



The Storm ...

The storm kept growing in intensity. Seas were ten to twelve feet with breaking waves. Green water cascaded over the bow of Pegasus, my 30 foot yawl, to run down the deck to the aft and spill into the sea. The dodger protected us from the spray of the ocean. I was secured to the boat by my safety harness and was wearing my foul weather gear ...

The air was cold. It was a pitch-black night. No moon, no stars, just blackness. The only lights were the masthead and navigation lights. The GPS showed we were doing one and one half knots over the ground. Position and course were also noted. The anemometer read a steady 35 knots, gusting to 40.

To the northwest, lay the Sacramento Reef (Arrecife Sacramento). To the east lay the Baja peninsula. And to the south lay Isla Cedros. With the vessel hove to (storm jib back-winded and the rudder all the way over), Pegasus self-steered west to the open seas of the great Pacific into the teeth of the gale and inky blackness of the night. She rode steady and I remained on watch while my first mate, Lisa, was below, safe and secure in the quarter berth cocooned within the lee cloth. I figured to ride out the storm until sunrise, then turn about and head for Bahia San Carlos to anchor and rest.

All I heard was the screaming of the wind through the rigging, the crashing waves as the bow plowed forward into the seas and the clanging of the halyards (the lines that hoist the sails) against the mast. Every once in awhile, the electric bilge pump would turn on as the water rose high enough to trigger the float switch. No use getting excited as Pegasus, while small, was strong and she always got me home safe. I took care of her and she took care of me. She was my mistress. I looked up and asked all the gods to see me through this and I swear I could hear them laughing. I made myself as comfortable as I could on the cockpit seat and maintained watch as the boat scalloped through the seaway, steady, slowly and safely.

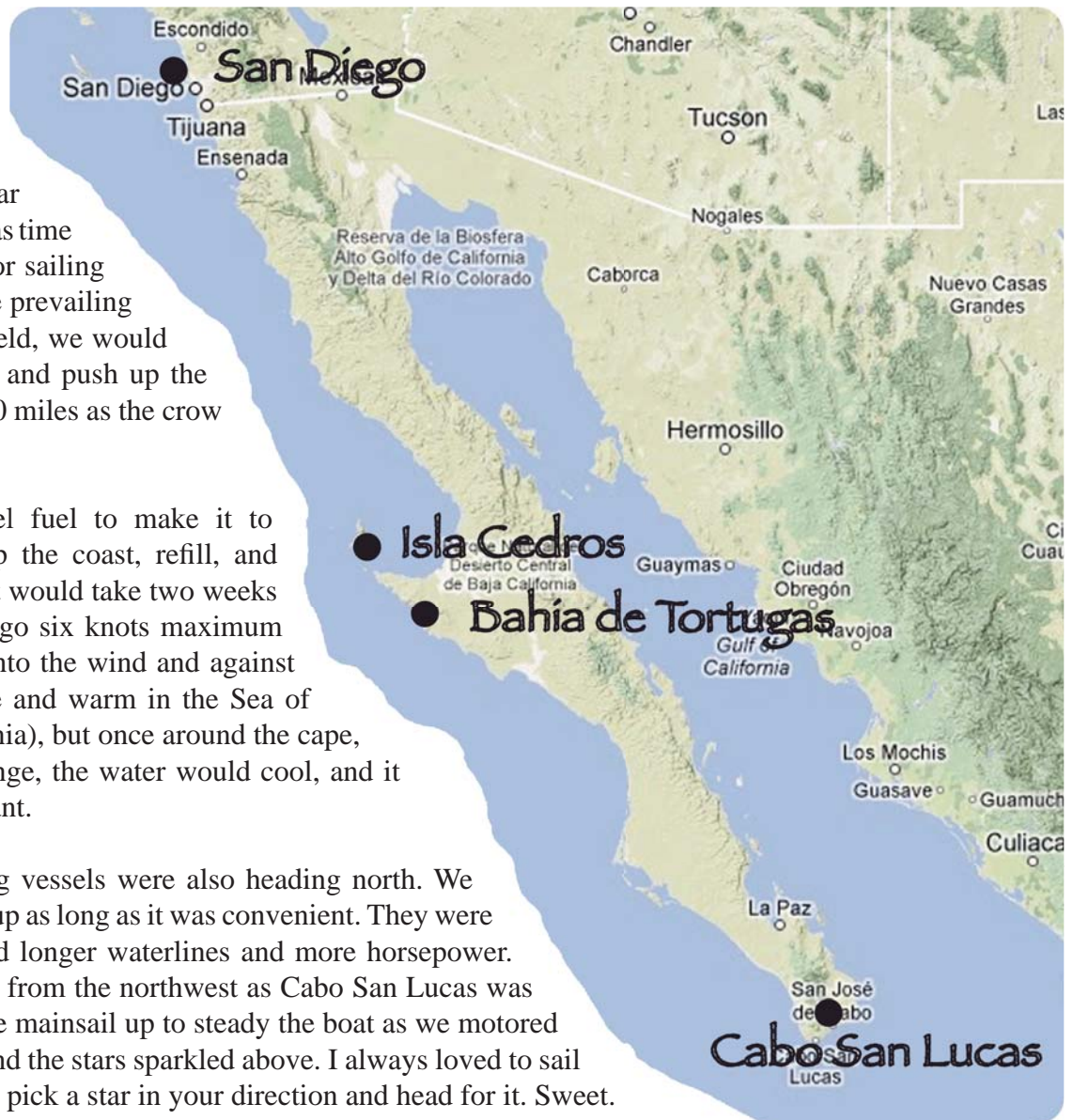
Lisa flew down to Loreto to help me sail back to the States. Belle had returned home earlier. I was concluding my three year cruising adventure. It was time for the Baja slog - motor sailing up the coast, against the prevailing winds. If the weather held, we would round Cabo San Lucas and push up the coast to San Diego - 800 miles as the crow flies.

I carried enough diesel fuel to make it to Turtle Bay, halfway up the coast, refill, and push onward. Figured it would take two weeks as the boat could only go six knots maximum and we were heading into the wind and against the current. It was nice and warm in the Sea of Cortez (Gulf of California), but once around the cape, the weather would change, the water would cool, and it would become unpleasant.

Two other larger sailing vessels were also heading north. We would convoy our way up as long as it was convenient. They were much faster as both had longer waterlines and more horsepower. The wind was light and from the northwest as Cabo San Lucas was lost from view. I had the mainsail up to steady the boat as we motored north. It was nightfall and the stars sparkled above. I always loved to sail at night. You would just pick a star in your direction and head for it. Sweet. The weather held and it was an uneventful sail to Turtle Bay (Bahia de Tortugas). As we arrived, the other two boats that we were sailing with, had already refueled and were heading out as the weather window was holding. A panga (Mexican fishing boat), pulled alongside Pegasus and its captain asked if we needed fuel. I threw my four, six gallon jerry jugs, to him and he motored off to fill them with diesel. When he returned, I filled my internal fuel tank with the fuel and returned the jugs to him to refill. I wanted everything to be full for the rest of the journey. Water was no problem as I had a water maker onboard. After paying him, we headed out to sea for the slow slog up the coast.

Later, I went below to use the head (bathroom) and smelled diesel fumes. Looking into the engine compartment, a stream of fuel was squirting out of a small hole in my secondary fuel filter. Diesel is much safer than gasoline and will not explode. As the engine was hot, I shut it down to let it cool so that I could replace the filter. Setting the jib (forward sail), I took a course out to sea and after an hour was able to perform the repair, bled the fuel lines of air and fired up the engine. Voila, we were back in business. I decided to head around the outside (western side) of the island. I radioed the other two ships that I had to do repairs and I would meet them in San Diego for a drink. The wind and seas started to "pipe up." I dropped the jib, put one reef (shortened sail) in the main and motored north. A few miles past the north end of Cedrus Island, the seas and wind really started to "kick up." I put another reef in the main and continued motoring.

Night was approaching and the winds and seas were increasing in intensity. Hooking onto the safety line, I



crawled forward, hanked (attached) the storm jib to the forward stay, and tied her down. The pitching boat, cold, splashing water, and slippery deck made this procedure much more difficult. We were motoring into the wind and if I raised sail, it would flog unmercifully in the wind. The reefed main acted as a steadying sail keeping Pegasus from rolling in the ever-increasing seas. Eventually, the black night enveloped us. The seas and wind increased. I had to go forward again, raise the storm jib, drop the main, tie her down, crawl back to the cockpit, tighten the jib sheet, turn the wheel hard over to back-wind the sail, tie the wheel down and “kill” the engine. The boat was now hove to and you know the rest.

Dawn finally came. The wind had abated somewhat. The seas were confused but now, at least, I could see. I was tired. Lisa prepared some coffee. Below deck, things were wet. I went forward and hoisted the double-reefed main, then returned to the cockpit and came about. Pegasus scooted forward on a broad reach. After balancing the sails, I engaged Ace, my autopilot, on a course to Bahia de San Carlos (San Carlos Bay). We enjoyed our hot coffee in the warmth of the sun as we continued sailing to the anchorage. There we would anchor, bring on deck the damp cushions and clothes to dry, and sleep. After laying over for a day, we continued motor sailing up the coast to our destination, San Diego, without incident. The Baja slog was over. I couldn't be happier and my crew, well, she was ecstatic. -- *Drake Regent*

