



By Captain Jean Levine

Chapter I March Cruising Journal

March found us slowly sailing down the Florida coast to Fort Meyers Beach. The town was in full spring break swing and Jeff and I splurged on a slip at Moss Marine. A regular stop of ours when traveling back from Key West and we know just where the hardware store and grocery store etc. are located conveniently accessed by beach trolley. After provisioning, laundry and fueling we are ready to head south to Key West. The weatherman had different ideas and we anchored off of Pine Island and waited. After two days the weather broke and we headed out through the Sanibel Causeway Bridge and cleared the Fort Meyer Sea buoy about one o'clock in the afternoon. The breeze was very light and Jeff and I put up all the sails, main, mizzen and jib. We sailed until sunset and made it as far as Naples until the wind faded away. So on went the engine, furling the jib and started motoring for Key West. Then about ten, while the stars were shining and the sky was clear the wind started to fill in, engine off and we are sailing again. As the night went on and the wind grew stronger, filling in right on our course I noticed we were on track for the Dry Tortugas instead of Key West. After plotting our position Jeff concurred that Fort Jefferson would be a better destination. We are cruising so changing the destination may be done from time to time based on weather and wind. We sailed on through the night and then dawn found us drifting as the wind completely faded and Florida Bay was glass calm. On went the iron jenny and after a few hours we arrived at Fort Jefferson.

Jeff realized that it had been ten years since he had been here last and ten years before that. The sands had shifted and closed in what was the channel so we managed to figure out the new channel and motored on into the anchorage. Now a cove at the southeastern side of the Fort the anchorage is very protected. We were tired so we did not even bother to get the dingy ready. We set the hook, relaxed and watched the activity on the other boats. The park ranger came over and gave us the low down on the hours of the Fort and what time the head boats arrived from Key West.

Morning came and we went over to the Fort and did the walking tour (pre-tourist arrival). The Fort was originally built has a strong hold to protect the fleet from invading countries such as Spain and then became a prison. Here Dr Mudd was imprisoned for aiding John Wilkes Booth. After ten years in prison he was eventually given clemency for helping the men down with yellow fever and malaria. While Jeff and I were touring the Fort we met another couple of sailors. Rick and Sandra along with crewmen Ross. They sailed from FT. Lauderdale on a 38 foot Beneteau named "Outrageous". We enjoyed the company and later invited them for happy hour.

Next on our agenda was snorkeling. Jeff wanted to clean the boat bottom so he was suiting up when I noticed a really BIG fish under the boat. It was at least 500 pounds. Apparently there are 5 Jewfish that size hanging around the park. They know they are in



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protected waters. Jeff says that was the biggest fish he had ever been in the water with. He (the fish) seemed to think that it was his shady spot and did not move although he was not willing to let Jeff touch him he never went too far. The water was clear and cool so I put on my wetsuit before getting in. We asked the park rangers for the best snorkel spots and took the advice. The visibility was about ten feet in murky conditions because of wind and cloud cover.

It was heartbreaking for Jeff to see what looked like a bone yard below as we snorkeled. Since he remembers beautiful colors of soft coral as well as colorful fish. What we saw now was a reef slowly recovering over the bones of the broken bleached coral beds. The fish however, were colorful and I saw the largest triggerfish I have ever seen as well as many other beautiful fish.

The time came when the wind was right for sailing to Key West so we had a little match race with “Outrageous”. We gave them a two-hour head start and still beat them to the anchorage in Key West. Then next day we met Ross’s wife who drove down to spend the weekend. We puttered around for a day and a night. Then the winds were fair for heading on to Marathon. Before leaving Key West we stopped at the fuel dock where we admired a 96-foot wooden power yacht. When I read the name on the side I realized that my girlfriend was the co-captain. Ahoy Deb! She had just delivered the boat from Georgetown, Great Exuma. Cool! So we took a few minutes to tour the boat and get pointers on entering Elizabeth sound since “Canim”(Big Canoe) also draws 7 feet. Then off we went with our big red spinnaker along the southern edge of the Keys up hawk channel to Boot Key. We anchored offshore in a cove just east of Marathon next to a private home on a big rock island. Jeff was wondering how they got the Sunday newspaper delivered.

March 11th in the early morning set sail again a beautiful spinnaker run to Key Largo. We anchor just inside of John Pennekamp National Marine Park. The next morning was flat calm so we motored over to the Mosquito Reef. There we picked up a mooring. It was still only 78 degrees so I slipped into my wetsuit. The snorkel here was beautiful, a healthy garden of soft coral, large yellow brain coral and purple fans also colorful reef fish. The fish were not as large or abundant as in the Tortugas. After our swim Jeff and I motored awhile until the wind filled in and then the spinnaker went up for another glorious sail to Biscayne Bay. We entered through the deepest cut on a medium tide as the sunset set over the Miami skyline. We squeaked through a shallow spot then right past all the old stilt fishing shacks until we were snug at anchor in the bay. The nighttime glow of Miami on the bay was beautiful as the city light illuminated the water.

The next morning off we went back through the shallow channel and out to meet the Gulf Stream. A fast broad reach with a little assistance from the current and we arrived at Port Everglades where all the cruise ships depart. Even on a Thursday afternoon the pass was filled with all kinds of boat traffic. The wind was up and the seas were rolling, the usual wind against the tide. With luck we cruised by Pier 66 and right



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through the 17th Street causeway Bridge. The cruise up the intercoastal waterway here was like an episode of the rich and famous or America's Castles here a 100-foot yacht is common along the dock behind a 10,000 square foot home.

We arrived at the Coral Ridge Yacht Club about 3pm in the afternoon. Our reserved slip was about 55 feet long and Jeff pulled parallel to the slip to make certain we could fit our 51 feet. Luckily the wind and tide helped to set us in the slip, along with Jeff's skill of course. We planned on staying for two nights to visit with Jan in Hollywood and provision. Well the two days turned into a week and after our lovely visit Jeff and I thought we were all set to go. When Jeff read something about pets in the Bahamas and we had a little snafu. Jeff ran down to the Bahamian counsel and obtained the proper form, which we then took along with the cats to the vet (Alberto Stark family friend in Miami) who was experienced at filling out the paperwork. Then we had to buy a couple of money orders and FedEx the forms and the money to Nassau, wait for the government to rubber stamp it and then fax it back to us.

So now it's March 20th and the yacht club has another boat coming in and we need to get out of the slip. We plan to pull out at noon but the wind was blowing 20-25knots and holding us nicely against the dock. The new friend we met in the Tortugas, Ross lives nearby, so we call him and he comes by dingy. Jeff managed to back out enough for Ross to get between the dock and us and pushed us away as Jeff backed out. WHEW! We didn't hit any of the other yachts and we didn't hit the dock and scratch the hull. Next, we get Ross up on deck and tow his dingy and ours heading for a spot to anchor until dark. We want to leave around 9pm to allow us to make landfall in the Bahamas in daylight. Just as we clear the Los Olas Bridge there was a field of moorings, all taken. No problem we can just anchor....oops! STOP! We are aground. Back up! Not enough room and oops we hit one of the moored boats. No problem, peel him off. OK next idea. We head down the intercoastal to an inland lake called Lake Sylvia Ross knows the deep-water route. Keep in mind the wind is blowing 20-25 knots and the waterway is shallow. You guessed it ...we went aground again. Well now what, Ross told us that he sails all the way to Abaco before clearing customs and not to worry about stopping at West End, (Grand Bahamas) to clear. With no place to go we drop Ross off and set sail for the Berry Islands. (Mid-way between Grand Bahamas Island and Nassau.) The wind had been from the south for days and the Gulf Stream was smooth and running 3.5 knots. The wind was southeast at a steady 25 knots, so we only set the mizzen and a small jib. Polyphonic cleared the Sea Buoy at 4pm and roared off at 8knots on course for Great Isaacs light. As we sailed the wind started shifting a little easterly and at midnight we arrived at Grand Bahamas Island West End so we tacked back to the south toward Great Isaac's. Now the seas are up and we are heading upwind into 25knots pounding into 6-foot seas. Also the fleet of cruise ships, container ships and tankers are busy cutting through the same channel, at 3 am it starts to rain. Luckily it's was short and as we sailed away from the



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gulf stream the wind backed down, but the seas stayed up and we pounded all the way to Great Stirrup Cay (The Berries).

Arriving about 5pm at Bertram Cove we tucked in behind the island on the leeward side, there was a picturesque white sand beach with turquoise water, a line of palm trees and on one side of the cove a few high rocky cliffs about 20 feet above the waterline. Four Boats at anchor. One of the boats was telling us on the radio about jumping off the cliffs for a swim. After our passage it sounded great but maybe tomorrow after some sleep. All the way across we took turns cat napping but really did not sleep with all the tacking and pounding. We did however, take a nice hot shower, eat dinner and go to bed.

The anchorage although a beautiful place was very rolling it felt calm after the seas but we were still moving back and forth, back and forth, and back and forth.

Morning comes and the other boats are gone, now a cruise ship is anchored out behind us the shuttle boats are loading passengers to bring ashore. The next thing we know HONK! HONK! HONK! "Hey mon you can't be there". The landing boat almost ran us down at anchor, so we bug out fast. Continuing our course east we head for Great Harbor Cay where we can clear customs and immigration. Arriving early afternoon with good light Jeff steers us through the reefs that protect both sides of the entrance to the bay.

Beautiful white sand beach in a horseshoe shape with a few modern custom homes and a small two story condo complex spaced about one half mile apart right on the beach. Clear turquoise blue water I can see the anchor in the sand beneath the boat. I drop Jeff off on the beach via dinghy and he walks across the dunes to the road and asked a kid for directions to the customs office. He points to a path through a stand of tall pine trees, bingo 500 yards away. Since the customs agent could not see the boat he had to decide if Jeff checked out OK with the immigration lady. After a conference they decided that if Jeff came and got me they would clear us even though we were not at the town dock. (Which was on the other side of the island and too shallow for our draft.)

Saturday March 22, 2003 Officially Cleared. There were two boats anchored when we arrived and they seemed to be traveling together. We had a little walk on the beach and a snorkel swim next to the boat. When I got out I noticed a pod of dolphins swimming up to the boat and called to Jeff to go to the other side of the boat. He did and enjoyed an up close encounter with a mom and baby. They stayed about ten feet in front of him until mom decided to swim off, the baby came right up to Jeff did a barrel roll and swam off with mom. When dad came over Jeff thought, "hey, he is a big fish" time to get out. The next morning when we look around the other boats had left. Enjoyed a peaceful walk on the beach then a dingy ride to Hawk's Nest Cay and reef that protected the eastern side of the bay. There we followed a large speckled stingray until he got tired and with a few strokes of his 6-foot wings, SWOOSH! The breeze was light and steady from the south, the sun was bright and the sky was blue. As the afternoon goes on the sky fills with clouds and the wind starts to build shifting a little southwest, we are still snug and quiet at anchor.



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Now it's 9pm, the wind has gone north and we are uncomfortable the bay is opening up to a fetch coming through the entrance from Africa. Not somewhere we can leave in the dark, so we go on anchor watch taking turns all night holding position. By morning the chop in the bay is about 2 feet, the wind 20-25 knots between north and northeast, which is the only unprotected direction. Up with the anchor and through the cut between reefs, away we sail south down the Berry Island chain to Little Harbor Cay. Another pass this time with big rocky cliffs on both sides about a quarter mile apart with a rock in the middle. With afternoon light and the seas up I spot "the rock" with waves breaking from both sides a fountain sprays straight up. Jeff at the helm watches the cliff on the right and the depth sounder while I keep a bearing on the rock. OK calm water and guess what the two boats from the other anchorage. Set the anchor, a new island to explore, but not today for now we will rest have dinner and go to bed.

Morning comes winds are light out of the northeast and the other boats are gone.

Was it something we did? Gee you don't like our sail covers? Hmm.

We head off in the dingy and explore the larger island, Little Harbor Cay, the island lies north and south, 50 to 100 feet high rocky coral and sand with one family home. The Darvilles if you radio ahead will cook you lunch or dinner or even bake you bread. Their home is tucked in the middle of the hillside with a small pier to tie up your dingy. There are a few boats with shallow draft, less than 4 feet anchored there, looks like they have been there a very long time. Parallel to Little Harbor are a small group of low islands about a quarter mile west forming a long protected finger. Then farther west across a bay sprinkled with shallow sand bars is an outcropping of small islands. To the south and west of Little Harbor is another small island about a quarter mile circumference, 30 feet high coral rock known as Cabbage Cay, which is where we anchored in deep water. The water is crystal clear and I take the hand held depth sounder along for our dingy ride to try and get use to judging the depth of the water. It was good practice. While we were out Jeff went for a little snorkel while I just put my mask on and looked over the side of the dingy, Jeff saw a little 5-foot nurse shark. Cool! Back to Polyphonic for a planning session on our next destination.

We need to leave at dawn to make it to Fleeming Channel the entrance to the "Bite of Eleuthra" by sunset; with the winds Northeast Jeff thinks we can point it.

Well we tried until noon and then the time distance equation wasn't telling us we would arrive before dark. So on went the iron jenny and we motor sailed arriving at the entrance to Fleeming Channel just before sunset. Once clear of the entrance the water was deep and clear of coral heads for the twenty miles to Mutton Fish Point the spot Jeff had picked to anchor. It was 10pm by the time we arrived using the radar Jeff was able to get us behind the point of land for protection from the seas. It was so dark we could not visually see anything no moonlight tonight. About 4am we awake to the bow dancing in the waves the wind has shifted and opened up the fetch from the south. Luckily the wind settled down enough to go back to sleep and ride it out until morning.



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As the day broke I got my first sight of Eleuthra, rocky and mountainous about 30 to 90 feet high the island is 90 miles long a quarter mile wide at its narrowest and 3 miles wide at the widest. We are anchored 1 mile south of the narrowest spot known as “the glass window”. The highway span joins the two high mountainous points over a rocky cut through the island and forms a window to the Atlantic. A hurricane way out to sea had caused the hole between the islands from its storm surge. We motored over to get a closer look then power south 7.8 miles to “Hatchet Bay”. The wind was a steady 25 knots and now the seas were about 4 feet in a short steep chop. We spotted another sail boat about two miles ahead going the same way; he made a turn east and disappeared. Then another sailboat coming up from the south he turned east and disappeared. Hmm...Now Jeff says” there it is “ and I say “that’s 90 feet wide?” The guidebooks say that it looks narrow but there is plenty of room. The entrance to Hatchet Bay is a sharp cut in 90-foot high cliffs that run 150 feet long and looks maybe 60 feet wide. With the sea short and choppy and the wind now on our beam Polyphonic is rolling from side to side big time. I am on the bow and Jeff at the helm, I give the stay your course and then the Ok once we clear the entrance. Now protected on all sides by the high terrain and from the sea because of the narrow entrance we set the anchor and for the first time meet the neighbors. First Contact! Since we sailed into the Bahamas every time we anchored the other boats left we had not met anyone yet.

Manana and Magic two families traveling together husband wife and each with a child one 2 and the other 5. They invite us to dinner, I baked an apple pie to bring and we enjoyed salad and pasta with freshly caught lobster and grouper blended in. (lobster was still in season which ended March 31) we came home stuffed.

The Magic and Manana crew had already been ashore and clewed us in, the docks are deserted the restaurant is gone. The guidebook was a little out dated apparently the charter base and marina complex were destroyed in hurricane Floyd, The townspeople were incredibly friendly and accommodating. We had read that there was a cave nearby to explore got directions and took off walking.

After about a three-mile hike we came to the sign that read “Hatchet Bay Caves”, We followed down the trail and came to a roped off hole in the ground it looked overgrown with tall weeds but there was a set of carved steps that went down into the earth including a handrail for about 15-feet. It opened up into a chamber with your typical stalagmites and stalactites and sadly spray painted names on the walls. I had rubbed a spot on my heel and my transition lenses were not adjusting very fast so I hung out, while Jeff took the flashlight and followed a cable that ran along the wall deeper into the cave. He went deep into the cave and found a ladder going down to another level and while he was deciding should I or shouldn’t I. His sunglasses fell down to the bottom, so down he went there was a long carved out tunnel and he decided that maybe a better flashlight and another person would be good. I was just starting to worry because he was not answering my calls and I didn’t have a flashlight to go look for him. Anyway all is well out he



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comes and we trudge back to the road to town, by this time my heel is bleeding and I am walking one shoe on and one shoe off and a little pick up stops and Red gives us a lift to town, a very nice fellow who has a landscaping business and lives right on Hatchet Bay. It was our turn to have the neighbors over and we had decided on a potluck of hot appetizers, I also thought that some Rum punch was in order. When I stopped at the liquor store it was closed, no problem the lady in the grocery store called the lady from the liquor store and she drove down and opened up. Back to Polyphonic For preparations Manana, Magic and another boat Aquila also a family traveling with 2 kids and grandma, so we had a boat full. I put on the new DVD we got which was “Stuart Little 2” and the kids sat glued until it was over. It gave the moms a welcome break and allowed for adult conversation uninterrupted, another wonderful evening making new friends. Saturday comes and it’s chore day, we putter around the boat do laundry, which fills the lifelines, by late afternoon we went ashore for a walk. This time we head across the island to the Atlantic side the trail came out on top of a coral ridge with waves breaking ten feet away at the edge which dropped down 6-10 feet to the sea. Looking to the south I could see a beautiful white beach and to the north the coral rock continued at various heights up to about 30 feet. The trail went past the power plant, which was a metal shed that protected four generators only one of which was running at the time. past “Sukie’s Pig” farm and 8-foot tall sea grapes. Making note of the two-toed footprints on the trail I was wondering what might make a track like that when...we heard rustling in the bushes and out pops a goat followed by two more goats. Bah! Bah! It was a nice relaxing walk to the beach listening to mockingbird’s sing and the waves crashing on the rocks. We dingy back to Polyphonic and we can smell the pot roast that I left cooking in the crock-pot and we end the day with a perfect meal.

Sunday March 30 we accept an invitation from yet another boat “Jieto” a young couple with no kids on their Grampian 30. Jesse had gone crabbing with great success so we brought desert. We arrived to see the catch, which was piled high in a box, I think there were 15 spider crabs which had claws the size of 2 lb lobsters, not much meat in the body...all in the legs. So we boiled ‘em up and had a couple of twice baked potatoes, another feast. While we were waiting for the water to boil a hawk billed turtle popped his head up and we watched as he munched on jellyfish. The bay although a very calm spot was full of jellies so no swimming. Jesse had gone crabbing at the next pond north on the island a spot the islanders say is haunted so it has not been over fished like much of the Bahamas.

March went out like a lion with the passing of a cold front while we sat comfortably at anchor in Hatchet Bay with our new friends. So ends part one cruising tales of Polyphonic.