

# *A Musical Journey*

## *Background*

For many years I thought that sailing across the Atlantic would be one of the many things that I'd simply not get round to doing. In the end, it was an impulse decision. A sailing e-newsletter, not unlike a Formby Choral Society e-newsletter, dropped into my inbox one day. Within 15 minutes, after getting the thumbs up from my beloved, I'd signed up. I suppose she did have a vested interest ... in future years, I wouldn't be able to claim that she'd stopped me from going!

People often use the term "bucket list" but I suspect that the nature of the term just encourages people to put things off until it's too late, so I prefer "I wish I had's". For example, I wish I had joined a choir 34 years ago, not 4.

Before my voice broke, I could go straight to a high note and stay bang on pitch; subsequently, I became a croaking yodeller. In my school, it was risky to demonstrate any interest or aptitude in music, as one was likely to end up being bullied. I chose music and endured years of torment from one particular Neanderthal twice my size. One day, the last straw broke and I found myself in a bareknuckle contest with my tormentor. I was being observed, and encouraged, by the whole class. I assumed the role of David in the Valley of Elah and, thanks to some form of divine intervention, I found myself victorious in this battle between good against evil. My tormentor didn't lose his head, but his street cred evaporated immediately; his bullying days were over. Nobody messed with me again.

In those days, at least at my school, many of the "brothers" (of a particular Catholic Order which shall remain nameless) had, like a few of the lay staff, a fondness for beating boys. Nowadays, such methods would lead to incarceration. I wouldn't wish to overstate the grimness of school, but for me it was something to be endured rather than enjoyed. As it turned out, my endurance skills, honed at school, were tested several decades later, during this boat trip.

A brief, but heavenly respite from the low-grade hellishness of school was provided by music. Well, not solely music *per se*; it was, in no small part, due to the arrival of "good" Catholic girls from a neighbouring convent school. Suffice it to say, the joint school Gilbert & Sullivan productions were platonic, in a hetero-centrist, totally binary kind of way, and great fun. Suddenly, music became cool and popular!

Music has been a constant companion during the rest of school, university life and the work years, but it had been in the background throughout. It came to the foreground during retirement and it accompanied me during this boat trip.

## Getting to the Boat

On Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October, I found myself sitting at the unedifying Wigan train station, where one cannot help thinking of Paul Simon. No wonder he wished, in the words of the song he wrote there, that he was "Homeward Bound". You're singing it in your head now, aren't you? I had only just said goodbye to my wife, Pat, and we were facing over 6 weeks without communication when at sea. We'd been together since 1976 and had never been apart for anything like this time. I was also conscious of the possibility of some maritime mishap, because an Atlantic crossing is not risk-free.

Would my granddaughter still recognise me on my return? Would the family be OK? What if something bad happened when I was away? I had no answers.

I travelled on a packed train to Glasgow, then to Ardrossan and stayed overnight in a small hotel. This was all to avoid the train strike on the day of departure. In the event, the boat's departure was delayed ... repairs had been undertaken but the work was not quite finished – an omen, I thought, briefly.



The Route

## 1. Ardrossan to Ponta Delgada, Sao Miguel, Azores 1703nm (nautical miles)

On the 7<sup>th</sup> October we finally set off, but I had spent my time at Ardrossan Marina wisely. I had made full use of the WiFi that was available at the pleasant marina café. I sent, via WhatsApp, several pictures and videos of the boat and me, mainly for my gorgeous granddaughter, Nancy. Soon, neither WiFi nor mobile phone coverage would be available to me on the boat. At the same time, last minute messages, pictures and videos were coming through from my family and friends. I looked at these repeatedly throughout the trip.

The boat, called Global Surveyor, is huge at 70 feet. It is of steel construction and heavy (50 tons, I think) and the sails are big. The boat felt a little like a frigate with sails. My Dad had been on a frigate during the war and for reasons which will soon become clearer, he was ever-present in my thoughts during this trip.

To get the look and feel of the boat, go to the "Go West Sailing" website and search under "Ultimate Adventure". Then, click on the video "Take This Once in a Lifetime Journey". Alternatively, follow this hyperlink if you are reading an electronic copy <https://www.gowestsailing.com/global-surveyor/> This promotional video got me hook, line and sinker. Naturally, the video was shot in good weather, but we would face some challenging conditions. The trip was for experienced sailors, used to what the weather can do out at sea and aware of how to prevent accidents to self or others. So, there was excitement, but some appropriate apprehension too.

We had a professional skipper and also a first mate who looked after the engine and the many things that would break down during the trip. That's the thing about ocean sailing – you don't have the option of popping into a nearby marina for a repair or spare part when the nearest land is 1,000 miles away. You either fix the problem yourself or do without.

The rest of us (i.e. the crew) were 8 in number initially, then 6 from the Azores, then 5 from Cape Verde, which was too few. A watch system was in place from the outset because the boat doesn't stop, day or night, until the next port is reached .... and the Azores were 1,703 miles away. For most of this leg of the journey, the winds were coming FROM the Azores.

So, this initial leg of the trip was, in the main, heavy weather sailing. Did I have the time or inclination to think about music then? Not really; we were all too busy battling with the elements in order to make progress on our chosen course. Everyone had a fair share of bruises but fortunately, no serious injuries. Although not a problem for me, several struggled with sea-sickness for weeks.

The boat was lifted up by the strong winds and large Atlantic swells, only to crash down violently moments later. One couldn't help but wonder whether the boat could take this punishment. Various images and the theme from the movie "Titanic" came and went. After a rough watch lasting 2-3 hours, sleep will come if one can avoid rolling around, so I used my luggage to wedge myself in. After sufficient sleep deprivation, one can sleep and forget that the boat is bouncing up and down but a low grade fatigue does set in. This was similar to, but milder than, the exhaustion I endured as an on-call junior doctor. In those days, my 40ish hours of on-call were in addition to a 40+ hour week normal work and were not followed by any rest period. It was scandalous; we had the choice of putting up with it or finding another job. I digress.

*Yes, you did digress, try to stick to the point, Mike, whatever that is.*

Although Titanic did flash by on this leg of the trip, the images that stayed in my mind throughout the trip, were those of my late Dad's ship when it was blown up. The bow of the ship, which was where he normally worked, was hit by a mine and blown clean off. He was standing on the bridge at the time and saw the bow come right out of the water then sink. All of his closest comrades in arms died. This was part of the "Corfu Channel Incident of 1946" which was an early, if not the first, serious incident in the Cold War. The Corfu Channel Incident is, from a military history perspective, fascinating and I recommend this hyperlink to take you to the Wikipedia page on the subject:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corfu\\_Channel\\_incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corfu_Channel_incident)

My Dad's ship was "HMS Volage". This image, from the Wikipedia article, shows his ship reversing through the minefield, towing the stricken HMS Saumarez. The steel tow lines are clearly visible.



Our family witnessed the lasting effects of this awful event on our Dad for the rest of his life. About 60 years after the event, following a couple of beers in The Freshie, he was able to describe some of the horror to me which I won't repeat here. My Dad was on my mind throughout this trip, particularly when I looked at the bow.

Yesterday, 28 January 2023, Formby Choral Society hosted their Come And Sing event, featuring "The Armed Man" from Karl Jenkins. What a wonderful and moving day it was. Personally, I found some sections difficult to sing, mindful of the above paragraphs and plight of the Ukrainian and Russian mothers and fathers who have lost their sons and daughters recently. I know I wasn't the only one.

*It WAS a moving day Michael, but could you lighten the mood a little?  
Perhaps a return to the boat?*

On many occasions during the trip, I turned to a piece I had listened to very frequently during my school years, in particular, when revising for A level exams. The piece is beautiful and poignant, exploring movingly, themes such as separation, loss and longing. The varied moods of the sea are captured too. "Sea Drift", by Frederick Delius, is set to words from Walt Whitman. I prefer the ASD 2958 vinyl version From the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra & Choir, conducted by Sir Charles Groves with John Noble (baritone). That said, this recording of Sea Drift from Sir Mark Elder, the BBC SO and Bryn Terfel from the 2012 Proms is much easier to find and will do nicely. Get some decent coffee, biscuits, and click on the hyperlink. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zBisvITp00> Alternatively, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVRcuLFKOYA> from John Shirley-Quirk, Richard Hickox and the London Symphony Chorus and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

A good recording of Sea Drift would have been a perfect musical backdrop to the Atlantic. As it happened, all I had on board was the music I could hear in my head.

Delius as a young man.



Source: Delius Trust, London

Throughout the trip, on the days where conditions allowed, I wrote a log, documenting what was on my mind at the time and anything of note that had happened that day. One morning, at around 4 am, I saw a halo around the moon. This is one of several manifestations of icy, cirrus cloud, high in the atmosphere, frequently indicative of approaching bad weather. The appearance was similar to this:- <https://www.skyatnightmagazine.com/space-science/moon-ring-halo/> We already knew from weather forecasts that we had to go through a big storm in order to get to the Azores. Next, came a striking sunset and an eerie but beautiful calm.



Calm before the storm

The storm was very unpleasant. On Monday 17<sup>th</sup> October, I was at my lowest ebb, having had no sleep, but plenty of new bruises, on account of being thrown about the boat. I was missing everyone and wondering what on earth was I doing on the trip. The boat had been bouncing along in 60mph winds, with waves to match. The following day, partly protected from the elements by the shelter of the land mass, we approached our destination. Subsequently, we arrived safely at the marina at Ponta Delgada, on the island of São Miguel, Azores, where other boats were taking shelter from the storm.

I now had access to WiFi, so I could exchange news, pictures and videos via WhatsApp and Facetime. I really appreciated the opportunity to catch up and get my thoughts clear because at one stage, I had been ready for going home.

On the other hand, it is hard to quit early from an ocean sailing passage because that just makes life harder for those you leave behind. I decided to stay on board.

For the next few days, I enjoyed what I saw of the Azores and I resolved to return with Pat for a holiday together at some time in the future.



Azores

## 2. Ponta Delgada, Sao Miguel, Azores – Mindelo, São Vicente, Cape Verde 1259nm

On Tues 25<sup>th</sup> October, we left the Azores and the memory of just how uncomfortable a boat can be, came flooding back. I jotted down a long list that I won't bore you with. Suffice it to say, that on this day I wrote, ironically, 'only 28 days to go'. We had two fewer crew for this leg to Cape Verde but on the plus side, we could expect fair winds and pleasant weather.

Global winds are quite interesting and worth a simple diagram and brief explanation. Some people will enjoy looking at this in more depth, but a perfectly good explanation for our purposes can be found on the Weather Wiz Kids website page on Wind. Just scroll down a little to the heading "What Are The Global Wind Patterns?" Click on <https://www.weatherwizkids.com/weather-wind.htm>

Coriolis Effect on wind.

This is nicely explained in Reeds Ocean Sailing Handbook. Imagine that you are in London and 2,300 nautical miles north of you, at the North Pole, someone sets off a missile heading straight for you travelling at 500knots. If the earth was NOT

rotating, it would reach you in 4 hours 36 minutes. However, on account of the rotation of the earth, the missile will land in Quebec. Looking at the earth from space, the missile is seen to be travelling in a straight line, with the earth rotating beneath it. However, from London, the missile appears to curve off to the west instead of coming straight at you. The same is true for wind or anything moving across a rotating earth (see diagram referred to above).

Sailors do keep a close eye on the weather, particularly wind strength and direction. Their lives may depend on their understanding of the weather.

Our prevailing winds in the UK come from the southwest (SW) so they are called southwesterlies. Further south of these winds, at around 30° north of the equator, is a band of high pressure with little or no wind. These are the "Horse Latitudes", so named because some sailors occasionally had to throw their cargo of horses overboard on account of shortage of water and fodder in light wind, i.e., when a sailing boat would stop moving. Further south, the NE Trade Winds predominate.

Further south from the NE Trades (around the equator) is the zone known as the Doldrums. This area is under low pressure with little or no wind, lots of cloud and rain and plenty of heat – thoroughly miserable! Relief comes once the SE Trades are reached in the Southern Hemisphere.

Nowadays, we speed things up and generate our own wind in the Doldrums or Horse Latitudes by turning the engine on to generate movement of the boat. The Horse Latitudes and Doldrums are dangerous places for an engine to fail because sails do not work without wind.

The Coriolis effect influences not only the direction of the trade winds but also the direction of rotation of winds in tropical revolving storms or smaller weather systems. For more detail see this video from National Geographic.

<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/coriolis-effect>

*Yes, yes, very interesting Michael; thank you for the meteorology, but PLEASE, what about the music?*

Well, it's about the setting. For this leg of the trip, the winds were generally steady and kind to us, the temperature continued to rise and the sailing was stunning.



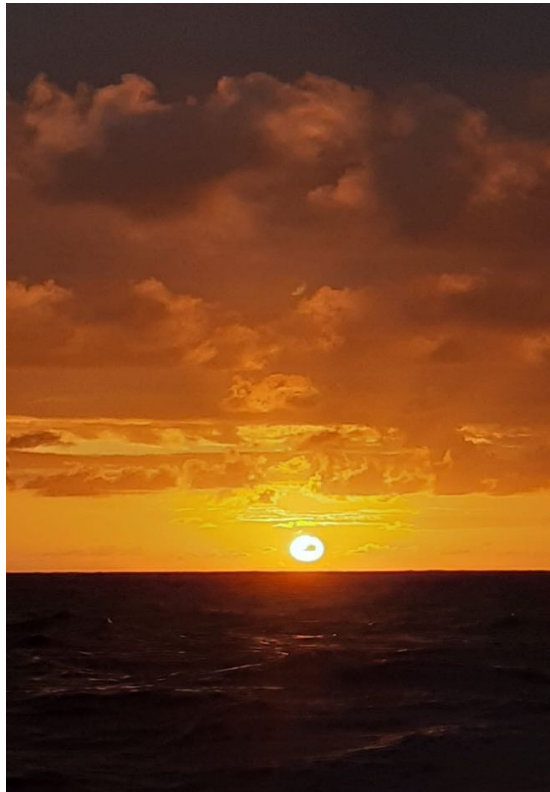
The boat heels gently in a steady, pleasant wind

The rhythm from day to day was slow, seductive and therapeutic. It was a perfect time to reflect on the past, present and future.

“Dirty Old Town”, a song from my roots, was the first earworm to emerge. I head-sang the melody for days, added a descant and tapped out a rhythm. Unfortunately I had no lyrics to refer to, and no access to the internet to find any. I had to rely on my patchy memory. I had no chance of motivating the others, who claimed to be unable to sing, tone deaf, or both.

A boat is quite a small space, and I wouldn’t wish to be thrown overboard, so head-singing was in order when others were around. When alone, I’d sing quietly with an imaginary accompaniment and an excellent place for this is at the bow of the boat in the “pulpit” in the late afternoon, as sunset approaches.

That reminds me, the sunsets and sunrises were absolutely stunning: They involved the whole sky, so photographs could never do them justice, although I’ve included a couple.



"Dreamed a dream by the old canal..."



"... We'll chop you down, like an old dead tree ..."

The night sky was also fabulous, with the vast Milky Way in all its glory, best seen on clear, but dark nights. The night sky is even more awesome if you contemplate what you're looking at. All the stars you see when you look up are in our galaxy, the Milky Way, which contains approximately 100 billion (i.e., 100,000,000,000) stars. That's a lot of suns. Furthermore, the Milky Way is only one of approximately 100 billion galaxies in the Universe. The appearance of the moon and the planets orbiting the nearest star (our sun) merely add to the unfathomable beauty.

### *OK Professor Cox, get back on track!*

Yes, I sang to myself at night too. Many tunes / songs stuck in my mind during the trip, usually ballads

It's Too Late	Carol King
Here, There And Everywhere	Lennon & McCartney
You Can Close Your eyes	James Taylor
Meet Me On The Corner	Lindisfarne
Who Knows Where The Time Goes	Sandy Denny
Danny Boy	Trad
Just The Way You Are	Billy Joel
Tenderly	Gross & Lawrence
Don't Stop	Christine McVie
Misty	Erroll Garner
Manha De Carnaval	Luiz Bonfá
Ständchen	Franz Schubert
Panis Angelicus	César Frank
Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal	Roger Quilter

And many, many more, all half-forgotten. So, in a message to self, I made the decision: never to get on a boat without taking something I could sing! A book of folk songs or sea shanties would have been ideal. I've no idea why I didn't think of that beforehand.

Some musical instruments don't work so well on a sailing boat and a piano is one of them! A keyboard is no better. I don't play guitar, so I opted for a harmonica and tin whistle and, unfortunately, neither cut the mustard!

### *That's enough about music M, anything to report about the wildlife?*



Flying fish corpses would litter the deck in the morning

Flying fish are curious creatures and about 50 landed on the boat during the trip. We saw many thousands of them. The sizes varied, but the fish shown in the picture was about 8 inches long.

If they land on the boat during a dark, moonless night, it can be quite disconcerting when trying to steer the boat. Flying fish leap out of the water at speed and glide for a few hundred feet close to the water rather than fly in the way that birds do. They are pursued by various predators, one of which is the Dorado. Flying fish do not look appealing to eat, I think it's the "wings" that are off-putting. Apparently they are delicious and taste a bit like sardine. One day we did some flying fish a favour by line-catching a Dorado; we enjoyed a tasty fried fish treat that night!

We saw dolphins in their hundreds and they were a joy. They swim playfully near the bow and seemed to enjoy our company as much as we did theirs.

I'm not particularly familiar with sea birds, but some would accompany the boat for days on end, often treating us to their amazing flying acrobatics. A wonderful and memorable sight that brought me back to "Sea Drift" on many occasions.

There is a bigger choral work by Frederick Delius with which I'm also quite familiar - "A Mass of Life". I've heard it live at several venues, including in a Cathedral, but there's nothing religious about this "Mass" – far from it. It is set to extracts from "Also Sprach Zarathustra" by Friedrich Nietzsche. It is life-affirming in a way and beautiful in parts. It is, however, disturbing, ugly, even, with Nietzsche's references to "higher born mortals". Some of these ideas have been hijacked by fascists and

xenophobes. For avoidance of doubt, take a look at <https://www.ushmm.org>. Better still, if you feel able, plan your own visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex. We emerged from our visit very moved, but also much more aware and emboldened to challenge discrimination of any type.

If you wish to hear more of Zarathustra's struggle, in *A Mass Of Life*, I'd recommend Sir Charles Groves again, but this time with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, with soloists Heather Harper, Helen Watts, Robert Tear and Benjamin Luxon. You'll need the German text and translation – I have copies. You'll need more than a cup of coffee too. As luck would have it, you can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3M4313GcxI>

### *P-L-E-E-E-A-S-E, back to the boat M!*

Oh, yes, sorry! As the temperature increased, so did the attraction of diving off the boat. A bit of thought prior to diving in is wise; the boat should be hardly moving and one needs to stay well clear of the propeller. In addition, have a quick check for sharks and retain enough strength in order to climb quickly back on board, which, I can confirm, can be a challenge. It was fabulous! We were half-way to Cape Verde and the sea temperature was 25°C. Later in the trip, the sea temperature climbed to over 29°C (84.2°F), by which time the deck temperature was over 45°C (113°F)

Later, we were joined by a school of dolphins – bliss!

On 29<sup>th</sup> October, a few things started going wrong. We had an electrical fault; the batteries were not charging and power was being lost. We had to switch off everything we could in order to conserve power, including the autohelm and fridge. A spare generator running all day and night did not solve the problem. We lost a tankful of fresh water, the head (toilets) flooded and there were other issues. Fortunately, we were only a couple of days from Cape Verde and had the winds to sail there.

On this particular boat, steering without the autohelm was hard work on account of a fault with the hydraulics on the rudder. I don't remember exactly when we arrived in Cape Verde, but I do remember that we were exhausted.

Unsurprisingly, Cape Verde has more of an African feel than the Azores. It is volcanic, like the Azores, but hotter and it seemed poorer, with a slight edge that I hadn't noticed in the Azores. We enjoyed a pleasant tour of one of the islands. We spent plenty of time in bars and cafes and caught up with family and friends thanks to WhatsApp.

Once it was safe to do so, i.e. when the boat was in the marina, Skipper and the engineer managed to fix most of the problems mentioned above.



Cape Verde

### **3. Mindelo, Cape Verde to Fernando De Noronha 1333nm**

We left Cape Verde on 3<sup>rd</sup> November and continued towards Fernando De Noronha off the coast of Brazil. Throughout this leg, the temperature was constantly rising and our water consumption increased accordingly. The winds remained pleasant for most of this leg, until we reached the Doldrums, which were humid, grey, virtually windless, oppressive and wet. Time to switch the engine on!



The dreary Doldrums

The Doldrums (Intertropical Convergence Zone or ITCZ if you prefer) are the birthplace of hurricanes. Hurricanes contain massive amounts of energy – one can

think of them as the safety valve on a global pressure cooker. Once the usual methods of dissipation of excess energy from the sun no longer suffice (i.e. ocean currents to cooler areas and normal atmospheric circulation), hurricanes are born. Sea temperatures above 80°F in a big enough area are critical.

### *The boat M, the boat!*

Oh yes. The temperature continued to rise and time travelled slowly. We were short of drinking water and decent food. Cape Verde is not a great place to buy fruit and vegetables as they rot very quickly. We wouldn't starve or die of thirst, but having some decent food does keep spirits up. Meals are something to look forward to on a boat.

I'm no chef, but, although I say it myself, I'm the bees knees at washing up, drying and putting stuff away. That's a useful skill on a boat because many can't stand being "below" for long, on account of sea-sickness.

I'm normally too hot when others complain of being cold. However, on this boat, everyone was struggling with the heat. Minimal exertion resulted in drenching sweats. The heat sapped my energy and everything was an effort. I had brought along my sextant for a spot of celestial navigation. In the end, it was too much effort - I was drained of motivation, so it stayed in its box.

Now for a short diversion that could save your life. *Really?*

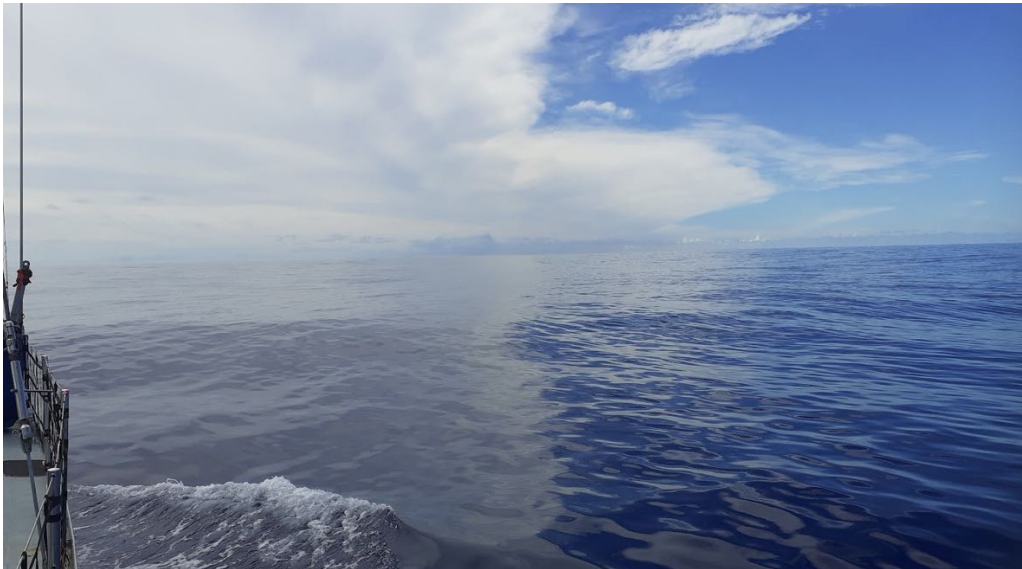
I'm a salt-loser: I lose salt easily, particularly during hot weather and my blood pressure is on the low side. It doesn't take long for me to start feeling dizzy when dehydrated. If exposed to prolonged heat and dehydration on a boat, I suspect I'd die quicker than most. This is what has been suggested happened to many people taken from Africa and destined for the slave trade. The theory goes that a disproportionate number died early on because they were salt-losers, whereas salt-retainers were more likely to maintain their blood pressure and survive the dehydration. As a consequence, their descendants may be more likely to be salt retainers, and, therefore, at greater risk of aggressive hypertension. At home we don't add salt to food and we monitor our own blood pressures (the kit is inexpensive). Save yourselves and the NHS – cut down on your salt and check your own blood pressure.

### *Michael?*

OK, sorry, force of habit. It's not as if I'm suggesting we deliver our own babies, although no doubt the government is giving that prospect some serious consideration as a game-changing, world-beating innovation for the NHS.

## *Hey! Steady on!*

During this part of the trip with the heat, the sheer beauty of the days and nights and the pleasant sailing, I think that psychologically, we were in a better place. We knew we'd broken the back of the journey. I started to list jobs for when I got home. Also a list of activities that I'd like to do ... split a bottle of red wine with Pat and have some real food, watch some Nordic noir, catch up with everyone etc.



Cloud affecting the appearance of the sea



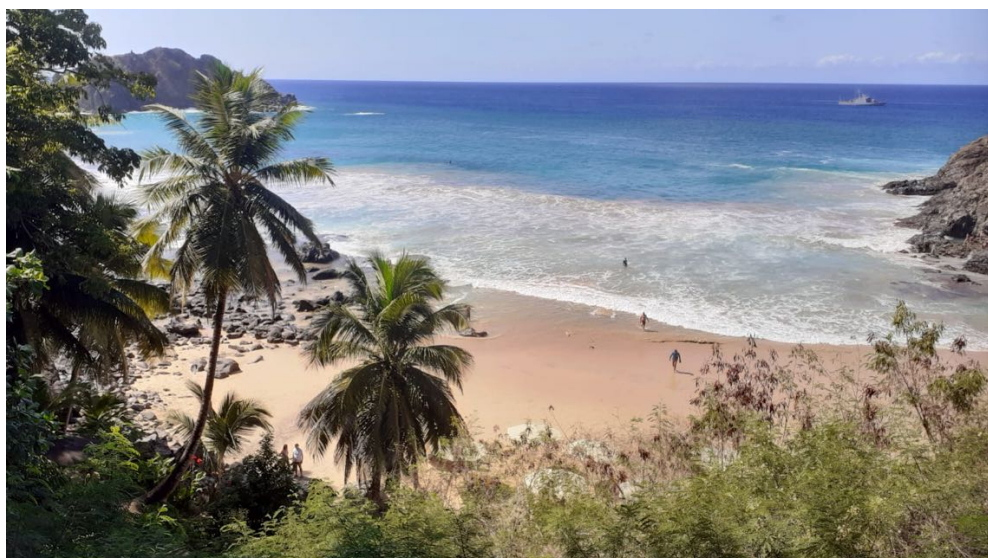
Saharan dust off Cape Verde.

We crossed the equator on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> November .... a little drink, a toast and carry on to Fernando. During this time I reflected on what effect the trip had had on me and others, and what changes I'd put in place because of the trip. I won't bore you with the detail but I'm glad I wrote it all down in my log.

With Fernando approaching, I was looking forward to the return of WiFi and ice cold beer! We arrived in the early hours of the 12<sup>th</sup> of November and left the following day.



Fernando De Noronha



Fernando De Noronha

***Fernando do Noronha – Salvador, Brazil 679nm***

This was a fairly boring stretch from the sailing point of view.

The end was approaching. All the conversations were more animated and forward looking. We did have our various plans, but we would keep up, sharing photos, contact details and thoughts on future adventures; foundation stones of potentially life-long friendships.

You might be curious about my fellow travellers. Well, I was the oldest and the youngest was, I guess, about 40. We had 3 from various central European countries, 2 from Scotland and 5 from England. Some had considerable sailing experience (including our skipper, obviously) but everyone was quite experienced. People had very different reasons for travelling but we all seemed to be looking for something.

Conversations shared on a boat stay on the boat, but I can say that many were deep, significant, and sometimes dark. They gave me an insight into the lives of others that I will never forget. "Don't judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes" came to mind quite often. I respected and admired all of them, often for very different reasons. I miss them and wish them all well.

One conversation was about what really happened around the Christmas Truce story. Did it really happen, was it propaganda or a myth? Generally, soldiers on both sides would have been shot for fraternising with the enemy. As it happens, I noticed today that the Imperial War Museum covers the story. If you wish to explore this topic, after the recent "The Armed Man" performance, follow this hyperlink.  
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-real-story-of-the-christmas-truce>

All of us on the boat had been through something very special together and had been changed by it. The trip was completed despite many obstacles (most of which are not even mentioned here).

A wise man thinks about death; I think we all left the boat wiser than when we joined it. We had enjoyed plenty of time for our own reflections. In addition, we had supported, challenged, entertained and listened to each other. A small group of very different people who gelled together remarkably well.

We arrived at the marina in Salvador, Brazil on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November. I left the boat on 20<sup>th</sup> November and my flight home was the following day.

I gave Salvador a wide berth and took a taxi straight to the airport from my hotel. Why a wide berth? .... Well, Salvador is a violent city (apparently, the most violent in Brazil, nowadays). After surviving the Atlantic crossing, the last thing I needed was to get shot in Salvador - I've become more risk-averse as I've got older.

It was wonderful getting back to loved ones, who had been on my mind throughout the trip. My granddaughter hadn't forgotten me. The period of separation hadn't been easy but it had reinforced that which is important. The return to normality was most welcome, as was the warmth of my fabulous family and friends, our pleasantly cool temperate climate, my C Bechstein upright, my shockingly under-tended garden and the gentle rhythm of the week, including Wednesday rehearsals.

Being with loved ones for Christmas was particularly precious this year – long may that continue.



My great niece, enjoying the recent Carols with Brass

If there WAS a point in writing this account for the choir, perhaps it's this...

There is something very satisfying about working on a project that at times feels too difficult. In the end, we can look back with a feeling of achievement and pride on arriving at our own musical destinations, that may once have seemed out of reach. So don't lose heart; keep going. Enjoy the struggle and the company of those you meet on the way, support others if you can, use the helpful choir resources available and follow the guidance of our fabulous duo, David and Jon; how very lucky we are.

Above all, relish those moments of sublime, if not spiritual, choral beauty that can only come from a choir such as our own.

*Oh, very nice touch Michael, it looks like you got there in the end!*



Yours truly

## A Musical Journey - Postscript

In the event of being stuck on an uninhabited desert island ...

*How would that make you feel Michael?* If I became stuck on such an island, I'd struggle. I'd sing along to any of the tunes listed and, I expect, many more. I'd also do a lot of gazing in awe. After a few days though, my wafer thin veneer of sanity will have been stripped bare. I'd die soon after, no doubt due to salt-depletion and dehydration. Given the conditions, my corpse would morph quite quickly, into sun-dried shark food. The likelihood, therefore, of me having the opportunity to enjoy a luxury item (your next question, I presume) appears remote.

*Even so, what luxury item would you choose?* Oh that's easy: A large piano with a secret compartment housing a record player, vinyl collection, some music/lyrics and a well-stocked beer fridge; also, a desalination plant, Bluetooth speaker, mobile phone charging facilities, ALDI, good transport links and an airport.

*I see, thank you for your contribution. Are you glad you did the trip Michael?* Absolutely

*How far did you go?* 4971 nautical miles (that's 5721 miles)

*Did you enjoy it or merely endure it?* I thoroughly enjoyed the company of my fellow travellers and our conversations. I also enjoyed the solitude, the wonder and the sheer beauty of what I saw. I endured certain aspects of the trip itself but I didn't quit; which, gave me satisfaction. Credit for me not quitting is due in no small part to the marvellous human beings who accompanied me on the journey. Perhaps I have the brothers at my old school, and even Zarathustra, to thank too.

*Would you do this again?* Not on your nelly, Nurse Ratched; I'm too content here.

## DISCLAIMER

*The views expressed are of an (arguably certifiable) individual, not FCS as a whole. They are sincerely felt, even if delivered in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, and are intended to amuse, not offend. If I failed in that regard, I do apologise. Some poetic license is, of course, assumed but the recollections are essentially truthful. Sources of information are generally indicated or self-evident from, for example, a web address. Occasional unreferenced snippets will have come from one of four sources: My vague understanding of a topic, my ill-informed opinion, the thoughts of people I admire or a book, that I should have taken with me, "Do Dolphins Ever Sleep?" from Pierre-Yves and Sally Bely.*

*In any case, "A Musical Journey" is merely for your entertainment; it isn't an MSc thesis (not that they aren't absolutely riveting and thoroughly entertaining). M*