

Blue note

It takes a village, or rather a marina, to make the life of a sailor successful, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** discovers

It seems that the kindness of cruising strangers is the glue that holds the sailing population together. It's funny when you think of how the stereotypical image of a sailor is a rather solitary figure.

In order to separate the flesh of a fresh conch from its bone it is important to make a hole in its shell one ring in from the outside at an angle the same as 2 o'clock on a clock's face – Valois taught us that. Similarly, when laying a second anchor in a storm, you can attach the chain to your bow cleat and set the anchor by going in a dinghy away from your boat – Asmat told us that. Or, when necessary, you can jury rig a shore power electrical connection without an adaptor by putting the bare wire ends into the terminal – which is the way that Jean-Louis does it in Cuba.

As novices to the life we were overjoyed with these titbits provided by new friends that we met at marinas or anchorages. When we embarked upon the long-term cruiser way of life we had no real understanding of how much time one spends tackling different issues on your boat.

All these years and miles later has given us a true appreciation of how multi-faceted and resourceful you need to be in order to make it work. We are not just sailors but self-taught mechanics, engineers, plumbers and electricians who spend our days adding to this wealth of knowledge that very few people but ourselves are interested in.

The fantastic flip side of this is that the entire wider cruising community exists as an extended network of work colleagues. I now understand that all cruisers have had issues that cause head scratching and have resorted to asking the chap on the boat next door; this is how we learn the things that we cannot teach ourselves. But, this is a sort of legacy, as everyone we meet, and apologetically ask favours from, has learned their skills in this same way. In fact I cannot think of a single instance in which any cruiser has said “no”, or “I don't have time”, or refused to lend a vital tool or an extra pair of hands to a project. Yet, although we experience



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new instances of this helpfulness with each sailing season, I think that perhaps the best example of this selfless compassion was something that happened to us in our very first year of sailing.

We dragged. We dragged after a week and a half of holding well in all sorts of blows.

We were on shore and returning to the boat just after sunset when we heard some yelps in the dark. We spotted two men on a dinghy, loaded down with luggage, no lights, calling us over to them. Their outboard had failed, the wind and waves had picked up and they were drifting out to sea in front of the high-speed ferry dock. We were happy to rescue them and, they were so laden down and our outboard so small that it took us a good half hour to get them to their boat.

When they thanked us profusely and asked which boat we were from, we said that we were their neighbours and were anchored just over.....oh. Oh dear...

A flashing torchlight signalled us over and we were soon talking to more strangers who could tell us the story. Our boat had been spotted dragging and was rescued and brought to safety by no less than three different boats working together as a team. Like something out of Mission Impossible, they broke in, figured out our engine system, established that although aground at the edge of a reef the boat had sustained no damage, and drove her off to the safety of a nearby mooring ball, then waited up on deck for our return so that they could calm us down and explain what had happened. They even checked all the bilges for leaks and dived on the keel to confirm that she was sound. One cruiser even delayed his planned departure to Key West in order to help ours. It was a strange coincidence that it all happened just a few hours before we were rescuing the drifters in our dinghy. That same night three others boats in the anchorage dragged wildly and out of control, including one belonging to one of our rescuers.

It makes you think, idyllic though that deserted island anchorage with nothing but a palm tree and some turtles may be, it's a bit more reassuring knowing that you have neighbours at anchor who are looking out for you. ✦



JESS LLOYD-MOSTYN

Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com

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