

	<h1>Still Waters Run Deep</h1> <p>by</p> <h1>Esther Arosemena</h1>	Printer Friendly Version
		Photo Gallery

Recently I've been introduced to sailing. If you go to a marine store or related bookstore, you can find a 500-page book on knots and more publications full of hints and advise that one can possibly read in a lifetime. Having decided that I really want to join this world I ask myself, what's essential?

So far I've learned the very basics of winds and currents and how to steer the helm. I've discovered that there are more seas and oceans that one could ever sail. And I've become aware that the sea can seduce a sailor with limitless promises or chastise him/her with unimaginable dangers. There are thousands of stories recorded in literature as far back as Homer and innumerable heroes to emulate. But at the core of all of it there is a primal engagement: the love of the sea.

In 1968 Bernard Moitessier wrote in his log:

"I felt such a need to rediscover the wind of the high sea, nothing else counted at that moment....All *Joshua* and I wanted was to be left alone with ourselves...You do not ask a tame seagull why it needs to disappear from time to time toward the open sea. It goes, that's all".

Moitessier and other eight contenders participated in the Golden Globe race. They raced in clippers and multihulls on route around the world by "way of the three capes", (the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa; Cape Leeuwin, Australia; and South America's Cape Horn) some of the most turbulent waters imaginable.

Traveling alone they were not to stop at any port and they could not have assistance or re-stocking of their supplies or resources. Those were the "simple" rules. To add to the challenge these men did not have the array of electronic and communications devices that guides us through the waters today.

In 2001 Peter Nichols published a detailed account of these voyages. What sets his book apart from others is that he offers not only a description of the adventure-full events, but

also and introspective view of what moved these men to undertake this mammoth challenge. "These men sailed for reasons more complex than even they knew". As I sit on *Unity's* deck, (sweet *Unity*) my lover's 31 foot sail boat I conclude we all go to sea to find ourselves. Here are some notes of my maiden voyage.

For one thing, I brought too much "stuff". I quote George Carlin, the comedian:

"That's all you need in life, a little place for your stuff. That's all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn't have so much stuff, you wouldn't need a house." " Sometimes you leave your house to go on vacation. And you gotta take some of your stuff with you. Gotta take about two big suitcases full of stuff, when you go on vacation. You gotta take a smaller version of your house."

You cannot make a boat a smaller version of your house. One thing about boats is that it teaches you to minimize. All the "stuff" you left at home, "stuff" in general loses a lot of its importance. It is not that you do without; it is only that you do much better with what you have. Take salads. How about cottage cheese, tuna, tomatoes, green peppers and bacon bits? Delicious! It's wonderful to discover the power of your own ingenuity.

The second most important lesson I learned on my maiden voyage is that a good sailor learns to trust intuition. Our physical senses are powerful receptors capable of processing tremendous amounts of information in seconds. We need to rely on our senses.

On our third day of sailing we decided to spend the night at Warderick Wells, home to the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park Headquarters and a very popular stop. A new cold front had been announced and we wanted a protected bay from gusts in the upper 20s that were forecasted.

We had radioed and inquired about a mooring spot but none of those sponsored by the Park's office were available. As we entered the bay we turned right to check anchoring on a shallower but more protected area of the bay. Derek calculated how close we could get to the shore to be snugger. The tides were already receding.

As we were getting ready to secure *Unity*, we noticed another spot totally opposite to where we were, to the left and closer to the other boaters. We motored there and after checking it we decided to go back to our original spot. By now, half and an hour had passed.

Right before we dropped anchor, somewhere in my brain, the quintessential light bulb, flagged me with the thought that the rocks flanking us were more exposed from the water than when we had arrived. "Is the tide lower?" I remember thinking." " Nah", my hunch was wrong. How can I dare tell a sailor with 30 years experience that I thought we were anchoring too shallow?

At first the “thump, thump” noise was gentle. Then Derek flew out of the V-berth and ran on deck. He pulled and maneuvered. Needless to say there was very little to do but wait for the tide to rise again... and pray.

Sometime during the sleepless night I said: “The thought occurred to me when we were anchoring that the tide was too low for us to moor so close to shore.” “And why didn’t you say something?” Derek answered. “Because I don’t know anything about sailing”, I replied. “Never, never underestimate the value of your sixth sense, it may cost you your life.” Derek said.

Always remain tuned in to your hunches and don’t dismiss any gut feeling or that sense of “knowing without knowing what one knows”. Never underestimate the power of your intuition.

By the way, as a sailor, one thing I learned really early is that the one factor that rules your life in cruising is the weather. I can’t offer much perspective based on my experience. Among others, I’ve gotten valuable outlooks on the subject from Dianna Jessie’s “Cruising Woman Advisor-How to Prepare for the Voyaging Life”. In a nutshell:

- 1- Steer clear of bad weather if you can.
 - a) Know the weather trends of the area you’re cruising. Pilot charts help.
 - b) Rely on your electronic equipment but don’t have blind faith in it.
 - c) Keep informed but avoid basing your decisions on panic stories or unknown sources. Learn to distinguish between good and bad information.

- 2- Prepare for bad weather.
 - a) Keep the right gear on board. Choosing the right gear is dependent on the type of cruising you do. A weekend cruiser has different needs than one cruising in severe weather. In choosing remember that the goal in foul weather is to keep dry and warm.
 - b) If bad weather is forecasted and you can’t get to a safe harbor on time, set a plan. Eating is important; it prevents fatigue. A warm meal a day is good for morale and energy levels, even if it’s instant cereal or soup. Keep thermos of boiling water for instant coffee, hot chocolate or soup mixes. Pre-cooked rice and anything makes a good meal. Keep crackers, dry biscuits and fruit, trail mix or the like handy. Don’t choose this time to watch you figure. Drink lots of water.

- c) Learn and practice techniques that will allow you to keep control of your vessel.
- d) Learn to replace fear and apprehension with intelligent action.

Robin Knox-Johnston won the Golden race only out of sheer determination and adaptation in face of unimaginable perils. After a severe pounding in the Indian Ocean, *Suhaili*, his 32-foot long ketch looked so wretched that she could have been mistaken for a vessel in distress. Nevertheless, he and his boat endured 29,000 miles and 310 at sea.

Neck to neck with Robin Knox-Johnston was Bernard Moitessier. But just six weeks before his projected arrival in Plymouth, Moitessier abandoned the race. Before he headed back to sea he sailed into Cape Town Harbor, South Africa. There he slingshot a small can with a message onto the deck of a British Petroleum tanker, *British Argosy*. It read:

“My intention is to continue the voyage, still nonstop, toward the Pacific Island, where there is plenty of sun and more peace than in Europe. Please do not think I’m trying to break a record. “Record” is a very stupid word at sea. I am continuing nonstop because I am happy at sea, and perhaps because I want to save my soul.”

Maybe all of us that seek “the sailing life” feel like him.