

## INTHESTREAM

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

"What happened to that 10-to-12 knots of wind?" my husband Chip asked.

"It's starting to gust into the 20s," I said from the helm. "I guess they meant 10 plus 12."

The morning had started out so gently, the palm trees on Sampson Cay wafting on a carefree morning breeze.

Our modest goal for the day had been a 10-mile sail three islands down, to Black Point Settlement on Great Guana Cay in the Exumas. The forecast had called for neighborly winds from the northeast for our southeast trip, near ideal conditions for a two-hour sail. By midafternoon, the wind was predicted to ease and clock southeast.

Just before 9 a.m., we had headed downwind out of the anchorage flying the main and jib side by side in my favorite point of sail, wing on wing.

*Cara Mia*, our Island Packet 380, glided over placid turquoise water.

*Then we rounded Sandy Cay, and things went south.*

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The wind was shifting to the southeast, way ahead of predictions, which would put it right in our face on the next turn, that dreaded angle called beating to weather.

Our choices: drop all the canvas and motor into increasing wind and swell or keep the sails flying, tacking out and back across the straight path to our destination.

We chose to sail and tacked southwest into the Exuma Bank.

"It's up to 22, sustained," I said. "And I don't like those squalls on the horizon." "But we're going 8 knots!" Chip replied, happy that we were crushing our usual pace of 6 knots.

"In the wrong direction," I thought to myself as we sailed farther and farther west in the Exuma Bank.

I was struggling to keep our heading against too much sail, fighting the wind, the sails and the boat. I wanted to reef. Chip didn't.

At the end of my watch, I went below to get out of the din, annoyed that Chip and I were still at odds about the sail plan.

Partway through his watch, Chip roused me from a nap, because he needed my help. I stumbled into the cockpit, and he handed me the wheel.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked, bleary eyed, as he dashed onto the side deck.

"Just sail the boat!" he said, rather abruptly, in my opinion.

"But I don't even know what's going on!" I said, and without a firm hand



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against the overpowered sails, *Cara Mia* was turning off course.

We have since agreed on a protocol for handing over the helm in a more considerate way, turning on the autopilot, so the boat stays on course, and then briefing the incoming helmsman on anything relevant before stepping away. But we were new cruisers and helm protocol was sorely missing that day on the wrong way to Black Point. I took



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the wheel in 25 knots of wind with annoying swell and too much sail, and without knowing which heading to take.

As I was groggily finding my way, Chip and I got in a fight that went like most married fights go: nowhere, only this one went at an 8-knot clip with actual gusts and flashes of lightning.

"Why couldn't you just sail the boat?" Chip asked.

"Why couldn't you just tell me what was happening?" I said. I stomped below in anger and skulked until my watch.

On the tack toward Black Point, we decided -- in a chilly manner -- to reef the main with our new, untried reefing rig, yet another maneuver for which we had no protocol. It was my watch, and when I turned into the wind, the jib got away, flapping like a flock of startled hens and just as noisy.

The jib lines got twangled around themselves and in the standing rigging.

Chip got everything tamed back down and the main reefed. I turned off the wind, and the new reefing ring popped off its new horn.

Once again I steered into the wind, and Chip went forward to put the ring back on. I filled the sails, and the ring popped off again. Repeat.

"Now we've got it," I said. The reefing ring was staying in place, the wind was easing to 10 knots -- just as we entered Black Point harbor, three hours after leaving Sampson.

That's when I noticed that the frenzied chicken maneuver had ripped out the entire back seam of the jib.

*Cara Mia* had paid the price for our mistakes, schooling us in the value of good seamanship -- and a new meaning of seakindliness that would serve us on land and sea.

Safely at anchor, Chip heaved my sewing machine on deck, and, with the jib billowing across the deck, he turned the hand crank while I guided the sail under the needle, working together to rethread the damage of working at odds.

Tammy Kennon is a writer, journalist and traveler who has been published in the New York Times and Washington Post. She is writing a book about the revelations of a midlife cut-and-run. You can follow her at [ploddingINparadise.com](http://ploddingINparadise.com).



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