

EXPERIENCES, AND THE PEOPLE WE MEET

Judy and Bob Howison Roving Rear Commodores

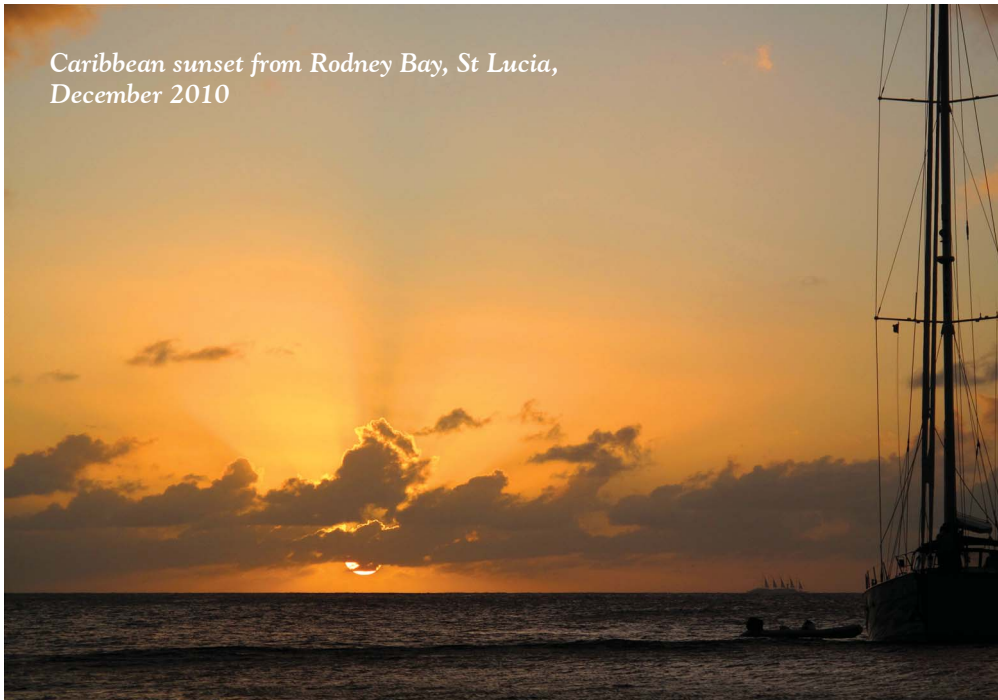
(After 25 years living in Singapore, in 2010 Judy and Bob – who are Australian and Scottish respectively – moved aboard their Elan Impression 434 Kinabalu for some long-term cruising. They have no plans to circumnavigate, preferring to go 'wherever the wind may chance to blow'.

In September they were taking part in the Sail 2 Indonesia Rally, which they describe as 'three months of absolutely amazing cruising!'. During November and December, with Bill and Lydia Strickland (RRCs SE USA) aboard, they plan to participate in Malaysia's Raja Muda Regatta and the King's Cup in Thailand. I hope we'll be hearing more from them!)

I remember Rebecca Shaw (past joint Regional Rear Commodore SE USA and winner of 2015 Vertue Award) saying some time ago that for her it was the experiences she'd had whilst cruising that were the most memorable, and not necessarily the sights. I relate to that wholeheartedly! Experiences with people we meet, 'our new best friends' – sometimes just for a short while – can create enduring memories.

Fifteen-year-old George, paddling out in his small canoe to greet us and to see if he could help, is one such memory. In December 2010 we had sailed from Rodney Bay, St Lucia as fully-fledged members of the OCC, after crossing the Atlantic with the ARC, and were approaching the northern tip of St Vincent at dusk when we caught a rather large tuna.

*Caribbean sunset from Rodney Bay, St Lucia,
December 2010*





Our Greek crew partying at the Ionian Regatta. Left to right: Dimitra, Nicko, Eva, Judy and Bob the skipper

Hauling it in, taking down the sails, and motoring in darkness into an unknown

bay where there were no other boats was rather more than we could handle at that stage in our cruising life. After all, we were in the Caribbean islands and hidden dangers lurked in some of these anchorages. What we didn't know was that Chateaubelair Bay had had its fair share of trouble over time. Bob shouted to me at the helm, "head for that wee orange light in the distance while I deal with this bloody fish". The small orange light turned out to be George in his canoe, who confidently confirmed that we could anchor in relatively deep water in the northeastern part of the bay. He said he would come back in the morning and, true to his word, he was alongside with a book of photos and a certificate with his name on it from the St Vincent Ministry of Tourism. He had odd-looking misshapen oranges for us, and wondered if we could donate some money to his quest for an anchor so that he could lay a mooring close to town. We were enthralled by this young man's entrepreneurship and gave him what we could. (See *Noonsite* entry for Chateaubelair Bay)

Another experience which was quite remarkable unfolded in the Greek islands in 2012 and 2013. We had sailed back across the Atlantic via the Azores, passed through the Strait of Gibraltar, and transited the Corinth Canal to make our way to Samos for the Aegean Regatta. Yacht racing was supposed to have been in our past life, but *Kinabalu* had already done three regattas in the Caribbean and was ready for the Med. Samos to Rhodos, racing each day to islands in between, was a dream come true for the crew and friends on board. There were no other foreign entries, but the Hellenic Sailing Federation and the competitors welcomed us with open arms. We were encouraged to join the Ionian Regatta out of Corfu the next season, following our cruise in the Adriatic and 'sailing into Venice'. For this regatta we had a full Greek crew and hospitality second to none at the Corfu Sailing Club. *Kinabalu's* cockpit was continually filled with charming Greek sailors as we ate and drank into the wee hours of the morning. What fun we had with them, and what memories!



The cottage we were lent in Deltaville, Virginia

"We have a cottage, would that do?" was an offer we'll never forget! We had met Bill and Lydia Strickland in June 2014 when we were 'blown' into the Chesapeake on passage from the Abacos, Bahamas to Newport, Rhode Island. We joined the hugely successful OCC 60th Anniversary Mid-Chesapeake Rally and decided, on recommendation from Bill and Lydia, to winter *Kinabalu* at Chesapeake Boatworks in Deltaville. We had looked for rental accommodation on the internet to no avail, so

Joint OCC and Fishing Bay YC Rally

Judy and Bob are at front left, with Bill and Lydia plus grandson just behind



asked Lydia if she knew of anywhere. Not only did we stay in their cottage while we worked on the boat, but we had the use of their truck as well! Best of all, they became firm friends and we had a wonderful time with them when they cruised with us in the San Blas islands and helped us through the Panama Canal in early 2016.

A much more recent experience was with a family in Santiago de Cuba. Not allowed into the marina, Pedro, the head of the family, offered assistance to cruisers with shouts and whistles. Pedro didn't have much luck with his offer to purchase rum for us, nor to provide taxi services via his network of friends, but he and his wife Rosa, son Porchito, and two daughters Roxanne and Clara, endeared themselves to



*Porchito (centre) at the restaurant in Cayo Granma.
On the left is the banished guide!*

us. We ate with them at their meagre dinner table – a wonderful meal of chicken, black beans and rice with a tomato, cucumber and onion salad, which we were to learn later is a staple meal throughout Cuba. Bob found his way to their front door through our laundry, which was hung outside in every conceivable inch of space (their twin-tub washing machine had been wheeled out onto the street from the living room). Pedro quoted us for fruit and vegetables, which was confirmed by Rosa, and he went out next day to procure them on the black market for a fraction of the price that we would have paid.

Porchito escorted us by local ferry, loaded with fuel drums, to Cayo Granma, a little island guarding a traditional fishing community close to the entrance of the harbour. We were given a fairly reasonable deal at a small local restaurant where we ate swordfish and octopus washed down with local beer. In contrast, an American who had chanced his luck with a 'guide' when he arrived on the island was ripped off, having been asked to pay the agent's commission. The American was angry and the proprietor asked the 'agent' never to bring anyone to his restaurant again.



We negotiated a good price for the ride from Cayo Granma to the Castillo del Morro

We negotiated for a small fishing boat to take us across the water, and trudged up the hill to the legendary Castillo del Morro. In parting, I was sad to say goodbye to my Apple computer which had housed my previous life of MBA modules, business files and 'death by power point', but know it will be treasured by Porchito and his sisters who can now do their school assignments. Gone too is an old iPhone which froze when we were deleting the contact list, but Porchito assured me that in Cuba they can fix anything!

In our new capacity as OCC Roving Rear Commodores, we'll report on our mission for www.daysforgirls.org as we sail north back through the western Pacific islands in 2017.*

* *Days for Girls* is a charity devoted to providing health education for girls worldwide, enabling them to make the best use of educational and other opportunities and contribute fully to their local communities.

