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Two of my grandsons' names start with a capital "A." Reports from either one come so far apart and so haphazard that it's hard to keep straight whether Alexander is the one in San Antonio or Austin who guides computers, or if Aubrey is the one who sails yachts in the Mediterranean or six of the other seas.

The Aubrey one, now of late called "Barnacle B," helped matters by coming by the ranch from a voyage working on a yacht from the Panama Canal to the Fiji Islands. Until he docked here (note nautical effect from here on), information was unclear whether his first mate came from Fiji, the Panama Canal, or stowed on board from the Majorca Islands in the Mediterranean, the original port of departure.

To further complicate things, within the same period, grandson Alexander left, or returned with, a girlfriend in San Antonio, or maybe Austin, to or from a visit to her home in the Barbados Islands. No one sent an update or made a cell call. My outpost on the 09 doesn't receive ship boardings from the Coast or the Caribbean.

The possibility of Barnacle B's girl being from Fiji caused the most distress. All I knew about Fiji came from a jet refueling layover long enough to watch a shimmy dance

performed by big hula-skirted gals slapping sandals on the runway to the beat from a tired Muzak system. Those girls were far too overweight for the flooring on the feeble old ranch house.

By eavesdropping on Alex's mother talking to my pal on the wire, I surmised that Alexander was in Texas with his Barbadian girl. For a fill-in, it sounded as though perhaps he might be busy wrapping care packages to send to hurricane victims in Barbados.

Word was scant on Barnacle B's arrival at his home in Austin. His dad's report over the wire centered on the first mate in glowing terms perfected from courtroom pleas. How she spoke French through exquisite lips pursed in Gaelic perfection to breathe soft words in a euphony of delight. How her presence made the Hollywood starlets look like rejects for a community theatre tryout.

The reason his dad called was expected. Each of my eight children feels deep responsibility to forewarn their old father of a new guest's characteristics prior to arrival. Somehow, they forget that a cross-section of Ellis Island's peak activity can only cross-section the guests my brother and sister dragged home from college 50 years ago. They further overlook that most of the nationalities of the United Nations membership have been represented in this

simple ranch house by their slate of roommates and school friends.

Arrivals changed speculation to show that the first mate worked along on the voyage as a sailorette from the Majorca Islands in the Mediterranean Sea across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal into the Pacific and the docking in Fiji. The news brought a big relief, halting arrangements for reinforcing the slats in the back bunk.

Comes out that she hails from northern France close to the Belgian border. I don't know the north part of France, but it must be smooth ground. She sure didn't show to be bunged up in the rocks, the crude way pretty women in the shortgrass country can be described as void of wind splints and bum ankles.

Ol' Barnacle looked good, too. Out on the decks in the sea air in daylight, he'd tanned to a soft brown sheen. On night duty, steering the boat by the stars refocused his eyes from the vacant gaze of his college days. I was still his big favorite. They planned on spending one whole night at the ranch.

Somewhere in the story I need to tell – and here's as good as any – that Barnacle B and his mate were on the way to Providence, Rhode Island, to a nautical safety school. For background, I need to add that my youngest son, George,

also came by here 20-odd years ago on the way to Providence to a non-safety any kind of school.

The ranch makes no claims to fame. Our cattle and horses rank commonplace, yet it has to be recognized that an outfit this far west must be a crossroads, established on the way to Providence, Rhode Island from Austin, Texas.

We talked late into the one-night stand. He explained that any person, even hairdressers working on board ship, had to go to a five-day safety school. The only one in the U.S. is in Providence.

He ended by asking if I had picked up a supporter to take his place after he left the country three years ago. All I could answer was, "Not yet."

Next morning, they spent 10 minutes packing and making the bed in the back room. Been a lot of taillights in this life. But I am lucky to be on the way to Rhode Island ...