

Chapter 7 The Azores

Before I start the story of the first part of the Azores, let me apologize for the length of my epistle; but, these islands are so great and we have been having so much fun, I just had to document many of our experiences for posterity to reread after my poor memory obliterates some of these stories.

As night fell on Friday July 4th, we were just twenty miles from Flores; but, because we did not want to enter a strange anchorage during the night, we hove-to until morning. Shadowfax, a thirty-six foot home made ferro-cement boat with Keith and Alison of the banana bread fame, were hove-to two miles away. There was no wind and the sea was dead calm. We slept well except for the fact that we still took turns keeping a lookout for other ships that may not see us. At first light, Shadowfax and ourselves fired up our engines and powered towards Flores. The mountain in the middle of the small island rises to over 3,500 feet and in good weather one can see it from over twenty miles away. However, the weather was not clear; in fact it reminded me of a foggy day in Maine. We didn't see Flores until we were within one mile of it. Nevertheless, any landfall after 14 days at sea is dramatic and sends my heart racing as though I were back in sixth grade and spied the girl I had a crush on walking up the street towards me.

The harbor is U shaped with a long breakwater along the eastern side. The open end of the U points to the northeast and that means that while it is a perfect anchorage in the normal west or southwest winds, it can be untenable if the wind swings around to the northeast. When we arrived the wind had been out of the southwest for over a week and the anchorage was as calm as a millpond; at least if one could get in behind the breakwater. There were thirteen boats already anchored snugly inside the small harbor which meant that we had to anchor at the back of the fleet just opposite the end of the breakwater. A small swell had wrapped itself around and into the harbor and made us roll from side to side.

After anchoring and launching our dinghies, Keith, from Shadowfax and I headed for shore to go through the formalities of checking in. We were told that the GNR (Guarda Nacional Republicana) lived up near town and the fisherman even gave us directions... in Portuguese. Even though I had lived in Brazil for six months in 93 and had been back there on average about one week a month for the next 8 years, I had a hard time understanding his accent; but, I thought I had it right. He pointed up the road which wound sharply up a steep incline to the village at the top of the hill. We could barely see the church steeple in the center of the town let alone the rest of the buildings which were obscured due to the steepness of the hill in front of us.

As I looked up the road in front of us, I realized that my legs had almost atrophied from lack of walking the past two weeks. But, we are sailors and sailors are

tough, right? We started walking and within a hundred yards my calves were aching and I was already breathing hard. By the time we had made the half mile trek into town, I was panting, aching and sweating. Now I thought I had the directions right but when we got to the intersection where he was supposed to be, there was no sign of the GNR official. There was however, two young kids playing in the front yard and in my best Portuguese I asked the where the GNR lived. By God they understood me and led us to his house. The check-in was very informal as he just took down the description of the boat from our ship's papers and the names of the crew and that was it.

The trip back down to the boats to get our wives was considerably easier. But, Keith and I were now faced with the uphill climb all over again because our wives were determined to see the town. That night as I crept into bed, I thought I had palsy as my legs shook uncontrollably. So much for thinking deepwater sailors are all fit as a fiddle. At least I slept soundly in spite of the slight roll from the swells that found their way around the end of the breakwater.

On Monday a couple of the inner boats left and ourselves and Shadowfax found great spots right in close to shore and totally out of the swell.... at least for the time being. By this time we were able to make the climb into town without keeling over along the way. However we were still somewhat short of breath by the time we got there. Monday the shops opened and a local guy who hung around the docks ingratiating himself to the yachties, brought us up to the gas station to fill the jerry jug we use for our outboard fuel. Joe was extremely nice and volunteered to take Don on Chautauqua, who had badly bruised his elbow in a squall, to the hospital in Santa Cruz once he got into port. Don was about four days behind us having stayed in Bermuda for two days after we left so they would have better weather. Unfortunately their weather was much worse than ours and Don had injured his elbow in one of the squalls.

I mentioned Joe's kind offer to friends on another boat who had been in Flores for a week already and they said to watch out for Joe. They had taken a tour of the island with him in his pickup truck. Ed had to sit in the back of the truck while Ellen, his wife, sat in the cab with Joe. Every time Joe would pull over to the side of the road to point out a breathtaking scene, he would lean way over onto Ellen and almost fall into her lap.

After we got our jerry jug filled, Joe let us off in town and we made our way to the biblioteca where there is an internet club and anyone can use the computers to get into the internet for free. As soon as I walked inside, I saw about eight computers seven of which were manned by kids from 10 years old to probably 14. Most all of them were playing computer games trying to out gun Rambo. I took my place at the only empty computer and double clicked on Internet Explorer. The next hour was a lesson in using patience to overcome frustration. When I was in the Navy, I thought they took the cake for the "hurry up and wait" syndrome; but, these computers were so slow that it took ten minutes just to get

into my email. Then it took another ten minutes to pull up each letter in the inbox. Most frustrating of all was the fact that it took almost twenty minutes just to delete all the spam that promised me a fast loan and a bigger penis. Maybe the computer was trying to tell me that I needed either one or both!

Each day when I went into the internet club to get our email, I saw the same kids playing their video games. They seemed to be just as addicted as American kids. One girl about 11 years old was really cute. After conversing with her in my broken Brazilian Portuguese, she showed me how to type an @ sign because their keyboard is different than ours. She thought my Portuguese was funny and tried to talk with me every time I came in.

One of the things that all yachties do when they arrive in Flores is to take a tour of the island. We arranged for a young (early twenties) kid to take us and Shadowfax on a tour of the island in his father's taxi. Flores means flowers in Portuguese and the island is covered in them. Along all the roads there are rows and rows of hydrangeas and all the fields are divided by stonewalls covered in hydrangeas and roses giving the impression of a huge green Garden of Eden crisscrossed with white red and blue flowers.

The island is also very mountainous. All of the Azores were formed by erupting volcanoes and most of them have peaks from three to six thousand feet tall with steep rugged sides and deep valleys. There are many cliffs and waterfalls; but, most of the steep sides are covered with tiered rich green pastures populated by cows, all of whom have their left legs longer than their right ones and always walk clockwise around the hills. Halfway through the tour, I began to suspect that God lives somewhere on Flores.

Back in Lajes, where we were all anchored, we stopped at Paula's Place to have dinner. Paula's Place is the bar and restaurant, near the docks where all the yachties congregate. We decided to have dinner there instead of going back to our boats to cook. During dinner, Alison mentioned how she loved to have chocolate candies during her watch because it kept her awake. Kitty concurred saying she always had a chocolate on her watch and admitted that she had bought a package of chocolate candies in Bermuda for the trip; BUT, had conveniently forgotten to tell me about them because she realized that she should have bought two packages. Did I mention that she is a saint????

The day after our island tour, Don and Pricilla on Chautauqua finally made it to Flores. After he checked in, he came over to Tamure and showed me his right elbow which looked like a balloon, it was so swollen. I called Mauro, our tour guide and asked him if he would take Don, Pricilla, Kitty and I to the hospital in Santa Cruz. While we were sitting on the patio of Paula's Place, waiting for Mauro, Paula told Don that before going to the hospital, he should visit the old

lady in Lajedo who is a healer. Mauro came to collect us and off we went to see the healer.

Mauro knew where she lived, as I suspect most people on a Flores do. He drove us down a narrow winding street and stopped in front of a small, white, square, cement house. We walked to the back door and waited while Mauro went inside to find her. Out of the door emerged a hunch-backed, plump old lady dressed all in black, with no teeth, a hooked nose and some hairs growing out of a mole on her upper lip. She looked like she had come out of one of Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tails except that rather than being the wicked old witch she had a wide toothless smile and a twinkle in her eye.

She motioned for Don to sit down at the table in her tiny living room. After Mauro told her what Don's trouble was, she took his arm, massaged his fore arm and triceps. Then she slowly felt his elbow and started to gently twist his arm. Soon Don turned to us in amazement and said, "My God, it doesn't hurt any more!"

Next Don got up and pointed to the small of his back where he had been having some pain. She had him stand up and bend over the table, whereupon he wiggled his butt at us in pure ecstasy as her fingers worked her magic on his back. After she was through, Don asked her how much he owed her. She smiled and held up five fingers. Don gave her a ten euro note and when she tried to give him five back, he would have none of it. It was difficult, but he did manage to have her keep the ten.

Just to be sure Don hadn't chipped a bone in his elbow, he had Mauro drive us to the hospital in Santa Cruz. For fifteen euros, he got to see the doctor who said his elbow was fine but gave him a prescription for an antibiotic and an anti-inflammatory. The next day the swelling had gone down and his elbow no longer hurt. Now I was convinced that God does live somewhere on Flores.

One small set back to this theory is the public restrooms. There are many facilities around the town and in all the restaurants, including at Paula's Place. However, it is rare to find a seat on the porcelain toilets or paper nearby. There was one public restroom in a small stone building all by itself on the way out of town that was perfect. The rooms were sparkling clean, the toilets had seats and there was a fresh roll of paper in the dispenser. But, it was a hike to get to it and by the time you got there, you didn't have to go anymore.

There are also free public showers just off the main dock as you start up the hill into town. The one catch is that there is no hot water. However, rather than use our fresh water on the boat, which was running low, we decided to grit our teeth and take a cold shower. There are two shower stalls in the men's room so I took one and Keith on Shadowfax took the other. We turned the water on and stepped in. Yeeeooww, it was cold. The girls who were waiting outside thought that we were slaughtering cows inside from the way we were screaming. Keith yelled

over to me, "It is so damn cold, I can't find it!" Afterwards, I told Keith, "Remember when we were kids and got all worked up over the opposite sex, people would say, 'just go take a cold shower', well that shower was so cold, there will be no sex on our boat for at least a month."

On Saturday, we had been in Flores for about a week. Keith, Alison, Kitty and I took a walk to Fazenda, the small town just a mile up the road. The town had a little village square in front of the Church. In the square was a gazebo. I sat on one of the benches in the gazebo and just listened to the silence and watched the few people who ambled along the street. There was a small soccer field across the street where three boys were practicing kicking at the goal. Then I noticed two young men watching the soccer practice and realized they were speaking English. I went up to them and asked where they learned their English. The older one responded that his name is Paul and that he lives in Massachusetts but that his father is from Fazenda. They were back here because his father is a cancer survivor and he is having a special service at the Church to thank God. Paul also said that there will be a big feast for the whole town afterwards and that we were invited.

Not to miss this special event, the four of us walked back to Fazenda the next day. The whole town of about a hundred people were milling around outside the church. We spotted Paul and when he saw us walking towards him, he gave us a warm smile and waved us over. He introduced us to his father and we chatted for a while. I told him that he and I had an affinity because I too was a cancer survivor having had a malignant melanoma almost thirty years ago. He embraced me and said to be sure to get some of the Ghost Soup that was being served in the restaurant that he had reserved for the occasion.

We filed into the restaurant and sat at long tables lining both sides of the room. Everyone was in a festive mood. The waitresses came with great cauldrons of Ghost Soup and ladled it into our bowls. Ghost Soup consisted of thick slices of bread soaked in some kind of beef broth and then served with plates and plates of tender beef. Paul had told us that his father had had two whole cows slaughtered for the occasion. There was enough beef to feed the whole Russian army. It was a very special experience.

That afternoon we went to Paula's Place, the local tavern near the water front, to wash down the Ghost Soup with a cold beer. Just as we were about to leave, in staggered an old salt with a stubble of white whiskers on his face. He had obviously been at sea for a long time. I looked at him and there was something familiar about him but I couldn't put my finger on it. I thought that maybe we had met him somewhere in our travels but couldn't remember where. He obviously recognized me and started to come over to say hello. Please God let me remember his name and where we had met him. Too late he was already saying hello. Best not to fudge it so I just stuck my hand out and said, "I'm sorry but I forgot your name!" He smiled and said "Lloyd." It still didn't hit me. Then about

ten minutes into our conversation, I put his face together with our friend Edwin Gaynor back home and then BOING it hit me; this guy standing in front of me was Lloyd Hamilton from the Pequot Yacht Club in Southport Ct. Years ago we had been out sailing with he and Edwin on Ed's boat when Kitty became sick. Lloyd is a doctor and attended to her while we made it back to shore. Lloyd the last person I had expected to see here in the Azores. What a small world. He and his wife Pat had come in and anchored about 50 feet from us. Lloyd is almost eighty years old and he and his wife Pat along with two crew of about the same vintage had just sailed their Seguin 44 from Connecticut to the Azores.

We got back to our boats late that afternoon and barely had time to get a nap in before going back ashore to the dance that was being held on the wharf that night. The whole town was going to attend. They had arranged one of the empty containers from the container ship that had just been there into a makeshift stage for the band by opening one side and stacking several others around the sides to form the dance floor. They also strung up some lights over the containers to make it festive.

Now there are only five thousand people on the whole island and everyone knows everyone else. We had been there a week by then and I was startled to realize that I recognized almost everyone at the dance. The band consisted of three guys in pony tails and blonde beards with electric guitars singing songs with a cross between a Latin beat, the polka and rock and roll. Everyone was dancing. There was one middle aged couple who were quite corpulent. However, they were amongst the most graceful dancers on the floor. They were doing a cross between a two step and a polka all around the dance floor and their feet were moving exactly together. Later I went over to them smiled and gave them the thumbs up. They nodded, blushed and smiled.

Kitty and I went out to try our skills on the dance floor, when, out of the blue, a local couple cut in and the guy took Kitty and the girl took me. They then proceeded to show us the intricate steps of their dance. Ten minutes later they switched back and watched as Kitty and I practiced our new dance. They scrutinized us for a while and then gave us the thumbs up, laughed and went back to dancing with themselves.

All the kids from the internet club were there and the 11 year old girl who would always talk with me came over to say hello. She had bright red curly hair and looked just like little orphan Annie. The other kids either danced together or ran around playing tag. There were a number of women dancing together and one mother-daughter couple was extraordinarily good. But the absolute best dancer was Lloyd Hamilton.

Lloyd showed up at the dance by himself because Pat was still tired having just arrived after a two week passage from Connecticut. Lloyd however was full of energy. He didn't want to miss the party; but only had time to brush his hair. He

still had on his old white shorts with a hole in the left leg just above the knee, a faded red T-shirt and a white captain's hat. But he was raring to go and went right over to a single girl from one of the other boats and asked her to dance.

The music was catchy and bouncy. Lloyd got right into it. Have you ever seen a chicken beating his wings, squawking and running all over the yard in a frenzy? Then you can picture Lloyd dancing. His arms were a flapping and his legs were a flying and he was having a hell of a time. When the girl from the other boat needed to rest, Lloyd grabbed an older Azorian woman and waltzed her around the floor. She loved it. All I could think of was, "my god, where does he get his energy?" He is now a legend on Flores.

After watching Lloyd for a few minutes a bulb went off in my head. I ran to the dinghy, motored as fast as I could back to our boat and grabbed our digital camera. I figured Lloyd would pay me a considerable sum to keep pictures of him dancing with the fat lady off the internet. Unfortunately God punishes men with evil intentions and I dropped my digital camera in the drink as I was getting out of the dinghy and it died a horrible death.

The day after the dance, the wind shifted to come out of the northeast, right into the anchorage. Even though the wind was rather light, it did turn the anchorage into a roly nightmare. That night we had to sleep in the main saloon with the lee cloths tied up so we wouldn't roll out of bed. We had been there for over a week and with the anchorage so uncomfortable, we left the next day for Horta.

It was an overnight sail with sloppy seas and light winds not much better than the anchorage we had just left. But, by two o'clock the next afternoon we were tied alongside the customs dock in Horta. We signed in with customs, immigration, the maritime police and the manager of the marina, all of whom had offices in the building next to the wharf. We were then assigned a place along the outer wall of the marina rafted alongside a French Canadian boat.

I bought a 220 volt battery charger and a hose that would fit the faucet on the dock and we were self sufficient without having to run the engine. While looking for a place to buy the battery charger, we had walked halfway across town and down a narrow cobblestone street and had gotten lost. I saw a couple getting out of a car and in my best Portuguese asked where I could buy something to fill my battery. A look of puzzlement came across his face and I then took a desperate stab and asked if spoke English. But of course he did and introduced himself and his wife as Betinho and Carolyn Moniz. He insisted on taking me down a few streets to a shop where I could buy a battery charger; only it was closed for lunch and I would have to wait an hour for it to open.

Two days later, these same helpful strangers, Betinho and Carolyn, were walking down the pier and as I passed oblivious to their presence, Betinho yelled at me, "Did you get the battery charger?" I turned and recognized them immediately. I

asked them to come to the boat and I would show them our home. When Betinho was down below he kept looking around and repeating , “Wow! I have always seen yachts in movies but have never been on one.” Betinho and his wife were extremely enthusiastic and friendly, just like all the Azorian people we have met. It gave me a good feeling to be able to reciprocate, even in the smallest way, to all the friendly hospitality the Azoreans have shown us.

Even though we had all the electricity and water we wanted, without running the engine, we didn't have hot water for showers. To solve that problem I bought a five gallon garden sprayer. Then in order to have a hot shower all I had to do was to fill the sprayer half full of water, add a kettle of boiling water, stick the nozzle through the head window and have kitty pump up the pressure in the garden sprayer while I merrily took my shower in the head. Her pumping the shower for me made up for the secret chocolate candies. She was elevated back to sainthood.

The whole outer wall of the marina, the wharf itself and any other available space around the marina was emblazoned with paintings done by all the yachts passing through Horta. In fact, it is rumored to be bad luck not to paint your own sign on the wall. The marina area was almost like the New York subway system in the height of the graffiti craze, except that the yachties' paintings were uniformly excellent art. We were surprised to see two signs recently painted by yachts we had known while on our circumnavigation in the late eighties early nineties. It was nice to know that they are still out sailing.

We found a spot for our try at art right under a very special sign; the one our son Spencer made last year when he was in Horta while crewing for Michael Fulton, an investment manager from the Royal Bank of Canada. Michael had always had the dream to sail across the Atlantic. His wife did not share the dream so while looking for crew, he met Spencer and together they sailed his 39 foot sloop from Ft Lauderdale to the Azores. Spencer said that he really liked Michael and they got along well; but, he left the boat in the Azores and Michael continued on to Portugal single-handed.

While we were in Lajes on Flores, I tried to move the booster pump for the watermaker below the waterline so that it wouldn't suck air while turned on underway. Unfortunately, as I was attaching the final hose back to the pump after moving it, I broke the attachment nipple right off. Bummer! I then called Village Marine in Ft Lauderdale and asked them to send me a new pump to Horta via Fed Ex. Village Marine was fantastic and sent the pump the same day so that by the time we arrived in Horta it was there. Well, not really! You see Fed Ex doesn't have a terminal in the Azores so it was stuck back in Lisbon. After many faxes and phone calls it was forwarded on to us in Horta.... for a cost of another \$105 euros or \$125 dollars for a \$50 part. Someone once said that sailing around the world is nothing more than the privilege of doing boat maintenance in exotic places. He was right!

After all the maintenance chores were done, we rented a van and loaded in a bunch of other yachties to see the island. First we had to make a short stop at the airport so one of the group could change his ticket back home. I went into the airport to get a couple of cokes for those back in the van when, who should I spy but Job, the brother of the cancer survivor in Fazenda Flores. He saw me at the same time and came running over to give me a big hug. We had an animated talk for a few minutes and then with smiles and another hug we parted ways. Back in the van, I could have kicked myself for not getting the phone number where Job and his wife were staying so I could invite them to dinner on Tamure.

At the western end of the island there is a huge lava hill, a result of an eruption in 1957. It is dramatic. The western edge of the island called Ponta Dos Capalinos, is defined by 600 to 700 foot high cliffs. At the very western tip there is one cliff that drops off to a small beach far below. The lava hill lies on the ocean side of that beach and looks like a moonscape rising up over 1100 feet. The panorama was so spectacular that I talked everyone into following the roped off trail down to the beach to get a picture. At the bottom, I stared up at the hill in front of me. The lower part looked like a big sand dune and the upper part looked like Hillary's Pass on Mt. Everest. In order to get a better view of the cliffs I started up the steep sand dune. It was tough going. Half way up the dune which was a quarter of the way to the top, I turned and took in the magnificent view. Then I looked back up the mountain (at least it looked like a mountain to me by then) and all of a sudden I pictured my self as Sir Edmond Hillary.

Onward and upward one foot at a time, resting every twenty steps, I made my way towards the top. I kept saying to myself, "I think I can. I think I can." Finally after an hour of struggle, I reached the top and said, "I knew I could!" Normally I have acute acrophobia but for some reason the view from the top just seemed too spectacular; beside I was too proud of myself to be scared. But now I had to get down and the decent was much harder on my knees than the climb. By the time I reached the others who had walked back up the island side cliff, my knees ached, I was exhausted and drenched with sweat. I could barely move and Kitty had to take over the driving. But I did it and by God I wouldn't let the others forget it especially Don on Chautauqua who had started up but quit less than a quarter of the way. Finally Don said, "Alright you made it! Now, on to the next subject!"

While we were on our climbing expedition, a four masted sailing bark owned by the Portuguese Navy had sailed into to Horta and was tied up at the customs dock. While we were admiring it from the dock, Kitty noticed that the name of the ship was Sagres, the same name as the local beer. She then asked the deck officer if in fact his ship was named after the local beer. He laughed and said that both the ship and the beer were named after a prominent point of land in Portugal.

He was so impressed by our fascination with his ship that he invited all eight of us to come aboard and he would show us around. We went over the whole deck and then he brought down to the engine room and from there to the officer's quarters. Finally he brought us into the petty officers' mess and asked us if we would like a beer or a soda. There were about ten other petty officers in the mess all drinking beer on their off-watch. We stayed for about an hour talking about the ship and the Portuguese navy. Paulo, was very entertaining and was obviously pleased to be hosting this grubby shore party. To Reciprocate, Don on Cautauqua invited Paulo over to his boat for dinner the next night.

Finally all our boat maintenance chores were done and we had seen the island or most of it. It was getting time to move on. One last check on the weather at www.weatheronline.co.uk and we, Shadowfax and Chautuqua all went to customs etc to check out. Early the next morning, we left for Terciera, another Azorian island 70 miles to the east. You will have to wait for the next chapter to hear of our adventures in the rest of the Azores as this one has gone on long enough. Bless you if you are still reading.

By the way we love to hear from you and what you all are up to. We do get to check our Kuhner@mail.com relatively often from internet cafes so please let us hear from you.