

THE SWAHILI FLIP-FLOP MAN

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Lilly M Service

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THE SWAHILI FLIP-FLOP MAN

Earlier this year we were in the Town Market of Kilifi, Kenya and Lilly was bargaining with a Swahili man named Mustafa for a new pair of flip flops. Now, it is an open secret that there are at least 5 progressively increasing prices for every object offered for sale in East Africa: The Mother Price; the Cousin Price; the Fellow Tribal Member price; the Non Tribal Member Price; and finally the mother-lode of retail, every merchant's dream, the Rich White Lady price...

Mustafa wanted the equivalent of \$4 USD in Kenyan Shillings for a pair of Chinese flip-flops which he paid \$1.50 for, and he was adamant that he was not coming down. Lilly was standing on \$3, not going up, and her vociferous bargaining had drawn a small crowd. East Africa is over 95% Muslim, and the Islamic community does not think much of a cheeky white woman openly arguing with a man in public. (But the local women, standing quietly in their chadors were smiling, and inwardly supporting Lilly!) The Swahili flip-flop man was visibly growing frustrated with the situation - he really needed this sale, and we were the only white people in the market that day.

Tom pulled Mustafa aside, and playing Good Cop-Bad Cop (he was the good cop) and mano-y-mano explained to him that the woman was as obstinate as an Army mule, and the best way to get her out of his stall - and out of his life - was to quietly accept the three bucks, pocket a reduced profit, and move on with his day. That is when Tom got a lesson in East African economics: Even though Tom was obviously an western infidel, he was first and foremost a fellow male, and Mustafa patiently, and respectfully explained to him that over the past two weeks - now get this - his VOLUME was down so he HAD to charge MORE to have the SAME INCOME! (Under the circumstances, Tom felt it would be improper - and unproductive - to point out the principle of supply and demand, or the concept of value for money, to this gentle man whose first exposure to Lilly was not going well...)

Well, back in the stall he stood firm on his East African economic model which predicated a \$4 White Woman Price for a pair of flip-flops, Lilly would not budge, so Mustafa the Swahili flip-flop man lost the opportunity to put a buck-and-a-half profit in his pocket; which would have paid for his and his wife's lunch that day - if he had made the deal.

This story is amusing until one examines it in the light of the recent edict of Seven Seas Cruising Association Board of Directors nearly DOUBLING the ANNUAL DUES because new memberships had fallen off, while the lack of value in an SSCA membership had caused many current members to balk at renewal - BUT THE BOARD NEEDED THE MONEY TO MEET THEIR INFLATED BUDGET! Any high school student of economics knows what happened, the unwarranted dues increase LOWERED THE VALUE of an already diminished SSCA membership - and drove off even more members! The worse it gets, the worse it gets... It has never occurred to these supposedly intelligent, educated Board members that they need to drastically SLASH the SSCA budget so that revenues will better match costs.

The obvious way to slash the SSCA budget is to cut out the largest cost, and offload the KFR Great Looper Power-boater "Professional" Management Company, and its unread and hugely inefficient SSCA website. Does ANY active cruiser actually use the SSCA website to exchange cruising information? We know of none, and we are out here actively cruising.

When the Board wanted to fundamentally change the membership structure of SSCA by allowing the ASSOCIATE members to vote, there was no open discussion, they just ambushed the COMMODORES on the Annual Ballot with this wrong-headed initiative. And this is the same proposal which was voted-down last year. When the Board could not figure out how to balance the budget, they tacked a hefty surcharge on this year's dues (probably illegal), and nearly doubled next year's dues; with no open discussion of such a drastic - and stupid - action. Predictably the membership roles are plummeting - and our Board members don't know what to do! The only way we can stop these people is to cut off the money. We hope that you will NOT QUIT SSCA, but we do hope you will QUIT PAYING YOUR DUES until some drastic changes are made in the administration of the Association...

Folks, you cannot make this stuff up. Our SSCA Board's performance is like the Keystone Kops do association management. As we would say in the Navy, "They could not lead a working-party to a beer hall!" We need to do a restart on the SSCA communications plan based on free social media and an inexpensive website (we pay only \$35 USD a year for Sailblogs), roll-back the unwarranted dues increase, and restructure the Association's CORE MISSION to serve SAILORS interested in exploring the world under sail.

One of the fundamental ills of the Association is the malaise in our Commodore ranks (read that cruising sailors). The value of an SSCA membership is to a large extent based on the EXPERIENCE of our Commodores, which directly relates to the utility and the value of the information SSCA puts out - but the SSCA Board has alienated many of our blue water Commodores and diluted the SSCA brand. (Again, the worse it gets, the worse it gets - how much longer can our Association withstand the degenerative leadership feedback loop created by our own Board of Directors?) Those blue water sailors that the Board has not driven off, are being forcefully push out. The SSCA Board cannot stand the logic of our criticism, so they are currently debating a motion to throw Tom & Lilly out of SSCA...

If we are going to revive interest within the International Sailing Community regarding SSCA - by appealing to aspiring blue water SAILORS - FIRST we in SSCA must sort out WHO we are. The crew of TIGER LILLY believes that we are first and foremost SAILORS seeking distant horizons, helping each other cast off the dock lines, and assisting our fellow SAILORS to avoid the rocks & shoals of cruising. But if the SSCA Board has its way, TIGER LILLY's voice will no longer be heard in that once venerable association of SAILORS.

Perhaps we should just replace the SSCA Board of Directors with Mustafa the Swahili flip-flop Man; we are certain that he could reduce our costs, with just about the same style of management performance...

Tom & Lilly
S/V Tiger Lilly
Zululand Yacht Club, Richard's Bay, South Africa

[Rob Wellman](#) An "open secret"? Isn't that an oxymoron? ;-)

- [Lilly M Service](#) Rob - From what we have seen in South Africa, that is exactly how race relations are handled... T&L

[Robert Schulke](#) So sad. Some people never get it until the train hits them.

[Maria Teresa Leonardo](#) Miss you [Lilly M Service](#)☺

[Ahmet N.Davran](#) You are on the way which I made in 2002-2004,,with a 352 Hallberg Rassy ,start from Turkey,Cyprus,Port Said,Suez channel,Hurghada,Massawa,Asab,Oman,Kenya-Lamu,Kilifi,,,,, better watch my adavran.blogspot.com

[Hans Kampers](#) It is a funny story if it wasn't so sad....

[Barbara Joyce Cole](#) I have not found SSCA of value for years. Too bad the leadership have no interest in reversing the trend. There was a time when the SSCA was relevant to international cruisers.

[Don Green](#) So you finally did get the flip flops but what was the price?

[Lorraine Escher](#) I wish you had just paid him the \$4. It might have meant a lot more to him than it did to you.

- [Harry Watson Smith](#) That approach has spoiled it for those less fortunate cruiser all around the world as the ugly American "just pay the money". Did you not get the point of the bargaining in the market place?

[Lorraine Escher](#) [Harry Watson Smith](#) yes, I bargain like the best of them here in Port of Spain. And, I have seriously balked when asked to pay the tourist price in Haiti. I'm a softie. I know what it's like to feel taken advantage of, or viewed as a means to a handout. It's absolutely not cut and dried.

[Alison Stroebel](#) This post made me so sad. That \$1 means nothing to you in life terms but it probably means someone in his family didn't eat that day or even week. We don't bargain in Walmart and top stores. Those people sell stuff to support and feed their families. Yes tourists pay more because relatively they have so much more.

- [Jessica Bourgeois](#) Alison Stroebel not always. I have legal residency in Costa Rica and live with the poor. Sometimes it is appropriate to bargain...sometimes not. A region can get a reputation of high prices and the tourists as well as locals stay away and the local market simply fails. Wisdom is hard won in life. A "do gooder" was watching a turtle hatching and could not bear to watch the gulls pick the eyes out of the few hatchlings and then pick away at their bodies so she rose from her blind and drove the gulls off. Those hundreds still in the nests, not hearing the cries of the gulls crawled out onto the daylight beach...and it was a slaughterhouse bloodbath as thousands of gulls swept in and no amount of waving arms could drive them off. Virtually the entire season of turtles was wiped out. Careful what you stand for...
- [Alison Stroebel](#) Jessica Bourgeois how can you compare interfering with nature to stopping people from earning an income. Doesn't even make sense. How often do you bargain at supermarkets and restaurants to give you a better price. They certainly have the means.
- [Wm T Jr Marsh](#) Ms. Stroebel, As we move toward socialism the affliction of economic breakdown in our society comes closer. Tom is a wise sailor! Economics is not about keeping good books as much as it is about human behavior that can understand value. Start at the top and read his comments again. This is an opportunity to begin learning economics and this knowledge will serve you well. All the best in your quest for knowledge, Wild Bill

[Jessica Bourgeois](#) Thank you Tom and Lilly for your wit wisdom and humor. I no longer am a member of SSCA ...fond memories of the annual sail-in at Melborne, Flori-daze. I have residency i Costa Rica and well know the "heirarchy of price" you speak of. Having lived there quite intimately with "the real people" (poor) I too "bargain" for price. Knowing the difference between greed and need takes skill and I think you have great insight on this. I too miss the SSCA. When they get back to their roots and original purpose perhaps I will rejoin.

[Pat Aben](#) yep I remember those special prices and they don't much respect you if you don't haggle with them LOL

[Stephan T Vance](#) Now this was such a cool read. I enjoyed the idea of the banter, and the experience dealing with the locals. Was excited to read and even got a chuckle.... I usually enjoy your posts in this way. I will say I was a little disappointed lily didn't break down and pay the \$4 usd. As I continued to read on I was bombarded by another rant about the S.S.C.A. I was disinterested at that point and my head started to swim. We follow your travels because you are accomplished cruisers with a wealth of experience, and knowledge. In which I hope to glean some incite from.

I hear more about the scca on your posts than anywhere else.
Your disappointment with them is obvious and I'm sorry that resource is no longer as viable today.
Thank you for your posts, thank you for giving us a glimpse of possible future scenarios, and the different ways to deal with them....
Have a blessed day.

[Baxter Williams](#) Mustafa likely got those flip flops for far less than \$1.50.

[Craig Brown](#) Well written Tom.... and you stirred the pot with all the comments!

Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow!
Found a member of my own tribe and building a roof over the veranda to give her comfort and protection!

[Melinda Taylor](#) Seems to meSSCA has just had its day , becoming irrelevant. The FB pages are getting more members every day. And are turning out to be great for information sharing.

[Herb Webber](#) Miss you both!

[Karen Preston](#) HI LILLY!!! HOW ARE YOU! <3

[Anne Lloyd](#) The man was working to feed his family in Africa. Not begging, not stealing. You could have paid what is a fair price and supported his efforts.

[Edith Aish-staff](#) Love to hear your travel stories. Thanks for taking the time for all of us. 😊
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[Lilly M Service](#) Since posting this story, as active blue water sailors **we have come to the realization that we are in a very small minority of the Seven Seas Cruising Association's membership - and as such we no longer identify with them.** After 32 years of sailing the world's oceans under the SSCA red swallowtail flag, **we have resigned our membership...** However we have not quit cruising, nor have we quit trying to help new sailors follow their dreams. If you are in the Cape Town area, come join us tomorrow morning at 0900 at the False Bay Yacht Club where we are putting on a CARIBBEAN CRUISERS GAM for the South African cruising community. Details are in our 1 December Facebook Post. SEE YOU THERE! Tom & Lilly S/V Tiger Lilly - Simon's Town, South Africa



- [Nick Kats](#) SSCA sounds worthless, judging from your previous posts on them. It seems to be a similar situation with the Irish equivalent.

[Joseph Abbott](#) Just scanned the SSCA FB site and it seems they are under the optimistic delusions their course is steady and true after weathering a “hostile storm”. Realization and affirmative course corrections are the actions of the sane. BOL with the GAM!!

 **NancyandBurger Zapf** is with Ed Kelly.
November 19 at 7:53 AM

Two people we are all indebted to: Ed Kelly, President of the SSCA Board of Directors, and Jeff Gower, Board Director and Editor (together with his wife Wendy Gower) of the newly renamed Cruisers Bulletin at the highly successful first annual Gam in St. Augustine, Florida, 2019. Missing: photo of Karen Nettles, Gam Organizer Extraordinaire!



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 Joy Carey Ed Kelly, Jeff Gower, Marc Bodian, Mark Hatton, Skip Gundlach, and Anne Lloyd along with spouses and Karen Nettles walked through the fire last year and came out the other side victorious. A little dramatic? I think not. They thwarted a hostile takeover, saved this organization, and set it back on course. The GAM last week was hands down one of the best gatherings of cruisers I've ever been to. We can look forward to some awesome years ahead.

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