

10/24/91 Lat: N 34° 42.5' λ: W 076° 39.5' Beaufort, North Carolina

I am tired of waiting. We arrived here several days ago. Had a great time down the ditch (Atlantic Intra-Coastal Waterway, ICW), and I am more than a little frightened as to what lies ahead. I once was navigator on a racing boat being ferried to Hawaii for the Clipper Cup Races, but I have never made an ocean passage in my own boat before. From here to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, is about 1,000 miles. I am trying not to let Judy, my wife, know I'm scared. She thinks I know everything. I do not, and I do not want her to find out.

Will the boat hold up? I've gone over the standing rigging three times now. It should be replaced as it is seventeen years old, but we can't afford it. The forward hatch could be replaced. It seems strong, but in a storm will it hold up? Will I hold up?

There are so many boats here waiting for good weather to cross the Gulf Stream that we are anchored bow and stern. The marinas are all full, and every night the skippers and families roam the streets of Beaufort looking for some information to give them the courage to head out.

All I heard while hoisting my glass of beer at a nearby pub were the words "Gulf Stream." They have instilled terror in my soul.

"You had better watch out or the Gulf Stream will get you!"

"Yeah. Especially when the wind blows from the north."

"Those off-shoot currents are not nice either. Got'ta watch out for them."

I don't want "it" to get me, so I'm watching out.

Right now it's blowing thirty-five mph from the north and I hear there is a terrible storm off New England. Not a good time to cross the

Gulf Stream. With its northerly current against this wind they must have thirty-foot waves out there.

Meanwhile, the cruisers stand around trying to out-guess the weather. We all know in our heart of hearts that we are mostly stalling. The weather we really want doesn't exist.

One of the skippers has enough money to hire a private "weather service" which sends him a daily fax detailing the weather situation. We all crowd around to see what it says. None of us, including myself, wants to make a commitment.

"I donno," says one. "Looks like that low over Georgia may be coming too quickly."

"Maybe," says another. "But looks like the northern wind has calmed down. The Stream must be getting better."

"What'd your weather people say?" one brave soul asks the guy with enough money for his own personalized weather service.

"They said to leave between Sunday and Wednesday. Think I'll go on Sunday," came the confident reply.

Panic gripes my heart and my guts become watery. I know that it is time to leave. Is the boat ready? Is Judy ready? No, I know that's not the real question. Am I ready?

"I'm leaving on Monday," I state, as everything I had eaten in the last twenty-four hours gives a flip in my stomach.

We're Off!

11/4/91 Lat: N 38° 25.0' λ: W 076° 30.0'
N.C.

Beaufort,

On Monday, after spending three weeks checking rigging and loading stores, Judy and I set sail with the assurance of good weather for St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. We left in the afternoon and by morning we were in the middle of the Gulf Stream, which was still filled with large menacing waves left over from the recent storm.

We're finally underway. Work, work, work has consumed us for the past two months. Are we ready? Are we fully equipped? Of course not; we ran out of money. So it is either stay, or take the leap of faith and set sail for distant horizons. Living aboard the boat for over ten years now, we have sailed the West Coast, the Gulf of Mexico, and the East Coast from Florida to Annapolis, Maryland. But this is the first time that we have really left on an extended offshore cruise.

"Where are you going? Do you plan to sail around the world?" people ask.

I hate these questions. To say we are going to "sail around the world" means we have to do it. If we were to say we are, and we don't because we change our minds, everyone would think we chickened out. Anyway, I'm not sure where I want to go, and I do not want to lock myself into a destination.

A couple I knew bought a 35-foot Morgan Out-Islander, stocked it with bags of flour and rice, and announced they were going around the world. The newspapers interviewed them and their pictures were in the paper. They had a grand send off. For six months, no one heard from them, so we all thought they were well on their way. Late one night, we heard a boat coming in. It was the couple returning from their cruise "around the world."

They had gone about three hundred miles when they ran into a storm. They panicked and, after limping into the closest port, stayed there for five months. When they finally made it back to their homeport they put their boat up for sale and no one ever saw them again. If they had said, "We're going down the way a bit and then we'll see," they would have been better off. At least that's the way I see it.

I want to be free. I want to go wherever I want, when I want, and stay as long as I want. So I answer these questions this way:

"I think we will go to Beaufort, NC, and leave from there to the Virgin Islands; and then again, maybe not."

They give me a strange look, and don't ask again.

So Judy and I took in our anchor line this morning and headed south down the Chesapeake. It's great to be underway at last. A few other boats left with us, and I hope to get to know them.

I refuse to think about all the things the boat needs. We're off!

Offshore

11/8/91	Lat: N 18° 25.0'	λ: W 063° 7.8'	Offshore
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Every time I go offshore, I get a strange feeling. I realize that between the ocean floor, a thousand fathoms down, and me there is only one and one-half inch of fiberglass. Pushing the boat down towards the ocean floor is the weight of 8,000 lbs. of lead keel, engine, fuel tanks, anchor chain and tons of equipment. All of this stuff wants to go to the bottom but can't because of that thin layer of resin and glass. I feel suspended above the rocky and craggy floor and hope that the hull doesn't give way.

I also know that the wind is trying to blow me over. It hits the sails, masts and rigging, and actually tries to roll the boat over so the ocean can get in and push that thin fiberglass layer to the bottom. Rationally I know the ballast and the hull and the rigging all work together to make the boat sail. I just hope they keep on doing so.