

Adventures of s/v Octavia, Part 2, Derek Elliott

12/17/11 Sunday

Boarded the bus to Puerto Vallarta airport from La Cruz at 9:30am. I traveled with two women cruisers from the marina (Christine & ????) They were going into PV for a day's shopping. Apparently they have a Costco, Kmart, Home Depot & a few other mega US stores in town. I alighted from the bus at the airport straight onto a 1' thick dividing wall, jumped down about three feet & was in the airport. Christ knows how old or infirm passengers get into the airport. Tried to find out about my Tijuana-San Diego shuttle ticket snafu but was told to sort it out in Tijuana. Went to security in the airport as I wanted to carry on my luggage & knew I'd have a problem with the Wind generator controller & WinchMate electric winch handle. They took me into a side room. I explained what they were for; luckily I had bought the manuals with me. Once satisfied they weren't bombs they walked me to the head of the queue & motioned that I was OK to the security guards on the scanners. They put my stuff through the scanner anyway & lo & behold I had one of those multipurpose tools with pliers, screwdrivers, files, knife blades on it, prompting them to demand I unpack everything. They would not let me take the tool on as carry-on, I didn't want to give it up, so I had to put that bag through as baggage which meant I had to start the ticketing process all over again, starting at the ticket counter. Luckily I'd allowed plenty of time to board the flight. Packing everything back into the bag was embarrassing as I'd had to remove my belt & having lost at least 40lb I could not keep my trousers up without holding onto them. I'm groveling about on the floor trying to keep my dignity & pack everything back into the bag with one hand while three security guards watched my every move. Once suitably dressed & bag packed again, I was unceremoniously ejected from the security area to start the process all over again. I tend to think rules & regulations are put in place to discourage dishonest & extremists & maybe also the people of below average intelligence. Then why do I keep fucking up? I'm not really asking you the question, as I know the reply, but it does piss me off when this shit happens to me.

One interesting thing I've noticed about the Mexicans since being here & it's very obvious as I sit here in the airport (still 45mins before we board) is the women are mostly well dressed & the more affluent are even shall we say flashy & rather provocative, especially the younger ones, with obvious pride in showing their fine bodies. The guys on the other hand are very sedate, in fact drab, boring & usually overweight. You'd think that with such a macho culture it would be the other way around.

Arrived in Tijuana airport @ 3:30pm local time & the fun began. Tried talking to the supervisor at the bus shuttle booth in the airport about my ticket dilemma, didn't get anywhere with him, in fact I think he got a bit nasty in Spanish. Next I tried the Volaris Airline Customer Service booth. He said it

was obviously the fault of the shuttle bus people & sent me to the ticketing office for the shuttle busses. No one there spoke any English except for one of the young tellers, so I stuck to her like a limpet, until her boss told her to attend to other customers, while he tried to pacify me. He kept on showing me lists that didn't have my name on them. He then wrote something in Spanish on a piece of paper to take to the Volaris guy. The Volaris guy then wrote something underneath the Shuttle guy's message & sent me back to him. By now I'm starving, it's about 5pm, I've already missed the 4:30 shuttle I should have been on, so I stopped into a Taco booth for a taco, beer & lick my wounds. I realized I wasn't getting anywhere & for the \$14 fare that had been stolen by the shuttle people it just wasn't worth wasting any more time. Sandi was waiting for me in San Diego to take me to a party. So fuck it, I'll bite the bullet & buy another bloody ticket. Eventually got to the party in San Diego about 10pm.

Next day I flew to Oakland having missed my San Francisco flight due to USA paranoid, artificial airport security. I'm bloody sure that if I wanted to blow up a fucking plane I wouldn't offer myself & baggage to security before getting into the security line. I even left my dastardly multipurpose assassins tool with Sandi to pick up on my way back into Mexico. With all these religious, righteous, arseholes on the loose, I'm thankful for passenger/baggage scrutiny. But let's do it intelligently & in a meaningful way. We have the technology to scan humans thoroughly & with no health risk. If a stranger looking at parts of your body where you could possibly conceal something that could bring down a plane hurts your sensibilities, I'm sorry, but the alternative is an asinine system that does not make me feel any safer. You can always go by bus - I happen to know a good Mexican bus service I could recommend.

Anyway, hope you all had as good a Christmas & New Year as I did. It was really good to meet up with old friends again. We had a lovely Christmas dinner at Jim & Liz's. It's a funny thing with old friends. The first few minutes of meeting are generally spent glossing over what went on since the last meeting, then the conversation continues as if you have never been apart.

1/7/12 Saturday

Arrived back at the boat in La Cruz Marina about 7:30 pm local time. Uneventful journey down. I left a fan running on the boat to keep it aired but due to 140 Volts of electricity coursing through it for a month it burnt out. Otherwise all was as I left it.

1/8/12 Sunday.

Got up late & missed the Sunday Farmers/Arts/Crafts fare. Went into La Cruz for basic supplies, as John will take me to the Mega store on Tuesday to stock up properly. John is the only one left in this side of the marina; all the others

that were here when I left are now out in the anchorage or moved on to greener pastures.

1/9/12 Monday

Paid for another three nights at the marina, as I need to rub the outside woodwork down using electric grinders & sanders. More convenient using the Marina electricity than producing my own by running the engine. The WinchMate electric windlass that failed was replaced by the manufacturer & returned to me well before I left the States. On the other hand the SunForce wind generator that I need to produce some electricity while on the hook was a complete PR., CS., disaster. They admitted it was defective & not putting out the advertised wattage. When I told them I needed it back in San Francisco before I departed for Mexico they said they would send it 3-day air if I'd pay the \$130 otherwise they'd get it to me as soon as possible. It still hadn't arrived when I left & looking at the tracking stats it actually sat in Syracuse, NY for 3-4 days.

Started rubbing down the old peeling teak varnish on the woodwork. To replace the varnish on the teak I need to remove the old peeling stuff down to bare wood. This is something frowned upon in the USA unless you can capture the sawdust & old varnish, but here no one seems to mind. I know I shouldn't do it, just because I can doesn't mean to say I should. The same as buying cheap Chinese or Indian or any foreign inexpensive goods, I know I shouldn't, as they are using tactics we outlawed as barbaric & cruel years ago. If they are bad for us they are bad for them. I would like to be a better humanitarian & not such a hypocrite, but unfortunately greed rules me.

Because the zinc on my shaft had been used up (sounds like a medical problem) I made a makeshift sacrificial zinc by attaching a piece of zinc to a wire that I attached to the shaft, then hung it outside the boat in the water. The theory being any stray current would not attack the shaft but would eat the less noble (softer) zinc. Rubbing down the teak with the electric sander I accidentally caught the wire from this contraption in the DC plug connector, a billion to one accident. This caused the wire to be energized, burning a groove in the porthole where it exited the boat & went into the water. Luckily it shorted & blew the breaker thus the whole fucking boat didn't catch fire. I wondered what was causing the funny smell.

1/14/12 Saturday

Finally finished rubbing down the woodwork, changed the oil in the engine, washed the boat down, filled the water tanks & completed the myriad jobs necessary for me to leave the marina & go back out on the hook. Last job was to fill the fuel tank with diesel. Stopped off at the Marina gas dock as I was leaving & as I was filling the tank one of the marina security guys came over & said I couldn't leave, as I hadn't settled the bill. I told him I was leaving & would be back later in the dinghy to settle my bill & return the key

as I'd be back to visit the local festival being put on in the marina by the local businesses. I needed to get away quickly as I wanted to find a good place while still light to anchor, where I could get an Internet connection. Apparently that wasn't good enough; they wanted me to settle before leaving. Fair enough, even though no one else could get to the fuel dock while Octavia was sitting there. I quickly pumped up the tires on my bike, pounced on it & promptly went arse over tit right there on the dock. The bloody chain had rusted. Eventually able to get to the harbormasters office using one gear all the way. Once at the office we had a real barney, as they wanted \$90. I was expecting to pay \$40. Eventually paid them the \$90 for expediency, but told them I'd be back after looking over their math.

Could not anchor were I originally anchored as there was now over 50 boats in the anchorage, whereas there were less than twenty when I first anchored here. Anchored in 20' water, put out 150' chain. Dinghy'd back to the marina for the festival, nice but crowded. Dinghy'd over to John's berth to see if he wanted to go for dinner. He didn't but lent me his key to get back onto the dock & my dinghy. Had a couple of tacos & a refreshing rice drink (not sake) 30pesos (less than \$3). It was pitch black, when I got back to Octavia, had a problem finding her in the dark amongst so many boats. Tried to get onto the Internet, real spotty. I'll try again tomorrow. Had to phone Cissy using the satellite phone. Not nearly as intimate as Skype that utilizes video as well as voice.

1/15/12 Sunday

Got up early as I needed to wipe the salt spray off the windows & first thing in the morning the dew covers everything making it easier to wipe down without using my precious fresh water. Yesterday when I left the marina for the anchorage I drove the boat at maximum revs, 3,900 to 4,000 RPM's for about 15 minutes & hitting the waves at 8knots drove spray all over me & my nice clean windows. I did this because sailing & motoring all the way down from San Francisco, basically for the past four months, a lot of mileage had been put on the engine & mostly at low RPM's, anything from 1,100 to max 2,000RPM. Also, whenever at anchor & I need to recharge the batteries the engine is run for 2-3 hours at less than 1,000RPM. I think I may have hit 2,500RPM at one time when I ran for cover in Marina del Rey. All this low RPM usage has probably caused a buildup of exhaust crud in the exhaust hoses & I wanted to burn some of it off. Michael, maybe you can tell me if this works or is it one of the many wives tales I live by?

1/17 Monday

Dinghy'd over to the La Cruz Harbormasters office to apologies, I did owe them the \$90 they quoted & not the \$40 I argued so adamantly about. I might be wrong but I'm sure.

1/18 Tuesday. Started Spanish classes at 70 pesos (\$5 a class).

1/18 to 1/19 Wednesday - Midnight, a monumental fireworks display from one of the towns along the coast. The Mexicans sure love their fireworks. I was still awake as I was cooking some beans & they took several hours longer than I thought they would to fully cook. I started cooking them in the evening as its too hot during the day. John recommends using a pressure cooker. Next time I go home I'll bring it down. It makes sense to use a pressure cooker on a boat as things cook so much quicker therefore using less propane & creating less heat.

Every morning at 8-30 the cruisers in Bandaros Bay come together on the VHF radio for a meeting. It is a place for English speaking ex-Pats/cruisers to exchange info, arrange tours, social events, news; in fact the net covers anything & everything. It's a great way to communicate & keep in touch. Whenever they spoke about buying or selling anything they mentioned coconuts. I had no idea why, so I interrupted & was told that as it was a non-profit organization & they were prohibited from using the net for business, therefore whenever a transaction was mentioned they'd say they would sell/buy for coconuts. The VHF radio is used here the same way cell phones are used on land. There are families here with kids & the radio is their means of communication. The other day a dad asked a question of his son who replied in a typical teenage nonchalant off hand way, forcing the dad to tell the kid to go to another channel, whereupon the dad promptly chastised the kid for his attitude. It was great. Exactly what would happen on land, but over the radio your dirty laundry is there for all to see (hear).

As I was unable to get a decent Internet signal where I'd anchored I decided to move closer to the marina. Upped anchor & re-anchored in 15' of water closer to the marina entrance.

1/19/12 Thursday.

John & I went into Puerto Vallarta for shopping. First we went to the Telcel telephone office, which is the equivalent of our AT&T. I needed to get something called Banda Ancha Movil. It's a device for accessing the Internet. Wherever a cell phone works this will work. The first thing they asked me for was my passport. Why would I need a bloody passport to buy what is basically a cell phone or modem? John graciously offered to take me back the next day. We then went to Costco, except for the labels being written in Spanish it was the same as the Costco I know, even the layout was the same. Problem with Costco is some stuff is in bulk, even with John & I splitting the order it would still be too much to store on a boat. Next we stopped at a large Marine chandlery, as I needed some glue for the dinghy. All that abuse the dingy took during the storms & at Avalon had separated the neoprene skin from the hull & whenever I planed (basically traveling fast enough to hydroplane) in the dinghy, water would be forced into the boat. I also filled

my propane tank. It was a year ago almost to the day that I last filled it, bet it doesn't last that long this time. I'd like to buy another tank as I can see being somewhere remote & running out.

Next day we returned with my passport. The first thing they asked for was my computer. Nope, I didn't have that with me either. Fortunately we could accomplish everything without the computer & I would hopefully finish the installation once I got back to the boat.

1/20/12 Friday. No wonder no one was anchored where I was. It was a very low tide & although my depth sounder showed 10' of water under me (I only draw 5'6") I suddenly heard a monumental crashing & grinding from the bilge, so I went over the side & dove down but couldn't see anything as the water was too murky. Coming back on board the boat I heard another muffled crunch & the boat lurched sickingly over about 30°, it all seemed unreal & bizarre. I started the engine but did not put it in gear for fear of the propeller hitting what was obviously a prominent rock or a pinnacle on the reef below the boat. I pulled the boat off the reef by pulling on the anchor chain using the windlass. Once I was sure I was clear I put the engine in gear & re-anchored a third time. This time I anchored in the middle of the fleet. I didn't need to be close to the marina now anyway as the Banda Ancha was giving me an Internet connection. Checked the bilge but thankfully Octavia has a hull that is 1.5 inches thick, allowing me to bounce off of rocks as she had just done. Should be a lot more comfortable here as I'm in 25' water & the marina traffic will not be screaming past at all hours of the day & night.

Just had lunch, the wind was probably 20 + knots when a Pan Pan distress call came over the VHF radio. A Mayday is when lives or property are in imminent danger, a Pan Pan is not so serious but is up there as a distress call & everyone with a dinghy in the water was requested to help. Apparently 'Journey', one of the boats that was anchored was drifting & as the wind was blowing on-shore she was being carried towards land through the anchored fleet. I could see her & also see the catamaran 'Elan' desperately trying to up anchor & get out of her path. 'Journey' was a large - probably 50' ketch. As I'd had a harrowing morning with the grounding it was now nice to relax. I must admit I wavered a bit about launching my dinghy & going to help as the waves were about 3' making it necessary to judge the timing to successfully launch the dinghy. Up to now I had only launched the dinghy from the davits in calm seas. Even then there were times when it was difficult. Having to judge the time to release the lines holding the dingy to Octavia, because releasing one end too soon would result in an upside down catastrophe. When the dinghy is at the top of a wave the lines are slack & tend to tangle, when the wave passes & the dinghy drops into the trough the lines suddenly become very taught, that's the time to release them so that the dinghy softly hits the water, now is the time to jump in, if you dare! The bloody thing is still jumping about like a bucking bronco & you have to time the jump so that you drop about 3 to 4 feet & not the 7 or 8 feet it can be

while in a trough. Once in you just hold on until you can get the engine going & untie the dinghy lines from Octavia. I eventually launched the dinghy & went charging off to the rescue only to find several people were already on 'Journey', had the engine going & were trying to operate the winch. Another guy in a dinghy & I just circled the boat in case we were needed, getting soaking wet in these steep nasty waves. The beauty of Paradise is that although it was windy & we were getting wet, it was not unpleasant, the water & the wind were warm. They raised the anchor & the problem was obvious straight away. When 'Journey' dropped the anchor it had gotten caught in the chain & would have just sat on the bottom, not digging in as it was supposed to. This happens if you drop your anchor & it hits the floor before the boat is moving backwards, the chain then piles up on the anchor, choking it. For the past few days 'Journey' had been kept in place only by the weight of her chain. Now the wind had picked up it wasn't sufficient. I've noticed on several occasions when I have raised my anchor that it hasn't had any mud or bottom crud on it, so I had probably been guilty of the same thing. Whenever I anchor now I let out a short amount of chain, reverse on it until the boats momentum is checked then let out the rest of the chain.

Although I am further from shore, for some reason I am getting a better Internet signal. I just Skype'd Cissy & could see & hear her perfectly, she'd just got out of the shower thus jogging this ancient mariners failing memory as to why I love this woman.

1/21/Saturday

Tried diving on the boat to clean the bottom & replace the zinc. Could not hold my breath long enough to do anything useful. So I hooked a 20' hose up to my snorkel. What a disaster. It was OK while breathing with my head at water level but when I dove down the pressure forced the water into my snorkel & I couldn't expel it from the 20' tube. I bet Jacques Cousteau had these problems in the beginning. They have contraptions called breathing hookers that allow you to breathe through a tube attached to a compressor at the surface. Think I'll look into one of those.

1/23/12 Monday.

Got up at 7:30am, although the sun wasn't quite up it was light enough to see. There is a cock crowing somewhere. All the anchored boats are facing the same way like some sort of prayer meeting with everyone facing Mecca. Sixty one boats at last count. All around is very calm, just the gentle rocking of the boat reminding me the sea is alive. A ray just glided by looking like a large bird slowly flying under water. At the end of his wings a sort of aileron sticks up & breaks the surface of the water on his upward stroke. I swear he's looking at me looking at him.

1/29/12 Sunday.

Last week I varnished the woodwork, caught two small fish. One I kept on the line for three days as live bait until something ate him & got away. He was really a survivor. So much so that I tried to let him go but he had swallowed the hook & I would have done more damage to him by removing it. Do you remember the guy in Morrow Bay on the journey down that I heard castigating his crew? He just came by in his dinghy & hailed me. Also the young Canadian couple that invited me over for dinner in Magdalena Bay came by.

I've been anchored out for two weeks now & need to take on water. I've used about 140 gallons so that's about 10 gallons a day. Christ that's a lot. I wash down & shave about every two days, timing it so that I can use the hot water produced from the engine when I charge the batteries. Although one day I forgot I was conserving water & took a shower. I contacted the net & was informed I could go into the marina & buy water for \$3 per cubic meter. Apparently that's \$3 for about 240 gallons. I'll need about 160 gallons.

I will be going back to San Francisco in March, as Cissy will be joining me for the rest of the journey. We will drive down in the Volvo, that way we can bring such stuff as a water maker & a Honda generator (so that we don't have to use the main engine to produce electricity). With these additions we should be virtually self sufficient, as long as the wind generator controller turns up. Also with a car down here it will be convenient for shopping trips & touring inland. Several cruisers have cars & catch a bus from wherever they are anchored back to the car.

It is now 6:30 pm Sunday; I just felt some rain drops on my skin. The day has been overcast & a bit muggy. I haven't felt like doing anything all day, just sitting here, eating, drinking, thinking & feeling very guilty because of all my chores. I need to finish the varnishing & today would have been a good day as it was not sunny & hot. I also need to clean the bottom & replace the zinc or at least contract with someone to come out & clean it. Tighten a couple of fan belts, change a fuel filter & clean the head hose filter, complete my Spanish homework for tomorrow, get my laundry together, etc., etc. But fuck it, I'm retired & living in Paradise, so manana.

Love

Derek

Octavia, La Cruz.