

# Cruising Log of Serafina of Maldon 2012

**This is our cruising log which runs from Jan 2012 through to October 2012 and covers our trip which had started in Grenada in Nov 2011 and finished in Annapolis, USA.**

Rob & Sarah Bell and their Najad 460 yacht, Serafina of Maldon.

## **Pigeon Island a view on Marigot Bay, St Lucia**

Mon 2<sup>nd</sup> and Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan

Well it turned out that we had got our anchor properly dug in at last and we remained safe and sound for the two nights we were in Marigot Bay.

Monday dawned grey and breezy and for the next 12 hours we got repeated blasts of what the locals cheerfully refer to as 'Liquid Sunshine', in fact an excess of it. It really seems to be a speciality of this extraordinary 'hurricane hole' that has its own real micro climate.

We went ashore in the morning and toured the few shops and restaurants etc. and admired a couple of outstandingly beautiful wooden yachts and then had a light lunch in Doolittle's Restaurant. (The original Dr Doolittle film was shot on location here centuries ago) before returning to Serafina to watch all the comings and goings. Somehow, despite Sarah's vigilance, we managed to miss Ko-Ko sailing in and this was despite them blasting their horn repeatedly when they saw Serafina anchored there! They got in touch though and we joined them and a number of their Norwegian friends in Mygos restaurant for another fun evening. However apart from this, somehow Marigot did not manage to endear itself to us and whilst we are glad that we made the visit to satisfy our curiosity, we would not rush back there again.

Ko-Ko had spent New Year's eve in Bequia and had tales of howling gales and the disturbing tale about the boat which was moored on a buoy behind them and was wrecked and sunk on the rocks on the far side of the bay, when the buoy broke free. A sort of object lesson in not trusting the local mooring buoys....

Furthermore whilst we were bemoaning the endless horizontal squalls of rain sweeping through Marigot, poor Ko-Ko was making her way from Bequia to Marigot (60 miles) sailing into 40 knots of head winds and 3 – 4 metre seas between the islands.

The boat boys offering fruit and veg in Marigot also have a lot to learn from their counterparts elsewhere. We had one lad's boat tied to our stern for an hour as he tried to fix his very ancient outboard and another chap who sailed around offering fruit using a decrepit small catamaran seemed very enterprising but was actually extremely surly and rude which did him no favours at all, particularly when he slipped on his 'deck' (piece of crate) and crashed into our anchor chain narrowly missing our bow! (We have since heard that Ellen on Ko-Ko had lent him a knife to cut open some fruit at which point he sailed off keeping her knife!) In contrast the services around Rodney Bay are very slick and enthusiastic and we were very impressed by the efforts made by Sparkle Laundry and the main fruit and veg man (see the photo pages).

On Tuesday we got ready for the sail back up to Pigeon Island and then went ashore in the dinghy to clear out through Customs and Immigration. We stopped by on Ko-Ko for a coffee and made loose

arrangements to rendezvous with them in a few days in Martinique when we also both plan to meet up with Song of the Ocean.

The sail back was outstanding and although we were seriously over canvassed, Sarah managed to beat us back upwind into 25 knots of wind (30 across the deck) making a respectable 6, 7 and even occasionally 8 knots, close hauled all the way.

We dropped the sails and found ourselves a good spot to anchor and it was not until we had done this and settled down to some lunch that we spotted Halsway Grace barely 200 metres away. Seems that they too are headed for Martinique in the morning.

Great news by email as we got a reply from Antigua Rigging to say that they would be happy to do the mast repairs for us and will endeavour to obtain the new part from Selden themselves. We even have a date fixed for 20<sup>th</sup> Feb, all being well.

### **Le Marin, Martinique**

Wed 4<sup>th</sup> & Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> Jan

Up with the lark – well it was daybreak and set sail out of Rodney Bay heading north to Martinique. There was the usual big overfalls off the north western tip of St Lucia and then we were back out into the Atlantic swell and the residue of waves from the previous few days of harder winds. We were blessed however with an easterly which meant that close hauled we were just able to make a heading direct to Le Marin in the south eastern corner of this French island. The wind remained a pretty consistent 15 to 20 knots all morning and so we made great headway through the swell with one reef in the main and just the staysail set forward allowing us to make 6 to 7 knots all the way. Glorious sunshine all the way too, so finally a day without rain!

We dropped anchor in final approaches to the marina which is handy for both getting to the supermarkets and the main town dinghy dock (Customs and Immigration etc.).

We had an early lunch and then set off to explore the town, which turned into something of a long drawn out exercise and we did not return to Serafina until around 6.00pm.

On Thursday morning we were up early again, firstly to clear in through Customs (they are only open 7.00am to 12.30am) and also to visit the internet café (no wifi in the bay). We needed to get going early as we had to pick up the car we had hired for two days at 8.00am. There was a bit of confusion about which day we had to return it mainly because we had mistakenly got it into our minds that today was Friday! So it was quite a bonus to discover we had just gained a day.

We then set off on one of our usual blind days out, only this time Sarah had done quite a bit of homework and we even had a half decent road map. It did not take us long to quite fall under the spell of Martinique and certainly we have been a bit dismissive previously, but today we got to see some of its better features and (with apologies to our old travelling companions Chris and Steve off Scott-Free, who of course we missed) it turned out to be one of the best days out we have had during our time in the Caribbean. We had an early stop for coffee in Le Francois and were very taken by the extraordinary brand new church (cathedral?) under construction there – funded by Rob's favourite financiers, the EU (anyone who hasn't been treated to a rant has something to look forward to....). But at least on this occasion even Rob felt it was a worthwhile cause if wildly out of place in such a poor town otherwise. The east (Atlantic) coast is stunning with some wonderful beaches and bays and glorious views. It also appears to be well protected by offshore reefs, although we felt it was a remarkably calm day for Atlantic swells. We can see the temptation of

sailing up this coast but the only pilot is in French. We explored the ruins of the great plantation at Caravelle which also had a lot of quite harrowing information and pictures (and even an early 1900s photo of a man manacled and netted) of the slave trade. Further on we stopped and had a very nice lunch at the Restaurant 'Point do Vue' which overlooked one of the best surf swept beaches of them all.

We then continued north, before heading inland and wound our way up several of the volcanoes before heading through the stunning rain forest, driving along quite narrow roads and endless chicanes until we reached the 'Jardin de Balata'. This was undoubtedly the highlight of the day and we had an adsorbing hour or so there, exploring the beautifully presented botanical gardens (including a very vertiginous aerial walkway – too much for me) with Sarah taking loads of photos, the best of which as usual we will post at <http://www.rhbell.com> as soon as we can.

So with the rush hour in full fury, we entered Fort du France looking for the huge Carrefour Hypermarket which we found surprisingly easily. After a leisurely hour visiting every aisle in the place, we headed back to Marin and around 7.45 pm we arrived back at the stern of Serafina in the dinghy and were able to take the first real advantage of our new courtesy light!

### **Trois Islets and Anse Marin**

Fri, Sat & Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Jan.

On Friday, following a quick visit to the internet café, we set off again in the car (Renault Twingo) and after buying a load of courtesy flags for some of the countries we are due to visit later in the year at a specialist flag makers shop, we drove back to Fort de France and found our way to La Galleria which is a vast shopping mall. (Well it seemed big to me!)

Near the top of the shopping list was the need to see if we could buy a Nespresso coffee machine on the island. I won't go into all the reasoning behind this, but we have been considering this for a while and it occurred to Sarah that as Martinique is very much part of France, it just might be possible to buy one here.

So it was with great delight that almost the very first shop we entered had the very machine we were looking for (well actually it was not the colour Sarah wanted, but under the circumstances she magnanimously backed down). We also bought a new Hoover and now just have to decide who gets which of these items as their next birthday present.....

Sarah then requested a few hours of independent shopping time and I set about seeing where I could buy coffee capsules for the machine. It transpired that there is a Nespresso franchise in Fort de France, but the address I was given was not very helpful. However, given that I had a car and few hours it seemed reasonable to try! It took well over an hour and a lot of U turns and stops for directions (Oh how I wish I had paid more attention during all those years of learning French at school) before I finally found the place and pretty much made the assistant's day by buying 1000 capsules.

I returned after an absence of two hours to find that Sarah had failed to find much of interest in the boutiques and so after a quick bite of lunch we did our food shopping in the 'Hyper U' supermarket and headed back to Marin.

Saturday saw us up early yet again for another internet visit and to return the car, after which we raised the anchor and set sail for Trois Islets where we were to rendezvous with Ko Ko and Song of the Ocean.

We had a wonderful sail round (about 30 miles) and although we were overtaken at one point by a French racing yacht, we were delighted to end up having a fantastic beat into the huge bay with Fort de France on the northern side and we tacked our way up to Trois Islets in 20 knots of breeze making a respectable 7 knots.

Just as we approached the small islands, we met Halsway Grace coming out and it seems that they had gone there hoping to meet us, but their anchor had dragged at some stage and they were heading off to a more sheltered spot.

We dropped anchor just astern of SotO and Ko Ko and were soon invited for tea! In the evening all three crews headed off in the dinghies to the small village nearby to have an outstanding meal in the 'Fleur de Sol' restaurant. This was a quite remarkable establishment since it was a very fine French restaurant, but the staff were able (and willing) to speak English. The waitress was from Montreal with a boating background and it was very handy as she was able to not only translate the menu, but added her own detailed descriptions of every dish. Quite a bonus as the 2 Swedes, two Norwegians and one Finn in our party evidently had even less French than us.

Sunday dawned pretty windy and it soon became apparent that our slight concern at mooring in such an exposed position was well founded! There was a long fetch and soon the swell became rather more dramatic and when Ko Ko's anchor broke free and they started to drag, we all conferred over the radio and agreed to move to Anse Matin. This is a sheltered anchorage only about a mile away and we were very lucky that despite it being quite popular, we managed to all anchor next to each other just out of the main channel. It was a very restful day although the new coffee machine was pressed into service when Iain, Jan and Birgitta arrived for morning coffee. Suddenly 1000 capsules did not seem too many once everyone had had two cups each.

We all met up on Ko Ko for drinks and farewells in the evening. Bert and Birgitta were flying home to Sweden at 10pm, Ko Ko and SotO were both heading south to St Lucia in the morning. Hopefully Ko Ko will catch up with us later in the season, but sadly for us, SotO will be heading back across the Atlantic in the spring and then on into the Med for a while.

## **St Pierre, Martinique**

Mon & Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Jan

Ko Ko and SotO set off fairly early in the morning for the 35 mile downwind sail back to St Lucia whilst we had a more leisurely start before we set off on the simple 14 mile trip north to St Pierre. We were lucky enough to have a fresh easterly breeze and for the first 8 to 10 miles we stormed along at 7 and 8 knots, but we could see Halsway Grace up ahead on the AIS and her speed was registering as only 3 knots and so we knew that as usual the wind was about to die in the lee of the main part of the island. Sure enough we eventually came into a hole in the wind and with just 3 knots of wind showing on our wind gauge we gave up the fight and motored the final miles into the big open bay.

Those who read this blog last year may recall that this is the very tragic town that was once the capital of Martinique until the catastrophic eruption of the huge volcano that looms above the bay in 1902. It seems that it gave plenty of warnings of the impending eruption, but these were ignored by the authorities who were more concerned with the upcoming elections in which the black voters were for the first time challenging the status quo of the island. When the blast came eye witnesses reported that the side of the volcano glowed red and burst open releasing a giant fireball of superheated gas that flowed down over the city releasing more energy than an atomic bomb. All that remained were smoking ruins and an estimated 29,933 people burned to death whilst twelve

ships were sunk in the bay, with just one managing to limp away with a handful of survivors in the crew.

We managed to anchor quite close to the main quay, but the holding here is dubious in places and we did drag a bit before finally digging in.

Halsway Grace anchored slightly to the south of us and later on kindly invited us to dinner.

On Tuesday morning we did sort of wonder what we had done to upset the neighbours because of the couple of dozen or so yachts moored here over night, just Halsway Grace, Serafina and two others remained!

Pretty lazy day really and in the morning I went ashore to use the local café's internet connection to catch up on things. We got a few jobs done and enjoyed a nice swim in the afternoon.

In the evening and through the night, the wind dropped away completely and we were left rolling in the residue of the Atlantic rollers that creep around the northern corner of the island. Rather uncomfortable and a bit unusual and a little bit disconcerting as we have committed ourselves to staying another night here!

### **Portsmouth, Dominica**

Wed 11th & Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> Jan.

Once again we woke to a pretty empty bay. The reason is that the destination for most of us heading north is Portsmouth on the island of Dominique and this is some 56 miles, mostly in the lee of the island and therefore quite slow sailing.

Very still, hot day with a flat sea. We went ashore to do our customs clearance for our departure the following morning and to get some essential shopping done. The internet café was closed and we had to return later to undertake sending and receiving our emails etc.

In the afternoon Sarah felt that we ought to be checking and rinsing our anchor warp and so we went to all the trouble of lowering all of this rope into the sea and then cleaning it as we replaced into the much cleaner anchor locker. This did cause one of our neighbours (Spanish) to come by in their dinghy to see if we were OK as they had watched us labouring away from the comfort of their restaurant table on the sea front!

We spoke to our son Ewan on the phone to wish him luck in a big interview that he has on Friday for a new job down in London. He seems to have prepared well for this with help from his Godfather so fingers and toes crossed.

On Thursday we were up at 6.00am and were under way by 6.30am heading north to Dominique.

By the time we reached the open Atlantic gap between the two islands, the wind was blowing a healthy 25 to m30 knots across the deck and there was a fair sea running, but the biggest issue was the torrential rain!

It was only after an hour or so that the skies cleared and we enjoyed a superb sail across the 25 miles to the southern end of Dominique. We then still had 30 plus miles to sail up the west coast of the high and forbidding island. We decided to press Henry into service (Henry is our Hydrovane wind

vane steering system and the slight changes we had just made proved to be wonderful and so despite the constant wind changes and downdrafts, we had a great sail up to Prince Rupert Bay and we dropped anchor just off Portsmouth, close to Halsway Grace who were spending a second night here.

However on the way up, we heard our name being called on the VHF and found ourselves talking to David and Lyn on Moonbeam. We were desperate to meet up with them again as they have just spent the summer sailing up the east coast of the USA and so were brimming with tips and advice for us. They were calling us because they had just changed their plan to stay in the Saintes another night and were sailing south to Prince Rupert bay as well. So we invited them for drinks and dinner and interrogated them pretty thoroughly!

Lots of rain today all the way up the island, although we seemed to be lucky most of the time, however it poured down in the evening and we ended up eating inside.

The wind came up in the night as forecast and we spent a few anxious hours checking our position, but an earlier dive to check the anchor had shown it to be well dug in and so we had not real need to be concerned. But we were still cautious as we had watched a 60ft yacht drag earlier (crew were away ashore) and it had been rescued by the boat boys just before it hit a large rusting hulk anchored in the bay.

### **Out and about in Dominica**

Fri 14<sup>th</sup> & Sat 15<sup>th</sup> Jan

On Friday morning Robin from Halsway Grace popped over to ask if we wanted to join them on Saturday on a trip around the island. We accepted the idea and persuaded David and Lyn on Moonbeam to join us to make up a full complement for the taxi/minibus.

Robin also enticed us to join him and Sue on a walk on Friday up to Fort Shirley which overlooks the bay and looked very impressive. The two hills that form this peninsular (the Cabrits) are actually two extinct volcanos.

So around 11am the four of us set off on foot and walked round the bay and up to the fort and after exploring this mainly British built stronghold and read all about its chequered history, we set off on the longest of the available walks to explore some of the outer defences. This took us up an ill-defined and rather unlikely path up the side of the hill through the woods and when we finally emerged at the top we found one very well preserved cannon and – well nothing else at all. Even the view out over the Caribbean Sea which should have provided such a fine place to spot whales from, was shrouded in trees and vegetation. So we had a rest and set off back down wondering all the while why we kept coming across crab shells. We found a large hermit crab along the way (photo at <http://www.rhbell.com>) and still are not too sure which predator eats them here.

As soon as we returned to the boats, David and Lyn issued an invitation for us all to come over for 'sundowners' which we did and after a chatty evening we made our way back to Serafina just as the wind started to rise to the forecast 30 knots. We managed to get the dinghy secure on the foredeck before the full blast began and we then had a night with the full 30 knots blasting through the bay although for a change there was no rain this time.

Things had quietened down in the morning and we were all prepared to leave our boats for the day as the forecast was for winds certainly no stronger than the previous night. Lawrence (of Arabia)

picked us up, promising that the Boat Boys would keep an eye on all our yachts and ran us ashore where Sam (Dr Love) was waiting with his taxi.

Sam was a great guide and driver and we an absolute mine of information as we made our way firstly to the north east corner of the island and then down to the central belt of rain forest and finally back across the island to the west coast and back up to Portsmouth. However Sam was also keen to ensure we saw and experienced all the fruits that pretty much grow at random everywhere in this incredibly fertile and undiscovered island. During the trip he would stop without warning jump out of the cab and pick stuff for us all. He climbed a grapefruit tree to get us all superb grapefruits. He cut us sprigs of huge bay leaves and then he carved cinnamon from a tree, cut bunches of lemongrass and even cadged some oranges from some lads loading a truck. But the vegetation on the island is quite remarkable and we saw pineapples, wild coffee beans, cocoa pods, coconuts, bananas, plantains, passion fruit, breadfruit, guava, yams, lettuces grown on the land and on trestle tables, papaya, oranges, grapefruit, limes, star fruit, wild ginger, soursop, nutmeg and bayleaves. This list is not exhaustive but about as much as I can remember along with so much else we did and learnt! And all these fruits and veg grow seemingly totally at random side by side in the wild.

Like so many of the Caribbean islands the east coast was pretty spectacular and the strong winds did make the seas appear very impressive as they broke along the dramatic reefs. We visited a small fishing village and marvelled at how on earth they managed to get their fragile skiffs in and out of the bay through the tumbling surf and treacherous outlying rocks and reefs. Sadly, we also learnt that the Coastguard that we saw offshore was out looking for a fisherman who had been missing from the previous day.

We drove through the Carib Reservation which is the last remaining home of the Indians, originally from South America who inhabited the island prior to the arrival of the western powers. In fact Dominica was the last of the Caribbean islands to be colonised by the Europeans due to the fierce resistance put up by the Caribs (who had themselves earlier driven out the native Arawaks). The Spanish discovered the island, but finding no gold, lost interest and like most of the other islands, it was left for the English and the French to squabble over. The British ended up as the dominant influence here and plantations of sugar were established but were not very successful and over time they failed and the crop was replaced by bananas and a host of other crops, but generally it seems that nothing was very well managed. [The Caribs called the island Waitikubuli, which means 'Tall is her body' but Columbus with rather less imagination named it after the day of the week that he 'discovered' it!]

We stopped for lunch in a small restaurant with a stunning view. The only options in most restaurants on this island are fish or chicken and this was no exception.

We then made our way up into the rain forest where we were dropped off and left to follow a rough and treacherous trail through the forest up to a fabulous waterfall. Sarah hardly hesitated before putting on her bikini and wading into the freezing water for a swim. David and Robin followed suit but dutifully I and the others remained to take the photos! One of the principal downsides to a rainforest is of course the rain, which then came down in bucketfuls but the swimmers remained too numb from the ice cold water to notice and we hardly felt we could complain! We then made our way back slowly to the mini-bus but not before we came across a ramshackle pig sty complete with pigs. Sarah had a small panic when one reared up to put its trotters on the top of the sty gate as the state of the woodwork did not give her any confidence that this was not about to break open.

The drive back took us over to the east (Caribbean) coast and we passed through a couple of fishing villages where it has to be said the standard of living was considerably lower than even the shanty town style houses we had experienced so far. The islanders had all seem unfailingly cheerful and welcoming, but these last two towns/villages were the first places where we had felt a bit threatened. Many of the buildings are painted with slogans: on the side of a school 'aim for the moon, for if you miss you fall among the stars', and on a bus stop 'get hooked on fishing, not drugs' – and all beautifully executed.

On our way across to the eastern side Sam drove us to the Layou River which was a scene of total devastation. It seems that 10 years ago there was a huge landslide in the mountains which had caused a massive dam of sand to be built across the river. Then 3 months ago this natural dam burst during heavy rains and the huge tidal wave swept down the valley removing bridges and houses. But it also brought with it unbelievable amounts of the sand which it deposited where the village near the mouth of the river used to flourish. We drove along only recently reopened roads awestruck by the mountains of sand and silt that had engulfed houses and the whole flood plain. Sam assured us that no lives were lost, but it seems remarkable that this was the case.

Finally around 5.30pm we returned to Portsmouth and after a quick drink ashore we were all ferried back to our boats and had time to reflect on a fascinating day out and certainly for us quite an eye-opener, causing us to review and upgrade our previous thoughts about this beautiful and unspoilt island.

### **Pointe a Pitre, Guadeloupe and sunken treasure**

Sunday and Monday 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> Jan

Sunday was spent on board doing the washing and getting a few jobs done. We had sort of been planning to move on, but we are so well dug in and everything is so relaxed here that we decided to stay on.

Apart from the frequent rain showers which caused flurries of feverish activity around the bay as we all scrambled to take in the washing, the day slipped by almost without incident. However, rather sadly I managed to lose a winch handle over the side into 10 metres of water which is too deep for my delicate ears to dive down to. It was just as it got dark so we could do nothing but see if we could find anyone willing to have a go first thing in the morning.

The Sunday big event (well the week's really) is the beach party and BBQ organised by the Boat Boys partially as a great social event and partially as a fund raiser for their activities. David and Lyn kindly gave us a lift ashore as we had already stored our dinghy on deck ready for the passage north and we had a wonderful evening enjoying some great food (chicken or fish again) and probably too much rum punch. Dancing was also on the menu and we did our best to get things going but most folk seemed a bit reluctant to make fools of themselves in front of the small crowd of locals who were gathered around the area watching. They were all moving with the beat, but we assume that they are not supposed to get involved because despite encouragement from the 'yachties' to get them all dancing as well, they mainly remained as spectators.

The Boat Boys here in Dominica are very well organised and trained. They formed a cooperative some years ago after spending so much time as elsewhere, bickering and fighting amongst themselves whilst competing for the same business from the visiting yachts. Now they work as a team with duty rotas and for example, provide (free of charge) a boat patrol all night to protect the anchorage from nocturnal visitors..... They undergo Tourist Board training, even including basic first

aid, as do all the taxi drivers on the island (two weeks per annum) and make it their business to ensure that the visiting yachts enjoy the full benefits of their stay in this poor but very fertile country. The BBQ & dance took place in a large new covered area on the beach and we gather that this time last year it was just a wooden structure, but it had no roof. A Canadian boater on being asked why it still had no roof was told that they simply could not afford it, so he gave them the money himself immediately and by the end of the week the roof was on!

Monday dawned fairly windless for a change, but still heavily overcast which is just something you have to accept about Dominica. I understand that Feb – April is their dry (less wet) season.

We headed off around 9.30am leaving our winch handle on the sea bed, so anyone following us could use the position we registered in the previous blog and dive thereabouts and see how they get on.

The sail across to Guadeloupe was very lively, partly because we probably had too much sail out! The wind was around 20 to 25 knots from the north east which at least allowed us to lay a course direct to Point à Pitre. In fact whilst it might seem a bit odd to sail here and then return to the Saintes later in the week, it actually makes good sense, as sailing from the Saintes to Point à Pitre is directly upwind which might explain why comparatively few yachts ever bother. So despite having to beat all the way, we made very good time covering the 41 miles mostly at 6 and 7 knots. The upside of staying in Dominica for a while is that the boat gets a wonderful fresh water clean every few hours, but sadly all that was soon undone as we pounded into the Atlantic waves again and Serafina arrived in Guadeloupe once more caked in salt.

Pointe à Pitre is a proper port, but is also a very large but very shallow inland area so there are quite a few sheltered anchorages available although their peace is occasionally disturbed by ferries, cargo ships and the odd cruise liner! We anchored on the town side of the estuary not far from the entrance to the marina and will see how this works out.

No wildlife seen on the way over, which reminds me that I failed to mention the other day the 50 odd Fraser's dolphins that joined us briefly on our way across from Martinique to Dominique.

Greasing the pole..... We have struggled since buying Serafina with making the cockpit table easier to use. The shaft which the table assembly slides up and down, steadfastly refused to work despite us trying all manner of applications. The outstanding solution has been to sparingly apply 'Tony & Guy's Defining hair wax' and many thanks to Sue on Halsway Grace for both the idea and loan of her pot!

## **Marie Galante Island**

Tues, Wed & Thurs, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Jan

Tuesday morning we launched the dinghy and went into town to catch up on wifi and have breakfast. Pointe à Pitre has the rather tired air of a rundown seaside resort. There seem to be lots of restaurants and bars, quite a lot of energetic renewing of shops and bars but no punters. Perhaps they come out at night?

We checked in with Customs at the Marina office and when we enquired about WiFi we were directed to a somewhat seedy bar with poor wifi and a very disinterested waitress brought two old croissants, one plate and 2 cups of coffee. Yup we are back in France! We then set off to visit the huge variety of shops detailed in the Doyle's pilot. There is one very good chandlery, Karukera

Marine, who happily talked Rob out of an expensive crimper for his fishing rod. Otherwise the shops various did not, as ever, live up to the hype although we felt Fred Marine looked very professional if you were to have engine problems. We also discovered that we would have to stay longer than we had planned to get some canvas work made for the outboard and various other bits and pieces which we decided against.

So we went back to Serafina for Rob to sort his emails and work out sizes, lengths etc. of proposed purchases from Karukera. We then went back loaded down with 2 gas bottles and our mini B aqualung air tank to refill, and all the rubbish from Dominica, where they struggle to dispose of boat rubbish. Sarah tottered off to the dive shop where she was told that the bottle was older than 2 years old and therefore cannot be re-filled. It's in pristine condition and has been used twice; €261 seems an awful lot to replace it and for it then to sit in our cockpit locker for another 2 years and go out of date again. So we hope to find somewhere (English speaking!) who will perhaps test and fill it. Otherwise we will wait until an ocean crossing is imminent, since at that price we can afford a few divers in the meantime for any problems!

Rob made various purchases at the chandlery but was unable to swap one of the gas bottles as it was in 'poor condition'. Sarah managed to find a hairdresser who immediately cut her hair, not such a successful crop as previously....

And then we got caught in the mother of all downpours. So all in all not a totally triumphant trip!

We have been really impressed by the black rain clouds that sit downwind of us covering the high ground at the southern end of Basse Terre (the other wing of this butterfly shaped island) and we haven't actually seen the top of the mountain yet as it is permanently shrouded in deluges.

On Wednesday we set off to the town's veg market and had to leave the dinghy on a slightly dubious fishing dock, where the enthusiastic selling of today's catch was going on from the boats – complete with pelican residents. (see the photos at <http://www.rhbell.com>) The market was wonderful: fantastic produce with the biggest avocados you have ever seen, but Rob discovered that the vendors were not prepared to be photographed despite the fact he was only taking general views and it did feel a bit threatening. After this, as per Doyle's Guide Book instructions, we set off to the far end of the three-basin marina to leave the dinghy by the Aquarium (we dipped out of visiting this as the idea of viewing captive turtles wasn't attractive) and then walk to the hypermarket. In the event the highway was full of speeding cars and had no pavement so we flagged a taxi down and then spent a happy hour or so in the huge supermarket. Oddly we never found any fresh chicken – all the other Caribbean islands profess chicken to be their preferred meat and most places are covered by the free-ranging fowl! Our return trip by taxi had to pass the marina basin nearest to our anchorage to get back to where we had left the dinghy. Not one of best Doyle's best suggestions!

Thursday dawned flat calm but by the time we left the anchorage to sail to Marie Galante we had a force 4 nicely on the nose! Two upwind sails in completely opposite directions are definitely rare out here. The good thing about this change in wind direction is that it will allow us to anchor more safely at St Louis. So we had a good four hour sail and Rob attempted more fishing after discovering that his usual fishing line has suffered UV damage and is too brittle to use, but still no success – cook was astonished.

We have anchored off the nicely shelving beach in incredibly clear water, but unfortunately some of the Atlantic swell creeps around the top of the island making it rather roly. The bay isn't too busy

as this island is a bit off the beaten track and even in today's ideal wind conditions, it hasn't attracted many yachts.

### **The Marie Galante TT and a downwind sail to the Saintes**

Fri, Sat & Sun, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan

We woke up on Friday morning to spot two ferries delivering lots of tourists to the quay in St Louis, since about the only activity talked about in any guide or pilot seems to be hire a scooter and go round the island, this did not bode well for the availability of machines..... And this proved to be the case once we had launched the dinghy and managed to negotiate the usual considerate French mooring of dinghies (in the Caribbean it is deemed good form to moor your dinghy on a long painter [rope] and security wire, so that there is enough give in these arrangements to allow other dinghies to nose up to the quay. Needless to say the French don't always think of this and are jammed in as tight as possible, latecomers i.e. us, found it a bit of a challenge to get ashore!).

Undeterred at the complete lack of scooters, we decided to take the bus into the main town, Grand Bourg and perhaps try and get a dinghy there or at least have a mooch around. A rather surly bus driver, who was unimpressed with Rob's hearty slam of the door, delivered us to Grand Bourg down some very impressive roads – the French do build good roads and care for their roadsides even on this tiny backwater of an island. We found half a dozen scooter hire stalls set up by the ferry port and were able to hire from one of them.

We set off eastwards to Capesterre down a road running along by the sea. Rob clearly reliving all those happy far off days of owning a motorbike was disturbed to be riding a rather light vehicle with no gears and a rather lumpen wife on the back. Sarah spent the whole day thinking how stupid we should look if we came off, dressed so sensibly in shorts, T shirts and sandals – although we were wearing nice, sweaty hired helmets.

As we neared Capesterre the beaches became even more impressive and were protected by a reef. As per Doyle's suggestion, Sarah went in for a snorkel but was disappointed to only discover a huge cache of empty wine bottles and not the promised reef extravaganza. We then had a great lunch of crepes at a gaily coloured restaurant on the beach run by three French women and one of their daughters was the chanteuse.

Having navigated our way round the one-way system in Capesterre (each of the tiny settlements seems to have one-way systems despite hardly any traffic – Rob suspects yet more EU grants!) where the only sign of life was the church undergoing major repairs, we drove up the east coast to visit Gueule Grand Gouffre. This is a huge, round sinkhole plunging down 200 feet with an archway where the sea rushes in. Unfortunately the photos would have been more impressive if we had visited in the morning when the easterly light would have lit the interior, even so it was quite sufficient to make Rob feel decidedly giddy as Sarah hopped around taking the shots.

After this we drove the last part of the circuit of the island, via St Louis back to Grand Bourg to deliver our scooter back. We had a quick look at the marina where a few yachts are tied up to buoys or a basic pontoon. All the boats looked pretty shallow draft and the pilot states it is dredged to 7' although the chartlet says it is deeper. It was very calm inside the marina, but the boats anchored just outside were heaving around very uncomfortably.

We had just about run out of things to do or see, so returned the scooter to the hirer who very kindly offered us a lift back to St Louis in an hour's time, at 5pm. This gave us long enough to discover that as soon as the ferry leaves at 4pm the whole town shuts and there is nothing to do! The scooter man was very friendly and a very fast French driver! We passed two people standing driving a huge oxen drawn cart and he screeched to a halt to enable us to take a photo; at this point

the cart driver took exception to the photo-shoot and whipped the two oxen into a canter. Our driver was absolutely delighted by this response – we were rather horrified and abashed.

We had intended to stay another day, but the anchorage is so rolly – perhaps if we had crept a bit farther into the NE corner of the bay it would have been better – we decided to set off for Isles des Saintes early on Saturday morning. Moonbeam had told us that this season, compulsory buoys have been laid throughout the anchorages there, so we hoped to find a buoy behind Ilet a Cabrit, although we are aware there are only a few in this nice sheltered spot.

We have enjoyed Marie Galante and felt it was a worthwhile excursion up wind to visit another completely different island but would not feel drawn to repeat the experience again. It is definitely one to visit in calm conditions, which, technically for the Caribbean, we had been undergoing.

We left the anchorage at 0645 but with the wind dead astern we only set the main to steady the boat and motored over to the Saintes. There was a most confused sea with a mixture of Atlantic rollers and other waves from both north and south of Marie Galante as far as we could work out. The wind got up to force 5 by the time we arrived three hours later but luckily we saw few fishing traps after last year's encounter, but there were loads of flying fish. The increased wind and sea decided us that it would be more comfortable behind Ilet a Cabrit although it does mean a long bouncy dinghy ride to town and the wifi. And we were lucky enough to find a free buoy which we hooked up successfully with our Duck Hook and relatively little bickering considering this is the first time we have picked up a buoy since 2006 in the river Helford in the previous Serafina!

Rob then shot off in the dinghy to check our emails and Sarah finally got down to the job of pumping up the fenders to capacity and covering them with the FenderSock purchased two years ago. The theory is that the extremely small cable ties can be induced to encircle the fender and secure the material. In practice it had taken two hours and very sore fingers to complete the first one at the beginning of the season. Sarah has now worked out that using one cable tie on the bottom of the fender and completing the job with cord around the top is the solution.

Otherwise the rest of the day was split between wishing we had brought a hunting rifle with us to shoot the neighbouring yappy dog and watching a huge motor vessel devote the whole afternoon to failing to anchor in three different locations and finally getting shooed off by a hooting from an enormous yacht the MV was getting too close to. Eventually he turned tail as the sun was setting, and motored off to Guadeloupe – no doubt with some rather irritated owners/clients!

Sunday was spent doing lots of postponed jobs and feeling very sanctimonious! We have finally set up the Anchor Rescue system and should we ever have to use it, will let you know its efficacy. But we both feel happier having it if it could potentially save our lovely Rocna anchor. This anchorage is quite entertaining with lots of coming and going of yachts and motor boats, particularly those that seem to come over from Guadeloupe for the day and the endless spinning on the mooring buoys that all yachts perform here. At any time of the day there are boats a few metres apart facing each other – obviously not as exciting as if they were at anchor and on different length warps, as happened last year. Sarah did not enjoy this aspect so much when she went for an energetic swim upwind to the reef area to admire the fish, expecting a nice downwind return trip to discover the wind was blowing heftily the other way....

We also watched the spectacular yacht in the opposite bay set off to Guadeloupe under reefed mizzen and two headsails. According to AIS, it was doing 14.5 knots but then it was also 207 feet long!

**Deshaies, Guadeloupe**

Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> Jan

We went into town early (Sarah slightly overdressed in chest high waterproofs for the bouncy dinghy ride, but in the event she escaped a single drop of water but perhaps Rob could have borrowed them for the return journey!) to catch up on emails which involves sitting in the town square to log on to the local wifi service. This sounds pleasant but is difficult with bright sunlight and old age sight!

We had a wander around the shops and bought a can of paint to see if we can lick our elderly gas bottle into acceptable state for a possible swap. This may be the last chance to exchange (rather than re-fill) our European gas bottles as we are within French territory, before we have to bite the bullet and buy (and somehow house) American gas bottles of completely different dimensions. We also bought some lovely French bread but the supermarkets were pretty disappointing, which isn't surprising as everything has to come by ferry to these small outlying islands.

On our return we were going to do the washing and charge up a few items, but to Rob's great consternation the generator suddenly died. Rob loathes any problem with the generator as it involves squeezing into extraordinary positions deep inside the engine room to get at its innards and hoping to God that he doesn't drop that precious screw into the depths of the machinery, despite not being able to see where he's putting it.

We decided to postpone the dreaded job until after we had taken the dinghy to the headland where we have been watching the dive boats deliver passengers and had a great snorkel although a strong breeze was endeavouring to blow us north to Guadeloupe. After lunch, a cup of coffee and a few procrastinating jobs, an hour's sweaty work in the hot engine room proved that the impellor had become brittle and disintegrated, spraying bits of plastic around inside the pump which all had to be extracted with tweezers. A new impellor was then fitted and the genny was up and running again. Of course, by this stage the weather had become rainy so it was impossible to dry our newly washed bedding!

Not such a productive day as Sunday! But this anchorage does provide us with lots of comings and goings to watch and either learn or giggle at the antics of buoy picking up. At one point there were 12 yachts in the vicinity with 5 dogs on board which is fairly unusual out here – the handbag variety were definitely the most irritating.

Tuesday was more things off the jobs to do list. It was not such a sunny day, so some inside things got completed and Rob had another re-organisation of storage boxes. Much to Sarah's horror, he also discovered her spare Marmite jar had obviously re-fermented during the hot summer and burst its lid but luckily it had been contained by the storage box – a permanent Marmite aroma in the bilges might be a bit too much for Rob! And much of the day was pegging out, re-pegging washing due to the wind or recovering washing as it rained again – you know it isn't as easy as you might think, this Caribbean life! What is certain that days can fly past doing incredibly mundane things very slowly, things that living ashore take minutes. Rob also set off to introduce himself to the owner of Apogee, an American boat flying the OCC flag. As we are now members (sadly our flag arrived after our departure) and have heard from Scott-Free just what a boon membership has proved in the USA we thought we should start taking advantage of this great club.

Rob has also penned a great many emails to OCC Flag Officers in the USA to try and find a definitive answer to the question of what we will have to do with Serafina when we get to the States. We

have recently heard that non-American yachts cannot stay in the USA for longer than 12 months at a time, at which point (and not before the cruising licence has expired) we have to sail out of the country for 15 days or more; which basically mean either south/east to Bermuda (which our timing would make this due during the hurricane season and we would not be covered by insurance, even if we should like to attempt this!) or north to Canada in June 2013. Since we are still keen to have two summer seasons on the east coast of the States we are trying to work out how to achieve this. We have had a flood of incredibly helpful emails back, with all sorts of suggestions and offers of great generosity and welcome, so Rob is hard at work replying and sieving out what looks like the inevitable trip up to Canada.

Early on Wednesday morning we set off to Deshaies in the north of Guadeloupe passing the British tall ship, Tenacious, anchored behind us (which, we think, is the ship Steve on Scott-Free used to skipper) and very grand she looked too. We had a great close reach across the 12 mile channel achieving 9 knots SOG but as soon as we popped behind the end of the bigger island the wind completely disappeared, so we more or less motored up the west side of Guadeloupe. We actually got to see the top of the volcano at the southern end of the island for the first time in a week as it was not covered in rain clouds. But again not a fish caught, or a dolphin, whale or turtle seen.

We arrived at this delightful anchorage and were surprised to see quite a lot of yachts at anchor but managed to find a spot against the north cliff again, where we know it to be relatively sheltered and steady. And throughout the afternoon, yachts continued to pour in until it was twice as busy as we encountered last year.

### **Anchoring as a spectator sport – Deshaies, Guadeloupe**

Thurs, Fri, Sat & Sunday – 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> Jan

When we arrived in the bay here in Deshaies, we had spotted a yacht called Shian with Paul and Janie on board who we knew to be friends of David and Lyn Wilkie, on Moonbeam, so on Thursday morning on our way into town we invited them for a drink in the evening. They had watched us energetically signalling to them the previous evening with some trepidation as they thought we were indicating that they had anchored too near to us!

Otherwise, after a quick shop in town, having decided that we wouldn't move Serafina closer into shore as we were happy that our anchor was well lodged, we spent most of the day catching up with correspondence (Rob still receiving and sending lots of emails to the various OCC contacts) and a lot of planning for our trip north as we finally have great wifi courtesy of Hot, Hot, Hot. We are beginning to comprehend some of the geography of the East Coast and have pinpointed the OCC Flag Officers on an ancient fold-out map inside a pilot kindly donated by Tabasco Jazz.

We had a great evening with Paul and Janie, including a good Green Flash sunset and thoroughly picked their brains for our sail to America. David and Lyn had already passed on their list of places visited and what to look out for. We are beginning to realise that there is just so much to see, sail to and enjoy in the States, quite apart from the massive amount of hospitality that will be on offer – two seasons there may be the bare minimum! The only small fly in the ointment is that Rob is able to considerably lengthen his list of sailing horrors to include fierce lightning storms, tides of up to 30' (plus the joy of tidal anchoring), the Gulf Stream, hurricanes, wall to wall lobster pot buoys, and impenetrable fog!

The following morning proved more windy but Sarah felt it was good practise to go up the mast in less than clement weather, so was winched up to have a further look at our inner Furlex mast vang to see if it also is due under the recall. Sure enough it is, but we have been told that although Selden will pay for the forestay fitting to be replaced they will not cover the other fitting which sounds completely idiotic to us. To have admitted responsibility for this fitting and then to leave potential problems just waiting to happen or cause the client considerable expense (we may well

have to have our mast lifted for this replacement, at our cost) seems madness in a world of publicity and litigation. So we will try and pursue this further.

Unfortunately we spoke too soon and the great wifi signal here packed up, so we decided instead to walk to the Jardin Botanique about one kilometre up the hill with Paul and Janie. This is a very pretty and exceptionally well laid out garden with an artificial but convincingly done waterfall and streams meandering throughout the gardens. They also had some very loud Parakeets, Macaws and Flamingos and even the Koi Carp had feeding stations with a pay slot for the visitors to be able to feed and attract them. The carp were actually squirming right out of the water over each other to get at the food.

On our return the wind had got up and was gusting 30 knots plus, so we settled down to the expected anchoring spectacle. The anchorage is described as a "vent" in the wind system and it can fairly howl here despite being relatively quiet outside the anchorage. Many yachts arrive from the Saintes and Antigua each evening as it is really the only stopping point on the 75 mile odd stretch and we had watched a few altercations the previous evening. This afternoon was nothing short of bedlam: an American yacht was the first to have a good five goes at getting his anchor to hold; meanwhile a Breton yacht was constantly racing out of the anchorage dragging an anchor back and forth. After three quarters' of an hour of this it continued to drift right out to sea still with its anchor down and it became apparent that its engine had failed. They appeared to refuse help from a returning dive boat and after another hour when they were at least a mile offshore they finally raised their anchor and slowly sailed away downwind and we did not see them again! A German yacht demonstrated their anchoring technique (their boat boasted a website address that seemed to indicate some sort of training scheme) at the very least, 15 times and after a good three hours of failing at this, settled for a position at the back of the pack well out to sea much to our great relief as their penultimate attempt had been too near Serafina.

Finally a French boat sailed into the anchorage with its sail still up to try and anchor; it too had a failed engine. They ambitiously attempted to get in amongst all the other packed boats in the anchorage, which with the gusts we were experiencing, was nothing short of madness. Eventually they sailed too close to the bow of the American yacht that had struggled earlier, caught their keel on the American's anchor chain and their boom in his forestay, dragging the yacht forward with them narrowly missing another boat in front. Inevitably the poor Americans had to re-anchor again. The French yacht managed in the end to drop its anchor also fairly well out to sea. Various dinghies set off to offer assistance but the general consensus was that the boat was in a pretty chaotic state and since now their anchor windlass had also stopped (flat batteries?), it was best to leave well alone.

All this was well debated over drinks on Shian with another couple, Craig and Karene, Americans with an Oyster 56, Il Sogno. They will probably be heading north at a similar time to us and we have agreed to stay in touch.

Saturday morning we went ashore for yet more French bread, roti chicken and Chilean Tarapaca wine. Anyone who knows us will be aware that we used to have a garage full of this wine courtesy of Rob's brother who used to import it along with the wool that was his business. Sadly his brother no longer does this and we have been unable to find anywhere, in the UK or on our travels, which stocks it. Last year in this very small port, Rob found a stock of red, white and even a rosè Tarapaca in a very tatty Spar supermarket. This year Rob has finally cleared all their red wine and a fair bit of the white from the shelves over the last few days!

Whilst we were in town, all the roads were lined with very smartly dressed locals in black and white clothes (and some amazing shoes, this is France after all). This is done to pay their last respects to the passing funeral cortege and then pretty much the whole town walks in procession behind the coffin to church. It is quite a wonderful sight.

In the evening we were invited to Il Sogno, together with Paul and Janie, for supper. It proved to be a very interesting evening all round. First we were treated to a very good snoop around their beautiful yacht which they have recently purchased second-hand. The previous owner had latterly

done less sailing but was very keen on improvements and they have inherited some very cleverly and beautifully executed enhancements. It then transpired that Craig (surname White) is a recently retired, very well-known NBC news cameraman and it was really interesting to hear American politics from a different perspective. Karene treated us to a lovely meal including good ol' flame grilled hamburgers from their BBQ and fries and Sarah discovered the joys of a Margarita – and not just one!

Today, Sunday, we have signed out with Customs for our trip north to Antigua tomorrow - the wind is due to ease round to the east a bit further to make this probably just one tack. Then on Monday night quite a blow is forecast so we thought we would go into Jolly Harbour to see about some work on the boat. We are hoping that after that the weather may be such to make a trip north to Barbuda possible.

So the rest of the day was spent just getting all the internet work, bank statements, Skype calls etc completed whilst we still have great wifi (back up and running now) and the boat ready for a bouncy trip to windward!

### **Jolly Harbour, Antigua**

Monday 30<sup>th</sup> Jan

Got up with good intentions for a very early start north to Antigua, but set off about 0645 hrs. The anchorage had been really crowded last night with several very grand yachts including a tall ship and a beautiful American 'gentleman's yacht' complete with amazingly active crew – they even had a stars jack flying, but taken down very correctly at sundown. So there was lots of activity as we left as most people were taking advantage of a lull in the weather with a more easterly wind to head north or south, as there is quite a blow forecast for Tuesday onwards; and there was the added excitement of yachts having anchored over other's anchors.

Initially it was flat calm with the Atlantic swell working its way around the top of the island. As soon as we neared the northern tip the wind started to get up to 18 knots or so. Very quickly we were romping along on a fine reach with a reef in the main and in the staysail. The day was very grey and gloomy and it soon became apparent that we would be beset with squalls. These went through with 30+ knots of wind and lots of rain, and the visibility was reduced to less than half a mile on occasions but coupled with big Atlantic seas and the knowledge that there were boats heading south on exactly the opposite course, it was certainly interesting!

Rob had to abandon his fishing attempts, but later as the weather improved he had another go. This year we have found a lot of seaweed floating on the surface of the water, especially around the ends of the islands. This is really irritating as it tends to get caught on the hook and has to be constantly released. The sun made a fleeting appearance before we encountered further squalls as we approached Antigua. We were heading for Jolly Harbour Marina on the west coast but could see many enormous masts in Falmouth as they have just had the Super Yacht Challenge weekend. When we arrived at the marina at 1500 and were marking time for the boat-boy to arrive to lead us in, we watched another beautiful yacht unloading its racing sails and putting back its cruising rig with an inner hydraulic furlex, fixed bimini and the radar dome amongst other items of cruising kit. The rigger was still up the mast as night fell!

William, the lovely boat-boy here, then pointed out that we had to go back out of the marina to customs. You are not allowed to berth in the marina and walk around to customs a few hundred yards away, they insist that you dock outside their offices and check in there which, when you are only two people on board, is a bit of a fag. So Rob duly trotted down the pontoon to customs to fill in the eight forms (the majority of which demand the same information) and with some complicated system of shuttling the papers between the three different offices there.

So we finally squeezed ourselves between the mooring posts into a berth in the marina by 1600. Having done this unusual mooring system ( involving a spring line on to one of the posts and accepting your neighbour's bow line as you are paired within the posts) before, we felt rather proud

of our technique as we slid gently in reverse between two moored yachts, although we have to admit that it was dead calm by now.

We have booked ourselves a couple of nights here to miss the nasty weather due and to try and organise some stainless work to cage the American gas bottles we are going to have to purchase which will not fit in our tiny gas locker. And we also had a text from Halsway Grace to say that they were in a bay nearby so they are now coming to supper tomorrow night as Robin and Sue are picking up guests from here on Wednesday.

## **Deep Bay, Antigua**

Tues, Wed & Thursday – 31<sup>st</sup> Jan, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb

Rob managed to borrow a gas bottle from the chandlery, together with a photo of Shian's gas bottle set-up, so that we can demonstrate to the metal fabricator what it is we would like him to make. Unfortunately Gavin (A1 Marine) has remained invisible all day, despite one or other of us hanging around on the boat waiting for him.

Various small jobs done, quick visit to the Epicurean supermarket – it is very impressive as supermarkets go at first sight, but actually fairly short on the basics (good bread, veg and fruit) but long on luxuries, but beggars can't be choosers – and cooking for our guests Robin & Sue.

We are alongside a yacht that made the mistake of leaving their boat here for 20 months unseen and are paying a very heavy mildew price. They were shocked at the state of the boat which had also been broken into under the care of the boatyard and so instead of a nice few days sailing before returning to Alberta, the couple and their teenage son (we were so impressed by how hard he worked) have been scrubbing and mending well into the darkness each day.

Robin and Sue (Halsway Grace) came for supper. Big decision: starter and main course, or main and pudding? Luckily Robin is a man after my own heart, so apple pie a la Susan from the EMYR won out, thank goodness! We had a great evening despite much rain again – we seem a bit fated whenever we meet up, it is wet.

We decided to stay on in the marina another day as we still hadn't seen Gavin and we hope to order the cage and then pick it up either when we drop friends back to the marina in two weeks or after our mast repair at the end of the month.

Sarah had a look at all three book exchanges, but discovered that the one with the best choice also had silverfish infestations, so abandoned it. As it is, any books we swap on to the boat we have been advised to bag up with roach-hotels for six weeks otherwise it is a good way to introduce cockroaches into the boat as they lay their eggs in the glue of paper or cardboard products.

The next morning we finally decided to abandon all hope of Gavin materialising and we will have another go at getting the cage made in St Martin, so got ready to leave Jolly Harbour for Deep Bay which is 5 miles north and on our way to Barbuda as the weather reports all seem favourable. William came to take the line of the yacht we are sharing the mooring poles with, to allow us to motor out and it was at this moment that we discovered that we had a beautiful green, 4" gecko sitting on the gantry under the solar panels. Sarah was quite keen that we should keep it having read of a yacht that got so desperate to get rid of a cockroach infestation that they bought a gecko in the market in Thailand. The gecko did the business but eventually it ran out of 'food', by this time the yacht was mid-ocean and at night the gecko would bark with hunger and the skipper would have to get up and feed it little bits of meat. Unfortunately a crew member did away with the creature as the noise got too much. But their gecko was probably a bit bigger....

Anyway we felt that one of our guests next week would be very unimpressed by our addition to the family so we tried to catch it in the landing net without success. Eventually William pointed out that it could swim so Rob knocked it into the water where it seemed to be paddling around quite efficiently and we left the marina.

We had a quick motor up to Deep Bay where Sarah lost her nerve and dropped the anchor quite well out from the beach. It became apparent, judging by the size of yachts that motored past us to anchor further in, that there is a bar across the bay and it then goes deeper as you go towards the shore, and where it is more sheltered. The wreck of the 'Andes' is just behind us and her mast head still just sticks out above the surface of the water.

Rob is also reassessing our anchor dropping technique and had freed off our windlass clutch cones again, (the windlass doesn't seem to appreciate the salty conditions of a yacht!) so that we can release the windlass clutch to let out more chain quickly if we are trying to anchor in windy conditions. This is when the bow falls off very quickly hardly allowing the chain to pay out on the motor. He thinks that as long as the anchor has hit the bottom and the chain is starting to lay along the sea bed OK, that this chain technique will work. We will have another go in Barbuda where we hope that the water clarity will prove his point. This all came about through debate in Deshaies as we watched the anchoring carnage going on all around in 30+ knots of wind.

A lazy afternoon reading and watching several party catamarans picking up and dropping clients on the two beaches we can see. As the same boats did this several times it really must be a case of "once round the bay". Sarah also saw a huge turtle surface by the boat but we have already forgotten the lessons of the Old Hegg Sanctuary in Bequia on identification – possibly a Green Turtle?

We will set off north early tomorrow for Barbuda, having read all available information from the pilots, various other yachts' blogs and even the Compass (the free monthly yachtie newspaper available throughout the Caribbean) has an article in it this month. The island is very low (125') so offers little protection and therefore you need good conditions to go there. It is also surrounded by coral reefs so one needs to pay very careful attention when navigating in past all the reefs and rocks.

### **Low Bay, Barbuda**

Fri & Sat – 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb

Got up early to sharpen the fish gutting knives and reassemble the Hydrovane before setting off for Barbuda around 0700hrs. We were following quite a few other boats from this anchorage all on the same track and crossing the path of three huge cruise ships entering St Johns in time for breakfast. The route is almost due north once you have avoided the coral reefs at the north end of Antigua and Rob quickly got the Hydrovane working. The very slight adjustment he made to the set-up has proved a revelation and Henry (the Hydrovane) was well in control of Serafina, 60° off the wind with speeds of occasionally 8+ knots. So we had a glorious sail with a reducing sea as we sailed into the lee of Barbuda Island.

We decided not to fish again as the sea is only, at its deepest, 30 metres for the whole 30 miles between Antigua and Barbuda and this puts any fish caught potentially in the category of reef feeding fish with the possibility of carrying ciguatera disease.

The pilot makes the whole approach of Barbuda very intimidating but we found plenty of depth along 11 Mile Beach and anchored up towards the small hotel in Low Bay so that we can be picked up by George Jefferys tomorrow for a visit to the Frigate bird colony. He will come over from the town, Codrington which is the other side of the lagoon which backs on to the beach.

Sarah, having as ever anchored a little too far out, decided to swim to the beach to check we were in the right place to meet George, which was hard work up wind and rather a surreal experience as it was a totally sandy bottom but the suspension of sand in the water means you can't see the bottom and it is like swimming in the sky as it is so blue. The outcome of this trip ashore was that we decided to move Serafina closer to the beach and once we had done this, we found it a good deal more comfortable. The beach is of very fine, slightly pinky sand and quite out of this world. Over a well-deserved coffee on her return she spotted a huge (4' ) ray leap several feet into the air and remembered that this used to happen at Anegada in the BVIs at dusk.

On Saturday morning we got up for another struggle with the SSB radio to try and get a weather forecast. Our SSB seems unable to receive at the moment although we know we are able to transmit, which suggests it's an aerial problem. Rob cleaned the deck connector but needs Sarah to go up the backstay and do something technical, so we are saving this one up!

Rob then inflated and launched our old dinghy as we have to carry it well up the steep beach to leave it untethered while we visit the bird sanctuary; With our small outboard on it is a whole lot lighter to manoeuvre than the bigger rib with its aluminium hull. So should the very worst happen, not such a disaster if it goes walkabout! So we set off at 1000 to meet a very punctual George Jefferys for our trip. He is well promoted in the Doyles guide book and was an absolutely charming and interesting guide. He charged US\$50 for the boat (plus the tax we had to pay in Codrington) and he pointed out that this is the fixed charge set by the authorities although there is an off-islander around, touting for water taxi business and making life difficult by over-charging.

George told us much about Barbuda's history and geography of which he is justly proud. Most of the 1,250 islanders share half a dozen surnames and are direct descendants of a small group of slaves brought here by the two Codrington brothers. They leased the land from the British Crown for "one fattened sheep" per year for nearly two centuries and grew food for Antiguan sugarcane workers, also using the island as their personal hunting ground. Consequently the Barbudans who were not closely supervised developed a tough independent spirit. The Codringtons also "bred slaves" as the Barbudans have a reputation for being big, strong people. Today all the land is owned communally and cannot be sold to outsiders. Antiguan government development plans have been fiercely resisted: one hotel project had the population march en masse and shove the building offices over the cliff! On the island are goats, sheep, feral donkeys, horses (which are raced), wild boar and white tailed deer – the latter two are legally hunted. They apparently also have a taste locally for the Red-Footed Tortoise.

George showed us a huge Canadian buoy (see photos at [www.rhbell.com](http://www.rhbell.com)) which is thought to have broken free, washed by currents to Europe and then back again across the Atlantic to Barbuda. Codrington also used these currents to his advantage, having an active wrecking team to plunder the many ships that foundered on this low island. George has a large collection of messages swept here in bottles, so now we know where they all went!

George took us through the saltwater lagoon passing a fisherman pulling in his nets who obligingly threw the smaller fish into the air for the circling juvenile Frigate birds to catch in mid-air. It was quite a spectacle with the huge birds competing so closely but not crashing into each other. When we reached the colony, George started to pole his Dory through the mangroves and it was a quite an

unbelievable sight. The sky was full of whirling, soaring birds and all the trees were stuffed full of every stage of Frigate bird development from this year's white fluffy chicks, through last year's immature birds with white heads, to the adult birds. And the best bit of all was that it is mating season so we were lucky enough to see the males with their red neck pouches inflated and hear the strange beak-clacking noise they make. The birds are not at all bothered by us and George was able to take us very close to the mangroves. Frigates have the greatest wing span for their size of all birds, but are not waterproof – so should they land on the sea they could become waterlogged and therefore they often harass other birds for their catch, hence their other name “man o’ war” birds. He also showed us the strange upside-down jellyfish which have brown or purple plants (zooanthellae) growing on their undersides, so they turn upside down to offer these plants maximum sunlight.

After this George dropped us back to the beach. We can't recommend this trip highly enough: see the Resources section at <http://www.rhbell.com> for George's contact details!

Rob then took some photos of the beach, Serafina and the amazing sea colours despite two couples walking from opposite ends of the 11 Mile beach to congregate just in front of his shots! Otherwise the rest of the day was taken rather gently (well, it was for Sarah, but Rob put away the dinghy, mended a hatch catches and did some work....).

### **Coco Point Bay, Barbuda**

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> Feb

On Sunday morning we thought we would still try and go round to the south coast of Barbuda where there is supposed to be wonderful snorkelling, despite the fact that the wind and the swell had gone round to the south east. This is against predictions and an unusual direction anyway. On our motor round the reefs, we listened to some yachties on the VHF and after contacting them ourselves, decided that in the end we would go into Cocoa Point bay which would be more sheltered than the south east coast, which is a pretty unforgiving anchorage if it gets difficult as it is all shallow reef.

And we are very pleased that we did: it's an even better beach than Low Bay, with finer sand and even bluer water but this time it is clearer. Rob immediately spotted two large turtles after we had worked our way well into the bay, towards the beach and the southern end for the most protection. Sarah with growing confidence, anchored us almost right on the beach which was ideal. When we went snorkelling we saw a large stingray and huge Parrot fish. And although we didn't really see much other fish life in the water, we have watched quite a lot of it jumping well out of the sea, presumably being chased by something larger! We then went for a paddle on the beach, at which stage Rob pointed out we should have brought our small waterproof camera with us, so Sarah swam back to Serafina to retrieve this and the results are at <http://www.rhbell.com>. The sea was pounding the beach and weirdly etching bays and promontories instantly – we were told by another boat that this had only just started presumably because of the change in swell direction.

There is no doubt that this is the finest beach and probably the most spectacular anchorage we have visited to date. We simply cannot recommend this island enough to other yachts cruising the eastern Caribbean looking for peace and privacy and it should be top of everyone's places to visit list out here. Sadly it can really only be attempted in reasonable conditions as manoeuvring in through the reefs in anything other than clear water would be very foolish, however you should not be put off by

the pilot guide which makes it sound near impossible. Equally it provides poor protection from heavy winds and seas.

## **Falmouth Harbour, Antigua**

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> Feb

Woke up to crashing surf on the beach and a good swell working its way in from the south east which was coming up behind the anchored boats so that we all rode forward on our anchor chains, but still stayed facing the easterly winds. We had already decided we needed to get back to Antigua and lost no time in departing! Surprisingly no one followed us and we reckon they were in for a bumpy ride....

We set off with our usual one reef in the main and a slightly reefed foresail and weaved our way out among the reefs. We soon met the Atlantic swell coming between Barbuda and Antigua, plus a somewhat confused swell from the NE. Rob had another go with the Hydrovane and it quickly became apparent that we were really carrying too much sail for Henry to cope with, as well as the hefty swell, but we were having such a great sail (9.7 knots at 60° off the wind) that we opted to abandon wind steering for the day!

As we neared Antigua the swell changed again – this was the promised northerly swell that we had heard rumours about, despite an almost south easterly wind blowing by now. Once we got into the lee of the west coast of Antigua, the swell then came from the north west and we were practically surfing down the waves, with spectacular breaking sea over the reef and Sandy Island. We were really surprised to see a west coast in the Caribbean look so untenable: we saw spume bursting about 100' into the air by the posh hotel in Five Island Harbour and waves sweeping right over usually sheltered beaches. At this point we opted to go inside of the south reef, into Goat Head Channel rather than battle round the longer route straight into the wind and unknown sea conditions, which is a decision that has to be made halfway down the west coast before you turn the corner and can see what is ahead of you. Once we turned east the swell remained northerly, but the waves were then coming from the east again!

We reached Falmouth which was even busier than we had seen it last year and wondered whether we would find an anchorage space, but in fact it is the large number of huge yachts that make it look so crowded but they were not going to be anchoring where we might fit! So we nosed our way in and luckily managed to get the anchor to bite first go, as the holding is notoriously poor here. And we seem to have picked 'Najad Nook' again: Weir Kraken, a N570 immediately behind us and Halsway Grace a few boats ahead!

We also appear to be in the area where the yacht club brings the Optimist and Pico dinghies out to learn to sail and watched one poor lad badly handle a tack, bang his head on the boom, lose concentration and then capsize. Whereupon his dinghy drifted on to the yacht anchored next to us. Enthusiastically our sailor righted the dinghy successfully bringing it up between the yacht and its anchor chain, with the hull one side of the yacht and the rig wrapped around the pulpit on the other side! Luckily he had an attentive safety rib in attendance and they sorted him out and the absent owners need never know!

After that a quiet evening while Rob attempted to get up to date with emails as we have been without internet access for over 4 days. He is less than impressed with Hot, Hot, Hot, the wifi

provider we signed up with for a month in Dominica: we have had rather too many occasions when the signal has been unavailable at all and here is it very flaky.

Night-time in Falmouth is all about competitive lights! The really big yachts have two red lights at the top of their masts presumably to ward off unsuspecting aircraft; they all have grand uplighters on their crosstrees, so obviously the more crosstrees (six is the best so far) the better and then even the motor boats can join in with underwater lights – all colours of blue, purple and red. We wonder if anyone would actually pick up our feeble anchor light amongst all this! We have been delighted to see the most beautiful yacht, Salperton back in action – this time last year she was dismasted and about to be shipped back to the UK. She is anchored behind us and looks a whole lot classier than the run-of-the-mill rich man's toy out here.

Incidentally, Rob feels you should all be aware that the blog author has changed to me, Sarah, since Pointe à Pitre, Guadeloupe and so any derogatory remarks about me are by me!

### **Back to Jolly Harbour**

Tuesday & Wednesday – 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Feb

Tuesday morning Salperton raised her anchor (yup we watch their every move) motored to the turn of the red buoys and then very gracefully sailed out under full sail – quite a sight. The owner was still on his phone throughout.

We, however, launched the dinghy and went into town. We moored the dinghy in the marina dinghy park despite the private moorings signs which have gone up this year. Rob has a theory that these have been erected to ward off the liveaboards who have notoriously tatty dinghies which get left for a whole day while their owners go to work. We are supposed to go on the possibly less secure public quay. We then found that all the rubbish disposal facilities have been removed and we had to take ours to English Harbour's dump. We have subsequently discovered that rubbish can be got rid of between 0700–0900 and 1500-1700 directly into a garbage truck behind the petrol station. We are definitely getting the feeling that smaller yachts are less welcome here.

The general opinion is that there are very much fewer charters of the superyachts occurring this season hence all the quay space is taken and double parked at that. In English Harbour, where we had easily been able to back up to the quay last year, it is now completely taken over by the overspill of superyachts who have been unable to make the grade in Falmouth! Consequently the anchoring area has been greatly reduced to allow for manoeuvring these huge boats.

We had a general mooch around and Rob visited the Signal Locker where Cap is based who is coming to have a look at our malfunctioning SSB radio. We then squeezed into Antigua Yacht Club for a very leisurely lunch. After lunch we dinghied over to the other side of the bay to visit Antigua Rigging who is dealing with the Seldon recall on our mast fittings. It seems to help if you show your face out here, and they appreciate that we care and are interested. The upshot is that it would be helpful if we got some closer photos of the tangs and surrounding fittings, so I need to go up the mast soon to take these shots.

After a quick visit to Baileys, the nearby supermarket, which was surprisingly good and with better looking vegetables and fruit than the very over-refrigerated stuff at the Epicurean in Jolly, we went back to Serafina. To discover that Salperton had returned and appeared to have dropped her anchor pretty well on top of Serafina (see photos!). Sadly, it seems that the grand gesture of sailing

out of the harbour had cost them a foresail as this had been removed and there was quite a bit of action up and down their mast. She does seem to be an unlucky boat.

Rob was delighted to watch some very competitive Laser racing going on around us all evening. He reckoned that there were some boats that were privately owned and some from the yacht club judging by how careful, or not, their sailors were! Lots of capsizing and chat made it an entertaining spectacle. Even Salperton's owner relinquished his phone for a short time to watch!

On Wednesday morning we set off back to Jolly Harbour under just a foresail and motor. We had decided we would go into the marina to allow Rob to catch up with work before the Curtii arrive on Saturday. Once we had berthed with the accompanying rigmarole and had helped Halsway Grace into their berth, Rob winched me up the mast to take the photos and then up the backstay to have a look at our SSB aerial connection which looked decidedly dicey. We think we should re-do the whole thing by cutting off the grotty bit and moving the cable up from the bottom to re-connect, hopefully this will all help in the black magic art of SSB Radio.

We then took off the bimini cover, unfortunately whacking Rob on the head in the process with one of the supports which we always forget drops down suddenly when released, so that I could give the stainless steel a clean. I then also cleaned our rather grubby cockpit. Anyone who knows me will be astonished to hear that I rarely wash down Serafina out here as the rain is more than sufficient most of the time, but the cockpit is nicely protected by said bimini and so it doesn't get the benefit of a good downpour, and since we are rarely in a marina or quay situation, doesn't get a good hosing either.

After that Robin and Sue came for a drink to discuss their trip to Barbuda and our visit to Nonesuch Bay and the changes that have occurred there – buoys have been put in now apparently.

The next few days involve shifting stuff around in the boat to shoehorn in our guests (Tim, Pips and Laura Curtis) and getting the boat stocked up with food and drink. We are off to the veg market in St Johns by bus tomorrow morning in the hope of getting better fresh produce than that in this supermarket which has a tendency to go off almost instantly. It is remarkable how different the food situation is between islands: the French islands are great in all aspects and in Dominica they grow all their own fruit and veg, and are astonished that one bread fruit could cost EC\$12 (£3) here when they are free there. I met a girl here yesterday from Dominica and she was stunned on moving to Antigua to work, to discover that you actually have to buy fruit here.

### **A Jolly good tidy up!**

Thursday & Friday – 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Feb

Rob and I caught the bus fairly early and arrived at the market in St John's (the capital of Antigua) which was right opposite the bus stop at 0900hrs. Although only about a third of the stalls were occupied we were engaged in chat by a very able saleswoman who helped us choose fruit and veg that should ripen at all the right times next week. We then visited another stall where Rob had a lot of banter with a wonderful guy who was very interested in our lifestyle. We had finished our shopping within half an hour and had had a thoroughly enjoyable experience – sadly the same cannot be said for the large supermarket at the marina. In fact Sue from Halsway Grace has made it her absolute goal to get suitable responses out of all the staff!

We then discovered that when we had been told to catch the no 20 bus, that is what we should do. Not be inveigled on to a no 22 with a promise that he is going to the marina, when in fact he has no intention of going there....

The rest of the day, Thursday, and also Friday has been spent re-organising the boat so that we can shoe-horn in our guests. It is at this point we always get over-ambitious: "well, we'll remember we've put this here".... Technically Rob is supposed to record any changes in location on our bible of a storage list, but since he doesn't suffer from my OCD tendencies, this is why we are still searching for a rather clever LED anchor light we purchased winter 2009 and have buried somewhere! Admittedly having guests is great for forcing us to have a very good tidy up of all those things that float from lodging to lodging without any purpose.

Rob managed to get our gas bottle filled. If you wander around the marina, just about everyone will stop you and tell you that Danny will fill it for you. There is just the small matter of tracking down the mythical Danny who is actually the travel-hoist driver and appears to do the gas as his side-line. But it was all achieved and at the times promised.

We like the marina, but get the impression that the actual boatyard promises much but doesn't deliver so we would not contemplate laying-up here. We have heard a lot anecdotal tales about boats being broken into, but have now also met several actual unfortunates. Nor does it seem that promised work gets done until you arrive and start jumping up and down.

Had our very final drink (probably) with Halsway Grace as they are off to Barbuda and then heading south to lay up for the summer in Grenada. At the last minute we decided to try and get a table at the Italian restaurant here, but despite there being empty tables they apparently would not be able to service them. So we went to what we felt was the less salubrious Crow's Nest and had a very nice meal, with great staff.

This afternoon I cooked up a chilli for next week and Rob went off to ask the Crow's Nest if they would be prepared to freeze it down for me. When it was ready he took it round to them where the original staff member was absent but one of the directors very happily made the arrangements. Now you can't fault that service with a smile and worryingly they were French! Pips, Tim and, my god-daughter, Laura Curtis arrive tomorrow for a week. They haven't been sailing before apart from a brief day on our old boat in the Solent 6 years ago so it will be interesting to see what they make of it. We are hoping to persuade a guest blogger to take over for a few days, so watch this space!

### **Falmouth, Antigua - A guest's perspective!**

Sat & Sun – 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> Feb

Arrived at Jolly Harbour marina to find Rob and Sarah waiting for us as if they knew the local bus timetable. Fact is that having left Gatwick at minus 9 degrees to arrive in Antigua at plus 28 degrees meant that we had undergone rather more than a local bus journey.

Our hosts made us feel very much at home with education and rules regarding the "heads" – toilets to fellow landlubbers – early and important information. Travelling clothes were quickly swapped for swimming costumes and we walked for our first experience of the Caribbean Sea, palm-fringed beaches, white sands, warm water and enough exercise for the first sundowner. How quickly the dourness of an English winter can be forgotten. Bell catering then took over.

The quartermaster had been busy provisioning Serafina. Not a cupboard was unfilled and the wine store was well stocked with Tarapaca from Rob's private store in Guadeloupe. Curtii were ordered to relax – easily done with a rum punch or Carib beer in hand. Rob had described sailing as upmarket

camping. Well, my experience of camping suggests cold bodies, wind-whipped tents and queues for lukewarm showers. We luxuriated in our teak lined cabin, steady at our mooring having been wined and dined in style. Sleep was much needed after our extended day. The forepeak was wonderfully comfortable and Laura seemed to sleep well on the 'sofa-bed' in the living area.

The next day brought the first sailing education as Tim attempted his first Knot – a bowline – he's still trying. Nevertheless, we managed to cast off and head off for Carlisle Bay only using the mainsail to keep Serafina from rolling too much as we motored into the wind. An unusual southerly wind made for a lively swell whilst we were at anchor. Swimming was enjoyed with Sarah winning the round the boat race only to find that she was the only competitor. Laura and Tim lingered in the water, the first indication that the swell was starting to find out those without sea-legs. Sure enough Captain Sarah decided that lunch would be best served in the shelter of Falmouth Harbour. After an hour flat on their backs Laura and Tim came round on the quieter waters of the harbour.

Lunch was enjoyed as we ogled the super-yachts and toured Nelson's dockyard before returning for sun-downers – wonderful rum punch featuring coconut milk, pineapple, nutmeg and rum as far as I could tell. Rob reckons they never taste as good when you try to recreate them back at home and I reckon he is probably right. Drinks gave way to 5\* catering again much enjoyed by sturdy tum Pips, so known because her stomach has so far stayed in

### **Nonsuch Bay, Antigua**

Monday 13<sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February

Up bright and early for some proper sailing today. Stugeron had been taken to stiffen the sealegs and settle the stomachs. The early start was designed to avoid any strengthening winds, but in truth the winds were being kind to the sailing novices. We were tacking upwind, our destination Nonsuch Bay. Had I been on a motorway I would have recognised some of the 'driving' as undertaking leading almost certainly to road rage. On the ocean, Gallic shrugs took the place of honking horns and much discussion took place amongst the learned as to the protocols which seemed to depend on who had the wind on their starboard bow.

Nonsuch Bay is a delight (we're still here!). Aquamarine alternates with a deeper blue according to the white sand or coral reef which lies below. To the cheers of watchers on the neighbouring anchorage, Sarah picked up the buoy's mooring rope on the first downwind approach and we settled down to admire the yachts, the water, the 'bounty hunters' beach and the continuing miracle which is the Serafina catering department.

Much of the activity here centres around small boats, that is ribs rather than Najad 460s when compared with the anchored super yachts. Apprentice kite surfers learned kite flying from a dinghy before graduating to boards, others tried their hand at sailing a gunter rig wooden dinghy before being rescued by a more conventionally powered dinghy and we, well we packed our snorkels and set off to investigate the reefs that make this Bay a sanctuary from the Atlantic swell.

When Rob's valiant efforts in logistics eventually gave way to Sarah, this put Tim in charge of knots. Specifically, as they set off for the reef in the rib, Tim was charged with attaching the anchor which would secure the rib whilst all snorkelled. From the secured safety of Serafina's mooring, Rob watched on with shaking camera as Tim put knot theory into practice. It was some way after the journey started that the anchor was secured with a text book bowline. Nevertheless, Pips requested a back up be put in place. Perhaps this was because she was to stay in the boat. Her snorkelling was to be done in a very individual style, from the safety of the rib with masked face lowered into the

water. When the snorkellers returned, complete with conch temporarily raised from the ocean bed by Sarah 'Cousteau' Bell, Pips was persuaded into the water and the fun began. Entering a dinghy from Serafina is one thing, from a depth of water something very different. We had not managed to land any fish on our journey to Nonsuch Bay, but we now know the technique for hauling them on board. The snorkelling itself was wonderful, following the edges of the reef and along passages towards the open sea taking in all the different fish amidst the alien underwater landscape.

Back on deck, the commissariat kicked in again as the hostess, modelling her 6<sup>th</sup> bikini of the trip, prepared what some would call a sausage casserole but, featuring prunes, apricot, aubergine, lentils and enough garlic to make the neighbouring French feel at home, might be better termed something fancier - Nonsuch jambalaya sans pareil?

The two day stay in Nonsuch featured a day night game of Mexican train. A little like when playing rugby in New Zealand, you are not supposed to beat the hosts in this game, specifically the hostess. Sarah was duly in the lead as play resumed on the second day/evening. However, two rum punches seemed to have blunted the sharpness of the mind as Sarah clocked up an impressive first century leaving the youngest, and rum-punch-free member of the crew victorious. And so to bed with a return to Falmouth planned for the morrow.

### **Deep Bay, Antigua**

Wed & Thurs – 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> Feb

Turtle watching has consumed us for the past two days. Of the big Caribbean 5, dolphin and whale have been invisible, pelicans and frigates stand-offish, whilst the turtle has teased on a regular basis. Like shooting stars, you can never see one when someone else has spotted it. So Tim 'Bailey' was proving highly unsuccessful resorting to scenic views which at least had the advantage of not disappearing as soon as a lens was pointed at them.

Rob enabled a snorkel tour of Green Island's fringes for Laura and Tim whilst Pips kept Rob company and collectively tried to spook a rare bird of prey from its tree-top perch. Disdainfully, it refused to move, so the rib was once more stored and we took our leave of Nonsuch heading for Falmouth, Shirley Heights and a meal on dry land to give the commissariat a well-earned rest.

The journey was uneventful, particularly for those of us laid flat on our back, knocked out by the Stugeron. Falmouth brought more yacht-ogling-envy and a trip to the shop, or was that shops. Souvenir shopping was successfully completed once Sarah had disentangled us from cruise ship customers and established us as almost as good as residents. Pips chose an unusual bartering method – honesty. She really did think the price was in East Caribbean dollars not US and was rewarded with a substantial discount.

A twenty minute nose-powdering turnaround led to a return visit to quayside and a taxi up to Shirley Heights courtesy of Eric's ("as in Clapton") taxi. What a view! We jostled for position with professional photographers, even trying the old 'kick over the bottle of beer' trick to establish a place on the front row. The self-timer picture was duly taken, despite having professional help on hand, and we settled down to wait for the green flash – and we were rewarded. Everyone said what a fantastic flash it had been. Even the best editing techniques of digital photography have failed to reveal the evidence thus far. And one more thought from a photographic point of view – isn't it embarrassing when you have left the camera settings on self-timer and you take another photo amongst a group only to hear the tell-tale beep, beep, beep of the timer as you hold the camera in place like an idiot for 10 seconds.

We survived and descended to supper in a lovely pizzeria. The salads were impressive, the service smiley as we celebrated another day in paradise. We returned to Serafina for an early night, but we hadn't anticipated the Mexican Train! Clearly bruised by her mauling in the first of the series (was it a series when we started?) Sarah insisted on another game. When stumps were drawn two rounds had been completed and Sarah had failed to register any points which, in Mexican Train, meant that she was winning, handsomely.

The next morning brought a visit from Arougoo, electrical engineer, as Rob sought to rectify problems with the radio and the Invertor. I speak as if I know of such things: I don't. Rob does though and electrician is one of his many guises. Others include helmsman, boat rigger, drinks waiter, snorkel fixer, water taxi, local historian, wildlife photographer, winchman, and general helpmate to incompetents. So while Arougoo whistled to the radio in various frequencies, watching for Tommy the Turtle continued on deck with similar results to last time.

The electrical problems had given us a glimpse of the other side of paradise: constant maintenance and repairs. Major surgery was put off for another day and we set off for Deep Bay. The winds picked up sufficiently for all the Curtii to take a turn at the helm with varying degrees of concern for Rob. The relative lack of wildlife – turtles excepted – was in part offset by a rock doing a very convincing impression of a tree frog. But what we were really watching was the sea and its amazing colours. Let's hope Bailey captured that one to impress the folks at home.

Deep Bay proved an inspired location for the final night. Palm fringed beaches, wrecks, pelicans and ... more turtles. We snorkelled and swam, trod the virgin sand (well almost), watched the cruise liners loom large in front of us as they departed St John's and the sun set beautifully behind us with, yes, another green flash (missed that one as well!). The last rum punches were downed, the last supper consumed and all that was left was ... Mexican train. But that will be Rob and Sarah's tale to tell when we are, sadly, far from this beautiful island, these lovely, generous people and their gorgeous yacht.

### **Falmouth Harbour, Antigua - (Again)**

Friday & Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> Feb

After a fairly reasonable night at anchor in Deep Bay – we had managed to creep all the way in and were sat right by the beach to avoid the swell making its way around the north of Antigua – and a leisurely breakfast, we set off back to Jolly Harbour Marina. Yet more motoring and this time so little wind that we didn't even bother with any sails.

Very sadly it was then that awful stage of packing and fiddling around until it was time for our wonderful guests, Tim, Pips and Laura to set off to the airport. In fact we spotted their plane flying in on time which was reassuring! We hope they enjoyed their trip (despite the lack of dolphins, whales and fish caught....) as much as we enjoyed their company.

After the Curtii departure, we got busy with cleaning, laundry and taking off the foresails ready for the riggers on Monday to replace the faulty tangs. Following a night of loud and pretty dreadful steel band music (and the Lady Gaga disco in between) – the band obviously had one member who felt he was good at improvising off the tune, but he patently wasn't – we got up early to complete our jobs list before kicking out time of 1200hrs from the marina.

Rob winched me up the backstay to remove, clean and reattach the SSB aerial. This took about an hour and a half aloft by which time one ankle had nicely inflated and I was my usual grumpy, ex-

rigger self! We don't know if this has had the desired effect on the SSB until we test it tomorrow. After a quick deck wash and tidy up below we managed to be ready to leave before the deadline and potted out into an anticipated gentle breeze.

We had decided to go round to Falmouth for the rigging job today as it was supposed to be quiet weather-wise, as Rob was worried about damaging the Furlexs in the swell whilst we don't have any sails on them. In the event we got 24 knots from the south east, so put up the main and both runners on, to steady us as we motor-sailed into the wind.

As we neared Falmouth it became apparent that lots of the yachts racing in the RORC Caribbean 600 race which sets off on Monday, were out practising and there were some amazing sights. Once we turned into the harbour it was obvious that there has been quite a changeover in the yachts on the marina pontoons: the very large charter yachts seem to have left allowing the yachts that are taking part in the racing to have their places. And quite a few of the huge motor vessels have also left or are having to anchor out in the bay.

We were just one of an afternoon flow of yachts trying to find a place to anchor in a much more crowded bay, but having been here quite a few times recently we knew where we could find enough depth so zipped past the dithering catamarans and several yachts failing to pick up buoys and managed to anchor first time again (Falmouth is known for poor holding). We also met the turtle again that the Curti had spotted in this unlikely environment.

The rest of the day was spent watching the world go by – and there was a lot to see!

### **Repairs and another remarkable coincidence.**

Sunday, Monday and Tuesday 19th, 20th & 21<sup>st</sup> Feb

Slow start to Sunday and did a few jobs: Rob fitted our fourth starboard Lopo navigation light since 2007 (who knows why this keeps deciding to give up the ghost) and I polished the transom and the red lines around the cockpit – these are definitely getting UV damage despite coats of polish. Not much displacement activity going on with the racing fleet either. We decided that it was probably going to be pretty busy in town so didn't bother to launch the dinghy. Early night ready for a quick getaway to the marina for the rigging work in the morning.

Set the alarm so that we are all ready to go at 0800 when we were to ring Antigua Rigging to tell us where to put Serafina for the work. They didn't respond to the VHF but eventually answer the mobile: they won't be able to start till 1300 and can we organise a berth in the Cat Club? Rob pointed out that they had offered to do this originally and perhaps they could do so.

So a bit of an anti-climax and so instead we settle down to watch the entire racing fleet (RORC Caribbean 600 Race) fly out of the harbour. The weather is not great – cloudy and some heavy downfalls, not exactly what the photographers would wish for. At 1100 the staggered race starts begin and the wind drops away completely! Unfortunately we couldn't see the start-line from where we were anchored, but we could just make out Shirley Heights, where the crowds had gathered to watch, through the pouring rain! Some incredible yachts taking part ranging from 200ft super yachts, to 40ft open race boats and just about everything in between. Some of the world's finest racing yachts are part of the 40 boat fleet undertaking this 600 mile annual race.

Finally get to the pontoon and the riggers turn up at 1430. We are lucky enough to have their start-up, Sean working on replacing the tangs. It takes him almost all afternoon just to get the old forestay tang out but joy of joys, we will not have to have the mast lifted out. Meanwhile Arougou from Marionics comes to check out the SSB again. Weirdly the system now seems to be producing full transmit and receiving power, but he does find that the backstay aerial cable is knackered.

So unfortunately we are going to have to stay another day in this exorbitant marina (and it doesn't even have showers – presumably it's another case of the type of clientele, ie huge yachts, has no need for facilities ashore!) for the rigging work to be completed. Arougoo is very hopeful that our new Mastervolt combi-invertor/charger will arrive tomorrow morning and he can fit that. We decide to treat ourselves to a meal at the Italian restaurant on site as the boat is upside down ready for work to continue tomorrow. Very nice supper but with that added trick of tax not included in the prices let alone service.....!

Lots of activity in the morning: Sean completes the job and does a rigging check. Arougoo fits the Mastervolt charger and then returns after lunch to replace the aerial much to my great relief as this means I don't get to spend another couple of hours suspended from the backstay. Presumably he is more adept (it would be hard to be otherwise) at using the tools than me, and finishes far quicker than I would manage. We have another test of the SSB radio and Arougoo deems it fixed – Rob and I are yet to be convinced.

I decided to walk into Falmouth in the morning to get some essentials. It is far further than I anticipated, three-quarters of an hour in blazing sun. I arrive to discover that there is a traffic jam! The road off to Antigua Yacht Club has been dug up and the diversion is through the gas station forecourt. Judging by the dozens of grand taxis (10 seater air-conditioned jobs) there are quite a few cruise ships in, but this doesn't prevent cars stopping to collect their lunch snacks made beside the road here, at which point all traffic stops whilst each meal is individually concocted! I caught the bus back and finished the shopping at Baileys. When I am walking down the narrow lane to the marina, a car stops to ask the way. And it is Ben Charny! Ben is the son of friends of ours at home who is out here working on a yacht called Mariette and we had been told to look out for him somewhere in the Caribbean. It really is a small world and it seems that everyone converges on Antigua; last year we bumped into friends from home on a four day holiday. His yacht is here for five weeks on Nelson's Dockyard so Ben rashly asked us to come and see her.

We have suddenly worked out that to get our money's worth out of a stay in Simpson Bay Lagoon on St Maarten, we should really arrive on Thursday – my friend Jo joins us the following Wednesday and the least amount of time you can pay for in the Lagoon is one week. We have discovered that our draft is too deep to enter more cheaply on the French side of the Lagoon via Marigot, although it isn't a huge difference if you end up staying for a week. It is about 90 miles to Simpson Bay from Jolly Harbour where we will check out with customs from Antigua, so we will sail overnight tomorrow to St Maarten. And so to take advantage of Ben's kind offer, once Arougoo had left we rushed off to catch a bus to English Harbour. As we were waiting at the bus stop we were very kindly offered a lift from a Mum and her three young children – they will be leaving Antigua to live in Kingsbridge after 25 years living out here so that their children can go to senior school in the UK. Heaven knows how they will cope with the change from here and the changes in lifestyle in the UK.

We found Mariette with the crew still washing down as the local lads left from preparing a varnishing job. At this point my camera chose to run out of battery so we only have two very poor photos which do not do justice to this utterly beautiful yacht. But if you are interested, google her. Ben showed us round the whole boat. She was built in 1915 and the present owner gets to use her only eight weeks a year, meanwhile she is sailed between the Med, the UK and the Caribbean with lay-ups for major maintenance. This really is a labour of love; she is immaculate. Rob felt positively giddy when Ben described how the sails are set by crew going aloft, and everything is on such a huge scale, with great spars to be lifted into the rigging. We spotted a newish looking winch in stainless rather than the traditional bronze in keeping with the rest of the boat and Ben explained that when they renewed it, the price for the same thing in bronze was €44,000! It gives you an idea

of the up-keep of a yacht such as this. Down below it is very much a gentleman's yacht with a stove for the colder climates, a bath, really elegant saloon panelled in beautiful walnut (with all the chairs secured to the deck with bronze hooks) and as at present there are no guests on board, everything, including all the carpets are covered in canvas to keep her smart. It is just a completely different world to our sailing!

It was lovely to hear Ben enthuse about the boat. He has been working on her as one of usually about eight crew members, for 3 ½ years. He told us that they, unlike many of the more modern yachts we have come across, will try and sail her everywhere they go, particularly as she is far faster under sail than under engine.

We finally dragged ourselves away and caught the bus back to the marina in the dark. We then put our foresails back up, sorted out all the emptied lockers from the work earlier in the day and got ready to go sailing tomorrow. Probably not the perfect preparation for an overnight sail the next night, but it was such a special opportunity to see a legendary yacht!

### **Simpson Bay, Sint Maarten - and a close encounter?**

Wednesday & Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb

Fired off a few emails to various marinas in fairly vain hope of a berth when we get to Simpsons Bay on Sint Maarten (it's the Heineken Regatta next week so we are pushing our luck) whilst we could get wifi, and then set off to Jolly Harbour to check out of Antigua.

After Rob had cleared customs and immigration we anchored in Mosquito Bay for a short rest after getting the boat ready to sail overnight to Sint Maarten (correct spelling). We left Antigua at 1700 hrs just at the same time as a stream of cruise ships left St Johns on a parallel course, and all going incredibly slowly (for ships!). We understand that these ships all tend to leave at this sort of time of day, so that their clients can have dinner at sea, first sitting at 1800. And judging by the amount of slow moving cruises ships milling around last night, they then waste time until it is time to dock the following morning in another destination which out here is not too far away!

We had already discovered online that we were likely to have the frontrunners of the Caribbean 600 sailing race crossing our path followed by encounters with the smaller boats on a different part of the race route later on! Around lunchtime from the anchorage we saw Hetarios, which is an enormous new ketch based on a pilot cutter but with a length of 215' and the largest composite rig in the world at the moment, plus a vast stainless retractable dagger board probably not quite the quaint thing you might imagine. She was just arriving at Antigua to cross the finishing line, sadly she had missed the record though.

I took the first watch at 1900 and Rob attempted to sleep but it wasn't a comfortable proposition as the wind on the stern quarter kept dropping away leaving us with a banging boom when the swell on the beam proved more powerful. This would be swiftly followed by a squall going through, so Serafina was alternately sailing at anything from less than 3 to 8½ knots in minutes. My first encounter with the racing fleet would be with P2 and it was going to be a close run thing as she crossed in front of us. Once I could identify her lights along with two other yachts in the vicinity a huge squall chose this moment to go through, no visibility, torrential rain and 39 knots of wind and obviously all of us accelerated into the potential collision zone – just perfect. But we survived! I eventually decided to pull the mainsail in really tight to try and make Rob's off-watch slightly more acceptable and was just popping my head around the sprayhood for a look around, only to take the full force of an enormous wave that drove down the boat (ie at 120° to the run of all the other waves) and through and across the cockpit. Rob was amazed to hear the power of this wave from

inside the boat. We are left wondering whether I had disturbed a whale and this was a wave generated from a tail flick. This would be fairly typical of this night: I finally get the first, longed for whale interaction and don't even realise it!

After that a further two of the racing yachts passed us astern: Adela and Nefertiti just as the former overtook the latter. Rob continued to hear Adela on his watch (skipped by the owner of Antigua Rigging in fact!) calling Nefertiti on the VHF with no response, which was unusual. Nefertiti is another of the boats we have found out here with their AIS icon (which appears on our chart plotter) set up at 90° to the direction in which they are travelling. We are always surprised that even quite large ships and yachts can make this pretty fundamental mistake – doesn't anyone tell them? (And, yes, I suppose we could do so, and no we didn't!). After all these excitements the rest of the night went quite smoothly, although eventually we opted to motor the last few hours as the boom movement became intolerable again in the swell. Rob put his fishing rod out at dawn to have a fast hit – and the fish raced off with his lure and line, and after replacing the lure he just reeled in hook-loads of weed. It just wasn't our night.

We arrived in time for the 0930 hrs bridge opening into Simpson's Bay lagoon. This is a huge natural lagoon on Sint Maarten. It actually has two entrances into it controlled by lifting bridges, the one we were using is on the Dutch side of this island and another on the North side of the island, from the French side of the island (where the island is called St Martin!). If you enter from the French side the customs and immigration are very straight forward as they are throughout the French islands in the Caribbean, and their charges are a bit cheaper; but sadly Serafina is too deep to get through that side. As there is a lot of traffic through the bridge and to minimise the disruption to traffic travelling out to the busy international airport, the bridge staggers its inbound and outbound traffic, and opens each way only three times a day.

Once we were in, we dithered around a bit as we hadn't really considered where we might go, but luckily had already taken Scott-Free's lat and long from when they had anchored here last year, so set off in that direction. We were surprised to find the 12 mile lagoon surrounded by quite steep hills and the water (considering just how many yachts are anchored and berthed in the dozen or so small marinas here) is surprisingly clear. We managed to squeeze into the anchorage alongside the channel, south of a hill called Witches Tit (no idea....!).

We then had to launch the dinghy to do customs and immigration which is back out beyond the bridge. Having done immigration we turned to the toll booth in the same office to discover they had knocked off for lunch at 1150 and probably wouldn't be back until after 1400....great. We then visited one of IGY's marinas who said would be able to squeeze us into a narrow berth for the week at US\$470! So we then set off to visit Lagoon Marina who we had also been in contact with and had helpfully emailed back keeping us updated with what they might be able to do for us. Most of the lagoon's marinas cater for the huge motor yachts and small fry like ourselves are pretty lucky to be accommodated, but with our friend, Jo, flying in next week we feel having to get into a dinghy in the dark after a long flight is a bit much to ask – and as ever, we have work we need to source here, where the engineers will need to see the boat.

After a very nice lunch at Lagoones, the bar/restaurant attached to the little marina, and having visited several metal fabrication yards to find out whether (and the astronomical price, especially in comparison with the stainless steel work we had made in Turkey at such reasonable cost) they can make us a cage to house the US cooking gas cylinders we are going to need to purchase for our trip north; we were successful in securing berths (yes two, complicated but we will need to move part way through the week) starting from tomorrow which is ideal.

After that we were definitely flagging so went back to the boat where I had a sleep and Rob did some work, whilst trying to tiptoe out into the cockpit to get the perfect shot of an aeroplane taking off from the runway just astern of the boat. Not quite sure why he was worrying about his footsteps in the light of competing aircraft noise! He didn't manage the photo but I imagine there will be plenty of opportunity tomorrow judging by how many planes arrive here.

### **Lagoon Marina, Simpson Bay**

Friday & Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> Feb.

On Friday morning we took the opportunity to visit the French side of the lagoon before we moved in the opposite direction to Lagoon Marina where we were sort of booked in. Our first impression of the French side of the island was it was distinctly tatty in comparison with the Dutch side. We found a dinghy dock to moor to, alongside three burly policemen and a furious Frenchman sizing up to what appeared to be one of the shop owners. This went on for some time while we scabbled around their feet securing the dinghy! Rob was appalled to find that there appeared to be wall to wall bikini shops, all of which had to be visited, but since the lowest price seemed to be €70 he was fairly safe.

We found the tourist office complete with an art display and armed with their map, set off to the US Supermarket described in gushing terms in Doyles pilot book. As ever we weren't in quite the right area and they are digging up all the roads, so it was a somewhat precarious walk to a supermarket that didn't quite live up to the hype. So Rob, after an interminable wait bought us some nice French cheese and pate and we walked all the way back for a coffee by the dingy dock. Here we found a lovely waitress who talked us into a delicious warm chocolate cake and ice cream (between us I hasten to add) – one to add to the book, Chris! After that we found the more salubrious dress shop area and a lovely art gallery – the Giclee prices started at €500.... And Rob was feeling in need of a good sit down.

Rob is going to insert his latest French rant here!: I have been meaning to say a few words for quite a while on this subject, but as Sarah has been doing such a wonderful job writing this log, I have not had an opportunity. We have stayed in several French Islands again this year and it never ceases to amaze me how a nation that prides itself on being chic, cool and stylish can have so little understanding of how basic sanitary plumbing works! In Guadeloupe the sewers ran straight into the marina in Point a Pitre , making a very expensive location close to unbearable, and we were only walking past. Toilets everywhere on these islands seem to be damaged, missing or simply ignored by cleaners – even the high class supermarkets in Martinique had rest rooms that fell a long way short of any standards of health or hygiene. Is it really so hard to put in plumbing that can cope with normal waste?

On our return to Serafina we rang up the marina (they don't seem to use a VHF channel) to confirm that the previous incumbent of the berth had left, but there was some confusion so we were asked to ring back later. Meanwhile I got the hoped for, all important photo of a Jumbo jet taking off... In the event, it transpired that the boats had all done a shuffle allowing us to go straight to the second berth allocated and stay there all week. So we lifted the dinghy as it sounded that it might be a rather close manoeuvre and we didn't need a painter in the water as an added distraction. And how right we were. The lagoon gets incredibly shallow the further south you go, with a maze of red and green buoys marking the hazards – but we had already been informed that at least two reds had moved completely out of position! Thank goodness for the forward looking sonar, as it was very difficult to discern any channels. Finally Rob successfully got us to the marina where weirdly there was a red buoy positioned inside of the hammerhead pontoon. He tried approaching it from either

side as I telephoned the office administrator who may not be a boater as she didn't seem to be able to answer the question of "look out the window, we are aground – which way shall we try now?" Luckily a man stuck his head out of his engine room and informed us that we had to "go right the way into the shallows and then swing back out along the bows of the boats already moored, stick tightly to the very edge of the boats on the hammerhead and spin very snugly around the end into our berth just inside of the hammerhead; and oh by the way it is really shallow there, I expect you will go aground"!!

Poor Rob looked fairly horrified, not helped by the fact that we had a gusty 18 knots plus across the boat but he did a totally textbook approach and squeezed backwards into the slot, with lots of enthusiastic helpers from the shore. Big sigh of relief.

We then discovered we were moored alongside a 30 year old Amel newly purchased by Nezh, a Turk who was on the same EMYR rally as us in 2010! He regaled us with stories about the price of boat work out here – not really what we wanted to hear, but we set off to look at the two big competing chandleries and assess where we might get the better discounts, as well as the duty free prices. By this time it was quite late so we came back and had supper on board.

We attempted to take part in the OCC net on the SSB radio, but still had no luck; so Rob asked the St Maarten boaters' net for a recommendation for another radio engineer. We have now contacted Owen on 'Magic' who will come and have a look in a week's time as his wife is due out for a week any minute!

We didn't launch the dinghy as we felt a healthy walk would do us good, so we set off to see the other suppliers, supermarkets and shops we had earmarked from Doyles. We discovered that all roads on Sint Maarten/St Martin are being re-built/in a state of disrepair; there are no pavements but lots of mad drivers and nobody else seems to walk, but sit in cars often in traffic jams. And there are lots of mangy dogs around – cats or dogs have been in short supply up till now. We will definitely be launching the dinghy however awkward it proves to be (we are close up against the dock and the next door boat) as it is the only way to travel around the lagoon – the roads involve quite big detours around the water.

Our copy of Doyles is dated 2009 and we are finding that things move on out here very quickly, so many of the people we want to see have moved/gone out of business and in one sad case, died. So we end up doing extra yardage finding all this out. Successes include two great supermarkets, finding the cinema which will be a first for six months, an unbelievable patisserie (a good enough reason alone to launch the dinghy for easy access) and we collected our new Wirie (WiFi aerial system) from Hyacinth at the Business Centre. We had the Wirie sent to Hyacinth as a holding address and she has been exemplary in her handling of it all, and is such a nice person – we can't recommend her enough. She also laminated two sheets detailing disposal of oil waste and garbage that we have to display – these are some of the myriad of requirements by the US Coastguard for our entry into the US. We also visited Harvin who may be able to do our gas cage at a far better price than quoted by anyone else. But on the way back, we were passing a bar when Rob spotted a sign saying that they would be showing the Wales v England Rugby live and since it was only 2 minutes past kick-off..... well we could hardly walk past and ignore it. Found ourselves in a big bar with 7 screens of varying sizes and just one other customer. His crisp new Welsh jersey was a bit of clue as to how noisy this was going to get. Sadly his lot sneaked it and Rob has been left to wonder how far you have to travel to get to watch a game without a Welshman showing up when they win. And how come you can never find one when they lose?

But we are still searching for a canvas maker for quite a few little jobs we need doing, a well-priced hairdresser (we are in super-yacht land after all!) and someone to take a look at our vacuum packer which has given up the ghost.

We did a proper price comparison at the chandleries, again both of them offered lots of help, and arrived back for lunch at 1500. Rob unpacked his lovely deep red Wirie and started looking at doing the update which we have just been notified is required (oh the Americans are a wonderful lot when it comes to customer service), and how he will secure it. We had also expected Harvin to arrive to look at the welding job but the heavens opened at quite the wrong time!

We managed to contact our youngest son Ewan via Skype and had a long chat with him and he was also able to confirm that Tom had arrived safely in Perth, WA.

### **Pottering in Simpson Bay lagoon.**

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday – 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and yes the 29<sup>th</sup> Feb.

Time slips by fairly quickly when you are not on the move and although we have been pretty busy, it is frightening how many days have passed since we last posted a blog entry.

Sunday was spent taking stock of things and getting a few jobs done here and there. The new WirieAP wifi aerial arrangement was easy enough to install and has shown itself so far to be a wonderful bit of kit, but I suppose sitting here close to the source of so many wifi signals is no real test of its abilities.

On Monday we set about tackling the two big chandlery stores (Budget Marine and Island Water World) armed with a comprehensive list of requirements and ideas. St Maarten is a tax free island and so this presents the best shopping opportunity of the season so far. In addition, by presenting your ships papers and other documents you can open an account at both stores and immediately start picking up some very substantial discounts. We had various projects in mind as we set about things and soon found that whilst buying goods is very easy and cheap here, getting work done is very hard and very expensive. Fortunately for a change, things have all gone our way and we found that we have overcome one big problem concerning the storage of American sized propane gas bottles and saved ourselves some \$1000 along the way!

On Tuesday we took the dinghy up the lagoon to one of the bigger marinas and used their dinghy dock to get access to a huge Super Marche. This did still involve a long walk in the hot sun but it was all worthwhile and we staggered back to the dinghy later laden down with food shopping.

On Wednesday we dinghied over to Sarah's perfect patisserie 'La Sucriere' where we had an indulgent pastry and coffee each. It also proved handy as they were then happy for us to leave our dinghy on their dock whilst we strolled over the road to another of the supermarkets to pick up some more stores. In the afternoon we completed our chandlery shopping pretty much and paid another visit to the one half decent remaining sail maker (one died and one has 'gone sailing') to add a canvas cover for our new gas bottles to the list of canvas repair jobs they are quoting to do for us. Nominally this half of the island is Dutch, but there appears to be little Dutch spoken. Most of the marine businesses seem to be run or staffed by Brits or Americans with other nationalities thrown in. The daily cruiser's radio net on the VHF is run by an amiable South African and it probably ranks amongst the best we have listened to in terms of helpful advice.

The marina we are in is a tiny but very jolly cosmopolitan affair. It comprises of just one concrete pier with a 'T' head. Some boats are moored stern to the pier on buoys and a few lie alongside. We are alongside the inside of the T which gives us good access and protection although we are downwind of Nezh who is busy restoring his newly acquired 30 year old yacht mostly using a large drill and a hammer it seems. But they are part of a lively Turkish community who all descend onto his boat in the late afternoon to offer help, advice and party. One of them brings 'Misha' his wonderful dog. Misha responds a number of languages including Greek (he was found in Greece as a pack dog originally) Turkish of course and then English. He does a passable impression of a guard dog up to the point when he wags his tail and licks you. He is an enthusiastic barker, but this matter little because he goes home around 9.00pm. We also have several Brazilian boats, a number of charter boats based here that come and go and recently a bloody great gin palace that is now parked on the outside of the T head blocking our view of all the comings and goings in the lagoon! There were a couple of American yachts here at first, but they have gone out into the anchorage now.

Jo, who is an old friend of Sarah's, is flying out to join us for a week and due to arrive this evening. The plan is to head off in the morning and sail round to the north of the island and anchor there for a night before heading north to Anguilla. The catch with this is that it means checking out of the Dutch Antilles and then checking into the French Antilles, before checking out again the following day to head for Anguilla and all this with a new crew as well who has to be added to the boat crew. Have to get all this right or else poor Jo will end up trapped somewhere! (Yes, this might concern her husband and children rather more than her perhaps.)

We have not yet made it to the cinema and probably will not manage that now(although extensive research on the internet panned all the films they were showing at the moment!), but it was at least an option. With such a good internet connection Skype phone calls are the order of the day and I even had to suffer Sarah making us listen to a podcast of the Chris Evans morning show on Radio 2 yesterday!

### **Marigot Bay, St Martin**

Wed night & Thursday – 29<sup>th</sup> Feb & 1<sup>st</sup> May

Settled down in the evening waiting for Jo to arrive and were a bit stunned when we heard her voice out on the quay a full hour before she was even due to land on the island. Seems she was offered a place on an earlier direct flight from Antigua and so she snapped it up.

Her and Sarah immediately began what is likely to be a 7 day talkathon and so I settled down with a fixed (hopefully) interested looking expression and offered to take back writing the log for the week.

Thursday dawned a bit overcast and really quite windy which was not quite what we had hoped as we had got to get Serafina out of her berth in the 'marina' and a strong cross wind was just one of the many hazards we could have done without. I took the dinghy over to Customs and Immigration first thing so we could perhaps get clear of the dock before the wind picked up any more, but this was dashed at the first hurdle when the first office remain steadfastly closed. I along with other concerned boaters asked the Customs officer when the desk would open and she shrugged and said rather enigmatically, 'when it opens'. Eventually an hour later I completed all the formalities and returned to Serafina and after a discussion with the marina manager, we agreed that we would attempt our departure with his help at 10.00am. He assured us that it would all be very straightforward and for the umpteenth time asked us our draft (Depth). I told him again that it was 2.2 metres and yet again he looked horrified that we had even attempted to come into the berth – let alone planned to leave it on a day like today!

So at 10.00am he re-appeared with an assistant and Nezih (our Turkish neighbour) and a few others assembled to help. The challenge was to quite simply drive straight out of the berth, execute a very sharp right turn followed by another and skim down the side of 75 ft gin palace before weaving through the impossibly tight slalom of red buoys on the end of the dock. Oh yes and of course the killer – there was not actually enough depth of water straight out from the berth for any of this to actually happen. He waited until there was a lull in the wind and off we went and by and large it went swimmingly well. We did the difficult part I felt and were clear of the first bit of the dock and safe from being driven by the wind onto the corner of the concrete quay. I waved a 'thank you' to the assembled throng in time and saw the manager shake his head and declare that we should be aground now. That is more or less the point at which we stopped as our keel slid into the thick soft mud on the bottom of the lagoon! But a wiggle with the bow thruster and a little more power and we were off on our way.

We had to kill a bit of time before the 11.00 am bridge opening so we potted slowly up and down the main channel of the lagoon for Jo to see around. Finally as the radio crackled to announce that the bridge would be opening shortly, we eased our way into the big throng of racing yachts all heading out for the start of the first race of the week long Heineken Regatta. Minor panic as we touched the bottom again even though we were well inside the green buoys and I had visions of us missing the bridge as a result, but all was well and we swept out in to the beautiful turquoise blue Caribbean sea again with several dozen other yachts.

We set the sails and we about to head off north as planned when we realised that the big race start was only 20 minutes away and so we joined a group of what looked like other cruisers and sailed over towards the start line to get a better view. It was almost too late when we realised that the yachts we were sailing with all had numbers fixed to their guard rails and were in fact competitors heading for the start line, so we veered off and were able to watch things from a rather safer view point than the grid itself!

We then had a cracking sail round to Marigot which is the principle port on the French side of St Martin. We had 20 to 25 knots of wind all the way and the early reach gave way to a tough beat once we rounded the western end of the island, but we made such good speed that we sailed all the way. Lots of excitement on board as the fishing rod bent double and the line screamed out, but sadly this turned out to be bad news as the lure had been 'caught' on some part of a large yacht that had chosen to cut across our stern for no apparent reason. One lost lure and 200 metres of line. We dropped anchor in Marigot Bay, (surprisingly unimaginative these old explorers – how many Marigot Bays are there out here?) tucked in behind the marina but we were slightly disappointed to find it very roilly in a quite unpleasant way. But it was too late to head off anywhere else so we elected to ride it out.

## **Road Bay, Anquilla**

Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> March

Woke to find the anchorage was just as roilly as when we had turned in so we resolved to press on today to Anguila.

The decision to make a prompt start suffered a set back as Sarah chose this moment to clean the bottoms of all our shoes. No big deal really, but it nearly proved to be our undoing as again we found ourselves embroiled in a huge race. This time the Heineken Regatta was sailing around the island of St Maarten/St Martin and as luck would have it, the fleet was beating up the channel between St

Maarten and Anguilla at the exact time that we set off across the same stretch of water at right angles.

We managed to get across ahead of most of the fleet and just had to drop behind a huge trimaran that was going like the clappers leading the fleet in real time. It was another wonderful sail as we reached across to Anguilla in 25 knots of wind. Again we had to beat our way up the north west side of the island to reach the anchorage at Road Bay, but this was really quite enjoyable with a steady 20 to 25 knots of wind and sensibly for a change, we had reefed appropriately allowing us to fly up the coast, inside the out-lying reefs in just 5 tacks.

We nosed our way into the shallow anchorage and dropped the hook in just a few metres of clear blue water. Sadly there was the same cross swell here and so it is not the perfect anchorage, but it seemed an idyllic spot right from the start. And Jo was treated to the sight of two turtles immediately.

We had lunch and then launched the dinghy and went ashore, primarily to clear in through Immigration and Customs here. Another island – another country.

Sarah and Jo wandered off to view the wildlife at the big saltwater lake behind the beach whilst I dealt with the formalities. Slightly complex here with yet another way of doing things. Not quite sure how it ended up like this, but we are cleared in for a few days at least and able to go off tomorrow and visit the protected wildlife parks here which should be great. We are tentatively cleared to leave the country on Monday morning but as we walked back to the dinghy, Sarah and Jo fell into conversation with a English lady who has been living on this island for the last 10 years. Amongst the many nuggets of information she passed over was the revelation that the feverish work going on to paint the outside of the Customs and Immigration office (the first time in living memory by all accounts) is because Prince Edward and Sophie are due here by boat on Monday morning and are spending the day here visiting the island before sailing off in the afternoon. Thank goodness there are only two beach bars and the one tiny shop (almost completely empty of any stock) here and so Sarah and Jo will have no opportunities to purchase special outfits.....

Mother and baby turtles seem to reside under our boat and if it was not for the relentless swell, this would be a near perfect spot.

### **Crocus Bay, Anguilla**

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> March

Strange that such a seemingly protected bay (Road Bay, Anguilla) should suffer so much from a general swell running across the prevailing wind, but we rolled quite a bit all night and by morning the increased wind added to the fun.

I nipped ashore to once again do more paperwork with the Customs and Immigration as they had requested, but this turned out to be duff information and they told me to come again to see them on Monday. I pointed out that they might be a little busy then with their royal visitors, but they laughed it off and suggested that it would just be moderate chaos on the beach first thing when Edward and Sophie arrived, but the office should be fine.

So after breakfast we raised the anchor and set off (towing the dinghy) round to Crocus Bay which is only a few miles away.

Anguilla is very protective of its natural resources and their way of doing this is to charge fairly punitive fees to visit their Marine Park and pretty much everywhere other than Road Bay. We chose to spend a couple of days anchored in Crocus Bay which is right next to Little Bay which is part of the park. Because of these fees, the place is not surprisingly pretty empty and we anchored between the only two boats there. This is a very much better protected spot than Road Bay and so we found that despite the 25 knots of wind, we were very comfortable here.

Once we were settled and before lunch, we set off in the dinghy to make our first visit to Little Bay which reads very well in the guide book. We anchored just off a small sandy beach and proceeded to snorkel along the edge of the dramatic cliffs. Sarah found herself swimming with a remarkably relaxed hawksbill turtle, we also saw cuttlefish and all the usual suspects such as parrot fish and wrasses etc. We also saw a kingfisher and a lot of Sarah's favourite Tropic Birds as well as Pelicans. It was an interesting swim and not short of wildlife, but we did feel that it had fallen rather short of its billing.

In the afternoon we opted to swim along Pelican Point which is the headland between where we are anchored and Little Bay and were rewarded with some really great sights. Sarah found a Lion Fish for us to see and Jo came across a family of at least a dozen lobsters (well perhaps crayfish) all poking their heads and bits out from under a big overhanging rock – we just couldn't work out how to take advantage of them. The coral here is better than we have seen pretty much anywhere in the Caribbean and there was a huge variety of fish, which Jo and Sarah then spent most of the evening trying hard to identify using our various books. We returned to Serafina for showers and then took the dinghy back out to the cliffs at Little Bay to watch the Tropic birds, Pelicans and Kingfishers roost. This was rather anti-climactic but we did get up close to the tropic birds and also the pelicans that were perched looking most ungainly, in the branches of the bushes and small trees growing out of the cliff face.

Finally we headed back and watched the sun set although the distant clouds did rather obscure a small but discernible green flash (missed by Jo sadly).

### **A right Royal close encounter.**

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday – 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> March

Sunday was a lazy day spent in Crocus Bay and we headed off in the dinghy to explore more of the underwater delights of Pelican Point and Little Bay, then in the afternoon Sarah and Jo went ashore to take a stroll inland. They felt that The Valley, the main town was fairly small scale and as it was Sunday, very closed! In the evening we had a game of Mexican Train which was rather predictably won easily by Sarah with Jo struggling to recall the rules from when she used to play some time ago.

There is a swell that runs around Anguilla pretty much all the time and although we were tucked up close to the shore and had the best of things, we did still roll quite a bit all day and night and it is a good job that Jo is something of a sailor herself as I fear many others might have found the fact that we have been rolling in all the anchorages since she arrived just too much to bear.

On Monday we made an early start as we had a busy schedule planned. Firstly we picked up the anchor and potted round to Road Bay in order to clear out through Customs and Immigration. (We were not leaving until Tuesday but clearance here is good for 24 hours). It also meant that we would be in the bay in time to see Prince Edward arrive which thought we ought to do given that we were on the island anyway.

The first clue that things were happening was the very large presence of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel 'Fort Rosalie' anchored about a mile offshore. Then as we approached Road Bay from the north, a large motor yacht with HRH aboard arrived from the south. We sneaked in ahead of them and whilst they took their time deciding where to anchor, we dropped our hook and with a fine sense of the occasion, we dressed Serafina overall with our signal flags. There were a number of other yachts anchored in the bay but only one other British yacht as it happens and none were dressed overall which was a shame.

HRH was not due ashore until 0900 hours and so I decided that it might be best if I nipped ashore in the dinghy and did all the paperwork before he arrived and then we would be clear to head off to Prickly Pear Island to do some snorkelling in the National Park. So I took the dinghy over to the small pier and stepped up onto the deck to be greeted by 5 burly policeman and a fine red carpet. They seemed quite relaxed about my arrival and seemed to enjoy the joke when I expressed some mock delight at the number of people that seemed to be waiting to greet me! They pointed out the Governor and various dignitaries waiting at the head of the pier and when I said that that was handy as they would know where I could dispose of the large black bag of rubbish I had also brought ashore. They wished me luck with that idea and so I asked them to keep an eye on my dinghy and wandered off (alongside) the red carpet towards the reception committee. They all looked pretty agitated so I ducked out of any smart comments and after dumping the bag on top of a skip that was overflowing with garbage (not sure that HRH was going to be impressed with the effort made to smarten the place up) I went into the freshly painted (yes the job was completed over the weekend) Customs building. Here they dealt with my paperwork in a rather distracted manner and the cleaner was actually very good natured about the trail of sand that seemed to lead from the front door to where I was sitting.... There was a big commotion as they were still only part of the way through processing me, which heralded the arrival of the launch from the motor yacht. I said I could wait whilst they went to see the man, which they did, but when I got up to see what was happening, it was clear to me that the person they were all photographing etc. was simply an equerry sent ahead of the royal party. They had some difficulty believing that this man was not a member of the Royal family but eventually they believed me and we completed all the formalities.

I then made my way back past the small crowd and the official welcoming party, down the side of the red carpet and back into the dinghy and returned to Serafina. It was at this point that the launch made its second trip ashore and with a growing sense of excitement we could not help but notice that it was making straight for us. Our reward for dressing overall was for the launch to pass within a few feet of us and we waved enthusiastically only for our waves to be returned by one of the protection officers. HRH was down below in the cabin and did not stick his head up until after they were safely past us. Bastard!

So suitably disappointed we took down the bunting and set sail for Prickly Pear island. We had a great sail over but the 25+ knots of wind made the bay pretty much untenable and added to this, the mooring buoys that you are required to use were close to useless with frayed lines. So sadly we had to abandon this idea and we then sailed back upwind to Crocus Bay again and dropped anchor to spend a last night in this delightful spot. Jo and Sarah swam over to the area we had been spotting turtles in and were both rewarded with good sights of turtles in action. Jo insisted on another full game of Mexican Train and had bravely emailed her family to say that she felt confident that she would restore their family honour. Well, she did more than that as she completely slaughtered her hosts and Sarah was left smarting with a near record losing score!

On Tuesday we had a lazy start as the plan was to sail back to Sint Maarten which was just 19 miles and catch the 1730 hours bridge opening to the lagoon in Simpson Bay. With 25 to 30 knots of wind we had a very fast sail over and despite being heavily reefed still arrived with an hour to spare. We

dropped anchor out in the bay to wait for the bridge and along with all the other boats rolled dreadfully until it was time to form up and make our way into the lagoon. There were a lot of yachts wishing to make the inbound bridge opening, including two yachts of over 100'. Sarah and Jo were highly entertained by the poor bridge controller who first tried the polite chivvy over the radio and eventually resorted to threats and sarcasm to try and chase on a very slow American catamaran who had obviously not read any information nor put two and two together – that the bridge opening meant that the road to the airport was shut, and creates huge vehicular tailbacks! We made our way quickly back to the spot where we had anchored last week and got all sorted out and the dingy launched ready for the evening run ashore before the heavens opened.

In the evening we went ashore and enjoyed an outstanding meal in the fish restaurant Skip Jack's which we can heartily recommend – but be advised the portions are American sized and this is clearly something we need to be aware of from now on!

During Tuesday night the wind picked up as forecast and by Wednesday morning we had 30 knots and torrential rain. We slipped ashore in one of the lulls and Jo did a bit of shopping for presents whilst I cleared in through customs and immigration and then at 1245 hrs we put her into a taxi to the airport (about a mile) and said our goodbyes. We watched her plane take off at 1420 hrs and waved farewell but suspect she will not have seen us, but it was at least clear and sunny so she should have had an interesting flight back to Antigua and then home.

### **Busy, busy.**

Wed, Thursday and Friday – 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> March

Now Jo has departed, no excuses, I am back on the blogging.

Wednesday afternoon and the last two days have been spent traversing the lagoon in the dinghy and trekking around getting all the other jobs and purchases done that we didn't do last time. Most annoyingly we didn't buy a new and very grand Dan buoy last week as we wouldn't have time to fit it (having been in a 'real' sea across the Atlantic, I became very aware that our rather weedy Jon buoy would be less than useless and have been admiring the stonking great Dan buoys carried out here – for the uninitiated, these are markers that you toss in the sea next to your man overboard to help relocate them once you have the boat under control) and now we are back, the chandlery offering an amazing price (possibly the wrong price?!) has sold out. After extensive research and discussions about their next container delivery dates, we bit the bullet and bought more expensively. Yes it might be cheaper in the US but we might need it on the way there..... (Rob here: Why am I nervous about that comment?)

A further irritation is that we failed to organise anyone to come and re-gas our fridge and check it out for presumably a leak – now they are too busy, but we hadn't realised that the company was at the end of the dock we were berthed on which meant he probably would have fitted us in. So this will have to wait until the Virgin Islands now unless something else comes up.

We spent much of Thursday dumping stuff on Nezh's boat in the marina for security as we marched off to various shops to add to the pile. I cut the Treadmaster to titivate our passerelle (also recognisable as a plank) and prevent the new locker lid in the dinghy from scorching our feet, or being a death trap in rain on Lagoon Marina's dock, as Rob is always rather nervous of me welding a Stanley knife on our teak decks. We also went and hassled the poor canvas man for delivery dates. Rob at St Martin Sails and Canvas has been very helpful in repairing our cockpit cover, deck screen cover and is also making up covers for our new gas bottles, a shoe store (for those that don't

know me, I have a total neurosis regarding cockroaches so shoes only make it as far as the pushpit on our boat in case they are liberally depositing dreaded eggs - one day I hope to be a grown-up), and a rather over-engineered high-wind wind scoop for the forepeak. Rob is actually from West Mersea and this together with his interest in our new gas bottles seems to have bonded us, and he is really helpfully squeezing us into his busy schedule.

Friday has been much of the same. I got my hair cut. This is always an exciting venture as you can only plunge into a saloon with hope. Here there is far too much choice; usually there is only one hairdresser if at all. The French girl who cut my locks this time did agree it was a rather unusual cut last time being twice the length in patches... so she offered to cut it all to one length, and boy is 'cut' the right word: it is short even for me! She then glued it position so I emerged as one of those un-PC dark coloured toys we don't mention any more. Obviously we rushed straight back for me to wash it despite the shortage of water – first wash was in lagoon water to save our stocks!

All our rushing around is interspersed with visits to the wonderful La Sucriere patisserie or Lagoonies for Rob to update his emails and work. We are hoping to visit Philipsburg by bus before we have to leave (there seem to be extra charges applied if you stay for more than a week) but tomorrow there is the fresh produce market in Marigot and a yachtie flea market and we are also hoping that Owen off S/Y Magic will come and cast some fairy dust over our SSB radio, so we shall have to wait and see.

Incidentally before we set off to Anguilla we did a big shop at Le Grande Marche, sadly much of the vegetables and fruit rotted in the first few days. Anything that has been refrigerated out here has to continue in the fridge and even then tends to go off, hence the required market visit. Particularly as the market is in the French half of the island, where they take their food oh so more seriously.

### **Sint Maarten Cruisers radio net - Outstanding.**

Sat & Sunday – 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> March

Up bright and early for the produce market and a marine flea market held in TOBY's marina on the French side in Marigot. We optimistically had taken two large bags for the fruit and veg but in the event only bought some dessert figs (tiny but really tasty bananas) and a pineapple, which turned out to be the least flavourful we've had out here! Somewhere on this island there must be fresh produce, perhaps Philipsburg? We grabbed a quick coffee and pastry at Sarafina's on Scott-Free's recommendation – obviously with that name it was a must. And very nice it was too, but unfortunately we spotted another branch of La Sucriere and they had the elusive almond and chocolate croissant that Rob craves and is usually sold out on the Dutch side. Helpfully, Chris is taking all the blame for this!

We then went off to the flea market – this was the real deal! Held in a very tatty boatyard, it was even difficult to get near the yard with all the liveaboard's dinghies clustered together. Also as it is based in the channel for the French bridge entry, all the dinghies were getting washed ashore on to the rocks and debris as larger speed boats went past –not ideal. We had a wander through but nothing caught our eye, luckily. In fact it was generally rather tired merchandise.

There was to be a talk about refrigeration and air-conditioning at Shrimpy's later in the morning so we thought we would go and listen and hopefully talk to the speaker about re-gassing our fridge. Shrimpy's is an institution in St Maartens. It is a laundry cum second-hand chandlery cum internet bar run by Mike and Sally, ex-liveaboards from South Africa. Mike runs the yachtie's net on VHF Channel 14 here and we have to say it is the best one we have come across so far. He is a font of information and very helpful. He introduced us to Dave from S/Y Minstrel who was doing the talk and he kindly agreed to come and take a look at the fridge for leaks and to re-gas on Sunday morning.

The talk was incredibly user-friendly – I actually understood and learnt things! Did you know that hot water will freeze quicker than cold water (all to do with the initial speed of the molecular change which is then maintained) and, vice versa, that colder water will boil quicker than warmer water. That to help your fridge at start up, bung in a couple of bags of ice, or return the cold items back in before switching on. And wiping out ice from the plate, use cold water as again hot water will instantly re-freeze. After that things started going over my head.

So then back to Serafina for Owen from S/Y Magic to come and check out the SSB. Another new idea: that the ground plate is insufficient. Owen did 'just happen' to be selling a new product called a KISS-SSB ground plane. This looks like a 4' black hose pipe with all its magical properties inside, with a 2' yellow wire to connect it. And wonderfully it only needs to be laid out, even just under cushions would be satisfactory. Rob managed to install it underneath our berth and at the same had a look at the copper plate Najad had fitted. He then discovered that Najad in their infinite wisdom had earthed all sorts of components to this plate – exactly the opposite of what should occur.....!

We also dashed off to do our emails and contact a rather monosyllabic son on his return from Australia. Tom had had a great time – everything was "amazing"! After all of this, we settled down to watch a DVD surrounded by the debris from all the other jobs we haven't got done such as fitting our new gas bottles and Dan buoy!

Sunday morning we leapt out of bed while the wind was still calm to pull out the mainsail so that we could tighten the halyard, a job that has been required since the work on the mast but one we can't achieve if it is windy as we have to swap round blocks and outhauls.

We had a go at listening to the OCC net on the SSB and eureka, we could hear them!

Followed quickly by Dave coming to take a look at our fridge. Sadly despite extensive searching with his magic bleeper Dave couldn't find the leak. Our fridge only holds 6 oz of gas, so any escape is going to make a difference. Possibly the problem is to do with the through hull cooling system which will have to be looked at next time we haul out Serafina. So we settled on re-gassing the system and will probably have to do this again before September – does this sound familiar Scott-Free?

Dave then stayed on for a beer and regaled us with stories of his sailing life, including his recent Panama and Pacific crossing which started in company with Laura Dekker the 15 year old Dutch girl who began and finished her world record solo circumnavigation in St Maarten. He has a 'saltwater for the skin' theory: he hasn't used freshwater for 15 years on his body or hair and endeavours to go swimming every day, and in the Caribbean summer frequently spends half his waking day in the water snorkelling and swimming. And he was certainly smart and clean. A side benefit of this regime is his interaction with sea-life: he spent hours swimming with the sealions in the Galapagos and has also spent much time with dolphins, both of which species have definitely responded and copied his actions! He agreed with our belief that the dolphins quite patently want your attention when they approach your boat and will stay with you if you are applauding their activities.

Quick lunch, and Owen came back to test the SSB. Naturally we are trying to get the thing to work whilst there is extreme solar action in the way of sun flares which are affecting the airwaves, but despite this Owen managed to receive and transmit with another ham operator in Canada and a friend of his in Jamaica. Could it be that we are finally on our way with SSB radio? Watch this space....

After that we tried to get all the other jobs complete, one of which included painting the boat name on to the new gas bottles and Dan buoy. Obviously I was being my fussy self and it was made a whole lot harder by all the Sunday boat traffic traversing the lagoon at speed. Not quite sure where the posh little motor boats go (given that there are such lovely beaches on the coast and we finally have beautiful, settled weather why be inside the lagoon?) but it has not helped a steady hand! During the week there isn't that much boat or dinghy movement and what there is, is very considerate of its speed and wake, so not the perfect day for sign-writing.

Rob has fitted our new gas bottles and we have achieved a pretty much inconspicuous installation, and then he arranged the launching tube for the Dan buoy involving drainage pipe and a now defunct rod holder.

### **Punter's paradise in Philipsburg?**

Monday & Tuesday – 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> March

Monday would be our final day in St Maarten (excepting possibly an illicit visit to a bay on the West end before we set off for the Virgins later on this month) so lots of finishing up to do. Rob dropped me off for a big food shop while he went and tried to catch the canvas man before he started our shoe store – having now juggled our storage at the back of the boat we have found a better solution with different dimensions....

He then went to Island Water World to discover we had had a bum steer on the morning radio net regarding which type of gas can be replaced on the Dutch side and will now hope to get it in St Barts. He also got a few bits and pieces we still needed to buy from the chandlery – does it ever stop?! Got some bread at La Sucriere and he caught me up at the supermarket to help in the lugging back of everything to the boat.

Back to the patisserie for the final almond and chocolate croissant which we had back on board Serafina. There is a small problem developing: Rob has decided that his coffee machine does the best ever coffee with its variable settings, such that he really doesn't want to visit coffee shops so much – great! Just how much people-watching can be done in a bay?

After lunch we up-anchored to motor over and get fuel at Simpson Bay Marina. Unfortunately a very large yacht had moored on the fuel dock so they could only offer us a tiny pontoon which barely reached past our cockpit when we were stern to; luckily there was practically no wind so Rob reversed us into the small space and we managed to balance there for the re-fuelling at lovely duty free prices. Then back to the anchorage.

Back into town by dinghy for a variety of necessities including yet another trip to IWW for a wire strop to secure the new gas bottles and to finally collect the last bits of canvas. Rob (from the canvas shop) had disappeared and it was left to one of his sailmakers to work out our costs and input them into the computer – his solution was to by-pass those items he couldn't find/be bothered to calculate! Final update of emails on Rob's computer at Lagoones and back to prepare Serafina for our departure tomorrow.

We got up to listen to the radio net at 0700 hrs and to thank everyone who had helped us, particularly the affable Mike at Shrimpy's and then raised the anchor relatively early knowing that there would be lots of goo to wash off the anchor. This was made a bit more exciting by being surrounded by a variety of boats all setting off for the bridge including a huge motor boat descending on us from an unlikely direction. The bridge openings are quite entertaining as we all jockey for position and the bridge operator encourages us to bunch up as it gets nearer the witching hour. Obviously Rob loves the way the French barge into the sedate line at the last minute! Once through the bridge we decided to motor the 3 miles to Philipsburg and it was weirdly flat sea-wise for the Caribbean. I wanted to enjoy the delights of the duty free shopping provided for the cruise ships and we hadn't got round to a bus trip into town, so I felt that an extra day in St Maarten and a possibly cheaper check out in Philipsburg might be the solution. Why do I go on believing the pilot book?!

As we rounded the headland we were treated to the sight of SIX cruise ships moored in town – so a potential 12000 people milling around in the shops.... We found the suggested anchorage pretty empty and eased our way in. After half an hour or so the yacht ahead of us left and it became apparent that we were now right in line of one of the inbound routes for the little passenger boats ferrying the cruise ship clients ashore, so we re-anchored before going ashore ourselves. The spectacle of these enormous cruise ships is something to behold. The logistics of getting them all into town is also impressive: the queues of people waiting to be ferried (rather than walk the shortish distance) standing in the blazing sun (and sometimes the pouring rain – the weather was undecided today) were unbelievable.

Once we reached town, the parade of vastly over-weight, often terribly sunburnt people was also incredible. And the shopping was pretty dire. We pounded up the so-called boardwalk which resembled a concrete road without shade, and back down the next street back which was generally filled with jewellery shops and, oddly, souvenir shops selling African ware. We settled for an ice cream after finding a long queue at the Hard Rock café – we had felt too impecunious in Beirut to treat ourselves there and thought this might be an opportunity.

Giving up on town we set off to find the Customs office at the commercial dock, initially erroneously trying to get into the cruise ship dock where the security officers there had no idea where the customs would be! We thought we would be standard fare for immigration but they don't seem to deal with yachts much and this was a rather protracted affair. They then asked if customs (Clearance) were in – this was the room next door to his divided by one thin wall, so we looked through the adjoining window to his and told him “no”. He announced we would have to come back later and he would keep my passport until then. Customs were due to be there, but are a law unto themselves. This was volubly confirmed by the office cleaner who was also waiting to get into the same office as we hung around outside.

Eventually a very nice customs lady cleared us to leave, the immigration officer returned everything stamped and we left – it only took an hour!

Back on board Serafina, after a few domestic chores, we settled down to watch several charter yachts anchor very nearby (yup you do tend to watch these manoeuvres) and then view the cruise ships peel off the dock for their evening departures. Usually the ships sound their horns as they leave and we were delighted to hear the 'Disney Magic' ship hoot the first few bars of 'When You Wish Upon a Star'. This ship was showing cartoons on a huge screen on the top deck and is decorated with an enormous Goofy apparently painting the name on the stern of the ship – really quite tasteful in the light of some of its competitors! They really are incredibly ugly things and look so unseaworthy it is no great surprise that occasionally they topple over. The town now became a complete ghost town and everything magically disappeared with the beaches cleared of all the chairs etc and literally the place closed completely. Good news for us as silence replaced the earlier booming music from various live artists along the prom.

And I almost forgot to mention that I also chucked a bucket over the side and failed to keep hold of the rope.... I watched it slowly sink out of sight with some squawking but didn't feel up to a leap over board to rescue it (it was cold, I was dressed and there is always that nagging feeling of what of value am I also going to lose in a hasty moment). In the morning we could see it on the bottom and hoped that our prop wouldn't stir up the floating nylon rope to add insult to injury!

## **Gustavia, St Barts**

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March

When we got up there were already four new cruise ships in place and three more queuing up to squeeze onto the dock. The beach had been re-covered with brollies and loungers, and the ferrying launches, the trip catamarans and the 12 metre yachts were all ready and waiting. I forgot to mention that there are three ex-America's Cup yachts, including Dennis Connor's Stars & Stripes yacht from the 1987 challenge, doing sailing trips around the bay. The yachts still look sleek and stylish, but perhaps not so well maintained – and considering that they seem to sail around the clock in daylight hours with passengers being ferried out to them for a fast changeover, it's no surprise they look a little tired. As we left the bay, we felt a bit sorry for their crews as we fear the worst for some of their clients' constitutions – there was quite a swell running and it looks like there is nowhere to hide as their paying public is well packed in for each trip.

We set off to St Barts directly up wind but were almost able to lay it in one tack. As we pounded our way into the seas we were closely accompanied by a very roly motor yacht of about 55' who was unable to go any faster than us in the big seas.

We have been having a few problems with toilet tanks that aren't 'dropping' very efficiently and sink drains that are smelling none too nice, so before we entered Gustavia we tried to rectify these problems with copious buckets of seawater down various pipes eventually resorting to bicarbonate of soda and vinegar – and life seems a bit more fragrant at the moment.

We had then expected to go into the anchorage just west of the town and have a look round to pick a spot but just as we neared the area a huge yacht left and we hurried straight into its spot. At this point the motor boat we had been sailing with chose to zoom backwards around the far side of a yacht on our port side, slicing straight across our bows requiring me to go full astern and then, very un-gentlemanly, dropped his anchor bellowing at us to get out of his way. Yes I am still livid. Then a charter yacht whizzed up behind us and anchored as I was trying to get us out of our predicament; it just wasn't my day.

St Barts is known throughout the Caribbean for an amazing race week at the end of March and fantastic fireworks on New Year's Eve, during which events the whole area is packed out. The anchorage is fairly busy at the moment but the moorings (à la Med, moored stern to the quay with a bow anchor out and even more Med-like it has very poor holding and a cross surge) in town are almost completely empty. And nowhere in the anchorage is exactly comfortable with a good southerly roll and no place to hide.

We went into the Port Office to clear in and then had a wander round. The shops are unbelievably swish, dozens and dozens of them, with the sort of merchandise that makes you think at least twice before entering in your shabby sailing shorts! And, of course, without the massive yachts in town, they too are empty. We wondered how they can eke out a living on such uneven patronage. There had been a cruise ship anchored in the bay, ferrying in its passengers (and begging via the radio, every passing boat of any size to slow down due to the precarious nature of transferring their passengers from ship into bouncing orange lifeboat) into town but they really didn't look like the clients the shops might be hoping for. It's really quite interesting how one island can gain such a positive reputation while having very little to offer. Originally this island made its living from being a refuge for pirate ships and later as a trading centre for the American rebels in their war of independence. It has been fought over by the British, French and Spanish, with Maltese and Irish ownership; it was then given to the Swedes in 1784 by the French in exchange for free port rights to Gothenburg, who then sold it back to France in 1878. Its duty free status has been the basis for its economic prosperity – only 30 years ago, small sailing boats were still smuggling alcohol and cigarettes to other islands if they could evade the customs men on St Kitts and Nevis, nearby islands.

Tomorrow we will go back into town, take advantage of the free showers (yippee) and Rob will try and get more information out of the Port officers regarding their free wifi which supposedly covers the whole bay. He was seriously unimpressed that it didn't spring into life when we got back to Serafina. And now that we can make water again, as we were a little nervous of doing so in the lagoon, I shall get down to a mountain of washing, oh joy. We also hope to fit our new canvas additions and glue in new window seals and add the Treadmaster non slip covering to the dinghy and passerelle (plank).

We got some great news yesterday, that our son, Ewan, has secured a new job in London which he has been desperate to move to, as all his friends are presently working there. So many congratulations to him and let's hope it is everything he hopes for.

### **Exploring St Barts.**

Thursday, Friday & Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> March

Well the showers were just great, not boiling hot for Rob but sufficiently warm for me. And we discovered it was possible to go round to the commercial dock, press a button on a microphone on the small dinghy dock and magically a very nice officer comes to the dock with a password for the other free wifi. And, even better, he directed (I use the term loosely) Rob to where he could get our European gas refilled.

I had forgotten to mention that in Simpson Bay we were successful in finally getting our Mini B sub aqua air tank refilled. In Martinique and Guadeloupe they had refused to do it as it was approaching the five year deadline – but did offer to sell us a new bottle at €250+! So we were delighted to get our hardly used tank tested and refilled for US\$50. We only use it in emergency for work under the hull as neither of us are brilliant at equalising our ear pressures. And it is beginning to look like we may need to go round all the boat orifices under water and give them a gentle clean out to keep the barnacles at bay – we seem to be growing a fairly healthy crop at the moment. The laundry mountain is subsiding and yesterday was spent fitting the new wind scoop (designed by me and modified by Rob at the canvas shop) – this will hopefully be up to serious wind strengths unlike the usual nylon jobs. We have created a neat hooking system to fix the base into the hatch by adding a hook secured by one of the screws for the hatch handles – our previous system was not going to be man enough for the job. You can certainly feel the breeze through the boat now. At long last we seem to be also having the weather to demand it. The winds have dropped away to about 15 knots and the seas are also waning, although we do have a good southerly swell which even makes sleeping at night uncomfortable.

And we also have a neat shoe store now, just by the pushpit gate; in fact we are looking decidedly twee in burgundy Sunbrella now!

Today we went back into town and booked a car for tomorrow to see the island and then confirmed with the Port Officers that we would like a further two nights in Gustavia and we will then move up to Columbian Bay. Rob then went and asked for a further two days wifi (Rob says that it helps to know that this is pronounced Wee Fee here) and was given a month! And I skipped into town to do the shops – which turned out less successful than I had hoped. If I was to be living a life where I waft around in white linen this is the place. And for anyone interested, this year's must have jewellery item is definitely pearls in any colour on leather thongs. And I am in the midst of a dedicated search for a loud but subtly patterned, Caribbean-type shirt for Rob that isn't in American XXXL and doesn't cost over \$200 – failed again. But it was great to see how the other half lives. With the wifi on board I have also been able to surf the various estate agents' websites for St

Barts' properties – fantastic palaces with the requisite infinity pool, if not two and views to die for from this mountainous island.

After lunch I went for a swim over to the three large rocks, Gros Ilets, which are within one of the marine park areas behind us. They are covered by swirling seabirds of many descriptions including the exotic Tropic Birds, Pelicans, Boobies and Frigate birds. The swim was made slightly hazardous by the lifeboats busily ferrying the clients from one of the Wind cruise ships (they have four enormous equally sized masts and actually do sail of a kind) beyond us. There is also an imaginatively named Yellow Submarine boat that does trips round these rocks so I fervently hoped they would not be viewing me from their underwater windows – and I was in luck. The sea is quite exceptionally clear in this anchorage, more so than anywhere we have ever visited. So the first thing I saw was a Hawksbill turtle about 20' below me. Once I reached the rocks, the marine life was brilliant in every way with brightly coloured coral and some of the biggest fish we have encountered. Rob then swam over to check our anchor and was watching a Stingray and several Jacks, when he became aware he had been joined by a very large Barracuda. And all this in main town's bay!

On Saturday we hired a car to go round the island. The island is only 21 square miles and much of it is covered by private roads to incredibly grand houses, so it isn't an onerous trip although the roads themselves are very hilly, narrow concrete ones with the occasional shocking French driver around the corner.... We decided to head north and then follow the sun around the island – us professional photographers find this best! So once we had negotiated the one-way system out of Gustavia, we reached the roundabout with Rob's favourite location below: the airport with the second shortest runway in the world (the shortest is Saba just across the sea from us). Rob has been trying to catch the perfect photo of the planes coming into land as they have to approach very low over this road junction between two hills and plummet down to the runway, stopping before they hit the sea at the other end, but cameras flatten it all out. Anyway have a look at the photos at [www.rhbell.com](http://www.rhbell.com) when we can upload them.

Every small town or village is based around yet another amazing bay. We arrived in Lorient to find a café for breakfast, settling on the patisserie where Rob had a very squashed almond and chocolate croissant (but his life has been ruined by the perfect one in Simpson Bay) and I had a very breakfasty chocolate mousse cake-thing, plus coffees. We then wandered down to the beach where kids were having surfing lessons on surprisingly good waves, despite the Atlantic Ocean being positively flat. Then back to the car parked by one of many cemeteries we came across with the usual French penchant for acres of garish plastic flowers, particularly strange out here where anything will grow very flamboyantly. This one had a dried out ditch alongside with some huge land crab holes and eventually we got to see one of the very large inhabitants. We visited the church above with a beautiful beamed ceiling and a further Swedish tower nearby with a pair of enthusiastically mating kestrels atop!

We then continued to the east stopping off frequently to look around at the spectacular scenery – this is another volcanic island and although the highest points aren't that high, in the context of the area it is very steep. Spotting a sign to an art gallery we diverted up a long, windy private road where the art was distinctly disappointing (judging by the prices all of Annie's art classes should move out here, we'd be rich! But we were suspicious of the age of the exhibits....) but the husband of the artist was very entertaining and showed around his house perched up above the bays of Marigot, Grand Cul-de-Sac and Petit Cul-de-Sac together with the two lakes behind; one of which is filled with saltwater and the other is freshwater and occasionally dries out.

We carried on round, by this time (mid-morning) we were already on the south coast where the vegetation had changed from the lush Atlantic side to far more desert-type flora. Even the roadside growth looked carefully tended on this immaculate island. We drove down to Anse de Grande Saline past another salt hole (this one seems to be being used to farm salt) and walked down to another wonderful long beach where the locals (and some white/pink wealthies) were enjoying the weekend. We then headed back towards Gustavia to the small Shell Beach (no prizes for guessing why this beach is so called, suffice to say I did do some beachcombing) just outside the town for lunch at Do Brazil owned by tennis star, Yannick Noah. I settled for a crab salad starter and Rob for a "light snack" beef burger, luckily they forgot to produce the French fries I had also ordered – how the other guests were managing further courses was quite beyond us. The restaurant is up above the beach with beautiful views (part of which was elegant topless French sunbathers Rob noticed) and a cooling breeze. Unfortunately we had also arrived on the day when they were combining the meal with a fashion show when one hapless girl got to constantly change her costume and parade at each table to our mutual embarrassment!

Then back to the car again, driving back through Gustavia to visit the North West end of the island and get some idea of the anchorage arrangements in Columbier Bay where we are going to take the boat tomorrow. The bay looks ideal although we will try and get there early and hang around in the hopes that a boat might leave its buoy: the buoys are farther into the bay and are set to protect the coral and sea grass for the turtles, they also happen to be better protected from the swell – and we could do with a good night's sleep! We have also heard that Jim who was in Spice Island Marine at the same time as we were fitting out is also due to arrive there tomorrow in his yacht.

A further photo op by the airport and a hasty shop at Marche U, after that we wended our way back eventually to Gustavia, spotting a very graceful yacht heading towards the anchorage on the way. We abandoned the car in a side street, the hirer had gaily told us not to worry where, he would eventually find it! To give him a sporting chance we gave him the road name when we posted the keys back. A quick shower ashore, made even quicker when the Port Officer started to lock me in and we loaded up the dinghy. The beautiful yacht had anchored just behind us so we had a pootle around her in Doris (this is our dinghy's name – the name I wasn't allowed to christen the yacht with. It's a long story). She turned out to be 'Velsheda', the stunning J class yacht built in 1933 for Woolworth's MD, and with quite the shiniest hull I have ever seen. The crew were resting on their laurels (what must it feel like to know that you are on the best yacht around?), lounging on the deck – the deck that doesn't, of course, have the merest hint of a guard rail – terrifying. (Google her)

All in all a great day out. All this blurb doesn't really mention quite how many times we stopped the car and got out to look around and take photos, let alone my house gazing obsession and oh how we miss Chris' (Scott-Free) running commentaries.

## **Columbier Bay, St Barts**

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March

First thing in the morning Rob went into town and checked out with Customs, who give us 24 hours grace. We then up anchored to motor to Columbier Bar in the NW of the island, with a slow pass round Velsheda to take some photos.

When we arrived we followed in a blue hulled yacht which turned out to be Jim on L'Esprit du Nord who we met when fitting out in Grenada, and we were both lucky enough to find free buoys. Whenever we pick up a buoy we never know what to expect: a metal loop on top to tie to, a loop to put straight on to your cleat or attach ropes to (one each side to prevent chafe) and, in this

case a very short loop which when hooked unexpectedly lengthened up through the middle of the buoy. I feel we need to make this a slicker operation for when we reach the Virgins where it apparently is all buoys, particularly when I am stood on the bows surrounded by a variety of ropes, a boat hook and two devices for attaching ropes to the buoy if I can't reach....

As it was Sunday the bay filled up more and more with boats anchoring willy nilly (the pilot encourages everyone away from coral, sea grass and near the beach – to no avail it transpires) and a couple of very smart “gentlemen's day boats” sailing through the mêlée. Sadly, despite being in one part of the Marine Park, the snorkelling was nothing like as good as in the town bay, although I did see a turtle happily chomping away on the sea grass.

So a few jobs got done including the finishing touch to the dinghy – a non-slip surface glued to the slippy/baking hot aluminium lid on the locker. Rob then decided to don the Mini B sub aqua rig and take a look at our prop shaft. We have been experiencing some suspicious noise from the gearbox. He was delighted to discover that yet another prop anode had come free and this has proved to be the mysterious noise, though it is irritating that the damn things regularly come away and this one has hardly worn away at all. He is contemplating stainless bolts next time and Jim suggested that you can hit the bolt with a hammer so that it can't unscrew.

At this point a Marine Park officer chose to mosey around the anchorage which was unfortunate as we had not paid for a dive ticket although we were only underneath our boat. He didn't spot Rob underwater when he motored past our stern and we felt discretion was the better part of valour, so although Rob was doing a good job on cleaning off barnacles from the prop we abandoned underwater activities for the day!

Jim and his wife, Ali, who we hadn't met before came for a swift drink – they had guests on board. Ali hales from Jersey and very much wanted to discuss the Corbiere lighthouse and Rob's family connection with it (his great grandfather built it). We would happily have settled in for the night with them, as they are very good company but duty called them back to their guests.

## **Basse Terre, St Kitts**

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> March

On Monday we dropped our mooring and headed off to Basseterre on St Kitts. The swell had dropped right away and with only 12 knots of wind at best we had the mainsail and the cutter rig fully set doing a very comfortable 6 knots. Eventually we were headed as we turned SE around the west of the island, so we motored that last bit.

Yet again we had no luck with the fishing. Rob is still mourning the demise of his favourite lure (after approximately 7,000 miles it fell apart) and has been unable to buy the identical article. He now knows how half the population feels about the impossibility to replace the perfect bra, I think! And notwithstanding the lovely flat conditions, we failed to spot any whales or dolphins. We had already contacted Port Zante marina and booked a berth which probably wasn't necessary: if St Barts has the feel of a very up-market Mediterranean island with a predominantly white population due to the inhospitable terrain for sugarcane growing (ie no slaves imported there), this marina feels like we are back in north Turkey! It is a small concrete square with berths around the edges. It has posts to attach bow lines to as you reverse in (no helpful William as in Jolly Harbour to help you – Rob had to resort to a very substandard wife with poor lasso skills) and short rickety wooden pontoons.

St Kitts feels like the real Caribbean again. The people are delightful and very friendly. This island does not look like so many, tarted up for the cruise ship trade although they do visit here. There are two ships due in tomorrow and we are right next to their dock so we are expecting mayhem. I am pleased to report that the local market is also nearby, so hopefully better fruit and veg again. We had planned to make a trip on the train which used to deliver sugarcane around the island. Now only an 18 mile stretch is operational, and the rest of the trip is supplemented by a tour bus. Unfortunately the ticket is US\$100 per person (2009 prices) which we felt was a bit steep. Instead Rob discovered that the West Indies are playing a one day international against Australia here at cricket on Saturday – if we can get tickets we thought that might be quite an experience!

Rob went off to do all the paperwork and eventually found Customs behind a blank door next to the gent's toilets. They were very helpful and it was all very straightforward, however Immigration had gone home early, so they just suggested we try again tomorrow after they have processed the cruise ships.

### **Out and about in St Kitts**

Tuesday and Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> March

There has been lots of confusion about the cricket – ask anyone and you get another version of possibilities. So we decided to walk up to the cricket ground and find out from the horse's mouth. We were introduced to a guy in the same complex but on the football side who thought that the West Indies had moved the match from Warner Park (St Kitts) to St Lucia and that the Australians had been upset by this! So regretfully we had to give up on that plan.

We had a further wander around, meeting a very nice lady on her way to church who recommended that we went to the fort at Brimstone Hill and the Batik workshop, which sounds a good idea. We then tried to find a way to get there cheaply: hire cars are very expensive and on top of that you have to buy a driving licence at US\$29, ditto scooters and taxis start at about US\$90 a round trip to the Fort plus waiting time. We have decided that we will catch the bus early and walk up (apparently 2 miles uphill....) while it's still cool. The lovely security lady on the gate here tells us we are "fit and beautiful and it should be no problem"!

Incidentally security seems to be quite tough for the residents in the marina: we have to get passes every time we leave the site but just about anyone else can wander in or out: the fishing boats that moor here seem to have large entourages of hangers-on and any number of cruise ship tourists, ferry users and guys touting for some sort of business can enter. On top of that I have to beg the one and only entry card to the loos and showers – the men's is always open.

The rest of the day Rob spent exposing the two toilet holding tanks and wondering how to get at the hose pipes and connections. He has finally concluded that our problems are calcium in the pipes which we are slowly solving with Porchov (a magic formula from Turkey which we are fast running out of, and will have to resort to descaler when we can find it). From now on we will also take Nigel Calder's advice and fill up the pipework with vinegar overnight once a month to keep the calcium at bay. And I completed my gluing of Treadmaster on to the passerelle this time.

When we got up on Wednesday morning the weather looked threatening which was typical when we are planning a lengthy walk! Easily caught a bus from round the corner with a very helpful bus driver who pointed out where to get out for the Batik place later. The bus fares in total for the day worked out at EC\$19 (less than US\$10), which was a saving of approximately EC\$241 on the next cheapest form of transport! As we got out of the bus at the junction of the main road and the long

drive leading up to the fort, a troop of monkeys ran over the road and then all along the first stretch of our walk they were peeping out of the trees at us. These are African Green Vervet monkeys originally imported by plantation owners and now in their 1000s here. They seem to do quite a lot of damage to the fruit crops here, ruining all the mangoes by biting each fruit and throwing it down on the ground.

Much of the walk up was shaded by trees and we were pleasantly surprised to arrive at the entrance after quarter of an hour, but we hadn't taken into account that it was still quite a way uphill to the very top! Brimstone Hill Fort is a UNESCO Heritage site and is the earliest remaining example of a pentagonal fort. It has been very well restored and has wonderful views. As we came back down to the café area we realised just where all the cruise ship tourists go (but not that many were managing the short walk up to the Citadel!). There was also a group of Harley Davidson riders there. It transpired that they were also on the cruise ship that caters for 35 bikers as a special deal. Unfortunately they were all rather long faced as one of their group, acting as outrider (a sort of whipper-in) had failed to see an oncoming bend in the road and plunged over the edge of a steep drop and fell down 20' but luckily isn't too injured.

We begged a lift down the hill in the workers' van and then as we got out at the main road we immediately managed to flag down a bus which turned out to be the same helpful driver from the first trip. He then dropped us by a narrow lane which would shorten our walk up to the Batik place. This visit was a bit disappointing, although interesting to see the demonstration of how it is done. It was also heaving with tourists. The beautiful gardens advertised around the plantation house were limited – perhaps we have been spoiled by other visits on other islands? Another bus trip got us back into town and we decided that we deserved lunch at the upstairs café, Ballahoo, overlooking The Circus, so named after Piccadilly Circus. The rest of the day was spent recovering from a lot of hot walking!

We are in a dilemma about where we should go next and for how long. We would like to see Nevis if only for the 24 hour pass we can get from here, which we think, saves extra taxes; and visit the bays at the southern end of St Kitts. But we seem to be heading into a hole in the wind which may last for at least a week and the idea of a long motor to the Virgin Islands seems a great waste when we had been looking forward to a good/broad beam reach all the way; so we may have to set off there rather earlier than planned to catch the wind.

### **White House Bay, St Kitts**

Thursday & Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> March

Finally decided that we would concentrate on the wind not Nevis, so Rob set off to Customs and I went in search of bread (nasty sweet plastic stuff here) and dessert figs (that is bananas to you). I discovered that the supermarket we had dismissed as a Cash and Carry opposite the Bus station was the best stocked shop of all and even found some brown rolls and brown sliced stuff, which is an improvement on the other sliced white. We have been carrying a loaf of bread we bought in Antigua in desperation which had survived 30 days unchanged and it had been opened! Sadly despite having a market area, we were subsequently told that it is sometimes open on a Saturday, but there are various fruit and veg stalls scattered around the main street along the coast road. I found that there were hardly any vendors today, presumably because there were no cruise ships in today and so the town is deserted. So no dessert figs but some good tomatoes, ie. not the chilled to within an inch of their lives tasteless ones from a supermarket, so a partial win.

Rob returned looking very pleased with himself. He has made it his mission this year to charm the customs and immigration officials, particularly the female ones who seem to be a whole lot fiercer

and more miserable. Today he had surpassed himself in begging a special clearance for Saturday. Usually you are given 24 hours grace to leave the country at most of the islands out here and St Kitts is no exception, but today is Thursday and we want to leave on Saturday. Amazingly the two women involved in the two different offices (and experience has shown that the two offices are always totally independent and do not talk to each other) independently agreed to give Rob special dispensation, the correct stamps on paperwork and even a letter to explain the discrepancy in dates if we are stopped by a coastguard. Unbelievable! And on top of this both the women serenaded Rob with gospel songs whilst completing the forms etc!

So after a rain shower had gone through we prepared to leave. To my horror as I got ready to undo our bow lines looped around the poles, I discovered a golden cockroach scuttling around on the foredeck. My squeamishness is completely abandoned when faced with one of these damn things, and I successfully squished it between finger and thumb – you can't be too sure with a roach. But we are now left wondering if any others have managed to get on the boat. I suppose this is the trouble of being in a fairly rundown marina with fishing boats. We were also backed up close to a hedge of oleanders and the enormous rubbish skip up wind had been emptied in the last 24 hours disturbing its inhabitants I expect.

We motored the few miles to White House Bay (no white house) which is wonderfully sheltered if less picturesque than hoped for. There were a couple of anchored but abandoned yachts so we had the whole bay to ourselves. We watched spectacular rain falling on Basseterre and through the gap between St Kitts and Nevis, but we seemed to be immune here. Meanwhile I gave the boat a good wash down with saltwater to try and convince myself there were no stowaways on board. We hadn't opted to use the fresh water in Part Zante as it was US\$15 a shot!

The snorkelling definitely lives up to the hype. Very clear water with loads of large fat starfish and lots of sand dollars littering the sandy bottom. I have been looking for these everywhere and we presume they are what are left over from former starfish? There were also lots of fish to see along the cliff edge, as well as our first sighting of black coral. I also spotted a Lion fish in rather shallow water for my comfort, and a stingray.

After a lovely flat quiet night we found there were three cruise ships over in town, so we expected that someone would be making use of the stack of flat canoes in the car park behind the beach close to us. Sure enough, eventually a busload of large, pink people arrived and were put through their paces. We are rather sure that one of the guys organising the event is a bit too fond of his own voice – 20 minutes at least for the briefing whilst stood in the sun (well on the second occasion in the teeming rain), when already wet isn't what teacher ordered. First they had a snorkel in the shallows and then set off downwind in the canoes to a beach about 2 miles away. The canoes were then towed back in a great long line for the next lot of punters.

We did some more snorkelling and I swam to the other side of the beach to a rock that seemed to be attracting the attention of the occasional car park user. When I arrived – and it's quite a swim from the boat – I was a bit nervous to find another Lion fish in full aggressive display so headed towards the rock to find a huge Barracuda watching me. He was about 4' long hanging above the side of the rock in about 1½ 'of water. I immediately became more neurotic, worried about my watch flashing in the sunlight which might attract further investigation and set off straight back to the boat, without bothering to explore further!

The weather is very uncharacteristic for the Caribbean. We have absolutely no swell or waves at all, quite a few showers going through, and where we are anchored, wind from practically any direction. The weather forecasts are even less encouraging than yesterday, but we now have to

leave for the BVIs tomorrow as we are signed out – and anyway the wind if anything gets worse (5 knots) for the rest of the week.

Rob pointed out that I haven't mentioned any background on this island which was the first British colony in the Caribbean founded in 1623. They then combined with the French strangely, long enough to massacre the 2000 Carib Indians living here at a site now known as Bloody Point. Normal service recommenced with Franco-British battles including the siege of Brimstone Hill Fort, where the French breached the wall (quite an achievement if you take a look at the site in our photos, [www.rhbell.com](http://www.rhbell.com) especially the panoramic ones) but failed to win the war. Surprisingly the sugarcane plantations continued right up until 2005 when EU subsidies were withdrawn from this struggling industry leaving a situation, as Lonely Planet puts it "many of the former cane-field workers now work as security guards, protecting against those former workers who've yet to find jobs". In the light of this situation we realised that we should probably be using our security bars in the hatches at night, particularly as we are alone in a bay but it didn't occur to us until today. We are definitely guilty of enjoying the societies out here and getting lulled into a false sense of security, without taking the proper precautions. So that will be rectified tonight!

The African Green Vervet Monkeys that run wild across the island were originally introduced as pets for the Plantation owners, but they have gone wild and have rather overrun the island. Fine for the limited tourist appeal, but loathed by all the islanders as the monkeys clear all fruit and vegetables and general vegetation at will – and most folks are desperate enough here as it is.

Rather surprised to find we have access to the internet, although quite weak, here in White House Bay. There is nothing here at all and so the signal almost certainly must come from the other side of the island which if nothing else is testimony to the power of the WirieAP wifi aerial we have.

Many congratulations to Rob's Godson Tom Butt whose wife Charlie gave birth to a healthy son 'Oliver Santiago' today. And congratulations also to our son Ewan who has got himself a star job down in London.

### **Nanny Cay, Tortola – British Virgin Islands**

Sat & Sun 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March

Saturday dawned pretty still and again during the night we seemed to have made several more circumnavigations around our anchor! White House Bay is pretty unusual by Caribbean standards as the wind seems to rotate around all the time rather like being in the Med.

Just before 1000 hrs. we lifted the anchor (and let the chain twist itself straight) and set full sail and a course direct for Tortola, some 125 miles to the north west. As forecast the winds started off pretty light and it did not help that we were in the wind shadow of St Kitts, but nevertheless we made reasonable progress achieving between 4 and 7 knots in the light breeze.

As soon as we reached deeper water I had the fishing line out again, but as throughout this season, I spent most of my time retrieving the lure to clear it of the seaweed that is everywhere.

We sailed past St Eustacia and then Sava as gradually the wind began to increase, but all the while it was well aft of the beam giving us a very broad reach.

At about 1700 hours the rod bent over and the line ran out to signal that we had at last hooked a fish, but as Sarah was fast asleep off watch below I set about sorting this out alone. I managed to

play the tuna we had caught to the boat and then landed it and was just beginning to gut it when Sarah appeared in time to set about cutting it up into steaks and popping it into the fridge for another day.

As darkness fell the wind if anything picked up and so we agreed that as we would be effectively sailing singlehanded on our watches, to reef both the main and the yankee headsail. Nothing dramatic but enough to weather squalls and allow us to continue to make good speed. As it turned out we whizzed along at speeds up to 8 knots, but more generally around 5 to 6 knots with fairly reasonable seas rolling in from our starboard beam. In fact as usual we were in danger of arriving too soon as we did not want to negotiate our way in through the Salt Passage in darkness.

Sarah's watches seemed to suffer from more variable winds and she also saw quite a bit of lightning a long way off, but my watches were all very straightforward and as dawn broke I was just calculating the usual problem of whether the 1000ft cruise ship 'Serenade of the Seas' was going to pass in front of us or behind us as it bore down on us at full speed, when during a squall there was an almighty crash and the boom swung wildly followed by the sound of thrashing sails. My first assumption for some reason as I caught a glimpse of flapping sails was that the jib had torn, but it turned out that we had blown out the main sail, that is to say the clew had detached itself from the sail leaving the sail wrapped around the port shrouds and the boom looking bare and forlorn! Fortunately we had rigged a line as a preventer so the boom was held steady and once I had woken poor Sarah and got her back up on deck, we simply rounded Serafina up towards the wind and furled the main into the mast much as normal. I had not forgotten about the cruise ship, but there were other priorities and these ships are generally pretty good about such things, however it was very reassuring when we looked out again to see that she had radically altered course. It turned out that this was actually because she was now heading for the same passage through the small islands as we were, in order to approach Tortola.

We were now just sailing under a headsail, but with storm clouds all around and winds of 20 knots, we decided that this was just fine and so we scooted along at 6 to 7 knots under just the yankee and let the worst of the huge rain clouds move on ahead of us.

We made our way into Road Town harbour and after a bit pottering about, dropped the anchor close to the cruise terminal and almost alongside Serenade of the Seas. I then took the dinghy ashore to clear in through customs and was sort of proud of the fact that this was the first time since 2007 that we had sailed into a country and not had to fly a courtesy flag – this being the British Virgin Islands. Customs and Immigration were a great disappointment and it was as if they had never done this for a yacht before. We had completed all the forms online using a system called Esea Clear but the officials here declared that the computer was not working so I had to fill in all the triplicate forms again by hand. Then these forms had to be taken from office to office and back again in a system that defied any logic at all and then to complete my misery, immigration decided that they could not read all of the third copy and so I had to complete that form all over again.

I returned to Serafina to find that Sarah had sweet-talked Nanny Cays Marina into letting us dock there for just the one night so we could get the main sail down and bagged and take it to a sail maker on Monday morning. Of course what we did not know then was that Monday is the start of the BVI race week and so the sail maker is bound to be snowed under with emergency work, but there is nothing else we can do at this point and so we will just have to leave the sail with them and hope they can get it done fairly quickly. As it happens we were planning to stay in this area now for a few weeks and the islands are all pretty close together so we can easily sail with just a headsail for as long as it takes.

First impressions of the BVI is that it resembles the Solent, but with very hot sun. We haven't seen this many yachts for a very long time.

Nanny Cay Marina seems a nice place and certainly the showers (bathrooms) are probably the best ones we have ever used.

In touch with our old friends Chris and Steve on Scott-Free as they are in Puerto Rico and closing in on the US Virgin Islands which are only a few miles from here. Hopefully we can meet up in the next week or so.

### **Great Harbour, St Peter Island, BVI**

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March

Very, very still night – ie extremely steamy for all the wrong reasons! But lots of lovely rain so when we woke up in the morning part of the morning's work had already been very much helped along. Before we had to leave the marina at midday we wanted to make full use of all the incredibly expensive facilities! So having topped up the batteries to bursting, Rob went off to find the sail maker and I started on a really good wash down and polish of the boat, inevitably soaking me and our neighbours in the process – I still don't seem to handle a hose too brilliantly. Anyway very good end result, can't remember when Serafina looked quite so shiny – and except for a very few little patches, the stainless steel is still holding up very well from its treatment.

Rob had had to hang around waiting for the sail maker to arrive back from a weekend's racing in St Thomas and had got chatting to a Canadian couple who had lots of suggestions about where to go to sit out being sail-less for a week. Although the sail maker was offering to get the repair done today, we opted to have a full check of the sail with our passage north to the US in mind, so it should be ready for Friday. (Hopefully he won't be snowed under with work from the racing fraternity with the BVI Spring regatta starting today – with our present wind conditions it seems unlikely!) Rob then very fortuitously overheard a young man on the pontoon talking to our neighbours about canal boat building. It turned out that he had worked for the New Boat Co in Droitwich and obviously knew all about Viking Afloat; but of much more interest was that he was the Manager of the marina here and went on to offer that he would be able to fit us in with a quick dash in and out to a hammerhead to collect our sail while all the racing boats were out sailing. We are learning the hard way that marina berths are like gold-dust and appear to cost as if they were coated in the stuff! Still Brendan looks like a very good contact to have made.

Rob was very impressed that when he went in to pay for the berth he pointed out that the electric supply had been a bit hit and miss, and in fact we had had the supply for the boat next door as our neighbour had failed to manage to use it as he had a far bigger draw, running his air-conditioning on board. The office administrator immediately contacted Brendan and by the time Rob had returned to the boat, there was an electrician sorting out the problem!

We left at the appointed hour and motored over to Great Harbour on Peter Island. We can't really sail anywhere without the main, so we are picking bays where it is possible to anchor (rather than be obliged to pick up an extortionate buoy) and be in relative seclusion and shelter. This bay was indicated in the pilot as having anchoring possibilities with good snorkelling, but you have to creep around the edges of the huge bay trying to find somewhere not too deep. We are anchored in 15m which just about allows for the fact that we can swing in towards the shore without going aground! The wind has completely disappeared today, together with the view of most of the islands. The BVIs is an amazing cruising ground with dozens of little islands all within a few miles of each other, many around the Sir Frances Drake Channel, which looks extremely like the Solent on a

sunny weekend with everyone out sailing! But today there was a really odd haziness with visibility down to less than a couple of miles.

So after an afternoon of jobs we had a quick swim, where I went stone hunting on the narrow beach and Rob met a shark and found more fish than he has ever seen before out here! And then in the evening we feasted on more tuna as a curry. Rob would like me to point out just how many (easy) meals one fish produces – at least two more to go. I'm not sure why as this just gives me more ammunition for comment when we are in a fishless state.....

## **Anniversary**

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March

Another very quiet day in the anchorage and all around – which makes a change from the nights.... A nearby charter boat seemed to be playing some sort of game which involved regular blowing of a conch shell followed by much cheering up until midnight, yup I am a spoilsport! Heaven knows what happened to the sailing regatta today, as from our viewpoint across the channel not a single yacht was even pretending to sail today.

There is a small motor boat that goes around several anchorages selling various necessities and taking your garbage away. As it is our anniversary today (30 years), we splashed out and bought some cakes to celebrate. The very nice chatty young man (don't I sound ancient nowadays?) gave us an incredibly depressing card about Lionfish. This fish originated in the Indo-Pacific region but somehow has arrived here where it has no natural predators. This is a very recent phenomenon and is terrifying the Caribbean as it will devastate their marine ecosystems and their commercial fishing industry. They can grow an horrific 7"+ a year, mature in less than a year, reproducing all year-round and are capable of laying 2,000,000 eggs per year. They can eat prey of up to three-quarters their size. They also have venomous spines – we have read of one guy who was stung and who was in agony for several days, no painkiller even touched it. Having seen none last year, we have seen several in St Kitts, Anguilla and St Barts. The more wealthy islands are organising response programs – presumably they go out and capture and kill them. The free yachting newspaper featured recipes for Lionfish which was swiftly followed the next month with all the various warnings. Sadly they are absolutely beautiful fish but they certainly make you nervous, nothing that pretty can be sat still displaying if it isn't really venomous!

Rob also chose today to fall in love with another fish. He was totally fascinated with her, so much so that I was instructed to take photos for posterity. Worryingly it was her character which so attracted him. Please go to the website and you will see her in all her charms (may take a few days before we can upload as we can just about get enough signal to send emails but no more at the moment.) Just bear in mind that this fish was the size of a fingernail.

I carried on with some more GRP polishing; our red Najad stripes are taking a real bashing in the sun, tons of chalky red comes off in the polishing process. Rob has been hard at work doing blurb for the marketing website of one of his clients, and for once was grateful not to be out in the heat. Our new unique windscoop is very efficient even in these very light winds, although it had been designed for the howling winds we usually are coping with!

We managed to fit in a couple of good snorkels. On my afternoon jaunt I spotted a Hawksbill turtle sat amongst the rocks, the biggest Hermit crab I have ever seen hauling along an enormous conch shell, a Goldentail Moray Eel and a Stingray. Rob on the other hand had another encounter with a shark, this time a very much larger specimen cruising over our anchor which inspired his very hasty

retreat to the boat. I am beginning to wonder if I am completely blind as Rob always sees much more interesting (threatening?) stuff. In the evening we spotted an Osprey roosting in a tree nearby. And once darkness had fallen we disposed of the blood and last bits of unusable fish into the sea, lit with our spotlight and watched some very large fish or something bigger still, snatch it from the spot-lit area. So ends today's nature report!

Tomorrow should see a brief return to windy climes with a NE wind due; hopefully we will still have protection in this bay. In which case we might wander over the hill to the very exclusive Peter Island Resort for a probably extortionate coffee and catch up with proper wifi. If not we will have to move around the island to the south with our rattling mast (the mechanism inside the mast is unstable without the padding of the mainsail rolled up inside or obviously, supported by the sail when in use).

### **The Bight on Norman Island, then White Bay on Peter island.**

Friday and Saturday – 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> March

Friday morning we finally launched the dinghy, motored over to the very stony/coral beach and dragged Doris up from the water's edge as she protested loudly and wandered over to the very grand Peter Island Resort. We had a good strong cup of espresso each and Rob got his emailing and website uploading up to date while I walked a bit further on so that I could view Deadman Bay from the road over the top of the island. It is a really pretty, typical in-your-dreams Caribbean beach: turquoise sea, white sand with palm trees lining it, but as an anchorage it seemed pretty busy and all the boats were facing out to sea and receiving quite a swell into the bay.

Once we got back to the boat, we were working out the length of rope we needed to buy to put as a warp on to the two new buckets we have had to buy since we have both successfully deposed of a bucket each recently. This involved lengths and weight of water versus ease of use and potential palm blistering! Weirdly all the splashing attracted some huge fish who sat under our boat. Rob was none too sure that they weren't Barracuda, and having already scared himself witless with his shark encounter, adopted Pips' technique of viewing the sea life – leaning out of the dinghy with a mask and snorkel on. As Rob had survived this confrontation and the fish hadn't zoomed away, I got in the water somewhat gingerly. There were nine fish the biggest of which was about 4' with under slung jaws and quite solid bodies, just hanging in the water, not at all worried by me. We eventually identified them as Tarpon who tend to habit the same area, and they spent most of the day around about the boat. Rob was obviously worried for the survival of his small fishy girlfriend but we decided she was far too tiny a titbit for them to even notice her!

As the afternoon went on, more and more yachts came into anchor when previously the figure had been under ten, the evening finished with 28 boats in the bay including two very large yachts and two massive motor boats. And to add to our entertainment, a few charter boats trying to anchor in the deep water (there *is* a technique, and we had only just been discussing that we seem to be a whole lot better nowadays – but we have had an awful lot of practice) far too close to other boats and having to repeat the process all over again.

Over the last few days we have been experimenting with the SSB to try and contact Chris and Steve on Scott-Free with a tiny bit of success and lots of frustration. In between whiles Rob has been texting and emailing them with various ideas of where we should meet. Very oddly, despite being unable to get much of a wifi signal, all the traffic with Scott-Free has managed to be sent and received although nothing else has gone or arrived at all!

First thing on Friday morning, after Rob had proved again that we are still struggling with the SSB by trying to listen to the OCC net, we set off to Road Town (Tortola) to do a food shop anchoring off Wickhams Cay II marina and zipping in on the dinghy. This marina is quite a sight as it handles all the 'Sunsail', 'Moorings' and 'Footloose' charter boats in their hundreds! (We have since been told there are over 600) We were amazed there were so many boats still in the marina, although it was apparent that some were being turned round and there were stunned new arrivals in all their glorious whiteness, hefting bags around. We rather thought that this fortnight everything would be out by now for Easter – obviously delighted that all these boats aren't out there yet cluttering up the anchorages (!) but worried for the survival of the companies themselves, we have known that feeling. The staff kindly agreed we could leave the dinghy there. Rob did point out that if all these boats emerge next weekend it will be hell on earth in the BVI and we might do better to go to the USVI then.

Short walk to a great supermarket which for once, amongst all the refrigerated food, had local produce that had not been beaten into submission with the chill factor. We staggered back to the dinghy via a nice French deli where we bought lovely bread, and had breakfast. When we got to the dock we discovered that a catamaran had in fact been parked on Doris so it was a bit of a fight to free her and then a very soggy trip back out to Serafina as there was quite a chop in the harbour now.

Rob then rang Brendan at Nanny Cay Marina who confirmed that we could come in and collect our sail. So we jammed everything into the fridge and cupboards, raised the anchor and hot-footed it round to Nanny Cay. Kindly they had offered us the hammerhead free nearest to the sailmakers and once we had docked, I set off to fetch the sail and Rob settled down to make good use of their wifi. The sail repair cost US\$65 which seemed a bargain and their precious trolley was lowered from the loft for my use. On my return I was somewhat surprised to find that Serafina had materialised on another pontoon and a very swish racing trimaran was in her place. It transpired that they had already finished their racing for the day being the first boat in and we had been put in their berth and were happily nestled against her rather nice fenders.

Rob had help from Miles who is the Manager of the marina and also our first OCC Port Officer we have come across, to move docks. He was charming and very generous in his help, offering us use of the showers and extra time on the quay. Rob then met Brendan, the Dock Master, with the narrowboat background and had a good chinwag about the trade, and how things work out here. They very kindly waived any fee for the two hours we ended up spending there – definitely good Samaritans.

It was too windy to try and get the sail up there and we decided to go over to the Bight on Norman Island so that we could snorkel the caves the next day and perhaps raise the mainsail there. This was a bit of an eye-opener: there were at least 50 boats mainly on buoys with more following us in. And right in the middle was Salperon looking the most elegant as usual. We are trying to avoid expensive buoys so ended up anchored quite a long way back in the bay, pretty much alongside Salperon again but this would have the advantage that we could nip out of the bay in the morning to the caves situated on the headland just behind us – and without having to swap engines on the dinghy for the more powerful model. The last few days, we have for the first time, towed the dinghy behind Serafina somewhat nervously, mindful of the article we had read about losing the same type of dinghy due to the weak tow points and just how difficult it is to replace them. We have beefed up the clips on our tow harness and use two ropes in case one breaks.

The day continued to be very windy and it appears that this is another place where the wind is accelerated through the bay although it isn't so windy outside. We certainly were not going to try

and put bend the sail on here, but were pleased that the anchor had taken so well in 21 metres. The wind had the added advantage of blowing away some of the squealing female noise coming from the Willie T, a replica of a topsail lumbar schooner which has seen better days, but is now a well-known bar and restaurant with a partying reputation.

After another abortive attempt with the OCC net when we heard Steve as clear as day as they were 4 miles out from their overnight destination in Puerto Rico, we dinghied out to the caves. We tied up Doris as instructed in the pilot to the buoyed line outside the caves and slid into a fairly cool sea. There were already some yachts tied up to the buoys also located there and we felt we probably wouldn't want to do so with Serafina: it is very calm here and the boats tend to swing every which way and seem very close together.

There are three caves which go quite far back, all covered with different brightly coloured corals and sponges, and some electric yellow anemones. The underwater terrain was of large boulders piled up against the sheer cliff face on to a sandy floor. There were some very large fish, shoals of smaller fish, some that we haven't seen before, a cruising Barracuda and a completely oblivious turtle who swam along with us. It was a truly magical experience from what was quite a low expectation. But we would recommend a really early start, by the time we lifted our heads out of the water the area was heaving with swimmers and boats.

As the bay was still very unsuitable for raising the mainsail we motored off upwind to White Bay on Peter Island in quite a bit of wind and a choppy sea. As we neared the beach we could see that the three boats anchored there were back-winded which bode well for sail-raising. We managed to sneak into the NE corner and the wind obligingly dropped, so we dashed about getting the sail up and breathed a sigh of relief that we are now back to normal.

The rest of the day was taken more gently and I did feel a little embarrassed to dress Serafina overall with a full complement of drying laundry in full sight of the beach which is also maintained by the Peter Island Resort.

### **Charlotte Amalie, US Virgin Islands**

Sunday, Monday and Tuesday – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> April

We left White Bay, Peter Island early so that we could get into White Bay, Jost Van Dyke. This is a very small (and shallow) anchorage inside a reef on the West end of Jost Van Dyke that I remember as an idyllic but exclusive hotel which is renowned for inventing the Painkiller cocktail. But when we arrived, there was this odd mini cruise ship that we keep seeing around the Caribbean parked outside and as we approached an Ovni sped in ahead. The anchorage seem is to be deep enough for us only just around the entrance channel and it became very clear that we were not able to compete for space there! So we abandoned and settled to anchor in Great Harbour, about 1 mile away, finding a nice spot in amongst all the mooring buoys.

We went ashore for wifi to Foxy's and I had a wander up the beach, finding a taxi driver happy to drive us over to the Sandcastle in White Bay. So having dumped the computer back on board and dressing nicely for the Sandcastle, we set off very slowly in the lurching taxi. Of course, when we arrived the beach was alive with people both off the ship and over for Sunday afternoon drinking from Tortola and boy were they drinking – I felt distinctly overdressed. We indulged in some Painkillers and had a very nice evening walk along the beach, with dozens of pelicans plunging into the sea amongst over-indulged oblivious swimmers.

Rob got off early to customs and immigration the next morning so that we could clear out of the BVIs and motored over to Cruz Bay on St Johns in the U S of A!! We anchored rather gingerly in the temporary anchorage in less than ½ m of water and dinghied into Customs just too late to avoid the disgorging of a Tortola/St Thomas ferry whose passengers were being forced to check in here, so rather a long queue in the boiling sun.

Now very excited we returned to Serafina to set off for Charlotte Amalie to meet up with Scott-Free who were arriving there from their trip north to the East coast of the USA, Cuba and all points west of the USVIs, to discover the tide had gone out and we were rather firmly stuck in the mud! Eventually managed to power our way out of the soft mud and headed off to Charlotte Amalie still with insufficient wind to make sailing worthwhile. But this did allow us to dress overall (decorate the boat with all our flags for the uninitiated) to celebrate Scott-Free's arrival. In the event they were already at anchor but we managed to anchor nearby and spent the rest of the day celebrating, catching up and going into town for a meal. It was perfectly wonderful to see Chris and Steve again.

Today Chris and I went into town for some much needed retail therapy to discover that the WHOLE place is devoted to jewellery shops, we even struggled to find a good coffee shop as presumably the cruise ship tourists are already fed to the gills before they disembark for yet another duty free experience. So we were back on the quay in no time and had to resort to a K Mart in another area of the harbour, where we managed to find the perfect loud shirt for Rob at a fraction of the cost and even in his size rather than marquee dimensions.

One of the reasons we were keen to see St Thomas was that we had thought to provision and leave from here for our passage north to the east coast of America, but we have decide that this definitely isn't the place we had anticipated and will probably leave from the BVIs now. In fact we will be quite happy to leave here and get back to our bay and snorkelling lifestyle! Tomorrow we will go back to St John's where there is a national marine park and as there is still likely to be no wind, will spend some time with Chris and Steve cross-examining them for every last drop of info on their latest travels! And of course there will have to be a Mexican Train game or two...

### **Hawkbill Bay, St Johns USVI - Great Harbour, JVD - The Bight, Norman Island, BVI**

Wed, Thurs & Friday – 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> April

In the evening we went and had a best-ever-burger (on St Thomas) up by the departing cruise ships: the dinghy dock is alongside their dock so it was quite exciting to be nipping in while they are smoking and blowing horns for imminent departure, separated by a very short few yards of water; and on our other side was the world's fourth largest private motor yacht (reportedly cost \$200 million to build) also readying to leave with a crew member stood to attention at each fender! We also enjoyed a happy hour at a nearby bar which had swings with backs as their seating, unfortunately you could not indulge in too much enthusiastic activity without removing your kneecaps on the bar.

The following morning we set off to Hawksbill Bay on St John's, picking up a mooring in the bay. As the day went on the swell became more pronounced and the usual evening die-away did not appear, in fact life got a lot more bouncier. The four of us had dinner on board Serafina while the rain came down outside in buckets, but it was far too lively below decks to contemplate balancing dominoes on their edges for Mexican Train!

We all had a horrible night with broken sleep thanks to the swell. The options for other bays on St John's were not too inspiring, and realising that with the approaching Easter holidays we may struggle to check in at the BVIs, we decided to scoot round to Cruz Bay (USVI) and check out there, and then go into Jost Van Dyke to check into the BVIs. As I had managed to tweak my back attaching the tow bridle to the dinghy, Scott-Free kindly offered to launch their dinghy for the trip into Customs rather than require us to lower our heavy outboard engine onto the dinghy in a swell (which requires me and my poor balance to grasp the outboard to prevent it hitting Serafina's hull and then lower myself onto my knees at the vital moment, securing the engine to the transom in one easy movement – I wish!). Whilst Chris and Steve were sorting themselves out, we realised that we were next to Il Sogno who were anchored off St John's so we had a quick catch-up with Craig and Karene and hope to see them later in the month. They did tell us that the best provisioning was in Red Hook on the east end of St Thomas – not too helpful now, just as we are leaving the USVIs and had decided to give our proposed return there a miss! They will be heading north to the USA about the same time as us.

When we arrived at Great Harbour on Jost Van Dyke it was very clear that everyone was not enjoying the northerly ground swell sweeping through the Virgins and this anchorage, with some protection, was very busy. We both found a reasonable area to anchor in and were amazed as the afternoon went on, just how many yachts felt they could squeeze into the same space – three boats actually anchored over us and each of them abandoned and went elsewhere eventually, but we ended up as a catamaran sandwich!

We had a lovely barbeque on board Scott-Free and retired to bed to catch up on lost sleep. In the morning Rob did a quick dash ashore for better wifi, to see if he could order an AIS personal transmitter in time for Simon and Caroline to bring it out with them later in the month. Poor things, the list of “can you just pack this” is getting a whole lot longer.....

Then we motor sailed over to the ‘Bight’ on Norman Island so we could enjoy the snorkelling by the caves again. This time the anchorage was less busy amongst the moorings, but all the way along the shore were lined up almost 50, high-rise sports fishing vessels mainly from, as far as we could make out, Puerto Rico for the holiday. Later we spotted an approaching charter boat attempting to take their mainsail down. Unbelievably they turned away from the wind and were determined to take it down downwind in quite strong winds with all the full length battens wrapped firmly around the shrouds. As it obviously became jammed, their solution was to constantly gybe, giving quick yanks at the vital moment, eventually there were two people at the mast hauling at this poor sail. In the end they seem to give up and decided to motor into the bay which was upwind – and amazingly the whole exercise became possible..... Rather worrying that this fairly basic knowledge was lacking. Rob also had to aid a maiden in distress: we had become aware of a Brazilian siren on a small black yacht who spends her time gazing out to sea. As he returned in the dinghy from Scott-Free, she hailed Rob and begged him for a lift to the distant beach (despite having a dinghy attached to the stern of her boat). Sensing this was a genuine problem, he gave in and collected her, when in very broken English she explained that she had gone on board as cook but her very much older captain had other ideas (what a surprise), and she needed to make an urgent phone call. Later in the evening she was back on board.

### **Peter Island - Marina Cay Island**

Sat, Sun & part of Monday – 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> April.

In the morning Rob and Steve went off to the Caves for another snorkel. The pilot advises going in the afternoon for the better light into the caves, but we have found it is a whole lot nicer to go when there is no one else around, nobody stupidly feeding the fish as requested not to, and no idiot in a

motoring dinghy who believes he is exempt from mooring to the provided line and that he alone is allowed to patrol through the swimmers! They spotted the large turtle we had seen on our previous trip to Norman Island and hung above him waiting for him to stop munching for a quick breath of air, but after 20 minutes they had to admit he was not putting on much of a show! But the rest of the visit was as wonderful as before and this is certainly a fantastic spot.

We then nipped round to Great Harbour on Peter Island which was busier than last time but we were lucky enough to anchor in almost the same place. Rob, with Steve's very kind advice and assistance, settled down to his favourite occupation of loo maintenance (repair). They discovered that the waste pipe had almost completely choked itself with calcium, in less than the season since Rob last had it all apart and sorted out.

Meanwhile Chris and I had a very leisurely snorkel seeing a large, tagged turtle with a much smaller one who happily swam along with us; Rob was also lucky enough to find the big one later in the afternoon and swam beside him for half an hour, right out of the bay.

In the evening we all had supper on board Serafina and got down to the serious matter of planning our navigation north, Chris and Steve kindly passing on lots of information, pilots (we now have a whole shelf devoted to American waters!) and charts. We reciprocated with our experiences of heading further south down the East Caribbean chain – in a fairly underwhelming way! I woke very early the next morning and after a couple of hours of fidgeting went to read on deck as it got light, but was treated to an amazing display of about 30 pelicans constantly diving further out in the bay, the bombing noise was very impressive. There was obviously something very tasty attracting all this attention. After a while the birds started moving towards us, so I decided to swim over and take a look. Underwater where it suddenly starts to shallow, the whole bay was carpeted in shoals of 2" long greenish fish, constantly moving as large fish plunged through them. I was in about 4' of water when about 30 very large (some almost as long as me!) Tarpon came charging through the water towards them. Fortunately the previous day we had read in Scott-Free's superior fish identification book that Tarpon take no notice of humans and will not take fright, so I tried to "still my beating heart"!

It was so wonderful I swam back to the boat to drag a resistant Rob (something about early mornings, his first lie-in in months and fresh coffee) back to the beach. We swam out and stayed to watch all this activity until we got cold, including the pelicans who after an initial rest to settle their tummies were back in the fray diving just by us which was fascinating to watch from underwater: they stretch out their necks as they dive into the water managing not to crash land into the very shallow beach just under the surface. For the rest of the day, the Tarpon cruised under Serafina again but ignored Scott-Free oddly.

We went ashore to get wifi so that we could Skype Ewan for his birthday and were offered a lift to the beach bar in one of the golf buggies that transport Peter Island Resort's guests around. When we got there we realised that Skyping was going to be impossible with the wonderful steel band in full swing for Easter Sunday lunch, complete with the charming resort nanny resplendent in bunny ears dancing away. So we rang Ewan who told each of us the up-dated football news – how would we survive without this vital service?

Later on Chris, Steve and Rob separately had close encounters with a massive Eagle Ray – its tail alone was 10' long. Rob was impressed to discover just what a strong swimmer he has become in times of pure terror! This bay offers so much with great snorkelling along the shallow edges, but its depth is home to very much larger species of all kinds; and with the added challenge of deep anchoring and very few mooring buoys it is a relatively quiet anchorage. Apart from the occasional

water-skier or towed child's bouncy thing (who were driving me demented yesterday as I tried to polish off our very unsightly exhaust mark down one side of the hull from a bucking splashing dinghy) it is a really civilised spot.

In the evening we were joined by Craig and Karene from Il Sogno for drinks and it was great to hear all their news from their voyage all the way to the south of Grenada and back, making us feel a little lazy with our one-way trip! And we finished with a lovely chicken kurma barbeque courtesy of Scott-Free.

This morning, as there was no excitement in the bay, we foreswore the swimming although we were treated to a great fishing demonstration by two guys in a little boat slowly poling around the bay throwing a purse net out. We didn't feel it was necessary to tell them they were one day too late. Craig pointed out that some of this activity was possibly due to the full moon on Saturday. So we set off for a gentle sail up wind (Scott-Free showing us a nice pair of heels while we towed our bouncing dinghy and bemoaned our dirty bottom – yes, very poor losers!) to Marina Cay. As we freed off rounding Beef Island we unfurled our second foresail for a last minute sprint, which was just perfect. We are now sitting in a slightly bobbing anchorage but hopefully well protected from the expected NW swell due later on today from the storms off Florida.

### **Trellis Bay, Bear Island**

Tues 10<sup>th</sup> April

There was no swell to cause any problems but we were a bit disappointed by the happy hour prices (\$7 for a punch!) so again entertaining on board with salads made out of the detritus left in the fridge.....

In the morning we got away early to motor the mile over to Trellis Bay and pick up buoys. The previous evening we had rung Hertz car hire at 6pm on Easter Monday and were astonished to get an answer: No, they couldn't help but passed us on to Avis (who were, we discovered, just over the low booth wall!). So we walked up to the airport and picked up our car; well in fact not our car as it hadn't arrived as we were earlier than we had said we would be, so we took out a slightly larger model un-cleaned for the same price – perfect! Rob and I had felt we couldn't possibly wave goodbye to Scott-Free without one of our infamous road trips sans decent map. And the Tortola map proved to be particularly awful, not helped by the rare but visually attractive road signs which leave you none the wiser. The roads also left a lot to be desired with many many sleeping policemen and huge pot-holes. More on this theme later.

First we hot-footed it to Road Town for traditional coffee and cake. And then proceeded west, nipping into Prospect Reef Hotel where I used to work on flotilla out of their tiny harbour (circa 1980). The hotel is now owned by the government and looks pretty sad. We then called in at Nanny Cay so Rob and Steve could have a wander around Budget Marine (no trip would be complete without a chandlery visit). On to Soper's Hole where, sat in the middle of the road was a huge Iguana with an extremely long tail. Rob hopped out of the car to stalk it with the camera as the Iguana sauntered to the roadside, at which point it shot off at amazing high speed into the undergrowth – quite a clever trick!

Soper's Hole didn't inspire us much with its slightly saccharine facades so we pressed on. Or tried to, it was impossible to decide which tiny dirt track continued on as the main road. Eventually we chose one, quite possibly the wrong one as further along the vertical road it pointed out that you proceeded forward under your own risk, but since a three-point turn was well beyond the driver

(me) in this situation we had to continue. At several points I had to turf out the passengers to allow the car to lurch forward (on only three wheels I was reliably informed) over rainwater gullies. Apparently there were some good views but most of us were hanging on for grim death and watching for every hole in the track!

We re-joined civilisation at Long Bay, a beautiful beach and drove along the north coast road climbing impressive hills over headlands between yet more wonderful beaches. We stopped for lunch at Sugar Mill Resort's lovely lunchtime café. This resort is known for its cuisine and its prices, but lunch was a much more reasonable affair with a view to die and extremely jolly staff.

After Cane Garden Bay, the coast road headed inland presenting us with difficult decisions at each junction. Eventually Rob went and asked at a bar at one junction as we couldn't come to a consensus. The local guy he asked had just driven out of Road Town, but was so drunk he couldn't recognise anything on the map and wasn't even sure which road he would be taking back! We continuously met the local taxis ferrying around the latest cruise ship arrivals. These taxis are wide, open trucks with the passengers lined up in bus fashion; not necessarily what you want to meet on Tortolan roads (They seem to follow a fixed route presumably to avoid meeting each other). We found our way to Josiah's Bay which had obviously been set up as a surfers paradise but was now a little worn. There were two surfers in the pretty impressive seas.

We eventually headed back to Road Town for tea (yes we do eat ourselves to a standstill, part of the excursion ethos) and then a quick shopping trip at the posh supermarket, before heading back to Trellis Bay. At this point we discovered that we had a flat tyre – possibly it had been in this condition when we picked it up, or just one too many staggers over potholes – so we pumped it up and crossed our fingers. As we were early enough, I dropped the others and the vast amount of bags and shopping we had accumulated and attempted to return the car. This became a long drawn out exercise starting with the fact that I was unable to get the parking ticket machine to work. So I drove round to the other side of the airport which leads you back to the same machine. Eventually I was told I should have double tapped the button and then held it – why didn't I think of that? The Avis lad then deemed we had returned it with insufficient petrol so kindly drove me back to the petrol station to top it up, overtaking every single car in front of us regardless of road state or orientation! After he had helped out a colleague with a broken tailgate, re-entered all our information into their previously broken computer, checked the car out for damage under the headlights of another car, I was free to walk back in the dark!

Saba Rock, Virgin Gorda

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> April

Wednesday dawned early when a dinghy came round to ask for our mooring fee at 0640 despite the fact that we had already paid, perfect – early morning call thrown in for the \$25 fee! So we headed off to the Baths on Virgin Gorda to try and get a mooring buoy before it got busy. But it had already got busy! So we aborted to Spanish Town and anchored off, and then set off in both our dinghies back down to the Baths. The Baths is an area with huge granite boulders piled up on a white sand beach; they are within a marine park and probably the most photographed feature of the Virgins. We attached ourselves to the dinghy line and were faced with a fairly daunting entry into a very rolly, wave-swept area. But once we were immersed it was far easier swimming than it appeared. The rock formations continue underwater and although the fish life is less impressive, the vast cliff faces and enormous 'rock pools' they create makes you feel you are in one huge aquarium. We swam down to Devil's Bay and back to the dinghies, and then ashore for a scrabble through the Caves. This is the land side of the Baths, where the rocks form caverns, pools and

narrow passageways. At this point one starts to encounter the cruise ship landlubbers, some of whom's physiques do not lend themselves to squeezing through holes and the whole process slows down, so we opted to re-don our snorkel gear and swim back from Devil's Bay to the dinghy once again. Rob did particularly well, being one of life's non-mermaids, he is now so fit with constant snorkelling that he was very able to fin the long swim and propel himself through surging passages. I however, who always swims without fins "for the exercise" was pretty wacked at the end! The whole site is quite spectacular (have a look at the photos especially the panoramas at [www.rhbell.com](http://www.rhbell.com) but they may not be posted for a day or so though) and is well worth the effort of getting there.

So back to the boats for a delicious cinnamon and raisin bagel on Scott-Free (never heard of/had one – definitely to be pursued) and then a nice sail round to the north of Virgin Gorda, passing Richard Branson's Necker Island on the way. We also saw the little island off the larger one resembling the cartoon idea of a castaway's atoll complete with three perfect palm trees which Chris is convinced are plastic – and we quite agree, far too idyllic to have survived summer winds! We then sailed into North Sound which is a huge almost landlocked area, a yachting mecca now far more developed obviously than when I was here 32 years ago – and oh yes, poor Rob is totally bored with any sentence starting with 'in my day'. We dropped anchor around the top corner near Saba Rock in hopes of getting wifi and spotted La Contenta, a blue Najad 490 last seen in the Hamble, just ahead of us. Rob went to say hello in the dinghy and Warren and Judy filled us in on all the sort of yachting info for the area which is vital for liveaboards. The rest of the day was spent with Scott-Free who kindly took on the catering this time.

## **Illegal Aliens**

Thursday & Friday 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> April

Most of Thursday was spent doing jobs and catching up on the washing etc. and so it was not until the early afternoon that we combined with Scott-Free and used their dinghy to visit first Saba Rock and then Bitter End Yacht Club/resort.

Saba Rock is an impressive use of a small island which has been extended to provide a bar, restaurant, shop and a few other facilities, which of course includes a field of mooring buoys, imaginatively priced at \$25 a day! However we ascertained that we could dine in the restaurant in the evening and still select from the bar menu. (Trust me you do not dine at these restaurants at full price unless you have no alternative.) We also found out that they had a happy hour from 4pm to 6pm and sensible prices to make this worthwhile.

We then potted over to investigate Bitter End which was pretty smart but we did have Sarah twittering on still about how things were in 'her day'. Not much to get our attention as it turned out and with the time fast approaching 4pm, we nipped back to the boats and got washed and changed and headed back out to Saba Rock for the happy hour(s). We watched the daily display of the kitchen scraps being fed to the local large Tarpon, some of which sported Ramona fish on their backs. We also met up with four other boat crews who had just come along the same route as S-F from Dominican Republic and were likewise heading on to St Maarten on Friday, so we all chatted until the very strong 'painkillers' worked their magic and we eased our way into the restaurant for a very nice and reasonably priced meal.

Friday was a pretty fraught day all round, although it started very well with a tiny hummingbird visiting the boat. But more importantly I had remembered that we were supposed to have gone to immigration on the 8<sup>th</sup> to get an extension on our immigration permits (all very confusing and I will

explain to boats following us all about this in more detail in our yachting resources section of the website). Steve had to check S-F out as they were heading out to St Maarten, so together we went over to Gun Creek in Doris, our dinghy and visited Customs and Immigration. Steve was dealt with quickly and very efficiently but when it came to me it all started to go horribly wrong. Yes we needed an extension, but no, they could not do this at this customs post. It seems that I needed to go to Spanish Town and get it sorted there – and quickly as we were strictly speaking now illegal. The officer was however very helpful and having failed to summon a taxi using his phone, he went outside and found us another taxi to do the round trip immediately. All went well as Steve and I settled into our seats, but before setting off the driver wisely chose to inform us that the fare was...US\$60. This to go from a point slightly below the top of the island, to a town just halfway down the island – and the island in question is just 6 miles long! So we thanked him for his time and got out and rushed back to the yachts where Sarah and I decided that the best bet was to take Serafina round to Spanish Town and for me to go ashore in the dinghy and get this all sorted ASAP. However Sarah had promised to cook a big brunch for S-F to say goodbye so she went ahead and treated us all to a slap up breakfast which we then packed away and by 12.30 we had said our rather tearful goodbyes to Steve and Chris (goodness knows when our paths will cross again as we are heading north to the USA now and they are headed south to Panama, via Grenada and beyond in 2013).

On arrival at Spanish Town, Sarah simply pottered around offshore in Serafina whilst I nipped in, in the dinghy. I walked round to the customs and ferry port and presented myself and my sorry case. They heard me out and agreed that we were in trouble and then informed me that this was not the right office as they too were unable to issue an extension. So off I went on foot into the town to find the huge government offices (very impressive for such a small island) where having logged into reception, I took the lift up to Immigration. Here they played a very extended game of make the Englishman wait and even when I was finally given forms to fill in and handed them back I was told that I would now have to wait for an interview! This finally took place and another wait ensued whilst the two officers with absolutely nothing else to do, simply sat and chatted and ignored my paperwork until their watches said that they had made me wait long enough. The frustrating thing is that when you check into the BVI the whole thing is messy but simple. Suddenly when you want an extension they have real concerns about your suitability. And nowhere can you find out how the system is supposed to work.

Finally I was released back into the wild and once back on Serafina we motored back to Bitter End (nil wind today). As we entered the Sound, Sarah saw a huge ray leap out of the water – it's really quite surprising that there are 4' + examples of sea life lurking in such busy areas. When we turned the corner we found S-F getting ready to set off. We had tea together and then again said our goodbyes and they motored off on their 85 mile overnight trip.

We sat back and started planning for the next 10 days which starts off with a load of bad weather complete with strong winds due here tomorrow.

### **Social Whirl in North Sound, Virgin Gorda**

Sat, Sun & Monday – 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> April

On Saturday morning quite a few boats around us joined the exodus from the Sound, which surprised us as we had been studying the charts and reckoned that North Sound was a fairly good place to be with the impending wind, and if you are not a charter yacht with time limits, it seemed a good idea to wait it out here. We however took this opportunity to edge in a bit closer behind the

protection of the hull and let out a lot more chain. Then we went ashore to enable Rob to send off various bits of work and for me to pursue the possibility of a leg wax.

Yes it was possible but the whole exercise became a complete farce: took three times as long as I am used to (and at the same cost three times as much) leaving me with patchy hairy legs, with sticky bits and lots of white towelling fluff attached - a highly attractive look as you can imagine. So after some discussion it was agreed they would waive the fee and two days later I am finally rid of the glue! The rest of the day was spent getting paperwork up to date and Rob ploughing on with work.

While the wind continued to increase, but although there was a lively chop, there was no real sea to worry about and Serafina did not sail around the anchor too much. Although we did decide that raising the dinghy alongside as we usually do would not be prudent, so we locked Doris to the stern.

The following morning we had a rather wet trip into the Bitter End despite wearing chest high waterproofs so that we could buy a few items from the extortionate grocery shop to enable us to entertain Craig and Karene from Il Sogno in the evening. Our return trip was worse as we were confronted by a small returning ferry who chose to press on, rather than make a small detour round us, so were engulfed in a large wave over the bow. Many thanks.

In the evening Craig and Karene gamely agreed to make the soggy trip upwind to Serafina and we had a lovely evening; they are certainly a very informative couple, and quite open about any shortcomings of America (they are American) - we are learning an astonishing amount now we are nearing our departure. Agreed we might have done all this before, but our sort of boating lifestyle means we manage to plan at least one step ahead - and that's about it!

On Monday we started to sort out space for Simon and Caroline Evans who join us on Tuesday, only for them to email us to let us know that their flight from the UK had been cancelled for technical reasons. Eventually they have been able to tell us they are flying tomorrow and should still make their connecting flight from Antigua to Tortola in the evening. We had thought to get nearer to Road Town on Tortola in the afternoon, to make a dash into the supermarket quicker but have agreed on a very early start tomorrow morning, when the seas should have dropped off a bit. On any other island we would normally catch the local bus but the BVIs do not have a bus system (although apparently it is now in the planning stages) and the short trip from Beef Island to Road Town, perhaps 6 miles, costs \$27 per head each way in a taxi!!!

We also caught up with Musketelle (Peter and Barbara, New Zealanders) a yacht we first met in Marmaris, Turkey and then we bumped into them again, in a pub on the Thames during the London Boat Show in early 2010, and then finally we fitted out together the following spring in Marmaris. They were anchored just behind us and are preparing to set off to Panama and take their boat home after 7 years of sailing.

In the early evening we met up with two other yachts, La Contenta and Sarah Jane at Saba Rock, as part of a Cruising Association informal arrangement which was a forerunner to a party tomorrow night on Tortola but which we won't be able to make. I also joined in with the Tarpon feeding during happy hour again and now have the delicate aroma of fish on my hands.

This sounds like more like a social diary than a sailing blog - but what can you do if you are sat in a bay waiting for a blow to go over?

## **Guess who's coming to dinner**

Tues, Wednesday & Thursday 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> April

Up at 6am to make the 20 mile dash down Road Town, Tortola in order to do a supermarket shop in preparation for the arrival of Simon and Caroline Evans who are staying with us for 5 days.

Things started badly when I was not paying full attention as I got the anchor snubber in and so the chain hook jammed itself in the anchor roller. It took 5 minutes and ever increasingly violent use of a club hammer and screwdriver to release it before I could then get on with raising the anchor. It of course came up caked in thick cloying mud and as I cleaned this off with the deck hose, Sarah set a course for Tortola.

We made very good time under sail and iron topsail (engine) and dropped anchor alongside the cruise ship dock a few hours later. We then took the dinghy into Wickham's Cay marina and went over to use the ATM. Helpfully, given that we were in a hurry today, this machine swallowed my card and declared itself 'Out of Order'. A obliging marina employee said that this happens a lot and if I went into town and reported this to the bank, they would probably be able to give me my card back on Friday....!!

So I jumped in the dinghy and shot across the bay to the town and found my way to the bank, which of course had huge queues. The security guard was very helpful and after he and I agreed that I could have to wait hours, he suggested that I just walk into one of the offices and explain my plight. I did this and found a very helpful lady (Christine) who took my details and assured me that the card would be safe and here waiting for me when we return at the end of the month. Nothing else I could do for now so I returned to where Sarah was standing guard over the machine and we headed off to the supermarket.

Successful shop generally (but no local tomatoes which upset Sarah) but when we returned to the dinghy we were somewhat surprised to discover that Wickham's Cay weren't quite as welcoming as previously and had padlocked our security wire to the dock. Luckily they hadn't looked very carefully at what they were doing and we were able to undo the padlocking from our end and hastily leave with their padlock still attached to the other end of our wire – a bit mean, but the day had already had a few setbacks. We got back on board Serafina and on our way to Trellis Bay by 12.30.

Trellis was busy, but fairly flat despite the pretty strong wind still blowing. We picked up a buoy and settled down to prepare for the arrival of our guests. At 6.00pm we wandered the 400 yards up to the airport and met Simon and Caroline and we walked back to the Loose Mongoose where we had left the dinghy. A quick painkiller each during happy hour was perfect before we all crammed into the dinghy with their luggage and made our way out to Serafina. Simon and Caroline recounted their awful journey where they were supposed to have left the UK on Monday to stay overnight in Antigua before their LIAT flight to Tortola. Unfortunately they were on a flight behind the one that caught fire at Gatwick and their own plane had technical difficulties, so after 5 hours on the apron eating lunch they were turfed off to queue for a further 4 hours and be assigned to a hotel prior to a flight the next day. Not ideal preparation for a relaxing holiday.

On Wednesday morning we went back ashore in Trellis Bay for a better look round and to drop our rubbish and the packaging that they had brought various things wrapped up in. We also visited Aragorn's artist studio with some of the best artwork in the Caribbean (and definitely the 'best' prices....) – we picked out a huge Humpback Whale copper sculpture as a perfect embellishment to

the Evans' beautiful new house but didn't dare even enquire the price! We then had a gentle sail down Francis Drake Passage to Peter Island where we dropped anchor and all had a long snorkel along the coral reef before a lazy lunch. Afternoon drifted by with another swim and a great evening on board which helped us celebrate what had been Caroline's birthday.

We had an early start on Thursday morning and motored quickly down to the 'Bight' on Norman Island where we dropped anchor and took the dinghy round to the caves where we enjoyed another great swim and exploration.

We returned to Serafina, had breakfast and then had a wonderful sail north up the sound to Cooper island where we opted to pick up a buoy. As we had sailed up (close hauled) we came across 'Il Sogno' who were also heading north, but as we were on starboard tack, they had to give way and sail under us. Much waving and brief banter before they sailed into the distance.

La Contenta (Warren & Judy) dropped anchor nearby and popped over in their dinghy on their way ashore. Just one of those endless sailing coincidences but Simon and Caroline had also met Warren and Judy before, in the UK, when La Contenta had arrived tied up next to them in a marina.

Sarah served up another wonderful evening meal and we then settled down to teach Simon & Caroline the fabled Mexican Train. Predictably Sarah won and seeing as how it is a game of skill and expertise, I came last.

### **Cooper Island, BVI**

Tues, Wednesday & Thursday 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> April

Up at 6am to make the 20 mile dash down Road Town, Tortola in order to do a supermarket shop in preparation for the arrival of Simon and Caroline Evans who are staying with us for 5 days.

Things started badly when I was not paying full attention as I got the anchor snubber in and so the chain hook jammed itself in the anchor roller. It took 5 minutes and ever increasingly violent use of a club hammer and screwdriver to release it before I could then get on with raising the anchor. It of course came up caked in thick cloying mud and as I cleaned this off with the deck hose, Sarah set a course for Tortola.

We made very good time under sail and iron topsail (engine) and dropped anchor alongside the cruise ship dock a few hours later. We then took the dinghy into Wickham's Cay marina and went over to use the ATM. Helpfully, given that we were in a hurry today, this machine swallowed my card and declared itself 'Out of Order'. A obliging marina employee said that this happens a lot and if I went into town and reported this to the bank, they would probably be able to give me my card back on Friday....!!

So I jumped in the dinghy and shot across the bay to the town and found my way to the bank, which of course had huge queues. The security guard was very helpful and after he and I agreed that I could have to wait hours, he suggested that I just walk into one of the offices and explain my plight. I did this and found a very helpful lady (Christine) who took my details and assured me that the card would be safe and here waiting for me when we return at the end of the month. Nothing else I could do for now so I returned to where Sarah was standing guard over the machine and we headed off to the supermarket.

Successful shop generally (but no local tomatoes which upset Sarah) but when we returned to the dinghy we were somewhat surprised to discover that Wickham's Cay weren't quite as welcoming as previously and had padlocked our security wire to the dock. Luckily they hadn't looked very carefully at what they were doing and we were able to undo the padlocking from our end and hastily leave with their padlock still attached to the other end of our wire – a bit mean, but the day had already had a few setbacks. We got back on board Serafina and on our way to Trellis Bay by 12.30.

Trellis was busy, but fairly flat despite the pretty strong wind still blowing. We picked up a buoy and settled down to prepare for the arrival of our guests. At 6.00pm we wandered the 400 yards up to the airport and met Simon and Caroline and we walked back to the Loose Mongoose where we had left the dinghy. A quick painkiller each during happy hour was perfect before we all crammed into the dinghy with their luggage and made our way out to Serafina. Simon and Caroline recounted their awful journey where they were supposed to have left the UK on Monday to stay overnight in Antigua before their LIAT flight to Tortola. Unfortunately they were on a flight behind the one that caught fire at Gatwick and their own plane had technical difficulties, so after 5 hours on the apron eating lunch they were turfed off to queue for a further 4 hours and be assigned to a hotel prior to a flight the next day. Not ideal preparation for a relaxing holiday.

On Wednesday morning we went back ashore in Trellis Bay for a better look round and to drop our rubbish and the packaging that they had brought various things wrapped up in. We also visited Aragorn's artist studio with some of the best artwork in the Caribbean (and definitely the 'best' prices....) – we picked out a huge Humpback Whale copper sculpture as a perfect embellishment to the Evans' beautiful new house but didn't dare even enquire the price! We then had a gentle sail down Francis Drake Passage to Peter Island where we dropped anchor and all had a long snorkel along the coral reef before a lazy lunch. Afternoon drifted by with another swim and a great evening on board which helped us celebrate what had been Caroline's birthday.

We had an early start on Thursday morning and motored quickly down to the 'Bight' on Norman Island where we dropped anchor and took the dinghy round to the caves where we enjoyed another great swim and exploration.

We returned to Serafina, had breakfast and then had a wonderful sail north up the sound to Cooper island where we opted to pick up a buoy. As we had sailed up (close hauled) we came across 'Il Sogno' who were also heading north, but as we were on starboard tack, they had to give way and sail under us. Much waving and brief banter before they sailed into the distance.

La Contenta (Warren & Judy) dropped anchor nearby and popped over in their dinghy on their way ashore. Just one of those endless sailing coincidences but Simon and Caroline had also met Warren and Judy before, in the UK, when La Contenta had arrived tied up next to them in a marina.

Sarah served up another wonderful evening meal and we then settled down to teach Simon & Caroline the fabled Mexican Train. Predictably Sarah won and seeing as how it is a game of skill and expertise, I came last.

Anegada, BVI

Friday, Saturday and Sunday – 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> April

Another early morning for poor Simon and Caroline (hardly a holiday, this more like a route march by sea) so that we could get to the 'Baths' on Virgin Gorda and nab a buoy rather than have to dinghy over from Spanish Town about a mile or so away. Believe it or not we left at 0630hrs and secured one ahead of the gang of charter yachts about 20 minutes behind us....

It was again a wonderful experience: the water was much clearer than our previous visit and although the seas seemed calmer, the surges were worse – perhaps it is to do with the almost non-existent tides? And we almost had the place to ourselves at that time in the morning.

After a second breakfast, we headed off for a leisurely sail round upwind to North Sound anchoring near Saba Rock, just in front of Il Sogno. This is where we will be dropping the Evans' off later in the week. We all had a swim and while showers were ensuing, I swam off to Il Sogno to invite them to join us for Happy Hour at Saba Rock. As I approached I spotted an enormous, ugly, evil, lurking Barracuda about 4' long, underneath their keel. For the first time in ages I was wearing my watch (they go for shiny things) and panicking big time; swam fast for Il Sogno's swim ladder and was going to beg a lift back, only to discover they were ashore - no dinghy, no lift and the swim ladder was not down. Hasty retreat to Serafina where Simon was kind enough to point out that I couldn't hope to out-swim the damn thing anyway!

We had a happy Happy Hour or so, including feeding the Tarpon again and their 'pet' Barracuda (nowhere near as big as mine), and supper ashore as well. We concluded that as Anegada was only 14 miles away, we could have a more measured departure and left around 0900hrs.

Anegada is another island almost completely surrounded by reef and the small harbour within the reef was going to be quite a challenge for a yacht with a deep draft such as ours, but I was keen to go: when I had worked out here (yes, very familiar phrase now) we used to take the flotilla up there every fortnight but other charter yachts were banned, in pre-chart plotter days, in attempting to find their way through the reef. In those days there was one hotel with a beach hut bar, beautiful coloured water and the rays used to leap out of the water at dusk. I had also seen a Humpback Whale breach on the way up there once.

Sadly today it was very well populated with buoys (and a flotilla was in), the sea is very milky/murky and the whole bay is developed with another small hotel, several restaurants (all serving expensive lobster) and a rather ugly quay with street lighting. Inland there were even concrete roads, a roundabout, and time enough for a quite extensive car graveyard to have developed! (No cars at all in my day!)

When we arrived there were several kite surfers very expertly threading their way through the mooring field. Later in the day the surfers launched their kites again and Simon spotted Richard Branson through the binoculars! His group appeared to have kited up from Necker to Anegada for lunch and were now returning (15 miles). Luckily they did have a launch with them as one amongst their number was not demonstrating such skill and was disappearing downwind!

We took a short walk inland to try and find the salt pond where they have reintroduced the flamingo. We did eventually find this up a short path, but it was very smelly and not a bird in sight. So back for a sundowner and then back to Serafina for supper. Actually there is a nice atmosphere of a more chaotic Caribbean flavour than in the rest of the BVIs which was nice to find. We rounded off the evening with another game of Mexican Train which Simon was tactless enough to win.

We had contemplated hiring scooters for the morning but at \$50 a shot and a grey sky we decided to follow the other departing yachts and headed back to Virgin Gorda. The wind had swung round to due south, so we were going to be close-hauled again but with fairly light airs apart from the occasional rain squall going through. We had a great sail down and only motored the final half mile into the sound.

We had a cooling-off swim on our arrival and after lunch delivered Simon and Caroline to their hotel (Bitter End Resort). Unfortunately during the dinghy launch I did spot that damn Barracuda loitering under our boat now.

In the evening the Evans kindly invited us for a sundowner and then we returned to a very sultry Serafina and thought longingly of their air fan the cold running water in their swanky hotel room!

## Extended farewells

Mon, Tues & Wed – 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> April.

We have spent the last three days loitering in North Sound, Virgin Gorda, being treated royally by Simon and Caroline. They have enthusiastically got stuck into the watersports, sailing lasers, paddling kayaks and Caroline had yet another early start with yoga at 0730. Simon even managed to take out a Hobie cat and Rob and I got to sail it in turn as well – great fun.

Whilst paddling her kayak around the back of Serafina, Caroline was asked if we would keep an eye on a windsurfer hidden away under a bush on the beach behind us while the next door boat (3 women plus skipper, one of whom is learning to sail so that she can be competent on the yacht she has hired for a month with her family, in Newport, Rhode Island – she will be skippering.....) went off for a sail. We spotted a lad wandering up and down the beach, obviously checking out the windsurfer. He later returned by dinghy with a friend. When we stopped him from towing it away, he told us he thought it had drifted away from the resort and he was going to return it. We weren't convinced and sent him packing! The following morning I had a long chat with the skipper-to-be and her captain very kindly gave us a particularly nice bottle of rum as a thank you for protecting his windsurfer – very uncalled for.

Our final evening with the Evans began with a drink on the veranda of their bungalow room on the side of the hill with a wonderful view of the reef and Necker Island. We then all indulged (and oh boy did we all indulge) in the Caribbean barbeque and buffet. The final icing on the cake was the floorshow: there was a band playing, which in Caroline's professional opinion was OK but without a drummer, lacked pace, but many of the diners got up to dance. We may have to raise our dancing fervour if any of the Americans taking to the floor are the norm. There was one woman in her 30s, stylishly dressed and totally enthralled with her own dancing. Her partner was equally interesting to observe (I am sorry I just cannot resist the people watching scenario). Eventually, having joined the rather cringing band on the stage, and had the microphone wrestled back from her grasp, she treated us all to the sort of dance routine that 4 year old girls doing fairy impressions do, including dashing around the floor and leaping on to ledges with flapping arms. We did rather wonder if the elderly threesome next to us were going to survive the apoplexy they were overcome with! The poor woman seemed to take this as applause or was completely immune.....

On Wednesday morning we said our farewells to Simon and Caroline when they caught the ferry over to Beef Island to fly back to Antigua for a few days in English Harbour. They have been great fun, yet again lovely guests and even more of a treat, ex-Najad owners – it really was a question of letting them get on with the sailing. And just as soon as Simon has mastered at which point we apply the hammer in anchoring (no not when we pull it up!), they will be totally perfect!

As we were readying the boat to leave, Tim from S/Y Matsu dinghied over to quiz us about St Maarten. It turned out that he hailed from Kington in Herefordshire among many coincidences and it was just like having Ewan on board: we got the blow by blow report of the Chelsea Barcelona Champions league football game – he was still wearing his shirt from watching the match on TV the day before! We eventually set off to Spanish Town, anchoring by the reef and nipping in for a quick shop to tide us over until we go into Road Town to fully provision for our trip north next week. We then motor-sailed back to Great Harbour on Peter Island to sit out the next few days and prepare the boat.

On the way I practised my crash stop technique and ran through our MOB routine – and it made Rob feel a bit more secure! And we also made loads of water. For some reason the watermaker had been on a go-slow, cleverly Rob managed to find his way into the machine's menu (not of course

detailed in the instruction manual) to discover there are high and low settings and somehow ours seemed to have altered; possibly when our filters needed attention a few days ago.

### **Getting ready for the off.**

Thurs, Fri, Sat & Sun – 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April

We settled ourselves down in our favourite anchorage here in Great Harbour, Peter Island, BVI. Sadly, since we have been here this time the water has not been as wonderfully clear as usual so the snorkelling has been less interesting, but there is always plenty going on to keep us amused. We are anchored in a good safe spot and have been able to enjoy watching everyone coming and going and because of the depths in this bay, it is frequently all a bit too much of a challenge for some boats that give up and either head off elsewhere, or simply potter over to the far side of the bay and pick up a buoy which they have to pay for.

On Saturday we splashed out a bit and took the dinghy ashore and walked through to Deadman's Bay where we enjoyed a wonderful lunch in the Peter Island Resort restaurant. The staff were simply wonderful and very attentive and the food was superb. The biggest star of the show was Jean who seems to be the principle 'resort personality'. When we were here over Easter she was dressed in bunny ears and was very much keeping the kids all entertained. On this occasion she seemed to be focussed on lunch guests and in particular us! She was very impressed with how we had got here and that we were off sailing next to the USA. She insisted on giving us freshly baked cookies and generally seemed to make it her business to ensure we had a good time there. Which we did!

With the wind from the east, Deadman's Bay was anything but flat and we were surprised how many yachts were lurching around so uncomfortably in the surging swell and almost all were riding on anchors. They were all charter yachts and had clearly not been very well advised! Overall the BVIs are definitely feeling far quieter than when we arrived which was the beginning of Easter school holidays. Its worrying to contemplate how the charter companies are making a living here when so few of their boats are out.

The only drawback with the bay we are in is that the free Wifi from the resort which is the other side of a hill from where we are moored is pretty weak, so during the last few days we have not had much contact with the outside world, which has at least allowed us to concentrate on getting Serafina and ourselves fully prepared for our passage north to the USA on starting on Wednesday. Sarah has been very focussed on passage planning and in particular working out options for where we could go if the weather deteriorates or we have any problems. This is not too easy as the southern coast of the USA is not too hospitable in bad weather for boats arriving from offshore.

We have as ever been very well entertained in the evenings by the fish in the bay. There seems to be a strict hierarchy with the poor whitebait at the surface being attacked in a frenzy by larger fish who in turn are being hunted by even bigger fish from below. In addition to all this thrashing and splashing going on, the terns and pelicans are swooping, diving and gorging themselves as well. A great source of amusement is watching the braver terns who have learnt to wait until a pelican has dived and scooped up some fish, at which point the tern swoops down and lands on the pelican's head and remains there until the pelican surrenders some food – or flies off.

We are heading off to check in to Village Cay Marina in Road Town, Tortola on Monday so we can do our final preparations, shopping etc. and from there we hope to head off north to Norfolk, Virginia on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

## Ready to go?

Mon & Tues - 30<sup>th</sup> April & 1<sup>st</sup> May

We didn't race off to Road Town, Tortola on Monday morning as technically we were not due in until 1200. We did just check that the casual confirmation on the phone had translated into a proper booking (!) and to confirm that they have a fuel dock. Yes, they have a fuel dock but no fuel. So we motored over to Wickhams Cay II, the next door marina that is purely a charter base and used their fuel dock instead. They had the slowest, most laid back lad (and for the Caribbean that is saying a lot) running the dock. Heavens knows what would happen if a rope had urgently to be thrown..... Rob nosed Serafina in alongside at the end of the trot, but we managed to go aground on the way out – it's a pretty tight hole if you aren't a twin engine catamaran!

Rob then managed a very nifty entry into our berth on the shallowest pontoon, passing Richard Branson's very smart, modern catamaran, Necker Belle – in to collect a guest we surmised. I then raced off to take the large load of washing into the laundry (we've been unable to make water in Great Harbour and now time is pressing), and catch a taxi to the supermarket. My day was made: fresh local tomatoes – I am easily pleased (Rob may not necessarily agree?). Despite being a large, new supermarket with many Waitrose items it still suffers from the Caribbean shortages – if the ship hasn't been in, the stock just doesn't exist. So some of the things I was relying on for our sail weren't available – but there are only two of us for possibly 10-14 days and we do still have the Fray Bentos pies from Gibraltar still!

Meanwhile Rob had checked us in with a monumentally disinterested woman in the marina, who had told him that they could fill both our European and American gas bottles “just leave them outside”. Rob was not at all convinced this was a sensible course of action: leaving a brand new gas bottle worth \$100 lying around by a bar! Amazingly a really nice man came and collected them from the boat, returning them later in the afternoon.

Sadly this IGY marina is not of the luxurious standard of the other IGY marinas we have visited. The pontoons are a bit dilapidated with little wooden bollards instead of cleats. The showers are deeply disappointing – only two, for which you need \$3 tokens; we haven't bothered with them and showered on board.

Rob trekked off to the bank to collect his debit card which had been swallowed by an ATM just before the Evans joined us, to discover that the BVI still has good old British banking hours – they shut at 3pm.

As I had managed to get a couple of meals cooked for the passage and wasn't totally inspired with another meal to prepare, we thought we would pop into town for a quick bite. So we set off hoping for a pizza but after a wander around, came to the conclusion that there are no restaurants in Road Town, you need a car to get out and about. In fact Road Town is pretty dire and has the delightful aroma of all-pervading drains. So back to the marina and we had a very pleasant, if slightly expensive meal. Unfortunately this came to an abrupt stop when first one energetic cockroach scuttled along the balcony balustrade to join us, Rob despatching this into the sea with a plate; but I finally lost my joie de vivre as a second one popped out of a hole in the floor and shot up the table leg.

On return to Serafina we found that the evangelical evening was still in full swing in the stadium behind the boat. Surprisingly the amplified singing was quite poor – we have become used to everyone dancing and singing in wonderful voices: in the Customs offices, especially by supermarket

shelf stackers, just about anywhere, so this was much more my type of vocal effort! And I am afraid that the pious brother pontificating does not bring out the best in me. But luckily it didn't run late.

Tuesday morning, Rob was up and running to be first in line at the bank – he's already experienced their queues. He wasn't first, but got seen very swiftly by a snippy woman who informed him, contrary to what he had been previously told, that overseas bank cards are destroyed and the issuing bank notified when they get devoured by an ATM. So that was a bit irritating and means we are one cash card down, but not the end of the world.

Rob also checked-out of Customs and immigration for tomorrow as unexpectedly, a different part of the office from that where we initially checked into, was more accommodating. In fact we are feeling really quite prepared for tomorrow (must have forgotten something vital!). We rang my brother, James to confirm about our passage plan – he has been emailed all the boat details for Falmouth coastguard in case we don't turn up in Norfolk, Virginia in a fortnight or so's time. He sounded worryingly hazy about the whole thing but since he is about to do his first adjudication of a law case, he quite rightly has his mind on higher things!

We have had contact from Chris Parker (weather forecaster and router) and although the weather patterns are not ideal (not nice Easterly trade winds - now where have we heard that one before?) we should get a good sail initially, then very little wind but we can't afford to get ahead of ourselves as a nasty storm will roll off (toward the UK again, sorry about that folks) Cape Hatteras around Monday and we need to let that get away and for the Gulf Stream to settle down again before we dash around the cape into the Chesapeake. We could wait a further 10 days for another weather window but the moon would be waning and we are already psyched up for the trip now.

So we will set off tomorrow and hope to post blogs as we sail, although it may just be positions depending on the sea state. We should arrive in about 10-12 days – and this time I really do intend to see a whale. In fact any sea mammal would be a real bonus at the moment having only had two dolphin sightings this season.

PS. You will be thrilled to hear that we are being treated to another religious event tonight – tomorrow is world prayer day and we expect lots of fervent prayers for our passage!!

### **Things can only get better.....**

Those who ever feel a little envious of what we are doing out here should try hard not to laugh out loud. 20 knots of wind, with gusts up to 30 knots - huge electrical storms and rain - massive confused seas and both of us suffering from seasickness pretty much for the past 24 hours!

But otherwise all is OK.

### **Pottering along**

Friday 4th May

First two days were no fun at all, although the wind was good and from a good direction, both of us suffered from the very unpleasant swell and confused wave motions. There is the usual long big Atlantic rollers with a different set running across them.

It has all settled down a bit this morning but the wind has died as well, so we are reduced to motor sailing at the moment. Both now managing to sleep OK and are feeling much better - thank

goodness as it was no fun to startwith.

Nice sunny day and we are waiting to hear what our weather man has to say today and his routing for us from here on for the next few days as we are currently half a day behind his suggested route plan, which throws things a bit.

Not easy to type in this sea so signing off for now, but all OK if just a little behind schedule and weary.

### **Light winds and a visitor**

Saturday 5th May (0700 hrs)

A much better day all round as the sea flattened out a lot, the sun shone, the clouds vanished unfortunately taking the wind with them though!

Motor sailed all day and it gave us the opportunity to sort ourselves out and get back into shape with nice showers and proper food.

Mid afternoon we saw whales breaching but sadly a long way off, so as sightings go, it was rather underwhelming. A few flying fish and the odd gannet graced us with their presence and then in the late afternoon we were joined by Noddy.

Noddy is a Brown Noddy, one of the tern family and he/she decided that a little rest sitting on our outboard engine on the gantry at the back of the boat would be fun. This was a very small slippery and precarious landing spot and frequently as the boat lurched off a wave, he was dislodged and forced to fly a couple of laps around us before attempting another upwind landing. Not all landings were successful, but it seemed to keep him and us amused. He remained on board until dark and then left us.

Progress has been slower than hoped as the wind has headed us and with just 5 knots blowing, we are reduced at present to gently motor-sailing. We did however get our latest personal 5 day updated weather forecast late last night and it made interesting reading.....

We will be passing through no less than 3 fronts, the first two being pretty straightforward but the third sounds pretty nasty. We are likely to be sailing NE then SW at times to use the weather to our best advantage which will sound crazy to non sailors. But the joy awaits us on Wednesday night as we are to expect 30 knot winds (force 7) with squalls blowing 40 knots (force 8) and 9ft confused seas. The wind is expected also to clock from South to West to North during all this. No problem for Serafina, but no fun for us!

However this is all days away and these things change so we can only continue to sail on a fine reach and make as best time as we can for now and just hope that Sarah gets to see some Whales at last.

### **There is no F in whales**

Sunday 6th May

Saturday stayed pretty flat with 10 knots of wind frustratingly coming from the north which forced us to sail rather further west than we had hoped.

Overnight this light wind vanished altogether and we have been motoring across an incredibly flat Med style sea. Perfect for spotting whales, but so far they have remained elusive. We were joined briefly by some Atlantic Spotted dolphins (or were they Pantropical Spotted Dolphin - the jury is out), but they seemed pretty disinterested and headed off rather sooner than we had hoped! A Tropic Bird fluttered around the boat - Sarah is constantly amazed that these seemingly inefficient fliers could be 300 miles away from land.

Stunning sunsets and sunrises and doubtless we will be posting our attempts to capture these on camera, on the website once we reach the USA.

Forecast has the wind building this afternoon and by tonight we may well be back in 20+ knots with 30 knot gusts. Overall the next few days will be pretty trying as these fronts go over as we have been told to expect lots of wind and a load of big wind shifts to keep us on our toes, with the peak coming on Wednesday evening.

The key point though about the forecasting is that we must not reach the point where we plan to cross the Gulf Stream until Friday morning. The weather forecast currently shows that the conditions in the stream at our crossing point will be wholly untenable until Friday. The Gulf Stream rushes north at at least 2.5 knots and if there is a northerly wind blowing against it, it creates huge and dangerous waves; with a southerly wind it is more of a sleigh ride! That is fine, but this is also a small window of opportunity because having crossed the gulf stream, we still have several hundred miles to sail until we are safely in the Chesapeake, including rounding the notorious Cape Hatteras. It seems that we HAVE to be beyond there and in the Chesapeake by Monday afternoon, or we are in big trouble from the next big weather front. Should all work out fine, but it is certainly a good deal more complicated than simply sailing across the Atlantic!

It may be that these logs 'dry up' for a while if conditions become unpleasant, but we will at least try to put our position up if we can.

Many thanks to those who have been emailing us so far. It helps a lot to know you are out there.

To those in the UK, we hope that your weather improves - I gather that you are experiencing the wettest drought since records began.....

### **Riding along on the crest of a wave**

Monday 7th May

Sunday remained pretty flat all day, with a light breeze from the west or north west and an almost silky flat sea. Had to motor all day and half the night, although as the day pressed on, the wind did gradually fill in and we were at least able to motor-sail and save precious fuel. By the early hours of this morning we were able to turn off the engine and under our full cutter rig were sailing at 8 knots through a confused but fairly amiable sea. The problem with the sea conditions is simply that there is a fairly standard Atlantic swell running from the north and a 'wind chop' of waves coming from the west.

No wildlife to report although we did see two ships (on the AIS) during the day, but the closest either of them came to us was a distant 12 miles.

Sarah spent a good part of the day cooking and preparing meals, as the last forecast indicated that

such activities might be a lot less practical over the next few days! We will get a new 5 day forecast this evening (our time, which is 5 hours behind the UK) and we are waiting to hear whether things are likely to be better or worse.

Current plan sees us crossing the Gulf Stream (our entry point is 33.50N 75.16W) on Friday morning and hopefully seeking to enter the inlet to the Chesapeake at low tide on Sunday morning. That is Plan A.....

Having a really great sail this morning and still doing around 8 knots through the water, but have picked up a counter current which is restricting our speed over the ground to just 5 knots or so. But fun all the same and we did not get the 30 knot gusts predicted last night which was a bonus.

### **Feast or famine**

Tuesday 8th May

It seems to be all or nothing on this trip.

Yesterday saw us flying along in 25 knots of wind with moderate to large seas, then we met the weather front and as we reappeared out of the big rainstorm, the wind died completely and we ended up motoring in just 1 knot of wind for hours on end.

At 0300 hrs this morning the wind came back and we are now back hammering along, heavily reefed in some frankly huge seas which are coming broadside to us.

We are ahead of the Plan A schedule which says that it is very important that we do NOT reach the Gulf Stream before Friday morning, so we may have to heave too at some stage if we arrive too soon.

Will get the new forecast at the same time as we send this report, so will know more about things very soon!

But otherwise all is fine.

### **Plan B**

This is really to update any of you actually following our progress and who may wonder what the hell we are up to when you see our positions plotted on Google Earth!

The bad news is that the weather is set to get considerably worse than first feared and also more extended. I will not bore you with the synopsis, but the new plan is as follows.

We are going to spend the next two days simply sailing up and down where we are making sure that on Wednesday evening we are well south of 30N and west of 70W. We are then going to be battered by a gale with wind speeds of 30 - 35 knots with gusts between 40 and 50 knots, the waves are forecast to be

16ft which is going to be very unpleasant. The hope though is that by remaining to the south and west of the co-ordinates above we might avoid the squalls, or the worst of them at least.!

Then on Thursday we start sailing for a point 30N 72W which we should aim to reach on Friday

morning. We then hightail it to our entry point to cross the Gulf Stream at 33.5N 75.15W which we should not approach until Sunday morning as things stand. We then have part of Sunday and all of Monday to race the 200+ miles around Cape Hatteras and get into the Chesapeake before the next system emerges possibly early on Tuesday.

So we have two days to wallow out here before the real fun starts, so time at least to prepare and plan.

### **Calm before the .....**

Wednesday Morning 9th May

This weather at sea is extraordinary: Tuesday night and morning we were doing 7 knots in 12' seas. Now we are swilling around in 5 knots of wind and a gently rolling sea albeit 7' high. After further consultations from our wonderful wind guru Chris Parker, we decided to head south of the worst of the incoming gale and sit and wait there until it is deemed prudent to turn round and start back again. (This is why we seem to be going backwards on our route - we are!)

So by 1500 hrs Tuesday we were hove-to, proving to ourselves just how comfortable and quiet it is possible to be in a windy, roly situation. We tried it on both 'tacks' to see if it made a difference to how Serafina sits in these seas - The jib to port enables her to point very slightly more towards the wind (as opposed to beam on), useful to know. The other surprising thing that happened was that, in our efforts to reduce flying objects inside the boat (and recognising that haute cuisine is less and less likely on this passage) I had lobbed a large cabbage overboard - the idea of an exploding gaseous vegetable was more than I could bear - an hour and a half later having changed the hove-to to the other side of the boat, we met the cabbage coming down the waves towards us again. Now doesn't that make MOB (Man Over Board drill to the uninitiated) sound more possible?

We stayed like this all night, so both of us had a good rest in preparation for a more energetic night tonight....

Today we are going to finish taking off and stowing pieces of equipment that could go flying, including the bimini cover so it could be a wet experience in the cockpit. And then we start sailing back north at sunset tonight to meet the cold front at a less critical point as it zooms through, (this is the point now where we will meet the 35 knot winds and 50 knot squalls and then sail on behind it in calmer winds (!) intending to cross the Gulf Stream on Saturday and get into the Chesapeake late Monday night, Tuesday morning. This is Plan C I think! The catch is that the various computer weather models disagree about almost all of what we are about to get and in particular, what might happen on Monday at Hatteras. We are relying in Chris Parker's wisdom and experience - oh yes, and the chap up there who we all turn to when the chips are down!

Incidentally we have been intermittently watching an Irish yacht in the same vicinity as us, on the AIS. They have obviously opted to do the same thing as us but instead of heaving-to have been sailing around. Just hope we stay out of each others' way tonight!

### **Still playing the waiting game**

Thursday 10th May

So far this promised low has slipped forward by 36 hours since originally forecast - we would feel so much better if it was over and done with! The grotty bit is likely to be midnight tonight, Thursday

and then as they say, it will be all plain sailing (well possibly even motoring again in our case).

Yesterday afternoon we continued to slowly make our way south - wind didn't fill in as much as promised but we weirdly had 2 knots of current pushing us south. Rob had a very successful time balancing the sails perfectly so that we could just lock the wheel and save the wear and tear on the auto-helm. Then as we had a little more wind, Henry 'The Navigator' our Hydrovane (wind steering for those out of the know) took over. But we had a definitely a feeling of all dressed up and nowhere to go, especially since we had taken down the bimini (cockpit sunshade) and experienced our first fully cloudless day! In fact in the last 24 hours we have only achieved 15 miles on the log!!! And in the wrong direction - more annoying still as the previous day, until it had been deemed prudent to go south we had been looking like breaking all 24 hour records.

We also watched a Tropic Bird constantly circling us for an hour or so. They are rather fairytale looking birds, with two very long curled tail feathers - but as I might have mentioned before, really don't look the business in the efficient flying department. But you can't fault them - here they are 300 miles from land, and we have seen several. This bird was definitely looking to land on Serafina, but was attempting to settle on our wildly swinging mast head and eventually the intricacies of landing (and he tried every direction) beat him and he set off again.

We continued sailing south through the evening and Rob kindly decided to keep on this heading for my off watch so that I could stay in one berth, rather than tacking, saving me finding that sleep was untenable and requiring a bed hop to the other side of the saloon.

At the start of my 0300 hours watch we finally tacked and bore off to head to the point we would like to intersect the incoming cold front. We discovered that far from the log mis-reading (as we have been suspecting for a while), we really did have 2 knots of current, but now against us. Barely making 4 knots SOG despite often doing 6.5+ knots through the water although we are carrying very little mainsail, but our cutter rig is doing sterling work. Wonderful night though: its great being sans bimini with the sort of starlit/moonlit nights we are having. And there is now enough headroom for me to dance to my ipod on the cockpit bar - just so many benefits! (Incidentally this is a horizontal bar at ankle height for anybody with strange notions of pole dancing and/or a bar in the cockpit.)

Presently we are sailing at bit better speeds and everything is hunky dory. There is this awful thing called time and weather and although we would rather not be sailing into the low pressure system, if we are ever to reach the Chesapeake before the next lot of weather systems peel off the coast at Hatteras on Tuesday, needs must as the devil drives (is that the saying?), we have to press on to cross the Gulf Stream on Saturday (perhaps....). Probably no log tomorrow until the seas stop swilling around.

And many thanks to all our friends who are so kindly sending us emails – it enlivens our day no end, and we WILL be replying just as soon as we reach terra firma. Our sons could take notice!!?

### **Bob, bob, bobbing along**

Friday morning 11th May

Well the weather system has obviously decided to teach forecasters that this is nature and it will do what it wants.

After sailing south for two days we finally set off north west again early morning yesterday heading for a collision with the cold front around

midnight last night. In reality we met it in the afternoon, further south than predicted and a good deal more benign. The steady winds were merely 15 or so knots and the squalls topped out at 25 knots. There was a lot of rain but none of the horrific stuff we were told to expect. (We gather satellite images show all the big 40+ knot gusts were north and west of us.) There were some impressive lightening shows - mainly firing up out of the clouds rather than aiming downwards (good news!) and no thunder; in fact the thunder clouds seemed to be barely moving. I also spotted some amazingshooting stars, so vivid I expected them to hiss into the sea nearby.

As we emerged from under the front the wind veered from SW to north and died away leaving us to motor sail again for several hours before finally we were able to start sailing again. But the bad news today is that the wind is coming almost exactly from where are trying to go, which means in theory a 600 mile beat to windward. We have been advised though that this will drop away tonight to nil and that we will be motoring for at least two days including the crossing the Gulf Stream assuming we have even reached that far north by then. Given that we have limited fuel, these will leave things quite tight for when we reach the Chesapeake and still have 6 hours to motor up the Elizabeth river.

Sarah had a fun visit from 6 Atlantic Spotted dolphins around 7pm last night (still light) and the pack was 5 adults and a very energetic juvenile which was doing all the leaping and showing off. We also had a pair of Tropic birds visit us on different occasions through the day and again the game seemed to be all about attempting to land on our mast head. Now you will understand that this is a near impossibility as the top of the mast is some 60 feet above the deck and the boat was pitching and rolling in the main swell with 10ft waves and we were sailing at 6 knots with an 18 knot wind coming at right angles. One of them was very persistent and very nearly made it, but sadly at the crucial moment, Serafina bucked and the poor bird got smacked by the VHF aerial array. He made a very disgruntled squawk and abandoned all further attempts.

So we have around 640 miles to run still (as a crow might, wishfully, fly) and it sounds like Wednesday might now be our arrival date (Sorry Greta!!) but the only bad weather currently thought possible, would actually be a benefit as it would give us stronger southerly wind as we approach Chesapeake. We will just have to wait and see and wonder how we can eke out the remaining fuel. (we brought Henry's rudder back on board at 0300 hrs as it presents a big drag when not in use which will help a bit.)

## **Hallelujah**

Saturday 12th May

Gradually through the day, the wind began to gently veer round towards the east letting us creep closer and closer to our required course, and with the full cutter rig flying we were sailing along at 6 knots plus, but then in the late afternoon it again started to back taking us yet again well away from the rhumb line. To add to the problem, the wind then died and by 2100 hrs we were reduced to motoring again, but at least heading in the right direction.

At 0300 hrs this morning the wind picked up again and to our restrained joy, it veered round to the east and now at last we could sail at full speed on a course direct to the point where we plan to cross the Gulf Stream some 140 miles ahead of us. In fact by 0900hrs we had to reduce sail a bit as the wind had picked up to 20 knots, but still we can lay our chosen course.

Very little else to report as we gratefully accepted yesterday as something of a rest day. Tried fishing for the first time on this passage, but the huge amounts of floating seaweed (which we have

encountered throughout the whole season) meant I was recovering the line every few minutes to clear

it. All rather pointless and frustrating - given that we have been sailing now for 9 days and still have 400 miles to run and had planned only to take 9 days in total, fresh fish would be a bonus on the catering front.

Entertained yesterday afternoon and again this morning by individual Tropic birds that seem to have an absolute fixation about attempting to land on our mast head. Just like the one I described in yesterday's blog, these ones were equally unsuccessful, and although they do get momentarily very close,

goodness knows how they plan to hang on once there! They also curtailed the fishing this morning as they are fooled into believing the lure is a fish and it is only a matter of time before one dives and gets itself hooked.

### **Frustrating weather continues**

Sunday morning 13th May

Well at least we were sailing all day yesterday and in fact made very good progress directly towards our next target which is the point at which we plan to cross the Gulf Stream. Sadly though, as the evening approached, the wind died away again leaving us once again relying on the old 'iron topsail' to keep us on schedule to reach Cape Henry (the inlet to the Chesapeake) at first light on Tuesday 15th May. We had encouraging periods during the night when the wind picked up to 18 - 20 knots from the SE, but as soon as you got all the sails reset it died away again!

A lot of swell all day which increased with the wind through the day, but when the wind died we were left rolling in a manner that seemed designed to make sleep as difficult as possible.

There has been a slight increase in the amount of traffic around us (we saw one yacht, and three ships) and on the plus side we had a few visits from a small pod of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins. But they were very quiet and subdued it seems and played largely underwater around the bow, with almost no showy displays.

Sadly little else to report, but we are getting close now and today we will be raising the Stars and Stripes courtesy flag on the cross trees in preparation. Hope they have got the band ready to welcome us!!

### **The end would be in sight if only....**

Monday 14th May

A much more eventful day (sorry readers!): around 0700 hrs we started heading across what we thought was the Gulf Stream as the current north began to increase. You may wonder why we have been going on at such length about this occurrence. One would think that if there is a nice northward going current it would be a good idea to join it as early as possible and take the sleigh ride (a bit like the turtles in Finding Nemo!) but as we have found to our cost, the nearer you are to the continent of America the more extreme weather changes you may experience, and you would NOT want a northerly wind blowing against the current which kicks up huge seas. Subsequently the perceived wisdom is to cut across it at 90 degrees which is harder than you would imagine. Eventually we ended up with a 4+ knot current and as we are also trying to slow down our speed at the moment (to enable a dawn entry into the Chesapeake on Tuesday), we weren't carrying as much

sail as we might wish, so we were actually heading south but being carried due west with the ferry gliding motion - for the best part of 40 miles! Quite what the ships bearing down on us made of it all we not sure. The sea temperature rose by 3 degrees to 31.5 while we were within the Gulf Stream.

We ambitiously both had showers wedged on the back deck in the very roly seas (another day without a good wash was beyond the pale) - and jolly chilly it was to expose bare wet bodies to a 20 knot wind. On the western side of the GS the sea depths go from over 4000m to about 40m! So with the Atlantic swell rolling in beam on and, guess what, another change to the weather forecast (no, not the nice benign southerly with small seas we have an easterly of 20k gusting 25k and a ESE wind chop - we weren't stupid enough to really believe our luck had changed!) the seas are 8' with a short interval. And together with our reduced sail makes for another uncomfortable day and night. It is also very noisy down below as every item in the boat tries to throw itself from one side of the boat to the other - every tea towel is employed padding something! As the weather forecast has changed and we may expect squalls, we also wrestled the bimini cover back onto its frame so that we have some shelter from the rain. We really do find things to do at sea....

My friend Jo and I have previously had long discussions on flat feet (I am sure your ears weren't burning, Ewan) and balance; and she tells me that the constant re-positioning on a boat is very good to strengthen feet as you get older and makes it less likely that you will experience falls in real old age. So after this passage my Donald Duck flippers are going to be positive stabilisers!

The GS took all day to cross and in the evening Rob had another attempt at fishing and actually caught a Little Tunney, (that's what they are called - not a reference to its size, it is sufficient for 3 meals at least so not so little), great celebrations and a relieved cook who can put the emergency Fray Bentos tins back in the bilge..... So we quickly sorted it out and Rob went off watch. As dusk fell I was joined in the cockpit by a very large flying fish flapping all over the place - luckily there was enough light to be able to scoop it into a bucket and lob it (well a small bounce on the deck!) overboard. I had just finished scrubbing my hands from the Tunney and really didn't need this - flying fish have huge scales and shed them copiously. Why is it that some fish have scales and the tuna, for instance don't? In fact the evening was very entertaining regarding live stock: a few dolphin joined us momentarily (our slow wallow did not engage their interest) and I could watch the flying fish off the starboard bow in our new, replacement, incredibly bright Lopo navigation light (no 4 in the series, all replaced under warranty which is astonishing). During the day these fish set off to avoid predators in very elegant flights just above the waves and can go for several hundreds of metres (despite what the books say). At night it is apparent (do they need eyesight to achieve accurate flight?) they just take off vertically like Polaris missiles, so it is no wonder we end up with a crop on deck - and they were firing off all over the place. I now realise that most of them most get washed/flapped off overboard again - I could even hear them bouncing off the aluminium dinghy bottom on deck!

During the night there were a few ships to watch going up and down past us, and one tug with a very long tow (quarter of a mile) to avoid. We could also see the sodium glow in the sky of various of the towns ashore. The navigation lights are also impressive (after several years of the Med and the Caribbean where there are hardly any and those may have dragged out of position, have disappeared, or worse be there, but unlit so become a hazard; or some kind soul has decided to add their own uncharted buoy and light); those that I could see last night had listed visible distances of, for instance, 3 miles but I could see it 25 miles away!

This morning Rob is very disappointed: we are 8 miles away from land having travelled all this way (in a timescale comparable with that of our Atlantic crossing which is twice the distance!) and can't see anything yet except for the buoy and tower we went between at Cape Hatteras. Yes, we

rounded this other potential nasty at 0915 this morning. The day is greyish and obviously roly (!) but the end is in sight (well it would be if the east coast was quite so flat!) - we hope to enter Hampton Roads, the entry into Chesapeake at dawn tomorrow so don't expect too much news, as we will be making our way the 30 miles to our destination up the Elizabeth River and then doing customs etc.

And just to set off a very positive day we have just been joined by about 10 huge dolphins (Common Bottlenose) diving under the bow, jumping and slapping down alongside.

Just need a whale to show itself now.

### **Good ole US of A - possibly**

Tuesday 15th May

Its 0700 Eastern US time and as far as we know we are in the United States - hard to tell as it is hissing down with rain and the thunder has just started up again! We have gone through the tunnel/bridge crossing Hampton Roads, the entry into the Chesapeake and can just see the buoy (boo-ee as they say here) in front and nothing more, so don't expect a panorama of the harbours! We are dressed in the full sailing-in-the-summer kit: waterproof top and bottoms, thermal top, sailing wellies (Rob just discovered he has been walking around in my second pair for two days which I had abandoned [they've lost all grip - he concurs!] in favour of my leather ones, which for the first time in five years finally feel comfortably worn in and no longer give me blisters, only for the soles to develop a 3"flap, equally lethal), neck warmers and woolly hats....

Yesterday was more of the same, we quietly sailed up towards the inlet entrance in fairly nice weather (none of the nasties suggested by Chris have actually developed - but he didn't mention this glorious weather change!). Unfortunately we still had considerably roly seas making me more and more irritable as I wrestled with the fish to turn it into curry and soup, and staggered and clonked from side to side in the galley. I am now down to onions, potatoes, carrots and a few bits of lurking veg not looking in the first flush of youth - the fresh produce didn't really survive very well (nothing like as good as the wonderful stuff we were still eating well after our arrival from the Canaries last winter). And sadly Little Tunney is not such an exciting fish to eat - good for soup though.

The seas have changed completely: positively a nice East Coast UK colour scheme - grey/green and opaque, and the water temperature has dropped to 21.5 degrees C.

And we still couldn't see actual ground - plenty of high rise buildings could be seen through the binoculars. I think we had imagined approaching this great big continent that it would look seriously impressive with grand cliffs or something. If Columbus had been arriving today he'd have sailed straight into it with its current visibility and lack of mountains and Rob thinks that if had been as miserable as this, the Pilgrim Fathers would have turned round and headed straight back home.

During the night I had some interesting encounters: a ship coming down our rhumb line again but this one decided to change direction across our already altered path in the final 15 minutes before impact (according to the AIS) - thanks very much. And suddenly, out of nowhere whilst I was concentrating on avoiding this, I found some sort of military/coastguard vessel had materialised on our starboard side which was very worrying, obviously it doesn't show on the AIS. With hindsight we think it was the South Pilot vessel which later radioed us for confirmation of our intentions, checking us out first.

Rob had a more entertaining watch, not many ships but he was tracking another yacht, Curlew which had been sailing around ahead of us during the day/evening presumably like us trying to time his entry into the Chesapeake in the daylight. He was charging around at great speed unfortunately getting into all sorts of problems with regard to other fast moving craft, and Rob watched as he changed direction many times to avoid collisions. Later he was ahead of us entering the TSS but chose to take the deep water channel (only allowed for really massive craft, even the 800 ft cargo ships weren't using it) to then have to be radioed "for your information" by the huge cruise ship immediately behind him as they both approached the squeeze point between the bridge heads! He apparently hadn't noticed the huge ship a mere half mile behind....

We are also amazed by the coastguards' radio techniques out here. Being used to the beautiful diction of our UK equivalents, out here they seem to pick coastguards by the ability to churn out the information at incomprehensible speed - what has happened to that lovely American drawl? Heaven help us if we ever need real information from them. Luckily weather information is given out over local MW radios in a loop, also with the facility to draw your attention by an alarm to any changes in the information and particularly, to squall information (which can tell you very accurately that in 20 minutes you will be hit by an almighty blast, or so Scott-Free tells us) - and all it is, is a tiny transistor radio costing \$20 (and Chris and Steve very kindly passed theirs on).

So we are galloping towards our destination which is a private condominium dock very kindly offered to us by Greta and Gary, 30 miles into the Chesapeake on the Elizabeth River. Greta is the Port Officer for the OCC (Ocean Cruising Club) here and has been a star: emailing us all sorts of comforting emails and as we speak, contacting on our behalf the representative for our charger/inverter. This has unfortunately failed - since we only replaced this expensive piece of equipment in Antigua, the good news is it is well covered by warranty. But the utter horror apart from no mains battery charger, is that without the inverter Rob can only get back to his special coffee consumption by turning on the generator for every espresso he makes - possibly a little extravagant!

So I am feeling the need to get a little tidying up done (we have four beds to dismantle to start off with having prepared the forepeak, and the two pilot berths on each side of the saloon depending on which tack [ie which side the boat is leaning] we are on) - especially as the rain is still teeming down and there is nothing to see! Just you carry on Rob in that nice soggy cockpit....

### **Not so plain sailing....**

So we continued up the huge expanse of water that is the Hampton Roads, fairly deserted, doing all the right things and keeping in the correct channels and getting heftily rained on. Serafina is radioed up by a US

Ship which turns up to be a jumped up coastguard who instructs us that we should observe regulations and pass him port to port - we are already doing this, so this is a bit worrying....

Carry on until Gary radios us and gives us the final instructions of where to berth Serafina and he and Greta are both kindly waiting to take our lines. After introductions Greta tells us that we must immediately telephone Customs, so we get out our US phone and I provide Rob with the telephone numbers, copy and pasted from the US Coastguard website six weeks ago - discontinued! Small panic as we try to find alternative numbers but Greta goes back to their condo and phones for us. We are instructed to go straight to the Customs office downtown, but after lunch (as Rob points out Homeland Security obviously waits for lunch).

Swift showers – it is very important to look the part always when dealing with officials we have discovered. And Rob fires off an email to the Mastervolt guy in Florida re our Inverter. Gary is back 30 minutes later and we drive to the office, not that far away but the cruise ship is creating traffic jams (but just not on the UK scale – they really aren't trying!) so a somewhat circuitous route, apparently. The town is beautiful just what those of us who have never visited the US (Rob never, me for a family wedding over a few days) would imagine with tall brick buildings, rocking chairs on porches, incredibly tidy and clean and floral smelling (in town!!). Initially we are ignored, then a very smart female officer chases up Officer Tom Ellis who doesn't really want to deal with us as we haven't made an appointment (because of course we knew exactly what time and day we would be available?). And then points out that if Agriculture and Immigration haven't already visited us on the boat before we set foot on land we are in violation and liable for a \$10,000 fine. Who told us to come down?

The end result is we are sent back to the boat to await further officers who will do all the paperwork including issuing the precious Cruising Licence which allows us to sail around the US without, at every port or anchorage we stop at, having to go and do Customs and pay a fee every time. Gary drives us back to Serafina and we go back on board and Rob rings up Immigration to come and visit us. Two officers arrive remarkably quickly but meanwhile Rob has disabled the toilets so that they cannot be pumped straight overboard and I have put up the Decals – notices regarding pollution and garbage disposal that we are required to display – which are among some of the regulations we have to follow. The female officer isn't brave enough to step on board and it really is only a hop – she's carrying a firearm for heaven's sake! So she sees to our passports standing on the pier. Officer McGowan is incredibly welcoming and bending over backwards to help and apologise for the mix-up. He takes down details of the boat and tells me I must dump all fresh produce into a bin liner, plus another with our rubbish for the Agriculture officers to inspect and dispose of. Even onions which last forever have to be disposed of. Well at least it gave me a chance to wipe out the fridge.

They leave having decided not to stamp our passports. And the next two officers arrive – actually they don't want to look at the food. I only need to officially dispose of food that I will not be using and for that we need to call their operative who will collect it. So I can restack the fridge, lockers etc. But if we have a bee swarm on board they can deal with it....

The other female officer is very clued up, somewhat surprised that the previous visitors have not stamped the passports (which is why she didn't bring her official stamps with her) and what paperwork have they left us with – none? Oh! So we fill in some forms and they drive back to the office where Rob has to join them – no they aren't offering lifts – to get the passports stamped and the Cruising Licence issued

So, so far no one has inspected the boat, disposed of rubbish/food, issued any paperwork or stamped us in on our passports. But we haven't been fined and we are 5 officers along the line though! This surely isn't the way to deal with incoming aliens? Gary confirms that this is completely different from the system used by the previous yacht that arrived. It is remarkably difficult to every find out Customs and Immigration procedures the world over, but we had expected that the USA would have it off pat rather than making it up as they go along. Perhaps this is a way to foil aliens overcoming the system, if there isn't one?

Gary to the rescue again and he drives Rob back down to the Marine Customs and Border Protection Agency office. Rob is greeted warmly by Officer Evelyn Waite and she starts to process our paperwork again. After 20 mins it seems they have lost it all in the computer system, but after 30 mins all is well. They require more info again and Rob has to complete two forms for the second time as they omitted to deal with them properly earlier. Meanwhile Gary has to nip out to feed the

parking meter and gets drenched in a massive downpour for his troubles. Finally all is completed and Rob tries to clear up a few of the details about the regulations and what exactly we need to do when our nice new cruising licence expires this time next year. They clearly have a lot less idea than us about this and so he gave up and returned to Serafina to deal with the Mastervolt Inverter/charger issue.

Gary and Greta have already contacted Mastervolt about our problem and they have sort of reacted in a positive way. We have to package up the unit (to avoid any transit damage) and UPS it to them in Florida and they will fix it and get it back as soon as possible... But not for several days at least. It is under warranty though.

We are at least now legal aliens and can relax – get some sleep and settle down to do some proper tourist stuff for a few days.

Thank you to all who have emailed us as we were on passage and we will try to get back to you all over the next week.

### **Out and about in Norfolk, VA**

Tuesday & Wednesday morning 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> May

On Tuesday evening Greta very kindly invited us to their beautiful condominium (they previously lived nearby in a very large house – Greta tells me she cannot persuade Gary to get rid of anything, so the apartment is packed full!) for a meal. Even better she was sensible enough to schedule this early before we started to fade for lack of sleep! She then manfully takes on all our washing from the last two weeks (bearing in mind that we were getting through a lot of clothes, as you are on watch during the day – few clothes – and at night – just about everything we could lay our hands on!) including bedding from three beds as we had made up both the saloon pilot berths as well as the aft cabin, depending on what the seas and winds were like, depended on where we slept. The condominium owners who lend us their dock space for free, refuse to gaze out at boats heavily decorated in washing, so their only stipulation is no laundry – which seems a very fair exchange to us.

So after a blissful night of sleep, we started more tidying up on the boat to hear Gary knock on the boat at 0900 presenting us with all our clean laundry – now that's what we call service! Later in the morning Gary takes us to UPS so that they can pack and despatch our inverter/charger unit to Fort Lauderdale. If we get it there asap they will deal with it immediately, but if it arrives next week there will be a long delay. It costs a handsome \$254 to send!

We were then dropped off at the Mall so we (well me obviously) could have a good dose of retail therapy.

First we had lunch at a pizza place. I was unbelievably sensible for me: I had a half portion salad and yes it was big – but I had been so craving vegetables on the passage, it was perfect. Rob opted for a pizza (larger) but equally delicious. I even forewent the dessert menu (impressed?) – we were out to buy jeans, so did need to feel able to squeeze into something. And I have a nasty feeling that the amount of OCC people we are expecting to meet plus the standard sizes of meals out here, may mean we are on the downward trail figure-wise!

After that, our first priority was to replace Rob's Keen sandals – they have been hanging together by some judicious cobbling by me for the last 6 weeks. This was easily accomplished. And it felt just

so strange to be able to wander around, buy exactly what you want – rather than endlessly looking for some form of acceptable alternative. And also to be able to do it in rather easier ‘English’ than Caribbean patois. Although Rob and I were a little stumped by “emonno”? This turned out to be “lemon or no” as in, in my glass of water. We have already had a few comments about our lovely English accents and the way we talk.

We then carried on with the shopping, each buying a pair of jeans to cope mainly with the ferocious air-conditioning as much as the downturn in the weather. And of course they were very cheap and in lovely soft American cotton. Yes I definitely enjoy the western standard of living! After that, it was somewhat aimless wandering around (Rob’s idea of purgatory although he was very entertained in a swish kitchen equipment shop – threatening to return for the purchasing of inane gadgets for my birthday....) but when we did decide to leave it was hammering down with rain so we opted for coffee before our walk home.

It really is a very beautiful neighbourhood – we’re not sure if we happen to be in a very wealthy area or this is what we are likely to encounter on the East Coast. The houses are either in lovely old brick or clapboard with the ubiquitous verandas with rocking chairs, and Stars and Stripes flying above them. The sidewalks are clean and bordered by well-tended gardens or strips of planting – and actually completely empty. We didn’t encounter any other pedestrians, this is definitely the country where the automobile rules. And many of the residential roads are surfaced with cobbles brought over as ballast in English sailing ships!

Today we have been completing the tidy-up and I discovered that the lower shelf in the locker beneath the anchor locker has taken some water. Unfortunately this shelf is not visible generally, so Najad had not done their usual job of a highly varnished thing of beauty, but put in some marine ply. This has not enjoyed the water, turning mildewed and splitting at the edges. So we have turned out the locker to give it a good air (not as easy as in our previous location with the humidity here from all the rain!) and will varnish the wood once it has dried out from my attentions.

Just as dusk was falling we heard strange aircraft noise and we treated to an amazing air display of a helicopter doing loop the loops (didn’t know they could do this without falling out of the sky), nose-dives etc until he waved his tail prop and sped off down river. Hopefully Gary is going to lend us some of his photos from his camera’s mega lens as our shots are a little underwhelming.

On Thursday morning we were joined by Gary and two other condo owners for coffee on board Serafina. One of them, Frank, is captain for Tow Boat US and swiftly joined us up. This is a great organisation: if you go aground anywhere you radio them up and they tow you off. If you don’t belong, each call out can cost \$400+ but for a lot less than half this we are covered for a full year. And we have heard many anecdotes indicating that we will go aground and will use them!

This afternoon we are hopefully being delivered to a grocery store (didn’t realise that supermarket is an unknown word here!) to stock up on fresh produce. Sadly I am greatly looking forward to this. I am always fascinated by other countries food habits. I understand that the biggest challenge here is buying foods, such as bread, which is not stuffed full of sugar.

### **Now we know why we came**

Thurs, Fri, Sat & Sun – 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> May

Well I was wrong, the grocery store (Harris Teeter) was out of this world – think Waitrose and then some. No worry about sweet bread – all sorts of artisan numbers, and anything else you might like to imagine. Unfortunately being accompanied by Rob and Gary, once

they had 'done' the drink section I couldn't indulge in a real explore, but I have been promised that someone will dump me there and I can have a real merchandise scrutiny by myself. Yes I know this is sad.

Gary joined us for a drink in the evening as Greta had gone to a baby party given by a neighbour who has just 'had' by surrogate mother, twins – and along with the 3 nannies in attendance, mother and babies are doing fine. Oh and she is also a multi-millionaire single mother. Gary seems to spend a bit of effort avoiding social events: their next stand-off is over another neighbour's wedding to be held on the pretty Norfolk Boat Club dock alongside us.

The following morning Rob went back for an in-depth discussion about Ipads (we are finally biting the bullet – it will be even easier to take ashore to upload if no wifi can be found afloat and the navionics charts are brilliant on it, costing a mere £30 for the USA!) and I found someone to cut my hair – not too bad. Rob then cleverly YELPd hairdressers and found loads of alternatives. YELP is the company Ewan has just joined in London and here in the US it is an impressive tool (there, good plug?). And of course on the way we picked up a coffee stop and salads for lunch – it's no wonder Americans are a slightly different shape from us, but probably not for long! Greta has explained the tipping here: 15% is average (10% if it's not great service, but that doesn't often happen) and if it is a self-service place, leave \$1 per head. And by the time you have also added on the tax (varying in each state) you have to be on your toes in calculating the real cost of a meal.

We have been amazed to find that if you are waiting in residential streets to cross, the cars will stop and invite you to carry on; but at main road junctions you must cross at the designated spots. Waiting for the signal can take ages and our minds and eyes start to wander around the sights, until we suddenly spot that the signal has changed and we have a counted-down 20 seconds to sprint across a six lane highway plus wide central reservation. Rob has a theory that this is why we do not see any elderly people, it is a culling system! And added to the fact that cyclists use the sidewalks rather than the roads, because obviously there are no pedestrians, we really should be paying more attention.

All around the city are statues of the same mermaid shape (which is also Norfolk's logo) which is the depiction of a children's story page by page, but each is decorated by different artists, so I am enjoying spotting them – another distraction apart from the architecture.

On Saturday afternoon I took a wander around the local area to do the Freemason Historic District walking tour. The oldest house dates from 1790 and the houses are very varied in the styles of "Italianate, Greek, Georgian, or Richardson Romanesque Revival, Adamesque, Beaux Arts, High Victorian, Federal, Queen Anne, Tudor, and Second Empire"! And we are beginning to get the hang of the history: Norfolk was razed during the Revolutionary War in 1776 (what we know as the American War of Independence), this was followed by the 1812 War (this seems to have slipped under our radar) also known as the Second War of Independence (Gary flatly told us "you lost this") and then the Civil War in 1861 where the Hampton Roads inlet into the Chesapeake was blockaded. Unfortunately this ended in somewhat of a stalemate as the two opposing ships were heavily armour plated (a new technique to change naval shipping henceforth) and neither could inflict the winning wound!

There is also lots of interesting river traffic (the road traffic is surprisingly similar to European – none of the massive wide American cars we had expected, but great trucks though): some interesting sail craft and a paddle steamer amongst others. Some of the other 'traffic' I am less keen on: there is a patrol of Canada Geese that paddle past at 0530 and I can't decide if the honking relates to the stragglers catching up or the shepherding of a harem, either way it wakes me up every morning. I have invested in another bird identification book (no 4) and we have seen among others, Ospreys, robins (not as pretty as ours), Black-crowned Night

Heron, and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons (do untold damage to decks we are reliably informed!).

The weather is still cold – we have even unearthed our duvets after a particularly cold night. This is not helped by an east to north east wind, which is also piling up the tides so that it is sometimes quite a feat to get on and off the boat as we are on a fixed pontoon. Oh and isn't Rob enjoying that other aspect of sailing (tides) that he sort of entrusts to me, but wishes I was more focused. But we seem to have the warps (Rob was ticked off for calling them 'ropes' – Gary informed him that "lines are for tying up boats, ropes are what we use for hanging people") well balanced.

Last night, after Gary had taken us on an emergency run to a hardware store and West Marine (his emergency not ours, which was his excuse to avoid the wedding), he then dropped us off at the cinema that has just started showing 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel'. This was a great experience as the cinema is an old-fashioned one just kept from extinction by donations. You weren't able to buy tickets until 20 minutes beforehand and as we watched some vast bottoms waddle past we felt it might be sensible to get in early, so were lounging against the old ticket booth. No it wasn't the relic we thought, promptly sliding up the screen and selling tickets. We then squeezed into the tiny foyer next to the old fashioned accoutrements for selling small (yes really) traditional snacks until the previous showing very slowly tottered out. Rob mentioned to our up-close neighbours that the demographic didn't look good for a swift evacuation if the fire alarm went off and was told "oh no, you're dead"! And after we had enjoyed our first film for 7 months, we walked the couple of (lonely) miles home to be greeted by the still-continuing wedding with all the sorts of records Rob enjoyed in his teenage years – although he was showing less enjoyment at 0100 hrs.....

Today (Sunday) we were taken by Greta to the Stockley Gardens Art Show which is held over three blocks with each artist in a small booth – luckily all covered as it has drizzled or rained for much of the day. This show has a very high standard of paintings, photography, pottery and jewellery – heaven! Rob was deeply relieved that as we are on the boat he would not be trekking back with large amounts of breakables. And the jewellery I was really drawn to (being made of pebbles, again) was way out of the price bracket.....

After that we went to the Chrysler Art Museum which has a world class glass collection amongst other things. I was particularly taken by the Aztec figures something I suppose we rarely see in Europe – and of course the compulsory Degas ballet dancer.

But almost the most exciting thing of the day was finally rediscovering the Ben and Jerry's Coffee Coffee BuzzBuzzBuzz ice cream which was fleetingly introduced to the UK five years ago and which I have been seeking ever since. I knew there was a reason we have sailed 18,000 miles!

We are beginning to look at our plans for the next bit: and are thinking to do a swift belt up the Chesapeake, probably to spend 10 days or so in Washington up the Potomac River, with a side trip (by car) to have a look at a possible boatyard to haul Serafina out for the winter. And then head north to enjoy as much summer season as Maine has to offer, escaping the apparently horridly humid weather here (particularly as it is well known for appalling electrical storm activity) – not much sign of it so far – then probably 'doing' New York on our way back down. But as ever things are fluid (in so many ways..... rain, indecision, heads problems again, tides etc!).

**The Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia**

Friday 26th May

Yes, well never mind the mountains, today we discovered the blue mud of Virginia. We had been warned that the anchor would be messy, but not much prepares you for the thick cloying glutinous stuff that we found clinging to every link of the chain and the anchor itself. The good news is that because the entire Chesapeake Bay is so shallow, you tend to anchor in just 3 metres of water and so at least we do not have to put out too much chain.

So today I recovered it all, trying to wash the mud off with a deck hose at the same time. (Sarah is sensibly installed behind the wheel, well away from all this mucky fun.) As we did this, Bill emerged from his lovely house to wave us goodbye and we do hope that we can return here and get to know the place properly.

As I cleaned up and stowed all the gear in the anchor locker, Sarah headed back down the narrow, shallow, twisting channel that takes you back to the 'Bay' but sadly as we went past one of the green markers (G9 for anyone following us) we went very suddenly and firmly aground. The osprey in the nest just a few feet from us was very unimpressed, but it is only soft gloopy mud and we were soon off and back on track (not that we had actually been off track!)

The rest of the day was a dull motor up to the entrance to the Potomac River

and we turned and headed upstream and hope very much to reach Washington DC by Saturday night and perhaps even in time for the Memorial Day celebrations there.

We then were enveloped in fog which was something we had not encountered since 2008 off Portugal. It was not too thick but did require us to use the radar for a while, but it soon cleared and we enjoyed a warm very sunny day, but sadly almost nil wind.

By evening (good to be having longer days now we are further north) we approached the entrance to the Wicomico River and made our way carefully a mile or so upstream before heading into a bay and again dropping anchor just short of all the laid crab pots and in front of some more large and impressive houses. It was a beautiful setting and the smell from the forest surrounding the bay was wonderful.

As we made our way into the river we were treated to a display of fishing by countless ospreys, watching the graceful sea eagles soar and swoop down and then lifting off the water with impressively large fish clutched in their talons, which they then took back to their nests built precariously atop almost every navigation marker. The grace of these beautiful birds is in stark contrast to the pelicans we had watched earlier in the day. Unlike their Caribbean relations who dive steeply from a height and vanish beneath the surface as they scoop up their prey, the local versions appear to glide low across the surface of the sea and then simply seem to crash

in to the water looking very ungainly with a big splash when they spot a fish.

Obviously this works as there is no shortage of large well fed pelicans!

We called up Customs and Border Control in Maryland to report that we had crossed from Virginia into their state and found ourselves talking to Betty who is based in Baltimore. Betty is someone we need to talk to at some stage over the next few months as she can advise us about how we can renew our 12 month US Cruising Licence next year. Sadly the phone signal was very weak and cut out altogether before we could expand beyond simply hearing her acknowledge our arrival and give us clearance to continue on our way.

There were no other boats at all in the bay and with no wind either it was an idyllic quiet evening to savour.

We are getting used to the water depths here in the Chesapeake which have a lot in common with the east coast of England, in as much as there is very little between the top and the bottom, so 8 metres of water is what can be described as deep and mostly it is quite a bit less!

### **Washington DC**

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> May

We are still pinching ourselves to be sure that all this is true!

We are anchored in a sheltered spot, opposite Capital Yacht Club in the very centre of Washington. We are yards from the Jefferson Memorial and within half a mile are the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the US Capitol Building and the White House! (zoom in on our position map so you can see exactly where we are.)

But not only are we central to everything and everywhere, but the Capital Yacht Club and its members are something else again.

As we dropped the anchor, we were welcomed to Washington and the club by Chris who popped over in his dinghy just to explain a few basics. We then tidied up Serafina and ourselves, launched the dinghy and headed for the nearest pontoon on which there was a large party taking place (the renaming of a boat just purchased by a new club member). Here we were immediately welcomed by Scott who took it upon himself to be our guide and mentor and proceeded to take us on a full tour of the club and explained exactly how everything here works. Since the office was shut (it is a bank holiday weekend here) he provided us with a key which gives us access to all areas. For just \$16 a day, we have full use of the club and all its facilities, which include the showers, free coffee, free soft drinks, free wifi, use of the bar, dining room, library and the secure dinghy dock. The banks of washing machines cost extra, but this is only \$1.50 a go! Actually the list of benefits is seemingly endless and the details became blurred as Scott happily answered all our questions explaining that either he or the other members between them could arrange or procure anything we could think of.

We started off by taking full advantage of the showers which were wonderful and when we emerged, we found Scott and his wife, Freddi waiting in the bar. They invited us to help ourselves from the big buffet that was spread out on the patio area and when I suggested that we did not yet know the owner of the boat whose party this was, it was further explained that it was a Club event and that the new member was simply sponsoring it. As transient visitors we were to consider ourselves as full members for the duration of our stay and that we were very welcome to the party. As it turned out we did our best before retiring early to bed, quite exhausted by the long day and the intensity of the welcome and the avalanche of information poured over us!

The day had started at 0500 hours as we raised the anchor (and attendant mud) and headed off up the Potomac River again. It was a long hot and humid day and although the Potomac river is a wide expanse of water, the actual navigable channel is frequently narrow and quite shallow. Surprisingly, in a river that is second in the amount of freshwater it delivers to the Chesapeake, we managed to ride the flood tide for 7.5 hours and at a greater speed than statistics suggested, arriving mid-afternoon which was great as we had thought we might not make it in the one day. We passed countless huge sprawling houses and their tended but rather featureless grounds – the architecture tends towards the ostentatious rather than tasteful. We saw many examples of the Scarlett O'Hara porch complete with full building height pillars tacked on to even quite modest houses but hours of fun for Sarah and some binoculars. We were passed in both directions by motorboats of all shapes and sizes, but were quite intrigued by the low two or three man sports boats that all seemed to have some curious type of equipment attached on the bow deck area. Later we were to discover that these boats are used for fishing and they take themselves into the shallows by the river edge and to maintain their position, they use an electric outboard motor that hinges down at the front of the boat and pulls them along very slowly and quietly! Ospreys nesting, fishing and just flying by are as common as seagulls – which they presumably have replaced! We saw our first Bald Eagle and a Black Vulture, but were disturbed to see so many large, dead fish floating past. We will endeavour to find out more about this.

There was absolutely no wind and we so motored along all day passing the Marine Corps base at Quantico and America's most visited tourist attraction, Mount Vernon which was George Washington's home. We slid under several bridges, the lowest of which was as we approached Washington itself, The Woodrow Wilson Bridge. There seems to be very little agreement as to the actual air draft of this bridge and it was because of this that we had spent some time on Thursday measuring our mast height. We believe that we our aials are 68ft above the water and there were some guides that have this bridge at 70ft – and then there is the tide to consider.... But all was fine

and we had plenty of room and it would seem that the excellent 'Active Captain' setup might well be right when they say it is 85ft.

It was a big surprise to see how green everything was right up the very edge of the city as we had expected a long urban sprawl. The only slight drawback last night is that we appeared to be on some sort of special very low level flight path for police helicopters as they seemed to whizzing overhead at frequent intervals, threatening our mast head more than some of the earlier bridges.

## **Rolling Thunder**

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May

Surprisingly quiet night: the helicopters that use the river to fly from Andrews Airbase to the Pentagon or White House, and avoid the air traffic which leaves Reagan (National) Airport across the Potomac from us, seemed to stop overnight - or we were too shattered to notice! In the morning we went into the Clubhouse to be given our formal welcome from the Dock master and to update our emails etc.

Today is Memorial Sunday (bank holiday tomorrow) when Americans remember all their servicemen and more to the point, here in Washington there is a huge, circular drive past by Vets on Harley Davidsons, known as Rolling Thunder. This year is the 25th Anniversary of this event and we were told by one Vet that there were expected to be over 9,000 bikes in the parade – nearly double the usual turn-out. The parade begins at the Pentagon where all the bikes assemble whilst the police close all the roads from there, through Washington to the Mall, via Constitution Avenue and the White House and various other important landmarks. So from 1200 hours onwards the bikes set off for the Vietnam memorial and just keep on coming. We found a spot to watch this astonishing parade, standing on the side of Constitution Avenue and without quite realising at first, we were seeing the parade against the backdrop of the White house further up the hill. We watched as hundreds of bikes, sometimes 6 abreast powered slowly past us and after about 15 minutes it seemed to have finished. We were just about to move off when a vet standing next to us explained that all we had seen so far was the advance group!! He warned us what to expect and what this was all about and we stood in awe really as firstly a huge body of police motorbikes came slowly past us followed by the main parade itself. Every bike seemed different, many decorated by huge flags: the Stars and Stripes and a particular flag supporting lost POW's and MIA's. There was one van pulling a very thin, bearded old Vet in just shorts crouching in a bamboo cage to commemorate and demand the return of the still outstanding Vietnam POWs - incredibly poignant sight. Another car carried the parents of a POW held in Afghanistan at the moment. But those two vehicles were very much the exception from the stream of incredibly smart bikes. To give you some idea of the scale of this, the bikes were driving past where we were standing at a rate of some to 40 to 50 every minute – and they kept coming for three and a half hours!!!

We watched for a good while then walked up to the Vietnam Wall Memorial which as you can imagine was thronged with people and many personal tributes were being laid. Other events were clearly being planned in that area for later.

We visited the Lincoln Memorial with its iconic statue. Sadly the view over the Reflecting Pool towards Capitol Building isn't quite what you might imagine as it is all being re-engineered to be more eco-friendly: the pool is empty and there is a huge pile of sand half-way down! But everywhere we went there were more and more bikes parked up and bikers were everywhere and these were the thousands upon thousands that did not take part in the parade itself but swelled the big crowd watching and supporting the event.

We were still in the area known as the Mall where there are 17 Smithsonian museums or galleries, the White House, Capitol Building, many commemorative buildings - it is compact and quite possible to walk the area. The only problem was crossing the avenue where the bikes continued to roar past! We were also feeling peckish. Unlike London, this area is not swamped with souvenir shops and eating establishments; in fact there were quite a few vans selling hot dogs, pretzels or ice cream but not much else. Eventually we succumbed and went into the Smithsonian Castle (!) and had a bite to eat. By 1530 the last bikes in the parade were making their way down the Avenue and we were definitely flagging and headed back to the yacht club (about 10 minutes walk away - this anchorage at \$16 a day is unbelievable value for a club with its facilities and location). A restorative shower and back to the boat to rest up for tomorrow's hiking!

## **Culture Vultures**

Mon, Tues, Wed & Thurs – 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> May

Monday was the bank holiday for Memorial Day - and another parade. This time of military marching - ancient and modern - and wonderful school bands complete with majorettes. And of course the best movers and shakers were definitely the mainly black bands. It was certainly another occasion of waking up to the sizes we are all fast becoming: it was incredibly hot (90 degrees) and very humid (and this is a bit earlier than expected here apparently), yet many of the bands were dressed in black themes, plus hat/helmet/wig, plus gloves and the dancing girls were either in tights with sort of skipping shoes, or boots - we began to worry just how many of them were going to faint! I was more than a bit irritated by the display of flags by "our WWII Allies" - but no British flag! And we have also discovered that WWII started in 1941 apparently according to the memorials here.

There was also an error in the figures for Rolling Thunder - there were rumoured to be 900,000 (not 9,000 as we reported in error in the last entry) Harley Davidsons in the drive-by. And if you do the maths, at the rate of 50+ per minute for 3.5 hours it may not be pie in the sky.

Tuesday, after I had started to clean off the awful exhaust staining down Serafina's aft quarter and stern and Rob had done some work, we visited the American History Museum. This is laid out around items, not chronologically which would have made it easier for us ignoramuses. However, we are slowly getting there with 18th, 19th and 20th American history and there was a very good display of transport various, especially regarding the fishing industry. We then hurried back as a cold front with attendant rain and thunderstorms was due in the evening and this anchorage is known for not brilliant holding as there is 6' of silt over harder mud (oh yes we are looking forward to lifting this!) and until your anchor has worked its way in to the underlying solid stuff, it doesn't hold. It did eventually arrive but the winds weren't too strong and the thunderstorms slowly made their way around us from NW to N, E and then disappeared south down the Potomac. Mind you it did rain like hell and we have never seen the dinghy so full after just one night's downfall.

Wednesday we succumbed and felt we would have to get a more detailed guide book for Washington and buy Lonely Planet guides for various areas further north of us. We have been using the Michelin guides so far but miss the less reverential tones of LPs. So we were very well directed to visit the Kramer Book & Afterwords cafe in the Du Pont Circle area. This involved our first trip on the Metro, which is terribly badly lit for elderly folk like us with nil eyesight - spotting the different station names was almost impossible. The Metro is housed in very high-ceilinged concrete tubes with no adornment or advertising - not particularly pleasant experience, but very efficient and fast! The bookshop is quite alternative and the cafe food just delicious as ever - this time crab

cakes, their speciality and blueberry pie..... Honestly we can understand why the Americans are becoming an enormous race: the servings are at least twice what we would normally eat and we haven't had a bad meal yet.

After this we took a bus to the nearby area of Georgetown (the machinery to take our money wasn't working so the driver let us for free!). Both Du Pont and Georgetown have beautiful Georgian-type houses and they are the most expensive areas to live in. There was also very good shopping to be had, but I restrained myself as the proud owner of a new iPad and eventually we set off back to the boat starting with a walk along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal which has been restored but is not navigable yet: the lock gates are all in place but the winding gear is removed to prevent vandalism. We wanted to walk home via the Holocaust Museum having failed to get entrance tickets on line; this museum is free-entry but with timed tickets and the first available online were for 22nd June. We discovered that it is possible to queue up (starting at 0830ish for 1000 opening) and get tickets first thing, so will do this on Friday. The walk really was further than we had anticipated and in boiling sun without a hat (I thought I would be mall shopping all day is my excuse) not a brilliant idea, but we took in the Korean War Memorial and the World War Two memorial along the way.

And today, Thursday, we began with a trip to West Marine Chandlery out in Alexandria which Scott very kindly drove us to, and came home via a wonderful old-fashioned hardware store called Frager's: it covers the frontage of one whole block and has everything. Scott also took us on two different routes as a true tourist guide should do! And we now know where the weekend farmers' market (apparently the "closest DC gets to foodie heaven") will be held and a branch of Safeways, if it proves insufficient. I then carried on to the National Gallery of Art which has West and East Halls, the latter with the Modern Art collection housed in an amazing building but holding surprisingly little art and much of this was given over to a Miro exhibition - not my favourite artist (please only whisper philistine) and one that seems to follow me around the world in large exhibitions. In fact both the halls felt like this to me, perhaps I am too used to European galleries where there just isn't enough space?

So we are working hard at catching up with the recent lack of culture and our unexercised feet and legs really know it; thank god for unlimited showers at the CYC!

### **President Obama & Maryland Blue Crabs**

Fri, Sat, Sun & Mon – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> June

We got up early on Friday so that we could get in the queue for timed tickets into the Holocaust museum, arriving there for 0830 hrs- opening time 1000 hrs ! We were (surprise, surprise) one of the earlier ones and got a ticket for 1015 entry into the main museum.

We have already been to the Yad Vashem museum in Jerusalem (see previous blog for July 2010), but the Washington DC museum has a very different feel and a far more political slant - not surprising I suppose in the western world's political capital, with a huge Jewish influence. It very much concentrated on how the political situation allowed Hitler to come to power rather than the actual way people survived within (and without) the concentration camps. It was still horrific. I think we must be here during schools' prime visiting time: many of the kids really were not very interested/affected.....

After that we went to their cafe for a coffee (well, I had a hot chocolate - am not coping with the air-conditioning and I had a fleece on, not sure how Rob survived - but it's not a place to discuss tiny

discomforts!), where we still had to go through security - a security guard was killed by a white supremacist here recently and they are very careful with all their checks now - to our first disappointing food experience. We followed that with what we hoped would be a nice roll at the Safeway's cafe, but it turned out to be (and we only had a small one) a vast and impossible to handle roll thing, overstuffed. So a write-off day where food was concerned. And so we did a bit of food shopping and wandered home.

We had kindly been invited for supper by one of the residents, but as we anticipated another storm we decided to stay on board in case we dragged our anchor. In the event this was a good decision: it absolutely poured with rain (I managed to collect a full bucket of rainwater in quarter of an hour by placing it under the runoff from the bimini (only 2 square metres if that) for several hours and would have made it impossible to dinghy back and forth. In one lull I bailed out the ankle deep water from the dinghy and we hauled it up alongside in the harness, with the bung out - and inspecting other dinghies the next morning this also proved a good idea! It was inevitably accompanied by spectacular lightning, so we shut away all electrical goodies especially computers in the oven - and wondered what to do next.

Saturday we took a day off from culture and went to the Eastern Market. This is a proper market which the farmers bring produce into the city for - we bought veg from an Amish couple who looked distinctly out of place surrounded by all the other stalls of Mammon selling jewellery, clothes, artwork etc etc. In the evening we were invited to join Scott and Freddi on-board for a pot luck supper. They, poor things, had set off the previous day to Alexandria to prepare to scatter Scott's father's ashes - the proposed BBQ had not happened in the downpour and so they had meat to eat up. We had a wonderful night getting to know other cruisers and particularly Jean, Scott's incredible mother.

Sunday was a day mainly spent on board. Scott came out to start the ever-present job of looking at the damn SSB giving Rob a few initial things to check out. In the afternoon we had arranged to be given a lesson in eating Maryland Blue Crabs. There is a fish market right next door to the yacht club which mainly sells shrimp and crab. Freddi took us along and we bought half a bushel of large male crabs (and they arrive live at the market in bushel baskets made of a lattice work of wood strips) which were then steamed, funnelled into a box and very liberally doused in Old Bay seasoning - a seasoning that you consider carefully once it is on your hands, ie proximity to more delicate parts of one's personage apparently. Once cooked the beautiful blue claws and backs all become bright orange.

We gathered outside Capital Yacht Clubhouse and the crabs were dumped on a newspaper covered table and Scott gave us a lesson in consuming these things. Basically it is an incredibly messy business, with lots of effort for little (but very delicious) gain requiring crackers and little sharp knives - and lots of kitchen roll. Sorry we forgot the camera but wouldn't have been able to pick it up anyway. Clearing up involved shovelling the mountain of shells and debris into a huge bin and then hosing the area down with a fire hose. Freddie, Scott and Jean then shot off to the theatre - David, Candy (S/Y Endeavour), Rob and I more sensibly adjourned to the bar. We are a little trepidacious as all our (well mainly Rob's) drinking is going on a tab, together with our daily access - the bar is very expensive and there is just a small worry that the bar bill will be bigger than the access one....

Monday back to the museums: Rob visited the Air and Space Museum and I went to the Hirshhorn (sadly in the middle of setting up a huge exhibition so not much open), the Freer and the Sackler - ie modern paintings and sculpture, Whistler, and oriental art especially some beautiful jades.

We then moved the boat over to the quay to take on water: the CYC generously allow you to have this and pump outs free. And apart from wonderful showers, there is also a very professional laundry you may use with many washing and drying machines, all taking \$1.50 for a complete run (as we were having such a good time at the bar, our washing is looking a little tighter for many reasons now....) which is amazing value.

Whenever Rob or I set up our computers, members start offering very helpful advice. I am now just 'way-pointing' any destination, particularly anchorages which are being pointed out - and the iPad is just perfect for this. I really can't emphasise too strongly what a useful tool it is: ours is loaded with Navionics \$15 for all North America plus Active Captain (a sort of Wikipedia for sailors in that anyone can pinpoint locations and add details about hazards, anchorages, facilities etc - although this system is checked by two incredibly hard-working cruisers who run the website) giving us very up to date information - almost making pilots null and void. Together with the Radio Shack VHF weather radio which gives up to the minute information for wherever you are at that moment (thank you again to Scott-Free who kindly gave us their old one) - this is alarmed to draw your attention to any further weather updates. And when the storms were over us, went off endlessly with the progress of said storm and tornadoes crossing our path!

And finally this afternoon (Monday still) we had a flying visit from President Obama! As we have mentioned we are directly under the very narrow and low air corridor for the helicopters on their way from the White House and Pentagon to Andrews Air Force base and when the President is being flown to confuse any attack he is in one of five helicopters being flown, and he has just zipped over our mast twice - I am sure he was mightily impressed with the beautiful Serafina and I am quite certain he was looking directly at us from the window of the 5<sup>th</sup> helicopter! They have an absolute flight ceiling of 200ft which means they cannot fly higher than that because of the civil airport nearby, but given that our mast is just under 70ft high, this must be the closest we get to the man himself.

### **Whole new ball game**

On Tuesday I went back to Du Pont and visited the Phillips Museum - easily the best art museum in Washington, housed in a Beaux Arts building. This is a private one so had to pay for the first time! I then did some real shopping in Georgetown, such a treat. Didn't (obviously) find what I was supposed to be looking for but bought some shorts in Gap (where their sizes have definitely changed from the UK - I was 2 sizes smaller, and no, I am not thinner after all this eating) and long sleeved T shirts. The weather has blessedly been cooler for the last few days - much better for touristy things. And then I negotiated my way back on buses and Metros.

Rob had stayed on board to change the oil, and do some proper work which seemed a very poor exchange for him.

On Wednesday I did the National Portrait Gallery and American Art (one museum confusingly) which was a bit of a disappointment; and the Women in Art museum, again not mind-blowing but it did have a brilliant exhibition of Sister Mary Corita's prints from 1960s endorsing love and peace (and religion) using lettering and words from advertisements of the time. Doesn't sound riveting but it really was impressive. And anyone who knows me will know it hurts to say anything positive about a nun!

Rob meanwhile had had a horrible day sorting out the back-filling problem on the loo (again), completing oil and diesel filter changes and then working with the magnificent Bill on our fuzzy SSB. But horrible it might have been, everything has been a great success. Yet more bits and pieces

to change - including the aerial up the backstay we had replaced in Antigua, which has proved a waste of time. We actually think that this thing will finally be a useful piece of equipment (rather than an a potential anchor angel).

We all had to be ready for 1700 hours to meet up with Scott, Freddi, David and Candy to walk to the baseball stadium and watch the local team, The Washington Nationals (who Freddi very keenly supports) against the New York Mets. Firstly we had a drink and watched them warm up, then climbed the ramps to the very top of the main stand and took our seats. Along the way we indulged in two half-smoked dogs and fries from the institution that is 'Bill's Chilli Bowl' - very good indeed but incredibly messy to eat. And then drank beer and we watched the game with extremely good commentary/instruction from our friends. It was fascinating to hear it from the experts (and would have been a complete waste of time if we hadn't had all this information) and the Nats (currently top of the league) won - so what more could we ask for. The Americans certainly don't enjoy any cracks about their 'World Series' but the truth of the matter is even stranger because they have two major baseball leagues: The American League and the National League. These two leagues are equal in status and play a regular season then at the end of this, they play each other in the 'World Series', BUT the two leagues have different playing rules, so never mind a global game, they have not got one set of common rules themselves. When they play this series, they play using the rules followed by the home team! Mustn't mock really, but we need to get our own back a bit as they are making a very big issue of the way of 1812, which is apparently some skirmish we drew (but not before we sacked and burnt the White House and the Capitol Building). I have been in denial about the war of 1812 until they pointed out in the bar this evening that Lonnie Donegan had a hit in the UK with a song all about it (Battle of New Orleans)! *Rob*

Today I have been washing every bit of cloth that will go in a washing machine, on shore and catching up with some internet stuff. Rob has been trotting round town collecting his chest highs from the repairer's, bit of food shopping and installing the new cables and fuses for the SSB.

Tomorrow we will do a proper food shop and get the boat ready for going back south towards the Chesapeake on Saturday. All good things must come to an end sometime, but Rob would be quite happy to settle here for a very long time. We have made some great friends, the Yacht Club could not be any better in any way. Sadly they are in the midst of a forced re-build and slight re-location by the city which has caused consternation in the club. There is a big vote next week when everything becomes set in stone. These changes will start to occur in late 2013 so anyone thinking of coming may want to factor that into their schedule! They are such a professional outfit that I am sure details will be on their website as and when.

## **The Great Escape**

Friday, Saturday & Sunday – 8<sup>th</sup>. 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> June

Friday was a busy day with a shopping trip (Safeway) in the morning and then I went up the backstay to refit the SSB aerial, which is a tedious and uncomfortable job. It would be a lot easier if undoing/doing up screws came naturally to me - even at the grand old age of 53 I can still undo all the good work I have just done.....! Each block holding the aerial away from the backstay had to be undone and therefore Rob had to manoeuvre me up and down accordingly and I then had to re-tie myself to the stay so that I didn't swing away from the job. Even so I still find it difficult not to cling on like some demented monkey so by the time I am on terra firma my legs are achy and wobbly.

Rob then completed the wiring and had a test run with the SSB. With everything else switched off it is definitely sounding better. Unfortunately Najad in their great wisdom have fitted a fuse that

deals with a multitude of devices - and, of course, these are not easily identified (nor is the wiring diagram accurate.....) so the next job will be discovering every item attached to this switch and then working out which one (or several) is creating the interference on each frequency by individually disabling them via fuses etc which will be a very long job.

Rob then fitted our new, 'time-able' fan in the aft cabin, and one of the new fittings to the main sheet traveller which will add in a further purchase in our quest for a more user-friendly operation.

And I made fish soup, but managed to fill in the rest of the day somehow?

David and Candy then very kindly invited us for a drink on their steel boat, Endeavour - a 1962 yawl of 45ft LOA. I have been itching to see around this boat and wasn't disappointed: she is beautiful (and extremely well kept. David and Candy bought her expecting to go sailing within a couple of years; 15 years later they were ready!): big comfortable cockpit, well laid out below, extremely sensible rig layout - I am in love. They have sailed her down to and round Cape Horn and all the way back up the coast of Chile, where they also met up with our friends on 'Flying Penguin'! And we had a lovely evening seeing off a full bottle of gin. We were also persuaded to join the capital yacht Club for Saturday breakfast as David and Candy were sous chef-ing for Scott in the morning.

So we went ashore for the lovely breakfast with, among other things, pancakes, hash-browns, and grits (something I have been wanting to find out about - they are seriously boring, similar to wallpaper paste, and won't be repeated!) and then said all our goodbyes. This was followed by a hasty return to the boat, lift the dinghy and anchor (and attendant extremely unpleasant goo) and back off down the Potomac for a long and very boring motor of 10 hours. Both very sad to be leaving both Washington and the club and its very friendly members and visitors. Cannot recommend this stop highly enough and we very much hope to meet up with a David and Candy as well as Scott and Freddi at a Severn Seas Sailing Association rally near Baltimore at the end of September when we come back south.

The only things of note that we spotted along the Potomac were: fewer sitting pairs of Ospreys (presumably the eggs haven't been successful for many pairs, perhaps to do with their predilection for nesting on buoys which heave perilously when the ridiculous number of motor boats plough past them at vast speeds/wakes); a goods train that was so long that we could see both ends of it either side of a mile-wide island; endless groups of said motor boats apparently racing around random buoys and back again -but as the only yacht bouncing over these wakes we tried to be friendly! And, very sadly, a huge house fire which had all but destroyed one of the very grand houses near to Washington - the family were stood on the lawn watching some rather inactive firemen.

We managed to slide into the same bay in the Wicomico River just as the sun was setting but unfortunately I made the wrong executive decision to save a couple of miles and not go back to where we were last time but stay nearer to the channel but in a more exposed situation, for a quick getaway in the morning. During the night there was enough wind to create a slight chop with wind against tide which heartily slapped Serafina's stern and kept us awake until the tide turned again.

This morning we were back to motoring through a glassy calm (plus lots of irritating mini flies - hopefully making the many spiders and webs that we now have on board very happy!) out of the Potomac and then north, up the Chesapeake Bay to Solomon's Island.

Arrived at Back Creek, Solomon's Island mid-afternoon. It is an absolutely delightful series of creeks (albeit very shallow and with a rising tide sweeping us in at 1.5 knots) full of yachts and motor

boats. We snuck into the anchorage near the Marine Museum and could see the local enthusiasts racing sailing boat models in the inner harbour there. It seems we arrived at about the right time as now boats are dropping anchors all around us! We are going to explore on foot tomorrow, but tonight we will just try and survive the steamy conditions....

## Herrington North

Monday & Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> June

Monday was incredibly hot but luckily less humid, after a fairly uncomfortable night. In the morning we contacted Andrew Gantt, an OCC Port Officer with a condo in Solomon's. He and his lovely wife, Digna, kindly immediately offered all sorts of things despite the fact that they were driving back to their farm for Andrew to have an operation that day! In the end we settled for a quick trip to the supermarket and a cup of coffee with them.

Andrew and Digna had just held an OCC Gam (Rally) to celebrate the (wait for it....) War of 1812 battles in Baltimore. Unfortunately we hadn't obviously made it - we are having to come to terms with the fact that you just can't fit in everything and if we commit to a certain date then we are likely to rush away from somewhere else. Nor am I very organised at contacting the next OCC representative, with at least 9 sources of information before I were to even contemplate surfing the web and a new place to sail to every couple of days there is a lot to take in. But it was a great shame not to spend more time with Andrew and Digna as they were great fun: originally sailed (everywhere including the Baltic, Ireland and the Faroes) in an 36' Island Packet which he loathed quite openly - it didn't go to windward at all!

My poor cousin, Brooke has been trying to arrange dates with us since last autumn and we are going to see him this weekend, but even now we are not absolutely set on our next destination where we will meet up with him, as we are waiting on a reply from another wonderful OCC PO regarding a possible dock space in Annapolis.....

After coffee we walked through the village which wasn't quite so impressive from the land, strung out along a fast-ish road and dwarfed by a huge bridge across the main river. We found a charming lady in the TIC who plied us with information and I finally clicked that this year (of all years to arrive in the USA) is the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. This is of particular significance here as lots of it was fought very locally in Maryland. We are lucky if a day goes past with only one jocular comment about this damn war!

After lunch we visited the Calvert Marine Museum which was great: information on the local fossil beach (no, apparently 'we' will not be allowing me to grub around), flora and fauna including a ray and skate pool, 2 sea otters (sadly) and terrapins, a lot of local craft from a very early Indian dug-out canoe, to beautiful oyster skiffs etc. and then a lot about the War (of 1812) including a very simple wall/audio presentation of the actual events which was exactly what we need to survive the next few weeks! They also have one of only 4 remaining screwpile light houses from the Chesapeake sitting in their little harbour (see my many photos of lighthouses various at [www.rhbell.com](http://www.rhbell.com)!). It was surprisingly spacious inside with two workmanlike stoves, 3 huge cisterns to collect rainwater (not difficult to fill I would hazard) but the privy is the little sentry box on the walkway outside. In fact we could have spent longer than the couple of hours we had there before they closed.

Tuesday we woke early to catch tides (now there is a novelty!) and it was grey, miserable, cold and portending rain - in fact with its lack of depth as well, we could be on the east coast of the UK. And no it did not improve. We did actually have some wind, in fact quite a lot of wind; 30 knots at one

point but directly astern, not Serafina's favourite point of sailing; and an unpleasant chop of about 3' and particularly nasty as we cut across shallow headlands planting ourselves in the middle of another crab pot field - we are going to have to learn to take the longer routes for peace of mind!

When we arrived at Herring Bay, Rob was very dismayed to discover that my extensive research had failed to concentrate on how to get across the too shallow bay to access the marina. I had stupidly presumed that if the marinas are dredged to accept boats which draw 7' we could actually reach the channel, having allowed for the top of the tide to give us the extra water we needed. In the event we had plenty of water as the following hefty seas had swept up the extra required (can we leave though?!).

Docking was not easy: we had been allocated an alongside berth next to a fixed pontoon with poles and no cleats - but we hadn't been told this! The docking lad was new, can't tie any knots (or even coordinate just wrapping the rope a few times) and didn't know what is required to get a large yacht alongside in a cross wind blowing you off. Poor chap meant very well but it was agony to watch, unable to get off the boat as we tower over the pontoon by 4', to help, and praying he didn't lose fingers in the process. We are definitely the largest thing in the marina.

The marina is immaculate and we have decided to haul out here for the winter, so after I had booked our flights home for 16th October (via Iceland for £267 sterling!), we booked Serafina in for winter storage here. By this time the rain had failed to let up at all and it was obvious that we were not going to be able to start the boat wash and stainless steel polishing we want to get done whilst we have available running water (from a hose as opposed to the sky) for the first time in the US, so we thought it a good idea to borrow the marina bikes and take a look at the local village, Deale. Great bikes: you have to cycle backwards to engage the brakes and the handlebars are so wide I was sure the passing cars were going to knock into them. New skill set required.

The village is tiny but we had a chat with the man in the machinery rental shop re hiring scaffolding in the fall and took a look at the good hardware shop. Cycled back in the torrential rain to the boat to dry out with a gin and tonic, then when the rain inconveniently did stop, we gave the boat a good wash down in the dusk (yes I know this sounds idiotic after all the rain, but the dirt does require loosening and the huge amount of resident spiders needed encouragement to abandon ship) ready for the stainless polishing tomorrow.

### **Crab Creek, Annapolis**

Tuesday & Wednesday – 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> June

Tuesday was perfect weather for the stainless cleaner to work (ambient temperature of 70+ degrees) so Rob and I painted on the cleaner and sprayed off with fresh water for all we were worth and completed the whole job within the day. The more we have used Spotless Stainless (ie the less residue clinging from previous cleaners used) the quicker the whole technique (previously it would have taken about a week to get all our stainless polished and waxed) has become and the result is astonishing. We just wish West Marine stocked it, since as yet we haven't actually found it any chandleries here in the USA! (It is available online to all those of you with an address to have it sent to... [www.rochemarine.co.uk](http://www.rochemarine.co.uk) )

Mid-morning on Wednesday we dropped our lines and set off in hope out of the marina: when we had arrived there were Force 5 winds creating a nice surge of water into the creek which has a dredged channel of only 7' plus tide (we draw 7ft 3"). We had literally towered over the dock we were on but since then, the wind swung round to the opposite direction and the middle of the day

high tide is considerably lower than that at night (we are talking inches here but every little counts in the Chesapeake!) so we really weren't sure we would manage to leave the harbour without going hard aground. In the event we had 0.4m under us and were able to enjoy seeing baby ospreys in their various nests on buoys and marker posts on the way out.

We motored up to South River just 8 miles away (very little wind as ever) and turning into Crab Creek were presented with a tiny 'gate' between a red and a green buoy, at such an angle that the buoys looked reversed, requiring us to glide right up to the port creek bank and then dog-leg into the creek itself. Once inside the depth fell away again (to a grand 2.5m) and we were waved at and had welcomes to Crab Creek shouted to us by several boats, all then telling us how to find Wolfgang further up the creek. We dropped the anchor where the creek widened out a bit, just below Wolfgang's house, surrounded by bluffs with tall trees and rather grand houses, all with docks and sail boats rather than motor boats on them. This creek is used as a hurricane hole, so it is incredibly protected and calm - actually silent and still, except for the birds.

We rowed ashore and introduced ourselves to Wolfgang. He has been very welcoming by email and phone since Rob first contacted him and other fellow volunteer OCC Port Officers regarding our entry into the US, but had not mentioned that he is quite ill so we felt a bit of a burden to him, although he seemed delighted to meet more sailors. He has his own boat moored to a short private pier at the bottom of his garden and had invited us to visit him and simply moor alongside his boat. Sadly there is probably not quite enough depth there for us, but we are very happy swinging to our anchor just 50 metres away. Tomorrow we are borrowing bikes from him to cycle the 3 miles into Annapolis and have a mooch round. And over the weekend we are meeting up with my cousin, Brooke who has offered to drive us around and show us the sights.

### **Annapolis and the Eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay**

Fri, Sat, Sun & Mon – 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> June

Got up with some trepidation: a long time on a boat with minimum walking is not the best preparation for a day's cycling. We were a bit later than planned getting ashore and then Rob had to pump up all the tyres from flat with a variety of pumps. My bike had loads of gears (no I did the usual settle for 3 middle ones) and Rob's had none and the original 30 year old seat.....

Lovely cycle through the woods to the main road where we chickened out (Wolfgang had explained that American drivers just aren't used to cyclists) and stuck to the un-used pavement. First we visited the Tourist Information Office with the usual War of 1812 discussion and then set off for a little light shopping and coffee. Annapolis wasn't quite the humming town I had expected so we admitted defeat, chained up the bikes and set off in search of chandleries and canvas makers. After a warm walk over the first bridge and a cup of coffee and further map perusal, we went back and fetched the bikes for further exploring - a good move, as it turned out there was an interesting scale in operation on the tourist map....

After a very long cycle and some confusion over Bay Ridge whether it was Road, Avenue or just marked as plain Bay Ridge (and no the locals are not sure which is which as they just drive it!) we found the chandlery which had offered to replace my Dubarry sailing boots which have shed their soles. In the event they actually meant they will do so at some undisclosed date, once they have heard back from Dubarry but at least we have started that discussion. We grabbed a quick pizza to share and ate it in the car park and got back on our now very uncomfortable bikes.

Serafina's spray hood over the deck screen is self-destructing from UV and we have fingers crossed it will limp on until the end of the season when we will have to get it replaced in a very short timescale as we come back to the area for a Seven Seas Club Gam (a rally with knobs on really - with speakers, Nigel Calder, the Pardeys and our friends, David and Candy) and then 2 weeks of hurried lay-up. So we thought we would explore the various canvas makers. We only managed to meet up with two as the distances (and the uphill sections for poor Rob with no gears) were becoming prohibitive. The first guy looks very promising and it appears that they are all happy to quote on photos sent via email to them. The second company was honest enough to tell us that they are already way behind, and it will also be the Annapolis Boat Show where they get even further behind - so we could exclude her!

I spotted our first bright red Northern Cardinal bird with its very dull mate and a Blue Jay - the birdlife is stunning. Rob does keep pointing out I would do better to photograph them rather than squawking and gesticulating - if nothing else to enable easier identification.

By now the idea of cycling all the way back was horrifying me, and I suggested seeking a ferry. As luck would have it a water taxi was arriving (early) at the marina we were in at that point and would take us and our bikes back to the City Dock for \$4 each - an absolute bargain. So we crammed our bikes into the ferry, wafting the ice creams we had just bought did not make the manoeuvring any easier and had a very nice and short ferry trip across the bay, instead of round 3 headlands by bike. And then we only had to cycle all the way back to the boat.

Astonishingly the next day, albeit with very tender bottoms, we were not crippled as well but we were definitely looking forward to a day in an air-conditioned car! We walked to the end of the road to meet my cousin, Brooke who whisked us away across the Bay Bridge where we sat on a balcony on the Eastern Shore overlooking the bay for a lovely lunch in the sun.

After that he drove us to the end of Tilghman Island (another place that is joined by a tiny bridge and is only just an island) for a wander around. We still can't get over the scale of this country, the spacing of the properties, how well looked after the majority of the houses are (and here they were mainly clapboard clad - pronounced clabbard. Really the bastardisation of our language is extraordinary! Brooke was teaching us that everything is pronounced with each syllable given equal value and apparently their Thames River is pronounced 'Tames' as in 'same'.....) and all surrounded by large expanses of mown lawn, no flower beds as in Europe. We also saw a Black Vulture squatting by the side of the road.

Brooke gave us a lot more understanding about the areas in New York where he works and lives in Yonkers, which was very useful. And we tried to explain the difficulties of committing to dates and places when sailing, as he is trying to arrange for us to meet up at my uncle's house in Connecticut! Quite apart from the difficulties of finding anchorages with enough depth for Serafina.

We finished the day on board for a drink and then Brooke drove back to Baltimore which was going to be a nightmare as it was the height of the celebrations of the Bicentennial` of the War of 1812 that evening. We had had a really lovely day - it is so easy to get blinkered by just sticking to ports and not seeing further into a country when sailing.

Sunday we walked to Safeways and provisioned up for the next few days sailing/motoring to Cape May and then our overnight sail to Block Island beyond New York. On our return we were suddenly inundated by English sailors: one sat on an American motor boat came to say hello, swiftly joined by another English yacht in the tiny anchorage who are off on Monday for a RYA organised sail-by for the Baltimore events.

We nipped off (as far as lifting and cleaning an anchor, and squeezing out of the tiny entrance can be considered a nip) to re-fuel at Liberty Boat Yard, which was a rather drawn-out affair on a Sunday afternoon with lots of other boaters with the same idea - but they kindly let us re-water and dump our rubbish.

On our return we went for a chat on board Dovka with Rebecca and Sid, who are OCC members and moor their boat in Crab Creek, and also spent 4 years in Marmaris! This chat and tea went on far longer than we had planned so by the time we went ashore Wolfgang and Gemma had disappeared and we were not able to say our goodbyes. They later emailed to say they had been to a first computer lesson and will see us at the end of the season.

We then readied the boat for an early start and I removed all the manure (guano does not convey the quantities of the stuff donated by something Dodo size - possibly the pair of large Blue Herons living in the creek?) off the dinghy.

Up early on Monday for a very boring motor in grey, drizzly weather towards the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, ready to traverse it tomorrow. Anchored, tucked into a slight bend in the Sassafras River to get out of the channel ready for a swift departure on Tuesday morning. As we anchored we could see a Golden Eagle paddling on the beach (it is freshwater this far up the Chesapeake), a pair of Ospreys and a pair of Black Vultures, and a Blue Heron - birds of prey they 'do' well here!

### **Delaware and canal boating**

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> June

Another grey early start after a nice quiet night. As we left, we passed a set of fishing stakes (in Maryland they fish by suspending nets across withies in the shallows - although we have never seen anyone retrieving these) and sat on these were 13 Ospreys, 16 Grey Herons (supposedly solitary birds!) and assorted Cormorants along a spread of perhaps 25'.

I had actually got the tides right so we zipped along with 2 knots of tide under us, which became an impressive 3.5 knots pushing us along at nearly 9 knots once we entered the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. With all that I had read, we had expected something similar to the Kiel Canal. Rob wasn't actually aware he had even entered the canal until the current increased rapidly along with strong eddies - there are no locks. The currents are created by the differential between the tidal range (the Chesapeake end has 2.5', Delaware 5.4' - sorry for the lack of metrication, USA does not use it at all). I was also a bit nervous about the amount of traffic as there are plenty of warnings about damage by suction or wash. In the event we didn't see any large traffic at all and were only passed by two motor boats.

So we swept through, under five tall bridges; two of which were being worked on at dizzying heights and oddly one of these was shut to road traffic, in what is presumably a busy area of Delaware. We also passed under a railway bridge, the centre of which can be lowered to allow a train to travel along it. I wasn't convinced it was as high as it might be, but Rob pointed out that it was still at least 100' high. As we reached the Delaware River we heard a sailing catamaran a few miles behind us, calling this bridge to query the height and was told it was at 110' (not the usual 135') as they were working on it. We then heard a very disgruntled yacht skipper point out that he had just hit the bridge with his 100' mast and the bridge official had been inaccurate! The official merely replied "well its high tide"..... not exactly helpful.

We then trundled down the Delaware, a much narrower stretch of water than we have become used to in the Chesapeake and a much busier waterway with large traffic going up to Philadelphia (yup we are learning all these cities locations as well!). We were called up on the radio by a tug who had diligently turned, with his large towed barge, to pass port to port with us - way out of his way and potential depth, as I had scurried further to port. We are finding that all vessels out here (and particularly shallow drafted, easily manoeuvrable motor boats - with morons driving them..... did I say that?) stick rigidly to col regs and do not apply any common sense to moving out of the way of bigger vessels, staying out of the deep water channel etc etc. And we finally know what "one whistle" when called on the radio means - one sound signal means turning to port and therefore they will pass port to port.

I had felt quite pleased with myself to have discovered a possible anchorage halfway down the Delaware (18 miles away) where we could stop rather than having to press on a further 70 miles to Cape May having already done 30 odd miles dictated by tides and therefore arriving at a very narrow Atlantic inlet in the dark. It is on the Cohansy river and there was conflicting advice about entrance depths through a narrow dog-leg. We approached this through a few crab buoys and then the huge horseflies started to appear. Green horseflies had been mentioned on Active Captain, but how bad could they be? Well completely and utterly appalling (Pips your worst nightmare): Rob was trying to beat off possibly 50 at a time in the cockpit as I tried to negotiate the narrows. We basically dropped the anchor the minute we found an area where we wouldn't block the river for the fishermen (there were also various allusions to the speed the fishing boats go at - well obviously they are trying to beat the horseflies with speed!). So we are in 11m of water and the river is perhaps only 40 metres wide, with a potential tidal speed of 3 knots – so fingers crossed! It is such a shame as the area looks lovely: salt flats with lush long grass growing to the edges, what little we saw of it before we dived below and closed all the fly screens.

Now what time do Horseflies get active in the morning?!

## **Delaware & New Jersey**

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June

Well it's official: horseflies get active well before 0600 hours, as do stinging black flies and 1000s of leaf hoppers, so anchor raising was fast and furious. Unfortunately although the huge numbers declined we were pestered by the damn things until we finally dropped anchor 10 hours later in Cape May.

The day was hot and slightly foggy, which was a shame as we went past more lovely mini lighthouses but the conditions were not conducive to photographing - you will all be relieved to hear! And of course no wind, so we motored down the Delaware River and at one point were out of sight of all land, then into the Atlantic, and round the corner into Cape May, New Jersey.

Highlight of the day was a visit from ten large Common Bottlenose dolphins and, as the water is getting less murky, we were just about able to see them bow wave before passing us by.

We are now anchored in a large lagoon by the Coastguard station, complete with its chorusing trainees,. Tomorrow we will go into town which was apparently the first seaside resort in the US with lovely Victorian architecture. One of the jobs will be to find a Raymarine agent as our VHF radio seems to be stuck on channel 16 and most ship to ship activity is on 13!

## **Block Island, RI**

Saturday & Sunday – 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June

Friday afternoon turned grey, then the rain started, heralding about 8 hours of on and off thunderstorms. We felt very grateful to the Coastguard for providing 2 huge aerals in the vicinity as potential targets, rather than us. And also very sorry for the family with 2 teenage daughters who had gone ashore in their dinghy but made no appearance back at their boat before all this started up!

As we were both awake rather too early courtesy of slapping wakes on the stern from departing fishermen, we opted to get up at 0430 and set off on the 210 miles trip to Block Island knowing that we probably had a 35 hour motoring trip ahead.

And exceptionally boring it was too: nothing to see, except to count the many helium foil balloons that drift around out at sea here causing initial panic as you think it is an unexpected fish pot buoy.

And as the day warmed up, you get to practice your favourite fly-swatting shot - we were inundated with black flies with very serious stings that could even penetrate jeans, so the cockpit was quickly back to resembling a battlefield again. When the sun was setting the flies became frenetic and I got to desperation point, resorting to covering the cockpit in a liberal coating of fly spray.

Quiet night as well with quite a few fishing boats executing their usual random manoeuvres just in front of you and the very bright lights of New York illuminating the skyline 50 miles to our northwest.

As we neared our destination at midday having made good time, I was pleased to find that tidally we had arrived at the right moment. There are very interesting tidal streams around Long Island, its sound and Block Island Sound (and then northwards around Cape Cod and Nantucket). Luckily David on Moonbeam had pointed me in the direction of Eldridge's Annual Tide and Pilot book (in its 138th year, it is a US coastal stalwart and still in its original format which is fun) - this sort of vital info isn't detailed in 'Doziers' and is hard to represent on chart plotters. It wasn't too prescient on a day of little wind, but the whirlpools (yes real ones!) we passed indicated you would really want to give it all due consideration on even a slightly more windy day.

We entered Great Salt Pond, Block Island via the channel which was cut through to the pond in 1895, after various previous attempts had failed. At one point we motored past a fisherman up to his knees in the sea and we were less than a boat length away - presumably lack of dredging had an influence on the failures! About 4 years ago the town council started laying buoys in huge mooring fields to accommodate the large numbers of boaters who arrive here (particularly at weekends and for July 4th) more efficiently, so the proper anchorage area is farther away from the marinas but we found a good spot and Rob has managed to find free wifi yet again and catch up with the rugby results.

We had a quick dinghy trip into the marina which also caters for boats at anchor, to suss out bike hire for the day tomorrow, but on our return to the boat we found that the weather forecast is now for 2 solid days of rain so we will wait and see how we feel on Wednesday or whether we will want to moving on by then.

### **Dutch Harbour, Jamestown, Rhode Island**

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday – 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> June

Monday ended up being either grey or raining, so not a good day for cycling round Block Island. I had ambitiously run the washing machine as it had seemed quite a nice day to start with, unexpectedly - which instantly encouraged the heavens to open. Serafina got a good wash but we were hampered from catching up with paperwork and emails as most of the time the computers were residing in the oven, hiding from the lightning. At one point there was the loudest crack of simultaneous thunder and lightning, accompanied by a very nasty smell of sulphur.

We decided to cut our losses and head off on Tuesday to meet up with Il Sogno (Craig and Karene), as Wednesday had northerlies forecast. We (at long last) had a lovely close reach up to Dutch Harbour in the Narrangsett Bay and Rob managed to catch a 4kg fish. It has taken a good 36 hours research to discover it was a Bluefish and has made good soup and roasting. I forgot to mention that on our previous flat calm sail, all the way up we could see boiling areas of sea with 6" fish breaking the surface in "fish balls" chased by large, heavy bodied fish below.

Active Captain indicated that most boats anchor north of the mooring field in Dutch Harbour which we have done. But we are considering moving as this area offers no protection from the island to the west of us, if the wind blows from the north with a good fetch down the bay - which it has been, unusually, doing since we arrived much to Il Sogno's surprise. This is a quiet residential bay on the west side of Jamestown on the island of Conanicut Island, but the island is less than a mile wide at this point. Across the East Channel from Jamestown is Newport and this is where all the America's Cup racing is going on - of course nicely staged for televising.

It was lovely to catch up with all Karene and Craig's news, and they kindly carted us off to the Narrangsett Cafe for the nicest fish and chips I can remember having, followed by huge puddings next door in the posh restaurant, as the cafe doesn't do desserts. Even better Dave Enstone, a great hockey mate of Rob's joined us, and later his wife, Judy came down from their house on the island - so much catching up all round. Dave despite living and working out here for the last 15 years does not have a trace of American accent and apparently still no inkling as to how the American mind works, although as a very successful businessman dealing in the world of real estate I find that hard to believe!

Today I went into town to find a haircut, cycling our bike which Rob had successfully spent most of Monday in the thunderstorm trying to repair a long-term puncture. Rob meanwhile was delighted to discover that all our present boat problems (broken Nav light, deck wash and VHF radio) all, of course, have agents in the boating Mecca that is Newport. And so he and Craig are planning a chandlery day with the huge bonus of Craig's car. They joined us for a drink on board in the evening to plan the next few days' activities.

### **It is all go here.....**

Thurs, Fri, Sat & Sun – 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> June & 1<sup>st</sup> July.

Thursday was to be our first adventure: joining a friend, Joe of Craig's near Newport and going on his boat to watch some of the America's Cup sailing - the last day involving all the boats before the semi-finals. So we set off from his marina but after a mile or so there was interesting coughing from the engine and then nothing. We were adrift in the middle of the channel and no wind.

So the men swiftly started burying their heads in the engine, Craig and Rob doing a nifty job on changing the fuel filters; and then they tried to bleed the fuel pipe which involved Craig crawling down into the cockpit locker (very full) and under the floor. Subsequently we have discovered he

has done a large amount of pot-holing so I now have less sympathy for him, but it certainly wasn't a space I would have squeezed into!

It becomes very apparent that we have actually run out of diesel much to poor Joe's mortification! So Joe rings Tow Boat US (a marine run insurance for disabled boats of all types in all sorts of predicaments) and we settle down to our picnic, still drifting on the tide. A very nice rib turns up and tows us back to the marina where we refill and get the engine going again, but it is really too late to get back down to the race course.

And this was the day that Team New Zealand capsized dramatically and took another hour to be righted - what a sight to miss! So we consoled ourselves with a very nice sushi dinner - Rob's first experience of raw fish, and delectable he found it too.

On Friday Craig had checked out the headland opposite Newport, Fort Wetherill on Conanicut Island, as a possible viewing point. As we expected that everyone else would have the same idea we got there for 1030 hours (racing started at 1400 hours), but as it had been drizzly all morning there weren't too many people to begin with - and they had all brought their own chairs so we were lucky enough to claim the only very smart fixed bench there. So we sat there getting hotter and hotter in no wind, watching a very ambitious man (with the help of Craig's bit of rope) erect a very unstable tarpaulin as a sun shade on the top of the little hill beside us - the very best spot, but Karene also suspected it would be full of ticks when we checked it out - while his wife totally ignored him and prepared her serious photographic equipment. Unbelievably, despite good gusty winds by the end of the afternoon this thing did not take off or maim anyone. There was also another character who, just as the race boats appeared on the course, decided to fly a large free-form kite - and he then raised a small camera up the string to take aerial photos of the fleet. In fact the people 'watching' was almost as good as the sailing, especially the 70 year old 'blonde' in a white towelling bikini.....

It was quite fascinating racing: the course has been laid out for maximum television benefit rather than sailing's intricacies - and it was in the narrow channel between the island we were on and Newport. Many spectator boats had VIP flags flying and were allowed to loiter just off the course - how none of them were walloped by a passing race boat it was hard to understand. From our raised vantage point we could easily see all the course except for the very top end and with the help of binoculars could watch all the activity on board the boats. We saw the two semi-finals, sadly both won by the US teams which seems a shame for the final; and then a further race with all the boats including the hastily repaired boat of Team NZ who lost to one of the US teams on the finish line, despite one of their dagger board mechanisms failing and having to effect a repair during the race, with the handicap of having it down at the wrong times while they worked on it!

Saturday I felt we could not sail around any longer with such a grotty looking hull so set to cleaning it from the dinghy. I did momentarily consider the swimming option but it was far too cold. Meanwhile Rob went off with Craig and Karene for some speed-shopping and a quick look at Bristol. By the time they came back the anchorage around us which has been completely empty except for us, had 24 new neighbours and some fun anchoring to watch! It became obvious that going out for supper might be a bit of a bun-fight to find anywhere as this is a holiday weekend with July 4th celebrations next week, but after a drink on board Il Sogno, Craig maintained that we were now late enough to go in and miss the prime-time 8 o'clock bookings. And so it proved, we managed to find a table at the Oyster Bar and were the last customers in there at the end of the evening (when they started hoovering we took the hint!) - the Americans do eat very much earlier than Europeans: lunch is 12-1230, supper at home here would probably be at 1800.

On Sunday Dave Enstone came to pick us up and take us to his gorgeous home on the north east corner of the island. They live overlooking the busy East Channel of Narragansett Bay with stunning views and equally beautiful grounds. They are both keen gardeners so this was the sort of garden we are used to, not a wide expanse of lawn. We were invited for brunch with friends of theirs but were still there at 1600! Judy and Dave have also acted as a post box for us, so we were able to pick up most of our packages - the vital lobster pot buoy knife has not arrived yet though. On the way to Dave's house, he called in at Zeek's Creek to pick up some 'shrimp' and Rob took the opportunity to discuss fishing with Zeek who was happy to give all sorts of information including a near live demonstration of cutting a fish's throat to get it to bleed out and preserve the meat!

When we returned to Serafina we discovered that our new neighbours were now OCC members and when we looked them up, they were also Port Officers. So accepting our shouted invitation, Ami and Bob paddled over from their boat (Scallywag II) for a drink and lots of chat mainly about the EMYR and Turkey where they had spent 2 years.

Tomorrow we head for Bristol where they have the longest tradition of July 4th celebrations and we are joining up with more American friends of Craig's with whom he had done the Salty Dog rally up from the BVIs, to Bermuda and then the USA. And yet more eating and drinking will be done - Rob is bemoaning this situation, but certainly not slowing down at the partaking of all this incredibly generous hospitality.

### **Clams, Clams, Clams and the big parade**

Mon, Tues, Wed & Thurs – 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> July

Quick motor up to Bristol first thing and found we could anchor in amongst Il Sogno's friends, although I messed up the first attempt (too close to another boat) and had to re-anchor - isn't that always the way if you are wanting to impress? Craig & Karene had been kind enough to arrange for us to join in with them and their friends in a few days of celebrations.....

We dressed Serafina overall (ie put the flags up), regretting that we haven't got an enormous Red Ensign to match the huge Stars and Stripes going up everywhere. And then we met our neighbours, one couple turning out to be Jenny and Charlie who we met before in the BVIs and Jenny is an ex-English Oklahoman!

We had a quick wander in town (mostly shut on a Monday) and failed to find any groceries, but got a good look at the decorations going up for 4th July. Bristol has the longest history of 4th July celebrations in the US and they are expecting 100,000 visitors on Wednesday to a town of just 20,000! By law the residents aren't allowed to line the street with their chairs until 0500 hours (this is to prevent the situation when people would arrive a week earlier and camp out to be ringside!), but to ensure a place along the parade they actually go and sit in their seats from 0300 hours to prevent the police disposing of their chairs; after 0500 they can go home and be confident that they now have a place for later.

At 1800 hours we went off to a surreal reception on-board a small schooner where we were inducted into the Conch Republic Navy with a faintly embarrassing ceremony, this had been suggested by Linda and Bill from S/Y Sapphire. Bill and Linda are an amazing couple who organised the Salty Dawg Rally from the Caribbean to the US, which Craig had joined earlier this year. The others in our 'party' are also all Salty Dawgs.

After this we went to Mary's house. Mary is a very game dame which is probably the best description of her: she is an ex-nun in her 70s with an incredibly generous nature and great sense of humour. As she drove us to her home she detoured to show us her next-door neighbour's house which had been picked up and moved, over and through the neighbours' gardens (the too low electric cables in the US prevented them from using the road) to a new plot on the other side of the block. Have a look on the website to see that it still has to be planted down. Gives a new meaning to moving house.

We were then treated to another gastronomic evening, this time learning how to eat steamed clams and lobsters on Mary's porch. This meal had been deemed impossible to do for 9 on-board, so Mary had been volunteered to lend us her house!

The following morning Rob and I visited the excellent Herreshoff Museum (which Bill used to manage) in the old boatyard where the family firm had built so many outstanding fine sailing yachts and boats including no less than 7 America's Cup winning yachts. We were also delighted to find a photo of Mariette, the beautiful yacht that Ben Charny was working on when we met him in Antigua - so now we have much more insight into what an important boat she is, as she was also built there. There were two rooms full of half models as the original designer/boat builder, Nathanael G Herreshoff was such a genius he could make these so accurately achieving just what he wanted for that individual hull, that the yard could build directly from them. Well worth a visit.

Early in the afternoon the tall ship, HMS Bounty (American replica made for the original film!) made an approach towards the harbour and fired 2 cannons at the 'Picton Castle' another tall Ship, docked alongside, making us all jump out of our skins. She then made a very tight turn past Serafina at anchor and went off to anchor slightly further out. She had gone by the next morning. Presumably all in the pursuit of a photo-shoot for the 4<sup>th</sup> July.

Then it was off to another local culinary spectacular on board Sapphire: this time 10 of us enjoyed a Southern Pulled Pork casserole, but this was preceded by seemingly hundreds of raw clams with a variety of hot sauces or combinations to add to them - again delicious. We had already been treated to many surrounding fireworks visible from all the islands around us but the main event, the local show, began at 2130 - and they were spectacular. Interestingly Americans don't seem to know what a Catherine Wheel is. And then we finally wobbled home in the dinghy.

It started to rain at 0430 hours which didn't bode well for the parade, but this had stopped by the time we got up, although it was still looking very grey. Luckily this all changed by the time we got ashore and it was steaming. Thanks to Bill's great organising we merely had to wander up the road just as the parade began, to our spot right opposite the TV crews which meant that all the parade participants did their 'bit' right in front of us, in their bid for posterity. I must say that this parade knocked spots off the Memorial Day one in Washington, perhaps because it is more intimate being a narrow street or just the bands were so much more enthusiastic. All the bystanders are seated along the road with picnics or wandering up and down with the parade to see friends further along - it is most casual; no barriers or health and safety interfering here. And we are getting to know why firemen are so revered here: there are so many beautifully maintained ancient engines that get into all the parades! We had made the effort to dress in red, white and blue - and so had everyone else without exception; it is a very patriotic occasion. As the only Englishmen we were treated by the restaurant beside us, to free hotdogs, and they were all as friendly as ever.

Jenny had really gone to town on her outfit (see the photo at [www.rhbell.com](http://www.rhbell.com)) and with legs like hers, she could get away with it. The navy admiral in the parade was particularly impressed!

Again the evening was spent on Sapphire eating delicious salmon with salsa, plus potato stuffed pepper as a starter (yes we beginning to resemble the natives!) followed by a clam boil which is an immense pot layered with clams, onions, sausages and a special white sausage, potatoes, and chorizo sausage. It is surprisingly good and funnily enough, very filling. Then Linda had baked the most wonderful Blueberry Pie (a July 4th staple) to finish (us) off with. There were more fireworks to be seen and also, less inspiringly, some lightning. We all crept off to bed a little earlier after all this partying, and in the morning we didn't feel any need for breakfast or indeed lunch until 1500!

We are now back anchored at Dutch Harbor to recover from the excesses of the last few days, sort out the few non-functioning items on the boat, see Dave and Judy Enstone before they depart to the UK and hopefully visit the tall ships now arriving at Newport – and probably for the first time ever, hope that nobody feels the need to invite us over for drinks or more food..... well not 24 hours anyway!

### **The fat bellies Bells**

Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon & Tuesday – 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> July

OK so recovery from the July 4th excesses is on hold, as we are continuing to eat our body weight each day it seems. One of our co-yachties expressed an aim to ensure that Rob's belt buckle (once a necessity to secure his jeans) disappears under flesh - thanks Craig!

Actually still having a great, if lazy, time - sorry to sound so smug. And still in Dutch Harbour waiting to meet up with my cousin, plus wife, Wendy, on Thursday. But in between we have spent the time with 'Il Sogno' and 'Lady', learning Liar Dice (not played since childhood) and teaching Mexican Train. Dave and Judy also came on board one evening for another postal delivery for us and we went out to a new Italian restaurant with them.

We have even managed some maintenance: Rob has fixed the port Lopo light, the deckwash pump, replaced our runner tail jammer cleats which seemed to have given up their bite, plumbed in our US gas bottles, and the long postponed job of repairing the opening portlight seal in the saloon has finally been accomplished as well. We had nervously not tackled this problem before our ocean passage, as whilst the hatch had not been re-opened, we weren't leaking, if hot! So we are (eagerly?) awaiting a heavy downfall to see how we've done - and we do recognise we are probably the only Englishmen able to say this.

Rob is presently playing toilets as ever. It seems the seawater intake on the aft heads might be partially blocked so at the moment we are flushing with minimal amounts of freshwater, as suggested by Lady. (Forgive the detail here non-boaters, but this is of interest to other sad souls - and this is a full time but normal activity of all liveaboards: solving the myriad of ever-so slightly different toilet malfunctions!) This has the advantage of pushing the effluent beyond the valve and there is no downside of the fatal mixture of seawater and urine which promotes crystalline blockage in the pipes. We have yet to decide how to pursue the blockage and whether one of us is going to be lucky enough to enter the oh so cold sea! Might wait until the water is clearer and we can at least we can see the rest of our body submersed.

There is one flaw in the swimming scenario: we are heading for Provincetown on Cape Cod at the weekend and have heard reports that they are experiencing exceptional numbers of Great White Sharks..... Yes just like Jaws, which was filmed just south of there.

I liberally sprayed neat lemon juice on to the Chesapeake moustache (tannin stains) on the hull and it magically disappeared. So all I need now is lots of freshwater so I can get a layer of polish on the hull, but at local berthing prices that is unlikely. We have booked into a marina in East Boston for a week on 19th July but will spend this extravagance indulging in galleries, sights and, of course, shopping (hopefully this has a city centre unlike everywhere else which has its shopping based out of town, which is hopeless for the car-less souls like us!). Perhaps they will have good lights and I can spend my nights polishing and justifying my existence!

And in our quest to spread the efficacious-ness of Spotless Stainless (my brother has been sending rude comments re what he calls our obsession - we feel we may be lightening the load for other liveboards on the never-ending maintenance mountain) Rob did, what Craig called a infomercial, on Lady to demonstrate the stuff to Craig and Charlie and they were suitably impressed, or so they said....

We all went back to Fort Wetherill to watch the "tall" ships process out of Newport, under full sail but sadly with no wind, so lots of use of surreptitious engines. This was slightly underwhelming as the boats were really just schooners etc, the biggest being the replica, Bounty - or perhaps we are just plain spoilt in what we see in our daily lives. Interestingly though, the viewing site was much more crowded by locals watching this pageant than for the America's Cup racing.

### **Hadley Harbor, Elizabeth Islands, Massachusetts**

Tues, Wed, Thurs & Friday – 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> July

Tuesday morning, having said goodbye to Lady, we set off to New England Boatworks on Rhode Island as they had the cheapest prices to fill up with diesel, petrol and water. As soon as we had finished fuelling up, the staff knocked off for lunch so we also took advantage of their showers for a swift wash under endless running water - what a luxury, justifying it by the fortune we had just spent on fuel.

Then back to Dutch Harbor (American spelling actually) to re-anchor, this time to the west of the mooring field as we thought it might be a drier trip into the dock by dinghy. Almost as soon as we had done so, a catamaran with all the rest of the bay to use chose from, anchored so close to us that we felt we couldn't leave Serafina until we were satisfied we wouldn't bump into each other. Rob did mention this problem to the owner, apparently (as a shallow draft cat owner) he was worried about the depth..... This anchorage is quite strange as the tide swirls as it reverses and next door boats can be facing completely different ways. Extraordinary how people feel the need to anchor close to others when there is so much space around. Seems to be a standard problem out here.

Dave, Judy and her daughter, Jennifer came out for drinks and then we went to try out a newly re-opened Italian restaurant which sadly we could not award full marks to!

Wednesday we fiddled about on the boat and in the evening Craig took us all in to watch a very quirky film, Moonrise Kingdom, filmed locally starring Bill Murray, Bruce Willis and Frances McDormand in another old-fashioned cinema in Newport, followed by supper at a hugely busy Italian restaurant – well until 2100 hours when they all disappeared and we were again, the last out.

We caught the ferry to Newport on Wednesday morning (\$38 for two for the return trip, so not as cheap as you might hope) captained by a very cheery Irishman and his effete assistant who talked me through all the possible shopping destinations! We passed a fairy tale house called Clingstones (have a look at [www.thedesignhome.com](http://www.thedesignhome.com)) built on rocks called the Dumplings on the way.

We then got the tourist bit which was highly amusing, as we entered the harbour. Newport is known for the holiday cottages of the rich and famous, such as the Vanderbilts, around the turn of the 19th century – ‘cottages’ is a misnomer for vast edifices many in European architectural style. One of these was owned by Stuart Duncan, a banker who imported Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce and the chimneys are said to resemble to the sauce bottles. Mrs Duncan was known for giving extravagant parties, at one of which she presented each of her guests with a silver Tiffany spade and invited them to dig in a sandpit for treasure - and treasure indeed there was: pearls, rubies and diamonds!

Newport was formally colonised by William Blackstone and Roger Williams fleeing from the strict Puritans in Boston and Salem in the 1630s, and they were followed by other religious exiles such as Jews and Quakers. It became rich during the 17th and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries a part of the unsavoury Triangle Trade (exchanging rum for slaves, who were sold for molasses in the West Indies to make more rum). Nowadays Newport is a major world-wide sailing centre. While we were in town we visited the International Yacht Restoration School where the fresh student intake start off rebuilding what seems to be an endless supply of lovely little shallow-hulled sailing dinghies, ‘Beetle Cats’ and then move on to huge projects, such as the 40m yacht, Coronet originally built with a marble tread staircase and a piano installed. We did feel that possibly restoration was a slightly inaccurate description of what appears to be a wholly new hull taking place in the shed, surrounded by a gallery lined with all the old panelling, chairs and the original piano etc to be re-installed eventually.

After that we wandered around the town until Rob remembered that the American Najad agent is based there, so we managed to find his office and spent a happy half hour or so chatting to Alain Baines about the company and what is happening under its new owners, Nord West. We took the ferry back in time for a quick grocery shop and then met up with my cousin and his wife, (Brooke and Wendy) together with Craig and Karene from Il Sogno for a final fish and chips at the Cafe. This time the portions were so ridiculously large not one of us finished, but it was still delicious fish.

We bade goodbye to Il Sogno for a while and headed off for Buzzards Bay. With insufficient wind we motor-sailed to Hadley Harbor which is a beautiful but small, almost totally enclosed bay on one of the Elizabeth islands and managed to squeeze into a gap between the only two other yachts there, having scouted around to look at the depths with the Echo Sounder and barely missed going aground. The outer anchorage is a tiny area for deep keeled yachts. We were then somewhat surprised at the amount of traffic passing in and out of what we could see was an inner bay. We have finally surmised that there is something impressive tucked behind the hill which we can't see - and are too lazy to launch the dinghy for a better look, perhaps next time.....

### **Provincetown, Cape Cod - Massachusetts.**

Sat & Sun – 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> July

We set off probably rather earlier than necessary to be sure of the tides to make a safe exit out of the bay, which left us with 13 miles and 3.5 hours to achieve this - and practically no wind. So a leisurely wallow northwards where we joined all the other boats loitering to await the magic moment when the tide switches direction in the Cape Cod Canal and you can whoosh through on a 3 knot current.

We followed a beautiful British yacht, Belle Adventure, and were followed by a tall ship under full (but completely ineffectual) sail, into the canal which was very reminiscent of the Kiel Canal in Germany but otherwise pretty boring and we were spat out at the other end an hour later. Our

speed log is choosing when and how it wishes to work at the moment - perhaps reaching a total of 19,000 miles has done for it finally. We were also registering winds of force 4, although the other displays clearly indicated 5 knots only..... Let's hope Boston has a good Raymarine engineer.

As ever, the promised 20 knots of wind failed to materialise but we consoled ourselves that this would be ideal whale spotting weather. Crossing the Cape Cod Bay to Provincetown is also crossing the Northern Right Whale "Critical Habitat" - surely we couldn't fail to see one? We had a very hot motor across the bay and only saw an interesting tuna fishing boat with a vastly extended bowsprit for fishing or a very high turret/crows nest for helming from and what appeared to be a sea-life spotter plane above, and they weren't having any luck either.

We arrived in Provincetown knowing that there is an extended mooring field and that anchoring was likely to be outside of the sea barrier, especially as now we are in areas with tidal ranges of 3 metres plus. What we hadn't expected was to find that all the other available holes amongst the mooring buoys would be filled with crab pots. We had a good explore of all the possibilities and found ourselves nearly at the southerly beach before we found a good spot becoming the third boat at anchor in a line of outcasts!

In the morning we dinghied into town. Provincetown was one of the first three openly gay towns in the US so it does have a slightly different ambience! It is primarily a seaside town with fast ferries visiting from Boston and quite a few whaling trip boats. We had a good walk round and I decided to visit again tomorrow rather than drag poor Rob around every art gallery, of which there are many. I left Rob and the iPad in a coffee shop while I did the trek up the Pilgrim Monument, a 77m tower commemorating the first landing of the Mayflower after 67 days at sea (before it went on to Plymouth setting up the settlement there. In the first bleak winter they lived on board the ship and built their dwellings. A year later of the 57 original pilgrims, 46 had died and one baby had been born). All the way up the tower, there are granite plaques from other historic towns, including Chelmsford (I was born in the original one) but not quite the right Maldon (instead it was Malden) – it's still quite strange to see so many familiar names. Unfortunately one is unable to get that perfect panoramic shot from the top as health and safety has caged and plastic-windowed every vantage point.

One bit of very positive news at last has been the new lease of life of the SSB radio. We have spent any amount of time and quite a few euros/dollars on getting this looked at and modifications made, but finally this seems to have paid off and Rob has been checking-in to the Ocean Cruising Club's North Eastern US net and talking to other yachts as far afield as Nova Scotia to the north and Chesapeake to the south. This has put us in touch with a number of other member yachts converging on the Maine sailing grounds where we plan to spend most of August. Hopefully we will also be able to resume conversations with yachts such as Scott-Free who are currently heading for Trinidad.

### **Art, fish, whales, sailing, thunder and lightning - never a dull moment**

Mon, Tues & Wednesday – 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> July

During the night/early morning the fishermen moved all the dammed buoys that had made anchoring so awkward, further out into the bay. Upside is that at least we now can't swing into them if the tide & wind conspire against us!

We went into town for an early lunch and to visit to the hardware shop (everything was open on Sunday - presumably it is such a short season here that they make the most of it), then Rob went

back to work on board and I set off to visit as many art galleries as possible. They are all listed in a glossy booklet and conveniently almost all are down one lane.

It was great to see the variety, not just anodyne seascapes as many of the towns we have visited display, but a huge variety of all genres. Admittedly I didn't actually peruse those galleries with a wealth of homoerotic or masochistic art forms! There were some lovely portraits - and yes quite a few simpering males, but on the whole few art club type attempts. One gallery seemed to be the front room of a house: I tried knocking, putting my head round the door and calling, tiptoed in and then an elderly lady tottered out on her stick, on her way to the loo and said help yourself, he'll be back soon. And there were some superb female nudes. Eventually an equally elderly and rather grumpy man barged in, shouting instructions evidently, to his wife but settled down to chat to me. He was the artist, but I didn't find out his name, pricing, or anything you might expect a selling artist to impart! After about 40 galleries in the hot sun, I called for my taxi (!) and we went off in the dinghy for a quick walk along the sand (and into the famous Edward Hopper painting of the Cape Cod lighthouse - see the photos) as the ferry washes tried to dislodge Doris from the beach.

We decided to leave the next day - we are due in Boston on Thursday, but the weather on Wednesday is forecast to rain so we can hole up amongst the Boston Harbour Islands then. The night was very still, so we were treated to an endless racket of the Cormorants rattling their bills as far as we could work out - they sounded like dozens of woodpeckers at work. There is a nesting colony on the long breakwater in the harbour - and very smelly it is too.

Woke up to a flat calm and slightly hazy day - so another whale hunt day. Rob set his fishing lines as we rounded the hook of Cape Cod, passing all the fishing trip boats already ensconced by the shore at 0730 hours. Almost immediately a huge fish hooked itself and jumped out of the water and a minute later broke off the hook - and that was that fishing-wise for the day.

Still near Cape Cod I spotted one pass of a black back breaking the water - possibly a Long-finned Pilot Whale. About an hour later as we neared the yacht we had been following out of Provincetown, my eye caught something black on the horizon and can only assume it was a whale breaching - since the other yacht quickly changed course towards the sighting, we followed suit. We saw in the distance two whales spouting, their backs breaking the surface and several times their tails lifted as they dived. Very exciting but I had hoped for a slightly closer encounter (yes spoilt) - Rob would rather be too far away than too close! Later Rob spotted a Fin Whale racing away in front of the boat and managed to snap a quick photo of it. So they are definitely out there.

Interestingly the boat we had discussed with the carver in P-Town (Provincetown) which he was happy to let us believe was a tuna boat, is in fact a boat employed in tagging Great White Sharks. There is a website (<http://m.capecodsharkhunters.com/>) that details each day's work and much of their tagging is carried out on the east, Atlantic side of Cape Cod where there is a huge colony of seals on the beach there. They are finding sharks as big as 18'. Funnily enough there seems to be less detail of the location of some of their findings - they certainly didn't specify they had been in Cape Cod Bay on the day we sailed across! The spirit of denial and Jaws lives on. The wind filled in nicely from the southwest and we had a great sail under the full cutter rig just as we turned to the west towards Boston. I had persuaded Rob to sail Serafina due north as we then crossed the Stellwagen Bank which is a prime whale feeding area and the wind then obliged to make it a good sail from then on. The wind died as we neared the Boston islands so we stupidly took down the sails, as it then subsequently increased again but as we were busy navigating through channels we admitted defeat.

There wasn't a great choice of anchorages for protection from westerly winds so we opted for one that is supposed to have good holding in mud behind Paddocks Island. Unfortunately Boston Harbour has re-installed the buoys which were missing last year, so the better area was filled with a mooring field. We edged our way in as best we could, the anchor dragged a bit and then seemed to bite; and we bounced around in a fairly gusty westerly knowing that the wind was supposed to go to the southwest when we would be better sheltered and then die away after midnight. After an hour or so, as conditions got worse and the radio forecast indicated more of the same westerly tomorrow, we had a hasty re-consideration of our options, up anchored and motored round the island into another area surrounded by two other islands which offered better protection from the winds crossing the tidal flow. We dropped anchor again just north of a small mooring field below Quincy Great Hill (well it's the highest bit of land we have probably seen coastally but it is by no means soaring!) in an area not noted as an anchorage and we are by far the biggest thing here, but in considerably more shelter. It didn't offer any respite from the ferries plying back and forth at great speed to Boston, but beggars can't be choosers.

Tuesday night wasn't ideal as once the ferries stopped, the fishing boats zoomed out, so Serafina did rock and roll somewhat.

Wednesday morning started hot and sunny and on the quay just south of us, the fishing boats were now belting back in with loud VHF radios conversing to each other. It transpired that today was the day that about fifteen local fishing boats together with their escort of five police boats, take disabled veterans out for a day's fishing in their wheelchairs. So the whole operation got noisier, the boats were seriously overcrowded, and everything was conducted at full speed! They all returned (one breaking down just by us and having to be towed in) - a whole lot quieter - at around lunchtime, just as the weather deteriorated rapidly and we were treated to an afternoon of a somewhat aimless thunderstorm and heavy rain but this did have the advantage of flattening the sea which very unusually had come out of the east. We hailed one of the Police boats (Quincy Police) to find out what the outing had been about and the officers explained. They then asked if we had sailed the whole way here from England so we explained what we had done so far. They were suitably impressed and then the senior officer offered his apologies for the poor quality of American beer!

Roll on a real live marina berth tomorrow!

## **Boston**

Thursday & Friday – 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> July.

Actually, when I say 'up early' every day, it seems that I am tending to wake up at 0730, but Rob is already hard at work on his computer and doing the OCC radio net on the SSB, if propagation is proving helpful that day - and unless I can think of a good excuse to stay in bed and read, my day starts around then. If we are going anywhere, and it doesn't completely foul the tides up, we get under way and have breakfast afterwards; if not, jobs start then.

So on Thursday we set off to wend our way through the many island channels (and fishing buoys) towards East Boston and Logan International Airport, which is next door to the marina. Strangely the aircraft noise was far worse in the anchorage and is barely noticeable in the marina. On the way we skirted around the many small boats fishing in the main channel into Boston, unlike the large tanker who was trying to stay within his depth – whose loud hooting constantly barely registered with this hardy lot.

We arrived at the marina, Boston Harbor Shipyard and Marina, in East Boston. I had got completely confused by the charts and guides which seemed to indicate 'Boatworks' as running one half of the marina, but this is actually a boat construction business on the same site. So we berthed opposite the most tremendous view of Boston city in a nice wide berth (lots of room to get on with hull polishing, sadly) and unbelievably good water pressure, so Serafina has finally had the biggest clean of the season. There is lots of sailing going on along the river, particularly as next door to us is a sailing school and they all go out and drift around. In the evenings some people seem to get out on their boats until dark, but few seem to leave this marina where there quite a few liveaboards on a wide variety of craft including an ex-Royal Navy cutter.

We met the wonderful Pat Gately who is the Manager here, and she kindly took us out in her car to familiarise us with the locale, most importantly the route to walk to the T (the underground) and she dropped us off at the supermarket from where we got a taxi back to the marina after an extensive shop.

The first settlement in New England was at Plymouth by Puritans escaping persecution from the Church of England, arriving in the Mayflower in 1620. In 1630 Charles I assigned land to the Massachusetts Bay Company and over 1000 Puritans set sail in eleven ships, naming the town Boston after their home town. They were encouraged to trade only with the company and when they refused to do so, Charles II put the colony under his control. After extensive and expensive French and British battles over the New World territory, the colonists were expected to pay their share of the costs in taxes, inflaming the colonists whose famous cry was "No taxation without representation" (all sorts of phrases are ringing bells here!). British troops were sent to protect the customs men but taunted by an unruly mob they opened fire killing 5 in the Boston Massacre (I had in mind that massacres were on a grand scale?), the location commemorated by a cobbled circle. A further revolt in 1773, the Boston Tea Party when men disguised as Mohawks boarded ships dumping their taxable cargo of tea into the harbour, became the spark to ignite the Revolutionary War (or as we know it, the American War of Independence!). Bostonians were also vehemently anti-slavery, playing an active role in the slave underground railroad and supporting the Union in the Civil War.

Boston continued to attract immigrants, 1000s came from Ireland during the potato famine and today that influx continues, and is a major influence on the city. Apparently it is only recently that it has become so genteel - just 20 years ago there would have been no-go areas dependant on your origins. In fact Craig (Il Sogno) warned us that East Boston has a reputation for violence, but reassured us that he felt quite safe - we now realise this advice was from a man who made his living visiting all the world's worst conflict areas.....

So we set off on Friday into town to initially find a more in depth guide, taking the T to Faneuil Hall (a sort of glorified Covent Garden area). Unable to find any tourist information and only a very scrappy map, we got lost several times and eventually decided we would have to travel on to South End and a large shopping mall to find the nearest bookshop, there are no others nowadays in the central area! The Old Boston area is a rare mix of old and new with old buildings crouching among the soaring modern towers.

So we went out to Prudential in South Boston, I went up the tower to the 50th floor for a panoramic view, and after more wrong turns (this city is not based on the lovely straightforward grids we are becoming accustomed to in the US!) we ended up at Copley Square. Here we visited Trinity Church, a Romanesque Revival building voted among the top 10 buildings in the US. Surprisingly many of the stained glass windows are by English artists such as Burne-Jones. We then went on to the Public

Library, a quite astonishing building (filled mainly by people using their laptops, not reading books) with amazing Pre-Raphaelite murals.

Boston seems to be fairly spread out, so we have invested in a weekly T pass at \$18 each (each single trip is a standard \$2 so it seemed to make sense) and will start covering more ground now that we have a decent guide to peruse.

### **Boston tea party and an Aussie bar**

Sat, Sun, Mon & Tues – 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> July

We thought the weekend would be very busy in town for any sightseeing so decided to spend the day doing things on the boat that require either running water or electricity, or both. We have plugged in to the mains for a day to fully charge up the batteries, but because of the difference in our voltage from the US's we have to use the expensive system mainly reserved and very expensive, for boats running air-con constantly, so we tend to only do it to treat the batteries to a proper juice up.

So I washed down the hull, treated the reappearing tannin stains with lemon juice and started to polish the hull. This is obviously done standing in Doris but as each wake goes past, I have to push the dinghy away from the hull to prevent splashes up the bit I am working on - so all very tedious and irritating, perhaps Saturday with all the extra boat traffic was a silly day to choose.

Rob did a lot of jobs around the boat and more work on Iain Simpson's rigging system website which Rob is running from inside our website. You might like to look at <http://www.rhbell.com/Simbo> to see Iain's thoughts on it - it was information we took to heart and have based much of Serafina's systems on.

I rather ambitiously decided to complete the polishing job in one day - partly as I expected to be so seized up the next day, that it would be impossible to carry on! We are definitely missing the regular swimming in the Caribbean. We finally finished re-tying alongside the dock (we had edged Serafina further and further out to facilitate getting the dinghy between her and the dock) and had showers in time for a sojourn to the tiny Aussie bar and pie factory run within the boatyard site.

This boatyard is quite a find, not only is it considerably cheaper (about a quarter of prices across the river) but it is well run by the marvellous Pat and her staff. A hippie who lived aboard here organised a sort of sculpture park on site, so all around the very much working warehouses and sheds there are extraordinary huge, mainly metal sculptures - spotting them is just half the fun. And the Aussie bar, 'G'Day' is another great addition - their main business in yacht catering but as a side-line they now also have a bar and sell their KO pies plus a limited menu from a tiny bar and kitchen.

In no time we got chatting to Cathy and Bill. Cathy had been brought up on the East side and both she and Bill were fascinating, telling us about their upbringings and family history (Cathy's grandfather came over from Ireland and was a fisherman, away at sea for months returning, usually with an itinerant fisherman in tow, to their two-roomed home. She'd been brought up with 5 siblings in a flat locally. Bill's grandfather had come from Germany just as the Depression was ending and made his way initially in New York. It is so strange to hear such immediate history and realise just how new a country the US is.), and also pointed out lots of local eateries, mostly run it seems by members of Cathy's immediate family that we have to visit on this side of the river. Around 2300 hours the bar closed and we were still finishing up our drinks when a skunk trotted towards us. We of course wanted a good look, whereas Cathy and Bill leapt to their feet and

charged off in the opposite direction, dragging us with them. Their dog was recently sprayed by one and was blind for 13 weeks and NOTHING removes the smell. Eventually two of their children returned with Uncle Joe from their trip to the Boston Red Sox (baseball) and we showed them all around Serafina. Apparently it was midnight. (You can read into this that Sarah had drunk sufficient to lose track of time and things....)

Next morning, despite feeling a little delicate, we set off to an arts and craft, plus farmers' market by City Hall. The first setback was Rob's 7 day T pass refused to work and there are no staff around on a Sunday. Eventually a platform cleaner let him through the barrier. Then when we arrived at City Plaza, but there was no market and the only information we could glean was that it ran on Wednesdays, although the website did say this was a Sunday special. Then we tried to visit the Aquarium but there were very long queues in the hot sun, and by this time my horrendous hangover was such that I only felt like a totter home to bed. And Rob was a total star and did not demure, if the roles were reversed would I be so kind?! We finally tracked down a T employee after 3 different stations who just told Rob to follow another passenger closely through the automated gates as after all his ticket is legal! So this is what we will be doing. The gates are unusual here as they open to allow passengers out of the station en masse, without counting you out by ticket and the same gates work in reverse to take your ticket, presumably the timing inwards is such to allow the larger American to waddle through, so there should be sufficient time for us both to scamper through.

On Monday I set off to visit the Museum of Fine Arts which is considerably bigger than the Washington Smithsonian Fine Arts museum. I only managed to view about a quarter of the exhibits but thoroughly enjoyed it. In fact you get the possibility of a second visit for the price of the entry ticket. After a bit of shopping I met Rob at a cinema to watch the Dark Knight Rises - weirdly there was a crying baby in the cinema with us. On our way home we found the famous pizza restaurant, Santarpios in Chelsea Street (I use the term loosely - great atmosphere with seating at the bar and one row of diner-type tables) near 'our' T station. Cathy and Lonely Planet had recommended it, but Cathy had also said that the staff were downright rude - pretty much! We stupidly each opted to have our own pizza which meant that a day later, despite taking a goodly amount home in a doggy bag, we are still groaning from the volume of pizza. Cathy's other suggestion was Rino's in Saratoga Street for handmade lobster ravioli but we are not sure we can face it yet. We were a bit lost as we tried to locate Santarpios and about to set off down the wrong street when a friendly policeman who had spotted us looking lost from a distance, came up from some way behind us and very helpfully pointed us in the right direction. We are not sure if this was an enthusiastic police officer doing the right thing, or perhaps he just saw us as a mugger's delight as we wandered through the Italian and Irish quarters!

Tuesday Rob had a brainwave about sourcing the equipment to re-gas our fridge ourselves, which turns out to be about \$60 to buy the equipment and around \$30 for the gas - which seems about what we would pay to have an engineer to do the job just once. So that will be delivered to the yard tomorrow. Then we set off to visit the USS Constitution. This three-masted frigate is still the flagship of the US Navy and is beautifully maintained. We opted to take the guided tour and it soon became apparent that it would have a British-bashing theme - which obviously Rob couldn't not possibly take lying down as the only Brits on the tour. It was a relatively short and quite basic tour of the deck and lower gun deck given by serving Naval personnel. Afterwards we spoke to our guide and on hearing that we had sailed here, Gilbert Caine (originally from Barbados where he was educated by English teachers) very kindly offered to take us on a private trip further into the ship showing us the officer's quarters, the keel and rudder controls which was a huge treat and very interesting. We felt very privileged.

We then visited the Aquarium, not necessarily my favourite activity but this one is very highly focused on conservation and education. The main exhibit is a four storey aquarium with a circular stairway around it and when we visited, apart from some huge fish in it, it also had two very busy divers hand-feeding the various fish their particular diet! The fishy highlights were a 560lb Green Turtle called Murtle, Leafy Seadragons (related to Seahorses), a wonderful Jellies (Jelly Fish to us) exhibition, 36' Anaconda (well it was astonishingly horrible), living corals and huge sea anemones. Many of the exhibits have been rescued from the seas following injury. Everything was beautifully maintained and clean - even the huge main tank's water is completely replenished every 90 minutes. And while we had been inside the heavens had opened dramatically. We managed to nip home before the next thunderstorm after a thoroughly entertaining day.

## **Gloucester and Fog**

Wed, Thurs, Fri & Saturday – 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> July

Wednesday was to be our last day in Boston, so I got off to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum fairly early to discover that a) it doesn't open till 1100, and b) contrary to the guide book it is open on a Monday but not a Tuesday - information that would have changed the T mileage at least!

This is a completely idiosyncratic place funded, sourced and arranged by the amazing owner, ISG. Sadly she lost her only son aged 2, her sister, then her parents and finally her husband died early, so ISG inherited bucket loads of cash and decided to realise her and her husband's dream, developing a building in the style of a 15th Venetian palazzo surrounding a beautiful garden courtyard, with 3 floors to house her collection to particularly to further education and on the 4th floor she lived above the 'shop'. She stipulated in her legacy that the way she had arranged all the artefacts and art must not be touched, but it is arranged in such a way that it looks like someone's house although this also makes you feel you are failing to give all the items your full consideration. It is in many ways surprisingly modern with brilliant blue or red walls in some of the rooms. Each room is themed with different wall and floor coverings, and the art from a specific age or country. She was innovative in having an artist in residence, although her first artist was John Singer Sargent! If you are named Isabella or it is your birthday you get in free.

It was here that 2 thieves dressed as policemen conned their way in on St Patrick's Day 1990 stealing artworks worth \$500 million including Rembrandt's only known seascape, and a tiny self-portrait, Degas drawing, and a Vermeer. The empty spaces are still left framed in the hope that they will be recovered, and this is still a very active investigation.

This place is not only a must if you are going to visit Boston, but worthy of a special trip - it is absolutely awesome (for once this is the proper use of this overused word!).

After that, I trekked off in search of birthday presents for a 60 year old, fairly unsuccessfully but found the very best shopping area just as the old pins were giving up: if you get the T to Copley Square and cross Newbury Street, it is actually interesting proper shopping and not all the same chains as everywhere else.

When I got back to the boat we dashed off and did a food shop ready for our departure and treated ourselves to another evening at G'Day (the Aussie bar). The next morning we discovered that the weather forecast was looking rather nasty "heavy and damaging hail" does not sound like the stuff you might wish to be re-anchoring in, nor was the possibility of a tornado, so we postponed our departure till Saturday.

Since then I have completed polishing the boat and Rob has done loads of work, ticked off lots of 'to-do-list' jobs and re-gassed the fridge with his new, all singing and dancing kit. We were also visited by Cathy's sister, Maryann bearing three different banana breads that she made especially for us to welcome us to Boston! She was just as lovely as her sister, full of chat about the area and again so keen to offer any help - so much so, that on Friday evening she came round specially and dropped off an Italian sub from the deli she works in, to further our education of course! And jolly good they were too.

We also donned our patriot Union Jack T shirts and spent the evening watching, (along with the Aussie staff of the little bar *G'Day* who greatly enjoyed the small glimpse of Johnny Wilkinson drop kicking that goal!) the NBC recorded highlights of the Olympic Opening Ceremony, well until after the bar had officially closed but we didn't see the very final bit about who lit what, but Googled it when we got back to the boat. We are a bit sad to be missing this all as well as the Jubilee, but thank goodness the weather has improved. Go GB!

In the event the horrible weather did not fully materialise although it has been pretty grey, so we finally bid goodbye to the wonderful Pat and un-glued ourselves from the dock and headed north, to immediately get enveloped in thick fog with visibility of barely 100'. As we had encountered lots of fishing boats and countless lobster pots in the fairly narrow channel on the way in, I watched from the bows (in full foulies) and Rob steered and hooted. This is the first fog since we first arrived in Portugal back in 2008 and it always is a somewhat surreal feeling: no horizon to give you any perspective, so that things looming out of the gloom could be a buoy or a boat, it's difficult to tell. We could see a large motor yacht pursuing us on the AIS and it transpired they had taken on a pilot to see them out of the harbour - they took things a lot slower once the pilot had been decanted on to his vessel!

We had intended to go to Rockport but what little wind there was would be blowing a surge into the bay there so we headed for Gloucester with occasional breaks in the fog and warm sunshine - plus the endless fishing buoys to avoid. By lunchtime we were anchored behind the mooring field of the Eastern Point Yacht Club enjoying all the wakes of the fishing and trip boats!

## **Isles of Shoals**

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July

Another grey morning with reduced visibility and rain, but luckily the fog didn't develop, however the wind stayed firmly fixed to the nose so we motor sailed around Cape Ann (where strangely there are 2 lighthouses, one private and one presumably state run!), then north and finally into sea depths of 80m+ where the damn pots disappear. Our depth gauge was having an off day flashing from 90m down to, at one point, 7m despite all the charts begging to differ. I was hopeful of it being caused by whales, Rob put it down to extreme temperature fluctuations or shoals of fish.

We have twice seen some sort of game fish chasing something, diving back and forth out of the water - I reckon a Sailfish or Marlin, it's certainly impressive.

We arrived at our destination, Isles of Shoals (named after the huge schools of cod once fished here, making this tiny group of islands one of Britain's richest colonies in 18th century) still in very overcast conditions and still in foulies! We picked up a yacht club buoy between Smuttynose, Cedar and Star Islands. This is one of those rare places where everyone says 'don't attempt to anchor as the holding is so bad'. Consequently several private bodies, including 2 mainland yacht clubs 'maintain' (we hope) buoys here, on a first come, first served basis - and free!

The islands are very reminiscent of Sweden: no trees, granite everywhere, and similar low slatted houses, some even painted red. There is also one huge building now a religious retreat, but in a previous incarnation a successful hotel advertised in 1872 as a "place for the tired worker. No noise. No dust. No trolleys." The public are allowed ashore during daylight hours to be greeted by the staff called 'Pelicans'! It's original attraction was enhanced by the poet, Celia Thaxter, daughter of the local lighthouse keeper, drawing such literary stars to visit as Longfellow. There is also Betty Moody's cave where the only survivor of an Indian attack hid, but had to kill her two infants to prevent their crying giving them away. And there are stories of pirates including Blackbeard and Captain Kidd visiting; indeed bars of silver were found here.

We intend to spend a certain 60th birthday here tomorrow (haven't made it to the bright lights, so Rob will have to settle for the promise of a stonking great steak in due course). And should the rain let up, will walk over the 3 nearest islands - they really are that tiny - 3000 nesting gulls allowing. They apparently have dive-bombing techniques and you are advised to walk holding a stick above your head (and on a treeless island.....).

### **Portland, Maine - While my guitar gently weeps.**

Mon, Tues & Wed – 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> July & 1<sup>st</sup> August

Beautiful day for the birthday boy, who was so impressed and touched by all the cards which had been secretly sent to Boston Harbor Shipyard and smuggled on board with the help of the perfect marina manager, Pat. Rob was less impressed at the option of healthy walks without the chance of alcoholic celebration on a dry island amongst religious retreat-ees!

We had woken to discover all our neighbours bar two, had slunk off over the horizon, so we went ashore for an energetic yomp across the headlands. But after visiting the retreat's reception and discovering that these tiny islands represent the poison ivy centre of the universe, where it grows in many different disguises to anything as tall as a 6' shrub on the island of Appledore, we developed a mincing gait avoiding anything growing except grass. (Incidentally the infamous Capt John Smith, who we hear about everywhere we go on the East Coast, actually imported poison ivy as a new and attractive plant from the colonies to England - luckily it obviously didn't thrive!) Added to this there was the other hazard of nesting gulls: July is chick raising time and there are as many as 3000 gulls on these islands, specifically Herring and Black Backed Gulls with wing spans of up to 5.5ft and beaks which looked to be a good 3"! The bird guide book told us that they are especially aggressive in the morning, evening and after the chicks have hatched - great! Apparently if you hold a stick aloft they will attack the highest point, rather than your head. But find a stick on treeless islands.....

So we walked around Star Island with the very large buildings of the ex-hotel, now a religious retreat and had a quick coffee settled in rocking chairs on their elevated porch - while Rob decided that he was never likely to come and enjoy the prayer meetings there! But it was a beautiful island with quirky monuments, gravestones (all over the place) including a pets' graveyard, rock circles, cairns, allotments divided up with bottles (so somewhere someone was drinking!) and everything built in granite or clapboard.

We then took the dinghy over to another island, the wonderfully named Smuttynose island, for a further walk, but eventually were beaten back by more gulls – trying to walk on a path beneath gulls standing guard on the walls with completely gormless chicks scurrying around one's feet was just too intimidating!

So back to the boat and yet more of the wonderful banana cake courtesy of Maryann, when we were hailed by Saltwhistle III. We fleetingly met Tony and Rachel in Tortola just as we were about to leave for the US and have heard them on the OCC radio net recently and dipped into their blog as well. We were delighted to invite them for a drink on board which turned into the rest of the afternoon and evening and made Rob's birthday a whole lot more jollier occasion! And finally five seals did a patrol around the harbour at dusk.

On Monday we set off at 0600 hours north to Portland, Maine to meet up with Il Sogno for a further birthday celebration. They had so very kindly sailed back West to meet us, and as usual gave us the lowdown on the area, where to anchor and the oh so precious wifi code. Our sail was the usual motorsail but with a positive tide and some aft wind, with the jib poled out we made reasonable time and were there for early afternoon. Again it was a case of anchoring behind the mooring field and the best spot just happened to be immediately behind a large, old-fashioned, British flagged motor yacht called Blue Guitar belonging to and with the owner on board, a certain Mr Eric Clapton. Oddly Eric didn't seem interested in celebrating Rob's belated birthday, in fact, poor chap was being constantly circled by small boats taking photos.

Craig and Karene treated us to a delicious supper of salmon and tuna sushi in a mixture (that was the official description!), followed by mussels in a Thai curry broth with vegetables, and then blueberries with lemon curd. The following day was spent in more gastronomic pursuit - coffee and pastries, chips cooked in duck fat (a local speciality cafe) followed by a mooch round Whole Foods (the world's most fantastic organic supermarket chain - with prices to match) and a huge pizza there. And tonight Craig is barbecuing Rob his promised steak; their generosity knows no bounds. Honestly we cannot work out how these two stay so trim. In between mealtimes, Karene and I visited the Portland Arts Museum seeing a number of Winslow Homer oil paintings (sadly no water colours), NC and Andrew Wyeths, and even an interesting (ie not the ghastly usual chocolate box affair) early Renoir. Rob and Craig meanwhile checked out a microbrewery.....

### **Snow Island, Quahog bay, Maine**

Thurs, Fri & Sat – 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> August

Presumably in the morning Il Sogno left for their dash back south to meet up with friends - it was difficult to tell as we could barely see more than a boat length away in the fog. Weirdly the decks were bone dry. I set off for a quick dash into town to find some new wellies (one pair in transit following the soles falling off my posh Dubarrys, and the rubber ones soles became lethally glassy following the hot lay up in the Caribbean), so of course the fog miraculously cleared leaving me overdressed in the humid sun. Visited the other chandlery I had noticed on the sea front to discover that it deals with off-shore oil vessels, not your average yacht! So settled for a pair from Hamilton Marine, by far the cheapest I have seen at \$54 - yes it does seem an awful lot for a fisherman's pair of ankle boots, but they are loads more comfortable than the yachtie ones at \$85!

We were then going to take a taxi into the mall with Tony and Rachael from Saltwhistle III, but laundry malfunctions postponed this till the next day. So we returned to town to find a hardware store (eventually decided it was just too far in the heat having walked much of the distance) and had a general meander around the shops, spotting an extra-wide wheelchair rider on the way.....! A few drinks with Tony and Rachel on our return until the descending fog made it too cold to stay on deck and went home for an early night.

Caught a taxi into the Maine Mall next morning - Tony in the front seat, exposed to the taxi driver's rants. Rob and I did some winter clothes shopping, and Rob then found a tool nirvana in

Sears. Tony and Rachel were off to buy an iPad, although they had heard our tales of woe, they were confident that their Travelex debit card would circumvent the ridiculous AT&T computerised requirements. And inevitably it didn't, resulting in an automatic refund by cheque for \$75 (for the Green Dot card they had bought under AT&T's direction) to be sent somewhere at some time within the mall! They also ended up with a 2.5 hour debacle which was satisfactorily concluded after a break for lunch. The solution was to buy another type of pre-paid debit card - we'll find out the make and put it up in the yachting resources section of the website should anyone else get into this situation....(This includes any Ipad owners hoping to use AT & T when they get to the USA) And they were given items in lieu of the lack of refund. It was agreed that the staff did stick at it and tried to solve the problem.

Back in town, I went off to find a haircut. The Vietnamese woman who cut it had two long discussions about how I wanted it and then proceeded to tell me how she was cutting it, and that it would be much better this way..... well, actually not really, but at least it's less irritating and will grow out!

Friday morning I did a quick shop at Whole Foods to see us through the next few days of sailing where we don't expect to find any grocery stores, or very limited supplies. In fact I am beginning to think that we are getting to the stage of eating up the food stores on board before we lay up - and we still have quite a lot of lurking tins stored in the bilge from the Med. Then we up-anchored and started the weave through lobster pot buoys out to sea.

From now on we will be heading generally in an easterly direction as Maine curves around to the Canadian seaboard, but all the rivers, bays and headlands run in a north-east/south-west direction. So passages take the form of getting to the sea heading east and then ducking up a convenient bay or around an island to avoid the prevailing southerly winds and swell, ie quite time-consuming for the amount of progress made eastwards. And all the activity takes place within lobster fishing areas; you have to get into water of at least 85m when they finally stop laying the damn things.

Not being too sure how much time slaloming through the buoys would add to the voyage we erred on the safe side and only travelled 18 miles up the Quahog Bay (much more of a river really) to Snow Island (owned by the late, great Dodge Morgan. A man who made his millions in radar and then was the first American, but the 4th person to sail non-stop around the world), arriving mid-afternoon. As the biggest yacht (with a forward looking echo sounder not enjoying the murky depths) we didn't press in too far into the anchorage, particularly as we had arrived at just after high tide. It seemed a wide and very pretty bay - and it still was 4 hours later, but a lot smaller as all the rocks and islands became more and more extensive as the tide ebbed and fell dramatically. And it is strange to be out of Portland harbour with all the wakes and stern-slapping we have been experiencing, to end up here in such completely still and near silent waters.

There was a lot of swimming going on and Active Captain does say that the waters up the head of the bays are much warmer, so I took the plunge (well a slow sidle down the swimming ladder) and gave Serafina's waterline a good clean. The water wasn't that clear but the barnacles are definitely winning the battle and covering the bottom of poor Serafina as we get to the end of our sailing season.

### **Port Clyde and Blubber island.**

Sun & Mon – 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Aug

Woke up to a lovely morning and with a planned 40 mile passage ahead of us we rushed around getting ready to head off. But as we did so, the first fingers of fog wafted through the dense fir trees standing sentinel all around us and we soon lost sight of the far side of the bay where the long fingers of land ran down to the open Atlantic. We opted to wait a few more minutes and soon we were alone in the dense swirling white cloud and all thoughts of sailing 'east' were shelved in favour of getting a few jobs done instead.

By midday though the fog began to lift and sunshine flooded into the clearing and with visibility improving with every minute we revised our plans and raised the anchor and set off on a shorter than planned trip. Sadly we only made around 400 yards before we ran straight into an impenetrable bank of fog that was sitting firmly in the long fjord-like entrance to the inlet. Only being able to see some 20 metres maximum was simply not safe in such a narrow, shallow and busy waterway, so we retraced our steps and dropped anchor pretty much where we were before.

By 1400 hours the fog had cleared completely but it was now too late to move off, so we sat back and having completed some worthwhile jobs on board (you know – laundry, rebuilding a toilet pump, that sort of fun thing), we simply enjoyed watching the comings and goings of our little oasis. The mother and young bald eagle, nested behind us dominated the soundtrack as the youngster demonstrated more pique than your average human child! Eider ducks swam around in clusters (could the new collective noun be a 'tog'?) seals hunted and the local sailing club laid out a race course that seemed to feature Serafina as an important midpoint/obstruction.

The weather forecast for Sunday night and Monday morning bode grave tidings of a summer storm and up to 35 knot winds and as usual these were accompanied by 'sensible' advice as how to stay safe/warm/cool/dry/alive! As usual we were taken in by all this and were resolved to spending another morning in this wonderful spot before venturing out around midday as the winds subsided.

In the event Monday dawned sunny and dead flat calm. So we reverted to plan A and set off for Burnt island. As we sailed clear of the fingers of land jutting out into the Gulf of Maine, we found ourselves on a converging course with another yacht that turned out to be Saltwhistle III who had been at anchor up a nearby inlet and had suffered all the same false starts as us on Sunday. We had a chat over the VHF radio before heading off to our respective destinations.

The gaily painted lobster pot buoys are now becoming denser and ubiquitous and so even long offshore passages now require a very vigilant helmsman (sadly Sarah is the wrong height to spot these and stand behind the wheel to steer, so I get all the fun!!) and the autopilot has been given time off. Seals came and went as did another pod of harbour porpoises (we saw some on Saturday as well), but no whales and only endless bits of seaweed were snared by the fishing lure.

Although the wind never ventured above 10 knots all day, there was a very large swell running in from the open Atlantic and this made the trip uncomfortable at best. We arrived at Burnt island to discover that these rollers were curling around the headland and sweeping across this empty anchorage and so given that the bay was also chock full of lobster pot buoys (of course) we changed our plan and made our way three miles north, through the thickest masses of these buoys yet, round to the northern side of Port Clyde which is by Blubber island.

Here we anchored in splendid isolation with lovely views across an open expanse of water to the north and again surrounded by islands and dense woodland, but with the tiny fishing town of Port Clyde behind us.

## **Out and about in Port Clyde**

Tuesday – 7<sup>th</sup> August

The plan today was to visit and explore Port Clyde and hopefully get a backlog of laundry done in the laundrette whilst we were ashore.

It was a beautiful day with unbroken sunshine and just a gentle breeze and having launched the dinghy we made our way to the dinghy dock next to the general store.

Here we firstly discovered that there was no longer any laundry in the small town, in fact there is next to nothing here except a general store, a bar and restaurant, a post office, a church and several art galleries. You can hire a kayak or take a boat trip out to the lighthouse – but that is about all.

Having said that, we had a great time ashore and found some wonderful people to talk to and did a fair bit of exploration. But first we needed a coffee and opted for the specials in the general store (where else?) and my breakfast sandwich which consisted of a fried egg and bacon in an 'English' muffin along with a cup of coffee set us back \$1.99 whilst Sarah's huge (and completely defeating) blueberry pancake and coffee was just \$2.29.

We toured the two floors of the store and Sarah invested in a new rug for the saloon and we were served by Bobby who seemed thrilled to hear about our travels and when we went back in the afternoon to pick the rug up, it turned out that she had already found time to view the website and read all about us! (Hi there Bobby if you are still reading this.)

We walked out of the town and followed the road to Marshall's Point Lighthouse (the location used to film the end of Forest Gump's run across America – Tom Hanks literally did his filmed run up the gangway to the lighthouse and was then rushed to another filming location. His brother hung around to sign his own autographs though....!) and whilst there we also visited the museum housed in the old lighthouse keeper's house. If nothing else we learnt quite a bit more about lobster fishing and the dreaded buoys that we have been making such a big deal about.

We stood on the headland and watched a British flagged yacht that we had first seen in Antigua, sail past and into Port Clyde and it was sheer luck that during our return visit to the general store later on, that we met the skipper who was ashore paying for their mooring buoy.

We also had a wander up the only street and popped into a couple of art galleries. The biggest of these was exhibiting works by . She has works displayed in the White House and various US embassies across Europe and as we wandered round we met her husband who gave us a personal tour including the private upper floors of the house that were used occasionally as a studio and their holiday home.

Beautiful sunset ended the day and the only slight set back is the large blue bag of dirty laundry..... This may help determine our destination tomorrow. I should perhaps quickly explain that the excess laundry has been caused by us having to unearth our more wintery clothing to cope with the decidedly colder nights and chilly daytime wind! This clothing has all spent a considerable amount of time vacuum packed away in the bowels of Serafina and mostly needs a little airing and 'freshening' up and sadly the tropical clothing that has not been designated as rags, is being stowed away.

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**Rockland, Maine**

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> August

Well we cannot go any further with report without commenting on the very courteous lobster fishermen based in Port Clyde. We were anchored in the bay, but it was necessary for them to come past us on their way out and back, yet rather than power fast at full speed with all the attendant noise and wash, they all potted past very carefully and only opened up their engines when well clear of us. And given that this started at 0500 hours, we were very grateful indeed.

We got away ourselves around 0800 hours and threaded our way through the fields of buoys towards the open Atlantic again. But this all seemed a bit easy, so we opted to take a more scenic route threading our way using the chart plotter, forward looking sonar and very eagle eyes through the granite rocks and islands (and those pesky brightly coloured buoys) until we finally approached the big anchorage at Rockland.

This is a massive open space and we simply picked a convenient spot just outside the field of mooring buoys and anchored. We had been in touch by phone with a company here who we hope can pop out and fix our heater. OK we are getting flak about wanting the heater fixed, but it is not getting any warmer here and we are still edging north (even though locally it is known as going 'down east') and unless I am mistaken, Canada and polar bears lie up here! It seems that our diesel heater is a bit upset that we have not attempted to use it since May 2008 and so an expert has been summoned, but of course cannot come until tomorrow.....

So Sarah and I took our dinghy to the public landing dock along with a huge bag of laundry. Sarah eschewed the single machine available dockside and we ended up walking three quarters of a mile on the hottest day for a while, to the nearest laundromat where they had acres of machines which made the job a good deal quicker. I set off to find the marina where the repair team were located so as to show my face and ensure that they really were going to send someone out in the morning. To add to the misery, our US phone has gone on the blink and of course this turns out to be the only town in the entire country that does not have an AT & T phone shop in the high street. Actually since the arrival of all the big out of town malls, there are very few shops of any description in towns now. Rockland boasts wall to wall art galleries and a museum, a few jewellers, two antique shops and loads of coffee shops. There is a Hamilton Marine which is a budget West Marine chandlery operation, but this branch seems to have cornered the market in untrained staff, which is quite a remarkable achievement in this country. In the meantime I had visited the Samsung phones technical support website and had a 'live chat' with Natalie. I detailed our problem and said it was urgent and her reply was to say how sorry she was to hear this. That was it! So I asked if that was the full technical response and this did galvanise her into some action, none of which actually solved anything of course. Turns out that AT & T have no coverage in Maine beyond Portland and so we need another phone to cover this state, but this we only found out from one of their competitors.

We do feel that we need to mention a bit more about the wonderful wildlife here in Maine. Seals, porpoises, bald eagles, ospreys, guillemots, gannets and eider ducks are all run of the mill and there is some talk of plentiful lobsters.... Not too sure how the lobster farming works, but each fisherman is allowed to set up to 800 traps and given the number of fishermen here, the math(s) is frightening. They have a size limit and throw back any that are too small or females with eggs – so edible size is 7 years plus. But given that the sea bed is almost just one endless cage, we fail to understand how these animals even begin to breed or develop. We were told by one British boat (no names Moonbeam) that it is simply farming by another name as they put food in the cages and in march the lobsters to eat it all up. The small ones are thrown back and simply march into the next cage and eat that set of bait and continue to be thrown back until they hit the magic size and are brought ashore. So it must be something of a fairground ride for them as they eat, get hauled to the surface and then free dive back down for another go. Turns out that there is some science involved and we

know a lot more about lobsters now than we did a week ago, and so I may explain a bit more about this another day!

Wednesday started rather earlier than we had hoped as another thick fog had descended on the area and so all the boats on the move were sounding their fog horns from 0400 hours onwards. Sarah went ashore to visit an art museum and gallery or five and I stayed on-board to meet and greet the engineer. Nick from Journey's End Marina arrived around midday to determine that the fault lay in the timing switch, but as the Swedes who built the boat had elected to modify the connector in their own inimitable style, he needed to get a new part from Rhode Island. The hope is that this will arrive tomorrow morning.

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We met up in the late afternoon and as I came ashore to pick Sarah up, I was invited to attend the party to celebrate the opening of a new boat storage facility (shed) in the Journey's End boatyard. So we rolled up and having chatted briefly to the only two members of staff we knew, we set about destroying all our pre-rally diet plans (they started today) by tucking into some really great food and drink. We introduced ourselves to Mike who it transpired was a retired wooden boat builder who lives in Port Clyde and after giving us loads of advice about where to go and what to see around the coast of Maine (he also was a professional boat skipper and ran various local boat services) he ended by inviting us to visit his place when we next passed by Port Clyde. Sarah was by now feeling guilty about us enjoying the hospitality at the party and so we returned to Serafina.

## **Rockland, Maine (2)**

Wednesday & Thursday - 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> August

Well we cannot go any further with report without commenting on the very courteous lobster fishermen based in Port Clyde. We were anchored in the bay, but it was necessary for them to come past us on their way out and back, yet rather than power fast at full speed with all the attendant noise and wash, they all potted past very carefully and only opened up their engines when well clear of us. And given that this started at 0500 hours, we were very grateful indeed.

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### **Fog and Heat**

Fri & Sat – 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> Aug

We woke again to dense fog but since we had to wait for Nick the engineer to turn up at some stage, Sarah headed off to Walmart and the shopping mall to buy another phone as we have discovered that AT&T has very poor or no reception in Maine, but Verizon coverage is good. So for the grand sum of \$9.98 we have yet another phone to add to our collection.

In the event there was a bit of a communications error and when the boatyard asked me to come to the yard, they did not mean for me to pop over in the dinghy, but wanted me to bring Serafina in to their dock so Nick could do the work! But this was not worked out until after the workforce had finished for the day and so it was agreed that we would bring Serafina into the yard at 0700 hours the next morning.

Sarah returned after a successful trip and was safely back on board before it turned very cold and wet. We were battened down inside when we heard our names being called and emerged on deck to find Il Sogno passing us close by, having just raced up here from Marta's Vineyard, by way of Portland. We exchanged hellos and agreed to meet up in the morning.

So at 0700 hours we crept through the dense morning fog (are you getting the feel for this stuff yet?) and made our way onto the fuel and work dock at Journey's End Marina. Nick was soon aboard and in no time had replaced the timer and switch unit and we now have a fully operational warm air heater again. We took this opportunity to top up the fuel and water tanks, use the laundry machines and both of us used the showers. We then headed back out into the fog and made our way out to the anchorage and dropped the hook close to Il Sogno all by 0940!

Then all four of us took Doris (our rib) ashore to have coffee and visit the 'Maine Boat and Home Show' that was taking place on the public landing area. This is a quirky little show, but in amongst the stands for furniture and the usual stuff, were some beautiful wooden craft, ranging from kayaks and small rowing boats up to an outstanding restoration of a 1924 100ft ketch, Adventuress. There were some stands that were of real interest to us, but the area reserved for dog and pet related exhibitors was close to bizarre. We simply had to photograph the stand selling oxygen masks for dogs – I kid you not! And there are buggies for dogs too.

We indulged ourselves in a nearby restaurant with lobster club sandwiches and returned to our boats.

In the evening we went over to Il Sogno for drinks which ended up Craig barbequing burgers for him and me, but did also have the merit that Craig and Sarah were able to agree on a common destination for tomorrow. However before we head off, I have to pick up Seth who runs a canvas company, at 0700 hours from the public dock and bring him out to the two boats for him to quote to do some repair work for us.

### **Mill Dam, South West Harbor, Mount Desert Island.**

Sunday & Monday 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> August

On Sunday morning I had to press the handheld GPS from the grab bag into service so I could take the dinghy ashore at 0700 hours to pick up Seth who was coming to cast an expert eye over canvas dodger that we feel needs replacing. Super dense fog meant that without the GPS device I would never have found the dock and certainly would never have found my way back out in minimal visibility.

Seth was very helpful, but managed unwittingly perhaps, to talk himself out of a job as he was also of the opinion that we need a new dodger and he simply is unable to do this in the time frame we have – though Lord knows he tried to find ways! But he gave us loads of advice about the job and recommended the company that we had already been in touch with in Annapolis. I then took Seth to Il Sogno who also had need of his services.

Around 0940 hours Il Sogno and ourselves, set off into the rapidly improving foggy conditions heading for the Eggmoggen Reach, but within only a mile or two, the fog closed right back in and we motored carefully close together picking our way through the invisible (but very verbal) traffic around us. It was not unlike a good old fashioned traffic jam in Italy in terms of horns sounding and before long one becomes a bit immune to the cacophony of blasts from all around. The Americans are keen to use the radio and sometimes this can be very helpful, such as when a boat announces where it is and its course. Less helpful is when they declare their position using local place names and omit to say where they are headed. Sarah particularly enjoyed one exchange recently when someone asked what the visibility was out there and the reply was three boat lengths – there was a short pause then the first chap thanked him for the information and suggested that this might be more useful information if we had any idea of how long his boat was!!

They say that Maine is beautiful and that light is an artist's dream, but since we have been here, we have seen almost nothing other than nice looking islands peering out of the murky mists. We reached the Eggmoggen Reach in good time and opted to head down this lovely stretch to Torrey island. The reach earned its name as it is the most wonderful place to sail as the wind is always over the beam, so a perfect reach – except of course today, when it opted to blow at 12 knots directly towards us, so we continued to motor to the end where we dropped anchor in a delightful spot (the fog had cleared) surrounded by islands and almost no signs of civilisation anywhere. No phone signal of any type, but wonderful wifi from somewhere!

On Monday morning we woke to fog of course but we had planned for this today and Craig and Karene kindly picked us up in their rib and we set off to Center Harbor (Spellchecker does not enjoy American spellings too much!!) and as we made our way slowly in, across a mirror smooth bay, we were treated to what must rate as a wooden boat Nivarna. The mooring field here is uniquely populated by the most wonderful array of classic wooden yachts of all shapes and sizes. There is absolutely no doubting that they have the most wonderful eye hereabouts for beautiful lines and form and the USA is certainly home to some of the world's most elegant yachts. Center Harbor is also known as Brooklin and it is home to Brooklin Boatbuilders who are a specialist wooden

boatbuilding company (one of many hereabouts). We went ashore at their dock to see if we could have a look around and were warmly greeted on arrival and told that we were very welcome to go anywhere we liked without restriction in the yard and sheds. Each member of the company that we met, took time to talk us through what was going on and told us all about the boats that they were currently restoring. It was fascinating and so strange to be given total access to the place without regard to H & S and all that guff. There was a beautiful small English yacht that was some 80 years old and was ready to be launched following a near complete refit. No regard had been given to cost and so the boat with a local value of perhaps \$30,000 had just had \$130,000 spent on it. Alongside it was a 70ft yacht that was only built in 1990, but that was in for a total refit which meant that it had been completely gutted with every single item being replaced. The instruction to the yard was that she was to be finished by April next year and was to be rebuilt so as to be exactly as if brand new.

Full of all this we then took the dinghy round to the Wooden Boatbuilding School in a nearby cove. This was rather less of an experience as we were not allowed in during 'classes'. We were a little underwhelmed by what we saw and presume that these were holiday classes as the average age of the students was some 40 years more than I had expected.

We returned to our yachts at anchor and with the fog clearing quickly, we headed off at 1050 hours heading today for Mount Desert island, which is an island, but has neither a mountain or a desert of course. Virtually no wind again and when we did get chances to sail it always seemed to coincide with narrow gaps (or a hewn channel of 14' through the granite) in the rocks or islands, or in one case we met a huge regatta heading up a narrow passage between islands as we headed down with a thick fog bank rolling rapidly in behind us.

Finally we arrived at Soames Sound which is talked up in the pilot books as a beautiful fjord and we were very fortunate that the fog finally vanished and a beautiful clear blue sky opened up as we made our way down the sound. It is very pretty indeed, with yet again stunning houses alongside, and is similar in many ways to parts of Scotland, but we all agreed that the tourist books may have slightly over egged this place.

We retraced our steps back down the sound and dropped anchor in a big bay near the entrance, close to SW Harbor and would have sat back to enjoy the view, but we had guests for dinner.....

### **Burnt Coat Harbor, Swan Island, Maine**

Tues & Wed – 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> August

Well I have to take it all back because on the strength of Tuesday alone, I can now confirm that Maine is indeed very pretty! The fog stayed away all day and the sun beat down out of a clear blue sky and we certainly saw the place at its best.

The day started with a good Samaritan act as we had spoken to fellow OCC member 'Dovka' the previous evening when they had called us on the VHF to say hello as they had just moored nearby and they had mentioned then that their outboard engine was broken. We are not using our smaller 2.5hp engine a lot and so we offered to lend it to them until the end of the rally next week which we are both attending. They were thrilled, but as we did not have our dinghy launched, Craig kindly ran me and the outboard over to them.

The morning was spent ashore with Craig and Karene in South West Harbour, Mount Desert island which was interesting and we took the opportunity to visit the William Gilley Bird carving museum

which was actually a good deal more interesting than it perhaps sounds – although Sarah was not overly impressed I suspect!

In the afternoon we settled down to a few jobs and Craig insisted on lending us their new two man kayak and we had a paddle around the anchorage (and great fun it was – although Sarah immediately started making unlikely plans for a second-hand one next season. And put it where?) which had only contained a few boats when we arrived (including the beautiful 138 ketch 'Rebecca') but was now rapidly filling with boats all flying the burgee of the 'Cruising Club of America'. Some of them also had OCC flags so we paddled over to one to find out more about what was going down here and it transpired that the CCA had 'do' on ashore in the evening and we were very welcome to come along for a drink! We turned this down for the very good reason that we were already invited to dinner on Il Sogno. We visited several more OCC member boats and most of these will also be coming to the rally we are joining on Sunday, so we are set for a busy social time next week.

Wednesday started pretty early as we heard Il Sogno raising their anchor around 0630 hours and so we stuck our heads up to wish them a safe trip on their way back to Rockland to pick up some friends who will be sailing with them for a few days. Dovka also hailed us as they slid past on their way out of the anchorage, but we chose to have a slow morning as we had planned a shortish 23 mile sail ( and I stress the word 'sail') and were in no hurry to set off. No fog, but sadly very little wind either, but all this was to change.

We have managed very little real sailing in Maine as the wind has been very light and fickle and we have been pressing on to cover some ground, so today we felt we wanted to have a nice relaxing jaunt. We left Mount Desert island at 1150 hours and set a course to the south west. Of course this being Serafina, the wind was now coming from the south west and so we had to tack our way out from the islands into the open Atlantic. The wind stayed very light, but with help from the tide we made good progress and were eventually clear of the southern tip of the islands we were skirting round and able to change onto the opposite tack. This was the point at which the fog rolled in without warning and visibility dropped to barely 50 ft. We had already found it hard enough to sail close hauled and thread our way through the omnipresent lobster buoys and their attached toggles, but now we were unable to plan very far ahead as they loomed out of the dense fog just a few yards ahead of us. Helpfully the wind picked up at this stage and so we found ourselves battling along at 5+ knots in this predicament. So we pressed on with Sarah positioned on the bow spotting the pairs of buoys as they appeared out of the gloom and calling instructions to swing to port or starboard, whilst I juggled these commands with the need to avoid the bits marked as land on the plotter and spot possible boats and potential collisions on the radar.

Our destination was Burnt Coat Harbor on Swan island which is a working lobster boat base and has a tight entrance and is pretty shallow and very restricted. We worked our way into the small harbour, past rocks and buoys, but unable to see any of them at all and were relying very heavily on the GPS and mark one eyeballs! The fog chose to lift momentarily as we got inside the first part of the entrance and we were able briefly to see the layout ahead of us, but within a minute all this visibility was snatched away again and were back to navigating blind. We gently edged our way across the bay to a spot we judged might keep us out of the way of the lobster boats, but this place is like everywhere else, full of lobster pots and their guardian buoys. We were about to drop the hook, when we were treated to a second brief sight of what was now within 50 metres of us and were stunned to see that we were about to anchor squarely in the entrance to an working arm of the harbour that does not appear at all on our GPS chart! Again the fog immediately closed back around us and so using the recommendation from Active Captain (three loud cheers for Active Captain), we headed back across the bay to the spot they suggested for anchoring and dropped the

hook there. Within minutes an American flagged yacht loomed out of the fog and it anchored nearby, which made us feel better and a bit safer too.

We were very pleased when a bit later the fog cleared again, albeit briefly and we were able to see where we were so to speak. It is actually a delightful spot and we seem to be well positioned, although having now seen the size of the resident fleet of lobster boats, we suspect we might be in for another early morning wake up call.

We have been reliably informed that the volume of pots generally deployed across the sea bed in Maine is possibly as much as a third less than usual, mainly because the price of lobster has fallen. (It is available to those of us in the know at just \$2 a pound) Back in the day, lobster was considered a cheap foodstuff and was only fed to prisoners and slaves.

### **Camden Harbor, Penobscot Bay, Maine**

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> August

Well the good news is that the fog was a lot less dense today, but that sadly is mainly because radiation fog tends to dissipate quite a bit in torrential rain.

The improved visibility at least allows us to see the murky outlines of the land and forests as well as the clouds and rain.

To round things off there was absolutely no wind and so we donned our full Atlantic wet weather gear (quaintly known as 'foulies' out here) and motored slowly out of Burnt Coat Harbor and past all the distinctive landmarks and navigational aids that had been hidden from us on the way in. One of these was the lighthouse at the entrance which was built in 1872 and its highly visible white presence served to guide the fisherman home, but in a cost cutting exercise the coastguard replaced this in the 70's with a 20ft beacon whose light could only be seen half as far. The islanders protested and the lighthouse was restored, but in 1982 the coastguard stripped the white paint off the building to reduce repainting costs, making it almost invisible against the black background of pine trees and granite. The islanders again protested and it has been returned to its former glory!

We made good time to the island of Vinalhaven and since it was only midday and still sheeting down with rain, we chose to press on to Camden Harbor on the west coast of Penobscot Bay. As we passed between Vinalhaven and North Haven, we saw some interesting houses and boats and we are looking forward to returning there next week when hopefully the sun might be shining and we can see things properly.

With just the odd seal and porpoise to keep us company we finally made our way past Curtis Island and The Graves into the outer bay of Camden. The plan was to anchor here, but the anchorage seemed non-existent and the entire place is one huge mooring field (mooring buoys). We called up Camden Yacht Club on the off chance they could help and Barbs offered us a buoy, giving us rather good instructions how to find it. After milling about in the pouring rain trying to identify the various empty buoys which are randomly numbered and lettered to indicate who owns what, we finally discovered that 'our' buoy had an occupant who had decided to stay another night but not mention it! Barbs then very helpfully came out in the YC launch and directed us to a buoy that was available for just one night. But because we are staying four nights as we are joining a rally that starts here on Sunday, we felt that it might be best to grab a spot in the tiny anchorage that she had pointed out to us so we could claim squatters rights, so to speak. So we thanked her for her help and dropped the hook nearby.

We had planned to go ashore at this point and check the place out, but if anything the intensity of the rain increased and with it came 20+ knots of wind from the north, so we hunkered down and whiled away the rest of the afternoon and evening getting some jobs down, listening to all the unseasonal sound effects outside.

### **For Camden, read Salcombe.**

Fri, Sat & Sun – 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Aug

Friday was an altogether better day and the sun shone and a lovely breeze blew all day and we of course were now anchored in Camden and so not sailing!

We went ashore and discovered that the yacht club was a bit light on useful facilities like showers or a laundry so in the end Sarah hiked to the nearest laundrymat.

We explored Camden after this and were able to agree that it really is the absolute twin of Salcombe, Devon in almost every single way and this being Maine there are also some wonderful yachts and old schooners and the like here and seemingly all in absolute pristine condition.

On Saturday morning John Franklin, the OCC commodore kindly offered to run us to the supermarket in a car that the yacht club had lent him. This allowed us to stock up properly for the next week or so and was very welcome as the prices at this out of town store were considerably lower than anything in the town itself.

He and his wife Jenny also invited us to join them on Al Shaheen for drinks in the early evening where we also met Dick & Suzie Guckel and David Bridges and of course had a great time. We were also joined in the anchorage by Il Sogno who were in for just one night so we had them round for coffee on Sunday morning before they headed off south again. We plan now to meet up with them in New York where hopefully they are to be our guides.

On Sunday morning the anchorage also began to fill with other yachts flying the OCC flag and at 1300 hours we headed off ashore to help set up the tables and chairs in the yacht club for the meeting and rally dinner. Before we set off though, Sid and Rebecca from Dovka came over in their dinghy to return our small outboard that we had lent them. Seems I may have forgotten to mention that there was no reverse gear when I lent it to them.....

The afternoon was spent meeting and talking to all the members (over 120) from across the USA (and 7 boats from the UK) who had come to the dinner. The event began at 1430 hours and more or less wrapped up at 200hrs after another enormous meal. We met some wonderful people (and put a lot of faces to voices we have heard over the radio, or people we have heard of by repute – in particular Patrick and Amanda on 'Egret' who lost their rudder 1000 miles into the Atlantic and managed to soldier for the remaining 1500 miles using a variety of jury rigs!) and exchanged cards and stories and seem to have got invitations to all sorts of places up and down the east coast of the USA, most of which will not now happen until next year when we plan to return up here. Big efforts were also made to persuade us to head further north into Canada and I must admit that the suggestion that it was every bit as beautiful as Maine but without the lobster pots did tick quite a few boxes, but again that is for next year perhaps.

### **Pulpit harbor, North Haven Island, Maine**

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August

Well it is day one of the informal OCC rally and it started with Sarah and me popping over to 'Matador', an British flagged yacht (Rival 42) where Steph and Stu showed us their spare 240v heavy duty sewing machine which they were thinking about selling..... So we are now the proud owners of a machine capable of repairing canvas and sails.

I went ashore to take advantage of the high speed internet in the library to download some work stuff whilst Sarah ran a load through our washing machine and rustled up a salmon and spinach quiche for the rally drinks party that was happening later – and magically discovered a storage space for the new machine. (this might be more impressive if we had found somewhere for the displaced items!)

We then said goodbye to James, the skipper on 'Contrarium' (Halberg Rassy 62) and raised the anchor and headed off for Pulpit Harbour, North Haven Island. This was a short sail of some 10 miles which included threading our way through some small islands and rocks along the way. There was a 12 knot breeze almost on the nose, but we were able to sail the way under just our foresail. Admittedly this meant we were making barely 3.5 knots but we also needed to run our water maker for a couple of hours so it all worked out very well.

Pulpit Harbor is a lovely creek with several inlets and there was plenty of room for all the rally boats to anchor, and in order to host the drinks party, 5 committee boats had rafted up together to provide a large venue. We all brought along "heavy hors d'oeuvres" and our own drinks and three hours slipped quickly by as we chatted to old and new friends alike. Not sure the brain can quite keep up with learning so many new names, but fortunately we mostly have cards to exchange to help us put it all together the next morning!

It was a beautiful day, the sunset was stunning and it is at these moments that we can begin to see that Maine is perhaps as good as the hype. Certainly we are very much sold on the idea of returning up here again next summer and would hope to spend more time in Maine to explore a good deal further than we have been able to manage in a few short weeks this year.

### **Pulpit harbor, Vinalhaven Island, Maine**

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August

Beautiful morning after a blissfully quiet night and with only a fairly short journey to the next stop we had a slow morning. Boats were gradually moving off and so we headed off just after 1000 hours and made our way out of the secluded bay and worked our way around the northern end of North Haven Island. Sadly there was absolutely no wind at all and so we had to motor round to the eastern side of Vinalhaven Island and into the stunning, totally protected network of bays all surrounded by pine forests and granite shorelines, leading to Seal Bay. We dropped anchor and were soon joined by Tony and Rachelle on Saltwhistle III who rafted up beside us. The rally organisers had arranged a competitive scavenger hunt which involved us all heading off ashore to wander through the forests hunting for various items. The slight catch was that the clues were cryptic and required both a comprehensive knowledge of botany and biology, but being American did seem to be an additional benefit when it came to understanding things! It was great fun though and by chance we found ourselves wandering along with John and Angela (Galadrial) who shared our relaxed attitude to the event. Strictly speaking we were being timed, but since there was little chance of us completing all the questions, we did not over exert ourselves.

We returned to Serafina and had a succession of people aboard for drinks over the next few hours and then once the last ones had departed (and when I say departed. Halcyon then set sail for an overnight passage to Newport!), Tony and Rachelle kindly barbequed some chicken and gave us a lovely supper on board Saltwhistle.

This anchorage has one unique feature and that is that it is the very first place anywhere in the USA that we have been where we were unable to get a free wifi signal, or a phone signal for that matter. The good folks of Maine are pretty parochial and consider the coastline of their state as 'God's own cruising ground'. People moving into Maine are 'from Away' and remain from Away for all of their lives. It also seems that if these 'from Away' people have children born in Maine they too are still considered outsiders. "If your cat climbed into the oven and had kittens, would you call them biscuits?" is the local logical defence for this view! However, Vinalhaven takes this whole attitude to an extreme and short of being a direct descendant of one of the founding fathers, your status is likely to remain 'from Away'. Listening to the local lobster boatmen on the VHF radio also revealed that some have a guttural and completely indecipherable dialect – by which I mean a good less understandable that even the 'UnitedStatesCoastguardSectorNorthEasternNewEngland' coastguards manage to be.

### **Perry's Creek, Vinalhaven Island, Maine**

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug

Crept out of the beautiful Pulpit Harbor at the bottom of the tide and were all pretty amazed at how the banks of the creek reach right out to where we were anchored overnight.

We made our way under engine as again there was simply no wind at all, round to Perry Creek. This involved cruising down the 'thoroughfare' which is the waterway between Vinalhaven and North Haven Islands, before wending and weaving our way again through gaps in between small islands and rocks into yet another secluded and totally protected creek. We assumed being a bit late that we would have to anchor here, but as we came in, Doug on Blue Water kindly hailed us on the radio and invited us to raft up alongside them on a mooring buoy. They were hoping to spend the evening with us, but we had already accepted a 1700 hours drinks invite on board Al Shaheen, issued to all the British boats.

But first we had the small matter of the main event of the day which involved us all whizzing across the outer bay in our dinghies to the beautiful house and gardens where Harvey and Pam Geiger had kindly invited us all for lunch.

On our return to Perry Creek, Doug and his wife Dale who incidentally have been the rally organisers, had some very sad family news and needed to return home at once. But as it happened they had two friends on board who were very keen to make the Rally's visit on Thursday to Hurricane Island, so we invited them to jump ship and stay on Serafina for 24 hours and we could drop them on the mainland after the rally finished on Thursday afternoon, as we were heading to Rockland for some fuel. John and Wendy seemed delighted at this suggestion so they transferred (all) their bags (plus meal ingredients!) onto Serafina and we took over the mooring buoy lines and Doug, Dale and Blue Water motored off back to Camden.

We could hardly leave our new crewmates alone on board whilst we headed off to the British drinks do, so of course we took them with us. Meanwhile Rebecca and Sid from 'Dovka' had come over to invite us for supper later and so we all four accepted that offer as well.....

Not a very early night as it turned out.

### **Hurricane Island, Penobscot Bay, Maine**

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> August

We woke to fog again today, but we could not make an early start anyway as I had decided that I needed to investigate the rumbling sound that we feel has developed recently under the boat when motoring. This involved a full wetsuit and a plunge into some pretty cold and rather murky water. I had rather assumed that it would be a lot clearer, but it was too late by then. The good news is that the prop all seemed fine as did the shaft anode which was a rather obvious suspect.

Miraculously the fog vanished around 1000 hours and we headed off from this idyllic anchorage and motored (again) to Hurricane Island. This involved more careful navigating between countless granite islands and rocks, but again we were rewarded when we made our way into the small anchorage close to the small dock on this rather special island.

Hurricane Island has had a chequered history, but its obvious heyday was in the late 1800's when there was a thriving granite quarry and over 1500 people lived and worked on this tiny island. Incredibly in 1915, when the mine's superintendent of some 20 years died, the entire operation shut down and within hours a panic had ensued with everyone rushing to catch what was billed as the last boat to leave. The place was turned into a ghost town literally overnight. In 1963 Peter Willauer (who was also on this rally in his boat 'Eight Bells') opened the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School, which was part of the worldwide network of outward bound schools. The school closed a few years ago, but the island is once again active with a newly developed Centre for Science and Leadership.

We were allowed to wander around the island and we saw the old quarry which was quite stunning as is so much of the scenery around here. The centre's director gave us a talk about the place and it was undeniably an inspirational location.

After the talk it was time for everyone to say their goodbyes and whilst some of us will be back up in Maine next year, quite a few of the British boats will not, as one is heading back across the Atlantic and three are heading for Panama and the Pacific. John and Wendy also said goodbye as they were jumping ship yet again, to join Al Shaheen who were heading back to Camden rather than come with us to Rockland and getting a taxi back to Camden.

We lifted the anchor and set sail (hurrah, at last) and had a lovely reach across West Penobscot Bay to Rockland where we anchored again in the mooring field to the south east of the town.

### **Whales, Whales, Whales.**

Friday & Saturday – 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> August

Friday started with a pretty early start so we could get the anchor up and head into the fuel dock at Journey's End Marina for 0700hours.

This all went well and we left, full of fuel and water at 0730 hours heading south and west for the Cape Cod Canal, some 200 miles away.

It was a long hot and almost windless day as we made our way past the western islands of Maine and Portland Harbor. We saw was a huge, glittering slick of fish scales which was probably just a trawler that had hosed down its deck, quite a few porpoises make gliding passes through the waters and a solitary Loon flew past. The night watches were less straightforward and the biggest problem was around 2200 hours when Sarah's watch was interrupted by a clattering and banging sound under the hull and around the prop. I was roused from my (needed!) beauty sleep and we had to assume that we had picked up a lobster buoy, which was pretty remarkable given that we were in 150 metres of water. Bursts of forward and reverse eventually seemed to solve most of the problem and hoping that the spurs rope cutter fixed to the prop shaft had done its job, we headed onwards, but at reduced revs.

As we went past Boston the radio seemed to get livelier and one memorable call was made to the coastguard there by a fishing boat around midnight, to say that he had heard gunfire on Rose Wharf and there were people screaming. There then followed a few exchanges between the coastguard, the police and the fisherman, but it was clearly all very genuine.

Dawn started to break around 0500 hours and by 0600 hours we were passing the grid reference given to us by an OCC boat as the spot where all the whale watching boats begin their searches and within minutes we spotted our first whales of the day. They were a little way off and as ever were hard to photograph, but over the next hour or so as we continued on our way, we saw more and more whales and they seemed increasingly more inquisitive! We had thought that additional noises still coming from our propeller might have been putting them off, but suddenly there was a huge fin whale surfacing to one side of us, barely 30 metres away. It was a magnificent sight and we stood and watched in awe, but this whale had no sooner made its way astern of us, when another massive beast surfaced barely 15 metres away directly alongside us on the other side. This Fin Whale dived and rose again still alongside and to our astonishment did begin to turn to some concern as they can be larger than Serafina, but it gradually made its way away from us. Finally yet another Fin Whale came heading across our bows, but at some distance out, but the next time it surfaced it was directly in front of us, only feet away and as it completed its surfacing and began to dive again, Serafina sliced over its vanishing tail. In all we had dozens of sightings and it is safe to say that Sarah was thrilled by it all and this hopefully has satisfied her desperation to see some of these beautiful creatures. Of course she wanted to see Humpbacks and Right Whales as well and the only possible sighting of either of these was fairly distant.

A slight miscalculation in tides meant that we had some time to kill at the entrance to the Cape Cod Canal, so we dropped the anchor off the beach and I once again went in to inspect the prop and stern gear. This time there was a problem, but it was loads of brand new floating rope used to secure the lobster pot to the now absent float. The cutter though had done its work and it was not difficult to unwrap the shredded lengths of line from the prop and clear it all ready for use again. Interestingly, about an hour later, the boat used for tagging Great White Sharks showed up and it is a safe bet that I would have been a good deal more reluctant to get this job done here if it had appeared earlier!

We motored through the canal and armed with a fresh weather forecast, we had to change our mooring plans for the night. This was not at all easy given the circumstances and we did well to find our way into Clarke's Cove, New Bedford, nearly an hour after sundown.

### **Jamestown, Rhode Island**

Sunday & Monday – 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> Aug

We had a surprisingly quiet night in Clarke's Cove given that it turned out to be very urban, but then we were off sailing again by 0710 in order to take full advantage of the west flowing tide.

Absolutely no wind and as we went past Newport we watched about a dozen absolutely huge yachts gathering for the start of a race, but they too were finding it hard to make any way under sail.

We motored into Dutch Harbor and anchored pretty much where we had been before and close to Il Sogno which was on a mooring buoy.

In the evening we went out for a meal in the local café (which means pub) and had a meal with Dave and Judy Enstone and caught up on each other's summer news and discussed the possibility of them coming sailing with us next season when we have to take Serafina out of the USA for two weeks, which will mean a sail to Bermuda and back.

Monday was spent catching up with things and again we were indebted to Craig and Karene who not only gave us lifts to various places, but rounded it off by inviting us to dinner in the evening, where amongst other things, we planned our route and sail to New York.

During the night sail two days ago our stern light gave up the ghost and it is remarkable luck that the main agent for Lopolights (a European company) is based in nearby Newport and that we had transport available. This had worked in our favour when we came here in June as they had replaced one of our forward navigation lights under the 5 year warranty and today they replaced the stern light also under warranty although strictly speaking it had expired a while ago!

### **Northport Harbor, Long Island, New York**

Tues & Wed – 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> August

We spent Tuesday catching up with the never ending list of 'jobs to do' and preparing Serafina for the sail down to New York.

The difficulty with the sail down Long Island Sound is the usual thorny issue of tides, tidal currents and the Long Island Race at the eastern end.

Sarah's solution was that we needed to leave the anchorage in Dutch Harbor at 2300 hours and use the favourable wind and tide for as long as we could. Craig & Karene in Il Sogno (who are coming down to NY as well, just to show us around for a few days) had reached the same conclusion, but in the event they headed off about an hour ahead of us and so we made our way to the Race travelling about 5 miles apart. The wind picked up nicely and there was a near full moon so we all enjoyed a most wonderful night sail, passing through the Race at exactly the right time, with 3 k of tide under us and continued to sail all the way to Northport Harbor which we reached in the mid-afternoon.

The only thing to spoil this perfect day, was the increasing number of flies that started to arrive on board as we sailed down the Sound and with some of them of the very positive biting kind, it became very unpleasant for a while, but happily they seemed to disappear in the late afternoon and evening.

In the early evening Craig took us ashore in their dinghy and we had a stroll up and down the main street and paused to enjoy some local ice cream and watch the locals at play. This was followed by

an early night as tomorrow we are off again around 0700 hours to catch the tidal flow down to Port Washington which is where we are hoping to moor whilst we visit New York itself.

### **Port Washington, Long Island**

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August

Weighed anchor at 0720 for the 15 mile trip round to Port Washington, very little wind (which was on the nose) and a clear blue sky was the order of the day as we firstly made our way out of Northport Harbor, past a number of small boats 'raking' up oysters.

We rode the westbound tide all the way to Port Washington and then made our way into the big bay slowly, along with Il Sogno and quickly found the free buoys supplied by the Town, picked up one and once we were settled in, we were delighted to find that they supplied a strong free wifi signal as well. All the way up Long Island Sound today, we had watched the distinctive sight of New York's stunning skyline growing ever larger in front of us.

In the early afternoon, the four of us headed off to the Stop & Shop supermarket in Doris and had a wander around the very handy Mall before buying some essentials and returning to the boats.

Craig and Karene invited us to come round to discuss the next few days of sightseeing in New York (under their direction of course) and kindly also supplied a few G & T's as well. Not easy as there is simply so much to see and do, notwithstanding the extras that Craig also wants to show us! Port Washington is about 17 miles from New York and provides a safe mooring with the added bonus of a railroad that runs directly into the heart of the city.

### **New York, New York**

Fri, Sat, Sun & Mon – 31<sup>st</sup> Aug, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept

We all set off early at 0700 hours to go ashore and catch the train, with a small detour to collect the compulsory coffee 'to go' plus bagels. Luckily the US Tennis Open is on at Flushing Meadows which is on our route, so extra trains are running, as well as the fact that Monday is Labour Day and this is the last week of the school holidays, so the trains and New York will not be heaving with humanity.

Craig suggested that we take the Circle Line boat trip around Manhattan to familiarise ourselves with the basics. This we did with the purchase of NY City Pass which gives you 46% discounts to various attractions. We also arrived with about an hour (they suggest 1.5 hours) to go before departure which was sensible as it gave us more of a choice of seats (port side in the shade, top deck - we aren't sailors for nothing you know!).

The trip was 3 hours and very informative, and 3 hours was just about all one could stand of the failed middle-aged actor (with "rug") giving his show..... And it is a brilliant way to understand the layout of all the various areas; I had never understood that Manhattan, where all the commercial activity, attractions and museums we think of as New York are based, is actually an island separated at the north by a canal from the mainland; The Bronx on the other hand is on the east coast, with Yonkers to the north and New Jersey on the west side (sorry to all those intelligent people who already comprehend all this) - and that everything has to get on to the island by truck via only 16 bridges nowadays, as practically all the ship piers are no longer used and are getting reclaimed for real estate. The boat also detoured south to go past Ellis Island and Lady Liberty herself, who was surrounded by dozens of other boats doing exactly the same thing.

After that Craig, our official tour guide, took us for a walk to immerse us in the atmosphere, empty though it is to him - having already given us (well Rob mainly) lots of coaching in the ridiculous NY accent and emphasis in speech.

And this has been the usual course of the last 3 days: Go in by train, getting progressively later in the day each day as pavements take their toll on our poor old feet! We have visited all those destinations that say NY to us: Times Square (feels like Piccadilly), Wall Street (surprisingly less grand than I expected) and the Charging Bull sculpture installed by the artist, Di Modica and a few helpers illegally in 5 minutes flat, in between police patrols, but today this was unfortunately draped in the inevitable tourists which Craig managed to chase off for the split second it took for me to get a photo! A free few hours in MOMA on Friday evening, American Museum of Natural History (dinosaurs & ocean hall), Central Park, Macy's and Sak's, Rockefeller Center (where Craig used to work), Grand Central Station, St Patrick's Cathedral, Trinity Church (both swathed in scaffolding, as was the Waldorf Astoria - in fact we have picked quite an R&R time to visit it appears!), South Street Seaport and the Bodies Exhibition (similar to Body Works in the UK with the plastination of real bodies. This one is slanted towards education and healthy lifestyle, fairly vital in the US you might think!), Brooklyn and the Brooklyn Bridge across to Long Island. And we still have lists of things we would like to visit....

Added to this is the gastronomic angle of each day: most days start with Craig working out which wonderful eatery we can aim the day at and he has been most ticked off that some of his favourite haunts have been 'discovered' and therefore have enormous queues outside which our feet have not felt it was necessary to stand in.

The only difficult thing we have encountered is NY's subway system which is impossible to understand, not helped by holiday running timetables. There is no easy diagrammatic layout as in London; different trains run express (ie missing out the station you expected to alight at) or local services; the intersections seem to be few and far between but you can get an unlimited Metro Card for 7 days, which allows you to take "14-20" rides - not quite what I understand as 'unlimited', nor does it tell you how it differentiates between these rides - but I am sure all will become clear at the most inconvenient time! And the platforms are a bit creepy - far too many places for a baddie to hide it appears to me with several platforms all backing on to each other; they usually aren't the contained tiled concourses we are used to in London. We have taken a couple of yellow cabs - one Craig had to direct (no 'Knowledge' here) and one driven by an Egyptian who did at least know where the Empire State Building was. You rarely find an American driver nowadays apparently.

And we are mastering the street layouts and how to find an address: the key is a complicated formula of dropping the last digit of the avenue (north to south direction) address, divide by 2, then add a magic number applicable to your avenue and it gives you the cross street (east to west direction) number and you can then pinpoint it on a map of the city. Now just as long as we don't lose the precious guide book its easy.

Finally, on Labour Day (Monday), we took a 'boat day' to catch up with jobs, water up and pump out Serafina's toilets at the free Town Dock. Karene and I were going to do large washes at the Laundromat but after trolleying our loads up there, discovered it was shut which was very annoying, so this has slipped to Tuesday. And after all this, Craig and Karene very kindly, as ever, fed us and Steve (wife, Carol on a mercy mission to the UK) from Innamorata with succulent ribs and corn.

Only slight cloud on the horizon is the Tropical Storm 'Leslie' which is building in the Atlantic and might very well choose to come our way either as a Tropical Storm or more worryingly, as a full

blown Hurricane. So we are all currently making plans for where to hide our boats (and ourselves) if this goes pear shaped.

### **Hurricanes, Tornados and New York City.**

Tues, Wed, Thurs, Fri & Sat – 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> September

First things first, yes we and Serafina are fine! And for those in the dark, several tornados hit New York coming down only about 5 miles away from us; the US tennis Open was evacuated for it.... Actually I am ashamed to say we were unaware that we were on tornado watch (although very aware we had had a lot of rain and were sitting in a very bouncy boat) until we went for supper on 'Innamorata' which was quite a challenge in the dinghy. (yes, possibly not the most sensible choice to go drinking on another boat with an imminent tornado bearing down on you) Craig and Karene chose the moment the massive downpour swept across the bay to toddle over to join us all in their dinghy, with Rob and Steve gesticulating wildly to urge them on, but they were blithely unaware of the monster rushing across the bay behind them! The skies were very impressive but we didn't actually see the tornado spout.

Unfortunately the rain was also excessive and I had opened up one of our largest ports in the very humid conditions before the storm and left it open. So when we got back two of the salon cushions were soaked, but luckily the strong winds had blown much of the rain into the galley sink! And they had missed both the iPad and my computer. So all sorts of stupidity on show yesterday.

And to compound it all, Rob had run the flush on the water maker with the filter houses not properly secured and flooded the area by the washing machine but most of the water was contained by the box we store there – which houses the Hoover..... Only time will tell if this recovers and as it is a different voltage to the US, which could prove difficult.

So all in all September 8<sup>th</sup> has not proved our greatest hour! Time to come home soon?

Anyway up until yesterday we had continued with more sightseeing in New York going in separate directions: Karene and I to art galleries (Guggenheim, Whitney, Frick, Metropolitan Museum of Art), Rob to the USS Intrepid museum (with ??????) and Craig off visiting work friends. And then we graduated to travelling by ourselves and have to admit that the NY subway system is far easier than we had supposed when performing the duckling role of blindly following Craig. We also visited the Museum of the City of New York with an interesting video on the development of the city, but as we have discovered everywhere, just after Labour Day and the height of the tourist season, now seems to be the time to change the exhibitions; so one floor was shut and a quarter of the museum was given over to a display of photography of London's streets – not possibly what we had come all this way to see! I also found the perfect museum to visit, the Neue and that is completely closed for re-hanging till the end of the month!

Apart from visiting my cousin, Brooke on Monday we are now thinking about our route south, the SSC gam and Annapolis Boat Show, planning our tides and watching 'Leslie' (our friendly hurricane/tropical storm out in the Atlantic) and should leave here early on Wednesday for an overnight sail down through the heart of New York City and south to the Delaware River.

### **NYC, Liberty, Humpbacks, tuna and a turtle**

Sun, Mon, Tues, Wed & Thurs – 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> September

Sid and Rebecca on 'Dovka' sent us an email which was swiftly followed by a phone call from Sid's brother, Len and his wife, Peedee: they had been instructed to meet us as they live locally! Despite their having spent all day visiting family in New Jersey, Peedee and Len treated us to a lovely dinner on Sunday evening at their beautiful home, providing the necessary taxi service as well. They were very good company and their very bouncy chocolate coloured Poodle 'Zoe' joined in the entertainment.

First thing on Monday we got up early to catch the tide to go into the Town Dock and fill up with water and pump out the toilets, but when we got near the dock we found the wind direction made any manoeuvring impossible, quite apart from the little boats moored nearby which had swung right into the channel alongside the dock. So we crept round to the marina fuel dock with fingers crossed that we wouldn't go aground - and the mobile pump out man invited us to help ourselves to water there. So we did and left ASAP before any staff came on duty.

We were then approached by the water taxi driver who looks after the town buoys. He was horrified to learn that we hadn't been appraised of the charges (2 nights free, or 1 at weekends, and then a charge of \$25 per night where they move you to another buoy) and was so embarrassed that he decided he couldn't charge us at all! However, he begged us to let other sailors know about their anchorage and the charges. We can only say it is the perfect place to stay (very convenient with a large supermarket, laundry, West Marine and lots of cafes and restaurants) even if it wasn't just the very best jump-off place to visit New York using the half-hourly trains that run into the centre of Manhattan. Plus also there is the perfect cafe/patisserie on the way to the station, the 'Main Street Bakery' complete with friendly locals.

My cousin Brooke then rang to suggest an earlier rendezvous than originally planned so we jumped into the dinghy and set off by train into NYC for the last time. We met up for lunch at a famous breakfast restaurant, so we all had breakfast type meals despite it being 1400 hours! And then went to the Natural History Museum (again) to watch the Planetarium display which was frankly a bit underwhelming, narrated by Whoopi Goldberg and aimed at a younger audience. It also made me feel seasick..... But we swung by the gemstones display which cheered Wendy and I up no end! After that a walk around the locality, seeing the Columbia University campus, St John the Divine cathedral (which is another unfinished construction begun in the late 19th century, but unlike the Gaudi cathedral in Barcelona, it is a very traditional building but sadly construction seems to have almost slowed to a standstill. It was very impressive though and almost totally unadorned with the usual tombs etc, and therefore the huge design has even more impact) and the Riverside Church. We got home well after dark and it was freezing, in fact the whole day had been windy and cold - and we were underprepared for it.

On Tuesday 'Caduceus' hove into sight, so Martin and Elizabeth came on board for a quick update on the town and local transport; we did a last bit of food shopping and then Steve and Carol came for supper. We had yet another discussion on tidal timings for going through Hell Gate which does hold some horrors for navigating: the tide can be flowing at 4 knots through this narrow stretch on the East River to the east of Manhattan and as the connecting water of Long Island Sound does exactly the opposite (ie it is ebbing as the East River is flooding) it takes some planning to get it right. In the evening, we could also see the double laser beams shining up from Ground Zero over in NYC as it was of course the 9/11 anniversary.

Time to head south to Baltimore and so we set off at 0630 hours on Wednesday having worked the timings out in three different ways and produced the same answer each time, and glory be, arrived at Hell Gate about right: even so we were doing 9.5 knots and bobbing along in the swirls of water. It is pretty amazing to sail down such a narrow 'river' through such a famous city, so I

snapped loads of shots, including the Statue of Liberty again, but the speed and lurching of the boat didn't make such good pictures as we had captured the previous week from the trip boat. We were shooed away from the Staten Island Ferry by two high speed, gun toting guard boats, presumably on heightened awareness for the previous day though I hardly feel two middle-aged English sailors racketing along in a yacht constituted too much of a threat.

As ever there was no wind and the forecast was from the south anyway so we settled down to a very boring, 20 hour motorsail south down the east coast of new Jersey to the Delaware River. As evening approached Rob hooked two large fish, each of which successfully got off the single hook lure; but finally we caught and landed a smaller tuna, not the greatest of eating, but OK for soup.

Just at sunrise on Thursday, Rob spotted a Humpback Whale very close to the boat and got me out of bed to see it, which was wonderful and this was quickly followed by a pod of about 20 dolphins cruising by and then as we entered the mouth of the Delaware, the biggest turtle we have seen surfaced twice beside us.

We plodded on up the Delaware River (which is not of the dimensions you might imagine as neither bank is usually in sight from the central channel which is fairly narrow, surrounded by depths of barely 4-8m) against the tide as it was 50 miles to Reedy Point where we hoped to anchor for the night, which would allow us to pick a favourable tide through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal the next day. We had been assured that the flies are only a seasonal phenomenon - oh yeah? Eventually the tide turned under us and we just made the very tricky entrance into the anchorage just before sundown. The anchorage is behind a very small island with a very long, submerged dyke running north and south of it, which gives it protection from the wakes of the passing ships and any bad weather. A hole has been dynamited in the submerged dyke making a narrow opening into this protected shelter of perhaps only 50' through which you have to 'ferry-glide' diagonally, across a tide of 2+ knots. Rob had been dreading this (once he'd stopped dreading Hell Gate!) but of course performed the manoeuvre perfectly. Once again information about depths etc. on Active Captain did help our confidence about the whole performance. Clearly the American boat ahead of us all the way down from New York and up the Delaware River did not have our self-belief as they ignored this refuge and were reduced to anchoring outside in the river. So now we are listening to the tide rushing along the hull and feeling very glad that the boring, hot, fly-bitten passage is almost over - we really are not fans of the Delaware's wildlife!

### **Still Pond, Susquehanna River, Maryland**

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September

The very photogenic mist at dawn became a dense impenetrable fog by 0800 hours but fortunately this had cleared by 1000 hours which was the magic moment when we had to leave in order to catch the tide up to the Chesapeake and Delaware canal and benefit from the favourable current along the canal heading west to Chesapeake Bay.

We were awake at dawn due to the sound of repeated rapid gunfire which was not exactly what we wanted to hear given that we were barely half a mile from a nuclear power station and only a couple of days after 9/11. We can only assume that this was actually duck hunters and that thought alone makes us rest a bit easier.... So with the fog clearing and the tide in our favour, we raised the anchor and again had to negotiate our way sideways through the break in the submerged dyke with a full flood tide ripping across the gap.

30 minutes later we were turning into the C & D canal and heading west along with a few other boats. Progress was delayed a third of the way along when the VHF burst into life with the Railroad bridge announcing that they were lowering the bridge for a maintenance inspection. This meant a clearance of just 45ft which is not much good to us as our mast is 68ft tall. In due course the inspection was completed, the bridge raised to around 100ft and we, along with several other yachts continued on our way.

By mid-afternoon we were out into Chesapeake Bay and at around 1630 hours we dropped our anchor in Still Pond, which is a fairly wide expanse of protected bay, but the whole area is only barely 3 metres deep – and we draw 2.2 metres. Welcome back to the shallow Chesapeake!

We watched a Golden Eagle fly across in front of us as we settled down to a relaxing evening, with just a handful of other boats joining us before dark.

### **Rock Creek, Patapsco River, Baltimore**

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September

Not a brilliant night as Still Pond did not live up to its name when in the early hours the wind went round into the NE and blew at 25 knots across a 3 mile fetch. Rob heroically got up at 0400 and kept an eye on things, I happily got back to sleep as the wind and the consequent bouncing up and down diminished slightly as the dawn broke.

After breakfast we set off into the still good blow, put a couple of reefs in the sails and headed off SW to Baltimore - when, of course, the wind faded away to 10 to 15 knots; but we still had a very nice sail. Looking back over our log we have only had 25 knots or more of wind on our way up from the BVIs, and when we didn't want it in the particular anchorage we were in near Boston. Sailing here seems as much a red letter day as in the Med.

We then nosed our way all the way up Rock Creek, off the Patapsco River just south of Baltimore, trying to find somewhere we could anchor without completely blocking the thoroughfare for other boats, yup we are definitely back in shallow waters in a too big boat! We ended up returning to the first turn and anchoring with just over a metre under us. Here our sailor-to-sailor waves were either totally ignored or very enthusiastically returned: one guy was so impressed that we were a) British and b) therefore trans-Atlantic he told us to "Rock on". It is just so great to be back amongst the Southern accents again!

So we will spend Sunday here doing jobs (and the dreaded tax return) and then scoot up to Baltimore and a berth right in the city centre - with cheaper weekday rates.

### **Baltimore City - The Charm City**

Sunday, Monday & Tuesday – 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> September

Did various jobs, and I actually completed our tax return instead of just talking about it - so a very useful day! Rob spent much of the day doing royal waving to all the boats passing us and the responses were either very enthusiastic with lots of chat, or no acknowledgement at all despite passing within a few feet of us. In the evening a local resident, Jim came out in his dinghy to offer us access to water on his dock and the use of his car to get to the grocery store or anything else he could help with. Jim had been sailing and also bought what they call out here, a trawler (what we

think of as a rugged motor vessel) out on the NW coast of the USA and told us all about boating round there in hopes of inspiring us to visit - you can imagine Rob's response in the light of his only sailing in T shirt and shorts theory. Jim is a Harley Davidson dealer and when we left the following morning and could see his various dinghies, yacht and trawler all in matching green canvas, tied to his own dock, we understood that the motorbike market here is very flush!

We motored up to Baltimore the next morning and berthed at the Inner Harbour Marina with the help of a very jolly dockmaster called David. The marina is right in the middle of the central harbour in Baltimore and was almost completely empty - but had been heaving for the IndyCar Grand Prix through the streets of Baltimore over the Labour Day weekend. We decided to take a (expensive) berth as a gale was forecast and some reports indicate that although you can anchor in the centre of the harbour, the holding can be poor. We have also discovered that you then also have to pay upwards from \$20 a day just to take your dinghy ashore!

As heavy rain was forecast we set off into town for a wander, having beef burgers at the Hard Rock Cafe (oh we are old, the music levels were conversation killing), then a bit of retail therapy. Back to the boat to give the decks a wash and to be invited next door to a Canadian boat for drinks. This boat is travelling in company with another (who we also met) from their yacht club and it is a well-trodden path at this time of year for the so called 'Snow Birds' fleeing cold Canadian winters for the pleasures of the Caribbean. They were great fun and we are sorry not to be seeing more of them. And then I did a couple of loads of washing in the marina laundry losing my marina pass card in the process. At first I thought I had washed it, but it transpired the next morning that another chap doing his washing had picked it up mistaking it for his, which was a great relief given the \$25 replacement charge.

The promised rain arrived the next morning (along with a huge pile of manure for the park alongside us, and yes we are downwind) so after catching the free 'Charm City Circulatory Bus' to a supermarket, we opted to do the trolley bus tour of Baltimore as recommended at the Visitor Centre we had visited yesterday. Baltimore is quite an extraordinary city for the way in which they are actively encouraging tourism. From the last quarter of a century when it was a decrepit industrial town and sea port it must have poured money into things, as it now has lots of shiny new tower blocks and some of the industrial buildings have been saved, renovated or rejuvenated into condos or shops and restaurants. They have built an impressive (albeit with an air of kiss-me-quick) waterside boardwalk and provide free buses on 4 different routes, plus a metro and light-railway system, and water taxis. And they have any number of museums (many shut on Mondays and Tuesdays unfortunately) including the Tattoo Museum complete with unusual gift shop apparently (since we have our own live example at home, I wasn't tempted) and the Museum of Dentistry where you can view George Washington's false teeth (not wooden) and sing along with vintage toothpaste jingles - we managed to hold ourselves back from that one as well. The tour was very good, visiting of course, Fort McHenry (1814 battle) and where the huge Stars and Stripes was made, which flew above it and all about how the words of the Star Spangled Banner were put to a British drinking tune to eventually become their national anthem (but not ratified until 1931). We also got to see a lot of sights and architecture (and Babe Ruth's birthplace) that we certainly were not going to slosh through the rain to.

After this Rob went off to visit the Customs and Border protection, fruitlessly it turned out as they stopped work at 1500, and I did a little bit more shopping and got caught in the most impressive rainstorm I have ever been in, as the wind swept the rain sideways so hard that it was even channelling rain off the windowsills at 90 degrees. Rob recorded 35 knots on the boat which made the berth charges much more worthwhile especially as we were also on tornado watch again this evening.

## **Whitehall Bay, Annapolis, Maryland**

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> September

We made an early start so that Sarah could take advantage of the fresh water supply to have another go at our grubby waterline – downside of the Chesapeake, whilst I set off into the city to have another go at visiting Customs and Border protection. My trip was a resounding success and confirmed the good news about how we can renew our Cruising License next May.

Once we had sorted ourselves out, we bade farewell to our Canadian neighbours and headed off south again towards Annapolis. We had a light wind, but with the need to cover 20 odd miles we ended up motor sailing using the jib downwind.

We passed under the huge William P. Lane Jr. Memorial bridges that span the Patapsco River and made our way gingerly into the beautiful, but very shallow Whitehall Bay on the northern bank of the Severn River.

Here we had a huge and perfectly flat anchorage completely to ourselves with just a couple of palatial mansions with vast grounds as neighbours. As ever there was a great wifi signal and if there is anyone reading this who does not yet have a WirieAP system on board, I recommend you get one soon!

We sat out and enjoyed a lovely warm sunset and enjoyed the absolute silence – in marked contrast to the previous two nights in downtown Baltimore.

## **Annapolis Landing Marina, Annapolis, Maryland**

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September

Bit of a slow start today as there was no rush to get into Annapolis where we had a marina berth booked. Before you all begin to think that we have gone soft, we are meeting up with Rob Pennington from North Sails who is going to measure up our existing spray dodger (the canopy above the fixed screen) and make us a new one before we fly home on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct. He is coming along on Friday morning and so we need to be in a proper berth for him to have full access, hence a marina berth.

Very impressed with the local fishermen/crabmen who were all very considerate to us and crept past us this morning as they crossed the bay on low throttle to avoid too much wake. At 1130 hours I again bent to the messy task of raising the anchor (the Chesapeake mud is very glutinous and smelly, but since it was so shallow here, at least I did not have to wash down too much of the chain) and in due course we set off under motor (again) on the 3 mile trip across the River Severn and up to Annapolis Landing Marina.

Here we were met by the very affable Dan who presented us with the rather posh fixed lines that clearly belong to the usual owner of this berth. Dan was very keen to point out in explanation that we were in the berth used by the owner of the entire marina complex, who was off cruising at the moment. Once we were all sorted out I went along to the office and Dan introduced me to the Dockmaster, Jim Stewart. They explained where everything was and all the arrangements and when I asked about getting to the nearest chandleries which it transpired were not very close, they told me I could just take the 'van' whenever I wanted.

Sarah was keen to get off into Annapolis Town and knew, from when we came here on ancient bicycles back in June, that the easiest way into town was by water taxi, so she headed off to hail one. Sadly they will not divert to this marina unless there are a minimum of three passengers wanting the ride, so Jim stepped in to save the day by telling Sarah that since the 'van' was being used, she could just take his girlfriend's car instead! So Sarah fetched me and I drove her into the town in the Chevy Tracker 4 x 4 before heading off to the chandleries, where amongst other things I was able to get Sarah's Dubarry sailing boots exchanged for a slightly larger size (long, long story that might finally now be concluded after 3 months). We met up again as planned and returned the Chevy unscathed to the parking lot.

But I now discovered that I had bought the wrong strength of potable anti-freeze for the water-maker and needed to exchange my purchases, so this time Jim and Dan threw me the keys to the 'van' which turned out to be a smart Dodge MPV with an interesting American column gear shift and foot hand brake.... Still all went well, although the directions I was given to an Autoparts store to get some other bits as well, turned out to be a good deal further than the chap giving directions had indicated – a common fault we have discovered here and I was away rather longer than planned!

Excellent showers and toilets here and overall we would recommend this marina if you have a need to use one in Annapolis – but like most things out here, it doesn't come cheap.

### **Crab Creek, South River, Annapolis.**

Friday 21<sup>st</sup> Oct

We got early, only to later get a phone call from Rob (North Sails) to say that he would be at the boat for 1100 hours..... He duly turned up then as promised with a helper and set about the very long and tedious job of firstly setting up the steelwork so it is exactly aligned correctly (almost an hour's work) and then making a template out of plastic sheeting. He then decided that as it is an unusual design ("almost concave") he would really like to take the dodger and the cockpit cover away with him to ensure it is absolutely right and the teeth on the zips also marry up between the dodger and cover. He was fairly impressed with its dilapidated state and hoped he would be able to return it before our lay up if it holds together that long! So possibly a month sans dodger etc. just as fall approaches and with the lay-up to perform is not ideal but we did feel confident in his abilities - he runs the canvas section of North Sails in Annapolis.

Meanwhile t'other Rob had whizzed off in a borrowed vehicle to buy yet more anti-freeze for the water maker (after coffee and doughnuts courtesy of this great marina!) and has now successfully winterised it, so one tick on his long lay-up list.

Once North Sails left we quickly headed on out of the marina so as not to out stay our welcome and motored round, to Crab Creek and met up with Innamorata who were already anchored there. So the usual evening drinks took place on board and we are now starting to get work done towards leaving Serafina in mid-October and will spend the next few days here before we join the Seven Seas Cruising Association gam (rally) in the next river south. We did watch a large Bald Eagle chase off an Osprey out of this very tiny creek which was impressive, and saw a Turkey Vulture (they have very ugly bright red bald heads) gliding on the thermals.

Crab Creek is a wonderful, quiet and protected anchorage and we have access to the shore and all the shops etc, via the private jetty belonging to the local OCC Port officer Wolfgang. There is a strong

free wifi signal from one of the houses nearby and Wolfgang has a comprehensive workshop in his cellar and has offered the use of his car and his bicycles for any shopping etc.

### **Camp Letts, Rhode River, Annapolis**

Sat, Sun, Mon & Tues – 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> September

Spent the weekend doing boat jobs and enjoying Innamorata's (Steve and Carol) great company and finally caught up with Wolfgang and Gemma who have been hard at work on their newly purchased boat 'Loki', with someone working on their engine. Everyone who knows Wolfgang will be very pleased to hear how well he is looking and how much he has achieved with the boat.

On Monday morning Wolfgang kindly lent his car to the four of us, and so with Rob driving, Steve and Carol took us off to the delights of Bacon Marine, a fantastic second hand chandlery with a huge loft of new and second hand sails. This was definitely the best organised one we have ever come across and just when we were about to leave with a few items, we found a whole new warehouse attached! Eventually after spending a good deal longer than we had planned, we came away with a less than half price Cobb barbecue (which has cleaned up perfectly) and some Sunbrella material to put the new sewing machine to good use next season. But even more exciting, Steve and Carol found the perfect extending spinnaker pole to suit their genoa, again with at least 50% off the price of a new one. After a quick zip round Safeways for essentials, we then went back to collect the pole and got it home precariously attached to the slightly wonky roof rack.

On our return we then offered our services to Wolfgang who had dislodged an electric cable which had dropped down the inside of his mast, so this needed re-mousing and then a new steaming light installed. So I went aloft and did the easy bit of re-mousing and then Steve went up to do the technical bit. But we all have to admit that if Carol hadn't joined us when she did with some bent surgical scissors and a bit of common sense we may still have been fishing around at the foot of the mast for a whole lot longer!

Wolfgang and Gemma were so pleased with what constituted a small job for us, but a horrid one for them that they kindly invited us for drinks which developed into a meal at the local Chinese restaurant and a lovely evening out.

Tuesday morning we decided to unearth the stored water we had put in the bilge for our Atlantic crossing back in 2010, in order to chuck out the water in case it freezes in the winter and splits the bottles - I have been hearing horror stories about mildew tendencies up here and we want to minimise any water laying inside the hull over the winter. To get to the bottles we have to empty our (extensive) drinks store and remove boxes and locker bottoms, and then everything needed cleaning to get rid of the slight tinge of mildew which was already present.

Rob meanwhile was employed cleaning the Cobb barbecue we had bought. We had invited Steve and Carol for supper but the change of plan the previous evening had moved it on to lunch today, as we were hoping to get away in the afternoon to Rhode River and "bag" a good anchoring spot for the Seven Seas Cruising Association 'Gam' as deep water spaces may be at a premium! So Steve & Carol came over to instruct Rob on usage of the Cobb and as with any barbecue, if you are in a hurry, it takes forever! After lunch we said our goodbyes to Innamorata who we may see again in the next week or so, but otherwise we hope to catch up with them in 2014 in Panama for the Pacific crossing!

We then whizzed off to get fuel, with me putting us firmly aground in Crab Creek entrance as I was fondly following what I believed was our track line, but was in fact a transit line marked on the chart..... And I have a horrible feeling I did that last time as well. So we got away with a re-fuelled, watered and de-trashed boat courtesy of Liberty Boatyard (with the most competitive prices we have seen for a long while) by 1545 hours and motored round to the next river south, Rhode River, rueing the fact that we finally had wind to sail (albeit on the nose) on the one day when we didn't want it as we had a selection of anti-freezes and various other large unsecured items lined up in the boat ready for imminent lay-up. As we neared the river we spotted 'Chardonnay', Scott and Freddi's boat coming from the other direction and Scott ended up anchoring just behind us. He had brought her single-handed up from Solomon's with a nightmare trip which he later recounted over a G&T on board Serafina. Scott and his wife Freddi had hosted us in so many ways whilst we were anchored in Washington and he has organised the upcoming Gam, so it was lovely to catch up particularly as we expect him to be far too busy once the event starts up to fit us in!

### **Seven Seas Cruising Association Gam, Annapolis.**

Thurs & Friday – 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> Sept

We got a few boat jobs done, sadly 'extra' jobs ie ones not already on "the list". Iain Simpson has much to answer for, this time he emailed to say they have cleaned out all their bilges - a quick peer into ours revealed mildew fields. So I spent the day lying on my stomach, sniffing bleach and scratching my hands. Although I did have a panic attack when suspended upside down into a very deep locker and had to be dragged out by Rob, who took over. Rob spent much of the day nursing backache but did some carpentry jobs.

Every so often a member of the SSCA would come by to introduce themselves, including Evans Starzinger (Beth Leonard's partner) who had spotted our OCC flag and as a co-member had rowed over to say hello. We later went on his boat to have a look at his Code Zero headsail and how he deals with it. Evans was also very helpfully forthcoming with sailmakers to approach and the types of material they will use and their suitability for our type of cruising. And he and Rob got to sing the praises of Rocna anchors of course!

Mid-afternoon Rob watched a large ketch run solidly aground and fail to get off. We then went off to meet Jeff and Karen Siegel of 'Active Captain' fame and on our return we offered our assistance to the team lead by Evans who had moved and re-anchored his own yacht 'Hawk' to try and shift the ketch on a falling tide. So Rob and I took turns on winching the tow line, Rob with his delicate back - but this seems to have been the magic recovery trick for him at least! Various other techniques were tried, one of which ended with me doing a very inelegant flop into the water to rescue a fast sinking heavy line that had sprung untied. You would not believe the colour of the water that I rinsed my clothes in and the informed recommendations were to disinfect my ears as well. And after all this we were not successful in our attempts, but the boat in question got up at 0200 hours for the next high tide and comfortably and quietly motored themselves off!

In the evening David and Candy on Endeavour (and speakers at the Gam) came over for a drink. They are very much the reason we are here as we met them in Washington and were persuaded by them to come along. The programme of talks all sounds very interesting particularly the input from the Siegels with yet more new technological possibilities. Although much of the weekend is aimed at first timers leaving the US via the ICW for the Bahamas - and leaving behind all the delights of western (US) culture (we would argue that the Bahamas is hardly 3rd world!). Surprisingly we are so far the only foreign flagged boat here and so I felt that Rob with his heckling tendencies did need to be reminded that he was less inconspicuous than usual when we

joined a dinghy tie-up behind Chardonnay on the 2nd evening for an informal question and answers session.....

We spent some of Thursday extracting items from various areas of deep and inconvenient stowage on board Serafina to offer up for the Treasures of the Bilge sale on Sunday morning, which inevitably leads to discussion about changing the way we do certain things on the boat and this time, whether we opt to get a Code Zero headsail made during the winter and if a Hookah system for swimming under the hull would be more useful than our sub aqua tank - watch this space.

Friday was the official start of the Gam and we took the opportunity to sign up to join the SSCA and were presented with big badges with our details on and then got a couple of fluorescent ribbons to also attach which marked us out as first-timers to the Gam and trans-Atlantic sailors - we felt like show dogs with rosettes! At lunchtime we sat with Scott and Freddi, who have Nigel Calder staying on board and he filled us on all the gossip about Orust, Sweden and the financial states of the various boatbuilders there. Then in the afternoon we listened to Nigel's talk on how reliable your charts or chart plotter displays really are. Elements of this talk I think we had heard as part of the Blue Water Round The World seminar in London but now it all makes a whole load more sense and is far more pertinent, or perhaps we are a bit more receptive as at that time we had other boating priorities. I went back to the boat to cook pizza (homemade as well!) while Rob then took in the insurance talk; then back ashore for drinks and a pot luck supper - the poor staff had great difficulty in breaking up the party and throwing us out into the teeming rain to dinghy home.

Biggest excitement of the day: David and Candy went out to their boat mid pm and when they got back into their dinghy a small beige and black garter snake appeared out of their outboard engine, tried to make an escape, took one look at the sea and beat a hasty retreat back into the engine where it got a lift ashore! Apparently not venomous, but bites and craps profusely when handled - nice.

### **Herrington North Marina**

Sat, Sun & Mon – 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1<sup>st</sup> Oct

For once we both overslept so it was a bit of a rush to get ashore for the 0830 hours start of the various talks we wanted to go to, and despite carrying my shower things around all day I never managed to squeeze one in until we were late for something else on Sunday evening....

During the day we attended talks on: energy management by Nigel Calder again (funnily enough only Rob went along to this onewhilst I went along to hear about para-anchors & drogues (but due to technical difficulties they never really got on to the drogue aspect which is what we have on board, and I wanted further tips on - and yes the speaker sold para-anchors...); David & Candy's brilliant talk (the best of the Gam) on sailing in High Latitudes, (Chile and Cape Horn), it was astonishing to hear what they achieved, they have now reached godlike status in our eyes!; Lin & Larry Pardey on 'Creating the Unstoppable Boat' (which was so poor we left early - weirdly there was always lots of coming and goings in the halls throughout most talks, very un-British where we would normally have felt compelled to stick it out); I went to the weather forecasting talk (another disappointment) and then Jeff & Karen Siegel's emergency medicine presentation (which was very well handled and a good brush up for us). Basically a lot of the weekend was aimed at sailors new to the living on board aspects of sailing, so we felt quite grown-up!

Immediately after this we hardly drew breath and it was a drinks party, followed by dinner and a very amusing talk by Nigel, yet again, about what lessons he has learned along the way. Nigel

appears to be a very slow learner and has repeated some spectacular groundings and many other mistakes which he is very happy to share, making us all feel that our own stupidities are just part of the game. His poor long-suffering wife, Terrie also featured strongly in the talk mainly for her long-suffering, distinct lack of enthusiasm for sailing and acute sea-sick abilities. We met her several times over the weekend and she and I had a good bonding session over managing sketching/painting on board (no I still haven't done a thing). They are a lovely couple and very happy to muck in - we are definitely finding that all these very experienced, erudite sailors do not suffer from airs and graces and seem delighted to go on sharing their knowledge, when we must sometimes seem complete idiots in their eyes.

Next morning we dragged ourselves out of bed for the flea market, ferrying all our kit ashore and we (well really Rob) were pretty successful in shifting nearly all our stuff - and we didn't come back with a single purchase which is a record! I also attended a round table discussion on the future developments within and in alliance with Active Captain - they really do have some astonishing things planned. And as ever, all we can say to any cruisers reading this is 'get involved': their system is spreading through the world, they even have information being submitted from sailors in the Arctic!

Early in the afternoon we went out for a sail on 'Hawk' with Evans Starzinger who had very kindly offered to show us his system for working a Code Zero sail, which was just brilliant and we even had some good wind. His aluminium yacht is only 2' longer than Serafina but is a sleek, aluminium yacht with a very much bigger rig, and feels a huge and completely different animal. This is their second boat and it is very much a working machine for high latitude sailing which is their passion. Rob couldn't contain his jealousy for all the exposed plumbing - none of the time-wasting of unearthing the fittings of anything from behind smart panelling. Evans and his partner Beth Leonard have done several circumnavigations on Hawk and seem to also enjoy sailing in the extreme northern and southern oceans of the world.

We had a lovely sail on Hawk in conditions that were at the top end of carrying the Code Zero wind-wise, so it was perfect to discover just how easy it is to use and more importantly stow and lower. I did much of the helming which was a treat as Hawk is so well balanced and fast, but a little nerve-racking with crab pots to avoid and Evans' competitive streak (well more like a very wide band) being exercised by any other racing boat in the vicinity.

Then back to Serafina for a couple of hours to catch up, but this became another session of visiting dinghies and then a drinks invite to a 'yacht' built by Nordhaven which is like a sleeker version of their motor yachts with a sailing rig. It looks quite strange but is total luxury below decks with a galley I would kill for at home! Then on with Evans to join Steve and Carol on Il Sogno, where we dined with Craig and Karene in the style we are becoming far too used to - the best beef-burgers we have had all year. Can't think how we will cope without them over the winter, although our waistlines have a good idea!

This morning we got up slowly as we couldn't rush round to Herrington Boatyard until the tide started to rise. We have now started the 'lay-up', but luckily (probably not from the viewpoint of actually finishing the work we have to complete!) we have now discovered that David and Candy will be in a boatyard just round the corner and Scott and Freddi are being hauled in the same marina just about the time that we leave.

We got settled into our home for the next 9 days and soon got the sails off and bagged ready for sending to the sailmakers for inspection, repair and washing.

## Herrington North Marina

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We had a lovely sail on Hawk in conditions that were at the top end of carrying the Code Zero wind-wise, so it was perfect to discover just how easy it is to use and more importantly stow and lower. I did much of the helming which was a treat as Hawk is so well balanced and fast, but a little nerve-racking with crab pots to avoid and Evans' competitive streak (well more like a very wide band) being exercised by any other racing boat in the vicinity.

Then back to Serafina for a couple of hours to catch up, but this became another session of visiting dinghies and then a drinks invite from Byron and Cynthia on their boat 'Perelandra' built by Nordhaven which is like a sleeker version of their motor yachts but with a sailing rig. It looks quite strange but is total luxury below decks with a galley I would kill for at home! Then on with Evans to join Steve and Carol on Il Sogno, where we dined with Craig and Karene in the style we are becoming far too used to - the best beef-burgers we have had all year. Can't think how we will cope without them over the winter, although our waistlines have a good idea!

This morning we got up slowly as we couldn't rush round to Herrington Boatyard until the tide started to rise. We have now started the 'lay-up', but luckily (probably not from the viewpoint of actually finishing the work we have to complete!) we have now discovered that David and Candy will be in a boatyard just round the corner and Scott and Freddi are being hauled in the same marina just about the time that we leave.

We got settled into our home for the next 9 days and soon got the sails off and bagged ready for sending to the sailmakers for inspection, repair and washing.

### **Annapolis Sail Boat Show**

Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs, Fri & Sat – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> October.

The rest of Monday went very well: we got the sails down without the standard marital row, but the result was the mainsail was so badly folded that it only half fitted into its bag - but at least the sail makers can manhandle it away! And we started stripping all the decks clear of ropes, various and other fittings. We pumped up our old dinghy to act as a bath for all the ropes we need to get washed and dried. Unfortunately with rain forecast for the next day we had to store all 4 sails down below and reposition our old bimini cover as a makeshift dodger.

Rob from North Sails was due to arrive with the new dodger but due to the rainy weather on Tuesday, he couldn't install it. And without it we couldn't work outside due to rain and had hardly any room inside due to huge sail bags everywhere. Rob managed to get on with all sorts of engine maintenance and I opted to cycle into town to deliver the curtains for repair, and buy fresh roach-hotels and any other killing product I felt appropriate for a winter here! Then the marina very kindly nominated their new yard lad to drive me to the supermarket and hang around till I had finished. He felt it was polite to offer help and then just tail me round the store - not a very relaxing shop!

Wednesday I finished off cleaning out the bilges as the weather was still a bit suspect. When we converted one of our aft water tanks to a diesel tank, the Turks unfortunately installed the new breather pipe in a hose material that gently oozes diesel and this slowly descends across the aft bilges. It is so slight that it doesn't actually smell but leaves a film everywhere. The only solution is to change the pipe and this can't be done now as we have a full tank of diesel to prevent condensation during the winter. So another item for the to-do list.

Eventually Rob and Scott from North sails arrived to fit our new dodger, which is beautiful - it seems a great shame to leave it in situ all winter, but our old dodger is so rotten that one good blow will probably leave us with flying streamers and no protection at all, so we really can't put it back up. Unfortunately they forgot to bring our cockpit cover back..... But he did leave with all the sails to clean, repair and store for the winter. As the weather had improved, we had a boom full of drying ropes and a lot of our canvas soaking in the dinghy. On their recommendation I had looked at the Sunbrella website regarding cleaning badly stained (ie mildewed) canvas. It suggested a fairly horrifically strong solution of bleach for a fast 15 minute soak but certainly our filthy bimini cover seems better for it.

By 1500 hours we were headed for the showers as Andrew and Digna Gant were kindly picking us up en route to the OCC dinner in Annapolis which was being held in Wolfgang's garden under a canopy, due to the bar licence being unforthcoming at the planned venue! The evening was a great success: Sid and Rebecca had done an amazing job arranging the tent, lighting and decorating it (with nautical flags of course), tables and chairs, tea-lights, even making the hors d'oeuvres and sorting out a catering firm to produce a delicious main course and cake. Plus the all-important booze! We caught up with many OCC members from this summer, including nearly all the Brits we have met and some more local members. Wolfgang was in good fettle which was lovely to see; it really was a wonderful evening to be finishing up our East Coast sailing for the season. And to top it off Lisa and David had been nominated to drive us back to Herrington North Marina, which really was above and beyond the call of duty (especially as they live in Annapolis in the opposite direction): it doesn't take very long to get there by sea but as with all ports in the Chesapeake they are at the end of long fingers of land....

Thursday was noses firmly back to grindstone and Scott came back to deliver the cockpit cover and ensure that it fitted to the dodger successfully, and so with fairly good weather we got a lot done. Friday was forecast to be hot and breezy - perfect laying up weather, but we had arranged to go the Annapolis Boat Show. This time Craig and Karene had drawn the short straw on the taxi service, but at least we were able to provide them with tickets as Spotless Stainless had kindly given us four - as their best ambassadors of the product! Both Rob and I had huge shopping/information collection lists but we started off by visiting the 5 sail makers that Rob had been in contact with during the week for quotes on a Code Zero/lightweight genoa-type sail. This proved very useful in perhaps narrowing the field and we should get all the quotes by mid-week. The Annapolis Boat Show has the usual American hype of biggest and best but it is nowhere near as big (or as well organised - no stand numbers for instance to try and work out where the hell you are, or more importantly just where was that stand you are looking for?) or possibly as interesting as Southampton or London - but perhaps we are just biased! There certainly is very little one can actually buy (I was in search of a variety of items for making up canvas wear) and none of the good deals we would expect to find at the UK shows. Despite that we got a lot done and bumped into loads of people we have met this summer, Rob even meeting a guy who used to work at English Braids in Malvern and used to supply Viking! And we did indulge in the biggest rare roast beef sandwiches you have ever seen - a good 2" of fabulous rare beef with the sort of horseradish that appears to complete clear your sinuses forever!

Craig and Karene kindly delivered us back to the marina before they shot off to an Oyster Yachts party at the show. We shall miss them hugely as we have spent much of the last 10 months with them off and on, and they have been incredibly generous in every way: they are heading south to the Caribbean for the winter but hopefully may be back again in the spring. We just crawled off to the boat and had an early night.

Saturday had promised to be sunny all day (yes, I am totally obsessed with the weather, it is the difference between an easy lay-up or a slog when everything starts with trying to dry the stainless or GPR, ropes etc. etc. before you even start the job in hand) but disappointingly turned rainy in early afternoon: I had to resort to hanging up the newly waterproofed bimini cover under the stairs of the office to dry. Rob is managing to get quite a lot done although it may come down to a race between the jobs being completed and his back seizing up altogether! He had started the day at the crack of dawn with another session in the gym (this is the pre-golf get fit regime) forgetting that he had to cycle into and then out of town to find the 7-11 store to top up our US mobile which was the number we had handed out at the boat show for a variety of contacts! Late morning the "CYC crew" (all the lovely people we had met at the Washington YC) - Scott, David and Bill turned up to make arrangements about ladder borrowing, anchor lid repairs and advise on the Air Breeze dampening down. Otherwise it was just heads down and getting on with something as the weather dictated - can't imagine how I would survive without the wonders of Audible books to listen to on my iPod as none of my jobs could be called challenging!

And once again we find ourselves singing the praises of the Spotless Stainless product. Never mind the free show passes, it is remarkable how each time you use this to clean the stainless steel, the job gets easier and faster and even better!

### **'ER' stands for Emergency Room**

Sun, Mon, Tues & Wed – 7<sup>th</sup> 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Oct

Sunday was cold and wet, as promised, so peripheral jobs got done with us itching to get on with the big ones. Scott arrived from UK Halsey sails to measure up for his quote, arriving in torrential rain and then just carrying on with the job very professionally. We are getting all sorts of suggestions, for shape, size, material, top down/bottom up furlers, torsion bolt ropes and of course, prices! And it was freezing - four layers of clothes.

Monday I managed to get lots done, whilst Rob went with David to fetch the ladders from Washington that Scott is lending us for the hull polishing and then he also carried on with jobs. We finally admitted defeat as it got dark and started getting the boat ready for the lift the next day.

Tuesday was damp and foggy but we were lucky enough to get an earlyish lift, the crew coming round to help us round to a waiting space behind the travel hoist. As we waited we were invited on to a huge fishing 'yacht' (one of those Hemmingway things) that had just been launched. It is a new build with a crew of three on board who are about to accompany it on a transport ship to the Seychelles to its owner - and it's registered in Guernsey! They were great hosts plying us with coffee and biscuits and letting us have a good nose round: there is a separate cabin for all the fishing lure preparations with the walls decorated floor to ceiling with enormous fishing reels; Rob fell in love with the pristine white engine room. And even they fail to catch fish some days!

We were lifted beautifully (pads to stop the strops coming into contact with the topsides as well), pressure washed off removing all the impressive crop of barnacles and then delivered to a slot with 50 amp electric supply. Although technically you are not allowed to live on board at this marina when hauled out, they obliging turn a blind eye recognising that transients can't just vaporise at dusk. And I was impressed to be apprehended by the very vigilant security vehicle on a nocturnal loo trip.

So we managed to get the hull washed down, and the waterline above the anti-fouling cleaned up from the horrible brown tannin stains (neat lemon juice is the magic solution) that the Chesapeake delivers and were definitely looking more the part when we treated ourselves to a meal at the on-site restaurant - I went for the crab special as this is my last chance for breaking my way into the five freshly cooked carcasses, so we were sat at a table covered in brown paper for the exercise. Poor Rob's old knee injury has decided to play up and the other one isn't too great either so it's a slow walk to and fro anywhere - now if he hadn't been a sports enthusiast he'd be skipping around like his lazy wife!

Wednesday finally delivered the warm sunny weather we have been hoping for, so after a few displacement activities I started to clean the hull and Rob carried on with fielding calls regarding the new sails and working out how to get a vital piece of stainless steel cut and delivered here so that he and David can dampen down our Air Breeze wind generator - there is an element of it not being installed as cleverly as it might have been in the Canaries.

Then disaster struck: in the knowledge that I was pushing the limits on the ladders by using the very top of one as a support (with the plank tied securely I hasten to add), I was being extremely careful in my clambering but while getting down the whole thing began to topple and I think I attempted to jump clear but I fell awkwardly and one ladder and the 12' plank landed on top of me. Luckily Rob had just spotted Scott who was working on a customer's boat in the yard and he downed tools, explained to his clients about the damsel in distress, and took me into Annapolis ER. Sadly (well probably very luckily) not at all like the TV series, the waiting room was on par with the private hospital in Worcester and I was very efficiently passed from A to B, x-rayed and, yup, I have broken my ankle (possibly in 3 places) but not near the joint and very cleanly. So I have a two way splint, plaster and crutches - and no skipping for a while! In fact the ankle isn't too sore it is the ribs where the ladder landed which are more painful. I caught a taxi back and Rob had cleverly positioned a ladder so that I could inch up on my bum on to the deck. Now I only have to contend with the lack of loos (drained down and anti-freezed for the winter) and no showering on board....!

So Rob who was already feeling under pressure isn't feeling a whole lot happier and I am working out just what a nuisance this is going to be both here and once we are back in the UK. Anyone wishing to email sympathy would be very welcome as I am immobilised with a frantic husband, 5 metres off the ground!

Tomorrow is going to be spent notifying flights, car hire, and trying to find miracle workers to take on polishing the hull to my neurotic standards - and no doubt getting irritable. And I can only blame myself....

### **Slopping out!**

Thurs, Fri and Saturday – 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> Oct

Well slow progress is being made and Rob is getting to look more haggard and tired by the minute. Nothing is straightforward in this marine world: the Raymarine chart plotters are choosing not to do their worst while on test with the electronics firm on site, typically; the new piece of stainless steel arrived unpolished and possibly the wrong size; and weirdly the boat stops charging every morning which we thought was another problem with the inverter but may just be a voltage over-demand on site, as it recovers mid-morning! But we have made a decision on the new sail, going with hopefully the best option and a sailmaker who has made a few of these lightweight Genoa/Code Zero cross sails before and importantly, for other cruisers rather than for racing

boats. And we have found a guy to polish the hull, somewhat reluctantly he has even agreed to do it by hand as I am still managing to maintain its surface without buffing mechanically.

Otherwise I have arranged wheelchairs and buggies at airports - Rob is delighted that a) his knees will also get a lift around the airport and b) no duty free shopping.

Friday I managed (well mainly Candy did, who came to offer help) to get the laundry up to date and have a shower in the disabled shower with one leg propped up a la stork. Then I packed away clothes and bed linen for the winter. And then I was pooped! Am seriously wondering whether I have also cracked a rib. Dione, good friend and magic nurse, pointed out I should be taking aspirin to combat possible DVTs on the flight - why didn't I think of that?!

So it is our last night on board tonight (Saturday) thank goodness: there was frost warning forecast and it's damn cold without heating, but lovely sunny days. After this on Sunday and Monday, we to and fro from our hotel room at the resort at the sister marina (Herrington South), unfortunately 15 mins drive away begging lifts as and when. Sunday the hull polishing will be done and Chuck from Enterprise Sails is coming out to measure up which is very good of him. We are almost at the stage of our last jobs that all depend on the previous one being completed before we can proceed - we will triumph!!

All sorts of offers of help have come from everyone around and we certainly do not feel alone or abandoned!

### **A less than glorious end to the season**

Sunday was spent frantically packing, final laundering, Rob doing technical stuff, guys polishing the hull, Chuck measuring up for the new sail and a bit of cleaning as well. I think we were both delighted to see Matt from Herrington South marina when he arrived at 1600 to drive us to the hotel! Despite previous phone calls, it took 3 tries before the hotel remembered they had a room with disabled showering facilities.... But it was a very comfortable room in a bungalow style complex. Rob got us a carry out from the not too distant restaurant and we crashed out.

Monday was gloomy and I had intended to stay at the hotel as the prospect of ladder climbing in the rain didn't appeal but as there was so much still to complete we both went back to Serafina and in the event, the rain chose not to rain on me during manoeuvres. I did as much cleaning as possible finishing with floor cleaning - resorting to a good polish with my bum seemed the easiest solution - and then going back to the hotel with Paula at lunchtime. Paula is another liveaboard from the marina who kindly gave me a lift, despite nursing a very sore tooth post-dentist herself. Rob finished all the jobs through the afternoon, only just in time before his lift arrived and he too crawled back to the room!

On our last evening we had a lovely meal at the hotel restaurant with David, Candy, Scott and Freddi, who, have all been unbelievably kind and helpful these last few days. Sadly we had to have a toast to an unsuccessful end to the Washington Nationals baseball season - they lost in the final playoffs much to Freddi's misery.

Tuesday was a long and boring day: our flight wasn't until 2040 from Dulles airport near Washington. So the morning was spent shuffling the packing in our room; the taxi got us rather too swiftly to the airport where the promised wheelchair is not forthcoming until you have checked in and the desk was shut (hardly the most practical solution) but Rob managed to find one unchained chair amongst a huge line of them outside the airport. But once you get the official chair plus pusher

life becomes very speedy - poor Rob hobbling along on his crooked knee with all our hand luggage, struggling to keep up (there wasn't an electric buggy as there weren't enough disabled people on our flight to warrant it). There is a dedicated security station for all the wheelchair users and it soon became apparent that some fliers use it as a ploy to avoid the queues as we later saw them gaily walking around duty free carrying luggage!

Although I had rung the airline and spoken to someone in India as ever, the airline didn't seem aware of my broken ankle and even less inclined to help: eventually the senior staff member on the check in desk intervened and allocated us 3 seats so I could prop my leg up having been advised that I am at risk of developing a DVT, but they couldn't carry it through to the next flight from Iceland. In fact flying with a problem was quite an eye-opener: air hostesses are definitely not the caring profession you might imagine and I am reliably informed this was not an isolated example!

We eventually got home early afternoon on Wednesday and the house was lovely and clean (well except for Ewan's chaotic and abandoned room!) and Tom had even bought lilies for me! Strangely it doesn't ever feel we have been away at all and we settled straight back in with supper with the neighbours, Tim and Pips Curtis.

Unfortunately Rob's knee has got progressively worse so he will have to see a consultant but as he points out not much can be done until I get to be more independent! I see a consultant on Monday and will know a bit more about the injury and prognosis - getting a weedy leg already..... So most of the things we had planned to do are on hold but it is great to catch up with the boys and friends and family.

Fair winds and fine sailing to all our friends and we will hope to catch up with you all in some way next spring when we will fly back to Serafina and sail some more in Maine and possibly into Canada.

### **Sick, lame and lazy.**

This is just a quick update on the state of the Bells generally!

Firstly, Serafina came through Hurricane Sandy unscathed. We were rung by David Masters (S/Y Endeavour) with suggestions of what he could do to reduce windage on deck. I am afraid I had taken my eye off the ball and presumed Sandy had headed away after Jamaica and Cuba ..... So David very kindly took down our cockpit covers and lovely new dodger, emptied the cockpit of debris and taped up round the companionway – unfortunately Serafina was stern into the direction of the hurricane. Luckily the path moved northwards and went over Delaware rather than Annapolis as originally forecast, so the winds were 'only' 65 miles per hour we believe.

It's hard to believe how much damage has been done to all those lovely places we have been to over the summer and we do really commiserate with everyone who has suffered. We were deeply relieved to hear from many of our friends who are all in the Chesapeake area, waiting to go south for the winter as soon as insurance companies let them leave the nice safe north and head south into hurricane areas.....and they have all survived intact.

Secondly, I have now seen a consultant here in the UK and had my (already weedy) ankle re-X-rayed and re-plastered. The joint is undamaged, it is only one straightforward break and there is no ligament damage to create joint stability problems. And so I will be out of plaster by the first week of December. On Monday we are hiring an automatic transmission car so that I will become mobile and Rob will be free! Yesterday, trying to be more independent I decided to try coming downstairs with my crutches (obviously I now know I am a complete idiot, but I thought that is what people

did....and one doesn't always want to be inelegantly bum shuffling in public places!) and managed to catch a crutch on the third last step and fall the rest. Rob is now speaking to me again but sympathy has definitely run rather dry!

Rob's knee is much more comfortable but it is probable that it is arthritic damage to the joint so no nice easy solution. And just as soon as he is rid of the useless wife, he will be heading off to the golf course at long last. Although all his UK clients are falling out of the woodwork with lots of work.....

This is the last blog until we go back to Serafina in the spring, so with all good wishes for Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year and thanks for the interest.

**New Year's resolution?**

**Try to be less loquacious when blogging!**