



By Captain Jean Levine

Chapter 10 December Cruising Log

The first week in December we slipped out of Falmouth Harbor before a Mega Yacht mistook us for its' sailing dinghy. The number of Super Yachts had grown to fill every slip in the 3 major Marinas and the Nicholson Charter Show was officially underway. We were slightly underdressed for the occasion so we left quietly. We had a lovely sail back around Cades Reef to Jolly Harbor with plans to sail to the Northwest corner of the island, known as Dickenson's Bay. Well the weather was not cooperative, so we turned around and went back to Deep Bay then moved to Five Islands, which put us one bay north of Jolly Harbor again. At Five Islands anchorage we left the dinghy on deck but tried something new, we threw Sunny the Sunflower in the water with the dagger board and two paddles and tried to paddle like a canoe, that would have been a video for the "Funniest video's Show", thank goodness no one was around. We made it to the beach and discovered a beautiful shelling beach, I will make a note to tell Ricci since she had been disappointed in the shelling, that I found "the spot" so on her next visit she can spend a day here.

Hurricane Odette develops and the wind and seas chase us back around to Jolly Harbor a good safe harbor. After 5 days of poor conditions we decide to try for Barbuda a low lying island 20 miles north of Antigua. December 10 we clear out of customs at Jolly Harbor and then get stuck waiting for the immigration officer for two hours, while we waited we met Lenny a Charter Captain for SunSail, he had a charter and was also planning on heading to Barbuda. Because of the delay in clearing out we were worried about getting through the reef in Barbuda before dark but Lenny assured us he knew the way and we could follow him in, his boat was anchored in Dickenson's Bay so we dashed out to Poly and set sail catching him just as he was heading out. Together we sailed side by side with his Sun Odyssey 51 close reaching at 9.2 knots, later I found out he was cheating, he had the motor on the whole way. We arrived just before sunset and followed Lenny in, he had a more direct route then we had planned, head for the Catamaran anchored and turn left. The cruising guide has been excellent but the warnings are loud and clear about coming here in good light, as over 200 shipwrecks will a test, if you can't read the water DO NOT GO! But thanks to local knowledge here we are. The anchorage was like surfing, the ground swell was so big that it gave you the feeling of the boat surfing onto the beach as the waves rolled from the stern to the bow and then went breaking on the beach, some of the waves were as tall as Jeff when they hit the sand. The wind was from the east on our bow, which kept us from going onto the beach, but what an odd feeling. The next morning the sky was slightly gray but the wind had backed down and we decided to try and beach the dinghy. Barbuda is low and flat with a long finger that extends down the western shore that spans 16 miles of pink sand beach; to the east is a large lagoon, which the islands only town is located. The town of Codrington houses most of the 1600 residents of the island and is the Capital. I had read that it is



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possible to carry your dinghy across the beach and launch it in the lagoon for a visit to town but there is only one spot where the strip of beach is narrow to make for a short carry, so we headed in to find it. Since Monotone our regular dinghy weighs about 300 pounds we left it on deck and blew up our little dinghy. The next challenge was picking a place to land the dinghy. The waves were breaking up and down the beach as far as I could see and the slope of the sand was steep, usually that means that the water is deep to the line where the waves break with a strong rip current: with that in mind Jeff tries to time our landing so that we can leap out and run the dinghy up the hill in front of us. That was the plan anyway but instead the wave we were riding broke under us and caused the dinghy to buckle and flip. Jeff had thought ahead and had secured everything to the dinghy; so I quickly grabbed the camera bag and held it overhead then with the next wave we both took hold of the dinghy and slid it up the hill, then pulled the plug to drain it and bail it out enough to scoot it the rest of the way to the top of the ridge. Finally with the assistance of three more waves we rustled it to the top. The only casualty was my hat...lost at sea.

Jeff and I set out walking the beach when we saw the five Italian Charter guests of Lenny's heading to the beach with their dinghy, so we stopped to watch. Well the four guys jumped out into only knee deep water the fifth guy kicked up the outboard engine and they executed a perfect landing. Oh its' only knee-deep....so now we know it was shallower than we thought, I made a note of that for our departure. After walking a few miles on the beach we took turns taking pictures of the Italians in front of an abandon hotel with the beaches only palm trees. Next Jeff and I carried our little dinghy across the stretch of beach and launched it in the lagoon and off we went toward Codrington, home of the islands only residents, all descendants of the Codrington family, who where given the island by the British for one fat sheep per year, nice deal. The town dock was full of kids and they all waved a friendly hello, but we continued on motoring around the edge of the lagoon. We beached the dinghy at the far end and went over the dune to see if the waves were any easier there, no luck, the beach was wider and the waves looked just as big. When we walked back over to the dinghy we noticed a couple of wild horses checking out the dinghy. When we tried to approach them they took off at a trot. Cool! Without any luck finding a better place to launch we headed back to our original landing spot. This time we waded into the water, Jeff hopped in first kicked down the motor then I pushed us out a little farther and jumped in, no problems and off we went. The anchorage was still rollee and the water still had not cleared so we skipped trying to snorkel the reef, so we stowed the dinghy and spent one more night rolling away. The next morning we retraced our path, go to the Catamaran and turn right and off we went to St Barts. I put my fishing line out and shortly afterward bang I caught something. Ooo! I think it's a Mahi Oh no! It's a barracuda and a good size one at that, I got him up to the boat and Jeff reached down to take the hook out and twist the line snapped and away he swam with my lure. Darn! Oh well try again I replaced the lure with a new one and we set sail in light winds right on our stern. I short time later bang I caught another one! Oh



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no it's another barracuda Jeff joked with me that it was the same fish, they were both at least 36 inches plus some, this time Jeff managed to get him off the hook without him stealing my lure. Oh well enough of that and on we went every so slowly in washing machine seas with little wind about half way to St Barts we gave up and turned on the engine. We made it to Gustavia Harbor just at sunset. St Barts is another French Island 60 miles west of Barbuda and 15 miles east of St Martin; the island has become home to many Rock stars and celebrates, known as the Riviera of the Caribbean. Since I was here last, the place has had a building boom, mostly of large homes. We were running a little behind schedule so we didn't go ashore and after an overnight in the harbor with more Mega yachts we set sail for St. Martin. Sailing around the Northern edge of the island we passed "Leopard" one of the large Wally yachts we had seen at the Nicholson Show a very sleek flush deck racing sloop, by the way they were motoring not sailing, disappointing. By afternoon we were anchored back in Marigot Harbor on the French side of St. Martin, it feels like home, we have anchored here so often and this is where we bought the boat.

Our friend Robert from "Élan" whom we met in Luperon, Dominican Republic has been here all hurricane season. He is a single hander and had engine problems so this was as far as he got, but he made the best of things, got a job playing his saxophone and got his engine repaired and met a girl, good for him. He has a whole music studio on board his boat and Jeff drooled over all his electronic musical toys. We had a short lunch visit and got caught up on the cruising gossip. As usual we spent most of our time provisioning and doing chores rather than enjoying the island but we did make time to stop at the local Patisserie and have pain du chocolate and fresh squeezed orange juice.

During our short stay we had a young man approach us looking for a crew position, Jeff explained that we did not need crew except for the delivery from Puerto Rico to Key West. He suggested that he do the overnight trip with us from St Martin to Virgin Gorda then meet us in Puerto Rico for the rest of the trip. It sounded like a good idea and after spending a little time talking to him, meeting the Captain he had sailed down from Canada with and checking into any problems we may have with US Customs and Immigration we accepted. Pat turned out to be a real blessing, he was an excellent seaman and watch stander, a great cook which gave me some relief and never got seasick. Plus the cats liked him. We met the owner/Captain of "Spika" the 45 foot Ketch Pat sailed down from Canada on and went through French Customs to clear him off and then on to our boat as crew. Pat spent the night with us at anchor in Marigot since our departure time was 03:00. We had a nice dinner together and prepared the boat for the crossing. We set sail almost immediately after hauling the anchor, with a reefed Mainsail and part of the jib. By dawn we needed to set the pole and get the full jib out, as our course was straight down wind. Not our favorite point of sail. The seas were a washing machine as usual for the Anegada Passage and it wasn't long before we knew what a lucky stroke it was to have Pat on board. We were about half way across the passage when we heard a "vessel in distress" hail on the VHF. The vessel was a sailboat heading



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upwind to St Martin from Tortola and had lost its GPS so he had no idea where he was, he was reporting that his crew, one other person on board was seasick and incapacitated. Jeff calculated based on his position at 8am that he was approximately 9 miles from us and we changed course to give him a new position fix and some seasick pills for his crew. When we got to him he was driving in circles and his buddy was laid out in the cockpit. I wrote our position on a piece of paper and put it in a plastic bag along with some Bonnie seasick pills, I put a fishing weight in the bag so it would toss and we pulled up alongside and I threw the bag, it hit the boat right next to the helmsman then bounced past his hand and down the scoop on the back of the boat. You have never seen such a discouraged look on some ones face, but just then I noticed the island of Saba on the horizon. Being a local Rasta style skipper, I pointed to Saba and said” hey Mon! Saba and pointed”. It was instant relief on his face where as he put the throttle down and powered on over the horizon. Any local knows that you steer just a little to the left of Saba and you run into St. Martin, with our good deed done we changed course back for Virgin Gorda where we arrived just at sunset and anchored for the night. The next morning we took the boat the five miles south around to Spanish town to clear in Customs and Immigration for the BVI’s. They are sticky about clearing promptly and we don’t take any chances, some friends of ours were fined for not reporting immediately. So with formalities done we sailed the short hop over to Beef Island where we plan to pick up the girls at the airstrip. Pat worked out really well and I thought it would be easier on all of us if we set up a rendezvous time with him for Jan 4th at the West End of Tortola where we plan to leave Maryanne and then clear customs to exit the British Virgins and therefore clear Pat in and clear out with him. Then he did not have to figure out how to get to Puerto Rico on his own and we would be assured of having him as crew for the rest of the trip. So off he went to explore the Virgin Islands on his own while we got ready for our guests Petra, Maryanne and then Annie, who will also sail back with us. Jeff and I had a few days to spend before all the company and we ran into our friends Wally and Sea Note so we went off with them to celebrate Jeff’s Birthday. Before we knew it December 26th was here and we were back at anchor in Trellis Bay to pick up Maryanne and Petra. Beef Island is attached to Tortola by a drawbridge and is uninhabited with the exception of the airstrip and a couple of bar’s, an Internet café and a grocery store along the beach on the end. The anchorage is perfect for meeting your guests flying in, you simply take the dinghy ashore walk over to the airstrip then dinghy them to the boat. In the center of the bay is a small island, which is just big enough for a Bed and Breakfast, their restaurant and bar. I had anticipated possible flight delays so I had dinner waiting in the crock-pot along with some nice French wine I brought from Guadeloupe. Sure enough both Maryanne and Petra’s flights were late and after Petra’s luggage finally arrived on the next flight, we headed off to the boat where we had a nice dinner. Then the girls wanted to go out so off we went to the “Last Resort” the B&B on the island in the middle of the anchorage, our friends from Sea Note said that the entertainment was worth the trip. They were right, the solo guitarist was excellent and we stayed until the wee hours.



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Saturday morning we set sail around the Northeastern corner of Tortola bound for Jost Van Dyke, home of the famous "Foxy's". The wind was fair and the seas calm so we flew all sail, until we passed Sandy Island then we dropped everything just in time for a little rainsquall. We got to Jost around 14:30 then after no less than four attempts finally got the hook set, sort of, well good enough to take a trip into "Foxy's". Foxy's is a little beach restaurant and bar that is famous for it's owner Foxy an old Rasta man who plays guitar and makes up songs about his customers not always politically correct but always entertaining; the night life also includes a steel drum band and lots and lots of people as it is "the Place" to be. So if you come to the British Virgin Islands you must check that box. Sure enough we walk off the dinghy dock into the restaurant and the song changes from something about a Brit sailing in the Caribbean to "He must really be a Big Mon cause he is sailing with three and if he gets to tired he could share one with me." Of course he noticed Jeff with Maryanne, Petra and myself hence the change in tune. Plus there were more lyrics that I wasn't fast enough to remember, but you get the idea. Petra and Maryanne did some souvenir shopping then we did a little hike to the top of the hill for a great view of Tortola to the east, St John to the south and St Thomas to the west. That evening the weather took a turn and strong thunderstorms rolled on through.

Sunday morning we set sail for Virgin Gorda, back the way we had come around the North end of Tortola, but this time the wind was up as were the seas and we sailed on a close reach with the only the Jib and Mizzen. Once we were back into Gorda Sound Petra treated us to a night on a mooring ball at The Bitter End Yacht Club. We went ashore and I lead the way up and over "Guys Trail" offering the best views of the neighboring islands of Anegada, Necker, Prickley Pear and Saba Rock (different then the one next to St Martin.). After the hike up to the 1540-foot peak we took a dip in the resort pool and sipped a cocktail poolside. That night the winds blew up to 40 knots from the North.

The next morning we had to leave since Annie was coming to meet us in Tortola and we had slip reservations, otherwise we probably would have just stayed put. The channel entrance to Gorda sound is clearly marked but narrow given the amount of traffic that passes through, we knew that it would be a short but difficult motorboat ride the one mile straight up wind in 10 foot high breaking waves that where raging in the channel once we got through we planned to just unfurl the jib. Well good plan, just as we cleared the last buoy marking the channel the engine died, having had a little practice at this, I immediately unfurled the staysail and we had steerage, but we did not have enough drive to power through the 10 foot waves, one even broke over my head. So Jeff turned the boat around and we sailed back in to the sound and to an anchorage. Once we got our heart rates back to normal, Jeff bled the diesel and we motored over to the fuel dock at Leverick Bay Marina. It was a simple matter of thinking we had enough fuel to power out the pass and sail to Tortola but not realizing that the added wave height changed the way the fuel pulled from the tank. So for our second time out the pass we hoisted more sail and now had full tanks. We cleared the channel and set sail with jib and mizzen, Polyphonic steamed down Sir Frances Drake channel at about 9.5 knots and on to Village



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Cay Marina in Roadtown where we safely arrived by 14:30 with enough time to meet Annie at the ferry dock. Annie flew into St Thomas then took the ferry, even though I had warned her about there being two ferries one to West End and one to Roadtown she still managed to take the wrong one. But lucky for Annie when she got off the ferry at West End and went to the Marina our friend Mark from Cat N Around was there. She asked if Polyphonic was there and he said no, but he knew us and then she got a ride with another yachtie to the Roadtown ferry dock where Jeff and I were waiting.

This was our first night at a Marina since June and this was the last slip we had stopped at on our way south. It was sure nice being able to just step off onto the dock and walk around town. The girls enjoyed all the shops and some time lying by the pool plus some nightlife at “the Bat Cave”, I enjoyed dropping off the laundry and walking to the grocery store. Petra treated us to a second night at the marina and we gladly accepted. We took a stroll around town and toured the Botanical gardens, plus I took the girls on an eye opening grocery shopping trip, which let them in on how good we have it in the United States, one gets to eat what you can find instead of the cornucopia that is available in the States, plus look at those prices, ouch!

Wednesday around noon we slipped the dock lines and sailed south to Coral Bay, St. John to celebrate New Years Eve with our cruising friends at “Skinny Leggs”. Mike and Chris from Rhum Runner have a home here and suggested we join them, also in attendance were Sea Note, Wally World, MoonShadow II, Navigator, and Surface Interval all of whom we sailed with over the past year. The little village at Coral Bay is stuck in the 1970’s, very eclectic with little Artisan shops featuring local artists and the focal point being Skinny Leggs Restaurant and bar. We had dinner on board and then met everyone at the bar to listen to the band and dance it up until the wee hours. At midnight the bar surprised us by bringing out plates of steamed shrimp and veggies with dip. Yum. New Years Day we set sail around the south side of Tortola to the West End and Sopers Hole Marina on a beautiful reach, again there was lots of wind so we sailed with jib alone. As we sailed along Jeff spotted “Georgia” the tallest sloop in the world so he made a few S turns to slow us down so we could get a better look. Well it was a lovely day and the girls were working on their all over tan and “Georgia” decided to get a closer look at the Poly girls and passed us very slowly to port. Smile and Wave girls!

Once at Sopers Hole we took a mooring ball and then went for a side trip by taxi to Cane Garden Bay. The village at Sopers Hole is a picturesque row of brightly colored shops, restaurants, hotel and Marina, where our friend Mark is berthed on Cat N Around. We invited Mark and Sharon to join us and got a taxi to drive us up and over the mountain to the prettiest beach on Tortola thus completing our circumnavigation of the island. The anchorage there was untenable due to the north swell but I did not want the girls to miss the chance to lie in a hammock and sip umbrella drinks. The sun was out and it was lovely, after our side trip to the beach we joined Mark for happy hour and took turns using the marina shower. Petra was scheduled to depart at 09:00 so she arranged for a taxi to take her to the airport on the other side of the island. After Petra departed



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Maryanne, Anne, Jeff and I sailed north to Green Island but when we arrived the swell was still too big and the water too choppy for snorkeling, so we turned around and sailed back past Sopers Hole and east to Norman Island or Treasure Island. We arrived around 16:00 with enough time for Annie and I to hike the island trail and Jeff and Maryanne to fire the cannon marking happy hour at “The Pirates Bight”.

January 3rd we sailed off the mooring and made a short hop to “The Indians” a large rock formation known to be a great snorkel spot. The British Virgin Islands Park service maintains day moorings for snorkelers and dive boats, the water was a little chilly and rough so Maryanne and I stayed aboard while Annie and Jeff did the snorkeling. They came back in awe; Jeff said it was the best display of soft coral and fish he had seen yet. I will have to save it for next time. After the snorkel stop we sailed back around to Sopers Hole to meet Pat and arrange for a taxi for Maryanne’s departure on the 4th. We got together with Mark and Sharon and enjoyed a farewell dinner at Pussers Restaurant, Maryanne jumped ship and spent the night tied to the dock on board Cat N Around which made it easier for her to catch her taxi in the morning.

So December took us from Mega Yachts in Antigua, to the pink sand beach of Barbuda, the Riviera of the Caribbean St Barts, our Provision stop in St Martin where we lucked into Pat, plus the girls visit in the British Virgin Islands. Sadly January brings us to the sail home.