

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE ONBOARD 'SHOW ME'

After joining the boat on Tuesday 17th January, I quickly become accustomed to life on board: Wake around 6-6:30am, brew coffee (for the Americans who cant go without several cups every morning complete with cream and sugar!) and tea for James and Vicki. James and I usually go for a 500m-2km swim most mornings to surrounding reef or islands, checking out the fish and coral along the way. What a way to start the day! We have been warned by local villagers to be careful of crocodiles which have taken people in the past.

Then it's breakfast. The owner is on the Atkins diet (protein and fat only, no carbs) so he has bacon and eggs every morning. Luckily James and me stocked up on Weet-bix and muesli.

After breakfast we generally do chores, these include anything from cleaning toilets, floors, airing mats, washing clothes/cushions/towels/bedding, sewing ripped sails, coiling lines, polishing stainless steel, washing dishes (James and I take turns, and Vicki the cook keeps us busy). The chores are endless as things are always breaking or dirty/smelly/damp.

After lunch (devoured quickly by all as there is usually no time for mid meal snacks, nor food to snack on), we usually get time for adventures and exploration... this is when the diving, snorkelling, swimming, exploring islands, local villages, walking through jungle and swamp, cave exploration etc are done. Of course James and I are probably the keenest of the crew, but Les (owner) is always up for a challenge even at 65yrs, often instigating many of our adventures on land and Vicki is nearly as keen as us too.

We're usually back on the boat in time for sundowners (cold beverage or 2), dinner and maybe a movie (they have a wide collection of movies that the crew have all seen more than twice while James and I have seen none not being movie buffs. Although the odd movie is welcoming I often wish I could get away from them, but there is little space for that.

Nights are hot, humid and muggy, often with no breeze. And stuck in our bunks in a 2m by 1m cell we often sweat all night, waking to soaked sheets and pillow cases (you can see why my early morning swim is becoming my favourite part of the day).

This life is definitely a long way from our lives back in Oz, definitely an experience and an adventure.

THE INJURIES

Started with Rod burning is back to the 2nd degree and at least 2 weeks out of action. Followed by James spraining his ankle by jumping into the dinghy (a minor injury, only kept him on boat for a day, though snorkelling and diving were fine). Next was James and I coming down with what we self-diagnose as Giardia, probably gained from swimming in contaminated water close to villages. Then Vicki whipped herself with the stern line while trying to free the boat from anchorage in high seas in

Honiara, winding herself and bruising her foot. Putting her out of action for a day. Rod and I cooked late lunch and dinner that day. Then I manage to pull the sail locker hatch over my foot ripping off my big toe nail... Now I'm out of action for a day or 2, not even able to stand on it.

BAD ANCHORAGE AT HONIARA

After a morning of rain and endless games of UNO, we decided to head back to Honiara from the Florida Islands to renew visas and replenish supplies. It was a lumpy 4½hr sail back making my already queasy stomach from Giardia even worse. Honiara has a terrible anchorage at the best of times, made worse by rolling seas and high winds meaning that we have to tie 2 stern lines to the rock wall in addition to anchoring so that we hold place.

With a squall fast approaching, strong winds and rain we tried to drop anchor, but found the chain was caught (knotted) after heeling over during the sail. In an already precarious position we quickly had to pull up anchor and head back out to sea to try and untangle the mess in the middle of a squall with rain and winds. It took some time, with Vicki in the anchor locker, James putting out the anchor on deck, Rod keeping the boat steady and me not knowing what to do (as is often the case in emergencies at sea).

With the anchor freed we head back in to try again. After the anchor is dropped and holding we have to quickly get stern lines attached to the rock wall to stop our boat, swinging in the wind and rolling seas, from hitting the pier or surrounding boats. In the rain and wind James and I jump into the dinghy with a spool line tied to the heavy stern lines to take it to shore. On approaching the rock wall I realise that one of us is going to have to swim to shore to pull in the line and secure it to a rock on the wall. This was not easy and obviously best completed by James, but that meant that I had to take control of the dinghy myself and in these waves I was scared I'd end up shipwrecked on the rocks! But with adrenaline pumping I managed to keep the dinghy circling in neutral until James had tied the line. The boat was now half secure and just in time as it had been swinging out of control dangerously close to the pier.

I now somehow had to get the other stern line to James so that he could attach it. I yelled to Rod asking him what to do and he told me to take the line under the two lines already attached from our boat, and another's, to James. I yelled through rain and wind that I didn't think I was the best person to do that job (seemed bloody difficult to me with my pathetic dinghy steering skills!). Luckily he said he'd come with me. We managed to get under the 2 lines to James on shore who had to throw the spool back to me, keeping one end, so that we could run it back to the boat, attach the other line for him to pull in. Of course he totally missed the dinghy by about 2-3m and I jumped out into the sea to grab the spool and climb back into the dinghy. Heading back to the boat I unravelled the spool, but it ended about 10m short (we later found out that the spool line had become jammed between the rocks and James had had to cut it by sawing it on the rocks at least 3 times). We had to tie the line to another line before we could continue back to the boat.

We attached the stern line to the spool and James pulled it in and secured it, but the line had dragged on the bottom and was wedged under coral so that we couldn't pull it tight. If left it would definitely tear through shortly due to the weight on the line from the heaving boat. James had to dive to try to free it and after several attempts it was freed. The boat was secure (but certainly not stable) and after 1½hrs of adrenaline beers were opened to reward our team effort. Not for me though, as soon as adrenaline wore off my stomach pains were back in full force and I was throwing up in the head (toilet). Needless to say I went to bed and slept for 10hrs!

The next day was not much better. James stayed aboard Show Me on anchor watch while the rest of us went to shore to renew visas and provision. By 10am waves were crashing in, wind was up and storms were coming from all angles. James couldn't leave the boat to come back and get us in the dinghy and even if he could we didn't know how we'd get into the dinghy because the waves were now crashing about 1-2 feet over the jetty and dumping on shore. Eventually he took a gamble and came to collect Rod who went back to the boat while James came in to get us. We had to struggle to get back out over the waves without capsizing the dinghy. Back on board we had to move fast to get out of there, the anchor was dragging and the boat was in full throttle against the stern lines to take pressure off the anchor.

We managed to pull up the anchor and release the lines from the boat (which we left as it was too unsafe to untie them from the rock wall), but not without an injury. Vicki was whipped by one of the stern lines while trying to let it out slowly under huge pressure.

With Rod behind the wheel, Les at the navigation table, Vicki injured with ice on her foot and me holding on in the cockpit while waves crashed over the boat, we set sail back to the Florida Islands and the calm inlet of Tulagi Island. Despite the rain, interrupted by waves of salt water, wind and rolling seas, the sail was much faster this time. I didn't move from my position for 3½hrs, after going down below for one minute to batten hatches and stow everything away, I vomited in the galley sink and decided it was better if I stay put on deck. Drenched from head to toe I quickly got goose pumps but still I wasn't moving.

Arriving safely at Tulagi around 4pm, the sea much calmer though no less windy, we were all starving after having not eaten since breakfast at about 7 that morning. With Vicki out of action I followed orders to heat up left over pasties which we devoured quickly, especially me having barely eaten for 2 days due to my stomach bug and sea sickness.

A CHANGE OF PLANS

Safely in Tulagi inlet we waited out the storms (high winds and rain from cyclone Jim South-East off Cairns). I'm bound to the boat for 2 days due to terrible stomach pains (which I now had antibiotics for and so slowly dissipate) and another of my unco, accident-prone stunts causing my big toe nail to be ripped off while opening the sail locker hatch. During this time discussions were held between Les, Vicki and Rod regarding Vicki's daughter needing her back home. So Les decides that it's best to head back to Hawaii to re-group. I'm some what apprehensive about the up coming

30-day sail, at least, from Solomons to Hawaii, but am quite excited about new adventures, surfing, and staying at Les' condo.

First we need about a week to provision ourselves for at least a month at sea, recuperate from recent injuries, fix various boat parts and refuel. So when the storms die we head to Guizo where we will depart for Hawaii.

Adelle Purbrick, February 1st, 2006 www.sula.com.au