

Making Improvements

What's the difference between a bad haircut and a good one?

Two weeks! (Smile!).

Would you trust this guy if he showed up in a TowBoat to help you? Oh no! It's Captain Maniac! He looks scary !

Mary cuts my hair with an electric clipper. It's just one more way that we economize and stretch our cruising budget.



Mary, on the other hand, is looking better and better; she's lovelier than ever! Here's her latest in cruising attire.

OK... she doesn't actually wear a formal dress while cruising. This was a "fashion show" to model the dress she'll wear to the wedding as mother-of-the-groom.

We're still at the docks in Port Royal. Working, saving our money, and quietly planning the next cruise. The bank account is low, so it's time to work and rebuild our savings. Like a lot of cruisers, we work part time to make ends meet.

We have family events coming up. Our son Luke is getting married in December, and our other son John is engaged to be married next May. With weddings plus winter holidays plus rebuilding our savings... well... it seems prudent to stick here and work over the next few months. This winter, we'll stay at the dock instead of going South.

Meanwhile it's a chance to fix things that were "deferred maintenance" from the last cruise. And, to make some improvements!

First, what's up with the electrical system? Whenever the engine is running, the lights in the salon flicker. (?!?!?!?!). Using a voltage meter, I found the voltage fluctuating between 12.2V and 13.5V, causing the "flickering" effect.

Ah ha! I guessed right. A new voltage regulator smoothed out the charging cycle. There, I fixed it!



One of our long anticipated improvements is to add a wind generator. I picked the Air Breeze, and ordered the full kit.

Part of the installation was pulling wire, and making the panel and battery connections.

Here's the inside of the electrical panel. It's a twenty year old boat, with multiple electrical upgrades and revisions. What a rats nest of wire!



It took a month of part time work to get the entire rig installed. Pulling wire; installing panel controls; doing carpentry work to create a teak mounting pad on the deck; and finally, erecting the tower. There, I fixed it!



There's always maintenance work, such as cleaning out filters. This one is on the water feed to the heat exchanger for the air conditioner. Ugh !

Last summer I installed a fitting so I could flush out the sanitation lines with fresh water. Let's see how that works...

Oh No !

The black crud is what builds up inside your hoses. I didn't have the hose clamps tight enough, and when I turned on the water, she blew! Another clean up job...



A roll of paper towels later, here's the flushing hookup for the sanitation line working-as-designed. (Smile!). There, I fixed it!



And, it's time once again for the semi-annual update to the Cetol finish on the wood trim on the boat.

This involves removing fixtures, cleaning, taping, cleaning again, scuffing the wood, cleaning again, and finally two coats of Cetol gloss. There, I fixed it!

Of course, on any project, it's nice to have help. "Skipper" always gets involved. Whenever a compartment is opened, she does an inspection to check for mice.

Why so much in this edition about the boat work? Well, it's part of the cruising life. I often work 4 or 6 hours a day on the boat. It may be polishing corrosion off of the stainless, if nothing else.



A live-aboard cruising boat is larger than most recreational boats, has more systems, and has more maintenance issues. And, living aboard puts more wear on the equipment. Most cruisers are live-aboard boat mechanics. My cost for maintenance is higher than my dock fees; and that's with buying parts and doing most of the work myself!

It amuses me when I get the common question from land lubbers, "what do you do with all your free time?" These days, a modern car is highly reliable, and takes little maintenance. But, a boat in salt water takes a lot!

Do you think you'll get too old for this? Here's a fellow cruiser who's a Korean War veteran, climbing his mast for maintenance. My friend Larry Martin is 79 years old.

The cruising life "keeps you young", but it does this by continually challenging you! Every day is an adventure, even when you're at the dock!



Being safe at the dock doesn't mean you don't have nautical misadventures. "Gideon" was tied up securely, and we had a ship wreck. Yes! In the dinghy!

There was a big party downtown for the Beaufort Water Festival. We took the dinghy downtown instead of driving. It's a 10' rib, with a 15 horse outboard. It gets up on plane and drives like a miniature speed boat. Wheeee!

We had dinner ashore, listened to the band for a while, and then headed back to the marina in the dark. Three miles, along a wide, deep river channel that I've traveled a hundred times.

We're buzzing along at about 15 knots (which seems like 25 when you're sitting right on the water) with the breeze in our face, the moon shining, the lights on shore parading past.... WHAM! The dinghy suddenly stops!

It was so much fun zipping along over the water that I had "zoned out" and kept going in a straight line instead of following the channel. We ran aground on a shoreline covered with mud and shells. The shells have edges sharp as knives, and our inflatable was no longer inflated!

Mary jumped out. (Wise girl!). I persuaded her to get back in, and with a partially inflated dinghy, we limped back to our marina. We made it home safe and sound.

Was continuing home the right thing to do? Looking back, there was more risk than I care to admit. The dinghy has three chambers, plus a hollow fiberglass hull. The bow chamber had a foot long gash in it and was instantly deflated. The port chamber had a small cut on the bottom; it was soft, but still holding air and providing some buoyancy. The starboard chamber was intact. There was enough drag the dinghy wouldn't plane, but it still chugged along.

What were the options, in hindsight? 1). Try to make it home; which we did, across a mile of open water. 2). Walk to shore across the marsh. It would have been a nightmare in the dark, with feet sinking into the mud, being cut by shells, and wading through water channels. 3). Putt-putt over to the nearest dock, about a 100 yards away, then walk to the street, and call a cab. 4). Pull out our trusty cell phone or VHF and call for someone-to-come-get-us!

Hmmm... Heading to the nearest dock might have been a wiser choice.



Here's the dinghy going into the shop to be patched. The repair bill was \$400. Ouch !

We wouldn't have run aground if I'd had a handheld GPS. Hey, I've got one! But, I didn't bring it along that night. (Sigh!). My new checklist for running the dinghy after dark now includes a VHF radio, flashlights, navigation lights, AND A GPS !!!



Meanwhile, our time at the dock gives us a chance to spend time with family. We've made visits to Atlanta several times, and we'll be back again for Thanksgiving.

Here's three generations of our family on the distaff side. Mary with her mother, Anne and our daughter Theresa.



They're so cute at that age, aren't they?

Here's our son John and his fiancé Laura.

Our daughter Theresa and her husband Matt. Thank goodness they've moved back to Atlanta... we have a place to stay when we visit !



It's been a busy Fall. Was there an election? Yes! Mary and I went to Washington on a "Tea Party" march.

We're retired on a fixed income. Somehow the message needs to get across to stop the deficit spending! We're sitting on the wall on the west side of the capitol building. The Washington mall is behind us.

I'm carrying a Gadsden flag attached to a boat hook. (Smile!).

There was even time this fall for a day cruise with friends. Jeff & Shirley O'Neill visited in October. We went SAILING ! (Ha! While we're docked, we rarely take the boat out!) There was 17 knots of wind on Port Royal Sound. An Island Packet loves a stiff breeze; we had all of the sails up as we blasted along on a beam reach, heeled over. HEY.... SAILING IS FUN !



Here's Jeff taking a turn at the helm. Starboard is left, right? No, it's right, Jeff !

And, Mary enjoying the company of her close friend Shirley.

Special times with special friends !



And, Mary at the helm while we're anchoring. We use the "marriage saver" headsets; I'm at the bow operating the windlass.

What's next? Our trip to England in December, for Luke's wedding. Mary has been in regular consultation with the kids on the wedding plans. (I'm amazed how much planning goes into a simple thing like a wedding!) She volunteered to make "Table Toppers" for Luke & Emma's reception; here's a photo.



The photo was taken with the topper laid out on a floating concrete dock. (Smile!).

Mary's interest is sewing and quilting. It proves that even while living aboard, we can still enjoy our hobbies.

Sometimes it's on a smaller scale, and there may be more effort involved; but that's part of cruising. The additional challenge adds a little spice!

We'll be here in Port Royal through the winter, as we were two years ago. Mary is working night shift as a nurse at the local hospital, while I bring in a few bucks with part time work as a Captain, driving for TowBoat U.S. Meanwhile the upgrades and the maintenance work continues. Life goes on. Working... saving... family events... and through it all, dreaming of the next cruise !

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