

[Page 16 - Advert: Sterling Silver - A Terrific New Collection by Silver Donald Cameron](#)

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Many men, I have found, are like Roy. Again and again I've told about my terrifying afternoon on the lake, and his reaction is almost always the same: a shocked distaste, then a recognition that it takes a bit of effort to be candid about fear, and finally the flood of stories and fellowship. "Every season," one man told me, "I have a couple of days so bad that I swear I'll never set foot on a boat again. You know, you wind up praying: 'Dear God, just let me get ashore this one time, just this once, I swear I've learned my lesson.' And every spring I can't wait to get her back in the water." There's the nub of it. Why do we court danger, why do we almost always yearn to feel fear? Maybe we are simply bored. The good life held out by the schools, the advertisers, the churches, the media • the good life we still recommend to our children • is absolutely stupefying. Is life really just a matter of NHA housing, consumer goods, fringe benefits and pensions? Are we genuinely expected to be thankful for a lifetime spent repeating pointless chores in cell-like offices or on the treadmill of a production line? What our institutions teach us is that we are small moving parts in a Rube Goldberg apparatus which everyone takes seriously even though nobody can figure out exactly what the damn thing is for. The good life is a crime against humanity. But even an interesting life in the affluent society conceals some home truths. I sit in my oil-heated house, working by electric light, with a phone to call the doctor or the fire department, with unemployment insurance and welfare to fall back on if I can't work. I make more money this year than last, and expect more again next year. I am surrounded by books and music; I even get to talk about ideas. It's easy to forget I am only a hairless animal. It's easy to forget I can freeze, burn or drown, that I can lose fatal battles with organisms I can't even see. It's hard to recall that life is precarious, that the universe cares no more about my welfare than about that of an individual sculpin or sea urchin. Oh Lord, runs an old sailor's prayer, Thy sea is so big and my ship so small. Even a modest gale on the Bras d'Or lakes puts you in touch with chastening realities. Perhaps fear is nothing more than a sudden recognition that you simply don't matter. Late in the season I met Charles Vilas, the king of the Washabuck River, which flows into the lakes. Carl is retired, and lives six months of the year in the Washabuck aboard his famous old cutter. Direction. He is a thoroughly experienced offshore sailor and editor of the newsletter of the Cruising Club of America. Carl came alongside Hironnelle one gusty evening in his little motorboat Highland Heart, and invited me to join him for a drink. We pattered around a point and through a barely discernible opening in the trees, dropping the anchor in a perfectly enclosed little pond no wider than a country road. The wind ripped through the treetops, the rain pattered on the flat water, and we sat under the shelter of the wheelhouse drinking Scotch and eating olives. I told Carl how I was feeling. "You should be afraid of the sea." Carl said. "That's plain common sense. If more people were afraid of it there'd be fewer drowned." "But that much fear really destroys the joy of sailing." "You'll get over that," said Carl. He paused to crunch a potato chip. "From what you



say, I probably would have tumbled back that day. Sailing is for pleasure, not for punishment." "I was already halfway across," I said. "Besides, there are times when you can't just turn back." "That's right That's when it's really scary." We looked around at the swaying trees, at the lemon-coloured sky of early evening. Highland Heart swung to a stray puff of wind. A cormorant, flying crabwise in the breeze, stroked his way across the little patch of sky between the trees. We might have been the only people in the world. The warm light of tranquil quillity, rendered luminous by the black backdrop of fear. "If we know it's dangerous, and we're frightened," I said, "why do we do it?" "That's easy," said Carl. "We do it so we can have moments like this." The first copies of Sterling Silver may be shipped by the end of October. You can order advance copies now • your credit card will not be billed until it's shipped. Specify if you want the books signed by Silver Donald Cameron • at no extra cost. Copies of Sterling Silver will be great and lasting Christmas gifts. Order 'd/c!'u?? HOWARD NARDOCCHIO • OWNER/MANAGER "At Island Mazda we pride ourselves in offering the best afterdate service possible. It's easy to talk service. However, the difference is only accomplished when the dealer makes it their policy to provide it, not promise it." CHECK OUT THE DIFFERENCE TODAY AT: 195 PRINCE ST. * SYDNEY, N. S. CHECK OUT MAZDA'S ALL NEW '94 PICK-UPS. NOW] AVAILABLE IN 3.0-L. V6 145-H.P. . & 4.0-L. V6 160-H.P. ENGINES'" nqw AVAILABLE PHONE 564-6668 IT JUST FEELS RIGHT" your gifts now. • SEE PAGE 79 • Quality Paperback \$16.95 Reserve your copy and gifts for friends. We will ship the book in plenty of time for Christmas. Use the ORDER FORM | on page 79