

EXCERPTS FROM *MAKING WAVES*
by Libby Brown
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PART TWO
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CROSSROADS

The islands of the Caribbean form a long arc that curves between Florida and Venezuela. After two years spent getting acquainted with the stretch from the Bahamas to the Virgin Islands, Stewart and I wanted to see the Leeward and Windward Islands, which lay off the northeastern tip of South America. That became our destination for an extended cruise in 1993-94. From Fort Lauderdale to Grenada, the round trip was 4,500 miles, a voyage roughly equal to the distance between Detroit and Honolulu. At an average speed of 12 mph, we felt that six months was a reasonable amount of time for the journey.

By the time we arrived in the Tobago Cays one evening, the all-day 35 mph winds had pummeled *Crossroads* and its family to exhaustion. I was weak from bracing myself against the vaulting seas and fluky currents. A potted plant, a basket of lemons, the entire CD collection — things that had not been put away or secured with a bungee cord — became a battery of missiles, but I was too seasick to clean up the mess. With such strong headwinds, our arrival time was much later than estimated and night was moving in fast. Gregg said we would have to drop anchor wherever we could since there was no marina in these cays.

The sky developed the color of a bruise and storm clouds glowered. Thunder and lightning erupted around us and Gregg fought to keep the boat in position to allow Stewart to lower the anchor. In *Crossroads*' spotlight, rain jetted sideways like a wideopen fire hose. Stewart's foul weather gear ripped open and flapped behind him, flinging hood, zipper and pull cords into a fury against his body. Unable to maneuver the boat against the heightened maelstrom, normally soft-spoken Gregg screamed from the flybridge against the oncoming wind.

"Drop it! Drop it!"

Gregg's command vanished in the howling storm, and Stewart heard nothing. Unanchored, *Crossroads* slid farther into the open water as if seeking a rendezvous with the encroaching tempest.

Even with that memory still vivid, words wilt and inadequately describe the sizzling arc of lightning that cleaved the sea only a few yards from Stewart, who held the anchor chain in one hand and the metal bow rail in the other. From my vantage point inside the wheelhouse, his body turned the blue of a blow-torch flame. He released the anchor, fell sideways onto the deck, and covered his head with his hands.

A tornado-like wind, rife with ozone, whipped into the boat as I ran out into the rain.