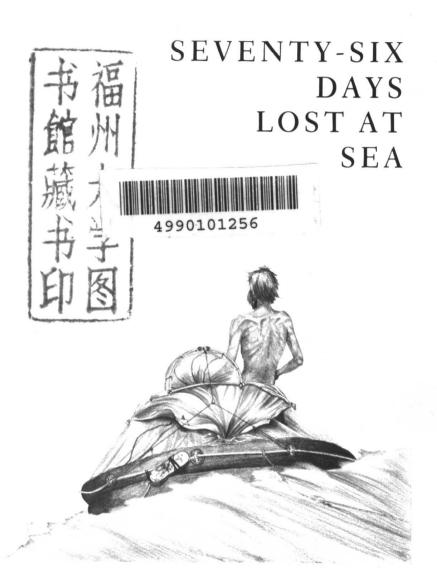


57.18195 C156

ADRIFT234p



Copyright © 1986 by Steven Callahan

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to Houghton Mifflin Company, 2 Park Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Callahan, Steven.

Adrift: seventy-six days lost at sea.

- 1. Callahan, Steven. 2. Napoleon Solo (Yacht)
- 3. Survival (after airplane accidents, shipwrecks, etc.)
- 4. North Atlantic Ocean. I. Title.

G530.C24C35 1986 910'.091631 85-14433

ISBN 0-395-38206-8

Printed in the United States of America

S 10987654321

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A huge number of people played a role in the creation of this book, directly and indirectly. First, there are those who introduced me to sailing and taught me the skills that enabled me to survive my experience: I am especially grateful to my parents and to the people of the Boy Scouts organization, particularly Arthur Adams. My ex-wife, Frisha Hugessen, was very supportive and tolerant of my projects, including the building of *Napoleon Solo*, while Chris Latchem helped me to achieve my goals and to develop techniques for confronting practical problems.

I am grateful to Dougal Robertson for his excellent survival manual, *Sea Survival*, which unfortunately is out of print. The Robertsons, the Baileys, and other voyagers who went before me kept me company through their books and provided not only essential practical advice but also the inspiration to pull through.

I might not ever have made it ashore had it not been for my timely meeting with the Paquet brothers and Paulinus Williams. They and the other people of Marie Galante were very kind and helpful during the final stage of my voyage and my subsequent recovery.

Kathy Massimini gave me an unbelievable amount of moral support and editorial advice throughout the writing of this book. Every author probably relies on someone like Kathy to pull him through the hard times and keep him on track, but I can't believe there are that many people out there with as much faith, tolerance, and insight.

Harry Foster, my editor at Houghton Mifflin, put a great deal of faith in me and guided me with a firm hand and patient ear.

I would also like to acknowledge all the people who aided in SAR operations and who kept circulating information and mes-

sages about me and Solo even after official channels were closed. In addition they gave my family a great deal of moral support. Among the many I would like to thank are the amateur and CB radio network, William Wanklyn, Francis Carter, Sail magazine's staff, Hood Sailmakers, Oscar Fabian Gonzales, the Steggalls, Beth Pollock, Hayden Brown, Cruising World's staff, the late Phil Weld, Mathias Achoun, his friend Freddie, and Maurice Briand. There are many others. I must also thank my family for their efforts in trying to locate me and keeping faith.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the sea. It has taught me quite a lot in life. Although the sea was my greatest enemy, it was also my greatest ally. I know intellectually that the sea is indifferent, but her richness allowed me to survive. In giving up her dorados, she was giving up her own children, so to speak, in order that I might live.

I truly hope that the remainder of my life will prove worthy of all the sacrifices made on my behalf.

PREFACE

This story is a true one. It is now three years after the event. Some aspects of the voyage were more important and produced stronger images at the time than they do now. For instance, weather is one of the most potent forces encountered by mariners, as it is for others who work directly with the environment—farmers, divers, mountain climbers. On land we hardly notice a low-pressure system that scatters rain and blows thirty-five miles an hour. It's simple for us to don a raincoat and hop from our house to our car to our office building. Offshore, the effects of weather are greatly amplified. Winds of thirty-five knots in the Atlantic can cause dangerous waves: in shoal waters and in areas of strong currents, I've seen twentyfive-foot breakers rear up. Even for relatively large vessels, such as trawlers, such conditions can be perilous. Encountering a rogue wave during such times almost guarantees disaster. Even slight increases in the weather are immediately noticed: vour vessel heels over, the apparent temperature drops, your coffee leaps out of its cup. Calming trends are just as apparent: the sails flop, the rig slams around, the apparent temperature rockets from 50° to 90°. The smaller the vessel, the more sensitive it is to such shifts. Unfortunately I cannot now remember all of the nuances in the weather when I was aboard my raft. The same is true of some other details of the voyage. I often have vivid memories—say, of the way the ocean felt one day—but I don't always know which day that was. The events related here have been reconstructed from the very detailed logs that I kept. Still, these do not always record routine circumstances in detail. I have tried to capture the overall feeling or essence of each event, but I am sure that the descriptions are often inadequate to convey a real sense of what was happening.

My notations in the text that concern the SAR (search and rescue) operations of my family and the Coast Guard come from several sources. Most of the references have been crosschecked with the Coast Guard's SAR log and official letters, or my family's SAR log. A few references are from family sources only, though they usually have been verified by third parties.

Some things have become clearer as time goes on, and my perspective on the events of three years ago has evolved since returning to shore life. Yet in writing this book, I wanted to relate my experience not as I see it now but as I felt about it then. At the time, events seemed to progress in a cohesive way. As I prepared the outline for my book, I divided notations from my log into two categories: events and ideas. Under events I wrote down the details of the ships I saw, the fish I caught, the sharks I encountered, and so forth. Under ideas I wrote what I felt and thought about these events. From this I organized chapters that corresponded to the different stages of the voyage I perceived at the time. Of course, I can never be completely sure that all my conclusions are exactly what I felt then rather than new insights.

One thing I have had to come to terms with is that my experience can never be accurately portrayed. The truth of my story is like one of Plato's forms, the perfect model after which the imperfect representation in reality is fashioned. After my return, many people wrote about my story. Some tied Christian dogma to it, others romantic adventure, others Hollywood hype. This was fine by me. Even my own rendition is but an imperfect representation of what I experienced.

In many ways that is a good thing. If I could convey the true horror I felt at the time, no one would want to read this story. I have not said on every line that I was in pain and felt desperate. In telling my story, I discuss things rationally and even make jokes. I talk about myself as if my body and my emotions were separate from my rational self, but of course they could not be entirely, and no part of myself was ever free from the pain and

desperation. Then, too, if I were to insist constantly on the awfulness of the situation, it would make for boring reading. The experience was too bad to be boring at the time; but readers should keep in mind that much of the survival experience is repetitive and horrible at the same time that it has its lighter, reflective, and instructive moments.

One of the most frequent questions that I'm asked is, "Do you still sail after all that?" My reply is simply, "What else would I do?" After a decade of doing nothing but messing around in boats, I cannot imagine suddenly launching a career as an astrophysicist or a Bowery bum. The sea is my work place, my playground, and my home. It has offered me a pathway to more disciplines than I can ever master. Oceanography, aerodynamics, astronomy, and common-sense problem solving are essential parts of sailing; hydrodynamics, physics, engineering, and intuitive extrapolation are essential to boat design; craftsmanship, metallurgy, forestry, and plastics technology are ingredients of boatbuilding. I am a jack-of-all-trades who has a passion for exploration. Where else can I find a place where knowing very little about a lot of things is so useful? Where else can I find such a great frontier within such easy reach?

MACHINITRODUCTION

It is always difficult to decide where a story begins and where it ends. However, some experiences—a romantic evening, a weekend retreat, or a voyage—have fairly distinct dividing lines. They are what I call "whole experiences." To a large degree, the first twenty-nine years of my life represent one whole experience that rests outside the scope of this book. But within those years are the seeds of this story. People often ask me how I got myself into such a fix in the first place. How did I know what to do? Was the boat I lost new or had it been tried before? Why was I sailing offshore in such a small boat? The answers to these questions are an integral part of the story, its foundation. The foundation was laid in 1964, when, at age twelve, I began sailing.

I fell in love with sailing instantly. I can think of a million reasons why it appealed to me so strongly—the immediate relationship with the environment, the simplified lifestyle devoid of "modern inconveniences" (as naval architect Dick Newick puts it), the sheer beauty of it—but all of the reasons can be summed up succinctly: everything about it felt right.

Before I ever began to sail, I thought that if I had lived in the 1700s I would probably have become a mountain man, or some such thing. Then I became enthralled with the history of the sailing ship, of square-riggers battling their way around Cape Horn. I yearned for the romanticism and adventure of ages past. Shortly after I began sailing, I read a book called *Tinkerbelle*, by Robert Manry. In June 1965 Manry had sailed his 13.5-foot boat across the Atlantic in seventy-eight days, a record at the time. Something about the simplicity of Manry's boat, and his accomplishment of so much with so little, struck a chord in my heart. He showed me that a life of adventure was still possible in the latter part of the twentieth century.

From that time on I dreamed of crossing the Atlantic in a small boat. As years went by I learned the skills necessary to accomplish this goal. I read books about all of the great voyages: the raft crossings of the Pacific by Heyerdahl and Willis, and the circumnavigations of Slocum, the Hiscocks, and Guzzwell. Before I was out of high school, I had helped to build a forty-footer; by 1974 I had begun a boatbuilding career and was living aboard; by 1977 I was designing boats and venturing offshore as far as Bermuda; by 1979 I was designing and teaching design full time. All along Manry and *Tinkerbelle* lurked in the back of my mind and served as an inspiration, a way to pull everything together and give my life a focus.

In 1980 I sold my twenty-eight-foot trimaran and put all of my resources into the creation of *Napoleon Solo*, a small cruiser. I relied on a great deal of aid from my ex-wife, Frisha Hugessen, my good friend Chris Latchem, and a host of others. The design was unusual, though not at all radical. We took pains to create a handsome, meticulously constructed cold-molded craft, excellent in light airs and well-balanced and forgiving in heavy weather. *Solo* became much more than a boat to me. I knew her every nail and screw, every grain of wood. It was as if I'd created a living being. Sailors tend to feel that way about their boats. Chris and I gave *Solo* a harsh thousand-mile shakedown cruise from Annapolis to Massachusetts through late-fall gales. By the spring of 1981, I was ready to follow in Manry's wake.

I was not interested in setting a record as Manry had done. Solo was just over twenty-one feet long. There weren't many boats of her size that had made the crossing, but there had been a few as small as twelve feet. For me the crossing was more of an inner voyage and a pilgrimage, of sorts. It would also serve as a measuring stick for my competence as a seaman, a designer, and a craftsman. I figured that if I made it to England safely, I'd have accomplished every major goal I'd ever set for myself. From England I would continue south and west, measuring Solo's performance in a single-handed transatlantic race called

the Mini-Transat. That would carry me to Antigua. In the spring I would return to New England, thereby completing a circumnavigation of the North Atlantic. To qualify for the Mini-Transat, I had to sail six hundred miles alone in *Solo*, so I entered the Bermuda 1-2 Race and sailed from Newport to Bermuda. From there I would make the crossing to England with Chris.

When I departed the United States, it was with everything I owned, except for some tools. Few insurance brokers had wanted to talk to me, and those who did set such exorbitant premiums that it would cost less to buy materials for a second boat. I decided to take the risk. I told people that the worst that could happen was that I'd be killed, in which case I wouldn't be worried about collecting any insurance money. The second worst thing would be to lose *Solo*. It would take a while to recover, but I would. I knew plenty of other people who had lost their boats and recovered.

Many of my friends still couldn't understand why I wanted to undertake such a voyage, why I couldn't test myself without crossing the Atlantic. But there was more to the crossing than simply putting myself to the test. From the first time I ventured from the shore in a boat, I felt that my spirit was touched. On my first offshore trip to Bermuda, I began to think of the sea as my chapel. It was my soul that called me to this pilgrimage.

One friend suggested I write down my thoughts for the benefit of those who thought I was mad. While waiting for Chris in Bermuda, I sat beneath a palm tree and wrote the following: "I wish I could describe the feeling of being at sea, the anguish, frustration, and fear, the beauty that accompanies threatening spectacles, the spiritual communion with creatures in whose domain I sail. There is a magnificent intensity in life that comes when we are not in control but are only reacting, living, surviving. I am not a religious man per se. My own cosmology is convoluted and not in line with any particular church or philosophy. But for me, to go to sea is to get a glimpse of the face

≈ xvii

INTRODUCTION

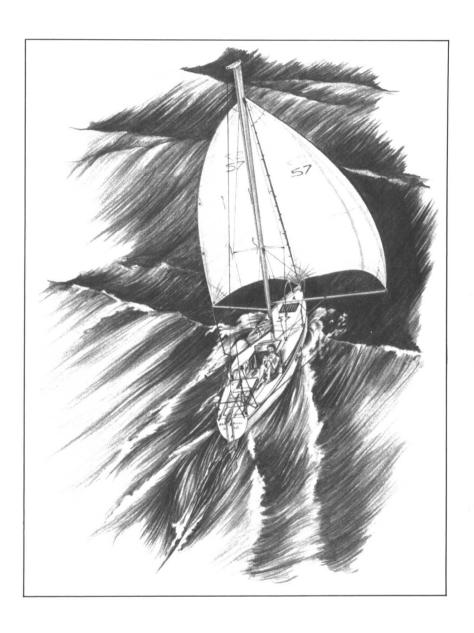
of God. At sea I am reminded of my insignificance—of all men's insignificance. It is a wonderful feeling to be so humbled."

The Atlantic crossing to England with Chris was exhilarating—gales, fast runs, whales, dolphins. It was the stuff adventure is made of. And as we approached the coast of England, I felt I was ending the whole experience that had begun at my birth, and beginning a new one.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
Preface	хi
Introduction	xv
Log of Napoleon Solo	I
Nerves Exposed	15
The Witch and Her Curse: Hunger and Thirst	31
Dream Keep	63
To Weave a World	93
Cries and Whispers	123
Twice to Hell and Back	151
Road of Trash	169
The Dutchman	185
Death	205
Life	213
A Man Alone	221
Epilogue	233

LOG OF NAPOLEON SOLO



TISTATE

at night. The fog has been dense for days. Napoleon Solo continues to slice purposefully through the sea toward the coast of England. We should be getting very close to the Scilly Isles. We must be very careful. The tides are large, the currents strong, and these shipping lanes heavily traveled. Both Chris and I are keeping a sharp eye out. Suddenly the lighthouse looms on the rocky isles, its beam high off the water. Immediately we see breakers. We're too close. Chris pushes the helm down and I trim the sails so that Solo sails parallel to the rocks that we can see. We time the change in bearing of the lighthouse to calculate our distance away—less than a mile. The light is charted to have a thirty-mile range. We are fortunate because the fog is not as thick as it often is back in our home waters of Maine. No wonder that in the single month of November 1893 no fewer than 298 ships scattered their bones among these rocks.

The next morning, Solo eases herself out of the white fog and over the swells in a light breeze. She slowly slips into the bay in which Penzance is nestled. The sea pounds against the granite cliffs of Cornwall on the southwest coast of England, which has claimed its own vast share of ships and lives. The jaws of the bay hold many dangers, such as the pile of rocks known as the Lizard.

Today the sky is bright and sunny. The sea is gentle. Green fields cap the cliffs. After our two-week passage from the Azores with only the smell of salt water in our lungs, the scent of land is sweet. At the end of every passage, I feel as if I am living the last page of a fairy tale, but this time the feeling is especially strong. Chris, who is my only crew, wings out the jib. It gently floats out over the water and tugs us past the village of Mousehole, which is perched in a crevice in the cliffs. We soon glide up to the high stone breakwater at Penzance and secure Na-

poleon Solo to it. With the final neat turns of docking lines around the cleats, we conclude Solo's Atlantic crossing and the last of the goals that I began setting for myself fifteen years ago. It was then that Robert Manry showed me not only how to dream, but also how to fulfill that dream. Manry had done it in a tiny boat called *Tinkerbelle*. I did it in Solo.

Chris and I climb up the stone quay to look for customs and the nearest pub. I look down on *Solo* and think of how she is a reflection of myself. I conceived her, created her, and sailed her. Everything I have is within her. Together we have ended this chapter of my life. It is time to dream new dreams.

Chris will soon depart and leave me to continue my journey with *Solo* alone. I've entered the Mini-Transat Race, which is a singlehanded affair. I don't need to think about that for a while. Now it is time for celebration. We head off to find a pint, the first we've had in weeks.

The Mini-Transat runs from Penzance to the Canaries and then on to Antigua. I want to go to the Caribbean anyway. Figure I'll find work there for the winter. Solo is a fast-cruising boat, and I'm interested to see how she fares against the spartan racers. I think I have a shot at finishing in the money since my boat is so well prepped. Some of my opponents are putting in bulkheads and drawing numbers on sails with Magic Markers in frantic pandemonium before the start. I indulge in local pasties and fish and chips. My last-minute jobs consist of licking stamps and sampling the local brew.

It is not all fun and games. It is the autumn equinox, when storms rage, and within a week two severe gales rip up the English Channel. Ships are cracked in half and many of the Transat competitors are delayed. One French boat capsizes and her crew can't right her. They take to their life raft and manage to land on a lonesome, tiny beach along a stretch of treacherous cliffs on the Brittany coast. Another Frenchman is not so lucky. His body and the transom of his boat are found crumpled on the Lizard. A black mood hangs over the fleet.