

SIGHTINGS

***nereida* lost on mexican beach**

When tragedy strikes, Jeanne Socrates feels the loss every bit as much as anyone else, but she doesn't let it slow her down. When Jeanne and her husband George bought their England-based Najad 361 *Nereida* in 1997, the plan was to do some long-term cruising. They took delivery in Sweden and spent the next four years cruising *Nereida* through Europe to the Caribbean. In the fall of 2001, George was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in 2003.

Some thought Jeanne would sell the boat and move back to England to be close to her kids. But she had other plans. She hopped right back aboard, cruising her way up the east coast of South America and on to Florida. Once there, she put *Nereida* on a ship bound for Vancouver B.C., her jumping-off point for singlehanded south as far as Zihuatanejo. Instead of bashing north, Jeanne put *Nereida* back on a ship, this one headed for Ketchikan, Alaska. She spent the summer of 2005 cruising the Inside Passage and headed back down the coast in the spring of '06.

Once in the Bay, Jeanne learned about the Singlehanded TransPac
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puddle jump

Southbound cruisers who haven't decided whether to turn left or right after exploring Mexico and Central America should consider attending our Pacific Puddle Jump seminar Saturday, October 25, at West Marine in San Diego (5 p.m., 1250 Rosecrans), the day before the Baja Ha-Ha festivities begin.

As in years past, we'll also be hosting Pacific Puddle Jump kickoff parties in February in both Puerto Vallarta and Zihuatanejo (dates TBA), and publishing articles on the 2009 fleet in these pages.

Other than the fact that French Polynesia is very expensive, there's almost nothing about it that's not to like. So it's not surprising that the universal com-



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plaint among Americans is that they cannot get visa extensions beyond 90 days. That's just not enough time to explore the Marquesas, Tuamotus and Society Islands. However, unbeknownst to many cruisers, if you're willing to jump through a number of bureaucratic hoops, there is a way to get a so-called 'long stay' visa — six months. To find out how, check out Steve and Susan Chamberlin's excellent step-by-step instructions, posted at www.pacificpuddlejumps.com (under 'news').

In the coming months, look for further Puddle Jump updates in the pages of *Latitude 38* and in 'Electronic Latitude' at www.latitude38.com.

— andy

Jeanne Socrates singlehanded her beloved 'Nereida' just 50 miles shy of a full circumnavigation before losing her on a Mexican beach.



nereida — cont'd

and, since she was determined to get *Nereida* back to Alaska — this time by sail — joined the race as a last-minute entry, correcting out third in her division. *Nereida* then continued on to Sitka, where she spent a soggy summer, and before going back down the coast to Zihua.

The confidence she gained from all those solo miles allowed Jeanne to plan something she never would have contemplated a few years earlier: a solo circumnavigation. On March 26, 2007, *Nereida* sailed out of Zihuatanejo, never to return.

Over the next 15 months, Jeanne successfully sailed *Nereida* around the world. She was just 50 miles south of crossing her outbound track when tragedy struck again. "*Nereida* was grounded halfway from Acapulco to Zihuatanejo on a desolate, mostly uninhabited part of the coast, after the autopilot went down just before first light on June 19," Jeanne wrote on her website on July 1.

"I was taking my usual timed nap — a stopwatch set for 45 minutes — which looked fine in the situation: full moon, some swell and waves but not much, motoring in very little wind, a good distance from a long sandy shore. Because I was motoring in calm conditions, the resultant change of course was not obvious enough to wake me up in time, as it would have had I been sailing."

Jeanne believes that the wireless remote for her Raymarine autopilot was the culprit. "If it's not plugged in and it discharges, the head unit will go on standby automatically," she said. "I discovered that fact quite by accident, and have been very careful ever since to plug it in when I take a nap." As it was part of her routine, she's sure she plugged it in but concedes it must not have had a good connection or it wiggled loose.

"It was still nearly dark with no lights on shore," she recalled. "No sign of anyone, in fact, for ages as I started setting my anchors, which was very difficult in the strong, swirling surf conditions. I came close to drowning a couple of times but managed to avoid being pulled out to sea in the surge — just!"

Jeanne remembers the surf on steep Playa Michigan to be about nine feet high. With the help of some fishermen, who were surprised to see her there, she spent the rest of the day setting anchors up the beach to keep *Nereida* from slamming onto the sand every time a wave lifted her. "She was flopping around — one minute she'd be lying up the beach, the next a wave would flop her over and the sea would pour in."

The pounding took its toll almost immediately. "Her starboard side began to crack slightly," Jeanne recounted. "It was difficult to keep the chain and lines taut enough to stop her from suddenly being heeled down the steep beach slope — and then she'd suddenly come back up the other way in the surge, often with a bang."

No matter who she talked to — the Marines, the Navy, the Acapulco port captain — no one could arrange a boat big enough to tow *Nereida* off Playa Michigan. "I kept saying '*mi casa, mi vida*' — my home, my life — but without an almost immediate tow off the beach, she was doomed."

Jeanne spent the next few days traveling four hours each way from the home of the Acapulco YC harbormaster to *Nereida*, desperately trying to save her. She finally accepted *Nereida's* fate the morning she arrived to find that the stern anchor rode had snapped in the night, allowing the boat to swing around and slam against the beach freely. "She now had a big hole in her side," said Jeanne, "so there was nothing left to do but salvage as much as I could."

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A smiling Jeanne at the awards ceremony for the '06 Solo TransPac.

neraida — cont'd

The next few days were spent removing the diesel from the tanks and pulling everything off the boat, sharing much of it with the local fishing village. "I was happy to give them what I could no longer use," she said. "It was the least I could do for all the help they gave me." She soon realized that if she wanted to wear anything other than the tank top and shorts she had on when she went aground, she'd better grab it soon. "I had to reach underwater and slowly tug each piece of clothing out of the sand, one by one," she said.

In the end, Jeanne only suffered a few bumps and bruises, walking away with a good amount of gear, many of her personal items, and her most treasured sentimental tokens — such as the belt buckle and plaque she received for finishing the Singlehanded TransPac. She also walked away with the determination to find *Nereida II* as soon as possible and finish her circumnavigation.

But even with her 'stiff-upper-lip' temperament, Jeanne admits the loss of her boat was a crushing blow. "I'm finding it difficult to come to terms with the situation, as you can imagine, feeling only half here — the other half still being with the beloved *Nereida I* knew."

— *ladonna*

crew overboard training

Rene Steinhauer makes a point to learn new skills aboard his Sausalito-based Hunter 34, *The Witch Doctor*, as often as possible. Realizing that he didn't really know how to get a COB (crew overboard) back on his boat, he started practicing with a LifeSling in Richardson Bay earlier this year. Steinhauer would don his wetsuit and jump in while his girlfriend was at the helm. "I found that my gear didn't work well," he admitted. Such a discovery could spell tragedy if it were made the first time in a real emergency.

Inspired by the realization that he couldn't be the only one having difficulties, he organized a training event to teach others how to effectively recover COBs. Enlisting the help of Mary SwiftSwan of

Oakland's Afterguard Sailing Academy, the Bay Model, the Sausalito YC, and divers from the Harbor Dive Club of Sausalito, two training sessions were held July 19-20 just outside Richardson Bay, and included classroom instruction with at least three hours of on-the-water practice each day.

Several of the 34 students offered up the use of their boats for the training, an option that was a real draw for Alameda's Mike and Val Gerhart. "We've always talked about how to pick me up if I go over," Mike said, "but we'd never practiced it. To learn how to do it with a diver and instructor on our own boat — and for only \$50 for each of us — was a golden opportunity." Like Steinhauer, the Gerharts quickly found out that the gear they thought was appropriate for their Catalina 30, *Windmill*, didn't work the way they'd hoped. "There's no way my wife could get me onboard with a 3-to-1 tackle," Gerhart said.

Indeed, SwiftSwan acknowledges that most of her students are "surprised that it's not the getting back to the COB that takes time — it's getting the COB back on the boat." She recommends hauling someone aboard while in your slip or at anchor to get a feel for how your gear works. After that, SwiftSwan suggests practicing on your way home from every daysail, making sure that all crewmembers

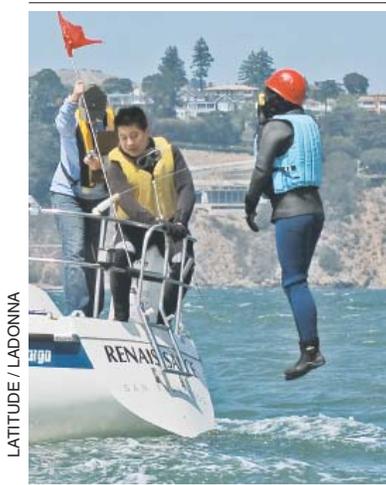
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point montara

If every picture tells a story, every lighthouse tells a thousand stories. One of the more intriguing ones that came to light only recently is that of the Point Montara lighthouse. Unlike the other lighthouses of Northern California, this one wasn't built in place — it was an existing struc-



Lost and found — It was long thought that the Cape Mayo lighthouse on Cape Cod, above, had been destroyed in the '20s. But it had really been shipped out west and put into service at Point Montara.



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Thar she goes! A trained diver plays COB in a recent training event.

