Tuesday, January 18. 2011

Back in Las Palmas / Retrospective on a year of voyaging

Happy new year to everybody! After Christmas in Germany with my Mum and Brother we packed our suitcases and went to the airport to fly to New Zealand to celebrate New Year Eve with my girl-friend Liz's family. My mother is 70 now and hasn't traveled much in her life. So naturally she was very exited about the trip (around half the world!). Fortunately everything went well and also the family get-together was a big success. AucklandAlan at his BBQinside Sky Tower Lake TaupoMt Ngauruhoe (aka "Mount Doom" in LOTR)Ngauruhoe Crater   Muriwai beachat Muriwai BeachNear the Whanganui River   Now I'm back in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and there is only one thing on my mind: the crossing. Harry has finished building the new cupboard where the washing machine was, and now I have to empty the boat, remove all the saw dust (the stuff is everywhere!), paint the surfaces, and then stow away my gear. Fortunately Liz came with me, and together this will be much easier and more fun too. Also over the next two weeks a couple of people are going to have a look at Vespina, and I'm quite confident that I can sell her this month. She is in very good condition and ready to sail. So there is still a little left to do, but nothing that should prevent me from sailing away end of the month ... which is pretty much a year later than I had expected when I started on this trip in Germany on November 8th, 2009. Which raises a few questions ... What happened? Why did it take so much longer? What happened was, first, the weather. Instead of three months it took me six months to get to the Canary Islands because the wind was blowing predominantly from the south-west, which was exactly the direction I had to go to. In the short spells of easterly winds (mostly above 40kn) I managed to sail three or four days towards my destination, and then the wind changed to south-west again and was blowing head on. With the bilge keel there is no going towards windward outside of a day-sail, and I had to turn into a harbour for a week or a month and wait. I could have motored against the wind, and many sailors I met on the way did just that, but it's not my way. For me this is strictly a sailing trip, not a motor cruise. The second thing that happened was the boat and my inexperience. I had left Germany without doing anything to Vespina after I had bought her only weeks before. The idea was to get going, see how I like it, and fix anything that came up on the way. Was that a good idea? Actually, I think it was. This way I fixed everything by priority and with a clear idea of how it should be. And I learned a lot in very little time. One of the happiest moments on the trip was when I had finally reached the Canary Islands turned into Puerto Calero, and there was nothing to do on Vespina. The wind-vane had worked, nothing had broken, everything was still as it should be. After a week of non-stop sailing with two storms and being knocked flat by a huge wave. Awesome. Would I do it again that way? No. Sailing alone through storm after storm with a boat that is not set up to be sailed alone is not only educating. It is also extremely frustrating, tiring, and yes, a little dangerous. Even if the wind hadn't changed after a few days to head on I still would have had to turn into the harbor, because after three days on the rudder (wind-vane not working) I was just done for. Which is why after buying Gudrun V I spent all that time in Las Palmas to set her up the way I need it and didn't just leave like I did with Vespina. Vespina is a very strong and forgiving boat. Gudrun V, being a race boat, is not. But she goes to windward very, very well, which is what I had missed on Vespina dearly. So, looking back, would I have bought Gudrun V again, knowing how much work (and money) it would be to fix her up? No! Honestly, not in my worst dreams had I imagined that it would take six months to get her ready. I would have continued with Vespina and continued playing the waiting game. As it is, I will have to do it anyway I think. Going against the wind is great fun on a day-sail, but not at all on an extended trip, and very tough on the material. Do I regret it? Hehe. No :-), absolutely not. Again, I have learned so much. Not only about sailboats, electrical and mechanical work, but also about organizing work and people outside of the software domain (see note below). And then it also allowed me to spent a lot of time on diving, video and photography. Because I knew very little about either of them that full-immersion approach allowed me to come a long way in all three fields. So the last six months were definitely not wasted, just spent in a very different way than anticipated. By the way, here is the completed promotional movie for the diving school, my first real video project. Not quite as I had envisioned it, but the best I could do at the time. Here in German, here in Spanish. So, what is it like to live on a boat? Before I went on this trip I had this idea of how it would be like: Planning a trip, trimming the sails and doing all the sailory things. Arriving in a port or lying at anchor, resting on the beach, stocking up on food in local markets and then heading out again for another few weeks at sea. As it turned out, life on the boat is not at all like that. A voyage is not a race where many years of planning, working and training (and financing) culminate in a prolonged feat of skill and endurance. A voyage on a boat is much more about keeping your boat seaworthy, organizing your life away from home, friends and support, and not so much about doing "sailory things" such as accomplishing great feats of skill or endurance. The boat gets you from A to B, and of course there are difficulties at sea that have to be dealt with. The biggest challenges are encountered on dry land, however: among the hardest are mundane things like paperwork in ports, paying the bills without a regular income, making sense of life without escaping into work and mass entertainment, and getting to grips with the fact that living a dream is very different from dreaming it. Having said that, working on a boat on an exotic island beats office work 9 times out of 10. So yes, I'm loving it . But I do miss conferences and being part of a community that is trying to make the world a better place. Back to the present. This week Liz and I will mostly clean and paint Gudrun with hopefully a lot of

test-sailing towards the end of the week to grow confidence and make sure there will be no avoidable surprises. Then next week I will stock up on food and water, sell Vespina (tock tock tock) and then go, go, go! Expected departure date: 29th of January anno domini MMXI, wether Vespina is sold or not. Gudrun is finally ready and I have to cross now. I started this trip and I have to finish it. Once I get to the Caribbean Liz will join me on the boat, and we are going to sail together for a while. One year apart is enough. That will be a whole new experience again! -- Note: I've done more than a hundred software projects, taking from a few days to a few years to complete. But after renovating a 17th century house this was only my second "physical world" project. In software you can start by building a very small and simple working solution, and then extend this on all sides until it does all the things it has to do. Houses and Boats need to be built form the bottom up, and each step has to be pretty much completed until you can start on the next one. It is true that many software projects are also built that way. Having the direct comparison now I am not surprised that most of these projects are way over time and budget. That approach simply doesn't take advantage of the opportunities the software-domain offers, but introduces all the extra complexities you would have when building a house with too many specialized workers and changing the design every few weeks. How could that possibly work at all?

    Posted by Axel Busch in Gudrun V at 03:35

Excellente!
    Anonymous on Jan 18 2011, 05:58