



Log Entry # – Through the Ditch One Handed or Spam... not the email variety!

Last we heard from the intrepid sailors, Michael was being flown to Panama City via a spiffy helicopter and Suzan arrived with the boat... alone, but then you know the story from our previous log.

Is this the southern port of the US?

Having arrived in Panama City to the only marina with actual docks, Suzan went immediately to the hospital to find Michael with IV in left arm, enjoying the air conditioning but not the local television mostly broadcast in Spanish... he was bored and ready to go, but the doctor kept him there 3 days and then sent us to the local hotel with a prescription for air conditioning and additional R&R before returning to MaaMa. In the meantime Suzan began to explore the fascinating city. From the sea, it looks like an early version of Hong Kong with a huge number of building cranes all around, as high rise apartments and condo's are the latest craze with rumors that it is Columbian drug money at work. The remnants of the US Army Corp of engineers are everywhere. We were fascinated at the number of buildings that had once been flourishing and well-built and are now vacant in a city that desperately needs housing! And we were surprised at the number of workers that 'commute' to Panama City from Colon, some 40 miles away and on the Atlantic side of the Coast. With the country being so narrow and rugged, the movement of goods and services from coast to coast is very time consuming and expensive.

It was in Panama City that we were to meet up with the World Cruising Club and join the Rally Around the World. Before being allowed to actually sail west into the sunset with the ARC fleet we had to prove that MaaMa was seaworthy and had all the equipment and devices required for safe ocean voyaging... never the mind we'd already done 10,000 miles just to get to Panama via Kodiak. So having been visited by an official of the WCC to conduct the safety review, it was determined that MaaMa was deficient in a couple of areas. We didn't have white smoke flares (except in the form of Michael's cigars), our US Coast Guard approved life jackets lacked crotch straps and our MOB (man overboard) did not have an approved 'drogue'. This being the case, the crew of MaaMa attached a small bucket to the MOB as a drogue and fashioned rope to each life vest which would pass unprotected through the wearer's crotch with the rejoinder to not fall overboard as it surely wouldn't be fun unless of course you were male and wanted to sing falsetto? But we were completely vexed to find white smoke flares anywhere in Panama as it seems that the local importer of flares was serving time for some illicit weapons trading and all importation of safety flares had come to a 'fizzling stop.'



Top: **Fully Loaded! Often there are 50 ships waiting.**
Bottom: **You can see 9 ships in a row.**



Pilot arrives



Lines and fenders being delivered

When opportunity strikes be sure you ask what's on the Bill of Fare

We were asked by Andrew the WCC Director if we would consider helping one of the other ARC boats make the Canal transit? Sure, *no problema* so long as a *hand-and-a-half* were enough, Michael being a one handed sailor. As is canal protocol, everyday only a handful of recreational vessels are allowed to transit with the majority of lockage space being dedicated to the transport of the world's goods. So by the time we'd arrived in PC only a few of the Rally boats had made it through, with the rest waiting in Colon for their reserved appointment to make the crossing. So it seemed to Michael and Suzan that It would be a shame for the crew of MaaMalni to have traveled so far and not to have experienced a pass through the ditch... so when offered, we jumped at the opportunity. To make a transit, all recreational boats are required to have 4 line handlers, plus the vessel's captain along with a qualified Canal Pilot, a minimum of 6 required. A number of boats in the rally did not have enough in crew to meet the requirement and so either had to hire professional line handlers or make reciprocal arrangements with another boat where they each helped the other with the

passage. In addition, each boat must have or must rent the required sized lines and fenders. Given that the requirement is for 1 inch diameter line that is 125 feet long, most recreational vessels are not so equipped and they rent their lines along with the prerequisite number of huge black tires that act as fenders during the passage.

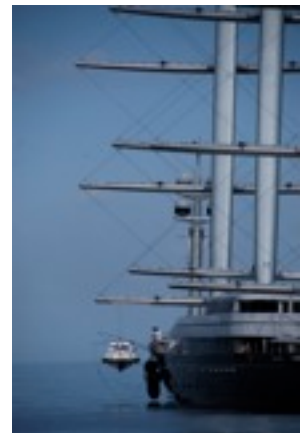
Having volunteered our services, we were assigned to meet up with the crew of *Annemare*, a Halberg Rassey 54 hailing from Hamburg Germany. So into a taxi and an hour's drive over the isthmus we arrived in the Port of Cristobol and Shelter Cove Marina where we met up with Friedrich and his crew. Our scheduled time for transit was 7pm... so after cocktails we left the marina and headed for the staging area to we pick up of our Pilot. While waiting we were treated to the opportunity to watch the Sailing Yacht *Maltese Falcon* cruise by... oh, WOW... the world's largest 3-masted, square rigged schooner recently delivered to Tom Perkins of venture capitol and Silicon Valley fame. Just as the sun was setting our pilot arrived and started with the briefing and procedure for our routing. Locking through this canal is a very different experience from that of our own Lake Washington Ship canal, which, after the Panama Canal is the second largest lock in the world. However the Panama Canal is a lot, lot bigger! To begin with, boats are rafted together in groups of two, three or four. The rafting up process is done before approaching the first lock and is followed with a retying exercise after about the first 1/2 mile of movement towards the locks to get the boats positioned just right. With a constantly changing current, this rafting



Annemare crew member Volker, a sailing master from Germany



Maltese Falcon – Longer than a football field!



See the 2 men lowering the 20 foot life boat? Puts the scale in perspective!

process can be quite the nightmare of both slack and taut lines with the chance of catching fingers in cleats... needless to say, Michael was not allowed to get close to any of the lines, but provided great insight on how to get the boats properly tied together. The process can take up to an hour. We got the lucky middle position with another german boat to starboard and an English boat to our port side. This meant that we didn't have to handle any lines but would power the boats through the locks with those outside boats doing all of the line handling...phew what a break! Now as a completed raft, we proceed into Gatlun Lock, this lock has three chambers in a stair-step arrangement quite like a fish ladder (no space between locks). Since everything can be watched live on a web-cam, we called a few friends to watch and waved arms, shorts and brassieres each according to gender. But given that it was dark, a viewer would have had a hard time making us out even if we were bare naked on deck, waving and making silly asses of ourselves... but there is a first for everything including a canal crossing.

How it works. Upon entering each lock, an onshore line handler first throws a light heaving line attached to a "Monkey Fist" to the outside boats. Our line handlers have to be careful not to get hit by the Fist, as if it were received on the head could result in sensory overload. This line is then attached to the big 1" x 125 foot lock line and drug back ashore. Recreational boats generally do not tie to the wall as is in Seattle, but rather are 'tethered' in the middle of the lock and lock lines adjusted accordingly by the boat crew to keep the yachts centered whether coming up or going down. It is the pilot who gives instructions to the handlers of the four line "points" to take up slack or give slack as the water rises or falls. After that, the experience up and down is very similar to what we experience in our locks, only the hydraulics are 10 times greater... and the currents are tremendous. After the first lock, the shore side handler releases the line and it is then pulled back aboard, but still keeping the heaving line attached so that the shore line handler can "walk" us forward to the next lock as the raft of boats motors forward into the next set of locks. The three locks raise a total of 85 feet and it takes about 2 hours to get through. A large container ship takes less time as it towed from one lock to the next by 'mules' or small but very robust train engines that use steel cables not lines to secure these huge ships.



Our Pilot with Michael – Pilots are the highest paid people in Panama. It takes nearly 20 years to get to the top position that can earn as much as \$300,000/yr.



*Top: Rafted together for the lift up
Middle: Winding our way thru the lake
Bottom: Approaching Gaillard Cut – where the mountain keeps sliding down*



Left : *Widening the canal is a challenge...*

Right: *"Going Down" – See the tourist boat behind... if you aren't on a cruise ship or your own sail boat, you can still "transit" the canal.*



Crew of Viva – Which was tied to our starboard

After passing through the first set of locks, we enter into a large freshwater lake, Lake Gatun, where the boats untie and anchor for the night and the pilot left us to go to his home for the night instead of staying onboard with us. What awaited us in the morning is a 31 mile trek around the myriad of islands in the "Lake" and then through the Gamboa Reach and the Gaillard Cut to the Pacific side and the Pedro Miguel Lock and Miraflores Locks where we were schedule to go down around noon. The Gaillard Cut is impressive and was the hardest part of the canal construction. A nine mile cut of dirt and rock some 500 feet in height... and with very unstable soil, which is evidenced by landslides that still continue. The Panamanian government is now widening and attempting to stabilize this area as well as constructing a third set of locks. The original design being no longer efficient due to the new sized ships needing passage and does not allow for reuse of the precious water both ways...water is discharged each trip, the new design will recapture water and reuse it again... thus making for a so called 'green' canal.

Part of what makes this trek interesting is that each boat is required to supply a berth and meals to the pilot and crew during the crossing. Friedrich, the German boat owner decided that if there is a woman on board, she would of course do the cooking... so the meals were prepared by Suzan. Little could he comprehend that Michael actually does most of the cooking on MaaMa. So lets say that there is a notable contrast in menu items on board a german boat than say on MaaMa. As Suzan was the only female crew, she was instructed to create a pasta dish with Spam...yes Spam! Now, as you'll recall, Americans gave up this delicacy shortly after VE Day Europe 1945...however our german captain apparently still harbored a taste for it. As for our canal Pilot, he was kind and said it was the best mac and cheese he'd ever had. *Go figure or go hungry* is all we can say. Oh, another interesting detail about this Halberg is that it does not have a freezer, only refrigeration... could this be why Spam in a can is so appealing? Breakfast was a little more conventional all be it a different experience indeed.



Friedrick – Captain of Annemare

We exited the last western locks in early afternoon and cruised under the Bridge of The Americas into Pacific waters. A pilot boat pick up our pilot with the transfer taking all of 30 seconds and he was gone and we headed for Flamenco Marina located just west of the city of Panama, out at the outer end of the long canal causeway that forms the entrance to the Pacific side of the Canal.

Breakfast of Champions or...Championship Breakfast?

Now due to advertising most will think the breakfast I'm talking about is a generous serving of Wheeties from a box featuring some steroidal sports star or action hero...No, no, no. *What in the wide, wide world of sports* we're talkin' about is a *Real* breakfast...of Beer and deep fried pig rinds...consumed while doing email at 8 am, temperature 90 degrees, humidity a-drippin...it was Suzan's inauguration into life out side of...posh...New York bistros and into the real world of how champions are really made, one beer at a time...to say the very least, she did not demure or as

Bill Clinton said, *I only inhaled...* Suzan being the proper lady we know and love, *only sipped with little finger in air!* while wailing away on the computer keyboard. Note - it was the only thing available to eat at this time of day, so there was no choice.

Are those flames painted on that taxi...or is it aflame?

Panama is a great place to provision for a long passage and we were advised that the selection would decline and the prices increase as we proceeded south and wets on our journey.... so off to the local warehouse store "Price Smart", which we think is owned by Costco as they are full of Kirkland Brand products, but they wouldn't recognize our Costco membership card. However with a US passport we were let inside and managed to buy about a thousand pounds of stuff... all in US dollars as the dollar is their national currency. Getting around Panama City entails taxi's. Not just ordinary run of the mill vehicles these... generally they are econo-boxes that are least 20 and sometimes more, years old, with dents, dirt, mildew, fleas, blue exhaust and no springs or shocks...you've got the picture. Fares, the cost of a ride is best negotiated before boarding or the price is likely to increase substantially at point of destination. So we hail a cab and load our thousand pounds of stuff into every conceivable nook and cranny... and as many of our readers know, Suzan can pack 10 lbs into a 5 lb space... along with ourselves we board the subcompact and off we go....Oh Driver, what's that smell? We insist on stopping and looking and indeed the car's frame is resting on the tires and the tires are a-smokin'. No problema! says the driver, we'll just drive slower. Well, not desiring to go up in flames for want of a second hack we commandeer the next available transferring half of the load and continue to the marina, hauling multiple loads down the gangway and a really, really, long, long dock...with NO dock carts of any sort, so this provisioning stuff is really hard in the third world, but at least we had a dock as some of our ARC members were tied out 2 or 3 boats out and we didn't have to transport everything by dinghy.

Because Michael was still recovering, we did not get out or tour much but one evening we opted for dinner in the 'old' quarter that had been the center of the city and operations during the construction of the canal. The architecture is turn of century colonial style and quite beautiful with a lot of historical restoration taking place... as such we had a wonderful meal in a 19th century building, enjoyed four courses along with a fine bottle of Chilean wine followed by double espresso's and a gooooooie desert...alas it was time to say *Good Bye Panama...Hello Ecuador!*



Michael's bandage being removed at the doctor's office. Notice the spray bottle of 'tire cleaner' on the sink edge.

Fair Winds _/) Suzan and Michael

**Where next time we ask the question
Ever done an oil change in reverse?...
If not, stay tuned!**



Suzan in the canal - It was HOT!