

# On Living Aboard

by Gene Henson



The sky was that azure blue that you normally associate with cool autumn days, not the middle of summer. But I welcomed the change. The temperature was going to be hard put to get into the seventies; that was for sure.

My wrist still was tender from my falling and breaking it in two places, but the doctor had assured me that in time it would be as good as new. Meanwhile, twice a week I visited Inger, a tall, muscular Amazon, who delighted in inflecting pain also known as physical therapy. In spite of her efforts, the wrist was getting better. I also had managed to find another truck to replace the old Ford, which was sick in the transmission. The new (to me, that is) carries the name Dodge Dakota and is a manual shift. I was trying to convince myself that a manual shift might last longer. The previous owner had installed dual exhaust, which gave it a rather interesting sound. My wife, the Blonde, just shook her head, and Roy, the yard manager, said, "Sounds like a diesel with a dry exhaust."

One of the sages at the coffee shop where I have breakfast most mornings, after expressing my concern that one more tragedy was going to occur to complete the trilogy (everyone knows that troubles occur in threes), replied, "Lemme see now. You broke your wrist in two places, right." I took a sip of coffee and nodded in the affirmative. "And your old truck blew the tranny, right?" This time it was a piece of toast that prompted the nod. "Well,

there ya go - that's three things, right?" How can you argue with logic like that?

My sprits were getting better along with my wrist, and I had managed to complete the re-finishing of *Patty O's* bright work. I didn't have to strip it completely, although I do like to do that maybe every other year. What I do is sand it down first with 120 grit, wipe it with turpentine, sand it again with 400 paper, and flow on some good old-fashioned spar varnish after wiping with a tack cloth. Then, I use fine bronze wool to finish it off. I'm sure these are strange words to some, but it gives that deep, rich-looking finish. Labor intensive? You betcha! But there isn't a lot of bright work on *Patty O*. Oh, I could get away easily by using one of the modern poly finishes, and it would probably look just as good, but somehow it wouldn't be the same. And besides, old ways DO work.

*Patty O* hadn't left the dock in over three weeks. It wasn't due to any sloth or laziness on our part; I just didn't want to take a chance with my wrist. A few years ago, when I was working a real job, a colleague did a number on his knee playing basketball. He thought he knew more than the doctors and didn't stay off it. To this day he suffers with that knee, and I'm sure he's going to be a very good candidate for a knee replacement one of these days. As I've grown older and wiser, I've learned to listen to those who know more than I about a particular subject.

So, we went to family picnics that in other years we would have skipped. We went to an outdoor concert and enjoyed chamber music under the stars. I was offered and refused a lucrative consulting gig that would have meant many hours at a computer keyboard, and I didn't think (nor did my doctor) that that would do much to aid the healing processes. I even did more reading than I have in years, but after three weeks, I was beginning to get restless.

On Wednesday morning of the third week, my cell phone rang. It took the usual several minutes to find it, and, of course, by then the call was committed to voice mail. "Hey, you old reprobate," the message began, "when you find the phone, get back to me 'toot sweet.'"

I recognized the voice on the other end. I had worked with Charlie for several years before we both were let go due to downsizing. I had become a boat bum, and he'd gone on to start his own software development company. We'd stayed in touch and I had done some work for him once or twice, and that's what I thought the call was about.

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