

I*N*S*I*D*E P*A*S*S*A*G*E

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Dick's hand is shaking too much for him to unscrew the bolts to the seal that was supposed to provide a water-tight connection between our sailboat's engine and the propeller. Sea water is gushing in around the coupling like the return of the Red Sea after Moses led out the Israelites. The piercing, electronic bleeping of the high-water alarm is incessant. As I shake off sleep and try to focus, one thought lights up in my brain like an old-fashioned burlesque marquee: What are two almost-senior citizens doing here, anyway?



At this point, I'm an unlikely candidate to master any Zen-like moments of spiritual calm. But, somehow, I manage to get the wrench started. In a matter of moments Dick regains his composure. He takes over again. I take a look at myself in a new light. Who is this cool-

headed woman methodically reviewing a checklist of emergency procedures?

- 1) Finish getting dressed in the warmest clothes available (it's 3:00 am and we're three miles out to sea – west, northwest of Crescent City, CA). Check.
- 2) Throw go-bags into our dinghy. Check.

Well, that's about it, actually. My other mental checklist is of items to do if/when we survive:

1. Enhance my list of emergency procedures.
2. Start drilling on emergency procedures.
3. Drill some more on emergency procedures.

Dick is now confident. He's reattached the coupling and the bilge pump has taken care of the excess water. Dick is incredibly adept at handling any emergency that arises on-board and actually seems to welcome the challenge. Which is probably what we're doing here in the first place -- I snort mentally -- conquering new horizons. It's like being married to Lewis and Clark. Let's face it, kids: I'm living *his* dream. Apparently that dream requires extreme tests of stamina, endurance and nerves. We're pounding into scary-looking twelve-foot seas. My hair has been permanently



rearranged into a charming monk-like coif from being anchored under caps to protect against twenty-five-knot winds on the nose. We're striving to beat our way toward the Inside Passage between Canada's mainland and the Gulf Islands toward Alaska. As we fight our way from Los Angeles toward the Strait of Juan de Fuca, I think, what am I doing here?

And, why am I still asking this question? It's been almost 18 months since we traded in our 36-foot boat for an almost 50-foot yacht (a Catalina 470). I had simultaneously started a new business performing public relations and marketing for a handful of select clients. Although communications with my clients in the beginning was often rough, it wasn't impossible, so I managed to keep the business going. But as we made good on our intention to do some "serious cruising" as far north as Glacier Bay, Alaska, I began to feel ill at ease. Is this worth the risk?

In truth, despite years behind the mast of our 36, I'm only so-so when it comes to being seaworthy. And if you take into account mental readiness, my happiest days were actually when we briefly owned "the land boat," a tiny, slide-in camper top which we trucked around on the back of a heavy duty Ford truck, from the Grand Canyon to Yellowstone. Now that was a vessel you could control: no weather issues, no running out of supplies and plenty of available ports-of-call. Not quite challenging enough for Dick, though, it would appear. Here's his note from the log that day:

"APRIL 27, 2008 (SUNDAY): CRESCENT CITY, CA TO CHARLESTON HARBOR, COOS BAY, OR

"Sky Condition: Overcast w/morning fog; visibility <1 NM

Temperature: 48° - 50° F

Wind Direction: N to SW

Wind Speed: 2 - 10 kts.

Wave Height: 2 - 6 feet

Total Miles: 116.3. NM

Miles Under Power: 116.3 NM (Motorsailing)

Miles Under Sail: 0.0 NM

Average Speed: 7.25 Knots

Cumulative Miles: 953.75 NM

"This will be the last very long leg for awhile. We will hunker down in Coos Bay until at least Thursday, maybe Friday. Unfortunately, this leg did not start out well at all. First, I had some orientation problems getting out of the harbor. We had trouble with the E120 and for a few moments were sailing "blind" as we left the harbor. Once the radar was back on and the tracking restarted we were okay. But about 20 minutes later an alarm went off. I thought it was the LifeTag, but quickly determined that wasn't the problem. Seconds later, with an adrenalin rush, I discovered it was the HIGH WATER ALARM.

"It turned out to be the hex nuts on the shaft for the PSS system were loose and the flywheel, or restraining wheel, whatever they call it, had slipped up the shaft again causing a flood. THE GREAT NEWS IN ALL THIS IS THAT OUR SAFETY SYSTEMS WORKED PERFECTLY. This was the first real test of the High Water Alarm. Without it, the floorboards could have been awash and the batteries shorted out before I knew we had a problem.

"After that, things calmed down, Sharon went to bed and I'm answering a few emails and keeping occupied."

Now, does that sound at all like we faced down death in a scene that could be spliced into the film "Victory at Sea"? Does it even sound like we're on the same boat? I had no idea there was any **great** news, other than the fact we survived.

This tells me Dick and I are living in strange and often complex, parallel universes. While he's Peter Pan, I'm the conservative and reluctant Wendy. While he's Captain Kirk – going where no man has gone before – I'm still Wendy. I haven't gone anywhere at all. And maybe that's my problem: while I talk a good line about loving to travel, I'm also risk-averse.



The good news is that we made it safely to Coos Bay, Oregon and after that, all the way through the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Georgia Strait and are now in the Queen Charlotte Strait. As I write this, we are waiting for a weather window to open so that we can cross Queen Charlotte Sound. We are deep within the Inside Passage, moored at a town called Port Hardy (now, doesn't that name just tell it all?).

It's been about four months since we undertook this journey, so it's a good time

to assess if we are 'hardy' enough to live on-board and roam from port to port for the foreseeable future. Yes, we've had a few emergencies since the Great Near-Sinking Episode, albeit none quite so life-or-death. Nonetheless, I find that I'm much calmer now during a day's journey; my stomach is no longer tensed up from the moment we cast off, through the course of the sail and upon arrival at the next port-of-call.

So I guess, yes, I've made my own, inside passage of sorts, from reluctant swabby to capable crew member. I've had my confidence in my boat and my captain reinforced on an almost daily

basis. I even find that I am less panicked about things that once possessed me: my work, my never-ending weight-loss diet. There has also been a transition internally from a workaholic, frantically multi-tasking my way through the day, to a woman who is gradually becoming accustomed to just being and enjoying each moment.

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