

THE DENIZENS OF 'D' DOCK PARTY ON!



by Virginia Cross

“Wicked woman!” Ed shrieked from somewhere in the bowels of his boat. His friends on the dock call him “Special Ed,” and he has the good fortune to be in love with Joan and she with him. They each have their own boat but are usually to be found together on one or the other. They compliment each other perfectly: she is the social director for the dock community and he the really bad boy, the party pirate.

A dependable cycle of celebration between daily routines keeps the inhabitants of D dock afloat and anchored at the same time — and on major holidays all the bells and whistles go off in a mutual chorus, celebrating life and companionship. Without Joan, the demarcation of the year would be limited to a few old geezers having a beer together and then wandering off to the closest bar. She turns the dock into a party destination and makes sure that everyone has a rollicking good time. As with most parties, the preparation is half the fun. Joan spends weeks building up her store of door prizes, either donated or purchased, and she has a complicated system designating who gets what.

On the morning of our first D-dock party, Richard and I encountered Bar-



“Special Ed” is always ready with a greeting.

ron. He had acquired a new hose nozzle and had been given the job of swabbing the dock, but the party spirit had already taken hold. “This is the best part,” he said enthusiastically, twisting the sprayer to the “massage” setting and demonstrating its attributes on Special Ed’s leg. Both of them were soaked to the waist and giggling like schoolboys. Joan dumped a heap of faded bunting in Ed’s arms, and he reluctantly left Barron to begin his own party job. Meanwhile, Barron’s never-lived-on-land, blue-eyed calico cat, Ito, lay curled up in a sunny spot at the end of his tether, well out of the way of the water sports,

contentedly snoozing amid the hectic preparations.

Strapped to the extreme end of Joan’s bow (her boat’s, that is) is a rubber hand, complete with wrist-watch, obviously from some Halloween long past. This hand has many uses — it can be shaken by a passerby or display some item that has lost its owner, but more often than not it holds a paper coffee cup or an empty beer bottle. On this particular day it held a plastic margarita glass at a jaunty angle. Under the beckoning hand, a chess game raged between old Dan and Morris (a gentleman with hundreds of hours of tattoo on display) with a sparkling glass chess set that sits ready for play next to Joan’s boat 365 days a year, rain or shine.

The morning gave way to a hot afternoon, the Stars and Stripes-covered trestle tables began to sag with potluck dishes of all description, coolers sat filled with icy beverages, the flags and buntings waved lazily in the on-shore breeze, and we began to notice something strange. . . . It was the shirt!

As people began to arrive, they were all wearing the same shirt! It was a blue-and-turquoise Hawaiian shirt, and some of the women sported the same material in a shift dress or wraparound skirt. It was, we discovered, the D-dock



D-dock members eyeing the door-prize extravaganza.



Joan, party goddess — and she cooks!

party gear, and it tied the scene together and connected the revelers in a kind of visual solidarity. On D dock discipline is not high on everyone's list, but a clean party uniform (supplied by Joan from the local swap meets) is a quiet display, before party fever takes over, of the bonds that run deep.

Dave produced tray after tray of multicolored Jello shooters as if from some sprawling New Orleans kitchen rather than his tiny galley. Two barbeque grills were in a competition to deliver the most succulent ribs, plump gator sausages from the Bayou and fragrant, freshly caught tuna, every conceivable salad, sauce and dip loaded up the food table as well as crusty breads and stinky cheeses, and on a second table decadent desserts jostled for attention in the afternoon light.

As the party rocked and rolled to the strains of Janice, Credence, Hendrix, the Stones and Dylan, a massive shape patrolled the waters between the dock fingers. It was J.R., the resident male sea lion. He is also known as Bud, Trigger and Fang, depending on where you moor your boat — but on D dock he is

J.R., and he is as much a fixture of the party scene as anyone else (although he has yet to be seen wearing a D-dock shirt).

When it looked like the garbage bags had reached bursting point, and Dave was almost out of Jello, the door prize extravaganza began. This is the high point of the D-dock party and an enjoyable talking point for many days later. Joan has patented her own method for distributing these treasures, and on the evening in question she toured the crowd with a plastic jar full of numbers, daring people to take their pick.

Don, who works at a local marine supply store, got a dog tag stating, "I'm Lost! Please return me to D dock," which he promptly pinned onto the bandana around his neck, saying he felt a new sense of security with this addition to his outfit. Barron received a large gold marshal star and a pair of handcuffs to deal with any party troublemakers, and Richard was handed his own pair along with a deputy badge. After that, the two of them swaggered about, feigning superiority until Barron tried the handcuffs on himself and

found out that the key did not work! Deputy Richard came to his rescue, and they discovered that their keys had been switched by some mischievous dock dweller.

Dave was given a motion-triggered singing frog that croaked out "The Gambler" by Kenny Rogers over and over again — fitting, since Dave loves a day at the races. Afterwards, he would not be separated from the thing. Special Ed had set his eyes on a pair of wooden nunchakus, and strangely enough, he ended up getting them under Joan's special system!

As the night progressed, the exhausted, happy guests gradually took their leave, and the residents drifted reluctantly back to their boats. It was time to gather up the debris, stack the molded chairs for another time, and close up another successful D-dock bash.

As we left we heard Dave's frog crooning on the moonlit dock:

*You've got to know when to hold 'em,
Know when to fold 'em,
Know when to walk away, know when
to run . . .*