



Postcards from the Caribbean #7
S/V Polyphonic
Jeff Grossman / Jean Levine
and the cats Sarge & Shadow
Dateline: Grenada

Polyphonic was leaving the French islands in our last postcard, sailing from Martinique to St. Lucia. At our last port in Martinique, Anse Mitan, we met Gary and Connie on their Gulfstar 50', "Aliyah". Gary and Connie are also from Florida (Daytona area) and we sailed in consort with Aliyah all the way to Grenada.

The Trade Winds have finally settled down to a normal pattern, which provides days of 10-15 knots breeze and mild seas. This makes for glorious sailing and we had a great sail to St. Lucia. We stopped about half way down St. Lucia's west coast to spend a few days in Marigot Bay. The bay's inner harbor is like a South Pacific movie set. Tall palm trees line a long narrow spit of beach that closes in the harbor, with tall lush hills surrounding the other sides. This makes for another excellent Hurricane hole, just in case something pops up while we're visiting.

Along the edge of this small harbor are a Moorings charter base, a couple restaurants, a resort, and JJ's bar. JJ's has a swimming pool in the middle of the outdoor bar. We enjoyed the pool immensely since we don't have one on the boat. With Gary & Connie we hired a guide for a land tour of St. Lucia. On the tour we visited a botanical garden with a small waterfall, a volcanic crater, and a got a good view of the Pitons. The Pitons are two spires of rock rising sharply out of the ocean with peaks of over 2500'! They are very dramatic and the signature landmarks of St. Lucia. We hope to anchor in between them on the way home.

St. Lucia's volcano is still active, but since it constantly vents, it hasn't had an eruption in some time. They say if it stops venting, watch out! The tour took us to the lookout platform where, from only 100' away, you can look about 20' down into a collapsed crater filled with bubbling pools of thick black water. Steam and sulfur rise from the pools to create the perfect set for Macbeth Act IV Scene I*. Watching the pools was hypnotic, like watching a fireplace. The water from the pools all joined to flow, hot and black, out into a stream. The locals believe that bathing further down the stream brings a healing power. We elected not to try this.

The inner harbor at Marigot is so picturesque that all of the "day tour" head boats, sailing from the populated ports of St. Lucia, take a swing through the harbor. So, as we hung out at anchor, periodically a catamaran filled with people pegging the party meter, would come winging by, everyone hooting and hollering as they go. Quite a show! The best was when the 100' Brig Unicorn would come in and turn around, under sail only, in a very impressive display of seamanship. We understand the Unicorn plays a starring role in the new movie "Pirates of the Caribbean".

Which leads us in to our next anchorage in St. Vincent. After another perfect sail, we stop in Wallilabou Bay, on the Southwest side of St. Vincent. There are warnings about crime and piracy (boat "invasions") in St. Vincent so we had not planned on stopping at the island. Most cruisers do pass it by, sailing straight from St. Lucia to Bequia in the Grenadines. However, we had heard from some friends, who



were sailing a few days ahead of us, that Wallilabou Bay was OK, and worth visiting. Since we had Aliyah traveling with us, we figured there would be some safety in numbers.

As we round the North point of Wallilabou and look into the shallow bay we are struck to see an 18th century village! Docks with gin poles (manual cranes), hay lofts, stone chimneys, and ox carts spread along the waterfront. It looked like 18th century Pirates should be hanging out on the docks. Turns out it was meant to look exactly like that since this where Disney filmed the new movie “Pirates of the Caribbean”! Disney had taken an existing hotel, customs house, some run down buildings and docks, and built the movie set over and around them. Walking around the set was fascinating and the realistic effect was impressive. You could walk right up to the stone chimneys and only realize they were sprayed stone over plywood by tapping on them. We could tell what angles the sets were filmed from since the backs, and many of the sides, were not finished. We can’t wait to see the movie!

We enjoyed our visit to the set, and felt relatively safe since the hotel had a 24hr security guard and floodlights. However, we learned from the locals (and later the cruising net) that a month earlier, in the next bay to the north, a boat had been attacked and cruisers injured. We will not be stopping at St. Vincent on the way back.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines are one country, but there could not be a bigger difference between them. St. Vincent is a large island, shockingly poor, no cruiser amenities, and a high crime rate. The Grenadines are a long chain of very small islands with many cruiser facilities, some of the friendliest people in the world and virtually no crime.

We leave St. Vincent for the first island of the Grenadines, Bequia ~20nm south. The wind dies, and then comes up light out of the West! This is extremely rare for these parts where the Trade winds always blow from the East. We get to set the spinnaker for the first time since the Florida Keys.

Bequia is a wonderful little island, somewhat U shaped with a very protected harbor within the arms of the U. Several beautiful beaches line the harbor and in the middle is a village with shops and restaurants. We stayed about 10 days, anchoring close off one the secluded beaches but still a short dingy ride to town. We spent our days swimming to shore for morning Tai Chi, walking around the island and many afternoons snorkeling right from the boat. One of the points of the U in the harbor is called Devil’s Point and has an excellent reef rising from 30’ deep up to the surface.

When we leave Bequia we sail a southerly course along the Grenadine island chain to the Tobago Cays, another perfect sail with Aliyah. Ah, THIS was what that travel brochure said the Caribbean was supposed to be like! Just as we are preparing for the tricky navigation into the Cays, Jean gets a big hit on her fishing line. The fish is pulling so hard that I have to luff all sail to stop the boat so Jean can fight it. Jean fights the fish for about 20 minutes, bringing it near the boat, right at the point we’re about to get a look at what this monster is, when twang ... and it’s a 30lb test “one that got away” story. Ah well, sheet in the sails and navigate into the Cays.

The Tobago Cays are one of the few, true coral atolls in the Atlantic. To the east, Horseshoe Reef forms a very large arc, extending over a full semi circle with a mile radius. To the west are a sprinkling of small islands and islets that close in the arc. Three narrow cuts, two deep and one shallow, allow entrance to the lagoon inside. Beyond Horseshoe, to the east, is the smaller arc of Worlds End Reef. We enter the lagoon and move up to the sandbar that backs up Horseshoe Reef, drop our anchor in 20’ of crystal clear water, and have a view from our bow looking straight out over the open Atlantic. Horseshoe Reef is so shallow that its outer edge creates a wall that you cannot even swim over, yet it is just underwater at high



tide. At low tide the wall looks like dragons teeth stretched along the arc of the reef. The outside of the wall drops off in a cliff several hundred feet deep. With the World's End reef breaking the big Atlantic swells, and Horseshoe blocking the rest of the waves, our anchorage is smooth and calm, despite being exposed to windward! This provided some of the most fantastic snorkeling I have seen, almost right from the boat. We went three times a day for three days! The wall was the eeriest. Having found some cracks in the wall and I kicked through and stared down into the abyss. Yep, that was precisely the view that someone had in mind when they came up with the word "abyss".

There were about 30 other sailboats with us in the anchorage and, while certainly not secluded, it didn't feel crowded. We definitely plan to stop in the Tobago Cays for several days on the way home. From the Cays we sail a short distance to Union Island, the southern most of the Grenadines.

On Union we clear out with customs and take a short visit of Clifton, the only village on the island. A short spinnaker sail takes us to the first island of the Grenada chain, Carriacou (pronounced "Carry ah CUE"). As we round the north point of the island, an island-trading schooner joins us, paralleling our course. These large wooden schooners are some of the last working sailing vessels in the world. Both boats are on final approach to the harbor when a big squall pops up over the hill. With the harbor ahead now invisible we heave to (stop the boat into the wind) with just our mizzen. What was cool is, just as we got Polyphonic hove to, I look to windward to see that the schooner, still parallel with us, has struck her jibs and foresail and hove to with her main. I get a glimpse of her settling in when the rain shuts down all visibility. Like our showers in Florida it was over in a few minutes, and as the skies clear, both sailing craft fell off in parallel to return to their course for the harbor ... felt just like days of yore!

We only take time in Carriacou to clear in customs and the next morning head for the big island of Grenada (pronounced GreeNAYdah). For the first time since we left the Turks & Caicos, some 4 months and over 1000 miles ago, the winds are light enough for us to put up the mainsail!

Just off the northwest point of Grenada is an underwater volcano called "Kick 'em Jenny". Though Kick 'em Jenny is many thousands of feet high, her crater is 800' below the surface. What this means is every time Kick 'em Jenny erupts all sorts of nasty things happen to the ocean surface around her. Even when she just burps the gas bubbles can rob a vessel of buoyancy and send it to the bottom. A 1.5nm exclusion zone is in force around Kick 'em Jenny's crater, and that is expanded to 5nm in times of alert. They say if Kick 'em Jenny ever really lets go the tidal wave will wipe out islands as far as St. Martin. Fortunately, she was quiet as we went by about 2nm off the crater.

We have a pleasant drift down the lee side of Grenada, flying four sails (~2700sqft) to the capital, St. George, on the SW coast. It is mid-August and time for us to hide in a Hurricane hole for the height of the Hurricane season. We choose to ride out the season here since Grenada lies below the "Hurricane belt" and has not had one since 1955. After provisioning in St. George's we sail around to one of the many protected bays that line the south coast of Grenada. For the first time since St. Martin we cannot see another island to the South, this is the end of the chain. Trinidad lays 70nm away, tucked into the coast of South America.

We leave you with Polyphonic anchored in Grenada's Mt. Hartman Bay, probably until mid-October. Our next postcard will cover our adventures on the wonderful island of Grenada including; racing with the local Grenada Yacht Club, hiking in the rainforests with the Hash House Harriers, and weathering the Rum Squalls.

* The Witches at their caldron chanting "Double, double toil and trouble ..."