



# Coyote Lost at Sea

*The* STORY of MIKE PLANT,  
AMERICA'S DARING SOLO  
CIRCUMNAVIGATOR

*Julia Plant*

*The journey of a fiery outlier who  
burned brightest at sea*



# Coyote Lost at Sea



*Mike Plant aboard Coyote, October 1992. (Billy Black)*



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*To Mom*





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Thanks also to Virginia, my editor, who took my very messy manuscript and created a book, and to Molly at International Marine/McGraw Hill, who decided to take a chance on me and this story.

# PREFACE



WHEN MY BROTHER MIKE DIED at sea in 1992 at age 41, he was sailing *Coyote*, his just launched 60-foot sailboat, to Les Sables d'Olonne, France, for her first race, the Vendée Globe Challenge, a singlehanded, nonstop, global circumnavigation race created by the French. This was Mike's second Vendée Globe race, but his fourth entry in an around-the-world race over a period of seven years. Each previous race had fueled Mike's passion for solo racing, and he'd worked like a maniac to finish *Coyote* in time for what he hoped would be the race that would put him at the pinnacle of the crazy sport of offshore, singlehanded racing. This was also the best chance he had ever had to beat the enemy, the French, and win the race.

Mike never made it to France, and consequently never joined the thirteen other boats that had entered the race. On November 25, 1992, French naval divers were sent to inspect *Coyote*'s overturned hull spotted in the North Atlantic three days earlier by the crew of a commercial vessel. He was presumed lost at sea, and his EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon) was also gone. At the time, EPIRB represented an advance in marine distress technology in that it transmitted a signal indicating a boat's position for search and rescue teams. Mike's survival suit was the only other item missing from the boat.

In addition to discovering *Coyote* overturned, divers saw no sign of the boat's unique—and innovative—8,400 pound lead ballast “bulb,” which had been attached to the carbon fiber keel. The missing ballast, and even Mike's EPIRB, set off endless speculation and debate over what happened to Mike Plant.

The world of ocean racing is a small club, and Mike was one of the best known members. He was much admired as a sailor and well liked as a person. Some even considered him heroic, his previous races the stuff of legends. So even outside our family and Mike's closest friends, his loss devastated the ocean racing world, along with the entire sailing community, whose writers and journalists immediately took up the story and followed the subsequent investigations and reports. In addition, the *New York Times* followed the search very closely, and the *Los Angeles Times* ran several articles.

What happened to Mike also triggered endless questions and speculation about boat design and *Coyote*'s innovative but controversial keel and bulb ballast. As well, in the investigations that followed, the electrical system became an easy target for speculation. Troublesome and at times nonfunctional before he left, was it truly fixed when he set sail? And had the boat itself been sufficiently tested—shaken down—to ensure readiness for ocean sailing, let alone the nearly unbelievable beating inflicted during nonstop sails around the world?

The world of ocean racing and its cast of characters are fascinating to sailors

of all stripes. However, the vast majority of individuals who love sailing, and might even own state-of-the-art sailboats, never enter a race. They get their satisfaction from day sailing and cove hopping in coastal waters. Their interest in speed is focused on getting to their destinations faster—with maybe a hint of competition with other cruisers. The more adventurous might undertake longer voyages, and a small but growing number of sailors throw off the dock lines to fulfill a dream of sailing around the world, which, depending on how it's done, can take years to complete. Making landfall and spending days, weeks, or even months in exotic ports is the goal.

By contrast, in long-distance ocean racing only the time at sea is important, because there is no port time; no time for being a tourist, explorer of cultures and geography, and so forth. The goal is to move as fast as possible and do nothing but sail as hard as you can. Time is measured in days or months. The two worlds of circumnavigation have little in common, except the sea itself and the basic sailing skills required.

By definition, ocean racing means coaxing every fraction of a knot of speed out of boats designed more for performance than safety. This is true even though today's racing boats are equipped with sophisticated electronics and safety gear, some of which were not available when Mike was racing, at least in his first ocean race in 1986–87. In that race, he sailed *Airco*, and many involved in the ocean racing world commented that she was a sturdy boat built to last. And so it did. In fact, it is still going strong, having raced around the world three times and transatlantic many times. *Airco* clocked more miles than most racing boats, and Mike had built her on a shoestring. Mike built his second boat, *Duracell*, with more help, but she was also considered heavier than her competitors, more likely to be able to sustain damaging winds, waves, and other stresses.

Mike's transition from *Airco* to *Coyote* is notable: from extremely strong, reliable construction proved by her history; to *Coyote*, a state-of-the-art racing boat. True, *Coyote* was designed to compete with the French who had been building faster but far less safe racing boats, and Mike changed his “native” style by adopting some of their design elements in order to compete.

In ocean racing, innovation is the watchword, and corporate sponsorship the necessity for most racers. The pressure of time and last-minute adjustments are realities to contend with. At the time of *Coyote*'s launch, some designers, sponsors, and racers called her the fastest boat ever built. It's pretty safe to say that, other than trimarans, *Coyote* was the fastest boat built in the United States at that time. Somehow it seemed fitting, nearly inevitable given my brother's history both in and out of the racing world, that he would have pulled it off and ended up with a star of a boat like *Coyote*.

In the aftermath of Mike's death, my family and I wanted to learn what happened to Mike, and we understood the need for ocean racing experts to draw conclusions—or at least try to—about the scenario that led to the tragedy. Ultimately, though, no one knows what my brother's last days or hours were like. The ocean racing community has moved on, always reaching for faster boats, creating more challenging races. Even Mike's race boat, *Coyote*, drifted on.

At the time of Mike's death, he and I were the most distant we had ever been. Nothing aggressive or dramatic brought on this separation. I doubt Mike noticed my withdrawal. In the last years of his life, Mike had found his passion in around-the-world sailboat racing, and had proved to himself and the sailing world that he was good at it. He had become a hero, surrounded by people who loved him, and he worked like crazy to make his dream last as long as possible.

Due to a combination of Mike's devotion to sailing campaigns and races, especially the dreaded but crucial aspect of successful fundraising, and my focus on my own life, I saw little of him during his final seven years. For most of my life Mike had been the proverbial big brother I looked up to. When I was a teenager Mike had been my hero. The orbit of *his* life defined my existence.

In our 20s, Mike and I ended up in Europe together. As I describe in the chapters that follow, my time with Mike brought its own risks and consequences for both of us, but they were more emotionally important in my life than his. Because of our shared earlier experiences, my withdrawal from Mike's life was not insignificant. I also knew that defining this boundary between his life and mine wouldn't be easy, because he remained the central focus of my family. If I chose to continue to follow him, then by association, I could always ride on his coattails. But it was time for me to shift my focus away to something less wild than Mike.

In 1985, before Mike's first race around the world, my husband and I went to Newport, Rhode Island, to join my parents who had flown in from Minnesota to spend Thanksgiving with Mike. I was living in New York City at the time, and since Mike's 1983 move to Newport I had made the trip north to see him several times. On the eve of Mike's first race he was 34 years old and I was 31. Most of us usually base our understanding of the past—and place a great deal of emphasis—on a few memories which are poignant, disturbing, or both. A conversation I had with my dad the morning after that 1985 Thanksgiving is one of those memories.

The two of us sat in a café in downtown Newport, where I drank coffee but my dad likely filled his cup with hot water, leaving the tea bag to the side, something he typically did. Since we were alone, I saw these few minutes as an opening to announce my decision to put some distance between Mike and me. Or more accurately, from Mike and his sailing campaign. In 1985 he was building his first boat to enter his first round-the-world race, which would also be, for all practical purposes, his first long-distance solo sail.

I told my dad that I wasn't interested in the race and was not able to provide support. It had nothing to do with the race, I said. No, my decision involved my place in the family, where Mike was a centrifugal force—everything spun around him. I had lived that reality, but no longer would that be the case for me. I had begun focusing on my life, and that meant consciously distancing myself from Mike, something impossible to do if I allowed myself to get wrapped up in his race. When I've told this story, listeners are naturally curious about the fallout. Would my decision ripple throughout the family? Was I making waves? Would my father be angry and fight with me about my decision? Would he see my point and accept my stance?

None of those things happened. Instead, Dad gazed away, out into the café. Maybe my need stung, but Dad chose not to acknowledge his hurt or my decision. If the topic didn't support Mike, or Mike's plans, dreams, and needs, Dad wasn't interested. A pattern, long in the making, held. The conversation moved on. The day moved on too, and we never revisited the subject. Still, I'd approached my dad and told him, at least in part, what was on my mind. What I really wanted to say was blunter: "Mike is your son, but it hurts when you spend so much time thinking about him at the expense of your other four kids."

True to my word, I showed little interest in Mike's newest project—a radical shift from the way I'd followed all kinds of projects he'd regularly come up with in preceding years. Mike, sailing *Airco*, went on to win his class based on boat size in that first race, which only whetted his appetite for more.

After Mike's first race around the world he started to write an autobiography. He took at least four stabs at it: once on his own and the other three times with a ghostwriter. So, we knew Mike wanted to tell his story, and as long as he was alive he would have controlled the content. When Mike died, however, he lost his editorial power. We all harbor uncomfortable bits of our past, and during his last years, Mike had been particularly careful to keep much of his past buried.

Although I'm a writer, working on Mike's story while he was alive held little appeal. Once he was lost at sea, writing a book about him seemed more important—even urgent. If I didn't write it then other people would have defined Mike and his story. I believed I would be able to tell the version that came closest to the truth. I also was possessive of Mike's image and wanted to maintain control of it and still honor him in some substantial way. This would be an ongoing exercise in balancing my need to be myself, out from under Mike's wing, and my objective understanding of Mike's story as a writer and a reader, which told me his was a great story, no matter how it affected me. However, if I wrote a book, it had to be *my* version of his story.

My family and others thought Mike made a natural subject for a book, but had little idea about who would be the best author. Because Mike and I had been close in our youth, it seemed logical that I would write it. I let all involved understand that any book I wrote would include the darker side of Mike's life, because those tendencies and events formed a part of the long path that led him to become a hero. Not everyone agreed with my approach. My mother wondered what purpose was served by bringing up Mike's somewhat sordid past. Why detract from the legacy he so rightly deserved? Helen (Mike's partner and fiancée) liked the idea of a photographic tribute and began work on it soon after Mike was lost. She intended to travel around the world, gathering quotes from Mike's fellow racers and friends, and then hunker down somewhere and put it together. She worked for about six months at this, but then dropped the project, at which point I began thinking seriously about writing Mike's story.

Taking on Mike's story meant re-immersing myself into an identity I had outgrown—that of the younger sister in the shadow of her charismatic older brother. Justifiably, I feared that assuming the role of Mike's biographer would have a negative impact on my own life. Although I believed then and now that the truth was more interesting than a glossed-over version of events, I was also

hesitant to start the project not knowing if Mike would have approved. After all, I'd be stirring up the muck of his earlier life.

About this time I had a dream about my concerns. In the dream, Mike stood at the far left side of the entrance to my garage in San Diego. The garage door was up and Mike leaned against the stucco wall abutting the opening. The garage was a perfect place for the exchange—it was Mike's favorite place in any house. He stood neither in nor out of the garage, looked at me with his head slightly tilted as if feeling a little shy, and said, "So you're writing a book. What are you going to put in it?"

"You wait and see," I replied, uncharacteristically authoritative.

When I started writing, my perspective was oddly distanced. Still, I wanted to honor Mike's amazing life—he was truly the most alive person I had ever known, and his story was just begging to be told. But with the specter of Mike looking over my shoulder, I was afraid to embrace the really relevant and complex material, including the parts that showed what a schmuck he had been at times. So I kept my distanced perspective and I shied away from the parts I knew little about, the years he raced and caught the attention of the international sailing community. At that point, I hadn't yet started talking in depth to others who knew him well.

My ambivalence went on for a year after Mike was lost at sea. About this time, my cousin, Frank Clifford, a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, visited me in San Diego. Frank could have written a book about Mike but deferred to me as the person with first rights to the story. We had discussed the book a few times, and that morning, seated at a table looking out across my backyard, he asked me how the writing was going. I admitted to a fair amount of procrastination. I've always had an aversion to talking about myself, so even discussing the book became difficult.

Add to that, my shyness and my identity as the family writer didn't sit easily with me. My cousin Frank was the professional; therefore, I paled in comparison, or so I believed. Unable to answer his question about the book's status directly, I turned to look out the window and saw a coyote walking across my yard, following the fence border, moving east to west. Coyotes are very much at home in San Diego, but they remain wily creatures, and seeing a medium-size one, or any wild animal for that matter, in the course of any day sets my heart racing. It's akin to watching the dolphins swim in the waves off the nearby coast—time stands still.

Only thirty feet separates my house from the edge of a deep canyon. The vast openness of this backdrop had compelled me to purchase the house many years ago. I had built a small picket fence along the edge of the canyon, thinking it would keep my two daughters from dropping into it, but they never once even ventured down toward it. At the western end, the land forms a point at one side of the house, looking like the prow of a ship. And that's where the coyote came to a stop and scanned the limits of his domain: a vast world with carrion to eat, trails to forge and follow, soft spots on which to sleep—everything was out there.

"That's odd," I told Frank, "There's a coyote in my backyard, and it's the middle of the morning. They usually don't come out at this time of the day."

A coyote can pass for a medium-size mutt, except unlike a dog, a coyote pays no attention to us. We humans are very much on the perimeter of its world. I watched the coyote disappear over the edge of the point, returning to a place unknown to me. Mike's last boat, his pride and joy, everything he had worked for in the last years of his life, his vehicle to a victory over his long-time rivals, the French solo sailors who were the best in the world, was named *Coyote*.

We were still staring out the window when the coyote reappeared on the eastern end of the fence and retraced his steps. He returned to the point, stood, once again surveying the view, and then loped over the edge—two appearances. That's cool, I thought.

Again I told my cousin it was unusual to see coyotes at this time of day, and then for the third time the coyote appeared and repeated his walk at an easy pace along the fence line. I knew that this time it would stop at the point like a sailor at the bow of his boat, survey the expanse, and then disappear.

"This can't be a coincidence," I blurted. "Do you realize we're talking about Mike, and a coyote appears three times? This has got to mean something."

I'm not sure it meant much to Frank. To me, however, it was a beautiful reminder of Mike. But even I wasn't sure it meant anything in particular about him. Did Mike, as the coyote, appear three times in the same place because he wanted me to write the book? Or because he didn't want me to write the book? Or did he just want to be part of the conversation?

The road to this book was traveled over a twenty-year period and produced at least three versions. I eventually began the project interviewing Mike's old friends, tracking down those who had fallen off the map, and put together the main events in Mike's life. But momentum flagged, so I put the project away or tried new approaches—and even considered collaborating with another writer. After that first, distanced attempt, when I left myself out of the story altogether, I next put myself in the story, telling it as a third-person narrative, but it was difficult to weave what I knew first hand with all that went on with Mike that I didn't know. Finally, my now-grown daughters convinced me that writing in my own voice allowed me to be both reporter and narrator with a personal role in the story. My being in the story was the critical perspective.

People's memories of Mike were animated and vivid, in Technicolor. Nobody who had met Mike forgot him. However, to protect the privacy of those who generously provided remembrances, I changed the names of several people included in this story. (I have not changed the names of those individuals interviewed in the Coast Guard investigations, nor the names of competitors or others named in public documents.) I also used artistic license when creating the dialogue in a few places, including the introductory two scenes, the conversation between the customs officials in the Azores, and the discussion between the meteorologists on Campbell Island.

This is Mike's story as I see, experience, and interpret it. If my siblings or parents had written a book, the story would have had a different slant—not better, nor worse, just different. I avoided, as much as possible, telling the story through anyone's eyes but my own, taking care not to violate contributors'



privacy. Since his words in letters, logs, and interviews are included, Mike's strong voice is part of this book and speaks for itself. If he had lived long enough, I have no doubt that he would have written his own story.

That said, this is my exploration of Mike Plant—brother, ocean racer, beloved friend, humbled and humbling son, powerful partner, and a complex, imperfect man. A born leader, Mike inspired many people to believe in his dream and in turn, their own. So many people helped with the construction of his boats and in his fundraising campaigns because they believed in him or liked him and wanted to be involved with his life. He had many friends, even a few who had hard stuff to say about him, but who were still drawn to him. Charisma is a complicated quality, not easily defined but easily recognized. Most people saw it in Mike.

Mike filled many of our worlds while he lived on this planet, and my telling of his story is in honor of, and a testament to, his brightly burned life.

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## South Street Seaport, New York City, October 15, 1992

*“The sea in its own way can tell us how insignificant we are, but in so doing illuminates its own beauty and power in such a way we cannot but marvel at our own existence and the fact that we are part of it.”*

—MIKE PLANT

IT WAS A SWEETLY WARM, FALL DAY on the docks of South Street Seaport in New York City. It was the kind of day that made people lazy. My brother Mike was standing on the pier next to his newest boat, *Coyote*, giving an interview to a local TV station. He was 41 years old. His hair was still brown, and although it was a little shorter than he'd kept it at other times, it looked as thick and healthy as it had in his twenties. Although he'd worn a beard most of his life, when he raced in the 1989–90 Vendée Globe, the French nonstop race around the world, he shaved before crossing the finish line after being at sea for 120 days. The French newspapers had made a big deal about his boyish good looks, so he kept himself clean shaven after that.

Mike's 5-foot 10-inch frame was lean, slighter than it had ever been since he was a skinny 13-year-old winning sailboat races on Lake Minnetonka. The stress of the preparations for his fourth round-the-world-race had worn him down in one way, but it had toughened him in others. He looked like he was made out of the same stainless steel wire holding *Coyote's* mast in place.

South Street Seaport is a marine museum on the southern tip of Manhattan Island. Mike was dividing his time between interviews for local TV stations, pitching for sponsorship in corporate boardrooms, and working on *Coyote's* electrical system. The interviews were to prove his advertising potential to the as-yet-unsecured sponsorships he was hoping to find in Motorola's Manhattan office. The electrical system—that was just a pain in the ass.

*Coyote* had been in the water for barely a month, and so far she had performed beautifully. Mike was ebullient after an early sea trial, sailing hard on the 35-knot wind with two reefs in the mainsail, making a steady 13 knots. “We were actually planing to windward,” Mike said, beaming. “That's unheard of.”

But the complex electrical system frustrated him. He loved sailing because it was self-sustaining: the perfect form of transportation. Now it seemed the

success of the boat depended on electrical power. He had a single-sideband radio and its power booster, two autopilots, VHF radio, computers, running lights, cabin lights, bilge pump, radar, an inverter, two 30-amp converters, watermaker, water ballast pump, and a DC power outlet. All electrical. Compared to Mike's first two racing boats, this one had a system only an electrical engineer could understand, and unfortunately, everything was connected to it. Nothing was manual anymore. If the electrical system failed, everything failed.

When Mike began competing as a long-distance, solo sailor in 1986, the sport, and its boats, was less complicated. As a consequence, solo ocean racing appealed to sailors from all backgrounds, recreational to professional. But each major long-distance race led to increasingly sophisticated racing boats, especially in their onboard systems. Competition breeds innovation. By 1992, racing had become so competitive and technical that only seasoned professionals stood a chance. Sailors spent more time below in the cabin, studying computer screens, reading weather reports via satellite, and discussing the weather routing options with their onshore team. Much of the "campaign" happened on land. If they could afford it, the competitors hired personal weather experts who forecasted the high- and low-pressure zones en route, increasing the sailors' chances of avoiding or managing the worst conditions. Boat-to-shore contact had increased so much, Mike told one of his friends, he couldn't even take a crap without someone knowing about it.

Before the TV crew arrived on the South Street Seaport dock, Mike had called Rick Viggiano at Pro-Tech Marine to complain about the functioning of *Coyote's* electrical system. He wasn't getting enough power from the batteries to charge the equipment quickly enough. So as Mike stood in front of *Coyote* giving the interview, the electrician was seen in the background scurrying around topsides and then disappearing down below, swearing a lot. It didn't matter if Mike could hear the reporter, he already knew the questions. They were always the same.

"So, how long do you think it will take?"

"Um, I'm hoping to break a hundred."

"Will that be a record? Around the world in a hundred days?"

"Yep. Something like that."

"How many times have you sailed around the world?"

"Three times. This will be the fourth."

"I guess you really like being by yourself. What do you do with all that time?"

"I'm so busy, I don't have time to think. Competing changes the whole thing, because you're always trying to get the maximum out of your boat."

"So, is three times round the world some kind of record?"

"Probably."

"What's this guy doing behind you?"

"Oh, him. He's just ripping out all the electrics."

"But you're leaving tomorrow, right?"

"Yep."

"Will it be working by the time you push off?"

"Yep."

"Tell us, what do you have left to get yourself ready for this cross-Atlantic trip?"

"You want to see my to-do list?"

The reporter laughs. "You have one?"

"Sure, but I only have the end of it. It's so long, I lost the beginning." Mike pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and unfolded it. Without looking up, he said, "According to this, I need to buy an alarm clock."

"Hey, maybe I could do that for you."

"Do you think you could? That would be great."

## **Northern Mid-Atlantic November 22–25, 1992**

As soon as it was light enough, the French tug *Malabar* left the harbor of Les Sables d'Olonne in southwestern France, heading northwest, looking for the hull of *Coyote*. For a long time they saw nothing, which wasn't surprising since the weather was so bad only the unlucky would be out on a night like this: a choppy sea with steep waves, almost no visibility, driving rain, dark skies, and winds whipping to 40 knots. The French Coast Guard had waited two days for the weather to clear or at least improve since the sighting of the black hull (with its occasional glimpse of white topsides) from the air before risking the lives of their rescue divers. News stations in France, England, Australia, and the United States had played again and again the minute or two video shot from a plane of the overturned hull. The hull was tiny and only visible because its color stuck out against the dark-blue sea rippled by white caps. Was the sailor still on board, huddled beside one of the bulkheads, near death from hypothermia and dehydration? Could he have survived for almost three weeks in the north Atlantic when the water temperature hovered at 50 degrees Fahrenheit?

They were looking for Mike Plant, the American sailor who had risen to hero status in France, a country where around-the-world solo-racing sailors are as admired as star quarterbacks were in the States. The U.S. Coast Guard had begun its search about two weeks earlier, but they were looking a long way from where *Coyote* was eventually sighted about four hundred miles north of the Azores and almost three-quarters of the way across the Atlantic from New York City to France.

For five days, six U.S. search planes had covered over one hundred thousand square nautical miles, finding nothing. The Coast Guard called off the search. Then on November 22, one day after what would have been the skipper's forty-second birthday, M/V *Protank Orinoco*, a 750-foot tanker, sighted the 60-foot hull of *Coyote*, at the time the fastest monohull built in the U.S., floating upside down. Her knife-shaped keel stuck straight up in the air, and everyone who knew the boat knew right away what was missing. The keel was normally held down in the water (thereby keeping the boat upright) by an 8,400-pound, 112-inch long, lead bulb, and it was only too easy to see that the bulb was gone. Without the bulb on the bottom of the keel, the boat would remain turtle, completely upside-down—a sailor's worst nightmare.

The Royal Air Force sent out a plane that night to conduct a flare search, and another tanker was diverted to try to determine if anyone was inside the hull of the boat. No one was sighted on top of the overturned *Coyote* hull. However, prompted by the insistence of the sailor's family, friends, and fans that the boat be boarded, the French Coast Guard sent out the naval tug *Malabar*, which could get close enough to send in divers.

As 15-foot waves crashed against the hull of the tug, rescue divers, squinting against the spray, their noses numb, pulled their masks down and jumped. They left one world to be swallowed up by another, much larger, darker, and restless. Their movements were ridiculously small and insignificant compared to the waves that carried them many feet up only to drop them down hard into the surrounding slop. Rescues like this could easily take the life of the rescuer.

In the past, Mike had often asked his friends and family, some more than others, to bail him out of the messes he had gotten into. One of the more notable was the time he was desperate to get out of a Portuguese prison, thereby allowing him and his new boat, *Airco*, to make it to the starting line in time to compete in his first round-the-world, singlehanded sailing race, the 1986–87 BOC. Getting him out of that mess involved his family and even public officials, but once it was over Mike didn't dwell on it. He was on to the next challenge. Mike could be frustrating and difficult, and concern over him had been a constant undercurrent in my life. This time, though, no one could bail him out.

## Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota, the 1950s

*“I’m a sensitive person. Maybe growing up blind had something to do with it.”*

—MIKE

MIKE’S FIRST NAME WAS FRANK, after our dad, but he was never called Frank. To avoid confusion, my parents agreed to call him by his middle name, Michael. Born in 1950, Mike was the third of five children, all of us born in the post–World War II era, and demographically anyway, forever baby boomers. My sister, Linda, came first in 1947, my oldest brother, Hugh, followed in 1949, then Mike; I was born in 1953, and finally my younger brother, Tom, in 1957.

Much of what we did or didn’t do was a result of my dad’s wishes, beginning with our move to Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota. We had been living in an old house in an established middle- to upper-middle class enclave called Kenwood on the edge of downtown Minneapolis. In June, 1959, shortly before my younger brother, Tom, would turn 2, I was 5, and Mike 8, we moved to the lake.

Lake Minnetonka is the largest lake in the Twin Cities area. It lies about 15 miles west of Minneapolis and is home to several towns. We moved to one of those towns, Deephaven, which is on the eastern edge of the lake. Everyone from the area called it “the lake” not because it was the only one, but because it was the largest one close to Minneapolis. In Minnesota, everyone took for granted that a lake, stream, pond, river, or swamp was within walking distance—that’s still more or less true today.

My parents built our new house on a quarter acre of land that bordered the lake at one end, a swamp at the other, and with a stream connecting the two. A basic two-story wooden house, it had four identical bedrooms upstairs, all facing the lake and connected by a long hallway. We four older kids had our own bedrooms, and the seven of us shared two upstairs bathrooms. My much younger brother, Tom, had a small room downstairs next to my parents’ bedroom.

The lake lapped at the edge of our front yard, a yard so low to the shoreline that extra soil had been brought in to make the foundation. In 1965, a tornado touched down across the bay and caused a tidal wave that would have swamped our house if the surrounding yard had not been raised.

From the air, Lake Minnetonka looks like a giant ink-blot—a collection of



bays of different shapes and sizes, with islands big enough to get lost on and channels connecting the bays just wide enough for two motorboats to pass. Once home to Native Americans, the land surrounding the lake is a mixture of public and privately owned. The shore is sandy, and except for areas where the muddy bottom swallows your feet, the bottom of the lake is sandy too.

Part of the mystique of the lake comes from its many wooded islands with names like Bug, Big, Spirit, and Ghost, which are for the most part public and begging to be explored. The lake is big enough to support three yacht clubs. The coolest of the three—to us anyway, because it was the biggest and had the best sailors—was the Minnetonka Yacht Club and sits to this day on its own island, less than a quarter mile from our house.

My family was well-to-do, but because of the location of our house, we belonged to two different economic neighborhoods. On one side of us sat Northome, a small but exclusive group of homes, and on the other side a middle-class neighborhood that was part of the larger town called Deephaven. We were not only physically in between these two worlds, we were also situated pretty much economically between them too. Typically the kids in Northome went to private schools; the kids from Deephaven went to local public schools. We lived on U-shaped St. Louis Bay, named for the summer tourists who traveled west from St. Louis at the turn of the century to escape the Missouri heat. Our house sat at the bottom of the U, with the public (town) docks and swimming beach on our left and Northome on our right.

Mike found his footing on the Deephaven side of our house, and many of his good friends grew up there. In the summer of 1959, our first on Lake Minnetonka, Mike was a skinny 8-year-old known in the neighborhood as the kid with Coke-bottle glasses. Because Mike wore contacts as an adult, few but his closest friends knew he was legally blind. Even with glasses or contacts, his vision could never be 20/20.

Mike's blindness never stopped him from doing pretty much as he pleased. Like other boys of the time, he wore shorts that hung down to his knees and short-sleeved, button-up cotton shirts, usually light blue or green with an innocuous pattern. He spent all his daylight hours—and later, many nighttime ones—outdoors on the lake, in the lake, or on its shores and docks.

Lake Minnetonka, covering over twenty miles, seemed infinite to us kids. Our family always had a boat of some kind, and at one time or another our fleet included an aluminum dinghy with a 5-horsepower engine; a wooden dinghy, originally our mom's, with a 10-horsepower outboard; an X boat (a fast, sailing dinghy indigenous to the area); and a small fiberglass boat that had a 50-horsepower engine referred to as the "inboard/outboard."

Obviously precocious in some ways, Mike was 11 when he built and launched his first boat on the lakeshore in front of our house. It was flat-bottomed, about 6 feet long, with a single sheet of plywood that covered the front half of the boat and left the rest an open cockpit. He painted it red—a color he would use twenty some years later for *Airco*—and hung a black Mercury 2.5-horsepower engine on the wood that acted as the boat's stern. It wasn't fancy, but it did the job, or so Mike assumed.



*Mike, age 4, already driving his own boat, Gull Lake, Minnesota.  
(The Plant family spent several summers in their cabin  
on Gull Lake before moving to Lake Minnetonka.)*



*Mike, age 11, at the helm of the first boat he  
designed and built, Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota.*

Mike got in the boat, and with one hand on the throttle and the other on the deck, he headed out for deeper waters. He drove the length of the bay, less than a quarter of a mile, took a right through the narrow channel between the point of Northome and the island that was home to the Minnetonka Yacht Club, and hit what we called "the main lake." He called this boat a hydroplane, because it was meant to skim across the top of the water, waves included. He figured it was light and fast enough that it would fly from the top of one wave to the next. But Mike got a lesson in boat design that day. As the boat entered the big bay and hit its first real wave, she plowed through it instead of over it, and the wave essentially

sunk the boat. Mike bailed her out, brought her home, and waited twenty-four years to build another one.

A builder at heart, Mike had built other structures before the boat. He constructed a wooden bridge over the creek that ran alongside our house, and then he built a three-story tree house that hung over the lake and equipped it with a tire swing.

The first summer we lived on the lake, Mike and Hugh, together with anyone else willing to help, built what became known as Plant's Boat Works. In the first summer, it was a barely standing shack about five feet tall and four feet wide; each summer, they essentially rebuilt it, and it ended up looking a little less like a random collection of pieces of wood and paint, and more like an actual shed. Looking back at it, I admire my parents for letting them build it right on the shore, visible from all directions—some adults would have considered it an eyesore in what otherwise might have been a scenic view of the lake. A small opening ran along one side and a counter on the other, where Mike carefully arranged his merchandise: candy bars and packages of gum. Mike kept a bucket of worms and a couple of bottles of pop inside the shed. Our brother, Hugh, along with other neighborhood kids, hung around to help, but Hugh also had his own world and enjoyed mucking around exploring the lakeshore and the woods behind the house. He and Mike never were particularly close anyway.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the small distance in age between Mike and Hugh, less than eighteen months, they grew up mostly apart from each other. By the time they were in their early teens, they hated each other. The rift lasted until Mike died, when ironically it was Hugh who did much to help find Mike's boat in the North Atlantic. Over the years Mike caused Hugh much more grief than the other way around. Mike could be vicious at times, often provoking Hugh, but

I never saw Hugh behave the same way toward Mike.

Mike built Plant's Boat Works as a way to make money. He intuited at an early age that money was power, and he quickly understood the power of money as a means to obtain things he wanted. Our dad, who had developed a successful law practice whose clients included many powerful families in Minneapolis, knew about two things: law and business. He identified with Mike's entrepreneurial spirit and figured Mike was a shoo-in for the business world.

Mike wanted money to buy parts for his boats, paint for the shed, and expensive Gant shirts. Later he needed money to buy cars or trucks



*Mike and Julia at Plant's Boat Works.*

so he could travel. Not content to travel only on land, he then wanted to buy a boat to take him sailing. He quickly learned that owning a boat was like having a hole in his pocket. But the financial challenge didn't deter his desire to live on the sea. His discovery of singlehanded racing around the world would eventually cost much more than a financial sacrifice.

Plant's Boat Works acquired an old dinghy that had somehow appeared on the frozen lake, apparently abandoned. Mike and Hugh dragged it home across the ice. Then, when the warmer spring weather arrived, they spruced it up, mostly by giving it a fresh coat of paint. It was Mike's idea to rent it out to neighborhood kids who came to the shore to fish. Somehow he got hold of a small outboard so the boat rental included a motor.

Joe W., a little younger than 10-year-old Mike, was one of the kids who rented the boat. Joe and Mike did a lot of stuff together—both as kids and in their later years as young men, for better or for worse. Joe became one of Mike's lifelong best friends. He grew up in a small house on the other side of the street from ours and in a family that was significantly less materially advantaged. At some point in Joe's childhood, his father left the family. Joe himself ran away when he was 17, lied about his age, joined the Army, and went to Vietnam.

One day many years earlier, Joe and his older sister, Sheila, came to the Boat Works. Joe nodded at Mike's resurrected dinghy. "How much?"

"Five dollars a day, unless you want it overnight, then it's seven. You got that much?"

"Yah. I have a paper route."

The three of them stared at the boat.

"The boat comes with oars and a tank of gas." Mike hauled the gas can out of the shed.

"Where did it come from?" Joe said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, where did you get the boat?"

"We found it . . . on Big Island."

"Yah? I'll think about it."

It was the middle of the Minnesota summer—cool on the lake until 10 a.m., but then the shoreline would begin to shimmer with heat, and the water would soon be almost as warm as the air. Joe and Sheila both had fishing rods, and they were excited about fishing on the lake. Mike stood next to the boat, which was pulled up halfway onto the beach. Joe handed him five one-dollar bills, which Mike counted and put in the back pocket of his shorts.

"Do you know how to run an outboard?" Mike asked.

"Nope."

Mike pushed the boat into the water and lowered the motor clamped onto the back of the boat, putting the propeller in the water. "When you start the engine, you want to make sure it's in deep enough water, so it's not stuck in the sand," Mike said. "This is the gas pump, and you need to pump that a couple of times, so you get the gas into the engine. This is the gear—forward, neutral, and reverse. Always start it here, in neutral. Okay?"

He looked back at the two of them standing knee deep in the water. "Then

you pull this handle out. You gotta pull it out fast, like this.” Mike demonstrated, but nothing happened. “So, usually you have to do it a couple times before it kicks over.” A couple more good yanks on the cord and the motor started.

Then Mike explained the procedure for backing up through the weeds, which was the tricky part of getting away from the shore. “You gotta go in reverse through those weeds.” He pointed at a small island of weeds waiting for them about 6 feet out. “The weeds get wrapped around the prop, so after you put it in forward for a little bit, you got to put it in reverse again to get all the weeds off the propeller, otherwise you’ll shear a pin.”

Joe and Sheila seemed a little confused by all these instructions, but Joe said, “Okay.”

“Sure?” Mike asked.

“Yah.”

Holding their fishing rods and a can of worms Mike had thrown in with the deal, Joe and Sheila sat down on the seats, which were nothing more than two planks running across the interior. Joe was in the stern next to the motor, Sheila in front with the rods. Mike pushed the bow, sending them backward into the weeds. “Oh wait,” he said, “I forgot to give you the oars in case you want to row. Just in case.”

According to the story Joe told me decades later, about five minutes after they shoved off, Sheila, looking down at her feet, asked, “Do you think there’s supposed to be that much water?” The boat was leaking so badly the water was up to their ankles. “Maybe we should start bailing.”

“With what?” Joe said.

Pretty soon they had another problem—the engine started smoking.

“What about the smoke?” Sheila said. “Do you think that’s okay?”

It wasn’t until the flames appeared that they decided to turn back.

No one was hurt, and as Joe told the story thirty years later, he laughed about it. “We practically sunk out in that bay.”

To Joe, it had become a funny story, one of many that showed how Mike was inclined to see how much he could get away with. Joe never had a bad thought about Mike, and plenty of things happened along the road of their close friendship. Joe loved Mike like a brother, and in many ways they grew up together.

There was no shortage of kids in our neighborhood, and Mike saw them as potential customers for Plant’s Boat Works. Kids from the Deeplaven neighborhood often crossed our property to fish on our neighbor’s property on the Northome side. Our neighbors lived on a hill a ways back from the lake and didn’t mind the neighborhood kids fishing off their shore. Mike tried to sell all kinds of things, but candy was the main source of income for Plant’s Boat Works.

One summer day when Mike was 10 and I was 7, Mike decided he needed to advertise. He made a sandwich board out of scrap wood and painted in large, red strokes, “Candy and Pop for Sale at Plant’s Boat Works.”

We lived less than a quarter mile down the road from the public beach, a popular spot. Kids were always there running in the sand and jumping off docks and the diving boards into the cool lake. Mike couldn’t just stick the sign in the sand at the beach, since that was probably against the rules. Although rules



usually didn't stop Mike, I imagine the police or some other authority had laid down the law. On the other hand, Mike might have thought other boys would come along and steal it. In order to promote his candy business, he thought up an alternate plan. Unfortunately, it involved me.

With three years between us, Mike and I moved in separate orbits. Our dad used to say there were two kinds of people: ones who could visualize a box in their head, and others who could not. Mike and I fell on opposite sides of that clearly drawn line, and when we were little there were few activities to bind us together. Mike built projects out of wood and fixed up old boats, things I found completely mystifying. Even though I don't remember what I was doing, I know it didn't involve building things. So the day he came looking for me was memorable.

My brother proposed that if I wore the sandwich board down to the beach and shouted "Nut Goodie" as I strolled, he would in exchange give me a Nut Goodie—a round candy bar with a creamy white filling covered with nuts and dipped in chocolate. Like most 7-year-olds, I would do practically anything for a Nut Goodie. This was an attractive deal for me not only because Nut Goodies cost twenty-five cents, but also because, other than Mike's supply, the closest Nut Goodie was at least a 20-minute bike ride away. Tempted by the candy, I said yes, and Mike lifted the sign—two solid wood boards hinged together—over my head and sent me off.

Shy as I was, this kind of public relations/marketing job was hardly a good fit. At that age it was unusual to hear me say anything at all, let alone make a public announcement. Yet I somehow convinced myself I could do this job, trusting perhaps, that Mike understood these things better than I did. But I also literally tasted the Nut Goodie as I walked toward the beach.

When I arrived at the noisy beach, full of the sounds of kids splashing, calling out, shrieking to each other, I realized in an instant, with the heavy boards weighing me down, that I couldn't do the job. Barely able to open my mouth, let alone form words, Nut Goodie or no Nut Goodie, I turned and walked home, the sounds of the beach fading behind in the distance the closer I got to Mike's shed.

I don't remember if I got the Nut Goodie. I've always wondered about Mike's response. He must have sensed my internal struggle and known any comment would sting, for he said nothing. The job and my personality were incongruous. Mike never asked me to act as his public relations person again.

Dad made many of the decisions that shaped our young lives. One of those involved his belief that his boys needed to learn how to sail. This was still the early 1960s, of course, where it was okay to single out the boys for a particular activity. No one in our circle thought much about excluding girls from things. It was a nonissue.

We lived in the perfect location for access to sailing: the Minnetonka Yacht Club was at the end of our bay. In our dinghy with its 5-horsepower motor on the stern, we could get from our dock to the yacht club in five minutes. Dad didn't know much about sailing, and except for a few trips he made when Mike had his first oceangoing sailboat, he never went sailing. However, in the summer of 1960, a year after moving to the lake, he bought a used sailboat, an X boat, the smallest

of the boats that raced in the summer months every weekend and Wednesday evening. Still raced today, X boats are 16-foot wooden (in those days) dinghies, with one mast, two sails (main and jib), plus a spinnaker. They're flat-bottomed with a centerboard.

Technically a sloop, the X boat belongs to a class of boats known as scows, although the X boat has different design features from the larger racing scows. It is the standard boat for the beginning inland lake sailor and popular in the Upper Midwest. In addition to the X boat, the Minnetonka Yacht Club raced five other classes of scow: the C, D, M, E, and A, which at 38 feet was the longest. These classes varied in length, the number of sails, the size of the sail area, and the number of crew. A crew of two (or three in heavy winds) sailed the X boats, which were designed specifically to sail upwind—into the wind—something, by the way, few sailors like. It's much more difficult to sail a boat into the wind than with the wind on the beam or downwind. Mike's first experiences sailing upwind on the X boat raised his expectations—classic monohulls that did not skim along the water surface always fell short.

Because the scow is flat-bottomed and can carry a relatively large amount of sail, they're lightning fast. Around the early 1900s, people raced long A-scow type boats on the Minnesotan ice, and they were known to reach extremely high speeds. My paternal grandfather had one of these boats, and my dad told us that in their day they were the fastest vehicles on land. Eventually, all five of us took sailing lessons at the Minnetonka Yacht Club, but we didn't all take to sailing the way Mike did. He was fascinated by the idea of the X boat itself—what it could do, how it moved, tipping it upside down, righting it, again and again testing its limits. I'm sure he would have altered the rigging if these boats hadn't had to comply with specific design criteria to fit the racing class rules.

In the beginning, Hugh and Mike took turns sailing our X boat, *Lucky Strike*, swapping turns at the helm. After a year or so, as Mike's obsession with winning grew increasingly serious, Hugh stopped sailing. I probably crewed for Mike more than any of my siblings did, and I remember how my arms and hands ached holding on to the line (sheet) attached to the jib, trying to keep the sail trim. For the most part, though, Mike had a friend crew for him all summer.

Mike practiced whenever he could. "Beginning at the age of 8, when he first sailed, Mike often spent whole mornings and afternoons on the lake by himself, his first solo sailing, hoping someone would show up he could race with. For he was very competitive."

Pretty soon, he started winning. One of Mike's crew began the summer thinking he could chat or tell jokes while they raced. He had a thing or two to learn about racing with Mike. When he tried engaging Mike in conversation, Mike was so focused, so completely silent, that the chattier crewmember quickly learned to keep quiet. Racing or practicing for a race, Mike worked to gain every fraction of boat speed and was a harsh taskmaster. He kept his crew ever vigilant to the trim of jib, always on the lookout for any sign of luffing—falling off the wind and causing the sail to lose its tautness, and thus also losing speed.

Dad wrote later, "Mike's chief sailing triumph was his winning the Interlake Regatta (the biggest regatta in the area in which the top five boats from each of



the large lakes in Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin competed at the end of the summer). I remember coming out to watch the final race and arriving in time to see Mike on the last lap all alone, having a lead of almost a full lap. With a big wind blowing, he had *Lucky Strike* on edge almost all the way to the finish. Afterwards, I asked him why with such a big lead he took a chance of tipping over. He just looked at me and said, 'I don't tip over.'" By the time he was 14, Mike had won the Interlake Regatta two years in a row.

During Mike's last year of sailing as a kid, he wore a big, nearly round, white helmet. Considering how conscious kids were about looking different, this must have been somewhat of an ordeal for Mike. First Coke-bottle glasses, and now a big, white helmet; how much dorkier could a boy get?

The helmet was a result of what Mike did the other half of the year: play hockey. As important as X boat sailing was in our Minnesota summers, for the boys hockey was even more important in the winter. Unlike football, which started when boys were older, they began playing hockey when they were six years old. And since they all played, you were distinguished by your hockey prowess. Mike was often the best on the team. Just as he took to sailing at a young age, Mike also took to competitive hockey. But he also worked hard at honing his skills, endlessly shooting pucks at the goal and playing pickup games with other neighborhood kids. The skating rink literally began at our back door: when our little bay froze over, and the paths we made on our lawn became frozen solid, we put our skates on inside the house, skated across the lawn, and jumped the short embankment between the land and the ice. Then we trudged the hundred yards or so through the snow to join neighborhood games such as pom-pom pull away—a skating game that involved speed and aggression and occupied us for hours.



*Mike, age 12, in the cockpit of the family's X boat, Lucky Strike, on Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota.*

Like many other Minnesotan hockey boys, Mike dreamed of achieving skating fame to rival Stan Mikita or Gordie Howe, the great hockey players of the 1950s and 1960s. These dreams were not unlike urban kids emulating their favorite baseball or basketball players and seeing them as heroes. It wasn't long before Mike was the highest scorer on his hockey team, which was sponsored by Woodhill Country Club. By age 10, the best skaters might already have a reputation for hat tricks, scoring three goals in one game. Mike scored a lot of hat tricks. Most dads love having a son who is an athletic star, and my dad was no exception.

Kids routinely played hockey on the many inland Minnesota lakes, where they used 4- to 5-foot-high wooden boards to frame outdoor rinks. We froze while watching those games, standing on hard-packed snow behind the boards, ever vigilant for high-flying pucks. Those of us not playing hockey skated back and forth to the warming hut to keep our toes from getting frostbitten.

During one memorable game, Mike was checked hard by another player. Mike hit his head on the boards, landing hard on the ice, knocked out. Play continued until someone noticed that Mike lay motionless, as if asleep. Fathers clambered over the boards, and two of them carried Mike off the rink to the back of the station wagon Mom had pulled just off the ice.

Mike regained consciousness in the emergency room, and after examining him the doctor said he was free to go home. He had two more concussions be-



*Mike, third from the left in the first row, posing with his Woodhill hockey team. Although legally blind, Mike was a talented and aggressive hockey player.*

fore turning 14, including one more on the rink. The third resulted from a fit of frustration when he kicked the yacht club's Coke machine, slipped on the wet concrete floor, and landed on his back unconscious. That time, my mom got the call from the yacht club and arrived at the club via our motorboat not more than ten minutes later. Club members carried Mike to the boat and lay him on the bottom. Mom then motored the half mile home. I watched from our dock as Mom brought the boat alongside, and I looked down at Mike. His eyes were closed, as if he was sleeping, and he wore a surprisingly blissful expression on his face.

After Mike finally awakened, the examining doctor somberly told our parents that Mike shouldn't risk another concussion. If he had another, he might wake up but his brain might not, resulting in the boxer's syndrome called "punch-drunk," which leaves the victim confused and slow, or irrationally and uncontrollably mad at the world. Today, we'd call this TBI, traumatic brain injury, and these injuries have serious consequences. The recent discussions regarding football concussions have highlighted these dangers. In Mike's case, the three concussions did leave Mike irrationally and uncontrollably mad at the world, and the signs and symptoms continued into his adult life. Ominously, the doctor went on to tell my parents that another blow might also sever the already weak connection between Mike's eyes and brain. Again, legally blind, Mike's eyesight was only partially corrected by glasses.

Mike was 14 when he was forbidden to play contact sports, including hockey. Hockey had been the most important thing in Mike's life, providing fun, companionship, competitive challenge, physical demands, and an acceptance of aggressive behavior. It was also a consistent source of praise. Hockey gave Mike all a kid would want; when playing he fit in perfectly with the world around him. Without hockey he was suddenly unattached and so spun out of control.

Before he had been banned from the rink, our family doctor had a special white helmet made to protect Mike's head from further concussions. This was the helmet Mike wore when he went sailing the next summer. As long as she could, my mom tried to protect him from further concussions. She even managed to keep him home while his school class traveled to the Black Hills. (The Black Hills are to the northern Midwest what Yosemite is to California—224,000 acres, with 64,000 designated wilderness, it is marked by a small mountain range with peaks up to 7,000 ft. that appears as if out of nowhere. Its most famous claim to fame, the portraits carved into Mt. Rushmore, pales compared to some of its other, lesser-known features, such as the striped rock formations that erupt out of the most bizarre geography in the country. To a Minnesotan, the Black Hills are relatively close, thus often our first encounter with a completely unfamiliar and otherworldly landscape.)

But my mom couldn't always keep Mike protected. It didn't help when Dad would say yes to something Mom had said no to. Mike would run off to do something he probably shouldn't have been doing because of the risk to his health, and Mom would get furious at Dad.

Mike's hockey prowess also affected our family dynamics. Mike and Hugh were constantly compared athletically, and even though Mike was younger and

smaller, he was the better hockey player. Dad was not an athletic boy but he loved sports and liked to analyze the athletic abilities of others, including his children. He rarely said it in words, but Dad admired Mike's abilities, and both Mike and Hugh knew it. When Mike stopped playing hockey, Dad didn't know how to relate to him.

Dad's comparisons of Mike and Hugh reinforced a dynamic among the three of them that took a long time to go away. Mike was instinctively more competitive and aggressive than Hugh. Other than hockey, Mike and Hugh never played the same sport, but since hockey was so important in Minnesota, the other sports didn't seem to matter. Later on, Hugh played football and ran track, but by then the initial comparison between the two had been written in stone.

The last summer Mike raced on the lake, at 14, he stopped winning. He seemed more interested in reequipping the boat with new gear than sailing it. The fact that he often hid a bottle of bourbon on the boat which he was known to sip from during races probably did not help his concentration. No one yet knew that Mike had discovered his Achilles' heel—alcohol. Years passed before Mike admitted to being an alcoholic, but alcohol had a powerful effect on him right from the start. It certainly influenced his ability to steer clear of trouble and stop himself from stepping into dicey situations. It also made a difference in his ability to protect his head from further concussions. Like many a youth, over the coming years Mike made poor decisions, often without regard for consequences—or the other people involved. Even a couple of beers altered Mike's behavior. With one sip he morphed into a happy, friendly conversationalist on the verge of becoming a friend for life. A few beers later, he became a belligerent punk egging people into fights, and after a few more he became incoherent.

When Mike was still a kid wearing his thick glasses, my memories of him are not particularly distinct, but as he became a teenager I picture him as always angry. When I was around him, he did one of two things: he remained completely silent and glared at me, or he ridiculed me. He had a natural talent for making fun of people, because he often knew what made someone tick. He could easily read a person's character within minutes of meeting him or her, but he was also judgmental. His remarks about others were entertaining if you shared his opinion, but his portrayals were meant to belittle. Largely because of Mike, I also learned to remain silent, not out of anger, but rather out of fear of saying the wrong thing and becoming a victim of his sarcasm.

Mike criticized the smallest things, laughing at me because I used a knife to cut my pancakes or ridiculing me for cutting a piece of toast in half. To him, these were character flaws. One night during a family dinner, I announced I wanted to be a nun, and Mike practically spit out his food he laughed so hard.

On a few occasions during that time, I would be in bed at night and hear my parents' muffled voices in Mike's room. Our small rooms shared a wall, and the sounds of their voices sometimes kept me up. I never listened too closely, I suppose because Mike's problems didn't involve me. Other than disliking his endless picking at me, I didn't have strong feelings about Mike's behavior or my parents' reaction to it. Because I didn't pay much attention, I learned nothing from these

late-night murmurings other than knowing I was on the outside of them—next door, but closed out. That was okay. I liked being inside my own cocoon.

Regardless of those late-night conversations, my parents were unable to stop Mike's slide into trouble. Mike became what we called a "hood." In the 1950s and 1960s, hoods were wild boys who rode motorbikes, got in fights on the weekends, stole things, drank too much, and usually wound up in juvenile hall. Hoods hung out in gangs, and girls adored them—that was certainly true for Mike. Girls and other kids heard rumors about the stuff Mike had done: stolen things, "borrowed" our parents' car long before he was legally allowed to drive, skipped school, started fights, and sold marijuana to his friends when it showed up on the market. Despite his behavior, Mike came off as cool. By this time Mike had started wearing contacts and left behind the un-cool glasses that had marked his near blindness.

As Mike matured, his looks became riveting. Without his glasses people could see his eyes, and they were the color of the Mediterranean Sea—bluer than blue—and unforgettable, as many women soon discovered. He had dark eyebrows and thick brown hair, and once he stopped cutting it regularly it always looked slightly ruffled. He had our mom's Irish nose, perfectly shaped, and a smile that could make all his transgressions disappear. If a good life depended on great looks, Mike had it made.

Unfortunately for Mike, a good life needs more than good looks. Mike's high school years were a series of run-ins with the law. My dad told me that in one summer alone he probably made five late-night visits to the local jails in the small towns around the lake to retrieve his wayward son. I can picture Dad getting woken up by a midnight call from a police officer informing him that his son needed a ride home. Dad would have changed out of his pajamas into his standard, summer weekend clothes: lightweight khaki-colored pants, always a little above his ankles, dark socks, worn leather shoes, and a shirt with a button-down collar. If the night air demanded it, he added a lightweight, button-up cardigan.

Dad remembered one police officer reporting that Mike had tried to kick him in the head from the back seat of the patrol car. I can picture the scene when Dad arrived at the police headquarters, nodding his head slowly as he took in this information, as he waited for his son to be escorted from the jail to the front of the station. What could he say? By anyone's standards, Frank Plant was a gentleman. He may have dressed humbly, but his manners were impeccable—the gold standard. Dad had no answer for the officer, turning silently to follow his son out into the night. I don't know exactly what Mike had done on that particular night, but it was likely either underage drinking or disturbing the peace.

Another summer night Mom woke to the sound of a crash at the end of the bay. A light sleeper, it wasn't the noise that woke her up as such, but it prompted her to go out to investigate. Her bedroom was only 50 feet from the lake, so she was outside in her terrycloth robe and matching slippers in less than a minute, peering across the water. The air was warm—sticky and soft. The house lights illuminated the grass in the yard and the shoreline. Beyond that, she saw only murk.



She suspected Mike was out there, since earlier in the evening he and his buddy Joe had gone out in the motorboat. “Mike, are you there?” she called. “Mike, is that you?”

She heard muffled voices, or more like muffled laughing. Mike had hit one of the boats moored in the bay. They heard our mom calling and thought the whole thing was hilarious.

“Mike, is that you? What happened out there? What was that noise?” Finally, she gave up and walked back into the house and to her bedroom, where she stewed in silence.

Years later Joe told me this story, but without letting me know the outcome. Unless someone caught Mike and Joe that night, I doubt they admitted to any wrongdoing. By this time Mike did as he pleased and rarely suffered direct consequences. Frequently our parents didn’t punish Mike and instead covered for him, bailing him out because they had enough money to do so and too much heart to kick him out. Then, too, the luck of a survivor followed him.

Today, neuroscientists tell us that early intoxication (before age 18 or 19) has consequences for brain development. In young teens, alcohol can thwart healthy maturation, and Mike’s post-hockey years gave plenty of evidence of that. Mike overwhelmed my parents; it wasn’t easy to know how to help him. Mom wanted Dad “to step up to the plate” and take charge of their wild son, but Dad just wasn’t that kind of person. Mom resented Dad for not acting, feeling he had abandoned her to suffer through Mike’s troubling years on her own—and the shame they no doubt caused. Although Dad was angry at Mike, his anger wasn’t strong enough to stop Mike from doing whatever he wanted.

My dad’s faith in God—one of the critical foundations in his life—taught him that it was wrong to be angry. Born in 1913, Dad grew up Catholic in the then all Protestant world of Minneapolis. He had an early memory of being mercilessly teased when another boy spotted his St. Christopher medal under his shirt. Despite the harassment, Dad continued to wear his St. Christopher medal; he was holding it when he died.

No one in Dad’s immediate social group was Catholic, with the exception of my mom and a few of his clients and colleagues at Gray, Plant, Mooty, Mooty & Bennett (now known as Gray Plant Mooty), one of the largest law practices in the Twin Cities, which he helped to build. Dad could have tried to blend in better culturally by taking his faith less seriously, but his inherited faith came with the understanding that it would always separate him from much of the world.

When we were young, we attended mass as well as catechism classes until we were confirmed sometime between ages 10 and 12. Once past that milestone, we all gradually stopped going and never went back. My mother, although born into a Catholic family, never embraced the religion, and later, after we had grown, she expressed a great dislike for the Catholic Church. Later on, I asked Dad if it bothered him that none of us went to church, and he said no, because he believed we were spiritual in our own ways.

Sensitive, soft-spoken, and kind, Dad had no enemies that I knew of. His faith taught him to accept others, especially those on the fringes of society—the outcasts. He befriended men serving time at Stillwater Prison, writing them let-

ters and visiting there. He worked hard to accept men who struggled with their homosexuality. He was torn between his beliefs and the rules of the church, particularly those that forbade divorce, homosexuality, abortion, and suicide. The last was particularly painful, because when he was 60 his sister, his only sibling, killed herself, and according to the Catholic Church, suicide is a mortal sin.

Dad struggled to reconcile his religious and competitive sides, and as he grew older he seemed to regret having worked so hard at becoming a successful lawyer, because it had taken him away from his faith. As a child I had difficulty reconciling these traits too, and his behavior seemed hypocritical. He told us that compassion was a greater virtue than winning, so his public persona was compassionate, yet in our private world he was relentlessly competitive and judgmental. It left me with an uneasy relationship with my own competitiveness; it must have been far stranger for Mike to reconcile these two themes.

I was—still am—naturally competitive, but I've always considered that being competitive, particularly in athletics, wasn't the ultimate aim. Some of this I got from Dad. He had played tennis as a young man and loved the game his entire life, so when I took up tennis at age 12, he was always commenting on my form, allowing me to believe that perfecting my form was more important than winning. Winning was for those who only cared about scoring points. Mike, always keenly aware of Dad's inner self, knew the opposite to be true: the game was all about winning. Years later, after reading some pieces Mike wrote, I discovered that Mike's intensely competitive nature coexisted, albeit uneasily, with his own intensely spiritual side.

Mike read people more quickly and accurately than anyone I know, including our dad. Several years after his death, we found some drawings Mike, at 6 or 7, had given to my dad as a birthday present. Dad had saved them amongst his papers, but no one had seen them for a long, long time. There were thirteen drawings, one for each station of the cross, complete with each station's identifying features. They are much more accomplished than a typical drawing of a six-year-old, and must have taken some serious concentration. These little drawings were also incredibly detailed—a contrast to the later restless, reckless, and unrestrained Mike.

Mike's recklessness created many literal brushes with death, the first when he was about 15. It happened on a Sunday morning early in the spring when the rest of the family was at church. Our church held back-to-back Sunday masses starting at 8:00 a.m., with us usually attending the 9:00 a.m. mass. That particular Sunday, Mike decided he could avoid mass and trick our parents by telling them he was going to the early service, and then, instead of walking to church, he surreptitiously took his skates and headed to a friend's house, where he put on his skates, and skated to a neighboring bay where friends lived.

In early spring, the lake may still be frozen over, but it will have soft spots where the ice is thin. During this time, no one really knows if the ice is safe enough to skate on. Ice thickness also varies throughout the lake, with pockets of dangerously thin ice that don't look any different than the thicker ice. When in doubt, most people stay off the ice.

Mike couldn't have known how safe the ice was without testing its thickness



all around, but he could have stayed off of it, too. But the chance of a long skate on stolen time—and perhaps an impromptu game of pickup hockey—compelled him, so he took the risk and went ahead and skated across the bay.

Falling through ice isn't a gradual process. One second you are on top of the ice, and the next you are immersed in shockingly cold water that collapses your lungs and stuns the skin. Within seconds, Mike crashed through. The weight of Mike's skates and winter garments pulled him down, making it hard to keep his head above the water. Getting out is tricky because the ice continues to break as you claw yourself out. That gray, cold Sunday Mike was alone in the middle of a fairly large bay, and as the cold penetrated his clothes and the shock set in, his body became hypothermic, a condition he was well aware of. The smaller the body, the faster hypothermia sets in, and Mike was always a scrawny kid. He must have been scared.

Many people were in church that Sunday morn, but a family friend who happened to be home was sitting in his kitchen looking out over the bay just as Mike went through the ice. The quick-thinking, and acting, man ran out of his house to the lakeside spot where he kept his dinghy, and he dragged it across the ice toward the open hole where Mike bobbed. As he neared Mike, the ice began to break further, so he got into the dinghy, finally reaching Mike, who although hypothermic, somehow managed to scramble in. Mike was lucky. He was grateful to his savior, but this incident, like many others, didn't seem to alter his reckless ways.

The man who saved Mike told my parents the story I've related here. Mike never discussed it, never acknowledged it as a cautionary tale. That was something he never did learn.

## Ely, Minnesota, and Ithaca, New York, mid-1960s

NOWADAYS WE LABEL KIDS LIKE MIKE as ADD or ADHD and talk about a lack of “impulse control.” Parents and school systems still struggle over how best to educate kids that aren’t easily molded or controlled.

From the fifth grade on, Mike (and my other two brothers) attended a prestigious private boy’s school in a suburb of Minneapolis named the Blake School. Our dad had been a student there, too.

By age 15, Mike had made it through the middle of the tenth grade mostly as an average student, in and out of trouble. But then he and two friends, Bobby and Steve, got caught with a stash of school keys. Although not exactly seeking the keys and stealing them, they’d found the ring of keys in a hall and decided to keep them, at least for a while. Over the next days they tried the keys on various school doors, and when they found one that worked they labeled it. They didn’t have any idea how or when they might use the keys. I suspect they’d have made some mischief with them. As it happened, though, they were caught before they could.

The administration asked Mike to leave the school, more or less expelling him during the spring of tenth grade. Steve’s family had already planned to move anyway, and Bobby, for reasons unknown—although he suspects it was because of his prowess in track and field—was allowed to stay enrolled. Shortly after this incident, Mike left home for a newly created camp in northern Minnesota called Outward Bound.

Mike’s involvement with Outward Bound came by way of Jeff, a young Scot staying with a family living across the street from us. Jeff was on his way to Ely, a small town near the Canadian border, to start a school to teach kids outdoor survival skills. A few years earlier, in 1961, the same school established its first U.S. base in Colorado. In Ely, Outward Bound had found an ideal location for their next school in what today is known as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. This large region straddles the U.S./Canadian border and contains more than a thousand lakes and a thousand miles of canoe routes. For most of the year, the national preserve is accessible only by canoe.

Today it may seem obvious, but it wasn’t until World War II that the military, and specifically the RAF Navy, noticed that sailors’ survival rates were directly related to the amount of prior experience they’d had living in the same kind of

harsh conditions. Regardless of any other factors such as age or nautical knowledge, a sailor who had experienced a similar situation stood a much greater chance of surviving a disaster at sea. This idea of learning through experience formed the basis of a boys' school founded in Scotland in 1941. The school was named for the nautical term "outward bound," which refers to a ship's direction as it heads out to sea. It's ironic that Mike's first survival training had its origins at sea, although he encountered it in the sweetwater lakes of northern Minnesota.

Jeff had an expression for youths like Mike: "kids who ran off the tracks." And since Jeff had been one, he felt an affinity for Mike, agreeing in the spring of 1965 to take Mike on as his unpaid assistant at the new camp, helping prepare it for the first session in June.

Jeff put Mike to work building storage sheds and establishing canoe routes and rock climbing courses. After mornings of physical labor, Mike did schoolwork in the afternoon, successfully completing tenth grade. The Outward Bound environment suited Mike. He loved nothing more than living outdoors, building things, making campfires, catching and cooking the fish they ate. Jeff later told Dad that Mike had the most real-life smarts of any kid he ever met. Thinking of all that came later, it's clear that Mike possessed an innate ability to survive in the wilderness, especially that vast wilderness of the sea.

Once the camp preparation was finished, students began arriving. At that point, Outward Bound could allow Mike to stay only for one six-week program, and even that violated regulations. The course was restricted to people 16 years and older, and Mike was still 15. So, at the end of the six-week course, Mike came home and picked up where he left off—on the fast track to delinquency.

Within a week back home, Mike had three tickets: one for driving a car without a license (he was still too young), one for reckless driving (on his motorbike), and one for speeding (also on the motorbike). Unlike cars, it was legal to ride a motorbike in Minnesota at age 15. Things were not looking good for the start of his junior year at the public school, where he had transferred after his expulsion from the Blake School.

Because of his concussions, Mike wore a helmet even when sailing. Although ubiquitous today, we didn't see many helmets in the 1960s. Mike never rode his motorbike without his jarringly white, doctor-designed helmet, making him stand out even more. The helmet had BUCKO stamped on the back in big black letters—Bucko being the name of the helmet manufacturer. Bucko became Mike's nickname until well into his thirties. As a kid I imagined the name referred to his wily character.

As reckless and, in a sense, "devil-may-care" as Mike could be, he understood the significance of the concussions he'd suffered and took seriously the need to protect himself. In fact, Mike worried about the concussions for the rest of his life. When sober he did what he could to prevent them, and for the most part, succeeded. Those he had, and there were a few, were byproducts of his drinking. Despite these obvious contradictions, Mike generally exercised caution, which served him well during his sailing years.

Mike was 15 when he wrecked Dad's favorite car, which Dad called the

Green Dragon Chevrolet because he thought it was so good looking. Hugh was looking forward to driving it in a few months when he turned 16. One evening, Mike took the car without permission and drove five miles to Cottagewood, his favorite place to hang out and often the town where his girlfriends lived. It's likely Mike was drinking and shouldn't have been driving anyway. On the way home he failed to negotiate a 90-degree turn in the road, hitting a tree head-on, smashing the front end, and totaling Hugh's future car.

Apparently unhurt, Mike walked the rest of the way home. He stood stock still when he opened the front door, but the faint noise of his arrival told me something had happened. I stopped watching TV and went to the front door and saw Mike, his face drained of color, standing just inside the doorway, exhibiting a rare moment of clarity about what he'd done—he looked lost. As Mike might have said, he was waiting for the shit to hit the fan. When Hugh heard the news he took off on foot, not coming back until the next day. Apart from Hugh's anger, I never heard of any repercussions.

Mike and Hugh's relationship became strained around the time they were 6 and 7. I don't think either of them knew what started it, but after their earliest years they were never close. Mike also hated his older sister Linda's attempt to control him, but he never literally fought with her. Mike never put up with anyone trying to control him. As the oldest boy, Hugh was ostensibly an authority figure, but the older they got the more Mike tormented Hugh.

I was an adult when Mom told me that one winter night Mike and his friends destroyed an icehouse Hugh had built. When I heard this I further understood why Hugh hated Mike, but I never understood why Mike hated Hugh. The one time I witnessed their mutual animosity, the strength of it scared me. It influenced my later life so much that when I became a parent, I made an intentional goal to do all I could to prevent sibling rivalry, promising myself that my children, especially ones of the same sex, would never grow up hating each other.

One evening when I was 11, my parents were out and the three of us were in the kitchen eating dinner. Mike was 14 and Hugh 15, and although Hugh was taller and stronger, Mike was always bugging him to get into a fight. Hugh and I sat on opposite sides of the small linoleum peninsula while Mike jumped out of his seat like a monkey, dodging in and out of Hugh's hitting range. Mike was so annoying even an angel would have had a hard time not wanting to smack him.

When Hugh couldn't tolerate Mike's teasing any longer, they started fighting, rolling around the kitchen floor. At one point, I lay on the floor and wrapped my arms around Hugh's legs, pleading with him not to kill Mike. Meanwhile, Hugh continued to smash Mike's head against the oven door. Whether or not I was right, at the time I believed that Hugh held Mike's life in his hands. I was terrified that he wouldn't stop smashing Mike's head until it was too late. Hugh did stop, and we all survived. After Mike was lost at sea, I told this story to Hugh. He said he had no recall of this particular fight. How selective, and entirely personal, are our memories.

Trouble was about the only thing predictable during Mike's teenage years. He had transferred to the local public school for eleventh grade (after the key

incident at the Blake School) and soon got himself suspended. During his suspension, he was not allowed on the high school grounds, but he grew restless and drifted over to the school parking lot. The day was early fall perfection, with the sky completely blue and the wind blowing the tops of the giant elm trees. This kind of day seemed magical until a chill would set in around 4 p.m. Warm fall afternoons like this were all too rare in Minnesota.

The art teacher had taken advantage of the day and moved her class outside to enjoy some “plein air” painting. About thirty students sat on the grass bordering the parking lot, holding sketchpads and pencils, while the teacher circulated amongst them. Then entered Wile E. Coyote—or the Big Bad Wolf depending on your perspective. One of Mike’s best friends, Kenny Peterson, was in the class, and Mike couldn’t hold himself back from trying to catch Kenny’s attention, coming out from the trees and calling his name.

Kenny turned around, flashing Mike a big grin. Naturally, the other kids stopped their work to watch. Mike moved closer and started talking to Kenny, at which point the teacher walked over to Mike and asked him to leave.

Mike stared at her. “Why? I have a right to be here. I go to school here.”

“Yes, but you are suspended.”

“But I’m in the parking lot. I’m not in school.”

“This is still school grounds. You have to go.”

Hating to be told what to do, Mike glared at her. All his internal sirens must have gone off. He stopped listening, and his ability to control himself vanished.

The teacher told one of the students to get the principal. The kids were on edge, waiting to see what happened when Mr. Bunghim arrived.

“Here he comes!” Kenny called out to Mike.

“You’re on suspension,” Mr. Bunghim said. “That means you’re not allowed to come on school grounds. That includes this parking lot.”

Mike stayed silent.

“So please leave.” The principal took a step closer. “Mike, get out of here right now. Go!” Mr. Bunghim leaned in toward Mike, shoving him so hard he landed on his butt.

“Hey, Mike, you’re not going to let him get away with that, are you?” Kenny whispered.

Scrambling to his feet, Mike drew his fist back and then in a fast forward motion landed a punch square on Mr. Bunghim’s jaw. The force of the punch knocked the principal’s glasses off, shattering them on the blacktop.

Mike took off running as if in a 50-yard dash.

That impulsive punch landed Mike in a reform school two thousand miles to the east.

Dad knew that if Mike stayed in Minnesota, he would be sentenced to at least six months in juvenile hall. Just as Mike had scrambled to his feet to throw a punch, my father scrambled around to find a solution that would keep Mike out of the juvenile justice system, a consequence that surely would negatively affect his future for a long time. Dad found a place for Mike at George Junior Republic, a semiprivate reform school in Ithaca, New York.

Mike hosted his own going away party on a night when our parents were out. That most important high school party item in the sixties, the keg, sat in the garage. Thirty to fifty teenagers, mostly guys, hung around the entire house, which had been transformed from a model of suburban décor to a movie set of a keg party of the era. Half-filled plastic cups sat everywhere—on top of furniture, counters, books, and armchairs. When I returned home, unaware that Mike had planned a party, I wondered why cups of urine littered the kitchen. In my innocence I had not realized the cups held beer.

Cigarette butts floated in the cups. Brightly colored cigarette packs, the perfect shape to stash in your pocket, lay on the counters. These packs were a powerful symbol of forbidden adulthood—tempting to even nonsmokers like me.

As a 14-year-old freshman, seeing the chaos of the party, I had the feeling I'd entered another world. Mike and his friends had first gathered in the garage around the keg with its hose and stack of plastic cups. Then they moved into the kitchen, and from there to the "new room," which was the kids' room, much like a family room would be in today's houses, and then out the back door onto the lawn.

At one point, I stood in the kitchen with Mike, who leaned to the side with his arm snugly around me. His hand rested heavy on my shoulder. No one had ever put his arm around me in that way before. Out of the corner of my eye I looked at his hand hanging off my shoulder. I remember thinking how limp—relaxed—it looked. I knew I didn't belong there, under Mike's arm. That physical closeness to Mike felt odd and the emotion behind it not quite real. But no one else knew that, so I pretended it was normal.

If this had been the last time Mike heavily draped his arm around me, I might have forgotten the incident. But he did this many times over the years, usually when he'd crossed the line from sober to drunk. Later, I got it. He wasn't so much holding me close as using me for support.

Out of the blue, Mike began to talk about his departure, turning to me, asking, "And you know what I'm going to miss the most?"

"No."

"I'm going to miss watching my little sister grow up. That's what I'm going to miss most."

No response. I couldn't think of anything to say.

This was a moment when my world stopped—a moment frozen and fixed, one you never forget. I have had such moments three times in my life: one when I was mugged in New York City, and the other two were with Mike. In our kitchen that night I was 14, Mike 17, and he had finally said something nice to me. Not just nice—he essentially said he loved me. It was the first time in my life he—or anyone—had said that. It was a rare moment of sincere kindness. My reserved parents and other relatives didn't speak the language of love and affection. Nor was anger allowed expression. Some people don't understand this reserve, but it wasn't so unusual at the time that families didn't express emotion, especially in the Midwest. And it wasn't just that we didn't express it, we also didn't really know our own emotions. Maybe our emotional ignorance was attributable to

the influence of the Scandinavians and the British cultures, where feelings were seldom talked about. But in that moment, something shifted.

I hadn't seen or experienced this sentimental side of Mike before. I didn't know he felt anything but animosity toward our family, including me. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect Mike to offer ordinary kindness to me, let alone tell me I was special. Our relationship had been built on my determination to be ever vigilant around him, keeping my silence out of fear of his cutting and sarcastic remarks.

That night changed everything for me. Ignorant of the effects of alcohol, I attributed none of his declaration of love to the beer. I took his words as a statement of truth, and thus began my devotion to him.

A month later, in January 1967, my parents drove Mike across the country to Ithaca, New York, with Mike not uttering a single word during the entire trip. Mike was mad at my parents even though they were paying for this school to save him from going to the workhouse. Mike would have been mad at my parents no matter what they'd done.

George Junior Republic was the brainchild of a philanthropist named William Reuben George. In 1895, George decided to introduce inner city kids to the country, a place with trees, wildlife, and horizons not blocked by concrete and glass, as a way to rewire these kids away from their delinquent tendencies. George eventually bought acres of open farmland outside Ithaca, New York, and established a school for troubled kids.

In becoming a state certified high school, George Junior was authorized to award diplomas to its graduates, but it was also a closed facility, just like any other reform school. The state paid tuition for in-state residents, but out-of-state residents paid their way. (In 2003, the name was changed to the William George Agency for Children Services, but the school is still in operation.)

The coed school was organized on the model of a republic, like a miniature country, with its own laws, lawyers, judges, prison guards, and everything else that makes up a community. Every student had a job, and the kids were in charge of themselves—theoretically. If you committed a crime, your peers decided on the appropriate punishment. That type of environment could be lawless chaos—a *Lord of the Flies* scenario—or it could be very positive.

When Mike arrived in January, the other kids thought he looked like a country club boy, but his good looks and hair, slightly longer than everyone else's, also wrapped Mike in an aura of cool. Despite his privileged background, Mike got along okay. He lived in a house with several other boys, went to classes in the morning, worked in the afternoon, and played games at night. The school prided itself on teaching trades their students could use later in life: cooking, printing, welding, farming, house painting, and sewing to name a few. Mike chose house painting, learning enough about that trade to start his own painting business, Fine Line Painting, several years later.

The whole reform school episode highlighted, and perhaps deepened, a long-standing rift between my parents. They were never physically close—I have no memory of even a subtle sign of affection passing between them, but just the



mention of the words, “George Junior,” made my mom angry. It felt to me as if she thought this was one of the worst things they could have done as parents, and it was all my dad’s fault. Mom hated that her son had been sent away to this place in Ithaca, and by association, she hated the school itself. She resented the whole event even more because for years she had to listen to my dad tell anyone who asked that the school was one of the best things that ever happened to Mike.

Presumably, our dad had made the decision to send Mike to George Junior based on the school’s philosophy and his visit to the school. When talking about this time in the family, he referred to his meeting with the school psychologist, who apparently left him with a positive impression. Mom didn’t believe a word of it. She thought Dad was duped by doublespeak used on naïve parents. To her, the school was essentially a reform school, a lockup without walls, despite how much the administration tried to gussy it up. And, what would these other juveniles do to her son? I doubt she asked what Mike might do to the other kids.

Dad maintained a tightly held belief that the school had a good effect on Mike, arguing this position again after visiting Mike in the late spring. He found Mike unusually calm and well adjusted to his surroundings. The students lived in houses in groups of ten or so, and each house had house parents. Dad later told me that Mike got along well with the house parents.

Although Dad thought Mike liked the school, near the end of the spring semester something happened that soured Mike on the place. Another mystery. We kids never did find out what this incident was all about. However, Dad used to claim that although Mike wouldn’t admit it, he was grateful for his experiences at George Junior. Mike would have agreed, since he received his high school equivalency certificate from George Junior and never had to return to school again if he didn’t want to.

These years took their toll on Dad. For the first twenty years of his law practice, he worked hard at becoming a successful lawyer. Then in his fifties he seemed to hit a wall, and he began to go in reverse. He was a mass of contradictions: at once competitive, and encouraging competition in his children, but also turning away from it and teaching his children to avoid the temptations of competition. To outsiders, he seemed at peace with himself, which for his children created even more confusion, because we knew he was far from it.

In his many letters to me, he often described his struggles with his inner self. “I could make a lifetime out of a sentence that I read recently which stated that, ‘We should consider such things as self-consciousness, reserve, and fear as sins.’ If we don’t, we wouldn’t work to correct them . . . In my case, they are nearly always the result of a worldly outlook—gotta look good.”

Later in the same letter, he told me that while saying the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, he heard a voice that seemed to say, “Don’t worry about the selfish life you often think you’ve led, just trying to get ahead.”

Things were especially hard when I was 16 and Mike was 19. Dad checked himself into the internationally renowned Menninger Clinic, located in Topeka, Kansas, seeking treatment for depression. Dad stayed for two months. Mom visited twice and only because Dad’s doctor expected her to participate in the

group family sessions. The possibility of divorce may have come up during Dad's stay at Menniger's, but since the Catholic Church didn't permit divorce, my dad would never consider it.

In my parents' social circles they hid their troubles. I know now, and sensed during the time, that Mike's troubled teenage years overwhelmed my mother and solidified the resentment she felt toward my dad and his inability to curb or control Mike. Ironically, being shuffled out of town to the lockup school made Mike "special."

Mike spent his childhood getting in and out of scrapes, and so I also fell into the habit of thinking of him as special more than bad or good—but special in a good way, not a bad one. Special in that he did things that sounded scary and defiant. Perhaps I felt challenged by his lifestyle. Among all the siblings, I wanted to do stuff, at least some of the stuff that I imagined Mike doing. Later on, that's why I chose to hang out with him as much as I did.

Mike never stopped claiming that he hated George Junior, but he admitted that his house painting skill was a practical, income-producing trade. Sure enough, it came in handy several years later. Finding himself alongside kids who were much worse off than he allowed Mike to gain perspective on his own anger



*Mike airborne, skiing, Vail, Colorado, 1970.*



*Mike wearing his white "Bucco" helmet kayaking in the Boundary Waters, Northern Minnesota (1970). As part of the Vietnam era, people put the American flag in unusual places. Mike covered the bow of his kayak with an American flag.*

and life circumstances. His classmates at George Junior were mostly inner city kids who had grown up on the streets. Mike was aware that many of them would return to lives lived out in those same inner cities.

Mike left George Junior at 17, and with high school behind him, headed west to Colorado. For kids in Minnesota, the Colorado ski slopes were like Mecca, and many of Mike's Minnesota friends headed west, too. He applied to and was accepted by Rocky Mountain College, a new community college located in Steamboat Springs.

A passionate skier, Mike loved to ski off the groomed slopes. He and his friends used to meet at a spot under one of the chairlifts at Vail, down a few drinks, and then head to natural terrain: deep powder and enormous ridges for jumping. One time he landed on one foot and broke the other. Undaunted, he quickly had it casted and then joined us (my parents, younger brother, and me arriving to ski for a week) the following day, skiing on one leg.

Mike, ever a product of the era, often drove to Vail and Aspen high on mescaline. Always in motion, he'd surprise his roommate as he returned from his latest weekend adventure after sometimes going as far away as San Diego. Unfortunately, he was also always getting stuck somewhere, like putting his jeep deep into a snow bank and then asking for help to get it out. His Colorado friends grew tired of pushing him out of ditches and seriously considered hiding his keys.

As the year passed, Mike, ever distracted by his nonschool activities, concluded that Rocky Mountain College had nothing particularly challenging to offer him. He applied to the architecture school at the University of Colorado in Boulder, but when he was rejected he gave up on college. He then looked up Jeff at Outward Bound. Jeff was happy to offer Mike a job teaching rock climbing at the school in Ely. Mike quickly accepted the job and at first enjoyed it and stuck around for the summer. Come fall, though, his restless spirit called again. The job didn't provide enough challenge to hold his interest. By October 1970, Mike was on his way to South America.

## South America, 1970–1971

*“I tried to reduce my existence to the simplest terms. This was my 20th-century walkabout—the reverse of what I had been taught. This was not college, but really the walkabout in the aboriginal sense.”*

—MIKE

*“After six months of walking, the trip reached a point that had no point. I stood on the highway one morning, and it didn’t matter which way I went. I truly did not care if I walked north or south. The trip at that moment was a success.”*

—LETTER FROM MIKE TO HIS PARENTS, SPRING 1971

ALTHOUGH THE DRAFT NEVER OFFICIALLY ENDED after World War II and the Korean War, few men were drafted into the military until our country’s deepening involvement in Vietnam. By the mid-1960s, the military enlisted over three million men. Many high school graduates of that time entered college and received student deferments, which they renewed year after year. Fatherhood exempted others. However, as the war dragged on, the need to increase manpower in the military and the inherent flaws in the deferment system led to a lottery system, started in 1970.

Mike’s draft number was low and consequently he received notice to report to the draft board in June 1970. Knowing he’d be rejected because of his poor eyesight, Mike showed up and stood in line with all the other guys between ages 18 and 26 born on November 21.

Those eligible for the draft never forgot when and where they received their notice—and what they did to avoid it. Many found themselves discussing the pros and cons of methods of deceit. Those most opposed to the war, or war in general, fled to Canada. Some filed as COs (conscientious objectors). For the rest, there were other options, such as trying to convince the draft board they were certifiably insane. Or, descriptive of the era and policy until recently, some claimed to be homosexual, which made them ineligible for military service. Others presented false medical papers claiming they were unfit for service. Some influential parents morphed a son’s duty in Vietnam into a community service job. Of course, in the end, most of those drafted served in Vietnam. All these



years later, men from that generation still can be divided into two groups: those who saw action and those who didn't.

When he reported to the draft board, Mike failed the eye test, as he knew he would, thereby being declared 4F, the military's classification for unfit for duty. (Much later, Mike admitted that he'd passed his driver's license test only by cheating. I don't know what he did, but I suspect he must have had someone help him memorize the eye chart or fool the examiner in some way.) The draft board's official term was "legally blind," a condition defined as best corrected visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best correction possible. (A legally blind individual would need to stand 20 feet from an object to see it, using corrective lenses, with the same clarity or less as a normally sighted person would have standing 200 feet away.)

Mike wrote later that he thought Vietnam was a lost cause, and he didn't want to fight. Like most guys his age, he'd heard stories from returning vets about their experiences in Vietnam. Then, after being declared 4F, he started thinking about ways to simulate the experience of combat, at least in terms of stretching himself and discovering the limits of his endurance. But for Mike it wasn't about war. His letters and interviews expressed a strong need for adventure and breaking out of an ordinary life. Since he was not going to be tested by Vietnam, he needed some other way. Ocean racing would eventually fill just that need.

We grew up listening to Dad describe his World War II experiences as a marine in the South Pacific. Dad survived the attack on Tarawa, the first American offensive in the Pacific and one of the worst. In the first twelve hours of the three-day battle the marines lost fifteen hundred men.

Tarawa's battle arose out of the United States' need to establish air bases so they could cross the Pacific and be within striking distance of Japan. The goal was to remove the Japanese from the Tarawa atoll twenty-four hundred miles southwest of Hawaii. Unfortunately for the marines, the Japanese had spent most of 1943 securing the island precisely for this scenario. The Tarawa atoll, at two miles long and eight hundred feet at the widest, with a Japanese army, was nearly impregnable. The Japanese commanding officer is quoted as saying, "It would take one million men one hundred years to conquer Tarawa."

Tarawa was a transformative experience in Dad's life. On November 20, 1943, marines from the Second Marine Division—including Frank Plant—approached the lagoon on the northern side of the island. It was the largest campaign to date by the U.S. military in the Pacific, involving a colossal seventeen aircraft carriers, sixty-six destroyers, plus large numbers of battleships and cruisers, and three dozen transport ships.

About thirty-five thousand troops from the Second Marine Division and part of the army's 27th Infantry Division were on board the transports, but the real brutality of the engagement fell on the shoulders of the five thousand marines who arrived in the lagoon in Higgins boats. Our dad was one of those five thousand men charged with securing the shore. But false intelligence led them to arrive when an unusual neap tide was still out, preventing the deep draft boats from crossing a reef five hundred feet offshore. There Dad and thousands of

others disembarked into water waist deep, easy targets for Japanese gunners on the shore.

It took the next twelve hours for the marines to advance those five hundred feet, leaving fifteen hundred men bobbing in a few feet of water turned red by the blood of the dead and dying. Over the next twenty-four hours, air power destroyed bunkers on the beach, and the Japanese were forced back to the island's interior, fighting almost to the last man standing. After seventy-six hours of nonstop fighting, a total of six thousand perished from both sides. Almost the entire Japanese defense fought until death, leaving only a handful of prisoners. The battle ended on November 23, 1943, and Mike was born on November 21, 1950, almost exactly seven years after Dad's hard won survival at Tarawa.

Dad returned home to Minneapolis a handsome man in uniform who had proven his mettle. For the rest of his life he could mention the marines and the battle of Tarawa, and his contemporaries knew he had seen the worst of battle. Within a year of his return, he married a local Catholic girl, Mary Kennedy, the daughter of one of the most prestigious bankers in St. Paul. My mother was a remarkable beauty, needing no makeup or hair coloring—her beauty was never altered by age. She never needed to “dress up” her looks, and her naturalism only made her more striking. At that time, at least within my parents' world, there was no question that either of them would marry a non-Catholic. In time, of course, the marriage became complicated and cold, and the more devout my dad became, the less my mom could tolerate the Church.

Ironically, my dad talked about Tarawa so often that at times it became a meaningless story for me. By the time I was old enough to fully comprehend the horror of his experience, I had stopped listening. But some elements weren't lost on me. Even as a five-year-old, I thanked God that girls were exempt from experiencing the direct horrors of war. Mike heard the same stories, but they had a different effect on him—he likely identified with Dad and the hardships he endured.

By September 1970, with the issue of military service out of the way, Mike began concocting adventures and bugging his friends to join him. He asked one of his best friends, Louie M., also turned down by the draft, to canoe to Canada with him and then across the Great Lakes and down the St. Lawrence River to buy beaver pelts and resell them back in the States for a considerable profit. Mike later said that Louie declined, reminding him of how “fucking cold” it got in Canada.

Mike's next adventure had them driving south to Mexico and then into South America. This trip sounded better to Louie, mostly because it would be warmer than spending the winter in Minnesota or Canada. But after initially agreeing, he bailed on the trip. Mike decided to go anyway. He wrote the following in 1987, seventeen years later:

“South America was supposed to be the answer to all my questions about Vietnam. I felt that [war] was the real adventure. This was life taken apart to its barest terms. War must do that—reduce people to their most gut fears, emotions,



reactions. I wanted that experience, but I sure as hell did not want to represent the U.S. in that fight. Maybe four years before I would have. I was not visionary and accepted our role at first. But by 1970, you had to be a damn dummy not to know we were wrong. But regardless, I could not fight. I was 4-F. Still, I was jealous of the experience and wanted to reproduce something.

“When I went to South America at 19, it was to explore all these things we were talking about in the sixties. The ultimate freedom was to be dependent on nothing. It wasn’t just materialism we were afraid of. It was deeper. It was everything. Values, morals, you name it. Nothing worked any more. We read Zen, studied Buddhism, and tried meditation, all of it to forget the past, cleanse the soul, and start from dirt like new seeds. Very hard, but it’s not an impossible goal. The proof is everywhere. My generation’s greed is only surpassed in history by the one immediately following it.

“I tried to reduce my existence to the simplest terms. This was my 20th-century walkabout—the reverse of what I had been taught. This was not college, but really the walkabout in the aboriginal sense. You leave home with no money, travel and live off the land, flow with it, let it take you where it’s headed. Try to strip it of direction. If you have no backdrop of experience, you are incapable of decision making. You are a pebble on the road—any road, going anywhere.”

Mike departed for South America the last week in October after Sunday dinner, a meal our family ate together in the dining room. During the week, we ate at different times at the small table in the kitchen. Mom never sat and ate with us during the week, and when Dad came home from work he passed through the kitchen. We often never saw him again. He’d head to his bedroom to rest and then work for an hour or so before going to bed. But Sunday dinners were different: Dad sat at one end of the table in the dining room, Mom at the other, and whoever was home of us five kids sat in between.

Much of the furniture in our house, including the long, solid dining room table—dark, rich wood, the finish as reflective as a mirror—came from my maternal grandmother’s childhood home. Mom never used a tablecloth—maybe given her upper-class background she thought it was too middle class—so the tabletop stretched out as an incredibly large, smooth surface. The sheen of the table’s top reflected an order that Mom imposed all around the house, and yet she didn’t seem concerned about anyone scratching or marring the table. We only used it for these Sunday family dinners, although sometimes my dad and I sat there to write. Mom’s clean, orderly aesthetic left the table free of centerpieces, flowers, seasonal reminders, or any of the hundreds of possible table decorations.

The night Mike left we ate a typical Sunday dinner, serving ourselves buffet style in the kitchen before taking our seats. My younger brother, Tom, and I sat on one side of the table, Mom and Dad sat at the ends, and Mike sat opposite me. The menu was likely our usual Sunday dinner fare: meat loaf with ketchup, scalloped potatoes, and green beans. When everyone was seated, our dad said a prayer—something he unfaithfully did and greatly enjoyed when we ate together, or at any other opportunity.

After dinner, Mike stood up and said, “Well, I’m going now.”

I don't remember wondering where he was going, nor do I recall my physical or verbal reaction to his statement. My lingering memory of this meal suggests I marked the moment subconsciously, if not verbally.

Mom, who apparently knew about the trip, said, "Now? It's already dark and it's raining. It's almost freezing out there. Why don't you go tomorrow morning?"

Mike, displaying an insensitivity common to many teens, was unconcerned by the worry the trip inflicted on my mom and insisted on leaving anyway. He hadn't bothered to tell her he was spending the night nearby and would leave from there in the morning on his hitchhike south to Florida.

A week later Mike landed in Kingston, Jamaica, fresh off a plane from Miami. Bright eyed with excitement and naivety, this being his first time on foreign soil, Mike accepted a ride from a friendly taxi driver who then offered him a place to sleep in his house. After eating, the entire family smoked ganja, a potent batch of marijuana. Mike lost track of the next few days—and of five hundred dollars, about half his money. (Mike was paid for his work with Outward Bound, but he also probably scraped together travel money through selling marijuana, which he had started doing before he left for South America.)

Losing so much cash forced a change in Mike's plans. Instead of flying to Peru, he flew to Caracas, Venezuela, planning then to travel overland to Peru. In Caracas, everyone told him not to go to Peru. Wherever he went in Venezuela, people advised him not to go any farther south. Peru, they said, was dangerous, better to stay where it was safe. But Mike, never one to take someone's word for something, wanted to find out on his own, and he did.

"I went to South America with no language, no clue as to what to expect. I flew to Caracas and proceeded to walk to Colombia. I went through a quiet evolution—I mean 'quiet' because I couldn't speak. I didn't know the language. But I could feel. I'm a sensitive person. Maybe growing up blind had something to do with it.

"Colombia is a wonderful place, probably the most beautiful country in the world. Nobody starves in Colombia. It is so rich, the Colombia Special [sic]. Everyone lives for the day. Life is good because they enjoy it thoroughly the minute it is happening. They accept the harsh reality of an existence like this and live by it. It's a lot less complicated, and their faces will show it. But life like this means someone will cut your head off with a machete for your camera or even your passport. The first thing you must do to survive is reduce curiosity. If you can't blend in, everyone out there has a question—mostly innocent, but not always. If you have a backpack, for instance, they want to know what's in it. You have to travel light. If they can't see some advantage you have over them, there's no problem. But turn it around: if they have the advantage, well, 99 percent of the time they will share it with you. I saw it over and over. But every single traveler I met had a horror story. They would not make the adjustment down. If you want to see the country, go as they would.

"No boots and no money. I had no fears in Colombia. After a while, I could stand in the worst part of a city in the worst part of the night and never worry. Nights when I slept in the city I would sometimes sleep at construction sites and have the watchmen just watch me. Or in a park, I would just roll into a bush and

spend the night out of sight. Or once in a while it would be a hotel for a dollar. Transportation was easy. It was always in the back of a truck. I had some glorious days riding through the countryside. Riding at night was a little scary. The drivers were quick to pick you up because you served as their alarm. The trucks go so slow uphill, anyone can get on without being noticed and start throwing off the goods. Well, with me in the back, they figure they'll hear one good scream before the guy kills me or I get the jump on him.

"If you can look past all the stories you hear—like midnight roadblocks where everyone is killed; or the mountain landslide that wipes out the road, dams up the river, and traps and drowns a hundred people; or the traveler who is shook down for whatever he may possess that someone else wants—it is well worth it, because the country is paradise. The vegetation is unique because the mountains are semitropical. The scenery is always changing. The clouds roll through, and it is truly magic as the valleys disappear and then reappear again. The hills are masked and unmasked. You can't remember how they looked 5 minutes before, and each time the light changes, they take on a different look or shape altogether."

As Mike told it, he soon forgot who he was, whose son he was, which country he belonged to, which century he lived in. Sometimes he pretended he was in a movie. He became Ringo, the character played by Clint Eastwood in Sergio Leone's *Dollars Trilogy*. If a small town had a theater it was usually playing a spaghetti Western, so Clint Eastwood was the best-known movie star in every town he passed through. It helped that Mike did actually look like Clint Eastwood, only a few inches shorter.

"I wore a serape and a cowboy hat with a flat brim, and every time I would get to a town it was always the same. The kids would gather round, and sometimes I would be talking to 20 or 30 of them. They thought I looked like their Italian Western hero, Rango, and that is what they called me everywhere I went. My clothes consisted of one pair of pants, an extra shirt, a cloth hammock, and a change of socks I kept in a straw bag that had a shoulder strap. I would carry this small bag under my serape so no one would see it. This worked well, and I was never bothered on the road. Colombia was great. Everything was so wild and different, like watching a movie and being completely overwhelmed by it. The marrying of colors and sounds was out of some dream that mesmerized you, and I let my imagination run with it."

Mike found his way to Peru and met another American in Lima, and they traveled together to Machu Picchu, the Inca town built 8,000 feet above sea level. This was Mike's first sight of the architectural evidence of a highly developed ancient civilization. The walls were built to exacting dimensions, with each stone individually carved and fitted so tightly that even today there are no gaps. Stunned by the grandeur of mountains rising above the clouds, of ravines so deep they disappeared from view, and surrounded by the work of the most accomplished stonemasons in the world, Mike contemplated the most dramatic landscape he had ever seen. Machu Picchu left a deep impression on him.

Mike remained in Lima with his new traveling companion, getting a job as

an English tutor for the daughter of a wealthy Peruvian. Mike was soon fired, though, caught by the young woman's father doing more than speaking English with his student. Mike left Lima and his American friend, heading farther south to Lake Titicaca, which at 12,500 feet above sea level is the highest commercially navigable lake in the world and the largest lake in South America. The deepest part of the lake is nine hundred feet. The ancient Inca religion believed that the world began at the north end of the lake, where the two children of the sun rose from the waters.

Mike was entranced by the locals fishing from 6-foot reed sailboats in the frigid, fifty degrees Fahrenheit water. The boats had little freeboard—the fishermen sat inches from the water, with strong, bitterly cold squalls sweeping down off the mountains. They spent the day half-soaked, sitting in the water, blown by cold winds, using sails that looked like reed curtains, sailing downwind, and then rowing back upwind to unload their catch. They were amazing sailors partly out of necessity, since none of them knew how to swim.

As Mike watched the Andeans navigate these tiny boats up and down the lake, he understood these men were much better sailors than he ever had been—but even more impressive was their ability to survive the cold. He had finally discovered a way of life he found admirable. He began emulating the local's endurance in extremes of weather and work. He stayed at twelve thousand feet as he walked, hitched, and rode buses to La Paz, Bolivia. He matched his pace to the locals as they walked up and down the Andes. He clocked them at about seven miles an hour, a pace they could sustain for twenty-four hours. Mike slept on the side of the road with them in twenty-minute intervals to avoid succumbing to hypothermia. And this was their summer, the hottest time of the year. Mike was tremendously impressed. Book smarts didn't impress Mike, but he admired people who could live this way—strong in a harsh world. Mike never forgot their endurance.

When he reached Santa Cruz, Bolivia, Mike discovered there was no road farther south, so he had to decide between two train routes: he could continue directly south into Argentina, or take another train that went to Boyuibe, which is in the southeastern corner of Bolivia. On Mike's map, one he had taken from a school textbook, the distance between Boyuibe and the Paraguayan border looked "walkable." Once he reached the border, he would be at the northern end of a main road that led directly to Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay. Mike was not familiar with the terrain of this area, because if he had been he would not have opted for this route. The train ticket to Boyuibe, Bolivia, was cheaper than the one that led straight to Argentina, and he figured he was used to walking, so he could walk the distance from the train stop to the Paraguayan border. As a lifelong miser, he obviously chose the cheaper of the two.

"The morning the train finally arrived, the station and surrounding area was packed with people. Now these people were excited. I mean, for many, this may well have been the biggest trip they ever took. Most of the people were Indians and possibly had never seen a train before. The train was sold out, probably two times over. The seats were straight benches without cushions, and there wasn't

a speck of paint anywhere. There was no room to sit or stand inside the cars, so the only remaining option was to ride between the cars. But actually, this was quite nice because the scenery was great and the fresh air necessary.

"After hours of screaming and laughing and eating, the train went off. The engine was steam and the fire was coal, and every few stops they filled the water tanks. But the picture created was classic: this old train billowing out great clouds of smoke as it chugged along with these hundreds of people hanging on to what surely was the only means of transport in these parts.

"The cars did not have toilets, and this soon became a problem. Not for anyone in the coach—at least it didn't appear to bother them when someone squatted in the aisle to take a crap. The funniest thing, though, was watching a kid take a pee out of the window of the moving train. Everyone for ten rows back got the 'golden shower.' But nobody seemed to be upset. I mean, this was the ride of the century for most of them. It didn't miss one town, one crossroad, one single excuse to stop. But this was great; it was all part of the show. When you're in no hurry, and no one is here, then everything just flows and is entertaining. I mean, life is entertaining. Every stop brought a whole new show of vendors. This was a celebration, and people like to enjoy themselves with food. So every time the train stopped, it was like a miniature state fair."

After about a day and a half, the train reached Boyuibe. Mike had been expecting a much larger town than what he found. He realized over the next several hours how wrong he was. One small, lonely looking, barely visible wooden sign indicated that they had arrived at the station. There was no town, so Mike told himself that it must be nearby. As in all the other stations, he watched the vendors come out to greet the train, and then they just as quickly disappeared back into the jungle.

"I decided to sleep where I was and explore the town and my new route in the morning. So in my true South American fashion, I sat at the side of the railroad station—back against the wall, serape covering me, and hat pulled down to cover my face. There I slept. In the morning, I started walking when it was light enough, and was I ever in for a surprise. The town existed, but barely. I am still not sure why it was even on that map. The map, you remember, was part coloring book, part kindergarten decoration. I thought anything on that map would be sizable. Oh no. About 12 huts built from all different sources of material, with one serving as sort of a store. Here I wandered in to find more surprises."

The people inside the hut were probably more surprised to see Mike than he was to see them. Mike looked at them and they looked at him, and they continued to watch him as he scanned the so-called shop for food. A few cans of fish, a couple bags of rice, and a row of cigarettes made up the inventory. Mike bought some of each, and then asked about the road to Paraguay. The men shook their heads, looking somewhat confused, and told him they did not know of any road to Paraguay; as if maybe there was one but they just didn't know about it. They thought perhaps Mike was a spy or a guerrilla, since the border between Bolivia and Paraguay had been contested for forty years, and there was a guerrilla army

hiding from the Bolivian government near the border. But if he was either, he would have been carrying a gun. Since they didn't see a gun, they had no idea who he was.

Mike asked again, "Paraguay? The road? Where?"

"No road."

"No?"

"No."

Mike rephrased his question. "Where does the road go?"

"There is no road. There is only the train."

No road? Mike had never been to a roadless town. He considered hacking his way through the jungle, but decided the train was the better option.

"When is the next train?"

"In one week."

This was a depressing prospect. Walking to Paraguay now seemed better than spending a week in this place. He made a deal with himself that he would look for a path for the rest of the day, and if he couldn't find one he would wait for the train.

In 1971, Paraguay and Bolivia had an uneasy truce. For forty years, thousands of soldiers on both sides had died fighting over a few hundred contested miles where nothing grew and no one lived. The region, known as the Gran Chaco, extends into three countries: Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil. It is a dry riverbed in the summer months (January through March) with temperatures around one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, and the rest of the year it is several feet of mud, completely impassable. The *Lonely Planet Paraguay* guidebook from the late 1980s describes the Chaco Road (running north and south within Paraguay and connecting the capital city, Asunción, to the northwest corner of the country) as "the no man's land of all no man's land."

"I walked about a mile along a small, deeply rutted track that showed very few signs of any traffic. I was making up my mind when another house appeared. This one was more of a house and even had a semblance of a porch around parts of it. Well, I thought, this will be my staging position. I will stay right here until I find out more about this road and its destination. So I walked up to the door, presented myself, and told them I would be there for a while. I told them I wanted to go to Paraguay, and I would stay on their porch until I found a way to go farther. This did not meet especially with their approval, but it did not receive strong disapproval, so I stayed right there, stringing my hammock and making myself fairly comfortable.

"I soon found out there was a camp of sorts about 20 miles farther up the track. It would be fairly easy to get a ride there, but after that it would not be so easy. The border would be another 30 miles, and the conditions were not very pleasant. The road was basically through a swamp, and the bugs were bad, the water was bad, and the sun was apt to be over 100 degrees.

"I did not relish this kind of hike and hesitated on the porch, waiting to see if someone was actually heading all the way through. I had been studying patience like a science this whole trip, but I was now losing mine sitting on the porch. The train going through in a week would not be going to Paraguay after

all, and this was really a big thing to me. The next vehicle to come by was a jeep, and I asked if I could ride along. He was only going 10 miles, but I was making a commitment. I was going to Paraguay via the only road I knew about.”

As far as Mike knew, the next dwelling they came across could be the last one before the border. After about a half day of driving, they came to a house that looked like it had collapsed. The driver told Mike this was as far as he was going, turned off the jeep, and disappeared into the house. Mike was left standing on the road, wondering how or why he had gotten himself into this situation. But he had made his decision to walk to Paraguay, and now he didn’t have any other option. So he started walking, and that was when the trip got rough. It was too hot to walk during the day, so he waited to walk at night. But night was also the time the animals came out. He had never heard these kinds of animals before, so each one was stranger than the next. The jungle was home to an almost extinct breed of tapirs not discovered until many years after Mike’s trip, as well as jaguars and pumas. For a kid from the Twin Cities, these were really wild animals. By the end of the night, he had serious doubts about getting out of that place alive.

In the morning, an army jeep appeared, driving slowly due to the road conditions. When the driver saw Mike he tried to speed up, but Mike stood in the middle of his path, blocking the jeep’s way. He begged the guy to give him a ride. The soldier looked at Mike, then at the bushes, and then back at Mike. Mike was obviously desperate, but the soldier looked equally desperate, even though he had a gun tucked in his belt. He kept asking Mike if he was alone. Mike was tempted to say, “What the fuck do you think? I’m dying out here.” Instead he just said, yes, he was alone.

Initially, it seemed the driver didn’t believe him. Since the only people in the area were guerrillas fighting the government, what else could Mike be? A few years earlier, Che Guevara and his soldiers had been hiding out in Bolivia not too far from where the driver met Mike. The driver probably thought there were more men hiding in the bush. Mike kept insisting he was alone, and he really, really needed a ride. Meanwhile, Mike could see the soldier had a pistol, so he asked himself, “He’s the one with a gun, why is he so nervous?”

Mike eventually won out, and the Bolivian soldier let him get into the jeep. They drove for hours from pothole to pothole, never going more than a couple miles an hour. Neither said a word. Mike thought about what it would be like to end his life here alone, and the driver probably worried if he would be able to shoot his gun if the time came. There were about fifty miles separating Boyuibe and the border, and so far Mike had been traveling for two days. He concentrated on the border, picturing a village or even a house where he could get something to eat and drink.

As it started to get dark, the driver stopped and motioned for Mike to get out, pointing at a small wooden sign at the side of the road with one word painted on it: Paraguay. A small wooden sign and nothing else. As soon as Mike got out, the soldier turned the jeep around and went back, disappearing within minutes into the forest. Mike figured there were hours more of walking until



the border. If he died out here, no one would even know he was dead. He beat himself up: what the fuck was he thinking, deciding to walk to Paraguay? He told himself again and again he was a total idiot and had definitely made the wrong decision not to wait for the train. He could be sitting outside one of those huts, eating rice, drinking water, knowing the train would come and take him to another town. He told himself he would never be impatient again, he'd be smarter the next time.

And then to his incredible relief he saw a hut. As he neared, two soldiers stepped out, pointing their rifles at him. They wanted to see his passport, visas, and everything else he had on him. The fact he was carrying an American passport didn't necessarily help, because the soldiers thought it must be some kind of trick. Some guy walks out of the bush, the closest town fifty miles away, looking just like one of Che's men with a scruffy beard and dark hair, carrying nothing but a small bag with a poncho, a shirt, a pair of jeans, a pair of glasses, and an American passport. They assumed Mike had stolen the passport and was a Bolivian spy pretending to be an American, or a member of some antigovernment guerrilla group. Paraguay was a military dictatorship; it would be easy to shoot Mike and claim he was a revolutionary. But, instead of shooting him, they let him hitch a ride south with a soldier who arrived the next day.

Two more days riding the potholes took him to the first village he had seen in days. Besides the small native population and a group of Mennonites who had emigrated in the nineteenth century from Germany, no one lived in that corner of Paraguay. The Mennonites still spoke nineteenth-century German, had survived by raising cattle, and essentially remained independent of the rest of Paraguay. As Mike came into town, he saw two guys who looked like they rode off the set of *Gunsmoke*, wearing long, black coats and wide-brimmed hats.

It had started raining, and overnight the road turned to mud, two to three feet deep in places, so his driver set up his hammock under some trees to wait until the roads dried up. Mike hung his hammock next to him. Somehow he got hold of some paper and wrote the longest letter of his life. The letter was to our parents, and he told them he was camping near people who spoke a language he had never heard before; he knew it wasn't Spanish or one of the many Indian languages, and concluded it was the Old German spoken by the Mennonites. He added that he had kind of forgotten who he was. For days, he had been tired, hungry, thirsty, filthy, scared, eaten by strange bugs, surrounded by a jungle emitting strange animal sounds, and worried he might not survive this foolhardy adventure.

After that letter, no one heard from Mike again for two months. His next letter came from Chile. By this time he had traveled south through Chile to Cape Horn and was working his way back north.

"June 6, 1971

Dear Mom and Dad,

It was good to hear you the other night on the phone. I sure am sorry to have to call you for money again, and even sorrier to know you haven't gotten a letter from me in two months. I have written, but if you could see how the

mail service works and the Latin American sense of time, it would be easier to understand. So much has happened. I've seen too much for my own head to maybe comprehend right now. South America has completely turned me upside down and inside out. I need some time to straighten things out. I have hitchhiked from almost the bottom of Chile to here and could get a bit of satisfaction going the rest of the way by road. I am speaking more Spanish and have learned how to cut a few more corners. But you still never know. The people who are not afraid of you are willing to give you anything or take from you anything. The hardest ones to figure out are the few speaking English. And so it is a constant game played at all levels or degrees of life. The only way out is not to carry anything and not to give a shit about anything. I am tired of living like that. When you stop trusting people, you become completely independent of them, and then all kinds of weird things start to change you.

"I have learned a lot, but the things I came here to find, the things I hoped to discover in myself, I have not found. I have seen how amazingly weak I am and how subject I am to my environment. In the mountains, I saw how much better the Indians can survive than me. How they don't feel cold or hunger. How they can walk for days without eating anything. In the cities, I saw myself put down every moral or principle I thought I had ever established. When they stole from me, I stole from them. When I saw people beg, I found it just as easy for me to get money the same way. It has been hard to keep my head open, and I am afraid if I don't leave soon, it may just close like so many people's I have seen here.

"It's been good, though. I have learned a hell of a lot about things I just never knew existed. I spent six months in the past rather than in the future. It's all relative; I just haven't met many people that think like me. I will be home in a month or so, maybe sooner. I sure wish I still had my camera because I've sure seen some beautiful country. *Pero está bien.*

Much love, Michael"

Next, Mike traveled north to Asunción, Paraguay.

"After six months of walking, the trip reached a point that had no point. I stood on the highway one morning, and it didn't matter which way I went. I truly did not care if I walked north or south. The trip at that moment was a success, and I have never felt such a feeling since. I had a freedom that morning that is hard to describe. The bottom had become the top. This was a window that had to be shut. I could not forget my past. I could not deny my past. Maybe it was too frightening. I had come close to something and did not want to make the leap. I felt anger. My fear made anger. I wanted to be compensated. I took risks. I wanted excitement. I wanted money for the life I was returning to."

Mike had transcended a conventional life. He found himself without responsibilities, ties, and goals, free from the identity of his youth, and he enjoyed the moment without needing to get somewhere else. The last line in that passage is pretty specific, "I wanted money for the life I was returning to." But other than that, the progression of his thoughts is not explained, and remains intriguing at best, frustrating at worst.

Perhaps he was angry because although he had reached a moment of true freedom, it was impossible to sustain it. And now that he had come so far and was so far away from his past—civilization as he defined it—he couldn't go any farther. The alternative meant that he needed to have all the things he thought he could do without: money, structure, plans, everything. That's when he thought about how he could take advantage of what he had learned on his trip. He had "discovered" cocaine, and he knew he could make money trading it. Like the conquistadors and their search for gold, he would be rewarded for all his hardships.

Mike's state of mind was mystifying: "it truly did not matter if I went north or south." His attitude was part of the zeitgeist of the 1960s and early 1970s. To live one's life without needing a goal (which for Mike had been reaching the tip of South America) was a "true" accomplishment. His declaration of freedom becomes even more intriguing when viewed from his later years, when he structured his whole life, 24/7, around a specific goal—winning the race around the world, and then winning The Vendée Globe.

When focused on a goal, we are always anticipating the next day, and the next day, and so forth, always positioning ourselves with respect to where it will put us tomorrow. We children of the 1960s wanted to do something other than what our parents had done, something other than build a life of material success with the American dream of marriage, two kids, a better-than-merely good job, the respect of our peers, and what for Mike amounted to a boring life.

We hungered for something original and more exciting, and that meant ignoring thoughts, worries, fears of a failed future—the haunting thought: If I don't get on the right path now, I won't make money later. If I don't go to college and get a good job working for a big company, I'll end up with nothing. Instead of working hard to get something that lay much farther down the road, we wanted to be alive in the moment. We believed that if we were able to have that sense of living in the now, we would have achieved success—not a material success, but a spiritual one.

Mike took this quest to the nth degree (as he did with everything) by losing his identity in South America and being reduced to living hand to mouth. He wasn't seeking a comfortable life dependent on material things, but something else less tangible.

We—the generation of hippies spawned by the depression and WWII generation—had this mixed attitude toward material success precisely because our parents had been successful. We didn't have the same immediate reasons to work hard in order to achieve security, so it was easy for us to reject it and find other goals.

To some of us "spiritual enlightenment" seemed possible: thus the migration of kids to India, and the back-to-the-land movement. We considered material goods unnecessary. This way of thinking influenced my dad, too, and he questioned his earlier striving and competitive nature. Perhaps that's why he always sympathized with the way Mike and I had chosen to live.

When Mike got as far north as Ecuador, he flew back to the States. He had been in South America for eight months, and he returned just in time.

## Summer and Fall 1971; Return to South America, Spring 1972; Excelsior, Minnesota, Summer 1973

MIKE RETURNED FROM SOUTH AMERICA with a bad case of hepatitis B. Before I saw him that June he had already been hospitalized once. When he arrived on his friend's Colorado doorstep, yellow with jaundice, this wise friend immediately took him to the hospital, where he stayed for a week before flying home to Minnesota.

The symptoms of hepatitis B can recede and then recur, and Mike suffered from this form of hepatitis on and off for at least a year. In letters to our parents written later that fall, Mike mentioned that his appetite was bad, he was underweight, and tired. He continued to check the color of his urine for the rest of his life, and if it was brown he knew the disease was coming back.

After nearly nine months mostly alone in South America, living on little and often going without food for lack of money, nothing at home seemed real to him. Despite the hepatitis he continued to drink. He knew drinking messed up his life, and that for him the only way to be free of its grip was to remove himself from its temptation. That was difficult, especially within the circles we grew up in.

Mike had become more romantic and enigmatic to me. I wasn't aware of his illness, but this wasn't unusual as I was often in the dark about the details of his life, at least in part because my parents didn't want me to follow in his path. As a family, we also didn't share information about one child with the others. On the other hand, I didn't always see things right in from of me.

Mike lived at home for the summer, and by October he was in Seattle, where he stayed for about two months in a co-op with three meals a day for twenty dollars a week. He spent his days visiting shipyards, hoping to teach himself how to build a boat for long cruising and charter work. He read all the books he could find at the library and wrote in a letter to my parents that he was "starting to understand now about hull design, weight displacement, and sail management." He wrote: "I want to see some cement boats being built, take some pictures, then go south down the coast. I think I can find enough boats in the process of being built to see one in each stage of construction . . . Then hopefully I can find a suitable place around home to start work on it. Gluek's [a neighbor] boat house or maybe a vacant barn close by. With good organization and a lot of work the hull could be finished by fall [presumably the next fall]."

I don't think money is going to be a problem. I am confident once the boat is underway the money will be made available. If not, we have enough to get to a very good start on it and will thus have the ambition to go back to work for the rest. I think, though, once we get momentum to finally start construction things will fall in place."

In another letter to my parents from Seattle dated November 14, 1971, he wrote: "Received traveler's checks and can't thank you enough. It means quite a lot more to me than the \$ value. It not only allows me to pursue this a little more, but also shows once again that you are interested in what I'm doing, and that's important to me. Will travel south through Calif. to look at other designs. My state of health unfortunately is about the same. I am to see the doctor again tomorrow. I am getting really tired of trying to find out what it is. The more consistent it appears the less I am content in hoping it will just pass away.

"I have had to give up the drawing temporarily as money and space is limiting. But it is fascinating, drawing something that moves gracefully through all types of conditions in a body of water and is three dimensional, yet has to be accurately explained on a flat piece of paper."

I received a letter from Mike while in Seattle that contained a drawing of a boat with two masts that looked much like the boat he eventually owned in Greece. "I think we should be started on one by next spring. It will be out of cement, about 42 feet, have two masts and a displacement of about 18 to 20 tons . . . And it will look like this [the drawing mentioned above] and it will go everywhere with about six people." He also wrote how awful it was to be living in a big city. "I could know 100 people and still feel lonely."

From Seattle he took a ferry to the San Juan Islands, which he described as beautiful and peaceful. There he met a naval architect who, "Is just a freak . . . Loves designing but hates business. Needs a start, and willing to design a boat for me for free besides being very available during construction for advice and help . . . So far it looks like an ideal opportunity, and I may have him start in a few weeks if everything checks out when Dan H. gets here." [Unlike what he wrote to my parents he had decided that] "The boat will have to be built here and a place to do it will have to be found next."

But somehow things changed, and by late 1971 Mike was back in Minnesota and early in 1972 he was returning to South America. Before he left, though, Mike went to Ely, Minnesota, where he bought a 1952 Ford pickup from a Native American he met on the reservation just outside of town. He named the pickup Betty. By 1971, Betty was 19 years old, and her color had lost all pigment, so the best description of her color would be "something dark." The salt from the frozen roads of northern Minnesota had taken its toll, so parts of the undercarriage were rotted out with rust. She had an open bed lined with planks, some of them seriously cracked, and the hood stayed down only because it was tied with a piece of frayed rope. The seats were plank-flat, all the stuffing worn out. Like all Mike's trucks, it stunk of cigarettes, and now the smell of stale cigarettes was mixed with the dust and dirt of a 19-year-old truck, which Mike tolerated because he always drove with his window down.

Parked outdoors for years in thirty-below temperatures may have hardened her up for the trip south, because even though she wasn't much more than a metal husk with an engine, Betty took Mike more than halfway around the world, north to south, and was still running when he sold her six months later in Ecuador. (Today, if the truck had been well maintained, she'd be considered a beauty, a representation of Ford in her heyday. But in 1971, the truck was nothing more than an old truck driven mostly in small towns by farmers.)

Mike filled the truck bed with used lumber which he hoped to sell in Colorado for a profit. He drove from Ely to Minneapolis, picked up some marijuana to add to his merchandise, and continued on to Colorado. From Colorado he drove to Phoenix, where he connected with a group of Minnesotan friends camped out in a house in the suburbs. They had all gotten jobs as extras on a movie filming nearby. Louie, a friend from Minnesota and one of the fellows Mike had tried to get to accompany him on his first trip to South America, was also in Arizona. Mike invited him along again, and this time he agreed. At some point they decided that if the truck lasted that long, they would go as far as Lima, Peru. They followed the Pan-American Highway through Mexico and into Central America, where as Louie put it, "the trip started getting fun"—i.e., border crossings.

Mike and Louie always had something on board that was illegal, whether it was a large jug of tequila, hits of acid, or bags of marijuana. They probably looked ridiculously guilty, and the armed soldiers who controlled the crossings often stopped them for hours, sometimes days, while they searched the truck. At the time, many Central American countries were replete with corruption, and a few were still a couple of decades away from becoming democracies. That atmosphere contributed to the petty power plays that slowed down the process. Even after the search, Mike and Louie still needed to have their passports stamped. Sometimes they were told that the official who had the stamp wasn't there, so often they waited hours for the official to show up.

One particular crossing fooled them, because there were two guardhouses, one after the other. They didn't see the second one. After they passed through the first guardhouse, Louie started rolling a joint only to look up and see another guardhouse with four guards staring at them. Then they were told to strip. Mike quickly pulled out his roll of twenty-dollar bills and gave each guard a couple of them. After the guards accepted the bribe, they reversed their behavior and treated Mike and Louie like royalty and carefully put back all the stuff they had just taken off the truck.

When they reached the Panama Canal, they found out they couldn't take the truck across, so they had it shipped to Peru and went on to Peru to meet it there. Mike sent a postcard to our parents dated February 11, 1972, from the Panama Canal. "Betty goes up on the boat for Lima. We fly to Colombia and bus it down."

Then, in a letter dated in March 1972, Mike wrote: "Dear Mom and Dad, Believe it or not we're all here in Peru, Louie, Betty and I. [Peru is a] beautiful place and I want to spend more time to appreciate its beauty. The people are good, and I am getting better at understanding more of the language and the values, which helps us [referring to Louie and himself] to work with them instead of against



them . . . This is a very important phase of my education. It is a trip that is very exciting but I will only do it once.”

Mike had something else in mind. He intended to buy cocaine.

In Peru they drove up into the Andes, and as they traveled from town to town it reminded Louie of caricatures of the Wild West: Indians with face paint and strange haircuts sitting or sleeping by the side of the road. Only these Indians were chewing coca leaves that they seemed to have an endless supply of kept in small pouches that hung from their waists.

In the mountains Mike and Louie bought coca leaves, drove to a small coastal town near Lima, and attempted to make cocaine by boiling the leaves. They burned a few pots, almost set the house on fire, and soon gave up trying to be chemists and headed back to Lima. They quickly lost interest in living in the city, though. Mike hated it, saying it was one of the worst places to build a city. He was convinced everyone worked for the Peruvian secret police.

Mike sent a letter to Dad describing the same time period. “Louie and I have moved out of the mountains and are now staying in a deserted resort town close to the beach. [Complains about dealing with the Indians.] We must now deal with big city retailers rather than hoping to find the same but higher quality on the mountains.”

He complained about Lima, the food, and his frustration with trying to work with the Peruvians. He planned to head to Colombia in about a month, sell the truck for a handsome profit, and then find a boat on the Caribbean side to sail to Texas. He ended the letter telling Dad that, “Dan [probably the same Dan as the one mentioned in the letter from Seattle] is collecting charts, etc. and will send them down.”

Mike’s admission that he was attempting to do business with “big city retailers rather than hoping to find the same but higher quality on the mountains” begs the question: higher quality what? He must have told Dad something about what he was doing. Later, my dad told me he thought Mike was dealing in emeralds. I don’t know if Dad really believed that or if he just wanted to believe it—his son, the new age Spanish conquistador, in pursuit of precious stones to bring home and use to establish himself in business.

During my freshman year at Vassar, I received a letter dated April 24, 1972, from Peru. “I’m stuck in the most depressing situation of my life.” Then follows a description of Lima, including how terrible the people were, the climate, the politics, and they were all a bunch of backstabbers. He wrote, as he did to Dad, that he planned to go north in a few weeks, then: “Will trade in the truck for a boat, sew banana leaves together, kindly ask Ma Natura to bring us home. It will be an adventure. The worst thing that could happen would be to [get] into Cuba by mistake. That is to [be] avoided at all costs. I would rather [get eaten by] a shark than try to become a Cuban any day. Living in Peru is as close to communism as I ever hope to see . . . No way can you ever think about being a free man here. How about a letter? I would like to know what is going on in the northern ½. Much love, Mike”

Then on May 2, still in Lima, he sent a short letter to Dad. “Will you sell some shares of Xerox and send me some money.” He complains more about how

bad the place was, and its moving toward communism. "Maybe it's better getting to know just one place really well, like Siddhartha." He ends the letter with, "It [money] must be getting kind of monotonous, I'm sorry, but you must please accept it as my education."

Mike and Dad had worked out some agreement in which Mike would receive money that would have gone toward a college education. Our older brother, Hugh, had gone to the University of Utah, and I had just started at Vassar. My older sister had spent a year at an art school and then left to start working. It would be like Mike to be acutely aware of money: who was getting what, and such. I can't say for sure, but I believe Mike likely had an agreement with Dad. Mike's reference to his education seems to point that way.

Mike and Louie drove the truck to Ecuador and auctioned Betty in a small town outside of Quito. The richest man in town bought the truck for four hundred dollars—leaving a profit of two hundred for Mike. He wanted to use the four hundred to buy a boat and sail back to the States, so they visited the Caribbean shore of Colombia to look at boats to buy, but Louie refused to step foot on any of Mike's choices

Mom and Dad received a letter dated May 15 from Mike, asking them to send a pair of [eye] contacts to the consulate in Medellin, Colombia. He also told them "the money came Friday and is quite sufficient for the trip. Thank you very much. Much love, Mike"

As Louie later told me, a day before their flight he met an American who wanted to sell him some cocaine and told him an easy way to smuggle it into the States. The guy had a friend who worked in the local post office, and with a particular stamp the package could bypass customs and go directly to a P.O. box in Arizona. Mike showed up in Denver sometime in late May or early June.

Mike and Louie were busted a hundred yards from my parents' driveway in June 1972. They were parked in a public parking space in Louie's VW, and the cops came so quickly and in such force that it would seem the bust was pre-planned. Louie fled the car, ran across the road, dove into the lake, and swam away. Mike's instincts were not quite as quick, and he was caught with a bag of pot and a smaller bag of cocaine. According to Louie, when the police tested the powder they were so impressed by its purity that they could only conclude Mike had gotten it from a much bigger dealer than himself. They figured they had stumbled onto a guy who would lead them to the dealers who worked for the mob. They wanted to know how two punks like them got their hands on something so pure.

Louie figured that since there were so many officers the bust must have been directed from higher up authorities, which meant he and Mike had been watched. Mike later told my sister that after that encounter he was more worried about the Mafia than the police, indicating that he knew he was stepping on someone's toes or selling something the mob thought was theirs.

The police took Mike and held him without bail. They couldn't technically charge him with anything, because the car belonged to Louie. They released Mike when Louie turned himself in a couple of days later. Louie was tried for possession of marijuana and cocaine. His car was seized, and he was sentenced

to one year of probation. According to Louie, this was a very light sentence, and he attributed it to the fact that the judge was a nice guy.

Likely believing he'd escaped prison, the incident scared Louie enough that he lost any desire to make money smuggling drugs. It also changed his relationship with Mike, although he never complained that he took the rap for both of them. Maybe he thought Mike should have thanked him for turning himself in, since who knows what the police may have done if Louie had never shown up. But when I asked him, "Were you ever pissed off at Mike?" he said, "No, Mike had his own agenda, and that was okay for some people, but eventually I got tired of it."

The year between the late summer of 1972 and the summer of 1973 are kind of a blur for me in relation to Mike's whereabouts, but he seemed to have been all over the place. Even Mom can't accurately put it in chronological order. I suppose we all have our bits and pieces. Louie's recollection of the dates of these trips is different from the sequence I've pieced together based on Mike's correspondence with our parents and my mom's memories. Louie was sure that he made at least two trips to South America with Mike, meaning that Mike made at least three trips. This could be the case, but I can't find anything to corroborate Mike's third trip.

I don't remember any details about Mike and Louie getting busted for marijuana and cocaine, and maybe that is because I spent the summer of 1972 in San Diego and likely wasn't around when it happened. I had decided to live in San Diego and work with a friend of mine who had recently received her graduate degree from the University of Minnesota Department of Theatre Arts and Dance. Before moving to San Diego with her husband, who was in the Navy, she had directed three one-act plays at my high school. I had played the leading role in one of them, Tennessee Williams' *Hello from Bertha*. I respected her enormously as a professional whose understanding of theater appealed to me. When she asked me to join her in San Diego to start a theater group, I was honored. It was a perfect opportunity for me.

I have one clear memory of Mike in the summer of 1972, shortly after he had come back from his second trip to South America. We were in my parents' driveway being dropped off by friends. He was outside his friend's car, leaning on the driver's side, and joking with whoever was the driver. I got out of the car and started walking toward the house. Mike stopped talking with the guys in the car and sauntered over to me.

"Hey, Julia, where are you going? I haven't seen you for months, and I missed you."

This was so unusual, so out of character, that I had nothing to say. With hindsight, I wonder if he had been drinking.

"I really missed my little sister. And I brought you some things."

In his hand he held a brown paper package tied with string. He gave it to me, and I opened it to find a purple t-shirt embroidered around the neck with flowers, a pair of woven sandals, and an orange and white weaving attached to two small pieces of wood with the shuttle in the middle.

He must have liked these things, though I honestly don't know if he bought

them with me in mind. Maybe these gifts were an offering to me, a way to forge a relationship with his little sister and not be as alone as he had been in South America. When he gave them to me, I felt his vulnerability.

Mesmerized is much too small a word to describe the effect of this gesture. The gifts were unlike anything I had seen before—sort of whimsical and sweet—and the fact that Mike was giving them to me, the words he spoke, and his solid physical presence directly in front of me, hypnotized me. It was another of the moments when he became completely intimate, making me feel I was the most special person in the world.

The sandals quickly wore out, but the purple t-shirt became a favorite. I happened to be wearing it two or three years later while sailing in Greece. As we came into port, I pulled the boom with the lowered main sail into the center of the cockpit. While securing the sheet to a cleat, I pulled again to tighten it, at which point the topping lift broke, letting the boom fall directly on my head. The blood from the inch and a half long gash on top of my head covered my t-shirt, and that was the end of it. The last I looked, the orange and white weaving is still with me, buried in the back of my closet.

At some point that fall, Mike left for Canada for reasons that aren't clear, and his next correspondence is dated November 15, 1972. "Hello Dad, [He described how he was living in his truck which had a camper on back.] I have an appetite all day and am gaining momentum for my new project, whatever it is going to be. I'm going to continue across to Montreal . . . Then I want to go on up the St. Lawrence, then cut down into Vermont and meet up with Tom.

"There is a hell of a lot to say about the recent past. The first thing is I'm glad it's over, and second, I'm sorry I had to bring the damned thing home. That was selfish. Maybe the whole trip was, but I always felt that the hardship, the sweat and the blood that country took from me, that somehow it would pay me back for all that.

"After awhile it got to be an obsession to make it pay for all the time I'd spent there. As warped as it got, I still felt obligated, somehow, for all the things they took from me. I felt I would get it back. I'm not just talking about physical things, but the values, values I had spent my whole life developing. Values I thought I needed to be able to live within society. Things I needed to believe in order to survive. What I thought a human being needed to believe in to sustain himself within society. The things [I] needed to believe to survive. For example, my adeptness with the Outward Bound School. South America stripped me of this."

The trouble Mike brought home was the drugs. He had written about these kinds of feelings in the last letter from his first trip, wanting compensation for what South America had taken from him. Unfortunately, no one can fill in the details.

By June 1973, Mike and I had come home to celebrate my sister's wedding in July and ended up spending the whole summer at my parents. Mike and I got to know each other pretty well that summer. No one who was around would ever forget what happened.

We lived between Wayzata to the east and Excelsior to the west, and both

towns were on the shores of Lake Minnetonka. Wayzata, the suburb closer to Minneapolis, had been home to a patrician class since the early 1900s. In the 1960s and 1970s, Excelsior was (and still is) less attached to Minneapolis and more of a small town. Its past was far more colorful than Wayzata's. Early in the twentieth century, less well-to-do Minneapolis families who could afford to bought tickets for the trolley that ran from Minneapolis to the lake. Once at the lake, a steamboat ride across it brought summer travelers to the Excelsior Amusement Park. The grandest amusement was the rollercoaster, one of only a handful in the country. The casino across the street stayed open pretty much all night.

I went to the amusement park a couple times as a teenager, where I got my first taste of the seediness often associated with state fairs. The street entrance led into a covered arcade framed by game booths like the coin toss and the basketball hoop. I didn't play the games—my awkward teenage self too embarrassed by the boys manning the booths. So I walked quickly through that section to the rest of the outdoor park.

By 1973, the rollercoaster was some 40 years old, making it one of the oldest in the country. The other wooden rollercoasters had burned down or collapsed, a fate easily imagined when you saw this one. It looked like a big tinker toy once painted brightly in primary colors and now weathered by the rain, snow, and sun, muting the colors to a dull gray. The thing made an enormous amount of noise, shaking and rattling, creaking and groaning, as the cars were pulled up the steep hills, and then bounced around as they came careening down. Everyone believed it would fall down sooner than later, but as long as it ran people rode it.

Early in the summer word spread that the park was closing to make room for condos with a view of Lake Minnetonka.

Mike and I spent much of our time that summer sitting in the Municipal Lounge in Excelsior that we called the "Muni," or the "Lounge," drinking beer and shots of gin. Since dropping out of college, I had lived in Key West for a couple months, then moved to San Diego for another month or so, and ended up in Berkeley in May. I never looked further ahead than the next couple months, and since January—when my sister told me she was getting married in July—I had been heading for Minnesota. Once home, I didn't need much money and got what I needed to pay for drinks at the Muni from Mom's purse.

Without plans of my own, Mike invited me to join his evening activities, which usually started at the Muni. The name of the bar wasn't unusual, because most towns in the area owned their own bars, which locals dubbed the Muni or the Lounge. Unlike a typical bar, the Muni was divided into two areas: one for drinking, and one for families to eat lunch or dinner so that kids wouldn't eat amongst the town drunks. The bar side had booths with seats covered in red Naugahyde and linoleum table tops, two air hockey games, and a jukebox. On the tables, the bar, and the sides of the air hockey games sat the ubiquitous black plastic ashtrays with cigarette butts and ashes spilling over the sides.

Sitting with a crowd of friends in the Muni, drinking beer and smoking, someone would suggest taking a ride on the rollercoaster, and a few of us would peel off and run down the street. I never rode it, but one afternoon I watched as

a couple of friends climbed aboard. They were the only customers, and they took the front car. They stood up as the car went into its downhill slide, wildly waving their arms in the air, screaming.

Across from the Muni, an old casino had reopened as Danceland in the early 1960s. Danceland quickly acquired a dual reputation as a favorite spot for gang fights in the parking lot, and as a venue for musical talent. The Birds, at one time the biggest band in the country, played there, and a little known group from England, the Rolling Stones, was booed off the stage. When we were young, my parents viewed Excelsior as the home of vice, the “House of the Rising Sun.” They stayed away and tried to keep all of us away, too. Instead, they shepherded us to the Woodhill Country Club in Wayzata for tennis and golf lessons (and hockey in winter).

With or without the booze and the drugs, summer in Minnesota was bewitching. The contrast was both miraculous and intoxicating between the long, cold, white winter, with dull, brown spring on its tail, followed by the wildly fertile profusion of life that appeared somewhere in the middle of May. It was especially magical to those of us living on a lake. As the weather warmed, the air and the water seemed to blend seamlessly into each other. Summer nights held us captive for hours. We spent at least as much time outside bars as inside them, piling in and out of cars and arguing in parking lots. Even the hordes of mosquitoes couldn’t keep us inside.

That particular summer money came easily to Mike, whether by legal or illegal means. He may have picked up some day jobs in construction or at the boat works, but he mostly made money by selling drugs: marijuana and cocaine.

One night he handed me a crisp one hundred dollar bill—the only time in our lives he ever did that. We were on our way to a bar miles out in the country. My clothes held no pockets, and I never carried a purse, so I stuck the bill in my underpants, a safe spot until I needed it, or so I thought. But excitement and too much to drink led me to lose that bill at an impromptu rest stop by the side of the road. Hours later, when I realized what had happened, I went back to look for the money, but I was too buzzed to see clearly. So, the only money Mike ever gave me I lost in a cornfield in Minnesota.

Mike also fell in love that summer. Cynthia’s high cheekbones and the whites of her eyes, a rich, deep ivory, captivated Mike from his first sight of her playing softball in a local park. Never one to hesitate, he followed her after the game, telling her she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Maybe it was a line, but it could have just as easily been the truth. Either way, it had an effect on her, and they started hanging out. They were an invincible couple—a pair of athletic, lean, dark-haired, and good looking bodies, matched with equally dynamic personalities daring each other to go further and further in whatever dangerous plan they conceived. Cynthia was almost as crazy as Mike: both of them seemed fearless and disdainful of most of the population. They were also extremely taciturn people. The two lived in the physical realm, spending little time analyzing or overthinking what they would do next.

Mike and I argued a lot that summer, or at least it looked like arguing. In reality, we had little of substance to argue about. We were just in love with



getting drunk and yelling obscenities at each other. It was a game: who better to swear at than someone who did not take your anger seriously? But we made it look serious enough that other people thought we were actually angry at one another. One night as I came down the stairs at a friend's house, someone came up to warn me that Mike was there. That was when I realized people took our arguing seriously and assumed we hated being around each other.

Mike let me play out a side of myself I never expressed when sober. He was the only one in our family who expressed his anger—albeit not in the healthiest ways—by doing everything he could to live his life outside the rules. I grew up avoiding anger, but that summer it was exciting to emulate Mike's.

Mostly, in Dad's presence we all obeyed his rules: no shouting, screaming, slamming of doors, or swearing. Somehow Dad, man of the church, solid community member, successful, respected lawyer, produced this son: an angry adolescent who kicked cops in the head, smuggled and sold drugs, and did everything possible to show everyone he was nothing like his polite, soft-spoken, intelligent father. Mike oozed anger. Maybe he was goading Dad to see if he could finally split the shell that hid our father's lurking anger.

But Mike didn't realize that no matter what he did, he was still the apple of our dad's eye. Dad admired Mike's character, in part because it was so different from his own. Dad was charmed by Mike's charisma and envied his son's courage and independence, just as he had envied Mike's aggression and skill on the hockey rink. Everyone knew this in our family—everyone except Mike.

One evening as Mike and I were driving to Excelsior, I told him exactly that. "You know, you're the apple of Dad's eye."

"What?" he said. "What are you talking about? Why do you say that?"

"Because it's true, and you know it. It's so obvious. Every time he talks about you, his eyes light up. Come on—you know that, don't you?"

Mike stared at me. "No."

Mike didn't know what was so obvious to the rest of us that we tripped over it. Maybe my screaming at him that summer wasn't entirely a game after all. Dad's admiration for Mike made me jealous, and that jealousy made me angry. So there I was, in friends' homes, at bars, wherever there was an audience, saying things I never said to anyone else: "Fuck you, you bastard! Get the fuck away from me!" And I loved saying those things, because although at that time I never wanted to be apart from Mike, my anger simmered at him because he was the chosen one within our family.

The summer reached its apex—or perhaps its nadir—just after the Fourth of July, when Mike suggested to Joe that they burn down Danceland. With its heyday long passed, it had closed in 1971. By the summer of 1973, everyone knew it was slated for destruction.

Perhaps Mike was inspired, thinking "Why not watch it go out with a bang? Why not get one-up on the developers?" Or perhaps he was just bored. Mike's old friend Joe hung out with us, and his response to Mike's idea was pretty normal. He told Mike he was crazy. But one night Joe finally agreed. Their plan wasn't complicated, and all they needed was gasoline.

Joe and Mike had been friends since our families were neighbors. Joe was

the friend who rented the badly leaking dinghy from Mike and then easily forgave him. As kids, Joe and Mike shot hockey pucks back and forth for hours after school and on the weekends. Mike spent Sunday mornings at Joe's house, spinning the plastic globe and dreaming about where they would go.

That evening word spread quickly that something was going to happen at Danceland around midnight. At least thirty kids showed up. I had heard something was up, so of course I was there, too. Although I later learned the conflagration was masterminded by my brother, at the time I was oblivious to what was going on. I hung out on the opposite side of the street trying to get rid of a bad case of the hiccups. I had just decided to try standing on my head when someone shouted "Run!"

We all turned and ran off like a pack of dogs, stopping a couple of blocks away to hide on the hill in the park and watch the huge wooden building burst into flames. But it didn't just burst into flames—it exploded into a visual splendor of bright orange against the black night sky. It was an incredible sight. Only later did we find out there were at least one hundred snowmobiles stored inside with gas in their tanks. Thus, the explosion and extensive damage. The police, urged on by the company that held the insurance policy on the lost snowmobiles, were determined to find the arsonist.

Fire trucks arrived within minutes, and we all took off again, dispersing into the night in different directions. Mike and I ended up spending the night at the same house, and then we walked the couple miles home together the next morning. Just as we reached the top of the hill overlooking the lake and our house, Mike asked me who I thought had set the Danceland on fire. I told him I thought it had been a controlled fire set by the fire department—odd as it sounds, that made sense to me.

Mike laughed. "You go on thinking that, and if the police ask you tell them the same thing."

I still had no idea my own brother had come up with and executed the whole crazy plan. Later I learned that Joe had filled a one-gallon container at the local gas station and met Mike outside the dancehall entrance. Joe poured the gas, and Mike lit the match. I was probably the only one who didn't know. When I asked around in our group, no one would say anything except, "You don't know?" as if I of all of them should have known it was Mike.

The police were pretty sure they knew who had set the fire. A couple of out-of-town girls happened to be staying in an apartment nearby with a clear view of Danceland. The girls had seen Joe, wasted and boisterous, wearing a red bandana around his head. Mike had urged Joe to remove his bandana before the police line-up, but Joe ignored the advice and was singled out by the two female witnesses. Another witness reported seeing Joe at the nearby gas station with a gas container. Unluckily for Joe, the building's owner could only collect insurance on the destroyed snowmobiles if the police could identify a guilty party. Joe was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison. Meanwhile, Mike kept quiet and Joe said nothing to implicate him. Mike saw his best friend go to prison for something he initiated.

In the weeks before Joe's sentence began, Mike, Joe, Cynthia, and I planned a trip to Montana. (Apparently, Joe had been given permission to leave Minnesota before serving his sentence.) The night we left we stopped at the Muni for a few drinks. Suddenly, a man flew through the doors, ran directly at Mike, and leaped on top of him. They fell in one mass and rolled around on the sawdust floor until one of them screamed. The stranger then jumped back up, left as quickly as he came, and disappeared into the night, never to be seen again. It all happened so fast, no one in the bar even reacted.

Mike got up slowly, holding his hand to his forehead. "Damn, that asshole bit me in the eyebrow."

When Mike took his hand away, Cynthia said, "Shit, you look ugly. I'm not driving all the way to Montana with that piece of meat hanging off your face." It was typical of her not to ask him how he felt or whether it hurt. "Go to the emergency room and get that sewn up."

Mike drove himself to the emergency room, where the doctor asked what had happened.

"A horse bit me," Mike said.

"This doesn't look like any horse bite I've ever seen," the doctor replied.

Mike never offered anyone an explanation about who the stranger was or why he had bitten him.

Later that night, we finally left town in Joe's Volkswagen bus. On the way to Bozeman, we stopped at a bar in North Dakota. Somebody asked Mike what had happened to his face. After Mike told him, the man offered to blow off the guy's kneecaps for fifty dollars. That was a bargain, it seemed. Mike laughed and told him thanks, but no thanks.

Once we got to Bozeman, Mike and Joe wanted to hook up with some old Minnesota friends for a party outside of town. Joe and I took the VW bus, and Mike and Cynthia took someone else's car. Driving out into the country the dirt road began to curve as we began to climb the mountains. Each curve had been cut out of the hill, leaving a wall of dirt on the side. Driving his friend's car full out, Mike suddenly turned off the road and drove straight up the wall of dirt, flipping the car over on its side. Since there were four of us, it was fairly easy to right the car, which we did, and then we got back into our cars and drove full out again until the next turn, and to my horror, Joe did the same thing.

I freaked out, and after the third or fourth flip I was screaming at Joe to stop. "What the fuck are you doing? Trying to kill us?"

Joe didn't reply. But all I knew was that we were on a dirt road in the middle of nowhere about to die. If this had happened back home, I could have left them and found my way to our house. But no such luck. I was trapped and, I was convinced, doomed. To make it all worse, the other three were having a great time. Sometimes the shoulder of the road dropped into a deep ditch and someone would get stuck trying to flip the car. Then everybody would pile out of the cars and push the other car out of the ditch.

Unable to get the bus righted on its side one last time, we spent the night in a cold, wet cow field on the side of the road. I swore I would get away from these

maniacs as soon as possible. That morning they flipped the bus upright, and Joe let me drive it to Billings, where I bought a ticket home to Minneapolis. The three of them spent the next week trying to outwalk each other in Yellowstone.

Before leaving Minnesota, I found out I had bronchitis—this news didn't affect my decision to go to Montana, but spending the night in the wet field influenced my decision to return home. For the first time hanging around Mike had lost all of its appeal. Being on the road with him meant I was locked in. I couldn't simply escape and go home. I also watched how easily Joe and Cynthia kept up with Mike; I couldn't—that made me feel like an outsider. After that experience, I was wary of following him too far and promised myself I wouldn't get into a similar position again.

I realized my need for security would always keep us separate, because he had no fear and I had plenty of it. Surviving on the edge was how Mike lived his life, and those around him had to live the same way. He made things so difficult, so extreme, that I sometimes walked away, saying, "This is bullshit. Why the hell do I have to do this?"

Others—like Joe, who was on his way to prison for Mike's grand idea—had a much higher tolerance for living on the edge. Joe went to prison; Mike went to Europe to look for a secondhand sailboat. I went to Amsterdam to join a long-neglected boyfriend I had met during my year at Vassar.

## Spetses, Greece, and Marmaris, Turkey, 1973–1974

*“We were about a half mile out [off the coast of Cos, Greece],  
but there was a rock and she hit it. The boat went down  
instantly.”*

—MIKE ON THE SINKING OF *MISTLE THRUSH*

MIKE AND I WENT TO EUROPE at about the same time, but not together. It was September 1973, and the war in Vietnam was winding down. Watergate was leading to the fall of Richard Nixon, and the drugs that characterized the youth of the 1960s had begun to take on more sinister tones. It seems laughable today, but because of an oil embargo a gallon of gas jumped from thirty-eight cents in May 1973 to fifty-five cents in June 1974.

The jump in gas prices meant little to me, particularly since no one had cars in Amsterdam, and in general I paid no attention to the world at large. Instead, I continued to burrow into a hole, disappearing in a haze of hash and the Dutch gin, Geneva. By moving to Amsterdam, I hoped to find the colorful and literary world that I had recently discovered in the books of Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin.

Alongside the drinking and getting high of that summer in Minnesota, I had discovered our recently opened local library and enjoyed the long walk from our home to where it stood between the gas station and the hardware store. One book led to another and another, and along the way I discovered Henry Miller’s *Paris in the 1930s* and the diaries of his friend Anaïs Nin. Being naïve and largely uneducated about this literary world, I thought it was perfectly reasonable to expect to find in Amsterdam something similar to the Paris of the 1930s, where writers and artists hung out at cafes and wrote novels despite any prospect of success. Living in an artistic Mecca had become my goal.

Mike was in England scouting harbors for old, wooden sailboats. He visited me in Amsterdam for a few days, and apparently I seemed so visibly dispirited that even my wandering brother wondered what I was doing. The truth was I spent the next three months aimless, depressed, and living off my boyfriend. I made it to Paris, but didn’t enjoy anything at that point. Having nothing that I absolutely needed to do was tough on me. I didn’t know then that loneliness and emptiness were necessary companions on the journey to find what I was looking for. I was good at rejecting the things I didn’t want, but not good at creating those things or life I did want. My summer reading had also introduced me to Samuel

Beckett, and I identified with the extreme immobility that afflicted his characters. Many, many years later, after fighting these periods of inertia, I learned to take medicine to help me avoid these black times.

Back in England Mike saw an ad in a British sailing magazine for a 32-foot wooden sailboat built in the 1930s. He had already seen a couple of boats of similar design, thought it would do, and liked the selling price.

The only hitch was seeing the boat, because she was in Greece. Post WWII Greece had endured most of the 1950s in deep poverty and nationwide hunger. In the 1960s, out of frustration, a group of army generals, referred to as the “Junta,” seized power and established a brutal dictatorship. The regime, which had enjoyed support from the West, began to lose control in the early 1970s. One of the confrontations between the government and its opponents erupted on November 17, 1973, a few days after Mike’s arrival. Mike was visiting the American Express office, a popular spot for travelers, in Syntagma Square in the center of Athens when army tanks, noisily and without warning, rolled into the square to end a student uprising.

The British-built boat of Mike’s interest, *Mistle Thrush*, was moored about sixty miles south of Athens on a small island called Spetses, off the Peloponnesian coast. The boat had been bought in England by an American woman who, at age forty, had quit her job as a librarian and sailed through the canals in France and across the Mediterranean to Greece. As several other sailors before her had done, she decided to moor the boat and spend the winter in the old harbor on Spetses. A year or so later she sold it to an American couple.

After the five-hour ferry ride to Spetses, Mike arrived at the old harbor, about a twenty-minute walk from the main harbor, and saw his dream nestled between two other wooden yachts. *Mistle Thrush* was tied to the harbor wall, stern facing in and an anchor set off her bow. A gangplank crossed the five feet or so of water between the street and her stern.

*Thrush* was a Hillyard built boat: 32-feet, wooden, and with a three-foot bowsprit. She had two masts: the mizzen (the one closer to the stern) was shorter than the main. She was gaff-rigged, meaning that her mainsail was a small, four-sided sail with a wooden gaff along the sail’s top. This rigging was typical of nineteenth-century sailboats and made her even more classic-looking.

The Hillyard shipyard was one of the first to produce standardized boats, and between the 1920s and 1978, Hillyard’s yard built an estimated six hundred to eight hundred boats of various sizes—sometimes turning out a boat in a week. Hillyard boats were heavy displacement, with long keels and canoe sterns, and were well known for their solid construction and seaworthiness. Designed for comfort and safety, they were a popular choice for families wanting to undertake long voyages. Not known for their speed, one writer on a recent boat forum wrote: “Glaciers consider them stationary obstructions.”

Quotes from the Hillyard Owners Association include: “The yacht’s quality of sea kindliness is legendary, very safe and seaworthy, and comfortable, seakindly motion.”

*Mistle Thrush* was not expected to sail well close to the wind; she was heavy



*Right: Mistle Thrush tied to the quay in Old Harbor, Spetses, Greece, Spring, 1974. Below: Mike in the middle with Hugh and Julia on Mistle Thrush, Spring, 1974.*



and at her fastest could go five knots. Knowing Mike's past as an X boat racer and his future sailing the fastest monohull built in the U.S. makes Mike's choice of *Thrush* a bit incongruous, but the allure of wooden boats is mysterious and compelling.

After seeing the boat, Mike didn't reveal he had already inquired about her, but instead pretended he was "David," a seemingly disinterested party. He asked around, and in less than a month after arriving he bought *Thrush* for a little under ten thousand dollars, money he'd made from selling cocaine.

Spetses, six miles long, a few miles wide, and one thousand feet at its highest point, is covered at its top with pine trees. The main town of about four thousand, also called Spetses, centers on two harbors: the main and the old. The Greek mainland, the Peloponnesus peninsula, is only a mile away, and in 1973 the only connection with Athens was five hours on a ferry that arrived on the island once a day at 7 p.m. and left in the morning at 6 a.m.

Spetses' main harbor had a long ferryboat pier and a seawall of large, square stones and was used by tourist and fishing boats. Foreign yachts used the smaller, older harbor, because it offered better protection against winter storms. When Mike arrived in November, the summer Mediterranean sailors had left and only a few Europeans and Americans remained on their boats. The frequent night squalls thundered as the buffeted boats surged toward the quay, then were yanked back out again by their anchor line. Growing up on a lake, I instantly know the sound of boat halyards slapping against a mast. It is a sound that remains constant no matter where you are in the world. When the wind buffeted

into the small harbor, usually at night, everyone was up quickly resetting their anchors; some even wore foul-weather gear. In the spring, wildflowers blanketed Spetses, and almond trees were festooned with gorgeous bundles of pale pink blossoms. Since the 1960s, the island has made its living off summer tourists, many of them Athenians. In the off season, the island rests.

Mike mailed me a postcard with a picture of the lighthouse and old harbor on Spetses and asked me when I was coming. Thrilled that I had a new destination, in January 1974 my boyfriend and I spent about a month traveling overland with another couple in their Volkswagen bus. We stopped along the way where everybody stops—Venice, Rome, etc.—and ended the trip in Brindisi, Italy. From there we traveled by boat to Patras, Greece, and took the bus to Athens. I was sick with an infected cyst, and on the advice of someone staying at the hostel, I saw a doctor who lanced the cyst. After a week or so of pain, I was well enough to take the ferry to Spetses. So we arrived in late January—early February and moved in with Mike.

In February, my boyfriend returned to Amsterdam and I stayed on in Spetses. We—as I, too, quickly became a member of this small group of expats—relished living on as little money as possible.

For thirty dollars a month, Mike shared a small house a few hundred yards from the harbor with a mysterious American named Joanie. He rented the space because he was busy tearing up his new boat, refitting the fuel tank, and redesigning the cockpit to move the tiller closer to the cabin, in addition to revarnishing all the woodwork. Mike probably had singlehanded sailing/cruising in mind right from the start of his work; moving the tiller forward made it easier to trim sail from the cockpit, and installing a larger fuel tank would let him go farther between refueling stops.

Mike escaped from the sawdust, paint, and varnish fumes, and to eat an occasional hot meal, usually a pot of pasta, up at the house. He was always covered in a fine layer of sawdust with splotches of paint on his clothes and sometimes in his hair. For a couple weeks, because he lost his contacts, he wore his glasses, which were taped together at the nose.

Joanie got a kick out of Mike because he was always happy, always had a big grin on his face. He quickly made friends with the other Americans living in the harbor, drinking with them at night, but not to the point of passing out. He had a reason now to get up early every morning and work until dark.

Mike had accomplished his goal of buying a sailboat, and he spent his days happily mucking around on *Mistle Thrush*.

Like all wooden boats, she needed constant care—sanding, varnishing, painting, and so on, not to mention replacing the rigging and repainting her keel—but all of that work was perfect for Mike. He distinguished himself by always working on his boat; he was the only one of the expat group who lived as if on a mission. When going into town he walked as if he needed to get whatever it was right away, with no time to lose, so he could get right back to work on the boat.

A few weeks after I arrived, Mike decided to take *Mistle Thrush* on a shake-down cruise to Hydra, an island about twenty miles to the northeast. We buddiesailed with a boat belonging to an American named Sandy, a tough-looking man

in his early thirties, who looked like a marine compared to most of the other expat guys with their long hair and beards. He and Mike became friends, but neither of them ever talked much about their past, and none of us knew where Sandy's money came from. He had no intention of working as a charter boat captain, and it seemed odd that he owned a sailboat since he didn't know how to sail. In fact, he'd hired a professional sailor, an American named Bill, to help him deliver the boat from Athens to the island.

When we set off on our trip to Hydra, Sandy hadn't yet sailed his boat. Luckily, the 28-foot fiberglass boat was relatively easy to control, but a boat is a boat, meaning anything and everything can happen. Sandy's crew included his girlfriend, Carol Ann—also an American and several years younger than Sandy—and Bill, the professional sailor. Carol Ann was tall and lean, with long, jet-black hair. Bill wore a long blond ponytail, talked with a thick Boston accent, and was the only one of us with coastal cruising experience.

The trip could have been idyllic—blue seas, the freedom of sailing into Hydra's harbor at sunset, eating, drinking, and dancing in the taverna, followed by a triumphant return to Spetses. But it was February, storm season, and the harbor on Hydra, unlike the old harbor on Spetses, provided no refuge in a storm. We sailed part way then motored when the wind died, reaching the island late in the day. The best docking spots at the quay were already occupied, so we moored on the other side of Hydra Harbor, inside a hundred foot long and twenty feet deep stone breakwater that separated the harbor from the open sea.

Mike had been told that Hydra was so hip that singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen lived there. I could see that it definitely attracted a wealthier breed of tourist—a decadent Athenian crowd fond of heroin, of which there was a steady supply from the east. It was pitch dark when I came back alone from the taverna on our first night, and as I stepped down into the cabin of *Mistle Thrush* I was alarmed to see a stranger shooting heroin into his forearm. The sight of the needle and a sudden side-to-side motion of the boat in the night's gale had me lurching and vomiting out the porthole. Mike was already on the boat, having left the taverna before me, but the junkie—and his companions—was a stranger.

The weather worsened as the night deepened. A brisk north wind blew straight into the harbor, and the breakwater did not offer much protection from the rising sea waves. The junkies quickly left the boat and disappeared into the night, and Mike went to check the anchor line. We were tied to the stone quay at the stern and had an anchor set off the bow. As the storm intensified, Mike set a second anchor, undersized though it was at twenty pounds. It was the first day Mike had set her anchors—the day had been one of many firsts for Mike and *Mistle Thrush*.

While Mike set the anchors from the bow, I was in the cockpit hanging our three fenders (large, white, rubber pillows used to protect a boat from neighboring boats or a dock) to keep *Mistle Thrush*'s stern from crashing against the stone pier. I was petrified. All of a sudden a wave took *Mistle Thrush* high in the air and then dropped us. Scared, and figuring the lurching boat would smash into the pier, I screamed.

Mike leapt from the bow, over the cabin and into the cockpit, his face white

with fear. He thought I had been pinched between the pier and the stern, crushing an arm or a leg. Realizing that I would probably get hurt if I tried to do anything else, he grabbed the fenders and told me to go below. Using all the line he could find, he tied the boat to the pier and to the boats on both the port and starboard sides, one of which was Sandy's. For added protection he tied a line to Sandy's anchor line.

The wind blew torrents of rain sideways, rendering the world invisible. I knew something existed out beyond *Mistle Thrush*, but only because I could hear and feel the pounding of the swells coming over the pier. The force of the swells lifted the boat up and down, like an irate child in the bathtub plunging and flinging its toy boat. Mike had no foul-weather gear, so once he soaked all his clothes he stopped trying to protect himself from the rain and came up out of the cabin naked. For the rest of the night, when I occasionally poked my head out of the cabin, I saw his naked form leaping through the sky, glistening like a dolphin, pulling on dock lines, moving fenders, reattaching lines that had frayed, agilely jumping from our boat to the neighbor's and back again. The sun eventually rose, but the storm continued to blow through the next day.

Sandy and Bill were busy taking care of their boat, too, but they had a few advantages Mike didn't have, including several anchors, more docking lines—new rather than old, like Mike's—and Bill had experience.

*Mistle Thrush* survived that storm thanks to Mike's vigilance. We hoisted anchor, considerably shaken, but managed to sail and motor back to Spetses. The old part of that harbor, a natural, deep cove inset from the sea, had protected many more boats through the storm than the harbor on Hydra could. We certainly hadn't been protected. The Spetses road along the northern coast had been washed out, the rain having loosened huge boulders as if they were pebbles. Mike waited another month before sailing again, and on his second sail took *Thrush* out to impress his new girlfriend, Helena.

We expats were a small and tight community, a mix of nationalities and ages. Probably the most distinguished of the group was a former captain in the French navy whose wife always called me "mon petit chou," or "my little cauliflower." I was the youngest, turning twenty-one later in the year, and probably the one who knew the least about cruising in the Greek Isles.

If we went out for dinner, all the foreigners went to the only restaurant in the old harbor: a one-room tavern with a few wooden tables inside and a couple more outside perched over the water. The fare was mostly French fries, cabbage salad, boiled chicken, fried meatballs, and the local wine, Retsina, served in metallic pitchers.

One black night in March, a young woman who had come to visit a friend who lived on a boat in the old harbor, poked her head into the taverna. A group of us were gathered around wooden tables covered with wine glasses and ashtrays. When she stepped down from the street into the tavern we all turned to look, as if one body with multiple heads. Our eyes beheld a small woman with long, dark, curly hair and enormous brown eyes dressed in a full-length, white cotton dress, trimmed with lace. A goddess. She barely finished asking if we knew an American named Jonathan when Mike was out of his chair moving toward her.

"Yes," he said, "yes I do, and I can show you where his boat is."

Mike knew Jonathan was away in Athens that weekend, but he also knew walking with Helena to Jonathan's boat would allow him to introduce himself. By the time Mike and Helena returned to the taverna it seemed Mike had cemented their relationship. Mike wasn't the only one interested in Helena. I immediately saw in her the makings of a much-needed companion. There weren't many young, single European/American women on the island, and definitely none that looked as hippie-cool as she did. I was eager to have a buddy.

Later that evening, I asked her if she wanted to visit a guy named Larry who lived nearby. Larry was an American about our age. He'd been coming to Spetses on and off since his dad had bought a house on the island several years before. He was amazingly handsome, tall, broad-chested, and with dense, brown hair. The first time I met him I assumed he was gay. Somehow he seemed too composed to be hetero. Besides, at that point in my life, a guy that good looking tended to be gay. I later learned he did like women, and women definitely liked him.

His house was cold and dark in the winter, but compared to the small sailboat cabins that were home to many of us that winter, it was spacious and comfortable. As Helena and I stood to go, Mike followed us out the door. From then on, Helena and Mike were inseparable, I had found a new best friend, and Jonathan was out of the picture.

It turned out that Helena was half English and half Greek, so her Greek was fairly good. She had been traveling in eastern Africa, but was now living in Athens with her aunt. Like us, she was on her own schedule, moving around at whim, free to stay with Mike for the next several days. Mike's second venture out of the harbor to sail on *Mistle Thrush* was intended to impress Helena. I joined them on this trip to the other side of the island. The trip was idyllic. We moored in an empty bay of blue sparkling water, dove off the boat, and swam to shore to eat at a restaurant that seemed open only because we were there. We returned to the harbor without any mishaps: perhaps Helena's company was the charm.

Eager to make money with his boat, Mike placed an ad in several British sailing magazines, as well as in the *New York Times*: "Charter boat with captain, all meals included." (I suppose Mike would have asked Helena to cook the meals, but I doubt he'd thought that far ahead when he placed the ad.)

Mike's plan worked, and he booked a week's charter for the end of May. My dad and aunt planned to visit Spetses in April, but at the last minute my aunt decided against it and Hugh went in her place. They arrived two weeks before Mike's charter. Instead of taking the ferry to Athens, Mike, my dad, Hugh and I made the trip on *Mistle Thrush*.

The first day we sailed and motored from Spetses to Poros and spent the night at the town pier. The second day we headed for the yacht harbor in Athens, which is next to the main shipping harbor of Piraeus. Luckily, sailing between the islands, all of which were close to the mainland, was easy. The first strong wind we encountered was in the open expanse between the island of Aegina and Athens. Mike, anxious to see how fast he could make his old wooden boat go, hoisted every sail: mainsail, topsail, mizzen, and jib.

With all sails full, we suddenly jibed; the sails swung from one side of the



boat to the other, and the boat heeled violently from one side to the other. As the mainsail swung over, it knocked me in the head, sending my treasured Ray-Ban sunglasses overboard. Hugh helped Mike douse the mainsail before it put any more strain on the mast. With a lot of swearing and hard work, Hugh secured sails while Mike took the tiller. Once the sails were down and the motor was on, Hugh took the tiller. Mike went below to discover that water was flooding over the floorboards. The jibe had caused two planks to separate, and *Thrush* was taking on water. When the boat had jibed, the boom's rapid movement forced the mast backward and then forward so abruptly that the planks down by the mast step had pulled apart, loosening the seam caulking and allowing water to enter.

The engine was located under the cockpit, and as the motor chugged away, diesel fumes spewing, I sat on the companionway steps pumping with a hand-held bilge pump, inhaling the fumes, and just barely keeping the water level from rising. Mike and Hugh strapped down everything on deck. Dad, at the tiller, steered us through the choppy sea. The most dangerous part of the voyage was still ahead—motoring in the gathering dark across the busy shipping lanes where huge cargo ships and tankers steamed in and out of Piraeus, the main port of Athens. They could not see our little boat.

We rounded the seawall at Piraeus, secured *Mistle Thrush*, and just got to the pier before the seawater rose to her portholes, her keel settling on the shallow bottom. My dad had already booked a cruise for Hugh, himself, and me, and since our time was tight, we had to leave immediately.

While the three of us cruised the Aegean—stopping at Santorini, Mykonos, and Rhodes—Mike slept on a friend's boat and stewed until he figured out a way to get *Thrush* off the bottom of the harbor. He met a Greek at a local bar who owned a small truck, and he convinced him to help him move *Thrush*. Mike maneuvered *Thrush* away from the docks and tied a line from the masthead to the back of the pickup. With the pickup doing the work, *Mistle Thrush* turned onto one side, putting the other side high enough in the air for Mike to examine the damage. He set about mending her planking and patched her holes using methods he had learned when he was ten rescuing and repairing boats from Lake Minnetonka at Plant's Boat Works. Always a quick learner, he figured how to adapt his earlier methods to his much larger craft.

Five days later, Dad, Hugh, and I returned to Piraeus to find Mike in *Mistle Thrush*'s cockpit washing the oil, sewage, and trash off the cushion covers. We all said our goodbyes. Dad and Hugh were heading home to the States, and I was walking over the hill, catching the ferry back to Spetses.

Just as we were leaving, Helena arrived from Athens, and later that day she and Mike sailed *Thrush* to Aegina. They managed to meet their American charterers on the pier shortly after they arrived. With Helena—who had never been on a sailboat other than that one-day trip from Spetses—as crew, and his charterers—who had no idea *Thrush* had recently been resting on the bottom of the harbor—Mike pushed off from the pier and began his brief career as charter captain.

The boat, although not luxurious, was set up to accommodate chartering. It had a berth for two in the bow, and another berth on either side of the cabin,



each of which could theoretically sleep two, making a total of six berths. The woodwork in the cabin was recently varnished, and the galley worked well, but the setup was minimal in terms of extras and décor.

Mike island hopped—Aegina to Poros to Hydra and back to Spetses—and Helena cooked. All survived Mike's maiden charter. A confusion between forward and reverse gears was the sole incident, with *Thrush* ramming the stone quay in Spetses and dislodging a chunk of the pier. No one was hurt. When the charter was over, Mike was told by the harbor officials that he had to repair the damaged concrete, which he did, leaving his initials (MP) in the wall.

With the first charter behind him, Mike decided that the tourist business would be bigger in Rhodes than in Spetses, which was true, and so with Helena he sailed from island to island crossing most of the Aegean before arriving in Rhodes. His decision to go to Rhodes proved to be a mistake, but one he could not have avoided.

In June 1974, when Mike arrived at Rhodes, relations between Greece and Turkey, never good, blew up on the island of Cyprus. Since WWII, Cyprus had been divided into two parts: one Greek and one Turkish. The Greek citizens far outnumbered the Turks, and as a result of a confusing incident, Turkey decided that the Turkish Cypriots needed their protection, and so invaded the Greek part of the island. The Greeks expected the international community, specifically the United Kingdom and the United States, to step in and push the Turks out of their half of Cyprus. When neither country came to their aid, the Greeks felt they'd been betrayed—Americans and English tourists bore the brunt of this hostility.

Flying an American flag made Mike an easy target for any anti-American feelings. The tension was worst on the Greek islands, which included Rhodes, that were separated from Turkey by only a few miles of sea. Many of these islands had blackouts during the entire summer, because they believed the Turkish air force might attack at any moment.

Mike's fledgling charter business suffered from the negative effect the Cypriot war had on the tourist trade. Rumors of war meant the tourists simply chose other destinations.

For months, Mike had been anticipating the arrival of his Minnesota girlfriend, Cynthia, and when she finally arrived on Rhodes, Helena and Mike had been living together for several weeks. Helena had a vague understanding that Mike had a girlfriend in the States, but she was pretty surprised when the girlfriend actually showed up. *Thrush* was tied up to the harbor, alongside another boat owned by a friend of Mike's, when Cynthia arrived. Mike said absolutely nothing to Helena, who caught on pretty quickly that she was being replaced, and the two women literally passed each other as Cynthia walked aboard and Helena walked off onto a neighboring yacht, making it look to Cynthia that she belonged there and had merely been visiting Mike.

It was the nature of life on the road in the early 1970s that people could get away with acting like this. Of course, Helena was hurt, but remaining stoic was part of the culture, and Mike characteristically just assumed that he didn't have to say anything to either woman. Helena took the next ferry back to Athens.

Cynthia maybe knew better than to ask Mike about Helena, but she was also supremely confident in her right to be there, and Mike had a knack for maneuvering quickly in and out of tricky situations.

Mike ran another ad in the *New York Times* and secured another charter from two New York City psychiatrists on their honeymoon. (This is already funny, because Mike really disliked psychiatrists.) But after one day of sailing, *Thrush* again began taking on water. The couple demanded to leave at their next stop, which would be Kos, an island northwest of Rhodes. As luck would have it, an available charter boat was tied up nearby, so the honeymooners walked off Mike's boat and onto another, presumably drier, boat.

As Mike and Cynthia sailed from Kos en route to Rhodes, Cynthia ran *Thrush* over a partially submerged rock, puncturing a hole in the hull. Mike later described the incident in an interview with Tom Gannon, a sportswriter and friend.

"I was with this girl, and she was driving *Thrush*. I was asleep in the cockpit, and she got too close to shore. We were about a half mile out, but there was a rock and she hit it. The boat went down instantly. The hole was about this big [probably a foot or two]. We got to the beach, but I put the boat on the beach the wrong way. It was really stupid. I thought the boat would fall toward the beach so the hole would be up, but it didn't. It fell away from the beach, back into the deeper water. It fell on the hole.

"First of all, we had to get to the hole so we could put something over it. Well, we were lucky because a fishing boat came and put his bow right on the beach. That's the way they fished. They had their winches right off the bow, and they put a line from a tree to his winch. We're full of water, and we're trying to pull up so we can get to the hole. I thought for sure the mast would just snap right off. But it didn't break, and the boat came up enough so I could dive down to put a piece of canvas on a piece of lead. It worked really well. The fishing boat captain had a pump, and he started pumping. He and his crew of six put some canvas around the cockpit to keep the water from slopping in. It took about six hours, and then he towed me back to the harbor.

"When you sink like that, the water goes into the engine through the intake, displaces all the oil out of the crankcase, and then comes down and covers everything. We spent a long time cleaning up. There were problems forever after that. The [fuel] tank was steel, and that filled with water and really rusted. I mean, the rust was unbelievable. The moral of that story is, when you go on the beach, to get the gas oil off just torch it."

By September Cynthia had returned home, leaving Mike single again. *Thrush's* sinking, Mike's resulting foul humor, and their mutual poverty had sent her packing. Mike was disappointed, but he wasn't going to abandon his plan to own and live on his boat. In September, I decided to go visit him, and on my way I visited Helena, who was still living in Athens. Now that Cynthia had returned home, Helena was happy to travel to Rhodes with me to visit Mike.

Seeing Mike again was a shock. "My god, Mike, what happened to you?"

"A bunch of Greeks jumped me in a taverna last night," he said. "They wanted to beat up an American, found me, and smashed a chair over my head."

Mike had a hard time maintaining calm when drinking. His recent wounds just added insult to his already ragged condition: he was alarmingly thin, barefoot, wearing jeans and a faded, threadbare t-shirt, and his hair and beard were so thick and unkempt I could barely see the skin on his face. His multiple boyhood concussions had left him susceptible to knockouts, and perhaps fueled his irrational bouts of anger. When I met him on the boat that day, anger was swirling around him.

"Let's go to Turkey. You want to go to Turkey?" Mike said.

"Sure."

"Let's go to Marmaris."

Later that day, four of us set sail for Marmaris, Turkey: Mike, Helena, Gary (a Canadian Mike had picked up as crew), and me. Because of the political tension, Greek and Turkish patrol boats had been monitoring the waters off the Greek islands closest to Turkey, waiting for an attack that never came. Rhodes, only twenty miles from the Turkish coast, was particularly vulnerable to the threat of a Turkish invasion. All travel was forbidden between the two countries.

Once we neared the Turkish coast, Mike sailed at night without running lights so we could pass undetected by the navy patrol boats. Of course, without running lights we also stood a good chance of getting run down by one of the patrols. The whole trip was obviously risky, but I lived in a naïve bubble. If Mike was willing to defy a travel ban and sail without lights, then it must be okay. I was a foreigner in this place, and luckily I never had to take the rules and the regulations too seriously. If we had been caught, the consequences could have been dire, but we weren't smuggling or carrying arms, so the punishment might only have been a requirement to turn around.

Despite the specter of being run over, it was an incredibly beautiful night. Mike and Helena were in love, Gary was hoping to share my bunk, and I never, ever forgot that night sky. I stood at the bowsprit, mesmerized by the stars diving diagonally across the inky sky, passing each other on their descents to the sea below. With no running lights, the reflection of the stars on the black sea appeared as a world separate from ours. Apart from the low grumbling of the engine and a few sounds from the four of us, the world was completely quiet.

We arrived in Marmaris and tied up to a stone pier. Helena and Mike slept in the cabin, and Gary and I spent the night topsides on the cabin house roof. The next morning I woke to find twenty or more Turkish kids checking out the new arrivals. They were so close to me we were practically touching noses.

"What? What are you doing?" I sputtered.

The boys started giggling and edged even closer as I tried to extricate myself from my sleeping bag. I was wearing only a t-shirt and underpants, so this was a tricky maneuver. Stumbling down the companionway to the cabin, I said, "Mike, Helena—we're surrounded. Look!" I pointed to the faces peering through the portholes.

Mike laughed and waved me off. "They're just curious. They won't hurt you."

I changed into my by-then daily outfit, a black crochet bikini. Thinking I was now decently dressed, I reappeared. Gaping at what may have been their first up-close view of a woman in a bikini, the young boys were even more shocked.

To them, I could have been a Hollywood celebrity. In that part of the world, the women wore veils and long black robes.

The local newspaper ran a photo of us on our second day in port: Helena and I in our black bikinis, Mike with a black eye, and Gary. Marmaris saw few foreigners and even fewer Americans, and we were welcomed as heroes once Mike told them he had fled to Turkey after the Greeks beat him up. As we walked through town heading to local eateries, we saw our photograph pinned up inside the local teashops. It fit right in with the other semi-naked women cut out of magazines also decorating the walls.

These days were time out of time, and I remember them well. Mike seemed content, wanting nothing more than to hang out, eat, and drink. We were wined and dined by the local cosmopolitans and invited to a disco that turned out to be like nothing I had seen before or have seen since. Located on the far side of the bay, it sparkled as we approached it from the sea; the vision enhanced by the raki, similar to ouzo, we had consumed on the crossing. Out in the middle of nowhere, built around an enormous tree, loomed a multilevel, open air nightclub. Colored lights hung from the branches, and on the upper level men and women danced slowly to what we Westerners thought of as belly-dance music. With the exception of one local's overbearing requests for favors I did not want to provide, it was magical.

Since we had met, Helena had been planning to travel to India. She wanted to make the trip on the "Magic Bus" that started in London and ended in India, with many stops along the way, one of them in Istanbul. She told me later that if Mike had asked her to stay in Marmaris she would have cancelled her trip and stayed with him. Since he didn't, the two of us made the day-long bus trip north to Istanbul. Before her departure we hung out mostly in an American bar called the Plum Pudding joking with the Turkish men.

The day Helena left, the innocent joking turned ugly. As I walked to the train station to take the thirty-six hour train ride back to Athens, a taxi driver who had frequented the bar stopped to ask me if I wanted a ride to the station. Twice I said no, but then the third time I got in. He took off across the Bosphorus, telling me he wanted to show me the beautiful view of Istanbul from his cousin's property. I just kept repeating, "Please take me to the train station." After a frightening hour or so—meeting his cousins who were smoking hash, and being escorted around the grounds to appreciate the view I refused to look at since I was so insistent he take me to the train station—he drove me back, discussing his sexual prowess the entire ride. He finally took me to my train.

After Marmaris, Mike and Gary returned to Rhodes, and Gary moved on. Mike wanted to see the Turkish coast, a remarkably beautiful coastline. Much of Mike's life motivation grew out of his love of beautiful and wild places, driving him to travel, and leading him to discover that the ocean held the grandest beauty of all. He seemed to have a sixth sense for beautiful places, and he sought them out wherever he was. It was one reason he could never be in a city for more than a couple of days, and he always lived more outdoors than indoors. His home was in the wild.

Mike knew he'd leave Rhodes sooner rather than later, so he didn't want to

*Julia Plant  
on a yacht in  
Greece, 1975.*



miss what could be his one chance to see the coast. He set sail alone, his first time with no crew, and decided to take his chances. He headed for Finike, an ancient town on the Turkish coast about seventy miles southeast from Rhodes. It was once called Phoenicus, marking the northeastern corner of the old Phoenician trade route on the southern coast of Turkey.

Remarkably beautiful and rugged, Cape Gelidonya, directly north of Finike, is notorious for the strong, sudden winds that blow down from the mountain range that rises immediately off the coast. The coastline is constantly changing as it weaves in and out of narrow bays and along thin peninsulas dotted with large rocks rising several feet above the surface of the sea. It is also the site of many sunken ships that failed to sail clear of the cape. In the late 1950s, an American journalist working in the area learned of a shipwreck not far off the cape. As a result, in one of the first underwater excavations, he discovered a Bronze Age ship dating back to 1200 BCE.

In Finike, Mike returned from a day trip inland to find that someone had stolen the starter motor on his diesel. A new motor, which he had no money for anyway, would take at least a week to arrive, so Mike sailed out without a working engine. *Mistle Thrush* was a cranky, stubborn, slow wooden boat with at least two hastily repaired openings in her hull that continually let water in. Each time Mike set sail, the boat leaked because of the pressure on the mast that opened the hull planking. The stronger the winds, the greater the pressure—and the more she leaked. Mike described his return trip from Finike to Rhodes:

“Day One: Hour of the wolf. A wind freshened from the southeast after a miserable night of rolling in an offshore swell. Mainsail was up, and *Thrush* was mashing through the oncoming surge. She was doing an easy 5 knots with the wind strengthening all the time. Incredible sunrise, which was beautiful but not evil. The moon was one day from full, and it passed behind a huge and threatening cloud mass to the northwest. I figured there would be a bit of weather today, but it was in the right direction, so I carried on. An hour after sunrise I guess the wind was gusting to Force 6.

“*Thrush* was moving along 7 to 7½ knots under mainsail, staysail, and

mizzen. I passed the light by which I had been steering since before dawn. The sequence of flashes did not match anything on the chart, so I assumed it was the first light along the coast, as marked on the chart. I was wrong. A half hour later, I was off the bay of Kas and 15 miles farther than I had reckoned.

"*Thrush* had never moved like this before. I was averaging 8 knots! I couldn't believe it. An hour later, I was off the bay of Kalkan. The wind was now gusting gale force. Although I was only a mile and a half off the coast, the waves were building—some I guessed already at 6 feet and very short lengths. I decided to take shelter in the bay and determine from there what best to do. I tried changing course, but the helm was almost too much with the wind on the quarter and the mizzen still up. The  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch steel fitting on the top of the rudderpost bent."

To sail into the bay, Mike had to change his direction and his angle to the wind. Where he wanted to go was the exact direction the wind was coming from, never a good situation for a sailor, especially a sailor with no engine. It was difficult to keep the tiller in the right position. The stronger the wind, the more difficult to hold *Thrush* on course. When the steel rudder fitting bent under the pressure of the sea against Mike's grip, he discovered his own strength was greater than he knew. He realized his adrenaline would push him beyond his normal physical limits, a powerful insight that probably allowed him to take on greater challenges that lay ahead.

"As it turned out, crossing the bay for protection was a mistake. The wind came over and down the steep, cliff-like walls even harder than at sea. I was 200 yards offshore, but only managed to escape the waves, not the wind. I moved in as close as I dared at the end of the bay, then left the helm to pull the boat into the wind while I ran forward to take the mainsail down. The lift was attached to the mast in the old fashioned way, except I had plastic fishnet bobbars instead of wooden hoops laced on separate lanyards around the mast and tied to the sail. With one pull, the mainsail was down. After the sail was secured, I jibed the boat and pointed her back out to sea. Shelter was out of the question, so I got her ready for the meanest sail I could imagine.

"Below, I pumped her dry and fastened everything imaginable. Then quickly she was pulling herself out to sea. I scrambled a fast couple of eggs, stuffed my mouth full of biscuits, and got ready to rig the trysail. Because the boat was gaff rigged, the trysail was easily hoisted with the throat halyard. The stormsail was replaced with the storm jib, and we were away."

Mike's sail reduction was a way to minimize breakage. Any more sail and he would probably have broken something, like his mast. He was in the midst of a balancing act. Any less sail, and he'd have no ability to control *Thrush's* direction. She would have been tossed here and there, eventually crashing onto the rocks ashore.

"Five minutes later, we were back into it. I took the mizzen down to reduce the helm, and *Thrush* humbled herself along at an easy 5 knots. Forty-five minutes



later, we cleared the last westerly point of Turkey and heaved out across the channel to Rhodes. I now guessed the waves to be fetching an easy 15 feet. They seemed to tower over the top of the mast at times. The helm was easy, and I tried to make as westerly as possible, only taking the big waves astern. We continued on like this for another two and a half hours. The wind at times gusted so fiercely as to take the top of the wave and thrust it forward impatiently into another different and infinite wave of mist. But *Thrush* was still moving easily, and there was time to observe. I was amazed.

“At approximately 1500 hours, the wind began to head back to the south, and the weather was in for another change! There were different and strange looking cloud buildups to all sides, the worst looking from the west. It is hard to describe what happened from here. There came rainsqualls, driving hard at first, as if trying to hush the sea. Sometimes seeming to overpower it, forcing it down. Then the sky went evil. Being from the Midwest, I can easily identify what the sky does before a twister. It was the sickest pink I ever want to see. Immediately, out of nowhere, was a huge, black cloud mass directly ahead due north. I took a quick look for a waterspout, the first thing I could imagine developing from this mess. When I looked back to the north, the black was gone. It seemed to be behind me, then on all sides. I thought, ‘Christ, I must be in the eye, and the spout will come up out of my bilges.’ I was scared. I’d never seen anything the likes of it. Then the wind hushed completely, and I was left in a confused swell with no steerage. The worst had come, I figured. I was to be stranded in this slop. For ten minutes we rolled and pitched without direction.

“I went below to try and pump the bilges. It was useless. The boat was fairly shallow with very full sections in the bilge, thus allowing the water inside to slosh aimlessly. Ten gallons can sound like a hundred. (And almost do as much damage.) I had been on pump watch every forty-five minutes during that trip—that’s how badly the boat was leaking. At one point, I was bailing buckets out of the companionway. I was getting pretty excited at certain points. It’s a lot easier to get the adrenaline pumping when you’re by yourself—a lot more intense. I almost lost the boat. It almost went down.

“Then the wind, slowly at first, came up from the northwest—a full 180-degree shift. It was a steady Force 3, but not enough to control the boat through the swell. I needed more steam. I replaced the storm jib with the number-two staysail. The mizzen went up, and the trysail trimmed. The wind continued to strengthen, and I laid a course back toward the Turkish coast. My destination now was the harbor of Fethiye, 45 miles to the north. By this time, the sun had set, and I was mentally preparing myself for a long night. At this point of sailing, *Thrush* practically steered herself, and the going was easy. At about 2200 hours, I picked up the lighthouse just outside the bay of Fethiye. This gave me a warm feeling, to say the least. I still had a good 25 miles to go until shelter, but the boat was making good headway and the prevailing wind for this time of year was northwest. Hopefully, it would hold for another four hours.

“Well, it did—the wind held four hours to the minute, I figured. I needed just another 3 miles to make it inside the harbor when it died. With no headway, the surge again took its effect, and I began to roll aimlessly. I took the sails down, tidied up everything, set the alarm to go off in an hour, and tried to get

some sleep. The surge was pushing me toward the rocks, but the headway was negligible, and I think I fell asleep.

“Day Two: The day was sheer frustration. The sails went up and down. I tried to tack into the harbor only 3 miles away. I thought, to hell with it—maybe I’ll try again for Rhodes. The whole day was made up of intermittent squalls from all directions amongst a confused sea. Finally, the wind freshened from the northwest just before sunset, and I decided to give it one final try. Everything went up. My last dwindling bit of strength: genoa, staysail, main, and mizzen. All or nothing. *Thrush* took off at a gallop, catching two small fishing bareas [small one- or two-man fishing boats] as she turned the corner into the final bay where the town of Fethiye lay. The sun was just setting, and the view was warm and beautiful as I approached the quay. The wind quieted. The sails came down. With the mizzen alone, I slowly jibed around, coming up into the wind and gently alongside a greatly welcomed mooring.”

But that wasn’t the end of the trip from Turkey—exhausted as he was, he needed to sail back to Rhodes without an engine, so he used one of the things he had been blessed with—charisma. He convinced an Australian to sail with him. Sailing directly into the wind, it took them thirty-six hours to make the fifty-mile crossing. By the end of those ten days, Mike had sailed one hundred and fifty miles, which may not sound like a lot, but he did it mostly alone, in stormy conditions, and in a wooden boat that leaked like a sieve. Those one hundred and fifty miles could have been one thousand.

Once back in Rhodes, Mike hauled the boat and again patched her leaks. Three months later, in March 1975, Mike wrote home while visiting Athens to purchase boat parts:

“I’ve been working on other boats, trying to get some money together to cruise awhile this spring before the big push is on. Rhodes is slowly filling up. I have a new crew, an Australian who I think will stay on for the summer. He’s been a lot of help, and it’s been good to have him. We had a trip to Turkey last week. On the way back we were driving into a very bad sea. The boat held up beautifully. I think maybe this time she will be tight. It’s about the worst punishment I’ve given the boat, and she did not leak. Very satisfying.”

One week later, Mike was on the run from the Greek police for smuggling hashish.

## Rhodes, Greece, April 1975

*“Yeah, I saw Midnight Express, and it scared the shit out of me.”*

—MIKE TO ME ONE NIGHT IN THE LATE 1970S AFTER HE LEFT GREECE

MIKE NEVER TOLD THE WHOLE STORY about what happened in Greece. For much of his life he had been starting stories and not finishing them, or telling one person one version and another person a different version—he’d tell just enough of a story to intrigue the listener, then change the subject. Combined with his natural hesitancy to say much about anything, it was virtually impossible to get him to tell you more than he wanted to say. Someone once joked that he rarely put more than three words together.

I pieced together the Greek episode by combining what I knew with what other people living there told me and the little Mike revealed to me. Later I found out from a Greek lawyer about the others who were convicted for drug smuggling. Throughout that winter, Mike made occasional trips from Rhodes to Turkey, supposedly working as a charter boat operator. In late March, an Austrian and his American girlfriend hired Mike to sail them from Rhodes to Turkey and back. After the trip, the couple traveled from Rhodes to Athens via ferry where they were stopped by police who had received a tip that the couple might be smuggling dope. When the police opened their suitcase, several kilos of hashish were in clear sight, and the couple, clearly not anticipating the search, were arrested and taken in for questioning.

In their first statement they said nothing about Mike. But in their second statement—that they claimed was given under duress and on the condition of being granted their freedom—they admitted they had smuggled the hashish using *Mistle Thrush*. They also said Mike knew about the hashish, and they could verify this by finding three kilos of hashish hidden on his boat. They also implicated a Scotsman living on the island of Symi who was arrested soon thereafter. As a result of their statements, on April 24, 1975, a judge in Piraeus, the port of Athens, issued an international order of arrest for Mike Plant.

Years later, in 1986, when Mike was detained in Portugal for an outstanding charge of smuggling in Greece, Mike told Dad that at first he thought it was a normal charter with the Austrian and the American. He had no reason to believe otherwise until they returned to Rhodes, where his guests told him they couldn’t

pay for the trip. They could, however, give him some of their recently acquired hashish, which he could then sell. Mike was furious over being ripped off that way, but he was also broke and had been living hand to mouth for months. The charter business had dried up, and he couldn't find any other work. He had seriously considered leaving Greece. However, since he really needed the money, he reluctantly took the hashish as payment. Mike was familiar with dealing marijuana and cocaine in the States, and he knew he could make money that way. So it's likely he wasn't particularly reluctant to take the hash. On our trip to Marmaris in the fall of 1974, Mike told me I might be better off not coming back with him on *Mistle Thrush* to Greece, but instead to go with Helena to Istanbul because he was planning on bringing hashish back from Turkey. At least he had the kindness to give me the option of not running the risk of years of imprisonment in a foreign jail. When he was accused of smuggling later on, I pretty much assumed he was guilty. I never heard an admittance, nor a denial from Mike.

When the couple was arrested in Athens, *Mistle Thrush* was moored in Lindos, Rhodes. Often paranoid, and almost always for a good reason, Mike wasn't unprepared when the police showed up at his boat in Lindos. After all, Mike had been accused of crimes before, so he knew to act nothing but innocent as the police turned his boat inside out. They looked in the cooking pots stored under the sink, pried up random planks in the cabin sole, pulled the sails from their bags, and dumped Mike's clothes in the middle of the cockpit. They found nothing.

It may seem odd, but the police, as was true of the local Greeks, knew surprisingly little about yachts, so perhaps that's why their search of *Mistle Thrush* turned up nothing. That didn't stop their worries that Mike was hiding something, and they ordered him to hand over his passport. Saying they'd be back the next morning, they left.

Barely two hours later, under cover of darkness, Mike quietly raised *Thrush's* mainsail and sailed west. He thought he could get all the way to Malta, which would place him outside Greek jurisdiction. However, he had only enough fuel to make it as far as the Peloponnesus. At some point he would have to refuel. He had no passport, no charts, little water, even less money, and he was now a suspected drug dealer.

A tiny town, Lindos had a couple hundred people—maybe. Fuel was sold in larger towns, and no fuel dock would be open in the middle of the night anyway. Besides, Mike had to leave without drawing attention to himself, so he didn't want to go anywhere near a populated harbor of the type he could have found on Symi or Kos. He feared the police would be looking for him.

Mike motored and sailed for the next three days and nights, finally reaching the eastern side of Peloponnesus, about fifty miles south of Spetses. He needed fuel, and he knew his time spent there in the past afforded him many connections, so Mike decided to turn *Mistle Thrush* north to the island of Spetses.

Mike also knew I lived only a few hundred yards from the fuel dock. As he motored north those last fifty miles he probably had several scenarios in mind for his plan—all of which were pretty sketchy. But at that point, Mike had no other options, so he had to make this plan work.

He probably approached Spetses from the western side, passing almost the length of the island before reaching the lighthouse that stood on the north side of the harbor. It was probably dark or very early dawn, with the sea calm. It was April, which was one of the prettiest times of the year on Spetses. The daytime temperatures were in the seventies, and the nights were slightly cooler. The water looked as beautiful as ever, but for most people it was still too cold for swimming. The tourist season had not yet begun, but the tavernas were open for the Easter holidays, the biggest celebration of the year. He must have seen the irony of his arrival. A month ago, or even a week ago, he would have been anticipating good times ahead drinking with old friends who still lived on the island, but instead he was coming in under cover of darkness, hoping no one would see him, and leaving as soon as he had filled his tank with diesel.

The old harbor faced northwest, set back from a larger bay that opened to the same direction. The main road, not much wider than one lane, ran along the coast from the town to the old harbor. Large homes—hidden by enormous, white, pockmarked walls made of concrete—overlooked the road. These walls ran straight up at about a ninety-degree angle from the road to the houses, most of them built in the 1800s or earlier by wealthy shipowners and were now owned by Athenians who vacationed on the island.

The coast road swung abruptly to the south, following the shoreline that opened up to the old harbor and the more middle-class homes that sat several hundred feet up from the road. The older houses were also surrounded by high walls, and the houses linked together by footpaths lined with red poppies. Since it was almost Easter, the houses wore fresh coats of whitewash, as did the benches and the stone paths. In startling contrast to those bright whites was the deep blue of the doors, gates, and wooden shutters—all painted in the same shade of ultramarine blue.

When Mike arrived, the restaurant favored by the foreigners and locals, including the carpenters from the shipyard, wouldn't have been open yet. Still, the island held rich memories for Mike, some of which would have included Helena.

Mike passed the shipyard and then into the harbor where there were twenty or so sailboats lined up, anchors off the bow and their sterns tied to the quay. Like sailboats everywhere, they were always making noise: jostling, dinging, whistling, clanging. A few fishermen in their small boats probably greeted him as they motored past already busy with the nets, bringing in their first catch of the day. Mike headed for the fuel dock. Luckily for him, no other boat was tied alongside it.

After he pulled into the dock, he ran forward and picked up a line, jumped over to the quay, and quickly tied *Thrush's* bow line around a tar-papered post. After more than sixty hours at sea alone, moving no faster than five miles an hour, eating little, and with no sustained sleep, Mike had just completed his second epic solo sail: three hundred some miles across the Aegean Sea, from east to west, in a 32-foot wooden sailboat that had a bad tendency to leak. He planned to continue west to Italy, but that was much more of a dream than a plan. In the end, here he was, back on Spetses, and a long, long way from the closest border.

The fuel dock was no more than one hundred yards from my house as

the crow flies, just across the coast road. If I'd been awake at that early hour, I could have shouted down to him. I would then have run across my patio, out the door onto the street, down the hill, around an empty lot, and then I would have hugged him. But I was asleep as he tied *Thrush* and walked up the hill to my house.

Mike, existing purely on adrenaline, as he could for days—a talent that would do him well as he raced around the world—surprised me that morning by walking into my bedroom and softly saying my name. At the time I was living with Peter, a German captain who ran a charter agency on the island, but he was already awake and gone. Mike found me alone.

"Hey, Julia." He watched me wake up.

"My god, Mike! What are you doing here?"

"Just decided to come."

"Really? That's great! I'll get up."

"I'll wait for you in the kitchen."

Seeing Mike so unexpectedly after several months filled me with a spontaneous joy. My big brother, my own personal hero, stood at my bedroom door. I never considered that he might be in trouble.

He pretended nothing was wrong, while he was actually running scared, processing a hundred things in his head, and continually imagining he heard the sound of a police motorbike. Later, I realized two things: I was remarkably blind to be unaware of his situation, and that he was remarkably good at playing it cool. Those few moments he stood in my bedroom summed up our lives at that point. Although this time he was really scared, I am sure he often stood before me seeming incredibly cool, while harboring great secrets that it would be better I knew nothing about. While I, on the other hand, was just blithely happy to see him.

The kitchen, the only other room in the house, led to a patio and garden overlooking the harbor. Mike wanted to keep an eye on his boat, so he stood near the small window next to the sink.

"It's great to see you. I can't believe it! Are you going to stay awhile? Do you want some coffee?"

"Yeah, sure."

I boiled water and stirred up two cups of Nescafé with an added dose of sweetened evaporated milk—fresh milk was either not available or very expensive. (Most of the expats only drank Greek coffee in the cafes.) I remember Mike hovering around the gas burner because it was directly under the window. His gaze kept returning to the harbor and *Thrush*. He was more subdued than usual—and nicer. He waited for me to do things, and he didn't seem to have something better to do than be there with me.

I took two big plastic bowls from the sink and put the kettle on to boil more water. I washed the dishes outside on the patio, filling one bowl with boiling water and liquid detergent and the other with water from the hose. Since we didn't own many dishes, we never had many to wash. I carried the dishes and bowls to the patio and went through my washing routine. During all this, Mike



said nothing and showed no signs of nervousness or impatience, nor did he give me any indication he was ready to throw himself over the wall the minute he heard sirens.

"Do you think Lambros would be awake?" he asked, standing at the end of the patio, watching his boat.

"Lambros? Why?"

"I need to put some gas in the boat."

Lambros, a handsome Greek in his thirties, owned the only fuel pump in the harbor. One of the wealthier islanders, he also owned the hardware and paint store, and he was one of the few locals we foreigners knew.

"Oh, okay. We can see. I know where he lives."

Only Lambros operated the pump, so unless you were a close friend you waited for him to appear at the station: a worn-down slab of concrete, twenty by twelve feet, along the water's edge with one gas pump that looked like it predated WWII. It was odd that Mike wanted to find Lambros, but I didn't think much of it as I set off on my mission.

I found Lambros, who readily opened and let Mike fill *Thrush's* fuel tank. Mike said he needed to move the boat across the harbor to anchor it out. The boats out there were often left for long periods—usually until their foreign owners returned. Back when Mike had lived on Spetses, he always just tied up to the pier. It didn't make sense to anchor out when the quay was so much more convenient, but I didn't ask any questions.

Mike moved the boat and set the anchor. While he stowed gear in the cockpit, I went below—the cabin looked better than I had ever seen it. The berths were covered with Turkish pillows, and there was a small watercolor of *Thrush* hanging on the cabin wall. When I emerged from my inspection we lowered the dinghy, and I climbed in. Mike got in behind me, holding something the shape and size of a brick wrapped in a dirty, brown towel—the same towel that only two years before had hung in the boy's bathroom in the house where we grew up. Mike sat on the dinghy thwart, placing the brick down between his legs, then stood quickly to push us away from *Thrush*.

He faced the stern of the dinghy as he rowed, watching *Thrush* fade from view—a strange crossing of time, as it ran forward and backward. I can imagine him looking at his world moving slowly away from him, literally and figuratively. And he didn't want to let it go. On the other hand, although he couldn't see anything, he was moving forward. If he had had only normal human abilities, his body would have shut down at least twenty-four hours ago. But Mike wasn't normal; once his adrenaline kicked in he could go for hours and hours doing what he needed to do, and this time he had more than enough motivation to keep pushing, desperate as he was to get out of there before the police showed up.

That was Mike's last view of what was probably the first love of his life: a beautiful boat that he abandoned to save his life. Classically proportioned, not too fat, not too thin, not too tall, not too short, thirty-two feet of beautifully crafted wood, some of it freshly painted blue or white, some of it shining with var-

nish, two masts, a three-foot bowsprit, a home on the water that moved with the wind. The seascape behind *Thrush* blurred so much that he could not have seen the two shipyards less than fifty feet away, each with the one or two unfinished boats sitting in their cradles. He could not see the dark, green land rising to the perfectly blue sky. The Aegean lay on the other side of this thin strip of land and stretched endlessly to the north and east. Mike would never see it again.

Looking at the brown bundle between his legs, I remember thinking that the towel from our parents' house was probably the only one he had, and it wasn't until much later that I realized the towel probably concealed the three kilos of hash the police had overlooked.

"Let's go to Larry's," he said. Larry was the handsome American whose dad had a house nearby.

Spetses didn't see a lot of crime. Although the island police held an important position, their role seemed limited to wearing snappy uniforms and driving large, black BMW motorbikes along the coast road between the two harbors—a distance of about a mile. The day after Mike returned to Spetses several police boats arrived from Athens and began aggressively patrolling the entrance to the old harbor as well as the waters between the island and the mainland.

This show of force was unusual for Spetses, the intrigue heightened because the search was not for a local, but an American. The Greeks straddled the dividing line between the Western countries and the Third World, so having an American potentially subject to their laws was a source of national pride. The story was featured on the front page of national newspapers for at least a week: "The American sailor Mike Plant, suspected drug smuggler, was on the run from the law and last seen on Spetses where his sister lives."

Mike was one of the "boat people," the community of sailors who lived in the old harbor and dressed like hippies—almost always unkempt, unwashed, underdressed, and usually barefoot. They wore odd clothes, which in Greece meant their clothes were not black. Local Greek women—whose body shapes were well hidden beneath their ample clothes—wore dark skirts falling just below their knees, thick stockings, and dark, bulky cardigans. Foreign women had exposed legs and arms and breasts, and according to the Greeks, were too skinny. Greek women pulled their hair back and often covered it with scarves or hats. Whereas the hippies were all hair—mixed colors, various shapes, long and straight, curly and uncontrolled, and the men never shaved. The locals had a term for us, *exenie*, which literally translates as "the ones from outside" (the root word is actually *xenos*, as in *xenophobia*), and we didn't stand a chance of blending in.

We rowed the dinghy to the outer harbor and pulled it up on the beach. Then we went off to find Larry's father's two-story house, which sat back from the coast road, guarded by a wall with ten-foot wooden doors. Once painted bright blue and operated by a large metal bar, the doors, faded and with hinges broken, lay discarded and damaged on the ground. Grand concrete stairs bordered by a stone wall led up to the second floor where Larry stayed in the short periods when he was there.

Mike knocked and turned to face me. "You wait out here." This seemed odd. Why did he want to keep me outside? What was I not supposed to see or hear?

Larry happened to be home; Mike returned a few minutes later.

The next few minutes are seared into my memory: I see Mike looking right at me, the door behind him, and the sun falling directly on him, slightly blurring his image in the glare.

"I'm on the run from the law."

Such a simple sentence—brief, easily understood—but those words changed the world around us forever. The old world stopped, frozen in place, and I saw it without me in it, like what some call an out of body experience. The world stood still, except for me; I could move, because I wasn't part of the real world anymore. An odd distance set in, my world turning into a film, Mike playing the outlaw. He was going to ask me to do something, and I worried whether or not I could act.

"I need someplace to hide," Mike finally said.

And then the moment broke.

"I know a place," I said, thinking of Lucy, an American who didn't live in the harbor but farther inland on the road to the hills at the center of the island. At that moment I needed all my concentration just to walk the quarter mile to Lucy's. Mike was no doubt spotted during that walk; he was easily visible from the second stories of the houses we passed.

Just before we rounded the corner to Lucy's house, Mike stopped. "I'll need money—foreign money. Dollars. Get me some money."

Sent on another mission, I started to turn back when Mike added two things. "Don't tell Mom and Dad," and "I'll kill myself if they catch me."

Lucy, in her late twenties, had separated from her husband about a year earlier. She'd been on the island for at least a year homeschooling her two children, Nick and Caroline. She was one of the few foreigners who had nothing to do with sailing, and she didn't live in the old harbor. Tall, with naturally streaked long brown hair, she exuded confidence. We were quite close on and off, and I never saw her even remotely stressed. She was a perfect person to provide cover for Mike. Her courtyard was on the other side of the house, more or less invisible from the road, and Lucy always kept it neat and welcoming. When the weather was nice the kids did their schoolwork at the table under the vines that covered the courtyard. They looked up when they saw Mike. The kids remembered him from the previous winter, and they were excited to see him, as was Lucy.

"Hey, Mike! You're back! When did you get in?"

"Just this morning."

"Really? So, how's it been? How was Rhodes?"

"Good."

The kids said hi, too.

"Hey, Caroline, Nick," Mike added, "you guys have grown." He then turned back to Lucy. "Can I talk to you inside?"

"Sure."

Lucy lived on a shoestring in a one-room house with a small loft. On one side of the room was a table painted dark blue, a couple of wooden chairs, a gas burner, and a neat stack of dishes next to the sink. They sat down at the table and Mike told Lucy his story. It didn't take long for Mike to summarize the last

few days, and Lucy was very familiar with the current situation regarding drugs in Greece.

Greece, and more so Turkey, had a fair amount of drug dealing among their own citizens, and heroin was actually surprisingly prevalent among the wealthy in both countries. But as a generalization, alcohol was the broadly used drug among the Greeks, and for the Turks hash was the drug of choice. Turkey's acceptance of hash, however, did not include foreigners who traded in it, so in that way the countries were alike. Foreigners convicted of dealing hash in Turkey and Greece received long prison sentences, and prison conditions in those countries were much worse than they were in American prisons—torture was commonplace.

*Midnight Express*, the movie released in 1978 based on a book of the same name, depicted the aftermath for a young American arrested in Istanbul carrying a minimal amount of hashish. He was sentenced to many years. The movie portrayed life inside a Turkish prison as about as bad as it could get, and showed torture as a standard method of control. Later, after he left Greece, Mike remarked that the movie “scared the shit” out of him. The experiences of the fictional American prisoner could have been his.

Lucy knew immediately that Mike's situation was serious—very serious. And luckily for him, she never doubted herself, never second guessed, but just acted and knew she was right. She had some oversize cardboard boxes in the loft, and Mike spent the rest of the day hiding in one of them.

The police showed up within the hour looking for him. Lucy and Caroline knew how to respond when the police asked them if they had seen Mike, but Nick, only 6, hadn't been coached. He said yes when the police questioned him, but his sister kicked him under the table while Lucy blurted that Nick thought they meant another Mike, someone else who lived on a boat in the harbor. The police entered Lucy's house, looked around, and since there was just the one room it didn't take long. They didn't bother to search the loft.

Lucy lived with the American sailor Bill, who arrived home later. A cross between a motorcycle guy and a hippie, but more macho than anything else, Bill was the one who joined us on the trip to Hydra the winter before. In his mid-twenties, he'd been in Greece for a couple of years working as a skipper on charter boats. He was probably the best choice to help Mike, because Bill disliked the police and had never made the slightest effort to adapt to Greek culture. Fearless, he loved the idea of helping a friend.

Just after dark, Bill led Mike up into the hills in the center of the island where pine trees alternated with open swaths of small rocks and underbrush. Except for the occasional bird hunter, the locals rarely used the several paths that crisscrossed the woods. Since cars were not allowed on Spetses, to reach the other side of the island locals took boats, rode motorbikes on the narrow road, or occasionally rode in horse drawn carriages.

After reaching the top, he led Mike along the ridge on an overgrown path until they found a well-hidden spot. The next day, Bill, making sure he wasn't followed, brought Mike water, food, cigarettes, and matches. Mike spent his time

digging a hole to hide in, and later joked that he dug his own grave. He believed the police wouldn't think to search the hills, so he felt fairly safe.

Mike had left me with the mission to find foreign money. I knew only one person who had American dollars, but unlike my experienced brother, I didn't think to use back roads to stay out of sight. I went down to the main road, and within minutes, Panayiotis, the Spetses customs officer, pulled up on his motorcycle. He asked where I was going and where my brother was. I told him I was on my way to buy yogurt for breakfast, and that Mike had gone swimming, even though the water was still frigid at that time of the year, and Mike wasn't much of a swimmer.

Panayiotis said we could wait together for my brother. He accompanied me to the corner café where I bought my yogurt, and then we walked back to my house to wait for Mike. Since the customs officer spoke no English, and I had stretched my Greek as far as it could go, we sat in silence. A few other officers arrived, and together we all waited. It struck me as strange that they believed Mike had gone swimming and would return at any moment. But word travels fast on a small island, and before long a woman telephoned the customs office to say she had seen Mike.

Fear of the police forged a bond among the foreigners in the old harbor. Each of them became paranoid, or full of creative escape plans, or something in between. One by one, the police brought in Lucy, Bill, Larry, me, and a few others for questioning, and for the next two days, two officers never left the vicinity of my house. I looked so stressed that my boyfriend, Peter, thought it best for me to leave the island, even the country, so the police couldn't question me again. I had a friend in Jerusalem who had just left Spetses, so I arranged to stay with her. The police trailed me when I got off the boat in Piraeus to the apartment in Athens where I spent the night. The next day I didn't spot them, so I went straight to the airport, passed through customs, and got on my flight.

Mike never was a patient person, so after two days and nights sitting in his hand-dug hiding spot, he decided to get off the island. He waited until dark and then worked his way down to the village, following the path past Lucy's house. Standing under her window, he threw pebbles to wake her. He wanted to thank them and let them know he was going away. Then he disappeared.

It was a half mile or less from there to the harbor, but Mike had two tense moments along the way. Tom Gannon, who interviewed Mike several years later, gleaned Mike's account of this harrowing escape:

"I had a few close calls—one with a local and one with an authority. I had to go through town to get to the water. I was a little bit lost coming down the street, and suddenly there was this motorbike. I stopped and put my back against the wall. The strangest thing happened: as he came by, he slowed down and looked right at me. He shouldn't have known I was there, but he somehow did. I knew the guy, and then he recognized me. He worked in the hardware store. There was no reason in the world for him to turn me in. We were even kind of friends. He kept going, but I couldn't trust him. I couldn't trust anyone.

“Then it happened again. I heard a motorbike coming from quite a ways away. About a half block from the water, the bike stopped. It was the police. I wasn’t on the road; I was on the path. The guy parked the bike and came in my direction. He already had a gun drawn. I didn’t know if I should run because I didn’t want to attract attention, so I just froze against the wall on the corner of the building. He was between the houses, and I thought, ‘Oh, fuck.’ That was too close, but he kept going up a couple more houses. I don’t know if the two incidents were related, but they could have been.”

Mike knew that the distance from the island to the mainland might be farther than he could swim, and he knew how cold the sea was in April. So instead of swimming he hoped he’d find a dinghy at the shore or in the harbor. Sure enough, he found his own dinghy right on the beach where we’d left it when we’d rowed away from *Thrush*.

The two patrol boats were still out there, shining bright searchlights across the water, waiting for Mike to appear in a dinghy or on a sailboat motoring out of the harbor as a stowaway. Around two in the morning, Mike pushed the dinghy away from the rocks, climbed in over the gunnels, and rowed across the harbor. It must have been torture listening to every dip of the oars, but no one saw him, and he continued to row across the distance of about a mile of sea that separated Spetses from the Peloponnesian coast.

Once on the mainland—where there was no one and nothing but thick undergrowth—he spent the next day hiding in the bushes, walking on and off the dirt road, and waiting for dark before approaching a town. Many years later when he checked a map, he calculated that he had covered forty-five miles in one night (this seems farfetched—but he insisted). It made him think of his time with the Indians in the Andes, watching with awe as they walked a steady seven miles an hour.

The next morning he felt he was far enough inland to catch a bus in one of the towns without anyone noticing him. He didn’t want to stand too long near the bus stop, so he circled the town until the bus came. The passengers looked at him but only because they always looked at foreigners. They probably noted he didn’t seem clean—definitely unkempt, like foreigners were—and that he wasn’t carrying a bag or a backpack, which was unusual. But although Greek villagers may stare at and think uncomplimentary things about strangers, they remain hospitable and accept just about anything.

The bus took him to Piraeus, the main harbor in Athens, and he found his way to the yacht harbor to look for anyone he knew, hoping to get a passport and make his way north to the Yugoslavian border. He had no money, but he thought he could borrow enough to pay for bus fare to the border. A passport would cost around fine hundred dollars, however, and no one he knew had that kind of money.

Peter, my boyfriend, provided a crucial link in the chain of events that got Mike out of Greece. Certain people react well in an emergency, treating the situation no differently than having dinner with friends. Other people, including me, stop functioning—our brains seize up and fear overwhelms us. It’s easy to



spot the difference between the two types. Peter—a street-smart businessman and a skipper, accustomed to the occasional dangerous situation—reacted well. He took the five-hour ferry ride from Spetses to Piraeus, where a police car then followed his taxi. When he recounted the story later, he laughed about how easy it was to lose the police. Once he had dumped them, he then passed the money to a friend, easily and casually handing her the money as they had prearranged to do while passing each other crossing a street. Then his friend took the money to Mike, who was hiding on one of the foreign sailboats in the harbor.

Mike was lucky again: the police searched the foreign boats in the harbor, but they somehow didn't find him. I later tracked down a friend of Mike's and mine who was living on a boat in the harbor at the time, and she told me that when he appeared on her boat, he was unrecognizable, and scared the shit out of her. She thought he was a homeless person. She took him below, shaved him, cut his hair, gave him some of her boyfriend's clothes, all the money she could find onboard, and told him to go. He moved between boats during the search, disappearing just as the police came on board. He could never have done this without the help of his friends who were all risking consequences, including extradition—meaning they'd be thrown out of the country if they were caught with Mike. This posed a serious threat.

Most people never thought twice about helping Mike—he'd long been able to instill that kind of loyalty in others. Perhaps it was because he would not hesitate too long before asking for help. When it was a critical request, the friend felt honored to be asked, pleased by Mike's trust and faith in his capabilities. It's human nature to feel a quick intimacy with someone you have helped. You have come through in a time of need, and consequently, the person who is helped has depended on you, even if only for a moment.

Once he got the money and escaped detection on a foreign boat, the waiting game began. Although he finally had money to buy a passport, he still had to find one, and it had to be someone who looked like him, since no one he knew had the skills to alter a passport to fit a client. An American who sailed in a few days later initially agreed to help Mike escape on his boat, but he kept changing his mind. Mike was going crazy.

The packed harbor had more boats than it was designed to hold, with no space between the boats. The water between and around them was black with patches of oil or floating debris, and probably filled with sewage. He couldn't even see the ocean, because the high stone pier that separated the harbor from the sea blocked the view. The only other view was of the street and the row of cheap restaurants that lined the far side.

Piraeus was always busy, flooded with street traffic that included buses, cars, trucks, taxis, and pedestrians. Trucks spewed thick, black exhaust that over the years had turned the sky grey and coated everything with a layer of grime. There was nothing to recommend Piraeus to any visitor. Mike, who hated cities, hated Piraeus even more. He saw it only as a trap. Finally, with the money that Peter had given him, he found an American willing to sell his passport, and after three long weeks of waiting he had a way to get out.

Freshly shaved and showered, with the fake passport tucked inside his

jacket, a spare pair of jeans and a shirt in a bag over his shoulder, Mike rode the subway to the bus station and bought a one-way ticket to what was then Yugoslavia. At the border, the driver collected everyone's passport for the guards to check. When the guard called out Mike's new name, Mike didn't respond. It took a few seconds, though it seemed longer, before Mike made the connection with the name that now belonged to him. But they never questioned him. He crossed into Yugoslavia, and from there made his way to Ireland. He went to the American Embassy there to report that he had lost his passport. They let him call our parents, who wired him money to fly home.

Mike was definitely lucky to escape standing trial with the three foreigners who were arrested when he bolted. They were accused of "buying, importing, stocking, having in possession, and selling narcotics." In their trial in an Athens court in August, 1975, Mike had been tried along with them in absentia. Two of the foreigners, the Austrian and the American arrested in Piraeus with hash in their luggage, stated during their trial they'd been forced by the police to change their original statement. Initially, when they were arrested and questioned, they told the police they had used *Mistle Thrush* to bring the hash from Bodrum to Symi. The boat belonged to Mike Plant, but he was not aware that they were using him to smuggle drugs.

These individuals changed this statement only after the police promised them their freedom if they could name anyone who had helped them. In their second statement they told the police that Mike had been a partner whose cut was three kilos, which he had hidden on his boat. (After Mike left *Thrush* on Spetses, the customs police searched the boat again, and they still came up empty handed. My best guess is that Mike had wrapped it in the brown towel he was carrying when he left the boat.)

Unfortunately for the smugglers, their second statement got them no closer to freedom, and they were found guilty. In essence, the police lied to these three foreigners, so pointing the finger at Mike did them no good. The Austrian was sentenced to seventeen years, the American eleven, and the Scotsman, who had been arrested on Symi after the first two, was given fourteen years. The issue for Mike's arrest was never dropped, intentionally or unintentionally, so until he found out otherwise, he remained wanted by the Greek government for drug-smuggling.

## Minnesota, Colorado, the Caribbean, and Newport, Rhode Island, 1975–1983

*“He was about 25, and he really bucked up. He had a routine which included getting up every day at 8 a.m. It was like boot camp and you’d get up or he’d kick you out of bed.”*

—CHARLES DOBSON

FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS, Mike had owned, lived on, and sailed a classic wooden sailboat on some of the most beautiful waters in the world. Then he lost it all and became worse off than ever—in addition to everything else, he was without a legitimate passport. The one item essential to world travel was gone, and he had no idea when, or if ever, he would get it back. It had taken him surprisingly little time to lose so much. He was 24, living at home, landlocked by two thousand miles, broke, unemployed, with no college degree, and depending on friends for beer money. He did come home with a story to tell, but like many of his stories, he only dropped a few hints and never really shared the whole thing with anyone. So that part of his life would remain a mystery, although it eventually came back and threatened to destroy him all over again.

One morning not too long after his return, Mom opened the front door to find Mike sleeping off the previous night’s drinks, naked from the waist down. As he lay on the steps of his childhood home he could have been a broken man, but it didn’t take long for him to get back in the race.

Mike started working with a neighborhood friend who advertised himself as a handyman. Mike’s job qualifications did not look great on paper, but he always was happy to fix things. Within a few months, he hooked up with another old friend—the same guy who had been his crew one summer when he was racing the X boat. They started a painting business called the “Fine Line,” and pretty soon they had work. Ironically, Mike said more than once that learning how to paint houses was the only good thing he got out of George Junior. Managing the business, finding work, submitting bids, and as the business increased telling his crew what to do, came naturally to him.

I stayed in Greece for another three years, until the spring of 1978, but I

flew home twice for a few weeks at the ends of 1975 and 1976. Both times I spent a great deal of time with Mike. He wasn't living at home when I visited. With money made from painting houses (interiors once the weather got too cold for exterior painting), he was able to make a down payment of \$3,000 on a \$16,000 house he was sharing with friends.

Charlie Dobson, who worked with Mike and lived with him on and off, described that first house. "That place was unbelievable . . . The water pump used to go off all the time . . . There was this trap door in the kitchen and you'd go down . . . This place was so old, and I don't know what Mike did down there, but he'd throw stuff around and the water pump would come on, and it sounded like an oil pump. It was a pretty amazing piece of machinery."

Mike had become good friends with a realtor, Ted H., an odd but loveable guy who was devoted to Mike. In fact, after Mike died, Ted had a daughter who he named "Michele" after Mike. Working with Ted, Mike made some pretty good deals buying and selling houses. He sold the \$16,000 house a year later for \$35,000—a big jumpstart to his income. Again working with Ted, he bought a house for \$26,000 and then sold it for \$45,000. This house had a problem with the plumbing, and to fix it Mike hand dug into the ground about eight feet with a shovel.

"The city inspector came and told Mike he had to dig it up again," Ted said, "and then get a permit." The inspector said he'd have to watch Mike do the digging. "If I'd been Mike, I would have hit the roof. I would have gone crazy, but that was one of the things I liked about Mike, he had character and he just took it like a man. He didn't yell and whine and complain, he just said I got to do it again. And this was no easy deal. The hole was eight feet deep, ten feet long, and four feet wide."

For the two weeks I was home, Mike would arrive, always after dark, at the backdoor of my parents' house, his truck parked on the ice that covered the lake. He enjoyed the openness and freedom of driving on the frozen lake—no stop signs, no blind corners, no speed limits, and usually, no one else out there. Generally, by about Christmastime the lake had frozen over enough to support a pickup truck, so if Mike could get home via the lake he would choose it any day over the land. His painting partner told me that during the summer Mike bought a secondhand, small, wooden speed boat, a Chris Craft, one of the more beautiful powerboats ever made. Whenever he could get to the job by lake, he took the boat.

Charlie Dobson got to know Mike better than most people. They grew up in similar ways: wealthy families, private school, switched to public school, and made their best friends with the less well off neighborhood kids. Charlie, unlike Mike, never lost his temper and got along with just about anybody. He was three or four years younger than Mike and had grown up knowing him as a hockey star. The summer of 1976, Charlie was home and unemployed and asked Mike for a job. They wound up sharing a house. Having grown fond of Mike, he spoke with me at length about him:

"Mike was one of the few people I knew who actually had long term visions



*Mike working on a remodeling job, Minnesota, late 1970s.*

and realized there were certain things he had to do to get to them, and he was very driven. Mike didn't talk about stuff much, but he seemed pretty interested in getting back to the mountains [Colorado]. He was about 25, and he really bucked up. He had a routine which included getting up every day at 8 a.m. It was like boot camp and you'd get up or he'd kick you out of bed. I lived with him one summer, and you'd go down to some greasy spoon and eat eggs and hash browns, and that was all he cared about. He didn't really eat much for the rest of the day. At about eleven thirty we were clamoring for lunch because we didn't take breaks—breaks were not allowed. We got used to it, but at eleven thirty we were getting hungry, and you'd almost have to force a mutiny to get to lunch. Move your own ladder, buster, we're going to lunch. When he was busy like that he didn't have time to eat, and he didn't have patience for people who needed to eat lunch."

Mike inspired Charlie's work ethic. "Nobody worked harder than Mike. I learned a lot about that just by spending those three or four summers with him. I certainly came into that relationship without any skills as far as painting. [On my first day working for Mike] I thought I was doing just fine, and he just lit into me. 'What do you call that? That's not painting!' But he was patient because he could have just said, 'Get out.' But he didn't, and I learned quickly."

When he wasn't painting Mike was making money in other ways. One weekend he and a friend drove eight hours to a place in northern Minnesota to dismantle an abandoned cabin. They'd already sold it to someone in Minneapolis and promised to assemble it for the new owner. They drove all night and then spent the next day dismantling the cabin that had been built at least one hundred years ago by a Scandinavian pioneer who had traveled halfway around the world to make his home in the wilds of northern Minnesota. They carefully labeled the parts to make it easier to reassemble, but when they arrived at the new

owner's lot, their labeling system didn't help—it took several attempts before they recreated the cabin.

Another scheme involved a friend who claimed to be at least half Native American. According to other people who knew Jimmy, he claimed a lot of stuff, but mostly, they told me, he was crazy—scary crazy. Jimmy had convinced Mike that he knew an easy way to make money. It involved driving to northern Canada, right up to the Arctic Circle—so far north it was only accessible by truck or car in the winter. It was almost Christmas, so this was a good time to drive. The rest of the year it was an amalgam of water, swamp, and wooded islands.

Jimmy had a cabin way up north that he visited in the summer, and he had made friends with some Native Americans who lived there year-round. Since Jimmy's cabin wasn't winterized they spent the night in the car with the engine on to keep warm. At dawn they set off on snowshoes to reach the Indian reservation to see Jimmy's friends, arriving just as Santa Claus rode in on a snowmobile the size of a big tractor. Once the snowmobile came to a stop, the inebriated Santa stood up and fell flat on his face in front of the eagerly waiting children.

Earlier, Jimmy had explained to Mike that the Native Americans hunted wolves and sold their skins for relatively little money. Jimmy and Mike could buy these skins and make a big profit by smuggling them across the border into the States, where they'd pay a seamstress Jimmy knew to sew them into coats. Then they'd sell the coats to pimps in Chicago, who, Jimmy claimed, loved fur coats. Mike believed it all.

Jimmy and Mike never found any skins to buy, and after several weeks their truck wouldn't start so they caught the one bus heading south, which took them all the way to the U.S. border. Jimmy really liked Mike, describing him as "a guy with balls as big as grapefruit."

At some point in 1976, Mike met Sara, his future wife. She was four years younger than him, and they knew each other vaguely through common high school friends. Sara had thick, long, brown hair, and matching big brown eyes. Short and lean with the look of an athlete, physically she was a good fit for Mike. I met Sara on my second visit home at the end of 1976.

When I hung out with Mike and his girlfriends I usually had a good time, and I became good friends with two of them: Cynthia from Excelsior and Helena from Greece. Sara and I, though, never seemed to have anything to say to each other, and I certainly never imagined she and Mike would get married. Their relationship didn't strike me as particularly important.

Charlie Dobson described a typical routine that Mike and his friends had after work, starting with going to the Excelsior Muni. Rocky, one of Mike's best friends who later died in a house fire, teased Mike unmercifully about falling for Sara. Mike bit the bait every time, and he'd get really steamed up. "Rocky just loved it," Charlie said with a laugh. "And a couple of times he used to sing Mike that Elvin Bishop song, 'You Fooled Around and Fell in Love.'" Apparently Rocky would start singing that and Mike would drop whatever he was doing and take off after him. Luckily for Rocky, Mike never caught him.

In June 1978, I moved back to Minnesota with my boyfriend, another Peter,



and our dog. Peter was English, but we had met in Greece, fallen in love, and after living together for six months decided it was time to leave Greece. We flew to London with all of our belongings, moving in with a generous friend of his. After a few months traveling around England and Ireland, we decided to go to Minnesota.

Peter was initially denied the visa he needed to travel to the States. A travel agent friend offered to sell him a roundtrip ticket for the price of a one-way, and with a copy of this roundtrip ticket as proof of his intent to return to England, the American Embassy issued him a three-month travel visa.

Peter was anxious to meet Mike. The two of them came from different worlds, both genetically and socially, but they were similar enough that they could spend a lot of time together. A product of a British boarding school and with a degree from Oxford, Peter had one of the best academic educations in the world. He also had an adventurous spirit, and like many Englishmen before him, wanted to be as far away from England as possible—Minnesota was pretty far. Mike didn't join the family crowd that met us at the airport, instead showing up after dark at my parents' house with a few beers in him.

The three of us sat at the kitchen table drinking Budweiser, and Mike suggested we go for a ride in the powerboat. As usual, he drove fast. It was a moonless (summer) night and completely dark, so unless you had driven across the lake a hundred times, like Mike and I had, you had no idea what was more than twenty feet in front of you. Mosquitoes were dying by the hundreds as they smashed up against the boat's windscreen.

So this is the picture: Mike, standing, with his right hand on the steering wheel, a beer in the other hand, trying to light a cigarette while looking at us. I was in the other seat enjoying the ride. Peter, standing between us and hanging onto the top of the windshield, was pretty certain he was about to die, which is more or less how he felt during most evenings spent with Mike. But Mike was always welcoming. He quickly found Peter a job working for a friend who owned a landscaping business.

So Peter, an Englishman, went from Oxford to the driveways and backyards of suburban Minneapolis; for eight hours a day he earned minimum wage piling large stones, better described as boulders, on top of each other in ninety-degree temperatures and 100 percent humidity. But it was a job and he was an illegal, and he liked proving he could do the manual work. After that job he worked for a friend of Mike's in the remodeling business.

I had hopes of becoming a playwright, so I sat at a beautifully made secretary that once belonged to my grandmother. For what seemed like hours, while not writing much, I stared at the land that had once been the old street car line that ran from downtown Minneapolis out to the lake. The tracks had been torn up when the company closed in the 1940s. The small, wooden house that Peter and I had rented sat on the track-turned-footpath—a thickly wooded path that ended less than two miles away at my parents' house. I made no progress toward my goal of writing a play, eventually realizing that sitting at a desk with nothing to write was not a good way to spend my time. I started busing tables at

the Lincoln Del, or what we in Minnesota described as the “Jewish restaurant,” because it served corned beef sandwiches on rye bread with pickles.

Peter had been unable to extend his visa beyond the original three months. If married he’d be granted a permanent visa, and since I couldn’t imagine a day when I would not want to be with my soon-to-be-husband, we were wed in my parents’ backyard. It was mid-October, which in Minnesota could mean anything in terms of weather. My mom, who was and still is always prepared, had reserved a giant tent. We awoke on my wedding day to a dusting of snow on the lawn, so the clear plastic walls of the tent were unrolled, creating a warm, outdoor elegance. As I walked down the aisle my vision held a blurry view of the lake less than twenty feet away. After the ceremony we sat at a long, U-shaped, linen covered table decorated with china plates, drinking endless champagne from elegantly shaped glasses served quietly by the ever-ready staff of waiters.

That same summer Mike lived in a trailer parked on an acre of land in Minnetrista, a distant suburb of Minneapolis. He had recently bought the land—for \$27,000—which included a twelve hundred square foot garage. The previous owner had bought the land with intentions to build, but a divorce changed those plans. It was a perfect property for Mike to build his first house; a house he built with the intention of selling quickly. One day Peter and I drove there to find Mike busy building a fence along the property line. He immediately handed the auger to Peter, who happily spent the rest of the day digging post holes.

Mike’s fulltime work running his painting business didn’t allow time for house building, so he asked his friend, Dan H., to come to Minnesota to help frame up the house. Mike and Dan knew each other from the mid-1960s when they were both sophomores at Minnetonka High School, the local public school Mike had attended briefly. As Dan put it, “Mike and I both seemed to have a problem with authority figures, especially those we had to deal with in high school. If your family was more affluent, you went to George Junior. If not, you quit school and went your own way. My way ended up being the Hennepin County workhouse. Mike and I looked at our experiences the same way: that being good or bad, you took what you could from them.

“His way of saying the same thing may have been when we were sailing the Atlantic in 1983. We’d had six days of forty-foot seas, foul-weather gear, and granola bars, and when Mike took his watch he said, ‘I’ve always had to pay for my experiences.’ ”

After George Junior, Mike and Dan drove to Colorado together in a 1959 Chevy they’d bought in Minneapolis for sixty dollars. According to Dan, he and Mike traveled across South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and into Colorado without so much as an oil change. After a month of driving, they left the car in a no parking zone too long, and it was confiscated by the authorities.

Dan and Mike had been in and out of each other’s lives ever since. In 1973, when the crowd gathered in front of Danceland, Dan climbed the rollercoaster to get a better look. They were together more than a couple of times in Colorado, and during that time Dan gave him a new nickname. Instead of Bucko, he called him “Kelo,” which, as Dan put it, “obviously referred to another form of travel.”

When Dan and Mike worked construction together Mike earned himself a third nickname: “Buckwheat.”

Dan was working in San Diego when Mike asked him to frame the house in Minnetrista. Dan suggested bringing another guy too so the two of them could frame the house. Mike bought them plane tickets, paid them a salary, and the house took shape. With its split-level design, the new house fit well in the Minnesota farmland; flat with a very gentle hill at one end, the house lines followed the curve of the hill, with the lower level tucked into the slope. Mike was keen on new ways to heat homes, so he designed the house for solar heat, providing almost every room at least a partial southern exposure. The significant insulation in the walls meant most parts of the house stayed warm long after the heat was turned off. The enormous kitchen ran the width of the house, with glass sliding doors on all sides leading out to a wooden deck. Mike equipped the house with the latest appliances, learning the wiring and plumbing needed to install them mostly from books checked out of the local library—the same way he learned to build boats.

About six months after I’d moved to Minnesota, having abandoned playwriting, I went back to school at the University of Minnesota. After one quarter I knew I wanted to study art history. I took as many art history classes as I could, studied all the time, and was an A student.

It’s ironic that I had been in Greece, walking up and down the Acropolis selling prints to visitors of the Parthenon; I had traveled to Ephesus, Mycenae, Knossos, Santorini, Delphi, and many other ancient sites, and never really seen anything. I had only visited them because whichever companion I was with wanted to see them. At that time in my life those places were not much more than words difficult to pronounce correctly. Now I was back in Minnesota, almost halfway around the world from Greece, learning about the world I had completely ignored. Such are the hard lessons of youth.

Although both of us still lived in Minnesota, Mike and I saw each other less and less. I had my own circle of friends, and he had his. One summer night in 1979, when my husband and I were still living in the little wooden house built on the old streetcar tracks, we gave a party. Mike arrived with a group of friends, most of whom I knew, and we played badminton in the yard, listened to music, and drank a lot of beer.

Long after midnight, I set up a slide projector to show slides of French nineteenth century paintings on the outside wall of our house. The crowd favorite was *La Grande Odalisque* by Ingres. Wearing a large, light-green scarf with an abstract orange design, wrapped twice around my body and tied in a knot at the top, I talked passionately about the images, and what I had learned in my art history classes. I was inspired by my audience’s enthusiasm. By this time at night the crowd was mostly Mike’s friends, and we were all heavily liquored, but their encouragement was a force that stayed with me—eventually, I went on to give many public lectures in my chosen field.

Sometime in 1979, Mike and I had a bizarre conversation sitting outside at a breakfast joint across the street from Lake Minnetonka, not too far away from his house in Minnetrista. Out of the blue, Mike announced that he was going to

marry Sara. Mike knew that Sara and I were not friends, and we had only become increasingly angry at each other. She accused me of lying, and I accused her of the same. The worst for me was that although I insisted she had lied about something or other, Mike never challenged her on it. He knew we were fighting over his loyalty, and if anything he was amused by it.

That morning, over eggs and bacon, he explained he wanted to marry her because she was due to inherit a lot of money. I thought he was joking. Since when did anybody marry for money? I naively thought people I knew just didn't do that kind of thing. When I realized he was serious about marrying Sara, I told him he was crazy and the marriage wouldn't work.

With hindsight, I was the crazy one, because I refused to understand that money always was and would be integral to any marriage. Mike's attitude was no different than most—except he was admitting it. Mike was a realist: for him, getting married was just one part of his future. Other things, like love, were important too, but love didn't buy sailboats, and buying a sailboat was becoming the motivation behind everything he did.

Ultimately, Mike didn't marry Sara just for her money; I think he pictured a fine life with her. She was pretty, easy to be with, and liked drinking and getting rowdy. They had friends in common and grew up near each other, attending the same high school. She had not grown up sailing, but anybody could learn, so that wasn't a problem. She was practical about money, and already had a job as a dental hygienist. She showed every indication that she could and would take care of herself financially if she had to.

From Mike's point of view, the money just made the arrangement better. Anticipating her inheritance coming sooner rather than later would mean he could buy a boat sooner rather than later. He wasn't thinking, "I'll buy a boat and leave Sara behind." But rather, "We'll buy a boat and go from there." Did Sara want to buy a sailboat and go off and live on it somewhere? Well, he figured she'd find out when they had the boat.

I never learned how much money Mike was talking about. He never said much about anything, and this was as true of this part of his life as it was for everything else. I heard that the money never came his way because Sara's grandfather, the source of the inheritance, suspected Mike's intentions and stipulated in his will that none of the money would go to Mike, regardless of his marriage to Sara.

Many years ago, I asked Sara if I could interview her for the book, and she said no. Not too long ago I asked again, and she agreed to write a summary of their time together and sent me a couple of paragraphs that helped me reconstruct the timeline of their relationship and marriage. She recalled her time with Mike, "At the best, challenging, exciting, along with demanding, confusing. I think frustrating comes to mind . . . But something kept us together."

Mike began thinking about moving on from Minnesota. He told a friend, "It's over here," meaning the housing boom. Mike was right. Property prices had leveled off. Interest rates went sky high. As the friend put it, "Mike was a lot smarter than a lot of people. He was right on the money."

In the summer of 1980, Mike and Sara moved to Colorado and built a one-room cabin at Hoosier Pass, which sits on the continental divide twelve thousand feet above sea level. A short but steep driveway led off the road up to their cabin, and even without any snow or ice, the driveway was a challenge. Standing at the cabin's front entry, you could see all of Dillon Lake, the largest lake around, surrounded by four ski resorts. The one time I visited, Mike stood proudly at the open cabin door holding one of our grandfather's guns, one of the few possessions smaller than a boat that Mike treasured.

In September, they came back to Minnesota to get married. They had a small, fairly traditional wedding in a church near Sara's home. Both sets of parents were there, and although friendly they rarely saw each other after the wedding. Mike's friends and some of his family wondered if he would show up drunk, but he didn't. The ceremony was short, followed by a much longer, casual reception held at my parents' country club in a small building down the hill from the large, formal club. Most of the guests were in their twenties, from Excelsior. We dined on sandwiches and drank plenty of beer—all of it video recorded on grainy film showing closeups of friends wishing the couple the best.

After the wedding, Mike and Sara returned to Colorado, this time settling in Vail. Mike again asked Dan for his help, explaining he wanted to build a house in Edwards, Colorado, a small town near Vail. Since Mike couldn't pay Dan much, they agreed on a lump sum, working day into night, seven days a week, building a house that his friends thought he planned to live in, i.e., not a spec house (a house built to sell). But, as Sara later described it, the house became his key to *Wind Song*, the sailboat he bought soon after moving in. She said, "It was also about the time I knew that our time together would not last, and that we were both moving in different directions in our lives."

*Wind Song* was moored on Lake Superior in northern Minnesota. The week before Mike went to close the deal, the whole Plant family was home occasioned by my Dad's invitation. Dad knew a therapist who had written a book about family therapy, and she'd recently had a two-day session with a family he knew quite well. That prompted Dad to ask each of us to come home and participate in a weekend-long family therapy session in August 1982.

Over the years, Dad had talked about group therapy and the families he knew who had successfully done this kind of work. He wanted us to give it a try. I don't remember thinking the family was falling apart, but he must have convinced me how helpful it would be, so I agreed to come.

Ironically, my dad was never interested in psychiatry for himself, even while in treatment for depression at Menninger's, where he avoided self-analysis, choosing instead to focus on the problems of other patients. He was a smart man, clever at presenting himself as the helper rather than exposing his own insecurities. His version of self-analysis was prayer. By 60 he became interested in several new forms of therapy.

That summer of 1982, I was about to start my second year of graduate school at Columbia but flew home for a week. Mike had been in Colorado for about two years, but was stopping home on his way to look at *Wind Song* on

Lake Superior. My sister and younger brother lived close to home, and my oldest brother, Hugh, lived in Utah. So for that weekend, Hugh, Mike, and I all stayed at our parents' home.

Our therapy session was scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, and when Sharon, the therapist, arrived at my parents' house early on Saturday morning, Tom and Linda were already there. Instructed that we could sit wherever we wanted within a circle in the living room, I sat on the right side of the sofa facing the lake. Sharon sat in a straight-backed chair to my right, and then counter-clockwise sat Hugh, Tom, and Mike, all in straight-backed chairs. Linda sat in a stuffed chair, next was my dad, and then to complete the circle my mom sat on the left side of the sofa next to me.

It was typical of me to be on the sofa, because I always went straight to the most comfortable seat and usually tucked my right leg underneath me. From my vantage point, we all looked awkward and apprehensive, wishing we were anywhere else, except for Dad, who looked open and hopeful.

Sharon started by asking us to tell the group about our relationships with the other members of the family, including a short summary of our lives since leaving home. Looking back, I'm assuming my parents were not included in this activity. It was Linda who first mentioned Dad's fixed ideas about us. As she remembers it, Mike, who had been completely silent, surprised everyone when he looked at her and asked, "Why don't you just say it? Just say that he's a son of a bitch."

With that, Sharon closed Saturday's session, perhaps to protect Dad. He'd hired Sharon to help bring his children closer together, not to unleash their anger at him. But if she came into that weekend with this kind of thinking, she wouldn't accomplish much. As it was, Mike—probably the most private of us all and possibly the only one who could have said anything really insightful—never got much of a chance beyond that one utterance.

As far as we knew, no rules applied between sessions, so Hugh, Tom, Mike, and I went out for a few drinks. I had at least one too many, because I woke up with a hangover. My sister didn't join us, as she'd never been much of a drinker and was the only one who had children. The youngest of her three boys was a little more than a year old.

Sunday's session started mid-morning with the same seating arrangements, and right off the bat Sharon announced, looking at Mike, that she wouldn't work with anyone under the influence of alcohol or any other drug. It was against the rules. (Like I said earlier, no one had said anything about rules.)

My jaw literally dropped, and I blurted, "You have got to be kidding me? It's the middle of the morning. You think Mike has been drinking?"

Sharon didn't say yes or no, and instead implied that it didn't really matter when he had been drinking, just that he had been.

Mike stood up and looked at Tom. "But what about him. Why just me?"

Sharon had no response. Mike walked out of the room.

Sharon had intended to meet with each of us privately in my parents' bedroom. Linda remembers her session. But knowing I had reacted negatively about her accusation about Mike's drinking, the therapist may have skipped me be-



cause I don't remember a one-on-one session. At the end of the second day, we didn't have a resolution or conclusion, so whatever transpired led to nothing that we could understand. Much later, I realized that I spoke up for Mike before he had a chance to even speak for himself. I had much invested in Mike and my relationship with him.

Over the next week, we found ourselves talking about Mike's drinking. Whether or not the discussions were triggered by the therapy, we unanimously decided that at the end of the week we would confront Mike about his drinking. We all had our own reasons for making this decision. My view of the issue had been evolving over the last year or so. I had only seen Mike once during that time, and that was when he came to New York.

Sometime earlier in the year, Mike had been in a car accident in Colorado, cutting a turn too sharply and knocking down a corner of a public building. He'd been drinking. Mike asked Dad to help with the resulting court case as his attorney. Mike came to New York City soon after, and I'd sensed he was on a downhill slide.

During his visit to New York City, he'd rented a car and we took a long drive along the coast, stopping at various harbors so Mike could look at boats he'd seen advertised in the back of sailing magazines. That night, back in the city, he wanted to go to Greenwich Village, "the village," because he had heard so much about it. My husband and I drove down there with him and wandered around, ending up at a jazz bar.

Around midnight or just after, my husband and I decided to go home, and the three of us walked out of the club together. Mike wasn't ready to go home, though, and said he'd see us later. Since he was already drunk, I suddenly realized that I didn't want to leave him there by himself. I was worried he'd get in trouble, maybe get beaten up, or wouldn't be able to find his way back to our place. Mike insisted he'd be fine.

Peter and I walked maybe twenty feet down the street. Then I looked back at Mike and said, "Be careful." At that point it dawned on me that something was seriously wrong with this picture. Mike was over 30 years old, and yet I was worried about leaving him alone in the big city. I didn't think he could take care of himself, and that's when I realized that my relationship with him was unhealthy for both of us, but mostly for him.

How could Mike respect himself if I thought he wasn't capable of being on his own? Something clicked, the parts fell into place, and I decided that from that point on, I was done worrying about him. He could take care of himself. If he couldn't, then he'd have to learn how.

Maybe six months after Mike's New York visit, at the end of the "therapy" week, I stood in the family room with my parents and all my siblings except Mike, discussing alcohol treatment centers. We talked about how best to approach Mike. We knew people had done this kind of thing before, and that there was a right way and a wrong way, but we had run out of time. We agreed that when Mike came into the room, we would tell him that we all believed that he needed treatment for his alcoholism and now was the time to go to Hazelden, a

drug and alcohol treatment center renowned for its success with helping people stop drinking, snorting cocaine, or shooting heroin. It happened to be only fifty miles away. He could be checked in by that night.

The hard part was convincing Mike. Someone must have been designated the spokesperson, but I don't remember who. I think Mike knew what was happening the minute he saw us. Ambushed. Someone stumbled through a sentence or two about how we all cared . . . he was an alcoholic . . . and he was gone. He'd been standing at the end of the room near the dining room and the door opening to the backyard. He took fewer than ten steps and was out the door, down the three concrete steps, and gone.

That was the end of intervention talk—and action. We all knew it wouldn't work, and no one ever brought it up again.

Within two weeks of the family therapy session and our attempt at alcohol intervention, Mike had bought a boat. His friend Joel Stebbins knew he was looking to buy a sailboat and suggested a used one he thought Mike might like—a 38-foot Cheoy Lee with a single mast called *Wind Song*, moored on Lake Superior in northern Minnesota. Cheoy Lee boats were designed by a number of different people, built between the 1950s and 1980s in Hong Kong, and advertised as a “classic bluewater boat.”

Lake Superior, at 31,700 square miles (82,100 square km), is the closest thing to an ocean for sailors living in the Midwest and the Rocky Mountain states. Mike met Joel at the boat and liked it enough to put in an offer. They settled on \$23,000, and Mike took possession of her early in the fall of 1982. The cost of the boat was split three ways: Mike, Sara, and Dan. Somehow Mike convinced Dan and Sara, neither of them sailors, to pay for a third of his new boat. I don't know if Mike ever really expected Sara to join him. Perhaps in the beginning Mike understood that the boat belonged to the three of them, but as time went on he saw himself as the primary owner.

Mike planned to move the boat to the Caribbean to start a charter business, a less daunting venture than chartering his first, older wooden boat. Boats are tradeoffs. Not old enough to be a classic, *Wind Song* was no character boat; unlike *Thrush*, she wasn't striking to look at. On the other hand, she was a practical, single-mast design whose fiberglass hull wasn't prone to leaking.

*Wind Song* easily accommodated two couples, so it was a good size for charter, but she was also small enough that Mike could singlehand her. The boat had a well-equipped galley, too, another advantage in the charter business.

In the fall of 1982, Mike and Dan moved *Wind Song* from Duluth, Minnesota, across three of the Great Lakes (Superior, Huron, and Erie) to Buffalo, New York. From there they took the Erie Canal to the Hudson River, a vertical drop of 566 feet with thirty-six locks to equalize the water levels and allow passage. Since parts of it could freeze over, the Erie Canal closed from November until early spring, so Mike left Lake Superior just in time to make the trip.

At Albany, they made a right turn south onto the Hudson River, which took them all the way to New York City and the Atlantic Ocean. Before reaching the

Atlantic, they stopped for a couple days at the 79th Street Boat Basin on the west side of Manhattan. As I'd planned, I returned from Minnesota and started my second year of graduate school in art history. My husband and I lived in an apartment on Broadway and 112th Street, about twenty blocks north of the boat basin.

Peter and I planned to have dinner on *Wind Song* with Dan and Mike. On our way to the boat basin I bought what we needed for a spaghetti dinner. To get over to the basin from 79th Street, we walked down through an ink-dark tunnel under the Westside highway that opened to a rickety metal staircase leading up to the docks. The piers were pretty much empty—by October few pleasure boats were still out on the Hudson.

The night was chilly, but not too cold, so we ate dinner in the cockpit. As we began, Mike poured himself a glass of red wine, looked at me out of the corner of his eye, and said, almost shyly, "You can't deny me a little red wine can you?" He seemed to acknowledge he had a drinking problem, but wanted us to be reasonable. He and I never mentioned his alcoholism again.

Two crew from Minnesota—one who had sailed on the Pacific and the other a deep sea photographer—joined *Wind Song* in New York City. The sailor might have been invited because of his ocean sailing experience, but since Mike was the captain and rarely took orders from anyone, there were bound to be disagreements. Sure enough, there were.

October in the North Atlantic can be treacherous. They ran into bad weather in the famous Bermuda Triangle. The wind ripped two of their sails, the crew wanted to head for shore, but Mike said no. Just as the crew planned to mutiny, the weather took a turn for the better. When they got to Bermuda, the photographer left the boat and flew home. (The other man continued on with them to the Caribbean, but he and Mike did not part friends.)

From Bermuda, *Wind Song* continued south to the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Mike and Dan decided to stay on St. John, one of a cluster of several islands that belonged to the U.S. When Sara arrived in St. John, Mike asked Dan to move off the boat. Sara didn't stay long, returning to Colorado to start a new life that didn't include Mike. They divorced about a year later. Dan, angered at Mike's expectations that he leave the boat, never came back. Mike agreed to buy Dan out for his share of the boat, but according to Dan he never did.

Mike visited other islands, careful to sail only to United States territories. He still didn't have a passport, and he was nervous about Interpol. He had been out of the country only once since coming back from Greece in 1975, and that was to Canada, which did not require a passport. On his return to the States on that trip he had to show his driver's license, and the name must have sounded an alarm because the border patrol looked at him, told him he was a lucky guy, and then waved them on into the States. After that, he'd never tried to leave American soil.

While on St. John, Mike found work building condos. But he had never worked for anyone and quit—he disliked being bossed around. He also found St. John boring. As somebody once said of Mike, "He liked to live close to nature."

Everything he did, he did outdoors: painting houses, building houses, working on boats, building boats, and of course, sailing. For Mike, being in nature meant being challenged by it. With the exception of a few days during hurricane season, even the weather in the Caribbean didn't demand vigilance, and for Mike that was dull. In an interview with Tom Gannon, Mike said that in hindsight, "I found it [the Caribbean] bottom line boring. Once you've been diving and looked at the bottom, seen the vegetation, there's no outside stimulation."

About eighteen months later, in late spring of 1984, Mike called Joel Stebbins, the friend from Minnesota who had found *Wind Song*, and told him he was going crazy living in the Caribbean. He begged him to come down and help him sail back to the States. (Dan stayed in the Caribbean and eventually started a successful business on St. Thomas that supplied lighting equipment to film companies.)

Joel flew to St. John to join Mike. Just before their departure they met a woman who sailed with them as far as Bermuda. Joel and Mike continued north, so slowly that they began calling the boat, *Chunk King*, in reference to the expression "a slow boat to China." Forgetting to charge the batteries, they lost power and couldn't start the motor, leaving them becalmed for three days in a sloppy sea with big waves, no wind, and baking their brains out.

Eventually, they were able to rewire the batteries so they could charge them, and just as Joel tried to start the motor, the key snapped, and frayed nerves had them yelling at each other. Joel was able to start the motor with a screwdriver, putting them underway again. Five miles short of Block Island, a small island off of Rhode Island, they ran out of gas. Joel inflated the life raft, threw in the five-gallon fuel tank, and rowed ashore to get gas. He also picked up a bottle of rum. With a working engine, they moved *Wind Song* to the main pier on the island, tied up, and went ashore—and got into further trouble. According to Joel they ended their evening backed against a wall by a group of guys accusing them of stealing their tools. Luckily for Mike and Joel someone had called the police, who arrived in time to escort the pair back to the police station, issuing them a warning to get off the island. Mike and Joel found their way back to *Wind Song* only to be woken by a loud horn—they had tied up at the island's only ferry landing.

From Block Island, they sailed to Newport, Rhode Island, arriving in time to see the end of the 1984 OSTAR (Observer Singlehanded Transatlantic Race) sponsored by the British newspaper, *The Observer*. Two of the ocean racers became Mike's competitors two years later in the first BOC race: Philippe Jeanot, who had capsized at the beginning of the race, and Warren Luhrs.

Newport was meant to be a temporary stop, but after Joel flew back to Minnesota, Mike stayed on. He was at loose ends in Newport, and although he was never unemployed, his life had turned stale. He and Sara had officially divorced, never to see one another again. Mike complained about the division of their stuff, saying she got everything but his grandfather's shotgun. He lived on *Wind Song* and got a job remodeling The Main Brace, a large bar/restaurant centrally located on a pier in downtown Newport. From that job he moved on to remodeling houses, one located just outside of Newport overlooking the harbor. On one

visit I went with him to the job site. In a rare, reflective moment Mike brought up Frank Lloyd Wright and asked me if Wright was as good as everybody said he was. I said yes and questioned why he'd asked.

"Just wondering," he said.

At one stage Mike had applied to architectural school. I couldn't help but feel he was considering lost opportunities. The houses he had planned and built in Minnesota and Colorado shared Wright's ability to build with a keen eye for the landscape.

Although Mike always found work, he kept thinking about places to go and ways to make a fast buck. He had schemes to make lots of money quickly, but his main dream was to find a companion to sail around the world with. He even got as far as putting an ad in a sailing magazine: "Looking for a woman who will sail around the world." Then a few months later he found Helen.

One of Mike's favorite places was the hardware store. He started visiting the one in Jamestown, Rhode Island, even more than he needed for the chance to see a woman named Helen who worked there. The two discussed the merits of one brush versus another, and she made him laugh. At the time, Mike was dating a friend of Helen's, so when Mike first called her she thought it had something to do with her friend. He told her he wasn't interested in her friend; he was interested in her, and did she want to go sailing with him? Helen said yes, and added that she'd grown up in Maine and had been sailing all her life.

Years later, I asked Helen what she thought of Mike when they met. "He seemed like he needed somebody," she said. "He was desperate, lost, and I was in my fix-it stage. But he was also very exciting, very sensual."

I visited Mike shortly after he'd started dating Helen. This is how he introduced me to the idea of her:

"What do you think about me dating an older woman?"

"Depends. How much older?"

"She's forty, and she has three kids."

Since Mike was approaching his mid-thirties, the forty was okay, but the idea of three kids shocked me. Mike had never shown any interest in children, his own or anybody else's.

I met Helen at a bar that night. The three of us drank and danced until Helen drove us to her house across the bridge in Jamestown. Although it was close to midnight, she cooked a dinner of shrimp, garlic, and pasta. Afterward Mike and Helen disappeared into her bedroom.

The next morning Mike told me how much he enjoyed being with Helen, that she was a first. What he saw in her he had never seen in anyone else; I assumed it included a special sexual chemistry. Over the next eight years Mike tested the relationship with infidelities, but he always came back, and had they had the chance it would likely have gone that way until they both died of old age.

Helen was tough physically, psychologically, and emotionally, without an extra inch of flesh or bullshit. She was beautiful—and a sailor. They both were fast, intense, and single-minded. They worked with their hands and could not sit at a desk or be in one place for long. They came from two of the northernmost

states in the country, Maine and Minnesota, and they were more comfortable outside than inside.

Helen was Mike's way out of the conventional idea about love and relationships and how to live. He loved her. He could have found many women to love, but not someone like Helen. Helen believed in Mike, as hokey as that sounds. She didn't just fall in love with him because he was good looking, charming, down on his luck, or any of the many other reasons women fell in love with Mike. She gave him another view of himself, a view that had nothing to do with his past, and everything to do with his future. It may sound like cheap fiction, but she did change his life. More than anything else, Helen supported Mike's crazy ideas. She could picture Mike doing what he said he was going to do. When he first told her about his idea about racing around the world, she said, "Yeah, what are you waiting for?"



## Newport, Rhode Island, 1984–1986

*“It’s [solo circumnavigation] sort of like driving around Canada in the winter for 30,000 miles naked. If your car stops, you freeze to death.”*

—MIKE PLANT

WHENEVER MIKE WAS ASKED why he decided to enter the BOC Challenge, he always gave the same answer: “I saw the movie about the first BOC. I walked out of that theater and knew exactly what I was going to do. Since then, I’ve never looked back.”

He was talking about a documentary of the 1982–83 BOC, *The Ultimate Challenge: Around the World Alone*. The BOC was named for its sponsor, the British Oxygen Corporation, and is usually referred to as the Mount Everest of sailing. The contestants race one sailor, one sailboat, around the world. The boats start together in Newport, and they all stop in three ports: Cape Town, South Africa; Sydney, Australia; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After a month in each port for repairs and restocking, the sailors depart together again; the winner is the boat with the best cumulative time of the four legs. It usually takes the sailors about nine months to complete the course: 27,000 miles from Newport, Rhode Island, and back to Newport.

Out of the seventeen sailors who started the inaugural 1982–83 race, ten finished, straggling back into Newport in collective and individual triumph. For most of the racers, their ambition was to finish the race. The winner, Frenchman Philippe Jeantot, set a world record of 159 days.

In this first BOC, nearly all the sailors ran into one kind of trouble or another. A rogue wave in the Southern Ocean took Tony Lush’s *Lady Pepperell* and tossed her head over heels, breaking her keel. While Lush’s boat sank underneath him, a fellow competitor, Francis Stokes on *Moonshine*, found him and maneuvered his boat close enough to the sinking *Lady Pepperell* to get Lush safely aboard. When Lush radioed for help, Stokes had been more than a two-day sail away. Even today, this is still considered one of the most amazing rescues of all time.

Skipper Neville Gosson was forced to climb his 70-foot, ice-covered mast to fix a broken halyard. On the way down one foot slipped, plunging him twenty feet before catching the next set of spreaders. Richard McBride was hand steer-

ing when a wave washed over his boat—he was held aboard only by his harness and lifeline. Later in the same day, McBride was again washed out of his cockpit, this time slamming into a stainless steel winch, bruising his ribs. Guy Bernardin on *Ratso* found himself hanging on his backstay high off the deck after a wave lifted him up out of the cockpit. If he hadn't blindly reached out to grab the backstay he would have been swept overboard. An ex-professional rugby player was below in his cabin when an enormous wave hit, sending him airborne and landing with such force that his head broke a plank of wood in the cockpit sole, knocking him unconscious.

When Mike saw the BOC movie in the fall of 1984, he had been in Newport for eighteen months. Once he decided to compete in the next BOC, he had a little over two years to prepare for the start on August 30, 1986.

Dad described Mike's decision to undertake the BOC as the one thing he could devote himself to completely, demanding everything and calling on every one of his abilities: his competitive nature, his skills as a sailor, his ingenious solutions to three-dimensional problems, and his boatbuilding skills, which Mike hadn't used since those early days as a kid at Plant's Boat Works. Before the BOC, Mike had never thrown himself into one thing; he used bits and pieces of himself along the way, but nothing had challenged him as completely as the BOC. This pursuit brought out skills Mike didn't know he had and allowed him to bloom into something much more suited to his already larger-than-life character.

The idea for the legendary BOC grew out of another race with a history of its own, one that had captured the attention of boaters everywhere. In 1968, fourteen years before Mike arrived in Newport, the *Sunday Times* of London came up with a publicity event called the Golden Globe. It offered five thousand pounds sterling to the sailor who circumnavigated the globe, from England to England, in the least amount of time. The only stipulation was that the sailor had to sail alone without stopping.

The start date of the race was fairly loose—between June 1 and October 31—and determined by each sailor. Nine sailors entered the race, but five did not make it out of the Atlantic Ocean (John Ridgway, Loïck Fougerson, Bill King, Alex Carozzo, and Chay Blyth). Although his boat was damaged, Nigel Tetley continued to race because he thought another competitor, Donald Crowhurst, was catching up. Tetley ended up being rescued as his boat sank beneath him.

This race will always be remembered for events surrounding Donald Crowhurst, who early on had abandoned the race but continued to send fake position reports as if he were still competing. In July 1969, his empty boat was found adrift. Three logs were found onboard: the real one, one he fabricated and used in his communications with the race headquarters, and the third was a radio log. At the end of his life, his log showed that he had created another world into which he could escape and presumably walked off the boat. Nicholas Tomalin and Ron Hall's book, *The Strange Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst*, examines both the man and "almost hoax" he attempted.

Another entrant, Bernard Moitessier, was in a strong position to win but came to realize that he loved solo sailing more than the competition, so he kept sailing until reaching Tahiti, having circumnavigated one and a half times. Robin

Knox-Johnston, the only sailor still in the race, crossed the finish line at Falmouth, England, on April 22, 1969, after 313 days alone at sea, making him, officially, the first person to sail singlehanded, nonstop around the world. Knox-Johnston donated his prize money to Donald Crowhurst's family.

An American sailor, David White, hatched the idea for the next round-the-world race, the BOC. This one differed from the Golden Globe because it was divided into four legs: Newport—Cape Town—Sydney—Rio de Janeiro—Newport. In addition, he proposed that all the sailors start together at the beginning of each leg, and the sailor with the best cumulative time won. It took several years and a sponsorship by the British Oxygen Corporation (BOC) to get the gears turning. The BOC Group was an international company based in London and known primarily for its industrial gases. The company realized this race would be a good way to advertise in their major overseas markets, which included the U.S., Australia, and Africa. Once they decided to sponsor the race, the BOC Challenge was born. Starting in 1982, the BOC has been held every four years although its name (and sponsorship) has changed: first to "Around Alone" in 1990, and then to the "Velux 5 Oceans Race" in 2006. In addition, in the 1990s its home port moved from Newport, Rhode Island, to Charleston, South Carolina.

Many boats have sailed around the world, but until the BOC race most of them were not trying to break speed records. For example, Knox-Johnston's Golden Globe winner is often mentioned as a slow sailboat. However, in the BOC, the boats need to be not only strong enough to withstand brutal conditions, but also as light as possible to be as fast as possible. These are conflicting engineering demands capable of leading designers/builders to make both elegant and disastrous choices. Whether sailors cruise or race, they follow long-distance ocean racing, not only because of the adventure, but also because of the innovation in boat design it encourages.

In the BOC, sailors constantly adjust their course in the eternal search for the optimum sailing conditions. Unlike auto racing, there is no "track," so victory depends as much on brains and the ability to gauge conditions and make good decisions as it does on the fundamentals of seamanship. Each sailor devises what he thinks will be the fastest route. After the start, the sailors never (or almost never) see each other until they are back on shore at the finish of the leg. Once a boat reaches the end of a leg, the sailor has several weeks to repair the boat and restock supplies before they depart on the next leg.

The 1982–83 BOC sailors came from around the world: the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, Poland, Australia, New Zealand, France, and South Africa. Almost all of them were amateurs with little singlehanded sailing experience. Most didn't think about winning; they were too busy keeping their boats intact and upright and staying alive. They sailed out of Newport with 27,000 miles in front of them, each port stop roughly 7,000 miles apart.

For his first two years in Newport, Mike lived on *Wind Song*, which he anchored outside the harbor so he wouldn't have to pay docking fees. He used his dinghy to get ashore, asking homeowners if they'd mind if he beached it on their shore.

In August 1984, Mike met Rodger Martin, a South African yacht designer working in Newport. Rodger grew up sailing and racing boats off Cape Town, so he had far more experience with ocean sailing than Mike. He'd been living in Newport since 1981, working with an established naval architect. Once Mike decided to enter the BOC, he paid Rodger's boss a visit; not wanting to take Mike as a client, he referred Mike to Rodger. Rodger later imagined what his boss probably thought of Mike: "Here's a guy who hasn't shaved in a few days and smells of beer. Probably not a real serious guy."

Since Rodger hoped to build his own yacht design firm, his old boss figured Rodger might have more time and be more receptive to Mike's project. Thirty minutes after meeting Mike and listening to him describe the boat he needed, Rodger pretty much committed himself to designing a one-of-a-kind racing boat for this guy who had virtually no background that might qualify him for the BOC. (Island hopping on a slow, heavy boat like *Thrush* or coastal cruising on *Wind Song* didn't count as serious offshore sailing.) They agreed on a fee, and Rodger went to work.

Mike knew that professionals in the sailing world were unlikely to respect his intention to race around the world. But Rodger added credibility and much-needed advice. When Rodger decided to take Mike seriously, he started something far bigger than he had imagined.

Mike had planned to build a 46-foot, cold-molded (wooden) boat, partially because he understood how to build with wood having built several houses. Rodger had other ideas, however, and convinced Mike that to be competitive the boat needed to be fifty feet and fiberglass. Rodger assumed Mike would hire a boatbuilder, so fiberglass wouldn't be a problem. Mike knew he couldn't afford a builder, so if he decided to go with Rodger he'd just have to learn how to build in fiberglass.

The design requirements for the 1986-87 BOC boats were simple—a mono-hull in one of two length classes: Class I boats were sixty feet and under, Class II boats were fifty feet and under. A 50-foot boat would provide Mike the largest possible boat for his class.

Many boats entered in the first BOC had been altered to accommodate a singlehanded sailor and had not been built specifically for the race. The same would be true but less so for the second BOC in 1986, but with two additional requirements to help ensure the safety of the sailors. Each boat had to be equipped with at least two watertight spaces, so that if a hull was breached at least part of the boat would remain dry and afloat. The second rule limited the amount of keel that could be induced with water ballast to ten degrees, ensuring that the boats had enough keel to be considered safe.

Mike agreed to pay Rodger five thousand dollars for the drawings and plans, and then he bugged Rodger pretty much every day because he was so anxious to get started. For the first two months they traded ideas about the vessel's design.

Rodger assumed that Mike would hire professionals for the first step in the building process—lofting the boat. "Lofting" gets its name from the boat loft (shed). In order to loft a boat you need to have a space bigger than the size of

the actual boat. Once the designer has drawn the plans and established a set of measurements (numbers), the loftier takes this two-dimensional drawing and creates full-size templates to form the frame of the boat, transferring an intricate set of measurements in which the vertical and horizontal cross sections of the boat are measured out from a series of different points. At least two people are needed to do the measuring. One person measures, the other records, and then they switch jobs and do the same measurements again. This isn't a job for beginners, nor is it a job for people who cannot visualize things in three dimensions. As I said earlier, Dad always told us there were two kinds of people: those who can visualize a box in their head, and those who can't. Mike was obviously a member of the first group.

Rodger told me that a professional boatbuilder's shop could loft a 50-foot boat in about two weeks. Mike told Rodger that he would do it, and he finished the job in ten days. As he told Rodger, "I understand spatial relationships." Mike didn't volunteer more information than necessary, but that was enough for Rodger, who already knew by then that Mike was a man of few words.

Boat construction started in a shed down by the water near the center of town. The shed belonged to a naval architect who had agreed to rent it to Mike below the market rate. With books lying open on the shed floor, Mike, Harry, a long-time friend, and Helen lofted the boat. Helen and Harry knew less than Mike about what they were doing, but they had complete faith in him, and he must have been born to loft boats. When Mom asked Mike how he knew what he was doing, Mike told her he got books from the library.

The next step for the fiberglass boatbuilder was to cut the lofted shapes out of wood and line them up (braced, of course) so that anything laid over them (thin, pliable strips of wood, for example) would take the shape of the hull-to-be. The builder was creating a mold, and only with the mold was it possible to lay down fiberglass roving, impregnate it with resin, and create a hull. A mold could be either female (fiberglass was laid up inside it) or male (fiberglass was laid up on the outside). Then, when complete, the hull was removed from the mold. A separate mold was used to create the deck. Finally the bottom (hull) was joined to the deck via a hull-to-deck joint.

In a 1988 interview Mike recalled the days of fiberglassing the boat:

"The success of anything is the direct result of the concentration given the project. In the back of his or her mind, the carpenter knows a window can be wrestled out of its hole if it's put in the wrong place during the framing. For that reason, a lot of windows get moved. I'm convinced if a mistake is made in fiberglass it can't be unscrewed. Working with fiberglass is like pouring concrete. As soon as it kicks, it's yours. Put your initials in it."

"[Fiberglassing was] 14,000 hours of the most miserable work that can be imagined . . . If you have ever done it you would know. The fumes make you sick, and the dust is like having permanent exposure to the itch weed we experience growing up around here [referring to Minnesota]. It takes lots of hands to organize it very well. I had to organize the crew to work nights and weekends.

"To get labor I collected bums off the street each evening, probably fifty or

sixty in total. And I paid them in wine and pocket money. Many times I didn't even know their names. I just directed them to lift the giant sheets of fiberglass.

"[Once the fiberglass is laid] the grinders come out, and the fumes are now replaced with dust and you start to itch. Showers don't help because the dust is so fine it is in your skin. We would work from five [in the morning] to eleven [at night] and then go home. The foreman couldn't work with a mask because you couldn't be heard giving orders, so at night I would get quite dizzy. At home I would kiss Helen and she would gag at the smell. We managed okay, no major screw ups. But it was a big production and some very anxious moments.

"I think it is sufficient to say I used fifteen 55-gallon barrels of resin, 5,000 pounds of fiberglass cloth, and 1200 pounds of structural core.

"But once you get past all of this, it's rewarding. One-off construction is a form of sculpture, you start with a pile of materials and end up with something quite beautiful, and the fiberglass, as horrible as it is to work with, does result in the strongest boat for the weight possible."

There were times when it got hard to keep going. At one point, Mike was completely broke and everything ground to a halt. "There were times when I could have been accused of denying creditors."

This was a gross understatement. Mike always owed money. When the prospect of completing the boat looked impossible, Helen abandoned the project. Those were tough times; Mike worked every day building or remodeling and went home to write sponsorship letters. He gave slide shows to every organization he could think of, mostly at country clubs with largely female audiences. He found businesses or individuals willing to donate supplies, including Dow Chemical who recently had developed a new kind of resin and were eager to have it tested. Dow agreed to supply him with all the resin needed for fiberglassing.

But it always boiled down to cash. Mike needed a positive cash flow. Then two things happened: he found a buyer for *Wind Song* and sold her for \$15,000, and he found a sponsor. The company that financed the race itself, the BOC (British Oxygen Corporation), had recently bought an American company, Airco, Inc., a major supplier of medical supplies including breathing equipment and industrial gases. The American franchise was called Airco Distributors, and they saw the race as a good way to advertise. Twelve distributors each agreed to put up \$10,000, and they went to BOC headquarters to ask about the American entries for the Class II category (50-feet and under). Three Class II boats badly needed sponsorship, and Mike was one of them.

Airco decided to run a sponsorship contest. They'd award \$120,000 to one boat, and each competitor had to make a presentation about his boat, qualifications, design advantages, and so forth. In order to make her look like a winner, Mike decided to have the hull painted red, a racing red.

Mike and Rodger sweated through the competition, which involved transporting the hull to Airco's offices for their examination. The trip to show the boat to Airco—hauling the big red hull on a trailer behind them—probably cost both of them a few years of their lives.

I visited Mike when he was waiting to hear about the Airco sponsorship. He considered me a good sounding board because of my ignorance of the endeavor



and my reluctance to ask many questions. So, after dinner one night, he told me about his main competitor, one he considered a worthy opponent. Mike had a thorough analysis of his competitors' faults. Like many competitive people, he was good at assessing people's character. He often made his friends laugh when he mimicked others.

Much to everyone's amazement, as Mike was the least experienced sailor of the three, he won the sponsorship. He believed the decision was mostly based on the design and construction of his boat.

Over the course of building *Airco*, Mike moved her four times. He had begun the project in a rented waterside shed. He finished the project in a boatyard in Jamestown. In between he moved the hull to Helen's at Christmas. After the neighbors complained about the presence of a large boat in Helen's driveway, he hung green Christmas lights off the deck, but the neighbors still complained.

Barbara Lloyd, writing for the *New York Times*, interviewed Mike while he was building *Airco*. She referred to him as "The sailor who knows no season . . . Working outdoors seven days a week, twelve hours a day, Mike Plant has spent the winter building a 50-foot boat . . . The skin on his face has the ruddy veneer that comes with chill factors carried on icy saltwater breezes."

I took the train from New York City to Rhode Island to visit Mike while he had the boat in Helen's driveway. When I arrived, the bright-red 50-foot boat sat covered with a thin layer of snow. I found Mike working inside the boat, and when I said hello he turned around, smiled, and then said something like "hey," before turning back to what he was doing. He was always a natural at working with other people watching. He never felt obligated to make small talk or take some time off to sit and chat. Once you were there, you were on your own. You were welcome to help, watch, or go do something else. Mike was content regardless of your decision.

I seldom stayed long, usually because it was raining, snowing, or just freezing. I never heard Mike complain about the weather, and yet because he was working, he never wore much more than a lined jean jacket. I always noticed Mike's hands. His hands were the vehicle for his dream, in constant motion, weathered beyond their years, and with an extra layer of skin built up over years of abuse.

Mike knew better than most the damage weather could do, and he had little respect for those who underestimated the harshness of nature. Having spent his childhood winters on the frozen waters of Lake Minnetonka helped. Once, I was back home at a Minnesotan bar with Mike, and we watched a couple come in from riding their snowmobiles in the cold, blue from exposure. At night on the lake the temperature fell well below zero and with the wind chill factor could plunge to thirty below. At the sight of their blue faces, Mike turned to me and said with absolutely no compassion, "Idiots."

In an interview before his second round-the-world race, Mike explained how he dealt with the cold in the Southern Ocean. "I'm not frustrated by things like being cold or hot anymore. That's why I get along so well on these long trips. I've broken down all those fences. The weather never pisses me off."

When Mike was almost finished building the hull, he called two Portuguese



*Mike's first ocean racer, Airco, designed by Rodger Martin and built by Mike in 1985–86. Length overall was 50'0" with a waterline length of 43'4". Her beam was 13'9" and draft 8'6". She carried a sail area of 1,100 square feet. After Mike had moved on to his next boat he sold Airco to Josh Hall, who raced her in another BOC. (Billy Black)*

shipwrights he'd met the previous year, asking if they would come back to Newport to finish the interior of his boat. They agreed, and Mike later said it was one of the best decisions he ever made.

When it was time to attach the keel, he moved the hull to a boatyard in Jamestown. He'd had the keel made in Connecticut: seven feet deep, weighing just under five and a half tons. He planned to hold it to the hull with twelve, 1-inch diameter bolts, each 40 inches long. Six bolts were to be drilled into place. Mike explained, "We had to drill 40-inch deep holes through the bottom of the hull. A real leap of faith. We bored. They fit. It was the happiest day of my life."

One Sunday in January, Rodger drove across the bridge from Newport to the Jamestown boatyard to see how Mike was progressing. The weather was miserable—rain, wind, slush on the ground—and by the time Rodger arrived at the yard it was snowing. From his warm, parked car Rodger couldn't believe what he

was seeing. Mike had the hull on the Travelift and he was moving it inch by inch, lowering it onto the keel. He'd lower the hull, jump down from the lift, maneuver the keel into alignment with the hull, then climb back up the lift to start the whole process again. Rodger rolled down his window and shouted, "Mike, what are you doing?" Mike tried to turn around to answer, but his shoes have frozen into the slush.

Rodger greatly admired Mike's will to drive the project forward. "There were a hundred times before the start when any normal person would have thrown in the towel." Rodger believed that *Airco* ended up performing so well because "Mike built it [*Airco*] better than I had allowed for. He had complete control over how much to laminate. She could have been lighter. [Mike put more laminate on, and by doing so he made her heavier and possibly slower, but more importantly, stronger.] She was only designed to race around the world once, so it's amazing how far she has gone."

*Airco* touched the water for the first time on a cold day in the spring of 1986. A small group of friends, family, and others gathered on the Rhode Island shore, most of us freezing. *Airco* sat gleaming high on the trailer above us, full of potential, waiting to get into the water. Slowly, the trailer that held her hull backed down the ramp, Mike giving directions to its driver. My dad watched Mike just as keenly as Mike watched the boat.

A small dock sat next to the launch ramp. When the trailer was deep enough, a couple guys boosted Mom up from the dock onto *Airco*'s deck. Someone handed her a bottle of champagne, and she carefully made her way to the bow. With the bottle raised high, she said, "God bless Mike, and God bless this boat." If this had been a movie her voice would have projected for all to hear, but as it was, her voice seemed small and quivered a little as she blessed the boat. In the movie version the bottle would have shattered on impact, but in this real life launch, nothing happened. The bottle had been too well wrapped to protect Mom from glass shards—only after Helen unwrapped a layer of wrapping did it break on Mom's second swing.

*Airco* was now officially ready to be dunked. Standing on the dock next to the boat, yard hands loosened the lines that tied her to the trailer—the true test had come. Would she float? Would she lean too much to one side? Would she float below or above her lines? As the lines holding her were eased, *Airco* gently slipped into the ocean she was built for. She was perfect. Mike's expression reflected complete happiness.

"The day [the boat] slipped into the water, [was] probably the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me. This was a one-of-a-kind boat, no one [had] built a boat like this before. I don't think Rodger slept for three days prior to its launching. None of us knew what was going to happen when it hit the water. Everything was theory up until that point . . . Now was the true test. You wanted it to float on its lines but all you could do was hope. . . It could sit in the water and look pretty, but that didn't mean anything or win races. The real test was how did it act under sail. This test took another month to get things going. We



*Mike at the wheel of Airco, Newport, Rhode Island. Note the wind vane self-steering unit hung off the stern—some system of self-steering is vital for singlehanders. (Billy Black)*

had to raise more money to put the sails on board and get all the gear ready for testing. The first day we set out to sail her was as big a day as the launching. It was incredible! When we set sail for open water. . . It was a dream come true.”

*Airco* performed far better than either Rodger or Mike had expected. Mike built her for the race, but as Rodger said, he overbuilt it. After the race, Mike sold *Airco* to Josh Hall, who raced her in the 1990–91 BOC. Josh later sold her to a man who raced her in an OSTAR, and since then she has crossed the Atlantic several times. Currently (as of 2012), she is harbored in England. Since many of the boats designed for the BOC didn’t make it through their first race, *Airco*’s strength and reliability is extraordinary and a rarity among offshore, singlehanded racing boats.

In a fundraising speech Mike said:

“These BOC boats are easily recognized by their long, fair waterlines, canoe underbodies, tall rigs, and deep keels. The boat has to be strong, fast, comfortable,

and capable of managing itself on all points of sail with the smallest amount of effort from a single crew. . . The cleaner waterlines and greater ballast-to-displacement ratio are two characteristics that help to define this new class of boats. . . *Airco Distributor* proved herself to be a very capable boat in all conditions. I had substantial sail area and fair hull for the quiet times, but when the sea became loud and furious, I could trust the boat to have the strength to drive hard."

*Airco* cost about \$250,000 to build—a lot of money given Mike's lack of means, but most of the winning boats cost far more, up to one million. Compared to today's boats, even that figure looks small.

At some point before the launch, Mike moved out of Helen's. Maybe things had become too stressful. As Mike told it, he moved out so he could focus, but perhaps Helen viewed it differently, particularly since he spent those last months with another woman, a cabinetmaker Mike had hired to finish the interior of *Airco's* cabin. (Helen and Mike were back together by the time Mike finished the race.)



## Horta, Azores, and Lisbon, Portugal, Summer 1986; Newport, August 30, 1986

*“It’s a lot easier to get the adrenaline pumping when you’re by yourself.”*

—MIKE, 1987

THE HARBOR ENTRANCE LOOKED STRAIGHTFORWARD, and Mike saw plenty of space to tie up at the quay. He never wanted people to know the number of times he’d screwed up coming into a harbor to dock his boat. But this time everything seemed to take care of itself. Nothing could tarnish this trip.

Two customs officers joined the small crowd of people waiting at the harbor. Word had spread quickly that an American boat, about fifty feet long (fifteen meters), was coming in under full sail. The fishermen spreading their nets next to their boats tied up to the pier were the first to notice. *Airco* was sailing into the wind, tacking to get into the harbor, and the fishermen saw one person moving back and forth on the deck, then to the cockpit, then to the mast. They wondered why nobody was there to help him. It was a good contrast: the fishermen mumbling to each other, barely moving for hours, repeating a process that had been done since humans began fishing; and this solo sailor, moving quickly in a very confined space on a boat that looked like it had just been featured on a design page of a fancy yachting magazine.

For many sailors, crossing the Atlantic is a fantastic dream. Of the many who have realized this dream, it has usually been completed after many earlier, shorter sails, or the crossing was done with a crew. Very few sailors ever make a long, offshore, solo sail. Mike, an amateur sailor who grew up in the middle of the country and with almost no ocean sailing experience, sailed the two thousand miles from Newport to the Azores alone, without an autopilot (he added a wind vane self-steering system just before leaving), using nothing more than a sextant for navigation, in an untested, 50-foot boat built for speed. And he did it, like everything else he did, fast: it took him six days, from June 8–13, 1986.

After Mike arrived, he wrote to Rodger:

“I’ve never had such a high. Everything was glowing. I was so happy with the boat, myself, and everybody who was involved. For me, it was the triumph of my life. I’ve never experienced such pride in anything. I had such a feeling of purpose and direction—it’s important that I remember this.”



In an interview with Gannon, Mike glowed about that first long-distance sail on *Airco*: "One day . . . was stupendous. I was averaging over twelve knots. The sea conditions were just ideal, really steep. The boat was literally pointing down, surfing like crazy, going like hell, and like every other wave, you'd think, this will be it. But I didn't bury the bow once. I was coming off them. It was unbelievable. And I could drive and drive and drive . . . I was screaming."

When the crowd at the harbor in Horta came to take his dock lines, Mike was grinning, everyone was grinning, falling over one another to secure *Airco* to the dock. Mike was bent over coiling a line on deck when the customs officials arrived. They, too, complimented him on his boat and congratulated him on a successful crossing.

"She's beautiful. Is she new?"

"Yes, yes, this is her first time at sea—her virgin run. She was great!"

"Are you American? Are you alone?"

"Yes." Continuing to smile.

"What are you doing? Why are you sailing here?"

"This is my qualifying run for an international sailing race called the BOC. It starts in Newport, Rhode Island, and circles the globe. I am going to be in the race."

Oh, this made sense to them. There had been others, mostly from England, but no one from America. Their greeting turned into an even warmer welcome. They were honored to be the first to receive a competitor for the international round-the-world race. They would be only too happy to stamp his passport; after all, he might be famous one day. Taking Mike's passport with them, they walked to their office.

Later, the customs officials returned to the boat, a little embarrassed, to apologize for the delay in stamping his passport and explained that Mike didn't have to wait on the boat. Would he like to come and have something to eat or drink while he waited? They explained there was some computer error, some confusion with the name. They were sorry, but it would be a little longer until they could stamp his passport.

Mike walked back with them to their office, and they asked if he would like something to eat, perhaps some fresh fish or a steak? And something to drink—coffee or beer or wine? Portugal was famous for its red wine. He must be hungry, they insisted. Yes, Mike said, he was hungry and thirsty, so could he have an omelet and a beer? They nodded, and one of them went across the street to the café. He was happy to wait while they chatted about his trip across the Atlantic, the upcoming race, America, the movies, and whether he had been to Europe before.

The next day, June 14, the telex came in from Lisbon stating that Mike was to be arrested. Reading the telex, the customs officer frowned, as if this was really all very embarrassing. "It is something to do with the name. It was all a mistake of course, probably there was another person with the same name, but we have to ask you to stay here tonight. Lisbon office asks that we must detain you. This is ridiculous, of course! Please have something more to eat, another beer, or a coffee?"

So Mike spent that night in the back of the café. On Saturday, June 15, they told him he could return to his boat since they wouldn't hear anything until Monday. But he could not leave the harbor. Mike made a joke about the difficulty of leaving the harbor unseen with a 50-foot, bright white and red yacht.

Mike weighed his options. How should he respond if they said they had to arrest him? Should he be angry? Act confused but tolerant of what would all turn out to be a mistake? Should he disappear? Where would he go? What would happen to his boat, the race, his dream? He had worked too hard and come too close to run away from it.

On Monday, June 17, the custom officials went to *Airco* and told Mike they'd been ordered to arrest him due to an international order issued by a judge in Piraeus, Greece, on April 24, 1975. They put him on a plane to Lisbon, and once there police officers met him at the airport and escorted him to the national prison to wait for extradition orders from Greece.

Mike later described his time in prison. "It was huge and old, probably two hundred years old, maybe more. It had tiers . . . You walk into a wing and there are four floors up open all the way up and you get to the cell by this iron scaffold. It was just like the movies. Cells were brick with stucco over them. The doors were arched, solid wood with a little peephole. There was no plumbing in the rooms, no water, [but there was a] bucket, every day you threw the bucket out. In the morning they'd open the cells, everybody's door would open at the same time, and everybody would carry their bucket to the sink, shit in the sink. Then you'd go back in, and you'd get locked up. You were in solitary for the first month. At first, going in there was really, really depressing, big time, you go into a place like that and you don't think you are ever going to come back out."

Mike was in the Lisbon jail in the company of one other American imprisoned for a drug infraction, and three foreigners, all Germans, as well as several Portuguese, all in for drugs. Mike was told that he might be released in two weeks, and on day fourteen the prison guards told him to pack his stuff because he was getting out that night. His bag packed, he waited. No one came, and nobody came the next day either. On the afternoon of the third day he stood at the cell door waiting, but the official came and told him the papers had not come through. He was not leaving the prison.

Later he found out that the lawyer assigned to his case had failed to submit the extradition papers to Greece in time, which meant he had to wait another two weeks.

As soon as Mom and Dad heard Mike was arrested they flew to Lisbon and tapped into their vast network of well-connected and well-financed friends. My parents lived in a community of prosperous Minnesotans with roots dating back to the late 1800s whose fortunes were built early and stayed within the families; the second and third generations were close friends of my parents. Ironically, this was the world Mike had desperately wanted to shed on his walkabout in South America.

I had finished my first year of a two-year appointment teaching introductory art history classes to Columbia freshmen. It was summer, and since there were

no classes, I was supposed to be starting work on my dissertation. I remember eating a tuna sandwich in the business school cafeteria, and explaining to a fellow grad student why my brother was in prison in Portugal, and why I needed to fly home to Minnesota. I didn't have any commitments for the next couple weeks, and it seemed it would be the best place for me to help.

My older brother Hugh flew with my parents to Lisbon and stayed for a week or so. I stayed with my sister in Minnesota. My sister's world was much the same as my parents', and she had lists of people to call or who had called. We talked frequently to my parents. We were also in touch with my younger brother, Tom, who had a business outside of Washington, D.C., and was busy contacting the Portuguese embassy in Washington. Linda and I sat at a little table in her kitchen, near the phone while her three kids ran around us. My sister always had various art supplies like paints, papers, and beads, and while we sat there we dabbled in watercolor—our way of filling time. I never considered going to Portugal. Rescuer was not my role. The men in our family shouldered those burdens.

My parents visited Mike daily in his Lisbon cell. The Portuguese prisoners were limited to one visitor per week, but Mike's foreigner status permitted visitors every day.

In an interview with Tom Gannon, Mike spoke of his time in the Lisbon prison:

"[The visits] took place in this really big, long room with about one hundred other prisoners. It was really, really strange. Ya gotta picture this room, about one hundred feet long and fifteen feet wide, ceilings high like an old building, all the prisoners on one side and the [prisoners'] relatives on the other. The relatives would be a dad or a sister or a wife or a baby, and the girlfriend would be [leaning] halfway across the table kissing. We'd sit down and the first five minutes we couldn't hear anything, and then by about fifteen minutes you'd be shouting and you could understand maybe half of what the other person was saying, by the end of the hour, you'd be screaming. Everybody just got louder and louder, because they were competing against the person next to them. By the end of the hour your head was just fucked. Babies crying."

Above all the screaming, Dad spoke to Mike about Airco Company's plans. Airco had told Dad that Mike should relinquish his claim to the boat as they wanted the boat to sail with or without Mike. So Mike grudgingly wrote a letter stating that since he didn't know when he would be released from prison, and it was already the beginning of July, he realized that they had the right to go with another sailor.

Despite the stress of dealing with Mike's situation, Dad maintained the demeanor of a saint, describing Mike playing chess with other prisoners as if all was normal. Dad expressed a growing fondness for Lisbon, suggesting a desire to return someday under different circumstances. Mom, on the other hand, never wanted to see the place again.

After the two-week deadline had come and gone, no one knew when—or

if—Mike would be released, and since *Airco* needed to be sailed back to Newport from the Azores and then equipped for the race, time was running out. The *Airco* sponsors in the States hired another sailor to take the boat back across the Atlantic, and it was assumed that the new sailor would be the BOC skipper.

Mike wrote an official statement explaining his situation. I don't know if this was sent to the *Airco* people, or anyone else, but a copy of it has survived.

"The problem for which I am here is very unfortunate indeed. In 1975, the climate in Greece was a very disturbed one. Cyprus had just exploded into what threatened to be all out war between the two countries. Nowhere was this more evident than on the island of Rhodes. With nightly blackouts and the evacuation of over 4,000 tourists in three days, things were looking very desperate.

"At the time, I owned a very old charter boat and made an existence taking tourists sailing for the day or occasionally overnight to the island of Symi. With the start of the Cyprus War in 1974, this all came to an end. My mistake was made then. I failed to realize soon enough the implications this would have for me. Instead of leaving then when I should have, I decided to stay. I stayed alive by taking Turkish people across to Turkey. This did not achieve me any great fame with the Greek Port Authority, and soon I was even in a worse position.

"It was at this time that I agreed to take a week charter to Turkey. The circumstances were a bit sketchy, but I felt I needed to do it in order to raise the little money it would take to remove myself from the area. I would plan to leave for Malta after the charter was over. Things did not work out; the charter did not pay the full amount, and again I was stuck from leaving. It was shortly afterwards that I heard rumors of what was going on, and decided whatever the circumstances I should leave immediately and did so. Not until my visit to Horta, Portugal, have I had reason to think about this affair and perhaps carelessly have not.

"I have had no reason to think about these things, because my last twelve years have been as far removed as life on the moon would be. I have been very active and very successful in the building trades. First owning a painting company, then a construction company, and now working as a real estate and construction consultant.

"Two years ago I made the decision to enter the BOC (British Oxygen Corporation) Around the World singlehanded race and have spent the better part of every waking second working toward this aim. The only affordable way to be competitive and enter a specialty type boat was to build it myself. I commissioned an architect and commenced construction of a 50-foot monohull in fiberglass. This I soon found out was a tremendously labor intensive project, not to mention expensive. I had soon invested my life's savings and was going into debt. The idea and project had merit, and more importantly I had a jump on the competition; the race, you see, had already begun. Because of these things, I was able to attract investors and the construction continued.

"Now, of course, the boat is mostly complete, and I have sailed it across the Atlantic (part of the qualification requirements for the race). I have achieved what no one thought possible nor has anyone even attempted. I have raised the

money and built an extremely competitive boat in preparation for a race that has been dubbed the Mt. Everest of Sailing.

"In doing so I have leveraged everything of my own, which, win or lose, will have to be accounted for. Ten years is probably a conservative estimate for the time needed to do this. In addition to these written debts, I have commitments to dozens of people to perform in this race. They have chosen to back my efforts for whatever reasons they may have of their own. But nothing in this world is accepted by an honest man for free, without obligation. This is the part that weighs heaviest. My only repayment can be to do my very best and to honor the trust that has been given to me. To not even be given that chance would be a hell in itself. How can I return to my home, to my friends, and to the people that believe in me and face this? For whatever reasons, if I don't participate in the race, the fact will be I didn't, and this will be almost impossible to overcome.

"From the start of this venture I believed that this event was made for me. That my life's entire collection of experiences and work had been preparing me for this race. My life was testimony to the rigorous qualifications needed to succeed in this race. My experiences are filled with solo expeditions in many different media. I have been to the far south, to the arctic, to the high mountains, and to the sea. I am mechanically good and have been trained in again many different areas. My strength in body and mind has been continually tested in all types of adverse situations, from Outward Bound Instructor to building homes at the 11,000 foot elevation, and I had the dedication it would take to drive this project through. I had no other commitments, I knew I could be 100% for the three years it would take. But the most important ingredient is I know above all other things I am a good sailor. For what it's worth, I believe in my ability above anyone else's to be able to drive a boat faster and safer and to reach the destination. This feeling has been with me since I was a boy sailing twenty-three years ago.

"This same feeling has never been more alive than it was on the way over across the Atlantic. I felt alive and in control. The boat that I had engineered and built was alive and fast. The mileage I was getting was winning stuff. Just practically equipped without a sail inventory and no autopilot other than the unpredictable wind vane that I had only just installed the day before I left, I was getting over 200 miles a day. The potential was great and I was excited. On arrival to Horta everything was glowing. We had been such a success. For the first time in my life I felt real achievement. My life had taken on purpose and direction that I never witnessed before. I had proved what I had known all along, that I would be good at this and I was happy.

"If my story ends here my life will not, that is for certain. But my life will not be exactly the way I know it now for the reason I have stated. To reach again what I have just touched (if this problem persists) will take many years. The momentum I have established will never be regained in the form it is today. People only stand behind the winner, and this situation no matter what the facts will not be understood.

"The degree of urgency now is the same that it has been for the past two years and for the same reason, to compete in the greatest race ever held in the

history of the world. My anxiety completely strips me of my thoughts. I can only hope that the person in charge of my immediate future will read this and find some solution.”

After my parents and Hugh flew to Lisbon, my brother-in-law, Simmy, also joined them. Three of them—Mom, Hugh, and Simmy—went one day to the prison to talk with Mike about the possibility that he might be released from prison, but that his name might remain on the Interpol list. If he traveled to another foreign country, there was a good chance that he would be arrested again. They felt it was important that in the event his name was not officially cleared, he should agree to drop out of the race. They returned from their visit with Mike and were happy to tell my dad that Mike had agreed not to race until his name was cleared.

Years later my dad wrote about that day. “The three of them were all very pleased that Mike at last had agreed that that was the only sensible thing to do. I didn’t want to annoy them, as we were all under a lot of strain, but such did not make me happy . . . I knew that Mike would not stay long with that decision, and of course, he didn’t. Mike and I are very competitive beings, and to us killing off the dream was worse than the risk of re-arrest. The other three are more rational, less emotional beings, and no race to them was worth the risk it might entail.”

On the advice of the American ambassador to Portugal, my dad flew to Athens to find a Greek lawyer who could help untangle the strings of this case. Simmy went with him, and through my dad’s law firm in Minneapolis, they engaged Nicolas G., an extradition specialist, who took the case for the fee of ten thousand dollars. He found the court papers from the 1975 trial and learned that there were three defendants, all tried and found guilty of drug smuggling from Turkey to Greece. They were convicted for smuggling ten kilos of cannabis and received sentences of eleven to seventeen years. By 1986, all had been released and presumably had left Greece. Mike was accused of transporting forty to forty-two kilos of hash and the three defendants from Turkey to the Greek island of Symi, and he had been tried in absentia and found guilty. Since the statute of limitations on a Greek felony was and still is fifteen years, the warrant for Mike’s arrest would not expire until 1990.

The extradition expert, among others, told my dad and Simmy they needed to stop this extradition in Lisbon, because if extradited to Greece it was likely Mike would, at the very least, be held for several months awaiting trial, and at the worst, be sentenced to several years in prison.

While Nicolas was working on Mike’s case in Athens, another plan was evolving back in Minnesota involving Andreas Papandreou, the prime minister of Greece, and Walter Heller, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors under John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Heller had become friends with Papandreou when both were professors in the economics department at the University of Minnesota in the late 1950s. Papandreou lived in the United States from 1942–59, became an American citizen, and only returned to Greece at



the request of Prime Minister Karamanlis in 1959. The Greek government was overthrown in 1967, and Papandreou, an outspoken opponent of the coup, was placed under house arrest, then released a few months later on the condition that he leave the country. Walter Heller was instrumental in forcing the Greek military leaders to release Papandreou and allow him to flee the country.

Full details of Heller's influence on Papandreou and Papandreou's involvement with Mike are unknown, but a friend of our dad's knew about Walter Heller's friendship with Papandreou and suggested Dad write a letter to Heller. The letter became my responsibility. My older sister and I agonized over the letter; it was a complicated set of facts needing presentation in the best possible light, and we knew that Heller was a respected professor of economics. He also didn't know our family from a hole in the wall.

The letter proved a moral test for me: I believed Mike was guilty of the crime he had been convicted of, in part because of my knowledge of Mike's past. He had smuggled and dealt marijuana and cocaine in the States, and had told me on the trip to Marmaris that he was planning on bringing hash back from Turkey. No one else knew of that conversation, and I never revealed it. In the letter we stressed Mike's fine character, his successes, and his potential as a terrific representative of the United States—one of the few American entries in a race that was respected internationally. He could be an American hero, and his chances should not be ruined by an 11-year-old misunderstanding in Greece. I was lying by writing this letter. I also was not as invested as my parents in Mike's future, so I didn't feel the need to present him as "hero" material. He was still someone who had a criminal past.

My sister, who did not know much about Mike's time in Greece, did not see Mike much differently than I did. Together we wrote what we thought was a persuasive account of an all-American boy. We were fudging the truth.

When we arrived at Heller's home in St. Paul, he was out, so we handed the letter to the housekeeper who answered the door. Heller's absence was an enormous relief—my sister and I had dreaded speaking to him on behalf of our brother. Our family later learned that Heller subsequently talked with Papandreou, but we don't know if Papandreou intervened or not.

At any rate, a request for extradition was never sent from Greece to Portugal, so on the fortieth day the statute of limitations for filing the necessary extradition papers ran out, and Portugal no longer had the right to keep Mike in prison. As my parents waited outside the prison gate, anxious, fearing that Mike may not be coming out, that they had been misinformed, and that he would be kept behind bars indefinitely, they saw Mike, alone, walking toward them with a big smile on his face. He was free. Mike flew from Lisbon to Newport on July 25, 1986, to pick up where he had left off—fifteen pounds lighter and with a shaved head. Although he was later asked by reporters about the situation, he never provided any more information about what had happened in Greece eleven years earlier.

Mike was finally free to focus on the race and outfitting *Airco*.

Mike had already lost six precious weeks for testing and equipping the boat, and there didn't seem to be enough time in the day to do everything he needed

to. And again he was strapped for cash. The utility of everything for the boat had to be carefully weighed against its price, and unless it was essential he did without it. Local businesses donated certain items, and he shopped carefully to get the best deals. He delayed buying pricier items until the last minute because he lacked cash, but he carried a list with things to buy. Shortly before he set sail he told someone that his list was so long he couldn't find the beginning of it.

Food and basics like toilet paper he procured in the last days, because he considered them far less important than a better piece of hardware he might need to fix the rigging. Mike appreciated food, but for this trip he couldn't care less. When asked later about his first race, one of the most frequent questions was, "What did you eat for forty days?" Mike usually just answered, "Rice."

Preparing for the race meant more than just equipping the boat, since the charges that led to Mike's arrest in Horta had never been officially dropped. The scenario of a customs official retaining Mike could easily repeat itself anytime he left the country, which included this race. About a month after Mike came back from Portugal, he visited me in New York City.

"I went to the South African Embassy today."

"Why?"

"To see if they have an extradition treaty with Greece."

"And?"

"They don't."

"That's great, but what about the other countries you stop in?"

"I don't know about them."

"So it could happen all over again?"

"Um, no. It won't."

"Are you still going to do this race?"

"Definitely."

"But Mike, don't you see how much hassle you put everyone through trying to get you out of prison? I put my life on hold and went to Minnesota to help. Do you know how much people did to get you released? Have you thanked anybody for what they did?"

Mike said nothing. Thanking people meant acknowledging that he had screwed up, and he didn't want to do that.

Back in 1975 when I saw Mike again after he had left Greece, I expected he'd thank me, or at least thank Peter, my boyfriend from those many years earlier, who had given him money to buy the new passport in Athens. Peter's move was risky, putting his own safety and charter business on the line.

Mike assumed offering thanks was unnecessary—what was done was done, so move on. Could Mike see the sacrifices people made on his behalf? Claim responsibility? What had he done to help others in their times of crisis?

Fast forward to 1986. Mike replied to my question, "That's your problem."

"What? It's my problem that I wanted to help you?"

"Your emotions are your problem."

"If I worry about you, that's my problem?"

"Yes."

I was stunned yet again. That was the way Mike lived his life: he never felt responsible for the emotions he aroused in other people—those were their responsibility. I couldn't argue with that. Part of me was furious, but part of me thought maybe he was right. I also didn't know if he really felt nothing when he told me it was my problem, or if he had to steel himself to say it. I still don't know. Perhaps it was the closest I had come to seeing something in him that was truly unacceptable, his utter selfishness. It felt like I had hit a wall, and suddenly I didn't know him.

"So you're really going to risk prison again?"

"I am doing this race. I am not going to give that up."

"And if you get thrown into prison?"

"I'll deal with it."

But I couldn't deal with another prison crisis. Mike's arrest in Portugal had stirred up memories of the weeks I spent after he had fled Greece. Although it was eleven years later, the stress of that time in Greece came flooding back. Then I knew I was a liability as the weak link in Mike's chain of protection—so I went to Israel for a month. While there, I got word from my parents that Mike was finally back in Minnesota. But until then, I had lived in limbo, not knowing if he was alive. The last thing he told me on Spetses was that he would kill himself if he was caught. I could resume my own life only after the threat of his death had passed.

I thought I had lost him during that time, so when he was arrested in Portugal I went through that emotional trap all over again. Twice I had been wrenched apart by his fate, worried he would end up in a foreign prison—or worse, dead. Now, as I contemplated him tempting fate yet again, I knew I had to protect myself from the emotional roller coaster of Mike's world.

(I later learned from Joel Stebbins that Mike had planned on the possibility of not being able to sail into Cape Town. He had stocked the boat with extra food that would cover him until he could stop somewhere out of reach of Interpol. I don't know how he would know he was wanted by customs in Cape Town if he didn't actually test it, by which time it would be too late for him to sail on, so the story seems a little illogical.)

As a result of our conversation, I decided to boycott the BOC race and pull back from any involvement with Mike. This was the only logical thing to do. If I believed so strongly that he shouldn't do this race, then I shouldn't cheer him on. I wasn't willing to be part of something that might land him in prison, especially if I believed that meant he might kill himself. So I severed our connection. Maybe that was what Mike had been telling me years ago—that I shouldn't be so attached to him. Or maybe there were more important things than my feelings, or perhaps he was protecting me by seeming so uncaring. He knew I was vulnerable to his fate. Why should he stop what he was doing because of my fear of his death? My sister agreed that Mike was risking a long prison sentence and possible death by leaving the country, yet she continued to support him.

As it turned out, I was the only family member not there when the BOC race began on August 30, 1986. Even my husband went. Although I chose not to

be there, my family still included me in all the news and excitement. So while I boycotted it for my own reasons, I was happy to hear about it.

In the last hours before the race start, Mike and friends were still stocking the boat with food. After two hours' sleep, Mike was up and sailing to the starting line. Twenty-four sailors converged at the imaginary line between committee boat and buoy on the outer edges of Newport Harbor, each boat unique: some wooden, some fiberglass, some old, others new. They differed in length, and they all carried varying sail capacities.

Today, round-the-world racing boats no longer look anything like they did in 1986; as in so many other things, the boats are built only for the race, costing millions of dollars with designs that would have seemed impossible twenty-five years earlier. Some boats starting the 1986 BOC had already sailed around the world, but some, like *Airco*, had sailed no farther than across the Atlantic and back for its qualifying sail.

Their budgets varied enormously. Mike's budget of \$250,000—he still owed \$100,000 at the race start—was one of the smallest. The French sailors, hailing from a nation very proud and good at this kind of sailing, had budgets of as much as one million dollars. Mike was the only sailor who had built his own boat.

The nationality of the sailors differed, too: of the eleven in Class I and fourteen in Class II, there were eight Americans (one of whom was a French-born American citizen), five French, two Australians, two Finns, two South Africans, one New Zealander, one Brazilian, one Canadian, one Czech/American, one Brit, and one Japanese.

Philippe Jeantot, the winner of the 1982–83 Class I (boats sixty feet and under), was the favorite for his class. He was sailing a new boat, *Credit Agricole III*, named for her sponsor, a French bank. He had won the last BOC sailing *Credit Agricole II*, finishing in 159 days, 11 days ahead of the rest of the fleet and setting a new record for solo circumnavigating the globe. Jeantot hoped to shave a few days off his time in this race.

Designed by Guy Ribadeau Dumas, *Credit Agricole III* was launched earlier that year, becoming the standard bearer for a new kind of boat, the Open 60. She featured a pointy bow, a plumb stern that maximized the waterline, and twin rudders to give better control while heeling (inclining toward the sea) and steadying her downwind. The wheelhouse had an improved design to provide better protection for the extreme conditions of sailing in the Southern Ocean. She had water tanks as additional ballast, designed so that the water could be shifted port or starboard as needed to improve the boat's stability.

Two other French sailors, Titouan Lamazou on *Ecureil d'Aquitaine*, and Jean Yves Terlain on *UAP Medecins Sans Frontieres*, were also favored. Both sailors had been racing on the international scene for years. The 31-year-old Lamazou made his first transatlantic crossing at the age of 18. Terlain, 42, had raced in each OSTAR since 1968. Guy Bernadin, a Frenchman who had recently become an American citizen, was racing the BOC for his second time. He had already sailed alone more than 70,000 miles, racing in many different events. New Zealander Richard McBride had an adventurous background that echoed

shades of Mike's, including attending an Outward Bound school in 1961, working as a photographer and bulldozer driver before leading a dogsled team in Antarctica, then building his first boat, *City of Dunedin*, which he had entered in the 1982–83 BOC. In 1986 he was racing a new boat, *Kiwi Express*, launched in 1985 and fitted with a new kind of keel with a lead bulb at its bottom. This new type of keel was a source of controversy, both then and in the years to come, as Mike and all of us were to discover.

The American favorite, Warren Luhrs, was sailing *Thursday's Child*, sponsored by Hunter Marine, and was already a proven winner in the 1984 OSTAR and the 1985 Round Britain Race. David White, the American sailor who created the BOC race, had competed in the inaugural BOC, but after a series of severe structural problems with his boat he'd withdrawn from the race. In 1986 he was back for the second BOC, sailing his rebuilt *Legend Securities*.

Class II, the fifty-foot-and-under category of boats, and the class to which Mike, on *Airco*, belonged, had fourteen entrants. This class was led by one of the older sailors, Jacques de Roux, 49, a former French submarine commander returning for his second BOC. In the first BOC race in 1982, he had pitchpoled—the boat had been taken by a monster wave that plummeted its stern over its bow, tossing it like a child's toy—to resurface with a broken mast which then rammed a large hole into the boat's hull. His boat was literally sinking underneath him, but three days after the accident he was rescued by another competitor, Richard Broadhead.

The next favorite in Class II, Jean Luc Van Den Heede, sailing one of the shortest boats in the fleet, *Let's Go*, at forty-five feet, was a former mathematics teacher from France. The oldest sailor, Harry Mitchell, at age 62, on *Double Cross*, hailed from England and had started singlehanded sailing in the 1972 OSTAR. In addition to Mike, there were five other Americans: Dick Cross, Hal Roth, Mark Schrader, Mac Smith, and a Czech who'd recently become an American citizen, Richard Konkolski. Other sailors included a 26-year-old Canadian, two from Finland, one from Japan, and one Brazilian.

## 1986–87 BOC, Singlehanded Race Around the World, Newport to Newport

*“I eat four candy bars. Spray glue on my hands and go hand over hand up the mast. Full moon. Nine knots, and I’m hanging from the mast in the Southern Ocean hesitating to cut this beautiful sail and start slashing, thinking the whole time, don’t drop this knife.”*

—MIKE PLANT, DECEMBER 13, 1986, HALFWAY AROUND THE  
WORLD ON THE SECOND LEG OF THE RACE, ONBOARD *AIRCO*

AS A SPECTATOR EVENT, the start of the BOC was crazy. Hundreds of boats circled in the harbor to cheer on the racers: plastic dinghies, small sailboats, large motorboats, tour boats, stolen boats, sinking boats, and anything else that could float for a couple hours. Chaos prevailed. Since most spectators had no idea what they were doing, they just shouted out questions or swore a lot. It was a bad day for motorboats: too much wind and choppy seas. Boats sped up and slowed down, trying to stay close to the starting line, a location which seemed a mystery even to the competitors. Right before the starting gun, a spectator boat crossed in front of the bow of one of the competitors, South African John Martin on *Tuna Marine*, and the two collided. The offending spectator boat dumped all five passengers into the water. Not a pleasant way to start a 27,000-mile race.

At the starting line, Titouan Lamazou, sailing the 60-foot *Ecureil d’Aquitaine*, collided with another of the sixty-footers, the American favorite, *Thursday’s Child*, skippered by Warren Luhrs. As a result of the damage to his boat, Luhrs decided to turn back into harbor for repairs.

Our family had rented a 20-foot powerboat, and my younger brother, Tom, was at the wheel. Linda held onto her two young sons to keep them from flying out of the boat with every sharp turn. Dad later said that it was all thanks to Tom’s driving skill that they hadn’t all ended up in the “drink.”

Up to thirty minutes before the starting gun, Mike’s friends were still working on the boat. At the thirty-minute gun they piled off into another friend’s motorboat. Since Newport was Mike’s hometown, he knew the conditions better than most of the other sailors and was one of the first across the line. After the



start, Mike's friends and family followed him out of the harbor, laughing and joking, everybody having a great time as if they were all still one big crew setting off on a long trip together. It wasn't until the shore crew finally turned back for Newport that Mike realized he was alone and had 7,100 miles of sea ahead of him. If all went well, he would make landfall at Cape Town in about forty days.

From a later interview, Mike said:

"When they turned back, I realized the race had started . . . Now I was alone. I went down below to turn on the main autopilot and get things ready for the first leg. When I flipped the switch nothing happened. I figured, no problem, I'll turn on the smaller one until I can get things figured out with the main pilot. But when I turned that one on, it didn't work either. I went to the wind vane system. I couldn't get that to work either. Here I was, 8,000 miles [it was closer to 7,100 hundred miles, but then distance in sailing isn't a straight line from point A to point B] to Cape Town, and I had no way to steer the boat [on its own]. I know it sounds crazy, but all this equipment was installed just one day before the start, and we had no time to test it out or do any sea trials. But I was not going to turn back—and I certainly was not going to give up."

There are two types of self-steering devices: those that need electricity and the mechanical ones that don't, referred to as *wind vanes*—essentially a rudder placed in the air that keeps the boat on track by steering according to the wind direction by way of a mechanical connection to the helm. Mike had been content to have only a wind vane (a Monitor steering vane) for his qualifying trip across the Atlantic, but for this round-the-world trip he needed more than one self-steering device. The better ones today are electronic, but they never seem totally reliable, and many racers spend lots of time adjusting, repairing, and coaxing their autopilots to keep them running. Long-distance solo sailors depend on them for their survival. Without them they couldn't sleep, make needed repairs or sail adjustments, or do any of the hundred or more things that need to get done while sailing a large yacht for days on end by yourself.

Self-steering devices improve conditions for a solo sailor, but their use conflicts with a basic law of good seamanship: keep a constant lookout to avoid collisions. At least one person on board must be awake and on watch to assess any potential collision and attempt to prevent the same. This rule is especially important when the sea gets crowded, specifically inside commercial shipping lanes and fishing areas.

BOC racers never slept for periods longer than an hour, and sometimes, if the waves were large and the winds were strong, they could only get away with twenty minutes at a time. Virtually all racers experienced times when they had to stay awake so long—thirty hours or more, while cold and hungry—that they eventually risked passing out from fatigue.

For these reasons and more, autopilots were crucial, but being electronic they also were notoriously quirky. So although reliable autopilots exist, sailors have to be prepared for those times when they don't work. Mike, along with all the racers, would have problems throughout the race with his autopilots. On his

last voyage the lack of a working autopilot also would make his job extremely difficult. In fact, autopilot problems at the beginning of that final voyage were a sad foreshadowing of his last days.

Among the BOC fleet, extraordinary things happened on that first leg—extraordinarily unlucky things even beyond Mike's autopilot issues. The Australian skipper, John Biddlecombe, on the Class I *ACI Crusader*, was dousing his spinnaker when he stepped backward and fell down through the forward hatch, catching one of his testicles in the fall. The pain was so bad it took him three hours before he could crawl aft to radio race headquarters. He sailed immediately to Bermuda for medical help. Once in Bermuda, he was told he needed two weeks to recover. But unable to let more time go by and unwilling to quit the race, he set off again two days later.

Shortly after Biddlecombe's injury, a U.S. Navy helicopter had to rescue Dick Cross, an American sailor, whose Class II entry, *Airforce*, had collided with a submerged object, probably a freight container, holing the hull. After four hours of bailing to no avail, he called for rescue, abandoned his boat, and climbed into his life raft. *Airforce* sank without trace.

In the second week, most of the boats sailed into the outer limits of Hurricane Earl. Mike's luck was better, and he easily cleared the worst of the storm. Several of the boats behind him were hit by 50-knot winds—the equivalent of 57 miles per hour, or Force 10 on the Beaufort scale used by mariners. These were the first strong winds of the race.

The doldrums—quirky winds found in the equatorial band of the earth and the bane of sailors—were next. Mike wrote:

"Everyone has to cross these before entering the southern trades again. There is an incredible misconception about the doldrums. There are small pockets of low pressure that carry a lot of wind that can cause real damage. You're sitting there with all your light-wind sails up, and before you know it you've got 50-knot winds coming out of nowhere. You try hanging on to these sails for as long as you can, because you don't know how long the winds will last. I tried to make good time with whatever I had in order to sail through as fast and carefully as possible. One boat lost its mast just fifty miles away from me. [Mike was referring to Richard McBride's *Kiwi Express*, whose rigging problems caused the loss of the mast at the equator, forcing McBride to sail under jury rig to Brazil for repairs.] We were both in the same weather, and these winds surprise you. It is important to be very, very careful or you are in real trouble."

By the end of the second week, the fleet had divided into two groups, with Guy Bernadin in Class I in the lead, closely followed by John Martin and Titouan Lamazou, also Class I. From Class II, Jacques de Roux on *Skojern IV* kept up with the Class I boats. Mike was in second place in Class II, almost three hundred miles behind de Roux. The sailors could keep track of each other by turning on a satellite tracking system called ARGOS, which allowed them to see both where other competitors were and to calculate how fast they were moving. Mike kept close track of de Roux, and from knowing his positions he learned that

de Roux had sailed into a particularly windless area. Mike chose a different route and narrowed their gap by two hundred miles.

“After going through the doldrums I was about halfway to Cape Town. The farther south I went, the worse the weather became—and the closer I got to the cape, the worse the seas became. The biggest surprise came the morning I first set eyes on Table Mountain [the mountain that rises out of the land like a tabletop] just behind Cape Town. It was an incredible sight. I had been at sea for about 42 days, which was the longest I had ever been at sea, let alone by myself. Here I was completely becalmed. The sea was like glass, the sun just coming up over Table Mountain, and the moon setting straight behind me.

“I looked to the south and there was *UAP*, the big 60-footer from France, not more than five miles away. [*UAP*, skippered by Jean Yves Terlain, was sailing in Class I and Mike was in Class II, so, in theory, they were not racing against each other.] We were both trying to get to the finish line with no air in sight. Before we knew what was happening, the wind picked up to about 20 knots, and we were going into a tacking duel for the finish line—8,000 miles of sailing, never seeing another competitor, and we were entering a tacking duel.

“As she got closer, I was covering her [keeping up, tack by tack], then the wind picked up to about 35 knots—both of us under full sail, moving at maximum speed, and closing in on the shore. Suddenly the biggest fog bank I had ever seen closed in on us. We couldn’t see 30 feet in front of us. Neither of us knew where the other one was, and the shore was getting closer. I knew I had to tack, but would I be tacking right into *UAP*’s path? There wasn’t much time to think about that. I could hear the breakers on the shore—I tacked just waiting for the crash to happen. I moved out on port tack; the sound of the surf got quieter, and my heart beat got louder—and I still didn’t know where I was. Then the fog started to lift, and sure enough there she was, just off my starboard quarter. I still had the lead, but I didn’t know where the finish line was. I decided just to cover *UAP*, hoping that she knew where to go. Maybe she would take me off to some corner and leave me there . . . And then what would I do? Suddenly the finish line came into view. I tacked again, covering *UAP*, and crossed the line just 15 seconds ahead of her [80 seconds according to one source]. It really didn’t matter because she was in a different class . . . But it sure was fun.”

The South African, John Martin, sailing *Tuna Marine Voortrekker II* (the full name, although it was generally referred to as *Tuna Marine*) won the first leg, crossing the finish line at Cape Town fourteen hours ahead of the second place boat, *Credit Agricole III*, and forty-two days after leaving Newport. Jacques de Roux on *Skojern IV* arrived on day forty-five, taking first for Class II and beating five Class I boats. Mike followed de Roux at forty-seven days. Nineteen boats finished the first leg with times ranging from forty-two to sixty-six days. Six boats never finished the leg.

By the end of Leg 1, six boats were out of the race: *Airforce* (sunk), *Kiwi Express* (dismasted), *ACI Crusader* (skipper injured), *Madonna* (rigging damage), *Quailo* (retired), and *Miss Global* (rudder breakage). (A list of racers is

begins page 224.) Most of the lead boats followed the race predictions. Mike, by finishing second in his class, was the big surprise. He was four days ahead of the third place boat, *Let's Go*, sailed by Jean Luc Van Den Heede. When asked what he thought about the first leg, he said, "It was a race, all the way from the minute we left Newport, all the way. Balls to the wall."

The nineteen sailors who finished the first leg took full advantage of the layover to make repairs, replace broken parts, and prepare mentally and physically for the start of the next leg on November 15. The amount of layover time depended on when they arrived, but it was no longer than a month, and the type of repairs needed varied enormously.

Forty-plus of days sailing, much of it with strong winds, going as fast as possible while traveling southeast across the Atlantic, puts more than normal stress on a sailboat. By the time the BOC sailors reached Cape Town, the boats and rigging needed repair. Most of the sails were damaged, and those who could replaced them with new ones. While at sea, many skippers didn't have time to bother with the upkeep of non-racing parts of the boat, such as the galley, so after forty days certain parts of their boats were disaster areas.

The conditions of the Southern Ocean—the main feature of the next leg—are extreme and carry a reputation. Winds frequently reach hurricane force, and storms can last for days. Waves as tall as an eight-story building sometimes break far above the stern. Skippers angle their boats down the sides of the bigger waves, hoping to stay ahead of the break. If one of these monster waves breaks onto the boat, it's likely to damage autopilots and rigging. In the worst case a wave flips a boat over, snapping the mast in two.

A sailboat rollover means a wave has knocked the boat so far over that her mast goes below the level of the water. A knockdown puts the boat over on her side so that her mast touches the water, and a pitchpole describes the movement of the boat as a wave lifts up her stern causing her bow to dive, and she rolls stern over bow. For non-sailors, imagine how helpless a toy boat is in the bathtub when you pick it up or submerge it. In the Southern Ocean video clips these boats look just like that—toys engulfed by seas, big, beyond imagining. For each knockdown, rollover, and pitchpole, a sailor holds his breath and prays the boat will right itself, and that when she comes upright he'll find the mast—and all the rest of the gear—intact. Sailboats right themselves because the huge weight at the bottom of the keel wants to find its way to the lowest point possible.

The race passed through the highest latitudes of the Southern Ocean where the air temperature drops to freezing, making it hard to stay both warm and dry. A frozen deck is treacherous, leaving no way to effectively make repairs or adjustments. The cold freezes hands solid within minutes, rain turns to sleet, and the sky closes in; the world becomes hidden from view for days. And making the lack of visibility worse, icebergs—the size of a city block and some much bigger, with most of the mass underwater and invisible to the skipper—begin to appear at 50 degrees south. Staying north of that line is no guarantee to avoiding them, as rogue icebergs can drift that direction. Mike described one iceberg with razor-sharp edges able to cut through the hull within seconds. All the racers faced

these Southern Ocean challenges—cold, windy, white-out conditions, icebergs, and killer waves—regardless of what boat they sailed.

While the challenges were common to all the racers, one comfort was that some of them were veterans of sailing the Southern Ocean. Those who had been before shared their experiences, and the length of the race gave the sailors time to get to know one another. Mike and Jacques de Roux—despite a fifteen-year age difference—became friends. This was de Roux's third circumnavigation. As a submarine captain in the French navy, he had spent almost his whole life at sea. Mike rarely had role models; he was too arrogant and cocky as a young kid to respect anybody, starting out with his older brother and his dad. As he grew up, if he did have any role models he would have never admitted to them. So Mike's attitude toward de Roux was unique. De Roux was his first, and perhaps his last, role model.

Mike knew that de Roux, sailing *Skojern IV*, was the better sailor of the two. De Roux had competed in the first 1982–83 BOC and was one of the most experienced skippers of the fleet, including those who were sailing the 60-footers. Mike assumed he'd follow Jacques—he hoped to learn a lot from him.

Mike was looking to de Roux for strategy about his course for the second leg. The race around the world essentially circled the South Pole. After sailing south from Newport, the course rounded two capes—the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn—and then returned north, back to Newport. The farther south the racers went, the smaller the circle around Antarctica and the shorter the distance. Sailors weighed the negative factors of the more southerly route—icebergs, freezing temperatures, terrible visibility, snow, and sleet—against the advantage of a shorter distance.

One of the BOC publications described a strategy for this second leg:

"The whole secret of making a fast passage through the Southern Ocean is to keep the boat between the high pressure systems to the north and the series of depressions that run constantly eastwards anywhere between latitudes 45 and 60 degrees south. Between these two systems, the winds are westerly. To sail too far to the north, about 40 degrees south, means having lighter winds, while to go too far south, and close to the centers of the depressions, involves very strong winds and big seas.

"It appeared that the best bet for a fast passage would be to head to about 50 degrees south and then level out at that latitude. The least distance between South Africa and Australia on the earth's surface, the great circle route, does call for a course well south, in fact so far south that it would mean sailing through solid ice. The sailing ship's shortest direct course is southeast to about 56 degrees south, and then due east as far as the longitude of Western Australia before starting a curve to the northeast. The sailors had to judge just how close they dared sail to this route and yet at the same time remain within the westerly wind belt."

A few days before the start of the second leg, Mike asked Jacques how far south he intended to sail. Jacques replied, "Well, that depends on how far you go." Mike took this as a huge compliment.

Choosing the best route depended on knowing what the weather was going

to do. Some sailors, particularly the lead boats in Class I, had onshore assistance from meteorologists who relayed routing advice based on more sophisticated forecasting equipment.

Hal Roth, a competitor in Class II, was concerned about the disparities in assistance for the boats: "The leading yachts received continual weather updates, advice from tacticians on land, and used computers both on land and at sea to coordinate the weather information with the vessel's performance . . . The most usual was an on-board Apple Macintosh computer with the \$3,000 MacSea program, which related a yacht's polar performance curves with wind strength and direction information. *Credit Agricole*, *Ecureuil*, and *UAP* used this system, and these three speedy vessels were far ahead of the rest of the BOC fleet."

Others, including Mike, had little or sporadic onshore weather assistance and instead relied on radio contact with their closest competitors as well as the weather fax to predict the weather patterns. Since it was patently clear to everyone that those who received professional advice had a significant advantage over the ones who did not, the race committee decided to disallow onshore assistance in the next BOC.

Fear can be a solo sailor's constant companion, but for many, including Mike, its presence was both tolerated and welcomed. Those extreme moments become a compelling force, a rush—after the few seconds of fear the desire to dive back in returns, often with a renewed commitment to return alive. Mike later described the emotional gamut of sailing the Southern Ocean:

"When the wind finally shows, it's on the nose of my boat. It's that stagnant weather that happens sometimes. The absence of a continuing westerly flow creates a void that is made up of a thousand little low-pressure cells, and I felt as though I was on the equator again. There is one exception, however, [when] the rain comes down white and there is ice on the deck and the fog never lets you see more than a half mile. But these are the times you live for and [you] are forced to surrender to them. You cannot resist Mother Nature for she lives within us—and we are she.

"Farthest south I got was 58 degrees. Not as cold as you might think. Maybe 40 Fahrenheit, but cold enough to have some icebergs. I saw one iceberg. One was plenty; one was way too many to see. I [was down below and] saw this reflection . . . And it was white. I thought it was a sail. I didn't want to think it was an iceberg. I mean you are not supposed to see an iceberg [at that latitude]. I ran up on deck, and it couldn't have been more than 300 meters [away]. We were going to miss it, but it was close, probably going to take some paint off the side of the boat. I steered away as far as I could, but there wasn't enough time to do a jibe. I ran up forward to see if there was more of it underwater. It didn't look like there was more of the berg underwater. It looked like the sides were vertical. We came about 150 yards from it. But what a sight! The sun was out, and this thing was just blue ice! It was like looking at a ghost, because it wasn't supposed to be there. I think my heart stopped. It was probably the most scared I've ever been."



Richard McBride, the New Zealander who raced *City of Dunedin* in the first BOC in 1982–83, wrote the following haunting description of the Southern Ocean. (McBride raced *Kiwi Express* on the first leg of the 1986–87 BOC, but was forced to drop out.)

“Bloody amazing scene out there. Seas going in all directions including over us [“us” refers to the boat and the skipper]. . . We had now reached that point where the situation is beyond control, chaos reigns, and the rational world of order and symmetry are but a fond memory. . . It seemed as if the yacht was the focal point of two intersecting lines of moving hills. . . A sea of epic proportions, much larger than I had yet observed, came barreling up behind, forming a real vertical wall. As I leaned over higher than the masthead, I watched in awe, and gripped the tiller with such tenacity, realizing I could not avoid this dousing.”

A few days before the start of Leg 2 into the Southern Ocean, the sailors were anxious to make sure everything was ready: Had they bought all the supplies they needed? Had they thoroughly checked the boat for potential weaknesses, reinforced everything that might break, and found replacements for all broken parts? Had they studied the weather patterns enough? Complicating matters for Mike was Rodger Martin’s decision that they should haul *Airco* out of the water to examine the hull. This was always an option. For some sailors it was an obvious decision, say for example, if the boat was leaking. For others, the decision was not so simple. Hauling a boat was expensive, and since it could be damaged when hauled out or when going back in the water, it was risky.

Mike argued against hauling *Airco*, believing it was unnecessary and not worth the risk. In the end, though, Rodger got his way, and *Airco* was hauled. Unfortunately, as Mike had feared, the boat was slightly damaged as she was taken out of the water. Mike, who had the capacity to get incredibly angry, lost it. Although the damage was minimal, Mike swore he would never listen to Rodger again. Mike’s decision years later not to haul *Coyote* after her grounding in the Chesapeake may have had its roots in this incident.

Nonetheless, the challenge of the Southern Ocean was too exciting, and Mike’s anger at Rodger did nothing to dampen his excitement about what lay ahead.

This was the beginning of the hardest part of the race—he would face more than thirty days at sea under punishing conditions. On November 15, 1986, the nineteen remaining boats were crammed together, jostling for the best angle at the starting line, when the gun went off. Ironically, the wind died simultaneously, and the racers, surrounded by more than three hundred spectator boats, drifted for an hour or two until the wind picked up.

After the finish of the 1986–87 BOC, Mike sat down to write a book about his life titled “The Possible Mission.” He got about twenty pages written, but then, unable to sit still a minute longer, he abandoned writing in favor of entering his next race. In that document Mike wrote about the start of the second leg:

"I had no idea what a first day was in store for us. After the [starting] gun we drifted down the coast with little breeze. Toward nightfall the wind began to fill in, and by midnight you could say the conditions had been reduced to horrible. I had an immediate [auto] pilot failure and was restricted from doing the normal sail change. At one point I left the helm unattended as I reduced the mainsail area. The boat lay on an angle that had it pointed close to the wind, and the seas were coming over the boat stem to stern. Sometimes the green water was over my knees. Now the winds were well over 50, and the main needed to be shortened down to its smallest reef. But to my horrible surprise, the outboard line was snagged on something inside the boom and the reef was not possible. The sail had to come all the way down or be ripped to shreds. The boat was way over-canvassed, and without pilot steering things were getting quickly out of hand.

"With the main down all the way the boat speed was reduced. I then took the boat off the wind a bit farther where I could make some headway and tied the wheel. It was now extremely rough, and the motion of the boat was trying to paralyze me. There was too much happening to become ill, but I became lethargic and it was easy to say, 'I don't give a damn, I just want to sit in a corner.' Your brain goes numb, and you really have to fight yourself to stay on top of it. I forced myself to grab the other pilot and make my way through the stern where the rudderpost came through the boat. I had to change drive units in order to be able to use the pilot. No matter, by morning I would have to get more sail on, and I needed a working pilot. I was making too much westerly. This exchange required chaining about fifteen very small wires and was normally about a twenty minute job at the dock. In that sea with the back of the boat being tossed around like a cork, it seemed to take hours. Every contact had to be solid, and I truly amazed myself that I had the patience, not to mention covering everything with vomit.

"The gale was short lived. By midmorning the wind and seas were down, and the barometer was rocketing up. A very fast moving high was about to put the whole race on hold again. It was just a warning, a stern warning, about what might be expected from the treacherous Indian Ocean. A good reminder of what the sea is all about and to be ready for the worst at all times.

"The next ten days [roughly the last part of November] went by very quickly. Jacques and I traded the lead eight or nine times and were never more than ten miles apart in the distance to go. In reality, we were fifty or sixty miles apart from each other, but our mileage to go was very close. [Sometimes as little as five miles; at this point, Mike and Jacques were seventh and sixth respectively in the overall fleet and second and first in their class.] Toward the end of those ten days I had decided to take a more southerly course and was beginning to get farther away. I had every intention of taking a dive south as the winds were light and the high pressure was reaching farther and farther south.

"I was at the point where you must make a decision to go above or below the Crugan [Kerguelen—Mike often spelled phonetically] Islands. These islands spanned a distance of one hundred and fifty miles. To take the southern route around the top put you quite a bit to the south. The strategy here was quite simple. The farther south you went, the shorter the distance around the globe

since it's much smaller the closer you get to either end. The other consideration was usually you would find more wind. The centers of the depressions that circled the globe at that latitude were traditionally low 50s. Now considering the severity of these low-pressure cells meant you didn't want to be too close to them—250 miles from the center was considered a good relative position. The direction of the winds would be favorable, and the strength would hopefully not overwhelm you.

"So now I gambled to go farther south, and it put me on the borderline. The weather may have been worse, but how bad? I had technically made the decision to go south and had a course plotted to the bottom of the Crozet Islands. [The Kerguelen Islands and the Crozet Islands are both part of the Territory of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands.]

"I had sailed the course for the better part of a day when I started to notice some major disturbances on the weather fax machine. The report was showing very serious weather on the way and it made no sense to sail deeper into it. I changed course to due east. This now led me through a small group of islands called the Crozet group. (And here I started thinking about Ulysses and his *Odyssey*.) The decision at first was a costly one.

"Approaching the Crozet group I was sailing blind. (And now I am thinking even more about Ulysses and sailing blindly.) Visibility was bad and the fax had not given a fix in ten hours. Distance to close was short, and the course took me near rocks and through a relatively close group of islands. The tension was building when finally the visibility lifted for a few minutes to reveal my position. I was dead center in the channel I had chosen and closing fast on the main island. The scene was so eerie I let myself stray from course to get a better look at the main island. It seemed so strange to see land out here so far away from anything that I let my fascination run wild. I talked myself into getting too close [to the rocks] and thought I may never be here again and I have to see this place better.

"Well, it was like a trap—a French trap. I sailed into a windward lee. The winds come across that huge expanse of ocean and take a very large leap over the island. The whole island creates an eddy and soon I found myself almost totally without wind. For four hours I battled in slop to keep the boat moving and to clear this now dreaded place. I felt frustrated and tricked. I lost sixty miles that day and knew it would be damn hard to get them back.

"These times when you really get mad are the hardest to be by yourself. It happened maybe twenty times during the race, and believe me, they make an impression. You feel completely devastated and have absolutely no place to vent it. It must have some huge social meaning that could easily be elaborated on. Remember those big storms coming? Well, they were getting close now. And I was damn glad not to be any farther south.

"Within a day of the islands the wind had built to a steady 40 and the seas were already the biggest I'd ever seen. They were like mountains. It was like being in front of a set of forever moving mountains. They looked huge. Some were steep. Some were starting to break. But everything was moving faster and faster and the boat's direction was becoming more and more difficult to control. Some waves were too big to race down—they looked increasingly steep and

close together. You're sure that the bow will bury at the bottom and the boat stopping will allow the ones behind to break over the top. If the boat got caught like that, God knows what would have happened. So I quartered the big ones and let them roll by. I did not let the boat go into a surf because by now my arms felt like spaghetti and the cold was getting inside me. I was more fatigued. The more [greater] energy expenditure makes you more aware of the 40 degree air temperature.

"This was my first real test. This was the reason I came to the Indian Ocean. And this was the reason I was in the BOC. And I was excited. The raw beauty in watching these forces at work was exhilarating. The day went by and now it was night—the wind felt to have dropped some. And because it was dark I thought maybe the seas were not so bad. It was time to take a short break. The mainsail was down and the boat was running under [head] sail alone. The sea was quartered [meaning the sea was coming on the quarter, the part of the hull aft of mid-ship] and I was on a good course. Things seemed to be under control and I went below.

"After a quick meal and another look up top, I figured I could rest for thirty minutes. I set the alarms and without getting out of my oilskins I got into my bunk. I choose a bunk because it was the safest. You cannot be tossed out and nothing can hit you if something breaks loose. I was there maybe five minutes before it happened. It was so quick and violent. It's hard to say how far over we were. But the boat went down a wave, and as it reached the bottom the wave broke over, inverting the boat. This wave was forty-five feet because they all were that night. And if you measured them from top to bottom, they were over one hundred feet. So you could imagine the noise inside that boat. Everything went flying. I had a bucket of tools on the floor. They replaced the food in one locker. The food then replaced the books and the books went somewhere else. The bilge had maybe three gallons of greasy water and that went right across the ceiling and everywhere in between. I scrambled for the wheel in the cockpit expecting the worst.

"The mast was the biggest concern and I was afraid for it. And also I was afraid it could happen again. I had never been in seas this big. Needless to say, I stayed at the wheel. The staysail had miraculously survived also, and I left that up to keep some speed on. You needed the speed for steerage. I wanted the option to steer around the big ones like the one that had just about done me in."

When he thought it was safe, Mike went below to the radio to patch a call through to our parents, waking them up in the middle of the night to tell them he had just had his first knockdown. Mom asked if he was all right, and Mike said he was fine.

It was by necessity a short conversation. Dad later described Mike during that phone call as terrifically excited, proud, and ready to take on more.

Mike recalled this part of the trip in an article written the following summer:

"Close to halfway across the Indian Ocean at latitude 48 south, a good portion of the fleet, including me, experienced eight consecutive days with winds over 50 knots. The seas built to over 40 feet and stayed that high as three major de-

pressions passed just south of us. *Airco* was knocked down a half-dozen times and once rolled under by a wave the size of a ten-story building. The feeling one experiences during all of this is indescribable. You look out across the sea, and you see a dozen waves that could roll you down and never even hesitate in their relentless nonstop surge around the world. To them you represent nothing more than another speck of phosphorescence. The power and the beauty you experience is unbelievable. You feel the immensity and the insignificance of our existence at the same time. I believe the soul is made from a million things, and in this case, one mistake and you could be reduced to a million specks of phosphorescence. But I was in control and the boat was surfing through these 40-foot mountains at 12 and 14 knots, and the feeling was great.

"I steered for hours—in and out, down and through, always keeping the boat moving so the waves breaking around and on me had little force and did little harm. Sometimes a wave would crack 80 and fill the cockpit, but usually they were not quite that big, and you got used to looking at 8 feet of foam on top of 40-foot swells a few feet from the back of the boat. When the conditions moderated somewhat, I shortened sail, put the boat on a course that quartered the sea, and tried to rest. As the low-pressure cell moves by, the wind and the sea will change direction, and you have to be ready to make adjustments to sail and change course. Sometimes the speed of the low will be quite fast. It is during these times that you rarely get to sleep more than half an hour at a time.

"Because it was a race, I had to be constantly pushing for maximum speed, and I had to change course and make adjustments to make the most possible miles toward my destination. Before my first knockdown . . . The barometer just kept rising, and the wind just kept building. You know that one out of every hundred or so waves is going to hit you, and you realize there is not much you can do. You just have to have faith that your boat will take that much punishment."

The weekly BOC newsletter quoted Mike's description of the monstrous seas:

"When it gets really bad you have to steer yourself. It's not very smart to heave-to in 40-foot seas. So you steer along with it and try to stay away from the big ones—or they'll break right over the top of you, and the boat will round up and roll. The only thing you can do is stay at the wheel and drive; because if you don't, it's just a matter of time before something bad happens."

Mike and Jacques exchanged the lead several times on the leg to Sydney, and at times they were just five miles apart. They couldn't talk well over the radio because Jacques' English was minimal, and Mike's French was worse. All of his competitive instincts came to the fore and Mike fought like crazy to keep up. He addressed the following letter, "Dear Liz," dated December 13, 1986, but never sent it. I found it in his papers after he died:

"600 miles from Bass Strait. I get the Argos [a tracking system] out. Twenty miles behind Jacques. This is it. I will get him tonight once and for all. I will thoroughly demoralize him, discourage him from this ludicrous pace. Up goes

the night stalker [a spinnaker]. 18 knots of breeze. Boat surfing up to 12s and 13s. Full moon. I will steer all night.

"I switch on the Robertson [a type of autopilot] so I can tidy up the lines. No response. I just had put the spare on three days ago. This is bad news. I try the Autohelm [another type of autopilot]. The helm is heavy and the base pulls out of the sole . . . [words illegible]. Oh well, I was going to steer anyhow. There are conflicting swells from opposite quarters so it's necessary. I pick a reasonable time to quickly go below and turn some lights on. I'm back in 20 seconds. That beautiful spinnaker is wrapped on the forestay. You can't imagine my despair. Well, I try everything. Of course everything makes everything worse. Now it's really wrapped.

"I am so mad I think I might get sick. I tie the helm. Wind is now 22. We are sailing due south. Time is running. Every hour I will lose 10 miles. The Robertson had unplugged itself. God knows how. The wires had fallen off literally, so it works [now] and I put the boat on course. Nine knots now [with] just the main. The motion seems to be as good on this angle as any.

"I eat four candy bars. Spray glue on my hands and go hand over hand up the mast. Full moon. Nine knots, and I'm hanging from the mast in the Southern Ocean hesitating to cut this beautiful sail and start slashing, thinking the whole time, don't drop this knife. One hour the whole job took. Well, the moral of the story is of course there's no free lunch.

"Weather is still settled, [wind is] SW 22 knots. Boat's sailing well. Where will Jacques be today? At 1200 GMT both of us had our share of problems. Both capsized [and] so many knockdowns I'm not keeping track. What do you do when the wind is 60 plus? Waves are cresting from two directions and every other one has 8 feet of foam on the top. I tell you, you don't have to have . . . [words illegible]. I tell you one day was like driving a sports car in the mountains. Bare poles, 9 knots, and enough steerage to go in and out of these monsters—that was the day Jacques went down. The wind rose with barometer, whatever that means. The barometer would rise and so would the wind. I never want to see that again. It's like Russian roulette. When your time is up, forget it. "The next morning I heard he had quit and was heading north. The guy has a funny sense of quitting. I still haven't caught him and it's been 6 days."

Jacques didn't actually quit the race, but he did give up his first-place lead knowing Mike would pass him if he slowed down, or if he took a break in a safe place to do repairs, or if he decided to seek help by pulling into a harbor.

Although de Roux set the race pace for Class II, he had sustained serious damages. "His steering wheel had been broken off its pedestal and badly bent out of shape. This meant that the electric autopilot, which depended upon a belt from the wheel, was inoperable and he had to ship the emergency tiller and steer by hand. He did his best to make repairs, but was not very successful and considered heading for Adelaide so that he could remedy the breakages properly."

Although hand steering for days, de Roux sustained nearly impossible speeds to keep ahead of Mike, but when Mike and others heard he was thinking about retiring they urged him to keep going. As Mike later said, "I needed him to keep



on. I needed his drive to drive me; his skill to push me to be smarter. For me, he was the race. A day later, he was no longer talking about quitting. The damage to *Skoiren* must have seemed a lot worse than it really was.”

Guy Bernadin, a Frenchman sailing *Biscuit Lu*, one of the leading Class I boats, crossed the finish line into Sydney at 1 a.m. on December 19, taking fifth place on elapsed (corrected) time. He reported to race headquarters that de Roux had failed to meet three radio schedules on Thursday, December 18, and he had heard nothing from him for twenty-four hours. (These scheduled contacts were informal arrangements the sailors made with each other.) De Roux had been without any navigational aids for more than two weeks. In his quest to stay ahead of Mike, he had managed only two to three hours of sleep per night. The last time Bernadin had spoken with him, de Roux told him he had hit his head badly on the spinnaker pole.

“At 3 a.m. December 19, the satellite system that kept track of the positions of the boats indicated that *Skoirn IV* was moving at about 4 knots on a course away from Sydney. After watching the ARGOS updates for the rest of the night and fearing the worst, Robin Knox-Johnston, at race headquarters in Sydney, decided to charter a plane and search the area where de Roux had last been heard from. Later that day, at 1:27 p.m. [Sydney time], the boat was sighted 35 miles southeast of Gabo Island sailing an erratic course with no visible captain. After the boat was sighted, an ore carrier was diverted and reached the boat. The boarding party found no one on board. A plane searched the immediate area with the hope that de Roux had survived and was in the water, or better yet, had made it ashore. After several futile attempts to find him, the rescue mission was terminated. Several days later, de Roux’s [floating] body was sighted five miles off the coast.”

The day de Roux was lost, Mike was still fighting fiercely to gain on him. “I had gigantic hopes of making a lot of miles on Jacques in this stretch. I . . . believed I had the advantage. That’s probably why I pushed so hard.”

Bill Biewenga, a member of Warren Luhr’s shore crew, joined one of the search vessels and was the first to board *Skoirn*, finding de Roux’s safety gear and clothing down below, as well as a half-eaten meal. It appeared that de Roux had gone up on deck in heavy weather intending to be there just a short time and had been swept overboard.

Dan Byrne, journalist and sailor, had raced against de Roux in the first BOC and wrote the following in honor of his fellow competitor: “It didn’t seem right . . . For it to happen to you. You, Jacques, so skilled, so prepared, so careful. If you, then what chances has anyone?”

De Roux—the most experienced, the most cautious, the most humble, the most respectful of the sea—was the least likely to do something dangerous or take an unmitigated risk. De Roux had been admired precisely because he didn’t brag or exaggerate; as a sailor and competitor he was quiet, unassuming, careful, and methodical. When salvagers boarded his boat later, they found charts on his navigation station with his route precisely marked; the last position marked showed him five miles off Green Cape, 230 miles south of Sydney. After sailing

non-stop, pushing his boat 24/7 for thirty-three days, leading Class II most of the way from Cape Town, and with less than a half day's sail to Sydney, something happened, and de Roux disappeared. Mike finished Leg 2 in 34 days, the first in his class, but he had no reason to celebrate. In an interview with Joel Stebbins, Mike said:

“Jacques was the best man for the job in this race. He represented all the things the race stands for. Though he was driving only a 50-footer, I think he was the best skipper in the fleet. He had the most experience. He was so self-disciplined. He had such control over things. He was just too good to go like that. I knew I was going to finish, but I didn't want to finish. It was a hell of a way to finish. There was a strong headwind and if the wind hadn't turned around to the south, I don't know if I would have made it in.

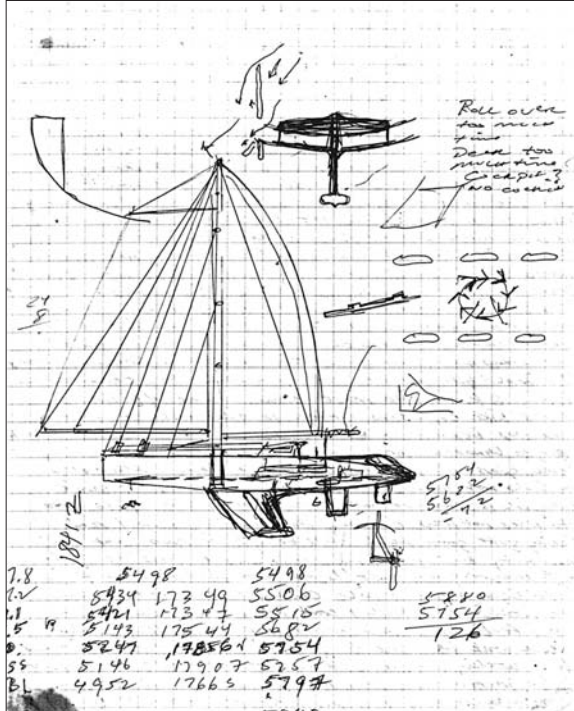
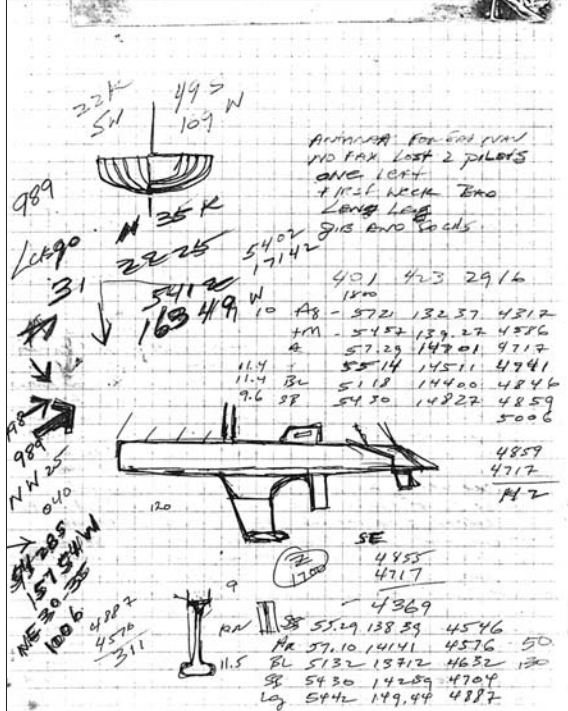
“I told myself I'd get the boat in, but I wouldn't go to the prize giving. But of course that was crazy. You get to the dock and they want you to open champagne and I couldn't do it. That was the last thing I wanted to do. But you have to keep going. That's the only way he'd like it.”

So the race went on. Although round-the-world racing is a high-stakes competition, the competitors rally around fellow sailors in need of help. Perhaps the loss of de Roux also reminded them of fragility and the importance of pulling together. The oldest BOC competitor, 62-year-old Harry Mitchell on *Double Cross*, struggled to complete Leg 2, arriving in Sydney only days before the start of the next leg. It was impossible for him to fully repair his boat before the start, so Mike and several other competitors took on various tasks—replacing worn-out parts or fixing broken rigging—so Mitchell could return to the Southern Ocean with the rest of the fleet.

On January 18, seventeen boats (after attempting to repair a broken mast, Warren Luhrs on *Thursday's Child* set sail, but when the rigging collapsed he withdrew from the race) tacked furiously near the start line in Sydney Harbor as Prime Minister Robert Hawke fired the gun signaling the beginning of Leg 3. The harbor swarmed with at least five hundred spectator boats and a noisy sky full of helicopters. Mike was second out of the harbor. His number one competitor now was Frenchman Jean Luc Van Den Heede on the 45-foot *Let's Go*. Sailing across the treacherous Tasman Sea and south around New Zealand's South Island, most of the boats struggled against strong headwinds and many sustained damages, including *Airco*. Mike wrote:

“Three days after leaving Sydney, I had lost sat nav, the weather fax, and two autopilots. I had over 8,000 miles to go with only one autopilot left and only a sextant to steer by. This meant two things. I would not be able to push the boat as hard as I would like for fear of breaking the last remaining pilot, and I would have to be extremely cautious of my course at all times because in those southern latitudes you rarely saw the sun—my celestial sights might be days apart. Needless to say, all of this in the first few days was a bit depressing, and my overall position of tenth was the worst yet for me.

“During the first week we had miserable weather. The winds were south/



Pages scanned from graph paper notebooks Mike kept aboard while racing. These were from his time in the Southern Ocean in the 1986–87 BOC Challenge. Mike jotted notes about his competitors' positions, his own speed and position, and distances covered. Among other jottings: "no fax, lost 2 pilots," "rollover, two more times." These also included sketches about weather systems and pencil thoughts about hull and rig design.

southeast and blowing over gale force. The course to the bottom of New Zealand was straight into it and heavy going. We crashed into 18- to 20-foot seas, and the boat took a tremendous beating. By the end of the week, I was down to trysail and storm jib as I desperately clawed my way to windward around the rocky bottom of South Island, New Zealand. The hard going paid off, and as I got farther south the weather improved. By continuing south, I escaped the fast-moving high that stopped everybody to the north of me, and I quickly overtook four boats, three of which were Class I.

"Two weeks later, I had established a 400-mile lead over the second place Class II boat. Then the impossible happened! At 58 degrees south, where the average winds were 25 and percent of gales every month was twenty percent, I found myself totally becalmed, without wind for two and a half days. This was not a place you expect to be sitting like that. The whole time I was there the rest of the racing fleet behind me was coming up fast. These were the times when it was hardest to be alone. I became very depressed—I couldn't eat very much, and I was afraid to talk on the radio for fear I might say something I would regret."

Over the next several days, due to the harsh weather conditions, the fleet experienced heart-stopping iceberg sightings, knockdowns, pitchpoles, and broken masts. There were badly cut hands, blackout-producing knocks on the

head, and one allergic reaction to antibiotics taken to stem a painful outbreak of boils. Then there were the ever-present realities of singlehandedness in the Southern Ocean: only a few fifteen-minute naps every twenty-four hours, sleeping in wet clothes, staying warm when the temperature dropped to the low forties, and a restricted and bland diet. Most of the equipment problems were with the autopilots that, when working, allowed the skippers to leave the helm, catching a nap or plotting a course. Without an autopilot they had to sail without the one thing that made their job even remotely possible, and that left them more than ever at the mercy of the sea.

All competitors struggled with the fickle wind: there was not enough, or too much, or it was coming from the wrong direction. As is often true in sailing races, tactical judgments about courses steered separate winners from the rest of the competitors; a decision to sail on a certain tack in order to pick up winds that might or might not be there could be the difference between falling behind, catching up, or overtaking the fleet. Sailors' decisions are calculated guesses; there is never anything certain about the wind.

Rounding Cape Horn is an epic sailing experience. It is the first sight of land after several weeks of nothing but the broad, and sometimes monotonous, expanse of sea—thousands and thousands of miles of sea. Sailing distance crossing the southern Pacific varies from 1,500 to 4,000 miles depending on where you leave and where you arrive. But Cape Horn is not just a distant shore—it's a breathtaking sight as it rises 1,300 feet (425 meters) straight up from the sea. At 56 degrees south, it is so close to Antarctica that winds blow from the South Pole and bounce off the Andes forming a tunnel of winds howling from both sides, creating waves up to one hundred feet (thirty meters).

Winds that circle the Antarctic, unlike other winds, are never broken, never softened by land masses, so they are stronger than anywhere else in the world. Since the distance between Cape Horn and the Antarctic is only 500 miles (800 kilometers), the winds are concentrated even more as they funnel through this relatively narrow stretch of sea known as the Drake Passage. The ocean floor drops suddenly off the Cape from 160 to 16,400 feet (50 to 5,000 meters), creating a powerful whirlpool: *un sacre bouillon*, a holy soup, as the French have named it. Mike wrote:

"I'm by myself in this 50-foot boat, surfing down 35-foot waves in very cold water, surrounded by cold air, rapidly approaching a very wild piece of land; the bottom of South America, the most feared of all the southern capes, Cape Horn, the start of a thousand legends and twice as many horror stories. I figure I'm a day away. Before, earlier in the day, I think I have seen mountains in the distance. I scan my charts for heights I should be able to see for 60 miles, but there they are again, and my God they are beautiful—and big. I can't believe I am seeing them. They have to be 60 miles away. Covered in snow they look like clouds, but now it's quite clear this is the bottom of the magnificent Andes range. I still have a long way to go, but this is the first land I have seen since leaving Sydney four weeks before, that is if you don't count the iceberg I almost hit. I should have seen it I was so close.

"You think about it a lot [Cape Horn]. It's a big milestone. I rounded at midday. It was perfect conditions. The sun was out. Gorgeous. [I was] about two miles off and you could see everything, the snow on the mountains. It was fun. We cleared the Cape; you head north, and you wind in and out of the rocks. The scenery is like something out of another world. It is really spectacular! Everyone should have this experience. Spectacular rock formations! I've never seen anything like it, and then I was becalmed."

Mike was becalmed for much of the trip north to Rio, hanging tenuously onto his lead over the second-place sailor, Jean Luc Van Den Heede on *Let's Go*. There were about 350 miles between them after Van Den Heede rounded Cape Horn. Mike sailed with his spinnaker up for six days, jibing five or six times a day. It took about twenty minutes to prepare for each jibe—a careful orchestration of sheets and guys and spinnaker pole, physically and mentally taxing. Mike barely got any sleep when the spinnaker was hoisted, because a downwind run on *Airco* with that sail configuration was a constant, high-speed sleigh ride. To get the sleep he badly needed, he contorted himself into uncomfortable positions that woke him every fifteen minutes. This lack of sleep may have contributed to Mike's unwise decision to go west of the Falklands; Van Den Heede went east and arrived thirty hours ahead of Mike.

Van Den Heede commented: "I had 300 to 350 miles to catch up and thought it was finished for me. But then I thought I may have a chance to catch up after he [Mike] went to the west of the Falklands. That was a mistake, but I was afraid that as soon as he knew I was going east he would come over to cover me. I avoided chatting on the radio so that I wouldn't have to say what I was doing. When Mike finally realized how far east I was heading, it was too late. He had no choice but to continue and fell into calms."

Despite finishing the third leg in second place behind Van Den Heede, Mike still held first place in Class II with an almost five-day lead. This made it pretty much certain—barring a disaster—that he would finish the entire race with the best overall time.

In Rio, as in the first two stops, the boats needed a wide variety of repairs. Jeantot's sponsors replaced most of the equipment on the boat, as well as the sails, which were/are very expensive. Most of the fleet didn't have these kinds of resources.

After surviving the Southern Ocean, rounding legendary Cape Horn, and reaching Rio, the fourth leg—from Rio to Newport—should have been relatively easy, but the trip started badly for Mike, as many of them had. He had barely left the harbor when the half-inch shroud at the bottom of *Airco's* headstay parted. "I had to cut down everything; the jib and roller furling . . . It all came down onto the deck in a crash and then fell overboard. It was an absolute mess."

The only intact gear that had the strength of the headstay was his anchor chain—which was snugly attached to the hull via a cleat on the foredeck. So he attached that to what was left of the stay. "Then he attached the headsails to hanks to hold the luff of the sails to the stay." The debacle cost him twenty-four hours.





*Mike aboard Airco giving a thumbs up to family and friends welcoming him home to Newport after his first-place finish in Class II of the 1986–87 BOC. (Kate W. Lacey)*

On May 4, only three days before the first boat crossed the finish line and after sailing 26,000 some miles, only fifty miles divided the first six boats. The first skipper, Bertie Reed on *Stabilo Boss*, finished on May 7, 1987, followed closely by Titouan Lamazou on *Ecureil D'Aquitaine*, and only forty-four minutes later Philippe Jeantot crossed the line. The overall winner of Class I, Philippe Jeantot, beat his own record from the last BOC by twenty-four days, setting a new record of 134 days.

Mike and Van Den Heede exchanged the lead several times on the way up the coast. Mike was frustrated by his performance, knowing that Van Den Heede, who had established a lead on him, was sailing a lighter boat that would sail faster than his in the light winds. Mike had some luck in the doldrums when the wind picked up a couple times, and although he ended up losing two of his light-wind spinnakers, he closed the gap to forty-five miles. But Van Den Heede, interpreting the direction of the wind more accurately, took a better tack in the end, finishing almost twenty-four hours ahead of Mike.

Although Van Den Heede sailed a better, faster last leg, he never really threatened Mike's overall lead of four and a half days. With an overall time of 157 days, Mike cut fifty days off that of Yukoh Tada from Japan, who won the Class II in the 1982–83 BOC. Mike was now the first American to win a BOC, making him a proven competitor in a sport that some countries view as enthusiastically as we do football. In France, where athletes are admired for their endurance and ability to perform under extreme conditions, singlehanded sailors are respected as the best athletes in the world. After finishing the BOC in Newport, Philippe Jeantot was not only swarmed by the French press, he was also flown immediately to France where he was honored by French president Francois Mitterand.



Our parents had rented a large boat for family and friends to greet Mike at the Newport finish. This time I joined the group to welcome him home. Even though I didn't approve of many things Mike did, I always forgave him. When he left on this trip around the world I pictured him ending up in a foreign prison, and not only did that not happen, he won the race—showing how shortsighted I had been. He was meant to run this race.

*Airco's* approach was breathtaking: Mike masterfully and gracefully trimming sails, gliding barefoot back and forth from cockpit to bow, demonstrating true mastery of the boat that had been his home for 157 days. Despite the calm of the inner harbor, Mike was still wearing his foul-weather overalls. As he got closer he went to the bow, waving, flashing a big smile. Friends threw beer cans into *Airco's* cockpit, and as Mike jumped to catch one he twisted his ankle as he landed, sustaining the only injury in his entire round-the-world race.

We mobbed Mike once *Airco* was alongside the pier, applauding as he popped a champagne bottle and took a drink, dousing the crowd. Everybody wanted to hug and congratulate him, welcoming him home. When we hugged, Mike said quietly, "You were always my favorite."

I didn't understand what he meant and didn't ask him to explain his greeting. I knew his words held huge meaning, at least to me, but if you asked me to explain them, I really couldn't. Neither Mike, my siblings, nor my parents ever mentioned my boycott of Mike's participation in this race. It was as if it never happened. To everyone else it was or had been an insignificant detail.

At the BOC victory party, Mike glanced at the \$15,000 check, his prize for winning Class II, held it high to the crowd, and then grinning, said, "This race represents the dreams and desires of all sailors to challenge themselves to the best of their abilities through the ultimate test of man and machine . . . I hope to see everybody, all of you, in four years. I'll be back."

## Vendée Globe, Newport, Rhode Island, to Les Sables d'Olonne, France, to Southern Ocean, Campbell Island, 1989–1990

*“People say you go out there to beat the ocean, like some macho thing. You don’t beat anything, you just live with it. It’s a rhythm.”*

—MIKE

NEVER ONE TO SIT AROUND THINKING about the past—good or bad—Mike found another race even better than the BOC. He didn’t have to look far. Philippe Jeantot, the winner of the first two BOCs, proposed a new race that would circumnavigate the globe but without stops. Eliminating the port stops would even out the field by removing the disparity of resources amongst the racers that had ranked many of the less-funded sailors like Hal Roth.

Jeantot—loved and admired as one of France’s best athletes—easily found sponsorship for the race in his home country. The people in the western French county of Vendée were happy to sponsor Philippe’s dream race, putting up \$150,000 (or the equivalent in Francs). The race became known as “The Vendée Globe Challenge,” or just the “Vendée,” starting and ending in Les Sables d’Olonne, a picaresque town on the western French coast known for its beaches. (“Les sables” is French for “sand.”) Mike was one of the first to enter. He believed he only had a chance at winning the Vendée if he had the right boat, a lighter, faster one. This mission would consume Mike—sailors from countries where ocean racing was ingrained in the culture had an easier time than him.

Crédit Agricole, a large French bank, readily extended the equivalent of a million dollars to Jeantot to design, build, and equip a new boat especially suited for this race. And so the race was on, with a start in November 1989—the competitors had slightly more than two years to prepare. Jeantot’s race concept was a huge hit: at least 300,000 fans, sailors, and non-sailors from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Canada, South Africa, and other countries, would travel to Les Sables d’Olonne to watch the start.

Many of the sailors who entered the inaugural Vendée Globe had sailed in the 1986–87 BOC: South African Bertie Reed; four Frenchmen including

Philippe Jeantot, Jean Luc Van Den Heede, Jean Yves Terlain, and Guy Bernadin. (Although Bernadin had become an American citizen by this time, he was born and raised in France.) Mike was considered the only American competitor. From the start at Les Sables d'Olonne in late November, the sailors would head south, circle Antarctica, and then sail north back to France, carrying enough food, spare parts, extra sails, and miscellaneous equipment to last them at least 130 days. The boats and their skippers pushed to sail as fast as possible without damaging the boat or themselves. If they received any assistance they were disqualified.

The sailboats specifically designed for singlehanded, long-distance continued using the Open 60 standard as they had in the BOC. "Open" referred to their restriction-free design standards. There were only two requirements: a monohull, and they could be no longer than sixty feet overall (LOA). Open 60s were designed to sail in all types of weather, ranging from no wind to 80-knot gales. The boats were lightweight to sail fast in light winds, yet able to carry a large area of sail, up to three times as much sail as on a 40-foot stock cruising boat. The Open 60s had similarities: plumb bows, providing a maximum waterline; twin rudders, which gave the skipper more steering control; simple cockpits with a small shelter forward so skippers could stay warm and dry while in the steep seas of the Southern Ocean; and ballast tanks, which could be filled and emptied of seawater as needed to keep the boats flat, maximizing their hull speed. The class of boats was nicknamed "rudders on fire." The Open 60 was the only class to be sailed in the Vendée—there would be no boats under 60 feet.

The race rules stipulated that the Open 60s met safety requirements, including carrying an EPIRB (Emergency Positioning Indicating Radio Beacon). An EPIRB transmits a signal that is picked up by the closest satellite, which then relays the signal to race headquarters. An immediate call for help lessens the probability of accidents resulting in death, because usually another competitor, once informed by race headquarters of the emergency, can reach the distressed boat in time to rescue the sailor. Without this device sponsors may hesitate to back a boat or a sailor. Deaths don't do much to help a company's image in the way corporate marketing departments desire. According to one of the few rules of the race, however, once the sailor had activated their EPIRB, he or she was out of the race.

As a safety measure, all entrants' boats had to have the ability to self-right after a knockdown. If a sailboat is knocked over and its sails fill with water, the weight of the keel would need to be heavy enough to bring the mast (and fully loaded mainsail if sheets haven't been released) back up out of the water. Normally sailboats are designed to return to an upright position, but the ever alluring factor of speed might make a designer forego this principle. The need for this requirement, and its failure to be met, became obvious once the Vendée was underway. One of the boats, *Fleury Michon X*, went over with a great deal of sail set and then stayed knocked down.

Mike's intention to enter the inaugural Vendée may have seemed grandiose, but Rick McGowan, sportswriter for the *Newport Daily News*, understood the

reasons for Mike's decision:

"He's kind of tilting at windmills in certain respects, but he has a great deal of respect among the boat people. After the BOC, everyone was exhausted but Mike was the only one who said he'd go right out there again. He's a still-water-runs-deep kind of guy. This isn't a spoiled rich kid who wants to sail around the world; if there's anybody who can work hard and has proven he can do it, he's it. But whether American corporations will respond is another thing. When the French come over here [to Newport] to cover races, they come with live TV and helicopters, and their sailors have no problem getting six-figure sponsorships. But twenty miles inland an American company will say, 'What race? Who?' Mike is a real legit guy. He's quite different from New York Yacht Club guys and from normal sailors. He can stay off Cape Horn two weeks to get around it. He's not the most gregarious, and he's sharp looking. The women around town are interested, but he's always leaving town on some race."

Rodger Martin, *Airco's* designer, who was back on good terms with Mike despite the Cape Town haulout incident, convinced Mike that his firm should design the Vendée boat. Mike knew it wouldn't be cheap. His quest for backing began full circle back in Minnesota, where he returned to meet sponsors and hoped to name his Open 60 *The Spirit of Minnesota*.

In the search for one of his first boats, before ocean racing, Mike had seen a boat on Lake Superior owned by Fred Wells, a long-time sailor and owner of the Asian Fine Arts Gallery in Minneapolis. Although Fred's boat had been out of Mike's price range, the two had struck up a friendship. Fred had dreamt of sailing around the world, and getting to know Mike was the next best thing. Fred spread his enthusiasm for Mike and his new race. Wells raised \$300,000 from local businesses. With that cash Mike began construction. As far as Mike was concerned, it was Fred who made it all possible. When he addressed audiences, Mike always included a special thanks to Fred, praising his courage and vision for investing in the Vendée project. Fred hired Mike's friend, Joel Stebbins, to put together a campaign, and the three of them worked closely to get Mike to the starting line.

Mike raised more cash when he sold *Airco* for \$100,000 to Josh Hall, who renamed her *Spirit of Ipswich*. (Mike and Josh became great friends, eventually racing against each other, although in different classes, in the next BOC. Josh finished third in Class II.)

Together with Wells' \$300,000, Mike now had a total of \$400,000, enough for the new Open 60's construction. To outfit her for racing, though, Mike needed rigging, sails, and all the gear found on high-tech sailing machines—at least another \$100,000. Ocean racing sailing was not cheap: at the time, a spinnaker cost \$8,000; two spinnaker poles \$4,500; one mainsail \$7,500. (*Duracell's* final cost for building and outfitting was \$700,000.)

In early August, three and a half months before the start of the race, *Duracell*, then the world's largest manufacturer of alkaline batteries, stepped in. Jim Donahue, *Duracell's* director of communications, effused over the race: "Mike's efforts in the Globe Challenge will represent the epitome of stamina and skill,

and we are proud that the Duracell name will be carried around the world with him." This was a major turning point for American involvement in the world of international sailing.

Almost simultaneously, inspired by an article about Mike published August 6 in the *Minneapolis Star & Tribune*, James Watkins, chief executive and founder of Golden Valley Microwave Foods, called Mike. By August 30, Watkins announced his donation of \$50,000 toward Mike's new boat. Meanwhile, as a condition for sponsorship Duracell insisted on naming the boat, so *The Spirit of Minnesota* became *Duracell*. When the new boat was finally launched her topsides bore the Golden Valley Microwave Foods logo along with the words Spirit of Minnesota.

As with *Airco*, Mike built *Duracell* on a miniscule budget using volunteer labor and donated supplies. And again, he built his own boat. Construction began in the summer of 1988 with an international crew: foreman Joao Filipe Galvao from Portugal; Serge Vivian, a close friend of Mike's who worked on various aspects of the project was French; and a young naval architect graduate from Japan, Haruhiko Katu, was also part of the team, writing letters to Japan looking for funds or sponsors.

*Duracell*, like *Airco*, was constructed of fiberglass laminated over a lightweight Airex foam core, an assemblage of materials designed for speed, not comfort. The forward sections of her hull were covered in Kevlar (the same material used in bulletproof vests). Her length overall was sixty feet, ten feet longer than *Airco*, but her waterline was ten feet longer than her length on deck, due to her reverse transom design—for sailboats a longer waterline meant faster boat speeds.

*Duracell* weighed 30,000 pounds, 10,800 of which was the keel, and the rest came from a water ballast system. On either side of the hull were 1,000-gallon water ballast tanks. Water ballast had a great advantage over the traditional ballast because the skipper could easily move it from one side of the boat to the other. When Mike sailed to windward he could pump in extra weight to help balance the boat. When sailing downwind, or with the wind, he could remove water to lighten the boat and increase speed. He had three watertight compartments (two forward and one aft) to keep afloat in case a collision breached the hull. Her twin rudders, angled out 20 degrees, provided maneuverability no matter the tack. *Duracell* also had a 10-horsepower diesel engine to run pumps and any other electrical equipment. She had a raised coach-roof enabling Mike to see in all directions—a feature he knew he needed from his previous time in the Southern Ocean. He could control sheets and talk on the radio from this relatively dry perch. Most important, he'd have protection from wind and spray when in the seas of the Southern Ocean.

Relative to *Airco*, which sported a fin keel with no bulb, *Duracell*'s keel was a narrow fin with a "duck bill," a lead bulb on the end that weighed 10,800 pounds. (Duck bill refers to the similarity of its shape to that of a duck's bill.) The narrow keel design was shared by many of these racing boats—the less surface area, the less the drag, the faster the boat. Changing the shape of the keel



was a logical progression considering the extreme level of competition among these boats. The keel of the Open 60s didn't have to conform to a standard shape, so it was ripe for experimentation—this was the single greatest change in design and occurred between the late 1980s and the mid 1990s. Strangely, and tragically for Mike, this period of experimentation mirrored that of his dramatic but brief six-year-long ocean racing career. Mike's three boats, *Airco*, *Duracell*, and *Coyote*, are/were textbook illustrations of how the shape, engineering, and material choices of the keel changed, and were experimented with, over that relatively short period of time.

*Duracell* carried a maximum of 1,750 square feet of sail, 650 square feet more than *Airco*.

All these features made *Duracell* faster than *Airco*, and with that speed came more work for the skipper.

A Minneapolis TV station interviewing Mike during the construction of *Duracell* asked: "What do you think your chances are [in the Vendée Global Challenge]?" Mike's response was short and fast. "I think they're damn good."

Mike launched *Duracell* in the spring of 1989. The boat had few comforts below deck. When sailing Mike spent most of his time in a swivel seat under the Plexiglas canopy, watching his sails, tracking weather conditions, checking the



*Mike in the Jamestown, Rhode Island, boatyard where he built Duracell. As with Airco, Mike was helped by friends, neighbors, and paid amateurs and professionals. Note the reverse transom which increased Duracell's waterline length, adding to her speed. (Billy Black)*





*Mike at the navigation station on Duracell. Ocean racers kept in touch with shoreside crew and other competitors and obtained important navigational information via multiple electronics, such as VHF, SSB radio, and weather faxes. Other onboard systems also relied heavily on power: early GPS units, autopilots, radars, bilge pumps, and pumps to move water ballast between tanks. (Billy Black)*

computer readings of wind, messing with autopilots, and cooking (mainly rice and beans) on a single propane burner. The rest of the time he spent on deck taking care of the business of sailing a boat.

Mike sailed *Duracell* out of Newport at 3 p.m. on October 4, 1989, crossing the Atlantic in 14 days and 22 hours, averaging 230 miles a day. Arriving six weeks before the Vendée start gave him plenty of time to finish outfitting *Duracell*.

Helen, Mike's girlfriend of six years (albeit with periods of separation) and fellow sailor, had flown to France for the race start, and at the official dinner for competitors on the eve of the race, Mike announced their engagement. He had planned the occasion well in advance, commissioning a ring with a tourmaline stone sometime in late summer. Mike had meant to surprise Helen, but in his haste to get *Duracell* underway he forgot to bring the ring with him to France. Foiled in the surprise but undaunted in his desire to marry Helen, Mike explained the situation to her via phone after he arrived in France. She brought the ring with her when she flew over. The unsuccessful surprise became a shared joke and fond memory during the few years they had together. Surprise or not, Mike staged the question with, as Helen described it, "a very romantic evening."

Helen joined my parents in Nantes, telling them about the engagement and



*Duracell storming along with a reef in her main and her smaller jib set. Mike's onboard power was augmented by the wind generator seen just aft of the boom. The wind vane self-steering unit is visible on the stern. (Billy Black)*

showing them the ring during the drive to Les Sables d'Olonne. My dad conveyed his response to me in a letter. "So that was big." No more, no less. No one in our family understood Helen or their relationship, and most of Mike's friends didn't think their connection made any sense. Either Helen didn't like Mike's friends, or they didn't like Helen. By their engagement in 1989, they had been together for six years, and for about half of those they had lived apart, either because Mike was racing or they had split up, a common occurrence. If they married—a big if, considering their history—we expected the relationship would maintain its on and off again rhythm.

The race was a big event for the coastal town of Les Sables, whose 30,000 inhabitants were overwhelmed by the 300,000 plus spectators who waited in snaking, long lines for a chance to look at the boats and their skippers. *Ecureuil d'Aquitaine II*, sailed by Titouan Lamazou, was the predicted winner of the race, and *Generali Concorde*, sailed by Alain Gautier, Philippe Jeantot on *Credit Agricole IV*, and Phillip Poupon on *Fleury Michon X* were all expected to do well. These skippers were superstars, and this was a rare opportunity to see them. A signature from even one of them was something to be cherished. The strangest of all the skippers, and perhaps the most exciting, was the only American in the race. The French press referred to him as "the new Indiana Jones," and because *Top Gun* had just opened in movie theaters, the new "Tom Cruise of the sailing world." He was the "BCBG" (bon chic, bon genre) of adventure. Mike summed up his ten competitors with typical brevity. "There were no flakes in this race."

My parents hurried around town buying supplies for Mike: at least one hundred pairs of socks, five giant jars of peanut butter, forty cans of pork and beans, fifteen pounds of spaghetti, six dozen eggs, and fifteen pounds of white rice. Mike had brought with him 240 microwave meals given to him by his sponsor, Golden Valley Microwave Foods.

My dad recorded the activities for Mike's many Minnesotan supporters:

"The whole town seemed agog with interest; the 'Global Challenge Visitor' patch we wore got us special treatment everywhere. As we were checking out of a supermarket with our purchase of one hundred large candy bars for Mike, the checkout girl held up a long line behind us to ask all about the race and 'ze American sailor,' but no one seemed to mind, they were all listening in. The newspapers carried enough articles to rival our Super Bowl coverage. The pier where the boats were [berthed] was invaded every day by an army of visitors carefully limited to fifteen-minute visits. As someone remarked, they were like golf fans, knowledgeable and polite. In a newspaper article on each of the sailors, Mike's started with '*Avec le visage de séducteur.*' I am told that wasn't as interesting as I translated it to be. Mary and I, of course, loved the ovations that Mike got from the largely French crowd at the two big parties given for the skippers."

Dad wrote me a letter about the Vendée:

"I was afraid I wouldn't be able to go out in the Duracell boat [the boat reserved for fans, family, and friends of *Duracell*]*—it was frigid with a high wind blowing and there was over a mile to walk to the boat—but the great Duracell gals [part*



*Mike at the helm of Duracell with a reef in the main for the start of the Vendée off the coast of Les Sables d'Olonne, France, November 1989. (Billy Black)*

of Mike's shorecrew] managed transportation part of the way—so I made it.

"As the race boats were towed down the narrow inlet leading to the ocean, they were all cheered by the throngs along the banks. All the boats had two helpers aboard to assist in the towing, and the first excitement came in getting them off just before the start. For that purpose, small rubber boats came alongside, really bouncing around in the big sea that was running. We saw one of Mike's helpers fall halfway into the water before hauling himself back aboard to try again.

"His two were about the last to leave, and the time being short, we saw Mike whip *Duracell* around as if it were an X boat on Lake Minnetonka and head full tilt for the starting line. A few minutes later we heard his voice come over the loud speaker, '*Monsieur le directeur, monsieur le directeur* [the limit of his French], where the hell is the starting line? I can't make out any of the flags.' The flags were small and hidden most of the time by the waves. The answer to his question came in French, but apparently he got enough from it to find the line, because a few minutes later there was an announcement that *Duracell* had crossed the line in third place. It put us on a cloud, of course, to hear [later] when we were in London that Mike was in first place with only 23,800 miles left to go. His last words to us were, 'Don't worry. Tell all the people at home that none of this would have been possible without them.'"

Dad again, from his letter to me:

"Everyone reported what great spirits Mike was in the morning of the race. It's hard for me to understand his serenity at the start of the race. He doesn't seem worried about a thing at that point. He was very harassed in the days preceeding by all the interviews etc., but come the day and all seemed peaceful and in order. He waved a number of times as we accompanied him after the start. It was a beautiful picture seeing those big racers slice through the waves as the powerboats were being tossed about by them. As if the sea welcomed sailboats but barely tolerated the other kind.

"Olivier de Kerarson, who is one of France's best known sailors and just completed a solo trip around the world without stopping (only fourteen so far have done that) in 125 days, told me that he had carefully examined every boat and liked some better than others. Mike's was one he liked—said it was very strongly built—perhaps not quite as fast as some of the more lightly built boats, naming Philippe Jeantot's *Credit Agricole IV* as possibly faster."

About five miles out to sea, a French Navy light frigate and a livid yellow buoy separated by about a quarter of a mile marked the starting line. After the start, the boats were to head for shore to round a buoy and sail parallel to the beach and around a second buoy so that the spectators who stood on the beach that stretched out over a mile could get a closer view of the racers and their boats. After that, as one newspaper article put it, "The only rules were to keep the Cape of Good Hope and the Horn to the port and Antarctica to the starboard."



A few days before the race, in an interview in *People* magazine, Mike talked about his mental preparation for the race. In his typical fashion he cut out the bullshit. "I don't think there is anything you can do to prepare. What are you going to do? Read a bunch of self-help psycho books?"

But he also added, "I get excited, I start pumping adrenaline like the next guy. But I'm not a masochist or suicidal."

That first night at sea was wild and unusually cold, but by daybreak Mike held the lead and his picture was on the front page of the French newspapers. It was a short-lived lead. By day two Mike telexed his shoreside crew in Newport, Rhode Island, "Left Les Sables sick as a dog. Too much kissing, hand-shaking, etc. Could not concentrate first night and dove into a corner. Took large dose of penicillin and shopping for Spanish real estate. Next time wearing gloves sort of like a party hat. But don't worry about position. It's a long race. I am only 12 hours off the pace. Besides, the frogs will taste better this way."

Over the next couple of days Mike fell even farther behind, so sick, whether with the flu or food poisoning, that he literally sailed off course. He was flat on his back for a day, and when he returned to reality he was looking at the Spanish coastline—not what he wanted to see. He had sailed due south and then due west, and he didn't even remember it. Later, he would blame those first couple of days for his dropping back from the fleet and never really catching up. "The next six weeks were the most frustrating ordeal that I've ever been out sailed in. When I had wind, everyone else had at least five to ten knots more. I consistently hit pockets."

As depressed as he sounds here, he also made a short video recording of himself standing behind the wheel on *Duracell*, "People ask me why I do this stuff. It wouldn't be too hard to explain it today. It's gorgeous out here. We are almost as far north as the race goes south-fifty degrees north. The ocean is this incredible color, a deep blue. You can't believe it's the same ocean that's off of NYC and we are only 700 miles away [from the African coast? Or Les Sables d'Olonne?] Birdlife gets better every day."

Later, still off the coast of Africa (Cap Blanco) he wrote:

"I am not in Africa to buy ivory. I have been going with too little sleep and it finally caught up with me. I have perhaps been in too many near collisions. Ten and I can't seem to get the right rest. A few days ago a ship came from behind on the same course in the middle of the day. Perfect visibility. For one hour he steamed for me and never did change course. I did and he comes so close I could have shot the windows out with a pistol. Last night it was an oil tanker. Same thing: nobody on the radio, no one on the bridge, and the bastard was cleaning his bilge. Smelled like oil spill for miles; so today I had my first meltdown for two hours. I don't know if I am asleep or awake. Ugly stuff."

Approaching the equator, he wrote, "Looking down at a spot to cross the equator is like looking down a slalom course from the starting gate. The first guy down has all the fresh snow, but he doesn't have the ruts to study. The lead boat has the weather." Three hundred miles north of the equator "you have no

options. Your course is fixed. The wind is behind you, it's light. The difference in boat speed is marginal: medium to light, light to nothing." Mike followed ten boats over the equator.

With no wind, Mike kept adjusting *Duracell's* rigging—trimming sails, tightening stays, loosening them, coaxing speed out of his sixty-footer. He was confident in the boat but depressed by his position. The first week had put him behind the pack, and it would be difficult to make up for the lost time.

"The wind goes from 15 to 30 knots, then dies altogether ever 10 minutes. You work all night long to get every little bit out of the wind and your boat. I'm exhausted; this is real tough on the equipment, not to mention the sailors. You just try not to get too worked up about it and so I concentrate, sail my boat, and hope for good winds . . . Soon."

Meanwhile, the leaders of the race had the opposite problem. They were just entering the southern Atlantic and making the turn east around the tip of South Africa when they sailed into their first really heavy sailing weather, with 55-knot winds and 25-foot waves. During these strong winds, one of the boats predicted to place in the top four, *Fleury Michon X*, sailed by Philippe Poupon, was knocked over on her side and did not come back up. Although Vendée race rules required that these boats be self-righting (as *Airco* did several times in the 1986–87 BOC), *Fleury Michon* did not right herself. As Mike commented later, "She carried an awesome amount of canvas [sail]." Her capsize activated her ARGOS, the emergency beacon connected to a satellite. The ARGOS sent the coordinates of Poupon's capsized boat to race headquarters in France, who then contacted their equivalents in South Africa and alerted all aircraft. A South African rescue plane spotted the vessel 1,300 miles southwest of Cape Town. Loick Peyron on *Lada Poch*, in third place at the time, immediately altered course to help his competitor. In another amazing feat of sailing, Peyron was able to find Poupon, who was still with his boat, and maneuvered close enough to get a line to the stranded sailor, who was then able to climb aboard *Lada Poch*. Together, the two sailors were able to right the boat, but *Fleury Michon* was out of the race. Perhaps, as Mike noted, she may have been carrying too much sail. The race committee had anticipated such a scenario when they insisted that the boats be self-righting. Unfortunately, when tested in the race, she wasn't.

*Duracell* and her skipper, however, were now having fun:

"We've finally rounded 'corner' and we're loving it. *Duracell* is great and so is her skipper—I'm going to take back those miles that I so graciously gave away at the start. *Duracell* has never been in better shape. She might not be as fast in lighter conditions as some of the French boats, but we know she is fast and sturdy. We will show our true colors in the heavier conditions."

As of January 1, more than 3,100 miles separated the fleet. On the 9th, Bertie Reed, on *Grinaker*, officially withdrew from the race, his boat having been severely damaged in a knockdown. After three days with only three hours' sleep





*Duracell bounding over a wave with a reefed main and staysail. (Billy Black)*

and sailing *Grinaker* with a damaged boom, bent rudders, and only one autopilot, his exhaustion forced him to retire.

As of January 17, *Duracell's* position was 53° 46'S, 84° 03'E, trailing the lead boat by 1,192 miles. Another skipper decided to withdraw, Jean Yves Terlain, after losing his mast in heavy winds. Ten out of the original thirteen boats remained in the race. Philippe Poupon, on *Fleury Michon X*, Bertie Reed on *Grinaker*, and now Jean Yves Terlain were all out of the race.

Hearing the news, Mike wrote:

"Things are not boring any longer but a bit lonely without my two neighbors. Can't believe they fell the same night. But Mother Nature is a tough task-master; she's unforgiving and doesn't discriminate. She demands your respect out here. And it reminds me of the real nature of the race: the boats which hold together for the long run are as important as the boats which are currently going the fastest. Too bad for Jean Yves [Terlain]. I thought *UAP* was going a little too fast—not that a boat should not be able to, but it's just such a long race. The seas are all piled up and its tough on equipment. Sorry about Bertie [Reed, on *Grinaker*], too. Sounds like all became too much, too tired with steering problems, and I'm sure Cape Town looked real inviting."

Seven weeks into the inaugural Vendée Globe Challenge, the boats were almost exactly halfway around the world from Les Sables d'Olonnes, due south

of Australia and New Zealand. They were deep in the Furious Fifties of the Southern Ocean, and Mike's *Duracell*, sailing at 27 knots, was the fastest boat in the fleet. He had made up for the miles lost in the beginning of the race and moved to sixth place. *Duracell* was averaging two hundred miles a day, and in one day she sailed three hundred miles with an average speed of 12.5 knots. Mile by mile, Mike, the only American in the race, was catching up. He set his sights on *TBS-Charente Meritime*, sailed by Pierre Follenfant, in fifth place and 670 miles ahead of him. Mike had finally begun to believe he had a shot at being one of the first three. He was happy for the first time in the race, and his land crew was ecstatic.

On January 30, 1990, high up on the 70-foot mast, a 1-inch screw popped out of its fitting and the mast lost its support on the starboard side. It is amazing how the smallest part can affect the integrity of the entire boat, but that's what happened. The screw had held a small piece of hardware called a tip cup, which secured a shroud—one of the stainless steel wire ropes stabilizing the mast—to the spreaders. (The spreaders run at nearly a right angle to the mast at about fifty feet above the deck and guide the two shrouds to the top of mast.) Ironically, Mike had anticipated this precise scenario and before the race had double-taped the screw in place. With just one shroud secure, the mast stayed upright only because its base was keel-stepped deep into the hull of the boat; any extra pressure, such as an enormous wave or stronger winds, could cause it to snap.

He was sailing east in 30-knot northwesterlies and 18-foot waves. He had a reef in the main and one jib up. He dropped both sails, but under bare poles the hull pitched madly and the mast pitched with it. He hoisted the minimal amount of sail to stabilize the boat. Then using his 85-foot carbon fiber spinnaker pole and a series of lines, he created a temporary rigging that allowed him to move ahead, slowly. He could sail this way, but not remain competitive, so he looked for the closest harbor on the same tack. Taking a quick glance at a map of the world, it's unlikely any of us would find any land at all even close to Mike's position. He was in the Southern Ocean, about halfway between New Zealand and Antarctica, somewhere between Tasmania and the George V Coast, a vast part of the world where oceans roar mostly uninterrupted by any land. Yet as luck would have it, there was a small island—Campbell Island, forty-three square miles—about one hundred miles north of his position, and by even greater luck, Mike had a chart of it. The island is about five hundred miles south of New Zealand. In the 1800s, the outpost was used by seal hunters and then whalers and later by sheep farmers, but no one could create a sustainable existence there. At the time of Mike's visit, the island's only human inhabitants were four New Zealand meteorologists tending a weather station on the edge of its main bay, Perseverance Harbor.

Mike calculated it would take him about twenty hours to reach the island (it ended up taking him twenty-six), and he knew that his mast could topple at any minute. Sailing north meant he had to tack to sail closer to the wind, a point of sail that greatly stressed the mast and laid the hull on her side. Taking everything into consideration, Mike was pretty convinced the mast would soon fall.

The next twenty-six hours seemed endless. He sailed, watched the mast, trimmed sails, watched the mast, checked the charts, watched the mast, calculated the distance, and watched the mast, knowing that at any minute his race could be over, his dream of finishing the inaugural Vendée Globe destroyed. Before he lost the starboard tip cup, the hardware integral to the support of his mast, Mike had already been awake for twenty hours. Looking back, although he had sailed one and a half times around the world by then, those hundred miles to Campbell Island were one of the best testaments to Mike's seamanship. Few sailors could singlehandedly bring a 60-foot boat to safety so delicately and precisely in 30 knots of wind, on a choppy sea, and with the mast unsecured on one side.

By careful sailing Mike reached Campbell Island at about four in the morning, skirted the coast to the opening for Perseverance Harbor, and then waited until sunrise to sail up the channel (fjord). He had to tack *Duracell* into the narrow harbor channel, and every time he tacked he held his breath and said ten Hail Marys. When he tacked he watched the tip of his mast, sensing at any time that the unsupported rig would topple. Over the next three hours, he did this eight times while enormous albatrosses flew overhead. He later described these last few hours: "I was the lone cowboy, and these albatrosses were the Indians, and they were stalking me and crowding me out."

Once in the harbor, he sailed to one of the three anchorages indicated on the chart, pointed into the wind, dropped his sails, and set both his anchors: a thirty-five pound Danforth and a thirty-five pound Fisherman. The depth of the harbor was about twelve fathoms, and he hoped the anchors would hold. He was anxious to go up the mast and get sailing again, but after two attempts, he realized, "I was wasted, but relieved and happy. There was nothing undone that couldn't be put back together. Then it started to snow, hard. I said this is not the time to fix this thing."

By the time he went below to sleep for a couple hours, the snow was so thick he couldn't even see the top of his mast.

As Mike sailed into Perseverance Harbor, the sight of his boat was a surprise to the meteorologists on duty.

"Do you have information on a yacht out here?" one of the weathermen asked the guy sharing his shift. "There's one sailing into the bay."

"No. I'll radio headquarters."

A few minutes later, he said, "They told me there's a sailing race going on right now, and the boats are nearby. It's a round-the-world race."

"Wow! Those guys must be crazy."

"Round the world and no stops."

"Yep, completely crazy."

"Do you think that's one of them? I wonder why he's coming here."

They watched him anchor, and then *Duracell* begin to drift—dragging her anchor. By the time it had drifted a mile they tried to raise him on the radio.

One of many reasons that a boat can drift from its anchorage is the nature of the sea bottom. When Mike dropped his anchor it hit the seabed, and Mike

tested the anchor rode several times to make sure it was secure. Unfortunately, what Mike thought was the sea bottom was a layer of seaweed several feet deep that moved with the tide. When the tide came in, the seaweed moved with it, taking *Duracell* dangerously close to shore.

Mike woke thinking the alarm had gone off, but it wasn't his alarm, it was a voice over the radio.

The voice kept saying, "Mate, are you sure you're okay? Are you sure you want to be there?"

Mike jumped out of his bunk, ran up the companionway to the cockpit, and could not believe his eyes. He was five feet from the rocks.

"Shit! What the fuck is going on? Jesus! What happened?" He ran down below and asked the guy on the radio, "Which way is the tide moving?"

"In."

"What's the wind going to do?"

"It's coming up. It's going to blow 45 knots from the northwest."

This was bad, very bad. It meant the boat would be blown ashore.

"I thought of tying a lot of rope together and getting it across to the shore, swimming and wading, and pulling and warping the boat. I realized I didn't have time, I said, oh fuck, get ready for the worst." He ran back on deck and decided to try to sail away from the rocks. He quickly untied the stops wrapped around the mainsail and then pulled on the main halyard as hard as he could. With the sail raised, he jumped back to the cockpit, took the wheel, and *Duracell* started to move. Even with the sails up, things still looked grim, and Mike made one of the most significant decisions of his life. He decided to save the boat, even if it meant losing the race. According to the rules, receiving outside assistance would disqualify him. He ran back down below and answered the voice that was still asking him if he wanted help, and said yes.

The meteorologists had never saved a boat before; they didn't have much need to use their wooden dory with its 8-horsepower outboard. But they left their weather station, carried the dinghy down the rocky shore into the water, and scrambled in. They started the 8-horsepower engine attached to the stern of the dinghy, and with the intention of saving a 60-foot boat that weighed 30,000 pounds, they set off. When they were close enough they tossed a line to Mike, but the wind had started to blow harder and continued pushing *Duracell* toward the rocky coastline. Mike could see that the dinghy wasn't strong enough to tow the boat, and he had to find something else to save her. He ran forward, pulled the staysail out of its bag, hauled on its halyard, and got the sail up faster than humanly possible, and with the wind in the sail he was able to inch the boat forward, parallel with the coast line. The coastline dropped away as the bay opened up. He ran forward to put up more sail, and then suddenly, miraculously, *Duracell* took off and sailed out of danger.

As *Duracell* picked up speed, the whole situation suddenly reversed itself. Mike moved the tow line the meteorologists had thrown him to *Duracell*'s stern, so instead of the dinghy towing *Duracell*, the dinghy was now dragging behind the sailboat. The bow of the dinghy began to snowplow into the water—the

faster *Duracell* sailed, the deeper the dinghy submerged. Now Mike's chief concern was saving the four guys who had come to rescue him. He reached for the knife stored in the cockpit and cut the dinghy loose.

Although Mike never said anything about sailing back out into the bay and resetting his anchor, that must have been what he did. Disoriented, confused, dazed, he probably wasn't processing anything after his very narrow escape from the rocks. He had been so happy and relieved to have saved his mast from falling over, and now he was even more thankful for having saved his boat from the rocks. It was too much to absorb all at once. He also never said whether or not he really had been rescued, since he had sailed away from the rocks under his own steam. Had he been rescued by the dinghy? Or had he sailed away from the rocks under his own steam? Did it matter that he had asked for help, but he really didn't use it to save his boat? With the boat at anchor, he went below and was asleep before he hit the bunk. When he awoke the next morning he knew exactly what to do. He went ashore and asked the meteorologists if he could use their radio to call his shoreside team.

Meanwhile, *Duracell's* shoreside team had not heard from Mike since January 10. They could keep track of Mike through the ARGOS system, so they knew where he was, but they hadn't actually been in contact with him either via telex or radio. This wasn't unusual for boats when they were part of the Southern Ocean, but Mike had been having problems with his radio since the early days of the race, so the combination of the two factors made communication with him even more difficult.

So, on February 1, when they finally heard his voice, the group gathered in Kathy's office was ecstatic. Normally, when Kathy was able to raise him on the radio the connection was so terrible she could barely hear him. This time, though, she was surprised that she could hear him so clearly, and that was the first thing she said. Then she heard him say, "I'm on land. I'm out, Kathy. I'm out of the race."

Mike's friends were completely silent as he repeated himself. They were in shock. This was the last thing they had expected to hear. Since they had been out of radio communication for several weeks, they had no idea what was going on. They'd figured he had sailed into the harbor to make a repair on the boat. After a long pause, Mike continued. "But I am going to keep going." Later, he recalled crying during the phone call and then feeling incredibly peaceful.

(When I read this [Mike and I never talked about Campbell Island, but he wrote and spoke publicly about it many times] I remembered one night Mike and I were sitting in a bar on the west side of Broadway a couple of blocks south of Columbia University. It was early evening, the bar dark, smoke-filled, and we were drinking a pitcher of beer, hunched over. Out of the blue Mike confessed, "Ya know, I don't think I have ever cried." He made it sound like he wondered what it felt like. It was also his way of saying that a guy like him just didn't cry; he did not even have to try to *not* cry; perhaps he had never felt sad enough.)

Kathy asked to speak with the meteorologists, and they told her they really hadn't helped Mike. That, in fact, he had sailed away from the rocks and ended



up towing them. No one would know if the incident was quietly forgotten, since they wouldn't tell anyone. Mike's story was safe with them, but Mike told Kathy he couldn't live with himself unless he told the truth.

Kathy called Duracell right away. Charlie Kernan and Jim Donahue, from Duracell, sent the following message to Kathy to relay to Mike:

"What happened, happened. There was absolutely nothing you could have done, except what you did. If we were behind you 100% at Les Sables, we are behind you 110% at Campbell Island.

"And do you know why? Because at Les Sables we already knew you were a great sailor with a great boat, but now we know you have guts—the real red, white, and blue, apple pie kind of guts that makes us proud to be a part of your team. Everyone here is so proud that you want to keep going. We go with you, if only in spirit. . . We'll see you in Les Sables."

Duracell told Kathy to tell Mike that they would continue to back him whatever he chose to do.

In the previous two days, Mike had worked his ass off to save *Duracell*, sailing for twenty-six hours with an unsupported mast, and then rescuing her within a few feet of the rocks. Knowing this made him happy and grateful. But realizing he'd just dropped out of the race made him miserable, devastated. Two years of unrelenting work and commitment, all for nothing.

(Swiss sailor, Bernard Stamm, competing in the 2012–13 Vendée Globe had a similar situation when he made a pitstop at the Kerguelan Islands—not far from Campbell Island—in order to repair his boat *Cheminées Poujoulat*. While there Stamm's anchor began to drag, as Mike's did, and to save his boat from crashing onto the rocky shoreline, he worked his boat closer to a ship anchored nearby. Unrequested, a crew from the vessel jumped on board Stamm's boat and retrieved the anchor line. Stamm was disqualified.)

Despite its role in dashing his hope to win the Vendée Globe, Campbell Island made a huge impact on Mike, who later said he wanted to return there someday. Its extreme inaccessibility made it seem another world. Fully surrounded by the Southern Ocean, it was stark, continuously wind-blown, and apart from the four meteorologists, absent of all human presence. The southern royal albatross fly around the world, coasting on the westerly winds that circle the South Pole. Once every year they stop to nest on one of a few islands, and Campbell Island is one of them. The meteorologists took Mike to see the albatrosses sitting on their enormous nests. In the minute or two of video shot during the visit, Mike posed next to one of the wild birds, humbled but not defeated, and uncharacteristically relaxed. He and the twenty-pound albatross made an odd pair, especially when the albatross stretched its wings to a vast span of eleven feet.

The meteorologists, who rarely entertained visitors, if any at all, were delighted to host Mike, feeding him steaks at story-filled dinners. Both sides greatly enjoyed the relief from their normal routines. But once Mike had fixed *Duracell's* broken gear—easily done without any outside assistance—he had no reason to stay. On Monday afternoon, February 5th, after spending four days on Campbell Island, Mike headed out to sea, determined to sail as if he were still in



the race. *Duracell* found herself ahead of a few boats with a chance at a decent time, but Mike was now sailing his own race—there would be no laurels or victory checks awaiting him on his return. As he tacked out of Perseverance Harbor, an albatross joined him, enjoying the airflow cascading off *Duracell's* sails. The albatross continued alongside Mike, gliding in and out of view. He couldn't tell if it was always the same albatross or if they took turns, but they never left him alone until he passed Cape Horn and started his sail north back to France.

After a few days at sea, Mike sent Kathy Giblin the following telex:

"I know I am not in the race anymore, but my subconscious does not. I have been trying to catch these frogs for over two years, and before Campbell Island I had closed the gap to just one week and felt like I was still gaining. I am very sad the race has to end like this. But the reason why the sadness is so acute is the same reason why it should not last. Everyone shared the same dream right from the concept on—we all wanted the same success and we tried our best to reach it. The dream was big enough for all of us to share, and I believe it took all of us to make it go. Because everyone approached this plan with the same enthusiasm and energy, this is what makes it all worth it. The project pressurized the time, and a lot of people teamed up to make a lot happen in a short time. Bottom line is that we did our best and I can't be sad."

For the rest of the trip Mike enjoyed other activities like shooting videos. He made one fifty miles south of Cape Horn, telling the audience he was looking forward to getting back in the Atlantic and heading north—it was cold and he was tired of being cold. He also felt good about the progress he'd made. "Maybe soon I will be in sight of [the lead boats]." To a non-sailor, the scene around him looks utterly unreal. The seas are enormous, and engulfed by them the boat literally looks like a toy. Watching the boat move through the waves you feel her speed as she surfs down the waves, awed by her ability to spend hours and hours, days and days, weeks and weeks, without stopping and yet staying intact. It seems beyond all possibility that the boat is moving with this madness.

Despite the boat speed and the towering waves, Mike moves gracefully around *Duracell*, the autopilot controlling the boat's direction. He goes forward and lowers the mainsail by bending down to the mast base and pulling on a line fed around a winch at the bottom of the mast. That movement alone would be difficult for most, and in the middle of the towering seas it looks incredibly dangerous. He isn't wearing a safety harness when he scrambles forward toward the bow, and you can easily see why these sailors had to be athletes. Just moving from one side of the boat to the other while the whole world is moving underneath you is in itself a feat. Mike's athleticism is obvious as he moves cat-like over the 60-foot boat, taking care of the hundreds of little things needing his attention. The whole time he is moving around the boat he has to shout to be heard on the video, but his voice always remains measured and calm.

It scarcely seems possible that anyone could survive in the vast, tumultuous sea, and yet Mike speaks to the camera as if he was standing on the boat in a quiet bay. A momentary squall captures his attention, then as it passes



*The crowd welcoming Mike in Les Sables d'Olonne, France, at the finish of the Vendée, April 10, 1990. Mike—not expecting much of a welcome since he had disqualified himself during his stop on Campbell Island, New Zealand, in February—was overwhelmed to see the thousands who had come to cheer him on.*

so does his topic, next explaining how the wind changes directions every few hours, forcing him to adjust his steering and trim the sails. All this confidence seems the perfect testimony to Mike's trust in *Duracell*, who is the real star in the video, perfectly fitted to her environment and a complete entity of strength.

On Friday, February 23, Mike rounded Cape Horn, and to celebrate he opened a can of asparagus. "But it was soggy, just like everything else on board." For the last week he had made good time, averaging two hundred miles a day. On the video he remarks, "I am heading north which feels very nice. Ah, can't wait to find some different kinds of clothes. So long, Patagonia."

On March 16, 1990, after 109 days at sea, Titouan Lamazou crossed the finish line in Les Sables d'Olonne and smashed the record for a solo circumnavigation by several weeks. Loick Peyron followed, then Jean Luc Van Den Heede, and in fourth, Philippe Jeantot. Two days after crossing the finish line, thousands of people swarmed the Champs Elysses to cheer on skippers Lamazou and Pey-

ron of the first two boats to finish the inaugural Vendée as they rode down the Champs Elysses in the back of a Cadillac DeVille.

Some of Mike's toughest sailing days were those approaching the finish line in France. Making landfall is never easy, and this one was more complicated by the treacherous waters. He hadn't had much time to sleep or eat because he was too busy handling the boat in the difficult conditions that have made the Bay of Biscay renowned for severe sailing conditions. Part of the continental shelf extends a long way into the bay, creating shallow waters which mix with deeper waters, causing sharp, steep waves. Hundreds, probably more, of sunken vessels lie at the bay's bottom. The weather is the worst in winter months. "As long as I remember, I have heard Bay of Biscay stories. Unfortunately now I will have my own."

Skippers on small boats crossing the bay have to steer clear of the huge freighters, which run in and out of the major harbors and often with no one on lookout. Crossing the main shipping lines was dangerous, and singlehanded yacht skippers had to stay awake for twenty-four hours or more to navigate their boats through the traffic. Because his radio had stopped working several days earlier, Mike had been out of touch with his land crew. He was looking forward to seeing them, and Helen too. At the same time, he was apprehensive about finishing because he had been disqualified, and he didn't want the race officials and the French people to think he was doing something against the rules. He had no idea what public opinion would be about his decision to finish the race. He also figured that by the time he crossed the line all the excitement would be over.



*Mike happily answering questions for the press after his return in the first Vendée. (Onne van der Wal)*

It was April 10 when Mike sailed into Les Sables d'Olonne. Mike, who hadn't put in his contacts that day, couldn't see the 25,000 spectators waiting there for him to cross the finish line. All he saw along the rocks lining the harbor entrance was a blur of colors. The spectators didn't care if he was an unofficial competitor, he was finishing, and they wanted to be there to cheer the lone American in the race and the only sailor arriving that day. He finished with a time of 135 days, beating the previous record held by Dodge Morgan of 150 days. He now held the record for the fastest, solo circumnavigation by an American.

The thousands of fans lining the harbor walls waving, cheering, and applauding admired Mike all the more for completing the race, as well as besting the time of some of his competitors. Helen and other friends rented a small motor boat and were the first to meet him, Helen quickly climbing aboard *Duracell*. Standing next to each other in the cockpit with the sea as background, they made a good team; they were almost the same height and size, both wore red foul-weather jackets and sunglasses, and both were sporting big, Hollywood-like smiles with one arm raised to the fans and the other around their partner. It was without doubt a triumphant return. Mike knew the French were passionate about singlehanded sailing, and he knew he was far more popular in France than in his home country, but he had no idea so many people would come out to greet a disqualified sailor.

As he stepped on the pier, finding his land legs, Mike was handed a microphone and an oversize bouquet of red and white flowers. Amid cheers he said, "My radio never worked very well so my voice is going to last about thirty seconds. It's a privilege to have been involved in this first Vendée, and it's a fantastic event. I hope there is another one. I'm not sure I will be in it."

Someone shouted, "Why not?" He laughed and only repeated the question, as if maybe he would change his mind, and the crowd cheered. Photographers from both the national and local media were there, and with schmaltzy French songs playing over a loudspeaker, many older women and children crowded toward him, holding out papers for him to autograph. They brought him to a huge reception hall that was fitted out with a stage, a large gold-colored throne, and filled with people waiting excitedly to hear what this amazing man had to say. Mike thanked the crowd again. "This makes it all mean so very much to me. It's fantastic." When asked his favorite part of the race, he immediately responded, "The finish!" And the crowd cheered. The front pages of the national papers the next day featured Mike with his photogenic smile.

## Second BOC Aboard *Duracell*, 1990–91, Newport, Rhode Island, Around the World, and Back to Newport, Rhode Island

*“I find the solitude of this kind of racing the thing that’s most interesting, and that’s why I like it; it goes on and on and on.”*

—MIKE

MIKE WASN’T SURE HE WOULD RACE again, but after a couple of weeks he changed his mind and spent the next six months preparing *Duracell* for her second round-the-world race, the 1990–91 BOC.

He didn’t talk much about this next race, perhaps because it was too much like something he had already done. He had been enthusiastic about the 1986–87 BOC because it was a personal first, and the 1989–90 Vendée was not only the first race of its kind, but the one hundred plus days of forced solitude in some of the most remote regions of the world also stretched him personally. “People talk about the depression and loneliness of singlehandeding, but if that were the case, why would I do it? A squash game is over in fifteen minutes. Then you have a letdown, and you have to do something else less enjoyable. I find the solitude of this kind of racing the thing that’s most interesting, and that’s why I like it; it goes on and on and on.”

For his first BOC, Mike had been on *Airco*, a 50-foot boat that put him in Class II. Since *Duracell* was 60 feet, he would now be racing in Class I against several skippers he already knew, either from the Vendée, the 1986–87 BOC, or both. (A third class of boats, for unsponsored boats between 40 and 50 feet, called the Corinthian Class, was created for the 1990–91 BOC.)

As in prior races, the leading French boats were sponsored by national businesses: Philippe Jeantot was sponsored by a bank, Credit Agricole; Philippe Poupon, who had sailed *Fleury Michon* in the Vendée until she capsized in the Southern Ocean, returned on a newly refurbished *Fleury Michon* and backed by the well-known (in France) company of the same name. *Groupe Sceta*, sailed by Christophe Augin, was backed by a large human resources consulting firm in France for whom Augin’s boat was named. The costs of these boats and their



full campaigns ranged from the equivalent of one to two million dollars. By comparison, *Duracell* had been built and outfitted for \$700,000—however, she was already outdated compared to the newer French designs.

Mike obviously loved singlehanded, around-the-world sailing, but few of his fellow countrymen even knew of its existence. And like many of his competitors, he didn't like schmoozing, shaking hands, and wooing sponsors. He was a long way removed from the stereotypical American sailor; as an adult he never belonged to a yacht club, and he had little interest and even less respect for the cultural superiority assumed by most of the American sailing community. Mike, like many drawn to adventure sports, found the marketing of the race—and himself—the hardest part. It was even harder knowing that in other parts of the world the sport was supported so well.

Angus Phillips of *The Washington Post* understood the difficulty of promoting an international race and wrote: "I'd say U.S. corporations are not in the habit of looking beyond their own borders to promote themselves through sport. Sports marketing is bigger here than anywhere, but it's all concentrated within our borders and stadiums. There's no global look."

Mike didn't write much about his second BOC, and though it was as demanding as his first two circumnavigations, it was a disappointment to him. At the beginning he had high hopes of winning or at least placing in the top three, and he started the race looking like a winner. At noon on September 15, 1990, Mike maneuvered *Duracell* into place, exactly between the race committee boat and upwind of everyone else, so when the starting gun fired he led the fleet of twenty-four down Narragansett Bay to the open sea. But after four days at sea, the top three boats: *Generali Concorde* skippered by Alain Gautier, Christophe Augin's *Groupe Sceta*, and *Credit Agricole IV* with Philippe Jeantot, had established the lead that they would hold for the rest of the race. Within the first day, Mike's generator failed.

Mike would face the same problem two years later on *Coyote*. Without the generator, he had no electrical power, and his navigational and communications equipment were electronic, as were his water-ballast system and running lights. While repairing the generator he discovered that the fuel line was taking in air. He pulled in the fuel by hand, and that worked. So, as he jokingly recounted, for the first leg he ended up pouring the fuel into the generator with a one-gallon milk container.

As in his first two races, Mike had been looking forward to the challenges of the Southern Ocean, so leaving Cape Town on November 24 for the start of Leg 2 should have been the beginning of the truly competitive part of the race. Instead, disaster struck as he and another boat collided just before the start. Bertie Reed on *Grinaker* broadsided *Duracell*, putting a two-foot hole in her side and breaking several of her stanchions. Reed admitted the accident was his fault and returned to Cape Town to repair his own boat. After the collision, *Duracell* was taking in fifty gallons of water an hour, and Mike had the option to return to port to fix the damage. However, he knew if he did, he would lose the advantage of sailing with the lead boats, and that was something he was determined to hang on to, so he kept going.



"I've never been so upset in my life. We had the boat just beautifully prepared for the first time ever, and then fifteen minutes before the start gun there's a hole in the side, and I just went berserk. I went crazy. I knew the weather patterns would not allow anyone any time to stop and make repairs. I felt I had to keep going, and I did. I still went the wrong way, but I got a better shot than if I'd gone back to Cape Town. I got the fiberglass out and put the bandage on."

Once he got underway, the boat performed well, and his spirits rose:

"There are those special days. When the weather is perfect and steady, and the boat is screaming along. There are no real big worries, [like] when you're afraid something is breaking or you'll have to change something. [There are] maybe six or seven of those days, and they are pretty special days. Personally I like it in the south when there's a lot of wind and albatross are flying around the boat. There isn't anyone else in miles and miles, and I just think there's a feeling down there that's really special."

The Southern Ocean brought the challenge of icebergs. For several days Mike sailed among huge ones that appeared as blips on his radar and that he couldn't always see because of fog or darkness.

"For three to four days you are literally at the edge of your chair. It's like driving 100 miles per hour with your eyes closed. The technique you have to use in order to survive this minefield [is] never let yourself sleep for more than 10 minutes, maybe 15; that's all the farther that your radar can see. We use very small radar, and it doesn't have the long range [that is] on bigger boats. We can only depend on 5 to 6 miles; so (you set your timer for as long as) it takes the boat to travel 5 to 6 miles."

The second port stop was Sydney. On his approach there Mike recalled sailing through Bass Strait, a treacherous piece of water separating Tasmania and the southern Australian mainland—a place holding some of Mike's fondest memories for this race.

"It was a very close race, and there were six of us [together]. When you are in the Bass Strait, it means you are about a day and a half from the finish [of the leg] in Sydney. It was exceptional because we had this very strong wind from the northwest, a quartering wind, quartering sea, very fast conditions, very shallow through there, so very steep seas, 15 to 20 feet, winds at 45 to 50 knots, extremely fast conditions, and the boats that we sail can handle these conditions, and the speeds that I was getting that day were consistently the best that I have ever, ever experienced, over 30 knots. It was so exciting because the boat would get on a surf, and it would take off. The speed climbed higher and higher, and it would get to 30 and just hover there for a while. It was extremely exciting, and at the end of the day I had picked up the six boats and had a comfortable lead and went into Sydney ahead of the fleet."

From Sydney, the fleet continued west heading for Cape Horn where they'd turn north. *Duracell* was fourth around Cape Horn and came into Punta del Este (which had replaced Rio as the third and final port stop of the race) in fifth place,

six and half hours after Australian David Adams on *Innkeeper*. From there, Mike and Adams chased each other to the finish in Newport. At 132 days, Mike finished fourth overall in the 1990–91 Class I BOC, behind three French boats—*Generali Concorde*, skippered by Alain Gautier, *Groupe Sceta* with Christophe Augin, and *Crédit Agricole IV*, raced by Philippe Jeantot. Each of the three had passed him on the fourth and final leg from South America to Newport.

It is a sailing truth that in light winds the lighter boats are faster than the heavier. Knowing the winds sailing north to Newport were likely to be light, Mike had correctly predicted the top three winners. The French boats were already a design and engineering generation ahead of *Duracell*, and racing in light winds *Duracell* couldn't match their speed. After that experience, Mike was determined to get another boat, lighter and thus faster than *Duracell*. Both *Duracell* and *Airco*, built by Mike, were slightly heavier than the newer Open 60 yachts, and stronger—they could sail as fast or faster than the lighter boats in the high winds and big seas of the southern portion of the race. Since 1986, and following the design of Jeantot's *Credit Agricole III*, the new boats became lighter and faster, but by doing so they sacrificed their longevity; the chance of capsizing during the race became greater. In other words, in a race around the world, sacrificing weight for speed makes the boat faster, but it also makes her more vulnerable.

As Mike said, "When we started the fourth leg, I was next to *Generali Concorde* until he took his reef out [making his mainsail bigger] and then he was gone. Then I saw Christophe [Augin] come up, and that was only until he put his jib up and then he was gone. And *Crédit Agricole* came by, and that's pretty much the way the whole race went."

After finishing this race—and even though he was now one of only four people in the world who had raced around the globe solo three times, along with Philippe Jeantot, Guy Bernardin, and Bertie Reed—Mike was disappointed with his fourth-place finish. In his post-race interview he was notably gloomy. "There were some disappointments, but if I talk about each one it might get boring, and it might sound like I'm whimpering. I think the order that the boats finished in has been pretty accurate, that's just my opinion. I mean, what can I say?"

Mike swore he would never let the French pass him again, and he set out to build a boat with more power that would sail faster—particularly during the last leg of the race, from South America to Newport, along the Atlantic coastline of North America where the winds were relatively light. As always, my dad understood Mike's competitiveness, often repeating to me how devastated Mike was in that last leg of the second BOC when he had to sit there and let the French boats pass him by.

Mike began to look forward to his next race, the 1992–93 Vendée, as the race in which he would trump the French. He had a year and a half to design, build, equip, and test his new boat before crossing the Atlantic for Les Sables d'Olonne.

## The Second Vendée Globe Prep, 1992

*"I'm not frustrated by things like being cold or hot anymore.  
That's why I get along so well on these long trips. I've broken  
down all those fences. The weather never pisses me off."*

—MIKE

PEOPLE OFTEN ASKED MIKE if he got bored sailing for so long by himself, doing the same thing day after day. He usually struggled to answer this kind of question, and over the years had been forced to find a sincere response. "Imagine going to your office, locking yourself in for one hundred and twenty days, and working every day and night. [The difference between that and long-distance solo sailing, is that in the office people have to] answer to the internal politics of complicated corporate society. I answer to the sun, the rain, the wind."

Once Mike decided to enter the second Vendée, he drafted his thoughts and ideas about the sport, presumably to present to potential sponsors. His notes follow:

"I have been lucky and had the good fortune of participating in three round-the-world adventures. On three different occasions now, I have sailed around the world in a race singlehanded, or solo. I say lucky because of many things. First, I've had the opportunity to drive some very exciting boats and in the process meet many interesting people, and also for a guy who loves to sail, I've had more time at sea than you would get in one hundred years of racing around the buoys. So now maybe I've answered the first question most people ask—why? I am obsessed with the competition that involves everything from the design to the actual course I choose to sail, and I enjoy my time at sea.

"The boats are fascinating . . . unlike any others, because this is an unlimited class. We do not suffer from artificial limitations imposed by self-righteous committees that rule in other areas of the sport. No, the only rule is the boat must be a monohull and less than sixty feet in length. From here the team is free to pursue any idea that will produce speed and safely navigate the course, which is simply put—around the world. As you can imagine, the number of variables that come into play in solving the goal, or rather winning the race, are infinite.

"The design is developed using sophisticated software and personal experience. An interesting analogy [combination].

"Now of course the design is not the first element in this whole process. The first is money. After all, the designer has to get paid. The first boat I built, in 1983, the designer foolishly agreed to do the job for \$5000. In the end he maybe earned two dollars an hour for his time. It's an expensive job. The whole project could cost close to a million, so you need a sponsor. In a nutshell, the sponsor gambles that his boat will do well, and he will read his name in the media clot. For *Duracell*, this was 1.5 billion times in nineteen months. A number that I am happy to say was acceptable.

"So these are a few of the ingredients that go into this insanity. If you've been lucky enough to get this far, the next obvious step is to build the boat, which for financial reasons I have had to do both times before. This process involves up to 10,000 hours of labor and is a killer. There are lots of people who do this type of work [boatbuilding] everyday and find it very gratifying, but unfortunately I'm not one of those. It is a grind, and for me it's mostly the means to an end. Remember, this process is a good part prototype and it has all the associated problems. This part is more interesting, but still the dust and the stink of resin is for the most part unavoidable.

"So you end up with this beautiful piece of sculpture and then you do two really stupid things—you suspend 10,000 pounds of lead from the bottom called a keel and then counteract that with a skinny mast that sticks up in the air 85 feet, and then I guess you do three dumb things, you put it all in the water and go sailing. Seriously, it's fascinating when it all comes together and you're actually seeing the boat work for you for a change. Because [even] though you still are busting your tail to set and adjust the sails, etc., the boat is starting to do the majority of the work, and this gives a very unique and satisfying sensation.

"The race I did in 1990, and is also the one I would like to do next year, is a French race that circles the globe without any stops or any outside assistance. In my opinion, this is the ultimate contest for man and machine.

"This means of course [the race] has the means to be the ultimate disappointment too. Three years of work, anxiety, sweat, all the things you expect when you work for yourself to build up anything, whether it's a new business, new home, or new marriage. You put out a tremendous amount of energy with no guarantees. The only thing that keeps you going really is this glimmer of hope or dream; and your faith in this vision is what feeds the motors. On the first boat in 1985, I used to work a full time job days, and at night go to the shop and put in another six hours and then be there all weekend. I'm still not sure how all of this happened. I look back on it and still can't believe we ever finished that boat. That boat by the way is still sailing. In the 1986–87 BOC round-the-world race, I finished first in that same boat, and since then with a different owner the boat won a transatlantic race and has been in another round-the-world race. That turned out to be a tremendously successful story. The next boat had a slightly different twist.

"After going through another lengthy building and fund-raising period, we finally had all the pieces together and were ready for the start of the round-the-world nonstop French race, the Vendée Globe Challenge. Thirteen magnificent machines were ready to participate in this first time ever event scheduled to start November 23, 1989, from Les Sables d'Olonne on the west coast of France.

What a race this turned out to be. In years before, because of the thousands of variables a small boat is exposed to at sea, these types of long races found the competitors hundreds of miles apart. But today, mostly because of advancements made in design, materials, technology, etc., and a few rules that limit [the] length of the boat, they are sailing in this case 24,000 miles and finishing within a day of each other.

"The course circles the globe west to east so the boats go around the bottom of Africa and head toward Cape Horn, South America. When you examine this route on a globe you will see that it is more like a circle of Antarctica with a long leg down and then back north to France. This means you cross most of the major bodies of ocean and have to sail in all of the different conditions that represents. For example, you experience steady trade winds, then areas known as variables, next, maybe, the doldrums where there is practically no wind, and then the long stretches in the Southern Ocean where the winds and seas can build to horrendous proportions. It is not uncommon to experience seas of over fifty feet.

"The rule of thumb is the seas given enough time will rise as high as the wind is blowing. A steady 40 knot wind will produce forty foot seas. This may at first sound bizarre . . . These seas crest quite far apart and for the majority of the time you are traveling with them. So really this is very fast sailing and is extremely exciting. For anyone who likes to go fast on the water this experience is a must. For example, *Duracell* has reached speeds of over 30 knots in these types of conditions, the America Cup Boats have a very hard time getting to 15 knots."

For the design of his second Vendée boat, on what would be his fourth time around the world, Mike planned to hire the French firm, Groupe Finot, who designed the boats that dominated the 1990–91 BOC. Rodger Martin, designer of Mike's first two boats, knowing about Mike's intentions, took Mike out to lunch to lure him back, promising that he could come up with a winning design, one as good as a Finot. He played to Mike's patriotic ambitions, telling him that since he'd changed his citizenship from South African to American, the two of them would be the only American team racing in the Vendée—America vs. France. Mike decided to go with Rodger.

Rodger's business had grown since he and Mike started working together in 1984. *Airco* had been such an enormous boost to Rodger's reputation that he had more work than he could handle, so he had hired another yacht designer, Steve Baker, to work with him. Baker, enthralled with technology, spent both his work and downtime on the computer. He took the lead on the design of Mike's new boat and set up a mock race using two computers, racing two contending designs around the world. He started the race at night and came in the next morning to see who won, and then raced the winner against his next design. His fifty-fifth design capsized, so he went with the fifty-fourth. In five years, yacht designers on both sides of the Atlantic had made tremendous strides trading off speed for stability in these racing machines. Theoretically, *Coyote*—the new boat Baker was designing but which had not yet been named—could sail 25 percent faster than *Airco*.

Although *Coyote*'s final design was similar to that of the leading French boats,

only a handful of people on this side of the Atlantic had ever seen anything like her. She looked somewhat like a souped-up X boat from Lake Minnetonka. People's first reaction at seeing her was, "What is it? An aircraft carrier?" She was the latest design in the Open 60, built solely for competing in the Vendée Globe.

Herb McCormick, a sailing journalist who had followed Mike's career from the beginning, described the new boat:

"*Coyote* was an extreme design with exaggerated dimensions. At 60 feet overall, she sported a plumb bow, a startling-looking 19-foot beam, and twin rudders. Her hull was a broad, Airex-cored, shallow dish with a displacement of only 21,500 pounds—5,000 pounds lighter than *Duracell*. With upwind and downwind sail areas of 2,600 and 4,700 square feet respectively, she carried an impressive power plant. (For comparison, a Baltic 64 or Little Harbor 63, with about three times the displacement, would carry about 1,800 square feet of sail area.) It was a ton of sail even for an experienced solo sailor."

The mainsail weighed 250 pounds and was so large that it took Mike ten minutes to haul it (via winches) to the top of the 85-foot mast. On one of her shakedown sails, it was hard work for several people just to reef the mainsail. To balance the tremendous amount of sail he could fly, he had 7,000 pounds of moveable ballast (seawater that he could move from a tank on one side of the hull to a tank on the other side).

Another point of comparison between sailing boats is the power-to-weight ratio. A typical recreational sailing vessel has a power-to-weight ratio of about 15:1. The power of the sailboat comes from her sail area. A racing boat needs to greatly expand its sail area without increasing her weight. *Coyote's* ratio was 45:1, making her three times faster than other boats her weight. (A racing trimaran can exceed 100:1.)

To non-sailors (and maybe a few sailors, too) the oddest aspect of her design was under water: a 14-foot long, narrow blade (foil) ending in a football-shaped bulb that was 112 inches long, 18 inches high, and 18 inches in diameter, made of 8,400 pounds of lead.

Traditional, or full, keels run nearly the full length of a sailboat, with the rudder at the back, almost as a tab. Gradually designers cut away the keel area on racing and some cruising sailboats, and in the 1960s, race boats separated the rudder from the keel—an arrangement that came to be known as a fin keel and spade rudder. This is the most common keel design seen today on racing boats and production cruising boats. What Mike had, and what is now common on race boats, was a hydro-dynamically shaped strut-rod (the "foil") balancing a lead bulb against the weight and dynamic force of the sails. The weight of the lead was enough to keep the boat upright.

During the construction phase of his new Vendée boat, Mike had hoped to commission a tungsten bulb to fit at the base of the foil. The tungsten bulb weighed the same as a lead bulb, but was slightly smaller, creating less drag as the boat moved through the water. Mike abandoned the idea because of expense—tungsten would have cost him \$80,000 more than lead—and commissioned a lead bulb instead. The two pieces of the keel, the foil and the bulb, were made out of different materials: the foil was carbon fiber and the bulb, lead.



How the materials were arrived at, and how they were engineered to fit together, was not an ideal process. In yacht design and construction, as in house design and construction, once the original plans are agreed upon between the design team and customer, the next phase entails a team of engineers and materials specialists looking at the design drawings to create construction diagrams and materials lists to show how, and at what price, the object—in this case the new Open 60—can be built. Careful attention at this stage ensures agreement between the designer's intent and the customer's objectives, and lays out cost and schedule and performance tradeoffs.

In large-scale projects, construction or project managers play this role. In small, shoestring operations it is often unclear who is playing this role. With lack of close oversight, schedule and performance and cost can all be compromised. In the case of Mike's new Open 60, the keel foil and the bulb were manufactured separately, and somehow at the boatyard these two materials would have to be forged together. Unfortunately, neither the engineering of these elements nor the process of securing them together had been given much thought.

The design of the keel and bulb, an integral part of Mike's new Open 60, was intended to produce the fastest monohull in the world. One way of maximizing the speed of a vessel is by increasing "the righting moment," the angle at which it heels before it capsizes. If the boat can tip over a long way before capsizing, it has a greater righting moment, and the greater this is the more wind your boat can handle without tipping over. The farther the boat can heel or tip over to reach her righting point, the greater her capacity for speed. Mike's new boat had twice the righting moment of *Duracell*.

When Mike was a kid racing his X boat on Lake Minnetonka, he figured out pretty quickly how to make the boat go as fast as possible. Even in the strongest breezes he kept the boat upright, racing with his butt over the side, the sail barely above the water. On those fast little scows, the crew was expected to provide the counterweight to right the boat as it heeled over. As Mike's crew on our family X boat, when the wind was strong I was expected to hurl most of my body weight over the side of the boat, arch my back, and suspend myself over the water. Hiking strips, strips of canvas several inches wide attached to the cockpit, helped a lot, because you could put your feet under them as you stretched out over the side of the boat, and this helped to anchor your body into the boat. The more weight you could create to counterbalance the weight of the wind on the sails, the greater the righting moment. The more wind your boat could tolerate, the faster you could sail. The greatest righting moment meant that the boat could achieve its highest possible speed.

Mike summed it up. "It's [*Coyote* is] really different from *Duracell*. It carries a lot more sail easily. I guess the best way to describe it is powerful."

For the safety of the crew, the Vendée required that a boat carry at least two watertight compartments that could keep the boat afloat if her hull was punctured. In the worst case scenario, if the boat broke apart and was upside down, the sailor could survive inside one of the compartments for a limited time, given he had water. *Coyote* had five watertight areas, three more than required.

Because of the increased expense of these races, Mike decided not to build



*Coyote slicing the seas on a starboard tack. Notice how small Mike looks in comparison to the boat. (Billy Black)*

the boat himself, as he had done with *Airco* and *Duracell*. Whether this was a “fatal” mistake can’t be known, but at the time Mike believed his efforts were best focused on raising money. Even with the proceeds from the sale of *Duracell*, Mike estimated needing an additional \$600,000 to finance the building of the boat. In the end, it was closer to \$800,000.

Mike hired Concordia Custom Yachts, based in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, to build his new Open 60. Concordia was well known for their wooden yachts, but had not yet built a fiberglass boat, let alone a one-off 60-foot racing sled. Bill Steitz, Concordia’s owner, had recently decided to expand their range of products, and Mike’s project looked like a good opportunity to enter a new market.

Assuming Duracell would continue their sponsorship with only an oral agreement between them, Mike initiated the construction project. Then two months into building the new Open 60, Duracell withdrew support. The company had gone public, and the shareholders decided to cut the funding of Mike’s new boat. Concordia, somewhat undaunted, had agreed to put up \$100,000 toward the project, but Mike still needed a new sponsor. Construction continued in fits and starts until in early spring of 1992 Concordia halted production. This was a terrible blow to Mike, and it seriously diminished his prospects of sailing in the next Vendée: the race start, late November, was only a few months away.

With the hiatus in construction, and knowing how difficult it would be to fully prepare for the race, some of Mike’s friends advised him to put the project on hold and try for the 1996 Vendée.

To make matters worse, Mike knew his key rivals had budgets of at least two million dollars from their corporate sponsors, often with an agreement to receive more money if needed. As Cathy de Moll, a fulltime fundraiser for Will Steger, another Minnesotan adventurer, known for his dogsled trips to the North Pole, wrote: “The French have a different priority in sports programs, and adventure has much higher visibility on TV and in newspapers. They tend to make national heroes of sailors, skiers, and climbers. They are even in fashion magazines. But Americans go for sports representing their cities. France doesn’t have a Hollywood, so in some sense their adventurers fill that role as well. And geographically it’s simpler: in France, you just have to go across the street to raise money, and if you get something on the radio station the whole country hears it. But here you have to tour and fly all over to do that.”

Mike’s weathered response to the well-funded competition was, “But you can’t just see that and say, ‘Okay, you win,’ and go home. They can break something or screw up just as easily as I can.”

The fall of 1991 had taken its toll on Mike. In addition to looking for sponsors and dealing with the stopping and starting of boat construction, his health was failing. One day while playing squash—a sport perhaps unlikely for someone like Mike with a certain disdain for the country club set, but Mike loved the competition and intense burst of exercise it provided in a relatively short period of time—Mike passed out on the court. One doctor’s visit led to another. Finally, he saw a specialist in Boston who told him he tested positive for hepatitis C. This form of hepatitis had been identified only two years earlier, in 1989, and the test

for detecting the disease was even more recent. Unlike other forms of hepatitis, this one had an extremely long incubation period, often lying dormant for twenty years or more, but was chronic and in some cases fatal. In the early days of its diagnosis, people believed that a liver transplant was the best treatment, but even with that the disease could only be delayed by two or three years. Mike quickly did the numbers to learn that the percentage of people needing a new liver far exceeded the number of available livers, and unlike kidneys, you have only one.

Mike called my parents on Christmas to tell them. I was visiting for the holidays, and my mom passed the phone to me. I sat on a pale green sofa, part of a three-piece ensemble beautifully upholstered in a floral pattern that I had sat on as a five-year-old. It was the same sofa I sat on during our family therapy session in my parents' living room, the literal center of my parents' world. Even though a small part of my parents' home, it was a tribute to their social status and prestige that anyone from our Minnesota community would recognize immediately. The sofa had lost none of its class. In the strange ways our memories work, my meditations about my parents' furniture became intertwined with my retelling of my conversation with Mike about his hepatitis, and whether I have forgotten it or it never did happen, I have no memory of my parents saying anything when they learned about Mike's illness.

In a low voice, Mike said, "I have hepatitis C."

"What?"

"Hepatitis C."

"When did you find out?"

"Just a few days ago."

"So what does it mean?"

"It's typically fatal."

"Oh, shit. What is it? How is it different from hepatitis B?"

"It's in the blood, and it doesn't go away. It's worse than hepatitis B."

"Which you had, right? So where does this come from?"

"I don't know, but it can lie dormant for twenty years, even longer."

"Shit."

Pause.

"The only cure is a liver transplant. Do you know how many people need liver transplants and how many people ever get one? Not very many. First they go to people who are famous. If there are any livers left then they have a list, and I would be pretty low on the list."

Mike, still in a state of shock, had formed a picture of his pitiful chances for living to old age. Even his chances of living for another five years were not good, and he lived with that reality.

One of the liver's jobs is to filter out toxins, such as alcohol. Mike's liver—put to hard use by years of drinking—was now further damaged. He suspected he had had the disease ever since he traveled to South America in 1970 and 1971. Like AIDS, hepatitis C is normally contagious through blood contact, and before its discovery blood donors were not tested for hepatitis C. Early on, prior to identification of the virus and routine blood testing, most who contracted the

disease did so through blood transfusions in which tainted blood was used, but no one knew it.

When Mike returned sick from his first South American trip the diagnosis was hepatitis B. Mike had told Helen that he got it from dirty needles when he sold his blood in South America to make some money. Except for an obscure reference Mike made in his early twenties which implied that he had tried heroin, there's no reason to believe he contracted the disease that way. (Mike's time in the Mediterranean had also put him in proximity with other IV drug users.) No one can say for sure when Mike contracted hepatitis C, but his drinking probably accelerated the progression of the disease.

Charlie Croft, one of the businessmen who owned the Airco franchise that supported Mike's first race, was one of Mike's bigger fans. He had recently been diagnosed with leukemia and was receiving a new kind of treatment at a clinic in South Carolina. (Charlie subsequently died from the disease.) He suggested the same treatment to Mike and generously offered to pay for it. The clinic doctor told him the treatment would put his disease into remission, and so every six weeks, from early 1992 until July of that year, Mike made the all-day drive from Jamestown, Rhode Island, to South Carolina to sit for two days while a new drug, interferon, was pumped into his blood. The four days following the treatment left him feeling like he had a bad case of the flu.

The last time I saw Mike, in May 1992, he was on his way back to Jamestown, Rhode Island, after one of these treatments. I was staying with my younger brother, Tom, who lived outside of Washington, D.C., to attend a friend's wedding with my husband. (My second daughter was nine months old, and it was the first time I had traveled since giving birth. The girls stayed with my parents in Minnesota.) Mike stopped to spend the night and left the next morning for Rhode Island.

Since I moved to San Diego at the beginning of 1989, Mike and I were at opposite sides of the country, and our paths rarely crossed. We had seen each other once or twice when we happened to be in Minnesota at the same time. We had fallen out of touch, and I no longer felt we could pick up where we had left off—too much had happened. I was struggling to keep afloat psychologically as a mother of two, and Mike, a sailing hero, was completely consumed by the campaign for the next Vendée due to start that November. I was aware that Concordia had stopped construction and that he was depressed about it.

Mike arrived late that night, more or less unannounced. He was one of the few people I knew who still dropped in without calling ahead. Maybe he liked the element of surprise, or maybe he didn't want to give potential hosts a chance to say no. I was surprised to see him asleep on the sofa when I awoke the next morning.

He wasn't as gloomy as he had been on the phone at Christmas. Despite having driven nonstop from South Carolina to Washington, D.C., and presumably suffering from the flu-like side effects of the treatment, he seemed well. He spoke highly of the doctor who ran the clinic, praising his knowledge of blood diseases, and relaying to us his belief that hepatitis C would soon affect more people than

AIDS. The information conveyed aside, it struck me as more important that he believed in this doctor and that the drug going into his veins would cure him.

The four of us had toast and coffee in Tom's small kitchen. As I sliced my toast in half Mike immediately took half and ate it. "Never cut a piece of toast in half," he joked—his way of telling me that it was my fault he took half of my toast. Mundane details, like cutting a piece of toast, hang around forever in our brains—it was also just this kind of inane remark that a big brother, or maybe just my big brother, would make. This was the old Mike, the one whose mind raced as he surveyed the world around him, looking for faults anywhere he could find them. The rice bread toast was tasteless and the coffee was bitter, but it was an unforgettable breakfast.

As I listened to Mike stepping back into old behavior patterns, I also noticed new things about him, though, and one was the faith he had in his doctor. Before his hepatitis C diagnosis Mike would have called the doctor a quack. Now, to endure the six months of debilitating treatments and remain confident about his future, Mike had to believe he'd be okay. He also had to believe he'd be okay to continue his quest for the next Vendée.

He was drawn and thin, but he had been thin all his life. He weighed 140 pounds—at 5 feet 10 inches he had nothing but muscles stretched over his bones. His athleticism never came from his strength but from his catlike agility, his whole body lithe, always showing an ease of sinuous movement and balance. He had to train hard to build the strength and stamina needed when he was at sea. Hoisting the mainsail or climbing the mast was hard work. It became easier after a few weeks at sea, but initially it was brutal.

Mike was never a health freak; no health freak drank so much. He had also inhaled a lot of toxic fumes over the last fifteen years. He'd painted *Mistle Thrush* at least twice when the paint was still leaded, worked as a house painter (indoor and out) for a year and a half, and the fiberglassing of both *Airco* and *Duracell*, which he described as the most awful work he had ever done, filled his lungs with toxic fibers. (He wore a protective mask but took it off when he gave instructions to others. In any case, a mask would never have protected Mike from the full array of toxins he was exposed to.)

He had smoked at least a pack a day since he was fourteen and consumed a great deal of alcohol over the years. He rarely smoked or drank when he was racing, which strengthened the connection he made between sailing and his salvation. He could stay clean at sea because he was alone and far from any source of cigarettes or booze.

That morning over coffee and shared toast, he talked about a new boat he'd been designing in his head—his way of changing his focus to something positive. This wasn't a racing boat, but a shoal draft boat for exploring as well as for ease of movement across difficult waters. His new design almost sounded like a Viking ship, a cross between a canoe and a sailboat. Viking ships were known for their ability to sail close to shore, giving them an incredible advantage in attacks, moving so quickly that their victims had no time to flee or hide their gold. The boats were the key to the Viking's rule of northern Europe.



Mike's interest in shallow-bottomed boats was partially inspired by his early adventures on Lake Minnetonka sailing his flat-bottomed X boat with its retractable centerboard. But this vision was probably even more related to his early experiences in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota when he worked for Outward Bound. This was a magical place where the water and land merged into one landscape. The land was most easily accessed via rivers and lakes, making water travel much faster than going overland. The canoe was perfectly suited to this environment—fast, silent, and portable. Maybe Mike also wanted to explore the lands he had sailed past during the around-the-world races. To sail across the Atlantic or the Southern Ocean and then head up a narrow inlet or fjord appealed to Mike's sense of adventure. His dream boat would make exploring the previously inaccessible inland waterways possible.

During that hour or so in Tom's kitchen listening to Mike talk excitedly about his new idea, it occurred to me that I hadn't heard him so enthusiastic since he had been overwhelmed with raising money for his campaigns. Until then, it hadn't occurred to me that he would ever think about anything but his new racing boat and his next race and finding the money for them. Perhaps with construction stalled on *Coyote*, he distracted himself by designing a new boat. Listening to him talk about these maneuverable boats reminded me of the old Mike, forever restless and endlessly conjuring up something new. And then he was gone. He left shortly after breakfast and drove the eight hours back to Jamestown.

In July, his hepatitis C in remission, Mike stopped treatments. At least that's what Mike reported. People who knew him well, though, said he was still sick, and although he stopped receiving interferon, his disease was probably not in remission. In mid-July, Mike was offered a job to crew on a boat in the greatest race in the Great Lakes, the Chicago to Mackinac. The race entailed sailing the length of Lake Michigan, from Chicago through the Straits of Mackinac to Mackinac Island. Mike needed the money so signed aboard, but the man who hired him never paid him anything.

Mike's longtime friend Joel Stebbins was also in Chicago competing in the same race. It was the last time Joel saw Mike, and Mike talked about being sick. He told Joel to make sure his kids didn't do stupid things like he had done. Mike blamed himself for getting sick, and although he never said so, Joel understood Mike to mean that he had gotten sick from contaminated needles. As a potential candidate for sponsorship, Mike did not want people knowing he was sick, so besides a few good friends, all of whom were longtime friends from Minnesota, and his family, Mike didn't talk about it.

In June, Bill Steitz, president of Concordia, agreed to extend his generosity yet again. Maybe he realized that the investment the company had already made would only start paying off if the boat competed in the Vendée. As part of the agreement, the boat would be used as collateral for a loan. But even with that support, Mike never had enough money. He joked, "If I win this race it's because of all the superior products [donated by suppliers] . . . If I lose, I can't come home [referring to the amount of money he owed]."

When Mike began the campaign for his second Vendée Globe Challenge in 1991, he had anticipated a different scenario from the one unfolding. He had planned to launch *Coyote* early in 1992 and then sail her across the Atlantic in time to join the Plymouth-to-Newport singlehanded race, with a midsummer return to Europe in the company of the Quebec-St. Malo race fleet. Three trips across the Atlantic before the start of the Vendée at the end of November was an ambitious amount of sailing on his new boat, especially considering how much time he actually sailed *Coyote* before he had to leave for France.

He also hadn't planned on getting sick. Hepatitis C can cause severe nausea, and people tend to lose weight. Managing the construction of his new boat would have included breathing in the toxic fumes from paint and fiberglass and that would only make his nausea worse. His decision to fundraise rather than build may have been a result of his increasing inability to tolerate the ever-present toxic fumes.

After more than a year of starting and stopping construction, *Coyote* was launched roughly eight months behind schedule at 7:45 a.m. on September 10, 1992, at Little Harbor Marina in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

Mike and a hundred or so friends and curious onlookers toasted the launching with small plastic glasses of champagne. Mike addressed the crowd, briefly and reluctantly, and then Bill Steitz spoke about what a great opportunity *Coyote* had been for all of them. Helen took over, blessing the boat with something she had found in Native American literature: "Great Spirit that moves in all things, whose voice we hear in the wind and the water, watch over this vessel." And with that, she climbed the scaffolding and broke the traditional champagne bottle against the hull. After the launch, five or six people, not including Mike, stood on *Coyote's* deck as a small boat towed her away to the dock.

Mike had hoped that by the launch he'd have a new sponsor for whom the boat would then be named. But with no sponsor, he gave the boat what he hoped would be a temporary name. *Coyote* was actually Helen's idea. Mike's explanation for the name was that a coyote "travels alone and eats sparsely." Helen elaborated, "The trickster! The magic dog!" The name was painted in small red letters on the hull.

For some, the word "coyote" inspires romantic visions of the American West. The name seemed fitting for a boat Mike sailed, since it was often the howling of the coyote that woke up its domestic brothers and sisters and made them realize they were related in some way to the wild. Like sailboats, coyote silhouettes are often pictured appearing on the horizon under the light of the moon. They are transitional figures, more so today than ever, between the wild and the domestic, crossing the boundary several times a day. Like the poetic image of the coyote, Mike's boat was a loner, a one-off design, and sailed by a solo sailor.

Billy Walker, the foreman at Concordia, videotaped Mike discussing the boat after the launching ceremony. When someone asked Mike if the boat would plane, his response was, "Oh, it will plane. Hull speed will probably reach nine to twelve knots, but it will hit thirty knots when it slides down a wave, certainly wide enough, shallow enough, and flat enough."

In an interview shot later, Mike was on the boat along with several others, some sitting in the cockpit, some watching the sails or the mast, fine-tuning the rig. Others were working with the winches, and one fellow was halfway up the mast. The guy at the wheel was Steve Pettengill, a sailor and long-time friend of Mike's who had worked for him. He worked pretty much fulltime once the boat was launched to get her ready to race. He had hoped to race against Mike in the next BOC. Steve later sailed the 1994–95 BOC, finishing second after Christophe Augin, who had also won the 1990–91 BOC. Steve's time of 128 days bested Mike's record by four days, making him the fastest American singlehanded circumnavigator.

The video camera then captured Mike working on a winch at the base of the mast, and he was asked to explain the Vendée. Reluctantly, with a lot of stopping and pausing, Mike began:

"Vendée starts in the village of Les Sables d'Olonne at 2 p.m. on November 22, 1992. It's a huge event in France. They are expecting 400,000 to 500,000 people to be at the start. The idea starting in November is that when they go south, half the race is in the Southern Ocean, [and] we will traverse the Southern Ocean during the height of the summer. [At] 60 degrees latitude, you steer due east. The race restricts the boats from going farther south. [It's a] drag race at that point, everyone will be at 60 degrees, then north after Cape Horn. Last race, the winner was 109 days. We are optimistic that some of the boats will be back in France in less than one hundred days."

Rodger Martin was one of those sitting in the cockpit, and among other things the cameraman asked him, "What is your goal for this boat?"

Rodger replied, "To win the race. Mike's very competitive and I think he'd like to win. We ran fifty-five different hulls through velocity tests and through weather conditions around the world, we expect it to be a good all rounder, good in doldrums and in heavy conditions . . . It's hard to design restricted boats after you've done this kind of design. I find it very liberating. I'm very fond of the freedom it allows you."

In the two weeks following the launch, Mike and a crew of sometimes as many as twenty people sailed *Coyote*, putting her through sea trials. Steve Pettengill was pretty much always on board, and Serge Viviani, a jack-of-all-trades who had become a good friend of Mike's and Helen's, would later fly to France to meet Mike when he arrived and continue to outfit *Coyote*. Dan Neri, who made Mike's sails, might have been on board, as was Bill Walker from Concordia, and other specialists for the mast, the compass, the winches—basically everything on this boat needed to be tested. Billy Black, the professional photographer and friend of Mike's, was often there to capture the beauty of Mike's new boat under sail.

A video of one of the sea trials shows Mike wearing a variation of the same clothes he wore all the time: a blue polo shirt with a logo of one of his past sponsors, khaki pants, and brown shoes. Since looking for sponsorship Mike had gradually cleaned up his appearance, but the changes weren't all that significant—a polo shirt instead of a t-shirt, khakis instead of jeans.

On one of the sea trials, someone asked Mike how sailing in the race would be different. He replied, "Well, there wouldn't be so many Fig Newtons, the sea wouldn't be so flat, it wouldn't be so warm, and a few less people on the boat."

When asked how the boat was doing, he always responded, "Well, she's doing well."

One returning sailor had this to say after his ride aboard *Coyote*: "Planing ahead through a running seaway, *Coyote's* bow carved a sharp wedge in the 4-foot waves and parted the inevitable torrent before the thick spray settled. Remarkably, it didn't slow the boat whatsoever. There was not a dry spot on deck. The crew was drenched but seriously pumped, especially Plant. As he steered, his ever-present Ray-Bans caked with salt, water streamed from his face. Every so often he allowed a soaked grin that said the previous year's worth of endless setbacks had been worth it."

On another boat, Helen was taped as she watched *Coyote* and asked to describe her feelings. "I'm surprised you can't hear my heart beating. It's exhilarating, absolutely beautiful. The lines are wonderful. Everything is perfect. It's power. It represents power. When you are on it, you can feel it. When you are here, you can see it. I'm very excited to see Mike finally on the water sailing, and he's very happy."

Asked to describe her feelings when he started a race, Helen replied, "Breathlessness. Excitement. Happiness. There's no fear. I always have tears of joy when he leaves, because I know that's the fulfilling part for him, to be out there and on the ocean."

After a gusty sail on *Coyote*, Herb McCormick wrote the following:

"*Coyote* met and surpassed her advance advertisements. She was the fastest, wildest monohull I've ever sailed. . . At the end of our sail, after he'd secured *Coyote* on her mooring, Mike walked aft taking in his boat and said, 'What have we created here . . .' It wasn't a question so much as an affirmation. Blue-eyed Mike was as handsome as he was focused, and he flashed a smile out of central casting. Amidst the chaos, there was true contentment. He had the gaze of a man on the verge of unlimited possibility."

Mike believed not only that *Coyote* was a better boat than *Duracell*, but also that he was now a stronger competitor and could win the Vendée. "Plant spoke slowly, choosing his words carefully as he sought to explain his reasons for his added confidence, 'I've had two more races behind me and that makes a big difference. I have the confidence that comes from experience. I feel like I have the ability to concentrate on the things that are more important' . . . he believes he'll be better able to pace himself during the relatively quiet periods, saving his energy for the times when he'll really need it."

*Coyote* stood out, even in the sailing Mecca of Newport: "J/35 sailors in Newport for their North American championship a week after the Newport International Boat Show were surprised coming in from a race when *Coyote* burst out of the fog behind them, zipped past on a broad reach, moving faster than the wind was blowing and vanished ahead of them." As always, the most amazing part of

this enormous speed machine was that she was handled by one person, and in the publicity photos taken before Mike left for Europe, he looked tiny compared to the size of the boat with its massive sails.

Mike was happier than a kid with a new toy; in fact he had been dreaming about this since he was a boy. Speed grabs hold of some kids and stays with them for a lifetime. Speed is power—you can go faster than the competition, and an adrenaline rush overcomes the person in control. Aboard a sailboat, the power comes from a combination of the wind and the boat. The wind is an invisible power, one that at times seems supernatural. Mike had built his speed dream, and his goal of beating the French sailors seemed within reach.

On September 30, twenty days after launching, Mike admitted to being a little behind schedule with testing the boat. But he made time to visit a third-grade classroom to collect letters and drawings the children had made for him. He had started out as a reluctant, yet somehow beguiling, public speaker, but had quickly grown to be pretty good at it, and as his fame grew he discovered how much he liked speaking to children. The closer he came to leaving, the more he liked it. Helen said it was because Mike thought that kids were honest, more “real” than adults.

He began receiving letters from students during his first race, the 1986–87 BOC, which he picked up at the three stops along the way. In France, he was met by eleven thousand school children when he crossed the finish line. After his second BOC, in 1991, Mike approached AT&T about a telex-based program for kids, which he called “Giving Kids the Helm,” and described it as a “key-board Outward Bound.” During his next race, he would communicate by telex with students around the world through the AT&T Learning Network. Mike’s log



*Mike speaking to school children in Rhode Island before the 1992 Vendée Globe.*

would be accessible to forty thousand students around the world, and he would be able to answer some of their questions.

Mike described his work with school children: "After making three races around the world alone, I wanted to share the experience of this type of no-holds-barred, open-ocean racing that some can only dream of. This is my way to lift the imaginations, build the self-esteem, and foster understanding between kids around the world."

The kids listened, enthralled, as he told them he would be taking their letters and drawings of his boat on his way across the Atlantic to Les Sables d'Olonne. "When I get to France I'll send a reply. Maybe I'll send it by telex, and if we get communications figured out it will be like you're on the boat." This conversation was caught on video—watching it, you can sense Mike's fatigue. There were times he looked like he might fall asleep.

After Mike left for France and didn't show up on time, one girl said, "His sails could have ripped." Another said, "He maybe had some trouble." One boy thought, "He might be worried that he may never get there."



## The Last Weeks, October 4–November 11, 1992

*“The power and the absolute beauty you experience is unbelievable. You feel the immensity and insignificance of our existence at the same time. I believe the soul is made from a million things, and in this case, one mistake and you would be reduced to a million specks of phosphorescence.”*

—MIKE, 1987

ON OCTOBER 4, with only a few weeks left before Mike would set sail for France, and against the advice of several people, Mike decided to sail *Coyote* south for the U.S. Sailboat Show in Annapolis, Maryland, beginning on October 8. This would be a perfect opportunity to show off the boat to the premier gathering of sailors in the United States. Mike had promised Concordia that he would take the boat to the show, but his decision to go probably had a lot to do with his continued, illusive, and so far unsuccessful quest for sponsorship of *Coyote* in the second Vendée.

Bertie Reed, a South African and fellow BOC competitor, had introduced Mike to Tony McKeever, a public relations promoter from South Africa. McKeever told Mike that he was working on “the big one”—a four-year, eight-race deal that would make the title sponsor a major presence in the sailing world—and consequently McKeever a major figure in the sports marketing world. Initially, Motorola showed interest in Mike’s race because they saw it as a chance to promote their new communications device, a portable Global Positioning System, the Traxar handheld GPS unit, and they gave McKeever \$50,000. Mike understood that the \$50,000 was given to McKeever to promote *Coyote* in the Vendée, but McKeever later said that he had been given the money for many reasons; sponsoring Mike was just one of them.

To better Mike’s chances for Motorola sponsorship, McKeever spent part of the \$50,000 on a spinnaker with the Motorola logo on it. The spinnaker might have worked as a clever billboard, and Mike agreed to fly it for a couple of publicity shots, but as a sail for *Coyote* it wasn’t the right size and was basically worthless. In the end, it was a big waste of precious funding.

The trip from Newport to Annapolis was *Coyote*’s first long-distance sea trial. Mike assembled a large crew for the trip: Fred Richardson, the Concordia Cus-



*Coyote flying the spinnaker sporting Motorola's logo, part of Mike's quest to gain corporate sponsorship, October 1992. Mike was disappointed not only because Motorola turned him down, but also because the spinnaker was the wrong size for Coyote, rendering it essentially useless for competitive purposes, and was a sad waste of much-needed funds. (Billy Black)*



*Mike on the bow of Coyote. Note her low freeboard. (Billy Black)*

tom Yachts representative; Brad Cavanaugh; Billy Black, photographer; Davis Murray, an experienced sailor who was a self-employed compass adjuster; Angus Phillips, sportswriter for *The Washington Post*; and two additional men, David Barnaby, a naval architect who was checking the mast under sail, and Quentin Warren, a sailing journalist. Rick Viggiano, who installed the electronics, sailed back with the crew from Annapolis to New York City. Scott Davis, one of Helen's sons, also came along. Scott was about 18 (or possibly a little older) and had helped Mike a lot over the past several years during which time he and Mike became pretty close.

A crew this size was unusual on *Coyote*, which had been designed to be sailed solo. The sheer number of hands to haul lines and sails made Mike less aware of any problems there may have been with the boat. When you sail single-handed, you are the only one who hauls a line, charts a course, feels the weather helm—all the feedback goes to your team-of-one. You, and you alone, are completely aware of your vessel. With other hands aboard you lose some of the direct sense of your boat. You also gain other perspectives and the accumulated experience of other sailors, builders, and navigators.

The sail from Newport down through Delaware Bay only increased the crew's excitement about *Coyote's* future. She averaged more than 13 knots as she covered the 245 miles between the mouth of Narragansett Bay and the mouth of Delaware Bay. Under spinnaker, she hit 22 knots, at that time essentially unheard of for a monohull. She flew like an X boat scow, just as Mike had hoped she would. He was ecstatic.

While she sped along at near hull speed, the overabundant crew also tuned the rigging, adjusted the sheets and the sails, inspected the mast, and attended to all the other hundreds of inspections needed for a brand new sailboat soon to be heading offshore. They discovered that she was a "plunger"—her bow driving through the bigger waves rather than over them. "In 25–30 knot breezes and

steep seas off Cape May, New Jersey, 'we had green water rolling down the deck up to here,' Brad Cavanaugh said, and he indicated his knees."

Mike had *Coyote* towed through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal in southern Delaware Bay; once out of the canal they sailed until the wind died. With no wind, they decided to tie *Coyote* to a dredge buoy, where they waited several hours for the wind to pick up. *Coyote*, designed to be light and fast, had no other means of propulsion besides her sails—so they waited. Once the wind returned, *Coyote* resumed her voyage. Briefly.

Chesapeake Bay's tributaries and gunk holes create wonderful meanders for recreational sailors, but the buildup of silt from the many streams and rivers entering an already shallow bay creates uncharted hazards for navigators. At 9:30 a.m. *Coyote* sailed into a ridge of mud that stopped her dead. Perhaps Mike could be excused for forgetting the reality of his own keel—this was his first time cruising aboard *Coyote* with her 14-foot, dagger-shaped keel with a heavy, torpedo-shaped bulb hung at its bottom. He also had little, if any, experience sailing in Chesapeake Bay. *Coyote* was sailing east on a port tack with an ebb tide, mainsail reefed, at 9 knots when she slowly came to a stop. The keel didn't strike hard. "It was fairly gentle, not abrupt," said Billy Black, who was at the wheel at the time. "There was no crunching of fiberglass or shuddering of the deck . . ."

There *Coyote* sat, immobile, heeled at an angle of about 18 degrees, 3 degrees more than it had been heeling while sailing. The crew tried to sail her off, but by then the wind was light, maybe six or seven knots and out of the northeast. They shook the reef out of the main and hoisted the genoa and another sail on the second self-furling forestay. They managed to turn the boat between 90 to 180 degrees (the information varies) to a starboard tack but could not free her. Then they released the mainsheet all the way, and a couple of crew climbed to the end of the boom in an effort to shift enough weight to force the keel out of the suction grip of the mud, but to no avail.

A fishing vessel offered to help. *Coyote*'s crew passed a halyard to the fishing boat, which motored forward slowly, hoping to lower the mast close enough to the water to force *Coyote*'s keel out of the mud. That didn't work, so they ran a line between the fishing boat and *Coyote*'s bow. Again the fishing boat motored slowly, this time successfully moving *Coyote* forward, but the two boats swung out at odd angles, bringing them dangerously close. Next they ran a line from *Coyote*'s port side—the low side—and another from her stern, back to the fishing boat, this time easily lifting *Coyote* over enough to free her keel. The whole grounding and release took twenty to thirty minutes.

No one aboard pointed out to Mike that the keel might have been compromised in the grounding. According to the later investigation by the Coast Guard, none aboard heard any loud noises that may have indicated the keel was cracked—or that the keel became detached from the hull when it hit. Those aboard felt the grounding was insignificant. Several crew checked the keel-bulb attachment by peering through a viewing port that had been installed in the hull for Mike's monitoring the keel as he raced. No one saw anything unusual—no cracks, no misalignment, nothing. The foil was intact, as was the ballast bulb at



the bottom of the foil. Mike's desire to continue to Annapolis was understandable, but *Coyote's* sideways release put awkward stress on the foil and bulb. There was a discussion with Billy Walker from Concordia about hauling the boat to check the keel's integrity, but Mike decided it was unnecessary. Hauling *Coyote* would take time and money, two things Mike didn't have. Nor did Mike hire a diver to investigate.

No one involved in designing or engineering the foil-to-bulb attachment, nor those who actually built the cutting-edge foil and bulb, are on record urging Mike to double-check those bolts or that plate, or the fiber wrap, in the wake of the grounding. The bulb was bolted to the carbon fiber foil through a stainless facing plate epoxied into the bottom of the foil; the plate was further bonded to the foil with fifteen layers of carbon fiber laminate. While none could see it then, the coming transatlantic sail would reveal that *Coyote's* bulb-to-foil attachment had been compromised.

Mike worked the boat show for six days from the deck of *Coyote* as she lay tied to the dock: shaking hands, discussing *Coyote's* design and speed capabilities, the challenges of the race, and even taking several groups out to sail. Mike hosted cocktail parties, autographed *Coyote* posters, and stood for countless photos, looking for that ever-elusive sponsorship dollar. He knew that every



*Coyote underway with a partial reef in the main,  
Ellis Island, New York, October 1992. (Billy Black)*

minute spent schmoozing was another minute lost on preparing *Coyote* for her trip across the Atlantic. With a sigh of relief, after the boat show ended Mike and his crew sailed *Coyote* out of Chesapeake Bay. Instead of heading back to Newport, however, Mike sailed to New York City. No one aboard noticed anything abnormal about *Coyote*'s keel or her bottom-hanging bulb on that return sail.

Mike went to New York because of an arrangement he'd made with McKeever. Despite how little time was left before his departure for France (Mike would pay a penalty if he arrived late), he needed to make his final pitch to the Motorola board members in their Manhattan offices. When Mike finished, McKeever handed him a check for \$3,000—all that remained from Motorola's \$50,000. McKeever told Mike that the other \$47,000 covered the expenses for twenty-five thousand bumper stickers, posters, the spinnaker with logo, and other miscellaneous publicity expenses. When questioned later, he explained, "I never received a cent from Mike. [Furthermore, I had] loaned him [Mike] my \$1,200 pair of binoculars, which I no longer have."

According to Helen, Mike was never comfortable with the spidery web of electronics aboard *Coyote*. The switch to a boat heavily reliant on electronics challenged Mike's penchant for simplicity. On his first singlehanded sail across the Atlantic from Newport to the Azores in 1986, Mike sailed *Airco* with no electronic instruments and no electronic autopilot—he did have a wind vane self-steering autopilot—and he loved it that way. By 1992, the boats and their gear were electronically driven; the sailors depended on their electronics for navigation, wind and weather predictions, and vital communication.

Mike had always been a self-reliant sailor—an ability that served him well in his first three oceangoing races. Equipment is always breaking on a boat, and a good seaman can repair and maintain all gear, not just that above deck. Mike loved mechanical challenges and showed his do-it-himself ability early on with Plant's Boat Works. Charlie, a friend of Mike's from the mid-1970s, remembers one frigid Minnesotan morning in an old, rundown house they shared. The furnace wouldn't kick on. Mike, in his determined manner, went to the kitchen, removed the trapdoor in the middle of the gritty floor, lowered himself into the cellar, and after a lot of banging the heat came on. Mike climbed back up into the kitchen, his broad grin showing his satisfaction.

Maybe the electrical system on these boats had become too specialized for Mike to decode. Increasingly, the navigation stations on these racers looked more like the cockpit of a 747, and ocean racers spent more and more time in front of computers, reading weather forecasts, plotting navigational routes, and so forth. For something that was/is intrinsically so simple, a boat with sails, the situation became complicated once the boat became competitive.

*Coyote*'s extensive equipment consumed an alarming amount of power: radar with a 24-mile range (Raytheon Model R-20X); two autopilots (Autohelm 7000s); a bilge pump; running lights; cabin lights; an inverter that converted 24-volts to 110-volts to power her computers; two 30-amp direct current to direct current converters to supply 12-volt power for a VHF radio; two Global Positioning Systems (GPSs—one made by Motorola and one by Magellan); a water-



maker; a water pump to transfer water between ballast tanks; a DC outlet for recharging portable equipment; a DC to AC converter to supply the 12-volt single side band (SSB) radio (Raytheon Model #152); an amplifier for the radio (AT&T direct dial unit that transmitted through the SSB radio); an AT&T telex; and a weather-tracking system. Initially, the running lights were the critical link to Mike's safety, since without them he could easily have been run over by a passing freighter—especially in the high-traffic areas.

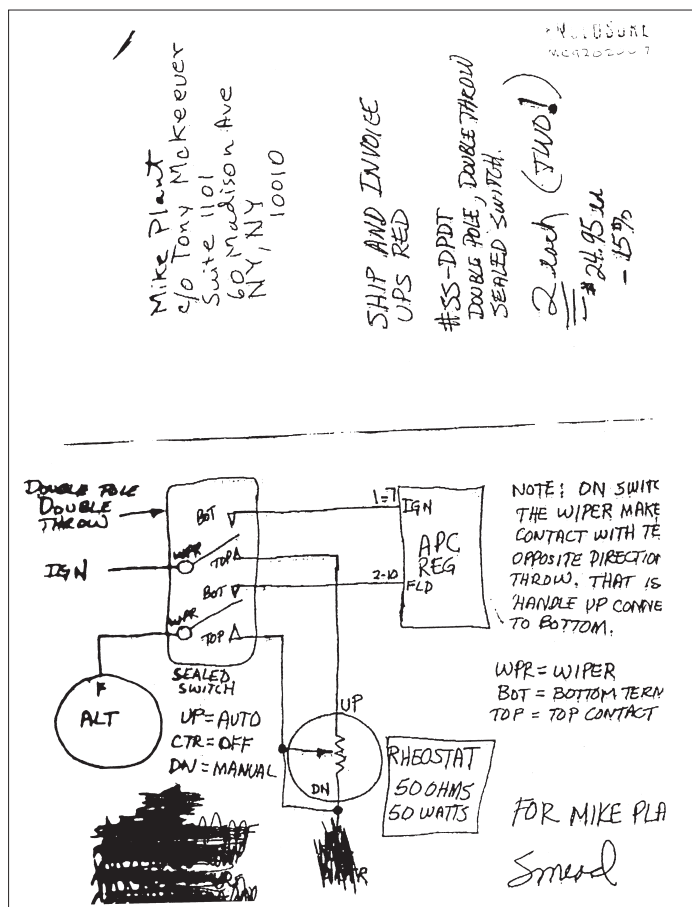
Concordia subcontracted the electrical work on *Coyote* to two different companies. Jose Antunes, working for Marine Electric Services, installed the entire power generation system, from the batteries to the wiring connecting the electronic gear. On a sailboat there are multiple choices for battery configuration and wiring. The challenge is to design and install a power generation system (entailing a bank of batteries and a battery charger and devices meant to regulate power) capable of providing enough amps in long enough duration for all of the sailor's needs. The other major issue is ensuring that all of the wiring going to and from the batteries is of sufficient gauge to conduct the electricity needed, and that it is hung in places where it will stay dry and free of any potential for chafe. Ideally, all the wiring runs are also easily accessible so the sailor can trace current and amperage as needed when troubleshooting electronic malfunctions.

According to the Coast Guard report, Pro-Tech Marine oversaw the next important part, the installation of all the electronic equipment itself. However, when the Coast Guard interviewed the individual who installed the electronics, Rick Viggiano, he is reported as "self-employed." So perhaps he was subcontracted to do the work. The installation of the electronic equipment is more than just mounting devices and plugging them in. A marine electrician confirms that the wiring is sound and that each piece of equipment is accessible. Most important, someone needs to confirm that the entire system is balanced—there is enough battery power and an adequate means to recharge those batteries to run all of the electronics on board. There is no evidence of an overall electronic diagram or written plan for *Coyote's* electrical system.

Mike's obligation was to tell those working aboard what he needed for equipment, and although he was consulted about the work, he had little to do with its installation or the selection of equipment. His friend, Steve Pettengill, installed the two engines (generators) that powered the batteries, and showed Mike several possible methods for starting them. He also showed Mike how to manually start the engines with a hand crank, and told Mike that in case of an emergency he could also use the alternators to charge the batteries. Steve believed that the system had enough redundancies that it could not fail completely.

After the sail from Newport to Annapolis, however, Mike worried that *Coyote's* battery-charging system wasn't working very well. He could foresee that in case of an emergency the process would be too complicated to troubleshoot quickly, and it would leave him without power for too long. However, Rick Viggiano, the marine electrician perhaps affiliated with Pro-Tech Marine, and who had sailed with Mike from Annapolis to New York, assured Mike that nothing was wrong with the system.

But what was nagging at Mike as he pondered the system on the docks at



*Smead's sketch made while aboard Coyote in Annapolis showing his suggestions for a new manual backup control system for the voltage regulation system. The parts were delivered to the boat in New York before she departed, but the system was not installed. (Coast Guard)*

South Street Seaport in New York City was that during the boat show two electrical engineers had questioned *Coyote's* electrical setup. Rick Proctor, who had designed the electrical system on *Duracell*, was the first to raise a concern. The other engineer, David Smead, worked in Seattle but knew Mike from his previous races. Smead and Proctor, although business competitors and barely on speaking terms, agreed that the backup voltage regulation system was overly complex, and that it should be made simpler. The problem, the two independent observers in Annapolis believed, was that the system had never been designed in the first place, but instead changed as the boat was built and as the various donated parts came in.

One such donation was a 24-volt battery, which then became incorporated

into the existing 12-volt system, and as Proctor pointed out, once you make the decision to have both a 12- and a 24-volt system, you have made the system *overly complicated*. (A dual-voltage system depends on a converter to change the 24-volt to 12-volt, and *Coyote* had only one converter, so if it failed, there was no way to convert the 24-volt to 12-volt, disabling any equipment that ran on 12-volts.) Proctor also didn't like the backup for the 24-volt system, saying it was "a mishmash of relays and wiring, which was confusing to an electrical engineer much less a layman like Plant. Mike didn't have a chance. There was no way to troubleshoot it."

Smead essentially confirmed Proctor's analysis and told Tom Gannon of *Practical Sailor*: "(The system) was a maze of relays and unlabeled black boxes—wire all over the place . . . One engine wouldn't run at all, and the other, after considerable work, was still cutting out under the load." Another reason the engine kept cutting out, Smead said, was because there was a fuel line that was too big for its fitting, and this may have blocked enough fuel from getting to the engine. Smead felt so strongly about the inadequacies of Mike's electrical power system that he told him he would have parts sent to him in New York so he could install a manual control system, hoping that that would take care of some of the problems. He ordered new parts to be delivered to Mike when he was in New York. Smead also believed Concordia should be aware of the problem, telling them he believed the system was too complicated for Plant to troubleshoot.

When Mike arrived in New York, the parts for a manual control system designed by Smead were waiting for him. Mike had already called Jose Antunes and asked him to come to New York and install the new parts. According to Antunes, however, "when Mike saw the control, he thought it was too small for the system, and it was not capable of handling the vessel's power requirements." So Mike told him (Antunes) not to install it. He (Antunes) said he ordered a larger replacement to be delivered to Mike in France for someone else to install when he got there. Mike also talked with Concordia and was told the system was fine and not to make any more changes. When Mike sailed away from New York, he left Smead's parts for the manual control system on the dock.

On October 16, 1992, *Coyote* was towed out from South Street Seaport to sea to begin her sail across the Atlantic. This was the first time Mike had sailed *Coyote* alone. Using the AT&T direct dialing system, Mike called several people the next day, including Helen, and said he was fine and adjusting to being at sea again. But two days out, on the 18th, he lost all electrical power. On that same day, he'd called Helen and complained about the electrical system, and he called Viggiano and told him the manual method to control the alternators, which regulated the electrical power from the batteries, wasn't working. Viggiano knew that when the engine reached full power the alternators would quit, and when the alternators did this the engine would not be able to handle the full load and consequently would shut down. This left Mike with no way to recharge the batteries.

Reports of Mike's next few days and his communications are inconsistent. One Coast Guard report recorded a witness saying that Mike had called to say

he was pulling in to Halifax to fix the electrical system. According to Helen and others, Mike never said he was going in to Halifax. Regardless, *Coyote's* electrical system, or lack of one, was causing Mike problems that became more serious every day. Without his autopilot, he had to stay awake to hand steer the boat. Without a working water pump, he couldn't move ballast water from one tank to the other, and not having this added ballast made driving the boat harder. Without power, he had no running lights, making him invisible to passing freighters.

Mike had recently become good friends with a man named David Stevens, and when Mike left for France, Stevens had already begun to write a book about him. Stevens told *Sports Illustrated* that Mike had left several phone messages for him on the 18th and "in one of them he said he was having trouble steering the boat in these seas. It was blowing 35 knots on the nose, and he described it as 'god-awful.' I think he used the word 'laboring.' "

The next time Helen, or anyone, heard from Mike was on Wednesday, October 21. Helen received a collect call from the captain of the freighter, the *SKS Trader*. Assuming he used his handheld VHF radio, Mike was able to make contact with this passing freight vessel, asking them to place a call for him to the States. When Helen answered the call, she could tell it was a three-way hookup. Mike's last words were recorded in two slightly different versions. Herb McCormick wrote in the *Rhode Island Monthly*, "Mike said he'd lost all power three days ago, but he was working on it and thought he would have it going again by tomorrow. He had had to slow down, so he would be a little late arriving in France, but tell her [Helen] not to worry, and I love her." The Coast Guard account, published about a year later, reported, "He asked the tanker to relay a message to his fiancée, Helen Davis: That the *Coyote* had a power failure, that he was continuing on to France and would probably be delayed in arriving, and that she should not worry about him." This was the last communication Mike made.

That was also the last fix on his position: 42° 12'N, 53° 30'W, 960 miles from NYC and about 360 miles south of St. Johns, Newfoundland, exactly where he had planned to be, maybe a day or two behind schedule. He was definitely on course but slow. He had only averaged about 190 miles a day, moving at 8 knots or less.

The next few days were the roughest ones Mike ever sailed. He was steering the fastest monohull ever built in the States: 60 feet of pure energy, with an 85-foot mast, and enough sail area to blast his way across the Atlantic in ten days if all went according to plan. Since he had not actually sailed the boat alone before the day he left, he wouldn't pretend to know the boat very well. Racing boats can take a year or so to shake down. On top of that, he was sleep deprived. He had no functioning autopilots, so he had to stay at the wheel the entire time, catching five- or ten-minute cat naps. Even after a couple days of no sleep, he kept *Coyote* moving.

On the first day of Mike's very first around-the-world race, the 1986–87 BOC, he'd been in a similar predicament—he couldn't get any of his three autopilots to work. He had the option of turning back and fixing the problem in harbor, but then as now, he continued on, determined to tackle it while underway.

Things don't work as they are supposed to for many boats on their first day out on a long-distance sail—the lone sailor transforms into a mechanic. Mike was so good at distance racing in part because he excelled at fixing things and devising creative solutions for broken parts. Off of Cape Town in that same race, he had spent hours in the bilge on his back in steep seas, seasick, rewiring a broken component on the engine.

Mike liked messing around with machines, so fixing *Coyote's* electrical system shouldn't have been an unsolvable problem. But he never recharged the batteries enough to gain enough



*Top: Mike in the cockpit of Coyote, October 1992. (Billy Black)*  
*Below: Mike had painted Motorola's name and logo on Coyote's topsides, hoping to gain their sponsorship—in the end they turned him down. (Billy Black)*





*A bird's eye view of Coyote showing her loose-footed main and her plumb bow.  
(Billy Black)*

power to even make a phone call. He must have worked like hell trying to make that system work, sleep deprived, moving in rough seas—not ideal conditions for any mechanic.

And if Mike didn't have enough trouble already, soon he had to contend with severe weather. He didn't have the benefit of his weather fax (WeatherTrac) to warn him that Hurricane Frances was on course to hit his intended route. But the gathering, thickening clouds and building wind would have forewarned him. And although the weather service was using the female spelling of the name, the gathering storm's closeness in name to Mike's baptismal name, Frank Michael Plant, Jr. (after our dad) was eerie. Hurricane Frances originated about four hundred miles south-southeast of Bermuda and was moving north. If Mike had been on course he would have been a day or two southeast of the eye. Frances peaked on October 24 with sustained winds at 75 knots. Few places are as ugly as the North Atlantic in an autumn gale. Unlike the consistent, rolling waves in the Southern Ocean, North Atlantic waves are short and choppy, or "messy" or "sloppy," as a sailor would say. The conditions would have been rough for at least five days. This was *Coyote's* first sail in big seas.

This "filthy" weather, as sailors describe such conditions, may have seen *Coyote* reaching record-breaking speeds, far faster than any speed *Duracell* had attained, fulfilling Mike's every dream. But *Coyote* would have been harder to control than *Duracell* and definitely more difficult than *Airco*. *Coyote's* lightness likely had her planing and surfing. Without a working water pump, moving water ballast to help her stability was impossible. These may have been the worst five or six days Mike ever had at sea.

Helen and several friends—as well as the sailing media, including photographer Billy Black—were waiting in Les Sables d'Olonne, standing by to get *Coyote* into final shape for the Vendée. Mike was originally scheduled to arrive no later



than October 31, crossing the Atlantic in fifteen days. None of his support crew, or his friends and family in Les Sables, Newport, or Minnesota, were particularly concerned when that date came and went. Mike had lost communication, but that didn't mean there was anything really wrong with him or the boat. Something must have happened to slow him down. Maybe, in a worst-case scenario, he had lost his mast and was making his way to France under jury rig. If something really bad had happened, Mike could use his JQE-2A 406 MHz EPIRB.

An EPIRB (Emergency Positioning Indicators Radio Beacon) is a small device that, once activated, sends out a signal every minute start-



*Top: Mike on Coyote's foredeck. Below: Coyote with a reef in her main, from the stern. Her wide beam is readily seen in this view. Water ballast tanks allowed Mike to adjust Coyote's angle of heel. (Billy Black)*

ing within a quarter of a second from activation. This signal is then picked up by satellite and forwarded to the closest rescue facility. An EPIRB is activated in one of two ways: manually, by removing it from its box, usually mounted somewhere on the boat; or automatically, when water pressure causes its hydrostatic unit to release it from the mounting bracket.

Designed to continue emitting the signal for twenty-four hours, each EPIRB has its own unique code registered—hopefully—by the owner at purchase, so the Coast Guard knows the identity of the vessel and the rescue center can quickly establish who is in distress. If the radio beacon is heard within twenty-four hours of activation, a rescue is often successful. Shortly before leaving New York, Rick Viggiano tested Mike's EPIRB and told the Coast Guard it had worked.

At the time when *Coyote's* was purchased, EPIRBs came with a registration card that the purchaser filled in and mailed back, so the owner's name, vessel, and contact information could be loaded into a database with the EPIRB's unique number. For whatever reason, Mike's EPIRB registration card was never mailed. The most likely scenario was that Mike forgot to send it in, or he may have asked someone else to mail it. The result was the same: Without the registration card on file, any EPIRB signal from *Coyote* would have been anonymous.

That is, until November 6, when Billy Walker, the foreman at Concordia, found the EPIRB registration card on Mike's desk at his home in Jamestown, Rhode Island, and immediately phoned the New York Coast Guard with the numbers. He told the Coast Guard he was worried because *Coyote* was a week overdue in France. He also said that based on Mike's last communication, on



*Mike in Coyote's cockpit letting the autopilot drive. (Billy Black)*



*Mike and Coyote heading out to sea with a reefed main and staysail. Coyote had a wide beam and a narrow draft hull, a skimming dish, much like the X boats Mike raced to win the Interlake Regatta (the largest regatta in the upper Midwest) two years in a row when he was 13 and 14. (Billy Black)*

October 21st, he was south of Nova Scotia and the tail of the Grand Banks. Billy asked them to give the case emergency status. So now the Coast Guard had Mike's EPIRB registration, but as far as that Coast Guard knew, there hadn't been any unregistered EPIRB signals. However, now they knew there was reason for concern about a yacht on its way to France—it was seriously overdue. Knowing all this, the Coast Guard might have checked with other agencies that monitor EPIRB activities: NOAA and the Canadian Mission Control Center.

Later that day, in a follow-up phone call with Walker, the Coast Guard told him no emergency signal from the North Atlantic had been received in the last four weeks. Walker made repeated phone calls over the next five days asking if there was any new information concerning *Coyote*, and each time he was told no.

But there had been an EPIRB signal: on October 27 at 23:26 Zulu time (GMT), 7:26 p.m. Eastern time, 4:26 p.m. in California, where I was. The United States Mission Control Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA) received a signal from an unregistered EPIRB, which lasted for three bursts. The Canadian Mission Control Center (CMCC) also received a signal from an unregistered EPIRB that lasted for two bursts. Both the CMCC and the USMCC/NOAA, however, required a minimum of four bursts before alerting the Coast Guard Rescue Command Center. Based on years of wasting precious time and money on false alarms, a signal shorter than four bursts was not considered to be a true sign of distress, but rather an accident. Many times the device was

activated accidentally, and the sailor turned it off right away. Additionally, since Mike's EPIRB had never been registered, neither the NOAA nor the CMCC had any way of knowing who owned this one.

After the first week, with each day that passed with no word, Mike's friends and family grew more concerned. Some, although worried, were convinced that Mike could handle anything and were waiting to hear his story once he got to Les Sables d'Olonne. Others thought *Coyote* had broken up, leaving Mike floating in his life raft or holed up inside one of the watertight compartments after having survived some kind of collision or hull breach. Surviving had always been Mike's game. That's the problem with people who seem invincible: When their time really does come, no one is prepared.

On November 10, Helen asked the Coast Guards in France and Portugal to search for Mike but was told that without a formal request from the U.S. Coast Guard, they could do nothing. As of that time, there had been no such request.

An additional detail emerged as well. Before Mike left New York, his insurance policy on *Coyote* had not been approved, and without insurance he would lose the boat if he activated the EPIRB. With insurance, he could be rescued and retain ownership of the boat. So when the policy came through shortly after he left, Helen joked with Mike's friends that they should send a blimp out with a sign that read, "Hey Mike. It's insured. You can get off now."

On November 11, our parents called the Coast Guard and asked them to please initiate a search for Mike, and they were told that there was insufficient information regarding the location of the missing vessel to initiate a search and rescue mission.

By this time, no one had heard from Mike for twenty-one days.



## November 12–30, 1992

*“The path (of life) is like a river in many respects. It can be dangerous and full of demands. Do I shoot the rapids or do I portage? Do I risk the whole venture now, this minute, or do I go ashore and select a different route? It’s damned if you do and damned if you don’t. The risk has to be evaluated. Why does there have to be a risk? you may even ask. The river here is full of salmon, maybe I’ll just stay.”*

—MIKE

ON NOVEMBER 12, Peter Dunning, a friend of Mike’s, decided to bypass the Coast Guard and go directly to NOAA. For several years Dunning had been the BOC Race Communications Coordinator, so he knew a great deal about ocean racing communications. When he asked NOAA officials if they had received any signals from an EPIRB with the numbers Dunning had from Mike’s registration card, NOAA answered yes, but since NOAA required four bursts before they passed the information on to the Coast Guard, they had essentially disregarded it.

The same day Dunning made his call to NOAA, my parents called the offices of Senator David Durenberger and Senator Paul Wellstone from Minnesota requesting help. Subsequently, their offices called the U.S. Coast Guard in New York. Also on that day, Bill Walker called Channel 12 TV in Providence, Rhode Island, who then called the U.S. Coast Guard in New York asking for an update on *Coyote*’s situation. A day later, the staff of Senator John Chafee of Rhode Island, prompted by several calls from Mike’s friends, also contacted the U.S. Coast Guard. Finally, on November 13, prompted by so many requests, the U.S. Coast Guard initiated a search and rescue operation for Mike Plant.

NOAA and the Coast Guard disagree about the sequence of events that led to the fifteen-day late response to Mike’s EPIRB. According to the Chief of Station at NOAA, Sam Baker, NOAA had received an inquiry from the Coast Guard on November 6 concerning Mike’s EPIRB and that they had passed this information on to the Coast Guard within twenty-four hours. The Coast Guard insisted that NOAA’s response to their inquiry on November 6 was negative; they had received no signal. (The Canadian Mission Control Center later reviewed their data and found that at some point the EPIRB number had been written down incorrectly, and so it did not match the one Billy Walker had supplied.)

Of course, if Mike’s EPIRB had been registered, this confusion would likely

not have happened. The tragic delay was partly a result of negligence on Mike's part. Even if one of the problems hadn't appeared, specifically the failure of the EPIRB to maintain its signal, we'd still be left with other issues. In the aftermath, the family dealt with the confusion over who knew what when, the regulation requirement of four bursts rather than three, and Mike's rush to get underway. Without those issues, Mike's EPIRB might have initiated his rescue shortly after it went off. Instead, the search for Mike started on November 13, by which time, if Mike had survived the accident that presumably prompted the signal, he would have had to survive in the middle of the Atlantic in a November gale, on his own, for seventeen days.

Unfortunately, neither the Canadian Coast Guard in Goose Bay (who had initially received the signal), nor NOAA believed they had a strong enough signal to pinpoint its source. After studying the possibilities, the Canadian Coast Guard in Goose Bay determined two possible locations (fixes). The fixes were later referred to as "the bad fix" and "the good fix." The bad was quickly rejected because it was one thousand nautical miles to the southwest of the coordinates for Mike's last phone call. The good fix, 36° 21'N, 52° 45'W (northeast of Bermuda), placed Mike approximately 660 miles due south of St. John's, Newfoundland.

Everyone agreed on Mike's last known position the day he made the phone call to Helen. On that day, he was roughly three hundred miles south of Newfoundland. The Canadian authorities arrived at their coordinates assuming that *Coyote* had sunk. They then estimated that the prevailing winds, which were blowing northeast, would have moved Mike, now presumably in his life raft and dragging an anchor to control speed, roughly three hundred miles south. Neither NOAA nor the U.S. Coast Guard had made their own calculations, so the search was based on this hypothesis.

Beginning on November 13th, the U.S. Coast Guard sent two search planes, C-130s, a four-engine propeller plane, and the Canadian Coast Guard sent one C-130. The three planes took turns flying for the next six days over an 18,000 square-mile area northeast of Bermuda looking for a life raft.

Mike's friends and family, both in the States and in France, immediately disputed these coordinates, which placed Mike three hundred miles south of his intended route. They knew Mike would never have abandoned *Coyote*; even in the event of a puncture or capsize he wouldn't have left her. The boat had several watertight compartments inside the hull which would keep her afloat.

My parents had gathered their own team of determined experts: former naval officer, Captain Tom Burns; Phil Harder, seaman extraordinaire; Bruce Watson, a much-respected meteorologist from Minnesota; and several others who showed up each morning to work at my parents' house. My mom provided an enlarged map of the Atlantic, and the experts and friends gathered around it and began to draw a track line. They started with Mike's last known position, and then factored in the weather conditions that Mike would have had at the time. The weather conditions would have been a result of Hurricane Frances, which they knew had moved northeast from Bermuda and lasted for about five days beginning on October 23. They believed that the eye of the storm would have



crossed Mike's course west of him. So Mike escaped the eye but had strong winds for at least several days. They figured that Mike would be roughly 45° 30'N, 32° 00'W, still on his intended course and about three-quarters of the way to France.

On November 19, the U.S. Coast Guard stopped the search. My brother Hugh immediately explained that they hadn't searched in the right area, and asked them not to give up but instead to search a different area. Hugh then called senators Durenberger, Wellstone, and Chaffee, reporting the same information, and all three of the senate offices also asked the Coast Guard to renew the search. When *Coyote* was found it was only too apparent how wrong the Coast Guard had been, and that they had been searching an area that was at least 300 miles south of Mike's position. Unfortunately, because it was ignored by the authorities, the probable course of *Coyote* recreated by Mike's family and friends nearly matched *Coyote*'s final track.

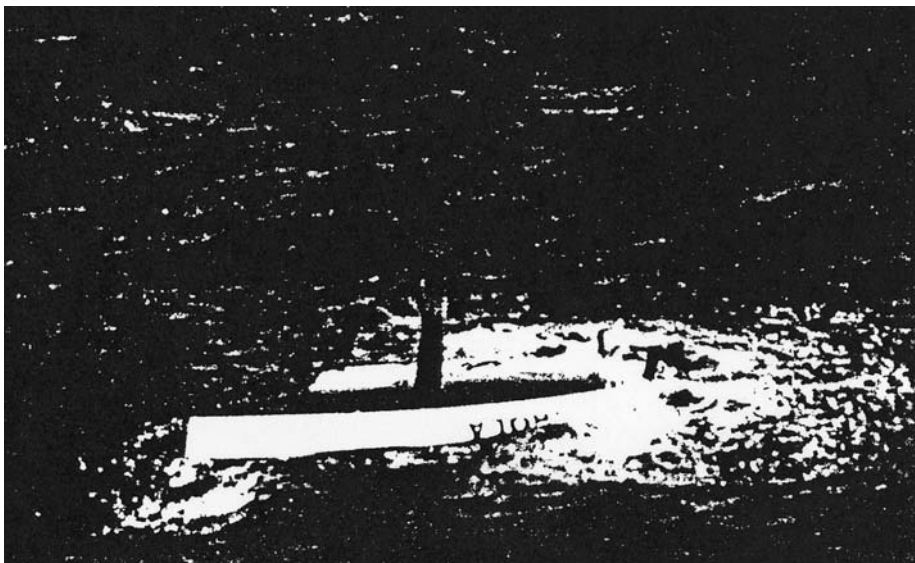
The Coast Guard resumed their search for Mike on November 20, sending search planes to an area north of the Azores. In the summary of their investigation into Mike's death, the Coast Guard report states, "An extensive and internationally coordinated Search and Rescue operation began that ultimately lasted a total of 9 days, covered 215,000 square miles of open ocean, and logged over 270 hours of flight time involving aircraft and vessel from the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, Canada, Great Britain, and France."

On the same day, Friday, November 20, Senator Durenberger also sent a letter to the commander of the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, Vice Admiral Paul Welling, asking him to invite participation from other countries to help in the search. Then, and only then, on November 22, the Coast Guard made a formal request for help from England, France, Portugal, and Spain.

On November 22, the start of the Vendée Globe, the French Coast Guard received a call from the tanker *Protank Orinoco*, which was about 460 nautical miles north of the Azores. The call informed them of a capsized yacht floating at the following coordinates: 46° 54'N, 26° 51'W, about fifty miles northeast of the coordinates that had been determined by Mike's friends and family. From his last known position, when he phoned Helen via a passing tanker, *Coyote* had traveled eighteen hundred miles and had stayed pretty much on course. *Protank Orinoco* circled the boat, coming as close as fifty yards hoping to find someone, but no one appeared. They described the hull as black, with white topsides, with a thin blade sticking straight up in the air from the middle of the upturned hull.

According to U.S. Coast Guard Lieutenant Andrew Sorenson, "It was next to impossible for them [the crew on the tanker] to get close to the yacht, but they could see as the boat crested on the waves the name *Coyote* written on the hull." Later on he added that "The Coast Guard now realizes that the area of its initial search, centered on the fuzzy signal received from Plant's radio beacon, was completely wrong." News of the sighting energized Mike's friends and family.

Mark Schrader, who had raced against Mike in the 1986-87 BOC, was part of the shore crew waiting for him in France. "Everyone here believes that if he had a chance to survive whatever happened, he will. He's as tough a guy as I've ever



*This image of the overturned Coyote as found in the Atlantic ran in news outlets around the world. (Coast Guard)*

met, and as determined. We all know that you can survive for incredibly long periods of time adrift at sea, and Mike is extremely resourceful. I'm sure he's out there somewhere, wet, cold, and madder than hell."

Initially, after the sighting by the tanker on November 22, the Coast Guard did not plan to board the capsized *Coyote*, believing that Mike could not still be alive. They suggested that the Plant family hire a commercial vessel to attempt a boarding. Because of the three airtight compartments, each accessible from a hatch on the deck, my family argued that Mike could be alive.

Hugh insisted someone board the boat. He was adamant that if there was a chance Mike was aboard, they could not turn back now. There were cases of people surviving a shipwreck by crawling into a watertight compartment in the hull of the vessel. With water and food a person could survive inside one of these containers for two to three weeks. If Mike had been able to get into one of the watertight compartments, he'd have had a chance to survive by making a small hole in the hull for air. He had enough food and water onboard to keep him alive for weeks. My family and others convinced the Coast Guard to continue their search. So the next day, November 23, they deployed a Navy Safeguard class salvage ship, the *USS Grapple*, ARS-53, home ported in Norfolk, Virginia, to the capsized yacht. The *USS Grapple* estimated it would take them four to six days to reach the upturned yacht. But on November 24, they changed course away from the yacht, because the seas around it were too big to allow an effective approach.

The water and air temperatures were working against Mike. The water was in the fifties and the air in the forties and lower. If he had been able to get into a

watertight section, he would of had no way to get dry, leaving him succumbing to the ultimate threat of hypothermia.

Meanwhile, on the evening of November 23, the British sent out a Nimrod airplane to *Coyote* at 46° 51' N, 26° 06' W. Using these new coordinates, the U.S. Coast Guard asked a nearby tanker, the MV *Rafael*, to change its course and head for the area. The MV *Rafael* found nothing, and they asked another tanker, the MV *Jobreid*, to divert their course to look for Mike. This tanker spotted something that could have been a boat and maneuvered as close as they could to see the word “Coyote” on the white topsides of the upturned sailboat. But the weather was foul, 40-knot winds and 20-foot waves, making it too dangerous to attempt to board.

At some point, a short video of the upturned *Coyote* made its way onto the news, and it was played again and again. The first thing that those who knew the boat noticed was that the torpedo-shaped bulb that had been on the end of the long, deep keel foil was gone.

In the end, it was the French who went to find Mike. After postponing their search for one day because towering waves made it too dangerous to risk boarding the yacht, early on the morning of November 25, they sent the French tug, *Malabar*, with divers aboard. When the tug was as close as possible, the divers jumped into the black, cold sea and swam to the boat. They dove down beneath the hull to examine the submerged deck and cabin, and saw that the sails and some of the running rigging were still intact, indicating Mike had his sails up when the capsizing occurred. The boom was snapped, the mast was broken, and all the deckhouse windows were smashed.

In the cockpit, they found a life raft, partially inflated, still trapped under the aft weather deck. The life raft was the cheapest one Mike could find, and as such it could only be inflated manually. But in this scenario, Mike may or may not have started to inflate the raft, since inflation could have been triggered by any number of things. They could see a survival bag attached to the raft, and they also found unopened flares. Inside the cabin, they found a life jacket tied to the bunk. (One wonders why Mike would have done that.) They saw no sign of a safety harness.

“Person on board was not located during inspection of vessel,” reported the Coast Guard.

The search for Mike ended.

Mike was no longer a living legend.

His body was never found.

Its investigation over, the French tug pulled away from the upturned *Coyote*, abandoning Mike’s pride and joy. It would have been impossible to right her with the keel bulb gone. Towing her upside down would have cost a fortune. Now that her iconic skipper was gone, *Coyote* was left to drift.

## Mike Remembered

*"Mike took everyone for a ride, he led them to places they hadn't imagined for themselves—expansive, wide places, like the sea."*

—JULIA PLANT

OVER FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE CAME to honor Mike in the ballroom of Lafayette Country Club on Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota. It was a miserably cold, raw day. November 30th. My birthday. Ice had begun to cover the lake; the view from the French windows opened to a world of different shades of white, even a sky of whitish grey. The large, beautiful room, lit by chandeliers, had immaculate wooden floors for dancing—echoing the deck of a fine yacht. My parents weren't members. They belonged to an older club on the other side of the lake—but they chose this one for its space and expansive views of water, now ice.

Mike's oldest friends, who had known him as a young, reckless, hell-bent guy with a chip on his shoulder, stood far in the back, perhaps enjoying the irony. The country club set would have shunned the young Mike, the flagrant law breaker and drug smuggler. These friends knew him as the instigator of the Excelsior, Minnesota, Danceland fire of 1973, a crime for which his best friend, Joe, had gone to prison in his place.

But they had admired him, whether because they thought he was recklessly crazy or because he exuded daring and fun. He had taken them on adventures they otherwise would have missed. As they watched and listened to the speeches in praise of Mike and his endeavors, maybe they felt proud too, since he was their friend long before the majority of those in attendance that day knew him.

Most of the crowd was more formally dressed than the crew in the back. The men wore coats, some with ties. The older women wore dresses or skirts. Many had known Mike his whole life, albeit from a distance since they were older and were good friends of my parents. Others had come to know him over the last eight years as he rose to fame in the elite world of long-distance sailing. Supporters who had given him money, some very generously, were proud to have risked their resources on him and his crazy sport. Sportsmen, sailors, and adventurers envied him for the risks he took and the experiences he'd had. The majority knew they lacked Mike's willpower and courage. All were proud to have been part of Mike's triumphs. All were dazed by his mysterious loss. Some were angered that they had not done more to support Mike's quest

with their ample financial means or perhaps other expertise. All wondered why *Coyote* had lost Mike and what really happened those few weeks earlier in the North Atlantic.

Several people traveled from Newport to attend the service in Minnesota: the yacht designer, Rodger Martin; Kathy Giblin, who had coordinated Mike's public relations from the very beginning of his career; Steve Pettengill, sailor, colleague, and friend; Billy Black, the photographer whose pictures of Mike's boats are a beautiful testimony to their existence; and Mark Schrader, who had competed against Mike in the 1986–87 BOC and had since become involved with the management of the BOC races. People came from AwlGrip, the paint company headquartered in Kansas that had supported Mike's campaigns, making him their poster boy for their paint, which he used on all three of his boats. Both senators from Minnesota, Dave Durenberger and Paul Wellstone, who had pressured the Coast Guard to keep searching, also attended. Durenberger visited our home after the service, too.

The night before the memorial I convinced myself I had to say a few words about the Mike I had lost. I knew I would regret not doing so. I wanted to try to explain who he really was beyond the sailor and competitor he had become—how he was greater than the sum of his parts. For some reason, I felt I had a duty to speak because I knew the real Mike, which may have been how several other people felt. My opinion of myself in this regard was delusional, and whether it was all my own doing or partly encouraged by Mike, I'll never know. Something about being around Mike had made me feel superior, and feeling that way is hard to give up.

Right up until the start of the service, though, I was conflicted about whether I should speak. I kept thinking that what I had to say was trite and not worth saying. I also wasn't sure I could get the words out. My legs were shaking when I stood, but at the podium my nerves quieted, and as I began to talk my voice found its strength.

"I thought it wouldn't be too difficult to find a few words to say about my brother, Mike. After all, I've been thinking about him most of my life. But I was wrong, it was difficult trying to find the words where once was Mike.

"Everyone who knew Mike knows how alive he was. He burned his way through life. It seemed he had a few more lives than the rest of us. I, for one, saw him come close to the end a few times only to see him rise from the ashes and rage on. And that's why when this began a month ago, I didn't realize what was happening. Mike had survived so much in the past, I had unconsciously begun to see him as immortal.

"I wrote an essay on Mike for a ninth grade English class, only to get a lukewarm response from my teacher. She doubted the veracity of my story. She wondered if I hadn't stretched the truth. She wondered if I didn't know the difference between reality and imagination. Perhaps I didn't, but I am sure she would have been more understanding if she had known my brother, Mike. My brother was always stretching the truth, stretching the confines of our reality, pushing out the walls of the boxes we live in.

“When I was younger I followed Mike around, somewhat compulsively, and for a few intense years, we were very close. But as I got older, I became more distant. My need for order and self-preservation got the better of me. Thank god it never got the better of Mike.”

On December 12, 1992, Helen Davis held another service for Mike in Jamestown, Rhode Island, which drew over three hundred mourners. It couldn't have been more different from the one in Minnesota. It was another raw cold day, but it was as wet and windy as it was cold, and many people wore foul-weather jackets, and if they weren't wearing their foulies, they wore bulky, fisherman's knit sweaters. Held in a concrete building with bare walls and no windows, not one folding chair was empty, forcing the overflow friends to huddle against the clammy walls. It was a far cry from the elegant, country club ballroom in Minnesota.

Unlike the men at the Minnesotan service, the men in the Jamestown audience probably didn't own many suits, and if they had, they wouldn't have worn them to Mike's memorial. These were friends Mike made when he moved to Newport in 1984. They were honoring a professional sailor who built boats, often looking for help, money, or supplies, if not all three. Mike had earned their admiration as the guy who raced around the world by himself. Helen, sitting in the front row, wore a black felt hat with a silver pin and stood with two of her sons, Todd and Scott. My parents and older siblings, Linda and Hugh, sat behind her, while my younger brother, Tom, was in the back of the cavernous room behind a video camera.

Mark Schrader, host of the memorial, spoke first, relating a story from when he and Mike were racing against one another in the 1986–87 BOC. About halfway through the race, deep in the Southern Ocean, Mark had become quite depressed. Over the radio, across the lonely sea miles, he told Mike that his boat was slow and heavy, and he was having a hard time keeping up with the pack. There was silence on the other end of the line, and Mark wondered if Mike had heard what he said, but then Mike's voice came back, clearly and forcefully in Mike's quiet way, “Your boat is not slow, and it isn't heavy.”

Mark's first reaction was anger, and his anger made him want to prove to Mike that his implication that Mark was sailing poorly was not true. So he became more committed to the race and began to sail more aggressively. Eventually, Mark realized what a service Mike had done, spurring him on with those few, simple words. Mark had also been with Mike at the memorial service for fellow sailor Jacques de Roux, held in Sydney, and he remembered Mike's words at the time, “The danger is there. It's obvious. Acceptance of the risk is the price of admission to this sport.”

Rodger Martin, intimately involved in the design of all three of Mike's boats, spoke, as he had in Minnesota, quoting T. E. Lawrence: “All men dream but not equally. Some men dream at night, awake during the day to find that it is all vanity. Dreamers of the day are dangerous men for they may act their dreams to prove them possible.” Rodger read part of the letter Mike had written him in



which he described being so happy, so proud, after his first, long-distance, solo sail on *Airco* from Newport to the Azores. In that note Mike told Rodger that he knew now that he had found his calling, and what an incredible feeling it was to have proven his dream could be real.

Steve Pettengill recalled a story about racing with Mike in the New England solo-twin race in 1986, when Mike forgot the height of his own mast and for an hour got stuck under the Narragansett bridge studying its superstructure. After that Steve could always kid Mike about being able to sail around the world but not Narragansett Bay. (Mike's legacy had done much for Steve, who finished second in the third BOC in 1994–95 with a time of 128 days, skimming four days off Mike's time of 132 days in the BOC 1990–91, and thus becoming the fastest solo American sailor around the world.)

Several others spoke, among them Mike's friend Dan Neri, from North Sails, calling Mike a hero sailing a "wild, fragile, beautiful yacht."

After the service, Helen led a long line of cars to a spot she had picked high on the coastline near Jamestown. There everyone gathered again, huddled groups in heavy outdoor clothing, in the wind, above the sea, while Helen, still in her black hat glistening with its silver pin, stood closest to the sea. She turned toward Mike's friends and family and explained that daisies were Mike's favorite flower, so to honor Mike she had brought a basketful, asking all to take one. Helen moved closer to the rocky edge and tossed her daisy into the black water below. Slowly, in no specific order, those gathered followed. Hundreds of daisies, already bent backward by the powerful, invisible wind, sailed out to sea.

I didn't attend the service in Newport, so I learned these details from Tom's video and later conversations. Part of my excuse was the expense and difficulty of traveling with my two small kids from San Diego. My husband and I had just returned to San Diego after traveling the length and breadth of England with our girls, visiting Peter's family and friends. We had been home (in San Diego) for about a week before the French boarded *Coyote*, and we knew Mike was officially gone. If it had been an emergency, I would have found a way to make the trip, but at the time I did not have anyone who could take care of my children during the day.

All those personal circumstances aside, the greater reason for not attending was my uncertainty about whether I belonged there. I'd never made any effort to get to know the friends who surrounded Mike once he became a professional sailor, and I was feeling guilty about that. At points in his sailing career I had shunned him, too. People in Newport would not know me, and I didn't want to be seen as—or feel like—a stranger at Mike's memorial service.

I also was still recovering from the events in Minnesota. I couldn't stop weeping—I spent the day after the memorial service huddled in a basement closet of my parents' home. I needed to leave Minnesota and all that it meant, so I booked three tickets home to San Diego for myself and my two young daughters—15 months and 4 years old. My husband had already returned. During the four-hour flight I sat between my girls, crying. Normally my fidgety younger daughter never stopped moving, and the older one needed nonstop entertainment, but on that

flight my mood infected them—they never left their seats. A huge part of my world had disappeared with the loss of Mike. Wedged between my girls, airborne, heading west, I wore his loss like a lead curtain of grief.

In 1995, three years after Mike died, I interviewed my husband. Peter had become one of Mike's greatest fans. During Mike's races, Peter had mapped his progress, marking his latest positions as well as those of his closest competitors on large-scale world maps, a new map for every race. In some ways, Peter knew Mike very well, and maybe because of his awareness of Mike's character, and because of his perspective as the brother-in-law, Peter was always a little wary of Mike.

As our conversation about Mike was winding down, Peter said some things that I had never heard from anyone else, and more important, what he said was intriguing. He was trying to get at the "inner" Mike, the part that Mike didn't, or couldn't, share.

"The big question about Mike was what was his state of mind. Was he tormented most of the time? Did his energy come from unhappiness? Did he rarely achieve any real happiness? He did have a hard time finding satisfaction. It was more difficult for him to find satisfaction than for other people. I imagine he was satisfied after he won the BOC in 1987, and at the end of the Globe Challenge (the Vendée). He finished the race, and he finished with style.

"I suspect he [Mike] was driven by the need to measure up to his father's image of him. Your father worshipped Mike and had an exulted opinion of him, and that could be difficult for any child to live up to. Michael, to a large degree, didn't want to let his father down . . . It put a lot of pressure on him. It meant that he had to keep on topping himself. He never really established a separate identity for himself, one separate from his father's image of him. Maybe he did for himself, but not for his father. He never said to him, 'Look, I'm not this completely confident, completely fearless person you think I am.' Part of his drunkenness was an attempt to demonstrate his incompetence to his father. The message never got through."

In the end, few of us establish a new identity in our parents' eyes. Raised within the same family, I know it would have been annoying, frustrating, and lonely for Mike to stand on that pedestal, and, as Peter wondered, his character may have been formed by his refusal to be anything pre-determined. But whether he was running from something or running toward something, his energy, his insistence on doing what he wanted to do, and his profound connection to something larger than all of us, was inspiring.

I have never known someone as entertaining and compelling, someone who could make something as common as going to the drug store exciting. He never had to work hard at selling himself to anyone, and, yet, for such a charismatic individual, he was never all that big on society. He was more attracted to other forces. After all, as he told a reporter, "I answer to the sun, the rain, the wind." Forces far more worthy of his spirit.

# Epilogue

## The Coast Guard Investigation

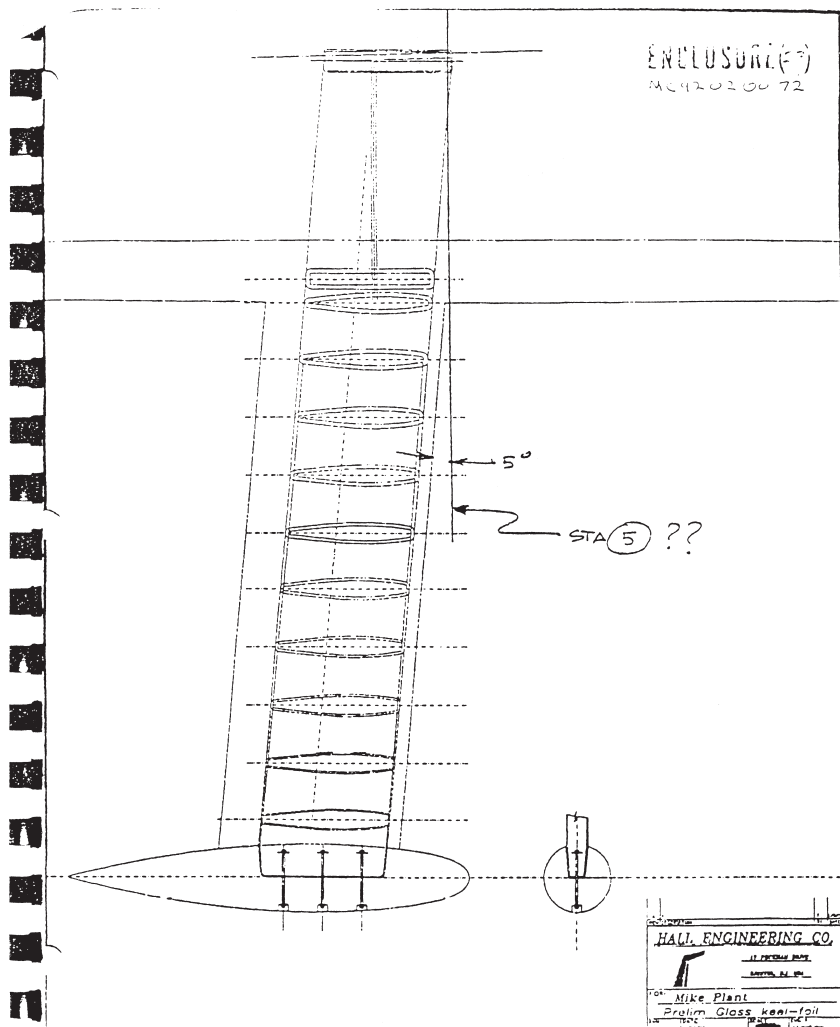
About a month after the search ended, *Coyote* was spotted off the southwest coast of Ireland. She had floated into the shipping lanes and was now a hazard to other ships. The British navy notified Helen of their intent to sink the boat to remove the hazard. Unable to accept the total destruction of Mike's dream, Helen hired a tug to tow *Coyote* the sixty-five miles to Cobh, a seaport village in County Cork, Ireland. She and Steve Pettengill flew to Ireland to see *Coyote* for themselves. Pettengill knew the boat as well, if not better than, anyone—he'd been on many of *Coyote*'s sea trials and had worked full time outfitting her before Mike left for France.

From the wreck Pettengill could tell that at the time of the accident Mike had reduced his sail area to the absolute minimum: a fully reefed main, flying only the storm jib to keep control of the boat while sailing in heavy winds. There was water in the port ballast tanks, which meant Mike had been sailing *Coyote* on a port tack when she capsized. Pettengill believes that Mike probably anticipated an imminent disaster and had activated the EPIRB, which after a short brief signal, stopped working. Pettengill also noted that in addition to the bulb, the steel plate that had been bolted between the bulb and the foil was also missing, apparently wrenched off the end of the foil with the bulb. Some speculated that the bulb tore off because the boat had hit something hard, like a whale or a partially sunken container. But this scenario was ruled out since there was no sign of damage to the hull or the foil. The plate just fell off and couldn't have been broken by colliding with some hard object. Before leaving Ireland, Helen decided to take the end of the foil back with her and had a 20-inch section cut off with a chainsaw. But what could the boat reveal about the cause of the accident?

For many, particularly those close to Mike's campaign to build and race *Coyote*, the aftermath included a desire to solve the mystery of what caused Mike's death—a search for understanding, yes, and perhaps also a quest to assign blame. How could the loss be explained of such an accomplished racer, sailing a million-dollar boat, built by a well-known yacht construction company, and designed by one of Mike's oldest colleagues, the same man who had designed Mike's previous two boats? There must have been a weak link in the chain, or maybe two or three. It would be easier to understand the accident if there was one factor to blame; but it is probably much closer to the truth to say an unlucky combination of issues made Mike's last voyage a fatal one.

The U.S. Coast Guard's investigation into the loss of Mike, which included interviews and preliminary findings in August 1993 (and a final supplement and case recommendation dated July 12, 1994), focused on three issues: the design

and method of attachment of the bulb to the foil, the design and installation of the electrical system on *Coyote*, and the grounding in Chesapeake Bay. Their report concerning the third issue, the grounding, is covered in chapter 15, as are many of the questions concerning the electrical system. A further mystery is shrouded in the report concerning *Coyote's* electrical system. In the conclusion of the Coast Guard's interview of Jose Antunes (the electrician who had worked on the system while Mike was in New York City), he is asked why the system failed. Essentially, he said, he didn't know, but he saw photographs of the system



*A preliminary sketch done by Hall Engineering for Mike Plant showing a side view of the keel foil set into a slot in the top of the bulb. This was not how the bulb and foil were attached when Coyote was launched. (Coast Guard)*

that had been taken after *Coyote* was found. He told the Coast Guard that, “it did not appear from the pictures that any of the wiring had been changed, or the alternators worked on, while Plant was underway.” The report continued: “there were burn marks on the bulkheads where the 24-volt system’s controls and circuits were mounted. There appeared to be minor burn marks around the 12-volt system as well. These marks, if they are burns, indicate to Antunes that the vessel had power when it capsized. He thinks they were caused by shortages in the electrical system as the vessel capsized and flooded.”

As for the foil and ballast bulb, the accounts of those who helped Mike build, design, and sail *Coyote* bear a bit more exploration here. Concordia Custom Yachts had never constructed a boat like *Coyote* (no one in the States had) and doing so would significantly widen their market and reputation—this was part of the appeal of taking on this project. Concordia had an established reputation for their classic wooden sailboat with full keels and whose lead ballast was integral to hull construction. They had no experience working with carbon fiber, nor with a foil-bulb keel design.

Although the three parties involved in *Coyote*’s keel and bulb construction—Rodger Martin Yacht Design, Hall Engineering, and Concordia Custom Yachts—discussed the method used to attach the bulb to the foil, no one was willing to take credit for the final design, and the statements recorded in the Coast Guard report made by Hall Engineering and Concordia are contradictory.

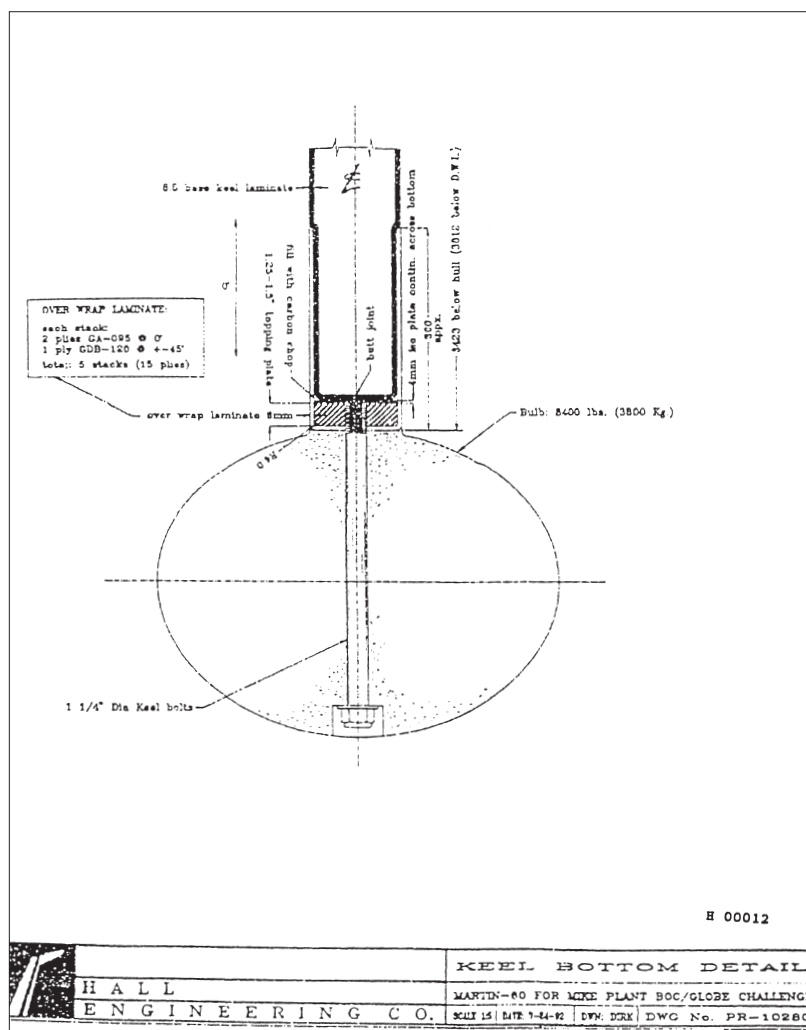
Rodger Martin Yacht Design drew the design of the lead bulb (112 inches by 18 inches by 27 inches), and Hall Engineering drew the design for the carbon fiber foil (11 feet 2.8 inches long, and at the area of attachment 32.1 inches wide and 6 inches across). Hall Engineering tested the safety factor of the foil’s ability to bend, fore, aft, port, and starboard. The bulb (lead) and the foil (carbon fiber) were manufactured separately, and in the final construction there was no structural member that ran through the two parts. There was, however, an early drawing by Hall Engineering showing the foil inserted into half the depth of the bulb.

The lead bulb was attached to the keel foil five days before *Coyote* was launched. The construction manager at Concordia called Hall Engineering to ask how these two were to be joined. According to Concordia, the engineer at Hall instructed Concordia’s Fred Richardson how to attach the bulb, and Richardson proceeded with the work based on that phone conversation.

Richardson attached the bulb by mounting a ½-inch thick stainless steel facing plate to the bottom of the carbon fiber keel foil. Before the plate was attached, he drilled six holes into the plate, and each hole had a ¾-inch nut welded to its underside. The holes and the nuts were threaded for a total of 1½ inches of threaded steel. The plate was then epoxied to the bottom of the keel foil with the side with the nuts facing down and toward the bulb. There were six ¾-inch diameter stainless steel bolts that came up through the ballast bulb into both the nuts and the facing plate, providing 1½ inches of threaded steel. To further secure the facing plate to the foil, Concordia wrapped five stacks of three plies of carbon fiber around the plate and the bottom of the foil. The six threaded

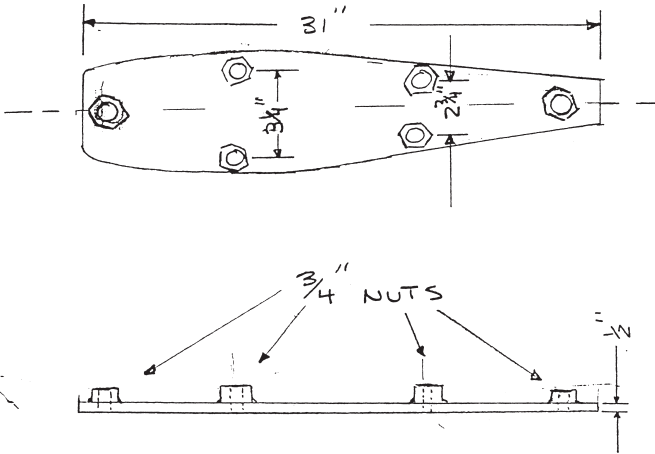
bolts, plus the facing plate and the extra carbon fiber wrapping, was thought to be enough to hold the bulb to the keel.

Dirk Kramers at Hall Engineering in Bristol, Rhode Island, said he originally assumed that the end of the foil would fit into a slot on the top of the bulb, and, that he found out that the bulb did not have a slot in it only six weeks before its attachment. After he saw the bulb, he drew another design for its attachment for Rodger Martin, who had asked him for the measurement of the keel fin from the hull to the bulb. Kramers faxed this information in a drawing to Rodger Martin; this fax also included a drawing of the attach-



*The July 24, 1992, sketch by Hall Engineering, showing the bolts through the bulb, the steel facing plate at the base of the foil, and instructions for overwrapping the bolted plate with carbon fiber laminate. (Coast Guard)*

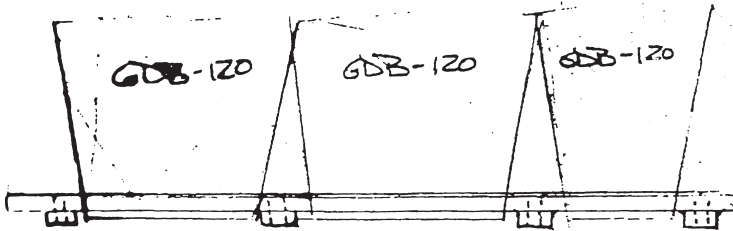




6  $\frac{3}{4}$ " NUTS CONTINUOUSLY  
WELDED TO PLATE

PLATE IS TAPPED ALSO  
GIVING  $\frac{1}{8}$ " OF THREAD

Sketch showing stainless steel facing plate with nuts welded in place.  
Bolts went through the bulb, through the plate, into the nuts. (Coast Guard)



MY THOUGHT WAS TO TAP THE PLATE  
ON FLAT SIDE AGAINST FOIL WORKING  
IN BETWEEN THE NUTS, THEN FILL THE  
BOTTOM LEVEL AFTERWARDS  
- IF I JUST GLASS IN BETWEEN THE  
NUTS, I LOSE A LITTLE AREA, SO MAYBE  
I NEED MORE THAN 12 LAYERS GDB-120?

PAGE 3

Sketch made the day before the stainless steel facing plate was  
attached to the base of the foil, showing the concern regarding  
how much carbon fiber laminate was needed. (Coast Guard)

ment of keel bulb to the fin. He said he did not send it to Concordia because it was not intended for use, since he had not yet tested the adequacy of the design or the materials. He had only sent it to Rodger because he wanted to know if this was the method Rodger wanted to use to attach the bulb. That drawing was dated July 24, 1992. As far as the Coast Guard could determine, the July 24 drawing of the attachment and the method employed by Richardson were the same.

When the Coast Guard asked Kramers if he knew who designed the final method used to attach the keel bulb to the keel fin, he said that he did not know. He explained to the Coast Guard that at the time that the keel bulb was being attached, he (Dirk Kramers) was in Germany. He denied speaking with anyone at Concordia about how the bulb should be attached and did not return from Germany until after the bulb attachment was complete. Kramers was the only engineer at Hall who had worked on *Coyote*—no one else from there would have spoken with Concordia.

In a separate section of their report, however, the Coast Guard gave the ultimate responsibility for the design of the attachment to Hall Engineering. “The joint that attached the keel bulb to the keel fin was designed by Hall Engineering after extensive discussions between Dirk Kramers, Rodger Martin, and Mike Plant.”

In an article by Tom Gannon for the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, March 11, 1993, Kramers stated that he had not designed the attachment of the bulb to the foil, and that he very specifically limited his engineering work to the design of the foil, because Mike couldn’t pay him for any additional work, such as a design for the attachment of the bulb. He told Gannon that “[The attachment of the bulb] was not really part of our agreement.”

According to Steve Pettengill, both he and Mike were at the boatyard when the bulb was attached, and no one questioned whether the method was adequate to support the bulb. Pettengill told the Coast Guard that Mike believed the attachment to be adequate. In an interview with me, Steve said that he had never seen a similar attachment. When he and Mike looked at it, Steve was somewhat skeptical and told Mike, “‘That black stuff [the carbon fiber laminate] must be magic.’ Mike glared a little, but we didn’t talk about it.”

Pettengill also told me that, at that point, he’d never worked with carbon fiber and didn’t believe it could both be flexible enough to bend at a 90-degree angle and still retain its strength. In the end, the one thing everyone could agree upon was that Mike had been involved with and was aware of the way the bulb was attached to the keel.

After several interviews, the Coast Guard report determined that, at the time, no one had thought much about the effect of the grounding of the keel bulb when Mike took *Coyote* to Annapolis. Everyone’s description of the grounding was fairly similar; no one aboard expressed any kind of alarm by the incident. On the trip back, everyone agreed that the boat performed well, and if there was something wrong with the keel it was definitely not evident to anyone on board that trip from Annapolis to New York City.

Several people had looked at the keel through the window that was designed

so Mike could see the keel if he was concerned about it. No one saw anything unusual. A few said that Mike had talked about hauling the boat out of the water to get a good look at the keel, but he didn't have enough time—or enough money to pay for it. In hindsight, some people may say this was a fatal mistake. But, even if he had hauled the boat and examined the keel more closely, he may have seen nothing to deter him from sailing *Coyote* across the Atlantic.

The Coast Guard concluded that the grounding was the main reason for Mike's death. "The grounding that the *Coyote* experienced in Chesapeake Bay was probably the single largest contributing factor to the loss of the vessel's keel bulb. The accident was caused by the effect on the keel of the grounding Mike made on his way to Annapolis, and so ultimately the accident was Mike's fault." But they added to this conclusion that "The reason the bulb fell off [was that] the carbon fiber overwrap laminate that secured the bulb to the keel parted."

The grounding cracked or weakened the layers of carbon fiber that were wrapped around the bottom of the keel and the top of the bulb. After the grounding, it was only a matter of time before *Coyote* would lose her bulb.

According to Rodger Martin, it was nobody's fault that *Coyote* hit bottom in Chesapeake Bay, but as the designer he had never factored in the possibility of a grounding, and even if he had, and then designed a keel strong enough to survive that kind of accident, the boat would have lost her competitive edge.

Tom Gannon of *Practical Sailor*, who had written several articles about Mike, asked two well-known naval architects who were not connected with *Coyote* to share their opinions about what might have happened. Jerry Milgram was a naval architect from MIT who had previously worked on the designs for several of the America's Cup boats and was one of the best authorities on hydrodynamics in the country. He told Gannon, "One way the construction could fail. . . . Would be the plate pulling out of the fin. . . . It [the method of attachment used on *Coyote*] is a lousy way to do it."

In another of Gannon's articles from the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, Milgram explained that the main difference in the bulb attachment between *Coyote* and recent America's Cup boats was that *Coyote*'s bulb lacked horizontal support, which was critical [for the attachment] to withstand the tremendous forces exerted on it while under sail.

David Pedrick of Pedrick Yacht Designs in Newport, Rhode Island, who has had a long, successful career designing competitive sailing boats like those in the America's Cup, told Gannon, "The means of attachment [used on *Coyote*'s bulb and foil] was extremely primitive." Pedrick also said that, although the boat had grounded, "[Any 14-foot keel] has to be able to withstand a full-speed, hard grounding."

The chief designer from Pedrick Yacht Designs, T.J. Perrotti, told Herb McCormick, "The vague area in my mind is how the plate was glassed into the carbon fiber. Everything up to that point is a mechanical bond, its bolts and steel and lead. But any time you bond a metal into a composite, it's something you want to address very carefully. Where do I see the weak link? It could be how that plate was glassed into the fin."

## A Second Life for *Coyote*

*Coyote* had a strange second life.

In January 1993, Helen decided to retrieve the boat from Ireland, and had her shipped back to Newport.

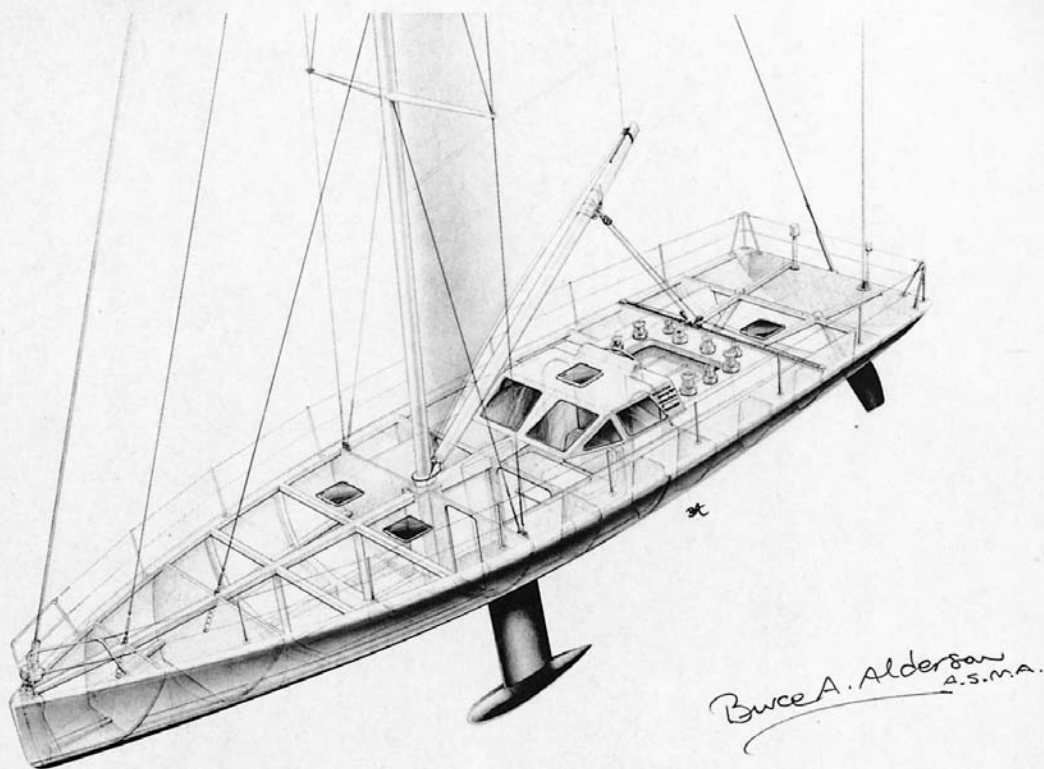
More or less at the same time that the Coast Guard was investigating *Coyote*'s loss, in the summer of 1993, Helen filed a six million dollar lawsuit against Concordia Custom Yachts over Mike's death. She had kept the piece of the bottom of the foil taken from *Coyote* when she was in Ireland and hired Jerry Milgram, from MIT, to examine it to determine why it had broken. (When I asked many years later, Milgram no longer remembered the specifics of the case but thought he might still have had that broken piece somewhere in his office.) Presumably, Milgram's analysis helped support her case, because the lawsuit was settled out of court in February 1994 for an undisclosed amount.

Mike left a will, and I remember the day he asked me to sign it. It was at a party for *Duracell* before her second race, the 1990–91 BOC. I had come to Newport for the race start and attended a party held for Mike. Many people were there, and except for a few, all were strangers to me. After an hour or so, while talking with a couple from Minnesota, Mike came up to me and asked if I could do him a favor. I followed him up the lawn to the house, where he asked me if I would witness his signing of a will he had just made. I said "of course" and signed on the line. I don't remember if Mike and I discussed anything afterwards; it was all matter of fact, and I didn't want to invite a discussion because he was about to leave on a rather dangerous journey. After he died, I found out that I was one of the two recipients of Mike's estate: 30 percent to me and 70 percent to Helen.

Since I had inherited 30 percent of Mike's estate, Helen wanted to make sure that any settlement from the lawsuit would not go to me, and sent me a form to sign stating that I would not contest Helen's full right to the lawsuit money. (This probably wasn't necessary since under the federal Death on the High Seas Act, money from the settlement must go only to Mike's dependents. Although Helen and Mike never married, she could be considered his common law wife, and a dependent.)

I also received a copy of Mike's contract with Concordia for a loan of \$437,688, signed October 13, 1992, two weeks before Mike left for France. He promised to pay off the loan with 7 percent interest in one year's time. Included in this document was Mike's \$672,188 estimation of the total cost, as of then, of labor and materials for building *Coyote*. When Mike sailed for France he still owed about two-thirds of the cost of his boat to Concordia Custom Yachts.

*Outside* magazine published an article about the lawsuit in their February 1994 issue (written before the February 1, 1994, settlement) titled, "Wind in the Sails, Cash on the Barrelhead." The author, Paul Kvinta, quoted Bill Walker, then President of Concordia Custom Yachts. "She [Helen] is suing us for faulty construction, yet she still wants to sail the boat, and she needs \$500,000 [to put the boat back in the water]. Make your own conclusions." Helen denied that the settlement money would go to rebuilding *Coyote*. "The only thing I would do with some of that money is give it to the Mike Plant Fund." (After Mike died, Helen



*Artist's sketch of the modified Coyote with reinforced lateral strength. The bowsprit is not shown. (Bruce Alderson)*

had intended to create a sailing school in Rhode Island for underprivileged kids. My parents also decided to form a similar fund in Minnesota, which is described later in this epilogue. The sailing school in Minnesota continues to prosper from ongoing donations built on the school's proven success; for whatever reason, no such school exists in Rhode Island.)

After she settled her suit against Concordia for an undisclosed amount, Helen began rebuilding and equipping *Coyote* with the intention of racing her. Helen hired Rodger Martin to undertake *Coyote*'s redesign.

After *Coyote* was back in the water, sometime in July or early August 1994, Helen rented her to David Scully. Scully was an investment banker turned sailor from Chicago who had learned to sail in France and was planning to race in the 1994–95 BOC, which began September 17. The speed of *Coyote*'s relaunch and

sea trials bore an uncanny resemblance to her first launching in September 1992, less than two months before the Vendée start in France on November 22, 1992.

In order to qualify for the BOC, each skipper had to complete a two-thousand mile sail alone in the boat he/she would be racing. A crew sailed *Coyote* two thousand miles from Newport to the Azores, and then Scully sailed her back to Newport alone.

On his qualifying sail from France to Newport, Scully, who may have dozed off in the cockpit, collided with a Canadian fishing vessel. In the accident, *Coyote's* bowsprit punctured a 6-inch hole in the hull of the fishing vessel. The fishing vessel filed a lawsuit, charging Scully \$76,616 for the cost of repairs and consequent loss of revenue. Scully refused to pay the damages, and the owners of the fishing boat filed papers with the U.S. District Court to hold the boat as collateral. It was only until the last minute before the start of the 1994–95 BOC, that the hold on *Coyote* was lifted and Scully was able to start on time.

Scully and *Coyote* finished fourth with an overall time of 134 days. He came in behind Frenchman Christophe Auguin on *Sceta Calberson*, who won first place; Steve Pettengill sailing *Hunter's Child* in second; and Jean Luc Van Den Heede from France on *Vendée Enterprises*, in third. (Mike had raced against Auguin in the 1990–91 BOC, and against Van Den Heede in the 1986–87 BOC. At 128 days, Steve Pettengill bested Mike's record of 132 days and held the title of the fastest American around the world. In 2005, Bruce Schwab broke this record, finishing the Vendée in 109 days nonstop.)

After Scully raced her in the 1994–95 BOC, Helen leased *Coyote* to Josh Hall. Helen and Hall were friends and had known each other since Hall bought *Airco* in 1988–1989. He had renamed *Airco*, *Spirit of Ipswich*, and raced her in Class II in the 1990–91 BOC. (Mike raced *Duracell* in Class I in the same race.) Then, together with Helen, Hall raced *Coyote* in the 1995 Bermuda 1-2, and in 1996, with the sponsorship of the UK firm Gartmore Investments, he sailed *Coyote* under the Gartmore banner in the *Europe 1 STAR* (Singlehanded TransAtlantic Race, East to West, formerly called the *OSTAR*) and took second in his class—the monohull Open 60.

After Hall, Helen leased *Coyote* to a Hungarian sailor who installed a small outboard on the transom. Sailing close to shore off Calais, France, he planned to motor steer the boat clear of the rocky shore, but the engine failed and *Coyote* ended severely damaged after hitting the rocks. A cameraman died during the grounding, but details are unknown. Helen sold what could be salvaged, and then *Coyote* was junked.

## Taxpayer Monies

Some experts in the sailing world complained about the estimated six million dollars spent by the Coast Guard during its search for Mike. (No breakdown of the costs spent by the Coast Guards, American and Canadian, the British RAF, and the French navy has been made available, so it is uncertain how this figure was calculated. It is an odd coincidence that the two figures, Helen's lawsuit for



the loss of Mike Plant and the amount of money spent in an effort to rescue him, are the same.)

Dodge Morgan had done a lot of solo sailing in his life, and before Mike broke it in 1987, held the record for the fastest American circumnavigation of 150 days. When Morgan sailed around the world nonstop in 1986, he was one of only four people in the world to have made the trip. The sport of singlehanded, long-distance racing grew quickly, and by 2000 at least twenty sailors had circumnavigated the globe, nonstop and singlehandedly.

Morgan wrote an article for the 1993 February edition of *Soundings* about the money spent on the search for Mike, suggesting that sailors like Mike should draft and leave behind living wills. He provided sample wording: "I am taking the sea on its own terms and am ultimately responsible for myself. My government is not responsible for my risk and should not spend a dime to rescue me from my errors or my bad luck."

Mike would have agreed with Morgan, but would other people, especially those the sailor left behind?

## A Reconstruction

Given the evidence, the following scenario is the most likely reconstruction of Mike's final days.

Two days after he left NYC, Sunday, October 18, Mike lost all electrical power. *Coyote* was designed and equipped to be sailed by one person, but when much of the equipment, other than the rigging, which may have broken at some point as well, was rendered nonfunctional, the boat became a wild beast—beautiful and awe inspiring—but out of control. Mike had to hand steer since the electronic autopilot was out.

Unlike the prevailing winds in the Southern Ocean, which move clockwise from west to east circling Antarctica, the winds in the autumn North Atlantic originate in the northeast and blow southwest. Since Mike was traveling west to east, he was sailing across the winds. Sailing across the prevailing wind is typically more demanding on the boat as well as the skipper. The boat has to sail "closer to the wind," and the pressure against the boat is greater than when the boat sails with the wind. In the North Atlantic the waves are usually much steeper with a shorter distance between them than in the Southern Ocean, and the boat's movement is more abrupt, moving from the height of the wave to the bottom more quickly. Mike's ability to sail *Coyote* for as long as he did is of epic proportions.

Mike had no weather information except what he could see building around him. The Atlantic is more afflicted with hurricanes than any other body of water, and late autumn is notorious for its gales. If he had stayed on course, and there is no reason to think he did anything else, he sailed through the eastern part of the outer circle of Hurricane Frances sometime around October 24. Pettengill could tell by the state of the rigging when *Coyote* was found off the coast of Ireland that Mike had done everything a good seaman would do to survive hurricane-

force winds. The main was down, and Mike was flying only the storm jib, the least amount of sail with which he could still effect some kind of control over the boat's direction.

For the next three days, he must have been close to delirium, barely able to stand or keep his eyes open. By October 27, he had been without power for ten days: no running lights, no cabin lights, no weather fax, no communication with the outside world, no microwave to warm food or heat water, and with air temperatures not much above freezing and 50-degree Fahrenheit water, he had no way to get warm. In storm conditions waves regularly douse a small boat, and it is impossible to keep dry; *Coyote* would be wetter than most, since she was prone to plowing through waves, submerging half the boat.

After Pettengill inspected *Coyote*, he reported that the EPIRB was missing, and the manual release latch on the mounting bracket for the EPIRB had been opened. Perhaps more significantly, the hydrostatic releasing mechanism had not opened. This would mean that Mike either had survived the capsize or, less likely, anticipated it. The life raft was found partially inflated, indicating again that Mike may have tried to abandon ship and had enough time to begin inflating his life raft. He had been hand steering for ten days, battered by hurricane-strength winds and monumental waves on the last three of them. In the mid-Atlantic, in late October or early November, the water and air were certainly cold enough to make hypothermia a very real threat. He had to have been wet for days, with no possibility of getting warm or dry. Hypothermia begins with an overwhelming desire to fall asleep. Try as hard as he might, Mike might have found it impossible to stay awake, so he likely had been periodically passing out, moving in and out of various states of consciousness. Although a man of epic adventures and a penchant for the Spartan, he had probably never stretched his physical endurance that far before.

If the EPIRB went off when the lead bulb fell off, the accident occurred just about at midnight. So the sea and the sky were no longer divisible. Mike—legally blind—may have lost one or both of his contacts by then and may have been sailing more or less blind anyway. Initially, I imagined that when the bulb broke loose *Coyote* would have turned over in seconds, throwing Mike into the sea or if he was below, hard against the cabin's side, and knowing Mike's vulnerability to concussions, knocking him out. If he had been on deck wearing his safety harness, the sudden movement may have caused him to hit his head against the deck or the mast hard enough to knock him out. But after reading an account of a similar accident, the survivors reported that once the bulb fell off, the boat came gradually to a halt and slowly turned over on her side. Given that information, I'm now not so confident that the movement was abrupt and violent.

In another scenario, *Coyote*'s bow may have burrowed into an exceptionally large wave; it is not hard to imagine that a big wave could have forced her bow down, pushing her stern into the air, pitchpoling *Coyote* end for end.

Mike's final twelve days at sea—from the day he left South Street Seaport at the base of Manhattan Island on October 16, to the moment his EPIRB was activated on October 27—remain a testimony to his almost superhuman ability

to drive one of the fastest sailing boats ever built, in extreme conditions, and survive for as long as he did. When the boat was found it proved that despite everything, Mike had kept *Coyote* on course. Or maybe *Coyote* had kept them both on course, as long as she was able.

## Mike Plant Fund

In 1993, my parents wanted to honor Mike and his relationship with the many children he had gotten to know toward the end of his life. He volunteered for a state-wide school program in which students in Rhode Island followed his races, learning about the various aspects of sailing along the way, writing letters, and eagerly waiting to hear from Mike. He had planned a satellite hookup so he could speak with the kids directly from *Coyote* as he sailed around the world. Mike loved telling the school kids—mostly in Rhode Island, but also in Minnesota—about the life of a sailor who raced around the world. To honor his legacy, my parents started the Mike Plant Fund.

The fund provides a sailing opportunity for kids who are likely to spend their whole life, or at least their whole childhood, without ever coming near a sailboat. Each August, for one to three weeks, kids from ages 8 to 14 spend each day on Lake Minnetonka learning about sailing both on the shore and on the water in small dinghies that belong to the Wayzata Yacht Club. The club provides the instructors, and my mom provides lunch. The fund has grown enough that it now also provides scholarships for kids to attend the yacht club's sailing school. The fund also sponsors the annual Mike Plant Regatta held on Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis, which attracts young sailors from the Twin Cities. Last year, over one hundred kids participated, and each year the kids leave the regatta with a Mike Plant t-shirt and, most of them, with a smile on their face.

## Sailor's Hall of Fame

On September 6, 2002, Mike was inducted into the Single-Handed Sailors' Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island. Herb McCormick, then editor of *Cruising World*, and a longtime friend of Mike's, spoke at the ceremony. "Solo sailing was a perfect outlet for Mike's resourcefulness, wanderlust, and sense of adventure."

Mike is noted for logging over 100,000 miles at sea in only five years. At the time of his death, he was one of only five people to have completed three solo circumnavigations. According to the Museum of Yachting, the other four were Bertie Reed, Guy Bernadin, Jean Luc Van Den Heede, and Philippe Jeantot.

# Racers, Boats, and Nationalities

## 1986–87 BOC Challenge\*

### *Class I*

Philippe Jeantot, *Credit Agricole III*, French, first place

Titouan Lamazou, *Ecureil d'Aquitaine*, French, second place

Jean Yves Terlain, *UAP Pour Medecins Sans Frontieres*, French, third place

Guy Bernadin, *Biscuits Lu*, French/American

John Biddlecomb, *ACI Crusader*, Australian (skipper injured, out of race after Leg 1)

Ian Kiernan, *Triple M Spirit of Sydney*, Australian

Warren Luhrs, *Thursday's Child*, American (out of race after Leg 2, broken mast)

John Martin, *Tuna Marine Voortrekker II*, South African

Richard McBride, *Kiwi Express*, New Zealander (dismasted on Leg 1)

Bertie Reed, *Stabilo Boss*, South African

David White, *Legend Securities*, American

### *Class II*

Mike Plant, *Airco Distributor*, American, first place

Jean Luc Van Den Heede, *Let's Go*, French, second place

Harry Harkimo, *Belmont Finland*, Finnish, third place

Dick Cross, *Airforce*, American (sunk on Leg 1)

Jacques de Roux, *Skojern IV*, French (skipper, lost at sea just short of the finish of Leg 3)

John Hughes, *Joseph Young*, Canadian (dismasted but sailed on with jury rig)

Richard Konkolski, *Declaration of Independence*, American/Czech

Eduardo Louro de Almeida, *Miss Global*, Brazilian (rudder breakages, out of race after Leg 1)

Harry Mitchell, *Double Cross*, British (out of race after Leg 3, run aground in New Zealand)

Hal Roth, *American Flag*, American

Pentti Salmi, *Colt by Rettig*, Finnish

Mark Schrader, *Lone Star*, American

Takao Shimada, *Madonna*, Japanese (rigging damage, out of race after Leg 1)

Mac Smith, *Quailo*, American (retired after Leg 1)

\*Newport, Rhode Island, start and finish, in four legs; the name changed in following years to Around Alone; it is currently called the Velux 5 Oceans

**1989–90 Vendée Globe (Globe Challenge)\***

Titouan Lamazou, *Ecureil D'Aquitaine II*, first place

Loick Peyron, *Lada Poch III*, second place

Jean Luc Van Den Heede, *36.15 MET*, third place

Jean-Francois Coste, *Cacharel*

Pierre Follenfant, *TBS-Charente Meritime*

Alain Gautier, *Generali Concorde*

Philippe Jeantot, *Credit Agricole IV*

***Finished, but Disqualified***

Guy Bernadin, *OKAY*, stopped for medical help

Patrice Carpentier, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, damaged autopilot

Mike Plant, *Duracell*, received help

***Retired from the Race***

Philippe Poupon, *Fleury Michon X*, capsized

Bertie Reed, *Grinaker*, damaged rudder

Jean Yves Terlain, *UAP*, dismayed

**1990–91 BOC Challenge\*\******Class I***

Christophe Auguin, *Groupe Sceta*, French, first place

Alain Gautier, *Generali Concorde*, French, second place

Philippe Jeantot, *Credit Agricole IV*, French, third place

David Adams, *Innkeeper*, Australian

Isabelle Autissier, *Ecureil-Poitou-Charente*, French

John Biddlecomb, *Interlox Crusader (ex-ACI Crusader)*, Australian

Kanga Birtles, *Jarkan Yachtbuilders*, Australian

Nandor Fa, *Alba Regia*, Hungarian

John Martin, *Allied Bank*, South African

Enda O'Coineen, *Kilcullen*, Irish

Mike Plant, *Duracell*, American, fourth place

Bertie Reed, *Grinaker*, South African

Jose de Ugarte, *Banco Bilbao Vizcaya (ex-Lada Poch III)*, Spanish

***Class II***

Yves Dupasquier, *Servant 4*, first place

Don McIntyre, *Buttercup*, Australian, second place

Josh Hall, *Spirit of Ipswich (ex-Airco Distributor)*, British, third place

\* Les Sables d'Olonne, France, start and finish, non-stop; except for the American Plant and the South African Reed, all racers were French

\*\* Newport, Rhode Island, start and finish, in four legs; the name changed in following years to Around Alone; it is currently called the Velux 5

Jack Boye, *Legend (ex-Thursday's Child)*, American  
Hal Roth, *Sebago (ex-American-Flag)*, American  
Yukoh Tada, *Koden VII*, Japanese  
Jane Weber, *Tilley Endurable*, Canadian

**Corinthian Class\***

Robin Davie, *Global Exposure*, British  
Bill Gilmore, *Zafu*, American  
Robert Hooke, *Nihau IV*, American  
Harry Mitchell, *We Are Lovers*, British  
Floyd Romack, *Cardiac '88*, American  
Minoru Saito, *Shuten-Dohji*, Japanese  
Paul Thackaberry, *Volcano*, American

\*A third class added for this race, includes boats 40–50 ft.



## Endnotes and Sources

BEFORE STARTING THIS BOOK, I knew little about sailing in the Southern Ocean, and everything I know now I owe to the stories written by sailors who have been there. To recreate the experience of sailing on the wildest waters in the world, I relied on several books, among them *The BOC Challenge—The Official Program of the 1990/91 BOC Challenge*, *Chasing Liquid Mountains* by David Adams, *Out There* by George Day and Herb McCormick, *The Ultimate Challenge* by Barry Pickthall, and *Chasing the Long Rainbow* by Hal Roth. For information about the BOC races I am indebted to the many brochures and race updates issued by the BOC and compiled by Kathy Giblin and Tony Lush, the weekly updates written by Kathy Giblin for the *Duracell* Globe Challenge, 1989-90, and the *Rhumblin*—*A Newsletter for the Friends of "The Spirit of Minnesota"* from Pretty Good Writing, Weaver Weed. (For complete details see the Bibliography.)

My mom kept the videos that were made of Mike once he began his racing career. They vary in length from a couple minutes to an ESPN full-length film. Some were made by TV stations, some by family and friends. They include an ESPN film of 1990–91 BOC sponsored by BOC Group and narrated by Gary Jobson and Michael Richard, 1991; a Seven Seas promotional video compilation of interviews of racers with footage of sailing, 1990; footage of Mike sailing in the Vendée Globe, which is unfortunately not identified; and those films made by my younger brother, Tom. After Mike died, Mom had her collection complied by a professional editor, removing the repetitive parts; later, it was transferred to digital format. For chapter 17 I relied heavily on the two videos of Mike's memorial services, one in Minnesota, and one in Rhode Island. Mike's own use of the video camera was sporadic and, true to his personality, also very short: the videos he shot sailing in the Southern Ocean lasted about five minutes, and the one that he made during his visit to Campbell Island is at the most a few minutes long.

For chapters 15, 16, and the epilogue, I had the advantage of one good resource—the fifty-some page U.S. Coast Guard report investigating the final days of Mike's last trip and their two-week search for him. After conducting many interviews, mostly in July 1993, the final report was published in July 1994. The report is divided into three sections: the electrical problems that may have led to Mike's end; the keel, or more specifically, the bulb at the end of the keel, which was the only thing missing when the *Coyote* was finally located; and the grounding in Chesapeake Bay shortly before Mike left for France. My older brother, Hugh, who led the effort to get the Coast Guard to commit to a search

and rescue operation for Mike, also wrote a report of the sequence of events in the three weeks before Mike was declared lost at sea, which was subsequently mailed to NOAA, the Coast Guard, and three senators.

Once Mike had circumnavigated, he started to write a book—at least four times. I was lucky enough to have access to these attempts, and have used Mike's words throughout this book. His first attempt was the summer of 1987 after his first round-the-world race, titled "The Possible Mission." It is about twenty pages long, and it's really good reading, but writing is best done indoors, and Mike, who made a point of never being indoors for more than thirty minutes, unless he was asleep, wrote his twenty pages and then walked out the front door of his house, knowing it was time to move on. The second attempt was with a woman I have never met named Melenie Soucheray, and it consists of a fifteen-page outline titled "Across the Line—An Autobiography by Mike Plant as told to Melenie Soucheray," dated July 10, 1988. In addition to the outline there are two unfinished chapters, both of which describe parts of Mike's first BOC. I found this in Mike's papers after he died, and since I have yet to make contact with Melenie, I take this opportunity to thank her for the work she did with Mike; I have put much of it in this book.

Tom Gannon, a friend, sailor, and journalist, was partly responsible for Mike's third attempt, and after Mike died, he generously gave me the tapes of their interviews. Unfortunately, Tom is no longer around to read the stories Mike told him. Lastly, shortly before he died, Mike met a writer named David Stevens, and once again began to tell his story. I have never spoken with David, but after Mike was lost, he sent my parents a copy of what they had done up to that point; I am thankful that I could use parts of it to fill out more about Mike's second race, The Vendée Globe.

Thanks to these previous attempts, written when Mike was alive, much of the book is in Mike's words. Chapter 3, for example, is almost entirely from "The Possible Mission." As mentioned in the preface, as with any biography of a contemporary, I have tried to use the words of Mike's friends and family as much as possible to tell his story.

## Pg. Preface

- x *Even Mike's race boat, Coyote, drifted on.* The word "Coyote" in the title of this book, *Coyote Lost at Sea* refers to Mike and his dreams, and not the boat. The strange life of *Coyote*, his boat, continued on long after Mike's death. See the epilogue.

## Chapter One

- 1 *The sea in its own way can tell us how insignificant we are* "Across the Line."
- 1 *We were actually planing to windward* Mike Plant, from a brochure with an overview of *Coyote* by Concordia Custom Yachts, 1992.

## Chapter Two

- 5 *I'm a sensitive person. Maybe growing up blind had* "The Possible Mission."
- 12 *Beginning at the age of 8, when he first sailed* Dad, written after Mike died.

## Chapter Five

- 44 *I want to see some cement boats being built* At the time ferro-cement boats were cheap to build and a favorite of backyard boat builders. They generally didn't turn out well, which is why we don't hear much about them among either ocean racers or cruising sailors.
- 45 *My state of health unfortunately is about the same* Mike is referring to the hepatitis he had when he came back from South America.
- 46 *Mike had something else in mind* I talked with Louie in the late 1990s and he relayed more information. I've pieced it together to fill in the details of this trip.
- 48 *As Louie later told me, a day before their flight he met an American who wanted to sell him some cocaine and told him an easy way to smuggle it into the States* This scenario seems unlikely, but Louie insisted it was true.
- 50 *Then I want to go on up the St. Lawrence, then cut down into Vermont and meet up with Tom* Not sure who this is, but our brother Tom would have been only a junior in high school.

## Chapter Six

- 65 *he had to repair the damaged concrete, which he did, leaving his initials (MP) in the wall* Last time I visited the island, they were still there.
- 66 *The boat went down instantly* From an interview with Tom Gannon, 1988. Tom Gannon was a sportswriter who worked in the Newport area. He interviewed Mike at length with the intention of writing Mike's biography. After Mike died, he generously gave me these tapes.
- 66 *the boat came up enough so I could dive down to put a piece of canvas on a piece of lead* A friend who was in the harbor at the time later told me he had no idea where Mike found this piece of metal and guessed it was one more sign of Mike's ingenuity.

## Chapter Seven

- 73 *Yeah, I saw Midnight Express, and it scared the shit out of me* *Midnight Express* came out in 1978, a movie based on the book by Billy Hayes that describes a relatively random imprisonment of an American tourist

traveling in Turkey. The tourist was arrested with a small amount of hashish on him, and consequently spent years inside a Turkish prison, which the movie depicts as a dungeon out of Dante's *Inferno*.

84 *They let him call our parents* Gannon interview.

## Chapter Nine

101 *Skipper Neville Gosson was forced to climb his 70-foot, ice-covered mast* Day, *Out There*, p. 112.

101 *Richard McBride was hand steering* Day, *Out There*, p. 114.

105 *The success of anything is the direct result of the concentration given the project* "Across the Line," p. 12.

105 *[Fiberglassing was] 14,000 hours of the most miserable work that can be imagined* Mike's discussion of fiberglassing comes from both "Across the Line" and a speech he wrote that I found in his notes, but do not know who he gave it to.

105 *To get labor I collected bums* Schroeder, "Tracking Global Gladiators," BOC Challenge publication.

107 *Barbara Lloyd, writing for the New York Times, interviewed Mike* Lloyd, *New York Times*, April 6, 1986.

107 *The weather never pisses me off* *People*, November 29, 1989.

109 *There were a hundred times before the start when any normal person would have thrown in the towel* Rodger Martin as quoted in McGowan, *Newport Daily News*, May 11, 12, 1987.

109 *The day [the boat] slipped into the water* *Docksider*, July 1987.

## Chapter Ten

112 *I've never had such a high* Letter to Rodger Martin.

113 *One day . . . was stupendous* Gannon interview.

115 *[The visits] took place* Gannon interview.

116 *Mike wrote an official statement explaining his situation* Found amongst Mike's papers.

122 *Designed by Guy Ribadeau Dumas, Credit Agricole III* The other boats in the race included McBride's *Kiwi Express*, a 60-foot fractional sloop designed by Bruce Farr. Reed's 60-foot *Stabilo Boss* was another Bruce Farr design. Luhrs' 60-foot *Thursday's Child* was designed by Lindenberg & Bergstrom. Mike's main competitor in Class II, de Roux, sailed a narrow aluminum cutter designed by Dominique Presles.

## Chapter Eleven

124 *I eat four candy bars* Mike's unmailed letter to Liz.

125 *When they turned back, I realized the race had started* Interview with Joel Stebbins, Video #5.

- 126 *Everyone has to cross these before entering the southern trades again Docksider*, July 1987.
- 127 *After going through the doldrums, I was about halfway to Cape Town* Continuation of above quote, Mike.
- 128 *It was a race, all the way from the minute we left Newport* From a video interview conducted by a reporter from a Minnesota TV station.
- 129 *The whole secret of making a fast passage through the Southern Ocean* Knox-Johnston & Pickthall, *The BOC Challenge 1986–87*, p. 44.
- 130 *The leading yachts received continual weather updates* Roth, *Chasing the Long Rainbow*.
- 130 *When the wind finally shows, it's on the nose of my boat* Interview with Joel Stebbins, Rio, 1987.
- 131 *Bloody amazing scene out there* Richard McBride as quoted in Pickthall, *The Ultimate Challenge*, p. 95.
- 133 *Well, it was like a trap—a French trap* These islands are owned by France. I do not know whether Mike knew that.
- 134 *Close to halfway across the Indian Ocean at latitude 48 south* *Docksider*, 1988, p. 1.
- 135 *When it gets really bad, you have to steer yourself* *The BOC Challenge 1986–87, Race Update: Week 16*, p. 6.
- 135 *He addressed the following letter, "Dear Liz,"* I tracked down Liz and spoke with her about Mike. Liz had been with Mike after he left Helen, before the start of the race.
- 136 *His steering wheel had been broken off its pedestal* *The BOC Challenge*, p. 54.
- 136 *I needed him to keep on "Across the Line,"* pps. 3–4.
- 137 *At 3 a.m. December 19* *The BOC Challenge*, pps. 58–60.
- 137 *I had gigantic hopes of making a lot of miles on Jacques* "Across the Line," p. 5.
- 137 *It appeared that de Roux had gone up on deck in heavy weather* *The BOC Challenge*, p. 60.
- 137 *It didn't seem right . . . For it to happen to you* Byrne, *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1986.
- 138 *Jacques was the best man for the job in this race* Video #5, Rio, 1987.
- 138 *Three days after leaving Sydney* *Docksider*, p. 4.
- 140 *I'm by myself in this 50-foot boat* "The Possible Mission."
- 141 *I had 300 to 350 miles to catch up and thought it was finished for me* *The BOC Challenge*, p. 76.
- 141 *I had to cut down everything: the jib and roller furling* *The BOC Challenge*, p. 84.
- 141 *Then he attached the headsails to hanks to hold the luff of the sails to the stay* *The BOC Challenge*, p. 84.
- 143 *This race represents the dreams and desires of all sailors to challenge themselves* Video #4.

## Chapter Twelve

- 144 *People say you go out there to beat the ocean* *People*, November 27, 1989.
- 145 *Rudders on fire* [www.vendeeglobe.org](http://www.vendeeglobe.org).
- 146 *He's kind of tilting at windmills* Rick McGowan, as quoted in "Going it Alone," *Winegar, Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 6, 1989.
- 148 *What do you think your chances are [in the Vendée Global Challenge]* From a taped interview.
- 153 *A few days before the race* *People*, November 27, 1989.
- 153 *Left Les Sables sick as a dog* Stevens, p. 7.
- 153 *The next six weeks were the most frustrating* Stevens, p. 11.
- 153 *People ask me why* Video #23.
- 153 *I am not in Africa to buy ivory* Stevens, p. 13.
- 153 *Looking down at a spot to cross* Stevens, p. 13.
- 154 *The wind goes from 15 to 30 knots* *Duracell Globe Challenge Update, Week 4*.
- 154 *She carried an awesome amount of canvas* Stevens interview with Mike.
- 154 *We've finally rounded 'corner' and we're loving it* *Duracell Globe Challenge Update, Week 5*.
- 155 *Things are not boring any longer* Stevens, p. 28.
- 157 *I was the lone cowboy* Stevens, p. 37.
- 157 *I was wasted, but relieved and happy* Stevens, p. 39.
- 157 *By the time he went below* The following account of Mike's experience at Campbell Island is a compilation of many sources, as well as, a fictive conversation among the meteorologists.
- 162 *But it was soggy, just like everything else on board* Stevens, p. 55.
- 163 *As long as I remember, I have heard Bay of Biscay stories* Stevens, p. 62.
- 164 *As he stepped on the pier* Video made by my brother, Tom Plant.

## Chapter Thirteen

- 165 *I find the solitude of this kind of racing* *Winegar, Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 6, 1989.
- 165 *People talk about the depression and loneliness of single-handing* *Winegar, Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 6, 1989.
- 166 *I'd say U.S. corporations are not in the habit* *Phillips, The Washington Post*, October, 18, 1992.
- 167 *I've never been so upset in my life* Video, #14, p. 4. Interview in Newport after the BOC 90-91.
- 167 *There are those special days* Video, #14, p. 4.
- 167 *For three to four days* Video, #17 Interview of Mike Plant, video made by U.S. Paint/AwlGrip.
- 167 *It was a very close race* Video, #17 Interview of Mike Plant, video made for U.S. Paint/AwlGrip.
- 168 *When we started the fourth leg* Video, #14, p. 2. (p. # refers to my transcription of video).



- 168 *There were some disappointments* Video, #14, p. 2. (p. # refers to my transcription of video).

## Chapter Fourteen

- 169 *I'm not frustrated by things like being cold or hot anymore* *People*, November 27, 1989.
- 169 *Imagine going to your office* *People*, November 27, 1989.
- 169 *I have been lucky and had the good fortune* I don't know if this speech was ever presented. I found these pages in Mike's papers after he died, and there was nothing more than what I have included.
- 172 *Coyote was an extreme design with exaggerated dimensions* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 94.
- 172 *The mainsail weighed 250 pounds* Bree, *Broken Seas*, p. 142.
- 172 *On one of her shakedown sails* McCormick, *Rhode Island Monthly*, March 1993, p. 24.
- 172 *To balance the tremendous amount of sail* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 95.
- 173 *It's [Coyote is] really different from Duracell* Philips, *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, October 1, 1992.
- 175 *Assuming Duracell would continue their sponsorship* Helen told me that there was an oral agreement between Mike and Duracell.
- 175 *The French have a different priority in sports programs* Cathy de Moll, from Winegar, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 6, 1989.
- 175 *But you can't just see that and say, 'Okay, you win,'* Phillips, *Washington Post*, October 18, 1992.
- 179 *If I win this race it's because of all the superior products [donated by suppliers]* Phillips, *Washington Post*, October 18, 1992.
- 180 *After the launch, five or six people,* The account of the launching of *Coyote* comes from a video that I think was made by Bill Walker from Concordia.
- 180 *Mike's explanation for the name was that a coyote* Buchanan, *Outside*, January 1, 1993.
- 181 *In an interview shot later* The video of Mike onboard *Coyote* was probably made for Concordia, or for the campaign to get to the Vendee.
- 182 *Planing ahead through a running seaway* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 113.
- 182 *Coyote met and surpassed* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p.110.
- 182 *Plant spoke slowly . . . I've had two more races behind me* Philips, *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, October 1, 1992.
- 182 *J/35 sailors in Newport for their North American championship* Phillips, *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, October 1, 1992.
- 184 *After making three races around the world alone* This is from an over-view of *Coyote Project* put together by Concordia Custom Yachts for the Coast Guard report.

## Chapter Fifteen

- 185 *The power and the absolute beauty you experience is unbelievable Docksider.*
- 185 *Mike had promised Concordia* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 99.
- 185 *To better Mike's chances for Motorola sponsorship* Gannon, *Practical Sailor*, March 3, 1993.
- 187 *In 25–30 knot breezes and steep seas off Cape May, New Jersey* Phillips, *The Washington Post*, December 1, 1992.
- 188 *Mike had Coyote towed through the Chesapeake* The Coast Guard Report is the most thorough report of what happened in Annapolis and has been used as the main source for the following section.
- 188 *It was fairly gentle, not abrupt* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 110. Also quoted in the Coast Guard Report.
- 190 *I never received a cent from Mike* Gannon, *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, March 11, 1993.
- 190 *Coyote's extensive equipment consumed an alarming amount of power* The Coast Guard Report is the most thorough report of Coyote's power set up and has been used as the main source for the following section.
- 191 *Mike worried that Coyote's battery-charging system wasn't working very well* Gannon, *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, March, 12, 1993.
- 192 *One such donation was a 24-volt battery* The Coast Guard concluded, "much of the equipment on board was donated to Mike Plant, because of this some of the equipment was incompatible. For example, some of the electronics ran on a 12 volt and others on a 24 volt. This caused the necessity for a very complicated electrical regulator which may have been the cause of the loss of power on the *Coyote*." Coast Guard Report, Enclosure 16.
- 193 *Smead also believed Concordia should be aware of the problem* Gannon, *Practical Sailor*, January 1, 1993.
- 193 *Mike also talked with Concordia* I don't know with whom specifically.
- 194 *Mike had left several phone messages for him on the 18th* Swift, *Sports Illustrated*, November 30, 1992.

## Chapter Sixteen

- 201 *The path (of life) is like a river in many respects.* "The Possible Mission."
- 202 *After studying the possibilities, the Canadian Coast Guard in Goose Bay* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 106.
- 202 *Beginning on November 13th, the U.S. Coast Guard sent two search planes* According to Herb McCormick, six planes were employed and the search lasted for five days (*Gone to the Sea*, p. 106). According to the *Sports Illustrated* article published November 30, 1992, the Coast Guard sent four C-130s, the U.S. Navy sent two P-3 aircraft, and the Canadian Coast Guard sent two C-130s. The Coast Guard Report states that the

- search and rescue operation involved aircraft and vessels from the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, Canada, Great Britain, and France.
- 203 *When Coyote was found it was only too apparent how wrong the Coast Guard had been* In Tom Gannon's article in *Practical Sailor* (May 15, 1994), he writes that the Coast Guard knew where the EPIRB was when it went off: 44° N, 34° W.
- 203 *It was next to impossible for them [the crew on the tanker] to get close to the yacht* Lloyd, *New York Times*, November, 23, 1992.
- 203 *Everyone here believes that if he had a chance to survive whatever happened* Lloyd, *New York Times*, November, 23, 1992.
- 205 *At some point, a short video of the upturned Coyote made its way onto the news* We aren't sure of the dates these broadcasts occurred.
- 205 *In the cockpit, they found a life raft* "According to the owner of Portsmouth Life Raft and Survival, Inc., Mike came in one day looking for a life raft. The owner stated he had donated to Mike Plant in the past. However, this time he could not and explained to Mike Plant that he would sell him one at the company's cost. Mike Plant's response was that he would take the lowest priced ocean-going raft available. The raft was a valise type which would have to be manually deployed." Quoted from Darius Bors, U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office, Providence, Rhode Island, included in the Coast Guard Report into Mike's death.
- 205 *Person on board was not located during inspection of vessel* Coast Guard Report.

## Chapter Seventeen

- 208 *All men dream but not equally* T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1922.

## Epilogue

- 211 *Pettengill also noted* Gannon, *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, March, 12, 1993.
- 216 *When the Coast Guard asked Kramers* Coast Guard Report, Enclosure 4.
- 216 *In a separate section of their report* Coast Guard Report, Enclosure 3.
- 216 *The joint that attached the keel bulb to the keel fin* Coast Guard Report, Enclosure 3.
- 217 *According to Rodger Martin, it was nobody's fault that Coyote hit bottom in Chesapeake Bay* McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 108.
- 217 *One way the construction could fail* Gannon, *Practical Sailor*, January 1, 1993.
- 217 *The vague area in my mind is how the plate was glassed into the carbon fiber* T.J. Perrotti as quoted in McCormick, *Gone to the Sea*, p. 107–8.
- 218 *asked if I could do him a favor* Even now it seems strange to me that a recipient can also be a witness.

- 220 *A crew sailed Coyote two thousand miles from Newport to the Azores* I don't know who.
- 220 *On his qualifying sail from France to Newport* "A Note to Mariners," an editorial for the January/February 2003 edition of *Ocean Navigator*. The case is online: U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, with the final decision made on December 2, 1997, in which the court found Scully 100 percent at fault and responsible for the damage cost of \$76,616.
- 221 *Morgan wrote an article for the 1993 February edition of Soundings* Morgan, *Soundings*, February 1993.
- 222 *But after reading an account of a similar accident* Lloyd, *New York Times*, November 5, 1995.

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