

LIBERTÉ, THE SCHOONER

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March 10, 2010 Greetings from north Biscayne Bay (Miami, Florida) and the crew of the *Liberté*. We finally took that cruise we have been talking about all these years. It has been quite the adventure to get here. Now we have to get back...

It will be impossible to relate, in these few pages, all the wonderful groups, events and charter sails we had this past year and the adventurous journey down the coast. I regret any omissions or apparent slights as we try to recap what was surprisingly a fine year for us. First, my deepest regrets for canceling all sails for hurricane Bill. A big no-show all around. Costly in so many ways, especially for opportunities lost and reputation tarnished. It was a rare bad weather call. My sincere and deepest apologies to all affected.

The winter build last year saw Ava's room get a bunk bed and closet. The Great Room wall was finished with paintings and a 40" TV. A refurbished bathroom with a fancy new commode was installed. The galley stove was fitted by Butch.



Ava on her perch

Our first charter of 2009 left from the Marriott dock. The Syracuse choral group had a brisk sail to Thomas Point lighthouse. Van's 50th was calm and K.C.'s birthday had gentle sailing, cupcakes, ice cream and dry ice. So we made a fog bank onboard. Cathy Shaw's kids had a close pass with the *Pride of Baltimore II*. Mother's Day was a brisk sail and Karen Doswell threw a birthday party for her husband, Roger. The Renaissance Society of York joined us once again and sang to Miss Jane. Wilson's Navy graduation experienced a lovely sunset over the Naval Academy. On May 29th we did our team-building program. Everyone learned a lot about each other and great camaraderie developed. We had a double 40th birthday party for some 1993 USNA grads. The Morristown Ski Club had a gentle cruise.

On the May 31st Sunday Champagne Sail, Butch drove us through lulls and gusts holding a fine line with the telltails. June 3rd brought a calm day of sailing and a crabber laid pots and line right under our keel. Beer chugging and a queen bee (a real one) made for some excitement on deck. SOAR got in their morning sail while the afternoon was canceled for rain. Wilmer Hale had another great day on the water. McBride Shopa had bad luck with their bus, but finally made it and we got their cruise in.

Ava had her class trip and Rusty, the pirate, was forced to "walk the plank" (go off the bow sprit). Ava devised some exercises and tests for fun. Then the kids had music and snacks. Midtown once again enjoyed swimming and music in a light breeze. On June 13th we left from the Marriott as a regular Cape Cod client brought out the Congressman he works for. The politician's sail had not a breath of wind; how ironic. A bachelor party started in complete calm motoring into Selby Bay off the South River where the groom and several of his friends grew up. Then the wind picked up and we had a fine sail as the group feasted on crabs, smoked cigars and enjoyed their beverages.

On June 16th we were honored once again to have the USNA Class of 1945 out as part of their 65th reunion. The Captains drove *Liberté* under full sail in a fresh breeze for most of the cruise. On the 20th we celebrated Thomas Carroll's 90th birthday in a calm as thunderstorms brushed by. On June 27th we took Hughes Hubbard to Cantler's crab house again and learned about a tradition the group has eating crabs. The "No Crab Left" contest happens as the feast is winding down and there is still a pile of crabs. The DeBernardis/Carney Cup is then awarded to the winner "For Excellence in Crab Picking". The contest is quite a sight and the winner's bragging rights are great. Next we had Scott and Elizabeth's wedding onboard. It was a big event, including a sit-down dinner and a 3-tiered cake, which we managed to keep from sliding apart. All went well and it was a wonderful sail. The last Champagne sail included friends/crew Patrick & Marcia, Chuck and Alexandra, Stacie and Bree, and Curt and Lynn.

On Monday afternoon we departed Annapolis bound for Cape Cod. Captain Chris, Jane, Perry, Andrew and Butch aboard, as well as Ava for her first trip offshore. That evening at 9:00 we anchored in the Sassafra River off the upper Chesapeake with the glowing remnants of the sunset over the Baltimore skyline. We had a fine dinner with steaks on the grill before catching some rest. At 2am, all of the crew assembled on deck to toast to a safe voyage; Ava had iced tea. Butch and the captain made way into the C & D canal, clearing into the upper Delaware Bay as the sun rose. At noon we cleared into the ocean, feeling the deep ocean swells as we hoisted sail. With a steady 15-knot breeze and a following sea, under full sail, we hit speeds of over ten knots.



DeBernardis/Carney Cup "For Excellence in Crab Picking"

The wind slowly faded and by midnight our boat speed was down to six knots. The wind continued to fade and by 2am the engine was on. The crew woke me for a ship and also mentioned that there had been a momentary change in r.p.m.'s. At 5am I noted a difference in the sounds of the engine shaft, so the engine was shut off. At dawn we saw that we were dragging something off the propeller. Soon our speed was down to two knots and a light fog had settled in. All but adrift, peering through the stern rail into the very deep, very blue, very calm sea, I decided to heave to so I could get in the water and have a look at clearing the prop. Standing back up and turning to face the crew, I saw a large fin ten yards off the port side. "Shark!" Everyone saw it; nobody was swimming that day. So we endeavored to sail to Cape Cod.

Digging into the sail locker, we found the "mule", a sail not cut for but capable of catching air. The crew was advised to watch the course and keep the boat moving. Through a day and night of thunderstorms, we made east in the hope that the cool ocean waters would take a bit of the power out of the storms. We dropped all sail as the winds blew up to 45 knots, then hoisted again later only to drop them again. We sailed in circles (not on purpose, just a lack of steerage) and sometimes backwards. Buckets of water dropped on us for a half hour and lightning surrounded the vessel. As false dawn approached, the last of the storms did too. By midmorning, we'd tacked north for Martha's Vineyard. An easy southwest breeze made for a difficult and slow run. So as I slept, the helmsman turned a bit to the west. Though faster and easier over the short run, it was not a good plan for the long run. Twenty miles west of Cuttyhunk the wind died, the fog descended and we were adrift on the tide. For hours we nudged and tweaked the sails just to make steerage. Accidentally tacking in the lack of wind and unable to change back, we all took ten minutes for coffee and a bite to eat before getting going again. In a bizarre stroke of luck, with all sails aback, the rudder locked straight and nobody at the helm, we started moving again, right into Vineyard Sound! With a favorable, but dying tide we continued on in this strange configuration, sailing "by the lee", for the next two hours. Just off Tarpaulin Cove, the fog lifted, the tide turned against us and the boat stopped sailing. We launched the dinghy (we don't call it "White Knight" for nothing) and pulled the *Liberté* into Tarpaulin. Arriving a day and a half later than we hoped because we couldn't motor, it turned out that there was nothing on the propeller by then. We dallied about, Ava swimming off the stern in cold water, then made our way to Falmouth.

With all we had been through, we were lucky to be ready to sail with passengers by 2pm and we started the summer season with a stiff breeze. Once again Miss Bonnie and "the pizza man" had a fantastic windy sail and fireworks display as the wind eased. July 5th was windy, then windier and then so windy that we had to cancel the sunset sail. Things greatly improved the next evening: a lovely sunset and full moon rise. The next day we had a big trip down to Tarpaulin Cove with Wendy and her group. The Falmouth Curling Club had an international meet and made a cruise on the *Liberté* part of their activities once again. We enjoyed a few Scottish songs courtesy of the Scotland Curlers. The gang from Headlines Salon enjoyed a glide with good food, good music, a fine sunset and s'mores. A group of bachelorettes started their day with a champagne brunch cruise, and later Miss Claire and Dave hosted their annual party.

Perhaps one of the most challenging professional sails we ever pulled off was on July 15th for esped. With a stiff southwest breeze, we had a great quantity of food from Eat Your Heart Out Catering, with two servers and a portable oven, live music with Henry French on deck, and forty nervous passengers. With the 1st reef in the main, we set out and made for Vineyard Haven. Once in the lee of the island, the seas calmed down. The food was great, the beverages were cold and the music was super. All I had to do was keep an even keel... They had a great time.

The bulk of my family was in town for brother Frank's wedding (you know, our famous Labor Day weekend bartender), so everyone came out for a sail. We canceled all sails on Saturday, July 18th for the wedding and reception (welcome to the family, Margaret!) and had the bonus of attending the huge soiree for Debby's & Brandon's birthdays/anniversary later that night. It was a big day!

Kip West had a fine birthday party on July 24th. The next evening was Ed & Gail's annual bash. We sailed almost to Vineyard Haven, then to Nobska as the fog rolled in and the wind faded. But the exuberant celebration went on. The rest of July offered us some fine sailing and on August 5th we had fun sailing in Vineyard Haven with the *Shenandoah* and *Unicorn*, with comfortable control in close quarters. It was very exciting.

Connolly Consulting joined us for a cruise once again, as did the New Seabury Women's Club. On August 7th, Glynn Electric was treated to some fine sailing, a lovely sunset and a full moon. A few days later, with the President's impending visit to the Vineyard, the U.S. Coast Guard conducted helicopter drills, preventing us from getting into Vineyard Haven. That evening we tried sailing "by the lee", and had no success. Perhaps it only works when no one can see you. The Minuteman Section of the Mercedes Benz Club of America had a delightful sail and were a fun group. They absolutely filled the lot with expensive cars. I will, when they come out again this year, reserve enough space so they can have their own car show.



A beautiful sunset over Nobska.

We saw the usual suspects throughout the summer. Even our old crew, Mike LaRocca, came out on a cruise. Then we had Hurricane Bill approaching. We called off all sails on August 22nd and 23rd, including a wedding, as the storm seemed to have us dead in its path. We packed up and moved the boat to Lagoon Pond off Vineyard Haven, stripped sails, set storm anchors and waited for Bill to arrive; it didn't. Missing some fine weather for a bad weather call, it was very disappointing. Back at it, the Buzzard Bay Power Squadron came out for an evening, as did Jepperson Marine. On September first we had our first pocket sunset of the summer, the sun setting into the water between Woods Hole and the Elizabeth Islands, and an almost full moon. The trend continued with an awesome sunset and full moonrise on the fourth (thanks for coming in to help, Brianna!) Lynne also had a beautiful sunset and moonrise for her sail. We finished off the summer season with a calm sail, full of friends and family.

The day after Labor Day, the *Liberté* was ready to go offshore by 10am with crew on hand: Dave Welch, Geoff Merrill, Cliff Brann and Jeff Anderson. A storm was brewing on the Atlantic seaboard. Do we go? Try to beat it? No. Had we gone, welcoming us at Cape May would have been 45 knots of wind and 18 foot seas. Seeing a storm that would blow for days, the crew returned home. Reassembling on Saturday (without Dave) at 7am, we pushed off and cleared Gay Head by 10am. The waves were small with a southeast breeze at 12 knots, but an 8 foot swell rolled the boat through the afternoon. The seas calmed as evening progressed. Dolphins played as the moon rose over a gently undulating ocean.

At the Delaware Bay entrance with a setting sun, we took in sails and left the ocean and its swell behind. On an absolutely crystal clear night, the Delaware quickly reminded us to stay alert. A string of four (very large) red bell buoys mark the channel over seven miles. We could clearly see three of them. It was the second one that was unlit. Its appearance was timed, but a bit unsettling as it showed up just to our starboard, a looming shadow in the dark. The rest of the Delaware was uneventful, always a good thing. We enjoyed a gorgeous sunrise as we entered the C & D canal, and continued on into a calm Chesapeake Bay. Our onboard excitement was the constant updates by cell phone of a company coup which was playing out in D.C. in real time.

The autumn season in Annapolis was quiet, but we were very busy preparing to voyage south for the winter. Debby and Brandon, our Cape Cod friends, brought his D.C. company out for a gentle glide and a pink sunset. A bachelor party was a busy cruise with a crab feast, music and stories. Ava's principle, Mrs. Dougherty, had purchased our donated charter at the spring fundraiser, and while her first attempt to use it was foiled by rain in the spring, the second try brought a lovely day and 12 knots of breeze. The faculty and staff of St. Martins had a great time. We finished off the fall with Brion Harris and the Premier Planning Group, sailing under full canvas and clear skies.

2010 Calendar

May 1 - June 27. Spring Sailing Season in Annapolis
July 3 - Labor Day..... Sailing out of Falmouth, MA on Cape Cod
September 15 - October 31..... Fall Season in Annapolis

In between all of the sailing, we were clearing out our storage locker: some things to the trash, some to friends, some donated, and the rest piled into the boat to be dealt with later. We set up the mail, phones and office stuff. Then we took Columbus Day weekend to go to Boston for Jane's nephew, Big Mike's wedding. (Welcome to the family, Kristen!) The weather was absolutely glorious. Returning to Annapolis on Monday, we had Tuesday to wrap things up and get supplies, then we were off on the first leg of our winter journey. The odd thing is that we started by heading north, to Baltimore for the kickoff events for the Great Chesapeake Bay Schooner Race.

Arriving at Fells Point, we were directed to tie up to *Mystic Whaler* and then hurry to the Safety Meeting for the parade of sail. We moved out for the parade but lingered near the dock for the arrival of Eric and Emma from Norfolk. Our timing was off, however, and they arrived from the airport as the parade ended, so we just slipped back into our spot. (A sign of things to come?) Emma is Ava's age and we thought the race would be more fun if Ava had a friend onboard and the race was heading towards *her* home. We all headed off to the crew party that evening and the girls had a grand time dancing as we enjoyed food and beverages. Then we were off to bed, the weather already turning cold and damp.

The next morning was the Captains' meeting for final briefing on the race. It just poured. We departed the dock at 8:20am with Jane, Ava, Eric, Emma, Curt Millington (who brought 2 1/2 cases of good wine!) and Capt. Chris aboard. We motored to the mouth of the Patapsco River and hoisted a reefed main, jib and jumbo jib. The next two hours were sheer agony. Plowing into wind and waves, raining buckets, my foul weather gear failed within an hour and Emma felt sick. It was brutally cold as well. Not one of us looked forward to 24 hours of that weather, so we abandoned the race before it even began and returned to Spa Creek. At our dock, we saw that not one, but two sailboats were tied up in our slip. We proceeded up Spa Creek, through the bridge, and anchored up. Everyone was starving, so we started up the stove (for warmth as well) and had some lunch. Curt "sabered" a fine bottle of champagne, brute that he is, for our drinking pleasure. It was about that time that we received a most welcoming phone call. Ham of TowBoat US invited us to take his dock, a blessing as it included electricity. We promptly turned on our space heaters. The rain (and cold) continued steady through Sunday morning. It actually snowed in Baltimore! Meanwhile, our crew headed home.



A HUGE jellyfish in Norfolk.

Having missed the Schooner Race, we headed south down the Chesapeake. We had two lovely cool days and cold nights anchored out. The mornings were beautiful, flat calm with porpoises surfacing and a crabber running his trot line; classic cruising images. We arrived at the Norfolk Naval Station Sailing Center where we were to spend some time cleaning up, prepping the boat and begin Ava's homeschooling. The boat was a disaster with stuff, and stuff on stuff, plus stuff that needed doing. We bought a generator for battery charging and a deckwash pump for cleaning the mud off the anchor chain before it got on deck. Our good friends, Eric and Amy Preuss loaned us a classic cherry-red Jeep Scrambler, which Jane thoroughly enjoyed tooling around in. Ava had a great time playing with Emma and Jonathan.

Our big concern for the ICW was mast height. Our main measured 64'9" with the anchor light. That left 3" for most fixed bridges at mean high tide. The "Wilkerson High Bridge" (oh, the irony!) is only 64', halfway between Norfolk and Beaufort, NC. We bought thirty 30-gallon stackable trash barrels, lined them up on one side of the boat and filled them with water. The result was a list to one side reducing our vertical height to 63'. We hoisted a slim bamboo reed on the foremast just an inch higher than the anchor light on the mainmast, as an early detection system of bridge clearance. Being as prepared as we could be, we almost set out. Checking the engine, it appeared that the transmission oil cooler had blown. Fortunately, Trans Atlantic Diesels was only 45 minutes away. By the time we acquired the part and installed it, the "storm" was on us. Forecasted for 25 - 30 knots for two days, the winds built to over 50 with a few gusts as high as 70, and lasted three days. Tides rose above the tops of the pilings the *Liberté* was tied to and flooded the streets of Norfolk. It took a full day to clean up the storm lines, then we were off to continue south. Arriving in Portsmouth, Virginia, 15 miles south of the Naval Station, we were at Mile 0 of the Intracoastal Waterway. Meanwhile, the storm gave us one last parting shot. The lock at Great Bridge had been damaged and we waited a few more days for it to reopen.

After going through the lock, we scored free dockage, taking the opportunity to walk ashore and have dinner at a little Mexican restaurant with the head of an 1100 pound bull hanging over us. Departing early the next day, we soon came upon and went under the first 65' fixed bridge. Success called for a spot of rum in our coffee. As we moseyed along, we watched an automatic railroad bridge go down, a train pass over it, then go back up again. A bit disconcerting knowing there was nobody actually there controlling the bridge. We made it to Coinjock late in the afternoon. It's iconic, like a truck stop on the I.C.W. We were able to get fuel and water, and eat at the restaurant where they had great fried chicken. The locals informed us that the water was "up" by 2 - 3 feet, which was confirmed the next morning by the Coinjock fixed bridge, just a tick higher than our masts.

We had a fine cool calm day to cross Pamlico Sound. A short "train of boats" lined up at the Alligator River swing bridge and an "ahoy" revealed the *Pearl of Eastport* with friends, Kevin & Jan, aboard. We rafted up at anchor that evening for a delightful visit and dinner. Oh, the stars that night! There were so many you could hardly pick out the constellations. Departing the Alligator River the next morning, we were heading for the shortest fixed bridge of them all. We laid out the trash barrels and began filling them with the new washdown pump. By the time we arrived at the Wilkerson *High Bridge*, we were well tipped and had no trouble at all sliding under.



Miss Jane driving down the ICW.

It was then a smooth ride for the next two days until Beaufort, North Carolina. There the sign at the fixed bridge between Beaufort and Moorhead City read 61', with a strong northeast wind and full outgoing tide to drag us under very rapidly. We moved away and anchored to consider our options. Calling our friend, Captain Rob, (my captain when I first began offshore sailing), he assured us that we could make it in "the back door" to Beaufort with plenty of depth in Gallants channel, which had a reported depth of 5 1/2'. We saw nothing less than ten feet. Anchored up in Town Creek, we met up with Rob at the "Handlebar" club, just up the street from the free dinghy dock. Ava played pool and games on the Wii with another young girl. We showed Rob the boat and he loaned us the best \$800 300k-mile boat van ever. The Laundromat had a pool table and Ava and I had a bit of practice while we waited. The local Piggly Wiggly grocery store had everything one could want plus grits. Just four days before Thanksgiving, we found the perfect 8-pound turkey for our little oven. We enjoyed Dorie's fine cooking that evening with dinner at their house. It was a great visit.

To bypass 38 bridges, 16 of them fixed, and the narrow shallow channels of South Carolina and Georgia, we went offshore. With dawn barely in the sky and sandy beaches framing the waterways that meandered around gentle curves, we headed into the ocean. By evening the wind and seas were flat. It was the darkest, blackest night I'd ever seen. With first light came a northwest breeze and rain. We made it in to Charleston, but barely. The main engine oil cooler was shot. We'd be stuck in Charleston for days, with farmers' markets, gorgeous architecture, great food and friendly people. We were okay with that. We enjoyed a marvelous Thanksgiving dinner aboard, worked on homeschooling and boat projects, and did a little touring of the town. It was all good.

With the part installed and a forecast of fair weather, we left for Brunswick, Georgia with a reef in the main. That afternoon, 20 miles offshore and under sail, I watched football, had a sandwich and a cold beer while Jane steered. It was perfect except that the Patriots lost. Under a reefed main and yankee jib as night fell, Jane found her night vision very poor. A huge ship/platform ruined my night vision for a few hours as well. After a very brief chance to relax, a ship crossed our bow ten miles out. It turned, crossed my bow again, then turned and crossed my bow a third time. I called and called on the radio, with no reply. At three miles out I shined my weak spotlight at it. "Ah, sailboat, yes, we are just looking for a place to anchor." Anchoring 20 miles off the coast, right in front of me? During this encounter, the wind and waves had built up and catching one on the beam, the roll got Ava up from a Scooby Doo movie to inform us that the microwave had flown off the counter. The fridge has quite the dent. Clearing the freighter, we needed to attend to our boat speed. We were moving at a steady nine knots, surging to 11 and 12 knots. The forecast of a 10 - 15 knot northeast wind had become 25 - 30 knots. I dropped the main and yankee, and hoisted the jumbo jib dropping our boat speed to about 5 knot. Off Brunswick we awaited dawn under jib and jigger, with a cold northwest wind of 18 - 20 and 5' - 8' seas left from the night before. We finally anchored off St. Simon's Island and were very glad to be off the ocean. Below decks looked like a crazed monkey had thrown things about. Remarkably, Ava never rolled out of her bunk and slept through it all.

St. Simons is pretty and we stayed a few days to have our Christmas cards printed and to rest a bit. We departed for Fernandina Beach under double-reefed main, slipping around a freighter anchored in the middle of the channel and between some shrimpers. We made a steady 8 knots with the following sea, making the entrance by mid-afternoon. With more foul weather forecasted, we tied to a dock for comfort. Asked what was for dinner, Jane replied, "Anything I'm not cooking!" So we walked into the cutest little town where everything was decorated for Christmas.



Tipped for the Wilkerson "High" bridge

The next day was cold with steady rain and we enjoyed running our space heaters at the dock. That night I wished for no rain; Jane for it not to be too cold. The morning brought no rain, nor cold, nor wind, but one of the thickest fogbanks I've seen. We moved out anyway. As a team we felt our way down the ICW, relying on the compass, charts, radar and g.p.s. to guide us through what we couldn't see. The fog cleared by late morning and the tides were low enough for the 1/2 dozen fixed bridges we passed under on the way to St. Augustine. We scraped the anchor light once, but it still worked. The waterway from St. Augustine to Daytona had some interesting forts from the Spanish conquistadors, as well as little towns, huge grasslands and all shapes and sizes of houses, most with their own docks. We passed an old houseboat, chugging along. It had an old refrigerator on the back porch, coolers on the front porch and three big ole boys drinking beer and having a grand time.

Once in Florida, it did get warmer. We no longer slept in socks, long johns, and sweatshirts with the hoods pulled up. As we traveled south, however, the bridges seemed to get lower and lower. At Cocoa, we "backed" under a bridge for the first time, as the following wind and fair tide gave us little control going forward. From Cocoa to Vero Beach

we had a cold, damp south-southeast wind, heralding the next batch of bad weather. On the last fixed bridge of the day, we ticked the foremast reed and passed under so slowly that the anchor light was nudged off. (It still worked.) At Vero Beach, also known as Velcro Beach because so many cruisers stay, we were too long for the moorings. So they put us on the fuel dock for two nights. Delaney and Mitchell from the *Charlotte Anne* got together with Ava for some hardy play-time while we enjoyed adult beverages and swapping stories with their parents, Mark and Lisa. It was unfortunate but that was all the playtime the kids had as the *Charlotte Anne* was headed for the Bahamas.

With all the rain we'd had, the ICW was up by two feet. So starting very early in the morning, we filled the trash cans prior to departure and headed south again. We spent the day heeled over and smoothly passed under several bridges. We made it to Hobe sound in time to have dinner with family on Jupiter Island. *Liberté* was snug on my Aunt Mary's friend's dock. My cousin's daughters took Ava in the golf cart to the club for tea and cookies while the rest of us caught up. The next day found us on cousin Tim's farm. It was a *huge* day for us. We saw horses, cows and alligators, and rode motorbikes and quads. The real highlight was when the six of us piled into a classic old Jeep and rode through the trails. With all of the flooding, we splashed through quite a bit of water. At one point, we were actually afloat. Tim masterfully handled the situation so none of us had to walk the miles back through knee-deep water with gators and other forms of "wild life".

Visit our website for the entire story of the trip South! www.TheLiberte.com

From Hobe Sound to Fort Lauderdale was a steady vista of lovely homes decorated for Christmas. (We did see one trailer park as well.) Anchored on Lake Boca Raton, the pink sunset was framed by the large pink condominium tower. With an early start, we arrived in Fort Lauderdale by noon, 24 hours before our flight to Connecticut for Christmas. We were back to the boat by New Year's and our one week of dockage became four. (Many thanks, Scott & Lisa!) We homeschooled and worked on the boat maintenance, then often biked to the ocean beach or rollerbladed about the neighborhood.

Our friends, Pete and Diane, visited in January, which was just the push we needed to move. Steady north winds nixed a plan to visit the Bahamas, so we motored down the ICW to "the cove" at Oleta River State Park. On a sunny, warm day we got out Ava's towable water tube for some high speed fun. It was not long before the marine patrol arrived. "Did you

not see the 'Slow - Manatee Zone' sign?" We had not. He pointed to three in plain sight. He continued, "Who, onboard, is not important?" It was Pete, on the tube, no life jacket. "What boat are you on?" He waved us off to go home and think about it. Suitably chastised and feeling very amateurish (we had seen signs for manatees for the last 300 miles!), we slowly motored back to the *Liberté*. There's also a lovely little half-moon beach at "the cove". It was a fine holiday.

After two months of "Manatee Zone" signs, we'd yet to spot one. Jane was feeling that they were mythical creatures, like unicorns and jackalopes. Then one day, exploring in the dinghy, we saw them. Slow, docile and very large, a single stroke of their tail sent them gliding. Almost all had propeller scars on their backs. Some mornings in the cove, I spotted a 4 - 5 foot tarpon, with big silvery scales beneath the swirl of water. Almost every evening, the porpoises came in, swimming into the park's roped-off swimming area almost to the beach. Stingrays would leap out of the water and do belly flops. Egrets, blue herons and pelicans soared around us.



The entrance to "The Cove"; Biscayne Bay on the right

In February, we hauled out at Playboy Marine for our biannual hull work and inspection. No bars or bunnies there, just a good old-fashioned boatyard. "Florida" Chuck took us under his wing and we wanted for nothing. Eric of Done Deal Yacht Services lent me his son and dustless sander for a day. It was the sound of my arms resting. It was a daily push, but in two weeks the *Liberté* was serviced and ready to go. During this time, Jane and Ava took a vacation to visit their best friends. First, they were off to California to visit Ava's best friend, Brianna: then they went to visit Jane's sister and best friend, Nancy, for their annual snowmobiling jaunt in Vermont. (Take a look at www.chixonsleds.com)

March 4th was approaching, my usual date to start recommissioning *Liberté*. Our plan was to skip the dreaded 28 fixed bridges in Florida and make a 320-mile offshore trip to St. Mary's, Georgia. We missed the weather window by ten hours. When the wind went north it stayed there for two weeks. So we opted for the waterway. The trip north through Florida was much easier and drier, though not much warmer than going south. Arriving at Fernandina Beach seven days later, we anchored for two hours, prepping for a short offshore hop to Charleston. A gentle warm southerly breeze pushed us along. Confirming with the City Marina that we could get fuel and water, I proceeded to empty my watertanks so that we could fill them with "sweet" Charleston water, the best we found on the east coast. We enjoyed being in Charleston, but after the cold front passed, we motorsailed to Beaufort, NC. The "Handlebar" club welcomed me again to visit with Rob & Dorie. The next day we headed north even though the ICW was closed because of a train derailment at the automated bridge. The powers that be would fix it. We made great time and decided to stretch it out, but just before the Pamlico Sound, our boat speed dropped from 7.5 to 3.5 knots as the wind came up out of the north at 35 - 45 knots. We retreated a good 15 miles to a cozy, well-protected anchorage.

By morning the winds had eased and we slowly retraced our steps. Approaching the same fixed bridge for the third time in 16 hours, we received a call from a motoryacht going in the same direction and we were asked if we were "aware" that there was only 65' clearance. Yes, we knew; all too well. But did she know that the next one was only 64'? We crossed the Pamlico at a steady 6+ knots, arriving at the Wilkerson *High Bridge* at low tide. We had not filled our barrels and to do so at that point would prevent us from making our next anchorage by sunset. Ever so slowly we inched under the bridge. The reed on the foremast hit, but not too far down. I went slower... As the main mast came to the bridge, we stopped and drifted. The anchor light came crashing to the deck, but we were under and then past the lowest bridge. A little rum toast was in order and we anchored up in the Alligator River at 6pm.

The next day's run was pretty simple. As the day warmed up, we followed the wide and well-marked Alligator River and then crossed the Albemarle Sound painlessly. Just south of Coinjock, Jane negotiated the channel perfectly as it narrows and twists and turns. By midafternoon, we were docked in Coinjock, just one day from Norfolk and Mile 0. The newspaper there showed a big color picture of the derailed train, hanging from its bridge over the waterway, but we were assured that it had been cleared, the fuel spill contained and the I.C.W. was open again. At 7am we left Coinjock with a light southerly breeze. Not a half hour later, the wind shifted to the north and wind and rain lashed the boat for the next two hours. As we crossed Currituck Sound, we heard severe thunderstorm warnings for the area. Checking the times given and our speed, we found ourselves just out of the Sound when the storm was to hit there. As we left the sound and

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By the way...

The *Liberté* offers a Teambuilding program, designed specifically for our charters. The perfect way to combine team training with a company outing. Call it “Fun with a purpose”! Call Captain Chris to discuss the possibilities.

entered the marshlands, the wind eased but the rain continued. We passed through more drawbridges and under some fixed bridges, saw the railroad bridge where the train fell off, went through the lock at Great Bridge and on through the industrial area south of Norfolk, then anchored off Portsmouth at Mile 0. We spent a few days there, visiting with Eric & Amy. Jane enjoyed shopping at the commissary and Ava played hard with Emma and Jonathan. Then the northwest wind let go and on Thursday we motored up the Chesapeake to the Wicomico River. The next day brought a very gentle southerly breeze which followed us up the Bay to Solomon's Island. On Saturday, we hoisted some sail and headed to Annapolis at 8+ knots. The sight of the Thomas Point Lighthouse, the Bay Bridge and the Annapolis skyline never looked so good. After our long voyage, it was wonderful to be home.



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