

We sail a thin line around the world

St. Helena

Lunenburg

Bermuda

Virgin Is.

Anguilla

Grenada

San Blas

Panama

Galapagos

Pitcairn Island

Samoa

Rarotonga

Tahiti

Fiji

Tonga

Vanuatu

Bali

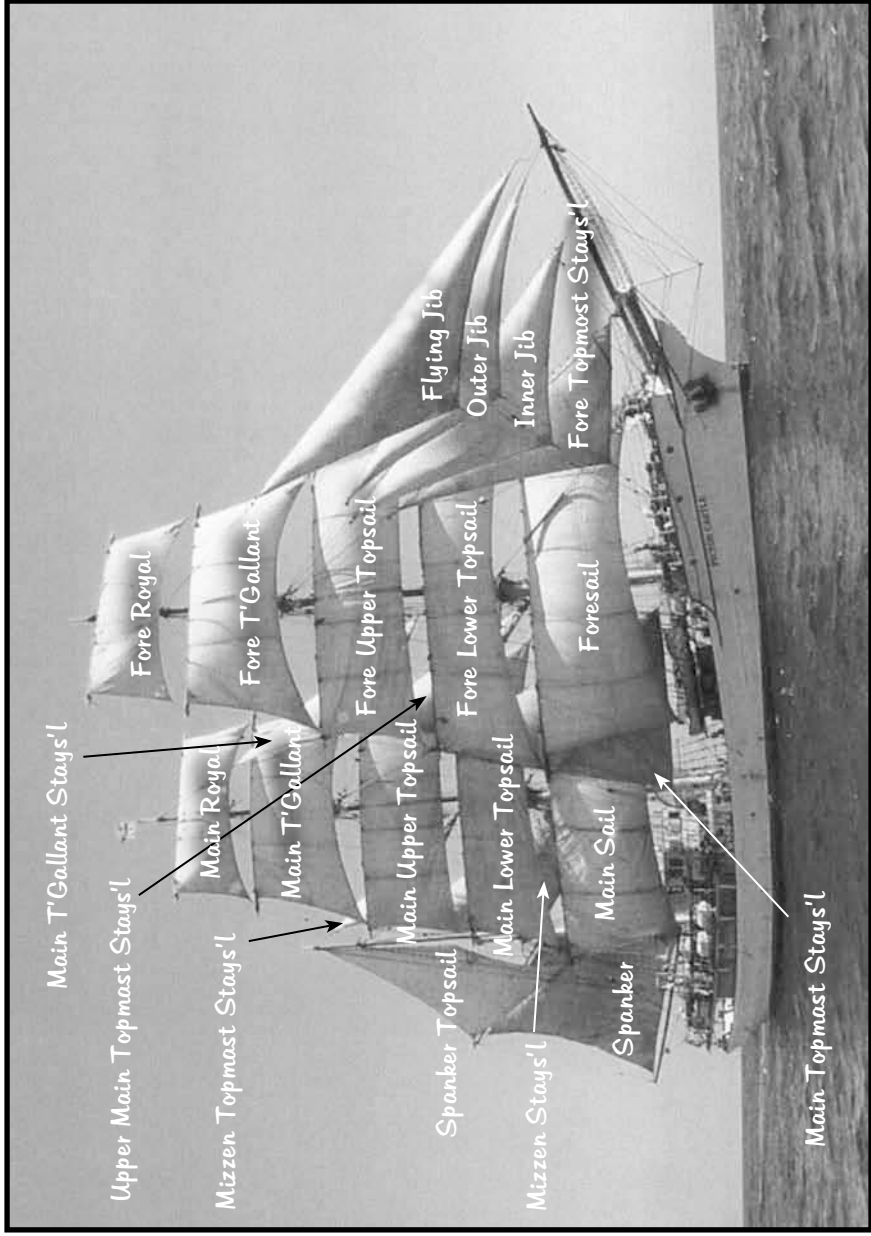
Darwin

Seychelles

Grand Comore

Madagascar

Cape Town



Main T'Gallant Stays'l

Upper Main Topmast Stays'l

Mizzen Topmast Stays'l

Fore Royal

Fore T'Gallant

Main T'Gallant

Fore Upper Topsail

Main Upper Topsail

Spanker Topsail

Flying Jib

Outer Jib

Inner Jib

Fore Topmast Stays'l

Fore Lower Topsail

Main Lower Topsail

Mizzen Stays'l

Foresail

Main Sail

Spanker

Main Topmast Stays'l



Jim Salmon

*How I Stowed My Day Job
and Went to Sea*

ILLUSTRATED BY JAN MERCURI GROSSMAN

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*To Chris,
for letting me go*





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LOG

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Capt. Dan

Dave L.

Sloane

Tom

Zeke

Maria

Emily

Sven

Dan V.

Kate

Liz

Linsey

Jill

Julie

Andy M.

Greenough

Finn

Wendy

Jen H.

Lauren

Charlie

Jenny M.

Andrew Y.

Jim

PICTORASHI



I USED TO RUN the rat race from the Jersey Coast into Newark. I'd race my Jeep to the commuter lot, slam over the curb into an empty slot, and sprint to a moving train, briefcase flying. In Newark, outside Penn Station, a bag lady sat on the sidewalk, her back to the wall, arguing loudly with no one. I'd hurry past, scarcely suppressing the urge to take her on. After thirty-one years of fencing with insurance salesmen, I resolved to stow the office job and put to sea—like Ishmael.

I dropped out of the twenty-first century by joining the crew of a square-rigged ship that sailed around the world. A circumnavigation wasn't a desire, it was a need. Like Thoreau, I would not “. . . when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

I was neither captain nor professional crew, though if I had a buck for every time someone asked me if I was the captain, I could have bought my own ship. Instead, I paid a cost-sharing fee for the privilege of signing on as ordinary seaman and trainee—not a lofty station for a person of my years and acquaintance with things nautical.

The sailing gene came to me by way of my father, who sailed the Arctic Ocean in the 1920s on the schooner *Bowdoin* with Arctic explorer Captain Donald MacMillan, and from his father, who fell from his boat and drowned while on a cruise from New York to Bar Harbor. My father's mother's ancestors were Coffins, the Nantucket family who commanded Navy ships in the Revolutionary War (for the British) and in the Civil War (for the North), and many a whale ship in between. My dad had his own brush with death one stormy night in the Arctic Ocean. He was alone at the helm when he accidentally jibed the ship. The boom slammed across the deck, caught him at chest height and flung him out over the rail. Fortunately for him (and for me) he managed to hang on until the boom swung back amidships. I went overboard the first time at the age of three. My big brother Doug snatched me out by a thatch of hair bobbing near the surface.

In spite of these blood lines I grew up far from oceans, and spent my adult life shackled to a desk. I've owned a dozen sail and power boats and considered buying a cruising sailboat in the 35- to 40-foot range for a circumnavigation, though a modern fiberglass cruiser is not the kind of boat I would want to own. My preference lies with classic beauties of the Herreshoff sort. The discerning sailor might argue that a well-found classic wooden yacht would equal the sea worthiness of any modern design. That may be the case with some of the classics, but not necessarily one I could afford. I've got a half-century-old Chris-Craft runabout named *Maybellene* to which I devote my summers' labors and gobs of cash. Other wooden boats I've owned have been even bigger disasters. But beyond the initial expense of buying a boat I didn't love, there would be equipment costs, charts, port fees, canal transit fee, provisioning, and the hassle of recruiting crew and extorting cost-sharing monies from them.

Years ago I dreamed of a solo circumnavigation, but came to learn from accounts by those who have done it, of the solitary sailor's crushing loneliness. I am by nature a gregarious soul. Then too there are the risks—getting run over by a freighter while asleep, sleep deprivation, falling overboard, eating all my food before reaching land, going stark raving mad, sea monsters, etc. As it was, the voyage was not without risk. Any number of events could have cut it short, not the least of which was the

wife I left behind in poor health. My tenure on the ship seemed at all times to be tenuous.

It was this domestic circumstance that made joining the *Picton Castle* crew for a relatively short nineteen-month circumnavigation an acceptable compromise. My only reservation was that it might be a somewhat passive passage, with the professional crew shouldering the major responsibilities of sailing and navigating, as is the case with the windjammers of Maine and the Caribbean. I needn't have worried. By signing Ship's Articles I became legally bound to the ship's master and required to do a full day's work, as were all hands. There are no passengers aboard the *Picton Castle*. She's an authentic working vessel in the tradition of square-riggers, with few modern amenities.

It is customary for nautical raconteurs to imbue their tales with a texture that may strain the reader's credulity. For all we know Joshua Slocum, the first single-handed circumnavigator and one of my heroes, could have embroidered his adventures with plausible, though improbable, events, though his accomplishments needed no embellishment. Was he really chased by pirates off the Barbary Coast and spared by a rogue wave, which, though it snapped his boom, completely dismantled the pirate vessel? I'll take his word for it, but we now know Tristan Jones' yarns are downright apocryphal. Such is the prerogative of the solo sailor. In any event, my experiences were far from solitary. Virtually any part of this chronology could be corroborated (or refuted) by a shipmate. For this reason and others, events related herein are factual, by and large.*

This book is not a recitation of all that happened, nor is it a travelogue, though it reads like one at times. It is not the definitive report on places visited. Having lived as an ex-pat in Colombia as a kid, I know it takes months and years to know a country and its people. It's not about who slept with whom. As for me, I slept with no one on the ship. (Though ashore I shared a bunk with Julie the Bosun, Linda the third mate, and Laurie the cook, but these arrangements were purely economic.)

The astute reader will soon note that little of this actually rhymes, and will be relieved to find that it has even less to do with underwriting. Rather, the book is a journal of observations and reflections on my

* A nautical term that means to sail close, but not too close to the wind.

experiences. I wrote it for the benefit of my family, who helped facilitate the expedition, for my friends and shipmates, and for guys (and gals) like me who want to know what it's really like to ship out on a classic sailing vessel for a world adventure. If I wanted to sell lots of books I'd have written *The Picton Castle Diet—How to lose weight even if you eat everything you can get your hands on*. For the definitive circumnavigation yarn read the classic *Sailing Alone Around the World* by Captain Joshua Slocum.

So welcome aboard this odyssey as it wanders from Puka Puka to Pago Pago, past Taboga and Tobago, to Kakadu and Jabiru, to Wreck Bay, to Hellville, and back again.*



Chief Saitol of Vanuatu, with villagers and crew. See Chapter 15.

* A glossary of nautical terms is provided at the back of the book.



1

LUNENBURG

The people of this coast, hardy, robust, and strong, are disposed to compete in the world's commerce, and it is nothing against the master mariner if the birthplace mentioned on his certificate be Nova Scotia.

SAILING ALONE AROUND THE WORLD
CAPTAIN JOSHUA SLOCUM

19 NOVEMBER ** LATITUDE: 19° NORTH ← LONGITUDE: 063° WEST

THE TRADE WIND snaps the pennants and the stern heaves and falls on a following sea. We're making eight knots. The ship is a living thing propelled by natural rather than mechanical forces, with a motion not unlike the rhythmical heaves of a great whale. I take the helm at 2100. The ship is dark and there's no moon. The running lights cast

their scant illumination outward, and are scarcely detectable from the quarterdeck. The rig swings silently against the celestial canopy, creating a ghostly aspect as stars wheel in elliptical orbits above the masts. It's been a month since I left Chris standing on the deck of her brother's ranch in the Blue Mountains near Walla Walla . . .

16 OCTOBER ✱✱ LATITUDE: 46° NORTH ➡ LONGITUDE: 118° WEST

I give Chris one last hug but she says nothing as I pull away. I can feel her watching my rental car roll down the long drive onto the main road and out of sight. I drive westward past the confluence of the Colorado and the Snake, past endless orchards and vineyards, and up the Cascade Mountain Range that separates soggy Seattle from the arid interior, leaving her and the State of Washington in my wake.

There's a knot in my stomach the size of a monkey-fist. By the time I fetch Stevens Pass my mood matches the storm clouds bunched against the seaward slope. This separation is going to be tough for her. I'm heading for Lunenburg, Nova Scotia to join the *Picton Castle's* crew for a voyage bound round the world. I should be euphoric, but instead I'm thinking, *this is gonna be a guilt trip.*

Only ten months earlier the planned circumnavigation was doomed before it began. My bride of many decades was struck down by a cerebral aneurism that nearly finished her. It was two days after Christmas. Chris was in the kitchen working up a Big Breakfast for the multitudes gathered for the holidays. I had run to town on an errand and on the way back, as I turned into the two mile long dead-end dirt road to our lake house, an ambulance was on the way out, lights flashing. I stopped the car behind it and asked the driver, "Who was in that ambulance?" There aren't too many people down that road, and I knew all of them. I didn't recognize the driver, but he answered, "It's your wife!"

I spun the car around and followed the ambulance to Memorial Hospital in North Conway. When I could see her she was lying on a gurney unconscious. The emergency room doctor told me it was a head bleed. Staring me square in the eye, she said, "This is very serious!" Her look more than her words told me *Chris may be dying!*

A helicopter flew her (and me) to Maine Medical Center in Portland

where they hooked her up to life supports. The following day they performed an exploratory angiogram. Her neurosurgeon told me, “There’s just too much blood; we couldn’t find the break.” He ushered our three kids and me into a little room next to Intensive Care—a place where doctors give families bad news and bad choices. He urged me to let him remove all support systems and end her life.

But as she lay comatose on that darkest day, my family closed ranks. My cousin Jim called his MD brother, Dan, who called our cousin Don, a retired neurosurgeon who knew Chris’s doctor’s partner. Things changed. A second exploratory angiogram found the rupture and they clipped it off. Thus began an uncertain recovery that restored some of what she lost.

Yet even though she couldn’t manage on her own, it was Chris who resurrected my dream. After months of recovery and therapy her memory gradually pieced itself together like a puzzle in four dimensions.

“When are you going sailing?” she asked one day.

“I’ve changed my mind.” I said. “I’m not going. It’s no big deal.”

It was a big deal. I had resigned my good-paying job as Director of Underwriting at Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey to pursue a lifelong ambition. Then in a stroke of bad fortune the course of our lives was altered. She lost a part of her brain, her right peripheral vision in both eyes, and her independence. I just lost my independence.

She persisted. “I can stay with my mom, and with the kids.” I put the matter to a family vote. Chris’s mom and each of our three adult children agreed to the arrangement. Even though her care was my responsibility, I took the deal, thinking that if I don’t go now I never will.

Some guys take to the cruising life with their mates, but not all mates are sailors. Chris is a delicate creature who weighed 93 pounds when I got her at age 19. Her tiny hands worked wonders in the kitchen, but on a boat they clung to the gunwale, knuckles white with worry that the skipper was going to capsize the boat at any moment. Her fear may have had its origin in the time I dumped her out of a capsizing catamaran off the coast of New Hampshire. The mast clunked her on the head on the way over.

Or it could have been that Father’s Day in New Jersey when after working in the yard most of the day I was determined to get out there for the first sail of the season. We motored out the Shrewsbury River onto