



## Log of *S/V High Drama*: San Diego to Puerto Vallarta

### **1. We almost make it away.**

**Sunday, November 7, 1999**

Sheraton Hotel & Marina,  
San Diego, California



Handing the keys from my beloved 1994 Honda Accord to her new owner would be the last painful act before cutting the dock lines, or so I thought. It worked out well because our dock neighbors at the Sheraton Marina, Garold and Diane Tisue aboard a Hans Christian 38, developed a fondness for the car. I felt it was going to a good

home. Cutting the docklines as one leaves to go cruising calls for the final ritual. Indeed, another celebration was mandatory.

Although the rock band failed to show up, we had our pictures taken, drank toasts, popped balloons, and talked about how grand it would be when we sailed south. As we got underway our dock neighbors hooted and hollered. Most indicated that they would soon see us “out there.” Since *High Drama* spent the previous two months in the boatyard, we were extremely anxious to get away. We had learned that for compulsive people, lists beget lists, jobs beget jobs. Our list of things to do and buy had grown exponentially as we got closer to leaving. We ultimately determined that some boat jobs, such as another coat of varnish on the teak brightwork (teak trim around the exterior of the boat) would just have to wait. And so we set sail for the fuel dock, only a hundred yards away, for our first stop.

Before the group of vicarious cruisers and well wishers had even dispersed, and before we had covered 200 feet, we heard a piercing sound; a strange and never before heard alarm. (Actually, since it was high pitched, I didn't hear it.) The voltage Bank Manager (a misnomer because it doesn't manage anything as far as I can tell) reported spiking voltages in our house batteries, which were being charged from engine power. Well, 16 volts doesn't seem that much higher than 12, but apparently for low voltage systems it spells disaster to batteries if it continues. Since we had just installed new aviation style maintenance free (sure) absorbed glass mat batteries, this seemed like a concern. We did an abrupt about face, snuck back to the dock as quietly as we could, and attempted to renegotiate permission to return to “our” slip, which had been rented to a fellow who wanted to move

in right away. After two trips to the chandlery, West Marine, Mike with very little help from me, replaced our voltage regulator. Not a very strong start to this new cruising life.

## **2. We get away.**

**Monday, November 8, 1999  
Sheraton Marina, San Diego,  
California**

This morning without fanfare we left town. We motored quietly to the fuel dock. While the crew filled the diesel tanks and 6 spare 5 gallon Gerry jugs with fuel, I made one last trip to West Marine. I figured that if a voltage regulator could fail within two hundred feet of the dock, we had better have a spare if we were going all the way to Mexico, a distance of almost 12 miles.

Our first effort at departure prompted much introspection. We realized that we angered Neptune by paying so much effort, time, and especially money to land based facilities for boat preparation and not any effort, time, or money to the spiritual side life at sea. These sea gods were just plain jealous of the boatyard and the Boat Unit tributes we had paid ashore. (For the uninitiated, a boat unit is \$1,000. Since the number of units seems much lower, it is less depressing.) To make amends, to seek dispensation, and request safe passage from Neptune, as we left we threw money directly into the bay without first circulating it through the San Diego economy.

It sure felt great to see San Diego in our rearview mirror.



## **3. We are away!**

**November 9**

We are at sea and about thirty miles south of San Diego. We are headed for Guadeloupe Island, about 200 miles straight south of San Diego. It is about 150 miles offshore. We hope that we have the electrical gremlins at bay for awhile. The new voltage regulator seems to be working well.

We sailed in 20-knot winds and 8-13 foot seas for about thirty hours when the wind but not the waves subsided. Apparently the waves were remnants from a storm in the Gulf of Alaska.

**November 10**

We sailed to Guadeloupe Island, but it was dark. Decided that we did not want to make an instrument landing as our first on this trip, so we sailed on toward Santa Maria on Magdalena Bay on Baja California Sur. The crew wanted some offshore overnight sailing experience.

This single side band marine radio e-mail really cracks me up! When I send e-mail by radio, a slow process, the aberrant radio waves sound the propane gas leaking alarm and shut off the gas stove, and then the radio directs the autopilot to alter course and turn the boat hard to starboard into a circle. I chart it all up to gremlins. On the other hand, maybe we didn't pay enough tribute some where along the line.

**November 12**

We have now (Friday at 7:00AM) logged 575 miles at sea in about four days, when we were 100 miles offshore. We are 80 miles from Magdalena Bay about 200 miles north of Cabo San Lucas. We will probably stop in Magdalena Bay even though it is too early to see whales and their babies. We will stop in Cabo San Lucas for sure.

Caught a 20 pound tuna (albacore) the second day and despite an inartful cleaning job, it has/will

provide 3 main meals. Even had some sashimi right away. Not really bad. Of course, if we keep eating it raw some will think we have crossed over to the other side, and maybe we have.

We left wearing everything we had including multiple layers of fleece and waterproof shells to keep the considerable dew from soaking us each night. This morning I removed all outer layers except a T-shirt. The rest of the crewmembers are lizards. They are still cold and clamoring for warmer weather.

Had radar practice with the Mexican Navy last night and avoided a collision. They were very polite at a distance of several hundred yards. Talked to a French guy about our radar contact with him. He deliberately gave us misleading information about his course, speed, and destination. Before we figured out that he was not being candid, we altered course to cross comfortably behind him. Low and behold, because of his misinformation, we turned toward him on a collision course. We continued to muse about his communication and concluded that he was doing something with drugs, either taking them or smuggling them.

We stand 4-hour watches by couple. Now we are in a routine, but naps are relished when off watches. We set the watches up so that we alternate watch schedules so one night you get 8-12pm and 4-8am and the next night only 12-4am.

Have seen dolphins and pilot whales, but no grays or humpbacks yet. The dolphins race along the bow and surf in High Drama's bow wave. Mike whistled at some and they actually jumped like the dolphins at Sea World. Never knew they did it for free.

So far this trip has been a blast.

More after I swab the deck.

J&A and M&S

### **November 13**

23 38 .188

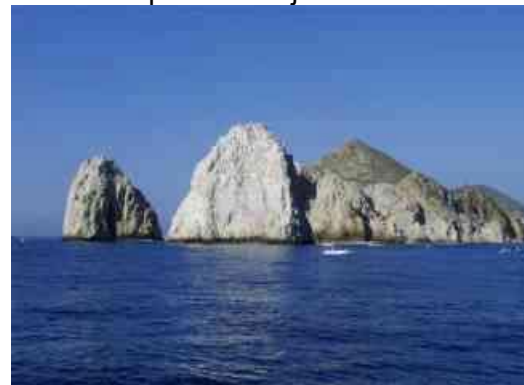
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Nov 13 23:55 Zulu. (I think we have a time change coming)

We celebrated passing into the tropics when we crossed about where I think the Tropic of Cancer should be. No map clearly shows it. We had an appropriate ceremony and advised our crew that this ancient ritual traditionally involved the sacrifice of a virgin. There were none aboard, and since human sacrifice seemed a bit much, we tried to convince Stacy that since she was the youngest, she should swim around the boat to demonstrate to the local sea gods that we came in peace. She would have no part of it. But she did join in the celebration on deck.



We went past Magdalena Bay because it was dark and again we did not want to land on instruments. We continued on to Cabo San Lucas on the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula.



November 14-17

Cabo San Lucas

We sailed 7 days to Cabo San Lucas without stops. *High Drama* loves

to run, although we are not very skilled downwind sailors

Cabo San Lucas is devoted to tourism with a heavy emphasis on sport fishing for game fish such as marlin, sailfish, Dorado, and others. We are moored at an intersection in the harbor and each morning at 5:00 am a hundred or more charter fishing boats depart with their engines rumbling and their exhaust fumes wafting into our cabin. Sleep is impossible, so we make coffee and watch the high riders rumble by and listen to the machos shout at each other. Around 2:00PM they return; each boat flies flags with images of the fish they caught. We were advised by a professional fish killer moored next door that the Americans on private sport fishing yachts believe that the Mexican charter boats overstate the number and type of fish actually caught. Sounds like sour grapes.

### November 17

We motored about 50 miles from Cabo San Lucas to Los Frailes, anchorage in a little bay in the Sea of Cortez. We will slowly make our way north to La Paz where we will reprovision (mostly beer) and then take off to some of the bays and anchorages north of La Paz. We should be able to spend a few days in La Paz and will call from there. La Paz is supposed to be a favorite stop among sailing cruisers.

The dinghy has now been launched and we are going swimming and then going ashore to buy some fish. We have been skunked for the last few days. Jeff thinks Stacy jinxed us because ocean fish don't respect the wax worm queen. Stacy formerly was involved in a family business that raised and sold wax worms (little fuzzy worms that eat bees' wax) as live bait to local and international fishermen. She claims to have conducted research and development on wax worms as bait for pan fish of all sizes in Wisconsin.

A big day for us today. Actually, it was our first day of kicking back in an anchorage. Mike and I fashioned a bridle to lower the dinghy from its resting-place on deck into the water. Of course the banter made the experience hilarious, at least to us. The folks anchored next door, with whom we had happy hour, tried to be polite and not say anything. But at the end of the evening they finally asked why it took us three hours just to launch a dinghy. Then when we had it launched, why we didn't go anywhere? The male wagered that we went below for a cold beer, but the female doubted beer was the answer for this behavior. Of course, she was wrong; that's exactly what we had done.

The female in this couple is straight out of *The Great Gatsby* and will figure prominently in my forthcoming novel.

Winds have been uncharacteristically out of the south at 15 knots here in Los Frailes. Now that we decided to move on to another anchorage, Muertes, 45 miles north, I can feel the wind clocking around to the north as I type.

Water temperature is 84 F and air temperature is the same. Swimming off the back of *High Drama* and coming back aboard for a cold libation constitutes the good life.



La Paz, Mexico

24 09.3N

110 19.5W

Winds 25 Knots out of North; storm building

Sea: Calm In the marina, but crazy in the harbor. The tide goes against the wind. Some chop.

Dinghy dock in La Paz Marina at bar pictured below.



We are located in Marina La Paz in La Paz Mexico. This marina carries the reputation of being a crossroads or Mecca for cruisers. Many cruisers apparently find the city of La Paz so enticing that they never leave. Some sail north to explore the Sea of Cortez, some cross the Sea of Cortez to Mazatlan and points south along the mainland coast of Mexico. But apparently many never leave.

We left weather just two days ago that saw us swimming off the boat and complaining that the heat was too much without fans. Now we are back with a genuine rainstorm building around us. It's cold... 60 degrees, and the lizards with whom I'm sailing chant about warmer weather and warmer water.

This is the time of year that the sea upheaves colder water. The temperature went to about 73 degrees from 83 a few days ago. Along with cooler water there are more nutrients. That is apparently why the whales like it here.

We will stay here a few days and then sail in some of the beautiful anchorages just 20 miles away. We will next head for the mainland coast of

Mexico. I am not sure, but maybe we will get to Puerto Vallarta by Christmas.

Two different people have come up to us in the first 30 minutes in this marina and asked if our boat was **Silver Lining**, which was her name when we bought her. Apparently her prior owners moored a couple of seasons in the very slip where we are now.

Jeff & Ann & Mike & Stacy  
**S/V High Drama**

We had a great Turkey Day week. There has been a "norther" booming down for about three days. Winds around 20-25 knots from the north and choppy seas. We were glad to be parked in the marina for four days where the only risk was that we would fall off the boat during happy hour.

Wednesday Mike befriended Ernesto the cut rate cab driver who gave us a wonderful tour of La Paz. Two churches, an orphanage, one municipal theater, one library, one art gallery, lunch at the mercado between the fish stall and butcher stall (pork heads right after they were butchered were upwind and adjacent to the table), fresh hand made tortillas at the factory (fried in lard), fresh machaca (great dried meat-low fat- for the tortillas), a lengthy visit the Cultural and Anthropological Museum, and then shopping at a supermercado. The beauty was that the whole trip was in Spanish so Mike made up most of the translation to conform to what he thought would improve on local history. It was a fun experience and we saw a slice of life in Mexico we would have clearly missed without Ernesto and

Mike.



Turkey dinner was consumed at the Marlin Club, a large cabana type restaurant run by some ex-patriot tax evaders. Dinner con todos trimmings, margaritas, and a couple of bottles of wine was sumptuous. Mike fell asleep at 5:00pm and was not heard from until this morning.

This morning the north winds died, the marina found out our credit was no good, and Ernesto wanted to take us on another tour, so we left La Paz. Motored about 25 miles to a beautiful spot between two islands. It is a bowl with desert coloring like Sedona, Arizona. During happy hour as the sun set and we watched a couple of other boats come in. We are not alone, but it's not quite like driving in traffic on the 405 in Los Angeles. Local pelicans and boobies chased fish while we watched. And now another gourmet meal is coming up. Life has given us a whole lot to enjoy here.

Perhaps the only negative is the category of living off the fruits of the sea. I retired from fishing in deference to the pro from Wisconsin who claims to have cut her teeth on pan fish and wax worms. So far, other than a tuna she pulled in back on November 9, we have been skunked. She has taken it hard. She walks the deck alone mumbling to herself "there aren't any fish in the Sea of Cortez."

Well, maybe we can swap baseball caps for fish with the local fishermen tomorrow.

Greetings from High Drama.



Mazatlan

We crossed the Sea of Cortez and are now situated in Marina El Cid in Mazatlan. We lost our hydraulic steering halfway here and had to steer by using the emergency tiller on the rudder for 24 hours. It proved to be very tiring even with each person steering on one-hour watches. The part that failed was a bronze collar that connects the hydraulic pistons to the rudderpost. The replacement part is being fabricated out of stainless steel at Industria Naval de Mazatlan, a commercial shipyard that makes 100-foot long tuna fishing boats. It has been a fascinating experience dealing with their young engineer and salty older machinist. Our combined Spanish equaled their combined English and it looked like a bunch of Italians ordering lunch, all talking and gesturing at the same time. We get the new part Monday when we are leaving Mazatlan.

Stacy guaranteed that we would catch supper once we started sailing again and she was true to her word. This one was a yellow tail tuna, about 15 pounds that Mike cleaned like a surgeon. Great eating.

The marina here is attached beautiful resort; they say the largest in Mexico. We have spent time in blocks at sea, in remote anchorages, and good marinas. Each setting provides a very different experience. For now we like the swim up bar.

Yesterday, after an hour at the repair yard, we swam in the "deep pool" which has a series of caves and slides. Mike organized up a bunch of 10-year-olds into competitive diving and splashing. Also, the Hotel had to call out for more rum.

Dinner was at a classic tourist place. Since we had started our shore celebration early we declined the tequila "poppers" which is a shot poured down your throat while your head is being rolled around while wearing a football helmet. We are too old for that stuff!

Today we celebrate Mike and Stacy's One-Year Anniversary, see old Mazatlan, the tuna fleet, and the mercado. Adios. Hope that all is well with you.



Ann walking to palapas on beach at Chacala

#### Chacala

Left Mazatlan Monday after our steering repair and landed on a bird sanctuary on Isla Isabella, about 80 miles away. Magnificent frigates were mating with the males blowing up a red pouch on their chests and females casually stopping by, appearing to be disinterested. Also saw thousands of brown and blue footed boobies nesting. Birds so thick that they were not afraid of us, rather they were more afraid of the other birds if they gave up their cherished nesting spot.

After an overnight anchorage Isla Isabella we motored to Chacala, a white sand beach on the mainland of Mexico with six small palapas on the beach. These palapas, or beachfront restaurants, we soon learned, serve cerveza and shrimp ceviche at 10:00 am. What a treat. Next we will swim, snorkel, nap, not necessarily in that

order, and go back ashore for happy hour. Not a bad Thursday.

We are still shooting to land in Puerto Vallarta Saturday, but Chacala is so much like a postcard we may not leave. Adios for now.

J&A&M&S

#### Nueva Vallarta

We are now in a suburb of Puerto Vallarta called Nuevo Vallarta at a marina attached to a well appointed resort called Paradise Village.

Thursday the 9th of December we left the idyllic shores of Chacala. Since it was calm, we easily spotted a half a dozen early visiting whales. Couldn't see much of them, but we believe that they are humpbacks.



The big news, however, was that our now semi pro fisherwoman pulled in a big Dorado (also called mahi mahi). Colorful beast until we poured tequila in it's gills to do it in quietly so it didn't flop and bleed all over our new teak decks. Mike's skill as a fish cleaner has prompted him to interview for a position with a local fishing boat. We had fresh ceviche and a couple of grilled mahi mahi dinners.



Mike and Stacy with dorado

After a day of travel we arrived at La Cruz de Huanacastle where we anchored overnight. We steamed into Marina Vallarta the next morning, looking like we knew what we were doing. After spending the weekend in the downtown marina, surrounded by hotels, condos, fancy restaurants, tourists, and time share hawkers, we opted for the quieter more removed spot with three pools and a half a mile of white sand beach for about the same number of pesos. We plan to stay here through the holidays.

December 15

Mike and Stacy reluctantly returned to cold country today. We had traveled more than 1500 miles together through some good sailing and motoring. We were sad to see this chapter close.

We took in the bullfight tonight. It started at 5:00 PM and as far as we could see, there were no Mexican people in attendance. We had understood that the corrida de toros was a national pastime, yet here there were just gringo tourists from the *Love Boat*, and *High Drama*.



The guys we saw were only matador trainees, but that made little difference to the bulls, whose fate remained the same. Maybe next time!

Stay tuned for more adventures. In the next issue we will dispel the widely held view that cruising is just a long vacation. I know that these missives have contributed to that view.