



By Captain Jean Levine

Chapter 11 January Cruising Log

January 4th, 2004 we cleared out of customs at West End, Tortola in the British Virgins then sailed the short hop to Water Island, just off St Thomas, retracing our steps from the voyage down. The Kon Tiki, party barge from St. Thomas came and went again and we enjoyed a peaceful afternoon.

Monday morning we awoke to gray skies and rain showers; so we waited for a break in the weather then set sail for Culebra in the Spanish Virgins. The wind was gusty at 20 plus knots and we put the pole out to port on the clew of the jib and set the staysail out on the starboard side to go wing on wing configuration. Soon we were doing 10 knots, enjoying a beautiful fast day sail. We entered through the protected reef of Culebra, around 4:30pm and anchored in the same spot as before in one of the protected mangrove bays.

Jeff called U.S. customs & Immigration and was told that we should show up at the airport office at 8:30am. So Tuesday morning Jeff, Anne, Pat and I marched off to the airport (small runway and a shed for a Terminal) and cleared in after filling out the appropriate forms. It was Three Kings Day, a Puerto Rican Holiday, and most everything was closed. So we took the dingy and went snorkeling in a few new spots inside the front entrance reef to the bay, and off the West coast of the island at Punta Tempico. The highlight of the snorkel at Punta Tempico was the large sea turtles; they reminded me of the penguins fast and graceful underwater. Wednesday we took the local bus to Flamingo beach and hiked the trail over the hilltop to Rosario Reef. This time we snorkeled over the top of the Horseshoe reef off the left side of the beach. It is hard to describe the beauty of this magical underwater garden. The corals hard and soft in red, green and gold, large Elkhorn and all different types of colorful anemones. Purple fans 6 feet tall and soft green coral swaying in the current look like evergreen shrubs. Looking down into 30 to 40 feet of water it is surreal. Plus beautiful Parrotfish and hundreds of colorful reef fish. While in Culebra we visited with our new friends on Touleme, from Guadeloupe where we sat out a week of rain together, and Flying Fifty the 1950 vintage 70 footer that we traded movies with in Bequia; both boats call Culebra home.

January 8th we set off for Puerto Del Ray Marina in Fajardo, Puerto Rico about 20 miles west of the Spanish Virgins. The sky was clear and bright blue and the wind was light. We put out the jib, staysail, Main and Mizzen enjoying a lovely sail all the way in to Fajardo. A very different passage from our voyage south bound in June of last year. Puerto Del Ray Marina recommended by our friends from Tampa, Rick and Robin who own Endangered Species a 44-foot Catamaran. The Marina has 1000 slips and is so large that they provide a golf cart to pick you up at your boat to bring you to the office. The facilities are clean and they have a number of shops for provisions, laundry facilities, restaurants and a car rental office of which we took advantage. Shortly after checking in with the dock master we rented a car and head off to Walmart. Stocking up on dry goods



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is followed by dinner at the Ponderosa and seeing “Return of the King” the last of the J.R. Token books turned Movie. It is our first movie in over a year.

The next morning I dropped off the laundry and we all schlepped to the grocery store to provision for the trip home. Pat and I prepared some meals ahead and placed them in the freezer then I spent the rest of the day cutting up veggies and fruit, bagging the meat in freezer bags and tossing out all boxes and Styrofoam thus eliminating most all of the trash for our long voyage. Saturday the four of us drove up to the rainforest El Yunque National Forest located on the Northeast corner of Puerto Rico, The drive took us past beautiful beaches lined with tall Palm trees the up into the mountains a short distance from San Juan. We stopped at the visitor center then set off to do some hiking. Stopping at one of the popular waterfalls for a swim then a picnic lunch before returning to the Marina. Sunday we were set to depart, but the weather was yucky so we stayed another day. Monday we stopped at the fuel dock then started off, once we got out into the open sound we realized there was no wind, so without enough fuel to motor all the way to Florida we dropped anchor to wait for wind. We went about 5 miles off the coast and anchored off of Isla Palominos a private Island owned by the Wyndham Hotel, they run a small ferry from Puerto Rico so their guests can sun themselves and have cocktails at the beach cabana, there are no rooms, just a small beach restaurant and bar. It was quiet for us; but we heard it could be a very loud spot on the weekends when the band plays until the wee hours.

Finally Tuesday January 13th we depart at daybreak heading west though the reef and into the open Atlantic swells. The wind was less than 10 knots and the seas were 8 to 12 feet left over from the previous week of rainy weather. With little wind the big seas make for an uncomfortable ride. Soon after we cleared the reef the engine quit and we began our long slow journey drifting along waiting for more wind. In the first twenty-four hours we barely sailed past San Juan about 25 miles west of our starting point. After hours of slow moving the wind filled in and we started to make way at about 4 knots. Jeff selected a three-hour watch system with four people that allows for standing watch at the same time everyday so your body can become adjusted to a new sleep pattern. Jeff was “on deck” from 3am/pm then stood watch from 6am/pm until 9. Anne overlapped his watch with her “on deck” time beginning at 6am/pm and her taking over at 9 am/pm. That is when I came up “on deck” and took over the watch at noon/midnight. Pat had the “on deck” hour’s noon/midnight and stood the watch from 3am/pm until 6. Hopefully you can get the idea that a three hour watch is actually six hours on deck; three of which you are “Watch Captain”. Pat and I took turns cooking dinner, all the crew shared lunch duties and breakfast was self-serve. That first ruff night at sea I made some gentle Potato soup and veggie crunchies, it is easier on the tummy to eat little snacks often instead of trying to have a big meal. The anxiety level is pretty high when the seas are up and you need to be prepared for a night of hell. But lucky for us the seas where kind and by morning we were enjoying nice sailing in 10 to 15 knots of breeze. Jeff was beginning his watch and Anne was on deck; Jeff said she looked as if she was in a trance, sitting staring out into



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the big swells with the camera in her lap. “Looking for Whales?” he said, just then a Humpback Whale breached the surface and disappeared in seconds. Even though she had her camera out no picture was taken, it happened so fast. The memory of that whale leaping out of the water will stay in our minds and in many sea stories to come. Each watch at sea can have its’ magic moments, shooting stars or the glow of phosphorus as a dolphin shoots past making a neon tube in the water, or a large spotted sting ray leaping out of the water and flying for a moment before splashing back into the sea.

Wednesday we still had big seas but the wind held up and we were able to sail though out most of the day, until the heat of the day stole the breeze and we were poking along at about 2.5 knots off the coast of the Dominican Republic. The light air and the lee of the Silver Banks started to calm the seas and we made progress slowly. (A.K.A. drifting)

I was attempting to fish once again when I spotted some feeding activity. I was determined to catch a Mahi, and I got my wish. Friday afternoon trolling a shiny green squid, bang! I got one! A beautiful Mahi I reeled him right to the stern of the boat and Jeff tried to lift him over the stern rail by the leader and snap, it broke. But we did get a picture of the one that got away. So when at first you don’t succeed try again right. I was determine so I tied on a longer leader to prevent the line from breaking and a new lure. It was about an hour later when I caught another one, this time we were ready for him or so I thought. The steel leader held but the big bull with a left/right of his head spit out the hook and away he swam, again a nice picture but no dinner. Next time I am jumping in and grabbing him with my bear hands. Both fish got away clean thank goodness we had a fridge full of food. So much for my fishing skills. Oh well so it goes.

We sailed on in light air and now calm seas as we approached Great Inagua we needed to try and the motor again. The wind was so light that we needed our engine working so we would be able to get out of the way of any big ships transiting the busy Old Bahama Channel. Yes, the sailboat has the right of way except when the bigger boat rule applies and the huge Super Tanker didn’t see you and didn’t even realize that he ran you over. So you just make certain you stand a good watch and stay the heck out of the way. Great Inagua lies at the intersection of the Windward Passage, ships coming South across the Atlantic heading to and from the Panama Canal transit here; and the Old Bahama Channel where ships to and from Florida hug the north Cuban coast heading East to the Caribbean or on to the Med. Needless to say a very busy place to be stuck drifting. So Jeff decided Great Inagua would be a good place since the seas were calm to drop the anchor get a good nights sleep, and then try working on the diesel in the morning. It was then I spotted a ship on the radar, constant bearing decreasing range, on a collision course; I hailed them on the radio only to find it was the U.S. Coast Guard. All the standard questions, size of vessel, flag of vessel, number of crew aboard, documentation number, name of owner, is owner on board, where are you coming from, where are you going, and so on and so forth. We proceeded to the anchorage where we spotted Coast Guard Cutter number two, it was only twenty minutes later same questions. Good grief. Next morning after good nights sleep Jeff spends a couple hours trying to get the diesel to



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stay running, with no luck, but the wind picks up and we decide to go for it. So up goes the little blue spinnaker and away we go. Next, no less than two coast guard aircraft buzz us from above this time they hail a tanker that appears to be adrift. Listening in on the conversation we find that the Tanker is early for his docking time in Great Inagua so he is drifting around killing time.

As we sailed into the night the wind picked up and the spinnaker came down. Instead we poled out the jib to port and the main to starboard in a dead downwind configuration. The Old Bahama Channel gets narrower as you head west and the shipping traffic gets thicker and thicker. Unlike our first time transiting the channel the Cuban look out stations were active, hailing every ship passing. It took me all night to understand the thick accent. Once I got use to hearing him I got a good laugh when the Cuban patrol hailed a cruise ship and asked “ how many persons on board” the cruise ship responded with 2309 passengers and 792 crew, the Cubans responded with so how many total? The ships Captain hesitated a moment, as if doing the math then gave the total. My watch was always very busy with ships traffic and I got a lot of practice on my radar navigation with no less than six targets at a time to track. It was my pleasure to find so many professional crews on watch, when I hailed them to determine course changes they responded promptly and some even hailed me before I hailed them.

As we sailed on the next morning the wind started to shift and we took down the pole and put out the staysail, as well as the mizzen staysail. Flying all five sails, we steamed along the beautiful Cuban resorts of the North coast. Hugging the coastline here we can take advantage of the counter current that runs one and a half to two knots towards the west. There are many beautiful resorts and all the vacationers were out enjoying the sun and fun at the beach.

It is now day 7 out of Puerto Rico and the wind shifts to the west as a front is approaching. The wind increases and we take down all the sail except for the staysail, which is our storm sail. We heave to and let the storm pass over, heavy rain and strong wind accompany the front. I was happy to be going off watch and with competent crew I went to bed on schedule. But I paid my dues when I got up and came back on deck for my evening shift. Jeff had put the mizzen up and put out part of the jib and now we were back to beating to windward. The Channel is only 12 miles at its widest and you bounce back and forth between the Bahama Bank and the reefs along the coast of Cuba all the while dodging the Tankers, Container Ships and Cruise Ships. I had to plot our position every half hour and keep a close eye on the radar to figure out when we would have to tack. I felt like the chicken running across an eight-lane highway; once across you had to turn around and run back again. What a night.

As the morning came the wind stayed at 20 to 25 knots from the west, so we felt like we were going fast doing 8 knots but only making good about 2 knots in the direction we were going. On my afternoon watch I spotted a pigeon, which kept circling and finally exhausted he landed on the deck, and promptly walked up under the dodger for protection from the wind. Once he made himself comfortable, he started to preen himself, while all



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this time Shadow, the black cat, had been watching from his cat carrier also under the dodger, soon he pounced. Oh no! I felt so sorry for the bird that was very tired but very determined. He escaped Shadow and flew back on board; I wish I had got a picture of the pigeon sitting on top of the dodger while Shadow sat under it. Next thing it seemed the bird had gone; and it was my turn to go below, when I went to the forward stateroom to lie down for a nap I looked up to see the bird was on the foredeck under the dingy. So we have to rename the dingy "Pigeon Coupe". Since we were off the Cuban coast when the determine bird hitched a ride with us we nicknamed him "Fidel".

The front had passed and the wind was dieing leaving us drifting off the Cal Sal Bank. To deep to anchor, and with no wind and no engine we can't attempt to cross the Gulf Stream. So we sit and sit and sit, until along comes another Coast Guard Cutter. We hail, answer the twenty questions again and also let them know that we are now an over do vessel. Having filed a float plan, our friends should be getting worried. So we wanted to leave word with the Coast Guard that we are O.K just having engine trouble, no worries. Finally I suggest to Jeff that we take the fuel intake off the engine and stick it straight into a jerry jug eliminating our fuel lines, sure enough the engine is back to purring. The only problem with this set up of course is that the Jug only holds 5 gallons and it is still 110 miles to Key West. So I set up a siphon and take the fuel from our tanks and pour it into a jug then carry the jug to the engine room and refill the tank we are running on. What a long night that was. All night the wind was less than 5 knots and the Gulf Stream was as flat calm as I had ever seen. About 2:30 am I noticed a persistent radar return but could not see any lights, I informed Jeff as we changed watches and he called on the VHF radio to find another Coast Guard Cutter. Now the fifth time we answer the twenty questions, with out ever turning on their running lights they took station off our port quarter and followed us though the night. As dawn broke and we were 12 miles south of Key West they hailed us to notify us they would be boarding us for inspection. Lucky for us they let us maintain course and speed while they used their rib to bring a boarding party over. It was a training exercise and the commander figured since we hailed them first, we were probably ship shape for the trainees. The rib pulled alongside and the crew boarded and now the breeze was back to 20 knots on the nose; we had cleared the stream and had the main and mizzen up to steady us for the upwind motor. The seas where just starting to kick up and the driver of the rib hesitated as he came alongside splashing the boarding party, the young faces all laughed and Jeff gave a sigh of relief that they were not going to give us a hard time. After they boarded one of the trainees came below with the manual and I proceeded to go through the check list with them, of course we have more of everything that they require so the trainee checked off the list and they all passed around our garbage disposition plan since no one had ever been on board a vessel that actually had one in writing. (This is one of the little things they use to write you a ticket, but not this time.) We came back on deck and he asked where we kept the life jackets and I told him besides the ones the crew was wearing we had 20 more in the locker on deck. They were very friendly and efficient and completed the inspection within a half hour; we



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came away with a gold star. With in ten minutes of their departure we entered the southern most channel entrance to Key West

And there we spotted 70 spinnakers sailing down to greet us. It was Key West Race Week on its forth day of international competition. We almost missed the whole thing, but we are finally here, yeah!

Even though we had used very little fuel Jeff headed straight to the fuel dock so that we could all get off the boat if even only for a short time. The fuel dock was full and we had to do some tricky maneuvering until a slot opened up. Once tied to the dock, Fidel came out from under the dingy and paraded around on deck like he was part of the crew. We had been feeding him tortilla chips and water and he wasn't planning on leaving. I thought once he spotted land he would take off but I guess he thought he found a new home; he was a banded bird and belongs to someone. During Race week in Key West one usually need s slip reservation a year in advance but I thought I would ask anyway and as it turned out a powerboat was leaving and a slip was opening up. So after I gave the dock Master a big hug we finished fueling and moved into a slip. What a treat a very expensive treat but a very nice one. After 9 and a half days it was really nice to be tied to a dock and take a nice hot shower and wash the salt out of our clothes. We enjoyed two days of visiting with about 700 friends there for the race, said our goodbyes to Pat who hopped a bus for Canada, per his mothers instructions and Anne traded rides to deliver a race boat home. So Jeff and I were left alone again. We anchored out after taking care of laundry and provisioning and visited with our friends Rick and Robin from Endangered Species, now back on there way south to the Caribbean. We have really enjoyed running into them all over and look forward to crossing paths again.

Well rested we head north for Fort Meyers that was the most beautiful sail across Florida Bay I can ever remember. Ten Knots of breeze on the starboard stern quarter giving us a beautiful broad reach all night maintaining about 7 knots of boat speed. Boy oh Boy did we deserve that. A short stop over in Fort Meyers and then on up to Venice, spending a night at the Crows nest Marina, where we visited with our friend Petra. Then we had a nice sail the fifty miles on home to Clearwater, back to the Yacht Club where we began the whole trip a year ago February.

Looking back on the year it is like a dream, a lovely dream, and oh how I want to do it again. Jeff and I took notes and are making plans to change some things on the boat to make life on board more comfortable and some things more maintenance free or at least easier to maintain. We hope to save enough to have a few more incredible trips abroad, like the one we enjoyed on the Royal Princess. Then maybe we will set sail to Mexico or through the Panama Canal and into the South Pacific, who knows. For now it is back to living on the hard and sailing on the weekends.

May everyone be forced to live his or her dream at least once.