

2001 Trans-Atlantic Cruise
By Jim Underwood
s/v Sabrina

To be underway at last, away from the pier and all that is left behind when lines are not slipped, but taken aboard for departure. There's something magical about heading out for open waters with no thought of returning that evening. Very magical indeed!

The night before, as my many sailing companions and close friends gathered for the dockside send-off party, I reflected on the almost 3 years of planning and dreaming. All the effort came down to that moment of hugs & kisses, hardy handshakes, envious happy/sad expressions, and SABRINA, my 1981 sloop rigged, Pearson 365, well provisioned & rigged for a year of Trans Atlantic sailing. And so, it begins.

Departure

Its 08:30, Saturday, June 9th, and the tide will soon start to ebb. A small flotilla of friends escorts us down the York River from Wormley Creek Marina, VA., and after a few miles the last boat waves goodbye and goes about. The wind holds SSE at 10-12 knots throughout the day and into the evening. By noon we're out of the Chesapeake Bay.

This being the first day at sea, routines are established. Meal preparation and galley cleanup, watch standing, preparing the ship for a night at sea. It's almost impossible to sleep, we're still keyed up with those "first day jitters". For me, I tour SABRINA like an expectant father. The awareness of independence/self-reliance increases as the last vestige of Virginia drops below the horizon. I think of the many disaster scenarios and my preparations for each. All solutions assume that no immediate outside help will be fourth coming. Though it is to be a solo cruise, I thought it prudent to have a companion for the first leg. This will allow me to ease into the routine. Bob was very excited as this was his first off-shore, small boat experience. My traditional first night at sea meal, chicken & rice, was almost ready as our wake trails into a setting sun. Come morning we'll be in the Gulf Stream.

The night passed without incident. The watch was set for 2 & 2 from 20:00-08:00 and 4 & 4 from 08:00-20:00. The man on watch was totally responsible for the ship and therefore could call out the other as he saw fit. Several large vessels were sighted. All but one returned our VHF hail. They acknowledged that they had us on radar at 8-10 miles or more and appreciated the contact. Better this than actions based on bad assumptions for the want of a simple "Hello".

We entered the Gulf Stream this morning and soon a 5 lb. dorado (dolphin fish), was hand-lined aboard! Lunch was sautéed dolphin finger sandwiches and tea. The royal blue of the Gulf Stream is in wonderfully sharp contrast to normal ocean hues. The water is so clear; I gaze over the stern pulpit into the deep and try to follow the shafts of sunlight. It's easy to imagine they go on to the bottom though I know otherwise. The average depth is 4,000 ft. Hmm? An object sinking at one foot/second would take 1.1 hours to reach the bottom. Yeah man, that's a long way down there!

There are errant bits & pieces of tuff Sargasso weed along with huge rafts of the nomadic flotsam. On a previous crossing I tried to motor through a patch. Imagine my surprise when the engine stopped dead, the shaft locked up with a clump of this strong-as-steel seaweed! These rafts are home to crabs and shrimp as well as a myriad of other small creatures. In the shadow of these great rafts the Dorado lurk. Woe be to the hapless little fish that strays too far from the raft!

There's many things a-drift in the stream. Some items, festooned with sea clams, have been out here for quite some time. Occasionally, we're reminded of humanity and that not everyone feels a respect for the ocean. About 250 miles at sea we encounter what can only be described as an aquatic trash dump! This swirling collection of Styrofoam, plastic, glass & wood must have been 50 yards across! No telling where it all came from or how long it has been out here.

In preparation for the cruise, I took Bob and went looking for trouble on the Chesapeake Bay. We found a couple of line squalls/thunderstorms and my perspective mate came through with flying colors. However, being out of sight of land often has adverse affects. Bob was feeling under the weather from day 2 through day 6, when we cleared in at St. George, Bermuda. Bob kissed the dock and caught the first plane home. His hopes of stepping into seven league boots dashed.

The first leg was remarkable if only for the want of more consistent wind. Unlike previous crossings, SABRINA was plagued with light & variables all the way to the Island with only one squall encountered. As it turns out, the majority of cruisers there had the same story, hours of motor sailing. Some came from Antigua and just made it in on fumes. Ironically, the previous weeks had gales north of the Island. Several boats coming from New England made it in with broken gear. One was dismasted. The message here is that May/June is the time of seasonal transition, a time when the North Atlantic is predictably unpredictable.

Generally, prices on Bermuda are high. We were shocked when a lunch bill was \$6 more than expected. The waiter explained that, unlike States side, water here was not free. But \$3 a glass!?! Diesel was \$3.80/gallon. One cruiser had dealt with this situation before. He organized the fleet and, as a group, we contracted for a tanker truck to deliver to the dock. If we could guarantee 500 gallons, the price would be duty free at \$1.90! There were 15 very thirsty boats rafted up when the truck arrived.

Having visited Bermuda previously, I did not spend time touring, but turned to getting SABRINA ready for the Azores leg. The following is a brief description of the pertinent systems installed for the cruise.

The sail inventory consists of a full battened main w/ Dutchman system. Foresails included a 6.5oz, 135% roller furling jib with a 7oz, 110% jib as back-up. Light air was handled with an asymmetrical spinnaker w/sock. There is no whisker/spinnaker pole.

It has been my experience that a cruiser does a great deal more motoring than might be expected. The electrical system consists of (4) 6 volt deep cycle cells and a dedicated 12 volt starting battery. I chose a 120 amp alternator with a smart charging regulator to support this arrangement. A 55 amp alternator was carried as a backup. No other source of power generation was provided. A 1000 watt inverter/charger completes the electrical installation. To this day, I've never wanted for power and have never had any electrical failures.

I carried a 4 man canister life raft secured on deck. I figured that in the worse case I may have no more than 2-3 minutes to launch the raft. A valise stowed in a locker just could not be deployed in time. My abandon ship bag contained a registered 406 MHz EPIRB, flares, water, hand held VHF, fishing line/lures, space blanket, and a few candy bars. It also contained my passport, some cash, and ships papers in a zip-lock bag.

For all normal sailing I relied on a Monitor wind vane. For the calm days I used an Auto Helm ST3000 belt drive electronic autopilot. The units proved themselves throughout the cruise.

SABRINA was designed as a cruising vessel with an 11 cubic foot icebox installed. Refrigeration is provided by a 12 volt, water cooled unit with holding plate. The cooling pump presented an interesting repair challenge the very next day!

It's a relatively new system, with less than a seasons use. Before departure I made sure that I was familiar with the cooling/heat exchanger portion and certainly expected no difficulties. Now, the steady red warning light indicated an overheating condition. As it turns out, it was my own meddling that caused this problem.

A fellow cruiser, who had an identical system, advised me to check all seawater passages for barnacle growth. Apparently this was a big problem in his system. And so, not wanting to leave any stone unturned before getting underway, I tore into the system and lo!, there was indeed seed barnacles in the cooling inlet hose. "Well" says I, "if they're in the hose they must be in the pump head too, so let's get into that as well!"

I'll take a moment here to confess that I was a typical Walter Mitty wanna-be as a young lad. I was great at taking all things mechanical apart but somewhat less proficient at re-assembly.

The cooling pump is a triple valve, quiet design mounted in the vertical, head up position. I removed the pump, dismantled the pressure head and sure enough, the little critters were in there too! I should've stopped there but I went on to remove the pressure diaphragm. Upon re-assembly I didn't tighten the diaphragm mounting screws enough. The result? You guessed it, saltwater contamination passed by the diaphragm and into the motor. That brings us back to Bermuda.

Inspection showed that the pump had been leaking since Yorktown, as there was silt in the motor housing. One of the armature brush springs had completely disintegrated. Not surprising with salt water and 2 amps. This was a 2.5 GPM pump and not readily replaceable on the Island. What to do, what to do? Well, what would Walter do?

I cleaned everything with solvent. The only substitute spring that even came close was one from my favorite ballpoint pen. The diameter was right but the pressure was too great. I cut off successive pieces until it was similar to its surviving mate. The unit was re-assembled, op checked in the sink and re-installed. From then on, the pump motor never missed a beat and is still going strong!

Azores Bound

There's a mob of cruisers waiting on the weather. Now it was a question of getting enough wind. The familiar voice of South-Bound 2, aka "The Herb Show", advises us that there simply is no wind, that you might find some if we motor NE for a day. So on 6/20 I head out to do just that. Our little flotilla of about 10 cruisers does likewise over the next 3 days. I chose not to install a SSB set and elected to rely on a multi-band

receiver for information only. The little Yacht Boy never failed to bring in the fleet's signal at the arranged schedule or The Herb Show, even at 13 degrees north latitude!

Indeed it was 24 hours before a few zephyrs filled in. Then a fine SE, 10-12kt breeze drew the sails and SABRINA through the night and next day. Progress is marked on the North Atlantic chart 120. As part of the cruise planning, I had sketched a gentle arch from Bermuda to the island of Fial, Azores. This would give me an idea of time/days at sea. Of course, in chasing the wind, I was already above that line. I intended to stay south of the Gulf Stream if possible.

As the days progressed the fleet was getting stretched out over a hundred miles. Some had gone further north only to find light airs. SABRINA and others found fair winds but were being headed by a counter current of 1/2-3/4kt that seemed to reverse parallel the Stream. Then Herb warned us, "You want wind? By golly, you gonna get it and how!"

On 6/29 the winds started to increase as a cold front edged closer. First it was 12-15kts with slight changes in temperature. Clouds were building on the western horizon, big clouds. The first reef was tucked in and the jib shortened. I went through the boat and secured everything, again. I put on the heavy foul weather gear and harness and changed out the Lexan hatch board for teak hatch boards, securing the lower two in place. I also took the time to make a thermos of beef stew.

Throughout the night the wind increased. By morning it was a steady 30 gusting to 35kts. Seas were running about 12-15ft. I had stowed the main during the night and reduced the jib to a meager 25%. SABRINA was ridding just fine at 5 1/2-6kts on a quartering reach. The Monitor, in total control, never missed a beat.

By late afternoon the wind peaked at 40kts. The boat was slammed a few times by breaking waves with only one dumping into the cockpit. Most of the time I stayed braced in the companionway just watching the show. It's a hell of an impressive sight to see such waves. Tends to sharpen your focus on just what's important in life. Dolphins visited, rocketing from the wave faces, they seemed to be having a great time! I gave them all 5.9's! Late that night the front passed and the bottom dropped out of the wind. What was left was a confused sea that made for a lumpy spinnaker ride.

The noon chat reported broken gear, lost equipment, and blown out sails. One unfortunate got her finger caught between a sheet and the winch which resulted in a clean break! There was also concern about SABRINA, had anyone made contact? "I'm here, doing just fine", I said to no one. Later that day I would hail a west-bound tanker and ask them to relay my position/condition to any sailboats encountered. The following day's chat reported contact with this tanker and that all was well with SABRINA.

I was now above 39 degrees north and on the edge of the Stream. The ocean was filled with life. Turtles and whales were a daily occurrence. On one particular full moon I came on deck at 02:00 to find I had company! A humpback whale was gliding next to the boat just 30 feet to starboard. The young cetacean stayed with me for several hours.

The hand line never failed to provide fresh fish, with tuna and Dorado being the usual catch. Occasionally, something big would grab the line and never slow down. Despite the heavy duty shock cord, the 150lb mono would snap like thread. "Good riddance to you sir", says I! I wouldn't want such a beast in the cockpit any way.

I had been under spinnaker moving along smartly. However, the wind was getting up and it was time to get the shute down. I was bagging the sail on the fore deck when an

unexpected wave slammed the bow. I was somewhat off balance and as the bow went one way my left knee went the other! I ended up on the deck holding the sail, a life line and my knee. Oh Lord! Huston, we have a problem.

I knew what it was, a torn meniscus, very painful but not fatal. I dragged the sail and myself back to the cockpit and took stock of the situation. I was prepared to deal with broken fingers, even a broken arm. I included a surgical kit for fishhooks, etc. But there was simply nothing you can do short of surgery for this injury. I was fortunate that I could extend the leg, albeit with much discomfort.

Well, let's get the jib out and get the boat squared away. The remaining four days to Flores, Azores, proved to be a quite a challenge. But, with some creative bandaging and hopping about, I arrived at sunset on July 7th.

Azores

One of the northern most of the Azores, Flores has a significant rainfall. Winters can be brutal with winds clocking in at 120km/hr for days on end. However, true to it's name, the island is dressed in a myriad of flowers. Like most of the islands, the hill sides are lush green. Flores is typical too in that it is often covered in mist. With its' tall peaks, I should've seen it at 35 miles but finally caught sight of land at just 5 miles! No wonder the Azores were known to the early navigators as the disappearing Islands! After a couple of days the fleet was in and we all had a terrific pot luck dinner on the beach with plenty of stories to go round. Next stop Fial.

The 130 miles to Horta, Fial, was an easy overnight sail. After clearing in, I rafted SABRINA to my assigned location on the sea wall. My wall mate was a German single hander, so we had much to talk about.

Horta is the Mecca for Atlantic blue water sailors. It was quite heady being amongst the well traveled. As I walked down the quay in the evenings it was not unusual to hear 5 or 6 languages spoken. The wall is a great sign post for those who have passed this way. Some of the pictures are true art. Others are more fanciful. I took the time to proudly paint my logo on the wall. As it turns out, a location was available right next to "WEDIDIT", a boat from my own marina that had visited the year before!

SABRINA had made the crossing in fine shape. However, the raw water pump shaft seal was leaking and the VHF had gotten a bit dodgy. Mid Atlantic Yacht Services (MAYS), provided excellent service for getting parts for the pump and ferreting out a loose connection in the VHF antenna cable.

I toured Fial in a taxi with several other cruisers. It is a beautiful, unique setting, that reflects its' European beginnings. The 6ft tall, blue hydrangea hedgerows that crisscross the meadows add just one more colorful accent to the pastoral scenes. The open air market is a cornerstone of island culture. Yes, there are supermarkets, but going to the open market is such a unique experience it should not be missed. And everything is absolutely fresh!

A note here on communications- I chose to rely on internet café's to keep the home front informed. Unknown to me, news letters sent to my ex-co-workers, blossomed into a circulation of almost 100 hungry, vicarious readers. Wherever I went the internet was always available.

From almost anywhere on the southern coastline, the adjacent island of Pico, with its' 2,350 meter volcanic crest, dominates the horizon. This brings into focus the knee

injury and all the hiking I had planned. While I was cautiously ambulatory, there would be no hiking trips. This then resulted in an excess of time. I had planned to visit Madeira next but not until late August or early September. What to do, what to do? Well, it looks like a side trip to the mainland is in order!

S. Portugal

After a brief stop on Terciera, Azores, I departed for S. Portugal on 8/2. It should have been an easy 7 day passage. I did get 4 nice days but then it turned into a beat against 18kts. What I hadn't fully considered was how much I would have to compensate for the Canaries current. The result was I had to pinch it higher and higher. What I really didn't plan for was the pea soup fog as I approached the coast and prepared to cross the North/South shipping lanes!

I woke up to a light mist on 8/9. The wind was down to 12/15kts and I was about 15 miles from Cabo Sao Vincent. If the visibility didn't get any worse I should be alright. After breakfast I came on deck again only to strain to see a hundred yards. Great, and I'm just entering the lanes. As if on queue, I heard a rhythmic thumping off the starboard bow. I tried to determine the Doppler angle. Left? Right? None!? Yes, he was moving left to right. I never saw the ship. But less than 2 minutes after he passed I was rolled by the wake and choked by the exhaust! God, that was close! My senses were a-tingle when another engine came in on the starboard quarter. Higher pitch, moving fast. The fishing trawler came out of the fog as he cleared away from me. Please, get me the hell out of this fog!

Finally, the water texture changed. There were bits of seaweed and the occasional puffin-like diving sea bird. Land, it must be close. The water was deep and did not yet register on the sounder. It was deep right up to within sight of the rocks and cliffs as they came out of the fog. I nearly impaled SABRINA on Cape St. Vincent! I followed the shore south about a half mile and rounded the Cape into beautiful sun shine! Yeah baby, life is good!

I put into a quiet river basin called the Alvor for a much needed rest. A few days became a week. The town of Alvor turns out to be the European equivalent of Key West. Sun, sand, and sex and very little of anything else. I was tempted to enter the Med but departed for Madeira on 8/15. Fortunately, there was no fog and I was clear of the coastal shipping lanes by sunset. However, there was plenty of other independent traffic and as always, one must be vigilant.

Madeira

The passage was notable for the rescue of an entangled turtle. I came upon what appeared to be a piece of fishing net. Within it was a turtle of about 30 pounds, looking very much the worse for ware. "Dead, I'm sure" says I. Poor bugger. But what if he's not? Where are you off to in such an all fired hurry that you can't at least stop and make sure?

I came back around, dropped a boarding gate, and with a boat hook, hauled the net and its captive aboard. No, he wasn't moving, but he was alive. Well, maybe this was his lucky day. I cut the net away and to my surprise, the turtle came to life and scampered overboard! Well I'll be damned! I finished mincing the net and sailed on.

Porto Santo came into view on the afternoon of 8/18. This island is about 30 miles from Madeira and has little to recommend it but miles of un-crowded beaches. In fact, the

Madeirans come by day ferry just for the beaches as there are none on Madeira. After a few days, I moved along to Funchal, Madeira.

Like the Azores, Madeira is Portuguese. The locals are very friendly and welcoming to the cruiser. The Island is tropical and, prior to the South American fruit trade, supplied much of Europe's banana crop. Madeiran wines have always been popular. I met another solo sailor here, James, from PATRICIA. Together, we sampled many of the outdoor cafes for fine dining and good music. James is 61, and on his return trip from Plymouth, England, to Brazil, to be reunited with his new love. But, as they say, that's another story. On 8/27, departure was made from Fuchal, bound for the Canary Islands.

Canary Islands

The passage to the Spanish speaking Canary's was just 280 miles. The Portuguese trades, ENE 10-12kts, were filling in. However, getting away from the lee of Madeira's tall peaks required half a days motoring.

On 8/29 I was having dinner when I casually glanced aft to see a pair of Humpbacks broach from the depths! Hope they know I'm here! The peaks of La Graciosa, the eastern most of the Canary's, should be visible now and indeed, they were. But at this speed and distance it will be a night approach. Not the best of circumstances. Normally, I would hang off an unfamiliar landfall, and wait for better light. But conditions were about to change.

I was cleaning up from the evening meal when the boat rocked unexpectedly. Where did that come from? I came on deck to witness the approaching sea change. Get the main down! Shorten the jib! Now the trades had really filled in at 20-25kts! Sabrina was soon dashing along at 7 1/2-8kts under half a jib. Because the night was clear with a 3/4 moon, I decided to make the approach, instead of hanging out in the maelstrom. ETA 00:30.

At 23:30 the water came alive with dolphins! Phosphorescent streaks marked their passing, so close you could reach down and touch them! I was lost in their revelry when the water erupted next to the boat and a swordfish rocketed past the cockpit! Holy Christ! This fish was 10ft long at least, and jumped 4 more times within a few feet of the boat! Lord, don't let him jump into the cockpit! Please, please!

I was spared further theatrics by the locals as the dark Island took on a more distinct shape. In the moon light, I managed to find the channel entrance, avoid the breakers, round up in the lee of a La Graciosa, and secure for the night. No one would believe this, no one.

Lanzarote

I was very surprised when, in the mornings light, I surveyed what was simply desert. I had this pre-conceived notion that the Canary's were going to be all palm trees and tropical anchorages. If I had read just a little bit about the Islands I would've known that, at 60 miles from the Western Sahara, the easternmost islands share the same climate, hot, dry, and dusty. The NE trades are called the Harmatten winds here. I would not feel the blessed touch of rain for many days to come.

La Graciosa was a good landfall, but I moved the following day to the adjacent island of Lanzarote. The windward side of the island is buttressed by towering, barren cliffs. The leeward side supports humanity. This is typical for many of the Canary's.

On the way to the anchorage at Arrecife, the handline brought in a 10lb. Wahoo. The fish was dinner for 7 people that night. Food is a great way to bring folks together, especially hungry cruisers. The spice of cruising is being open to these new relationships. A few days later our troop of (1) American, (4) Germans, and (1) Spaniard crammed into a sub-compact rental to tour "Timanfaya" volcano park, and the rest of the island. We had a great time, especially with the languages!

Fuerteventura

After a week or so it was time to move on. I was anchored at the northern end of an adjacent island, Fuerteventura, on 9/11. Some German friends stopped by about mid-day and said they had some bad news for me. Perplexed at what they could possibly give me as bad news, I was shocked to hear of the Trade Center bombing. Like all Americans, I had my sense of reality rocked that day. I recalled conversations with my co-workers after the first attack on the Trade Center. They will try again, perhaps with a nuclear device. These acts are horrific, but they are not unbelievable or unexpected. I know there's nothing to be done, but I feel so impotent.

I looked at SABRINA's American flag. I had been underway for 3 months and the flag was less than pristine. I took it down, washed the salt stains away, and pressed it neatly. That afternoon I raised it proudly and proclaimed aloud, "Yes, I'm the American, and damn proud of it"!

Over the next several days, other cruisers came by to express their feelings. Some, I had not yet spoken to but that didn't matter. They expressed their feelings as if it was their own country that had been attacked. Here, underway, we are all part of the same community. On 9/20 I departed for Las Palmas, Grand Canaria.

Grand Canaria

The city/port of Las Palmas on Grand Canaria is the capital of the Canary's. Any service one could imagine is available. Provisioning, ship/yacht repair, and international communications are all readily provided. Additionally, the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers, (ARC), is staged from Las Palmas. The rally gets underway in December with this year's fleet numbering in the hundreds. What a mob! I too plan to depart from here, but for now it was time to see Tenerife.

On 9/22 I passed around the north end of Grand Canaria. The breeze was a pleasant NE 10/12kts. I deployed the hand line and sat back and, my nose buried once more into a dog eared paperback.

The hand line shock cord is secured to the stern pulpit. The line end of the cord is then brought back and clipped into a clothes pin that is mounted to the pulpit as well. When the fish strikes, a tell tale "snap", reports the event. I had just cleared the island when the line roostered through the water! The strike was so violent that the clothes pin flew into pieces! Instantly the cord shot out. I cringed, for when it came up short and broke, I was sure the pulpit had pulled loose! I never even saw the bugger! "There goes another \$5 lure", says I. From then on I made my lures from pieces of red & white spinnaker cloth whipped around a 1oz. sinker. The fish hit that just as much as anything else.

Tenerife

Turning south, I passed down the eastern side of Tenerife, and in the morning came into Los Christianos on the southwest coast. The Island is heavily populated, has light industry, and English is the first language. Tourism is a major element of the Canary's

economy. In this way, Los Christianos is typical. The tan beaches are groomed every morning. There are endless shops that provide everything the visitor could ever need with sun faded signs touting the absolute lowest prices of the year. The night pulses with live music until the wee hours. For me, it was a place to have SABRINA hauled for a much needed bottom job.

The "confradia pescadores" or fisherman's co-op, controls all such activity. On Friday, the yard boss gave me 30 minutes to get into the haul-out slip. So I hustled to pull the anchors, stow the tender, set fenders, and get the dock lines ready. I put SABRINA into the hauling slip only to hear the operator said "Oh no senior, you must turn de barco around!" Nuts! A crowd had gathered and I'll have to clear away and back in her in! Lord above! All went well without a scratch. The lift operator motioned that I should jump overboard to ensure the aft sling did not foul the propeller shaft. So jump in I did, adjusted the sling, and scrambled back aboard in time to see several approving nods as the crowd dispersed. Tough bunch, these local fishermen. I was hauled out with a modern travel lift but they blocked the boat using 55 gallon drums and sections of tree trunks! OSHA be damned! Come Monday I was back afloat, none the worse for ware.

On 10/2, I slipped away for an overnight sail to La Palma. In the cool morning I approached the island. The breeze had gone light. At first light the mists came creeping down the pine studded hill sides on cats' feet, carrying that sweat scent with it. The contrast between the smell of land and that of the sea evokes a flood of thoughts. Some primal, some wistful, but always strong feelings.

Unlike the eastern most islands, there is plenty of greenery on Grand Canaria and the islands to the west. La Palma is tall enough to catch the moisture picked up from the sea. The hills cause clouds to form and viola, rain! At least, over the land anyway. Compared to Las Palmas, La Palma is a sleepy little place. With friendly people and quiet nights, it was a very pleasant visit indeed.

I returned to Los Christianos and prepared for the short, 25 mile run to La Gomera. The day started out pleasant enough but turned into a real slugfest.

A little note here on acceleration zones. These are areas between islands that, when the Trades are right, act like natural funnels. The result is a stretch of sea where the local wind will increase 10-15kts over the adjacent waters.

I encountered such a zone on this day. Along with it, there was an adverse tide. This combination resulted in a beat into 25kt winds and square, breaking seas. Even double reefed, it was very unpleasant and the worst sailing of the trip. The motion was so violent that it snapped all the Dutchman lines in the mainsail.

I came about and never did get to La Gomera. On the return leg I passed two chaps in a small rowboat. "Pretty gutsy if you ask me, or crazy", I thought, as I lost sight of them in the waves. But then I remembered, it was Sunday, the start of the rowers race to cross the Atlantic from Tenerife. Some people just have to push it I suppose.

In late October I returned to Las Palmas to top off provisions. By this time the anchorage had swelled from 10 boats to over 40. I hadn't seen another American cruiser since the Azores but now I counted 7 American flags. The next few days were filled with impromptu parties and dinners. We shared our stories and plans to cross back over. I met a Pearson 36, Le CIEL, which was headed home too. Perhaps we would see each other along the way. Some boats planned to drop down to the Cape Verde Islands and then over. This would break up the trip and thereby reduce the at-sea time. 800 & 2020 miles

vs. 2,800 miles. On the other hand, the Cape Verde's didn't have a particularly good reputation. But wasn't that the southern most islands of that group? On 10/31, SABRINA set sail for the Cape Verde Islands.

Cape Verde Islands

It was a blissful 8 days of mostly light winds to Isla Do Sal, the northeastern most of the group. Since Portugal, sailing has been off the wind on a broad reach or running. The main was not used very much except for inter-island trips. On day four of this leg, the spinnaker masthead block was being quite verbal in its need for some attention. I rigged my folding mast steps in the mainsail track and went aloft to silence the offending shackle. What a perfect time for a couple of pictures!

From my underway perch, 53 feet above the water, the view was fabulous! How did that song go, "I can see for miles, and miles, and miles, oh yeah" I could also see several small tuna escorts at the bow and a rather sinister shape trailing off the stern! I changed out the shackle and greased it copiously. Perhaps I would invite the tuna for lunch. In fact, the tuna would keep for now. I still had fresh Dorado. I watched the 5lb fish dart out to get small minnows from time to time and race back to the shadow of the boat. The next day they would make a fatal error in judgment.

The following day, the dark trailing shape had come within a few feet of the boat. The iridescent blue-black, sickle shaped tail casually stoked back and fourth to match SABRINA's 5kts. It was a swordfish, about 8-10ft long, his colors incredibly vibrant. "So that's what's been running off with my lures!" To see the fish so close was certainly a treat. But, he was there for a reason.

I was finishing a breakfast of fresh fruit and dorado fingers when there came a slight thump against the hull. "Must be the tuna knocking about." It would be easy to catch one when the time came. This morning the little guys didn't stay at the bow but moved towards the back of the boat. Within seconds the swordfish flayed and slashed in an explosion of wave and foam. Only a few bits of tuna remained, drifting into the deep. Small fish darted after the scraps. Just a little reminder that there's very little room for mistakes out here.

Isla Do Sal was sighted on 11/08. The Cape Verde's have been in a drought for about 28 years. It looks like they've never had rain, ever. Fishing is the only industry of these islands. There was an effort to organize that industry here but it appears to have seen better days. I decide to do the 95 miles overnight to Sao Nicolau that afternoon.

Conditions on Sao Nicolau were somewhat better. I stayed overnight and spoke with several cruisers. Their message was clear, "Stay away from the southern islands. There's a lot of thievery going on". They had even heard of similar conditions in the capital, Mindelo, my next stop. Great, just, great.

There was a hoard of kids on the beach kicking what appeared to be a knotted -up clump of rags as a soccer ball. This I thought is a home for Wilson. At a departure dinner back in late May, I was given a Wilson basketball as a parody to the movie "Survivor". I whistled to get the kids attention and held up the ball. Several ran to the waters edge with arms raised. I smacked the ball in their direction, and let the wind and waves carry it in. I don't think I've ever seen a happier bunch of youngsters in my life. Come to think of it, I felt pretty good too. The next day I flew down wind the 50 miles to Mindelo.

My intention for stopping at Mindelo was to top off fuel and fresh fruit, if any was to be had. The anchorage was being blasted by the late afternoon trades when I finally rounded up and set the anchors. Within 20 minutes an enterprising boat boy had pulled along side and offered his services. As it turns out, he was the dark horse of the anchorage. Several boats, including Le CIEL, came in that afternoon and the next day. It was a happy reunion for us that included several days of shore trips. The following night the first boat was robbed. The thieves took mostly money. They even picked the hired watchmen's pocket! Later, it was found that he was part of the gang. Complaints to the local police fell on death ears. Their response was "Well you know mon, there's trouble all over de world". And so an impromptu vigilantly committee arose. There were rumors of another hit the next night. It was agreed, we were going to have to protect ourselves.

It was 02:00 when the horns and lights shattered the night! Some very angry Germans accosted 3 locals that had come on board. A fourth was standing by in a small skiff. It was my boat boy! The locals were roughed up quite a bit but made it ashore, barely. Alrighty then, me thinks it's time to move on.

The Return Leg

After the difficulties at Mindelo, November 14th, departure day, was welcomed with opened arms. I must admit too that ever since I put my logo on the wall at Horta, I've had something of a "horse for the barn" attitude.

The morning sun had just kissed the crests of the surrounding peaks as SABRINA cleared the harbor. Le CEIL was to depart an hour behind me. Our boats are essentially the same so with luck, we should be in radio contact all the way across. The 2,020 miles to Barbados should take about 18 days.

The trade winds are easterly here, and will be gaining strength the further east I progress. There's no threat of hurricanes at this point in the season, though I'm crossing a little early and may have to dip a little further south to get consistent winds. However, one should avoid getting below 10 degrees north. This is the Inter-tropical Convergence Zone (ITZ), an area known for dodgy weather any time of the year.

The first week underway was rather benign with light winds and a northerly swell. There was also a secondary SE swell running and combined, conditions were at times quite lumpy. Contact with Le CEIL was lost by the second day. Weather reports advised of 20-30kt winds up around 19 degrees north. As always, the fishing was great.

Week 2 had the trades fill in. Under spinnaker, the miles ticked off. I was getting into more convection activity now and fast moving squalls were not uncommon. Of course, sail drill kept things lively. Down with the chute; out with the jib. Etc., etc. I never did set the main. One day, just before noon, a huge shower came rushing down on us. I buttoned-up the boat and took the wheel. What the hell, the spinnaker needed a bath and so did I. The winds hidden in the shower pushed SABRINA to 9 1/2 kts! There were a few moments where I thought I might lose the sail. It was all over in 25 minutes, two huge rainbows marked the passing.

I was rolling along at a casual 51/2kts, when something thumped against the boat. In the wake was a huge turtle recovering as if he was just rudely awakened! This was by far the biggest I had ever seen. The head was about twice the size of a basketball. The flippers were the size of a New York snow shovel! The green body I guessed to be over 6ft in length. He just rolled along as if it happened every day, seemingly un-phased by the encounter.

For the entire crossing there was only one piece of serious weather. This particular day started with the southern horizon lined with sentinel-like cumulous clouds. Through out the day their steady advance was like a drumbeat of a coming battle. At sunset lightning streaked as the vanguard unsheathed their swords! The night passed with skirmishes but SABRINA managed to avoid the worst squalls. At first light, only a few ragged stragglers could be seen moving off to the northwest, the roll of thunder fading with them.

On the morning of 12/02, mist shrouded Barbados came over the horizon. All those miles of trade wind seas piled up to make the final approach quite interesting. As I rounded the southern end, a topless lass buzzed by on a windsurfer and yelled, "Welcome to Barbados mon"! Welcome indeed, I must say! Le CEIL rolled in the same day as the sun set.

The Windward Islands

Barbados' British influence and her native island culture join hands to make it a delight for the visiting tourist. Conditions for the visiting cruiser are somewhat less accommodating. Still, it was great to gorge on fresh fruit and veggies. It was also a relief to have the longest leg completed, and to be on the western side of the Atlantic once again!

There was a tropical depression forming just south of the island. With the anchorage at Carlisel Bay wide open to the west, well, maybe it was time to move on. I was scheduled to rendezvous with my partner Lisa, on St. Thomas the week after Christmas. For this, the course would turn north. The southern Windward's would have to wait for another cruise. Martinique, 110 miles NNW, would be an easy overnigher.

The steady Trades gave Le CEIL & SABRINA a lovely reach for the day and moon lit night passage. It's these times, when it's perfect, that will never be forgotten. The Big Dipper, Orion, and Cassiopeia will always be there. And when I'm in my twilight years I'll see them and remember, and be so glad I did this, rather than regretting that I so wanted to, but never had. We put in to the little town of Marin on the southern tip of Martinique the next morning.

Marin is a key point for sailing interests. Everyone is very supportive and relaxed. Even the customs official was smiling! Like most Windward Islands, the air here is thick with that earthy, greenhouse smell. After the desert-like eastern Atlantic islands, the afternoon misty showers are a God-send! It's overwhelming how everything is so, "green"! Le CEIL's crew flew home to South Carolina for a month. After a few days of relaxing and bussing about the island, I departed for points north.

The Windward Islands are generally within a day sail of each other. Most often the hook is down as the sun does likewise. It's rather nice to end the day with a smooth drink and a comfortable bunk. In this way I moved up island to Dominica and Guadalupe.

I spent a few days at Pointe-a-Pitre, a small town between the two main islands of Guadeloupe. I intended to spend my last French francs on a final trip ashore but when I entered the open air market place, a fight erupted between two female vendors. It looked like it was coming to blows when the gendarme stepped in to separate the combatants! Things calmed down after a few more well placed insults and spittle broadsides. You have to love these little impromptu bits of theater.

Rather than go around Guadalupe, one has the option to pass through the middle of the "butterfly" via the Salee River. That is, if you don't draw over 5ft. At 04:30 the next morning the bridge lifted and the parade advanced. But, there always seems to be someone that just has to be first. In the dark, as the boats were creeping towards the dimly lit bridge, a chartered catamaran broke ranks and ran ahead. "Hell, he might not even fit because of his beam", I'm thinking. Sure enough, with a crack that shatters the graveyard stillness, the brand new boat bounces off a concrete foundation. The rig threatens to come down but he manages to wiggle through intact. Heated voices roll across the still waters, much to the amusement of the other cruisers. Once through the bridge, I and another cruiser probe our way down the mist enshrouded, mangrove lined river and anchor in the first open area to await the morning light. After a light breakfast, it was up and away under shortened jib. The 40 mile romp to Antigua passed quickly and the day ended with SABRINA anchored in Falmouth Bay.

The weather was acting very peculiar for this time of year. What should've been steady easterlies was coming in fits from the northeast. As was my custom, I dove on my anchor just to make sure it was well set. The unexpected winds continued to rise. At 21:00, I set out a second anchor. That night the winds peaked at 60kts in lightning squalls! The locals all agreed, never had they ever seen such weather in early December. One unfortunate motor sailor dragged onto a shoal. The ensuing re-floating operation provided great entertainment. The day before, as I watched him anchor, I thought his ground tackle was a bit light. There are times when there simply is no substitute for a good length of chain and a heavy CQR.

Having read a number of Hornblower novels and thereby being immersed in the history of the Caribbean, I took the obligatory tour of Nelson's Dockyard. It was also charter yacht week. This is an excuse for all the very large and very expensive yachts to strut their stuff. The paid crews were constantly in motion, cleaning, polishing, and laying on that 12th coat of varnish. One crew had used several cases of 3" wide blue tape to mask off the teak. My God, I don't think I could even afford the tape! But I must say, all the boats were gorgeous. The next day I moved around the corner to Five Island bay. Ostensively, this was to afford a daylight crossing to St. Kits. However, the bay itself was to leave a very lasting memory.

It is a broad bay, and being on the leeward side of Antigua, is fairly quiet. In the afternoon I ghosted into a verdant hill bordered cove about half way up the bay. "What a splendid location," thought I. There was even a small beach frequented by cattle from a local farm. I anchored in the normal fashion and prepared to dive to inspect the set. One never knows what's down there. The circumstances being totally private, I elected to do the inspection a-la natural. Donning mask & fins, I make the short swim through the somewhat cloudy water to see that indeed, the anchor was well into the marl. I was stroking along the return leg, thinking of supper, when the first gossamer strands caressed

my chest and shoulder. By the time I realized what it was, the jellyfish had passed between my thighs and the entire world was aflame!

KEE-rist! I sat in the cockpit with tears in my eyes. And no meat tenderizer on board! Well, there's little choice in the matter. One must do what one must do. So with great concentration I peed into my hands and coated the affected areas. Relief was fourth coming, albeit not as fast as I'd have liked. Dinner was rather low key that evening.

The passage to St. Kits' Ballast Bay was notable for the fish, that wasn't. Approaching the southern end of the island (the Narrows), the hand line snapped to attention! It was only a minute before I started hauling the line in. It didn't feel right. The strike was solid but this felt like a lump of seaweed, no action. When I boated the fish, or what was left of the fish, I understood why it was dead weight. Half the 4lb Spanish mackerel was gone. The razor cut was moot evidence left by the shark. Well, there's enough left for a brace of mackerel sandwiches accompanied with that now familiar sundowner.

Mindful of the upcoming holiday and impending visit, I did not go ashore, but departed in the morning for St Croix. As I passed along the western shore, the view of the emerald, gently sloping hillside seduced a promise to return for an extended stay.

The course passed within a mile or so of Saba Island. The pinnacle of rock looked quite un-inviting. However, there's a colorful history of squabbling between Saba and St. Kits involving a cannon that reportedly could reach from one to the other. Checking the charted distance, I think it more likely it was the threat rather than the reality of such a gun. Late that afternoon the Saba bank lived up to it's reputation and provided a fine dorado for dinner.

The Leeward Islands

I reduced sail during the night to time my arrival at Buck Island, St. Croix, during good daylight. The approach, though well marked, is shrouded in reefs. Picking my way in, I had the anchor down at 09:00. The island is a nature preserve and the anchor check dive (trunks on!), turned into a full morning of exploration ashore. The leeward shore is littered with mini-tank tracks coming from the water. Following the tracks brought me to the nest sites the turtles had labored over the night before. With the coming of the morning light, the beach was deserted once more.

The next day I too left the island and made the very pleasant sail of 37 miles to Coral Bay, St. John. Coral Bay is a quiet little place with friendly folks. The local store has most anything you would need to top off stores. They even had Nutter Butter cookies for goodness sakes! The local bar & grill is called "Skinny Legs", and serves a great cheeseburger in paradise. Yep, I could get distracted in a place like this.

I was going to take a few days to sample a couple of anchorages on the way to St. Thomas, but the roller furling gear developed problems. So it was direct to Crown Bay where professional services were available if needed.

Several foil sections had separated as the result of their set screws vibrating loose and falling out. The jib itself was the only thing holding the rig together. I was aware of this problem since the Azores and had made temporary repairs. However, only metric fasteners, not SAE(standard threads), were available until I made it back to the western side of the Atlantic. I purchased the screws from a local rigging shop. I then dropped the

system onto the adjacent pier and made the necessary repairs. By the afternoon the furling system was re-installed, and the rig hoisted.

Lisa arrived on 12/31. Our reunion at the airport was marked by a very public, long, loving embrace. Happy tears ran freely as all the concerns of time and distance melted away. We were together now, and that's all that mattered. That afternoon we set out for the north side of St. John with the intent of moving on to the British Virgin Islands (BVI).

On the second day we approached Norman Island and were shocked at the number of boats trying to get into the anchorage. It was worse than Christmas eve at Wal-Mart! We quickly decided to go back and sample the anchorages of southern St John.

Lisa and I often talked about our "perfect anchorage", and just what it would be. You know- the quiet cove, the great diving, and the tasty dinner. Top it all off with a canopy of stars on a warm night to consummate the setting. Well, we found that very spot just around the corner from Coral Bay.

The relatively shallow waters of 10-15ft provided plenty of snorkeling in clear, warm waters. We anchored over a sandy bottom and were soon over the side exploring. On the very first dive, we found several large conch & starfish. Pictures just can't capture their vivid hues. The real treat was a turtle that popped up and became quite curious. Nice to see that not all the wildlife ran away terrified. Perhaps it's because a large portion of St. John is a nature preserve and they're protected.

For the rest of Lisa's stay we toured the Island and anchored in a different location every night. On 1/07 we returned to St. Thomas and reluctantly, Lisa departed, headed back to the Virginia winter. She was not a happy camper. However, we both agreed, the next few months would be easy compared to the last six. On 1/13, I got underway for Culebra and points west, never expecting what was to come.

2001 Trans-Atlantic Cruise

The Return Leg- part 2

Culebra is just 21 miles west of St. Thomas. Actually, there's two islands, Culebra and Culebrita or "Little Culebra". As I approached the pair, a nice Spanish mackerel was brought in for dinner. I maneuvered around the reefs of Culebrita and eventually put in to a very protected anchorage on the eastern shore of Culebra called Bahia De Almodovar. To my surprise, there were moorings here as there had been in the USVI & BVI's.

It was early and so I cooked the mackerel fillets and made fresh salad out of one of them. The afternoon I spent diving. That evening I enjoyed the salad with sweetened tea and felt all was right with the world, until about midnight. The initial symptoms were similar to food poisoning- headache, and sour stomach. It was a little hard to differentiate because my sinuses were raging too for which I was using an over-the counter anti-histamine. To be on the safe side I threw out everything associated with the salad. I also threw the rest of the fish overboard. Then, I gagged myself and threw that overboard too!

It was a miserable night. The next day I tried to dive for a while but felt very lethargic. I had a rough time just getting back in the boat. That little bit of activity brought on the next symptoms. I could feel a wave moving slowly down my arms. No, this isn't simple food poisoning. It could only be Ciguatera, fish poisoning.

Ciguatera is a neurotoxin that inhabits certain reefs. There was no reason to think that the mackerel was contaminated. After all, I had eaten many with no ill effects, but apparently this one had dined on contaminated reef fish. Gotta love that food chain. I tried taking an anti-biotic suspecting that it probably would not be effective. It just felt better being pro-active. The gross symptoms, nausea, chills, etc, had all but disappeared within 24 hours. For this reason I thought I was on top of the situation. However, there was a peculiar itching in my forearms and lower back.

I continued to sail westward with brief stops in San Juan and Arecibo, Puerto Rico. I had visited these locations on a southbound trip in '95 and did not need to tour them again. The quiet anchorage at Arecibo had turned into a rental jet ski hell. I originally planned to stop in at Samana, Dominican Republic, but changed my mind and went straight for Big Sand Cay in the Turks & Caicos. It would be a run of about 310 miles. The itching was subsiding, somewhat.

The 21/2 days of down wind sailing went without incident. At one point, a young humpback whale about 20ft in length came to visit. The youngster spent a morning darting under and around the boat. January & February is their mating season in these waters. He was certainly too young for that, but the adults would not be far away. The Dominican Republic ghosts the horizon at about 15 miles. The weather turned squally the second day out but fortunately cleared off as I made my final approach.

Big Sand Cay is just that, a big hump of sand that you can tuck-up under and get out of the Trades. It's a popular staging location for points south. Today there are two

boats at anchor as I stowed the spinnaker and found a comfortable spot. Nice to have the hook down and get a good nights sleep. The trade winds are in full swing now and blow nearly non-stop at about 15kts, sometimes, closer to 20kts.

The following morning I moved on to the Caicos bank and anchored for the night at Ambergris Cay. I had considered the angle of the sun for this little passage. However, by early afternoon, it was lower than expected and I was headed almost into it. This made for some rather dicey eyeball navigation dodging elk horn coral outcroppings.

The waters around the recommended Ambergris Cay anchorage had a few coral heads that made for interesting diving, but little else. The anchorage itself is protected from the major swell, but the fetch is enough to generate a short chop induced by the Trades. The decision to cut across the Caicos bank as opposed to going outside around the western rim/reef would be put to the test in the morning.

There are no markers on the bank and so navigation is a constant issue. Even more so because the water is quite shallow and there are coral heads everywhere. Additionally, with the trades kicking up, the water is rather murky. The course was to be a simple dogleg for a total of about 46 miles.

Lord, what a day! I spent the entire passage at the wheel dodging the black heads and skinny water. The sounder would jump from 12ft to 51/2ft in a heartbeat and I would brace for the impact that fortunately never came! There were times that a clear path ahead was just not apparent and I was plagued with visions of SABRINA driven into a cull-de-sac. I updated my DR every 30 minutes via GPS. This was the recommended course and no, this was not fun at all. I'll take the long way next time, thank you very much! At 15:00 the anchor was down off the town of Providenciales (Provo), Caicos Islands. Dinner was followed by two sundowners and some much needed sleep.

Provo is a pleasant town with very friendly folks. Facilities cover the spectrum for the rich & famous to everyone else. It is a popular stop for boaters moving north & south and cruisers are welcome. I had considered seeing a doctor here for the ciguatera, but the condition seemed to be lessening. The itching had become localized, mostly in the fore arms. Tingling in the fingers and lower back had ceased. In the area of this itching an interesting condition was developing. Small pimple-like eruptions were beginning to dot the skin. It was as if the body was transporting and expelling the toxins via the most direct path possible. The "itching" was therefore the movement of the toxins through the tissue. Well, perhaps I'll get it checked out at Georgetown, on Great Exuma island.

Bahamas

I was no stranger to the Bahamas. My first passage to the Islands was in 1980/81 and I had visited several times since. On the morning of 1/24, I cleared away for the 55 mile jump to Mayaguana.

The narrow cut through the reef via Sandbore channel, into the Caicos passage use to be clearly marked by the rusting hulk of a very unlucky freighter. Now, a gap in the white teeth of breakers is the only visible clue. You could chance it at night but you could also play Russian roulette. Either way, the odds are not very good. The fishing on this morning was terrific for as I passed through the opening, a Bar Jack hammered the

hand line! As one might expect, I would never eat another mackerel. Then too, larger Jacks are known to carry ciguatera. I slipped the fish back over the side.

The crossing was "lively", with a quartering 15kt breeze and half a jib. The cut through the reef at Mayaguana is tight and changes immediately to skinny water. With a draft of less than 5ft, SABRINA found her way through and anchored among several other cruisers. The following day, the morning dive produced a fine 3lb lobster.

The passages to Plana Cay and Crooked Island were uneventful. The approach to the Crooked Isl. anchorage was bizarre in that the depth sounder apparently went a little crazy. It vacillated between 25ft-75ft-35ft-90ft. The next day, after doing laundry, I dove to see that the terrain was indeed mountainous with grottos between the hills leading off into the darkening, blue deep.

The next day I made for Clearance Town on Long Island. The weather was so fine and the moon so bright, that I continued passed the village and through the early night. At 21:00 I rounded the north end, Cape Santamaria, and tucked it up tight in the lee for a quiet night at anchor. A stiff 20-22kt breeze provided a quick broad reach to Georgetown, Exuma's, the following day.

The entrance through the reef at the south end of Foul Cay was a confusion of piled up waves and white water. I was just making final preparations to enter when the hand line announced a fine dorado that I guessed to be about 10-12 lbs. I say guessed because it was either land the fish or handle the boat. When I cleared the reef, the fish was gone.

Georgetown hosts the Family Islands regatta in April and my original plan was to be here then to see the show. As it was now January 30th, I didn't expect any difficulty in finding a suitable place to anchor. Wrong! There must have been 500-600 boats packed in to all the normal spots. I just couldn't imagine what it would be like come April. However, there was a spot just off the town that might just be suitable. Definitely a place for a Bahamian moor as the wind shifted to the daily thermals. Keeps your neighbors happy too to see you are on two anchors, as are they.

I did get to the local clinic and the doctor agreed, "Yeah mon, looks like you gotta bad fish. Nothing to do now but wait for your body to purge the toxins." He did prescribe some vitamins and a steroid, but also agreed that the sinus medicine(anti-histamine), I had been taking was very helpful too. Still, the itching persisted.

Well, this calls for a little celebration. A stop by the local cruiser's pub, Three Turtles, proved very entertaining. A well lubricated fellow was expounding on his latest adventure of traveling down the coast from Maine in an outboard powered, 30ft sailboat, headed to a job on St. Croix. He had run aground on the entrance to Sandbore channel. He found that the prop shaft had sheared. Finally getting clear of the reef, he decided to return to Georgetown to effect repairs. Along the way he ran aground on the reef at Crooked Island where he discovered that his centerboard had snapped off. He seemed to be offering these tales as testimony towards experience, for his next speech was dedicated to finding a berth to work his way into better finances. We all raised our glasses and wished him good fortune. Yeah, right.

I had visited the local dive shop several times for some helpful hints. The proprietor was quite concerned about the fish poisoning and relayed to me a horror story of a friend who "to this day, five years after a dose of ciguatera, still suffers from facial muscle distortion!" He gave me the name & number of a specialist in Miami and all but

begged me to go see him immediately. Well, that's comforting and certainly makes for sound sleeping. The more I thought about it, the greater my concern became. I had planned to spend the month of February in the Bahamas and to rendezvous with a good friend at Nassau. Well Charlie, it'll have to be another time. I departed for Miami in the morning.

The passage north through the Exuma's was a series of day sails and included stops at Rudder Cut, Warderick Wells, and Pimlico Cays. During this time of year a cold front can be expected every 2-3 days, but as long as you can tuck-up in a lee, your evenings should be quiet. The prevailing winds are ESE and so the run north was quite pleasant. Along the way I passed many boats struggling to get south. No doubt they questioned my sanity for going north!

On 2/07, I rode a broad reach into Nassau. The "funky Nassau" from the old hit tune has improved considerably with a complete face lift since my first visit in 1980. I suspect that one would not have to scratch to hard to find the old town & attitudes. I'll savor the memories thank you. I anchored adjacent to the harbor's north entrance and had the company of a pair of Haitian trading sloops.

These people are closely managed during their visits to the Bahamas and their vessels are restricted to this anchorage. They have no motor, no GPS, and damn little of any creature comforts on board. Yet they navigate the 300 plus miles from their homeland consistently without incident. They're here primarily to sell charcoal. I've never seen one of their boats depart that wasn't festooned with mattresses, plastic milk jugs, and rusty bicycles, all acquired from the local dump. On this day I replaced my hand line and, along with a package of hooks, I swam these items over to one of the sloops. A wide grin and fractured thank-you was enough for me. The next day I made the 38 miles to Chub Cay, arriving just after sunset.

With the shortened days of winter the sailor can expect that if he departs in daylight, he will occasionally arrive in the dark. For my final leg in the islands, westbound over the Bahamas Bank to Cat Cay, it will be about 80 miles. Definitely, a night time arrival.

I departed Chub Cay before first light and ventured out over the "tongue of the ocean." This area is well named, for in these shallow water islands, the depth here reaches down to over 1,200 fathoms! The approach to the banks is not a gradual rise, but is announced with a shear wall! Inside a few boat lengths you are in skinny water. Shortly after, you are looking at the sand through gin-clear water. Yes, the sounder says 15ft, though it looks like 5.

The day progressed from a light breeze & spinnaker to 18kts and half a jib. The cut between Gun & Cat Cay is very tight and I would have anchored on the flats and wait for first light had I not been familiar with the passage.

I made the approach at 19:30 under engine alone. You have to almost put your bow on the south end of Gun Cay and then cut left to stay in safe water. In the moonless dark, as the depth sounder hit 7ft, I turned the wheel and ever so slowly the depth increased to 8, 8.5, 9.5, 11, 12, 15ft. Yeah Baby! Nothing but net and the sound of breakers! I rounded up in the lee of Gun Cay; anchor down at 20:00.

2001 Trans-Atlantic Cruise

Part 4- Stateside

It had been a long day. The crossing from Chub Cay went well enough but there's always the worry of running up on a sand bore and being left high & dry, out in the middle of nowhere. Now, anchored in the lee of Gun Cay, I was looking forward to a good rest before crossing the Gulf Stream.

Surprisingly, even with a steady easterly, the lee of the island was still a bit rolly. Sound sleep was not to be had. At 03:00 I started breakfast and then checked SABRINA one last time. Any crossing of the Stream can turn into a rude event, no matter how perfect conditions are at the start. By 04:00 all was ready. The anchor was secured and, under full jib, SABRINA headed out into the Gulf Stream for Miami, just 42 miles distant.

The wind had come south of east, and so the crossing was a pleasant broad reach. I passed several cruisers headed east. From their VHF chatter, I could tell it was their first time. The memories of my first foray across the Stream came flooding back. Over twenty years ago, it started with a mid-night departure from No-Name harbor (yes, that's a real name), on Key BisCayne; then the overheating Atomic Four motor; the decision to sail/tack across; the thunderstorms; fixing the motor, and finally, the sight of land (Cat Cay), coming over the horizon, just where it should be! Pretty heady stuff for the novice ocean sailor and an indelible bookmark to hold such memories. At 13:00 on 2/10, I once again entered No-Name harbor and was shocked to hear "Hey SABRINA!"

What the hell!, you just never know who you'll meet up with. It was wonderful to see the familiar face of Pat from PATTERN 3. He and his wife had left Wormley Creek Marina, VA, in October and made their way down the Inter-Coastal Waterway (ICW), planning to visit the Bahamas. It was to be their first crossing and for the past month well, the weather just hadn't been right. We had a terrific night of story telling and great food. They eventually made it to the Islands the following week.

In the morning I made contact with the fish poisoning specialist who smiled and said. "Yeah man, you just got a bad fish. There's nothing to be done now. Just let it go its' course." So there it was, the same advice as the doctor in Georgetown. Now I sat in Miami after running like a crazy man through the Islands. Doing in six days what was to have taken one month. What was to come next?

Northbound

The original plan was to follow the seasons northward. However, I was a month early for that. I had already visited the Keys on another occasion. And well, what the heck. I started north after making a couple of phone calls and finalizing visits to family in Ft. Lauderdale and Jacksonville. The visits went well. However, the coast was plagued

with east-north easterlies so travel was restricted to the ICW. It wasn't until Georgia that I was able to get back outside.

The weather was predicted to change. A front was due and the wind was already starting to clock. In the early morning hours of 2/25, SABRINA rode the Savannah River's outgoing tide. By 10:00, we had been flushed out onto the ocean for what was to be our last dance.

It was a cool 35°F, though 60's were predicted. The coast is very shallow for about 20 miles north of the Savannah River entrance. Five miles out, depths of 15ft or less are not uncommon. The day progressed into evening under a moderate breeze and full sail. By 21:00 Charleston, S.C., was abeam. The wind continued to clock.

By first light the temperature, that had dipped overnight, was on the rise. The breeze was steady southwest, 12kts. I had considered making for Beaufort, N.C., but the front was closing in. The Barometer and the clouds agreed. No, I think it'll be Wilmington N.C., and the Cape Fear River.

Throughout the afternoon the wind increased. By 16:00 it was a steady 25kts, gusting to 30kts. As it was a broad reach, I reduced sail to 1/4 jib and was holding a comfortable 6 1/2kts. The wind vane handled the boat with ease. By 18:00 the shore lights were dotting the horizon and we were waltzing onto the final approach. After making the channel and picking our way to a familiar location, the anchor's down at 19:30. That night the temperature dipped into the low 20's and with no heater on board, the Joy dishwashing liquid froze.

As part of the original planning, I had expected to encounter some winter weather and included suitable gear. At this point the down sleeping bag was worth a small fortune. The next morning I stared at my smoke-ringed breath and thought of those warm, tropical nights in Martinique. Oh, how I'd like to click my heels, and return to that palm tree lined lagoon! After two days of ICW motor sailing in snow squalls & sleet storms with wind chills in the teens, I pulled into Beaufort, N.C., and got a motel room!

The weather finally broke and it was time to get along. I had called Lisa and faked that it was the U.S. Coast Guard with an urgent message for her. With trembling voice she said "Yes, go ahead." To which I replied "Your boyfriend's back, and there's gonna be trouble!" Well, it's best not to print her response. But once the smoke had cleared, she was a happy camper to know I'd be home in a few days.

The rest of the ICW trip to Hampton, VA., was unremarkable other than it was indeed the beginning of seasonal change. Canada geese were headed north. Daily sightings of eagles, ospreys, otters, and a host of other local critters was the norm. There was even the occasional mud caked turtle to be seen. Hampton came into view on 3/04.

On 3/06 I took SABRINA home to the York River. The day before, as I was driving with Lisa through local traffic, I felt the first flames of re-entry licking at my patience. This morning I took the first steps to rejoin the herd by getting my own vehicle back on the road. I couldn't deal with the numbing crowd at DMV and decided to postpone the inevitable, and ran back to the boat.

At 10:00 we're headed up the Chesapeake Bay. The tailwind is light and fills the spinnaker. Morning turns into afternoon with a warming sun and I'm overwhelmed with

the desire to keep on going, to turn right and clear the Bay, headed once again for Bermuda and points beyond.

Epilog

In relating this adventure, I'm often asked what have become some rather stock questions. The following touches on these.

I was 49 at the start of the cruise. No, it was not a mid-life crisis. It was the fulfillment of a childhood dream. The total distance traveled was approximately 10,650 sea miles. The longest single leg was the return from the Cape Verde Is., Africa, to Barbados, a distance of 2,020 sea miles. Contrary to most thinking, a sailboat does a lot of motoring. Total engine hours were 1,200. These hours were mostly motor sailing. The only mechanical failures experienced were the refrigeration pump, the engine raw water cooling pump, and the foil sections of the jib roller furling system. The lack of mechanical failures attests to the intense preparations and attention to details. I had made endless lists and played out numerous worst case scenarios before the start. While SABRINA was not a floating warehouse of spare parts, suffice it to say that I had what I needed when I needed it.

While underway, there was never the feeling of loneliness. However, when ashore, there was the feeling of being alone, something akin to being a stranger in a strange town. This was enhanced by the language differences. However, I must say that the locals never made it an issue. It was in fact my own short coming. For this reason and others, I was often eager to get back to sea.

I was prepared to perform minor surgeries but fortunately never had to. The torn meniscus of the left knee and the ciguatera (fish poisoning), were the only serious ailments. Life at sea is generally quite healthy and the diet usually reflects the abundance of fish. Physical movement and mental activity are a near constant as one counters the motion of the boat and deals with the challenges of ship management. It is therefore mandatory to maintain the flow of calories. I actually lost 12 lbs. during the cruise even though I ate almost constantly.

I don't recall being actually afraid at any time during the cruise. There were times of great anxiety such as in the fog during the approach to the Portuguese coast. I encountered numerous "dicey" conditions, some of which were questionable, even at the time. Maneuvers such as a night approach to a foreign anchorage or approaching coral islands at night in a stiff breeze should never be undertaken without just cause.

And finally, Lisa swears she's going with me the next time!