

## Sailing to Forever

by Judith Yarrow

One rainy November night in 1969, sitting at a worn vinyl booth in Casey's Bar in Tacoma, my partner Ed and some of his buddies started talking about sailing around the world. Tropical waters, tropical nights. Who knows what they were fantasizing, but when he recounted their conversation to me later, the fantasy woke up in me and whispered, *adventure*.

I started reading every sailing travel book I could unearth in the Tacoma Public Library.



Judith at the tiller, in Biscayne Bay

The most gripping tales were full of disaster: shipwrecked on coral reefs, rolled over by forty-foot waves, dismantled and deck houses torn off, sails shredded, the sailors saved by luck and will to write the tale and sometimes go back to repeat it. The disastrous close calls made for thrilling reading but my dream was full of soft breezes, easy landfalls, long days lazing in the sun, snorkeling, and spear-fishing.

The sailing enthusiasts dwindled to Ed, me, and Sky, one of the barroom dreamers. We decided to test our enthusiasm for a

round-the-world adventure on a smaller trip—cruising the Caribbean. Our next-door neighbor, a boat designer, had a boat in dry dock in Ft. Lauderdale. A ship surveyor inspected it and judged it sound. We bought it sight-unseen for \$2,400.

Ed, Sky, and I, all in our mid-twenties, had just spent two years together in the Teacher Corps, earning MAs and teaching credentials while working in inner city schools in Tacoma. Ed and I had met in Teacher Corps. By the end of the first year, we were living together. In the summer after the sailing around the world dream was seeded, we built a little fiberglass dinghy and taught ourselves to sail on Commencement Bay. We figured the choppy waters and unpredictable winds in the bay were good practice for tricky Caribbean currents and tropical sudden squalls.

Sky had grown up in Hawaii and learned to sail there. Prior to Teacher Corps he'd spent two years in the Peace Corps in Micronesia. It was the middle of the Vietnam war and most of the men I knew were avoiding the draft one way or another. Ed had spent the two years before Teacher Corps working with Alaska Eskimos as a Vista volunteer.

I was a single mom with a six-year old son, Ciam. I'd grown up on a farm, put in a few years in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, and managed to get through six years of college without much idea about where to go next with my life.

When the four of us arrived in Ft. Lauderdale, we found our boat, Teal, perched on its heavy-timber cradle in a shed at the back of the boat yard. She'd been there several years. Dust covered the jumble of stuff piled on her cabin and deck—masts and booms, tangles of rigging, buckets, plastic jerry jugs, wood pallets, and smaller junk.

We assessed the situation. First at the top of the task list was to clean off the boat enough to see what repairs were needed and then to clean out the cabin so we'd have a place to sleep that night. Second was arranging to get the boat into the water. Ed and Sky went off to arrange for a couple more days of storage in the boat yard. I started dragging stuff off the boat to clear a way into the cabin and then began to clear sail bags, moldy bedding, and paint cans out of the cabin. Ciam clambered around in the cockpit and over the cabin top with his sock monkey tucked under one arm, carrying on both sides of a conversation with Monkey. Ft. Lauderdale in mid-summer was muggy and hot, 98° and 95 percent humidity. No breeze made it into the dusty boat shed.

Teal was a 28-foot yawl, the shorter of her two masts, the mizzenmast, was stepped behind the rudder and carried a small sail that extended out to the end of a three-foot board we called the mizzen sprit. Subtracting the mizzen sprit and the two-foot bow sprit gave a deck area 23 feet long by 8 feet at its widest. The short owner-designer had built the cabin to fit himself. I could stand upright in the tiny galley, just down the companionway ladder, but only Ciam had full headroom anywhere else in the cabin, which varied from about five and a half feet at the stern end to about three and a half feet in the tiny, curtained head at the forward end.

She drew three feet and was stabilized by a lead keel that rounded off into two bulbous lead testicles. We often speculated on how our neighbor had come by that keel. I thought he may have poured it himself and finished it off with that little underwater joke. The deck was eight or



Teal in Miami Marina

ten feet off the concrete floor. The balls hung down in all their suggestive glory between the stacked timbers of the cradle. While I was in the cabin cleaning the mummified three-year-old celery and potatoes out of the refrigerator, Ciam stepped on a pallet propped against the side of the cabin, and he and the pallet fell to the floor. I scrambled over ropes and buckets and down the ladder propped against Teal's side and raced to my crying child. At least he was crying. At least he wasn't unconscious. But what else would I find? I wanted to scoop him up into my arms, but was afraid to move him for fear of spinal damage. But somehow he'd survived the fall, the pallet missed him, and perhaps the cradle timbers had deflected him from a full-force landing on the concrete. He wasn't even bruised. I could have seen it as a warning cloud on the horizon of my adventure, but instead I imagined it would become one of his exciting stories, when he was older, about living on a sailboat.

We worked on the boat for several days, cleaning and repairing it, before it was ready to go back into the water. The boatyard regulations prohibited staying on the boat at night, so we

pretended to leave and then sneaked back into the yard in the dark. The yard workers knew what we were up to, but we finished our preparations before the managers found out. Finally one morning we had the boat hauled across the boatyard and lowered into the water. We proudly watched her bobbing there like the fat little duck she was named after. Then suddenly water began to flood into the cockpit.

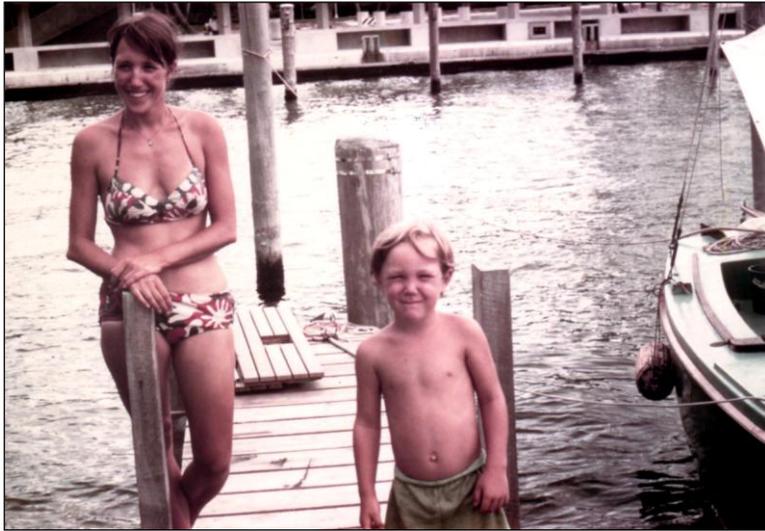
One of the quick-thinking workers leaped down into the cockpit and jammed a cork into the drain hole that we hadn't remembered to plug. We climbed aboard, bailed out the water, and putted off down the canal under the power of our little Seagull outboard engine, past the long, low houses set in tropical yards that lined the canals threading through Ft. Lauderdale. Yachts two or three times longer than our little Teal nosed up to their docks. I never felt so poor as I felt in Ft. Lauderdale, surrounded by all that ostentatious wealth. At that point Ed and I had around a \$1,000, maybe, and my five-year-old Corvair, which we planned to sell before we left the States. When we needed more money, we expected to find jobs along the way—maybe we'd stop at Puerto Rico or St. Thomas where, as U.S. citizens, we'd be allowed to work. But for the moment, our needs were few, our wants were even fewer, and the ocean horizon promised freedom from mundane worries like earning a livelihood.

Late summer in the Caribbean is hurricane season. We decided to delay our departure for a month or so, until the likelihood of hurricanes was past and also to earn a little extra money and stock up on supplies. We put up at Miami's new marina, the first boat in. Ed and Sky worked day labor jobs; Ciam and I stayed around the boat, preparing for our trip. I calculated tins of corned beef, vegetables and fruit, pounds of dried beans, rice, and flour. I estimated the likelihood of survival of eggs against the tropical heat. I scrubbed the inside of the boat, and cleaned out the lockers under the two and a half by five and a half foot seats. The seats doubled at night as beds, one for Ed and one for Ciam. Sky and I got the upper berths, blue canvas slings attached on one edge to the boat and threaded through on the other with a three-inch diameter pipe that fit into chocks on either end. The slings rolled up around the pipes, out of the way during the day and weren't particularly uncomfortable to sleep in. At least I fit into them. Ed, on the other hand at 6'2", hung over the edge of his bed. Trying to have sex in his bed was no easy task, either, especially in the middle of the night when Ciam and Sky might or might not be sleeping, 18" away. Our sex life declined precipitously.

One of my tasks was to paint the cabin top, cockpit, and deck white. The boat was teal blue on the sides and a pale blue on the decks. We'd quickly learned that under the tropical sun, even light blue held too much heat for bare feet. The hull was fiberglass over lath and the outer layer of fiberglass had bubbled up irregularly on the sides of the boat. With her shiny new top coat, her peeling sides looked even scruffier. We stocked up on acrylic putty and began what turned out to be a months-long process of chipping off the bubbles and patching the skin with the putty. As we got each section finished and sanded smooth, we'd give it a coat of sealer and then a coat of paint.

We yearned for a brass sextant but bought a cheaper plastic one. We studied a book on navigation and followed the steps for taking sights at noon and sunset. As Ed and I walked to the shore one noon to practice taking sights, we passed Ciam and his sock monkey visiting with a young couple on the steps to the marina office. I overheard him say, "That's my mom and dad. They're going to go find out where we are." From the shore we became accurate to within a mile, close enough for finding harbors, we figured.

July passed and part of August. We sailed around in Biscayne Bay learning the boat and how to sail by the compass. Sailing is a practical exercise in physics. The wind blows the sails, the currents move the hull. Speed through water being a function of hull length, we could only go as fast as a 25-foot hull was capable of going—about three and a half knots at most. I quickly learned that sailing strictly by the compass would send us wide of the mark, tides and currents shoving the boat invisibly. I had to pick out a landmark and aim for it. The water was generally an opaque turquoise varying from dark to light depending on the depth and whatever it covered. The sand showed light, seaweed darker, pilings almost black. We steered



Judith and Ciam on the dock, beside Teal, in Miami Marina.

clear of the pilings marked on the chart. Big black cormorants hunched on the pilings that broke the surface, their snaky necks and long, hooked beaks giving them an ominous air not shared by their pouched-beak pelican companions.

We also practiced swapping between the gaff sail and the sloop sail. Teal's builder had first designed the boat with a sloop main sail but then, in order to increase the potential speed, had changed to a gaff-rigged sail. Gaff-rigged boats usually had the main sail attached to the mast by hoops but the owner had kept the sloop sail's track and used it to hoist the gaff boom and sail. This arrangement meant that the lines holding up the gaff boom chafed against the stays holding up the mast, one of the potential problems we didn't pay attention to.

Finally, bored with our dock-side life and easy practice sailing, but still leery of the open sea, we decided to explore some of the Florida Keys while we waited out the rest of the hurricane season. Biscayne Bay extends south from Miami between the mainland and the string of low sand islands called keys, little more than mangrove swamps and sandbars. Occasional causeways with drawbridges crossed from the mainland to the larger keys. When you wanted to pass through, you approached and blew a horn. We were under sail when we came to the first one, cockily tooting our horn and sailing forward. Unfortunately the bridge didn't open as fast as we'd expected. The top of the mast caught on the bridge's steel undergirding, bent back, and snapped the bowsprit off at the bow. Everything—mast, rigging, sails—collapsed onto the deck. One of us jerked the Seagull into life and we pushed on through the passage before the bridge lowered onto our mizzenmast. We furled our sail roughly out of the way, tied the main mast down, and headed for a nearby marina to make repairs.

The marina had its share of boat owners who'd suffered mishaps on the water. One of them gave us a 4-foot length of teak plank. Ed and Sky trimmed it up into the shape of the previous bowsprit, sanded and varnished it and bolted it in place.

Ciam, his sock monkey tucked under his arm, supervised the operation. I untangled rigging, coiled lines, and folded sails. After we'd finished repairing and tidying, we wandered around the docks, meeting the local residents, live-aboard boat owners, day trippers, and dock-side fishermen. One long-haired guy was scraping the bottom of his barnacle-encrusted dingy. He paused long enough to tell us he was leaving next week to go down through the Panama Canal and off into the South Pacific. As we continued on down the dock, his neighbor grinned and said, "He's been going to leave next week for two years now, just as soon as he finishes one last thing." All the people tied up there dreamed of shoving off into adventure but clung to the shore. The marina suddenly transformed from a haven to a trap. We decided to leave first thing in the morning.

We were tied up next to a schooner, 35 or 40 feet long. The captain, a heavy-set, dark-haired guy in his middle 30s, invited us over for dinner. The cabin seemed palatial after our cramped quarters—the living space actually had a table, and the head had a door. The book shelf built into the bulkhead above table held the biggest collection of pornography paperbacks I'd ever seen outside a porn shop. The captain said off-handedly that he wrote porn to support himself, \$1,500 a book. At the time, it seemed like a lot, and I tried to imagine going into business myself. I guessed it'd probably get pretty old, pretty fast. My own plan was to write some travel articles to help make money, and I'd brought a portable typewriter along so I'd be able to write and submit them to travel and sailing magazines. I expected to be able to write my way around the world, just like the authors of the sailing books I'd been reading.

We made our getaway with the early tide and headed on down Biscayne Bay. The bay is about forty miles long and between two and ten miles wide. It gave us enough room to practice real navigation and was contained enough that we couldn't get seriously lost. Evening found us well south of Miami. We headed in toward a little key, dropped our sails and an anchor and congratulated ourselves on the first landfall of our trip. Ed and Sky grabbed their spear guns—four-foot metal stakes with a sharpened end and a circle of surgical tubing that worked just like shooting pencils in a classroom—and swam off looking for dinner. Ciam and I played in the water around the boat looking for shellfish. The sandy bottom held little of interest. Sand doesn't support much in the way of animal or plant life. The guys came back with no fish but nervous about the barracuda that appeared to be stalking them. In the Bahamas we lived largely on what they caught but that evening we ate one of our fall-back meals, canned corned beef, canned vegetables, and rice. After dinner and a night-time mystery program from the BBC that we picked up on our shortwave radio, we settled down for our first night at anchor, rocking gently on the wind-ruffled wavelets.

In the morning we woke to find ourselves aground. We had managed to anchor at the height of the tide in water too shallow to float us when the tide went out. Teal listed slowly over, the edge of the cockpit settling closer and closer to the water. We all leaped over board and tried to push the boat toward deeper water. She wouldn't budge. "We can't let her start taking on water," Sky yelled. There was nothing on board we could use to prop her up, but by placing both our anchors off the bow as far apart as possible we were able to keep her balanced on her double-balled keel. The worst fear with a grounded boat is that she'll lay over so far that when the tide turns, the water will start coming in over the sides before she starts to float into an upright position. We stood in the waist-deep water and consulted on what to do. Deeper water was only an agonizingly few feet away. The tide table showed a fairly significant drop in the height of the next high tide, so if we couldn't shove off before it turned, we'd be stuck there for a long time.

Over breakfast we decided to offload everything we possibly could and prepare to dig a trench to deeper water if we had to. Our two five-gallon jerry jugs of water, caps screwed down tight, went into the water. Our six-month store of canned food, paint cans, and anything else that could be easily moved went into the yellow, inflatable dingy. The tide turned, with Teal still relatively upright. We breathed sighs of relief and prepared for the next stage of her rescue. As soon as the rising water had floated her completely upright, we pulled in the anchors and started shoving her toward deeper water.

Our first run aground was terrifying. But eventually we got pretty blasé when we grounded on sandy bottoms. “OK, whose turn is it to shove us off?” the person at the helm would ask. We were never moving so fast that we drove too deeply aground, so we’d usually be able to easily shove Teal back the way she’d come. Shoving a big object like a boat through the water single-handed always made me feel like Wonder Woman.

After we reached deeper water, we reloaded our supplies and headed on south, congratulating ourselves on surviving our second adventure. That night we were careful to consider the tidal change when we dropped anchor behind a little key covered with a tangle of mangroves.

Over dinner we listened to the news and the weather. A tropical storm was blowing in, due sometime the next day. Tropical storms had a way of turning into hurricanes. We calculated the distance back to the marina and divided it by our average running speed. Sailing at night risked running aground or hitting a submerged piling. Even if we left at dawn, we couldn’t make it back to the marina before the storm hit. We set out our second anchor, battened down the forward hatch, furlled the sails, pulled on the sail covers, and hoped the little key would provide us sufficient protection.

The storm came in the next morning and blew all day, 50 knot winds that drove up waves and then flattened them. The wind whined in the rigging, swinging Teal on the anchor lines and leaning her over a little. But the anchors held. We sat around all day. I read a natural history book about someplace inland, nothing to do with water or storms.

After the storm passed, leaving us safe, we congratulated ourselves again. In our first week of sailing we’d survived a dismasting, running aground, and a tropical storm. We decided we were ready for the Bahamas.

The Caribbean Sea fills a basin bounded on the Atlantic side by a chain of islands strung in a wide loop from Florida to Venezuela. Along the top of the loop lie Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic sharing the island of Hispaniola, and the American territory Puerto Rico. Dropping down from these big islands are the smaller Leeward Islands, including the American and British Virgin Islands, and Windward Islands: Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Kitts, and the Dutch Antilles off the coast of Venezuela, which include Aruba, Bonair, and Curaçao.

Extending north from Haiti are the Turks, Caicos, and the Bahamas, a 600-mile-long coral plateau topped with around 700 low, riverless islands and about 2,400 cays (called “keys” by the locals). When Christopher Columbus first encountered these islands, he called them the islands of the *baja mar*, or “shallow sea.”

We sailed out of Biscayne Bay early in the morning and headed east northeast, planning to circle around the northern-most Bahamian islands, swing back down the Atlantic side of the archipelago, and then head into the Caribbean. Grand Bahama, the largest northern island, lies about 50 miles off the Florida coast. We figured we should make it in 20 hours or so.

When we reached the Gulf Stream, about 25 miles out of Miami, the aqua water we'd been sailing through turned sharply to a clear, deep, blue as perfectly aquamarine as if it had come from a paint tube. The Stream is one of the major currents making up a great ocean river circling the Atlantic. In the straits that separate Florida from the Bahamas and Cuba, the stream can spread up to 50 miles across and reach almost half a mile deep. It sweeps northward between Florida and the Bahamas at about 3.5 knots, which was about our maximum hull speed. We estimated how fast we were moving based on how hard the wind was blowing and balanced our eastward movement against the northern push of the Stream. With no land visible to aim for or measure by, our true eastward movement was a guess at best.

The boundary between the Gulf Stream and the coastal bank had been drawn by a steady hand; the two colors of water butted against each other without gradation. We stood in the cockpit and marveled at the abrupt transition. The bright orange polypropylene rope we trailed behind us as a safety line to catch in case one of us fell overboard stood out sharply against the Stream's ultramarine blue. The sky overhead was a robin's egg blue dome dotted with a few towering thunderheads. The wind died.



Ed and Judith on Teal under full sail.

After a while, Ed suggested that we go swimming, as long as we were in a lull. Swimming over a 2,000 feet depth is eerie; it has a kind of floating-in-space quality. The water is clear and fathomless. What kind of monsters could swarm up out of that depth? I couldn't relax above that mystery, not to mention worrying about a breeze springing up and carrying off the boat. After a short while I clambered back aboard.

We had to sail overnight, delayed by our windless afternoon, and finally arrived in the morning in Westend, the Bahamian entry point

on Grand Bahama Island. The black customs officer came down to our boat and took us through entry procedures, wondering I suppose what these Americans thought they were doing, crammed into the little sailboat with scaly sides. With our long hair and Goodwill clothes, he probably assumed we were some kind of American riffraff. Freeport, the nearest real town on the island, was a few miles away. It didn't tempt us. We were heading for Abaco Island and an anchorage that offered coral reefs for skin diving.

As I stood on the wharf that morning after the customs officer had left, a wave of doubt swept over me. Life aboard our tiny boat was cramped, and with the lack of privacy Ed's and my sex life had dwindled to nothing. The guys assumed that as a woman, I'd do the cleaning and cooking. Even though I was a co-owner of the boat, I had to insist on my right to participate in decisions. Sky and I argued over petty details of navigation or fair shares of boat maintenance. I suddenly couldn't imagine spending months with them cooped up on Teal. I thought about taking Ciam and leaving the boat right then and there. But where would I have gone, and on what

money, the few hundred or so we still had left? And besides, I reminded myself, sailing the islands was my adventure, too. I wasn't about to be forced off the boat.

The Abacos lie east of Grand Bahama, but to get there we had to swing north around the shallows mottled with dark mounds and patches of coral that rimmed the island chain. Even though we drew only three and a half feet, we were still leery from our earlier grounding and not anxious to repeat the experience, especially not on a coral outcropping, so we steered a course well away from the shore.

On our first passage in the Bahamas, we hadn't reached a protected anchorage before the sun sank behind us. To our south the nearest shore lay beyond a quarter-mile of water too shallow for us to venture into, to our north stretched the open Atlantic all the way to Greenland. The wind blew from the north. To have leeway means having room to maneuver—the wind not pushing you onto some rocky shore or coral reef or other boat. To be leeward is to be downwind of land as opposed to upwind of it. Leeward was where we weren't. We set out our two anchors and took turns at anchor watch. All night the chop rocked us, tossing around every loose piece of cookware in the galley, the canned goods in the ship's stores, and Ciam's toy cars. I spent my watch tracking down and securing banging pots and pans, rigging, and tools in the cockpit storage bins. We set sail as soon as we had enough light to see the color of the water.

We'd planned to sail fairly quickly down to the Caribbean, but the slow island life caught us. Days turned into weeks. We drifted along, island-hopping through the Abacos, staying longer at the best anchorages. Moraine Cay, a tiny private island in the Abacos group, was one of the best. We reached the anchorage with the last bit of light, just enough to make out the water depth and the crescent of white sand beach nestled in the small bay. I promised myself I'd get up early and be the first person to set foot on that beach.

In the morning I slipped into the warm aqua water while the others were still sleeping and swam to that virgin shore. Sky was angry at me for having been the first one to reach the island. But I didn't care. My romantic adventure dreamed on a rainy Northwest evening had become a reality that morning.

The beaches weren't pristine, though. They all had tar in their sand, from oil spills, from tankers flushing their holds, from fish boats, from who knows where. We always had to clean our feet with gasoline when we got back to the boat so we wouldn't track the black tar on the deck. And there were always plastic bottles and other trash along the tide lines—the islanders, as well as other coastal people and ships, dumped their garbage at sea. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was less than ten years old, the environmental movement was just starting to build up steam. And there we were on the frontline, with our first-hand proof that the ocean didn't swallow garbage, just moved it somewhere else.

One thing special about that little island, of all the ones we snorkeled around, was its coral reef. Most of the reefs we explored were flat beds with a few coral heads poking up here and there. But, perhaps because it bordered directly on the ocean, the reef at this particular cay was a maze of canyons, some fairly deep, and all filled with an amazing array of iridescent fish, from narrow-bodied angel fish to swarms of little yellow and gray striped schoolmasters, as well as starfish, snails, and anemones.

I snorkeled happily on the surface but I was afraid to go under the water, gripped by an unshakable claustrophobia. Ciam, though, snorkeled fearlessly in his life-jacket and flippers. I had to urge him back to the boat once when I noticed three barracudas stalking him.

Ed and Sky went spear fishing at every anchorage. We ate a variety of medium-sized fish. The round-bodied red squirrel fish with big black eyes were least desirable because of their many large scales. The skin of the parrot fish was tough as leather and came off easily; the flesh was delicious. Groupers were oily. They'd dart into a coral crevice to escape the spear gun, but then poke their snouts out to see if the coast was clear. Most of the groupers we ate had holes in their snouts. We avoided barracuda, which were rumored to be poisonous in some parts of the Bahamas.



Sunset at Moraine Cay.

Mostly, though, we ate a lot of conch (pronounced *konk*). The foot muscle was often the size of my palm, meaty and delicious. A good-sized conch might be slightly smaller than a volley ball, with a heavy creamy, brownish pink shell. Knobs protruded from the edges of the shell's spiral. The conch was attached inside the shell at about the third knob from the top. The guys would knock off the third knob with a hammer and cut through the attached muscle. As cook, I got to clean them. Their eyes, each mounted on top of a short fleshy stalk about the thickness of my little finger, had

golden irises. The eyes tracked me as I handled its extracted body. Conch are supposed to be one of the smarter shellfish. It felt creepy to be watched by it as I cut off its intestines. After being watched by them the first few times I trimmed them up, I always cut off the eyes before I cleaned them. We had breaded and fried conch, curried conch, conch fritters, creamed conch, conch with hot sauce and conch with soy sauce, conch for dinner and left over conch for breakfast and sometimes for lunch. With no refrigeration, we couldn't keep cooked food much longer than overnight.

We also ate a lot of what the Bahamians call lobster, but which were really a kind of large crawfish. They looked like lobsters minus the big front claws. We'd toss them into the rubber dinghy as we caught them, which wasn't smart in the long run because the lobster's antennae and carapaces were covered with sharp protrusions that poked holes in the dinghy. I got very good with the rubber patch kit, but eventually the dinghy would only stay full of air for 15 minutes at the most.

As cook, I also managed the food stores. Basic food wasn't much of a problem, but snacks became a volatile issue. Ed and Sky ate with no awareness that they had a share, and only a share, of what was available. I figured we should each get as much of the basic foods as we individually needed, but that snacks were even shares, so after a few times of complaining to no avail about the disappearance of a box of crackers during a night watch, I started dividing treats and snacks into fourths and stashed Ciam's and my shares away where we could eat them at our own pace without worrying about them disappearing overnight.

I got really good at cooking complicated meals with a pressure cooker and the two-burner propane stove. I even made bread, cooking it in the frying pan and flipping it over when it was half done. It was flat, but tasty. We spent Thanksgiving in Marsh Harbor, which was large enough to have a store, where we got a chicken, and I produced a multi-course Thanksgiving dinner, swapping the frying pan and various pots over the burners, and completing it with steamed blueberry pudding for desert.

Sailing in the Bahamas is a matter of judging water color. The Bahamian fishermen can probably tell the water depth to an inch just by the color shift along the spectrum of ultramarine to pale turquoise. We had a lot to learn. There were times when one of us would wade along in front of Teal testing the depth and leading the way to deeper water. We used a guidebook written by a couple who'd sailed for years among the islands. The approaches to safe anchorages were described in great detail, particularly the water's color change, along with little sketches of the island skyline. Most of the time the sketches were the most useful part of the book, although the low, flat islands tended to have similar profiles, and a few times when we'd be running into an anchorage, we'd discover, as the expected channel shallowed out into a coral reef, that we were not approaching the island described in the book.

Throughout our months in the islands, the weather was consistently wonderful—hot sun, blue skies often with towering thunderheads marching along the horizon, winds that varied from mere breaths to 20 knots. We were near enough to the equator that the days and nights were almost equal in length. Away from any urban lights, the night sky was shockingly full of stars. We found all the constellations, even the obscure ones like Aries and Cancer. We identified stars and spoke their names like friends—"There's old Aldebaran." One night, using our binoculars, I managed to locate both the Andromeda galaxy, a fuzzy oval of light not too far off the constellation Cassiopeia, and the Great Nebula dangling from Orion's belt. I read Fred Hoyle's book on astronomy in the mornings before I got up. I loved the feel of my consciousness being stretched out and out for light years as I rocked there in what seemed in comparison nothing more than a nut shell.

Our days fell into a routine. After breakfast and cleanup, Ciam and I sat down in the narrow aisle between the two bunks and spent some time doing math with his set of Cuisenaire rods, reading, and writing in his journal of our trip. This was his first-grade year. The journal filled up with drawings of little boats with very tall masts. Most of the time the little colored math rods stood in as people, cars, and buildings in his endless fantasy play. Monkey played various parts indicated by changes in Ciam's voice.

At some point in the morning it would be my turn at the tiller. We stood regular watches on long runs, but mostly we took turns as the mood moved us. Sailing the boat was fun—judging the set of the sails, navigating the tricky waters, leaning back in the cockpit in the sun and breeze, watching the islands slowly drift by. We'd anchor and fish, read, wander on the islands if we could get inland. The islands were mostly desert micro-climates, cactus-filled scrublands with little hermit crabs crawling on the thorny bushes and occasional casuarinas—a kind of evergreen some people called an Australian pine. The highest point of any island we explored was 90 feet.

After dinner, as dusk fell, we usually listened to the BBC on the short-wave radio for a while and then went to bed. There were days when I was certain I never wanted to end this life. Lying on the top of the cabin one day, I thought about how the lizards moved through that harsh landscape, scuttling along with their own kind of grace. Grace in movement shifted slowly in my

mind to grace as blessing, and the grace-fullness of life suddenly fluttered before me—easy as walking on the beach or as difficult as scrambling over a thorny hillside, but grace possible in either case.

Other days I wasn't so sure how long I could continue. Wandering among the islands was an aimless life in a suspended world. I came to want something more than just wandering, and yet each day the next island called us on, the warm, multihued water with its schools of exotic fish nibbling the coral, drifting as aimlessly as we. I painted water colors of the islands and wrote an article about sailing in the Bahamas, planning to mail it when we reached Nassau. I worked on a story that involved a wandering group of seafarers, water gypsies, which grew out of my increasingly strong desire for a group of people to live and share with, not paying attention to how hard group life was, even in just our small group. I yearned for some kind of real connection instead of the lack of privacy and emotional isolation I'd been living in for the past half year on the boat.

My relationship with Sky worsened slowly but steadily. We argued but didn't manage to resolve our disagreements. Ed and I had our own communication problems. Sometimes when Ed was angry at me, he wouldn't talk to me for days. But at least we had some affection for each other and even occasional sex to connect us. When I was angry, I'd tramp forward ten feet and sit in front of the main mast or put on my snorkel and fins and go look at fish.

When Columbus arrived, the islands were inhabited by around 40,000 peaceful Lucayan Indians. Within 25 years, disease and slavery had wiped them out. Eventually the Bahamas passed from Spanish to British rule. In 1970, the Bahamas were still part of the British crown colonies. The mostly black population, newly elected to power in 1967 after years of white rule, were eager for independence. In the outlying islands, though, life was slow and easy-going. The people were poor, but the sea was full of food.

We had only occasional contact with the local people. One was an old baker on Green Turtle Cay who made great bread, a wiry older white man. The second time I bought a couple of loaves from him, I asked him for his recipe. While he told me the ingredients and amounts, I struggled to put them into some logical memorable sequence—a glass of sugar, two pounds of flour, salt about this much in his hand, yeast three big pinches, water to make a nice stiff dough—the sugar was the key, and the climate. Later, in George Town, a baker told me when the weather suddenly fell cold, the bread rose slowly and was late coming out.

Green Turtle Cay was one of the places the Loyalists fled to after the American Revolution and was still populated mostly by whites. Once it had had a thriving economy based on salvaging wrecks and building boats, but the island shipwrecks and shipbuilding had died with the changing world economy.

On one tiny island that we explored briefly, we found an old black woman sitting on her porch. When I asked what was growing in front of her house, she said, "Peas. Here we say 'Peas and rice sure is nice; eat 'em once, you want 'em twice.'" She had one of the children pick a pod and opened it to show me two black-eyed peas inside. Then she had the little girl put the peas in the house. Even two peas mattered here. The soil was so precious on the rocky islands that every little pocket of it held some food plant, a couple stalks of corn, a few pea plants.

On another island we found a huge open-mouthed cave with thousands of bats clinging to the cathedral-high ceiling and walls, squeaking and rustling as they jostled for space. Supposedly pirate treasure was hidden there, but I couldn't see where it might be since the cave was quite

shallow. Pirate treasure was rumored everywhere in the islands. During the late 1600s to early 1700s pirates and privateers had used the islands as bases. Henry Morgan's treasure, the most famous of the lot, has never been found.

Once when the weather report predicted a large tropical storm moving in, we scouted the chart for a protected anchorage and headed for cover. The island we chose had a long narrow bay that looked perfect but when we sailed into it, we were quickly confronted by a man who motored out and told us it was a private island, and we'd have to leave. We cajoled our way into an overnight stay to wait out the storm, and he invited us to come on shore for a drink and some snacks. Never ones to turn down the offer of someone else's food and booze, we happily cleaned up and paddled to the dock. It turned out the island belonged to an owner of the Dallas Cowboys, and the man, probably the caretaker, gave us to understand he was that owner. Just another one of the oddballs we met throughout our trip. The storm blew over by the next morning, and we continued on our way.

Occasionally we met other boats, often sailed by American vacationers escaping the northern winter. Once we offered to take a vacationing family skin diving. We paddled the rubber dinghy to a likely spot over the reef and dropped our anchor. The water was so clear we couldn't be sure of its depth. Even at 20 feet you could identify the kind of fish swimming along the bottom. The anchor settled at six inches. We had to wade to deeper water before we could start swimming.

Ciam seemed to be the only one of us without a problem in the world. He played with Monkey, snorkeled around the boat, and drew countless sailboats in his journal. Sometimes we let him ride in the dinghy behind Teal, when the dinghy still held air. Once as we ran down the sound between Great Abaco Island and its off-lying cays, I watched him sprawled back, asleep in his life jacket, monkey in the crook of one arm—the orange life jacket, the yellow dinghy, the turquoise water. But life was not entirely a paradise for him. One time when Ciam was playing in the dinghy, at some anchorage, Ed let the dinghy's rope loose from the boat and made the panicked Ciam paddle back. Given the vagaries of our life on the water, I suppose Ciam had to learn how to deal with sudden emergencies that required paddling the dinghy, but I thought the method was cruel. Ed was teasing him, not teaching him. It was one of the many things we fought about.

Ed did watch out for Ciam in kinder ways, though. Once when we were walking along a white sand beach hunting for shells, Ciam splashing along in the water, Ed called Ciam over, to see something. Actually he was calling Ciam out of the water because he'd spotted a nurse shark cruising in toward the playing boy. It was the only shark we saw in the Bahamas.

When we were wading along the shore, rays were more worrisome than sharks. They'd settle on the bottom and blend into the sand, just resting, but if you stepped on them, they'd flip their tail up and could hit you with their poisonous spine. There were a number of different kinds of rays besides the big mantas with their six-foot wingspan. It seems natural to speak of wingspan; they appeared to be flying through the water as their side fins undulated. Once I watched an eagle ray, a stubby little guy about three feet across, flapping along eating something and dribbling scraps of whatever it was chewing. A school of smaller fish swam along under it, scavenging the crumbs.

That was the same day we found a fisherman's conch corral—a ring about 10 feet in diameter made of rocks with conch inside. The sharp coral rocks were about the same size as the conch, but apparently the big snails couldn't creep up over them. The fishermen would store the conch in a corral and then load them all into their boat at the end of the day to take to market. We



Teal under full sail.

saw fishing sloops mounded with conch so high you couldn't imagine how they survived even a mild wind.

The Bahamian fishermen used rocks as ballast. One of my favorite island stories was about an annual regatta in the Exumas. One of the crew members got angry at his captain, the favorite to win, so he took out all the rock ballast and went home. Without the ballast, the boat wasn't stable enough to sail.

In Hope Town, on Elbow Cay, we strolled around the narrow streets, past neat New England style saltbox houses with their hedges of red hibiscus, and went out to the red and white striped lighthouse, which looked like a chubby candy cane and was still at that time lit by a kerosene lantern whose light was reflected and amplified by huge corrugated lenses. We were getting eager to be off the boat for a longer while though, so we moved on the next day.

We were a day or so away from Nassau when our propane ran out. We had a small camp stove to fall back on, and one night we cooked over a driftwood fire on a beach at the foot of a small cliff—baked potatoes and baked foil-wrapped conch, the air warm, the starry night wheeling overhead as the fire burned down. Slowly Orion rose up over the edge of the little cliff.

We avoided sailing at night because we couldn't spot the hazards in the shallow water around the islands. But a deep-water channel called the Tongue of the Ocean cut through the Bahamas chain between the Abacos and New Providence Island, the location of Nassau, the Bahamian capital and largest town in the islands. To cross the channel we ran all night, standing four-hour watches. To conserve the batteries that powered our running lights, we turned the lights off and steered by the stars. The sound of the water slooshing along the sides of the boat as it moved through the water and the rhythmic beat of the rigging under the pulse of the waves was hypnotic. On my watch, to keep myself awake, I sang every fragment of song I could remember: rock songs, folk songs, Christmas carols, hymns, a musical archeological dig of my past. I named stars and constellations, made up stories, and when I heard the *huh huh huh* of porpoises running beside us, tried to talk to them.

The political maneuvering that was taking the Bahamas from Crown Colony to independent nation translated in Nassau into unease between the mostly black natives and the mostly white tourists. We mostly stuck close to the dock where we'd tied up Teal. Sky dressed up in his madras jacket and headed off in the evenings to the casinos on Paradise Island, across the harbor from Nassau, looking for a woman with money, I unkindly assumed. We stocked up

on supplies, using up the majority of our remaining funds and planning to replenish them by working in Puerto Rico, or maybe the Virgin Islands.

Hooked up to the dockside electricity, we had lights at night for reading, and I made up for the past months—consuming *Andromeda Strain* and other novels my sister had sent me. We filled the propane tank, did repairs, scraped, patched, and painted the sides of the boat some more, and after a week or so headed east southeast, bound for the Exumas and then for Puerto Rico.

We were getting eager for the Caribbean and pushed on fairly quickly after we left Nassau. We took time though to stop at Staniel Cay to swim in the cave used in filming the James Bond movie *Thunderball*. The entrance was under water, so we donned snorkeling gear, and the four of us swam down to the entrance, a few feet under the water's surface at low tide, and emerged in a grotto carved out of the coral by the water. Light filtered in through a hole in the dome high above and lit the grotto with a blue light. The water sucked and lapped at the rocky walls. It was so clear you could see the bottom deep below. The tide could trap you inside if you lingered too long.

Exuma chain is a long string of cays, and as we sailed along them, a storm started blowing up. We were heading to George Town on Great Exuma, our last stop in the Bahamas before we headed out for Puerto Rico. Realizing we wouldn't be able to reach George Town before dark, we found a navigable channel between two islands and edged through it to shelter for the night in the lee of the low, spiny brush- and cactus-covered island.

The next morning when we tried to get out through the channel, the storm was still driving the waves into its mouth, churning and boiling the water over the coral outcroppings that lined the passage. We decided to wait for the storm to blow over.

The wind blew relentlessly all that day and the next day. Each morning we'd go check out the cut and be scared off. Finally after three days of close quarters, getting closer every day—no fishing, no conch, only beans and rice, canned vegetables and corned beef—we agreed to try to run the channel, regardless of how bad it was.

And it was bad. Water surged through the cut in standing waves as tall as the ten-foot rocks that lined it. The cut was a few boat-widths wide and a few boat-lengths long. We'd have no room to maneuver once we were in it. If we got turned sideways, we'd founder on the rocks.

Ed and Sky took the boat in. Ciam and I went below—not a safe place to be, but out of the way. With the little outboard Seagull engine at full bore and a sail close hauled and reefed down, we headed into the cut, into the wind, into the wildly churning water. I watched the cabin windows fill with waves, then sky, then waves, the boat thrashing and groaning with its effort, the engine whining, alternately in the water and then out of it, and then everything was suddenly quiet as we made it through the cut and into calmer water.

We reached George Town, in Elizabeth Harbor on Great Exuma, in late January. We anchored across the Sound in the lee of a smaller cay, Elizabeth Island. Our propane was low again, and we had to send the tank on the weekly mail boat to Nassau, there being no way in George Town to fill it.

Before the mail boat returned, Sky announced that he planned to take the next ferry back to Nassau and return to the States. I was so tired of living with him that it was a relief to hear, but what were Ed and I to do? Return, too, or carry on? And how could we buy his share of the boat?

We finally agreed that Sky would advertise Teal in sailing magazines and take his share of the boat's value when it sold, if he was able to sell it. Ed and I decided to continue on to Puerto Rico—stubbornly clinging to our adventure and the hope of work.

The mail boat was due midday. As we set off across the Sound to take Sky to the ferry dock and pick up our propane tank, we saw the mail boat set off up-Sound—leaving earlier than scheduled, of all things, there in the tropics where everything ran late. It meant we'd have to hang around another week with Sky on board, he eager to leave and us eager for him to be gone.

One night we went to a bar to dance to the local band. Eventually I got tired and went back to the boat, tied up to the George Town dock. For some reason I had the fantasy of the stern coming untied, and I imagined the routine I'd go through to pull it back to the dock. In the night I woke to feel Teal bumping oddly. I got up and found the stern had come untied. I followed my recently fantasized routine and snugged the boat back up to the dock, the whole sequence happening while I was half in and half out of sleep.

In George Town, as elsewhere in the islands, we ran into an odd collection of non-Bahamians. There was the apparently wealthy yachtsman and his entourage. He bought the three of us lunch for taking Teal out to his yacht and bringing in some of his guests who'd stayed behind. And there were the British models who were staying in a house on Elizabeth Island while on a shoot in the Islands. And the refrigerator repairman from the Bronx, who'd rented a sailboat with his son-in-law, escaping the New York winter; we went lobster hunting together and caught 20 lobsters. We ate lobsters for every meal for the next two days. A young vacationing Canadian couple we met, the woman's voice hardly ever above a whisper, sent us some photos, to our State-side address.

Our Christmas package from my mother caught up with us in George Town but the duty on it, though minimal, was too much for me to pay, and I had it forwarded on to Puerto Rico, where we wouldn't be charged any duty.



At anchor off Elizabeth Island.

We washed our clothes and ourselves at a cistern of rainwater we found up on Elizabeth Island. A smooth broad, cement rimmed-sidewalk, really a shallow trough, ran from the hilltop down to the cistern. In the rainy season water would rush down the trough filling the cistern with sweet rainwater. The fresh water felt wonderful after the clamminess left by saltwater bathing. I wondered whose cistern it was. Were we stealing the water?

On the ocean side of the island, we found a blow-hole, a hole opening from the rocky cliff top into a cave. Ocean swells moved the water in and out of the cave, and every swell pushed air out the opening at our feet, sweet air, whose passage made a strange booming sigh.

Sky caught the next mail boat, and then it was just Ed and me and Ciam. We set out on our own, sailing four-hour watches. It was on my watch on one of the night runs that the line for the gaff gave way, whacking the gaff boom down against the mast. We managed somehow to make our way to an island anchorage, but couldn't get close enough to land to lay the boat over and reach the pulley at the top of the mast to run the line through again. Since the mast wasn't strong enough to support Ed's or my weight, we attached the bosun's chair—a board in a rope sling—to the sloop sail line, put Ciam in it, and pulled him up the mast, gaff line in hand. The boat rocked with the waves. Ciam clung to the mast. "Hang on tight, Ciam, and don't let go of the line. If you drop the line we'll have to send you back up again," I called to him. Cold-hearted encouragement, but in our desperate straits, it was the only encouragement I could give him.

The mast swung out over the water as the boat rocked with the waves, but he got the rope through the chock and kept hold of the end all the way down—our hero. We praised him and celebrated that, even though he was terrified, he did it anyway. He had become a real crew member.

One evening while we were underway, and I was cooking dinner, Ed called me out on deck. His voice had an ambiguous edge of excitement, uncertainty, and question of danger. I popped my head out the companionway in time to see a strange red reflection hanging on the horizon. For a moment it looked like some large distant glowing vehicle before it began to dissolve or fade, only a sun-lit cloud. On our last evening in the Bahamas—anchored in the harbor of a small island—a hawk landed on the top of the mast and eyed us as we ate dinner.

The next morning we set out for Puerto Rico. To the east southeast of us and about 90 miles north of the island of Hispaniola were the Turks and the Caicos archipelagos separated by the Turks Island Passage. We didn't have the money to put into port there.

On all other sides was the open ocean. We had our choice of winds: northeast storm winds or east southeasterly trades, both thirty-five to forty-five knots.

What was the ocean like? Immense space sectioned in half: blue sky full of clouds and gray ocean full of twelve-foot swells. The wind chopped the surface of the waves and flung foam off them. The swells were moving with the wind. We had to go against both. And not in a straight line either. Between us and Puerto Rico was the Silver Bank, a broad, flat reef of low-breaking coral heads. We plotted a course as close as possible to the southeast, guessing how much leeway we'd lose to the northeast storm winds that would be pushing our tubby little boat down onto the Silver Bank.

After three days of standing four-hour watches—watches that were all beating up wind into the choppy swells, always working the tiller, minding the sails, watching the compass—we were tired. We figured we were well out into the Atlantic so when night came on, we dropped the sails, tied the tiller down, and went to bed, hoping to get a good night's sleep. We figured it would be OK to bed down at night in the open ocean, since we were well away from land and weren't in a shipping lane.

When we got up the next morning, we were bearing down on coral cliffs. Ed yanked the Seagull into life, and I rushed a sail up the mast. We beat our way farther off-shore and pulled out a chart to try to find out where we were. It could be the east side of the Turks, or the east side of the Caicos. A few landmarks, optimistically read, suggested Caicos, so we headed for the cut into what we hoped was Cockburn Harbor.

As we rounded the coral outcropping and came into a protected bay, we saw khaki tents pitched among the three-sided, roofless ruins of a brick building. The rest of the town seemed intact and ringed the harbor. It turned out the khaki tents belonged to the British Army's Royal Engineers, equivalent to the US Navy Seabees. They were doing exercises, which consisted of building a landing strip and some other construction projects around the island. We quickly met the officers, as well as some of the Others, as they were called, like Sarge, who drove around in a jeep like some army-movie wheeling and dealing sergeant. He immediately struck up a friendship with Ed, which netted us a welcome box of C-rations.

Once the Caicos had been forested, a guidebook said, but the salt rakers had cut down the trees to make room for their salt pans and, the islanders claimed, because they thought the trees caused more rain. The town's main street was lined with stores and houses, their shuttered second-story balconies providing protection from the sun.

Shortly after docking, I sliced my finger badly while whittling away on an old loaf of bread. The Royal Engineers medic patched me up. Ciam thought the Royal Engineers were wonderful. The Royal Engineers showed movies on a screen in the courtyard every night. When they showed a cavalry and Indian movie, Ciam asked, "Is that the Royal Engineers?" They adopted him and went to work helping him build a sailboat, with a mast so long it immediately capsized when he launched it.

One day one of the officers, Ian, whose intellectual presence was a welcome respite from the tedium of Ed's and my relationship, saved our boat from a crippling accident. I'm not sure it was a blessing. We were hanging out on deck, Ed, Ian, Sarge, and I. A sleek 40-foot boat was coming in to dock behind us when its motor cut out. The guy at the tiller lost steerage, and it looked like the yacht was going to collide with us near our stern. Ian, who was standing on our stern deck by the yawl mast, at the last minute reached out a foot as graceful as a dancer and shoved the bow of the yacht off our stern just before it hit us. The yacht plowed into the wharf, doing itself the kind of damage it might have done to us. A young Canadian couple owned it, a young hip self-made businessman and his long-haired girlfriend.

When we came back from one visit to the Royal Engineers' camp, we found our tool box had been stolen. By then we had only about \$10 and would have to wait until we found work in Puerto Rico to replace the tools.

That night we went to a dance at a local bar. The band was composed of a saw, washboard, guitar, and drum kit. Those too poor to pay their way in hung in the windows. Eventually I was tired of dancing, and Ciam was sleeping alone on the boat, so I walked back in the warm night. It had been raining recently, and the mosquitoes had hatched. That night they swarmed so badly they bit the soles of my feet through my sheet.

Ed came home in the morning. He and Sarge had dealt with the mosquitoes by staying up all night drinking. He decided it was time to leave. We left the harbor under motor and partial sail. The faithful Seagull pushed us out into the channel where we could pick up the wind. Out in channel between the Turks and Caicos, the Seagull started sputtering. Ed killed it and started to pull off the black flywheel that sat on its top like a little beret. "Bring it on board before you take it apart," I complained.

"No, it'll just take a moment," he said, and that's all it took for the flywheel to fly off into the water and sink. Now we had no working motor. I wanted to return to the harbor. Ed wanted to go on.

We raised our sails, picked up the northeastern storm winds, and headed for Puerto Rico. We went back to our four-hour watches. Four hours with a hand on the tiller, steering as close to the wind as we could get, trying to make easterly distance before the northeast storm gave way to the easterly trades, into which we'd have to tack to make headway. It made the length of the trip unpredictable. We figured a week, maybe, with bad winds two.

The noisy rush of the wind and the water filled our world. Rain and the ten- to twelve-foot waves drenched us as we pounded over them. I worried the keel would drop off, or the tiller snap, or a sail give way. Off watch I mended the leaking seals around portholes, kept Ciam entertained with reading, math lessons, and games, and cooked—we were back to beans and rice, corned beef, canned vegetables. Usually I could get a couple hours of sleep, rolled and tossed by the boat's movement in my damp bunk

Day after day. By the fifth day, we estimated we were still at least 80 miles off Puerto Rico, and the wind was starting to shift to the southeast. We dreaded those 80 miles of what would be tacking into 40 knot winds.

One night I dreamed that we were floating on a calm, gray and pink sea in an end-of-the-storm sunset, and I could see scattered lumps of coral heads jutting from the silvery water, half shrouded in the pinkish mist or just barely breaking the surface, so mysterious and still, with tiny wavelets washing gently on their sides. I knew I was looking at the Silver Bank. The treacherous Silver Bank had foundered galleons loaded with Mayan and Aztec gold on their way back to Spain. Still, in my dream the Bank spread away to the horizon as innocent as a cheap oil painting. Totally calm.

On the sixth day I had morning watch, after breakfast, facing the same stretching field of waves, the same sky. Water constantly splashed on board from the waves we crashed against and over, so I was in my tattered orange rain gear. I noticed that a tear was starting in the corner of the mainsail. "Ed, come spell me at the tiller. I want to go pull the sail down for a moment and stitch up a tear."

He took the tiller. I snapped my safety line onto the lifeline—the line that ran along the side of the cabin— and started forward. Just as I climbed onto the cabin, the upwind spreader gave way. The mast snapped. The sails, booms, and rigging banged down across the cabin, trailing half overboard. Luckily everything missed me.

It was suddenly silent.

We rushed to pull the waterlogged sails back on board, lash things down, and inventory the damage. Then we sat down in the cockpit and asked each other, "What do we do now?" We assessed our options. They were slender.

We had enough water for three weeks or so, plus what rain we'd be able to catch. We had food stores for a couple months—canned foods, beans, rice, and flour—fare Columbus's sailors would have drooled over, I suppose. The water in the canned vegetables would extend our liquids a bit. The toolbox, stolen in Cockburn Harbor, had held our saws. The generator gas tank had suffered condensation, resulting in water in the gas, and wouldn't run at the moment, but that might be resolvable. Our rubber dinghy held its air for less than 15 minutes by now. We had no radio transmitter, nor engine, but we did have the yawl mast standing, and two thirds of the main mast, so we could probably rig enough sail to maneuver downwind at least. Florida was somewhere west, although the Silver Bank lay between us. South 80 miles or so lay the island of

Hispaniola, shared by Haiti on the west and the Dominican Republic on the east. Its coast would be the same kind of coral cliffs we'd seen on the Caicos, and if we managed to find and maneuver our way into a harbor, the Dominican police were rumored to shoot first and then find out who you were.

We didn't have time to do more than discuss these options when an oil tanker appeared on the horizon. Even though it was daylight, we tried firing our flares. They fizzled out. We wildly waved our tattered orange slickers. "It's turning," we rejoiced, and then watched as the tanker continued along the horizon. "It's not turning," we feared.

The tanker traveled about 13 knots and took a while to slow and change direction, maybe 15 minutes. When it finally was close enough to hail by voice, we discovered it was manned by a Spanish crew who didn't speak much English. We didn't speak Spanish. The tanker was empty, heading from Bermuda back to an Esso oil port on Aruba off the coast of Venezuela. It rode high in the water, unmoved by the waves that lifted and pounded Teal into its metal side. Our puny rubber bumpers were futile protection. Each wave crest lifted us up almost to eye level with the crew, each trough took us down below the tanker's belly. Ciam stood in the cockpit, crying while Ed and I tried to figure out how to protect Teal.

The tanker crew dropped a rope ladder over the side, and a sailor clambered down, scooped up Ciam, and swarmed back up the ladder. Stunned by the sudden disappearance of Ciam, we followed along, no time for pondering decisions, only taking action. At the last minute I snatched up our passports and my wallet, with its pitiful contents, \$10 in total.

As it turns out, oil tankers aren't fitted with any kind of crane to lift a boat, only one that could lower their lifeboat. The captain and crew were kind and efficient; they wanted to do what they could for us. They wouldn't let us return to the damaged Teal but they did maneuver her astern and take her under tow. By then, though, she'd suffered a cracked hull from being pounded against the tanker and was taking on water. The tow rope snapped as soon as the tanker picked up speed. Ciam and I sat on the steps to the wheelhouse and watched our tubby little boat rolling under the waves broadside.

"Monkey," Ciam cried, as the waves washed over Teal's cabin.

"Monkey has to stay on the boat and take care of it," I told him.

We arrived in Aruba 24 hours later, on February 18, 1971. An ESSO employee took us to the Seaman's Rescue Union the next day, where we each got a change of clothes. He also loaned us \$100 for plane fare, and we flew to Puerto Rico, where we had \$200 waiting us. We spent a week in San Juan looking for work. When we'd used up our money, I borrowed money from my sister to return to the States with Ciam and made my way back to Tacoma, where Ed—who had managed to find a job as a cook in Puerto Rico and then was engaged to sail a yacht to New York—eventually rejoined us.

Our sailing adventure ended abruptly in mid ocean, unfinished, incomplete. For years I pictured Teal somewhere in the Atlantic, a shipping hazard crewed by fish and plankton and piloted by Monkey.