

The Transition

Copyright Russ and Donna Sherwin, 2005, in San Carlos, Jalisco, Mexico.

It's 4 AM and I'm waiting for it to be 5 so I can legally get up. There's a half moon overhead, but the cloud cover is making hard work for it. This is the morning we leave San Carlos, Sonora, Mexico. The target is 0630 hours and it always seems to take longer than expected to get ready, even though there really isn't much to do. I make coffee, cut the grapefruit, set out the plates and cups, and fix Gracie the Wonder Dog's breakfast. Donna stows and checks everything below, then comes up and we eat in the Pilot House, waiting for it to get light. I top off the water tanks, disconnect and stow the hose and the electric cord and all but two lines fore and aft. At 0620, it's still pretty dark. I take the Wonder Dog up to the dumpster with me to dispose of the last of the trash and give her one last chance at land. For the next week or 10 days we must be sufficient unto ourselves, making our own water and electricity, eating up the food that Donna has provisioned us with. After a summer on land, Gracie has to relearn how to poop at sea, for she will not touch land until we get to La Paz.

As we walk back down the ramp I am struck by how pretty the boat looks. I had Miguel wash and polish it just before we arrived. The engine is running, the red and green navigation lights are on, the pilot house lights emit a warm glow and I can see Donna moving about inside. I stop and look at it for a moment. Our boat. Almost 7 years now we've been full time on board *Four Seasons*, except for last summer when we abandoned her to go RVing around the Rocky Mountain parks. We abandoned her with considerable trepidation, for the Sea of Cortez, AKA the Gulf of California has hurricanes in the summer. San Carlos is a hurricane hole, but there are still storms, and we worried about her all the time we were gone. She came through with flying colors, though. No bugs, no damage, no mildew, she's just as we left her.

The usual inertia of getting underway after a long hiatus is mitigated by the fact that San Carlos is not exactly a garden spot. It's adequate but we find it lacks charm. Charm, of course, is in the eye of the beholder, and some people love it. We're ready to leave. We've been back on the boat for a week, provisioning, stowing stuff, cleaning filters, changing oil, fixing things and getting ready for sea. I have agonized all week about fuel. I have, I calculate, more than enough to get to La Paz where I would prefer to buy fuel. But something just doesn't feel right, so yesterday I put another 200 gallons in the tanks. Now I have over 400 gallons on board just in case. Just in case what, I'm not sure. I can't conceive a scenario that would cause us to burn even half the amount of fuel I had before between here and La Paz, but just in case...

At 0645 it's still pretty dark, but getting lighter. We cast off the lines and follow a small fishing boat out through the narrow and shallow channel to open water. The boat begins to feel the sea, a little swell from the NW. To the west we see the lights of a small city. Wait -- it's not a small city, it's fishing boats, dozens and dozens of them stretching across the horizon. We have about 70 miles across the middle part of the Sea of Cortez to Punta Chivato where we will anchor. We debated all week about that plan, or the alternate plan of going 90 miles more southwesterly direct to San Juanico. The latter is more of a destination; the former is just a stop. But to go direct to San Juanico, we would have to leave at 3 in the

morning and travel 4 hours in the dark. Donna finally settled it by correctly pointing out that we didn't need to start our Mexico trip in the dark. We both hate traveling in the dark.

As dawn finally breaks behind us, we listen to the Amigo Net on SSB and confirm what we already knew; we have a three to four day weather window with light winds throughout the Sea, very unusual and very welcome. Mid-morning we go through a pod of a dozen or so feeding whales and a bunch of dolphins. Gracie has developed a new behavior: when I say "dolphins", she runs up to the bow and looks down into the water. She is fascinated by their antics. We have a good trip to Punta Chivato, arriving there about 4 pm with calm seas all the way. I have dragged the fishing lines all the way across, and have not had any luck. I even bought a kilo of yellowtail tuna before we left, figuring that would ensure that I would catch some. So we eat the fish I bought, read for a while and go to bed in dead calm water, the calmest we've ever seen at Punta Chivato. Last spring we had, according to the log, 25 knots gusting to over 30 at this same place. Next morning we're off at first light for San Juanico, 50 miles south. It's a bright clear day, light clouds, little wind, no seas, and I'm once again dragging the fishing lines.

Hope springs eternal.

The End