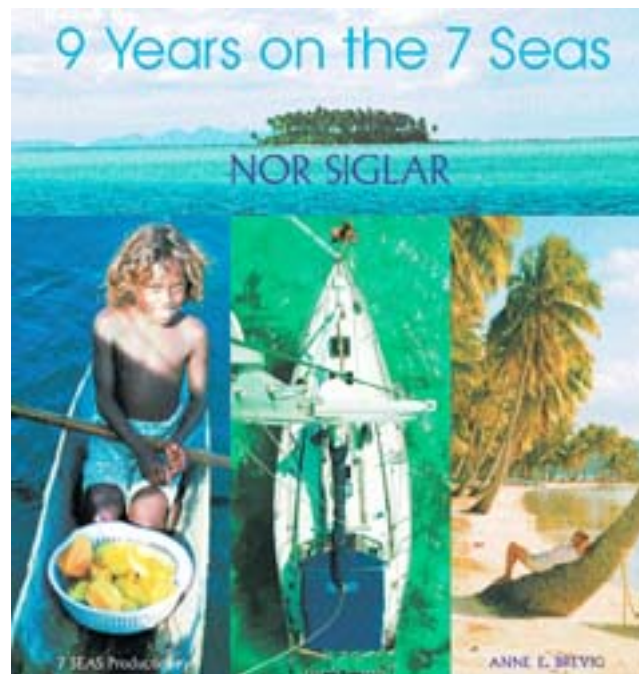


Anne E. Brevig

# 9 Years on the 7 Seas

## NOR SIGLAR

Sample Chapter: South to warmer Climes



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# NORTH SEA – MEDITERRANEAN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

AUGUST 1994 – MARCH 1998  
18,000 NAUTICAL MILES



## SOUTH TO WARMER CLIMES

“What if I’m washed overboard?” I worry anxiously as I sit exposed and alone in the large shallow cockpit while *Nor Siglar* barrels down the west coast of Portugal in a full following gale. Bashing around like a cork, she surges ahead on breaking wave tops at record speed. We register 12 knots before the waves sink away and leave us in a sea of foam and bubbles. The next one will end up in the cockpit for sure. But no, *Nor Siglar* is like a ballerina, dancing with great ease and skill in the big seas and the cockpit stays dry. “You’re looking great!” a freighter captain calls with envy in his voice. His ship is barely visible in the rough seas. “Would you like to trade places with me?” We keep up with him for quite a while.

Since we left Norway a month ago, we have explored the isolated Shetland and Orkney islands, transited the canals and lakes of the beautiful Scottish Highlands and visited some of Ireland’s famous old yacht clubs, pubs and castles. But the whole time we worried about the challenge ahead. The infamous Bay of Biscay. We wanted to get

across before the autumn storms set in. That meant having to cut our stay short and miss England. Impatient, we left at the tail end of a gale, a move that has often proved to be a wise decision for us. And so it was. Except for the first day out, we had benign conditions and the crossing went remarkably well. So it was a happy and relieved crew that after seven days at sea could report to keen radio amateurs back home that *Nor Siglar* had arrived safely in Porto. What we did not report, however, was that the bread was mouldy, the milk sour, the fridge on the blink, the head leaking and the aft bunk soaked with salt water. But such is the joy of cruising.

And now we are on our way further down the unprotected coast. It’s midnight and change of watch. Exhausted, I collapse into bed. I am feeling really miserable so Martin puts a patch behind my ear. Lying down, the boisterous sleigh ride feels like a carousel gone wild. Sleep does not come easily. It’s fitful and restless. My brain is working overtime, thoughts popping in and out of my head. I recall a Christmas greeting we received long before we set

out on our adventure: “are you two still intent on going ahead with this oft-mentioned circumnavigation of yours?” Now, three years and 20,000 nautical miles later, still plagued by seasickness, the question arises time and again: Why in the world am I doing this?

“It’s love, of course!” an old childhood friend exclaimed, as simple as that. She is right, of course. But only partly. Had I not met Martin, the sailor, none of this would have happened. Still, there is no way he could have forced me against my will to leave a good job, the comforts of home and a safe existence on land. So there is definitely something much deeper behind a motivation, which makes someone voluntarily cut all ties, to chance, even to embrace, a totally new and uncertain lifestyle, filled with totally new and possibly extreme challenges.

Why then would someone want to expose oneself to so much danger and discomfort? The reasons are many. Pure adventure is, of course, the obvious one. New challenges – both physical and mental – and the satisfaction of mastering them, is another.



*Shetland's trademark.  
The cute ponies can be  
quite aggressive, though.*

*Typical Scottish mist in  
the Caledonia Canal.*

Could it be the need to prove to yourself and others what you are good for? Or a strong desire to test and get to know yourself in a new and unfamiliar situation, to see what else you are capable of beyond the regular day-to-day grind? Maybe it is a fascination for the fight for survival? The fight against the elements? Against the conventional? Against the clock? Or is it simply the quest for freedom? For a new and meaningful lifestyle? Certainly alluring is the dream to run away from it all. From the conventional, the rat race, routine and restrictions, to seek something better elsewhere. It just might be that the grass is really greener on the other side of the fence – or the horizon in our particular case. One thing is certain: It feels wonderful to be FREE, to be independent, self sufficient and a bit crazy – at least for a while.

Lying in a daze, I meditate and ponder my situation. Did I regret what we have done? No, not for a moment. Although, after the first month, when it hit me that we didn't have to go back to work, it felt rather strange. My colleagues predicted that I would miss my job, be sorry, change my mind and want to come home again. "And *you* of all people!" my boss exclaimed when I handed in my resignation. "You, who worked so hard for equality! How could you possibly abandon your career just like that, to become a subordinate on a small sailboat? You, who are used to being in a management position making important decisions every day? No, Anne. This will never work!"

But it has. And why? Because there is no power struggle onboard Nor Siglar. First priority at sea is



to reach your destination safely. To ensure that, the person in charge must have complete confidence and control. Regardless of size, there is only room for one captain on a boat. And there is no doubt who is the best qualified on Nor Siglar. Martin is a born sailor. He has been around boats all his life. He never gets seasick and reacts automatically when something happens. Sailing is in his blood. What is second nature to him is far from natural to me, having learned the ropes as an adult. Besides, seasickness gets in my way. So relinquishing this power to my soul mate has never been an issue.

Still, power struggle and dissatisfaction are typical problems on a small yacht. So why have these conflicts never afflicted us? An important reason is that we were already used to living onboard and

existing together in an area barely larger than a normal size kitchen. We had already tested our relationship and knew that we were able to function well in close quarters day in and day out. We discovered that we did not need our own space. We like each other's company and enjoy being silent together. Quite simply, we don't get on each other's nerves. Besides, we are usually on the same wavelength and move at the same pace. Basically, we have common goals and seldom disagree. In fact, we are quite similar. We are best friends.

So it comes as no surprise to us, who seldom disagree ashore, that we don't do it onboard either. At sea, where you are completely dependent on each other, it is absolutely vital to cooperate – to play on the same team. We feel that we have be-

come such a team. We have found a balance that suits us. We are comfortable with our roles and responsibilities. Things get accomplished with few words and little kaffuffle. But there is no doubt that in order for this kind of undertaking to succeed, it is absolutely necessary to be patient, flexible and understanding, and last but not least, respectful, considerate and kind to one another.

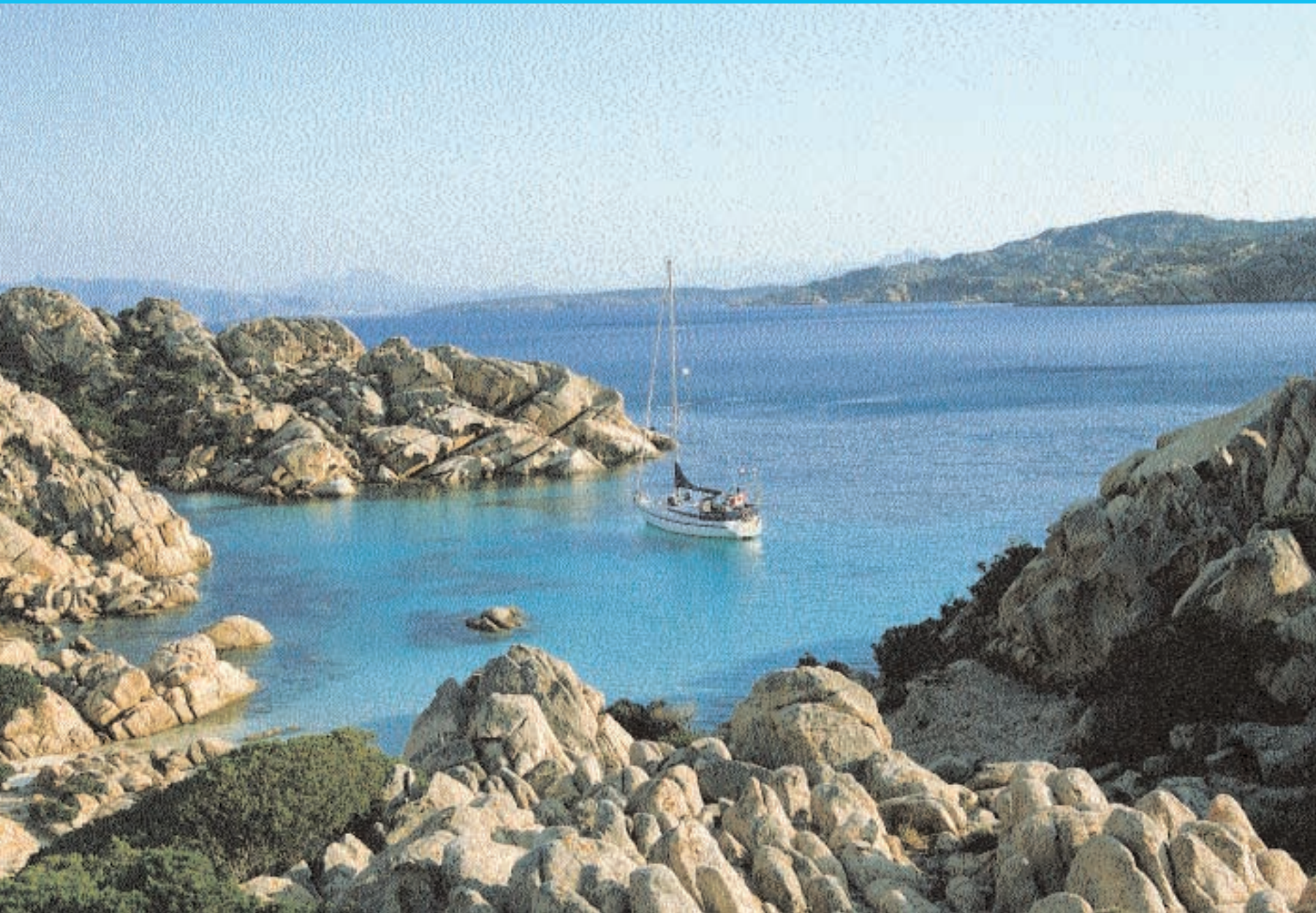
Still, it is obvious that living together so closely may be stressful. And at sea you can't escape or take off when you feel like it. Therefore, it is important to deal with the issues as they arise. It is important to speak up the minute something bothers you. Keeping things bottled up inside only leads to more frustration. So conflicts must be solved right then and there. There is no use sweeping the problems



*Portuguese woman in traditional dress laying out fish for drying.*



*Fishermen mending nets in Nazaré.*



*Cala Coticcio, Sardinia. One of the most beautiful anchorages of the circumnavigation.*

under the carpet. And never ever go to sleep as enemies.

Being an optimist at heart and blessed with a good sense of humour makes life a whole lot easier. Fortunately, neither one of us is pessimistic. Martin may, however, consider me overly cautious at times. He thinks I worry too much. In my defence, I like to think that I am just being realistic. I am obsessed with safety onboard. So when my fearless skipper doesn't want to reef, wear his safety harness or

be as careful as I would like, the atmosphere can be pretty tense for a while.

My ponderings are rudely interrupted by a sudden racket above. "Anne! Help me! Hurry up!" The genoa sheet has come undone and the sail is flapping uncontrollably in the strong wind. Martin, minus harness, has been trying to bring it in while falling off the wind. But Nor Siglar just won't cooperate. Even with the main reefed right down and the traveller to leeward, she keeps pointing into the

wind. We are not used to our new main sail yet, which we had made in Norway. It is much more powerful than the old one. Eventually, we manage to furl the genoa.

As the sun peaks over the horizon, we round Cabo de São Vicente on the south-western tip of the European continent – once considered the end of the world – and set a new course for the Strait of Gibraltar and the Mediterranean.

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