

Stone Soup

Written by John Marshall

Tuesday, 28 January 2014 14:17



Some Nights

Most nights I try to lie in the comfort of the cockpit and gaze at the stars until I lose my earthly grip and fall into them . . . some nights, when the wind whistles off the stays and the stars feel like pinpricks in the frigid air, I am forced below.

I seal the cabin from the weather, as best I can, and three steps down in the darkness find the switch that dimly lights the cabin.

Heater switch next, then two fingers of Appleton, hoping its warmth can steel me against the bitter night. It feels good to sit as I wait for the heater to do what it can and let the golden rum do its work.

From my perch on the companionway steps I watch the river flow and feel its strength against the boat. Rocking in the cradle of the cabin, I feel the tide flow through me, and consider the places I have lived and the path that guided me to this seat.

Memories of my journey appear through the cabin windows reflected in the swirling water by the

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lights in the marina, then get carried out to sea as I recount them.

Memories of growing up in Detroit, of Tiger games, of endless summers . . .

. . . of Tampa, tending bar at the Colombia, at The Tobacco Co. and 20 other places – of coming home on Friday nights to my Japanese room mates and and 30 of their closest friends playing Mah Jong and cooking Yakitori at 4 in the morning.

. . . of San Francisco, Wine School, The London Wine Bar and every cellar door from Santa Barbara to Seattle and beyond tasting with my roommate Mike Bonnacorsi, who would go on to become a Master Sommelier, may God rest his soul.

. . . of Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, a decadent summer, leaving with \$50 in my pocket and landing at Loon Mountain in New Hampshire for the ski season, saving just enough by seasons end to journey to Boston and find work in the North End.

. . . of Richmond, Virginia, where despite being in my 30's I grew up.

. . . of New York, the Culinary Institute, and Mashomack Hunt and Polo Club where I toiled each night after school for the craziest employer I have ever known, living in the Mustard house adjacent to the polo field, warmed only by the heat of an electric oven.

. . . of Germany watching the life of a village from my third floor apartment above the Eiscafe Dolomitten, of floating down the Mosel below the towering vineyards to its confluence with the Rhine.

. . . of Barboursville, Virginia, the little farmhouse, and building Palladio Restaurant at the winery and vineyards after a long stage in Italy.

. . . of Costa Rica, and the Villa DeCary and the adventure of driving there.

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. . . of Charleston, life on Folly Beach and my little trattoria Al di La.

. . . of North Carolina, the farm in Rockford, the loft and the old house in the west end.

. . . of all the travels in between, Japan, Morocco, Buenos Aires – Spain, France, Italy . . .

The wind blows the boat hard against the dock and the rigging clangs against the mast. I climb out onto the deck, it's gusting, and the boat is pitching in the weather, but I feel the need to check my dock lines. The leap to the dock is a little tenuous, and my freezing hands work slow to make fast each line until satisfied I am tightly tethered to my town, I can rest easy, and as I fall asleep it occurs to me that all my travels have been one long journey – home.