

Day 31: August 16, 2010

Maybe today is actually the month-in date since July and August have 31 days- regardless, hard to believe.

We are finding tropical depression #5 depressing. You may recall it tropical depression #5 that was essentially forcing us in to shore in St. Petersburg last week. Then it was supposed to be making land fall and disappearing. Nope, it made a U-turn and came back and we are once again on the outskirts of it bouncing around. It is going to force us to go in a couple of days early, which of course simple means the next leg will likely begin a couple of days early so no real time lost- just redistributed.

The day started easily enough. We had increased our effort to 4 people on watch. By 8 am, Greer and Cathy were atop the mast and Ryan and Matt atop the pilothouse. I heard a shriek of girls' voices and looked up and rain was pelting Greer and Cathy. Not a downpour-type rain, rather a warm Gulf rain. Surprised that I heard no peals of laughter from Matt or Ryan, I headed up to look for them, and found them in the pilothouse ducking out of the rain. I guess they were worried about melting. I encouraged them to get back up on watch, but alas they were not budging. So I peeled off my shirt and went up myself. Matt was not about to let me do that alone so he followed me up, freely admitting he had no issue acknowledging the girls were tougher than he, but also subtly admitting that he was not about to let me have the same claim.

We were washed with warm rain for a bit. Then dried with wind and sun. Actually, it was quite enjoyable and became my new office. I spent three hours on watch that stint. Ryan eventually relieved Matt and enjoyed a similar shower of rain followed by sun and wind. We saw nothing by flying fish and some small yellow birds we could not identify.

We all did watches for most of the day. I stopped in the afternoon to attend to other obligations. The watches are an interesting experience. The pilothouse watch is a bit like riding one of those electronic bulls on low. Every muscle in your body is tense and flexed for the hours you are up there- quite a work out. The midlevel watch, which I have not done yet, is even more grueling and jolting and probably more like that bull on medium. The students are exhausted after those watches. The crow's nest watch then must be like the bull on maximum. We have not done many of those in these conditions for the obvious reasons.

By 6 pm we stopped. Johnny said looking for whales in these conditions is like having a mass of pennies at your feet and trying to spot the one Canadian penny in the bunch. Captain Bob shook his head explaining that at this time of year the Gulf is supposed to be HOT and FLAT. HA!

We should have seen it coming better. In the early afternoon, Kyle, our stalwart cook, was working on lasagna. Suddenly, the pans were sliding all over the stove and Kyle was diving for bungee cords to hold them down. Somehow, he got the meat, sauce and noodles to the galley kitchen and there he sat assembling the lasagna. I am sure the

calm look on his face was exhausting. The only thing out of place was small lime rolling along the bench bouncing from bench back to tomato can (also on bench) with the rolling waves. We ate our lasagna and appreciated his efforts.

After dinner, I figured I would read in my bunk ... My bunk is a bit high off the ground so one had to leap a little to get in it. So I leaped and the boat rolled with me and I sailed right over the bed and into the starboard wall. I read a bit but really this rolling, jostling motion is hard to hold yourself still in any position. I turned to look at the time and nearly found myself doing a superman imitation headed across the room. As I was about to fly (or should I say be launched), I noticed a small leak coming from the lab fridge. Concerned, I opened the fridge- really stupid thing to do- and immediately the boat lurched and everything started falling out.

You should know that this fridge is about 3 feet tall and on top of a counter and the floor is not level- it rises up. So I am standing on an incline desperately trying to hold three shelves of stuff with one hand while frantically reloading it with the other all before the next lurch. I know what you are thinking- why not call for help? Well this is happening in real time and my focus was on the boat and the fridge and my narrow window of time to get it done. Each time I would get so close, but no, a couple of bottles would still be askew and the boat would lurch and I would start all over again.

I guess I started yelling out in my frustration as soon Johnny arrived followed by Cathy and Greer. It only took them a moment to realize what I was doing and jump in to help. After a couple of struggling attempts, we got it all in, just as a wave hit and sent us all sprawling across the room. They then asked what I was doing to end up in this chaotic position. I pointed out the leak. Cathy smelled it and said it was the ethanol we used to sterilize things. It looked like it was still leaking.

This next moment is where one realizes the expression that "apples do not fall far from the tree" is true - for better or for worse. I am not sure what possessed him to do so - other than the fact he is my son- but Johnny followed the spill with his eye- just as I had while preparing to superman across the room... and opened the fridge to fix it. Only his timing was off and the roll hit and EVERYTHING went flying out of the fridge!!! So there we were me, Johnny, Greer, and Cathy simultaneously tossed around like rag dolls, laughing hysterically and surrounded by bottles everywhere. Matt then walked into this raucous scene wondering what weird experiment we were up to.

We collected ourselves and started to once again attempt to reload the fridge while being tossed around, walking up hill and standing on an incline. Matt holding things on the top shelf, Johnny the middle and me the bottom, while Cathy passed them up from the floor. And Greer... What did Greer do- well she did what any self-respecting college student would do- she left to get her camera to take video of us for Facebook!!! Indeed, she has some video of the four of us cramming things into the fridge.

Finally, we got it all in. The door closed and all set. But in the fraction of a second where we would just begin to relax and sigh, a wave hit and sent me, Johnny and Cathy

flying backwards across the room and onto the bed. Cathy did a backwards summersault. Johnny and I landed in a pile after smacking into a shelf. Matt was standing almost perfectly parallel to the ground so he did not budge. And Greer...missed that video shot.

We had a nice laugh about it all and headed back up to the Salon to unwind a bit. Things were just as crazy there. Johnny and Greer both sat on that 3 foot wooden bench I mentioned before. It mattered not; the waves pushed them from one end of the room to the other like bobsledders in the Olympics. Matt and I were sitting on the 6 foot bench and even that almost launched us across the room.

The waves are not that big. Just powerful. It is a remarkable thing to be sitting with your feet firmly; I mean firmly planted on the floor, and still have to hold on and hope.

This ride is not like Cape Hatteras which was more like getting slapped silly day and night as the waves are really in one direction rather than random. Typically we are rolling either left or right. But this ride really is Mr. Toad's wild ride. We will hope the tropical depression #5 is done with us soon. We will hope for those flat summer Gulf seas everyone talks about. We will believe it when we see it.

Oh and as I am lying in bed, knowing that I will not sleep tonight. I see the fridge is leaking again...

John