

JANGADA

The Adventure Never Ends

THE IDEA

Ever since first stepping on board a sailboat 15 years ago I have longed for the day when I would have the time, energy, courage and stupidity (not to mention the money...) to buy a boat. Over the years I sailed when I could; on charter boats, as crew on various friend's boats, day sailing and occasional racing.

There is, of course, the well worn expression (recounted to me perhaps a thousand times in the past few months) that the best two days of a boat owners life are the day he buys his boat and the day he sells it. I don't know about the second part, but I do know about the first and once again conventional wisdom is, at least in my case, rubbish. I have done some 'out there' things in my life, but I can pretty much say that the first day of boat ownership for me was not the best day of my life: it was the scariest.

As I stepped on board for the first time as the owner of a big, expensive, and yes, beautiful new yacht, only one thought came to my mind: OH MY GOD.... WHAT HAVE I DONE????!!!! I was, without a doubt, totally overwhelmed and totally petrified. Suddenly it was all on the line: my commitment, my knowledge, my reputation, my money. All right there, sitting in the water. OH MY GOD!!!

For years I told anyone who cared to listen, "Yup, in a few years I'm gonna buy me a big sailboat and cruise around.... maybe even sail around the world!" I went to boat shows, subscribed to a bunch of sailing magazines and cut out ads for boats I wanted, cruised the docks whenever I had the chance, talked with experienced sailors and read endlessly about electric systems, sail plans, cockpit layouts, power options, communications and anything else even remotely associated with boats.

I was my way to New Zealand to watch the America's Cup races this winter when I happened across an ad in a boating magazine for the boat of my dreams. The boat, a 42' Fountaine Pajot (French, of course) catamaran, was in San Diego. Since I had a short layover in L.A. before continuing to Auckland, I decided that a short detour to San Diego would make perfect sense. I landed in L.A., rented a car and drove down to Loews Coronado Bay Marina, a very posh resort/marina on San Diego Bay where I met the owner and had a quick tour of the boat. It was immaculate. It was also \$60,000 more than I wanted to spend, and besides that, I was not totally ready to make the leap to major boat ownership yet. Still kicking tires.

The owner had worked as a programmer for Oracle for ten years. In 1990 when he started, the internet was just spooling up to light speed and the sky was the future. Within four years, with stock options and other perks, fresh out of college, he was a millionaire. That was only the beginning. He bought more stock, the company kept flying high, and by 2000 he was worth over \$10 million. Life was good. He was spending \$40,000 a month on, as he put it, stuff. Fancy clothes and cars and toys of all sorts, an expensive apartment and every meal at the best restaurants. And, in 1998, a brand spanking new \$370,000 catamaran. Living large!

Then, as often times is the case, shit happened. His stock portfolio, like everyone else's, tanked. Big time. Instead of bailing—or even saving a million or so “just in case”—he continued spending, refusing to believe that his life would, or could, ever change. Within three years the party was over. He was down to his last \$100,000, an old van, and a beautiful boat which he was now living on.

He had the boat listed with a broker for many months, like so many others in his situation, refusing to believe that it wasn't worth the \$500,000 he had into it. By the time I met him it had been on the market for nine months and he told me that if he didn't sell it in the next few weeks he was going to pack up and head to the South Pacific, which sounded very strange to me indeed. Sell it or go around the world? I thanked him for the tour, told him I'd think about it (but not at that price), and headed to New Zealand.

A week later I got an email from him asking if I was still interested. Yes, I reiterated (a large knot growing in my stomach at the mere thought of actually spending that much money....on a BOAT!), I was still thinking about it, but at a much lower price than what he wanted. I gave him a ball-park offer and told him to think it over.

A few days later he wrote back and said that he would consider my offer but he'd be taking some of the “stuff” off the boat at that price. No way, I said. I wanted ALL that cool stuff—radar, SSB and VHF radios, watermaker, washer/dryer, dinghy with outboard, dive gear, GPS, spinnaker, safety equipment, etc.—which he had spent tens of thousands of dollars on. Okay, he said, but only if we could do the deal quickly. I gulped. Hard. OH...MY...GOD! What was I thinking?

A boat? A BIG boat! A big EXPENSIVE boat! A big expensive boat berthed in a fancy expensive marina and ready to gobble up every penny I could throw at it. What WAS I thinking???

THE BUY-IN

I called my bank and told them to send him the earnest money—we didn't even have any kind of contract, just a couple emails and phone calls from New Zealand, for crying out loud. But that seems to be the way I usually do things: seat of the pants. That “if it's meant to happen it will” attitude that has gotten me into so much trouble all my life. And yes, many good things too.

When I returned to the U.S. in early January I went home for a couple days then flew straight to San Diego to do the deal. We went for a sail, I had the boat inspected and surveyed, and within a couple days I was the owner. I stood on the deck, very much alone and totally overwhelmed, and tried to smile. This was, after all, one of the great dreams of my life. The

timing was a bit earlier than I had planned but the whole thing was inevitable..... so why not now? Sooner is better. So there I was.

The next day I flew to La Paz (Baja) to check out marinas and talk to people who had sailed down the coast. I spent several days walking the docks, meeting cruisers of all types, and formulating a plan. A week later I was back home, packing up huge piles of gear to bring to the boat. This was, after all, a 4 bedroom, 2-bath house with two motors and more electronics and plumbing systems than Trump Plaza. I flew down again the following week and began work; first doing a three-day thorough inspection, cleaning and inventory, then starting a loong list of projects to get her ready to sail south. Every day included trips to West Marine, Downwind Marine, San Diego Sail Supply, a dozen other stops for everything from insurance to coast guard documentation to getting a new bimini (cockpit shade awning) made. My week on board flew by.

Home again for a week, then loading my van to the gills with more stuff, lots of tools, and of course me skis for a detour along the way. A friend from Alaska flew down to help me and soon we were hip deep in boat chores. We bought fishing gear and pillows, weather FAX software and dishes, spliced lines and polished chrome. I worked on the boat 14 hours a day for 5 days and was just getting started. And, I loved EVERY minute of it.

A boat. Definition: four letter word for a hole you shovel money into. A boat: a thing on which every possible part will break, usually without warning at the worst possible moment. When you have a boat, your financial thinking takes on an entirely new perspective; at least mine did. I was deep into spending 'boat bucks', humorously defined as \$1,000. It's pretty easy to spend a few boat bucks every time you turn around. Waiting until eggs go on sale so that I can save 20¢ suddenly seemed pretty trivial.

Of course everything I bought had to be "marine grade", meaning it cost ten times as much as it should. A sponge which would sell for \$2 in Safeway would cost \$4 in an automotive store, and \$8 in a marine store. The only happy moment in a marine store is realizing that the \$2 sponge would cost \$16 if it was for an airplane. Salesman: "Well sure it's expensive, but it's your LIFE up there! Your LIFE is certainly worth \$16 isn't it???" Me: "Only if I can clean the past 40 years of sinning off my record...."

I paid \$135 for a gallon... A GALLON! of bottom paint which I'm sure would go for \$25 at Home Depot. But it's got all sorts of poisons in it which are supposed to kill anything which comes within five feet so there's probably a government "tax" of at least 5,000%, like cigarettes and gasoline. Why don't I just drop a hand grenade in the water next to the boat every few days?

At the same time, on a boat you don't waste ANYTHING! Old screws, plastic bag twist ties, pieces of plastic and odd bits of rope all become priceless treasures to be squirreled away until needed for some vital project or repair. Plastic bags become gasket material; pieces of hose go around dock lines to prevent chafe; old rusty razor blades can be used to cut your wrists when you realize what you have gotten yourself into.

After a long week of projects I headed to Colorado to ski, then home to pack up and get ready to sail south. The only hold up was the fact that I had neither crew nor coast guard documentation (title to the boat). Other than that, things were rosy: I had no legal ownership to the boat and no one to help me sail it. Perfect, just frigging perfect.

I named my boat '**Jangada**' after a type of Brazilian fishing boat. I had always wanted to name my first boat 'Tonto'. I thought it had that kind of whimsical connotation which I believe every large toy should possess (although not going as far as naming it 'Ricky's Toy' or 'Babe Bait'), but then I discovered that Tonto means 'idiot' in Spanish and while that fit my irreverent

style perfectly, I decided that there might be something not quite proper in sailing around Mexico in a big sailboat named 'Idiot'. I compromised and named my dinghy 'Tonto'.

But indeed I am an idiot since I later discovered that Jangada sounds identical to a nasty Spanish swear word (*chingara*, meaning 'little fucker'). The first time I told a local Mexican the name of my boat he looked at me quite askance I can tell you. Live and learn. Boat: Jangada. Me: Tonto. After a while I figured out I could pronounce it Yan-gada, thereby saving myself significant embarrassment.

A Brazilian jangada is made from small logs that are lashed together and powered by a Rube Goldberg type of sail arrangement made from mahogany sticks and old pieces of canvas. Two or three fisherman at a time will head out to sea – as much as 40 miles off-shore – and spend 2-3 days out fishing, somehow finding their way back to their departure point with no navigation equipment other than their senses and experience. It is a truly wild contraption and I have been off the north coast of Brazil on a jangada in 25 knots of wind and very aggressive seas. Amazing!

A week before my scheduled departure and still no crew nor papers. Maybe this means I'm just supposed to leave it in San Diego (for \$650 a month....). Then everything happened at once. After several frantic calls to the Coast Guard Vessel Documentation Center in Maryland they located my paperwork and agree to FedEx it to me. Seems that two freak (and huge) blizzards had slowed things down a bit in the office, not to mention a nice new war that Bush had just started. My trip to Baja wasn't their highest priority.

So with all my paperwork in order I started calling my sailing friends and within a couple days had six eager bodies to man the blenders for the 2-3 week adventure down the coast from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas, then up the Sea of Cortez to La Paz. Woohoo! I was so busy getting things ready that I didn't have time to be scared.

Originally I had a commercial 500-ton skipper friend of mine coming along. He's sailed around the world several times and I was looking forward to 8 hours a day of sailing school along the way. When he had to back out at the last minute I freaked out, then called another skipper friend who had expressed an interest earlier. When he too backed out—along with my final backup backup—I began to stress. I was *certainly* no captain and I wasn't sure that the rest of my crew, while somewhat experienced, were fully up to the task of bringing Jangada through a thousand miles of nasty Pacific Ocean.

But there was no stopping the Jangada juggernaut now. I arrived in San Diego on March 12 and immediately began making lists of all the stuff we had to do and get before we could leave. The others dribbled in a couple days later and we quickly spooled up to warp speed in order to keep on our schedule of departing on March 17. The 14-hour workdays flew by. We went out sailing to test all the electronics, watermaker and other systems, practice anchoring, tweak the rig, and get used to each other and the boat. Naturally the typical sunny, warm southern California weather turned nasty, with cold wind and pissing rain. We hardly noticed.

By the evening of the 16th we had almost everything ready and everyone was antsy to get to sea. The weather was forecast to remain nasty, and perhaps get worse. Gale force winds and big seas. Oh great, just frigging great. We went to sleep early as the rain splattered down. Hard.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

At 7 the next morning we were all up, into our foul weather gear and ready to rumble. Spirits, much to my amazement, were high. At 8 we pulled away from the dock and headed into the Bay with gray skies, a light drizzle and fluky winds. An hour later we stopped for last minute fuel and propane, then set off for the Pacific.

Exiting the bay with the incoming tide took all the energy Jangada's twin 27hp diesels could muster but soon the wind came up, we hoisted the sails and off we went on a broad reach in 20 knots of wind and 6' seas, passing the Mexican border and out past the Coronado Islands.

My original plan was to stop our first night in Ensenada to regroup and take a breath. But with the bad weather (and the forecast for more of it) we decided to high-tail it south (hopefully into warmer and friendlier conditions) as fast as we could. That afternoon the winds started gusting to 25 knots and the seas grew larger as we headed further off the coast. By nightfall the winds were a steady 25, gusting to 30, with icy squalls whipping the tops off the 12-15' waves off our stern. We set watches of two crew for 3 hours and I turned in to get some badly needed rest.

My watch was for 3am but I didn't make it that far. At 2am one of the girls woke me to say that the winds were gusting over 35 knots and she thought we needed to reduce sail. I scrambled into my rain gear, PFD and safety harness as I felt Jangada climbing up over huge swells, her rigging groaning as the massive waves first boosted her forward then stopped her cold as her bows dug deep into the backs of the next set.

The night was ink black and the wind howled with a sense of dark power. Three of us struggled to take a second reef in the mainsail as the spray poured over the bows and doused us with torrents of icy salt water. This was living and I was having the time of my life. Luckily for me, everyone else shared my enthusiasm, or at least they pretended to, and that was good enough for me. I was reminded of being a kid in a haunted house:

"You scared?"

"Not me! Are you?"

"No way. I ain't scared of nothing!"

"Yeah, well neither am I!"

Meanwhile we're all scared shitless. Woohoo!!!

After fighting with the sails for a half-hour I was fully awake. I took the wheel and told the girls to go to bed as my buddy Rod and I took over early. The stupendous roar of the wind and crashing waves, not to mention the fact I couldn't even see the front of the boat in the blackness, made steering Jangada a fiercely intense experience. Eight tons of metal, fiberglass and sailcloth thundering along through the night in 30 knots of wind, powering up over massive black swells which you can't even see until you feel the wallop of their crest as they slam into the bows and a wall of white spray appears in your face, is about the most fun I can think of. But that's just me, you understand.

People (non-sailors) always seem to think that sailing a boat must be a very boring experience. Nothing, and I mean NOTHING, can be further from the truth. My three-hour watch went by before I had a chance to pick my nose. Every moment I am checking something: the sail trim, the winches, the GPS, the charts, the apparent wind speed, the current, the drift, our course, the compass, the barometer, the wind angle and strength, the rigging, the waves, the depth, the true wind speed, the jib telltales, our VMG, ETE, ETA, XTE, COG, radar, power

consumption, buoys and markers and a hundred more things. The minute I get through, I start all over again. Sleep? I don't THINK so!

Suddenly it was 6am, there was a faint glow on the eastern horizon and the adrenaline was pumping through my system so hard that my eyeballs hurt. The wind had increased to 40 knots, also known as a gale. Our WeatherFAX said, indeed, GALE right across our path. And out in the Pacific on my second day at sea in my new boat, GALE was one thing I was not looking forward to seeing on my computer screen. The swells were getting huge. We watched as one twenty-footer steamed up on our stern and Jangada slowly pitched forward as if being shoved off a steep ski slope. Instantly her speed climbed. 12 knots...13....14....

Matt was driving when I heard him cry out, "New world record! 16.3 knots!!!" That was it: the gauntlet had been thrown down.

An hour later the sun began to peak through the black clouds as cold squalls closed in around us. We could see them coming and sometimes they passed by just 100 yards to one side or the other. Ha! Cheated death again! Suckers!!!

I took the helm and immediately began searching for more speed. 14.5..... 15.1..... 16!!! The exhilaration and power of a big cat racing down a massive wave is something you have to experience to be able to understand. The shear mass of all the forces involved makes it seem inevitable that something will break. That there is not a catastrophic failure of some part of the boat seemingly defies the nature of the situation. But nothing breaks, so far.

16.8.....16.9...A new world record! The cheers erupt. 17.4...18!!!! Everyone sits stunned. How fast can we go? Something has to break. This is, after all, just a cruising cat, not some 30-knot highbred racing machine. Hell, we've got pillows and a BBQ and an espresso machine on board! 18.3..... 18.6!!!

We are flying along; the twin wakes of the stern look like a waterski boat has made them. In two hours we travel over 30 miles, ripping down the coast, dodging squalls and angry seas. The sailing is exhilarating and Jangada is holding together. So far, so good.

In the late afternoon we head for shore to anchor for the night and get some badly needed rest after 165 miles of hard sailing. We pulled into a small, poorly sheltered cove at Punta Baja, surrounded by steep, rocky cliffs, and I decided to set two anchors, not wanting my very first anchorage to also be my last. It wasn't quite as easy as I had anticipated.

The idea was to drop one anchor, drift back to set it, then motor back up at 90 degrees to the first anchor and drop the second one. Piece of cake. We set the main anchor—a 45# Delta—in 25' of water with 4:1 scope, drifted back, and proceeded to motor off to drop the second. That's when we discovered that we really had no idea where that first anchor was. It was only when we had drifted back again that we discovered we had dropped the second anchor right on top of the first one. DOH!

So we hauled it back in and tried again, with only marginally better success. That's when I had the grandiose idea of tying a plastic bottle to the first anchor so we'd know where the hell it was. They always make this stuff sound so easy in the books.

We finally got securely anchored (secure as in: ready for a hurricane) and sat down to a huge dinner of grilled chicken, broccoli, salad and roasted red potatoes, washed down with lots of cold beers and finished off with strawberry shortcake.

For this warnt no down home cruise, I'll a tell ya! We were living large, having fun, and ready to rumble. Tomorrow. After a good night's sleep.

The boat swayed and yanked and lurched in the swells all night long but since she was a cat we all slept like logs. Had we been in a monohull we would probably have had several knockdowns during the night, and probably a dismasting as well. I think that everyone should

have to spend a night in a rough anchorage on both a monohull and cat to really see the difference. It's like comparing a heavy-metal head-banger rock concert to a cello concerto. To each his own....

We were up early and well out to sea by 10am. Our crew had settled into a routine which consisted mainly of sleeping, eating and being on watch. Mostly sleeping and eating. I took the time to do boat projects (never ending), trying to stay topside in the heaving seas as much as possible. For some reason I tend to get a little woozy when I spend more than 20 minutes with my head stuck deep down into the toilet bilge trying to tighten some obscure hose clamp as the boat bashes into 12' seas. I'm just strange that way. Whimp.

Our next stop was Punta San Carlos, a legendary and very remote windsurfing spot. I had visions of a short day at sea, sneaking into a protected anchorage, rigging my windsurfing gear and having a great afternoon session in the waves.

So much for plans. We didn't arrive until 4:30, and it was not a pretty sight. The huge rollers that had amused us so at sea were pounding the coast with 15' wave faces and the wind was still howling. We messed around trying to find a comfortable anchorage in the large bay but the swell was so big that it simply wrapped around the point, producing large smooth swells that kept us in a lively position as we tried to anchor. Too far out and we'd have a very uncomfortable night; too far in and some sneaky swell might actually break outside and deal us a nasty blow. Windsurfing was out of the question, but at least I was mollified by the fact that although there were at least twenty cars and campers parked along the bluff, no one was out in the waves. Whimps.

From San Carlos we headed far out to sea to skirt the big northern bight to the east of Isla Cedros and head into Bahia Tortugas (Turtle Bay), a well known and very protected bay 300 miles from San Diego.

The days drifted by. Sometimes we'd stop for the night, sometimes we'd sail right on through. I don't remember some of the stops, nor many of the nights. Life on board a boat at sea becomes simplified. The days are all the same yet all very different. After a few night watches there ceases to be a real difference between day and night. We watched frolicking schools of dolphins riding our bow wakes and nearby groups of whales heading north, splashing their enormous tails to produce plumes of spray.

While there are endless projects to keep one busy 20 hours a day, living on a boat out on the ocean frees up a tremendous amount of time that is otherwise spent doing mundane chores on land. There are no phones, email, faxes, pagers or mail to answer; there is no UPS, FedEx or other deliveries to wait for; there's no junk mail to wade through and no Jehovah's Witnesses magically appearing at your door; no answering machines, no interminable waits for internet web pages, no cell phones playing Beethoven's 5th tones.

Best of all, there's no TV. While at sea I totally missed the Iraq war. Completely. Didn't have a clue, didn't care, didn't want to know. Whenever someone mentioned it we would make jokes: "I wonder what the score is?" "I heard we're leading 8 to 3..." "I'm bummed we'll miss the half-time show. I heard Michael Jackson is boxing Madonna." "Don't blame ME - I didn't vote for EITHER of them!" "I hear that NBC just bought the rights to the next five wars through 2008!" What if there was a war and everyone was out sailing???

Anchored in Turtle Bay in the late afternoon, Matt decided that the seven of us should pile into our 4-person dinghy and motor across the bay, then hike across a low pass to a hidden beach where he had heard there was lots of flotsam and jetsam and other nautical messes piled high on the beach since it was so inaccessible. It's only a mile across, he assured us. I thought it looked more like 4 miles.

We loaded in and began our tour. Half way across the wind picked up. Within minutes it was blowing 20 knots and building. And this was no warm, tropical breeze; in cotton t-shirts and shorts we were all soon drenched and freezing.

A few hundred yards from shore we hit the sand. Matt jumped out and tried to convince us that the murky trudge to shore would be short and easy and well worthwhile. Everyone balked. "Let's get the hell out of here... if we can..." was the sentiment. By now the wind was whipping up the bay into a froth of cold, ugly chop and we suddenly realized that there was no way we were going to be able to make it back across.

I headed the dinghy for a small fish camp a half mile away, heading straight into the wind and waves as water poured into the dinghy, threatening to swamp us at any moment. Everyone was shivering and I was quickly going hypothermic. Oh great... just great.

We pulled into the fish camp just as a heavy wooden panga pulled in, thank god. We scrambled ashore and took refuge in a squalid tin shack that was, of course, Trump Plaza to us. I noticed a filthy pile of old rubber rain jackets in a corner, eagerly put one on and went back outside, much to the amusement of the fishermen.

Matt explained our "situation" to the men and they agreed to shuttle us back across the bay, including the dinghy which they proposed to load on top of their dilapidated boat. Not wanting to see my new \$5,000 boat and motor trashed I declined and I made Matt accompany me back across.

Everyone else loaded into the panga and off they went. At first we tried to follow in their wake but even that was too rough. When I took off to the outside we went totally airborne several times. It was quite a frightening journey; go slow and we'd get swamped in the waves; go fast and we'd careen off a wave and flip.

Half an hour later we made it back just at dark and we scrambled back on board, happy to be safe. What a bunch of hosers: 20' seas and 40 knots—no problem. Dinghy across a benign looking bay—big problem. We gave the fishermen a bunch of t-shirts, fishing lures and beer and thanked them profusely for saving our lives.... well, at least our evening. We hauled the dinghy up and tied it with 100' of rope so that we'd think twice about ever doing something so stupid again. Enough adventure for one night.

The following day we decide to take a day off and explore the village of Bahia Tortugas, along with long hot showers and great tacos that Steve assures us we'll find. Sure enough, we rent two rooms in a tiny hotel for \$5 each and take showers. I would gladly pay \$50 NOT to have to stay in one of these rooms for the night, but the hot water from the rooftop tanks is plentiful and we even get to watch a tiny black and white TV in the bright pink room while waiting our turn to shower.

After tacos and a quick tour of the town (both buildings....) we head back to the boat to nap and read and, for me, do more boat projects. Woohoo!!!

BOAT SCHOOL

On a boat each day is a new learning experience. I learned how to use the Nobeltech chart-plotter/navigation software on the PC (an incredible program), operate the SSB radio to get daily weather faxes, program the autopilot, manage our power consumption, trim the sails for different conditions (we did a lot of reefing during the first few days), tweak the radar, and a hundred other fun, interesting and endlessly challenging chores.

And of course, as on any boat, things broke. All sorts of things. One of our three GPS simply up and died (that's why I had three...); the watermaker developed a leak; the auto-pilot got water in it and died when a rather large wave pour up over the hulls AND the main salon into the cockpit; the windlass stopped working for 15 minutes (it was, after all, in Mexico and I guess it felt it deserved a break); one of the sail drives developed a leaky seal and got sea water in the transmission; the battery power/charger/inverter/equalizer/alternator started doing all sorts of crazy things; and we couldn't keep the BBQ lit (the 20 knot winds at some of our anchorages might have had something to do with this problem).

But everything else worked flawlessly.

Rather than view these several small breakdowns as problems, I viewed them as new and interesting challenges. Of course this might be a very idealistic and naïve way of looking at things—very typical, I was told, of a new boat owner—but I was having a ball. I rebuilt the watermaker with parts on board and no more leak; Matt and I disassembled the autopilot control, dried it out, remounted and sealed it, and got it working perfectly; the windlass started working again (after we had done a thorough trace and check of all the wiring which was in itself quite interesting); we figured out the electric system on board (how to work it, not WHY it was wired that way—I guess it's just a French thing); and we even figured out how to keep the BBQ lit in a gale. [Unfortunately the saildrive leak will require a haul-out but that's part of having a boat.]

Passing Bahia Asuncion we tuck into a bay we hope will offer better protection than we have been finding for our anchorage. But the swell was still running strong and the nasty-looking 3-4' shorebreak dissuaded us from even trying to go ashore. It was strange being just a few hundred feet from shore, looking at a town (which was having a lively festival we could see and hear—but not touch) but not be able to get there.

Punta Abreojos is another legendary Baja windsurfing spot. We anchored in 18' of water in a rolling swell—being careful not to get too close to shore where we might get caught by a wave—and tried to figure out how to get to shore in the treacherous shorebreak. Luckily common sense prevailed and we set out for Magdalena Bay the next day in good spirits. The wind was still steady and strong and the air and water temperatures were starting to climb; I no longer had to wear my Ugg sheepskin boots all day.

We rounded Cabo San Lazaro and carefully skirted the rocks at Punta Hughes that had snagged an 80' fishing boat that lay up on the shore in pieces. We tucked into a fairly quiet anchorage in 16' of water and tried to make out some way to get to shore through the armor of rocks and cliffs. I spied a tiny strip of sand and decided to make a try for it so we could hike to the top of the intriguing peaks that rose a thousand feet above the bay. The plan was to make two trips, timing the wave surge carefully going in and out. Matt and Gary grabbed their bags of hiking shoes and off we went.

Naturally as soon as we got 50' from shore a massive set rolled in, casting us ashore like a feather in a tornado. Drenched and befuddled, we beached the boat and stared back out at

Jangada rolling gently in the swell, trying to figure out how we'd ever get back again. But not to worry: Matt had only brought one shoe and Gary had brought his wife's by mistake, so there was zero chance that we were staying ashore. So much for hiking.

Somehow after waiting fifteen minutes we caught a lull in the surf and roared back out to the boat. Whimps. But I just had to find a way to risk my life so I loaded Rod and his surfboard into the dinghy and we went out in search of waves (not a difficult search...). I took him out to the point by the wrecked boat and dropped him off in the water near a long, slow, beautifully peeling wave. He caught a few rides and that's when I got the idea that I should try to ride a wave in the dinghy. I shut off the motor, pulled it up and gingerly rowed closer.

Perhaps you've heard of "tow-surfing" where a surfer is towed by a jet-ski into a wave so big that it would be impossible without the ride? Well I have now perfected a new sport: row surfing. While I admit I never quite ventured into the impact zone I did manage to ride the shoulder of the wave a couple times. Luckily I take my responsibility as Captain Fun very seriously and I didn't want to endanger my crew by dying. At least not today.

The following day the shorebreak had subsided so we immediately called a lay day, went to shore and hiked up the peak and along a spectacular ridge for a mile, descended to the wrecked boat where we mucked about for a while, then hiked back along the coast to the little beach. We managed to trade a few t-shirts, hats and beer for a big pile of lobster from the local fishermen so dinner was a delectable affair.

From "Mag Bay" we entered a long, straight, rocky section of coast called the Southern Bight. Stretching 140 miles southeast to Cabo San Lucas, it offers little in the way of hospitable beaches or anchorages. We decide to high-tail it to Cabo.

Of course this is exactly when the fish we've been trolling for during the past 600 miles decide that they're hungry. Zzzzzzzz.... The 60# line zings off one reel, and a moment later the second reel goes off. Matt and Steve lunge for the whizzing reels, crank the drag down and begin reeling them in. Whatever is on the other end is no minnow. The heavy deep-sea rigs are fully bent and the fish are running at will.

Twenty minutes later they're getting closer and ten minutes after that Matt has landed our first yellowtail tuna. He proudly held it up and declared: "Look Captain, the most expensive fish in the world; this one cost you a quarter million bucks! Everyone laughed. Hard. Yes, even me. Twenty minutes later Joyce has filleted it, mixed up a potent batch of Wasabi, and we are scarfing down piles of sashimi. Steve lands a beautiful 20# yellowfin ten minutes later and announces, "Hey, this one's a \$125,000 fish; they're getting cheaper!" Woohoo! Sushi for life!

But that's just the beginning. The lures aren't back in the water for more than a minute when off they go again. It's one thing reeling in a fighting mad 20# fish when the boat is standing still; it's quite another when the boat is ripping along at 8-10 knots, and we were ripping. No stopping this baby. We landed two more big yellowfin (the BEST eating fish there is!) and set the lures again. There was blood and fish guts ALL over the boat; two people attempted to wash things down with buckets while two others cut up the fish on the back swim steps. It was hard to tell whether we were a sailboat or a fish factory.

Five minutes later both poles got hit again. "Here, give me that thing," I yelled to Becky as she tried to control the line which was being stripped off the reel like it was hooked to a flying saucer. The line went out another 80 feet before I got it stopped. This was going to be a loooong fight.

I couldn't even budge the reel for the first few minutes. Slowly I was able to get the fish a few feet closer, meaning I'd have him at the boat in.... about a week. Matt grabbed the line with

his hands and tugged on it as I reeled in what I could. A hundred feet aft my fish decided to become a flying fish. HOLY SHIT! That's a big one!!!

When the fish was about 30' away he decided he really didn't want to come aboard. He and Matt played tug-of-war for a moment as I leaned back on the rod when... SNAP! The pole broke. But not the line! I continued reeling in and fighting and a few minutes later Matt was bludgeoning yet another big tuna with our baseball bat (bought just for the occasion). This last yellowfin weighed in at at least 35# and probably more. Since this is a fish story, a LOT more!

We sliced and diced and butchered for a half-hour and soon had a good fifty pounds of fresh tuna in the freezer. Life is good! We don't need no stinking lobster!

A day later Cabo San Lucas came into view. We could tell we were near when we began to see more and more big million dollar sport-fishing boats heading out to sea with their \$800-a-day clients. I fish to get fish to eat. I don't find it particularly fun or challenging or athletic or even interesting. The first fish is fun, the second is security, and after that I'm over it. But I sure like to eat piles of yellowfin seared on the grill and drenched in Wasabi, I'll tell you. We gorged ourselves.

THE END IS NEAR

Even with all the tourists, the tip of Baja—Cabo San Lucas—is a very spectacular place. Of course there is now a mile long stretch of \$2-\$5 million homes lining the coast on either side of town, but don't worry: most of them will be gone when the next big hurricane comes. Especially the ones built 20' from that beautiful white beach.

We pull into the fuel dock and bribe the dockhand into letting us give Jangada a quick washdown with fresh water as we're filling up; t-shirts and hats work great for those kinds of things. Then we have to move off the dock when a 120' mega-yacht shows up—I guess they must give those guys Brooks Brothers suits instead of t-shirts.

We snag a mooring in the bay and head to town to explore. Gary, Becky, Joyce and Steve are leaving us here. Originally we had planned to get here sooner but then decided... what's the hurry? Now their flights are leaving and they have to get back to their jobs, something I wouldn't know anything about. We drink a bunch of farewell Margaritas—a big bunch—offload their gear into a water taxi piloted by "Sumo", a jolly 400# Mexican who *nobody* messes with.

Three of us left. In the hot afternoon sun we dinghy out to the point to explore. I go rock climbing while Rod tries to drown by diving into the pounding 6'-8' shorebreak, somehow making it through. Of course there's no chance of him ever coming back in so he ends up swimming around the point, appearing a half-hour later at the opposite beach.

Meanwhile I was not about to see someone attempt suicide without me to help, so I scrambled up a hundred feet of 5.7 – 5.9 rock in an attempt to get high enough to watch Rod get swept out to sea and eaten by a monster shark or something. Much to my amazement, I would say that the rock climbing here is as good as anywhere I've seen. In the world. The rock is solid and the holds are incredible. I longed for either a rope or a LOT more confidence. Slowly I

worked my way up and back down a few tricky sections to be sure that I could descend if per chance I didn't find that hidden escape route which I KNEW was just around that next bulge....

Finally I reached a section which I knew I could easily climb up.... but not so easily climb back down. I inched up and down it for 5 minutes as the sweat rolled into my eyes and dripped off my nose in the afternoon sun. Matt sat on the rocks below me watching and plotting about how much fun he would have on his new boat when I died. Finally my tiny brain overcame my foolish pride and I back down. I was NOT a happy camper. I coulda been a contenda! I coulda BEEN somebody!! I vowed to come back and spend a couple days climbing. What a place!

Even though the place is swarming with teenagers and kooks on jet skis, bleach-white and scorch-skinned tourists, drunken college kids and Mexicans hawking everything from Sombreros to seaweed, it is still beautiful—especially from a nice boat out on the water. So many times I have been in similar places, looking out at the boats peacefully anchored in the turquoise water, their unknown occupants undoubtedly have some sort of secret pleasures known only to those lucky enough to be in their situation. Well, now I was one of those enviable people, and I was loving every minute of it.

The next day we headed north, straight into "El Norte", the wind that rips straight down the coast for 4-5 months each winter. 20 knots right on the nose: this was not my idea of fun. We made a few big tacks as the wind increased and the seas built.

We made it as far as Bahia Frailes, 50 miles north, pretty much the standard stopping place for anyone sailing north into El Norte. The forecast was for more wind tomorrow. Oh great.

We were up early to try to make the 50 mile push by dark. But of course with all our tacking it was more like 80 miles and at dark we were still 20 miles and a LOT of tacks away. We turned on the radar, tucked a reef into the main and settled into a long night. We beat hard up the coast in totally blackness as the huge swells, having traveled 500 miles to greet us, rolled up over the bows, ripped through the trampoline netting and slammed into the cabins. Woohoo! Now we're REALLY having fun!

I could just imagine the round-the-world solo sailors doing this in 40 knots and 40 degrees for a month straight. I closed my eyes and pretended it was me slamming into those icy seas; then I opened them, got pasted by a big cold wave over the top in the oily blackness of the night, and it was me. No imagination needed.

At 2am we eased into Bahia de los Muertos: Bay of the Dead. We could tell from the bobbing mast-top anchor lights that there were a few other boats anchored so we gingerly picked our way closer. I got out my big spotlight but the darkness easily ate up the beam. I stood out on the bow guiding Matt closer to shore, even though I had no idea where it was. That's the captain's main job, you know: pretend you know something that the rest of the crew doesn't so that you become indispensable.

I picked a hole between two of the anchored boats and we dropped the hook (sailor talk for anchoring). No sooner had we got it set than there's a voice from the boat next to us: "SIXTEEN."

"Excuse me?"

"GO TO SIXTEEN!"

I go inside and turn on our VHF radio.

"This is Jangada. May I help you?"

"This is Buttface (or some such—I never could understand what he said). You know, I assume, that you woke me up?"

"Well I'm terribly sorry Mr. Buttface."

“Why didn’t you anchor somewhere else – across the bay? There’s lots more room over there.”

“Well Buttface, it happens to be pitch dark out and I haven’t been to this anchorage before; but I’ll be sure to do that next time. Jangada out.”

“Well Jagander you should study your anchoring etiquette before anchoring again. Buttface out.”

Now I have to say that this is the VERY first time that a yachtie has been rude to me. Granted I’ve only been doing this for a couple months, but it was a surprise none the less. We were beat tired and instantly turned in, leaving Buttface to stew in his anger.

In the morning we saw that we had given him more than enough room, more indeed than any of the other boats had given each other. In a similar situation I think I would have first asked if the boat which was anchoring in the dark (after an obviously long journey) needed assistance before complaining that they had woken me up. But looking at the decrepit rust and mold-stained scow that Buttface owned it was no wonder he was not happy. We pulled anchor and moved a few hundred yards away so as not to be bothered by the sight of his rusting and frayed rigging. I don’t think it’s good anchoring etiquette to be near a junker boat, especially in the Bay of the Dead.

We decided a lay day was in order, particularly since the wind was still howling and the sea was a maelstrom of confused chop and contorted swells. Rod went off to hitchhike to nearby La Ventana to go kiteboarding while Matt and I went for a hike up a nearby mountain and back along the coast, past the amazing brightly painted 30,000’ villa of one of Mexico’s wealthiest men. I did some more climbing, picking the most difficult route I could find through the sea cliffs. Not enough adrenaline lately.

Rod returned in the evening saying that he was going to stay in La Ventana and kite for a couple days while Matt and I continued up the coast to La Paz. The crew was dwindling, but Matt and I felt confident that we could handle the boat with just the two of us (well-weathered seamen that we were) so we agreed.

We set off at a reasonable hour the next morning with 18 knots of wind on our beam and blue sky above. Perfect. What a change from two days ago when we were getting beat up like Rocky Balboa; this was more like the Sound of Music.

All day we sailed north in shifting winds, riding the puffs and going from tack to tack like pros. We took in a reef when the wind reached 25 knots for an hour, deciding that with just the two of us neophytes on a fast, feisty boat, perhaps prudence was the best of policy. Very unlike me. Just at dusk we rounded the tip of the bay and tucked into Puerto Balandra, a small, quiet bay just 6 miles north of La Paz, for the night.

The end was in sight. What a trip! Life... what a trip!

PART DEUX: THE RETURN

Well, I'm back down here in La Paz after a frantic two weeks back home repairing flood damage to my house which occurred during one of my earlier winter excursions. I had to rip up some floors and walls, dry everything out and install new insulation, sheetrock, subfloor, carpet, paint, trim and various other water-soaked appurtenances. I actually enjoy building stuff but it's much more fun the first time around rather than undoing a big mess.

I finished work on a Thursday night and flew to Cabo first thing Friday morning carrying two huge bags of boat goodies, as usual. Much to the disappointment of the taxi drivers at the Cabo airport who would happily have driven me to La Paz for \$220, I opted for an \$11 bus trip to La Paz. Cheapskate. But the busses are clean and efficient and I like riding with the locals.

I arrived at the Marina at 10pm and dragged my bags down the dock to JANGADA.

Arriving at the boat, something looked different. I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Something..... was..... missing.... DOH! No dinghy! My brand spanking new Zodiac and brand spanking new 15hp outboard were gone. POOF! The steel cable had been cut sometime during my absence and now I was dinghy-less (although personally still a bit dingy).

The next morning I made all the usual rounds—the marina office, the police, port captain, customs—and posted STOLEN DINGHY notices all over the place. Several people offered their opinion about who/when/where/how but I quickly resigned myself that I would never see it again.

Filing the police report was particularly amusing. Arriving at the big, dirty La Paz police station on Saturday morning with Jolanda, the Marina de La Paz office manager, I was prepared for total chaos and a loooooong wait. But the place was empty except for minimal staff. Seems all the 'usual' police business is only conducted during weekdays (presumably it takes Monday-Friday to report all the crimes of the past weekend).

We were lead into a small office to give the report. The 'commandant' sat down at his big desk and Jolanda relayed what had happened. He glanced seriously at me every now and then as if to confirm that I was still there. Suddenly he raised his hand and began rifling through his desk looking for something. Finally he found what he was looking for: a pen. He continued searching for another couple minutes, then left the office, returning a few minutes later with a small piece of paper which had obviously been torn from a larger one. He spread the paper on the desk, sat down and began asking Jolanda questions.

As she slowly answered them—What was my name? My boat name? The marina name? When did the theft occur? What was stolen? Where was I when it happened? Where do I live?—he painstakingly wrote the information on the piece of paper. No forms, no copies, no computer.... not even a typewriter. Now this is in a city of 350,000 people mind you; we're not talking some remote village.

After a half-hour of note taking he folded the piece of paper up and put it in the desk drawer. I had to wonder if the process would be similar if I had been mugged or run over by a busload of orphans. But I really didn't want to find out. If I didn't know better I would assume that this was the very first crime to ever happen here. Or the first time he ever actually had to write anything down. We left with his promise to follow up. Assuming he could find his pen.

Visiting the various offices took the better part of two days, with the rest of my time spent working feverishly on the boat to get it ready for friends who were arriving from all over. The usual: cleaning and repairing, equipping and installing. Every time I looked aft at the two empty dinghy davits I got mad. This had occurred right in the middle of a 'secure', well-lit, populated

marina. So much for security. To add insult to injury (had to stick in at least one cliché), I had brought down a big new super cable to lock the dinghy. Just a wee bit too late.

Monday some friends arrived and despite not having a dinghy to get to shore everyone was happy to be on Jangada. It was Cinco de Mayo (translation: a sink full of mayonnaise), which I assumed would be some HUGE holiday celebration. Not so. There are many holidays just as big and important in Mexico. It seems Cinco de Mayo is celebrated more in the U.S. than Mexico; here it is just one more excuse for a big party and a day off from not working.

La Paz, nonetheless, was in full swing with the Malecon (the strolling walkway along the waterfront) alive with music and food and thousands of people in their best clothes. In the middle of it all, where I would expect some sort of raucous majarachi music, was a 30-piece orchestra playing mellow classical music to a seated audience of a thousand people. Strange.

We strolled through the crowds and enjoyed the energy of the warm evening, stopping for cervezas, tacos and big drippy cones of ice cream. Around 10pm the more lively music started up and fueled with several stiff margaritas we danced and carried on until the wee hours. They're called 'wee' hours because that's what you have to do when you drink so much. We met up with two young ladies who were looking for some holiday fun, and before long they had joined our crew.

Next morning, despite hangovers and lack of sleep, it was time to head out. We sailed north around Isla del Espiritu Santo and Isla la Partida, two marvelously close and beautiful desert islands with serene coves and white sand beaches. Just like the photos. Paradise. We sailed, anchored, ate, drank, snorkeled, sang songs, laid in the sun, windsurfed, swam, read, hiked, fished, kayaked and all those other Jangada things which make sailing in the Sea of Cortez so perfect. The weather was ideal—cloudless 90° days and warm but comfortable 70° nights.

The days drifted by. We'd spend a couple days in a secluded bay, then move on to the next one. There was no schedule, no phone, no problems, no stress. Everyone was happy and Jangada was proving to be the perfect platform for tropical cruising: lots of room, lots of privacy, lots of comfort, lots of fun.

No one wanted to go home, as is usually the case, but we were back in La Paz by the next weekend. People had places to go, things to do, work and families and responsibilities to get back to. Me? I had nowhere to go, nothing to do. No wife, no kids, no job. Life is good.

CALLING ALL IDIOTS

But I have a boat, and that means work. I spent a day tinkering around (always fun) and then decided it was time for my maiden solo voyage. Granted I have never sailed a boat—any boat, never mind one this big—by myself. But there's a first time for everything, and this was the time. Woohoo!!!

I eased Jangada out of the marina and into the narrow, shallow channel out of the harbor, through the maze of channel markers (many of which were missing—after all, this is Mexico...) and out into the sea. Everything was perfect. After motoring clear of the large freighters that were anchored around the oil refinery at the end of the harbor, I decided it was do-or-die time: hoist the main and go sailing.

I headed Jangada into the 10-knot breeze directly from the north and cranked up the main. Luckily I had bought a new double-handled winch handle since the huge fully battened mainsail weighs several hundred pounds. It is, indeed, a BEAR to hoist and it took me a solid fifteen minutes to get it up, keeping the reefing lines, lazy jacks and dousing lines all clear and running free as I cranked (that in itself is a full-time job for a crew person).

Then out came the jib, I turned off the motors, bore away and off we went. YeeeeHaa!!! We're sailing!!!! This is SOOOOOO much fun! Jangada was making 5 knots at 45° to weather in 10 knots of wind. The sun was shining, the water was sparkling and I was zipping along all by myself. Those 'Around Alone' guys have nothing on me, I'll tell you. Within five minutes I wanted to continue, alone, around the world. This was living large. This was what life is all about.

I set the autopilot and walked around the boat, inspecting everything like a good captain is supposed to do. I checked my course on the computer. I coiled lines and trimmed the sails. I checked the wind and looked for whales. I went inside and fixed myself a sandwich. And I smiled a lot. Big.

An hour later, as forecast, the wind started to build. I was heading northwest towards the main coast under full sails as the windmeter read 12....15.....18 knots. From my limited experience I knew two things: first, the wind would probably continue to build; second, Jangada develops a good case of weather helm (the rudders 'freeze' and the boat wants to round up into the wind and stay there) if fully rigged in anything over 20 knots of wind.

Briefly I thought about putting in a reef and reducing the jib a bit. You know, the conservative thing to do. The smart thing. Naa. A few days before I had met another guy on a 42' cat in La Paz who told me he had never reefed, even in 25 knots. He said he didn't even know how. If he could do it, so could I.

The wind continued to build. 20 knots....23.....26..... Things were getting... exciting. As expected, Jangada started heading to weather, confusing the autopilot and making all sorts of radical noises. The pressure on the mast, boom and rigging from a big set of sails on a 42' boat in high winds is enormous.

At the same time, of course, we were sailing faster and faster, Jangada and me. 8 knots... 9....10.... and this was heading upwind. I have no doubt that I could have easily done 15 knots on a beam reach. Indeed, whenever I would bear off a bit the speed indicator would jump, but I had a destination in mind and hopefully things would hold together until I got there.

Jangada was right on the edge of control. With a reef or two things would have been just fine, but I was far too excited (and lazy) to think about any sort of reasonable behavior. Suddenly a wild buzzing noise erupted from one of the fishing poles I had set. Oh great, a fish; perfect timing. I ran to the bending pole and whizzing reel, tightened the drag and began winding in line. It wasn't a big fish—probably 20 pounds— but with 10 knots of boat speed it was all I could do to bring it in. Twenty yards out it started skipping along the surface, wondering, no doubt, what the hell was pulling it so fast. Ten yards from the boat the line went slack. Damned! I reeled it in and discovered a bent hook. Guess that fish was bigger than I thought.

Then it was time to tack. Uh oh; hadn't thought about that one.

With even one other person on board this would have been a cinch, even in high winds. Alone... for the first time... with no practice... this was going to take a bit of thought. First I had to figure out how to manage everything—turning the boat to a new course and having it stay there, not too far but just far enough so it wouldn't stall, releasing the old jib sheet and winching in

the new one at the same time so the line wouldn't flog around violently and kill someone (me). This is basically an easy process, but doing it alone brings on a set of entirely new challenges, especially on a cat where the jib winches are at opposite sides of a very wide boat.

I devised a plan using the autopilot to steer while I simultaneously release one jib sheet and hauled the other one in. Three, two, one.... GO! I pressed the autopilot and as the bow came into the wind, released the jib sheet and began to pull on the new one. Then everything stopped. Dead. Right into 25 knots of wind. The jib flapped madly, the main crashed back and forth, and Jangada just stayed put for a moment until it decided to go back to where it was, even though the jib was now set on the wrong side. SHIT! What the hell just happened???

With the autopilot still set to the new course, the jib sheeted to the wrong side, and the gusts bearing down on us with new ferocity, things were not going well. Since the autopilot was still set to turn, Jangada began trying again, all by herself, but this time with virtually no forward speed to carry her (and me) through the tack. She stalled again as I frantically ran back and forth between the jib winches, releasing and tightening and trying not to get killed by the flying lines and crashing boom.

Anyone watching this frantic maneuvering in the middle of the ocean would certainly be convinced that I was either mad or drunk. Or both. Or maybe just dumb.

I shut down the autopilot to try to figure out the problem. That's when I realized that I hadn't set the new course far enough off the wind on the new tack. I had only set it for 60° difference from my existing course, figuring that we were headed 30° into the wind and I wanted to head 30° into the wind on the new tack. But in order to gain enough speed to make the tack, I had bared off to 40° before starting the tack. Try again.

Same result; Jangada would head right into the wind, go another 10°, then turn back just as I was trying to sheet in the new jibsheet. Between the adrenaline and running back and forth between winches and the helm I was getting exhausted. This is not good.

Back to the autopilot. I had added 10° to the new course but it still wasn't enough—it only brought us 30° off the wind and I was discovering that we needed more. So I gave it another 10°. Same result. I tried again. Then I tried to do it without the autopilot. We made it through the wind and all the way around. Suddenly we're going dead downwind and jibing. I couldn't control the helm and didn't have the time to trim the jib and steer at the same time unless I had twenty-foot arms.

After two more tries I finally made it, I'm still not sure how. The problem is how to control the boat as it enters the new course; too little angle and it stalls, too much and it goes out of control. That and simultaneously sheeting in and out on the jib at just the right time while monitoring everything else going on. I think I have to study this more, and then practice (preferably with someone else on board to tell me what the hell I'm doing wrong).

A few minutes later I discovered at least part of my problem: the wind had clocked around another 15° in the middle of all my maneuvering, significantly changing my new tack angle so that I was actually still heading considerably upwind when I thought I was more on a beam reach. Pay attention, TURKEY!!!!

Half an hour later I was at the entrance to Puerto Balandra, a stunning turquoise bay with a wide entrance ringed by jagged cliffs and white beaches. There were 4-5 other boats anchored.

I was still under full sail and flying along smartly. I considered heading to weather and taking down the sails before entering the bay.... But decided that an old salt like me would instead cruise smartly in through the anchored boats to a spot further into the shallow bay

(which only a shallow-draft cat can go) where I would drop my sails right at my anchorage. Like a pro. Very impressive. Like Joshua Slocum: we don't need no stinking motor! Oh boy.

I slid silently past the boats and headed upwind to slow my progress. Luckily for me the bay is protected and the direction of the wind was such that it was not howling through the narrow gap at the far end, which would have pushed me firmly onto the rocks.

At just the perfect spot I started an engine and put it in gear to hold my in place (whimp), hauled in the jib and dashed to the mast to manhandle the corpulent mainsail down to the boom. It was a chore. The main halyard kept getting stuck in the jam cleat that just happened to be on the opposite side of the mast from the dousing line that I needed to pull down the sail. You'd think that such a heavy sail would come down easily by itself, but that's one of the rules of a sailboat: nothing works the way you think I should. I put in another 10 miles sprinting back and forth to either side of the mast and the end of the boom to try to keep the sail in the lazy cradle as it came down. Again, this is no big deal with at least one other person. Alone? It's a challenge.

Then I dropped the anchor in 15' of crystal water, let out 70' of chain, set the bridal, turned off the motor and just stood there on the deck. WHAT A DAY!!!! This was insane!!!! How much fun was I allowed to have in one life????

That lasted all of 30 seconds before I was again consumed with boat chores. Set up the solar panels, zip the lazy cradle, coil lines, secure the boom.... and then dive in the water. The water temperature was perfect as I swam around the boat, scrubbing here and there, inspecting the props, rudders and through-hulls, and diving on the anchor. Half an hour later I was relaxing on the rear deck with a fresh, icy margarita and Jimmy Buffett serenading me.

As a brilliant orange sunset finished off the day I sautéed a big pile of local shrimp, garlic, tomatoes, white wine and jalapenos I had bought from Martin, the local farmer who sold produce outside the marina entrance every morning. I finished it off with fresh mangoes, papaya, pineapple, limes and a couple of succulent melons of which I have no idea of their names. Two more margaritas *really* finished me off.

During the night the wind came up strong and I got up to check things. I could see the other (monohull) sailboats rocking wildly in the swell under a half-moon, and I was glad to be on a nice stable cat. Once again: Jangada rules!

I spent the following day reading and writing, swimming and kayaking, eating and relaxing, and tweaking various things on the boat. A little zip-tie here, burning a rope end there....ahhh! Perfect! I finally took a trip up the mast for the first time. It's quite tall, you know. I thought about that self-snapped photo of Ellen MacArthur (the tiny, young, brilliant solo ocean racer) on the top of her mast fixing something or other in the middle of the southern ocean as her 60' boat Kingfisher was flying along at 15 knots beneath her. This brings new meaning to the word 'adrenaline'.

In fact, as I was zinging along the afternoon before I thought quite a bit about solo sailing and what it would be like to go around the world alone. I don't think there's anything quite like it in the world of sport other than perhaps a solo climb of a big—a very big—mountain. Most people assume that sailing is quite boring. Obviously these people have never sailed in anything over 10 knots of wind. There's more excitement, adrenaline and energy in solo sailing than almost anything else I can imagine (and I've only done it once, so far, but I've done lots of other solo adrenaline sports: kayaking, climbing, skiing, hang-gliding). No, sailing is not boring. Especially solo sailing. It holds your attention. Quite.

Some of the most memorable moments in my life were solo efforts. Remote, wildly dangerous climbs in northern Canada, Patagonia and the Himalaya. Linking thin, dicey turns

down a steep, icy couloirs in Alaska—you fall, you die. Windsurfing alone from the mainland to a remote island off the coast of Thailand; crossing the Molokai Channel in Hawaii without telling a soul where I was going. Pushing the envelope, living large. But I don't know if I could handle the endless day-to-day stress and energy requirements of 20...30... 90 days at sea. No, that is something reserved for a special breed. The few, the proud, the crazy!

ON THE HARD

After a nice rest day it was time for some windsurfing. Now here was the solo sailing I was used to. Around 1pm the wind picked up to 20 knots in the bay, quite enough for my 120l board and 6.0m sail. As usual I could only go back and forth for so long—say.... 5 minutes. Then I headed out to sea. YaaaHaaa! Pelicans, cranes and kites swooped around me, thinking perhaps that I was some sort of kindred mother ship. Schools of flying fish and small rays swarmed and jumped as I sliced overhead.

Five miles out I decided to turn around. Or course by now the tide was in full flood, rushing downwind into Bahia de la Paz at 3-4 knots; it was all I could do to get back into the safety of Balandra where a few short tacks brought me right back to Jangada and a nap in the shade.

A while later I inflated the kayak and went for an exploratory paddle along the coast. Every few minutes I'd put on my dive mask, slip into the warm water and swim around to cool off and check out the underwater scenery. Along the beaches it was stark, an 'underwater desert' as I recall Jacque Cousteau describing it. But along the rocks and cliffs the sea was teeming with colorful fish, darting in and out of hidden crevasses and holes, then peering out with big eyes to see if I was about to eat them.

Back at the boat I went for a swim, diving under Jangada and scraping small barnacles from the water intakes under the hull. It's amazing how these tiny creatures can adhere and quickly grow on a boat. I checked the props, rudders and saildrive seals, making mental notes of what to replace when I haul her out of the water next week. Evening brought a cool breeze, another spectacular sunset, and a 3/4 moon that illuminated the bay with a shimmering glow.

Next morning it was time for my first trip up the mast. This was something I had been planning to do for....ever. Something I should have done the day I bought the boat. But... oh well. Now or never. I rigged my climbing harness, ascenders and prussiks and headed up the main halyard before the morning breeze started up. Along the way I inspected the spreaders, shrouds, mast track, radar dome and everything else which got in my way.

At the very top I discovered the main reason that the mainsail was so damned hard to raise: the main halyard was wrapped around the topping lift (a line from the top of the mast to the boom end used to support the boom when the sail is down). I couldn't see this from the deck (indeed it was hard to see from even 5' away) but with tension on both lines it clearly added a huge amount of friction, especially when raising the main the last 10'. Yup, shoulda gone up there sooner....

As I pondered this latest discovery I felt a slight breeze and looked out of the bay to see a nice fat windline racing towards me. Oh great, just what I need. I was about 6" from the top of the mast when the gust hit and Jangada starting rolling. Now granted a cat doesn't roll

anywhere near as much as a monohull, but on top of a 60' mast, a 10° roll turns into 15' of sideways travel (I knew trigonometry would come in handy some day....)

The mast pitched from side to side as I desperately tried to cling to whatever I could, at the same time trying to loosen my ascenders and work my way back down the halyard. When my legs (which were wrapped around the mast) slipped off I went careening wildly into space, slamming soundly back into the mast on my return trip. This continued all the way down until I was finally back on the deck, pumped and bruised. Mission accomplished. Time for a hike.

I paddled to shore and headed up a long, wide ridge above the bay. From the top there was a 360 degree view of... the world, or at least my part of it. I hiked along for an hour, traversing the entire bay as the sun beat down mercilessly. Back at the boat I swam languidly in the cool water and drank two quick beers before siesta took over. There are rules down here you know, siesta being one of them.

The following morning I decided to leave my idyllic setting and go for a sail. I wanted to try one more trick to see if I could really screw things up good: sail off the anchor with no motor. No power. Nada. Nothing but me and the wind.

I rigged up the manual anchor windlass and began the laborious task of winching in 90' of chain holding my 14,000 pound boat. Fifteen minutes later I had gotten it all of 40' closer. Time to hoist the main. It was a bit easier without all the twisting going on at the top of the mast, but still a chore. I tightened the outhaul and mainsheet to keep the flapping to a minimum, then let out half of the jib, my thinking being that I needed a bit of control once the anchor was up or within 30 seconds I'd be crunched up on the rocks 300 yards behind me. Luckily the wind was light, 5-10 knots; I continued hoisting the anchor. Suddenly it was free. Of course the problem was that I didn't have time to get it all the way up so I left it dragging 10 feet in the water as I scrambled back to the helm to try to make headway. Luckily I have a cat, so a dragging anchor really can't damage a hull. I'd worry about it later.

Rather than head upwind, of course, Jangada wanted to jibe. The problem with that was that there wasn't room: to my right was the beach, in back of me were the rocks. The slightest miscalculation or hesitation and we'd be grounded. Or worse. But it was too late for other plans. I swung the wheel to starboard and prayed.

In what seemed like a timespan somewhere between a minute and a month, we swung around 270° and headed out of the bay just as tight as you please. The blood pounding in my head made my eyeballs hurt. I rushed up to the bow to finish taking in the anchor, 4" at a time. No wonder God invented the electric windlass.

I rounded out of the bay and headed on a beam reach across the bay. I tacked and jibed and did all sorts of sailing stuff, and gradually figured out how the boat worked and more important, how much thought I had to give to every maneuver before I started it. I have a loooooong way to go before setting out across the Pacific, I'll tell you. I anchored back in the bay for the night and slept out on the trampoline under an almost full moon.

Around midnight the wind came up. Big time. But out of the south. It was gusting over 25 knots; the rigging was banging and clanging as the wind shrieked through the myriad lines surrounding the mast. Sleep was not an easy task. At 6am I gave up, brewed up a strong pot of coffee and watched the sunrise over the hills. Jangada had turned 180 degrees on her anchor (lucky for good holding ground) and the wind showed no signs of abating. Oh great, just what I need: I had to beat straight into the wind getting up here and now, instead of a sled ride downwind back to La Paz, I have to beat my way back here. Oh wait, I forgot: that's the first rule of sailing: the wind will always blow in the wrong direction.

Around 10 o'clock, just as I was packing everything up for the journey south, the VHF radio comes alive: "Calling Jangada, calling Jangada..." Now who the hell can that be? Only one other person in the world knows I'm out here and that ain't him.

"This is Jangada. Who is this?"

"Eric? Is that you? Is it really you? Where ARE you??? It's Sue!!! We're here at Marina de La Paz!!! I can't believe we found you!!! Where are you???"

In a truly bizarre coincidence, two friends from Hood River were driving south through Baja, knew that I was supposed to be around here somewhere, stopped at the marina and asked, and someone told them to try me on the radio, that I might be out sailing somewhere. I hardly ever have the radio on but I had turned it on in the morning to get a weather update and had forgotten to turn it off. And the chances of finding me inside the cabin, actually able to hear the radio.....

And... it just so happened that I was in a bay that you could actually reach by car. So they drove north for a half-hour while I kayaked to shore to meet them (remember: I have no dinghy). I paddled Sue back to the boat while Bill swam, and we immediately decided that a drink was in order. After a couple of those I came up with the brilliant (at least for me) idea that they should sail back to La Paz with me that afternoon, then take a taxi back up to their car that evening. Sure... why not....

The wind had calmed down to 10-12 knots; we raised the sails, pulled the anchor and headed out into a lively sea. The wind had again turned 180 degrees and we had a delightful downwind cruise. Bill even decided that he should toss a rope overboard and get dragged along behind Jangada, which he did. Obviously he had a gross overestimation of my sailing skills in getting back to him should he let go of the rope.

We pulled into Marina Palmira around 5pm, they headed back to their car, and I started in on taking the boat apart so that it could get hauled out first thing the next morning. Sails down, lines stowed, bimini off, everything put away—lots and lots of chores to do well into the evening. Extra fun in 95 degree heat. At 10:30 it was still 89°; summer's on the way. Time to head north.

Next morning I drove Jangada around the corner and up onto the big trailer which would haul her out for the summer; a couple hours later she was sitting 'on the hard', atop four big piles of wood blocks. She looked..... out of place. I started right in on the enormous task of getting her ready to sit out the summer of heat and hurricanes, both of which posed considerable concern, not to mention substantial preparation.

I lowered the jib off the roller furler and stowed it. I took the HUGE main down (managing to lose a handful of loose ball bearings from one batten car along the way, as expected), wrestled it to the side deck and lashed it tight. I pulled down all the lines and stashed them out of the sun (the chance of me remembering how to re-rig all this stuff again in the fall? Pretty much ZERO.) I waxed the decks and windows and put on sun resistant covers. I worked on the saildrives, motors and props. I cleaned and stowed, lashed and strapped, tweaked and sweated and worked non-stop for two days in the 100° heat until I was satisfied that everything was in order. And yes, although you couldn't pay me enough to do this work for pay, I was having a blast getting to know the boat. Unless you're Donald Trump, that's part of the deal. You're not likely to find pearls in oysters served on a plate.

A final few margaritas with friends on the waterfront (of course in my parched, dehydrated state they pack a pretty severe punch) and I crash hard at 10pm. Tomorrow, home. The first part of my new life as a boat owner has begun. Who knows what the future will bring. I plan to put her back in the water in November and spend much of next winter cruising around the Sea of Cortez. I've already had friends from all over the world email me to say they want to come

along, so I anticipate a busy winter as people fly in to join me on various parts of the journey; one week....two....four.... time seems to melt away when you're on the water.

When I decided to buy a boat I figured I would give it a shot, see what happened and if I didn't like it I'd sell the boat (undoubtedly taking a BIG bath) and move onto something else. As it turned out, I LOVE having a boat. It is everything I ever imagined, and much more. I love everything about it.

I think that everyone needs a passion in their life. For some it's an art: music, painting, photography; for some it's sports; for others it's their family. I've had many passions during the past 40 years, mostly adrenaline related but some not: skiing, judo, climbing, photography, kayaking, biking.... and now, sailing. Actually, cruising. I have no interest or intention of racing. Competition: been there, done that. Now I just want to cruise around and indulge my long delayed passion—writing—free of the distractions of phones and wars and people wasting my time by asking for advice on how to get their lives together and then ignoring it.

I am back from a great adventure, both in body and in spirit, and about to embark on many more. My advice to all is to take your dream and make it happen. It won't be easy, it may not work out, but you'll never know until you take the chance. You seldom find pearls in oysters served on a plate. If you want to come along for a week or two next winter let me know. If you only have half as much fun as me you may never want to come back.

DOC FUNS BAJA SHRIMP CORTEZ RECIPE

INGREDIENTS:

10 nice-ah ripe-ah Roma tomatoes, chopped
 1 medium onion, chopped
 6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
 1# shrimp, peeled and cleaned
 1 medium Jalapeño, chopped
 black pepper – a couple good shots
 oregano – perhaps a teaspoon
 fresh cilantro – small handful, coarsely chopped leaves
 1/4 cup olive oil
 1 bottle of tequila

In a large frying pan or wok, add olive oil, garlic and onion and cook over medium heat 3-4 minutes. Add shrimp, oregano, Jalapeño and black pepper and cook for another 3-4 minutes. Add tomatoes, cilantro, a splash of tequila, stir, cover and simmer at low heat for 15 –20 minutes while drinking lots of tequila.

This dish is fast, easy, cheap, spicy, and reeeallll good. And like all soups and stews, it's even better the next day. Serve over rice or noodles. Makes 3-5 servings, depending on how hungry you are. I can eat the whole thing myself.