

A Life Changing Moment

Many years ago I had the good fortune to sail the seven seas in a small yacht with my husband and the parrot. My career to date had been chiefly in market research and IT. Neither of us had any nursing/medical experience beyond a First Aid Certificate.

Prior to departing from Australia I decided to research products and equipment, in the event I found myself facing the prospect of performing an emergency appendectomy on the chart table (with the parrot assisting). Fortunately my GP was a regular Sydney to Hobart sailor and entered into the spirit of our forthcoming adventure, providing advice, suggested equipment and medications. At the time I was at a loss to see how a pair of crutches would be any use to nautical travellers. However, on one occasion they successfully doubled (with careful modification) as emergency oars for the dinghy.

Additionally we acquired the nautical healthcare gospel "The Ship Captain's Medical Guide". A must-have for all prospective cruising yachties. This tome is laid out as a succession of flow charts. Signs and symptoms are described and, with a bit of luck, by following the directions the problem is identified. There then follow a series of interventions from simple to complex.

We were sailing through the Tongan islands from south to north when the skipper became unwell. Febrile, occasionally confused and complaining of sporadic low intense back pain. I consulted the gospel. After much head scratching and frantic page turning, I started to giggle. "What's so amusing", growled the patient. "Well, darling, I don't know whether to call an air ambulance or the media. According to this you are about to give birth!"

It turned out, when we finally made port and visited a doctor, he had a severe kidney infection. However this episode started me thinking about what career I would like to pursue when we returned to Australia. Today I am proud to be a member of the nursing family.

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