

Going from up to down v.1.4

by Stéphane Tremblay

It was on our engine less thirty six foot Trimaran , that my girlfriend Melinda and I was setting sail for the Virgin Islands, leaving Georgetown S.C., in the beautiful month of November. Three days of perfect sailing, of beautiful sun and basking in it, naked on the deck, enjoying life.

At night under a sky filled with stars and steady movement from a gentle breeze, we dragged our only technology, a DVD player, up onto the deck to watch the movie "Whale Rider". It was a romantic time, nothing couldn't been more perfect, but if we only knew what was to come. Before ending my watch, with my tired and blurry eyes I thought I saw a giant thing swim beneath the boat, but I dismissed it, thought that I was crazy and went to sleep.

On the fourth day the weather decided to change, and the sky begin to grew some unattractive cloud. Consulting our ever so useful "Instant Weather Forecast Book" I found we faced two rather different scenario; a light peaceful breeze or some crazy hellish winds.

Surviving our perfect dream and vacation we were relaxed as the sun sets and we rest calmly in the cockpit. Suddenly there was a bang, a sound nobody on a boat ever wants to hear. We've hit something, something hard. Racing to the source I saw the tail of a whale as wide as the boat disappearing beneath the surface. (Keep in mind the Trimaran is twenty feet wide, this is a huge whale.) An ancient blind whale that apparently can't see where it's going. And at that moment when I still try to believe what is happening, the wind vane comes loose from it's holding and crashes into the sea as the boat is hit a second time. I quickly turn my attention to the rudder barely held on by the steering cable (the cable fastened to the wheel in the cockpit) and pull the wounded victim on board.

"Well, give me one of those emergency cigarettes and in five minutes I'll have a solution" I say to Melinda. I decided to contact another boat and leave our location with them as a safety measure, while hoping to hear a real updated forecast. Of course nobody answers, because we are in the middle of no where, 380 miles off the coast and three days since we spotted another boat. We were on our own, just like we wanted at the beginning, and that we were hoping not for the first time of this trip.



1 day before the whales

As the sun sets the wind picks up and continues to grow stronger and stronger as the hours pass. We stabilize the boat as best we can, but with no keel on the Trimaran and no rudder it was not an easy job. We spent the night in what feels like a washing machine. We tried to dream of nicer things. Like a Trimaran with a rudder!

When finally, the sun that we were so much waiting for decided to wake up, it give me the confidence that I can fix the rudder with all the supplies I had insisted on bringing through the laughter of people.

The fix held for the day until one hours before the night when a big wave came to kiss us just right. Of course it's was a time when we didn't want that kind of love! The rudder breaks and we spend another night sleeping in a washing machine.

The rudder get fix during the night and installed at the first sun light, but again by dusk it too breaks in a strong wave. During the night the wind reaches its peak, making us appreciate more what did begin like a dream.

On the third day, I've put the boat upside down searching for anything that can hold. I find thankfully, 2 flat bar of stainless steel. This repair holds, stronger than the previous ones and I was happy and confident it will continue to hold. The wind were in our favor to reach the closest land with a strong NE pushing us toward the Bahamas. Within 24 hours we will be at an anchorage.

"Hey darling we will be there by tomorrow" I say to Melinda, "get out that nasty bottle of rum and get drunk! I may even try to cook something edible for you!" I laughed.

When we finally saw the island, the sea began to give us more of a challenge. The waves were high and the sea swelled, but the sun was bright and clouds were few. That breaking in the weather bring our mood back, and we were enjoying that beautiful day. It was impossible to make it for land that day. The wave going the same direction than the entrance of all inlet with a strange pattern (Phenomenon called Rage), we decided to sail around the island for another twenty-four hours...

The sailing that day was gorgeous, straddling on the edge of courageous and crazy. We surfed down some waves and even had the hull come out of the water. We just wanted to reach it and put out all the canvas the boat was able to take. Pushing it like we never had before, l'Esperenza was riding with a bone in her teeth*.

Because of all previous nights we lacked rest and after so much time without sleep we begin to suffer hallucinations. I passed from being at the helm of the boat to a dinner table seated amongst friends, a hallucination I readily preferred over my current situation, the food was really too tempting to ignore!

Finally anchored in the morning we cleaned the boat and slept for twelve hours straight. In the Bahamas we hunted for a welder to make some much needed repairs, but we laughed at our lack of chart and our only book dated at 1972. Hardly useful in our quest.

We had hoped to find work in the Virgin Islands. We needed to face customs and properly repair the boat, but with only \$270 in our pockets we were unable to afford it ourselves and considered contacting our families for funds and maybe materials to get the repairs done.

In honesty, though we size the Trimaran as a thirty six footer on paper, her actual measurements are thirty four. A \$150 difference to customs. The truth can not be avoided and it catches up to us. Worse yet it is three weeks into our stay in the Bahamas and we were running out of food. Our famous diet consisting of beans and rice has been reduced to beans. With finances too meager to afford to feed ourselves let alone make repairs on the boat and a country not really cooperative we are faced with the hard fact that the trip has come to it's conclusion and we needed to sell the boat.

We found a buyer willing to take her off our hands, but for almost nothing. Two plane tickets were bought to get us back to Florida. On the bus ride back to Canada the understanding that Melinda loved the solid earth beneath her feet while I longed for the open sea brought our relationship to an end.

The seemingly defeatist loss of two loves did not detract me from immediately searching for a new boat when I returned home. Four months later I was ready to cruise again on a new boat, Joshua, a Contessa 26.

Now, eighteen months later after leaving from the same Georgetown location on the same day of the month as my previous departure I hope to prove to myself, as this is a solo trip, that the journey makes the story, not the route taken. No trip will ever be the same as the last, each with it's own set of obstacles to overcome and memories to be made. I still travel poorly funded, I think it makes life interesting and bring other people closer. I prefer no electronic instruments and no engine, it give less problem at sea. But one thing changed since this adventure, is that EVERYTHING that touches the water is completely secured to the boat.

*a phrase implying that a boat is moving through the water at considerable speed. The "bone" is the bow wave thus produced.