

HISTORY OF GRAPETREE

REVISED & POSTSCRIPTED (AGAIN) - 5/11/99

by Mr. Mountain owner of
"Pink on The Brink"

ST. CROIX - THE AMERICAN VIRGIN ISLANDS - AMERICAN BY VIRTUE OF OUR HAVING BOUGHT THEM FROM DENMARK IN 1917 FOR \$25 MILLION - ARE WELL SITUATED. THE WEATHER IS *ALMOST* THE FINEST IN THE WORLD, YEAR AROUND, SPOILED ONLY BY AN OCCASIONAL HURRICANE. I SAY '*ALMOST*' (YES! I SHALL BE WRITING THIS MEMOIRE IN THE FIRST PERSON - THE ONLY WAY I KNOW HOW TO HANDLE IT) BECAUSE ED MOORE, WHO WAS ONE OF THE LATER ARRIVALS IN THE GRAPETREE 'COLONY', TOLD ME SO. HE WAS AN EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF SANITARY ENGINEERING AT MIT WHO, UPON RETIREMENT, GAVE THE PARAMETERS OF EDEN TO A FELLOW PROFESSOR WHOSE REPUTATION WAS IN THE CLIMATIC WORLD, AND ASKED HIM TO GIVE HIM A LIST. NUMBER TWO ON THE LIST WAS ST. CROIX - THE FIRST BEING SOMEWHERE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN - AND IT WAS READILY ACCESSIBLE. HE CAME AND WAS PLEASED TO BE AMONG MANY WHO REFERRED TO ST. CROIX AS, 'ARIZONA BY THE SEA'. IT WAS, AND IS, A 'PARADISE'.

LUTTRELL (AND OTHER LANDOWNERS)- HIS WAS ONE OF MANY FAMILIES WHO HAD LARGE LAND HOLDINGS ON ST. CROIX, MOST OF WHICH LAY FALLOW AS THE SUGAR CANE PRODUCTION DIMINISHED. HIS LAND WAS LARGELY ON THE EAST END OF ST. CROIX. HE WAS ONLY TOO AGREEABLE TO DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES WHICH BEGAN TO COME INTO FOCUS IN THE MID- FIFTIES.

BOB LODGE - BOB CAME TO THE CRUZAN SCENE JUST AFTER THE MID -FIFTIES FROM THE NEW YORK FUND RAISING SCENE, AT WHICH HE WAS VERY GOOD, FEEL IN LOVE WITH ST. CROIX AND MARJORIE PLATT, WHOM HE MARRIED. HAVING A ACTIVE IMAGINATION AND KNOWING OF THE AVAILABILITY OF DIVINE LAND AND LOVELY BEACHES, ETC., HE GEARED IT UP AND PUT IT TO USE.

THE CONCEPT - HE ZEROED IN ON THE EAST END, CHOSE GRAPETREE BAY AS THE SITE FOR HIS 'CONCEPT' AND BEGAN TO PUT TOGETHER THE GRAND PLAN. IN THE PUTTING TOGETHER, LODGE ACQUIRED THE 'RIGHTS' TO MUCH PROPERTY BOTH ON THE EAST END AND OTHER PARTS OF THE ISLAND - LITTLE MONEY DOWN, BALLOON MORTGAGE PAYMENTS - ALL OF WHICH WAS USED TO COLLATERALIZE SHORT TERM FINANCING (DISCUSSED LATER) AND SOME OF WHICH, WAY DOWN THE LINE, BECAME THE SEED PROPERTY IN ESTABLISHING HESS AND HARVEY.

THE ARCHITECT - IN DEVELOPING THE CONCEPT AND LAYING OUT THE AREA WHICH WOULD CONSIST OF A CLUB - READ HOTEL- HOUSE SURROUNDED BY 35 HOUSES OF 3 ROOMS EACH, LODGE NEEDED A SUPERIOR ARCHITECT AND PLANNER. THE HOUSES, WHEN NOT USED BY THE 'NEW' OWNERS, WOULD BE THE HOTEL'S CAPACITY. ENTER DAVID P.C. CHANG WHO GAVE UP BETTER THINGS, MOVED TO ST. CROIX AND WAS A HANDS-ON PERSON. THE HOUSES WERE WELL DESIGNED, ALL HAVING THREE ROOMS, EACH HAVING ITS OWN OUTSIDE ENTRANCE, IN 5 MODULAR MODELS, ALL HAVING THE SAME SQUARE FOOTAGE. THEY WERE CONTRACTED FOR, AND BUILT, IN NORWALK, CT. AND WERE SHIPPED DOWN VIA MIAMI TO STX BY WAR SURPLUS LANDING CRAFT. AT SUCH TIME. MERWIN WAS THE GOVERNOR AND THE MERWIN COMPANY WERE THE 'TRANSFER' AGENTS.

THE BUILDER - THE NEED FOR SOMEONE TO UNDERTAKE THE GENERAL CONTRACTING WAS SOLVED BY LODGE AND CHANG, WHEN THEY ENGAGED JAY WAITE, AN EXPERIENCED STATE SIDE BUILDER. IN MAKING THE DEAL, ALL COSTS WERE THOUGHT TO BE CONSERVATIVE AND, PERHAPS, THEY WERE ELSEWHERE, BUT THE 'CRUZAN' WAY HAD NOT BEEN FACTORED IN. (MORE LATER). SITE DEVELOPMENT GOT UNDER WAY. IN GENERAL, A HOUSE WAS OFFERED IN FEE SIMPLE INCLUDING +/- 1 ACRE, FOR \$25,000.00. IT WAS UNDERSTOOD THE \$5,000 WAS FOR THE LAND, THE REST FOR THE HOUSE WHICH, INCIDENTALLY, WAS TO BE DELIVERED FURNISHED. THE OWNER WAS, OF COURSE, OBLIGATED TO LEASE IT BACK TO THE HOTEL EXCEPT FOR A LIMITED PERIOD FOR HIS OWN USE, BUT THERE WAS A GUARANTEED PER ANNUM MINIMUM INCOME. THE LAND MONEY ENABLED LODGE TO PLAN FINANCING FOR THE HOTEL CENTER.

THE SALES PITCH - CHANG DID LOVELY RENDERINGS AND BOB LODGE DEVELOPED GREAT RHETORIC AND SUPERIOR PROSE. HE ADVERTISED IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL ABOUT THIS INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY FOR 'RISING EXECUTIVES' TO HAVE A RETIREMENT HOUSE THAT WOULD PAY FOR ITSELF WHILE ALLOWING VACATION PRIVILEGES. THE WHOLE DEVELOPED AREA WAS POSITED AS EXCLUSIVE, SOPHISTICATED AND HE EVEN PLANNED A TICKER TAPE (REMEMBER THOSE DAYS?). IT WAS ALL TOO MUCH AND 35 PEOPLE BEGAN TO JOCKEY FOR POSITION. IT SHOULD BE NOTED, AT THIS STAGE IN THE 'STORY', THAT ONE OF THEM WAS THE AUTHOR AND ANOTHER WAS DICK DICKINSON, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY FALLEN IN LOVE WITH ST. CROIX AND THOUGHT THE SCHEME HAD MERIT.

THE LOGO - AT THIS STAGE, THE GRAND SCHEME HAD NO IDENTIFICATION AND NEEDED ONE. IT TURNED OUT THAT MARJORIE AND BOB LODGE HAD TAKEN OFF FOR A TOUR OF EUROPE (TO GET IDEAS FOR IMPORT TO THE DEVELOPING GRAPETREE) WHEN BOB SPOTTED, A LABEL ON A BOTTLE OF BEER OR WINE, A TREE WITH GRAPE LEAVES, AND 'IMPORTED' IT FOR THE LOGO. WHILE SUCH WAS MODERNIZED LATER, THE ORIGINAL CAN STILL BE SEEN ON THE WALL OF THE HOTEL, OUT FRONT.

CONSTRUCTION - AS THINGS MOVED ON, UNFORESEEN CONSTRUCTIONS DIFFICULTIES AROSE, CHANG HAD TO MAKE ENOUGH CHANGES TO BLUR THE ENVISIONED COSTS, AND SUCH BEGAN TO 'ESCALATE'. AN INTERESTING ASIDE IS THAT IN THE SHIPPING AND HANDLING OF THE HOUSES, DAMAGE DONE BY INEPT FORK LIFT OPERATORS REDUCED THE 'BUILDABLE' HOUSES TO 32. AS ALL HOUSES WERE MODULAR, CANNIBALIZATION WAS POSSIBLE. ANOTHER ASIDE IS THE DISCOVERY OF THE CONSTANT AND STRONG WINDS. THE HOUSES WERE DESIGNED TO OPEN OUT ON A LANAI, PORCHES AND DECKS. THE MULTIPLE REDWOOD DOORS - REDWOOD IS ACID AND HAS A TENDENCY TO SPIT OUT SCREWS - BEGAN TO FLAP, BECAME DETACHED, AND WENT SAILING AROUND THE PROJECT. THE ERA OF THE FLYING DOORS WAS BROUGHT TO AN END BY NAILING CLOSED ALL DOORS EXCEPT THE ONES NEEDED FOR ENTRANCE AND EGRESS. AS THINGS PROGRESSED, A SERIOUS CASH FLOW DEVELOPED.

CASH FLOW PROBLEMS AND INTERIM FINANCE - WITH COSTS ESCALATING AND CASH BECOMING SCARCE, LODGE NEEDED MONEY TO TIDE THINGS OVER AND ALL SORTS OF SCHEMES WERE UNDERWAY, ALL UNDERTAKEN WITH THE FIRM BELIEF THAT THINGS WOULD WORK OUT. A STORY TOLD, WHICH IS STEEPED IN TRUTH, WAS THAT THE BANK (CHASE) ADVANCED ANOTHER INCREMENT OF THE MORTGAGE FINANCING

WHEN THE ROOF WAS ON. A MOVEABLE ROOF EVOLVED - DON'T FORGET THE BUILDINGS WERE ESSENTIALLY MODULAR - AND WAS MOVED FROM ONE HOUSE TO

ANOTHER AS THE BANK MADE DAILY INSPECTIONS. WHILE THESE MANEUVERS HELPED, SERIOUS FINANCING WAS NEEDED AND THAT IS WHEN LODGE PERSUADED DICK DICKINSON TO 'LEND' A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT, SHORT TERM. IT CAME FROM THE IRVING TRUST COMPANY ON A PROMISSORY NOTE, SAID NOTE EVENTUALLY RISING TO CLOSE TO A MILLION. IRVING ASSIGNED A VP TO HUSBAND THIS LOAN -

ALL THIS MONEY FAILED TO STEM THE LEAKS AND CONSTRUCTION CAME TO A HALT ABOUT THE TIME THE PROJECT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS 30/35% COMPLETE.

FAIRLEIGH S. DICKINSON, JR. TAKES OVER - AT THIS POINT, DICK WAS IN A PANIC POSITION, TO SAY THE LEAST, AND MADE THE DECISION TO PICK UP THE 'PAPER' AND COMPLETE THE PROJECT. HIS RATIONALE WILL, PERHAPS, NEVER REALLY BE KNOWN, BUT I BELIEVE THAT HE FELT HIS NAME AND ASSOCIATION HAD BEEN USED TO LURE OTHERS IN AND THEREFORE, HE HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO THEM - DELIVERING WHAT THEY HAD ALREADY PAID FOR. HE AND BETTY WENT UP THE ORINOCO RIVER (PRESUMABLY TO FORGET THE GRAPETREE DILEMMA) AND DICK SENT THIBAUT DE ST. PHALLE, A BRILLIANT N.Y. LAWYER DOWN TO ST. CROIX TO ASSESS THE SITUATION, MAKE SENSE OUT OF IT AND TO STRAIGHTEN IT OUT. HE ALSO HAD TO RENEGOTIATE THE 32 CONTRACTS WHICH, CERTAINLY WERE UNFAVORABLE AND A CONTINUING DRAIN ON THE GRAPETREE BAY HOTEL CORP. I MET THIBAUT - WE HAD GONE TO SCHOOL TOGETHER, SURPRISINGLY - ON HIS ARRIVAL (I WAS THE FIRST FAMILY TO LIVE IN GRAPETREE, WAS THERE UNDER DIRE CONSTRUCTION DEBRIS) AND WAS AS ANXIOUS AS OTHERS TO KNOW WHAT LOOMED. ANOTHER ASIDE - WHEN I ARRIVED AT GRAPETREE IN MARCH 1959 WITH MY BRIDE AND 4 KIDS AND CAME OVER THE HILL, I ALMOST HAD A HEART ATTACK AT THE SCENE. WE WERE MET BY LEO RIORDAN, WHO HAD BEEN HIRED AWAY FROM INTERCONTINENTAL, ONLY TO FIND NOTHING TO MANAGE WHEN HE ARRIVED. HE HAD INDEED PUT LINEN ON THE BEDS, HANDED ME CANDLES SHOULD THE POWER FAIL, AND POINTED OUT IT WOULD BE RUGGED. IT WAS RUGGED AND THE POWER FAILED CONSTANTLY. I WOULD ALSO NEED PAILS TO GET WATER FROM THE SEA FOR THE JOHNS.

RENEGOTIATION - MANY PRIORITIES HAD TO BE EXAMINED AND MONEY FOUND TO CONTINUE CONSTRUCTION. ALSO DURING THIS PERIOD, AND PRIOR THERETO, WITH LACK OF COHESIVE DIRECTION, A RETIRED ARMY COLONEL OF ENGINEERS, WHO AMONG OTHER THINGS OPERATED OUR GREAT BULLDOZER, CUT LOOSE FROM THE PLANS AND PUT ROADS AND ACCESSES WHEREVER HE THOUGHT THEY SHOULD BE. NO ONE GAVE IT MUCH ATTENTION AT THE TIME - CHEERING HIM ON - BUT DOWN THE LINE, PROPERTY LINES AND RIGHTS OF WAY BECAME INDISTINCT AND DOWNRIGHT HARD TO SORT OUT. THE PROBLEMS EXIST TODAY. BACK TO THE HOME OWNERS - THEY WERE TO GET THEIR HOUSES BUT NEEDED TO RENEGOTIATE AS TO GUARANTEED RENTALS, PERIPHERAL PERKS AND UNDERSTANDINGS, ETC. A THOROUGHLY FAIR PACKAGE WAS ARRIVED AT WITH THE FIRM THOUGHT THAT NO ONE WOULD TURN IT DOWN AND OPT FOR OUT; HOWEVER, THE SUBJECT CAME UP (WE THOUGHT, ACADEMICALLY) THAT IF THEY DID OPT OUT, WHERE WOULD THE MONEY COME FROM. BUD SILVERMAN AND I WERE AT THE MEETING WHERE THIBAUT JOKINGLY SAID THAT IN THE MOST UNLIKELY EVENT OF HAVING TO REACQUIRE A HOUSE OR SO, WE WOULD BE WISE TO HELP IN AN INTERIM MANNER. HA! HA! - BUD SAID HE WOULD TAKE THREE AND I, TWO. NOT SO FUNNY WHEN SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, THIBAUT CALLED US TO SAY THAT WE HAD OUR THREE AND TWO. WE ULTIMATELY CAME OUT EVEN, NOT PROFITING FROM THE OBVIOUSLY INCREASED VALUE AS THE PROJECT NEARED COMPLETION AND STARTED OPERATING.

CONSTRUCTION CONTINUES - FROM THE APRIL PERIOD WHEN DICK TOOK OVER, THERE WAS FRENETIC CONSTRUCTION, TERRIBLE DECISIONS, A CONTINUING LACK OF FUNDS WHICH DICK CONTINUED TO MAKE UP. AS MY BUSINESS CAREER HAD TAKEN A TURN WHEN I HAD SOME SLACK TIME, THIBAUT CONVINCED ME TO BECOME CONCERNED AND I WAS, BOTH IN RENEGOTIATIONS, REAL ESTATE PLANNING, CONSTRUCTION GLITCHES, AND IN 'OPERATION' PREPARATION. I COMMUTED AND WAS MISERABLE, - I USED TO STAY IN MY HOUSE AND, IF I SAW ANYONE COMING, I USED TO HIDE IN THE OWNER'S CLOSET UNTIL THE COAST WAS CLEAR. THINGS FORGED AHEAD (IN THE CRUZAN MANOR, OF COURSE - TWO STEPS FORWARD AND ONE BACK, OR IS IT VICE VERSA?)

AT LAST, 'GRAPETREE BAY HOTEL' OPENS - IT WAS DECEMBER 1959. THE WHOLE ISLAND HAD SPECULATED FOR ONE YEAR THAT GRAPETREE WOULD NEVER OPEN, AND WHEN IT DID, THEY WERE ALL THERE, KNEE DEEP IN ALCOHOL, TO CELEBRATE THE IMPOSSIBLE. WE HANDED OUT A SILVER DOLLAR IN A BAGS OF SAND THAT SEEMED TO CELEBRATE THE PIRATE OR BUCCANEER (NO REFERENCE INTENDED) THEME. IT MUST BE TOLD - THERE WAS A REASONABLE WELL GROWN PALM TREE THAT HAD BEEN INSTALLED IN THE POOL AREA AND IT WAS DECIDED TO DEDICATE IT TO DICK DICKINSON, WITH LOVE AND APPRECIATION. CAME THE TIME, AND THERE WAS NO DICK. IT SEEMS THAT DICK SUFFERS ENJOYS HIS SLEEP, AND THE WHOLE THING WAS PROBABLY BORING, AND HAD GONE UP THE HILL TO A COTTAGE FOR A 'LIE DOWN'. I VOLUNTEERED TO GET HIM BUT THERE WAS SUCH A COLOSSAL TRAFFIC TIE UP, I COULD GET TO NO WHEELS AT ALL. IT WAS THEN THAT I SPOTTED AVAILABLE WHEELS (THE LT. GOVERNOR'S CAR) AND USED IT TO GET DICK. WHEN WE RETURNED, THEY HAD ALMOST CALLED OUT THE NATIONAL GUARD AND IT WAS ALL WE COULD DO NOT TO BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY. ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL? ONE UNFORTUNATE THING - SOCHA, A LOCAL ARTIST OF MERIT KNOWN FOR HER WATER COLORS AND SCULPTURES, HAD CREATED TWO RATHER LONG FRIEZES DEPICTING THE GAYETY OF LIFE ON ST. CROIX. WHILE WE LOVED THEM, WE WERE GIVEN TO UNDERSTAND THAT THEY WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE IN THE PUBLIC ROOMS. I ACQUIRED ONE OF THEM, WHICH I LOVED, AND IT WAS ON MY WALL UNTIL 'HUGO' TOOK IT AWAY.

LEFT OVER AND OPERATING PROBLEMS - WE STUMBLERD ALONG THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS WITHOUT ANY OUTSTANDING SUCCESS IN OCCUPANCY, AND CONTINUAL ADJUSTMENTS. THE SPREAD OUT HOUSES, WHICH WERE THE ROOMS IN THE HOTEL, REPRESENTED A CONTINUING PROBLEM AND WERE, BY AND LARGE, NOT SATISFACTORY TO THE CONTINUING OPERATION OF GRAPETREE AS A RESORT. A STORY - MY GOD! THERE ARE SO MANY. WHEN WE OPENED, WE REALIZED THAT NO PROVISIONS HAD BEEN MADE FOR THE MANAGER'S LIVING (SOME STAFF AS WELL) SO WE HAD TO REACQUIRE #14 WHICH, THENCEFORTH, WAS WHERE THE MANAGER STAYED.

CONTRACT MANAGEMENT - WE TRIED CONTRACT MANAGEMENT (TREADWAY), OUR OWN, AND VARIOUS OTHER FORMS, IT SEEMED, AND MOST DIDN'T WORK, OR WORK WELL ENOUGH TO PROJECT A WAY OUT OF OUR CONTINUAL OPERATING DEFICIT. IT WAS IN THIS PERIOD, AND WE ARE MOVING INTO THE SEVENTIES, THAT WE ACQUIRED THE OLD BEACH HOTEL, IMPROVED IT, BUILT ON TO GRAPETREE (CAPTIVE ROOMS, SET UP A EXECUTIVE NIGHTMARE (ALL CHIEFS AND NO INDIANS) AND PRESUMABLY, HAD IT MADE. DURING THIS PERIOD, WE BOUGHT (BUILT) TWO DESALINATION PLANTS AND A DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM STEMMING FROM THE 1,000,000 GALLON CISTERN WHICH LEAKED. THE SCHEME ENDED UP AS UNWORKABLE. HOWEVER, THE BEAT WENT ON. DURING THIS PERIOD, DON CADY WHO WAS A VICE PRESIDENT OF

NESTLES AND ONE OF THE ORIGINAL 'GRAPETREERS' TOOK HIS RETIREMENT, WENT TO DICK AND SUGGESTED SOME REAL EXECUTIVE OVERSEEING WAS INDICATED AND SAID HE WOULD BE GLAD TO DO SUCH FOR A DOLLAR A YEAR.

IT GREW, WRITHED AND CRASHED -THE IMPOSITION OF CADY ON THE ALREADY OVER EXECUTIVED HOTEL UNDERTAKING DIDN'T HELP. 'THEY' USED TO OPERATE FROM AN EXECUTIVE BUILDING BUILT FOR SUCH PURPOSE, ON THE GRAPETREE RESERVATION, CALLED 'THE WHITE HOUSE'. EVENTUALLY, DICK SIMPLY COULD NOT AFFORD THE RIDE ANY LONGER AND SOLD OUT, KEEPING THE MORTGAGE AND A SIZABLE ONE, JUST BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR 198?. SUCH ACTION WAS MANDATED BY TAX LOSS CONSIDERATIONS AND THE CONSIDERABLE GAIN REALIZED FROM THE SALES OF SOME BECTON DICKINSON SHARES. THIS INTRODUCED YET ANOTHER SERIES OF CHARACTERS, WITHOUT WHOM WE WOULD NOT HAVE ALL THIS EXCITING QUILTWORK . OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW!!!

SALE OF MORTGAGE - THIS TIME PERIOD IS A LITTLE FUZZY, EXTENDING ONLY A FEW YEARS, AND SOME OF THE FIGURES THAT I WILL USE ARE ONLY ROUND HOUSE NUMBERS MEANT TO GIVE A FLOW TO EVENTS. DURING THE CONTINUING PERIOD THE OWNER (?) HAD CONTINUING OPERATING PROBLEMS THAT SEEMED TO GET WORSE AND WORSE. THERE WAS POOR MANAGEMENT TO THE POINT THAT THE BILLS RAN UP AND THE INDEBTEDNESS TO WAPA WAS SUCH THAT THEY THREATENED TO TURN OFF POWER. A PERSONAGE NAMED GEORGE KING, OF DUTCH ORIGIN MARRIED TO A BLACK WOMAN WHO CLAIMED SHE WAS A AFRICAN PRINCESS BUT WAS REALLY FROM LAS VEGAS, OR SOMEWHERE OUT THERE, APPEARED ON THE SCENE, SAVED THE OPERATIONS, ASSUMED MORTGAGE PAYMENTS TO STOP FORECLOSURE, AND STAYED TO RUN A GOING PLANT. HIS IDEA WAS TO PURCHASE THE MORTGAGE. PAYMENTS FELL IN ARREARS, THERE SEEMED TO BE SOME SKIMMING (OR WHAT WAS THOUGHT TO BE DISHONEST ACCOUNTING PRACTICES) THAT RESULTED IN FORECLOSURE AND DICK'S SALE OF THE MORTGAGE. THE PURCHASER OF THE MORTGAGE WAS A SWISS FINANCIAL PERSON, A SPECIALIST IN BUYING DISTRESSED PROPERTIES, AMONG OTHER THINGS, AND UNLOADING THEM FOR A CONSIDERABLE PROFIT. IN THIS INSTANCE THE VALUATION OF THE GRAPETREE PACKAGE WAS SOME \$12,000,00, MAS A MENOS, AND THE MORTGAGE SOME 5/6 MILLION, IN ARREARS. ...

ENTER MONROE DODD - THE SWISS FINALLY FOUND A PURCHASER IN MONROE DODD. THE PURCHASE PRICE WAS REPORTED TO BE ABOUT \$7.000,000, AGAIN MAS A MENOS. A SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPER OF HOTEL PROPERTIES IN FLORIDA AND A HANDS-ON, SLEEVES-UP PERSON WHO COULD MAKE IT WORK BUT HAD NO DESIRE TO RUN IT. TO DO THAT, HE HAD A LADY FRIEND, QUITE A BIT YOUNGER, NAMED DIANE BECK WHO COULD, AND DID. WHEN 'THEY' TOOK OVER, HE CONCENTRATED ON GETTING THE 'PLANT' UP TO SNUFF AND SHE THE GUESTS COMING AND SATISFIED. IT MUST BE SAID THAT THEIR PRIORITY WAS THE BEACH HOTEL. THEY HAD ACQUIRED BOTH HOTELS AND ALL ANCILLARY PROPERTY IN THE MORTGAGE DEAL, AND SO GRAPETREE, WHILE NOT CLOSED, CONTINUED TO GET LITTLE ATTENTION; HOWEVER, THE 'TEAM' DUG IN AND THERE WAS HOPE.

THE BEACH HOTEL DEAL - THINGS WERE STABLE AND IMPROVING WITH EACH SHINING MINUTE AND, OF ALL THINGS, THE BEACH HOTEL WAS MAKING MONEY. MONROE SAID HE FIGURED IT WOULD TAKE TIME AND ALOT OF MONEY TO GET THINGS IN THE BLACK AND WAS PLEASED THAT THE PROFITS WERE RELIEVING FURTHER CAPITAL EXPENDITURE. THEN CAME THE BIG ENCHILADA - AN OFFER FROM DIVI, A CARIBBEAN HOTEL CHAIN, TO BUY THE BEACH HOTEL. THE DEAL WAS DID AND THE PRICE WAS REPORTED TO BE ABOUT 11,000,000.

ALMOST THERE - MONROE DODD PUT ALL HIS ENERGY INTO BRINGING THE PLANT, IN POOR REPAIR, UP TO SPEED AND DIANE BECK (I USED TO CALL HER LADY DI) REALLY CONCENTRATED ON THE HOTEL AND PLANTING. THINGS WERE REALLY 'LOOKING GOOD', THE PLANTING LOVELY AND THE BOOKINGS GETTING BETTER WHEN LADY DI WAS STRICKEN WITH CANCER. WHILE BEGINNING THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE - CHEMO AND THE WORKS - 'HUGO' SWEEPED IN AND CLAIMED, AS ITS VICTIM AMONG MANY INCLUDING MY HOUSE, THE HOTEL. IT BROKE DIANE'S SPIRIT BUT NOT HER WILL TO LIVE AS SHE SURVIVED WELL OVER A YEAR AFTER HUGO, IN FLORIDA. MEANWHILE, THE PLANT WAS LEFT TO ROT, AS IT WERE. THE ARGUMENT OVER INSURANCE, ETC, WAS INTERMINABLE AND IS PROBABLY STILL GOING ON, FOR THAT MATTER, BUT NO PLANS ARE AFOOT TO REBUILD EVEN IF THE MONIES WERE RECOVERED. MONROE LOST HEART AND HERE IT IS, 1996 AND NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE. SOME 'BOYS', WHO WERE LIVING IN THE ABANDONED LOBBY OF THE HOTEL AND WHO, PRESUMABLY WERE GUARDING WHAT GOODIES WERE LEFT, STARTED TO TIDY UP AROUND THE AREA. THEY WERE TOLD TO CEASE AND DESIST AS DODD HAD NO LIABILITY INSURANCE AND COULD NOT GET ANY.

SOMEDAY, THERE WILL BE A RECOVERY. GRAPETREE HAS GONE A LONG WAY IN REBUILDING ITS ALMOST TOTAL DEVASTATION AND TOMORROW LOOMS BRIGHTER - UNLESS, OF COURSE, ANOTHER HURRICANE ARRIVES. WE HAD THREE CLOSE ALMOST-ESCAPES IN 1995,'96,'97, AND '98. I, FOR ONE, WILL BE ON MY KNEES FROM 6/15 TO 11/15 OF EACH YEAR, AS WILL, NO DOUBT, ALL OF US.

(THIS IS A POST SCRIPT - IN ADDITION TO 'ALL THE GRAPETREE PROPERTY' THAT DICK DICKINSON AQUIRED, HE BOUGHT SOME X ACRES IN THE JACK'S BAY AREA, RUNNING ACROSS ISLAND TO KRAMER'S PARK, FROM ALEXIS LECHINE AND 'OSCAR OF THE WALDORF' WHO HAD ACQUIRED IT FOR ALMOST NO MONEY DOWN, SMALL AMOUNT AND FOR SPECULATION. WHILE SAVING A MINISCALE AMOUNT FOR HIS DAUGHTER AND GIVING A MAJOR AMOUNT TO THE V.I. GOVERNMENT, HE EVENTUALLY SOLD THE REST (SOME 300 ACRES IN JACK'S BAY) TO A DEVELOPER WHO HAD SOME GRANDIOSE SCHEMES. SUCH WOULD HAVE COMPROMISED THE SERENITY (OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF IT) OF GRAPETREE BAY AND THE PROBLEMS OF GETTING COASTAL ZONE APPROVAL AND OTHER 'PERMISSIONS' HAS BEEN GOING ON FOREVER. DICK DICKINSON, HAVING NEVER RECOVERED ANY MORTGAGE PAYMENTS FROM A NOW DEFUNCT 'CORPORATE' DEVELOPER STILL. HOWEVER, FIGHTING FOR BUILDING RIGHTS [TO BAIL HIM OUT?], BROUGHT FORECLOSURE PROCEDINGS. A FAVORABLE RULING HAS BEEN GRANTED AND THE PROPERTY HAS BEEN RETURNED TO THE DICKINSON ESTATE. THIS HAS BEEN THE HOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTALISTS, CHAMPIONED AMONG MANY BY ROBBIE BIDELSPACHER. AT THIS POINT, THERE IS OPTIMISM THAT DICKINSON ESTATE WILL IMMOBILIZE THE PROPERTY BE GIVING IT TO EITHER THE V.I. GOVERNMENT OR THE NATURE CONSERVANCY. [AS OF THE ALTTER PART OF 1997, THE LAND HAS BEEN RECOVERED AND ITS TRANSFER TO THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IS BEING WORKED OUT; HOWEVER, AS I UNDERSTAND IT, LIMITED ACCESS TO THE AREA REMAINS A LESS-INTENSE WORRY OF GRAPETREE.]

(THIS WAS WRITTEN OVER A PERIOD OF SEVERAL DAYS IN APRIL, 1996. CONVERSATIONS WITH MANY WHO HAVE SINCE COME TO GRAPETREE HAVE CONVINCED ME TO OUTLINE PART OF OUR HISTORY SO THAT WE CAN ALL BE IN AWE AT WHERE WE ARE CONSIDERING WHERE WE HAVE BEEN. THERE ARE MANY SUB-STORIES, MOST OF THEM UNBELIEVABLE, THAT SOMEDAY SHOULD BE TOLD. PERHAPS THEY WILL.)

[THIS POST SCRIPT IS REWRITTEN IN NOVEMBER, 1998. REGRETTABLY, CLEAN UP OF THE 'MESS' IS AT A STANDSTILL WITH EFFORTS STILL BEING MADE TO MOTIVATE MONROE DODD TO DO SOMETHING; HOWEVER, THE DIVI HOTEL WHICH HAS LAIN FALLOW SINCE HUGO, IS IN THE LATE STAGES OF BEING RESTORED AND IS SCHEDULED(?) TO OPEN IN THE SPRING OF '99. THIS WILL ALSO RECORD THAT OF THE 2 REMAINING GRAPETREE ORIGINALS (DATING FROM 57/58), HAROLD HOLCOMBE DIED IN FEBRUARY LEAVING THE AUTHOR ALONE IN HIS SOLE KNOWLEDGE OF WHERE THE BONES WERE BURIED. THE REGRETTABLE THING IS THAT SO MUCH TIME HAS PASSED THAT THERE IS NO ONE AROUND TO GIVE MUCH OF A DAMN.

[THE DATE IS MAY 11TH AND THE CHANGS (LORNA AND DAVID) HAVE JUST SPENT A DELIGHTFUL NIGHT WITH US, CATCHING UP. DAVID WAS SURPRISED TO FIND THAT I WAS THE ONLY LIVING SURVIVOR OF THE ORIGINAL GROUP, MANY OF WHICH HE HAD DEALINGS WITH BEFORE THINGS FELL APART. MEMORIES WELLED FROM THE EARLY DAYS AND WHILE I FOUND OUT SOME THINGS I HAD NOT KNOWN, THEY WERE NOT SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH TO CHANGE THE GIST OF THIS 'HISTORY' WHICH IS, INDEED, BROAD BRUSH AND EXTENDS OVER MANY YEARS. THE GRAPETREE HOTEL STILL REMAINS A RUIN BUT HOPE STILL IS THAT SOMEONE WILL COME ALONG, BUY IT AND FIX IT UP.

AT THE BEACH HOTEL, THERE IS NOW FRENZIED REBUILDING AND THE BUILDING OF A SEPARATE CASINO FOR GAMBLING, WHICH WAS APPROVED OVER 2 YEARS AGO BUT HAS BEEN SLOW GETTING STARTED. IT IS SUPPOSED TO GET UNDER WAY BEFORE THE MILLENIUM BUT IN ST. CROIX, IT'S A TOSS-UP AND THE HURRICANE SEASON IS COMING. THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IS ON THE BRINK OF GETTING THE JACK'S BAY AREA AND THEREBY REMOVING THE THREAT OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT TO THE EAST. WHEN DAVID FINALLY GETS BACK TO GRAPENUTS, AS HE CALLS IT, HE WILL FIND IT SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT AND STILL STRUGGLING. NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDEWAY FOR THE CHANGS TO HAVE AN EXTENDED FAMILY GATHERING IN '00 AT, NO LESS, THE AUTHOR'S 'CHALET' WHICH, HAVING BEEN COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY HUGO, WAS CLONED FROM DAVID'S ORIGINAL PLANS.)