

## Day 51, Voyage 2, July 29, 2011

It was a long night. No one slept much. It's hard to sleep when the boat is rocking that much. Plus there are the noises in the night. At one point, about 1 am, it felt like the boat went up into the air and crashed down and then sounded like it split in half. There was a loud crash followed by the scurry of crew feet pounding on the deck (our ceiling). Turns out, both wire cables holding in the dinghy gave way. Our trusty crew caught it and saved the dinghy and all was well. It was a long, hard night, but, we managed to stay away from the serious parts of the tropical storm and all were safe and sound.

It's a real adventure when the swells get going. Even swells at 9 feet toss you around quite a bit. I often sit against the port-side wall at the salon table writing grants and papers and taking care of both current and future projects. It's about 3 feet from where I sit to the middle of the salon and then I can choose to go fore into the galley or aft to the cabins. Normally, a decision and a function I don't really think about, I just go. But, when the waves come, as they did yesterday, last night and this morning, it's a whole different ball game.

Let's say, for example, you are in my seat and are going to leave it, go to the galley and come back with your dinner. As soon as you stand, the swells are going to try and push you over. Hence, you have to cautiously balance yourself for 3 feet, then make a 90 degree turn and rebalance yourself for the 6 foot walk to the galley steps. All with swells slamming into the boat from random directions. Of course, it's stormy, and the boat is small, so most of the other members of the crew are enjoying the spectacle of your attempt and offering their performance assessments. You might earn a 10 from the judge from Florida for artistic flair! Or maybe you just get a chuckle and grin from the soccer player in the room. Phew, you have made it to the galley steps and you are still on your feet!

You now have to descend 5 steps into the galley. Only problem is the boat pitches and rolls over the waves and one moment the steps are right under your feet, but the next they are three feet below you and you are stepping into empty air! Johnny makes the biggest thuds in these moments, when he misses the stairs, so it's hard to beat his artistic scores for stair walking through the air. Good news! You're in the galley. It took you a while, and you had to muster every ounce of concentration you had, but you made it. You have moved all of 10 feet of distance and yet, it's the thrill of victory.

Now, the galley poses its own set of challenges. It is the rockiest room on the boat and stuff is sliding everywhere. For this example, let's make dinner a simple dish- say spaghetti in a bowl. You have to get a bowl (and you are praying the cook put enough bowls on the table so you don't have to cross the 5 foot of galley floor to find one). With one hand holding the table to balance yourself - you grab the bowl. Instant problem, you

have to let go of the table to scoop your spaghetti and sauce. That means balancing in the rockiest part of the boat with just your legs and core muscles. You serve the spaghetti. You add the sauce. Still on your feet? Lucky.

Next problem - you want a drink. But, you now have a bowl a spaghetti to hold on to. The fridge is 4 feet away, which seems ridiculously far and it takes two hands to get the fridge open and the drink out. Time to strategize on the spaghetti bowl. You look around the room and find some corner to wedge your spaghetti bowl. Phew, you have it stuck down. Wham! A swell hits and you go skittering across the room grasping for a hold and shuffling your feet to the 'I have sea legs' version of the chicken dance! Still on your feet? Lucky. Time for juice.

You open the fridge. Grab the juice. Wave hits. Chicken dance across the room. You grab a cup. Wave hits. Dance a jig to the counter over the fridge. Uh oh. Gotta POUR the juice. You evaluate your thirst. Do I really want a drink?

Ok. You do. This time. While swaying with the boat, you carefully aim and pour the juice. Spill any? Quickly you wedge your glass somewhere. Wham! wave hits you go skittering across the room. You put away the juice. Close the fridge. Victory! Dinner is in the bowl! Sigh a sense of relief and accomplishment. You're almost there!

Or are you???!!! You lift your bowl and cup and realize you now have to ascend the 5 bobbing stairs back into the salon. With no hands! With stuff to spill in each hand! Your crew mates- the ones who so kindly judged your performance on your way down- their eyes are wide with fear for they know that any failed attempt on your part means you and/or your food falls all over them.

They cringe in fear. You hold your breath. You step onto the first stair and then as fast as you ever have moved you ascend the other four stairs and then in one continuous motion propel yourself down the 5 foot narrow path, around the 90 degree turn, across the three feet of floor, and spin into your seat, while simultaneously setting your food on the table. Then you breathe. You made it! You can eat! Your crewmates stare in disbelief and marvel with relief that neither you nor your food landed on them. Only problem... your forgot your fork!

I have experienced this dance time and time again. I've been part of the spectator crew panel and I have been the primary performer. It is a true sea experience. Amusing and exhausting. It just a small taste of life in the swells.

Of course using the bathroom and sleeping- they require entirely different strategies on days like these.

Ultimately, the water calmed down and the weather cleared. At 2 pm, I had Johnny restart whale watches. By 4 pm, we had biopsied two whales and work was back to normal. We ended the day with three biopsies, jellyfish samples and lots of tired smiles.

Pictures of the sunset (closest we got to one) and the team collecting jellies attached.

John

P.S. We are on the Gulf off of Louisiana. Our current location is 28 degrees 50.9 minutes North and 88 degrees 33.8 minutes West, for those who want to track us as we go. For Google maps (not Google Earth – but maps) or Bing maps use (include letters and comma): 28.509 N, 88.338 W

For those of you who are new to this email diary - the previous days can be found at: <https://cms.usm.maine.edu/toxicology/dr-wises-voyage-leg-summaries-2011>



