

Europe to Australia 2001

Well it was in Frankfurt airport, checking my e-mail account while on transit from a splendid month in Turkey to Dublin, that i got offered by an South African friend Nick, an opportunity to sail a 52 ft Bermudian Cutter Sailing boat all the way from Gran Canaria to Australia. WOW a dream of mine at that time coming through. I had met Nick in a shipyard in Gran Canaria who employed me for three months around October 1999. So i was aware of the boat itself, GOLDEN EMERALD, whose owner, also South African, is retiring in Australia and maybe even donate it to his daughter now living there. The basic deal was that i do not get paid nor pay myself. The only money i needed was personal which i would have spent ashore. Being that, i decided to go back to Malta for two months to make some cash and organise my 12 month holiday Visa for Australia.

The days flew by in Malta. After a year out already, I realized that alot has changed but nothing has changed.... Do you understand what I mean or maybe i changed!!!! All my friends i used to hang around with have gone seperate ways in away but solidified other friendships and made new once. I could see and feel a change of a new era and a positive attitude in the youths around. Working for two months on a film production "Count of Monte Cristo" gave me an opportunity to work with foreigners and local peple which was great fun.

The Trip begins; 7th November. All set to go and after alot of tiers from Mum and a brave talk with Dad at the Airport, I eventually made it to the Aircraft's doorway. At that instant i turned round and my eyes captured the amazing brownish Maltese Landscape with the sun seeting between two hills, colouring the sky red. It was a big "goodbye see you again" feeling my country gave me before leaving here again. " I'm on the raod again" - YES.

Twenty-four hours later i was on Golden Emerald in Puerto Rico, Gran Canaria, my means of escape from Europe and gateway of more than two thirds around the globe to Australia. After a whole week preparing the boat we set sail as planned to Barbados across the Atlantic Ocean. We meaning Nick, as the Skipper and responsible for the boat, Steve Rose, English from Bath, Javier from Buenas Aires Argentina and of course myself. Only after ten nautical miles sailing off the coast we lost our mast. Two chain plates holding the starboard lower shrouds snapped due to corrosion which was not visibal to us prior of our departure. Nick acted well and altogher managed to lift the first half of the mast and sails out of the water and motored back to port dragging the rest of the mast in the water. I will never forget the silence that was around us for hours. It was deep for everybody. Anyways as Forest Gump says, "Shit happens" and we spent a month and a half fixing the mast ourselves passing through "crazy" Xmass and New Year's there.

D-day came to leave again; January 7th 2001. This time Javier had dropped from the team and joined instead by Nick's girlfriend Melissa, 18 English from Surrey.

It took us three weeks to cross the Atlantic Ocean to St. Lucia in the Caribbean. The following is an itinerary of where we've stopped. I would have liked to give a short description of what I saw and felt, my experience with local people and their cultures but if so I'll be stuck in front of this computer for ages. Maybe next letter but for the time being I suggest you follow the route on a map or an Atlas if you like to learn more about this massive, marvellous and interesting World we live in.

11/1 Left Puerto Rico Gran Canaria to Windward Islands in Caribbean

02/2 Arrival St. Lucia: Rodney Bay across Atlantic Ocean.

08/2 Marigot Bay

09/2 Soufriere

12/2 St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Wallilabou Bay and Cumberland Bay

14/2 Bequia

17/2 Mustique (Brittania Bay)

21/2 Canuan (Charlestown Bay)

22/2 Tobago Cays

26/2 Mayreau (Saline Bay)

27/2 Palm Island

28/2 Union Island

01/2 Carriacou (Hillsborough and Tyrrel Bay)

02/3 Grenada (St. George's Bay)

08/3 Venezuela Islands: Los Testigos (Isla Iguan grande and Isla Iangoleta)

11/3 Isla Margerita

16/3 Isla Cubagua

17/3 Mochima (Main Land Venezuela)

19/3 Isla La Tortuga (Playa Caldera)

22/3 Isla Tortuguillas

23/3 Los Roques (Dos Mosquises, Elbert Clay and Cayo De Aqua)

25/3 Aves de Barlovento (Isla Sur)

27/3 Dutch Antilles: Bonaire (Kralendijk)

03/4 Aruba (Oranjestad)

12/4 Panama (Colon - Carribean Side)

05/5 Panama (Panama City - Flamenco Pacific Side)

06/5 Las Perlas (Isla Pedro Gonzalez)

19/5 A week and a half to Galapagos (Equador) San Cristobal (Wreck Bay)
(Across Equator like)

25/5 Santa Cruz (Academy Bay)

27/5 Isabella (Villamil Bay)

20/6 Three weeks across Pacific Ocean to French Polynesia - Marquesas - Hiva
Oa (Taahuku Bay)

23/6 Tahuata (Baie Uaitahu)

25/6 Ua Pou (Baie D'Hakaou)

29/7 Nuku Hiva (Baie de Taiohae and Baie Taioa (Daneiel's Bay))

17/7 A week to Society Islands. Tahiti Papeete.. skipping the Tumotos due to
engine failure. These are just atolls in Pacific Ocean and need absolutely engine
power to go in.

13/8 Moorea

14/8 Ferry to Bora Bora via Huahine, Raiatea and Tahaa

This was already eight thousand nautical miles and over ten months together. The amazing factor about the trip was that your character gets much stronger and your mind flips open like a book and the most awesome thing was that you experience different cultures from one group of islands to the next within a few miles range of each other. Great travelling. But I would like to picture you in a situation were you are living on a floating room with same four people watching each other's move. Imagine how well you get to know the other crew members, the way they think, act and attitude which unfortunately became a problem. A lot of things happened on the way especially in Marquesas islands that cause friction between us all and i was also running late to enter Australia. So with the help of a great skipper (BIG BEN) on a 105ft sailing boat NAOS, i boarded a 90ft ketch THALASSI as delivery crew from Bora Bora (Society Islands) to Savu Savu in Fiji.

Thalassi, Meaning God of Ocean in Greek, was another different experience

where my knowledge, both sailing and maintenance wise I learnt from Golden Emerald, went into Thalassi, helping me improve them, like a chain becoming thicker the more experience you get. Thalassi has three permanent crew, Mick, the skipper, his girlfriend and first mate Bee and Jason as the chef on board, all English and cool easy going people. Together with another two awesome blokes, Steve, Australian and a Kiwi, Justin, had a really enjoyable sail down wind and full sails taking us a week and a half to get there. We even celebrated my twenty-six birthday during the crossing making it another unforgettable one. Thank you Thalassi.

Fiji was different again. Stayed there a week and a half before flying to New Zealand. Auckland is a small but biggest city in NZ and very similar to Dublin I'd say. The Kiwis' and the Maoris' hate the city because it is a city but it is very chill compared to most cities I have been in.... So imagine the rest of the country, especially South Island!! Tried to look for work there but yachting season was very low and bloody cold at that time. I mean spending more than a year in the tropics and then go down south my balls were freezing. Anyways decided to cruise early to Australia and start working there straight away once I have my papers organised.

Fifth September was my arrival day to Sydney. Finally made it. The flight over the city was spectacular but in the city itself was a big shock to the heart. After travelling through all those amazing islands, local people full of fun and enthusiasm, all the great cruising sailors I've met on the way and then ending up in a big city, where you can't even see the sky due to mega tall buildings, no more starry nights and people walking in the streets like robots..... HELP!!! Luckily in Bondi Beach I met up with a Maltese friend of mine Peppi (Il-Gunnie) who left Malta at the same time that I did and travelled through India and Indonesia before ending up in Sydney. Good times with Peppi for sure because we had common tastes. Together we managed to find a job that generated some cash; selling oil paintings door to door. I used to tell them that I travelled from Europe to Fiji on a sailing boat and on the way painted some of them. That was a good experience, learning how people live in a big city making me think that that's no place for me. We travelled around Sydney, up the east coast and also down to Canberra in a seven-seater van with six people and the painting themselves.... we looked like canned sardines!! Israeli, Dutch, Kiwi, Irish, German and us Maltese made a great team and heaps of fun, laughter and stories. A girlfriend Nina, that I had met in Gran Canaria joined me after 3 weeks there. The job and Sydney was getting too much for us, so we decided to buy a car (Nina bought it) and cruised up the east coast to Nimbin stopping in Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Byron Bay.

Unfortunately all our personal belongings got stolen from the car during a visit to Nimbin Market. Everything happens for a reason and that was another change in my life. People at a backpacker's farm in Nimbin were very kind and offered us free accommodation and even provided us with some clothes. Two days later, 23rd

October, i left Nimbin, got a bus to Brisbane and flew to Fiji to deliver Thalassi again from there to Nz. Thank you God. I needed an escape after all that bad experience and sailing did it again. It made me realize things that were happening around me back in Australia and gave me energy to deal with them. Sailing wise we had another great trip and awesome time. It took us only five and a half days and another two weeks working on the boat gave me the opportunity to explore a bit more of NZ especially the great bars/clubs with groove house music and mad house parties the way i like it. Even cruised to the west of North Island together with Jason and his Van. I love New Zealand, great country and yet to discover more for sure.

Back in Australia, Peppi, Ninna and myself decided to cruise up to the Airlie Beach, Whitsundays, knowing there is a lot of work on charter boats around the islands or at least that's what they told me. The relationship between myself and Nina ended straight away. I was realizing facts like freedom again. The thing is not that i wasn't free but that matter that you can be more yourself and independent is awesome. Anyways that's me again for sure. Basically i tried to work out a relationship but i am simply HOPELESS. Peppi and me first went to visit some friends of friends of his in Mount Jerusalem close to Mullimbimby. They live in a big wooden octagon shaped house in a National Forest with a view overlooking a valley leading all the way down to the Pacific Ocean and it's all pre-maculture. The vibe there was absolutely great and, talking to the whole family and seeing the way they live, made me understand a lot of things about the way i am and the way i would like to be (working towards my next dream) because they are like me. Excellent week over there.

Next stop was Noosa Heads and then Redcliffe in Brisbane because Steve had arrived there three weeks before on Golden Emerald. That was already good news that my friends had made it also. Steve was in great form. We had a lot to catch up with and even tried to see Golden Emerald again but had been moved somewhere else. But i coincidentally met a couple on another sailing boat, Northern Light, that i had first met in Galapagos and last saw in Marquesas. That was a great feeling knowing it's a "small" World. Moving further north we stopped in Agnes water and Town of 1770. Their the beaches were fantastic..... kilometers long and few people around because it is still unspoiled by tourism. A night in Koomala with some local friends we met in Nimbin was another experience. Again people living off their own land, cut away from the rest.

A mission that had to happen one day was a visit to my "never saw never met" relatives in Mackay and it was finally a door step away. First was a visit to Aunty Vinnie and the last night there she kindly organised a BBQ at her very Maltese decorated house inviting all the rest of my uncles, aunts and cousins living around the area. It was great to see how these 30 years ago immigrant Maltese are living here in Australia and now how their children are earning a living around this Sugar Cane or Coal Mine Industry. Thank you Zi for all that.

It was only the last hour and a half drive to Airlie Beach, now over five Thousand kilometers north of Sydney. Straight away myself and Peppi jumped for a job hunt, handing out CVs to all skippers and companies around. I was lucky with a splendid Gaff Rigged boat PROVIDENCE V whose skipper and owner Tony allowed us to help him and also went out for a sail around Whitsundays islands. The following day i was a trainee crew on a charter trip for 3 days and 2 nights with six guest on board. The skipper, Tony and a real genlteman, accepted me as a relief crew mainly cooking for fourtheen guest and three crew and sail handling. Again nice to be sailing, this time even better....the old tradittional way and i loved it. In Airlie beach i met up again with Steve and his ex-girlfriend Monique that i knew and live with in Gran Canaria. All of us toghether we drove a bit around, trekked a beautiful state forest and visited Dingo Beach. It was sort of a holiday (if i may say so) becasue Peppi had decided to return to Mullimbimby and Nina to head here own way. I decided to keep the car and pay here once i sell it again. A car is of utmost importance and means of freedom in a country so big. Soon after i went out on a paid trip on Providence and afterwards even relief another crew member on another boat. This generated a bit of cash to keep me going for Xmass and New Years.

The best thing of all is that Tony offered me his other 30ft Admility Gaff Cutter as accomodation purpose and to fix it up as i go along and prepare it for sailing again. She is a small cute boat that is anchored outside Abel point Marina and i need to row there, so it is my own Eli's den for the next few months. And if all goes well next month (that is money wise) i will be preparing to do my Ocean Yacht Master in Febuary. I'm ready for what ever comes next.

I hope this was of great interest to you and again apologies for not being in touch. Please pass on this letter to friends if they have not received themselves. My diary was stolen in Nimbin so i do lack heaps of contacts and phone numbers. Wish you an awesome and great New Year, full of HAPPY DAYS of course.

Last thing, i would like to thank everybody that helped me out in one way or another but a special thanks to Nick and Brian (the owner of Golden Emerald) for the biggest opportunity and experiance you guys gave me. Thanks a Zillion.... Respect.

Love and Peace

Eleandro

Whitsundays islands

31/12/01

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