



Foreword :

In my attempt to sail non-stop from Saint-Malo in France, around the world to Gaspé, in Québec some 30 years ago, I had pulled the engine out of *Jean-du-Sud*. I sailed without an engine for the following 14 years and I re-powered gradually : for moving through calms and entering harbours, I fabricated a support on the port quarter, which pivots to drop a 9.9 hp outboard into water or up and out of it when sailing. Naturally, this is not enough power to move against an established head wind, so I sail more. I have never been tempted to drop a diesel back into the boat. I preferred to locate the real engine of *Jean-du-Sud* in a vehicle, with the boat behind, on a trailer.

For me, the Alberg 30 is the perfect boat : big enough to sail through the Roaring Forties, but small enough to move over the road at 50 knots towards the body of water chosen for the season.

Succinct account of the recent cruise of *Alberg 30* *Jean-du-Sud*.

Chesapeake

On Sept. 28 2015, *Jean-du-Sud* left Oka on its trailer, hauled by the CapHorn Suburban. One thousand kilometres down the road, it hit water in Galesville MD, south of Annapolis, very close to the house of a long time friend, Doug Wintermute, conveniently close to water, where we could step ashore with the dinghy and park the truck and trailer for a few weeks.

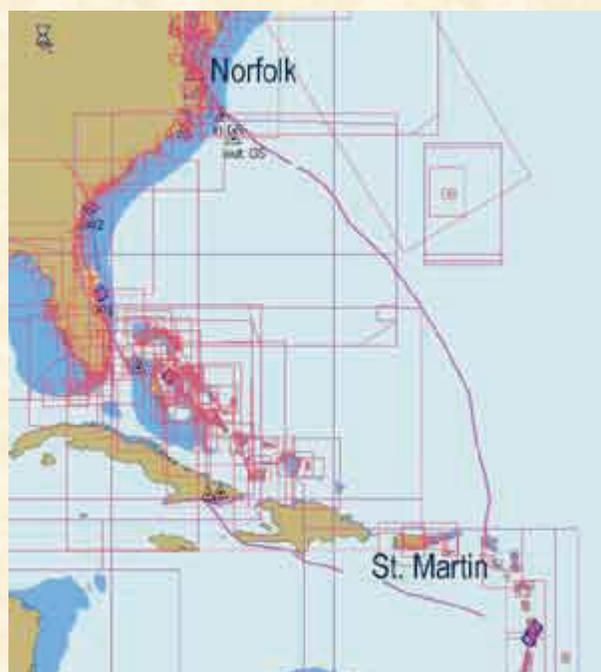
Keven Grondin, 24, had been dreaming of an ocean passage for the past 4 years when he heard about my project of sailing South, he asked if I needed a crew. Without really knowing him, I answered Sure! I discovered later that he was an authentic sailor and found in him a spiritual son, as he was as crazy about ocean sailing as I can be. We sailed very harmoniously these past 6 months.

At the Annapolis Sailboat Show, we met Andy Schell and Mia Karlsson, organizers of the Carib 1500 rally (we already knew each other, Andy had installed a CapeHorn gear 6 years ago on his earlier boat *Arcturus*, then they both sailed it to Sweden, where they got married). They invited us to join their fleet that sailed from Portsmouth VA to the BVI or the Bahamas in the first days of November ; we gladly accepted the invitation. I acquired a few additional notions in the seminars during the week preceding departure, I was invited to project my film in the local cinema, and we met beautiful people in the other crews. I discovered that Andy did as good a job as rally organizer during the day, as animator of the crew parties in the evening. The whole event went very smoothly.

Passage

Adverse weather forced to postpone the departure a few days. At dawn on Nov. 11, some 30 boats left Portsmouth and by mid-morning, were past the Chesapeake tunnel-bridge. During the first two days, we had already been forced down to two reefs. We had also discovered that the outboard motor, mounted on the port quarter, would no longer start. But more important, Keven noticed that more than half the slides fastening the luff of the genoa to the groove in the furler foil were broken and that two sections of the foil had come apart, preventing the swivel to slide down: we had to climb up the mast to disconnect the halyard above the swivel. Even if ratlines in the lower shrouds and steps above the spreaders make going aloft easier, I was glad that Keven could do it in my place.

Had *Jean-du-Sud* been rigged like all others, those two failures, no motor and no fore sail, would have forced us back. But it is not rigged like all others: it has two parallel headstays: to port is a furler with the small genoa; the large genoa, which remains furled under the top lifeline, is hanked on the starboard stay. So we were able to remove the small genoa from the furler on the port stay, and hank it on the starboard stay, using nylon tie-wraps. We could not reef the sail and could no longer use the large genoa, kept prisoner below, but there was always more wind than needed and never missed it. The gap between small genoa and storm jib (on a removable inner forestay) was a bit large, we were occasionally over or under canvassed, but at least we kept sailing.



El Niño in the Pacific also affected weather in the Atlantic and the passage was rough; we sailed with three reefs and storm jib for more than half the passage. Other rally boats landed in the BVI, but we headed a bit further east and landed in St. Maarten 12 days and a half later leaving the Chesapeake.

St. Maarten - Union

We did not succeed in getting the outboard motor fixed in St. Maarten. We sailed on to St Barth, then Guadeloupe. The trade was still strong and south of east; we were close to the wind and had to tack to windward a few times to make it into harbours.

While anchoring at the diving reserve of Malendure, on the west coast of Guadeloupe (still without engine), we suddenly lost the wind and *Jean-du-Sud* drifted close to another boat at anchor. Keven reached forward to fend us off, but the tip of his right thumb got caught between our pulpit and the rail of the other boat, and was severed. Once the anchor down, I rushed him ashore where, fortunately, a taxi was waiting. He ended up spending 4 days at hospital in Basse-Terre, where he had his thumb operated on and stitched. He lost almost half a centimetre of his right thumb.

We learned that the problem with the motor was due to some stripped screws in the carburetor, which could no longer be adjusted, and it needed to be replaced. There was no Honda dealer on the island, and it would be both expensive and lengthy to have parts sent from abroad. I was due to fly back home for Christmas so would bring back the needed parts. We moored *Jean-du-Sud* on two anchors at the entrance of marina Bas du Fort in Pointe à Pitre and I flew home Dec. 20. Keven spent three weeks on the boat at anchor, so as a Christmas present, his Spanish-Basque girlfriend Ainoha flew in via Paris to keep him company.

On the afternoon of my return, Jan. 10, the new carburetor was installed and the motor was running.

Ainoha was still with us, she would fly back home later from Martinique. After spending nearly a month at anchor, everyone was anxious to get moving again so we sailed to the Saintes on the afternoon of the following day, then to Dominique and Martinique.

I noticed that Martinique has changed considerably since my last visit, some 40 years earlier. The gathering place for yachts used to be Fort de France, and Anse Mitan, across the bay. The huge marina of Le Marin where every yacht now congregates, did not exist. Thousands of them are now moored or anchored in this hurricane hole, most of them sailing actively, others growing barnacles, some are wrecks, half sunk, but still on a mooring.

Fortunately, the Anses d'Arlets were as pretty as they used to be and after seeing the other lovely anchorages on the leeward coast, we wanted a glimpse of its windward coast, said to be beautiful, but almost deserted on account of the windward work needed to get to it.



From Sainte-Anne, we sailed 10 miles to windward around the southern tip of Martinique until we reached Baie des Anglais, on the windward coast, where we found shelter for the night. The next day, we had to beat an other 8 miles until we reached Passe du Vauquelin and sheltered water. The fringing reef is not continuous, and to reach some anchorages, sometimes received the full force of the trade. I realized that I may have been tempting fate by playing to windward of reefs with a boat powered only with a small outboard on the port quarter...

We nonetheless spent a week on this coast and enjoyed beautiful anchorages, the pearl being Ilet Thiery, where to the east of us, was Africa, a reef being the only barrier to windward. I had never seen so many hues of blue and for someone who loves this color, I was well served.

Ainoha flew back home from Martinique and we headed for the Grenadines. We sailed south as far as Union Island, where we spent a few days in the beautiful anchorage of Tyrell Bay.

We were back in Martinique and we still had time before turning North, Keven suggested we come back via Cuba, as Santiago was only 1000 miles downwind, an easy sail in the trades. I countered that the problem was not getting there, it would be in coming back : we did not have time to sail west about around the island, we would have to beat 100 miles in the so called windward passage, against wind and current. Our 9.9 hp outboard on the quarter would be useless against a trade wind; furthermore, gentlemen don't go to windward! He replied all we needed to do was to wait for a lull in the trade. In March, they become more frequent. As I was also interested in Cuba, I gave up and on March 3, we left Martinique, and headed due west. We shipped a third crew member, Gwen, Kevin's friend from Brittany, this would be her first ocean passage.

Before we left, sure of his competence and so that he would himself becomes aware of it, I had asked Keven to act as the skipper of my boat; from now on, I would be only crew. He would make all the important decisions regarding the navigation and the sailing.

Five days into the passage, the North-east trade wind suddenly picked up strength and made us gradually shorten sail to third reef and storm jib. It became a whole gale and we spent a night lying a-hull under bare poles. Three days, of getting slapped, shaken and drenched. To rest and refit, we decided to stop at Ile à Vache, off the south coast of Haiti, 150 miles downwind.



Île à Vache

Jimmy Cornell's *World Cruising Destinations* mentioned a marina with docks, moorings, power, water and even washing machines or Wifi in a village called Port Morgan on the south coast of the island. The general chart we had showed no such place, the south coast was almost straight, without any bay or cove and we sailed along it at a prudent distance ; after 6 miles, it turned north-west and there were two coves in which... But no. We had to sail around the north tip of the island to find a bay with a pretty basin, shown on the chart as being 2 meters deep, but in fact as much as 7 meters, where 5 sailboats were already at anchor (one with a CapeHorn on the stern!), where we also anchored. Two boats arrived after us the same day, one with a blown genoa and broken gooseneck, the other had been knocked down, suffered a blown hatch, and lost solar panels and dinghy. This demonstrated the violence of this gale which *Jean-du-Sud* weathered without damage. I noted that Keven was more prudent than I would have been in the amount of sail to be carried; I would probably have shortened sail later or shaken reefs earlier, but it is better this way.

As soon as *Jean-du-Sud* entered the bay, we were assailed by a number of "boat boys" of all ages, coming on a variety of crafts they had to keep bailing, propelled by anything that would do the job, board, stick or even the stem of a coconut palm. They offered a visit of the island, inquired if we had work for them, asked if we had any old sail or line for their father who is a fisherman, or milk for their mother who has a baby, or a cookie... They clutched the lifeline until we gave away. However, they were very polite; the conversation invariably began with "What is your name ? Mine is Wenson, or Bélizair. If you want, I can write it for you on a paper...

We had planned to eat ashore that same evening, so we landed at the hotel (its owners were going to build the marina, but were prevented by the locals, who wanted to keep earning from incoming yachts). It was closed; however, the kitchen could serve us dinner for US\$35 each. There was no Wifi either. Ashley, the first boat boy to reach us, and whom we adopted for the rest of our stay, had mentioned a lady down the road who served some food. After walking a few hundred meters, we arrived at a clearing lit by a dim lamp post ; two fires burned directly on the ground; a few pots and pans on a table, with bags of vegetables and cans of oil or water. Four posts were planted into the ground and linked at the top with a 2 X 4, forming two benches at right angles. The only table was for preparing food, ingredients, pots and pans. We could have chicken for \$10 each. But Ashley had said that we would pay around \$3! We realized, the dollars were not US, but Haitian dollars (it seems that they no longer say Gourde). Having no local money, we agreed on 3 euros each. Did we want our chicken fried or boiled? Fried! We were served a fried drumstick, with plantain and sweet potato, also fried, with some cole-slaw, which we ate with our fingers, paper plate in the other hand, sitting on the benches. Quite tasty, nevertheless.



The following morning, Keven and Gwen took the boat to Les Cailles, on the “continent”, some 7 miles away, where Ashley said there was a supermarket. 25 people in a 20 ft open boat powered with an outboard, sprayed on during 45 minutes, covered with a too short tarp. Once there, no supermarket, only a public market; they came back in the afternoon with only a few local vegetables. Even finding toilet paper was difficult.

A middle-aged couple in an open canoe came alongside; he introduced himself as Doudou, she, Vilna. They offered a Creole dinner at their place, about 20 minutes walking distance. I accepted for that evening, subject to confirmation after the return of the other two. Some time later, Doudou came back to show the few fish he just purchased from a fisherman and which Vilna would serve in the evening. As soon as Keven and Gwen came back, we confirmed and agreed on the price, \$10. per person. Doudou would meet for us at the dinghy landing at 1730 to guide us to his place.

We met him at set time. During the half-hour walk to his place, we learned that that his real name is Alexandre-Salomon, but he is better known as Doudou; together with Vilna, they have four daughters; that two thousand people live on the Ile à Vache and are called Lavachois and Lavachaises (Lavachwaz in Creole), that ex-president Martelli was appreciated, that an “international” airport would be built on the island...

Dinner was ready when we arrived, but first, Vilna wanted to show her house: a dining-living room in front, followed by three bedrooms with two beds each. A number of girls chatted and giggled around us, some were their daughters, the others their grand-daughters, their eldest being 23.

This time, we ate at a table; each of us had a plate and a soup spoon. Fried fish, mango puree, rice with beans. The food was good and we ate our stomachs content. There was no public electricity on the island, we were lit with a few Leds recharged in sunlight. Doudou owned a solar panel, but no battery. When he had come to offer the dinner, he had timidly asked if I had a battery and I had given him a few flashlight batteries. I understand now that he meant a 12 v battery.

Keven had agreed with Ashley that with his pal Jasmin, they would pick us up at Doudou’s place with their motorcycles at 1900 to take us into “town” to drink a few beers and dance. Keven and Gwen on Ashley’s bike, I on Jasmin’s, riding on a path all in holes and bumps, more like a bike trail than a road. As a matter of fact, there are no cars on the island, as there are no roads. The only car is the police’s. Half an hour later, we arrived into “town”, but we had to believe our guides, as we could not see any light that would reveal a city. A small generator purred on the porch of a place called “Amical Bar” to illuminate the place and power a sound system that blasted Haitian music. The place was almost empty when we arrived, but filled up as the evening advanced. We hung around two hours, drank a few beers, but no one danced. After an other half hour beating our behind on the trail, the two bikes brought us back to the dinghy.



We kept ourselves busy with various jobs on the boat the next day, but at the end of the afternoon, Ashley guided us in a visit of his village. The ground was swept clean, there were no dead leaves, and the houses were prettily painted. The wooden fishing boats we could see on the beach were built without power tools.

We came back next morning to take some photos. It was Sunday and people wore their best clothes. A lady in an elegant suit walked on the dirt road in high heels. Two religious services were held simultaneously; we could hear the hymns of one and the preacher of the other. The visit of the village ended at the bakery, where we got some small loaves as they came out of the oven, then we picked up our anchor and left for Cuba.

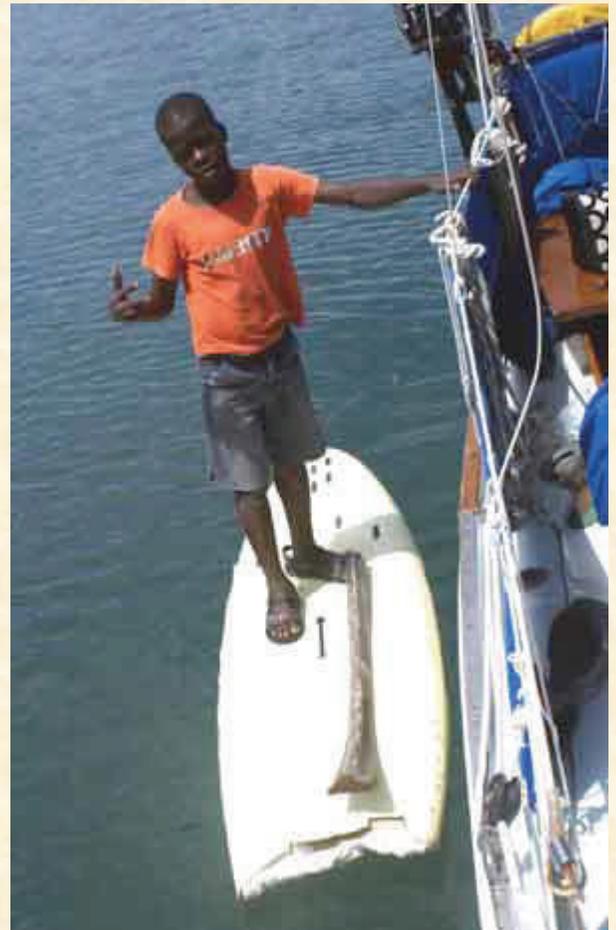
Cuba

We entered the great bay of Santiago on the east coast of Cuba on the morning of the third day. Over the VHF, the port authority directed us to an anchorage some distance from the marina, where we were ordered to wait for the sanitary inspection. We had to wait until mid-afternoon, it seemed that the port doctor was held on a cruise ship.

His name was Luis and he was extremely surprised when I told him that the "capitan" was not me, the eldest, but Keven, the youngest. Luis took our temperature, in order to ensure we are healthy; he then requested our medical insurance certificates. A full hour later, we received permission to land at the marina, where we still had to present our passports at immigration, then at customs, answer questions such as "Are you carrying meat, fruit, vegetables, weapons...?" Finally, three agents and a dog came aboard to sniff the boat. The complete procedure took two more hours.

Cubans are very welcoming and I learned that Kevin's charm worked once again : doctor Luis invited us for dinner the next evening at his home, in company of the couple on the boat that had arrived before us.

The marina is made of a U-shaped concrete dock, alongside which about 10 boats can moor, at the cost of some \$12 a day. The town of Santiago is 7 km farther up the bay, and we were not allowed to anchor in front of the town; We had to go by taxi (\$10.); buses are unpredictable, but fortunately, there is a boat that runs 3 times a day for \$1. We took the boat the next day to go provisioning, there was nothing left to eat aboard, as there was nothing to purchase in Haiti.



Santiago is noisy and not especially interesting. It is the second-largest city in Cuba after Havana. As we came off the boat, we were assailed by people offering taxi, guide, etc. We found an ATM that distributed convertible pesos called CUC, which the tourist use to pay, locals paying with ordinary pesos (1 CUC = US\$1, 24 pesos to 1 CUC). Internet and phone cards could be purchased in an office in front of the square facing the only Wifi hotspot in Santiago. 2 CUC for one hour of internet connection, 5 CUC for 3 minutes on the phone abroad. Acquiring those cards almost took the whole afternoon; we had to line up at the door of the office, which admitted one tourist at a time, for an attendant to note his passport number, as well as the number of the card; she took her time, she was not paid by the number of cards she sold. At the end of the day, it is frequent that the office runs out of cards, so one has to come back the following day.

Card in hand, we headed for the terrace of Hotel Casa Granda. Even though the hotspot covers the whole square, there is no shade and one prefers to download mail in front of a beer, disconnect while reading and writing the answers, and reconnect to send them. Mail seemed to work ok, but many sites such as some newspapers were blocked. Naturally, there was no e-mail exchange with USA.

Our mail answered, we tried to purchase a few bottles for the evening at Doctor Luis, but many stores were closed on account of a "fumigacion" that is supposed to kill parasites, as there were a few cases of malign fever. We finally laid our hand on a few bottles of beer and wine for the evening, and a few fruit and a loaf for tomorrow's breakfast.

I believed that this invitation to Doctor Luis' was due to Keven's charm and his command of Spanish. I was wrong. On the boat that had arrived ahead of us, were two musicians from Brittany, Titou and Cathy. Titou played piano and Cathy accompanied him on percussion. Doctor Luis was a fan of music and had invited them when he visited their boat before ours, asking Titou to bring along his electronic piano. Ileana, Luis' musician cousin was also invited.

Ileana sang accompanying herself on the guitar, then it was Titou on piano and Cathy on percussion, then the three together. All evening, we heard music from Cuba, but also south-America, Spain... all kinds of music.

Keven requested music from Silvio Rodriguez, his favourite Cuban singer and the conversation suddenly became political : Rodriguez sings about the Cuban revolution, but also denounces its mistakes, such as sending poets, homosexuals or other marginal people in re-education camps. My command of Spanish allowed me to approximately follow the lively conversation, and whenever it was possible, Keven, gave me a few explanations. The evening ended towards 2300, the trip back to the marina being aboard a 50 year-old Russian taxi with an amply patched body and leaking muffler. I will never know if the many bumps we felt were due to worn shock absorbers or to the bumps along the road.



We had planned to ride the 1000 km to Havana aboard a night train. But it seemed that this train is not reliable and breaks down often. Flying being too expensive for us, the bus was the only alternative. But buses leave only when they are full and stop often. I knew I would find no pleasure in cooking in a bus stopped under the sun, then in being shaken during a thousand kilometres. A few walks in Santiago those last days had made me realize that at 77, I no longer had the energy to spend days walking under the sun in noise and pollution. I preferred to let Keven and Gwen, who really wanted to see Havana, go there without me, I would wait for him here. Keven would be back after a week, while Gwen would fly home from there.



The marina is the only place where a boat can be left in Santiago. Anchoring out is only allowed when all the docks at the marina are full. Fortunately, this was the case, more sailboats having arrived in the past days, and I got permission to anchor out. But cruising the bay is out of the question: I anchored a little too far from the marina and the harbour master ordered me closer, I had to remain within sight.



Lela, Titou and Cathy's boat was also at anchor. Titou landed Cathy in the dinghy at the dock of the Santiago boat, some 100 m from the marina. The harbor master told him that the only place one is allowed to land with a dinghy is at the marina. If you want to go the bar across the bay, you have to land at the marina and walk around. Titou also allowed some youths, who had swam from the nearby beach, to rest on the stern platform of his boat and allowed others to play with his dinghy. The harbor master threatened to fine him if he did it again.



There is no dinghy dock. You land at the main dock, the bottom of its concrete slab being level with the freeboard of the dinghy, which will drift under it at low tide if you have not dropped a grapnel to keep it off. There is no cleat for the dinghy painter, you have to tie it to a bolt sticking out or to another boat.

Among the boats at the marina was the Swiss flag flying *Maranatha*, an aluminum 35 ft power boat which its owner, Ernst, built himself. He was waiting for a part for his engine, which was coming from Germany. To kill time, he rented a scooter for a week and took me on a visit of the surrounding countryside. It was very pretty, we saw many animals, elegant and well kept villages, and grandiose landscape with 1000 + m. Sierra Maestra summits in the background. After the ride, I was invited for dinner aboard his boat to sample the excellent cuisine of his wife Patricia, which marked a welcome change with what is found in Cuban restaurants, where one has a choice between a slice of chicken or pork, both rubbery, or fish, everything fried the same way. Françoise and Francis, from *Mikado III*, a Canadian boat that had arrived the previous evening, were invited to join us for Patricia's fruit pie. They had been sailing around Cuba since the beginning of the season and said that restrictions are the same everywhere, except in deserted islands, where one can come ashore without being suspected of taking aboard a runaway.

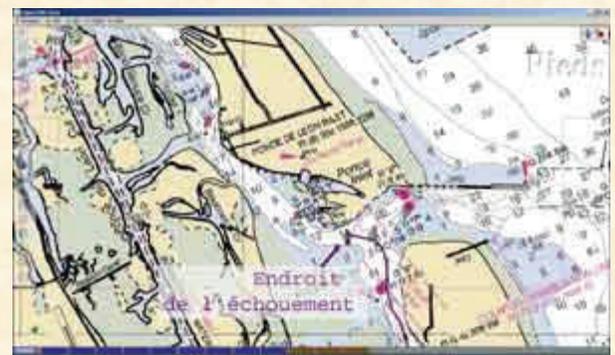
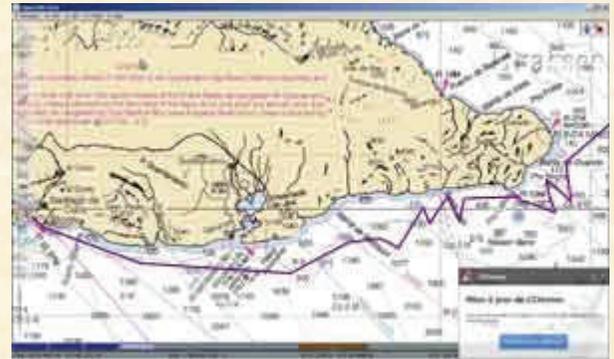


Music is omnipresent. A bar across the bay played music all day, at full blast; in general, it is rather rhythmic, but that morning, we could hear a powerful tenor voice singing what sounded like bel canto. Radio Musical National broadcasts an excellent selection of classical music which I listened to when I was belowdecks. Titou paid a local musician to teach him the secrets of Cuban music.

Gentlemen to Windward

Keven came back as planned, one week later. From Santiago, we had 100 miles to sail directly to windward and against current. We had to pass at least 5 miles off Guantanamo Bay, forbidden by the US Army; there are two smaller harbors on both sides and they are also forbidden, this time by the Cuban army. The first possible shelter was 65 miles to windward, a bay offering excellent protection, but where we would not be allowed ashore. A lull in the trade wind was forecast for the following days, so we decided to leave the next day. We went into town in the morning for provisions and to download the most recent forecast, and pulled anchor at the end of afternoon. The trade was kind enough to blow from SE at 10 kts, offering us a close reach, but it dropped at night, as expected. After 65 miles under power, the wind came back from NE, right on the nose, and earlier than forecast. We needed a whole other day to sail the last 40 miles against wind and current before we could head North towards Great Inagua Island, in the Bahamas, two and a half days later. Would we be able to head North to sail the 800 miles to Beaufort or Norfolk? No, the weather was still unstable farther North, so we sailed through the Bahamas with a single two-day stop in Nassau to let a small gale blow by, then towards Florida and the Inland Waterway. We would go offshore when the weather would become favorable.

In fact, we never sailed offshore. We had planned to do it from Ponce Inlet, North of Cape Canaveral, but as we got there, while we were still inside the waterway, we went aground on a sand bank, immediately in front of the inlet. This bank was probably formed in a recent gale and was not signaled on our 2014 electronic charts or marked by buoys. Under the effect of the strong wind and swell coming in through the inlet directly to windward, the boat kept pounding. We heeled 45 degrees, the wind and swell pushing us farther on the bank. A Sea Tow boat showed up, but could not help us, we had to wait for an other boat which would be there half an hour later. We were heeled to port and I tried to use the outboard mounted on this side, but it was useless, the keel was planted on the bottom and the engine almost got drowned on account of the heel. The swell coming in through the inlet directly to windward pounded continuously and prevented using the dinghy to set an anchor. During two full hours, the banging of the keel on the bottom shook the whole rigging and we were drenched by spray. A sea bigger than others suddenly heeled the boat on the other side and the engine became useless. The tide was still rising and we were finally able to use the sails to get off and reach deeper water, where we dropped anchor to ensure the outboard engine, which had been drenched many times, still worked, which it did, and we came to anchor among other sailboats.



This nightmare was the worst of my whole sailing career. I was already tired by the long sail from Cuba and this grounding marked the end of this year's cruise. I flew home to get the truck and trailer and haul *Jean-du-Sud* back to Oka on the road.

Even if the combined weight of the boat and the trailer exceed the limit that my Suburban can tow, I had previously hauled it many times over more than a thousand kilometers between Oka and Halifax or Annapolis. But this time, I was a little worried: it would be more than twice the distance, 2300 km. Before leaving Oka, I asked my mechanic to inspect both Suburban and trailer to prevent any failure. There was a lot to do and his invoice was not inconsequential, but it was worth it: we brought *Jean-du-Sud* back in two days, arriving in Oka April 24, 2016, without any mishap.

