



**By Captain Jean Levine**

## Chapter 3 May Cruising Journal

The first of May as Polyphonic sits at anchor in Sapodilla Bay off the island of Providencial in the Turks and Caicos, I heard a familiar voice on the VHF radio, it's Rick from Endangered Species our friends from Tampa. They were heading into a marina on the other side of the island Jeff hails them and we set a time to meet and share a car to tour the island. Well the wind was howling on our side of the island and Jeff and I were stuck with no way of getting off the boat Jeff pattered at our continuous boat list and I was listening to the VHF in the background. I kept hearing Turtle Cove Marina sending it's pilot boat out to guide boats through the reef and into the Marina where Rick and Robin happen to be. When I heard boats with 7foot draft going in I got Jeff's attention and we made a plan to move the boat the next morning provided the wind backed down enough to see our way out Sandbore Channel. On May 2 the wind finally slowed enough for us to brave the move. So a downwind run through Sandbore Channel then a reach north around the tip of the island, then furl the jib and motor straight upwind to Sellars Cut where we met the pilot boat and he guided us through the reef and to the anchor zone where we would wait until morning for the tide to be high enough for us to transit into the marina. We no sooner had the anchor down when Rick and Robin rounded the corner in their dingy; it was great to see them. Jeff and I launched our dingy and followed them through the winding marked channel to the snake path cut into Turtle Cove. We had the dock master call customs and immigration and we were able to have the inspector come out to the marina and clear us in for a \$5 per person fee. The formalities were taking care of, so in the morning we crept into the marina carefully and went right to the fuel dock and took care of filling up first thing. We had been warned that once in our slip we would be aground at low tide we were so happy to be out of all that wind and sea that we didn't care. Rick and Robin have a 44foot Catamaran (Endangered Species) and had left Florida in November and were now on the way back from the British Virgin Islands. Rick had a complete set of computer charts, which Jeff downloaded to our computer that filled in the gaps we had in our paper charts. The next morning Robin arranged for the rental car, which turned out to be a left hand drive Toyota four runner.

A British island they drive on the left side of the road, Robin had some experience so she was our chauffer. So we drove all over the island, checked out marinas, the marine parts store, dive shops and of course the grocery stores of which we found a bargain center the Price Club for dry goods and IGA a regular supermarket with lots of selection of fresh produce, to wine and frozen foods. We saw some incredible homes and canals being dug to make more waterfront home lots to build more homes. This place has been discovered the homes start at \$300,000 and up. We treated ourselves to lunch out at Leeward Going Through and toured the Conch Farm. I had heard that the conch had been over fished but had not heard of farming them. It was a very educational stop. First the tiny little conchs



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are raised in pans 2feet by 3feet in a huge greenhouse then they get moved to a bigger pan, then outside into concrete pools (by then they are 1 to 2 years old and can be sold as escargot) then they get placed in pens out in a 2 mile long paddock in the shallow water at sea. The tour guide talked two conchs out of their shells one male and one female. That was cool! They each hung there and peeked out with the eyes on the end of their antenna.

Turtle Cove had a hotel, four restaurants, and two dive shops and across from our slip was a row of condos with docks. A short walk past the hotel was a road that leads to a 7mile white sand beach. Along the road where large single family homes mixed in with a couple of Bed and Breakfast Inn's at the far end along the pass to the marina was the National Park just offshore was Smith's reef and beautiful snorkeling accessible by the beach then the beach extended in a curve for seven miles and included Club Med and Sandals Resorts. Anchored just off of Club Med were two yachts straight from our Show Boats Magazine Rogue a 107foot sloop and Grand Finale a 147-foot motor yacht.

During our stay at the marina we met a couple with a Catana 43foot Cat from Texas they had a home on the beach here as their second home and they invited Rick, Robin, Jeff and myself to potluck dinner and guitar jam session. We all had a wonderful time trading stores. They were both dive junkies and had some incredible tales about diving with whales. Also at the marina was a 62 foot Sailmaster hailing from Treasure Island another neighbor from Florida, they were also heading back to Tampa. I had asked the skipper if he had any advise for us headed the other way and he loaned us a book "Passages South". It turned out that Jeff and I made good use of it. The main theme of the book was to use the night lee of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico to make the easting much like that of the British Admiralty's fleet.

After a week it was time to move on and we cleared out and set sail for West Caicos back through the reef, which was crystal clear since waves were breaking on both sides of the boat as we powered out. Then the daily afternoon rain storm kicked in and we continued powering until we reached the northwest corner of the island then we had a screaming reach on down to West Caicos were I scooped up the last mooring buoy for the night. The next day we beat our way south and around to French Cay a long 20miles upwind in rough seas. French Cay lies on the southwestern edge of the Caicos bank and is a bird sanctuary. There was a shipwreck off the end of the island a fishing boat named Capt Crunch from Tarpon Springs Florida of all places. I wish that I had taken a picture. At first we had not noticed how the boat was rolling but soon after the anchor was set it was clear this was not going to be comfortable. Rocking and rolling for three days the wind just blew and blew and blew. On Mother's Day May 11 the winds were predicted to be 10 knots from the southeast and shift east as we sail farther south with a slight decrease from 20 to 25 knots down to 15 to 20 knots we set sail for Manzanillo. Jeff and I had hopes as we sailed south we would be able to head up and point our true destination which was Luperon about 65 miles east of Manzanillo. The wind was steady at 20 knots (apparent) and we sailed with a reef in the mizzen and the jib, which we made smaller



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and smaller as the day turned to night. It was mid-afternoon when Jeff spotted a full size refrigerator floating on past, it was sitting 2 feet above the water on its back with no door. Yikes!!! Thank goodness we didn't hit it. Well that made for a nerve wrecking watch. The wind was supposed to be getting lighter as evening set in but instead it got stronger and stronger soon it was solid 30 knots gusting higher, the seas were 15 to 20 feet and the boat was charging up the waves and crashing down the other side sending water straight up the stanchion pipes like four foot fountains that was the most water I have ever seen over the deck and the guy with the bucket had a 55 gallon drum there wasn't a dry spot on deck. The wind had shifted east and we were almost pointing Luperon but when the wind got up to 40 knots Jeff and I decided to give up the windward and crack off 30 degrees for Manzanillo. We took down the mizzen and with only the tiniest sliver of a jib we maintained 8 knots of boat speed. So much for that weather prediction of 10 knots. After 60 miles we finally made the lee of 7 brothers (Siete-Hermanos) shoals we sailed a curved path along the Haitian boarder and by morning we were 18 miles from the dock at Manzanillo, Dominican Republic. What a rough day and night 24 hours that felt like a week. Safe and sound Jeff went ashore to clear in to customs and immigration shortly he came back with 3 officials in our inflatable dingy. (So it can hold four adults.... just barely.) I offer to cook them breakfast but they declined, as they preferred a cold beer, which I didn't have so I gave them cold soda instead. Jeff paid the fees and took them back to shore then we ate breakfast and went to sleep.

I woke up in a sweat and realized that the wind had died and immediately thought we should get underway to the next stop but here you must clear in and out of every port and we could not leave without traveling papers. Jeff went back ashore in hopes of getting our clearance with no luck. So we waited until the next morning and tried again Jeff got clearance for us to transit from Manzanillo to Puerto Plata and by 9 am we were on our way. A late start according to the "Passages South" handbook we had, but only a 15-mile day to Monti Christi seemed short enough to endure no matter what the wind. It started out 6 knots on our starboard stern quarter and I washed our laundry and hung it on the lifelines. Well I think that it was only about 45 minutes before the wind shifted to just off the bow and increased to 20 knots good grief I ran around and took the laundry down just in time to keep the salt spray off. So much for a little jib reach before we knew it we were back to pounding upwind short tacking along the coast to stay out of the big seas. The point of land the juts out is known as El Morro it is 1500 feet tall in the shape of a Texas Mesa. A mountain with the top cut off which protected the bay to the east and to the west is a reef, which is clearly visible. By the time we arrived at the anchorage the wind was 25 -30 knots true and I guess I hadn't had enough of a workout short tacking for 3 hours so I had to anchor 3 times before the hook was set of course the windless was on the fritz and I hand pulled the 66lb anchor and 135 feet of chain. (I had sore shoulders the next day.) To the south of our anchorage was the village of Monti Christi with a hotel



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along a white sand beach. Along the beach to the east was a canal under a fixed bridge where the local fishing boats are moored. The hillside St Pierre Hill is the backdrop to the town and is topped by a fort and a notable A-frame home, which makes a good bearing line into the anchorage. Jeff and I decide to stay put for 24 hours and log the wind speed and direction to try and get the rhythm of the wind pattern. Even though it was only Tuesday night the hotel had a beach band that started at sunset and went until 1 am and they were good. In the morning I decided to try laundry again and was surprised by a young man snorkeling beside the boat. He held up 5 lobsters to show me what he had caught. Jeff had just snorkeled the anchor and had not even noticed the lobsters.

After a restful day we plan for a midnight departure. Under a full moon sky we head out around Cabra Island and Punta Granja the wind was calm and the seas were rounded swells. Jeff kept the throttle at 1700rpms hugging the rocky coastline we made great time for Luperon. We arrived at 8 am behind four other sailboats one of which was zigging and zagging later we found out they had lost their rudder and had to be rescued by a few sailors in the anchorage and a brave skipper of a Catamaran named Folie a Deux.

(Translated means insanity for two-2 who share the same craziness.) Following the cruising guide Jeff stayed in the middle of the channel between two lush mountains straight ahead lies a mangrove cove turn to the right into a long finger surrounded by lush rolling green hills down to mangroves at the waters edge, there were about 70 boats at anchor. After a little depth sounding Jeff finds a spot and before I could finish getting the anchor set we were boarded by a boat load of local officials. Since we had cleared into the country in Manzanillo where we paid the comandante \$40, a translator \$20, and \$10 per person for immigration now we paid an agriculture inspector \$10 per person and a drug inspector \$10 plus a port fee of \$11. Good grief everyone had told us how cheap it was in the DR.... I guess that is after you clear in and if you only stop at one port.

After a nap we launch the dingy and head to town to find a long pier and a large dingy dock. The town itself is a small village about 10 blocks by 4 blocks. The streets are filled with colorful wooden shacks with wooden shutters for windows, there is an iron working shop, a machine shop, a laundry, a hair salon and several fresh vegetable stands where I bought the best tomatoes I have had since leaving Virginia and also the sweetest pineapple and cantaloupe melons. Still dog tired from our all night motor sail Jeff and I made a reconasense mission to find the provisioning store and the Pharmacia for more sea sick meds. The streets are busy with motor concho (scooters) and a variety of beat up cars and trucks all of which drive in the middle of the road. Alternating with the shops are dozens of little restaurants, chickens, horses, and cows roam free. The town square has a band playing and a number of artisan booths and rum punch stands. Even with all this activity you are quite aware of being in a third world country.

Friday May 16 Jeff and I pick up a few groceries, check email at the local Internet café a bargain at \$3 per hour and clear out with plans to depart again at midnight. I was a little worried that our friends on Kamal and Architeuthis still had not arrived since they had



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planned to leave the Turks 5 days before us. After an afternoon nap we checked out Puerto Blanco Marina on the other side of the anchorage. I secured the dingy to the dock then we discovered the gringo section of town, a nice open-air restaurant and bar full of the happy hour cruisers enjoying presidente beer and rum, coke and lime. That was when we met Robert, Mark and Sharon from Elan and Cat N Around they gave us the scoop on the path to the hilltop with a great view of the harbor and the sea. They are both from the Tampa area and invited us to join them for Karaoke later that evening. So Jeff and I walked through the fields with the bulls and past the houses on the hill and the resort along the coast to an absolutely magnificent view at the top. Then we joined the group at one of the resorts for singing and drinking, so much for leaving at midnight. We got back to Poly around midnight and heard Architeuthis on the VHF radio just entering the harbor so Jeff gave them a quick hail and asked about Kamal. No sign of them they had gotten separated at French Cay. Now I was worried, but the next morning my worries were over since they were now anchored right behind us. Happy to meet new friends and reunite with our traveling companions we decide to hang out a few more days. Saturday night Robert from Elan invites us over for a jam session, he plays saxophone and also has a beautiful singing voice. Sunday I organized a girls walk and talk with the purpose of scouting the wind and sea conditions for moving on. The boys got together for the local swap meet and flea market. We all agreed after collecting all the data that a window for moving out had come. Some of the boats had been there for three weeks waiting for weather and were really ready to go.

Sunday May 18<sup>th</sup> the first boats begin to head out at 6pm, Jeff hails Robert on Elan to ask about the conditions. He responds "not too bad, but we haven't gone out the pass yet Folie a Deux is having engine trouble so we're going anchor and work on it." So Cat N Around, Elan and Folie a Deux are anchored at the intersection, out of the anchorage but before you get out into the seas. About 8pm just after sunset along with Kamal we decide to head out past the others anchored with me on the bow with a spotlight to spot the buoys marking the reef we slide out to sea. Jeff turns the bow onto our heading and the waves, which were rough, start breaking over the bow and the spray is getting us all wet and it is just ugly. So Jeff hails Kamal and asks if they are having fun yet? The answer was heck NO! So we both turned around and went back in the pass through the reef and anchored comfortably with the others. Dawn came and Elan, Cat N Around and Folie a Deux all took off. We elected to wait until midnight to allow the wind and sea to back down (remembering how we had been leaving later to take advantage of the night lee). Argo, Seanote and Wallyworld also wanting to tag along, Jeff has been promoted to Commodore of the Fleet. They join us at anchor in the staging zone just before the exit and at midnight in a single file line spaced equidistant Polyphonic leads the fleet. Out and around the corner eastward bound, this time the winds less than 10 knots and the seas nicely rounded. We motor past the well-lit Puerto Plata then the moon rises and lights the way. A beautiful night motoring along the coastline by dawn we arrive at Rio San Juan



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were we join Cat N Around, Elan and Folie a Deux. We had planned on stopping here before rounding the dreaded Cabo Francis Viejo point warned that the cape effect accelerating the wind around the point would be unbearable. But when we arrive it was clear that the front from Florida had made it all the way to the north coast of Puerto Rico giving us a break in the trade winds and opening a window to stand on for the 220-mile passage from Luperon across the Mona Passage to Boqueron. Just after passing Cape Francis Viejo I had the watch while Jeff took a nap and there they were, the largest pod of pilot whales, just hanging out feeding 6 groups of 5. It was breathtaking. On and on we went around the eastern edge of the D.R. past the magnificent white cliffs and lush green tree covered mountains, past Samana and out into the Mona Passage. As night came so did the clouds and the speckled rain showers. We had set up a 3-hour radio watch with the fleet so we could track everyone's position through the night. It was midnight my turn at watch the darkest night I have ever seen the clouds blocked out the moonlight and I could not see where the sky ended and the sea began. The fading shoreline of the D.R. only visible by flashes of lightening every so often with only 5 knots of wind the sea was flat calm and our motor left a trail of luminescence 50 feet long and our wake glowing sparkles. It was an incredible sight. Since Polyphonic powers at a 7+ knots we were out in front of the fleet and it did not take long for me to notice we were on a reciprocal course with a fleet of container ships. So as they passed I hailed Cat N Around to keep a sharp look out here comes another tanker. By dawn Wednesday May 21 we were just off Isla Desecheo when I spotted a couple of small fishing boats and decided to put out my line. Bang! Just like that I caught a fish. Yippee! I woke Jeff up to take a picture I was so proud. To Jeff's dismay it was a Blackfin Tuna, which he does not care for so the cats and I had a feast. By noon we were anchored in Boqueron, Puerto Rico. (Located on the southwestern edge.) Called in to Customs, launched the dingy and set up the shade awnings. Around 4pm the other boats started to come in and Jeff and I played welcome committee delivering cold beer and rum punch. We wound up pilling on Folie a Deux (45 foot Cat with huge cockpit.) telling tales of just missing that freighter etc. It was just after sunset when we hear Kamal on the VHF coming into Boqueron (their first nighttime entrance ever) so Jeff and I head out by dinghy to play pilot boat. No problem soon they are anchored and join us for a nightcap.

Jeff had called our mail service before we left Luperon and we should have a mail packet so our first trip ashore is to the post office and surprising enough our mail was waiting. After walking to the post office we joined the others for lunch at a waterfront restaurant called Galloway's. Boqueron has a beautiful 2 mile long beach lined with palm trees and is run by the Park Service complete with tennis courts, playground and cabanas. At the far end is a foot-draw bridge over a canal to a private condo complex with docks. The bridge is strictly for pedestrians and has a 24hour bridge tender to open the bridge on demand for the yachts. The town itself is a small version of Kitty Hawk N.C. with T-shirt



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shops, restaurants and hotels. A travel agency has opened an Internet café across from the ice cream shop. No big high rises but the Boqueron Beach Hotel was 6 stories.

Thursday May22 becomes chore day, the depth at the fuel dock is too shallow for us so we lug our jerry jugs and after 2 trips of 6 cans each our tanks are full. There was some confusion about clearing into immigration and it turned out we had to go to Mayaguez and present our papers and ourselves so that was Friday's chore. We shared the 'publico' with another couple Alan and Gail from Duchess and had an adventure in Puerto Rican public transportation. After explaining to the second driver in our best Spanish we finally made it to the ferry dock and ultimately Immigration and the Department of Agriculture and after taking care of business we decided to spring for a taxi to take us back to Boqueron. The taxi driver was nice enough to stop at the bank and the supermarket before returning us safely to the dinghy dock. We joined Duchess for dinner and talked the night away. Saturday came Memorial weekend and every type of watercraft was zooming around the harbor. The jet skier's were actually very courteous as were most of the motorboats and the beachcat's/hobiecat's just blazed by so fast they were a blur. We dined with Kamal, shared happy hour with Cat N Around, and then rounded up all the boats in the bay for a night out on the town once the weekend madness had ended. I started the morning girl's walk and talk we rendezvoused at the dingy dock every morning at 9 am and walked all of the town and the public beach. By Wednesday we were ready for new territory so I suggested a field trip via Publico to the next town of Puerto Real. There were seven of us, for the first ride in a full size van ok, but then at the transfer point we all managed to fit along with the driver into a sedan. The town itself turned out to be a quaint fishing village but we found a hardware store that had boat stuff cheap and even the guys were happy they came. The next publico to come by was even smaller then the last but we pretended we were still in college and stuffed ourselves in returning to Boqueron laughing like kids. (We must have looked like the clown car at the circus with endless people coming out.) All in all a great time was had but now the weather was starting to look like we could move on so we said our goodbyes.

Thursday morning Kamal and Polyphonic once again the first to depart headed out of the bay and around to the southern most point Cabo Rojo. A beautiful lighthouse in the style of a New England lighthouse decorated the point perched a top spectacular cliffs. We intended on watching the wind and sea then departing at midnight when it should have been calm. Well the seas did not seem to be calming and the wind kept on howling (sound familiar?) and the swell wrapped around the corner. We renamed that point Cabo Rollo. Every hour all night I got up and checked the wind speed, still too much wind for the seas to subside I finally just gave up around 4am and went to sleep. When I awoke at 6:30am something amazing happened I looked out to sea and it was calm. Jeff wake up lets go; we had been considering going back to Boqueron (After our rolling experience at French Cay no way could I stand another rollee night.) We all knew that the departure time was late according to the guidebook we had been following one had to be around



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this corner by 5am but we decided to go for it. Thank goodness it turned out to be just a little bumpy but we made it to La Parguera by 9:30am. About 10 miles around the southern coast a resort village with 2000-foot mountains for a backdrop. After you enter through a barrier reef, there are a dozen small mangrove islands to anchor behind, one of which is 500 feet tall. Several small marinas surround the shoreline with rental boats and tour boats a typical tourist waterfront of t-shirt shops and gift stores. A lovely two-story resort shares a view of the bay and the reef with a pool complete with waterfall and beautiful flowering gardens. Bougainvilleas of purple, pink and orange colorful lantana and bleeding hearts abound. The village is modern and well maintained a short walk from the dock was a supermarket that was very well stocked and Jeff and I loaded up. We also discovered a Chinese Restaurant and splurged on a dinner out. Jenny, Mike, Jeff and I shared spareribs, Hunan beef, orange chicken, steamed veggies and sesame shrimp then spent two hours walking it off. The next day Saturday May 31 Jenny and I did the morning girl walk then a day of provisioning and the evening we decided to play tourist. We took the nighttime charter boat ride to the luminescent bay. It was a new moon and I though it would make the experience even more illuminating. We piled on a 2 story Cat about 70 feet long with an open-air upper deck and glass bottom ports in the floor of the lower deck. The guests hooted and hollered at the other charter boats as we sped past each other in the dark unlit channels around the reefs and mangrove islands (talk about local knowledge!). After about 20 minutes we arrived in a small bay surrounded by 300 foot hills about 2 miles in circumference, the captain announced something in Spanish and everyone crowded the lower deck around the glass peek plates. He gunned the engines and the green phosphorescence lit up under the boat then one of the crew scooped a bucket of water and poured it on the feet of a kid who screamed in delight at the green sparkles. All of us sailors looked at the display and laughed since we had all seen a much more spectacular show at sea. All in all we thought that the ride was a hoot, worth the price of admission \$5. We said an early good night since Kamal and Polyphonic were planning another 5am first light departure. Another short hop to Guanica 10 more miles up the coast to a spot known as Gilligan's Island. A pleasant morning motor sail put us at anchor by 8am and so begins the June cruising log.