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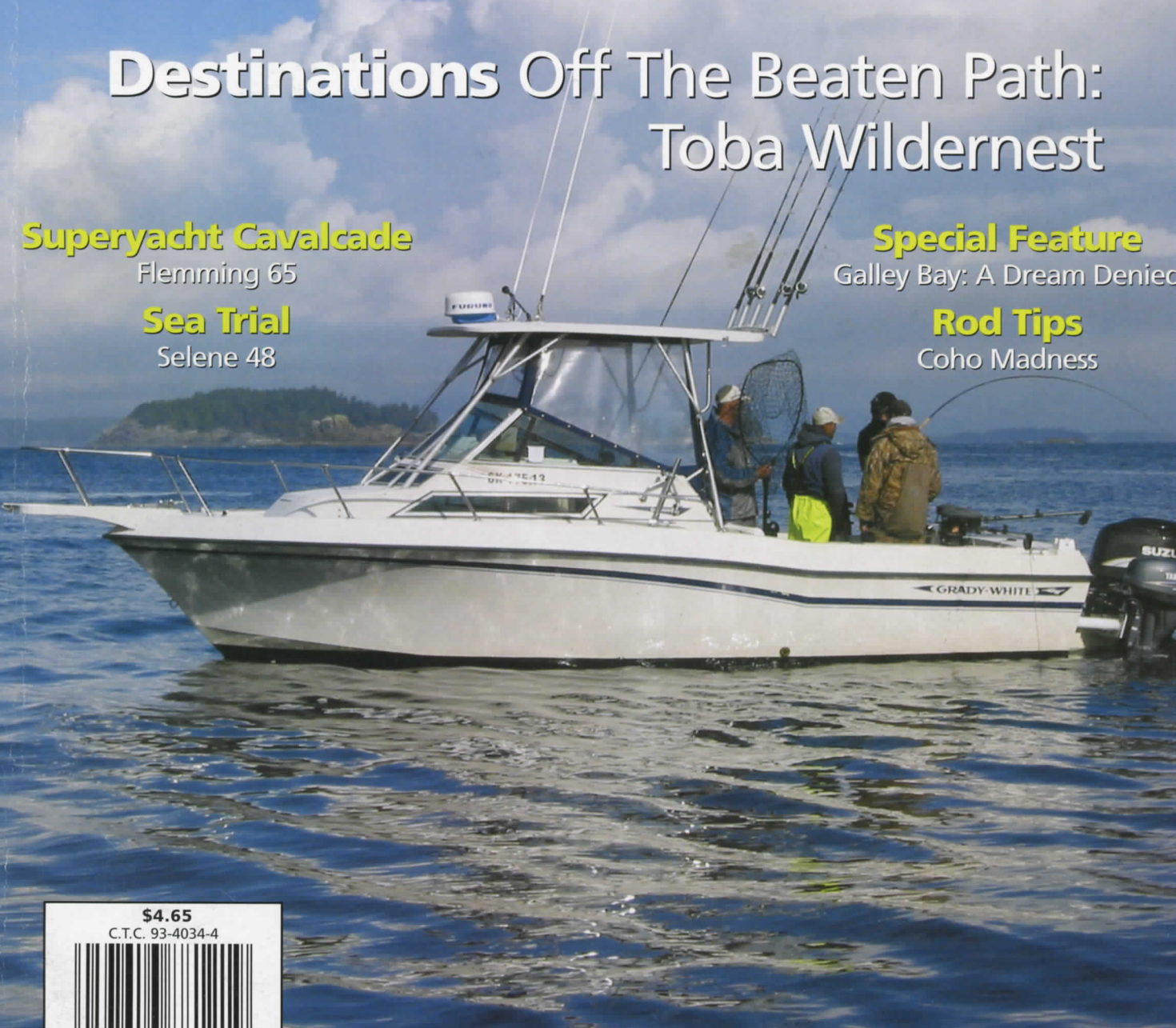
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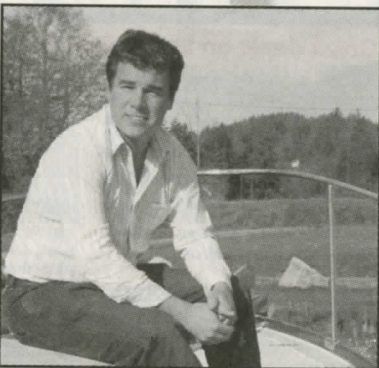
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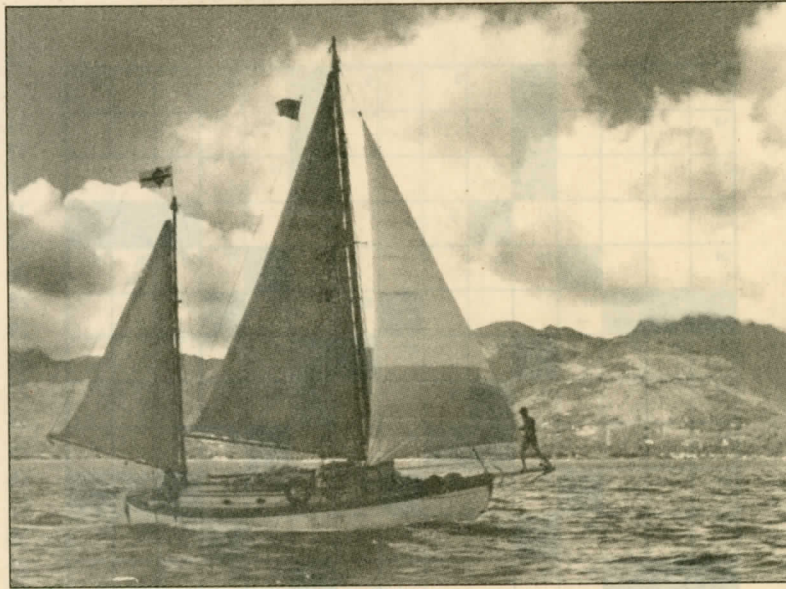
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Front Cover Photo
DCPG Photography

By Erika Grundmann

Galley Bay: A Dream Denied



Above: *Te Rapunga* under sail with Dibbern's flag, in defiance of the decree to hoist the swastika. Hawaii 1937. (Roy Crabb photo, courtesy Peggy Powlison Bredesen)

Below: The passport Dibbern devised declaring himself a citizen of the world, notarized in San Francisco on May 31, 1940. (Courtesy M. Murray Heise)



That Galley Bay, at the entrance to Desolation Sound, was home to a commune in the late 1960s and early '70s is general knowledge among boaters. The entry that appears in the *Waggoner Cruising Guide* of 2005 states: "At one time a hippie colony was established on the west shore. By close observation contributing editor Kincaid noted that among other idiosyncrasies, they practiced a clothing-optional lifestyle. He reports that some of the ladies would swim out to bargain for cigarettes. Alas, he says, they are now gone." A less idyllic picture is revealed in the book with the protective title *Apple Bay*, written by American musician/writer Paul Williams (better known for *Das Energi*), in which he describes his time as a member of the commune there in 1970. The fact that in the late 1930s a similar vision of communal living and self-sufficiency was held by a group of idealists and pacifists—of which "sailor-philosopher" George Dibbern was a driving force—is less widely known.

German-born George Johann Dibbern had experienced life abroad and had even been interned in New Zealand during the First World War. Deported back to Germany in 1919, he married, had children, and

tried to settle into family life. Times were difficult with six million people unemployed. After 10 years of failure to adapt to the unsettled conditions in Germany at the time, Dibbern acknowledged that he no longer fit in the country of his birth. He especially did not agree with the direction German politics were headed. His outspokenness was bound to get him into trouble. For him it was a matter of "break out

or die." And break out he did.

With his motorless 32-foot Baltic double-ender *Te Rapunga*, constructed of one and a half inch oak planking, in 1930 he set sail from Kiel for New Zealand in search of his own identity and of a better life. The journey, which took four years, convinced him that if people got to know individuals from

different countries they would be more sympathetic toward and tolerant of others. On this premise he decided to make his *Te Rapunga* the means to foster international understanding and brotherhood, to build bridges of friendship.

In 1935 he put together a crew and sailed from Auckland northwards. That was the year the Nazi party in Germany decreed the swastika as the only allowable German flag. Dibbern felt, however, that a flag represented the values of



From top:

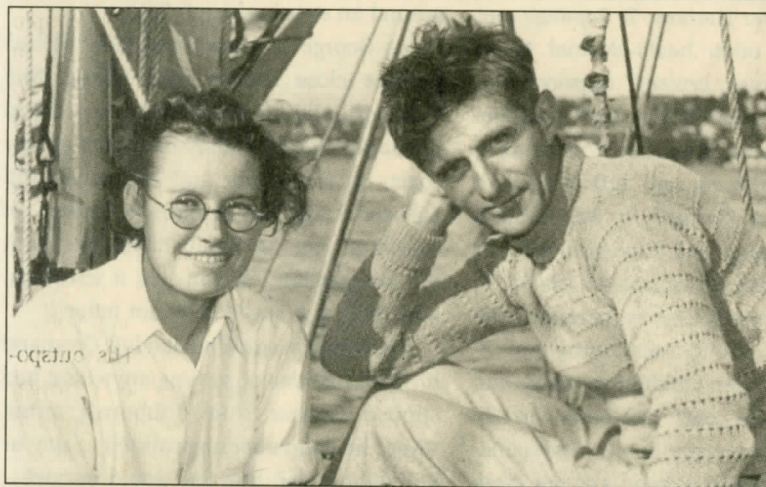
Eileen Morris who, having just turned 21 in 1935, dared to join an all-male crew aboard *Te Rapunga* and sail from NZ into the unknown. Vancouver, July 1937. (Courtesy Dr. Frauke Dibbern Ploog)

Denied immigrant status in Canada in January 1939, Dibbern and Morris were allowed to stay till June when they sailed to Port Angeles, then Seattle, which they reached exactly two years after they first arrived in Victoria, BC. photo, July 1, 1939.

(Courtesy Lee Church)

Hamming it up for the camera. Left to right: Dodi and Betty Blanchet; teenaged Rachel Jukes foreground, Major Harry Jukes right of mast, Peter Blanchet yanking hair of George Dibbern, Capi Blanchet far right. Deep Bay, July 12, 1938.

(Courtesy Rachel Jukes McKenzie)



Throughout the two-year voyage from New Zealand, Roy had corresponded with a cousin, Muriel Murdock, who worked at the Westinghouse office in the Marine Building just up the street from the Immigration Wharf in Vancouver, where *Te Rapunga* ultimately moored. Employed in the same office, Gladys Nightingale, later known as Sharie Farrell (of the legendary BC boatbuilding couple who were the subject of *Salt on the Wind* by Dan Rubin and *Sailing Back in Time* by Maria Coffey), had followed with great interest and envy the movements of the adventurous crew and ketch.

When she finally met the skipper, the mutual attraction was immediate. Dibbern made it clear from the start that his family in Germany would always come first, but he saw no reason why they couldn't go the road together for a while. Nor did Gladys.

George had begun writing the manuscript for a book describing his four-year journey from Germany to New Zealand. He was a gifted storyteller, but while his command of English allowed for eloquence in oral expression, he hated sitting still in front of typewriter where his language became as cramped as his body. He found Gladys the perfect and willing solution.

Roy had left the crew to ultimately become associate editor of *The Daily Colonist* in Victoria. For the winter months of 1937-38 Eileen lived aboard *Te Rapunga* at Enterprise Wharf in the Victoria Inner Harbour, while George rented a room in Vancouver with a view to Hollyburn Mountain.



the individual who raised it—and the swastika did not in any way reflect his own beliefs. Thus it was flying a flag of his own design that *Te Rapunga*, and her crew consisting of a daring young woman, Eileen Morris from Napier, and a cub reporter, Roy Murdock from Gisborne, arrived in Victoria, BC, on July 1, 1937.

Mornings he often gave talks about his philosophy of the sea—he felt that to learn how to sail was to learn how to live—at schools or service clubs; afternoons he prepared notes; and evenings he was joined by Gladys. To George's dictation, after a long day typing at the office, she typed some more. The result was the manuscript



George Dibbern aboard *Te Rapunga*.
Vancouver, July 1937.

(Courtesy Dr. Frauke Dibbern Ploog)

The Flag

George Dibbern's explanation (in the pre-feminist language of the time) of his flag:

It has a white ground with a red cross of St. George cutting a dark blue circle; and in the upper left-hand corner is a blue star. The white stands for equal rights—not equality, but equal rights for men to evolve, each according to his individuality. On this right the human world stands or falls. The dark blue circle stands for the brotherhood of man, for though we fight like brothers we must grow a loyalty to our one family if we are to survive. On top of the circle of brotherhood lies the red cross of freedom and of pain. It is through freedom to experience, and the pain experience brings, that we learn. The blue circle also represents a planet, like the earth, which receives its light from the sun as we have received our light from God. But I believe that God is within each of us, and that our aim should be to be conscious of him, to become a self-shining light, a star. So the star in the corner represents my aim. It is a blue star because I try to become a brother of a new brotherhood.

that would become *Quest*, the chronicle of Dibbern's search for meaning and purpose in life, of the self-recrimination alternating with the guilty exhilaration which charted that journey of self-discovery. When the first draft of *Quest* was completed, by the summer of 1938, it was left to gel. With a great sense of relief, George heeded the call of the Gulf Islands and Desolation Sound.

He fetched Eileen and *Te Rapunga* from Victoria and, with an ever-changing collection of would-be sailors, they headed north. At Pender Harbour *Te Rapunga* met up with two other boats—Muriel Wylie Blanchet's motor cruiser, *Caprice*, and Major Harry Jukes' 39 foot yawl, *Ivanhoe*. "Capi," as Muriel Blanchet was known, had been widowed and left with five young children. Contrary to her family's advice and urging, she refused to sell her house in Saanich on Vancouver Island. To manage financially, every summer she would rent it out to vacationing Americans and take her children cruising and exploring up the coast. Her book describing the adventures of a fiercely independent and determined woman and her family, *The Curve of Time*, has become a well-known coastal classic. She and George, both of them people who lived life on their own terms, had much in common.

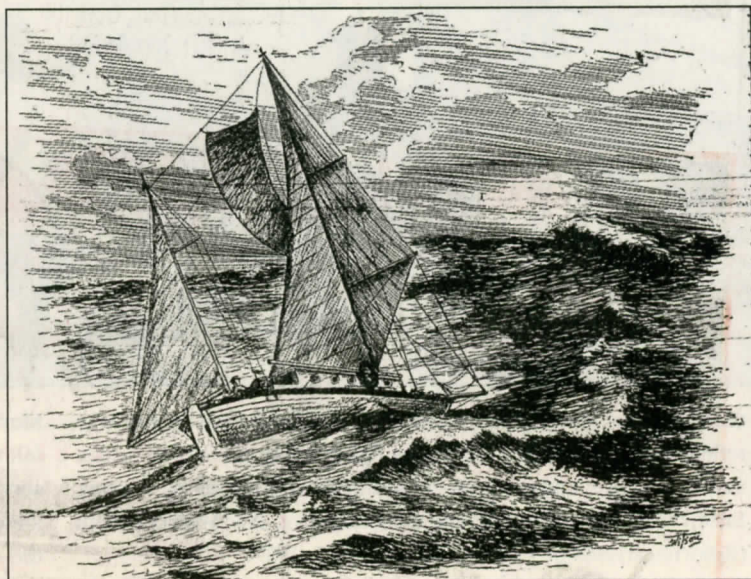
The three boats sailed up the inland waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland. On calm, windless days, still-motorless but grateful, *Te Rapunga* would

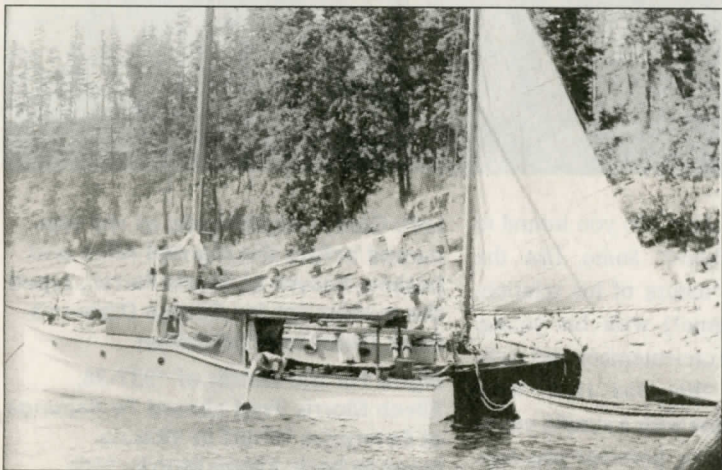
be lashed alongside one of the other boats and be towed. Rachel Jukes MacKenzie, then a teenager, recalls that Capi knew all the ways to get up the coast. She led them through narrow and shallow passages that challenged the *Ivanhoe*, seven feet at the keel. Snapshots of the time show the group of boaters rafted up together, tanning themselves on the sun-warmed rocks or all crowded onto a single boat for fun and laughter. In the bays where they stopped for the night, they separated for a little privacy, but gathered together around an evening beach fire.

As George had predicted, Gladys had become close friends with Eileen. She took her holidays from Westinghouse and joined the "gang" as they navigated up the coast. So frequently and eloquently did Dibbern extol the wondrous beauty of coastal BC, he was finally challenged with the observation, "If you like it so much, why don't you stay?" Why not indeed!

In the years since he had left Germany in 1930, the idea of settling anywhere had slipped further from Dibbern's mind. Either he hadn't been permitted to stay or he couldn't see how he would survive—and he certainly was not prepared to take on any old job just to make money! But Canada seemed to offer possibilities: a sense of freedom and affordable property; a place for him to bring out his family from Germany; a safe haven for him from the long arm of the Nazi party (his flag had not gone unnoticed); a retreat for

Sketch of
(then white-
hulled) *Te*
Rapunga
which
accompanied
a feature
article in *The*
Vancouver
Sun, August
21, 1937.





artists and writers; a refuge for friends to come and live; a place where people would share the work and give of their talents. "How many there are who need quietness and rest and our spirit of friendship to recuperate, to straighten out their thoughts. Here we could do it, and the place would send them, fresh and strong back into life again," wrote George to his mother-in-law in Germany. "We will build small cabins for friends to stay in [...] They'll give to us and we'll give to them, each what he has to give and they can have a royal time on this coast fishing, sailing, swimming, exploring. Each of them can throw in what he can afford, and so we will all live and have fun and enjoy this beauty."

The search for a suitable property pre-occupied the group to the point of obsession. The dream property manifested itself in Galley Bay, available for payment of \$472 in back taxes. The property was on the east side of the bay (as opposed to the 1960s commune on the west) and had belonged to Axel Ragnar Hanson, a fisher-

man based in nearby Bliss Landing and son of the old Finn from Hangö, who was fondly referred by locals as "Pa Hanson." Drunk with the dream rather than with Pa Hanson's renowned blackberry wine, Dibern, who rarely partook of alcohol, wrote in an unpublished manuscript "Ship Without Port":

Curving round a lovely sheltered bay, it is two hundred acres of forested land, with a beautiful view of the mountains up the inlet. At the highest part there is a lake, with trout, high enough above sea level and with a strong enough overflow to give us electric power. There are good pockets of earth here and there for gardening, and in the water round about enough fish, salmon, cod, flounder and shellfish, to give us a good supply. We are so enchanted that we cannot part from the place, but live here in a dream, building it up. In our minds we make tracks through the woods, and plant fruit trees, build a long low log cabin, nothing to mar the harmony of the landscape. Definitely there will be no radio blaring through the night, disturbing the beautiful silence.

Clockwise from top left:

Capi Blanchet and George Dibern aboard *Te Rapunga*. Desolation Sound, July 1938.

M. Wylie Blanchet's *Caprice* with motorless *Te Rapunga* (now black-hulled) lashed alongside and being towed, and Major Harry Jukes' *Ivanhoe*. Homfray Channel, July 12, 1938.

Beach fire around which the "gang" gathered after a day's cruising. Second from left: George Dibern; to his right Capi Blanchet and Betty Blanchet. Peter Blanchet standing. Mink Island, July 11, 1938.

***Caprice* and *Te Rapunga* rafted together. Desolation Sound, July 1938.**

(Photos courtesy Blanchet family)

Daily we are struck anew with the beauty of the place, the still waters, framed by dark-green shores of fir, spruce and cedar, high mountains behind, raising their snow-peaks into the sky, looking down on us in coolness and tranquillity like symbols of eternity and wisdom, little islands dotted here



and there like so many scrubby heads of giants swimming in the water, with the sun turning their bristly hair golden towards evening. There are steep bluffs with red-stemmed arbutus trees which bring a new colour into the green, yellow rocks covered with moss, russet and brown-leafed shrubs and the dogwood opening its white stars amongst the dark-green firs in early summer, while the golden maple holds all the summer's glow long into the autumn.



The idea of building their own boats and going fishing, which George presented to his 14-, 15-, and 17-year-old daughters raised in the culture of the old world and in the urban setting of Berlin, did not convince them of the merits of living in the Canadian wilderness. And there was the more immediate matter of Dibbern's having to convince the immigration authorities of his suitability as a new Canadian.

While the summer and fall months of 1938 passed blissfully coloured with optimistic visions of communal and self-sustaining life at Galley Bay, George and Eileen's visitor's permits expired. George as a German citizen and Eileen as a New Zealand citizen filed their applications for residency. Their immigration hearings took place in January 1939. The questions put to George were wide-ranging. How did he intend to make a living? Log cabins. A shared garden. Fishing. A home for people

to come and stay...Aha! "Do you intend to start a cult up there?" Some, like the inquiry about the nature of his relationship (was it platonic?) with his young, female, liveaboard crewmember and navigator—remember this was 1939—were impossible to address with a simple yes or no. The final question, however, was easy for George to answer: an emphatic "No," for he would not bear arms for *any* country. Needless to say, neither Dibbern nor Eileen was accepted, nor was the appeal, urged by friends, successful.

Te Rapunga was permitted to stay in Canada till June. As she sailed from Vancouver, George and Eileen could not help but reflect on their vision, how they had just wanted to live simply and happily, and how they had aspired to help make others happy...but that obviously hadn't been enough.

Te Rapunga's flag was greeted in Port Angeles with light-hearted curiosity as a "pirate" flag. The *Seattle Daily Times* took it more seriously and depicted Dibbern as a "self-described queer bird, who doesn't care to lose his individuality" and, more importantly, as "a man without a country." This designation confirmed to Dibbern that he would have to take another stand, which he subsequently did. In San Francisco, he devised his own passport, declaring himself a friend of all peoples and a citizen of the world, which he had notarized on May 31, 1940, just before his

Left: Gladys Nightingale, as she was named before she married Allen and became known as Sharie Farrell, typed the manuscript for George Dibbern's book *Quest* to his dictation.

Right: For the winter of 1937-38, Eileen Morris lived aboard *Te Rapunga* at Enterprise Wharf in Victoria. Front to back: Eileen Morris, Jack Shark, and Margaret Willis. Victoria, November 1937.

(Photos courtesy Jack Shark)

American visitor's permit expired and he was forced to leave the United States. When he returned his New Zealand crewmember to her home in January 1941, his passport, put to the test, was not recognized and he was promptly interned for the duration of WWII—the ultimate insult to what had started out years earlier as an idealistic vision of goodwill, friendship, and universal acceptance.

On the other hand, sun- and fun-loving George Dibbern had never experienced a dull, gray, cold, and wet northwest coastal winter. Perhaps the Galley Bay dream that had been denied him would have collapsed, just as the commune described by Paul Williams in Apple Bay did.

The complete story of George Dibbern's remarkable life is told in Erika Grundmann's book *Dark Sun: Te Rapunga and the Quest of George Dibbern* (Auckland, NZ: David Ling Publishing Ltd., 2004). For more information, visit www.geocities.com/georgedibbern/. ■

By Chuck Gould

From the Book Locker



Restless Soul Seeks the Spirit of the Sea

Grundmann, Erika. *Dark Sun: Te Rapunga and the Quest of George Dibbern*. Auckland, NZ: David Ling Publishing, Ltd., 2004. ISBN 0-908990-93-6.

Nearly everybody wants to be George Dibbern. If not all day, everyday, then certainly during moments when we fantasize about throwing off our yokes of obligation and responsibilities to go adventuring at sea.

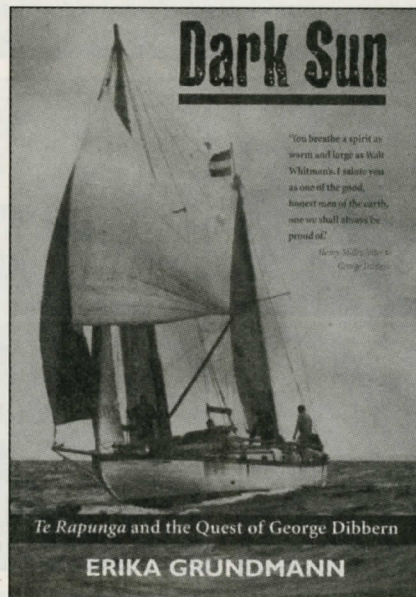
Erika Grundmann has written a very readable account of George Dibbern's fascinating life. Readers might wonder about the controversial motivations leading to Dibbern's decision to abandon his wife and daughters in Germany and follow his own star across the planet, and Grundmann's well-researched and insightful text provides some clues essential to unraveling the mystery of this "man without a country."

Readers will follow Dibbern's eventful life of 73 years, beginning with his birth to German parents in 1889. As a teenaged apprentice seaman he jumped ship in Australia and drifted through a series of short-term jobs and failed business ventures in Australia and New Zealand. His German nationality resulted in his internment as an "enemy alien" on Somes Island in Wellington Harbour (NZ) during the final months of World War I. Following the armistice, Dibbern was repatriated to Germany where he met and married Elisabeth Vollbrandt. George and Elisabeth had three daughters.

The most remarkable portion of Dibbern's life began when he set sail for the South Pacific in his 32-foot ketch, *Te Rapunga*, in 1930. As Hitler's Nazi party ascended to ever-greater prominence, Dibbern refused to fly the swastika and

crafted his own flag, as well as a passport that declared him a world citizen.

Dibbern's meanderings throughout the Pacific for the following 32 years were the journey of a restless and unsettled soul, and a fascinating account of the travels of a bohemian vagabond. Grundmann cites a plethora of newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and sources (including an extended correspondence with American author Henry Miller) to document the



physical and suggest the spiritual odyssey of George Dibbern. People, places, and romantic relationships are continuously discarded throughout the remainder of Dibbern's amazing life.

A CBC reporter's interview with George Dibbern, as recorded in *Dark Sun*, may offer some insight into his philosophy.

"Why, sir, did you make the trip from Germany to Vancouver in such a small boat?"

"To find the spirit of the sea."

"Would you explain that, Captain Dibbern?"

"Well, the Bible says that the spirit of God moves on the face of the water. And I wanted to find that spirit. And, as you can never find anything by chasing it...but only by waiting and humbly preparing yourself for it...I took a small boat and no motor...small because of his humbleness...without a motor...because of the waiting. I wanted to find that spirit because of the condition the world is in."



West Coast readers will particularly enjoy the chapters pertaining to Dibbern's adventures off the coast of British Columbia. In the late 1930s, Dibbern's ketch was often seen in close company with M. Wylie Blanchet's vessel *Caprice* (M. Wylie Blanchet wrote the iconic regional cruising book *The Curve of Time*).

At 510 pages (including 100 photos), *Dark Sun* initially appears slightly intimidating (and there are portions where the book suffers from an overdose of minutia), but Grundmann's pleasant style is very fluid and easily read. Her writing features a consistently skillful structure and tone, rather than needlessly complex paragraphs where every phrase must be parsed and dissected to be fully appreciated.

George Dibbern may or may not have realized his quest to discover the spirit of the sea, but Erika Grundmann seems to have done a credible job of reflecting the elusive spirit of a restless adventurer.

The book is published in New Zealand, and Grundmann is currently seeking a distributor for North America. *Dark Sun* is available for purchase directly from Erika Grundmann, who can be reached through her e-mail address grundman@island.net. ■