

## **WHAT COMPASS DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUR LIFE?**

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What an exciting prospect, not only to sail the Cape to Rio Race but to do so at the start of the New Millennium (note caps!). And exciting it certainly was for the five of us on board: Geoff the skipper, Keith the navigator, Martin and Barnaby on foredeck and moi the chief cook and bottle washer (= team finances, victuals, watch captain, foredeck hand, part time navigation etc!)

Viking II led Class II on handicap for the first 10 days but dropped back to 5<sup>th</sup> place out of 15 at the end, crossing the finish line between the Copacobana and Ipenema beaches exactly 25 days, 9 hours, 5 minutes and 41 seconds (!) after the start in Cape Town (had we crossed the line 2 hours earlier we would have been in 3<sup>rd</sup> place – just 2 hours in it after 25 days!). And as we motored in to the Iate Club de Rio de Janeiro, darkness fell and the lights of Rio came on, with the statue of Christ the Redeemer floodlit atop the Corcovado Mountain, glowing in the dusk to bid us welcome.

The wind strength at the start did its normal Cape Town trick of being inversely proportional to the time still left to the start gun – it was 10 knots at the 10 minute gun, 5 knots at the 5 minute gun and nothing, da nada, el zippo as the start gun went! So all those high powered racing machines, instead of roaring off into the sunset with colourful spinnakers billowing, crept snail-like past Greenpoint, until we at last found a bit of breeze some miles beyond the Mouille Point Lighthouse buoy. Or at least we on Viking II did. I have photographs taken astern just before sunset with Table Mountain and the Twelve Apostles on the horizon, dropping away fast - while some unfortunate yachts still had that same view the next morning! When we woke up next morning all we could see was wall-to-wall sea; and suddenly I became very fond of the compass! Of which more later. Let me first tell you a bit about the trip.

Unlike Zepherus, the line honours winner, and the other maxis who chose to head west on that bit of breeze off Mouille Point, we tacked and headed north west away from and up the coast, heading for the south-east trades which should start at around 31 degrees south, the latitude of Springbok and Kleinzee up the West Coast. As it happened though, we had to go further north to 29,5 degrees south before the wind, on day four, swung out of the north into the south west enabling us at last to head for Ilha da Trindade, the next mark on the course, at that stage some 2 200 nautical miles (4 000 kilometres) ahead.

Once we had settled down on board and got our sea legs, our daily routine started with each of us helping himself to breakfast, since we all woke up at different times depending on our watches.

Fresh water was used for drinking purposes only. The washing of ourselves and our clothes, cleaning of teeth and cooking of vegetables were all done in salt water, there being a more than adequate supply of that commodity! And the colour of the sea is an indescribably beautiful deep translucent turquoise; four kilometres deep in mid-ocean.

Lunch was muesli bread from the Protea Bakery – which lasted us for 2 weeks! – with gouda cheese (I had bought a huge round one) and fresh tomato or cucumber, again pretty much ad hoc. When the muesli bread ran out Martin – our Bread Chef - baked us loaves of mielie or nutty brown bread, both cooked with salt water as the mixer, absolutely delicious! Then at 18h00 came the main social event of the day – Happy Hour! – when each one of us was allowed two *dops*, which in my case was one beer (the people seeing us off drank most of my beer!) and a tot of the Skipper's whisky, which he kindly gave me to compensate for his mates having drunk most of my beer!

There was a serious side to happy hour too. It was a time when we could discuss problems and get issues that were worrying us off our chests, a major contributor to harmony on board. And here I must thank you for your prayers in this regard. We had a few tense moments of course, but nothing that we were not able to resolve amicably. Thanks, I am sure, to the power of your prayers.

After nine days Geoff, who had been watching the fresh water level but had been unable to do a proper check because the yacht was heeling too much, concluded that there was a leak in the port (left) water tank and that we had lost about half of our water, so were down to about 150 litres – or two half cups each per day for the rest of the trip. To put the fresh water consumption on a yacht at sea into perspective, each one of us here in Cape Town probably uses more water in one day - just showering, cleaning teeth and flushing the loo - than one of us consumed on the entire trip to Rio!

So we kept a watch out for rain squalls in the hope of catching some rain, but while we saw plenty of them, they all passed us by! By day 15 we were down to a total of 70 litres of water in the tanks plus 25 litres in a jerry can, with an estimated 9 days to go to Rio.

And then what I can only describe as a miracle happened. On day 18, two days out from Ilha da Trindade, we went through three rain squalls one after the other, the third one lasting for nearly 20 minutes. We had three 30 litre jerry cans on board and had collected about 12 litres in the first two squalls – most of the first squall went to washing the salt off the mainsail which was the main (excuse the pun!) collection device. And then came the third squall at about 5 in the afternoon: It rained...and it rained...and it rained...and it rained. We danced on deck in the rain, delighting in a

glorious fresh water shower while the runoff from the boom filled the first, then the second and finally the third jerry can to the brim – a wonderful 90 litres of beautiful, pure, sparkling rain water! And then, as the third can was about to overflow, the rain stopped. Almost as though someone was watching and said, “Right-oh, they’ve got as much as they can store – waste not want not!”

Remember Elisha and the poor widow with just a little oil left, and her late husband’s creditor who was about to take her two sons as slaves in payment for his debts (2 Kings 4: 2 – 7)?

*“...Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?"*

*"Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil."*

*Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side."*

*She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring.*

*When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.*

*She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."*

Truly the Lord was watching over us like He did that poor widow (in Biblical times, without a husband, brother or son(s) to care for her, a woman’s outlook was bleak indeed; begging or prostitution were pretty much the only options she had to survive).

And so we sailed along following the Great Circle Route (the shortest distance) to Ilha da Trindade, and the device that kept us on course was the compass. Sure, we had a GPS to give us our position (latitude and longitude), a log for our speed and distance, a wind meter for the wind direction and strength, and radar. But the most basic navigation device, which goes way back to the beginning of time when man first ventured onto the sea, is the magnetic compass. You can do without the others at a pinch but you cannot do without a compass, and this realisation came to me while at the helm on my night watches...

*When we were ghosting along under full sail on a flat, lazy, undulating sea in 5 knots of wind, with the phosphorescence of the wake trailing out into the darkness behind, the sails a faint glimmer in the starlight and the stars so bright and close that you could reach up and touch them – and the compass glowing in the starlight just for 'ard of the wheel.*

Or...

*Roaring through the night with 40 knots of wind and 5 metre swells on the quarter, the number 2 jib up and one reef in the main, the yacht vibrantly alive and surging forward at 12 to 15 knots, surfing through the pitch darkness with the water surging green along the deck and spray flying into the cockpit, unseen till it rattles like machine gun fire on my oilies. And the only things visible in the blackness are the log and the warm glow of the binnacle light, the compass needle swinging wildly as I wrestle with the wheel to keep her on course. What an adrenalin rush. Like driving a high powered sports car flat out down the highway, blindfold!*

But also very sobering. The more time I spent at the helm with just the compass for company, the more I came to realise that I had come to trust it implicitly to guide us across the South Atlantic. And I came to realise that here was a parable about how I should navigate the rest of my life:

Focus on Jesus.

Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Through Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit. He empowers us to follow Him, and guides us to our Father’s Kingdom where we will rejoice in His presence for eternity.

And here’s another thought:

Eternity starts right now. It doesn’t start when we die. It starts the day we begin to really live, the day we give our lives to Jesus and start seriously working at building a personal relationship with Him. The day we acknowledge Him to be the True Compass of our lives.