

Memories of Marty by Carolyn K. Shearlock, aboard Que Tal

"Hurricane Marty has speeded up overnight and the eye is right now over La Paz. They reported having winds over 100 knots. For those of you in Puerto Escondido, you need to finish your preparations immediately. I think you'll see the winds increasing in less than an hour."

The cruising and shore-based fleet in Puerto Escondido got a surprise when we listened to the Amigo Net on Monday, September 22, 2003. Overnight, Hurricane Marty had speeded up dramatically, from 4 knots to 20 knots. Don Anderson of Summer Passage Radio, the net's weather guru, reported at 8 AM that the eye was over La Paz and boats there were reporting winds over 100 knots, making Marty a Category 2 hurricane. Don thought that Marty's center would pass about 30 miles to the east of us, putting us on the edge of hurricane force winds. But, he warned, the path could easily shift and Marty could make a direct hit on Puerto Escondido.

About 80 boats were in Puerto Escondido – 24 with people aboard and the others left in the care of boat watchers while their owners traveled to the US or Canada. The manned boats were *Sarah Elizabeth, Springbok, Ballena, Champagne, SummerWind, Calliope, Que Tal, Topaz, Pequod, The Cat's Meow, Casual Water, Kindred Spirit, Tuuglick, Elusive, Blue Chip, Western Sea, Chez Moi, Rari, Texan, Angelos, Una Mata, True Companion, Eileen May, and Seven Seas.*

Puerto Escondido was considered to be the best hurricane hole in the Sea of Cortez, and no one could recall a direct hit on the bay. About half the boats in the Inner Harbor and most of those in the Waiting Room were on moorings, the rest on traditional anchors.

A certain amount of luck was with us. While Marty did turn and hit Puerto Escondido directly, the storm had decreased to a Category 1 hurricane, with sustained winds of 70 knots and gusts to 82. More importantly, the storm moved quickly, lasting just 12 hours. And those hours were all daylight hours - just after 8 AM to about 8 PM.

Throughout the day, the manned boats talked to each other on the VHF radio, periodically checking to make sure everyone was okay and to pass on news of dragging boats to watch out for. As the rigging howled and several boats took knockdowns, we couldn't help one another but we could provide moral support. Visibility decreased until conditions were a total white out. Suddenly, the winds lightened considerably. Had the storm passed? Most of the fleet thought that it was over.

Unfortunately, it wasn't. The white out had been the eyewall, and we were now in the eye of the hurricane. For over half an hour, we had almost calm conditions. Cruisers called to one another and fixed problems in their ground tackle. Dario, on *Ballena*, was getting ready to launch dinghies and help friends. Suddenly, the winds rapidly built back up from the opposite direction. Boats swung on their anchors and straightened out their chains once again. "Halftime" was over. We all hunkered down for another 4 hours of helping our boats protect us.

As the storm finally died down for real, we began to take stock of the damage. Of the occupied boats, two had broken rudders, one had torn loose its bow pulpit, many had dragged, and

numerous others had minor problems or damage. But none had major damage or injuries to crew.

Among the unattended boats, though, the story was different:

- 9 boats went aground in Puerto Escondido – *La Sirena*, *Distant Vision*, *Wild Flower*, *Toy Boat*, *Debutante*, *Allie*, *Erickazona*, *Sambita* and *Cleo*.
- 6 boats sunk – *La Tortuga*'s fishing boat (tied to the dinghy dock), *Zinfandel*, *HiJinx*, *Revel de Dos*, *Vagabond Lover*, and *Discover Baja* (Fonatur's boat). The only one that could be salvaged was *La Tortuga*'s fishing boat.
- 3 boats had been swept through the entrance channel – *Mahayana*, a large trimaran, was found floating and re-anchored near Isla Danzante with the bottom of its entire port ama gone, *Winsome* was high on a beach 4 miles south, and *Odyssey* had reset its anchor in the middle of the channel.
- Several had dragged and either hit or almost hit other boats, although none of these had major damage. *Viento Sauve* broke free just after the storm ended and was found floating near her mooring.

Several of the manned boats had astounding stories. Bill, a single-hander aboard the 27' *Elusive*, had seen his anchor rode chafing through but could not replace it or pull it in. So he used a pair of Vise-Grips™ to clip the retrieval line for his kelleet to the rode ahead of the chafe point. It held until the eye passed overhead and he could pull the rode in beyond the chafed spot.

SummerWind, in the Waiting Room, had begun to drag its mooring shortly after the storm began. As Bill motored to try to take the strain off the ground tackle, Stephanie began tossing anchors off the bow. Unfortunately, they tangled with the mooring and Bill's motoring was the only thing that kept the boat out of the mangroves.

Texan had anchored with two anchors on a single rode, and began to drag a couple of hours into the storm. In fifty knot winds, they retrieved their anchors, motored further from shore and re-anchored. They had no further problems during the remainder of the hurricane.

Several other boats also dragged significantly and had to re-anchor, deploy a second anchor and/or use their engines to stay off the rocks. On top of everything else, the dinghy dock broke free and made its way into Cocktail Cove.

Tuesday morning, we heard on the SSB and ham nets about Marina de La Paz being almost totally destroyed and that two boats in Puerto Refugio – *Spirit Healer* and *Mirador* – had gone aground. Our hearts went out to our friends who had lost their boats as we formed ourselves into an impromptu boat recovery team. Adrian from the Port Captain's office showed up with a boat and the little gas they had to help.

Over the next week, with the aid of the powerful trawler *The Cat's Meow*, Elvin's panga, and a fleet of dinghies, and a number of potlucked meals eaten while working, the cruisers (and several land-based friends) managed to rescue 10 boats:

- *Mahayana* (after patching the ama)
- *La Sirena*
- *Distant Vision* (and stopped the leak in the centerboard)
- *WildFlower*
- *Toy Boat*
- *Debutante*
- *Allie* (after Ed and Laurie patched the hole in her)
- *Winsome*
- *Erickazona*
- Black's fishing boat

They also took *Odyssey* and *Viento Sauve* back to their moorings and spent a day helping Connie (SunLover) and Elvin (SeaLover) put their palapa back together. Others spent considerable time patrolling the harbor and picking up items that were either floating or had washed ashore as well as hauling trash off.

The rescue team didn't attempt to pull *Sambita* off the north jetty at the insurance company's request, although they did remove and store all the valuables. Finally, in August 2004, the Puerto Escondido fleet did refloat *Sambita* and she now sits on a mooring in the middle of the harbor with a small hole above her waterline. She has reportedly been sold.

The highlight of the "recovery week" was the "Kick Marty's Ass Good-Bye" party aboard *The Cat's Meow*. Robin said it was the biggest party they had ever hosted, counting over 60 people aboard. Working together, we had all grown closer over the past week and it was a great time to relax together.