

HNTS006: *The Great Leap*

3,274 words (total compilation)



V.O.: How Not To Sail. Sponsored by...Latitudes & Attitudes. They ruined my life. So why not let 'em ruin *yours* today...at LATS ATTS DOT COM.

SFX: AT ANCHOR? GALLEY SOUNDS?

V.O: So it's Day Five of my solo sailing trip from St. Pete to Miami.

As always, if you haven't heard the previous episodes, I encourage you to start with Episode One.

But today, I have 5 days left to make it 190 nautical miles around the southern tip of Florida to the Miami Boat show, to promote *this podcast*.

I still don't know exactly what the podcast will sound like. And I only have one interview recorded so far.

But I have my promotional postcards printed out, and I'm headed south.

V.O: Yesterday I sailed and motored from Cabbage Key to Marco Island, where--as our friend Kiera will be proud to know, I promptly ran aground at

SFX: RUNNING AGROUND

the exact same spot as the last time I was here, trying to tuck into a little curve of the beach in front of the hotels.

I was no more successful in staying out of the waves than I was in not running aground...but at least the bottom was sand, and all I really needed was a place to crash (so to speak) before today's Great Leap Forward.

SFX: AT ANCHOR? GALLEY SOUNDS?

Today, I have to make the jump about ninety miles south--at maybe six miles an hour--from Marco Island, past the Everglades, and down the empty stretch of ocean to the Florida Keys, dodging the shallows north of Marathon Key as I head toward *and through* Seven Mile Bridge, and finally--hopefully--into Marathon.

What could possibly go wrong?

MUSIC: DRUNKEN SAILOR THEME



Setting Off From Marco

BRADFORD: So it's 11:38am. We're about 19 miles off the Everglades.

V.O: If you look at a map of southwest Florida...or the show notes...you'll see how just below Naples and Marco Island, the land curves inward toward the east. If you're looking at a satellite view, you'll see that all the condos and hotels and houses and streets *stop*.

That's the Everglades. ~~The land retreats into the jungle of Ten Thousand Islands.~~

BRADFORD: You can see where the Everglades are by the layer of cumulus clouds over to our left. Then they just end about thirty miles off our port bow down at Cape Sable.

V.O: I've discovered that eighteen miles south of Marco, cell service stops completely for the next ten or twelve hours.

V.O: As you pass Cape Sable, the land reaches out again, but not close enough to see. The last chunk of the Everglades hides over the horizon, eight or ten miles away.

And then you are in the no-man's land between Cape Sable and the Keys for another three or four hours.

The depth never gets more than thirty feet, but it feels like you're in your own world for almost the entire fifteen hour crossing...

...although there's the occasional reminder.

BRADFORD: [HINDY 2/8 "TAKE 4"] And from there all the way around to the right's nothing but blue sky... And a crab pot. [LET SFX TAIL OUT A LITTLE...]

SFX: UNDERWAY--USE TAKE 3 BETWEEN SPEAKS?

V.O: When I woke up today, it was sixty degrees out. I had my hoodie on as I hoisted the stays'l and main, and weighed anchor.

BRADFORD: [HINDY 2/8 "TAKE 3"] Okay. Eight o'clock [8:00] straight up in the morning. Spot tracker is on.

V.O: As I departed Marco Island, I unfurled the jib, and enjoyed the beautiful sight (and sounds) of making 4.8 knots toward Marathon in only seven or eight knots of wind.

But the fifteen hour jump would take almost twenty at this rate--and I needed to charge the batteries--so reluctantly I cranked up the "Iron Genny" after a half hour.

SFX: ENGINE CRANK AND UNDERWAY

[SFX CONTINUE]

V.O: As Bob Bitchin said in Episode One, the longer passages are where you get most in touch with nature. And yourself.

SFX OUT

BOB: A crossing, to me, is what sailing's about. [Because] what people don't realize is, when you're out there cruising, the only thing you're thinking about is what's for lunch. You're just reading a book, or if something goes wrong, you're fixing it...

SFX: UNDERWAY [FROM TAKE 10?]

V.O: By 10:30, I'm already thinking about what's for lunch....but lunch doesn't actually happen until four hours later...

BRADFORD: [from TAKE 10] Time for a steak lunch. In the middle of nowhere.

V.O: On previous crossings here, both The Admiral and I have gottem plenty "in touch" with nature. Just ask her about the time lightning struck within a thousand feet of us when we

were the only metal thingie sticking up from the ocean for miles around.

But the only hazard I figure I'll encounter today is...crab pots.

Crab Pots

About twenty minutes after Noon, I bonked my head on the boom for about the millionth time.

BRADFORD: [TAKE 7, take parts] Well, that hurt... You'd think I'd know it's there by now.

V.O: And I had to throw the autopilot into Standby and steer around a crab pot dead ahead.

BRADFORD: [TAKE 4] Twenty miles out...there are crab pots. Like a mine field.

If I haven't mentioned it yet...crab pots are a regular "feature" of southwest Florida.

BRADFORD: [TAKE 5] Here's another string, just fifteen feet off starboard.

V.O: Just north of the Keys, they're ridiculous. Because the sea floor off the Gulf Coast is so shallow, they extend miles out, even past the twelve-mile international line.

BRADFORD: [TAKE 6, use motor sound to pad top/tail as necessary] It's just crazy. We're twenty miles from land. I don't know whether I want to eat a lot more crab, or never eat crab again. [bird sound]. Sorry, buddy. I seem to have startled a water bird. [little more bird call]

V.O: When I say "crab pots," I actually mean the little round styrofoam floats that are attached to a stone crab or lobster trap on the bottom.

The little floats, or buoys, are six inches or more wide, often bright red, orange or white--or some color that doesn't look like the ocean--and usually have some code of letters and numbers written in magic marker around the equator.

Just like on "Deadliest Catch," they're laid out in strings. And *somehow*, most of these strings of pots will be laid out *along* your path--where you have to keep putting the autopilot into Standby and steering around them--instead of *across* your path, where you could cross 'em one time and be done.

I still haven't figured out how these fiendish crabbers know which way I'm gonna be going.

MUSIC: COMIC OOMPAH.WAV

V.O:

The *problem* with these things is not the buoys...which are just the visible part that make my blood pressure go up and make me jump for the autopilot Standby button...but rather the *line*, about the size of a small ski tow rope, that connects the buoy to the crab or lobster trap on the bottom.

This is the part that wants to mate with your propeller and wrap around the prop shaft like a chinese finger trap.

MUSIC OUT

Which is a bad thing.

Imagine you're the thirty horsepower engine, going about your business turning the prop shaft at two thousand RPM...when suddenly, the shaft locks up.

At the very least, your engine is dead in the water. At worst, you may have just signed up for a new engine. I've heard of engines braking away from their mounts because of a crab pot.

These trap lines are such a menace that several companies now literally make saws that go around your prop shaft to supposedly cut the line before it can make it to the prop.

I may have to investigate one of those.

V.O:

But otherwise, the only way to avoid getting a line wrapped around your prop shaft is to avoid the buoys. And the only thing you can do if you get a line around the prop shaft is to dive under the boat with a knife and cut it loose.

This can be *extra* fun--if not impossible--at certain times when you need the engine the most. Like during rough weather, for example.

So when I see the crab pots, the first things I do is...curse.

SFX? CURSE (BLEEP), TALK ABOUT IT? OR USE ONE FROM MONTAGE?

And then I steer around 'em.

MUSIC: "DRUNKEN SAILOR-TAG"

V.O:

Maybe just slightly above crab pots on the list of "Things To Avoid" is...navigating in shallow water at night.

I'll be doing both today.

LEA Ad (and Show Notes plug)

BOSSA ELEVATOR MUSIC

V.O: But speaking of *things to avoid*, another one of those things is ticking off your sponsor. So it's time to pay the bills for thirty seconds...and I'll be right back.

LATS & ATTS COMMERCIAL

V.O.: Yeah. So that's pretty much the story. The cruising magazine that I got into cruising with, Latitudes & Attitudes, transformed into Cruising Outpost after Bob Bitchin got screwed over by a very unscrupulous fellow who shut down their offices and moved to South America. Or something like that.

But now they're back as Latitudes & Attitudes, and we are super happy about that.

SFX; STUDIO AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

...and *don't forget*, be sure to check out the show notes for this episode at HowNotToSail DOT COM...forward slash...SIX--that's the number SIX--for photos, the *script* and ship's log for this episode, and all kinda stuff.

SFX: CROWD "AHHHHHHHHH!"

The Long Day (with apologies to Moitessier)

another is: If you're blind as a bat like me, it's good to make sure you can read the chartplotter at night.

BRADFORD: It was a challenging evening. Couldn't find my glasses. Couldn't read the chart plotter with my contacts. Jib got all wrapped around the forestay. I beat a hasty retreat back through it.

V.O: Tonight will be different, of course. I've navigated Seven Mile Bridge several times, and the shallows that extend ten miles north of it.

What could possibly go wrong?

MUSIC: "DRUNKEN SAILOR" TAG?

V.O: By the time I finish my late lunch, it is officially *hot*.

BRADFORD: I have no idea what the temperature is, but I'm gonna say 80. Not a breath of wind... My iPhone just gave me a reminder that says time to work out at the gym.

V.O: As I was cleaning my plate, at least a half dozen dolphins came and played at the bow.

BRADFORD: I got out my melodica to regale them with a rendition of Jethro Tull's "Wind Up," but when I came up they were gone,

and the music didn't seem to bring 'em back. Or maybe it ran 'em off.

V.O: The dolphin may be gone for now, but there is other sea life about.

BRADFORD: Huh... bonefish just skittered by on the port side.

V.O: And of course, there are the crab pots.

[TAKE 6, USE MOTOR SOUND TO PAD TOP/TAIL
AS NECESSARY]

BRADFORD: And there's one twenty feet to port....

V.O: By five o'clock, I've had almost as much fun as I need today. I've lowered the mains'l...all it was doing was making the boom squeak back and forth.

BRADFORD: Just under two hours left to Bullard's Bank now, I've pushed the throttle up to 2200 RPM and...we'll see how she does. There's a strong smell of...something...in the cabin and the cockpit. Gonna keep an ear on it. I'm getting a little antsy now. I'd like to be able to get into Marathon Marina--or at least anchor south of Seven Mile Bridge--before it starts blowing from the East.

V.O: It's already showing the first hint of the east wind, and by sunset, I've closed the hatches and port lights, and changed my wardrobe a little...

[TAKE 15, REMOVE PAUSE?]

BRADFORD: I've gone from shorts and...burning up, to having my foul weather gear on. [pause] and still dodging crab pots. Hopefully I'll get to the channel at Bullard's Bank while there's still a *little* bit of light left...after sunset...and maybe I can avoid dodging so many crab traps, and get down to Seven Mile Bridge and get south of that where I'll be in the lee of the land, hopefully, before it starts blowing.

V.O: By six thirty, I'm just twelve miles north of Seven Mile Bridge. And I'm looking for lights.

BRADFORD: Let's see: red, one second. Where's green, four seconds? I don't see green...

V.O: The shallows extend for miles north of Marathon Key, and I need to make sure to find the channel entrance at Bullard Bank. My chart says, "Green lateral beacon number seventeen, having green flashing light with a period of four seconds and a range of four miles."

BRADFORD: I don't see the green light on Bullard Bank yet, it's...it says visibility four miles, we are three point seven. [I] see a red light. And there's no flashing red light on my chart that I should be seeing. Seems like this happened before.

V.O: THIS is why you don't do this at night.

BRADFORD: I see *a* green light. It's further to the right than I would expect. Need to be careful to find that channel, it gets pretty shallow here.

V.O: Finally, I spot the marker.

BRADFORD: Okay, that's it. Four seconds... Green light.

V.O: So I'm in the channel. But it's narrow. And I still have a dozen miles through the shallows to the bridge.

...and in the dark, there are *still* crab pots in the way.

BRADFORD: Oh, look, another crab pot. In the middle of the channel.

V.O: I've almost got a fatalistic view about the damn crab pots at this point. I've slowed down a little to five knots, and just hope I don't run over one. The tiny sliver of moon isn't helping much, but the stars are magnificent.

BRADFORD: I can see the traffic on Seven Mile Bridge. And a whole s--- load of stars.

V.O: *Finally*, fourteen hours after starting out today, I reach the ruins of the old bridge, just north of the new one. It was part of the railroad line destroyed in the hurricane of 1935, which

at the time was the only way to visit the Keys other than by boat.

BRADFORD: There's the red lights that mark where you pass through OLD Seven Mile Bridge. They've removed the center span there, 'cause it was too low. The first time I came through under sail...by myself...I thought those looked like the gates of Hell.

V.O: Now I'm through the old bridge, and almost home free. But wait...

MUSIC STARTS AND BUILDS

under the center span of the *current* Seven Mile Bridge--the span that I need to pass through--is...

MUSIC STOPS ABRUPTLY

...something.

RE-ENACT BELOW, BAD AUDIO...

BRADFORD: What the f--- is that?!??

V.O: I must be losing my mind. It looks like the bar in Porky's, parked under the center span. Is that flashing neon on the top? And it's taking up half the channel.

I go around twice, before I finally ease past it.

BRADFORD: This time I got through the cut in OLD Seven Mile Bridge, and then under NEW Seven Mile Bridge, there was some...monstrosity parked there, that...I didn't know what it was. [It] was like some sort of construction shack...meets tugboat, with--I thought it had some kinda neon stuff on it. [And, uh..] made a couple of passes before I decided to go through very slowly.

V.O: But now I'm south of the bridge, and we're *all good*...

...almost.

BRADFORD: And there's another crab pot. I'm gonna check the depth again.

V.O: Yep...even in the home stretch...

TAKE 28

BRADFORD: *Enough of f-----* crab pots already! Jesus! 's another one just went right next to me...

V.O: It's enough to make a fella tired. But now that I've cleared the bridge, I just have to creep over a couple of miles east, toward Marathon Key itself, making sure not to get too close to the bridge and the shallows near it.

I see an anchorage on the south side of the Boot Key Harbor entrance channel, but I don't feel like getting in among a

dozen other boats at night. Nobody's anchored on the north side of the channel...so you can guess where I drop the hook.

TAKE 29

BRADFORD: [Unwrapping plastic]. Okay. So we're at anchor. I'm laying in the short berth, with...some sort of protein bar. And I am tired. Opened up all the hatches and portholes to let some fresh air in, because it smells very much like diesel. Diesel exhaust. I need to air this b---- out. [pause] So it's about 10:40 at night, and I finally made it. I'm anchored in front of Knights Key. In a dubious spot, but hopefully it'll be all right. Should be protected from the east wind that they're predicting, and...yeah.

V.O: Apparently fortune continues to favor the stupid, and fifteen hours after raising the anchor, I set it down again. Of course, I set it down just a couple hundred feet from where the chart shows an underground cable...but I'm sure that's okay.

I'm now just a quarter mile from one of my favorite places...where I have a slip reserved for tomorrow...

Marathon Key.

Outro

MUSIC: DRUNKEN SAILOR THEME

V.O.: Be sure to join me next episode... I'm sure I'll get into the marina without incident, right? And I'll chat with a very interesting person who's seen it all: Fuel Dock Debbie.

Big thanks to everyone who's left the nice 5-star reviews on Apple Podcasts and elsewhere, and everybody who's jumped on the email list.

Don't forget to check out the show notes for this episode, for the map, the script...and the ship's log, among other things...at How Not To Sail dot com...forward slash...six.

You can also get in on the *private, invite only* Facebook group by just going to HowNotToSail dot com...slash...community.

V.O: I sure appreciate you listening, and I'll see you next time on...

How Not To Sail. Screwing up is part of cruising. Let me show you how!

SFX: ENOUGH OF F----- CRAB POTS!!!