



The Baby Boat



By Karen and John Cross



Cape Town at the end of the voyage



Leaving Denmark

1970 was a time when there were no GPSs; no electronic calculators or notebook computers; no communication via VHF or SSB radios and satellite phones; no accurate quartz watches; no access to weather forecasts; no Epirb (emergency position indicating radio beacons); no AIS; no lightweight small boat refrigeration; no water makers; no disposable napkins (except cottonwool wadding); no yellow margarine and only limited dehydrated foods. However, we had a sextant, ship's clock, radar reflector, radio direction finder and a DSB radio with a range of 25 miles.

We were married and living on Kloof Gold Mine both having completed our tertiary education at the University of the Witwatersrand. John, who was from Johannesburg, had had a dream to sail the high seas in a yacht and I was enticed to join him.

At that time several people had been sailing blue water voyages. One who inspired us was Sir Robin Knox Johnston who won the 1968-69 Golden Globe race, having sailed single-handed, nonstop and unassisted around the world. An advert in a local newspaper excited us. "Vertue Carina" owned by the Springbok yachtsman Bruce Dalling was for sale. He had sailed her single handed from Hong Kong to Durban in 1964. "Vertue Carina" had been built by Cheoy Lee shipyard of solid Burmese teak. The Vertue class designed by Laurent Giles, are classic blue water boats and about 230 were built between 1936 and about 1990. We made an offer and it was accepted. "Vertue Carina" became our own.

My Danish grandfather came from a long line of seafarers having been cabin boy on his father's Baltic trader, the "Hjalmar." He came to look at "Vertue Carina." He said: "She is only 25 ft long you should never put to sea in a boat less than 30 foot." John then made a pact with him that if we got to Ascension Island we would meet him at the entrance to the Limfjord in Denmark and follow his father's route to the island of

Mors where he was born. My granddad had come to South Africa in 1900 as an adventurer, so he agreed and was prepared to fly from South Africa to Denmark and meet us there.

So the excitement began! People tried to dissuade us, parents were worried, members at the yacht club said that we were teenagers who expected to be rescued if things went wrong. But we eagerly forged forward with our plans.

The voyage down the South African coast was treacherous. We were inexperienced and I was very seasick. Off Port Elizabeth "Vertue Carina" was in danger of running aground. It was the middle of the night, and we thought we were close to Bird Island. John tried to start the motor and a rope wrapped itself around the propeller. John dived into the inky sea to free it and I, seasick and petrified held the torch for him. "Never again" I thought "if we reach land will I set foot on a boat again". We had crew around the South African coast as Bruce Dalling had advised that we needed an extra pair of eyes. My brother, Richard Johnson and a friend, Keith Davidson sailed with us from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town.

In Cape Town negative thoughts disappeared as we enthusiastically planned for the voyage to England and ultimately Denmark. We waxed tins to prevent them from rusting and had eggs, specially treated by the Egg Board to preserve them. We bought a sack of potatoes, a bag of gem squash, a box of apples, onions and dehydrated foods. A carefully planned medical kit and vitamins completed the provisioning.

The passage from Cape Town to St. Helena Island took seventeen days, with a further seven days to Ascension Island. The next leg to England was a long 56 days. We had scary times, beautiful experiences and much anxiety as stores dwindled. We were becalmed in the doldrums and the horse latitudes, experienced heat near the Equator and storms in the high latitudes. Whales, ships and diminishing water and food supplies were a constant worry.



Vertue Carina in Tenerife



Peter with food supplies in Rio de Janeiro

The passage through the English Channel and North Sea to Denmark took 22 days and was characterized by heavy shipping and adverse weather. We arrived to a wonderful welcome from the mayor and villagers of Nykobing Mors. My grandfather introduced us to his wonderful family all over the country.

We returned to UK where John worked on a tin mine, and I picked daffodils for a farmer and gathered winkles to sell to fishmongers. We had planned and discussed sailing back with a baby, and Peter was born on 29 March 1972 at Truro hospital in Cornwall. Friends tried to dissuade us from sailing back with him, but we reasoned that a baby needed only his mother and if I breastfed I would have sterile food for him. There are no germs at sea. We left when he was four months old.

The logistics involved in having a baby at sea were far greater than when we left with just the two of us. A new and lighter diesel engine was installed and plastic tanks doubling our water carrying capacity were fitted. A gimbaled crib was built so that Peter would not feel the motion. A complete medical aid kit was compiled so that, in the case of illness, we were self sufficient. Our boat was tiny but when we left we found uncluttered decks and a well ordered cabin. All was securely stowed to prevent movement in heavy seas.

We sailed to Tenerife in the Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands and to Brazil. From Rio de Janeiro we made the 52 day-long passage back to Cape Town from West to East. John wanted me to fly back to South Africa so he could go down into

the Roaring Forties which would guarantee wind. I insisted that Peter and I returned with him.

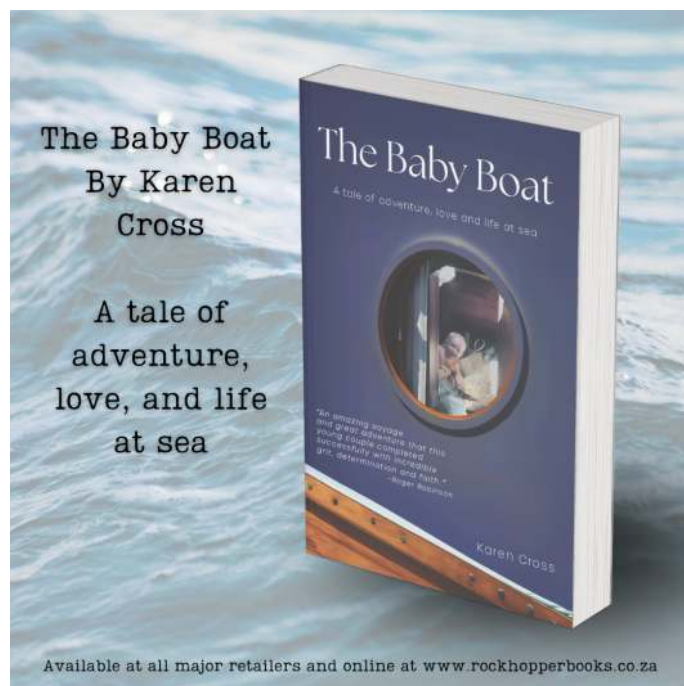
We had heavy seas, huge mountainous swells and deep hollows. Our vegetables deteriorated quickly as a freak wave wet our supplies. I got hives rash. We were in danger of running out of food, water and fuel. The Southern Ocean was stormy and chaotic.

However, Peter developed both mentally and physically. Very soon he held onto bunks and clambered his way about the cabin. Instinctively he had one hand for himself and one for Carina. When Carina heeled he would always play on the lee side. He was 13 months old when we finally sailed into Cape Town's Table Bay, three years and one day since we had left. It was 23 April 1973. We had sailed about 23 000 sea miles.

Peter was land sick with little balance on the stable ground and when placed on a car seat fell to the floor. He was scared of grass and sand. He was susceptible to infections from other babies as, at sea, he had not built up a resistance to germs.

Back in Johannesburg we were given a welcome

home party. We were found at the bottom of the garden, alone in each others company quietly reflecting on perhaps another voyage and hoping to see a shooting star in a star speckled sky which would make us feel at home. In our hearts was a huge feeling of gratitude to God who had kept us safe and a deep longing for the sound of the bow wave and the thrust forward of our solid Baby Boat which had become so part of us. We knew that we would miss her dearly so much so that it would ache for years to come. 🌀



MG NEWS SNIPPETS

MG Enthusiast magazine is celebrating MG's centenary only in 2024, unlike us in South Africa who celebrated last year. Anyway, the magazine asked its readers to list their favourite MG model of all time and these choices have been ranked from 1-10.

They are ranked: 1, MGB (Launched 60 years ago. Production run of 18 years during which more than half a million were made); 2, MG TF; 3, MGF; 4, MG Midget; 5, MG ZS; 6, MG Metro; 7, MGA; 8, MG TC; 9, MG ZR; 10, MG Maestro.

There was also an interesting article on the MG RV8 in the latest magazine. It was unveiled at the 1992 Earls Court Motor Show when MG was under Rover management. Surprisingly, only 5% of MGB parts were incorporated in the new model, despite the two looking rather similar. The RV8 was built as a high-quality

model with Connolly leather, burr walnut dashboard and Rover V8 engine. They were built in 1995 and only in RHD form. There was huge demand from Japan, so the bulk of these models went there. Only 330 of the 1983 total production run, made in eight months, went to other countries. Australia did not even get a look-in.

Many cars have subsequently been brought to Australia. They needed substantial changes so they could operate on public roads.

This included new seat belts, concave rearview mirrors, catalytic converters, metric instrumentation, new tyres, English owners' handbook, and even the fitment of intrusion bars on the doors. Each car was inspected by an engineer before being cleared for driving on the local roads.

There are now estimated to be 260 ex-Japan MG RV8s in Australia.



MG B Roadsters ranked 1st choice



Only 1 983 MG RV8s were built, all during a period of 8 months, and only in RHD form

