

OUR BIG WOODEN BOAT -PART V

By Dottie Fletcher

□ Our unplanned arrival in Morro Bay, California must have been an omen. Though we had planned on re-rigging *Duen*, we certainly had never planned on doing it in Central California. Having done our first boat in San Diego we had options for either San Pedro or San Diego as our working destination. We cleared customs in Port San Luis and made a trip to San Pedro. Finding a berth in that crowded metropolitan area seemed to be close to an impossibility. So we made plans to set down a mooring in Port San Luis.

This appealed to us for many reasons. We really preferred to live at anchor. It definitely keeps one much more attuned to life at sea than dockside living. Another big factor was Albert's father, John Fletcher, who kept his beautiful fishing boat, *Spray*, on a mooring there. Albert and I planned on doing a bit of salmon fishing with him. We did at first but soon realized that it didn't leave enough hours for us to accomplish our re-rigging. As we surveyed the immensity of our undertaking we knew we

needed all of our concentration, strength and time on just that project.

Our first step in that direction was to haul the boat out in Port San Luis. This was done on a travel lift, which was strained to the optimum by our weight. Then we were planted down in the middle of the parking lot. Talk about a fish out of water! The mast was then removed along with most of the metal work. What wasn't remade was galvanized. We had had our share of rust. We did all the usual haul-out work and went back in the water looking very barren indeed with no masts.

Out, way out, in Port San Luis we sat on our new mooring. There we put on a new capping rail which meant hauling out huge amounts of lumber in our dinghy. It was quite a challenge as every afternoon, almost without fail, it blew at least a Force 5 and the red flag was always up. There were days we hated that wind. It did in fact finally whip us down and we realized we were never going to be able to complete our work there. We then put a mooring down in Morro Bay and finished the boat.

Doesn't that sound easy? "We finished the boat." Just

like that! Well, it wasn't just like that at all. It was hours and hours, weeks and months of hard, hard labor.

In the Caribbean we had met a young couple whom we thought we would enjoy cruising with. So we wrote and offered them a trip as crew if they wanted to come and help us work on the boat getting it ready. There were many people who wanted to go and were very willing to work but we had figured we would be compatible with Dana Godbe and Billy Fortington. They arrived in Morro Bay around the end of September 1975 and moved aboard.

Dana worked two jobs so they would have spending money for the trip as well as helping on the boat. Billy went to work with Albert.

Through the courteous efforts of John Lawrence of PG&E, we located two seasoned, 15-year-old poles to use for our masts. Then Albert and Billy went to work with the adzes of antiquity. From huge rounds down to square, then to hexagonal and back to round. Albert made all the metal work and they were able to do all of this in the serenity of a two acre ranch that Albert's father owned.



Getting Duen ready for her Pacific adventure was no easy task. First she was hauled and deposited on a parking lot. Then new spars were shaped and then a new gunwale was put on while at anchor, necessitating our rowing the lumber out.

No more pressure than chasing away the goats, dogs or sheep and the noise factor about the same. It was much nicer than the busy rush and sounds of San Pedro or San Diego.

Kenny Jenkins, the Harbor Master at Port San Luis, graciously loaned us their pole-dolly and Albert's father used his pick-up truck to transport the finished spars to Morro Bay. A huge thank-you goes to Orville Teague and his crew who used his crane and know-how to step our masts for us. His big charge was a couple of six packs, which we all sat down and drank with a big sigh of relief after the masts were in place. We have a piece of pure gold under our mainmast, given us by a fisherman and a bicentennial dollar under the mizzen. That should keep us in real good luck!

Step by step *Duen* took shape. When her new sails arrived from Hong Kong and were bent on we were pretty excited. We took a lot of shakedown sails around Morro Bay, where the wind is stiff, and a few trips to the Channel Islands.

Then it was time for the last visiting. Dana and Billy spent the summer in New Jersey with Billy's family and then some time in Monterey with Dana's family. Albert and I were busy sailing around the southland entertaining family and friends. We were busy doing our storing also.

Always a hard job to do. There just is never enough room on a boat for all the things one would like to take along. Food supplies are the essential and after our 78-day experience before we wanted to make sure we had plenty this time. Medical supplies, clothing, bedding, batteries, charts, spare parts for so many things, cosmetics (the sun is a killer, gals), books, embroidery and sewing supplies, drawing kits, photo supplies. The list went on and on. Albert swore I was going to sink the boat. I kept saying, "But we may be gone for five or six years." I should add here that my mom, Edra Riehl, was a tremendous help in our storing. Having been aboard the boat for a length trip, she knew the things we could use and would need. Her eagle eyes were peeled for bargains for us for a whole year. Albert tried in vain to keep us apart on shopping expeditions.

Finally the day arrived; supplies aboard, good-byes said, we filled the Diesel and water tanks and, at 4:30 P.M. on November 18, 1976, we set sail for the Marquesas Islands. Set sail? Loose usage of the term. Actually in true Southern California and *Duen* style we were windless until we were almost to Catalina Island, so we motored. Then the wind came up and we managed to get past San Clemente before it died again.

We decided to be hard-nosed and took down the sails and drifted.

Since we were close to the island and shipping lanes we sat night watches. Shipping lanes I say? More like an air-lanes. Planes seemed to be zooming overhead constantly and then flash -- the sky was alight. We were surrounded by umbrella illumination flares. It was just like daylight. A helicopter came over us shining a bright beam of light on us. To top it off an unlit speedboat came whizzing by. We finally decided we must have stopped right in the big middle of some San Clemente war games. The winds came again the next day and we were off once more for the Marquesas.

I had decided on our last trip that the next time we went, we would be able to can fish when we got in big schools. We are such a lucky fishing boat that we hardly ever get to fish since we catch what we can use right off. This time we were stocked with a canner (pressure) and jars and instruction book. Feeling rather silly about hauling too many empty jars to sea Dana and I had canned quite a bit of meat for our trip. This, by the way, is a smart thing to do since canned meats are so expensive. We bought the cheaper cuts of roasts, steaks and even liver. It turned out beautifully. Consequently a lot of our jars were full. So wouldn't you know? The third day out we hit albacore. In truth we had not planned

on this big project before we even had our sea-legs but there they were! We had two handlines and a pole going and in less than two hours we had over 100 pounds of albacore tuna on deck plus a couple of mahi- mahis and some bonita. Sound glorious? It was, but first cleaning and filleting and then the canning process. A big job but we did it. Still unused to the rocking and rolling, hot, steamy and smelly we were tired of fish already. From experience, though we knew there were days when we didn't catch fish. Also in heavy cigueta (fish poisoning) areas we could have our canned fish and not have to take chances with the reef fish.

The trip started out with a lot of exercise in up sails, down sails. Started out? Not only started out but all during the trip. We did have a lot of nice Force 3 and 4 winds but also a lot of nights with the sails down just rocking and rolling and praying for some of that wind we had hated so much in Port San Luis.

Parties were practically the order of the day. On the 19th of November it was Billy's birthday, the 23rd it was Dana's and the 25th was Thanksgiving. We managed birthday cakes, barbecued steaks and even turkey legs and dressing topped off with pumpkin pie.

So cruising can even be luxurious with a bit of planning.



A birthday party while becalmed.



Dottie cans some of the fresh caught fish.



Dottie gets in a morning sun shot.

We all seemed to keep might busy -- especially we gals. Not only do we stand our watches but we do all the cooking and washing up in the galley, we keep the boat clean and ship shape, do the necessary clothes washing and our share of the navigation. I would not hesitate to say that on a long cruise I think the girls work a bit harder than the fellows. Of course the male version of that thought may be a bit different. I will confess to the fact that in any case of emergency or breakdown they have the lion's share of the work.

I do have a wonderful "no knead" whole wheat bread recipe that takes a lot of the strain out of bread making. This is one of the more time consuming jobs in the galley. Note for all galley slaves: not only must you be a chef (Cordon Bleu or otherwise) but a practical knowledge in the skills of acrobatics, juggling and patient philosophizing are next to essential. Another little hint is always have extra big pots and pans. Things do slosh about amazingly. Also a big supply of paper pieces -- handi-wipe type -- are great. These dampened and spread on counters or tables help immensely to keep utensils somewhere in the vicinity you are using them.

Standing watches can be grueling or it can be grand. On a trip such as this, approximately 3000 miles

long, you are pretty likely to have both. When we first started out our day watches were not too chilly but the night watches called for long johns, sweaters, jackets and, quite often, oilers. After about 10 days the change was glorious. Hot, sunny days and warm night watches. The thing I like most about night watches is the silence. Everyone asleep and you sitting in the stern of the boat feeling the amazing power as all 50 tons of her pushes through the sea. The sails taut with wind, the fluorescent bow wake swooshing along side, the occasional slap of a wave right at the stern, moon and star trails across the sea. Truly a magnificent sight and just for you, the helmsman. And when you get tired of all this glorious beauty you can go inside.

Introspection must be one of the most valuable gifts of an ocean voyage. Lots of quiet hours to take a good long look at yourself. To think over your actions of the day and whether you like what you did or not. Consider the interplay of emotions and reactions on board. Do you handle it all well? Perhaps this learning process is the basis for the desire of many people to cruise and live on their boat. One must come to terms with oneself, with the crew and with nature. If this is done successfully, a certain peace has been obtained.

Good Force 3 and 4 winds kept us moving along. But in the lower latitudes the westerly current is so strong that we had to sail on a close reach most of the time. Not quite as serene and peaceful as a nice broad reach or even downhill, but no complaints as we scurried right along headed for the doorway, so to speak, at Nuku Hiva.

On December 8th, we crossed the equator. Albert was King Neptune as he was the only one to have crossed the equator before. Since it was three crew and one Neptune, the vote was for a party instead of the usual torture. That we did. Even got out our stemmed wine glasses for the occasion. Cheese, salami, nuts, wine -- quite a bash it turned out to be. *Duen*, herself, performed like a lady and steered herself so we could play a few games of hearts.

Our original plan was to make Nuku Hiva the landfall. After studying the charts and the winds we were having we decided to go first to Hiva Oa and clear customs then see the southern islands. Better winds to sail northerly and then back down through the Tuamotus.

On December 15th at 11:30 A.M. we let go the anchor in Taa Hua Bay, Hiva Oa, 27 days from departure. The island looked very beautiful and the water divine as four bodies followed the anchor into the bay. ☼