

Not only has this project taught Izzy a lot about marine engineering and mechanics, it has also inspired her to become a teacher herself in the future. Her plans for this fall include attending Wor-Wic College in Salisbury, Md., and then continue to get her Masters Degree in Education.

"The pride and the commitment these kids show is great...[a project like this] leads them to the point where they can be in control, to be the master of their destiny here," says Ryan. "They plug in and get engaged because of that. To be involved in this year after year gives me a sense of purpose - I hope that this opens the door for these students to become involved in marine-related careers in their futures." 📌

For more of Elizabeth Ellis's writing, visit her blog at <http://theinsatiablenritic.blogspot.com>"



## Festivo Royale

by Ellen Birrell

You may have no idea this took place, but on December 18, 2010, in a funky little spot called Culebra, Puerto Rico, an Aussie put on THE surprise birthday bash for, as he ascribes, "The Queen of Florida and the Bahamas."

Queen Lauren and 30 cruisers ate, drank and laughed under a magnificent explosion of color -- no, not a sunset. Dozens of 40 x 50 inch country flags flapped in late afternoon breeze. Just approaching the "1958 all from one tree 52' ketch *Arita*" (as Rob calls her), how could you feel anything but already festive?

We tied off mid-ship and Rob, wearing a satiny sky blue pareo, extended a hand and hoisted us up onto *Arita*. So glad I had taken the time to bake a cheesecake and buy fresh strawberries, it was a hit after partygoers had moshed on appetizers for hours. It was the queen herself, nestled on her stern throne, who asked I bring forth the royal dessert. Despite the inebriated state of many on the vessel, Rob scampered back and forth from the foredeck delivering small slivers of the delicacy to his guests. It was difficult to see the last piece be swept away, but I grabbed a large morsel still adorned with strawberry and savored it like a peasant taking crumbs from his master's discarded plate.

To say the evening had a regal flair was the best part of the whole paradox. Here you find a mix of cruisers from affluent owners of \$800,000 craft to the less is more gang. No matter. A universal appreciation sweeps through the cruising community -- a mutual admiration society of sorts. Not that there aren't knock out drag out disagreements and discussions of things like how to anchor, is the explosion of mooring balls moral, you know, important subjects like that. But, there seems to be a shared respectfulness that we all have survived, have found a way to make this impossible dream-life sustainable. For that, I am

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thankful to be numbered amongst this odd and wonderful community. The enthusiasm and friendliness dripped off *Arita* like honey overflowing its jar.

Standing mid-ship, we had shared pirating to privacy issues. It was Rob and three of his female guests.

As one must on a swaying medium-sized vessel, we were cloistered tightly together which makes sharing your story and punch line all the easier. The wind was blowing, we bent at knee and arm as we clutched on a rigging and drink, keeping our upright perch on an ever-moving surface. The subject changed to attire. "Is wearing a pareo like wearing a Scottish kilt?" one of the women directed at Rob. Before he could answer, I interjected: "Scots wear no underwear under their kilt, is it the same with pareos?" Rob's head is bouncing off one fun loving question and remark to another when

he looks down his ample tummy at his beautiful blue shiny pareo. Realizing it is riding pretty low on his trim hips, he began to untie the fabric. Now, he had our undivided attention.

Dropping the pareo to his knees, we gasped. At least, I gasped, I couldn't hear the others. A tiny speedo in matching fabric clung to, you know where. This is a man of big flags and tiny trunks! In a burst of laughter, maybe sheer joy, we toasted this man who throws the best party! Rob matter-of-factly re-draped the blue fabric more tightly at mid-hip, looked back up and with an Aussie wink, grinned, nodded and marched off to please another royal guest. ♪



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