saw the gun, howled in dismay, and garbage men scattered along the Foreshore in both directions.

The garbage men returned slowly, eyeing me dubiously as they grinned winningly. From then on they dumped in front of either of our neighbors' houses, but never in front of ours.

Through it all, Carli stayed where she had been told to stay, either unconcerned or petrified. I returned to my sewing, taking extremely shaky stitches. The soldier returned, thanked Carli, and reclaimed the two dories.

Our daughter came upstairs to christen me *Shotgun Mama*.

Path Back to Normal

November 1961 – January 1962

Through the aftermath of the hurricane, Alex and Carli ran errands, did chores, and remained happy, uncomplaining, and relaxed in the midst of the rubble that was Belize. As soldiers began patrolling the shopping districts, however, gangs of drunken looters armed with stolen machetes turned to prowling through damaged and empty homes. We could not even let the children leave the yard.

Sanitary conditions and morale sank. The seawall was being used as an open-air latrine. The danger of epidemics and fire remained high.

Within a few days after the hurricane, many families, like the Tattersfields, sent wives and children off to stay with relatives in other countries until Belize was livable again. Bucher and I first thought we could keep our family together. However, schools were closed, and most of the children's friends had left. We reluctantly decided that we should send Alex and Carli to Atlanta, as their Aunt Deezy and Uncle Frank O'Neill were urging us to do.

It was the only time in my life I sent children off to visit with dirty clothes in their suitcases. We had little water for laundry. I sorted through their closets and found what I could to outfit them for fall and winter up north in the southern U.S. In Carli's case there was the usual periodic task of letting down hems on dresses that would be suitable for school in Atlanta.


It was both lonesome and a relief to have the children safely in Georgia. We had loved their cheerful sharing of our difficult life, but had worried about them increasingly.



The high point of our days became each evening when we joined forces with Tom Tattersfield to fight the hurricane depression that was affecting everyone.

We three sat on our veranda, night after night, retelling hurricane stories, each of us quietly and devoutly grateful that we all had survived. Tom looked over at his fine, relatively new home, damaged but sound, then at our great, unpainted barn of an ancient structure, shook his head in disbelief, and remarked, “The termites must have held hands and formed a living chain to hold your house together.”


Bucher and Tom ran a single electric line from our house to his. This sad, frail, sagging little thread meant that if Tom timed his departure right, he could stumble through the moderated darkness to his house, avoiding debris as best he could, and get ready for bed by the light of a solitary bulb before “Betsy,” our generator, coughed and expired for the night.



I looked out a back window one day not long after the storm and was delighted to see sailors busily repairing the roof on a small house standing in the middle of our block. I never had seen the house before the hurricane because it was hidden by trees and shrubbery in an inner yard, with only a path leading out to the street. Five or six young tars were removing damaged zinc, handing up new sheets of corrugated galvanized roofing, and lustily hammering it into place.

That evening I mentioned how heartening it was to see the British seamen diligently repairing storm damage. Bucher and Tom greeted my story with roars of laughter. Mystified, I waited for them to pull themselves together, then asked coldly, “What’s funny?”

“That’s the neighborhood whore house,” they chortled.



Tom reported that he gradually was trying to clean his house. He went into a small cupboard under their stairs to get the vacuum cleaner. Tom and Lia’s house had a closed veranda across the front, clapboard siding part way up with glass jalousies to the ceiling. The jalousies were closed tightly for the storm and had not broken, except for one slat that had been knocked out by the wildly weaving swing at the far end of the veranda. A

heavy door led from the veranda into the hall. Another solid door secured the cupboard. Inside, stood the vacuum, unbelievably and totally caked with mud.



Bucher came home one day with a grin of success, to tell us one of the improbable stories we had learned to expect in the wake of Hattie. He had been talking with a friend, Guy Nord Jr., in his store on the corner of the lane about a block from Bucher's freezer plant. The store had been looted, as the empty glass counters attested.


Bucher happened to glance down into the counter on which he was leaning. "That's my General Ledger," he shouted. He opened the sliding-glass door at the back of the counter, took out the thick binder, and opened it to find his missing business accounts. It was muddy—pages were still wet and the posting, blurred. How it had washed from his office, up the lane, around a corner, into "Guy's," and enclosed itself safely behind glass, no one ever discovered. However, Bucher and the Income Tax Department were delighted to have it.



I was assigned the task of sorting through the mud-compacted bits and pieces of Bucher's plant records and setting up new accounts. Fortunately, I had Tom Tattersfield, my handy neighborhood CPA. Tom's way of "singing for his supper" or, more correctly, for his light bulb, was to attempt to show me the basics of bookkeeping.

My world was words, not numbers. To my own surprise, the tidiness of one entry's balancing another began to charm me. I had some difficulty understanding why money in the bank was a *debit* in the books and why money we owed someone else was a *credit*. The process of translating bookkeeping rules so that they made sense to me resulted in my delighted discovery: "A debit is a credit."

Tom was not amused.




The insurance adjusters, most of them from England, arrived and moved into Nobby Lewis's home. After the storm, Nobbie's wife Maizie had gone back to England along with many other British wives. Nobby lived on the other side of our block, facing Regent Street. Like storm-blown birds huddling together, he and the adjusters began coming to our house every evening after dinner to sit on our veranda for drinks, story-swapping, and commiseration. They arrived about the time Bucher turned on "Betsy" the generator.

I had one rule: everyone had to bring his own ration of beer.

Canned beer was available after the hurricane, but brands were unidentifiable because of the mud caked on the tins. Bucher started carrying a burlap bag on his bicycle so that he could bring home whatever supplies of beer he located.

I kept three pans of water for washing the tins, throwing out the contents of the first when it no longer could pretend to be a liquid. Then the second rinse became the first, until it, too, finally was a semi-solid. The final clear rinse made the print on the cans visible and the cans themselves, presumably, clean enough to be opened.

The beer was chilled in the freezer compartment of our refrigerator. Betsy's thrice-a-day power was enough to cool the tins pleasantly. The nightly offerings from Nobby and the insurance adjusters were dumped into the first pan of water to be cleaned the following day, while I opened and served clean, chilled cans from the refrigerator. I would like to think it was Bucher's and my charm that won the attentions of our guests, but suspect that cold beer had a lot to do with their faithfulness.



Every man of the group had at least one, and most often several, wonderful / maddening / funny / heartbreaking / aggravating stories to tell each evening.

Each evening one of the group would feel suicidal. Fortunately, the others would be in hilariously good spirits. Threats to throw oneself off the veranda and into the sea dissolved in the common laughter.

Nerves were frayed. The pungent mud everywhere, the destruction, the sad losses, the monumental tasks ahead, the difficulty of each step in trying to live through the day battered at everyone. Bucher and I were lucky to be able to escape temporarily with affable companions.

We were in bed each night by the time “Betsy” turned out the limited lights. As if roused by alarm clock, Bucher and I were wide awake at about two o’clock every morning. We kept a lamp near the head of our mattress on the floor where we could light it easily and read for an hour before we were able to sleep again.



The hurricane hit at the end of October. November ground past, and early December. Cleanup throughout the city progressed. There was a promise of electricity by the end of the month. The large stores and tiny shops had been cleaned up and gradually were restocked and opened. Little by little, life became easier.

Even so, most people still suffered from remnants of shock. Bucher and I usually felt that we were operating normally, with exceptional poise and energy. Much of our vigor probably had an element of hysteria. We both were plagued by abnormal mood swings, sudden losses of strength, abrupt irritations, which fortunately aimed outward, away from each other, and focused on the situation around us. It was a strange, dream-like time, when nothing was as it should be. We both were vaguely aware of our anomalous state and its cause and were not worried by it.



St. Catherine’s Elementary announced that classes would resume after Christmas. We made plans to spend Christmas in Atlanta and bring the children home with us.

As mail service resumed, we had begun getting delightful letters from Alex and Carli. Aunt Deezy had signed legal documents putting herself *in loco parentis* and had entered both children in school. The children were enjoying being surrounded by solicitous family and making new friends. I suspect that eventually they even got tired of telling their hurricane tales.

Carli had a minor contretemps soon after she began classes. Her spelling test came back with several words marked “wrong.” Despite being in a strange school in a (to her) strange country, she marched up to the teacher to protest. Carli explained that her school used British spelling, so that for her “colour” and “honour” and “labour” were correct. Fortunately, the teacher was familiar with the differences between U.S. and British spelling. She accepted Carli’s explanation and regraded her test paper.



Back in Belize, our life continued in its post-hurricane pattern. Tom came over every evening. Nobby and the insurance adjusters joined us later. Gradually the adjusters began leaving the country, their work done. We were a smaller group each night.

Just before Tom was to leave for Miami for a reunion with his family, and we were to leave for Atlanta, Bucher developed an abscessed tooth. He was in agony. He went to our dentist, Salvador Awe.* Dr. Awe looked at the tooth, said that it had to be pulled, and explained regretfully that he did not have any drugs to enable him to do the extraction. Bucher said, “You still have instruments, and you can boil water to sterilize them. I don’t give a damn about Novocaine. Nothing can hurt worse than the tooth does now.” Reluctantly Dr. Awe agreed to do what Bucher asked.

Bucher returned mid-afternoon with as much of a smile as he could manage with his grossly misshapen face. He carried a precious bottle of Scotch, still not usually available, which he had wheedled out of a sympathetic friend in one of the stores. Bucher sat down on the veranda and had a stiff drink to go with the aspirin that I forced on him. Tom

* Awe is pronounced *AH-way*.

arrived around five o'clock. Bucher was on his fourth Scotch, and the pain was becoming tolerable. Tom and I had our usual evening beer. I served our Hurricane Goodies; Bucher was not able to eat. Bucher had another Scotch. By the time Tom said goodnight to reach his house before "Betsy" retired for the night, Bucher had finished the bottle and, to our amazement, walked into the house, completely sober but pain free, to get ready for bed.

The next day we left for Atlanta. The Scotch had worn off, but the pain from the abscess had not. Bucher was almost paralyzed with it. I do not remember much about the trip.

That evening we were in his mother's apartment, reunited with the children and with my father, whom Mama thoughtfully had invited for the holidays.

Bucher left the living room, with its happy shrieking, to telephone his cousin and dentist, Julius Hughes. He explained his problem, and Julius was at the apartment twenty minutes later with expertise and antibiotics. Julius asked Bucher to relay his admiring compliments to Dr. Awe for the work he had done under unthinkable circumstances.



Kate and her father, Jack Van Brunt, in Atlanta, December 1961

In a few days, the pain and worry were behind, though not forgotten.



That Christmas was a happy time. The children were delighted to see us, despite the fun they had with Deezy and Frank. We could be gracious about their remaining in the O'Neill apartment a little longer because we all would be leaving together. We were surrounded by Bucher's charming family, all of whom were sure we had been in far greater danger than we thought we had been. Just staying in an apartment where light switches routinely turned on lights, where water ran with the touch of a tap, where the only smells were the enticing ones of superb Southern cooking, was soothing to our besieged psyches.

Christmas came and went, as did New Year's. We bade a warm goodbye to Dad as he returned to Michigan. It was time for us to leave. The children packed eagerly, hoping not to hurt the feelings of the aunt and uncle who had been so kind to them, but ready to return to the world they knew. Bucher and I left, refreshed, enthusiastic to face remaining problems and to rebuild our lives in Belize.



Kate and Bucher in Atlanta, December 1961

Belize After Hattie

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Kate on Belize River, 1960's

Reporting for UPI

Early 1962

After Hattie, United Press International tracked me down and asked me to be their Belize stringer. Bucher was as pleased for me as I was excited. What nosy female could resist a ready-made excuse to talk to everyone in Government from the Premier on down? I did my best to file completely unbiased stories, occasionally was sent clippings of my stories from papers in far-off countries, and had a marvelous time with it for ten years.

From letter dated March 22, 1962

In late January, a bunch of Guatemalans “invaded” the colony, crossing the southern border. At first there was a real flurry of excitement about it, since the word was that they were Guatemalan soldiers. They tore down the Union Jack and burned it, burned a picture of the queen, proclaimed to



Kate's press pass, 1960's

the villagers that they had been “liberated” from Britain, and urged them to march to Belize. British troops were rushed down, of course.

When the band was captured, a very different picture emerged. The police superintendent (one of our friends and one of my best news sources) said it was a comic-opera performance. They were armed with .22's and some revolvers, some with ammunition. One man had his revolver in two parts in different pants pockets because he had lost the screws out of it during the march into British Honduras. Aside from the leader and one young British Honduran who is a student in Guatemala, the rest were poor, illiterate Mayan *chicleros* (chicle gatherers) who thought they were on a mahogany-cutting expedition.

Well, things were wild around here for about a week, news-wise. I ran my legs off getting news, but it was fun. The Guatemalans are on trial now. I hope they let all the chicleros off and put the leader away for a good long time. His entire point, I gather now, was to get notoriety for himself to help his political career in Guatemala. He is a hero at home, since Guatemala has been more and more violent lately in her claims to sovereignty of B.H. But the fact that he has these poor chicleros on trial for using armed forces against the state and facing sentences that can be as high as life imprisonment doesn't bother him at all.



The latest newsworthy event was the visit of Earl Mountbatten. As you probably remember, he was the first Governor-General of independent India, was one of Britain's greatest naval heroes in World War II, is Admiral of the Fleet and Chief of the Defense Staff (equivalent of U.S. Joint Chief of Staff), and is uncle of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. I've admired him for years. When I heard he was coming for a three-hour visit at the end of a Caribbean tour, you can be sure I made arrangements to be on hand.

I went out to the airport with Rudy Castillo, who is head of radio news here, Chief Information Officer (a government post), and on the side is my competition as correspondent for Reuters.

Bucher, bless his heart, made me take our movie camera; I wouldn't have thought of it. Rudy and I were standing under the overhang in front of the terminal when I realized that to get pictures, I should be out on the runway. I told Rudy, really to get his permission, knowing that this had nothing to do with my job, but was purely for our family pleasure. He told me to follow the government photographers, so I waltzed out onto the runway with one of them. I imagine that the sight of the two Creole men and me, high-heeled and feather-hatted, must have helped to make the occasion colorful.

When the plane landed, I was right at the foot of the steps taking pictures of the Admiral as he walked down. As a matter of fact, if I hadn't recognized him, I might have waited for someone more impressive looking. He's a handsome man, of course, but his entire manner is as relaxed and easy as anyone you've ever seen...not at all like an Earl and an Admiral. Furthermore, even on an admiral, tropical green uniforms look ruffled...although covered with battle ribbons half-way to the waist.

I got some excellent pictures (I hope) while the Earl accepted the salute of the honor guard of the B.H. Volunteer Guard and then inspected them. I got more in the army camp, where he inspected armaments and men.

Rudy had been told he could not arrange a press conference, but I kept heckling him and suggesting ways he could work it out. We ran by Government House just after the Earl arrived there for lunch and a meeting with the local heads of government, and Rudy was turned down again.

I had let Alex stay out of school just to see the Earl when he left, and the two of us walked down to Government House (a few blocks from our house). While we were standing there, one of the radio announcers came dashing up, gasping that the press conference had been granted, and saying that a car was waiting. They had gone by my house, and when I wasn't there, followed me to be sure I didn't miss out. I think that was darned nice.

Anyway, we made it in time. The Earl was introduced to us, shook hands, and answered questions. He really is a very impressive man, warm and approachable, but with a great deal of authority when he speaks. We asked the usual questions involving British Honduras, and then I couldn't resist throwing in a loaded one. I felt rude doing it, but often you can catch someone of his position off guard and get a really good quote.

I asked if he would comment on the announced resumption of nuclear testing by the U.S. He opened his mouth as if he were going to answer, did a double-take, took two quick paces backward, and then burst into a guffaw and a broad grin, crinkling up his bright eyes. "What?" he bellowed. "Are you trying to get me sacked? Don't you know the military doesn't dare comment on political matters?" I laughed and agreed that that was the answer I was afraid he'd give, and he chatted for a minute or two longer.

He seemed very pleased at the crowds who turned out to see him as he left the city, and I assumed our son was one of the mob. It was a *big* day for me. I loved it. Furthermore, it made a good rehearsal for Prince Philip's visit. He's coming on April 4th. I can hardly wait.

Bookkeeping

March – December 1962

From letter dated March 22, 1962

Once the hubbub over the Guatemalan invasion quieted down, I spent most of my time catching up with my bookkeeping. The company has started importing meat and wholesaling it. It is a good deal, since Don Eckis, Bucher's partner from Miami, already is in that business and can get the best possible prices. It has allowed us to charter a plane at very favorable rates to bring the meat down and fly our seafood back. However, it has just about doubled my bookkeeping.

And let me tell you, this British system, which I'm forced to use, already involves about twice as much posting as the U.S. system would for the same business. However, somewhere along the line, I've learned what I'm doing. That helps. I now can do my own trial balances at the end of the month without the auditor's help, and can deal with almost all of the odds and ends that don't seem to fit anywhere. Still, instead of taking an afternoon or two a week, it takes a good half day everyday. By the time I try to do some news gathering, write stories, and manage my house, I find I'm neglecting my mending, letting drawers get disordered, and not answering letters.

From letter dated December 8, 1962

Everything has seemed in a snarl lately, and I seem hard put to get through the days. Most of the problem is that the company is outgrowing my bookkeeping...there's more and more routine work, and I have trouble keeping up with it and also running a house and doing a little of my own work. That will be solved after the first of the year, when Bucher has a new man coming. Meanwhile, I've been in a swivet.



Kate's niece, Peggy Robinson, and Carli, December 1962


Thanksgiving Activities

November 1962


From letter dated December 8, 1962

I had to do some unexpected house hunting. Our charming landlady is coming back the middle of January, to our dismay. Still, she originally expected to be back in mid November, so we're pleased to have the house through the holidays. With my Dad coming for Christmas and bringing my sister Mary's oldest daughter Peggy (to our utter delight), we will appreciate being in this lovely, large house on the waterfront.

Finally found a house that will do. It is adequate and in the same neighborhood, but it isn't on the sea. It needs quite a bit of work, and it isn't furnished. We have very little furniture of our own after all this moving about. Still, we'll fill in here and there and get along.



Had a lovely Thanksgiving. I like to do a little something though it isn't a holiday here, so we invited three couples for a buffet supper. Two of the men had been with us last year after Hurricane Hattie, when I also had a Thanksgiving supper. Their wives were in the States at that time, so it was fun having them all together with us. We also included the perfectly charming new American Consul and his wife plus their son, Alex's age. Bucher got my turkey...all 25 pounds of it, the largest I've ever cooked. We had a nice dinner and really a very pleasant evening.



The following Sunday we went up to spend the day with Frank Norris, an American friend of Bucher's who has a farm near the Western border. Frank and Martha Norris are lovely people and have worked like dogs for fifteen years. Their farm was "high bush" when they bought it...that means jungle with trees 80 to 90 feet high. Just clearing is a massive job, of course. They started logging the trees, and built a lumber mill. As they

cut out, they cleared and planted. Now they have bananas, cacao, coconuts, beans, and a fine herd of cattle that Frank is gradually upgrading with purebred Santa Gertrudis breeding stock.

We all got into Frank's jeep pick-up and drove around the farm. The two-hour trip took us over things he called roads, but which looked like low jungle to me. We went up hills, down through muddy sinkholes, across fields full of stumps where he just finished bulldozing, and through a sea of sorghum-grass pasture. Although Frank said the grass had been cut down three weeks earlier, it was already higher than the top of the jeep.

Frank's farm is up on a plateau above the Belize River, with the highest fields 30 feet above river level; in the floods after the hurricane, those fields were six feet under water. His banana trees along the river bank up on the highest level were mowed flat. He cut out all the trunks, and new shoots came up from the roots. He said it had looked like a series of football fields paved with two inches of mud right after the storm; in the same spot just 13 months later we saw full-grown trees with massive bunches of mature fruit.

We saw a section that Frank had cleared three years ago and then, for some reason, had to leave without planting. It is now solid with trees and bushes and vines 20 to 30 feet high. The jungle sneaks up on you the minute you turn your back.

I was exhausted simply seeing the work that had gone into the farm. Frank has done well...and deserves it.

By Sea to Guatemala

November 30 – December 2, 1962


From letter dated December 8, 1962

Last weekend we had another excursion...this time by boat to Guatemala. The new Guatemalan Consul-General, Alfredo Toriello (called *Al*), has become a good friend. He wanted to bring his wife, Ellie (a charming, beautiful Peruvian), five children, car, and household goods to Belize. Bucher's work boat, the *Beliceña*, seemed a good way to do it.

Al flew home to Guatemala City a week ahead to help Ellie pack up. The boat met them in Puerto Barrios. The trip was well worth it to the company, because they saved something like \$1,000 on diesel fuel they were able to buy in Guatemala. (Fuel is wildly high here for no good reason except gas company collusion.)



Beliceña, April 1963



The two oldest Torilleo boys have been here in Belize with Al; we took them down on the boat with us so that they wouldn't miss the trip. Alfredo Jr. is 13, and Carlos Eduardo (called *Eddie*), 11. They are lovely boys...active, attractive, with beautiful manners. They were a little shy at first...and I don't blame them...adrift at sea with a boatload of foreigners! But it didn't take long.

The small problem was that Alfredo and Eddie speak only a word or so of English. Alex had a friend, Tony Tattersfield, with him, and while those two are studying Spanish, they don't know much. Somehow, the boys all got along beautifully. They carried on long conversations and seemed to understand each other and really had a marvelous time together. Carli and Eddie are about the same age and seemed to like each other in the little time that Eddie cut loose from the bigger boys. It was good for all of them.

My Spanish improved moment by moment. One of the men Bucher brought as crew speaks Spanish, so that helped. But I got pretty fluent talking to the boys.

You have to be pretty careful on a boat so that no one goes overboard. The Toriello boys aren't used to boats and really weren't aware of dangers, so I was issuing orders from time to time. They both responded perfectly. Alfredo is one of the most attractive boys I've ever known...fine looking, with mischievous eyes. He finally got to bracing himself up with his eyes sparkling and saluting when I finished my safety lectures.



On Friday evening Lupe Alamilla, the cook, fixed a lovely dinner of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, etc., and we got all the children into bed early. Bucher was uneasy having them around the decks in the dark, particularly as the decks get damp and slippery.

One of the other men took the wheel, and Bucher and I turned in around nine. He got up around 3:30 AM to stand watch, and since I was awake, I got up with him. We had coffee and simply enjoyed the night. It was calm

as a lake, the stars were spectacularly bright, and it was the nicest time of the trip. To our surprise, one by one the boys emerged about the same time. They sat on the catwalk in front of the wheelhouse and talked (somehow).

We made better time than we expected, so we slowed down and finally went into neutral and sat in the water just outside Puerto Barrios until dawn. Guatemala had had a revolution the weekend before, and we didn't want them thinking we were Cubans invading their ports if we went in while it was dark.



On Saturday morning the Customs and Immigration people couldn't have been nicer. It was due to Al, I know. He has some prestige himself because of his position, and furthermore, he's brother-in-law to the Guatemalan Foreign Minister. Anyway, they even let our Beagle Pedro go ashore...which is unheard of.

The boys and Carli wandered around the docks; Ellie, the three younger children, and their Mayan maid came on board. It was a little dull except when they loaded the car. Took till 4:30 in the afternoon to complete loading fuel, and then we left.



Let me tell you it was hair raising. I had forgotten how young the little Toriellos would be...3, 5, and 7. They were all over the place. Up and down ladders, around the docks. Ellie was almost in a collapse over her moving, and the young maid didn't have a clue. I chased those children till I was frantic and, after about thirty minutes, decided that was a losing job.

I told Al he'd have to assign a watchman to each child since they weren't safe out of sight for a moment. This is a work boat. The rail on the entire after deck is only about waist high to a three year old, and you can imagine how quickly one could tip over when leaning out to watch the wake. Around the top deck, there is a rail at adult waist height...which is

above the children's heads, so that there isn't a thing between them and the water some 20 feet below. Rapidly Al took charge, and I acted as "floating floor manager" making sure everything was in order. But it was a strain.



Our original plan had been to anchor at one of the cayes for the night, spend the morning swimming, and get back to Belize on Sunday, late afternoon. Ten minutes out of Matías, Bucher called me to the wheelhouse and said that after watching the situation, he thought the best thing to do was head for home...so the little ones would be in bed most of the way.

Actually, we had only about three hours of that running around. And they are delightful children, just as polite as they can be. But busy! We were enchanted with them...but thought we might like them even better on dry land.

Again we were up long before dawn on Sunday, and again it was the best time of the trip. Home safely and, even with the short period of fairly hectic performance, we all had a wonderful time.

Relaxing Times

From letter dated April 19, 1963

Bucher and I were in Guatemala City recently; the trip really was a delight. I had plenty of time while Bucher was business-ing to wander around the city, particularly the market. It was very restful, and best of all, Bucher had plenty of time free so that we could wander about together. It really has been years since the two of us have had anything approaching a pleasure trip off by ourselves, so this was wonderful.

Friends had directed us to a particularly delightful little tiny restaurant that served Spanish-from-Spain food. Don Pepe's Hostería was only a couple of block from the hotel, so we went there several times. Don Pepe himself was delightful...in and out of the kitchen in a huge apron...friendly and businesslike. He spoke no English, and Bucher speaks only a fragmented Spanish, so I had to be the interpreter. We found that he uses Bucher's lobster and fish fillets, which made us old friends instantly. His food was divine and the atmosphere pleasantly homey. We loved it.

I went there by myself for lunch the last day. They wouldn't let me sit in the little room with the bar, which apparently is not the thing for an unescorted lady, though they were very subtle about it. Don Pepe came in to see me and told me what he wanted me to eat. Both waiters managed to spend most of my meal talking to me, since I was the only one in the "big" dining room (5 tables). Furthermore, I got one of the waiters to interpret everything in the menu for me. I could read the main ingredient, but wasn't familiar with the style of preparation, so hadn't a clue of what it might be.

My Spanish is getting quite workable, particularly in a situation where the other person knows no English, and we muddled through nicely. So next time I go there, I'll know what I want...and what to expect when it comes.



In the meantime, Bucher's been back to Guatemala again. He went over on Wednesday and is coming in this afternoon (Friday). All this dashing back and forth has been in connection with his becoming the Texaco agent here. He went to sign contracts for that agency and also for the hire-purchase lease from Texaco of a fuel barge to transport fuel.

He's been working on this deal for several months. It all hinged on getting a contract between Hercules Powder Company and Texaco for all the fuel used in the Hercules naval-stores plant in Mango Creek. That contract came through recently, plus another contract from a subsidiary for an even larger annual amount of fuel...so we're in business. This all is being set up in a separate company, but until the new company can get hold of a good little tug, it will have to tow the barge using boats it hires from the existing company, Baymen Fisheries.

The new company is *Scott Towing and Shipping*, though Bucher is only part owner. Through the years he has avoided using his own name in any company. He said he tossed out another name he had thought up, *Sea Services, Ltd.*, but his associates obviously were unimpressed. Just as they were setting out by boat one day, he heard that they needed a name for the new company so that it could be registered. One of the men suggested *Scott Towing and Shipping*...and then took off to sea...so Bucher shrugged and used that name.

The fish business is running along fairly smoothly now, with the majority of the developmental kinks worked out, so Bucher is delighted to have a new operation starting up.



We had a lovely Easter weekend. Bucher took all of us off on the *Beliceña* for the weekend. We invited Muriel and Don Stauffer along. They're Americans, our age; he's head of Hercules here. The boat is rough, but has six nice foam-mattressed bunks plus plenty of space, and we had a grand time.

We left Friday morning, cruised north and anchored at the end of one of the uninhabited cayes. The beach is sandy there, and the island so narrow that you can see clearly through the coconut palms to the sea and the reef on the other side. We towed our big open outboard and had a light aluminum skiff on deck, so we had two boats with which to get back and forth to shore.

It was very restful...swimming, a little bridge, an occasional nap, a bit of reading, dinner over charcoal on the beach.

On Sunday, Alex went down to St. George's Caye and picked up the Tattersfield family, our very close friends, and brought them all up to spend the day with us. The children had fun together. When the T-fields left, they took Carli to the Caye with them, and Alex brought Tony back to finish the weekend with us on the boat.

We went home the middle of the day Monday (a holiday). We all had had a wonderful time. The Stauffers are delightful, easy company, and aside from lugging home about half of what Muriel and I were sure we needed to take along to eat, everything was perfect.



Kate with Cessna Zero-Four-Uniform
in Chetumal after getting her license, 1964

Flying, Part 2

May 1963 – May 1966


The second phase of my adventures with aviation began in 1963, when Bucher had a tug-and-barge business and the contract to deliver Texaco fuel down the coast to a new Hercules plant, set up to extract resin from pine stumps. The Hercules manager and his wife, Don and Muriel Stauffer, were close friends. Bucher came home one day to tell me excitedly that Don and he had decided they needed a plane to facilitate travel between Belize, Mango Creek where the plant was located, and Guatemala from which we shipped the fuel. The idea was that all four of us would learn to fly in the happy future.

In what any beginning psychiatrist would recognize instantly as denial, I let Bucher's explanation of why we absolutely had to have a plane drift in and out of my wandering mind. Reality hit me like a thunderbolt the noon he came home for lunch to announce that "our" Cessna 172 had arrived and that the Stauffers had invited us for a celebratory dinner that night.

Our plane's registration number was N2704U, spoken as *November-Two-Seven-Zero-Four-Uniform*, or *Zero-Four-Uniform* for short.

I pride myself on being a lady in the face of disaster, so I chose a suitably festive dress and went off to dinner with what I hoped was a pleasant smile glued to my terrified face. The other three were so volubly excited that my unusual lack of responsiveness was not noticed. Another guest at the dinner table was our good friend Tom Tattersfield. As we left the dining room together, Tom softly said to me, "So you intend to leave home and children and take to the skies, abandoning care..." It was my first laugh of the evening.


The next day I was at our lawyer's office demanding (to his enormous amusement) that he write my will.



Muriel and I immediately co-opted a highly trained flight instructor who worked for a local airline. With the dedication of True Love and no confidence at all, I began taking flight lessons. Somewhere along the line I fell in love with The Wild Blue Yonder.

Bucher soon regained his proficiency. Muriel and Don both got their licenses the next time they went back to the States on a visit. I continued with my training in Belize.


Alex's high school, St. John's College, was located at one end of the municipal airstrip where we kept our plane. Air traffic was minimal in those days. We knew the schedules of both the international flights and the local ones. Rarely did another small plane invade our space. Alex told me that the noise of planes attracted the attention of students in their classrooms with all doors open to the tropical breeze. He enjoyed remarking offhandedly, "That's just Mom practicing takeoffs and landings."



Another routine training exercise was making successive "S" turns over a road. The problem was that Belize had three main roads, north, west, and south. None had a straight stretch. I practiced my S turns over the Burdon Canal, which cuts arrow-straight from the Belize River to the Sibun. Since these turns were done at fairly low altitude, I managed to terrify a number of people peacefully taking cargoes of fruit to market in their dory or small launch.

As for steep turns, I found a tiny, round mangrove caye just off the coast above the city. I spun round and round it day after day, one wing pointing directly to what I named *Kate's Caye*.

I don't remember my excitement at soloing because by then I was so enamored of flying.



Time came for my solo cross-country. I decided to fly north. I made my first landing at Corozal, then headed toward the western border for the little dirt strip at Gallon Jug.

I saw the strip and a windsock about a minute earlier than my calculations predicted. However, I trusted my eyes more than my math. In proper procedure, I “dragged” the unfamiliar strip, flying over it at an altitude of 50 feet to assure all was safe. As I did so a Mennonite horse and buggy drove by the adjacent road and I saw that my landing strip was now a field of waving corn stalks, complete with windsock.

I was so shattered at not finding Gallon Jug that I headed back for the safety of my little municipal airstrip home. That afternoon I flew safely south to fulfill my cross-country requirement.



I took and passed my written exam. It had to be sent to England for grading. The weeks passed, and I continued flying. The aviation department was undone at having their first student pilot in many years, and a woman at that. They could not agree for my instructor to do my final flight check. Eventually they gave me permission to go to Guatemala and have it there.

In December 1963, the Stauffers and I accompanied Bucher on a business trip to Guatemala.* During the trip, Bucher arranged for a flight instructor there, an old friend of ours, to check me out. Bucher did me the dubious honor of asking him not to treat me like a friend, but to really make darned sure that I knew what I was doing.

Flying at high altitude in the mountains was very different from flying at sea level. I had to learn to compensate in a hurry.

Most flight checks take a maximum of an hour; mine lasted an hour and forty minutes. It was rugged. My examiner gave me three emergencies

* “Guatemala with Muriel & Don” on page 13 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

before I reached the end of the (admittedly long) runway. Then we climbed and did timed turns. We did six or eight stalls of various kinds, which impressed him; he didn't know that I had a very demanding instructor and that I enjoyed stalls. We did steep turns at 60 degrees, which qualifies as aerobatics and which I'd never done before because we concentrated on 45-degree bank turns.

In his last dirty trick, my examiner turned the engine off in a simulated emergency and asked where I would land. I pointed to a large open expanse. He said I couldn't land there because it was a military post. I told him I didn't know that and intended to land there and talk my way out of trouble later.

We did some advanced maneuvers that I'd never done before and that aren't required for a private pilot's license—chandelles and Lazy Eights. Partly he just wanted a chance to do them himself, showing me how, and partly he wanted to see what sort of coordination I had trying them cold. After that we went back to landings, did two with power and three dead-stick spot landings, which I'd never tried before but managed to do to his satisfaction. It was one long but exciting hour and forty minutes.

We went back to the terminal restaurant for coffee, and I was given an hour lecture on my abilities and shortcomings as a pilot.

Despite good grades on both the written and flight check, it took officials six months to bring themselves to give me a license. On June 10th, 1964, I received the first private pilot's license ever issued by the British Honduras government.*

* After finally agreeing to issue Kate's private pilot's license, the officials couldn't bring themselves to give the license number 1, but chose 5 instead.)

C.C.A.3

I. TERRITORY OF ISSUE:
British Honduras

II. PRIVATE PILOT'S LICENCE
(FLYING MACHINES)

III. Number of Licence 5

Particulars of holder:

IV. Full name: Scott,
Katharine V.

V. Address: 36 Regent Street
Belize City, British Honduras

VI. Nationality: U.S. Citizen

VII. Signature: Katharine V. Scott

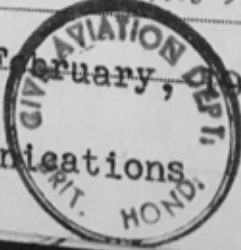
VIII. Issued in accordance with the Civil Aviation Act, 1949, and the Orders in Council in force thereunder, and with the provisions of the International Convention on Civil Aviation signed on 7th December, 1944.

IX. The holder of this licence is hereby authorised to fly as pilot of flying machines in accordance with the terms and conditions specified herein, provided he also holds a current Certificate of Validity in respect of this licence.

X. Signature of Issuing Officer L. Calderwood

Date and stamp 22nd. February, 1964.

XI. BY AUTHORITY OF THE
Minister of Communications



 CIVIL AVIATION DEPT.
 BRIT. HONDI.

Kate's private pilot's license, issued 1964

The plane added another dimension to our pleasure. While we all used it regularly for business, we also had it available for pleasure. Long weekends in neighboring countries...Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras...became easy. Sometimes we went together; sometimes either couple took other friends; sometimes we took the children. We “girls” used to take two friends and fly over the border to Chetumal, Mexico, for shopping, an obligatory stop at the bread shop, and lunch, much to the amazement of the airport authorities who kept searching the plane for a pilot, not believing at first that we were “it.”



Our flying days came to an end in May of 1966 when a waterspout destroyed most of the airplanes in the airport hangar, including ours.



Cessna Zero-Four-Uniform after the waterspout, 1966

Christmas Is Coming

Summer – Fall 1963

From letter dated December 10, 1963

The children and I enjoyed our visit with family in the U.S. this summer. We brought our nephew South Bryan back to live with us for a year. He's the oldest son of Bucher's sister Becky, a darling child, and quite big for his age (13 and over six feet tall with bulk to match his height). South has made a wonderful adjustment, has made friends, done well in school, has found that he rather enjoys being "out of the nest," and has settled into the family as if he had always lived here.



Alex and South got out of school a week ago. South has gone home to Jefferson, Georgia, for his five-week Christmas holiday, but will be back in mid January.

Alex took a job in the shoe store. He's working in the stock room, marking, putting merchandise away, etc. For this he earns the equivalent of US\$5 per week working 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM with an hour for lunch, plus two evenings a week. Bucher offered him a better-paying job on the boat, but Alex admitted he wanted a soft job. Frankly, I think he is luxuriating in having his room and family to himself for a few weeks and think he is perfectly all right as long as he does something.

Carli's school doesn't let our till tomorrow. She wanted to get a job, but is obviously too young. She'll keep herself busy through the holidays, however.




As to my flying...I had barely started when I went north with the children for our summer visit. When I got back, Don and Muriel Stauffer, our friends who are half-owners of the plane, were flying every possible

minute, trying to get in their time so they could get their licenses while they were in the U.S. in the late summer. After they left, I went to work.

We have a wonderful instructor. He flies for the local airline, and since we keep our plane at their airstrip, it was easy enough to steal thirty minutes of instruction when he had a long stretch between flights. I soloed fairly soon and keep working to pile up hours.


I've taken the written exam for my license, but we have one major problem. The only man in the country whom the Civil Aviation Director considers competent to give me a flight-check ride is my instructor...which is a little dubious. So here I am with about 75 hours flying time, still waiting for my license. We'll find someone soon, I'm sure.

Don't worry...I'm very conservative. I love flying, but have a healthy respect for the plane and weather. As far as I'm concerned, a plane is one place you should have your mind on business every minute.



The plane is in constant use. Don Stauffer is manager for Hercules Powder Company's operation here in British Honduras. They have a resin-extraction plant seventy miles south, and he has to go down there at least once a week, plus he often has to go back and forth with visiting brass.

Bucher needs the plane even more. He's the Texaco distributor for the country. They're setting up several installations, so he makes one or two trips a week, minimum, from here to our southernmost city, Punta Gorda, and back up the coast to Mango Creek and Stann Creek. We just couldn't do without a plane. Furthermore, he has to go to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, where his barge loads fuel, on an average of once a month.



We're off on our third business trip to Guatemala by plane on Friday. It should be a lovely weekend. Pete Crawford, the Number Two man in

Texaco Guatemala, was here about a month ago. He told Bucher to plan to go over there about now, and then decided he'd hold off his own Thanksgiving celebration (he's a bachelor) until the weekend when Bucher is there and insisted that the Stauffers and I come along too.

Since Hercules is our biggest customer...aside from the Stauffers being close friends...it is almost a command performance. Not that I don't jump at any sort of chance for a weekend in Guatemala. Muriel and I plan to head for the market early Saturday. I adore shopping there. We both want to do some Christmas shopping, so I feel sure we'll be well occupied while the men are busy.



Muriel and I both need a rest. I got myself involved in a church bazaar. The Bishop came around to see me, somewhat desperate since he couldn't get anyone to take chairmanship of the "Fancy Stall." I felt sorry for him...the Dean died recently, and the Bishop never had been in charge of the fair before and hadn't any idea what he was supposed to do. I agreed to take it, though I normally flee from anything of the sort.

I had a wonderful committee...sewing, collecting donations, and doing handcraft sort of things (the latter, principally Muriel, who is very talented and artistic). It was a long, busy task, and I fretted over wanting to do a good job.

Apparently it was well worth it. The Bishop insisted he'd never seen a Fancy Stall look anything like ours; we more than doubled the money any of the other stalls made. Our \$280-plus looked quite spectacular in view of the record of Fancy Stalls rarely hitting \$100. Still, I'm ready for a little relaxation.



Bucher and I are thinking about taking the children to Campeche or Mérida for a few days, perhaps over New Year's. But it isn't decided.*

* “Mérida with the Family” on page 19 in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

Busy Year

Summer – Fall 1964

From letter dated November 24, 1964

I never have had such a busy year. As you know, I am bookkeeper for Scott Towing and Shipping. It started out involving a couple of afternoons a week, and now it is every afternoon and some mornings, if I want to keep up with everything. That leaves me remarkably little time for marketing (which is a rather slow process here), supervising housework, sewing for my growing daughter, etc. I enjoy it, but will be simply delighted when Bucher finds he can afford to hire a replacement!



The children had their two-month summer holiday during July and August, but there was no possible chance of our getting away this year. Carli kept herself busy with friends. Alex went to work with the labor crew on a steel barge Bucher bought and has made over into a fuel barge.

Alex used to come home powdered from head to toe in rust while they were scraping the hull. He worked long hours and made only the equivalent of US\$7 a week, but seemed happy about it. I was delighted when the husky foreman (a British Honduran, more-or-less boss stevedore and odd-jobs man) told me that Alex really had a touch at welding and that I should see that he got some training since he could make a fine living as a welder, judging by the way he picked it up on the job.



In August Bucher added to our household one baby ocelot, whom we named *Oscar*. He's a perfect beauty, and we have high hopes of being able to keep him tame. He lives on our screened porch, but we bring him in with us as often as possible. He plays with various toys...a paper on a

string dangling from a chair back, an old sock with a knot in it, a squeaky plastic mouse.

Oscar and Pedro the Beagle wrestle by the hour. They adore each other. I have clipped Oscar's claws (just the sharp tips), which has helped his relationship with Pedro as well as saved my furniture. However, even when his claws were long, we never felt anything but those satiny soft pads.

Oscar's leaps from one piece of furniture to another are magnificent. And since we don't have a decent piece in the house anyway and enjoy watching him, we let him leap about until he gets wild...at which point he's banished to his porch. More and more now, he'll play for a while, then curl up in a chair or sprawl over the end of a ledge and nap, happy just to be with us.

I was worried about Oscar's eventual size, but gather he'll be slightly smaller than Pedro, except for his very long tail. He's so lithe and light on his feet that you don't have the sense of bulk.

[Editor's Note 11 on page 386]



In late September we had very, very sad family news. Deezy's husband Frank has incurable cancer. You may remember that I worked with Bucher's sister Deezy in New York, and she introduced Bucher and me. She left United Press and set up her own publicity agency in Atlanta and did extremely well. She and Frank married only about five years ago. He's a wonderful person, and we are all heartbroken about it. In October, I was in Atlanta for a week to see them both and offer our loving support.

Exercise Bay Rum

August 31 – September 8, 1965

News Report

News report that Kate filed with UPI

EXERCISE BAY RUM . . . an adventure training exercise with the aim of teaching soldiers seamanship, sailing, and simple navigation . . .

PLAN . . . a ten-day three-boat sea trip from Belize to the Bay Islands of Honduras . . .

PERSONNEL:

Colonel J. S. S. Gratton, OBE; Commander of the British Honduras Garrison, in command of the exercise

Mrs. Gratton

2nd Lt. Michael M. Tulloch, originally of The Sherwood Foresters, now with the Staffordshires

Volunteers from D. Co., 1st Battalion, The Staffordshire Regiment (Prince of Wales):

Lance Corporal Daniel J. Johnson

Private William S. Farley

Private Stephen A. Warburton

Lance Corporal Thomas T. Currie, Royal Corps of Transport;
Col. Gratton's driver

Bucher Scott, formerly of Atlanta, Georgia, and Sarasota, Florida, now a resident of Belize; "sailing master"

Mrs. Scott; Belize correspondent for UPI

Alex Scott; their 16-year-old son

Egbert Williamson; Belize sailor

Mascots: Pedro—a beagle
Oscar—an ocelot

EXERCISE BAY RUM got underway way when the 24-foot auxiliary sloop *Ceilidh* (pronounced *KAY-lee* in case your Gaelic is rusty), flying the Garrison burgee with its sailfish, cleared Belize Harbor under command of its owner, Col. Gratton, and Mrs. Gratton. Following was the British Army sailboat *Ambassador* with the detachment of soldiers and the local sailor. The Scotts left later in their faster cruiser, *MY Blivet*,* tender and tug for the trip, stored with supplies of food, water, and fuel for all.

First destination, Tobacco Caye on the reef south of Belize. As the wind dropped, the *Ceilidh* proceeded under power, leaving the engine-less *Ambassador* to thumb a ride astern of the *Blivet*. As the sun set, the sturdy lines of the Belize-built fishing smack at the end of its tow line made a stark silhouette against a skyline of mauve, violet, shocking pink, scalloped by the low, graying mountains along the coastline.

As it grew dark, the lieutenant on the *Ambassador* and Alex (who had been instructed by a signalman before leaving) rigged up the platoon radio equipment which had been issued to each boat. First, unnerving message from the *Ambassador*: “You will be interested to know that we sprang a leak thirty minutes ago. However, it is satisfactorily attended to. Do not reduce speed.”

At the first glimpse of the colonel’s light far ahead in the darkness, flashlights signaled as the radiomen tried to make contact. Bucher called Alex forward as lookout, and I took over the radio work in my own timorous and inept fashion . . . delighted with my apparent professionalism when I had wits enough to send out a for-your-information message telling the crew in the *Ambassador* not to expect to

* *MY* before the boat’s name means *Motor Yacht*.

reach *Ceilidh* for another thirty or forty minutes, realizing that most of them were unfamiliar with the deceptiveness of distances at sea.

Tobacco Caye to South West Caye, at the southern tip of Glover's Reef, an atoll on a long ridge of an oceanic mountain range east of and paralleling the reef off British Honduras (second longest reef in the world, after the Great Barrier Reef of Australia).

South West Caye was almost trite in its adherence to the tropical paradise format . . . long sandy beach, hundreds of coconut trees, jagged coral along its weather coast, crystal water shading from clear to aqua, pale green, jade, turquoise, and indigo according to depth . . . everything for the soldier-sailor from the north except tropical maidens.

Utila, Bay Islands, Honduras

Exercise Bay Rum's destination, the Bay Islands, is an interesting area settled by the British in the 17th Century, long a stronghold for pirates, formally ceded to Honduras in 1859. At the time the islands were given to Honduras, the people, principally British, were given permission to keep their own language, own schools, own churches. The Bay Islands still are a little pocket of British Colonial culture, resentful of their political subservience to Honduras, resented by the mainlanders for their resistance to latinization. Its people are principally fishermen and seafarers. A good percentage of the small boats sailing the waters in this part of the world have Bay Islanders as captains.

The flotilla, which sailed from South West Caye at ten o'clock at night, deserved Technicolor movie treatment. It was an eerie melange of disembodied faces exposed and changed by running lights, skeletonized rigging, lightly moving hulls temporarily huddled as tow lines were secured and payed out.

The three moved through the pass in the reef with the *Blivet* towing the sailboats. The wind was directly ahead, the sea moderately rough, and it would have been a desperately long and hard beat for the sailboats to cross separately. Alex was seconded to the colonel

in the sloop *Ceilidh* for the long passage across open water to the Bay Islands. We carried two soldiers since the *Ambassador* was a bit crowded for the six men she was carrying.

The trip . . . rough, but not violently so; dark, but with a temporary piece of moon and night-long stars; endless, as relentlessly rolling through the dark can be no matter how many cat naps and cups of coffee break it.

Navigation was difficult even after daylight, with haze hiding the coast of Honduras. All of us were tired from the rough night so we changed our destination for Utila, the nearest of the Bay Islands, rather than proceed to Roatán, for which we had cleared.

Ceilidh turned loose her tow line as we rounded the point of Utila, and blue-and-white be-starred Honduran ensign and yellow quarantine flag flying, the colonel led his “fleet” into harbor.

Several local launches ran out to meet us and led the way past the shoals. It was a picturesque town, typically British Colonial with red-roofed, square frame houses lining the crescent harbor facing the rugged mountains of the mainland across twenty-odd miles of sea.

The main pier was solidly jammed with people awaiting our arrival. All the local authorities were there, desolate that confusion over our schedule had spoiled the elaborate reception planned for the colonel.

Somehow word had been that we would reach Utila (not Roatán) two days earlier. All the top officials of the Bay Islands . . . military commandante, gobernador, policía, aduana,* a detachment of soldiers and other key people . . . had been sent over from Roatán to meet Col. Gratton. They had left, finally, just an hour before our arrival.

Gradually it registered with all of us that despite the colonel’s assurances to the Honduran Consul that this was an informal

* *Aduana* is Spanish for *Customs*.

visit, the bare facts which had filtered through to Tegucigalpa, the capital, must have appeared questionable, possibly sinister!

A British colonel, first officer of that rank to visit the Bay Islands in over a hundred years, was arriving from Belize with three boats and a detachment of soldiers.

The Hondurans outdid themselves in offering the colonel an enthusiastically friendly welcome. Utila authorities accepted copies of the ships' papers, although we were to enter formally next day in Roatán, and waived quarantine so that the soldiers could go ashore.

One of the soldiers, seeing his first Honduran coin, 20 centavos of lempira,* with an Indian chieftain's head on one side, exclaimed, "Blimey, there's Hiawatha."

Next day, asked about Utila, one of the corporals remarked that it had seven churches and one bar . . . and that one so small that they had to take turns lining up at the bar to order a beer.

Coxen Hole, Roatán, Honduras

We arrived mid-afternoon after an easy crossing from Utila. The official reception committee had reconvened on the pier at Roatán, stiff in khaki uniforms. Col. Gratton, who had not tried to find space for a uniform in the limited living space on his sloop, met them in khaki trousers, scarlet sport shirt, and seasoned Malayan jungle hat, demonstrating the informality of his visit to the country.

The officials entertained us the first evening in the cool patio of the Club Bossa Nova, under a gloriously spreading almond tree. Next evening we invited them with their wives to the *Blivet* and ended the evening with a cruise from our anchorage back to the main pier.

* *Lempira* is the unit of Honduran currency; *centavos* are cents (hundredths).

Ice was not available in Coxen Hole so we took the Grattons and went up the coast to Oak Ridge to buy some. The island is lovely . . . benign green hills, coves, little islets, coastal communities of houses on stilts built right over the water, thatched huts, and in the distance facing the southern coast of Roatán, the mountains of the mainland.

Oak Ridge is a town on stilts, built on the long, narrow fingers of a winding bay. The rusted hulk of a stranded ship looms as a dismal warning at the west edge of the narrow channel into the harbor. The ice house is part of a neat little marina operated by an enthusiastic American who bought his property sight-unseen, visited it, returned to California, sold out, and with his family moved down to Roatán.

The soldiers were invited to a big dance where Miss Roatán would be selected. To their chagrin, there were just two contestants, and the party folded at ten o'clock when the town's lights went out. As a matter of fact, normally the lights are put out at nine o'clock, but they were left on later in honor of the colonel's visit.

Another day . . . picnicking at the western end of Roatán . . . great wide sandy beach, coconut palms, and pitted volcanic cliffs.

The soldiers took some local friends with them, and one of the girls, spotting Steve's one blue eye and one brown, made up a calypso about him, to the delight of the young soldier . . . who understood not a word since it was in Spanish.

Half Moon Caye, British Honduras

Cleared Roatán in the early afternoon, with a strong southeast wind. The *Ambassador*, who had suffered the indignity of frequent tows, sailed off almost out of sight. Lt. Tulloch, an experienced sailor, put his men on the tiller in rotation and let them practice the lessons in sailing he had been giving them through lectures.

Another night-long sail with alternating naps and turns at the helm. Interesting, with the responsibility of watch-dogging the two sailboats and keeping the flotilla together. *Ceilidh* skirted the edge of one of the squalls dotting the area and had severe enough winds for Mrs. Gratton to have to call the colonel to relieve her at the tiller.

Sighted Half Moon Caye soon after dawn. Picked a slow passage to anchorage through the treacherous reef. Behind us the *Ceilidh* scraped briefly without damaging herself. A local fisherman, Pete Young, assessing the situation, poled out from a nearby caye in his dory to guide them through the coral.

Half Moon Caye is one of the loveliest in the country. Although its shape was altered by Hurricane Hattie, it still is a sandy crescent with a Victorian lighthouse at one end, coconut palms without underbrush giving a clear view from one side of the caye to the other, and on the southern half of the island, dense green foliage with Chinese-red blossoms. Living in the bush are some of the rare booby birds, which behave like slightly inebriated clowns.

At Half Moon, the Colonel's Lady invited the entire party for a curry lunch. Mrs. Gratton magically produced can after can of ingredients, simmered all over a charcoal fire, cooked her rice, and served the traditional British Army luncheon on the beach.

Just before the *Ambassador* sailed from Roatán, the secretary to the aduana arrived in a launch with a gift of two chickens for the men. They were put on board squawking, proudly held aloft for photographing as I took pictures of the *Ambassador* under sail, and stepped on during the night accidentally by Egbert, who was probably more startled than the chickens. The fowls were destined for roasting on Half Moon Caye, but that evening as cooking time approached, the soldiers turned the execution over to Egbert, who had not developed their degree of affection for the feathered passengers.

Trip home, uneventful. Summing up the trip wryly as the *Ambassador* was taken in tow for the last time, the colonel's driver, Cpl. Tom Currie, remarked in his broad Scot's brogue that one of the things he had learned from the trip was "never a-go-go-go without an engine."

On the wharf at Belize City, army lorries waited for the arrival of the convoy. The soldiers stepped ashore considering themselves seasoned sailors. And Exercise Bay Rum was over.

Kate V. Scott

Personal Addendum

Letter written after trip to Bay Islands in September 1965

Very few British Army adventure-training exercises include a family of Americans among their personnel...and almost none, I expect, carry ocelots as mascots.

At the briefing session preceding departure, newly arrived Lt. Tulloch asked Col. Gratton if he were taking his beautiful pair of black cockers. The colonel replied that because their boat was small and the trip long, they had decided not to. The Lieutenant remarked that it would have been nice to have pets along.

Col. Gratton's blue eyes twinkled as he answered that Mr. Scott had the pet situation under control...that he was taking his beagle and his ocelot.

Lt. Tulloch looked startled and said, "Ocelot, that's a kind of cat, isn't it?"
"Yes, like a panther...only smaller."

Oscar is a good bit smaller than a panther. He's a little over a year old, born in the British Honduras forest, very tame and affectionate, but a bit "jungle-y" at night. It is not easy to find babysitters for ocelots, so we decided to take both Pedro the Beagle and Oscar with us.

Within a day, Oscar had decided that ocelots belong on boats. He found several easy holes to retire into: a cupboard in the galley; a perch among

the life jackets in the forepeak, where only a banded tail dangling over the edge betrayed his presence; a padded nook behind a suitcase.

Oscar was a good sailor after the first rough night passage, when he was in his cage and probably got whiffs of diesel fumes. He was released and was quietly seasick in neat little piles before retiring in dignity to one of his “caves.” As we saw him adjust to his sea life, we simply leashed him in one of his hideaways during passages when it would have been dangerous having him prow on deck, and he was completely happy, rocked to sleep by the boat’s motion.

At night, before being incarcerated so that the rest of us could sleep without being pounced on and licked awake with a sandpaper tongue, Oscar prowled the boat, swinging on the after-canopy, leaping to the deck-house top, disappearing in and out of hatches, behaving as if he had his own private jungle afloat.

He showed a shocking lack of respect for the Colonel’s Lady and jumped briefly on her head, not once but repeatedly, at very awkward moments indeed.

The soldiers loved both animals. Pedro swam with them, visited the *Ambassador*, stole rides in any available dinghy whenever he could.

And Oscar quickly made himself responsible for the comings and goings of all personnel of the flotilla. After one visit ashore, when he decided ocelots don’t really belong on beaches, he stayed on the boat, appearing the moment a dinghy pulled alongside. The soldiers got used to finding an ocelot in their inflated 4-man raft whenever they returned to it after coming aboard the *Blivet*.

Oscar’s first appearance at Utila caused something of a panic. As we tied up at the deck with dozens of people crowding alongside, Oscar, who was leashed in the cabin, managed to stick his head out of a window level with the ankles of the onlookers. There were screams of *tigrillo* as the nearest Bay Islanders pushed backward, almost sending those behind them into the sea on the other side of the wharf.

In both Utila and Roatán, people circled the boat endlessly by dory and launch, trying to see the tigrillo. While ocelots are common to the forests throughout this part of the world and frequently are kept as pets, people usually are afraid of them. Also, few of ocelots are as “people-y” as Oscar or have as much freedom as he was able to have in the relative confinement of the boat.

Oscar was always leashed at a dock, although leaving the security of his very own boat for the terrifying and threatening outside world was probably the last thing he would have done. And we kept him secured when alongside the sailboats since he certainly would have boarded them to visit his friends and would have been difficult to retrieve from the rigging.

Buccaneer Lodge

May 1970

The owners of the shipping agency that we operate, Billye and Spencer Robinson (called *Robby*), invited us to spend a long weekend at their “Buccaneer Lodge” on Ambergris Caye. Left Belize mid-afternoon in the Cessna that owner John Greiff recently flew to Cuba with his Chinese hijackers. It is about the second small-plane flight I’ve had since the demise of Zero-Four-Uniform, and I was very close to dissolving at the happy and un-re-attainable familiarity of it. Lovely day, wonderful flight.

Enrique Stains (*Rique* for short), manager of the Lodge, met us at San Pedro. We walked back through the town. It has changed amazingly since my first and only visit, probably before Hattie. There are far more houses, far fewer thatched roofs, far more indications of encroaching civilization...with its conveniences, such as town lighting. Rique stopped by his own home, which is a substantial frame house, to introduce us to his wife, a rotund San Pedrana. Bucher hissed that I was to speak Spanish, which I promptly did with quite extraordinarily flamboyant Mainland Hispanic syntax (from collegiate literary Spanish) and probably execrable accent.

We piled into a large open boat and took off on the six-mile ride to the Lodge. About half-way there, Rique asked if we minded stopping to get some “sardines” (sprat) for fishing. He got onto the foredeck of the boat with a cast net while Bucher tried to pole the boat into the positions Rique indicated, against a fairly heavy chop and strong wind. Rique was furious to find only the odd fish, since he had seen whole schools of them there as he went down to meet us. We ran on to another flat, and with one picturesque cast of the net, he filled the bucket with three-inch bait fish.



The Lodge is lovely. It is on the edge of the sea with the reef a line of white breakers in the near distance. The entire front is jalousied with a

generous T-shaped living area. Bold black-and-white Mexican tiling flows through the living area into the huge adjacent bedrooms on either side. Bedrooms have private tiled baths and are separated from the wings of the T by accorded wooden doors that do not quite reach the floor and that, therefore, permit full privacy with full ventilation. The modern kitchen is separated from the main house by a tiled and screened breezeway.



Late in the afternoon, Rique took Billye and me fishing for supper. I really never have gone out to “catch” my meals and was slightly unnerved about the whole thing. We took a small whaler from the dock at the back of the property, ran through a man-made passage through the mangrove only wide enough for the boat, twisted into and out of wider natural basins, and debouched in a large lagoon where they had built a fishing platform not far from a natural boil where saltwater bubbled up from an underground passage.

This was all hand-line fishing which, again, was unfamiliar. There’s a business of grasping the line about two feet from the hook, whirling it madly as a zoot-suiter whirled his key chain, and then letting fly so that the weight of the bait carried it many yards away. Some people do this through natural skill. Some people do this by practice. Some people are chronically afflicted with not knowing the moment when the line must be released and so become experts in wrapping line, hook, and bloody bait around themselves.

Even so, I caught the first fish...a lovely, big silk snapper. Billye caught one. And they still weren’t really biting. Rique, who is a professional fisherman, was frantic. He went off trolling by himself and caught nothing. Came back and practically ran us off the platform hurling his line at the water. He caught six large snappers very rapidly, probably by hitting them on the heads with the ferocity of his casts.

By this time it was full dark. No moon, but a clear sky with stars that gave some light. Through the active final half-hour when we were working

full-time to catch supper, lines had become twisted, intertwined, knotted into great flourishing flowers of knots. In the dark there was no hope of sorting them out so we somehow managed to gather all up, shove overboard leftover bait (my job), wash down the platform (my job), and get ourselves into the boat.

The mangrove was a low, dense darkness rimming the lagoon. Rique set off at full speed, and as the mangrove came closer, I began figuring the best way of diving under the deck as he smashed into the underbrush. Tiny adjustments in his direction, and we were back in the narrow passage, winding correctly with the twisting passage through the brush.

In the next open place there were three vaguely apparent channels—rather like the classic short story *The Lady, or the Tiger?* Rique didn't even pause, but headed into the least likely of the three...as I began dropping into the bilges for safety. Moments later we were cruising to a halt at the Lodge dock, the closest thing to full darkness I've ever been adrift in.



Pleasant evening...wonderful supper of freshly caught fish...and a special surprise for Bucher and me. To celebrate our Twenty-Fifth wedding anniversary, Robby had a huge driftwood fire on the beach that lit and warmed us all while we sat a foot or two from the water's edge in a thatched-roof open hut, drinking champagne.



Kate and Bucher, 1973

Hurricane Edith

September 10, 1971

Edith looked like a possibility from the beginning. But then, so have dozens of others.

The Tenth of September, formerly *The Battle of St. George's Caye Day*, now *National Day*), is still the country's big holiday celebration. The Premier broke tradition—or established a new one—by giving his National-Day speech from Independence Hill, the National Assembly in the new capital of Belmopan.

As he concluded—as Hurricane Edith went inland in Nicaragua— Our Leader announced to the people via Radio Belize that this monstrous storm with winds up to 160 miles per hour was “on a direct course to Belize.” And he then led us in the National Prayer plus assorted prayers for deliverance.

At the time I was explosively outraged, almost (but not quite) speechless. After the fact, I wonder if perhaps the old boy doesn't have more pull than I realized. Fortunately, Our People did not panic. As the weather stayed quite decent, they went on with National-Day festivities and dived into shelters at the last (and unnecessary) minute. However, among other things, it occurred to me that at any given moment, any one point on this earth (here) is on a direct line with any other given point (the location of Hurricane Edith).

It was a Tenth to remember. It was a day of radio. We had our Command Post upstairs, and Bucher wore a track from the radio, across the veranda to look at the sky and the wind direction per the courthouse flag, and back through the upstairs “living room.” From dawn we were onto ships in Puerto Cortés, Honduras, and were able to keep fairly close track of the storm's effects and movements.

To my delight, I had an urgent cable from UPI in London saying that the circuits were out between New York and Belize so I was to file my reports

in duplicate to New York and London. I only filed two, though I did get some fairly good information because of the radio.

The happiest man in the country was the Voice of Ambergris—Peter Martinez on the Buccaneer Lodge radio. Aside from not really knowing which direction was which, he was quite a help. As the day went on and the storm got closer, Bucher kept in constant touch with him and Pete Hancock at Ambergris and with William Bowman at Pelican Beach in Stann Creek. Since the storm was approaching dead on, it gave us a fair idea of what it was doing.



In brief, Edith slashed into Nicaragua, reportedly sank forty fishing boats, broke up over the mountains of Honduras, and went back into the Bay of Honduras very early on the Tenth. She sat still over the Bay Islands for several hours, dumping rain, but doing little real damage, with winds between 60 and 80 mph.

At two in the afternoon she passed Half Moon Caye with winds of about 35 mph. Dick Bradley talked to the young lighthouse-keeper, who couldn't quite understand why about four o'clock he suddenly had no wind at all, and then it began coming from the opposite direction. As he was told he'd had the Eye, his story got better. To everyone's amazement, by six o'clock he was having SE winds of 60 mph. Since that didn't fit any of the other data, I told Bucher I thought the boy had had a touch of Glory. In all probability that is partly right. However, from the wind speed and direction reports from all our regular stations, it was obvious that Edith had a very long and irregular Eye.

Caye Chapel must have had the Eye, since she had a flat calm with bright stars before the SE winds began. Anyway, the storm was a classical tropical storm as far as the circular motion went, but she wasn't any sort of blow at all when she came through here. Two nights before, a perfectly normal midnight squall had ripped one of the kitchen blinds off completely. With Edith, I didn't even close all the windows.



And the telephone. Everyone who wasn't on the radio was on the phone. In addition to the usual close friends or business people we had some interesting ones:

Raymond Weir—Should he move all his ground-floor people upstairs, because he really didn't have room to.

Jeanne Dinger—I just listened to Radio Belize so thought I'd better call you to see what is really happening. (Radio Belize meticulously passed on Miami reports, but they all were over-estimated, judging by the information we were getting from people in the hurricane area.)

Barry Bowen—How can I believe we're having 60-mph winds as Radio Belize says when my weeds aren't even waving?

The Honourable C.L.B. Rogers from the Hurricane Center—Can you reach Ambergris? (The government apparently had decided it was going to wash away instantly.)

The Honourable Fred Hunter, who stayed in touch with Bucher after he had returned a reassuring report re Ambergris

It really was fun. Naturally it was a bit more fun once I realized that 1) we were getting the Eye, and 2) it wasn't going to do any damage. This time I got the white gas (hadn't managed that in time for Hurricane Chloe) and wired a few more blinds. We have the gorgeous new underwater flashlight, and I remembered where it was early on the 11th.

Bless their hearts, all of Bucher's sisters called. Bibba called the night of the 9th. Apparently she had been talking about it, and her husband, Charles, told her that if she were worried about Bucher's not being there after the hurricane, she might as well talk to him before it. Becky and her husband Morris called at noon on the 12th and Deezy called later in the afternoon. Deezy wanted to know if we had called Carli to let her know that we were safe, and Bucher explained that both children are pretty well

informed on hurricanes and can interpret the news on them well enough not to worry.

I'm about to make a Handy Hurricane Guide for Nervous Relatives, since it honestly is hard for someone with no experience with the things to interpret news reports.



MV *Westkust* aground on reef, 1974

***Westkust* Stranding**

February – March, 1974

On Saturday morning, February 23rd, just before dawn, the MV *Westkust*,* a freight ship under charter to Dow Chemical Co., carrying sacks of polyethylene pellets, went aground at Northern Two Cayes, at the northern end of Lighthouse Reef, one of two outer reefs, about 60 miles east of Belize City. At the time, the Captain had his sextant in hand, waiting for a squall to stop, hoping to catch a star for his morning sight. He saw a rock move past on his starboard side, and by then it was too late. He was hard aground.

This is a graveyard for ships. Six have gone on in the same place since Hurricane Hattie, and only two (including this) have come off. There is a very strong northwesterly set that causes several near misses annually; it is somewhat unpredictable. The light on the reef hasn't worked in months; the government has not notified the Admiralty so that it can issue the standard Advice to Mariners, and therefore ships unfamiliar with the area expect to see a light. The reef itself is shown on charts in an approximate location. I believe I understood the ship's Master, Captain Thomas Dickson, to say that he was about 20 miles north and 20 miles west of his expected position when he went aground.



Mike Williams, the United Brands manager, picked up the ship's radio call and passed it on to Bucher. At the owners' request, Bucher sent his tug, *El Torito*, out to assist in re-floating the vessel. Using tug and ship's engines, they were not able to move her, so arrangements were made to sent a barge out to lighten the ship. At this time, the salvage appeared a simple matter of taking off some 150 tons and easing her off the dead coral.

* *MV* before the ship's name means *Motor Vessel*.

However, before the barge could reach the reef, the weather worsened. They had managed to discharge some 2,000 sacks when, at about 7:30 at night on Monday (February 25th), the Master ordered the barge away because she was heaving so in the seas that they were in danger of damaging each other. We were listening on the radio, and Bucher instructed his tug to take the barge and make for safe anchorage at Dog Flea Caye, some ten miles west at the northwestern-most point of Turneffe Reef.



We arranged with the Mike to keep radio watches with the Master, with Mike taking the pre-midnight watch and our doing the rest. We slept with the radio and lights on. At two in the morning the storm was increasing, but the ship, well ballasted down, appeared secure. We awoke on Tuesday morning (February 26th) ahead of our 5:00 AM radio contact to hear the Master sending a May Day.

A front had moved through at about 4:20; a big wave had literally picked the vessel up, swung her bow 120 degrees to port, and slammed her down broadside to the reef. They were taking “white water” the full length of the ship.

At the same time, the barge broke loose from *El Torito*, which still had not reached Turneffe, having been hove to through the night because of the heavy seas. Bucher ordered his men to stop trying to find the barge and to make for secure anchorage as quickly as possible.

(And as the Norther come through, some miles to the east, a large container ship en route from Honduras to Miami had two containers washed overboard, and they were heavily lashed down.)

We stayed on the radio, of course. Captain Dickson said that he had his entire crew in the deck-house. The water was causing intermittent power failures, and he was afraid he would lose communications. He wanted his crew removed (if and when possible), but said he would stay with his ship.

The *Caribbean Enterprise*, a small container ship, was only a few miles south and proceeded directly to the *Westkust*. Bucher went out to see what he could do to help, and I manned the radio. The weather continued so severe that Captain Dickson had the *Enterprise* proceed on her way since there was no possibility of her offering any physical assistance at the time. However, they had a good chat, which probably was reassuring.

Captain Dickson endeared himself to us very quickly. He was Scots, very quiet, very slow-speaking, very much in command. Only periodic thickening of his brogue indicated stress.

The Comptroller of Customs sent the army helicopter out to the stranded ship. The Master said later none of them could believe it when the soldier was lowered to the deck, but it was most reassuring for them all. At that time there was no chance of getting a boat close to them or of launching a lifeboat. The wind continued gale force; seas were breaking the full length of the vessel; and the northerly swells were increasing. The helicopter made no attempt to remove anyone (which would not have been practical at the time).

Tuesday night was very bad. Mike and we shared radio watch and talked to the Captain every hour. It was poor help, but with a ship grinding on the coral, even a distant voice is reassuring. The barometer dropped; the ship pounded increasingly. However, by daylight it was apparent that there still was no serious holing and the ship was not taking on water. There were no oil slicks visible (which would have indicated holing). The weather began moderating. As the spray and weather cleared, the Master was able to see his situation—virtually no water at all to starboard, coral heads along the side, but reasonable water to port.



Around 7:30 Wednesday (February 27th) morning, Bucher checked with his tug and asked them to proceed slowly back to Lighthouse Reef to stand by the *Westkust*. Around noon they were anchored inside the reef about 100 feet off the stranded ship's bow. That afternoon, two of the tug's crew walked across the reef towing a light skiff and went aboard the

Westkust, leaving the skiff there. I feel sure none of the ship's crew had a clue that it was possible simply to walk away from their ship, and the combination of that knowledge and the fact that the tug was anchored close to them settled them all down. There no longer was any talk of leaving the ship. The weather was easing, though the swells still were heavy. In his meticulous manner Captain Dickson reported, "The danger is past."

Meanwhile, Ford Young had flown two air searches for our missing barge. He failed to find it on the Tuesday afternoon, but got some spectacular color photos of the waves breaking over the *Westkust*. Wednesday morning he found the barge just inside the north end of Glover's Reef, another outer reef some 35 miles south. The cargo appeared intact; our tarpaulins were blown aside, but still aboard; and the towline was drifting astern.

Two salvage operations began, the ship and the lost barge. The main one, of course, was the ship; that operation took two weeks, involved several boats, barges, divers.

On Thursday (February 28th), the first day it was possible to work, Bucher went out to the ship with David Gegg in David's dive boat, *Carib Gypsy*, arriving late that afternoon. Bucher and David dived early Friday (March 1st) morning to evaluate damage and, more important, the lie of the ship so that Bucher could figure out how to try to get her off the reef. As he explained, you want to find out how she got there and bring her off the same way, since you know it can be done.



Rapid discharge was important from one particular hold, since it was known to have a hole (in the side, not in the ship's bottom). The stevedores worked inside, and divers had to break the coral away from the sides of the ship to examine the hull. They located a 3" by 6" hole.

Bucher gave me the specifications for his patching material by radio at 5:00 one morning...plates and angle iron, drilled to certain specs that

weren't easy to describe over the air to someone who hadn't a clue how they were supposed to work. I relayed the message to the Lloyd's agent, who also works for the company that was to make the things.

We held the little supply boat while the patches were made; they were delivered before noon the same day and were at the reef late in the afternoon. They were installed the next day, and then the hold was pumped. Those patches held, not only into Belize City, but until the ship reached dry-dock in Tampa about two weeks later.

Once that main patch had been attended to, it was a matter of finishing the discharge. The ship was discharged to, quite literally, the last polyethylene pellet, swept up by the last stevedore and dumped overboard. Approximately 60% of the cargo was saved and brought into Belize City. It was a slow, frustrating business, fighting weather, delays, inexperienced men. I will quote from part of Bucher's report:

The tug had to launch a skiff, go to the ship's side, pick up a heaving line, and take it to the barge. The stevedores then would haul a towline from the ship. The ship would heave the barge in alongside by her towline while *El Torito* slacked off on her line to ease the barge in through the swells until she was in position. This procedure was necessary due to the fact that our ground tackle (anchors and anchor lines) was so positioned and the ground swells were such (3' to 5' during most of the operation) that we were unable to maneuver the barge alongside with the tug. Consequently, the tug had to stay at anchor and tend the barge's breast-line on her capstan, heaving in or slackening off as necessary to keep the barge about three feet off the vessel's side and prevent heavy pounding.

The discharge itself was tedious and dangerous. The cargo had to be broken from its pallets and handled by individual sacks, loaded into cargo nets, taken over the side, and safely secured on the heaving barge. When a barge was full, it was taken inside the reef, where the cargo was removed and placed in the hold of a small coaster that later took it into Belize City to be stored in the Customs shed. Bucher says that the loss and damage came first from a hole in one hold that wet some bags, and second from

the excessive handling. The cargo itself was impervious; the bags couldn't take the repeated movement.

Later Bucher's report says:

This business of taking the barges through under these conditions was, in itself, quite a feat, and I was very proud of our tugboat crew. As you can appreciate, with a following 3' to 5' swell, taking a barge through the reef with no marker lights at night, and having barely ten feet to spare on either side, had to be done at full speed. It was jolly good sport until they reached the inner part of the reef. Then they were in a lovely, big basin with plenty of water.

The night that they got the last cargo off, the highest tide was around midnight. I listened to them over the radio, heard them pull the bow around as Bucher wanted, and heard him order the tug to pull at a heading of 030 at half speed through the night.

According to Capt. Dickson later, he was up around four in the morning getting coffee when the *Westkust* slid into deep water so smoothly that he didn't realize she was going until he saw the lights of the coaster anchored inside the reef swing across his deck-house screen. Through the night, she had worked in her coral bed and the strain from *El Torito* was enough to ease her free. Of course, there was a mad rush then to cut anchor lines, stop the tug, etc., to prevent new damage.

As soon as it was light, they had divers overboard to inspect the propeller and rudder, then they cranked up and started for Belize City under their own power. They anchored around 3 that afternoon, and Bucher-with-a-full-beard was home after a celebration drink following boarding formalities.

Meanwhile, the lost barge. Bucher gave that salvage job to a local man, Lester Reyes. The barge was found to be in one foot of water, undamaged, sitting on soft sand and grass, but unmovable; local fishermen had stolen the tarpaulins, anchor, and towline. She was too far from deep water to be towed free. After several attempts, she was brought out after having been discharged sack-by-sack into outboards, the cargo towed through the shallow water afoot, and then stowed on a smaller barge.

Back-to-Back Hurricanes

August 31 – September 21, 1974

In late summer of 1974, sixteen-year-old Mal Price came to spend a few months with Bucher and me in Belize. (The previous year, the official name of the country had been changed from *British Honduras* to *Belize*.) Mal is the youngest son of our close friends Patty and Kendall, neighbors when we lived in Atlanta.

The hurricanes that September gave Mal more of a floor-show than we had planned to provide for him. Can't remember two so close together before.

Hurricane Carmen

From report dated September 2, 1974

At about 1:00 AM local time on Saturday, August 31st, the storm became organized and was traveling on a heading that would take it south of Belize City, straight into Stann Creek. It became a hurricane by mid-morning and was moving fairly rapidly, 15 to 25 miles per hour.

By 4:00 AM on Sunday, September 1st, Hurricane Carmen had begun a slight swing to the north, was moving west at about 19 mph, and had sustained winds of 110 mph.

The new course, which curved ever so gently toward the north in the next eight hours, pulled the storm-center slightly—but safely—north of Belize City. Winds now were 125 mph with gusts to 160. The barometric pressure in Belize City (combined readings from two Scott barometers; one barometer on the *Ultra Freeze*, one of our ships anchored in the harbor; United Brands' barometer; and others) stayed sufficiently higher than the reputed reading in the storm, which tended to keep her offshore. Main problem: a high-pressure center located somewhat to the north, which might tend to hold the storm down. This high pressure dissipated

somewhat through the day and the hurricane eased slowly, slightly northward.

At about four in the afternoon, when the storm center appeared north of Belize City and sufficiently far offshore to pose no positive threat of either hurricane-force winds or high water, The Government Went Mad.

They announced on Radio Belize extreme danger from Punta Gorda (in the very South of the country) through Stann Creek, to Belize City, with probable tides ten to fifteen feet higher than normal. At the time they made this announcement, the storm was north of Belize City and posed no danger whatever to the two southern towns.



We re-evaluated our situation and discovered certain facts:

1. Swan Island (official) weather report placed the center north of Belize City.
2. The surface winds in Belize City were from the west (which they could be *only* if the storm were north of the city).
3. The pattern and action of the clouds indicated that the center was north of Belize City.

Which left one missing item from the equation—the wonderful new Belize Airport Radar. When the Comptroller of Customs flipped and ordered Bucher to move tugs, barges, and miscellaneous vessels from their moorings in the mouth of the Belize River, his protests were met with, “You don’t have the information we have.”

Reconstructing, Bucher theorized that they may have had a “ghost” on the Radar (not unusual) or could have spotted a large thunderhead on the edge of the hurricane (again, normal) and decided that it was the Eye of the storm, headed ashore well to the south of where every other bit of

information put it. And they trusted their fancy new machine. Which, according to Bucher, is handicapped by:

1. Untrained personnel
2. Little usage to acquaint personnel with the radar
3. Fluctuating voltage, which has limited the radar's usage and compromised its results
4. Possible faulty calibration, due to all the above

Anyway, the country was informed by Radio Belize that they were in instant danger of Hattie-like winds and water.



Authorities had been meeting since morning in their Emergency Committee and had been doing all the logical and necessary things with a hurricane in the area. However, once they got whatever new information they got—and we have reason to believe it was a phony radar reading—they started announcing the opening of hurricane shelters and generally putting the populace into a panic.

At the same time, Bucher, who had been plotting the storm, predicted that if it continued on its present course and speed, it would go inland a little north of Xcalak on the Yucatán peninsula. He was completely right on the location, and once he re-estimated for Carmen's slower speed late in the day, he was right on the time.

Meanwhile back at the farm, the telephone rang constantly. There is an increasing list of friends and business people who call Bucher to get the true picture about hurricanes when they are in the vicinity. He manned all radios, and I stood by the telephone.



That morning, Mal had gone off with Bucher's assistant Crispin Williams to play basketball at St. John's gym. Mal thought he would be goofing around with just Crispin and Linsford Myvette, Crispin's one-eyed, amiable helper on Bucher's tug, who is one of our local basketball stars.

When they got there, Mal found that the entire team had come out to “play hoop.” He obviously enjoyed it. He obviously was nonplussed initially at the loose and rather vicious rules.

Mal came in around 1:00 PM, hot, happily tired, and amused at the great commotion over a hurricane that didn’t look imminent.

Bucher went off mid-afternoon to make sure his tug and barges were tied securely in the river, and from some call or other, I got the idea that the entire position of the storm had changed. Mal and I were out on the upper veranda, Bowditch* in hand, plotting the center and, to our own satisfaction, determining that Bucher was right. However, Mal dashed off to meet Bucher at Customs when he called in to say that the Comptroller had asked him to tow a small freighter out to distant anchorage and to move the tug and barges out.

I was alone until 6:45 PM, answering the telephone and hearing increasingly alarming reports of the status of the hurricane. Bucher finally called in from Customs to say that he would be home shortly and asked what-the-hell was this foolishness about the hurricane and high water in Belize City. I quoted Radio Belize to him, and he got so mad he slammed the phone down on me.

Shortly after Mal and Bucher came in, a sometime-stevedore who lives in an alley across the street from us came over to ask if he could leave “his things” here since he had to work for Public Works, battening down buildings, and his wife and children had to go to “shelter” alone. He said that anything he left in his house would be gone by morning. So he, the wife, and the children lugged their modest possessions over to our laundry room—three great lumps done up in sheets, a wash tub, a fan, a carton of miscellany, and two boxes.

Our telephone “service” continued till two in the morning; Bucher kept the radio on all night to talk to Captain Nelson Cooper on the *Ultra*

* *Bowditch* means *The American Practical Navigator*, an encyclopedia of navigation originally written by Nathaniel Bowditch.

Freeze. I assured Mal that he could spot a hurricane by the noise, and Bucher assured him it was already past, so he went to sleep happily.

The night brought a squall, some rain, and news at dawn that the storm had gone inland where and when Bucher predicted.



To my surprise, today (Monday, September 2nd) became a holiday. I had forgotten that it is an unwritten law that no one goes to work the day after a hurricane or hurricane scare. That did not apply to our cook, Miss Leonie Usher, who arrived right on time, terribly excited at all the activity.

Bucher and Mal have gone off to retrieve the tug and bring it back to the wharf. I think it needs to be done—but I *know* they both need to be out doing something.

Bucher still is seething at the business of scaring the population to death unnecessarily and wondering when this business of crying wolf may backfire.

And Radio Belize is having a glorious time telling about what teams of saviors have gone where to do what:

- British Army teams by helicopter to assess damage on the Cayes
- Volunteer Guard teams “rushed” (at the 15 mph that the Northern Highway permits in its deplorable condition) to help in the cleanup
- Police, Firemen, Reconstruction Development Finance personnel (in teams) up to do their things

The whole point, of course, is that they have worked tirelessly to save Belize from the storm. And at the upcoming election, they can claim honestly that not a life was lost in the fearful, storm (which never even hit the country).

Expletive Deleted.

Hurricane Fifi

From report dated September 21, 1974

The Belize radio and weather bureau acted commendably. The backstage word after Carmen was pretty derogatory and apparently it got back to them. Also, Gilly Hulse wrote a fairly strong column in *The Reporter* suggesting that instead of playing stimulating marches during a scare, Radio Belize give some helpful hints such as boiling water, securing property, etc. This time they did. The whole thing was far lower key.

However, we felt that the Central Emergency Organization, communing with each other in their aerie atop the Cattouse Building, went into public action a bit precipitously. The storm was something more than 500 miles distant and moving at a maximum of ten miles an hour when they declared Red Phase and closed the schools countrywide. If a storm 500 miles distant covering ten mph can reach Belize—for which it is not heading—in under 50 hours, I'll eat it. And if 50 hours isn't *mas o menos** two days, I will further eat.



Fifi formed in the location we have come to distrust. On the evening of Monday, September 16th, she was below Jamaica, scheduled to hit Cayman at dawn, and the following morning she was headed due west toward the Honduras-Guatemala-Belize intersection. Conditions the same as for Hattie—cold, high-pressure front turned the thing around. Had she turned later, we could have had a direct hit. Even as it was, we had a two-day Hurricane Watch.

Wednesday morning, September 18th, when Fifi took her low, westerly course, the country packed up. Schools closed; no one showed up for work. Boarding began. Bucher and Mal charged around town, sort of enjoying the holiday. Bucher's tug *El Torito* and two barges had gone to Big Creek with a load for Chevron, and he radioed the tug and told

* *Mas o menos* is Spanish for *more or less*.

Crispin to stay there. It was a far more sheltered anchorage than he could have here in Belize. In the City, traffic was heavy through the bridges taking boats to river anchorages.


The weather here was fair, with one very heavy rainstorm at lunchtime. Nevertheless, my cook, Miss Leonie, waded through town to arrive slightly late, well togged out in red boots, raincoat, and the most dashing reversible rain hat—black plastic lined with a print, well tilted over her nose with the brim up in back at a jaunty angle to show the print.

Most of Wednesday there was nothing to do except track and plot the storm. As usual, we had our Command Post in operation. Can't tell how many calls; the list of regulars has lengthened. I talk to Lia Tattersfield and Lady Wolffsohn about every other hour, and Bucher usually has me makes the regular calls to the families of Captain Cooper and Captain Gough.

Wednesday afternoon Lia called to ask if there were a law that you had to move your boat upriver. She thought there was; Tom refused to move the *Capri*; and she was sure he would be arrested, the boat confiscated, etc. Tom has been very sick with high blood pressure and was not physically well enough to move the boat. He rightly said it was safer well secured on the Foreshore than upriver, where any of dozens of craft could break loose and ram her. I buzzed Bucher at the office for official word and then reassured Lia.

Also on Wednesday the Comptroller of Customs (Telford Vernon) told Captain Cooper that he could not take his loaded molasses barges upriver because it would be dangerous. He had to send all his tugs North to Corozal with the barges. However, a loaded fuel barge was sent upriver because it had supplies for the government and obviously was no danger to anyone.

While there was no possibility of the storm's reaching our coast until at least midday Thursday, Bucher kept all radios on all night Wednesday to track Fifi and to talk to the people in Honduras who were beginning to catch the storm. Not restful.




Thursday, September 19th, was bright, no rain, very gusty winds through half of the day. We stayed at the Command Post most of the time.

Hurricane shelters had been opened the night before, and to our great irritation, Radio Belize had announcement after announcement about shelters in Corozal (in the North), but said not a word about Punta Gorda (in the South), which appeared in direct line for a hit.

Watching the winds, Bucher decided by early afternoon that the storm must have gone inland. At that time, both radar here and Miami hurricane-hunter reports had it in slightly different locations off the southern Belize coast. Finally mid-afternoon it was announced that she had gone inland across Placencia.

And where were Bucher's tug and barges? Right under the Eye. Sorting it all out later, it appears that while the storm seemed to stay fairly still and was reported back and forth at 16.1 and 16.2 and 16.3 degrees North latitude, it may have been blowing its top, since it came inland at far less than its reported strength. The only reported damage in Belize was to some of those flimsy houses of Hercules at Independence. Of course, it wiped out our new banana industry.

The tug and barges were safe—didn't even blow away the antenna—and they started back to Belize City the morning of Friday, September 20th, arriving through heavy seas just after dark that night. Bucher was rather nervous through most of the day, however, not being able to get any information from Big Creek, but he finally got through by radio in the early afternoon and was reassured.



Honduras caught hell. Fifi ran up between the coast and the Bay Islands. On the Islands, some houses went down, and the coconuts were pretty well taken care of, but there was no loss of life reported. All the towns along the mainland coast were hurt by winds and high water, but only a few casualties were reported. However, it now seems that the devastation

inland may have been enormous, caused by torrential rains over the mountains resulting in heavy flooding, plus the high tides and winds holding the water back in the rivers. They now are saying a thousand or more may have been killed, with whole towns washed away.

As for us, I really had not thought much about the predicted “tides two to three feet above normal”—until I looked out and saw Regent Street completely awash. The water was ankle deep in the shallowest part at the center of the street and flowed into all yards. Mal, Bucher, and I waded across to the office mid-afternoon Thursday, waded into the office, splashed across the rug through ankle-plus-deep water, saw that most of the office furniture was safe and that the lowest file drawers either were soaked or were waterproof and safe—and that there was nothing to do but lock up, go home, and have a drink.

We had heavy squalls with rain and winds about 40 mph, gusting above that, for about four hours or so after the hurricane went inland. The storm meanwhile continued northwestward, giving Benque quite a blow and starting a Top Gallon flood. Most of the highways are out and roads and bridges under water.

However, we were lucky again.



Kate and Bucher's house on Marine Parade



View from front yard of house on Marine Parade

Our House

1976

Two wonderful changes came to our lives in 1976.

After living in rental houses for over 20 years, we were home owners. Bucher had a chance to buy a charming old Colonial house on Marine Parade, facing the sea, with a separate apartment on the ground floor and a large yard for our dogs.

Later that year, Alex announcing that he wanted to return to Belize. He had graduated from Georgia Tech in 1970 and then finished a six-month training course in offshore oil drilling when he was drafted. To our enormous relief, he was not sent to Vietnam. After his service, he returned to the marine end of offshore oil. He spent six years as the equivalent of First Mate, then Captain, of offshore rigs in Louisiana, the North Sea, Portugal, Nigeria, Norway, and Scotland.

Alex moved back to Belize in October of 1976 and settled into the downstairs apartment of our house.



Alex and Bucher in living room of new house, 1977



Bucher's large tug, Oso Negro, 1977

Farewell, My Love

January 1979

About a year and a half after Alex's return to Belize, Bucher was diagnosed with cancer. Alex was able to take over the business during the six months when Bucher and I traveled back and forth to Atlanta for radiation treatments and, ultimately, Bucher's death.

Bucher and I parted knowing that we had more happiness than anyone has a right to have. I never have felt that he was very far away.



From letter dated January 13, 1979

You will want to know about yesterday...everything was easy, gracious, and as it should have been for Bucher.

As you know, our plan was for Alex and me to go out privately on the *Oso Negro* to scatter Bucher's ashes. However, driving home from the airport when I returned from Atlanta, Alex explained...no way! Bucher's two other tugs, *El Torito* and *Water Dog*, were to follow, regardless, and a number of other people had asked to join the flotilla. My first reaction was horror...then understanding...then amused acceptance. Since there had to be a delay, both because of the weather and because *El Torito* was off on a job, I had time to get used to the idea. The more I thought about it, the more fitting it seemed. I did make two conditions...Alex and I would be alone (with the crew) on the *Oso Negro*, and we would go ahead alone for the final moments.

As we were leaving the house yesterday afternoon, Alex mentioned that I might be surprised at the people accompanying us. I was...and touched. On *El Torito* were the office staff (Roy Pandy, the new accountant; Missy I; and Eloisa); Eloisa's brothers Junior and Bert Bradley (Junior provisions our boats and Bert is our Customs Broker); Sid Turton; Roy Canton, who does *not* go to funerals; Captain Gough, who is home on

leave; Jack Guild, a local boatman who has worked with Bucher for years; and probably others. On the new little tug, *Water Dog*, were Captain Bulley and his wife; Mrs. Louis Locke (wife of the chief pilot, who came out by skiff from English Caye to board the tug); old Chief Flowers, the engineer who ran *El Torito* for a long time and then was our Chief Engineer for all the boats; his brother Donald, who was our mechanic; old Bill Garbutt, who operated tugs for years (usually for Lester Reyes, as I remember); and the most touching of all, Desmond Vaughn, the president of the Christian Workers' Union (he and Bucher fought during union negotiations and were fond of each other). Tuto Alamilla and Mike Williams went out on Mike's new tug, *Dangriga*. And B.E.C. sent both the *Juanita* and the *Bay State*. Walter Robison had asked to send a Storage tug, but there was a problem at the last minute so, though they didn't go, the sentiment was there. I am sure I've forgotten some people. On shore to wave us off were a crowd from Customs and the Roes (who had found out about our plans).

We started out in line, with the *Oso Negro* leading. Somehow it was comforting, not sad, to take this last look at the shoreline behind us and the cayes ahead. Before we had gone too far, *El Torito* called over the radio to say that the boats wanted to steam alongside, and I gave permission. So the six tugs swept slowly out the English Caye Channel abreast.

We had taken my chaise and put it in the crew's cabin (although both bunks were made up with immaculate fresh linens). Alex added a 2-inch-thick foam pad he had bought for himself when he made a fourth crewman on the trip to Colombia last year. It was divinely comfortable, alongside an open door that made me feel practically on deck, yet in privacy. Actually, I spent over half the time standing on the bridge just below the wheelhouse. I had *War and Remembrance* with me, which seemed especially suitable, though I read very little.

At English Caye, the other boats stopped, and we went on a mile or so out into the "blue" beyond the reef. Fortunately we had a west wind so the seas were running out rather than in. Captain Earl Young swung the *Oso*

Negro in a slow 180 degrees, I read the prayer for burial at sea from the Prayer Book, and together Alex and I did the last courtesies. Afterwards I tossed in Louis' silver dollar.

Alex asked how I wanted to log it, so I put the entry in the tug's log myself:

1550 Hove to beyond English Caye to consign the ashes of Bucher Scott to the sea he loved. May he rest in peace.

By the time we were back on course, the other boats had started back to port, and it became a race. We had gone out keeping pace with the slowest boat, *Water Dog*. Having everyone steam flat out on the way back was a lovely relief and a lighthearted ending. It took a while for us to overtake the leader, *El Torito*, and we were fairly close to town before we did, but Earl was beaming at docking the *Oso Negro* first.

Alex and I stayed to speak to the people who had gone along with us, and I think everyone felt that the afternoon had been a suitable and gratifying farewell.

The Youngs and Robisons came by after we got home, which made things easy. I had asked Betty and Al Bevis, but Betty was sick with sinus trouble.

[Editor's Note 12 on page 386]



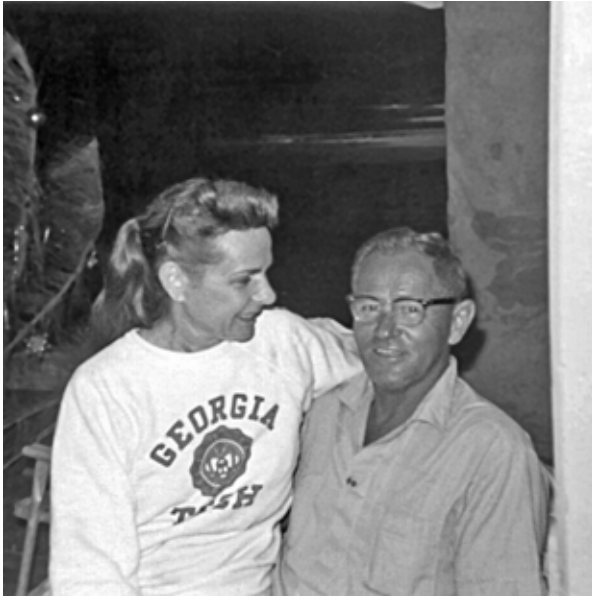
Things are going smoothly, and I am doing far better than I had hoped. The bad times are brief, because I have been able to pull my thoughts away from the self-defeating paths. I have a strong feeling of Bucher's love being with me and helping me.



Kate and Bucher at their wedding, May 2, 1945



Kate and Bucher in Atlanta, late 1940's



Kate and Bucher, late 1960's



Kate and Bucher, 1977

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to a number of people who contributed—some knowingly and some unknowingly—to my creation of this story of my mother’s life.

My thanks go to all who provided letters or photographs, who helped get the material into usable form, and whose enthusiasm and encouragement kept me plugging away at this daunting project.

— *Carli Scott*

Source Materials

I’ve woven together my mother’s narratives from a number of sources.

Letters and Reports

Most of the text comes from Mom’s letters and reports. To quote from email she sent me in 2010:

As you know, I have been addicted to long letters and reports for years. After my marriage, I sent regular, long letters to Mother and Dad. Of course, the letters got longer once we moved to Belize.

Mom’s typical *letters* were a few pages long. Except when etiquette required a hand-written note, they were typewritten—partly because she could write more efficiently that way, and partly because she thought (with good reason) that many people would have difficulty deciphering her handwriting.

Mom corresponded regularly with her father’s brother Frank Van Brunt. Uncle Frank seems to have kept all his correspondence; after he died, the letters Mom wrote him were returned to her. So, although she hadn’t kept her own copies, she acquired a large collection of her letters to Uncle Frank dating from 1952 to 1964. Toward the end of this project, I came across an email from which I learned that it was Mom’s Uncle Walt Van Brunt who had returned the letters to her.

In addition to letters to individual relatives or friends, she typed more general letters with carbon copies, which she sent to a number of people,

adding a hand-written, personalized note to each. She kept copies of many of these letters.

Mom's longer *reports*, also typed with carbon copies, were more like news stories, describing significant events such as trips, major moves, or hurricanes. Luckily for me, she kept one copy for herself. Her email continues:

I don't have copies of most of them, but managed to save a lot. Eventually I secured them in binders, planning to go through and reread them in my declining years.

I wrote all of these on typewriters...I think I made four or five carbon copies so I could send them to various members of the family. My file copies are reasonably legible but could do with some editing. I simply typed the text and only rarely corrected anything. I have found misspellings and occasional missing words.

In the early 1990's, Mom got a laptop computer and started writing letters and reports with word-processing software, which allowed her to correct and polish her letters and reports before sending copies to various friends and relatives.

Anecdotes and Essays

Mom's computer contained many short files with material that she could copy and paste into different letters. I characterize Mom's colorful descriptions of amusing events as *anecdotes* and her reminiscences about family or life in Belize as *essays*.

Memoir

After she started using a computer, I (and possibly other relatives) urged Mom to write an autobiography. She worked diligently on the project, composing some parts from memory and others by adapting the stories in her collection of letters and reports. Instead of a full autobiography, she decided to concentrate on her early years in Belize, starting with my Dad's first trip there in 1954 and ending in 1962, a few months after

Hurricane Hattie. Because of its limited scope, I refer to this work as Mom's *memoir*, although she tended to call it her *book* or *autobiography*.

Wedding Story

In late 1992, Mom wrote the story of her wedding. She had finished the first draft of her memoir and may have decided to expand its scope. Or, probably more likely, she simply thought it made another good story that my brother, Alex Scott, and I would enjoy reading some day.

Recap of Life

In 1993, Mom wrote a recap of her life since graduation from college. It appears that she sent this recap in letters to a number of friends with whom she hadn't communicated for years. The recap may have been her contribution to a larger project organized by her classmates to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of their graduation from Ohio Wesleyan University.

Family and Early Years

In the summer of 2007, Mom's sister, Mary, organized a family reunion at Higgins Lake in Michigan, where she and Mom had spent summer vacations as girls and then returned to years later for summer vacations with their own children. During the reunion, various cousins and I encouraged Mom to record stories about her older relatives for the younger generations. In 2009, she produced a draft describing her family and early years entitled *Memories of My Parents*, which she hoped Mary would edit and add to.

Collection Process

I started with my own collection of some of the letters, reports, faxes, and emails that Mom had sent me over the years. After her death, I found many more in her file cabinet and on her computer. Her computer files also contained essays, anecdotes, drafts of her memoir, the wedding story, recap of her life, and *Memories of My Parents*.

Family and friends who learned of my project provided additional material. My stepdaughter, Kristin Eukel, forwarded emails that Mom had written to her. My sister-in-law Karen Rindfleisch sent me the letters that Mom had written to Karen's late son, Andrew, while he was fighting cancer. Raoul Clarke, whose family and grandparents were close friends of the Scott family when we lived in Sarasota, sent me numerous missives that Mom had mailed, faxed, or emailed to his parents, Polly and Dil Clarke, and to him and his wife, Linda. Knox Hurst, my cousin Charlie's oldest son, sent me a letter that Mom had written to him and his wife, Stacy.

By chance, my sister-in-law María Scott came across the notebooks in which Mom had collected her copies of various letters and reports. María scanned and emailed me the ones that were missing from my collection. Later, María found a box of very old papers, which she saved for me to look through on my subsequent visit to Belize. Some of the sheets were barely legible, others were on the verge of disintegration and the lower right corner of many had been eaten away. This material included Mom's copies of more old letters (some missing pages) in addition to drafts of a couple children's stories, an essay, a poem, and an unfinished short story.

Photographs

Most of the photographs that illustrate the books in this series are from Tom's and my collection, Mom's albums, and Alex & María's collection. My second cousin Katy Jenkins gave me a photo from the 1930's of her mother (Mom's beloved cousin Helen Anne) with Mom and her sister Mary, which appears at the bottom of page 6 in this book. Mom's friend Betty Flinchum emailed me photos she had taken on her visits to Mom in 2012 and 2014; two of these appear on pages 352 and 358 in Book 2: *Life & Times, 1980 – 2014*.

Collaborators

This work has been a family project, and I am forever grateful to all who helped. I couldn't have done it on my own!

Most of all, I thank Mom for creating such a colorful record of her journey through life, and for having the foresight to keep copies of much of her work.

I'm am particularly grateful to Mom's Uncle Frank for keeping her letters and to her Uncle Walt for sending the letters back to her after Uncle Frank's death.

My sister-in-law María spent a great deal of time looking for relevant material in Mom's binders, boxes, and photo albums, and then either scanning and emailing me letters, reports, and photos she found, or else putting them aside for me to peruse on my next visit to Belize.

My husband, Tom Rindfleisch, copied Mom's computer files and scanned hard copies of older letters and reports. He greatly reduced the amount of material that I needed to retype, experimenting with various optical-character-recognition programs and converting many of his and María's scanned documents into editable text files. He also scanned numerous photographs and then edited and enhanced many of the resulting blurry, faded, or lined digital images to produce clearer illustrations.

When I was uncertain about a person, place, or event that Mom referred to or that I found in an old photo, my brother, Alex, was able to provide details that I don't remember and to ask friends in Belize about things that neither of us remembers.

Alex, María, my cousin Margaret O'Neill, and Mom's friend Betty Flinchum read chapters I had "finished" as soon as I posted them online; they each reported typos and other errors, enabling me to make corrections before the books were printed (and before too many others read the incorrect version online).

Editor's Notes

This project has given me a review of my family history, my Mom's life, and my own childhood. I've encountered stories I never knew, stories I had heard but forgotten, and stories I remembered, but in less detail. Some of the stories have caused me to wonder about what exactly happened, what a particular description meant, why a particular word was chosen. These notes are by no means necessary for understanding and enjoying my Mom's accounts. Rather, they contain my reflections and perspectives, as I might relate them to a friend who had just read the relevant chapters.

— *Carli Scott*

1. On the Ways

In 1952, my family lived on a boat while our house on Siesta Key was being built. Mom's introduction of this boat (page 30) explains:

Bucher had found her in Bradenton a couple of days earlier. He took her out in the Gulf, and he put her on the ways to make sure she was sound.

I wondered whether readers who had not grown up around boats and nautical terminology would understand what Mom meant. I got my answer when my stepdaughter, Kristin Eukel, read the chapter. She thought there must be a typo. Was *ways* supposed to be *waves*? After I explained the nautical meaning of *on the ways*, my husband, Tom Rindfleisch, said that he had never heard that usage of *ways* either.

So for those who are unfamiliar with nautical terminology, the Wikipedia Glossary of nautical terms defines *ways* as:

The timbers of shipyard stocks that slope into the water and along which a ship or large boat is launched. A ship undergoing construction in a shipyard is said to be *on the ways*, while a ship scrapped there is said to be *broken up in the ways*.

So what Mom meant is that my Dad took the boat to a shipyard, where she was pulled out of the water and onto the ways. That done, he could walk alongside the ways to get a good look at the hull and verify that it was sound.

2. Literal or Figurative?

I was intrigued to read in a letter written in 1952 (page 33) when we lived on a boat in Sarasota:

...Bucher almost knocked us over, dashing ashore to rub two twigs together to build a fire.

When I later related this discovery, my friend Ellen Campbell asked, “Did your mother mean that literally or figuratively?” Ellen had grasped immediately what it took me a whole day to realize.

I initially took the description literally. I had heard that Boy Scouts learned to build fires in this way and had seen demonstrations on TV. But I marveled that my father had possessed this unusual skill. It seemed plausible, though not probable, and was definitely surprising. After a brief period of wonder, however, I put it out of my conscious mind and continued my work.

The unconscious apparently didn’t let go as quickly. Later that evening, long after I’d stopped working, it suddenly dawned on me that my father was a heavy smoker until the early 1970’s. In 1952, he always carried matches or a lighter and would have had no need to rub two twigs together. Mom clearly knew that Dad had a ready means of starting a fire. And anyone reading the letter knew Dad would realize that the colorful description in Mom’s letter was meant figuratively.

3. How Far Back?

When I was a child, I often heard Mom relate my Dad’s first impression of Belize (page 52) as like going 25 years into the past. As an adult, I heard that it was like going 50 years into the past. In a letter that Mom wrote to a young relative in 2005, it was like going 75 years into the past.

At first this inflation just amused me, like the angler's story of a fish that grows with every retelling. However, I gradually realized that Mom wasn't exaggerating or even changing her story. In all cases, she was trying to communicate that Belize reminded Dad of the U.S. in the late 1920's or early 1930's. I suppose that if she'd stuck with 25 years, a 20-year old reading her letter in 2005 might have imagined a world like the 1980's.

Although Mom's latest written account of this episode specifies "seventy-five" years, I used "twenty-five" instead because I believe that's closer to what Dad said in 1954.

4. *Porte Cochere?*

In 1992, Mom send me the first draft of her memoir. In her description of our first morning in Belize (page 59), she had written:

We strolled through the lobby, out under the *porte cochere*, and down the drive to Cork Street.

I thought, "*porte cochere?*" My knowledge of Spanish and French told me that *porte* related to *door* and *cochere* related to *car*. I also could picture the entrance to the Fort George Hotel, where the roof extends out past the front door and over the driveway to shelter cars dropping off passengers. So I knew what Mom meant. But I'd never heard the word *porte cochere*, and I wrote next to the paragraph, "I'd suggest using a more common word." Tom had never heard the word either. After reading the draft, he wrote at the top of the page, "Your use of language is wonderful, but watch for baroque words."

Mom argued that *porte cochere* was a perfectly good word and that we both were illiterate.

To test whether we were really off base, I asked my friend Christine Pfeil whether she knew the word *porte cochere*. Whereas Tom and I have interests, strengths, and training in mathematics and science, Christine's inclination is toward the liberal arts. I've been impressed with her vocabulary since I was in my twenties when she used the word *disabuse*

in a casual conversation, early enough in morning when not everyone's brain was fully in gear. I must confess that, at the time, I didn't know what that word meant.

I felt vindicated when Christine laughingly said she'd never heard of *porte cochere*. But within a few months she reported having come across the word a few times in her reading. Even *I* came across it in my reading. Some years later, when Tom and I met my cousin Charlie Hurst in Alaska, I was amused to hear him use *porte cochere* as if it were a perfectly common-place word. I conceded that Mom had been right (but I never told her so).

In the mean time, Mom prepared a second draft. At the top of the page describing the same scene she wrote:

“Porte cochere” is back in. Have read it five times in various novels since you were here. Anyone with a smattering of Latin or Romance languages should guess its meaning.

At the end of this note, my Aunt Rebekah, who had read the draft, wrote:

To DDC (Dear Dahlin Carli) Your mother says it's now back in. I beg to differ—it's never been out.

As a compromise to assist illiterates like me, Mom had reworded the sentence to make it clear what a *porte cochere* is:

We strolled through the lobby, out the main entrance with its *porte cochere* that protected arriving and departing guests from sudden tropical squalls, and down the drive to Cork Street.

5. Century

In her description of my family's initial explorations of British Honduras, Mom wrote that the arrival of our Century inboard boat (page 71) allowed us to turn our attention from inland to offshore.

My brother, Alex, remembers that our Dad bought the Century boat sight unseen. He initially had bought a different boat, but discovered that it was too big to fit through the door on the cargo plane. He then looked up

dimensions of possible replacement boats and picked the Century Viking because it would fit.

6. Ukase?

In the first draft of Mom's memoir, the chapter on exploring the cayes (page 76) included the sentence:

There was no argument over the ukase that they wear their life jackets at sea.

Mom had circled *ukase* and had written in the margin:

Alex protests "ukase." I say it is exactly right.

Underneath her note, I wrote:

Tom and I had never heard the word—use "edict."

By the time I started to work on the relevant chapter in 2016, I had completely forgotten that I had encountered the word *ukase* when I read Mom's first draft in 1992. It looked like a typo to me, though I couldn't imagine what she had intended to type. Just in case it *wasn't* a typo, I looked it up and was completely surprised to find that it is a legitimate word.

Merriam-Webster defines *ukase* as:

1. a proclamation by a Russian emperor or government having the force of law
2. edict

I decided that *ukase* was simply too obscure and replaced it with *edict*. Sorry, Mom!

After the fact, I consulted my vocabulary expert, Christine Pfeil. She didn't recognize the word, but noted that terms that are unfamiliar to us were:

...thoughtfully chosen by Kate...her choices say a lot about her background and the times in which she lived. They, in many ways, bring her to life as a personality and intellect, and you wouldn't want to lose that!

Her sister, Catherine Pfeil, added:

I love that Kate so often taught me new words, as she was so eloquent.

So, this note is my compromise. I'd like people to enjoy Mom's writing without having to consult a dictionary, but those who read the note may learn a new word.



Seven months after our discuss, Christine Pfeil gleefully informed me that she had come across *ukase* in a crossword puzzle (the clue was *decree*), adding:

Imagine how flabbergasted and “superior” I felt! I've done bazillions of crosswords and only now encountered *ukase*! Thanks again to Kate!



About a year passed before I encountered my next suspected typo; that one also turned out to be a real word. Thereafter, I left all of Mom's “obscure” words unchanged and without editor's notes. It's up to curious readers to look up words that they don't recognize—as I've had to do.

7. U.S. Consulate

In Mom's description of the Fourth of July party in 1954 (page 105), she writes of the U.S. Consulate building:

...the lovely old building has survived to the present.

The U.S. Consulate at the corner of Gabourel Lane and Hutson Street became the U.S. Embassy when Belize gained its independence in 1981. At the end of 2006, the U.S. Embassy was moved to the capital city of Belmopan. The former Consulate building in Belize City was officially decommissioned at that time and was demolished in 2011.

8. Joan Gerli Hempstead

In her description of the Fourth of July in 1955 (page 105), Mom describes meeting Joan Gerli, who was in Belize on a fishing trip with Chris Hempstead. Some years later Joan and Chris married.

The Joan and Chris became my parents' good friends. Mom and I visited them in 1965 and Mom visited them in 1987.*

9. Ninth of March

In her essay about the national holiday on the Ninth of March (page 177), Mom wrote:

Baron Bliss Day is celebrated with a sailing regatta, a kite-flying competition, and bicycle races.

After reading this chapter, my sister-in-law, María, told me that her first date with my brother, Alex, was on March 9th, 1986, when he invited her to a barbecue and, of course, to watch the races.

The holiday has been renamed “National Heroes and Benefactors Day” and is now observed on the Monday closest to the Ninth of March (unless it falls on a Saturday). Sadly, the regatta is a thing of the past, having been replaced by the Ruta Maya Canoe Race from San Ignacio to Belize City.

10. Alex's Present to Kate

In a letter dated January 12, 1959, Mom describes the first Christmas present that Alex picked out for her and purchased with money he had earned (page 203). She concluded:

Naturally, it will always be one of my cherished possessions.

True to her word, Mom kept the little incense burner with her, through many moves, for the rest of her life.

* “Guatemala with Carli” on page 27 and “Guatemala on My Own” on page 99, both in Book 3: *Travels, 1961 – 1994*

11. Oscar Scott, the “Ocelot”

In a letter dated November 24, 1964, Mom writes of our new pet (page 329):

In August Bucher added to our household one baby ocelot, whom we named *Oscar*.

When we got Oscar, we were told that he was an ocelot; he looked just like all pictures we saw of ocelot kittens. As he matured, however, Oscar never developed the longer legs and more elongated torso of an adult ocelot. While Oscar was a part of the family, we always referred to him as *Oscar Scott, the Ocelot*. But decades later, after encountering adult margays in zoos or photographs and being struck by how much they resembled Oscar, each of us came to the realization that he was a margay rather than an ocelot.

12. Louis’ Silver Dollar

In her letter dated January 13, 1979 (page 367), Mom’s description of scattering my Dad’s ashes ends with a cryptic remark:

...together Alex and I did the last courtesies. Afterwards I tossed in Louis’ silver dollar.

My brother, Alex, and I know that *Louis* is Louis P. Bondurant Jr., our parents’ dear, long-time friend from Atlanta. However, neither of us has a clue about his silver dollar. I guessed that Louis must have given the silver dollar to either Mom or Dad at some point and that it had special emotional significance.

Unfortunately, by the time I worked on this chapter in 2017, Louis himself had passed away. I checked with his son, Louis P. Bondurant III, to see whether he or his mother, Fran, could shed any light on the matter. Fran did not know of any specific circumstances that might explain the remark. However, she did recall someone once giving Louis a silver dollar for good luck and suggested that he probably did likewise with Bucher.

The story of Louis’ silver dollar remains somewhat of a mystery.

Kate V. Scott was a journalist, a wife and mother, a private pilot, a bookkeeper, a shipping agent, an airline agent, a dog lover, a bridge player, a traveler, and a tireless correspondent with a uniquely engaging writing style.

This is the first of four books in a posthumous autobiography that her daughter, Carli Scott, assembled from Kate's letters, reports, and other writing. In it, Kate describes her early life and marriage, and she relates how her young family came to settle in British Honduras and what life there was like in the 1950's through 1970's.



Kate with husband Bucher, daughter Carli, and son Alex;
British Honduras, 1955