

Lido

THERE was a girl who came to work in my laboratory once, with very high grades, from out of the north land, wearing long red hair, green eyes, and freckles. When she left, she left with a Ph.D., a boyfriend, and a boat, and headed back to Minneapolis for a few years in medical school. She bought the boat in Omaha; I don't know where she picked up the boyfriend, maybe from among her sailing friends. Come to think of it, she might have fallen in amongst those sailing friends out of frustration with the local culture. After all, Nebraska is not quite the same as Minneapolis, at least that's what everyone from Minneapolis tells me. Well, if her sailing friends here are anything like people in Minneapolis, then they're a bunch of real competitive souls up there in the north country, for about all she did with her sailing friends around here was race. Oh, she did a lot of talking about racing, too, and about cats turtled out in the algae, broken rudders, and beer. Through all this conversation ran a paracommunication of intensity, of human striving against human, of glory in a broken mast only if the disaster happened in the heat of some contest of wills. Tales of gore and splintered steel cables and shredded Dacron and sweet victory with Lite came every Monday during "the season" after every

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Sunday afternoon of "the season." And on every Monday evening, after such tales, I would go home, walk into my garage, and talk to my Lido.

"I don't really think a sailboat was made to race; do you? Is that really your purpose, to extend this Medieval joust we humans call a workaday world out into the winds of the Third Planet?"

And every Monday the lines of the Lido would reassure me. I would squat down on my heels, the better to see that design along the bow carved in fiberglass, that curve of the gun'l, and every Monday my blue mistress would answer, "No, it was never intended that Man should race a sailing boat. Man races other, lesser, machines; Man races other Men. But a sailing boat was given to Man so that he might tether himself to the wind. That is a higher purpose, to be tethered to the wind." Then every Monday we'd stand together for a while out in the garage, my hand on her deck, not talking anymore, just watching the leaves blow out on the driveway, and thinking about every wave we'd ever hit together, every cat's-paw we'd ever caught, and about all those times we'd spent those blistering hours doing nothing but riding the wind just for the sake of riding the wind. Nothing more, just the wind, a Lido, and some guy who wanted to be with the wind for a few hours, all standing remembering each wave, that's what it would be like on those Mondays out in the garage.

I *do* have this love affair going with the Lido. This is a luxury upon which I spend great amounts of intellectual energy. It has all the elements of a true love affair: the immunity to outside influences, the times of infatuation, the times of frustration, the reluctance to abuse, the strained patience toward others, the reassurances of a mast hanging along the garage ceiling as snow blows against the doors, and the little surprises that creep into a life when we're apart. Then there's the bit about the lines, the watching and staring from every possible angle. It's parked in the garage in the summer; every day I walk through the garage and look at those lines from a different angle. Sometimes I just stand there in my city clothes at the end of the day for a long time with my hand on the

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deck. Sometimes when I do that I can feel the burn of the mainsheet cinched around a wet hand straining against the wind.

Now *there* is an element of nature that all prairie creatures know: the wind. The wind comes out of The Dakotas in winter, carrying a harsh cutting bitterness you must stand and feel to understand. The wind comes out of Kansas and Oklahoma in spring, carrying an organic smell that means danger for anyone dependent upon responsible behavior from people like me. That Kansas wind is warm and moist; it makes you smile before daybreak and it blows back the swallows. The wind shifts suddenly, but by then you've usually been warned by the thunderheads or by the sheets of rain carried on the wind to where you can sit watching from a bluff. The wind also goes away, leaving a lake of total smoothness, and although they're so far away you can't see, you can nevertheless hear them: fishermen talking in the stillness way down the lake, a duck quacking in the stillness way down the lake. Everyone out here knows all *those* things about the wind. But a few know some other things about the wind, such as the fact that the wind blows away my mind, too, for I've learned the movement of every leaf of every tree I can see from my city work building. When those leaves move just right, my mind goes home, hitches up the Lido, and heads out across the prairies for some stretch of water and some lee rails down in green-algae green prairie water.

People in my profession think the Lido is a luxury. I'd like to put that thought into some kind of perspective now: the man across the street is an electrician, he has several-thousand-dollars-worth of boat parked in his garage; the man next door is a milkman, he has several-thousand-dollars-worth of boat; the man who used to live across my back fence was a truck salesman, he had a self-contained RV mobile home parked alongside his driveway. I am a university professor, so what the hell's wrong with a university professor having a boat? Nothing, of course. That was my thought one day when I was thirty-eight years old and decided, having lived seventeen years since my last sailboat, that I could not then live another minute without the next.

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The Lido cost \$2000. It had sat on the T & R Yacht Company's lot for a year, unsold, and was slightly damaged. It was love at first sight. That was nearly five years ago, and the Lido has paid for itself in noneconomic terms a trillion times over. "How can you afford *not* to sail every day?" people often ask. The answer to that question seems so obvious: there have been times out on Lake McConaughy, the largest lake of Cowboy Country, when a single day was worth the entire purchase price of my Lido. Knowing what I know now, if some day in the future I was guaranteed such a day out on Big Mac, and did not have a Lido, I would easily pay \$2000 for that day in communication with the wind. Don't recoil in disbelief. Think about it a little bit. Power, money, politics, your friends' divorce, car repairs, gasoline prices, stress, your dog biting a visitor, taxes, hostages, Afghanistan, war talk on the horizon, OPEC, is there more I should mention? Leave it all. That stuff is all the baser human animal instincts at play. Leave it all; come tie yourself to the wind; communicate directly with the planet that supports you; merge your senses into an entity of wind, water, and boat. Forget Dacron and fiberglass, forget they are man-made materials, for although they are man-made *materials*, it is their *shape* that is some designer's successful idea of what it takes to tie yourself to the wind!

Thirteen feet, six inches long, but broad, roomy enough for four adults, since the molded seats go all the way back to the transom and the side decks are but a few inches wide. Blue above, with blue waterline stripe on a white hull. There is a tray at the fore end of the cockpit, a tray to hold the corks that fill the holes in the ends of hollow seats, a tray to hold the halyard wax, some Nosekote, a tray that a generation ago would have held a "church key." Back then beer cans had to be opened with a "church key." The spars are gold extruded aluminum, but the gooseneck is cast aluminum and breaks easily if the mast is lowered on it. Stay and shrouds are stainless cable sheathed in polymer, sheets are nylon, blocks are nylon and steel, travel is adjustable, and the foot of the mains'l can be loosened to spill the wind, or to add curvature, but when you spill the wind from the main, that wind spills out on your feet.

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There was a boom vang; I took it off. There were hiking straps; I took them off. Vangs and straps are the accoutrements of racers. A clean cockpit is the accoutrement of a man who would be at one with the wind.

Jib and main are Dacron. Jib sheets run outside the shrouds and I always, *always*, give a guest the responsibility for jib sheets. It makes them feel a part of the operation, a part of this being at one with the wind, with the planet. It also keeps them from sitting on the jib sheets at critical times. The jib runs up the stay, the main runs on a track in the mast. Into the leading edge of the main is sewn a heavy cord that runs in the track. Battens are fiberglass and the longest is the middle one of three. Halyards are steel, stainless cable, with nylon spliced onto an eye. The trailer is angle iron painted white, nontilt, with standard tires, one-inch axles, and wheels with Tyson bearings. Wheel bearings are packed with Sears best grease and Janovy's best loving care. The trailer had two welded tie-down loops that have long since broken off and have been replaced by loops bolted through holes I drilled myself in the angle iron.

The rudder hinges through a pin at the top, and is wood covered with fiberglass hinged into a brass fitting. When the fitting is in place and you're far enough out, you can put the rudder down and clamp it with a big levered bolt through this fitting. The tiller is about three feet long and had an extension on it. That extension went the way of the vang and straps; tiller extensions are also the equipments of racers. The centerboard is hinged forward, and thus the angle, and center of lateral pivot, can differ, depending on how far down you put the centerboard. I used the vang hardware to rig a lock for the centerboard. The lock consists of lines running through opposing jam cleats. The vang business was a nuisance; the centerboard lock is essential. As in any simple trailered day sailer, when the centerboard and rudder go down, then there is a bite, a catching hold, a surge forward, lines and cables go tight, you can feel all that in the seat of your cutoffs, and it's a feeling that tells you the connection between wind and earth has been made. When

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you get that feeling in the seat of your cutoffs, then you need to know that centerboard is locked where you want it.

That bite, that catching, must be the same sensation that astronauts have when the docking maneuver is made, when contact between two elements of the universe is made properly. And as in the case of astronauts, that electricity of connection between vast natural elements is made through a human body. You are a conductor; communication with the wind flows down the length of Lido main, out onto the mainsheet, through your arm, through your rear end, through fiberglass, and into the depths of the water; that's what that first bite, that first catch, feels like.

Cast off technique is summer special at Big Mac: there are no deep water ports, at least for public use. Oh, the power boats pull up to those floating docks that run out alongside the ramps at Martin Bay, but power boats are power boats. No sooner do they run up against the dock than they pick up some passengers and go a hundred yards down the beach where they run right up on the sand and unload. Besides, the power boats don't draw as much as the Lido with her centerboard and rudder down. For the summer special you wrestle the Lido off the trailer and wade it around the power boats and pull it up on the beach to step the mast. Then you have to wade out far enough to put on the rudder, put the centerboard down, raise the sails, etc., all with someone paddling out. There must be a hundred more seamanly techniques for getting underway other than the summer special. I'm sure there are thousands of people out there, accomplished in long years of seamanship, who would without thinking handle getting underway very differently. There would be sails raised while the thing was still beached, there would be rudders on while that blue waterline rested on hot sand, there would be spars and sheets rattling in the wind, the whole thing would appear smooth, a merging of technique and human desires. But you must see where my approach to getting underway comes from; you must see wherein lies the summer special, the reluctance to raise sail except in deep water, the paranoid care of rudder, all that. It comes as part of the affair. I

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have this sense of exactly what stresses and strains my Lido should be subjected to. It may not be the correct sense, but it is the sense that dictates our relationship on the beach. There are some things you just don't do with women, things like walking along the inside on a city street. As so there are some things you just don't do with a sailing craft, things like stress them in ways you don't *think* they should be stressed. Who knows if all those special things are necessary; who knows? No one really knows if senses of treatment are at all necessary. All one sees is the results. The Lido has never been damaged. Nor have I; the relationship has been nothing but freedom and pleasure.

R. D. Schock, Newport Beach, California, the manufacturer; 3962 the serial number, and 3962 the blue numbers raised against the blue cowboy country sky meeting the blue Big Mac waters too far to see across a blue deck right above a blue cooler with Pabst Blue Ribbon all sure to leave behind in shambles any vestige of the blues brought on by whatever-ails-you. I've taken to raising sail myself, turning the tiller over to any intelligent crew. It's easier to say "push" or "pull" than it is to judge the trim of a sail. It's easier to call out "push!" or "pull!" than it is to adjust the downhaul, the outhaul, or to let out an inch on some sheet, take up an inch in some halyard.

The Lido has an interesting design feature that is not a part of every sailing craft. Trailered, the golden aluminum mast lies along the top of the boat, resting in blocks and tied down with the running rigging. Out on the interstate, I tie a red cloth to the halyard loop at the top of the mast. The fixed rigging, except for the stay, remains attached, with the shrouds running down through holes in the deck to pins (adjustable) on the front of the seats. To step the mast, you untie all that running rigging, carry the mast aft along the deck, fit it into the step, then bolt it in. You then stand pulling on the stay while someone raises the mast, then tosses it into the air, after which you catch it with the stay and pull it all the way up. The unique Lido design feature is this: When the boat is pulled up on the beach, on that two-thousand-dollar-day, there is

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some unique combination of lines, shapes, proportions, so that when that mast goes up there is a tremendous flood of emotion. You almost shudder with it. No one talks, for with that act of raising the mast, you've entered that realm of freedom known only to other creatures that ride the winds. I never get that feeling watching other sailors raise *their* masts. I hardly ever get the feeling they are there only to be at one with the prairie wind. I get the feeling they are there to race.

There are probably a thousand bays like Martin Bay. There are probably a thousand places where you have to get out of, away from, for those thousand places probably reek of humanity as does Martin Bay. Right at the mouth, that's the only place Martin Bay doesn't reek of humanity. The parking places disappear, at the mouth, and the road runs out into deep sandy gulleys between gigantic barren dunes. Sometimes you can see people way down that beach below the dunes. You almost always think those are people who want to get away from the crowd; there isn't any other reason to go down that far toward the mouth of Martin Bay. Across the bay from the dunes there is an island, on the west. Since the wind is almost always from the south, you have to tack to get out of Martin Bay. But the trees on the island bend the wind a little bit, so it's not really a difficult tack. Probably the most difficult part of the tack is seeing that beach with the dunes and the people who don't want to be with the rest of the crowd. That's the place where you're suddenly out on the main lake. You can't get to that place fast enough.

It's total impatience tacking out of Martin Bay, watching those people, seeing them watch you, waving, just waving at some other people *they* know want to get away. Sometimes those people have little kids with them, sometimes dogs. Sometimes when they have kids and dogs, the kids and dogs run along the beach waving. No one else waves, except Karen out sunning, seeing those blue numbers, 3962, out across the sunstruck waters of Martin Bay. But the people on the dunes at the mouth, they almost always wave. They're kindred souls, probably, or they wouldn't be where they

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are. But then you look back and those people are still waving, getting smaller, and out ahead across the miles are the bluffs of the south shore, and in your hand is the mainsheet, and it's cinched hard around your hand, and through it you can feel the wind, so you sit up on the little deck and put your sunburned foot up on the centerboard well. And the wind takes hold, and you look for a while at the sails, and it all goes away, all that's ever been a part of some vegetative responsibility, some sets of rules, regulations, obligations, tasks, races and more races, fights and more fights. It all goes away, and it's just you and the boat and the wind and the intelligent crew and that mainsheet, no don't forget the mainsheet, cinched around your hand. On the other end of that nylon rope is the prairie wind. And though they're so far gone over the horizon you can't see them, somehow you feel that those people on the dunes at Martin Bay are still standing, waving at those blue numbers, 3962, and themselves wondering how to hitch a rope to the wind.

Sliding air masses, the jet stream, cold fronts, warm fronts, warm moist air from the Gulf meeting cool dry air out of Canada, still air, hanging-in-shrouds air, deceptive air, Branched Oak air, thermals, downdrafts, puffs and cat's-paws, to wind'ard and to lee'ard, but a mile above the masthead floats a redbill hawk. The hawk turns into the sun, but the sun turns and runs down the gold mast, casting high value shadows over on the main, the one with 3962. The hawk turns on a long glide into the haze above south shore bluffs, but the south shore bluffs turn, moving lazily beneath the jib, then out beneath the boom and off away to Lewellen. The hawk is gone into that haze over the bluffs, but there remains a mile above the masthead the essence of hawk, that essence of redbill that tells of a union with the wind. Somewhere among those long feathers, out along that wing, and on that rump where rectrices become body, there are the sensory receptors for sliding air masses, the jet stream, cold fronts, warm fronts, warm moist air from the Gulf, still air, hanging-in-shrouds air, deceptive air, Branched Oak air, thermals, downdrafts, puffs, and cat's-paws. And somewhere

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out there beneath that hawk I've crossed the 102nd meridian, tethered to the wind by a three-eighths-inch nylon mainsheet, wet, sunburned, pulled into the west and into those flights of fancy that only a sail can evoke: pirates, simpler times when men did not know of engines, simpler times when it seemed the natural thing to tether yourself to a wind and ride that wind into history as an explorer.

Someone said the Lido was designed for saltwater day sailing, with its broad beam, stability, and its bite. I don't know whether that's true or not, but what I do know is of the bite, or at least what I call the bite. To watch it is to see another world of design, another world of movement, another world where there's only the water, white against a white hull, clear yellow with refracted sun, black into the depths with fleeting impressions of large fishes, and the white fiberglass reflecting all those colors as the designer's lines bite into waves. The Lido never swerves, never slaps back at waves, is never pounded aside underway, never intimidated by water; no, the Lido bites, cuts, welcomes, almost, the challenge of a wave out over the 102nd meridian, and commands the water, carrying me off on some mission into the unknown reaches of the mind freed from races humans race.

There is a feel to this boat, a feel of solidity, of a need for steady wind and long reaches, for that sandy bluff seen below the jib. When you reach that bluff, you'll feel a million miles from everywhere because you sailed there. It's that feel of having gone straight and long away, knowing there's somewhere at the end, something at the end, but not knowing where or what. That's the feel some designer put into the hull of a Lido. How many times we've been to that somewhere together, and how many times we've come back having found that something! That somewhere is the place you don't have to go any farther to know you've put into perspective some race run back in the trenches. And that something is the knowledge that you've been there, dragged on the prairie wind, carried by a hull that bites the waves and never swerves. And I guess the knowledge that we've been there is what makes me

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stand out in the garage sometimes, dressed in city clothes and carrying city thoughts, and put my hand on fiberglass to feel those lines that feel best crossing the 102nd meridian.

Wings of Dacron, an imaginary line from someone's brain carved into fiberglass, golden aluminum to release that flood of emotion, and a nylon rope to wrap around your wrist, hitch to a sliding air mass, and make yourself at one with the redtail; those are all the things you can buy for a couple thousand dollars American currency. Wings, are not wings the symbol for freedom? Are wings not the things with which creatures catch the prairie wind and ride off into their destinies? Are wings not the things with which creatures can turn, choose, ride a hot thermal off to another place in a straight line? And are wings not things that give lesser animals powers no human could dream of having? Yes; yes to all those questions, and yes to still another question: Do you also have wings? Of course; they're made of Dacron with big blue numbers, 3962, and if you think for a moment I can't put them on and ride a hot thermal off to another place in a straight line, then you are very wrong. What seems a luxury, when put in those terms, becomes instead a necessity. I knew it would eventually come to this; I knew even as a child that someday I would have to have wings. What I didn't know then was the extent to which a Lido of the mind would serve as well as a Lido in the garage, and almost as well as a Lido out on those host sands of the very biggest lake in Keith County.