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Keystone Cops in BVI

In the spring of 2005, my husband, our teenaged son and daughter and I joined the masses of people headed south to the Caribbean for vacation. We had chartered a sailboat with the plan of cruising among the British Virgin Islands, enjoying the waters, scenery and local culture. Our boat, a Catalina 42, was named *Clewless*. Although we weren't thrilled with identifying ourselves as *Clewless* over the radio, she had everything we needed to enjoy a week sailing the crystal clear waters in the Caribbean.

A little background on myself – I am not a strong swimmer and do not have very good upper body strength. These facts became more apparent every time I tried to get back into the dinghy after snorkeling. My family figured out an orchestrated process for getting me back in. First, I would grab one of the handles and my daughter, Colleen, would hold onto my forearm. Next, I would struggle to swing one leg up near the edge of the dinghy and my son Brendan would grab my leg. My husband Pete would try to get a grip around my middle and on the count of three, all of them would pull until I flopped into the dinghy. Every time we went through this, I only hoped there was no one watching my graceful moves.

Because this was our first visit to the BVI, our agenda included most of the popular tourist spots, including the Baths at the southern end of Virgin Gorda. For those readers who don't know, the Baths is a national park with natural formations of giant boulders which create picturesque pools and grottos.

We arrived there about mid-morning, found a mooring for *Clewless* and took the dinghy to the Baths. There was no dinghy dock on shore. The dinghy moorings were already overcrowded and too far from shore for my limited swimming abilities. We decided to be adventurous and look for another place to put in. We found a lovely, deserted beach – Spring Bay – just north of the Baths.

"Where are the radios?" I asked, realizing we had left them on the boat, snug in their waterproof pouches. We brought the two-way radios on the trip for just such a circumstance, but were anxious to get on with our day and decided not to return to the boat to get them.

Brendan dropped Pete, Colleen and I off near the shoreline at Spring Bay. We assumed we would walk along the shore to the Baths while Brendan returned with the dinghy to the mooring area, and we would all meet to explore the park. However, we could not find a passage through or over the boulders.

Soon a lone beachcomber arrived at the beach and informed us, "In the ten years I've lived here, I've not been able to find a passage through here." He went on to tell us about a path up the hillside to a road and another path from the road to the Baths. And so began our Keystone Cops routine.

Pete decided that he would take the hike to the Baths while Colleen and I waited on the beach in case Brendan returned. Those two-way radios would have been nice to have then.

When Brendan didn't find us at the park, he returned to Spring Bay. The waves were much stronger now and he had trouble keeping the dinghy off the rocks and the beach while Colleen and I tried to get back in. As usual, Colleen was able to easily pull herself into the dinghy while I struggled. By now there were several people on the beach watching this spectacle.

One of the spectators shouted to Brendan, "Take the dinghy out past the wave break. She can swim to you." I responded, "Are you kidding?" but he didn't hear me. Obviously, he didn't know about my shortcomings as a swimmer. When it was apparent that I was not going to be able to swim to the dinghy, Brendan jumped in, leaving Colleen alone to manage the dinghy. Somehow, he was able to pull me through the waves to the dinghy, and with great effort, Brendan and Colleen got me into the dinghy. I looked back at the beach and realized I had an even larger audience now, except Pete was no where to be seen.

At this point, my body and my ego were battered and bruised. All three of us were tired, thirsty and hungry. We decided to take the dinghy back to the Baths to look for Pete. The two-way radios really would have helped.

In the mean time, since Pete did not find us at the Baths, he hiked back to Spring Bay, but arrived after we left (and the audience on the beach dispersed). Colleen and I waited at the dinghy mooring while Brendan swam to shore to look for Pete. Over the course of the next hour, Pete and Brendan kept missing each other on the hiking paths. Eventually they met up, swam back to the dinghy and we all returned to *Clewless* without ever seeing the Baths. The two-way radios were just where we left them.

Brendan claimed the title of hero for saving me at Spring Bay. For the rest of the vacation I heard, "Mom, would you _____ (fill in the blank)? Remember, I did rescue you on that beach." I couldn't argue with his logic.

We continued on to North Sound where we settled in for the night. "Let's go snorkeling before dinner." Pete suggested. I declined. I had had more than enough adventure for one day. They did take one of the radios with them this time and I kept the other one with me. ♪

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