

I Seaplaned out to search for a summer house on Dering Harbor side of the Island (abt 1958)

I found nothing of interest. On taking off we passed over Taylor's Island (Map Name: Cedar Island) in middle of Coecles Harbor. Intrigued. Gave the pilot a Baron Von Richtoffen signal--down. We pontooned on on Island's shore I walked around the house, with its Widow's Walk-- saw all in a state of disorder.

I reached in a broken window, opened the door and entered. Found table set with breakfast dishes and a newspaper from three years before.

I found Greg Price, capable, blind realtor, assisted by his wife. He researched and reported the Island's status: It had long been owned by J. Gregory Taylor, a Greek-American who had built the St. Moritz Hotel in New York. He owned the Island for many years, loved it, and planned to be buried there. He had willed it upon his demise to his young nephew, Steve Stephano, his sister's son, for Steve's lifetime and then to Shelter Island. He had arranged a trust fund to keep up his grave, but a few months before his death had moved the funds into a share of a Greek tanker and never replaced them. During the ensuing years the Island had fallen into severe disrepair.

The story of Taylor's death and burial: The funeral cortege, led by the Greek Orthodox bishop, had started from Philadelphia. The winter's day was waning as they approached Shelter Island. As custom insisted on burial that day the bishop admonished the group: "We must hurry or I'll take him." (and bury him by the side of the road) At twilight, they finally reach the Island where a group of Taylor's friends had prepared the grave-site in the frozen earth and there he rests today.

Through Greg Price, I contacted nephew, Steve, from a well-known Philadelphia specialty cigarette making family. I secured a five year lease on the property for zero dollars--with two provisos: I would restore the Cape Cod house and the small generator house- also, Steve's mother, Taylor's sister, could visit the her brother's grave when she wished. Thus began my twenty-two years of stewardship and warm contact with Steve, his wife and, later, his sons John and Dan.

With the house restored and the Widow's Walk safely reachable, I now became a Shelter Islander.

That first summer, guests and I were lunching outdoors when Mrs. Stephano phoned, asking permission to visit her brother's grave. On this windy day I muscled my Century speed boat to the shore (and my good neighbor Bucky Clark's dock) to carry this elegant woman and her lady friend to the Island. I introduced them to my group and carried two chairs and cups of tea to graveside for their visit, then ferried them back to shore and saw them to their car. Next day, Steve called thanking me for his mother's visit. She had told him "That's the man Gregory would have chosen to have the Island"

I enjoyed every bit of Shelter Island and its native Hare-leggers and their hospitality and humor. I joined Gardener's Bay Golf Club the year Bob DeStephano and Anne began their long association.. I made wonderful friends on the Island--my neighbors, the Clarks and their kids, Ray Davis, Sid Beckwith, Johnny Picozzi, Gene Case, Bob Clark and many others. I was then 34 years old. Thus began an important twenty-two year phase of my life with many experiences and stories. A few of these follow:

I had several years as a bachelor on the Island. (Friends claimed I only invited girls who couldn't swim) I played golf with local Hare-leggers, who liked nothing better than to win a couple of bucks from a city fellow--which they usually did. This past summer I saw Sid Beckwith and recalled a story of Gardener's Bay eighth hole: I hit a good drive, an excellent iron across the dog-leg to the back of the green and was putting for a key birdie. What do you think I scored? Well, my long putt for birdie kept rolling, finally into the trap. I left one in the trap, blasted out, then three putted.-- seeking a three I had scored an eight. I took each shot seriously. I walked off the green and then doubled over with laughter at myself. Only then did the courteous opponents permit themselves their laughter. Sid said he tells the story of the "three that became an eight" more often than I do.

A few years later, at 38, I married Joan, much younger than I. I was 46 when we adopted Jason, at 13 days. He grew up on the Island. Running around naked, cutting his feet on the shells of the causeway, fighting to reach the island in stormy weather all kept him from being a sheltered city kid. As Jason began to speak we would use the drive out from the city to practice words: I would point and he would answer: "Dog", "house", "bus" etc. Finally he was stumped : I pointed to a bull tethered in a farmer's yard. He struggled to find the word. He finally found his answer- " A moo with sticks." (he's now 32 and a Columbia degreed Social Worker. He has married Lori, a fellow adventurer.)

Last Jason story: We could reach Taylor's Island by jeep across the causeway during a couple of hours of lowest tide. One Friday evening after the (even then) horrors of the LIE we had guests with young twins. We were running late when we reached the shoreline and transferred everyone into my jeep. Water was already lapping over the causeway. My speedboat was moored Island-side and it was beginning to rain. I turned to Jason, six years old, for his advice: "Do you think we can make it across in the jeep?" I asked. He considered it carefully and said "No, too late." But I decided to give it a go. I revved up the jeep, raced along the beach, and turned onto the causeway. With the tide rising I missed the center of the causeway and a few yards from the Island wetted out the jeep (which never recovered) We all waded the last few yards to the Island carrying our luggage. I turned to Jason and said: "You were right and I was wrong. I made a mistake." The six year old considered the events and his father's blunder. His observation: "You did make a mistake. But I still love you."

I was a good water skier. One weekend, I hosted Bono Bonatti, the Mexican water ski champion. He observed the protected stretch from the mouth of Coecles harbor to the Boat Yard. He commented "You could hold the World Championships here."

Another time, I had guests delivered by seaplane. When the plane was leaving I arranged that I would mono water ski with rope attached behind the speeding plane I arranged for my motor boat to try and keep up as the plane reach its takeoff speed of about 65 miles an hour. I then let go of the rope and glided silently for what seemed a long time. When the boat picked me up and returned me to Taylor's Island, my wife said "I think you're too crazy for me." (we were divorced shortly thereafter.)

Ray Davis and I often played golf often with Stanley Blaugrund, a New York physician and an outstanding golfer. I always felt Stanley's attention kept Ray alive longer than his throat condition should have permitted. When he passed, Stanley and I planted a tree on the 17th hole of Gardener's Bay CC in Ray's honor. I had often dropped in on Ray's Irish mother, then in her eighties. On the mantel was a photo of her in her late teens. I remarked how beautiful she was. She responded in her rich Irish brogue: "They never told me."

Of all the parties and gatherings on Taylor's Island the one I remember best was a sit-down outdoor clambake for 60 guests, many from the fancy Hampton villages. All went well until a torrential rain and windstorm hit about 9 p.m. After most had scrambled across the rising causeway we slept 18 on our living room floor that night.

Another time, I was jeeping through the woods to my shore with fancy European Fashion Business guests. Nancy Palmer, who then headed Lanvin, Paris, in the USA, recalls a 30- point buck deer majestically leaping across the rough road just in front of us-- an astounding sight. She quotes me as calling after it "Send the bill to the office Monday."

I'm a great believer in Randomness-- you never know whether a path will end tomorrow or last a lifetime. After 22 years on Shelter Island my road took me elsewhere but islands remained an important part of my life--Martha's Vineyard, off Cape Cod and 100 acre Muskingham Island (part of a small oil company I owned) in the Ohio River off West Virginia. My son, Jason and my wife, Amy, a true conservationist, and I had the fun of gifting Muskingham to the Fish and Wildlife Service to remain "forever green."

After 22 years it came the moment to vacate Taylor's Island. I had requested permission to remove my belongings on Memorial Day (though my leases were Dec 31 to Dec 31) I especially wanted to hold on to a wonderful batch of antique furniture which Buffy Cobb had presented to me after her Grandfather Irwin S. Cobb and Grandmother, Moy, had passed. I offered the new, young tenants everything else for \$1,000. The response was "My husband says that's not the price for used furniture." (that stuff later sold at auction for 5K.) So I arranged with Jernick, who had moved me onto the Island to move me off. We showed up at the right tide on Memorial day. Now the young couple, with guests visiting, wanted to renegotiate but I stuck to the evacuation plan. We loaded everything-- lamps, tables, silverware, chairs onto Tom Jernick's truck.

As we left, I called out cheerily to the new Islanders and their guests: "I'll be back next week as

a house guest." The glum response: "When you come, bring a chair." -4-

The years to the present have brought some funny coincidences. I became a good friend of a marvelous young woman, Aphrodite Savalas and her husband, Dan Schiff. Aphrodite is the late Telly Savalas' (Kojak) niece, and her paternal grandparents owned and ran the Ram's Head Inn in the 1940's. There are marvelous stories of Grandmother Savalas, a painter, going across to Sag Harbor to visit with Picasso the summer he was there. Aphrodite and Dan are just now finishing the beautiful mansion at the Sag Harbor turnoff onto South Ferry road.

I came out last summer to show them Taylor's Island and talk with the neighboring Mashomack Conservancy. I found Shelter Island as beautiful as ever, although more "fashionable" than in my day.

With Steve Stephano, Taylor's nephew, passing a couple of years ago, Taylor's Island now reverted to Shelter Island. I've been following the transition of the Mashomack Preserve from a private club to the care of the Nature Conservancy. (The Conservancy was lucky enough to get Mike Laspia as part of the deal.)

Now have come the discussions of the Town fathers and the Conservancy on how best to implement Gregory Taylor's will and wishes: the Island will go to the benefit of the people of Shelter Island. Taylor's Island is again in some disrepair and needs much work and constant care to meet Taylor's goal. I am confident the combination of the Nature Conservancy and the officials of Shelter Island will arrive at a practical solution. But boating visitors, beware-- Rocky shoals off the Island used to ensnare are many unwary boats a summer.

The realization of Taylor's goal will take some financing for restoration and maintenance. I'm going to help. ANDREW ARKIN