

Accidental Circumnavigation

Part Two: Closing the gap on a seven year journey around the world

By Joanne Bush

Somewhere along the way we had lost our direction, or maybe I should say, we found our direction. We left Pensacola, Fla. aboard *Miss Jody*, our Antares 42 catamaran, on a six-month trip to Panama. Nearly five years later, we found ourselves in Phuket, Thailand waiting for the northeast monsoon season to make it possible to start our 4,000-mile trip to the Red Sea.

Being a reluctant sailor, it was my

unflinching confidence in my husband Ron's ability and in *Miss Jody* that allowed us to get as far as we had. I loved being in new anchorages and meeting new people, but when we were underway I questioned my own ability to sail the long passages. This next passage to the Arabian Sea would be yet another test for me.

A TRYING START

We set sail from Thailand and enjoyed time in the Similian and An-

daman Islands on our way across the Indian Ocean to Sri Lanka. Five days after leaving the Andaman Islands we encountered strong westerly winds on our nose and received word from fellow cruisers both at sea and onshore of 40 knot winds ahead. We decided the best thing to do was to stay put and wait for Mother Nature to calm down. So with the main and jib reefed, we hove to and *Miss Jody* sat comfortably with bows cocked to weather in winds up to 40-knots and 20 foot seas.

While waiting out the wind and seas, we monitored another cruiser who was taking on water and had to abandon their sailboat before being rescued by a commercial ship less than 20 miles to the south of us. This was by far the most unpredicted and

uncharted weather system we had experienced. And while we were in no immediate danger in *Miss Jody's* protected salon and fully enclosed cockpit, it was still a very trying event.

PIRACY REPORTS

Once we reached the Maldives we were advised by MARLO, the government agency that monitors and escorts ships through the Gulf of Aden, that pirate activity had increased 10 fold and moved from the Gulf of Aden into the Arabian Sea. January alone saw the number of attacks increase to 28, plus three more in early February. The activity was mostly in the shipping lanes from the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Aden and south along the coast of India. The only encouraging part of the reports was that all the attacks were targeted against commercial ships. Ron debated changing our course and heading to South Africa and another option was to ship *Miss Jody* back to the US from Singapore, but neither of these panned out.

By now, I was certain that I couldn't continue on this passage as I was well beyond my comfort zone. Long before

we even left the dock in Florida, Ron had always insisted that if at any point I didn't want to continue sailing I could fly back home. It was a tough decision, but as a reluctant circumnavigator, I redeemed my "ticket" home. With the boat fully provisioned, Ron and Jules, a young Englishman who joined us in Sri Lanka, sailed to the Red Sea where I met up with them.

In hind sight, it was easy to see the perfect storm that was brewing. This was the beginning of 2011 and the revolution in Egypt had already started; Yemen and others were to follow as part of the wave of political discontent in the Arab world that framed the Gulf of Aden. On top of that, a Somali man had been recently convicted in a U.S. court for his role in the high-seas piracy that led to the standoff of a U.S.-flagged commercial vessel. Sadly, the casualties in the sailing community would soon be felt.

Quest, a sailing yacht owned by California couple Scott and Jean Adam with Phyllis Mackay and Bob Riggle on board as crew, was in the wrong place at the wrong time and was hijacked February 18, 240 nautical miles

off Oman. Four days later they were murdered by Somali pirates.

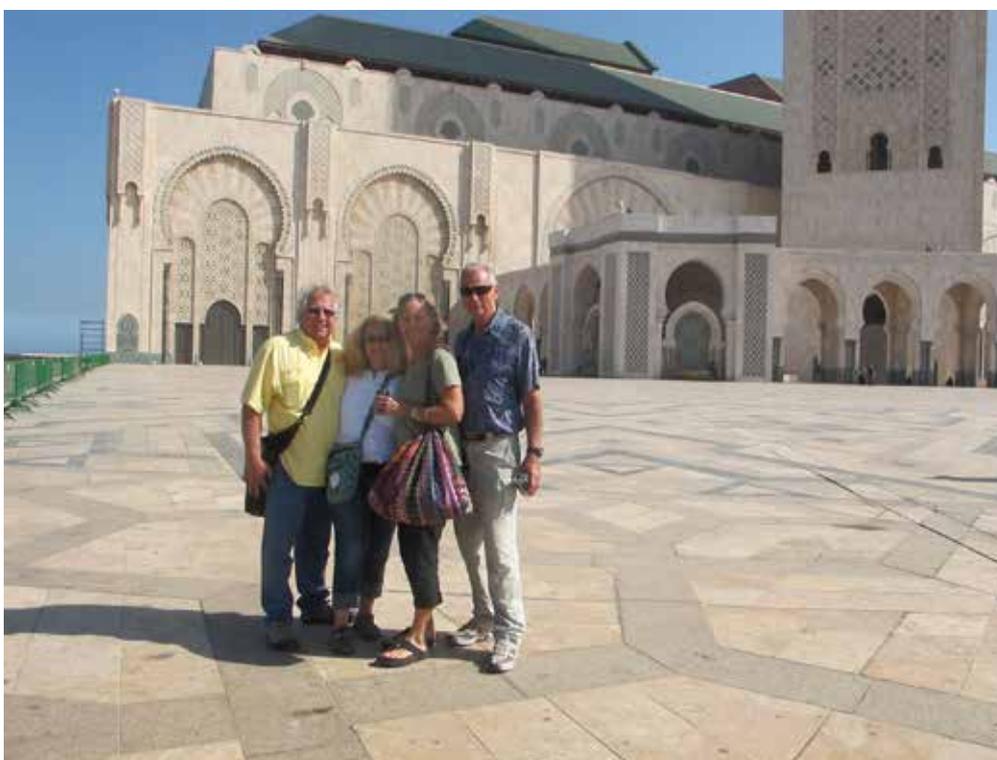
RED SEA BOUND

Miss Jody left for the Red Sea on February 9 with a small convoy of other cruising vessels, including fellow Antares *Spirit of Nina*. The protocol was clear—black out the boats, including the reflective strip on the hull, limit communication to a pre-determined time and stay within half a mile of one another during the night. But despite the convoy's best efforts they had several scares during the nighttime: wooden boats with no identification passing close by and some ships would have an AIS signal while others would only show up on radar.

Upon leaving Al Mukalla in Yemen, they sighted a large wooden fishing boat towing a smaller one, a classic description of the modus operandi of the pirates. Ron hailed a nearby Japanese warship that was monitoring the International Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), a shipping lane extending from the Gulf of Aden towards the Somali Basin and the Horn of Africa, and advised them of the

Ron and Joanne Bush astride camels in Egypt, opposite; *Miss Jody* in Turkey, below





Rabat, the capital of Morocco, above; visiting Casablanca with friends, below

suspicious vessel stalking them. They acknowledged and immediately sent a plane to investigate and after four passes advised Ron that the ship was not a threat.

Needless to say, it was with some relief when Ron and Jules docked *Miss Jody* in Egypt nearly a month after leaving the Maldives. With no intention of sailing around the world, the lure of the unknown had driven us through the Panama Canal all those years ago and our option to backtrack was well behind us. Now we were

about to transit the Suez Canal and enter another chapter of our circumnavigation.

THE MED AND ATLANTIC

We spent two summers touring and visiting countries in the Mediterranean before departing Gibraltar on September 7, 2012. For me, the last three years of sailing aboard *Miss Jody* proved to be more challenging than the first four. This was partly because the Med didn't offer the same rewards as the South Pacific and Indonesia in

terms of diving opportunities. With the exception of observing the highly intelligent octopus, there was very little sea life and I missed discovering the kaleidoscope of colorful fish and exotic underwater life. So we turned inland to explore the rich cultural history the Mediterranean had to offer before continuing our journey west across the Atlantic.

Our pleasant reintroduction to the Islamic world after leaving the Middle East was in Rabat, Morocco. We toured Rabat, Casablanca, and Fez, all of which were unique and similar at the same time. Intricately designed carpets, curious looking water pipes and every imaginable leather good gave us plenty of excuses to roam the labyrinth of old markets. In total, we spent 21 days in Morocco searching for the likes of Humphrey Bogart while waiting for our weather window.

The normal route from Europe to the Americas is to sail south down the coast of Africa to the Canary Islands before the

weather turns cold in Europe. Once there, you'll wait out hurricane season before sailing further south down the coast of Africa until the trades fill in and push you across the Atlantic to the Lesser Antilles.

The North Atlantic is notorious for its changing conditions with the movement of highs and lows from the Americas and Europe. This resulted in a prolonged stay in the Canary Islands. The Canaries are a territory of Spain, very modern and upscale. The water is clean and the islands are majestic in appearance.

However, during October and November the winds are inconstant, sometimes building up to 30-knots from all directions. There are very few anchorages but numerous marinas that are happy to take your cash if you are so inclined. Consequently, we spent most of our time in the all-weather, easy access anchorage at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Ron insists that this trip could never have happened without me, and he is right, but as true as that may be, it certainly would never have happened without him. Along the way I gained immense confidence in my sailing abilities and also learned to accept my limitations; crossing the Atlantic was one of them. I left *Miss Jody* well provisioned and ready to close the loop on our accidental circumnavigation with Ron and friends, Will Berry and Larry Bowyer, from Pensacola. I would meet up with Ron in Antigua.

THE HOME STRETCH

Back on board and inching closer to closing the gap, we spent the last few months sailing through the Caribbean where the clean and clear water quenched my thirst for diving and snorkelling. We took a leisurely pace back to the US and revisited many of the islands we had cruised earlier in our previous sailboat, *Footloose*.

With courtesy flags from 64 different countries adorning *Miss Jody*, we sailed into Pensacola Bay and were greeted by six Pensacola Yacht Club boats loaded with cheering and waving friends. Ron and I were overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness and enthusiasm. Landing at PYC concluded *Miss Jody's* circumnavigation of seven years, four months, seventeen days, seven hours and 10 minutes that covered somewhere between 35,000



Homeward bound, Ron and Joanne with *Miss Jody* in the background, visit the Bahamas, above; Ron and Joanne, far left with the welcome committee, Pensacola, FL, below

miles and 40,000 miles, depending on your method of measurement.

During this time, we made many lifetime friends, met hundreds of friendly locals and accumulated some amazing experiences and memories. We found ourselves a little astonished, not yet able to comprehend the full magnitude of our journey. Putting aside all our expectations and gradually letting go of commitments and ties, we opened up to a world so few have the privilege of experiencing. Not long ago, someone asked Ron if

he had always intended to sail around the world and he beamed from ear to ear. I'd recognize that mischievous smile anywhere. **BWS**

Over seven years ago, Joanne Bush and her husband Ron Bruce moved aboard their *Antares* catamaran s/v *Miss Jody* and proceeded to make their way around the world. Now after sailing nearly 40,000 miles and visiting 64 countries, they are back in their home port in Pensacola, Florida where they are slowly adapting to life on land.

