



## THE NEW YORKER THE 85TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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### AT SEA A THOUSAND DAYS



While cooking lunch one day a year ago, Reid Stowe, a not-quite-discovered artist who had a place on the West Side but always travelled a lot, was unexpectedly interrupted. One moment he was serenely simmering rice and lentils atop a gas stove, and the next he was hurtling across the kitchen. He heard a noise that sounded like jet engines revving and train horns blaring, and he noticed that his back hurt, his head hurt, his left elbow really hurt, and he was completely drenched, as if his whole body had been submerged, which it had. At the time, he was roughly halfway between Tierra del Fuego and Buenos Aires, though he was some nine hundred miles from terra firma. It was Day 658 of the Mars Ocean Odyssey, his attempt to sail his seventy-foot schooner, the Anne, non-stop for a thousand days, along the way replicating the likely physical, psychological, and spiritual experiences of astronauts on a round trip to Mars.

Even if the Anne hadn't capsized, Day 658 would have been memorable, as it also happened to be the day Stowe broke the world record for the longest non-stop ocean voyage. After the boat righted itself, exactly as it was designed to do when he began building it, in the late seventies, he realized that a rogue wave had rolled it more than ninety degrees, judging by the rice and lentils decorating the ceiling of the galley. Still, under the circumstances—his staysail boom had broken, the staysail itself had shredded, his body had slammed into a wall of the galley—he managed to do a quick inventory of all the things that hadn't gone wrong. An extremely fit fifty-

seven-year-old daily yoga practitioner, he had no lacerations or fractures. Nothing had washed overboard, the mainmast and foremast and riggings had held up, two of the boat's ten solar panels were askew but remained intact. Below deck, the electronic equipment was fine and the motor room was dry—as were his clothing, bunk, communications gear, and three-plus years' supply of food and coal and firewood. The tool trunks had stayed locked. He wasn't sinking.

One Saturday last month, forty or so of Stowe's friends and admirers (his "onshore support team") gathered at the South Street Seaport Museum, and from there moved a couple of blocks, to Ryan Maguire's Ale House, to commemorate his thousandth day at sea. This was the milestone Stowe had contemplated since the late nineteen-eighties, after he and a crew of seven spent six months sailing the Anne to Antarctica and back. When the Anne departed from the Hudson River on April 21, 2007, the only other crew member was Stowe's girlfriend, Soanya Ahmad. On Day 306, however, she reluctantly disembarked eleven miles off the western coast of Australia, where a motorboat from the Royal Perth Yacht Club picked her up—the last time Stowe saw land or had a face-to-face conversation with another human being. It turned out that the acute seasickness Ahmad had been experiencing for almost two months, since they rounded the Cape of Good Hope, was actually morning sickness. Their son, Darshen, was born in New York in July, 2008, while his father was in the South Pacific.

Day 1,000 found Stowe four degrees north of the equator, in the Atlantic doldrums, where he has been cruising for several months, waiting out the Northern Hemisphere winter and anticipating a New York homecoming on June 17th (Day 1,151). At the museum, several people took turns at the lectern, among them Ahmad, who mentioned that Stowe had spent a year and a half of the voyage painstakingly repairing sails ("But he stopped six months ago—it's hard to do, and his arms are tired"), and Joe Barello, a Wall Street technology professional, who, while awaiting a call from Stowe, recited a partial list of the expedition's sponsors, which included manufacturers of sailcloth, solar-power technology, batteries, and foodstuffs (dried fruits and nuts and legumes, Parmigiano-Reggiano

cheese, chili-flavored peanut butter).

The Anne's onboard computer died a couple of months ago, and since then an Iridium satellite phone has been Stowe's only means of communication. Barello's cell phone rang at the appointed hour, but the signal immediately got lost somewhere between Earth and Mars. When Stowe called back, he sounded as if he were in the same room, rather than afloat four thousand miles away, in calm weather on a night brimming with stars, with a school of porpoises loitering nearby. "I've just done my yoga, I'm eating fish every day, I haven't seen another ship for two weeks," he reported. "It's just very beautiful and peaceful—the timeless and eternal sea, a very primal, connected-to-the-universe feeling out here." There was no discernible background noise from sirens, honking horns, jackhammers, or garbage compactors.

As the event progressed from its ceremonial phase through its extended liquid phase, Stowe's devotees recounted experiences they'd had with him on land and sea. Jeff Blumenfeld, the editor and publisher of *Expedition News* and the author of "You Want to Go Where?: How to Get Someone to Pay for the Trip of Your Dreams," described his efforts to help Stowe get bankrolled. "For years, Reid kept sending me handwritten proposals that referred to his 'thousand-days expedition,'" he said. "I felt I had to meet him, at the very least to teach him how to spell 'expedition.' Reid's the Energizer Bunny of explorers. It's still very difficult to come up with backers, but I'm trying. It was tough for Shackleton, and it was tough for Columbus. The sponsorship game hasn't gotten any easier."

—Mark Singer

1000 Days at Sea  
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[www.1000days.net](http://www.1000days.net)

[soanya@1000days.net](mailto:soanya@1000days.net)  
(347) 784-1940