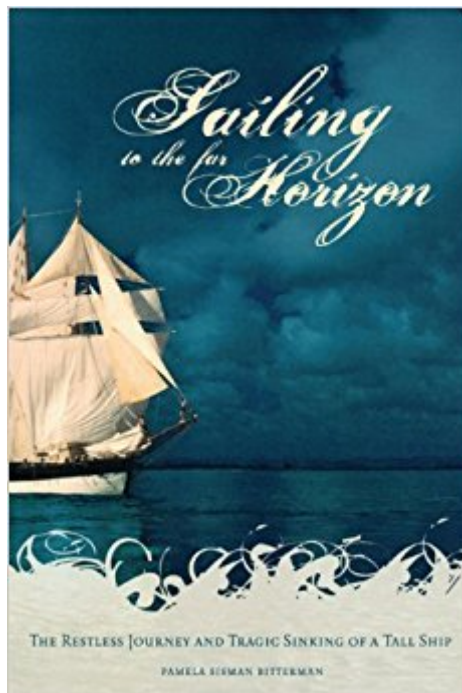




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Sailing To The Far Horizon: The Restless Journey And Tragic Sinking Of A Tall Ship



Synopsis

Of the legions of wayfarers who shared in the tall ship Sofia's diverse and colorful history, only seventeen were on board when she went down. Of those who survived to tell the tale, none has . . . until now.

More than twenty-five years ago, Pamela Bitterman began her journey on board a 123-foot, sixty-year-old sailing ship being readied for its second global circumnavigation. Bitterman's initial voyage, during which Hurricane Kendra chased the schooner miles off course to Bermuda, did not impel her to retreat home. Instead, she immersed herself in this created space between the life of a tall ship sailor, world traveler, and adventurer. Her narrative describes rare gatherings with Cuna Indians in the Gulf of San Blas, the discovery of original ancient tikis hidden away in the Marquesas, and a treasured offering of traditional tapa cloth from island natives. Bitterman's experiences also give readers insight into a time of civil unrest in Latin America, including a frightening road trip through Mexico and Central America, and the chaos during the final stages of the treaty that returned control of the Canal Zone back to Panama. The drama ensues with the arrest of the entire Sofia crew in two different countries, a bout with dengue fever, and a near-mutiny in New Zealand before the final voyage.

The details of events from this journey endure as vividly today as when Bitterman was a naive "shellback" swabbie, later ship's bos'un, and finally acting first mate. In the end, she was merely one on a life raft of grateful survivors.

Sailing to the Far Horizon draws on original journal entries, photographs, and excerpts from official Coast Guard documents that chronicle the fascinating enigma that was the Sofia and its dramatic end.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1978, Bitterman found an ad in Co-Evolution Quarterly seeking crew members for the Sophia, a tall-ship sailing cooperative planning to circumnavigate the globe. You paid your share and you sailed. If you didn't know how, those more experienced taught you. It was an irresistible call in a freewheeling era that suited not only her sense of adventure but also her insatiable desire to learn new things. The ship was primitive, the weather sometimes foul, and crew members came and went, but Bitterman took to sailing and the unorthodox life as if she were born to it. It was a grand, three-year ride, but as the subtitle tells us, the Sophia sank, putting an end to the venture with crushing finality. Drawing primarily on the logs and letters she sent home, the author tells this compelling 25-year-old story as if it happened yesterday. And the reader can't help but mourn the loss of the ship and the crew's improvised lifestyle, as well as feel the joy, danger, and discovery that the author experienced and never forgot. Danise Hoover Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

“[Bitterman] tells this compelling 25-year-old story as if it happened yesterday. And the reader can't help but mourn the loss of the ship and the crew's improvised lifestyle, as well as feel the joy, danger, and discovery that the author experienced and never forgot.”

•Booklist “When Pam Bitterman talks of her experiences on the adventurous but ill-fated Sofia in her late twenties, you can hear that this is a story she feels she can't keep to herself. Lucky for us, she hasn't because the result is a book in a class by itself. . . . Bitterman came away with not only a plethora of fascinating tales of world exploration and personal dynamics, but also the wisdom of one who has truly grown through adversity.”

•The Log “Although Pam wrote *Sailing to the Far Horizon* 25 years after the sinking the story is alive and fresh as much is based on her journals kept during her roughly four-year voyage. Her writing is very descriptive, taking the reader through the adventures and near-disasters as she lived them. . . . A well-told tale and wonderful reading.”

•Santana Sailing Magazine “The human stories embedded in this book, poignant and painful, reveal the way that a ship boils people down to their essentials. You really get at the heart of who someone is on a voyage, even before you add the defining element of tragedy.”

•Jim Delgado, host of National Geographic Television's *The Sea Hunters* and executive director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum “Several hours after I finished reading this book, I was still recovering. I felt as if I'd been shaken, and punched in the stomach. And yes, that's a desirable reaction.”

•Gillian Kendall, coauthor with Mark O'Brien of *How I Became a*

Human Being: A Disabled Man's Quest for Independence

I really enjoyed this book and the author does a good job of catching the beauty and horror of sailing around the world in a beat up old wooden tall ship. She must be a good writer because even after hearing about them being stranded at sea for days with little hope of a rescue I still want to try my hand at sailing.

As engaging of a sail adventure tale if there ever were. I was transfixed throughout the book and really didn't want it to end especially as it did. But with all things in life, good tales, good times and often good ships do indeed come to an end. Although true there could have been better editing. And also true the author's use of language is a bit strained and over done but given that this is her first book and the tale she tells is so fascinating and fun I was more than willing to overlook problems in the interpretation of the adventure. I'm just glad she took the effort to put the only accounting of the ship 35 years after its demise. It made me wish that I hadn't waited so long before sailing in my own life. The biggest suggestion would be to add many more photographs which is so much cheaper in Kindle than printed form. More information on the tales of Sofia in the author's own words can be heard in a very good episode of David Anderson's "Sailing Podcast". She is an even better story teller orally. The story she has to tell will make you want to join a tall ship commune...or not.

I came across this story of the Sofia because a sailing friend of mine, upon whose story my own second novel *Waves: A Novel* by Dave Bricker is modeled, had an encounter with the ship in the Caribbean during the 1970s. Though my account of that meeting is highly fictionalized (and as yet unpublished - look for "Currents" towards the end of 2011), I became intrigued with the story, and purchased this book to supplement my research. I cruised a small sailboat solo during the 80s and 90's, and though my own story is quite different from Pam Bitterman's, I can appreciate any book that approaches seafaring authentically. Times have changed not only for tall ships, but for cruisers in general. There was a magic "golden age" of cruising that took place at the end of the twentieth century before "yachting" became a sport of the rich. "Shoestring sailors" odd-jobbing their way around the globe are fewer and farther between these days, and the remarkable stories of those people, places and times are worth telling. As a University professor, I see the concept of "just going" to be sadly inconceivable to young people today. That, in itself, is an important message. Likewise, if you go sailing, you'll have the best and worst times of your life. Sailing to the Far Horizon neither glosses over the seasickness, heat, dampness and hard work nor dwells on the

almost unbelievably profound beauty of the best of the experience. It's measured and balanced. Though some have accused Bitterman of overwriting, there is a great tradition of Victorian seafaring literature by Conrad, Melville, Dana et al. As a sailor on a tall ship, it's only natural to write with some extra flourish. I found the prose to be an excellent balance between that tradition and today's postmodernist "get on with the story" style. Though the book is set in small type, rather tightly packed, it's well-edited and moves along articulately, without getting bogged down. As the Sofia took on no passengers, only crew, the story asks the reader to "learn the ropes" along the way, but does so without pedantry. Sifting through old photographs, log books and letters, to write and reconstruct any remarkable story is a difficult labor of love, especially when passing decades blend together people and places encountered along the way. Stories such as this are not written for the bestseller list; they are a gift from the writer to those lucky enough to receive them. This is what small presses and self-publishing are all about.

Ms. Sisman's book is a thrilling account recalling the rich tradition of 19th century nautical fiction and travelogues of Melville and Dana, or the rich evocative canvasses of Turner. Like so many restless wanderers in search of themselves, Pamela's memoirs recount an epic journey to exotic ports of call and encounters with people who, without the trappings of our 21st century mall-saturated American culture, manage to maintain serenity, sanity and dignity. At the same time, the book recalls the 70's and the youthful quests all but lost to the "Baby Boom" generation. I recommend this book to anyone who's fascinated with the sea, with travel articles and memoirs, and to anyone who has ever suffered a traumatic experience and lived to move on. I'd welcome a sequel about the reunion of the crew, should this be possible. Gripping, descriptive, yet imbued with both nostalgia and horror, "Sailing" riveted me from start to tragic finish. S. Nathanson, Valley Stream, NY

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