

THE CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF S/V KAMAL

A journey by Greg and Lauren Henry aboard their Pearson 365

Excerpted from e-mail correspondence between Randy Powers and Lauren Henry in December, 2003. It is presented on this website with the permission of Greg and Lauren Henry.

PART I

Introduction • Guadeloupe

INTRODUCTION

Underway to Fatu Hiva, Marquesas, French Polynesia.

Its 11:00pm and my wife Lauren is on her watch, which began three hours earlier. Behind us a line of squalls are quickly approaching. She can't actually see them, but is tracking their progress on our radar screen; bright, thick, menacing green blobs growing steadily closer. I should be off watch and asleep below until 1:00, but with a violent suddenness the boat lurches to starboard, waking me up. She's lost her game of hide from the squall and now we are heeling over severely as what was before an appropriate amount of canvas has within an instant become way too much. I climb out of my bunk, put on my harness and clip in to the safety lines which run the length of the deck. Soon I am at the bow fighting to bring down the jib, trying to keep in mind the old adage one hand for you, one for the boat because to go overboard even attached by my tether would be a disaster.

The following day marked the end of our week-long battle with the nightly squalls, and we settled in to beautiful downwind sailing; the evening skies filled with so many stars they seemed to collide in a swirling haze, while behind us our wake shimmered with phosphorescence. This is but one example of the extreme highs and lows you experience when sailing full time. In November of 1999 we slipped the lines of our 36 ketch and embarked on a three year odyssey which would ultimately take us south to the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal, across the Pacific ocean to Australia, along the Indonesian islands and up to Thailand, west to Sri Lanka and Oman, then up the Red Sea through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean and finally down to the Canary islands where we are now poised to cross the Atlantic and return home. We could give you statistics, such as the 26,911 miles we have sailed to date, how our total sailing time equals 192 days spent at sea, the 1440 gallons of diesel we've burned, but these stark facts do little to convey the essence of what we've done.

In the space of three years we've visited places that can only be reached by boat, such as the San Blas islands in Panama, swam alongside reef sharks in the Tuomotus, went octopus hunting with

a clergyman in Tonga, shared a traditional bowl of kava root with a village chief in Fiji, watched a four day old humpback whale breach the water just yards away from our boat, climbed an ancient glacier, ate damper over an open fire with Australian Aborigines, hiked the forests of Borneo to watch captive orangutans reintroduced into the wild, saw the southern cross with no land for hundreds of miles in any direction, haggled in the souks of the Middle East, rode horses along the dunes surrounding the Egyptian pyramids, walked back in time at the ruins of Ephesus in western Turkey, acquired a Labrador puppy in Greece, and absorbed the culture of Europe.

Hand in hand with all of these wonderful experiences were the difficulties posed by leaving family and friends, having to learn true self-sufficiency, the fear of falling sick far from medical help, and learning to accept the vagaries of those things you can't control or even predict, such as an approaching gale, or a ship crossing your path at night.

We learned more about ourselves from all of these experiences, and they have changed who we are and how we look at the world. But perhaps the most valuable gift we have been given is the opportunity to see the world from a perspective unavailable to us at home, or even during sporadic vacations abroad. Growing up in the U.S. in the 1980s we didn't see political upheaval, military coups, extreme poverty, the effects of drought and disease. As we traveled we were shocked to see armed guards patrolling the supermarkets in Panama City, to walk in towns reeking from open sewers, or pay exorbitant prices for food staples. We learned there are people who have very little and are still happy, but many more who live in appalling conditions with no hope for the future. We realized how sheltered we have been, how privileged.

Our trip happened to coincide with a series of extraordinary events, beginning with the military coup in Fiji, independence of East Timor in Indonesia, the first tentative steps towards peace in Sri Lanka, and culminating with the unbelievable events of September 11th. We sailed through Asia and the Middle East in the months following the attacks and had the unique opportunity to see first hand the people and places being written about back home. We talked to merchants in Malaysia, fishermen in Oman, taxi drivers in Egypt. We did encounter animosity and resentment, but at the same time were the recipients of true acts of kindness everywhere we went. In early March severe weather forced us to anchor along an isolated stretch of water separating Egypt from the Sudanese border. This particular area was in dispute, and the Egyptian military was trying to quietly starve the Sudanese out. We were not allowed off the boat, but one evening the Egyptian navy vessel posted there gave all three visiting yachts free fuel and an invitation to dine aboard their ship. We spent several hours talking with the young Captain and six of his crew. It was

difficult to reconcile the Captains generosity towards us with the rhetoric he used to express his deep and burning hatred of America's foreign policy, but somehow he was able to separate us as individuals from the actions of our government. Our discussion led to Israel, and the mounting tensions in the West Bank, and he made it clear that not only was he anti-Israeli, but would gladly kill any Jew for the smallest infraction of the law (whereas we would only be reprimanded and left with a warning). He went even further, saying he would willingly give his life for the Palestinian cause. We were hesitant to dwell on this overlong, since Lauren is Jewish and although he could not know that, his implied physical threat was disturbing. He was but one of several people we met who espoused what we would call extreme views, and although it was sometimes uncomfortable for us, along the way we tried to actively engage in discussions such as this in which we learned to better understand their grievances, and more importantly, tried to understand how they view us.

After transiting the Suez Canal we had been hoping to head for Israel and see firsthand the land held so dear to so many people, but for the first time we were reluctant to go somewhere because of the political situation. Instead we went to Cyprus, where we were thrilled to find we could once again wear shorts without offending the local populace, and did not feel compelled to continually defend or explain America's role in the conflict. Reaching the Mediterranean represented a return to western civilization, and in particular we reveled in the beautiful produce and varied cuisine once again available to us. It also meant western prices, and we were shocked to learn that fuel would cost \$3.50/gallon and we discovered that in the med the prevailing westerlies would mean more motoring and hardly any sailing.

We'll be returning home soon, selling the boat, looking for jobs and housing, and getting on with the business of our lives. But if we want our circumnavigation to represent more than a simple milestone, an album of photos or a commemorative plaque hanging on the wall, we will try to carry the lessons we learned with us and return to them as we navigate the uncertainties of this new and changed world.

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Guadeloupe 1/16/00

In the last few weeks we've made our way down the island chain to Guadeloupe, where my parents have come for a week of vacation. After St. Martin/Sint Maartin we spent a few days in St. Bart's, a paradise for the rich and famous. The town docks are crammed with mega yachts year round, and the small town has the requisite Cartier and such shops. The island is small but extremely mountainous so the only flat areas are on the coasts, and often not even there. We hitchhiked our way around, spending afternoons on white sand beaches, hiking to the top of a cliff looking down on the waves crashing below. It was by far the cleanest island we've encountered.

After a lavish Christmas dinner we moved on to St. Kitts, where we were excited to be able to participate in the local Carnival. Unfortunately it was not what we were expecting. Most events were held at night, and we got tickets to the "Men's King Calypso Competition". It was the most popular event of the celebration, held in a walled in area with a temporary stage set up in front. It was more like a high-school talent competition than anything else. We left disappointed but managed to save the evening by meeting some interesting people in the local bar. The island is so small that we encountered them often in the subsequent days.

Our next stop was Nevis, only 11 miles away but with a very different feel from the previous islands. Higher up the chain the islands are more arid, St. Kitts having a combination of dryer areas interspersed with lush forests at the higher elevations. Nevis is brimming with fauna, from bright flowers to plants yielding fruits and vegetables to a rain forest high in the mountains. We took a taxi tour with Melvin, our knowledgeable guide. He showed us local landmarks, from old sugar plantations converted to hotels (which we never would have thought to visit on our own. We were in fact a bit leery of visiting them since it seemed they were built on the suffering of the slaves who toiled there. However they have made concerted efforts to make sure that the past is integral to the hotels, with the old machinery and ruins preserved as they were when the land was recovered) to a gallery filled with paintings by local artists.

Conditions were not good for crossing to Guadeloupe, but knowing we had to meet Bruce and Reva we set out on an overnight from Nevis. It was indeed rough, with frequent squalls and a very wet ride. We arrived to a beautiful morning, of course, happy to be there. A day later, anchored in a bay on the lower of the two islands (Guadeloupe is actually two islands which together resemble the shape of a butterfly with its wings open.) we looked up to see one of our neighboring boats floating out to sea. The night before we had moved when we arrived, because he

anchored in front of us a little too close for comfort. Our decision proved to be a good one, because had we stayed he would have definitely drifted down on top of us the next day. After a brief discussion and a few groans we got into our dinghy in pursuit of the errant boat. He apparently hadn't set his anchor well because it was still out, hanging over the bow. We were in the process of trying to bring the boat back in when the owner arrived in his own dinghy. He said he was eating lunch at a local restaurant when he looked out and saw nothing where his mast should have been. We agreed it must have been a heart-stopping sight. He looked a bit shaken, but brought the boat back and hooked onto a mooring, whereupon he promptly returned to the restaurant to finish his meal. I think I would have lost my appetite.

By the time Bruce and Reva arrived we were moored in a marina on the other island near a town called Point a Pitre. Guadeloupe is not pretty. The towns are generally small but not well kept. We rented a car in which to tour the islands, stopping to see several beaches, one-road towns, the national park in which we made a short, muddy hike to a small waterfall (it was not strenuous; several of the women walked the same path in their high heels and platforms) and stopped for lunch at a tranquil restaurant on the edge of a cliff. French is the official language, and not many people speak English. The restaurant we ate at had English translations, including "Fish Moss" (fish mousse) and "Lamb Shop" (lamb chop). At the request of the owner we spent a hilarious half hour pouring over the menu making corrections, much to the amusement of the staff. Reva was particularly impressed with their toilets, which were in fact toilets and not the undignified hole in the ground. (I thought the French were supposed to be sophisticated and chic.) Greg was amazed by the tendency of the French to dine in the company of their dogs. At night the marina often sounds more like a kennel than anything else, with much yapping. (No big dogs here). We've also seen lots of colorful lizards scampering along the sidewalks. We encountered more wildlife at the national floral park, a botanical garden erected in the middle of a forest with towering trees covered in vines, and plants from all over, from Tonga to Australia. Trails meander along the hillside, with aviaries and fishponds interspersed here and there. It was truly impressive, and we ate lunch in an open-air restaurant hidden in one corner of the park, built over a babbling stream.

We made an excursion to one of the neighboring islands, Marie-Galante. Like Guadeloupe the mainstay of the economy is sugar, but unlike Guadeloupe it is relatively untouched by tourism. After a choppy ride in a high-speed ferry, well, 25 kts, not fast by Derecktor standards, (during which we learned why they are called "vomit comets") we ran for cover after debarking from one of the frequent, if short lived, rain showers. A tour of the island revealed fields covered with sugar cane, an old sugar plantation

(what would any self-respecting Caribbean island be without one?) dramatic cliffs, and beautiful beaches lined with palm trees, supposed to be the most beautiful of the archipelago. Unfortunately visitors are already beginning to spoil the island, with trash littered along the side of the road where we are told there used to be none.

If you are reading this then you have gotten an email about the new website. Whenever it is updated you will receive a notice. I'm told there will be a space for people to leave us messages, so please do! We hope all is well with everyone at home, and we will write again soon, Greg/Lauren Henry c/o Mishkin 245 East 25th Street Apt. 17C New York, NY 10010 and they'll forward it on to us. Perhaps we'll figure out a better solution soon, but until then this is it. So for now happy holidays, happy new year and we'll write again soon.