

DEPLOYING THE LIFE RAFT

By

Mary Hutchings Reed

Chicago, Illinois

October 30, 2017

The subtitle of my essay could be, “Everything I Needed to Know I Learned While Sailing 1500 Miles of Open Ocean: To Wit, ‘Don’t Hurry. Don’t Worry. Stay the Course.’” And, in the words of Bobby McFerrin, “Be Happy.”

One day in 1989, my husband Bill announced that he was going to Florida to look at a sailboat. We already owned a sailboat--two, actually--a Cape Dory 25 and a Melges-16, both of which we sailed on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, so I was surprised that we needed another one.

“It’s an ocean-going boat,” Bill said.

“We don’t live on the ocean,” I said.

“But I’d hate to die without sailing across the ocean one day,” he said.

I said something supportive, like “oh.” Looking back, that boat, named *Vikara*, changed the course of my life and taught me something about fortitude, fearlessness, and surrender: in short, how to sail steady and live slow. I firmly believe that aboard *Vikara* I developed the courage and fortitude it took to pursue my own life’s dream, which was to write--in all, thirteen novels, one memoir, one musical and numerous short stories--all slowly, one page at a time.

Since early times, people have yearned to go to sea. In 4000 BCE the Phoenicians and Egyptians sailed under cloth sails on simple log boats. By 100 BCE, The Roman Empire had

cargo and passenger ships that were 180 feet long and 45 feet wide. By 200 AD, junks were common on Chinese waters. Between 1000 and 1200 AD, Leif Ericson is said to have become the first European to set foot on North American soil, arriving on a 42-foot boat 12 ¾ feet wide.

Bill and I went to sea in a Westsail 32, a double-ended cutter, 10 feet wide; 32 feet at the waterline and 39 overall, including the bowsprit and the out-hung rudder in the stern pulpit; 19,500 pounds including 7000 pounds of lead ballast in the 5-foot keel. The mast is 52 feet, tall for a boat her size, with triangular steps on either side so that a sailor can literally walk up the mast to fix a problem. There are two foresails off the bowsprit, the smaller, inner sail (called a staysail) giving the cutter its defining configuration and classic profile.

Vikara--roughly translated, "us folks"--is hull number 437 of about 830 built between 1971 and 1980. The hull shape is descended from the double-ended pilot and rescue boats designed by the Norwegian naval architect Colin Archer for extreme seaworthiness in the rough conditions of the North Sea. The design was adapted for pleasure sailing by William Atkin in 1928 and further adapted in 1969 for fiberglass by Walter Creelock. Below deck, the interior walls are dark mahogany and teak.

In the main cabin, which is about as long as a hearse, there are single bunks on either side. The double bed would normally be in the V berth, but we used that space for storage--pots, pans, plastic food containers, sheets, towels, clothes, raingear, books, radios, and navigation equipment. The galley consists of a sink, two pressurized-kerosene burners, an oven, and two deep ice lockers. It is on the port side and the navigation table is on the starboard. There is also a fold-down teak dining table for six.

In addition, storage lockers under the main cabin berths contain all the equipment and parts needed to rebuild *Vikara* while at sea, including an emergency tiller, water and oil filters, tubes of grease and caulking, fiberglass repair epoxies, spare alternators, pulleys, bolts, screws, grommets, wires, sail cloth, sail tape, wrenches, screwdrivers, saws and various other tools and gadgets, including an EPIRB (an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon which when deployed tells the U.S. Coast Guard our location) and hydraulic wire-cutters, for cutting away the mast should it fall at sea. There's even a built-in vise-grip under the cover of one locker.

After two summers of sailing *Vikara* on Lake Michigan, I happened upon an advertisement for an annual rally called the Caribbean 1500. The Caribbean 1500 is a non-competitive rally of sailors taking their boats south for the winter. Most, like Bill and me, are inland and coastal sailors who have not been off-shore before. The event includes a week of safety inspections at dock in Norfolk, Virginia, prior to the start, and a daily radio check-in while underway.

We signed up. Bill, an internist, was on an annual contract with an HMO. I was a partner at Winston & Strawn, but was granted an unheard-of three-month sabbatical. Bill spent a year preparing *Vikara* for the voyage; I spent a year worrying. Bill installed a marine short wave radio transmitter and receiver and tuned up the Yanmar 3-cylinder diesel. The diesel is very efficient, averaging 18 miles per gallon, but it is not particularly useful in heavy seas, and outside of harbors, its main job is to generate electricity for running lights and radio communications.

A trucking company took *Vikara* to Norfolk on a flatbed. During the week of preparations there, we attended seminars designed to reduce fears but disastrously titled: "Man-Overboard," "Abandon Ship," and "Emergencies at Sea." I felt my incompetence growing in

direct proportion to how much I learned. None of my success in any other phase of my life counted. It didn't matter what your title was back home; what mattered was who you would be "out there"--in essence, who you *were*. By the end of that week, I was in a dither about how much I didn't know of celestial navigation, diesel mechanics and the logic of our automatic steering mechanism, the wind vane. I fended off my fears with humor and scotch.

We made special friends with Alan and Pat and their third crew member on *Sea Otter*, the other small boat in the fleet (a Pacific Seacraft 31). Pat, who had lived on *Sea Otter* for six months, intimidated me with her precise organization and knowledge of everything on board. She even had a file in her computer named "Mayday" (from the French M'aidez), and printed instructions on who was to do what in case of an emergency.

The pre-start week was a feeding frenzy of "keeping up with the Joneses," as fear perversely became the measure of preparedness. When one boat owner already carrying 40 spare gallons of water bought the last twelve 5-gallon jugs available in the entire city of Norfolk, the rest of us panicked. If he needed 100 hundred *spare* gallons of fresh water for his six-person crew in his ultra-fast boat, was a *total* of 90, including our 10-gallon emergency stash, sufficient for the two of us in our very slow one?

There were two major tasks during the week before the start: one, provisioning for thirty days at sea and a prolonged stay in islands then without Walmart's or Whole Foods, and the other, packing the life-raft in case we had to abandon ship.

Toward the end of our week of seminars and training, Bill and I filled two shopping carts at a local grocery without much more of a plan than it "looked like enough." Pat of course had elaborate meal plans in her computer and a storage chart to facilitate finding the necessary

ingredients. We did things the old-fashioned way--a kind of scissors-paper-rock game as we stood in the canned food aisle.

"How much tuna should we buy?" I'd ask Bill.

"Lots," came his typical reply, "like four cans."

"For thirty days? Plus two months after we get there?"

"They have stores down there, Mary Michael."

"But not *out* there," I said. I bought fifteen, and made a mental note that most miscommunications could be avoided if I didn't assume I knew what was meant by "lots" or Bill's other favorite words, "in a minute" (which can mean an hour) and "maybe" (which can mean "never.")

At sea, precise communication is critically important--that's one of the reasons we use starboard for right and port for left, named from the boat's perspective, so that two people facing each other have a reference other point than their own. As I learned later, in an emergency, it is imperative to pause, talk through the response, and most of all, to obey. The captain is presumptively the most knowledgeable and skillful one on board, and the first mate should not waste time second guessing the captain's judgment. There may be alternative ways of handling a problem, but conflict is time consuming and potentially dangerous. The captain's role is to make a decision and the first mate's role is to trust and execute instructions. There is no way to avoid mistakes, or sub-optimal choices; but life-and-death emergencies require quick decisions, not debates. While I *sometimes* have control issues and *occasionally* like to be "in charge," I became grateful that my captain, Bill, was willing to assume that awesome responsibility for our mutual safety.

We didn't have electrical refrigeration, but we were not terribly limited in what we could

bring. In the mid-Atlantic in November, potatoes, onions, carrots, margarine, hard cheeses, vacuum packed salamis and even eggs don't require it. I am not fond of canned vegetables, but we bought canned corn and beans and spinach anyway. I dutifully stripped the cans of labels, which could get wet and peel away, and wrote on them in indelible laundry marker: tuna, beef stew, corned beef hash, chicken, salmon. I put the dry foods--mashed potatoes, rice, flour, sugar, soup mix, instant oatmeal, crackers and cookies--in plastic canisters. We made up ten pounds of GORP--good old raisins and peanuts--and I added an emergency bottle of scotch and one of brandy. Big bottles, by the way.

That week we also packed our abandon-ship bag, the one bag of survival necessities that one of us was supposed to remember, hopefully, to take with us if we had to abandon ship, or, in less alarming terms, "deploy the life raft." I was dismayed by its primitive contents: a plastic sextant, chart, pencil and watch, so we could know where and when we were dying; a mirror, so we could see ourselves dying, (and perhaps flash reflected sunrays at a passing ship that may want to rescue us or catch a glimpse of our dying); sunscreen, so we wouldn't burn to a crisp before we died; a couple fishhooks, in case there were a fish or two that would sacrifice its life for ours, and a space blanket to cover our weakened bodies as they lay dying.

We also had an emergency fishing kit provided by the U.S. Coast Guard. It came in a small envelope and contained line, hooks and lures, and a pamphlet with encouragement and instructions on how to fish. The pamphlet advised:

Successful fishing involves three basic steps,

- (1) Placing your hook in the general vicinity of the fish.
- (2) Attracting or luring the fish to the immediate vicinity of your hook.

(3) Inducing the fish to place the hook within his mouth.

Always upbeat, it continued: "Accomplishing these apparently simple steps involves patience, ingenuity, hardware, and more patience." The pamphlet also offered a list of do's and don'ts, including, "Don't fish for sharks intentionally--danger far exceeds benefit."

We had a couple of other gadgets that required some instruction and explanation. Bill showed me what looked like two plastic soup cans and a Coleman lantern filter. "It's a water maker!" he told me excitedly. He moved his hand rhythmically like a bicycle air pump. "I think it can make about a quart in half an hour."

"Yum!" I said, and added to the abandon ship bag six eight-ounce plastic bottles of domestic spring water, a couple pounds of GORP, and six breakfast bars. I figured I'd grab the brandy bottle when the time came.

We never had to use the life raft and the abandon ship bag, and as it turned out, I never had to eat canned spinach. Provisioning for our first ocean passage turned out to be more for mental comfort than physical. During the first few days, we fought off seasickness with Saltines and gingersnaps; between Norfolk and Bermuda, our most complex culinary undertaking was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, which, in the constant rolling of the boat, took me half an hour to prepare.

Twenty-five years ago this Halloween, our Caribbean 1500 began in bitter and inauspicious rain. I donned my new and expensive red Henry Lloyd foul weather gear, my armor against the elements for the next ten days. Together, the overalls and hooded jacket

weighed at least seven pounds, and encased me in stiff high-tech material that repels beating rain; with the hood tied up just under my nose, it echoed inside like pebbles on a tin-roof. Our new friends began to motor out of the harbor, and shouted "See you in the Virgins." I shouted back but wondered if I believed them. Bill cried, "We're off!" and since I was in the cockpit, I seized the helm as if it were a rip-cord and a shot of adrenaline ran through me. For that instant, there was no fear, just pure joy.

In the blustery afternoon, we easily dodged the freight and military traffic coming in to Norfolk and a parade of tug boats. In the distance, the fall colors had faded and a pervasive, layered gray hung low in the sky, as if it were raining from the water up. After about an hour, the first of our group, an elegantly sleek, black-hulled 48-foot yacht, turned back. They radioed good luck to the fleet, but didn't say whether they had serious troubles or were simply going to wait for better weather.

It was cold, and it was miserable. The realization that we had begun, that we would not stop now for at least fifteen hundred miles, oozed into my consciousness. I shoved it aside with my mantra: "Be open and awake with God." It occurred to me that I should not imagine catastrophes that were not imminent. I had to trust and to stay in each moment. In each moment, we were O.K., even if we couldn't predict what would happen in the next.

The afternoon in the Chesapeake was sloppy, but *Vikara* was moving well. Having stomached a couple of gingersnaps, I opened a can of Campbell's Chunky Sirloin Burger soup, served with a side of Premium crackers. Bill was three spoonfuls into his lunch when we heard what sounded like a rifle shot over our bow. The brown staysail flailed wildly in the twenty-knot wind, its brass fitting puncturing the sailcloth repeatedly. Bill quietly said, "Let's take a minute to think."

Tied to the boat in his harness, Bill went forward, crouching to avoid the flogging inner forestay. When he had it under control, he could see that the brass eyebolt that anchors one of the mast's two forestays in the bowsprit had spontaneously sheared in half. In Norfolk, every piece of rigging had been inspected by experts and given a clean bill of health, and Bill had been over every inch of the boat himself. But there had been no way to inspect a brass bolt sunk in the wooden bowsprit. The best of plans, the best of Bill's months of daily intense preparation, had come to this. We could go to sea with only a single forestay holding the mast, but that would be an unnecessary risk and we needed to be able to use our second foresail. We motored up the Chesapeake towards a boatyard where we might be able to make repairs.

Stranded at dock after five on a Saturday, it became painfully obvious that marine stores wouldn't be open on Sundays in November. This delay--if it was only a delay--would have us leaving Monday at the earliest, unless we got special help, and that would put us several hundred miles behind the company of the fleet. I wondered aloud if two people were enough for the ocean. Bill said it was a good question.

Over a dinner of canned beef stew, Bill said, "Well, maybe we'll just stick around here. We can always try again next year." I searched his face for signs of anger and frustration, but there were none. He appeared willing to accept our disappointing circumstances with equanimity.

"No! Not next year. Now!" Suddenly I was not relieved, as I should have been, that I was off the hook for the thing I had so feared. Perhaps I didn't want to suffer the embarrassment of "giving up," to confess that Bill's idea was "stupid" or that we had caused my family anxiety for naught, but I suddenly had the courage and the determination to follow through, then and there, on Bill's grand idea. We had a destination and a goal and I've never been the type to give

up easily.

We listened on the shortwave to the first night's "Chat Hour." It was "lumpy" out there, according to the voices that got through the static on the radio. One boat had "good copy" and relayed to the others the message that we'd made an unexpected landfall. A boatyard worker stopped by for a visit, sliding down the hatchway, spewing scotch from his plastic tumbler. We filled him up and he nearly nodded off during the end of Chat, but he said he might have a spare part that we could use on Sunday.

Sunday had the bad grace to look like Saturday. Bill stretched his ingenuity to the limits trying to jerry rig *Vikara* to the point where he could honestly assure me that there would be nothing to worry about. We took a picture of me sewing a patch in the brown staysail as we'd been shown during the Norfolk seminars; since I've rarely successfully sewed on even a button, we were testing the limits of my homemaking skills.

We re-began our slog out of the Chesapeake on Monday, dead against the wind. Around dusk, we were still beating into the wind, still within the bay, and even the U.S. Coast Guard was concerned. From out of a dense fog, a cutter circled *Vikara*, signaling us to our radio.

"You've been out here all day," said the voice on the radio, the implication that Big Brother had been watching our movements not lost on us. "What's your next port of call, skipper?"

"St. Thomas," Bill responded gamely. "We got a late start on the Caribbean 1500."

The radio was dead for a minute, but I thought I heard guffaws. "Have a safe passage, *Vikara*. Fair winds."

Around midnight, we were approaching Chesapeake Light, a lighthouse surrounded by water, thirty miles from the boatyard where we'd made our repairs. I came topsides to spell Bill

on watch and immediately tossed my ginger cookies over the side. In the cold night air, I then felt fine and took the watch while Bill went below to sleep. I saw my first “water stars,” tiny bits of green luminescence churned up in our wake. At three, Bill came up and spelled me and I slept a few hours, waking at six to take another watch. I heaved again in a small plastic bucket, but it was mild, and I was spared any *mal de mer* for the rest of the trip. At midnight on Tuesday, we ran into a wall of warm air. The water temperature rose fifteen degrees. We’d arrived in the Gulf Stream!

The boats ahead of us in this dreaded ten-mile-wide river of ocean had reported violent seasickness, annoying discomfort and, in some cases, near panic. At first it didn't seem to us any rougher than Lake Michigan in a stiff breeze, but perhaps that was because we were just so grateful to be underway. When morning came, Pat reported during Chat that Alan was terribly ill, possibly with appendicitis, and she had spent the night on the radio trying to determine whether to evacuate him by U.S. Coast Guard helicopter. Their third crew wasn't experienced enough for her to go on without him, so his evacuation would also mean abandoning their boat at sea. Bill and Alan chose one of the shortwave channels for the seaman's equivalent of a public house call:

"Where does it hurt, Alan? Over."

"My side, over."

"Right or left? Over."

"Both....Over."

"Is your urine Coca-Cola colored? Over."

"Negative. Over."

"Uh, Alan," Bill said, aware that the world could be listening. "Have you ever had

uh, a sexually transmitted disease? Over."

"Negative," came the prompt reply.

"Let's wait on the evacuation," Bill said.

Our first bit of foul weather followed on Bill's diagnosis of Alan's kidney stones. I had been alone in the cockpit, trying to let Bill get some sleep, drinking in the short twilight and trying to imagine what we would look like in a picture taken from an airplane, or a cloud, or standing on the moon. Suddenly, I heard an unfamiliar scratching sound, looked up and watched helplessly as the main sail shredded just above the first reef. (Reefing is a mechanical way of reducing the area of the sail by folding it around the metal boom; the smaller sail catches less wind and thus slows the boat down and steadies it in big winds.) Reluctantly, I woke Bill up to put in the second reef line. Almost on cue, the wind kicked up. For the next forty-eight hours, we were buffeted by 40 mph winds. We would have had to reef anyway in such a gale. The rip forced us to do it earlier, which, as it turned out, was safer than in the middle of the storm. We closed the hatch and were entombed down below. Rogue waves hit us broadside, full force, and down below drawers flew open, spraying their once-neatly organized contents about the cabin. Pulleys, cotter pins, screws, shackles, eye rings, batteries, tape: everything, everywhere.

Topsides, the cockpit filled with water, then drained, only to be filled again. We listened to the radio and I forced myself to read books to pass the time. We heard that one boat's crew was sick, and another was taking on too much water too quickly and was returning to her Carolina home port, defeated. We did what we could, putting out a "security" call on the VHF radio, "sécurité, sécurité." In theory, if there were someone within a fifteen-mile radius of us, they would hear us and answer back their position or be on the look-out for us, as if we were a

navigational hazard to be avoided. *If* they were listening.... If we weren't on deck keeping watch, we had no way of knowing, for sure, whether any other vessel or a sleeping whale was in our path, or we in theirs. And we had concluded that we would have no way of responding even if we had known--our engine was no match for the reality of the weather, and we weren't going to be able to maneuver our way out of any close calls. We settled for a quick look around every hour or so when one of us would be startled awake by a new and unfamiliar sound.

Sea Otter radioed that they would stop in Bermuda to check out Alan's condition. We decided to meet them at that unscheduled stop to check our own rig, but perhaps more importantly, so that we each would have company--even if only the short-wave kind--for the last one thousand miles to St. Thomas.

Bermuda lies 580 miles off of North Carolina, and its 19 square miles are flat against the horizon. The guidebooks say that vessels have been known to blow by without seeing it. Our last 50 or 75 miles on the approach to St. George's took all day and night. The chart showed no perceptible progress. But the morning of our arrival was the kind of sailing day that I'd been promised in exchange for making this trip: sunny, steady 30-knot winds and 12 to 15-foot following swells. When we were about thirty miles off their shores, Bermuda Harbor Radio spotted us and asked us to identify ourselves and gave us instructions for clearing customs and immigration. When we finally jibed and turned up into the harbor channel and dropped our sails, the wind stopped as if the world itself were no longer spinning. It was deafeningly, eerily silent. We were immediately boarded by Bermuda Harbor patrol with rifles slung over their backs. Bermuda has zero tolerance for controlled substances and guns. At Immigration, they stamped our passports, "Entry by Sea."

Bill headed for the showers with a pocket full of tokens. We did the laundry, dried out

our cabin, and changed sails. I held the line on the bosun's chair to hoist Bill up the mast to replace our tricolor navigational light. After extracting some promises, I let him down and we guzzled a couple cold beers and tried some conch fritters and goat curry. Within 36 hours, we were again underway.

Our first storm had given me some courage but fed my anxiety. Now I knew for sure what a storm at sea was like: that the boat would creak and shudder, that drawers would fling their contents of nuts and bolts and spices and flatware like flying bullets around the cabin, that sails would rip and rigging would fail, and *none of it would be as bad in the happening as it was in the anticipation or later in the retelling*. I could even laugh when I awoke one night in mid-flight, tossed out of my bunk and over the lee cloths that were supposed to keep me from rolling out. Staring up at Bill's bunk from where I'd landed on the floorboards, I was relieved when he assured me that *Vikara* had not turtled, that we were not sailing upside down. He had heard the freight train of a wave coming before it smacked us, but there had been nothing he could do.

In Norfolk, we'd learned of a land-based sailor in Bermuda whose hobby was conducting a daily short wave radio check-in and giving weather advice to all sailing vessels in the Atlantic. Herb now predicted our weather would not improve. Our second storm pushed us east, 100 miles out of our way, instead of south. It was no more uncomfortable than the first, except that we suffered more when the radio reports told us that other boats were catching tuna in the southern sunshine and arriving in St. Thomas. With several hundred miles to go and longing for anything southern, I defiantly baked cornbread in my kerosene oven.

Just when we thought the worst was over, the wind mounted to a force between a howler and a screecher, and the third storm hit us broadside with walls of water. *Vikara* rolled, vibrated,

stopped dead and lurched ahead. About 8 p.m. that night, Bill decided we needed to take down the main sail. He told me to hold the boat into the wind while he went forward to the mast. Tired and scared to tears, I shouted at him that I didn't want him to go on deck. Even though we were both always tethered to the boat, I didn't think I had the strength to haul him back in if he were thrown overboard by the smack of a wave.

His lips no more than three inches from mine, Bill shouted, "Mary Michael! We do not have a choice!"

For a split-second, I thought he was going to slap me out of my hysterics the way I've seen it done in movies. But I recognized in his urgency that survival was at stake. Fear was not an option. I shoved my entire body weight against the tiller, trying to do what I was told. The tiller alternately threw me back and forth with the full force of the pounding sea. Bill had just returned to the cockpit, breathing heavily, when the staysail sheet ripped loose and he had to inch forward again to tie it down. I was crying but it didn't matter: my tears, mixed with waves and rain, could not be seen or heard.

We retreated to the relative peace of the cabin, hung our water-heavy Henry Lloyd's in the galley, and trusted. In a couple of hours, we were awakened by a terrible commotion topsides. Bill dragged on his soggy foul weather gear amidst a flurry of swear words I'd never heard him utter before. The clew of the little jib, the only sail we had up at the time, had blown out, and Bill struggled again to the bow to take it down. Wet and miserable but standing watch in the cockpit, there was absolutely nothing I could do--I couldn't see him and I couldn't hear him. His words were lost on the din of the gale. I prayed. It was a classic foxhole prayer, sincere and urgent and full of promises I probably couldn't keep. But we made it through that night, we were not shipwrecked, and in the next twenty-four hours, we made our best run ever:

one hundred ten miles under bare poles--no sails--and *in the right direction*! Bill wrote in our log book that we would have to get there soon; he'd already fixed everything on the boat that he knew how to.

We made our final approach to St Thomas about 11 am on November 24, 1992, off the east end of Jost Van Dyke in the eastern British Virgin Islands. Bill logged that the water was "green" and it was "hot." Around one, we were hailed on our VHF radio by *Sea Otter*. "Look back," Pat said. Sure enough, after not seeing them for the twelve days since Bermuda and not talking to them on the short wave for three because of their need to conserve power, and despite having taken a different tack out of Bermuda, *Sea Otter* was only a few hundred yards behind us in the Windward Passage between St. John and St. Thomas. It was a perfect blue Caribbean day and dozens of sailboats dotted the Passage. Passing us outbound, we spotted Walter Cronkite's beautiful 64 foot Hinckley, *Wyntje*.

Around five, with the sun threatening to set before we reached the dock at Crown Bay near Charlotte Amalie, Bill suggested we spend the night in a little cove on the tiny island of Great St. James on the southeastern coast of St. Thomas--so close and yet so far. I'd trusted my captain on the open sea, but now he was just plain wrong. I insisted we push on, and we made landfall about six. Four dinghies of fellow Caribbean 1500 sailors came out to greet us. It turns out the marina bar had been abuzz for several days as they listened to Herb's ominous weather reports and our check-ins, and many had worried that we weren't going to make it. *Sea Otter* and *Vikara* were the last two boats in, but we got in. Still, we were reminded we weren't that important: the Caribbean 1500 celebration dinner had taken place the night before without us, the leader had flown home to Rhode Island that morning, and a silver bowl, our medals, a pink Caribbean 1500 pennant and a warm bottle of champagne were waiting at slip D-8.

Thanksgiving Day was two days later, celebrated with a potluck on the dock. Despite all my useless worry, we had much to be grateful for.

A few days later I saw my hero, Walter Cronkite, and his wife having breakfast a couple of tables away from us at the marina restaurant. Having been to sea, and having learned that fear is useless, I screwed up my courage and did something else I'd never done before. Casually but confidently, I sauntered over to his table and asked for his autograph. We chatted about our voyage and he signed our log book:

“For Mary: It is an honor to sign this extraordinary log. Congratulations on your fortitude.”