WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

Author of AIRBORNE and ATLANTIC HIGH

RACING THROUGH PARADISE

A PACIFIC PASSAGE

With Photographs by Christopher Little

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For
FRANCES BRONSON
With gratitude

Acknowledgments

I am primarily indebted to my son Christopher, for reasons that will become evident to the reader.

Christopher Little did the fine photographs. Those on the first page of the second color signature are by Claudio Veliz, Jr.

To my other companions: I am grateful for their company, for their journals, and for their friendship.

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I want to acknowledge, even though I run a risk in doing so, those who, during the month of June 1985 paced the widows' walks, if indeed they did. On that assumption: My affectionate thanks to my wife Pat Buckley, my daughter-in-law Lucy Buckley, to Shirley Clurman, Betsy Little, Bootsie Galbraith, and Gloria Merritt. Their patience, understanding, and fortitude were exemplary, though here and there a little practice is indicated.

Prologue

"Here's a package for you, Pup." From the sunny dock, my son Christo handed me down to the deck what looked like a shoebox. From below, the voice of Liz: "There is literally not room to stow one more hot dog." I have been a little queasy about Liz; there's a professional irritation in her voice. Whatever was in that shoebox wasn't going to sink our 71-foot, 70-ton ketch, granted that we are stuffed to overflowing. Reaching for the package, I said simply, "Don't worry, Liz."

It was a bottle of champagne, to which a note was appended. "This champagne is yours," the donor had written, "because you were responsible for naming our boat. You're welcome to come aboard if you want." She had designated the pier. The letterhead carried the printed name Querencia, *and she hailed from Vancouver.*

I looked up. The donor was at the corner of the dock, talking to Dick Clurman. I climbed up and approached her. She was in her late thirties, animated, pretty, tanned, competent in manner, and warm. She told me, a little shyly, that she had run into the word for the first time in one of my books and on reflection had thought it just right for the boat she and her husband had been planning for years. She had needed to check it out—she smiled—just to make

absolutely sure, but I had been right, the word doesn't translate. It is used in Spanish to designate that mysterious little area in the bull ring that catches the fancy of the fighting bull when he charges in. He imagines it his sanctuary: When parked there, he supposes he cannot be hurt. It is the first responsibility of the matador carefully to interpret the bull's initial roaring about the ring, as he is teased this way and that by the peones with their capes. The matador must discern exactly where in the ring is the little twenty or thirty square feet this particular bull has designated in his mind's eye as the area of imagined immunity, because when the time comes for the final, dangerous, exhibitionistic passes preceding the kill, the matador must not initiate them so close to the querencia as to risk the bull's deviation from his normal, rectilinear charge. If the bull doesn't charge directly at the cape, deviating instead toward his querencia, he might run his horns into the matador.

So it is, borrowing the term, that one can speak of one's "querencia" to mean that little, unspecified area in life's arena where one feels safe, serene. In the company of one's wife or husband, say. Within the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, perhaps. In due course, for all men, such an area will be underground, the graveyard's bower. But meanwhile—the lady smiled—she thought it just right for her boat, and so did her husband; a boat that had brought them peace of mind. I told her how very sorry I was I could not visit her Querencia, *as the hectic final minutes before our setting out preempted distractions, however pleasant. We would drink to their querencia that very night, I promised, hoping that, in* Sealestial, *we would find our own.*

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SETTING OUT: PACIFIC PASSAGE

It had been a busy morning, each of us occupied with his own concerns, though Dick Clurman located on behalf of us all the clinic that would inject us with gamma globulin, to fortify against hepatitis, and several of us assembled for that protection, fanning out afterward to attend to our special commissions.

I went back to my hotel and attended Mass in one of its little ballrooms, where I prayed also for the safety of the journey. Back in my room I wrote out my final newspaper column and phoned it in to the automatic recorder in my office. It was easy to write, and caught my mood. Oddly lacking in excitement, I think back, perhaps adumbrating the relative detachment Danny and Christo would detect early on . . .

> Five years ago, setting out from Bermuda to the Azores on a sailboat, I advised friends and critics of this space that for the first time I would take two weeks' holiday at one time, instead of the customary one week at Christmas, the second in midsummer. The experience apparently entered my bloodstream because, however unremarked, building within me were seeds great and strong in effrontery, blossoming one day in outright contumacy. What happened one month ago ranks with the day Oliver Twist held out his porridge bowl to the beadle and asked for "More."

I asked my editor for one month's leave.

It isn't exactly sloth. It is that, one month ago, I addressed the question of how to transmit my punditry from wherever I would be all the way to Kansas City, home of Universal Press Syndicate. I will be on a sailboat wending my way through Micronesia, propelled by the trade winds. I shall be pausing only four times in a four-thousand-mile journey, in exotic atolls where telephones function irregularly. One of these atolls is unfriendly to visiting yachtsmen, allowing them to disembark only if wearing gas masks . . . The prospect of telephoning in my injunctions through a gas mask proved the conclusive argument, my spies tell me, in this unusual act of indulgence by my friendly editors, one of whom is said to have remarked, "He's hard enough to understand speaking through plain ether. I wouldn't want to listen to him through a gas mask."

And so it is that this is the final column. Final, that is, for four weeks, after which, if the Pacific is pacific, the column will resume. As for the Pacific Ocean: from North Latitude 21 degrees in Honolulu to South Latitude 5 degrees in New Guinea the wind tends to dawdle pretty gently during the summer months, and if we have any indication of a typhoon, we shall show it great respect. I do not believe in confrontational engagements with nature.

To get out of the way of a storm whose location you have established requires of course that you know where you are. Well, I will have on board two secret instruments, one conceived by me, a second by a conglomerate of geniuses. This last permits measurements of one billionth of a second, and translates, or will by the year 1989, into a little box that will tell you where you are so exactly that you can double-park your car by following its instructions. The other is computer software. If the navigator feeds the computer: 1) where I think I am, within thirty miles; 2) in which direction that star I just shot lies, within thirty degrees; 3) what second, minute, hour, and day it is in Greenwich, England; 4) exactly how high up from the horizon it was—then lo! the star's identity is vouchsafed. The computer will say, "By Jove, that was Arcturus!" And I will know where I am.

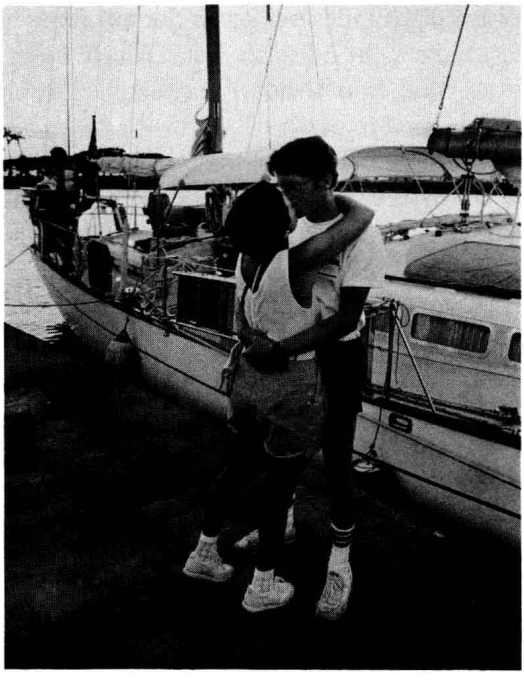
Our preoccupations during this period will be with the nitty-gritty. Heat, for instance. We shall be hovering over the equator, propelled by winds that come astern, as we travel at seven or eight knots. If the wind behind you is sixteen miles per hour and you are

moving forward eight miles per hour, the net force of the wind on your back is a mere eight miles per hour. I have never measured the velocity of the wind from a house fan perched at the corner of a desk, where they used to perch before God gave us air conditioning, but I would guess the wind comes out at twenty or thirty miles per hour, which is why the skin stays tolerably cool. It will be otherwise when the sun is more or less directly above you, and the temperature, hour after hour, is in the high eighties, and your ocean fan dribbles out only one quarter of the air you get from an electric fan, as though the motor had a gear marked "Extra Special Slow." In such moments sailors dream less of wine, women, and song than of Frigidaire.

Do such concerns get wished away, under the category of Problems of the Idle Rich? Well, the case can be made: Nobody forced me to undertake to sail from the United States to the East Indies. But it is the human way to exert oneself, every now and again, in eccentric enterprises. Yesterday in New Haven I listened to a classmate describe his ascent of Everest and wondered how it is that anyone should willingly engage in such madcappery: Dick Bass had taken risks I do not contemplate in my irenic passage with my son and my friends, my books and my music, across the great Pacific Ocean.

We had made no arrangements to forgather at noon, permitting me to lunch lightly with two old friends, residents of Honolulu, while Danny spent a poignant couple of hours with his wife, Gloria—the young husband going off to sea—and his sister-in-law, Marian, there to console and to enjoy a few serene days in Hawaii; and we had convened aboard the *Sealestial* an hour or two before the gift of champagne.

The sun overhead was hot, as one might have expected on the second day of June in Honolulu. It didn't occur to me at the time, but I now note, looking in the almanac, that on June 2 the sun circles the earth (that's the way navigators are trained to reason: the earth never moves; the moon, the sun, the planets, and the stars rotate above us) almost exactly at the latitude of Honolulu, which would make that day theoretically the hottest day of the year.



A farewell: Gloria and Danny Merritt.

But there was wind to cool us off, and excitement to distract us from the heat. *Sealestial* had been scrubbed by its standing crew for six weeks, two of whom—the mate Noddy and the stewardess Maureen—would join my crew—the captain Allan, and the cook Liz—for the passage. Four of my cruising companions (Reggie, Christopher Little, Danny, Dick Clurman) had been aboard for two or three days. Van Galbraith arrived only last night, from a commencement address in Utah; and Christopher, my son, and I also arrived only last night. I had been busy the day before in New Haven, where I did an hour's television on the reunion class of 1950 (my own and Van's), and a second hour on the graduating class of 1985. *Vive la différence* was the sour aftertaste following

the second hour (a not terribly bright dean at Yale, acting on the request of my program's producer to nominate five graduating students, had selected five with pronounced and rather disheveled political biases over in left field, reasoning that my own presence required ideological counterweight. She overdid it).

On Saturday morning, before Christo and I left on the afternoon flight for Hawaii, my lawyer had driven over to my house in Stamford to have me sign my Last Will and Testament. He had assured me that his fitful initiative had nothing to do with my projected Pacific passage. We had the farewell and slightly strained lunch with wife/mother (Pat worries when we go off sailing). On top of which Mrs. Reagan called from Camp David to advise me that this ocean trip of mine was to be *"the last time"* I would do such a thing, that she had exacted a similar promise from her husband a few years before to give up steeplechasing on horseback. I was both reassuring and evasive. Ten hours later, Danny and Reg met us at the airport in Honolulu.

I tactfully stowed the *Querencia*'s champagne myself, in a remote and neglected little hollow I unearthed in the back of the hanging locker, and looked now at my watch.

It was just after 3:30. Seven months earlier I had sent a memo to all hands saying that we would set out from Honolulu at 1600 (4 P.M.) on June 2. I went back up to the cockpit. Quite suddenly there was, well, no bustle. I looked about. Dick, shirtless as usual, was seated, smoking of course, fussing with one of his radios; opposite, Dan was wedged between wife and sister-in-law, drinking a beer, of course; Van and Reg bent over the cockpit instruments—Reg was quietly explaining something. Christo was testing the new 24-volt fan in the saloon below. Christopher Little, twenty yards abeam, waved to me from his rented power boat—they call it a chase boat (its function is to pursue a departing vessel for the convenience of a photographer who wishes to record the scene). After a few miles, the chase boat would pull alongside, Christopher Little, with his photographic gear, would leap onto the *Sealestial*, and we would wave goodbye to the power boat. *Sealestial* would sail on toward the little island, 716 miles away, which I plotted to stop at

on our southwesterly course to the East Indies. About the same distance, I was reminded, as Newport–Bermuda.

"What do you say we shove off?" I announced.

We proceeded to do so, twenty minutes earlier than scheduled, on that bright afternoon—suddenly experiencing that blend of elation, excitement, and apprehension one feels when heading out into the ocean on a long passage. Such moments live on in the memory. We hoisted the spinnaker on a broad reach and the heavy-laden ketch sprang to life, the meter rising quickly to eight and one-half knots. The seas were lively without being boisterous. The sun was at about two o'clock on our course, still high but a little less white-pallid than at noon. To our left, at nine o'clock, was imperious Diamond Head. Aft of the windward beam, at five o'clock, we could make out Pearl Harbor. From the wheel I could

Departing Honolulu. Next stop, Honolulu.

see, a couple of hundred yards to windward, Christopher Little with his camera, hanging on tightly to what looked like a huge cleat on the chase boat: Houston Control had never had a better launch. Christopher's journal (my son is hereinafter designated as Christopher, or Christo, his nickname; Christopher Little, our crewmate and photographer, is always "Christopher Little") logged what then happened.

> **Christopher.** Knew something dreadfully wrong yesterday when we left the dock twenty minutes early, ahead of schedule. We were up forward putting up the Multi Purpose Sail (MPS), me, Noddy, and Van, when the gods exacted their propitiation for our effortless departure. (Well, effortless qualified by WFB's spending three years getting us ready.) We had one wrap of the MPS halyard around the winch, getting it raised okay. It hourglassed, but then filled out. Then when Noddy tried to get another wrap around the winch, he got his fingers caught between the halyard and the winch. I thought he was awfully calm under the circumstances.

Under way: Diamond Head in the background.