

7-12-96

Bobbi & I are at Musket Cove in Fiji preparing to sail into the Yasawa group. The Yasawas are located in northwestern Fiji. Fiji has had extreme ups & downs for Bobbi & I, we lost our dear friend Bandita and just can't seem to get over it. She was 16 years old and finally succumbed to her breast cancer. She died in our arms after a very tough month & a half of hope & despair. She was a great little cat.

We had a great sail from Tonga and really enjoyed Fiji's capital city, Suva. Suva is very "east meets west" being about half Indian & half Fijian with small numbers of Chinese and English. The city life was fun for us after the remoteness of Tonga. We were able to do long awaited repairs and reprovision supplies. Oso Bueno was the first boat to arrive in Suva after the hurricane season and the local school children were brought to King's Wharf to watch us clear in - lots of fun. The remaining Tonga boats came in within the next few days along with the hoard from New Zealand. We reconnected with scores of old friends to tell lies at the Royal Suva Yacht Club.

Tired of partying at last, we sailed for the Great Astrolabe Reef making the passage into the reef just as the wind freshened to 30 knots. No problem - we slipped in behind an island named Yaukuvalevu and found a great spot to anchor. The island was uninhabited, covered with coconut, papaya and breadfruit. We caught an amazing number of fish trolling from the dinghy. Everything was perfect. We were in this location for about ten days when we had a serious lightning storm approach us from the southwest. The intensity was amazing and we began to disconnect electrical equipment and putting it into the oven for shielding. We were struck by the first bolt at about 11pm and simply lost all electrical power. This meant flashlights only for the violence of the wind precluded kerosene lamps. I worked over the next 3-4 hours with my voltage-ohmmeter and restored power with a juryrig ground line.

The boat was torn to hell --- cushions in disarray --- cupboards open and empty. I had to get at the wires. It was a real mess! The storm was raging on. Bobbi went topside to check our position while I tried to sanitize the wiring. We were struck by a second bolt at 3 AM. The masthead VHF antenna vaporized in the explosion of light, sparks, and noise. Bobbi fell to the deck but was uninjured. I was down below and uninjured. The cat slept. This time we lost our electrical motors on both of our bilge pumps, our radar rator (on the mast) and a variety of other not-so-urgent items. We could only hang on at this point. Bobbi was sitting on the overboard bag with Bandita in her harness while I worked through systems until daybreak. The storm passed as they always do.

Daylight came and I dove on the hull to inspect the through-holes to make sure we were not holed. All was intact! Our most significant damage were the bilge pumps and the radar with the bilge pumps being critical. We had a nice sail back to Suva and were able to repair the bilge pumps within one day of our return. Friends on other boats had replacement motors. It took me two weeks to get down to just a few items in disrepair -- the radar and our VHF radio. We decided not to replace our 12 volt marine television and VCR. We then headed for the new marina at Vuda Point in western Fiji to take care of those items as it involved hours up the mast. We had a wonderful time sailing and spent a week getting there. We visited some great spots along the way. I ordered the replacement parts I needed when we arrived and installations went smoothly. The lovely restaurant "First Landing" adjacent to Vuda Point Marina held a fourth of July celebration

party which we enjoyed with other cruisers also working on their respective boat projects at the marina.

By the end of July Oso Bueno was again functional . We found ourselves sailing off to the paradise of the Yasawa Island group. We anchored first in Yalombi Bay at the southern end of Wayasewa Island. It was gorgeous. Low tide uncovered a sand bank connecting the smaller island to the larger Waya .

Visiting a village in Fiji always involves a ceremony called "savu savu". The visitor comes before the chief and presents a bundle of kava roots (a narcotic plant that Fijians grind up, add water to and drink). The chief accepts your offering, says a prayer, and grants permission to visit the village. The whole thing is really quite a genuine experience and is enjoyable.

In the morning we dinghied ashore and presented our kava to the eighty year old chief named Moses through his spokesperson and bodyguard Bill. Moses was near blind from cataracts. Bill showed us the four British military medals Moses had earned in the Solomon Island campaign during World War II. The wooden case was very worn. We were allowed to touch them. They were one of three items in his thatched one room hut. The other items were his bed - very conventional - and a wood block on the floor that he used for a pillow. Moses was asleep on the floor when we arrived with his head on the block.

The children were our escorts. The boys followed Bobbi; the girls strolled with me. My main escort was an 11 year old named Sumo and her two younger twin sisters.

Wonderful kids! They gave us the grand tour through their very traditional village. Most structures were wooden floored with woven pandanus and coconut fiber sides and thatched roofs. Women of all ages were busily weaving mats and working with the pandanus in its various stages of preparation for mat and basket making. A mob of at least a dozen kids helped us into our dinghy for the ride back to Oso Bueno.

We spent an extraordinarily rolly night at anchor in a cross swell, sometimes rolling gun'l to gun'l. Morning arrived along with my new found friend Sumo and an older brother Sam. They brought us papaya and coconut in a handmade woven carry basket as a gift, requesting from us some sugar. We had them on board the boat and gave them paperback books, magazines, sugar and fishhooks. The children said that we were invited to join in watching a "meke" that the village was putting on later that day for one of the large tourist crew ships. A "meke" is a ceremonial dance traditionally performed by Fijian men. The dance is very warlike and violent.

Unfortunately we never made it to the meke. The wind shift came just after lunch on deck and a short nap. The wind blew around 20 knots windward towards the anchorage creating quite a chop. It took us over an hour to move to comfortable protection in the lee of the island. We sailed to an anchorage at the northern end of Waya arriving there 45 minutes before dusk --- another beautiful place with a traditional village. In the morning we dinghied into the village of Nalauwaki, working our way in to the beach through reef and breakers at low tide. This chief was another great old guy who performed the sevu sevu ceremony for us accepting our gift of kava, lollypops, and books. The Fijians are wonderfully friendly, outgoing, and extending. In this village as in most of their villages a herd of children took our hands and lead us through an exploration and tour of their tribe.

Several of the children acted as guides and took us to a trail which lead over a ridge to the western side of the island.

Waya is a green island, volcanic and fertile with its own water source. Along the trail we witnessed fields of manioc, taro, and papaya. Pigs were kept penned while cows grazed free. As we descended down the ridge we came upon a small resort named "Octopus" run by an Austrian couple named Ingrid and Wolfgang. The resort was beautifully landscaped

- natural but well tended - with grass hut "buraes" and a larger circular thatched hut serving as a center bar. We enjoyed a relaxed breakfast of beer and bloody Mary's with Wolfgang after which he picked us a huge box of large ripe papayas. We carried our loot back to the dinghy noticing that the wind was on us again! We again had to move to a safe anchorage and quickly as the seas were building very fast. I laid a course for Soso Bay on the next island north - the island of Naviti. It seemed like the weather was pushing us from place to place much too fast.

We found Soso village to be so so. Actually it was gorgeous and very groomed. The huts were more formal with tin roofs and electricity. The sevuvu was performed by the chief's brother who took a shine to my sunglasses. He showed us around the village and through their church, famous for its interior religious woodcarvings. He wanted us to take his picture with our camera and later send him the photo. We will do it. Soon the wind came up. Back to the boat we went. So much of our Fiji sailing experience has been dealing with the combination of rapidly changing weather and coral reefs. Fijian waters are truly the most treacherous we have yet encountered. We sit out bad weather at anchor on the boat ensuring proper anchor resets with contrary wind shifts. Safe anchor at night is very reliant on radar. Radar gives you the "eyes" to see at night - and to know if you are dragging anchor in high winds. We tuned into the local weather after getting back to Oso Bueno learning that another trough of low pressure from the west was lying west of Fiji and moving east.

The next week was one of the most enjoyable so far in Fiji. We were anchored in a large beautiful bay named Somosomo at the northern tip of Naviti. The weather cooperated and we were able to have a truly wonderful experience with several of the Fijian families in the local village. They took us into their homes, fed us tea and lunch, gave us papaya, coconuts, breadfruit and gifts of shells and shell necklaces. They guided us through their gardens and hills to special places and other villages. They graciously insisted that we would come away with a wonderful story to tell about them. In return they inquired about us and our home countries. We gifted them with fishhooks, batteries, T shirts, baseball hats and lollipops for the children as well as purchase souvenirs from their local handicrafts.. The hikes were stunning, the snorkelling good and the visiting superb. One interesting day was spent snorkelling over a sunken World War I small fighter plane. We witnessed their copra production, their farming techniques for taro and pineapple, and toured a primary and secondary school.

Time was running short and we had to return to Lautoka in order to provision and prepare for guests. Two of Bobbi's brothers, Barry and Randal, with their respective wives, Suzanne and Bonnie, joined us in Musket Cove for the latter half of August. It was a fantastic visit for all of us. The arrangements at Musket Cove Resort were ideal since each couple stayed in their individual burae while Oso Bueno rested safely on a mooring

close by. Besides the usual vacation R and R with much eating out and drinking, everyone played hard at beachcombing, shelling, and snorkelling. One day everyone kayaked, another day the girls took scuba lessons while Randal went on a big dive with the resort's dive boat. We took everyone day sailing to a lovely beach further north on Malolo island. We even arranged for a special trip to a small island named Yanucu via a local long boat for a village experience where they watched pottery being hand-made and fire flamed. It was a great romantic time. After Barry and Suzanne flew home Randal and Bonnie joined us on Oso Bueno for four days to see what living on a sailboat was like --- kind of like camping out in a tight space yet filled with adventure and the capability of going places the usual tourist can't. We like it. Life isn't always a rose garden and one has to work hard at making the most of what life has to offer. Sailing is overall a pleasant way to travel and see the world.

It's early September now and we are back in Lautoka getting the boat sea worthy and preparing for a passage to Australia. Today we received a windgenerator from West Marine which will markedly improve our power generating capabilities. Dave managed to fix our engine problem - a leaky heat exchanger - although has a new one on order for permanent use. So while Captain Dave is very busy with boat work - maintenance and improvements - I'm typing away this newsletter long overdue for all our friends and family. We miss you all. Until around the first of October we can be reached by mailing to Yacht Oso Bueno, c/o Neisau Marina, P.O.Box 3831, Lautoka, Fiji or fax 679-663-807. We hope to arrive in Gladstone or Brisbane, Australia by November and will forward our whereabouts at that time.

Love you all.