

## Flexible Cruising

We left Georgetown SC on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, continuing our southbound fall cruise. The goal was Florida, for a warm winter layover, and then over to “the islands” (Bahamas) in the spring.

We were in the South Carolina low country now, with its distinctive winding rivers and mud flats and sawgrass. What beautiful country!



There's a natural relaxed graciousness here. A lifestyle that's close to the water. The hustle and stress of the city seems far away.

We pass Charleston without stopping. We've seen the city; we have groceries on board and the tanks are full. Why pay a \$70 transient marina fee just to eat out one night?

I'm not sure Mary even noticed Charleston. She was on the phone... (Smile!)





We move through a series of anchorages. Whiteside Creek, Toogoodoo River, and others. Each creates a new memory.

Early October in the low country has temperate days, gentle breezes at night, and beautiful sunsets.

Four days after leaving Georgetown we're anchored in front of Ladies Island, across from Beaufort SC. The next day we stop at Port Royal Landing Marina and made an overnight stop to resupply.

What happened? I'm still not sure.... ( Smile! )

Mary had applied for a "travel nurse" job in Florida, to work part time after we got there. But, she hadn't gotten any bites. Hmm... Port Royal is nice... why not apply here? She did, and was hired at Beaufort Hospital the next day. I had coffee on the marina deck with some of the other live-aboards the next morning. When I mentioned I had a Captains license in process, I was offered a part time job by the local Tow Boat U.S. operator. The marina is super nice, and has great facilities. It's operated as a family business, with personal attention to their live-aboard cruisers. We signed up for a one year slip lease the next day.

But.... we were on our way to the Bahamas. What happened???

As Mary and I talked it over, we realized it was a good fit. We had overspent our cruising budget, and working for a while was a good decision financially. Further, there's a stress in being constantly on-the-move. You're disconnected from family, friends, and the normal social network. Being "based" somewhere for a while would provide the human contact we'd been missing. There were a dozen other live-aboards at the marina, a mixture of ex-cruisers, future cruisers, and cruisers on hiatus. We had instant friends!

So many things magically "fell into place" in ONE DAY that I can't help but marvel. When coincidence piles atop coincidence, you have to recognize something special is at work. Mary and I figure it's "Divine Providence"; God looking out for us.



Here's our new home for the next 12 months:



We've settled in at Port Royal. There's always work to do on the boat. I need to repair the radar, and work on the autopilot.

Mary has started on cleanup and fighting corrosion. Being "at the dock" is when you catch up on maintenance!



I mentioned running short of money. Yup, I underestimated the cost of cruising.

Maintenance costs were the biggest difference. I had figured \$500 a month. I counted it up, and we've actually spent \$15,000 over the past year. There were some big ticket items, and it's tempting to dismiss these as "one time expenses". Ha! When I look ahead, there are going to be more big ticket items next year! A full size boat equipped for cruising and off shore passages has lots of systems and gear to maintain. I don't think the \$15,000 is unusual.

Insurance. The 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons drove boat insurance rates dramatically higher. Get an insurance quote before you decide to buy a boat. My present policy, which includes U.S. east coast plus Bahamas, is \$3,907 a year.

We also have a larger food / entertainment budget than I expected. It's tempting to eat out at marina restaurants, and they're usually pricey. It takes a lot of self control to "eat at home" when you arrive at a new port, but that's what you have to do to control the food budget.

We save money by doing much of the "labor" part of boat maintenance ourselves. We also save by anchoring out most of the time as we travel. We have typically done a transient night at a marina once every five days or so, to fill tanks, resupply, and have a night out. We get monthly rates at marinas for short term stays, and for staying the summer in Chesapeake. Even so, we blew our budget. The big surprise was maintenance.

So.... current plans are to take a year off from cruising, stay at Port Royal Landing marina, work locally, rebuild our cruising kitty, and then continue cruising in 2010.

Flexible Cruising!

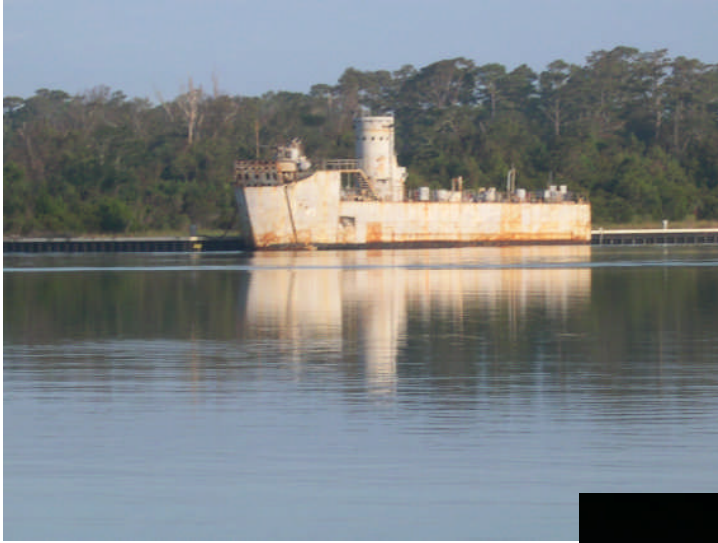
As we take a break, it's nice to remember some of the iconic images that cruisers see on the ICW...

Peaceful anchorages



Beautiful sunsets





The rusting relic at Mile Hammock anchorage in Camp Lejeune, where marines trained for troopship landings in WW II.

The infamous Figure Eight bridge, that sometimes gets “stuck” and won’t open.



Southport Ferry crossing the Cape Fear River.



The Lighthouse on the Little River, marking Lightkeeper's marina.

And, finally, seeing the sunrise as we prepare for an early morning departure from a low country anchorage.

This is what cruising is all about. The memories !

....Roy & Mary Stegall  
aboard S/V "Gideon"

