

Come sail with a seafaring family from Hawaii to Tahiti. Experience a typhoon and party on a desert island. Catch a Mahimahi, sail with the dolphins and learn a few sailing terms. When you arrive, fall in love again.

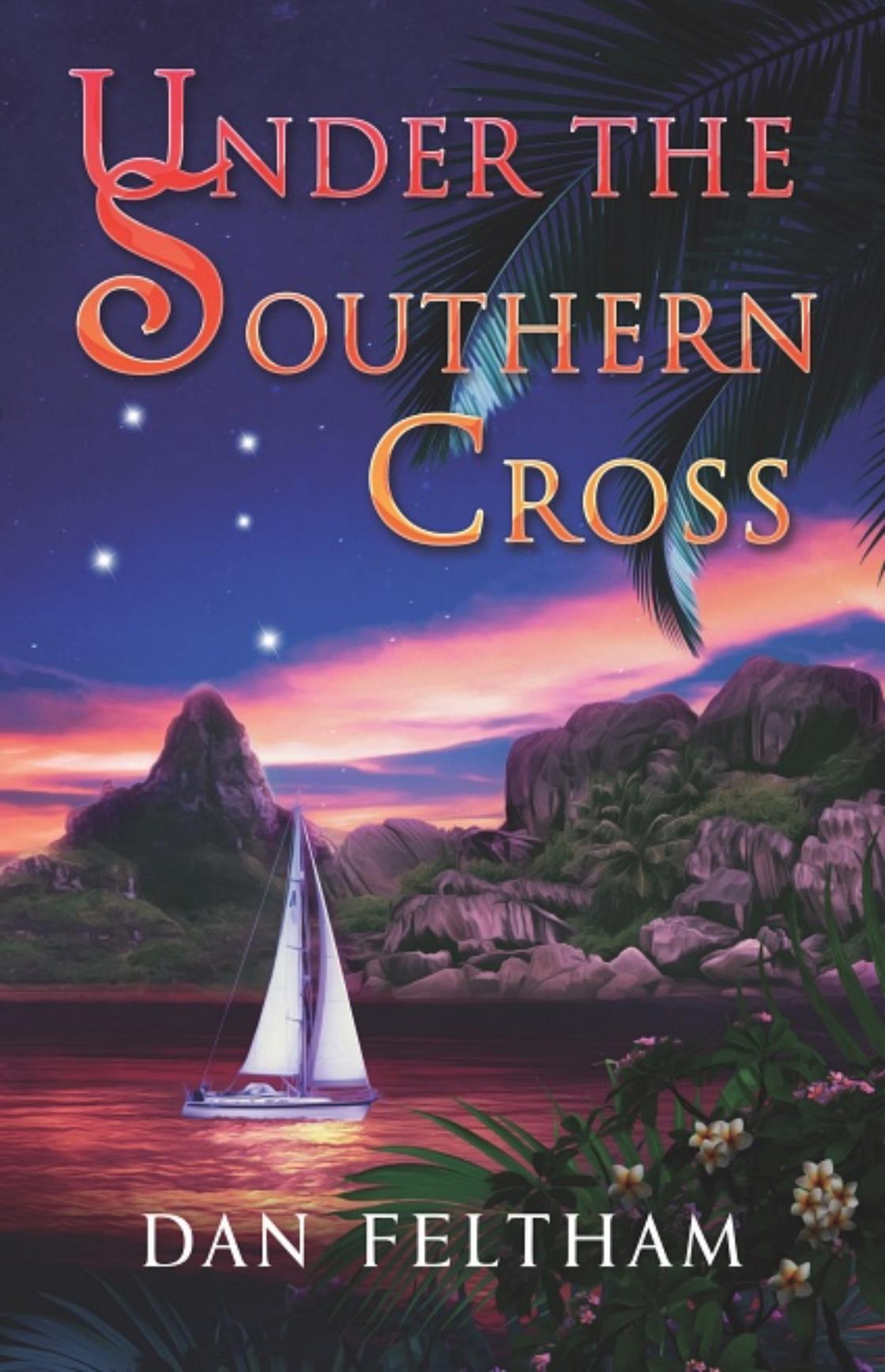
Under the Southern Cross

By Dan Feltham

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The background of the cover is a vibrant tropical sunset. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a warm orange and red near the horizon. Several bright stars are visible in the upper portion of the sky. In the foreground, a white sailboat with a single mast and sail is on the water, its reflection shimmering. The water is dark with a golden glow from the sunset. In the background, there are large, rounded rock formations and lush greenery, including palm trees. The overall mood is serene and tropical.

UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

DAN FELTHAM

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The Catalina Connection, 2011

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Terror in the Gulf, 2014

Trade Winds Calling, 2015 (Revised Edition)

Mexican Standoff, 2016

Sahara Sands, A Memoir, 2017

Copper Canyon, 2018

Egyptian Gold, and the Wages of Love, 2019

O'Taheiti Dreamin', 2020

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Chapter 1 – Sail Away

“At sea, I learned how little a person needs, not how much.”

– Robin Lee Graham, Dove

As soon as *Cherish* poked her fiberglass bow into the Molokai Channel – that 26 mile wide tempestuous body of water between Oahu and the island of Molokai – the wind went from a comfortable twelve knots to the anemometer bouncing off of twenty-five. *Cherish* seemed to take on the deep blue rolling seas with the joy of a freed bronco that wanted to run wild on an open range. *I feel the same joy*, thought Bob; *I have this bronco’s reins and have changed to a different person than a desk or courthouse bound lawyer. I have traded black wingtips for Sperry Topsiders. No departure regrets; Christine knew I loved sailing when she married me.*

Bob anticipated the change in sea conditions and elected to bear off as soon as his charge rounded the southeast corner of Oahu at Makapu’u Point and then run fast and easy with the prevailing ocean swells. The full mainsail and staysail jib swept the yacht on a broad reach past Koko Head, where we jibbed onto starboard tack and into Maunalua Bay and on past Diamond Head crater. It seemed wise to let the two new crewmen gain some aspect of their sea legs before turning south into rougher open seas.

As we sailed abeam of the Diamond Head lighthouse, I re-experienced the thrills I had in past years crossing the

finish line of several TransPacific yacht races. Unconsciously I said to myself “Mark”, as if to an imaginary navigator at the yacht’s chart table who would record our exact finish time. Several years prior, I had also watched one entire night from the top room of that same lighthouse calling “Mark” as each yacht passed abeam of the Diamond Head buoy to complete their race over the 2,225 nautical miles from California. Names of yachts I had crewed on, raced against, and many old sailing friends flashed through my mind, but there would be no Ala Wai Harbor mai tai drinking parties or trophy presentations for this day – quite the opposite. This was a start of my new life.

I told my two novice crew, “Hey guys, last chance to change your minds. There’s no turning back now, unless you want to swim in from here.”

Both Pete and Jack laughed honest laughs.

“Uh uh skipper; we’re with you all the way to Tahiti and glad for it,” shouted Jack.

“Ask me in three weeks,” said Pete. “Aloha my sweet and sour island,” as he blew a farewell kiss to his Oahu and the end of a twelve year marriage.



Yacht Cherish's sister ship

We passed by tourist catamarans, outrigger canoes, kite boarders and board surfers having fun off Waikiki and were soon several miles southwest of Honolulu. I made out the form of the iconic Aloha Tower, built as a lighthouse in 1926, now dwarfed by towering hotels and condominiums. The tall buildings of one of America's busiest playgrounds looked like kid's block toys in a kindergarten playroom; they in turn were backed by the green of the Ko'olau Mountain Range that framed Honolulu, Punch Bowl, and Pearl Harbor. High above, a Hawaiian Airlines commercial jet was making the turn for Honolulu International bringing more tourists to an over crowded Hawaii.

Holding to a mile offshore, in the lee of the island, the wind gave up its claim to being channel heavy and held consistent at twelve to fifteen knots in smoother water. Cindy

went forward to the bow, gathered up the maile and pikaki lei from the pulpit and took it to her portside stateroom.

“That woodsy vanilla scent should keep me smelling sweet for a few days,” she said to no one in particular.

We sailed on past Barber’s Point, the Ko Olina Marina, Makaha’s booming surf and Kaena’s prominent headland that was soon several miles off to starboard, and held our westerly course. With daughter Cindy or stepson Temaru switching off at the helm, we soon left any easy weather influence of Oahu’s two mountain ranges to enter the rougher ocean between Oahu and the distant island of Kauai, and on into the realm of the northeast trade winds. Alaska lay 3000 miles due north, Tahiti 2800 miles south.

My heart sang with the new freedom. I took a moment to reflect – *No more weekend only sailing, no more paying bills, tending gardens, business meetings, late night legal calls, squinting at my cellphone, errands, car problems, politics, and so on. I’m not just playing temporary hooky from my past life; I’m now in charge of a whole new way of living. I had no idea of how much I would learn and appreciate in the next few weeks.* I said a silent prayer and after let out a loud ‘whoopie’. Cindy turned to look at me and smiled; she understood.

I also reflected on the fact that I was now responsible for the lives of four other people as well as myself and a \$500,000 yacht. *What gives me that right, that responsibility?* I went through the list – *self-confidence, years of sailing, a special skill set, faith in God, a dependable crew – two of whom were untested, a wonderful sea tested boat, a healthy*

respect of nature, plus nerve and will. As skipper, the major decisions enroute would be mine. I mentally embraced a new future; my dream was becoming reality.

Even though Tahiti is south southeast of the Hawaiian Islands, our first objective was the very remote Palmyra Atoll, over a thousand miles and almost 300 miles farther west and still north of the equator. Sailing west with the predominant rise and fall of the Pacific swell for the remainder of the day and all the first night would be a good thing for everyone's untested stomachs, even mine.

I had been curious about Palmyra for a long time. A Spanish treasure is rumored to be buried there, and it was the scene of an unsolved 1974 murder. I loved out-of-the-way islands and Palmyra was unique because of its isolated location. There is a special beauty about tropical atolls; the low-lying coral is so well defined by dark deep water on the outside and shallow aquamarine lagoons on the insides. It was almost half way to Tahiti; a shore-side rest would be nice. Even fake amphibians, as we now were, have to come out of the water once in a while.

For a brief instant, I wondered about myself; why was I leaving such a pleasant existence in Hawaii? We had a fine home on Oahu's Lanikai Beach; Chris taught hula several afternoons each week; Temaru was in middle school; my daughters were helping raise the younger kids, attending classes at the University, and dating whenever they wanted.

But, I wanted to charter, I wanted to see if I could make a living doing something other than what I was college trained for, meet new people, teach them how to sail. Mark Twain had called Hawaii '*The loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean.*' But, he wasn't a sailor and hadn't been to Tahiti, Fiji or the Caribbean. Why not stay and charter in Hawaii? The answer, in spite of Twain, is that the Hawaiian Islands are laid out in the wrong geographic direction; sailing west to east is always a very rough go and there are few protected coves in any of the islands, other than Oahu, in which to anchor behind barrier reefs like there are throughout Polynesia. *Yeah, I was probably being selfish but, 'Each person has to do what each person has to do.'*

As the remaining afternoon hours followed the sun to the western horizon, I assigned watches to the five of us, with Cindy, Temaru or myself always coupled with either of the two new hands, Pete or Jack. Neither man had ever sailed out of sight of land and needed big boat coaching if they were to assume full responsibilities within the next few days. I needed to be able to count on them if the weather turned ugly. Jack had never sailed in his entire life; he had volunteered after talking with Cindy at the Marine base, learning that she would be aboard and because it was something he had never done. I knew that Pete, although an experienced dingy sailor, had never steered a boat with a wheel or sailed anything over 18 feet. He wanted to 'get away' because of his broken marriage.

A separate worry of taking on two strangers was the question of their compatibility for three weeks living in the space of a small school bus. I was gambling that Jack and Pete would fit into the routine of life that long distance sailing requires. Would either one freak out in heavy weather, or get bored and stay in a bunk, or share the sailing duties equitably?

I posted the watch system by name and hours near the interior of the companionway bulkhead – 2 six-hour watches during daylight and 3 four-hour watches at night, rotating forward in time so that no one person would keep repeating the same watch with the same watch-mate multiple days in a row. I would also keep an eye on my fourteen-year old stepson as promised to my wife. Cindy had unlimited energy and volunteered to do the cooking, “for awhile” plus regular on-deck duties. She had her own single cabin portside forward (see above diagram), so there would be no girl/boy sleeping complications on this cruise.

Pete and Jack would have to share the spacious after cabin, sometimes referred to under different circumstances as the ‘matrimonial suite’. They would work it out with their duffle bags as a bunk-separator down the middle. Usually one would be on watch while the other rested and not have to share any sweat or snoring. I occupied the forward stateroom, but what looks very plush on the schematic is no pic-nic. Attempts at sleeping there during a rough sea can be problematic; you lay within feet of where the fiberglass bow meets pounding wave after wave. That part of the boat goes through the maximum up and down motions as boat meets

ocean, and it can sound like a washing machine loaded with tennis shoes or in heavy going like a bass drum keeping time to something by Beethoven.

For many a sailor, sleep up forward does not come easy; it is loud and very active. It is also where a number of spare sails are stored – extra mainsail, storm jib, storm trysail, and a reaching spinnaker, plus other stuff that can't find a home. Sails made of Egyptian cotton went out with the dark ages and the sail makers have continued to design and manufacture better, lighter, stronger sails of exotic materials, but no smaller. They continue to be expensive, so are cared for and make up a boat's long-term inventory. A sailor's home automobile garage usually becomes their lifetime boat-stuff warehouse – old halyards, canvass, half-full cans of bottom paint, spare hardware, even broken parts that for some reason can't be thrown away. Taking my old or second hand sails to Tahiti was like taking extra clothes on a train trip and having the ability to dress for every occasion. On this trip I would share my cushy double bunk with extra sails instead of my wife. The forward sleeping quarters are best for two when at anchor and all the bags are stacked on deck. I didn't mind sleeping with inert bags if there was no other warm alternative, but a wet sail dumped down the forward hatch after a nighttime sail change can be a bad surprise.

Temaru wanted to sack out in the main cabin on whichever cushy settee would be the leeward and lower side and let gravity keep him from rolling out onto the cabin floor. All he had to do was switch his pillow and cover, depending on which tack we were on. Smart kid.

Cherish never rested and didn't give a damn where anybody slept. Be my guests, she said, but care for me and feed me wind.

On deck, Cindy was showing Pete and Jack everything from stem to stern – equipment they would have to become familiar with in the next few days. She sounded like a college professor in a science class and first explained our double headsail option, then the triple spreader 71-foot mast, halyards, and shrouds, then aft to the mainsail controls, winches, jammers, something called the ditch bag and a white fiberglass canister containing our self-inflating emergency life raft.

“In an emergency someone launches the raft by first tying its painter to a strong point here on deck, then throws the canister over the lee side and jerks on the painter. The raft will auto-inflate within less than a minute. It's not something we expect to use, but if and when we do, get ready to jump. The ditch bag has stuff like cash, IDs, passports, charts, flashlights, binoculars, a radio - things we would need if we didn't have this boat.”

Finally, she went to stand at the stern pulpit to talk about antennas, safety equipment, backstay adjuster, and man-over-board gear and rescue procedures.

“There's an emergency tiller and a steel strapping tool in the lazette – somethin' else we don't plan to use.” That brought some questioning looks from the new guys.

“Don't touch anything until we ask you to, or until we are 110% sure of what you are doing and given the go ahead.

Watch and learn from the three of us as you become more comfortable. *Cherish* will reward everyone accordingly. Oh, and stay off the foredeck until you get your balance. That's an order."

Pete took it all in; Jack did not, and was trying to remember terms and relate it all to a more familiar aircraft configuration. I had to remember that for both Jack and Pete everything was new – shapes, sizes, distances, materials, functions, names, environment, and even self-balance – everything. They had committed themselves to literally a whole new universe – one in which everything was always moving.

Jack looked somewhat overwhelmed, so I told him, "Think of us as one of your airplanes turned at 90 degrees, the keel and sails provide the lift in water instead of horizontal wings in air; the rudder serves like your vertical stabilizer as it turns the boat. We don't have the equivalent of ailerons, flaps or elevators, since we can't go up and definitely don't want to go down. Ha ha."

I laughed at my ominous analogy and continued after Cindy's tour.

"Most names make sense – an outhaul pulls out; a downhaul pulls down, a jammer jams, a furling line furls a sail and the lines are each one color coded according to their use; memorize them."

Jack was green and would require some extra direction, but I also knew he would be Marine smart and dependable, not panic if things got a little wild. And he might help with diesel maintenance if ever necessary and his shoulders and

biceps could provide the extra muscle that we didn't quite have. I had no idea how both Jack and Pete would perform as team members, relate to each other, or handle their-selves over time at sea. Being a small boat sailor, Pete knew wind and the functions of the sails, lines and gear; I figured he would learn the operation of a large boat soon enough and love the size and relative stability.

It occurred to me that I might have to watch both men with respect to Cindy. At 24, a sun-bleached long-haired blonde, very tan, very shapely, with a penchant to tease, she was irresistible to most men but had enough experience to tell them 'no thanks'. I also suspected, from what I had heard from her sister, she would sometimes whisper 'perhaps another time, another place'.

During the afternoon, Jack came to me and said, "I'd like a private word with you skipper."

"Sure Jack, what's up?"

"I think you should know that I have a personal handgun in my rucksack with the rest of my gear."

I had always wondered about the advisability of carrying weapons on long distance sails like this one. If not a gun, a flare pistol at short range can do a nice job on an unwanted boarder. Pirates and thieves still abound in parts of the world's oceans, but I had not heard of any around the central Pacific.

"Glad you told me; always a good thing to know who has what. Too late now to tell you no. What kind of gun is it?"

"It's a Beretta M9 pistol but not loaded."

“Okay thanks; don’t worry, I won’t ask you to toss it overboard. Keep it private and well hidden. We’ll have to declare it when we get to Papeete.”

I didn’t tell him that I had a close cousin hidden away, a Colt M911, left on board by my Marine nephew five years earlier. I had cared for it, but sure never wanted to use the damn thing.

The evening meal that first night had been prepared beforehand at the house and was a bland beef stew free of any spices, grease, or onions. Cindy also fixed a tossed salad, blue cheese dressing optional, and we had apple slices and lemon cake for ‘afters’. No one complained. There were other heat-and-serve dishes in the freezer for future meals.

“If anyone complains, guess what?” Cindy laughed, “You get the galley duty. This doesn’t have to be my permanent job.”

Early warned, no one complained for the rest of the trip.

I figured one beer wouldn’t hurt anyone, except Temaru who opted for a Sprite. I had always considered beer to be a food while at sea, as most sailors do. We had plenty of beer and soft drinks aboard with champagne and the hard stuff well hidden for special occasions and island celebrations.

I suggested to Pete and Jack that they make every attempt to stay ‘regular’. Constipation at sea is not a pleasant thing and can lead to major problems if not ‘rectal-fied’.

“Let it be known that I do not give enemas; there are suppositories in the medicine cabinets next to the barf bags.”

I told them to not put anything in the toilet bowl that they hadn't already eaten, with the one exception being the biodegradable wipes; if the mechanism became plugged they would have the unpleasant task of fixing the problem. Cherish had one advantage over most cruising yachts; she had two Jabsco Electric heads on opposite sides of the boat – one aft on port and the other forward on starboard. It is much more comfortable, if given a choice, to use whichever one is on the boat's lower heeling side so a user's legs and feet aren't dangling from the seat high in the air. However, it is not a pleasant thing to hear someone's use of the Jabsco macerator blast forth in the middle of a sound sleep. For we four men there was another urinal aft and always available while hanging on tight with the other hand around the backstay, and it didn't have to be flushed, only aimed.

I also told everyone, "Drink plenty of liquids and eat plenty of the fresh fruit we have on board, please." I looked at Pete, who was fair skinned and said, "You already know not to get sunburned; it can ruin your trip. There is plenty of Banana Boat SPF 100 in the medicine cabinets and zinc ointment works fine for the nose."

"Oh, and several more rules before I forget - we don't throw anything overboard that isn't biodegradable; all solid waste goes into the bagged trash bin, please keep all your stuff picked up and put away. This will be our home for the next few weeks; treat it so. The old cliché applies here - a neat ship is a happy ship. And don't sleep in your wet foulies; after a few days you'll regret it."

We would be sailing in the tropics for the entire voyage so warm clothing would not be needed – more like shorts, tees and windbreakers, with good topsiders required while on deck. I remembered the cover of a popular sailing magazine showing Hawaiian sailors all being barefoot; the following issue was full of scathing Letters to the Editor about how un-seamen-like that was. We Hawaiian sailors all laughed at the letters because we knew we had bigger better luau feet for gripping decks due to going barefoot or wearing sandals all the time. However, on long distance sails, deck shoes are imperative – a toe broken or stubbed on a deck cleat or anchor winch can be very painful. For heavy weather, there were five sets of new foul weather float coats with attached strobe lights. Double tether safety belts and flares were accessible in the hanging locker nearest the companionway.

I asked Cindy to throw one reef in the main, now so easily done by one person with our ‘stack pack’ reefing system that folds the main over the boom without the aid of extra crew. With plenty of wind, there was no use pushing hard the first night. Cindy eased the main halyard, winched in the lowest reefing line that ran through the leech and luff reefing cringles, tightened the halyard again, putting a lower shape in the mainsail thus reducing sail area by 15 percent.

My next request was more emphatic, “Cindy dear, I shouldn’t have to ask you to wear a bra or a bikini top under that tee shirt. I don’t want these guys losing their concentration and falling overboard if they are working the deck with you.”

“Okay Dad, I thought you might say something.” She stuck her tongue out at me and giggled. Before going below, she remarked, “I am so glad I decided to come with you. I’m loving this freedom.”

Cindy remained below for some well-earned sack time before her midnight watch.

I was interested in how Pete and Jack would handle themselves this first night so I scheduled myself to partner with each of them for their first night watch. The Hawaiian sunset was spectacular and Cherish was sliding up and down over and through very large Pacific hill-like rollers that surged on parade under her keel. Every once in a while a maverick swell would break just wrong and slap against her bow, sending a misty spray high into the air followed by water coursing down her decks. Sometimes the splash would reach the center cockpit to serve as a saltwater shower. With the air and seawater temperatures both in the low 80s Fahrenheit, a little surprise was refreshing.

Our first night’s official watch rotation began at 8 p.m. or on eight bells ship’s clock time. Both Hawaii and Tahiti are in the same time zones, so why bother with any other system such as using Greenwich Mean Time tied to an internationally agreed upon arbitrary zero meridian that passes through London. Best to keep our clock time and watches simple.

I took the wheel and directed Jack to sit next to me. He put on a safety belt, an imperative at night. I showed him the

function of having two separate tethers, both alternately clipped to something fixed if moving around on deck. I wanted to be his flight instructor this first night and have him try his hand at steering something different but not nearly as difficult as a F-35 fighter jet. We were sailing in what had become a moderate to heavy seas – not the easiest time or place to learn.

“You feeling okay,” I asked.

“A little disoriented Skipper, everything is so new; but as far as being sick, naw, I’m good. If I can pull 7 or 8 Gs at Mach 1.3 in a roll over dive, I think I’ll be able to handle this stuff.” He did the two-hand diving thing that all pilots seem to do when words are not enough. “Night doesn’t bother me either; my eyes are 20/20 and we jet jockeys fly at all times and in all kinds of heavy weather.” Then he pointed up to the Milky Way and said something that gave me more insight to his thinking. “Our God didn’t say, ‘Thou shall not fly airplanes’. But, he might have said, ‘Thou shall not covet other planets; you need to care for this one first.’”

“Amen to that.”

The glow of phosphorus defined the boat’s bow wake forty feet forward and rare streaks of bio-luminescence showed the path of a tuna, a mackerel or other hunting residents of the dark sea around us.

After the first hour, with Jack watching, I moved aside and he took the wheel. At first he treated it like a hot potato straight outa the oven until I said,

“Relax your body, but grip it with both hands and listen to me.”

Standing at his side, I told my pupil, “If you’re steering a set course, like tonight, there’s no normal need to move the wheel more than several inches - one spoke to the left or right – minor corrections only; it takes a while to get the hang of it and Cherish doesn’t like us changing her mind back and forth. Keep a solid but sensitive grasp; don’t over steer, but try to work the waves, don’t let them work you. This is not a one handed casual thing, it takes concentration. In these conditions, this big girl needs firmness to make her behave and she will reward us with a smoother sail. Let Cherish be your partner.”

I reached out to spread his hands and steady the motion – beginners have a tendency to over-correct – not much different than teaching a nervous teenager to drive a car. Several years ago I had installed a larger diameter wheel that helps any helmsman steer with less effort and more precise control - something called leverage. Jack spread his arms and hands wide, squared his shoulders, and tightened his grip on the leather-covered stainless steel.

“Plant your feet wide; try through your fingers and feet to sense the water passing by the keel and rudder. As I said before, the keel and sails are a balancing act, much like your airplane wings.

“Watch the trim of your sails and the dark horizon ahead with respect to the heel of the boat. The horizon is your best reference and is always level; this boat is rarely level on this point of sail. Don’t let her stray.”

“The damn horizon keeps disappearing behind the swells,” Jack complained and laughed.

I laughed too, “It’s always there, I assure you. Feel the wind on your face and neck. Glance at the compass, wind speed and wind angle instrumentation once in a while like you do in an aircraft; they are there for you but you don’t need them if you use all your senses. You’ll get used to it.”

I thought back to when I was a teenager, an old-timer at Newport Beach harbor taught me how to sail while facing aft so to feel the changes without looking forward.

“Keep a watchful eye for lights – especially any that seem to move. Don’t talk too much, words can dim the eyes and brain; you need to be attentive to everything going on around you.”

I paused to let this last instruction sink in and looked through the night, past our red and green bow lights, for anything unusual – always the constant job of all crewmen while on deck. I didn’t expect to see any other sailboats. Nor are there many commercial ships between Hawaii and Palmyra, but fishing vessels can always be a hazard with their submerged trailing lines that stretch miles behind; they are supposed to have orange lighted buoys and radar reflectors attached at intervals. You never know and always watch anyway. Sailing at night depends much on faith. On clear nights there are the stars of the Milky Way and half the month you have the phases of the moon. When it is stormy or overcast all you have is dark and more dark from after sunset to early dawn. You might think about driving a car on a mountain road with the car lights on dim or even turned off. I tried it once but not for long.

I told Jack, “Don’t let the night hours bother you; they make up half our lives.”

He said, “Yeah, don’t I know it.”

Night hours can drag; it is good to have someone to talk with, a periodic cup of coffee or a piece of chocolate.

“We have an Auto Identification System AIS,” I told him. “It’s line of sight, tied into our radar mounted up on the mast; it sounds an audible alarm when it senses an approaching commercial ship. The ship’s position, course and speed will be displayed on our chart table instrumentation. When that happens you really need your night vision. The bad news is that not all ships have the system installed.”

I remembered from my teenage sailing years while rounding the southeast corner of San Clemente Island one midnight, an aircraft carrier, part of a mock Navy coastal invasion on California beaches, passed close across our race course. We actually sailed through the remnant boil of the big ship’s wake and felt the churn. That was prior to AIS availability or GPS; scared the crap out of us on our insignificant 40-footer. The sponsoring yacht club had not notified the Navy about our tri-island racecourse, nor had the Navy notified the sponsoring yacht club of their plans, a recipe for possible disaster. After that, two way notification rules were changed.

Sailing west-southwest, the weather report indicated clear skies ahead; an unfiltered bright gibbous moon began to show her face behind us. How clever I had been to schedule the trip during a week of a full moon. Actually it had been an

accident. I looked with awe at the heavens, thanking God and my lucky stars. It was good to be back at sea.

“On a night like this, pick out a star or two, twenty or thirty degrees above the horizon straight ahead and steer by them until the night sky rotates west a bit, then, pick out one or two more. That’s what the ancient Polynesians used, as well as explorers like Magellan, Columbus, and Cook. Their charts were the stars.”

I selected a bright pair that would serve as examples, well above the ocean’s rim, but couldn’t remember their names from five years before. Arabic and Greek names made good stories, but known relative positions made them useful.

Over the space of another hour I watched the joy and confidence grow on Jack’s face. The dim light from the binnacle betrayed his determined smile. I thought, this young man is a natural – some can, some can’t. Glad to have him aboard. We traded the helm a couple of times for the remainder of our four hours and each time he steered a better course. At five minutes before midnight, Cindy and Temaru came up on deck for their watch.

“Nice job Jack.” We exchanged high fives. “Time passes quick when you’re challenged and learning. Go get some sack time.”

“Hey Jack,” said Temaru as they squeezed past at the companionway. “Use that lower main cabin bunk if you don’t want to sleep near Pete. I think he has had his face in the

toilet bowl a couple of times. You might get more sleep amidships?”

“Thanks buddy; good idea,” replied the pilot.

I was glad to see the start of some camaraderie, and after briefing the new watch on sea and wind conditions, I went below to see if Pete needed anything other than a damp clean towel or two, between his gut retching sickness.

“I’ll be okay Skipper,” he croaked. “Lost some dinner but feeling better. I’ll be okay. Shouldn’t have partied last night.”

I had my doubts and wondered if fear and worry had contributed to his problem; but it is true that after an initial upchuck or two, you do feel better. You either recover or get worse. He would have to work it out alone.

I returned to the chartable, my office so to speak, flipped on the red nightlight and gazed at the bank of blinking lights and displays in front of me. It had been awhile since sitting at Cherish’s nighttime nerve center. I dialed in a reliable Met Service out of Wellington, New Zealand that gave cloud structure and type for my Pacific area and checked it against another weather service from the United States Coast Guard out of Point Reyes, California. Steady easterly winds would prevail for the short-term. The weather around Palmyra showed variable without direction. I then entered our wind, boat speed, sea condition, time and GPS data on page one of my brand new logbook and placed a neat little ‘x’ and time on the large scale North Pacific chart. I wanted to plot our dead reckoning position as a running backup to the electronic magic of the digital Garmin instrument package blinking in front of me. I thought, we’ve come a long way from the need

to shine a flashlight on a colored piece of yarn blowing from the wire shrouds and luff of the sails.

The paper log had a space for comments, so I started an open commentary that would be kept by us all for the duration of our trip and perhaps serve much later as entertaining reading or the nucleus for a book. I wrote something about Pete paying his initiation dues to Neptune and that school for the new guys was in session. It was way too late to call Christine.

I headed forward to a shortened four-hour appointment with the sail bags. Before going to sleep, I thought about my wife and young daughter as they had waved aloha from the yacht club docks. Chris had the forethought to buy me a bon voyage pikaki flower lei that was now hanging around the ship's bulkhead clock. She knew that the fragrant jasmine smell was my favorite and might contribute to a more pleasant cabin odor, at least for a day or two before we began to smell ourselves and take bucket baths. In five years, she and I had never been separated for much more than a day at work. I would miss her presence and love more than I figured. I owed her a sat-phone call.

Temaru and Cindy made a good team for the midnight to four a.m. watch; both could steer well, set or reduce a sail, and make good decisions. I trusted them completely. Although this trip would be Temaru's first long distance sail, he had raced with us on many Oahu club races and would make his Tahitian ancestors proud with his boatmanship and maturity. Temaru would grow to be a good-sized man; at fourteen he was already five foot nine, a hundred and fifty

pounds and well muscled. The two hapa-siblings, Temaru and Cindy, had always gotten along with each other even though not blood related. Their commonality was water sports and of course living under the same roof as with my other loved ones.

Cindy took the wheel and Temaru hooked a tether from his safety belt onto the plastic coated wire jack-line that runs almost the length of both side-decks. He sat back against the wet fiberglass cockpit siding, and asked, “Wow, Cindy, how would you describe these conditions?”

She laughed and answered, “Somewhere on the edge of gnarly and fricking awesome. Cherish needs to air her wings and fly awhile. We are in the Ka’le’le Waho Channel; Kauai is way over there and already well out of sight if it were daylight.” She pointed northeast. “This large swell going our way is a little tricky, but we’re making good knots – eights and nines – sometimes more. Steering is fun; it is almost like directing an orchestra.”

“I love it too Sis. I’m so glad Mom said okay; this is a great way for me to return home”

“I guess little brother that Tahiti will always be your home, no matter where you are.”

“Yeah, but I’d like to see some of the world like Dad has.”

“I should tell you Temaru that Dad has a tendency to embellish his travels and omit the negatives.”

The two turned silent for a while, checking sails, scanning the horizon – or at least as far as they could see through the

night - and getting used to the rise and fall of their 50,000 pound steed. Temaru watched his stepsister handle the wheel and utilize her senses to keep a steady course yet at the same time watch the seas ahead and behind. She would steer the bow up a few degrees from the bottom of a blue-black trough and then ride the breaking crest of some of the larger waves down the other sides until the bow threatens to be a submarine and then recover to repeat the process. Cindy and her twin sister Diane had been sailing since they were toddlers.

Temaru broke the silence, speaking loud enough over the sound of the wind and waves. “Cindy, you and I haven’t spent a lotta time together. We are kinda both around the house, comin’ and goin’ for meals, but we haven’t talked about stuff very much. Maybe we can on this trip?”

Cindy smiled and asked, “What do you mean, ‘stuff’?”

“Oh, girl boy stuff. Mom is pretty private and tells me, ‘You should ask your dad’, but dad is always busy. I asked him once and he said, ‘You have to find that out yourself like I did’. I was hoping maybe you could explain a few things. I’ve been busy with sports, school and lately helping to fix up the Papeete house; I don’t know how to act. I think about girls, but I don’t know why or what I should be thinking. You vahines, even at my age, know a lot more about that stuff than we guys.”

“So it’s young women now you want to know about and not girls?” And she thought. This should be interesting; how much do I tell him?

Her wonder went unanswered. Right then, Pete came scrambling up through the companionway, holding a towel over his mouth and grabbing a handy rail. He leaned dangerously out of the cockpit on the lee side next to Temaru who quickly unhooked and jumped to the other side, out of the way. Pete's accumulated mouth-full flew with the wind, mostly overboard and aft. After minutes of spitting, belching, sweating, and retching, he sat there huddled and shaking, his face pale, and his back pressed against the cabin bulkhead, waiting for the next explosion. A sympathetic wave ran the length of the deck and washed his remnant bile into the sea. Even so, the smell lingered.

Cindy told him, "If you need to stay below, lie on the floorboards in the center of the boat, or better yet stay up here, like you are, for the fresh air; concentrate on the horizon. The rim of the earth is the only thing that's fixed and level. Temaru, get him some saltine crackers, a bottle of ginger ale and his windbreaker and harness."

"I'm so sorry," was all Pete was able to mumble, as Cherish continued to ride the untamed waves to the southwest.

"My fault," said Cindy. I should have insisted yesterday that you wear a Scopolamine ear patch; too late now. She turned to Temaru, "There are three kinds of human beings – alive, dead, and seasick - I don't think you can die from seasickness, but it is said that you want to."

Chapter 2 – Outward Bound

"Seize the time...Live now! Make now always the most precious time. Now will never come again."

– Jean-Luc Picard, Star Trek

The first few days on a small boat at sea are the most important and perhaps the most difficult. That short step from dock to deck becomes a long leap of faith from the world of solid land and complexity to the ever-changing not-so-simple world of boat, sky and water. It's a definite relearning process.

When *Cherish* cast off from San Diego five years earlier, bound for Polynesia, she carried an experienced crew of five, all family and everyone familiar with each person's strengths and weaknesses. It was a beautiful, exciting and a strange passage to several South Pacific islands as well as an unplanned trip back two hundred years in time to a place called O'Taheiti. For this present passage *we* sailed away from Oahu's north shore, again with five aboard, but three had never been out of sight of land. I knew I should have had at least one all day shakedown cruise to allow Pete and Jack to become familiar with the boat, or better yet one more experienced crewperson aboard. I also knew the short briefing while at the dock was insufficient, but I didn't want to wait 'til after the forecasted heavy weather from Mexico rolled on through. I was all too anxious to get back to sea and on our way to Tahiti; I had a business to set up and a beautiful

ocean front place to live with my loved ones. Sailing *Cherish* or any boat has always been pure joy, a friendly dual with the elements, a long time love affair, and a place where I feel most alive.

Perhaps my overconfidence and thirty years of sailing experience had replaced wisdom. A day or two at sea would tell. There were at least 2800 open ocean miles ahead, about the same distance as from Los Angeles to New York City – a long sail at an average speed of six knots – with one or two planned island stops along the way. I planned twenty days at sea.

The first afternoon, sailing away from Kaneohe Bay, was almost perfect, cloudless with moderate winds; the kind of day that if a person didn't sail, they might be playing golf or napping under a palm tree at a grassy park. I knew that when each of the crew stepped aboard *Cherish* they had different concerns and expectations. Once aboard they must instantly transform, adapt and commit to a different life and change from being individuals into a compatible team. Natural land stability is immediately gone, traded for the hoped for workings of the inner ear – balance, orientation, awareness, and equilibrium. We essentially have a gyroscope in each of our ears that hopefully begins to work sooner than later. Most things ashore need be forgotten, to be replaced by dealing with physical limitations on an always-moving watery world to include constant considerations for safety, crew duties, personal hygiene, handrails, fellow crew, good food, and if possible enough sleep. In rough going, fatigue can be a formable enemy. They must also commit to living with four

others in the space of a tiny apartment with up top awkward deck privileges and the possibility of one misstep and drowning.

I watched as Pete Dawley slowly recovered from the hated mal de mar. I had been there, done that more than once – spent a number of minutes or a few hours curled up in a bunk wanting at least to be somewhere else - and then summon the resolve to crawl on deck, suck in fresh air, and hope to hell you can shake it. One of my worst had been crewing on a Hunter 54 on a race from Waikiki around tiny Mokapu Island, a rock just past the Kalaupapa leper colony off the north shore of Molokai. At the time, I would have volunteered for solace ashore with any remnant leper. I laughed to myself, and knew the feeling, as I heard Pete mumble, “Ah, thank you god, maybe I’ll live.”

Pete’s recovery is a well-known process, from the initial emptying of all offending stomach contents, followed by partial upheavals or random dry heaves and sour rancid tastes, and then the resolve to nibble on a few crackers eaten like precious time capsules, maybe an entire pretzel, with slow sips of ginger ale or 7 UP. Sometimes a stalk of celery will help. Pete recovered in time to join me for the four a.m. watch.

I wanted to go through the same instructions and hands on experience with Pete that I had completed earlier with Jack, so was pleased when he joined me again on deck. Temaru and Cindy went below.

“I think I’m okay skipper; let’s do this thing. Show me about wheel steering. All I know are small boats with stick tillers*.”

“Well, if you are sure and not macho pretending, sit next to me for a while, watch and listen. If you’re feeling queasy again, get a fix on the thin horizon. The initial thing you need to do when coming out on watch is figure out what is happening, look around at the sea, the sky and stars.

“I can find the big dipper and North Star, but that’s about it.”

“Okay, that’s a start, but won’t help us where we are going. Check out the set of our sails, our boat’s relationship with the waves, and what the instruments are telling us.”

I pointed to each dial mounted on the pedestal instrument package in front of the wheel.

“Right now the apparent wind speed, taken at the top of the mast, is averaging 18, our course is 240 degrees southwest, and boat speed is between 8 and 9 knots. *Cherish* seems well balanced and note I am not normally turning the wheel more than a spoke; I may have to spin it if she gets thrown off course by a larger wave. Jack picked it up pretty well. I’m sure you will too with your small boat experience.”

Cherish’s bow was slicing through the seas, throwing chunks of foamy ocean high into the air. The phosphorescent bow wake glowed red and green reflecting our navigations lights, and our stern wake was leaving a white path one hundred yards behind. Night sailing is a whole different experience and I was loving it.

By the time I went through the steering by star navigation with Pete, and he completed two hours on the wheel with little coaching, the eastern sky had turned from inky black to dark blue and lighter. Coming on deck for the 4 a.m. morning watch is like entering a mysterious, dark and starlit planetarium in the middle of a sky show. Mother Earth slowly turns up her morning rheostat, then along comes the welcome sunrise bursting on the watery scene with a sequence of colors not seen on land. What wonderful splendor we false denizens of the sea are treated to when we wander over the horizon and the weather cooperates. Other times a morning can remain dark, foreboding and very wet and rough. This dawn was near perfect. *Good morning world.*

The Milky Way was the first to fade, and all the sky took on a pink and golden hue - a few tardy stars persisted, until they too went to sleep for another half a turn. Before it got too light, I recalled the classic Greek and Arabic names of a few old friends; the brightest remaining stars spilled from my memory's tongue; I pointed.

"There's Rigel, Betelgeuse, Castor, Aldebaran and the always faithful Morning Star, also known as planet Venus - they are all easily identified by most old time sailors and by nomads on Sahara camels."

I laughed and remembered to tell him, "Don't mistake a satellite for a star or planet; there are something like seven thousand satellites up there and more than half are no longer operational and have become 'space junk'. I guess space is free, at least for now?" I wondered, *are we cluttering up space like we are the oceans? I knew the answer to be yes.*

How way above earth will we ever clean the ionosphere? My mind wandered. Even if man can gather up all the pieces in some gigantic vacuum cleaner, where then would we put them? Hmm, not my problem.

Night sailing, heavy seas, stars, wheel steering were all new to Pete. By the end of our four hours he seemed to have recovered his equilibrium and was thankful for it. Funny thing, a bright morning sky doesn't seem so important on terra firma and is taken so for granted. At sea change is constant; the sun can bring hope for each new day that all is well throughout the sailor's world. The night can mystify; the morning light explains. Pete smiled and said, "Thanks Bob, that was great."

The wind decreased and the seas began to soften with the dawn, whitecaps dissolving into wavelets. The day would be what I had hoped for – 12 to 15 knots and smoother seas - and as far as Pete and Jack were concerned, I think I had my reliable crew, a few more days would prove the point – thanks to good referrals and a little bit of luck. They were both good men.

***Comment:** With a tiller, the helmsman pulls or pushes left to turn a boat to the right, depending on which side he is steering from. With a wheel, the helmsman rotates the wheel left to go left and right to go right, like a car. Author's apologies to those of you who already know both.

As we sailed, I thought about Mother Ocean. She can be a lover with soft and playful caresses to be enjoyed for as long as she cares; she can be a tough protagonist to be met with equal sailing skill and defenses; or, she can be a bully, a screaming bitch, and an angry monster all combined, conspiring with her friends the wind, rain, and cold to take advantage by massive size and weight, all to test man's capabilities and patience. There is never much to see on the ocean's surface other than her current behavior – she keeps her secrets well hidden below, and she never tires of new surprises. I expected that during this trip we would encounter all of her fickle moods. What I did not expect to see was as much plastic – bags, Styrofoam, cups, water bottles, six-pack can holders, and other floating debris we were sailing by, the kind of stuff to be seen layering a city dump. No wonder Mother Ocean gets so angry.

Yesterday I was concerned – were we under-crewed and ill prepared? With this new day, I was much more optimistic and looked forward to sharing this new experience with two family members and two new sailor friends – the four now dependent on me.

A blond head poked out of the companionway with two steaming cups of coffee. “Hot coffee guys?” she asked and handed one to me.

“I'd like to trade mine in for another cold ginger ale if I may?” asked Pete.

“No problem,” Cindy answered but hung there in the opening with a big ‘Good Morning’ smile, her long blond hair blowing around her sun tanned face.

Oh my gosh, for a split second I had a flash from the past; I thought my first wife Megan was smiling at me from so many years ago when Cindy’s mother had brought the morning coffee, they looked so much alike. Megan had loved sailing as much as I and was competitive enough to enjoy racing with me – all the Catalina Island, San Diego and Ensenada races. Memories like that must happen for a reason and the split-second image seemed to whisper – *don’t forget me in your enthusiasm for adventure, and now you have another wife who loves you as I did.*

The thought left me with some guilt about leaving Christine and Tania, and I decided that when *Cherish* got to Tahiti I needed to talk Chris into joining us on some of these long distance sails – to teach her, if willing, as I had my daughters, give her a chance to relax, be comfortable with the motion like she was with her Tahitian dancing – oh my, did she have the motion of the ocean when she danced - and to enjoy raw nature. She had been using daughter Tania as an excuse, but maybe having her son Temaru on board as crew, she would agree to sail with us – worth thinking about anyway. It may be true that many women in their thirties have a hard time acclimating to long range cruising or competitive racing; by then they have developed their own interests and are often wrongly treated by experienced male sailors as ‘in the way’ or ‘not strong enough’ or simply along to do the

cooking. I certainly would never mention this observation to anyone I knew.

I remembered sailing many weekends during high school with a good friend named John on a 33-foot sloop. His father was Commodore of a well-known California yacht club and owned the sailboat. John's brother also sailed. Looking back, I guess they were both expected to sail and be good at it and they were. John had the same girlfriend all through high school and college, but for some reason she didn't sail with us – perhaps not invited? It was more a guy thing in those days. After college they became engaged, but there was a problem. She apparently told him, “John, it is either the boat or me; I will not compete with your sailing.” They married but he never sailed again. I sure as hell didn't want a similar conflict with my Chris.

There is no stronger bond than true human love in this world and I was missing her already and wondered, if during the excitement of departure, had I really kissed her goodbye? I needed to call her.

“Thanks doll; have always loved that first coffee,” was my reply to Cindy and I think she understood about who was missing. We smiled and touched cups in a silent toast to the past and a new day.

When Temaru came up on deck for fresh air, wiping sleepy eyes, no shoes, no shirt, no safety belt, he climbed forward to stand at the base of the mast. I yelled at him.

“Hey young fella, get back down here and put your belt on; you know the rules. It’s still pretty rough.”

“Okay; in a minute.”

But he didn’t move – just stood there – one hand shielding his eyes, one hand holding tight to a wire shroud, turning his body, head and eyes to view 360 degrees of undulating salt water – searching all points, changing hand holds, then looking at me.

“Wow, Dad; no more land, no reference points, no island to check out where we are. I didn’t know it was so awesomely vast from down here on top of all this blue. We’re like five tiny ants on a leaf floating on a big lake. From an airplane, it is huge but not so overwhelming.”

“Good analogy son. As they say, ‘water water everywhere,’ not to mention that it is over 10,000 feet deep.”

Temaru had started calling me Dad instead of Bob only recently, perhaps subconsciously or finally wanting to recognize our substitute relationship. I was so thankful for such a change. I had sired three girls and raising a teenaged boy was a different kind of challenge that I welcomed. My own father had been killed in Vietnam. How could I help Temaru grow into a man, there is no manual?

Cindy handed up his safety belt.

“Hey Temaru,” I yelled. “Put on the belt, and let’s switch to the big jib. Keep a watch and make sure the lines run smooth.”

I turned to Pete, still next to me, and told him, “Watch.”

Two years ago I had upgraded the headsail rigs with Harken roller-furlers that allow for the sails to be furled to

any size. I had to have the jibs slightly recut at North's Sail Loft. Since then everything works smoothly and both headsails roll up as easy and tight as an old-fashioned, vinyl window shade. "Hey Cindy, show Pete how it's done." She bent to the task.

Furling lines hummed through fairleads and spinning drums and in the next minute, sheets were eased and the smaller staysail was tightly wound around its jackstay; then the larger genoa jib-sheets were pulled through track slide blocks to three speed winches, the sail unfurled, sheets tailed and cleated, and #1 was filled and pulling with twice the area and twice the force. Our boat speed picked up two knots. *Cherish* loved it and showed her pleasure by heeling six more degrees.

About the Author

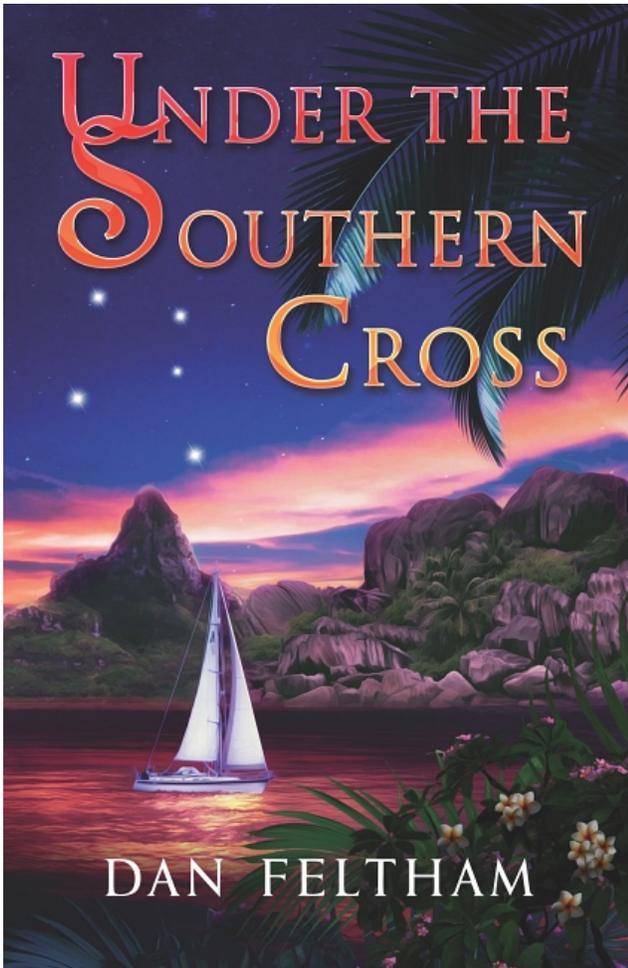
Dan Feltham is retired and living the quiet life in Southern California with his loving wife, Erika. He was born in Long Beach CA in 1934. He is a graduate Geologist of Stanford University with follow up studies at UCLA. After living three years in North Africa in petroleum exploration, he switched disciplines and pursued an extensive career with the IBM Corporation in what he prefers to call 'problem solving' with systems, marketing and management, including several years each in Hawaii, Southeast Asia, Saudi Arabia and Southern California. He has enjoyed international travel and also owned and raced sailboats most of his life. He is the author of ten other e-Pub adventure novels, *Trade Winds Calling*, *The Catalina Connection*, *Mount Rushmore's Legacy*, *The Edge of Time*, a San Diego County award winner - *Terror in the Gulf*, then *Mexican Standoff*, *Sahara Sands* as a Memoir, *Copper Canyon*, *Egyptian Gold*, and *O'Taheiti Dreamin'*. As background material for sailing episodes within a few of his books, Dan can refer to bareboat sailing charters in Caribbean, Mexican, Tahitian and Fijian waters, extensive racing including the 1976 Olympic Qualifying Trials and three TransPacific yacht races to Hawaii. Dan also self published a non-fiction account of his personal Vietnam experiences entitled, *When Big Blue Went To War*, *the History of the IBM Corporation's Mission in Southeast Asia During the Vietnam War*. The book has been praised by many as a one-of-a-kind look at war from the civilian contractor's

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personal point of view while living within a war zone – a life changing experience for Dan and his Band of IBM Brothers. Dan can be reached via e-mail at danfeltham77@gmail.com.



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