

## The Three Loneliest Places!

By Michael M. Tickenoff

Years back in another time it seems, I lived and sailed aboard a 35 foot schooner. With five other adventurous souls we sailed far to the southwest of the Hawaiian Islands, I would guess us to have been about a thousand miles away from our port in Honolulu. We sailed free and adventured among clusters of tiny lost and uninhabited atolls. Each tiny island was cluttered with green waving palms and was always surrounded by foaming white surf breaking over the coral reefs, ringing in each secret place.

On and on we went, day after day over the deep blue, under and through the clouds and skies, continuously being pushed by the winds. Then one day the wind ceased to blow and our sails hung dead. There we set in the calmest ocean, absolutely still as a sheet of glass. One day, then two, and into the third day the boat moved only when movement aboard pressed the deck into or downward the glass like waters. In that absolute stillness, everything seemed so far away for me. Never had I thought to be so far away from family, friends or from civilization. It was lonely and extremely still, oh so still!

Then in the heat of mid day I dove overboard into the mirror glass waters which stretched out beyond the horizon, encircling us in a maddening grip of calm. Down I went, deeper and deeper into the bluest waters one can imagine. Then I stopped and looked up, and far above me was a tiny hull like a toy imbedded into brilliant blue. Below me was nothing but blue which faded into deeper blue, thick velvet blue, dark blue and then into black blue. Deeper and deeper I stared into pure black while a brilliant glazing blue sprinkled and sparkled the surface so far above me. I floated there, suspended in time and space, incomprehensible now, and then too!

Then and there I was overcome with the most distant feeling, so far away. Further away than I have ever been, so far away. Totally separated from everything, completely detached from all support and life itself. I was the loneliest soul ever, consumed deep in the blue Pacific sixty feet from the tiny hull that contained the only knowledge of my existence! A thousand miles from shore, three thousand from family and home...I was really far away and at that single moment, so lonely!

With my arms and legs totally limp, I slowly floated, suspended in a place no human had ever touched and I was there alone. Five miles of black ocean beckoned me down; the brilliant blue above awed me as I heard my heart pounding, seemingly asking me if I knew how far away from everything I was?

As beautiful as that moment was for me, I can only remember the terrifying fear of being left or suspended forever in that lonely untouched place. I slowly ascended back to the surface and there I gasped into my lungs the breath of life and sweet pardon. Then I swam back in desperation, to my tiny floating island sitting so still in the vastness. There it had waited for me; like a faithful friend just waiting patiently allowing me to taste deep loneliness and then come back!

Then about seven years later I was married and had moved to South America where I lived in a "Great Forested" land called Motto Grosso! This was a vast wilderness State in western Brazil and we lived off a ratty dirt road which was about three hundred miles from the nearest city. My wife and I cleared 35 acres of forest and began to build a crude Brazilian style house about a half mile from the outpost where our few friends lived.

We were about 8 thousand miles from the States, dwelling in the very center of South

America. Existing 300 miles from the nearest city, 300 miles from the nearest phone and 300 miles from the nearest hospital. You might say we were really far away, in fact about as far away as you could get and still survive. But that was still not far enough, for we often traveled hundreds of miles further into the great forests hunting out massive trees for possible milling, this was really far away but still not as far as I found myself one day.

The time came when we began to build our house but first we had to dig our own well and so we began. With pick and shovel I dug down through the soil, through the grit and into the hard clay. Day after day I dug until I no longer could reach the top of the hole and so my wife would drop a bucket down to me and haul up the dirt with a long rope. About fifteen feet down the clay grew moist and as I went down further puddles of water began to form in the deeper holes. About twenty feet down I was into water but continued to dig into the muddy waters and expand the pool and I finally came to a point where I had to submerge myself under water in order to dig deeper and so I dug---bucket after bucket---deeper and deeper I went.

Each day I descended a narrow notched pole to the bottom of my pit which was now about twenty some feet to the water and about six feet of muddy water from there. After the initial well was dug, my wife had to return to her own chores back at the tiny outpost and I was left alone at the bottom of this watery pit. I would look up from the water which was up to my nose and stare at a blue patch through the tiny round opening far above. There, in the Amazon forests, thousands of miles away from all my family and friends, out in the middle of a desolate field, deep in a narrow muddy pit I found myself very secluded. I placed my hands upon the curve of the well shaft and knew that it was very possible that this well could cave in at any time and bury me alive and believe me, I was really alone.

The stillness was deafening as I stood alone, but as I would submerge myself under the muddy waters to reach down and dig further filling each bucket up with handfuls of mud, the world and all its reach was gone from me. I never felt so alone and so distant, from not only myself, but from all that I was familiar with. From all that I knew as security, I was really, really separated from what everyone might call assurance.

After my breath ran out, I would lift my head up to the surface and find my self at the bottom of a narrow tube with only a tiny pole leading up to the tiny circle of sky. It was then wonderful to climb up to the surface and stand in the warm sun, letting the lonely wind blow away the chill of that deep muddy shaft.

To the north was four thousand miles of jungle, to the east and the Atlantic Ocean was two thousand miles of jungle, to the west and the Pacific was two thousand miles of jungle and mountains and to the south was another thousand miles of forest and my little patch of cleared forest seemed like a postage stamp floating upon the vast ocean. And there I was descending down a hole to hide from even the vastness of such distances.

By no fault of anyone but my own, I tasted raw loneliness and isolation so strong that thirty five years later I can actually feel that hollow and empty loneliness. These were two powerful experiences I once had, and have since sought to never again experience such loneliness.

But loneliness has a whole other aspect to its power. It is sometimes sneaky and we can become unmindful to its reach. It can sneak up on us and catch us sleeping and if we are not careful, we can find ourselves lost in its vastness or its confinement!

For loneliness is a “choice” and to be lonely or all alone is a “decision” that is made

individually. To choose a life of a cast away from the goodness of friends and other humans, is far worse than being cast away into a deep ocean or buried in a pit in the vast wilderness.

If you have only one friendship waiting for you, swim to it and if you only have one companion waiting for you, climb out of your pit and quickly run to him or her! Do not ever give into the power of loneliness!

By Michael M. Tickenoff ©  
Monday, December 16, 2013

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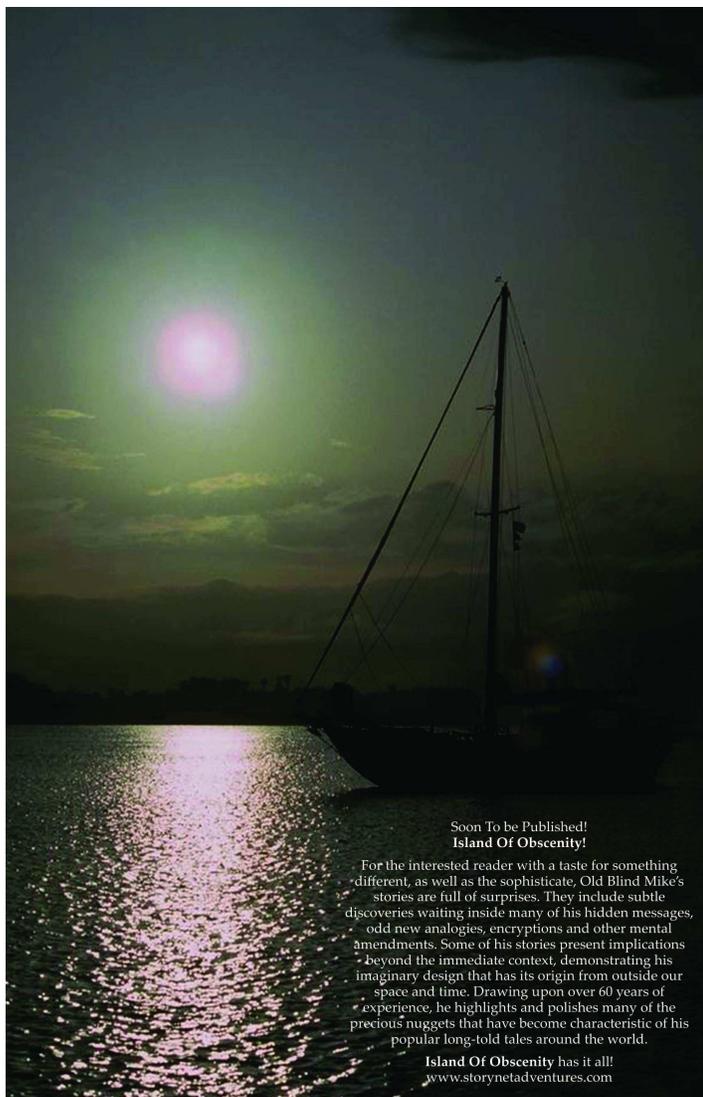
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