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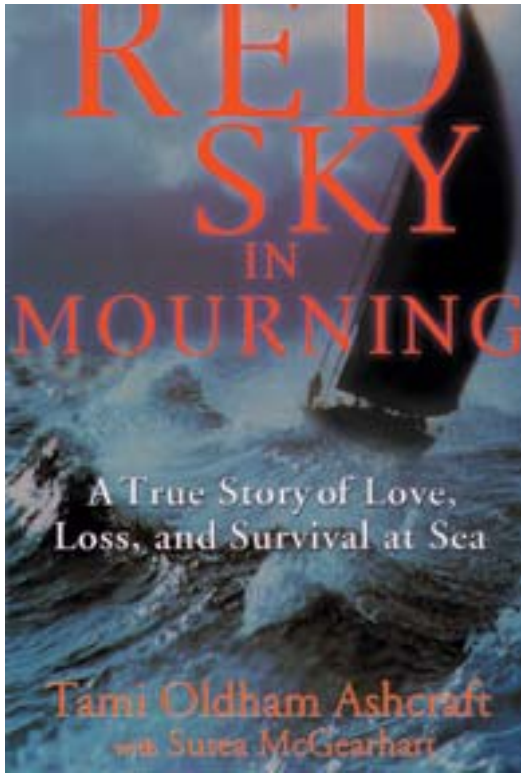
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New book recounts terrifying tale of woman's 41-day survival at sea when her fiancé is swept overboard

You've seen the movie, now imagine the horror of *living* through the "perfect storm."



One of the most gripping accounts of human survival ever published, *Red Sky in Mourning* by Tami Oldham Ashcraft takes readers literally into the eye of Hurricane Raymond – followed by her terrifying 41-day ordeal to reach land, 1500 miles away, after her fiancé was swept overboard.

Both accomplished sailors with over 50,000 miles logged between them, Richard Sharp and Tami Oldham Ashcraft, then 23 years old, had been hired to deliver the 44-foot luxury yacht, *Hazana*, to its owners in San Diego. The day they left Tahiti, the skies were a brilliant blue and the weather forecast predicted perfect conditions for their 31-day cruise.

Twenty days into their journey, they were suddenly trapped in every sailor's worst nightmare, as their vessel heaved and dropped over five stories with each rolling wave. Sharp sent Ashcraft below to watch the barometer

readings, while he remained behind the wheel. The last thing she remembers was his scream, "OHMIGOD!," as the boat slid into a mammoth trench – then capsized 360° and catapulted end-to-end through the air.

Twenty-seven hours later, Ashcraft regained consciousness, severely injured and disoriented. Sharp was gone, and the sea was now a dead calm. The boat had taken on over three feet of water. The mast had snapped off, taking the sails with it. The motor was ruined, the electronics were fried. The radio was lost, making it impossible for her to send a mayday signal. And she had a limited supply of food and water. Only the rudder was still intact.

Left with only her native instincts and an often-wavering will to survive, Ashcraft managed to chart a path to the Hawaiian islands, though averaging only two knots an

RED SKY IN MOURNING Book Announcement

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hour. One wrong calculation on her sextant or hour not spent at the wheel steering the *Hazana* to its destination, and there's no doubt she would never have arrived.

Through it all, Ashcraft conquered overwhelming heartbreak, paralyzing fear, and severe depression. On her arrival, she weighed only 100 pounds (40 pounds less than when she started), and the boat was declared a total loss by the insurer.

Originally self-published in the fall of 1998, *Red Sky in Mourning: A True Story of Love, Loss, and Survival at Sea* was discovered by New York agent Jill Grinberg while visiting Friday Harbor, a popular travel destination in the San Juan Islands off the coast of Washington State where Ashcraft lives. A subsequent bidding war among several major publishing houses ensued, won by Hyperion Books – which released it in July 2002. *Red Sky in Mourning* is already in print in six languages and over seven countries outside North America, along with the audio version (narrated by Ashcraft).

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A complete online media kit is available at www.tamiashcraft.com/pressroom.html.

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Red Sky In Mourning A True Story of Love, Loss, and Survival At Sea

*by Tami Oldham Ashcraft
with Susea McGearhart*

On September 22, 1983, Tami Oldham, then only 23, and her fiancé Richard Sharp, 34, set sail on a 31-day crossing from Tahiti to San Diego, California, hired to deliver the 44-foot Trintella luxury yacht, *Hazana*, to its owners.

Despite their ages, Tami and Richard had collectively logged over 50,000 miles on the high seas. Richard, who had been born and raised in England,

built 30- to 50-foot ferro-cement yachts before taking off on his own 36-foot sailboat, *Mayaluga*, several years before. Tami, a San Diego native, had already crewed her way from Mexico to French Polynesia and New Zealand, before joining up with Richard on an extended cruise to the South Pacific islands and New Zealand.

At first, Tami had not wanted to make the trip, preferring instead to continue on the course they had chartered. But the offer was too good – a \$10,000 delivery fee, plus round-trip airfare from San Diego to England and back to Tahiti – and they needed the money.

They carefully checked the weather forecasts, before setting sail at 1330 hours on a calm sea, making five knots. Not a single storm was expected, and it was past the middle of the hurricane season, plus the occurrence of storms at that time of year was statistically low.

On Day Three, a 35-knot squall hit. Forty-eight hours later, a deck fitting came loose and saltwater leaked onto the single-side band radio, shorting it out. And they'd lost sleep, due to the constant rolling from the northeast winds and rough ride.

But by Day Six, everything was tranquil again. The wind came around to their beam and pushed them easterly, exactly what they needed. Richard wrote "Bliss" in the logbook.

Then the Brooks & Gatehouse wind indicator gave out on Day Eight. "I hope no more of this bloody equipment breaks down," Richard told Tami, referring to the advanced on-

board electronics. Even so, for the next three days, the *Hazana* flew, allowing them to relax, read and catch-up on their sleep.

On Day Eleven, they celebrated their crossing of the equator with a bottle of good wine while watching a pod of playful pilot whales. As the next six days ticked by, they continued to make good time, with the help of the southeast trades, accompanied by both whales and dolphins.



Then Day Seventeen broke gray, rainy and miserable. The winds were unpredictable, gusting from the southeast to southwest and back around from the north.

The next day, Tami and Richard learned from the weather channel that a storm – only a 100 miles to the west, off the coast of Central America – had been upgraded to Tropical Depression Sonia, plus another, dubbed Raymond, was brewing. But neither was overly concerned, as “storms come and go, I thought, often petering out,” Tami writes in her book. Near midnight, however, they were hit with squalls and pelting rain.

When the wind veered to the north, Richard decided to take advantage of it, hoping to outrun Raymond. So they clipped on their safety harness tethers and pushed *Hazana* to her max, hoping to steer clear of the storm’s path. Though both had sailed in horrendous

conditions before, this superceded anything either had ever experienced. To be safe, they cleared the decks of heavy objects, to prevent anything flying around.

Then came the radio report that Tropical Storm Raymond had been re-classified Hurricane Raymond with a minimum of 75 mile-per-hour winds. The next day, more bad news: the storm was now tacking to the north. So Richard and Tami flew every sail to its maximum capacity, desperate to out-run it.

Tami had never seen Richard so fearful and nervous. He decided to try another tactic, altering their course to the southwest. “If we couldn’t situate ourselves above Raymond, maybe within the next twenty-four hours, we could sneak to the south of the center and reach the navigable semicircle – the safer quadrant that would push us out of the spinning vortex instead of sucking us in,” she recounts of his decision.

At 3 o'clock that afternoon, the updated weather report told them Raymond had altered direction and was now moving due west with gusts to 140 knots. It was only a matter of time before they collided with the storm. So they changed course again, this time heading northeast.

They're biggest concern at that point was losing the rig, which would leave them disabled in the middle of nowhere without a radio. They didn't fear for their lives, "as we knew Trintellas were built to withstand the strongest of sea conditions," Tami writes. However, there was the risk of getting seriously injured in the middle of nowhere. Richard wrote in the ship log book: "All we can do is pray."

The next morning, the seas arched into skyscrapers looming over the boat. The wind gauge read a steady sixty knots and they were forced to take down all the sails and maintain their position under bare poles with the motor running. By noon, the wind was a sustained one hundred knots. Richard made Tami put on the boat's only emergency position-indicating radio device.

While Tami steered, Richard went below to try to pick up the latest radio report, but all he got was static. He gave up and came topside, fastened his safety harness and took the wheel. It took all of Tami's strength to hold onto the cleat where her tether was fastened as the hull raised to dizzying heights and dove into chasms. The ascent of the boat over the monstrous waves sent the hull airborne into a free fall that smashed down with a shudder. Richard insisted she go below and keep her eye on the barometer. "Let me know the minute it starts rising," he said.

The wind – which was now up to 140 knots – sounded like jet engines being thrown in reverse. Suddenly, an avalanche of white water hit them, and the boat shuddered from bow to stern. Behind Richard, who was standing at the wheel, sheer cliffs of water rose, the tops blown into cyclones of spray by the ferocious wind. Tami remembers that Richard gave her one last wink as she slammed the hatch shut from below.

Below, Tami tethered her safety harness around the table post, looked up at the clock, which read 1300 hours, then at the barometer (now below the 28-inch mark). "No sooner had I closed my eyes when all motion stopped. Something very wrong, it became too quiet – this trough too deep. 'OHMIGOD!' I heard Richard scream. My eyes popped open. *WHOMP!* I covered my head as I sailed into oblivion."

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When Tami regained consciousness, the sea was completely calm, with swells only a slow rolling six feet. She had to struggle to free herself from the dead weight pinning her down. "Cans of food, books, pillows, clothes, a door, and panels of the main salon's overhead liner spilled off me as I struggled to sit up," she writes. She was also covered in blood, the result of a deep cuts to her left shin and forehead.

“Where was I? What had happened? I was confused. I couldn’t orient myself. The clock on the wall ticked a beat. 4 p.m.? That didn’t seem right...My tether, still clipped onto the table post, confined me. I was obviously on a boat – what boat?”

Her vision was blurry, the pain in her head excruciating. The water in the boat was two feet deep. “My God, what had happened?” she thought, trying to grasp the chaos of the situation. Books, charts, pillows, silverware, floorboards, cups, clothing, cans of food, spare parts, beans, flour, oatmeal – everything was either floating or stuck to the overhead, or to the bulkheads, or to the hull. The oven had been ripped from the starboard side of the boat and was wedged into the navigation station’s bookshelf on the port side.

While searching the boat for Richard, Tami happened to pass a mirror and screamed: she was covered in blood.

She struggled to the deck and found Richard’s safety line secured to the cleat on the cockpit coaming, but the tether hung over the side of the hull. The D-ring had parted.

“I desperately looked in every direction. Where was the howling wind? Where was the pelting rain? Where had it all gone? The ocean was a slow rolling six-foot, not monstrous like it had been...I became a lunatic. Forcing the seat lockers open, I threw cushions, anything that would float, overboard. He’s out there somewhere. Maybe he’s alive. Oh God, please...”

She scanned the ocean with her binoculars, then searched every inch of the boat for Richard, hoping he had found safety below. He hadn’t.

The *Hazana* was ravaged. The main mast was gone except for a four-foot piece still attached to the main boom. The mizzen mast was in the water, banging against the hull, held on by a shroud. Stainless steel rigging hung overboard. The lid to the in-deck propane locker was missing, and the propane tanks were gone. The engine wouldn’t even turn over, much less start.

“I knew we had capsized, but with this much damage and the way things were heaved about the cabin I knew we had to have pitched too – flipped end over end, like a gymnast sprightly executing a handspring on a mat,” she writes.

When Tami discovered how much water was actually in the interior of the boat, she panicked and thought it might be sinking. So she inflated a life raft, where she found fishing gear, hand flares, a miniature medical kit, a half dozen cans of water, and a sponge. She threw in canned goods, the portable world band radio receiver, and a can opener. As she was filling the raft on the deck, a swell hit the boat and everything in the raft tumbled overboard – including her only radio.

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The ordeal had just begun. Though she didn't know it then, Tami would spend the next 41 days inching her way over 1500 miles to Hawaii – without a mast, sails, or any kind of radio – while grieving for Richard and fighting severe depression and paralyzing fear. Her average speed: about two knots per hour.

Only her sailing experience, some shrewd decisions, and The Voice ultimately saved her life.

She immediately took the five Naugahyde-covered plywood sheets that had fallen down from the boat's ceiling, and using a tube of lipstick, wrote: "Help – I am demasted at 15 degrees N LAT," before tossing them overboard into the water. Unfortunately, it would not make a difference.

Tami also made a nine-foot mast out of the spinnaker pole and attached the storm jib to it – giving her a tiny forty-five square feet of sail area, which was better than none.

And she dug out the sextant – a delicate instrument used by mariners throughout history to locate a position by using two objects to measure attitudes above sea level – which miraculously had not been destroyed. The only problem: the exact time is required to calculate a precise location, and Tami had lost her watch – requiring her to navigate solely by latitude. At noon each day, she would peer through the sextant's sight tube on deck, carefully set fragile instrument down and lean over the broken boom blocking the companionway so she could see the bulkhead clock below.

Based on her calculations, Tami's only chance of survival was to reach the northern nineteenth latitude, turn left and head towards Hawaii. When she took her first reading, she was amazed at how far north she was, since it was only the fifth day after the capsizing. Indeed, throughout the trip, she based her calculations on being unconscious only a matter of hours – though it was actually 27 hours.

The danger: if she drifted too far south, Tami would miss all the Hawaiian islands and end up in China or some other Far Eastern port – putting her in jeopardy of starving or dying of thirst, a constant fear.

"Noon was the most exciting time of day, because I would take my sun sight and calculate how far I had traveled in the past twenty-four hours. It was always somewhere between twenty and sixty nautical miles. I just prayed I would hit one of the Hawaiian Islands and not sail past them. It didn't have to be the big island of Hawaii I came to, even thought that would be the closest. Any island would do."

On Day Eleven since losing Richard, another storm came up. But, without a radio, Tami had no way of knowing how severe it would get. Fortunately, the squall dispersed as quickly as it hit.

On Day 12, she was overjoyed to discover she still had a quarter tank of water – which she writes was a “great turning point. I knew I would live, but more so, I felt as if I wanted to live. A tremendous weight had been lifted.”

Deep into the journey, Tami saw a ship on the horizon, grabbed her flare gun and shot off three flares. The ship didn't even alter course. Desperate, she grabbed a smoke bomb, lit it and accidentally dropped it in the cockpit – instinctively grabbing it to throw overboard, burning herself in the process.

At one point, she decided to remove the remains of the broken mast, since it inhibited her from getting to the bow easily. Tami spent hours trying to pull out the steel clevis pin. When it wouldn't budge, she finally eased herself under the boom, then used her feet to lift the mast to relieve the pressure on the pin so she could remove it. Instead, it toppled from the boom, fell on top of her and trapped her.

“Flat on my back near the edge of the deck, I was terrified I'd fall overboard. As I tried to move, the jagged edges of the mainmast cut into my stomach. It weighed a ton. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't stay there; I had to get free. I lay gasping, staring at the sky, mustering every ounce of strength I could find to shove the massive piece of aluminum off me. Arms pushed, feet shoved, stomach contracted, and every muscle in my body strained to break free. As the chunk of aluminum rolled off me, I caught myself along the toerail – the edge – just before the momentum could hurt me overboard. I lay back against the warm deck, panting. How much more could I take? I should have realized the mast's foot would fall on me. What's the matter with me? My sanity was treading water,” she recounts in the book.

After the horror of nearly falling off the boat, Tami decided to trail a three-quarter-inch rope off the stern in case she ever fell in.

Tami continued to crawl to latitude 19° degrees north – and, hopefully, Hawaii. But she was getting apprehensive about the developing lack of wind. Ideally, she should have been in the lower 18° N latitude, where she could use the power of the north equatorial current to push her forward. But without her watch, she didn't dare risk getting off course.

As if by fate, her first major turning point came the day she forced herself below to tackle the overwhelming mess created when the boat flipped and somersaulted during the hurricane. “I was becoming so depressed that I couldn't stand to be around the mess another minute.” she says now with a laugh. “A man probably wouldn't even notice it!” It didn't take ten minutes before she felt the watch, which had been laying on the floor just out of sight.

Tami was immediately able to move to the lower 18° N latitude – where she could count on steady wind and a strong forward current. Her new game plan: stay in the lower portion of the latitude until she got closer to the longitude of Hawaii, then hang a right and head for the islands. “This would also keep me in the path of more shipping lanes, where I hoped my flares would be seen.”

Within 590 miles of Hawaii, Tami started making good time: 60 miles one day, 50 the next, as the north equatorial current pushed her along.

The rudder became harder to steer, causing her to fear that it might become disabled – making it impossible to control the boat. The only solution: to dive under to investigate the cause.

It took days before she could work up the courage. When she finally did, standing on the side of the deck, “I asked God to protect me. Then I took a deep breath and jumped in feet first. The water felt chilly but surprisingly refreshing. The saltwater burned my cuts, my head especially, but I didn’t mind – it was healing....I treaded water, allowing myself to get acclimated, and then put my mask on. I took a deep breath and dove under the boat. Seven four- to five-foot mahi-mahis hovered against the hull. The bottom of the boat looked ominous with its large keel and small rudder. I surfaced for another breath as I tried to keep my anxiety and fear at bay.

“Diving deeper, I swam toward the propeller. I could see that one of the mizzen shrouds had wrapped itself around the propeller’s shaft...It would just have to trail along. I hated that it would cause drag through the water, impeding *Hazana*’s progress, but there was nothing I could do. There was no way I could hold my breath long enough to try to cut the shroud free, nor would I have the strength. Surfacing, I grabbed another mouthful of air and plunged down to survey the rudder. I turned it side to side and inspected it for any damage or obstructions. It seemed to be working fine....Oh, well, stiff steering is bettering than no steering. I was just thankful the rudder was in its place so I could steer at all.”

On Day 26, with 480 miles to go, she began seeing birds – a hopeful sign that land was near.

On Day 34, with 240 miles to go, a ship appeared out of nowhere. She shot off much of her remaining supply of flares, and waved an oar with a red T-shirt attached – sure it would attract attention. It didn’t.

Day 35: an estimated 145 miles from Hawaii, she started seeing “floating objects – signs of humanity like plastic soda-pop bottles, a tattered tarp, flip-flops, and a Styrofoam float.”

Day 38: Tami spotted land way off in the distance and celebrated with the last beer she had found onboard. Just as she was experiencing the relief of seeing the island, she saw a military plane overhead and rushed to shoot off more flares and raise her oar. “The plane never even dipped its wing.” Then the island disappeared. Now as distraught as the day she discovered Richard missing, she ran below, grabbed the rifle from a locker, and crammed the barrel in her mouth. Fortunately, she didn’t have the nerve. And, as if fated, Tami returned topside and the island has reappeared.

Tami’s luck seemed to be running out as she veered off-course by 25 miles that night – the equivalent of 12 hours of sail time – due to heavy rain and building wind. Desperate,

she made herself stay awake around the clock with a minimum of sleep in order to steer the boat constantly.

On her forty-first day alone at sea, Tami finally arrived within a few miles of the entrance to Hilo Harbor. “AT 0230 in the morning the lights in the bay beckoned me, but I dared not go closer because of the huge reef that stretched far off shore. With a glow stick I studied the illustrated chart of Hilo Harbor I had found in an old cruising guide. The words ‘Not for navigational purposes’ stood out...I had to keep reminding myself that I hadn’t gone through all this to end up on a reef now.

“So in the early morning I tacked back and forth just off the reef-strewn entrance. I was so near and yet still so agonizingly far away. Couldn’t I just be there? No, I couldn’t. I felt so confused. I knew I was a changed woman, never to be that innocent, carefree girl again,” she writes.

The next morning, Tami prepared for the harbor entry by getting the anchor ready to drop overboard in case she drifted too close to the reef or shore. She also raised the American flag, and hoisted a yellow quarantine flag as required upon entering an international port. Just as she was about to move forward, a large ship headed out of the harbor entrance. Taking no chances, she grabbed the flare gun again and began shooting.

This time, it worked. The ship towed her in, and Tami’s extraordinary survival became a headline story relayed around the world.

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Q&A with
**Tami Oldham
Ashcraft**

Author of
***Red Sky in Mourning:
A True Story of Love,
Loss, and Survival at Sea***

How accurate was the film, “A Perfect Storm”?

ASHCRAFT: Actually, they did a terrific job portraying what it’s like. The only criticism I have of the film is that they didn’t show enough spray. When the wind’s howling that hard, it’s picking up spray right off the top

of the water. There’s so much spray, you can hardly see anything. It’s like being in a blizzard.

Describe what the conditions were like just before Richard was swept away and you got knocked out.

ASHCRAFT: The waves were 50-footers – about the size of a five-story building. Before the weather intensified, we were handling it really well, going up and over them. As it got worse, we’d become air borne on the tops of the waves and come crashing down the backsides. (of these huge big guys. DELETE) That’s where the integrity of the boat came through for us – because I thought it was going to split in half at times. There was such force on that hull from that amount of pounding. I didn’t see the size of the wave that capsized us, because I was below. But I know Richard saw it, because he screamed. It must have been just a monster.

How long was it like this?

ASHCRAFT: I say we were in the worst of it for probably two hours. It started about 11 in the morning. I went below about 1 p.m. Those two hours were just wicked. Just unimaginable. It was finally to the point that I didn’t even want to look out to the side. I’d never been in anything that severe. I screamed over to Richard at one point, “Is this

the worst it's going to get?" And he said, "We'll tell our grandchildren about this. We're going to make it."

Had you ever been caught in a storm anywhere near that bad?

ASHCRAFT: I've been in a couple of gales, but nothing like Raymond, which was a category four hurricane.

How does that rate on the scale of hurricanes?

ASHCRAFT: Five is the worst.

How do you know the boat capsized and pitch-poled, since you were unconscious?

ASHCRAFT: I know it capsized 360°, because I was conscious for most of that. I know from how all the debris was arranged down below that the boat went end over end—pitch-poled.

Tell me about the *Hazana*, the boat you were stranded on.

ASHCRAFT: Well, 44 feet isn't really that big when you start pacing it off. But as a boat, it's a *big* boat. It was 12 feet wide. There were two state rooms, two heads—bathrooms, a nice size galley and dining area, and a navigational station, where all the electronics were. Very plush, very nice. It was a state-of-the-art boat. Trintellas are incredible. There is a lot of attention to detail. They start at a million dollars. I don't own one, but I'd love to.

You've said that you probably would not have survived if the boat had not been a Trintella. Why?

ASHCRAFT: It's a very well-made boat and very strong. It was just phenomenal that the rudder didn't break off, like so many probably would. It says a lot for the integrity of the boat that it stayed together. The mast being ripped off the boat was not a good thing, but at least it didn't stay connected and banging around possibly puncturing the hull. Very little of the deck was actually ripped out. I mean, there was a hole ripped in the deck, but it wasn't a great big huge portion of the deck. And the fact that the boat righted itself; probably half the boats on the market would have sunk.

During those 41 days you were alone out there, what did you do most of the time?

ASHCRAFT: Mainly, I focused on my three daily sun sights, where I got out the sextant and calculated my position and how far I'd drifted off course when I was sleeping. At night, if I had a good wind, I'd steer *Hazana* as long as I could stay awake. Then I'd lash the wheel and crawl into my sleeping bag in the cockpit until the sun came up. Every

morning, I'd look 360° around the horizon. But there was never, *ever*, anything there but water and sky. The second thing I'd always do was check the jury rig, to see if the lines were chafing. If there was no wind, I'd lash the wheel and force myself to go below to make notes in the logbook and clean up a bit.

What if there was wind?

ASHCRAFT: I spent a lot of time steering and being behind the wheel. There was always the constant pressure of knowing that when I wasn't at the helm, the boat was not going in the direction I needed it to. When I was taking my navigation readings, it took about half an hour to get all the mathematics down. That whole half hour I'm rushing, because I have to get up behind that wheel in order to stay on course. I was always under pressure to keep moving. And then, of course, there were the calm days – the days you can't go anywhere, because there's not a breath of wind.

How did you ever manage to sleep during this ordeal?

ASHCRAFT: Well, I was exhausted. I would stay up as long as I could. The boat would not steer itself, so if I was not behind the wheel steering the boat, it would not be going in the direction I wanted it to, and *every* inch counted. And so I spent hours and hours and hours steering. I would stay up until I was literally just falling asleep right at the wheel. And then I'd let the boat drift at night and get maybe six hours of sleep, if I was lucky. Then I'd be up at the crack of dawn back at the wheel.

You couldn't attach a rope to the steering wheel to keep it going in the right direction?

ASHCRAFT: No, that's only when a boat is balanced. That's only when the sails are set right, and you can put the auto-pilot on or you can put the wind vane on and the boat is very balanced. Under my tiny little jury rig, even when the sail was full of wind, there was no way the boat was balanced enough to steer itself.

You never saw a single ship the whole time you were out there?

ASHCRAFT: I actually saw two of them, plus a military aircraft, but couldn't get their attention.

The sextant basically saved your life. Where did you learn how to use one?

ASHCRAFT: I started becoming interested in celestial navigation while I was crewing on the square rigger *Sophia*, a 123-foot schooner. The captain on board helped a little group of us to learn about how to read the sun and the stars and the sextant. Then when I got to New Zealand, I took a course in it. And thank god I did. There's no way you can

get to a location just by compass reading. It was the biggest part of my survival. If I would have not known how to celestial navigate I would have died.

What would have happened if you hadn't found your watch on the boat to give you the exact time in order to make the calculations?

ASHCRAFT: Until I found the watch, I was doing what the old time sailors had been doing before they had accurate time pieces: sailing by latitude. Get on a latitude and follow it until you hit land. Hawaii is on the latitude 19° North. As long as I stayed on that latitude, I probably would have hit Hawaii. *Maybe*. And as it was, even with having a watch and my calculations, I was quite a bit south. I saw the island on the horizon 60 miles away, but I really had to work my way to windward to get to it. It didn't just appear right in front of me.

Meanwhile, you were only doing a maximum of two knots an hour?

ASHCRAFT: Some days, not even that if there was no wind. If I was lucky and had a really good trade wind going, I'd do two and three miles an hour. When I had wind and a strong current, I could get up to four or five knots. There were three different days I did 60 miles in a twenty-four hour period. And that was huge for me. At that point you knew the current had kicked in and was really running. But it was slow going, 41 days of that. It was like watching grass grow.

What did you have to eat?

ASHCRAFT: I really survived on peanut butter. All of the fresh food was lost when the refrigeration went out, and I had no way to cook. I had one duffle bag of canned goods, but after awhile all the labels came off. It was always a mystery what was for dinner.

How close were you to running out of food or water?

ASHCRAFT: I would have run out of food before I ran out of water probably – because I didn't have all that much food. But I probably would have lasted only another month.

Did you ever go on another long cruise again?

ASHCRAFT: Oh, yeah. Three months later I flew back down to Tahiti and gathered my things off Richards boat, the *Mayaluga*. I signed on another boat and cruised the South Pacific Islands to Fiji. I then came back home, and that's when I got my 100-ton captain's license. After that, I was flown to the Caribbean and I became the first mate on a 109-foot schooner. That was a research vessel that sailed off-shore up the United States to Labrador, where we were dodging icebergs.

How did your ordeal change you?

ASHCRAFT: I'm much more cautious now. I guess it does stem from fear. I do not take any chances at all. I'm the first to say reduce sail. I will not cruise outside of cruising seasons.

Does your husband sail?

ASHCRAFT: Yes, he sails. He's very good on boats. He fished for a long time up in Alaska and he's very boat savvy.

Any plans for another long cruise?

ASHCRAFT: Five years from now, my husband and I want to take off with the kids, home school them onboard, and cruise to the South Pacific for maybe a year or two.

Why did you wait so long to write your story?

ASHCRAFT: There were many times I thought I would start a project of writing the book, but it's just such a monumental task that I didn't have the time to do it. My life was too busy trying to keep my head above water, making a living and all that. Several times I attempted to start, but mostly I made notes. So I had those to look back on. It was such a monumental happening in my life that even some of the smallest details I will never forget.

When did you start writing the book?

ASHCRAFT: We started writing it in 1994, and the self-published version came out in the fall of 1998.

How did the book come about?

ASHCRAFT: Susea McGearhart and I decided to write the screenplay first, because her dad was involved in making movies and she's always been fascinated with writing. When the screenplay was done, we decided to write the manuscript for the book. When we got it done, I sent it off to a couple of publishers and got refused. I'd been told by so many people – just normal, everyday people – that I should be putting this down in book form. So when I got refused by these publishers, I decided that I was going to do it myself. It's not easy doing a self-published book, but it was a total learning experience and I enjoyed it.

How much did it cost to print it yourself, and how did it do?

ASHCRAFT: \$17,000. My first print run was 5,000. It ended up selling about 9,000

copies before Hyperion Books acquired it.

The hardest thing about self-publishing is getting your book in stores. How did you do it?

ASHCRAFT: I just called up the main book distributors and Amazon.com and set up accounts. Plus, this island sold a ton. Friday Harbor [where she lives in the San Juan Islands] is a major tourist area in the summer, and the book was carried in all the bookstores and gift shops here. I also sold a lot of them through yacht clubs, boat shows, and speaking before groups and organizations.

How did your book get acquired by a major publisher like Hyperion?

ASHCRAFT: About two years ago, a New York literary agent by the name of Jill Grinberg was visiting Friday Harbor and found my self-published version in a local bookstore. The store owner told her I was a local author, and Jill bought it and stayed up all night reading it. She went back to the store the next day and said, "Do you know this gal?" Dorothea, the owner, said, "Yes." So Jill gave Dorothea her card and said that I should call her if I'm interested in taking the book to the next level. Well, Jill wasn't out the door a second when Dorothea called. So Jill, Susea, and I got together the next day. Then Jill went back to New York, and sure enough, the book ended up in a bidding war between a couple of publishers and now has changed my life.

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A complete online media kit is available at www.tamiashcraft.com/pressroom.html.

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