

A UNIQUE MONTH... TO SAY THE LEAST

Like people all around the world, we've had a strangely unique month. Fortunately, our time was filled with mostly good things – trips back to the USA, a birth, grandparenting, boat work (always), and even eerily pleasant times during a public health lockdown.

APRIL 2, 2020

THE BEST NEWS OF ALL

We have a new grandchild! Evan David Tucker, our first grandson, was born in Washington, DC, on 23 February, 9 days after his due date. But he was worth the wait, and we're delighted to report Evan and our daughter Shelby, his mom, as well as his father, Travis, and big sister, Maebel, are all happy, healthy, and doing well. Vicki and I feel fortunate to have been in DC at that time to share the experience with the Tuckers, especially the extra time we got to spend on grandparent duty looking after Maebel while her parents were otherwise occupied waiting for Evan's arrival.



The Tucker Family enjoying Evan David Tucker, just a few hours after his birth on February 23, 2020.



Two happy and proud grandparents with their two favorite grandkids, Maebel (3 years) and Evan (3 days).

BACK TO SPAIN

Vicki and I had been in the States for a month and in DC from around the time of Evan's due date, and we concluded shortly after his birth the Tuckers could use some time and space to themselves, especially since they were expecting other family visitors soon. We learned of a USAF C-17 cargo plane that was leaving from Norfolk with a few potential "Space A" seats. So, we rented a car and drove down to Norfolk, lodged one night at a hotel close to the naval base, and signed up for the flight the next morning. As luck would

have it, we manifested for 2 of the 12 available seats and landed in Rota the following morning after a smooth overnight transatlantic flight. We spent one day in the Rota area, picked up our wonder dog, Saylor, from her Hotel de Mascotas (pet hotel), and then took 2 days to drive the 600km back to Cartagena, where At First Sight had been tenderly cared for by our friend Juan Peñuelas's nephew, Santi. Although we missed experiencing firsthand the joy Evan was bringing to our family, it felt good to be home aboard At First Sight.



We needed rest in the back of the C-17 cargo flight on the 9-hour flight from Norfolk to Rota. And Saylor needed a bath after a month at the dog hotel. Many car washes in Spain have dog washes, too.



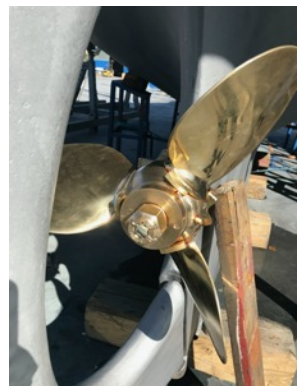
NO REST FOR THE JET LAGGED WEARY

We were scheduled to haul out 3 days later at Varadero ASCAR, a busy shipyard on the other side of Cartagena's beautiful harbor, and we had a lot to do. Our worklist in the yard included installing a new bronze Luke feathering propeller (\$\$\$), changing the seacock in the engine room (\$\$), refreshing the antifouling bottom paint (\$) and replacing a hatch cover (1/2\$) we had purchased several months ago. We hoped to get in and out of the boatyard in one week's time, but our previous boatyard experiences told us to prepare for a three-times longer stay (with expenses likely to be three times greater than first estimated, as well). Looking back, however, we can't say enough good things about Varadero ASCAR and its crew of marine mechanics, technicians, and craftsmen. First of all, they provided totally outstanding quality service on time and on budget from haul out to splash, 5 days later – weekend included. Second, they allowed us to stay aboard AFS while she was on the hard, which is somewhat of a rarity, although some yards do look the other way. And finally, everyone one we met in the yard – management, workers, and other boat owners – was a class act. We are especially grateful to have met Brits Tony and Sarah Boas, in S/V Ione, and Andrew Miles.



(At left) S/V At First Sight in the slings for maintenance at Varadero ASCAR in Cartagena.

(At right) Our new bronze Luke feathering prop. The original only lasted 35 years.



BACK AND FORTH, JUST IN TIME

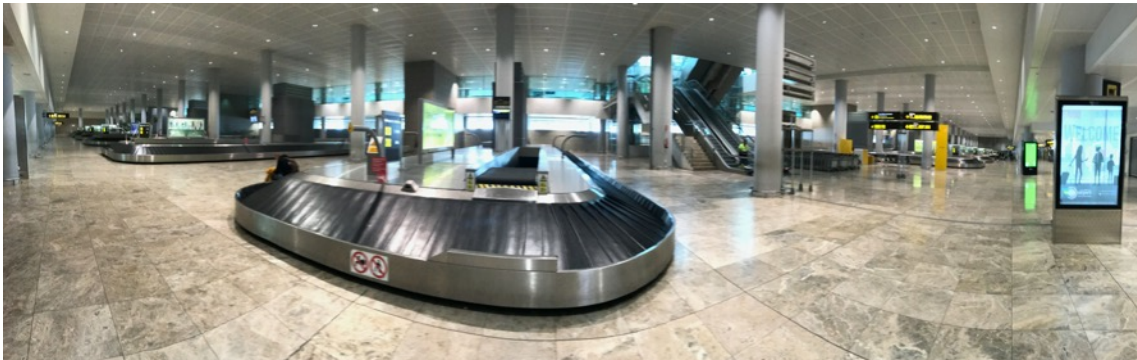
Two days after we launched and motored to our berth along the promenade at Real Club de Regatas de Cartagena, I flew back to DC to speak at longtime friend, CAPT Steve Blivin's retirement, which also gave me another chance to spend a few days with grandkids Maebel and Evan, and their parents. Steve had a terrific ceremony befitting his impressive career, but social distancing precautions negatively impacted attendance, especially by flag and general officers who were busily working on contingency plans in response to the burgeoning pandemic. With the rapidly changing public health situation in mind, I gave one shot at taking a Space A military flight from Norfolk back to Rota the very next day. And when that fell through, I bought a commercial ticket from Norfolk to Alicante, rented a car one-way from the airport to the train station in Cartagena, and arrived aboard AFS just as a nationwide lockdown went into effect. It was surreal landing at the normally bustling Alicante International Airport (ALC) to find it nearly deserted.



Grandpa got to spend a few extra days with his two favorite grandkids while back in DC for a ceremony.



Check out this museum-like homage to the humble sardine at the Lisbon International Airport.



It was quite eerie to arrive at Alicante International Airport at midday on a weekday, and find it totally deserted. And unfortunately, my bag didn't make the connection in Amsterdam, and it was 5 days until the next flight.

LOCKDOWN

As I write this, we are on day #18 of Spain's nationwide public health lockdown. Non-essential businesses are closed and individuals only (not couples or families) are permitted out of their homes (or off their boats) for brief trips for essentials only – groceries, pharmaceuticals, fuel (gas/diesel, bottled gas, etc.), or medical. Short walks for pet bio breaks are also permitted, and we read one report early on of a

gentleman who put a leash on a goat so he could go for a walk off his property. Obviously, there are few other valid reasons, but not many. And while the COVID-19 situation is horrible in Madrid and several other large Spanish cities, here along the Costa Calida, of which Cartagena forms the eastern boundary with the adjacent Costa Blanca that extends to Barcelona, we are fortunate that the case rate has remained low here – and we hope it stays that way. We are part of a community in two adjacent marinas of ~20 vessels with liveaboards. We've met just a few of our neighbors due to the lockdown orders; however, everyone is very good about looking after each other as best we can, given the rules. We have a Facebook group, Cartagena Liveaboards, and we have a network chat on VHF channel 72 at noon on most days. As a result, we were able to get our empty propane tank filled, for example. We're still figuring out how we can give a guy in the other marina a liter or two of the automatic transmission fluid he needs. (We have it, but the rules don't permit us to deliver it to him at the other marina.)



Gas bottles on the pier waiting for an authorized marina worker to take them for filling or exchange.



The Guardia Civil making morning rounds of the marina, for safety and security, and to enforce the lockdown.

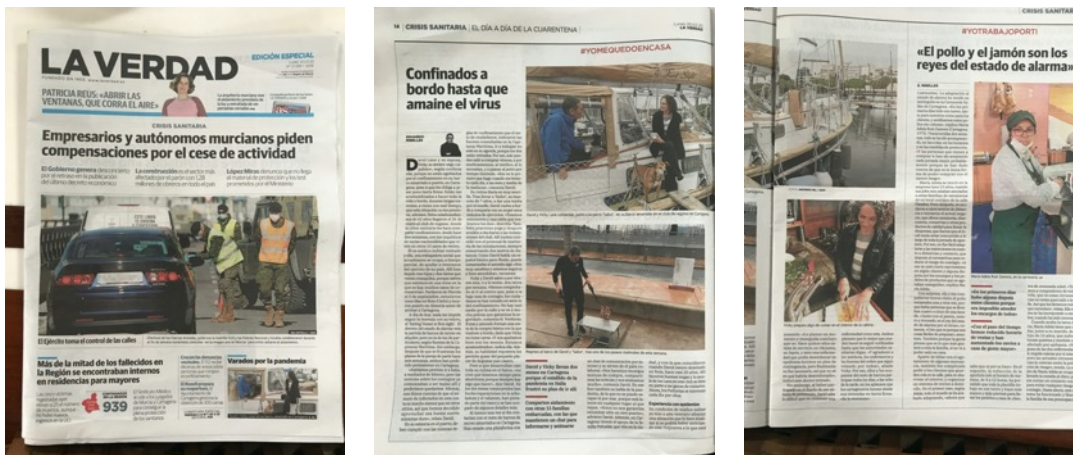
Vicki and I have been feeling a little guilty that, for us, the lockdown has been, well, almost too pleasant. First of all, we are both perfectly content to spend time alone with just the two of us. That's a natural part of both our relationship and the cruising lifestyle. But beyond that, we already had just about everything we might need or want aboard At First Sight before the lockdown began, and what staples and perishables we need to replenish seem mostly available at the nearby grocery stores. I had to go to 3 grocery stores and 2 bakeries, however, to find yeast.

The days are going by quickly, too. Almost too quickly. We get up in the morning around 7:30, and I immediately take Saylor for a walk, and then do some sort of exercise (yoga, HIIT/HITT with bands or body weight, TRX, etc.) on or immediately beside the boat, while Vicki exercises aboard the boat. We tried exercising together about 2 boat-lengths away once, but we were told to stop by the Port Police. After PT, it's typically somewhere between 9-10am, time for breakfast. After breakfast on most days we tackle a boat maintenance project, and thus far we've installed a second hatch cover, fixed the sump (gray water) pumping system, rewired the refrigerator thermostat, rebedded a portlight, repaired our Power Over Ethernet (POE) internet antenna system, and rebuilt our two biggest sail-handling winches. Still much to do... always. We're also reading, taking classes online, texting/emailing family and friends, and baking bread. On some days after a late lunch, we show respect to our host country's traditions and take a siesta until dinnertime. After dinner, it's shower time (Vicki on the boat; David at the marina facilities), followed by evening entertainment, such as a movie or watching one of the several sailing vloggers we follow on YouTube.



It had been more than 5 years since the bottom end our big Lewmar 65ST winches had been serviced, and it showed. But would we be able to reassemble them once we disassembled and cleaned all the gears and bearings? Fortunately, the answer was yes. (And no extra parts!)

We had some additional excitement late last week when a reporter from the regional newspaper, *La Verdad*, interviewed us for an article on how boat people have adapted to the lockdown measures. The nice article appeared in last Sunday's edition, with a caption and thumbnail picture on the front page! We declined a follow-up interview by a TV station. As I said, maybe we're enjoying the eerie semi-isolation and tranquility a little too much.



We were interviewed (at a distance) by a reporter from the local newspaper. He was interested in how foreign transient recreational sailors were coping with the tight lockdown measures. We can't speak for others, but we think quiet well. Perhaps it because we enjoy each other's company and because we were already used to semi-isolation?

By contrast, we learned via the VHF radio net that a gentleman on a sailboat in the adjacent marina was taken to hospital midweek last week by an ACLS ambulance. As the story goes, he was possibly exposed to the coronavirus about 10 days before, and he felt completely well for the next 6 days when he developed symptoms like a cold or flu. Two days later, he suddenly developed respiratory failure, prompting his wife to call for an ambulance. We heard (again through the VHF net) that COVID-10 was confirmed, he spent ~2 days on a ventilator, and then showed signs of recovering. At last report, he's expected to be discharged in a few days. Meanwhile, his wife has remained symptom free but quarantined aboard their vessel, which was moved to a more remote section of the marina. We, along with all the other cruisers in Cartagena, are hoping for a full and speedy recovery, and no further spread within our community.

That's all for now. Stay safe, stay healthy, stay happy.

David, Vicki,

And Saylor, too!