

July 8, 1998

Cheryll and I are back from Greece. As you may recall from your Greek mythology, the God of the Sea, Poseidon, made a declaration to the effect of; "Those who return from the sea without incurring my wrath, shall in appreciation, cast upon the waters a young virgin....." Not having easy access to anyone meeting those qualifications, I've instead decided to express my gratitude to Poseidon by telling the tale of our travels to as many people as possible in hopes that they will someday visit his sea, and he can reap his rewards, sort of like a pyramid scheme.

We departed Detroit on Friday, June 19th for Athens, with a five hour layover in Amsterdam. We took the 15 minute, \$3 train ride from the airport to downtown Amsterdam for a brief tour of the city. We had time for a one-hour boat tour through the canals and a brief walk downtown. It was a beautiful day, and the city was crammed with tourists. Interesting place, we may go back some day when we can get more time.

Our flight to Athens arrived on time, Saturday evening, and my Dad and Dee were there to meet us. As has become the custom, we delivered their mail and an assortment of boat repair parts. It was a half hour cab ride to the place where their boat was anchored, and the tired travelers quickly fell asleep. The anchor was lifted early the next morning and we began our sailing adventure. It was great sailing with a fifteen knot wind out of the northeast pushing Free Spirit easily westward toward the Corinth Canal. Geography buffs know that Greece is divided into both the northern mainland, and the southern Peloponnesian peninsula which was connected to the mainland until the canal was dug in the 1890's. It's three miles long and the cut is over 200 feet deep in places. After the toll of \$112 was paid (highest in the world on a per mile basis), it was cool driving through the narrow canal with the steep rock walls rising dramatically above us on both sides. We spent the night tied to the quay in Corinth. We toured some local ruins and saw the site of Argos, former home of the Argonauts. It was an amazing city, built thousands of years ago, on the top of a mountain.

We also got our first taste of Greek culture in the town of Corinth. Like the people around the Mediterranean, the Greeks work morning and evening, sleep in the afternoon, and stay up late at night. Dinner is eaten around ten. The food was good yet inexpensive. We ate our first of many Greek salads. The Greeks don't use lettuce; only tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, peppers and olives, topped with a large block of feta cheese, sprinkled with oregano, and swimming in olive oil. We never spent more than \$10 per person for dinner including drinks, tax and tips. The people were very accommodating and fluent English was spoken by almost everyone. In the town square that evening, some local children were performing folk dances which started looking the same after about five minutes. Like the Caribbean, the standard of living is not high. I think most people were working for one or two dollars an hour. Cab rides cost sixty cents plus thirty

cents per mile. Unlike the Caribbean, the people were generally industrious and hard working. The towns were kept clean and the beaches picked up for the most part. We were made to feel very welcome. There are fifteen million people living in Greece and ten million Greeks living abroad. I think a lot of people leave to make some money, but most return to Greece eventually.

On Monday we sailed 40 miles on the Gulf of Corinth to Itea and arrived mid-afternoon. We took a cab to the ruins at Delphi (pronounced Del-fee), and visited the temple of Apollo where the Oracles sniffed the sacred fumes and chanted proclamations incomprehensible to all but the priests, who translated them for the masses. There was an ancient theater built into the side of a hill and I received a standing ovation from two tourists for my rendition of "The Impossible Dream". For some reason which was not readily apparent, Cheryll seemed to be pretending not to know me. Perhaps she was under the influence of the sacred fumes.

Tuesday afternoon found us on the tiny Island of Trezonia. It's a beautiful, relaxing place. It has a marina, but no cars. There is one small hotel and a few tavernas. It would be a great place to get away from it all for a while. On Wednesday it was ten miles to Navpatkos. This was really cool. The tiny harbor is a medieval castle. We hiked up a hill to a fortress for a great view of the area. There were some problems in the afternoon when the winds came up and the knot holding the stern anchor let go. (The bow was tied to the quay.) We lost the anchor and had to spend the night anchored outside the harbor.

Thursday we motored 60 miles to the island of Zakynthos where we spent the next three nights. Zakynthos is in the Ionian Sea, off the west coast of Greece. Most tourists visit the Greek islands in the Aegean, east of the mainland. This meant that most of our trip was remarkably untouristed and quiet. We took a tour of the Island and just hung out for a few days here. There were some interesting caves at the north end of the island. Mostly, they grow olives and grapes.

Next we headed to Ithaca, where we spent two nights anchored out, swimming and snorkeling. Cheryll and I took the dinghy to the quaint fishing village of Frikes and had lunch. On the way back, we stopped at a small, secluded cove for a while.

The next day we went to Fiskardo on the island of Kefhalonia. Kefhalonia and Ithaca both claim to be the setting of Homer's novel, "The Odyssey". On Kefhalonia, we spent our last three nights in Agia Efemia. We rented a moped and toured the island. More beautiful fishing villages and some interesting caves.

On Friday afternoon we left the boat and caught a flight back to Athens. Athens was interesting, but not fun. We had dinner at a sidewalk cafe in a touristy area known as "The Plaka". On Saturday, we climbed to the top of the Acropolis and looked down on the city from the Parthenon. We watched the changing of the guard at the tomb of the unknown soldier, Cheryll did some jewelry shopping, we strolled through a park, and by the time we ran a lap at the Olympic Stadium it was 108 degrees. Inside the Archaeological Museum it was only 91 degrees, but it didn't take long to get bored looking at the thousands of pots which had been dug up at various sites across the country. We went back to our non-air conditioned room and hid from the sun for the afternoon. Our flight home on Sunday was an hour late when someone checked their bag, but failed to get on the plane. Security regulations require that they search the luggage compartment and remove the unaccompanied luggage. Otherwise, the trip home was uneventful.

This was my thirteenth and Cheryll's sixth trip to sail on Free Spirit over the past twelve years. My Dad and Dee plan to spend two more years cruising before selling the boat and buying a pick-up and a "fifth-wheel" for a few years of land yachting around North America. Considering their lifestyle, they are holding up very well.

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