

A FIRST MATE'S LOG: STUART TO KEY WEST It's All About the Dog!

2/17/04 With warm clothes, canned soup and dog biscuits stashed aboard UpWind (Hull #201), we leave Palm City for Key West. By Florida standards, it's raining and cold. The first voice we hear on the radio is Diversity II asking the Roosevelt Bridge to open for him. Fulton tells us that he has been to Stuart for repairs and is single-handing to New Smyrna. He reminds us to write up our story for the website.

As we head down the St. Lucie River, a pod of dolphins follow and Schooner, our yellow Lab, studies them with confusion. We turn into the ICW and find Tuesday a busy day on the waterway: Boats are returning from the Miami boat show; Towboat US pushes a big trawler home. Our 75 pound dog lounges on the settee, his head resting on the pillow and his lips quivering as he snores. When he awakens, I take him outside where he barks at blonde and brunette pelicans sitting on junk boats anchored in Lake Worth. The Port of Palm Beach is filled with huge container ships being unloaded by overhead cranes. I wonder what's going on in the tents erected in downtown West Palm Beach. Tugs and barges share the waterway with us. It is overcast and we have warm soup for lunch. When we stop for diesel, the dog gets so excited that he poops in the cockpit and howls in embarrassment. We are pleased when we can squeeze under the bridge at Boynton Beach.

We dock at the Del Rey Harbor Club and read on our contract that dogs are not allowed. We agree to walk Schooner only on the vacant lot away from the marina. That night I cook a frittata for dinner but find that on a small burner and with cheap frying pan, I can make only burnt scrambled eggs.

2/18/04 When we awake, we find the dog sleeping between us. He kisses each of us on the mouth, and his loose black lips are pulled back in a wide smile.

We meet Alan's medical school classmate and his wife, and all sit by the pool. They tell us of their plans to move to Florida. We look up to see Dick Tuschick cruising up the waterway. "He sold us our boat," we say. "He lives in our neighborhood," we add. "Florida must be like a small town," they say. We spend the day walking through downtown Delray Beach. That night, Alan and I shiver together under the sleeping bag.

2/19/04 The next morning it is sunny and cold. We struggle to release our lines from the poles in the marina; no one is there to help. Luxurious houses line the waterway. We try to obey the signs and struggle to determine if our wake is less than the legal 15 inches (25 feet behind the boat). In Fort Lauderdale the canal widens, and we pass diesel delivery boats and boats rushing to suck out holding tanks. We see water taxis shaped like yellow bullets, a plane made into a boat, mega yachts and miles of marinas. Around noon we see huge cruise ships and container ships but the scenery quickly changes to mangroves, a few restaurants and modest condos.

We both stay down below. We both watch for 'no wake' signs and channel markers. When I steer I stray too close to shore and hit a rock. A small boat that has been following us veers port to avoid the same rocks. The depth sounder registers ridiculous numbers for awhile, and I feel like a failure. We run into a section of waterway where we can't read the numbers on the channel markers.

When we reach Hollywood we appreciate the modest two-story buildings, tangle of mangroves and tiki restaurants. The dog discovers that if he stands on the salon table he can see in all directions and we shoo him off. Here the waterway is more accessible to local residents: A road runs near it and there are public parks. Soon the condos get huge and morph into mansions. We see dogs jumping into their personal swimming pool. Navigating downtown Miami is awesome and confusing, giving us little time to write about it.

We anchor in No Name Harbor, taking care not to be too close to anyone. We take the dog to shore in the dinghy and have to lift him onto the seawall. Alan lifts him from below while I pull up on his harness. He seems grateful to be on shore and rushes into the bushes. Passersby pet him and tell us about their convention in Miami. We walk in the woods and by the water, take out hamburgers and salad from the restaurant, and eat at the picnic table, drinking wine hidden in a back pack. We discover that the shower is closed but the pump out station works.

2/20/04 We choose Hawk Channel, the outside route, and leave at 9 AM. We are now in the ocean and there are small swells. Schooner flops on the floor, looking unhappy. We pass Stiltsville and can see the Keys. We worry about running over a crab pot and getting line wound in the propeller. Alan announces that he brought his scuba gear and will dive if necessary. The dog refuses water. The windows get salty. We take turns cuddling with the dog and aren't sure if it is he or us who needs the comforting. The hanging locker door slams back and forth as we head over the waves. For lunch we have turkey, avocado and spinach sandwiches, on Atkins diet bread. Alan is a good sport and doesn't complain that the bread is dry and grainy.

When we leave the channel for John Pennekamp State Park we find ourselves in a maze of mangroves and are thankful for the computer charts, even if they show us going over an island. On the radio we hear a commercial boat calling 'Securite' on the radio and saying it is approaching 'collision corner.' A minute later we see the huge vessel. We decide this is like a jungle ride, because we are alone with the birds in the mangroves. The marina is friendly and empty. We learn that dogs are not allowed but no one says anything.

We dock bow in and can't get the dog off the boat. We have taught him not to walk along the gunnels (he fell off once) and he won't do it now, even with bits of dog biscuits sprinkled along the gunnels. His long legs shake in fear when we coax him. We lift him up through the hatch in the V-berth and a crowd ashore cheers as he climbs onto the dock. We meet two other trawlers who have come down the Mississippi together. At John Pennekamp Park we find white beaches, boats leaving for snorkeling and dive trips, and a visitors center. Lots to do. We let the dog swim on an isolated beach covered with algae, and he drinks seawater (which means diarrhea later).

Alan uses the dinghy to return the dog to the boat. We take showers in the campground. Alan's side is filled with excited boy scouts who let him go first. That night we stay inside to avoid the no-see-ums. We listen to a Miami radio playing soft jazz and promising free apple flavored martinis for women at a bar we don't know. Schooner shows signs of digestive problems so we rush him into the cockpit where his explosive diarrhea bursts forth.

2/21/04 This morning the dog jumps into the dinghy to get to the dock. When his feet hit the floorboard, his bladder explodes. Alan takes him to shore anyway, and we spend an hour rinsing out the dinghy (and the cockpit) before we leave. We are outbound through the mangroves around 9 AM and

following the huge commercial sightseeing vessel. We don't worry about hitting anything as we round 'collision corner.' People aboard wave and take pictures of our boat.

The ocean is flat and the sky is sunny and clear overhead. Smog and fog hover just above a turquoise ocean. We continue on the outside route south. We see long bridges and islands to starboard. Today is Saturday and boats approach us from all directions. We avoid the buoys that mark the location of crab pots, still worrying that their line would wrap around our propeller.

While I steer the chair teeters and crashes into the woodwork, leaving a gouge. We both vow to ensure that the legs are properly secured before each trip. Back on the settee, the dog sits on my lap, his tail next to my face. I am reminded that this is a gassy animal. We turn into the Marathon harbor. It is huge and full of moored and anchored boats. We stop at Burdines for fuel. A large black dog barks at our dog from the open-air restaurant above. The gas attendant tells us, "That's my dog. You'll find dogs to be welcome in some restaurants in Marathon and Key West." I beg Alan to stay so we can eat out, but we push on. Alan determines that we have been getting 5.5 gallons per mile, less than he'd hoped. As we leave, we hear of a search for two missing scuba divers; they are in their mid-fifties, the same age as us.

We turn off the main route and head for Bahia Honda, a park between two bridges (one with a missing slice so boats can go through) with a white beach, rocky shore and boat basin. We walk onto the old bridge and marvel at how narrow it is. Schooner's not allowed on the beaches. We admire a Roseborough and a homemade boat in the basin and learn that both have been trailered to Florida, one from California and the other from Toronto. The Roseborough owner admits he feels some jealousy over the fine interior finish of our trawler and the storage space in our lazarette.

At night we eat Indian food from foil packets and listen to easy rock. We can see the headlights of cars blinking through the railing as they pass over the bridge. We notice that we are both covered with small bug bites.

2/22/04 We leave under a clear, sunny sky with a slight mist. As we travel south we see land as a long green ribbon. While making egg salad, I spill capers on the galley floor. The dog sniffs excitedly at the fallen food but decides to leave it lay. We continue to alter course to avoid boats and crab pots. Around noon we see the southernmost beach at Key West. Nearby, an old-fashioned schooner's sails are full of wind. Mega yachts are leaving the harbor and several cruise ships are in town. All marinas near the fun are full, and we argue over whether to anchor or stay in a marina at Garrison Bight. We choose the municipal dock to make it easier for the dog.

The first thing we notice is bird poop all over the dock. It is so thick that it alters the texture of the wood. The dog takes one whiff and tries to roll in it.

It takes us thirty minutes to walk to town. We see a poodle chasing a chicken across a residential street. We can hear locals sitting in yards or porches, behind thick foliage and out of view. We watch the sunset events: a juggler on a high unicycle and a show with a dead-acting Bassett hound and hoop-jumping Australian shepherd. The dogs greet ours and we meet the performers, a young couple with college degrees who have lost their jobs. We eat at Schooner's Wharf, famous as the place where the big dogs go. An Irish wolfhound lounges at the table next to us and her owner tells us that the dog is shy. The wolfhound and our Lab bark urgently at each other until we are able to divert their attention. People at other tables laugh and come over to pet the dogs. Schooner scours the rocky ground under our

table for food scraps and manages to arrange himself so that each person coming from the women's restroom pets him on her way by.

The next day we clean out the boat before we walk to town and stroll along the wharf. Our dog greets the dogs who sit at attention waiting for their masters. They all manage quick sniffs before we move on. We get water for Schooner from a juice bar and hear the story of a retired guide dog that was rescued from living aboard a boat, which was too tiny for the 100 pound Lab. When he walked into his new land-based home, the dog smoothed out a turned-up edge of carpet, an act designed to protect a blind master. On the walk home we meet a couple who trailered their sailboat from New York to Ft. Meyers. They are staying in a nearby marina and excited about their travels around South Florida. We pass an old graveyard with cute houses lining its perimeter. Most of the graves are above ground. Alan buys wine at a 'girlie' Club. We both wish we had better shoes.

2/24/04 We decide we are tired of the sore feet, long walks, dirty restrooms, hordes of tourists and aggressive street people. As Upwind rounds the southern end of Key West, we spot helicopters, parasailers, glide planes, Coast Guard ships and mega yachts. We feel regret, knowing there are adventures we are leaving behind. When we hear that bad weather is approaching, we celebrate our decision. We regret that we hadn't filled our tanks with fresh water.

We sit on the fly bridge but it is too rolly. Down below, the dog insists on snuggling and is smiling. Does he know we are heading home? I try to wash out several pairs of socks, worried that we will run out. The roll of the unprotected ocean sends me back to the settee and the comfort of the dog. The closet door is banging. Dishes rolling around on the counter. The cushion under me is slipping out; someone did not put it back correctly. Alan decides that we can ignore crab pots. We pass by the seven mile bridge and the water is a phosphorescent turquoise. We hear of a tornado watch on the West Coast and listen closely/ At 2 PM we stop for diesel in Marathon. We find dock space alongside the Sombrero Dockside Restaurant.

We dock in front of the kitchen and notice that the cooks can look directly into our head. They are cooking large pots of hamburger meat and chopping vegetables early in the afternoon. There's a laundry and shower plus the restaurant provides mail service. A couple who just purchased a Camano meets us at the restaurant. They tell us how much they like the boat and renamed her Xanadu. We swap stories. I enjoy hearing how their Jack Russell jumped onto a manatee because he wanted to play. We show them around Upwind and try to fill them in on what we learned at the last Rendezvous.

We walk to the store, passing dozens of boats docked against the seawall and a golf course across the street. At the grocery store, we meet people who saw us dock and tell us they admire our boat; they are staying in a campground nearby. Back at the restaurant, a big trawler pulls up behind us at the dock. The German who is transporting the trawler with her new owners tell us he is off to Iraq to repair water systems. When he returns to the US he plans to buy a catamaran sailboat.

Tonight is taco night, only \$1 each, and the restaurant is crowded. When I take Schooner out for his evening walk, the dog stops at each table to be petted, as if he is on a visit to the nursing home where he provides therapy services. One lady says she used to raise Labs and her companion is a veterinarian who examines Schooner's teeth, announces that he is in good shape and recommends against the prong collar we use. I can hardly hear them because of the lively music. Alan is not able to take a shower because the bartender is too busy with customers to give him the key to the shower. When he showers on the boat, I notice that he has a bruise on his hip, scratches and bug bites all over.

2/25/04 We decide to continue north on the inside passage. It is calmer on the inside but only five feet deep. We can see the backside of Marathon bathed in morning shadows. When we are on the fly bridge, we can see through the water to the bottom. There are few channel markers and the water is choppy than on our trip down. Land is to starboard now, with a few islands off port. We maneuver through narrow channels that take us between islands. We see working boats, picking up the crab pots.

We anchor at Cotton Key. When we take the dog to shore, it is difficult to find a place to land. We see a small, neat dome tent set up in the mangroves. The island is littered with floats, rope, pieces of cheap Styrofoam coolers and discarded crab pots. Schooner jumps from the dinghy and hustles to shore. When he's done, he races back and jumps high in the air, landing in the middle of the dinghy, getting us both wet. Two men are fishing. One is standing on a platform built over his outboard engine.

The radio is full of stories about tornados north of here. We see a dark storm approaching at 5 PM. We secure the oars, take down the canvas, let out more scope and set a second anchor. We put chafing gear on the anchor rode. As the dark cloud passes over, it is cold, dark and windy. After dinner we find we have dragged close to shore. We move the boat and reanchor.

2/26/04 We leave under low fluffy clouds and 15 knot winds. On the radio we hear of a man who has a heart attack on his boat and Boat US is looking for someone with a defibrillator. An empty life raft is found drifting by the Coast Guard. The ICW is shallow and we are close to shore. The dog is playing with a yellow tennis ball, asking us to throw it inside the boat. We pass several boats of scuba divers in Buttonwood Sound. Mangroves appear to surround us. We wait for the Jewfish Bridge, motoring in front of a picturesque marina and lovely condos. Pelicans dive close to the boat driving the dog crazy.

We turn into Angelfish Creek, a tangle of channels through the mangroves and are glad we have computer charts to show us where we are. We search for a beach for Schooner to land and anchor near one. We put down a second anchor at our stern in anticipation of the tide changing. Alan dives on the anchors and the boat while the dog barks nervously at him. The dog does not recognize him in the wetsuit. Alan finds the anchors are fine but we are missing three zincs. We take the dog to the small beach and find it to be a mound of dead coral that he cannot walk on. We encourage him to jump into shallow water and the dog takes off into the mangroves. When he returns, he looks happy but starts pulling up small mangroves by the roots. We now understand why dogs are banned from so many parks.

Later that evening, we take the dog to shore again. It is low tide and he walks on the sand. He digs in the mud and starts pulling up the mangroves until we stop him. That night I empty one can of chicken chunks into one can of cream of chicken soup and add one can of green beans and some fresh spinach. Alan says dinner is spectacular. We can see lights from a few houses on land. At night the phosphorescent turquoise water looks eerie against the dark sky.

2/27/04 It's cooler this morning but sunny. We leave Angelfish Creek and head north. Within thirty minutes we pass a nuclear power plant, which stuns us. Why would something so potentially deadly be put into such a beautiful spot? It is calmer and the dog insists on playing ball as we travel. Salt spray makes our windows difficult to see out of so we use the window washers. The clouds make dark shadows on the water. The dog asks to go outside and, for the first time, relieves himself on the piece of green astroturf we had placed there for him.

We reach No Name Harbor by noon and are happy there is room for us. We see a Customs and Immigration boat and two camouflaged speedboats. Young men, dressed in flak jackets, are meeting on shore. About an hour later, they speed off in the three boats, probably looking for Haitians.

When we hoist Schooner up onto the seawall, we notice he is quaking. We walk to the Key Biscayne lighthouse and Alan takes the tour; the dog and I stay behind. We walk through the woods and let the dog off leash.

That night we get good television reception and on the news see Haitian boats intercepted at sea. We're almost out of coffee and milk and the wine is gone. I'm ready to go home. The bed is a tumble of sheets mixed with dog hair and clothes that fell from the shelves. I vow to sew fitted sheets, in spite of my limited abilities.

2/28/04 We see Miami through the fog as we travel north. Mile marker 4 is crowded with dark brown birds. The water gets shallow and we panic for a moment. Lots of cruise ships sit waiting for passengers. At the private marina in Coconut Grove where we dock, we are told to keep the dog on the path by the water and close to the marina. Dogless, we explore the hotel, pool, park, Jacuzzi, tennis courts, kayaks and lovely condos. That night as we prepare to leave, I notice we both have sun-red faces. We attend an alumni event for my small college in Los Angeles. There are about a dozen grads there to meet the college's new president in a condo overlooking Biscayne Bay. We learn that the college wants 10% overseas students as we sip good wine and snack on sushi. I meet a former classmate from Bolivia who now lives in Boynton Beach.

2/29/04 In the morning we find the Sunday newspaper in our cockpit. We sip coffee by the tennis courts. The shower is roomy and clean. On the way out, we notice a house with a breakwater made from stone and shaped like an ancient ship.

The seas are 5-7 feet so we stay in the ICW. We pass cruise ships and see three-masted schooners and mega yachts. We approach a bridge that we can't find in any book. We take the Bimini down and go under the bridge, holding our breath. I rinse off the salt-encrusted windows. We watch for shallow spots. There are many 'no wake zones' and bozos speeding through them. The dog is back to standing on the table and doesn't hear us tell him to get off. The sky turns gray as we crawl through Hallandale flanked the high rises. Why did they build the parking lot next to the ICW? I wonder. We have whitefish on stale bread for lunch. In Hollywood people sit on apartment porches and watch the boats pass.

There are mangroves on the west bank. We see tugboats stored in Dania. The heavy warm dog is still sitting in my lap. Around noon we approach Fort Lauderdale and gambling boats, container ships and cruise ships. A tiny sheriff's boat guards the waterway outside these monsters. Crewmen are testing the lifeboats from the cruise liners.

We get stuck behind the Jungle Queen, a wide tourist boat. In Pompano we get fuel and Schooner and I take a walk. The only bridge we have to worry about is in South Boca. We decide not to stay at Lake Boca because it is not protected and would be difficult to get Schooner to shore. We slow down when we see three big boys stuffed into a small boat so as to not topple them. The tender to a bridge in Delray calls, "Nice looking boat," as we pass under. We are running to get to Lantana before dark. We arrive at 5:15 PM and share the anchorage with one junky-looking boat we saw at No Name Harbor.

On shore we find a hole in the fence where Schooner and I slip ashore while Alan parks the dinghy by the sea wall. At least a dozen dogs have landed here and no one has picked up after them. A man with no teeth and a wide smile is watching his five active fishing poles. Two sleazy looking guys check out our dinghy while I walk the dog and Alan goes to the store. A man from Iowa tells us he is here because his wife told she needed time alone today; it is the second day of their vacation.

3/1/04 We are eager to get home. We find a tick on Schooner and he uses the green carpet again. A woman on the radio reports to the Coast Guard that a bridge tender closed the bridge on her boat. It is raining, cold and windy. We squeeze under the Lantana Bridge and determine, after North Palm Beach, that we will be able to go under all the remaining bridges. We have trouble keeping track of the speed signs and worry that we will be ticketed. Jupiter is so overcast that the water doesn't look blue. When we reach Stuart, we are running at fifteen knots. Schooner howls when we pass his favorite park. The dog is first off the boat. Alan is next. He rushes in to check his email. I take a shower. It was a good trip but we are glad to be home.

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