

# Log of the *HILDE M<sup>2</sup>*



Vol. 1, No. 6

Issued by the Admiralty, Accokeek, Maryland

November 30, 1986

THIRD INSTALLMENT of Major Adventure #1. As indicated earlier, the story was written in longhand "on the spot" and then typed in Puerto Rico. P.S. This evening the HM<sup>2</sup> departed SJ for Jost Van Dyke.

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"PASSAGE 1, DAY 16 (THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13). This morning I invented a new nautical saying that B will understand: "A sunshiny squall won't last hardly at all". But it wasn't true in our case. It blew strongly enough to make me pull in most of the genny until noon. Noon sights were impossible again but loran put us at 23,01.23N; 68,11.63W making the day's run close to 175 degrees when I had expected something like 160. We just make an awful lot of leeway when we're heeled over, even though there's the feeling of moving faster. Obviously the ride would be easier with less sail as well.

"I tried a brief tack to the NE again but soon reverted to the old 160 heading, always pinching as close to port as possible and hoping for a more easterly slant. I wanted to stop the scopoderm today but queasiness crept in around the edges and I put another patch on. More cottonmouth, drowsiness, and distaste for food, etc. We put in lots of hours at 4 knots or so during the day. That evening we pounded along under a brilliant moon. I had planned a full moon for the approach to the islands figuring any breaking reefs would be easy to see and avoid at night. At 10 PM we had a ship in sight crossing our bow about 2 miles off.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 17 (FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14). The early morning brought some of those high wispy clouds that are supposed to predict bad weather ahead but our barometer was hanging steady at 32". At noon my sights agreed pretty well with the loran. We'd made good 96 miles at 170 degrees putting us about 200 miles NW of Dorado, PR. In the afternoon the wind gradually moved more to the NE allowing us to move 140 degrees for the first time in more than two weeks.

"We ran through a brief shower about 3:13 PM. If I had thought about it I'd have gone up for a welcome fresh water rinse-off. With stronger wind in the evening we slammed along showing 135 glorious degrees sometimes but making lots of leeway. Regular pumping of the bilge had risen from about 15 to around 25 strokes per hour -- not bad considering the pounding we had taken over the two week period. The moon was perfect again.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 18 (SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15). This morning I saw the first seagull in a couple weeks but the wave action was enough to keep me in the bunk most of the time. Still making 140 - 150 degrees. Noon fix showed 97 miles made good at 150. Hooray! At this rate we should see the Culebra Light Sunday night. Around 2 PM I was putting water in the "sun-shower" (a 2.5 gallon vinyl bag, clear on one side and black on the other, that heats water admirably in sunny weather and delivers a nice shower when hung in the rigging) for a luxurious wash-down and shampoo when a special wave thumped the port bow and sent about a gallon under the dink on the cabin roof and through the partly opened hatch there right on my bunk. Great shot! I could change sheets but the mattress pad can't be used until it has been washed and dried.

"This got me thinking about diverting into San Juan tomorrow night. It should be about 12 hours closer and a slightly better run with eased sheets. I could then skip St. Thomas which I don't particularly like as a cruising stop anyhow) and tack past it to Tortola, BVI. Also I was betting the cost of getting back in cruising shape would be a lot less there (true, true). So I altered course for SJ with a happy heart and the HM<sup>2</sup> immediately sailed better.

"After showering I felt much better but I figured the non-sticky feeling wouldn't last long. Sure enough, during a look around at 9 PM I discovered the starboard forward shroud was slack. A wet trip forward showed that the rigging screw didn't have cotter pins to keep it from loosening. By the time I had it tightened and cotted I was as soaked with spray as ever but the potentially dangerous situation was fixed.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 19 (SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16). I woke up at 3 am and found us headed NW at less than 1 knot. Don't know how long this had been going on, probably not long, but it would mess up my dead reckoning. It was hard to get us turned around and headed SE again. We ended up moving at 1.5 knots steering by hand in light variable wind. By 5 AM I had the tiller lashed again, trying to lay 140 - 150 degrees to compensate for the earlier drift to W.

"My reckoning put us about 40 miles N of SJ. I set the watches one hour earlier for Caribbean time and celebrated by whipping up scrambled eggs for breakfast – the eggs were still OK after 10 days with no ice. At 10 am I shook the double reef out of the main for the first time in a week and that meant experimenting with the tiller lash-up until we were balanced to lay our course again. I saw a lot of flying fish skimming the waves this morning, but none landed on deck. Mold was growing on nearly everything on the boat.

"I've been naked most of the time but will have to wear shorts for the LAN sights today; I got a touch of sunburn on my butt yesterday. I've coped with the sun mostly by staying below much of the time during the day. I'm hearing about a dozen Spanish speaking FM stations on my little walk-man radio but I still can't pick up the SJ RDF beacon on the frequency shown on the chart. (Learned later the frequency and signal had been changed.)

"Our noon position was 19,12.21N; 66,06.33W, about 47 miles due N of SJ and a little further out than my earlier reckoning. We headed 180 degrees but found ourselves pinched by the wind which swung SE just to be contrary. An absolutely gorgeous sunset unfolded over about an hour. Not one you could describe easily, but a spectacular show because of some isolated thick clouds to the SW. A huge swell from the NE was running but there were no waves to speak of.

"We moved south on the light evening air, watching the sky unfold and listening to Gunot's Faust on the local public radio station with commentary en Espanol, while eating corned beef hash right from the frying pan. Looks like we'll get in tomorrow sometime unless the wind cooperates. We're at its mercy and it has decided to give us a lesson in patience and fortitude. Wish B were here and hope she's not worrying too much while we coast along.

"The wind shut down completely at 6 PM and the boat swung around to the N headed into the swells. I got her back around with great difficulty and tried hand steering for awhile, but the breeze was too light for any real progress. The lights of SJ are spread out on the southern horizon. At 8 PM we just drifted along waiting for a breeze. Tricks of refraction made the lights seem to advance or recede in a disconcerting way. We tried to head for a 6 second flashing white light which the chart indicated marked the starboard side of the harbor entrance. The group flashing red 40 second light atop El Morro was nowhere to be seen. A 40 second light is ridiculous against all the lights of this huge city.

"PASSAGE 1, DAY 20 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17). At 2 AM a light breeze came up -- from due S exactly where we need to go. It's incredible. Impossible, of course, to try to enter the narrow channel under sail with the swell producing 30 and 40 foot spray on the headlands. We gradually tacked a bit closer and watched a procession of ships enter the harbor about 6 AM. About 8:45 I AM screwed up my courage for a try. I called Coast Guard station San Juan on the VHF radio to tell them I was entering with no power, but they didn't respond. Both a CG helicopter and a launch were in sight at the time. I chickened out and turned tail back to the N. The swell seemed too strong and the breeze too light to give me reasonable control .

"About 10:30 I approached again with slightly better breeze. This time I called San Juan Port Control who answered promptly and directed me to proceed as there was no other traffic. The entrance was spectacular with waves dashing against the rocks just to port, but we went well at 1.8 knots with wind on the port quarter as we slipped around the battlements of El Morro and into the harbor. We moved along at between 1 and 2 knots with only the main and stay-sail set and tacked repeatedly to work our way around to the left into the San Antonio Channel and the anchorage area near the Club Nautico de San Juan in Santurce.

"The only problem was a Chandris Lines cruise ship that was leaving the docks with assistance of tugs. She kept turning when it seemed she should be steaming out the channel and I just wasn't sure how to deal with her. Port Control came to my rescue and told me to tack past her port side to clear the channel down into the main harbor. Apparently they were taking her to a shipyard for repair. With no further complication I short-tacked down to the anchorage area and dropped the hook about 1:45 in the afternoon.

"After emotional regrouping and a short sag I got the dinghy off and rowed to the San Juan Fishing Center to arrange for three days at the dock. We couldn't have longer as they were closing the dock for major rebuilding, but at \$35 a day I couldn't afford it anyway. I inquired about a canvas shop (none, apparently) and a mechanic (several suggested) and returned to the HM<sup>2</sup> to set up the dink with the outboard to push us to the dock. Incredibly the Seagull started on the second pull and got us quite smoothly from the anchorage to the dock. In a slow motion crash landing I cut the outboard, leaped back on the HM<sup>2</sup> and raced forward just in time to ward off from a huge cabin cruiser and throw lines to a couple of fellows from nearby boats. About 5:30 we were snugly tied up bow-to and plugged into shore power. Whew!

"It wasn't 'til 8:15 that I could call B. I got her as she came in the door at home I believe. What a welcome phone call for both of us! She had heard nothing from the CG and had been worried because we were at least a week overdue. We've generally made fast passages in the past and she was sure we were in trouble. So much for the U. S. Coast Guard. We'd made it to San Juan, almost whole, the HM<sup>2</sup>, Alice the aloe plant, and me. Now began the days of work cleaning up and getting back in sailing trim. But that's another story....



The *Hilde M<sup>2</sup>* peacefully at anchor in Santurce, San Juan Puerto Rico