

Log of the *HILDE M²*



Vol. 1, No. 8

Issued by the Admiralty, Accokeek, Maryland

December 20, 1986

COMMUNICATIONS IMPROVE.... Several phone calls help keep and the rest of the family calm while we enjoy a family wedding and Thanksgiving feast and get ready for Christmas. Please note the request on bottom of page 5.

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SECOND LETTER FROM THE CAPTAIN. Here's the story of what happened after they (Karl, the *Hilde M²* and Alice the aloe plant) arrived in San Juan. Written in Road Town, Tortola, BVI, it's dated December 6.

"Dear Everybody: The first boatlet got Alice the aloe and me to San Juan on Monday, November 17. We've had a busy 3 weeks or so since then, so I'll try to catch up. Sorry it's been this long between letters, but other things keep getting in the way of setting up the computer and keying it all in. The actual writing is done in snatches here and there, so tenses may sometimes get fouled up, but I hope you'll understand. One reason I seem to get less done these days is that I've sort of gone native and tend to get up and go to bed with the sun.



The computer (when electricity was available) let me print broadcast weather maps – and write up the voyage.

"In SJ the first job was to wash everything on the boat. Unless you get the salt water out nothing will dry properly. 12 loads of laundry went through the lone washer and dryer at the marina. It wasn't the washing that was tough, it was the folding and repacking of everything in the duffle-bags with new plastic trash can liners (to more nearly waterproof them for future) that just about did me in. Fortunately there was lots of water at the dock so I was able to hose down nearly everything on the boat, pumping it back out through the bilge. Three days at the dock gave me time enough for the swabbing and re-stowing, but only if I worked at it all day and late into the night.

"Even now, 3 weeks later, I'm still finding spots that I missed. I'd have been rich if I had a sales outlet for mold. It was growing on everything, including me. It's a good thing we had marked all the canned goods. Their labels, those that remained, were mostly unreadable after their salt water and fresh water baths. Now the cans are rusting slowly and it's a race to see if I can eat 'em before they completely go.

"One other job was getting the engine back in commission. That turned out to be fairly simple. I tried cranking it (after recharging the batteries with shore power) with no luck. Fortunately the mechanic, Sr. Saturnino Fernmaint, was able to breathe life into it using a spray can of ether after he checked the injectors. A couple reluctant groans and she coughed into life and has run apparently normally ever since. That's a trick I'll never forget! I wanted to have him check and adjust the valves but couldn't find a dealer with the necessary gaskets and parts in SJ, so that's still on the list if I ever find both the parts and the mechanic.

"Thursday I moved the boat back to the anchorage. In most ways it was more pleasant -- quieter and more private -- but I missed the convenience of water, power, and ease of access. Every trip ashore in the dinghy takes expedition-style planning. If you're going to do the laundry you must take the soap and bleach as well as the dirties and the coins to feed the machines, and a carrying bag to bring back ice, etc. etc. Some days I had to make extra trips because of something forgotten and other days I stayed on the boat because it seemed such a waste of time getting organized to go anywhere.

"While at the dock I had gotten in the habit of having at least one meal a day ashore in one of the nearby restaurants along Avenida Ponce de Leon. The food there was good and fairly inexpensive. A good Pollo al Horno dinner with rice and beans came to \$4. An outdoor food bar (they called it a cafeteria) served 2 eggs, ham, toast, and juice or coffee 'til 11 AM for \$.99 and the Iberia Delly across the street made absolutely huge subs for \$1.75 - \$2.50. At anchor I dropped back to a meal out every other day or so. One night I had a really big bash and followed with a meal at my favorite little Hirammar Restaurant with a movie at the Fine arts Cinema: "A Room with a View". It was an amusing period piece set in the late 1800's in England and Italy. All of this was within a couple blocks of the marina.

"Combined with most of my trips ashore were stops at the Pueblo supermarket for more supplies. I stocked up on as much as I could (and, boy, am I glad I did there -- prices in the BVI are more than double on most items and many are unavailable), picking up a dozen cans or so at a time for the trip back by dink. I managed to replace what I had consumed and then some.

"The care package B sent by USPS arrived on the first Friday -- super service, but the letters that went out about the same time never arrived in the 10 days or so before I left. In the area of practical finance I had no problem cashing travelers' checks but the American Express cash advance deal really amounts to having them cash a check. Problem is I didn't bring any, not thinking they could be used. (Editor's note: He's now received our second package, including checks.)

"I took a few hours off the first Saturday for an excursion to Rio Piedras and a huge shopping mall called Plaza Las Americas. It was just like the larger ones back home, about 190 stores including Sears, J. C. Penney, and Woolworth. I was looking for a Radio Shack to get a cable to replace a faulty one for the computer. Also bought some supplies to try to reclaim some of the 60 or so cassette tapes that got ruined in the flood. (Ed.: He was able to reclaim at least some of them.)

“A sailor from Bequia, who was replenishing funds by working on various boats, did a really fine handstitch repair of our cockpit dodger. It doesn't fit well (never did, unfortunately) and leaks a bit, but it is serviceable until I can find a canvas shop to make up a replacement somewhere along the way. Alick, my canvas working friend, is an interesting guy. A Black islander, he has crewed on several tall ships and just recently returned from a windjammer trip to Baltimore, New York (for the festivities on the Fourth), and New England.

"Other casualties of the trip down took time. I ordered a replacement pendulum rudder for the Aries wind-vane from England to be sent to Tortola, BVI. The Tillereaster is definitely dead, though I spent hours trying to bring it around. I still haven't been able to get it packed up and sent to California for repair, and I sorely missed it on the trip over to BVI.

"The ham radio rig is not loading the antenna properly and its memory functions are not working. It's receiving but I can't get a signal out. Spent two days trying to track down a shop to test and repair it with some false leads but no success. The man in one electronics shop said there are few amateurs in PR due to a heavy tax on equipment and it must be true. I identified a half dozen 2 meter repeaters but only found one that ever had any traffic during the several days I listened, and I never had a response to calls I made. Of course, I'd have had better luck calling en Espanol...

"Deck work included filling and caulking a number of possible leak sources including a huge crack at the port scupper. That hole alone had been responsible for 50% of the water below deck. I'm sure I didn't get 'em all and I'm not anxious for another real test. One big job involved pumping water and sludge from the bottom of the main fuel tank and getting rid of about 3 gallons of the stuff. The marina wouldn't take it and neither would the one nearby gas station. I finally made a highly illegal trip at 2:30 AM to a field (actually the edge of a civil airport) bordering the harbor and dumped it in a hole and covered it.

"The highlight of my second week in SJ was the big Thanksgiving Day phone call. It was great to talk to everyone gathered at our house for the traditional feast. Naturally, I was sad to miss being with them just as I had been sorry to miss the wedding of my niece, Heidi Wald, a few days earlier. As I said, this cruising is not ALL peaches. In fact, it can get pretty damn lonely.

“The letdown after the call was chased away (temporarily) by going with Alick and Paul (another single-hander) to a nearby bar that caters to merchant seamen. They had a really nice turkey dinner with all the trimmings -- all free. I talked with several interesting sailors there, including one of the proprietors who had sailed on tall ships for many years. If you get to Santurce, look up the Port O'Call on Avenida Ponce de Leon and ask for Jim or Carmen. They are good people.

"The last several days in SJ were basically waiting for mail and a good weather prognosis. Many small jobs got done, and I took some time again on Saturday for sightseeing and photography. I even bought some postcards and sent them off like a regular ole tourist.

"We finally got a good weather report on Sunday afternoon the 30th, and I decided to move on without the mail. I scrambled fast to make ready before high tide at 7 PM. As always, nothing is as simple as it should be. Getting the dinghy back on board after the last minute trip to the dock to call B should have

been a 5 minute chore. This time it came aboard with zillions of tiny crustaceans attached. The bottom looked and felt like a coarse grindstone. It took an hour of hard work to get it scraped off and washed down. The moral: don't leave the dink in the water for more than a day or two at a time -- or put bottom paint on it!"

PASSAGE 2: "Anyhow, we got away from the anchorage about 7 in the evening with the promise of lighter than usual trades from the SE. For once, NOAA delivered on its promise and we had a good trip without most of the usual bashing to windward between PR and the Virgins. Essentially, we made a long starboard tack to the NE and a somewhat shorter port tack back to the SE, putting us just N of St. Thomas about 9 PM. Monday evening. Another nine hours were spent in two shorter tacks under reduced sail so that we could clear the unlit pass between Tobago Island and Jost Van Dyke in the daylight.



Approaching the West end of Tortola

"We were safely anchored in Great Harbor, Jost Van Dyke, at 8:30 AM. The breeze off the island smelled like jasmine, and the steep green mountainside seemed to drop right into the electric blue water. I couldn't believe I'd made it to the Virgins until I had jumped into the water and let it soak in, while I looked at the boat and the island. Sanity returned after I hollered and climbed back aboard, and I got ready to row ashore and clear customs in the proper sedate manner.

"Customs was painless. I found later that I had been wise and fortunate to clear into the BVI where I did. Other sailors tell me it's an ordeal at the other ports of entry. My sleepy little island (population: 180) couldn't have been nicer. I had a nap and another swim in the afternoon and went ashore to Happy Laury's for a supper of broiled fish in his picturesque shanty on the beach and an interesting chat with "Fat Albert" Chinnery, the island's customs and immigration officer, while a local man with a sonorous voice played a 12-string guitar and sang Christmas carols.

"Wednesday morning I sailed across to the west end of Tortola and into Drake's Passage, but very quickly turned tail and slipped back around into Soper's Hole and West End. To quote a charter crew

member who called another boat on VHF radio, "It was blowing like snot out there". My wind meter said 22 knots and I said "enough". I picked up a mooring off Stevens Marina in the somewhat sheltered harbor and went ashore to check out the area. It's expensive. A bag of ice (\$1 in SJ) costs \$3.

"There really wasn't much to see except the marina and a restaurant operated by Pusser's Rum (the people who have supplied it to the Royal Navy for 300 years, I'm told) on the Frenchman's Cay side of the harbor; and a customs house, post office, and a tiny store or two on the north side. Having exhausted the cultural possibilities of the area, I rowed back out to the boat and went for a swim before tackling some chores. In the evening I rowed back to the Customs House to call B and let her know I'd made it. No phone was available on Jost Van Dyke, but somehow I liked it better there.

"Thursday morning I took a look at the wind meter and it was registering 19 knots in the harbor. I decided to write some of this and to work on tightening the shaft log, which had gradually gotten to the point where it leaked so that an average of 20 strokes per hour on the pump were necessary to keep the bilge clear. Should have done it sooner because it was easy once I got all the jerry cans moved and the carpet up and the hatch opened.

"In the afternoon I noticed another Southern Cross 31 anchored across the way. I rowed over but the crew had gone to clear through customs. The boat is hull #131, built in December 1980. I looked up the owner in the SC directory and was able to greet Mark Fruehauf by name when they came over to say hello. Mark and wife (sorry) and daughter Madeline, about 8 years or so, came aboard for cold drinks and spent a couple of hours talking about their cruising to New England, along the east coast, and down the chain from the Bahamas. He had most recently been working in St. Thomas to build up their funds and is interviewing for a radio technician job in Road Town. They are an interesting live-aboard family and it just goes to show that it can be done on a Southern Cross 31. I'm amazed that three people can do it without killing each other.

"I decided that, blowing or not, I'd move around to Road Town on Friday. Winds were undiminished Friday morning, but the seas were not quite as rough, so we were able to tack across Drake Passage without getting too wet or sick. It took 5 hours and eight tacks, for the trip of about 10 miles as the gull flies, but it was fun and the views were fantastic. I remembered the same trip (it was straight, though) on the Cunard Countess last year.

"The anchorage in Road Town is exposed and kind of lumpy, at least in the current ESE wind, and I'm doubting my smarts in coming around, since I'll have to be here at least 3 nights because most of my business will have to be done Monday. In compensation, the views of the harbor and mountains by day and by night are super as the HM² swings on her anchors.

"Guess that's it for now from the best looking boat and crew in the Caribbean. Hope this finds all well and happy, and encourages someone to come down and share it with me. God bless! Karl"

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YES, HE FINALLY DOES GET TO DO SOME DIVING and other island things. The next Letter from the Captain, letting you know about all that, will be along shortly.

In between, we receive some personal letters, too, with great pictures. Besides the proper amount of sweet nothings (not as good as a visit, but very nice to get!), the letters explain various requests, which I follow the best I can, hoping I am comprehending the technical terms correctly.

I get the “other” ham rig, including mike and antenna tuner, packed and sent, hoping I have everything right as I crawl around under the counter following cables and trying to make sure I don't disconnect the wrong thing and get the computers screwed up or do some other dumb thing. I make a trip to Woodbridge to buy a "Hustler whip antenna” and send that too. I call Ryder in Bristol to see about a pair of bronze rudder gudgeons; they will ship them but it will take six weeks. (The stainless ones originally installed on HM² looked okay when we hauled her, but K says he is getting paranoid; there are some scare stories and Ryder is replacing them.) With help of Boat-US, I get a reversing solenoid for the electric windlass on its way, plus a spare handle for the manual windlass; this will help a lot in solo upanchoring. All these errands sound simple but take a number of local and long distance calls.

Of course, everything isn't as big deal as the above. Other errands include sending a special kind of fruit-flavored tea and certain addresses he forgot to take. I write letters and ask questions about ordinary household things I never paid much attention to before, but now I need to know something. Various things need getting or fixing and I learn more about some of them than I really wanted to know.

Then the Christmas presents arrive, a neat island tee-shirt for each of us, and for me a skirt-length of fabric with matching silk screened design. Luscious! We are impressed that he was able to shop and get gifts to us on time. Some of ours get to him in Tortola but some we send on to St. Croix, for that's cheaper (part of the USA, even has a zip code), and we hope he will get them all safely.

ONE REQUEST: Does anyone remember the name of the young man who gave K a metal tag on a chain at the Hard Bargain Oktoberfest in Accokeek right before he left? It has the verse from Isaiah on it, about mounting up with wings like eagles. We were both very touched by this. K took it on HM², and would like to write the man, but in all the rush and excitement we failed to get his address.

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