

## CHAPTER 1

### RUNAWAY BOAT

The S/Y 'Restless' breaks hard through the heavy unpredictable undercurrent of the dangerous estuary, where the river loses momentum and builds a sand bar against the rolling sea. With the next roaring wave, the boat must be precisely above it. Like a nutshell the 10 tons of steel push 10 feet up, try brutally to burst sideways. Only with the utmost strength can she be kept straight before she staggers again into the nothingness of a swirling shaft hole: 'BANG', with a deep tremor through the ship's body, her keel hits, losing half speed immediately, the next wave rescues her by heaving her up again into the air. One more wave and we are already beyond the foaming, gurgling power struggle between the river and the sea. The first rodeo is over. My lady is now stable climbing gracefully over the oncoming swells out of sea. The small port town of Ballina soon disappears on the horizon and only the lighthouse of nearby Byron Bay remains barely visible.

By this time, sailing has become impossible. Contrary to all the weather forecasts, it is blowing hard on the nose. We hardly make any progress, although the speed indicator shows 3.5 knots. We drift miles eastward in direction of New Zealand. My destination, however, is the Solomon Islands, north of Australia, 1400 nautical miles away. Friends had doubted whether I would ever get anywhere - in this nutshell. I was travelling with my young family in a 10m converted coach from Europe to Australia as a landlubber. The bus had been shipped from Calcutta to Melbourne. So I am certainly a skillful bus driver, but totally inexperienced as a skipper. If necessary, I just want to motor all the way, I said. 800 liters of diesel were stored, enough for 1400 nautical miles and sufficient food for two months. In February the northeast monsoon should be over, but just everything had been going wrong in recent weeks. My seasickness became worse; it shook me to and fro in the cockpit. The erratic movements breaking against the side of the boat were more than nerving. I had never been alone on a yacht, or on the high seas. Not that I had planned to sail single handed the Tasman Sea; I simply could not find a real skipper to accompany me. In such an awful and dangerous season, they all advised me to forget my plans. It still was the time of treacherous, subtropical depressions, which were forming mostly between the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the actual origin of most cyclones - before sweeping over Australia and New Zealand. Alas, I had no time to wait for

a good weather. My departure could not wait. Too much had happened before I left. Yesterday six Australian Civil cops had come down to the yacht harbor unexpectedly with flashing blue lights and quickly split into search teams all over the marina. Two of them surprised me on the way from the 'Restless' to the restaurant I nearly jumped down from the narrow jetty into the water, but kept quiet and cool and stalked toward the stubborn cops. We then literally had to squeeze past each other, phew! Nothing happened. They looked at all the yachts. In the restaurant, I learned that some cons had broken out of the Brisbane jail.



RUNAWAY-BOAT S/Y 'RESTLESS' later 'NAMASTE'

Everything seems to be running out of control; I just hang over a bucket wedged behind the steering wheel and want to die. No vomit comes for a long time. I choke; my stomach is rolling badly again and again. Without food and drink I cannot go on and don't even want to be alive anymore. My eyes stare at the Winchester pump gun in the salon for a long time. It is loaded and stored in between the cushions - for emergencies. Drowning would take too long. So I'm glad the gun is with me. Honestly, I'm not prone to suicide, but happily live up to the motto: "Despite everything, a monkey never gives up!" There is always a way out; however hopeless my life might look, riding against the wind.

I have always travelled a lot, mainly to Asia where as a young architect I designed a hotel and two restaurants in Kathmandu. Through this, I came to meet traditional woodcarvers in Nepal. However, most of them would produce only small wooden souvenirs for tourists, small enough to fit into their baggage. Kathmandu with more than 1,000 pagodas and stupas has many architectural possibilities! I had a vision: Not to bring western architecture into Asia, but to preserve Asian architecture with the know-how of the west. In the last 200 years, no new pagodas had been built, only after earthquakes damaged ones were rebuilt and restored. For my beloved Nepal I wanted to do something big, something important. So I studied the architecture of the Newar, the indigenous people of Nepal and designed architectural wood carved elements, to fit into our western styled houses. It worked well. I got the exclusive rights as a sole-agent for Europe from the most important woodcarving factory in Nepal. The Nepalese Chamber of Commerce provided me with the necessary power.

After a long stay in Nepal I visited my brother in Munich in the autumn of 1980. I learned from him about the IGA '83, an International Horticultural Exhibition project, which was to take place during 1983. From the balcony of his house, I could watch the construction work close up. And it was there on that balcony, smoking a good joint, when in the distance on this south-facing slope I saw a golden roofed pagoda - an idea was born. It might have been the reflection of a working bulldozer toiling in bright sunlight, which sparked my vision: A Peace-Pagoda for Munich! "This is exactly where the gilded roofed pagoda will stand!" I wanted to participate in this exhibition, for my beloved Himalayan country, with a beautiful pagoda, a symbol of peace.

Today, this magnificent Temple stands there and Nepal got what they had hoped for, the Gold Medal - but the Germans wanted to put me behind cheap iron bars. My idea fell through at first because the funding remained a problem. 120.000 German Marks equity was held for the preparation of the pagoda, but not for the

rich cultural program that was to accompany my APAC project. The 'Association to Preserve Asian Culture' I had to establish to deal with those in charge. The project was threatened to fail at an early stage, there was also no money for Nepalese handicrafts which were to help refinancing. But I would not give up; I could not step back now. Too much was already at stake. Therefore I tried to downsize the project and look for sponsors. At that time a man of my age, about 35, was introduced to me, Peter Helfer, nicknamed Pitti. He was a friend of Dieter Tews, one of my staff from Berlin. Pitti lived in Berlin and Portugal and came to Munich because he had heard that I was looking for money for my project. As the son of a wealthy factory owner in Bielefeld, he was more than interested to invest capital in such a wonderful cultural project. Nepal had always fascinated him, he told the board members of APAC and then to our relief he gave us a DM 100,000 loan and in exchange, we granted him a fair share of 20% of the profit. The business contract seemed totally legitimate. Months later neither Pitti came to Nepal nor did we receive any money. In the meantime, the pagoda carvings were almost done and now there was no cash for the container transport to Germany, nor for the already ordered Nepalese handicrafts, I needed plenty for the many millions of IGA-visitors.

Months passed by, Pitti was already two months overdue. Nobody knew where he was and I was broke and had already started to sell my trucks in Kathmandu. Anyway they were too small for the heavy pagoda parts, which had to be transported to the nearest seaport of Calcutta. Thus, at least, the money would help to pay for the pagoda to some extent at least. Even my household - as far as I did not require it was sold off. There was definitely no time for the TV and video machine and some cash would at least keep us alive. I travelled to Berlin and Bielefeld, to search for Pitti in vain. At last, I found out that he was in the Canaries on his sailing yacht 'Jakeria'. There I caught him just before he was leaving for Madeira. In a courageous jump I made it to the deck of his million-dollar yacht, a SWAN, the Ferrari among the yachts. In the six days at sea Pitti's friend Jürgen took over the sailing to the large part. Pitti and I meanwhile discussed below deck about morality and decency. I accused him of being arrogant and ruthless – monkey born persons are always very emotional, but honest. We smoked one joint after another. They had a fist-sized piece of Morocco's finest hash on board. Mainly we spoke about cash and Pitti did not seem to have any. His business was going badly. I will never forget how perplexed I was when he told me bluntly that all of its revenues came from large scale hash deals that he accomplished on his SWAN and other yachts between Morocco and Portugal. When I objected to this that he as the son of a millionaire really did not necessarily have to do any smuggling, he just laughed and told me

about his very strained relationship with his old dad – who always wanted to nail him down to his stupid damned business, producing cloth hangers ironically in the awful town of Bielefeld. In this way, Pitti was financially independent and still living in style. But of course money he could not get right now, because a deal had leaked - a yacht had been lost to the cops – what he called a dead investment. I had never had to deal with rich dudes but when I ever needed one, he was just not liquid. Pitti soon got busy, suggesting a hash deal with Nepal. The hash business with Morocco was long dead. The trick of transporting the dope from Portugal in huge speakers of a music band to Berlin was too frayed. New paths and connections would be of paramount interest for him. No, thanks, I wanted nothing to do with this project; I had no desire to do anything with cannabis beside smoke it, thus honoring Lord Shiva.

At dinner, Pitti talked about the super prerequisites that I had created with the container bridge between Kathmandu and Munich, and in such a serious way that it would be a sin if I reject such a unique opportunity. It seemed like he was brainwashing and blackmailing me, again he stressed that if I agree with the deal he could make a financial commitment and he could get dough from the donor's straight away. "No thank you, my peace pagoda project has to remain clean – that's it!" We did not talk about it anymore. There was a dull atmosphere on board – even though we reduced Pitti's fist-sized piece in a few days to almost nothing. Only that kept me afloat. But something important had happened, I had learned more about people! All my urging to agree to the signed contract with our APAC only made him shrug his shoulders and smile wearily. He was professional and a ruthless asshole.

Empty-handed, I flew to Munich to get the container truck, which was provided by Mercedes-Daimler and rushed back to Kathmandu. Then I chose to go a different way. I had made some other incidental visits to the office desks of various bosses, because the pagoda-budget was not enough for the container truck, the shipping, or for the roofing or glazing. As an architect and project-manager I was always happy with the company's cost prices and if I was unable to fund high-paid skilled workers then I gladly involved volunteers and skilled craftsman friends. But to convince those bosses of my temple project was like casting pearls before sows. They did not give a damn about my crazy idea; they only sensed public relations, as the business sharks they were.

Like a press hungry politician who uses every opportunity to get into the press, they wanted a good advertisement for their houses no matter what; so far only one press-release with some photo came out as a result. Karl Dersch was like that