

Ahhhhh, Perfectionism!

HAVING A LITTLE CHAT WITH A GOOD FRIEND CLARIFIES WHAT'S ALWAYS SEEMED LIKE, WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL, "ONE OF MY ISSUES."



I had an interesting talk recently with a good friend of mine, Pat, who owns a small construction company specializing in fine carpentry. Pat's about my age, maybe a bit younger, and has been in the carpentry biz for more than three decades. We were talking about getting stuff "just right," i.e., in total accord with a given individual's take on things. You know, what you might call the perfectionism syndrome.

"Of course," Pat said, "perfection is not really obtainable. It's something you shoot for."

"Yeah," I replied, getting slightly defensive. "But I gotta admit I'm just a little perfectionistic about my boat. I mean, everything's gotta be just right. What's so bad about that?"

Which is where the interesting part kicked in. Pat's one of these good ol' southern boys, you know, a persuasive storyteller, with a beautiful riverside home he calls "The River House." And he promptly produced a parable, sort of, that involved his watery residence and an acquaintance of his who's a tad more practical (as in aesthetics be damned) than he is perfectionistic. Pat said he'd recently hired the guy to fix a soffit at The River

House because he'd got himself jammed up with other stuff. The result was serviceable but far from pleasing to the eye.

"He put a two-foot scarf into it," Pat complained, "when he should have just bought himself a whole brand-new board. That woulda been the right way to go."

I agreed, of course. But then Pat doubled down on me—he opined that going for top-shelf performance these days, whether you're talking soffits or boats, is wholly unrealistic, considering the time sensitivities a man's gotta deal with.

"I guess so," I finally agreed, walking away. But then, in less than an hour, I zipped right back to my original perfection-lovin' position, opting to buy a new, super-precise Dremel Saw-Max to complete a woodworking job on the *Betty Jane II* rather than hang with the clunkier tools I already own. "Might as well do this job right," I told myself, "And hey, maybe I'll be able use the Saw-Max on some other fine-tolerance project somewhere down the line."

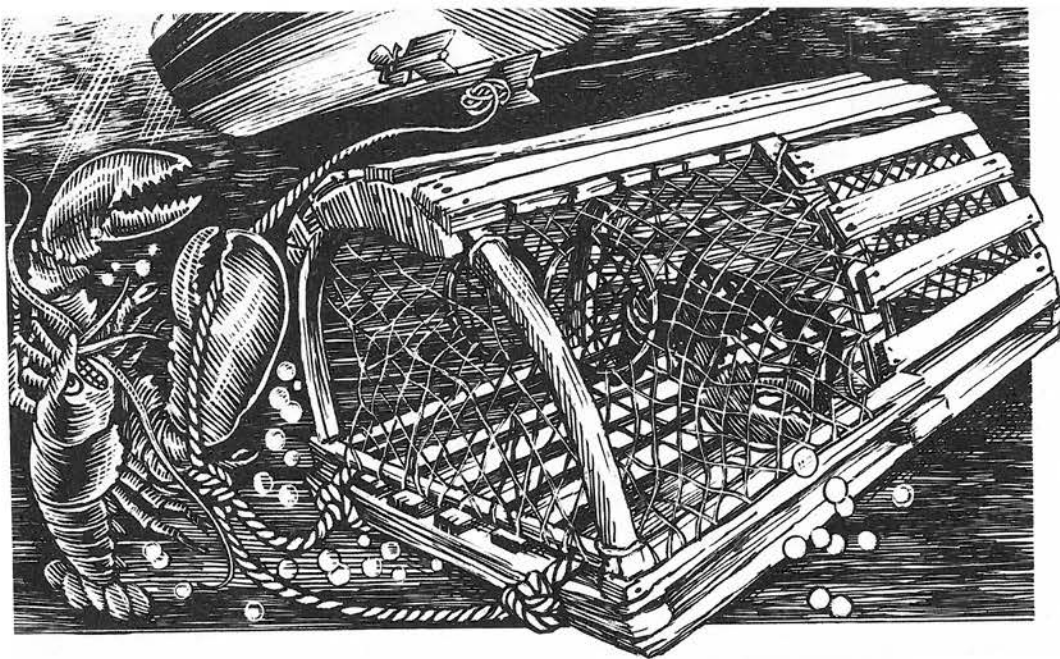
The whole affair sorta put a bee in my bonnet, however. So, with the conversation with Pat still fresh in my mind as I forked over my credit card to pay for the Saw-Max, I began wondering for the first time in my life—why, really, am I never, ever satisfied unless things are precisely right on board a boat? Is it just some neurotic habit? Is it just an outgrowth of the conviction that things that float need to be carefully maintained and cared for in order to continue floating? Or is it just plain ol' cussedness?

The answer surprised me. Heck, I've always thought of myself as a free spirit, a roll-with-the-punches kinda guy who's the farthest thing from a control freak. Was I wrong?

Well apparently ... yes! When it comes to boats—like the *Betty Jane II*, the *Betty Jane*, the *Scrumpy Vixen*, *Misty*, and all the other vessels I've owned and enjoyed over the years—I seemingly need total, absolute, politically incorrect, pain-in-the-transom, deeply perfectionistic control. Why?

Consider "The World" for a moment. Is it not a confusing, disturbing, imperfect place, especially these days?

Now consider a boat. Is it not different? Is it not a special, if admittedly small, place apart from the vast imperfect whole, which if carefully managed and maintained, constitutes a temporary refuge that's precisely the way you want it, that's perhaps even precisely the way it should be? And hey Pat, I ask you again, man: What's so bad about that? □



Lobster's Revenge

Is coastal Maine the essence of salty, succulent serenity? Yeah, but watch out for the feisty *Homarus americanus*—he can be brutal.

A boatbuilder up in Maine had just intro'd a new 48-footer and the company was offering me first dibs on a sea trial if I'd deliver the boat from Demillo's Marina in Portland to the Maine Boats, Homes & Harbors Show, some 80 nautical miles up the coast, in the artsy little community of Rockland. If all went well, I'd do the actual trial toward the end of the trip where protective islands would offer a lee in case mid-August easterlies piped up.

"Sounds cool," I told the marketing guy on the phone. "But you gotta join me, my friend. I can't run the boat and operate the test equipment at the same time."

Departure day dawned unpromisingly. The zephyrs zipping across Casco Bay from the east were doing a steady 20 knots and, in addition to this sorry kettle of fish, it was rainy, foggy and cold, at least by a Florida boy's standards. Moreover, a boat-testing trainee I'd brought along last minute—a young fellow unschooled in the wiles of the sea—was eyeballing the horizon with misgivings.

"Wow, this is Maine?" he wondered, as we ambled down Custom House Wharf toward the Porthole Restaurant and Pub, an ancient Portland eatery known for its omelets loaded with lobster, a Maine-identified creature I intended to feast upon throughout the day or, to be more accurate, at least for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The omelets were excellent, with big, reddish chunks of lobster meat, yellow lemon hollandaise and home fries on the side. And immediately after polishing a couple of them off, our merry band was wailing up the craggy coast at 22 knots, with 4- to-6 footers hammering the starboard bow.

The marketing guy, bracing himself against the heavy lid of a locker for support while seated in the salon, seemed cool with the uproarious ride. But my sidekick? For starters, he was turning shades of green I'd never before seen on a living human being. And then, as we dropped bodily off the crest of a wave into a mighty trough just abeam of the Damariscotta River, he lunged from the

starboard lounge to the day head below while making a constricted, woofing sound. Simultaneously, the marketing guy let out a yell—the lid he'd been bracing against had flown open and then slammed back down on his hand, drawing a sporty spurt of blood.

Of course, the better part of valor dictated that I hang a hard left immediately and find a coastal restaurant for a first-aid-augmented lunch break. And, to the undying credit of all concerned, once I'd found a likely spot we all ordered lobster rolls, although the marketing guy ate his with bandaged fingers, the trainee (who was preoccupied with efforts to arrange a cab ride to the nearest airport) ate only half of his and I ate mine with paleolithic abandon, no doubt due to survivor's guilt.

Our troubles were far from over, however. Later that afternoon, as the marketing guy and I conducted our sea trial not far from Rockland, a relatively costly and time-consuming accident occurred—we ran over a lobsterpot buoy in our haste to finish up before dark.

"Shoot!" the marketing guy exclaimed, while the two of us stood despondently in the gray rain in the cockpit, with a poly pot warp wrapped around one of our props and, at its bitter end, a lobster pot way down in the depths, perhaps hosting a seriously disturbed lobster. "We're gonna need a diver."

When we finally arrived at Maine Boats, Homes & Harbors that evening, the place was packed. Nevertheless, I squeezed the 48-footer into a tight spot without incident, although the exercise was a true, stomach-churning nerve-racker. But here's what's interesting: The lobster lasagna I dined upon afterwards brought two surprising things to pass. First came a wicked case of heartburn, due either to my recent docking travails or to the veritable slew of crustaceans I'd devoured over the previous 12 hours. And second? While burping queasily, I was constrained to wonder—does being table fare make the ever-so-delectable Maine lobster mysteriously vindictive? And, as a result, will he sometimes, somehow, under some circumstances, have his revenge? □



One Helluva Guy

Why ask for help when you can do it all yourself?

It was the weekend. The two-year revamp of the *Betty Jane II* was virtually complete and, in triumph, I jumped into her cockpit, ready for a little cruise maybe or a relaxing afternoon spent dockside, puttering on small leftover projects. You know, like finally securing the screw-in deck plate over the fuel sender on the port fuel tank. Or figuring out all the programming options on my new, high-falutin' stereo.

But then, whazzat! I heard a strange *bump, bump, bump* coming from *Betty's* interior. The sound stopped me dead in my tracks, at least for a moment. Then, with mounting angst, I threw open the salon door, lunged in, made my way to the galley, from whence the *bump, bump, bump* seemed to emanate, and soon settled my eyeballs on the obvious culprit.

Yikes! The thing I'd been dreading since I'd bought *Betty* in 2016 had apparently taken place—the soul of her 30-year-old Norcold undercounter refrigerator had either departed for that great reefer roundup in the sky or was in the process of doing so. A puddle of water on the galley sole offered mute testimony to this, as did the humid warmth I smelled when I opened the door.

Man oh man! I couldn't help factoring the cost of a new fridge into my tapped-out future as I fiddled with the Norcold's controls, trying to nix the *bump, bump, bump*. No dice. Then I flipped the pertinent switches on *Betty's* electrical panel. Nada!

There was one last ray of hope. I determined to extract the reefer from its undercounter home so I could check the compressor and other components at the rear. Maybe there was a bad electrical connection, or a leak that I could easily fix.

I loosened some screws, pulled the Norcold out and again came up with nothing, a finding that triggered a gloomy attack of self-pity. Gone was the day I'd so lovingly envisioned. My plans for that little cruise? Trashed by Fate's fickle finger. The leftover projects I'd anticipated? Cancelled by the sea gods. And the im-

mediate future? Overhung by the need to get an old, croaked refrigerator ashore. But how to do this?

As I discombobulated both AC and DC hookups, I held a conference call with myself. "Now, I could," I opined, "see if I can find somebody around here to help me get this baby off the boat. But then again..."

An idea popped into my head that has often popped before—it's a bad idea but, I gotta say, an enduring one. It goes something like: "Bill, you're one helluva guy. Why bother traipsing around asking for help from every Tom, Dick and Harry when you can simply get 'er done all by yourself? With way less hassle. And way more finesse."

Of course, I heartily agreed. And after lifting the big, unwieldy, box-like reefer aloft, I carried it in my arms through the galley, up the galley steps, through the salon and across the cockpit, where I tried transferring it to my tightrope-thin finger pier without wasting a whole lot of time snuggling *Betty* up close with stern and spring lines.

This was a bad idea. More to the point, doing the split, with one foot on the boat, one foot on the pier and me and a 62-pound monster suspended above the drink, proved overly challenging. So, I back-tracked briefly, snuggled *Betty* up close, accomplished the transfer to the pier with a great heave-ho, jumped onto the pier myself, lifted the reefer into my arms again and set off for parts unknown, with sightlines forward totally obfuscated.

Can you believe—I made it! After almost dumping both myself and my charge into the depths when I glanced off a short, stocky piling I'd forgotten about, I lowered the Norcold into a dock cart with a dramatic, ego-satisfying *thunk*.

"You pulled that thing off the boat all by yourself?" accused my friend Jerry while passing by only moments later. "Are you nuts?"

Well, yeah, maybe. □