

INTHESTREAM

Novice sailor Tammy Kennon thoughtfully examines a cruising life's learning curve.

"There's a nurse shark coming your way!"

My husband Chip and I, along with our daughter and her boyfriend, are peering over the lifelines, marveling at the sea life beneath *Cara Mia*, our Island Packet 380. As the tide rushes by, it brings with it a living tableau of colorful fish and bits of seaweed suspended in clear, turquoise brilliance.

We are moored in a sliver of deep water in the lee of Warderick Wells Cay, and the man on the trawler next to us is giving us a play-by-play of the sea creatures passing his way.

"I'm seeing yellowtail snappers!" he calls out.

"What have you got over there?"



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Dreams of sailing in paradise are fashioned from hope and fancy, but turning those dreams into reality is tedious labor. I know this, because Chip and I struggled for five years trying to breathe life into our cruising dreams.

And just when we were ready to sell our house and business, liquidate our land life and sail away, we were blindsided by the worst economic disaster of our times.

As we labored in suspended animation, waiting for our property to sell, sailing seemed faraway, perhaps even unattainable. To rekindle our hope on gray days at the office, Chip would call me over to watch online footage of a magical (maybe mythical?) place called Warderick Wells. And then we would watch it again.

So today, as we motored into this 3D rendition of a blurry YouTube video,

we were not just entering a crescent of shocking turquoise water. We had reached the confluence of dreaming and reality and were about to discover the difference.

As we tied up to a mooring ball, the four of us gathered like excited schoolchildren as a 7-foot nurse shark came right up to the boat to greet us, or so it seemed. Not to be outdone, tiny, yellow-chested

birds flew right into the cockpit beside us. One was tame enough to light on an outstretched hand as if we were Snow White and the three dwarves.

Cara Mia hovers in water so clear that we can see individual blades of turtle grass growing on the white sand 15 feet down. Peering over the edge of the boat, I can see my reflection on the surface and my shadow on the sand far below.



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Forty yards away the uninhabited island at the heart of the Exuma Land & Sea park waits to be explored, a sprawling playground for our sea legs and skittering, curly tailed lizards. The island's limestone embrace shields us from the raucous Exuma Sound just beyond.

For our daughter Casey, this Bahamian visit is our gift to her for realizing her own dream, a bachelor's degree in French completed just one month ago. I watch as she and her boyfriend Remi paddle up next to our boat in a neon pink kayak, a riotous swath of pink against the vibrant turquoise water.

"A huge ray just swam right under me!" she says to me. "Actually it kind of freaked me out."

She is putting words to our common experience here: stunned by the grandeur and beauty that surrounds us in this remote, unsullied paradise that can only be reached by private boat or plane.

At the close of our first day here, we dinghy to a white beach a few yards off our starboard bow for cocktails with Yannick and Evelyn, French friends we met a few

islands back. We have invited new friends, two young brothers from Philadelphia, who spend every spring sailing in search of waves for their surfboards and wind for their kiteboards.

The golden glow of sunset calms our chatter and draws us to the water's edge for the close of day.

The sinking sun has tamed the lagoon, turning its bright palette into achingly soft pastels, and as the last rays disappear, the mellow peal of a conch horn wafts across the glassy water. So what *have* we got over here?

I believed that my old dreams of sailing were vivid and fanciful, that my imagination was overly rich and detailed. I feared that the reality would not be the same as the dream, and I was right.

The reality is so much better.

Tammy Kennon is a writer and journalist who relishes traveling the world at 5 mph. She has been published in the New York Times and Washington Post. Follow her adventure at ploddingINparadise.com

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