Donn Denman '79

Sailing Back: Mexico, Hawaii to California The long overdue story of sailing Tao Neutrino back to The Bay Area

APR 18, 2026

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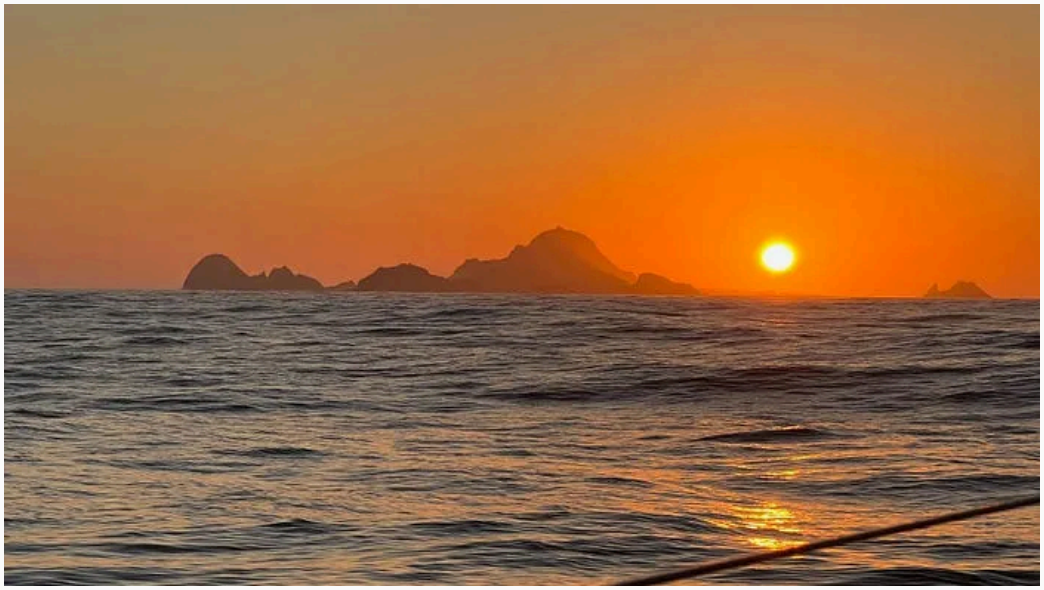
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I shut off the engine and let the current gently slide us under the bridge, from the open Pacific into San Francisco Bay. Above us the sights and sounds of traffic crossing the Golden Gate bridge became louder and louder, and soon we were beneath the shadow of the bridge.

> Traffic, a sound we have not heard for a month, was above us!
>
> *Welcome to the San Francisco Bay Area, you are now leaving the opening Pacific Ocean.*

We'd started the day in the early morning light gazing towards the Farallon Islands as they emerged from the mist. Our shore crew texted — demanding photos.

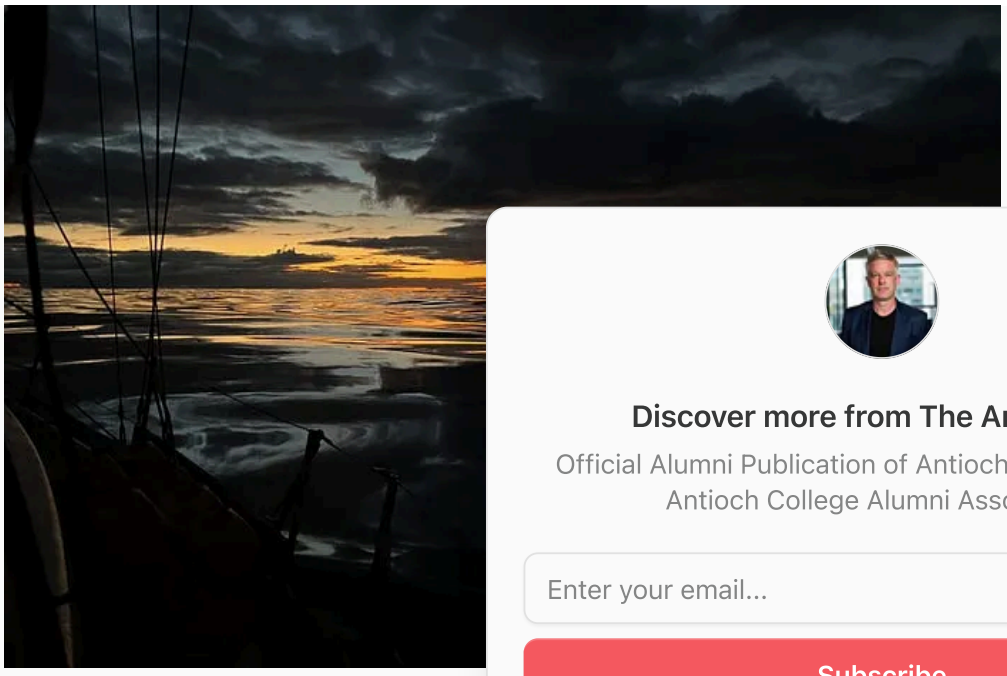
I offhandedly snapped this shot, only to realize later that it was darn good — another happy accident at sea.



Land, at last! And wildlife comes along with it, seals swimming happily past our boat and a million birds overhead.

It had not been an easy crossing. We had to sail around a no-wind area known as The Pacific High. This is also where all that garbage circulates in the North Pacific Garbage patch.

One morning we woke up in a complete calm. The sea was like glass. I started taking photos, and everytime I pointed my phone there was another amazing picture.



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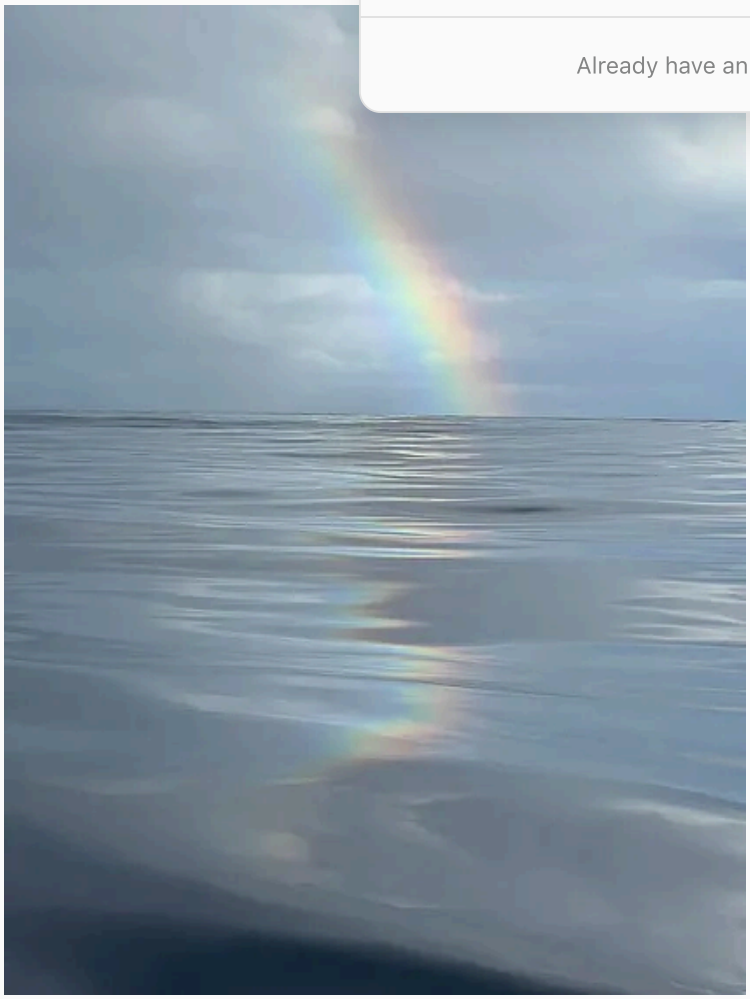
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Rainbows



Our first piece of trash



This ball floated by. It looked like a basketball, but was probably a fish net float.

Rewind to our departure, I was very glad I'd scrubbed the bottom of the boat.



Donn in his wetsuit on Kawaii before scrubbing the bottom of Tao Neutrino

On our last day in Hawaii I used my AirBuddy to dive under the boat for an hour and scrub all the scum off of the hull, so we would slide smoothly when the wind is light.

The crew made sure all our solar was working. We had loaded up on fuel, both diesel for the engine and food for ourselves. We knew there was a chance we'd need to motor a lot, and we didn't run out of energy. The diesel engine can generate electricity, but it's better to generate it from the sun. And if we ran out of everything, we could just drift … but we would need to eat!

And eat we did!



Sean caught a Dorodo, and although I hated watching it die, I did enjoy eating it.



After about two weeks going around the high we hit the prevailing westerly winds. This gave us a quick ride all the way back to the mainland.

Unfortunately the wind causes my little boat to heal over on its side quite a bit, and the Pacific swell would wash over the side of the boat repeatedly.



Something was leaking, because the water was above the floorboards in the head (bathroom), and our bunks were getting wet.

The boat moved a lot, both pitching forward and back, but mostly rolling from side to side. Occasionally the waves would collude to cause a real lurch throwing us and everything across the cabin. During one of these lurches our inside dining table broke! Luckily nobody got hurt, even though it landed in Sean's lap. We picked it up and moved it into the storage area.



After almost a month at sea we were really looking forward to being on dry land.

The crew saw the Golden Gate growing larger as we approached.



I turned off the motor as we glided under the bridge.

Our “shore crew” had followed our journey via modern media, and now their boats came into view.



Here’s Sea Spirit

Here’s Miss Lady, getting close enough to toss us a cold beer! Oliver really appreciated that!



I had hoped to return to Sausalito, which had been the home for Tao Neutrino before our departure about a year ago as we headed to join the 2024 Baja Haha. But all of Sausalito was full of boats, so our shore crew got us a spot in the Berkeley Marina.

The boat had gotten beat up by that last crossing.

A sense of accomplishment started replacing the relief and elation of being back in civilization. I only really felt that through the eyes of my friends, especially Ben. As I settled back into shore life I felt a bit worn out, like the boat. Here's my hat in a pile of wet clothes and my bunk. But I got a boost every time I told someone that I was living on a boat that had just sailed to Hawaii and back.



Author's Note: Now I'm off to Indonesia to get on a friend's sailboat in one of the top eco and dive spots. It will feel good to not be the captain or owner. I'm hoping this will help me decide if I want to sail Tao Neutrino there as part of my planned Pacific Circle. This time, I think I'll do more planning.

Donn Denman '79 is a software developer turned sailor.

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