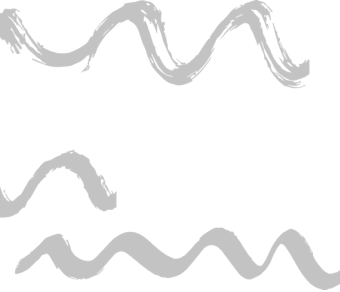


CHANGE OF COURSE



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Sailing into Love & Adversity
on Caribbean Shores

REGINA PETRA MEYER



BROADCAST



Published in Australia in 2022 by Regina Petra Meyer,
www.reginapetrameyer.com

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A catalogue record for this work is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN: 978-0-6489053-8-7 (Paperback)
ISBN: 978-0-6454445-4-4 (Ebook)

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Produced by Broadcast Books, www.broadcastbooks.com.au
Cover and text design by Hazel Lam
Typeset in Bembo Std 12.5/14 by Hazel Lam
Cover photograph portrait from the collection of Regina Meyer
Cover photograph yacht by Don Hebert Photography
Author photograph by Blue Sky Photography
Map by Maryia Foteva
Proofread by Puddingburn Publishing



*To all the curious dreamers.
May you find the courage to take the first step.*

*And to my dad.
He preferred to stay put.*



AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a true story of my wanderings in the Caribbean, my passion for sailing and the unexpected, of love lost and found, and my search for freedom. It is my most genuine attempt to recount my experiences as close as possible to how they transpired all those years ago. But even after the last words have been typed, edited and printed, *Change of Course* simply holds this: recollections of my personal perspective and its subjective truth.

The years depicted in this book cover a stimulating and turbulent period in my life. These situations and stories are etched deep into my soul and have allowed me to access vivid memories: some make me laugh out loud, some leave me squirming in my chair, while others highlight surprisingly brave and daring moments. During the writing process, I had personal photos to fall back on (and occasionally lose myself in), plus passport stamps, old notes, and emails to help me stay on track.

To protect the privacy of those who have influenced this work, I have changed all the names of the people and some locations in my story. Except for Sven. He chose to be himself.

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Antigua



PREFACE



My goal was never to live an ordinary life. From an early age I'd felt a niggling presence, a fear almost, of getting stuck in a situation or place. Something drove me to challenge and question this persistent irritation. I had a stubborn determination to break free from the confines of my upbringing. My rebellion was not so much about the way my parents raised me, but more about the confines of my culture and the accumulative pressures of a traditional society. Switzerland is a stunning country and I count myself lucky to have been born and raised there. These days I love to go and visit, and I fully appreciate my origin, because I have since found a home in myself and am no longer dependent on a people or culture to define me. But as a young woman, I found my home country stifling and constricting. I associated the place with phrases like, 'You are just a cog in the wheel' and 'We all must fit in and play our part.' I could not stand these sayings, nor the people peering out from behind closed curtains and openly judging my unconventional choices. I was one of the first 'divorce children' in my community. The label 'divorce child' was used

regularly in conversations in my childhood and it confused me. Somehow, I understood that it meant I was flawed, my future doomed and possibly I was destined for failure. So I set my sights on a different kind of horizon.

Years later, when I asked my mother about the origins of my insatiable wanderlust, she chuckled. No, this desire to travel was not inherited, she said. None of my ancestors appeared to have ventured far from home. Instead, she recalled catching me walking down the road with a little suitcase in hand when barely three years old. I digested this information and for the first time felt a deep sense of acceptance for that indescribable urge lodged deep within my soul. This desire to seek, learn and uncover had always been with me. What if *this* was the purpose I had been seeking for years?

In my teens I rebelled against the conservative culture in Switzerland by colouring and reshaping my hairstyle on a fortnightly basis. I spoke my opinion at school openly, often challenging teachers and school friends with my unpopular ideas, like the time when refugees first arrived in my hometown and some of them took shelter in our local church. During an art class my friends expressed disgust at the refugees' actions and when I challenged their racist comments the room fell silent. When deliberating my career path, my father suggested a certificate in administration. At the time, he reckoned university education was unnecessary for a woman who was only going to end up married. I had been picturing myself as a kindergarten teacher or social worker. However, I did not want to burden either of my divorced parents with the cost of my ongoing education and yearned to be free and independent as soon as possible. As a compromise, I settled on a business diploma, but chose to specialise as a travel

Preface

agent in a last grasp at defiance. This job became the launch pad for my explorations of the world around me.

I had barely completed my diploma before reconnecting and becoming romantically involved with a school friend. We developed a nourishing and harmonious relationship, travelled the world together, feeling enriched in each other's company. But after twelve years, our union was beginning to reveal cracks. A gnawing doubt was making me question myself and the relationship. A haunting emptiness was threatening to swallow me; there was a pain that I couldn't yet identify. Something wasn't right, but though I tried, I was failing to understand what it was, or the meaning of my life. Who was I and what was my purpose?

While not knowing the answers, I did know how to respond to my yearning for adventure. At the age of ten my father had introduced me to boating life aboard his little yacht, docked at the shores of our neighbouring lake in Switzerland. Thereafter, during my occasional visits, we sometimes ventured out on what was a modest sailer but which to me was the most beautiful yacht in the world. I was certain I wanted more of these treasured moments. Why did sailing ignite my passion? It spoke of ultimate freedom – the simplicity of being at sea with life defined by weather, watch rosters and mealtimes, and being isolated from people, society and everyday pressures, was appealing.

Self-reliance was essential when exposed to the forces of nature, while navigating the high seas on a long-range passage or cruising among island groups. Sailing, for me, appeared as a meditative and environmentally friendly mode of transport, offering unbridled adventure beyond the reach of an eagerly extended bow.

CHANGE OF COURSE

Aside from adventuring, this story is about my journey of self-discovery. Propelled by restlessness, I was driven to seek truth and understanding through travel, and through relationships with men. I had to learn to claim responsibility for myself. Each choice affected everything on my path: the people I encountered, the connections I made or broke, the directions I sailed and where that put me emotionally. This journey was exciting on the outer, the physical level, but profoundly confronting and challenging to my inner world. Physically and emotionally isolated, I had to make decisions I sometimes did not feel ready to take. At times I felt deeply lonely and vulnerable, harshly exposed to the uncertainty of my unfolding path.

Always, however, I let myself be guided by my moral compass, my integrity. This was the quality I treasured above all and if my personal standards slipped, it hurt the most. It did not matter whether my path was clear, or if I took a wrong turn, as long as I stayed authentic and true to myself. I had to leave the safety of my home, and later of my relationship, so I could explore, discover, and learn for myself.

‘A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.’

J.A. Shedd



CONJURING UP ADVENTURES

I could feel the sun caressing my skin and could taste the salty air on my lips. Closing my eyes, I saw palm trees fringing picture-perfect tropical beaches and sailing boats anchored in serene bays. Excitement and anticipation rushed through my being, yet here I was, facing a bleak reality. The long winter in New Zealand was cold and damp. Not tempted by the outdoors for once, my favourite pastime was sitting rugged up in front of the meagre gas heater, devouring book after book. Ignoring my dripping nose, I clumsily opened another thick volume with my frosty hands. These were quiet and lonely days in our new home, in yet another new country. Seeking refuge from my harsh and dreary circumstances, I became engrossed in adventurous sailing tales that I found in the local library. My body was stiff from the cold, but my mind did not notice, for it was escaping to hot and exotic places. I began to dream of extraordinary journeys.

Accidentally I stumbled upon crewing websites and was immediately hooked by this tantalising world hovering at my fingertips. Since first stepping foot on my father's yacht in my

childhood, my wonder and fascination had remained palpable. On the yacht, my heartbeat accelerated in proportion to the boat gaining speed, its sails proudly billowing in the breeze. As the boat moved along, making a soft whooshing sound, I was mesmerised by our wake splashing and curling the water's surface behind us. Sometimes we would drop the sails mid-lake and sit motionless for a while. I loved listening to the gentle sound of the waves lapping against the hull and the feel of the soft sun caressing my face. Over the years I had repeatedly tried to convince my partner to take up a sailing lifestyle, but he suffered from terrible seasickness and, hence, we never pursued my dream. But on these webpages, I reasoned, I could at least get a taste of other people's exciting life choices and adventures. Thrilled, I learned that anyone could apply to join private yachts for a stint at sea. In exchange for a holiday on board their vessel, the yacht owners requested help with sailing, the onboard chores and possibly a small financial contribution. This information was entirely novel to me and I felt inspired by its possibilities.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of the warming gas flame, I reached for my laptop and googled 'crewing opportunities'. Delighted to find reputable sites, I immediately set up a profile on several of these online communities. With this task completed, I made a cup of tea. Holding the warming cup in my hands and sipping the steaming liquid, I closed the computer and shut my eyes. I felt an energetic tingling through my body and realised I had opened a door to potential adventure. I wondered where it might lead.

Shortly after posting my profile, offers started flowing into my inbox. They were plentiful and diverse, each seeming more exotic than the last. Should I join a sailing boat on its voyage

from Thailand to Africa, or cruise comfortably on a catamaran in the Caribbean? Maybe I could explore the Pacific with a young family, or venture into the grey and stormy Southern Ocean on the way from New Zealand to Chile.

These quick and unexpected offers were tempting, but I felt too immersed in my current reality to accept any of them. Instead, with my partner and best friend of twelve years, Sven, we decided that life in New Zealand was not working out the way we had imagined and arranged to relocate back to Australia. Sven could transfer with his job to a rural and coastal area south of Adelaide. For a while I forgot about this alternate sailing lifestyle. We settled into a tiny village by the sea. This quaint little community was surrounded by undulating hills on one side and the ocean on the other. Most of the houses were holiday homes, bestowing the place with a ghostly energy, and living there proved to be eerily quiet.

Sven started his new job and I tried to secure employment. However, in a village of minute proportions this was difficult. Chatting to the few locals, I quickly learned that aside from one sizeable resort there was only a pub, a coffee shop, a small grocery store and a post office, all of which were family-run businesses. I lodged an application with the resort and was pleased when I was invited for an interview a few days later. As the manager and I sat on a sofa facing each other I felt hopeful.

‘Regina, thank you for coming in. I have to be honest though, we do not have any positions vacant at the moment, but I was intrigued by your colourful CV and wanted to meet you for a chat,’ he said, with a sheepish smile.

For a moment I felt baffled by his confession and then burst out laughing. This was not what I had anticipated. I took it as a

positive sign that someone at least valued my life experience and after a stimulating conversation I left the resort. The days were starting to seem long and lonely with no work and no friends. Eventually I stumbled across a morning coffee circle of retired folks who, although twice my age, welcomed me into their midst. Day by day we conversed over coffee, while my life trickled by. No matter how hard I tried to ignore it, the niggling voice within persisted and kept pushing me towards an adventure. Living quietly and comfortably was not for me. Trying to satisfy this growing wanderlust, I found the local library and devoured more yachting sagas. But these short-lived, second-hand experiences only stoked my fire. I wanted more.

The first step was to learn how to sail. A local sailing school offered a basic training course and, without thinking twice, I enrolled. From the first moment I loved being on board a wind propelled yacht. I loved learning how to raise and trim the sails to improve performance. I could not hear enough about storm tactics and increasingly I was visualising thrilling adventures on sleek yachts and sailing to exotic and wondrous locations.

While Sven and I had spent many harmonious years together and had travelled and lived in several countries, we felt our relationship had stalled in recent years. On one of our many walks along the local coastline, we finally agreed that we needed time apart, to figure out what each of us wanted from our lives and whether our relationship was a part of that future. As I was still without work and desperate to fulfil my dream of a sailing adventure, we decided that I would crew on a yacht while Sven remained at home in his job.

Immediately, I revisited the online crewing sites. This time I looked up the profiles in earnest and considered which boat

and experience would suit me best. I chose a boat located in the Caribbean. The South African skipper, a man in his late sixties with lifelong ocean-going experience, was planning a final sail to Australian shores with the hope of finding a suitable buyer for his treasured old wooden sailing boat, and then he'd return to his home country. The photos showed a well-maintained yacht with beautiful lines. Being an older vessel, the interior was rustic, confined and less spacious and private than the more recent builds. The boat was an ex-racing yacht, had an array of sails and the deck was crammed with winches and lines. The combination of this yacht, together with the knowledge of the captain, seemed a fantastic opportunity. I knew that time on board would increase my sailing ability in leaps and bounds and decided that I would happily forfeit comfort and privacy in exchange for this learning experience. The trip was planned to take three months. Starting from Antigua a crew of five would sail through the Panama Canal, stopping over in the Galapagos and at all the Pacific Island nations on the way back to Australia. Enthusiastically I signed on and booked myself a one-way ticket to the Caribbean.

A few weeks later I stood in front of the airport's passport control, my hands damp and shaking with nervous anticipation. I took one last look into Sven's kind, deep blue and so familiar eyes. We embraced tightly, I kissed his lips, and made myself turn and walk towards the gate. Halfway, I looked back, seeing my beloved man of many years walk away, his head downcast, and wondered if I was making the biggest mistake of my life. A sudden burst of tears threatened to escape. I took a deep breath, re-centred and walked determinedly towards the plane and my future.

Once in the air, my thoughts focused on my destination. My much-anticipated adventure was about to start, and I was eager to

sail the big, open oceans. I visualised blue skies, dolphins playing in our wake, days of moody clouds and towering waves. I saw myself swimming in crystal clear water, visiting stunning beaches, enjoying good company with lots of laughter, and fulfilling interactions with local people. Most of all, I looked forward to gaining clarity.

Everyone around me seemed to know exactly what they were doing and what their purpose was. On the contrary, my life seemed slightly derailed, lacking direction and purpose. I wanted to address that unsettling restlessness that had bubbled inside of me for a long time now. And the time had come for Sven and me to bring clarity to the nature of our relationship.

My life was on the verge of taking a sharp and unexpected turn. Armed only with courage and the desire for adventure, I leapt into the unknown, immersing myself in the waves of life.

2



CARIBBEAN AHoy!

Peering through the elliptical window beside me, I saw a small island emerging from the seemingly endless ocean and sky. The tiny dot gradually grew bigger as the plane approached. As the green hills and rust coloured rocky outcrops of the island took shape, their rugged forms contrasted sharply with the soft hue of the surrounding ocean. As the plane descended, tantalisingly beautiful beaches became visible. Antigua. This was where my one-way ticket would end and my adventure was set to begin.

I was overcome with feelings of deep gratitude and certainty that this island would be a favourable and hospitable destination for me. Excitedly, I stepped onto the tarmac and, for the first time, breathed in the hot and fragrant air of the Caribbean.

At the immigration counter, a formidable officer eyed me with a stern, somewhat disapproving look. Had my captain not forewarned me about the immigration procedures, I would have quavered under her relentless gaze. Instead, I confidently pulled out the crewing confirmation letter the skipper had sent me and passed it to the officer, who promptly stamped me in for the next

thirty days. Relieved I proceeded to Baggage Claim, hauled my heavy backpack onto my shoulders, declared the many nuts and seeds I had packed to augment the boat's provisions, and was swiftly waved through.

Outside the busy terminal a taxi driver was waiting to whisk me away in a comfortable van. The pothole-riddled ride took us almost across the entire island. We drove through little villages hiding from the street behind lush growth. I glimpsed small wooden houses with curtains blowing through open windows in the afternoon breeze, occasional bare brick houses awaiting a coat of paint, ramshackle food stalls shaded with sun-faded umbrellas tiredly advertising a local beer, and semi-finished brick buildings with rusty iron bars reaching out of the walls, looking forlorn.

As we slowed, I noticed a group of young children by the side of the road. They were running around in bare feet laughing and teasing each other, engrossed in their play. Each was sporting a creative and uniquely braided hairstyle. Dressed in hand-me-downs that were faded and hanging off their lanky frames, they appeared completely carefree and joyful.

A few sickly looking dogs were roaming the gravel paths, scavenging for a tasty piece of rubbish. Groups of plump women were chatting animatedly on a verandah while small clusters of grey-haired men sat quietly in the shade of a tree, watching the world go by. A stunning young woman dressed in tight pants and a tiny top was confidently sauntering down the street. I opened the window so I could smell and hear and immerse myself more fully, soaking up the atmosphere.

The driver turned in to a dirt driveway and stopped in front of the small marina. I paid for my ride and nervously gathered my bags. This was it! What if I did not like the owners of the boat?

What if I did not like the boat? What if I did not like my crew mates? What if ...

But, too late. I tried to calm my nerves and started to walk down the narrow dock towards the yachts, neatly lined up one after the other. As I approached, an old man with a slight limp walked towards me. He had the distinct look of an old sea salt: dishevelled grey hair, gangly bowlegs, weathered wrinkly skin and clothing that had been extended well past its use-by date. His T-shirt and shorts bore holes the size of a grown man's thumb and were covered with stains from long hours spent maintaining an equally old vessel.

'Regina?' I was not surprised to be greeted by a hoarse, bordering on croaky, voice. It matched his appearance. I smiled as we made eye contact. His eyes were slightly faded from age but shone with a glint of humour and spirit that I immediately liked.

'Yes, that's right. And I presume you are Henry from *Zephyr*?'

'Indeed, I am. Welcome to Antigua, Regina. Nice to meet you.' His outstretched hand firmly gripped mine. 'Come along this way,' he said, pointing down the finger dock. '*Zephyr* is right up there.'

As we walked towards the yacht, I silently assessed Henry, my skipper for the next three months. He seemed older than I'd expected and his gait was quite frail. His skin was like leather, hanging off his frame as if he somehow had shrunk over the years. His posture was slightly bent forward, and his hands and fingers were strong and calloused, bearing the signs of a lifetime of physical labour.

'This is it. Welcome on *Zephyr*, Regina.'

I took a moment to measure the boat. Externally, she was as beautiful as portrayed in the images Henry had sent me. The

hull was clean, and reflections of the water's surface sparkled on the immaculate paintwork. The bow proudly pointed towards the dock and the teak deck elegantly extended all the way back to the stern of the boat. Henry stepped stiffly across the railing at the bow and indicated to me to hand my bags over. Clearly, he was a man of few words.

First, I handed him my heavy backpack, followed by the small carry-on, and finally I stepped onto *Zephyr* myself – my new home. Carefully I walked towards the cockpit in the back, willing myself to be graceful and appear like a seasoned mariner. During our preliminary contact I had not pretended to possess a lot of experience, but I wanted to leave a positive first impression and start this new chapter on the right foot.

Henry dropped my bags down below and introduced me to his wife, Maude. She smiled and appeared friendly. Her piercing blue eyes were set in a soft and wrinkled face, framed with shoulder-length wavy grey hair. Compared with her skinny husband, she was stocky and had a grandmotherly air. Her greeting was pleasant, and I felt relieved that the people I had chosen seemed genuine and welcoming. Choosing a boat far from home with an unknown captain and crew had been a gamble. The perfect host, Maude had already boiled the kettle in anticipation of my arrival. The three of us sat down in the cockpit, sipping cups of tea and getting acquainted.

The retired couple told me about their joint life working on luxury sailing yachts around the world. Henry had been a professional yacht captain for most of his career, while Maude had worked in other roles on board. Having enjoyed a nomadic and childless life throughout their working years, they had chosen a similar retirement life by acquiring *Zephyr*. For the past few years,

they had been mostly stationed at this marina in Antigua. Maude quietly confessed to being tired of the ocean-going life and was yearning to return to her family in South Africa. Henry gruffly mentioned plans to sell the yacht soon due to his health concerns and was hoping to attract more affluent buyers in Australia.

Once we finished our drinks Henry beckoned me to go below deck, so he could give me a tour and an introduction into the finer details of the yacht. 'You see, Regina, this is not a spacious interior.'

I nodded and thought that it indeed appeared rather cosy.

To my right, I could see a small galley, the yacht's kitchen. On the left was a cubicle with a door, which I presumed was the shower and toilet. Ahead in the cabin there were two benches, one elevated above the other, on either side of the hull, and a narrow passageway in between. Up front I found the bow cabin, the bed covered with heavy sail bags. At the back I could see two bunks on either side of the engine and a small navigation station behind the shower room. To my astonishment, aside from the head – the bathroom on board – there were no doors, no privacy, whatsoever. The interior was fitted out in varnished wood. It was gleaming and well maintained, but made the cabin look dark and enclosed. I swallowed and tried my best to look enthused. I was excited, but the lack of privacy was something that I would have to adjust to.

'It's homely and you have maintained it well,' I said, highlighting the positives. 'It's smaller than I thought. But I will adapt,' I added with more conviction than I felt.

Henry nodded. 'Yes, I know. Compared with the new boats this is small. But it is a great boat. *Zephyr* took part in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race back in the '70s, you know.'

Both Maude and Henry proceeded to give me detailed descriptions on how to operate the levers on the toilet correctly. I was instructed not to use hair conditioner, so the shower pump would not clog up, and to open and close the fridge sparingly and only when cooking, to save energy. The couple were obviously fond of their boat and set in their ways. Fair enough, I thought, after all it was their home. Henry pointed at the four benches and mentioned that one of these would be my designated bunk. Two other crew, a Scottish couple, would join *Zephyr* shortly and I was given the first choice. Looking at the bunks I saw that the lower ones were slightly wider than the elevated ones.

‘I’ll pick this top one here.’ I preferred the bigger bunk, but picking the smaller one meant I would not have anyone sleeping above me. The lesser of two evils, I thought.

‘Sure. How about you unpack, then we’ll go for a beer?’ Henry had already clambered up the small wooden staircase into the cockpit.

I opened the lockers next to my bunk and was relieved to find them empty. Unpacking my bag, I tried to fit everything in a logical order for convenient access. I was pleased when all my belongings easily fitted into the small compartments without having to cram them in. This was going to work quite well, I decided, feeling content with my situation and the streamlined gear. I closed the lockers and zipped up the empty backpack. I had arrived.



We walked to the bar, which was integrated into the main marina building, and ordered a cool beer. When unpacking earlier I had

noticed the cabin was very warm and attributed this to the lack of windows and hatches. Greedily I took a gulp of the beer and felt myself relax. Henry and Maude were busy chatting to other boaties about their day-to-day challenges and I was able to absorb the atmosphere. Our group had gathered around a large table and were happily talking, comfortable in each other's company. Most of the yachties were either retirees or professional skippers and their crews. A mixed bunch, many came from Europe, the United States, Australia or South Africa. They were dressed in daggy old clothes and shared the same sunburnt look. The conversation was friendly and occasionally I was eyed with interest and asked a question.

After our drink we wandered back to *Zephyr* where Maude prepared dinner for the three of us. As we sat in the cockpit, they started talking about the neighbouring boats.

'Do you see that boat over there?' Henry pointed at a stately new yacht on the other side of the dock.

'Yes, what about it?' I asked, scanning the standard looking cruising yacht.

'Poofter boat. That's not proper sailing.' He snarled dismissively.

I could not believe what I had just heard and did a doubletake to see if this was a joke. Henry was frowning and after a bitter laugh he growled, 'Lazy morons that invent something like that. Furling sails and powered winches. No understanding of real sailing.'

'Oh, okay. But I guess that's a sign of the times, right? Things change. I mean, furling sails are handy with shorthanded crew?' I tentatively probed.

'No, that's not proper sailing. You can never trim correctly and overstretch the sails. It's for lazy bastards,' Henry barked, and

I decided the best course of action was to keep my mouth shut for the time being.

‘And see that boat over there. They have just replaced their engine. Have no clue how to do any maintenance, but enough money to throw around. Stupid! And, by the way, Regina, beware of the local people, especially the men – they are out to take advantage of you. Be on guard, will you?’

I was stunned by the anger and judgment in Henry’s speech. I had not come across someone so harsh in a long time and wasn’t sure what to do. Was it my place to challenge his old-fashioned and righteous opinions, or was it better to remain silent for now? This was my first day and I was yet to find my feet on this boat. I decided to wait and see how things would develop.

Over the next few days, I learned to sit and listen with detachment. Both Henry and Maude were unpleasantly outspoken, and I quickly discovered it was best to sport a non-committal look and nod my head occasionally. They clearly did not approve of late model yachts, how those vessels were equipped, or how the younger skippers ran their boats. They continually enlightened me on fellow yachties’ mistakes and to my disgust the couple were also very vocal about their dislike for the local population.

Holding on to old and rigid values gave Henry and Maude plenty to talk about, but they did not seem happy. Neither within themselves, nor as a couple. Their faces were carved with deep, angry-looking lines and they appeared stuck in the past. I didn’t share their opinions and occasionally tried to give them a gentle nudge, especially relating to their racist comments. I kept mentioning my positive experiences and hoped to at least sow a seed. But largely I tried to avoid such conversations and hoped that my fellow crew mates would be more companionable.



Clare and Andy arrived from the United Kingdom a few days later. A professional couple in their late thirties, they were taking a sabbatical to fulfil their own sailing dream. Being only a few years older than me, I was overjoyed to have their company. I was hopeful the atmosphere would lighten up now we had three positive and happy people on board.

Over the next few weeks, we started preparing the lovely old *Zephyr* for the big ocean passage back to Australia. We worked long days in the blistering sun, carrying out our delegated chores. I loved Clare and Andy's company. They were laidback and between them, had considerable sailing experience. We were all excited about our upcoming Pacific adventure and kept visualising what our time at sea would be like.

Henry mentioned that we would sail to Dominica for a few days so we could get sailing experience on *Zephyr*, and extend our entry permits for Antigua upon our return.

To keep my luggage to a minimum, I was travelling without a laptop. I had planned to keep in touch with Sven via internet cafes but discovered they were scarce in Antigua. Cautiously I approached Henry and asked if I could borrow his computer to make a Skype call before we left for the short trip. The skipper handed me his device, cautioning me to be careful with it, and I went to the bar to access the wi-fi. After a few tries I got a connection. Overjoyed to hear Sven's familiar voice, I told him about *Zephyr*, describing the yacht in minute detail. I mentioned Henry and Maude, including their challenging personalities, the arrival of my pleasant crew mates Andy and Clare, and the sailing

we were about to do. Sven listened patiently and passed on his news from his daily life in Australia. Hanging up I felt happy and recharged and was looking forward to my first sail on *Zephyr*.

Back at the yacht Henry told us about the various colour-coded lines that connected the sails to the boat and were relayed with numerous blocks and pulleys on deck to their end position. He went on to explain the function of each of the dozen manual winches on deck and, as he continued his instructions, I strained to remember what each line was used for. Once he finished the induction, Henry turned on the diesel engine and proudly stood behind the wheel. Precisely as briefed, we released line after line and slowly glided out of the harbour, weaving our way carefully through the anchored yachts. Once we reached the mouth of the bay, Henry assigned each crew member to a specific position. I stood beside the mast, alert and ready. I could feel the adrenaline in my body as I waited for Henry's instructions.

'Hoist the main!' A resounding bark by the old salt kicked us all into gear.

We rushed to raise the sail as quickly as possible. Henry shouted instructions in rapid succession and we scrambled to carry out the tasks on the rocking deck. Once the main sail was proudly bulging in the breeze, we had to clamber to the foredeck and hook the jib onto the forestay. Hoisting the smaller sail on the front was slightly easier, but soon my arms were on fire from the exertion. When the two sails were up and trimmed to perfection, we breathlessly gathered in the cockpit.

'Well, there's a lot of room for improvement, that's for sure. Regina, at the mast you are responsible for relaying all messages between the helmsman and bowman, so make sure you speak up. Andy, you picked the wrong line, make sure next time you

get it right. Clare, you were too slow on the winch, that has to improve.'

We sat there sombre and slightly stunned. As this was the first time we'd sailed on this yacht, Henry's harsh feedback left me deflated. I had looked forward to sailing on his beautiful yacht and yearned to do myself and the skipper proud. Henry did not waste time and ordered us back to our posts. He proceeded to hammer us with nonstop tacks and gybes so we would gain experience. We all were focused, wet from the spray, and worked tirelessly to please our unforgiving skipper. The atmosphere plummeted. Gone were the happy smiles from earlier, instead we were now labouring with pinched faces, straining our untrained muscles and impatiently yelling instructions at each other. In the short breaks between manoeuvres we sat morosely bunched together in the cockpit. Andy, Clare and I would occasionally give each other an encouraging nod, while listening to Henry and Maude recount glorified stories from their sailing careers.

Nothing could dampen my spirits for long, however, and by the end of the day I was feeling exhilarated. The wind pushed our boat relentlessly through the disturbed seas and I enjoyed watching the waves splashing over the bow, washing all the way back to the cockpit, and drenching us. I did not mind getting wet – it made me feel alive and invigorated. I loved to see the sails filling with wind and, taking advantage of the weather, we made the yacht gain speed as we adjusted the trim. I was surprised how fast *Zephyr* was moving through the waves and found myself completely absorbed in the sailing. My world was the boat and the ocean beyond.

My arms started to feel heavy and drained from the hard, physical labour and my hands were wet and wrinkly from the constant exposure to salt water. On my right hand I felt the

painful sting of a big blister. In our last sail change of the day it burst during one of the tacks, where the rope had been pulling on the flesh. I felt a searing pain and momentarily wondered if this trip had been a good idea. Would it be this hard for the whole trip? Surely not. I firmly pushed that thought away.

Once we arrived in Dominica, Henry went to clear customs for us all while Maude prepared a vegetable and chicken curry with rice, and a small rocket and tomato salad. We ate our meal overlooking a quiet bay and a lush and mountainous tropical island. Taking in the sights, I felt rewarded after the day's stresses. This moment suited my image of cruising life on a yacht.

Tired from our day's efforts, we quickly retreated into our narrow bunks. As my body started to relax, I found myself being gently rocked to sleep by the sound of waves softly lapping against the hull.

The following morning, Henry and Maude surprised us by announcing we would stay in this anchorage for another night. When they said we could take the day off the mood lifted immediately. Shortly after, Henry ferried us ashore in the faded grey inflatable dinghy.

Andy, Clare and I took a quick walk around the tiny settlement. Aside from a few drab looking restaurants that were advertising the local brew and plain seafood dishes, there was not much to explore. For something to do, we hired a young tour guide so we could trek further afield, through lush tropical rainforest, to the Salton Waterfalls. The guide showed us a local cinnamon bark tree and harvested a cocoa seed on the way. Reaching our destination, we saw a steep and impressive moss-covered cliff, surrounded by dense growth of ferns, shrubs, dangling lianas and enormous trees with far reaching roots.

Water was rushing over the edge and thundering into the small pond below. I inhaled the moist air and tiny drips of the humid mist settled on my face. Sitting on mossy boulders next to the swimming hole, we snacked on nuts and fresh bananas and, after a refreshing dip, the worries and doubts of the previous day fell away.



The next morning, we rose early and helped ourselves to a quick breakfast of oats and tea. While I washed the dishes, the others securely stowed our belongings in the dedicated spots, so nothing would tumble around the cabin during our sail back to Antigua. Henry and Maude eyed our progress like hawks, making sure we followed their instructions to the letter. Clare, Andy and I occasionally shared a conspiratorial glance and rolled eyes at their pedantic requests.

Once *Zephyr* was prepared, we lifted the anchor and set off, leaving the lush little island of Dominica behind us. We were greeted by a fresh breeze and a vast blue sky, with only an occasional puffy cloud. Perfect sailing conditions! We hoisted the sails and the yacht started to move effortlessly through the deep blue water. The boat was pushing along at a great pace, creating a perfectly curved bow wave at the front and we sat listening to the gurgling sound of our wake.

We relaxed, enjoying the moment. The tension that had risen again during the sail manoeuvres eased off and we shared stories and engaged in light banter. Maude prepared the usual 9am tea and passed everything up from below deck. As she handed a mug to me, she had a sparkle in her eyes that I had not seen before

and quietly said, 'Regina, this cup needs to be thrown away once you finish it. It's cracked and has reached the end of its life.'

'Okay,' I replied, 'I shall give it an appropriate burial!'

Once I had finished, I waited for a gap in the conversation and loudly announced, 'You need to know, I've had enough of this. That's it from me!' With an exaggerated theatrical gesture, I launched the retired mug overboard, far into the ocean, where it immediately disappeared from our view.

Henry's jaw dropped and he looked at me in shock. He was at a loss for words for once, which satisfied me immeasurably. Trying to process my comment, he was slowly coming to terms with the fact that he had just witnessed me chucking a perfectly good mug into the sea.

'Regina! What the heck is going on? Why did you throw the cup away?' was all he could get out.

I cracked up, exploding with laughter. Turning to look at Maude, I saw her peeking up from downstairs with a sheepish look on her face. Suddenly everyone was in stitches and we experienced our first truly exuberant moment together.

As we reached the northern end of Guadeloupe, which we had been slowly passing on our right side, we changed our course back towards Antigua. With the favourable wind angle gone, the waves were coming at *Zephyr* from an awkward direction, making our passage bouncy and wet once again. The wind picked up and Henry called me to his side, saying he would show me how to put a reef in the main sail.

I stood on the rocking cabin top, trying to keep track of the different steps and knots involved. After explaining the procedure once, Henry told me to perform it on my own. I fumbled and frowned, trying to remember the correct sequence. Once I

finished, pleased with my result, I looked at him expectantly, hoping to receive his approval. Instead, Henry glared at me and at the top of his lungs yelled, ‘You stupid bitch. You got it wrong!’

I froze. Nobody had spoken to me like this before. Previously when Henry had been harsh or disrespectful, I had brushed it off as a minor, isolated incident. But this was more than a mere comment, this was his bitter personality, so I decided to stand my ground.

‘Henry! Stop right there. How dare you talk to me like that? This is unacceptable! If you do not change, I will leave the boat straight away. I did my best with the task you set, and this was my first time doing it.’

Henry quickly back-pedalled and grovelled. ‘Ah, Regina, I did not mean it like that. It won’t happen again.’

I gave him a bone-chilling look to convey how serious I was. As he met my gaze, I knew we had reached a silent, mutual agreement. From that moment, Henry treated me with more respect and started giving me more sailing responsibilities.

When we got back to Falmouth Harbour, we docked *Zephyr* back in her spot and started to clean her. The decks and hull needed to be soaped and rinsed. The jib needed to be unhooked from the forestay and dried, folded and stowed. The lines were carefully rolled up and hung in neat coils at the bow rail. Once the boat was cared for, we sat in the cockpit and relaxed with a hot cup of tea.



SUNDAY FOLLIES

‘Today is Sunday.’ Henry was stating the obvious but I had lost count of the days. Appreciating the reminder, I nodded my head in acknowledgment.

‘Well, on Sunday evenings we usually go to Shirley Heights, a historical locality on top of that mountain over there,’ he said, pointing up. ‘It’s on a cliff edge overlooking both English and Falmouth harbours, the hills of Antigua and the Atlantic Ocean, plus we get to see a beautiful sunset. A Caribbean steel drum group plays first, followed by a local band. We can buy a barbecue dinner, rum punches and other drinks at the bar and there is usually a lot of dancing. In short, it is a fun night out. Would any of you like to join us tonight?’

‘Yes, I’m in,’ I replied as soon as Henry put his question. Clare and Andy were also keenly nodding.

We had showers at the marina building and quickly dressed and got ready. Soon enough we piled into a taxi, slowly weaving our way up the hill, caught in an impressive traffic jam for such a small island. This seemed the place to be on a Sunday

evening. Getting out of the car we were immediately greeted by a captivating rhythm and the distinct metallic sound from the steel pans in the distance. Instead of walking along the carpark towards the entry gate, however, Maude and Henry directed us to an opening in the prickly shrubbery next to the paved area. Puzzled, we trudged behind them along a tiny goat trail, while Henry urged us to stay out of view from the road.

‘Henry, why don’t we just walk up the road like everyone else?’ I asked.

‘Because of stupidity, that is. They started charging an entry fee a couple of months ago and it never used to be like that. God knows what they use the money for. But anyway, we found a way to get around paying.’

I thought that Henry was being stingy and a snigger escaped my lips. The irony of watching our group stumbling single file along a barely visible dirt track, trying to avoid being scratched by the thorny shrubs, only to save a few bucks, was amusing. I decided that I would happily support the local economy on future visits.

Once we inconspicuously entered the grounds from the rear, we found ourselves in an old military complex, which I later learnt dated from the late 1890s. We wandered around what remained of the once majestic stone buildings to a small square in the centre. A steel band was playing on a small covered side stage and the musicians were beating their drums with focus, creating the rhythmic and melodic tunes. I could feel my feet starting to tap and a grin began to stretch from ear to ear. This was my kind of fun!

I left the safety of the group to explore the small area alone. An outcrop with massive boulders sat on the edge of the cliff.

Scrambling onto a rock, I could see right down into English Harbour and the adjoining historic site of Nelson's Dockyard. As my eyes roamed, I took in the mountainous landscape of Antigua in the background, a glass-shaped bay filled with anchored yachts leading out into the ocean, an occasional white cap highlighting the vast sea. Excitedly I identified the inlet as Falmouth Harbour, the home of *Zephyr*. The sun was already dipping low and within moments the entire scene became bathed in a golden glow. The sky turned various shades of red and amber as the sun slowly disappeared beyond the horizon. I admired this beautiful spectacle of nature and was filled with deep appreciation. I was on holiday on a tropical island in the Caribbean and feeling happy and free.

On the way back to the square I walked past a man who was weaving hats, fans and animals out of palm fronds. As I stopped to have a look, he smiled and swiftly wove a rose, handing it to me with a charming gesture and a cheeky wink. I wandered on and grabbed myself my first rum punch.

The steel band was finishing their set and I could see another band was getting set up on the main stage. Soon enough their music was blasting out of the large speakers and the rhythms started heating up. The music was pumping and people began to move onto the dance floor. Everyone seemed to be up and dancing, having fun. The energy was electric.

Swaying from side to side, I was not comfortable enough to dance just yet. I was scanning the crowd, adoring seeing so many people enjoying themselves, when my eyes fell upon a tall man. He was dancing nearby and his fluid moves were mesmerising. He had short, stubbly dreadlocks, which bobbed rhythmically as he danced and jumped to the beat. Dressed in a pair of loose jeans and a crisp white sleeveless shirt that revealed muscular, well-toned

arms, I could not take my eyes off him. He looked strong, sensual and agile as he moved with the rhythm. Suddenly he raised his head and looked straight at me. My heart dropped a beat and I nervously smiled at him. His eyes sparkled and a smile lit up his face. Then he stopped dancing and sauntered towards me.

‘Hi. Would you like to dance?’ His voice was deep and warm, and the corners of his lips lifted.

‘Ahh ... Mmm ... No, I think I’m okay, thanks,’ I stammered. My throat was dry and my hands damp. My, oh my, I was in way over my head and promptly remembered Henry and Maude’s warnings about the local male population.

‘Okay. No problem,’ he said, giving me a friendly smile.

Feeling rather deflated I watched him walk away from me.

A moment later Henry came up to me and said, ‘Regina, I just want to let you know that that young man is Jeremiah, Jay for short. He is actually all right. We know him well. He comes here every week to dance, so feel free to dance with him if he asks again.’

Bummer, I thought, wishing I’d known that earlier.

I sipped my drink, trying to inconspicuously watch the handsome guy dancing. He must have felt my eyes lingering on him, as he suddenly turned and walked towards me.

‘Hi again.’ Another breathtaking smile. ‘Are you sure you don’t want to dance?’

‘Oh ... Okay. That would be nice,’ I quickly added. I emptied my drink, disposed of the cup and followed him onto the dance floor.

Confidently he walked into the centre of the square until we were surrounded by dancing bodies. We stood in front of each other with the sound of the music filling the air and the

bass resonating in my chest. I lifted my gaze, immersing myself in his silky, golden-brown eyes, and in that moment, all the noise and commotion around us seemed to fade away. Suspended in profound stillness, my heart fluttered. One look and I felt I had touched the depths of his being. In the same instant, I had a glimpse of the most sublime human beauty.

‘Are you ready to dance?’ His husky voice catapulted me back to the dance floor, and somewhat dazed, I nodded.

I had always been a staunch sceptic when it came to ‘Love at First Sight’ stories. But suddenly my world had turned upside down. Something, yet to be defined, had shifted. Shaking off any thoughts, I let myself be swept up in the moment. I loved dancing, but in the past few years I’d had little occasion to. As if needing the prompt, I noticed in the crowd a man with a T-shirt in big letters announcing, ‘Dance Like No One Is Watching You!’ Throwing my head back, I laughed. The electrifying music moved my body as if it had a mind of its own. I soaked up the energised atmosphere on the dance floor, while the night slowly took over the sky above us. Throughout, my senses were fully alert to the presence of this delightful stranger.

Jay was close to me, very close. I watched him dancing with his eyes closed and lips gently parted. He appeared completely absorbed in the music and I greedily took advantage, secretly scanning this intriguing man. His movements were in sync with the sound, fluid and almost painfully sensual. I noticed his sculpted muscles flexing as he lifted his arms and saw a few pearls of sweat appearing on his attractive dark face.

I was dancing, jumping and winding my body to the Caribbean tunes. Every now and then Jay moved behind me, his torso demandingly pressing against mine. Immediately my body

tuned into his and we began moving as one. Whenever Jay's hand brushed the bare skin on my arm it triggered shivers down my spine. There was an electrifying current in the air around us and at times I stepped away, needing to ease the tension. Jay always met my gaze with a little smile, wrinkles forming in the corners of his eyes. His lips looked soft and tantalising and I had to consciously avert my eyes to distract my vivid imagination. I felt alive and intoxicated.

Once the music started to wind down, I spotted Henry and Maude. They were standing on the edge of the square and were eagerly signalling me. Guiltily, I wondered how long they had been trying to gain my attention.

I tugged Jay on his shirt. 'Jay, I'm sorry I have to go now. Look, my captain and his wife are waiting for me.' I smiled shyly. 'Thank you so much for the dancing. It was wonderful!'

'Are you coming back next Sunday?' He looked hopeful.

'I am not sure, but I will try to come again,' I said, already aware that I would move heaven and earth to return in a week's time. 'Good night.'

I slowly turned away, sincerely hoping to meet this man again.

Clare and Andy giggled as I approached them. On the way back down the hill in the taxi, they enjoyed teasing me.

'Girl, what was with the intense winding and grinding on the dance floor?' Andy lifted his eyebrows suggestively. 'You two could have burnt down a house.'

'Good on you for having fun!' Clare chipped in. 'All said and done, he certainly is easy on the eyes. Well done, girl.'

For a moment I felt self-conscious and guilty about the intense attraction I felt for this stranger and how intimately we

had danced together. A mental picture of Sven flashed before my eyes, but I quickly reminded myself that I had not done anything wrong. I was feeling so happy and energised by the experience, nothing could dampen my perfect mood.



Over the next couple of days, Henry and Maude kept us busy on *Zephyr*, preparing the yacht for the big ocean passage. We had not used the spinnaker yet and Henry instructed us on how to correctly bind the massive, lightweight sail to prevent it from tangling during the hoisting process. He then took out the bosun's chair and explained that we would have to learn how to sew sheepskins onto the shrouds, so the sails would be protected from constant chafing during our voyage. Carefully Henry taught us all how to hoist a person up the mast and impressed on us that the second person who was stationed on deck, lifting and lowering the suspended colleague as needed, was never to lose focus or stray from their post. I had never spent much time dangling from a rope, let alone on a yacht, and was looking forward to being hoisted up.

Once I was strapped into the simplistic chair made from durable car seat straps and a small wooden board as a seat, Andy assisted me to climb up the mast by pulling me with the halyard. At the top I briefly enjoyed the sweeping bird's eye view across the yachts and the bay. With a sigh I swung myself carefully out to the shroud and tried to lock myself into a spot so I would not dangle around too much. Gingerly I took out the sheepskin, the chunky needle and thick thread, strapped the sewing protector onto my right hand, and went to work. It looked rather easy on the dock, but with every puff of breeze, the mast and I wiggled.

I had to constantly wrap my feet around a rope or a piece of the mast in an attempt to maintain my position. At the same time, I was tightly folding the patch around the wire, so it would remain in place, and began pushing the needle through the tough skin. The sun was burning. Soon, sweat was pouring down my face and my hands became slippery. I had classified this task as a minor job, 'just a little bit of sewing', but now that I was labouring, I realised that it would take days rather than hours to complete. Meanwhile, Andy was uncomfortably shuffling on the teak deck, keeping a close watch on my progress. After lunch we swapped positions and persevered until dinnertime.

The days were excruciatingly hot, especially with the jobs that needed to be done on deck and up the mast. Despite wearing sunproof clothes, hats and sunscreen, we felt like we were sizzling. Henry and Maude, comfortably settled in their well-worn routine, liked to get up around 7:30am, followed by breakfast at 8am and were ready to start the day once the 9am VHF marine broadcast was finished. After that we worked for about an hour, until ordered to stop for a mid-morning tea break. The afternoons, in contrast, were long and painfully hot, interrupted only by yet another tea ceremony. We repeatedly pleaded with Henry and Maude, asking if we could start working at sunrise, when the air was still cool, and finish earlier in the afternoon. But the old couple insisted on sticking to their routine and we grudgingly and dutifully complied.

Despite the heat and the hard physical work, day in and day out, my mind constantly drifted back to that previous Sunday. The handsome face with the big smile, surrounded by the cheeky little dreads, kept flashing before my eyes. Ashamed, I would push the image aside, willing my thoughts back to Sven in Australia.

I could not explain why I felt so drawn to this man. Regardless of the guilt, I kept hoping to see him again next Sunday.



One morning, as we sat drinking our tea in the cockpit, Henry suddenly announced that he was changing our crew positions. Being an old captain, he still ran his boat like a professional yacht and instead of rotational jobs he preferred to assign specific positions to each crew member. When Henry and I had communicated prior to the trip, he'd said that due to my limited sailing experience I would be the designated cook on board.

His statement came as a total surprise. He explained that he had decided to relieve me of the cooking and instead promoted me to be the bowman on board. The bowman (or woman) was responsible for all tasks on the foredeck and hierarchically is second in charge after the captain. Andy had held this position and looked absolutely crushed, understandably, as he had far more sailing experience and certifications than me. So far, I had only completed a basic sailing course and managed to accumulate ten days on a yacht. Henry's decision was unexpected and although flattered by his trust in my sailing abilities, I did not understand the need of assigned positions for a cruising passage. As far as I was concerned, we were a team and the overall aim was to sail the boat safely from the Caribbean to Australia.

Henry, oblivious to the emotions he'd unravelled, bluntly went on, 'Andy, you will now be stationed at the mast and Clare will handle the winches and cook.'

Andy's frown deepened and leaning forward he challenged Henry immediately. 'I don't see why we need a designated cook.'

On any other passages and trips I have taken part in, we've always shared the cooking among the crew.'

I quickly jumped in. 'I totally agree with Andy. I don't mind doing some cooking, that way it's not a massive chore for one single crew member. Between the three of us we can share the catering on a rotating basis.'

'No. We will have a set cook. I am not letting anyone tell me how to run my boat.' Henry slammed his cup down, rose from his cockpit seat and heaved his gangly body onto the deck. With a stubborn look he barked, 'About time we got back to work.'

That night, as Andy, Clare and I sat in the local bar, our spirits were at their lowest and none of us spoke for a while. Henry's moodiness and Maude's righteousness had started to wear me down and I was wondering how the other two felt. As crew, the three of us got along well, but I had noticed Henry treating Andy, and Clare in particular, with harshness and impatience.

'What are you guys thinking?' I said, finally breaking the silence, not liking their grave expressions.

'Well, frankly, Henry's a prick!' Andy thundered, as if he had been waiting for a prompt to allow him to unleash his frustration. 'I don't understand why he's so bloody stubborn. Surely it's not a big deal if we all agree to cook. Why does he act so ridiculously authoritarian? And I can't stand the way he talks to us – especially you, Clare!'

'I feel like I am absolutely useless, you know.' Clare's eyes filled with tears, as she quickly continued, 'Before we came here, I took a long sailing course and we circumnavigated the UK with the sailing school. I loved the trip. It was fun and challenging at times. At the end they told me that I'd done really well. But this,' she said, indicating with her hand towards *Zephyr's* berth, 'is

unbearable. He nags about every little thing I do wrong and I get nervous and make more mistakes. Now I am questioning if the UK sailing school was crediting me wrongly, or if Henry really is a mean old sod.'

'Oh, Clare, I am so sorry that you are feeling like that. There is nothing wrong with your sailing abilities,' I said. 'He is nit-picking and probably frustrated about something else altogether. Regarding the cooking, I don't see why we can't agree to share the chores among ourselves anyway. Why should he care who is preparing the meals, as long as we all fulfil our other duties, too?'

'Yes, I think that's the best we can do. I am happy to go along with this plan,' Andy said. He seemed composed again and Clare nodded, a tentative smile lighting up her face.

Nursing our cold drinks, we began to discuss the missing crew situation. Throughout our email communications, Henry had mentioned he'd wanted a total of five crew for the passage. Four crew members, plus him as a captain. Since Maude refused to do the trip, we technically remained a crew member short. Henry had not touched on this situation during our chats and that left us wondering about his plans.

That's when Patrick strolled into the bar. He was one of the professional skippers on a yacht that was docked a few berths down from *Zephyr*. Unlike other vessels with multiple crew, Patrick was running the boat on his own. He was in his early fifties, his hair short and surprisingly neat for a mariner, and he sported a comfortable little bulging belly, most likely due to his passion for good Italian food and wine. He was a casual and friendly guy and in recent days had made a conscious effort to welcome the three of us. Patrick questioningly indicated towards the empty chair and we all enthusiastically nodded.

‘Well, you lot don’t look overly happy. Is the cranky old bastard getting to you?’

I nearly choked on my drink hearing his blunt statement. Suddenly everyone spoke as we tried to tell him what had been going on.

Patrick shook his head. ‘Guys, you can’t let him get to you. Look, they are my friends and essentially, they are nice people. But they have been stuck with each other and this boat for a while. They are too old to physically sail their yacht on their own. That’s how they got stuck in Antigua.’ Patrick looked around our group and I started to feel sorry for the old couple when I thought about their predicament. Patrick continued quietly, ‘Now Maude desperately wants the boat gone, while Henry doesn’t really want to sell it.’ He took a gulp from his drink. ‘You should know that you guys aren’t the first crew they’ve had here. There was a whole group here last year and I am sorry to say that in the end he didn’t follow through with the trip.’

Shocked, I absorbed this information. Perhaps Henry was not as committed to sailing to Australia as he made out to be. We were not a full crew and, so far, Henry had not mentioned the missing member of our team. Did he have someone in mind or was he deliberately not looking, I wondered? Or did he subconsciously plan to sabotage our trip in this manner? My heart ached at the thought of our trip not happening, and I could not imagine abandoning my dreams at this stage.

I could understand that selling *Zephyr* would be a painful choice for Henry. A professional captain all his life, he would not only say goodbye to his passion, the yacht, but also to a way of life. He would have to make the transformation from a sea nomad to a landlubber. I felt a pang of compassion for his situation. Henry

had mentioned that he was on blood pressure tablets and various other medications. Aside from his temper, which was positively fiery, he was a frail old man. He was lost in the past, endlessly recounting stories and staunchly believing in how much better things used to be. He was desperately trying to hold on, while knowing it was already gone.

And Maude, his professional offsider and wife of many decades, had spent most of her adult life at sea. Whether the ocean-going lifestyle was something she chose deliberately, or if she only remained in it due to her marriage, I did not know. We knew that in recent years she had been longing for a steady home on land and wanted to enjoy more time with her family in South Africa. Henry and Maude had been spending these past few years wishing for different outcomes. Instead of looking for a solution that suited them both, they each had projected their bitterness and anger onto the people and situations around them.

Patrick had given us a new perspective into the circumstances of our skipper and his wife, and for a while we sat quietly in front of our drinks, contemplating the situation. Before leaving the bar, we agreed that we were all committed to proceeding with the planned passage and wanted to focus on learning more about sailing *Zephyr*. We decided to support each other as a team and confront Henry if his behaviour got any worse.



The remainder of the week was relentless. We worked all day Saturday, and on Sunday Henry and Maude gave no indication of allowing us a break. We were too timid to speak up and, albeit half-heartedly, completed our tasks. Andy was splicing some ropes

and Clare and I were alternating with the dreaded sewing on the shrouds. My arms and legs were sore from the constant balancing act in the bosun's chair and the heat of the sun was getting to me. Clare looked equally worn out from assisting me from her post on deck.

'It's a pretty hot day today. You've done good work, team!' Henry tried his best to sound cheerful as we sat slumped over our plates. 'I reckon after lunch we will clean up our work stuff, give the deck a quick hose and finish for the day. Sound good?'

We perked up a bit and nodded in unison.

'Who's up to going to Shirley Heights later this afternoon?' I asked, trying not to look too excited.

I looked expectantly at Clare and Andy, who were whispering to each other.

'No. We are not coming today. We will enjoy a little downtime with just the two of us.' They looked relieved at having created some space for themselves and we all launched into the clean up with new enthusiasm. We were done in no time and went our own ways. Henry and Maude took a nap. Andy and Clare wandered off. I borrowed Henry's laptop and unsuccessfully tried to call Sven.

At four o'clock on the dot, Henry, Maude and I stood ready at the mouth of the marina. Once on the mountaintop, not wanting to upset the couple, I obligingly trudged behind them along the goat trail with the prickly bushes. I didn't mind this time, as long as I got to dance.

'Already looking forward to seeing Jay again, Regina?' Henry asked.

I blushed and laughed nervously, unsure how to respond. Of course I was looking forward to seeing him. Jay had dominated my thoughts all week.

Once in the compound I left Henry and Maude to themselves. As with everything else, they maintained a routine and always sat in their usual spot. I got myself a sweet rum punch and assessed the situation. Not seeing my handsome stranger, I wandered across to the steel band, closed my eyes and started moving to the catchy tunes.

‘Hello. You came back!’

I felt lips brush against my earlobes and my heart missed a beat. I turned and immediately lost myself in those silky eyes. What was it with this man? I wondered. He was irresistible.

He smiled and asked, ‘You want to dance?’

The evening was a blur. Just like the previous week, the place was packed with people and the atmosphere was fun and full of energy. Jay and I danced with our bodies closely connected. Eyes closed, I absorbed the sounds, the movement of my body against his and the quivering sensations when our bare arms connected. I was intoxicated, not from the rum, but from my heightened senses. I felt incredibly happy and alive.

‘What’s your name?’ Jay placed his hand on the small of my back and gently guided me to the lookout area during a break.

‘I’m Regina. You’re Jeremiah, right? Jay for short, if I remember correctly?’ He already felt so familiar, it was strange to do the introductions now.

‘Yes. Jay, the invincible,’ he said with a cheeky wink and I promptly blushed. His smile broadened. ‘Regina. That’s a nice name. My dancing queen.’

I was not used to flirting and his intense looks threw me off guard. Although not prone to blushing, this man had a knack of making my face flush, and my body responded with waves of tingling.

Sunday Follies

I loved to dance and to my surprise, I particularly enjoyed the sensual Antiguan dance style. Jay mostly danced behind me, his body connected with mine. Moving as one to the loud music, the intimate touch and moves were new territory to me, yet seemed natural. My body was loving the freedom of the movements and on the dance floor my mind switched off entirely. I was in the moment, enjoying the sensations and letting the energy flow. I noticed an occasional disapproving glare by a contemptuous holiday maker and was unsure if this was due to our interracial interaction, or the sultry dancing. Probably both. I cared about neither.

When I was once more abruptly summoned by Henry and Maude, I had to leave the party in a hurry. Turning to go, I looked into Jay's eyes and felt a magnetic pull towards him. I could not understand how he managed to get under my skin, but I knew I would find a way to return the following week.

YACHTING GLOSSARY



Bilge Space beneath and in between the floorboards and the hull.

Boom Pole underneath the mainsail, usually reaching across the cockpit area.

Bow Forward area of the yacht.

Cabin Rooms onboard.

Companionway Usually a staircase, leading from the cockpit down into the cabin.

Deck Top outside area.

Dinghy/Tender Small vessel used to travel from the yacht to/from the shore.

Foredeck Area of the deck forward of the mast, reaching to the tip of the yacht.

Galley Kitchen.

Guardrail Stainless-steel fencing enclosing the deck.

Gybe Changing sail direction, as the stern of the yacht passes through the wind.

Halyard Sheet attached to the top of the sail; used to hoist it to the top of the mast.

Hatch Window built into the hull or onto the deck, for light and airflow.

Head Toilet and/or bathroom.

Heel, heeling Tilting of the yacht, caused by wind angle and force of wind.

Helm, helming Steering wheel, steering the boat.

HF (radio) Radio for long-distance communication (high frequency).

Hoist, hoisting Raising a sail up to the top of the mast.

Hull Body of the yacht.

Jib Sail at the front of the boat, reaching from the mast down to the bow.

Mainsail Big sail attached to the mast on one side and to the boom on the bottom.

Mast Pole in the centre of the yacht's structure, designed to hold up the sails.

Navigation Station Alcove containing all the navigational aids, computer and charts.

Port Port side is the left side of the yacht, facing the bow aboard.

Porthole Circular window in the hull.

Rigging Construction that holds the mast in its upright position (includes shrouds).

Saloon Living room of a yacht.

Self-tailing winch Winch with a mechanism that holds the sheet in place.

Sheets Ropes or lines on board; attached to a sail they are used to hoist or trim the sail.

Shroud Wires connecting the top of the mast to the deck, stabilising the mast.

Spinnaker Large lightweight sail used instead of a jib, with wind from the stern quarter.

Starboard Right side of the yacht when facing the bow.

Stern Rear area of the yacht.

Tack Changing sail direction, the bow of the yacht turning into the wind.

Tailing winch Winch where tension on a rope is kept by manually holding on to it.

Topsides Two sides of the hull.

Trimming Adjusting the sail according to wind angle and force, for best performance.

VHF (radio) Radio for short-distance radio calls (very high frequency).

Winch Cylindrical component on deck; a winch will trim the sail by tensioning sheets.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



When I set out to write this book, I had no concept of how much time and effort the project was going to swallow up. This was likely a positive, for had I known the hours-upon-hours of work involved, I probably would have abandoned it long ago. Over some periods the manuscript lay dormant and I often wondered if it would ever see the light of day. Well, it did. Because I am stubborn and child-free and have the luxury of time to spare. This work shall be the only birthing process I endure. *Now live on, baby! I've paid my dues.*

But most importantly, the book is here today because of kindness. It was the countless small gestures, timely words of encouragement and support that kept me going.

Helene Young. It was you who instructed me to sit down and write 1,000 words a day. It wasn't until you pointed out the obvious that I became serious. Thank you. And again, for your kind offer to read my manuscript. I am humbled and immensely grateful for your generosity and support.

Isolde Martin. You were the first person to set eyes on the earliest (and cringeworthy!) draft of the manuscript, and I appreciate your gracious feedback immensely. Your generous assistance and encouragement early on instilled hope and trust in me to persist on my writing and publishing journey.

June Alexander. It was by pure chance that I stumbled upon your website, and I am thankful for the algorithms that placed you in my trajectory. It was magic to see you carefully editing my words, gently smoothing out abrasive parts and elevating what deserved to shine. Thank you for encouraging me over and over to pursue publishing.

Bernadette Foley. It was your skill, care and experience that turned my manuscript into a polished and quality book. I watched you do this with grace, calm and great professionalism. Thank you for keeping it all on track at times when I felt flustered.

Hazel Lam. I feel incredibly lucky that you were available and willing (!) to work on this project. The book looks fabulous, inside and out, and I am absolutely stoked with the result. Thank you!

Nicole Webb. You brought peace of mind to the process by taking care of the publicity aspect. Thank you for sharing your skills and insights, and for making my story accessible to a much greater audience.

Mum. When I was little, I remember feeling that it was you and me against the world. You were the centre of my universe, the person I admired most and the authority I persistently rebelled against. You stood firm in your truth and in your love for me, and I knew, even during turbulent times, that you would always be there for me. I.H.D.G.G.F.G.

Dad. We didn't always see eye to eye, and it took work to create our bond later in life. But we did. We talked, learned from each other, appreciated our differences, and healed our connection. This I will value forever. Wherever you are, thank you for accepting my wild and unconventional choices, for your love and the warm and cuddly hugs. I miss you and you are forever present in my heart.

Acknowledgements

Thomas. You were the rock in the family equation, and I am grateful for your steady and loving presence. You are my bonus dad and I feel blessed to have you in my life.

Sven. Thank you for the time we shared together, the memories we created and for being a cherished friend. I value our friendship more than you are probably aware of. And thank you for sharing your beautiful family with me. I love you all deeply.

Leo. Thank you for catching me when I truly needed it. I will always be grateful for the love and support you have so generously extended.

Evelyne. Our history and the genuine connection we share mean the world to me. I am grateful for your love, the unwavering support, and the countless belly laughs.

Jo. My Sagittarius sailing soul sister. We met on a yacht many years ago and I am grateful we still get to dream up extraordinary adventures.

Morgan. You are my distant anchor whenever I need to seek shelter during a storm. Thank you for who you are and for being there.

To the all the special women in my life. I look up to you. You inspire me, give me strength and make me laugh. I hold you dear in my heart.

To the ASA and QWC. I am grateful for the resources, support and communities you provide.

To all the writers, published or 'yet-to-be'. I thank you for your time and the kind and genuine advice. It is amazing to feel held in such uplifting company.

I wish to extend my love and gratitude to the people who inspired my story. Your presence touched, challenged, enriched and changed me. Without you I would not be who I am today.

CHANGE OF COURSE

Thank you. Every now and then I wonder if you, like me, find yourself quietly chuckling and reminiscing about this time. ‘What a blast it all was!’

And to Kianoush. Thank you for adventuring through life with me. *Asheghetam*.



Regina Petra Meyer was born and raised in Switzerland and worked as a travel agent for several years. Her curiosity was piqued by coordinating trips for her clients to all corners of the globe, and eventually she packed her own bags and adopted a globetrotting lifestyle. Regina has adventured across all continents, enjoys meeting people and trying new foods – providing she can distinguish what’s on her plate. She has lived and worked in Antigua in the Caribbean, the USA, New Zealand, and currently calls tropical Cairns, Australia, her home.

Regina has no children, remains unmarried, and cherishes the freedom her life offers. Alongside her love of exploring the world, she is equally curious and passionate about her inner journey and evolution. When she’s not writing, Regina helps people to become empowered, to embrace courage and follow their dreams.

Regina’s memoir *Change of Course* is her first book.



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