

Grateful For Simply Being

May 16, 2020

Plans Are Made For Changing

If this is May, then we must be in Italy now – or so the notional plan went at the start of 2020. A friend was planning his retirement party in Rome in the middle of the month, and we were intending to sail somewhere along the Italian coast to be within easy commuting distance of the event. But that was before COVID-19 became a household word, and like nearly everyone else on our tiny planet, we changed our plans.

Instead of sailing eastward, farther into the Mediterranean, we've been sheltering-in-place in Cartagena, day #54 as I write this. (I actually started writing on day #41...) But no complaints whatsoever from us, because everything we could want or need was already aboard *At First Sight* at the start of the lockdown, or readily available nearby in Cartagena – which is a terrific small town with big town amenities or a big town with a welcoming small-town feel. This is a good thing, too, because the Spanish government has taken its public health lockdown quite seriously, with nearly all businesses ordered closed except for essential services like grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, and the like, all of which are within a short walk or bike ride from the Real Club de Regatas marina, where we've been docked.



The picture on the left shows how deserted the normally bustling walking street has been during the lockdown. The sailorman statue on the right isn't taking any chances with exposure to COVID-19. Both pictures were taken midday ~45 days into Spain's strict shelter-in-place order allowing only truly essential businesses to open, and allowing for only few essential reasons to patronize the businesses.

Passing Time In Lockdown

Many essays, newspaper articles, radio spots, and TV news pieces have already been written and broadcast about what people are doing when their mobility and even their livelihood has been

severely restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Books are no doubt already in press, too. Many lament that the confinement and isolation has been a total bore and that being “locked down” for a prolonged period has driven them stir crazy.

But as for Vicki and me, the days, weeks, and even months have flown by. Far from being bored, we’re amazed at how fast time goes by, and if we have a lament, it is only for more hours in a day to accomplish things on our to do list. Here is just a partial list from our maintenance log of what we’ve accomplished. It might not seem like that extensive a list, but remember this a boat and every project takes ~3 times longer than you’d expect, and costs ~3 times as much, too!

Maintenance At First Sight				
Job	Activity Section	Finished	Due date	Job state
	Rig		Operating hours	
ⓘ Replace Victron 75/15 MPPT Solar Controllers	Replacement Electrical installations	4/29/20		Finished
ⓘ Replace Solbian Flexible Solar Panels	Replacement Electrical installations	4/7/20		Finished
ⓘ Mainmast Lewmar 40ST Winch Maintenance	Regular maintenance Rig	5/2/20		Finished
ⓘ Repair Bow Navigation Light	Replacement Electrical installations	5/4/20		Finished
ⓘ Repair Forward Head Shower Sump	Repair Plumbing	5/5/20		Finished
ⓘ Mizzenmast Lewmar 16ST Winch Maintenance	Maintenance Rig	5/7/20		Finished
ⓘ Replace Lower Crown Half Lewmar 65STs	Replacement Rig	5/6/20		Finished
ⓘ Varnish Rub Rails Fore and Aft	Regular maintenance Deck	5/9/20		Finished
ⓘ Replace Hawse Pipe Cleats at the Bow	Repair Deck	5/12/20		Finished
ⓘ Dinghy Antifouling	Regular maintenance Dinghy / Tender	5/14/20		Finished

Jobs: total | found | position in list - 165 | 165 | 1

At left is a screenshot of our maintenance logbook showing some of the repair projects we’ve completed while in port in Cartagena. Below, Vicki applies varnish to a grab rail over the aft cabin.



We’re just finished one of our most important projects, which was to replace a broken bronze fitting on the port bow called a cleated hawse pipe or horned chock. I carelessly broke it by putting too much tension on a marina’s mooring line with the electric windlass, which we normally use for hoisting our 100-pound anchor and 100 feet or so of steel chain, without first checking to ensure the line was running free. It wasn’t, and there was a single wrap around one of the stout bronze horns. So, when I pushed the windlass button for a couple of seconds, the line drew quickly tighter, and then I heard a depressing “snap” as the powerful windlass broke the horn completely free of the hawse. And then depression set in...

We scoured the Internet looking for an identical replacement, both new or used, and finding none, we turned to suitable substitutes such as secondhand chandleries, foundries that fabricate in bronze, and eBay. Fortunately, someone on eBay, had something pretty close to what we needed, and we bought it right away. Unfortunately, however, because of a SNAFU with Correos Express,

a package delivery service affiliated with the Spanish post office, it took 3 weeks longer that it should have to receive the goods. And despite a strict public health lockdown that has confined almost everyone in Spain to their homes (including us to our boat) for 8 weeks, the carrier reported an attempted delivery on 29 April, but noted, "Recipient not at home. On vacation until mid-June." And because of that note our replacement hawse pipes were banished to the Correos Express warehouse in Murcia (~30 minutes away), where they stayed for the better part of 2 weeks.



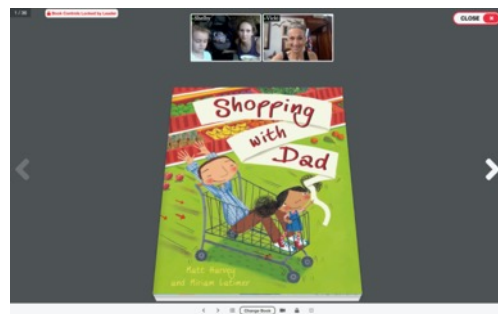
It was a team effort to remove my *handiwork*, the broken cleated hawse pipe, while we looked for a replacement online and waited for it to arrive. Vicki worked the inside, while I went over the side in our bos'n chair, which is normally used for going up the mast. Although we never found an identical replacement, we fortunately located a suitable substitute on eBay and worked with a nearby boatyard to install it after an agonizing 2-week delay in its arrival.



We got help from boatyard Astillero ASCAR to make reinforced fiberglass pieces to adapt our new used hawse pipes to fill in "dead space. The hardest part, really, was the emotion involved with cutting a bigger hole in the port and starboard bulwarks for the new fittings.

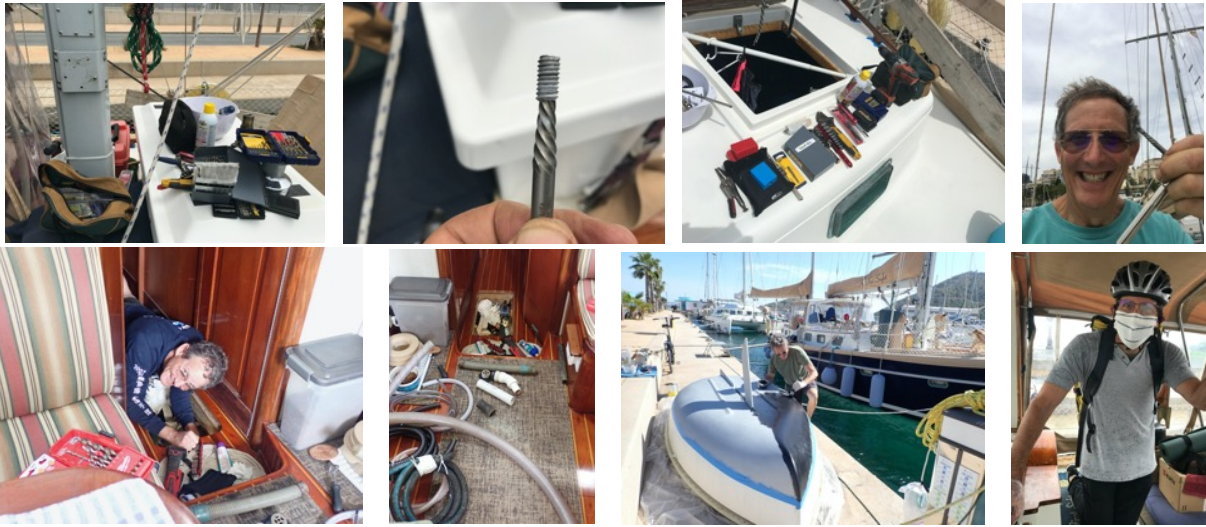


In addition to boat work, Vicki and I have each found plenty of pastimes to keep us busy. Vicki has been baking, reading to Granddaughter Maebel online several times a week, more baking, sewing, more baking, varnish work, making kombucha, and still more baking.



As she's done for us forever, Vicki is constantly doing a myriad of things that turn our house – whether on the land or on the sea – into a home. She's seen above baking, making protective face masks, doing laundry by hand, cleaning butyl off the foredeck, making kombucha, varnishing, and most importantly and enjoyably, reading with Granddaughter Maebel.

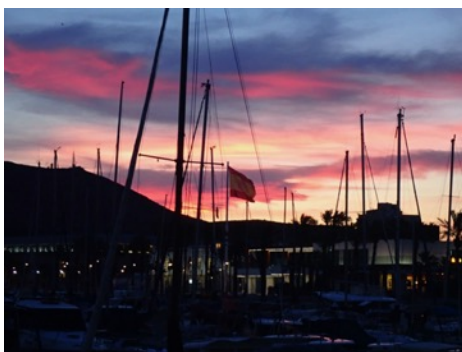
Meanwhile, I've been having fun chipping away at the endless list of preventive maintenance, repairs, and replacements that is just part of the routine of living and cruising on a sailboat.



A smorgasbord of boat projects (much of the time head down and butt up) ranging from replacing a broken shower drain, to refreshing the antifouling paint on the dinghy to grocery shopping by bicycle in the era of strict lockdowns. They say any 30-minute boat job is one broken bolt away from 2-day project, and that was nearly the case here. I broke a bolt during winch maintenance on the mizzen mast. Fortunately, I was able to extract the broken piece in ~2 hours – but look how many tools I needed!

What lies ahead?

As it's been throughout history, the future is filled with uncertainty. Here in Spain, authorities are relaxing public health isolation measures, and we expect to be sailing again in a 3-4 weeks. Our immediate plans are to do a couple of day sails in Cartagena Bay before embarking on a short shakedown cruise eastward to a port or anchorage near Valencia. From there, our next destination of note will be the Balearic Islands – Mallorca, Minorca, and Ibiza – and then we're thinking further eastward toward Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. Somewhere along the way, we'll start to plan for where we will winter over. Yes, we're already far enough into the sailing season that we need to be thinking about safe harbor for unsettled weather patterns and gales of winter.



A beautiful mid-May sunset over the Port of Cartagena. Regardless of the future's uncertainty, Vicki and I look forward to navigating it together, one day at a time.