

GOING... GOING... GONE!!!



December has been wonderful. We had the boat out sailing several times. Once with Mary's Dad, Dick Davis, and again with Dick and his friend Joyce Mullett.



They had not seen the boat before, and I think it was reassuring to our relatives to help understand our new lifestyle. They still think we're crazy for selling everything to go cruising!



We had a family Christmas on board the boat. It may be our last one where Mary and I act as "hosts" for the holidays. We rented a condo at the Burnt Store marina for a few days, all of the kids came to Florida, and we had a wonderful time.

One day we sailed down Charlotte Harbor and anchored out by Gaspirilla Island. There were seven people on the boat. VERY close. (Smile!). But it was loads of fun to have everyone together! The next morning, we ran the engine just long enough to hoist the anchor, and sailed from the anchorage. The wind was light, and the boat was only moving 2 to 3 knots as we turned south on the Gulf ICW to return to the harbor.





A pod of dolphins came up to check us out... what is this thing silently ghosting through the water?

A slow moving sailboat in shallow water seemed to amuse them. There were 6 or 8 dolphins that shadowed us for half an hour.

Occasionally one would roll on it's side to get a good look at us while we were getting a good look at them!





I still found time to get some last minute chores done, including replacing the lens for the anchor light at the top of the mast.



That means going aloft in the bosun's chair, with Mary working the winch. Here's a couple of pictures from the top of the mast; proof I was there!



The other boats on the dock had a combo Christmas and Farewell party. Here's a photo so we can remember old friends; Harold & Valerie, David and Patty; Bob & Mary; Johnny & Susan; David & Christine; Chuck & Alice. We'll miss you !

By Dec. 27th the kids were gone. Hmm... the dock lines are starting to get mossy. We bought the boat to go cruising, not just to be liveaboards at a marina. Time to go. We're still not ready, and there are still projects to do. But, everything is 90% done, and that's probably as close as you ever get on boat maintenance!



It's December 28th as I write this; our departure day. A final pump-out, fill all the tanks, and we head south for Marathon. WE'RE OUTTA HERE !

There's a pretty well defined route for cruisers leaving Southwest Florida for the Keys. You can go straight to Key West, or to Marathon, or to Channel Five. These last two are the only places with tall bridges for sailboats. Our choice is Marathon. It's very cruiser friendly, with a mooring field maintained by the city. Our itinerary is to stop at Fort Myers, Marco, and anchor at the Little Shark River on the way south. Then, its only 19.5 miles across Florida Bay to approach Marathon from the north.

Next month: I'll share the details about our journey to Marathon... and about how we were aground twice... (Smile!).

Mary & Roy Stegall
aboard S/V "Gideon"