



Postcards from the Caribbean #1
S/V Polyphonic
Jeff Grossman / Jean Levine
and the cats Sarge & Shadow
Dateline: Florida

We're finally getting a chance to send this update on our travels to all our friends. We left our slip in Clearwater Florida on Feb 10th and that day traveled about 500 ... yards ... to the Clearwater Yacht Club! Hey, it got us out of the slip! A couple days later we sailed down to St. Petersburg and anchored in the Vinoy basin for about five days. We had signed on as crew on our friends 34' race boat, Desperado, for the St. Pete NOODs regatta, a major three day event. We had a wonderfully fun time, with our moments of glory, and other moments as well. About 160 boats participated in the NOODs this year, so the activity at the docks and parties was in full swing.

Tuesday Feb 18 had us sailing South, and after overnight stops at Manatee river and Venice, we reached our favorite Florida Cruising grounds in Charlotte Harbor. Several days were spent at the Useppa anchorage. For those not familiar with the area, Useppa is an ultra exclusive island (what vacant property is left starts at well over \$1,000,000) that can only be reached by boat. The island has no cars, golf carts are the local transport, and only 40 or so homes. Going on to Useppa is by invitation only. We used this anchorage as a base to: visit Cabbage Key, sailing Sunny (our sailing dingy, thanks Wendy!), taking Monotone (our primary dingy) through the Tunnel of Love, and visiting with old and new friends met at the anchorage. Cabbage Key is across from Useppa and also can only be reached by boat. With only a restaurant and small inn on the island, it is an incredibly beautiful, quaint, and unchanging local. I call it "a place out of time" since it hasn't changed a bit since I first went there 30 years ago! Even Terry the dock master is still there, and he was old when I first visited! The Tunnel of Love is a tiny creek cutting through the largest undeveloped barrier island left in Florida, Cayo Costa. The tunnel is completely surrounded and canopied by a Mangrove forest, and is so shallow that even small outboards need to be kicked up and the paddles brought out. The Tunnel ends in a small lagoon that is on the back side of the Gulf Beach. Truly unique old Florida beauty.

After another 4-5 days of sailing up Charlotte Harbor to visit Burnt Store, our lot/dock in Port Charlotte, Pine Island and Fl. Myers, we finally set out to cross Florida Bay and headed for Key West, about 120 miles due South. About half way there the wind shifted and instead of sailing 180deg to Key West, we were aiming Southwest at about 220deg. Ah, for once we are actually cruising, no schedule, no hurry or deadline. So, since the Dry Tortugas happened to be on a course of 220deg, we changed our minds with the wind and went there! Jean had never been there and enjoyed touring Fort Jefferson, walking around Loggerhead Key, and snorkeling the reefs. A gigantic Goliath grouper (they used to be called Jew Fish) took up residence under our boat. Jeff got in the water to touch up the bottom on Polyphonic and the Goliath didn't mind the



company, letting Jeff get within three feet of him. The Goliath was over 6' long and the Park Rangers estimate he weighed around 500lbs!

After two days in the Dry Tortugas, we set sail for Key West. Couldn't be a bigger contract between the two locations. The Tortugas are 70 miles West of Key West and, except for the Fort and a few rangers, there is NOTHING there. No water, stores, buildings...nothing but sun, crystal clear water, reefs and local wild life. Now Key West does have plenty of wild life, but not much of it is local! We spent two days in Key West resupplying, refueling, and wild life watching on Duval Street. Many colorful and exotic species were spotted. Our only 'scare' of the trip so far was on one of the night dingy rides from the anchorage to town. Crossing the main channel, with our proper lights showing, we suddenly saw a 30' powerboat appear out of the night real close and heading right at us... with NO lights on it! After evasive maneuvers, and getting our heartbeats under control, we discovered it was a Navy Patrol boat (with a 50 caliber on the foredeck). I guess they realized we weren't Cubans or Iraqis since they didn't challenge us.

While walking the docks in Key West we came upon a striking 96' 1926 power yacht called Canim. While admiring it Jean realized that this was the yacht our friend Debbie was captain of (last we heard they were in Georgetown, Bahamas). We called for Debbie and found she had just brought Canim in a few minutes before, talk about timing! We got the tour of the yacht and Canim is a grand and stately beauty.

After Key West we spent three days day sailing up Hawk channel (which runs between the Keys and the barrier reef) up to Biscayne Bay of Miami. Perfect sailing days with smooth water, just enough breeze to set Mizzen and Spinnaker and make 4-6 knots of lazy sailing up the Keys. We stopped for an hour to snorkel Mosquito Bank in John Pennekamp Park. This Bank is a world class example of soft coral gardens and hosts numerous Angel and Parrotfish, and a variety of other colorful species. Jean had her first Sting Ray chase (Jean chasing the sting ray) until the ray got bored and reburied itself in the sand.

We spent one night anchored in Biscayne Bay with a spectacular view of downtown Miami across the water. The back our Biscayne Channel past the Stiltsville houses (they are still there!) and a lazy Gulfstream assisted sail up to Ft. Lauderdale. We had planned to sail along the beach so Jeff could see his old haunts up close. But since we were only doing 2 – 3 kn through the water, we headed about four miles offshore which gave us a nice Stream kick, yielding~5-6 over the ground.

Polyphonic is now at the Coral Ridge Yacht Club in Lauderdale. We're spending about four days here doing needed chores, resupply and visiting Jeff's Mom (real bed, use of a car, Mom's home cooking, etc). The cats are appreciating some time on a non-moving air-conditioned boat. We hope to set sail for the Bahamas around the 18th of March.

Stay tuned for the further adventures of the S/V Polyphonic!