



The Keema and its crew — Paul and Betsy Marti — after a rocky crossing of the Gulf Stream from Key Biscayne, Fla.



The Martis were captivated by a young Bahamian boy and his dog who sought the comfort of a large shade tree outside Cat Cay.

## Land ho!

### Gulf Stream jaunt tests seamanship

It's a glorious Tuesday morning in the Bahamas. Keema is anchored in the lee of Highborne Cay and although the wind is blowing hard from the east we are well protected and quite comfortable.

Since I last put pen to paper Betsy and I have sailed Keema over 1,300 miles.

From Norfolk, Va., we motor sailed south along the East Coast's busy Intracoastal Waterway.

The "main" sector of the Intracoastal winds its way from Norfolk to Miami, Fla., 1,100 miles of rivers, lakes, canals and sounds passing through five states. The waterway is operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is a model of efficiency. Today pleasure craft and commercial vessels share the route and numerous coastal communities benefit by the traffic and business it creates.

WE TOOK four weeks to make the passage, about average for a boat our size. Our routine was to leave early in the mornings and run for six or seven hours arriving at our next anchorage by mid-afternoon. By arriving early in the day we had the opportunity to visit many of the waterway towns. Betsy and I both enjoyed our afternoon walks either running errands or just wandering, always keeping an eye out for the local ice cream parlor.

In Belhaven, N.C., Betsy's Mom and Dad, Joe and Jackie Piscitelli of Ulster, met up with us. Joe, recently retired from General Motors, had purchased a small motor home/van. For two weeks the Piscitellis drove along as we sailed Keema, meeting most evenings. We spent days in Beaufort and Wrightsville Beach, N.C., as well as Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Sharing time with her parents helped cure the homesickness that had been creeping up on Betsy. We all had a great time and even snuck in a few rounds of golf as my father-in-law gave me a few lessons on the finer points of the game.

IT WAS tough to say good-bye again, but on Halloween we parted. That evening we hung up drawings by our nieces, put out our pumpkins and even found a Halloween film on TV. However, no trick or treaters found their way to our isolated anchorage on Duck Creek.

The next two weeks passed quickly, longer days pushing to get to Miami by the 15th of November.

As you travel south on the Intracoastal you can see, hear and feel the changes. Vegetation becomes much more tropical and palm trees start to appear in South Carolina. Even the sounds of the birds tell you you are getting into the deep south, and of course each day a little warmer breeze signals the transition toward the tropics.

Through the Carolinas and Georgia much of the waterway is wild or underdeveloped. Bird sanctuaries abound and towns are small and few. Once in Florida the developments begin, slowly in the north but by mid-Florida every inch of waterway is precious and bird sanctuaries give way to condominium complexes.

IN FORT Lauderdale we spent two expensive days at dockside getting last minute marine supplies and replenishing our larder of canned goods and sundries.

We had contemplated sailing directly from Fort Lauderdale to Cat Cay in the Bahamas. However, three days of 30 knot easterlies had us sitting and waiting for the right weather. Although the run from the Florida coast to Cat Cay is only 50 miles, you must cross the infamous Gulf Stream. It is "essential" that you select the right weather for this passage. Conditions in the stream can be very difficult and downright dangerous if the wind blows hard out of the North. After waiting three days in Fort Lauderdale we decided to head to Key Biscayne in hopes of getting a better angle for the crossing and perhaps tonking up with some other boats for the passage.

No Name Harbor is at the southern end of Key Biscayne and is a common meeting place for boats waiting to cross the stream.

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We arrived at 15:30 on the 18th of November, and found six sailboats at anchor in the tiny harbor. I took a dinghy ride around the anchorage and talked with all six crews, finding out that five of the six boats were leaving that night. Times of departure varied on the size of the boat, all crews wanted to time their arrival for late morning at Cat Cay. We decided to sail across with "Tamyrand" an Alberg 30 from Ontario with Mario and Danielle aboard. At 18:40 we left No Name together, winds from the south-east at 15 knots, seas 3-4 feet, not the best conditions but acceptable.

AS WE sailed away from the coast of Florida I found myself deep in thought. In some ways I felt as though my journey was really just beginning. Although we have sailed Keema four thousand miles from Michigan, it all seemed to be a prelude to the real passages. These last five months have served as an apprenticeship to living aboard and becoming self-sufficient. Now with the United States fading from view we were truly beginning! It will be almost two years before I return to the States, and as we sailed into the darkness of the Atlantic I felt the butterflies take flight in my stomach.

It is difficult to express what I felt that night. I have planned this trip for so long and there were never any doubts at home going over charts and preparing. But that night heading for my first Island landfall I wondered if I was really prepared. I'm not sure what I was afraid of, certainly not dying out here — I somehow can't imagine that. Perhaps fear of failure, or fear of fear, whatever the case my nerves were raw and I was very anxious.

The only comparison I can make in my life is the feeling I had on December 5, 1968. On that winter afternoon I boarded a Seaboard World Airlines flight from Travis Air base in California bound for Vietnam. I was a naive 20-year-old infantryman. My fears then were of failure in combat of somehow lacking at my moment of truth.

Whether on the flight to Vietnam or on the tossing seas of the Atlantic fear of the unknown made me pause and ponder what lay ahead.

Fortunately, the sea keeps you busy and washes away idle thoughts. A series of squalls brought high winds and heavy seas and preoccupation gave way to hard sailing. It was a relief.

THIS WAS not the best passage for Betsy. After weeks of Intracoastal calms, we found ourselves rolling heavily in 8 to 10 foot seas. Betsy retired to her sea berth and fought "mal de mer" for the rest of the passage.

"Keema" fought her way across the stream under double reefed main and staysail, we were lucky to make three knots and carried on for 18 hours.

At first light I expected to see the chain of cays appear on the horizon. No such luck. The stream and head winds had slowed us more than I had anticipated. We continued on now alone. Just before dawn we lost sight of Tamyrand and did not see her again for several days.

At 10:45 the outline of land came into view and my spirits were lifted. Two hours later we tied up at the customs wharf at Cat Cay. The sun was shining it was eighty plus degrees, the water was crystal clear and yesterday's butterflies were asleep once again.

Clearing customs was quite simple and the official was most pleasant. There were no charges to obtain a cruising permit, and only \$10 for a fishing license.

Shortly after we set anchor in Honeymoon harbor off Gun Cay, dove into the warm Bahamian water and enjoyed the satisfaction of having cleared one more hurdle on our personal odyssey.



Navigation isn't an easy task, but the Martis decided to ignore a hodge-podge of directional signs in plotting a course to the Bahamas from Key Biscayne, Fla.

## CIRCUMNAVIGATION

-a journal