

# ESCAPE THE RECESSION BY BOAT

by Sarah Rose

ANCHORED IN AN AQUA LAGOON, surrounded by a necklace of thin coral beach, the 32-foot cutter Saltbreaker has a tight below-decks cabin that smells like mildew, body odor, and, just now, a strip-mall dollar store. The space is a catastrophe of new T-shirts, cheap baseball hats, sunglasses, ballpoint pens, disposable lighters, aerosol string, flashlights, nylon rope, and four liters of Jack Daniel's, the duty-free maximum.

"I heard you can get anything here for a bottle of Jack Daniel's," says Alex Kleeman, Saltbreaker's 29-year-old co-skipper.

It's a balmy afternoon in June 2012. Alex and his 27-year-old brother, Nick, are floating inside a sparsely populated atoll called Fakarava, part of the Tuamotu island group in French Polynesia. The plan is to trade this dime-store gear for food and supplies as they head west toward New Zealand, with stops at the Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, and many places in between. Bourbon and aerosol string they've got, but they're running low on things they can actually eat.

The Kleeman brothers are classic examples of a timeless urge: to do something very different with your life—now, not years from now, even if doing so requires walking away from ordinary comforts and charting a radical, potentially dangerous new course. They're middle-class Midwesterners from suburban Chicago, and they grew up about as far from the Pacific as the Americas are from Polynesia. But they decided to ride out the Great Recession with a full-on adventure, so they pooled their savings, bought a yacht for half-price on Craigslist, took a few sailing lessons, and set off to circle the world. After months of preparations, they left in September 2011, accompanied on the San Francisco-to-Polynesia leg by a college buddy of Nick's, Dave Green.

Eight months after cutting dock lines in San Francisco, Alex flew back there for two weeks, to be the best man at his best friend's wedding. Now he has returned to the boat, and his father, Tom, joined him for a quick visit. Alex brought two suitcases full of swappable goods, along with wide-eyed tales about the shock of being in civilization again. "While I was home I got land sick," he says. "One night I just woke up and puked. One day I was riding an escalator and thought, 'It would take 50 solar panels to keep this thing going. What a waste.'"

Nick digs into the suitcases like it's Christmas morning. Saltbreaker's main cabin is already packed to the ceiling with books, tools, spare parts, musical instruments, three laptops—one of which holds a download of everything published on Wikipedia—two radios, a radar, a GPS, kitchenware, and their dwindling supply of food. With Alex's haul, it's even more crowded.

Alex reaches into a suitcase and places a brassy new piece of plumbing on the chart table, admiring it like a work of fine art. The Kleemans have coaxed Saltbreaker 4,000 miles across the Pacific, mostly under sail, because their diesel engine turned out to be unreliable and developed serious problems during the voyage. This part, a replacement raw-water pump, should fix it.

"Now that's a pump," says Tom, a career engineer. The lingua franca of the Kleeman family is tinkering. Tom gave his sons old VCRs to dismantle as a rainy-day activity when they were kids. He's here now with no itinerary other than assuring himself that his boys are OK. The machinery of sailing is a world away from Kleeman's laser-cutting factory in Illinois, but seeing his sons solve technical hiccups helps soothe his doubts. "Otherwise, I have no frame of reference that sailing a 32-foot boat to French Polynesia is a sane thing for them to do," he says with hard prairie vowels.

Saltbreaker is a bit worse for wear but seaworthy enough. She's a Valiant, older than her crew, ugly, slow, fat-bottomed, and hard to handle. She was designed for offshore blue-water sailing and proved herself

during long passages helmed by a previous owner. Still, she has creaky systems and seams: her jib is a patchwork of rips and repairs, her life raft is past its expiration date, her toilet is “finicky,” and she was insured to sail from San Francisco out to the Golden Gate Bridge, but not past it.

Those are just the crapped-out necessities. Saltbreaker’s luxuries are on the blink, too. Her windlass is broken, her desalination device isn’t working well, and she has a dorm fridge that can’t be used; it draws too hard on batteries that can be charged only by solar panels, since the feeble engine doesn’t run reliably.

“I really miss cold beer,” says Nick.

Later, toward sundown on my first day as a visitor aboard the boat, Alex is tinkering with the autopilot while Nick is in the galley, making fresh pita bread for dinner. Nick pops up from the companionway, holding an empty bottle of rum. “Alex, can you help me out? We need a signature drink. I’m going to make a Saltbreaker.”

Alex heads to the bow and unlashes a five-gallon jerry jug that was, at one time, full of Nicaraguan rum but is now bottoming out. Alex refills the bottle, and Nick starts improvising his new concoction. In short order, he hands me a cocktail made with rum, sugar water, vanilla, and lime juice—with a generous dash of paprika. It tastes like a blend of cough syrup and bloody mary mix. In a bar on land, a Saltbreaker wouldn’t find many takers. But out here? I’ll have another.

THE NEXT DAY, the crew of Saltbreaker wakes up to the sound of open-ocean rollers beating against the outer shores of Fakarava. The atoll has two breaks leading into a placid interior lagoon. At the north pass there’s a one-road town, Rotoava, though it seems remarkable that the island can host a road at all, since it’s barely wider than a two-lane street. The south pass, where Saltbreaker is anchored near a village called Tetamanu, has even less infrastructure. It’s ecologically pristine, under Unesco designation as a biosphere reserve, and will be among the first places lost as melting polar ice raises sea levels.

Alex is still operating on Pacific time after his furlough, so he wakes up ahead of Nick, who’s asleep in the V-berth. He brushes his teeth in the cockpit, spitting into the lagoon. A three-foot remora fish that’s been hanging around the boat for days eagerly gobbles up the suds. “His name is Toothpaste now,” says Alex, who names animals after the things they eat. “If I ever have a dog, it will be named Dog Food.”

Alex listens to marine weather reports while he cooks pancakes for breakfast, leaden pucks made from eggless batter, because there aren’t any eggs. Nick jumps out of bed and eagerly devours the hot food. The plan for the day—the plan for every day lately—is to wait for slack tide and drift aimlessly through the coral on an incoming current, swimming and snorkeling along the way.

Both Kleemans are lean guys with shaggy beards, blue eyes, and wide smiles. Alex is dark, tall, and social; Nick is shorter, blond, and more reserved, though only by a little. They’ve been anchored in Fakarava for two weeks and will stay for another two, and it’s easy to see why they like it here. The Tuamotus are a stunning 78-island graveyard of fallen volcanoes dotting an area as large as Western Europe. Because of their remoteness and postcard beauty, the tiny islets are favorites among cruisers, the pleasure sailors who, each year, make the coconut-milk run from the U.S. to the South Pacific.

Alex and Nick, of course, are not the only sailors DIYing their way around the world. A record number of people are out there these days, and the recession that began in 2008 clearly has been a motivating factor. Before the big downturn, in the sailing season of 2006, some 350 small sailboats checked into Tahiti, the capital of French Polynesia, the country that is the nearest South Pacific port to the Americas. That number more than doubled after the Wall Street apocalypse: by 2009, 694 boats made the crossing, and the total jumped to 826 in 2010.

This happened, in part, because the recession led to a fire sale on boats. As the economy plunged, the flood of yachts into the resale market drove down prices to the point where anyone with a dream and a GPS could afford an adventure. Saltbreaker was originally listed in sailing magazines at \$60,000; Nick and Alex bought her for \$30,000. On their very first day out of the boatyard, they ran her aground, but over the months they learned to sail her, making it from San Francisco to Baja, down the coast of Latin America, and halfway across the Pacific. Their aim when I met them was to reach New Zealand before hurricane season began in November.

“Right now, around the world means getting to New Zealand,” says Alex.

It’s quite a goal, and an undeniably dangerous undertaking, but we live in an era when new technology has, for better and worse, knocked down many of the barriers to attempting a trip like this. In all of the planet’s seas, at any given time, there are about 10,000 cruising boats taking long-term transoceanic voyages. As the number of live-aboards in blue water increases, expertise at the helm hasn’t risen accordingly. Sailing skills once acquired over a lifetime are easily replaced with technology: a GPS trumps a sextant, paper charts give way to electronic counterparts, and an iPad makes a fantastic chartplotter. No one really needs to know how to read the skies or the tides anymore, since computer-generated weather reports are delivered via single sideband radio. In 2000, when President Clinton ordered the unscrambling of the space-based global positioning system at the end of his second term, he launched more ships than Helen of Troy.

Sailing bloggers encourage boat owners to just go, forgetting the wait for someday, for more expertise or more money or a swankier ride. The growth in marine digital technology is undoubtedly a good thing, but cheap boats and tech toys can also curse captains with a false sense of security. As many as five boats were lost during the 2011 South Pacific cruising season, including a yacht whose owner was reportedly eaten by cannibals in the Marquesas, just like in Herman Melville’s *Typee*. During the 2012 racing season off California, the 37-foot sailing vessel *Aegean* ran aground during the night while motoring in the Newport to Ensenada race. Its GPS transmission suggested that the autopilot was set to a waypoint that went right through Mexico’s Coronado Islands rather than around them. Four sailors died.

THE KLEEMANS cut it a little close themselves. They brought no cruising experience to their grand escapade, and early on they came frighteningly close to a serious mishap.

The whole idea originated in 2004, during Alex’s junior year abroad, when he and Nick went on a European backpacking trip. One day on a beach in Croatia, they started talking about islands that could be reached only by private yacht, and they were seized by a desire to learn how to sail. Later, back home, Alex took a four-day course on Lake Michigan. By 2007, they were both living in the Bay Area and had moved into what they call the “dream phase.” They bought a Santana 22 to sail on San Francisco Bay, and then Nick moved to South Korea to teach English and raise money for the cruising kitty. Together they purchased Saltbreaker in 2010.

Alex had a master’s in computational mathematics from Stanford and paid for his share with money he made writing weather-modeling software for an online insurance company. But weather was still a theoretical rather than practical subject for the Kleemans when they embarked with Dave Green in September 2011. They had never sailed farther south of San Francisco than Half Moon Bay, a day sail, and they’d only done that twice. They figured they would learn on the fly the skills they needed to travel around the world. Not surprisingly, they got their asses handed to them at Point Conception, the infamous headland northwest of Santa Barbara.

The wind and swells that run uninterrupted from Alaska’s Aleutian Islands to California are blocked at the point. It’s the so-called Cape Horn of the Pacific, dividing Northern and Southern California, and it’s an object of fear to offshore sailors. The same 20-knot winds that Alex and Nick were accustomed to sailing in San Francisco Bay were in the forecast as they neared it, and they saw no reason not to make a run

with that kind of weather window. They had no experience sailing into offshore winds, but that wasn't going to stop them from trying.

On the night of September 27, Saltbreaker was moving along at five knots when the wind started to pick up. The swells were large, about 12 feet, coming long and slow. They were far too big for the boat's autopilot to cope with, so the Kleemans were forced to hand-steer. As Saltbreaker got closer to the point, the wind rose. The brothers took in the mainsail and staysail, riding only a fraction of the jib in 35-knot sustained winds. The onboard weather station measured a gust of 40 knots

"We were really cooking," says Alex. "Imagine holding a twin bedsheet by three corners and getting enough power to pull 12 tons of boat through the water at seven miles per hour."

They rounded the point at midnight, the seas growing angry as the northwest swell met currents from the Santa Barbara Channel and reflections off the land. Waves were hitting across the beam and on the bow. The boat dropped into a ten-foot hole; seawater washed into the cockpit. The Kleemans and Green were on a rotating watch, with two of the three steering or navigating while the other rested. Saltbreaker was pitching so much that the instruments couldn't get a true read on their velocity. They were cold, wet, tired, and possibly 45 degrees off course. Alex began navigating by hibachi, eyeing a grill mounted on the lifelines as it bobbed up and down between the stars. As long as a fixed point on the boat kept rising between the same two stars, he reckoned, they were on course.

The Kleemans could have hove to, a method of waiting out heavy weather, setting sails and helm so that the boat stalls and slips smoothly into oncoming waves. Instead, they white-knuckled through to a foggy dawn and Santa Rosa Island.

This was the kind of decision-making that vexes seasoned sailors, and the brothers were undeniably lucky. If anything disastrous had happened, they lacked the skills and safety equipment needed to survive. If they'd had to abandon ship, they could have gone for the life raft, but it hadn't been inspected and might not have worked. Their inflatable dinghy was packed away, and there may not have been enough time to get it out and launch it. Looking back, Alex says, with considerable understatement: "We were still figuring stuff out."

THE KLEEMANS WERE in a hurry to leave the U.S. in part because they were trying to get to a big sailing party in Mexico, the Baja Ha Ha, the culmination of an annual rally from San Diego to Cabo San Lucas organized by Latitude 38 Magazine, the Bay Area's sailing bible. For Alex and Nick, making it to the Ha Ha wasn't just about having a good time: it would also put them among sailors who actually knew what they were doing. But fun was on the agenda. The event is famous for boozing, racing, fish stories, and spouse swapping. It's a party that sells the cruising fantasy, a bash amply lubricated by festival sponsors, brokers, and marine suppliers.

On the way down, the Kleemans felt like they were steadily becoming sailors. The weather got warmer, and they could sit through a watch shift without shirts or pants. They landed a tuna, having never caught a big saltwater fish before. But now what? The Cruisers' Handbook of Fishing suggested gaffing it and thumping it "hard on the head with a large heavy club." So they did, using a piece of hollow steel tubing to beat wanly against the fish's cartilaginous skull, making no difference to the tuna whatsoever. It flopped around until Nick had the sense to hit it with a wrench.

During the sail to Mexico with Green, the Kleemans picked up another friend who didn't know much about sailing, Nick "Dosh" Niedospial, who got on the boat in San Diego. They celebrated notable moments by shouting, "Hard to port!" In sailing terms, that would be an order to the helmsman to bring the bow to the left, but on Saltbreaker it was a drinking game—pound a shot of tequila, chase it with a shot of port. They broke a spinnaker pole when no one thought to take down sail during a freshening breeze, but that was part of the fun.

Latitude 38 arranged entry for the cruising fleet into Mexico, so Saltbreaker's crew learned how to check into a new country by boat. But beyond that crucial lesson in paperwork, the Ha Ha wasn't very useful. "It was mostly just a bunch of over-50 sailors drinking," says Alex. Still, they met a few peers, including a twentysomething couple on another novice boat, Ustupu, who would buddy-boat with them across the Pacific.

The Kleemans are younger by half than most puddle jumpers, as members of the South Pacific cruising fleet are called. Cruising is typically a middle-aged bucket trip for sailors enjoying an early retirement, living off investments or rental income after lives that have mostly wrapped up. In contrast, Alex and Nick had barely started their careers. They're part of a demographic that endured a 9.2 percent unemployment rate in a recession that blew up eight million American jobs.

At one point during my time on Saltbreaker, I ask Alex and Nick the obvious question: What next? When I visited, it was already clear that their money would run out before they made it around the world. Under New Zealand's working-holiday program, Alex and Nick were young enough to obtain work permits, but the visas are temporary, the wages are low, and Alex would age out of eligibility when he turned 30 in November 2012. They planned to sail on, but there's no safe passage through the Indian Ocean these days, thanks to pirates who patrol off the coast of East Africa. An entire cruising fleet has been bottlenecking in Southeast Asia for years, hoping that a roundable world will be possible again.

Retired cruisers can afford to wait. For the Saltbreaker crew, the "What next?" question was more pressing. Surely they will go home at some point, and when they do there will be a big gap in their résumés. "Mine actually says 'Captain, Sailing Vessel Saltbreaker,'" says Alex.

People who know the brothers say it's not in their nature to fret about such things. "They're just not worried about the future," says Dave Green. "It's what makes them happy people. It turns out that unhappiness is just about getting caught up in your expectations. Alex and Nick really don't have any." Green, who does have a few expectations, ran out of money by the time they reached French Polynesia. He returned to Illinois to finish a degree in film.

"I admire them," says Charlie May, their 87-year-old maternal grandfather and a former Navy gunner who saw extensive combat in the South Pacific during World War II. "If I were in the same situation they are, unmarried with no children, I would love to do the same thing they are doing."

Just like Green says, Nick and Alex don't seem overly burdened by the future. "We hope someone will think that we're picking up skills," says Nick. "We're learning plumbing and electrical and a lot about making do."

"We can put up with a lot for a long time," says Alex. "That has to be useful in a job. Or not?"

OFFSHORE CRUISING is a kind of long-distance travel that resembles through-hiking, with groups all on the same route but essentially alone, haunted by a shared determination to be moving while the winds blow. It's a monasticism of forgone comforts such as hot showers and fresh vegetables. The crossing from the Americas to Oceania takes about a month, time in which there is nothing but the reflective mirror of the ocean and no one around to hear a Mayday.

In April 2012, Saltbreaker left Costa Rica with both a full tank of diesel and a working engine, on course for Cocos Island, the uninhabited spot best known for the opening scenes of Jurassic Park and one of the last points of land before the big, empty Pacific. Saltbreaker started to smell of diesel, which can happen after the small spills of a fill-up, so Alex and Nick didn't give the stink too much thought. They shut down the engine to take a look at the fuel gauge. It was already down to half-full, even though they were only six hours out. They soon figured out that there was a leak in the fuel line and half their diesel had spilled into the bilge.

By this point they were in the doldrums, the dead-air band at the equator officially known as the intercontinental tropical convergence zone (ITCZ), and they had to motor to get anywhere at all. They could turn back and refill, but they had a good weather window and figured they would be fine.

“Maybe that was a bit stubborn of us,” says Nick. “But it turned out fuel wasn’t going to be an issue, because we weren’t going to have much chance to use it.”

In the days that followed, they sailed between Cocos and the Galápagos—the absolute last point to jump off before starting the crossing. The wind died completely, and the engine was running too hot for steady use. Marine engines get cooled in two ways, with raw seawater pumped from the ocean and with a closed system that uses antifreeze, like a car’s engine. The Kleemans figured they had sucked up something against the seawater pump’s impeller and broken it, so they replaced it with the freshwater pump from their faucet.

The new pump worked, but not well, and it wasn’t meant for saltwater. A leak had developed in the seal between the pump and the engine, so saltwater was slowly entering the works, drip by drip, getting churned together with oil. “That’s exactly how mayonnaise is made,” Alex points out.

There was just enough oil on board to flush the engine and try to rinse out the saltwater. But even if they had had another pump available, which they didn’t, the failed seal meant that running the raw water system would only create more black mayo. So they got creative. They built a cooling system unconnected to the engine, by piping in the brine output from their watermaker. This worked for about 15 minutes before the pump heated up again. Next they rigged computer fans to blow air on it. The fans could cool it for an additional half-hour.

“It wasn’t dangerous, like physically dangerous, but we could have very easily ruined our engine,” says Alex.

They were on the equator, in the ITCZ, motoring up to squalls without reliable horsepower, hoping to use the wind to press on. They spent weeks hopscotching between storms trying to get somewhere, anywhere, under sail. “We motored and sat, motored and sat, all the way to the Galápagos,” says Nick.

“We’re a little more tolerant of not moving fast than most boats out there,” says Alex. “But those days added up.”

The Galápagos is a protected wildlife preserve that charges steep entrance fees, but international law dictates that a boat in distress can seek assistance in port to make repairs without checking into the country. Saltbreaker showed up at Santa Cruz Island without an engine, in need of a machine shop, and met a port captain who was wary of impoverished sailors claiming maritime rights. The crew was quarantined to their boat and allowed into Puerto Ayora only to shop for parts and repair service. There were no impeller pumps to be had, so they would continue to use Saltbreaker’s engine as rigged: with a makeshift stainless-steel seal, a saltwater washdown pump for raw water intake to the engine, and computer fans cooling the pump. With this thoroughly hacked setup, they took off again.

Alex brought the new impeller pump with him when he returned from his trip to the U.S., but by that time they had both grown accustomed to the Rube Goldberg cooling system and didn’t mind that they couldn’t use the engine much. “It makes noise. It gets things hot. It disturbs the peace,” says Alex.

“Fixing the engine wasn’t high on our list of boat projects,” says Nick.

Somewhere around Bora Bora, more than a month after my visit, they finally got around to installing the new pump.

AFTER BREAKFAST on my first morning, Nick puts on his snorkel and mask and dives off the bow to check the anchor. Cruising is as much about anchoring as it is sailing, and the guidebooks suggest checking the anchor religiously in the Tuamotus: “Variable currents, sudden storms, and poor charts make cruising this group by yacht extremely hazardous. ... Wrecks litter the reefs of many atolls.”

While Alex was on furlough in San Francisco, Nick had single-handed Saltbreaker in Fakarava and broke a snubber—the shock absorber on the anchor line—on a squally night. In a storm, over a sandy bottom, boats drag on their anchors, but on a coral bottom, anchor chains wrap around coral heads, jerking the boat around in furious seas and tugging at the bow fittings. Nick freedived on the anchor frequently, sometimes unwrapping it from the coral, manually hauling 150 feet of chain off the bottom to reset it again.

While Alex was gone, Nick had tried not to move the boat too often or too far or at any hour during which the sun wasn't giving him full view over the treacherous coral. If the balky engine died for good, he knew he'd lose control and run into the reef, ripping Saltbreaker open on knife-sharp coral. It was tough to sail alone, so he usually didn't. Mostly he just hung out with other cruisers, ate fish pizza at a French pension on Fakarava, and freedived in a pass full of sharks.

The Tuamotus are too low, with too little decent soil, to grow much of anything, and the meager local economy consists of copra and black pearl farming. There aren't enough stores on the island for money to be of much use, and a resupply ship comes only once a week from Tahiti, which is 200 miles away. Fresh fruit, which Saltbreaker carried from the Marquesas, was more valuable than jewels, and they traded bananas and mangoes for \$150 worth of black pearls.

Nick is an elegant freediver, and he seemed to take to the Robinson Crusoe aspects of cruising with more fluency than Alex. When the Kleemans made it to Tonga, five months after my visit, Alex took a scuba-diving class, while Nick spent several days in the woods trying to trap a wild pig. He learned to set snares, then tied the snares to a log hung over a tree limb. He baited the trap with mangoes, and when the pig's foot tripped the snare, the log dropped and hoisted the pig. He dug an umu, an underground oven, and invited six or seven boats in the anchorage to a pig roast.

“I have never been hunting before,” Nick told me by phone after this experience, pleased to have added another skill. “But every-thing I learned about gutting fish carried over to a pig.”

During my time on the boat, we didn't do anything quite so primal. Tetamanu is a sleepy place, with the spare and composed quality of a Gauguin painting. Along with the dive shop, the town has two small hostels, a decrepit old church and a shiny new one, and a few houses. But it has one world-class highlight: the exuberant corals of the South Pass. Late in the morning, Alex, Nick, their dad, and I all dinghy toward the mouth of the pass, expecting a tidal flood into the lagoon at lunchtime, but we're told at the dive shop that their weather calculations were off and 2:30 P.M. is more like it.

“Lunch and then beer? Or beer and then lunch?” asks Alex.

Beer, lunch, beer, they agree. The dive shop has an overwater café, an open hut with a pandanus-thatched roof above the drop-off where the coral shelf gives way to the pass. The seawater is as clear as gin.

After lunch, the standing waves at the mouth of the pass calm down and the Kleemans take their dinghy into the current. For the next several hours, we all drift the entire width of French Polynesia's widest pass. The current pulls us along at a brisk five knots, and we see sharks, eagle rays, schools of jacks and snappers, striped barracuda, moray eels, parrot fish, angelfish, lionfish, and a Napoleon wrasse so large it could conquer Europe. The coral valley reaches 70 feet down, and there are several hundred gray sharks at the bottom, six feet long, noses into the current, waiting for a meal to float past. The coral is so

ostentatious that it beggars belief. There are fields and gardens of bright brain coral, fan coral, staghorn coral, and neon soft coral.

We're carried along for three hours, then delivered back to Saltbreaker. Nick and Alex climb aboard to watch the sun fall and the stars rise. Soon there are shooting stars, too. They bring out musical instruments, and Saltbreakers are poured all around.

"So... that was OK," Alex says.

"I wouldn't object to a few more days of that," says their dad.

"After an average day of snorkeling, I like to relax with a cocktail of cough syrup and bloody mary mix," says Nick.

In the months that follow, the Kleemans will make it to New Zealand but not past it— stopped, as anticipated, by a lack of money. As of May 2013, Alex was back in the U.S. and Nick was in Tauranga, trying to figure out his next move.

So should the voyage of Saltbreaker go down as a failure? Judging by what I saw when I was on board, no way. After our reef-cruising excursion, we spend the next few days on the same rhythm: food, weather, snorkel, booze, rinse, repeat. Finally, the Kleemans decide to sail somewhere, so they take an easy downwind trip toward the airstrip at Rotoava. The breeze is light, about ten knots, and the sun is high and dazzling, a flawless South Pacific winter day. Nick and Alex work together in a ballet of ropes and cloth, chains and muscle, as if they've been training for this their whole lives.

Saltbreaker is tidied up for movement, her unpacked goodies put away and her garbage strapped down. She may be ugly, slow, and old, but she's a fun ride. Toothpaste, the remora, follows along to her next anchorage.

Alex is at the helm, trying his luck with the autopilot. The backing plate is cracked. The stripped gears have been replaced. Saltwater has corroded the power-supply socket, so he's soaking the contacts in vinegar. He gaffer-tapes the loose cord to the power source.

Just like that, the autohelm comes back from the dead. Alex sets a course and it dutifully takes the wheel. At that moment, the wind vane dies. "I guess she can only have one form of self-steering mechanism at a time," Alex says.

It's the kind of easy spinnaker run that any sailor would embrace. There aren't so many moments in life when everything is at stake—every dollar, every object, and everyone you love—but that is a constant aboard Saltbreaker. Alex and Nick decided to go all in on a half-price Craigslist boat. Why would they ever trade that?

<http://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/australia-pacific/Tune-In-Give-Up-Ship-Out-Kleemans-Sail-the-Pacific.html?page=all>