

Chapter 1

The Journey Begins

Sign on one of the boat's locker doors:

"In as much as three quarters of the earth's surface is water and only one fourth land, the good Lord's intentions are very clear. A man's time should be divided-three fourths for boating and one fourth for work."

Unknown

Near the end of the saga of *Diver Down*, our sentiments were to change, at least a little.

From the log of Diver Down – First June, 1985

0530h – Good bye Santa Cruz! (2 weeks to get engine parts).

"I can hear the rumble of an engine," I called out. "It must be close but I can barely see the bow in this soup!" I on the helm and Vicki on the bow, peering intently in the direction of the sound, were nervously straining to see the vessel we could only hear. It was 10 o'clock in the morning and once every minute since leaving Monterey our ears suffered the loud but very necessary sound of our fog horn.

Vicki and I had been awake since dawn having listened to the bark of the sea lions on the breakwater in Monterey Harbor for most of the night. We are expected in Santa Cruz, some 20 miles across Monterey Bay, at 2:00 pm to have a leaking engine seal repaired.

As happens, sometimes more often than is reasonable, events conspired to gang up on us. The rear main seal is leaking oil at prodigious rates and the idiots who built the boat drilled a hole in the bottom of the engine drip pan through which all the battery wires were run up from the bilge. This hole, in the deepest part of the drip pan, ensured that the bilge became full of oil which will now be illegally pumped over the side by the automatic bilge pump. The alternative is to turn off the bilge pump which we have done, at least until the water level in the bilge gets too high.

The mechanic in Santa Cruz, at the other end of Monterey Bay, was so busy that we had to make an appointment several weeks in advance to have him work on the problem. Time is critical, we cannot afford to miss our appointment and THE FOG IS IN.

There is a truth that all sailors know. Each and every person who has ever ventured forth on the water will undoubtedly agree that fog is one of the great perils that can befall vessels at sea. Other vessels can not be seen or, even more insidious, can an unintentional landfall be discerned. Thus begins the foggy saga of the sailing vessel *Diver Down*.

The air that morning felt like a cold heavy wet blanket. We could hear the seals barking but our eyes were unable to penetrate the thick gray wall around us. I had sailed Monterey Bay for a number of years in both power and sailing craft. *Diver Down's* log possessed the precise loran latitude and longitude readings for the entrance to Santa Cruz Harbor and so, in pea soup fog so thick we could barely see beyond the bow, we weighed anchor and set out to rendezvous with our diesel mechanic. How little we knew then what this May morning in 1984, would portend for *Diver Down*, and her crew.

Vicki and I had only recently met. Our first date is perhaps one of the most unique of our storie. In truth Vicki picked me up on a beach. Not any beach, mind you, it is the beach in Stillwater Cove beneath the 17th green of the famous Pebble Beach Golf Course. On the beach at Pebble Beach, as it were.

I had purchased *Diver Down*, a Catalina 36, a year earlier and moved aboard the day she was delivered to the ways in Santa Cruz, California. Within months, I had moved her to Moss Landing, a small commercial fishing harbor south of Santa Cruz and joined the Elkhorn Yacht Club (EYC) in the north end of the harbor.



Each year during the Labor Day weekend, EYC sponsored a cruise to Stillwater Cove. Some years later we were to learn that Stillwater can be anything but still; but during the Labor Day Weekend of 1984 it was one of the most beautiful anchorages on the California coast.

Vicki was serving as crew on a Crelock 37 named *Coasters* out of Seattle on her way to Mexico. *Coasters* had left Seattle, sailed south for eight days and turned left, intending to make its destination San Francisco. The captain of *Coasters*, fortunately for me, forgot to consider the change in variation that his magnetic compass was subject to as he sailed south and used the variation he had always used when sailing in Puget Sound. Instead of arriving in San Francisco, *Coasters* first sighted land near Santa Cruz some 75 miles south of San Francisco.

On the list of stops the captain of *Coasters* had intended was a visit with friends on the catamaran *Manatu*. [Manatu](#) was berthed in Moss Landing, located in the south east corner of Monterey Bay. And so, by pure and simple fate caused by an error in navigation, *Coasters* received an invitation from EYC to rendezvous with the yacht club fleet in Stillwater Cove over the Labor Day weekend.

I, not knowing how my life was to change, had arranged to invite another lady, also a member of the yacht club, to join me aboard *Diver Down* for the weekend's festivities. As fate would have it my choice of dates proved to be one of the worst I had made in some time. Vicki, on the other hand, eventually became my wife and the driving force for our adventures at sea.

We sailed to Stillwater Cove Friday evening and by Saturday afternoon Vicki was standing on the beach enduring my date's tale of the horrible monster she had to endure for the weekend. Monster indeed! Clearly I had not met my date's expectations and equally clearly my 'date' had become a genuine dud. I forthwith gave my 'date' use of the tender hoping that she would go back to *Diver Down*; she promptly did.

I remained on the beach to attend the party around a fire after sunset. I cannot tell you why but for reasons known only to the fates, I had taken two wine glasses to the beach with me. Not the usual plastic variety most commonly found on boats, but real glass. The young lady whom I had thought to be the wife of the skipper from the visiting Seattle boat joined the group around the fire and asked if anyone had an extra glass. I quickly reached into my float coat pocket and handed Vicki a genuine wine glass and with that small display of "class", I must have immediately been considered a "prospect".

Vicki and I took a stroll up on the 17th fairway. We sat and talked for a while and began to discover some common history and future goals. It was pitch black when we started back to the beach. I tripped on the edge of a sand trap and both Vicki and I tumbled end over end into the sand. The glasses had both been returned to my float coat pockets and sadly were smashed to pieces. For a mercifully short time I became known as a "glass" act.

I think I must have been smitten then and there for the next morning I awoke at dawn, anxious to rid *Diver Down* and myself of the date who was still aboard. I weighed anchor and had *Diver Down* promptly under sail and headed back to Moss Landing. Of course Vicki awoke to find *Diver Down* missing from the harbor and concluded that I had fled, never to be seen again.

Fortunately I had a quantity of food left over that needed to be used soon and with that as an excuse invited the skipper of *Coasters* and his crew to dinner the evening we all arrived back at Moss Landing. History has proven my dinner a rousing success that gave Vicki and me the opportunity to begin arranging the rest of our lives with each other.

"Can you see the bluff off to the right?" Vicki asked me.

"Yes, I see it", I responded, looking through the tiny break in the fog. "It might be Soquel Bluff."

A small patch of brown cliff became visible through the thinning haze for a brief moment before the soup closed in around us again. We had been on the motor all morning and heard but not seen a couple of small boats and one very large sounding ship.

According to the Loran we were getting close to Santa Cruz. The depth sounder began to indicate smaller and smaller numbers as we closed with the land. A short time later our trusty Loran beeped loudly, telling us that we were within half a mile of the entrance to the yet unseen harbor.

The entrance to Santa Cruz harbor is made of two parallel rock filled jetties that have a short dogleg at the entrance. You enter from a south westerly direction and then turn east to head down the channel and into the harbor. The jetties are perhaps 100 feet apart and the entrance, extremely prone to shoaling, is often closed for most of the winter storm months. This is due entirely to the design of the north jetty which

forced the prevailing current to pass around its end and into the harbor entrance carrying all the sand and detritus the waves had collected on their passage over the bottom of the bay.

The jetty was designed and built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. These fine folks have built and maintained a great many very well engineered projects throughout the country. Sadly, I must report that the jetty at the entrance to Santa Cruise harbor must have been one of their practice exercises done before they perfected their craft.

Add to the defective design a California Coastal Commission bent on disallowing any and all development and/or repair to anything on the coast of California, including the annual dredging that was needed to keep the harbor entrance open and you can begin to understand why some of the port commission meetings were the rather heated variety where those whose boats were stuck in the harbor until spring were screaming at the port commissioners to earn their pay and do something about it.

As we watched the readings on the depth sounder become shallower and with the Loran indicating we were approaching our final waypoint I slowed the boat to a crawl. At 20 feet of depth, the same depth as the shallowest part of the channel into the harbor, I knew we could go no further and determined to stop and wait out the fog.

We could hear the surf breaking onshore but the fog was still too thick to see anything at all. "I think we should either drop the anchor and wait or just steam around in circles," I suggested to Vicki.

"What if another boat comes along," she worriedly inquired?

"We'll have to hope they hear our fog horn," I replied as we continued to slowly circle the spot that the Loran said was the entrance.

Suddenly Vicki cried out, "What is that pole over there?"

I peered through the mist and saw a tall white pole sticking up out of the fog. The antenna for the radio beacon on the North West point of the jetty was visible. Steering toward the antenna, the rocks on the jetty quickly swam into view. Looking to the other side of the boat we also saw the south jetty appear. *Diver Down* was exactly in the middle of the channel entrance!

Our trusty Loran had done its job and we motored straight on in to an end tie and our appointment with the mechanic. At another time and place the Loran very nearly put us on the rocks, but that is another chapter.

The company I had been working for was putting itself into serious jeopardy both financially and by the way they were treating their employees who were actively meeting with union representatives. I had no desire to deal with either bankruptcy, having experience that with my previous employer in Silicon Valley, or with union representatives who would arrive with their own baggage for me to carry.

My boss at the time seemed much more interested in expanding his 3 piece suit and gold watch collection than in ensuring that the factory had everything it needed to meet the truly staggering goals that had been set for it. Following a particularly strenuous and overly long day, I gave my boss a letter offering three solutions for these problems and strongly suggested he pick one or triple my salary.

Knowing full well his only possible response I left the office and returned to the boat for some much needed sleep. Upon return to work I accepted the response my boss had made, cleaned out my desk,

reported to Personnel for my final paycheck and with never a look back got in my car and drove back to *Diver Down*.

Vicki was waiting when I arrived and confirmed that I had been fired. With no job prospects whatsoever I proceeded to ask her to marry me. Perhaps it was shock at my audacity but she said yes and we set about making plans. I thought that San Diego would be a good place for a boat and plenty of opportunities for an out of work electronic production manager.

Vicki was born and raised in Spokane, Washington and had spent the previous ten years living in Seattle. I offered to flip a coin and Seattle won the toss. Since Vicki probably had contacts in Seattle who knew the job market it was likely the better choice for work and Puget Sound was reputed to have some good sailing. We would need to make a quick trip there to pick up some of Vicki's things for the sail north and make arrangements for a slip for *Diver Down* but from that day on there was nothing keeping us in California.

I immediately began preparations to make *Diver Down* ready for the voyage north. Provisions were gathered, maintenance done and shortly we were ready to go. The coast pilot indicated June and July the best time to go so the schedule was set for May 10, weather permitting. We got the start on May 10, just as we had planned. From there on out our most carefully laid plans dissolved into salt water at almost every possible opportunity.

Weather permitting came to mean something one waits for every time one plans a voyage. It also means that if you stay at sea for more than a day sail, sometimes more than an hour, weather is something you must endure until your can return to port.

The infamous 'Murphy' spends a great deal of time aboard *Diver Down*. I have since learned that Mr. Murphy spends a great deal of time on a great many boats, in most workshops and on most hunting trips. The more gadgets the vessel or shop possesses, the more time friend (?) Murphy will spend.

After two tries, the mechanic was still being sent the wrong part. Not only that, the harbor master wanted us to vacate our end tie so that a boat show could take place. Our engine in pieces, a crowded harbor and we are asked to move! Ah well, this is a sail boat and we are sailors, are we not?

The wind was blowing straight in from the harbor entrance, but with the wide channel, all we have to do is tack out to the temporary anchorage near the Santa Cruz Pier, right?

"Vic, will you get the dock lines? I'll get the main raised and we'll just sail her out." Off we went across the channel.

"Ready to tack?" I asked.

"Ready", she replies.

"Helm's alee," I yelled as we started our tack. Unfortunately, we hadn't enough speed to overcome the wind on the bow and the tack could not be completed. With no jib up, all we can do is run and there is a low bridge to run into if we do!

"What do I do", Vic cried.

"Get ready to drop the main. I'll gibe her back around and we can get back onto the end tie", I croaked, not knowing what else to do.

For the non-sailors, a tack is a turn that takes the front of the boat, the bow, across the direction from which the wind is blowing. It is critical that the boat have enough forward speed to push its bow far enough into the wind that the wind can then push the bow in the direction the sailor wishes to go. Insufficient forward speed and the wind pushes back hard enough that the turn cannot be completed.

A gibe is a turn away from the wind. A gibe has the benefit of the wind aiding it and is therefore easier to accomplish. A gibe also can cause the mainsail to go from one side of the boat to the other with the wind slamming the sail and boom against their stops, most often ripping pieces of the rigging apart and making the skipper look completely incompetent. An extremely severe gibe can dismast the boat.

Around we went, away from the wind and back across the channel. As we neared the dock I pointed *Diver Down* back into the wind and alongside the pier.

"Drop the main and get ready to jump off with the stern line", I called out to Vic as I maneuvered alongside the pier. "Now!" I screamed.

Down went the main but, again we had too little, too late. We had sailed past the end of the pier and could only watch as the bow was being blown down into the channel between slips. We would either hit boats in their slips or put her on the rocks.

"Be ready to fend off!" I hollered as I jumped into the dingy and frantically tried to start our 5 horse outboard. I got it started just as Vic fended off the first boat. In near panic, I gunned the outboard which immediately began producing ominous clouds of blue smoke and I equally blue language to match.

Within feet of the rocks we slowly began to back *Diver Down* out to our end tie. This time I was much more forceful with the harbor master and we got a tow out to the anchorage.

For those who have never had the distinction of lying to anchor beside the pier at Santa Cruz, let me assure you that life is often more comfortable under sail in open ocean. Some of the best surfing in Northern California is at Steamer Lane and where do you imagine the swell goes after the surfers are through with it?

Uh huh, past the pier to combine with the fishing boat wakes into a rollicking good rock and roll time for all! Ah well, only a day or two and the right part will be in, we assured ourselves. The engine seal arrived FedEx and of course it was still the wrong part.

The mechanic who, after the third wrong part had arrived, suspected that I had given him the wrong information. He called on the VHF radio in a less than pleased tone, "Check that *#@\$** engine model number again and get it off the engine this time and with the serial number, if you please." I did as the mechanic requested and confirmed that I had the correct part number all along. At least I had done something right.

After consulting with the factory, we discovered that early model 25 Universal Diesels have different size main bearings. I am quite confident Mr. Murphy, ever our companion, had ensured this small detail had been omitted from the parts manual.

On the forth try, the right part arrived and after 8 days of enduring rock and roll on the hook and the screams until midnight from the amusement park roller coaster on the beach, we were granted permission to reenter the harbor. As before, no tow, but the harbor master assured us, "We'll have our boat escort you in case anything goes wrong."

Do you think, perhaps, their lawyer wrote the procedures for the harbor patrol craft? "If you don't touch another boat you won't be sued!"

This time we were prepared. Both main and jib were up when we weighed anchor. After nearly drifting down on the boat anchored in our lee we began to make steerage and as though we had practiced the maneuver a hundred times sailed directly to our end tie, gently nudged the pier while dropping both main and genoa and stepped lightly off to tie fast to the mooring cleats. By three in the afternoon the engine was purring; we would be underway to Half Moon Bay in the morning.

Following an uneventful sail to Pillar Point Harbor in Half Moon Bay, *Diver Down* was anchored in the very well protected, though at times windy, outer harbor. A quick stop at the harbor master's office to let them know the boat would be there for two weeks and off to Seattle in Vicki's heavy old blue Oldsmobile I had aptly named "Tank".

The Pillar Point harbor master, by the way, was most accommodating and agreed to keep an eye on *Diver Down* while we were away. We were quite anxious, while in Seattle, but aside from a tire mark on the side of the hull made by the harbor boat's fender, *Diver Down* remained as we had left her.