

## A Social and Anecdotal History of Great Cruz Bay: Homeowner Memories with an introduction by Irene Patton

In the 1970's, we drove on an unpaved road, the Great Cruz Bay Road, so rough that the battery in our car became detached and fell out. We took it in stride; the roads that were paved were narrow and black topped. The side roads were not named in 1978 when we moved onto Great Blue Waters Road. In fact, our neighbor, Ken Colony, who served as president of the Association, did not want the roads repaired. He said people would only drive out on them to bother us. This also kept our dues to a minimum. We had to "close" the Great Cruz Bay Road one day a year to maintain its private status. Many of the first residents of our association were of comfortable means when three families of us from Mongoose Junction moved in as 30-somethings.

We had many trials and tribulations in the 1970's. Allen Williams built "The Great Big Hotel" as Merry Nash named it, after our Association carefully put the kibosh on a small (12 unit) guest house that was planned at the head of our bay. The contractors kept us awake at night with bright lights, a construction dock and barge after barge of materials landing for construction. Sand (for a beach) and palm trees from Puerto Rico changed the shoreline, complete with imported coqui frogs. The Bay had already been dredged in the early 70's, before Coastal Zone was in place, which provided an anchorage with some moorings for private yachts. Our dock was in place as was a private dock at the head of the Bay.

Gallows Point, a popular watering hole for the St. John Yacht Club members, closed down to be re-invented. So, of course, Dodie Fisher rented Butts on the Rocks (present day Beach Villa) in 1977 for a casual evening spot for food/drinks. Our association finally refused to let a business operate on private land; Barbara and John Knight bought the property and lived there until Hurricane Hugo which left only the foundation and stone walls. Also about this time, Caneel Bay moved employees off their property into the community and housing became even more scarce. House sitting jobs and small apartments were very valuable and hard to find.

There were many island characters in those days and Great Cruz Bay had its share. We had one resident rabble rouser that disrupted every annual meeting. Finally, we figured out that no alcohol should be served at the annual meeting! The meetings were usually held at the president's home. I remember Bets Wesson had an elegant bar and was very elegantly president herself. Mal and Suzie Preston hosted in their homes as well as Mort and Mary Sue Cox, Sandy and Seena Stein. These annual meetings were lots of fun with a closely knit group such as the guys who hiked together: Mort Cox, Dick Corkhill and Mal Preston. Bobby Leigh and Dick Corkhill kept our roads and drains functioning. Bobby and Joyce were known for their perfect dancing. Mary Anne Campbell who bought their house (300-19 No Vacancy) and turned it into a show place garden quoted Joyce to Bobby: "If you had done this for me, I would have stayed here." Bobby used to store his dune buggy in the kitchen when they left island for hurricane months.

When Rudy and I bought our house (43 Palms) in 1978 from New Yorker Tully Plesser (built by Dale Baird in 1974) there were already the following houses in GCB: Maria Breeze (300-14,18); Butts on the Rocks (300-59,60); Leeward (300-19); Collinson (300-

40); Sands (300-36); Vail (300-24); Smith/Dykema (300-55, 56); Colony (300-57,58); Zouk (300-66); Baird (300-62); Boulon and Lewisohn (associates in Chocolate Hole). There was a beach house with dock below Moonlight Serenade which was rented by Forest Fisher. I remember the algae bloom in that corner of the bay each summer.

Not many of the original houses were architect designed but I believe Collinson's was (she was the architect of 300-40) and Abbink's (around 1986, 300-3,6) designed by Dan Sullivan. The Abbinks built their dream retirement house and shipped all their possessions via ocean freight. A storm at sea took everything. Mostly, contractors and builders would use local stone masons and crew and possibly the Public Works back hoe on the weekends. There was no average house since the lots were all unique and some were deemed "unbuildable" until the large equipment was brought in about 1990. A cement plant built on the island changed things after the late 90's. For reference, Mongoose Junction II was built by TA Carter in 1989. Glen Speer used cement mixers and poured all walls and floors by hand. Things went faster at the Market Place.

In 1973, before Coastal Zone was established, Great Cruz Bay was dredged to deepen the anchorage and the sand was deposited on the beachfront properties. After the storms, we began to lose land on the waterfront lots (the Bay was reverting to its original shape) so the Association installed rip rap (1995) to stabilize the dock and landing area and planted Malaysian palm trees. Bob Leigh had a Fiberglas water tank installed and we watered the trees religiously until they "took." Many of the survey marks by this time were out in the water. During all these years, we dutifully paid our \$300 annual fee to the Lt. Governor for our dock which made our association unique.

We also battled with the Great Big Hotel at the head of the bay. Our minutes are full of letters back and forth to the general managers to tone down the music and to stop the music by 10 pm. We did hear some amazing concerts when private parties hired name bands such as Buffet or the Beach Boys. Today, the hotel has been converted to time shares and is a hub for water sports. There is a designated channel for boats (thankfully on the north side of the bay.) One of the good things that came of all that noise, limbo dancers and ferries is that Rudy and I air conditioned our house. It is still a common thing to hear out-of-control guests in the rental homes in our neighborhood screaming and yelling; that and the ongoing construction noise can take just the edge off Paradise.

The 1980's were tumultuous for Cruz Bay and many social developments plagued the quiet of Love City (so named by Big Lou Sewer). Stateside laborers were imported to build the quickly growing community and the night life of town was challenged. We learned to live with the hotel at the head of the Bay, the boaters who filled our Bay and the breaking and entering of our homes (malicious mischief they called it). There were beginnings of trafficking of stolen VCR's and other equipment taken from houses and brazenly carried to the dock for sale. The first serious drug use effects were also felt on the island. Our neighborhood organized a boat horn alarm system so that neighbors could help if anyone was in distress. I think the only time it was used was for a marital dispute in the middle of the night!

We had a few storms with winds around 80 MPH but no serious hurricanes for 30+ years. Then Hurricane Hugo hit in '89. People had built island homes not to code and

many public buildings also suffered devastation. There was no communication from the islands for days/weeks. The Great Big Hotel (Hyatt) was operating and took in people with damaged homes. During Hurricane Marilyn in '95, the Hyatt closed and business came to a standstill on the island. I remember the unity of the island residents during these devastating times. When the National Guard called St. Johnians to St. Thomas for duty, our guys refused to go and stayed here to help! They drove back hoes and manned chain saws to get the roads opened.

The 90's in Great Cruz Bay were all about development. People were busy repairing damage from Hurricane Marilyn in 1995. The owners of 300-44, 46, Steve Simon and Helen Porter, bought the 4 acres that were zoned commercial above our dinghy dock. Previously in the 1970's Forest Fisher and a group tried to build a marina and guest house there and our association also battled another developer and kept him out. It was decided by the association that only from within could something work for everyone. The 4 acres were subdivided by Simon and Porter into 4 one acre lots, for which we were all so grateful, thinking this was more in keeping with our neighborhood. Today, 3 lovely homes have been built with beachfront access.

Our dinghy dock and bay access by all members was described by Miles Stair as our greatest asset. I believe the size of the lots and location has added to that desirability as well as the small size of our association. People enjoy their neighbors, for the most part. We used to have cook outs at the dinghy dock each year sponsored by the group. Now we are hoping to meet monthly in members' homes casually during the months most of us are on island.

We have always been closely tied to Estate Chocolate Hole and their owners. Part of our Great Cruz Bay Roads were laid out by the developer with Chocolate Hole members on one side and our members on the other. We have deeded access on the Great Cruz Bay Road which was finally paved in the early '80's as a settlement to a lawsuit against the hotel developers.

We had an arrangement in the 1970's that allowed the Chocolate Hole members to contribute to our road maintenance and be credited for that on their Chocolate Hole dues. We always had members who did not want to pay dues which were only used for road and dock maintenance. Many meetings were spent in trying to get people to cooperate. Since the roads were privately maintained and we had a finite income each year, the work was always done in segments. One year, an associate member loaned GCB the money to pave a large section of the roads. We payed her back in 3 years.

When a disaster struck or funds were needed for any legal work or to advance payment on road construction, the group came to the rescue and pulled together.

Two of our old time associate members, Ralph and Elizabeth Boulon, who had a lovely island home on lots 175 Chocolate Hole, are buried on their historic property. I remember trying not to be at the intersection of the Great Cruz Bay Road and Great Blue Waters at 9 a.m. when Ralph bared down the hill for coffee in the park with his friends!