



**Log Entry # 15 – Don't forget to look around, or next stop Panama City...**

We last left our intrepid sailors anchored in the pretty little anchorage on the north side of Isla Paradita in the western section of Panama. Panama is a long and narrow country with an extensive coast line full of small bays, large mangroves and rocky cliffs.... and difficult winds and currents.

**Who knew that we were about to find that technical manual writers would have a sense of humor**



Anchored at Isla Paradita

The family had left the private island, so we pulled up anchor and wouldn't you know it... the engine quit and refused to restart...so it goes. With the Perkins manual in hand and assistance from another yacht anchored next to us "Iwa" and 'Plan B' who communicated with us via ham radio, the crew of MaaMalni learned about one more hidden bleed point on our Perkin's engine. As we all know, the British can have a very dry sense of humor, but you generally don't expect to find it in a technical manual. While reading aloud through the engine bleed instructions and carefully following each step of opening and closing various bleed points... we get to step number 8, where the manual says and I quote *"Tighten the unions on both fuel pipes and the engine is ready for starting. In the unhappy event of the batteries becoming flattened during the above operation, look to your flare locker (did you check its contents before leaving port?)."* It took several readings of this passage as we weren't sure if the writer meant for us to shoot a flair at the engine to get it started or was it over the side to signal for help. At this point of exasperation we would have shot the flare into the bloody engine if we thought it would have produced the desired result.

Alas six hours later, we finally got 'Perky' our 87 hp Perkins up and going again, but as it was now late afternoon so we elected to stay in this beautiful little bay for yet another night. We left early the next day and sailed SW with 20+ knot winds on our port beam bound for Panama City and joining the World Cruising Club. As the sun was lowering in the west and the sky turning brilliant colors we were, once again on the lookout for fishing nets or other things that go bump... when all of a sudden this huge dark patch appears off our bow...and it was moving. What seemed at first might be a partially opened umbrella, on closer inspection turned out to be a large fin shaped as a sail... and that a sail fish was indeed sailing along using its sail... and then there was another. We never imagined that there was a reason for the name "Sailfish". And just as soon as it appeared , the pair sailed into the sunset.



Unexpected color - Isla Paradita

Turning the corner of Punta Malo into the Bay of Panama we encountered unusual currents against us. About 3 knots. We had wind to 25 knots but had to run the engine at 1400 RPM just to make 4-5 knots over ground. Usually with this kind of wind we can make at least 7-8 knots ... this was all very frustrating and



There are many uninhabited islands in western Panama - navigating is therefore more difficult with all of the shoals and reefs along the way

so we headed to the other side of the bay (some 70 miles) and the eastern coast of Panama.... which leads me to the following true story.

### **Oops, one too few fingers**

I know, I know, I know ... you never, never try to unload a boom vang under load, but I did. We were some 130 miles south of Panama City somewhere along the eastern coast of Panama very close to Columbia. I went to shake out a reef in the main sail but could not get the sail up... something was wrong and I looked at the boom vang which was impeding the upping of the main. I addressed the problem with my right hand to release the vang... it would not budge. So, not to be out done, I pulled harder and the vang released with a bang and took along with it 1/2 inch of my right index finger. @\$%!!!. I ran down to the galley, washed off the finger finding exposed bone and mangled flesh. I wrapped it in a paper towel and held it high above my heart to staunch the flow of blood.

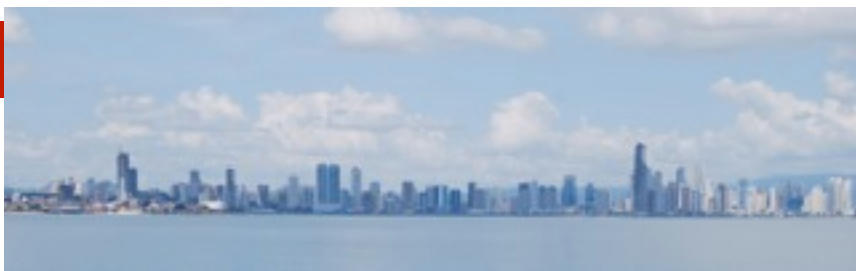
Suzan knew I was in trouble when she asked to view my severed digit... and I don't think she nor I were up for some high seas emergency surgery but she acted as though she could have handled it... So out came the medical books, the satellite telephone, charts and various travel guides. After weighing the options, Suzan called our ship's agent in Panama City and explained our medical emergency. We asked if we should divert to a small port along the Darien Provincial coast as the guide book said there was a hospital there. The agent didn't think that was a good idea and said he would arrange to have me flown out. We found a small airport shown on the chart some 15 miles distant and thought we could there in less than 3 hours. So, with the pedal to the medal we tacked MaaMa and headed north.

While this was going on, I solved the reef problem when I found that a reefing line was still locked and needed to be released. **Always Always Always** look the situation over when things are under load and won't easily release! The solution was there for the looking... now back to events.



Michael injured but still at the helm -

Approaching Panama  
City at dawn



**What are the odds that you get the *perfect guy* for the impossible mission?**

It was decided that I should go to Panama City for surgery. The agent organized a helicopter to meet us approximately 110 miles south of Panama City.... and as good fortune would allow on board was an english speaking Paris trained hand surgeon! So what do you think the odds are that when traveling in a third world that this would happen! The helicopter landed on a beach in a small cove as we rounded a point of land. The doctor came out to meet us in dugout canoe with outboard motor and took one look at my amputated finger. With Suzan handing me an overnight bag, he and I motored ashore to the waiting chopper. Just prior to lift off, the pilot told me that the boat was in a part of Panama so close to Columbia that even the Panamanian Army refused to enter... Oh great, I had left Suzan in a dangerous section of the world and alone. The agent told me that they could arrange for crew to be sent out, but it would take a while to get it organized. However Suzan being Suzan, she made the decision to start the boat and immediately head to Panama City. This she did by herself, alone. I landed in Panama City an hour later and off to hospital with my doctor and with in two hours of arrival I was in surgery. Suzan arrived next morning and docked MaaMa without a bow thruster as it was also on the fritz. What a good job she had done. Organizing the evacuation and then single handedly piloting our boat to safe harbor. I am writing this some six weeks after the event. My finger is healing quite well but I do miss the last 1/2 inch...still not typing with it and I am still being very protective until it is completely healed... I think another 2-3 weeks should do it. I am further blessed as our ARC group has three doctors, two French and one Australian who've also looked after my post surgery and healing process. I cannot say enough about Suzan and the way she handled the whole situation... hats off to her!

More on Panama to come including our helping another boat through the canal. Until next time and the start of of journey with the ARC World Rally. Fair Winds \_/\_) Suzan and Michael

**Postscript:** As you might expect, many fellow sailors have asked, "Did it hurt?"... and Michael answers "*The incident happened so fast that there was no time for hurt*"... *his body immediately reacted by going into shock and numbness going into the site of the amputation.* This state of cathartic bliss lasted about 45 minutes... but with conservative amounts of the two "V's", Vicodin and Vodka, Michael soldiered thorough and the pain reduced to that of an ouch. The finger is healing and Michael reports that skin is beginning to regain sensitivity although one point of skin, when touched, reacts as though being hit with an electric shock. We hope that this will evolve into a more positive situation.



*Above: Dr. Abrego with his family during a visit to MaaMa*

*Below: Michael recuperating in the hospital*



The private hospital that treated Michael