



Photo Contest Winner

James Layh

SV My Destiny, a 1984 built Whitby 42 stay sail ketch, sits quietly at anchor on the pristine western shore of Bitter Guana Cay, in the Exuma island chain of the Bahamas.

One of the many uninhabited islands in the Bahamas, Bitter Guana Cay is home to one of 3 sub-species of Rock Iguanas endemic to the Bahamas, who kept a watchful eye on us as the only visitors in the anchorage on this beautiful day in May 2023.



Currents

July 2023

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Topolabampo to Alamos

<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/topolabampo-to-alamos/>



We had a great sail from the islands off Puerto Escondido, Baja, to Topolobampo, Mexico. This crossing was bittersweet as we bid goodbye to our dear friends Bruce and Gina on ***Dreamcatcher***. Over twenty years ago we met when both sailboats circumnavigated. We had a wonderful month cruising north in the Sea of Cortes with Bruce and Gina. Now it was time to head to the mainland of Mexico.



Bruce and Gina from Dreamcatcher and sunset on our crossing to Topolobampo

Sailing into the entrance of Topolobampo was intimidating. Surf was on both sides. Fortunately, with very well marked waypoints and buoys it was fine.



Crossing into Topolobampo's channel

Arriving in Topolobampo

The town of Topolobampo looks like the Easter Bunny came through and painted it. It sits on a hill overlooking the marina. The town's fishing fleet is well-matched.



The colourful town of Topolobampo

We had googled a recommended restaurant Don Gato so we set off to the town to find it. Google Maps took us to the left around and to the top of the town hill. When our destination appeared there was no restaurant. We checked our directions and we had followed them correctly. An hour and a half later we arrived at the waterfront Malecon and there was our restaurant. What we didn't realize was had we gone right instead of left on our walk, the restaurant would have been 15 minutes away! Well we got a tour of the town and some exercise so all was good. The food at Don Gato was delicious.



Restaurant Don Gato

We received a warm welcome to Topolobampo marina. The marina is located north of Mazatlan and makes a great stop for boats transiting the area. Nelson, the Marina Manager went out of his way to ensure we had everything we needed and even arranged our ride to pick up our rental car. Located next to the marina is a concrete fuel dock. It might be tenable at high tide. We chose to jerry jug the fuel. Laundry can also be sent out at a reasonable price. Water is non-potable.

Renting a Car

Once in the Topolobampo Marina, Dave arranged to pick up our rental car from the Los Mochis airport – a 15-minute drive from Topolobampo. The Topolobampo marina manager, Nelson, had one of his employees drive us there. At the airport rental car booth there was a flourish of Spanish which Dave and I desperately tried to understand. The rental agency person looked at our faces and realized we didn't understand anything she said. She came out of her booth and took us outside to meet two other employees. We got into the car – I thought it was our rental. It was dirty, dented and old! Well, if it is mechanically sound I thought – that's what matters. Turned out this wasn't our rental (phew) it was how we were getting to our car! It soon became apparent we had to pick up the car from the heart of Los Mochis – a 40 min drive away (even though we booked it to pick up at the airport). Once at the other rental location we were motioned to sit down. Again, questioning faces. Preguntas? Questions? They

wanted to wash our car before we took it.

Two hours after arriving at the airport we were on the road- in a beautiful Nissan red rental car! It was 3 hours to Álamos on a good highway. We went through 3 military check points. A little intimidating with the well-armed military folks. Each time we rolled down our window and Dave would start with “lo siento, no hablo espanol” (I’m sorry I don’t speak Spanish), and they waved us on. US has warnings in these areas about the cartel but we felt safe. People said travel during the day and all will be ok. Policia or military appeared to be searching only the semi-trucks pulled over at each stop. By the last checkpoint when Dave rolled down his window and the policia saw we were gringos, they just waved us past! The rest of the drive was uneventful. Along the way there were vendors hawking their wares as well as two toll booths. When we couldn’t understand how much to pay the toll booth woman held up a 100-peso bill with a smile.

Friends in a Magical Town

We stopped at a restaurant in the city of Navojoa for lunch and then drove onto the Magical Pueblo of Álamos- meaning magical town. It truly was magical, sitting in a valley with houses all adjoined, cobblestone narrow roads, and white concrete and brick Spanish style casas.

We met Kelley 24 years earlier in San Diego on our first sailing trip. I had just hung up from an emotional call with my Dad prior to leaving Mexico for the South pacific passage to the Marquesa Islands. It was going to be a big passage of 3000 miles and I truly thought we might die on the trip. Kelley was there and when I shared my fears, he hugged me and said, “Mary the ocean is safe. More people die every day on the highways.” Somehow this did comfort me and to this day I still remember his hug and words of assurance.

Approaching The Colonial, the hotel our friends owned, Kelley and Janet were standing outside. It seemed like no time had gone by as we embraced our friend Kelley and his wife Janet.



Janet

Kelley and

Entering their home, I felt like Cinderella. A large open courtyard filled with huge plants, flowers, antiques and paintings is surrounded by 10 hotel rooms, each with their own bathroom. Beautiful Mexican tiles lined the bathrooms. The rooms had fireplaces and sitting areas. Sadly, it was too hot for a fire!



Some of the rooms

At the one end of the courtyard a spiral staircase led up to a two-level terrace where you could look over all the town rooftops and hills. Kelley designed and built the spiral staircase – a true work of art.



Looking up at the top of the staircase

We enjoyed a delightful rooftop dinner, with a gorgeous view of Álamos.



Rooftop dinner

At the other end was a grand ballroom complete with an 1865 square grand piano. The ceilings were over 20' high with matching arched windows along one side that opened to a huge coffee roaster – they sell their coffee. Kelley is an expert at making cappuccinos.



The ballroom with a 1865 Hallet Davis & Co. square piano, made in Boston

Our friends had their own separate suite next to an indoor pool and commercial kitchen. Everywhere I looked were beautiful artifacts and Spanish architecture. I learned that the hotel had 15 bathrooms, 10 rental rooms and 10 fireplaces (all wood burning but one). Janet had first bought the mansion when it was in ruins. With Kelley, extensive renovations were done to bring it to the magnificent place it is today.



The main entrance and inner courtyard with the fountain

We did a lot of reminiscing on this trip about our past sailing days. It was truly a special visit seeing Kelley after so many years and meeting Janet, who we instantly loved.

After a quick 2-day visit we drove back to Los Mochis Airport to return the car. Or so we thought! There was no one at the Alamo rental agency. We tried calling the number on the business card we were given, with no luck. We waited 3.5 hours. We noticed there were more staff than passengers at the airport. Finally, we talked to someone from another car agency who phoned Alamo. Thirty minutes later they arrived. The agent felt bad because she didn't start until 1500h but no one told us and the car had to be returned at 1000h. At least she drove us back to the boat. Mexican time.

Leaving Topolobampo we chose to anchor just inside the entrance up a side channel. This gave us a good jump off for an early start the next day for the long run down to Puerto Vallarta.

About The Author

Mary Kruger

Synchronicity - Fraser 41

Dave and Mary did a world circumnavigation with their two daughters, visiting 37 countries from 1998-2002. Now 20 years later they have set sail again, this time without their girls, for ports in North and South America.

Rookie Mistakes - And The Things We Did Right!

<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/rookie-mistakes-and-the-things-we-did-right/>



We departed BC last fall, headed for our first year of long-term cruising, foolishly believing that we had read enough, learned enough, knew enough to avoid the mistakes that many new cruisers make – we were so wrong!!! We have loved our travels, and there have been soo many high points in the last year, but there have been so many mistakes as well – here are the biggest mistakes and the couple of things we did absolutely right:

The Mistakes

Mistake No. 1: We went too fast and covered too much ground. We left Canada in mid-September, with hops down the US west coast, the Baja west coast, up to La Paz, across to La Cruz, down to Barra de Navidad, back to La Cruz, up to Mazatlan, back across to La Paz and then north until we jumped over to Puerto Penasco, where our boat currently awaits our return to Mexico after a summer at home. This has been our biggest mistake – we left later than we wanted and then felt like we were always running. We set some unrealistic timelines and then were left racing to get to destinations by certain dates – all the while

rushing through places we wished we could have stayed at longer.

Mistake No. 2: We did not get a water-maker. I have always argued that we would do just fine without a water-maker. We were always able to find water when we needed it but getting the water to the boat was often a long, frustrating and sometimes very difficult process (it was ALWAYS very lumpy in the anchorage when it came time to load jerry cans on board!!). The couple of times we were on a dock, it was of course easier, but even then, we had to plan for a delivery, wait around for its arrival and of course pay per jug. If we had had a water-maker, we could have possibly stayed out longer in places we were enjoying, without the fear that we were going to run out of water or clean clothes. We could have showered far more often, rather than living like feral animals always afraid to waste that extra bit of water!!! We should have gotten a water-maker and we are going to install one in the fall.

Mistake No. 3: I was too rigid in requiring certain ingredients that were familiar from home. But really? No canned tomatoes anywhere?! This led to spending far too much time in grocery stores and spending exorbitant amounts of money to buy those “must have” ingredients. In the same theme, I tried to cook too much like home. I need to adjust to new recipes, hopefully ones that don’t heat up the boat, take ingredients I don’t have, and make too big of a mess. If anyone wants to send me some (light on fish) suggestions, I would love to see them!

Mistake No. 4: We have not created enough shade on our boat (especially when we are underway). By the end of some days we would be so overheated that the thought of doing anything, even going for a swim or boondoggle in the dinghy, was just too much. So, instead, we would retreat below deck and waste what was often our one and only afternoon in a place.

Mistake No. 5: We did not look enough into the cost of staying at Ensenada. We ended up staying in San Diego for quite a long time, waiting for a part to be delivered so that we could fix our wind speed sensor. While we stayed at anchor, costing us nothing, the City itself if just so expensive and we had nothing to do but go out and spend money!! Had we looked into it further, we would have realized that, for not much more than the cost of the 4 days we stayed at the dock after checking into Mexico, we could have stayed for a month in Ensenada. That would have left us in a slightly less expensive city, on the dock where it might have been easier to complete a few (still as of yet incomplete) projects. If you know that you will be waiting for parts, or holding off until after hurricane season, it might be worth checking on the cost to stay at Ensenada for a month. There are of course a few things to consider – there is a pump out fee and you need to be willing to forego the temptation of going out for dinner every night! But it might be a great chance to meet the crew of other boats that will be heading down the Baja coast, and to knock a few jobs off your list!

The Wins

After reading the above, you would think we didn’t do anything right! But, we do feel we had a few wins along the way:

Win No. 1: We put a Hydrovane on our boat before we left. This was possibly the best money we have ever spent on our boat. The unit is not inexpensive but it drove for us nearly the entire way down the west coast and on all our big crossings. If you are considering a self-steering vane – do it. We love our

Hydrovane but of course there are many options – anything that lets you let go of the wheel (maybe get into a bit of shade) is a bonus – especially when it is not costing you precious power!!

Win No. 2 : We took a satellite texting device. In our case, we used a Zoleo. This is a win for a couple of reasons. Firstly of course for safety. Knowing that we could always reach out if we were ever to run into trouble, and having our location sent to 5 of our contacts every time we “hit the button”, was comforting. More than that, though, was the connectivity. I was getting text updates from my Mom in the middle of the night (to warn me of a fishing fleet or cruise ship she could see on AIS) and was able to check in with friends and family every day. I know that some people enjoy being totally off the grid but for me, with my Mom sick at home, being able to check in was essential. I was also able to keep up middle of the night text check-ins with other cruisers also out on their night shifts. This kept us alert and a little less lonely out there! We did not have Starlink, which of course would have given us even greater connectivity, and we are still considering adding it to the boat for next year. So far it is a “nice to have” thing. Yes, it will give us better weather reports along with all of the other access to the “real world”. But that is not a must have in our minds.

Win No. 3: I kept a good daily log and published a blog when we had access to internet. I also kept up with updates on Facebook and Instagram. This allowed us to bring our family and friends along for the ride, as well as reminding us of all the places that we rushed our way through – often needing to look back at that log and our position reports just to remember exactly where we might have pit-stopped! We also took tons of pictures, most just on our cell phone. Very few places, and even fewer sunsets went undocumented. I love to look back at the places we went and know that in coming years, as the list of places grows, we will value those snapshots in time even more.

Win No. 4: We upgraded our solar before we left. We have never particularly liked the look of a solar arch, but we realized that we definitely would need more solar and so we added the arch (it doesn't look so terrible after all) and ordered new panels (those were still in boxes on the stern of the boat when we left the dock in September!). We could have, should have ordered (and likely will) slightly bigger panels than we did. We were so concerned about them looking too big or bulky... But the solar we had managed to keep up with our demands during all but the shortest, gloomiest days of the year. Marinas are few and far between, and the demand for them mostly outpaces the availability, so having the ability to remain off-grid without the need for a generator (we do not have one) or to run the engine every day was essential.

Win No. 5: We added a small 12 volt freezer. Owen would likely argue whether or not this was a win as he liked to point out that it is likely our biggest power draw, but I definitely think it was a win. We have a smallish drawer style fridge with a miniscule freezer that does not really freeze anything. Having a freezer (with a small overspill refrigerated area) was essential to being able to stock up on meat when we were in a location with good prices and to keep some extra milk, cheese and butter on hand. It also allowed me to batch cook some items and store them in the freezer to pull out when we were on passage when prepping was difficult. In the past, I have put up some canned meats (ground beef and steak), and will do so again before we cross the Pacific. I also really like Kirkland canned chicken. These items are great to have but it is even nicer to be able to throw some chicken breasts or steaks on the barbecue. The freezer we purchased was not one of the “higher end” brands and that is likely why the power consumption is higher, but it was the only one that fit into the only spot we had on the boat to put it and in my mind it made our trip just a little bit easier. I know that there are those that cruise without any refrigeration and I am truly in awe of them, but I love having both the fridge and freezer on board.

Overall our first year of cruising was amazing: great places, people and food. We have learned a few lessons and hope that the next season will be a bit easier and even more entertaining!

About The Author

Tara Donley

Solstice Tide - Van de Stadt 36'

Tara Donley and her partner, Owen Popplestone, departed Canada in September 2022 on their 36' van de Stadt, Solstice Tide, and spent their first season cruising the Sea of Cortez and mainland Pacific Mexico. Tara and Owen have been members of BCA for years. They have taken several courses (Psychology of Voyaging being the most impactful), attended uncounted presentations and club nights, and were members of BCA Fleet for two years.

First Aid Items for Shore Excursions

<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/first-aid-items-for-shore-excursions/>



Most cruisers travelling long distances or to remote areas have fairly comprehensive first aid kits aboard. Whether home rolled or store bought, these are generally based on lists developed by wilderness first aid experts, military personnel or professional paramedics. I wrote a [longer article on first aid kits](#) a few years ago, which you may want to check-out. Some of these kits will include smaller first aid kits to take ashore, when going exploring, on a hike or a bike ride.

When smaller first aid kits are based on lists developed by experts in specific fields, typically there is an assumption that some items are present (in this case, somewhere on the boat) but they may not be in the kit itself. For example, wilderness first aid experts think you're on a camping trip and have all your camping gear close at hand; military personnel think you have your 'issue gear' on your person, and professional paramedics think you're near an ambulance or similar transport with all its accoutrements. For boaters, none of these assumptions hold true, and there are a few things that you can add to your kit that can fill these gaps and prove very handy for use when away from 'the mother ship'. Here are some items that we include in our shore excursion first aid kit:

Some extra large, heavy duty garbage bags: Useful as a ground cover under an injured person (to keep them drier and cleaner); as a place to spread out your first aid supplies other than in the mud, sand or dirt; as a rain cover in inclement weather, or to make a shade cover in a relentlessly sunny tropical location. They can be cut along the edges to make larger or smaller covers or mini tarpaulins, or have holes cut in them for your head and arms to use as a kind of emergency poncho. Aboard, they are useful to keep boo-boo juice off the upholstery. Grab a few (3-5) and slip them into a ziplock bag to store. The orange ones are higher visibility than the black or transparent ones, and can be used to mark your position, and small pieces can be cut off and tied to trees etc. to flag a trail to an injured person.



Large plastic bags that can be stored inside a small ziplock bag

A knife: Useful for clearing vegetation, cutting branches, cutting wood for fires, etc. A simple, cheap, strong and lightweight utility knife like this Mora Companion will do the job. Similar blades are often found in the gardening section of a hardware or dollar store. Get one that's reasonably sturdy. You don't need a Rambo style survival knife; something with a blade 3 1/2 inches long or so is enough. Stainless blades are likely longer lasting, but stainless or not, wipe the blade with oil or wax before storing to forestall rust. Make sure it's sharp before you put it in the kit.



A simple utility knife

A way to make a fire: In the event you can't move an injured person, you may want to be able to make a fire for warmth, illumination, signalling/marketing a position or simply for morale. The simplest and easiest fire making kit you can carry is likely a cigarette lighter, with a couple of feet of duct tape wrapped around it. You can secure a bit of shoelace or paracord under the tape to make a clip on grab loop. Duct tape makes an excellent fire starter, just peel off six inches or so, tear it lengthwise into fettuccine or linguini-like strips, loosely bunch them into a blob the size of a tennis ball or a bit smaller with lots of air space in it, and light with the lighter. The adhesive and fabric are both flammable and once lit, burn tenaciously. Add kindling and then wood on top. Get a genuine, full sized lighter, the minis are less reliable as their smaller flints fail. Also, try to get a brand name lighter as many of the generic versions have dubious reliability.



A full sized cigarette lighter

Duct tape: There are 1,000,000 uses for duct tape; and having a bit for mending clothes, securing the garbage bags above, fashioning or securing a splint, binding a bandage to a wound, fire making, etc. can be really handy. Peel ten to fifteen feet of duct tape off your family-sized roll and make a handy size roll by re-rolling it around an appropriate length of drinking straw. Fold the open end over to make a tab so it's easy to peel with cold or wet hands. A bit of cordage or paracord can be threaded through the straw to make a grab/hang loop. Wrap it in cling wrap or similar, or place in a small ziplock, as the adhesive can ooze out over time and be messy.



Multi-use duct tape

A whistle: Whistles are useful so you can signal your position to people trying to find you. A neck lanyard is handy so you don't misplace it. They're small and weigh almost nothing, you could have a couple, so someone who goes for help can signal their return.



Whistles can help locate people at night

A headlamp: You don't need a super fancy headlamp, but something to help you see in the dark. (It gets dark almost every night, so a light can be really handy if you can't move your causality before it does). Hung from a branch, it can be an area light; strapped to a water bottle with the lamp pointed into the bottle it can be used as a makeshift lantern. Also useful for signalling your position at night. Store the batteries separately (perhaps two sets) so they don't go bad inside the lamp and render it useless.



A bright headlamp

Reading glasses: Cheap dollar store reading glasses are fine. Useful if you or another rescuer forgot theirs, and useful for wound cleaning or other detail work made easier with magnification even if you don't usually wear them. The low power (1.5~2.0 diopter) is probably the most universally useful.



Inexpensive reading glasses

Water purification tablets: You likely have some water with you on a shore excursion, but you probably don't have much, and you may need more for drinking, compresses or wound cleaning. With a few of these handy, you can make more 'safe' water from sketchy local water sources like streams or ponds. Get water from just about any local source, filter it if it's cloudy (you can use a gauze pad from the kit as a filter), add one tablet per litre, shake to mix, let stand for 30 minutes and it's potable. They take almost no room, so grab a bunch. Toss the bulky packaging, but make sure you include the instruction sheet with the tablets.



Water purification tabs can come in handy

Most of these items are available at a hardware store, a dollar store or similar venue for a few bucks, fit easily in your first aid kit, and can make a huge difference in your ability to respond effectively to an emergency away from the “mother ship”. And who doesn’t want an excuse to visit their local dollar store?

About The Author

Rob Murray

Avant - Beneteau First 435 Sloop

Rob Murray and Debra Zhou are doers currently in El Salvador, Central America.

Canada Day BURP

<https://currents.bluewatercruising.org/articles/canada-day-burp/>



Denis and I went to Winter Cove, Saturna Island to attend the infamous [Saturna Island lamb barbecue](#) to celebrate Canada Day. This is my second time attending this community event which is always great fun! In addition to the yummy lamb, of course, there were many activities, such as games (BINGO and three legged races are just a few examples), a stage with a variety of live music to entertain us while we had our lunch, a market with crafts tents showcasing local hand made pieces and information tents where we could learn about the local orca population or about environmental issues impacting our marine parks and our oceans.

The lamb barbecue has a [long history](#), having started in 1950 as a school picnic. You can [learn more about the event here](#).



While at the event, we met up with three other [Bluewater Cruising Association](#) (BCA) boats. We rafted up to *Rizpah*, with Nicholas and Catalina, and were very happy to hear that John and Alison from *Bare Necessities* were also there, as were Tanya and Ed from *Seadra*! A happy hour event was quickly arranged aboard *Counting Stars* and the discussion ensued about whether or not that constituted a BURP!

What is a BURP?

What is a BURP you may ask... well, the guidelines were not entirely clear to us, but a BURP is a Bluewater Unofficial Rendezvous Place, however, how many boats must gather before we can call it a BURP? Two boats? Three boats? I think that with four BCA boats represented we were safe to call it: we had a BURP!



From left to right: Rosario Passos from *Counting Stars*, Dina Aloy, former BCA member from *Good as Gold*, Nicholas Isaac and Catalina Acevedo from *Rizpah*, Denis Heinrichs from *Counting Stars*, John Oliver and Alison Manley from *Bare Necessities*, Tanya VanGinkel and Ed Choromanski from *Seadra*.

We gathered together, had a few laughs, talked about sailing plans for the Summer and the future, got some good cruising stories from the *Doners* in the group (Dina, Tanya and Ed) all accompanied with fabulous food and drinks! And that is what a BURP is all about!

The wind blew overnight and with that came all the excitement of boats dragging. If you have been to Winter Cove before, you are all too familiar with the phenomenon of current running through the anchorage. Well, add wind gusting to 17-20 knots to the mix and you get waltzing boats and a symphony of headlights on deck! *Rizpah*'s anchor held steady and we woke up the following day to a gloriously sunny Canada Day!

Seadra and *Bare Necessities* were all dressed up for the Canada Day celebrations showing off the beautiful and colourful flags.



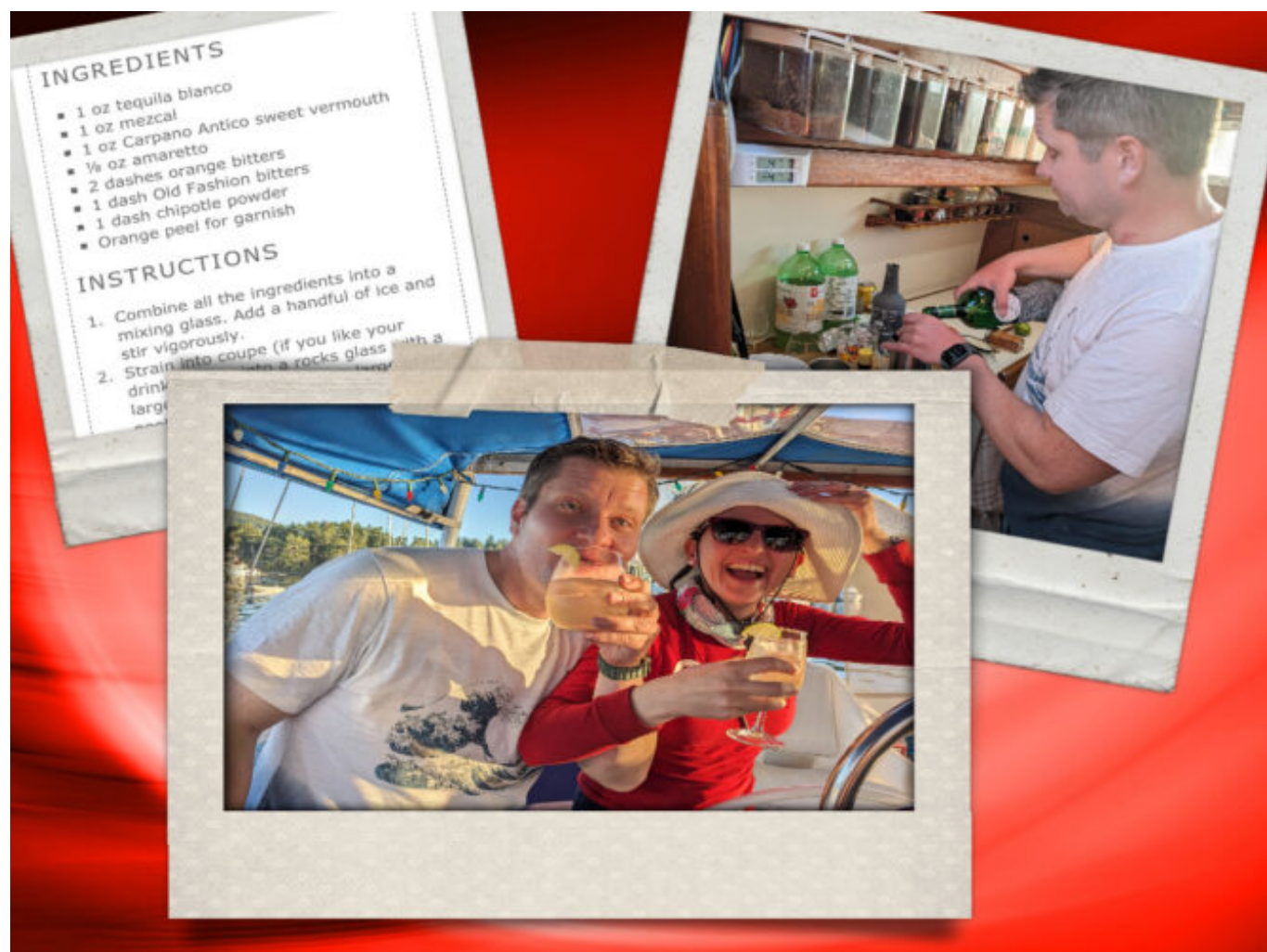
Left to right: *Bare Necessities* and *Seadra* showing off their flags

Denis and Nicholas, aka “mighty fishermen”, caught two fish so the dinner menu was set for fish tacos aboard *Counting Stars* and another BURP was had!



Another BURP!

We also celebrated Nicholas and Catalina's 19th anniversary with a delicious concoction created by Nicholas and designed to use up some of the Mezcal aboard *Counting Stars*.



Celebrating!

And this is what BURPS are all about to us! We are still not sure how many BCA boats must gather before we can call a BURP (if you know the number, please add a comment below), but the spirit of the BCA BURP was definitely there: friendship, camaraderie, laughs, support, togetherness, fun...

So, if you are out there sailing, regardless of where you are, if you see another BCA boat at an anchorage, get together for a BURP and send your BURP story to [Currents](#).

About The Author

Rosario Passos

Counting Stars - Whitby 42 Ketch

Rosario is a dreamer who wants to sail the South Pacific.... so far she sails the local waters of the Salish Sea to get as much experience as possible.

Currents Bluewater Cruising

The Bluewater Cruising Association

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