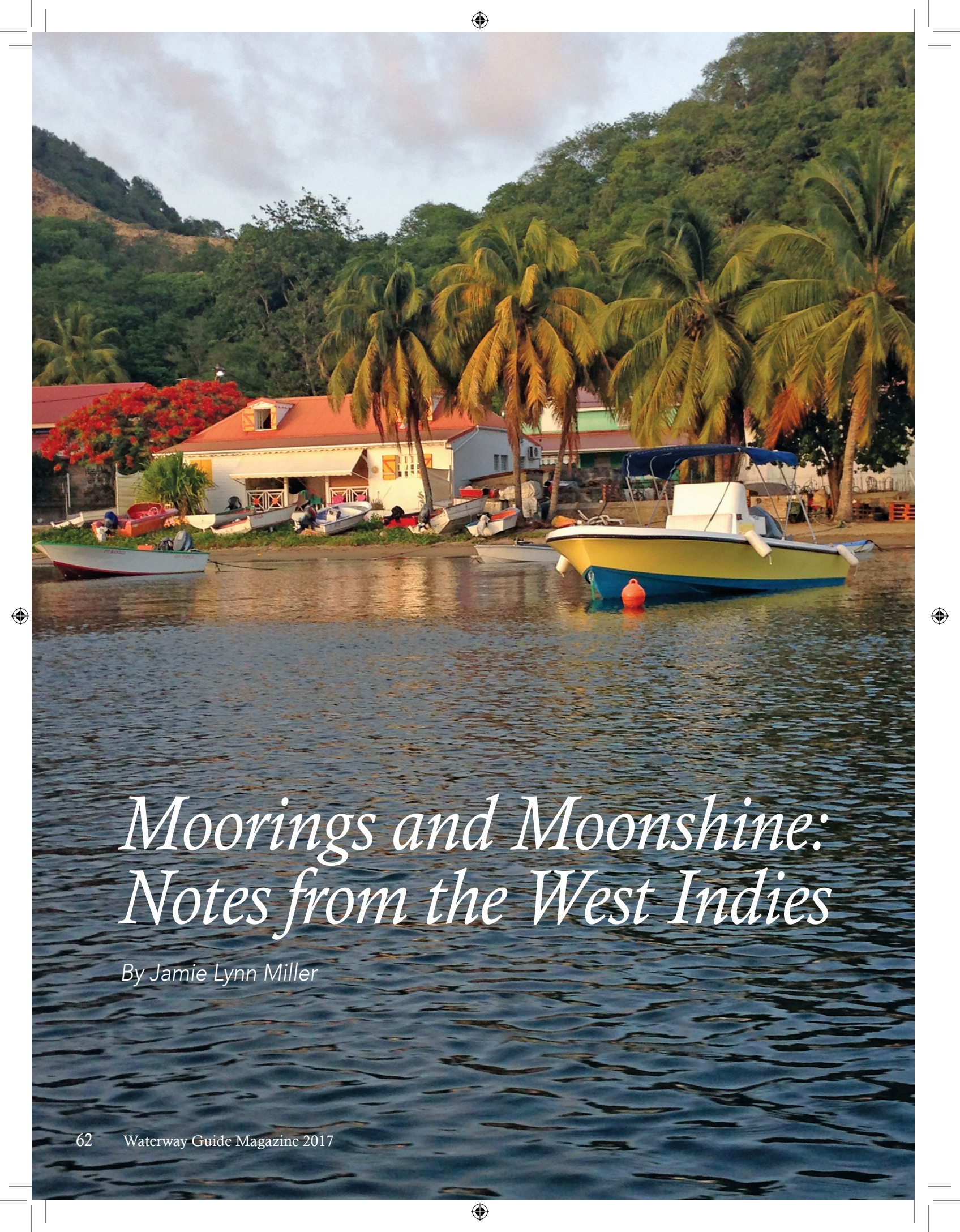


A photograph of a tropical harbor scene. In the foreground, a yellow and blue motorboat with a blue canopy is moored in the water. Behind it, several smaller white boats are docked along a shoreline. The shoreline is lined with palm trees and buildings, including a prominent white building with a red roof and a red flower bush. The background features a steep, forested hillside under a cloudy sky. The water is dark blue with gentle ripples.

Moorings and Moonshine: Notes from the West Indies

By Jamie Lynn Miller

"I'm going to grow on you like a barnacle," I told David the first day of our trip. I'd bought a one-way ticket from North Carolina to St. Martin to join my good friend, Amy, and her brother-in-law, David, who was moving his boat down island. After several years in St. Thomas, David and *Windchyme 2*, a 37-foot Fountaine Pagot, were headed to Grenada. The plan was to cruise a bit, see the islands along the way then reach Grenada before full-on hurricane season. As underemployed writers with a bit of time on our hands, Amy and I were officially "unofficial" crew – on board for adventure, some boating experience and, as always, stories for the page.

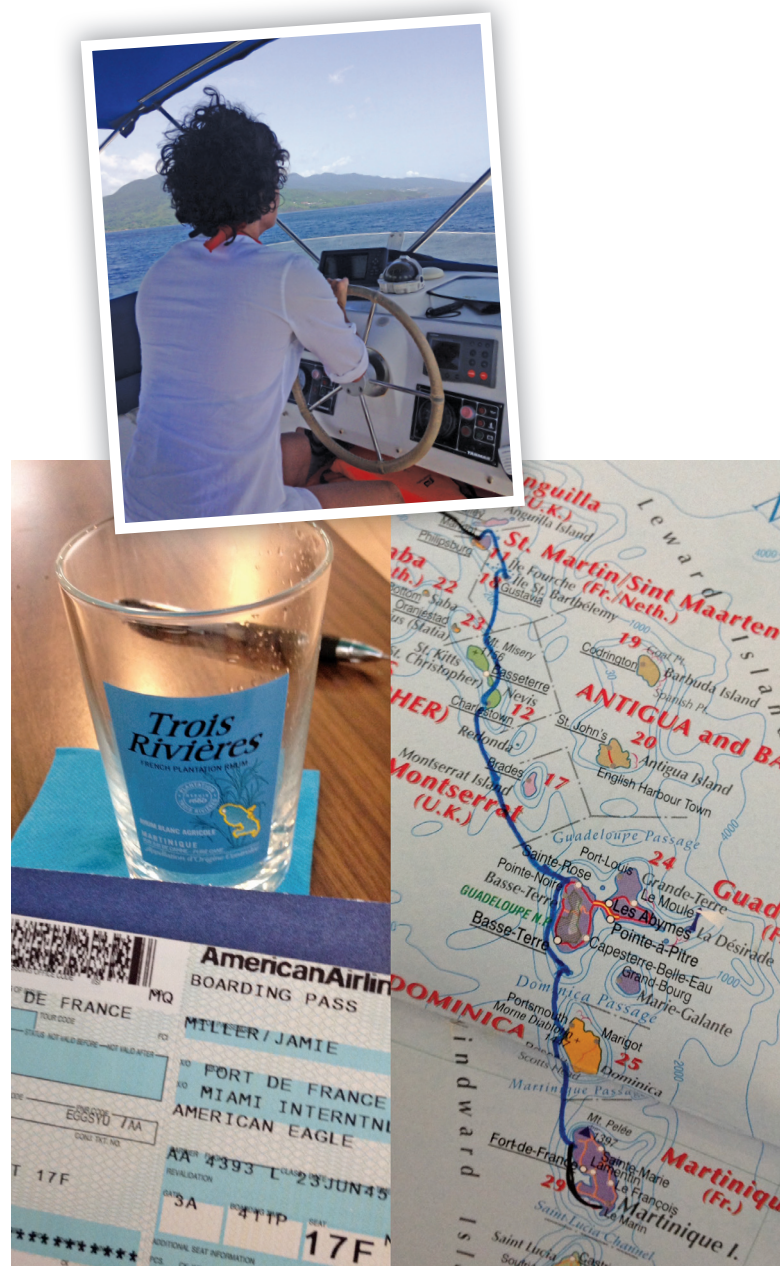
Thus far, I'd only spent one week at sea – on a Spanish tall ship, a real trial by fire. I struggled with the captain's rapid-fire commands, issued in broken English, while trying to dodge her withering looks, which needed no translation. As unpleasant as she'd been, the Spanish crew was amazing, and the rugged, unorthodox experience had given me a craving for time on the open sea, for the ever-changing adventure of moving through the ocean.

After a couple days in St. Martin and some first-rate lounging around St. Barth's, Amy, David, and I readied for our next destination. As we pulled out of Gustavia Port Marina, I was on fender duty, something I'd somewhat mastered during my tall ship days. As an avid rock climber, I liked being on (or over) the edges of ships. Coiling the lines, wrapping the cleat, perfecting that "slow-pitch softball" toss to a waiting dock hand that David showed me in St. Martin – all this was reminiscent of rope management in the wilderness. From rock outcroppings to rambling sea, many of my skills seemed to transfer.

Steep, jagged bluffs loomed starboard, rising plateaus that dropped back to sea – valleys and dips, contours and curves. It had been several smooth hours of sunshine and scenery, and my energy downshifted.

I relaxed beneath the bimini and nestled into the cushions, lightly running my hand along the railing.

The port engine sputtered and the speedometer dropped. This was the second round of engine troubles since we'd left St. Martin. There was some old fuel in the engines, David told us, that first time the engine died; he had hoped it would burn off or, if not, hold off on clogging until he could properly flush it.



Welcome sight of Saintes (left); steering toward Nevis (top); still life with rum country (above)

Unfortunately, the old fuel wasn't behaving according to plan. Yet he'd managed to free that first clog and get the engine restarted. Land was in sight, our radio worked, and emergency flares were on board. I determined that, while annoying, and kind of scary, the recurring fuel situation wasn't necessarily dire. It seemed we would still reach our daily destination.

It also occurred to me that I didn't really know what was happening; I only knew what David told us. Mine was a hands-on learning style, and with no real know-how or experience of my own, I could only trust that our captain knew how to problem solve. Nevertheless, I wondered if this was no big deal, why the mad dash to the berth and tearing up of the bedding to crawl into the engines?

This time the engine didn't die and, within minutes, David was back on deck. He cleared the sputter, and the speedometer was moving toward cruising altitude. We cheered and exchanged high fives, happy to be moving toward Nevis.

"A boat is like a woman," said David, as I took the wheel, quoting our movie mascot, *Captain Ron*: "She responds to touch." A slight turn to the left, a little bit right, then a gradual turn past St. Kitts – our St. Kitt's "drive-by," I called it – before a gentle approach to Nevis.

We moored off Pinnar's Beach, a 3-mile strip of deep golden sand, home to the Four Seasons, and well within snorkeling distance from the boat. Amy and I snorkeled

to shore, passing starfish as big as our heads and menacing-looking sea urchins, which we scurried past. We emerged from the sea and flopped onto the sand, unidentified creatures of the deep with snorkels dangling, and masks shoved onto foreheads.

There were a couple of bars scattered around the sand. The Sunshine Bar had red, green and yellow booths, and reggae music poured from private cabanas. I wanted to sample the local fare, but snorkeling to shore meant wandering with empty pockets.

Amy chatted with a local shopkeeper who told us the Sunshine Bar threw an all-night dance party on Saturday nights. From our mooring ball, we'd have front row seats – even though I kind of wanted to be ashore.

Tomorrow was the big push to Guadeloupe, however, and a sunrise departure, so we settled for an "across the water" serenade.

David fastened my hammock, where I had been starting each night's sleep. Sleeping above deck with the stars, the breezes, the solitude of swaying over the open sea – I loved it. At some point in the night, I would move to the salon and wake in the morning to the smell of strong coffee steeping in the press pot.

In St. Barth's, I had Hermes at my feet, yachts behind each shoulder and Karaoke echoing across the water. In Nevis, my hammock faced natural, primal and vast – a sleeping volcano, the ocean, and the rhythmic beat of an all-night dance party.

The music started out familiar, and (surprisingly) Western with Justin Beiber and Selena bouncing from beach to boats.

*"A boat is like a woman,"
said David, as I took the
wheel, quoting our movie
mascot, Captain Ron:
"She responds to touch."*

I fell into a sound sleep, the best hammock sleep yet, and somehow missed the guttural rhythms that kept my friends awake. As the night wore on, they reported, the rhythms got grittier and jungle-like.

"Guess the Four Seasons crowd left early," Amy noted, with a laugh. The tribal music in the heart of the night was for the locals.

As Sunday morning dawned, the island slept a deep, profound sleep. Later that day, the shopkeeper told us, islanders would gather from all over the island for a communal feast, a tradition as essential as dancing till dawn.

We made it to Guadeloupe, after a long day at sea and pulled off the coast of Deshaies, adjacent to Hemingway Bar and Restaurant. Deshaies was closed, we were told, due to some sort of holiday, and we couldn't check in. "How can an island be closed," I asked, good-naturedly. We were illegitimate, in between countries and unaccounted for – "just a band of tourists bobbing on mooring balls," I observed. Here today, gone with tomorrow's sunrise. I liked that.

Guadeloupe was massive. I admired her contours as we moved towards the Saintes – the pagoda-like roofs and hidden beaches, and a long, thin road slung around the island like a belt, worn low and loose, barely containing all that beauty.

It was a short jaunt to Isles des Saintes in choppy water. Between the southern tip of Guadeloupe and our first glimpse of the Saintes, the engines began to cough.

With the port engine restarted, starboard still sounding weak, David cleared his throat.

"I'm very sorry about all this," he said, quietly. "I know it's a real bummer."

I nodded and offered a weak smile, not sure how to proceed with the conversation. Tensions had been growing, morale was dropping and I was no longer sure about the trip. Could we only travel on perfect, windless days? Would we even make it to the next island or a major port of call, perhaps Marin in Martinique, where the boat could be worked on?



Moorings and Moonshine: Notes from the West Indies



Fresh conch and a turquoise sea (top); dinghy life in Deshaies, Guadeloupe (bottom)



Terre-de-Haut at dusk

We resolved to spend a few days on the Saintes to let the engines rest, let David flush the clogs, and ultimately, recharge our own engines. It would be good for everyone to sit on an island for a few days.

One of my assignments involved checking the anchor's bearing. It was my favorite. I felt like an explorer, if an explorer wore a

snorkel mask and dove down to where anchor meets ocean floor. It was a wonder-filled job, and an important one, David told me, which made me even happier. Each anchor check gave me the first glimpse of an island's undersea creatures, both plant and animal.

At the Saintes, there was a cheetah-like sea snake, undulating sea grass, and here, the sand dollars were as big as my head. Koki frogs greeted us as we dinged toward Terre de Haut. They sounded like creatures three times their size, their big chirps echoing far and wide. There were roosters, too, an island disturbance I had grown to love.

"Roosters are everywhere in the Caribbean," said David. He was sick of them. To me, though, they were the sound of passport stamps, of leaving home and crossing borders.

"Waiting for my dinghy to come in," I called, as David locked the tender. I gave him a mock wave. He shook his head and chuckled. We were all feeling better, glad to be on land and en route to dinner and with a few days off.

It was off-season at the Saintes, rendering it quiet and quaint. We strolled through the center of town, smiling at local shopkeepers, diners and the islanders, all enjoying a peaceful night. I had conch for dinner, a

creature I had seen underwater during anchor duty. With calm eyes and wide smiles, the fisherman in town sorted their catch. They laughed with ease as we oohed and ahed and answered our questions in French.

The conch tasted rich and thick, not something I would reorder, but memorable, which was what I wanted. I wanted to try all the foods, even those I would never dare to put in a grocery cart – escargot in a puff pastry, conch – maybe Koki frog? I couldn't picture eating those music-makers, who filled my hammock nights with rhythm and joy. An old sailor in St.

Martin once told us, "Once you taste frog, that is all you will eat. All the time!" He seemed serious, but his eyes smiled into mine.

I enjoyed seeing the various sea creatures, including the tube-like corals and jumbo-sized sea urchins in the waters surrounding Deshais and the starfish around Nevis. I remembered what lived near which island, along with each local water's special shade of blue. The trees and flowers, the colors and angles, the soft, lacy touches – I took fewer pictures that first night in Terre de Haut and felt myself sensing more: seeing, smelling, simply experiencing.

The next morning, Amy and David rented a golf cart, but I decided to take a solo day. I just wanted to walk, I told them, as far as my feet would carry me. And I wanted to spend some time alone to reconnect with my own energy. My companions accepted my decision, which I appreciated – they didn't question me or seem upset. They may have needed some time off too. I asked the rental clerk for beach recommendations, "within

walking distance," I added. She smiled, nodding at my preference to walk around her island. "A perfect idea on a nice day," she said in French. "Don't swim at this first beach," she cautioned, pointing to the map: "Only for looking, not for swimming." I told her I wouldn't swim at Grande Anse and would instead just look and then head to Anse Rodrigue: "Good for swimming and daydreaming!" she had said. I've learned to respect where locals do and don't go, and what they share about their backyard. My adventurous spirit takes me many places,

but I always ask directions.

I walked through hills and cobbled streets, a jumble of colored roofs and walls, and down side streets. A moto driver gave a friendly beep and slowed to a halt. "Ca va?" he

asked, then pointed to his bike, asking if I need a ride. "Non non, ca va," I responded, pointing to my feet. I confirmed where I was going and he smiled, gesturing around the corner. "C'est juste la, ta plage!" *Your beach is right there.* And the beach at Grand Anse was indeed wild, just as the woman told me.

The ocean on this side of the island was raging, uninhibited, and the antithesis of our sweet little mooring. Grande Anse is long and dotted with driftwood, bookended by jagged cliffs and imposing bluffs. It reminded me of the rugged coastline of Northern California, where I grew up. I peered out at the waves, somewhat daunted by their erratic movement, not sure how close I wanted to get, or if I even wanted to walk this beach.

A young girl ambled up the road, barefoot, with windswept hair, and moved silently onto the sand. She walked down the beach, her

My adventurous spirit takes me many places, but I always ask directions.



Splashes of color (left); local fauna (middle); Eleanore, La Femme de la Mer (right)

hair swirling, an island girl at home in her own backyard. I followed her onto the beach, inspired by her grace and ease.

Back on the road and around a few corners, I discover Anse Rodrigue, the swimming and daydreaming beach. There I found an abandoned fishing boat, three towering palm trees and a handful of goats nibbling on a hill. I sat at water's edge, letting the ocean nudge me back and forth. I felt the freedom of this moment – fingers running through faraway sand; face turned toward exotic sunshine. I was truly present.

Walking back to town I saw clothes flapping on clotheslines, curious goats against brightly colored backdrops and more of those mysterious "punch de maison" signs. These signs were everywhere – scribbled in colored marker across cardboard draped over fence railings, or in front windows of homes. I'd been tempted, but I hadn't yet sampled the myriad of local flavors: ananas, banane, and the intriguing maracudja, or passion fruit.

"Vous voulez quelques des punches? Quel type? Un gout, oui?" The elderly woman smiled, and gestured me through the colorful front gate. "Bien Sur," I responded. *But of course, I'd like a taste!* Her name is Eleanore, she tells me, which sounded so much better in French, and she has lived there all her

life – for 82 years. Her eyes sparkled with joie de vivre, and something more. Perhaps her Punch de maison is a magic potion, I thought.

"J'ai 14 enfants," said Eleanore. *14 children?* My eyes widened.

"Oui," she confirmed. She held up two hands and then one, her thumb folded in.

"All from one, marriage? Or different..." I started, clumsily, not sure how to word this in any language. I was curious about these 14 children though, and I was somehow sure Eleanore was curious about things too. I sensed a kindred spirit, someone who wanted to know the world. Something told me Eleanore knew much about the world.

She laughed. "Il y a pas de pere," she declared. "Leur Pere est la mer." *Their father is the sea.*

I smiled, moved by the simple grace of her words. The ocean brought her fishermen to shore, just long enough to love her, she explained. Then it called them back to sea.

Though the fisherman ebbed and flowed, the tide brought connection, children and stories to tell. Her eyes shone with wonder at the ways of the ocean; at how it has shaped her life.

"Et vous?" she asked. I hesitated; I was feeling rather "unproductive" compared to this prolific bottler of house punches and mother of 14.

"I'm single," I began. "Never been married." I waited a moment, expecting surprise, or questions, but Eleanore looked unfazed.

So I told her, this woman with 14 children, that I had none. "Good," said Eleanore, with a knowing nod. "It is better this way."

Now I was surprised. "Better?" I laughed. "Why better?" "Because you are here," she said quietly. "Because of your way, you are here. We have met."

Eleanore poured me a taste of the punch de maracudja, the passion fruit – her favorite, she told me, with "only a touch of alcohol." I tipped back the shot glass and coughed loudly. The maracudja tasted like moonshine, almost pure alcohol. Maybe the passion fruit had burned off.

A "touch" of alcohol Eleanore had said? Ha. Bien Sur! With 14 kids, she drank this for breakfast.

I bought the bottle of maracudja.

Then I walked the soft, yellow sand behind Eleanore's house and sat awhile, watching the locals in the bright turquoise sea. A mother and young children splashed around, and a young couple kissed in a sudden rain.

I wedged the moonshine into the sand near a bright orange fishing boat, and found my way to the water. I gazed out to sea, like Eleanore must have done – at least 14 times I think with a smile.

I turn my head toward the growing rain. ☔

As a teacher, writer, and podcaster, Jamie Lynn Miller enjoys well-crafted communication. But she doesn't like writing her own bio. Fortunately, some Facebook friends had a few suggestions: "Space cowboy with a knack for sparkling prose; Likes witty conversations while wearing vintage button downs – with a smile; Boxer, sailor, with humor as my compass and a sharp left hook; Lover of rainbow clogs and raincoats, and lost cell service." Jamie can be reached at: jamielynnmillerthefirst@gmail.com.

Green Turtle Bay Marina & Resort
Western Kentucky's
"Water-Way-of-Life"
for over 30 years!
greenturtlebay.com

Bay Point Marina
BAY POINT MARINA
Bay Point Yacht and Country Club
FINEST FACILITIES - *** MARINA
5' MLW • 29 Slips • Alongside Dockage
30 Amp. & 250 V Electricity
Swimming Pool • Restaurant • Groceries
Fishing Tackle • Tennis • Golf
Bike & Sailboat Rentals
(904) 263-6692
Bay Pt. Rd., Panama City, Fla. 32401
Ad in 1977 Southern Waterway Guide
A 70th Anniversary Partner of Waterway Guide
WATERWAY GUIDE 70 YEARS THE CRUISING AUTHORITY