



Log Entry #14 – All quiet on the Western Front, or will they miss the breakers?

Robinson Crusoe should have it so good. We last left our intrepid sailors making for the Panamanian border, now with Suzan’s family onboard for an overnight passage to a small island in the western section of Panama.

Can you ever tell your siblings what to do? Yes... But not likely.

Passage making in open waters can be dangerous, but good preparation and skill mitigates the danger. When new crew comes aboard MaaMa, Suzan will spend several hours going over all the ship’s systems, safety procedures and general operating instructions. With family, its a whole other process, particularly since when we were children we grew up on a large sail boat (73 feet and many more staterooms and heads than MaaMa), but that was 35 years ago and MaaMa is quite different than Sundancer, the boat of my father’s Round the World dreams... needless to say the the briefing was truncated as ‘they’ thought ‘they’ knew all that ‘they’ needed to know... even if it was 35 years ago. As it was a pretty quiet evening and we had only about a 14 hour run, we sent everyone to bed and Michael and I quietly chatted about the previous days events...we had had a lot of fun and decided that maybe it was okay to have family around even if they didn’t want the briefing.

The next morning as the sun rose and the family was getting up we were visited by the National Park Police. While we were flying the Panama courtesy flag, I had forgotten to fly the “Q” signal flag which also doubles as the Quarantine Flag which indicates to officials that we haven’t “cleared in”. This lead to some confusing conversation in ‘Spanglish’ as we were on route to be guests on George’s islands located inside the National Park but which isn’t an official port of entry. I was able to convince the Park Police that if indeed I would check into the Port of David. Only problem was that the waters leading to David are quite shallow and there would be no way to get MaaMa up the river so to speak. George’s caretaker showed just how resourceful he was when he was able to convince the 5 various government clearing agencies required for entry to each send a representative out to the boat to do the “check in”... the procedure just required a high speed motor boat to go fetch them the 30 miles distance. So, for \$200 in fuel (which is very expensive in Panama) and then the various entry fees, we were in and did not have to leave the anchorage. Good thing we got this taken care of as the Park Police showed up again the next morning (and yes we had now forgotten to take down the Q flag), but everything was good to go.



Afternoon respite with Tish on the island



Sister Lisa being “King of the World”

Donna on the ‘local transportation’





“Entrance” to anchorage at Isla Paradita
6’ Breakers at maximum tide flow!

The fastest way is rarely a straight line

Prior to leaving the US, we had asked family to get the “secret” local information from George the island’s owner to be sure we knew how to approach the island and where to find the anchorage. After leaving the US or European waters, one of the main concerns of mariners is getting good information about harbor entrances and anchorages. Charts outside of the US and Europe are woefully poor, some using datum from as far back as the 1870’s. Needless to say, there is limited information about private anchorages and the charts never match up with GPS coordinates. I had explained to my family that while we had purchased \$10,000 worth of charts covering the areas of our cruise around the world (the 2 best electronic versions available and 1 set of paper

from the British Admiralty), that there was almost no information about Isla Paradita which was our destination. As we approached the island it was suggested that we go for the narrow passage that lead directly to the anchorage. Much to the chagrin of family, Michael decided that we should ‘go around’ even though it would take an extra 2 hours.

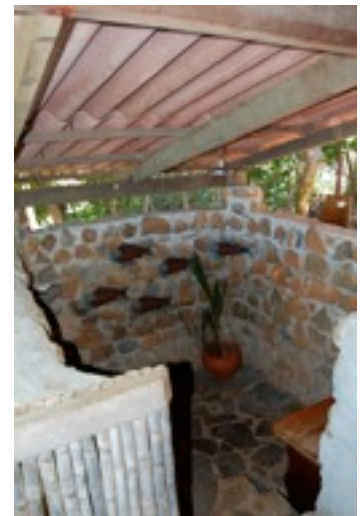
Good thing too! See the picture of the 4’ rolling breakers coming through the pass... this is not something you want to encounter on your first entrance to an unknown place. Phew! Another safe touch down... we really weren’t ready for a true shipwreck and becoming a modern day Robinson Crusoe.



A “Palapa” or bedroom

And you want to buy what?

Safely anchored it was time to explore the private island owned by an American who was looking to sell ... and which my step-mother was giving consideration to buying after having sold the family vacation house in Aspen. This trip was the opportunity for the rest of the family to take a look and see if it fit into the category of “family compound”. What a pretty island with three distinct areas. There is the north beach with the protected anchorage, the Pacific side with the Palappas (aka basic bungalow) and fabulous sunsets and then the western side which is rugged and fascinating with limited access, and then a lagoon with the crocodiles on the east side... so there is fun to be had in every part of the island. The island’s owner has made his fortune in the well drilling and water distribution business so of course there are several excellent water wells on the island, but the islands resources are limited. The National Park authorities will only allow 6 structures, so there are 4 palappas with en-suite toilet & shower, the kitchen and eating area and a laundry shack. George has had built a number of pathways carved out of rock and mangrove. It only took a couple of days... or rather a couple of hours to appreciate how difficult it must have been to construct but more importantly to maintain this infrastructure in an environment as brutal as the tropics. Power is supplied by solar panel and all supplies come from a distance of at least 30 miles if not more and all by boat. So once stocked for meals, we spent our days swimming, reading and hiking... and that’s about it, as there is little



Rustic shower



The ‘dining’ hut

Crocodile lagoon to right - looks peaceful enough

Below:
A brick pathway through the jungle - easily overtaken with jungle in a matter of months, but beautifully maintained

Farther Below:
Michael preparing lobster for dinner on the 'stove'



to do on a small private island. The caretaker caught us 8 lobsters for one meal and some fish

for another onto the barbie and fabulous meals were had! We were visiting during the dry season, the 2 seasons of the year being "dry" and "wet". Staying on a desolate island does cause you to reflect on what is



Clockwise: View from a palappa of the Pacific Beach at low tide. The family at dinner. Our hostess, Tish shopping before going to the island





really important to life... basic shelter, food, fresh water and a shower and life is good. But after 4 days on the island the 'moms' were getting anxious to talk with their children and it was time for the brood to leave. Off into the sunset... or rather the jungle as Reidar had rented a 4



The western shore is very rocky



Perfect for an afternoon nap



With solar power, Reidar is still able to work



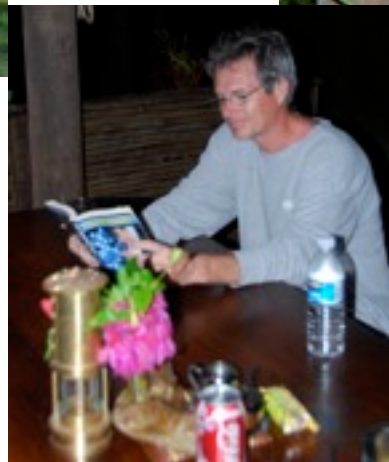
Donna in the kitchen



Dinner table set at sunset

wheel drive car to get the family back to Panama City (thru the jungle) and they were gone!

We decided to stay on in the anchorage for another day or two.... it really was a lovely island paradise. Fair Winds _/_) Suzan and Michael



Steve - left

Lisa relaxing - right

