

Hawaii Voyage Communiqués  
Porpoise Crew  
Friday May 14  
Wandering treasures

Today I sat again before the mast and had to repent of my previous rowdy judgements on the open ocean. Today it was quite orderly. Big, long, slow swells all going in the same direction and far apart. A gentle northerly breeze sent the Porpoise along at a steady pace, climbing and descending the gentle hills. All four sails are up and it is exhilarating to feel how even the slightest wind can empower us, and send us purposefully along like we're out to discover something great. It just doesn't feel right if the wind dies and we have to motor along. We have had surprisingly little wind since our first couple of rollicking days, and a persistent sea fog obscures the blue which we know is there, with these high pressure readings on the barometer. The grey sombers (Lyza says this is not technically a word but I like it) the seascape, and makes us sometimes feel like we're in a limitless, horizonless, void, desolate, barren waste land. Then with out warning the sun above will break through, with a blue patch of sky, and everything transforms into a brilliant, sparkling blue wonderscape.

We crossed into the thirties of latitude this morning and all suspect the air is getting slowly warmer, though northern clothes are still necessary, especially on night watches. Have I told you about those three hour stints, enclosed in the dodger cubicle, rocking in the helmsman chair, staring at the red numbers of the compass heading and the lighted rudder indicator? So far it has been wet with rain or fog condensation. Cold, with that northwest cold, penetrating to your bones way down inside, and dark, very dark - while outside the sounds of waves running and splashing against your ship. On the couple of sailing nights so far, the Porpoise surges on into the seas and the invisible night, heedless of anything we see (or don't see). One has to just trust we're not rushing toward the rocks, or worse, a big ship, in the night. Our faith focuses on our few little electronic images: a GPS screen, the compass, and the green sixteen of the VHS radio. A couple of times now a voice speaks out of the darkness, the captain of a nearby freighter, and we talk. That part feels most friendly under the circumstances. There is actually another person in the black void. "You come up awesome on our AIS!" That's good to know. We just installed this new technology whereby through the satellites your boat - its name, registration speed, and direction - come up on the other boat's chart plotter screen. That's some comfort as we charge on through the night.

Two nights ago as I sat alone in the dark, about 3:00am, I kept hearing a chirruping kind of noise behind me just off the stern.. It sounded like a bird, or birds, but then again I wondered if I was hearing that funny chuckling noise that dolphins make. This went on for an hour or so, sometimes distant, and sometimes seemingly right in my ear. The mystery soon resolved with a flutter to my left in the cockpit. As the light of my headlamp shone upon it, I thought at first it was a bat. On closer inspection it turned out to be a lovely shaped bird, much like a swallow with forked tail, grey, with a white triangular marking across his back. I watched him flutter about for some time, thinking maybe he was a lost baby something, yet

how could he be out here some three hundred miles from the coast - a lost shore bird blown to sea and seeking refuge? Then I saw his little black webbed feet.

"OK little fella, whatever you are. Can I help you at all?"

Reaching down with both hands I gathered him up, and to my surprise he showed no fear or resistance. In fact, he nestled into the warmth of my hands and remained there seeming quite satisfied with himself, closing his little dark eyes with composure as I stroked the black head with my thumb - just looking for a little respite from his wanderings apparently. Maybe out here they don't see enough people to be afraid of them. I studied him closely. A small protuberance grew up from the top of his beak and curled, giving his rounded little head the appearance of a Roman helmet. I held him for almost an hour, and I dare say he may even have slept. He was still there when Chris came on watch, and three hours later when Matt came, all of us passing our little charge to each other. As morning dawned, Matthew launched him into the air with both hands and he flew off to find his fortune. The next night he came back again - or was it a different one? They couldn't all make this sort of a thing a habit, hanging out on a passing boat for the night. I like to think he picked us out more special like. We travel 120-150 miles a day, so it would have been quite an effort to find us again. We'll see if he comes back again tonight.

That would be almost as hard to believe as the finding of a glass ball. When Jack sent me a DVD of one of his trips to Hawaii, I was incredulous to see the footage of his buddies holding up a large glass Japanese float they plucked out of the water as it floated by. Impossible I thought. As a kid, I searched the Olympic Peninsula beaches for hours and days during successive years, coming up with one measly green ball the size of a tennis ball, and they just scoop one out of the limitless ocean as it floats by. Doesn't happen.

Three days ago, on one of those grey flat sea moments, we were motoring along stoically when Matt spied a green object afloat off the port quarter. "It's probably green plastic garbage," I said. It came closer and we looked intently. It was transparent. Stupified is the best word. I was stupefied. There was that illusive icon of treasure from my childhood floating next to the Porpoise, and Matt was laying claim to the icon with a fishing net. It was a beauty of dream dimensions, probably fourteen inches in diameter with strange foreign mussel-clam things growing on it. What is this? The real way you get treasure is not to look for it? Wander around in this zillion square miles until it just floats by? I don't know, but I'm keeping my eyes peeled clear across the Pacific!