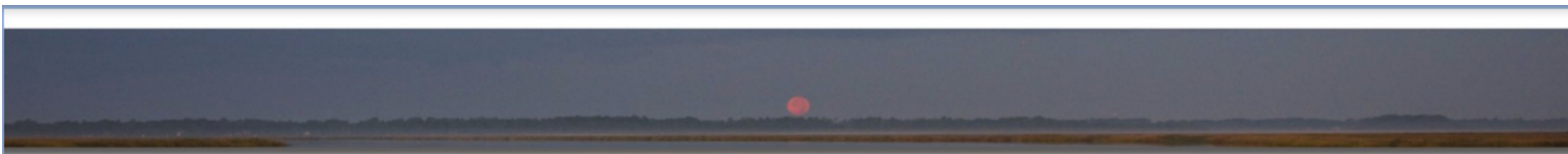


IN THE STREAM

**Story & Photos:
Tammy Kennon**

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

*Popping my head out of the companionway hatch on a
chilly November morning, I peered around in a pre-coffee
blur. On the horizon, the rising sun looked about like I felt:
pale and lifeless. Then, I noticed the sun was sinking.*



It didn't take me long to realize, even without coffee, that I was looking, not at the sun, but at the full moon setting in the west. The current in Georgia's Darien River had spun the boat around in the night, so that our stern, which had faced the moonrise in the east last night, now faced the moon setting in the west, its pale pink glory sandwiched between a gray sky above and gray water beneath.

How is it that even though the moon has set at sunrise more than 600 times in my lifetime, I had never bothered to witness it? How fortunate for me that my first time was in Georgia.

When we'd cast off from our home port in North Carolina four weeks earlier, I had a bead on turquoise water, not a slog down the Intracoastal Waterway. Anxious to make our way south as quickly as possible, we had sat for a week in Beaufort, South Carolina, waiting for an offshore path to open for an overnight sail to Florida, saving ourselves almost a week of traveling through Georgia on the ICW. But a series of low-pressure systems kept chugging up the coast with no break in

sight, leaving the inland path through Georgia as our only option. Cold wind chasing us from the north and warm island breezes beckoning from the south made both of us eager to keep moving.

The weather sent us through Georgia, despite the fact that our fellow cruisers had groused about its perils: 9-foot tidal swings, currents changing every few miles, unpredictable shallows, exposed sounds and a meandering route so winding that it sometimes feels like you're backtracking.

What they hadn't mentioned was the payoff. Those 9-foot tides create a sprawling marshland that is a thriving habitat for shore birds, fish and reptiles -- and completely inhospitable for human development. The ICW wanders through miles and miles of rare undeveloped waterfront on our coast, human-free but for fellow travelers and a few fishing boats. A midday low tide kept us from traveling past midafternoon, leaving us long, lazy hours at anchor in complete solitude, no sign of human existence other than an occasional vapor trail left by a jet too far up in the atmosphere to be heard.

For much of our first four weeks, the emotional impact of getting underway and the precipitous learning curve of a new cruiser had hogged my attention. Let's just say I was self-absorbed. But if our relatively glacial pace was beginning to iron out my psyche, it was Georgia that truly captured my attention.

It's hard to remain oblivious when gliding within yards of a majestic bald eagle perched on a marker. Even more so when it takes flight right beside your cockpit. And no internal storm can stand up to a roiling squall approaching on the horizon.

Standing there groggily on the top step in the Darien River, I was captivated by the grandeur of nature.

The utter silence of gray. The screech of gold marsh grass slicing through the sheer artistry of gray on gray on gray on blue. The sweet and gut-wrenching science of pink wrought by sun and bits of atmosphere.

Perhaps we didn't put a notch in our belt by going offshore, making it from South Carolina to Florida in one great

overnight leap. But why am I out here moving at this pace if not to experience each mile, to tune my senses to nature's voice, to plod, to gawk, to have no shame in feeling wonder?

Which cloud cares if I have traveled three miles or fifty or five thousand or none at all?

When we left Beaufort, I had dreaded this journey south as a necessary evil, a long slog that, at the end, would deliver me to paradise. But Georgia and a full moon at sunrise taught me that paradise is not an external destination at all but my own awareness of what's been spread before me, just outside the companionway hatch.

Tammy Kennon is a writer, journalist and avid traveler. Her boat, Cara Mia, an Island Packet 380, waits in Georgia for hurricane season to pass while her crew spends time in Paris. Tammy has been published in the New York Times and Washington Post and, best of all, Classic Yacht Magazine.

You can follow her adventure at ploddingINparadise.blogspot.com