

SERENDIPITY

Richard George Pitzl , 1937-2021

Judith Catherine Pitzl, 1940-2003

By Steven Pitzl

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Richard was born to Martin and Loretta Pitzl on October 15, 1937 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the second of four children. His father had emigrated from the Weimar Republic of Germany in 1920 as a young engineer, to escape its rampant post-WWI inflation. Martin Pitzl soon found work as a machinist and shop foreman and in 1932 he married Loretta E. Benke, a native of Milwaukee who was also of German descent.

During his teens Richard worked summers at a service station and then on the washing assembly line of a soda bottling plant. By age 17 he was driving a delivery truck to stock soda machines at several West Allis and Milwaukee factories. Enticed by this busy environment he soon set his sights on becoming an engineer himself and, upon graduation, enrolled at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. In 1959 Richard married his high school sweetheart Judith C. Rademacher, daughter of Phil and Leone Rademacher of Milwaukee.

As the young couple started to build a grubstake they worked separate jobs: Judy in sales and later as a secretary at an employment agency, Richard as a letterpress operator at a firm that produced wedding invitations. He then joined another printing business that was in the process of converting their operation from letterpress to the more modern offset method. This involved all new machinery and the building of a darkroom to process film. It was then he recognized that offset printing was the future, and recast himself from any vague aspiration of engineering to become a practical engineer who specialized in letterpress-to-offset conversion. His plans always included someday being proprietor of his own printing business.

With that company's conversion a success there was less allure for him to continue as a simple press and darkroom operator. He continued full-time but started using the family's savings to make incremental purchases of printing equipment: a miniature letterpress with some type, an offset press, a simple camera and office typewriter. Judy was still working, looking forward to be a partner in a new business. They rented a storefront at the triple intersection of Beecher, Burnham and Beloit (to be christened 'The Busy B') in West Allis and gathered equipment. Richard's father helped him build a thermal conveyor for drying heat-set letterpress ink, a device that resembles a small roller pizza oven. They were poised to open their new business. The year was 1960.

Suddenly — Richard received his Army draft notice as did so many other young men in those times, and business plans were turned upside down. He reported to Fort Chaffee in the city of Fort Smith, Arkansas. As his partner and now "Army wife," Judy's first unpleasant task was to empty the commercial building space they had so meticulously stocked and sell most of the equipment. She later left Wisconsin and joined him in Fort Smith, and from a small rental house he commuted to the Army base. Despite the disruption to their lives Richard had a great stroke of good fortune. He was assigned to the 66th MP Company attached to the 82nd Airborne. As his tour of duty began he was surrounded by career veterans returned from Korea, but his company had not yet been assigned to Vietnam.

When his span of compulsory service ended in 1963, the 66th was only months away from receiving the call. Aside from some very tense moments when they were packed and ready to be summoned to Cuba during Kennedy's Missile Crisis, Richard's most notable assignment with the 66th was a one-month occupation of Oxford, Mississippi. This historic US Army operation ensured the peaceful attendance and continued safety of James Meredith, the first African-American to successfully enroll at the University of Mississippi. Richard's MP company was an even mix of races then seldom seen in civilian life of the American South. He described his thoughts and those of other MPs as "baffled" by the ignorance of the segregationists. When a fellow MP showed up at bunk check wearing a replica Union soldier cap, it was promptly confiscated.

Richard and Judy returned immediately to Wisconsin after his Honorable Discharge from the Army late in 1963. They stayed for a time with Richard's parents, but not to settle. Now that their options were open, his recollection of life-long bouts with pneumonia and a serious flare-up he claimed imperiled his life, tempered any resolve to settle in Wisconsin. Judy was likewise open to adventure. They learned there was a baby on the way. Richard had read Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* as a child and had dreamed of warmer latitudes. So the next chapter, though brief, is an odd and interesting piece of family lore. In apparent disregard of pneumonia, they packed a U-Haul trailer and headed for — New York City!

What is interesting is that city life itself never held any allure for them, before or since. But aside from a general impression that there would be opportunity and perhaps some letterpress-to-offset conversion happening there, the city also drew them because New York City was the declared epicenter of Ayn Rand and the new Objectivist Movement. Richard and Judy were curious about the philosophy in the same way other young couples of the era were exploring the Beatnik and Hippie movements. Perhaps they were some sort of proto-libertarians. If things had worked out the story might have been very different. They found a place in Brooklyn among a row of row-houses and moved in with their Arkansas tomcat.

Things did not work out. The cat cautiously ventured out to explore a few times and returned. But days later he did not return. Subsequently, he was spotted mewling at an identical door two identical houses over. This is significant because Richard noted it every time he recalled New York. They attended lectures and made new friends, but also glimpsed a dramatic side of Rand that had followers gossiping about her inner circle, which was less interesting.

But the clincher was Richard's prospects. He went through the Yellow Pages and visited printing firms, but the city seemed to be short on printing presses. Despite grandiose claims and detailed bullet lists of equipment and services, he would arrive at an address to find only a person and a desk and a phone. He called these "I'll get it done for you" people. After a few lukewarm offers he found a large building with actual presses and people, and was hired on the spot. But he discovered by day's end that the Union would be scrutinizing him to ensure he never did anything he wasn't hired for, and dues would be deducted whether he joined or not. He did not return the next day. Judy had also found nothing of interest.

By this time their firstborn was kicking in the womb and they decided that meant the baby didn't want to be born in New York. Barely a month after their arrival in the city, Richard returned to U-Haul and found the very same trailer they had used, waiting. So it was back to Wisconsin with bindle-sack, cat and trailer. By 1964's end they were renting a cozy A-frame in the woods near Hartford, and Judy was a happy new stay-at-home mother. There was a mid-sized pond on the property and Richard bought a tiny sloop with a centerboard keel and taught himself to sail, Wisconsin summers permitting.

Richard had been enticed to join a regional newspaper plant in the process of converting its papers from letterpress. In this capacity he was in the confident position of helping to select equipment and took charge of designing and streamlining typesetting, paste-up, darkroom, and stripping prepress operations. Richard's aptitude and ability were so prized by the owner, Chinnners, he was at one point earning the highest wage in the plant, which ruffled a few feathers. He would continue as a valued employee until the day they left Wisconsin.

The Hartford years 1964-1970 were busy with full-time work at the news plant which offered a full career and advancement, but the wanderlust remained and the couple kept yearning for their own business, even if operated from the kitchen table. The Kluge (kloo-gee) letterpress — named 'Waltzing Matilda' by Richard's mother from the sound it made — had been stored at the parents' house and was now installed in basement. Judy was on an errand one day and, by pure luck, spotted in someone's dusty corner the very same thermal conveyor Richard's father Martin had helped him build, and she had been forced to sell years earlier. "You can have it, we have no use for it now, but you can see it was cleverly built." Other acquisitions, a tabletop proofing-press and a cabinet of old wood block type from a newspaper converted to offset,

rounded out the basic requirements to print letterpress business cards, envelopes, stationery and wedding invitations. Richard may have been an offset printing genius, but he knew the timeless value of older letterpress technology and it was cheap and available.

But even this small operation, run out of the Pitzl A-frame in the Wisconsin woods, took a novel turn. One day Richard noticed an ad in a magazine that offered to mail you for \$1, an adhesive bumper sticker that said "[your name] for President". What if, he wondered, you could say anything at all? They were near the nexus of many country, county and state fairs, even rock concerts, that brought thousands of people together for a day, a weekend or a week. Print shops tend to be bulky affairs but this idea could fit in a booth. Use wood type in a small chase to set a custom message with large letters in less than a minute. Roll over the type with heat-set ink and the portable proof-press would transfer a sharp type image onto a single strip of vividly fluorescent ('Day-Glo' it was called) sticker with a peel-off backing. And, to satisfy the impulses that ensure entrepreneurial success, the thermal conveyor could dry the ink in a couple more minutes, bumper-ready.

By 1969 the portable bumper sticker business operated by Richard and Judy was a reality and had traveled to dozens of fairs. "Anything you want to say for \$1. Browse box 50 cents." It could fit under a tent and everything, even the tent, folded and fit neatly inside a converted International ambulance. So long as electricity was available they were in business. One photo still exists of this booth with Richard inking a sticker for a customer. Behind him is a backdrop with dozens of sample stickers. The photo is black & white but in reality the stickers were a visual riot of color. Judy was the final judge of any sample's appropriateness for this display since their business traveled between venues with widely different attitudes, so it consists mainly of the clever and the kitsch. But this was the late 1960s, the messages people wanted and the Pitzls printed were varied and at times angry or zany (but never obscene).

On January 18, 1970 they were snowed in knee-deep but the road had been plowed and the Sunday paper was waiting. Within it was a UPI wire story that had been published in papers across the country with the somewhat sensational headline, "Too much prosperity causes problem in Virgin Islands." Melvin H. Evans, last-appointed and soon to be first-elected Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands, was describing the Territory's rise in popularity with American tourists and its struggle to retain cultural identity, yet his message of optimism for the future was straightforward and the friendly invitation was clear. The Pitzls had been considering a move to some warmer place, perhaps Hawaii or Guam, and the USVI suddenly appeared on their horizon. It was no contest. Richard would later quip good-naturedly, "Mel Evans promised me two jobs. He didn't say I would need them both."

Judy sat down at the kitchen table and typed out a formal letter of introduction to the St. Thomas Chamber of Commerce. Richard's printing and engineering credentials must have raised a flag somehow, for his letter found its way with what seemed like blinding speed into the hands of Ariel Melchior Sr. of the Virgin Islands Daily News. Some weeks later Mr. Melchior telephoned directly. Pleasantries soon gave way to a discussion of the challenges the Daily News was facing and the practical query, "How soon could you arrive?" The Daily News had converted to offset some six years before and its Fairchild press was now in need of repair and refurbishment in time to produce the upcoming 40th anniversary edition.

In Spring of 1970 Richard flew alone to St. Thomas to see if his expertise could help the Daily News, and scope out the islands to settle. The flight from San Juan was interesting, the views breathtaking and the abrupt landing of the small propeller plane was exciting in its own way. He was met by Mr. Melchior and as they drove into town Melchior said unexpectedly, "I spoke to your boss. He wants to buy the paper." Richard's Wisconsin boss was becoming a media mogul and as fate would have it, Melchior had actually met Chinnners and befriended him a couple years earlier at a publishers conference. Among media moguls such offers to buy are fronted in small talk and received as praise, but for a moment Richard found it funny to imagine himself as part of some package. He later described his bosses' prior acquaintance as 'serendipitous' — a word he often used to describe coincidences in life that could be seen as positive signs — and of their friendship he said, "It was inevitable. They were great men. Big men. They stood head high above the others and probably spotted each other from across the room."

The Fairchild press at the Daily News had run reliably and continually for several years but had now reached the stage where a single problem requires immediate attention. Unfortunately, it was also the case that the single-problem solution involved shutdown and partial disassembly. This is a nuisance to a daily paper, yet also a terrifying prospect for skilled operators of large machinery who discover that all temporary workarounds, even their greatest triumphs to meet deadlines, has led them to some sort of final reckoning. So it was that barely an hour after the plane touched down and after a few hasty introductions, Richard was presented with 'the problem'.

Offset chemistry can be corrosive to metals and the rubber blankets of those newspaper presses seldom needed changing, but this one had needed to be changed for months now, and the steel bail mechanism that held it in place (of particularly poor design) had finally frozen solid after years of increasing difficulty to operate. To make matters worse, its levers were bent. As Richard explained that the best solution at this point was to remove gears and lift the whole 300 pound cylinder out of the press, take it to a machine shop to hydraulically push the

bail out, straighten the levers, clean everything and re-insert it, his recommendation was answered with a nervous silence.

When he pointed out the cause of “the problem” was poor design and suggested that longer and stouter bars could be welded on to ensure that the levers would not bend again, senior operator Ernest Gerrard smiled and nodded vigorously. Richard had just made his newest friend, for Gerrard had suggested this also. Gerrard felt completely absolved from blame, and at last saw a clear path to the solution. Practical engineering can involve not only the expertise to figure how it needs to be done, but also the confidence and courage to begin. With the help of Corneiro's machine shop in Sub Base, the whole operation was completed over a weekend, and they didn't even miss a paper. They had fixed it with "no need to even leave the island!" Richard wrote triumphantly in a letter to Judy.

Solving any difficult problem without having to go off-island became a point of personal pride for Richard. He later refined the concept as a series of stages: no need to leave the island, no need to leave the building, or the room, or no need to drive to that second place to find any necessary piece or part. He then, rather conveniently, stretched it to include laziness as a vital component of effective problem-solving.

As his month in St. Thomas extended to two, the lone Richard had the press running smoothly and factory-perfect, adjusted the chemistry for better impressions and less ink, replaced some hardware in the finicky air-driven actuators that were the boon (and bane) of that model, and shared some tricks of the trade he had observed in the Milwaukee plant. Some of these were new to the St. Thomas operators who had only ever received hasty on-the-job training. One trick was very well-received, the so-called "flying splice" where a can of spray adhesive is used to mate the cut edge of a new newsprint roll to the dangling edge of the old, to draw it tightly through the press eliminating any need to re-thread or re-adjust. "You can even sell the paper!" (with the splice) he announced. No applause was forthcoming, but the next day there was an anonymous bottle of rum with his name on it.

Richard was made very welcome by his new friends at the Daily News, each in their own way. Tugged along to their favorite watering holes, invited to dinners, they competed with island tours to show him 'this view' or 'that view' as if one of them wouldn't be enough. After a brief stay at the Midtown Guest House, The Melchiors graciously stocked and prepared a room for him on the 2nd floor of the old Grand Hotel. The hotel itself had recently closed but was still operating during the day as a restaurant, so at night Richard found himself to be the only one in the building. "Just me and the ghosts," he wrote one night. They were friendly ghosts, and he would sit with them and gaze from the spacious balcony overlooking the park, to the lights of boats in the harbor. While sitting at breakfast the next morning he ended the letter with,

"We'll move here — if you are willing." With that letter in hand, Judy called him at the Daily News to say yes.

With that future prospect in mind, Richard returned to Wisconsin to pack and sell off vehicles and accumulated printing assets, this time also the beloved letterpress 'Waltzing Matilda.' Two families pooled their capital to buy the whole lot, but of their principal interest was in the portable bumper sticker business. After a bit of training, the potential owners took it to a fair for a trial run. Since Richard was busy it was Judy who accompanied them and walked through the finer points of each process. She had suggested that the business was so lucrative the new owners might even recoup the entire investment within a single busy year, and at fair's end she gifted them with a cash box of almost \$500 to prove it. When the final offer was made it was generous, and The Pitzls now had \$10,000 plus in savings to begin their great Virgin Islands adventure.

Richard had not been idle. From the moment Judy called down to give the green light to relocating, he had started the process on his end. Soon he acquired a used 1968 Volvo and rented a fine concrete house in Hospital Ground with a veranda of beautiful stone-walled masonry overlooking the hospital, stadium and harbor. He had begun to stock it with furniture: a fridge, some chairs, a table, and a master bed.

All The Pitzls that were then — Richard, Judy and son Steven, now almost six — touched down in St. Thomas at the beginning of July 1970, in late afternoon. A friend who introduced himself to Judy as 'Mello' picked them up and shuttled everyone downtown where Richard's car was parked, and helped transfer luggage. Richard drove on the left. Judy knew this already but, as so often happens, she was still not prepared for it. The car snaked through town and past the (old) hospital and left up the hill, turned right, curved left and through a sharp right switchback and immediately up another hill that looked suspiciously vertical, and would have been had there not been ridges to climb. Up some more to an intersection of three roads where he turned sharply left, then suddenly hit the brake and began coasting backwards. This was an expert move though no one else knew it at the time. Finally letting out the clutch to propel forward over the hump and down the same road from which he had come, to veer to the left into a parking space that would have tumbled down the hill had it not been retained by a retaining wall. While Judy and Steven eyed the wall and concrete veranda somewhat below and the steep steps leading down to it, with a bit of vertigo, Richard was already extolling the virtues. "See? Even the parking places have views!"

Books and household items would arrive later by slow boat. After unpacking into closets and drawers, trying out a portable radio someone had left in the house, sifting through touristy literature, admiring Charlotte Amalie as it faded to twilight and illuminated night, the family

finally retired comfortably with the front door wide open. "The mosquitoes will find us tomorrow," Richard announced in a tone that almost made it seem like good news. He had it all on that day, or all he had ever wanted. There was no bed for Steven that first day, but cool tiles on concrete have always been good enough for him. Later that night the newest arrivals learned the meaning of a passage from one of Richard's letters, "The roosters begin at 3, or 4, or 2."

As 1971 began Judy was expecting her second child and working part-time at Barringer Advertising. The newspaper was running smoothly and Richard was starting his next major project for Melchior, clearing out an interior space in the middle of the Daily News courtyard directly beneath Kay Atchison's dance studio. It had once contained letterpress equipment and later the composing section, now upstairs, and had its own door off the street. This was to become Caribbean Graphics, a modern offset print shop. The premier purchase was a brand new Heidelberg press that could print full unfolded newspaper size, so Melchior could print specialty color covers or page inserts for the Daily News, and a smaller ATF Chief press. Other items included a paper cutter and Baumfolder that had been salvaged from Antilles Printing in Krum Bay, closed after the Carib Gas explosion and fire. There was also a brand new Roneotronic scanner, just introduced, that put out continuous-tone color separations to photograph through special angled halftone screens for print-ready negatives, an island first. Richard loved to build print shops and this was his best yet.

The year 1971 also brought two other blessings — a daughter Rosie, and the culmination of a life-long dream — his very own sailboat, purchased with a good part of the remaining bumper sticker money. "A sailboat with somewhere to sail to!" he reminded Judy, thinking of those intricate tacking maneuvers on the small pond, more instructive than dreamworthy. It was a beautiful 26' wooden sloop he would have christened "Serendipity" had it not already been dubbed the "Happiness Is." The sailboat was moored in Cruz Bay. One fine, light, breezy day after finalizing the sale, Richard brought the family aboard and secured the dinghy, tested the long shaft outboard, unfurled and set sail for St. Thomas. It was literally the first time he had ever sailed a larger boat, and he did the island traverse with confidence and caution. As a final test, he veered wide to the ocean as the boat approached the narrow Benner Bay entrance and started a gradual turn, adjusted sail for the new angle, lined up the entrance... and passed between the buoys with only sail and rudder. Then started the motor, for prudence's sake. A perfect maiden voyage.

All The Pitzls that were, were happily sailing each or every other weekend, never very far and mostly between Jost Van Dyke, Tortola and St. John. One tense and windy day in 1975 the keel was fouled in a floating net near Frenchcap and the boat heeled menacingly. Before he could luff the sails, bolts sheared and the keel was lost. He carefully motored in after breathing a sigh

of relief at the sight of dry bilges. Serendipity after all? A new keel was being fitted in drydock but by then demands of a family-owned shop left little time for sailing. The 'Hap' was sold as is. Richard's computer desktop background in later years was a photograph he had taken aboard the 'Hap' under full sail, heading West along the South Side of St. Thomas towards Benner Bay. Perhaps that is one of the places his mind has finally come to rest.

From 1971-1973 Caribbean Graphics was thriving and slowly expanding, now with several full-time employees. Richard flew stateside with Melchior on a junket to evaluate new newspaper presses to replace the Fairchild. After looking at several, including fancy four color models and configurations, they settled on units of Goss Community, an established machine that (Richard assured him) was simple, sturdy and would hold up well. The initial Goss was less expensive than many and as an added bonus, would actually fit within the cramped space of the Back Street building.

He brought Judy on board and for the first time in St. Thomas they were running a shop in tandem, with Judy doing books, typesetting and paste-up. In May 1973 she had her final child, daughter Susan. Soon after, they had decided to part with Caribbean Graphics. There was some disappointment and tension between Melchior and The Pitzls, but no lasting ill will.

Ariel Melchior, Sr., treasured family friend, was the last boss Richard would ever have, last in a series of bosses who were sorry to see him go. It was a forward movement towards owning their own shop free and clear, just as they had envisioned all along. Judy had always handled the money and had the final word on big decisions, for which Richard expressed pride and gratefulness. He was entrepreneurial yet always content to earn a living wage plus some. As if some biological clock was ticking, it was Judy who said "now or never."

St. Thomas Graphics was started on a budget. The \$20,000 Barclays loan with only a sailboat as collateral was vetted verbally (not co-signed) by Isidor Paiewonsky and several other printing customers who confidentially assured the bank the business was a good risk. The entire shop was provisioned for less than the landed cost of Melchior's Heidelberg press, so there could be no new presses, color separation scanners or even photo-typesetters. Richard toured the Florida Appel Mackie warehouse and filled a container with a simple one-color 1947 Lum Harris, a small Davidson, a Baumfolder, NuArc camera and darkroom sink, a couple light tables, and various new and used cans of ink. The single costliest item was a brand new Adast Maxima paper cutter for \$4500.

The Harris press was quite a find. It was cheap and being sold as-is, but Richard knew that precise model well and had used several of them at Wisconsin shops. The practical engineer's confidence was high, and 'good t'ing' as they say, for when it first ran it suffered from a subtle-but-serious feed problem that would mystify most but Richard the least. He quickly identified

one of the hidden tensile springs as the culprit and fixed it with a paperclip. The press (with the same paperclip) ran smoothly until 1998, and was the heart of the business. The essential equipment and shipping totaled around \$12,000.

One crucial difference from some other island printers was that Graphics remained committed to IBM Selectric impact typesetting through the entire age of photo-typesetting, avoiding large capital outlays and the headaches of typesetter computers and chemistry. The Selectric Composers were typewriters with proportional spacing and justification, a hard plastic ball striking a letterform through plastic one-use carbon ribbon onto brilliant white paper. The recommended paper had a backing of actual pressed clay. The clay deadened each impact, saving the type ball and machine from damage or wear. Its type was crisp and precise even for small serifs. Materials were expensive, the typewriter itself practically unaffordable. But IBM offered aggressive leasing arrangements and though it set them back as much as \$400-\$800 a month, when it broke down, IBM covered technician time and airfare from Puerto Rico. The IBM unit was very intricate but well-made. Though he wasn't supposed to touch them, Richard traced and replaced many a broken internal spring and removed countless unmentionable items from between the keys.

With the container from Miami on the way, Richard and Judy were left with ~\$8,000 to rent the ground floor of 34 Norre Gade (now the Zora's building), purchase paper and chemicals, initiate the lease with IBM, and buy a used car. With cosmic silliness, The Pitzls were literally driving away from Caribbean Graphics for the last time when their car gave out completely on Back Street. The 34 Norre Gade building had been empty for awhile and needed deep cleaning. When the container arrived, permanent jack-posts had to be installed under stairs and floors before the press and paper cutter could move in. Finally, in August 1973, the print shop they had intended to open in 1960 — their very own — was open and operating.

Among the very first jobs printed was V.I. Forum magazine and flyers for A.H. Riise.

Richard and Judy Pitzl operated St.Thomas Graphics from 1973 to 2003, the year of Judy's passing. While Judy was active in the community and most often the face of the business, Richard was always the one to see the process through, his hands the last to touch the final product. Although they were both skilled in many areas and one would often help the other, they maintained a strict division of labor with no expectation that the other must help, unless it was an emergency. Richard never typed, Judy never did darkroom or final placement of negatives onto a stripping mask or burned plates. Richard never sat with customers to organize copy, Judy never ran a press. Richard never did the final quote on a job. He explained, "She crafted the one. My job was to make more."

Specific innovations of Richard Pitzl during the Graphics years – "in the simple pursuit of our hobby," as he once declared in an ad to generalize the entirety of it — are too numerous by far to mention here, as are the names of all the good people, employees and friends, customers and benefactors, places and dates, challenges accepted and problems solved, milestones and nose-to-the-grindstones. Some day the Author hopes to chronicle these to the greatest extent possible. The couple were personally and professionally a synergy that is — was — sublime.

Graphics employed anyone who was willing, island professionals and transients alike, but especially dear to them were the young who started after school, arrived seeking a new career or just needed part-time work. If you asked for something to do you might find yourself in a practical and useful apprenticeship, for it so happens that skills learned in a print shop are very useful in life. All three Pitzl offspring can attest to this, having been given the gift of immersion in the family printshop early and often. It's hard to describe how being treated as a valued and integral member of 'the shop' (from a young age) gave one a sense of ownership in the final product. It's a mark of Richard's kindness and skill as a father that these lessons seemed natural.

Youngest daughter Susan proved surprisingly adept at scheduling part-time hires, tapping into a vast social network to help staff and supervise the bindery. Several weekly and monthly publications hinged on ensuring sufficient staff to meet hard deadlines. It didn't hurt, of course, that this work paid about twice the minimum wage of the time.

Young Graphics hires would go on to other shops, whole printing careers or college after several years, and Richard always considered these his "outside children." Any who agreed to be summoned on weekends or the occasional all-nighter were especially prized, for Judy was often exhausted after the organizational and artistic task of preparing an intricate job for print. As Richard and the 'crew' toiled through the night, Judy wanted to return home, sit reading for awhile eating potato chips, and go to bed.

When the shop finally embraced laser typesetting in 1993 it was Judy who mastered the computer, and by stages took on the scanning and on-screen placement of photos and line art, even color separations. By their established division of labor it was Richard for whom decades of offset experience was becoming obsolete.

But it had been an innovation by Richard, a simple one, that had made this 'twilight era' of offset printing — 1993-2000 — even possible. By 1995 Judy was producing pages on the laser, photos and all, with acceptable (halftone) screen resolution — whole finished pages. But Graphics never purchased a typical and expensive part of this computer age process, a 'rip' or direct computer-to-negative photographic printer, such as made by Panther. Laser printed halftone dots or type with small serifs are difficult or impossible to reproduce on camera. How

did he manage to do it? By laser printing to smooth-coated paper which has no grain, setting a piece of film emulsion-up onto the camera's vacuum surface, laying the laser printed sheet face down over it, figuratively emulsion (toner) to emulsion (film), securing with clear acetate and giving a long exposure through the paper with bright overhead light. As long as Judy could produce pages of the actual size printed on press, this 'contact method' worked. Thus, it is an exaggeration to say the camera itself became obsolete. Rather it was the traditional method of optically projecting through a lens from copyboard to film, that Richard rendered unnecessary. Under this new regime even the traditional act of stripping — which once could involve the placement of dozens of items on a press flat — was now streamlined to an amazing extent. Just a few pages' negatives placed, add register marks, and done. Sometimes Judy even put register marks on the page, margins permitting.

Around 2000, when Graphics retired most offset printing except for long or simple jobs and began to print letter and tabloid size on HP 8550 color lasers, it was Richard who mastered the finicky operation of these machines, refilled toner cartridges and replaced the (laughable) 'killer chips' that attempted to force users to source all supplies from the manufacturer, and destroy the bottom line. Old dogs can learn new tricks and he learned these tricks well.

Another Graphics acquisition of the era who cannot escape notice was a parrot, a green-cheeked conure who had named himself 'Squiggits' by whispering it into Richard's ear. After an initial period of flying mayhem as visitors and customers were suddenly terrified (or elated) to find a bird on the shoulder, a screen door was installed between back and front office. Squiggits settled down and chose Richard as his alpha human. Richard had arrived in St. Thomas in no small part by reading Treasure Island as a boy. He had sailed the islands without committing a single act of piracy. But in grizzled appearance and a bushy beard, the parrot made him look the part.

In 2003 Judy fell ill and passed on. The Pitzl children Steven, Rose and Susan gathered from on- and off-island to surround him with love, and amongst themselves debated the question, what now? Of them only Steven was able even to attempt to fill his mother's shoes, so he tried, resuming some echo of normalcy and continuity at St. Thomas Graphics. This would not have been possible without the invaluable contribution of one of Graphics' long time artists and dear family friend, turned professional partner, Karl H. Callwood.

The sisters, meanwhile, began to lay the groundwork for their father's eventual retirement. With supreme effort and a broken heart, Richard pressed on and did what he had always done, in familiar surroundings. When his actual beating heart began to give menacing signals a couple years later the children gathered once more to present him with options. He was weary, and to their surprise, he accepted. In 2005 Richard left St. Thomas to seek medical care and

take sanctuary with daughter Rose in Maryland. His St. Thomas Graphics chapter had come to a close.

Richard's heart stabilized with medical care and he enjoyed a quiet year in Maryland reunited with his daughters' families and grandchildren. The only problem was that Winter really vexed him, late Fall and early Spring only slightly less so. The pneumonia had returned with a vengeance, almost life-threatening, but soon he was ambulatory and a bit stir crazy. The family explored options and a kind, serendipitous invitation came from only 900 miles away.

Fran Burgess was one of the first people he had met at the Virgin Islands Daily News in 1970. She had even later joined the Graphics team, and all told, three generations of Burgesses had been employed over its 30 years of operation. Now Fran was a retired matriarch, living a solitary and mostly serene existence in Homosassa, Florida, painting and gardening with occasional visits from her boisterous family. The Pitzls shopped around and found a 1991 Coachmen van conversion RV in nearby Pennsylvania. After a few minor repairs and a new GPS unit Richard called 'the British chick,' it was stocked for adventure and independence.

With Squiggits on his shoulder and the window cracked only slightly to ensure he would stay that way, Winter close on his heels, he hit the road as a Snowbird, in his new "boat." He had christened it 'Suite Chariot,' and added the obligatory "I'd rather be in the Virgin Islands" bumper sticker. After a life of being responsible for home and business, paring down to a small van with bare necessities was a transition he made with ease.

Richard found a welcome home in Fran's driveway, as idyllic and seasonless as the 'States' can offer. Fran's porch became the meeting-place where he would show up with a bird and a snack, and read quietly until she emerged with morning coffee and sometimes a bit of cooked breakfast. The two would then hold court as only the oldest and best of friends can, plotting and prognosticating or simply existing in measureless moments of silent contemplation, interrupted only by the bird who had the run of the table. Richard told the family once, "Today we held a Hermits Convention. Nobody came." He helped Fran with chores and expenses, and as naps beckoned or afternoons waned each would retreat to their own abode. A most excellent arrangement.

As Spring became Summer and people up North shucked their sweaters, Richard would head North. He tarried awhile with Rose's family, parked under a Maryland oak tree, and Susan's family, under a Virginia maple. When acorns started to fall on the RV's roof, or he received a phone call from Fran (always attuned to climate) with the plea to "Get your butt down here!" — he would head South for Fran's Cypress trees.

When Steven finally closed St. Thomas Graphics in 2007 and left island the next year as the last of the 'Island Pitzls' it was to his father in Florida he traveled. The pair hit the road in a new direction, briefly to Austin, Texas and then to Duncan, Oklahoma where Steven settled and was reunited with his daughter, Richard's oldest grandchild. Richard tarried with Steven until even Oklahoma weather threatened to kill him, then he fled for the safety and sanctuary of Fran's porch.

For the first few years of nomad existence Richard was never alone. Every waking hour there was a bird. Now known to himself as 'Squiggits-Bird' (after whispering the name change) the little fellow was always on the shoulder, in the shirt, in the hand, on the knee, in the plate... or 'elsewhere', which could be any number of places inside an RV, many never discovered since they connected to other places and portals. Life with Squiggits was either constant companionship, frenetic activity and incessant chattering or quite suddenly, no bird present: all quiet, location unknown. As you were speaking to Richard on the phone he would break conversation to mark these transitions formally, as if he were announcing Royals. "The bird has departed." Or "The bird has emerged."

On the darkest day of 2012 Richard lost his friend to avian pneumonia. Together they had weathered and shared tumultuous times, but also a comfortable existence and the elation of the open road. Perhaps a bird on the shoulder gazing out the windshield with feathers ruffling slightly, can imagine it is flying. A tearful memorial was held that day on Fran's Porch, and Squiggits-Bird was finally laid to rest. Fran planted roses.

The following year Fran had to give up her cherished porch and move into independent living. Richard moved into an RV park close by. The old friends still met and swapped visits and porches, though not daily as before. Richard often commented "Fran gave me Florida."

The passing of Frances Burgess in 2014 was a grievous blow to Richard. It heralded the end of another era and a break of continuity that extended far into the past: to happier days, new friends, wild adventures in St. Thomas and a long span of years, good years, with his beloved Judy. Deeply heartbroken once more yet adaptively stoic, he continued his yearly treks to the Florida park to escape Winter. To honor his departed friend, Richard would sit at a picnic table next to his RV and hold a Hermits Convention. And as always, nobody came.

This entire chapter as RV nomad spanned 12 years and over 20,000 miles. Richard treated every planetary wobble as just another problem to solve, and he solved them by being elsewhere. Retracing lines between waypoints, even venturing once again to Oklahoma, after first passing through Fort Smith Arkansas, where he found and photographed the same little house he and Judy had once shared in Army days.

Richard was in Maryland preparing for his yearly trip South when COPD and pneumonia caught up with him again, this time very seriously, and by the onset of Winter it became clear there would be no more road trips. Daughter Rose had glimpsed this eventuality and immediately set to prepare a cozy corner of their basement with bed, chair, table, shelves, microwave and small fridge which was very reminiscent of the RV and close quarters to which he was accustomed. Fresh home from the hospital he felt weaker and needed more oxygen, and a bewildering array of medication. As Judy had once handled the money, Rose now dealt the pills, and despite the rude change of circumstance Richard was patient, gracious and ever thankful, never failing to remind everyone she was his 'guardian angel.'

As the warming began again Rose placed a couple of chairs onto the narrow walkway in front of the house bounded by a thick hedge, and the little place soon became a daily outside oasis for him. If any aspect of Maryland weather became uncomfortable it was dealt with, easily at first, a fan or an umbrella, perhaps a sweater or coat. As Fall set in and Winter approached, Richard's stand against the elements grew to a heated battle. Rose proved to be a practical engineer herself and they faced it together, fitting the oasis with tall windbreaks on each side, placing sheets of insulating material against the hedge with a surface of heat-reflective foil, and finally two heaters: one electric and a robust propane patio heater.

He was especially fond of the patio heater and would declare "You can see the snow melting on the hedge!" with the satisfaction of a battlefield general describing fleeing enemy soldiers. After almost a lifetime of avoiding Winter he had come to grips with it, and on all but the worst days year round he ventured outside, providing status updates on the crops across the street, the classic cars going by or just sitting in thought. Wherever Richard settled in the world he had built print shops. Now his quest was to put the finishing touches on the perfect porch-oasis.

There were a couple tiny branches of evergreen hedge poking against the barrier, pushing it forward. Richard cut slits down from the top to draw them through. The resulting clump of needles on the silver surface reminded him of the crest of a coconut palm, so he drew in the coconuts, a trunk, and over time with various sharpie markers it became a whole vista with palms in the foreground, blue ocean and distant green islands. It was Pillsbury Sound as he remembered it, and he would point out St. Thomas, Jost Van Dyke and St. John.

Richard's final decline was brief and merciful, and it was just good fortune — serendipity — that as he slipped away all of his loving children were present, holding his hands.

The most tangible evidence of their incredible industry — booklets, samples and other materials from St. Thomas Graphics — are now in the care of the Caribbean Genealogy Library.

The family sends out a very special Thank You to the dedicated archivists, librarians and historians who have seen the collection preserved through hurricane and high water.

Richard and Judy Pitzl were inseparable in life. Be there any possible way, these two will find each other again.