



THE DEEP END: A DINGHY SAILOR DIVES IN

BY CARA KUHLMAN

When I left Seattle this past April I'd never spent a night at sea. I hadn't even really ever sailed offshore. I'd never stood a watch, navigated the open ocean, or sailed through a squall. I wasn't that type of sailor.

I had sailed a lot, but on a different scale, a dinghy-sized one. In college I raced up and down the West Coast tying down dinghies on trailers, roll tacking, and rigging so often it became second nature. After six summers instructing I can quickly wrangle Optis onto a tow-line and spot a lose boom vang across the lake. Up until April I considered myself a dingy sailor, an instructor, and a racer, but not a cruiser.

By June 1st, that changed after I completed my first cruising experience, all 4,000 nautical miles of it. During 30 days offshore crossing the Pacific Ocean, I stood watch, learned about navigation, and sailed through a very large squall. I dove into the deep end as far as first passages go and am a different kind of sailor now.

The Ride

In mid-April I joined *Gal*, a Gallant

53, in San Jose del Cabo. The owner, Anna, is a family friend with over 30 years of cruising and live-aboard experience. Finally retired and running out of systems to replace, Anna decided *Gal* would head west this year, very west. For me, it was a chance to get onboard and learn about these "big boats."

Gal is a distinctive masthead ketch with striking lines. The Southern Ocean Shipyard built just twenty-two Gallant 53s in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The design entered the record books after Naomi James' accomplishment as the first woman to single-hand around the world via Cape Horn.

With my lack of experience and *Gal*'s considerable power, a third crewmember, Phil, joined us. An Englishman currently residing in California, Phil spends much of his time in La Paz, Baja California on his own sailboat. Phil was eager to try his hand at an ocean crossing, perhaps paving the way for crossing aboard his boat.

Together we made a unique trio each bringing different experience,

specialties, and aspirations. When I arrived in Mexico I hit the ground running as we finished last minute projects, over-supplied, and tied up loose ends. We had a whole ocean to get to know one another and we were eager, even antsy, to cast off.

Fridays

Despite superstition, we challenged maritime lore and left on a Friday with good breeze. For the first 24 hours, we cruised along on a close reach in 15 to 20 knots. The next morning we all were impressed by the progress we made, a small triangle creeping across the big blue map.

The wind shifted and we found ourselves sailing at a deeper angle. Anna decided to set up a preventer and repurposed the boom vang. We moved one end of the purchase system from the base of the mast and attached it to a secure point on the port side.

In the evening the wind dropped but remained in the teens; a steep cross swell sent us in and out of the breeze. Occasionally the main would collapse and rush astern, then slap back, slatting



It's all double rainbows and butterflies 'til your boom breaks.

did not want to see *Gal's* rig go anywhere and the task ahead seemed daunting.

We secured the clew with the mainsheet and traveler and attached the spinnaker halyard to the sheared off end. With everything secured we lowered the mainsail, slowly and cautiously. Just before dawn we tied down the mainsail without a single tear, and continued

securing the two pieces of the boom.

Following a brief discussion we turned east, we would head to Puerto Vallarta for repairs. Several hundred miles back to Mexico seemed miniscule compared to the greater distance *Gal* planned to travel.

All of us quickly accepted the turn of events and our sense of relief kept things lighthearted. During the day we backtracked quickly under jib and jigger. That night, I stood my first solo watch as we motored, the wind light and our precious diesel now expendable.

Following the boom repair in La Cruz, north of Puerto Vallarta, we did a test sail on Banderas Bay. Everything checked out and so we continued sailing west and departed from Mexico again, this time on a Sunday.

By Degrees

Over the next couple of weeks, degrees defined everything. As we covered more distance, we watched the coordinates tick in the right direction. We lusted for lower latitudes. Time had a different meaning and the days flew by even though the hours seemed slow. It never quite felt like a routine but looking back it varied little: Stand watch, read, eat, and sleep with some Sudoku puzzles thrown in.

The wind came and went, blurring between days and sail adjustments. In bigger breeze, *Gal* charged ahead, disregarding her crew's comfort. When the wind dropped off and the sails began slatting we remained on edge, but the boom repair held.

Major breakdowns behind us, there remained other challenges such as losing the head for several days and constant spills in the galley. We mitigated the frustrations as best we could with fresh baked cookies, movies, and delicious dinners.

loudly against the rig. The sharpness and severity of the sound made it seem like the boat would fall apart.

Early on the third morning an extra loud snap and shudder came. Half awake, I heard Anna approach my bunk and calmly say, "Cara, we are going to need you on deck, we have a broken boom."

Boom, Boom, Boom

Nearly everyone has a breakdown; it is a long and demanding passage. The Pacific makes an imprint the vessel won't forget soon. Some breakdowns are unavoidable, others the result of human error.

After the fact, Anna announced that she should never have used the boom vang as a preventer. Each time the main sail slatted, it strained against the makeshift preventer connected to the boom about three feet from the gooseneck. After hours of this, the 35-year old aluminum boom broke clean through.

I arrived on deck to a dark night, a large luffing main sail, and winds still in the teens. Anna appeared exhausted but briefed me on the situation; our first priority was to drop sail. It was hard to see but she feared the broken edge of the boom might catch on the standing rigging.

I'd seen a Flying Junior's 25 foot mast drop in heavy winds, recovered several screwed up Optimist rigs against an ebb tide, and rescued numerous overwhelmed dinghy sailors. I



The author is still able to smile despite the breakdown. The crew carefully worked to get the two parts of the boom secured and the sail down without any sail damage.



Unpredictable weather comes fast and furious in the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone.

Big vs. Little

Early on Anna joked, "Cruising is just boat maintenance underway." Watching her and Phil work on fuel lines, alternator adjustments, and pump repairs, I believed her. Without much boat repair experience, I could only offer a good attitude and an extra pair of hands, which they often needed. Instead, I contributed to the passage in a different way because of my different experience.

Anna and Phil agreed one of my strengths was communication underway, the result of sailing with lots of people and teaching sailing. Phil often sailed his boat alone so talking through a maneuver, such as gybing, was new to him but essential to me. Anna and I mastered reefing with practice and adding verbal cues.

Sailing on a bigger scale took some adjusting. The weather three boat lengths and 15 minutes away no longer mattered. We cared about what lay several miles away or 72 hours out. The equipment is scaled up too, with larger winches, lines, and sail area.

While the others mastered all of *Gal's* systems below I took on something else I know well: sail trim. As a racer I'd been forewarned we wouldn't adjust the sails very often but with shifty conditions we kept a

close eye on them. I tried to find the most efficient and comfortable way to sail *Gal* on every point of sail we encountered, sometimes with more success than others.

The technology aboard astounded me; there are a lot fewer screens on dinghies. *Gal* had a touch screen navigation system with two control panels and several observation screens throughout the boat.

The computer on board took the weather data downloaded over the radio and applied it to open source navigation software with Google Earth screenshots available. We kept a paper chart on the table for nostalgia because, like many sailors, we shared the dream of sailing around the world, or at least part of it.

Temperamental Trades

Even with hundreds of miles behind us, I felt intimidated by how much distanced remained, including crossing through the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). Each boat is dealt a different hand in this finicky, shifting zone where the northeast and southeast trade winds converge. Some vessels may spend days without wind while others are pummeled with squalls or experience a combination of both.

After crossing 10°N, incoming weather data showed a large low pressure region called a "monsoon trough" south of our location. That night, Anna remained jumpy, popping out into the cockpit more than usual during my watch. Eventually she admitted, "I'm just nervous." Me too. The unpredictable nature of the ITCZ makes it a challenge all its own.

Not long after night fall, the first squall appeared, taking the stage and demanding attention. Within a few hours colorful blobs littered the radar screen. We maneuvered through the minefield of squalls taking advantage of wind shifts. They continued, relentlessly marching in from top of the radar screen and painfully, slowly crossing past us. It was like playing Pac-Man for hours on end, eyes straining to follow the blobs and avoid them with just the right turn.

The next morning, the weather didn't improve but daylight diminished the intensity a bit. The frequent rain soaked us all in turn, cleaned *Gal's* decks, and cooled things. To my astonishment, after such a long and shocking introduction to squalls we were only at 8°N, almost 500 nm from the Equator.

We were given one night of respite with only a few squalls passing in the distance. Over the next couple of days the wind increased and decreased, shifting and sputtering as we moved through different weather systems. From across the water the storm clouds were dramatic and awe-inspiring, as long as they stayed over there.

One night, the forecast called for scattered thunderstorms 70 nm west of our location but calm at our coordinates. We tempted our luck by turning on a movie. Before Denzel Washington could save the day, a squall came up around us. The wind rose from a sustained 25 knots to 40 knots with gusts above.

The downpour darkened the already dark sky, but thankfully without any sign of thunder and lightning. We changed course several times in attempts to avoid the densest part of the storm or get a better point of sail. After several hours the chop built and we headed up slightly to try for a smoother struggle.

I learned about the "blind spots"

on radar. For us they occurred directly behind the boat, when the boat heeled significantly, and the heavy rain limited the radar's range. We rotated turns in the cockpit, warming up below and monitoring a few small porthole leaks.

Down below I watched the radar religiously, looking for any new information or opportunities. We were pounding along with the storm 4 miles in every direction and it felt like we'd be there forever. Then I saw it; a gap off to port, maybe a lull or kinder conditions.

I consulted Phil and we concluded that the gap really existed, not a result of the radar's limitations. We tested it by turning off course slightly and the gap still appeared on the radar. Anna listened to what we had found and we all agreed to head for it. It still took us a couple hours to beat our way out, but we cleared the most intense part of the storm and finally got moving again.

I stood watch for another hour so Anna could rest. We had been in the squall five hours, as best we could tell it was 8 or 10 nm wide. *Gal* had sailed soundly, but down below things were terribly jumbled and damp.

The morning after, the ocean barely moved and the glassy surface remained eerily calm. We turned on the engine and set up the awning turning the once-soaked cockpit into a lounging paradise with cushions and pillows. We soaked in the sun, read for hours, and unwound. The squall still dominated our conversation but by 4°N we started obsessively counting down the days, hours, and arc minutes to 0°00'00.

Expectations and Communication

Crossing the Equator turned out to be anticlimactic but wonderful in its own way. A proper equatorial crossing celebration had been part of Anna's dream since she beginning the trip. There would be champagne, boas, festive attire, and of course we all pictured it warm and sunny.

Instead, at the end of a gray and overcast day Anna steered *Gal* across the equator under sail, the tail end of twilight giving everything a dusty, rosy look. After heaving-to, it quickly got dark, dinner plans were abandoned, and we just star gazed for about 20 minutes. Falling back off, we continued

on at a good pace angling farther West with a phosphorescent glow in *Gal's* wake.

It took nine more days to reach Nuku Hiva, the largest island in the Marquesas. Approaching the green, steep slopes of the island felt unreal. Lumpy and jagged both apply to the landscape, like someone coloring in sharp angles but boldly going outside the lines. I perched on the bow as we rocked and rolled through the swell, *Gal's* stern sashayed through the waves.

During the passage I expected to feel lost, sea sick, and at times overwhelmed. I expected there would

be fun days and dreary ones. I expected not knowing what would come next. All of these expectations were fulfilled.

Over my five weeks aboard *Gal* there were plenty of surprises from the boom breaking, our experience in the monsoon trough, and spending very little time sailing downwind. Upon reaching French Polynesia our trip took another unexpected turn. After making landfall in Nuku Hiva our journey together as *Gal's* crew came to an end.

Each crew situation is unique. The dynamic and experience depends on the boat, the agenda, the personalities, and the needs of the captain. Following

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Where to read 48°N? Why, on a boat on the ocean, of course!

Anna chose to sail the next leg solo. We had drinks together one last time before I departed.

After leaving Nuku Hiva I visited boats and met crew from all over the world; Israel, Turkey, South Africa, Canada, and fellow Pacific North westerners. Cruising is like a global gathering wandering from one tropical haven to the next.

One day in Tahiti, I spied dinghies from the beach. Fleets of Optimists and Hobie 16s racing with the stunning silhouette of the neighboring island Mo'orea in the background. I was so excited to see these familiar boats and longed to be on the water with them.

A few hours later near the marina, I watched a 40-foot sailboat come into the marina after island hopping for months. Her canvas was softened from the sun, jerry jugs lined the rails, and

the crew prepared to dock with the ease of routine. I longed to greet them and hear stories over cockpit cocktails, lend a hand for the ever-present projects, and be back onboard.

I am a different kind of sailor now, a bit saltier yet also still curious. There is always more to learn. It makes no difference the LOA, sail configuration, or equipment; all types of sailors benefit from experience. I plan to continue sailing and experiencing as much as possible on any size boat.

-48°N

Cara is a Seattle-based writer and sailor who is always eager to share a good story, especially over a beer. After growing up in the San Francisco Bay area she migrated north first to the University of Oregon, then to Seattle and sailed all along the way. This summer, she sailed at Sail Sand Point with the J24 and J80 fleets.

**S/V "Gal," Anna, and Phil's names have been changed.*

a long discussion while drifting in Gal's 8-foot dinghy, we determined it was time to part ways. Phil and I made arrangements to disembark early and

PNW Boats and Sailors Representing at the *Latitude 38* Tahiti-Mo'orea Sailing Rendez-vous!

The 10th Annual Tahiti-Mo'orea Sailing Rendez-vous took place June 19-21st as the season for Pacific Ocean crossings wraps up. *Latitude 38 Sailing Magazine* organizes the 3-day event along with Tahiti Tourisme and various marine partners based in the United States, French Polynesia, and New Zealand. With cocktails, a casual race, and Polynesian traditions the event introduces sailors to Tahitian culture and to one another.

The Tahiti-Mo'orea Sailing Rendez-vous is part of *Latitude 38's* "Pacific Puddle Jump," a loosely organized rally for sailboats crossing from the Americas, with most boats kicking off in Puerto Vallarta or the Galapagos. The PPJ hosts informational seminars, facilitates fleet communication, and helps sailors sign up with Tahitian yacht agents. In 2015 more than 200 boats from around the world registered for the PPJ. Over 30 of those vessels hail from Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.

Several Northwest boats also attended The Rendez-vous including *Lorien*, a Panda 38 from Bellingham, WA whose crew welcomed me aboard for the 20-mile crossing from Pape'ete to Cooks Bay in Mo'orea. *Lorien* and their Bellingham buddy *Kookaburrra*, an Island Packet 370, both broke their booms during the crossing. Although the separate incidents and damaged differently, the "Bellingham Boom Boom" boats were both able to get the necessary repairs in Pape'ete and continue west with The Rendez-vous.

The "casual" race from Pape'ete to Mo'orea is the main event, and migration, of The Rendez-vous. This year, the catamarans started first around 10 am local time and monohulls started approximately 20 minutes later. The cruisers experienced exciting conditions with winds from 20-26 knots and choppy seas. Clouds hovered Mo'orea obscuring the very tops of the island's dramatic peaks but couldn't diminish the lush, tropical green mountainsides.

Before long the crew of *Lorien* and I bundled up in fleeces and rain shells over our tank tops, shorts, and tans. Sailing under reefed main and staysail, *Lorien* clipped along comfortably making 6-8 knots. Once we crossed into the lee of the island, the wind dropped significantly and we came to a halt with the rest of the fleet. Nearby two local fishermen on a small tender bobbed dramatically in the chop. They smiled and held up their fresh catch, a large tuna, for us to see.

The two channel markers at the entrance to the bay marked the finish line and the wind returned, funneling through the deep bay and perking *Lorien* back up. Right as we sailed towards the finish and prepared to smile for the photo boat, the gray clouds came closer and it began to pour. I couldn't help but laugh as I ducked under the dodger. This far around the world, I'm still sailing with my fellow Washingtonians in the rain!

- Cara Kuhlman

SANTA CRUZ 27 NATIONALS: SUMMER VACATION, SCHWENK-STYLE!

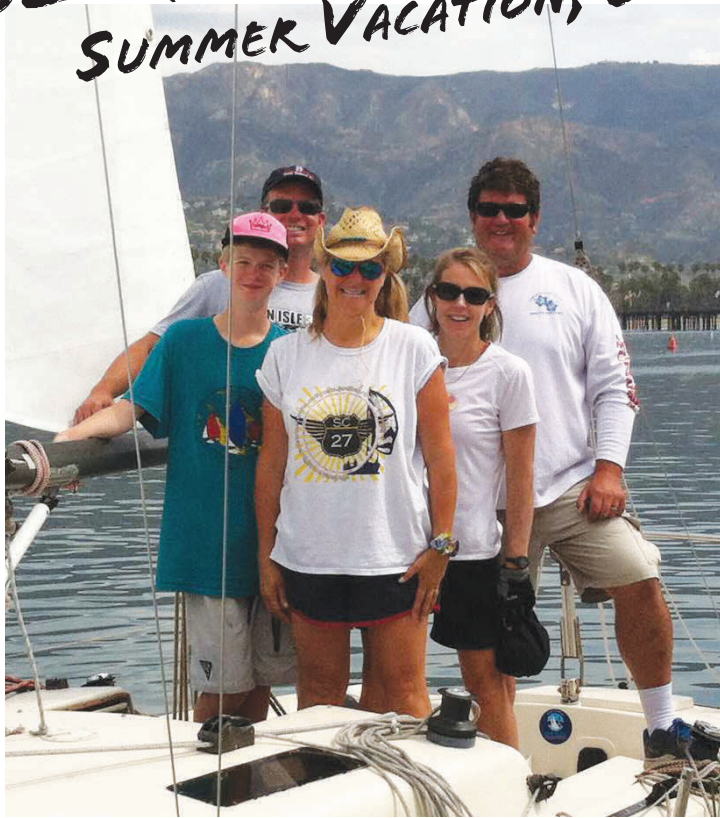
I started sailing in 1978, and I can say what a long, strange trip it's been. This article is primarily about my family's summer vacation, during which we won the SC-27 National Championship. Of course, it was more than that. We would never have been as successful without the help of friends, sailmakers, and Les Schwab.

We intended to leave Friday July 10th, but due to numerous delays we actually left Monday, July 13th. Our homeport is Anacortes, WA and our destination was Santa Barbara YC for their annual Fiesta Cup. The SC-27s would have the water to themselves Friday, and would share it with Vipers, J-70s, and Harbor 20s on Saturday and Sunday.

We hauled the boat a week before we left. Our trailer is equipped with pads that can be individually lowered so we were able to get the bottom in shape down to a final sanding with #400 grit wet sandpaper. The usual blisters and the smooth spot where we used the keel as a fathometer off Spanish Banks outside of Vancouver were still visible, but the road was calling so we called it good.

PHRF Northwest measures sails a little differently from the SC-27 fleet, so we have a certain spinnaker that conforms to one design class rules and we save our best genoa for regattas like this. We waxed the mast and buffed the topsides and made sure we had all class equipped gear, and of course all the safety items. This regatta required life jackets at all times. We shimmed some wobble in the tiller with aluminum scraps from our favorite beverage and felt the boat was as ready as it could be.

Our family truckster, a 2003 GMC Yukon, went in for a service. Meanwhile, we checked over and secured the trailer pads, hitch, and



By ANDY SCHWENK

spare. The mast was lashed to the boat, and the boat lashed to the trailer. We liberally spread dish soap over the front of everything to catch the bugs. It can be easily rinsed off, and works great unless it rains. Thankfully, it did not on our trip.

Our merry band spent the first night at a Motel 6 in southern Oregon. The next morning, I stepped out to greet the day on the second floor overlooking the boat, feeling fairly proud to have a terrific wife and family doing a road trip and having fun. The man in the next room stepped out for a smoke with an electronic monitoring device on his ankle, but it didn't dampen my spirits a bit.

Next stop, sunny California! We wound through the Siskiyou and saw where Lake Shasta used to be. They are building a brand new bridge across it even though you will soon be able to ford it without getting your ankles wet. Thanks be to Jah for air conditioning and electronic wizardry to keep my two teenage boys entertained. We spent the second night at a state campground that has the same name as a state beach,

and "Siri", the voice on the GPS, got a little tangled up in her underwear for several minutes. The friendly park ranger that came to chase everyone off the beach and lock the gate was able to direct us further down the endless gray asphalt ribbon to our campsite. I'm thinking that on the 8th day, God must have invented Therm-a-Rests®. My body, which was happy to sleep on the dirt during my US Army Ranger training days, just isn't as able to find comfort on Terra Firma anymore. Back to Motel 6 and a soak in the pool for the third night on the road.

We rolled into SBYC and I can tell you there are a lot of pretty people in California and they wear

much less clothing at regattas than the PNW crowd does at, let's say, 'Round the County. I made an effort to concentrate on the process of safely launching the boat rather than being distracted by tan lines. Santa Barbara is a cornucopia of boating activity with SUPs, kayaks, jet skis, commercial fishing boats, cruisers, oh and yes, sailboats of every description.

The SBYC has a beautiful clubhouse literally right on the beach and they start Wednesday night racing promptly at 5pm. Doesn't anyone have jobs in this state? The SBYC clubhouse quickly became our base of operations. The drinks were tall and cool, food delicious, and the staff cordial and accommodating.

The crew rolled into town Thursday evening. Kathryn Brunette-Harang was our foredeck goddess. Ward Naviaux, my pal from the 2014 DH Pac Cup, was the pit boss and cooler monkey. My son Dylan and Kathryn's son Erik worked the mid deck. My first (and only) wife Steph manned the tiller. And, I pulled on the sheets when directed to do so.