

Day 1. The Departure

Friday, December 1, 2000

Newport Beach, California

Departure is set for noon, but we all know we won't make that! I am still sending truckloads of supplies down to the dock. It is as if I look around me at home and suddenly say, "But I can't live without this...or...we definitely will need that" and load whatever it is I suddenly think we can't live without into the truck and down to the dock. I have also sent some items I had planned all along to take, but needed the cover of confusion to get them on board without an argument. I have sent a keyboard and guitar for Cole and Mclain (which I'm pretty sure we never used), a six foot collapsible Christmas tree complete with lights, a bread maker, workout weights, and a wheel barrel full of wrapped Christmas presents. I am actually amazed that my Christmas shopping was done, wrapped and ready, but dare not congratulate myself out loud or my cache of presents as well as the Christmas tree might get jettisoned. Let me correct that – they will certainly get jettisoned if Sean finds out I've snuck another fifty pounds of stuff aboard! I am counting on Sean being so busy this morning that he will not see what I am sending, because if he does I know there will be a huge pile of things he has vetoed. I gave Jessica the heads up and she is going to run interference on loading whatever she can.

I still have several last minute errands to do and decide the safest course of action is avoidance of the dock until the last possible moment. I can see it now...a dozen people helping load the boat, with piles of "stuff" still scattered everywhere below, confusion reigning, nerves stretched taut...no thanks. I am going to stay away until 11:45 and hope that I can escape the frayed nerves and frantic atmosphere. I am still without foul weather gear – I just can't bring myself to buy those hideous yellow man tailored things. West Marine has been waiting on a delivery of a new line of women's gear - pink, pretty and designed to fit - that was scheduled to arrive this morning. I head over there with crossed fingers but no luck. I end up with the badly fitting ugly yellow things and hope I won't have to wear them very often – ha! If only.

At three pm everything is finally aboard and we cast off dock lines and head over to Gary Hill's fuel dock. Gary Hill's fuel dock will become a dirty word soon enough, but we don't know that as we unsuspectingly top off the tanks and head out of the harbor. Sean has spent the past three years readying the boat for this and we look at each other, silently acknowledging the enormity of what we are about to do. Our amazing adventure finally begins as Quiet Woman sails out of Newport Harbor for the last time. Too little wind and too few places to sail pretty much dictate that wherever our travels take us, when and if they conclude, it is unlikely that this boat will ever return to southern California.

The first leg of our trip, Newport Beach to Puerto Vallarta, will be made without the children on board. The ten-day passage is too long for our four-year-old twins and it is a shakedown cruise for us anyways, best made without kids to deal with. We have spent lots of time working on Quiet Woman but little time sailing her. A few trips to Catalina, back and forth to Dana Point and that's about it. Some people spend years living aboard preparing for the day they finally set sail into the sunset, but that wasn't an option for us. I have had a restaurant to run, our children were eight months old when we bought the boat and she has been continually torn apart with Sean working on her. The lesson we have repeatedly learned is that no matter how "perfect" every little thing on the boat is, tomorrow that piece of equipment that you're sure could never break – it's broken. Living aboard to get to know our boat better was not a big concern, but the scant number of hours and limited conditions under which we had sailed her certainly was. The crew consists of Sean, Jessica, our children's pre-school teacher in our land life, their on-board teacher for the next year and a half as well our crewmate and someone who would become part of our family over the next two years, Ted Ripley, Mike Dillon and me. Ted and Mike are marine industry friends of Sean as well as experienced and able sailors. Ted would become our on-board astronomer over the next ten days and we would spend many crystal clear evenings gazing at the sparkling night sky while Ted pointed out constellations.

We motored south down the California coast and spent the rest of the day stowing the piles of supplies stacked in the galley and salon.