

THE EBB AND FLOW

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DOUG MITCHELL



It amazes me how amazingly easy it is to take for granted just how amazing getting to work on yachts can be. I know that's a whole lot of amazement for one statement, and perhaps an echo of some of my previous articles, but some recent developments in my life have floated that awareness to the surface once again. Like a chest full of treasure that falls overboard, unnoticed and forgotten, only to be discovered by a new and more thankful you following behind at a later time, the things that once amazed us about yachting often fade and lay dormant in the darkness, waiting to be revealed again when we need a strong dose of reality. A much needed

and powerful lightning bolt jolting us out of our complacent slumber and illuminating the forgotten benefits of yachting that few people get to experience.

I know that all sounds like some over-dramatic fluff, and I like to think that I've done a pretty good job of remaining grateful for being able to work in this industry (thanks in large part to my friends and family at home who are ready to keep me grounded and humble if I ever talk of my life as anything less than amazing), but recently, all that metaphorical gold came dangerously close to being ripped from my grasp. Without getting into too much detail, after

a recent trip home to see my family and friends in Canada, I was blindsided with some unexpected issues that for a few nerve-racking weeks threatened to really inhibit my yachting career and potentially derail the plans my girlfriend and I had been putting in place for the past eight months. Thankfully, after doing our research, keeping in contact with friends and colleagues in the industry, and staying as positive as we could, everything got back on track and eventually ended up better than we could have hoped for. With some incredible timing, we were both offered positions back on board my previous yacht, which we gratefully and enthusiastically accepted since we al-

ways hoped there would be room for both of us one day. We are now living this fantastically ideal reality, a boatload of reason to keep your bridges un-burnt and the positive vibes flowing when things look grim.

Now, in some ways, it's like I never left. I'm back on the boat I started on in Panama nearly three years ago as green as could be and spent the next two-plus years getting to know very well while taking my first steps up the ladder. I've returned to my old role as bosun with a future that looks very promising for learning a lot more and pushing forward, and apart from a few changes, I'm working with the crew and owners I've already established great relationships with. An island of familiar territory that is very comforting after navigating the sea of other options.

But in most ways, it's excitingly different and fresh. The same 130 feet of teak, stainless and fiberglass that I got to know so intimately before greets me every morning now as a new challenge. An opportunity to apply what I've learned from working on other boats, while picking up where I left off with the vessel that started it all and gave me the foundations of my career. I guess when you take a surprise ride on the mental rollercoaster of life's unpredictability, getting another chance in a great situation spawns a renewed pride in your work and a resolve to do your job well. Having a dose of gratitude with the morning coffee makes for a powerful concoction.

So, as we are settling very happily and thankfully into our new life working and living together on board, I think about the ebb and flow of things. I think about those out there that have recently found employment in the industry for the first time and are basking in the amazingness of it all, and I think of those out there in yachting duped by time itself into forgetting how grand the privileges are; how underneath the dull coating of dust, the shine still remains. Getting employed in this industry often requires treading water for a while in a grey sea of procedures and perseverance, as there isn't always a black-and-white set of guidelines to keep you afloat. But hopefully, even if it requires a lightning bolt to remind us, we can all appreciate being able to tell people that working on yachts is our job. ☺

Doug Mitchell is the bosun aboard the 130-foot Westport M/Y Sovereign. He grew up in High River, Alberta, Canada, and studied photojournalism at college in Calgary. He has been in yachting since 2008.