

Mark & Janel Seier on *Nana Maria*

Crew: Kelly Reed (log writer), Howard Schwartz, Rod Nuttal, Marianne Nuttaland Fozzie (the dog)

Tuesday, November 4, 2008

As you can imagine, sailors are often faced with unknowns and challenges. Frequently we have to change sails, adjust course, or make decisions that ultimately can affect the comfort and well being of everyone on board. We are in just such a situation aboard *Nana Maria*. Our exciting adventure out to sea aboard *Nana Maria* has been delayed by weather. An ugly Low Pressure system has started working its way off the Carolina coast. If we were out there today, we'd be facing 20-30 knot winds on our nose and 12-15foot waves. Not a pleasant experience. So, we're "hove-to" in Hampton until Friday!!!

Many of the boats are finishing up on projects that they didn't think they'd have time to complete. With the known delay, they've been able to have parts shipped in and have workers come aboard. The staff of West Marine organized daily shuttles back and forth from the Marina to their store so that the participants can get any last minute items that they may need.

On Friday (Halloween), we had our "Farewell Dinner" even though we're not leaving for another week. There are a lot of kids coming on the trip and they were all decked out in their scariest outfits as they collected candy from the boaters. Since then, the Rally has been sponsoring nightly "Sip & Socials" for everyone. Last night, there was a great Pot Luck Dinner. All of the boaters brought up food to share. Roast beef, sausage & peppers, ham, scalloped potatoes, pasta salads, pear cobbler with lime whipped cream, spinach salad with pomegranate, cabbage slaw, General Tao's chicken, rice salads, steamed shrimp, stews, cakes, pirogues, brownies, chili, cornbread, and on and on. There were at least 3 or 4 tables full of food.

Lots of folks have rented cars to take the opportunity to explore the area. A few went to Fort Monroe and the Mariner's Museum with a local resident and had an exceptional experience. Another local rally participant was able to bring some fresh rosemary, basil and bay leaves from her home garden to share with everyone. Howard and Rodney are at the new Air & Space Museum in downtown Hampton.

Normally, without the weather delay, you spend all your time at this end rushing around finishing tasks, stowing gear and doing your final provisioning. One of the nice things about this delay is that you get the chance to really talk to people and get to know them before the race starts.

Thursday, November 6, 2008

It still looks like it's a go for departure on Friday. Even though Tropical Storm/Hurricane Paloma will be brewing, all of the experienced weather folks say that the cold waters around Bahamas and Bermuda should keep it from developing into anything other than bad weather by the time we're near. If it comes to it, we can always divert to Bermuda until it passes. The lows that were off the Carolinas have worked their way up the coast and since Tuesday it has been "blowing like stink" (that's a nautical term) here. The weather is supposed to move off today and tomorrow things should be a little calmer out there.

There has been a 24 hour flu going around the fleet. Captain Mark had it on Tuesday. Captain Janel has it today.

Howard and I stayed up late on Tuesday night to watch the election returns. It was very exciting. Right after CNN called the election for Barak Obama, I went up on deck to see if anyone else was around. Across the river is Hampton College. From our dock, you could hear screams and cheers and celebration from the students that had gathered to watch the returns together. There were fireworks and car horns honking. It went on for 20-30 minutes. It certainly gave me goose bumps to hear how ecstatic everyone was.

Friday, November 7, 2008

We are heading out to sea! The fleet has decided to get our "easting" done early so we're heading towards Bermuda. By Monday we expect to know whether or not it's safe to turn South toward the islands.

Currently, we are at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. We are surrounded by warships and freighters and tug boats and all sorts of really large traffic. We are keeping just outside the channel markers to stay out of their way. The winds have died down considerably from the 30+knots we have been living in for the past couple days. Unfortunately, we are left with no wind at all, now. So we are just bobbing as we wait for the official start of the race. If you cross the line too early, you have to buy everyone a round of drinks once we get to our destination. But with no wind, we'll probably be motoring for the first hours.

Captain Janel is feeling better today. Howard and I have our Scop patches on. The rest of the crew is taking Bonine or Sturgeron. The first day out is supposed to be quite lumpy so that will be a good indicator of how well our meds will work. They just announced "3 minutes to start" so I'd better get up on deck.

Sunday, November 9, 2008

Our first day at sea was Friday. Winds were light and variable so almost all the boats spent the day motoring out of the Chesapeake Bay.

Janel is a wonderful chef and has prepared and frozen several lovely meals that we can eat on the crossing. Friday night, was her fabulous homemade Lasagna for dinner. The sails were set for the evening and it was a lovely dinner followed by a beautiful sunset. Howard and I covered the Midnight to 4M shift. A thick fog settled in around 10pm. We could not see a thing so we used the radar to keep an eye on things. The fog lifted by the end of our shift at 4am.

By daybreak we were well into the Gulfstream with its choppy waves, Saturday's wind lasted all the way into the night and we spent the day plowing through the stream. We watched water temperatures jump from 68 to 82 in a matter of a few hours. By the end of Saturday, we were out of the Gulfstream. The confused and choppy seas not only contribute to seasickness but also make it hard to do the simplest tasks.

On Saturday, Marianne and I both came down with the 24hour flu that has been going around the fleet. With 3 crew members down and out, the "weak" cold front that the weather folks had been predicting blew through. It slammed with us with sustained winds at 30knots, gusts of 45knots, rain and 10' seas. The winds were so strong that they sheared the foam off of the violently breaking waves. Finally, the weather calmed down around 7am on Sunday.

Monday, November 10, 2008

Sunday we were able to sail most of the day. The winds were pretty light and behind us, so we got out Captain Mark's favorite sail—a flasher that he affectionately calls "The Whomper!!" (Janel refers to it as "His Bag of Terror!") The Whomper looks like a big kite

flying on the front of the boat. It is just too big and powerful to be used safely in heavy winds, so Sunday was a good day to try it out while making progress toward Tortola at the same time.

Janel is determined to catch fish for dinner. She has resorted to her final trick—she is spraying the lure with a secret recipe of WD-40 and a secret ingredient. But just in case we're skunked again, she has started working on Plan B—she has pulled a homemade meatloaf dinner from the freezer.

Today, the engine is back on as we try get some "easting" done before the winds shift. The seas were still very roly-polly on Sunday, but today they are smooth as glass. We just saw a small pod of whales not too far off the starboard side of the boat.

Tuesday, November 11, 2008

After motoring all night, we are sailing along at 7 knots with a blue sky speckled with all sorts of different types of clouds. Somehow we quickly forget about the squalls, the agony of life on a slant and the frustration of not being able to control the weather.

Rodney, our last healthy crew member, finally came down with what we are now calling the "1500 Flu". So now, we've all been sick.

Janel has had the fishing line out again today since 6 am. She is determined to catch our dinner. No luck yet. Fozzie and Howard have both gotten their sea legs again and are almost inseparable.

Right now, there is a new line of squalls in front of us that are starting stir up the winds. After each squall, it seems that the energy is sucked out of the area and we have to wait for the wind to build again and then adjust the sails for a new direction.

Besides the beautiful sunrises, sunsets, full moon and starry skies, there's not much more to tell.

Wednesday November 12, 2008

The wind is blowing 25 to 30 knots, the waves are 12 feet and rising. The boat is heeled over 15 to 30 degrees and the simplest chores become gargantuan. Picture yourself standing up on a roller coaster, try to boil water in order to make coffee. So dinner tonight might just be the wraps and sandwiches that Marianne made or a whole lot of junk food.

We have 10-12ft seas today. The waves have been slamming against the boat constantly. We are keeping dry from the sea water because of the enclosure, but it's like a sauna inside. Poor Foz is not liking this too much. We do have a spray bottle in the cockpit filled with cold water so we can all try to keep cool. I guess I shouldn't complain too much. I could be knee deep in snow back home, instead of shorts and tank tops. Nana Maria had her first and last (I hope) break down. Our aft head (aka bathroom) has become inoperable...A huge breakdown, as there are six of us on board now sharing one tiny tiny head. Mark and Howard spent yesterday trying to fix the problem, but alas it has eluded them.

With the boat on a slant, you have to figure out different ways of doing things. If I open the vanity cupboard in the bathroom the wrong way, everything comes flying out. You have to be very careful with knives because you can't just put them down on the counter or they will slide away. The same goes for a coffee cup or a soda can. If you're not holding it, it won't stick around long.

Sunday, November 16, 2008

WE MADE IT!! We crossed the finish line at latitude 18-29 at 11:01am. That was actually much earlier than we expected. Nana Maria outdid herself and we made great time. The winds were favorable so we were able to sail a pretty direct course from where we were to the finish line. It was still pretty bumpy and we stayed on a slant until almost the very end.

As we approached the finish line, the swells softened. Mark, our Captain, put on his swim trunks and went onto the back deck for a quick shower. We often shower back there because it keeps the humidity out of the boat. Mark's first job when we get to shore is to visit the Customs & Immigration office and we are told that it is best to dress respectfully. So he cleaned up and put on his best plaid Bermuda shorts and a pink polo shirt. He looked very tropical and respectful. He then took a quick walk around the boat to make sure all was in order. Just before he came back into the cockpit, Neptune decided to give us one last prank—a wave crested the beam and hit Mark smack dab in the shorts!! Fortunately, his Bermuda shorts are so busy, you couldn't even tell they were wet, but the look of surprise on Mark's face said it all.

Off in the distance, we could see the north side of Tortola. Fozzie caught the scent of land. His nose started sniffing the air and his mood perked up. He started barking and playing and getting excited. He was as excited this to be over as we were. Of course, he had it harder in a lot of ways. He couldn't understand all the noise and movement and flapping sails. All he knew was that this just wasn't right. But with land within a nose's reach, he knew it was coming to an end.

The finish line came and went. Dibs ice cream treats and Veuve Cliquot Orange Pop are a finish line tradition aboard *Nana Maria*. Some will substitute Jack Daniels or rum for the Orange Pop, but the purists aboard always stay true to the traditions.

As soon as we tied up to our slip in Village Cay, out came the hoses and cleaning supplies. The boat was caked with salt. All of the dirty clothing and towels were bundled up and sent to the laundromat. The woman in charge was surrounded by bags and bags of laundry from the incoming boats, but she still says ours will be done within 24 hours. I remember her from last year. She is a good spirited, hard-working woman.

A friend and former *Nana Maria* crew member (now living in St. Thomas) came to visit and help clean up the boat. By working together, we had *Nana Maria*, pretty well back to normal by dinnertime. We had a celebratory dinner in the Marina restaurant together along with the crews of *Excalibur* and *Splendido*.

This I also caught up with my cousin Ed who was on Fruition. His boat got in a 3am. He hadn't been to sleep yet. Apparently, his boat lost its autopilot 5 days ago and had some major leaks. He was truly exhausted. But he still had a good attitude about his adventure and is hoping to participate again some day. I guess the experience is always what you make of it. And it certainly helps to be with good friends aboard a safe and comfortable vessel like *Nana Maria*. I suspect we make more out of the hardship and challenges than we should, but in the end, those sorts of memories are quickly replaced by the memories of glasses raised in toasts, orange sunsets into the sea, a full moon on a starry night, soft winds across your face, and the gentle (or not so gentle) rocking of the boat as you fall to sleep.