

"This is bad. This is really bad," Rod said. I was relieved. Yesterday's seas were calm, not so today. Rod had said the sea was a little rougher today, yesterday would have been better. This he explained to us as we loaded our stuff on to his herring skiff at the First St. dock in Tofino on December 30, 1994. The marine weather report cited a low south-westerly swell but the seas were 3.8 meters at La Perouse Bank. Rod would have preferred to take us out to Vargas with less than a two-meter sea. But we were off. Leaving Tofino wasn't rough (at all), but as we approached Maurus Channel we could see the breakers pounding the shores off Meares and other smaller islands in the distance. And finally, as we came around the point to our beach, I looked in disbelief at the surf. Now I am not a person of the sea, never been around it that much, not raised near it, so I'm a little tense anyway being on it. But these breakers were big. Real Big. They were the size of those I imagined in Hawaii. There would be no landing on that beach today. So we continued over to Mel's beach, passing in sight of our cabin, to try to find a more sheltered spot to land. The rollers were coming in pretty big there too. Rod decided to

try the rocks at the far end of Mel's beach. That might be the safest place. We decided Ed would get off the skiff first on the rocks and I would pass our stuff to him from the bow. We had plenty of stuff: 14 boxes, several garden implements, a garbage can, chainsaw, 2 jerry cans of gas, a 4-liter container of kerosene and one of methyl hydrate, 2 knapsacks and a wheelbarrow. I passed to Ed an item at a time while holding on to some kind of handle on the bow—all the while watchful of those rollers coming in. I was scared but didn't really want to admit it, not even to myself. I thought that due to my inexperience with the sea, my expectations were completely out of whack and naive. Yes, this is the Pacific Ocean. This is what it's like. Better get used to it. So it was with relief that even an old salt like Rod found this a bad situation. The rollers were so big that Rod and I would hover well off the rocks. Rod kept his eye on them and when he saw a break, momentarily of course, he would motor us into the rocks, I would pass a parcel to Ed, and then back out we would go again ever so quickly so as not to swamp the skiff with the next incoming rollers. Ed stood as far on the edge of the rocks as possible, twice hit by the incoming waves and one of those times lost his balance. Half way through

this ordeal, Rod's engine started to cut out. Not a good sign. We headed further out to sea to let the engine run a bit. Hopefully it wouldn't conk out on us now. Then back in, carrying on with the same technique and the same pace.

During this time, my knee went out on me from kneeling on the bow and being pounded by the sea. But eventually all our belongings were on the rocks. I'm sure Rod had not expected this trip to be nearly as demanding as it was—it took us an hour to unload the skiff alone. Still, he would stick to the bargain made—and he would pick us up from the same rocks two weeks from today. Off he went.

There we were, high tide, perched on rocks with our supplies. Now we had to wait for the tide to ebb before we could move our stuff from the rocks to the beach, lug everything down Mel's beach, which is probably about a quarter mile, through the woods to our beach and finally our cabin.

This was not our first trip to Vargas. We had come here the previous September to eye the cabin with hopes of getting a lease on it and moving here. We got a lift from Richard in Tofino who let us off on the rocks at the far end of our beach. As we climbed over these rocks towards

the beach, we realized we were cut off by the tide. So we had to sit and wait it out. While patiently waiting for the tide to ebb, we watched a dolphin, or maybe two, surfacing and swimming about, and a seal would occasionally poke its head up. Enticing sights for our first visit. We stayed overnight not in what eventually became our place but in Mel's guest cabin. We explored the beaches and the woods. Loved the setting and the cabin. We told Mel (the owner) we were indeed interested in the place. He had some details to sort out first but he would get back to us, and by the end of September we knew we had the lease. Until the end of 1996 for starters, then we'll reassess at that time. Oh, how wonderful to finally have a place to live in the wilderness! A Treasure! Now we needed to focus our lives on getting out there—supplies, equipment, lists of lists to tie up all the loose ends of our lives in Victoria so we may begin our new journey. A journey quite different from the city life. A complete turnabout. On the eve of that September visit now a year ago, it is fitting I begin to write the story—my story.



The tide was ebbing, we could start to move our things along and down the rocks. Thank heaven

Ed bought that wheelbarrow in Tofino. It was going to prove to be very useful, especially now with the distance we had to carry everything. We hadn't banked on that. We were already a little weary from loading and unloading the skiff. We brought one load down to Mel's cabin and realized we would have to really move it to get the remaining supplies off the beach before the tide would rise again. We worked as methodically and as determinedly as we could, mostly in silence. By the time everything was at Mel's, the time was getting on and I could feel my knee begin to swell. We knew we wouldn't be able to get all of our stuff over to our cabin by nightfall. So, we would just carry what we could through the woods for now and worry about our other things tomorrow. By this time we were pretty tired, hungry and thirsty. What I mostly wanted was a big glass of water and a slice of bread. Wants can become very simple when you're taxed. We trudged on further over the trail through the woods and at last came to our beach. Ed stood at the end of the trail ahead of me and laughed. What was it? The winter seas had eroded the path to our cabin. What last September was a nice wide solid path from our cabin sloping gradually down to the beach was now a

four-foot high sand bank. As exhaustion was so near, all we could do was laugh at our final feat to day's end. We continued—moving our load of wares to the cabin. That night's supper fare was simple. Yes, that slice of bread and water. And then we collapsed onto the wide built-in couch and snuggled into our sleeping bags for our first night's sleep.

The next day I could barely walk on my right leg. My knee had ballooned out making me quite immobile. It was clear I would be no use to help get the remainder of our stuff from Mel's to here. Ed would have to complete that by himself. It took him quite a bit of that whole day to accomplish the task. I tried to unpack what was there, read some of the newspaper articles that we used in packing, and did the exercises to help strengthen the muscles around my patella recommended to me by a physiotherapist I had previously seen in Victoria. We were both becoming a bit more settled—all the stuff we brought with us on this trip was here. The weather was clearing and tonight was New Year's Eve. What a great time to be out here, even just for a two-week stay. New Year's Eve in our new home. We weren't sure when we would make the whole move out here, there were still loose ends in Victoria. Like the packing. We

had already begun this massive job but there was still much to do. And the major expense, a boat and outboard, still had to be purchased. And of course the selling of our house still loomed. We had put it on the market in September—a time when the housing market in Victoria was slumping—badly. Who knew when we would be able to unload it. But for now here we were, nestled away in this beautiful wilderness.

We had brought some fresh food with us: tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, bread and the like. At the end of our second day, we placed the tomatoes and peppers in the cupboard and the rest of our fresh produce in a box on the kitchen counter and retired for the evening. Not much later we heard noises. Could it be squealing? Sounds of joy? Ed investigated the cupboard flashlight in hand and a mouse stuck his head back out at Ed. He had nibbled a bit on the food and must have thought he struck the mother lode. For a better part of that night we listened to the mice exploring all this new stuff. From our sleeping bags we could hear them scamper about. Shining the flashlight around we could see them race back and forth along the floor and up the platform wall. Once during that evening we could hear them get into the fresh produce box on the counter.