ANNUAL BLUEWATER ISSUE!

PassageMaker®

The Trawler & Ocean Motorboat Magazine

A REFINED CLASSIC FLEMING 65

EGRET'S CIRCUMNAVIGATION: Turn Your Dreams Into Reality

OFFSHORE CRUISING: Venezuelan Islands And Bimini

AUGUST 2011
$5.99US $7.99CAN
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Egret's Circumnavigation & You

Story And Photography By Scott And Mary Flanders

Egret, our little white fiberglass ship, completed her circumnavigation in February, becoming the first small, private powerboat to pass below the five great Southern Ocean capes. *Egret* had departed her home port of Ft. Lauderdale on May 16, 2004, as a participant in the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally. After her time in the Mediterranean, she left Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in the Canary Islands, in September 2006, bound for South America.

Four and a half years later, she returned to Las Palmas, having completed her circumnavigation and having visited countless countries along the way. It was the grandest adventure imaginable.

We've told stories in the pages of *PMM* about the breathtaking ports we've visited around the world, and there are many more to tell. But now we'd like to talk about something much more important than what *Egret* did—what you can do to get started on your own personal voyage of discovery aboard your boat.

We will use the crew of *Egret* as an example that is fairly typical of other circumnavigators, under both power and sail. When Mary and I decided to embark on our voyage, we were at the peak of our careers, our two boys were enjoying their own lives, the dog had died, the cat had died, and we were buried in the work routine of simply making more money. It was only that—money—nothing more. The mountains we had climbed earlier in our careers were behind us, and now it was time to enjoy something fresh and exciting, something that would present new challenges.

We had been small-boat owners for years, boating and fishing in our home waters of South Florida. Then *PMM* entered our lives, along with various sailing magazines, with tales of faraway places. This became a powerful pull, and ultimately we decided that the passagemaking lifestyle was for us. However, we were cautious, as you might imagine.

We researched boats for four years and decided to buy an "interim boat" to see if the cruising life was really for us. We bought a lovely little 32 Grand Banks and named her *Proud Mary*. Then we took an unprecedented month off work and spent it in the Bahamas.

We were hooked.

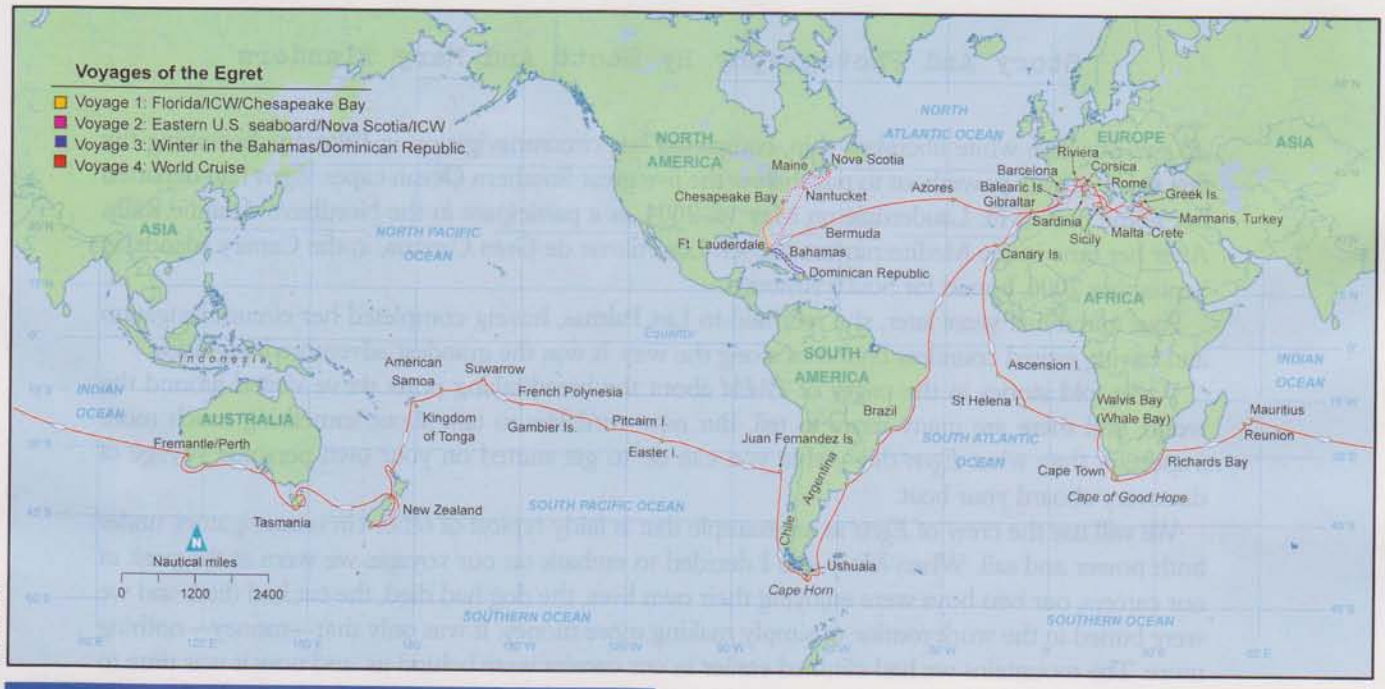
Initially, we planned to keep our weekend home in the Florida Keys and buy a larger used Grand Banks and follow the sun north and south. Then we were bitten by the long-distance bug. At the Miami boat show in February 2000, we handed a deposit check to PAE's Jim Leishman for what is now our only home—our Nordhavn 46, *Egret*. What a beauty she is, even after a decade of ownership. She has never let us down in all the miles we've traveled. No matter what, we know she will always take care of us.

OUR CRUISING PLANS—OR LACK THEREOF

We worked and lived aboard for six months before retiring in the spring of 2002. At that time, our only goal was to cruise to the Chesapeake for the summer and to winter in the Bahamas. This, we did. Our first offshore trip took us from Ft. Lauderdale to St. Mary's Inlet at the Florida–Georgia border. What an adventure that was! The following year we cruised from Ft. Lauderdale directly to Nantucket, then directly to Nova Scotia. We arrived in Nantucket just after daybreak; the fog had lifted, and the Blue Angels were overhead, practicing for the Fourth of July celebrations. It was magic. We were so proud of ourselves for completing our first 1,000nm offshore leg.

Then came the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally, and off *Egret* went to the Mediterranean, spending two and a half years living history. She wintered the first year in Barcelona, Spain, and the second in Marmaris, Turkey.

Opposite page left: Local day-fishing boats, Mauritius. The locals motor offshore to the reefs with tiny outboards and ride the afternoon sea breeze back under a simple jib. Opposite page right: An emerald set in bronze. Interior of St. Helena Island, South Atlantic. St. Helena is best known as the home of Napoleon's second exile.



Paul Mirto

Egret in the mist, Walvis Bay (Whale Bay), Namibia. Namibia is a special place in Africa where we hope to return someday.

By this time, we were ready for a grand adventure, so we recrossed the Atlantic to Brazil, cruised south to Argentina and Chile, and rounded Cape Horn. We enjoyed the "deep south" so much that we spent 15 months cruising this wonderland (see *PMM* July/Aug. '07 and July/Aug. '08). Then we headed to the Juan Fernández Islands off the coast of Chile, magical Easter Island, Pitcairn Island, and the Gambier Islands. Next, we cruised north to French Polynesia (including Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine, and Bora Bora; see *PMM* July/Aug. '09), then to American Samoa and Suwarrow, and west to the Kingdom of Tonga. We spent 14 wonderful months in New Zealand (see *PMM* July/Aug. '10). Our next stop was Tasmania (see *PMM* May/June '11). We explored the Australian continent for nine months; crossed the Indian Ocean, stopping at Mauritius and Reunion; and traveled to South Africa and Namibia, cruising back into the Atlantic and to St. Helena Island and Ascension Island. We then continued north, staying east of the Cape Verde Islands, and completed our circumnavigation in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

When Mary and I took delivery of *Egret* on Aug. 6, 2001, we didn't have the slightest idea what we were going to do or where we were going to cruise, other than our aforementioned plans to visit the Chesapeake and the Bahamas. The rest sort of evolved. Never in our wildest dreams did we think beyond a trip to Alaska, and even that was intimidating at the time. In fact, just getting to Chesapeake Bay from Florida was a bit intimidating. But it happened. We made mistakes and learned from those mistakes, and the next thing you know, here we are. It is somewhat remarkable.

LETTING THINGS EVOLVE

Now let's talk about you. You may notice in what we described above that we didn't have any long-term plans for traveling to predetermined destinations. More specifically, we had no schedule. A schedule is a dangerous thing to have on a boat. We believe travel plans should be made on the fly as your cruising evolves, your interests mature, your skills improve, and your tolerance to sea conditions changes. It is a constantly moving target.

The first step is to get you started thinking about boating as a lifestyle, not focusing on how to do this or that. However, I will add this one observation. Your choice of boat should be forward-thinking; it should not be based

on your current ideas and skills, because those will change with time. Again, it's a moving target. If you address each target specifically, you will wear yourself out both mentally and financially, meeting each new era with the boat of the year. Mary and I were lucky enough to have the foresight to buy a boat that could do it all, just in case our plans changed. It was a wise decision.

Next comes the biggest lesson of all—a lesson about partnership. At this point, you're probably racing to absorb all the boating information you can. Of course, your wife of many years will pick up on this. She's pretty smart—in fact, very smart. A smart husband will share with his wife all the information he has and will discuss it with her. Smart couples become a team and research together, plan together, dream together. These deals don't work at 80-20 or 70-30. The admiral-to-be needs to be completely filled in.

Consider the alternative. Let's say you keep your cruising dreams to yourself, and then one day you announce what you (the two of you) are going to do, completely upsetting your spouse's comfortable life. The reaction is predictable. So you start dancing with your sales routine, but she doesn't buy in. Let's turn it around. Say your wife announces one day that you (the two of you) are going to adopt seven children from Nepal. And then she starts dancing with her sales pitch. Get the picture?

If you plan your cruising life together and set off on your adventure as partners, you will experience a wonderful phenomenon. You won't just want each other, you'll need each other. You will become closer than ever before, without the distraction of jobs, family obligations, and shore-bound issues. You will become the people you always envisioned yourselves being, without having to put on a work face or a parent face. You will be free for the first time in your lives. Think about it.

Even as a team working together with a common goal, the practicalities of boating may seem intimidating at first. How will we steer? How will we anchor, dock, navigate, and acquire the long list of skills we will need? Boating is nothing more than a series of skills that you will learn, just as you've learned in your careers and family life. In your teens, the first day you took the family car out of the driveway was very intimidating. (And very exciting.) The same applies to when your first child was born, when you started your first job, and so on. Boating is exactly the same—learning in baby steps. In no time, what seemed so daunting will become routine. You will develop as a team. To this day, when we're anchoring or docking, Mary runs the deck, and I drive. Even when skilled boater friends are aboard, Mary makes the decisions about what to do when. We have our routine, and it works every time. And remember: it is much safer to boat than to drive an automobile.

Something else we should mention that relates to this topic: Let's say you goof up docking and get a scratch on your shiny new boat. So what? It's just a scratch, and gelcoat is easy to repair. If you think the world has witnessed your mishap, again, so what? They've all done the same thing. In fact, we still bash docks, just not as regularly. We haven't gotten stuck in the mud these past few years only because the mud has been deep. Before *Egret* left on the Nordhavn Atlantic Rally, getting stuck in the mud was a somewhat regular occurrence. An occasional mishap is a small price to pay for the freedom and sense of doing that we cruisers enjoy.

Lastly, do both of yourselves a big favor, and don't yell at each other. Yelling is very counterproductive to happy. We find the best thing to do is to turn it around—if you've made mistakes, after things calm down and it's time for sundowners on the flybridge, have a good laugh about it. Or even make up your own song. Something like, "We are the bashers, we are the bashers, da-da-di-da-da..." Sound silly? It is. So what? When you're out cruising, you are free to do anything, including being silly. And the two of you will become even closer.

DESTINATION: HAPPY

Another topic to address is cruising destinations. All that matters is that you are happy in your travels. Cruising is not a competition; it is a lifestyle that can make you very content. And don't think you have to cross an ocean to be happy, or do some dangerous deed. A dangerous deed is dangerous because you haven't acquired the skills or don't have the boat to make it safe. Boating itself is not dangerous. As I type these words, *Egret* is well over 1,600nm from Brazil and 1,300nm from Angola, but we feel perfectly safe. You are at greater risk driving to work tomorrow. Learn the skills, and if you want to cruise a thousand nautical miles from land on a grand adventure, good for you. If you want to cruise the U.S. coast, good for you, too. It doesn't get any better than happy.

One topic that deserves a brief mention is the cost of cruising. How much does a car cost? The question is unanswerable, and the same is true of cruising. The most accurate statement we can make is that you spend what you have. We will say that by dropping our shoreside responsibilities, we live quite comfortably on a small percentage of our former income. As a simple personal test, look at your checkbook and credit card entries for last month, and eliminate all shoreside expenses. You will be surprised at the result.

Egret has less square footage than our bedroom, closet,

Top: In a National Geographic-like setting, flamingos were nesting by the thousands within sight of downtown Walvis Bay. Above left: Mary in Karijini National Park, Western Australia. Karijini is Australia's mini Grand Canyon. Ancient riverbeds cut these beautiful areas through the plateau. Above right: Inland Queensland, Australia, is pastoral with a mix of Norman Rockwellish villages, each with their distinctive roadhouse/hotel/bar from the 1800s where we stopped occasionally for pub meals and conversation with locals.

and dressing area in the home we used to own. There was a time, years ago, when the relative lack of space might have been important. But after cruising and living a simple life, we do not have the slightest desire to own the possessions we used to own. We don't want that life again. Fellowship, camaraderie, adventure, and freedom are today's wants, not anything material.

If we take a look at ourselves and our fellow long-distance cruisers, as a group we are no smarter or braver (or any other adjective you might choose) than you. We've simply had a head start with cruising, nothing more. We all learned in baby steps and lengthened our stride as time and sea miles passed. For the fortunate among you who do choose cruising as a lifestyle, in time you will realize you are the same as the others who are out on the water, and vice versa. Then, it will be your turn to give back and help the newbies find their way, just as others helped us.

What is next for the *Egret* crew? After completing our circumnavigation and arriving in Las Palmas, we planned to return to our hometown of Ft. Lauderdale for a whirlwind visit, catching up with family, friends, and doctor's appointments. We would fly back to Las Palmas a few weeks later and make a short hop to Gibraltar for fuel.

Upon reentering the Mediterranean after five years away, our first destination will be the small village of Andratx on the west coast of Majorca, in the Balearic Islands off Spain. Andratx features a natural harbor with high hills rising behind it. There is a *restaurante* on the waterfront that has small tables and large umbrellas perched just at the edge of the harbor. In the mornings, it is *Egret* tradition to arrive early, before the crowds, and order a *café con leche,* along with a couple light-as-a-cloud pastries with powdered sugar on top. *Egret* will sit at anchor in the background, sparkling in the morning sun.

Our plans after that? Whatever we choose.

We hope that in the future you can write those powerful, life-changing words—"whatever we choose." Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Ciao.

PAE interviewed Scott and Mary about their views on cruising in a "fireside chat." The five-part video series is listed at this link: www.nordhavn.com/egret/video.php.