



News Release
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Meridian – A Family Affair

By Hillary Beach

“We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch - we are going back from whence we came.” - John F. Kennedy

We were at dinner when my dad first mentioned the possibility of sailing in the 2011 Marion to Bermuda race. It sounded like an epic adventure and the entire family was excitedly talking about how much fun it would be. I immediately volunteered. That first night however I lay in bed and was hit with the scope of the journey. I was plagued with nightmares of huge rolling waves and crewmembers being washed overboard. It played much like *The Perfect Storm*, yet I was not nearly as brave or ruggedly handsome as George Clooney. Our family had never done anything like this. What did you bring on such a voyage? How much food? What type of clothes? Where was Bermuda exactly? These anxieties persisted over the following weeks although they remained unspoken as I remained buoyed by my father’s clear enthusiasm and confidence. Dad wouldn’t really sacrifice four of his children and throw himself into the danger as well... right?

Our next logical step was to practice. We were set on entering the family division of the race, but managing six people’s schedules is no easy accomplishment. My father, Murray, was captain. The crew was comprised of three of my brothers Max (27), Bryan (17), Alex (15), and me, (24), the lone woman. We were allowed to bring one non-family member along so we chose my friend Colin (24) who had a lot of race experience. There was never a good time for the six of us to get together and it ended up that we only got one four-hour sail as a complete team. We did man overboard drills. Let’s just say this didn’t make me feel any better.

The start of the race quickly approached and I even contemplated bowing out. It seemed like we were gleefully rushing into peril. It didn't help that everyone I told about the race either looked at me as if I were crazy or like they would never see me again. My parents, however, had done their job too well and quitting something I had promised to do was not an option. As we traveled to the boat on the morning of June 17th, I tried to convince myself that we were just going for a nice little day sail and that the comforting land under my feet would never truly be too far away. Boy, did the start ever shatter that little protective cocoon!



Start of the 2011 Marion Bermuda Race – photo courtesy of Fran Grenon/Spectrum Photo

“No one would have crossed the ocean if he could have gotten off the ship in the storm.” - Charles Kettering

The start of the Marion to Bermuda race was the exact opposite of a “nice little day sail.” A few moments of that morning stand out in clear detail: watching the wind meter increase from 10, to 20, to 35 knots as we wove about the starting area waiting for our division, seeing Dad brace himself in the companionway while he shouted orders no one could hear; hearing Bryan on the helm yelling “I can't hold the course anymore!” as we were just passing the starting boat; and peering over the high-side of Meridian into the wide eyes of the racing officials in 35 knots of wind, heeled over so far that my feet were dangling.

Fortunately things calmed down relatively quickly after the start. Once the squall passed, the crew settled into our watch rhythm: three hours on deck, three hours off, three hours “on call.” Each pair -

Colin & Alex, Max & Bryan, Dad & myself - had its own distinct personality and outlook. Colin and Alex were the competitive team. With their headphones securely in place, each pumping up with techno or rap, they were constantly making small adjustments and were never afraid to push the boat faster and faster. Max and Bryan were much more cautious. Their watch became known for reefing early and often, and they consistently questioned each tactical maneuver to cover all possible outcomes. Dad and I were the quiet watch. Dad had so many responsibilities that typically he would be down below for at least half of the time leaving me up on deck gazing out to sea. It is breathtaking and humbling to look in all directions, seeing nothing but ocean and sky, hearing only the fluttering of sails, the humming of taut ropes and the lapping of water on the side of a boat, speeding toward an unseen speck of land.

Meals were the best times because all three watches would come together. One of my favorite memories is all of us sitting in the cockpit on the day after the start. It was 70 degrees with clear skies and the sun was sparkling on the water. As we ate lunch, a pod of about twenty dolphins came alongside and began to play around and under Meridian. Their presence brought joy and laughter to the crew and their spirit remained with us for the rest of the race.



“The ocean is a mighty harmonist.” –William Wordsworth

Over the next four days our journey ebbed and flowed. After our glorious day of dolphins, the wind dropped to below two knots and we were stuck in the doldrums, but we were able to celebrate Father’s Day doing what my Dad loves most in the world. We soon put up our gennaker, gaining speed and confidence... until we were pressing too hard and, in the blink of an eye, a gust hit blowing out the sail. We were able to reset the genoa and soon we were roaring ahead with 30 knots of breeze. We passed five boats! It was easy sailing... until our autopilot failed. Our watches suddenly became much more demanding as evening fell and a lightning storm sped our way. We experienced some of our highest highs and lowest lows, moments that were exhilarating and moments that were truly frightening, all

while we pushed ever onward toward Bermuda.

In the end, it was lucky that we approached in the dark. The sea was heavy enough that some of Bermuda's lights were occluded from time to time – it would have been very hard to see the markers in the day between wave tops. As it was, we skirted the correct lights, posts and polls that marked the bounds of the danger-zone. But then there was a last, unmarked light post in the sea. We watched it for a few minutes – not sure what it signified. Then it dawned on us that this post was actually moving. It was another boat! Their port/starboard light in the bow was out and as the white top-light gradually shifted to green, we knew that we were going to have to deal with this racer.

By this time, we had fallen off more than we'd wanted to as we had sought to go around the mysterious 'post.' We changed to a starboard tack just as our competition did. We started to raise our halyard and shake out a reef when we saw the other boat come about. So as not to collide, we tacked again – but we were VERY close to the wind and not sure that we'd make the windward side of the finish line buoy. I remember seeing the huge white bobbing buoy pass within ten feet of our side. If we had been a second or two earlier in our tack – or if we hadn't been going over a wave as we passed, we might very well have collided.

We had done it. Despite my fears before the race and all of our challenges throughout, we had found that beautiful speck of land. Throughout our voyage, everyone had naturally looked to Dad for instructions – after all it was his boat – but he carried the responsibility naturally and with ease. His leadership held the crew together and led us to winning the Beverly Family Trophy, which fittingly depicts a group of dolphins. In an email to our friends and family, my Dad wrote:

“I am so proud of how the entire team did. Hillary was the life of the crew and made each day really enjoyable. She took every watch, did every turn at the wheel and kept the greatest spirit of all of us. Max, was always the pragmatist and man of reason. He helped us think out our strategy and to calculate our most ambitious, yet reasonable course of action. Colin was a super leader and crew chief. He was able to handle every task and did it totally willingly. Alex was a super team player. He loved his watches with Colin and has emerged as the comedian in the crew (hard to believe!) And in the end, Bryan was there to handle the boat when the pressure was on. At both the start and through the last evening, Bryan was pushing us the whole time to go faster and make a bolder move. What was most enjoyable was how well we worked together. No egos, just cooperation and camaraderie. For a Dad, this is the best part of the race. I had the time of my life helping to make this take place for all of us. It will be an event that all six of us will cherish for the rest of our lives.”

The adventures that I experienced during the race changed how I view the world and altered the core of my being. It was a journey that tied my brothers, father and friend together and one that we will never forget. I cannot fully tell all of our fish stories, but get us all together (a small, enclosed space will make the memories all the more immediate), and you're sure to hear of red moon rises, sailing among lightning, dolphins and phosphorescent algae, laughter and candle-lit dinners and moments when we

worked, not as six individuals, but as one, cohesive unit. It was an honor to sail on Meridian and the call of the ocean is strong within me. Just give the word, raise the anchor and off to the sea I will gladly go.



Crew of Meridian, Marion Bermuda Race 2011

About the Marion Bermuda Cruising Yacht Race Association

Since its inception in 1977, the biennial Marion Bermuda Race has been a premier 645 mile ocean race and sailing event which appeals to a broad range of non-professional cruising and racing enthusiasts, sailing Cruising and Racing/Cruising monohull yachts. The spirit of the race is one focused on Family and Fun, and all yachts and crew are participating for the joy and pleasure of sailing, competition, and the camaraderie that accompanies such an offshore event. The Marion Bermuda Race encourages the development of blue water sailing skills on seaworthy yachts that can be handled safely offshore with limited crew. The Marion Bermuda Race is a 501(c)(3) organization and among other educational efforts, supports and encourages [Youth Sailing](#) programs. The Marion to Bermuda Race is organized and run entirely by hundreds of volunteering members of The [Beverly Yacht Club](#) (BYC), [The Blue Water Sailing Club](#) (BWSC) and [The Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club](#) (RHADC) for the Marion Bermuda Cruising Yacht Race Association.

2011 Race PHOTOS: <http://www.spectrumphotofg.com/marionbermuda/index.html>

2011 Race Results may be found here: <http://www.marionbermuda.com/index.php?page=results>

Website: www.marionbermuda.com

Race Forum/Discussion: <http://racetobermuda.ning.com>

BLOG: <http://marionbermuda.wordpress.com>

