

Blog of the *Mary T*: Bahamas 2010-2011

October 22, 2010
On Our Way

Our trip to the Caribbean has officially begun. We left Deale, MD, on Monday, October 18—only two and a half weeks after our target date. Although we had been preparing for this trip for about a year, the month of September was especially frantic.



We had the boat hauled out and did all the bottom cleaning, painting, waxing, some minor hull repairs, along with the installation of our new solar panels. We stayed with our dear friends, Tim, Viki, and Annie while *Mary T* was out of the water. As usual, they treated us like family and never put any pressure on us to get a move on.

We didn't want to live aboard *Mary T* on the hard. For one thing, the boat sits at a steep angle with the bow higher than the stern so the rain won't collect on deck. Secondly, it's not very romantic.

At the time we were getting hauled out, Hurricane Earl was a potential threat to the Chesapeake region, so, Robert, the yard manager at Shipwright Harbor Marina, placed *Mary T* in a safe place amongst some larger vessels and also put additional jack stands under her as a precaution. Robert was also very helpful with advice on some of our repairs.



The major event of our September occurred on the 19th, when we went to Gloucester, MA to get married aboard the sailing vessel, *Windfall*, a Hinckley 49. *Windfall* is owned by our friends Raffi and Lisa who charter her out of Gloucester in the summer, and then, out of the Abacos in the Bahamas for the winter. Massachusetts is one of the few states that allows ship captains to perform weddings. So, when Amy and I got engaged, it was a no-brainer to ask Raffi to officiate ours. My brothers Jack, and Bob, along with all of Amy's family came aboard for the ceremony. We left the dock, circled around Gloucester harbor, and then head to Misery Island near Salem and Marblehead. What better place to start a marriage, eh? It was a splendid day aboard *Windfall*, followed by an exquisite meal at Duckworth's Bistrot back in Gloucester. (yes, that is the way they spell "bistro.") We highly recommend *Windfall* to all who may be looking to charter a crewed sailboat. (www.defiancesailcharters.com)

Our trip to Massachusetts, by car, was a great opportunity to visit cruising friends Lou and Jane in Nyack, NY, as well as Corning and Tita in Edgecomb, ME. It was a very special ten days. Kind of like a "pre-honeymoon." In between, we stayed at Amy's sister, Molly's, place in Littleton, MA. Molly, husband Tim, and son Woody, hosted with the mosted, making us, along with the rest of Amy's family, feel like royalty.

We had to complete all our boat work after the wedding when we returned to Maryland. Weather played a small part in our delayed departure but most of our was spent re-organizing our lives. With daughter Kai-lee' and family headed to Finland in May, 2011, we realized that we had better get all our stuff out of their garage and attic. Then there was the unexpected passing of Peter, the Berke family dog. Kai-lee' and Rory had raised Peter since his puppy-hood in Hawaii and his passing was very painful. He was special and will be sorely missed. Here is a link to a short film Amy did when we were pet-sitting Peter a few years back. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?>

November 2, 2010

Carolina Beach, NC

We arrived in Carolina Beach after a long day on the ICW. It was slow going despite having the wind and current with us. We had several bridge openings to time and actually had to spend a good bit of the trip in reverse so we didn't pile up at the bridges along with the large number of other boaters heading south.

Since leaving Norfolk, VA, it's been Great Bridge, VA, where Amy bought a ukelele, Coinjock, NC, Broad Creek, NC, Pongo River, NC, South River, NC, Beaufort, NC, and Mile Hammock Bay, NC. We hope to get to the border of NC and SC tomorrow, weather permitting.

–Kenny, 11/2/10



The ukelele is proving to be a delightful cruising companion. I am working on mastering 2-chord favorites including Skip To My Lou and Polly Wolly Doodle and Rock a My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham. Kenny is suitably encouraging.

Speaking of cruising companions we have added another crew member to our party — Dickey Bird an old British WWII veteran. He is our imaginary friend whose primary role is to keep us calm and cool when we start to get anxious and disagreeable about the shallow depths, bridges and heavy boater traffic on the ICW. We want Dickey to be relaxed and enjoy the trip, so we do our best to keep things light and mask any stress we might feel. Calm and cool sailors are we. Dickey shares war stories with us which is yet another reminder that we have no reason to complain.

As the weather is a bit gray and gloomy we've decided to remain in Carolina Beach, NC for a couple of days. We went ashore for a walk about, beverage and nosh. The place is pretty dead as it's mainly a summer getaway kind o' place. Back aboard Mary T I am baking my first banana bread ever. We had a lot of bananas and they started getting kind of mushy so...

I would like to extend my condolences to all my Democratic friends who are disappointed in the outcome of the recent elections and my congratulations to all my Republican friends who are overjoyed.

- Amy, 11/3/10

November 11, 2010

The Love Boat Arrives in St. Augustine

After inching our way down the ICW with hoards of other boaters, we decided to take a crack at sailing on the outside from the Cape Fear River, NC to Charleston, SC. The weather looked favorable: NW winds of 10 -20 knots with only a slight chance of rain. So, on November 5 we coasted down the Cape Fear River on an ebb tide and into the welcoming swells of the North Atlantic.

Unfortunately, the wind was not as strong as predicted and we soon found ourselves motoring. No sooner were we lamenting the lack of wind when a black cloud appeared on our horizon, disgorging buckets of rain. We dropped sail and managed to skirt the worst of the little squall only feeling a few rain drops. Darkness fell as the the wind picked up considerably and we managed to raise the mainsail and double reefed in preparation for a wild ride. Turned out the wind was more westerly than northwest and our course was southwest, so we found ourselves on a close reach with 15-20 knots of wind and short choppy seas. For 12 long hours, we raced like a bucking bronco through blackened seas. It was so rough we failed to make log entries or mark our position on the paper chart. All we could do was hold on for dear life and curse the NOAA meteorologists and commiserate with other cruisers over the VHF radio.

It was quite a relief to enter Charleston Harbor the next morning. We stayed there three nights, but only left our marina once to go into town. We feasted on a grits-based brunch at Fleet Landing on the waterfront. It was so filling we didn't need to eat for the rest of the day. Love that southern cuisine. In Charleston Market, Kenny bought me another wedding ring as I seem to have lost the original somewhere on *Mary T...* The cool weather has caused my ring finger to shrink, allowing the wedding band to escape. Replacement was mandatory, lest I forget my status. After resting up in Charleston, we were ready for another tour at sea.

We exited the Charleston harbor November 9 on a bright sunny morning headed for Florida. This time there was NO wind. We motored all the way to St. Augustine, FL on glassy seas. For several hours we glided through piles of grapefruit-sized jelly fish that resembled acorns in shape and color. Then a fearless little brown bird paid us a visit. He stuck around for awhile and lounged in the cockpit like it was his own nest, casually hopping across our laps and feet. I thought of all



the years as a child I chased birds around the back yard brown bag and now I had caught one without even trying.

We arrived in St. Augustine yesterday and headed out to meet our Canadian cruising friends Greg and Corinne with whom we sailed in 2007 on our first trip to the Bahamas. We had a jolly time visiting three different venues for food and drink and live music. Everyone in St. Augustine seems to sing and play

guitar. An eccentric one-armed dancing man showed up on the outskirts of two of the outdoor venues to hop and twirl to the tunes. I almost went and danced with him, but my seldom seen more conservative side kept me seated.

Now we're relaxing in the gentle breeze on a mooring south of St. Augustine's Bridge of Lions planning our next foray into America's oldest city. A fierce nor'easter is building strength in the Atlantic so our next jumps south will be on the good ole Intracoastal Waterway. Tomorrow Daytona, Inchallah.



November 19, 2010 Inching Down the ICW

Since our rollicking time in St. Augustine, we've inched our way south on the good ole Intracoastal Waterway. The large seas and Northeast winds in the Atlantic have kept us "inside." November 17, we arrived in Jensen Beach wearing shorts and T-shirts. Jensen Beach is a must stop because Kenny's cousin, George, and his wife Peggy dwell there.

Upon arriving, George met us at our dinghy and drove us at great speed in his convertible Porsche to Conchy Joe's for cocktails while we awaited Peggy to get off work. All three of us were able to squeeze in the car with the top down. It would not have been possible otherwise. When Peggy caught up with us they treated us to a lovely dinner at the Dolphin, their neighborhood restaurant. I ordered the Dolphin a la Dolphin, which I surmised was the signature dish. It was a lightly breaded Mahi Mahi with a sauce of white wine and capers, etc. I was not disappointed. I am hoping to catch some dolphin fish of my own on this trip. I've been busily downloading documents about how to clean and fillet fish. I am somewhat daunted but not discouraged.

You'd think I would've learned how to clean a bloody fish during the two years I spent in Senegal as a Peace Corps volunteer. My village "mother" went fishing several days a week and prepared dinner, while princess Peace Corps chowed down on the fresh catch, never deigning to dirty her hands. So much for development work.

Anyway, Cousin George has been most generous with us. He took us out for a major shopping trip so we could stock up on food items before we jump over to the Bahamas in the next week or two. The second night in Jensen Beach we dined at an Italian restaurant owned by friends of Peggy and George. Everyone at the restaurant was terribly friendly and the ambiance and appearance of the wait staff made one feel as if on the set of the Sopranos.

Prior to arriving at Jensen Beach, we anchored at Daytona Beach, then Melbourne, and finally took a mooring at Vero Beach, often referred to as Velcro Beach. Apparently some cruisers have a hard time pulling themselves away from the cozy harbor, free bus service to shopping areas and nearby public beach. We'd never stopped there before and were curious about the place. Taking a mooring at the Municipal Marina is compulsory as there is no space for anchored boats in the tiny harbor, and the marina often puts 2 or more boats on a mooring. When we learned we would have to share a mooring we almost declined and went

elsewhere, but changed our minds and decided to give it a try.

Much to our surprise and delight we found ourselves sharing a mooring with Ruth and Barry on *Another Adventure*. We'd met the couple from Appleton, WI, on our previous trip to the Bahamas in 2007-2008. They'd heard us on the VHF radio and told the marina to raft us up with them. They put out fenders and we slid up next to them and jumped into their cockpit for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. In addition to being very generous and loads o' fun Ruth and Barry are a wealth of knowledge re/sailboat maintenance and cruising. They develop and sell boating paraphernalia for Cruisingsolutions.com. Ruth and Barry cruise with their parrot, Buddy, who enjoys whistling and laughing with people. I have yet to hear him utter a word, but they say he has quite a vocabulary. (Barry passed away in February of 2012. We will miss him.)

In addition to meeting up with Ruth and Barry, we also had a chance meeting with the Sayres aboard *Spartina*. Their hailing port is Claiborne, MD, where friends John and Susanne Scott have a home. We asked if they knew them and sure enough, they're close neighbors and good friends.

We just arrived in Lake Worth near North Palm Beach and dropped the anchor. Saturday and Sunday we'll get a slip at the Riviera Beach Municipal Marina while Kenny's many relatives come to visit. We are expecting to see brother Jack and wife from Tampa; son Justin and family from Jupiter; and cousin Alex and wife from Delray Beach. We're looking forward to it! Nothing like a Kurlychek fest!

November 26, 2010

Kurlychek Fest and Thanksgiving

We've had so many celebrations recently, I hardly know where to begin. Last Sunday a bunch of Kenny's Florida relatives joined us in Riviera Beach at the Tiki Hut restaurant for lunch. A fine time was had by all. Brother Jack and wife Mary drove all the way from Tampa. Kenny's son Justin (from Jupiter) brought his lovely 8-year-old daughter Trynity who charmed the whole lot of us. Almost as charming as Trynity was, Cousin Alex and wife Sharon's dog, Emma — a pint-sized ball of white fluff who never barked. The highpoint of the Kurlychek fest was when I rowed Trynity in our new inflatable kayak out of the marina and across to Peanut Island. She hoped we'd discover some new species while there and she used her best Christopher Columbus voice throughout the voyage.

After the family reunion, Kenny and I departed the marina and anchored in North Palm beach among many other cruisers bound for the Bahamas. I've have been making two kayak trips around the anchorage per day examining the luxurious mansions which line the shore as well as the pelicans and dolphins. The weather has been ridiculously gorgeous — mostly low 80s during the day and low 60s at night.



The day before Thanksgiving we were delighted to welcome to the anchorage our fabulously

generous and silly friends Corning and Tita Townsend of Maine. We initially met them on our cruise to the Bahamas three years ago and have visited them three times in their home in Maine on our trips north. It was Corning's birthday the day they arrived so they joined us for much merrymaking and singing of birthday songs on the *Mary T*. Tita brought a tasty duck dish and asparagus. Last night we had Thanksgiving aboard their boat, *Blessed Spirit*. I brought the partial turkey and Tita did all the complicated side dishes. Somehow I always get off rather easy... Thank you Tita. Corning and Tita have added a third crew member in the form of the cutest, fluffiest puppy dog in the world. Her name is Demi and she comes from Havana.

The main reason we're sticking around here for awhile is that we decided we should honor the recommended service schedule for our life raft. So, we found a service center nearby where we took it to be inspected and repacked. It's ridiculously expensive, but what can one do. Better pay than to find oneself floating in the Caribbean next to a sinking boat and a life raft that won't inflate. Thus, some time after next Tuesday when we get the life raft back we will continue south to Fort Lauderdale then to Key Biscayne from which point we will sail away from the good ole USA and jump into the Bahamian world.

Tomorrow *Blessed Spirit* and *Mary T* will go and anchor south of Peanut Island for a change of pace. Kenny's son, Justin and family will return for another visit and Trynity will spend the night on the boat. Trynity was very taken with *Mary T* and expressed the desire to spend the night on her last visit. We are more than happy to accommodate her.



December 1, 2010

Grand-daughter Trynity's Visit

We celebrated "Pirate Saturday" with grand-daughter Trynity, last weekend. She spent the night aboard the *Mary T* and delighted us with her excellent reading and interpretation of "Diary of a Wimpy Kid." We went to Peanut Island on Sunday for a bit of exploring and digging. We all had a wonderful time.

December 5, 2010

Meniscus Happens

My left knee has been bothering me since late August. But, it only hurt when I walked any distance longer than a block or two. Amy kept asking me to get it checked out but, I didn't think it was worth a visit to a doctor. It continued to bother me every time we went for a long walk, then would feel better when we stopped. We did quite a lot of walking while we were in North Palm Beach awaiting our life raft. On one walk, I saw an orthopedic clinic and thought maybe now would be a good time to have it checked out. I got an appointment very quickly and my cousin, Alex, kindly agreed to drive us. It was a good thing too, because they sent me to another town for an MRI. Turns out that I have a torn meniscus—the cartilage in the knee. The



doctor said it would not heal itself and recommended arthroscopic surgery. Not wanting to miss out on all the hikes we expect to take, I agreed.

So, I'll be heading into surgery Monday afternoon. We are parked again, at the Riviera Beach Municipal Marina and will be here until the knee is good enough for us to go back out to the nearby anchorage. Once it's good enough for me to move freely about the boat, we'll start heading south again.

December 9, 2010

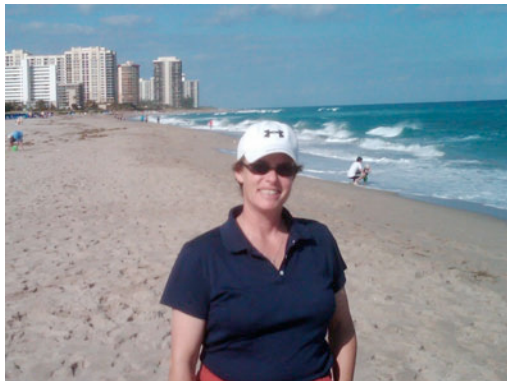
Operation "Meniscus" a Success

We pulled in to the Riviera Beach Municipal Marina for another visit in anticipation of my procedure on the 6th. We were prepared to come back to the boat after the trip to the surgical center, but cousin George insisted we spend the night at his place in Jensen Beach. We are very grateful to him and wife, Peggy, for their help and hospitality. It would have been a bit tricky getting on to the boat in the groggy state I was in.

We went back to the doctor on Tuesday for the post-op exam and he declared it a success. I even went to my first physical therapy session that day. The knee is a bit achy and a little stiff but I can walk around pretty good. We are back on board the *Mary T* and still in the marina, but hope to move back out to the nearby anchorage this weekend.

December 30, 2010

Fort Lauderdale At Last



After visiting nearly every doctor in the Palm Beach vicinity over a period of five weeks, Kenny and I finally pressed on and are now in Fort Lauderdale. Although just 40 nautical miles south of our previous location it is refreshing to be moored in new waters.

Though still somewhat stiff and achy, Kenny's knee is coming along and he is religious about his morning rehab exercises. As for me, neither the ear nose and throat doctor nor the gastroenterologist could account for the feeling of something being stuck in my throat, though the daily ingestion of Prilosec (an antacid/acid reflux medication) seems to have alleviated my symptoms, leading one to assume it was some kind of reflux issue.

My esophagram and endoscopy did not reveal anything out of the ordinary. The biopsy from the endoscopy was negative. The ear nose throat doctor was angling for a CAT scan of my throat, but I felt we'd poured enough money into the Florida health system and declined the invitation.

As for the celebration of Christ's birthday, on Christmas eve, Kenny and I had a lovely lunch at his cousin Alex's house in Delray Beach, which is midway between West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale. Alex's wife Sharon is an artist and has done a beautiful job decorating the house in Mexican style with beautiful tiles, bright paint and lots of Dominican and Mexican

artwork. It was warm enough that day to eat outside on their patio. (We've had three cold snaps since we've been in Florida with temperatures in the low 30s). Later, Alex dropped us off in City Place in the Center of West Palm Beach, where we stared at the throngs and listened to free live music and watched fake snow fall from the sky.

On Christmas day we took the dinghy to Singer Island (a barrier island in Palm Beach vicinity) to look at the ocean. Although we were anchored only a short distance from the ocean inside the barrier islands, we hadn't seen it for weeks. The pounding surf was mesmerizing as was an expert kite boarder flying over the waves at 45 mph and doing flips in mid air. We settled into Christmas lunch at a hotel poolside tiki bar and watched the variety of human shapes and sizes slither in and out of the pool. There was absolutely nothing Christmassy about the whole scene including the live music which was absent of carols. It didn't take us long to realize we were probably the only gentiles present.



Last night we walked up and down the strip in Fort Lauderdale looking for the perfect venue for an after dinner beverage. First we tried the Big Kahuna, a 3rd story restaurant which which turned out to be full of screaming children. Not satisfied, we thought we'd try one more place and during our search we saw a bicyclist get hit by a car. Amazingly the young man popped up from the pavement and walked to the side of the road holding his face. The bike was demolished. The victim's friends were there and the driver immediately stopped and leapt out of the car to check on him. Another bystander called 911 and ambulances were soon on the scene. I hope the poor boy is doing all right.

At the second after-dinner-drink-venue, Kenny ordered a regular margarita, but was given two fish- bowl-sized beverages. Apparently it was a compulsory "two for one deal" and I had already ordered a drink, so Kenny was stuck with the two giant margaritas. He didn't complain.

Now we are just waiting for a weather window to cross the gulf stream and plant our anchor in Bahamian waters. We may move on to Miami tomorrow or the next day, to position ourselves for a crossing to Nassau or, the Berry Islands, as soon as the wind turns to the south or west. At the moment its east/southeast which is a bit too much on the nose for our taste. Gentlemen and ladies do not sail to windward.

January 18, 2011

Bahamas At Last!

The crossing of the Gulf Stream from Miami to the Great Bahama Bank (A shallow shelf in the sea, not a place to keep money) was not quite as easy as we'd imagined. We thought with a west wind of 20 - 25 knots we'd fly across to our first way point just north of Bimini, the western most Bahamian Island. In reality we could only sail southeast or northwest



of our mark, because the wind was right at our back. Putting the sails out wing and wing was difficult to maintain as it was a bit too rough for Kenny to put out the whisker pole with his delicate knee.

We reluctantly resolved to motor-sail and after ten hours gratefully arrived on the crystal clear, suddenly calm, waters of the Bank. We ended up going through a cut in the Bimini Island chain rather than shooting for the more northerly waypoint. The only disadvantage to that was that we found ourselves sailing in 6 to 10 feet of water, which when it became dark started to spook me. What if the shoals shifted and the chartplotter was no longer accurate? In daylight, you can see shallows and sail around them, but at night... I woke Kenny and told him I wanted to deviate from our course to sail in deeper water. He sleepily agreed, not knowing it would add 16 nautical miles to our trip. The good part was that this new course made for a lovely point of sail and we gently moved through slightly deeper and calm waters at 4-5 knots underneath a sky emblazoned with stars.

Later on my watch at about 3 a.m., I decided we should drop the anchor and sleep for a couple of hours and wait until daylight before going through another potentially tricky area. Once again, the captain acquiesced. The banks are no more than 30 feet in most places, so if it's fairly calm you can drop the anchor anywhere.

We docked at the Nassau Yacht Haven at 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, January 9. I apologized to the customs officer for making her work on a Sunday evening. She was very nice and gave us a 90 day visa. (Many cruisers have been given only 30 days, for reasons unknown to us.) Cruising in the Bahamas for one season costs \$300 which includes a fishing permit. Not cheap.

We enjoyed a dinner out at the Poop Deck, adjacent to our marina. It was ridiculously expensive as is everything in the Bahamas, but we felt like celebrating. That night we slept like the dead.

The following day, I trudged off to Batleco (the phone company) while Kenny washed the boat. I purchased a Blackberry last summer because it has a GSM chip, and I was told it could be used all over the world. A Sprint employee explained that all I needed to do, was take out the Sprint SIM card and put in the card of the country in which I was traveling. Tiffany Ferguson, a very lovely and helpful employee of Batelco, tried to assist me in this procedure, only to discover that Sprint had put a lock on the phone preventing me from converting it to a Batelco phone while visiting the Bahamas. I intend to break my contract

with Sprint, and if I had the energy I would start a class action suit against them, as this seems to me a highly illegal practice.



I bought a calling card from Tiffany instead which can be used with pay phones. I tried using it that evening to no avail, so the following day I tramped back to Batelco and got yet another card, which does work, though my mother was not in when I called. I shall use it, the next opportunity I get.

After two nights in Nassau, Kenny and I moved *Mary T* to an anchorage just six miles to the east next to a tiny piece of rock and scrub with a few houses, called Rose Island. It provides excellent protection from the north and was a lovely place to sit out a cold front and enjoy kayaking. I discovered a little beach with chairs and a hammock, which I rested in one day before kayaking back to *Mary T*.



We intended to leave Rose Island after 3 nights but the wind was still rather fierce, so we decided to stick it out one more day and headed for Shroud Cay in the Exuma chain on Saturday, January 15. We will always remember Rose Island because it was a place of many firsts. There, Kenny baked his first loaf of bread; I made my first granola; and I wrote my first tune (the Cruising Blues) on the Ukulele. Now instead of listening to Polly Wolly Doodle ad nauseum, Kenny has to suffer through endless repetitions of “The Cruising Blues.”

A very lively sail from Rose Island landed us in Shroud Cay a couple of days ago. It is part of the Exuma Land and Sea Park, which means it’s a no take zone - no fishing, no hunting, etc. There are creeks there which run through the mangroves so we took a spin in our dinghy and felt like Katherine Hepburn and Humprey Bogart on *African Queen*, only more comfortable. Another couple from Maryland, Sarah and Phil aboard *Spartina*, joined us in their dinghy and then invited us over for a sundowner aboard their boat. Phil and Sarah are our new best friends, and they share some old friends in common with Kenny. It turns out we’d all met a few years ago at the mutual friends’ house (the Scotts) on the Eastern shore of Maryland.

We are currently (as of January 18) in Wardrick Wells, which is also part of the Land and Sea Park and another truly magical, postcard kind o’ place. As we picked up our mooring, banana quit birds joined us in the cockpit to scour for crumbs. They have no fear of people as they used to be fed sugar by hand on the deck of the park warden’s office. Now that they’ve become somewhat pesky, that practice has ended. A minute ago, one landed right on my computer.



Tomorrow if it’s warm enough, I hope to do a bit of snorkeling and a hike through the park will be in order. Until our next entry, know that while the dazzling Bahamian waters continue to enchant us, we are missing you all.

January 23, 2011

Marina at Emerald Bay

After several days in the Exuma Land and Sea Park, we headed to Little Farmers Cay — a day sail’s away. We had just enough wind to move along at about 3 knots and thoroughly enjoyed the beauty of the Bahamian waters. As we dinghied to shore, we met a couple off of *Falcon’s Nest*: Phil and Leona. We all had the same idea to walk around and check out the



island.

We headed to the Ocean Cabin Restaurant and Bar for drinks and were later joined by Phil and Leona. We were served by the gregarious owner, Terry Bain. Terry got to talking about environmental issues in the Land and Sea Park and informed us of threats by developers that we had not heard about. We wish him much luck in his efforts to stop harm to the park.

We later moved on to the Little Farmers Yacht Club to check out the bar and restaurant there. Owner Roosevelt Nixon greeted us and chatted a while as the four of us were the only customers. He showed us some great photos of Little Farmers taken about 100 years earlier showing residents picking cotton and Bahamian sloops fishing in the harbor. Between Terry and Roosevelt, we learned quite a lot about the area.

Our next stop was the Marina at Emerald Bay to meet up with cruising friends, Corning and Tita aboard *Blessed Spirit*. We've been here a few days now, catching up on laundry, web work, and just enjoying the company of our friends. We expect to head out to George Town tomorrow.



February 1, 2011 Thompson Bay, Long Island



Having thoroughly enjoyed the luxury of the Marina at Emerald Bay yet anxious to move along, we headed to George Town, Great Exuma. George Town has long been a mecca for cruisers due to its well protected harbor and recreational opportunities. Many boaters go there and stay the entire winter. We, however, were on a short mission. I needed to re-stock my meds. Those of you that know me, know how impossibly difficult I can be if I miss just one dose of my meds.

We anchored near town and dinghy-ed to shore the following day. The government clinic where Amy had visited a dentist three years ago, is a short walk north. However, they did not have any of my prescriptions in stock. We were told to go to Smitty's Drug Store quite a piece up the road.

Fortunately, hitch-hiking is a very acceptable way of travel in the Bahamas. You can usually count on a lift within about three cars. We were quickly picked up by a pick up. Riding in the bed of a pick-up is also a very Bahamian thing. Although somewhat stirred, we were not shaken by the five mile ride. The two ladies (mother and daughter) dropped us off at Smitty's which is also a food store. There, in the back, was the pharmacy—about the size of a very

small closet. Without asking for any other paperwork, the pharmacist read the prescriptions off the bottles and filled them all within ten minutes. With our mission accomplished, we headed back. To our surprise, we were picked up by the same gals in the pick up who just happened to be heading back south. How convenient.

We got back to *Mary T* mid day. Amy prepared a picnic lunch that we enjoyed on the Atlantic side of Stocking Island. We were in the company of Ralph and his seven-year old son, Nicholas, off of *Pfiffikus*, from Switzerland. Ralph was spear-fishing for lobster so, Amy and Nicholas snorkeled. I watched. We were the only people on this lovely beach despite the fact that there were close to 200 boats anchored on the other side of the island. Ralph speared one lobster—enough for an appetizer for his family of four. And, Amy made a new friend in Nicholas shown here with his father's spear.



The following day, we headed to Thompson Bay on Long Island, knowing we'd find our friends on *Blessed Spirit* there. The sail over was great despite the threatening clouds. We set anchor in the protected waters of Thompson Bay around 4:30 and called our friends on the radio. Normally, when out of VHF radio range, we keep in touch by SSB radio. Thus, they were very surprised to hear us on the VHF only about a quarter mile away.



We've been here since Friday, enjoying the company of friends, visiting the beach, and partaking of the food and beverages at Long Island Breeze, the cruisers' hang-out in the town of Salt Pond. On Monday, we made a hitch-hiking pilgrimage to Max's Conch Bar down island at Deadman's Cay. We'd been there three years ago and were looking forward to Max's famous conch salad. We were not disappointed. It took only two rides to go the 15 or so miles there and only one, to get back. Jenny, the school teacher who drove us back, went about five miles out of her way to drop us off at the path to the beach where our dinghy was beached. Such is the hospitality of the Bahamians.



February 14, 2011

Clarence Town, Long Island: Waiting on Weather, Again

The intrepid crew of the *Mary T* has slowly worked its way to a latitude of 23 degrees 06 minutes North and longitude 74 degrees 58 minutes West, which puts us just a hair below the Tropic of Cancer. It is the farthest south we have ever sailed, though we visited this place by

car three years ago. Clarence Town on the southeast side of Long Island boasts two exquisite churches, three restaurants, the world's deepest blue hole and a small comfortable marina called the Flying Fish. After four nights at two different anchorages here we elected to take a slip at the marina while a fierce nor'easter blows through. If we had remained at anchor it would have been difficult to make it ashore in our dinghy with its five horse power motor.

Marinas, however, do have their disadvantages. Yesterday morning I was passing breakfast items out to Kenny in the cockpit. After handing him the coffee pot cozy that Viki Keating made for us, I heard him yelp. A mouse had hidden in the cozy and jumped out as Kenny was placing it over the coffee pot. It must have sneaked aboard via our dock lines when we weren't looking. The frightened creature skittered around the cockpit and suddenly disappeared. There is nowhere to hide in the cockpit, so we were mystified. Then Kenny realized it must be hiding in one of his shoes. He slowly picked up one shoe and turned it upside down over the water. Nothing. When he held the second shoe over the side of the boat, a small grey mass tumbled into the water. That is the last we've seen of the poor little fellow.



After talking with some other cruisers here, we have decided to alter our course and enter the Caribbean via the Windward Passage between Haiti and Cuba. It is something Kenny had suggested long ago, but we had decided to go the way of most cruisers along the north coast of the Dominican Republic and head south between the DR and Puerto Rico. Most cruisers choose that route because it is more direct if you're heading for the Virgin Islands and points further south. Taking the Windward Passage obliges one to go a bit to the west before heading east. It is a much gentler and quicker route to the Caribbean if one is not in a hurry to arrive in Puerto Rico. According to many accounts, sailing east along the southern coast of Hispaniola in the Caribbean is much nicer than bashing east against the trade winds in the Atlantic Ocean on the inhospitable northern coast of the Dominican Republic. This route also allows us to avoid the Mona Passage between the DR and Puerto Rico which is known for being treacherous.

Of course as we sit here listening to the winds howl through the rigging, we sometimes wonder if we'll ever go anywhere at all. Our current plan is to wait for things to settle down and then head for the island of Great Inagua, the southernmost in the Bahamian chain - a 25-hour sail from our current location. It is known for its birds and meteor showers. It also has a small town where one can get basic provisions and fuel. From there we will prepare for our trip through the Windward Passage. The trip from Great Inagua to Ile a Vache off the southwest coast of Haiti is about 230 nautical miles, which is two days of sailing for us. The northern part of the passage can be a bit rough, but once you get south of 20 degrees latitude things settle down. Ile a Vache is reputed to be a little paradise without many of the problems, which plague the Haitian mainland. At any rate these winds won't settle down for a while, so it's possible we'll be here for a couple of weeks or more... No



matter. We've got plenty to do - videos to shoot, videos to edit, books to read, bread to bake, boat projects and cleaning. Never a dull moment on the *Mary T*.

We've made new friends here, at Clarence Town. Wade and Diane on *Joana*, a 53-foot gorgeous steel behemoth of a sloop, that they built entirely on their own. Diane is a retired nurse and Wade a retired lieutenant colonel from the Canadian army. They are a very can-do, helpful and generous couple. Diane gave Kenny some good advice on how to bring down the swelling of his knee. *Joana* has been traveling in company with Brian and Gail on *Novia*. *Novia* is in the marina with us while *Joana* remains at anchor. We are all headed in the same direction, but as *Joana* is a much larger vessel they may end up departing in higher winds than *Novia* or *Mary T*, so we may part ways and find each other down the road. Gail and Brian are a very sweet, laid back couple. Brian used to be an air traffic controller, which is one of those jobs that makes me shudder.

We had a Valentine's Day lunch at Le Pon in town, with the crews of *Novia*, *Joana*, and *Marionette*. *Marionette*, with Dee Dee, Pete and their two dogs, is out anchor as well, hoping to get favorable winds to head down to Luperon in the DR. The crews of *Joana* and *Novia* and me, rented a car together to see some sights and do some shopping. We drove to Dean's blue hole nearby with our snorkel gear. (Kenny generously offered not to go as we could only fit five in the car). There were a couple of guys at the hole free diving. One of them was the world record holder and we got to see him dive down 100 meters (about 325 feet). He lay on the surface of the water for some time relaxing and then gulping as much air as possible before taking the plunge. Brian and I watched him from the surface with our masks and snorkels as he disappeared into the black hole. We could only see him for the first sixty feet or so. Three minutes later he shot to the surface, took a few deep breaths, and climbed back onto the raft like nothing happened. He was using a new thing called a mono-fin, which is a giant flipper that you put both feet in. It allows for greater speed and when sporting it with a sleek wetsuit, one could easily be mistaken for a mermaid.



The other night, while we were still at anchor I was flinging my dinner crumbs over the side of the boat and accidentally tossed my whole plate into the drink. We gazed over the side as the black disk floated to the bottom. The moon was half full and the water as clear as a bell so we could see it without any problem. I asked Kenny if he wanted me to go down and get it right away. He thought it would be fine to wait until morning. Next day the boat had swung on anchor so we weren't exactly in the same place, but after swimming around the boat for five minutes with mask and snorkel I eventually came upon the missing plate. It wasn't hard to clean after that, just a short rinse to remove the salt water. Kenny surmised we could save a lot of time and fresh water by flinging all the dishes in the water every night and fetching them in the morning.

Prior to arriving in Clarence Town, we were in Calabash Bay on the west side of Long Island with our friends Corning and Tita on *Blessed Spirit*. We enjoyed sharing meals with them and Corning and I went snorkeling together one morning. We parted ways there, but we continue to talk nearly every day on the SSB radio. Next we visited the islands of Conception and Rum Cay. Conception is uninhabited and part of the Land and Sea Park. I did some snorkeling

from the kayak, and saw gobs of colorful fish and fields of underwater fans waving in the current.

Rum Cay was a mysterious place. We felt we'd arrived at a private club where we were not members. The marina owners were absent, so other boaters and friends of the owners were kind of running things. The guidebooks talked about the amazing gourmet food at the marina restaurant, but when we arrived on Superbowl Sunday (how 'bout dem dere Pack, eh?) we were told there was a potluck. When we went up later to check things out, "Rasta" told us he was cooking something for the skydivers staying in the cabanas and we could come and pay like \$20 each in addition to bringing our own dish. We didn't quite get it, so we decided to try another local joint.



We'd had cocktails at Kaye's with a gregarious group of islanders, so we decided to try the only other place in town, the Ocean View Restaurant. Although she normally expects at least one hour advance notice for dinner, Ruby, the owner, cooked us up a delicious fish dinner. She took pity on us when she learned we'd come all the way from the marina through the mosquito gauntlet. There were only three other patrons and Ruby's son or nephew who seemed less than thrilled with our presence. By halftime the only ones left were Kenny and I and Toby, who had passed out in his chair. The population of Rum Cay is only about 55 people and most of the inhabitants are really quite friendly. There is not a heck of a lot to do, so I can understand why a lot of the population has embraced drinking as a primary pastime.

We were tired and decided we didn't need to watch the rest of the game, so we bid adieu to the Ocean View, and walked the mile back to the marina along the dark, dirt road with our flashlight. The crowd of skydivers and kite boarders were hooting and hollering at the TV up at the marina restaurants as they watched the 2nd half of the Superbowl, while we lay snug in our V-berth wondering what we were missing.

It is now two days since I wrote this blog and we've had a change in plans. Due to boat insurance considerations and the inability to buy diesel fuel in Ile a Vache, Haiti, we've decided to take the other route to the Caribbean. From here we will sail to the Turks and Caicos and then travel along the north coast of the Dominican Republic, go through the Mona Passage (Puerto Rico and the DR) and land on the south coast of Puerto Rico...or maybe we'll turn around from Turks and Caicos and head back north... We'll keep you posted as we continue on this mystery tour.

February 19, 2011

Consumer Report on Flags

For those who may not know the etiquette, boats visiting foreign countries are expected to fly the flag of the host country in a prominent position on their boat. This is referred to as a courtesy flag. On sailboats, it's supposed to be flown on a flag halyard on the starboard side



of the mast.

We spent about four months in the Bahamas our previous trip in 2008. We used flag on the right (Ny-Glo, purchased from Defender)

This year, we've been here five weeks today (February 19) and are using the flag on the left. (some no-name brand, purchased from Bluewater Books & Charts)

Did we have that much more wind in five weeks this year than we did in four months in 2008? Or, does Ny-Glo make much better flags? We're inclined to believe the latter.

February 28, 2011 Change of Plans

Well, it is now the end of February and rather than being further south, we are actually further north. The day before we were planning to depart Clarence Town, Long Island for Turks and Caicos, Captain Kenny declared a halt to the voyage due to a persistent pain in his back in the kidney region. (He has a history of kidney stones). He was also feeling uneasy about going so far and being away from our families and friends for so long. Being a generous soul and not wanting to shatter my dream, Kenny offered to let me take *Mary T* with the crew of my choice. It was a thrill to know he had such confidence in my seamanship, but the thought of going without him on *Mary T* just didn't feel right. All for one and one for all. Trinidad and Tobago won't go anywhere. We can try again in the future when we're both feeling fit as fiddles. Although initially saddened by our change in plans, we are now embracing the concept of a leisurely sail through the Bahamas visiting some old haunts and investigating some new ones.



We are currently in the sailing Mecca of Georgetown, Great Exuma, along with 400 other cruisers. The harbor is so littered with boats that at night the anchor lights make it look like a city. Stocking Island, opposite Great Exuma is the playground for hundreds of cruisers all winter long. They play volleyball and dominoes, weave baskets, do yoga, aqua fitness, bocce ball, dances, concerts, talent shows... Many people camp out here for the whole season, while others spend just a few days and move on. Every morning there is a radio network on VHF for the

cruisers and the announcements last for at least an hour. Next week is regatta week, so there are even more planned activities than usual. I was thinking about making a documentary about it, but I found out one has already been made and I'm afraid my heart isn't really in it. Besides we'd rather move on to new territory.

If the weather remains favorable, we shall depart Georgetown on Tuesday and head for Cat Island, birthplace of Sidney Poitier. We've never been, so it'll be a new adventure. Cat Island is famous for its hermitage built by Father Jerome, a British Anglican turned Catholic who is also an architect. His beautiful churches can be found all over the Bahamas.

Other than our change in itinerary, the really big news is that on Kenny's 60th birthday we caught our first fish. The HORROR! We'd been trolling so long without success that neither of us noticed when the line had been pulled out from its clip attached to the stanchion. Suddenly Kenny said, "Hey, I think there's something on the line. Maybe some seaweed." I slowly started to pull it in and could see that it was a fish. Reeling it in at first seemed easy, so we thought it must be quite small. "Maybe we'll just let it go."



As it got close we realized our catch was a rather good-sized Mahi, a beautiful, brilliantly colored fish. It was so easy to pull in that I wasn't prepared for the violent thrashing when I actually lifted it from the surface of the water. I quickly let the line out again and dragged it for a bit. "Kenny, get the gaff and the alcohol." As it thrashed to and fro trying to free itself, Kenny tried alternately to get the gaff in it's gills and spray it with alcohol from a mister with little success. "This is horrible!" As the fish became more tired we managed to hold it above the surface of the water off the stern of the boat. Kenny took the top off the mister and dumped several big gulps of cheap vodka down the fish's gullet. Finally it went limp.



Then came the more arduous work of filleting and skinning it. I'd watched videos and read about it and even watched people do it, but suddenly confronted with the task on my own, I couldn't seem to remember exactly how to do it. Fortunately we have a good knife, so I did manage to get enough fish off of it for us to have two meals. If I'd done it right we could've had three or four. Kenny said he felt like an accomplice and was afraid he'd have nightmares of the dying fish's gaping mouth.

Maybe we'll become vegetarians.

March 12, 2011

Cat Island and Black Point

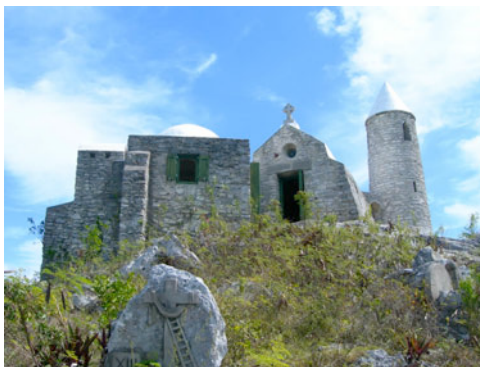
Floating around the Bahamas is proving to be a rather pleasant exercise indeed. Who needs the Caribbean? We met a British couple in Cat Island who just came from the Caribbean, and they said the Bahamian waters are much clearer and more beautiful. That isn't to say we've given up in our quest to sail beyond familiar waters. At this juncture, our intentions are to return to the Chesapeake Bay this summer to work and enjoy the company of friends and family. In the fall we shall cast off our lines again and head south.

Our last day in George Town we called the pump-out boat for an appointment. For those unfamiliar with this service, it consists of sucking the sewage from one's holding tank into the pump-out boat's tank. When the pump-out man arrived at *Mary T* I was so glad to see

him that, as I was reaching out to grab the line he was offering me to attach our two boats, I fell into the water between his boat and ours. I was not hurt at all and, with his aid, clambered quickly onto his boat. I rewarded him with a \$5 tip for the rescue at sea.

After that undignified maneuver, we escaped from the regatta madness in George Town and sailed to Cat Island, about 50 miles to the northeast. Cat Island is a very quiet place littered with abandoned homes and never to be completed resorts. Much of the population has gone elsewhere in search of higher education and employment opportunities. Those who remain are friendly and welcoming and let you know how grateful they are that you have come for a visit. Our first day there in New Bight, we lunched at a shack on the beach and I played 3 or 4 games of backgammon with an older gentleman named Pompey.

The next day we climbed Mt. Alvernia to visit the "Hermitage." Rising 206 feet above sea level, Mt. Alvernia is the highest point in all of the Bahamas. (And I thought Iowa was flat). The Hermitage was the retirement home of British Catholic Priest, Father Jerome, who designed and built the place. Though constructed in the 1940s, it looks like something out of the middle ages in miniature.



Everything about the place is diminutive - the tiny chapel for one, the little wooden platform for his bed, the low doorways... Father Jerome couldn't have been much over 5 feet tall. There was no plumbing or electricity. He wanted just a simple monk's life in his last years. Ascending the stone steps to the Hermitage, one passes the 14 stations of the cross carved into the rock of Mt. Alvernia. I am not a Catholic, but I was truly moved by this place. I felt the soul of a true contemplative, an enlightened man.

On the road leading to the Hermitage, we noticed a huge garden with ripe tomatoes that were in need of harvesting. Many had already fallen off the vines and were rotting on the ground. We couldn't resist tasting a couple of little ones and found them delicious. I was horrified to think they would all go to waste, so I set out to discover the owner. It wasn't difficult as the first person I asked was the daughter of the gardener. She explained that her mother was in Nassau and therefore could not harvest the tomatoes. (Is her mother the only one in all of New Bight who knows how to pick a tomato)? "So they'll just go to waste. That's such a shame," I hinted, to no avail. We were actually at this woman's house/bakery to buy some fresh bread, so we picked out a loaf of raisin bread and she generously offered us a bag full of tomatoes, which someone in the family had managed to gather.

The next day I returned to her house with the proposal that if she'd let me pick some tomatoes I would bring them to her and she could take as many as she liked and I would keep the rest. She agreed so I trudged back to the field and picked at least 25 pounds of tomatoes. I didn't even put a dent in the crop. I was gone so long that the woman sent her sister Olive to check on me. Olive offered to give me a ride back and I foolishly refused because I hadn't

yet filled up the container I'd brought. Plus I was a little wounded, because it meant they didn't quite trust me.

Back at their house, Olive and sister only took a small amount, so now Kenny and I were saddled with a mountain of tomatoes. Back on the boat we started sorting out the damaged ones with which I immediately made a sauce. The hearty variety we kept out for salads and the rest we froze. I filled three bags and delivered them to the three boats anchored nearest to us. Needless to say, by the cocktail hour I was thoroughly exhausted.

One day on Cat Island, we rented a car so we could see the whole island. Cat Island is largely uninhabited, with tiny settlements scattered about, but there are some nice views driving along the water. It's about 45 miles long and the average width is about one mile. There's not a lot to see, but we discovered three really cute resorts. We ate lunch at one of them called Greenwood. It was German owned and the waiters were "interns" and totally clueless, but nice. Maybe they'd never actually eaten in a restaurant before. It's the only resort on the ocean side (as opposed to the shallower bank side) and the sea was really roiling that day.



Our favorite spot was called Cocktails by the Sea up in Arthur Town, Sidney Poitier's birthplace. It was a cute-as-a-button little watering hole hanging out over the water. The bartender/owner was a consultant for one of the big political parties in the Bahamas and he talked a historical political blue streak mostly to some other customers, but we got an earful at the end. That isn't to say he wasn't interesting. Before we left he told us there was some relic in the cemetery that gave credence to the argument that Cat Island was Columbus's first landfall. We didn't quite understand, but we went to the cemetery anyway and found nothing related to Columbus.

Our last stop on the road trip was Fernandez Bay resort. We were ushered to the lovely seaside bar in the round and told it was serve yourself. The young American lady explained where things were and how we should write down what we consumed. After she walked away we looked at the prices posted on a beam. They were higher than the normal prices, so we decided we'd rather serve ourselves on our boat where the drinks were already paid for.

Our last two nights in Cat Island we moved to an anchorage in Old Bight, which was the most deserted anchorage we'd experienced in the Bahamas. Only one other boat showed up for one night and the beach was deserted. A few large never-to-be-completed resort homes were the only signs of humanity.

Departing Cat Island I hadn't had the line in the water for 15 minutes when we caught another three-footer. Yes, the slaughter continues. This time it was a Little Tunney, of the Tuna family. We were more efficient than last time, but still found the killing unsavory. Rather than two meals for two, we'll get three meals out of this one due to my improved filleting techniques. Next time we'll hope for four.



Now we're in Black Point in the Exuma chain. It is one of my favorite settlements in the Bahamas, because it's still a vibrant village with all generations present. At dusk, the kids play in the street and the grownups all sit around weaving palm fronds. It gives me such a nostalgic feeling for West Africa I just want to sit and soak it in forever. Today there's a community fundraiser, so as soon as we're done using the internet, we'll head over to support the community.



The other day here, I kayaked over to a beach and went for a swim. The water was crystal clear and the only one in it besides me was a big old stingray. I swam along parallel to him for about ten minutes and he didn't seem to mind at all. Most Bahamians don't go in the water. I think they've been told for generations to fear and respect the sea.

Many friends have asked, "What do you guys do all day?" A typical day at anchor goes something like this: Wake up and argue about who is going to get up to turn on the single side band radio for the 6:30 a.m. weather report. Listen intently and write down the relevant bits. After the weather, Kenny does his morning exercises in the 7' x 2' space in the saloon while I meditate cross-legged on the settee. Then I do my exercises while Kenny finishes up the previous night's dishes and puts out breakfast items.

We usually listen to the local AM radio at this time which consists of a little news and community announcements like: the power will be shut off temporarily on such and such island and the ladies group at the Baptist Church is having a meeting... Then come the endless death reports, which include naming ALL the relatives of the deceased. People here have huge families - six to eight siblings, 10 children, 16 adopted children, numerous cousins... I'm not exaggerating either.

At 8:20 a.m. it's time for Corning in the morning. We check in with Corning and Tita on *Blessed Spirit* on the SSB to see how they're doing and find out where they're headed. Then sometimes we switch over to Cruiseheimers Net at 8:30. Boats all over Florida, the Bahamas and the Caribbean call in to give their location. It's a good way to learn where cruisers you've met have gone. Mostly it's the same old boats calling in just piddling around the Bahamas, but it's a nice service if you're trying to get in touch with someone.

After being up for over 2 hours it's finally time for breakfast out in the cockpit surrounded by beautiful water and other sailboats. Sometimes we have homemade granola for breakfast if I've bothered to make any. After breakie, we usually read for a while and drink our tea. Then it's time to DO SOMETHING. I might go for a kayak and swim while Kenny cleans or fixes something on the boat. If we're near a town we take the dinghy in for some sightseeing, grocery shopping and fetch water in our jugs for the boat, or look for wi-fi and have lunch.



Around 5:30 it's time for cocktails on the boat accompanied by Yahtzee and maybe some ukulele playing. Then I retire to the galley to cook dinner while Kenny plays the ukulele and I make up lyrics about our recent adventures. I've come to realize I have a natural ineptitude for the ukulele. My fingers simply do not want to make the necessary contortions to play many of the chords. I have to wear an ace bandage on my right arm when I play, because the edge of the body of the uke cuts into me. For a moment I thought of giving it up altogether, but then I

figured I'd keep plugging away at it for a while. It's a good exercise in patience - mostly Kenny's. It would probably help if I could get a few lessons and had a better ukulele. Still I don't think I'll ever be a virtuoso.

By nine o'clock at night we've finished dinner and are usually taking our pre-bedtime naps in the cockpit until one of us finally gets up and heads to the V-berth and the other one follows.

April 16, 2011 Bitter Iguanas?



We moved north from Black Point on Sunday, March 13, and headed to Bitter Guana Cay which is only a few miles up the Exuma chain. There are quite a few cays in the Bahamas with "Guana" in their name. We've heard that it's local slang for iguana. Anyway, Bitter Guana Cay is a great, uncrowded anchorage, but we don't understand why the iguanas are so bitter. Maybe it's because of the signs declaring, "Don't feed the iguanas," which half of the visitors ignore anyway. There was only one other boat there with us one night and we had the place to ourselves the next night.

The endangered Exuma Island iguanas (*Cyclura cychlura figginsi*) are black and pink and pretty scary looking. We approached them slowly in our kayak not knowing whether or not they were aggressive. When we walked up on the beach they emerged en masse from the thick vegetation. We are not the kind that like to get up close and personal with wild creatures, so we kept our distance as they kept coming closer. Were they looking for a handout or defending their turf? Since we had no food for them and didn't care to invade their territory, we backed up slowly and got back into the kayak.

The next day, a family pulled up to the beach in a small skiff to greet the iguanas without any of the trepidation we had. One kid even got down right in front of one of the small dinosaurs and started filming—perhaps, a future Amy Flannery in the making?



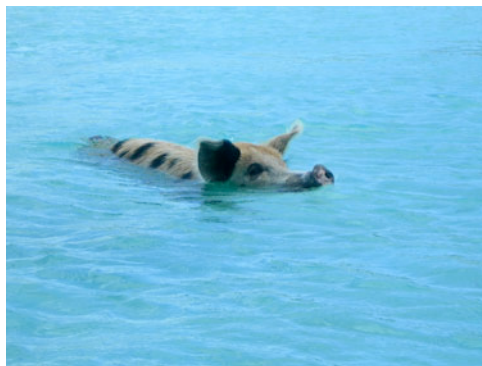
The scenery at Bitter Guana, iguanas aside, is pretty neat. The area is dominated by a crumbling hillside that has exposed white sandstone. It's very dramatic at sunset. While the iguanas romped on the beach beautiful white-tailed tropic birds performed mating acrobatics overhead.

After two peaceful nights at Bitter Guana, we headed for Big Majors Spot/Staniel Cay just a couple miles to the north. It was crowded with mega-yachts and sailboats. We were enjoying a lovely little sail to Big Majors as we approached a turning point at Harvey's Cay. We saw a 43-foot catamaran heading south under engine power that turned into our path to raise their sail. We figured they would alter course as they were under power while we were under sail and also had right-of-way due to our starboard tack. They didn't change course so when we were within shouting distance I waved my arms and yelled "We have right of way," to which Mr. Catamaran responded "Get out of the way you son of a B_____." Not wishing to have an accident, we did just that. May he be well, happy and peaceful.



Thunderball.

Big Majors is well known for the swimming pigs that come off the beach several yards into the water as small boats approach. The sound of the outboard motors get them salivating, because it is usually followed by a handout. These pigs are huge and aggressive and will try to climb into your dinghy, so we throw our slop into the water at a safe distance. They are very cute swimming though and quite agile in the water. There's also a major snorkeling spot there which is featured in a James Bond film called



Irish tune.

After sitting at anchor for a short time at Big Majors we were delighted to see cruising friends Steve and Kim aboard *Fine Lion* pull in and anchor next to us. We hadn't seen them since North Palm Beach, FL. We celebrated St. Patty's Day together at the Staniel Cay Yacht club and were joined by our new British friends John and Ann from *Moonlight*. All the drinks were served with green food coloring and we feasted on corn beef and cabbage which was really good. Live music followed, but they didn't play a single

A couple of nights later all four friends came over to *Mary T* for sundowners. As is often the case, enough hors d'oeuvres were consumed to call it dinner.

Our dear friends Corning and Tita, on *Blessed Spirit*, also caught up to us at Big Majors and we enjoyed a delicious Mahi dinner aboard their luxurious bateau. Corning caught the fish and Tita did a fabulous job filleting and cooking it. We enjoyed a few more meals and games of dominoes with them before saying goodbye. They have zoomed ahead and are already back in the USA.

We also lunched at a local restaurant at Staniel Cay with our friends on *Spartina*, between their numerous social engagements. A TV crew from the Nassau station, ZNS, was dining at the same spot, so they interviewed each of us about Staniel Cay and how we liked ZNS. Of course we only said positive things, though there are many aspects to ZNS radio that drive us crazy. For example, they always cut off the BBC news at 6:30 p.m. right in the middle of a story. We listen to ZNS radio nearly everyday in the morning and again at 6 p.m. if we're aboard *Mary T*. We are not familiar with the TV station, but maybe we appeared on the news.

We left Big Majors for a night off the shores of the Sampson Cay Marina. We needed to fuel up and fill our water tanks in preparation for our upcoming visit to Cambridge Cay, part of the Exuma Land and Sea Park. We had gone there before in our previous trip to the Bahamas and found the snorkeling to be superb. On this occasion, we investigated a different part of the park and were delighted with the beautiful underwater topography as well as the fish and coral formations. All was going great until we saw a very large shark—8-10 feet or so. It was not paying any attention to us but it got us back up on the dinghy lickety split just the same.

After two days of hiking and snorkeling in the park, we headed across Exuma Sound to Rock Sound, Eleuthera. Rock Sound has a great anchorage where, no matter what direction the wind is blowing, you can find a comfy spot. And we did just that—not that the weather was all that blowy but just because we could. We wanted to see all sides of the sound.

Our land adventures in the town of Rock Sound were rather mundane except for one day when we contemplated a visit across the island to see Rose at the “Nort’ Side” restaurant—about two and a half miles away. We had met her in our 2008 trip and wanted to drop in to say, “Hi.” As we started walking through town, I stuck my thumb out just to see if anyone would pick us up. And, as often happens in the Family Islands, the first car stopped and took us all the way to the Nort’ Side even though it was out of her way.

Unfortunately, Rose was not there. Not a soul was there except her dog. After a short walk around, we figured we should head on back to town. It was a terribly hot day and not one car drove by on the long walk back. Amy did not have on sensible shoes for this event and was limping after about a mile. We finally made it back to civilization and refreshed ourselves at “Sammy’s Place,” the most reasonably priced restaurant we’ve found in all the Bahamas.

The most significant change we found in this visit to Rock Sound was that the waterfront restaurant and bar, “Four Points,” was back in business. It’s a great place that allows boaters to use their dinghy dock even if they are not visiting the establishment. This courtesy may not sound like much to those who don’t travel around in a boat, but to cruisers, it’s a wonderful convenience for getting groceries or other necessities.

All told, we spent about a week in various parts of the Rock Sound anchorage. Our plan had been to work our way lazily up the western coast of Eleuthera, but the dire weather forecast of upcoming squalls made us reconsider. Thus we scurried up through the northern gap of

Eleuthera called, Current Cut. Appropriately named as the water, at maximum speed, rushes through at up to 6-10 knots. We anchored on the other side and visited the settlement there called, The Current. This town had been thoroughly flattened in the early 1990s by Hurricane Andrew but has made a great comeback.

From Current we moved on to Royal Island and then Spanish Wells. While the dire squalls that we were sheltering from hit the Abacos hard, they never really affected us. Nonetheless, it was an important stopover as we had to renew our visas. We had thought we could do that in Spanish Wells, the most bustling burg we'd visited since George Town. However, they only do customs there—not immigration. The customs officer said we had to go to Lower Bogue on the “mainland” (meaning Eleuthera) and renew our visas there.



So, the next day, we took a small ferry from Spanish Wells (aka St. George Cay) to Jean's Bay on Eleuthera's western shore. The ferry captain had called ahead for a cab to take us on to Lower Bogue. It was a relatively short distance in miles that was made quite long by the incessant, non-stop, repetitive chatter of our driver who wanted to show us everything Lower Bogue had to offer. After he finally freed us from the car, he assured us he'd be back to pick us up. We politely declined saying, “No thanks, we'll hitch hike.”

With the formalities of visa renewal taking less time than our cab ride, we were free to head on over to Dunmore Town on Harbour Island. We hitched and, as usual, were picked up quickly and taken all the way to the next ferry on the east side of Eleuthera. Our driver just happened to work in Dunmore Town. For readers unfamiliar with Harbour Island, it is one of the prettiest and lushest islands in the Bahamas. We had a very pleasant day traipsing about enjoying all that Dunmore Town had to offer. Although we had originally thought we'd take the high speed ferry that goes direct from Harbour Island to Spanish Wells, we opted for the two small ferrys with the overland hitch hike in between. It was cheaper and also allowed us more flexibility in timing.

Our voyage from Spanish Wells to the Abacos was a spectacular passage. We were able to sail the entire way even sailing through the North Bar Channel cut. The wind and waves were all in our favor—a very unusual occurrence. We anchored nearby in a spot called Spencer's Bight and had the place to ourselves. Nearby was a great snorkeling site that we enjoyed the next two days.

Eventually, we made our way to Marsh Harbour where we met up with the jolly crew of *Moonlight*. We re-provisioned at the most fabulous grocery store we've ever seen in the Bahamas—Maxwell's. Maxwell's is very much like the supermarkets you'd expect to find in the USA and so, we loaded up the cart and made a couple of return trips as well.

A couple of days later, we departed Marsh Harbour in company with *Moonlight*, headed for a nearby reef for snorkeling. Although the reef did not compare to previous snorkeling sites, there were a great many conchs sitting on the bottom, free for the taking. John and Ann were able to dive the 20 or so feet to retrieve them and, lucky for us, knew how to extract the

creatures from their shells. That night, Ann and John treated us to a delicious dinner of cracked conch and conch salad. We provided the drinks and veggies.

The next morning we went separate ways—*Moonlight* down to the coral gardens near Spencer's Bight and *Mary T* to Hope Town which is where we are now. Hope Town is as cute as a Bahamian town gets, with its brightly colored clapboard houses, candy-striped lighthouse and abundance of flowers. There is a well protected harbor and a gorgeous beach. Yesterday our friends Raffi and Lisa on *Windfall* caught up to us. We were married on their boat last September in Gloucester, MA, and we hadn't seen them since, so it was a joyous reunion. They charter their boat out of Gloucester in the summer and out of the Abacos in the winter. Kenny maintains their website: www.defiancesailcharters.com



We plan to bounce around the Abacos for a few more weeks then head back to the good ole USA arriving in the Chesapeake Bay sometime in June. Can't wait to see you all!

June 21, 2011

Back in the good ol' USofA

We sailed around the Abacos for about three more weeks after writing the last installment of this blog. Cruising is very easy there, with many great harbors and well-protected anchorages all within a short distance of each other.

We hit some familiar spots multiple times and tried out some new ones. We met up with the crews from *Moonlight* and *Windfall* on several occasions for food, drink and revelry. On one such occasion, anchoring next to *Windfall* in Marsh Harbor, we lost control of our transmission. It was stuck in forward while the shifting stick just flopped around uselessly. Fortunately, we were nearly finished anchored, but we feared a major problem. Upon closer inspection, we discovered that it was just a nut and bolt that came undone causing the cable to disconnect. It was so simple, Amy fixed it. We couldn't believe our good fortune.



That evening, we went with the above mentioned crews to the "Jib Room" for the Saturday night steak dinner and limbo show. The steak was great and the show was quite a hoot. The limbo man invited the customers to join in until he lowered the bar to about 1 foot off the ground and lit it on fire. The next day, Raffi and Lisa, along with us and Raffi's niece and her boyfriend, all rented a car to do some land site-seeing. One of the more interesting places was the town of Cherokee Sound, which is about 22 miles south of Marsh Harbour. It's a very tidy little town

with the longest wooden dock in all the Bahamas. Naturally, we had to walk out to the end of the 770 foot structure and pose for photos. (That's Lisa and Raffi in the photo on the right.)

We revisited Hope Town and picked up a mooring due to foul weather that was forecast. On this occasion, we rented bicycles and went to the far reaches of Elbow Cay, stopping to sample the food and drink at various establishments along the way. Unfortunately our favorite place, On Da Beach Bar and Grill, was closed.



On Easter Sunday in

Hopetown, we saw a group of young churchgoers all dressed in white wearing hats with crosses and holding paper Easter bunnies. Their Sunday school teacher told us they were going to be performing at their church service and that we were more than welcome to come in and watch. At first we said, no thanks, but she assured us that we could leave at any point in the service—so, the pressure was off. Sure enough, people were going and coming throughout

the time we were there. It was quite casual. The children's presentation was somewhat hard to understand but their point was that Easter was not about Easter eggs and jelly beans.

While in Hope Town on our first visit this year, we had met Art and Ann aboard *Discretion*. *Discretion* is a Morgan 38 just like ours which meant visiting each other's boats to see how things are the same and different. In the process of visiting, we loaned Art and Ann a copy of our DVD. They loved it so much they bought four copies to give to friends. (Thanks, guys). Later in our journey back to the US, we were greeted by two different boats asking if we were celebrating Pirate Friday. Turned out that these folks had been shown the DVD by Art and Ann. For a very brief moment, we felt almost like celebrities.

Eventually, we worked our way westward to Green Turtle Cay just in time for their annual cultural/heritage festival. We took a mooring in Black Sound and heard from the marina manager that there was an opening reception being held at the New Plymouth Inn. We figured we'd go have a look and move on if it didn't look appropriate for us to be there. As we timidly nosed our way in through the gate, Kevin, the marina guy called to us to come on in. Kevin was there as the entertainment. Besides being a one man band, Kevin is also guitar player and lead singer for the Gully Roosters—the number one band in the Bahamas.

While there, we also met the visiting Pirate troop who were part of the festival's entertainment and the crew of *Sinn Féin*. (No, not the political party from Ireland). The youngest member of the crew—a 10 year old girl—was taken under the wing of the Pirates and the next day, she was dressed in full pirate wear and part of the show. We learned from her grandparents, that she had had quite a few remarkable experiences on their voyage, notably, spending a month going to the public school on Little Farmer's Cay in the Exumas. Like most cruising kids that we've met, she was very bright, poised, self-assured, and quite comfortable around adults.

The next day at the festival, we had the pleasure of meeting Hubert Ingraham, the Prime Minister of the Bahamas. He just came up to us and shook our hands as if we could vote for

him. No security detail was evident—just an aide or two. Imagine that happening in the US?

We also met Bob and Jane, surveyors and publishers of the Wavy Line charts. They had a small, wooden sailboat on display at the festival that was made in Man o' War Cay. We learned that they were living aboard their sailboat while they were finishing their house on nearby Manjack Cay. They invited us over for a look if we had the time. So, the next day, a Sunday, we left for the short hop to Manjack. We did some snorkeling there as well as dinghying around looking for their house. While we did see the house from the water, we didn't see Bob and Jane. The house certainly looked gorgeous from the outside.

From Manjack we went to Crab Cay at Angel Fish Point. This was a more remote anchorage compared to most we'd enjoyed in the Abacos. While checking the oil prior to departure the next morning, we discovered that the alternator belt was shot. We had a spare on board but we weren't sure how long the old one had been loose. A maintenance book on board said that the alternator may be damaged if it were run with a loose fitting belt. This caused us much concern as we knew we'd be needing the amps that the alternator produces. Our solar panels are great but they don't work very well at night. We pondered the idea of installing our old alternator but were hoping we could make it back home without doing all that work.

We moved on to uninhabited Great Sale Cay for one night, and then up to Grand Cays. We were killing time waiting for the winds to shift from north to east so we could cross over to Florida. We'd never heard of Grand Cay before and were quite happy to go there. It's an interesting place where lots of sport fishermen keep their boats and basketball is the sport of choice amongst the cay's local population. The marina isn't really suited for deep draft sailboats, though. Our keel was sitting in the mud at low tide. We thoroughly enjoyed our walks around town, greeting the peeps and visiting the local hang-outs. We left the evening of our second day there, with the plan to sail slowly during the night over the banks and hit the Gulf Stream in the morning. The plan worked perfectly. We got to Fort Pierce on Friday the 13th. Having left the day before saved us from the curse since we didn't start our voyage on the 13th. The nautical superstition actually states that you shouldn't start a voyage on any Friday, let alone the 13th.

Raffi and Lisa, aboard *Windfall*, set off on their trip on the 12th as well, leaving from a different cay and taking a slightly different route. We were in contact via radio at various times throughout the day and were only a few hours ahead of them getting into Fort Pierce. After they arrived, they came over to *Mary T* with champagne to toast the successful crossing.

We had acquired "Local Boater" cards for easier customs clearance on our 2008 trip so, we expected to clear in with just a phone call. Back then, we had asked the agent how long these cards were good for, he replied, "Forever, or until the rules change." Thus, we were confident that when we called in, we'd just have to give our numbers and be on our way. Not so fast, *Mary T*. Our passports had been renewed in the interim therefore, our new info was not "in the system." We were told that we must go in person to the nearest customs and immigration office. Luckily,



there was one at the little Fort Pierce airport.

The next day, we rode into the Fort Pierce municipal marina with Raffi and Lisa. They were hoping to rent a car in order to attend a memorial service for an acquaintance, and we were trying to find our way to the airport. It turned out that Raffi and Lisa couldn't rent a car in time to get to the service so they went to the splendid farmer's market that the city hosts every Saturday.

We were looking for the marina office to inquire about transportation to get to the airport when we met a yacht broker named Joe who worked in the same complex. Amy figured that he'd probably know how to get to the airport and asked him for directions. He said there were no buses and taxis were hard to find, but he'd be happy to give us a ride.

Joe Strazzulla is currently a yacht broker at East West Yachts. However, he has been a citrus fruit farmer, pilot, bank owner, developer and various other things in his long life. He even used to own a Morgan 38 just like ours. He told us many humorous stories on the way to the airport and waited for us as we went through the customs and immigration paperwork and took us back to the marina. We were so grateful, we offered to take him to lunch. After lunch, he drove us, along with Raffi and Lisa, to the local West Marine store so Raffi could get a new wash-down pump and we could get more stove fuel. Meeting such nice, helpful people along the way is one of the highlights of the cruising life.



Fort Pierce seemed like a nice town judging by the small bit that we saw. We'd certainly go to the farmer's market again. The only negative aspect was that the place was inundated with flying insects in the process of mating. The locals referred to them as love bugs. Thankfully, they do not bite—after all, they're lovers, not fighters. We had to deal with them for the next few days but nowhere else were they as thick as in Fort Pierce. Also while there, we were hit with one of the worst squalls of our entire nine month journey. It was quite intense but a look at the online radar showed that we were not getting the worst.

Moving along up the coast with *Windfall* gave us many opportunities to share meals and trade stories. One such occasion was in Eau Gallie near Melbourne, FL. Lisa and Raffi had us aboard for breakfast and a viewing of the take-off of the space shuttle, Endeavor. The launch happened so fast but was still very impressive. The sound arrived a few minutes after the shuttle was halfway up in the sky. We made a

pilgrimage to the hottest spot in Titusville—the “Dixie Crossroads.” And, we also enjoyed the St. Augustine scene with the *Windfall* crew. (That's Amy with the “Ghost Sheriff” who gives ghost tours of St. Augustine. Photo by Lisa Kennedy.)

Both crews were planning to go offshore from St. Augustine to points north. *Windfall* to Beaufort, *Mary T* to Charleston or thereabouts. During the day, we realized that it would not

be prudent to try and do an overnight without our alternator working properly. So, we opted to go to Fernandina in northern Florida, and replace our high output unit with the original alternator that came with the boat. Once the engine had cooled down enough to work with, I started to detach the power supply wire. The ring connector was hanging on by only one wire strand. Aha! So, that was the problem all along. We had a new connector on in a few minutes and were all set to go the next day. Another major engine repair avoided. (The photo on the right shows the industrial side of Fernandina.)



Our trip up the coast went so well that we went beyond Charleston to Winyah Bay and up to Georgetown, SC. We'd been there briefly once before but decided to linger a couple of days this time. It's a very pretty town with many stately homes along its streets and some pretty nice restaurants. Our favorite was "Rice Paddy." We visited the Rice Museum which explains the plantation rice culture of the mid 1800's. Skilled rice cultivators, the West African slaves did a bang up job enriching the plantation owners. Slaves made up 90% of the population in those days!

Rested and refreshed, we continued north up the ICW enjoying the scenic Waccamaw River, traveling as far as Calabash/Little River in SC. From there, we took a brief offshore hop to the Cape Fear River and up to Carolina Beach. Working our way up through the ICW again, was rather tedious but we never ran aground. We eventually arrived in Beaufort, NC where we spent Memorial Day weekend. Raffi and Lisa were long gone having arrived in Beaufort many days earlier.



The remainder of our trip back to the Chesapeake was rather leisurely with pretty good weather the whole time. The worst part were the bugs we encountered in Broad Creek off the North Landing River in NC. The evening was perfectly pleasant with hardly any bugs. But, when we awoke, our boat was covered with winged insects of an unknown genus. Taking no chances, we dressed in long sleeves, long pants, gloves, and, our never

before used mosquito hats (like the one in the photo). As we went out to do battle, they buzzed up a storm and flew frenziedly about. These bugs looked like mosquitoes but, like the love bugs, they didn't sting.



They left green spots everywhere which we guessed to be their excrement. We chased most of them out of the cockpit and hoped the others would blow away as we moved away from the anchorage. No such luck. It took us most of the day to swat, spray with soapy water, and hose them away. And that was just to dispose of the bodies. We are still cleaning up the green spots which are showing up in various nooks and crannies of the exterior of *Mary T*.

The following evening in Chesapeake, VA, we spent a restless night fending off no-see-ums in our V-berth. Apparently, some of the screens in our ports are not made of a fine enough mesh to keep the little buggers out. We survived, however, and motored on up to Hospital Point on the Elizabeth River. This popular anchorage gives one access to both Norfolk and Portsmouth, VA. Some other boaters who were motoring with us through the bridges, recommended we check out the Olde Towne section of Portsmouth, so we did. Although it was quite hot that day, we enjoyed walking the shady streets of the old neighborhood and found a great German restaurant named, oddly enough, "The Bier Garden." One can withstand almost any touristy discomfort if they find a bier garden at the end of the trail.

Later that day, we went over to Norfolk in search of air conditioned venues. We wanted to know what was beyond the revived waterfront so, we headed inland. After a few false steps, we found ourselves on Granby St. A few blocks later we were sitting in a cozy tapas restaurant called "The Empire." Since we were still fuming from a terrible meal we had in Beaufort at a place called "Finz," we were quite pleased with ourselves having found two great eating/drinking establishments in one day.

We moved along the next day to Sarah Creek off the York River. Taking the dinghy over to Yorktown, we soaked up all the history the town had to offer. The museum recounts the events leading up to the Revolutionary War up through to the last battle which took place in Yorktown as Cornwallis's redcoats were surrounded and overtaken by rebel and French forces. Hooray! We followed the tour with a pub lunch at the "Yorktown Pub" which is very popular among the Harley Davidson crowd.

We ended up spending four nights in the York River although we only intended to spend two. Forecasts of thunderstorms kept us in port, and when we finally weighed anchor and departed a water spout forming over the Bay, chased us back in. No need to challenge Mother Nature not to mention the fact that Amy just happened to have had a bad dream the night before about a tornado on the water. The next day we finally got underway.

After stops in the Great Wicomico and Solomons Island, we got back to Deale, MD on Wednesday, June 15. We've decided to spend this summer and winter in Deale at Herrington Harbour North Marina. It is quite delightful with plenty of amenities including clean bathrooms, swimming pool, workout room, kayaks and bikes. They even have parties with free food, drink and live music. Every other Saturday is movie night with free popcorn. We almost feel like we're at club med.

We shall remain here gathering our strength, repairing the boat and working until it's time for the next sailing adventure. That will be in the summer of 2012 when we head back to Newfoundland.

Some stats:

3066 nautical miles traveled

241 days out

654 hours underway

449.3 hours motoring

204.7 hours sailing