

Clockwise from top left: Grouper and parrotfish for dinner; at anchor in Indo; *Rudis* being hauled out in Thailand; Last trip on *Rudis*; Komodo island village, hammock in Pulau Singha Basar; Jamie and me.



Diving Vanuatu.



Fully reefed on a close reach in Vanuatu.

**I stopped wearing clothes.** I was stuck in the doldrums and thunderstorms hit regularly, everything was soaked and there was nowhere to dry anything, so it all got mouldy. It simply became easier to stop wearing clothes.

A massive thunderstorm hit, and I needed to rip the sails. I threw the harness on and climbed the mainsail, straddling this metal pole, naked, with thunder cracking down around me, and thought, "What the heck am I doing?" All you can do is laugh and hope you don't get zapped. I didn't. I continued on for American Samoa. It's a US territory, I thought maybe I could get my clearance papers there.

The next day, the winds picked up as I exited the doldrums, and I realised I'd lost my rudder in the night. These things always happen at night, when you have to fix them in the dark. It was a Monitor wind-vane rudder, a kind of mechanical autopilot. I had a drill and such, so I made a new rudder from an old oar. It actually worked, and that oar-rudder got me to Samoa and then on to Fiji. I sailed with it for about 1800 miles, until Monitor heard about this and donated a new rudder.

The 1200-mile trip from Fanning to American Samoa took me 14 days. Coming into Samoa, another big storm hit. Winds reached 50 knots. At first, I just brought down all the sails and went down below, but the wind was pushing me towards the island, so I had to go out and raise the sails and try to move north of the island and drift. The next day, winds were only 30 knots, so I was able to sail into port.

After two weeks there, I sailed to Niuaotupapu island, which is part of Tonga, spent a week,

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then sailed on to Fiji. Sailors call Niuaotupapu “new potatoes”. My plan was to sail all the way to Australia and then on to Indonesia during that season. But in Fiji, my transmission went out – for the first time.

I told my friend Alan, who'd I'd met on Niuaotupapu, and he said, “You don't need a transmission. Just sail everywhere.”

He then spent a few days with me, sailing on and off anchor, finally teaching me how to sail. I had never learned any of these skills. I'd already been through quite a bit, I'd covered 3,000 nautical miles on the headsail, but I finally learned how to use the mainsail properly.

**I didn't have enough money for a new transmission.** A yachtie asked me to sail his boat to New Zealand for him, and as payment, he'd repair my transmission. When I got back to Fiji, he had done the repair and gave me a little money. We did some other repairs and got the boat ready.

Well, between Fiji and Indonesia, my transmission went out again. I got the boat to Bali and tried to repair the gearbox a few more times, with no success. I called the manufacturer in the US and explained that I was out of both money and options, and had no idea how I would make this work. The company kindly sent me a new transmission, without receiving the old transmission under warranty in return.

I tried to leave Bali six or seven times with the new transmission, having to be towed back to the island each time. Failed transmission again, failed motor, you name it. Of course I knew that I could just sail, but the winds in Indonesia can be weak. It isn't safe. During one of the attempts to leave, the mast broke in just five or six knots of wind. Lucky for me, at that point, the motor worked, so I motored the five miles back to Bali.

Eventually I decided I wouldn't use the transmission. I raised the sails in Serangan harbour, headed away from Bali and then north towards Java and Sumatra. It took me 24 days to cover 900 nautical miles, normally an eight-day trip. Winds were calm. The trip was painfully slow.

I had since acquired an SMS satellite. Around 150 miles out from the Mentawais, a friend texted – my disability insurance was suing me. I was supposed to be in the US in order to receive

payments and they had tracked me down via Facebook. I had been gone for months now.

Very worried, I knew I had to get somewhere to deal with this. My boat was going so slow, it turned into a fish-aggregation device. Dolphins visited me ritually twice a day, picking off the small fish gathered in the shade of my barely-moving hull.

One day, I jumped in the water to swim with the dolphins. I got out, made coffee and breakfast, looked back down off the side of the boat, and lo and behold, a whale shark was there, maybe three metres long. I had wanted to see one all my life. I was so excited that I jumped back into the water and forgot my mask, wondering why it was so blurry.

I went back to get my mask and camera, but I'd taken so many photos of the dolphins that my camera had run out of batteries. So I swam with the shark for half an hour and it was just amazing. He would come and go and tow me around a bit. It was absolutely incredible. I was maybe 200 miles off the coast of the Mentawais, in the middle of nowhere, and the moment was magical.

**I crept up the coast of Sumatra** and finally arrived at Asu, off Nias, where I met some great friends. There was wind again, so I could make quick trips back and forth between the Hinakos, Nias and Langkawai. In Langkawai, I tried to figure out how I could get my transmission sorted, and someone told me that I should do it in Thailand. So I pressed 100 miles north to Krabi to see if I could fix it.

The Krabi river is really shallow, with a narrow channel, and yep, I hit a rock. The boat balanced on the rock for an hour and a half as the tide pulled out and swung back in. The high tide floated the boat off the rock, but I had damaged the rudder and the hull. The boat was taking on water. I was low on cash – I didn't even have enough to haul the boat out of the water, but I knew I had to. I sailed into the Krabi boat lagoon, hauled the boat, really at a loss as to what to do.

My friend Jamie had sailed with me from Langkawai to Krabi. It was nice to have company. It was the first time I'd had someone else on the boat with me. Jamie racked her brain for solutions and suggested I start a GoFundMe campaign. I didn't really know what that was, but she put it together.

In a matter of days, I'd raised \$7,000 and within a few weeks, some \$14,000. I started to look for new motors. The person I had asked to help me with this went around and had a look for new boats for me, as well. He found one dry-docked directly next to mine. I just looked and looked at the boat. It was amazing, in great shape. I spoke to the owner. He said he would sell it for \$20,000, which was quite a bit more than I had, but it made sense to invest the sum in a new boat instead of funnelling money into a losing battle.

I asked about instalments, but the owner was adamant that \$20,000 was already far underpriced. He was willing to let the boat go for a quick and easy sale. Then one of my good friends offered to loan me the last \$6500, saying to pay him back whenever I could.

I'm actually on the boat at this moment, on my way to Langkawai to handle the title transfer. It's so luxurious and comfortable compared to the *Rudis*.

It's incredible. All of it is so unexpected.

